

= Battle of Kalavrye =

The Battle of Kalavrye (also Kalavryai or Kalavryta) was fought in 1078 between the Byzantine imperial forces of general (and future emperor) Alexios Komnenos and the rebellious governor of Dyrrhachium , Nikephoros Bryennios the Elder . Bryennios had rebelled against Michael VII Doukas (r . 1071 ? 78) and had won over the allegiance of the Byzantine army 's regular regiments in the Balkans . Even after Doukas 's overthrow by Nikephoros III Botaneiates (r . 1078 ? 81) , Bryennios continued his revolt , and threatened Constantinople . After failed negotiations , Botaneiates sent the young general Alexios Komnenos with whatever forces he could gather to confront him .

The two armies clashed at Kalavrye on the Halmyros river in what is now European Turkey . Alexios Komnenos , whose army was considerably smaller and far less experienced , tried to ambush Bryennios 's army . The ambush failed , and the wings of his own army were driven back by the rebels . Alexios barely managed to break through with his personal retinue , but succeeded in regrouping his scattered men . At the same time , and despite having seemingly won the battle , Bryennios 's army fell into disorder after its own Pecheneg allies attacked its camp . Reinforced by Turkish mercenaries , Alexios lured the troops of Bryennios into another ambush through a feigned retreat . The rebel army broke and Bryennios was captured .

The battle is known through two detailed accounts , Anna Komnene 's Alexiad , and her husband Nikephoros Bryennios the Younger 's Material for History , on which Anna 's own account relies to a large degree . It is one of the few Byzantine battles described in detail , and hence a valuable source for studying the tactics of the Byzantine army of the late 11th century .

= = Background = =

After the defeat at the Battle of Manzikert in 1071 against the Seljuk Turks and the overthrow of Romanos IV Diogenes (r . 1068 ? 71) , the Byzantine Empire experienced a decade of near @-@ continuous internal turmoil and rebellions . The constant warfare depleted the Empire 's armies , devastated Asia Minor and left it defenceless against the increasing encroachment of the Turks . In the Balkans , invasions by the Pechenegs and the Cumans devastated Bulgaria , and the Serbian princes renounced their allegiance to the Empire .

The government of Michael VII Doukas (r . 1071 ? 78) failed to deal with the situation effectively , and rapidly lost support among the military aristocracy . In late 1077 , two of the Empire 's leading generals , Nikephoros Bryennios the Elder , the doux of Dyrrhachium in the western Balkans , and Nikephoros Botaneiates , the strategos of the Anatolic Theme in central Asia Minor , were proclaimed emperors by their troops . Bryennios set out from Dyrrhachium towards the imperial capital Constantinople , winning widespread support along the way and the loyalty of most of the Empire 's Balkan field army . He preferred to negotiate at first , but his offers were rebuffed by Michael VII . Bryennios then sent his brother John to lay siege to Constantinople . Unable to overcome its fortifications , the rebel forces soon retired . This failure led the capital 's nobility to turn to Botaneiates instead : in March 1078 Michael VII was forced to abdicate and retire as a monk , and Nikephoros Botaneiates was accepted into the city as emperor .

At first , Botaneiates lacked enough troops to oppose Bryennios , who in the meantime had consolidated his control over his native Thrace , effectively isolating the capital from the remaining imperial territory in the Balkans . Botaneiates sent an embassy under the proedros Constantine Choirospaktes , a veteran diplomat , to conduct negotiations with Bryennios . At the same time he appointed the young Alexios Komnenos as his Domestic of the Schools (commander @-@ in @-@ chief) , and sought aid from the Seljuk Sultan Suleyman , who sent 2 @,@ 000 warriors and promised even more . In his message to Bryennios , the aged Botaneiates (76 years old at his accession) offered him the rank of Caesar and his nomination as heir to the throne . Bryennios agreed in principle , but added a few conditions of his own , and sent the ambassadors back to Constantinople for confirmation . Botaneiates , who likely had initiated negotiations only to gain time , rejected Bryennios 's conditions , and ordered Alexios Komnenos to campaign against the rebel .

= = Prelude = =

Bryennios had camped at the plain of Kedoktos (a name deriving from the Latin aquaeductus) on the road to Constantinople . His army comprised 12 @, @ 000 mostly seasoned men from the regiments (tagmata) of Thessaly , Macedonia and Thrace , as well as Frankish mercenaries and the elite tagma of the Hetaireia . Alexios 's forces included 2 @, @ 000 Turkish horse @-@ archers , 2 @, @ 000 Chomatenoï from Asia Minor , a few hundred Frankish knights from Italy , and the newly raised regiment of the Immortals , which had been created by Michael VII 's chief minister Nikephoritzes and was intended to form the nucleus of a new army . Estimates of Alexios 's total force vary from 5 @, @ 500 ? 6 @, @ 500 (Haldon) to some 8 @, @ 000 ? 10 @, @ 000 (Birkenmeier) , but it is clear that he was at a considerable disadvantage against Bryennios ; not only was his force considerably smaller , but also far less experienced than Bryennios 's veterans .

Alexios 's forces set forth from Constantinople and camped on the shore of the river Halmyros ? a small stream between Herakleia (modern Marmara Ere?lisi) and Selymbria (modern Silivri) , modern Kalivri Dere ? near the fort of Kalavrye (Greek : ????????? , modern Yolçat?) . Curiously , and against established practice , he did not fortify his camp , perhaps so as not to fatigue or dishearten his men with an implicit admission of weakness . He then sent his Turkish allies to scout out Bryennios 's disposition , strength and intentions . Alexios 's spies easily accomplished their tasks , but on the eve of the battle some were captured and Bryennios too was informed of Alexios 's strength .

= = Battle = =

= = Initial dispositions and plans = = =

Bryennios arranged his army in the typical three divisions , each in two lines , as prescribed by the Byzantine military manuals . The right wing , under his brother John , was 5 @, @ 000 strong and comprised his Frankish mercenaries , Thessalian cavalry , the Hetaireia , and the Maniakatai regiment (descendants of the veterans of George Maniakes 's campaign in Sicily and Italy) . His left wing , 3 @, @ 000 men from Thrace and Macedonia , was placed under Katakalon Tarchaneiotes , and the centre , under Bryennios himself , comprised 3 @, @ 000 ? 4 @, @ 000 men from Thessaly , Thrace and Macedonia . Again , according to standard doctrine , on his far left , about half a kilometer (" two stadia ") from the main force , he had stationed an outflanking detachment (hyperkerastai) of Pechenegs .

Alexios deployed his smaller army in waiting near Bryennios 's camp , and divided it in two commands . The left , which confronted Bryennios 's strongest division , was commanded by himself and contained the Frankish knights to the right and the Immortals to the Franks ' left . The right command was under Constantine Katakalon , and comprised the Chomatenoï and the Turks . The latter , according to the Alexiad , were given the role of flank guard (plagiophylakes) and tasked with observing and countering the Pechenegs . Conversely , on the extreme left Alexios formed his own flanking detachment (apparently drawn from among the Immortals) , concealed from enemy view inside a hollow . Given his inferiority , Alexios was forced to remain on the defensive . His only chance at success was that his out @-@ flankers , concealed by the broken terrain , would surprise and create enough confusion among Bryennios 's men for him and his strong left wing to break through their lines .

= = Alexios 's army collapses = = =

As the rebel forces advanced towards his enemy 's line , Alexios 's flankers sprung their ambush . Their attack did indeed cause some initial confusion , but Bryennios (or , according to the Alexiad , his brother John , who commanded the right wing) rallied his men and led forth the second line . This counter @-@ attack broke Alexios 's flankers ; as they retreated in panic , they fell upon the

Immortals , who also panicked and fled , abandoning their posts . Although they suffered some casualties from Bryennios 's pursuing men , most managed to escape well to the rear of Alexios 's army .

Alexios , who was fighting with his retinue alongside the Franks , did not immediately realize that his left wing had collapsed . In the meantime , on his right wing , the Chomatenoi , engaged with Tarchaneiotes 's men , were outflanked and attacked in the rear by the Pechenegs , who had somehow evaded Alexios 's Turkish flank @-@ guards . The Chomatenoi too broke and fled , and Alexios 's fate seemed sealed . At this point the Pechenegs failed to follow up their success , and instead turned back and began looting Bryennios 's own camp . After gathering what plunder they could , they left the battle and made for their homes .

Nevertheless , Bryennios 's victory seemed certain , for his wings began to envelop Alexios 's Franks in the centre . Realizing his position and despairing in the face of defeat (and , as Bryennios the Younger records , because he had disobeyed imperial orders to wait for more Turkish reinforcements and feared punishment from Botaneiates) , Alexios at first resolved to attempt an all @-@ or @-@ nothing attack on Bryennios himself to decapitate the enemy army , but was dissuaded by his servant . With only six of his men around him , he then managed to break through the surrounding enemy soldiers . Confusion reigned behind their lines as a result of the Pecheneg attack on the rebel camp , and in this tumult Alexios saw Bryennios 's imperial parade horse , with his two swords of state , being driven away to safety . Alexios and his men charged the escort , seized the horse , and rode away with it from the battlefield .

Having reached a hill behind his army 's original position , Alexios began to regroup his army from the units that had broken . He sent out messengers to rally his scattered men with news that Bryennios had been killed , showing his parade horse as evidence . At the same time , the promised Turkish reinforcements began arriving at the scene , lifting his men 's morale . All the while , on the battlefield , Bryennios 's army had closed around Alexios 's Franks , who dismounted and offered to surrender . In the process the rebel army had become totally disordered , with units mixed and their formations disordered . Bryennios 's reserves had been thrown in confusion by the Pecheneg attack , while his front lines relaxed , thinking that the battle was over .

= = = Alexios 's counter @-@ attack = = =

Having restored his surviving forces to order , and aware of the confusion in Bryennios 's forces , Alexios decided to counter @-@ attack . The plan he laid out made far greater use of the particular skills of his Turkish horse @-@ archers . He divided his force into three commands , of which two were left behind in ambush . The other , formed from the Immortals and the Chomatenoi under Alexios 's own command , was not arrayed in one continuous line , but broken up in small groups , intermingled with other groups of Turkish horse @-@ archers . This command would advance on the rebels , attack them , then feign retreat and draw them into the ambush .

The attack of Alexios 's division initially caught Bryennios 's men off guard , but , being veteran troops , they soon recovered and once again began to push it back . Retreating , Alexios 's troops , and especially the Turks , employed skirmishing tactics , attacking the enemy line and then withdrawing swiftly , thus keeping their opponents at bay and weakening the coherence of their line . Some among Alexios 's men chose to attack Bryennios , and the rebel general had to defend against several attacks himself .

When the battle reached the place of the ambush , Alexios 's wings , likened in the Alexiad to a " swarm of wasps " , attacked the rebel army on the flanks firing arrows and shouting loudly , spreading panic and confusion among Bryennios 's men . Despite the attempts of Bryennios and his brother John to rally them , their army broke and fled , and other units , which were following behind , did likewise . The two brothers tried to put up a rear @-@ guard defence , but they were overcome and captured .

= = Aftermath = =

The battle marked the end of Bryennios 's revolt , although Nikephoros Basilakes gathered up much of Bryennios 's defeated army and attempted to claim the throne for himself . He too was defeated by Alexios Komnenos , who then proceeded to expel the Pechenegs from Thrace . The elder Bryennios was blinded on Botaneiates 's orders , but the emperor later took pity on him and restored him his titles and his fortune . After Alexios Komnenos seized the throne himself in 1081 , Bryennios was further honoured with high dignities . He even held command during Alexios 's campaigns against the Pechenegs , and defended Adrianople from a rebel attack in 1095 . His son or grandson , Nikephoros Bryennios the Younger , was married to Alexios 's daughter Anna Komnene . He became a prominent general of Alexios 's reign , eventually raised to the rank of Caesar , and a historian .