

The Emperor Alexios, my father

The *Alexiad* is everything you could ask a history to be. It is of course a great primary text, a source of precious information both for Byzantinists and for historians of the West. More than that, it is an outstanding literary text from a distinguished mind with highly developed powers and stamina. Anna Komnene has raised a monument to an emperor, a civilization, an age and to the discipline of history itself, inasmuch as a great history combines respect for evidence, intellectual curiosity, a mythologizing energy and a coherent range of human values. The *Alexiad* responds to pressures and counter-pressures from evidence, ideas and values, sometimes covertly, sometimes overtly. It recreates in a new form a great imperial myth.

The first three books, touching on his boyhood and dealing with events from 1073 to 1081, establish Alexios on the throne. Book One takes him through his early military feats as leading general to the beginning of his foreign wars as emperor. Book Two backtracks to chart his rise at court under the previous emperor, Botaneiates, the Komnenoi rebellion and the reasons for it, Alexios' preferment over his older brother Isaac and their successful coup. Book Three lays out in rich and careful sequence all the steps he takes to consolidate his power, rethink government, sanctify the new regime and undertake the heavy responsibility of a largely broken empire. These first and third books invite particular attention.

Like the Prologue, but more specifically, Book One lays out the kind of history it is going to be. Its international reach appears in the later Norman section but first it shows, through Komnene's departures from and fine adjustments to Bryennios' text, just how positively she will construct her own Alexios. Reinsch has outlined the main effects of her changes to the three episodes from the *Hyle* that she re-presents,¹ but I hope it will prove useful to examine her changes more intensively because they show an important aspect of her art in depth: how she deals with her inheritance

¹ Reinsch 1996.

and how she honours it and is attentive to it, while treating it as material for her own design. They show something of the daring revisionism that Neville has seen: Komnene's redirection of her history as a corrective to her husband's, so that, where Bryennios has drawn on ancient Roman cultural capital to define manly virtue, she foregrounds a countering value-system within the Byzantine literary heritage, one more favourable to Alexios, the ancient Greek. But her changes also suggest that she is leaving behind the binary approach to narrative that marks the *Hyle*² for something more pluralistic. At times her emphases vary and at times she forms new compounds. Even as her recast episodes Hellenize Alexios' image, they are enhancing the idea of him as a future representative of Christ. They begin to suggest Komnene's view of his empire and its culture as a blend of the Hellenic and the Christian. This view will be developed to differentiate his New Constantinian empire from Constantine's in ways that will incorporate the history between, through the memory of past emperors, and show Alexios' reign in an eschatological perspective as the last. What Komnene does with sections from Bryennios' text, and later with Psellos', can be traced precisely. Those comparisons give entrée to what she is doing with other material: memories, testimony, public facts, documents, perhaps even Howard-Johnston's archive,³ together with familial duty and mixed cultural and historiographic traditions.

Book Three foreshadows her interpretation of Alexios' reign. Book Two, between those tours de force, shows something of the distance that Komnene had to travel from the text she was purporting to continue to the history she actually produced.

Imperial destiny and task

Book One establishes two things immediately: Alexios' unalterable imperium and her own writerly control. From these follow other principles in a crystalline display. From the beginning, Komnene revises the model of a linear narrative to which the *Hyle* loosely conforms.⁴ She does not pick up where the *Hyle* ends but (as in her Prologue) starts with an idea: an idea of her father's essential identity, a twinned identity calling for the objectivity of history and the powerful feelings of drama.

² Seen in many forms, from Bryennios' formulaic narrative swing between East and West to the division Neville has described between his heroic Romans and his duplicitous non-Roman others.

³ Howard-Johnston 1996: 278–82, 290.

⁴ The *Hyle* is not mechanically linear. But it does not consistently depart from the linear model or shape its material with more purpose than to keep the reader up to date with events.

The Emperor Alexios, my father . . .⁵

That double focus is her unfaltering theme for fifteen books. Alexios was neither emperor nor father in the *Hyle*, and into this new frame she packs his past: itself a double past, as it contains an act of violence and a record of imperial loyalty.

The Emperor Alexios, my father, even before he seized the throne had been of great service to the Roman Empire.

Her point is that the more remote past illuminates the nearer one: everything must be understood by what has gone before; Alexios' seizing power was an act of rescue in a continuum of service. As she retells his earlier history, to show how that was so, she moves directly back to the fatal expedition of Diogenes:

although he was only fourteen years old, he wanted to serve on campaign under Diogenes.

Thus she evokes at once Byzantium's great disaster, the defeat at Manzikert, that has left the empire in lasting disarray and made Alexios' reign as necessary as it is hard. From its opening, the history shows it will move forward with events, while reaching back for their origins and causes, bringing those into the structure of a current crisis or illumination. The method is Thucydidean, although the effects are different in her historiographic tradition with its layering of textual and historical comparisons.

The same compressed beginning shows how the dual relationship with time foreshadowed in the Preface is going to work.

Despite the youth's warlike fervour the emperor did not let him go on this campaign, because his mother . . . was mourning the recent death of her eldest son Manuel . . . she feared that he too might die before his time on some unknown battle-field. So he was left behind . . . against his will.

Having framed the event as past, she revives the emotions of an earlier time when its outcomes were not known.⁶ There is a pulse of uncertainty in the mother's anxiety (will her son live to fulfil his destiny?) and the son's

⁵ Ὁ βασιλεὺς Ἀλέξιος καὶ ἐμὸς πατήρ: *Alexiad* 1.1.1 (R-K II, S 31, F 9). The yoking of the two goes far beyond Psellos' claims of importance to and intimacy with imperial patrons, or Bryennios' disclaimer – when he praises his grandfather – 'Let no one think me περιαιτολογούντα': *Hyle* 4.15 (Gautier 281). I am specifically not engaging with the many discussions of περιαιτολογούντα as I wish to draw attention to structural principles in the *Alexiad* that supersede these. In his account of the traditions of disavowal of this boasting topos, Hinterberger 1999: 137–43 highlights Komnene's claim to be entirely focussed on illuminating her father's memory in a way that makes the accusation irrelevant. Papaioannou 2013: 166–74, 235–7 investigates the topic of self-representation at depth and in new ways. (The following three quotations are from the same opening passage.)

⁶ See her quotation from Sophocles in the opening passage of the Prologue: *Alexiad* Pr.1.1 (R-K 5, S 17, F 3).

impatience (will he get to fight the foe?)⁷ Already her style shows the vitality of drama as well as the organizing intelligence of history.

Her one criticism of the *Hyle* in the Preface was that Bryennios began his history 'with Diogenes, the Emperor of the Romans . . . [when] my father was only a youth; he had done nothing worthy of note'.⁸ Her manoeuvre sets this right, reviewing the same period not for signs of precocity but to sketch Alexios' formation and the calamitous background to his rule. Impetuous but under governance, he is seen growing up between the value-laden demands of family and empire: these, of course, were the desiderata for an emperor in Psellos' *Chronographia*.⁹ The young Alexios is placed straining at the leash within the framework of his future imperium and then, in two and a half driving pages, Komnene arrives where Bryennios began his second book.

The rest of her Book One charts Alexios' 'great service to the Roman Empire' through four campaigns, all told in the light of his achieved imperial character. The first three rework episodes from the *Hyle* about individual rebels inside the empire, each a potential rival for the throne. The fourth, during which Alexios becomes emperor, is a new departure into international conflict. Reinsch has pointed out how Komnene tightens the three episodes from the *Hyle* as she 'leads [Alexios] over three steps, namely the military challenges that bring him to the threshold of imperial power'.¹⁰ Each is also shaped and honed to contribute some preliminary insights into Komnene's ideal emperor. Throughout the *Alexiad*, she seeks out literary and cultural models to illuminate the ideal within the circumstantial, these changing as Alexios moves from one set of events into another. Book One shows how the

⁷ 'He wanted to serve on campaign . . . he made it clear that one day he would come to grips with them, and when that happened his sword would have its fill of blood': *Alexiad* 1.1.1 (R-K 11, S 31, F 9).

⁸ *Alexiad* Pr.3.3 (R-K 8, S 19, F 5). Neville 2012: 185 suggests that she omits the tales of early prowess in the *Hyle* because 'the sequence does not reflect well on Alexios'. If so, Komnene's reference is diplomatic but firm: 'nothing worthy of note', and nothing to blame either, since he was too young to be held up for judgement.

⁹ Psellos spells out the need for a 'soldier-emperor' during Isaac Komnenos' rebellion. His attitude to the need for an iconic imperial family most often shows in inverse forms, where the family is dysfunctional or parodies the ideal: as in the eunuch John's attachment to his family under Romanos and Zoe, two members of which he manages to promote successively to the throne; or the picture of Constantine IX flanked by his empress and his successive 'Augusta'-mistresses; or in the ambivalent role played by Isaac Komnenos' family around his seeming deathbed. The ideal of the imperial family is given a more positive form, however, in the speech made by Zoe to her illustrious and loving forebears as she is sent into exile, and in the popular rebellion on her behalf, when the women of the city call out for her restoration. "'Where can she be . . . she who alone is noble of heart and . . . beautiful . . . the mistress of all the imperial family, the rightful heir to the Empire?": Psellos, *Chron. Michael V*, 5.26 (Renauld 1.102, Sewter 138). In the *Alexiad* Book Three, this dual requirement for a soldier and iconic imperial presence is institutionalized when son and mother rule together. She sets the administration in order, while he takes risks on the empire's borders. Later still, it is internalized as a tension within Alexios himself.

¹⁰ Reinsch 1996: 116.

approach will work. It intimates a parallel between her strategies as historian and Alexios' as ruler. The reign she charts will be their joint creation.

The first campaign deals with Roussel's prolonged rebellion under Michael Doukas, emperor since his stepfather Romanos Diogenes was deposed. The rebellion had already lasted a year or two when Alexios was sent against him in about 1074. In both the *Hyle* and the *Alexiad* the story displays Alexios as a brilliant general, diplomat and orator as well as an unusually inventive and humane man with personal charisma. Bryennios romanticizes rebellion in a context of military adventure while incidentally constructing some flamboyant characters; he follows Roussel enthusiastically for his own sake. As Reinsch pointed out, Komnene uses only part of his material.¹¹ She treats Roussel as stimulus and paradigm, using his rise to power to identify particular weaknesses in the empire and set a standard for the energetic and adventurous young leader who might rule the empire better. (Those functions are only half-seen in the *Hyle* among several narratives loosely strung together, linked by tropes about the folly of emperors.) She introduces Roussel in terms that name potential sources of trouble – a Frank, a former military ally, an ambitious local leader in the East – while framing his campaign to work Alexios into the imperial system as the active principle of an otherwise sluggish body politic. The Frank is made a lodestone for Alexios, to draw out his early powers and show how they are relevant to rule. Roussel is a 'formidable rebel',¹² opportunist,¹³ rapid and decisive,¹⁴ like a force of nature.¹⁵ An able diplomat, he proves a talented actor. Finally, he is a 'noble and . . . true hero'.¹⁶ Alexios supersedes Roussel on every point.

True to heroic traditions, he not only surpasses his opponents but appropriates some of their virtù. Roussel is quick; Alexios is quicker, his youthful impatience maturing into a rapidity of mind and action that is urgently required. He too can seize the moment; indeed, it seizes him.

It was at this crucial moment . . . when the barbarian was everywhere on the move . . . that the admirable Alexios was promoted to supreme command . . . within a few days the affairs of the East were settled.¹⁷

The full force of Alexios' superiority is spelt out later: if Roussel fell on his enemies 'like a whirlwind', καθάπερ πρηστήρ,¹⁸ Alexios in Book Three

¹¹ Ibid. ¹² *Alexiad* 1.1.2 (R-K II, S 32, F 10).

¹³ 'Roman prestige had fallen': *Alexiad* 1.1.2 (R-K 12, S 32, F 10).

¹⁴ κερσυνού: *Alexiad* 1.1.3 (R-K 12, S 32, F 10).

¹⁵ '[F]lood in full spate': *Alexiad* 1.1.3 (R-K 12, S 33, F 10). ¹⁶ *Alexiad* 1.3.4 (R-K 17, S 37, F 14).

¹⁷ *Alexiad* 1.1.3 (R-K 12, S 32–3, F 10). ¹⁸ *Alexiad* 1.1.2 (R-K 12, S 32, F 10).

becomes a πρῆστῆρ enthroned,¹⁹ carrying the idea into a biblical region to invoke the psalmist's God.²⁰ Meanwhile, the spare brisk narrative not only demonstrates Alexios' speed and resolution, the history speeding up mimetically, but the first rebellion defines the *Alexiad's* default mode as a mode of crisis.

Roussel succeeds in making an alliance with the Turks. This is no mere piece of storyline but represents a basic and recurring problem for the empire. It is the emperor's task to sow division among his neighbours and Alexios does that with great skill throughout his reign (although less successfully with westerners). Following the *Hyle* closely, Komnene shows in hair-fine changes her consistency in touching into life some of the qualities and skills Alexios is to bring to ruling: for they go beyond 'military challenges'. In both texts, he outdoes Roussel in diplomacy and simulation but, where Bryennios says that he was eager to out-general the barbarian,²¹ she says he is stronger in εὐμηχανία (resourcefulness, ingenuity, touch),²² a more comprehensive superiority. In the *Hyle* Roussel makes overtures to the sultan and Alexios makes counter-overtures, persuading the sultan through intermediaries to hand Roussel over to himself for a price. Komnene has Alexios use the same arguments to the same effect but she removes some of the intermediaries and makes his tone more intimate: he talks about "your sultan" and "my emperor", where Bryennios used indirect speech and the stiffer third person. She adds warmth and presence to his sketch. Her Alexios enters sympathetically into Persia's own territorial ambitions as if he were a disinterested adviser, saying that Roussel is taking "all that she herself might win"²³ and showing something of the charm of manner that Bryennios referred to,²⁴ the instinctive empathy that makes him so effective in manipulating. At the same time, Komnene makes him more introspective than Bryennios' character, more steeped in forethought (*pronoia*). She locates Roussel's plans within Alexios' imaginative reconstructions, just as she places the *Hyle's* vivid picture of Roussel's capture ahead of time in Alexios' prescriptive message to the sultan. Already she is taking the action into a locus that exists in only rudimentary form in the *Hyle* but is dominant in the *Alexiad*: Alexios' mind. This reflective, planning mind is the counterpart

¹⁹ *Alexiad* 3.3.2 (R-K 93, S 109, F 85).

²⁰ As in Ps. 58:9: 'he shall take them away as with a whirlwind, both living and in his wrath'; or Job 38 and 40: 'Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind' (King James Version). The prophets also use the metaphor.

²¹ καταστρατηγεῖν τὸν βάρβαρον ἔσπευδε: *Hyle* 2.20 (Gautier 185).

²² *Alexiad* 1.2.1 (R-K 13, S 33, F 11). ²³ *Alexiad* 1.2.2 (R-K 13, S 33, F 11). ²⁴ *Hyle* 2.21 (Gautier 187).

to his lightning reflex and ability to seize the moment. Both together meet her underlying condition for good rule.

By internalizing the action like this, she suggests how the empire's causes weigh on Alexios and occupy his spirit. The *Hyle*-Alexios, who had gaily and without forethought promised money that he did not have, is ἐν ἀμηνανίᾳ (at a loss) when he has to pay.²⁵ Komnene, with Bryennios' text before her,²⁶ refers that term to the crisis in the empire²⁷ while forestalling its application to her father by several times insisting on his strength in its antithesis, μηχανία (resource, invention).²⁸ She gives a context to the difficulty:

But then the money was delayed; for he himself did not have the resources from which he might supply it, and the emperor did not care about it.²⁹

She has him spend the first of many nights sleepless with anxiety for the empire, an important motif that links him with his two greatest exemplars³⁰ and brings the narrative closer to his nerve-endings. Bryennios has Alexios far away from the emperor³¹ but Komnene has the emperor far away from Alexios,³² a minuscule change that centres her narrative where Alexios is. These minute changes are to have a long development. They are the first steps towards symbolically internalizing the empire itself within Alexios so that, when he dies, the empire dies as well.

When he calls the Amaseians together, she adds the detail that he fixes his eyes on them, especially the rich – the sign of a good orator as a Roman leader has to be, and one that anticipates his role as an emperor who sees everything and is seen by all. He shows a statesman's respect towards the assembly as he explains the larger situation of the empire:

²⁵ *Hyle* 2.22 (Gautier 189).

²⁶ The verbal parallels here and elsewhere make it impossible that it should be otherwise.

²⁷ ἐπεὶ δὲ ἐν ἀμηνανίᾳ ἦν τὰ πράγματα τηρικαῦτα Ῥωμαίοις: *Alexiad* 1.1.3 (R-K 12, S 32, F 10).

²⁸ He is stronger in εὐμηχανίᾳ and wins the emir over by all methods and devices (μηχανήμασι), for he more than anyone was able to contrive means (ἐνμηχανώμενος) in the most difficult situations: *Alexiad* 1.2.1–2 (R-K 13, S 33, F 11).

²⁹ *Alexiad* 1.2.4 (R-K 14) (my translation).

³⁰ Namely, Constantine the Great and Basil I. In the case of Constantine: 'Thus he took unsleeping care for the general welfare': *VC* 2.14 (Winkelman 54, Cameron and Hall 100); writing to the disputing churches, 'Give me back therefore peaceful days and undisturbed nights': *VC* 2.72.1 (Winkelman 78, Cameron and Hall 119); 'to enlarge his understanding . . . he would spend the hours of the night awake . . . [for] he thought that he ought to rule his subjects with instructive argument': *VC* 4.29 (Winkelman 130–1, Cameron and Hall 163–4). Of Basil I: 'the emperor was greatly distressed, lay sleepless thinking of these matters, and sought some suitable means by which to rout the enemy altogether': *VB* 55.199; 'Whenever filled with anxiety he would retire for the night and toss about some matter of state in his thoughts, he would frequently see the outcome in a dream': *VB* 72.251.

³¹ *Hyle* 2.22 (Gautier 189). ³² *Alexiad* 1.2.5 (R-K 15, S 35, F 12).

'We are quite incapable of paying the money, being on foreign soil and having already exhausted our capital on a long war against the barbarians.'³³

This Thucydidean mix of eloquence and candour (backed here by a personal guarantee)³⁴ marks all the crises of his reign.

Komnene meanwhile uses his predicament to indicate the difficulties he will later face. Bryennios' crowd breaks out in loud hubbub, the majority saying Roussel has never done them any harm, the rest being confused.³⁵ Her crowd is much more dangerous: she has them execrate Alexios or hiss him off the stage and goes so far as to see them as moving towards *apostasis* or rebellion.³⁶ For her the pro-Roussel group is the confused one, 'the dregs of the people'³⁷ who have been worked on by an element that she has introduced, the agitators and troublemakers (κακουργότατοι).³⁸ For Bryennios the people tend to act as a spontaneous unit. To Komnene, they are constitutionally volatile, mixed and given to disorder. She uses the episode to foreshadow a reign-long history of conspiracies and rebellions in which large numbers are corrupted by a few. Bryennios' sympathies are more readily given to the people and by extension to their rebel-leaders. Komnene's point of view is more strictly centred and her world more adverse. For Bryennios, the problem lies with emperors. For her, there is no real emperor but one and the problems do not lie with him.

Through all these tiny modifications she begins to construct a complex character, as well as an intrinsically imperial one, and a view about the difficulty of ruling. Anyone else, says Bryennios, would have been dismayed to see the people so deranged and the city in uproar. 'But this noble young man . . . not afraid of anything . . . makes a sign with his hand . . .'³⁹ Komnene's noble young man, by contrast, knows both fear and courage:

Alexios realized that his own position was extremely precarious. Nevertheless, he did not lose heart and bracing himself made a sign with his hand.⁴⁰

³³ *Alexiad* 1.2.5 (R-K 15, S 34–5, F 12).

³⁴ δι' ἡμῶν: *Alexiad* 1.2.5 (R-K 15, 'on my promise' S 35, F 12). ³⁵ ἀσήμως: *Hyle* 2.23 (Gautier 191).

³⁶ *Alexiad* 1.2.6 (R-K 15, S 35, F 12).

³⁷ τὸ συρφετῶδες πλῆθος: *Alexiad* 1.2.6 (R-K 15, S 35, F 12–13).

³⁸ *Alexiad* 1.2.6 (R-K 15, S 35, F 12).

³⁹ Or 'not at all afraid'. Gautier's text is unsatisfactory – φημι, ἡδὲ μὲν τι δείσας (*sic*): *Hyle* 2.23 (Gautier 191 l.13). The TLG (Gautier) version has φημι, ἡδὲ μὲν τι δείσας. This may still have a negative meaning, as an implied protestation, though it does seem somewhat awkward. Gautier takes it as a negative in his translation, which matches Meineke's φημι, μὴδὲν τι δείσας (Meineke 89). The context strongly suggests that Gautier's understanding is correct.

⁴⁰ *Alexiad* 1.2.6 (R-K 15, S 35, F 13).

There is tension in her figure. When the crowd leaves, Komnene feeds her anxiety for him into his own thinking:⁴¹

as unaccountably as the way a potsherd falls this or that side up, they changed their minds . . . Alexios was aware how on the slightest pretext the common folk will reverse a decision . . . and he was afraid that agitators would harangue them during the night.⁴²

Her working style creates a kind of symbiosis with her subject, investing in him the propensities and powers of her own mind as part of his internal drama and extending to him what he may need to show *pronoia*. It is a standard practice in history-writing but she raises it to art.

She is editing what she takes but also deepening and furthering. The mainspring of Bryennios' story was surprise:

What was this plan? He has the executioner summoned; a fire is lit; the iron is made red-hot; Roussel is thrown to the ground; he is ordered to cry out and to groan in lamentation as if he were being deprived of his eyes. And he obeys and began [*sic*] filling the house with cries and groans. Then a soothing ointment is put on this man's eyes and a covering on the ointment; and at dawn he is led out to the people and is seen by all as if blind. This act wholly silenced the uproar.⁴³

That is oracular demonstration of great force, but not without problems of context. The pseudo-blinding takes place behind closed doors, so that its intense realism is, for the purposes of crowd control, half-wasted. Then, in the interests of a good story, Bryennios forgets about the money.

Komnene's point of view is both that of the enthralled audience and the insider's, kindling to Alexios' idea. As she tells it, the show is aimed at a baser human level than Bryennios' – at a crowd whose changeability and craving for violence need direction:

He pretended to blind Roussel. The man was laid flat on the ground, the executioner brought the branding iron near to his face, and Roussel howled and groaned; he was like a roaring lion. To all appearances he was being

⁴¹ Having dropped the pithy maxim from his speech to them (*Hyle* 2.22, Gautier 189) as too comradely perhaps, she inserts a cynical one of her own, the potsherd (*Alexiad* 1.3.1, R-K 16, S 36, F 13), so that what has seemed her own aristocratic scepticism towards a semi-foreign crowd is now woven into Alexios' thought.

⁴² *Alexiad* 1.3.1 (R-K 16, S 36, F 13). F has a 'crowd', which is more likeable, but the Greek has τὸν δῆμον. The threat of situations outside Alexios' control is strongly associated in the *Alexiad* with events that happen in the night, when the emperor's 'eye' is not on them. So important is this role of watcher that the Empress Eirene assumes it on campaign while Alexios sleeps, doing for him what he does for the empire: *Alexiad* 12.3.6 (R-K 366, S 376, F 339).

⁴³ *Hyle* 2.24 (Gautier 193).

blinded. But in fact the apparent victim had been ordered to shout and bawl; the executioner who seemed to be gouging out his eyes was told to glare horribly at the prostrate Roussel and act like a raving madman – in other words, to simulate the punishment. So he was blinded, but not in reality, and the people clapped their hands and noisily spread the news all over the town that Roussel had lost his eyes.

This bit of play-acting persuaded the whole mob, inhabitants of the town as well as those from outside, to give money to the fund. They were busy as bees.⁴⁴

Her account is multilayered, theatre from behind the scenes as well as from the front. She animates the executioner, thickens the texture of the action, removes the house that hides the action and remembers its object, to persuade the Amaseians to pay the money. Bryennios' crowd was silent, even shocked; hers applauds noisily and is stimulated into action. In a grotesque way, she incorporates the crowd into an image of the social contract.

Roussel howling 'like a roaring lion' is comic ('Well roared, lion'), a tribute to his wild energy and a sign that he represents the first of Alexios' Heraklean labours.⁴⁵ But the main theme of the pseudo-blinding in both texts is Alexios' humane spirit, essential to Komnene's view of him as fit to rule. Hers keeps his captive lion conspicuously with him,⁴⁶ like the captive sultana in Book Eleven,⁴⁷ a spectacle of imperial power deployed to prevent bloodshed.⁴⁸

Her changes to the denouement realign the action further. Bryennios' version was romantic but comparatively wasteful.⁴⁹ It included some displaced gestures: Alexios leading his cousin Dokeianos by the hand, and

⁴⁴ *Alexiad* 1.3.1–2 (R-K 16, S 36, F 13–14).

⁴⁵ Though its naming is deferred until a little later in the episode. Later, Alexios takes on Roussel's *anima* and goes forth 'like a terrible lion . . . to do battle with this long-tusked boar, Basilakios': *Alexiad* 1.7.3 (R-K 28, S 47, F 24). The Heraklean myth is reinforced there: 'Such was the third "labour" borne by Alexios before he became emperor, like a second Herakles': *Alexiad* 1.9.6 (R-K 34, S 52, F 29).

⁴⁶ *Alexiad* 1.3.1–2 (R-K 16, S 36, F 14). ⁴⁷ *Alexiad* 11.5.2 (R-K 336, S 346, F 309–10).

⁴⁸ Howard-Johnston 1996: 285 finds fault with Komnene's brief passage over the follow-up campaign, where Bryennios returns to the ambushes and cutting of supplies that he had described before Roussel was taken. In fact, it is a good example of her shaping and economy: she saves this very Alexian style of low-cost guerrilla fighting for its prominent place in Book Three, where, as the new emperor, he has to drive the Turks out of the Propontis without funds or trained men. In Book One, she keeps her focus on the making of a hero. She also excises Bryennios' claim (*Hyle* 2.24, Gautier 193) that Alexios defied the emperor's command to return at once with Roussel. She reserves Alexios' one act of defiance for Book Two.

⁴⁹ He had Dokeianos embrace Alexios at their meeting and Roussel embrace Dokeianos and Dokeianos embrace Alexios again and again. He also included a ritual dismounting, dusting down and feasting. Komnene has no interest in feasts or the social rituals that identify romance and no need of romance forms here.

Dokeianos kissing Alexios' eyes. Komnene corrects the displacements, having 'blind' Roussel led and referring the part of Dokeianos' gesture that concerns eyes to the appropriate person:

It was here that [Alexios] afterwards performed a feat worthy of the famous Herakles when he rescued Alkestis, the wife of Admetos. Dokeianos, nephew of the former emperor Isaac Komnenos and cousin of Alexios, himself a man of distinction not only because of his lineage but also on account of his own worth, saw Roussel wearing the bandages, apparently blinded, and being led by the hand. He sighed deeply, shed tears and accused my father of cruelty. He even went so far as to rebuke him personally for having deprived a man so noble and a true hero of his sight . . . For the moment Alexios merely remarked, 'My dear fellow, you will soon hear the reasons for his blinding.' But not long afterwards he took him to a little room and there uncovered Roussel's head and disclosed his eyes, fiercely blazing. Dokeianos was astonished at the sight; the miracle filled him with wonder and amazement. Again and again he put his hands on Roussel's eyes, to convince himself that it was not a dream or a magic trick . . . When he did learn of his cousin's humane treatment . . . and . . . his artifice, he was overcome with joy. He embraced and kissed Alexios repeatedly and his wonder turned to happiness. The members of the Court and the emperor were similarly affected: so was everybody else.⁵⁰

She enlarges the action as she tightens it, ennobling the lineage of the characters, mythologizing the event – as one most like Herakles' special feat, the raising of the dead – while extending it into the public domain. Bryennios sees it as purely a private revelation in a little room between two cousins but, in Komnene's version, it is relayed to others: her father's reputation concerns the world. Picking up ideas latent in the *Hyle*, she makes the episode an epiphany of what Alexios' reign will mean: kindness plus invention, μετὰ τῆς φιλανθρωπίας τὴν τέχνην,⁵¹ *suitably made known*. Her history is in that sense an extension of his reign.

For her, even more than for Bryennios, the crime with which Alexios was charged is savagery. Her great preoccupation over all the political blindings is whether Alexios knew about or condoned them, while her later defence of his coup is that he and his brother would otherwise have been blinded themselves.⁵² Though the myth that predominates in Book One is the heroic, she is already grafting it on to another, a myth of civilized values,

⁵⁰ *Alexiad* 1.3.3–4 (R-K 17, S 37, F 14–15). F is closer at some points but S follows the Greek cadences where they matter.

⁵¹ *Alexiad* 1.3.4 (R-K 17, S 37, F 15). It is difficult to translate. S has 'with his humanity his artifice' and F keeps the second term, but in this context I should prefer something like 'invention', 'skill' or even 'art'.

⁵² *Alexiad* 2.4.1–2 (R-K 62, S 79, F 56).

and that, in turn, on to the Christian myth. She takes her matter from Bryennios but the world-view is subtly different.⁵³ In his very Roman story he has Dokeianos cry out that ‘the young man’s spirit was worthy of his ancestors’.⁵⁴ Perhaps in part because her social picture is darker, she gives a more metaphysical cast to the denouement. She models her version on a Gospel miracle, where Christ holds attention through mysterious gestures when restoring sight.⁵⁵ One of her changes is to have Alexios himself remove the bandage and show what is behind, directly experienced as Alexios’ gift: ‘his eyes, fiercely blazing’. She invests a great deal of significance in the human gaze⁵⁶ and, while never pretending that Alexios is Christ, she is consistent from the start in working his personal resemblance to the Saviour whose vicar he will be.

All these changes are meticulous, imaginative and directed towards a larger end. While none misrepresents the earlier text, they show a formidable discipline and power to shape, qualities she goes on to apply to the ὕλη (*hyle*) or raw material of fact.

The second rebellion in the *Hyle* reads as something of a struggle for Bryennios to write since the hero-rebel was his own admired ancestor and namesake: somewhat yearningly he says, ‘if the narrative were not looking towards another mark, but were willing to recount this man’s deeds in order, it would need another *Iliad*’.⁵⁷ Macrides suggests that ‘Anna Komnene perhaps took her cue from Bryennios by writing another *Iliad* for her father’⁵⁸ and, in so far as the *Alexiad* is another *Iliad*, this seems highly likely. Komnene’s version of the episode, however, marks the limitations of the heroic as well as its glory, while the work as a whole treats even Homer as one honoured resource in a cultural richness that cannot be confined to any single tradition or genre.

In his unwritten *Iliad* for his grandfather, Bryennios came closest to a theme, the lost possibility that a perfect hero might attain the throne. Komnene’s theme being that a perfect hero did, she treats with tact and respect those passages in the *Hyle* which dealt with the first Bryennios,⁵⁹ and

⁵³ Strongly different in Neville’s reading. ⁵⁴ *Hyle* 2.25 (Gautier 197).

⁵⁵ E.g. Mark 8: 23–6: ‘He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village; then he spat into his eyes, and laid his hands on him, and asked him if he could see anything? He looked up and said, I can see men as if they were trees, but walking. Once more Jesus laid his hands upon his eyes, and he began to see right’ (Knox translation).

⁵⁶ Indeed, in Alexios himself, it is the point of likeness to the Godhead whom it is his task to represent.

⁵⁷ *Hyle* 4.15 (Gautier 281). ⁵⁸ Macrides 2000: 70.

⁵⁹ She also borrows and adapts several motifs from Bryennios’ history of his grandfather in her story of Alexios’ coup. She barely mentions John Bryennios, who formed the original conspiracy with Basilakios in the *Hyle* and figures powerfully in the fighting, but his ungrudging support for his brother is paralleled in her Komnenoi brothers of Book Two. Later in the *Hyle*, John Bryennios’ and

pays her husband the tribute of using some key features of his hero for her own, while something of Bryennios' sorrow at the waste of greatness seems to infiltrate this part of her narrative; she even picks up his latent argument that there was a vacuum at the top. She assimilates the whole, however, to her larger awareness of the ruinous condition of the empire before her father saved it:

Later Alexios was sent back to the West by the Emperor Nikephoros . . . to deal with Nikephoros Bryennios. The latter was throwing the whole of the West into confusion . . . Bryennios was a mighty warrior . . . an outstanding candidate for the imperial throne in that generation . . . It was my father, therefore . . . whom they decided to pit against Bryennios.⁶⁰

Her Bryennios is not so much a ruler manqué as the fulfilment of a heroic dream: he sets a standard that Alexios must both meet and outgrow.

Bryennios emphasized his grandfather's reluctance to rebel:

The man was deep in thought, not knowing what to do; for to proceed as far as rebellion he thought a momentous thing and a cause of great harms, but to surrender himself to evident danger, scorning all considerations, was not, he judged, the act of a good and intelligent and high-minded man. He went on wrestling with these arguments for a long time, even though he was much roused by the letters of his brother.⁶¹

That representation of interior struggle is unusual in the *Hyle*. It is used to exculpate Bryennios from the charge of personal ambition but in effect it excludes him from real leadership. He stalls his brother but fails to stop his soldiers laying siege to Traianoupolis:

and when the news was reported to Bryennios, he thought it a strange anomaly that, while he himself was still hesitating and drawing back from seizing power, the soldiers should be giving proof of actual rebellion.⁶²

Finally, his son with two companions seizes the town in a kind of vain-glorious prank.⁶³ He never actually decides. In contrast, while Komnene

Basilakios' purpose is fuelled by discovering that Michael has sent a man to spy on Nikephoros Bryennios in Dyrrakhion (*Hyle* 3.4, Gautier 215–17) and the logothete has sent a Varangian to kill John Bryennios (*Hyle* 3.5, Gautier 217–19). In the *Alexiad*, the Komnenoi learn on at least four occasions of plots and charges against them before they rebel and the last precipitates their coup: *Alexiad* 2.1.3–6, 2.2.4, 2.4.2, 2.4.3–4 (R-K 56–7, 59, 62, 62–3, S 74–5, 77, 79, 80, F 51–2, 54, 56, 57). These figures are common enough but, true to her principles of economy and selection, when Komnene uses them for Alexios, she drops them from their first context.

⁶⁰ *Alexiad* 1.4.1–4 (R-K 18–9, S 37–8, F 15–16).

⁶¹ *Hyle* 3.5 (Gautier 219). See also his earlier reaction to discovering the spy: *Hyle* 3.4 (Gautier 217).

⁶² *Hyle* 3.9 (Gautier 229).

⁶³ *Hyle* 3.9 (Gautier 229–31). The youths refuse all support, telling the troops to stay outside and join the acclamation, from below.

consistently inscribes Alexios with interior struggle, and with this particular struggle in Book Two, she does hold him responsible for his actions, as he does himself. Fate may hurry him along but he still chooses, to act and to face public censure and do penance for the actions of his men. Those are the choices that confirm him as a leader.

Bryennios avoids comparing the two heroes. He does not bring his ancestor into direct contact with Alexios until it is all over. Komnene matches them from the beginning.

Now that the history has brought these men, Bryennios and my father Alexios Komnenos, both heroic men, to the point of battle, it is worthwhile to arrange them in their opposing battle lines . . . Bryennios . . . moved to the attack with the following formation . . . his brother John was in command of the right, where there were 5,000 men in all . . . On . . . the left, Tarkhaneiotēs Katakalon was in command of Macedonians and Thracians, well armed and numbering altogether 3,000. Bryennios personally commanded the centre of the line, where Macedonians and Thracians were posted with the elite of all the nobles. All the Thessalians were mounted on horseback; with their breastplates of iron and the helmets on their heads, they flashed like lightning. Their horses alert with pricked-up ears, their shields clashing one on another, the brilliant gleam of their armour and their helmets struck terror into the enemy. Bryennios, circling round in their midst like some Ares or a Giant standing out head and shoulders above all others, taller by a cubit, was in truth an object of wonder and dread to those who saw him. Apart from the main body . . . were some Scythian allies equipped with barbaric weapons . . . My father Alexios Komnenos, on the other hand, first inspected the lie of the land, then stationed one part of his army in some ravines with the rest facing Bryennios' line. When both the contingents, concealed and visible, had been duly arranged, Alexios addressed his soldiers, individually inciting them to deeds of bravery . . . He kept for himself the so-called Immortals and some of the Keltoi . . . Katakalon . . . was to be responsible for the general surveillance of the Scythians and the repulse of their forays.⁶⁴

As Reinsch points out,⁶⁵ it is Komnene who mythologizes the already heroized Bryennios by likening him to Ares; this tribute, of course, increases the appeal of Alexios as a David to a Goliath. She is also showing that there is more to Alexios than meets the eye. She sets the rebel leader and his large, well-equipped army, its energies vibrant but held in, in open sunlight, so that every movement is magnified and signals power. Bryennios makes a show of his strength. Alexios' strength lies in concealment: his smaller force

⁶⁴ *Alexiad* 1.5.1–3 (R-K 20–1, S 39–41, F 17–18). ⁶⁵ Reinsch 1996: 118–19.

is partly hidden, and the narrative attention is given to his personal encouragement and instruction of his soldiers, man by man. She underlines his mental powers by drawing a verbal parallel between her role as historian and his as strategist in charge, using ἵστημι twice for her own narrative intervention and three times for his tactical arrangements, but not at all in referring to Bryennios.⁶⁶ At the same time she pauses on the *mise en scène* to give it a suggestion of metaphor: the hero in the sun ultimately dazzled and the man whose glory is effaced by his attention to the immediate task.

Bryennios has Alexios conceal his troops to hide from *them* the magnitude of the rebel army.⁶⁷ Komnene restores the trust between him and his men by having him do it to conceal from the enemy their own small numbers.⁶⁸ Bryennios has Alexios engage against the emperor's orders as well as common sense,⁶⁹ when his army flees and he wants to fight his way into the rebel lines with six companions, the veteran Theodotos calls the idea 'dangerous and silly'.⁷⁰ Komnene excises all disobedience⁷¹ to the emperor until Book Two and makes Theodotos more respectful.⁷² In her version, taking Theodotos' advice, Alexios himself decides to 'retire a little way . . . collect some men . . . reorganize them and again plunge into the fray': he keeps his dignity and stays in control. By these small adjustments she increases Alexios' self-discipline and generalship, while taking the action further into his mind.

Bryennios tells how his ancestor's Scythian allies created disorder in his rear and Alexios, 'caught up inside the army of Bryennios', captured a horse

⁶⁶ Komnene begins with a governing idea, ὁ λόγος κατεστήσατο, which places the source of order and of the comparison in the narrative itself. Then she sets herself to examine (ἀποσκοπήσαι) the fortunes of war, καταστησαμένους τούτους εἰς φάλαγγας καὶ ἀντιπαρατάξεις, where the arranging mind of the speaker mediates the arrangements of the troops. Bryennios' troops are detailed in a series of terms related to τάσσω (εὐταξίαν τῆς παρατάξεως, ξυνταξάμενος, τάξας, συντεταγμένον, τάγματος, διετάξατο). There is no use of ἵστημι. Alexios' movements are three times described using ἵστημι: κατέστησεν the troops in the ravines, ἔστησε the rest against Bryennios, and κατέστησε Katakalon in charge of the Turks. He has also παραταξάμενος his two divisions and there is a greater range of command words in his section. In other words, Bryennios is characterized in terms of tactics and more specifically military arrangements, whereas Alexios' dispositions are conceived in a more general and plastic way which is linguistically associated with the ordering capacity of the narrative itself. All these usages are found in the passage previously quoted.

⁶⁷ *Hyle* 4.7 (Gautier 271). ⁶⁸ *Alexiad* 1.4.5 (R-K 19, S 39, F 16). ⁶⁹ *Hyle* 4.7 (Gautier 271).

⁷⁰ πρὸς τῷ παραβόλῳ καὶ εὐήθεις: *Hyle* 4.8 (Gautier 273).

⁷¹ There are three such instances in the *Hyle*, the others being over Roussel (*Hyle* 2.24, Gautier 193) and a second time here (*Hyle* 4.8, Gautier 273).

⁷² As 'a common soldier . . . who had served my father from boyhood': *Alexiad* 1.5.5 (R-K 22, S 41, F 19). Her Theodotos says merely that Alexios' plan is 'a thoroughly dangerous undertaking' (my translation). S and F, 'the enterprise was foolhardy', seems both too much and too little for ὡς ἀντικρὺς παραβόλου τοῦ ἐγχειρήματος ὄντος: *Alexiad* 1.5.5 (R-K 22, S 41, F 19). The following quotation follows immediately.

imperially dressed, 'adorned with its purple trappings and the golden cheek-pieces', and sent it back inside his own lines 'beside a herald crying loudly that Bryennios was dead'.⁷³ The story is packed into one very long sentence⁷⁴ in a sequence so rapid that causality and interpretation give way before the powerful impression of chaos in battle.⁷⁵ Komnene knows a spectacular story when she sees it but she also knows how to make it resonate beyond its own boundaries. She punctuates the story as several sentence-phases during which Alexios sees and then acts: the pauses are so brief that they can still signal his quickness of reflex but they do allow an instant's thought, as he plucks an opportunity out of confusion and turns it into a reasoned event.⁷⁶ Her changes give the dominant image time to be allusive. A riderless imperial horse driven by Alexios out of Bryennios' camp and back into an imperial army led by himself: what – in a tradition of history-writing so recently dominated by Psellos – could more clearly suggest an empire needing leadership? The vivid story from the *Hyle* turns into a parable.

She adds a curious detail. At the sight of the horse, Alexios' half-scattered army freezes: 'the horses on which they rode were gazing to the front, but the faces of the riders turned backwards . . .'.⁷⁷ One of her key practices is to make a naturalistic image express an idea, here Alexios' capacity to reverse a situation: something 'beyond all belief'. Though it is a simulated marvel, it takes on the momentum of the real by attracting belief. This is a political principle for Alexios, necessary to the theocracy Komnene will show him re-creating.

Victory comes with the awaited Turks and, as Reinsch says,⁷⁸ Komnene modifies Bryennios' version to show Alexios in charge of all they do.⁷⁹ Again, the *Hyle* story is vivid and powerful in its details but difficult to follow: it is

⁷³ *Hyle* 4.9 (Gautier 273).

⁷⁴ This is clear despite the lacunae. In fact, the genitive absolutes and succession of participles pack the sentence even more closely than the translation suggests. There is only one main verb, ἐξέπεμπε, which comes at the end flanked by two subordinate verbs.

⁷⁵ Bryennios' Alexios covers his face without apparent reason and knocks a groom down before the reader knows what the groom is leading, while the rhomphaiai seem to float along unsupported. Komnene gives them running porters, and Alexios has his companions carry them away, but she keeps the action moving fast enough not to weaken its force.

⁷⁶ ταῦτ' οὖν θεασάμενος καλύπτει: *Alexiad* 1.5.7 (R-K 23, S 42, F 19).

⁷⁷ *Alexiad* 1.5.8 (R-K 23, S 42, F 20). ⁷⁸ Reinsch 1996: 119–20.

⁷⁹ 'My father and his men saw them in this state of confusion; they also took into consideration the Turks . . . and decided to split up their combined forces into three groups: two were to stay in ambush . . . the third was ordered to advance against the enemy. Alexios, my father, was responsible for the whole idea . . . The signal was then given . . . My father Alexios, who had devised the plan, followed immediately behind them with as many soldiers collected from his scattered forces as circumstances permitted' (my italics): *Alexiad* 1.6.2–3 (R-K 24, S 43–4, F 21). The accounts are tightly similar, yet Komnene's is systematically changed.

not clear there whether Bryennios is on foot or mounted when the Turk whose hand he has just cut off leaps off his horse and on to Bryennios' back.⁸⁰ There is colour but also vagueness in the picture of the rebel leader, who strikes vainly at the man concealed behind him and yet, 'so long as his arm was not exhausted, he did not stop giving and receiving blows'.⁸¹ Komnene rationalizes the story to give it full power. She keeps Bryennios on his horse when it founders. 'Bryennios reined it in, and like some noble athlete stood ready for combat, challenging two high-born Turks to fight'.⁸² She thus plausibly divides the roles of the wounded and the persistent attacker, as Reinsch says,⁸³ and sets off the heroic miniature by making them 'high-born':

The other Turk leapt down from his horse and panther-like jumped on to Bryennios' mount, fastening himself on its flank, and there he clung desperately, trying to climb on its back. Bryennios like a wild beast kept twisting round and tried to stab him off with his sword, but without success, for the Turk behind him kept swaying to avoid the blows. Eventually his right arm tired of striking at empty air.⁸⁴

It is one of her signature images that stand against the flux of time: the flow her history resists, embraces and mourns. The picture has the clarity and suppleness and deep pathos of a Stubbs painting: all the figures are seen as noble and also as animal, with admiration but at a distance. It is not only the first Bryennios who is seen in this way but the heroic stance itself. Komnene uses the Bryennios story – so important to the writer of the *Hyle* – for an equally important end of her own: as one in which Alexios achieves, and starts to outgrow, the heroic mould Bryennios exactly fills.

The *Hyle* sends Bryennios with some pomp to an absent Alexios,⁸⁵ who is further distanced from the action by an intervening story⁸⁶ and has never encountered Bryennios before:

He was delighted when he saw what kind of general he had brought down, noble in deeds of arms and daring in spirit and firm of character; for he bore an heroic soul and let no one think I am congratulating myself in saying and writing these things, but let him know that all description is overmatched by the right actions of this man and the graciousness and the splendours.⁸⁷

⁸⁰ The *Hyle* does not say – his brother's horse topples and his own has foundered. It is possible to read the whole story either seeing Bryennios mounted or seeing him on foot, as he and his brother and son wheel round fighting off Turks: *Hyle* 4.12 (Gautier 277). Reinsch 1996: 120 takes him to be mounted but Gautier translates ἐχώρουν as 'marchèrent' (*Hyle* 4.13, Gautier 279) and Neville 2012: 128 sees him as 'unhorsed'.

⁸¹ *Hyle* 4.13 (Gautier 279).

⁸² *Alexiad* 1.6.6 (R-K 25, S 45, F 22). But F prefers 'brave' for γενναίους.

⁸³ Reinsch 1996: 120.

⁸⁴ *Alexiad* 1.6.6 (R-K 26, S 45, F 22). ⁸⁵ *Hyle* 4.14 (Gautier 279).

⁸⁶ The flight of Bryennios' brother and son: *Hyle* 4.14 (Gautier 279–81).

⁸⁷ *Hyle* 4.15 (Gautier 281).

Alexios is complimented on his conquest, which he has achieved 'by patience and daring and general-like care, and taking divine providence as his support'.⁸⁸ It is positive enough but the note of passion has vanished. Komnene, contrastingly, takes Bryennios to an Alexios she shows is close at hand, busy supervising things;⁸⁹ then, passing quickly over the prisoner's impressive appearance, she raises a new issue, the humane treatment of prisoners:

no attempt whatever was made to injure his eyes by Alexios . . . he thought capture was punishment enough for an enemy. He treated them with humanity, with acts of kindness.⁹⁰

The *Hyle's* tribute to Alexios was granted on the technicality that Alexios had won. Komnene points the moral of the event towards his future role.

Bryennios gives the episode two endings. The first laments the loss of his ancestor to the throne but takes comfort that Botaneiates restores the man's property and showers him with honours, so that he emerges as an injured hero given reparation. The second is an account of the emperor's insulting behaviour to Alexios,⁹¹ much like that shown to rebels in both the *Hyle* and the *Chronographia*. Thus the Kaisar glorifies his ancestor and leaves Alexios with a reason to rebel.⁹² Komnene bypasses all this⁹³ and adds instead a final episode in which Alexios escorts his prisoner home alone and on the way proposes a rest:

Alexios immediately lay down on some green grass as though it were a couch, but Bryennios kept apart, propping his head against the root of a high-leaved oak. The former fell asleep but heavenly sleep, as sweet poetry would put it, did not visit Bryennios. Lifting his eyes, however, and noticing Alexios' sword hanging from the branches, as he spied no one anywhere present, he recovered from his despondency and became more composed; he would kill my father. And maybe the plan would have come off, had not some divine power from above prevented it, calming the man's savage wrath and compelling him to turn a benevolent eye on the general. I have heard this story many times.⁹⁴

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ 'The latter was standing not far away from the place where Bryennios was taken and was at the time marshalling the barbarian troops in his force as well as his own men, encouraging them to fight': *Alexiad* 1.6.6 (R-K 26, S 45, F 22).

⁹⁰ *Alexiad* 1.6.7 (R-K 26, S 45, F 22–3). ⁹¹ *Hyle* 4.16 (Gautier 283).

⁹² The same reason as he ascribed to John Bryennios and Basilakios (*Hyle* 3.4, Gautier 217) and Psellos ascribed to Phokas and Isaac Komnenos. Psellos, *Chron. Basil II*, 1.10 (Renauld 1.7, Sewter 32–3); *Michael VI*, 7.3 (Renauld 2.84, Sewter 276–7.)

⁹³ She never shows Alexios as vain enough to react to insults. ⁹⁴ *Alexiad* 1.6.9 (R-K 27, S 46, F 23).

The story is an *ave atque vale* to the carefree fearlessness of Alexios' youth⁹⁵ and something more. The passage sees Alexios as trusting in a providence that does indeed encircle him, and closes gaps in time so that the young man fuses with the older man remembering and with the Alexios still in her mind's eye. It is far from hagiography, but it is infused with a theological (and iconographic) habit of mind that in the end defines her view of both emperor and empire. Bryennios is both sharer and outsider in this idyll, included in the heroic ambience but excluded from the mystical destiny. She uses such strong or haunting images to *fix* perception in 'this stream of Time'.

For otherwise it is a story of perpetual struggle, where each resolution of a crisis invites new dangers to be felt and, like Alexios, Komnene has to find new ways to deal with them. She uses her third episode from the *Hyle* to develop a mental weapon for the coming Norman war:

Thus ended the revolt of Bryennios. But the *meGas domestikos*, Alexios, my father, was not to rest, for one struggle followed another . . . There was a kingly aura about this man Basilakios. He looked the part. With a voice like thunder he could strike terror into a whole army and his shout was enough to humble the boldest heart.⁹⁶

She magnifies the rebel Basilakios in a way that Reinsch considers enhancement⁹⁷ but she also cuts him down.⁹⁸ Even her mythologizing additions are ambivalent: he is a savage boar after the noble lion, a hundred-headed giant, comparisons that make Alexios a Herakles and even a Zeus. In both texts, Basilakios' noise is the biggest thing about him.

Bryennios' story of Basilakios in Alexios' tent swells into a scene where energy and exuberance constitute the spectacle and almost the sole subject – like Psellos' scenes with Constantine IX's alter ego, his Fool.⁹⁹ Alexios had left behind 'the monk who was his companion, an eunuch, to whom his mother had entrusted the supervision (πρόνοια) of him'.¹⁰⁰ On entering the tent, Basilakios

⁹⁵ Bryennios describes Alexios' youth in the conventional terms of vainglory and impatience. Komnene sets it in an aura of trusting simplicity, folly and right instinct.

⁹⁶ *Alexiad* 1.7.1–3 (R-K 27–8, S 46–7, F 23–4). I have used *F* for the first part and *S* for the second in this quotation.

⁹⁷ Reinsch 1996: 123–4.

⁹⁸ τυραννικόν is her word. *S* emphasizes its non-pejorative character but it is not imperial either, and Basilakios' kingly aura is no more than that – the way he breathes and looks. Here, as so often, the slight freedom in *S* ('looked the part') catches the quick of what is there, and *F* retains it.

⁹⁹ Esp. Psellos, *Chron. Constantine IX* 6.139–43 (Renauld 2.38–40, Sewter 228–30). There, the Fool is the lisper as well as fantasist buffoon.

¹⁰⁰ *Hyle* 4.21 (Gautier 289).

thought he had gained everything and was seizing this man there and that he would take him prisoner and lead him off; but as he stared round the whole [tent] and saw no one except the monk and the burning lamp, elated out of braggadocio he cried, 'Where is the lisper?' – for he [Alexios] could not clearly manage the 'rho' –, 'Bring him out here to me.'

But when the monk, on being asked, denied on oath knowing what had happened [to him], he thought he had been tricked and, seized with rage and joy, began laughing a scornful laugh, as the proverb has it, and ordered his men to cut the tent to pieces. When this was done, he told them to bend down [and look] under the domestic's bed to see if he was hiding there; as he was nowhere there, he ordered the chests standing in the place to be overturned; so completely was his arrogance destroying his judgement.

Disappointed and turning to the opposite [extreme] – for by now his joy had been turned to grief – he beat his thigh repeatedly and exclaimed: 'To hell with it, I've been cheated by the lisper.'¹⁰¹

Monk, lamps, bed, coffer are mere props and Basilakios fills the stage with the contours and gestures of his delusion. The language of the episode is unrelievedly hyperbolic.¹⁰² It is sheer entertainment.

Small changes in the *Alexiad* shift the balance:

when he saw the general's tent blazing with light, he hurled himself into it with blood-curdling terrible cries. But when the man he expected to see was nowhere to be found, and no soldier, no general at all started up from it, nobody in fact except a few disreputable servants who had been left behind, he shouted and bawled even louder, 'Where the hell is the lisper?' . . . So Basilakios roared his abuse and in his thorough search turned everything upside down, chests, camp beds, furniture, and even my father's own couch, lest perchance the general might be hiding in any of them. From time to time he fixed his gaze on the monk called 'Little John'; Alexios' mother had taken pains to insist that on all his expeditions he should have as tent-companion one of the more highly esteemed monks, and her dutiful son submitted to her wishes . . . indeed until he married. Basilakios made a complete search in the tent and never relaxed his 'fumbling about in nether darkness', as Aristophanes says. At the same time he questioned 'Little John' about his master.¹⁰³

Kommene does not so much enhance Basilakios as exaggerate his exteriority. Even his thoughts are represented as behaviour. She belittles his authority: he overturns the contents of the tent himself. She elaborates the monk's presence, connecting it in Basilakios' puzzlement with Alexios' absence: as

¹⁰¹ Hyle 4.22 (Gautier 289–91).

¹⁰² Hyle 4.22 (Gautier 289, τὸ πᾶν, τὴν ὄλην, οὐδένα; 290, οὐδαμοῦ, παντάπασσι) together with a proliferation of prefixes especially κατά, verbal gestures (ἄνω καὶ κάτω) etc.

¹⁰³ *Alexiad* 1.8.1–2 (R-K 30, S 48–9, F 26). Frankopan (F 484 n. 36) suggests that 'Little John' may be the Basil (Ioannikios) Kourtikios mentioned elsewhere.

if the monk *ought* to be Alexios and perhaps in some disguised way was. Bryennios shaped the story as a mounting tumult within Basilakios to his exit with a shattering cry¹⁰⁴ but Komnene has him enter with ‘blood-curdling, terrible cries’ and no power of crescendo, so that he leaves almost subdued. The scatological reference to Aristophanes degrades him altogether,¹⁰⁵ while alerting the reader to the inner darkness of his delusion: in no sense can he ‘see’ Alexios.

Bryennios created a grotesque figure and Komnene learns from it to exploit the grotesque style, using this thunderously puffed-up creature as stylistic model¹⁰⁶ for the coming struggle with the Normans. Robert Guiscard:

was a man of immense stature . . . Robert’s bellow, so they say, put tens of thousands to flight.¹⁰⁷

As for Bohemond:

the sight of him inspired admiration, the mention of his name terror . . . he towered almost a full cubit over the tallest men. . . . even his laugh sounded like a threat to others.¹⁰⁸

Tancred:

mouthed out the words like a tragic actor . . . he was like the Assyrian, a mighty irresistible giant.¹⁰⁹

Throughout the Norman war the Normans are both frightening and grotesque, their grotesquerie providing a mode of narrative control and a measure of Alexios’ superiority, a yardstick for their ruthless, barbarous unfitness for power. (Robert Guiscard too is ‘like some wild boar’.)¹¹⁰ Basilakios is her trial run.

While she builds his bullying histrionics up, she begins to work in another mode verging on the mystical to suggest Alexios’ different kind of power and authority, one touched on with the hidden section of the army in the previous story.¹¹¹ She hints at ways in which Alexios may exert power by being silent, absent, unseen or just wrapped in his own thoughts:

¹⁰⁴ *Hyle* 4.23 (Gautier 291).

¹⁰⁵ Aristophanes, *Clouds* ll. 191–3 (Hall, vol. I). The reference is not only scatological; it ridicules Basilakios’ pretensions. The line is used of students at the school of sophistry, by an old scoundrel who wishes to profit by its ‘Bad logic’: the stooping students are ‘examining the lowest reaches of hell’, their ‘third eye . . . looking at the sky’ (Sommerstein 120); ‘diving deep into the deepest secrets’, ‘their rump turned up towards the sky’ (Bickley Rogers 159). They are grotesques in every way.

¹⁰⁶ With some help from Homer. ¹⁰⁷ *Alexiad* 1.10.4 (R-K 35–6, S 54, F 31).

¹⁰⁸ *Alexiad* 13.10.4–5 (R-K 411–12, S 422, F 383–4). ¹⁰⁹ *Alexiad* 14.2.4 (R-K 429, S 440, F 401–2).

¹¹⁰ *Alexiad* 1.13.6 (R-K 45, S 63, F 40).

¹¹¹ Where Alexios’ strength (ἀπὸ τῆς τέχνης) was half-hidden like his men: *Alexiad* 1.5.1 (R-K 20, S 39, F 17).

I suppose . . . my father suspected danger that evening . . . either forewarned by long experience, or guessing for some other reason. The presentiment came . . . He led his army from the camp . . . In the camp lights were left burning everywhere . . . Alexios himself . . . sat down with his soldiers . . . to wait . . . His idea was that Basilakios . . . would think . . .¹¹²

Alexios' thinking is partly veiled even from the narrator – οἶμα . . . εἶτε ἄλλως – but his sitting down to wait is its visible embodiment. His absence from the tent is more nearly palpable and during the battle the effect is stronger again. Bryennios refers only once to the fact that the battle takes place in darkness, but Komnene makes this its key feature. Both versions begin with Alexios mistaking an enemy officer for his leader¹¹³ but she intensifies the episode, having the man's size and armour magnified by starlight.¹¹⁴ Then she makes this powerful addition to her source:

After that Alexios continued his whirling onslaught, shooting at them with arrows, wounding them with his spear, roaring out his battle-cries, confusing them in the darkness, summoning to his aid everything – time, place, weapon . . . Never did he fail to distinguish friend or foe as he waylaid men flying in all directions.¹¹⁵

The night becomes a medium for an Apollonian centre of the whirlwind, a Lord of Hosts. Again she adds mystique.

Staying close to her source,¹¹⁶ she shifts one passage forward¹¹⁷ to leave another as final, an episode in which one of his own Franks mistakes Alexios for the enemy and attacks him with a spear. In the original version, Bryennios says Alexios would have been felled had he not had a particularly good seat on a horse;¹¹⁸ he whirls round and the Frank recognizes him and begs forgiveness for a fault 'committed unknowingly' (ἀγνοίᾳ).¹¹⁹ With an

¹¹² *Alexiad* 1.7.5 (R-K 29, S 48, F 25). In the *Hyle* Alexios sends out spies, one to Basilakios himself, offering to lead him to Alexios sleeping in his tent. As Basilakios approaches by the 'secret' route, the spies observe him as a moving cloud of dust visibly incorporating Alexios' will: *Hyle* 4.20 (Gautier 287). It is a finely suggestive effect that has other resonances in the *Alexiad*, but here Komnene chooses to drop the intermediaries and concentrate on the single figure.

¹¹³ *Hyle* 4.23 (Gautier 291); *Alexiad* 1.8.3 (R-K 31, S 49–50, F 27).

¹¹⁴ She says, 'thinking, either from the size or from the glittering of the armour (for his arms reflected the light of the stars)' (my translation). The size may be the man's own, or the (apparent) size of the arms as they reflect that light.

¹¹⁵ *Alexiad* 1.8.4 (R-K 31, S 50, F 27).

¹¹⁶ Apart from introducing an Homeric dimension to one encounter: *Hyle* 4.24 (Gautier 291); *Alexiad* 1.8.4 (R-K 31, S 50, F 27).

¹¹⁷ In the *Hyle*, Alexios keeps going ahead to attack and returning to his own men, 'ordering the phalanx not to delay': *Hyle* 4.25 (Gautier 293). Bringing the passage forward, Komnene has him sending messages to the forces further back (εἰς τοὺς ὀπίσθην), which extends his strategic control: *Alexiad* 1.8.5 (R-K 32, S 50, F 27).

¹¹⁸ εἰ μὴ ἔδραϊότατος ἦν ἱππότης: *Hyle* 4.24 (Gautier 293). ¹¹⁹ *Hyle* 4.24 (Gautier 293).

almost unnoticeable emendation, Komnene says Alexios would have fallen had he not 'seated himself more firmly in the saddle and called him by name . . .'.¹²⁰ She places his stability in his quick reflex, and Alexios becomes the one who recognizes the other: he knows his own even when his own do not know him. She ends the episode with yet another reference to the darkness that only Alexios seems able to penetrate¹²¹ and inscribes the campaign more firmly to him than her source.¹²²

Among her omissions,¹²³ the last is the most important. Bryennios makes a big claim for Alexios' victories:

For one man and a single counsel in a short time brought down the most formidable of the Roman generals . . . and strengthened and raised up the state which had openly collapsed and the exhausted morale of the imperial forces.¹²⁴

Favourable as that judgement is, Komnene does not make it. She is committed to a longer view. Alexios' coup in Book Three is justified only on the grounds that the state is still radically disordered. Following her use of silence, absence, darkness, to deepen her presentation, she now tacitly identifies him as *the Alexios who is not yet emperor* in what is still imperial disorder.

Komnene has picked out three combats from a flood of storytelling in the *Hyle* in which Alexios' behaviour, formulated within partly incompatible conventions, is sometimes incoherent. With small far-reaching revisions she frames the episodes as neo-Heraklean labours and moulds them into a progression,¹²⁵ retaining youthful ardour and editing out youthful

¹²⁰ εἰ μὴ αὐτὸς ἄμα τε πρὸς τὸ ἑδραιώτερον ἑαυτὸν ἐφηδράσατο: *Alexiad* 1.8.6 (R-K 32, S 50–1, F 28).

¹²¹ Her Frank explains his ἀγνοοῦντα with reference to τὴν νύκτα and the confusion of the fighting: *Alexiad* 1.8.6 (R-K 32, S 51, F 28).

¹²² 'Such were the deeds achieved in the night with a few men': *Hyle* 4.25 (Gautier 293). 'Such were the exploits of the Great Domestic of the *Scholae* with a handful of soldiers during that night': *Alexiad* 1.9.1 (R-K 32, S 51, F 28).

¹²³ For one, Komnene does not dignify Basilakios' flight with Bryennios' Homeric simile – 'Someone might then have fittingly applied Homer's verse, that one about Achilles and Hector which said, a brave man fled before, but a much better one pursued him': *Hyle* 4.26 (Gautier 295). Or perhaps she did not wish to liken Alexios to Achilles. She also drops Bryennios' comment that Alexios 'became master of his [Basilakios'] many possessions': *Hyle* 4.27 (Gautier 297). Her Alexios is never seen as taking booty for himself.

¹²⁴ *Hyle* 4.28 (Gautier 297). Neville 2012: 41–3 discusses this passage as part of a largely verbatim borrowing from Polybius but does not comment on Bryennios' editing, which removes one derogatory sentence while leaving the logic of the reference to fortune somewhat opaque. The passage seems to me a good example of the ambivalence in Bryennios' whole approach to Alexios: a willed attempt at heroizing him with an undercurrent of unease. The sabotage may be systematic and coherent, as she says, but I cannot clearly see it, either because there is confusingly different material intervening or because Komnene does not admit to seeing it.

¹²⁵ See Reinsch 1996: 116.

inconsequentiality; she gives Alexios more control over events and a growing awareness of responsibility, while also tracing a loss of political innocence. Alexios protects Roussel from blinding. He fails to protect Bryennios, though he is not complicit in the blinding. He consciously hands over Basilakios to be blinded, after he has received 'the written imperial ordinances about him'.¹²⁶ A tension is created between ethics and politics in which 'the emperor, my father' will have to live. It is part of his apprenticeship to empire. Even more important is the tension she sustains, through the firmness and concentration of her narrative, between the young hero of the three campaigns and the emperor that in her history he intrinsically is. More particularly, through the management of the first episode to recall the Gospel miracles, the added story of Alexios' sleep within the circle of divine protection in the second and the mystical dimension that she gives the third, she inscribes Alexios with the imperial role of representing Christ. It is subtle but consistent.

Courteously, in the spirit of the Preface, she honours her husband's themes and choice of military narratives. Meticulously, in the spirit of the traditionalist who hands on the established culture in good faith, she borrows much of his shaping and even more of the wording of these anecdotes. Decisively, in the manner of a craftsman, she edits and adapts those same anecdotes to make them serve a very different narrative: not an invigorating, entertaining history of rebellions, with the best man set to win,¹²⁷ but the early history of the one intrinsically imperial leader destined to restore the empire. Her tributes to cultural memory and her revisionism serve each other and act as mutual disguise.

The *Hyle* gives Alexios a fourth abortive combat, when he is asked to campaign against his brother-in-law Melissenos and refuses, lest he be impeached if he should fail. Command passes from him, and the history stops in the middle of a bungled campaign under an incompetent eunuch. Komnene shifts the Melissenos rising to Book Two¹²⁸ and brilliantly substitutes a different fourth antagonist. Here she has no source to edit and turns implicitly to the writer who supplied her theme, Psellos. She has dealt, she says, picking up one of his favourite metaphors,¹²⁹ with the diseased internal organs of the body politic, 'Roussel and Basilakios and all who filled

¹²⁶ *Alexiad* 1.9.5 (R-K 34) (my translation). In the *Hyle*, τὰ ἐκ βασιλείως . . . γράμματα are put into Alexios' hands (*Hyle* 4.28, Gautier 297) but Komnene spells out their explicit nature, so that the officers put into Alexios' hands τὰς περὶ αὐτοῦ ἐγγράφους προστάξεις βασιλικάς. After all, the letters Bryennios mentions might conceivably have been about something else.

¹²⁷ Or, in Neville's reading, to lose tragically and nobly.

¹²⁸ Where he figures more as a threat to Alexios than to Botaneiates until assured of the rank of kaiser.

¹²⁹ See McCartney 2006: 89.

the ranks of pretenders' (tactfully she omits Bryennios).¹³⁰ Now she turns to 'foreign pretenders'. Manzikert was not Alexios' only burden from the past. He has to deal with other consequences of previous emperors' decisions: 'pretenders whom Michael in his folly raised up against the Roman Empire'. 'One such was that braggart Robert.'

This particular emperor, Michael Doukas, promised his own son Constantine in marriage to the daughter of this barbarian Robert, and from that sprang their hostile acts.¹³¹

The parallel is not exact but the Normans roughly function as the Greeks invading Troy.¹³² When Michael Doukas was deposed, the betrothal was broken off, giving Robert Guiscard a pretext to invade. To show how serious this is, Komnene enlarges her geography: the western half of the world is needed to contain Guiscard's impetus. Already she creates the context for the international diplomacy that will exercise Alexios throughout his rule. His actual accession to power is kept a sub-theme, chiefly registered in a great expansion of material as the whole empire and beyond become his responsibility.

Robert Guiscard is a leader who can accomplish the greatest feats with the smallest numbers (something else Alexios will have to match). He 'set out from Normandy with . . . five [knights] and thirty foot soldiers',¹³³ set up as a pirate in Lombardy, married into power. He is now himself a rising western force, an invader of extraordinary ruthlessness and cunning:

He was a man of immense stature . . . he had a ruddy complexion, fair hair, broad shoulders, eyes that all but shot out sparks of fire . . . from head to foot the man was graceful . . . Homer remarked of Achilles that when he shouted his hearers had the impression of a multitude in uproar, but Robert's bellow . . .¹³⁴

He is a veteran fighter and strategist and has a mind to match Alexios' in all but the humane and Christian virtues. Komnene rates him higher in dignity than Basilakios, and therefore worthy of a Homeric likeness, but even lower in behavioural standards, for as well as being a 'braggart' he is cruel.

¹³⁰ *Alexiad* 1.10.1–2 (R-K 34–5, S 53, F 30). The following short quotation occurs in the same section.

¹³¹ *Alexiad* 1.10.2 (R-K 35, S 53, F 30). The previous short quotation occurs in the same section.

¹³² It is interesting to see how differently Homeric reconstructions and quotations in the *Alexiad* may be read. Dyck 1986: 120 identifies a variety of local Homeric effects but finds, as their main function, 'to pursue encomiastic ends without sacrificing the appearance of historical objectivity'. Ljubarskij 2000: 171–5 sees the Homeric presence as structural and systematic, more systematic than Macrides 2000: 67–70 does. I see it as less systematic again, although highly focussed and structural in places.

¹³³ *Alexiad* 1.11.1 (R-K 36, S 54, F 31). ¹³⁴ *Alexiad* 1.10.4 (R-K 35–6, S 54, F 31).

His first specific crime was committed against his father-in-law, trapping him with an ambush round a meeting in open country. The story is told at some length with one episode that parallels Alexios' final tryst with Bryennios. Maskabeles' men, waiting at an agreed distance, saw nothing amiss and dismounted, 'tied their reins to the branches of trees and lay down on the ground . . . in the shade'.¹³⁵ Their trust – unlike Alexios' in the parallel episode – was misplaced. In stark contrast to Alexios' efforts to spare the 'pretenders' from being blinded, Guiscard wantonly blinded his father-in-law, having first pulled out all his teeth. Not only was the crime anathema, as an act of civil war within the family, but the subsequent shameful marriage contract to Constantine Doukas reached into Komnene's own family, since Michael Doukas was her mother's cousin. This is the first stroke in Komnene's portrayal of the Normans as the worst kind of external threat to the Byzantine empire: an ethos of savagery against civilization. By introducing Guiscard here, she pits Alexios against a foe so fierce and persistent that he can hope to meet it only as emperor. In Book Two she will tell how Alexios had to rebel for his own safety but, in the broader perspective of Book One, she draws him as the emperor the empire had to have.

She describes Robert's aggrandizement through the interaction of three western powers, the pope, the German emperor, Henry IV, and his own Normans. Pope Gregory and Henry IV engaged in a long struggle, with mutual excommunications over their powers of investiture, in the course of which Henry's synod elected an 'anti-pope' and his forces captured Rome but were driven out again by Robert Guiscard, 'with a Saracen army, which put Rome to the sack'.¹³⁶ She brings forward this scandal of the western separation of powers early, before showing how Alexios reunifies the superior Byzantine system. A context is given here for the hubris of the Norman attack on Byzantium but it functions in a long-term way as well. In later books she shows how the Byzantine Empire can, under the right emperor, deal with disagreements and power struggles between emperor and church to fulfil a theocratic ideal. The West, as she describes it, lacks this possibility, given its would-be emperor in one country and pope in another, with conflicting national interests and armies. She adumbrates a tale of the pope's obscene insult to the German emperor's envoys, underlining that such a pope is not a moral leader and his church is involved in his disgrace. It is a picture of *stasis* and abomination. As German emperor and pope meet to fight it out:

¹³⁵ *Alexiad* 1.11.6 (R-K 38, S 56, F 33). ¹³⁶ Davies 1996: 339, 342.

the abominable pope . . . this despot . . . marched to make war on his own flock . . . the man of peace, too, and disciple of the Man of Peace! . . . all the plain beneath their feet was swamped in the blood of the dead . . . the survivors . . . fighting on like ships on a sea of gore.¹³⁷

The violent turpitude of emperor and pope allows the Guiscard to grow. He treats with both sides while building up his own army, and later makes common cause with the pope, who duly crowns him and sanctions his attacks on Byzantium as Crusades. Already Komnene projects the Norman invasion as a spearhead of the ecclesiastical invasions to come.

The section is highly polemical,¹³⁸ even inflammatory, yet it outlines the complexity of the *Alexiad* as a whole, her own position as historian included. Psellos gives her some guidance, but he had to account only for himself while she has to acknowledge an inheritance, if not of guilt, then of a kind of complicity with the past in that she inherits its benefits and burdens. She is deeply embroiled in the events she is describing and conscious that she may be charged with conflicting interests. She sets out to distinguish roles within her participation in events and to show how these serve her larger responsibility for the history. First, Constantine Doukas, the innocent victim of the marriage contract, is idealized as her own lost possibility:

When I recall this young man again, my soul is sorely troubled . . . I will defer giving a full account of his life until the appropriate time. But this at least I cannot refrain from saying, even if I speak out of place: Constantine was Nature's masterpiece, a triumph . . . of God's handiwork . . . a descendant of the mythical Golden Age of the Greeks.¹³⁹

In that burst of rhetoric, she does more than place herself: she uses her emotions to voice an interplay of values in her culture, matching elements in herself to features of her task, even to the consciousness of a lost golden age that underpins so many histories. She shows, as a tragedian, the power of earlier emotion to re-enact itself and then, as classicizing historian, she disciplines her natural feelings as a witness and participant:

lest by mingling my own lamentations with the historical narrative I confuse the history.¹⁴⁰

Her culture honours spontaneous feeling but order and self-mastery more. Alexios exemplifies all these but here she places them in the historian 'who

¹³⁷ *Alexiad* 1.13.7–8 (R-K 45–6, S 63–4, F 40–1).

¹³⁸ 'The truth is that when power was transferred from Rome to . . . the Queen of Cities . . . the senior archbishopric was also transferred here . . . the Council of Chalcedon especially raised that bishop . . . and subordinated to him all dioceses throughout the world': *Alexiad* 1.13.4 (R-K 44, S 62–3, F 39).

¹³⁹ *Alexiad* 1.12.3 (R-K 40, S 58, F 35). ¹⁴⁰ *Alexiad* 1.12.3 (R-K 40, S 58, F 35).

was there'. And, in refusing to particularize the pope's outrage on the German king's ambassadors, she invokes her standards 'as a woman and a princess'¹⁴¹ to place the level of discourse in her culture as superior to western grossness. The historian, like the emperor, reflects the culture to itself.

She moves into a third role richly created by Psellos: the philosophical spectator at the play of life. As a conscientious historian, she tells us two accounts were current of Robert and the monk he brought to impersonate the deposed Michael Doukas. Then she builds each version into a performance on the lines she imagines its protagonist would have drawn. A history-making event, so she suggests, much like a written or reconstructed history, requires invention and design and personality. The first version says the monk took the initiative, but she prefers the second because the source, and theatre, are better:

After that [Robert Guiscard] dramatized the whole business, with the monk at the centre of the stage.¹⁴²

In tragic fashion Raiktor . . . uttered the most bloodcurdling threats . . . with loud cries and slapping his thigh with his right hand . . . In the midst of this story I cannot help laughing at the silly and farcical behaviour of these men . . . For Robert, of course, this rogue was a mere bait . . . When I think of it, I cannot but smile and a laugh rises to my lips as I slowly move my pen in the lamplight.¹⁴³

As she animates the story – giving the monk the gesture of the *Hyle-Basilakios* – she foregrounds for herself a new version of Psellos' role: spectator at the drama of her own imagination. Even that role has more than one aspect: inhabiting it, she is spontaneous ('rises to my lips') but also ('slowly') bound. She allows a fictional element in everything, if only because past events must rise through layers of what is experienced as 'present'. This sophisticated construction, including as it does a view of the historic process, demonstrates the art involved in tracing past experience in the living organism.

As Reinsch points out,¹⁴⁴ the second half of Book One sets the rise of Guiscard against the rise of Alexios in the first. Alexios' rise is directed and constrained by family, ethical training and the orderly idea of empire, even though the throne itself has no stable occupant. Robert Guiscard comes from nowhere and is self-made without moral inhibition. All stages of his life are predatory: from living as a brigand in a cave to preying on the family he marries into and exploiting the hostility between the German emperor and pope. He not only rises, he expands laterally and to chaotic effect;

¹⁴¹ *Alexiad* 1.13.3 (R-K 44, S 62, F 39).

¹⁴² *Alexiad* 1.12.9 (R-K 42, S 60, F 37).

¹⁴³ *Alexiad* 1.15.6 (R-K 50, S 68, F 45).

¹⁴⁴ Reinsch 1996: 116.

Komnene has to ground the sprawl of his ambitions in a complicated sweep of information. In counter-balance, since Alexios as yet cannot hold back this force, she brings forward the narrator – or perhaps the compact between writer and reader – to ensure control.¹⁴⁵

Father and son you might liken to caterpillars and locusts, for what was left by Robert, his son fed on and devoured. But we must not get him across to Avlona yet. Let us examine what he did on the opposite mainland.¹⁴⁶

A little later, when Alexios is immersed in the confusions of his dealings with George Monomakhatos, she repeats the device in a metaphor dear to Psellos:¹⁴⁷

these speculations have carried me off the main road of my history; we must get my horse back on the right path again.¹⁴⁸

Psellos used the metaphor for the empire.¹⁴⁹ Komnene uses it of her own narrative. The parallel is there.

Book One pauses at an ethical dilemma: in a dire situation, do you act and take responsibility or do you let things take their course? As Alexios struggles to take control of the empire as its leader, this problem is focussed in the tension between George Monomakhatos' desire to stay out of the conflict and Alexios' need for his support. As negotiations stretch between Dyrrakhion and Constantinople, Monomakhatos plays the role Alexios was given in the *Hyle* when Botaneiates seized the throne: he stands aloof to wait the outcome. Unlike the *Hyle*-Alexios, however, Monomakhatos makes simultaneous overtures to Botaneiates, the Normans and the kings of Serbia as well. Anxiety makes of him a multiple traitor and one of Alexios' first tasks as emperor will be to defuse that anxiety and re-establish Monomakhatos as a loyal Byzantine. Here Komnene uses him to focus Alexios' choice. She dismisses those who, like Monomakhatos, protect themselves on every side and wait:

men of such character are naturally inconstant . . . such men contribute nothing to the common good, but when it comes to themselves they are most circumspect . . . Yet they generally fail.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁵ Croke 2010: 25–53 discusses these moments of direct audience address expressing concern for due narrative sequence and decorum, and sets them in a general context of sophisticated Byzantine practice. In this matter, as in so many others, Komnene seems to me to use the practice not pro forma, not for self-accreditation or stylistic display or even out of habit, but sparsely and discriminatingly, for specific effects.

¹⁴⁶ *Alexiad* 1.14.4 (R-K 48, S 66, F 43). ¹⁴⁷ See McCartney 2006: 89–91.

¹⁴⁸ *Alexiad* 1.16.7 (R-K 53, S 71, F 48).

¹⁴⁹ Psellos, *Chron. Isaak Komnenos*, 7.56–8 (Renauld 2.117–18, Sewter 309–11).

¹⁵⁰ *Alexiad* 1.16.7 (R-K 53, S 71, F 48).

The Normans personify the active option. Komnene dwells most on their cruel aggressive culture but she pays tribute to their physical courage and their mental power. Robert Guiscard's wife Gaita 'went on campaign with her husband and when she donned armour was indeed a formidable sight'.¹⁵¹ In Book Four, when the Normans are throwing themselves into the sea, she rallies them.¹⁵² She is an example of commitment to action whether right or wrong. The Normans are the reason why Alexios has to act.

Book One, then, describes an urgent need for Alexios to take power while showing that the empire he will rule is compromised. The Guiscard betrothal is framed as a moral and political disaster. It leads to the large-scale western incursions that swell into Crusades and culminate, after Komnene's life but not beyond her apprehensions, in the sack of Constantinople in 1204. Indeed, the *Alexiad* is a history of Alexios' strategies to contain that very disaster almost as much as a history of his restorations after Manzikert. First, his revolt removes the pretext for the Norman attack and causes some anxiety and delay among the Normans. Later, his re-betrothal of Constantine Doukas to his daughter Anna further unifies the imperial family that is the state. His slaughter of the Scyths is at least equalled by his triumph in the Treaty of Devol. Open-ended as it is, and somewhat sprawling and broken as the second half may seem, Book One sets the parameters and scale of the whole history.

For the moment the narrator rules:

Let us then leave Robert at the point where the history has brought him in, and now consider . . . Alexios. His . . . wars against Robert we shall reserve for another book.¹⁵³

Just where the empire seems in danger of dispersal, she asserts the rights of the narrator to control. Alexios – not quite emperor yet – is no longer a servant of the crown. The need for a strong ruler is extreme, the drama of the unknown in the ascendant. Overt narrative control is a short-term substitute and a kind of promise of the stable rule to come.

Alexios the rebel

The second book is less impressive than Book One. Book Two rather suggests the workshop; one can see it emerging from Bryennios' history. It picks up where the *Hyle* left off and focusses on palace politics in a style

¹⁵¹ *Alexiad* 1.15.1 (R-K 48, S 66, F 43). ¹⁵² *Alexiad* 4.6.5 (R-K 133–4, S 147, F 121).

¹⁵³ *Alexiad* 1.16.9 (R-K 54, S 72, F 49).

closer to the *Hyle* than to Psellos. Its most flamboyant characters, like some scenes, are unmistakably modelled on Bryennios' prototypes and, while these are elaborated and given a much broader context, they are not re-seen like the rewritten episodes in Book One. Anna Dalassene may do new things in Book Two but she resembles the Anna Dalassene of the *Hyle* more than she does the Anna Dalassene of Book Three. Unlike Book One, which decisively frames what it is doing in clear contradistinction from the *Hyle*, Book Two follows the earlier work in practices and assumptions that the rest of the history discards. Its relative immaturity may owe something to the fact that Komnene is not revisiting and reshaping events previously dealt with by Bryennios, but striking out without a text from which to differentiate her own. Yet she has already done this successfully in the second half of Book One, where, without guidance from Bryennios or Psellos, she strongly delineated a big international picture relative to later events.

In Book Two, however, she has to deal with something more problematic: she is writing not 'the Emperor Alexios, my father' but Alexios the rebel. She leaves behind the *Hyle* material but reverts to its theme, a theme that suited Bryennios' genre and sympathies but does not match with hers. Her solution in the short term is to engage in uncertain, possibly unconscious, imitation of the very work she can no longer use directly. It does not fit her history as a whole. Book Two lacks the clear perspective of Book One and its tone is somewhat discordant. One assumption scored into the *Hyle* is that Alexios' rebellion will mark the climax and resolution of a series of rebellions in a weak, disrupted empire, where rebellion is a natural expression of malaise. This will not do for the *Alexiad*: she must fight off that assumption in every subsequent book. I suspect, purely on internal evidence, that Book Two developed directly from the *Hyle* and that Komnene returned to write Book One some time after she had found her perspective and formed her own style.

At any rate, Book Two has nothing to equal the dramatic rise of Robert Guiscard, with Alexios coming up to match him in ability and outshine him in value; it lacks the central practice of Book One by which no one, least of all the hero, is exempt from ethical scrutiny. Book One ended with George Monomakhatos excusing himself from supporting Alexios' rebellion, saying that the faith he kept with the current emperor would likewise be given to whoever happened to succeed him. Komnene dismissed the plea as moral cowardice but she certainly accepts that, if inaction is open to moral scrutiny, action is no less so. Book Two does not so much abandon that awareness as prove unequal to it. The Komnenoi rebellion destabilizes the empire and damages the social fabric, while Alexios in particular appears to

put self-interest ahead of family solidarity; her account of all this is awkward, even embarrassed. The confident framing of past events within the imperium of 'the Emperor Alexios' disappears and dramatic uncertainty prevails. It is not until those same events render him emperor again, in Book Three, that she regains the authority to show how comprehensively Alexios' rebellion does contribute to the common good.

In fact, Book Two begins the history all over again, this time just where the *Hyle* stopped, in Botaneiates' reign. It freshly introduces source, main characters and family background as if Book One did not exist, placing Alexios third among his brothers as the *Hyle* did,¹⁵⁴ whereas in Book One she delayed the first mention of Isaac and did not name him at all. The *Hyle* was most animated when presenting the Komnenoi brothers as a pair and, in Book Two, Komnene adopts this point of view, even changing her myth from that of Herakles to Orestes and Pylades. She sets Isaac and Alexios in the claustrophobic palace politics of the Queen of Cities:

The Emperor Nikephoros . . . looked on them with pleasure and occasionally invited them to share his table. This inflamed jealousy, particularly in the case of the afore-mentioned Slavonic barbarians, Borilos and Germanos.¹⁵⁵

It is a situation made familiar by Psellos and Bryennios: a weak emperor, bad palace counsellors and a general who feels threatened by an emperor who has been persuaded to feel threatened by him. The topos is particularly hard worked in the *Hyle*. There, for example, Alexios' relationship with Botaneiates broke down when he refused to campaign against his brother-in-law:

he feared the lightness of the emperor, the malice and the jealousy of his entourage.¹⁵⁶

'Lightness' is Bryennios' preferred term to minimize the emperor's fault while suggesting that he is not strong enough to rule.¹⁵⁷ Komnene uses the formula exactly (twice in three lines) when describing the Komnenoi brothers' need to enlist the empress' support.¹⁵⁸ She also has them *θεραπεύσαι* (guide, support, assist, advise) the emperor when he is disheartened by the fall of Kyzikos.¹⁵⁹ *Θεραπεύειν* is Bryennios' word for Andronikos Doukas' attempts to curb and

¹⁵⁴ *Hyle* 1.2 (Gautier 77–9); *Alexiad* 2.1.1 (R-K 55). S and F blur this effect by placing Manuel third (S 73, F 50).

¹⁵⁵ *Alexiad* 2.1.2–3 (R-K 55, S 73, F 50). ¹⁵⁶ *κουφότητα*: *Hyle* 4.31 (Gautier 301).

¹⁵⁷ See also *Hyle* 2.2 (Gautier 145), 3.4 (Gautier 215) and 3.6 (Gautier 223). Bryennios uses a thesaurus of terms for the emperor's weakness of judgement but this is the most prominent.

¹⁵⁸ *Alexiad* 2.3.4 (R-K 61). S and F obscure this borrowing (S 79, F 56).

¹⁵⁹ *Alexiad* 2.3.3 (R-K 61, S 78, F 55).

guide the Emperor Michael¹⁶⁰ and for Isaac Komnenos' manipulation of Botaneiates.¹⁶¹

Such terms, easy to recall, suggest the level of Komnene's dependence on the *Hyle* in this book. She adopts its analysis – weak emperor, bad counsellors – and its bluffly loyal military point of view, which deflects anger and frustration away from the emperor to his entourage. This was not Alexios' point of view in Book One, where the emperor is squarely blamed for not caring.¹⁶² Komnene gives social colour to the evil counsellors by making them foreign 'slaves'¹⁶³ but otherwise borrows Bryennios' simple fairy-tale perspective in which the better a young hero is and does, the more bitterly his enemies attack him, until the alternatives to rebellion run out.¹⁶⁴ When she borrows a speech, there are no sustained verbal echoes but rather a familiar and easily remembered mindset. The *Hyle*-Alexios proposed to break out of a house surrounded by Turks. Not to fight, he declared, was to hand themselves over to slavery (σφᾶς αὐτοῦς εἰς δουλείαν προδοῦναι): he urged them to consider it right to live well or die well (ἀλλ' ἢ καλῶς ζῆν ἢ καλῶς τεθνηκέναι δέον σκοπεῖν).¹⁶⁵ Komnene has Alexios adopt the same stance in the more tendentious case of rebellion against an emperor to whom he has sworn allegiance: οὐ χρὴ ὡς ἀνδράποδα παθεῖν, ἀλλὰ δράσαντάς τι γενναῖον ἀπολέσθαι ('it was not right . . . to suffer like slaves – better to do some noble deed and perish').¹⁶⁶ That is textual influence rather than carefully modified quotation, with perhaps the δουλείαν displaced on to the Scyths.

Events take Isaac and Alexios behind the scenes to a power base in the gynaeconitis (women's quarters):

The Komnenoi decided that they must conciliate the officers in charge of the women's quarters and through them gain the goodwill of the empress . . . the officers of the gynaeconitis on the advice of Isaac cajoled the empress to adopt Alexios as her son.¹⁶⁷

This is a risky move for a moral hero and Komnene does little to sanitize it, despite showing Anna Dalassene as complicit. As she will say in the next

¹⁶⁰ *Hyle* 2.2 (Gautier 145). ¹⁶¹ ἐθεράπευε: *Hyle* 4.29 (Gautier 299).

¹⁶² *Alexiad* 1.2.4 (R-K 14, S 34, F 12).

¹⁶³ She calls them this repeatedly – e.g. δούλοις: *Alexiad* 2.1.3; δούλους: *Alexiad* 2.2.4 (R-K 55, 59, S 74, 77, F 51, 54).

¹⁶⁴ She does add one factor: she made much in Book One of the barbarity of political blinding and here the barbarians' threat of blinding precipitates the Komnenoi flight.

¹⁶⁵ *Hyle* 2.10 (Gautier 159, 161).

¹⁶⁶ *Alexiad* 2.4.6 (R-K 63, S 81, F 58). Interestingly, Komnene reserves the more usual term *douloi* for the Slavs.

¹⁶⁷ *Alexiad* 2.1.4–5 (R-K 56, S 74, F 51).

book, the gynaeconitis had shameful associations, being ‘the scene of utter depravity ever since the infamous Constantine Monomachos’ and still noted for ‘foolish love intrigues’ before Dalassene reforms it.¹⁶⁸ Psellos gave it bizarre overtones in the *Chronographia*, expressing some astonishment at Zoe’s and Theodora’s ‘transformation of a *gynaeconitis* into an emperor’s council chamber’.¹⁶⁹ When the manly, military style of the *Hyle*, tinged with homophobia and some misogyny,¹⁷⁰ is borrowed for this setting, it does not show Alexios to advantage; Komnene writes as if she were ashamed of his powerlessness and indirection. The unheroic ‘conciliated’ and ‘cajoled’ are compounded by vague references to plans and secrets. The brothers hoped to ‘confide in her [the empress] their secret. The plan, however, was . . . divulged to nobody at all . . . they intended . . . to run away’. ‘The original scheme was abandoned and a new idea took its place.’¹⁷¹ ‘Already they had guessed her secret.’¹⁷² What it is, we are not told, and they do not tell her theirs.

The narrative itself is secretive and repetitious, with unnecessary attention to body language that does not deliver. ‘With eyes fixed on the ground and both hands covered, they stood there for a moment in deep thought’ – and nothing comes of it. This obtrusive and non-functional emphasis on body language – much in evidence at the dinner where the fall of Kyzicos was announced¹⁷³ – is one of the legacies from the *Hyle* that Komnene uses in Book Two to cover her lack of a clear narrative course. (It functions effectively in the *Hyle*.)¹⁷⁴ Later developments in the *Alexiad* suggest that Alexios’ air of furtiveness and disingenuousness here is misconceived. Women are openly the strength of his administration. He himself is celebrated by his author for his domestic and compassionate nature as well as for giving full imperial power to his mother, under whom the women’s quarters become the moral centre of the palace. Some of Komnene’s embarrassment in Book Two may attach to the incipient scandal surrounding Alexios’ relations with the empress and to the fact that the gynaeconitis is not yet reformed, but some is also due to the residual influence of the *Hyle*.

¹⁶⁸ *Alexiad* 3.8.3 (R-K 105, S 120, F 96). S is more exact.

¹⁶⁹ Psellos, *Chron. Zoe and Theodora*, 6.1 (Renauld 1.117, Sewter 155).

¹⁷⁰ See e.g. *Hyle* 2.7 (Gautier 155). The homophobia, as we understand it, is displaced on to eunuchs, especially in a military context. Skylitzes makes the same kind of association when he describes a military commander as ‘an effeminate (θηλυδριών), sedentary fellow with no experience of war, one of the eunuchs of the bedchamber at the palace’: Skyl. *Constantine VII*, 15 (Thurn 245–6, Wortley 237).

¹⁷¹ *Alexiad* 2.1.6 (R-K 57, S 75, F 52). ¹⁷² *Alexiad* 2.2.3 (R-K 58, S 76, F 53).

¹⁷³ *Alexiad* 2.3.1–3 (R-K 60–1, S 77–8, F 55).

¹⁷⁴ Most characteristically and brilliantly in John Doukas’ supervision of Botaneiates’ wedding to Maria Alania: *Hyle* 3.25 (Gautier 253–5).

Bryennios' two most striking characters become Komnene's in this book as well. Her Anna Dalassene and John Doukas are very recognizably his, though developed to new levels of sophistication and made pivotal to far more complex forces of connection and causality. Some of Dalassene's gestures recall the *Hyle* directly – perhaps even the closing of the doors before their flight, so as not to wake the tutor¹⁷⁵ – though she is not the isolated figure she was there. Here she carries with her a train of influence and associates: a large body of women covers her sons' departure as the horses are fitted with 'saddle-cloths appropriate for women'.¹⁷⁶ When asked their business at the church where they intend to seek sanctuary, someone calls out with the confidence of the whole group: "Women from the east. They've spent all their money on necessary purchases and want to worship quickly before going home."¹⁷⁷ The social scene is finely adumbrated: those 'necessary purchases' are wonderfully calculated to baffle a male challenger while placating him with the intention of 'going home'.

Bryennios' Anna Dalassene is certainly much developed in this second book, where she masterminds a whole domestic revolution to match her sons'. It is she who first sends them to the empress; at the point of no return she abandons the emperor's sleeping grandson, to whom she had betrothed her granddaughter; in sanctuary she embarks on a new series of alliances with the hated Doukai through Maria of Bulgaria, whose support leads to that of the indispensable George Palaiologos and eventually to the Kaiser John Doukas himself. But her performance as a tragedy queen springs straight out of the *Hyle*. Bryennios' μεγαλόψυχος character turned the court into a theatre when she whipped out an icon from her cloak to confront her accusers with their and her true Judge.¹⁷⁸ Komnene's great soul, too, manipulates religious images on a stage of her own devising:

As if she were weighed down with old age and worn out by grief, she walked slowly . . . and . . . made two genuflections; on the third she sank to the floor and . . . cried in a loud voice . . . 'Unless my hands are cut off, I will not leave this holy place, except . . . I receive the emperor's cross as guarantee of safety.'

She spurns the cross the envoy offers:

'I will not be satisfied with just any little cross . . . it must be a cross of reasonable size.'¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁵ Dimly recalling the flight of a tutor and his charge, an opened door and creaking ladder: *Hyle* 2.16 (Gautier 175).

¹⁷⁶ *Alexiad* 2.5.1 (R-K 65, S 83, F 59). ¹⁷⁷ *Alexiad* 2.5.4 (R-K 66–7, S 84, F 60).

¹⁷⁸ *Hyle* 1.22 (Gautier 131). ¹⁷⁹ *Alexiad* 2.5.6–7 (R-K 67–8, S 84–5, F 61).

She is thinking of what witnesses can see. This clever and commanding woman is entirely political in Book Two. If she later turns the palace into a monastery, here she rather turns the monastery into a palace. The change in her from Book Two to Book Three mirrors the whole change from rebel to emperor and from corrupt empire to one restored. That change is quite abrupt, from what is essentially a derived character to one emphatically Komnene's own.

John Doukas too is very much the *Hyle*-Kaisar, a man whose powerful mental life is interspersed with bursts of powerful application to affairs. In the *Alexiad*, however, his behaviour develops through a series of changes that express and measure changes in the state. First, roused from sleep, he boxes his grandson's ears and then, convinced that there *has* been a revolution, he says, "Oh dear me!"¹⁸⁰ Stirred into taking sides, with a mix of eloquence and bullying he hijacks a load of taxes and co-opts a force of Turks.¹⁸¹ In the rebels' camp, during the silent contest for leadership between Alexios and his older brother, the Kaisar uses 'his fine intellect, his tremendous stature, his regal presence' to ensure the choice falls on Alexios, who is married to his granddaughter.¹⁸² Later again, as king-maker and statesman, he has to live with the consequences of his own power-broking: when asked by Alexios to review the city walls with him, 'John was indignant at this command, for he had only recently adopted monastic garb and he knew he would be laughed at by the soldiers'¹⁸³ (a touch straight from the *Hyle*¹⁸⁴). He is a dominant but plastic figure, from the early buccaneering stage of the rebellion through the politicking to the rearranging of appearances. Power has irreversibly shifted: recognizing that, he gives Alexios political legitimacy and the strategic advice he needs. In Komnene's hands, he is more than a recurring powerful presence; he is a focal one, a dramatic embodiment of affairs developing beyond himself.

Komnene's talent for dramatic incident outshines even her Kaisar's. Her George Palaiologos is the kind of hero Alexios might have made if he had not become emperor: Palaiologos negotiates for the betrayal of the city, gives the signal, opens the gates;¹⁸⁵ he boards a ship, leaps to the prow and single-handedly persuades the rowers, and afterwards the fleet, to abandon Botaneiates and the rival rebel Melissenos and accept that Alexios has won.¹⁸⁶ He is a dashing Errol Flynn, bowing to his angry father as their

¹⁸⁰ *Alexiad* 2.6.5 (R-K 70, S 88, F 64). ¹⁸¹ *Alexiad* 2.6.6–8 (R-K 71–2, S 88–9, F 64–5).

¹⁸² *Alexiad* 2.7.2 (R-K 73, S 90, F 66). ¹⁸³ *Alexiad* 2.9.3 (R-K 78, S 95, F 71).

¹⁸⁴ As when the soldiers deride the eunuch who is their new commander with shouts of 'klou klou': *Hyle* 4.32 (Gautier 303).

¹⁸⁵ *Alexiad* 2.10.2–3 (R-K 80–1, S 97, F 73). ¹⁸⁶ *Alexiad* 2.11.2–5 (R-K 82–3, S 98–9, F 74–5).

ships pass.¹⁸⁷ In Book Three he gives an equally bravura performance, calling out from the fleet below the walls, when the Komnenoi are trying to exclude Eirene from the acclamation: “It was not for your sakes . . . that I won so great a victory, but because of the Eirene you speak of.”¹⁸⁸ In all these cases, however, Komnene aligns dominant personalities within the intricate networks of power and influence that determine events. From a derivative and simplistic beginning, her political analysis in Book Two becomes sophisticated and compelling, developing beyond and partly at odds with the constraints of genre.

Alexios is commended to the rebel troops in terms set by the *Hyle*, as a man’s man and a soldier’s soldier: “he has shared salt with you, fought bravely at your side . . . sparing neither his body nor . . . even life itself . . . crossing with you over mountain and plain . . . He is a real soldier, with a deep affection for the fighting man.”¹⁸⁹ Komnene shows that Alexios is chosen because he is married to Eirene and is the better politician (he has summoned officers ‘well disposed to him’)¹⁹⁰ but she wants to retain the *Hyle*-Alexios as well,¹⁹¹ the golden young saviour chosen for unrivalled merit. To this end she puts forward the Doukai rhetoric and the memory of a Basil-like prophecy about Alexios, an ‘apparition’ or a ‘vision’.¹⁹²

But she is uneasy.

Alexios himself treated Isaac with every respect, allowing him precedence at all times, whether through brotherly love or rather (this too must be said) because the whole army was rallying to his side . . . It involved no unpleasant risk . . . he could afford to flatter Isaac and make a pretence of yielding authority to him.¹⁹³

There is a kind of shudder of incompatibility between the ethics of the ‘real soldier’ and this urbane, hypocritical parade. Neither Alexios nor John Doukas advert to the real reason for the choice. Komnene’s growth in political awareness is the source of her unease: the moral framework of the *Hyle* cannot contain it. She shows a similar discomfort over the dispatch of Melissenos’ rival rebellion: as Alexios’ brother-in-law he is promised the kaisarship and Thessalonica but, when the chrysobull confirming this keeps failing to arrive, she refers the dissembling excuses to the secretary (he has lost his pen etc.) and censures the man, though he, unlike Alexios, has

¹⁸⁷ *Alexiad* 2.11.6 (R-K 83, S 99, F 75). ¹⁸⁸ *Alexiad* 3.2.1 (R-K 89, S 106, F 81).

¹⁸⁹ *Alexiad* 2.7.2 (R-K 73, S 90, F 66–7). ¹⁹⁰ *Alexiad* 2.4.2 (R-K 62, S 79, F 56).

¹⁹¹ That is, the *Hyle*-Alexios of Bryennios’ more positive rhetoric, if not the *Hyle*-Alexios whom Neville has brought into the light. As she says (2012: 160–1), the *Hyle*’s glowing first portrait of Alexios is directly modelled on Psellos’ John Doukas and no irony is seen.

¹⁹² *Alexiad* 2.7.4–6 (R-K 74, S 91, F 68). ¹⁹³ *Alexiad* 2.7.3 (R-K 73–4, S 90, F 67).

nothing to gain by it.¹⁹⁴ Once Alexios is established on the throne, this kind of ‘crafty deceit’ and ‘play-acting’ is cheerfully attributed to him as statesmanlike strategy.

Her unease is probably excessive in the expanding framework of Book Two. In terms of its themes – succession, family, dynasty – Alexios’ behaviour asks to be seen as more intelligent and lateral than dishonest. Botaneiates’ decision to bypass Constantine Doukas, son and grandson of two recent emperors, in favour of his relative, comes close to a breach of social contract. Alexios bases his approach to the empress on his support for her son Constantine and he honours it by making Constantine Doukas titular co-emperor. No one in the *Alexiad* quarrels openly with this compromise, while the imperial Doukas presence with Alexios at the head of ceremonies, and the young co-emperor’s seal on documents, are invaluable in legitimizing Komnenian rule. Even more important is the interweaving of the two recent imperial families, the Doukai and Komnenoi. The more recently imperial Doukai have perhaps more odour of sanctity but not much reputation for good government; the Komnenoi (coming violently to power) are known for military effectiveness. Komnene traces an elaborate network of inter-marriage and alliance, but Alexios’ marriage is the crux. Even his behaviour to Isaac, though so unpleasant on the page, is essential to the preservation of that family unity on which the reign and, after it, the dynasty depend. Komnene’s new strength in Book Two is to chart so clearly these causalities and alignments: a strength she did not need in Book One and which the *Hyle* does not have.

Other new insights are emerging. Komnene treats God’s will with reticence and tact but as historian she takes much responsibility for tracking the mysterious forces that limit and guide choice – namely circumstance: ταῦτα δὲ ὁ βασιλεὺς Νικηφόρος ὀρῶν . . . (‘Seeing these things the Emperor Nikephoros . . .’);¹⁹⁵ ἐν ὄσῳ ταῦτα ἐτελεῖτο . . . (‘While these events occurred . . .’).¹⁹⁶ It is circumstance that turns a reasonable, necessary rebellion (‘the Komnenoi . . . after marshalling the whole army with great skill advanced slowly towards the city *en masse*’)¹⁹⁷ into something uncontrolled and wrong: ‘the rebels rushed in pell-mell . . . scattered in all directions . . . in their cruelty sparing neither houses nor churches nor even the innermost sanctuaries’.¹⁹⁸ In Book One, as an individual hero, Alexios

¹⁹⁴ *Alexiad* 2.8.4, 2.10.1–2 (R-K 77, 79–80, S 93–4, 96, F 70, 72).

¹⁹⁵ *Alexiad* 2.11.1 (R-K 82) (my translation). S and F indeed translate, ‘Under the circumstances’ (S 98, F 74).

¹⁹⁶ *Alexiad* 2.8.1 (R-K 75, S 92, F 68). ¹⁹⁷ *Alexiad* 2.10.2 (R-K 80, S 97, F 73).

¹⁹⁸ *Alexiad* 2.10.3–4 (R-K 81, S 97–8, F 73–4). S is more precise.

had some freedom to define himself but in Book Two he is hedged about, threatened, advised, constrained, acted on. As the empire amasses itself about him, making him its nerve-centre, its victim and its eye, he must learn to keep it all in mind, marshal it, somehow assume responsibility for everything that is the case and control those pell-mell forces which have placed him where he is. The opening books illuminate a metaphor in the history so obvious it is almost impossible to see: maintaining rule over an empire involves warfare but it is also likened to a war itself. Frontier campaigns, rebellions deep within the imperial family or within that other family the church, civil war – these make the substance of Alexios' labour but they are its emblem as well. Ruling is a constant perilous struggle to impose the will of one or of a group on others. This is why military history is a natural vehicle for Komnene's view of empire, why she does not write, say, legal history, and why her change of principal metaphor from warfare to the building of the city is so significant at its end.

There is even a philosophical perspective coming into view that does much to illuminate the long-term development of Alexios' characterization. The Komnenoi rebellion bears all the marks of fine-tuned and elaborate organization yet its success depends on crucial decisions taken on the spot. ("If you leave here at daybreak tomorrow, I will follow you . . .", says Pakourianos, "but if you defer your plan to the next day . . . I shall go to the emperor without delay".)¹⁹⁹ Two parameters of being are borrowed from the Prime Mover for the vicarious art of government: one, *pronoia* or foreknowledge, which in human hands becomes a capacity to plan; the other, a version of that human free will which in Christian doctrine mirrors God's, the ability of a leader – borne along by, trying to govern, circumstance – to seize the moment or the *kairos*. Τούτων οὕτω τελομένων καὶ τοῦ καιροῦ κατεπείγοντος . . .²⁰⁰

A successful coup must hinge on the *kairos*. Anna Dalassene seizes the moment for her sons; George Palaiologos does the same to win the fleet and to establish his kinswoman; John Doukas captures the moment and the taxes thereof. Even the 'slave' Borilos shows that he has what leadership takes when he draws up the Varangian Guard to profit from the scattering of rebel troops and so reverse the fortunes of the city.²⁰¹ Botaneiates' lack of – call it self-belief or nerve – loses him his throne.²⁰² Alexios' ability to

¹⁹⁹ *Alexiad* 2.4.7 (R-K 64, S 81, F 58).

²⁰⁰ *Alexiad* 2.10.2 (R-K 80). S deftly renders it, 'While this was going on, it was becoming urgent . . .'

(S 96, F 72).

²⁰¹ *Alexiad* 2.12.4 (R-K 85–6, S 101, F 77). ²⁰² *Alexiad* 2.12.6 (R-K 86, S 102, F 78).

respond with lightning reflex to the moment is so marked that it leads Macrides to accept Howard-Johnston's characterization of him 'as a ruler who cannot anticipate or forestall danger'.²⁰³ In fact, Alexios anticipates and forestalls danger all the time; he is just not omnipotent. Of all the antithetical virtues that he equally possesses, these two are the most marked and most consistent: he rises to occasions and he does foresee developments and consequences. As vicar of Christ, his quickness matures into a deeper autonomy while his *πρόνοια* is always tacitly or openly likened to Providence. These same two parameters do most to define Komnene's own technique: her history is stamped like a coin with hindsight, the historian's foreknowledge, and yet retains the lively uncertainties, the suspense, that give it the urgency of drama.

All this is not so much established in Book Two as emerging: if Book One showed Komnene as having far outgrown the limits of the *Hyle*, the narrative of Book Two shows her outgrowing them. The workshop tracks the emergence of a master.

Alexios invested

Book Three sets the imprint of the history. Its ground plan is familiar and conventional enough. When Eusebius created a new genre for Constantine – the hagiographical imperial Life – its influence was wide and lasting, despite the fact that, over time, his Constantine was reimagined to suit changes in imperial self-construction,²⁰⁴ while the genre also underwent some adaptations. One fine midstream example of the adapted cultural memory is the *Vita Basilii*,²⁰⁵ traditionally if wrongly ascribed to Theophanes Continuatus.²⁰⁶

²⁰³ Macrides 2000: 68.

²⁰⁴ Van Dam 2007: 350–1 reads the *VC* principally through the lens of Eusebius' Arianism and therefore sees the work as somewhat marooned in the light of later, orthodox versions of Constantine: 'After the council of Constantinople, emperors, historians and churchmen all rejected Eusebius' construction of a Christian emperor whose standing as an analogue of Jesus Christ could reinforce Arian theology. Augustus the Republican emperor, Diocletian the Tetrarchic emperor, Constantine the Arian emperor as imagined by Eusebius: all these models for a Christian emperor were now outdated.' For the time. But historians continued to revisit and make their choices from 'different constructions of cultural memory' (Neville 2012: 193) and, whatever its modes of transmission, the Eusebian Constantine is strongly present (minus Arianism) in the *Alexiad*. Komnene constantly sees Alexios as an 'analogue' for Christ even as she scrupulously avoids equating them. Indeed, she remoulds and integrates elements from all the 'outdated' imperial characters in her Alexios.

²⁰⁵ See e.g. Markopoulos 1994: 167: 'Both the second version of the Logothete and Leo the Deacon praise Phokas, following the *Vita Basilii*, as the model of encomiastic historical biography.'

²⁰⁶ In his introduction to Ševčenko's edition (2011) of the *Vita Basilii*, Mango argues that it ought to be regarded as a separate work from other texts in the same manuscript ascribed to Theophanes Continuatus. His case is strong and I accept it.

Skylitzes changes its emphasis through stringent editing, and sections off some potentially disreputable material into the preceding Life of Michael III, but otherwise follows its layout in his own Life of Basil. Komnene uses and adapts the genre to her history.²⁰⁷ Whether or not she knew those Lives of Basil directly (and, given Bryennios' use of Skylitzes, she probably knew his) their format was part of her cultural capital. In fact, Skylitzes' Basil shows the ground plan of the *Alexiad* clearly, in eight phases. First, there is Basil's family history, at once royal in the legendary mode and modelled on sacred history with a captivity and exodus. Second, his reign is foretold by signs, portents and dreams. Third, he early shows himself a champion and a hero. Fourth, he rises at court, and is even crowned co-emperor, but 'the incessant plotting . . . against him' forces him 'to take the initiative before he fell victim himself'.²⁰⁸ Five, after his pre-emptive strike, he sets his house in order: treasury, administration, church, law, family. Six, his wars occupy his reign (and include negotiations with the Frankish king and pope and some startling tricks and disguises). Seven, he builds churches and engages in missionary activity. Eight, he deals with the succession and dies.

In so far as the genre bodies forth ideas and assumptions as to what makes greatness in an emperor, Komnene scrutinizes them. Its stage three, for instance, lauds the youthful exploits of the emperor-to-be, in imitation of the saint's pre-sanctity: in her Preface, she criticizes her husband's version as inflationary, editing and re-framing it in her own Book One in a more serious and realistic way. She principally uses the genre (and the Life of Constantine that lies behind it) to show how both her narrative and Alexios' reign are deeply rooted in tradition; how he matches all the standards previously set by emperors; and where and how he is an originator, and himself unmatched.

This last is seen in her adaptations of the pattern. She limits the first stage – family history – to a single generation and motif:²⁰⁹ the anxious

²⁰⁷ For example, two justifications are offered in both Lives of Basil for Michael's murder and Basil's taking power: that Michael was trying to kill Basil, and that his general abuse of his position was wicked, cruel and specifically blasphemous. The last is a version of Eusebius' support for Constantine against the God-hating Maxentius and Licinius. Komnene does not use it to justify Alexios' taking power but perhaps draws on the idea of Constantine's religious wars in Alexios' struggle for religious supremacy against the West.

²⁰⁸ Skyl. *Basil I*, 15 (Thurn 131, Wortley 130).

²⁰⁹ Apart from a brief story in Book Eleven that recalls the military prowess of Alexios' grandfather Manuel, fighting for Basil II against Skleros: *Alexiad* 11.1.6–7 (R-K 324, S 335, F 299). Anna Dalassene's piety is also given a background in the history of a particular church, built by the emperor Isaac Komnenos to commemorate 'God's care for him' during a storm: *Alexiad* 3.8.10 (R-K 109, S 123, F 98). Both these episodes are parenthetical and add no more than passing weight to Alexios' family credentials.

Marian mother. (Basil's mother did not want him to go to the city and Dalassene did not want Alexios to go prematurely to war.) It is a significant variation, almost as significant as the matching variation at the end. Alexios had no legendary ancestors²¹⁰ and even his imperial uncle Isaac Komnenos is mentioned cautiously and later. The difference is characteristic: Komnene consistently avoids the name-dropping and surface embellishment of imperial encomia. Her Alexios, like his mother, is himself to be the source and substance of a legend, not dressed in that of others. He will contain the qualities of other emperors, and even call up memories of them, but without parade. There are many concealed references to those others but only one emperor – the first – will be named. No one overtly preceded him. He is initiator and fulfiller.

The second stage – signs and portents – is restricted to a single prophecy supporting the choice of Alexios over his elder brother: his reign is to be measured and rational and should start that way.

The third stage is magnified and adapted to his future character: Alexios figures as a second Herakles, but whereas Herakles strangled snakes in his cradle (self-preservation), and Basil I hit a wolf with a flail (self-assertion), all Alexios' labours are undertaken for the empire. Basil I's leap on to the emperor's horse signalled his rise to power and displacement of the emperor. Komnene delays Alexios' matching feat until Book Four, where he and his horse perform an extraordinary leap to safety together, a more resonant image for the reigning emperor.

The fourth stage, the rise to prominence and the pre-emptive strike, is also elaborated in the *Alexiad*, not only because of Komnene's reliance on the *Hyle* but, as well, to show the lateral connections that make up the fabric of the new administration, and because she chose not to gloss over the coup but to justify it through stringent examination.

The fifth stage, where he sets his house in order, is greatly expanded in her Book Three and builds in some additional models. While Basil I towers over the middle to late Byzantine period as one ultimate standard that cannot be ignored, he is by no means a sufficient model for Komnene's deeply humanist emperor. Even in the *Vita Basilii*, and more obviously in Skylitzes, Basil is a scourge of God. He provides the pattern for the *Alexiad*, but Skylitzes' John Tzimiskes (whatever the text in which she found him) comes closer to a prototype for Alexios' personality. John Tzimiskes is

²¹⁰ See Markopoulos' account (1994: 162–5) of the development over the ninth and tenth centuries from an initial emphasis on Basil I's humble birth to a revised emphasis for him and his successors on noble and legendary ancestry, eventually including Constantine the Great.

kinder than Basil, more introverted, given to critical self-examination, ready to accept some blame for the preceding violence.²¹¹ Both Basil and John Tzimiskes, however, lack the new factor that Alexios brings, the extended dual-family administration. For all his ruthless behaviour as a paterfamilias, Basil I remains essentially a man without entanglements or obligations, while John's weakness is his lack of family backing; he needs Basil the Parakoimomenos to help him govern at first and then lacks the ruthlessness to dispose of him.²¹² On the other hand, he rids himself of previous entanglements too weakly and abruptly, blaming the murder of the previous emperor on 'the instigation of the Sovereign Lady'.²¹³ This same empress was called 'adulteress' in an earlier passage that appeared to implicate John Tzimiskes;²¹⁴ she certainly behaves as if he had cleared his reputation at her expense. Alexios faces a very similar problem and Komnene subjects the interweaving of his two families to forensic moral scrutiny.

Alexios is to re-establish a state embracing all that is valuable in the great Byzantine tradition and he is to embody those same values in his person. His blended family administration is the new element he brings and it becomes a symbol for imperial unity and durability. His family is his resource as it is the empire's, for the drive throughout the history is to show that, while he lives, Alexios and empire are indivisible. Not only is he rich in mothers, brothers, married sisters and nieces who, unlike Basil's, will be trusted and, when necessary, reunited by Alexios' active efforts. There will also be a family historian. Viewed from the outside, Alexios might seem like John Tzimiskes in having a guilty relation with the previous empress, or his actions towards her son, Constantine Doukas, might seem all too like Romanos I's (co-reigning with a child heir, marginalizing him, betrothing the heir to his own daughter). But 'the Emperor Alexios, my father' has a daughter with a voice, who can give first-hand testimony to the inner meanings of events. Her presence in the text, as witness, but more importantly as simultaneous interpreter, makes Alexios' history unmatched among imperial Lives. She is his co-ruler on the page as Anna Dalassene was in action.

The final three stages occupy the rest of her history, her most significant change being that she does not show Alexios confirming the succession at his death.

²¹¹ Skyl. *John Tzimiskes* 2 (Thurn 285–6, Wortley 272).

²¹² John speaks disdainfully instead of acting, leaving Basil time to have him poisoned (Skyl. *John Tzimiskes* 22, Thurn 312, Wortley 296), a mistake not made by Psellos' Basil II (Psellos, *Chron. Basil II*, 1.19–21, Renauld 1.12–13, Sewter 37–9).

²¹³ Skyl. *John Tzimiskes* 2 (Thurn 285, Wortley 272).

²¹⁴ Skyl. *Nicephoros Phocas* 22 (Thurn 279, Wortley 268).

All her changes to the format are pointed but the whole comes with the assurance given by its imprimatur.

Except where Alexios' imperium was briefly clouded in Book Two, the *Alexiad* sustains its tension between a fixed idea – 'the Emperor Alexios, my father' – and a long drama of becoming. Book One keeps tension between the retrospective framework and the soldier who was not yet emperor. Book Three opens with the same sure touch that distinguished Book One. A single sentence reconstitutes the family coup as family administration:

Οἱ δὲ Κομνηνοὶ τὰ βασιλεία καταλαβόντες παραχρῆμα τὸν ἐπ' ἀνεψιᾶ
γαμβρὸν αὐτῶν Μιχαήλ, ὃς ἐν ὑστέροις καιροῖς λογοθέτης τῶν σεκρέτων
ἐχρημάτισε, πέμπουσι πρὸς αὐτόν.

Having seized the palace, the Komnenoi straightaway sent their niece's husband Michael, who in after days became logothete of the *secreta*, to Botaneiates.²¹⁵

This crispness and certainty is maintained while all the political muddles and rivalries of Book Two are being resolved. The same opening sentence contains a time gap – ἐν ὑστέροις καιροῖς (in after days) – to be filled as the coup is seen being turned into administration through Book Three. By stages, Alexios integrates the two families, Komnenoi and Doukai, then integrates the family and the state, the state and the church and finally the two roles that so often and so fatally became unstuck in Psellos' emperors, the roles of the domestic icon and the 'soldier-emperor'. This book enthrones Alexios in the formal likeness of an icon while tracking him as he establishes rule from day to day and from one situation to another. Iconography and pragmatism work together, inscribing the third book with the potential of the new reign and its labour-intensive difficulty.

Some of the measures Alexios takes are unprecedented. Others have precedents that he develops or transforms. By a parallel process in the narrative, Komnene brings together various established formal elements, blending political analysis, animated novelistic detail, classicizing history, satire, epic and imperial hagiography in a flexible narrative style; she builds a character for Alexios that looks right back to ancient heroes and Roman emperors²¹⁶ but passes through the crucible of Constantine and his successors. Her task is to show in Alexios a figure who fulfils all the significant past

²¹⁵ *Alexiad* 3.1.1 (R-K 87) (my translation). S breaks this sentence into two, which does not quite reflect the effect of transformation and integration, and F does the same (S 103, F 79).

²¹⁶ Where Psellos in the *Chronographia* described emperors whose faults were the defects of their virtues and vice versa, her approach is always to show virtue matched with complementary virtue, something on the principle of Suetonius' Julius Caesar. 'It is a disputable point which was the more remarkable when he went to war: his caution or his daring. He never exposed his army to ambushes, but made

criteria for the good or great leader while also showing how he brings an innovatory genius to the peculiar problems of his time.

The first step is to see the old emperor off. This is easily done through an accepted, non-violent measure,²¹⁷ with a wit honed by Komnene's reading of Psellos.²¹⁸ Botaneiates has been seen to lack the spirit and the will to rule. Forced now to accept the tonsure, he neither embraces a life of prayer nor regrets the loss of power: "Abstinence from meat is the only thing that worries me."²¹⁹ Establishing the character of the new emperor is the challenge, for which neither Psellos nor Bryennios can directly help. A civil war brings chaos and its aftermath demands political solutions. Accordingly, she begins with a fierce power struggle that revolves around Alexios, while not actively engaging him. At the start of his reign he moves into the upper palace but the former empress, Maria, does not leave. This is a standard problem during a change of regime but there are specific complications and everyone around Alexios is shown as anxious. Rumours surround Maria's presence, alleging that Alexios means to repudiate Eirene, his young Doukas wife, for her. Anna Dalassene's hostility to the Doukai was well known and the cries of the Komnenoi on the battlements not to link Eirene's name with

careful reconnaissances . . . On the other hand, when news reached him that his camp in Germany was being besieged, he disguised himself as a Gaul and picked his way through the enemy outposts to take command on the spot . . . Sometimes he fought after careful tactical planning, sometimes on the spur of the moment . . . Towards the end of his life, however, he took fewer chances . . . now that he could not possibly gain more by winning yet another battle than he would lose by a defeat': Suetonius, *De Vita Caesarum: Divus Iulius* 58–60 (Maximilianus 1.30–1, Graves 35–6). Psellos was very familiar with this method and used it in encomia – e.g. in the encomium on his mother: 'But for my mother this division did not hold: everything came together . . . There was both prudence and intelligence, a disposition inclined to reason, a reason inclined to action, and an ability to divide and not divide these opposites and to embrace one while seeming to embrace the other. Thus she never strayed far from God, or from careful housekeeping either': Psellos, *Encomium in matrem* 4.201–9 (Walker 14); 'Who . . . has in equal measure mixed opposites together – timely governance with measured gentleness, sublimity of mind with discipline of thought?': Psellos, *Encomium in matrem* 7.405–8 (Walker 20); 'Things that were dissimilar co-existed in her . . . as similar because they shared one nature': Psellos, *Encomium in matrem* 25.1587 (Walker 57). But, as Papaioannou has shown (2013: 82–3, 119–24, and in many other places throughout) Psellos' discourses on similarity and dissimilarity take this method of analysis into much deeper rhetorical and philosophical territory. Komnene does not so much blend opposites as hold them in antithesis, using the method of the *Chronographia* without the negative effect.

²¹⁷ Applied by that same emperor to his predecessor, without penalty at home though it did give the Normans the pretext to invade. R. Morris 1994: 205–7, 212 names several grounds on which emperors who took power violently might be legitimized: the unfitness of the previous emperor to rule, and the new emperor's subsequent repentance and 'military victories signif[y]ing divine approval'. Komnene includes all of these. Botaneiates' injustice to Constantine Doukas, indifference to his responsibilities and trivializing attitude to being tonsured mark the first of these grounds. The others follow shortly.

²¹⁸ See e.g. his wry account of the emperor Isaac Komnenos' reluctant acceptance of the tonsure: Psellos, *Chron. Constantine X*, 7.10–13 (Renauld 2.143–5, Sewter 336–7).

²¹⁹ *Alexiad* 3.1.1 (R-K 87, S 103, F 79).

Alexios' in the acclamations suggested to the Doukas family that they might be betrayed. While Komnene brushes aside the sexual innuendo about Maria – neither she nor Alexios shows the slightest concern over it and that, she indicates without needing to say, is proof enough – she exposes the real issue behind, the uneasy truce between the families on whose cooperation any future political stability must depend.

The two characters who emerged from the *Hyle* to dominate the coup are the leaders of those families. Kaisar John Doukas and Anna Dalassene now engage, and resolve their rival interests in a narrative that clearly shows how the resolution will be the basis for the reign. Because the story has a potentially sordid aspect, and because Dalassene is to be the emperor at home, Komnene keeps Alexios out of it. The solution is developed over several days during which Eirene remains uncrowned and the Empress Maria stays in the upper palace. It is brokered by Eirene's grandfather John Doukas, using the influence he gained with Maria some years before, when he arranged her marriage to Botaneiates. Then family interest led him to sponsor the mother of a Doukas rather than a former Doukas empress.²²⁰ Now he prefers his granddaughter to his great-nephew. He advises Maria how to leave with dignity and safety and persuades the patriarch ('the Kaisar had long been a friend of his')²²¹ to insist on crowning Eirene. When Anna Dalassene retaliates by demanding a change of patriarch, a deal is struck between them giving John Doukas the succession and Dalassene control over the church: Eirene is crowned and the patriarch makes way for Dalassene's nominee. John Doukas demonstrates again that he is too powerful to defy: no new regime can succeed without him. Dalassene, seeming to give ground, finds the cornerstone of her own power, the building block for a new theocracy. The political perspective is relentless, yet on this settlement an empire can be raised reflecting an historical ideal.

A foundation belief of the *Hyle* – and it underpins the *Chronographia* – is that for some unspecified time there has been something rotten in the state of Byzantium. Manzikert was its symptom as well as a powerful secondary cause, and the rebellions charted in the *Hyle* are further symptoms of malaise. Alexios has taken power to serve the empire but he too has inflicted damage. Book Three charts a process through which, by taking responsibility for that damage, he revives more than the status quo.

He does not do it quite alone. If he starts by governing in tandem with his mother, he reconstructs in symbiosis with his daughter. Her strategies are subtle. She positions herself as an intimate of much of the action, to give

²²⁰ Even though Eudokia had once been his sister-in-law. ²²¹ *Alexiad* 2.12.5 (R-K 86, S 102, F 78).

her narrative authority and entrée to the inner life of certain figures, but partly too to show that there are limits to what anyone can know. From her privileged viewpoint, she reviews Maria's remaining in the palace. She picks up from the *Hyle* the argument of John Doukas to Botaneiates, that Maria is a foreigner with no relatives to trouble him. This, says Komnene, is why she is in no hurry to leave: 'she was in a foreign country, without relatives, without friends . . . some evil might befall the child . . . When emperors fall, that kind of thing usually happens.'²²² Hers is as unillusioned as the slanderous view but it allows for innocent human feeling.

She acknowledges, however, that the case is complex:

I have other reasons to believe I know the truth in this affair: from my early girlhood, before I was eight years old, I was brought up by the empress. She . . . shared all her secrets with me. I have heard many others speak of these things with differing accounts, as some interpreted the events of that time in one way, and others in another; each followed his own inclination, influenced by sympathy or hatred.²²³

These two kinds of data – personal testimony based on experience, and multiple viewpoints based on interest – seem to conflict, but by introducing them together she creates a tension. Personal testimony may show 'inclination'; 'truth' can never be entirely disentangled from construction. Whenever she invokes 'the truth', she gives it a problematic context. Here, by introducing the possibility of doubt, she gives the narrative depth and makes it feel more trustworthy.

Her interventions admit new perspectives. Feeling and perception are invited in. With those come pieties, attachments, values, apprehension, all seen as having a proper place in the narrative and in the state. The opening story of political stabilization is strikingly punctuated by a series of images of *basileia* that work as links to the reintroduction of true *basileia* to the empire. In the reminder that Maria too is the mother of a Doukas, and Alexios bound by honour and adoption to her son, Komnene puts the case that the issue is not Maria but that son. To indicate a dimension beyond mean expedience, she opens up a different kind of space in the narrative for her first image; it takes the form of an *effictio* or portrait-likeness, not of Alexios but Constantine Doukas, son and grandson of two emperors and the first claimant to the throne:²²⁴

²²² *Alexiad* 3.1.2 (R-K 88, S 104, F 80). ²²³ *Alexiad* 3.1.4 (R-K 88, S 104–5, F 80).

²²⁴ I am avoiding the accepted term ekphrasis here because I do not want to entangle myself in theories of ekphrasis and its uses over many texts. Komnene makes sparing, exceptional and discriminating use of ekphrasis: here, and in Book Fourteen when she likens Alexios to a bronze statue, she is at once according the general attribute of *basileia* or imperial mystique to each person so described and

He was blond, with a skin as white as milk, his cheeks suffused with red like some dazzling rose that has just left its calyx. His eyes were not light-coloured, but hawk-like, shining beneath the brows, like a precious stone set in a golden ring.²²⁵

That is unmistakably imperial imagery, even to the evocation of the porphyria.²²⁶ At the same time it is as formal and conventional as a minted coin and perfectly matched by the formal imperium Alexios grants him, the right to wear the scarlet sandals and walk at the head of processions and sign chrysbulls after himself. The mystical element of *basileia* is thus blended with the ethical and symbolically restored to the new, violently imposed, regime. One of the fundamental principles of the history is inscribed in Constantine Doukas' story: an emperor has a sacred responsibility to the past.

It must, however, be discriminating: this Constantine is not given actual power. While insisting on complexity, Komnene is introducing a principle of coexisting realities. Different things may be simultaneously true in different spheres of being. She writes repeatedly of her husband Nikephoros Bryennios in the most ardent and heroic terms, but that is not seen to cancel the claim of her first affianced husband, the young Constantine Doukas ('no one should blame if I praise my own').²²⁷ In the same way, her praise for Maria, who was to have been her mother-in-law, is not prejudiced by her loyalty to her mother Eirene. Each has her own space and her own way of inhabiting it; Komnene proves as inventive in creating new spaces for competing personalities as her father does when he invents new honours and titles. At the heart of John Doukas' politics she creates a space for Maria herself:

She was . . . very tall, like a cypress tree; her skin was snow white; her face was oval, her complexion wholly reminiscent of a spring flower or a rose. As for the flash of her eyes, what mortal could describe it? Eyebrows, flame-coloured, arched above eyes of light blue . . . Neither Apelles, nor Pheidias . . . ever created such a work. The Gorgon's head, so they say, turned men who saw her to stone, but a man who saw the empress walking . . . would be stupefied, rooted to the spot . . . no one till then had ever seen its like among

making quite specific assessments as to the nature and degree of the individual's endowment with that quality. This involves referring to different art forms as well as different images within them. I want to emphasize particularities.

²²⁵ *Alexiad* 3.1.3 (R-K 88, S 104, F 80). More exact.

²²⁶ It is a much more directed image of an imperial type than Psellos' idealization of the same Constantine Doukas as a baby – 'never have I seen such beauty on earth. His face is rounded into a perfect circle, the eyes grey, very big and most serene . . . the tip of the nose straight . . . towards the base . . . somewhat aquiline . . . his hair golden as the sun . . . his eyes . . . gentler than the angels . . . a nature . . . divinely inspired': *Chron. Michael VII*, 7.12 (Renauld 2.178–9, Sewter 373–4)

²²⁷ *Alexiad* 3.1.3 (R-K 88, S 104, F 80). Stylistic.

humankind – a living work of art, an object of desire to lovers of beauty. She was indeed Love incarnate, visiting as it were this earthly world.²²⁸

Maria's foreignness is intensified to make her a figure of myth. She is a 'living work of art', the mark of *basileia*, but beyond the skill of any artist she personifies divinity, being "ἰμερος . . . σωματοθεῖς, 'Longing embodied'. Desire is immortal and yet transient. As in an epic, she is 'visiting' from another world.²²⁹ She does not speak or interact with those who observe her yet gives out a flash of mortal danger. The *effictio* stays the flow of the narrative, while she herself is seen walking, as if from the crease. In this beautiful tribute, Komnene insists on the intrinsic imperial being of the Empress Maria even though her time has gone. *Basileia*, like its institutions, must not be seen as debased, though its representatives change. Maria's quasi-divine beauty is distanced as a potent memory, framed within an exercise in rhetoric used by John Doukas in the past for a political end.

Alexios is exempted from this struggle. He takes no notice of Maria (beyond refusing to evict her) nor of his wife: he 'had . . . no such thought in his mind (how should he?)'.²³⁰ If the two families are to administer the empire, it seems they need first to administer themselves, and while the strong spirits of the upper and the lower palace are reaching their accommodation in one narrative, he is fully occupied in another. But as soon as the two families reach accord, and Eirene is crowned, Alexios is pictured on his throne in full authority and given his *basileia*. He too is a living work of art 'beyond the artist's skill',²³¹ in his case a work of art sacred to Christianity:

When standing he did not seem particularly striking to onlookers, but when one saw the grim flash of his eyes as he sat on the imperial throne, he reminded one of a fiery whirlwind, so overwhelming was the radiance that emanated from his countenance and his whole presence. His dark eyebrows were curved and beneath them the gaze of his eyes was both terrible and kind. A quick glance, the brightness of his face, the noble cheeks suffused with red combined to inspire in the beholder both dread and confidence.²³²

Komnene draws powerfully on visual traditions to show Alexios transfigured by his office: he becomes a living icon in the likeness of the Pantokrator. This is the image that Psellos' Isaac Komnenos simulated in the tent scene.

²²⁸ *Alexiad* 3.2.4 (R-K 91, S 107, F 82–3).

²²⁹ S picks up a nuance by saying she is 'visiting' and F keeps it.

²³⁰ *Alexiad* 3.2.2 (R-K 90, S 106, F 81–2). ²³¹ *Alexiad* 3.2.4 (R-K 91, S 107, F 83).

²³² *Alexiad* 3.3.2 (R-K 93, S 109, F 85).

Alexios will later re-embodiment it in his own tent scene in a more harassed and precarious form.

Eirene is at once pictured as the other figure in a diptych. Though it is she who has just been crowned, she is seen standing, as if beside the throne.

She stood upright like some young sapling, erect and evergreen, all her limbs . . . symmetrical and in harmony . . . Her face shone with the soft light of the moon; it was not the completely round face of an Assyrian woman, nor long, like the face of a Scyth, but just slightly oval in shape. There were rose blossoms on her cheeks, visible a long way off. Her light-blue eyes were both gay and stern: their charm and beauty attracted, but the fear they caused so dazzled the bystander that he could neither look nor turn away . . . if someone . . . had said . . . that she was Athene made manifest to the human race . . . his description would not have been . . . inappropriate . . . she humbled swaggers, but when they were subdued and fearful restored their courage by a single glance . . . The pupils of her eyes, with the brilliant blue of deep waves, recalled a calm, still sea, while the white . . . shone by contrast, so that the whole eye acquired a peculiar lustre and a charm.²³³

Like Maria and her son,²³⁴ and unlike the emperor, she is classically mythologized, but in several fine details her description competes with and departs from Maria's. A young sapling has replaced the cypress. Athene, signifying war and wisdom, has replaced the potentially fatal goddess of love. To some extent, her description distances itself from its own classicizing mythology, as fits a Christian empress. Her gaze also has power – a mark of *basileia* – but it can (in the right spirit) be borne and give a morally uplifting pleasure. Maria's gaze had power outside ethical systems but Eirene shares with Alexios and his mother a look that has the moral force to raise or to reduce, encourage or curb. These four versions of *basileia* are finely distinguished and each is set in its own space. Isaac's likeness follows, a pale shadow of Alexios. Komnene places her one criticism of Isaac just here: his 'impetuosity was Isaac's undoing – the one fault for which he can be censured in war'.²³⁵ A great fighter but not emperor-material.

These four images encapsulate a principle on which the ideal empire is based, one vital to an icon-based religion as to a court that mirrors heaven's: the sacred may live in and be transmitted by the visual. Not only can images conduct the numinous to earthly situations but they can teach the hierarchical principle of divine order. The four images of *basileia* are deep in

²³³ *Alexiad* 3.3.3–4 (R-K 94–5, S 110–11, F 85–6).

²³⁴ Constantine Doukas is 'like a picture of Eros': *Alexiad* 3.1.3 (R-K 88, S 104, F 80).

²³⁵ *Alexiad* 3.3.5 (R-K 95, S 111, F 87). F correctly restores 'my uncle' instead of 'Isaac'. S is slightly less literal but its cadence and word order are expressive in a way that is closer to the Greek.

shades of instructive difference, a principle about to be applied to Alexios' invention of new titles and positions. Though in some ways they inhabit different spaces, they do form a sequence. They imply procedure. They introduce a principle of precedence. They have been artfully placed to interpenetrate the story of *Realpolitik* so as to seem to participate in its causes and effects. At some level beneath the political, but not divorced from it, the feeling is created that the honouring of each debt makes possible the honouring of the next until Alexios emerges in due sanctity and power.

From the incandescent image of Alexios on his throne, showing the re-establishment of *basileia* there, flows a series of honours and entitlements. It is unusual for Komnene to concern herself with ceremonial but in this section she shows Alexios using it to restore the social contract and its sacred underpinnings. The visibly fixed hierarchy was enough by itself to keep the empire stable under Psellos' Zoe and Theodora, but things have changed since Manzikert. Alexios now reinvents the hierarchy in a system of new positions specified together with the kinship patterns in the new administration. He devises a position superior to that of Kaiser, to keep his word to Melissenos while placing the faithful Isaac above him and beneath himself, the three positions all being visualized with crowns. Just as Isaac's beard is thinner than Alexios', so his crown and Melissenos' contain few pearls 'and are not cap-shaped'. Unlike theirs, the emperor's own crown is seen in the wearing, as part of his face: 'shaped like a half-sphere . . . clusters of pearls . . . hung down, lightly touching the cheeks'.²³⁶ New names are brought forth, some of them compounds of the old; new meanings are assigned. The list is both anatomy and manifesto: each claimant will be given ample justice and reward but without that loss of distinction censured by Psellos.²³⁷ Komnene may even be responding to Psellos' charge that, when 'Constantine [IX] reduced this *cursum honorum* to mere confusion and abolished all rules of advancement' he showed that he had 'little conception of government', for she makes her highest claims just here for Alexios as 'the master of the science of government'.²³⁸

The whole section may be seen as a response to the *Chronographia*. Psellos – so alert to nuance in ceremonial – gives us a spectrum between

²³⁶ *Alexiad* 3.4.1 (R-K 95, S III–12, F 87).

²³⁷ Psellos, *Chron. Constantine IX*, 6.29 (Renauld I.132, Sewter 170–1).

²³⁸ *Alexiad* 3.4.3 (R-K 96, S 112, F 88). The word used is ἐπιστημονόρης. As Macrides 1990: 64 (reprinted in Macrides 1999) points out: 'the word's monastic origin is not explicit but is evident in the emphasis on the *taxis* or order which Alexios creates . . . All other examples of the word's application to emperors are related to imperial activities within the church.' The parallel is evident with Anna Dalassene's turning the palace into a monastery: Alexios' science of government would seem to draw, however implicitly, on a monastic understanding of order.

empty gorgeousness and that display which is oracular demonstration of real power, in a society whose unifying symbols, red for blood and gold for bounty, are backed at least in a promissory way by force. Both he and Komnene are aware that the art of ruling is very much that of deploying symbols to maximize belief in their underlying sanctions: the art of grafting open government on to closed power systems, using show as a substitute for force. Alexios on his throne needs no support for the natural colour in his face, 'the noble cheeks suffused with red', whereas in the tent scene, in Book Nine, his colour is a sign of strain and she augments his visible majesty with gold. Here, the individually visualized details of the new *cursum honorum* imperceptibly meld into a half-seen procession. The history of Constantine Doukas is retold in ceremonial terms: his renunciation of his purple slippers, Botaneiates' restoration of 'a few strands of red', the pledge given to Maria 'in letters of red and a golden seal . . . that . . . her son . . . should be co-ruler with Alexios, with the right to wear the purple sandals and a crown'.²³⁹ That resumé leads to a picture of the young co-emperor walking immediately after Alexios in processions, 'wearing an imperial diadem', his place secure and contained, and this in turn leads to Maria's leaving the palace 'with an escort worthy of her rank'.²⁴⁰ From *basileia* proceed justice, mercy, harmony and order. It is an idealized picture, not of the apostrophizing kind favoured by Corippus on the accession of Justin II, but a picture nevertheless of due succession. The breach in the imperial tradition is visualized as healed.

Alexios has been active at another level, in the city. He came to power as a soldier-emperor and in this role he is given an Homeric character that never quite leaves him:

At sunrise he entered the palace, and before shaking off the dust of battle and resting his body, applied himself immediately and totally to the . . . military position.

His first task was to curb his own rioting soldiers:

the rest of the day and all that night he spent in devising ways of ending the indiscipline and licence of the soldiers who were scattered over Byzantion²⁴¹ in great number . . . he feared their wildness . . . they might even plan a coup against himself.²⁴²

²³⁹ *Alexiad* 3.4.5–6 (R-K 97, S 113, F 88). The following brief quotation occurs in the same passage.

²⁴⁰ *Alexiad* 3.4.7 (R-K 97, S 113, F 89).

²⁴¹ One of the ways in which Komnene referred to Constantinople was by its original name, 'Byzantion'. Use of the term 'Byzantium' for the empire ruled from Constantinople evolved later.

²⁴² *Alexiad* 3.2.2 (R-K 90, S 106, F 82). The preceding brief quotation is from the same passage.

Though he evidently did control them, the more painful breach was to the body politic, 'the plundering of the capital, which on his arrival had affected the whole population'.²⁴³ After Eirene's coronation, that narrative is resumed at a new depth as Alexios agonizes over his responsibility for something he has not authorized or done himself:

He regarded the evil which had befallen the whole city as his responsibility . . . He was sick at heart, filled with shame . . . and though he was aware that these crimes against the city were the work of other hands . . . yet conscience told him . . . that . . . he himself . . . had afforded the pretext . . . he assumed the whole burden of guilt and was anxious and willing to heal the wound.²⁴⁴

In accepting this burden of guilt, Alexios had a spectacular and famous predecessor in Theodosius I. During their stay in Thessalonica, as Attaleiates²⁴⁵ and Kedrenos tell it, his soldiers had disturbed the city. When Theodosius heard that the citizens had responded by rioting and had insulted him, he gave the city prefect full authority to punish them, and thousands were indiscriminately killed. Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, responded furiously, holding the emperor responsible, and placed a church interdict on him for many months. When he at last relented and let Theodosius enter the church, Theodosius fell to the ground, tearing his hair and eyes and watering the ground with tears.²⁴⁶ Skylitzes' John Tzimiskes also began his reign with a ritual penance, though it was relatively low-key (he was hastening to exculpate himself even as he paid his fine). Indeed, Alexios' act of penance is traditional and sanctioned: Dagron proposes it as a legitimizing ritual for all emperors.²⁴⁷ Late western medieval history too is rich in images of kings and emperors walking on their knees or barefoot through the snow in penance for their sins – King John, Henry II, the Emperor Henry IV and so on. But all these penances differ from Alexios' in one important way. They were all enjoined on those rulers, by patriarchs, bishops and popes. Indeed, the *coup de grâce* of the Theodosius story is Ambrose's subsequent refusal to let Theodosius inside the sanctuary.

²⁴³ *Alexiad* 3.5.1 (R-K 98, S 113, F 89). ²⁴⁴ *Alexiad* 3.5.2–4 (R-K 98–9, S 114, F 89–90).

²⁴⁵ Attaleiates (Bekker 315).

²⁴⁶ Kedrenos (Bekker 1.559). Kazhdan and Constable 1982: 62 cite a parallel episode from the Life of the Patriarch Euthymios in which Leo VI was excommunicated and refused permission to enter Hagia Sophia by the patriarch. The emperor withdrew, watering the ground with his tears. At his second attempt, the same thing happened and 'he cast himself on the ground and after weeping a long time rose up and bade farewell to the patriarch'.

²⁴⁷ 'The fault of kings . . . was inherent in their power' and repentance was 'the price paid for [their] *dynasteia*': Dagron 2003: 124, 120. He gives a fascinating account (114–24) of penitential rituals in story and iconography with special emphasis on Basil I and Leo VI, together with their Old Testament model David.

Alexios pre-empts all this by assuming the necessary humility and remorse before they can be imposed. He *invites* the church to fix his punishment, as, in effect, its head. The atonement thus assumes a different power structure and acquires a somewhat different style, exemplifying the blend of Hellenic and Christian elements in the rule to come: as hero-general he answers for the actions of his men while, like a priest, he performs a sacrament on their behalf together with his own. First consulting his mother, he calls together the patriarch (still the saintly Kosmas) with 'certain leading members of Holy Synod and the monastic order',²⁴⁸ and re-empowers the church in the new state, demonstrating that he is not above its law. Nor is he enthroned in their presence, as he will be in a later enquiry:

The emperor came before them as a man on trial, a person of no account, one of 'those set under authority', condemned and tensely awaiting at any moment the verdict of the court . . . He admitted all in fear and faith, passionately demanding from them a remedy for his misdeeds and offering to undergo penance. They condemned not only Alexios but his blood-relations, as well as those who shared with him in the rebellion; all were to submit to the same punishment – fasting, sleeping on the ground and the performing of the appropriate rites to appease the anger of God . . . their wives could not bear to stand aloof . . . The palace became a scene of tearful lamentation . . . It was typical of the emperor's own piety that he should inflict on himself a further penalty: for forty days and nights he wore sack-cloth beneath the royal purple and next to his skin. At night his bed was the bare ground and . . . his head was supported on . . . a stone.²⁴⁹

Komnene grasps to an unusual degree how difficult it is to right old wrongs or to excise them from the living tissue of the present. Here she brings together several levels of awareness in one impassioned episode. Nominally, Alexios does penance for his soldiers' damage to the city. Symbolically, he does it for illegally seizing power. At another level again, he does penance for his own human inadequacy in the face of overwhelming responsibilities. (Like Oedipus, perhaps, he is trying to avert divine wrath for what he cannot help.) And, finally, he does it for the wounded empire. While the 'royal purple' and presumably some tasks of government are not abandoned, the closing image, 'his head . . . supported on . . . a stone', anticipates his later role as athlete for Christ.²⁵⁰ In the end the focus is on him alone, no church or Ambrose-figure or priestly caste in sight.

²⁴⁸ *Alexiad* 3.5.4 (R-K 99, S 115, F 90). ²⁴⁹ *Alexiad* 3.5.5 (R-K 99–100, S 115, F 90–1).

²⁵⁰ The Lenten reference in the forty nights gives Alexios the two-fold character of a Christian penitent and of a Christ-figure preparing to begin his ministry.

In embracing a shared guilt, his family is seen to be united: there is no more male or female, slave or free, and no more Doukas and Komnenos. No further power struggles are recorded between the two sides of the blended family.²⁵¹ The rite marks their passage from a conspiratorial role to their new role as guardians of the empire.²⁵² This cleansing of group guilt in the family and palace presages, even symbolically enacts, a cleansing in that larger entity the empire, for which the palace may again be envisaged as the moral centre. The ritual releases Alexios to administer the empire 'with clean hands', which he does in an original way by entrusting the domestic administration to his mother. It also works as a pivot in her characterization. Komnene's view of her grandmother has been as critical as the *Hyle's* to this point. Dalassene's chosen patriarch was a monk with 'a false reputation for virtue' who won his position by making 'prophecies about power': 'such words flattered her'.²⁵³ Having shown how the state's institutions may be suborned by politics, Komnene uses the penance to refill them with the power to sanction: it is *after* the rite of penance that Anna Dalassene turns the palace into a monastery and is spoken of with unqualified respect.

The great innovation of Alexios' rule is presented as extreme yet necessary. Only the bonds within a family – this family, rich in selfless genius – could be strong enough to raise a devastated empire.

It was his desire that his mother should govern rather than himself.²⁵⁴

Komnene is at pains to show that that is no mere figure of speech. In fact, she fortifies it in what looks like another direct response to the *Chronographia*. McCartney has examined the expressive variations in Psellos' use of the traditional metaphors of ship and chariot of state to encapsulate his emperors' idiosyncrasies and failures.²⁵⁵ Komnene seldom uses these but here she takes up both to praise Dalassene's government in pointedly conventional ways:²⁵⁶

She desired to guide the ship of state on the best possible course . . . especially since the young man had only just taken his seat in the stern and put his hand to the tiller, with no previous experience of storms, winds and waves of such

²⁵¹ Where suspicion is kindled – against Constantine Doukas and Maria in Diogenes' conspiracy, and against John Komnenos, Isaac's son, by his Komnenos uncle – Alexios refuses to countenance it, so that family unity is not breached.

²⁵² A passage with deep psychological and cultural roots, its deepest level found, perhaps, in the transformation of the Furies into the Eumenides.

²⁵³ *Alexiad* 3.2.7 (R-K 92, S 108–9, F 84). F drops 'false' but S's 'false reputation' seems justified to me.

²⁵⁴ *Alexiad* 3.6.1 (R-K 100, S 115–16, F 91). ²⁵⁵ McCartney 2006.

²⁵⁶ Basil I's assumption of government in the *Vita Basilii* is described in similar standard terms: he had earlier made up for Michael's deficiency in 'steering the ship of universal state': *VB* 18.73; 'Now . . . when Basil, exalted by Providence, had taken his seat at the helm of the government, he strove right from the start . . . to appear worthy': *VB* 30.117.

violence. She was constrained . . . by a mother's affection for her son, and governed with him, sometimes even grasping the reins (to change the metaphor) and alone driving the chariot of power – and without accident or error. The truth is that Anna Dalassene was . . . endowed with a fine intellect and . . . a really first-class aptitude for governing.²⁵⁷

The history makes many vague references to storms and seas of trouble but this passage is unusually traditionalist, avoiding anything fanciful or *neos* and restoring to full vigour the time-honoured metaphors diverted by Komnene's great predecessor to describe corrupted reigns.²⁵⁸ It is a signature use of tradition to sanction a Komnenos innovation.

The natural feelings of a mother have already been invoked to defend the empress Maria. Now Dalassene has the benefit of the same pieties. Alexios' chrysobull begins 'there is no safeguard stronger than a mother',²⁵⁹ and he assigns to her a power even beyond his own (analogous to the queen of heaven's):

her decisions . . . shall have the force of law permanently.

Neither now nor in the future shall such decisions be subjected to inquiry or undergo any examination whatsoever at the hands of anybody . . . It shall be absolutely impossible in the future to demand account of any action taken by [her or her ministers].²⁶⁰

Of course he is thinking of her previous arrest and interrogation under Michael VII. Alexios never claims this kind of privilege for himself. On the contrary, when Dalassene and Isaac (ruling in her shadow as he does in his brother's) requisition church property to fund the war effort,²⁶¹ it is Alexios who appears before a court to answer for it.²⁶²

Komnene does grant the apparent strangeness of the arrangement. She forestalls in order to rebut whatever 'the reader may well censure', such as an imagined complaint that Alexios was 'transferring the government of the empire to the women's quarters'.²⁶³ If another reader should suppose that Dalassene is the ambitious and manipulative figure of the *Hyle* and Book Two, that supposition also is dismissed: 'She had in mind the last stage of

²⁵⁷ *Alexiad* 3.6.2 (R-K 100, S 116, F 91–2). S is slightly free but F's removal of all reference to a metaphoric (or riddling) way of talking is reductive.

²⁵⁸ E.g. 'The . . . emperor . . . set in motion the chariot of State, and of those who rode in it most were thrown overboard or struck down by him. As we, too, were aboard, there was every reason why we should fear some great jolt on the wheel: he might jerk us off, as well as the rest, for we were not very firmly seated': Psellos, *Chron. Constantine IX*, 6.193 (Renauld 2.66, Sewter 255).

²⁵⁹ *Alexiad* 3.6.4 (R-K 101, S 117, F 92). ²⁶⁰ *Alexiad* 3.6.7–8 (R-K 102–3, S 118, F 93–4).

²⁶¹ They inform the synod that this is what they have done and the requisition is afterwards repeated: *Alexiad* 5.2.2–3 (R-K 144, S 158–9, F 131).

²⁶² *Alexiad* 6.3.2 (R-K 172, S 184–5, F 156–7). ²⁶³ *Alexiad* 3.7.2 (R-K 103, S 116, F 94).

life and dreamed of monasteries . . . Despite this longing in her heart . . . she also loved her son to a quite exceptional degree.²⁶⁴ She has no desire for power now and thus is fit to govern. The dream of monasteries is assumed into her new role, as she cleanses the gynaeconitis and establishes a discipline, extending through the palace into government, of God-fearing self-control:

She instituted set times for the singing of sacred hymns, stated hours for breakfast; there was now a special period in which magistrates were chosen. She herself set a firm example to everybody else, with the result that the palace assumed the appearance rather of a monastery . . . Her house was a refuge . . . Priests and monks . . . shared her meals . . . she wore herself out with continual prayers and vigils. Nevertheless, at dawn . . . she was applying herself anew to state business, attending to the choice of magistrates and answering the petitions of suppliants.²⁶⁵

Under her, the government of the gynaeconitis and the empire is reformed on an ungendered model of a religious house.

Other charges are anticipated and ruled out. This is not one of those dangerous maternal regencies for ungrown heirs. Alexios is mature in years. Indeed, he is old enough to feel ‘the lust for power’,²⁶⁶ but by investing her he shows he too is free of that lust. Nor is he incapable of single rule: ‘he could have managed several empires of more than one type’.²⁶⁷ His mother, however, ‘was capable . . . of managing not only the Roman Empire, but every other empire under the sun as well’.²⁶⁸ She has the pieties and feelings of a mother but she has long been head of her own house (still the model for a dynastic reign). Nor is it a petticoat government. ‘She had vast experience and a wide understanding . . . She was a most persuasive orator . . . She was the legislator, the complete organizer and governor . . . not only was she a very great credit to her own sex, but to men as well; indeed, she contributed to the glory of the whole human race.’²⁶⁹

Unlike the imperial figures who were given images of *basileia*, Anna Dalassene has no physical description beyond the look she shares with Alexios and Eirene: ‘pleasure-loving fools . . . found a single glance from her more than they could bear; yet to the chaste she seemed gentle and gay’.²⁷⁰ But she is given more power by Alexios, and more space by Komnene in these early books, than any one else, including him. Her modelling is

²⁶⁴ *Alexiad* 3.6.2 (R-K 100, S 116, F 91). ²⁶⁵ *Alexiad* 3.8.2–4 (R-K 105–6, S 121, F 96–7).

²⁶⁶ *Alexiad* 3.7.1 (R-K 103, S 118, F 94). ²⁶⁷ *Alexiad* 3.2.2 (R-K 90, S 106, F 82).

²⁶⁸ *Alexiad* 3.7.2 (R-K 103, S 119, F 94).

²⁶⁹ *Alexiad* 3.7.2–8.2 (R-K 103–5, S 119–20, F 94–6). F’s ‘gender’ reads as an anachronism in a translation where Komnene says ‘women’.

²⁷⁰ *Alexiad* 3.8.3 (R-K 105, S 121, F 96).

notable, as she moves out of her *Hyle*-character into one very like the character created by Psellos in his encomium for his mother. Psellos' mother prayed 'to end her days in the monastic life'.²⁷¹ Her presence was strong: 'who had a more cheerful look, or conversed more gracefully, or corrected error with a gentler manner? . . . But . . . with many persons . . . she exercised stern discipline, and could dissuade them merely by raising an eyebrow . . . she could unnerve them . . . [by] the superior force of her virtue'.²⁷² 'She judged the female and the male, not giving one sex the greater and the other the lesser status . . . but assigning equality to both . . . their reasoning power is equal and indistinguishable'.²⁷³ 'She manifestly was stronger than the rest of her family . . . by being incomparable to the women and better than the men'.²⁷⁴ This modelling is striking and there are other, more authoritative, models behind it. Komnene works by layering: it is not uncommon for Byzantine writers to incorporate precedent behind precedent, but she does it in an unshowy way, so that the character interiorizes the references rather than merely wearing them, while the reader's recognizing mind receives an almost painterly effect of thickened texture.

For, unlike other imperial characters in this work, Anna Dalassene is not apparently mythologized,²⁷⁵ yet, behind the first and second likeness, the character built up for her in Book Three is that of a Theotokos, Mother and Guardian of the City. She is never explicitly likened to the Theotokos: there are no metaphors or classical allusions, only references to her having a single will with her son.²⁷⁶ This austerity of reference is consistent through the *Alexiad* and is an aspect of Komnene's own silent demonstration of judicious self-control: in important matters she does not decorate her narrative with overt comparisons but leads the reader to discover them. To call Bryennios an Ares, Alexios a Herakles, or Eirene an Athene, is part of a quite different practice, where she displays a 'Hellenic Christian' mentality – and asks the reader to engage with it – expressive of the culture she accredits to her father's reign. But, where she wants to show Alexios as matching this or that great predecessor, she avoids an easy naming; she works rather to develop the likeness to that predecessor in the embodied actions of an Alexios who resembles him and yet is different and more.

²⁷¹ Psellos, *Encomium in matrem* 11.645–7 (Walker 28).

²⁷² Psellos, *Encomium in matrem* 8.494–8 (Walker 23).

²⁷³ Psellos, *Encomium in matrem* 25.1595–1600 (Walker 58).

²⁷⁴ Psellos, *Encomium in matrem* 7.422–4 (Walker 21).

²⁷⁵ Apart from her seal bearing the Transfiguration and the Assumption, which might be taken to refer to Alexios and herself: *Alexiad* 3.6.6 (R-K 102, S 118, F 93).

²⁷⁶ Alexios says in his chrysobull that 'one soul animated us' and she does die on a day prophesied as Alexios' death-day in Book Six: *Alexiad* 6.7.5 (R-K 182, S 195, F 166).

Of these, only Constantine is ever named and that naming is a high point in the structure and development of the whole work.

To acclaim Anna Dalassene a Theotokos would be too little as well as too much. It would reduce the likeness to a commonplace rhetorical ornament, a figure of speech. Her presence is functional. She is in her own being a source of myth and guarantor for tradition and in this role Komnene ascribes to her great innovatory power: 'she . . . was always evolving new ideas . . . wholesome schemes which restored to full vigour the already corrupted empire and revived . . . the ruined fortunes of the people'.²⁷⁷ Komnene marks that power with an innovation of her own, the inclusion of a lengthy document that isolates and magnifies the investiture to show it as a formal, legal, almost a liturgical, act.

As Psellos showed in case after case, ruling at home and defending in the field are roles very difficult for one man to fill. Where eunuchs may supply active political wisdom they can fall victim to imperial jealousy²⁷⁸ and they can be dangerous.²⁷⁹ Alexios' choice of an older woman closely related to him is more daring and much safer. His mother will not foment a rebellion in his absence, nor succumb to sexual blandishment; she is driven as he is and has the same objectives without the same sensitivity to censure. As soon as she is established, he can go to war.

Komnene has shown Alexios putting his house in order under extraordinary pressure, much of that pressure being felt in the objections that she circumvents. Her strongly circumstantial account of a narrow power struggle has opened to include the ethical and sacred. Justice has been done to individuals, promises kept, histories respected and imaginative remedies constructed. Atonement has been made, divisions healed. Institutions have been reconsecrated, public confidence restored and *basileia* renewed. But it is not the easy victory given to Basil I. When Basil sets his house in order, his reforms are sweeping and unopposed. He refills the empty treasury like a magician. (Alexios has a battle with the church to face.) He reinstates the patriarch, codifies the law, cleans up a conspiracy and consigns all his daughters to a monastery, thus avoiding the possible ambitions of a son-in-law. Basil's reforms are the unimpeded expression of his will: when it is proved that there is no longer any need or injustice in the city, he 'shed tears of joy and gave thanks to God'.²⁸⁰ He settles his administration once and for

²⁷⁷ *Alexiad* 3.8.4 (R-K 106, S 121, F 96). ²⁷⁸ As with Basil II or Michael V.

²⁷⁹ As with John Tzimiskes.

²⁸⁰ His legal and social reforms are praised for showing that he remembers being poor but there is no suggestion in his Life of any of the social or lobby-group resistance which might reveal the working

all, so that he can give his time and energy to war and in particular to his vendetta against the Bulgars. Alexios also frees himself to be a soldier-emperor. Dalassene's administration is the firm foundation on which he builds. But his measures come under scrutiny and are hard won.

The empire is in chaos and the struggle to re-establish order there is more difficult than anything that happened in the city:²⁸¹

The Emperor Alexios knew that the empire was almost at its last gasp. (The east was being horribly ravaged by the Turks . . .) . . . while Robert strained every nerve . . . The brave young emperor . . . did not know which way to turn . . . both enemies demanded the right to challenge first. He was worried and vexed. The Romans had no worthwhile forces . . . there were no reserves of money . . . The emperors before him . . . had reduced Roman prestige to a minimum . . . he wanted to restore his empire . . . He realized that he must quickly summon all the *toparkhes* in the east . . . At once . . . he dashed off important dispatches to all of them . . . He explained . . . how by the Providence of God he had been promoted to the supreme rank of emperor . . . He ordered them to ensure the safety of their own provinces, leaving for that purpose enough soldiers, but with the rest they were to come to Constantinople.²⁸²

Komnene sets the pattern of her history as a pattern of pressures on Alexios' awareness and his quick yet strategic responses. All the characteristics he was given in Book One are reassigned to him in Book Three in the new context: some are still effective, some need supplementing. The mythic characterization of Book One is no longer adequate: 'if Herakles could not fight two opponents at once . . . how much more true was it of a young general who had but recently acquired a corrupted empire?'²⁸³ But the early strategies of an impoverished, unsupported general work very well against the encroaching Turks: Alexios sends scratch troops with instructions to make small cautious raids on their coastal settlements, gradually extending

structures of an empire: none of the bureaucratic opposition of a John the Lydian, no acknowledgement of the groups inevitably impoverished by social change: Skyl. *Basil I* 16 (Thurn 132–4, Wortley 131–2).

²⁸¹ In Book Three, even the digression works to justify its space, almost becoming a mini-genre. It has the effect, characteristic in the history, of abruptly following periods or pictures of stability with tumultuous out-of-control experiences in which the thin thread of 'God's care' is the one link between past and future. Between the calm order of Dalassene's administration at home and Alexios' beginning his desperate military efforts on the borders there is an anecdote about his uncle Isaac and an oak blown down in a storm. In one swirling movement that simulates the storm, Komnene invokes Alexios' brief imperial experiences, his uncle's prowess as a 'Wielder of the Thunderbolt', the chaos of immigratory invasion and a flooded battlefield, the sheer precariousness of life, the chance or fate that takes Isaac away from the oak just before it falls, which he interprets as 'God's care for him', and the church he builds in gratitude: it is an unexpected but effective transition to Alexios' new position as the empire's fragile saviour: *Alexiad* 3.8 (R-K 105–9, S 122–4, F 97–9).

²⁸² *Alexiad* 3.9.1–3 (R-K 109–11, S 124–5, F 99–100). ²⁸³ *Alexiad* 3.11.5 (R-K 116, S 130, F 105).

these into daytime cavalry attacks. He trains the troops through carefully monitored experience. His early acts of war take place directly around the city, with the keen awareness that the empire is effectively reduced to this small area, where his experience of fighting with almost no resources is his specific strength.

The war against the Normans – broken off at the end of Book One – has to be pursued by new, imaginative methods. In Book Three, to this point, Komnene has mapped the course of Alexios' restorations as a picture of the reign to come and done it in a way so orderly as to have something of the quality of ceremonial. Now she reopens the history to the threat from overseas. Dyrrakhion is still the strategic focus and remains so until the Crusade. To deal with the problem at the end of Book One, Alexios sent the matchless George Palaiologos to take over Monomakhatos' command while dissuading Monomakhatos from defecting.²⁸⁴ More is required against Robert himself and more is possible now that Alexios holds the throne. He reaches deep into the West, behind the Norman, with a new resource, international diplomacy.²⁸⁵ He writes with unctuous affection to (among others) the 'German king', offering him specific inducements from the Byzantine treasury and a marriage alliance with 'my favourite nephew . . . [who] takes for me the place of a true heir'. The inducements he names, gold coin and purple cloths, 'pieces of silver of the old quality', cross, reliquary, cup and crystal goblet, may have something in common with the insulting heap of trinkets later offered to Bohemond but, more significantly, they have an international symbolism: such objects may so embellish earthly courts as to make them resemble the court of heaven and appropriate its imperium. Byzantium might be said to have invented this symbolism and Alexios is entitled to offer its currency to Henry alongside praise of his 'noble and truly Christian brother' in an alliance against the 'sinful enemy of God and the Christians'. The litany of precious objects gives the document the character of a contract. At the same time, it slyly sets Henry in the traditional German posture of a liegeman receiving precious objects and commissions from his suzerain; the vague yet insistent references to the 'oath' Henry is to take are very like the references to the oath expected from the Crusaders. This letter exemplifies a new imperial mode of being for

²⁸⁴ Monomakhatos does indeed defect to Alexios' enemies, the 'slaves' from Book One, but Alexios is able to reverse this: 'he now despatched a chrysobull guaranteeing his complete safety. Monomakhatos, with the letter in his hand, came back to the palace': *Alexiad* 3.12.1 (R-K 116–17, S 131, F 106).

²⁸⁵ New for him, that is. International diplomacy was hardly new. Basil I, for instance, had written to the French king and the pope asking for help in protecting Byzantine territories in Italy and he had received it: *VB* 55.200.

Alexios, that of the showman, actor, spin doctor: 'Although in other respects my affairs go well, to a very small degree they are in disarray.' Henry can after all measure the 'very small degree' to the last piece of gold and silver.²⁸⁶

In this letter, and to some extent the chrysobull and 'important dispatches', Alexios is heard laying hold of some of his official voices as he establishes his authority. Komnene does something similar in producing those documents: Book Three is fortified by documents in a way matched only by Book Thirteen. They give an impression of the 'brave young emperor' desperately contriving, using his theatrical skills fantastically in an unknown auditorium, and curiously (if they are authentic) they produce an air of unreality. Their language is necessarily more artificial than Komnene's own flexible, all-purpose style, and the distance set by this ornate screen of diplomatic discourse makes one more aware just how intimate Komnene's narrative is.

Most of Book Three was given to reconciling discordant elements and integrating family, church and state. In the final section, the threats on various borders disperse Alexios' attention and stretch his resources, while the documents open a gap between the unassuming Christian emperor at home and the masks he wears for foreign diplomacy. In this respect, too, Book Three anticipates the rhythm of the reign, a recurring rhythm of concentration at home and dispersal abroad.

In so far as it re-concentrates abroad, it does so under pressure from the Normans. Komnene's technique in tracking Robert's moves and talking up his juggernaut approach mirrors, in a colder way, her practice with Alexios. She interfuses Robert's actual movements with his thoughts, his expectations, his ideas. She ends this book with the huge storm that overwhelms his fleet during his crossing to Dyrrakhion: 'as if God were venting His wrath on Robert for the unyielding, presumptuous arrogance of the man . . . None of this frightened him, or affected his iron nerve.'²⁸⁷ In Book One the two champions came up towards a match and again, in Book Three, they are set against each other as strategists examining the board: it is not unlike the tension between Thucydides' Pericles and Archidamus early in *The Peloponnesian War*. Not that the leaders or their situations are alike but the shifting between points of view is similar: it is always acknowledged that the Normans have one.

The move into the next books' classicizing military history is signalled by a reference to Komnene's own first-hand military source²⁸⁸ and a stylish

²⁸⁶ *Alexiad* 3.10.2–7 (R-K 112–14, S 126–8, F 101–3). ²⁸⁷ *Alexiad* 3.12.6 (R-K 118, S 132, F 107).

²⁸⁸ 'The Latin who gave me this information was with him, an envoy, he said, from the Bishop of Bari sent to Robert': *Alexiad* 3.12.7 (R-K 119, S 133, F 108).

digression on the place that is to be the focus of the first Norman war, Dyrrakhion. Here, 'Pyrros, King of Epiros, once lived'. As she tells it, this ancient Greek hero fought against the Romans with 'so much carnage' that the city was depopulated; afterwards, however, it was rebuilt by Amphion and Zethos and given its present name. The story is unsound in detail and does not translate back into the present antagonism but it flags two themes: the destructiveness of the coming war and the capacity of mythic heroes to rebuild.²⁸⁹ Books Four to Eight take the reader into the military history proper as Alexios expands the theatre of war and grows into his warrior role.

²⁸⁹ *Alexiad* 3.12.7 (R-K 119, S 133, F 108). Amphion and Zethos were known for rebuilding, only not this city.