

The Apostolic Emperor: Anna Comnena's Conceptualization of Alexius I

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Anna Comnena best reflects her view of her father's infallibility through her assertion that Alexius I "alone made use of arms and words alike, for with arms he conquered them and by his arguments he subdued the ungodly" (466). Her text, *The Alexiad*, is an exemplary historical work by a medieval woman that expressed the Comnena dynasty's perception of imperial office. The concept of the imperial office as the earthly embodiment of the Kingdom of Heaven was not new to the Comnena dynasty. In the sixth century, Justinian had considered himself the ultimate political and religious authority and involved himself in heretical matters, including those of the Manicheans whom Alexius I would later encounter (Gregory 123-25). Alexius I initially focused on consolidating a fractured Byzantine empire when he rose to power in 1081. However, as his authority stabilized, he became increasingly interested in religious matters. In her historical account of her father, Comnena justifies his interference in conflicts over heresy by vilifying his religious opponents and propagating the emperor's role as both a political authority and apostolic teacher.

After Alexius I died, his widowed empress requested a suitable biography. Comnena's husband Nikephoros began the work, but when he died Comnena herself picked up the project where he had left it (Herrin 233-35). Alexius I is perhaps most well-known as the emperor who called on Pope Urban II for aid, a request that inadvertently

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started The First Crusade (Herrin 254-57). Comnena's text covers the onslaught of crusading along with Alexius I's entire reign, during which he involved himself in numerous economic, political, military, and religious matters. In her introduction, Comnena cites her motivations for continuing the work as a desire to pay tribute to her father's memory and historicize his legacy. However, her intent is not just to record her father but glorify his reign, particularly in juxtaposition of the previous, failed reign (Comnena 18-21). Comnena may claim to be an impartial historian, but her close relationship to her subject reveals The Alexiad to be a calculated and biased account. Her father, Alexius I, had not ascended to the throne through inheritance, which was the normal custom. Instead, the Comnena dynasty's rise to power was the result of a coup by leading families of Constantinople. Comnena finds justification in her father's unorthodox rise to power in the failings of the deposed emperor (Herrin 230). Alexius I took the throne amidst what historians deem the crisis of the eleventh century, a period involving numerous inadequate emperors, military threats within and outside the empire, and a debasement of coinage after centuries of economic stability (Herrin 221). The Alexiad serves as propaganda to solidify the Comnena family's position. Scholars have suggested that the text served to counter the rising favor Comnena's nephew, Manuel I, received for his relationships with Western crusaders. Manuel I's glory threatened to eclipse Alexius I's legacy (Herrin 239-240). Comnena's representation of her father likely worked to secure his place in the history of Byzantine politics and the Orthodox Church.

Comnena emphasizes her father's role as a teacher who instructed his subjects on proper beliefs and practices. She likens Alexius I to a "good helmsman" who led his "craft," Byzantium, through various religious and secular conflicts (125). Comnena illustrates how like a pilot, her father spent the beginning of his rule maneuvering his empire out of the destruction caused by the previous dynasty. She recounts his great skill as a military commander, which he used to defend his empire from enemy armies (Dalven 107). Alexius I's duties extended beyond secular matters, and his daughter considers him a "true representative of God" (174). Comnena shows that Alexius I served as a symbol to his people of orthodoxy by promoting the supremacy and study of Scripture. She maintains that her father was not merely an emperor but

the “thirteenth apostle” (466).

Comnena uses the controversy over John Italos to illustrate how her father deftly handled religious conflicts. Italos was an Italian immigrant whose writings had begun to receive wide circulation. His case provides an excellent example of the relationship between politics and religion within Byzantine society. Alexius I believed in upholding orthodox doctrines, but he had an additional motive in initiating this trial. Italos’ patron had been the former emperor, Ducas, who ruled a disarrayed empire shortly before the Comnenas’ rise to power. Comnena reminds her readers that during Ducas’ reign, Italos was involved in suspicious political activity and “was betraying our cause” amidst conflicts with Italy (176). The *Alexiad* shows that Alexius I solidified his reign by eliminating the remnants of the previous dynasty and establishing his own as the justified power. As Comnena explains, Italos was a remnant of the ousted power. On a basic level, a heretic represented a threat to the purity of the Orthodox Church because he introduced wrongful ideas, but, in Byzantium, influential heretics also threatened the emperor’s political authority. Comnena thus professes Alexius I’s knowledge of the true orthodox doctrines in order to diminish Italos’ influence as a religious authority (175-79).

Italos’ position within the public sphere as the Chair of General Philosophy made him one of the foremost scholars who educated young men from aristocratic families. The Chair of General Philosophy, called the hypatos in Greek, held authority over education in Constantinople (Kazhdan and Epstein 123). Italos had studied under the well-respected Psellos, but their relationship was not harmonious. Consequently, the elevation of Italos to a position Psellos once held sparked an intense debate (Kazhdan and Epstein 158-159). Comnena, following the example of her father, chooses the side against Italos and claimed he had many followers whom “he incited to revolt” (179). She gives the impression that he not only promoted religious dissent but encouraged his followers to defy the empire. Comnena makes a point of noting that the emperor’s first act was to send Italos to Sebastocrater Isaac to determine whether the scholars’ supposedly heretical ideas warranted official scrutiny. Sebastocrater Isaac was a member of the imperial family, and Comnena’s mention of him reflects her family’s strong presence in the bureaucracy. The decision over whether Italos’ actions

and beliefs necessitated a full trial began and continued within the imperial family. Comnena explains that Isaac promptly deemed Italos a heretic and publicly renounced the scholar's writings. She concludes that Italos stood trial, and the ecclesiastical tribunal found him guilty of heresy (177-180).

Comnena emphasizes that her father sought to rehabilitate heretics such as Italos before he condemned them. Italos' religious reinstruction fell to the patriarch, Eustratios Garidas. Comnena writes with thinly veiled contempt of Garidas' ability to turn Italos to the true faith and claimed the patriarch came close to becoming a heretic himself. She notes that Italos "almost made Garidas his own dedicated disciple" (179-180). This attitude towards Garidas reveals the imperial family's lack of reverence for the patriarch's spiritual authority, especially in relation to their own. Though Garidas ultimately failed to convert Italos, his tactics attempted to rehabilitate the heretic before condemning him completely. A period followed in which Italos attempted to flee, and a city-wide manhunt culminated in his apprehension. Comnena states that Italos had to give a public retraction of his beliefs while standing "bareheaded" before the church as an added sign of humility (180). She presents this spectacle as proof of her father's successful effort to end the heretic's influence within influential families. Whether or not Italos truly believed the orthodox doctrines, the incident forced him to affirm an assumption called into question by his initial relapse. Comnena portrays the incident as the triumphant transformation of a known heretic into an obedient subject (179-180).

By conceptualizing Italos as a belligerent foreigner who lacked proper intellectual training, Anna Comnena presents her readers with an ideal antagonist to Alexius I. Byzantine conceptions of foreigners often consisted of condescending stereotypes, and Comnena's view of Italians as belligerent and uncivilized is common to the time (Kazhdan and Epstein 169). Comnena seeks to discredit his influence as a scholar by focusing upon his Italian origins. His Sicilian learning as a child was in "the art of war as the Italians understand it" rather than scholastic matters (174). Italos allegedly had an ego which prevented him from fully accepting Pseullus' teachings and prompted him to see himself as a better scholar than his master. Comnena clearly sees Italos' arrogance as unwarranted and a testament to the danger of his influence within

Byzantium. She argues that Italos lacked rhetorical training and that his writings were full of “dialectic aggression” (176). Although Comnena praises her father for his rhetorical ability, she condemns Italos for his, suggesting that it reflects an essential barbarism (Quandahl and Jarrat 324). She adds an unflattering description of Italos’ appearance as a man with “a large head” and “freely-breathing nostrils” to her criticism of his argumentative style (177). Comnena’s unflattering portrayal of Italos may seem petty, but it reflects a clever way of taking his admirable qualities and turning them into flaws.

In Comnena’s view, even after venturing into Constantinople Italos did not associate with the proper crowd and never became properly civilized. Comnena uses Italos to illustrate how before her father, even Constantinople had fallen away from intellectualism and learning. Italos was undoubtedly an intelligent scholar, and his mentor, Pseullus, earned great admiration, even from Comnena. Comnena explains Pseullus’ ability to escape the influence of the “cruel and rough natured” teachers that populated the capital as a result of the guidance of God and his mother (175). However, she suggests that Italos was never able to attain his mentor’s level of intellect. He used his skills as an orator only to incite “daily commotions” rather than to instruct (175).

Comnena also follows her father’s conflicts with a philosopher named Nilus who studied the scriptures. She complains that Nilus gained access to aristocratic homes by working as a tutor and that his ideas had thus become popular enough to threaten orthodox control. Comnena states that Nilus was not silent about his beliefs, “proclaiming openly on all occasions,” and condemns his persistent refusal to renounce his heretical beliefs (293). Nilus frequently appeared in public to share his beliefs, an act showing a lack of reverence for the Comnena family’s demands for orthodoxy. The development of heretical ideas within aristocratic families, thanks to Nilus’ instruction, undoubtedly concerned Alexius I because it marked a diminishment of the emperor’s own control over those families.

Comnena has little information about Nilus’ origins, a fact which she openly admits and turns to her advantage. His mysterious background leads her to conclude that he must have been foreign and was “living in obscurity alone, no doubt,” when he began developing

heretical ideas (293). He had studied the scriptures, perhaps, but without a proper mentor and a Hellenistic training. An important connection between classical scholarship and understanding of scripture arises in Comnena's frequent references to Nilus' lack of adequate education (Dalven 143-44; Comnena 293-95). Nilus could review the scriptures on his own but would have needed formal training to understand them properly. As a result, Comnena argues, he misunderstood hypostasis, the doctrine of the trinity. The classical tradition remained closely tied to religious scholarship within Byzantium, and Comnena reasons that such ignorance led to his heretical theology (293). Worse yet, Nilus associated with Armenians, a group which Comnena treats with blatant contempt. Anyone with ties to them is suspect as well. Nilus' allies made him more dangerous in the eyes of Comnena than a common, misguided heretic. The two men whom Nilus conspired with were "the notorious Arsaces and Tigranes" (294-295). The pejorative adjective implies that the two men were infamous within Byzantium, but Comnena does not provide further explanation. Such scandalous ties work to suggest that Nilus, like Italos, was an outsider. Nilus' uncertain roots and relationship with a stigmatized group helps Comnena justify his eventual condemnation.

Comnena insists that Nilus gained his influence by "worm[ing] his way into great houses as a self-appointed teacher" (293). The statement implies that he acquired influence through sneaky guile rather than through virtuous intellect. Despite his "apparent virtue and austere way of life," she undermines his positive attributes in one fell swoop by describing them as a contrived mask used to manipulate decent Christians (293). Nilus' followers became ignorant accomplices who had fallen for the heretic's tricks. Comnena explains Nilus' beliefs more clearly than those of other heretics in *The Alexiad* and his heresy involved a wrongful understanding of Christ's divine and human natures. However, the intent of Anna Comnena's biographical sketch is not to analyze Nilus' theology but merely present it as ignorant and heretical (293-95).

Comnena's portrayal of Alexius I in the Nilus trial emphasizes his confidence in his own ability to handle the religious conflict. She notes that Alexius I scrutinized Nilus' actions himself instead of passing him off to his brother. Comnena represents her father as both a

ruler and teacher who “taught him [Nilus] clearly the meaning of the union of divine and human” (294). She crafts Alexius I as a merciful and pious emperor who attempted to reeducate the ignorant Nilus. Nilus, however, refused to cooperate and acquired the support of two Armenian leaders, which prompted Alexius to involve his own religious and secular allies. A public synod commenced, presided over by Alexius I along with numerous religious leaders. The sequential order of these events is important. Comnena shows that once Alexius I realized that Nilus had allies and his own methods were ineffective, he felt the need to involve other religious officials. The patriarch and clergy presided in the trial, but Comnena clarifies that it was Alexius’ decision “to counteract the violent course of the heresy” by establishing a synod (294). The synod then deliberated on whether Nilus’ heresy was condemnable and how to eliminate his influence. The synod successfully censured Nilus and prohibited his writings as a way of reasserting the proper orthodox doctrine (295).

After narrating the Nilus trial, Anna Comnena inserts an extremely brief summary of a similar heresy conflict surrounding Blanchernites. The account provides only limited information, but the major steps of Blanchernites’ trial mirrored many of those in Nilus’. According to Comnena, Blanchernites differed from Nilus in that he was a member of the clergy, but to her mind the men were equally condemnable for their heretical teachings. She explains that Alexius I called Blanchernites to court several times and tried to instruct the priest on orthodox doctrine. When this tactic of reeducation failed, Alexius again convened a trial presided over by religious leaders and Blanchernites suffered the same fate as Nilus (293). Thus, Comnena reaffirms the strong grip that her father held on religious orthodoxy.

Comnena spends a considerable amount of time justifying her father’s subsequent actions against the Manichean heresy. She relates how Alexius I became preoccupied with the Manichean heresy after discovering its presence in the recently conquered Philippolis. Other leaders began to question the extent of the emperor’s involvement in this religious matter, especially since his original motivations for entering the city were not religious but rather to establish political and economic control. He had arrived in Philippolis to await the enemy armies of the Cumans, and only after settling in Philippolis did the

heresy come to his attention. Comnena sees no problem with her father's dual focus and indeed defends his preoccupation with religious matters amidst the military crisis. She argues that Alexius I had fulfilled his military role by overtaking Philippolis but also needed to fulfill the responsibilities of his apostolic role by purifying the city's faith. Comnena refers to Philippolis as a "double trophy" as it provided economic gain and an opportunity for her father to prove his piety (466-467).

Comnena represents Philippopolis as the epitome of an impure city, a foreign society fully indoctrinated in heresy – and thus a new variety of heresy for Alexius I to overcome. The previous heretical matters Comnena had discussed center on an individual scholar whose ideas had become too influential within the aristocracy or had aroused dissent. Heresy was the exception in Constantinople, but it was the rule in Philippopolis. Furthermore, Comnena illustrates Alexius I's recognition that the residents of the city were new subjects whom he had to rule carefully. Technically the Manicheans in Philippopolis were in a specific sect called the Paulicians, named for one of the founders, Paul. Comnena traces the catalyst for such rampant heresy to the previous ruler, Tzimiskis who, she claims, left the residents to their own devices as long as they served as a buffer zone against enemy forces. The heretics became so dominant that the city became "a meeting-place, so to speak, of all polluted waters" (465). Comnena implicitly justifies the use of military force as a purifying assertion of political and religious dominance.

Comnena refuses to go into extensive detail about the Manicheans' theological beliefs because she assumes "that everyone regards them as absurd" (464). This assertion reveals that her audience must have been familiar with the Manichean heresy, and that Comnena feels they would share her contempt. She does not offer detailed descriptions of physical appearance or behavior as she does with individual heretics, although she does refer to their "savage and unusually cruel disposition" (464). Portraying them as a belligerent group of people, she undercuts their credibility and suggests that their religious ideas reflect this character as well. Comnena frequently refers to the Manicheans' habit of "tearing to pieces the Holy Word" to justify their own doctrines (467). She portrays the Manicheans as a sect who purposefully and knowingly

manipulated the scriptures to proclaim their heretical ideas.

Comnena asserts that her father elevated his reputation to the level of Constantine through his involvement in the Manichean controversy. In his effort to combat the heretical teachings in Philippopolis, Alexius I fulfilled what Comnena deems his “apostolic mission” (466). She recounts that Alexius I began his efforts to convert the population through reinstruction of orthodox theology after taking the known heretics into custody. Comnena speaks of her father’s dedication to teaching, boasting that he “sometimes [taught] till the second or third watch of the night” (467). She overemphasizes her father’s sacrifices by noting the uncomfortable environment that exposed the emperor to extremely hot weather and how he skipped meals because of his commitment to teaching. Comnena crafts Alexius I as a humble figure, willing to give up imperial privileges for the betterment of his subjects.

Comnena’s representation of the conflict shows that Alexius I found himself in an inverted scenario. Instead of dealing with a foreign heretic spreading untruth within his own city, Alexius I now found himself in the role of the outsider as he tried to impose orthodoxy on an unwilling population (465-466). Comnena deems this stage a “war of words” and sees it as a spiritual battle paralleling the military victory that had led to Alexius I’s occupation of Philippopolis (467). She writes that once her father established military control, his position as a Byzantine emperor and representative of orthodoxy required an establishment of religious control, as well. Since the Manichean problem involved an impure city, Alexius I uprooted those who converted to orthodoxy from Philippopolis’ population and moved them into a new, orthodox city that he named Alexiopolis. Comnena applauds Alexius I’s generosity by detailing the gifts he gave to affluent converts. The gifts were hereditary, so all of their descendants would benefit as well. Converts from lower social classes received “ploughland, vineyards, houses and immovable property” (468). Comnena is careful to clarify that the population did not receive punishment for their heresy as long as they followed orthodox beliefs from that point onward and submitted to Byzantine rule. She highlights the bestowments’ legal backing and that the gifts were inheritable for women as well as men. This system sought to not just appease converts

but completely reintegrate them and their future descendants into Byzantine society. Comnena recounts Alexius I's calculated handling of the heretics' relocation to show how he successfully expanded Byzantine loyalty and unity.

Comnena assures her readers that Alexius I had no difficulty in refuting the Manichean's heretical doctrines, comparing them to an easily destroyed "spider's web" (467). The Manichean sect lacked a sole leader to punish, but three members, Kouloen, Kousines, and Pholos fought ardently against Alexius I's impositions. The three men were audacious and stubborn, using their ideas like a "boar's tusks" (467). Comnena once again perceives belligerence as a personality trait of heretics who opposed her father. She informs her readers that the Manicheans' refusal to convert was not because of her father's inadequacy as a teacher, but rather their own obstinacy and ignorance. Comnena documents Alexius I's ardent efforts to convince Kouloen, Kousines, and Pholos of their heresy, but complains that they foolishly remained set in their ways.

Comnena writes that after their repeated refusal to renounce their heresy, her father had to remove Kouloen, Kousines, and Pholos completely from Philippopolis. She once again describes Alexius I's efforts of reeducation. Only Kouleon converted, and Kousines and Pholos remained imprisoned for life for their refusal to renounce Manichaeism. The text portrays Kouloen as a shining example of a heretic who converted and "became the gentlest lamb in our fold" (467). The blame for the ongoing heresy of the other two falls, predictably, on their personal failings; Kousines and Pholos had "savage tendencies" (467). Comnena implies that Kouleon once had these traits as well, but his conversion transformed not only his religious thinking but his personality. She does not see her father's inability to compel Kousines and Pholos to convert a failure, especially in comparison with the masses who did convert. Instead, she boasts that daily Alexius "led to God a hundred, sometimes more than a hundred" people (468). These numbers might seem to be an overstatement, but they at least express the Comnena dynasty's perception of its own religious influence. "East and West alike are witnesses," Comnena proclaims of her father's vast control not just over Byzantium but neighboring societies, as well (468).

Comnena closes *The Alexiad* with her father's final encounter with heresy, which involved the Bogomils, a particularly insidious sect that had grown popular in Byzantium. By the time the Bogomils became problematic, Alexius I had consolidated his empire and completed his major military endeavors. The emperor was now able to focus his efforts entirely on religious matters, and his dealings with the Bogomils were harsher and more complex than previous heresy trials. Comnena notes the influence of the heretics within important political families. If the aristocracy refused to follow Alexius I's religious ideas, they were refusing to accept his full sovereignty. Comnena's account shows that the Bogomils received punishment not just for straying from the faith but for undermining imperial authority (496-500).

Comnena's contempt for the Bogomils is clear. In her text she states that all the previous heresies had "coalesced" within the Bogomils (496). These heretics, she insists, were imposters within orthodox society who used feigned piety to lure citizens into their sect. The Bogomils had crafted an image of devoutness through their clothing, manner, and their gait. Comnena writes that "their wickedness is hidden beneath cloak and cowl" and their "somber look" (496). Their deceitfulness explained why they were able to survive for so long unnoticed and could gather followers so easily. She vilifies them as a polluted sect, using animalistic terms that compare them to wolves and snakes. To her mind, the Bogomils represent the ultimate heretical sect and their eradication would provide Alexius I with a fitting end to a glorious reign (Comnena 496-499).

Comnena emphasizes the absurdity of the Bogomils by refusing to even explain certain aspects of their beliefs. Her purposeful omission serves as a rhetorical device, but it prevents the reader from fully comprehending the Bogomils' crimes. Rather than arguing doctrine, she chooses to slander the leader of the sect, Basil, who, as a monk, represented a problem from within the Orthodox Church. Comnena begins her smear campaign by mentioning the presence of "women of bad character" in his entourage (497). She further suggests that Basil had a relationship with Satan. *The Alexiad* recounts a tale in which hail and an earthquake targeted Basil's prison cell, and Comnena concludes that the phenomenon was retaliation from demons on account of "the betrayal of their secrets" (499). Comnena claims that Basil was not a

mere heretic but an ally of Satan himself.

The initiation of heresy trials had not changed as Comnena states that Alexius I first called known heretics into questioning. After the use of torture and imprisonment, tactics not mentioned in the previous cases, a follower named Diablutius revealed that Basil was their leader. Another new method of ferreting out information from the heretics was entrapment. Comnena praises Alexius I for deciding to combat the deceivers by outwitting them and using “compulsion, but with a show of persuasion” (497). She recalls that this change in tactics reflected a perception that Basil would not willingly share his heretical ideas with the imperial court. Comnena says her father had to use “honey-sweetness” to encourage Basil to “vomit forth his dark beliefs” (497). Basil came to court after Alexius I feigned interest in the heretic’s doctrines. Comnena adds that Isaac, the emperor’s brother, was once again present and helped to add further credibility to the charade by playing along. She sees the charade as an ironic reversal of the normal roles in which Basil thought he was the teacher and Alexius I pretended to be the pupil. Convinced of their sincerity, Basil finally professed his heretical views, and Alexius I revealed a curtain hiding a scribe who had documented the confession. Thus, Comnena praises the strategy that leads Basil to inadvertently bring about his own downfall (497).

Comnena details the emperor’s prompt creation of a council of military and religious leaders to discuss the matter, showing that Alexius I felt Basil was a threat to the entire empire. Once again the fine line between political and religious matters blurred by the presence of “all of the senate, the chief army commanders and the elders of the church” (497). Comnena describes how Alexius I imprisoned Basil and proceeded to fulfill his role as the teacher, compelling Basil to repent and change his heretical ways. Unlike previous heretics who tried to defend their doctrines, Basil merely accepted his fate and offered himself up willingly to serve as a martyr. Comnena explains that Alexius I kept Basil nearby in a house especially built for him near the palace. Despite his efforts, Alexius I failed to convince Basil to convert.

Comnena shows that Alexius I not only handled Basil’s trial but simultaneously prosecuted the heretic’s followers. She quotes her

father's assertion that "chorus and chorus-leader alike were to suffer death by burning," but subsequently softens Alexius' character by citing his concern about accidentally condemning innocents (500). The Bogomil heresy had become enough of a threat that the eradication of only the leader was not satisfactory. Comnena recounts that the use of trickery arose again as a solution to Alexius' conundrum about how to distinguish between falsely accused orthodox Christians and the heretics. The emperor pretended to sentence all the accused to death, offering an option of dying with or without the cross. The few who decided to die with the cross revealed themselves as true Christians, prompting Alexius to halt the execution "just in time," an assertion from Comnena which emphasizes the emperor's strategy and power (501). She defines her father's role as a teacher for a final time as the converts received reinstruction on the faith before receiving their freedom again. The proven heretics ended up imprisoned, but Alexius visited them personally to deliver what Comnena describes as "frequent exhortations" (501). Those who converted went free, but those who did not remained in prison where, as Comnena implies, the majority died (502). Comnena lauds her father's ingenuity by detailing his crafty plan to ensure that no innocent would suffer such a fate.

Comnena concludes this episode by demonstrating how imperial religious authority reasserted itself through submitting Basil to a humiliating death. The political element of this controversy is especially apparent in her portrayal of Basil's punishment. The vote to burn Basil was "unanimously decided" and the execution took place as a public spectacle in the Hippodrome, a location that often symbolized the emperor's power (502). Alexius I exhorted Basil to take a final chance to recant, but, Comnena suggests, the devil must have prevented him from repenting. She recalls observing fear in him as he approached death and provides several illustrations of Basil's trepidation. This apprehension was ironic, a fact which Comnena takes delight in pointing out, since Basil had persistently claimed that angels would save him from his death. The public nature becomes apparent in Comnena's comment that her father became concerned about the crowd's reactions to Basil's increasingly fervent claims of his eventual salvation. The guards disproved the devil's power and derided Basil by throwing his cloak into the fire and proving the heretic's mortality. The

fire had been so massive that “even afar off he [Basil] could feel the fire” (502). Comnena adds vivid imagery to Basil’s demise by telling of how the flames reached out to grab the heretic and all that remained of him was a line of smoke. Since the fire would not have burned a truly devout man, Basil’s death proved his guilt. The exaggerated descriptions of the flames, the crowds, and Basil’s reactions provide Comnena with materials with which to craft a climactic scene that represented the “final triumph” of Alexius I’s reign (504).

Comnena seeks to highlight her father’s skill as a political and religious leader within *The Alexiad*. She details his role in instigating investigations into matters of heresy, noting how he also incorporated the guidance of religious leaders and other politicians, who almost always were members of the family. The Comnena family had reestablished order in Byzantium, and Comnena’s commentary on heretical conflicts shows how they revived the religious environment of the empire. Comnena justifies her father’s actions against heretics by conceptualizing them as ignorant, belligerent, and crafty individuals and groups who actively sought to create political upheaval and pollute the Orthodox Church. She presents her father, in contrast, as a selfless and effective teacher who worked ardently to convince heretics to convert. Only when they absolutely refused to relinquish their ways did he enact harsh punishments. Comnena shows that the increasing stability of his position as emperor allowed him to focus more and more of his efforts on spreading the faith. *The Alexiad* allows Anna Comnena to pay tribute to her father’s successful reign and support his reputation as an apostolic ruler.

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