

I would like here to give a clearer and more detailed account of the matter. According to widespread rumours, the first to sell his land and set out on the road to Jerusalem was Godfrey.¹⁷ He was a very rich man, extremely proud of his noble birth, his own courage and the glory of his family – every Kelt is anxious to outdo his peers. The upheaval that ensued as both men and women took to the road was unprecedented within living memory. The simpler folk were led on by a genuine desire to worship at Our Lord's tomb and visit the holy places, but the more villainous characters, in particular Bohemond and his like, had an ulterior motive, for they hoped on their journey to seize the imperial capital itself, looking upon its capture as a natural consequence of the expedition. Bohemond disturbed the morale of many nobler men because he still cherished an old grudge against the emperor. Peter, after his preaching campaign, was the very first to cross the Straits of Lombardy,¹⁸ with 80,000 infantry and 100,000 horsemen. He reached the capital via Hungary. The Kelts, as one might guess, are in any case an exceptionally hotheaded race and passionate, but once they are motivated they become irresistible.

6. The emperor was aware what Peter had suffered before from the Turks and advised him to wait for the other counts to arrive. He refused, however, confident in the number of his followers. He crossed the Sea of Marmora and pitched camp near a small place called Helenopolis. Normans, numbering 10,000 in all, joined him but detached themselves from the rest of the army and ravaged the outskirts of Nicaea, acting with horrible cruelty to the whole population; babies were hacked to pieces, impaled on wooden spits and roasted over a fire; old people were subjected to every kind of torture.

The inhabitants of the town, when they learnt what was happening, threw open their gates and charged out against them. A fierce battle ensued, in which the Normans fought with such spirit that the enemy was forced to retire; they in turn therefore returned to Helenopolis with all the booty. An argument erupted between them and those who had not gone on the raid – the usual quarrel in such cases – for the latter were green with envy. That led to brawling, whereupon the daredevil

Normans broke away for a second time and took Xerigordos by assault.

The sultan's reaction was to send Elkhanes with a strong force to deal with them. He arrived at Xerigordos and captured it; of the Normans some were put to the sword and others taken prisoner.¹⁹ At the same time Elkhanes made plans to deal with the remainder who had stayed back with Peter the Hermit. He laid ambushes in suitable places, hoping that the enemy would fall into the trap unawares on their way to Nicaea and be killed. Knowing the Keltic love of money he also enlisted the services of two determined men who were to go to Peter's camp and announce that the Normans, having seized Nicaea, were sharing out all the spoils of the town.

This story had an immediate effect on Peter's men, and threw them into a state of great confusion; without a moment's hesitation they set out on the Nicaea road in complete disorder, without regard to military discipline appropriate to men setting off to war. As I have said before, the Latin race at all times is unusually greedy for wealth, but when it plans to invade a country, neither reason nor force can restrain it. They set out neither in rank nor in file, but near the River Drakon they fell into the Turkish ambushes and were miserably slaughtered. So great a multitude of Kelts and Normans died by the Ishmaelite sword that when they gathered the remains of the fallen, lying on every side, they heaped up, I would not call it a great ridge or a hill or a peak, but a mountain of considerable height and depth and width, so huge was the mass of bones. Some men of the same race as the slaughtered barbarians used the bones of the dead as mortar to fill up the cracks in walls which they built some time later, thereby making a tomb for them rather like a town. To this very day it stands with its encircling wall built of mixed stones and bones.

When the killing was over, only Peter and a handful of men returned to Helenopolis. The Turks, wishing to capture him, again laid an ambush, but the emperor, who had heard of this and indeed of the terrible massacre, was extremely concerned by the thought that Peter himself might have been captured. Constantine Euphorbenos Katakalon, already mentioned many

times in this history, was accordingly sent with a powerful force in warships across the straits to help him. At his approach the Turks took to their heels. Without delay Katakalon picked up Peter and his companions of whom there were only a few and brought them in safety to Alexios.

The emperor reminded Peter of his recklessness at the outset and added that these great misfortunes had come upon him through not listening to his advice. Far from accepting responsibility, with characteristic Latin arrogance, Peter blamed his men, stating that they had been disobedient and had followed their own whims. He called them brigands and robbers. This was why they had not been allowed by the Saviour to worship at the Holy Sepulchre.

Others among the Latins, who like Bohemond and his cronies, had long coveted the Roman Empire and wished to acquire it for themselves, found in the preaching of Peter the opportunity they had been looking for and caused this great upheaval by deceiving more innocent people. They sold their lands on the pretence that they were leaving to fight the Turks and liberate the Holy Sepulchre.