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Colin McAllister
University of Colorado, Colorado Springs

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10 Byzantine Apocalyptic Literature

ANDRÁS KRAFT

Apocalyptic writings formed a marginal yet significant part of Byzantine literature. They complement the Scriptures and the church tradition, which are overly reticent on eschatological matters. To fill this gap, late antique and medieval authors produced a wide range of pseudonymous texts that professed to supplement the ancient prophetic tradition by disclosing the developments of what was anticipated to be the near future, and concomitantly to advance socio-political as well as moral criticism about the contemporary conditions of their respective audiences. Elements of apocalyptic literature appear in various literary genres, and first and foremost in historiographical and ecclesiastical writings. The histories of such eminent authors as "Theophanes Continuatus" (tenth century), Nikētas Chōniatēs († 1217), and Nikēphoros Grēgoras († ca. 1360) contain numerous motifs and interpretations from the apocalyptic tradition. Hagiographies, too, are saturated with apocalyptic references. In order to fully appreciate the meaning of these references it is necessary to understand the evolving tradition of apocalyptic literature. Apocalypses were constantly reproduced, compiled, and revised. Although many texts and oral traditions have been lost to oblivion, the remnants that have survived constitute an indicative corpus from which the Byzantines' rich apocalyptic imagination can be reconstructed.

This contribution surveys medieval Greek apocalyptic literature written for Christian audiences. Jewish and Muslim apocalyptic texts have not been considered here. Likewise, neighboring linguistic traditions, first and foremost the Syriac, Slavonic, and Armenian traditions, have been omitted as well.[1] However, it needs to be stressed

[1] For surveys of apocalyptic literature within the wider "Byzantine commonwealth," see Lorenzo DiTommaso, *The Book of Daniel and the Apocryphal Daniel Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 2005); Vassilka Tapkova-Zaimova and Anissava Miltenova, *Historical and Apocalyptic Literature in Byzantium and Medieval Bulgaria* (Sofia: Исток-Запад, 2011); Julian Petkov, *Altslavische Eschatologie: Texte und Studien zur apokalyptischen Literatur in kirchenslavischer Überlieferung* (Tübingen: Narr

that although Byzantine apocalyptic literature largely comprises *apocalyptica* written in Greek, it is not limited to them. Furthermore, the focus of this study rests with narrative texts, which are mostly concerned with describing the signs of the end. Alternatively, some apocalyptic texts focus on chronological calculations presaging the precise date of the end. End-time calculations have been disregarded here, since they do not feature prominently among apocalyptic narratives.[2]

Modern apocalyptic studies began in the late nineteenth century, when German (Wilhelm Bousset, Franz Kampers, Ernst Sackur, et al.) and Russian (Vasilij Istrin, Alexander Vassiliev, Alexander Veselovsky, et al.) scholars edited and analyzed Greek, Latin, and Slavonic redactions of medieval apocalypses. Arguably, the interest of these scholars reflected the political climate in the two countries on the eve of the First World War. In the aftermath of the defeat of the German and Russian empires, scholarly interest in apocalypticism abated. It was revived in the second half of the twentieth century by European and American researchers—most notably Gerhard Podskalsky, Paul Alexander, and Agostino Pertusi—who can be seen as the pioneers of the field, as their studies have remained foundational until today.[3] Moreover, it was this second wave of scholarship that conclusively established the academic merit of investigating Byzantine apocalypticism. In recent decades, scholarly work has been focused on continuing their interpretative work while paying less attention to the edition of still unexplored literary sources. Although a few new editions

Francke Attempto, 2016); and Kevork B. Bardakjian and Sergio La Porta, eds., *The Armenian Apocalyptic Tradition: A Comparative Perspective; Essays Presented in Honor of Professor Robert W. Thomson on the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday* (Leiden: Brill, 2014). Much work still remains to be done on Christian apocalypses written in Arabic. Curiously, the Georgian tradition does not seem to have been receptive of Byzantine apocalypticism.

[2] On the topic of end-time calculations, see Paul Magdalino, "The End of Time in Byzantium," in *Endzeiten: Eschatologie in den monotheistischen Weltreligionen*, ed. Wolfram Brandes and Felicitas Schmieder (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008), 119–33.

[3] Gerhard Podskalsky, *Byzantinische Reichseschatologie: Die Periodisierung der Weltgeschichte in den vier Grossreichen (Daniel 2 und 7) und dem tausendjährigen Friedensreiche (Apok. 20); Eine motivgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (Munich: Fink, 1972); Paul J. Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, ed. Dorothy deF. Abrahamse (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); Agostino Pertusi, *Fine di Bisanzio e fine del mondo: significato e ruolo storico delle profezie sulla caduta di Costantinopoli in Oriente e in Occidente*, ed. Enrico Morini (Rome: Nella sede dell'Istituto Palazzo Borromini, 1988). The latter two works remained unfinished and had to be published posthumously.

have been published at the turn of the millennium,[4] the majority of available source material was edited during the first and second waves of scholarship.

As will be shown below, much of Byzantine apocalyptic literature is closely related to historiography. For this reason, scholars have often read apocalypses as historical sources and have "mined" them for new, otherwise unknown information. Although the historicist approach is potent in establishing new factual and chronological insights, it does not exhaust the functions of the apocalyptic genre. Medieval Greek *apocalyptica* can also be read from literary, sociological, or aesthetical perspectives. The approach of this contribution is to survey Byzantine apocalypses from a literary point of view.

DEFINITORY APPROACH AND GENERIC CHARACTERISTICS

What is a Byzantine apocalypse? This seemingly plain question bears considerable difficulty. The issue of defining the genre of Byzantine apocalypses has received little notice. In all likelihood, this is partly due to the silence of our sources. Ancient rhetorical handbooks do not discuss this genre, nor do Byzantine apocalypses themselves suggest any definition. At the same time, it is tempting to apply the classical definition of the apocalyptic genre, as formulated by John J. Collins, to the Byzantine period. This definition classifies apocalypses as a group of narrative texts that (1) convey revelatory information concerning either the end of history or the otherworld and (2) are necessarily mediated by otherworldly beings.[5] The definition was established on the basis of a comprehensive survey of late antique apocalypses. When reading medieval Greek apocalypses, however, it becomes apparent that references to angelic mediation (criterion 2 above) were generally omitted. That is to say, if Collins's definition

[4] Willem J. Aerts and George A. A. Kortekaas, eds., *Die Apokalypse des Pseudo-Methodius: Die ältesten griechischen und lateinischen Übersetzungen*, 2 vols. (Leuven: Peeters, 1998); Paul Magdalino, "Une prophétie inédite des environs de l'an 965 attribuée à Léon le Philosophe (MS Karakallou 14, f.253r–254r.)," *Travaux et mémoires* 14 (2002): 391–402; Ihor Ševčenko, "Unpublished Byzantine Texts on the End of the World about the Year 1000 AD," *Travaux et mémoires* 14 (2002): 561–78; Antonio Rigo, "La profezia di Cosma Andritzopoulos," in *Καvίσκιν: studi in onore di Giuseppe Spadaro*, ed. Anna di Benedetto Zimbone and Francesca R. Nervo (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2002), 195–201.

[5] John J. Collins, "Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre," in "Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre," ed. John J. Collins, special issue, *Semeia* 14 (1979): 1–20, at 9.

were to be applied, various Byzantine apocalyptic narratives could not be properly called "apocalypses."[6] Alternatively, one may argue that the genre underwent some degree of historical development and that Byzantine apocalypses therefore require their own definition.

A major challenge for any definitory approach to medieval Greek apocalypses lies in the fuzzy boundaries of the genre. Apocalyptic narratives possess a wide variety of stock motifs and compositional methods, few of which are used in every single representative of the genre. Moreover, numerous apocalyptic components are not exclusive to the genre; they also appear in other literary forms such as homilies and hagiographies. It seems unfeasible to identify essential and genre-specific attributes that are necessary to demarcate this literary type clearly. Therefore, a nonessentializing approach is needed to accommodate the ambiguity of Byzantine apocalypses. A prototypical approach lends itself to such generic fuzziness. Accordingly, membership of the apocalyptic genre is not merely dependent on containing particular elements or features; it rather depends on how elements relate to one another in the *gestalt* structure of a given text. As a result, membership is a matter of degree depending on the relative distance from the prototype.[7]

Byzantine apocalypses consist of a number of typical motifs and techniques. Although these alone are not what trigger recognition of the genre, the compositional methods are important building blocks of apocalyptic narratives. Typical literary devices are the use of word pictures (e.g., "the lion and the whelp will pursue together the wild ass"),[8] particular *topoi* (e.g., the savior-emperor or the Antichrist), and oracular formulae.[9] Moreover, characteristic is the prevalent use of demotic Greek, a language register that was closer to the spoken

[6] This view is taken by Lorenzo DiTommaso, "Biblical Form, Function, and Genre in the Post-Biblical Historical Apocalyptica," in *The Reception and Interpretation of the Bible in Late Antiquity: Proceedings of the Montréal Colloquium in Honour of Charles Kannengiesser, 11–13 October 2006*, ed. Lorenzo DiTommaso and Lucian Turcescu (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 145–62, esp. 151–52.

[7] This approach has been proposed by Carol A. Newsom, "Spying Out the Land: A Report from Genology," in *Seeking Out the Wisdom of the Ancients: Essays Offered to Honor Michael V. Fox on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Ronald L. Troxel, Kelvin G. Friebel, and Dennis R. Magary (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 437–50. It should be noted that the prototype does not need to be an historical artefact; it can also be an ideal type.

[8] On this word picture, see Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, 172–74.

[9] Oracular formulae are larger coherent units of motifs. See Lorenzo DiTommaso, "The Armenian Seventh Vision of Daniel and the Historical Apocalyptica of Late Antiquity," in *The Armenian Apocalyptic Tradition: A Comparative Perspective; Essays Presented in Honor of Professor Robert W. Thomson on the Occasion of His*

vernacular than to the stylized model of Atticism. This allowed for the general intelligibility of apocalyptic narratives, at least in terms of language. Byzantine apocalyptic literature was, for the most part, comprehensible by every layer of society: the learned and uneducated, clergy and laity, emperors and commoners.

Further characteristics are the rationale of retributive justice, the notion of apocalyptic urgency, periodic shifts in verb tenses, and typological exegesis. Apocalypses are governed by the dualistic rationale of good fighting evil. The emotive descriptions of misery and hardship are resolved by images of climactic vengeance when the forces of the good finally vanquish their antagonistic counterparts. This struggle is framed by a timeline that anticipates the relatively near end. However, for the most part Byzantine apocalyptists were eager to postpone cautiously the ultimate end to the next generation. This notion of relative proximity must have evoked a sense of urgency to act while tempering the fear of immediate death. Another characteristic is the frequent alteration of verbal tenses and moods. Usually, verbs stand in the future tense or aorist subjunctive, which together with the pervasive use of temporal conjunctions convey a diachronic narrative. The diachronicity of historical developments is contrasted by the use of the present indicative and the aorist imperative, which are generally reserved for divine actions and direct speech. Arguably, such changes in verbal forms do not portray the lack of the author's erudition but rather convey different notions of time. On the one hand stands the diachronic progression of earthly time, and on the other stands the synchronous stasis of divine eternity. Furthermore, shifts in verbal tenses are potent to suggest that the orderly flow of worldly time is going to be unraveled once the world undergoes gradual destruction. The remaining aspect of typology requires some more explanation.

Typology is an exegetical technique that is best known from the Bible.[10] The Old and especially the New Testament present numerous

Eightieth Birthday, ed. Kevork B. Bardakjian and Sergio La Porta (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 126–48, esp. 134–40, who proposes the designation of "apocalyptic oracles." See further Zaroui Pogossian and Sergio La Porta, "Apocalyptic Texts, Transmission of Topoi, and Their Multi-Lingual Background: The Prophecies of Agat'on and Agat'angel on the End of the World," in *The Embroidered Bible: Studies in Biblical Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha in Honour of Michael E. Ston*e, ed. Lorenzo DiTommaso, Matthias Henze, and William Adler (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 824–51, esp. 825–26, who coin the descriptive appellation of "text-blocks."

[10] On biblical typology, see Leonhard Goppelt, *Typos: The Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New*, trans. Donald H. Madvig (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982) and Jean Daniélou, *From Shadows to Reality: Studies in the*

characters and events as the fulfillment of earlier adumbrations. Biblical texts construct correspondences among past, present, and future moments in salvation history, whereby earlier characters or events (*types*) are said to prefigure their subsequent counterparts (*antitypes*). Famously, Christ is characterized as a new Adam (Rom 5:14), as a new David (Matt 1:1–17, Acts 2:29–32), as a new Jonah (Matt 12:39–42, Luke 11:29–32), and the like. Since salvation history is unilaterally directed towards the Last Judgment, the later the corresponding counterpart, the higher its eschatological significance and value. Christian historiography is inherently typological in structure, and Byzantine *apocalyptica* faithfully accommodate this Christian heritage. Medieval Greek apocalypses are replete with typological reasoning that employ not only biblical types like Moses and Christ, but also extra-biblical ones like Alexander and Constantine the Great. Typological structures were pivotal hermeneutical stratagems in (re)constructing the history of the apocalyptic future. On the basis of the belief that history is purposeful, apocalyptists were convinced that by looking into the past they could anticipate the future with some amount of accuracy. It would be difficult to find any Byzantine apocalypse that did not employ typologies. Yet typology is not specific to apocalypses. Typological reasoning appears in every genre that conveys the Christian notion of salvation history. Put differently, while typology typically belongs to the apocalyptic genre, it is not an exclusive feature that could serve as a differentiating hallmark in a definition.

With that being said, Collins's definition is far from being irrelevant for the Byzantine period. The distinction between historical and moral apocalypses (criterion 1 above) does apply. Moral apocalypses (also called otherworldly visions or celestial journeys) are revelatory texts that disclose what happens to the individual soul in the ambiguous state of postmortem existence.[11] Historical or political apocalypses, on

Biblical Typology of the Fathers (London: Burns & Oates, 1960). See also Erich Auerbach, "Figura," in *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 11–76.

[11] On moral apocalypses, see Evelyne Patlagean, "Byzance et son autre monde: observations sur quelques récits," in *Faire croire: modalités de la diffusion et de la réception des messages religieux du XIIe au XVe siècle; actes de table ronde de Rome (22–23 juin 1979)* (Rome: École Française de Rome, 1981), 201–21; Jane Baun, "The Moral Apocalypse in Byzantium," in *Apocalyptic Time*, ed. Albert I. Baumgarten (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 241–67; Jane Baun, *Tales from Another Byzantium: Celestial Journey and Local Community in the Medieval Greek Apocrypha* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 30–33. Concerning the related notion of the afterlife, see Vasileios Marinis, *Death and the Afterlife in*

the other hand, prognosticate the political fortunes of the entire community in anticipation of the Last Judgment. Byzantine apocalyptists composed numerous pseudepigraphical texts in both subgenres. Yet it is noteworthy that these subgenres did not always enjoy equal popularity. The composition of moral apocalypses was in vogue during the ninth to the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The most notable exemplars are the *Apocalypse of the Theotokos*, the *Life of St. Basil the Younger*, the *Vision of the Monk Kosmas*, the *Life of St. Niphon*, and the *Apocalypse of Anastasia*. Curiously enough, it seems that no new moral apocalypse was composed thereafter—a fact that has not yet been explained. Be that as it may, the manuscript tradition of these middle Byzantine texts testifies to their unabating popularity, which eventually reached its climax in the post-Byzantine period.

It is intriguing to observe that while interest in composing moral apocalypses was high during the middle Byzantine period, interest in writing historical apocalypses was markedly low. Apocalyptic narratives with historico-political agendas boomed during periods of political crisis, like the seventh century, which saw the Arab expansion, the eighth and ninth centuries, which saw the iconoclast controversy, or the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, which saw the repeated conquest of Constantinople. During times of imperial prosperity, however, the fate of the individual soul took precedence over the fate of the empire. The surviving manuscript material suggests that moral apocalypses, on the whole, enjoyed more widespread circulation and presumably more popularity in Byzantium than historical apocalypses. Starting in the fifteenth century, historical apocalypses became the dominant literary type, to judge from the increasing number of distinct texts as well as the staggering amount of manuscript witnesses thereof. Yet both types, historical and moral apocalypses, constitute the apocalyptic genre in Byzantium.

HISTORICAL APOCALYPSES AND THEIR NARRATIVE SEQUENCE

Two kinds of historical apocalyptic literature can be distinguished: one that is composed in prose and the other in poetry.[12] The vast majority of medieval Greek apocalypses were written in prose, emulating the

Byzantium: The Fate of the Soul in Theology, Liturgy, and Art (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

[12] See John Wortley, "The Literature of Catastrophe," *Byzantine Studies/Études byzantines* 4 (1977): 5–6.

prophetic books of the Bible, especially the Book of Daniel. A few apocalyptic texts followed another paradigm. In imitation of the Judeo-Hellenistic tradition of Sibylline oracles, some texts were versified. The most renowned collection of Byzantine apocalyptic poems is the *Oracles of Leo the Wise*.[13] The *Oracles* are famed for their images. Each oracle is placed next to a depiction, to which it closely relates. It can be debated whether this oracular collection qualifies as apocalyptic literature or not, given its linguistic, textual, and pictorial idiosyncrasy. This largely depends on how one defines the genre. A prototypical approach to apocalyptic literature could readily incorporate them.

The *Oracles of Leo the Wise* exerted great influence in Byzantium and beyond. Initially, the collection does not seem to have enjoyed wide circulation before the thirteenth century. In fact, our first reliable textual testimony of the *Oracles* comes from the court official and historian Nikētas Chōniatēs. Chōniatēs informs us that the *Oracles* were consulted by virtually every emperor of the twelfth century, who sought to learn from them the significance and the prophesied length of their respective reigns. The *Oracles* belonged to the genre of *basileiographeia*, texts with regnal lists that specify years of reign. Imperial legislation prohibited public access to such texts. The dissemination or sheer possession thereof was a capital offense punishable by death.[14] The fact that Chōniatēs could quote from the *Oracles* testifies to his privileged access and his intimate knowledge of imperial decision-making. The Latin conquest of Constantinople spurred an even greater interest in the *Oracles*. They were amended with further oracular pronouncements that clearly relate events surrounding the fateful year of 1204. Furthermore, the *Oracles* inspired the composition of a series of poems in demotic Greek as well as a compilation of various text-blocks

[13] For the edition and English translation of the Amsterdam version of the *Oracles of Leo the Wise*, see Pseudo-Leo the Wise, *The Oracles of the Most Wise Emperor Leo & The Tale of the True Emperor (Amstelodamensis graecus VI E 8)*, ed. and trans. Walter G. Brokkaar et al. (Amsterdam: Universiteit van Amsterdam, 2002). A critical edition (with Dutch translation) can be found in Jeannine Vereecken, "Τοῦ σοφωτάτου βασιλέως Λέοντος χρησμοί: De Orakels van de zeer wijze keizer Leo; Editio princeps van de Griekse tekst en van de Latijnse bewerking, de Vaticinia Pontificum," 3 vols. (PhD diss., Ghent University, 1986), vol. 3. For an expert study of the *Oracles*, see Nikos Kastrinakēs, "Εικονογραφημένοι χρησμοί του Λέοντος του Σοφού: Από τη βυζαντινή εποχή στην πρώτη έντυπη έκδοση (1596)," 2 vols. (PhD diss., University of Crete, 2018).

[14] See Wolfram Brandes, "Kaiserprophetien und Hochverrat: Apokalyptische Schriften und Kaiservaticinien als Medium antikaiserlicher Propaganda," in *Endzeiten: Eschatologie in den monotheistischen Weltreligionen*, ed. Wolfram Brandes and Felicitas Schmieder (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008), 157–200.

concerning the savior-emperor. Both texts show dependence on the *Oracles* and were compiled during the course of the thirteenth century.[15] By the end of the century, the *Oracles* had also been rendered into Latin. This translation came to exert tremendous influence in the West as an ever-expanding collection of papal prophecies, generally referred to as *Vaticinia de summis pontificibus* (Prophecies of the Supreme Pontiffs).[16] Although the dependence of the Latin *Vaticinia* on the Greek *Oracles* has been securely established, the context and process of the transmission remain to be elucidated.

There are a number of other apocalyptic narratives—written in prose—that were formative for the Byzantine apocalyptic tradition. Without any doubt, the most significant apocalyptic narrative, not only in Byzantium but also in the Latin West as well as in the Christian East, was the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodios*. Originally composed in Syriac at the end of the seventh century, the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodios* was quickly translated into Greek and thereupon repeatedly updated, leading to four Greek redactions.[17] The importance of this apocalypse can hardly be overestimated. It provided a firm condemnation of nascent Islam and interpreted its political successes as an apocalyptic—and thus final—divine test to separate the faithful from the impious. Furthermore, it prophesied the imminent reversal of fortunes, with Christians gaining the final victory at the hands of a messianic Byzantine emperor. The irredentist vision to recover lost lands became

[15] For the respective text editions, see Erich Trapp, "Vulgärorakel aus Wiener Handschriften," in *Ἀκροθίνια:Sodalium Seminarii Byzantini Vindobonensis Herberto Hunger oblata*, ed. Johannes Koder and Erich Trapp (Vienna: Institut für Byzantinistik der Universität Wien, 1964), 83–120, and *The Oracles of the Most Wise Emperor*, ed. and trans. Brokkaar et al., 90–101. See further the still relevant study by Cyril Mango, "The Legend of Leo the Wise," *Zbornik radova Vizantološkog instituta* 6 (1960): 59–93; repr. in *Byzantium and Its Image* (London: Variorum, 1984), no. XVI.

[16] See, among others, Bernard McGinn, *Visions of the End: Apocalyptic Traditions in the Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 188–89, 194–95, and Martha H. Fleming, *The Late Medieval Pope Prophecies: The Genus nequam Group* (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 1999).

[17] The four redactions have been critically edited in Anastasios Lolos, ed., *Die Apokalypse des Ps.Methodios* (Meisenheim am Glan: A. Hain, 1976) and Anastasios Lolos, ed., *Die dritte und vierte Redaktion des Ps.Methodios* (Meisenheim am Glan: A. Hain, 1978). Only the first redaction has received scholarly attention, while the later ones still remain to be dated and analyzed. An English translation of the first redaction is available in *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius: An Alexandrian World Chronicle*, ed. and trans. Benjamin Garstad, Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library 14 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 1–71.

a hallmark of subsequent Byzantine apocalypticism. Before the Arab conquests, Byzantine apocalyptic thought was rather optimistic in tone.[18] The Christian Roman Empire was believed to realize Christ's kingdom on earth. This interpretation made good sense in view of the continuous deferment of the Last Judgment, the global spread of Christianity, and the military successes of the sixth-century (Eastern) Roman Empire. The rise of Islam called into question the latter two aspects and thereby shocked the optimistic view of Roman imperial eschatology. The *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodios* set the stage for an alternative eschatology that was pessimistic and defensive in character, focusing on irredentist and retributive claims vis-à-vis Muslims and other foreign conquerors.

Another important apocalypse had been integrated in the *Life of St. Andrew the Fool*.[19] This text is peerless, as it presents the only historical apocalypse in Byzantine hagiography. Its content follows the irredentist ideology laid out by Pseudo-Methodios: the Muslims would be vanquished and the Byzantine Empire reconstituted before political power would ultimately disintegrate, climaxing in an imperial abdication that would allow the Antichrist to come forth. But the *Apocalypse of St. Andrew the Fool* does more than reiterate the Pseudo-Methodian narrative. It reinforces the usage of the Book of Revelation in the apocalyptic tradition by weaving key references into the saint's end-time vision. Most notably, it identifies Constantinople with the harlot of Babylon. While most of the *Life* equates the imperial capital with the new Jerusalem, the apocalyptic section is explicit in portraying the final destruction of Constantinople in unmistakable reminiscence of Rev 18, which describes the devastation of Babylon in graphic detail.[20] The ambiguity of being the saintly Jerusalem while at the same time the wicked Babylon developed into a standard conviction during the middle Byzantine period. Apocalyptists increasingly turned Constantinople

[18] See Alice Whealey, "The Apocryphal Apocalypse of John: A Byzantine Apocalypse from the Early Islamic Period," *JTS* 53, no. 2 (2002): 536–37, and Paul Magdalino, "'All Israel Will Be Saved'? The Forced Baptism of the Jews and Imperial Eschatology," in *Jews in Early Christian Law: Byzantium and the Latin West, 6th–11th Centuries*, ed. John Tolan, Nicholas de Lange, Laurence Foschia, and Capucine Nemo-Pekelman (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), 239–42.

[19] Lennart Rydén, ed. and trans., *The Life of St Andrew the Fool*, 2 vols. (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1995), 2:258–85.

[20] The *Apocalypse of St. Andrew the Fool* was not the first apocalypse to apply Rev 18 to Constantinople. Yet this hagiographical account lent substantial support to the authenticity of the Book of Revelation, whose canonical status was not undisputed in Byzantium.

into the focal point of the Byzantine apocalyptic imagination. Not only historical apocalypses but also otherworldly visions expressed the conviction that the end-time drama was expected to be largely played out in a Constantinopolitan setting. The apocalyptic sections in the *Life of St. Basil the Younger* are well known for their depictions of the afterlife as a passage through celestial tollhouses (τὰ τελώνια): an image that recalls procedural law courts in Byzantium. Likewise, the *Vision of the Monk Kosmas* imagines the heavenly city to be encircled by a wall system that is reminiscent of the Theodosian Walls, while the *Apocalypse of the Theotokos* characterizes the heavenly arbiter in close likeness to his earthly equivalent, the emperor.

The *Last Vision of the Prophet Daniel* was another extremely popular apocalypse, to judge from the amount of surviving manuscript copies and the fact that it was translated several times into Slavonic. This apocalypse seems to have revived the type of historical apocalypses that were written in the guise of the prophet Daniel and that had been particularly popular in the eighth and ninth centuries.[21] The fact that we do not possess Pseudo-Danielic prophecies from the tenth through twelfth centuries may reflect a lessened concern about political developments. Yet it may also be the result of more effective censorship or of a transmission history that filtered out these prophecies. The *Last Vision* comes down in two recensions. The latter one was redacted in the aftermath of the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453, while the original version was composed in reaction to the Latin conquest in 1204. Its language and structure are typically apocalyptic. It uses various word pictures like "the sleeping snake" (ὁ ὄφις ὁ κοιμώμενος) or "the savage-looking wolf" (ὁ λύκος ὁ ἀγριοειδής) and employs numerous typological correspondences, for instance, between Constantinople and Jerusalem, between the Latin conquerors and the Old Testament King Ahab, or between the savior-emperor and Constantine the Great.[22] In terms of content, the text contains one

[21] See the Pseudo-Danielic apocalypses edited in Hans Schmoldt, ed. and trans., "Die Schrift 'Vom jungen Daniel'und 'Daniels letzte Vision': Herausgabe und Interpretation zweier apokalyptischer Texte" (PhD diss. University of Hamburg, 1972), 202–37. See also Klaus Berger, ed. and trans., *Die griechische Daniel-Diegese* (Leiden: Brill, 1976).

[22] See András Kraft, "Typological Hermeneutics and Apocalyptic Time: A Case Study of the Medieval Greek Last Vision of the Prophet Daniel," in *Ὄψεις του Βυζαντινού Χρόνου: Πρακτικά Διεθνούς Συνεδρίου, 29–30 Μαΐου 2015, Αθήνα*, ed. Elenē G. Saradē, Aikaterinē Dellaporta, and Theōnē Kollyropoulou (Kalamata: Πανεπιστήμιο Πελοποννήσου/Χριστιανικό και Βυζαντινό Μουσείο, 2018), 180–94.

of the earliest references to the capture and occupation of Constantinople, a notion that had been thought absurd before 1204. Otherwise, it presents the usual account of imperial irredentism, which is followed by the final and irreversible destruction of the empire and the arrival of the Antichrist. The primary purpose of this apocalypse is to integrate the apparent catastrophe of 1204 into the narrative of salvation history and to demonstrate thereby its purpose within the divine plan. Byzantine apocalypses persistently argue that even if outside forces challenge the fortunes of the empire, they are unable to usurp Byzantium's honor of being God's elect nation.

Another end-time revelation, the *Apocalypse of Leo of Constantinople*, is much harder to contextualize historically.[23] Its main narrative revolves around the struggle between a pious monk and a villainous emperor who orders his imperial image to be venerated together with the icon of Christ. This dispute has been interpreted by its modern editor to mirror the iconoclast controversy. Yet the notion, mentioned in passing, that the use of unleavened bread (ὁ ἄζυμος ἄρτος) will be established in Constantinople points to the Latin occupation in 1204 and can be read as a *vaticinium ex eventu*, a prophecy after the event.[24] Apocalypses use *vaticinia ex eventu* in order to bolster their authenticity and authority by claiming that since their alleged predictions concerning present events are accurate, their genuine predictions about the future are reliable. Such *vaticinia* are often the only means to date a given apocalypse, since their pseudonymity and their usually late manuscript transmission inhibits a secure dating. Although the reference to the unleavened bread seems to refer to the Latin rule of Byzantium, it may simply be a later interpolation. Apocalypses are prone to subsequent insertion and addition, which served to update a prophecy and to render it meaningful in a new historical context. In any event, the final text that has come down to us seems to have been redacted in the thirteenth century, while various sections of it may well have been composed centuries beforehand. The main narrative is positively concluded when angels intervene and righteously slay the immoral emperor. The remainder of the *Apocalypse of Leo* discusses the alternation of good and bad rulers before expounding the workings of the Antichrist. The

[23] Riccardo Maisano, ed. and trans., *L'apocalisse apocrifa di Leone di Costantinopoli* (Naples: Morano Editore, 1975).

[24] Ibid., 71, lines 58–59.

apocalypse closes with a rare description of the Last Judgment, a topic that is usually not dealt with in historical apocalypses, which is another indication of its compiled nature.

There are many more historical apocalypses from Byzantium.[25] These prophecies were most commonly attributed to the prophet Daniel, the church father Methodios of Olympos († 311), and from the late Byzantine period onwards to the Emperor Leo VI († 912). The pseudonymous nature of apocalyptic literature ought to be seen as an honest exegetical approach that aims to interpret and to supplement traditional prophetic material. Given the undisputed canonicity of the Book of Daniel, it is not surprising that Byzantine apocalyptists saw in the prophet Daniel the greatest authority to be emulated. Consequently, Byzantine apocalypticism consists to a large extent of Pseudo-Danielic texts, some of which still remain to be edited.[26]

Typically, Byzantine historical apocalypses follow a standard narrative that revolves around three major groups of protagonists: the ideal emperor(s), the eschatological peoples of the north, and the Antichrist. The narrative customarily starts with a period of hardship that is overcome through the intervention of a messianic ruler or a series of rulers, who carry out a set of eschatological tasks that include the defeat of all foreign enemies, the inauguration of peace and posterity, and the abdication of the imperial dignity to Christ in Jerusalem. The abdication is followed by the arrival and malicious deeds of the Antichrist. Woven into this sequence are the eschatological peoples of Gog and Magog (Ezek 38–39; Rev 20:8), whose identity was an issue of constant dispute, with speculations ranging from the Huns and the Göktürks to the Rus' and the Bulgars. Medieval Greek apocalypses also often prophesied that Constantinople would be besieged yet saved from conquest before being destroyed by a deluge. Given these motifs, the following narrative scheme can be drawn up:

[25] For a useful survey of the most prominent Byzantine apocalyptic texts (supplemented with extracts in French translation), see Marie-Hélène Congourdeau, "Textes apocalyptiques annonçant la chute de Constantinople," in *Constantinople 1453: des Byzantins aux Ottomans; textes et documents*, ed. Vincent Déroche and Nicolas Vatin (Toulouse: Anacharsis, 2016), 983–1024. See also the excellent survey by Paul Magdalino, "The History of the Future and Its Uses: Prophecy, Policy and Propaganda," in *The Making of Byzantine History: Studies Dedicated to Donald M. Nicol*, ed. Roderick Beaton and Charlotte Roueché (Aldershot: Variorum, 1993), 3–34.

[26] For a survey of the various Pseudo-Danielic texts, see DiTommaso, *The Book of Daniel*.

Source	Narrative succession of motifs					
(Greek) *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodios*	**A** (XIII.11–18)	**B** (XIII.19–21)	**C** (XIV.2–6)	–	**E** (XIV.1, 6–13)	**F** (XIV.14)
Apocalypse of St. Andrew the Fool	**A** (lines 3824–58)	**C** (lines 3913–20)	**D** (lines 3989–99)	**B** (lines 4050–65)	**E** (lines 4069–101)	**F** (lines 4118–27)
Last Vision of the Prophet Daniel	**B** (§§34–39)	**A** (§§47–59)	**C** (§§60–61)	**D** (§§69–70)	**E** (§§74–78)	**F** (§§83–85)
Apocalypse of Leo of Constantinople	**B** (§14)	**A** (§15)	–	–	**E** (§§16–21)	**F** (§§22–29)

Key
A motif: savior-emperor's victory and benefactions
B motif: arrival of the eschatological peoples
C motif: imperial abdication
D motif: destruction of Constantinople
E motif: arrival and deeds of the Antichrist
F motif: resurrection / Last Judgment

THE MANUSCRIPT TRADITION AND OTHER SOURCE MEDIA

It is important to note that Byzantine apocalypses have been preserved, for the most part, in late manuscripts. According to a rough estimation, about 70 percent of manuscripts containing Byzantine apocalyptic sources date to the fifteenth century or later.[27] The Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453 can be seen as the main reason why interest in Greek apocalyptic texts peaked in the fifteenth through seventeenth centuries. Apocalypses professed to render intelligible the Muslim subjugation of Byzantium within a providential plan that promised the eventual restoration of the orthodox body politic. They fed salvific hopes and irredentist confidence that fell on sympathetic ears. Moreover, many prophecies that had been written in reaction to the fall in 1204 seemed to perfectly apply to the second fall in 1453. This apparent congruence was believed to confirm the veracity of the Byzantine apocalyptic tradition. For instance, the *Last Vision of the Prophet Daniel* was believed to have adequately foretold the Ottoman conquest. That is why Nestor-Iskinder extensively quotes from the work in his account of the capture (*halōsis*) of 1453.[28] Around the year 1470, the *Last Vision of the Prophet Daniel* was subjected to a textual revision; it was shortened and slightly updated into a new Pseudo-Danielic prophecy entitled the *Vision of Daniel on the Seven-Hilled City*.[29] The intrinsic ambiguity of prophetic narratives facilitated their repeated reinterpretation.

Another pivotal cause for the unparalleled proliferation of apocalyptic speculation in the fifteenth century can be seen in the disappearance of imperial censorship. Apocalyptic narratives were frequently instrumentalized to advance *Kaiserkritik*, that is, to reproach imperial policies and incumbents. As a result, apocalypses were rigorously censored throughout the Byzantine millennium. Conversely,

[27] András Kraft, "An Inventory of Medieval Greek Apocalyptic Sources (c. 500–1500 AD): Naming and Dating, Editions and Manuscripts," *Millennium-Jahrbuch* 15 (2018): 69–143, at 141–43.

[28] For the respective passage in the *Tale on the Conquest of Constantinople* (Повесть о взятии Царьграда), see Walter K. Hanak and Marios Philippides, eds. and trans., *The Tale of Constantinople (of Its Origin and Capture by the Turks in the Year 1453) by Nestor-Iskander* (New Rochelle, NY: Aristide D. Caratzas, 1998), 94–97 (= §§86–87). See further Pertusi, *Fine di Bisanzio*, 76–81.

[29] Edition and German translation in Schmoldt, "Die Schrift 'Vom jungen Daniel,'" 190–99.

apocalypses could flourish during periods of crisis when imperial censorship was curtailed or altogether abrogated.

In the wake of 1453, various workshops (especially in Constantinople, Crete, Rome, and Venice) produced a large number of anthologies that compiled and updated the Byzantine apocalyptic material at their disposal. Consequently, most of our textual witnesses belong to a post-Byzantine context that was selecting and filtering Byzantine apocalypticism. The historical filter inherent in the manuscript tradition still needs to be investigated in order to differentiate, as much as possible, the original Byzantine layers from the post-Byzantine additions and omissions.

Our knowledge of Byzantine apocalyptic literature, however, is not solely dependent on the manuscript tradition of medieval Greek apocalypses. We find additional source material in the patriographic tradition, in exegetical works, and in art history. Patriographic writings collected legends about Constantinople and its monuments. This genre was particularly popular during the middle Byzantine period. Its most well-known exemplar, the *Patria Kōnstantinoupoleōs*, was compiled in the late tenth century and contains numerous apocalyptically connoted legends.[30] Furthermore, exegetical literature provides an abundance of information about Byzantine apocalyptic traditions. Of particular significance are the commentaries on the Book of Revelation. Altogether four Byzantine commentaries are known, which were penned by Oikoumenios, Andrew of Caesarea, Arethas of Caesarea, and Neophytos the Recluse respectively.[31] The early seventh-century commentary by Andrew of Caesarea was by far the most influential.[32] Among others,

[30] For the Greek text with English translation, see Albrecht Berger, trans., *Accounts of Medieval Constantinople: The Patria* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013). For supplementary studies, see among others Albrecht Berger, "Das apokalyptische Konstantinopel: Topographisches in apokalyptischen Schriften der mittelbyzantinischen Zeit," in *Endzeiten: Eschatologie in den monotheistischen Weltreligionen*, ed. Wolfram Brandes and Felicitas Schmieder (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008), 135–55, and Albrecht Berger, "Magical Constantinople: Statues, Legends, and the End of Time," *Scandinavian Journal of Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 2 (2016): 9–29.

[31] See Cyril Mango, "Le temps dans les commentaires byzantins de l'Apocalypse," in *Le temps chrétien de la fin de l'Antiquité au Moyen Âge, IIIe–XIIIe siècles, Paris 9–12 mars 1981*, ed. Jean-Marie Leroux (Paris: Éditions du CNRS, 1984), 431–38, and Stephen J. Shoemaker, "The Afterlife of the Apocalypse of John in Byzantium," in *The New Testament in Byzantium*, ed. Derek Krueger and Robert S. Nelson (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 2016), 301–16.

[32] For an English translation, see Eugenia S. Constantinou, trans., *Andrew of Caesarea: Commentary on the Apocalypse* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2011).

it represents one of the earliest witnesses to the identification of Constantinople with Babylon and repeatedly expresses the anxiety that the Antichrist would be a Roman emperor. Other exegetical works deserve attention as well, such as the *Commentary on Daniel* by Basil of Neopatras (tenth century). Unfortunately, this text remains unpublished.[33] Likewise, the Greek pseudepigraphical corpus attributed to Ephraem the Syrian († 373) awaits much needed editorial and commentary work.[34] Fortunately, the eschatological treatise by Pseudo-Hippolytos entitled *On the End of the World* (probably from the seventh or eighth century) has been recently reedited.[35] This largely exegetical work was widely disseminated, as testified by its copious manuscript tradition and its influence on neighboring apocalyptic literature. In addition to textual sources, one should not forget about the contributions of Byzantine art. In the aftermath of the iconoclast controversy, artists began to depict the Last Judgment in manuscript illuminations and mural paintings. Notable examples are found in Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, cod. gr. 923, folio 68v (ninth century), and cod. gr. 74, folios 51v and 93v (eleventh century), as well as in the wall paintings in the Church of St. Stephanos in Kastoria, Greece (tenth century), in the Church of St. Peter and St. Paul at Tatev Monastery, Armenia (tenth century), in the Yılanlı Kilise (Snake Church) in Cappadocia, Turkey (ninth to eleventh centuries), and, most famously, the Last Judgment mosaic in the Torcello Cathedral, Italy (twelfth century).

The Byzantine apocalyptic imagination found expression in various visual, oral, and textual media. Only a fraction thereof has been preserved, with apocalyptic literature making up the greatest part. The fragmentary material needs to be studied with care since the genre required texts to undergo constant revision in order to remain relevant. Any given text is likely to contain multiple layers of redaction and interpolation. Apocalyptic literature should be seen as a continuous project in textual interpretation, a project that is still ongoing. Scholars contribute to this project by presenting critical editions of texts whose

[33] An edition is currently in preparation by Caroline Macé and Pablo Ubierna.

[34] For a recent discussion, see Emmanouela Grypeou, "Ephraem Graecus, 'Sermo In Adventum Domini': A Contribution to the Study of the Transmission of Apocalyptic Motifs in Greek, Latin and Syriac Traditions in Late Antiquity," in *Graeco-Latina et Orientalia: Studia in honorem Angeli Urbani heptagenarii*, ed. Samir K. Samir and Juan P. Monferrer-Sala (Cordóba: Oriens Academic, 2013), 165–79.

[35] Panagiotis C. Athanasopoulos, ed., *Ψ.-Ἱππολύτου Περὶ τῆς συντελείας τοῦ κόσμου—Κριτική Ἔκδοση* (*Ps.-Hippolytus's De consummatione mundi—a Critical Edition*), 2nd ed. (Ioannina: Carpe Diem, 2016).

original form is often untraceable. This is not to belittle editorial work, which is gravely needed in apocalyptic studies. Numerous short oracles and full-length apocalypses remain to be discovered in manuscripts scattered across Europe. I only wish to call attention to the hermeneutical responsibility scholarship holds and to incite methodological humility in view of the fuzziness of the genre and the textual openness of Byzantine apocalypses.

Selected Further Reading

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