



NEW APPROACHES TO  
BYZANTINE HISTORY AND CULTURE

# Alexios I Komnenos in the Balkans, 1081–1095

MAREK MEŠKO

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# New Approaches to Byzantine History and Culture

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*To my family*

## PREFACE

Byzantine emperor Alexios I Komnenos is a historical person conceived rather differently by many scholars. Their opinions tend to gravitate toward two major points of view. The former group of historians holds that Alexios Komnenos was an undisputed savior of the crippled Byzantine Empire which in 1081 was tottering on the verge of disintegration because of the fateful defeat at Manzikert in 1071 and the ensuing civil war. The latter group of scholars tends to view this emperor much more critically, and some of them even suggest that because of his rather inefficient way of handling military and political matters, the crisis after the battle of Manzikert lasted for a longer period than if a more capable emperor had reigned over the Empire.

The main goal of this monograph is to describe and analyze the military and also to some extent the political measures of Alexios Komnenos in the Balkans prior to the coming of the First Crusade. In this way it is possible from 1081 onward to discern and to evaluate the emperor's steps and actions during the long-lasting conflicts endangering this very important geographical area, which was rapidly becoming the sole core territory of the Byzantine Empire after the loss of its eastern territories in Anatolia which had played this role from the seventh century until 1071. The present detailed reconstruction focuses on Byzantium's armed forces, whose evolution can be traced thanks to various historical Byzantine and non-Byzantine accounts in the period under review, during which they had to provide safety and protection to the Byzantine Balkans against the onslaught of the Normans, the Pechenegs, and the Kumans. By this it is also possible to furnish substantial support for the view of Alexios

Komnenos as a capable and strong ruler and resourceful military commander who in spite of his hard-fought successes against the Normans in 1085, against the Pechenegs in 1091, and eventually against the Kumans in 1095 was during the whole period under concern finally not in a position to initiate and organize a full-scale Byzantine *Reconquista* of the lost territories in the East prior to 1095.

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