Coping with Crisis: Invasion, Defeat, and Apocalyptic Discourse in Seventh-Century Byzantium

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Statement of Originality

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

(Signed)_____ Date: 5 September 2018

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ABSTRACT

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The seventh century was a period of transformative crisis for the Byzantine Empire. Conquests by the Sassanid Persians and ascendant Islamic Arab forces reshaped the region for centuries to come. This sudden change in fortune is witnessed in the decline of triumphalist rhetoric in Byzantine literature which, in the wake of defeat, began to ring false. To comprehend their circumstances, and bolster Byzantine identity, many authors turned to apocalyptic discourse to emplot themselves and their enemies into a providential plan, to provide both meaning and hope.

Most scholars have considered Byzantine apocalypticism to be part of a general interest in eschatology and speculation about the end of days. Such scholarship tends to centre around the so-called genre of apocalypse which is, in turn, relegated to the realm of *Volksliteratur*. This thesis argues that Byzantine apocalyptic discourse was less concerned with the *eschaton* than with providing an explanation for contemporary crises and predicting God's imminent deliverance. Byzantine authors employed apocalyptic discourse to address imperial decline at the hands of Persian and Arab forces and to transform Roman and Christian identity. Furthermore, considering widespread usage of apocalyptic discourse, this thesis questions whether a generic approach is the most effective way to discuss Byzantine apocalypticism.

Chapter 1 introduces the historical and intellectual background to the thesis, and provides the methodology for the remaining chapters. Chapter 2 addresses sixth-century antecedents which provided the literary foundation for seventh-century apocalyptic discourse. Chapter 3 discusses positive depictions of the emperor. Chapter 4 addresses the role of apostasy in prompting apocalyptic speculation. Chapter 5 studies the dehumanization of Roman adversaries, including the Persians, Arabs, and evil emperors. Chapter 6 concludes the thesis by arguing that seventh-century Roman authors used apocalyptic discourse to rhetorically construct their political and religious identities, and provide hope, in the wake of unprecedented defeat.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to Seventh-Century Byzantine Apocalyptic Discourse

I. Introduction

This thesis addresses the ways in which many authors under the cultural influence of the Roman empire used apocalyptic discourse to rhetorically construct their political and religious identities in the seventh century. This approach, used by authors from a variety of cultural, religious, and linguistic backgrounds, represents a new paradigm in response to unprecedented crises, one which has been poorly understood by most modern scholars. After a brief introduction of the topic, this chapter lays the foundations for this study, including a discussion of the methodology, an historical overview of the primary sources discussed, an examination of the *status quaestionis* and a brief overview of the organisation of the thesis.

The seventh century was a period of transformative crisis in the Roman Empire.[1] From its opening decades, military defeat, internal political conflict, and religious division dominated Roman society. The Justinianic age, itself a mixture of hope and uncertainty, was brought to a sudden conclusion with three emperors in quick succession: Maurice died at the hands of the usurper Phocas in 602.[2] The Heraclian dynasty, the dominant political force of the century, rose to power when Heraclius (r. 610-641) overthrew Phocas eight years later. In addition to the imperial throne, the emperor Heraclius inherited a divided Church and an entrenched defensive war against the Sassanid Persians, whose victories continued to rattle Roman resolve. In 614 Heraclius presided over the loss of Jerusalem to the Persians, and with it the True Cross, taken as spoils to Ctesiphon.[3] Such events led many to ask whether God's favour

[1] Considering the centrality of Roman identity to the subject of this thesis, I have opted, whenever possible, to favour the adjective "Roman" to describe the subjects under the nominal hegemony of Constantinople. I will occasionally employ the term "Byzantine", particularly in reference to modern scholarship, understanding its reference to a people who self-identified as Romans. While this is done primarily to address the importance of Roman identity to the authors under consideration, it has the added benefit of avoiding the anachronistic use of a relatively modern term that would have been foreign to the people of the time.
[2] Whitby (1988), 24-7, Olster (1993a), Kaegi (2003), 42-57.
[3] Haldon (1990), 42-3.

had departed from his Christian empire. After all, what else could explain the alarming success of the fire-worshipping barbarians from the East over the Christian Roman Empire?

Roman morale received a needed boost as internal struggles within the Sassanid administration led to a decline in hostilities after a series of Roman successes, including the recapture of Jerusalem, and the return of the Holy Cross in 628 from Ctesiphon. This victory provided a psychological boon to the empire which had been brought to the brink of collapse, and victory seemed to indicate that divine favour had once again returned to the Romans. On 21 March 630, in a scene reminiscent of both the triumphs of the Republic and the triumphal entry of Jesus Christ before the crucifixion, Heraclius made a historic visit to the Holy City, where he personally restored the Holy Cross in a solemn ceremony.[4]

However, the successes gained by Heraclius would prove short lived. Decades of continual warfare had depleted the empire of both treasure and manpower, and had left the *limes* vulnerable to attack. As early as October 630 Byzantines easily overcame small skirmishes with the followers of a new religious sect led by the prophet Muhammad.[5] Little did the Byzantines know that four years later this ragtag group of desert dwellers would become a force that would inflict a stunning defeat on their forces at the battle of Ajnadayn, or that Jerusalem would fall permanently into Muslim hands in 637.[6] By the end of the century, the map of the region had been redrawn, with most of the Arabian Peninsula, Palestine, Egypt, and North Africa controlled by the ascendant Islamic Caliphate.

The rapid succession of defeats at the hands of non-Christian invaders led to an existential crisis within Roman society. Roman triumphalism, which equated divine favour with military victory, was ill prepared to process the meaning of sudden and dramatic defeat at the hands of an unknown enemy. Authors were compelled to appeal to new rhetorical strategies to address this change in fortunes. For many, this included a rise in the production of *adversus Judaeos*

[4] Kaegi (2003), 205-7, Drijvers (2002), Zuckerman (2013).
[5] Kaegi, (1992), 68-73.
[6] Kaegi (1992), 95.

literature, a phenomenon which represented not only a disdain for the Jews but misrecognition of the Arab threat.[7]

Others appealed to apocalyptic discourse, a long-established tradition which, while always present in certain circles, had begun to regain popularity in the sixth century after a long period of disfavour in the Greek-speaking world. Although many seventh-century anti-Jewish writings employed apocalyptic discourse, unlike anti-Jewish discourse, the use of apocalypticism crossed confessional and social boundaries, and appeared in numerous literary forms. It was used by Chalcedonian and anti-Chalcedonian Christians alike, and indeed, many texts within the apocalyptic genre, or what will be referred to here as generic apocalyptic texts, such as the *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius, leave the reader with little clue as to which side of the Christological divide the author stood.[8]

Moreover, Jewish authors employed apocalyptic discourse as well. Critical themes, such as the role of religious apostasy in the face of defeat, or the cosmic importance of the Byzantine emperor were discussed by Jewish and Christian authors alike, in writings ranging from liturgical and panegyric poetry to historiography and epistolary literature. Apocalyptic discourse could be found in writings from all regions under Byzantine influence and was written in Greek, Syriac, and Hebrew by authors ranging from simple monastics to the intellectual elite.

II. Methodology

The pervasive use of apocalyptic discourse is the subject of this thesis, which investigates the way in which seventh-century Roman authors rhetorically transformed their political and religious identities in the face of unprecedented crises. In order to properly address the question, we must first discuss the methodology employed in this thesis. Scholarship on Byzantine apocalypticism has been limited by numerous prevailing assumptions which must be addressed before we are able to fully appreciate the ubiquitous nature of apocalyptic discourse in the seventh century. Many of these assumptions are based on the traditionalist nature of Byzantine

[7] This topic has been discussed in great detail in the literature. See Olster (1994), and Déroche (1999), 141-61.
[8] Griffith (2008), 35.

Studies which has inherited numerous biases, instilled by classicist methodology, against later Greek, and especially religious, literature. This has resulted in an undue focus on genre, biases against apocalypticism, and anachronistic distinctions between "high" (read secular) and "low" (read religious) literature which has hindered scholarship on Byzantine apocalyptic discourse. Furthermore, the centrality of religious polemic in late-antique historical scholarship has resulted in an exaggeration of cultural divisions within Roman society. While such cultural divisions did exist to some extent, as this thesis argues, evidence suggests that they were far more permeable than most scholars have imagined. This approach has prevented a full appreciation of the level of cultural exchange among members of rival religious groups.

The guiding principle of this thesis is to be as inclusive as possible without making it unwieldy. Traditional divisions based on culture and religion will be avoided, treating Christians, both pro- and anti-Chalcedonian, and Jews as participants in a shared Byzantine milieu. Material frequently overlooked, based on a separation of the fields of Christian and Jewish studies, will be opened to consideration, revealing the extent to which the various late-Roman religious groups took part in a shared culture.

While judgements between what should be considered "high" and "low" literature based entirely on linguistic or philological considerations can be useful for classification or for determining the social setting of a document, value judgements based merely on content will also be avoided. An otherwise sophisticated text should not be considered "low" literature based solely on its use of apocalyptic discourse. Likewise, the reverse corollary is true: an apocalyptic analysis of a text should not be avoided based solely on its traditional classification as "high" literature. Such distinctions, while increasingly out of favour in most Byzantine literary scholarship, persist in scholarship on apocalypticism. By avoiding such labels, I hope to avoid anachronistic biases which may skew the interpretation of authorship or lead to judgements of the intellectual quality of authors who employed apocalyptic discourse. This approach opens new avenues of study which have hitherto been neglected due to the judgement that apocalyptic speculation is inherently primitive.

Furthermore, this thesis questions the utility of the traditional generic approach to the study of apocalypticism. Traditional scholarship on apocalypticism locates apocalyptic speculation in a single genre, quarantining, as it were, apocalyptic discourse within a defined set of tropes and constructs. This approach makes the study of apocalypticism more manageable, and prevents the perceived contagion of apocalypticism from contaminating purer forms of literature. This thesis sets aside these limiting factors, including their inherent biases, by exploring the way in which authors of all literary genres employed the rhetorical tropes so prominent in traditional apocalypses to interpret contemporary events. By approaching the subject through the lens of "apocalyptic discourse", rather than focusing on generic apocalyptic texts, fresh new data is made available for interpretation. While traditional apocalypses are important to this thesis, a focus on such texts to the exclusion of others limits the understanding of Byzantine apocalypticism. Such an approach gives the impression that apocalyptic speculation only took place within a small, anonymous and countercultural movement, obscuring the ubiquity of apocalyptic discourse among all levels of society.

Admittedly, the inclusive approach advocated here risks becoming unwieldy and particularly prone to falsification. In a culture which saw divine interaction with human events as standard in historical causation, many documents which attribute an outcome to divine will could be considered apocalyptic. To mitigate this risk, this thesis will employ limiting criteria. Documents under consideration must include one or more of the following criteria: namely, *vaticinia ex eventu*, or historical events depicted as prophecy, related to the crises of the seventh century; an interpretation of the crises as evidence of divine judgement; a warning of divine judgement to come; prediction of future punishment; the interpretation of contemporary rulers as divinely raised deliverers; or the prediction of future deliverance.

While the thesis attempts to address the above-mentioned gaps in contemporary scholarship, it also builds upon the work of several scholars who have contributed significantly to the study of Byzantine apocalyptic discourse. For example, this thesis adopts Paul J. Alexander's now axiomatic theory that the level of apocalyptic speculation in a given period can

serve as a "barometer" for "eschatological pressures" exerted upon a culture.[9] While this thesis would not limit the scope of such pressures to the eschatological, it does adapt and employ the principle to gauge the correlation between the unusually high level of apocalyptic discourse in the seventh century and the impact of defeat and invasion upon Byzantine society. While eschatological pressures can be seen in seventh-century literature, apocalypticism also accompanies pressures in identity formation and the comprehension of unprecedented events.

Alexander's work has also been pivotal in establishing criteria for philologists and historians for dating apocalyptic texts based on the transition from *vaticinia ex eventu* to "true" or, rather, unfulfilled prophecies. Based on this principle, an apocalyptic text can be dated approximately to the latest historical event referenced. Depending on the chronological scope of the text, the dating can be further narrowed down by historically significant events which are not mentioned.[10] Similarly, Alexander has demonstrated that later redactions of apocalyptic texts can often be dated to changes in prophesied dates, as later scribes would often adjust dates further into the future when a prophecy had failed to come to pass, or update topographical references to geography or events relevant to the editor.[11] Such principles are important to modern scholarship on traditional apocalyptic texts and have stood the test of time. Most of the sources discussed here were not written as apocalyptic texts *per se*, but rather employed apocalyptic discourse in the interpretation of contemporary events. The majority of prophecies discussed here are *ex eventu*, with some abstract predictions of future punishment, rather than concrete prophecies. Accordingly, Alexander's analysis, while important, will play a minimal role in this thesis.

Recent contributions by András Kraft further illuminate the use of apocalyptic discourse in the formation of meaning. Although his claim that apocalyptic literature and eschatology are inseparable, like most scholars before him, is open to debate, Kraft is correct when he states that apocalyptic texts "construct a theology of history that bestows meaning upon the present".[12]

[9] Alexander (1968), 1002.
[10] Alexander (1968), 999-1001.
[11] Alexander (1968), 1001-1003.
[12] Kraft (2012), 214.

Kraft's observation offers an important insight which helps us understand how authors used apocalyptic discourse to bestow meaning upon contemporary disasters and transform late-Roman political and religious identity. This thesis also builds upon his illuminating work on the "Last Roman Emperor" and "Victorious Emperor" *topoi* in later Byzantine literature by exploring the role of the emperor in Byzantine apocalyptic discourse in the early decades of the seventh century, a subject absent in his study.

Stephen Shoemaker's recent work on Islam as an eschatological movement has done much to draw attention to the apocalyptic milieu of the first decades of the seventh century.[13] While Shoemaker's work relies heavily on the assumption of an inextricable link between eschatology and apocalypticism, it goes far in illuminating the ways in which cultures in the Near East understood the conflict between the world's two strongest empires in apocalyptic terms, and the ways in which members of these cultures formed their identity within this context. However, Shoemaker relies heavily upon his contested dating of a redaction of the *Tiburtine Sibyl*, with its reference to the Last Roman Emperor, to the fourth century, and an assertion that Muhammad was aware of and consciously adapted this early tradition.[14] The reliance on two highly tenuous assertions is entirely unnecessary to Shoemaker's point, which he could have made by observing apocalyptic discourse outside traditional apocalyptic texts. This thesis builds upon the foundations laid by Shoemaker, by examining the extent to which apocalyptic discourse influenced not only the Romans, but those within their sphere of influence, including the pre-Islamic Arabs.

Finally, this thesis relies upon significant principles demonstrated by scholars of Jewish and early Christian apocalypticism. As will be discussed in greater detail in section III below, current Byzantine scholarship is grappling with theoretical problems already addressed by scholars of earlier fields. Most significant for this study is David Sim's critique of the narrow generic focus prominent in scholarship on early apocalypticism, a critique which the thesis

[13] Shoemaker (2012); Shoemaker (2014).
[14] Shoemaker (2015).

applies to scholars of Byzantine apocalyptic discourse. Sim has attempted to liberate his field from the narrow focus advocated by scholars such as John J. Collins by demonstrating that apocalyptic discourse often defies modern categorisation.[15] Likewise, this thesis questions the usefulness of the traditional generic approach to apocalypticism, and applies Sim's insights to their implications for seventh-century apocalyptic discourse.

With the thesis situated within its theoretical framework, the following section addresses the primary sources discussed in subsequent chapters by placing them within their historical context. After a discussion of the goals and organisation of the thesis, followed by a brief historical overview, this chapter will address the *status quaestionis* of our subject. This will be accomplished by first discussing previous scholarship on Byzantine literature, particularly the use of the common dichotomies discussed above, and second by advocating for the reframing of the conversation. After this, the chapter will examine previous scholarship on the study of apocalypticism, both by Byzantinists and scholars of cognate fields. Through this process, we will be able to properly define the categories used throughout this study.

This study advocates a holistic approach to Byzantine imperial literature, a category which will be used to reflect the unity in diversity that is found in the wide array of literature produced by all citizens, regardless of language and creed, of the empire. Furthermore, rather than attempt to define "apocalypticism" and its varied connotations in a narrow way, this study will continue to employ the term "apocalyptic discourse", to be as inclusive as possible, while still providing a heuristically useful standard. Rather than a focus on generic tropes, this term allows us to focus on the apocalyptic worldview as one which understood contemporary crises as an effect of divine causation, in reaction to or reflective of the state of the empire, and one which may or may not include speculations about the *eschaton*.

[15] Sim (1996).

III. Goals and Organisation of the Thesis

The stated goal of this thesis is to examine the way in which numerous authors under Roman influence used apocalyptic discourse to rhetorically transform their religious and political identities in the wake of unprecedented crises. This will be accomplished by examining several recurring themes, such as the position of the emperor in apocalyptic discourse, apostasy, and the dehumanisation of imperial adversaries. Each chapter will address these themes through a close examination of primary source literature from the period.

"Chapter 2: Sixth-Century Antecedents" addresses the historical foundations of the burgeoning apocalyptic attitudes of sixth-century Greek and Syriac literature. During the earliest decades of the century, during a period of relative peace, we find an uptick in the production of apocalyptic discourse, in large part due to the belief that the world would end on 6000 *anno mundi*. Even after this auspicious year had passed, we see a continuous trickle of apocalypticism. The recording of portents, and depictions of emperors as antichrists— as Anastasius I (d. 515) is depicted in the *Oracle of Baalbek*, or demonic as Justinian (d. 565) is described in Procopius's *Secret History*— will be discussed as foundation of attitudes which would find their most widespread manifestation in the seventh century in authors such as Theophylact Simocatta, George of Pisidia, and the author of the *Sefer Zerubbabel.*

"Chapter 3: Messianic Hero or Antichrist? The emperor in Apocalyptic Discourse" discusses apocalyptic depictions of the role of the emperor in seventh-century literature. While views of his role varied significantly among authors, the emperor, whether in the guise of actual emperors like Heraclius or in abstract form such as the unnamed emperors mentioned in pseudo-Methodius's *Apocalypse*, consistently served as a significant actor in contemporary and eschatological history. Here we will discuss heroic depictions of emperors, such as Maurice and Heraclius, the depiction of Phocas as a destroyer, and ambivalent depictions of Heraclius as a potential usher of the apocalypse. We will conclude this chapter with a discussion of the *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius's depiction of the Last Roman Emperor. Across the board, we

will find that the emperor is a cosmically significant figure who is able to save or destroy the world.

"Chapter 4: Apostasy, Religious Conflict, and Identity in Apocalyptic Discourse: 600-690" addresses the role of religious conflict and apostasy as both catalysts and symptoms of apocalyptic discourse. This chapter begins with a discussion of apostasy as it is found in *adversus Judaeos* literature and is followed by its use by authors writing about the Persian and Arab invasions. Such authors make stark admissions about unusual numbers of apostates from Christianity and blame such apostates for Roman defeat. These admissions are interesting considering the fact that authors of previous centuries rarely discussed Christianity at all. During the period discussed we will find that not only were there numerous apostates, they frequently received blame for imperial crises, and apostasy itself often inspired apocalyptic discourse as a hedge to prevent further attrition.

"Chapter 5: Wolves and Centaurs in Byzantium: Dehumanising the Enemy in Seventh-Century Byzantine Apocalyptic Discourse" examines the sociological and social-psychological mechanisms at work in the dehumanisation of imperial adversaries. Such dehumanisation includes the depictions of the Persians, evil emperors, the Arabs, and the eschatological nations of Gog and Magog. Dehumanisation was used by Roman authors to comprehend their enemy and maintain their political and religious identity in the face of defeat. Insights from modern social-psychological theory allow us to pinpoint the mechanisms at work in seventh-century Roman texts.

Finally, Chapter 6 will conclude our study with a synthetic analysis of seventh-century Byzantine apocalyptic discourse. The chapter will argue that, based on evidence discussed in previous chapters, apocalyptic discourse was an integrated coping mechanism employed by seventh-century Byzantine authors to comprehend the drastic changes brought about by sudden and unexpected defeat. The discourse does not merely reflect a stylistic change in a select subculture, but a transformation of worldview, to one in which the many crises of the seventh century were evidence of a sudden change in divine attitudes toward the empire, a change whose

reality was accepted and reflected in Byzantine literary production. Apocalyptic discourse can properly be called an imperial phenomenon, rather than simply Christian or primitive, as evidenced by its appearance in texts across religious and socio-economic boundaries.

IV. Historical Overview of The Sources

a. The First Decades: Maurice and Phocas

Our topic begins at the turn of the seventh century. The emperor Maurice (r. 582-602), in many ways, stood as a figure of transition. He was the final emperor of the Justinianic dynasty, the final emperor of the sixth century, and reigned over a period of relative calm before the storms which would follow the turn of the seventh century. His reign represented the last glimmer of hope for Justinian's promise of an expansive Roman empire. Maurice consolidated Roman power and secured a hard-fought and durable peace with the Sassanid empire by earning the affections of Persian King Chosroes II.[16] His reign was by all accounts prosperous, and he was generally beloved by the people, supporting Chalcedonian orthodoxy while taking a tolerant stance toward anti-Chalcedonians within the empire.[17] As we will see in Chapter 3, public affection toward Maurice can be observed in reactions to his demise, and evidence of veneration of Maurice as a saint in the years following his death.[18]

While Maurice may have earned the respect of the people, his military policies and frugality earned him many enemies within the army.[19] The military lost confidence in the emperor, and proclaimed an officer Phocas emperor in his place. With the support of certain members of the circus factions, Phocas was able to gain control of Constantinople.[20] In November 602 Maurice was captured and brutally executed, along with his entire family.[21] For many of the authors discussed in this thesis, including Theophylact Simocatta and George of

[16] Whitby (1988), 9-17. Cf. Theophylact Simocatta, *Historiae,* IV.11-14 [de Boor and Wirth (1972), 169-178]
[17] Whitby (1988), 17-24.
[18] Chapter 3, 89-106.
[19] Treadgold (1997), 229.
[20] George of Pisida notes the disturbances of the factions in the *Bellum Auacarum,* 58-60 [Pertusi (1959), 178]. On the activity of the circus factions from the reign of Maurice to the ascent of Heraclius, see P. Booth (2011)
[21] Whitby (1988) 24-27. Cf. Theophylact Simocatta, *Historiae,* VIII.11-13.6 [de Boor and Wirth (1972), 304-309]

Pisidia, this event marked a disturbance of divine order, leading God to inflict his wrath upon the Byzantines in the form of the Persian invasions.

b. Heraclius: The Persian Campaigns

In 608, the Exarch of North Africa, Heraclius, and his son, Heraclius the younger, began a revolt against Phocas, which launched a brief but decisive civil war. The Heraclii went so far as to issue coinage with the two in consular, though not imperial, regalia.[22] By 610, the younger Heraclius reached Constantinople, and was proclaimed emperor by a group of aristocrats from the capital, who permitted him to enter the city. On 5 October 610, the newly crowned Heraclius (r. 610-641) executed Phocas, while his body was burned by the demes.[23]

While much of the population welcomed Phocas's death, Heraclius faced a similar problem of legitimacy. The newly ascendant emperor was, like his predecessor, a usurper who had no more claim to the throne than Phocas. To prevent suspicion, Heraclius relied heavily upon the construction of legitimacy by his supporters, who bestowed upon him decadent titles such as the New Alexander or the New David, and upon the embellishments of imperial ceremony.[24] To assist in this process, the emperor found support in the anonymous Syriac author of the *Alexander Legend*, which typologically depicted Heraclius as Alexander *redivivus*, or George of Pisidia's *In Heraclium ex Africa redeuntem*, an epic paean which celebrated the newly ascendant Heraclius's promise as the restorer of the empire from the destruction of Phocas.

Moreover, Heraclius's usurpation did nothing to ease tensions with the Persians. The newly crowned emperor failed to announce his ascent to Chosroes II, who in turn refused to recognise the emperor's legitimacy or cease hostilities. Heraclius's ascent provided hope to a beleaguered populace, but victory proved elusive. Heraclius may have been victorious over his domestic rivals, but his ascent did nothing to halt Persian advances. In 611 Sassanid troops made advances on the eastern front. During this period, Andrew of Caesarea produced the extant

[22] Hahn and Metlich (2009), 69-71; Woods (2016).
[23] Theophanes the Confessor, *Chronographia* AM 6102 [de Boor (1883), 299]
[24] See Meier (2014) on the construction of Heraclius's legitimacy at the expense of Phocas.

Greek commentary on the New Testament Apocalypse of John.[25] The increased interest in the Apocalypse of John, a controversial text viewed with ambivalence by many Greek commentators, suggests an increase in curiosity in the book's esoteric content indicative of the rise of an apocalyptic movement. This is supported by the increasingly popular view exemplified in George of Pisidia's *In Heraclium ex Africa redeuntem*, an epic paean, which declared that Heraclius was raised up by God as an almost messianic figure to deliver the empire from the Persian scourge.[26]

The initial hopes placed in Heraclius were tested by the Persian occupation of Jerusalem in 614. For the first time, the Roman Empire witnessed the fall of the Holy City into enemy hands, though it would not be the last. The frustration of defeat was compounded when Persian forces captured the relic of the Holy Cross and carried it back to Ctesiphon as the spoils of war, symbolically demonstrating the superiority of the Zoroastrian Persians over the Christian Romans.[27] This moment marked the biggest psychological blow to Roman morale of the entire campaign, and was lamented by contemporary observers as an event of apocalyptic significance which tested imperial resolve.

The authors of the *Life of Theodore of Sykeon* and the *Life of George of Choziba*, interpreting the Persian incursions through the lens of apocalyptic discourse, reveal that many Byzantines saw the Persians as the instrument of God's wrath, punishing the empire for its sins.[28] While various misbehaviours are cited, the apparently widespread apostasy of Christians was identified as a major factor of Persian success.[29] Apostates were addressed in particularly harsh terms, and the high number of records of apostasy, a subject of embarrassment rarely discussed by authors prior to the seventh century, suggests that an unusually large number of Christians abandoned their religion, or converted, in response to Persian success.[30]

[25] Constantinou (2011), Constantinou (2014).
[26] See Chapter 3, 105-21.
[27] Theophanes the Confessor, *Chronographia* AM 6106 [de Boor (1883), 301]
[28] See Chapter 5, 201-5.
[29] See Chapter 4.
[30] This subject will receive extensive coverage in Chapter 4.

Based on documentary and limited archaeological evidence, it would appear that the Persians were a major persecuting force in their campaigns against the Romans. However, this is only part of the story. The same archaeological evidence which reveals widespread destruction in Palestine shows that Christians in other areas thrived and even flourished under Persian control. New churches were built, and appear to have even been financed by the Persian government.[31] The history attributed to Sebeos suggests that anti-Chalcedonian populations, which largely embraced Persian control as favourable to unpredictable treatment from the Romans, received special treatment and were heavily patronised by the Persian regime. Even in Jerusalem, there is evidence of construction and restoration of churches under Persian occupation. In some areas, Byzantine officials were permitted to retain their posts, and Byzantine administrative systems were maintained by the Sassanian regime whenever possible.[32] Taken as a whole, the Persians strived to maintain continuity in former Roman territories. Dramatic changes or widespread oppression would have risked rebellion, making it difficult to maintain control of distant territories.

While the Persians may have treated the Jews favourably at the beginning, and even offered the hope of the restoration of autonomy, a sudden change in Persian attitudes brought these hopes to a grinding halt. The Jews found themselves stripped of their authority and under a strict regime that continued until the recapture of the city by the Romans. This reversal of fortunes is witnessed in the Jewish liturgical hymnography produced during this period, as well as the apocalyptic *Sefer Zerubbabel*, which recorded Jewish hopes for future deliverance.[33]

The Persians made significant advances into Byzantine territory. However, internal within the Sassanid administration brought a change in fortunes for the Byzantines. In February of 628, Chosroes II fell victim to a coup d'état orchestrated by his son Cavadh II.[34] Eager to make peace with the Byzantines, Cavadh II converted to Christianity, taking Heraclius as his godfather, and

[31] Foss (2003), 154-55.
[32] Foss (2003), 158.
[33] See Chapter 5, 196-8.
[34] Haldon (1990), 46.

appointed the emperor as regent over his son Ardashir III, who succeeded Cavadh II after his death from the plague in September 628.[35] This marked the effective end of hostilities between the Byzantines and Sassanid Persians. By July 629, the Romans negotiated the withdrawal of the last remaining troops, commanded by Shahrbaraz, from Egypt and Asia.[36] George of Pisidia composed his epic *Heracliad* on this occasion, which put Heraclius in the place of Biblical and Classical heroes, using apocalyptic discourse to praise the emperor's semi-messianic victory.

The cessation of hostilities between the Roman and Sassanid empires marked a significant turn in Heraclius's fortunes, and a much-needed boon for the Roman population itself. In 21 March 630, Heraclius capped his victory with the triumphal return of the Holy Cross to the recently reconquered Jerusalem. The pageantry of this event has led many scholars to conclude that Heraclius held eschatological ambitions to be a final, restorative emperor who would bring the final spread of Christianity across the world.[37] Whatever the case may be, this moment marked the apex of Byzantine fortunes.

While the reconquest of Jerusalem bolstered the spirit of the Christians of the empire, it did not bode well for the city's Jewish population. Sources indicate an active policy of hostility toward the Jews, including their expulsion from the city, culminating in an edict of forced baptism in 632.[38] This edict was controversial enough to draw a response from Maximus the Confessor who wrote a letter to an unknown recipient protesting the law. The letter, which survives as a fragment, predicts an apocalyptic chain reaction if the Jews of the empire were baptised *en masse.* Byzantine anti-Jewish attitudes only increased as the century progressed, particularly during the Arab invasions.

c. The Arab Invasions

In 622, while Heraclius was on campaign against the Persians, a former merchant named Muhammad received a warning of an impending assassination attempt. Accompanied by his

[35] Kaegi (2003), 184-5.
[36] Kaegi (2003), 188-9.
[37] Cf. Magdalino (2013).
[38] Kaegi (2003), 216-8.

close companion, ‘Abu Bakr, in the dead of night, Muhammad fled his home city of Mecca for Yathrib. In time, Yathrib was renamed Medina, or “the City” in honour of its importance as a refuge for the prophet, and Muhammad’s escape, known by Muslims as the *Hijrah*, marked the beginning of the Islamic calendar. Twelve years earlier, the same year Heraclius received his crown, this former merchant received the first of several revelations from God which eventually formed the *Koran*. Muhammad solidified his following in the midst of a death battle between the world’s two largest empires, an event which cast an apocalyptic tone over all cultures within the Near East.[39] Muhammad was considered by his followers to be the final prophet of God, sent to unite the Arabs under the banner of monotheism, purge ancestral pagan practise, and reform the corruptions of the Judeo-Christian tradition. This movement spread quickly across the Arabian Peninsula, as Muhammad served as a religious leader and a head of state.

While Islam’s territorial spread was modest under Muhammad’s leadership, upon his death in 8 June 632 C.E, just eight days after Heraclius’s decree of forced baptism of the Jews, the prophet’s friend and successor, the first Caliph, ‘Abu Bakr began a campaign of military expansion that continued under his successors for the remainder of the seventh century.[40] By the end of 633, and the beginning of 634, Islamic forces began incursions into Syria, winning minor defeats against Roman troops.[41] By 30 July 634, Roman forces suffered their first decisive defeat at the Battle of Ajnadayn.[42]

In 634, the monk Sophronius was made Patriarch of Jerusalem. In his *Synodical Letter*, announcing his election, Sophronius begged his recipient to pray on behalf of the imperial family that they could fend off the attacks of the Saracens, which God permitted because of imperial sin. By Christmas of 634, the armies of the Caliph ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab had captured Bethlehem, rendering the traditional Christmas pilgrimage impossible.[43] On this occasion

[39] Donner (2010), Shoemaker (2012), Casey (2013), Shoemaker (2014), *contra* Cameron (Forthcoming).
[40] Kaegi (1992), 67. Cf. Theophanes the Confessor, *Chronographia* AM 6124 [de Boor (1883), 336]
[41] Kaegi (1992), 67.
[42] Kaegi (1992), 67.
[43] Kaegi (1992), 101. See Chapter 5.

Sophronius composed another homily, urging his congregation to repent so that further disaster could be averted.

Damascus fell soon after. The Byzantines were able to recapture Damascus for a time, however the resounding defeat of Roman forces at the battle of Jabiya-Yarmuk in August 636 marked the beginning of the end of Roman control in Syria.[44] By early 637, Islamic forces had permanently captured Damascus and, by autumn, had captured and occupied Jerusalem, so recently recaptured from the Persians.[45] This defeat marked the permanent loss of Byzantine hegemony over the Holy City.

The capture of Jerusalem was significant for all parties involved. For the Muslims, Jerusalem played an important eschatological role, as Muhammad had been supernaturally transported to the city during his lifetime. For Christian Romans, the final loss of Jerusalem, less than a decade after Heraclius's triumphal entry, provided a major psychological blow, and the establishment of Islamic rule was considered a divine punishment. Sophronius referred to Islamic entry into Christian holy places as the "abomination of desolation" predicted by the Prophet Daniel.[46] As Islamic hegemony became firmly entrenched, and as later Caliphs transformed the space of the city, Jerusalem took on an increasingly important place in Byzantine apocalyptic discourse. As for the Jews, 'Umar is said to have lifted the ban imposed by Heraclius and allowed the Jews to return to the Holy City.

d. Islamic Hegemony and the Dome of the Rock

Islamic control over former Roman territories expanded as the century progressed, encompassing the Levant, Mesopotamia, and North Africa. Despite military success, civil war led to the collapse of the Rashidun and the rise of the 'Umayyad Caliphate. Perhaps the most influential of the early 'Umayyad Caliphs was 'Abd al-Malik, who laid the bureaucratic foundations for a lasting Islamic empire. According to Arietta Papaconstantinou, it was during the caliphate of 'Abd al-Malik that we see a consolidation of Islamic identity built on the loose

[44] Kaegi (1992), 112-46.
[45] Kaegi (1992), 146.
[46] See Chapter 5, 211-14.

conglomeration of peoples that made up the earliest Islamic '*Umma*, or faith community.[47]

Perhaps the most enduring legacy of 'Abd al-Malik's reign was the construction of the Haram al-Sharif, or Dome of the Rock, on the foundations of the second Jewish temple.[48] This magnificent mosque dominated the Jerusalem skyline, proclaiming Islamic superiority in striking visual form. Its location, on the site of the second temple, was considered by some Christians as an apocalyptic sign, the final rebuilding of the temple which had been destroyed in 70 AD. Perhaps the best expression of this sentiment can be found in the *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius, written in the final decades of the seventh century; in part as a response to this momentous event.[49]

As with the Persian occupations, many of our sources lament the widespread apostasy of Christians in response to the Arab conquests. Some sources provide accounts of severe persecution and martyrdom in former Roman-controlled regions at the hand of Muslim armies. One Melkite *adversus Judaeos* dialogue, the *Dialogue Between Papiscus, Philo, and a Monk* is particularly revealing. In a discussion of apostasy among their respective co-religionists, the Monk admits that some Christians have apostatised, but many more have remained loyal under imprisonment and torture, and many had remained true unto death, while Jews abandoned their faith with no such hardship.[50]

Apocalyptic texts composed during this period portray an increasingly bleak situation. Through *vaticinia ex eventu*, the famous *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius laments the both widespread apostasy and the destruction and desecration of churches. The *Apocalypse*, in grim detail, speaks of persecution at the hands of Arabs and at the hands of the very apostates who abandoned the church. While one may be tempted to dismiss these accounts, along with those in *adversus Judaeos* literature, as generic excess, as David Olster has observed, their candid admissions of Christian failures, particularly apostasy, an unprecedented embarrassment in itself,

[47] Papaconstantinou (2008).
[48] Reinink (2001), Griffith (2008), 32-33.
[49] Griffith (2008), 33.
[50] See Chapter 4, 151-4.

lend some credence to their basis in fact. Taken with the institution of the *dhimmi* tax, and the construction of the Dome of the Rock on the temple mount, at first glance it would seem that the earliest Islamic invaders were keen to oppress Christians and impose Islam where possible.

However, as with the Persian invasion, the story is not so simple. Historians agree that the Jews faced little hardship under the Arab invaders, and indeed the *Dialogue of Papiscus and Philo and a Monk* confirms this. Moreover, many accounts confirm that many anti-Chalcedonian Christians, as under the Persians, thrived, in some cases considering Arab rule an improvement on Roman persecution; they at least viewed their Arab rulers with ambivalence. Recently, scholars such as Thomas Sizgorich, and Arietta Papaconstantinou have questioned whether we can speak of a unique Islamic identity at all in the earliest *Umma*, and Papaconstantinou has shown, in agreement with Foss's analysis of the archaeological record, that the 'Umayyad Caliphate, like the Persians before them, were interested in maintaining Byzantine administrative apparatuses whenever possible, even permitting Christians to maintain their former positions.[51]

The seventh century, as we have seen, was a period of stark transformation across the empire. The earliest years marked a transition from the Justinianic age to the rule of the Heraclian Dynasty. The former aspired to recapturing the borders of the Roman Empire at its imagined heights, while the latter fought to preserve the empire from oblivion at the hands of two superior forces. Two centuries after the *Oracle of Baalbek* predicted that Emperor Anastasius would rise as the antichrist and drive the empire into ruin, the Heraclian dynasty seemed as though it might finally bring this prophecy to fruition.

However, as John Haldon has recently observed, the late-Roman Empire was the empire that would not die.[52] Heraclius and his heirs protected the capital and preserved the empire for future generations. The Romans, who saw victory as evidence of divine favour, also endured and adapted to the rapid changes in circumstances. Instead of a discourse of military superiority as evidence of divine blessing, seventh century authors appealed to the apocalyptic traditions

[51] Sizgorich (2004), Papaconstantinou (2008), Sizgorich (2009), Foss (2010).
[52] Haldon (2016)

revived under Anastasius, Justin, and Justinian I. Romans located themselves, their adversaries, and the crises of the empire into a providential narrative of divine chastisement and redemption.

V. *Status Quaestionis*

Having framed the historical context of the documents under consideration, we will turn our attention to the present state of scholarship. Traditionally, Byzantinist scholars have neglected the subject of apocalypticism. There have been important exceptions, and in recent years much has been done to remedy this neglect. However, compared with other subjects, or with related fields such as Biblical studies, Byzantinists have given apocalypticism short shrift. The main area of growth has been the output by prominent scholars of excellent studies on specific works, most notably the *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius. However, when compared with other fields of inquiry in Byzantine studies, there is still significant work to be done. Some possible reasons for this neglect include traditional approaches to late-antique and early-Byzantine literature, coupled with the way in which "apocalypticism" has been defined. These two scholarly trends have artificially limited the scope of material available for study. The result has been a skewed perspective on the use of apocalyptic discourse, and widespread negative assumptions as to the historical value of material which can be considered "apocalyptic". In what follows, we will examine these trends, as well as prevailing scholarship about Byzantine apocalypticism and relevant primary source translations and editions which, though not necessarily synthetic studies, are essential for the subject of this study.

a. Late-Antique and Seventh-Century Literature

The first historiographical topic which requires discussion is the nature of late-antique and seventh-century literature. Traditionally, late-antique literature has been discussed as a series of dichotomies. Secular literature, including government documents, court poetry and Classical histories, has been separated from theological, that is to say, Christian literature. The former is typically judged by how classicising it is or how far it adheres to mimetic standards of a given genre, that is, how well it adheres to Attic models. Secular literature is widely considered the literary province of intellectuals, and somehow removed from the religious milieu. Theology on

the other hand is the considered to be the work of monks, clergy and religious laypersons, filled with religious speculation and often with a "superstitious" approach to history and contemporary events. This conception has led Michael Whitby to conclude that the seventh century was a period of stagnation in secular literature.[53] Scholars such as Peter Brown, Cyril Mango and Judith Herrin have called the seventh century, with its lack of any particular classicising historical texts, a "dark age", which evokes the image of a backwards and ignorant populace.[54] Other historians such as Averil Cameron agree with this assessment, but qualify it by observing that, while the seventh century was a period of scholarly stagnation, the production of high literature was supplemented by a proliferation and great variety of Christian texts.[55]

Jewish texts are rarely commented upon in such discussions. Instead, Jewish literature is treated as a separate field and Jewish texts tend to be treated on their own terms, largely separated from their wider literary context and as the subject of individual studies which, more often than not, focus on the theme of messianism. An early example is Bernard Bamberger's study of a seventh-century messianic passage from the *Pesikta Rabbati*.[56] Recent years have seen increased attention on the genre of Jewish liturgical poems known as *piyytim*, which were particularly popular in the middle of the century. Hagith Sivan broke new ground by suggesting that many of these passages contain messianic overtones written in response to Heraclius' reign.[57] Wout Jac van Bekkum's draws similar conclusions and examines Jewish liturgical poetry for messianic expectation.[58] Bernard Lewis has drawn further attention to seventh-century messianic apocalypticism by translating the short, messianic poem *On That Day*.[59]

This division of Byzantine literature is appealing to modern sensibilities. It represents the way in which we divide modern generic categories. However, this would have been foreign to the Byzantines themselves and should be regarded with extreme caution. Such divisions obscure

[53] Whitby (1992), 28.
[54] Brown (1973); Mango (1980), 45; Herrin (1986), 133.
[55] Cameron (1992) 84-86; Cameron (1994) 199-200.
[56] Bamberger (1940).
[57] Sivan, (2000).
[58] van Bekkum (2002).
[59] Lewis (1974).

the shared experience of Byzantine citizens of all backgrounds, and introduce separations between religion and politics, church and state, which simply did not exist in that period. Moreover, the isolation of Jewish literature as a distinct field can give the impression that the experience of Byzantine Jews was somehow detached from, or only acted upon externally by, Byzantine culture. It ignores the fact that Jews and Christians interacted on a daily basis, in the markets and in the streets, and that Jews were subject to Roman authorities. For this reason, this thesis will use the term "imperial literature" to refer to all documents composed by authors under the cultural influence of the late-Roman Empire. This is not done to negate the value of individual studies of Judaism or Christianity, but to illustrate the profound fact that Jews and Christians, despite their mutual hostility, partook in a shared culture, and to avoid the anachronistic dichotomies which have dominated scholarly discourse on the subject.

Closely related to the dichotomy between secular and theological literature is the distinction between elite and popular literature. In this paradigm, Christian literature, particularly hagiography and monastic literature, is considered "low" while secular literature is the product of "high" culture. However, scholars such as John Haldon and Vincent Déroche have questioned the usefulness of this distinction.[60] Cameron captures this perspective when she notes that, "The familiar distinction between 'high' and 'popular' writing is no longer very helpful in relation to the actual situation in this period when the 'theological' works range over an enormously broad spectrum, from the most 'popular' in saints' lives or miracle stories, to the most sophisticated".[61] It is noteworthy that these scholars, like Cameron, who critique the distinction between elite and popular literature remain comfortable with the distinction between secular and theological literature, which itself is problematic when many so-called secular authors were churchmen.

Although prominent scholars have questioned the distinction between elite and popular literature, at least in the period under examination, this distinction has remained axiomatic in scholarship on apocalyptic discourse. Francisco Martinez classified all apocalyptic texts as, by

[60] Haldon (1992) 142-144.
[61] Cameron (1992) 85-86.

definition, "*Volksliteratur"* even if they present themselves "in a more 'scholarly' disguise".[62] The association of apocalyptic discourse with low literature has led Wolfram Brandes to conclude that the disputed apocalyptic critique of the forced baptism of the Jews by the emperor Heraclius on 31 May 632, attributed to Maximus the Confessor in what has traditionally been considered the ending of his *Epistula* 8, was "so primitive that it seems hardly possible to believe that a theologian of his status wrote this".[63] Thus, for Brandes, the presence of apocalyptic speculation in a document attributed to an elite theologian like Maximus is sufficient evidence to discount its authenticity.[64]

David Olster has pushed back against the trend by noting this distinction between "high" and "low" literature that has led to the widespread neglect of apocalypticism in modern historiography.[65] Olster notes that apocalypses display a high level of literary sophistication. This sophistication and level of cultural homogeneity leads Olster to conclude that, if anything, the audience of Byzantine apocalypses was the elite, or at least highly literate, class.[66] Olster's observations have failed to find traction among recent scholars of apocalypticism, who still maintain that apocalyptic discourse is inherently primitive, or even anti-intellectual.

This thesis argues that understanding apocalyptic discourse as inherently low literature imposes modern judgments on the intellectual quality of past apocalyptic speculation. There is an implicit understanding among scholars that apocalypticism is superstitious and intellectually suspect, the product of a primitive philosophy of historical causation. Such a view is simplistic at best, and fails to account for the nuanced "politico-religious" nature of Byzantine thought. At worst, it reveals an entrenched bias among scholars of apocalypticism against the subjects of their study. The consequence has been not only the widespread scholarly neglect of apocalyptic

[62] Martinez (1985), iii.
[63] Brandes (2002), 38.
[64] On the composite nature of this letter, and the authenticity of the ending, see Strickler (2016). Much has been written on Maximus the Confessor's "realized eschatology"- see Blowers (1997), Blowers (2014), and Andreopoulos (2015). I do not dispute that Maximus developed an advanced eschatology which precluded any immediate concern about the end of time. However, by separating the traditional links between eschatology and apocalypticism, we find that apocalyptic discourse is perfectly compatible with eschatological scepticism.
[65] Olster (2003), 255.
[66] Olster (2003), 255.

texts and their dismissal as historical sources, but a failure to recognise the ubiquity of apocalyptic discourse among the seventh-century literary elite, who employed apocalyptic rhetoric to comprehend an otherwise incomprehensible situation, resulting from unprecedented defeat.

This critique of the traditional classification of apocalyptic literature as low, or merely popular, is not to discount the valuable information that apocalyptic discourse provides about popular understandings of contemporary events. In this I fundamentally agree with Paul Alexander who observed that the accumulation of apocalyptic texts can "serve as a kind of barometer" of what he referred to as "eschatological pressures" at a given time in history.[67] While, for reasons which will be discussed below, one might substitute "eschatological pressures" for crisis or difficulty, the principle remains the same. The widespread nature of apocalyptic discourse beginning in the seventh century provides valuable insight into popular responses to an unprecedented level of uncertainty. The very fact that apocalyptic discourse is found in such a variety of texts, produced by authors from all levels of society, and was not limited to "low literature", if such a category is useful, is what makes the phenomenon an interesting subject of historical inquiry.

b. The Nature of Apocalyptic Discourse

Another historiographical difficulty which is closely related, and perhaps a cause of classifying apocalyptic as "low", is traditional definitions of apocalyptic literature and apocalypticism more broadly. This is in large part due to one of the symptoms of scholarly neglect of apocalyptic discourse, namely, the lack of any monograph-length treatment of the subject. There are several small works dealing with particular aspects of apocalypticism, and several short studies on individual apocalyptic texts, but no definitive treatment or definition.

One of the more substantial treatments, which is still considered an essential starting point, is Gerhard Podskalsky's short study of imperial eschatology.[68] As the title suggests, it is a broad

[67] Alexander (1968) 1002.
[68] Podskalsky (1972).

treatment of the way in which the books of Daniel, Ezekiel, and the Biblical Apocalypse were used to support imperial ideology. The focus is limited in scope, dealing less with apocalypticism *per se* and more with exegesis of Biblical texts to promote the eschatological importance of the Byzantine Empire through the centuries.

Bernard McGinn, in his reader of medieval apocalyptic texts, and in keeping with the title of his work, argues that apocalypticism is a genus of eschatology. He is careful to note that the two are not strictly synonymous but, nevertheless, according to McGinn apocalyptic is by definition eschatological. Accordingly, among other optional elements such as pseudonymity and prophecy, a prerequisite for a document to be considered apocalyptic is that it deals with the end of history and what lies beyond.[69] Fitting within this definition, all the selections found within his reader contain what would be considered apocalyptic texts by genre. Most of the selections chosen by McGinn are from the Latin West, though some are of eastern provenance, including samples of the Sibylline Oracles and the *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius. Nevertheless, Byzantine apocalypticism is a minor subject in McGinn's work.

Paul Alexander intended to produce a monograph on the subject of the Byzantine apocalyptic tradition, but his untimely death in 1977 prevented him from completing this project. In 1985, Alexander's former graduate student Dorothy deFerrari Abrahamse edited the incomplete pieces of his research, resulting in a tantalizing though incomplete treatment that focused primarily on the origins and reception of the *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius, though his research was intended to be more expansive.[70] Both Alexander and Podskalsky deal with major apocalypses, rather than apocalyptic discourse in minor works, and both fail to provide an overarching definition of apocalypticism in the period of study.

In an earlier work, now considered to be seminal, Paul Alexander created a methodology for the use of generic apocalypses as historical sources. Three principles which have endured to the present include firstly, the use of *vaticinia ex eventu* to determine dating limits of a given

[69] McGinn (1979) 6-8.
[70] Alexander (1985).

apocalyptic text, secondly, the use of apocalyptic texts to corroborate material from other sources and, in some cases, provide material not found elsewhere and finally, as alluded to above, using levels of apocalypticism to gauge eschatological tension.[71] While this study marks a watershed moment that redeemed the use of apocalyptic texts as sources in historical inquiry, and defines some parameters for the use of apocalyptic texts, what makes a text "apocalyptic" is not defined. It seems that instead Alexander assumed his readers would know an apocalyptic text when they saw one.

Other short studies have been more explicit in categorising what can be considered an apocalyptic text. Wolfram Brandes provides one of the more substantial definitions as follows:

> "Die byzantinischen apokalyptischen Schriften stehen in der Tradition der christlichen und jüdischen Apokalyptic. Sie weisen die gleichen genusspezifischen Merkmale auf, sind also u. a. Pseudonym, geben sich als Visionsberichte, verwenden oft *vaticinia ex eventu* usw".[72]

Paul Magdalino adds New Testament prophecy, and focuses on the eschatological aspect of apocalyptic.[73] Both define apocalyptic narrowly, and consider "apocalyptic' to be part of a defined genre recognised by a set of rhetorical tropes. Neither scholar addresses apocalypticism as a phenomenon and, as a result, both scholars exclude most literature outside of the defined genre.

Among more recent scholars, András Kraft, in his study of the *topos* of the Last Roman Emperor, offers an interesting set of parameters which are typical of modern scholarship on apocalypticism. Most important for the present study are his observations that "apocalyptic literature is expressive and symbolic in character rather than referential and factual", and that, in agreement with McGinn, "apocalypticism should be regarded as a subcategory of eschatology".[74] Kraft does note that the pool of apocalyptic *topoi*, which are the proper object of his study, were "trans-confessional, involved various genres (apocalyptic and oracular literature, oral prophecies,

[71] Alexander (1968). Echoed by McGinn (1979), 7.
[72] Brandes (1990), 306.
[73] Magdalino (1993), 3-4.
[74] Kraft (2012), 214-215.

liturgies, etc.), and drew its material from Biblical and para-scriptural substrates".[75] By this list, Kraft, like most scholars before him, considers apocalyptic a genre, whose *topoi* are occasionally used in other defined genres. Despite his pertinent observation that such *topoi* appear in a variety of texts, the sources of his study consist entirely of apocalypses by genre from the middle through late Byzantine period.

This brief survey of secondary literature has shown that, although standard approaches to the study of apocalyptic literature are fluid, most scholars share some common assumptions. Among the most prevalent is the association, or perhaps conflation, of apocalypticism and eschatology. There is an assumption that for a text to be considered apocalyptic, it must be concerned with or assume the imminent *eschaton*. This assumption is logical, considering the coincidence of apocalyptic discourse with times of crisis; however, like many approaches to the study, it imposes modern conceptions of apocalypticism onto the sources and misses a wide variety of apocalyptic literature that has little to no concern for the end of time. As David Olster has argued, much of seventh-century apocalyptic was less concerned with the end of time as such, but more with the place of the Byzantine Empire within the succession of kingdoms.[76] Indeed, the most famous Byzantine apocalypse, the *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius, is primarily concerned with establishing a lineage of the Byzantine emperors starting with Alexander the Great, and while it ends with a famous eschatological Last Roman Emperor handing over his reign to Christ, this passage is brief. Instead, the concern seems to be to prevent apostasy and assure the audience of the imminent demise of the Arabs, material restoration, and retribution, matters which assume the continuation of history for a period long enough for these benefits to be enjoyed.[77]

Another characteristic of the predominant wave of scholarship, as noted above, has been to confine apocalypticism to a specified genre. The majority of the definitions cited above do not permit the inclusion of literature outside the narrow confines of traditional apocalypses. The

[75] Kraft (2012), 215.
[76] Olster (2003), 255.
[77] Cf. Reinink (1992), 149-187.

most notable exceptions are Gerrit Reinink and David Olster. Olster's study of the treatment of Jews in imperial literature in the wake of Roman defeat has demonstrated that discourse began to change in the seventh century as Byzantine hegemony failed.[78] As Olster has shown, with the decline of the Byzantine Empire in the seventh century, many writers began to employ Biblical themes to describe their circumstances when the triumphal language of the past would not suffice. According to Olster, this phenomenon was witnessed across genres, in poets like George of Pisidia, historians such as Theophylact Simocatta and the anonymous author of the *Paschal Chronicle*, homilists such as Sophronius of Jerusalem, or the author of the so-called *Doctrina Jacobi nuper baptizati*.[79] Apocalyptic is only a subtheme of Olster's study, but it goes far in demonstrating the "apocalyptic mood" of the period.

Reinink has, like most scholars of the subject, focused much of his scholarship on larger generic apocalyptic texts.[80] Indeed, he was a pioneer in his study and critical edition of the so called *Alexanderlied*, a metrical rendering of the Syriac *Alexander Legend*.[81] Reinink drew new attention to the role of Heraclius in the *Alexander Legend*, arguing that Syriac Alexander literature represented imperial propaganda aimed to ensure loyalty of anti-Chalcedonian Christians in the wake of the Sassanian invasions of the first part of the seventh century.[82] Beyond this, however, he expanded his study to include apocalyptic representations of Heraclius, not only as the new Alexander in the *Alexander Legend*, but in other genres such as the court poetry of George of Pisidia, and the *Doctrina Jacobi nuper baptizati*.[83]

One contributing factor to the current state of neglectful scholarship on Byzantine apocalypticism has been the lack of incorporation of insights gained from scholars of earlier fields of apocalyptic literature. Indeed, many of the problems addressed here have been discussed at length by scholars of early Jewish and early Christian apocalypticism.[84] Scholars in

[78] Olster (1994).
[79] Olster (1994).
[80] Reinink, (1982), 336-344; Reinink (1992); Reinink, (1996), 317-321.
[81] Reinink (1983).
[82] Reinink (1985), 263-281.
[83] Reinink (2002), 81-94.
[84] For a review of earlier scholarship in this field, see Collins (2011) and Sim (2012).

those fields recognised early on that the ambiguity of the term "apocalyptic" necessitated further precision. To this end, P. D. Hanson distinguished between the genre of "apocalypse", the worldview of "apocalyptic eschatology", and the social movement which influenced the production of apocalyptic literature which he referred to as "apocalypticism".[85] Although Hanson's categories are useful, there has remained a strong urge to maintain a "family resemblance" definition which includes eschatology as a critical defining feature of apocalypticism.

One major attempt at such a definition was a result of scholarship produced by a team of researchers addressing apocalypticism in Jewish and Early Christian literature, the results of which were published in a special issue of *Semeia*. The goal of the contributors was to create a comprehensive generic construct by which one could determine if a particular work could be considered an "apocalypse". The result was a definition, articulated by John J. Collins, of "apocalypse" as a:

> genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world".[86]

This definition was then applied to a wide range of literature within the timeframe of 250 BCE to 250 CE. There were no attempts to test this definition against later apocalyptic discourse, and a focus on eschatology and "otherworldly" beings consciously excluded oracular literature, or any revelation from an inspired terrestrial figure, such as those found in many Byzantine saints' lives.[87] This definition has remained extremely influential, and has been continually defended by Collins in his several influential studies.[88]

"Family resemblance" definitions are useful heuristic tools for defining a genre if one insists on such an approach, and can be effective in determining what can and should be considered apocalyptic. However, they should be treated with caution. The application of the

[85] Hanson (1979), 429-44.
[86] Collins (1979), 9.
[87] Ibid, 10.
[88] See particularly Collins (1999), 2-9 and Collins (2014), 2.

definition by Collins would severely limit the study of Byzantine apocalyptic discourse, where in many cases texts universally considered apocalyptic use figures of the past rather than "otherworldly" beings. Even the *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius would be excluded on the grounds that the deliverer of prophecy is a terrestrial holy man, not a supernatural being. Beyond this it excludes the unique facet of late-Roman apocalyptic discourse which saw apocalypticism employed in numerous literary forms.

More recently, David Sim has noted that while these categorisations brought progress, they failed to account for the fact that early Jewish groups produced generic apocalypses which were not concerned with eschatology, and that communities existed, such as that at Qumran, which exhibited an eschatological worldview but did not produce a single generic apocalypse.[89] These insights are highly applicable to the seventh century, a period which saw both the greatest production of generic apocalyptic texts since the third century CE, many of which were only incidentally concerned with the *eschaton*, and a wide range of apocalyptic discourse employed in other genres.

Applying these insights, I argue that a generic approach to Byzantine apocalypticism should be treated with extreme caution. Even texts widely accepted as apocalyptic, such as the *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius or the *Sefer Zerubbabel*, are problematic when considered from a generic standpoint. Both apocalypses could just as easily be classified within the genre of the world chronicle, as typified by the sixth-century chronicler John Malalas. Both texts address the scope of human history from creation to their present day, the predominant feature of world chronicles. While much of the history given in the *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius is fictitious, the author clearly intended to write a text modelled on Syriac world chronicles, and intended his history to be considered in that tradition.

Literary theorists have demonstrated the problematic nature of the category of genre, demonstrating that most of our contemporary generic categories are modern constructions. Genre

[89] Sim (1996), 23-31.

is essentially fluid and prone to anachronism, and nowhere is this more evident than in the study of apocalypticism. In the seventh century, not only do recognised apocalypses defy the boundaries of genre, generic limitations obscure the way in which the recognised rhetorical tropes of apocalypticism were used by disparate authors writing in disparate literary forms.

I have attempted here to question prevailing conceptions of Byzantine apocalypticism which are limited in scope and, with signal exceptions, apply only to generically defined apocalyptic texts. Limiting the study of apocalypticism to such apocalyptic texts fails to illustrate the extent to which Byzantine authors engaged in apocalyptic discourse. Insights from the field of early Jewish and early Christian apocalypticism have been ignored at great expense by scholars of later apocalyptic literature. This study will incorporate such insights, and rather than attempt to define "apocalypticism" as a genre will employ the concept of "apocalyptic discourse", a term which aims to be generically inclusive, while capturing the way in which an apocalyptic worldview permeated, without entirely eclipsing, Byzantine engagement with contemporary events. Apocalyptic discourse is defined here as the rhetorical construction of the world as one in which God was actively engaged, and one in which triumphs and crises in relation to human action could be considered effects of divine causation. This engagement was manifested through the use of prophecy, instances of divine revelation, divine reward and punishment, and the prediction of imminent supernatural deliverance from hardship.

c. Scholarship on the *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius

No document captures the apocalyptic mood of the seventh-century better than the *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius, the example par excellence of an apocalyptic text. Therefore, it is no surprise that scholarship on this apocalypse has dominated the study of Byzantine apocalyptic and has indelibly shaped the way in which scholars approach the subject. Thus, while this particular apocalypse is not the focus of this thesis, considering the impact this document has had both on the Byzantine apocalyptic tradition and its study, a brief examination of prominent streams of scholarship is necessary. These streams can be summarised as falling into three camps: those of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scholarship, those who

follow Paul Alexander, and those who follow the now dominant argument put forth by Gerrit Reinink.

Early scholarship was hindered by a limited understanding of the manuscript tradition of Pseudo-Methodius. Until the pioneering work of Paul Alexander, it was assumed that the *Apocalypse* was originally composed in Greek, and subsequently translated into Latin. Ernst Sackur, the editor of the first modern edition of the Latin text, first suggested that the text may have had a Syrian origin. However, unaware of the Syriac text, he was compelled to speculate that it was a Greek original that was translated into Latin.[90] In the first half of the twentieth century Michael Kmosko discovered the first complete Syriac manuscript, which simplified Sackur's Syrian theory, and began the process of solidifying the Syriac origin of the *Apocalypse*.[91]

The next advancement was made by Paul Alexander, who was able to revolutionise the field and argue conclusively that the *Apocalypse* was written in Syriac in Mesopotamia, was immediately translated into Greek, and shortly thereafter from Greek into Latin.[92] Alexander dated the apocalypse to the 650s, based on the absence of direct mention of the Arab civil wars and naval battles of the later seventh century. He argued that the enigmatic nature of the Last Roman Emperor with his featureless description was evidence of latent Jewish influence within Syriac Christianity, citing similar messianic obscurity during the Bar Kochba revolt in the second century.[93]

While Alexander's demonstration of the original Syriac provenance of the *Apocalypse* has been universally accepted, his dating and explanation have received significant criticism from subsequent scholars. Sebastian Brock, concerned primarily with the dating of Syriac sources in the seventh century, pushed back the date of the *Apocalypse,* giving a range of 690-694.[94] Gerrit Reinink, building upon Brock's work, strongly criticised Alexander for not considering the

[90] Sackur (1898), 53-55.
[91] Kmosko (1931).
[92] Alexander (1971). See also Alexander (1985).
[93] Alexander (1978).
[94] Brock (1976), 34.

unique typological features of Syriac literature, going so far as to accuse him of negligence by resorting to a Jewish source and promoting a widespread neglect of Syriac culture.[95] This strongly worded critique was echoed by Francisco Martinez shortly after Reinink's publication.[96] Further study led Reinink to conclude that the *Apocalypse* is best understood as a Christian response to the propaganda surrounding the construction of the Dome of the Rock, dating the document to 690.[97]

Reinink's well-articulated position has eclipsed Alexander in the court of scholarly opinion. Another result of the work of Reinink and Martinez has been to draw attention to seventh-century Syriac literature, and in particular the unique features of the Syriac apocalyptic tradition. However, in emphasizing the unique traits of Syriac literature one risks losing sight of the surprising amount of cultural exchange between Greek and Syriac speakers in the Byzantine Empire. The fact remains that there was significant translation between the two languages, as the tradition of the *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius demonstrates. This phenomenon indicates a surprising level of cultural exchange which does not permit a position of strict cultural isolation. It is true that Syriac literature as a whole has been the subject of unfortunate neglect in Byzantine studies, but I would suggest that the contemporaneous presence of apocalyptic discourse in both Greek and Syriac literature is evidence of a shared culture which penetrated linguistic barriers. Moreover, it is possible that the dismissal of Alexander's thesis may be symptomatic of the common dichotomy between Jewish and Christian literature in late-antique cultural studies and the lack of recognition of the surprising level of cultural communication in the seventh century, not only across languages but across "confessional" boundaries.

The most recent development in dating the *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius has been the work of Stephen Shoemaker. Shoemaker attempts to redeem Alexander's dating, arguing that Brock and Reinink neglected internal evidence which "clearly favours an earlier dating", and

[95] Reinink (1982).
[96] Martinez (1985), Martinez (1987).
[97] Reinink (1992), Reinink, (2001). See also Kraft (2012).

relied on a single manuscript tradition in their determination.[98] The question hinges on whether one accepts a manuscript variant which refers to "ten weeks of years", as Brock and Reinink accept, or "seven weeks of years", which Shoemaker and Alexander adopt as primary. Christopher Bonura has pushed back against Shoemaker, demonstrating that even "seven weeks of years" permits a later dating.[99]

Shoemaker's work addresses another subject which has significant bearing for this thesis, though it has not been without controversy. Shoemaker's recent work has attempted to demonstrate that Islam was a movement born out of the eschatological atmosphere of the early seventh century. His argument hinges largely on his theory that the tradition of the "Last Roman Emperor", contrary to scholarly consensus, predates the *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius by several centuries, and that Muhammad was both aware of and tried to emulate this tradition.[100] Bonura has countered this specific argument quite convincingly, analysing the adaptation of the tradition in later sources, and demonstrating the late nature of the redaction of the *Tiburtine Sibyl* which Shoemaker argues was the origin of the myth.[101]

As stated above, Shoemaker's larger point of Muhammad as an eschatological prophet should not hinge on Muhammad's knowledge of the last Roman Emperor myth. Damien Casey has shown the relationship of Muhammad to the seventh-century apocalyptic milieu apart from the last Roman Emperor tradition.[102] Averil Cameron has offered an independent critique by arguing essentially that Muslims and Christians were independent communities with their own traditions, and that Islam developed independently from the Christian tradition.[103] I find this argument unconvincing, and a product of the same anachronistic approach that imagines concrete delineations between communities that did not exist, and which neglect the level of cultural exchange present in the Near East. Thomas Sizgorich and Arietta Papaconstantinou have

[98] Shoemaker (2015), 230.
[99] Bonura (2016), 53, n. 23.
[100] Shoemaker (2015).
[101] Bonura (2013), Bonura (2016).
[102] Casey (2015).
[103] Cameron (forthcoming).

clearly demonstrated the influence of Christian culture and models on the earliest Islamic communities, arguing that in fact it took several decades for a distinct Islamic identity to manifest.[104]

I accept Shoemaker's overall point that the seventh-century Near East was rife with apocalyptic expectations. I disagree with Shoemaker about the primacy of eschatology and the Last Roman Empire tradition in the first decades of the seventh century. However, I do not believe that Shoemaker's larger point about the widespread cultural influence of apocalyptic discourse hinges on an early date for the Last Roman Emperor or an expectation of an imminent end. It is entirely conceivable that Islam rose out of the same apocalyptic milieu that influenced the writings of major Roman authors under consideration in this thesis. By building upon this central premise, and adopting the insights of Casey, Sizgorich, and Papaconstantinou, we can move beyond the dated model of Cameron to see the full impact of apocalyptic discourse in late-Roman society.

VI. Conclusion

The traditional dichotomies between Christian versus secular, Christian versus Jewish, and "high" versus "low" literature which have dominated Byzantine literary scholarship have contributed to an arguably unorganised and neglectful approach to the study of Byzantine apocalyptic discourse. These problems have been exacerbated by an undue focus on generic apocalyptic texts based on recurring tropes, which focus is itself is the result of a lack of communication between scholars of Byzantine apocalypticism and scholars of Jewish and early Christian apocalypticism. As a result, scholars have failed to recognise the extent to which apocalyptic discourse permeated seventh-century literary production, and the degree of cultural exchange between Byzantine authors of varied religious and linguistic traditions. This thesis serves as a corrective, by using a thematic approach and applying modern sociological and

[104] Sizgorich (2004), Papaconstantinou (2008).

social-psychological methodology to understand the mechansims by which Romans used apocalyptic discourse to cope with crises.

Chapter 2: Nascent Apocalypticism from Emperor Anastasius to Emperor Justinian

I. Introduction

The apocalyptic response to the crises of the seventh century did not occur in a vacuum. Depending on how one defines it, it could be argued that apocalyptic discourse was a ubiquitous feature of the ancient world. The Greek oracular tradition, continued by the ancient Romans in their appeals to the Sibylline books in times of crises, adapted by Hellenistic Jews, and modified by early Christians bears a close family resemblance to Jewish prophetic and apocalyptic literature.[105] Christianity is often considered to be a product of the Jewish apocalyptic milieu, and in many cases it is difficult to determine whether an apocalyptic text from the first or second centuries should be considered Jewish or early Christian, or indeed if such a distinction can be made at all. Early Christians produced a wide array of apocalyptic literature with varying degrees of sophistication, resulting from the expectation of Christ's imminent return combined with varied degrees of persecution by Roman authorities.[106]

However, as the *eschaton* became increasingly delayed, and Christianity exited the catacombs and entered the imperial palace, in the Greek-speaking world apocalyptic literature progressively fell out of favour. Eusebius of Caesarea (d. 339) condemned a literal interpretation of millennial passages of Scripture, and ushered in an age of optimism that saw the Church as triumphant with the conversion of Constantine the Great.[107] From this point forward, whenever homilists appealed to the apocalyptic tradition, it was generally to take a spiritualizing approach which emphasized ascetic virtue.[108] This is not to say that apocalyptic discourse disappeared altogether. Indeed, there was shortage of controversies or crises to fuel the apocalyptic

[105] See Collins (1999), 116-27, on the relationship between oracular and apocalyptic literature, which he considers separate phenomena. I would suggest that this separation is superfluous, at least after the third century C.E.
[106] A close examination of early Christian apocalyptic discourse is beyond the scope of this thesis. For an overview, see A. Y. Collins (1979), and more recently Daley (2003).
[107] Eusebius, *Hist. Ecc.* 3.39.13; 7.24.1; and *Vita Constantini* 1.33. See also Daley (2003), 233.
[108] I do not intend here to generalise across the entire empire. The Latin tradition, in the wake of the crises of the fifth century, saw its fair share of apocalyptic speculation, though not without opposition, most notably from Augustine of Hippo. Although this is beyond the scope of this study, see Daley (2003), 235-44.

imagination. Nevertheless, apocalypticism remained associated with the fringes of society, and was largely discouraged by the ecclesiastical elite.

By the turn of the sixth century, however, this began to change. A confluence of factors led to a gradual revival of apocalyptic speculation in the Greek-speaking world. The revival started not with an event or crisis, but with an accident of the calendar. According to the calculations of the third-century theologian Hippolytus of Rome, the world would end 500 years after the crucifixion, roughly the year 500 C.E., or 6000 *anno mundi*.[109] Although he was largely ignored in his own time, Hippolytus's predictions gained new relevance at the dawn of the sixth century. Panic began to rise within certain communities of the empire as the fear of the imminent end rapidly spread.

Our primary evidence for the popularity of apocalyptic discourse in the sixth century, beginning with the reign of the emperor Anastasius (r. 491-518), is the indirect testimony of contemporary witnesses, rather than apocalyptic texts themselves. Observers noted that the hysteria which accompanied the millennial speculation led to panic despite the relative prosperity of the period.[110] Eventually, the "Y6K crisis" passed without incident. However, while the world survived the "millennium", other catastrophic events captured the late-Roman apocalyptic imagination.

The reign of Justin (r. 518-527) and his nephew Justinian I (r. 527-565) were marked by expansion, war, and natural disasters. Numerous earthquakes devastated cities, most notably Antioch in 526, and Persian forces continued to make advances into Byzantine territory. The so-called "Justinianic" plague, which wiped out significant portions of the Byzantine population and nearly killed Justinian himself, was viewed almost universally as an event sent by God, echoing the flood of Noah, and viewed in apocalyptic terms. Providence and divine chastisement were blamed for these disasters, and speculation rose about the advent of the antichrist. Perhaps the

[109] Magdalino (1993), 4.
[110] On the reign of Anastasius, see Haarer (2006) and Meier (2009).

most famous example can be found in Procopius's depiction of Justinian in the *Secret History* as a demon spawn who conspired with Fortune to attempt the destruction of humanity.[111]

Yet, despite the chaos and destruction, we see no sustained apocalyptic discourse. The century only produced a single apocalypse text, the so-called *Oracle of Baalbek*, and even that was an interpolation into the much older *Tiburtine Sibyl.* Instead we find the development of themes, and the recording of portents, dreams, and visions. We find, in their earliest forms, all the ingredients for apocalyptic discourse to lay the foundations for future apocalyptic speculation, without the ubiquity we find a mere century later. Brief apocalyptic expressions in reaction to specific events are integrated into larger non-apocalyptic texts.

This chapter examines the nascent apocalyptic discourse present in sixth-century sources. These sources bear witness, either directly or indirectly, to the establishment of an approach to comprehending crises that would provide a foundation for seventh-century authors to expand upon in profound ways. To do this, the chapter will examine a select group of recurring themes, including early millennialism, records of portents, depictions of the plague, and increased speculation surrounding the antichrist. This will provide an intellectual context for the explosion of apocalyptic discourse to follow in the seventh century.

II. Methodology

At this stage, it is necessary to discuss the methodology of the chapter. Sixth-century apocalyptic discourse in its nascent form would benefit from a detailed and systematic study. Unfortunately, such an undertaking is beyond the scope of this thesis, and thus a brief survey must suffice. This chapter applies a selection of heuristic themes to a selection of representative documents, coupled with case studies of individual sixth-century authors, in order to discover evidence of a growing apocalyptic discourse.

Much of the evidence for apocalyptic discourse in the earliest decades of the sixth century is tangential and often comes from sceptical sources. This is especially true of the millenarian

[111] This is discussed in detail below.

speculation during the reign of Anastasius. Other sources are even less direct, including accounts of unusual portentous events and ominous signs, without an interpretation of their meaning. Even our more direct sources from the middle of the century, such as Procopius's depiction of Justinian in the *Secret History*, is complicated by *Kaiserkritik* and must be taken with a grain of salt.[112] The nature of our sources means that, when it comes to evaluating the apocalyptic movements of the sixth century, we are often looking through a glass darkly.

a. Themes

To assist in our attempts to glean insights from these complicated sources, this chapter employs a series of organisational themes to analyse the material. The first of these themes is millennialism. In many ways, this is a tricky subject, as many of our sources for millennial apocalyptic discourse are second-hand accounts written by sceptical authors critiquing millennialism. Unlike other themes, millennialism is highly abstract. However, the millennial movement provided the first spark to ignite a revival of apocalyptic speculation, which grew into a full flame nearly two centuries later.

A second theme considered in this chapter is the rise in popularity of cataloguing portents. Abnormal natural and astronomical phenomena were recorded in detail by sixth century authors in a way that suggests that the Romans were looking to nature for signs of future events. Astrologers, typically outlawed in previous centuries, were consulted with increasing regularity. Events recorded in chronicles and histories were heavily weighted toward traditionally portentous events such as earthquakes, floods, comets, and eclipses. Here too we will discuss indirect accounts of dreams and prophecies which are found in numerous sources throughout the century. These accounts, whether or not they are accompanied by apocalyptic interpretations. are evidence of a shift in thinking among certain sectors of late-Roman society and an attempt to find meaning in unusual events.

[112] On *Kaiserkritik* during the reign of Justinian, see Meier (2003).

Literary depictions of the bubonic plague, perhaps the single greatest generator of apocalyptic discourse in the sixth century, provides our next theme. Death and destruction on a massive scale naturally led Romans to consider such events as divine punishment and to speculate that the end might be near. Heightened apocalyptic sensibilities, fuelled by the millennialism of the first decades of the century, were stoked further as authors recorded the events of the plague and its symptoms in detail, and provided apocalyptic reckonings of divine causation and potential deliverance. The fact that many apocalyptic occurrences surrounding the plague, such as ghastly visions and astronomical events, are corroborated by multiple witnesses suggests nascent apocalypticism had spread throughout Roman culture.

The work of Procopius, perhaps the most prolific and enigmatic author of the sixth century, has contributed significantly to the subject of this chapter, and as a result receives special attention throughout our analysis. One area of interest is his fascination with *Tyche*, or Fortune.[113] Many scholars, such as Averil Cameron and Anthony Kaldellis, have debated Procopius's religious affiliations and the sincerity of his Christian belief, particularly considering his affection for *Tyche*.[114] I will not rehash these questions here. Regardless, his view of personified fortune weaves a providential thread throughout his histories. The idea of a divine principle behind the events of history, including successes and disasters, is a critical feature of apocalyptic discourse, even if Procopius actively discouraged apocalyptic speculation on the causes of natural disasters. Nevertheless, the historian employed enough apocalyptic discourse for us to consider him a foundational figure for later authors.

The final theme discussed in this chapter concerns Procopius's scandalous testimony concerning Justinian's demonic heritage. In perhaps the best-known example of apocalyptic discourse from the sixth century, Procopius provides salacious accounts that Justinian was the result of the union between his mother and a demon. Justinian is presented as a sort of antichrist

[113] On Procopius's conception of *Tyche*, see Kaldellis (2004), 165-221

[114] Cameron notes that "Procopius' writing is thoroughly Christian, and recognisably late antique in type": Cameron (1985), 113. Kaldellis argues that Procopius was a pagan, "writing in an intolerant society that persecuted dissidents": Kaldellis (2004), 107.

figure, although the title is never used. Justinian is transformed into an inhuman anti-emperor who actively seeks to the destroy not only the Roman Empire, but humanity itself. As we will see in later chapters, the use of anti-messianic dehumanisation in apocalyptic discourse to criticise the emperor was central to the *Kaiserkritik* of the seventh century. Such language was used to describe the usurper Phocas and even the widely beloved emperor Heraclius as enemies of the Roman state.

These themes have been chosen for analysis for two reasons. First, and most importantly, they provide the building blocks of nascent apocalyptic discourse which provided the foundation used by later authors in their accounts of the crises of the seventh century. Secondly, the chosen themes make the otherwise diverse and obscure evidence from the sixth century more manageable. As the apocalyptic discourse from this period had not yet fully flowered, it can, without the proper perspective, be difficult to see its early budding.

Finally, it is worth defining and justifying the description of sixth-century apocalyptic discourse as "nascent". This chapter argues that we are able to trace the rise of sixth-century apocalyptic discourse from its humble origins in millennial speculation to more developed expressions in authors such as John of Ephesus and Procopius. Even so, it never becomes a predominant discourse in sixth-century Byzantine literature. For example, despite creating the single most profound example of apocalyptic discourse in sixth-century Byzantine historiography, Procopius's corpus, including his *Wars*, *de Aedificiis*, and even the *Secret History*, is predominantly *anti*-apocalyptic. In book two of the *Persian Wars*, Procopius goes so far as to criticise the multitude of authors who use apocalyptic language to determine the cause of the plague.[115] John Malalas, who employs apocalyptic tropes such as divine causation of disasters, largely avoids further apocalyptic speculation.[116] Thus, I would argue that, rather than producing a sustained apocalyptic discourse, the likes of which we see in the seventh century, we find instead the embryonic stages of what later authors would develop.

[115] This will be discussed in detail below.
[116] I largely agree with Mischa Meier's argument that Malalas's apocalyptic discourse was not designed to narrate the end of time, but to strike fear and provoke repentance. See Meier (2007).

b. Primary Sources

Let us turn now to the primary sources analysed in this chapter. As with the broader thesis, I have attempted to be as generically diverse as possible, though this is an admittedly difficult task given the comparatively limited nature of sixth-century apocalyptic discourse. This is further hindered by the fact that scholarship has only widely recognised one source used here, the *Oracle of Baalbek*, as apocalyptic, and even this is controversial. However, these efforts are not without fruit.

Our sources will be heavily weighted toward the similar literary forms of the chronicle and narrative history. Chroniclers such as Agathias, John Malalas, and John of Ephesus provide both direct and indirect witness to apocalyptic discourse. This can be seen indirectly through their records of portents, dreams, and prophecies, which suggest a burgeoning interest in apocalyptic signs. In the case of Malalas and John of Ephesus, we see examples of direct apocalyptic discourse, while Agathias is unique in that he provides a critical account of prophetic outbursts during the plague and, in general, seems sceptical of apocalyptic speculation.

The author who looms largest in our study is Procopius of Caesarea. His monumental corpus informs much of what we know about the reign of Justinian, particularly the wars and building projects which took place under his regime. It is impossible to examine the entirety of his largely panegyric corpus in such a short overview.[117] We will therefore limit our inquiry to book six of his *Wars*, and his posthumous *Secret History.* The former addresses Justinian's wars with the Persians and the outbreak of the bubonic plague. Procopius's controversial *Secret History*, written after the death of Justinian, reveals the author's true feelings about the emperor in a fantastical mix of history and heavy handed rumour and innuendo.

[117] Anthony Kaldellis has convincingly demonstrated Procopius's masterful use of the Classical tradition to subtly critique Justinian's administration, through the use of veiled allusions in ostensibly panegyric accounts of the emperor's reign. This is a welcome correction to the work of scholars such as Averil Cameron who, at times, underestimates Procopius's command of Classical literature. See Kaldellis (2004) 118-164.

III. Early Millennialism

The sixth century opened with a phenomenon that will be familiar to most modern observers of religion and current events. In a period of relative prosperity, an outbreak of eschatological tension occurred. These pressures were caused not by external military or economic pressure, but by the belief that 6000 *anno mundi*, calculated to occur sometime in the early 500s C.E., would mark the end of time.

This outbreak of millennialism is a curious phenomenon. It came suddenly, after more than a century of decline in and suppression of apocalyptic discourse in the Greek-speaking Roman world. What is more, our evidence for its widespread nature is found primarily in accounts of critical observers who rebuke the population for their irrational behaviour. Evidence from pagan philosophers, as well as indirect evidence from Christian historians, testifies to the fact that the phenomenon was not merely a literary device but a widespread cultural event.

Simplicius, the pagan commentator of Aristotle's *De caelo* criticised the belief of a Christian opponent, who Paul Magdalino suggests was John Philoponus, that, despite the lack of decline, the world would soon come to an end a mere 6000 years after its creation.[118] While the opponent's account does not survive, Simplicius's critique suggests that the belief in the imminent end was held even among the sort of Christian literati who would engage in philosophical debates. Further, the fact that pagan philosophers were aware of the outbreak of millennial speculation suggests that the panic was known in all corners of Byzantine society and was not isolated to a fringe sect within the Christian community.

Direct mentions of apocalyptic speculation are supplemented by chronicles which record lists of portentous events which are indicative of anxieties about the immediate future. Paul Magdalino notes that the *Chronicle* of Joshua the Stylite was written "expressly to record the wars, famines, and epidemics that befell Edessa during the generally prosperous reign of Anastasius".[119] The *Chronicle*, which does not engage in the sort of direct apocalyptic

[118] Simplicius, *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graecum*, VII, [Heiberg (1893), 87-8]. Podskalsky (1974), 357. Magdalino (1993), 5.
[119] Magdalino (1993), 5.

speculation of later writers of the period, records events which are often noted during periods of eschatological tension.[120] Even if writers were hesitant to speak of the implications of the data they were collecting, the fact that such events were recorded suggests that observers were highly attuned to ominous events in anticipation of the imminent *eschaton*.

Although most of our evidence for apocalypticism at the turn of the century comes from indirect sources, one example of direct apocalyptic discourse survives in the form of an apocalyptic text from the reign of Anastasius. This comes in the form of a sixth-century interpolation of the *Tiburtine Sibyl* written before the emperor's death. In the first half of the twentieth century, two manuscripts of a Greek version of the *Tiburtine Sibyl*, previously known only in Latin, were discovered.[121] These manuscripts contain a previously unknown oracle, dubbed by its editor Paul J. Alexander "the *Oracle of Baalbek*", which contains *vaticinia ex eventu* related to the emperor Zeno, and actual unfulfilled prophecies related to the emperor Anastasius. The inclusion of unfulfilled prophecies about a historical emperor indicate that the *Oracle of Baalbek* was composed during Anastasius's lifetime.

The oracle predicts that the reign of Anastasius will usher in a period of great terror and destruction. Regarding the emperor, the Sibyl provides the following description:

> ...γενναῖος, φοβερός,... μισῶν πάντας τοὺς πτωχούς. Πολλοὺς δὲ τοῦ λαοῦ ἀπολέσει δικαίως ἀδίκως καὶ καθελεῖ τοὺς τηροῦντας θεοσέβειαν. Καὶ ἀναστήσονται ἐν τοῖς καιροῖς αὐτοῦ οἱ Πέρσαι καὶ καταστρέψουσι τὰς πόλεις τῆς Ἀνατολῆς μετὰ τοῦ πλήθους τῶν στρατιωτῶν τῆς Ῥωμανίας μαχαίρᾳ. Καὶ βασιλεύσει ἔτη τριάκοντα ἕν.
>
> …he is noble, terrifying…and hates all the beggars. He will ruin many from among the people either lawfully or unlawfully and will depose those who observe godliness. And the Persians will arise in his times and will overturn with the sword the cities of the East together with the multitudes of the soldiers of the Roman Empire. And he will be king for thirty-one years.[122]

The author may have had the so-called Anastasian War in mind, which represented the first major conflict between the empires since 440, and disrupted the longest period of peace between the forces in Roman history.[123] The Persians seized Theodosiopolis in 502, and after long sieges,

[120] Magdalino (1993), 5.
[121] Alexander (1967), 4.
[122] Oracle of Baalbek, 168-172 [Alexander (1967), 19]. Trans. Alexander (1967), 27-28.
[123] Greatrex and Lieu (2002), 62.

captured Amida and Edessa in 503.[124] By 506, the Romans managed to gain the upper hand, forcing an armistice with the Persians. [125] The short-lived success of the Persians led Anastasius to invest in civil defences, including the construction of the fortress at Dara, and to update the infrastructure in Amida and Edessa.[126] In the end, the dire predictions of the *Oracle* did not occur.

The oracle expands this grim prediction by prophesying that the reign of Anastasius will lead to a collapse of civilization, writing:

> Καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα ἔσονται οἱ ἄνθρωποι ἅρπαγες, πλεονέκται, τύρανοι, βάρβαροι, μισομήτορες [τὰς ἰδίας πατρίδας] καὶ <ἀντὶ> τῆς ἀρετῆς καὶ τῆς ἐπιεικείας βαρβάρων σχῆμα ἀναλαβόντες.... Καὶ ἀναστήσονται δύο βασιλεῖς ἀπὸ Ἀνατολῆς καὶ δύο ἀπὸ Συρίας, καὶ ἔσονται οἱ Ἀσσύριοι ὡς ἡ ἄμμος τῆς θαλάσσης ἀναρίθμητοι καὶ παραλάβωσι πολλὰς χώρας τῆς Ἀνατολῆς ἕως Χαλκηδονίας. Καὶ γενήσονται αἱματοχυσίαι πολλαὶ ὥστε γενέσθαι τὸ αἷμα εἰς τὸ στῆθος τῶν ἵππων τοῦ συγκερασθῆναι τὴν θάλασσαν.
>
> And after that men will be rapacious, greedy, rebellious, barbarian, they will hate their mothers, and in lieu of virtue and of mildness they will assume the appearance of barbarians…And two kings will arise from the East and two from Syria, and the Assyrians will be countless like the sand of the sea, and they will take over many lands of the East unto Chalcedonia. And there will be much shedding of blood, so that the blood will reach the chest of horses as it is commingled with the sea.[127]

The oracle predicts that the reign of Anastasius will usher in a period of chaos and destruction of the Roman Empire at the hands of the Persians and other barbarians. While the Persians did inflict some initial damage, the predictions failed to come to pass during Anastasius's reign. The overestimation of Anastasius's reign, which only lasted twenty-seven years, rather than the thirty-one predicted by the *Oracle,* suggests that the prophecy was composed before the emperor's death.

This passage, like most surviving apocalyptic discourse of the sixth century, is polemical in nature.[128] It is quite unusual for an apocalyptic author to compose actual prophecies in such detail during the reign of a living emperor, as most apocalypses transition to symbolic language

[124] Greatrex and Lieu (2002), 69-71.
[125] Greatrex and Lieu (2002), 77.
[126] Greatrex and Lieu (2002), 75.
[127] Oracle of Baalbek, 173-185 [Alexander (1967), 19-20]. Trans. Alexander (1967), 28.
[128] See Brandes (1997), Meier (2008).

and abstraction in actual prophecy. This may indicate that the author was opposed to the emperor's anti-Chalcedonian affiliations, which culminated in the controversial replacement of the bishop of Chalcedon with an anti-Chalcedonian, leading to riots within the city.[129] The author's boldness suggests a certain confidence in the imminent end of the world, coinciding with the sixth millennium after creation.

The reign of Anastasius was not without crisis or controversy, but it was relatively tame for the apocalyptic reactions it provoked. The Persian wars were quickly managed, and economically the empire flourished. Although his anti-Chalcedonian allegiances drew criticism, and he did replace the bishop of Chalcedon, overall Anastasius maintained a tolerant religious policy and strove to maintain peace. Thus, the amount of apocalyptic discourse for this period is puzzling.

The nascent apocalyptic discourse of the first decades of the sixth century provided a foundation for understanding the real cataclysms which occurred mere decades later. If apocalyptic speculation was rare in the beginning, it blossomed in the wake of the plague, earthquakes, and wars under the reign of Justinian. Historians, chroniclers, and poets who were subdued in the early decades found their voice in interpreting these events, and did so through the lens of apocalypticism.

IV. A Period of Portents

The world may have failed to end during the reign of Anastasius; however, the groundwork for the use of apocalyptic discourse to interpret contemporary events had been firmly laid and only increased in prominence. The reign of Justinian I (r. 527-565), with his ambitions to restore the Roman Empire to its former glory, combined with the frequent natural disasters and invasions, was ripe for apocalyptic speculation. The historian Agathias (d. 582) famously mocked the self-proclaimed prophets and oracles who contributed to the panic of the populace.[130] It is during this time that we see the rise of *saloi*, or "holy fools", whose nonsensical

[129] Treadgold (2001), 57.
[130] Agathias, *Historiae*, V. 5 [Keydell (1967), 169-70].

declarations of divine will stirred popular anxieties. We also see the increased popularity of astrologers who studied the stars to predict future events.[131] These phenomena are witnessed in the narratives composed by Agathias, John Malalas, John of Ephesus, and Procopius, particularly in the way in which successes and victories are attributed to divine causation.

a. Agathias

To demonstrate the ubiquity of apocalyptic reactions to natural disasters and portents, it is useful to start with a sceptical perspective. In Book V of his *Historiae*, Agathias provides a detailed account of the aftermath of an earthquake which struck Constantinople during the reign of Justinian. In addition to descriptions of the event itself and the damage done to the city, the historian records a variety of popular reactions to the tremors, and their attempts to understand the event and its cause. The responses fall within two camps, namely, rational or philosophical approaches, and superstitious and apocalyptic. Agathias reflects fondly on the former, noting attempts to appeal to Aristotle and Anthemius of Tralles.[132] The historian also notes some positive outcomes of the disaster, including citizens putting aside their differences, or turning to ascetic and religious devotion.[133] However, he has nothing but scornful words for those who took a superstitious approach, claiming prophetic revelation or appealing to astrology. Agathias goes so far as to suggest the latter should be imprisoned for impiety.

Agathias's account of the superstitious response is important for our study. It reveals, from a sceptical perspective, the extent to which apocalyptic discourse had become a means for the Roman population to understand the disasters which struck Constantinople. Concerning the superstitious response of Christians, Agathias provides the following account:

> Τότε γὰρ καὶ ἐφεξῆς ἐπὶ πλείστας ἡμέρας κίνησις τῆς γῆς ἐγίγνετο, βραχεῖα μὲν καὶ οὐχ οἵα τὴν ἀρχὴν ἐπῆλθε, ἱκανὴ δὲ ὅμως τὰ λειπόμενα διακυκῆσαι. τερατεῖαί τε ἐνεδήμουν εὐθὺς καὶ προαγορεύσεις παράλογοι, ὡς αὐτίκα μάλα καὶ τοῦ παντὸς κόσμου ἀπολουμένου· ἀπατεῶνες γάρ τινες καὶ οἷον θεοπρόποι αὐτόματοι περιφοιτῶντες, ἅττα ἂν ἐδόκει αὐτοῖς, ἐχρησμῴδουν καὶ μᾶλλον ἔτι τοὺς πολλοὺς ἐξεδειμάτουν, τῷ ἤδη κατεπτηχέναι ῥᾳδίως ἀναπειθομένους· οὗτοί τε οἱ μαίνεσθαι εἰκῇ καὶ δαιμονᾶν ὑποκρινόμενοι δεινότερα ἐπεφήμιζον, ὡς δὴ ὑπὸ τῶν

[131] Magdalino (1993), 7.
[132] Agathias, *Historiae*, V. 6 [Keydell (1967), 171].
[133] Agathias, *Historiae*, V. 5.3 [Keydell (1967), 170].

> προσπεφυκότων αὐτοῖς φασμάτων τὰ ἐσόμενα δεδιδαγμένοι, καὶ μάλα ἐπὶ τῇ κακοδαιμονίᾳ μεγαλαυχοῦντες.
>
> The tremors continued for several days and though they had lost most of their initial fury and were of much shorter duration they were still sufficiently violent to disrupt any remaining semblance of order. Fantastic stories and extraordinary predictions to the effect that the end of the world was at hand began to circulate among the people. Charlatans and self-appointed prophets roamed the streets prophesying whatever came into their heads and terrifying still more the majority of the people who were particularly impressionable because they had already become demoralised. Still more ominous were the prognostications of those who pretended to be seized by a prophetic frenzy and possessed by some supernatural power, claiming that they had learned the future from the spirits that consorted with them and bragging about their demonic possession.[134]

In this passage, we see widespread eschatological speculation surrounding the earthquake. A significant portion of the population seems to have believed that the end of the world was at hand. Agathias describes the rise of what appear to be holy fools, whom he considers to be charlatans, who take advantage of a demoralised people by making up prophecies which bring further terror. Others took things further, claiming to be possessed by a supernatural power, who provided revelation. It is interesting that Agathias considers such events to be demonic possession, and seems to acknowledge the reality of the possession, even if he dismisses the message.

Agathias took a sceptical approach to those who responded with Christian apocalyptic discourse. His main concern seems to have been that they preyed on the fears of a vulnerable populace. However, his greatest scorn was reserved for those who appealed to astrology and the occult to explain the earthquake. Of these members of Roman society, Agathias writes:

> ἄλλοι δὲ ἀστέρων φορὰς καὶ σχήματα ἐκλογιζόμενοι μείζονας ξυμφορὰς καὶ κοινὴν μονονουχὶ ἀνατροπὴν τῶν πραγμάτων παρεδήλουν καὶ ὑπηνίττοντο. εἴωθε γὰρ ἐν τοῖς δεινοῖς ἀεὶ ὁ τῶν τοιούτων ἀνθρώπων ἐσμὸς ἀναφύεσθαι. ἐψεύσατο δὲ ὅμως εὖ ποιοῦσα ἑκατέρα μαντεία. ἐχρῆν γάρ, οἶμαι, καὶ ἀσεβείας φεύγειν γραφὴν τοὺς τὰ τοιάδε ὀνειροπολοῦντας καὶ μηδὲν ὁτιοῦν πλέον γνώσεως πέρι τῷ κρείττονι καταλιμπάνοντας.
>
> Others, as might have been expected, pondering over the motions and aspects of the stars, hinted darkly at greater calamities and at what amounted almost to a cosmic disaster. Society in fact never fails to throw up a bewildering variety of such persons in times of misfortune. Luckily both predictions proved wrong. In my opinion these

[134] Agathias, *Historiae*, V. 5.1-2 [Keydell (1967), 169-170]. Trans. Frendo (1975), 140.

> dabblers in the occult who sought to encroach on the intellectual preserve of the Deity ought to have been prosecuted for impiety.[135]

While Agathias critiqued Christians who claimed prophecy, however he stopped short of calling for punishment. The historian's opinion of astrologers was different. He suggests that they should be arrested and prosecuted for impiety, and for presuming upon knowledge which is reserved for God alone. The predictions of the astrologers are interesting in themselves. They appealed to astrological events not only to explain the earthquake, but to predict a greater cosmic disaster. Such predictions fit well within the eschatological *milieu*, but the astrologers take things a step further. Instead of merely speculating that the world was ending, they pointed to the stars as proof, and used pagan methods instead of Christian methods in an attempt to prove their theory.

Agathias is an interesting case study in sixth-century apocalyptic discourse. His account demonstrates that the apocalyptic mood of the period had reached all levels of society, and that the millennial speculation of the first decades had manifested in an eschatological panic in the face of natural disasters. His sceptical account provides a unique and trustworthy perspective, providing outsider observations of the phenomenon which is witnessed directly by the authors discussed below. Moreover, his later discussion of the more rational discussions which took place provides a necessary counterbalance. It demonstrates that apocalypticism, while certainly popular, was not universal. From Agathias's perspective, cooler heads would prevail over the panic of the populace.

b. John Malalas

Our first direct witness to the observation of portents in apocalyptic discourse is found in the *Chronographia* of John Malalas.[136] Malalas composed the first extant example of a world chronicle, a genre which proved highly influential in Byzantine historical writing. Malalas's *Chronographia* details the history of the world from Adam through the reign of Justinian to at

[135] Agathias, *Historiae,* V. 5.3 [Keydell (1967), 170]. Trans. Frendo (1975), 140.
[136] John Malalas, *Chronographia,* [Thurn (2000)].

least the year 565 in eighteen books.[137] Malalas was likely born in Antioch, worked as a public servant in the city, and eventually moved to Constantinople during the reign of Justinian.[138] An examination of the full chronicle is beyond the scope of this chapter. For our purposes, we will limit our focus to Malalas's account of the reigns of Anastasius, Justin and Justinian, contained in books sixteen through eighteen.

1. Anastasius

Book sixteen of Malalas's *Chronographia* gives a chronological account of the reign of the emperor Anastasius. The historian provides our first window onto what later became essential features of apocalyptic discourse, including a focus on divine causation and the use of dreams to depict *vaticinia ex eventu*. Although these elements are not necessarily apocalyptic in themselves, they became foundational for later authors' explicitly apocalyptic accounts of causation.

The first example can be found in Malalas's depiction of the abortive rebellion of the Thracian Vitalian, who managed to gain control of Thrace and plotted the overthrow of Anastasius.[139] When the rebellion was brought to the attention of the emperor, Anastasius summoned the philosopher Proclus of Athens to provide counsel on how to proceed. Proclus advised the emperor to avoid despair, predicting that Vitalian would retreat as soon as he sent a force against him. The philosopher then provided the emperor with elemental sulphur, and advised the emperor to use it against Vitalian's fleet, suggesting that the spectacle would bring an end to the rebellion.[140]

Anastasius heeded the advice of Proclus and gave the elemental sulphur to Marinus the Syrian, commanding him to take a fleet to meet Vitalian in battle. Upon learning this, Vitalian gathered a fleet of Huns and met Marinus, who sprinkled the compound on the enemy fleet as

[137] Jefferys et al (1986), xxi.
[138] Jefferys et al (1986), xxi.
[139] John Malalas, *Chronographia,* XVI.16-17 [Thurn (2000), 329-333].
[140] John Malalas, *Chronographia,* XVI.16 [Thurn (2000), 329-332].

advised by Proclus. As predicted, when the ships caught fire without apparent cause and sank, Vitalian fled with the remaining ships. On daybreak, Malalas notes the following result:

> καὶ πρωίας γενομένης οὐδεὶς εὑρέθη εἰς τὸ πέραν ἐκ τοῦ αὐτοῦ Βιταλιανοῦ, καὶ ἐνίκησεν ὁ σωτὴρ Χριστὸς καὶ ἡ τοῦ βασιλέως τύχη. καὶ ἐποίησε πρόκεσσον ὁ βασιλεὺς Ἀναστάσιος εἰς τὸ Σωσθένιν ἐν τῷ ἀρχαγγέλῳ Μιχαὴλ εὐχαριστῶν ἐπὶ ἡμέρας πολλάς.
>
> At daybreak, none of Vitalian's men could be found on the other side, and Christ the Saviour and the Fortune of the emperor prevailed. The emperor Anastasius made a *processus* to Sosthenion and gave thanks in the church of the archangel Michael for many days".[141]

Malalas attributes victory to Christ and "ἡ τοῦ βασιλέως τύχη", the Fortune of the emperor. This provides an interesting formulation of providential victory, particularly the attribution of victory to Fortune. As we will see, the role of Fortune proved to be a favourite motif in Procopius, borrowing a pagan concept to formulate an almost fatalistic understanding of divine providence. While not explicitly stated, victory is part of a larger divine plan. This understanding of divine favour is also demonstrated in the emperor's response, setting up camp in Sosthenion to give thanks at the church of the archangel Michael, the commander of the heavenly host.

Another stark example of nascent apocalyptic discourse is found at the end of Malalas's account of Anastasius's reign, where he receives a vision in sleep predicting his end. Malalas gives the following account:

> Μετὰ δὲ ὀλίγον καιρὸν εἶδεν ἐν ὁράματι ὁ αὐτὸς βασιλεὺς Ἀναστάσιος, ὅτι ἔστη ἐναντίον αὐτοῦ ἀνήρ τις τέλειος, λευχείμων, βαστάζων κώδικα γεγραμμένον, καὶ ἀναγινώσκων καὶ ἀναπτύξας τοῦ κώδικος φύλλα πέντε καὶ ἀναγνοὺς τὸ τοῦ βασιλέως ὄνομα εἶπεν αὐτῷ·'ἴδε, διὰ τὴν ἀπληστίαν σου ἀπαλείφω δεκατέσσαρα.' καὶ τῷ ἰδίῳ δακτύλῳ αὐτοῦ ἀπήλειψε, φησίν.
>
> After a short time, the emperor Anastasius himself saw in a sleeping vision, that there was a perfect man standing across from him, clad in white, carrying a book with writing on it; and reading and having unfolded five pages of the book he read the name of the emperor and said to him "Behold, because of your insatiability, I am erasing fourteen". And he erased them with his own finger, he said.[142]

The language used to describe Anastasius's encounter is interesting. Rather than simply having a dream, the emperor is described as actually seeing something in an ὅραμα, or a sleeping vision,

[141] John Malalas, *Chronographia,* XVI.16.84-87 [Thurn (2000), 332].
[142] John Malalas, *Chronographia,* XVI.20.42-46 [Thurn (2000), 334-335].

which carries a stronger sense of reality than a mere dream. This passage is reminiscent of the story of Hezekiah, who was told by the prophet Isaiah that he would die because of his behaviour.[143] However, instead of from a prophet, Anastasius receives the message from a heavenly figure in a dream-like vision.

Anastasius awoke frightened, and summoned the *cubicularius* and *praepositus* Amantius to tell him about the vision. Amantius tells the emperor that he saw a similar vision in the night, which Malalas relates as follows:

> ἐνύπνιον γὰρ εἶδον κἀγὼ ἐν ταύτῃ τῇ νυκτί, ὅτι ὡς ἑστηκὼς κἀγὼ ἐναντίον τοῦ ὑμετέρου κράτους ὄπισθέν μου ἐλθὼν χοῖρος, ὥσπερ σύαγρος μέγας, καὶ δραξάμενος τῷ στόματι τὴν ἀρχὴν τῆς χλαμύδος καὶ τινάξας κατήγαγέν με εἰς τὸ ἔδαφος τῆς γῆς, καὶ ἀνήλωσέν με κατεσθίων καὶ καταπατῶν.
>
> For I too saw a sleeping vision on this night, that as I was standing, facing your majesty, that a swine, as big as a wild boar, having come up from behind me and taken the edge of my cloak in its mouth, and having shook me pulled me to the ground, and killed me by devouring and trampling me.[144]

Here, the language used to describe Amantius's experience is similar to that of Anastasius's sleeping vision. Instead of a dream, Amantius says that he too saw a sleeping vision in the night (ἐνύπνιον γὰρ εἶδον κἀγὼ ἐν ταύτῃ τῇ νυκτί). Like ὅραμα, ἐνύπνιον evokes a greater reality than a dream. In both cases, the visions seen by Anastasius and Amantius are depicted as real events versus fleeting constructions of the imagination.

After Amantius told the emperor of his vision, Anastasius became dismayed and summoned the Asian philosopher Proclus, who had a reputation for interpreting dreams. Malalas records Proclus's visit as follows:

> καὶ προσκαλεσάμενος ὁ βασιλεὺς Πρόκλον τὸν Ἀσιανὸν φιλόσοφον, τὸν ὀνειροκρίτην, ὄντα πάνυ ἐπιτήδειον, εἶπεν αὐτῷ <τὸ ὅραμα, ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ Ἀμάντιος·ὁ δὲ ἐσαφήνισεν αὐτοῖς> τὴν τοῦ ὁράματος δύναμιν καὶ ὅτι μετὰ χρόνον τελειοῦνται.
>
> And the emperor, having summoned the philosopher Proclus the Asian, an interpreter of dreams and good friend, he told him his sleeping vision, and Amantius did likewise. And Proclus explained to them the power of the dream, and that they would die after some time.[145]

[143] Cf. Isaiah 38:1.
[144] John Malalas, *Chronographia,* XVI.20.50-54. [Thurn (2000), 335].
[145] John Malalas, *Chronographia,* XVI.20.55-58 [Thurn (2000), 335].

In this passage, we see an example of two parallel dreams, or sleeping visions, predicting the demise of Anastasius and his adviser. The first is revealed to the emperor himself, while the second is revealed to Amantius, his *cubicularius*. Malalas's account is interesting for several reasons. We see here an example of God revealing his will concerning the order of emperors through prophetic visions, provided in sleep. The rise and fall of emperors is established within a providential arc, and is confirmed by visions given to multiple witnesses.

We also see that the ability of dreams to predict the future is well established by the first decades of the sixth century. The emperor had experts among his friends, including the philosopher Proclus the Asian, who could reliably be called upon to interpret dreams. Proclus's reputation as an interpreter had, apparently, been well established prior to the dreams of Anastasius and Amantius, and this reputation had been strong enough to warrant a place in court. We are not told the methods used by Proclus to interpret the dreams, but his council was trusted nonetheless. This tells us that Byzantine society, even among the ruling class, understood dreams as a legitimate avenue for divine revelation about current events. [146]

In the end, the prophecy of the sleeping visions was fulfilled. Malalas's discussion of Anastasius concludes with a brief, but important notice on the emperor's death from natural causes. The chronicler notes:

> Καὶ μετ' ὀλίγον χρόνον ἀρρωστήσας ἀνέκειτο, καὶ ἀστραπῆς καὶ βροντῆς γενομένης μεγάλης πάνυ θροηθεὶς ὁ αὐτὸς βασιλεὺς Ἀναστάσιος ἀπέδωκε τὸ πνεῦμα, ὢν ἐνιαυτῶν ἐνενήκοντα καὶ μηνῶν πέντε.
>
> Shortly afterwards the emperor Anastasius became ill and was confined to bed. And after a great lightning flash and thunderclap, he became terrified and breathed his last, at the age of 90 years and five months.[147]

Anastasius's death was preceded by what the emperor interpreted as portentous phenomena, in this case lighting and thunder. Malalas does not attribute any supernatural cause to the weather, however Anastasius was frightened enough by the possibility that it led to his death. Based on Malalas's account, it would appear that the court of Anastasius held an apocalyptic worldview

[146] Neil (Forthcoming a); Scott (forthcoming).
[147] John Malalas, *Chronographia,* XVI.22 [Thurn (2000), 335].

which understood dreams and portents to provide information concerning the divine will. One wonders if the court itself took the millennial speculation of the first decades of the sixth century seriously.

2. Justin

Further evidence of nascent apocalypticism in sixth-century Roman literature can be found in John Malalas's account of the reign of Justin, discussed in book seventeen. Here, Malalas records the details of Justin's providential election, as well as portentous events and natural disasters which occurred during his reign. Malalas's account of Justin's reign provides direct evidence of apocalyptic discourse, especially in attributing natural disasters to divine causation. Indirect evidence is found in the chronographer's accounts of popular Roman reactions to those events.

Book seventeen opens with a double confirmation of Justin's election through the divine inspiration of his electors. Anastasius left no heirs, so a new election, primarily organised by the military though confirmed by the people, was necessary to choose his successor. Malalas begins his description of Justin by observing the following about his election: "At God's command the army, with the *excubitores* guarding the palace, together with the people, crowned him and made him emperor".[148] The historian records the following account of Justin's election instead of the *comes* Theocritus, which took place contrary to expectation:

> ὅντινα ἐβουλεύετο ποιῆσαι βασιλέα ὁ αὐτὸς Ἀμάντιος, δοὺς τῷ αὐτῷ Ἰουστίνῳ χρήματα ῥογεῦσαι, ἵνα γένηται Θεόκριτος βασιλεύς, καὶ ἐρρόγευσεν. ὁ στρατὸς οὖν καὶ ὁ δῆμος λαβὼν οὐχ εἵλατο Θεόκριτον ποιῆσαι βασιλέα, ἀλλὰ θελήσει θεοῦ ἐποίησαν Ἰουστῖνον βασιλέα.
>
> Amantius had determined to make the latter [Theocritus] emperor, giving Justin money to distribute so that Theocritus might become emperor; and Justin distributed it. However, the army and people, after taking the money, did not choose to make Theocritus emperor, but by the will of God made Justin emperor.[149]

This passage reinforces the concept of the divine election of emperors, by which the will of God overcame the will of Roman power brokers. Justin is depicted as having no imperial aspirations,

[148] John Malalas, *Chronographia,* XVII.1.7-8 [Thurn (2000), 336]. "ὅντινα ὁ στρατὸς μετὰ τῶν φυλαττόντων τὸ παλάτιν κελεύσει θεοῦ ἐξκουβιτόρων ἅμα τῷ δήμῳ στέψαντες ἐποίησαν βασιλέα".
[149] John Malalas, *Chronographia,* XVII.2.15-19 [Thurn (2000), 337].

and indeed as being a willing participant in the election of Theocritus. Nevertheless, God's will prevailed and Justin was chosen. It is worth noting that while Justin may not have had any ambitions for the throne, he quickly executed any potential rivals.

Malalas immediately follows his account of Justin's election with a description of a portentous event that took place during the first year of the emperor's reign. According to Malalas, "At the beginning of his reign there arose in the East a fearful star, named a comet which sent out a beam pointing downwards, which people called 'bearded', and they were afraid".[150] Once more we find evidence of the heightened apocalyptic pressures at play within Roman society during the early decades of the sixth century. The social tensions which led to a fearful response to a comet suggests that the millennial speculation which arose during the reign of Anastasius may have been alive and well.

3. The Wrath of God

In book seventeen of the *Chronographia* Malalas records a series of misfortunes which befell various settlements in the empire. Included within this account are several major cities, including Antioch, Anastasius's home city of Dyrrachium, Corinth, and Edessa. In the cases of Dyrrachium and Corinth, the cities are said to have suffered from the wrath of God with no further description of the nature of the tragedy or of the sins that instigated God's wrath.[151] In these cases, Malalas is content to invoke divine causation of disaster. The means are inconsequential as are the extenuating circumstances. There are two notable exceptions, namely a fire and earthquake which befell Antioch, and the flooding of Edessa. The mention of the means of destruction punctuates these disasters in a wave of misfortune, and their descriptions are worth close examination.

While, chronologically, the fire in Antioch preceded the flooding of Edessa, I will examine the disaster of Edessa first, while treating the two Antiochene calamites together. Malalas's

[150] John Malalas, *Chronographia,* XVII.4 [Thurn (2000), 338]. "Εν δὲ τῇ ἀρχῇ τῆς αὐτοῦ βασιλείας ἀνῆλθεν <εἰς πέραν> ἐν τῇ ἀνατολῇ φοβερὸς ἀστήρ, ὀνόματι κομήτης, ὃς εἶχεν ἀκτῖνα πέμπουσαν ἐπὶ τὰ κάτω, ὃν ἔλεγον εἶναι πωγωνίαν· καὶ ἐφοβοῦντο".
[151] John Malalas, *Chronographia,* XVII.13-16 [Thurn (2000), 344-5].

depiction of the flooding of Edessa is important in the development of sixth-century apocalyptic discourse, not only for the depiction of the event, but also for the discoveries made in its aftermath. Malalas records the following:

> ἐν αὐτῷ δὲ τῷ χρόνῳ κατεπόθη ὑπὸ θεομηνίας ὑδάτων ποταμιαίων Ἔδεσα, πόλις μεγάλη τῆς Ὀσδροηνῆς ἐπαρχίας, μητρόπολις, ἐν ἑσπέρᾳ, τοῦ αὐτοῦ ποταμοῦ κατὰ μέσον τῆς πόλεως παρερχομένου αὖτανδροι σὺν τοῖς οἴκοις ἀπώλοντο. ἔλεγον δὲ οἱ περισωθέντες καὶ οἰκοῦντες τὴν αὐτὴν πόλιν, ὅτι καὶ ἐν ἄλλῳ καιρῷ κατέκλυσεν τὴν αὐτὴν πόλιν ὁ αὐτὸς ποταμός, ἀλλ' οὐχ οὕτως ἀπώλεσεν.
>
> And at that time Edessa, a great city of the eparchy of Oshroene, its metropolis, was swallowed up by the wrath of God in the form of river water, in the evening by the very river, called the Skirtos, which winds through the middle of the city. The inhabitants were lost together with their houses. And those who survived and dwell in that city said that at another time the same river flooded the city, but did not destroy it in the same way.[152]

In this passage, Malalas describes the flood in vivid terms not used in his accounts of other natural disasters. Here, he states that Edessa suffered the wrath of God, manifested physically in the form of a flood. Malalas is fond of attributing disaster to divine causation, but this formula is unique. It provides a tangible sense of divine agency and rare specificity in Malalas's work.

After recording the testimony of the inhabitants of stories in previous floods, Malalas continues his account in vivid terms. Here, he accents the apocalyptic nature of the flood by the discovery of a prophecy:

> μετὰ δὲ τὸ παυθῆναι τὴν ὀργὴν, <εἰς> τὰ πλησίον {τῶν θεμελίων} τοῦ αὐτοῦ ποταμοῦ οἰκήματα φιλοκαλίας <τῶν θεμελίων> τυγχάνοντα εὑρέθη πλὰξ λιθίνη μεγάλη, ἐν ᾗ ἐπεγέγραπτο ἐν γλυφῇ ταῦτα· 'Σκίρτος ποταμὸς σκιρτήσει κακὰ σκιρτήματα πολίταις.'
>
> And after the anger was brought to an end, in the buildings by the river, near the foundations, when they were having their foundations cleared out, a large stone tablet was found, on which was carved the following inscription, "The river Skirtos [Leaper] will leap terrible leapings for the citizens".[153]

After revealing this fascinating discovery, Malalas provides no information. Instead, he moves on, simply informing the reader that Justin generously sent resources to help in rebuilding the city.

[152] John Malalas, *Chronographia,* XVII.15.70-80 [Thurn (2000), 345].
[153] John Malalas, *Chronographia,* XVII.15.82-95 [Thurn (2000), 345].

The account of Edessa is fascinating on several levels. Like the other disasters recounted in book seventeen, the flooding of Edessa was depicted as the wrath of God. Malalas specifically notes that God used the river Skirtos as the instrument of his wrath, and goes to lengths to emphasize that the flooding and number of victims was unprecedented in the city's long history. As in the previous accounts, Malalas does not speculate what provoked God's wrath; nevertheless, the death toll was unprecedented.

Perhaps most interesting for our purposes is the discovery of the tablet. Here we find a *vaticinium ex eventu* carved in stone! Not only was the flood divinely ordained, it had been prophesied by an unknown carver in an unknown period. In some ways, the pun on the river's name suggests that the disaster was foretold in the naming of the river itself. Malalas does not expound on the significance of this event, which is immediately overshadowed by the earthquake at Antioch. However, the providential nature of the disaster is made crystal clear. There is an implied sense that the citizens of Edessa should have known better, and were, to some degree, responsible for the death toll. As we will see below, John of Ephesus takes this one step further, locating the cause of the flood in the persecution of the anti-Chalcedonian community.

The destruction of Antioch, first by fire then by earthquake, was one of the greatest disasters of the sixth century, and is noted by each of the historians under examination. Malalas's description is particularly noteworthy because he treats the fire as a precursor to the earthquake. Concerning the fire, Malalas notes the following:

> Τῷ δὲ αὐτῷ χρόνῳ, Ἀνατολίου τοῦ Καρίνου ὄντος κόμητος ἀνατολῆς, συνέβη ἐν Ἀντιοχείᾳ ἐμπρησμὸν μέγαν γενέσθαι ὑπὸ θεϊκῆς ὀργῆς·ὅστις ἐμπρησμὸς προεμήνυσε τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ μέλλουσαν ἔσεσθαι ἀγανάκτησιν. ἐκαύθη γὰρ ἀπὸ τοῦ μαρτυρίου τοῦ ἁγίου Στεφάνου ἕως τοῦ πραιτωρίου τοῦ στρατηλάτου. ἐγένοντο δὲ καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα ἐμπρησμοὶ πολλοὶ εἰς διαφόρους γειτονίας τῆς αὐτῆς πόλεως, καὶ ἐκαύθησαν πολλοὶ οἶκοι καὶ ἀπώλοντο πολλαὶ ψυχαί, καὶ οὐδεὶς ἐγίνωσκεν, πόθεν τὸ πῦρ ἀνήπτετο.
>
> At that time, when Anatolius, son of Carinus, was *comes Orientis*, it happened that a great conflagration occurred in Antioch, by divine anger. This conflagration announced that the predestined wrath of God was coming. The burned area extended from the shrine of St Stephen to the praetorium of the *magister militum*. Even after this, many conflagrations occurred in various neighbourhoods of the city, and many

houses were burned and many lives were lost and no one could discover whence the fire started.[154]

God's anger is manifest once again, this time in the form of a fire which devastated Antioch. Even this fire was merely a precursor to a greater, predestined wrath which was to come. The conflagration, whose material source was not determined but whose true cause was God, served a predictive function. The citizens of Antioch, in other words, were being warned by this disaster of a greater disaster to come, and should have taken note to avoid God's further displeasure. Unfortunately, from Malalas's perspective, they failed to heed the warning.

After his description of Dyrrachium, Corinth, and the flooding of Edessa, Malalas continues his account of the woes of Antioch. This is among the lengthiest depictions recorded by Malalas, and is worth examining in detail. He begins his account as follows:

> Τῷ δὲ ἑβδόμῳ ἔτει τῆς αὐτοῦ βασιλείας ἔπαθεν ὑπὸ θεομηνίας Ἀντιόχεια ἡ μεγάλη τὸ πέμπτον αὐτῆς πάθος ἐν μηνὶ μαΐῳ, ἐπὶ ὑπατείας Ὀλυβρίου. πολὺς γὰρ ἦν ὁ φόβος ὁ τοῦ θεοῦ γενόμενος κατ' ἐκεῖνον τὸν καιρόν, ὥστε τοὺς συλληφθέντας ὑπὸ τῶν οἰκημάτων ἐν τῇ γῇ καὶ πυρικαύστους γενέσθαι, καὶ ἐκ τοῦ ἀέρος δὲ σπινθῆρας πυρὸς φαίνεσθαι·καὶ ἔκαιον ὡς ἀπὸ ἀστραπῆς τὸν εὑρισκόμενον, καὶ ἐκόχλαζε τὸ ἔδαφος τῆς γῆς, καὶ ἐκεραυνοῦντο οἱ θεμέλιοι, κουφιζόμενοι ὑπὸ τῶν σεισμῶν καὶ ὑπὸ τοῦ πυρὸς τεφρούμενοι, ὥστε καὶ τοῖς φεύγουσιν ὑπήντα τὸ πῦρ. καὶ ἦν ἰδεῖν θαῦμα φοβερὸν καὶ παράδοξον, πῦρ ἐρευγόμενον ὄμβρον, ὄμβρος καμίνων φοβερῶν, φλὸξ εἰς ὑετὸν λυομένη, καὶ ὑετὸς ὡς φλὸξ ἐξαπτόμενος καὶ τοὺς βοῶντας ἐν τῇ γῇ κατανήλισκεν. καὶ ἐκ τούτου Ἀντιόχεια ἄχρηστος ἐγένετο οὐκ ἔμεινε γάρ, εἰ μὴ τὰ πρὸς τὸ ὄρος μόνον παροικούμενα οἰκήματα.
>
> In the seventh year of his reign, in the month of May, Antioch the Great suffered its fifth disaster from the wrath of God, during the consulship of Olybrius. Great was the fear of God that occurred at that time, so that those who had been seized by the earth under the buildings were burnt up and sparks of fire appeared out of the air and burned anyone they found like lightning. The surface of the earth boiled and foundations of buildings were struck by thunderbolts thrown up by the earthquakes and were incinerated by fire, so that even those who fled were met by flames. It was a fearful and incredible marvel to behold, with fire belching out rain, rain falling from fearful furnaces, flame dissolving into showers, and showers kindling like flames consumed even those who were crying out in the earth. And from this, Antioch became desolate, for nothing remained apart from some buildings beside the mountain.[155]

[154] John Malalas, *Chronographia,* XVII.14.52-59 [Thurn (2000), 344].
[155] John Malalas, *Chronographia,* XVII.16.92-20 [Thurn (2000), 346-7].

Antioch, as described by Malalas, was transformed into a complete hellscape. Flames fell like rain, striking people like lightning as they fled, all weapons of God's wrath. The once great city was reduced to a barren wasteland.

Malalas continues, describing the destruction of churches and monasteries in the city. The biggest blow to the city was the destruction of the Great Church, which Malalas describes as follows:

> ἡ δὲ μεγάλη ἐκκλησία Ἀντιοχείας ἡ κτισθεῖσα ὑπὸ Κωνσταντίνου τοῦ μεγάλου βασιλέω τῆς θεομηνίας γενομένης καὶ πάντων πεπτωκότων εἰς τὸ ἔδαφος ἔστη ἐπὶ ἡμέρας ζ΄ μετὰ τὸ γενέσθαι τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ φοβερὰν ἀπειλήν. καὶ αὐτὴ ὑπὸ πυρὸς ληφθεῖσα κατηνέχθη ἕως ἐδάφους.
>
> The great church of Antioch, which had been built by the emperor Constantine the Great, stood for seven days after this tremendous threat from God, when everything else had collapsed to the ground during the wrath of God. This too, having been seized by the fire, collapsed to the ground [156]

Even the Great Church, the cathedral built by Constantine, which hosted luminaries such as John Chrysostom and formed the seat of the patriarchate of Antioch, was not spared God's wrath. The psychological blow of this event, coupled with its ultimate collapse seven days later is palpable in Malalas's account.

While in general Malalas avoids speculation about the events which triggered God's wrath against entire cities, he does give examples of individuals who were punished for sins during the chaos surrounding the earthquake. One such person whom Malalas sees fit to mention was a certain *Silentarius* named Thomas. Malalas provides the following account of his crimes, and the divine retribution which followed:

> ἐν οἷς ἦν ἐν αὐτῷ τῷ καιρῷ ἁρπαγῇ χρησάμενος Θωμᾶς τις σιλεντιάριος, ὅστις ἐξῆλθεν φεύγων ἐκ τῆς θεομηνίας, καὶ ἔξω τῆς πόλεως ὡς ἀπὸ μιλίων τριῶν ἐπὶ τὴν πόρταν τὴν λεγομένην τοῦ ἁγίου Ἰουλιανοῦ οἴκει, καὶ ἀπέσπα πάντα ἐκ τῶν φευγόντων διὰ τῶν οἰκετῶν αὐτοῦ. τοῦτο δὲ διεπράξατο ἐπὶ ἡμέρας τέσσαρας, καὶ ὡς λυμαίνεται πάντα, ἐξαίφνης, ὑγιὴς ὤν, ἐτελεύτησεν, ἐδόξαζον τὸν θεόν. ἡ δὲ αὐτοῦ περιουσία, ἁρπαγεῖσα ἀπώλετο, καὶ ἐν ᾧ τόπῳ ἐτελεύτησεν, καὶ ἐτάφη.
>
> One who plundered at that time was a *Silentarius* called Thomas, who, by fleeing had escaped from the wrath of God and lived three miles out of the city at the place called Saint Julian's Gate, and stole everything from those who were fleeing by means of his servants. He did this for four days, and as he was polluting everything,

[156] John Malalas, *Chronographia,* XVII.16.25-30 [Thurn (2000), 347].

> suddenly, despite his good health, he suddenly died, and everyone glorified God. His property was stolen and lost. He was buried there, in the place where he died.[157]

Thomas, a government official, managed to rob with impunity, even apparently maintaining his health. However, appearances were deceiving as God struck him down without warning. It is interesting that his crimes are described as pollution, and that he is targeted as an office holder. Malalas appears to be incorporating social commentary in his depiction of the destruction, calling out corruption in the face of tragedy.

Malalas's description of God's wrath is an important step in proto-apocalyptic discourse. As we will see below, he revisits this theme in his depictions of the second great disaster of the sixth century, the bubonic plague. Developing an interpretative apparatus which interpreted disasters as part of a providential plan was critical to later authors who used this method to comprehend disaster. Malalas differs, however, in that he offers no call to repentance, and stops short of diagnosing imperial sin. Later writers established hope of deliverance by naming the sins of the empire and suggesting that God would relent if the people would turn from their sinful ways.

4. Justinian

Malalas addresses the reign of Justinian in book 17, the longest by far of his *Chronographia*. While much of the content is a mundane record of the events of Justinian's reign, he provides interesting glimpses into the apocalyptic fervour which continued to grow during the sixth century. We will pass over further descriptions of natural disasters as "the wrath of God". However, the reactions to one such disaster are worth close examination.

When Antioch was hit by yet another earthquake during the reign of Justinian, the emperor and the people had a unique response:

> Ἐν αὐτῷ δὲ τῷ χρόνῳ μετεκλήθη Ἀντιόχεια Θεούπολις κατὰ κέλευσιν τοῦ αὐτοῦ βασιλέως. εὑρέθη δὲ καὶ ἐν τῇ αὐτῇ Ἀντιοχείᾳ χρησμὸς ἀναγεγραμμένος, περιέχων οὕτως· 'καὶ σύ, τάλαινα πόλις, Ἀντιόχου οὐ κληθήσῃ.' ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ἐν τοῖς χαρτίοις εὑρέθη τῶν τὰ ἄκτα γραφόντων τῆς αὐτῆς πόλεως, ὅτι ἔκραζον κληδόνα διδοῦντες εἰς τὸ μετακληθῆναι τὴν αὐτὴν πόλιν.

[157] John Malalas, *Chronographia,* XVII.16.66-79 [Thurn (2000), 348].

> At that time, Antioch was renamed Theoupolis by order of the emperor. Also, a written oracle was discovered at Antioch, which read as follows, "And you, wretched city, shall not be called the city of Antiochos". Likewise, it was found in the papers of those who record the acts in the city, that they had provided an omen when they had chanted for the city's name to be changed.[158]

It is unclear why Justinian ordered the name of Antioch to be changed to Theoupolis. It seems to have been done at the instigation of the people. Perhaps they believed that by changing the name to Theoupolis, or City of God, it would repel further divine wrath. This action in itself is illustrative of the mindset of the Byzantines, who sought to prevent disaster by placating God.

According to Malalas, however, the change of name had the opposite effect, becoming an omen and fulfilling another lost oracle that predicted that Antioch would be unhappy once the name was changed. The appeal to another lost oracle, like the tablet discovered in the rubble of the earlier earthquake, shows a rise in minor apocalyptic texts. Whether these texts were literary devices, actual discoveries, or contemporary compositions is largely irrelevant to the point at hand. Regardless of their authenticity, Romans in the sixth century began to turn to oracles to provide answers to otherwise incomprehensible disasters. By locating the cause of disasters in preordained events, some semblance of order could be assured.

Malalas later records a celestial event to which he attributes a rash of tragic events and crimes. The account is given as follows:

> Ἐπὶ δὲ τῆς αὐτῆς βασιλείας ἐφάνη ἀστὴρ μέγας καὶ φοβερὸς κατὰ τὸ δυσικὸν μέρος, <κομήτης> πέμπων ἐπὶ τὰ ἄνω ἀκτῖνα λευκήν, ὁ δὲ χαρακτὴρ αὐτοῦ ἀστραπὰς ἀπέπεμπεν·ὃν ἔλεγόν τινες εἶναι λαμπαδίαν. ἔμεινεν δὲ ἐπὶ ἡμέρας εἴκοσι ἐκλάμπων, καὶ ἐγένοντο ἀνυδρίαι καὶ κατὰ πόλιν δημοτικοὶ φόνοι καὶ ἄλλα πολλὰ ἀπειλῆς πεπληρωμένα.
>
> During this reign, a great and fearful star appeared in the western region, a "comet", sending a white beam upwards; its surface emitted flashes of lightning, which some people said was a torch-comet. It remained, shining, for 20 days, and there were droughts and murders during riots in every city, and many other events full of ill omen.[159]

Malalas directly associates this celestial event with droughts, murders, riots and other events across the empire. Malalas does not directly attribute the events to the comet's appearance, but

[158] John Malalas, *Chronographia,* XVIII.29.1-6 [Thurn (2000), 371].
[159] John Malalas, *Chronographia,* XVIII.52.26-30 [Thurn (2000), 382].

their close association indicates an implied cause and effect. His willingness to make such connections is indicative of larger apocalyptic trends during the century.

Malalas's account of the Nika riots which brought Constantinople to its knees contains a fascinating theory of supernatural causation.[160] Regarding its initiation, Malalas gives the following account:

> Ἐν αὐτῷ δὲ τῷ χρόνῳ τῆς δεκάτης ἰνδικτιῶνος συνέβη ὑπό τινων ἀλαστόρων δαιμόνων πρόφασιν γενέσθαι ταραχῆς ἐν Βυζαντίῳ, Εὐδαίμονος ἐπάρχου πόλεως ὄντος καὶ ἔχοντος ἀτάκτους ἐν φρουρᾷ ἐξ ἀμφοτέρων τῶν μερῶν
>
> At that time of the 10th indiction, a pretext for rioting, caused by some avenging demons, occurred in Byzantion when Eudaimon was eparch of the city and was holding in custody trouble makers from both factions.[161]

In this passage, Malalas attributes the root cause of the Nika riots to the provocation of "avenging demons". There is a sense in Malalas's writings that all of the major tragedies of the empire can be attributed to a supernatural cause, in this case, the work of demonic forces. It is possible that Malalas was making a pun, comparing the avenging "δαιμόνων" to the prefect, Εὐδαίμονος.

Malalas continues his account of the revolt, recording the plot and its demonic origins in the following passage:

> τοῦ δὲ ἱπποδρομίου ἀγομένου τῇ τρεισκαιδεκάτῃ τοῦ ἰανουαρίου μηνὸς τὰ ἀμφότερα μέρη παρεκάλουν τὸν βασιλέα φιλανθρωπευθῆναι. ἐπέμενον δὲ κράζοντες ἕως τοῦ εἰκοστοῦ δευτέρου βαΐου, καὶ ἀποκρίσεως οὐκ ἠξιώθησαν. τοῦ δὲ διαβόλου ἐμβαλόντος αὐτοῖς λογισμὸν πονηρὸν ἔκραζον πρὸς ἀλλήλους· 'φιλανθρώπων Πρασίνων καὶ Βενέτων πολλὰ τὰ ἔτη.' καὶ τοῦ ἱππικοῦ ἀπολύσαντες κατῆλθαν τὰ πλήθη φιλιάσαντα, δεδωκότες ἑαυτοῖς μανδάτα ἐκ τοῦ λέγειν 'Νίκα', διὰ τὸ μὴ ἀναμιγῆναι αὐτοῖς στρατιώτας ἢ ἐξκουβίτορας καὶ οὕτως εἰσέλαυνον.
>
> While the chariot-racing was being held on 13th January, both factions began to call upon the emperor to show mercy. They continued chanting until the 22nd race and they were not granted an answer. Then the devil prompted evil counsels in them and they chanted to one another, "Many years to the merciful Blues and Greens!" After the races the crowds went off united, having given themselves a command with the word, "Nika!" so as not to be infiltrated by soldiers or excubitores, and so they marched on.[162]

[160] On the Nika riots, see Cameron (1973).
[161] John Malalas, *Chronographia,* XVIII.71.26-29 [Thurn (2000), 394-395].
[162] John Malalas, *Chronographia,* XVIII.71.44-51 [Thurn (2000), 395].

Here, we see again it is the devil who prompts the evil counsels within the hearts of the leaders of the circus factions. Malalas conceives of the revolts as being supernaturally provoked, from beginning to end, by demons. It is curious that the events of the Nika riots are given demonic origins, whereas natural disasters are said to be the wrath of God. There seems to be a link between demonic forces and manmade disasters, and divine wrath and natural disasters.

One of the most direct examples of apocalyptic discourse can be found in a sceptical account provided by Malalas of a woman who prophesied that the city would sink. Malalas provides the following account:

> γυνή τις καταμένουσα πλησίον τῆς λεγομένης Χρυσῆς πόρτας χρηματισθεῖσα ἐν μιᾷ νυκτὶ ἐφλυάρησε πολλά, ὥστε συνδραμεῖν τὰ πλήθη Κωνσταντινουπόλεως καὶ ἀπελθεῖν λιτανεύοντα εἰς τὸν ἅγιον Διομήδην εἰς Ἰερουσαλὴμ καὶ καταγαγεῖν τὴν γυναῖκα ἐκ τοῦ οἴκου αὐτῆς καὶ εἰσαγαγεῖν εἰς τὴν ἐκκλησίαν τοῦ ἁγίου Διομήδους· ἔλεγε γάρ, ὅτι μετὰ τρεῖς ἡμέρας ἀνέρχεται ἡ θάλασσα καὶ πάντας λαμβάνει. καὶ πάντων λιτανευόντων καὶ κραζόντων τὸ ‘κύριε ἐλέησον·’ ἠκούετο γάρ, ὅτι καὶ πόλεις πολλαὶ κατεπόθησαν.
>
> A woman living near the place called the Golden Gate went into ecstasy one night and spoke a lot of nonsense, so that the people of Constantinople came running up and went off in a procession of prayer to Saint Diomedes-in-Jerusalem. They took the woman out of her house and took her to the church of Saint Diomedes, for she was saying that after three days, the sea would rise and take everybody. And everybody was processing and chanting, “Lord, have mercy”, for it was reported that many cities had been swallowed up.[163]

This passage, like the account of Agathias discussed above, reveals the level of apocalyptic speculation which had taken hold of Constantinople by the time of the reign of Justinian. It rose to such a degree that individuals who claimed ecstatic revelation were gaining followings through predictions of imminent destruction. According to Malalas, the news spread after an outbreak of the plague in Egypt. The hysteria had risen to such a degree that Justinian himself was alerted.[164]

The *Chronographia* of John Malalas is an example of what I have referred to as nascent apocalyptic discourse. John’s use of such discourse is inconsistent; at times embracing apocalyptic rhetoric, at times critical of its use, and at other times unwilling to take a position or

[163] John Malalas, *Chronographia,* XVIII.90.87-95 [Thurn (2000), 407].
[164] John Malalas, *Chronographia,* XVIII.90 [Thurn (2000), 407-408].

take his expressions of divine wrath to their fullest conclusions. Apocalyptic, while present, is not a predominant or even sustained theme.

John's primary goal was to situate the reign of his contemporary emperors, particularly Justinian, and the empire itself in the long scheme of history dating to Adam. In many ways, the project of the world chronicle, a unique Byzantine historical genre which transformed Byzantine literature for centuries to come, laid the foundation for later authors who employed apocalyptic discourse to situate themselves and their empire in the larger succession of kingdoms. It seems fitting that a century which dawned with high millennial expectations would also see the creation by Malalas of a genre which would make later works like the *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius possible.

c. John of Ephesus

We will now turn our attention to the fragmentary *Chronicle* of John of Ephesus. John was a Syriac anti-Chalcedonian monk who wrote during the reign of Justinian. Unfortunately, the bulk of John's *Chronicle* was lost to history. However, significant portions were preserved, quoted verbatim in the eighth-century *Chronicle* of Pseudo-Dionysius of Tel-Mahre.[165] Although fragmentary, the sections preserved are an important witness to the sixth century, and provide the rare account of an anti-Chalcedonian partisan of the thoroughly Chalcedonian emperor Justinian.[166] His account borrows heavily from John Malalas, while providing extra detail in critical areas, particularly in his account of the plague.[167] Moreover, John of Ephesus is more prone to emotional lamentation than his Antiochene contemporary, and frequently provides a more direct witness to nascent apocalyptic discourse. It is not surprising that much of the seventh century's apocalyptic output originated in the Syriac tradition, perhaps influenced in part by John's historical approach.

John's account is too long to examine in the course of a thematic chapter. To avoid repetition, I will focus primarily on apocalyptic passages unique to John. These are frequently

[165] Witakowski (1996), xxvi.
[166] Witakowski (1996), xvi.
[167] Witakowski (1996),xxix.

found in the hagiographical accounts of persecution of anti-Chalcedonian Christians. I will pass over material covered by both John of Ephesus and John Malalas, except in cases where John adds unique apocalyptic details. The primary exception to this approach will be our examination of John's description of the plague, which is the largest and most detailed extant contemporary account of the epidemic. We will treat his description with other contemporary accounts below in a separate section.

1. Demons

Demonic influence plays a significant role in John's history. Demons are frequently credited as sources of heresy, such as a group of heretics who renounced all food except for the Eucharist.[168] One noteworthy example involved demons entering a group of pilgrims who travelled to observe the feast of the exultation of the Holy Cross. John records the account as follows:

> The year 828 (A.D. 516/7): many people of (Upper) Egypt, Alexandria and Transjordania-Edomites and Arabs-gathered and came to the feast of the Encaenia, of the setting up of the Cross in Jerusalem, which took place on the 14th September. Then demons entered into many (of them) and they barked at the Cross like dogs. Then (the demons) calmed down and left them.[169]

The demonic activity described here is brief and involuntary, and ends as quickly as it began. What makes this incident unique is that John suggests that the possession was permitted by God for a specific purpose. John records the purpose as follows:

> This caused a lot of anxiety and distress to discerning people, but they could not understand exactly the cause until the event itself manifested the outcome: God had let people know beforehand about the strife concerning the faith which came thereafter, and the scandals which subsequently occurred.[170]

According to John, this incident of possession served a divine purpose, namely, to warn of coming theological controversy. This becomes a recurring theme in John who is generally more explicit than Malalas in defining the purpose of divinely ordained events. God, here through

[168] *John of Ephesus, Chronicle, an.* 821 [Chabot (1895), 9-10]. Trans. Witakowski (1996), 11.
[169] *John of Ephesus, Chronicle, an.* 828 [Chabot (1895), 14]. Trans. Witakowski (1996), 16.
[170] *John of Ephesus, Chronicle, an.* 828 [Chabot (1895), 14]. Trans. Witakowski (1996), 16.

demons, warns his people of impending crisis. By extension, the people are partially blamed for not heeding divine warnings.

One event which is witnessed by both John of Ephesus and Malalas is the comet which was seen during the reign of Justin. It is worth noting here, due to John's account of the popular reaction, which offers greater detail than that given by Malalas. John notes:

> The year 836 (A.D. 524/5): before that, however, at the beginning of the reign of the emperor Justin, a star appeared in the East, similar to a huge spear. The point of the spear was turned downwards. It revolved in a frightening way and long rays were seen by everyone to come out of it. It was called, according to the Greeks, a "comet". Fear overwhelmed everybody who saw how awfully it arose, looked and shone, and how it revolved and altered in a threatening fashion, so that many people would talk about many things they thought to be imminent in the future-a chastisement, war and perdition, (all of it) because of the terrible appearance of the star.[171]

We find here that John is more explicit regarding the portentous nature of the comet, and the popular fear which resulted. John expounds upon this further in the following:

> Nor was there any delay in these things: many afflictions followed quickly along with war causing much bloodshed. Also, what is most grievous and bitter, it soon brought about turmoil in the Church, (that is) dissensions, disagreements, persecutions, killings and (other) evils.[172]

For John, who clearly accepted the portentous nature of the comet, the omen carried greater warnings regarding the persecution of the anti-Chalcedonian party. Malalas, a firm Chalcedonian, makes no associations between the comet and anti-Chalcedonian oppression. John also immediately follows the account of the comet with a description of the earthquake at Antioch, which borrows heavily from Malalas.

John's record of the comet provides both direct and indirect witness to the growth of nascent apocalyptic discourse in the sixth century. The indirect evidence comes in the relatively detailed description of popular reactions to the comet, as well as a more threatening description of the comet itself. The direct witness comes from John's own testimony. Unlike Malalas, who focuses only on descriptions of popular reactions, John himself clearly accepted that the comet was a sign of the disasters that he would witness later. It is interesting that both authors recorded

[171] *John of Ephesus, Chronicle, an.* 836 [Chabot (1895), 19-20]. Trans. Witakowski (1996), 21.
[172] *John of Ephesus, Chronicle, an.* 836 [Chabot (1895), 19-20]. Trans. Witakowski (1996), 21.

the comet well after the natural disasters befell the empire. In hindsight, it would have been reasonable for both authors to label the comet as a portent. However, only John makes a direct association between the comet and the concrete events which occurred. Malalas, on the other hand, only records a general sense of anxiety and chooses not to directly attribute a divine warning to the comet. This is particularly interesting as Malalas was not afraid to consider disasters themselves as divine chastisement or warnings of future turmoil.

Later in his account, John recalls a story about the anti-Chalcedonian bishop Mar Jacob, who was invited to come to Antioch by the zealous Chalcedonian patriarch Paul, whom John refers to as Paul the Jew. John gives the following account of the invitation, and Mar Jacob's response:

> Paul invited the blessed Mar Jacob, the bishop and teacher of Batnae of Serugh, to visit him. He, however, excused himself from coming because he saw that (Paul) was not sound in his faith. When Paul put pressure on the blessed man to come, he entered the church and threw himself before the altar and prayed with grief, and with many tears. He said, "My Lord God, (who) knowest what is in the hearts of all (people), and who examinest kidneys and hearts: if Thou knowest that the false teaching of the Two Natures is in Paul's heart, let me not see his face".[173]

As a testimony of the holiness of Mar Jacob, God answers his prayer in the following way:

> In the night it was revealed to him about his (own) departure, and he was ordered to return to his city. So he rose in (the middle of) the night, hastened to his attendants (to tell) them promptly to prepare the beasts of burden for the journey back to (their) city. He said, "In two days I shall depart this world", and to the astonishment and amazement of his attendants he returned and arrived in his city.[174]

In similar fashion to Malalas's account of Anastasius, God revealed the details of Mar Jacob's death in a dream. We do not have the details of the dream, but when the prediction came true the people were astounded and praised God.[175]

This passage is further witness to the prevailing belief that dreams can reveal divine revelation of the future. There appears to be no hesitation to accept the accounts of dreams as accurate testimony, which can inspire dread, as in the case of Malalas's testimony of Anastasius's dream, or comfort in the case of Mar Jacob. Dreams appear to have little relation to piety,

[173] *John of Ephesus, Chronicle, an.* 837 [Chabot (1895), 26]. Trans. Witakowski (1996), 26-27.
[174] *John of Ephesus, Chronicle, an.* 837 [Chabot (1895), 26]. Trans. Witakowski (1996), 27.
[175] *John of Ephesus, Chronicle, an.* 837 [Chabot (1895), 27]. Trans. Witakowski (1996), 27.

appearing both to the emperor because of his excess, and to Mar Jacob due to his holiness and access to God. As we will see in later chapters, dreams continued to play a crucial role in seventh-century Byzantine apocalyptic discourse, as witnessed in the works of Theophylact Simocatta, and the trial of Maximus the Confessor.

2. Divine Retribution

Like Malalas, John of Ephesus attributed natural disasters to the wrath of God, as divine chastisement for sins. John gives an account of the flood of Edessa which parallels Malalas, with the similar conclusion that the flood was sent by divine wrath. However, unlike Malalas, John locates the cause of divine wrath in the activities of Asclepius, the Chalcedonian bishop of Edessa, who actively persecuted the anti-Chalcedonian community.

While much of John's account of the flood borrows from Malalas, John records a fascinating debate concerning the true meaning of the flood and the cause of God's chastisement. John records this debate as follows:

> Thus the day before that disaster of the flood the wicked Asclepius, who was the bishop of the city, seized monks from all sides, about ten blessed and chaste anchorites and tortured them in order that they might accept communion with him….But that night the flood came, and so it seemed to everybody that it was because of the tribulation of these blessed men that God became angry with the bishop and the city.[176]

The anti-Chalcedonian community located the cause of the flood directly as punishment for Asclepius's torture of anti-Chalcedonian monks. However, the anti-Chalcedonians were not the only ones to offer an interpretation of this event. When it was realized that Asclepius had survived the flood, John records the following Chalcedonian response:

> After the city had been emptied of the water, all who had survived took stones and rushed to the bishop's house to stone Asclepius. But he managed to hide himself, escape from them and flee to Antioch to Euphrasius, whose opinions he shared. Euphrasius having received him had him come up together with himself to the *bema*, where he preached about him to (the people of) the city in these words: "Come and see the second Noah, who like (the first) in the ark has also been saved, from the second flood".[177]

[176] *John of Ephesus, Chronicle, an.* 836 [Chabot (1895), 46]. Trans. Witakowski (1996), 43.
[177] *John of Ephesus, Chronicle, an.* 836 [Chabot (1895), 46-7]. Trans. Witakowski (1996), 43.

It is difficult to judge the veracity of this account, which is not recorded in Malalas, who offers no specific cause for the flood beyond divine chastisement. If it is true, it provides witness of a competing apocalyptic discourse of divine chastisement to interpret the cause of the disaster which befell Edessa. In this case, the anti-Chalcedonians attributed the flood to divine punishment for Asclepius's persecution, while the Chalcedonians interpreted the flood as a divine cleansing of Edessa from the so-called heresy of miaphysitism. John concludes the account by noting that Asclepius died in Antioch without returning to Edessa, and continues with his account of the earthquake in Antioch, which mirrors that of Malalas.

It is worth considering once more Malalas's silence regarding the trigger for the divine punishment associated with the flood. As we have noted, Malalas was a staunch Chalcedonian, and as such he makes no mention of the persecution by Asclepius or allied bishops of the anti-Chalcedonian community. Malalas's silence here is glaring, and suggests that he may have been aware of Asclepius's actions, and chose to ignore it and the popular belief that the flood was sent to punish Asclepius precisely because it reflected negatively upon pro-Chalcedonian religious policy. This is admittedly speculative; however, it is otherwise difficult to explain Malalas's silence about a popular uprising in the wake of the disaster.

After an account of various persecutions and natural disasters, John records a unique astronomical event not mentioned by Malalas. In 530 a dramatic eclipse occurred, which John records as follows:

> The year 842 (A.D. 530/1): the sun darkened and stayed covered with darkness a year and a half, that is eighteen months. Although rays were visible around it for two or three hours (a day) they were as if diseased, with the result that fruits did not reach full ripeness. All the wine had the taste of reject grapes. Then the Lord let his mercy appear to his creation and shine upon it. And again the people reverted to hardness of heart without fear, just as before.[178]

This passage records yet another portentous event, an extended eclipse which had a dramatic effect on local viticulture. It is worth noting that there is debate as to whether the word "year"

[178] *John of Ephesus, Chronicle, an.* 842 [Chabot (1895), 70-1]. Trans. Witakowski (1996), 65.

was an early scribal error in place of "hour".[179] Regardless, the effect recorded was initially troubling. John indicates that this event was caused by God to provoke repentance. However, once the eclipse had passed, the people returned to their recalcitrant ways.

This passage provides an example of a recurring theme in John's *Chronicle,* namely, that God intervenes in nature to promote repentance. While similar language is used by Malalas, John of Ephesus is far more explicit, and in many ways, mirrors the language used by later authors to describe the catastrophes which would befall the empire. John provides a direct witness to the growth of apocalyptic discourse in the sixth century. What is noteworthy in John became common place in the seventh century, as we will see.

V. The Plague: God's Rod of Chastisement

Perhaps the single greatest source of apocalyptic speculation was due to the outbreak of the bubonic plague which ravaged the entire Byzantine empire. Entire cities were emptied of their inhabitants, and an incalculable number of casualties dramatically reduced the population of the empire. Sources are consistent in describing hellish scenes in which nobody was left to bury the dead, and in which seemingly healthy individuals died without warning or symptoms. The plague was depicted as a great equalizer, sparing neither sinner nor saint, rich nor poor. Even the emperor Justinian contracted the disease, though he managed to survive.

Studying the plague from the perspective of apocalyptic discourse presents several challenges. Among the widely recorded symptoms were ghastly visions which preceded more familiar physical symptoms such as buboes and pustules.[180] It is difficult, therefore, to determine whether such recorded visions were simply the result of hallucinations spurred on by infection, or rumours which spread rapidly as part of a larger apocalyptic discourse employed to understand the outbreak. For our purposes, this chapter will treat such visions, and other closely related manifestations, as an element of apocalyptic discourse. I do this largely because they accompany other apocalyptic tropes such as omens and divine chastisement.

[179] Witakowski (1996), 65 n. 309.
[180] For an analysis of the plague, see Allen (1979), Meier (2016).

As the plague was covered by each of the historians under consideration, I have decided to treat it as a separate theme, rather than part of the larger discussion of individual authors. As the primary instigator of apocalyptic discourse, it requires a closer, independent study. This approach also allows us to compare the accounts of multiple sources, which will allow us to draw wider conclusions about sixth-century Roman culture as a whole.

a. John Malalas

Perhaps our least detailed account of the plague comes from John Malalas's *Chronographia*. Malalas opens his account of the "Justinianic" plague with the following sombre observation:

> Ἰδὼν δὲ κύριος ὁ θεός, ὅτι ἐπληθύνθησαν αἱ ἀνομίαι τῶν ἀνθρώπων, ἐπήγαγε πτῶσιν ἀνθρώπων ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς εἰς ἐξάλειψιν ἐν πάσαις ταῖς πόλεσι καὶ ἐν ταῖς χώραις. ἐπεκράτησεν γὰρ ἡ θνῆσις ἐπὶ χρόνον, ὥστε μὴ αὐταρκεῖν τοὺς θάπτοντας. τινὲς γὰρ καὶ ἐκ τῶν ἰδίων οἴκων ἐν ξυλίνοις κραβάτοις ἐξέφερον, καὶ οὐδὲ οὕτως ἐξήρκουν. ἔμενον γὰρ καί τινα τῶν σκηνωμάτων ἐπὶ ἡμέρας ἄταφα·τινὲς γὰρ καὶ τῶν ἰδίων προσγενῶν τὴν ταφὴν οὐκ ἔβλεπον. ἐπεκράτησεν δὲ ἡ εὐσπλαγχνία τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν Βυζαντίῳ ἐπὶ μῆνας δύο.
>
> The Lord God, seeing that lawlessness of humanity had multiplied, caused the fall of humanity upon the earth, leading to its destruction in all cities and in all of the countryside. Death prevailed for some time, so that there were not enough people to perform burial rites. For some carried out the corpses from their own homes on wooden litters, and even so, it was not enough. Some of the corpses remained unburied for days. For some people could not attend the burial of their own relatives. The compassion of God prevailed in Byzantium for two months.[181]

Malalas's account of the plague is brief and to the point. However, in this short description, he manages to pack a rich description replete with apocalyptic discourse. Malalas describes the plague as an "overthrow of humanity" due to humanity's "lawlessness". Malalas interpreted the plague as a righteous cleansing, and even referred to it as "the compassion of God".

This is perhaps the grimmest account in the entirety of Malalas's *Chronographia*. Malalas's account is filled with contempt for Byzantium's population and their sins, which is in stark contrast to the more muted accounts of other disasters. One might consider it a moment of

[181] John Malalas, *Chronographia*, XVIII.92 [Thurn (2000), 407].

candour, perhaps even a subtle *Kaiserkritik* aimed at Justinian's reign, in an author who has been considered a counter-witness to Procopius's biting imperial critique in the *Secret History.*[182]

b. John of Ephesus

The longest and most detailed account of the plague comes from John of Ephesus. His is also the most emotional account. He explicitly chose to style his description of the plague after the book of Lamentations, stating that "the blessed prophet Jeremiah has proved most helpful to us, being versed in raising songs of lamentation amid groans over the afflictions and the ruin of his people".[183] His opening is a list of lamentations, illustrating the sudden destruction and mourning the beauty destroyed in an instant. His central theme is that the woe was visited by God in response to the people's sins.

John recounts that he was initially hesitant to bother writing an account, considering no words would suffice to recount the gravity of the destruction to which he bore witness.[184] Ultimately, however, he decided it was necessary to warn future generations, as he says:

> Even if together with us they are knocking on the gate of the consummation, perhaps (during) this remainder of the world which will come after us they will fear and shake because of the terrible scourge with which we were lashed through our transgressions and become wiser through the chastisement of us wretches and be saved from (God's) wrath here (in this world) and from future torment.[185]

For John, the plague, like so many disasters, was a source of pedagogical chastisement. John felt compelled to relay the details of the plague in hopes that future generations would heed the message and refrain from the sin which had befallen the empire.

The details recorded by John tell of a population which was caught up in an apocalyptic terror. Mass hysteria, perhaps early onset symptoms of the plague itself, befell communities before initial outbreaks. John recalls one particularly ghastly vision seen by many victims just before the spread of an outbreak. John describes these visions as follows:

> Now when the chastisement had been fulfilled it began to cross the sea to Palestine and the region of Jerusalem; furthermore, some terrible shapes also appeared to people at sea…many people saw shapes of bronze boats and (figures) sitting in them

[182] Scott (1985).
[183] *John of Ephesus, Chronicle, an.* 855 [Chabot (1895), 79]. Trans. Witakowski (1996), 74.
[184] *John of Ephesus, Chronicle, an.* 855 [Chabot (1895), 81]. Trans. Witakowski (1996), 75.
[185] *John of Ephesus, Chronicle, an.* 855 [Chabot (1895), 82]. Trans. Witakowski (1996), 76.

> resembling people with their heads cut off. Holding staves, also of bronze, they moved along on the sea and could be seen going whithersoever they headed. These figures were seen everywhere in a frightening fashion, especially at night. Like flashing bronze and like fire did they appear, black people without heads sitting in a glistening boat and travelling swiftly on the sea, so that this sight almost caused the souls of the people who saw it to expire.[186]

The visions of these death ships, supposedly seen by many, preceded the plague's advance and served as harbingers of divine chastisement. Whether these were hallucinations provoked by the illness has been debated. Regardless, the imagery provokes a sense of apocalyptic dread and divine inevitability.

John provides another moralising tale concerning the looting by unscrupulous characters profiting from destruction. In what John describes as "another sign of menace and God's just sentence", he relates the story of seven men and one boy who were the sole survivors in an Egyptian border city. They conspired among themselves to gather the riches of the dead from the now abandoned houses. They proceeded in this fashion for three days, until, according to John:

> On the third day (when) they were carrying (the booty) and entering the house, there, inside the house, (God's) wrath came upon them. Immediately they fell and all of them except that little boy within one hour perished on top of (the booty) they had gathered.[187]

John recounts that the boy, as the sole survivor, attempted to leave the city. However, at each attempt he was prevented by a ghastly figure. As John states:

> He went, but when he reached the gate of the city something in the shape of a man seized him, brought him back and set him in the doorway of the house filled with what the (seven men) had gathered. Many times it treated him in this way.

In the end, one of the original inhabitants, while praying and living a life of repentance, heard of the fate of the city. He decided to send an agent on his behalf to check on his property. When the agent discovered the boy and his dead companions, not learning from their mistakes he attempted to take the treasures for himself. Predictably, things did not end well. John records his fate in the following:

> Thus he entered and carried out as much of that gold as he was able (to load) on his pack animals. Then he also took along that boy and tried to leave, but when he

[186] *John of Ephesus, Chronicle, an.* 855 [Chabot (1895), 83]. Trans. Witakowski (1996), 77.
[187] *John of Ephesus, Chronicle, an.* 855 [Chabot (1895), 84]. Trans. Witakowski (1996), 78.

> reached the gate of the city (something) resembling a man rushed after him, caught him, bound both him and the boy and brought them back. Being seized, he took thought that (all) this was happening because of that gold, while the others called out to him: "Come back and put it in its place and perhaps you will be released". Then he and that boy came back to the house and when they entered (it) both of them perished. The rest of them fled and thus they were saved.[188]

Greed overcame each of the individuals in this account, all of whom tried to take advantage of the tragedy of the plague for personal gain. In each case, the would-be thieves survived the plague only to be hunted by a supernatural force avenging their crimes.

Supernatural activities were not limited to thieves robbing the dead. The disasters of the plague made people desperate to do anything they could to avoid death and despair. One example of such behaviour can be found in John's account of some local Egyptians who were deceived by demons into idolatry in a vain attempt to ward off the plague. John records the deception as follows:

> Demons appeared to (its inhabitants) in the shape of angels. They deceived them saying that they should make haste to worship an idol of bronze which had been left like other bronze statues which now stand in cities. Previously it had been (one of) the idols of the pagans and also it had a name and it was even now secretly worshipped by those few who were caught up in paganism. Thus, the demons made the entire city worship (the idol) saying: "If you first worship such and such an idol, death will not enter this city".[189]

This passage reveals the level of despair which had befallen the community. Its members were willing to do anything to prevent the devastation of the plague, including abandoning their faith and worshipping idols. According to John, demons took advantage of their despair to lead Christians astray.

However, in this case of the Egyptians, God was not willing to abide demonic activity. In response to their idolatry, God visited his wrath upon the worshippers through supernatural means. John describes their punishment in the following passage:

> To this they were led by their error, for (they thought) they would escape death. Knowing not the second death after this one, all of them fell down and worshipped that idol. But because (of that) the divine power revealed itself on account of their error: when they (were standing) gathered before the statue, suddenly, in order that others might not yield to such error, a whirlwind as it were entered into this idol and

[188] *John of Ephesus, Chronicle, an.* 855 [Chabot (1895), 85]. Trans. Witakowski (1996), 79.
[189] *John of Ephesus, Chronicle, an.* 855 [Chabot (1895), 85-6]. Trans. Witakowski (1996), 79

> lifted it about 1000 fathoms, as far up as the eye could see, and threw it down with force from all that height upon the surface of the earth.[190]

God reveals his divine power through the destruction of the idol, and the revelation of demonic folly. The account also serves a moralising function. The Egyptians were so concerned with preserving their earthly lives that they neglected eternal life in a vain attempt to prevent bodily death. This is a recurring theme in John, particularly regarding the plague. The Romans had become too fearful of death and were so concerned with its prevention that they neglected their salvation.

John's account of the foolish Egyptians ends with an association of the idolaters with a prophecy from the book of Isaiah. John notes their death as follows:

> And the sword of death fell upon (these people) and towards evening no living soul could be found in the city, but it was as is written in the prophet, "Now all of them have perished since they did not remember the name of the Lord". So it befell them too.[191]

John interprets the idolatrous Egyptians as a fulfilment of prophecy. The idolaters had brought God's wrath not only upon themselves, but upon the entire population of the city. This passage reveals not only the desperation incurred by the plague, but also speed and devastation with which the pestilence took effect, in this case wiping out an entire city.

John frequently makes use of Isaiah to interpret the events of the plague, building upon the theme of lamentations. We see an example of this practise in the following passage:

> At the sight of these things we had occasion also to recall what had previously been said by the blessed prophet when he prophesied saying, "The earth shall be laid utterly waste and be utterly despoiled", and "the earth shall be utterly stirred up and shall utterly totter and shall be utterly shaken and shall quiver like a hut, and its iniquity shall prevail over it" and, "it shall be burned again like a terebinth or an oak, which fell out from its acorn cup;" all these things were completely fulfilled in our days, not over a long period but in a short time.[192]

John's despair in this account is palpable. The prophetic discourse reveals a society devastated and wasted. Again, John, unlike other contemporaries, continued to see the disasters of the plague as the fulfillment of prophecy, and anticipated the destruction of the earth in his lifetime.

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[190] *John of Ephesus, Chronicle, an.* 855 [Chabot (1895), 86]. Trans. Witakowski (1996), 79-80.
[191] *John of Ephesus, Chronicle, an.* 855 [Chabot (1895), 86]. Trans. Witakowski (1996), 80.
[192] *John of Ephesus, Chronicle, an.* 855 [Chabot (1895), 88]. Trans. Witakowski (1996), 81.

John's prophetic worldview was confirmed, according to his account, by the earthquakes which preceded the plague. In the following passage, John builds his case for the prophetic nature of these events:

> However, in the year preceding the plague, earthquakes and heavy tremblings beyond description took place five times during our stay in this city. These which occurred were not rapid as the twinkling of the eye and transient, but took a long time until the hope of life expired from all human beings and was cut off, as there was no delay after the passing of each of these earthquakes. And thereafter they ceased, (or), as is written in the prophecy, after "the earth had been violently shaken".[193]

In this case, the earthquakes were interpreted both as signs of the disasters to come, and as a fulfillment of the prophecy. John's nascent apocalyptic discourse is illustrative of the way in which he and his contemporaries understood the place of the Roman Empire in prophetic history. The prophetic books, particularly Isaiah, referred to contemporary times, not ancient Israel nor some distant future.

Toward the conclusion of his chronicle, John recalls another instance in which demons took advantage of the chaos and fear associated with the plague to deceive the people. John begins his discussion of this event as follows:

> It happened in this way: being stupefied and confused each talked to his friend like men drunk as a result of liquor, thus through drunkenness resulting from the chastisement people were easily led to madness of mind.[194]

Here we see that the devastation of the plague caused such mental trauma that people began to go mad, resembling drunk men in their interactions with their friends and neighbours. As John's account progresses, he observes that the state of madness resulting from the plague made people uniquely vulnerable to demonic influence. In one instance, John observes the following:

> (The latter) happened indeed in this city: the demons wanted to lead people astray and to laugh at their madness. A rumour from somebody spread among those who had survived, that if they threw pitchers from the windows of their upper storeys on to the streets and they burst below, death would flee from the city. When foolish women, [out of their] minds, succumbed to this folly in one neighbourhood and threw pitchers out ...[195]

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[193] *John of Ephesus, Chronicle, an.* 855 [Chabot (1895), 88-89]. Trans. Witakowski (1996), 82.
[194] *John of Ephesus, Chronicle, an.* 855 [Chabot (1895), 108]. Trans. Witakowski (1996), 97.
[195] *John of Ephesus, Chronicle, an.* 855 [Chabot (1895), 108]. Trans. Witakowski (1996), 97.

Instead of idolatry, in this event the demons inspire the people to resort to absurdities to avoid death from the plague. This passage once more reveals the desperate nature of the pestilence, and yet again we see that Byzantines were so fearful of death that they were willing to try anything to prevent its occurrence.

The rumour of this absurdity spread quickly in the community. The result was that people became socially isolated, avoiding interactions with friends and neighbours. John describes this depressing state of affairs here:

> Everybody succumbed to this foolishness, so that for three days people could not show themselves on the streets since those who had escaped death (in the plague) were assiduously (occupied), alone or in groups, in their houses with chasing away death by breaking pitchers.[196]

Those who happened to survive the plague had convinced themselves that their survival was contingent on breaking the pitchers. Based on this conception, people who lived refused to leave their homes, investing all their time in breaking pitchers to chase away death.

However, inevitably, some among the pitcher throwers eventually succumbed to the plague. Once it was realized that breaking the pitchers was ineffective, the people began to despair. Again, taking advantage of this weakness, the demons put on a new guise, as John recounts:

> Again it was effected by demons who deceive people that when those who had acted so foolishly by breaking pitchers (started) to lament that they had failed in what they imagined their deception (would achieve, but instead) were drawing closer each day to utter perdition, (the demons then) appeared to them, wishing to mock the garb of piety, that is the (monastic) habit of the "shorn"-of the monks and of the clerics.[197]

In this passage, we find the psychological effects of the plague upon the population expressed in apocalyptic discourse. At the height of the paranoia driven by the devastation of the plague, people began to imagine that monks and clergy were demons in disguise. This not only increased fear among the Roman population, but prevented them from seeking spiritual council in a time of crisis.

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[196] *John of Ephesus, Chronicle, an.* 855 [Chabot (1895), 108]. Trans. Witakowski (1996), 97.
[197] *John of Ephesus, Chronicle, an.* 855 [Chabot (1895), 108]. Trans. Witakowski (1996), 97.

John expands upon this delusion and its effects upon the Roman population. According to John, the demons managed to convince the people that death would come in the appearance of a monk. The account is recorded in the following passage:

> Thus this foolishness was manifested in that death would come in the likeness of the "shorn" ones. It befell simple people especially and the populace of the city, so that hardly anybody wearing the monastic habit would appear on the streets, for on seeing him they fell upon each other.[198]

John's account of demonic influence upon the people illustrates a very real sense of despair and mental anguish in the face of untold suffering and death. John uses elements of what would eventually be used in apocalyptic discourse, namely, demonic apparitions and supernaturally caused suffering, to understand the rapid decline of morale and reason in Roman cities. In this interpretation, the plague was not a natural pathogen, but a divine scourge sent to winnow the Roman population in response to their sins.

The purpose of John's account of the plague seems to be to offer explanations for the horrors of the plague, namely sin, and to warn future readers to avoid such circumstances. His *Chronicle* is as much a warning as it is an account of the events of the sixth century. John makes his purpose known at the conclusion of his plague narrative, where he states:

> We have left these matters for the remembrance of other (people) who will come after (us), in order that when they hear about the chastising of us, fools and provokers, and about the sentence for our sins, they may "become wise", as it is and that they may cease to anger that One for whom everything is easy to do, and that they may repent and ask mercy continually, lest this chastisement also be thrown upon them.[199]

This brief paragraph explains John's purpose behind the graphic and frequently emotional approach he takes in his account of events. It also serves to reinforce the primary theme of John's account, as well as nearly all future apocalyptic texts. namely, the interplay of divine chastisement and repentance in historical causation. From this perspective, history progresses intentionally, and represents a providential narrative in which God punishes and restores his people based on their behaviour and faithfulness.

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[198] *John of Ephesus, Chronicle, an.* 855 [Chabot (1895), 109]. Trans. Witakowski (1996), 98.
[199] *John of Ephesus, Chronicle, an.* 855 [Chabot (1895),109]. Trans. Witakowski (1996), 98.

c. Procopius

Procopius of Caesarea's response to the plague is among the most subdued and most critical of authors who, like Malalas and John of Ephesus, employ apocalyptic discourse, or attempt to peer into the divine mind to determine causation. He makes this point perfectly clear in the introduction to chapter XXII of the Persian Wars, where he states:

> ἅπασι μὲν οὖν τοῖς ἐξ οὐρανοῦ ἐπισκήπτουσιν ἴσως ἂν καὶ λέγοιτό τις ὑπ᾽ ἀνδρῶν τολμητῶν αἰτίου λόγος, οἷα πολλὰ φιλοῦσιν οἱ ταῦτα δεινοὶ αἰτίας τερατεύεσθαι οὐδαμῇ ἀνθρώπῳ καταληπτὰς οὔσας, φυσιολογίας τε ἀναπλάσσειν ὑπερορίους, ἐξεπιστάμενοι μὲν ὡς λέγουσιν οὐδὲν ὑγιὲς, ἀποχρῆν δὲ ἡγούμενοι σφίσιν, ἤν γε τῶν ἐντυγχανόντων τινὰς τῷ λόγῳ ἐξαπατήσαντες πείσωσι.
>
> Now in the case of all imposed from heaven, some account of the cause might be given by bold men, such as the many things that people who are clever in these love to conjure up, which are incomprehensible to man, and the love to invent outlandish natural phenomena, on the one hand knowing that they say nothing sane, and on the other hand considering it sufficient for them, if indeed they deceive some of their interlocutors by their reason. [200]

Procopius's critique is as sobering as it is sceptical. He puts other authors who produce outlandish explanations of the plague on notice, including most of our extant sources, aside from his own history. While a modern historian should avoid value judgements by agreeing with him, Procopius is insightful about the human need to find answers for the incomprehensible, and to find meaning in otherwise meaningless chaos.

Procopius does concede that the plague was sent by God, but is adamant that no further explanation can be determined. To support this, Procopius cites the demographics of the victims of the plague, which proved to be no respecter of persons. Procopius notes:

> τούτῳ μέντοι τῷ κακῷ πρόφασίν τινα ἢ λόγῳ εἰπεῖν ἢ διανοίᾳ λογίσασθαι μηχανή τις οὐδεμία ἐστὶ, πλήν γε δὴ ὅσα ἐς τὸν θεὸν ἀναφέρεσθαι. οὐ γὰρ ἐπὶ μέρους τῆς γῆς οὐδὲ ἀνθρώπων τισὶ γέγονεν οὐδέ τινα ὥραν τοῦ ἔτους ἔσχεν, ὅθεν ἂν καὶ σοφίσματα αἰτίας εὑρέσθαι δυνατὰ εἴη, ἀλλὰ περιεβάλλετο μὲν τὴν γῆν ξύμπασαν, βίους δὲ ἀνθρώπων ἅπαντας ἔβλαψε, καίπερ ἀλλήλων ἐς τοὐναντίον παρὰ πολὺ διαλλάσσοντας, οὔτε φύσεώς τινος οὔτε ἡλικίας φεισάμενον. εἴτε γὰρ χωρίων ἐνοικήσει εἴτε νόμῳ διαίτης, ἢ φύσεως τρόπῳ, ἢ ἐπιτηδεύμασιν, ἢ ἄλλῳ ὅτῳ ἀνθρώπων ἄνθρωποι διαφέρουσιν, ἐν ταύτῃ δὴ μόνῃ τῇ νόσῳ τὸ διαλλάσσον οὐδὲν ὤνησεν.
>
> But for this evil, no contrivance is able express a cause, either by word or thought, except indeed to refer such things to God. For it did not come upon a portion of the

[200] Procopius, *De Bello Persico*, II.xxii.1-2. [Wirth (1963), 249].

> earth, nor among a selection of men, nor was it limited to a certain season of the year, so that it might be possible for subtle causes to be discovered, rather it encompassed the whole earth at once, and stopped the lives of all men, though differing exceedingly from one another, sparing neither one's nature or age. For in location, or custom of life, or manner of nature, or in their business, or in any other way men differ from other men, in this disease alone, difference offered no advantage.[201]

The plague affected people of all classes and behaviours from all regions of the empire. There was no single targeted group or location. Thus, Procopius argues, it is vain to try to determine what sin or what human action caused the plague. Only God knows the reason for its arrival, and Procopius makes no attempt to solve this theodicy.

Although Procopius is far more sceptical than his contemporaries, he does serve as an indirect witness to the nascent apocalyptic discourse of the period. Like John of Ephesus, Procopius notes that the plague was preceded by strange apparitions. According to the historian:

> ἐγίνετο δὲ ὧδε. φάσματα δαιμόνων πολλοῖς ἐς πᾶσαν ἀνθρώπου ἰδέαν ὤφθη, ὅσοι τε αὐτοῖς παραπίπτοιεν, παίεσθαι ᾤοντο πρὸς τοῦ ἐντυχόντος ἀνδρὸς, ὅπη παρατύχοι τοῦ σώματος, ἅμα τε τὸ φάσμα τοῦτο ἑώρων καὶ τῇ νόσῳ αὐτίκα ἡλίσκοντο.
>
> And it came as follows. Apparitions of demons appeared to many, as all types of men, and those who came across the apparitions thought that they were struck by the man they encountered, that some part of the body had touched them, and upon seeing the apparition immediately they were also seized by the disease.[202]

The apparitions were so widespread and frightening that people began to lock themselves up and ignore their friends and relatives out of fear that they may be the apparitions in disguise.[203] We see here a similar phenomenon to that recorded by John of Ephesus where the pitcher throwers avoided public interaction, and where panic caused citizens to avoid clergy out of fear that they were demons. One of the primary spiritual attacks associated with the plague involved social isolation and the collapse of community life.

Apparitions were not the only way in which plague patients were made aware of their affliction. For others, according to Procopius, it was revealed through dreams or waking visions. On this, the historian writes:

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[201] Procopius, *De Bello Persico*, II.xxii.2-3 [Wirth (1963), 249-50].
[202] Procopius, *De Bello Persico*, II.xxii.10-11 [Wirth (1963), 251].
[203] Procopius, *De Bello Persico* II.xxii.11-12 [Wirth (1963), 251].

> τισὶ δὲ οὐχ οὕτως ὁ λοιμὸς ἐπεγίνετο, ἀλλ᾽ ὄψιν ὀνείρου ἰδόντες ταὐτὸ τοῦτο πρὸς τοῦ ἐπιστάντος πάσχειν ἐδόκουν, ἢ λόγου ἀκούειν προλέγοντος σφίσιν ὅτι δὴ ἐς τῶν τεθνηξομένων τὸν ἀριθμὸν ἀνάγραπτοι εἶεν.
>
> But for some, the plague did not come in the same way, rather, seeing a vision of sleep, they seemed to suffer the very same thing from the one standing over them, or they seemed to hear a voice predicting to them that indeed they were written down in the number of those who were about to die.[204]

As with the accounts of Malalas and John of Ephesus, Procopius provides evidence of the prevalence of dreams in predicting the future. However, unlike the chroniclers, Procopius's dreams appear common to victims of the plague. It is worth noting that, according to Procopius, the majority of victims had no previous warning by "waking vision or dream".[205] For the rest of the victims, symptoms struck suddenly without warning.

The authors under consideration, Agathias, John Malalas, John of Ephesus, and Procopius of Caesarea provide a broad spectrum in their degree of witness to nascent apocalyptic discourse. John of Ephesus is by far the most apocalyptic, embracing in his own writings the realities of portents, and blaming imperial sins for natural disasters and supernatural deaths. Malalas is more moderate, varying within his own narrative in the degree to which he is willing to embrace apocalyptic discourse. At times, he merely records portentous events, at other times he embraces divine causation and records prophetic dreams. Sometimes silence may be strategic, when he passes over accounts of persecution of anti-Chalcedonians mentioned by John of Ephesus. Agathias and Procopius, however, are more sceptical. Agathias addresses the fact that apocalyptic discourse was present; however he dismisses it as at best superstition, and at worst a willing attempt to prey on the emotions of vulnerable people. Procopius too records apocalyptic accounts, but avoids engaging in speculation, at least in his plague accounts and in the wars. While he appeals to Fortune, or Tyche, he is critical of those who tried to apportion blame for the plague. Nevertheless, as we will see, his *Secret History* is one of the most directly apocalyptic sources of the sixth century.

[204] Procopius, *De Bello Persico*, II.xxii.13-14 [Wirth (1963), 252].
[205] Procopius, *De Bello Persico*, II.xxii.14 [Wirth (1963), 252]. οὔτε ὕπαρ οὔτε ὄναρ.

VI. Justinian and Other Antichrists

The sixth century produced an unusual amount of speculation regarding the antichrist, who was often associated with or looked very similar to a sitting emperor. We have already seen the *Oracle of Baalbek*'s intriguing depiction of Anastasius as the one who would bring about the end of the empire. Romanos the Melodist (d. 556), the Constantinopolitan hymnographer best known for the *Akathistos* hymn, composed a *kontakion* which contained a description of the antichrist, who built churches, caused earthquakes, and promoted terror, a depiction which matches Justinian's C.V., even if he was not mentioned by name.[206]

Perhaps the most notorious example of such speculation is the description of Justinian as demonic by Procopius of Caesarea in his *Secret History*. The *Secret History* itself is full of invective against Justinian and the empress Theodora, supposedly setting out the realities he was unable to express in his largely panegyric *Wars* and *de Aedificiis* for fear of his own safety. The *Secret History* serves as almost an anti-panegyric, full of bombastic and fantastical stories of Theodora's sexual exploits and Justinian's insatiable greed and bloodlust.

Procopius's depiction of Justinian as demonic is among the most extreme examples, and is among the most fascinating aspects of the historian's works. Procopius is otherwise known as a rational writer, as evidenced by his depiction of the plague, which limits itself to description, rather than speculation upon causes. Procopius's description of Justinian and Theodora is found in chapter 12 of the *Secret History*, which begins with a description of the numerous thefts committed by the imperial couple. At the end of an account of thefts just prior to the Nika riots, Procopius digresses to discuss the supernatural nature of Justinian and Theodora, as follows:

> διὸ δὴ ἐμοί τε καὶ τοῖς πολλοῖς ἡμῶν οὐδεπώποτε ἔδοξαν οὗτοι ἄνθρωποι εἶναι, ἀλλὰ δαίμονες παλαμναῖοί τινες καὶ ὥσπερ οἱ ποιηταὶ λέγουσι βροτολοιγὼ ἤστην, οἳ δὴ ἐπὶ κοινῆς βουλευσάμενοι ὅπως ἅπαντα ἀνθρώπεια γένη τε καὶ ἔργα ὡς ῥᾷστα καὶ τάχιστα διαφθείρειν ἱκανοὶ εἶεν, ἀνθρώπειόν τε ἠμπίσχοντο σχῆμα καὶ ἀνθρωποδαίμονες γεγενημένοι τῷ τρόπῳ τούτῳ ξύμπασαν τὴν οἰκουμένην κατέσεισαν. τεκμηριώσαι δ' ἄν τις τὸ τοιοῦτο πολλοῖς τε ἄλλοις καὶ τῇ τῶν πεπραγμένων δυνάμει.

[206] Romanos, *Kontakion on the Second Coming*. A minority have questioned Romanos's authorship.

> Wherefore, indeed to me, and to many of us, they seemed not to be human beings, but some sort of blood-guilty demons [or daimones], and these two were just as what the poets call "the bane of man", who counselled in common how they could most easily and quickly destroy the entire human race and its works, and they assumed a human appearance, and becoming man-demons [or daimones], they shook the world in this way. And one could prove this in many ways and in other ways, but especially in the power of their accomplishments.[207]

Procopius describes the imperial couple as bloodsucking demons who became incarnate in human form with the specific aim of destroying humanity. Procopius cites as proof Justinian's seemingly superhuman ability to bring their will to bear upon affairs.

The historian's account takes things a bit further, elevating Justinian and Theodora to the divine plane, and suggesting that, using demonic powers, they collaborated with Fortune, or Tyche, to destroy the earth. On this evil conspiracy, Procopius provides the following:

> ὄλεθρον δὲ ξυμπάντων ἀνθρώπων ξυμφοράς τε γῆς τῆς οἰκουμένης ἁπάσης οὐδεὶς ὅτι μὴ οὗτοι ἄνθρωποι ἐργάζεσθαι ἱκανῶς ἔσχον. ὧν δὴ καὶ ἡ τύχη ὑπούργει τῇ γνώμῃ συγκατεργαζομένη τῶν ἀνθρώπων διαφθορὰν σεισμοῖς τε γὰρ καὶ λοιμοῖς καὶ ὑδάτων ποταμίων ἐπιρροαῖς ὑπὸ τὸν χρόνον τοῦτον πλεῖστα διολωλέναι τετύχηκεν, ὥς μοι αὐτίκα λελέξεται. οὕτως οὐκ ἀνθρωπείῳ, ἀλλ' ἑτέρῳ σθένει τὰ δεινὰ ἔπρασσον.
>
> No one in the entire world, except for these two people has been able to bring ruin on all mankind, and misfortune on the whole earth has been beyond the power of any but these two, with whom Fortune assisted planning, conspiring in the destruction of mankind, for by earthquakes, plagues, and influx of river water, at that time they succeeded in destroying almost everything, as will be explained by me shorty. Thus, it was not by human, but some other, power that they did such terrible things.[208]

This passage is interesting when compared to the account of the plague in the *de Bello Persico* discussed above. In the earlier account, Procopius specifically criticised those who would attribute any cause beyond divinity to explain the reasons for the plague. Here, Procopius does just that, citing a supernatural plot with Fortune/Tyche to destroy the world. Perhaps Procopius is being hyperbolic, or perhaps he had these thoughts when he composed *de Bello Persico* but was unable to state them explicitly. Regardless, it is an about-face which situates the plague in an apocalyptic narrative of supernatural conspiracy.

[207] Procopius, *Secret History*, xii.14-15 [Wirth (1963), 79-80].
[208] Procopius, *Secret History*, xii.16-17 [Wirth (1963), 80].

To aid in his testimony, Procopius invokes the testimony of anonymous witnesses that Justinian's mother herself admitted to his demonic patronage. Concerning his conception, Procopius provides the following description:

> Λέγουσι δὲ αὐτοῦ καὶ τὴν μητέρα φάναι τῶν ἐπιτηδείων τισὶν ὡς οὐ Σαββατίου τοῦ αὐτῆς ἀνδρὸς οὐδὲ ἀνθρώπων τινὸς υἱὸς εἴη. ἡνίκα γὰρ αὐτὸν κύειν ἔμελλεν, ἐπιφοιτᾶν αὐτῇ δαιμόνιον οὐχ ὁρώμενον, ἀλλ' αἴσθησίν τινα ὅτι δὴ πάρεστιν αὐτῇ παρασχὸν ἅτε ἄνδρα γυναικὶ πλησιάσαντα, καθάπερ ἐν ὀνείρῳ ἀφανισθῆναι.
>
> And they say his mother said to some of her friends that not of Sabbatius her husband, nor of any man, was Justinian a son. For when she was about to conceive, a demon visited her, invisible but giving evidence of his presence perceptibly where man has intercourse with a woman, after which it vanished utterly as in a dream.[209]

Here, Procopius invokes a sordid conception narrative, calling forth Justinian's own mother as a witness, through the accounts of his sources, to the reality of his demonic conception. It is almost an inverse of the conception of Christ, with the visitation of a demon in place of the holy spirit.

Procopius also provides testimony from supposed witnesses testifying to Justinian's change of appearance late at night. He is careful to note at the end that he himself was not a witness, but "heard about them from men who insist they saw them at the time".[210] Here he notes:

> ὁ μὲν γὰρ ἔφασκεν ἄφνω μὲν αὐτὸν θρόνου τοῦ βασιλείου ἐξαναστάντα περιπάτους ἐνταῦθα ποιεῖν· συχνὸν γὰρ καθῆσθαι οὐδαμῆ εἴθιστο· τῆς δὲ κεφαλῆς ἐν τῷ παραυτίκα τῷ Ἰουστινιανῷ ἀφανισθείσης τὸ ἄλλο οἱ σῶμα τούτους δὴ τοὺς μακροὺς διαύλους ποιεῖν δοκεῖν, αὐτόν τε ἅτε οἱ τῶν <ὀμμάτων> περὶ τὴν θέαν ὡς ἥκιστα ὑγιαινόντων, ἀσχάλλοντα καὶ διαπορούμενον ἐπὶ πλεῖστον ἑστάναι. ὕστερον μέντοι τῆς κεφαλῆς τῷ σώματι ἐπανηκούσης τὰ τέως λειπόμενα οἴεσθαι παρὰ δόξαν ἀναπιμπλάναι.
>
> One man said that he, rising from the imperial throne, went for a walk around, for he was not accustomed to sitting for long periods, and for a moment, Justinian's head vanished, while the rest of his body seemed to ebb and flow, so that he stood aghast and fearful, wondering if his eyes were deceiving him. But then, with the head returning to the body, he saw the vanished parts return back to normal.[211]

[209] Procopius, *Secret History*, xii.18-19 [Wirth (1963), 80].
[210] Procopius, *Secret History*, xii.23 [Wirth (1963), 81]. "ταῦτα οὐκ αὐτὸς θεασάμενος γράφω, ἀλλὰ τῶν τότε θεάσασθαι ἰσχυριζομένων ἀκούσας".
[211] Procopius, *Secret History*, xii.21-23 [Wirth (1963), 81]

Procopius depicts Justinian not only as a demon, but as a shape shifter, whose head occasionally fell out of phase. His sources are anonymous figures, trusted courtesans permitted to remain in the throne room.

Justinian's changing appearance proved a popular theme in Procopius's attempt to demonstrate the emperor's demonic nature. Procopius continues with another account:

> ἄλλος δὲ παρεστάναι οἱ καθημένῳ ἔφη, ἐκ δὲ τοῦ αἰφνιδίου τὸ πρόσωπόν οἱ κρέατι ἀσήμῳ ἰδεῖν ἐμφερὲς γεγονός· οὔτε γὰρ ὀφρῦς οὔτε ὀφθαλμοὺς ἐπὶ χώρας τῆς αὐτῶν ὄντας οὔτε ἄλλο τι τὸ παράπαν ἔφερε γνώρισμα· χρόνου μέντοι αὐτῷ τὸ σχῆμα τῆς ὄψεως ἐπανῆκον ἰδεῖν.
>
> Another man said that he stood next to the emperor as he sat, when suddenly the face became something resembling a shapeless mass of flesh, with neither eyebrows, nor eyes in their proper places, nor anything else bearing a mark; and after a time, the natural appearance of his countenance returned.[212]

Again, Procopius cites an unnamed official, trusted enough to stand within the emperor's presence, as a witness to Justinian's demonic nature. The line of argumentation is strange, considering Procopius's reputation for fact-based historiography. Perhaps Procopius was cashing in on his earned credibility in order to fully besmirch the emperor's legacy.

It is worth repeating here the observation made by Roger Scott that there is a striking degree of correspondence between Procopius's critiques of Justinian in the *Secret History* and the positive portrayal of the emperor in Malalas's *Chronographia* which suggests that one is responding to the other.[213] While, as Scott suggests, it is difficult to determine which portrayal came first, it is conceivable that Justinian believed that he held a significant eschatological position, providing an opposite corollary to Procopius's "antichrist motif".[214]

While Scott's argument is compelling, two factors are also worth noting before taking this too far. Malalas himself, in his brief description of the plague, condemns the entire empire and blames its sins, and presumably the sins of its leader, for the wrath displayed by God in the

[212] Procopius, *Secret History*, xii.23 [Wirth (1963), 81].
[213] Scott (1985), 99-109.
[214] Scott (1985), 108.

plague. I would argue that this could be interpreted as a subtle *Kaiserkritik,* in which Malalas simply lacks the courage or will of Procopius to openly critique Justinian's excesses.

Furthermore, it is worth remembering that Procopius stops short of identifying Justinian as the antichrist- the word does not appear anywhere in his narrative. This could be evidence supporting Anthony Kaldellis's argument that Procopius was a thinly veiled Hellenistic "pagan" who used Christian rhetoric out of necessity, to survive the persecution of pagans under Justinian and to avoid unnecessary scrutiny from his largely Christian audience. This fits well with Procopius's recurring appeals to the role of Tyche or Fortune as a driving force in historical causation. If Kaldellis is correct, it could be argued that Procopius did not consider Justinian and Theodora to be "demons" in the Christian sense, but rather δαίμονες in the original Classical sense, namely lesser deities. If so, Justinian would not be the antichrist, but a minor god of chaos who conspired with the greater goddess Tyche to bring about the destruction of humanity.

In many ways, the *Secret History* runs counter to the entirety of Procopius's remaining extant corpus. This was his stated intent and is plainly the case. However, this counter current is not limited to his about-face in his praise of Justinian, but also in his general avoidance and vocal critique of apocalyptic discourse. It is here, especially in his demonic (or perhaps daimonic) portrayal of Justinian, that we find the fruition of the nascent apocalyptic discourse of the sixth century. Procopius set the standard for supernatural *Kaiserkritik* which was used by later historians to describe future evil emperors.

VII. Conclusion

The sixth century saw the slow beginnings of a renaissance of apocalyptic discourse, a phenomenon which had fallen out of favour and had been explicitly discouraged in previous centuries. What started out as an outbreak of millennial speculation with the advent of the year 6000 *anno mundi,* spread, and was fuelled by several catastrophic natural disasters. Common citizens and historians alike began to take note of portents. Comets and eclipses began, once more, to be considered predictive, sent as divine warnings of future destruction. Dreams were believed to be sent by God to provide insight into the future. Finally, and most importantly,

earthquakes, floods, and the bubonic plague were sent by God to punish the empire for its sins, both abstract and specific. According to Procopius, the latter was the result of a divine conspiracy between the demonic Justinian and Fortune herself, in a nearly successful but ultimately abortive attempt to destroy humanity.

As Roger Scott has argued, the all too human emperor Justinian appears to have conceived for himself an eschatological role, perhaps accepting the widely popular expectations that the end was near, and had been preceded by the natural disasters which culled the Byzantine population. Paul Magdalino, agreeing with Scott's suggestion, has recently argued that Heraclius took cues from Justinian, and took on the mantle of the eschatological emperor.

Magdalino argues that Heraclius's conception of his eschatological role was the impetus behind his edict of forced baptism in 632.[215] Using the ending of *Epistula* 8 by Maximus the Confessor along with the *Doctrina Jacobi nuper baptizati*, Magdalino argues that Heraclius's forced baptism is best understood in the context of *Reichseschatologie*. According to Magdalino, in the eyes of the emperor, Heraclius's triumph over the Persians "marked a decisive moment in the accomplishment of the empire's divine mission on earth". Moreover, it could be claimed that, in fulfilment of Matthew 24:14, the Gospel had been preached throughout the whole world. All that remained was for all Israel to be saved in accordance with Romans 11:25.[216] Heraclius, Magdalino argues, was attempting to fulfil this divine role by the forced baptism of the Jews. Magdalino argues that Maximus's objection, based particularly on the risk of apostasy, was out of fear that ex-Jews would cause weak minded Christians to Judaise, rather than abandon Christianity altogether.[217]

Magdalino is correct in his observation that Byzantines under Heraclius held a worldview that "blurred the distinction between the Christian Roman Empire and the Kingdom of Christ".[218] However, Magdalino relies on a single, poorly attested event to prove that Heraclius's actions

[215] Magdalino (2013), 231-42.
[216] Magdalino (2013), 238.
[217] Magdalino (2013), 241.
[218] Magdalino (2013), 239.

were motivated by semi-messianic aspirations. Only two pieces of evidence concerning the forced baptism survive, both of which are from North Africa, and they do not, on their own, indicate a concerted effort to save "all Israel". There is simply not enough evidence of the edict's enforcement on an empire-wide scale, let alone on a Biblical scale. Moreover, Heraclius's general anti-Jewish policies, including possible expulsion and massacre, indicate less of a desire to save the Jews and more a strategy to eliminate them as a perceived political threat.[219] Nevertheless, based on Justinian's precedent and literature from the period, the idea that Heraclius had a messianic self-belief is well within the realm of possibility.

Whether or not Magdalino's argument about Heraclius can be proved, it does remain plausible precisely because the discourse of the seventh century was a direct continuation and expansion of the nascent apocalyptic discourse of the sixth. Malalas's *Chronographia*, the first extant "world chronicle", was instrumental in the development of the Syriac appropriation of this genre in its unique apocalyptic discourse, the greatest example of which is the *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius. The semi-apocalyptic *Chronicle* of John of Ephesus, itself composed in Syriac, made possible the explicitly apocalyptic Alexander literature during the reign of Heraclius, as we will see in Chapter 3. Furthermore, Procopius's apocalyptic *Kaiserkritik* of Justinian paved the way for Theophylact Simocatta and the author of the *Sefer Zerubbabel* to critique emperors in demonising and dehumanising terms, as will be shown in Chapters 3 and 5.

At this point, there are two observations worth noting for our study. We have, by the end of the sixth century, the foundation for a fully developed apocalyptic discourse that is spreading beyond the confines of traditional apocalyptic texts. While a continuation of a well-established apocalyptic tradition is only witnessed in a select number of surviving documents, the tradition was not yet dominant by the end of the sixth century, but would provide fertile ground for apocalyptic discourses in response to the crises of the seventh century. Secondly, the surviving evidence, both direct and indirect, demonstrates that the emperor often played a significant role,

[219] Kaegi (2003), 205.

both positive and negative, in Roman apocalyptic discourse. The remaining chapters of this thesis will explore exactly how seventh century authors, from a variety of generic and cultural perspectives, built upon the nascent tradition to generate the greatest production of apocalyptic discourse since the third century.

Chapter 3: Messianic Hero or Antichrist? Depictions of the emperor

I. Introduction

The sixth-century authors discussed in the previous chapter established the foundations from which later writers could interpret contemporary events through the lens of apocalyptic discourse. However, unlike their immediate forbears, seventh-century authors were motivated not by millennial concerns or natural disasters, but by numerous crises which transformed the empire in indelible ways. Historians have remembered the century as a period of transformative crisis.[220] While this legacy is primarily related to the fact that the century witnessed the near mutual destruction of the two largest global powers of the period, followed closely by the rise of a newly ascendant Islamic empire, it could just as easily be remembered as a century of coups d'état. Through most of the seventh century, in addition to external threats, the late-Roman Empire suffered from significant internal instability. The usurper Phocas set the tone from the beginning, seizing power from Maurice in 602 C.E. and disrupting a fragile peace set in place by the beloved emperor with the Sassanids, and causing enough disruption for the Persians to capitalise and begin a conflict that lasted for three decades.[221] A mere eight years into his reign, Phocas himself met his end in a coup at the hands of the general Heraclius, whose dynasty was plagued by bloody struggle between siblings vying for succession.[222] The direction of the empire was driven largely by the personalities of the emperors, and, as a result, rulers tended to loom large within apocalyptic narratives.

This chapter examines the place that the imperial office held in the late-Roman apocalyptic imagination and, by extension, the position of the Roman Empire in the divine order of kingdoms. Included are historical emperors, such as Maurice, Phocas, Heraclius, and Constans II, as well as eschatological emperors found in apocalyptic texts from the period. By examining sources from Christian authors, including both supporters and critics, we will demonstrate that,

[220] Cf. Haldon (1990).
[221] On the reign of Phocas, see Olster (1993a) and Meier (2014).
[222] Haldon (1990), 51-52.

despite well-established mutual animosities, authors under Roman cultural hegemony shared a common conception of the emperor as a cosmically significant figure, capable of participating in and affecting divine order.

For all levels of late-Roman society, an emperor's legitimacy as God's regent on Earth was tied closely to his ability to guide the empire through the hardships of war and protect the *ecumene* from threats both foreign and domestic. A toxic combination of internal instability coupled with unprecedented defeat by foreign invaders seems to have had a negative effect on the popularity of individual monarchs. The Roman emperor was the head of the state, and the state's successes and misfortunes could be placed directly upon his shoulders.

Nowhere is this attitude more manifest than in seventh-century apocalyptic discourse. The victories of the Sassanian Empire in the immediate years following Phocas's usurpation of the throne were interpreted by late-Roman observers as signals of divine disapproval and an unholy disruption of providential order. As a result, authors of histories and hagiographies depicted Phocas as a bloodthirsty murderer and enemy of God, while at the same time Maurice was honoured as a martyr. The ascent of Heraclius, on the other hand, was interpreted by many as a restoration of the order. To his most vocal supporters, his reign was accompanied by an almost messianic hope, one which seemed to be confirmed after his unlikely rally and final victory over the Persians. His Syriac speaking contemporaries praised him as the new Alexander the Great, and the poet George of Pisidia bestowed upon him the title κοσμορύστης, or "Deliverer of the Cosmos". Heraclius brought the promise of a new, golden age of restored and expanded Roman hegemony, where old enemies were brought low and peace was secured.

However, while the emperor Heraclius was beloved by many, even he was not beyond apocalyptic reproach. Members of the late-Roman Jewish community, whom Heraclius had labelled as collaborators with the Sassanids, suffered under an oppressive system of state-sponsored persecution as punishment for their perceived disloyalty. In response, Jewish liturgical

writers depicted the emperor as an anti-messiah.[223] In various *piyyutim*, a popular variety of Jewish liturgical hymns, and most famously in the Jewish apocalypse the *Sefer Zerubbabel*, Heraclius is depicted as a demonic beast, sent to bring about a final tribulation which would bring the Jews to the breaking point and presage the advent of the actual Messiah, who would vindicate the Jews and elevate them to their place as God's chosen people.[224]

Even imperial critics within the Christian community were known to grant Heraclius a prominent place within apocalyptic discourse though, unlike his supporters, critics did not consider Heraclius to be a messianic figure. Although Heraclius was not seen as the antichrist, Maximus the Confessor warned, in a letter that survives in a fragment, that if Heraclius were to follow through with the edict of forced baptism, and if it were enforced, the resulting apostasy could bring about the apocalypse.[225] Apocalyptic discourse was not a central theme of Maximus's letter, or of his overall pattern of imperial critique; however, his warning does suggest his belief that the emperor might alter the course of divine providence.

In ecclesiastical affairs, based on their controversial religious policies, Heraclius and his successors appear to have taken a hands-on approach. The level of imperial intervention in matters of doctrine was so great that court officials sought to establish the emperor as a priest, giving expression to a latent but never spoken concept in Roman ideology of the imperial priesthood. As Gilbert Dagron notes, such ideas had been present, if not voiced in Byzantine society since Constantine the Great claimed to be a "bishop of outsiders", and found its most infamous expression in Leo III's declaration, "I am Emperor and Priest".[226] We find the first glimpse of this ideology, however slight, among the accusations made against Maximus in his heresy trial in Constantinople in 658. Here, Maximus was accused, among other things, of denying the priesthood of the emperor. Though this fleeting passage is the only direct evidence

[223] Stoyanov, (2011), 46.
[224] van Bekkum (2002), 95-112. We will discuss this depiction of Heraclius in Chapter 5, 195-7.
[225] Strickler (2016)
[226] Dagron (2003), 3.

of the Heraclian dynasty's claim to priesthood, it is further evidence of the increasing religious gravitas accorded to the person of the emperor in the face of increasing uncertainty.

Late-Roman perceptions of the cosmic role of the emperor in providential history was not limited to historical emperors. In times of great difficulty, eschatological emperors could be found as heroes or villains, depending on the author's perspective. The famous *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius predicted that the Islamic hegemony, which had been fully established in large portions of former Roman territories by the end of the century, would be overthrown. The abuses suffered at the hands of the Arab invaders would be avenged by an unnamed Last Roman Emperor who would rise from his slumber and restore material losses inflicted upon Christians by the Muslim invaders.

II. Methodology

Before we proceed in our analysis of the role of the emperor in late-Roman apocalyptic discourse, we must discuss the methodology of this chapter. We will begin by organising our data into manageable themes. We will apply these themes to a variety of primary sources, covering the spread of seventh-century history from the rise of Phocas to the establishment of Islamic hegemony in former Roman territories. What follows is an examination of the themes and sources employed in this chapter.

a. Themes

We will begin with a discussion of the themes which will be employed in this chapter to analyse the role of the emperor in late-Roman apocalyptic discourse. These are separated into two primary themes, which are further divided into individual subthemes. These will provide the lens by which we explore several primary sources in detail.

The first primary theme discussed is the depiction of the emperor as heroic. For the sake of clarity, we will consider four subthemes within this larger category, including the depiction of the slain Emperor Maurice as a martyr, the use of Classical and Biblical tropes to narrate the triumphs of Heraclius, as well as the depiction of the latter as κοσμορύστης. Finally, within this first theme we will discuss the apocalyptic Last Roman Emperor, as depicted by Pseudo-

Methodius, and what the eschatological role of the emperor reveals about late-Roman conceptions of the emperor as a cosmically significant figure.

At the other end of the spectrum of late-Roman apocalyptic discourse, the second major theme discussed in this chapter is the adversarial, or at best, ambivalent depiction of emperors. Here we consider the depiction of the usurper Phocas as a destroyer of divine order and bringer of disaster, as well as the unusual admission that the empire was brought to destruction by his usurpation. In addition, in this section we will discuss the more ambivalent conception of Heraclius as a potential usher of the apocalypse through his policies, and the denial of the priestly ambitions of the Heraclian dynasty by Maximus the Confessor. On the basis of this analysis, we argue that the emperor's cosmic potential was not manifest solely in his ability to benefit the people, but was rather a neutral power, equally capable of advancing the empire as well as of destroying it.

b. Sources

In keeping with the wider goals of this thesis, the aim of this chapter is to be generically inclusive. To that end, we will examine literature from a variety of literary genres spanning a long chronological period within the seventh century, although, admittedly, heavily weighted toward literature from the first half of the century. This is, in part, by necessity, as the emperors Maurice, Phocas, and Heraclius received more literary attention than later emperors; the first three decades of the seventh century saw a higher rate of turnover in occupants of the throne, as well as a rapid decline and recovery of imperial fortunes during the Persian campaigns. While this selection is necessary, this is also in part by design: literature produced in the first decades allow us to observe the way in which the conception of the emperor as a cosmically significant figure developed, as attitudes toward emperors changed in conjunction with the fortunes of the empire during the Persian campaigns. Still, despite a heavy focus on earlier literature, this chapter considers events occurring as late as the 690s after Islamic hegemony had been firmly established in significant portions of Byzantine territory.

Within this chapter, Theophylact Simocatta's *Historiae* represents classicising historiography. Of interest is Theophylact's depictions of the emperor Maurice and the coup of Phocas. The so-called "court poetry" of George of Pisidia, in particular his early work *In Heraclium ex Africa redeuntem* and his epic poem the aptly titled *Heraclias,* will be examined as evidence of the earliest years of the reign of Heraclius and his overthrow of Phocas, through to his triumph over the Sassanid Persians. These two sources are similar in intent, as they seek to demonise Phocas as a usurper and tyrant, and elevate Heraclius as a figure of restoration.

Three documents are examples of apocalyptic texts in the fullest sense. We will discuss the *Alexander Legend*, an early Syriac apocalypse written shortly after Heraclius's triumph over the Persians. This text illustrates the depiction of Heraclius as the *redivivus persona* of Alexander the Great in the form of a typological narrative.

As an example of apocalyptic discourse within late-Roman letters, we will examine a fragment by Maximus the Confessor in which he recounts the edict of forced baptism and its enforcement in North Africa. This letter exemplifies the use of apocalyptic discourse in imperial critique. An examination of the record of Maximus's trial, the so called *Relatio Motionis,* will provide data regarding imperial ambitions toward the priesthood and the critique offered by the confessor.

Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion of the *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius, a Syriac apocalyptic text written after Islamic hegemony had been established in the Middle East. Together with the *Alexander Legend*, the *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius represents evidence from the Syriac milieu as well as the full development of apocalyptic discourse after the sudden and permanent decline of late-Roman hegemony in the region. In the *Apocalypse,* we find the logical conclusion of late-Roman conceptions of the emperor as a cosmic actor. Here we find the emperor not as a concrete, historical figure, but as a semi-messianic eschatological hero who will deliver his people from oppression and restore the empire, concepts already in play in earlier depictions of the emperor Heraclius.

III. The emperor as Hero

We begin our discussion of depictions of seventh-century emperors by examining depictions of the emperor as a hero. The emperor held sway in the late-Roman imagination. While corrupt emperors could destroy the state and incur God's wrath, heroic emperors could inspire hope and provide examples of virtue. The latter sort are the object of analysis for the following section, beginning with depictions of the slain emperor Maurice as a martyr.

a. Maurice's "Martyrdom"

Most of our sources for the life of Maurice were written in the first decades of the seventh century, and after both his death at the hands of Phocas and the death of Phocas at the hands of Heraclius. These sources praise the emperor as a wise and prudent statesman, chosen by God, whose unnatural death destroyed proper order.[227] In the account of the historian Theophylact Simocatta, we first encounter Maurice at his coronation as Caesar. Theophylact recalls the emperor Tiberius II, lying on his deathbed, who provides Maurice with prudent wisdom on how to rule justly.[228] Theophylact recounts a scene in which the people were filled with mixed emotions, with mourning for the dying Tiberius tempered with jubilation over the coronation of a man as worthy as Maurice. Theophylact describes the occasion as follows:

> διεχεῖτο δὲ πολλὴ ταῖς εὐφημίαις παρὰ τῶν ὑπηκόων βοή. ἔνιοι γὰρ τὸν προστησάμενον ἀπεθαύμαζον ἀγάμενοι τῆς εὐβουλίας τὸν αὐτοκράτορα, ἕτεροι τὸν ἀναρρηθέντα καὶ τηλικαύτης ἡγεμονίας ἑαυτὸν παραθέμενον ἄξιον, ἅπαντες δὲ τὸν αἴτιον τούτων ἁπάντων θεὸν ἄμφω ταῦτα καλῶς συμβιβάσαντα.
>
> A great cry poured from the subjects in acclamation: for some, admiring the emperor for his good counsel, marvelled at their leader, others at the man who had been proclaimed and who presented himself as worthy of such great command, but all marvelled at God, who was responsible for all these things and had arranged this happy conjunction.[229]

In this passage, which appears early in the work, Theophylact establishes the tone in which Maurice is depicted in the rest of the *Historiae*. The author establishes Maurice's standing as a worthy leader chosen by God himself, as well as a man loved by the Roman people at large.

[227] For an overview of Maurice's life and accomplishments, see Whitby, (1988), 1-27.
[228] For an overview of Theophylact's life and career, see Whitby (1988), 28-46.
[229] Theophylact Simocatta, *Historiae*, I.1.22 [de Boor and Wirth (1972), 42]. Trans. Whitby and Whitby (1986), 21.

The passage also serves to establish Maurice as the rightful successor of Tiberius, as well as the choice of God, "who had arranged this happy conjunction", for imperial election. This clear and providential choice is what makes Phocas's presumption so abhorrent. The disruption in divine order caused by Phocas's usurpation is so grave that it is the subject of several apocalyptic prophecies and visions which occur early and frequently throughout Theophylact's narrative. No fewer than four *vaticinia ex eventu* concerning Maurice's death and subsequent imperial disasters are given in detail, and Theophylact suggests that the actual number exceeds his ability to record them.[230] Theophylact recounts the first prophecy in the following story:

> Ἔτους δὲ ἐννεακαιδεκάτου ἐπιστάντος τῷ αὐτοκράτορι, ἡ τῶν μελλόντων προαναγόρευσις γίνεται, τά τε κοινὰ τοῦ κόσμου ἐξομολογοῦνται παθήματα· ἀνὴρ γάρ τις πρὸς τὸν τῇδε κόσμον διαλυσάμενος καὶ ἐν ἀσκήσει θεωρίας τῶν ἀπορρήτων μετειληφὼς ἐπί τε τὸν μονήρη βίον κατακλιθείς, σπάθην γυμνώσας ἀπὸ τοῦ λεγομένου Φόρου … μέχρι τῶν προαυλίων τῶν ἀνακτόρων ξιφήρης διαδραμών, ἅμα τὸν αὐτοκράτορα τοῖς παισὶν ἐν φόνῳ μαχαίρας τεθνήξεσθαι προηγόρευεν.
>
> In the course of the nineteenth year of the emperor's rule, a prediction of the future occurred and acknowledged the universal sufferings of the world; for a certain man, who had severed himself from the present world, participated in the mysteries through the practise of contemplation, and retired to the solitary life, unsheathed a blade and, after running with sword in hand from the Forum…as far as the palace vestibule, he prophesied that the emperor together with his children would die slain by the knife.[231]

In this passage, Theophylact depicts an unnamed monk, perhaps a *salos*, or holy fool, enacting a *vaticinium ex eventu* within the public precincts of Constantinople. The appearance of a monk running with a sword in the forum must have made for a shocking scene, made all the more startling by the boldness of the prophecy itself. Predicting the death of the royal family would have been a dangerous and potentially treasonous act. The man's status as a holy man may have saved him from further consequences and, along with the spectacle, would have contributed to the gravity of the prophecy.

[230] Using a standard trope, Theophylact notes "Many other miraculous prophecies of the future occurred in the Roman state, but all eternity would fail us if we should try to record these in greater detail." Theophylact Simocatta, *Historiae*, VIII.13.15 [de Boor and Wirth (1972), 311]. Trans. Whitby and Whitby (1986), 232.
[231] Theophylact Simocatta, *Historiae*, VII.12.10 [de Boor and Wirth (1972) 266]. Trans. Whitby and Whitby (1986), 196

The prophecy of the anonymous monk is followed immediately by a similar, though less dramatic, prophecy. In this case, Theophylact provides the name of the recipient of the prophecy, a certain Herodian. The historian gives the account as follows:

> ὥρα δὲ θέρους, καὶ λόγος Ἡρωδιανὸν Μαυρικίῳ τῷ αὐτοκράτορι ἐς τὸ φανερὸν προαναγγεῖλαι τὰ ἀποτεύγματα· ὁ δὲ ἀνὴρ <οὐκ> ἐκτὸς θείας ὀμφῆς κατισχυρίζετο τὰ τῆς προρρήσεως ἐπιφανῆναι αὐτῷ.
>
> There is a story that in the season of summer Herodian publicly predicted to the emperor Maurice his misfortunes; the man asseverated that the prophetic message had been manifested to him not without divine utterance.[232]

Although Theophylact gives Herodian's name, the historian provides no further information about him. We do not know whether he was a monastic or clergyman, simply that he was somehow privy to divine utterance. Herodian's prophecy was understated and, unlike the anonymous *Salos*, was not accompanied by any physical gestures. Still, the prophecy was made known in some way to the public. The casual reference to the man's name, in contrast to the unknown monk mentioned prior, coupled with his ability to gain a public audience, suggests that Herodian may have been somewhat of a celebrity and well known to Theophylact's audience.

The use of monastics or saintly people as the mouthpiece of these *vaticinia ex eventu* is interesting on several levels. It is curious that the prophecies contain no rebuke or accusations of misdeeds. The deliverers of the prophecies are not exercising a prophetic office in the Biblical sense to speak truth to power, but rather bringing tidings of what is to come. There is a sense that, unlike many predictions of death, such as the warning to the emperor Anastasius discussed in Chapter 2, Maurice's impending demise was no fault of his own, and furthermore, was a preordained inevitability. The prophecies offer no means to prevent the events which they predict. They are simply an inevitability, preceded by a supernatural warning.

Theophylact prefaces the story of the anonymous monk with the remark that his prediction bore witness to the impending demise of the imperial family, an event which would bring "the universal suffering of the world". In this statement, Theophylact reveals his belief that the

[232] Theophylact Simocatta, *Historiae*, VII.12.11 [de Boor and Wirth (1972), 266]. Trans. Whitby and Whitby (1986), 196.

murder of Maurice and his family is the direct cause of the Persian invasions and the associated suffering. The inclusion of these prophecies, through the mouths of holy men, each corroborating the other, lends a sense of authority to the predictions and, more importantly, lends a sense of gravity to the events which they predict. These events will shake the foundations of the earth to such a degree, that God has seen fit to warn the people of Rome through a series of prophecies. Moreover, these episodes illustrate a recurring paradox throughout Theophylact's work that the events which are predicted, while disturbing divine order and bearing future disaster, are nevertheless inevitable and, more importantly, fall within God's providential plan.

While the accounts of the prophecies given by the two holy men are an initial shock to the reader, it is not entirely surprising to find gifts of prescience bestowed upon holy people. However, Theophylact does not limit the prophetic accounts of Maurice's murder to holy men. In two instances, lay people, with no apparent concern for political events, are made aware of the coming regime change through prophetic revelation. The first instance occurs during a mutiny during the campaigns against the Avars, perhaps related to the military discontent discussed in Chapter 1. Godwin, a junior military official in the Balkans, tells the general Peter of a dream in which he had received royal missives with an unusual greeting.[233] Theophylact provides the following account of the exchange:

> τὴν δὲ τῆς ἐπιστολῆς προγραφὴν ἔχειν ἐπὶ λέξεως οὕτως· "ὁ κύριος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦς ὁ Χριστός, ὁ ἀληθινὸς θεός, ἡ θεία χάρις, ὁ τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν προεστὼς τὰ ἐλλείποντα ἀναπληροῖ εἰς τὸ πᾶσι συμφέρον καὶ προΐστησιν ἐπὶ τοῦ παρόντος τόνδε τῆς νέας δεσπότην".
>
> The salutation of the letter was this, word for word: 'Our Lord Jesus the Christ, the true God, the divine grace, the leader of the churches, accomplishes what is lacking for the advantage of everyone, and for the present promotes this master of the revolt.'"[234]

[233] Recent years have seen significant work on Byzantine dream theory, however much work remains to be done on the seventh century. Paul Magdalino takes no notice of Theophylact Simocatta in his study of dreams in Byzantine historiography, beginning his study in the ninth century with Theophanes Continuatus: Magdalino (2014). Bronwen Neil's work has helped to address this lacuna.Cf. Neil (2016). I would like to thank Professor Neil for letting me examine her chapter "Pagan and Christian Dream Theory in Maximus the Confessor"(Neil forthcoming b), in which she discusses Maximus the Confessor's theory of dreams. As Neil states, Maximus the Confessor was accused of having a dream which lent support to the exarch of North Africa, Gregory the Patrician, in his attempted coup against Constans II, a charge which Maximus deflected based, in part, on his view of the involuntary nature of dreams. This account bears striking similarity to the one discussed by Theophylact.

[234] Theophylact Simocatta, *Historiae*, VIII.6.6 [de Boor and Wirth (1972), 294]. Trans. Whitby and Whitby (1986), 218.

Theophylact depicts Godwin as a passive recipient of a prophetic dream. Godwin does not appear to be attempting to justify a coup, but instead seems to find the dream disturbing. Both Godwin and Peter are troubled by the dream, and decide to remain silent. This would have been a politically expedient move, considering the uncertainty of the political situation.

Theophylact's next prophetic account is said to have occurred on the day of Maurice's murder. In this instance, the recipient is an ordinary individual, an Alexandrian calligrapher. While returning home from a night of celebrations and excessive drinking, the anonymous calligrapher received a horrifying vision revealing the actions taken by Phocas and his associates. Theophylact describes the vision in the following account:

> μεσούσης τοίνυν νυκτός, καὶ γενόμενος κατὰ τὸ λεγόμενον τῆς πόλεως Τύχαιον χῶρος δ' (οὗτος τῆς Ἀλεξανδρείας ἐπίσημος) ὁρᾷ τοὺς ἐπισημοτέρους τῶν ἀνδριάντων ἐκ τῶν βωμῶν καθερπύσαντας καὶ μεγίστην αὐτῷ ἀφιέντας φωνήν, ἐξονομακλήδην τὸν ἄνδρα προσαγορεύσαντας διηγουμένους τε μεγάλῃ καὶ συντόνῳ φωνῇ τὰ κατ' ἐκείνην τὴν ἡμέραν παρηκολουθηκότα συμπτώματα Μαυρικίῳ τῷ αὐτοκράτορι.
>
> In the middle of the night then, as he was approaching the city's Tychaeum, as it is called (this is a famous place in Alexandria), he saw the more famous statues stealing down from their pedestals; they emitted to him a very loud utterance, addressing the man by name, and in loud and vehement utterance describing the calamities which had attended the emperor Maurice on that day.[235]

In this instance, the calligrapher in a state of intoxication receives a waking vision. It is interesting that, although the statues call him out by name, the calligrapher remains anonymous. This account is not a prophecy in the strictest sense, because the events announced have already come to pass. Instead, it is depicted as a supernatural revelation of the "calamities" which have already occurred.

News of this supernatural event eventually reached the ears of Peter, the prefect of Egypt, who, incidentally, is revealed to be a relative of Theophylact. Peter ordered the calligrapher to remain silent about the vision and await confirmation regarding the fate of the emperor. Messengers arrived nine days later to announce the death of Maurice and the accession of

[235] Theophylact Simocatta, *Historiae*, VIII.13.10 [de Boor and Wirth (1972), 310]. Trans. Whitby and Whitby (1986), 231.

Phocas, and consequently confirmed the waking vision. Upon the confirmation of the vision, Peter changed his attitude toward the event, and attempted to capitalise upon the calligrapher's prophetic gifts, as Theophylact recounts in the following:

> τῶν τοίνυν προμεμηνυμένων διὰ τῶν ἀνδριάντων, ἢ δαιμόνων εἰπεῖν οἰκειότερον, ὡς διέγνω τὰς ἐκβάσεις ὁ Πέτρος, ἐς τὸ φανερὸν τὴν προαγόρευσιν ἐθριάμβευσε τόν τε εἰς κάλλος γράφοντα ἐς μέσον προὐβάλλετο καὶ κύριον αὐτὸν τῆς ἱστορίας ἐδείκνυεν.
>
> Then, after Peter had discerned the outcome of the events predicted by the statues, or to speak more appropriately demons, he publicly paraded the prophecy, brought to prominence the man who wrote for adornment, and pointed him out as the authority for the story.[236]

This account provides several interesting contrasts with the previously mentioned prophecies. It is curious that in this instance Theophylact attributes the prophecy of the statues to demons. The calligrapher's vision was far more horrific than the three previous prophecies. What is more, Theophylact associates the calligrapher's vision of the statues with his excessive drinking, which seems to have rendered him subject to demonic influence. There seems to be further differences in the fact that the vision of the statues announced events which had already come to pass, and which Theophylact had already made clear were the root cause of the Persian invasions and associated disasters. Perhaps, in this instance, the demons were not providing a warning, but were gloating about the accomplishments of Phocas. We also hear that the exarch Peter, rather than mourning over Maurice's demise, seeks to profit from the calligrapher's abilities, demonstrating extreme avarice.

Regardless of Theophylact's purpose for the demonic association, there is a clear distinction between prophecies which provide warnings of future events— and which were attributed to holy people, or in the case of Godwin, Christ himself— and the demonic announcement of the event after it had taken place. Each of the negative factors surrounding the vision of the statues and their subsequent reception serve to reinforce the horrific nature of Maurice's demise. By associating the emperor's death with demonic influence, Theophylact

[236] Theophylact Simocatta, *Historiae*, VIII.13.14 [de Boor and Wirth (1972), 311]. Trans. Whitby and Whitby (1986), 233.

illustrates the true inspiration behind the murders. Phocas was not elected by God, but inspired by demons to usurp the throne.

As a whole, the *vaticinia ex eventu* associated with the murder of Maurice prompt a number of interesting observations. It is worth noting the diverse figures who were bearers of prophecy. In the first two examples, we find figures who are depicted as holy men. The prophetic holy man was a common trope in late-Roman apocalyptic discourse, as we have already seen in sixth-century examples discussed in Chapter 2. Thus, the reader would not have been surprised to see the anonymous monk and Herodian depicted as bearers of prophecy. What is more, the first two prophecies take place in the capital. In the case of Herodian, he apparently had direct access to the emperor himself, while the anonymous monk was free to wander the forum unhindered with an unsheathed sword. Each of these instances represents both an urban and ecclesiastical source of prophecy. Moreover, both initial recipients seem to have been willing participants, actively seeking prophetic revelation.

These *vaticinia ex eventu* and their bearers are of a different kind from Godwin and the calligrapher. Both of our later recipients were figures located on the periphery of the empire. Godwin was located in the Balkans, on the front lines fighting against the Avars and removed from Constantinople. The unknown calligrapher was located in Alexandria in Egypt, a nine-day's journey from the capital. Neither figure was apparently known for his holiness; in fact, the calligrapher received his vision after a night of drinking. Both men appear to have been the recipients of unexpected and unwanted dreams and visions, the descriptions of their visions differing from the prophecies received by the holy men. Moreover, both men are noteworthy for their relative obscurity. Godwin, while an officer, was no general or person of apparent significance. Likewise, the calligrapher is so obscure that he remains nameless, even after gaining local notoriety once his vision was proven true, and despite being known by Theophylact's relative.

Finally, while all four prophetic accounts are given supernatural origins, their receptions and implications are varied. For the two holy men, their *vaticinia ex eventu* of the death of

Maurice and his family spelled disaster in no uncertain terms, even if they seemed to express the inevitability of Phocas's rule, rather than its aberration. Godwin's dream, on the other hand, seems to indicate the approval of Christ himself of regime change, going against the grain of book eight which portrays Phocas's ambition and brutality. Godwin's dream seems to remind the reader that the rise and fall of rulers is dictated by God's providential plan. Finally, in contrast to all three, we have the calligrapher's vision which is ascribed to demons. When considered alongside Godwin's dream, the calligrapher's vision reinforces the paradox that God may use demonically driven actors to accomplish his providential plan.

The simplest explanation for the variety of prophecies is Theophylact's varied sources.[237] Perhaps Theophylact compiled a variety of reported prophecies to demonstrate the aberrant nature of the events, as well as the significance of Maurice's death in ushering in the disastrous Persian invasions. Although the variety of stories seems to lack cohesion, it is their variety that is interesting for the subject of this chapter. If these *vaticinia ex eventu* are from disparate sources from a variety of locations, it demonstrates the extent to which apocalyptic discourse was employed to understand Maurice's demise and the subsequent decline of the empire. From this perspective, we have not a single source which uses apocalyptic discourse, but rather four independent sources. We also find in these accounts evidence that Maurice had begun to acquire heroic status shortly after his death, presaged by an uptick in prophetic stories about his demise, as preserved by Theophylact in his *Historiae*.

Michael and Mary Whitby, in a footnote on the final prophecy from the calligrapher's vision observe another dimension— possible evidence of a nascent movement towards Maurice's canonisation as a saint. Here they note that "the miraculous announcement of a person's death could be used as proof of his saintliness", as demonstrated in a similar instance in the life of John the Almsgiver.[238] This observation is confirmed by their later observation about a surviving Syriac hagiography on the life of Maurice, which includes an account repeated by

[237] For Theophylact's sources, see Whitby (1988), 222-241.
[238] Whitby and Whitby (1986) 232, n. 82.

Theophylact in which Maurice reveals that the royal nurse had replaced a royal infant with one of her own children to preserve Maurice's line, sacrificing his dynasty in an act of virtue in the face of death.[239] This story may have allowed the false Theodosius, the pretender to Maurice's dynastic line who claimed to be the emperor's son, to gain enough of a following to be accepted by Chosroes II as the legitimate Roman emperor.[240]

It can be debated whether Theophylact was building a case for Maurice's sainthood, considering that, despite Theophylact's clear loyalty to Maurice, he provides no evidence of any personal veneration. While this could be explained by the fact that Theophylact is writing a history rather than a hagiography, as we have noted, traditionally ascribed generic lines were fluid, and some personal assertions of Maurice's sainthood would not have been out of place. Regardless, I would argue that the proliferation of prophetic accounts of Maurice's death and subsequent imperial misfortune were, in part, evidence of a movement which understood Maurice's death as martyrdom, and revered the emperor as a saint. Perhaps Theophylact's role in this movement was as a compiler of evidence, or perhaps he unwittingly bore witness to a phenomenon in which he had no personal stake. In any case, since clear evidence exists of the veneration of the emperor as a saint, it is entirely plausible that a cult venerating the emperor as a martyr grew after Maurice's death. Given the brutal way in which Maurice and his family were killed, and given the growing apocalyptic significance associated with Maurice, the formation of such a cult would not be surprising.

b. Heraclius: The Empire's New Hope

If our sources are to be trusted, it is difficult to overestimate the negative psychological impact that Phocas's *coup d'état* and the subsequent defeat at the hands of the Persians had upon the Roman people. Surviving documents present a paradoxical record of Phocas. On the one hand, the usurper was a destroyer of divine order who presumed to violate the sanctity of the imperial office through murder. For this he received his just reward, while bringing the empire

[239] Whitby and Whitby (1986), 227, n. 64.
[240] Treadgold (1997), 238.

down with him by provoking divine wrath. On the other hand, Phocas was merely a pawn in a divine providential drama, and would never have been able to act otherwise.

If Phocas's usurpation was one act in a divinely written play, then after eight years of tragedy, Heraclius represented a dramatic change of scene. The poet George of Pisidia captures the hope in this transition better than most. George's earliest surviving work, *In Heraclium ex Africa redeuntem*, was written shortly after Heraclius's coup against Phocas and captures the tension between the difficulties of the present and the hope represented by the new emperor's ascent. One passage in particular summarises the hopeful optimism associated with Heraclius's rise, where George writes:

> πράττεις δὲ ταῦτα καὶ βιάζῃ τὸν χρόνον, // ὅταν τοσαύταις συμπλοκαῖς τὰ πράγματα // τὴν γῆν ἐπικλύζωσι ῥευμάτων δίκην. // ἀλλ' ἔστιν ἐλπὶς τῶν παρόντων δυσκόλων // ἐκ σοῦ πεπαῦσθαι πανταχοῦ τὰς φροντίδας·// εἰ γὰρ τὸ κοινὸν πολλάκις διώλετο // ταῖς τῶν κρατούντων ἀπροσεξίαις πεσόν, // καὶ νῦν τὸ κοινὸν ἐκ Θεοῦ σωθήσεται // ταῖς τοῦ κρατοῦντος εὐσεβῶς εὐπραξίαις
>
> But you accomplish these things even when you contend with the time, // whenever troubles, like floods // inundate the earth with so many struggles. // But there is hope concerning the present troubles // that the concerns will utterly be brought to an end by you; // for if the state has been utterly destroyed // having fallen by the neglect of those who rule // Even now the state will be saved by God // by the care of the pious ruler.[241]

Within this passage, George makes a number of stark contrasts, as well as some candid admissions. The situation inherited by Heraclius is bleak indeed, as George compares the troubles of the empire to a land inundated with floods. The admission that the state has been "utterly destroyed" is an unprecedentedly sombre image in late-Roman literature, which is traditionally characterised by triumphal optimism. These images capture the extremity of the despair which gripped the empire, even if one considers the panegyrical nature of the poem, which seeks to contrast the hope of Heraclius with the devastation of his predecessor. The reality of the situation is confirmed when compared with the "disaster" described by Theophylact, who deals with Heraclius only in passing.[242] George is equally clear in diagnosing the cause of this

[241] George of Pisidia, *In Heraclium ex Africa redeuntem*, 33-37 [Pertusi (1959), 64]. Translation mine.
[242] See Olster (1994), 30-44

ruin, namely, "the neglect of those who rule", or the unnamed Phocas. While this image of devastation is compelling on its own, its primary purpose is to highlight the fact that the long-awaited hope for the empire's restoration has arrived. God has raised up the pious ruler Heraclius who as God's instrument, will save the state from destruction.

George builds upon this imagery of hope throughout the rest of the poem, focusing on Heraclius's piety and devotion. In one particularly vivid passage, George writes:

> οὐκ ἐσφάλης δὲ τῆς τοσαύτης ἐλπίδος, // ἀλλ' ὡς ὁ πιστὸς Φινεὲς τῷ πνεύματι // τὴν πίστιν ἔσχες τῶν φόνων φονεύτριαν. // ἀφ' οὗ γὰρ ἡμᾶς τῆς τυραννικῆς βλάβης // ἐλευθερώσας ἐκ Θεοῦ δούλους ἔχεις, // τῶν αἱμάτων ἤργησεν ἡ δεινὴ χύσις, // ἐξ ἧς τὸ ῥεῦμα τῶν κακῶν ἐτίκτετο. // τούτων ἔχων, κράτιστε, τὴν μνήμην ἀεὶ // ἄνω τε ῥίψας πρὸς Θεὸν τὰς ἐλπίδας // ὄψει τὸν αὐτὸν ἐν τάχει Θεὸν πάλιν // σωτῆρα τῆς σῆς ἐλπίδος τὸ δεύτερον. // αὐτὸς γὰρ ἡμῖν τὰς πρὸς εἰρήνην θύρας // τοῖς σοῖς ἀνοίξει πανταχοῦ σπουδάσμασιν // δεικνὺς ἐκείνην τῷ κράτει σου σύνθρονον.
>
> But you did not fall from such hope // rather as faithful Phineas in spirit you held the murderess of murders. // From which, having freed us from the damage of tyranny // you hold us as slaves from God // a terrible flow of blood is fruitless, // from which the stream of evils sprung forth. // continually keeping the memory of these things, O Greatest Ruler // and having cast your hope up toward God, // you will look upon God himself again speedily // the second salvation of your hope // For he will open the door to Peace for us again // altogether through your pursuits // showing that She is your coregent in rule.[243]

Here, again, we witness George's beleaguered spirit, one surely shared by most Romans who endured the Persian conflict. George uses rich language and allusions to describe Heraclius, and by extension Phocas. Heraclius is described as "faithful Phineas in spirit", recalling the priest of the Hebrew Bible who slew the Midianite woman, here compared to an unnamed Phocas, and stopped the plague which had befallen the Israelites who disobeyed God's command to slay the Midianites.[244] This allusion serves to justify Heraclius's own murder of Phocas, which had no more legal justification than Phocas's own murder of Maurice. Heraclius is further described as a second salvation, who will be blessed by God for his faithfulness, and rule with a personified peace as his co-regent. Within this passage, we see the full expression of the primary hope for Heraclius's reign, that he would restore the empire's faithfulness to God which, like the Israelites

[243] George of Pisidia, *In Heraclium ex Africa redeuntem*, 56-69 [Pertusi (1959), 66].
[244] Cf. Numbers 25.

who allowed the Midianites to live, had been broken by Phocas; and as a result, peace would be restored to the realm.

These two passages, like the passage from Theophylact, bear witness to the developing conception of the emperor as a cosmically significant, almost supernatural, figure. For George, Heraclius did not seize the throne by his own ambition, but instead was chosen by God according to providence. We also see a turning point, where the depression after defeat begins to shift toward an attitude of hope. This hope only increased and found further expression as Heraclius rose from a newly ascendant emperor to a triumphant commander, whose armies finally made inroads against the Persians. This poem, an early example of George's work, is rich with anticipation that Heraclius will be a divine instrument of peace, just as Phocas was an instrument of destruction. The fact that this poem is early is important to remember. It was composed well before Heraclius had a chance to prove himself on the throne, and with no hint of the future Arab invasions. It serves as a barometer of early Roman attitudes towards Heraclius's ascent, which can be compared with later attitudes as Heraclius's campaigns progressed.

1. Biblical Tropes

If the hopes for Heraclius's reign were elevated at the beginning of his career before they had been proven on the battlefield, they found their full expression after his final victory over the Persians. George of Pisidia made full use of the literary resources at his disposal, though his preferred rhetorical devices were Biblical and Classical typologies. We have already seen an example of George's use of Biblical typology in his depiction of Heraclius as a new Phineas, contrasted with Phocas as the Midianite woman. After the death of the Persian king Chosroes II, and the subsequent truce between Heraclius and Chosroes's successor Cavadh II, George penned one of his most ambitious works, the *Heracliad*, an epic poem in praise of the emperor. Within this work, George juxtaposes the evil fire-worshipping Chosroes, along with the useless Magi and astrologers, with the victorious Heraclius who, combining Classical and Old Testament tropes, is called a new Demosthenes and a new Heracles, as well a new Daniel, and new Noah.

In one of his more colourful passages, George draws upon the language of the book of Daniel, comparing Heraclius with Daniel and the three youths in the furnace. We see this typology in the following passage:

> σκίρτησον αἰθήρ ὁ κρατῶν Περσοκράτης // ὁ πυρσολάτρης ἐζοφώθη Χοσρόης. // πάλιν κάμινος Περσικὴ καὶ Δευτέρα // δροσίζεται φλὸξ <τῷ> Δανιὴλ τῷ δευτέρῳ, // ἀνωφερὴς δὲ καίπερ οὖσα τὴν φύσιν // χεῖται κατ᾽ αὐτῶν καὶ διώκει καὶ φλέγει // τοὺς τὴν πονηρὰν ἐκπυρώσαντας φλόγα·// πάλιν λεόντων ἠγριωμένων στόμα // εἰς γῆν δι᾽ ὑμῶν Περσικὴν ἀνεφράγη·// πάλιν παροινεῖ δυσσεβῶς ὁ Χοσρόης // καὶ πῦρ θεουργεῖ καὶ θεὸς φαντάζεται, // ἕως σὺν αὐτῷ καὶ τὸ πῦρ ὑπερβράσαν // σὺν τῷ θεουργήσαντι συγκατεφθάρη
>
> Leap, O Ether! For the Persian King of kings, // The fire worshipper Chosroes, has gone dark. // Again, the Persian furnace and a second flame // bedews the second Daniel, // And the flame, by nature, is ascendant, // it spreads over all of them [the Persians] // and chases, and burns up those who kindle the evil flame. // Again, the mouth of the ferocious lions, // because of you was stopped in the land of the Persians, // Again the impious Chosroes played the drunkard, // and worshipped fire and made himself into a God, // until the heated fire with him, // and with the worshipper was destroyed.[245]

In this vivid passage, George casts Chosroes II as Nebuchadnezzar, as foil to Heraclius, who has taken on the role of a second Daniel in the lion's den, along with that of Azaria, Mischael, and Hananiah in the furnace.[246] The poet expands upon this typological pairing by extending it to ironically incorporate Zoroastrian fire worship, and by comparing Chosroes II's defeat to the death of the Babylonians who were burned by the furnace they were heating.

In this passage, George inserts contemporary events into the prophetic narrative of the book of Daniel, through the use of poetic typology. Historically, these parallels are a natural fit, as the comparisons are well suited to depict a divinely chosen emperor who delivered the empire from destruction. Natural parallels can be drawn between the "Babylonian captivity" of Daniel, and the Persian occupation of Roman territory, particularly Jerusalem. George uses Biblical typology to insert the Christian Romans, the *verus Israel*, into God's providential narrative, making them a continuation of the prophetic narrative of Daniel, and placing the deliverance of

[245] George of Pisidia, *Heraclias*, I.15-25 [Pertusi (1959), 194, 196]. Cf. Daniel 1-6.
[246] Cf. Daniel 3.

the Romans by Heraclius on an equal footing with the deliverance of Daniel from the lion's den, and the youths from the fiery furnace.

2. Classical Tropes

It may seem counterintuitive to depict am emperor as a martyr whose death was prophesied, as we saw above with Maurice. After all, with the purple come numerous occupational hazards, chief among them the increased risk of an unnatural death. In the Christian Roman empire, it is a little less surprising to see its leader depicted in Biblical terms. Christian emperors from Constantine onward referred to themselves in Christian language, and their supporters often used Biblical tropes to promote their patrons. Likewise, the Old Testament provides a wealth of suitable tropes and typologies to depict God's use of a chosen ruler as the vehicle for his deliverance. However, in the post-Justinianic era, it may be less usual to find Christian authors using Classical typologies, and depicting their emperors as the reborn personae of pagan heroes. Yet, this very phenomenon proved to be a favourite among the emperor Heraclius's partisans, and occurred with relative frequency throughout seventh-century literature.

Perhaps an example of the most prolific use of Classical tropes to describe the emperor can be found in the revival of the legend of Alexander the Great, particularly in Syriac literature.[247] The seventh century witnessed a rediscovery and readaptation of the early-Christian romance genre, particularly the fourth century *Alexander Romance* of Pseudo-Callisthenes. This revival brought with it a twist, wherein Heraclius appears as the New Alexander.[248] Numerous examples survive in prose and metrical forms, the most famous being the Syriac *Alexander Legend.*[249] In these works, authors built upon earlier Syriac and Persian traditions, casting Heraclius as Alexander reborn, a superhuman figure resembling a messianic king. Doing battle against the Persians on behalf of the beleaguered Christian empire, he emerges triumphant and avenges oppression, in a continuation of the Classical tradition. For Heraclius's Syriac supporters, the

[247] See Monferrer-Sala (2011), 41-72.
[248] Reinink (2002), Reinink (1985).
[249]Budge (1889), 255-275 (Syriac edition), 144-158 (English translation). For the date and the Legend's role in promoting the Heraclian dynasty, see Reinink (1985).

events of the Persian invasions had been foretold during the reign of Alexander the Great, and Heraclius, though not mentioned directly, was typologically foretold in the life of the great Macedonian ruler.

The anonymous author of the Syriac *Alexander Legend*, written shortly after Heraclius's triumph over the Persians, circa 630, records an apocryphal tale of Alexander the Great's attempt to find the limits of the earth. In his search, he reaches the territory of the Persians, who are plagued by the nations of the North, Gog and Magog, whom the author identifies with the Huns, and who are described in vicious and dehumanising terms. Alexander constructs a giant gate, designed to hold the nations back until such time as God releases them to plague the Romans and the Persians.[250] Upon their release, Gog and Magog (or the Huns) and the Persians will destroy each other, and the Romans, identified with the line of Alexander, will rise up and defeat both empires.[251] On the gates, Alexander inscribes a prophecy concerning the future of the Roman and Persian Empires.

After the construction of the gate, Alexander is met in battle with the forces of the Persian King Tubarlaq. I agree with Gerrit Reinink's observation that these two figures represent a typological pairing, with Alexander representing Heraclius, and Tubarlaq standing for the typological counterpart of Chosroes II.[252] The two rulers decide to negotiate a truce to avoid further bloodshed. During the negotiations, Alexander discusses the prophecy of future Roman conquest which he inscribed upon the gate. This exchange provides two *vaticinia ex eventu*, one from Alexander followed by another from the Persian astrologers in Tubarlaq's court. The first prophecy, related by Alexander, is as follows:

> And my kingdom, which is called [the kingdom] of the house of Alexander the son of Philip the Macedonian, shall go out and destroy the earth and the ends of the heavens. And there shall not be found any among the nations and tongues who dwell in the Creation that shall withstand the kingdom of the Romans.[253]

[250] *Alexander Legend*, [Budge (1889), 268-271]. The description of the Huns will be discussed in chapter 5.
[251] Cf. The Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius for the lineage of the Roman imperial line.
[252] Reinink (1985), 266, Reinink (2002), 86.
[253] *Alexander Legend*, [Budge (1889), 270]. Trans. Budge (1889), 155.

Alexander's prophecy accomplishes several things relevant to our study. First, he establishes the Romans as a continuation of the line of Alexander. This theme will be picked up at the end of the century by another Syriac author, Pseudo-Methodius, who employs a fictitious genealogy to trace the Roman imperial family back to Alexander the Great. More specifically, it establishes that Heraclius, under whose reign the *Alexander Legend* was written, was descended from Alexander and, by extension, the reborn persona of the Macedonian hero. Finally, and perhaps rather more mundanely, it establishes a supposedly ancient prophecy concerning the historical victory of the Romans over the Persians, a victory which was contemporary with the composition of the *Alexander Legend.*

Although Tubarlaq does not protest Alexander's account, he decides to consult his astrologers or, more properly, Magi, to see if they are able to confirm the authenticity of the prophecy. The Magi in turn confirm the prophecy by offering their own, as follows:

> And Alexander took with himself in writing the king's and his nobles' prophecy of what should befall Persia: that Persia would be laid waste by the Romans, and that all the kingdoms would be laid waste, but that that [kingdom of the Romans] would last and rule to the end of times and that that [kingdom of the Romans] would deliver the kingdom of the earth to Christ, who is to come.[254]

With a parallel prophecy in the voice of the Persian astrologers, the author offers a secondary confirmation of the prophecy, from a hostile source, lending credibility to the account. The Persian prophecy builds upon Alexander's by confirming that the Roman Empire will endure until the end, and only cease upon Christ's return, whom the pagan Alexander and Zoroastrian Persians acknowledge to be superior. Here we find the only mention of eschatology, which is tangentially addressed to confirm the eternal duration of the Roman Empire.

Since Tubarlaq is a representation of Chosroes II, it is worth noting a similar prophetic tradition attributed to Chosroes II and discussed by Theophylact Simocatta. Reinink offers the interesting suggestion that the author of the *Alexander Legend* may have written his prophecies in response to this tradition which provided a more positive role for the Persians.[255] In an

[254] *Alexander Legend,* [Budge (1889), 275]. Trans. Budge (1889), 158.
[255] Reinink (2002), 86-89.

encounter between Chosroes II, John, Maurice's general of the Armenian forces, mocked the disorder of the Persian troops. In response, Chosroes offered the following prophecy:

> εἰ μή περ ὑπὸ τοῦ καιροῦ ἐτυραννούμεθα, οὐκ ἂν ἐθάρρησας, στρατηγέ, τὸν μέγαν ἐν ἀνθρώποις βασιλέα βάλλειν τοῖς σκώμμασιν. ἐπεὶ δὲ τοῖς παροῦσι μέγα φρονεῖς, ἀκούσῃ τί δῆτα τοῖς θεοῖς ἐς ὕστερον μεμελέτηται. ἀντικαταρρεύσει, εὖ ἴσθι, ἐς τοὺς Ῥωμαίους ὑμᾶς δεινά. ἕξεται δὲ τὸ Βαβυλώνιον φῦλον τῆς Ῥωμαϊκῆς πολιτείας κρατοῦν τριττὴν κυκλοφορικὴν ἑβδομάδα ἐτῶν. μετὰ δὲ τοῦτο πεμπταίαν ἑβδομάδα ἐνιαυτῶν Ῥωμαῖοι Πέρσας δουλαγωγήσητε. τούτων δὴ διηνυσμένων, τὴν ἀνέσπερον ἡμέραν ἐνδημεῖν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις καὶ τὴν προσδοκωμένην λῆξιν ἐπιβαίνειν τοῦ κράτους, ὅτε τὰ τῆς φθορᾶς παραδίδοται λύσει καὶ τὰ τῆς κρείττονος διαγωγῆς πολιτεύεται.
>
> If we were not subject to the tyranny of the occasion, you would not have dared, general, to strike with insults the king who is great among mortals. But since you are proud in present circumstances, you shall hear what indeed the gods have provided for the future. Be assured that troubles will flow back in turn against you Romans. The Babylonian race will hold the Roman state in its power for a threefold cyclic hebdomad of years. Thereafter you Romans will enslave Persians for a fifth hebdomad of years. When these very things have been accomplished, the day without evening will dwell among mortals and the expected fate will achieve power, when the forces of destruction will be handed over to dissolution and those of the better life hold sway.[256]

This prophecy serves, in part, as a *vaticinium ex eventu* of the Persian occupation of Roman territory as a result of the initial Persian campaigns, as well as of the subsequent Roman victory under Heraclius. It is followed by a more obscure, unfulfilled prophecy of a future period of peace when "the forces of destruction", probably the military forces of both armies, will be dissolved and a period of peace will occur.

Reinink is right to note that neither of these prophecies includes traditional eschatological themes, such as the end of days or the rise of an antichrist.[257] The prophecy of Chosroes II in Theophylact, as well as in the *Alexander Legend*, each provide apocalyptic accounts through *vaticinia ex eventu,* which are primarily non-eschatological, and are concerned with depicting the future status of the Roman Empire as a universal empire that conquers the Persians and other local adversaries once and for all, to accomplish complete domination. Gog and Magog, which traditionally serve as the final adversaries who are defeated at the return of Christ, are here

[256] Theophylact Simocatta, *Historiae*, V.15.5-7 [de Boor and Wirth (1972), 216-217]. Trans. Whitby and Whitby (1986), 153.
[257] Reinink (2002), 90.

defeated by the Roman Empire and its ruler, the New Alexander. We see here not an anticipation of the end, but a new beginning for a long enduring Roman Empire.

Depictions of the emperor as the new Alexander the Great continued to be a significant theme in the late-Roman apocalyptic imagination. The author of the *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius, writing more than fifty years after the death of Heraclius, carried the Alexander tradition forward by devoting the first half of his text to establishing a fictional genealogy of the Roman imperial line back to Alexander who, according to the *Apocalypse*, was the son of Philip of Macedon and his unknown Ethiopian wife Chuseth. For reasons which are not immediately clear, the author is highly concerned to link the Roman emperors, and in particular the Last Roman Emperor, to Alexander and the kingdom of Ethiopia.[258] It is also interesting that genealogical accounts such as those found in the *Alexander Legend* or the *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius assume an unbroken imperial line, and do not take account of the numerous dynastic changes which took place throughout Roman history, including those of the seventh century.

Alexander was not the only Classical figure used by late-Roman authors in their typological depictions of the emperors. Within Constantinopolitan circles, Homeric tropes were popular choices to portray both Heraclius and Phocas. Theophylact Simocatta's *Historiae* is replete with Classical references, beginning with his opening dialogue, the only one of its kind in classicizing historiography, between History and Philosophy. Employing the *dramatis persona* of Philosophy, Theophylact refers to Phocas as a "Barbarian mongrel of the Cyclopean breed" and a "centaur", here drawing on negative imagery from Homer's *Odyssey*.[259] Using a range of Classical tropes, Theophylact describes the rule of Phocas as a period of ostracism, which is overturned by Heraclius in the following:

> κἀγὼ δὴ τότε τῆς βασιλέως στοᾶς ἐξωστρακίσθην, ὦ θύγατερ, καὶ τῆς Ἀττικῆς ἐπιβαίνειν οὐκ ἦν, ὁπότε τὸν ἐμὸν βασιλέα Σωκράτην ὁ Θρᾷξ ἐκεῖνος διώλεσεν Ἄνυτος. χρόνῳ δ' ὕστερον Ἡρακλεῖδαι διέσωσαν καὶ τὴν πολιτείαν ἀπέδοσαν τό τε ἄγος τῶν ἀνακτόρων ἀποδιοπομπήσαντο, ναὶ δῆτα καὶ πρὸς τὰ βασιλέων τεμένη εἰσῴκισαν. καὶ περιλαλῶ τὰ βασίλεια καὶ ταῦτα δὴ τὰ ἀρχαῖα καὶ Ἀττικὰ μουσουργῶ

[258] This remains a subject of significant debate. See Alexander (1978) and Reinink's response in Reinink (1992), and Reinink (2001).
[259] Theophylact Simocatta, *Historiae*, dialog.4 [de Boor and Wirth (1972), 21]. Trans. Whitby and Whitby (1986), 3. Phocas as an adversary will be discussed in Chapter 5.

κελαδήματα. ἐμοὶ μὲν δὴ ταῦτα ὅπως ἔχει καλῶς

> I too, my daughter, was ostracized then from the royal colonnade, and could not enter Attica at the time when that Thracian Anytus destroyed Socrates my king. But subsequently the Heraclidae saved and restored the state, exorcized the pollution from the palaces, and indeed settled in the royal precincts. I celebrate the royal courts and compose these antique Attic hymns. For me indeed this is the source of prosperity.[260]

In this passage, Theophylact depicts Phocas as a "Thracian Anytus", the accuser of Socrates, whose accusations resulted in the philosopher's death by poisoning. For Theophylact, Socrates, as Michael and Mary Whitby observe, represents the emperor Maurice, whose murder by Phocas was as detrimental to humanity as the death of Socrates.[261] Continuing the rhetorical use of Attic metaphors, Theophylact describes the decline of philosophical inquiry under Phocas as a type of ostracism, mirroring the system of political exile in Classical Athens.

Although Theophylact depicts the reign of Phocas in the darkest Classical terms, Philosophy's speech is not without hope. Heraclius, in the fitting typology of the Heraclidae, the mythical descendants of Heracles, restores the state and purges it from the pollution of Phocas. Furthermore, Heraclius restores philosophy to its proper place in the court and ensures its prosperity. In exchange, philosophy composes antique Attic hymns. The typology of Heraclius with Heracles and his descendants, made practical by the similarity in name, would prove popular among the emperor's partisans.

Theophylact deploys this Heracles typology once more in the opening dialogue, but does so in a puzzling way. In this case, the *dramatis persona* of History describes Her saviour in the following passage:

> μῶν οὐκ οἶσθα, βασίλεια, τὸν μέγαν τῆς ἁπανταχόθεν οἰκουμένης ἀρχιερέα καὶ πρόεδρον;… ἔχεις οὐκοῦν, ὦ βασίλεια, τὸ ζητούμενον αὐτοσχέδιον ἔρμαιον. ἐκεῖνος ἐνεψύχωσεν ὥσπερ ἐκ τάφου τινὸς τῆς ἀλογίας ἀναλαβόμενος, οἷάπερ Ἄλκηστίν τινα ἀλεξικάκου τινὸς Ἡρακλέους ἀναστησάμενος ῥώμῃ. εἰσεποιήσατο δὲ μεγαλοφρόνως περιέβαλέ τε ἐσθῆτα φαιδρὰν καὶ χρυσέῳ κατεκόσμησεν ὅρμῳ.
>
> My queen, do you not know the great high priest and prelate of the universal inhabited world?... Assuredly, my queen, you have at hand the godsend you were seeking. That man brought me to life, raising me up, as it were, from a tomb of

[260] Theophylact Simocatta, *Historiae*, dialog.5 [de Boor and Wirth (1972), 20]. Trans. Whitby and Whitby (1986), 4.
[261] Whitby and Whitby (1988), 4.

> neglect, as though he were resurrecting an Alcestis with the strength of an evil-averting Heracles. He generously adopted me, clad me in gleaming raiment, and adorned me with a gold necklace.[262]

Philosophy echoes the praise of History with her own panegyrical observations in the following:

> ἄγαμαι, θύγατερ, τῆς μεγαλονοίας τὸν ἱεροφάντην ἐγώ, ὁπόσης κατορθωμάτων ἀναβάσεως ἐπιβέβηκε τὴν ὑψηλὴν τῆς θεολογίας ἀκρώρειαν περικαθήμενος ἐπί τε τὸν κολοφῶνα τῶν ἀρετῶν τὴν ἀποικίαν ποιούμενος. καὶ τῶν ὑπὸ σελήνην πλεονεκτημάτων ἀντέχεται, καὶ βίος αὐτῷ οἱ πανάριστοι λόγοι· οὐκ ἐθέλει γὰρ οὔτε τὸν περίγειον κόσμον μένειν ἀκόσμητον. οὕτως ὀναίμην τῶν ἐμῶν ἐραστῶν. ἢ σώματος ἐκτὸς φιλοσοφεῖ ἐπὶ γῆς, ἢ θεωρία σωματωθεῖσα μετὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ὡς ἄνθρωπος ἀναστρέφεται.
>
> My daughter, I admire the hierophant for his magnanimity, and for the great ascent of good deeds he has mounted; he sits on the lofty summit of divine wisdom and makes his abode on the peak of the virtues. He clings to terrestrial excellence, and the all-perfect words are life to him, for he does not wish even the earthly order to remain disordered. May I thus profit my devotees. Either he lives as an incorporeal philosopher on earth, or he is the incarnation of contemplation dwelling as a man among men.[263]

Until now, I have avoided identifying the "saviour" of History and the subject of this extended panegyric, as it presents a complicated historical problem. Scholars have accepted two likely possibilities. Initially, the most obvious "saviour" would be the emperor Heraclius, based on the comparison with Heracles and the natural pun on the emperor's name. Indeed, George of Pisidia uses the same pun in an unambiguous description of the emperor that will be explored momentarily. This association was first identified by Pertusi in his edition of George's work, and confirmed by Hunger and Frendo.[264] In defence of this position, Frendo argues, "What must be decisive here is the utter inapplicability of the Heracles-Heraclius pun (already exploited by Theophylact in his reference to the Heraclidae) to Patriarch Sergius".[265]

At first blush, it makes perfect sense to identify the "saviour" of History as with the emperor Heraclius. Yet, this hypothesis is difficult to maintain when one considers the priestly language used to describe History's obliquely referenced patron. In her initial description, History describes the subject as "τὸν μέγαν τῆς ἁπανταχόθεν οἰκουμένης ἀρχιερέα καὶ

[262] Theophylact *Historiae* dialog.8-9 [de Boor and Wirth (1972), 21]. Trans. Whitby and Whitby (1986), 4-5.
[263] Theophylact *Historiae* dialog.11 [de Boor and Wirth (1972), 21-22]. Trans. Whitby and Whitby (1986), 5.
[264] Pertusi (1959), 12; Hunger (1978), 315; Frendo (1988), n. 11.
[265] Frendo (1988), n. 11

πρόεδρον", which Michael and Mary Whitby translate as "the great high priest and prelate of the universal inhabited world". Here, "ὁ ἀρχιερεύς" unambiguously refers to a high priesthood. On the other hand, although "ὁ πρόεδρος" indicates a position of primacy, it does not necessarily carry priestly connotations of a prelate, and could just as easily refer to a presiding officer.[266] Philosophy continues the use of priestly language, describing the patron as a "ἱεροφάντης", another word with unambiguous clerical connotations.

This priestly language has significant implications for the identity of the "saviour" of history. Michael and Mary Whitby have followed Toynbee and Schreiner in identifying the subject as the Patriarch Sergius, based on the Theophylact use of priestly language.[267] Frendo, however, protests the elimination of Heraclius based on these considerations alone. Frendo's argument is based primarily on the heavy weight of the Heracles pun, but also on the fact that precedent existed for the use of ἀρχιερεύς as a title for the emperor in the Acts of the Council of Ephesus, as well as ἱεροφάντης, which was used by Eusebius of Caesarea to describe Constantine.[268] I would also add that it would be strange to praise a patriarch in such lofty terms, by using a Heracles typology. Moreover, the assertion that History's saviour "restored order", is in line with praise offered to Heraclius by other authors such as George of Pisidia.

Both options present significant problems for the study of the seventh century. If we identify Patriarch Sergius as the referent, we are faced with the difficulty of explaining the Heracles typology. This would not be so problematic if had not been used by George of Pisidia to refer to Heraclius in unambiguous terms. Likewise, the elevated language seems excessive for a panegyric directed toward a patriarch, and nothing about the work suggests that Sergius had commissioned the *Historiae*, or done anything else to warrant such fawning praise in this context. On the other hand, if we accept Heraclius as the referent, we are confronted with the most direct association of the imperial office with the priesthood since Constantine. If we accept Frendo's arguments, we must reject his easy dismissal of the importance of the priestly language

[266] Cf. *LSJ*, s.v. πρόεδρος
[267] Toynbee (1964), 95; Schreiner (1985), 240-241, n. 12; Whitby and Whitby (1986), 4, n. 9.
[268] Frendo (1988) n. 11.

employed by Theophylact which, as we will discuss below, was at best at a nascent stage at this point in history. I am inclined, with some hesitance, to accept Frendo's attribution of the referent of praise to Heraclius, while noting the revolutionary nature of this association between the imperial office and the priesthood.

We will return to the nascent conceptions of the imperial priesthood momentarily. With regards to the use of Classical tropes by Theophylact in his depiction of seventh-century Roman emperors, the opening dialogue between Philosophy and History is a set of tropes within a trope. The use of the Platonic dialogue to introduce a classicising history was unheard of, and was not repeated. Theophylact uses the Classical genre of philosophical teaching to depict the impact of Heraclius's ascent not only on the empire, but on Knowledge itself. Theophylact skilfully employs a range of Classical typologies to depict the emperor Heraclius as not only a new set of Heraclidae, but as a new Heracles himself, the hero who purged the empire of the filth induced by the new centaur Phocas. The martyrdom of Maurice, a theme which we have seen is central to Theophylact's narrative, is depicted the death of Socrates. In each of these cases, the events of the first decades of the seventh century are translated into a Classical narrative, making the Romans and their emperors a continuation of ancient Hellenistic tradition.

Part of what makes the attribution of the Theophylact's "saviour" of History to Heraclius so convincing is the use of the Heracles and Alcestis narrative, with its natural pun on the emperor's name. This evidence is made more compelling by the fact that this same narrative and typology was used by George of Pisidia to describe Heraclius and his rallying victory over the Sassanid Persians.[269] We have already visited George's epic paean, the *Heraclias,* in our consideration of its use of imagery from the Book of Daniel. Here we will revisit the poem to focus on George's use of Classicising tropes, in his comparison of the life of Heraclius with the trials of Heracles. In what follows, George stretches the limits of classicising typology when he

[269] For George's representation of his patrons Heraclius and the Patriarch Sergius, whom he shared with Theophylact, see Whitby (1988).

transposes the emperor and his adversaries to the Classical drama of Heracles and his twelve labours. He writes:

> Ὅμηρε, τὸν πρὶν μηδαμῶς Ἡρακλέα // θεὸν προσειπεῖν ἀξιώσῃς ἀσκόπως·// τί γὰρ τὸ κοινὸν ὠφέλησε τοῦ βίου // κάπρος φονευθεὶς ἢ λέων πεπνιγμένος; // θαύμαζε μᾶλλον ὡς ἐν ἀνθρώποις ἕνα // τὸν **κοσμορύστην** εὐλόγως Ἡρακλέα. // κατῆλθεν οὗτος ἄχρι τῆς Ἅιδου θύρας, // τὴν λύτταν ἦγξε τοῦ κυνὸς τοῦ παμφάγου, // Ἄλκηστιν ἐξήγειρε τὴν οἰκουμένην, // ἀνεῖλε τὸν δράκοντα τὸν μιαιφόνον // καθεῖλεν ὕδραν μυριαύχενον βλάβην, // ῥυπῶντα τὸν πρὶν ἐξεκόπρωσεν βίον, // ἔπνιξε τὸν λέοντα τὸν κοσμοφθόρον, // καὶ νῦν προῆλθεν Ἡρακλῆς τῷ πράγματι // λαβὼν τὰ χρυσᾶ μῆλα, τὰς πόλεις ὅλας.
>
> O Homer! You were right of old // not to heedlessly consider Heracles a god // for what benefit for the common good // is a slain boar or a strangled lion? // Rather marvel, reasonably, that there is one among men // who is the **deliverer of the Cosmos**, Heraclius; // for he descended into the nethermost gates of Hades // and strangled the rage of the voracious dog // He raised up the empire as Alcestis, // he destroyed the bloodthirsty dragon // he subdued the hydra, the many-necked monster // he purged the life covered before with filth, // he strangled the world-polluting lion // And now Heracles went forth into the state // having taken the golden apples, the whole city.[270]

Although we find striking similarities in the treatment of Heracles by George and Theophylact, there are significant differences as well. For George, Alcestis represents the Roman Empire rather than the personified History in Theophylact. This association is striking, as it echoes George's admission of the fall of the empire referenced in his poem *In Heraclium ex Africa redeuntem* discussed above. Likewise, the rescue of the empire, here the new Alcestis, by the new Heracles fits well within the paradigm of Heraclius as a restorer.

George goes well beyond Theophylact's typology by associating Heraclius with several of the twelve labours of Heracles, including the Nemean lion, the Erymathian boar, the three-headed dog Cerberus, the Golden Apples and the slaying of Lydon, and the Auegean stables. With this expanded typology, George goes well beyond mere comparison of Heraclius to Heracles. Indeed, George declares that Heraclius is *superior* to Heracles, as the latter's twelve labours contributed nothing to the common good. For George, Heraclius, not Heracles, is the one deliverer of the Cosmos, whose exploits are superior to his namesake. Deliverer of the Cosmos, or κοσμορύστης, is a rare Greek word, and one which George employs elsewhere to describe

[270] George of Pisidia, *Heraclias*, I.65-79 [Pertusi (1959), 198]. Translation and emphasis mine.

Heraclius.[271] The poet's preference for this term illustrates his conception of Heraclius as a superior being who has been raised up to deliver the entire world from destruction, and re-establish Roman domination. This deliverance is important, as George's apocalyptic discourse anticipates a bright future for the empire without any apparent eschatological speculation.

The motif of Heracles's descent into Hades to deliver Alcestis, which in both Theophylact and George, has other implications which are worth exploring. The descent, used by Theophylact in reference to the defeat of Phocas and by George in reference to the final conquest of the Persians, evokes parallels to another descent into Hades, one which a Christian author or poet would not dare to use in reference to an emperor; namely, that of Christ. In both cases, Heraclius is a saviour, of History by Theophylact, and the Cosmos in George. For George, Heraclius is the deliverer of the Cosmos who descends into Hades to rescue the empire. In both examples, the image of Heraclius takes on clear messianic overtones, muted only by the use of Classical allusions instead of New Testament ones. In some ways, the use of Classical language allowed Christian authors greater flexibility in praising the emperor because they could make covert Christological comparisons which could be considered blasphemous if overt.

It would be tempting to discount the use of such extravagant language as the excesses of panegyric. George in particular has been remembered as a sycophant, due to his often decadent praise of his emperor. Scholars are right to question the sincerity of imperial flattery which, as we have seen in the case of Procopius in Chapter 2, is often obligatory if one desires a career in court. However, we should pause to reflect upon the significance of the events being addressed both by Theophylact and George. Crises had plagued the empire after Phocas's coup, resulting in significant Byzantine defeat, and the symbolic loss of Jerusalem and the True Cross. Heraclius, in equally dramatic fashion had recovered, against all odds, everything lost to the Persians. Such a dramatic and positive reversal of fortunes in the reign of a single emperor was almost unprecedented.

[271] Cf. George of Pisidia, *Hexameron*, 1845-1848. See Whitby (1998), 254-255.

Therefore, it is not farfetched to suggest that George believed that Heraclius was a divinely ordained restorer. Given the dramatic turn around, it is not unreasonable to believe that late-Roman citizens, including the literary elite, considered the emperor to be a divine figure on an apocalyptic scale. When we consider the material in light of the reaction to Maurice's murder, George's portrayal, expressed through the Classical canon, seems to be a simple extension of the view that the Roman emperors were cosmically significant figures. The use of Classical typology in apocalyptic discourse allowed Theophylact and George to locate the Romans and their emperors firmly in the Classical tradition. This had several effective results. The legitimacy of Heraclius, which as we have seen was as equally questionable as that of Phocas, could be promoted on the basis of its continuity with Classical history. Besides, the comparison of the emperor with Heracles, and the Persians with the 12 labours, made the difficulties of this period comprehensible, and provided reassurance. The Romans were not alone in their struggle. They need only look to the heroes of the ancient past, who paled in comparison with the great Heraclius, the saviour of History and the Cosmos, to find comfort in the fact that they were in the company of the ancients.

c. The Eschatological Emperor

Theophylact and George were justified in their celebration of Heraclius's victories over the Persians. After all, they had witnessed the destruction caused Persian invasions and the impact it had upon the Roman population. Heraclius's reversal could have been considered almost miraculous under the circumstances. However, the successes of the new Alexander and new Heracles would be short-lived, and the hopes of Heraclius as the final restorer of the empire's former glory were misplaced. Heraclius died with significant portions of Roman territory in Muslim hands, including the Middle East and Holy City of Jerusalem, along with Mesopotamia, and North Africa. Much of this territory had only recently been recaptured from the Sassanid Empire. Even as the hopes invested in Heraclius faded, many late-Romans hoped that that God would raise up a champion on the imperial throne who could once and for all restore the empire to its rightful glory.

No document expressed this hope more vividly than the *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius. The *Apocalypse*, attributed to fourth-century martyr Methodius of Olympus, was composed in Syriac but was almost immediately translated into Greek.[272] From Greek it was translated into Latin in the early eighth century, and in the Latin it was swiftly disseminated throughout Europe. The text can be roughly divided into two sections. The first provides the fanciful genealogy mentioned above, in the style of a world chronicle. The second carries the narrative to the Arab invasions and beyond.

The Pseudo-historical section is followed by a series of *vaticinia ex eventu* up until the taxation regime imposed upon the recently conquered Christian subjects. It describes in detail the invasions of the Sons of Ishmael, whom the author "predicts" will be permitted to be victorious over the Romans: "not because God loves them [the Ishmaelites] that He allows them to enter into the kingdom of the Christians, but because of the iniquity and the sin that is being wrought by the Christians", iniquity which is described in great detail.[273] The chastisement brought by the sons of Ishmael included, primarily material deprivation and taxation, but also the defilement of churches and holy services.

The punishment brought upon the Christians through the Sons of Ishmael, acting as God's rod of chastisement, is described in detail. The following passage depicts the extent of Christian torment under the rule of the Ishmaelites:

> After these calamities and chastisements of the sons of Ishmael, at the end of that week, mankind will be lying in the peril of that chastisement. There will be no hope of their being saved from that hard servitude. They will be persecuted and oppressed, and will suffer indignities, hunger and thirst. They will be troubled with a hard chastisement. All the while, those tyrants will be enjoying food, drink and rest, and they will be boasting of their victories…They will dress up like bridegrooms and adorn themselves as brides, and blaspheme by saying, "There is no Savior for the Christians".[274]

[272] Reinink (1992), 154-155.
[273] Pseudo-Methodius, *Apocalypse,* XI [Martinez (1985), 77-8]. Trans. Martinez (1985), 140.
[274] Pseudo-Methodius, *Apocalypse,* XIII [Martinez (1985), 86]. Trans. Martinez (1985), 148-9.

The situation described by the *Apocalypse* is bleak. The Christians languish in poverty while their captors live in gratuitous luxury. The success of the Ishmaelites leads them to boast of their superiority over the Christians.

The description above depicts the lowest point of Christian suffering, when despair has reached its peak. At this point, when the situation seems most dire, as their captors taunt Christ, the awaited deliverance comes. Pseudo-Methodius describes the vindication of the Christians as follows:

> Then, suddenly, as with a woman in childbirth, the pangs of travail will be stirred up [upon them], and the king of the Greeks will come out against them with great anger. He will wake up against them "as a man who shakes away his wine". He who was accounted by them as dead will come out against them from the sea or the Kushites, and pour desolation and destruction in the desert of Yathrib and inside the dwelling place of their fathers, [and take their wives and their children captive.] The sons of the king of the Greeks will seize the regions of the desert and will finish by the sword any survivor left among them in the Promised Land. Fear will fall upon them from all sides. They, their wives and their sons, their leaders and all their camps, the whole land of the desert of their fathers will be delivered into the power of the king of the Greeks. They will be given over to the sword, to destruction, captivity and slaughter. Their oppression will be one hundredfold stronger than their own yoke. They will be in a hard calamity of hunger, [thirst] and exhaustion. They will be enslaved, they and their wives and their children. They will serve as the slaves of those who were serving them. And their servitude will be one hundredfold more bitter than theirs.[275]

In this scene, one of the most influential in medieval literature, the long-suffering Christians are delivered not by Christ, but by his emperor. The suspense has reached its peak, as the people suffer chastisement, and the emperor is assumed dead. In other words, all hope, including that described by George and Theophylact, has been lost.

In this passage, we find the logical extension of the cosmically significant emperor. From the martyrdom of Maurice to the cosmic deliverer Heraclius, Christian Roman society saw the emperor as a critical figure in providential history. Even when all hopes had proven wanting, with the ascent of the Islamic Arabs and the conquest of Jerusalem, Christians under Islamic hegemony looked to the future for deliverance from an emperor who would come to restore material losses and right the wrongs that had been inflicted by the "Ishmaelites".

[275] Pseudo-Methodius, *Apocalypse,* XIII [Martinez (1985), 86-7]. Trans. Martinez (1985), 149.

We find here too the full expression of the messianic overtones expressed at the beginning of the century. Theophylact and George had both described Heraclius as a saviour, and had both employed the typology of Heracles's descent into Hades, which provided a safe way to draw parallels to Christ. Pseudo-Methodius has taken this further, with a full resurrection narrative of the Last Emperor who had been assumed dead, and who rises from his sleep to destroy the empire's adversaries and restore all that had been lost. While the final emperor does finally surrender control to Jesus Christ, who returns in the end to rule in person, the emperor plays a central role in salvation history, well within the tradition initiated by Theophylact and George. Thus, for the seventh-century Romans, the emperor was more than a ruler: he was a semi-messianic saviour who performed the functions of Christ.

IV. The emperor as Adversary

So far, this chapter has focused, with the exception of the portrait of Phocas, on largely positive depictions of the cosmically potent emperor. However, for seventh-century Romans, the supposed potency of the imperial office was a neutral force which could be wielded for good or evil, depending on the proclivities of its holder. Even if Roman subjects generally recognised the potency of the emperor, this did not mean that all Roman observers held the emperor's actions in the same esteem. In this section, we will examine the reverse of the coin, where emperors serve as potent adversaries, equally significant, though acting toward negative ends.

a. Phocas: Destroyer of the Empire

We have already introduced the negative depictions of Phocas, in as far as they served as foil to the positive portrayals of Heraclius and Maurice. Theophylact Simocatta wrote the most explicit critique of the usurper, mentioning him by name and describing his evil attributes in vivid detail. We have seen this at work in Theophylact's introductory dialogue, in which Phocas is depicted as a drunken, mongrel-barbarian centaur. We will discuss such depictions in Chapter 5. However, for Theophylact, Phocas's monstrous nature does not prevent him from being able to exert a significant impact upon history, with devastating results.

Theophylact spells out the sinful nature of Phocas's usurpation, and its association with divine punishment, in Book VIII. Here Lilius, the lieutenant of Phocas, displays the heads of the imperial family to the armies. Theophylact describes this scene and the subsequent punishment in the following:

> Ὁ μὲν οὖν Λίλιος…ταῖς τυράννοις στρατιαῖς τὴν τῶν βασιλέων στηλιτεύει ἀναίρεσιν. ἔδει γὰρ τοῦ μύσους καὶ διὰ τῆς θεωρίας μετασχεῖν τὸ ἀφιλάνθρωπον στράτευμα, ἵνα καὶ ἅπαντας τοὺς ἐπὶ τούτῳ καταμανέντας ἡ μισοπόνηρος τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἀδέκαστος κρίσις τοῖς τῆς ἀντιδόσεως σαγηνεύσῃ δικτύοις. ἅπαντες γὰρ οἱ τῶν παλαμναίων στρατοπέδων ἐκείνων μεγίστοις τε καὶ ποικίλοις περιπεπτωκότες κακοῖς τὸν τῇδε βίον κατέλυσαν. τοῦ Περσικοῦ γὰρ λαβόντος παρρησίαν πολέμου, θεηλάτοις τισὶν ἀπειλαῖς τῶν κακῶν ἐπιχείρων ἐκείνων κατεκληροδοτήσαντο τὴν ἀντίδοσιν, ποτὲ μὲν πυρὶ οὐρανόθεν βαλλόμενοι κατὰ τὴν τῆς παρατάξεως ὥραν, ἄλλοτε λιμοῖς καὶ προνομῇ ἀναλισκόμενοι· οἱ δὲ πλεῖστοι στόματι ῥομφαίας καὶ ξίφους παραδιδόμενοι τὴν φιλάμαρτον ταύτην ζωὴν κατεστρέψαντο, καὶ οὐ πρότερον Πέρσας τὰ τῆς νίκης ἀπέλιπεν, πρὶν ἂν εἰς τὸ παντελὲς διεφθάρη ἡ φιλοτύραννος
>
> And so Lilius…publicly displayed the emperor's slaughter to the tyrant's armies. For it was necessary that the inhumane army also share in the pollution through observation, so that the evil-hating and impartial judgement of God might also net in the toils of retribution all those who had raged in this cause: for all members of those murderous camps departed this life after falling into manifold grave troubles. For, when the Persian war gained free rein, they received their allotted retribution for those wicked enterprises by divinely ordained threats, now being struck down by fire from heaven at the hour of the engagement, at other times being wasted by famine and ravaging; but the majority perished as they surrendered this sinful life in the jaws of cutlass and sword, and victory did not desert the Persians until that tyrant-loving and most impious mob had been utterly destroyed.[276]

This passage describes the personal punishment delivered by God upon the perpetrators of the coup, which is seen as an affront to divine order. The Persians were permitted to succeed until each conspirator had been struck down individually through direct punishment in the form of fire from heaven and famine, and indirectly through the Persian sword.

Theophylact is clear that divine punishment was not limited to the individual conspirators, but was extended collectively to the empire in the form of the Persian campaigns. The historian describes the collective punishment in the following passage:

> ὁ μὲν οὖν Χοσρόης ὑπόθεσιν πολέμου τὴν τυραννίδα πραγματευσάμενος τὴν κοσμοφθόρον ἐκείνην ἐστράτευσε σάλπιγγα·αὕτη γὰρ λυτήριος γέγονε τῆς Ῥωμαίων τε καὶ Περσῶν εὐπραγίας. ἐδόκει γὰρ κατειρωνευόμενος ὁ Χοσρόης ἀντέχεσθαι τῆς

[276] Theophylact Simocatta, *Historiae*, VIII.12.8-11 [de Boor and Wirth (1972), 307]. Trans. Whitby and Whitby (1986), 229

> ὁσίας Μαυρικίου τοῦ αὐτοκράτορος μνήμης. οὕτω μὲν οὖν ὁ Περσικὸς πόλεμος τὴν γένεσιν ἐκληρώσατο, ὁ δὲ Λίλιος διετέλει παρὰ τοῖς Πέρσαις σκληραγωγούμενος.
>
> And so Chosroes exploited the tyranny as a pretext for war, and mobilized that world-destroying trumpet: for this became the undoing of the prosperity of Romans and Persians. For Chosroes feigned a pretence of upholding the pious memory of the emperor Maurice. And so in this way the Persian war was allotted its birth, and Lilius remained among the Persians in great hardship.[277]

In these passages, Theophylact lays out what is happening behind the visible act of the *coup d'état*. This is not a mere regime change, but an unholy pollution, cause for God's righteous judgement. The judgement came in the form of continued victories for the Persians until all who had perpetrated the murder were dead. God actively punished the empire for the sins of Phocas and his co-conspirators. The Persian attacks are called the "world-destroying trumpet", to which Theophylact attributes both the Roman and Persian decline.

Theophylact Simocatta was not the only seventh-century author to blame the woes of the empire directly upon Phocas's usurpation. George of Pisidia echoes this perspective, and although he does not mention Phocas by name, his descriptions of the usurper are no less critical. In his *In Heraclium ex Africa redeuntem,* George provides the following observations:

> καὶ πρὶν γὰρ ἡμᾶς ἠθλιωμένους βλέπων, // ἡνίκα τὰ πικρὰ τοῦ τυράννου τραύματα // νομὴν λαβόντα τῶν μελῶν καθήπτετο, // καιρὸν μὲν εἶχες τοῦ μένειν χωρὶς πόνων, // ὡς μὴ πεφυκὼς τῶν κακῶν παραίτιος·// ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐπέσχες οὐδὲν ἧττον, δέσποτα, // τῶν εἰς ἀπείρους συμφορὰς πεπλεγμένων, // δι' ὧν ἕκαστος ἀγρίως ἐδάκνετο // ἐκ τοῦ κρατοῦντος θηρίου τῶν πραγμάτων…
>
> For even before, seeing us in misery, // While the bitter wounds of the tyrant, // spread with festering limbs, // You held the time of waiting apart from deeds, // as a cause not born from evils, // but you were not closed to anything inferior, O Master, // to those tangled in endless misfortunes, // Through which each has been stung savagely // from the ruling beast of troubles…[278]

We have already examined, briefly, George's portrayal of Phocas in *In Heraclium,* in which he, through "neglect of the government", is blamed for the destruction of the empire. In this passage, we find a more explicit description of the nature of this destruction. Although Phocas is never mentioned by name in *In Heraclium,* the usurper is likened to a disease, festering within the

[277] Theophylact Simocatta, *Historiae,* VIII.15.7 [de Boor and Wirth (1972), 314]. Trans. Whitby and Whitby (1986), 234-235.
[278] George of Pisidia, *In Heraclium ex Africa redeuntem,* 39-47 [Pertusi (1959), 64]. Translation mine.

wounds of the empire, and is compared to a beast. In contrast, the newly ascendant Heraclius is hailed as the cure to these ailments, who will repair the damage wrought by Phocas's plague.

The imagery used by both Theophylact and George to portray Phocas is vivid and disturbing. He is continually dehumanised, compared to vicious animals and festering disease. Moreover, he is credited with doing what no emperor before him was able to accomplish: destroy the Roman Empire. The admission of both Theophylact and George that the empire had been brought low, incredibly rare in previous centuries, bears testimony to the difficulties faced during this period. The fact that Phocas is given credit for the unprecedented decline is witness to the immense hatred he evoked in many Romans, as well as the power attributed to the imperial office. Both authors describe the full range of the emperor's power, who, depending on his virtue and proclivities, could destroy the state, as Phocas, or, in the case of Heraclius, could rescue and restore it. Institutions and material conditions were irrelevant. What mattered in historical causation was the piety and character of the emperor.

b. Heraclius: Usher of the Apocalypse?

Although many prominent Christians viewed Heraclius as a deliverer and figure of hope, others were more sceptical. Controversial imperial religious policies had earned Heraclius numerous outspoken critics. Chief among these was the monk and theologian Maximus the Confessor. Maximus was one of the foremost intellectuals of the seventh century, composing numerous letters and theological treatises. Writing in exile in North Africa, he was an important critic of imperial policies, particularly the doctrines of one energy in Christ (monenergism) and one will (monotheletism), which were proposed as paths for unity between the pro- and anti-Chalcedonian parties within the empire.[279]

In addition to critiquing Heraclius's doctrinal policy, Maximus was openly critical of the emperor's edict of forced baptism issued in 632. In a letter, which only survives in fragmentary form, he informs his recipient about the edict and its apparent enforcement in North Africa. The

[279] For an overview of the life of Maximus, see Allen (2015), Van Deun and Mueller-Jourdan (2015).

fragment under consideration was rediscovered in the early twentieth century by Robert Devreesse, who considered it to be a hitherto lost ending to *Letter* 8, traditionally considered to be written to the monk Sophronius.[280] *Letter* 8 and the fragmentary "ending" remain the subject of significant debate, which is beyond the scope of this chapter.[281] For the purposes of this discussion, the ending will be treated as a distinct document which survives as a fragment.

The surviving letter is of significant historical value. It discusses the controversial edict, issued by Heraclius circa 634, which mandated that all Jews within the empire be baptised by force and convert to Christianity. The fragment, which discusses the enforcement of the decree by the exarch of North Africa, is a rare piece of evidence of the edict's existence. The only other contemporary witness to this mandate is the *Doctrina Jacobi nuper baptizati*, whose title character, as we have seen, was a product of the forced baptism. Evidence, or lack thereof, suggests that the edict's enforcement was limited. Certain officials, such as the exarch of North Africa, appear to have enforced the edict with particular zeal, although no extant evidence survives of the law's application beyond that region.

The letter's salutation has been lost, so we are unable to confirm the intended recipient with any certainty. Maximus writes to his interlocutor both to announce the tidings of the edict's enforcement and to express his strong opposition. Within his objections, Maximus expresses concerns both for the Jews who are to be forced to endure baptism, and for the consequences of the baptism both for the Church and for the world at large. Maximus's reasoning is expressed in the following passage:

> Δέδοικα γὰρ πρῶτον μὲν μή πως καθυβρισθῇ τὸ μέγα τοῦτο καὶ θεῖον ὄντως μυστήριον δοθὲν τοῖς μὴ προεπιδειξαμένοις τῇ πίστει γνώμην ἁρμόδιον. Δεύτερον δὲ καὶ αὐτῶν ἐκείνων ἐννοῶ τὸν εἰς ψυχὴν κίνδυνον μή πως—τὴν πικρὰν ρίζαν τῆς πατρικῆς αὐτῶν ἀπιστίας κατὰ τὸ βάθος διέμειναν ἔχοντες, καὶ τὸ [μὲν] τῆς χάριτος φῶς ἑαυτοῖς ὑποτέμνουσι—τὴν [δὲ] κατάκρισιν πολλαπλασίονα καταστήσωσι τῷ ζόφῳ συναυξηθεῖσαν τῆς ἀπιστίας. Καὶ τρίτον τὴν κατὰ τὸν ἅγιον ἀπόστολον προσδοκωμένην ἀποστασίαν ὑφορῶμαι μή πως ἀρχὴν λάβῃ τὴν τούτων πρὸς πιστοὺς λαοὺς ἐπιμιξίαν, δι' ἧς ἀνύποπτον ἐν τοῖς ἀφελεστέροις ποιῆσθαι δυνήσονται τὴν κατὰ τῆς ἁγίας ἡμῶν πίστεως πονηρὰν τῶν σκανδάλων σποράν, καὶ εὑρεθῇ τοῦτο σημεῖον φανερὸν καὶ ἀναμφήριστον τῆς θρυλλουμένης τοῦ παντὸς

[280] Devreesse (1937).
[281] For an overview of the debate, see Jankowiak and Booth (2015), 40-41, and Strickler (2016).

> συντελείας καθ' ἣν τοὺς ὑπερ τῆς ἀληθείας μεγάλους πειρασμοὺς καὶ ἀγῶνας προσδοκῶσιν οἱ δι' εὐχῶν καὶ δεήσεως καὶ δακρύων πολλῶν καὶ τῶν πρὸς δικαιοσύνην ἐξευρημένων τρόπων ἑαυτοὺς ἑτοιμάζοντες.
>
> I am concerned first lest this great and truly divine mystery be desecrated by being presented to those who have not been proven in faith as an agreeable doctrine. Secondly, I am anxious lest danger somehow come upon their soul—for from their depths they retain the bitter root of their ancestral faithlessness and thus cut themselves off from the light of grace—and lest having sunk more deeply into the darkness of unbelief they become subject to a condemnation many times greater. Thirdly, I suspect the apostasy predicted by the Apostle (c.f. 2 Thessalonians 2:3), and I am fearful lest it begin through intermingling of these Jews and the faithful people, through which they will be able to spread the evil seed of the stumbling-blocks against our holy faith among those who are most simple, and there appear that manifest and undisputed sign of the end, discussed by all; according to this, they expect great temptations and struggles for the sake of the truth, for which they prepare themselves by prayers, by entreaties, by many tears, and by seeking paths toward righteousness.[282]

Maximus' concerns are threefold: first, he fears the desecration of baptism itself by exposure to the uninitiated; second, Maximus worries that Jews, with the "bitter root of their ancestral faithlessness", will sink deeper still into darkness by bringing condemnation upon themselves; and finally, and most importantly, Maximus is concerned that the result will be the mass apostasy predicted in 2 Thessalonians, which would result from mixing unproven and faithless Baptised Jews with simple-minded Christians, which Maximus refers to as "the undisputed sign of the end, discussed by all". After voicing his concerns to his interlocutor, he ends his letter with a request for prayers.

Some recent scholars have dismissed this passage as a forgery, interpolated into the larger *Epistula* 8.[283] Their argument is based primarily on the purported use of apocalyptic discourse by Maximus, an accomplished and sophisticated author who, based on biases highlighted in Chapter 1, would not have lowered himself to such primitive speculation. Scholars cite Maximus's sophisticated "realised eschatology", which they presume would be incompatible with the citation of 2 Thessalonians.[284] Such arguments are based primarily on negative stereotyping of apocalyptic discourse, and do not reflect the reality of its widespread use, including by advanced

[282] Maximus the Confessor, *Fragmentary Letter on the Forced Baptism* [Devreesse (1937), 34]. Translation mine.
[283] Cf. Brandes (2002).
[284] Brandes (2002), 38.

historians and poets as we have already seen in this chapter. Finally, a realised eschatology is not incompatible with a prediction of future apostasy, and even its citation of a sign of the end does not require that end to be imminent.

This commentary about the sign of the end can easily be passed over at the end of a historically significant critique of an unprecedented edict of forced baptism. However, this short section reveals a great deal about Maximus's conception of the imperial office. Maximus's critiques are otherwise subdued. He does not deride the emperor, nor does he seem to consider the emperor an antichrist. However, he acknowledges that the emperor's decisions can have ramifications beyond earthly consequences, to the point of having the potential to signify the beginning of the end. The fact that Maximus makes such bold statements about the risks of the emperor's actions, without any need to clarify his remarks, suggests that clarification was not necessary. His recipient would have understood that, yes, the emperor's actions could change the course of providential history, and that something must be done to prevent this course of events from happening.

c. Emperor and Priest?

This final category, the Heraclian dynasty's pretensions to the priesthood, reveals a certain ambivalence. One could consider it as evidence of an elevated, positive position, in line with Heraclius's portrayal as a messianic figure. However, our evidence of such pretensions is limited and complicated. Since the only direct evidence we have of any claim to priesthood comes from Maximus the Confessor's denial of this title, I have chosen to consider it as an adversarial claim.

We have already seen indirect evidence of the claim for Heraclius to be a priest in the introductory dialogue in the *Historiae* of Theophylact Simocatta. There, the patron and saviour of History is depicted as a high priest and hierophant, terms with clear priestly connotations. However, the patron is never addressed by name, and as a result, the meaning of the passage is contested. If the passage refers to Sergius, as Michael and Mary Whitby and others have suggested, then there is no controversy, as of course a patriarch would be referred to in priestly

language. If, however, as Frendo has argued, and as I tend to agree, we have a not-so-thinly veiled reference to Heraclius, the implications are significant.

If this is the case, we have at the earliest stages of Heraclius's reign a well-developed idea of the emperor as a priest. No other author uses such language to describe Heraclius, and it would be the first time since Eusebius that a specific emperor was addressed in such language. That being said, it is not evidence in itself of a self-conscious effort by Heraclius to depict himself as a priest. If we accept Heraclius as the designee, all we can say for certain is that Theophylact, an author with close ties to the imperial court, conceived of Heraclius as a priest, a designation he did not afford to Maurice who was the focal point of his history. Even if this is all that we can say, it remains significant as evidence of a nascent idea that would be fully embraced by Heraclius's successors, to the extent that a critique of this claim could be levelled as evidence in a legal trial.

Given Heraclius's hands-on approach to religious affairs, it would not be a leap to suggest that Heraclius considered his office to include a priestly function, even if our evidence is tenuous at best. Religious unity, in a period of significant instability, had a strategic advantage, one which the emperor, along with his patriarchs Sergius and Pyrrhus, took great pains to achieve. Heraclius was personally present at an attempted union between pro- and anti-Chacledonian parties in Alexandria in 633 about the doctrine of monenergism.[285] When the grounds of union threatened to bring further division, Heraclius issued a decree, known as the *Ekthesis*, which forbade the discussion of the number of operations of Christ, opting instead for the new formula of monotheletism. In 647-648, Heraclius's eventual successor, Constans II, continued the Heraclian dynasty's direct intervention in doctrinal affairs, issuing the *Typos*, confirming the imperial policy of monotheletism.[286] While imperial intervention in doctrinal matters was standard practise by this period, the frequency of Heraclian interventions was well above average and could be seen as an extension of a priestly imperial office.

[285] Hovorun (2008), 67.
[286] Allen and Neil (2002), 14.

It was largely Maximus the Confessor's active opposition to imperial religious policy that led to his arrest and subsequent trial for treason. In the record of his first trail before the Senate in Constantinople, recorded by Maximus's disciple Anastasius, we find the only direct evidence of a court-sponsored imperial priesthood, in the following accusation levelled against Maximus:

> Καὶ μετὰ τοῦτον, τέταρτον ἄγουσιν Γρηγόριον τὸν υἱὸν Φωτεινοῦ λέγοντα ὅτι "Ἀπῆλθον εἰς τὸ κελλίον τοῦ ἀββᾶ Μαξίμου ἐν Ῥώμῃ, κἀμοῦ εἰπόντος, ὅτι καὶ ἱερεύς ἐστιν ὁ βασιλεύς, εἶπεν ὁ ἀββᾶς Ἀναστάσιος ὁ μαθητὴς αὐτοῦ· Μὴ ἀξιωθῇ εἶναι ἱερεύς".
>
> And after him, they brought a fourth person, Gregory the son of Photinus, who said: 'I went to Father Maximus' cell in Rome, and, when I said that the emperor was a priest too, Father Anastasius, his disciple, said: He shouldn't be considered a priest".'[287]

It is difficult to overemphasize the significance of this passage. We have here the first direct statement, without the use of typology, that the emperor was a priest. Later emperors, beginning with Leo III, claimed this title for themselves, but this is the first extant reference to an imperial official connecting the priesthood to the imperial office.

In response to these accusations, Maximus chastises Gregory and falls to the floor before the Senate before relating his account of the story. After some discussion about the troubles preventing union between Rome and Constantinople, and arguing that priests and emperors have differing prerogatives, Maximus relates the following exchange:

> Καὶ εἶπας· Τί οὖν; Οὐκ ἔστι πᾶς βασιλεὺς Χριστιανὸς καὶ ἱερεύς; Καὶ εἶπον· Οὐκ ἔστιν· οὐδὲ γὰρ παρίσταται θυσιαστηρίῳ, καὶ μετὰ τὸν ἁγιασμὸν τοῦ ἄρτου ὑψοῖ αὐτὸν λέγων· Τὰ ἅγια τοῖς ἁγίοις. Οὔτε βαπτίζει, οὔτε μύρου τελετὴν ἐπιτελεῖ, οὔτε χειροθετεῖ, καὶ ποιεῖ ἐπισκόπους καὶ πρεσβυτέρους καὶ διακόνους· οὔτε χρίει ναούς, οὐ τὰ σύμβολα τῆς ἱερωσύνης ἐπιφέρεται, τὸ ὠμοφόριον καὶ τὸ εὐαγγέλιον, ὥσπερ τῆς βασιλείας, τὸν στέφανον καὶ τὴν ἁλγουργίδα. Καὶ εἶπας· Πῶς ἡ Γραφὴ βασιλέα καὶ ἱερέα λέγει εἶναι τὸν Μελχισεδέκ; Καὶ εἶπον· Ἑνὸς τοῦ φύσει βασιλέως τῶν ὅλων Θεοῦ γεγομένου φύσει διὰ τήν ἡμῶν σωτηρίαν ἀρχιερέως, εἷς ὑπῆρχεν τύπος ὁ Μελχισεδέκ.
>
> And you said: "Well then, isn't every Christian emperor also a priest?" And I said: "No, he isn't, because he neither stands beside the altar, and after the consecration of the bread elevates it with the words: 'Holy things for the holy'; nor does he Baptise, nor perform the rite of anointing, nor does he ordain and make bishops and presbyters and deacons; nor does he anoint churches, nor does he wear the symbols of the priesthood, the pallium and the Gospel book, as [he wears the symbols] of imperial office, the crown and purple". And you said: "How is it that Scripture says

[287] *Relatio Motionis* 4, [Allen and Neil (2002), 54]. Trans. Allen and Neil (2008), 55.

> that Melchisedek was king and priest?" And I said: "Melchisedek was a single type of the one who was king by nature, God of all things, who became by nature a high-priest on account of our salvation".[288]

Here we find an interesting line of reasoning to justify the priesthood of the Heraclian dynasty, and in particular, the right of the emperor to formulate dogma and act to preserve the unity of the church, and by extension, the stability of the empire. Considering the active participation of the emperors of the Heraclian dynasty in the ecclesiastical affairs of the seventh century, this argument is strong evidence in favour of an accepted conception of an imperial priesthood within the court.

Maximus counters the suggestion that every Christian emperor is a priest by noting the strict separation, both in function and symbolic paraphernalia, between the offices of emperor and priest. These are tied closely to the sacramental functions of the priesthood, which emperors have no rights to perform, namely, consecrating the Eucharist, performing baptisms, chrismation, ordinations, and consecrating churches. Thus, for Maximus, matters of doctrine are secondary to the sacramental functions of the priesthood, which are its ontological foundations.

What follows are two competing exegeses of the enigmatic priest-king Melchisedek, first mentioned in Genesis 14. The partisans of the Heraclian dynasty had incorporated the motif of the priesthood of Melchisedek, the priest-king who blessed Abraham, as a precedent for the union of offices, and as a priesthood distinct from that of traditional clergy and thus not dependent upon the sacramental functions forbidden to emperors and other laity. Melchisedek was to appear in later polemic surrounding the emperor Leo III's iconoclast policies and pretensions to priesthood.[289]

Maximus offers a counter exegesis, where Melchisedek is a type of Christ, the great high priest and king, and thus a singular phenomenon not to be repeated. He argues later that further poof lies in the commemoration of the emperors among the laity rather than the clergy within the

[288] *Relatio Motionis* 4 [Allen and Neil (2002), 56]. Trans. Allen and Neil (2002), 57, 59.
[289] Dagron (2003), 170-171. Dagron quotes this account in full, but only discusses in relationship to its precedent for later polemic.

Divine Liturgy. Maximus's arguments do not appear to have convinced his accusers, as they accused him of inciting schism by denying the priesthood of the emperor.[290]

What is interesting for our purposes is the sudden appearance of an articulated theology of imperial priesthood. No such formulations existed beyond Constantine's claim to be a sort of bishop, but by the middle of the seventh century the Heraclian dynasty had acquired a sophisticated theory that the emperor was also a priest in the order of Melchisedek. Given Heraclius's and Constans II's active religious policy, this is not entirely surprising. However, they were by no means the first emperors to impose their views on matters of doctrine. What accounts for this sudden expression of imperial priesthood?

I suggest that this is best understood in light of the subject of this chapter. The increasing gravitas in the office of the emperor, replete with apocalyptic and messianic overtones, had established the emperor as a cosmically significant figure. We see the beginnings of such a claim comingled in the apocalyptic discourse of Theophylact's opening dialogue. The deliverance of the Christian empire required a church united in orthodoxy. Thus, ecclesiastical union became a matter not only of dogmatic importance, the traditional purview of the clergy, but also of strategic importance. As a result, the emperor needed to be a priest, and a priesthood was easily justified in a period when the emperor's religious image was already enshrined in apocalyptic discourse, accompanied by strong messianic overtones.

Moreover, as we have seen, Byzantines were accustomed to seeing their emperors as the rebirth of Biblical figures. George of Pisidia frequently compared Heraclius to Daniel and David. The idea of the emperor as the New Melchisedek fits well within this paradigm. Melchisedek presented a particularly useful prototype, both as a mystical figure and as one who was simultaneously priest and king.

[290] *Relatio Motionis* 4 [Allen and Neil (2002), 58].

V. Conclusion

According to Theophylact Simocatta, when Tiberius, having offered his advice on how to rule prudently, placed the crown upon Maurice's head, the crowds were filled with sadness and joy. They mourned the fact that a wise ruler was nearly dead, but exulted in God's raising a new and worthy candidate to take his place.[291] When Phocas displayed the heads of Maurice and his imperial kin to the armies, the same God that had chosen Maurice to rule with wisdom, visited righteous judgement upon the empire and the partisans of Phocas. Eight years later the poet George of Pisidia put to verse his praises of the deliverer of the cosmos, the new Heracles, who would destroy the Persians.

For Roman subjects, regardless of religious or political persuasion, the Roman emperor was a significant cosmic actor and part of a divine plan. Politics and religion were intertwined and, for his subjects, the emperor played a significant role in the cosmic order of kingdoms. The role may have been as the destroyer, as Phocas was for Theophylact and George of Pisidia. For George, Heraclius was a figure of hope in a period of despair whose promise was fulfilled in victory. We do not know if George's optimism would have lasted through the Islamic conquests. However, in this brief period, Heraclius had brought victory against an indomitable foe, and religious triumphalism could cautiously raise its head.

When that window closed, replaced by the cold reality of the failure of Roman hegemony, a hypothetical future emperor raised people's hopes. The eschatological "last king of the Greeks" would finally, as Heraclius was to do before, bring peace and restoration to an empire brought low by sin. In the end, though he would surrender his crown to Christ, it was the last emperor, not Jesus, who would overthrow the oppressive yolk of the Ishmaelites.

For each of our authors, even the subdued Maximus the Confessor, the role of the emperor was expressed through apocalyptic discourse. Whether in the numerous *vaticinia ex eventu* surrounding Maurice's death and subsequent disasters, George of Pisidia's semi-messianic

[291] Theophylact Simocatta, *Historiae*, I.1.16 [de Boor and Wirth (1972), 42].

portrayal of Heraclius as the new Daniel, better than Heracles, and the heroic κοσμορύστης, Byzantines of all positions expressed the politics of their times in apocalyptic terms.

Closely related to the emperor's place in apocalyptic discourse was the growing assertion of belief in the priesthood of the Heraclian dynasty. Some glimpses of this idea can be seen in the enigmatic opening dialogue of Theophylact Simocatta's *Historiae*. An outgrowth of the active participation of Heraclius and his successors in doctrinal affairs, and the tendency to see the emperor as the embodiment of heroes from the Old Testament, imperial officials developed the belief in the emperor as the inheritor of the priesthood of Melchisedek. Maximus the Confessor offered a detailed rebuttal, but it fell on hostile ears. The emperor as Melchisedek would live on, finding expression in Emperor Leo III's claim to be emperor and priest.

While the seventh-century partisans may not have found much to agree upon, even to the point of mutual hatred, it seems that they could have found some common ground in apocalyptic discourse. One thing is for certain: the emperors, particularly Heraclius, as well others, both historical and symbolic, were seen as cosmically significant figures in a divine plan. For all communities within the empire, apocalyptic discourse could provide a comforting hope in a time of significant crisis. Whether the emperor was seen as the hero, or the enemy whom the hero would defeat, depended on the author.

Chapter 4: Apostasy, Religious Conflict, and Identity

I. Introduction

When the emperor Tiberius invested his successor Maurice with the crown and double cloak of purple in 582, he handed over the reins of a thoroughly Christian empire at the peak of its influence. The religious reforms of Justinian and his successors and the peace established through Maurice's management of the Persian campaigns as general had clearly demonstrated that God had blessed his chosen people, the Christian Romans, and the empire's Christian identity was unquestioned. However, all of that began to change with Phocas's usurpation in 602. The Zoroastrian Persians of the Sassanid Empire began to make inroads into Roman territory, and to test imperial resolve. With each successive victory by the Zoroastrian regime the strength of Roman Christian identity began to show signs of weakness. Once the Persians began to win major victories in Palestine, including Jerusalem in 614, literary accounts suggest that many Christians began to adopt Zoroastrian practises. Pilgrimage destinations, such as Christian monasteries and saints' shrines, which traditionally had a monopoly on popular piety, found themselves competing with Zoroastrian magi who began to supplement and, in some cases, replace traditional holy sites as destinations for healing and spiritual consultation.

After Heraclius's decisive defeat over the Persians in 628 and the restoration of the cross in Jerusalem, Christian identity was reaffirmed for a time. However, soon a new threat arose, in the form of Islam, with the increasing success of the Arab invasions. The earliest decades of Islam were poorly documented, and as a result numerous questions remain about the formation of Islamic cultural identity, as well as about cultural identity of the various peoples who suddenly found themselves under Islamic governance. Recent years have seen renewed debate on the nature of nascent Islam, particularly the makeup of the earliest *'Umma*, or community of Muslims, and the exact role of the prophet Muhammad and his message in inspiring the rise of an empire whose reach expanded globally only after his death.[292] Many open questions remain

[292] Sizgorich (2004).

concerning the treatment of conquered peoples under the Rashidun and Umayyad Caliphates, as well as the reception of the Islamic conquerors by the formerly Roman subjects under their control, and the extent to which Islamic governors left local Roman bureaucratic institutions and structures intact. Some scholars have suggested that intra Christian conflicts may have overshadowed oppression by Muslim governors, who treated cooperating populations relatively mildly.[293]

Although in many ways life may have gone on as before for most former Roman subjects under Arab rule, as it had before under Persian occupation, it can hardly be debated that the sudden changes and decline in Roman imperial hegemony, beginning with the Persian conquests at the beginning of the seventh century, left an indelible mark on Roman Christian self-identity. Since the time of Constantine the Great (d. 337 CE) and his victory over Maxentius at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge in 313, late-Roman and early-Byzantine literature had developed a rhetoric of triumphalism in which victory in battle and material success were visible evidence of divine favour. This perspective was carried over from Classical times in which the victory of a nation was also seen as a victory of the nation's gods over the deities of the conquered peoples.[294]

For Christian Romans, the victory of Christian emperors demonstrated the superiority of Christ over false pagan deities. The reverse corollary existed as well, wherein defeat and subjugation, whether of "heretics", "pagans", or Jews, were evidence of heterodoxy and/or divine abandonment.[295] According to Thomas Sizgorich, purity of Christian identity was ensured, at least in theory, through narrative "emplotment", a term used by sociologist Margaret Somers to describe the process by which communities create meaning out of disorganised circumstances. Sizgorich argues that authors set events within the empire within a larger narrative of Christian victory, one dating back to the martyrs' defeat of pre-Christian Rome and carried on by wise

[293] Papaconstantinou (2008).
[294] Cf. Kyrychenko (2014) 175.
[295] Olster (1994), 31-34.

monks, authority figures, and ascetics who were willing to fight for orthodoxy, against the enemies of the true faith.[296]

Any society that considers victory to be evidence of divine favour will find difficulty coping when the tides of war shift in favour of the adversary. This proved axiomatic for the seventh-century Romans in the face of sudden and catastrophic defeat at the hands of non-Christian invaders. Literary evidence suggests that an unknown but significant number of Roman subjects took this worldview to its logical conclusion, shifting allegiances with the fortunes of war, and as a result abandoned Christianity in favour of the religion of the enemy, whose truth, it was reasoned, was manifest in their decisive victory. Although it is impossible to arrive at any concrete estimations, numbers were great enough that apostasy, a topic rarely mentioned by Roman authors in previous centuries, is a theme in multiple documents from the period.[297]

As this thesis argues, Roman subjects who remained loyal to Christianity addressed the logical difficulty of defeat by crediting divine causation for the circumstances which befell the empire. In such a framework, Christian superiority could be maintained through blaming the crises not on Christianity itself, but on punishment for the sins of fallen Christians within the empire. For many authors, apocalyptic discourse proved a fruitful medium for assigning blame and for bringing a semblance of order to the chaos of the period. Emperors influenced the course of history, as we have seen in chapter 3, in part, through the exercise their moral qualities such as piety and wisdom, or in the negative corollary, dishonour and weakness of character. Just as God rewarded the behaviour of wise rulers with prosperity, so too did He punish the empire because of the failings of tyrants. However, divine consequences were not reserved for emperors alone. The citizens of the empire could also provoke divine blessings or wrath based on their own virtue or vice. Sexual licentiousness, neglect of the poor, or betrayal of the faith by a few members of the population could, in the tradition of the Old Testament, bring communal punishment, such as the temporary subjugation of large territories by instruments of God's

[296] Sizgorich (2009), 1-20.
[297] Olster (1994), 7.

wrath, namely non-Christian invaders. Therefore, it is not surprising to find that apostasy, the queen of sins, was a recurring theme in seventh-century Roman apocalyptic literature. Apocalyptic discourse could be used to critique apostasy and serve as a warning to would-be apostates to remain steadfast in the face of hardship.

This chapter examines the relationship between the theme of apostasy and the use of apocalyptic discourse in seventh-century Roman literature. This is accomplished through a case study which applies discourse analysis to four representative documents, in conversation with *adversus Judaeos* dialogues. Anti-Jewish discourse represents a parallel discourse which also recognises the threat posed by apostasy. The documents within the case study include two hagiographies written in the immediate aftermath of Persian conquest and subsequent victory of Heraclius, a fragment of a letter by the prominent theologian Maximus the Confessor written circa 632, and finally an apocalyptic text written after the final establishment of Islamic hegemony in the Levant at the end of the century. Within these documents, the theme of apostasy, and its role in promoting apocalyptic discourse will be examined in detail.

The aim of this chapter will be to illustrate the literary strategies authors employed to define apostasy in opposition to true Christianity, and thereby to solidify the author's perception of orthodox Christian identity. Seventh-century authors established an oppositional binary between faithful Christians and apostates. Writers employed numerous literary types to demonstrate the gravity of apostasy, closely associating it with apocalyptic discourse, and arguing that apostasy was a root cause of divine punishment. Through emplotment, authors created a narrative in which the empire, the faithful, and apostates were characters of a providential drama, one in which God was punishing the Romans for the mortal sin of apostasy. This apocalyptic drama allowed the Christian Romans to assign blame, give meaning to incomprehensible defeat, and offer hope in the face of a series of unprecedented existential crises.

II. Methodology

The chapter employs several terms which are highly contested. Thus, it will be useful to briefly discuss the methodology of the chapter, and in particular, to define our terms. The chapter approaches the theme of apostasy as primarily as it is related to the rhetorical construction of late-Roman and Christian identity. Sociologist Margaret Somers's theory of narrative emplotment will assist us in interpreting the numerous literary strategies employed by the authors under consideration to strengthen Christian identity, and to prevent the spread of apostasy. Finally, we must define the category of apostasy itself, the central theme of the chapter, as it is a term that carries significant confessional assumptions which need to be addressed in order for it to be a useful category of analysis.

a. Identity: A Fraught Subject

The question of identity and cultural distinction in the seventh century has been the subject of significant scholarly debate in recent years. Most scholars have focused on the impact of the early Islamic invasions at the expense of the Persian campaigns. However many principles are broadly applicable to both subjects. In his study of identity in late antiquity and early Islam, Thomas Sizgorich applied contemporary sociological and anthropological models to demonstrate that Islamic authors of the first centuries after the *hijrah* employed a familiar set of late-antique semiotic strategies to create a unique identity, to distinguish themselves from what had, until then, been a surprisingly mixed community.[298] Indeed, Sizgorich is one of a recent group of scholars, including Arietta Papaconstantinou and Robert Hoyland, who suggest that the earliest manifestation of the Islamic community ('*Umma*) may have been a more heterogeneous group of monotheists than has been previously assumed. They argue that the first decades of the Rashidun and Umayyad conquest were ones in which Islamic identity lacked significant distinction from the greater Roman society; the conquerors absorbed existing Roman power structures, allowed local administration to remain in place, and permitted subjected peoples to maintain a certain

[298] Sizgorich (2009), 5-12.

level of autonomy.[299] Sizgorich argues that it was not until the earliest members of the *Umma* had died and the oral histories began to be written down that Muslims began to establish an entirely distinct Islamic identity, separate from their contemporaries. According to Sizgorich, even at this early stage, the first Islamic authors constructed their identity by employing the cultural *koine* of late-antique Christian literature, using standard tropes of ascetic devotion, wise monks, and resistance to corrupt authorities even to the point of martyrdom.[300] In other words, the earliest Muslims constructed their identity within the cultural context in which Islam arose.

b. Narrativity and Social Identity

In recent decades, sociologists have studied the role of narrativity in the formation of unique identities among heterogeneous social groups. Sociologist Margaret R. Somers has drawn attention to the fact that narrative, long considered the purview of historians, has traditionally been neglected in sociological research. However, as Somers observes, contemporary sociologists have recently begun to recognise the usefulness of narrativity as a category of inquiry. According to Somers:

> [T]he new approaches define narrative and narrativity as concepts of *social epistemology and social ontology*. These concepts posit that it is through narrativity that we come to know, understand, and make sense of the social world, and it is through narratives and narrativity that we constitute our social identities. They argue that it matters not whether we are social scientists or subjects of historical research, but that all of us come to *be* who we *are* (however ephemeral, multiple, and changing) by being located or locating ourselves (usually unconsciously) in social narratives *rarely of our own making*.[301]

For Somers, not only is narrativity a worthy category of sociological inquiry, it is in fact the locus of identity formation. Individuals find meaning by locating themselves within social narratives which exist independent of themselves, and do so as a result of the inherent need to find one's unique identity. Fittingly, Somers uses the term "narrative identity" to describe the results of this social process.[302]

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[299] Papaconstantinou (2008) 129-131. On the "catholicity" of the first decades of Islam, see Hoyland (2006) 409-410.
[300] Sizgorich (2009), 144-271.
[301] Somers (1994), 606. Somers's emphasis.
[302] Somers (1994), 605.

Expanding upon the theory of narrative, Somers identifies four dimensions of narrativity. These include ontological, public, conceptual, and metanarrativities.[303] Of these four, ontological narrativity is most significant for our purposes. Somers defines ontological narratives as:

> [S]tories that social actors use to make sense of - indeed, to act in - their lives. Ontological narratives are used to define who we *are;* this in turn can be a precondition for knowing what to *do.* Ontological narratives process events into episodes. People act, or do not act, in part according to how they understand their place in any number of given narratives - however fragmented, contradictory, or partial.[304]

Ontological narratives provide the content of self-identity by making sense of the events within an individual's epxerience. Individuals base their actions on their understanding of the ontological narratives as they have constructed them.

Somers's theory provides a useful apparatus with which we can study the literary strategies of identity formation employed in seventh-century apocalyptic discourse. Roman authors coped with the numerous crises of the Persian and Arab invasions by placing events into individual episodes, including in some cases discrete moments of sin which in turn resulted in discrete events of divine wrath. In many ways, the narratives crafted by the authors under consideration can be considered ontological narratives. Authors were careful to define who the Romans were in relation to their neighbours and adversaries based on their understanding of divine causation in response to sin, and they thereby provided their audience with guidance on how to act.

c. Emplotment

Closely related to the category of narrativity is the concept of narrative emplotment. According to Somers, emplotment is the process by which meaning is provided within a given narrative. Addressing the sociological process of emplotment in organising events, Somers states the following:

> It is emplotment that gives significance to independent instances, not their chronological or categorical order. And it is emplotment that translates events into episodes. As a mode of explanation, causal emplotment is an accounting (however fantastic or implicit) of why a narrative has the story line it does.[305]

[303] Somers (1994), 617.
[304] Somers (1994), 618.
[305] Somers (1994), 616.

Emplotment is the function of narrativity which translates random events into episodes, independent of chronological considerations. This is the process by which seemingly arbitrary events are given meaning and render the events comprehensible within a narrative.

For Somers, emplotment arises as a means of relieving tensions that result from the seeming randomness of an event. Concerning the cognitive functions of emplotment within a narrative, Somers makes the following observations:

> Similarly, it is also apparent that serious mental confusion or political emotion rarely stems from the inability to place an event or instance in the proper category. Rather we tend to become confused when it is impossible or illogical to integrate an event into an intelligible plot. To make something understandable in the context of a narrative is to give it historicity and relationality.[306]

Thus, for Somers, emplotment is the mechanism by which otherwise unfamiliar events are rendered understandable by being placed within a comprehensible plot. It is a coping mechanism by which seemingly random events are set within a narrative context, and by which rationality is established.

Somers's theory of narrative emplotment is widely applicable in the study of late-ancient history. Thomas Sizgorich has successfully applied the concept to his study of early Islamic identity formation.[307] Sizgorich's application has focused on late-antique martyrologies and monastic hagiographies and their semiotic impact on early Islamic historiography. However, it is further applicable to the study of seventh-century apocalyptic discourse, and in particular the rhetorical construct of apostates in contrast to orthodox Christian Romans. If we accept Somers's paradigm, the crises of the seventh century were incomprehensible within the standard Byzantine narrative plot of imperial success and expansion as a demonstration of divine favour. To cope with instability, Byzantine authors emplotted themselves, apostates, and their crises in a new paradigm of divine chastisement, and thus alleviated the anxiety induced by unprecedented defeat and political transformation.

[306] Somers (1994), 617.
[307] Sizgorich (2009), 1-20.

d. Apostasy

Scholars such as Sizgorich, Hoyland, and Papaconstantinou have been correct to note that the cultural milieu of the seventh century was less static than has been previously imagined. The use of common literary forms among Jews and Christians across the Chalcedonian divide, along with increased perception of apostasy as a threat, indicates that cultural and religious lines had become blurred. The subject of apostasy, which had scarcely been addressed in prior centuries, became a recurring theme among authors writing in a variety of genres. Given the triumphalist nature of late-Roman literature, which considered military victory and economic expansion as evidence of the supremacy of the empire and Christianity, most authors avoided the topic of apostasy all together. History had known plenty of individual apostates, such as the fourth-century emperor Julian, but his dramatic death in battle demonstrated the foolishness of his ways and reinforced the legitimacy of Christianity.

Likewise, there was no shortage of accounts of miraculous conversions to Christianity. However, conversion away from Christianity was rarely discussed. David Olster has noted that the rarity of apostate accounts in traditional sources makes noteworthy the relative frequency with which the theme of apostasy appears in the seventh century. In addition to the apocalyptic texts which are at the core of this thesis, several non-apocalyptic *adversus Judaeos* dialogues. such as the *Dialogue between the Jews Papiscus and Philo With a Monk,* and the *Doctrina Jacobi nuper Baptizati,* depict both Jews and Christians lamenting the loss of large numbers of adherents. Such a candid admission of religious apostasy would have been unthinkable in previous centuries.[308] The implications of these accounts in determining levels of apostasy and the reality of religious attrition depicted in apocalyptic texts will be discussed in greater detail below.

When approaching the subject of apostasy, scholars must exercise an abundance of caution. Apostasy, derived from the Greek ἀποστασία, literally refers to a "standing away" or

[308] Olster (1994), 7.

rebellion against a common cause. As with similar polemical categories, such as heresy, apostasy is a loaded term, inherently designed to alienate the so-called apostate, and is used by confessional insiders to establish their identity in contrast to those who are considered to have removed themselves voluntarily from, or otherwise have rejeceted, the community. Whether a person chooses to remove themselves, or is simply considered to have removed themselves by default, depends largely on the situation under consideration. Members of a religious ingroup may consider a member to apostatise by participating in the rites of a rival religious group, even out of ignorance, and even if the individual had no intention of apostasy and considered themselves to be full members of the ingroup. It is important to note that "apostate" is never used as a self-definition, and along with apostasy, is always attributed to a person in a polemical context.

Some scholars may prefer to use the value-neutral term "conversion" to describe the behaviours under consideration. After all, one person's apostasy is another person's conversion. However, the nature of conversion in late antiquity remains a subject of significant debate.[309] Conversion in the ancient world is difficult to define and discussion is prone to anachronism. Just as strict divisions between religion and culture did not exist in this period, it is difficult to pinpoint when an individual in the ancient world consciously chose to change "religious" affiliations.[310] In the seventh century, the difficulty is compounded by clashes between empires and religions, and coupled with the politics of conquest, it is difficult to sort the reality from the rhetoric. On the whole, accounts of conversion and apostasy come from literary figures rather than from the converts themselves. Authors who employ the term "apostasy" do so exclusively in the context of polemic, making it difficult for the historian to determine the reality behind the accusation and the criteria necessary to classify someone as an apostate.

Moreover, while many of the examples we will consider involve what we might today call "conversion", that is, a complete change of religious affiliation, the term apostasy itself is

[309] Cameron (2015).
[310] Cf. Smith (1998).

generally employed along a spectrum of meanings. The charge of apostasy could be levelled against a range of people, from those naively participating in rites of an adversary's religion while self-identifying as Christian, to full renunciation and adoption into a new religious community, such as, in an extreme case discussed below, by being a practising Jew. Likewise, outside pressures such as political alienation, religious persecution, or military conquest varied within different communities, rendering the decision to apostatise more or less voluntary, depending on individual circumstances. Individuals might convert under duress to save their lives or their family, while others might choose to convert for political or economic gain without any compulsion to do so.

For this reason, the present chapter considers apostasy from the perspective of the authors under examination, allowing each to define the term according to their own internal value system. Rather than attempt to construct a theory of apostasy, or for that matter, conversion, we will simply evaluate the role of apostasy and so-called apostates in seventh-century Byzantine literature, and in particular, in apocalyptic discourse. The approach allows for a nuanced understanding of the numerous approaches taken by authors in addressing the problem of apostasy. The approach seems reasonable considering that our interest in apostasy limited to the rhetorical role it played in constructing or maintaining a religious identity in a shifting political and religious environment, particularly as it is employed in apocalyptic discourse. Since the numerical realities of apostasy, which cannot be determined with surviving evidence, had no bearing on the polemical use of apostasy, this is the best approach to take. Finally, it should be noted that in this chapter we impose no value judgements on so-called apostates and do not debate the legitimacy of the terms employed by the authors under consideration.

e. Sources

Now that we have discussed the categories under consideration, we can turn our attention to the primary sources addressed within this chapter. Two broad categories of sources will provide the data for our analysis, namely, *adversus Judaeos* literature, and literature which employs apocalyptic discourse. The first category includes two major anti-Jewish dialogues, the

so-called *Dialogue Between the Jews Papiscus and Philo with a Monk,* and the *Doctrina Jacobi Nuper Baptizati* which, although they are for the most part non-apocalyptic, both feature apostasy as a prominent theme. Although it may seem counterintuitive to focus on non-apocalyptic literary forms, the discussion of apostasy in *adversus Judaeos* literature demonstrates the widespread concern for the subject in Roman society at large, and serves to confirm the reality of widespread apostasy in the seventh century. As we have discussed briefly in Chapter 1, anti-Jewish discourse served as a parallel means to address the increased anxiety which accompanied the crises of the Persian and Islamic invasions. Because of this shared concern, authors of *adversus Judaeos* literature addressed several themes which are common to those who employed apocalyptic discourse. Among such themes is the maintenance of Roman and Christian identity in response to increased religious and political instability and cultural transformation. Within this paradigm, *adversus Judaeos* literature will serve as a control group to demonstrate that apostasy was not used merely as a trope, but represented a genuine concern within seventh-century Roman society at large.

The second category of sources addressed in this chapter includes four key texts spanning the chronological range of the seventh century, beginning with *ex post facto* accounts of the Persian invasions and their aftermath, and ending with the establishment of Islamic Arab hegemony over former Roman territories in the Levant. Included in this category are two hagiographies, the *Life of Theodore of Sykeon* and the *Life of George of Choziba*, a fragmentary letter by Maximus the Confessor, and the *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius. The primary rationale behind the selection of sources is twofold: namely, to examine evidence across the chronological spectrum of the seventh century and to exemplify the variety of literary forms in which apocalyptic discourse was employed. This will form a case study, through which we can gain insights into the way in which apocalyptic literature was both catalysed by apostasy, and sought to prevent further apostasy by providing object lessons in the consequences of abandoning the faith. In some cases, apocalyptic discourse by illustrated the futility of apostasy because of the promise of impending deliverance of Roman Christians from enemy occupation.

III. *Adversus Judaeos* Dialogues

The theme of apostasy had a significant place in the Roman apocalyptic imagination. While numerous sins were blamed for Roman defeat, apostasy served as the primary cause, rivalled only by the actions of unjust emperors. Considering the prominence of apostasy among other highly visible sins, and the hyperbolic nature of apocalyptic discourse, it is tempting to consider the generic "apostate" as a mere trope, and the accounts of apostasy as exaggerations of the realities on the ground. In order to avoid this trap, we will begin by considering the theme of apostasy as it appears in the decidedly non-apocalyptic genre of *adversus Judaeos* literature; this will serve as a control group. On the whole, authors of anti-Jewish literature blamed not "sin" in the abstract, or divine punishment, but on the equally abstract and equally problematic "Jew". Although the image of the "Jew" was full of stereotypes, in most other respects this genre was more tempered, and attempted to depict a reasoned intellectual debate. The goal of such literature was to demonstrate that Christianity was overwhelmingly superior to Judaism, and that Christianity was *verus Israel*. Thus, *adversus Judaeos* literature rarely acknowledged any failings within the Christian community. Thus, in those rare instances where Christian sin is acknowledged or even blamed, close attention is warranted, and we can cautiously accept such candid admissions as based in reality.

In the wake of the Persian campaigns, accusations against the Roman Jewish community of collusion with the enemy led to a significant deterioration in the treatment of Jews by the government, and in the relationship between Christians and Jews more broadly. The emperor Heraclius took numerous actions against the Jews, including the expulsion of the Jewish community in Jerusalem, and issued a decree that all Jews within the empire would be baptised and forced to convert to Christianity. While the enforcement of the latter edict is a matter of speculation, the general anti-Jewish attitude of the government had a chilling effect on Jewish-Christian relations within the empire. This is best exemplified by the significant increase in the production of *adversus Judaeos* literature. A wide variety of literature was produced, ranging from apologetical manuals designed to provide Christians with the tools necessary to counter

Jewish objections to Christianity to Platonic dialogues, depicting what were ostensibly accounts of debates between Jews and Christians about the merits of their respective traditions, and debating who held the rightful claim to the traditions of the Hebrew Bible.[311] Whether these *adversus Judaeos* dialogues were stylised accounts of historical debates, or rhetorically constructed literary fictions designed to communicate larger ideas, as a rule they served one primary purpose: to demonstrate the overwhelming superiority of Christianity and to ensure Christianity's claim to be *verus Israel.*[312]

In light of this purpose, when authors of *adversus Judaeos* dialogues address themes such as Christian apostasy, which only serve to demonstrate Christian weakness, the reader should to pause and consider the implications. Not only did authors raise this subject, they candidly acknowledged the reality of apostasy, and offered defences or deflections. Since the Christian authors who composed these dialogues had full control over their narratives, the inclusion of difficult subjects such as apostasy can serve as a barometer of the presence of real anxieties about apostasy within the Christian Roman community. For this reason, the discussion of apostasy by authors of multiple *adversus Judaeos* dialogues in the seventh century is worthy of further consideration. While apostasy is by no means a dominant theme in these dialogues, its widespread discussion suggests that their authors must have considered Christian attrition to be a legitimate line of critique and, as such, Christians needed to be prepared to offer a substantial, if perhaps cursory, rebuttal. The following section examines this theme as it appears in two important dialogues of the mid seventh century: The *Dialogue Between the Jews Papiscus and Philo with a Monk,* and the *Doctrina Jacobi nuper baptizati.*

[311] Examples include the anonymous treatise 25 Chapters to Counter the Jews (edited by Déroche [1991] translated by van der Horst [2004]), the anonymous *Doctrina Jacobi nuper Baptizati* (edited by Déroche [1991]), the anonymous *Trophies of Damascus* (edited by Bardy[1927]), the anonymous *Disputation Between Gregentius and Herbanus the Jew* (edited by Berger [2006]); and the anonymous *Dialogue Between the Jews Papiscus and Philo* (edited by McGiffert [1889]).
[312] The historicity of *adversus Judaeos* dialogues is a highly-debated topic. See Olster (1994), 116-179; Déroche (1999), 141-161; and Cameron (2002), 57-78.

a. Papiscus and Philo

The first document under consideration is the *Dialogue Between the Jews Papiscus and Philo With a Monk*. This anonymous seventh-century dialogue recounts a disputation between the two title characters and an unnamed monk, and addresses questions concerning the legitimacy of the claim of Judaism and Christianity to the law and the scriptures. The subject matter itself is not unusual, and follows a well-established tradition in line with most previous *adversus Judaeos* dialogues. What makes this text unique is what it reveals about the circumstances of religious minorities in the earliest period of the Islamic invasions.

The dialogue was composed in 650 in Syria by an unknown Melkite author after Islamic hegemony had been established in the region. Subtle hints throughout the text reveal the author's allegiance to the empire, and the author's commentary offers some clues about the treatment of Christians and Jews during the first decades of Islamic occupation. While the author of the dialogue's perspective is bleak, his responses to his Jewish interlocutors betray a hope that his present circumstances will soon come to an end, and that the empire will recapture the territory and put an end to what the author considered to be a foreign occupation.[313]

At one point in the dialogue, discussion turns toward the ability of the characters' co-religionists to remain steadfast under the threat of persecution. The debate begins with questions about the legitimacy of icons in worship, but in the middle of his response, the protagonist steers the conversation toward a comparison of the plight of Jew and Christians under Islamic rule and their respective rates of apostasy. The monk addresses these concerns in the following passage:

> ἐγὼ προσκυνῶν τὸν σταυρὸν, οὐ λέγω δόξα σοι ξύλον· μὴ γένοιτο· ἀλλὰ λέγω δόξα σοι σταυρὲ παντοδύναμε ὁ τύπος τοῦ Χριστοῦ· σὺ δὲ προσκυνῶν τὸν μόσχον λέγεις "οὗτοι οἱ θεοί σου Ἰσραὴλ οἱ ἐξαγαγόντες σε ἐκ γῆς Αἰγύπτου". ἐγὼ αἰχμαλωτιζόμενος καὶ τυπτόμενος καὶ σφαζόμενος καὶ πολλὰ καταπονούμενος, τὸν θεόν μου οὐκ ἀρνοῦμαι· εἰ δέ τινες χριστιανοὶ ἠρνήσαντο, ἀλλ' οὐ τοσοῦτοι ὑμεῖς δὲ μὴ φονευθέντες ἀπὸ ψιλοῦ τὸν θεὸν πράγματος ἠρνήσασθε.
>
> While venerating the cross, I do not say, "Glory to you, O wood!" God forbid! Rather, I say, "Glory to you, O all powerful cross, you are a type of Christ". But you, while reverencing the calf say, "These gods are your gods, O Israel, who led you out

[313] Olster (1994), 21.

> of Egypt!"[314] I, although captured, beaten, tortured, and crushed exceedingly, did not deny my God; and if some Christians have denied him, still they are not as many as you, who deny God even though you are not killed due to lack of concern.[315]

This passage provides an interesting defence against the accusation of idolatry through the veneration of icons and the cross, a subject that was a common debating point in seventh-century *adversus Judaeos* literature. The opposition to the veneration of iconography was a characteristic common to both Judaism and Islam, and became an increasingly important subject with the outbreak of the iconoclasm at the beginning of the eighth century. By that time, some Christians blamed the veneration of the icons as the sin which had incurred God's wrath against the Romans.

More importantly for the subject of this chapter, the monk counters Jewish objections by changing the subject to a discussion of apostasy, and a comparison of the faithfulness of the Jews and Christians under Muslim rule. The protagonist begins by providing a list of the hardships which he had personally endured. By means of this list, the monk is likely serving as a stand-in for Christians more broadly as he claims to have been captured, imprisoned, and tortured at the hands of the occupying Arab forces, apparently in an attempt to coerce him to renounce his faith. Despite enduring these hardships, the monk remained steadfast and he claims, moreover, that some Christians had even been killed for not abandoning their faith and embracing Islam.

While the aim of this passage is to highlight the endurance of Christians in the face of torture, the monk does admit that not all Christians were able to endure that level of abuse. At this point, the monk's account becomes very candid, when he admits that "some Christians" had denied God rather than suffer mistreatment. Raising this subject is of no benefit to the monk's position in the debate, unless Christian apostasy was an inescapable fact that the author felt required a defence. Even so, the author manages to turn weakness into an advantage, by turning apostasy into a numbers game and comparing the "some" Christians with the "many more" Jews

[314] Cf. Exodus 32.
[315] *Dialogue Between Papiscus and Philo and a Monk* [McGiffert (1889), 75]. All translations, unless otherwise noted, are mine.

who denied God. The monk takes things further by asserting that, unlike the Christians, Jews denied their faith willingly, without hardship and without the threat of death.

Even if we allow for polemical exaggeration, the text suggests that the Islamic invasions resulted in relatively high levels of attrition among both Jews and Christians. The author claims that Jews experienced a higher rate of apostasy than Christians, and with little to no coercion. It is difficult to ascertain the number of Jewish converts to Islam during this period, but the relatively light treatment of Jews, who were permitted to return to Jerusalem after the Islamic conquest, suggests that the author's testimony has some truth. Further, the mixed nature of the early '*Umma*, and Islam's focus on monotheism, lends credibility to the suggestion that many Jews willingly embraced Islam in some nascent form.

What is most interesting for our purposes is the author's testimony about Christian apostasy. The candid admission of significant numbers of Christian apostates, at least enough to warrant mention, is highly informative. The testimony provides evidence that Melkite Christians offered enough resistance to Islamic rule to provoke a policy of persecution which, to some degree, was successful. The monk's account tells us of three classes of persecuted Christians, including those, like the monk himself, who resisted and survived, those who died as martyrs, and those who apostatised under pressure. It is worth noting that the author takes a surprisingly merciful view of this third class of persecuted Christians, and offers some excuse for their apostasy. Furthermore, the monk stops short of condemning the apostate Christians or blaming them for the difficulties facing the empire. As we will see, no such indulgences are present within apocalyptic discourse of this period.

The passage testifies to a significant external threat that was levelled against Christian identity by the spectre of persecution and apostasy. The author goes to great lengths to establish the identity of the Christians as a persecuted people who, with a few exceptions, endure faithfully. This is then contrasted with the Jews who, like their Old Testament ancestors, are willing to betray their God even without the threat of hardship, drawing an analogy between contemporary Jews and those of the Old Testament who worshipped the golden calf in the

wilderness. Those among the Christian community who betrayed their faith only did so under extreme duress, and are were few. This testimony allows the author to both acknowledge and dismiss the significant threat of apostasy, while simultaneously asserting Christian superiority despite heavy territorial losses which would indicate otherwise.

b. The *Doctrina* of Jacob the Newly Baptised

The second and final *adversus Judaeos* dialogue which we will discuss is the unique and enigmatic *Doctrina Jacobi nuper Baptizati*. This document provides a fitting transition in our discussion, as it defies many of the conventions typical of anti-Jewish literature. Unlike most such dialogues, the *Doctrina* delves into apocalyptic speculation by addressing contemporary Jewish messianic prophecies. The dialogue is not between static Christian and Jewish interlocutors, but a set of men who were born Jews conversing with a recent convert to Christianity under the forced baptism edict of 632. In these ways, the *Doctrina* defies the established conventions of *adversus Judaeos* literature, while still adhering to the axiomatic purpose of demonstrating the superiority of Christianity over Judaism.

The dialogue was written circa 640, in Ptolemais in Palestine by an anonymous Christian author.[316] Ptolemais and Caesarea were cities known for their significant Jewish populations and, incidentally, receive extensive mention within the *Doctrina.*[317] The dialogue is narrated by the character of Joseph, a newly baptised Jew. The *mise en scène* is a secret meeting of Carthaginian Jews, lamenting the edict of forced baptism, and debating the best course of action in light of the edict's enforcement. The title character, Jacob, is a Torah scholar who mistakenly identified himself as a Jew while trying to avoid the forced baptism, and was promptly seized by local Christians and taken to be baptised. Although Jacob initially resisted, while in captivity he received a vision from a heavenly messenger who revealed to him that Jesus was the true Messiah, and urged him to embrace Christianity and accept baptism.[318]

[316] Boudignon (2013), 239.
[317] van der Horst (2009), 4.
[318] *Doctrina Jacobi* I.3 (Old Slavonic translation) [Dagron and Déroche, 1991, 73-74] A lacuna exists in the Greek text which Dagron and Déroche fill using the Old Slavonic translation.

Written from the perspective of a former Jew who was baptised as a result of Heraclius's edict, the *Doctrina* is the closest we have to the perspective of an apostate, though in this case an apostate from Judaism to Christianity. Unlike the *Dialogue Between the Jews Papiscus and Philo with a Monk*, the nature of apostasy itself is a central theme in the *Doctrina*, as we will explore in detail below. This theme is explored most poignantly in a debate between Jacob and Justus the Jew in which Jacob recalls his former life as a Jew, his participation in actions against Christians, his initial arrest, mistreatment and resistance to baptism, and his eventual and sincere conversion.

Aside from the unique perspective of a Jewish convert to Christianity, several features distinguish the *Doctrina* from other *adversus Judaeos* dialogues of the period. Perhaps most surprising is the fact that the *Doctrina* is openly critical of Christians and their treatment of Jews. There is an awareness on the part of the Jacob that Christians are flawed, despite his attempts to convert his interlocutor, and is illustrated in the vivid narration of Jacob's treatment by Christians prior to his baptism. During his ordeal, Jacob is forcibly abducted, and then stripped down in front of a group of Christians who inspect his genitalia for circumcision. After his status as a Jew is confirmed, he is taken by force to be baptised, although in the end he sincerely converts and accepts his baptism.

The *Doctrina* further differs in its disclosure of a close familiarity with Judaism beyond standard tropes of the Law and the Old Testament. As we have seen in the *Dialogue with the Jews Papiscus Philo and a Certain Monk*, the knowledge of Judaism by most authors of *adversus Judaeos* literature was limited to repackaged Old Testament stereotypes. The author of the *Doctrina*, on the other hand, has demonstrable knowledge of seventh-century Roman Judaism. For example, much has been made of the use of the term "*mamzir*" (μάμζιρος), a Hebrew colloquial insult roughly equivalent to "bastard" in English, which is still preserved in modern Yiddish slang.[319] Although μάμζιρος is attested in Septuagint Greek, it is exceedingly

[319] Olster (1994), 161. Marie-France Auzépy argues, based on the frequency with which μάμζιρος appears in the *Doctrina*, that the term was "used as an insult by Christians against Jews". This conclusion misses the point of the author's use of the term, which was to mimic Jewish colloquial speech. Auzépy, (2015), n. 84.

rare and betrays a knowledge of Jewish idiomatic speech.[320] Beyond the mere use of the term, the frequency with which it is employed by both parties provides an informal tone of mutual insult to the *Doctrina*. The disrespect reaches such a degree that at one point Jacob and Justus nearly come to blows. All of these aspects are unique and differ from the formalised setting typical of most *adversus Judaeos* dialogues, which involve a respectful and reasonable exchange of ideas, even if in the end the Christian is revealed to be superior. As a result, the *Doctrina* has an air of authenticity that differs from other examples of the genre which are typically contrived and derivative.

Another way in which the *Doctrina* differs from other examples of *adversus Judaeos* literature is the inclusion of an apocalyptic section. In this section, the author predicts the division of Rome and the rise of the anti-Messiah Hermolaos (Ἑρμόλαος).[321] Hermolaos appears to be a Hellenised form of the Hebrew Armilos who is the anti-messianic figure in Jewish apocalyptic literature. The most prominent appearance of Armilos is found in the *Sefer Zerubbabel* where, as we will discuss in Chapter 5, he stood as a substitute for the emperor Heraclius who was predicted to attack the Jews and usher in the return of the messiah due to his extensive program of persecution, including the very edict of forced baptism at the centre of the *Doctrina*.[322]

The associations with the emperor Heraclius are not present in the *Doctrina*. This is not surprising considering the pro-Byzantine stance of the dialogue as a whole. Nevertheless, the discussion of the eschatological adversary, even if not associated with a specific figure, is still informative, and raises further questions about the authorship of the *Doctrina*. It is noteworthy that the entire corpus of Jewish apocalyptic literature, including the *Sefer Zerubbabel* and the liturgical *piyyutim*, was composed in Hebrew, and was closely guarded by the Jewish community

[320] David Olster suggest that this, combined with the author's familiarity with Jewish social organisation, is evidence that the *Doctrina* was composed by an actual baptised Jew. Olster (1994), 160-161. Most recent scholars, follow Déroche's assertion of a creative Christian author, based on the author's reliance on generic constructs of *adversus Judaeos* literature and the fact that μάμζιρος could have been known by a Christian through its appearance in the Septuagint. See Déroche (1999), 148, n. 30; van der Horst (2009), 2; and Gador-Whyte (2013), 212.
[321] *Doctrina Jacobi* V.1 [Déroche (1991), 183-185].
[322] Chapter 5, 195-7.

because its subversive nature. As a result, it was largely inaccessible to Greek-speaking Roman gentiles. This fact begs the question as to how a Greek-speaking Christian could have gained access to the material, and under what circumstances they would have had the opportunity to familiarise themselves with Hebrew accounts of Armilos. The inclusion of the subversive Jewish apocalyptic material, the extensive use of Jewish colloquialisms, as well as the author's familiarity with the Jewish communities of Palestine is indicative of an author who was either an actual former Jew, or of a Christian who went to extraordinary lengths to research obscure aspects of contemporary Jewish thought.

Whether the *Doctrina* was written by an actual former Jew or was a carefully researched dialogue from within the Christian community remains the subject of debate. While most scholars agree that the *Doctrina* is a completely unique piece of literature for the period, most argue that the *Doctrina* was composed for Christians without a Jewish audience in mind, though there are compelling arguments to the contrary. Its exact purpose, whether to convince hesitant Jews or to ease anxieties regarding the "convertibility" of Jews is also a matter of debate.[323] The correct answer has little impact on our topic, and is beyond the scope of this chapter. However, the author's unique literary approach, particularly the rhetorical construction of the *mamzir*, has significant bearing on the way in which apostasy is discussed and framed within the *Doctrina.*

One passage will suffice to demonstrate the author's approach to the rhetorical construction of apostasy. Given the impact of the edict of forced baptism upon the Jewish community, the central event of the *Doctrina*, it is not surprising to find that apostasy is a primary concern of the author. The Christian protagonist, a convert from Judaism, would naturally be considered an apostate by his interlocutors. Within the *Disputatio,* the debate about the true nature of apostasy leads to a heated exchange, following the introduction of Jacob by Isaac, one of the parties present at the secret meeting. Isaac asks Justus, his cousin, to give his opinion about Jacob's testimony. The conversation is depicted as follows:

[323] Most recently, Christian Boudignon has argued that the *Doctrina* was a well-researched and highly creative composition designed to counter Christian objections that the Jews were not suitable for baptism. See Boudignon (2013), 255-256.

> Καὶ καθίας ὁ Ἰοῦστος λέγει· Κακῶς εὗρον ὑμᾶς τὰ τέκνα μου καὶ μαθητάς, τοὺς μὴ ἔχοντας φόβον Θεοῦ, ἀλλὰ ἀποστάτας τοῦ Θεοῦ. // Ἀποκρίνεται ὁ Ἰάκωβος καὶ λέγει· Ἀταράχως, κύρι Ἰοῦστε. // Λέγει ὁ Ἰοῦστος· ὄντως ὠφελον ταραχθῆναι, ὅτι σύ, κάθαρμα ὢν καὶ ἀποστάτης καὶ βδέλυγμα τῶν Ἰουδαίων, διὰ τῆς συκοφαντίας σου ἄρτι διδάσκαλος ἀνεφάνης. // Ἀποκρίνεται ὁ Ἰακωβος καὶ λέγει· Ὄντως ἀλήθειαν λέγεις ὅτι καὶ κάθαρμα καὶ ἀποστάτης καὶ βδέλυγμα καὶ τυφλὸς καὶ συκοφάντης ἤμην ποτέ, μὴ γινώσκων τὸν Θεὸν τὸν ὕψιστον· τοῦτο ἀλήθειαν εἶπας καὶ προεφήτευσας.... ὁ μὴ δεχόμενος τὸν Χριστὸν καὶ πιστεύων εἰς αὐτὸν ἀποστάτης Θεοῦ ἐστι καὶ μάμζιρος καὶ ἀνάθεμα. // Ἀποκρίνεται ὁ Ἰοῦστος καὶ λέγει· Ὑβρίζεις με, ἄθλιε Ἰάκωβε. Οὐκι ὁ πατήρ μου, ὁ μακάριος Σαμουῆλος, διδάσκαλός σου εἰς τὰς θείας γραφὰς ἐγένετο; // Ἀποκρίνεται ὁ Ἰακωβος καὶ λέγει· Οὐχ ὑβρίζω σε, μὴ γένοιτο - ἀλλὰ τὸ ἅγιον Πνεῦμα «τὸ λαλῆσαν δὶα τῶν προφητῶν» ὑβρίζει καὶ ἀναθεματίζει τοὺς μὴ δεχομένους τὸν Χριστόν.
>
> And Justus sat down and said, "I have found, evilly, that you, my children and students, do not fear God, but rather are apostates of God." // Jacob answered and said. "Be calm, lord Justus". // And Justus said, "Truly I am obliged to be angry, because you, as a scourge, an apostate, and an abomination to the Jews, have now been revealed as a teacher by your slander". // And Jacob answered: "Truly you speak the truth, that before I was a scourge, an apostate, an abomination, a blind man, and a slanderer, not knowing the highest God; in this you spoke the truth and were a prophet…. He who does not have the Christ and does not believe in him is an apostate of God, a *mamzir*, and is cursed". // And Justus answered and said, "You commit an outrage against me, wretched Jacob! Was not my father, the blessed Samuel, your teacher in the Divine Scriptures?" // Jacob answered and said: "It is not I who commits an outrage against you, God forbid! Rather, it is the Holy Spirit, 'who spoke through the prophets' who commits outrages and curses those who do not accept Christ".[324]

This brief but heated exchange provides significant insights into Christian and Jewish concepts of apostasy. Considering the author's detailed knowledge of contemporary Jewish culture, there is no reason to doubt that Justus's response to Jacob would represent an authentic Jewish reaction to a Jewish convert to Christianity. Justus responds in visceral anger, accusing Jacob and his followers of abandoning the fear of God, and of apostasy. When Jacob tries to calm Justus's anger, he escalates his accusations, calling him a scourge, an apostate, an abomination to the Jews, and a teacher of slander. Justus's accusations of apostasy were technically accurate. Jacob has literally abandoned Judaism in favour of Christianity, and Justus's response could be considered righteous indignation.

Justus's response is not surprising and, in many ways, mirrors similar responses by Christians to apostates in apocalyptic discourse, as we will discuss in further detail below. Yet, it

[324] *Doctrina Jacobi,* III.1-2 [Dagron and Déroche (1991), 153-155].

is Jacob's response that has the greatest bearing upon our investigation. Jacob responds, quite unexpectedly, by agreeing with Justus's accusations, even calling him a prophet. However, he then upturns the readers' expectations by applying Jacob's attacks to his former life as a Jew, prior to his baptism. What follows transforms the *Doctrina*'s discourse on apostasy and is entirely unique in *adversus Judaeos* literature, and Christian discourse more broadly. Jacob transforms the meaning of apostasy to refer to anyone "who does not have Christ and does not believe in him". Such a person, Jacob asserts, is "an apostate of God, a *mamzir,* and cursed". Jacob redefines apostasy from meaning any abandonment of one's religion to indicating anybody who actively rejects Christ. He introduces a new understanding of the apostate as a true *mamzir.*

This transformation is unique within Christian discussions of apostasy. Jacob applies the label apostate to those who have never been baptised. Traditionally, and in the documents discussed below, apostasy requires the active abandonment of Christianity by a baptised individual. The implication of Jacob's formulation is clear. Jews, who have been given the knowledge of God, have still actively rejected him by rejecting his Christ. As a result, even pious Jews are apostates by default.

Justus, predictably and understandably, takes offence at Jacob's new formulation. However, it seems that what has offended him the most has the label of *mamzir*, which Justus takes as a personal insult against him and his family. In fact, Jacob takes the insult literally as an accusation of being a bastard, rather than as a metaphor referring to his spiritual state. Justus counters by citing the fact that Jacob knew his father Samuel who, according to Justus, had instructed Jacob in the scriptures.

Interestingly, Jacob does not respond directly to this rebuttal and ignores the literal meaning of the accusation. Instead, he responds to the accusation that he caused offence to Justus. Jacob argues that it was not he, but the Holy Spirit, who inspired the prophets of Judaism, who caused offence to Justus, and that the Holy Spirit brings outrage to and "curses those who do not accept Christ". Again, the implication here is that the Holy Spirit causes outrages and

actively curses the Jews, and any others, who do not accept Christ, and that the Jews are, in fact, a cursed people.

This passage represents a radical new approach to the theme of apostasy, and reflects a sophisticated attempt to construct a new and unique Christian identity in opposition to Judaism. Apostasy, in the traditional sense, was a concern. However, the author reverses the readers' expectations: rather than addressing the phenomenon of Christians abandoning the faith, as the author of the *Dialogue Between the Jews Papiscus and Philo with a Monk* had done ten years later, the author of the *Doctrina* adapts the concept to refer primarily to Jews, apostates by default, because they abandoned God by denying Christ. This is a twist in the traditional concern of *adversus Judaeos* literature. All anti-Jewish dialogues before and after the *Doctrina* had been tasked with establishing Christians as "*verus Israel*". Instead, the author here turns the concept upside down to define Jews as "*veri apostatae*". The final result is the same, but the means are a new and rhetorically sophisticated approach to the argument.

In a recent article, Christian Boudignon argues that the *Doctrina* was written in part to counter the concerns of a particular faction of Christians, exemplified by Maximus the Confessor, who were resistant to the idea of forced baptism based on a conception of Jews as recalcitrant and incapable of conversion. To counter this perception, Boudignon suggests, the author, through a subtle rhetorical strategy, introduces permeability to what was considered to be rigid confessional identity. To demonstrate this, Boudignon draws attention to the parallels between Jacob's move from apostate and *mamzir* to Christian through baptism, and his shifting allegiances between the Blues and the Greens during the circus riots in Constantinople in the reign of Phocas.[325] Boudignon notes:

> La facilité de Jacob à la conversion dans le texte repose sur le fantasme d'une fluidité confessionnelle comparable à celle qui existe entre les dèmes, au rêve de certains chrétiens, majoritaires, que les démarches individuelles de conversion triomphent des structures sociales de la minorité juive.[326]

[325] Cf. *Doctrina Jacobi* I.40, in [Dagron and Déroche (1991), 153-155].
[326] Boudignon (2013), 255-256.

In Boudignon's estimation, the *Doctrina* was written primarily for Christian consumption, and in particular a subset of Christians who believed that the Jews were incapable of conversion, and therefore rendered baptism, whether voluntary or forced, futile. Moreover, the baptism of Jews could, they believed, be harmful by adding to their inherited ancestral condemnation. To counter, Boudignon argues, the *Doctrina* was attempting to demonstrate that, just as anybody, even a Jew, can switch partisan allegiances at the hippodrome, so too can anybody become a Christian. The author of the *Doctrina* reasons with the anti-baptism crowd by addressing their concerns. For example, the author acknowledges that, yes, forced baptism is traumatic, abusive, and humiliating. However, all of these factors are for the greater good, and are in fact merciful, as this trauma brings salvation to the Jew.[327] His message is all the more convincing by the novel setting of a secret discussion among fellow Jews. If the *Doctrina* were written as a typical formalised disputation between a Gentile Christian and a Jew, it would be less compelling: the reader would have been aware that the deck was stacked. However, by disguising the Christian element, and creating a meeting of Jews complete with accurate depictions of Jewish social life and the use of Jewish idiom, the author has made the arguments in the *Doctrina* more compelling.

Overall, Boudignon's argument is convincing and adds new insight into the carefully constructed discourse on identity which is central to the *Doctrina*. I would also suggest that the *Doctrina* bears witness to the permeability and possible cultural exchange between the Christian and Jewish communities within Roman society, even during the seventh century when tensions were higher than average. This is evident not only in the author's knowledge of Jewish culture and social hierarchy, but also in the revelation that Jacob was a Jew, which took place while interacting with Christians. Even if the account of Jacob's unmasking is a literary fiction, the unflattering way in which the Christians are depicted indicates that the account probably reflects

[327] Boudignon (2013), 252.

the circumstances under which many Jews, who were attempting to avoid detection, were discovered.

While I agree with Boudignon's thesis, I would suggest that some caution must be exercised. It is true the author does make a strong case for the convertibility of Jews, and Boudignon is right to note the parallels between conversion and switching deme loyalties. However, we cannot lose sight of the fact that the author is, at the same time, reinforcing a distinct Christian identity in contrast to a Jewish identity, and does so in a new and rhetorically unique way. Central to the author's construction of identity is the *Doctrina*'s discourse on apostasy. This concept, which was traditionally reserved for the abandonment of one's current faith, is employed in a new and different way.

I suggest that this observation strengthens Boudignon's thesis. The demonstration that, contrary to popular belief, the Jews are the true apostates, as opposed to lapsed Christians, indicates the urgency of rescuing Jews from their cursed, *mamzir*, state. In addition, established strict boundaries to the superiority of Christianity which could potentially be harmed through the ability of Jews to be converted. It must be emphasized that, while a Jew may have been able to become a Christian, and "confessional fluidity" was possible, the Christian identity was still concrete, and the author of the *Doctrina* makes a conscious effort to reinforce that identity.

To summarise our findings regarding our "control group", the *adversus Judaeos* dialogues, we can make some preliminary conclusions that will inform our discussion of apocalyptic discourse. The first conclusion is that apostasy was a real concern for Christians and Jews alike. Its mere mention is enough to support this conclusion, but the fact that significant space is devoted to addressing the problem of apostasy reveals that it had become a point of contention among the Christian literati. Second, we can confirm that apostasy appears to have carried dramatic consequences for the apostate and the community. The vitriol that informs the discussion of apostasy and the vivid descriptions associated with apostates in the *Doctrina* show that apostasy was a grievous offence. Apostasy was condemned in the harshest terms, considered among the worst sins possible to commit in late-Roman society, and rendered the apostate

anathema, an abomination, and even a bastard. Finally, Roman authors were concerned to build an independent Christian identity that could withstand the threat of apostasy. In many ways, apostasy could be considered a rejection of this identity, a rejection which Byzantines were keen to discourage by any means necessary. With these factors in mind, we will now turn our attention to the theme of apostasy as it was used in seventh-century Roman apocalyptic discourse.

IV Apostasy in Apocalyptic Discourse

Thus far, our discussion of apostasy in *adversus Judaeos* literature has established that many Christians, as well as Jews, when faced with unprecedented defeat at the hands of non-Christian adversaries, abandoned their religion for that of the victorious enemy. For some, this was done in the face of hardships inflicted by invading forces. For others, it was a voluntary choice, either for personal gain or in response to the apparent divine favour bestowed upon the victor. Our sources so far have been limited to anti-Jewish dialogues composed during the earliest decades of the Arab invasions, as Islamic hegemony was first taking root. As we return to the subject of apocalyptic discourse, our sources will date back chronologically to the first decades of the century in the wake of the Persian invasions, and expand to the end of the seventh century to the establishment of Islamic hegemony over the Levant.

We will begin by addressing the theme of apostasy as it appeared in response to the Persian and Avar conflicts. In this task, we will examine two hagiographies, the *Life of Theodore of Sykeon* and *Life of George of Choziba*, which were composed within two decades of the end of the Persian conflict. To conclude our examination of this period, this chapter will discuss a fragmentary letter by Maximus the Confessor, written in opposition to the edict of forced baptism, and representing the perspective that Boudignon argues prompted the composition of the *Doctrina Jacobi nuper baptizati.* The chapter will conclude with a discussion of the *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius, which provides insights into Christian apostasy in response to the establishment of Muslim hegemony at the end of the century.

a. The *Life of Theodore of Sykeon*

Our study of the role of apostasy in seventh-century apocalyptic discourse begins with an examination of the *Life of Theodore of Sykeon*, a hagiography composed circa 640, shortly after the death of Heraclius.[328] In many ways, the *Life of Theodore* is a typical and derivative hagiography, borrowing many elements from earlier examples including Cyril of Scythopolis's *Life of Euthymius* and *Life of Sabbas*, and the anonymous *Life of Daniel the Stylite* and *Life of Symeon the Stylite*.[329] The *Life of Theodore* was composed by George, a disciple and companion of Theodore, who identifies himself late in the narrative. George constructs the *Life* as a record of accounts of the saint given by trustworthy witnesses, including descriptions of events which George himself had witnessed firsthand.[330] The *Life of Theodore* is the only contemporary source pertaining to Theodore of Sykeon. Historically, the *Life* provides an important witness to the end of the sixth century, as well as the political turmoil in the first decades of the seventh century.

The *Life of Theodore* bears witness to six emperors, beginning with Justinian under whose reign Theodore was born. The author provides commentary on each of the major usurpations of the seventh century, including the overthrow of Maurice, the demise of Phocas, and the rise of Heraclius. The text also serves as an important source for the Persian invasions and the Roman reactions to defeat. In a rare critique of the emperor Heraclius, the *Life of Theodore* attributes Roman defeat at the hands of the Sassanids, in part, to the emperor's rude behaviour. In one instance, for example the author suggests that a major Roman defeat was the result of divine punishment for a personal slight against the saint when Heraclius declined gifts and a dinner invitation.[331]

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[328] Robert Holyand observes that the author claims that Theodore correctly predicted the number of years of Heraclius's reign. See Hoyland (1997), 54 n. 4. Cf. George of Sykeon, *Life of Theodore*, 166 [Festugière (1970) 153-4]. For a classic English translation of the *Life of Theodore* with introductory notes, see Dawes and Baynes (1977), 87-192.
[329] Festugière (1970), vii.
[330] Festugière (1970), v. Cf. George of Sykeon, *Life of Theodore* Title, 22, 165, 170a [Festugière (1970), 1, 19-20, 152-153, 160].
[331] George of Sykeon, *Life of Theodore* 166 [Festugière (1970), 153-154].

According to the *Life,* Theodore was born during the reign of Justinian in Sykeon, a dependency of Anastasiopolis in the province of Galatia Prima, and died during the reign of Heraclius in 613.[332] The author notes that his birth was accompanied by miracles, and that by the age of fourteen he had established himself as a thaumaturgist by successfully bringing rain during a period of drought through his prayers, with the help of his spiritual father Glycerius.[333] Theodore quickly developed a reputation as a holy man by devoting himself to the ascetic life, and established local fame for performing miracles and predicting disasters. His reputation put him in high demand, and it was not long until Theodore was sought to be made a bishop.

Theodore considered the episcopacy to be a distraction from the monastic life and was at first reluctant. However, after a period of resistance, he grudgingly permitted himself to be consecrated as a bishop. Predictably, he found the clerical burden to be too difficult, and quickly sought to resign to continue to pursue his ascetic labours. At first, his metropolitan resisted, claiming that a man of Theodore's holy disposition was necessary to shepherd the church in perilous times. Theodore appealed the decision, however, and after the matter was referred to Constantinople, the patriarch granted his resignation, with the condition that he retained the *omophorion* of a bishop in order to maintain his rank and recognise his dignity.[334]

The Persian invasions occupy a central space within the *Life of Theodore.* The author pays close attention to the disasters which resulted, and readily attributes the invasions and disasters to divine causation in response to sin. The construction of Theodore as a holy man with the gift of foresight readily lends itself to the use of apocalyptic discourse. One of the best examples can be found in two parallel passages which are separated by several chapters. The first section tells the story of an omen which was observed during a liturgical procession and a brief prediction of troubles. This is followed up later in a second section which recounts Theodore's reluctant explanation of the omen, followed by a *vaticinium ex eventu*. The omen is described in detail in the following passage:

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[332] Festugière (1970), v.
[333] George of Sykeon, *Life of Theodore* 14 [Festugière (1970), 12-13].
[334] Rapp, (2013), 142.

> Ἐπεὶ οὖν τῶν κατὰ τὴν χώραν πόλεων καὶ χωρίων λιτανευόντων, τὰ σταυρία λιτανεύοντα ἤρξατο κλονεῖσθαι καὶ στασιάζειν, θέαμά τι φοβερὸν καὶ ἐλεεινὸν ἐπιδεικνύμενα, ἐρωτώμενος περὶ τούτου ὁ θεοφόρος ἔλεγεν εὔξασθε, τέκνα, ὅτι μεγάλαι θλίψεις καὶ ἀνάγκαι ἐπίκεινται τῷ κόσμῳ.
>
> When the people of the cities and country came to that place making a procession, the processional crosses began to jump about and make a ruckus, making a terrible and piteous spectacle. And the God-bearing man, when asked about this matter, he said, "Pray, my children, since great afflictions and punishments are being imposed upon the world".[335]

In this instance, a miraculous event, the shaking of processional crosses, is immediately observed by the crowd to be a "terrible and piteous spectacle". Even before an interpretation is offered, the crowd intuitively recognises that the incident does not bode well, and requires interpretation. This is confirmed by the author, who, through Theodore, uses the occasion to compose a *vaticinium ex eventu*, predicting great afflictions and punishments that will come to pass. The language of punishment is noteworthy, as punishment presumes a crime. The fact that the afflictions and punishments were to be imposed upon the entire world implies that a grave crime has occurred.

Despite the dire nature of the circumstances predicted, Theodore's interpretation remains intentionally vague. Although the people beg for further elaboration, Theodore remains mum on the subject and refuses at this stage to expand upon what sins have been committed, or the nature of the coming afflictions and punishment. Theodore's silence on the subject causes further dismay in the crowd, but the saint does not relent.

According to George's account, news of the event spread quickly, along with Theodore's vague but dire prediction. Word eventually reached Constantinople, at which point the Patriarch Thomas I (607-610) invited Theodore to the capital, seeking to learn more. After meeting with Phocas, healing his gout and admonishing the emperor for his bloodshed, he departed the palace with the patriarch.[336] Thomas had such great respect for Theodore that he convinced him to be ritually joined with him as his brother through *adelphopoiesis.*[337]

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[335] George of Sykeon, *Life of Theodore*, 127 [Festugière (1970), 103].
[336] George of Sykeon, *Life of Theodore*, 133 [Festugière (1970), 105-106]. We discuss Theodore's meeting with Phocas in Chapter 5.
[337] George of Sykeon, *Life of Theodore*, 134 [Festugière (1970), 106].

The patriarch tried to leverage this newly formed familial bond to convince Theodore to reveal the details and the meaning of the trembling crosses. Initially, Thomas's efforts fell short as Theodore refused to provide an answer. However, the patriarch refused to relent and in a dramatic display fell to the ground, grasped Theodore's feet, and refused to stand again until the monk revealed the meaning behind the dancing crosses. Moved by the gesture, Theodore finally relented. The saint proceeded to raise the patriarch up from the ground and reluctantly gave in to Thomas's request. The author gives the following account:

> …«πλὴν εἰ καὶ ἕως τοῦ παρόντος ἀπεκρύβη σοι καὶ οὐκ ἔσπευσας περὶ αὐτοῦ μαθεῖν, νῦν, ἐὰν αἰτήσῃ τὸν θεόν, πάντως σοι ἀποκαλύπτει» Εὐλογήσας δὲ ὁ τοῦ Χριστοῦ δοῦλος ἐπὶ τῷ πληροφορεῖν αὐτὸν ἐποίησεν αὐτὸν ἀναστῆναι, καὶ δάκρυσι συσχεθεὶς εἶπεν αὐτῷ·«οὐκ ἤθελόν σε θλιβῆναι, οὐ γὰρ συμφέρει σοι ταῦτα μαθεῖν. Ἐπειδὴ δὲ οὕτως ἐπιζητεῖς, ὁ τῶν σταυρίων σεισμὸς πολλὰ σημαίνει ἡμῖν ὀδυνηρὰ καὶ ἐπικίνδυνα· καὶ γὰρ ταλαντισμὸν τῆς πίστεως ἡμῶν καὶ ἀποστασίαν σημαίνει, καὶ βαρβαρικῶν πολλῶν ἐθνῶν ἐφόδους, καὶ ἔκχυσιν αἱμάτων πολλῶν, καὶ φθορὰν καὶ αἰχμαλωσίαν κοσμικὴν καὶ ἐρήμωσιν τῶν ἁγίων ἐκκλησιῶν, καὶ κατάπαυσιν τῆς θείας δοξολογίας, καὶ τῆς βασιλείας πτῶσιν καὶ ἀκαταστασίαν, καὶ πολλὴν τῆς πολιτείας ἀπορίαν καὶ περίστασιν·λοιπὸν δὲ καὶ τοῦ Ἀντικειμένου τὴν ἐπιδημίαν ἐγγίζειν προδηλοῦσι. Λοιπὸν αὐτός, ὡς κύβερνος τῆς ἐκκλησίας καὶ ποιμὴν τοῦ λαοῦ, ἐνδελεχῶς, ὡς ἔστι σοι δύναμις, ἱκέτευε τὸν θεὸν φείσασθαι τοῦ λαοῦ καὶ μετὰ ἐλέους καὶ φιλανθρωπίας ταῦτα οἰκονομῆσαι.
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> [Thomas said] … "However, if, even until this moment it was kept hidden from you and you have not been eager to learn about it, now, if you ask God, he will certainly reveal it to you". Then the servant of Christ, doing the honour of satisfying him made him stand up, and constrained with tears he said to him "I did not wish for you to be distressed, for it is not profitable for you to learn these things. But since you have requested so, the shaking of the crosses signifies many distressful and dangerous things for us: it signifies a taxing of our faith and apostasy, the invasion of many barbarous nations, the spilling of much blood, destruction and captivity on a global scale, the desolation of the holy churches, and the cessation of divine worship, and the fall and collapse of the Empire, great poverty and difficult times for the state; and what is more, it foreshadows that the arrival of the Adversary is near. Finally, you, as the governor of the sheep and shepherd of the people, continually, as far as you have strength, beseech God to consider the people, and manage these things with mercy and love for mankind.[338]

When we consider this passage in light of the triumphal nature of traditional Roman literature, we see some stark contrasts. Theodore reveals to Thomas what is, in effect, a small apocalypse with eschatological implications. The saint's previous refusals to elaborate on his earlier prediction are reversed in an unusually detailed and distressing *vaticinium ex eventu*.

[338] George of Sykeon, *Life of Theodore*, 134, in [Festugière (1970), 106].

Theodore predicts the collapse and fall of the empire itself (τῆς βασιλείας πτῶσιν καὶ ἀκαταστασίαν), an event which would have been inconceivable in previous decades. The language used is similar to that of George of Pisidia, who described the empire's fallen state under the rule of Phocas, and illustrates the depths of despair present at the time of the *Life's* composition.[339] The fall of the empire, along with the remaining laundry list of horrors, begins with "the taxing of our faith and apostasy", from which everything else results, including the arrival of the Antichrist.

It is worthwhile to pause for a moment to consider the context in which this passage was written, and the placement of the passage within the narrative. There is little reason to doubt the 640 dating of the *Life of Theodore of Sykeon*, considering its detailed prediction of Heraclius's death. This date makes the *Life* contemporary with the Islamic conquests of the Levant. By this point, the effects of the Arab invasions would have been felt throughout the empire. Within the narrative, the scene of the revelation takes place during the reign of Phocas, shortly after Theodore delivered a strong rebuke to the emperor. The narrative placement of the passage, coupled with the historical dating of the *Life*, presents numerous possible interpretations of what events are being referred to in Theodore's prophecy.

In terms of the narrative, the utter collapse of the empire, the desecration of churches, and mass apostasy described here this could be referring to the Persian and Avar invasions and their devastating effect on the region. However, since the *Life* was written well after Roman defeat of these "barbarian nations", it seems unlikely that the author would include the collapse of the empire, which was averted, or the advent of the "Adversary" or antichrist, which did not come to pass, in a *vaticinia ex eventu*. We cannot associate the sins described with any specific emperor. While Phocas and Heraclius each receive warnings throughout the *Life of Theodore*, no specific individual is blamed. Instead, we are presented with a domino effect, beginning with apostasy

[339] Cf. Chapter 3 above.

and concluding with the collapse of the empire, a collapse which at the time of composition would likely have seemed more possible than ever.

I would argue that the *Life of Theodore* is presenting a long view of history, which includes the trials of the Persian and Avar invasions, and incorporates the contemporary Arab conquests. The events described, including the desecration of churches and cessation of services, resemble the accounts given in the *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius, which will be discussed momentarily, more than contemporary depictions of the Persian invasions. Thus, although the Arabs are not named directly, the author most likely had the current crises in mind when composing this prophecy. Here, the advent of the Adversary could be an unfulfilled prophecy, or perhaps could refer to the Islamic leadership.

The prominent place given to the theme of apostasy in the passage is in line with what we have seen so far and, I would suggest, provides insight into the reactions of many Christians in the face of defeat. The bloodshed described by Theodore, coupled with the accounts given in the *Dialogue Between the Jews Papiscus and Philo With a Monk*, suggest that the threat of physical harm may have contributed to higher than usual numbers of apostates as well. Using Margaret Somers's categories, the author George emplots the apostates of the empire into an ontological narrative in which invaders punish and destroy the empire for their sins. The threat of apostasy was significant enough, at least from the perspective of the author, to threaten the very stability of the state and even usher in the advent of the antichrist and, by extension, the eschaton itself. It is worth noting that, unlike other contemporary examples of apocalyptic discourse, this passage does not offer hope of immediate deliverance outside of the possibility that the prayers of the faithful can convince God to relent. It does, however, offer an explanation of the crises of the empire, and serves to warn would-be apostates to consider their lot in the providential narrative which was continually unfolding.

b. The *Life of George of Choziba*

The *Life of Theodore of Sykeon* was not the only hagiography to employ apocalyptic discourse and warn against the dangers of apostasy. Our next document, the *Life of George of*

Choziba, uses similar techniques. Written immediately after Byzantine victory against the Sassanid Empire, circa 631, by the monk Antony of Choziba, the *Life* does not indicate awareness of the threat of the Arab invasions.[340] In many ways it is a standard hagiography narrating the miraculous events surrounding the life of George, Antony's spiritual father, a Cypriot monk who eventually became abbot of the Monastery of the Theotokos at Choziba in the Wadi Qilt approximately five kilometres west of Jericho.[341] Its primary historical interest lies in the fact that it provides an eyewitness account of the Persian invasion of Palestine. The *Life* centres on the miraculous events in the monastery, and the monks' endurance of the hardships of war, including their temporary flight from the monastery at the height of Persian occupation. Moreover, the *Life of George* records numerous encounters between Christians and Persians, and the breakdown of Christian identity through Christian participation in the Zoroastrian religious traditions of their Persian occupiers.

Archaeological and numismatic evidence confirms that the Persian invasions had a devastating effect on the Roman economy. Significant numbers of coin hoards and evidence of violent sieges against Roman settlements survive in the archaeological record as a testimony to the disruptive nature of Sassanid attacks.[342] David Olster has argued convincingly that this disruption was the impetus behind the composition of the *Life of George*, which he suggests was written in an attempt to promote the monastery and restore the pilgrimage economy which had been devastated by the Persian occupation of Palestine.[343] With its companion work, the *Miracles of the Virgin at Choziba*, the *Life* is a sort of promotional anthology, advertising the monastery and its elders, particularly George, as a source of spiritual wisdom and miraculous healings.[344]

While in most ways, the *Life of George* is a typical hagiography, one section in particular has a bearing on our subject in that it employs apocalyptic discourse to assign blame for the

[340] Antony of Choziba, *The Life of George of Choziba* [Houze (1888)].
[341] Vivian (1996), 54.
[342] Foss (1975) 721-47; Foss (2003), 149-70. While the Persians did attempt to maintain administrative continuity when possible, uncooperative populations were severely punished. Even if a settlement cooperates, warfare is naturally disruptive.
[343] Olster (1993b), 309-322.
[344] For an introduction and full English translation of both works, see Vivian and Athanassakis (1994).

Persian invasions. The section details the curious story of Epiphanius the Wrestler who, the *Life of George* relates, was a successful wrestler of Cilician extraction. During a bout, his career was brought to a halt when he was poisoned by his opponent.[345] The poison had its intended effect, and Epiphanius fell deathly ill, to the extent that he was no longer able to care for himself. His friends initially sought help though traditional Christian resources, taking him to various monasteries and saints' shrines to seek a remedy. In the end, their efforts were to no avail. As his situation became increasingly grim, his cohort became desperate and gave up on finding a Christian solution, instead deciding to seek help from a group of Zoroastrian magi. The magi provided temporary relief by placing Epiphanius under demonic possession, which, like a supernatural steroid, granted him invincibility and propelled his wrestling career to new heights.

After two years, however, the demons abandoned him. Predictably, Epiphanius was left a wreck and in worse condition than before his possession. Realizing the gravity of his sin and fearing divine wrath, he sought council from the abbot George, whose reputation for wisdom had become well known.[346] George assured him that, while he would never be able to rid himself of demonic influence, he could still save his soul under one condition: that he remained in the monastery and channelled his wrestling skills toward the ascetic struggle. Epiphanius accepted these terms, and was tonsured a monk, spending the remainder of his life at the monastery.

George's use of Epiphanius did not end with his adoption of the angelic life. The abbot used the occasion of the wrestler's sin to provide an object lesson to the brothers of the monastery. Anthony recounts George's speech as follows:

> Βλέπετε, ἀγαπητοί, τί ποιοῦσιν οἱ χριστιανοί. Οὐαὶ τῷ κόσμῳ τούτῳ ἀπὸ τῶν σκανδάλων. Πῶς ἐγενόμεθα χριστιανοί; Οὐχὶ συνταξάμενοι τῷ Χριστῷ, ἀποταξάμενοι δὲ τῷ ἐχθρῷ, καὶ πάσῃ τῇ λατρείᾳ αὐτοῦ καὶ πάσῃ τῇ πόμπῃ αὐτοῦ καὶ πᾶσι τοῖς ἔργοις αὐτοῦ; Καὶ ἐβαπτίσθημεν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ Υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου Πνεύματος· πῶς οὖν ἀποστρέφομεν πάλιν, ὡς κύων ἐπὶ τὸν ἴδιον ἐμετόν; Χριστιανοὶ δῆθεν λεγόμενοι, καὶ τῷ ἐχθρῷ τοῦ Χριστοῦ ὑποκύπτομεν, οἱ μὲν γινόμενοι μάγοι, οἱ δὲ παρ' αὐτῶν βοήθειαν ἐπιζητοῦντες…Ὁρᾶτε ὅτι καλῶς εἶπεν ὁ ἅγιος Πέτρος· Καλὸν ἦν αὐτοῖς εἰ οὐκ ἐπέγνωσαν τὴν ὁδὸν τῆς ἀληθείας· διότι ἀπέστρεψαν ἀποστροφὴν ἀναιδῆ ἐκ τῆς παραδοθείσης αὐτοῖς ἁγίας ἐντολῆς; Πῶς οὖν μὴ ὀργιασθῇ ὁ Θεὸς ἐπὶ τὸ γένος ἡμῶν;…Τίς δὲ καὶ δυσωπήσει αὐτὸν μὴ ἐπαγαγεῖν κατακλυσμὸν ἔτι τῷ κόσμῳ, ἢ πάλιν ὑετὸν πυρὸς καὶ θείου,

[345] Antony of Choziba, *Life of George Choziba* 18, [Houze (1888), 114].
[346] Antony of Choziba, *Life of George Choziba* 18, [Houze (1888), 115.

καταφλέγων τὴν γὴν ὡς ἔτι τῷ κόσμῳ, ἢ πάλιν ὑετὸν πυρὸς καὶ θείου, καταφλέγων τὴν γὴν ὡς Σόδομα καὶ Γόμορρα; Ἐγὼ μέν, τέκνα, ἔμφοβός εἰμι καὶ ἔντρομος διὰ τὰ ἐπερχόμενα τῇ οἰκουμένῃ κακὰ διὰ τὰ ἐπιτηδεύματα ἡμῶν τὰ πονηρά…

Look, beloved, at what Christians do! Woe to this world because of its stumbling blocks! How have we become Christians? Have we not united ourselves to Christ, have we not renounced the enemy and all honour to him and all his pomp and all his works? We have been Baptised in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. How then can we turn back again, like a dog to its own vomit (cf. Proverbs 26:11)? Being called Christians from that time, we bow to the enemy; some become magi and still others seek their help!…Do you see that Saint Peter spoke well when he said, "It would have been better for them if they had not known the way of truth since they have shamelessly turned away from the holy commandment passed on to them" (cf. 2 Peter 2:21)? How, therefore, can God not be angry at our race?...Who will persuade him not to bring a flood upon the earth or once again rain down fire and brimstone or consume the earth with fire like Sodom and Gomorrah? I myself, children, am filled with fear and trembling because of the evils that will come upon the Empire on account of our wicked practises.[347]

For Antony, the story of Epiphanius provided an object lesson and an occasion for a moralising speech and *vaticinium ex eventu*, to which we return below, thereby endowing his spiritual father with gifts of discernment and prophecy. However, for our purposes, this episode reveals a number of interesting observations of religious life during the Persian occupation of Palestine. First, it is apparent that there was a significant level of cultural exchange between Persian and Roman religious practises. We find that Zoroastrianism, the religion of the Persian enemy, was considered by many Christians to be a viable alternative to traditional Christian methods of healing, such as pilgrimages to monasteries and saints' shrines or sacramental healing. In these circumstances, the lines between Persian and Roman identity were increasingly blurred.

The true extent of the problem is seen in George's speech to the brotherhood, which provides Antony with an opportunity for further exposition. In this context, the brotherhood merely provides a platform to address intended audience of the *Life*. It is unlikely that a crowd of devoted monastics was the true audience for his moralising speech, but rather the potential pilgrim or outside reader of this *Vita*. From George's language, we see that Epiphanius' actions were not seen as merely seeking "alternative medicine" but as a complete abandonment of his

[347] Antony of Choziba, *Life of George Choziba* 18, [Houze (1888), 116-118].

baptism. George even quotes the baptismal exorcism prayers, asking "Have we not united ourselves to Christ, and have we not renounced the enemy and all his honour, all his works, and all his pomp?". Furthermore, the gravity of the speech suggests apostasy was considered a clear and present danger, that Christians were turning to their old ways, even converting to Zoroastrianism and becoming magi, or at least, in Epiphanius's case, seeking remedies from the magi. Baptism, the fundamental mark of Christian identity, was being renounced at an alarming rate.

Antony, through George, locates the evils of the Persian invasions to come, which had in fact already happened by the time of the *Life of George's* composition, directly in Epiphanius' perceived disloyalty to Christianity. In this way, to employ Somers's categories, Antony emplots the Palestinian Christian community, and especially apostates, into an ontological narrative of divine reward and chastisement. George's apocalyptic "fire and brimstone" message serves as a warning, an attempt to stem the tide of apostasy. The *Life of George* was written after the Roman defeat of the Persians, so the true purpose of this speech was likely to impart spiritual meaning to the Persian crisis and serve as an object lesson to readers who had just survived the difficult times of the Persian occupation. God punishes the disloyal and brings down his wrath upon the empire as punishment for apostasy.

c. Fragment by Maximus the Confessor

The third document in our apocalyptic dossier is a letter by the monk Maximus the Confessor (d. 654) which survives only as a fragment. We have discussed this document as it relates to apocalyptic conceptions of the emperor, so we need not repeat that information here. [348] In this section, we will examine the letter from a different p erspective, namely, what it tells us about Roman conceptions of the effects of apostasy.

By way of review: Maximus writes to his interlocutor both to announce the tidings of the edict's enforcement and to express his strong opposition. Within his objections, Maximus

[348] See Chapter 3, 127-30.

expresses concerns both for the Jews who are to be forced to endure baptism, and for the consequences of the baptism both for the Church and for the world at large. Among Maximus's chief concerns is his fear that the forced baptism would lead to mass apostasy. I will not reproduce the entire passage here. Instead, I will focus on the material relevant to the topic, as follows:

> Καὶ τρίτον τὴν κατὰ τὸν ἅγιον ἀπόστολον προσδοκωμένην ἀποστασίαν ὑφορῶμαι μή πως ἀρχὴν λάβῃ τὴν τούτων πρὸς πιστοὺς λαοὺς ἐπιμιξίαν, δι' ἧς ἀνύποπτον ἐν τοῖς ἀφελεστέροις ποιῆσθαι δυνήσονται τὴν κατὰ τῆς ἁγίας ἡμῶν πίστεως πονηρὰν τῶν σκανδάλων σποράν, καὶ εὑρεθῇ τοῦτο σημεῖον φανερὸν καὶ ἀναμφήριστον τῆς θρυλλουμένης τοῦ παντὸς συντελείας καθ' ἣν τοὺς ὑπερ τῆς ἀληθείας μεγάλους πειρασμοὺς καὶ ἀγῶνας προσδοκῶσιν οἱ δι' εὐχῶν καὶ δεήσεως καὶ δακρύων πολλῶν καὶ τῶν πρὸς δικαιοσύνην ἐξευρημένων τρόπων ἑαυτοὺς ἑτοιμάζοντες.
>
> Thirdly, I suspect the apostasy predicted by the Apostle (cf. 2 Thess 2:3), and I am fearful lest it begin through intermingling of these and the faithful people, through which they will be able to spread the evil seed of the stumbling-blocks against our holy faith among those who are most simple, and there appear that manifest and undisputed sign of the end, discussed by all, and accordingly, they should expect great temptations and struggles for the sake of the truth, for which they prepare themselves by prayers, entreaties, by many tears, and by seeking paths toward righteousness.[349]

Maximus' concerns are threefold, namely, the desecration of baptism itself by exposure to those unprepared for the faith; second, the Jews, with the "bitter root of their ancestral faithlessness", will sink deeper into darkness by bringing condemnation upon themselves; and finally, and most importantly for our purposes, the result will be the mass apostasy predicted in 2 Thessalonians. This last concern is based on fear of what would result from mixing unproven and faithless Baptised Jews with simple-minded Christians. According to Maximus, the resulting apostasy would be "the undisputed sign of the end, discussed by all". In this objection, Maximus exemplifies the hypothetical perspective proposed by Boudignon, that Jews are incompatible with baptism, and any attempt to act against this fact would result in dire consequences.

By framing the threat of apostasy in apocalyptic discourse, Maximus is in line with the authors of the *Life of George of Choziba* and the *Life of Theodore of Sykeon.* In the case of

[349] Maximus the Confessor, *Fragmentary Letter on the Forced Baptism* [Devreesse (1937), 34]. Prof. Andreas Andreopolous has suggested to me that εὑρεθῇ can suggest an impression contrary to reality, potentially softening Maximus's position on the subject.

Maximus, he argues that such an apostasy would be a fulfillment of the prophecy given in 2 Thessalonians 2:3. In many ways, the forced baptism of the Jews could have been considered a threat to Christian identity itself, not only by blurring well-defined boundaries between Jew and Christian, but also by threatening to lead less-educated Christians to abandon their faith. Such a threat must have seemed uniquely possible in this period, shortly after the widespread desertion recorded in the *Life of George of Choziba.* Roman Christians had proven themselves prone to apostasy in periods of crisis and, for Maximus there would have been every reason to suspect that a sudden influx of forced Jewish converts could significantly impact the Christian community.

We can also examine this episode through the lens of Somers's categories, as a form of emplotment by Maximus. Here, the confessor emplots the emperor and the church at large as significant characters in the ontological narrative of Biblical prophecy. By tying the edict of forced baptism to the great apostasy of 2 Thessalonians, Maximus suggests that the empire, and its leader, Heraclius, are significant actors in providential history, whose decisions could bring about not only the fulfilment of Biblical prophecy, but the end itself. While Maximus may have been a stern imperial critic, such an opinion reveals his view of the elevated status of the emperor and empire, and the obligation of the emperor to maintain the purity of the church. It also reveals his concern about the danger of apostasy, which posed a danger not only to the souls of the apostates, but to the existence of the empire itself.

d. The *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius

In 691, Abd al-Malik erected the Haram al Sharif or Dome of the Rock upon the Temple Mount, dominating the Jerusalem landscape and architecturally symbolising the superiority of Islam over Christianity and Judaism. There is some debate as to whether the dome was intended as a slight against Christians, with its non-Trinitarian inscription, or as a unifying symbol built on a site sacred to Jews, Christians and Muslims.[350] Whatever Abd al-Malik's intentions, it is

[350] Papaconstantinou (2008), 140.

clear that it had negative repercussions in the Christian community under Islamic domination. Gerrit Reinink argues that this event, along with the *'Umayyad* taxation regime, was the impetus for the composition of the final document under consideration in this chapter, the *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius.[351]

We have briefly encountered the *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius in Chapter 3, and its detailed descriptions of the invasions of the Sons of Ishmael, who the author "predicts" will be permitted to conquer the Romans as punishment for their wickedness, couched in similar language as the *Life of Theodore of Sykeon*. The chastisements brought by the sons of Ishmael include, primarily, material deprivation and taxation, but also the defilement of churches and holy services. The greatest scorn, however is reserved for voluntary apostates. These apostates and their crimes against Christians are described in the following passage:

> A great part of those who are sons of the Church will deny the true (f. 131v.) faith of the Christians, and the Holy Cross and the lifegiving Mysteries. Without violence, torments or blows, they will deny Christ, and make themselves like the pagans. For this reason, the Apostle also preached about them, "In the last times, men will abandon the faith and will follow the unclean spirits and the teaching of the demons". And they will become insolent and slanderers, arrogant, enemies of good things, traitors, and cruel. All those who were false and weak in the faith will be tested and made known in that chastisement. And they themselves will separate from the assembly of the Christians by their own will, for that time will invite them to follow its abomination.[352]

The author goes on to describe how the apostates will rise to high positions over their brethren, will blaspheme the church, and will treat honourable Christians and clergy "as dung". However, the author provides some solace to his readers. This period of apostasy is not without purpose and is part of God's providential plan to separate the wheat from the tares in the "furnace of trial".[353] Those who survive and remain faithful can consider themselves among those whom Jesus called blessed in the Beatitudes for being persecuted for his name's sake (cf. Matt. 5:11).

What is more, those who survive will be vindicated in what is perhaps the *Apocalypse*'s most enduring literary legacy, the rise of the Last Roman Emperor, whom we met in Chapter 3.

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[351] Reinink (2001), For an alternative view, harking back to Paul Alexander, see Shoemaker (2015).
[352] Pseudo-Methodius, *Apocalypse,* XII [Martinez (1985), 83-4]. Trans. Martinez (1985), 145-7.
[353] Pseudo-Methodius, *Apocalypse,* XIII [Martinez (1985), 85-6]. Trans. Martinez (1985), 147-148. (cf. Is. 48:10)

The king of the Greeks, the Last Roman Emperor, will restore the material losses inflicted by the sons of Ishmael. Those who endured without apostatising will be rewarded with peace and plenty, for a time. However, the time of peace will be short lived, as the Son of Perdition is revealed, and the evil nations of the North, Gog and Magog are released from their imprisonment.[354] Many more will be led astray by the son of Perdition and his false miracles and still more will apostatise. Despite this grim vision of the future, hope remains, as the king of the Greeks will surrender his rule to Christ, who will deliver the son of Perdition and the armies of the North to Gehenna, securing a final victory. At this, the apocalypse concludes with a prayer that its readers will endure in faith.[355]

In terms of this study, the *Apocalypse* serves several important functions. First, it serves as a warning against would-be apostates, a warning that was timely as many Christians, if the author is to be believed, converted to Islam without coercion. Voluntary apostasy suggests that there was a crisis of identity within the Christian community when a Roman resurgence seemed increasingly unlikely as Islamic hegemony became permanent. The author sought to counter this perception by assuring his readers that the current situation was only temporary, and did not represent a change in divine favour. The assurance came first by claiming that the current state of affairs was brought about by sin and did not represent God's favour towards the "Sons of Ishmael", but rather that God's use of the harsh rod of chastisement was to weed out false believers from the chosen flock, in which the author urges his readers to number themselves.

Second, it reveals to the readers that deliverance will come even when the situation seems direst, and material losses will be restored and vengeance will be exacted. Finally, and perhaps less comfortingly, the author suggests that the end has not yet come, and in fact the end will be much worse. Indeed, it will not be until the unclean nations are let loose upon the earth that the final evil will be present, but even this will be brought to an end by Christ.

[354] Pseudo-Methodius, *Apocalypse,* XIII [Martinez (1985), 88-9].
[355] Pseudo-Methodius, *Apocalypse,* XIV [Martinez (1985), 92].

As with the *Life of George of Choziba*, the *Life of Theodore of Sykeon,* and the fragment by Maximus the Confessor, the author of the *Apocalypse* can be read in terms of Somers's categories. Through emplotment, the author places the empire, the Christian community, and its apostates in a providential ontological narrative that extends well beyond the mundane. For Pseudo-Methodius, the narrative reaches back before Alexander the Great, who becomes the progenitor of the Roman emperors, and extends to the *eschaton* itself. The crisis of Arab domination, and the changes wrought therein, were acts in a divine drama whose final and most terrifying act had yet to debut. Apostates and other sinners were the real villains, the chaff to be burnt, who brought upon themselves God's mighty rod in the form of the Arabs. Through narrative emplotment, the authors bolstered Christian identity in one of its greatest periods of instability.

V. Conclusion

To make sense out of chaos is a basic human instinct. When order falls apart, people seek to locate a cause for their misfortune. From the premodern world until today, it is not uncommon for people to attribute disaster to divine chastisement for sins, or to punishment of a specific group of sinful people. In late antiquity, these sins could take many forms, from regicide to sexual debauchery. However, among the worst of these was the grave sin of apostasy.

Apostasy was not a topic discussed lightly. In previous centuries, the topic was rarely broached at all. However, with the dramatic decline of Roman hegemony at the hands of non-Christian adversaries in the seventh century, apostasy became a problem which needed to be addressed head on. Whether in response to torture or threat of sword, or simply because it was understood that God's favour had shifted to the enemy who had manifested their superiority in battle, enough people were abandoning their religious affiliations for the subject to appear in many documents.

We have seen this phenomenon on display in *adversus Judaeos* literature. A genre known for stacking the deck in favour of Christianity, candid admissions in the *Dialogue Between the Jews Papiscus and Philo with a Monk* reveal that apostasy was a problem that required a direct

address. The *Doctrina Jacobi nuper baptizati* reveals the bitterness with which apostates were vilified by Jews and Christians alike, and the connotations of the label "apostate", a label which the author turned upon its head by redefining it to refer to Jews who had not accepted Christ.

The apocalyptic sources evaluated here, the *Life of Theodore of Sykeon*, the *Life of George of Choziba*, the fragment by Maximus the Confessor, and the *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius, reveal significant information about apostasy in the wake of the crises in the seventh century. First, and perhaps most significantly, is that apostasy was a real problem. Sizgorich and Papaconstantinou have suggested that the late antique culture, and more specifically, the seventh-century milieu in which Islam was formed, was far from static, and indeed was a varied and heterogeneous community in which identity boundaries were blurred. If the concern about apostasy demonstrated by our authors is any indication, this may very well have been the case.

However, even if only one segment of society experienced a particular lack of cultural cohesion, there were those who saw this as a significant threat, not only to the community but to the empire and even the world. The revival of apocalyptic discourse in seventh-century literature, along with increased production of polemical literature against the Jews, accompanied an increased concern with and admission of widespread apostasy. The admission of apostasy was unprecedented and suggests that, to the authors, the military and political crises of the seventh century had brought an accompanying identity crisis. Authors of apocalyptic literature sought to curb anxieties stemming from both crises, first by tying imperial defeat directly to punishment for sins, chief among which was apostasy, and then by offering hope of future deliverance by suggesting a means to prevent future crises. The aim was to warn would-be apostates through object lessons, and, by emplotment, to anchor the Christian community, as well as the empire and emperor, in a providential narrative. By doing so, authors ascribed spiritual meaning to an unprecedented crisis and sought to shore up threatened Christian and Roman identities, both of which had been built upon a triumphal model of military and material success as evidence of divine favour.

Chapter 5: Wolves and Centaurs in Byzantium: Dehumanising the Enemy

I. Introduction

This chapter examines the rhetorical dehumanisation of enemies by seventh-century authors across a wide array of genres and cultural backgrounds. The insights of sociological and social-psychological theory will be applied to primary sources written during both the Persian campaign and the Islamic Arab invasions, focusing on the process of rhetorically Dehumanising the wide array of perceived and actual threats against the empire. We will conclude that dehumanisation was a critical element of apocalyptic discourse, one which emplotted temporal enemies into a providential drama, and which eased the anxieties created by the crises of the seventh century by promoting hope of ultimate victory after a temporary period of chastisement had passed.

The year 628 C.E. was an historic one for the emperor Heraclius. Fresh from a successful campaign that brought nearly three decades of bloodshed to an end, and after rallying to deliver an overwhelming defeat to an enemy which, a mere decade earlier, had brought the Roman Empire to the brink of collapse, in an imperial first he entered the Holy City of Jerusalem in triumph. At the centre of his procession, he carried with him the relic of the True Cross, the holiest relic in Christendom which, for fourteen years, had been held in the Persian capital of Ctesiphon as the spoils of war, displayed as the ultimate symbol of Persian superiority over the Christian Romans.[356] In a scene which simultaneously recalled the triumphs of ancient Roman generals returning from campaign, as well as the triumphal entry of Christ into Jerusalem before the crucifixion, Heraclius was greeted by a beleaguered populace, once again able to celebrate, after the humiliating occupation by Persian forces had been brought to a joyous end. To any observer, it appeared that peace and prosperity had finally returned to the Roman Empire, and that God had once again deigned to show his favour to his chosen people.[357]

[356] Haldon (1990), 43.
[357] Drijvers (2002)

However, the pomp of triumph belied a darker reality. Decades of prolonged warfare against the Persians, Slavs, and Avars had stretched Roman resources to the breaking point, leaving the empire more vulnerable than ever.[358] Economically, the cost of paying soldiers in the field, while maintaining infrastructure, and the bread dole, and protecting the capital while the emperor was absent on campaign had depleted the treasury, had left the imperial coffers essentially bankrupt. It was not long until the gilded veneer of prosperity was ripped away in dramatic fashion.

The true nature of the situation was revealed in 634 when Arab forces, taking advantage of weakened defences, began to make advances into Byzantine territory, a feat which would have been inconceivable decades earlier. By 637, Jerusalem had fallen, along with the rest of Palestine, as the empire was no longer able to maintain its garrisons. By 641, economic crisis followed military defeat when Alexandria, the empire's breadbasket, fell permanently to Arab forces after a prolonged siege.[359]

The military and economic woes of the empire were compounded by the psychological trauma of unaccustomed defeat. Such a dramatic reversal of fortunes, less than a decade after the triumph in Jerusalem, left the Romans perplexed. Perhaps most mysterious of all was the nature of the new enemy. While the initial victories of the Persians had been traumatic, they were an ancient foe, known from Classical times, and therefore comprehensible. While the Arabs too were familiar to the Romans, they were known as nomads, and some tribes, such as the Ghassanids, were proven allies who provided protection to Byzantine trade. At worst, a rogue caravan may have posed a threat to traders and unarmed monasteries, but certainly not fortified cities.[360] Whether friend or foe, the Arabs as the Byzantines knew them were incapable of raising an organised army strong enough to defeat the greatest empire in the world.

Moreover, this new found Arab unity was centred on a religion that was entirely unfamiliar and initially misunderstood. Some believed that Arab unity had coalesced around an unknown

[358] Haldon (2016), 18.
[359] Haldon (2016), 77.
[360] On the relationship between the Byzantines and Arab nomads, see Kaegi (1992) 54-5.

Jewish sect, a theory fuelled by rumours of Jewish collaboration and a large number of voluntary Jewish converts.[361] Jewish reactions, for their part, were varied. Our admittedly biased sources depict a community that was, at times, cautiously optimistic, and at other times suspicious. The prospect of Byzantine defeat by an army inspired by a reforming prophet who preached extreme monotheism and the oneness of God against the Christian Trinity fuelled messianic hopes of deliverance from centuries of Roman occupation and oppression.[362] Others, following sceptical rabbis, were hesitant, wondering how a true prophet could come bearing a sword.[363]

Disaster at the hands of an unknown enemy created an intolerable anxiety among Roman authors, which in turn required creative thinking to resolve. In the absence of understanding the enemy, many Romans coped by employing familiar strategies to comprehend their circumstances. One literary technique was to rhetorically dehumanise their adversaries. This approach, part of a larger strategy in which authors emplotted the Romans and their foes into a providential narrative, had proven fruitful in comprehending the success of the Zoroastrian Persians at the beginning of the century. Within these narratives, defeat, rather than being evidence of divine abandonment, was transformed into pedagogical chastisement. The Arabs, like the Persians before them, were rhetorically constructed as the rod with which God punished the empire for its sins, a lesson which clearly had not been learned in the Persian invasions.

Narrative emplotment through the use of apocalyptic discourse translated the futility of defeat into an understanding of providential causation, and restored hope through the promise of future deliverance. The diseases of the empire could be diagnosed as symptoms resulting from a variety of imperial sins, and a cure could be prescribed in the form of immediate repentance. However, as in all good narratives, Roman authors required heroes and villains to drive the plot forward. In the case of the Persians, an ancient and well known enemy, this could be easily achieved by appealing to Classical and Old Testament tropes.[364] But the Old Testament typology

[361] Haldon (2016), 84. See also Theophanes the Confessor, *Chronographia* AM 6122 [de Boor (1883), 333].
[362] On the messianic hopes Byzantine Jews, see Silvertsev (2011), and van Bekkum (2002).
[363] Cf. *Doctrina Jacobi nuper baptizati* 16-17, [Déroche (1991), 208-214].
[364] Cf. Stoyanov, (2011), 45-76.

failed to provide language to describe the unknown Arab foe, and so required the invention of new rhetorical strategies. Arab success was not the result of a battle with a strategically equal and ancient foe, but could only be understood as demonically driven. Moreover, in this construction, the Arab invaders were not an army of human foes who were capable of reason, but animalistic barbarian hordes.

In both the Persian and Arab conflicts, Roman authors, writing from various religious and cultural backgrounds, emplotted themselves into their own providential narratives, complete with supernatural heroes and villains. Heroes could be found in the emperor Heraclius, who was transformed from a mundane emperor into the new Alexander the Great in the Syriac apocalyptic tradition, or into a new Heracles, a new Moses, and a new Daniel in the case of the poetry of George of Pisidia. Others placed their hopes in a future leader, eschatological heroes such as the Jewish Messiah of the *Sefer Zerubbabel*, who would avenge the oppression at the hands of the Romans, or even the Last Roman Emperor, the leader who Pseudo-Methodius predicted, would restore the empire and surrender control to Christ.[365]

As compelling as these heroic figures are, it is the so-called "villains" who are the subject of this chapter. Temporal, human enemies, such as corrupt emperors, military adversaries such as the Persians and Arabs, or traitorous and apostate Romans were transformed into subhuman or even demonic forces through narrative dehumanisation. In this way, the enemy could be understood, quantified, and properly vilified. Moreover, Roman defeat could be understood as the result of a conflict between a righteous empire and an unstoppable evil, permitted by God to be victorious for a season. According to this narrative, Roman defeat was not the result of institutional failure, but moral decay, a deficiency that could be easily remedied by swift repentance.

[365] See Chapter 3, 121-4.

II. Methodology

Before we begin our analysis, it is necessary to briefly discuss the methodology of the chapter. Recent scholarship in the fields of sociology and social psychology provide significant insights into the processes of dehumanisation, narrativity, and narrative emplotment in constructing human identity. These insights will be applied to a selection of representative sources, encompassing the genres of hagiography, homily, historiography, court poetry, epistolary literature, and generic apocalyptic text. To give order to this material, we will apply a thematic organisation, discussed below in detail.

a. Narrativity and Emplotment

This chapter will revisit Margaret Somers's theory of narrative "emplotment", discussed in detail above in Chapter 4.[366] Somers theorised that in establishing a unique identity within a heterogeneous society, cultural actors create a metanarrative in which they "emplot" themselves, establishing themselves and others as characters in a larger story and providing identity through the creation of meaning.[367] Somers's categories will be employed in this chapter to evaluate the way in which seventh-century Roman authors emplotted themselves and their dehumanised adversaries in a providential narrative of divine chastisement and restoration.

b. Social Psychology and Dehumanisation Theory

While sociology can help us understand the purpose of dehumanisation and its role in establishing narratives, it is still necessary to determine the nature of dehumanisation itself. In this task, the field of social psychology offers insights into the processes considered in this chapter. Questions of "humanness" and dehumanisation have received significant attention from social psychologists in recent decades. While Classical studies on the subject have linked dehumanisation to violence, aggression, moral exclusion, and organised evil, recent studies have developed a more nuanced approach.[368] Jacques-Phillipe Leyens has addressed the process of

[366] See Chapter 4,
[367] Somers (1994)
[368] Bandura *et al.* (1975), Kelman (1976); Opotow (1990); and Staub (1992).

racial essentialism, prominent up to the modern period, through which members of a designated ingroup assign less humanity, as defined by its members, to those outside of the group.[369]

This process, dubbed infrahumanisation, forms the basis of a new turn in the socio-psychological study of the processes of dehumanisation. Rather than focusing on traits and circumstances which lead some humans to dehumanise other humans, based on arbitrary criteria, recent scholars have addressed the content of "humanness" or, rather, what is denied in the process of dehumanisation. For Leyens, this includes uniquely human emotions which the ingroup claims for itself and denies to the outgroup and, by extension, dismisses the outgroup as more animalistic in nature.[370]

Building upon Leyens's research, Nick Haslam developed an approach to the study of dehumanisation which has significant implications for the present study. In what is a self-described departure from Leyens, Haslam and his team noted a tendency among humans to distinguish between "human uniqueness", which includes learned social niceties, norms, and other markers of civility, and "human nature", which includes innate, "essence-like" qualities common to all human beings.[371]

Based on this two-fold model of humanness, Haslam argues that dehumanisation can occur in two ways, namely:

> Individuals or groups that are denied human uniqueness are perceived as lacking civility, refinement, and rationality, and hence are seen as coarse, unintelligent, immoral: in a word, bestial. Because nonhuman animals represent the contrast against which this sense of humanness is defined, people who are denied uniquely human attributes are likened to animals. People who are denied human nature, in contrast, are perceived as lacking emotion, warmth, and openness and thus are seen as mechanical, cold, rigid, and lacking in vitality and animation.[372]

According to Haslam, to dehumanise other individuals or groups in bestial terms is to deny them the unique attributes associated with humanity, while reserving those qualities for members of the ingroup. This is subtly differentiated from the denial of human nature, which renders

[369] Leyens et al. (2000)
[370] Leyens *et al.* (2001) 408-409.
[371] Haslam, *et al.* (2012), 203-204.
[372] Haslam, *et al*. (2012), 205-206.

members of the dehumanised group as automatons, lacking any self-will or ambition. These two categories provide a framework to assess the degree of the dehumanisation of a given subject. It is important to note that, within this framework, dehumanisation occurs on a spectrum. Haslam's approach is a method by which we can analyse the degree of humanness granted to a dehumanised subject by the ingroup in question.

Expanding upon the broad category of "human nature", Haslam isolates the quality of human agency as particularly important. Agency is a quality associated with human nature, and ingroups who deny the human agency of a subject consider the dehumanised subject to lack the ability to act consciously of their own accord. By analysing several studies of leading social psychologists, along with his own independent research, Haslam and his team found that groups who attributed high levels of human nature to a particular group granted correspondingly high levels of human agency. People who were ascribed high levels of human nature were considered worthy of praise for their actions and worthy of blame for misdeeds.[373] Most importantly for our study, the reverse corollary was observed as follows:

> Perhaps more important, individuals or groups that are subtly or not so subtly dehumanized are likely to elicit different patterns of moral disengagement depending on the form the dehumanization takes. People who are denied human nature would receive diminished protection, would not receive praise for their good actions, and would not be seen as meriting rehabilitation in response to their misdeeds. People who are denied human uniqueness, in contrast, may tend not to be morally blamed for their wrongdoings on account of the perceived limitations in their capacity for intentional action and inhibition.[374]

While dehumanised individuals or groups are held less culpable, this is based on a perceived lack of autonomy, or agency. In other words, groups are dehumanised, in part, because they are considered to lack basic human agency and control over their own actions.

The findings of Leyens and Haslam provide insights and explanations for contemporary human behaviour. The spectrum discussed covers a wide range of dehumanisation, from the subtlest neglect, covert and overt racism, to the extremes of modern genocide. As historians, we

[373] Haslam, *et al*. (2012), 207-209.
[374] Haslam, *et al*. (2012), 209-210.

need to exercise caution when applying results tested on contemporary analyses to the study of past societies whose behaviours are only observable through literary and material evidence, each of which present its own difficulties.

However, dehumanisation as observed in seventh-century Roman literature exhibits numerous similarities to the behaviours described by contemporary social psychologists. This suggests that a certain level of psychological consistency persists across chronological periods. In the broadest sense, infrahumanisation can be observed in all domestic as well as foreign conflicts. Authors who accuse their opponents of heresy deny them basic human qualities such as honesty and piety, which are in turn reserved exclusively for the author's ingroup. Likewise, as we will discuss in this chapter, literary responses to the Persian invasions of the first half of the seventh century describe Sassanid forces as monsters, while the earliest responses to Islam portray the Arabs as animals and as demonically controlled, subhuman hordes. In both cases, Roman authors deny their adversaries human agency, depicting them as mere tools of God's wrath, to the extent that most authors withhold any actual blame for their enemies' behaviours, instead blaming members of the ingroup who are held to have a higher level of human nature. Such depictions result in the denial of human uniqueness and human nature described by Haslam and his colleagues.

This chapter applies the categories and methods developed by contemporary social psychologists to provide an interdisciplinary examination of Roman dehumanisation of political and military adversaries. By employing the categories proposed by Leyens and Haslam we can gain fresh insights into these processes, as they relate to seventh-century Roman apocalyptic discourse. Incorporating Somers's theories of narrativity and emplotment, we can develop a more complete picture of the psychological and sociological processes at work in seventh-century Roman society.

c. Sources

Let us turn now to the primary sources which will be examined in this chapter. These sources will be organised thematically, based on the kind of dehumanisation employed within

each document. We will begin by discussing the dehumanisation of disfavoured emperors. These themes include negative depictions of historical emperors, in particular, the emperors Phocas and Heraclius. Beginning with the emperor Phocas, this chapter addresses the inhuman portrayal of the usurper by the author of the *Life of Theodore of Sykeon*, the historian Theophylact Simocatta in his *Historiae*, and the court poet George of Pisidia in his *On Heraclius's Return from Africa* and in his epic poem the *Heracliad.* Analysis of dehumanisation of the emperor Heraclius will focus primarily on his portrayal as the anti-messiah in the Jewish apocalyptic text the *Sefer Zerubbabel*. We will also discuss the question, raised by Daniel Sahas, as to whether Maximus the Confessor's *Kaiserkritik* of Heraclius can be considered dehumanisation.[375]

Following this discussion of the dehumanisation of Roman emperors, my next theme in this chapter is the dehumanisation of the Persians. While most discourse concerning the Persian conflict employed Classical tropes to interpret the success of the Sassanid empire, some envisioned the Persians as an inhuman scourge. Of interest here will be George of Pisidia's *Heracliad*, a particularly noteworthy example which employs elevated Biblical and Classical tropes in a dehumanising discourse on Chosroes II's demise.

Dehumanisation in the earliest depictions of the Islamic Arabs by Roman authors will follow our discussion of the Persians. The Arab invaders were allotted the lowest levels of human nature and human uniqueness of all the Roman adversaries, and here we find our most direct application of Haslam's categories. Here too we find our most elaborate formations of ontological narrativity and emplotment, as the Arabs represented an entirely new foe, and authors needed to think creatively to resolve the resulting tensions. This section examines works associated with the patriarch Sophronius of Jerusalem, the bishop who presided over the conquest of Palestine and the final surrender to the Caliph Umar ibn al-Khattab in February 638. Of interest is a selection of writings by Sophronius, including his *Synodical Letter*, issued upon his elevation to the patriarchate, as well as his homilies on the occasion of the Nativity in 636

[375] Sahas (2003).

and the Epiphany of 638. Finally, we will examine a later account, written by Theophanes the Confessor after Sophronius's death, which offers an important recollection of the interactions between Sophronius and Umar.

In addition to Sophronius, we will discuss the writings of his most famous disciple, Maximus the Confessor. Here we consider two letters which detail Maximus's progressive awareness of the Arab threat, and the extent to which he denied the human nature of the Arab invaders. Finally, the section concludes with a discussion of the portrayal of Muslims, apostates, and future enemies found in the anonymous *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius.

The sources under consideration represent a wide cross-section of Roman literature of the seventh century, beginning with Phocas's usurpation of Maurice in the first decade of the century through to the establishment of Islamic hegemony over Byzantine territories in the East in the final decades. Moreover, the selection reflects the ubiquity of apocalyptic discourse in seventh-century Roman literature. Through the application of the sociological concepts of ontological narrativity and emplotment, in conjunction with insights from social psychology, we argue that dehumanisation was a critical aspect of apocalyptic discourse, insofar as it bolstered Roman and Christian identity in the wake of what might otherwise have been perceived as God's abandonment of the empire.

Narrative dehumanisation provided the means necessary to deny the human nature of physical enemies, while simultaneously locating them within a supernatural plot of good versus evil. In the case of the Arab invasions, it allowed the Romans to comprehend an unknown foe. Moreover, dehumanised enemies were a critical element in the formula of divine causation. The Christian Romans, as God's chosen people, endowed with the highest levels of human nature and human uniqueness, could not be seen to be defeated by mundane human foes. Instead, God permitted supernatural foes, devoid of human qualities, to prevail over his chosen people as punishment for their sins. Thus, the Romans maintained their dignity in the face of unprecedented defeat.

III. Imperial Dehumanisation

a. Phocas

We begin our study at the top of the Byzantine social ladder with an examination of the rhetorical dehumanisation of emperors, beginning with the much-hated usurper Phocas.[376] For many Byzantines, the crises of the seventh century began with the overthrow of the beloved emperor Maurice by Phocas in 602. The historian Theophylact Simocatta suggests that this event was the primary cause of the devastating Persian campaigns which dominated the first decades of the seventh century. Chosroes II had entered into a strategic peace with Maurice and, according to Theophylact, used the emperor's death as a pretence for invasion, in the guise of avenging the murder of a friend. Many sources, such as Theophylact, the *Life of Theodore of Sykeon*, and George of Pisidia attributed Persian success to divine punishment for Phocas's murderous coup.

An early critical witness of Phocas is found in *Life of Theodore of Sykeon*, written by his disciple George. Phocas receives three mentions in the *Life*, two of which are in passing, without commentary on the usurper's morality. On one occasion the saint offered hospitality to a retinue accompanying a prisoner who had been charged with conspiracy to overthrow the emperor. The saint managed to convince the prisoner to continue, without resistance, to face his punishment with dignity and with the knowledge that God would accompany him regardless of his fate. Once the conspirator was convinced, his chains were miraculously freed. Frightened by the event, the guards panicked and rushed to secure the prisoner. However, the saint convinced the soldiers that the conspirator was no threat and to allow the prisoner to continue unbound.[377] On the surface, this story seems to indicate Theodore's respect for the emperor, or at least an acceptance of the emperor's place in God's plan. The saint offers no commentary on whether the prisoner's actions were justified, only that he should concern himself with spiritual rather than earthly matters.

[376] On the efforts of Heraclius to promote his legacy at Phocas's expense, see Meier (2014).
[377] George of Sykeon, *Life of Theodore* 125 [Festugière (1970), 100-102].

The *Life*'s final mention of Phocas involves a direct meeting between the emperor and the saint during a visit by the former to Constantinople. The author records the incident as follows;

> Μαθὼν δὲ καὶ ὁ βασιλεὺς Φωκᾶς τὰ περὶ τοῦ ὁσίου ἐπεζήτησεν αὐτόν· ἦν γὰρ κλινήρης κατακείμενος ἐκ τοῦ τῶν χειρῶν καὶ ποδῶν ἄλγους. Καὶ εἰσελθόντος αὐτοῦ πρὸς αὐτὸν καὶ ἐπιθέντος αὐτῷ τὴν χεῖρα καὶ εὐξαμένου, ἐκουφίσθη τῆς νόσου. Αἰτοῦντος δὲ αὐτὸν εὔχεσθαι ὑπέρ τε αὐτοῦ καὶ τῆς βασιλείας αὐτοῦ, ἤρξατο παραινεῖν αὐτῷ ὁ τοῦ Χριστοῦ θεράπων ὡς, εἰ θέλοι ἀεὶ μνημονεύεσθαι παρ' αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐνεργεῖν αὐτῷ τὴν εὐχὴν αὐτοῦ, παύσασθαι τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης κατακοπῆς καὶ ἐκχύσεως τῶν αἱμάτων· τοῦτο γὰρ αὐτοῦ κατορθοῦντος, ἔφασκε καὶ αὐτὸς εἰσακούεσθαι εὐχόμενος πρὸς τὸν θεὸν ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ· ἐπιμένοντος δὲ αὐτοῦ τῇ συνήθει κατασφαγῇ, προέλεγεν αὐτῷ τὰ κατὰ θεοῦ μῆνιν μέλλοντα αὐτῷ συμβαίνειν. Ὡς ἐπὶ τοῖς ῥηθεῖσιν αὐτῷ καὶ ἀγανακτῆσαι αὐτόν.
>
> And learning these things about the saint, the emperor Phocas requested to see him (for he was bedridden with gout of the hands and feet). And when he came to him, and after he laid his hand upon him and prayed, the emperor was healed of his illness. But when Phocas asked him to pray on behalf of him and his rule, the servant of Christ began to exhort him, that if he wished to be remembered by him always, and if he wanted Theodore to make prayers for him, he must cease the killing of men and the shedding of blood. For if he succeeded in this, the saint said, "My prayers to God will be heard on your behalf". But if he persisted in the habit of slaughter, the saint predicted the things which were to come upon him through the wrath of God. The emperor became angry with him on account of these words.[378]

This account in the *Life of Theodore of Sykeon* is mild, compared with others discussed in this chapter. We find no further mention of the emperor after this point. Nevertheless, it provides an important glimpse into contemporary Roman attitudes to the usurper.

As with the guards escorting the conspirator, Theodore offers hospitality without consideration of persons, and heals the emperor's gout. The saint does not remain silent on the emperor's behaviour, and offers both a sharp critique and *vaticinium ex eventu* of the emperor's final demise. The emperor is not dehumanised *per se*; however, it is clear from this account that Phocas's murderous ways were disapproved and would eventually incur God's wrath. The emperor's intractability at the saint's admonishment further illustrates his hardness of heart and lack of piety. He was willing to seek out the saint for his own welfare; however, he was unwilling to turn to God in repentance. While Phocas's demise at the hands of Heraclius is not

[378] George of Sykeon, *Life of Theodore* 133 [Festugière (1970), 105-106].

recorded in the *Life*, the author firmly establishes the place of Phocas's role and future demise in the providential narrative of divine punishment and deliverance through Theodore's prophecy.

Theophylact Simocatta expressed the disdain felt by many Romans toward Phocas. Written safely after Phocas's demise, Theophylact's monumental *Historiae* serves both as a tribute to the reign of Maurice, as well as a critique of the perceived savagery of Phocas's coup and the disasters which followed. The author's hatred is manifested immediately in the opening dialogue between the *dramatis personae* of History and Philosophy. The dialogue, unique in classicising historiography, laments the decline of History and Philosophy under the tyranny of Phocas while praising the restoration of the arts under Heraclius.[379] Philosophy describes Phocas's reign in the following manner:

> Ἐπέχει δὲ τοῦ λόγου πάλιν ἡμᾶς καὶ οἷα χαλινῷ τινι πρὸς σιωπὴν ἀνακρούεται τὸ τῆς ἀπιστίας ἐπαγωγότατον, μή πού γε φαντασία τις τερατισμάτων ἡμᾶς φενακίζηται. πολλοῦ γὰρ χρόνου ἐτεθνήκεις, ὦ παῖ, ἐξ ὅτου εἰσήρρησε τῇ βασιλίδι αὐλῇ ὁ Καλυδώνιος τύραννος σιδήρῳ περίφρακτος, **μιξοβάρβαρος** ἄνθρωπος, τὸ κυκλώπειον γένος, ὁ τῆς σώφρονος ἁλουργίδος ἀσελγέστατος Κένταυρος, ᾧ βασιλεία οἰνοφλυγίας ἀγώνισμα.
>
> But the great seductiveness of disbelief checks us from speech again and, as if with a bridle, restrains us to silence, lest perchance an apparition of wonders should be beguiling us. For, my child, you were long dead, ever since the steel-encircled Calydonian tyrant entered the royal court, a barbarian mongrel of the Cyclopean breed, the Centaur, who most brutally ravaged the chaste purple, for whom monarchy was a feat of wine-swilling.[380]

In what might be called classicising dehumanisation, Theophylact associates Phocas with the mythical beast defeated by Heracles, forming a typological pairing with Heraclius who, in a word-play on the emperor's name, is called a new Heracles for his restoration of the empire.[381]

The typology of the centaur proved to be favourite for Theophylact, as he employs it again in Book Eight. Here the historian recalls Phocas's rise to the throne, after feigning disinterest in the purple by recommending his colleague Germanus. The following scene is recorded:

> πάντων τοιγαροῦν γενομένων πρὸς τὸν Καλυδώνιον τύραννον,τὸν τῆς σώφρονος ἁλουργίδος ἀσελγέστατον Κένταυρον (πρέπει γὰρ οὕτω τὸν Φωκᾶν ὀνομάζεσθαι), ἔδοξεν **ὁ μιξοβάρβαρος** τύραννος κατειρωνευόμενος Γερμανὸν ἀναγορεύειν ἐθέλειν. τῶν τοίνυν δήμων κατευφημούντων τὸν τύραννον, καὶ πάντων τῆς

[379] See Frendo (1988).
[380] Theophylact Simocatta, *Historiae*, dialog.4 [de Boor and Wirth (1972), 21]. Trans. Whitby and Whitby (1986), 3.
[381] Chapter 3, 117-20.

> μεταβολῆς γλιχομένων, ἀναγορεύεται τὸ κακόν, καὶ κύριος τῶν σκήπτρων ὁ τύραννος προχειρίζεται, καὶ κρατεῖ τῆς εὐδαιμονίας ἡ συμφορά, καὶ λαμβάνει τὴν ἔναρξιν τὰ μεγάλα καὶ ἐπίσημα τῶν Ῥωμαίων ὡς ἔπος εἰπεῖν ἀτυχήματα. περιβάλλεται τοίνυν τὸν βασίλειον στέφανον ὁ παλαμναῖος ἐκεῖνος ἀνὴρ ἐν τῷ νεῷ τοῦ προφήτου καὶ βαπτιστοῦ Ἰωάννου.
>
> Accordingly, when everyone had come before the Calydonian tyrant, the Centaur who most brutally ravaged the chaste purple (for it is fitting that Phocas be so named), the mongrel barbarian tyrant feigned a pretence of wanting to proclaim Germanus. Then, as the factions were applauding the tyrant and everyone was eager for change, the evil was proclaimed, the tyrant was appointed lord of the sceptres, disaster overcame prosperity, and the great and, so to speak, distinguished misfortunes of the Romans took their origin. Then that murderous man donned the royal crown in the Church of the Prophet and Baptist John.[382]

Within this colourful *Kaiserkritik* we see a concerted effort to strip Phocas of his human nature. The usurper is portrayed in terms which are beyond inhuman. Instead of a mere rogue general, Phocas is transformed into a drunken mythical beast who ravages the imperial office. Moreover, the purity of Phocas's lineage is called into question, as the author again refers to the usurper as a "mongrel barbarian" (ὁ μιξοβάρβαρος). Theophylact locates the beginning of imperial decline in this event, with all subsequent disasters resulting from Phocas's violation of divine order.

The association of Phocas with a drunken centaur, and general bestial descriptions proved popular among the Byzantine literary elite. The court poet George of Pisidia made use of the same tropes favoured by Theophylact, although in the years immediately following Heraclius's own usurpation, George's critiques of his patron's predecessor remained oblique. Considered by many to be a sort of audition piece for a position at court, the short poem *On Heraclius's Return from Africa* praises the emperor's defeat of Phocas and the promise of deliverance from the Persian campaigns.[383] It is noteworthy that George's *Kaiserkritik* of Phocas is subdued, and the usurper is never mentioned by name.

The encomium opens with praise of Heraclius's eloquence and spiritual devotion. Not long after this florid introduction, George depicts Heraclius's defeat of his predecessor in the following terms:

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[382] Theophylact Simocatta, *Historiae,* VIII.10.4-6 [de Boor and Wirth (1972), 303]. Trans. Whitby and Whitby (1986), 225.
[383] See Whitby (2002), 159-61.

> σὺ πᾶσαν ὀργὴν ὡς ἀνημέρους ἀεὶ // θῆρας διώκεις ἐκ πανημέρου σκοποῦ, // σὺ θηρολετεῖσθαι τὴν κακουργίαν θέλεις, // δι᾽ ἧς τὸ κοινὸν τῆς παροικίας γένος // ἐκ τῶν ἐπιβούλων σκανδάλων θηρεύεται·// τῇ σῇ φύσει, κράτιστε, καὶ τὰ θηρία // ἐξημεροῦσθαι πολλάκις διδάσκεται·
>
> You always drive away all anger, like wild beasts // from your constant sight, // You wish to destroy all malice as wild beasts, // by which the common race of our province// is caught by treacherous snares; // by your nature, O excellent one, even the beasts // are altogether taught to be tamed.[384]

While Phocas is not mentioned by name, his reign is compared with that of wild beasts which have ensnared the nation. In contrast, Heraclius, by mere force of nature, is able to tame the wild beasts, bringing Phocas's rampage to an end. George creates an ontological narrative, emplotting Phocas as a beast in a narrative in which Heraclius's steady hand shields the empire from attack.

George continues the ontological narrative through a more direct attack, although once again Phocas is not named directly. Here George specifically locates the woes of the empire in the actions of Heraclius's predecessor, and the hopes of the empire in the newly ascendant emperor, writing:

> ἀλλ᾽ ἔστιν ἐλπὶς τῶν παρόντων δυσκόλων // ἐκ σοῦ πεπαῦσθαι πανταχοῦ τὰς φροντίδας·// εἰ γὰρ τὸ κοινὸν πολλάκις διώλετο // ταῖς τῶν κρατούντων ἀπροσεξίαις πεσόν, // καὶ νῦν τὸ κοινὸν ἐκ Θεοῦ σωθήσεται // ταῖς τοῦ κρατοῦντος εὐσεβῶς εὐπραξίαις // καὶ πρὶν γὰρ ἡμᾶς ἠθλιωμένους βλέπων // ἡνίκα τὰ πικρὰ τοῦ τυράννου τραύματα // νομὴν λαβόντα τῶν μελῶν καθήπτετο, // καιρὸν μὲν εἶχες τοῦ μένειν χωρὶς πόνων, // ὡς μὴ πεφυκὼς τῶν κακῶν παραίτιος.
>
> But there is hope concerning the present troubles // that the concerns will utterly be brought to an end by you; // for, if the State has been utterly destroyed // having fallen by the neglect of those who rule // even now the state will be saved by God // by the care of the pious ruler. // For even before, seeing us in misery, // while the bitter wounds of the tyrant, // having taken the festering of the limbs, spread, // you held the time of waiting apart from suffering, // as a cause not born from evils.[385]

In this passage, George reveals his opinions of the cause of the empire's woes, namely, the neglect of Phocas. While a shred of human nature is granted to the usurper, he is reduced to a disease-carrying tyrant, whose wounds have caused the limbs of the state to fester. George uses the language of medicine in an ontological narrative of the empire as a diseased body, in which

[384] George of Pisidia, *In Heraclium ex Africa redeuntem*, 14-20 [Pertusi (1959), 62]. See Chapter 3, 107-8 for a discussion of this passage in relation to the heroic portrayal of Heraclius.
[385] George of Pisidia, *In Heraclium ex Africa redeuntem*, 33-37 [Pertusi (1959), 64]. See Chapter 3, 106-8 for a discussion of the first half of this passage in relation to Heraclius.

Phocas is emplotted as the pathogen. However, this woeful scene is not without redemption, as George reveals the hopes placed upon the newly ascendant Heraclius's shoulders. The emplotment of Phocas as disease and Heraclius as doctor serves to give meaning to the disasters which followed the former's ascension, and give hope that the latter will restore the ailing empire to proper health.

The similarities between the rhetoric of Theophylact Simocatta and George of Pisidia are more pronounced in one of George's more ambitious works, the epic poem aptly titled the *Heracliad.* Written shortly after the death of Chosroes II and the Persian surrender, the poem employs Biblical and Classical tropes to create an ontological narrative in which the Persians and Romans are characters in a providential drama, most famously praising Heraclius as the new Heracles and new Moses. While Book I focuses exclusively on the defeat of the Persians, Book II recalls Heraclius's defeat of Phocas and the circus factions who supported him. Using tropes reminiscent of the *Historiae,* George writes:

> ἐπεὶ δὲ λοιπὸν καὶ τὰ τοῦ δήμου θράση // συνεκτραφέντα τοῦ τυράννου τῇ μέθῃ // ἔνοικον εἶχε τῶν μελῶν ἀταξίαν, // σχεδὸν δὲ πάντας τοὺς πολίτας ἡ Πόλις // πεφυρμένους ὤδινε Κενταύρου δίκην.
>
> And finally, when the insolence of the deme // was nurtured by the drunkenness of the tyrant, // a lack of discipline inhabited the members // and the city nearly carried citizens justly abused by the Centaur.[386]

Here we see the familiar topos of the drunken centaur representing Phocas's reign. Again, the usurper is dehumanised and transformed into a mythical beast, only in this case we also see a critique of the circus faction who, stirred up, wreaked havoc during Phocas's reign.[387] One interesting aspect of the passage is the treatment of the crisis of Phocas's rule as a crisis which has been averted. In light of the success of Heraclius's reign, woes described in *On Heraclius's Return from Africa* are nowhere to be seen.

The works of Theophylact Simocatta and George of Pisidia display remarkable similarities in their treatment of the usurper Phocas. Whether this reflects George's influence on

[386] George of Pisidia, *Heraclias*, II.34-40 [Pertusi (1959), 212].
[387] George notes the disturbances of the factions in the *Bellum Auacarum,* 58-60 [Pertusi (1959), 178]. On the activity of the circus factions from the reign of Maurice to the ascent of Heraclius, see P. Booth (2011).

Theophylact, or simply the use of tropes current in the Constantinopolitan literary elite, they both serve a specific purpose, namely, to dehumanise and therefore delegitimise Phocas's reign, and provide a scape goat for the troubles which followed his ascent. Moreover, the transformation of a human emperor and skilled tactician into a drunken beast, mongrel, and carrier of disease imparts meaning to the otherwise incomprehensible defeat of the Christian Romans by the Zoroastrian Sassanid empire. Both Theophylact and George locate the troubles of the empire squarely in the accession of Phocas to the throne. The circumstances of the empire, the archvillain Phocas, and the superhuman saviour Heraclius are emplotted into an ontological narrative which transforms military woes and political intrigue into a providential narrative of divine punishment and supernatural deliverance, all instigated by Phocas's unjust usurpation.

When we apply the lens of social psychology, we find a further layer to the Dehumanising rhetoric of Theophylact and George. The two authors are from an ingroup, namely, partisans of the newly ascendant Heraclius. Phocas and his partisans are the dehumanised subjects. In this case, we find that, using Haslam's terminology, while Phocas is granted a certain degree of human nature, maintaining agency and therefore considered worthy of personal blame, he is virtually stripped of human uniqueness. Theophylact and George both reduce Phocas to a level beyond mere bestiality to monstrousness. Both authors describe Phocas as a drunken centaur lacking all social niceties. Theophylact allows him even less human uniqueness by labelling him a mongrel barbarian, that is, illegitimate and outside of borders of Roman social standing. George extends his dehumanisation to Phocas's partisans by denying the human uniqueness of the circus faction which supported him. Here we find that Theophylact and George clearly exhibit dehumanisation tactics which serve to bolster Heraclius's standing and increase his humanness at the expense of a less than human Phocas.

b. Heraclius or Armilos?

Phocas was not the only emperor to be dehumanised by an ingroup and considered to be opposed to divine will. For the Jewish community, Heraclius, with his anti-Jewish policies, most notably his decree of forced baptism in 632, was not only a persecutor, but

an enemy of God and his chosen people. Nowhere is this attitude more manifest than in the pseudonymous *Sefer Zerubbabel*, a generic apocalypse composed shortly after Heraclius's defeat of the Persians. In this text, a "despicable man", who is revealed to be the coming messiah, reveals a series of visions to Zerubbabel, the governor of Judah charged with rebuilding the temple after the Babylonian captivity in the Book of Ezra. After revealing himself to Zerubbabel, the despicable man makes the following prediction:

> In the time to come, I will fight the battles of the Lord alongside the Messiah of the Lord—he who sits before you—with the king 'strong of face' and with Armilos, the son of Satan, the spawn of the stone statue. The Lord has appointed me to be the commanding officer over his people and over those who love Him in order to do battle against the leaders of the nations.[388]

After a series of *vaticinia ex eventu* regarding historical events, ranging from the destruction of the temple and the expulsion of the Jews under Tiberius in 70 CE to details of the Persian campaigns under Heraclius, the author recounts the following vision:

> There he showed me a marble stone in the shape of a maiden: her features and form were lovely and indeed very beautiful to behold. Then he said to me, 'This statue is the [wife] of Belial. Satan will come and have intercourse with it, and a son named Armilos will emerge from it, [whose name in Greek means] "he will destroy a nation". He will rule over all (peoples), and his dominion will extend from one end of the earth to the other, and ten letters will be in his hand. He will engage in the worship of foreign gods and speak lies. No one will be able to withstand him, and anyone who does not believe in him he will kill with the sword: many among them will he kill. He will come against the holy people of the Most High, and with him there will be ten kings wielding great power and force, and he will do battle with the holy ones. He will prevail over them and will kill the Messiah of the lineage of Joseph, Nehemiah b. Ḥushiel, and will also kill sixteen righteous ones alongside him. Then they will banish Israel to the desert in three groups. [389]

The despicable man predicts that Armilos will rise up and bring misery upon the Jews, expelling them into the desert and slaying the present messiah, which Hagith Sivan and John C. Reeves have suggested may correspond to an actual Jewish leader during the Persian occupation of Jerusalem.[390] This *vaticinium ex eventu* corresponds closely to Heraclius's expulsion of the Jews from Jerusalem upon his re-conquest, as well as his general anti-Jewish policy, which culminated in the edict of forced baptism. Zerubbabel despairs, but is comforted when it is revealed that the

[388] *Sefer Zerubbabel* [Yassif (2001), 428], Trans. Reeves (2013), 454.
[389] *Sefer Zerubbabel* [Yassif (2001), 430], Trans. Reeves (2013), 460-1.
[390] Reeves (2013). no. 148, Sivan (2000), 288-291.

despicable man of the vision will rise up in glory, reveal himself as the messiah, and that divine wonders will herald God's deliverance.

In the depiction of Heraclius as Armilos, the author of the *Sefer Zerubbabel* employs the full range of techniques of dehumanisation observed by Haslam and his team. The emperor's human nature is not simply lacking, but denied in its entirety. Instead, the emperor is fully dehumanised and transformed into a demonic figure, the result of the union between Satan and a stone statue, whose primary purpose is to terrorize the Jews. Scholars have suggested that the stone statue represents an icon of the Virgin Mary, and may have been a critique of the use of images in Christian worship.[391] Regardless, no shred of human nature is permitted Heraclius.

Not surprisingly, Heraclius's human uniqueness is denied as well. The demon spawn Heraclius is in direct opposition to Jewish social norms and customs. Instead of monotheism, he worships foreign gods. Instead of truth, he tells lies. What is worse, instead of liberating the Jews, he kills them without question and opposes the Messiah. Here, the dehumanisation, or rather demonisation, of Heraclius serves a similar function to the dehumanisation of Phocas. The prospect of Jewish self-rule and the restoration of temple worship in a Jerusalem liberated by the Persians had been crushed not only by a sudden change in Persian policy, but a final defeat and reconquest by Roman forces. This change in fortunes was exacerbated by an increase in anti-Jewish policies at the hands of the Heraclian dynasty.

Faced with a devastating change in circumstances, Jewish authors emplotted the anti-messianic Heraclius, dehumanised as a demonic figure, into an ontological narrative in which the historical suffering of the Jews was emplotted into an eschatological struggle, pitting Heraclius, depicted as the anti-messianic Armilos, against a heroic Messiah who will come soon and defeat the emperor. The Jews and their demonised adversary are emplotted in a providential drama in which the protagonists will be victorious in the end, even if they suffer in the present. The Jews, like the Romans, held out hope for God's imminent deliverance and restoration.

[391] Reeves (2013), no. 144.

A discussion of the dehumanisation of Heraclius requires a brief discussion of Daniel Sahas's article addressing the treatment of the Arab invasions by Maximus the Confessor. While there is much to be praised in this article, the insights of which we will employ below, his thesis rests on the belief that Maximus used his occasional epistles and his testimony at his trial to blame the Heraclian dynasty, particularly Heraclius and his son Constans II, for Arab victory, and that he frequently employed subtle and indirect *Kaiserkritik* in his letters. In other words, for Maximus, the Arabs were a demonising force in as much as they provoked criticism of the imperial family, which blinded people to the actual threat of the Muslim invaders.

In *Epistula* 10 written to John the Chamberlain, dated by Sahas to 630-640, in line with Jankowiak and Booth's dating, Maximus comments on the question as to "why humans may be ruled by other human beings since all humans are one of the same kind".[392] Maximus responds that kings are appointed to prevent humans from devouring one another, and that a king should rule according to God's will. However, as Sahas observes, Maximus gives a caveat. Any ruler who rules his people in contrary fashion is a tyrant, and "leads the ruler and those ruled to the precipice of perdition".[393] Sahas argues that this commentary served as a subtle notice to Heraclius, perhaps in response to the edict of forced baptism which drew Maximus's stern critique.

In *Epistula* 43, dated by Sahas to 628, Maximus reflects on the benefits of peace, likely reflecting upon the end of hostilities between the Persians and the Byzantines. As Sahas observes, the focus of the epistle is not on peace between nations, as one might expect, but between rival Christians, who Maximus argues must submit to God's sovereignty, and "rid themselves of passions which result in revolt against God".[394] Although Maximus makes no

[392] Sahas (2003), 100. While not citing Sahas's article, Jankowiak and Booth agree with Sahas's assessment of this letter, and suggest it was composed "before 642, but the precise date is indeterminable". See Jankowiak and Booth (2015), 38-39.
[393] Maximus the Confessor, *Epistula* 10 [*PG* 91, 453A]. Trans. Sahas (2003), 101.
[394] Sahas (2003), 101.

mention of imperial religious policy, Sahas interprets this statement as a veiled critique of what he refers to as "Heraclius's deviation from orthodoxy and his adoption of 'monoenergitism.'"[395]

Sahas raises some interesting questions, and we will engage with his discussion of Maximus's response to the Arab invasions in greater detail below. However, in an article, ostensibly about the demonising force of the Arab invaders, Sahas argues that Maximus is primarily concerned to blame the Heraclian dynasty, in an entirely covert way, for Byzantine defeat. It is true that Maximus was an outspoken critic of imperial religious policy. It is also true, as we will discuss below, that Maximus did not blame the Arabs for their own successes, but rather blamed the Romans' sins for imperial woes. However, I suggest that Sahas is, at times, too speculative in his readings of Maximus's critique of sin, and critique of intra-Christian disputes.

Sahas fails to consider the numerous occasions when Maximus, or his disciples reflecting Maximus's perspective, absolve the emperor himself of any wrong doing. In his letter to Peter the Illustris, Maximus argues that Heraclius cannot be blamed for imperial heresy, as he was deceived by the patriarchs Sergius and Pyrrhus.[396] Maximus suggests that Heraclius was a well-intentioned victim who accepted the advice of his deceitful patriarchs but had no personal role in the heresies of monenergism or monotheletism.[397] A similar defence is offered in the *Disputatio cum Pyrrho*, where the *dramatis persona* of Maximus blames Pyrrhus and his predecessor Sergius, calling them liars, while absolving the emperor of any wrong doing.[398] One could argue that Maximus was simply being cautious and acting out of political expediency to avoid retribution; however, at that stage of his career he was already a marked man.

Although Maximus was critical of the religious policy of Constantinople, it is difficult to prove the letters cited were veiled critiques of the imperial family, specifically, or that Maximus blamed Heraclius directly for the crises befalling the Romans. It is possible that Maximus had Heraclius in mind when he wrote *Epistulae* 10 and 43; however, it is equally plausible that he

[395] Sahas (2003), 101.
[396] Maximus the Confessor, *Opusculum* 12 [*PG* 91, 141A-146A].
[397] *Disputatio cum Pyrrho* [*PG* 91, 287A-354B].
[398] *Disputatio cum Pyrrho* [*PG* 91, 287A-354B]. See Strickler (Forthcoming).

was speaking in generalities. When we examine the social-psychological processes at work, we find, somewhat surprisingly, that Maximus affords full human nature and human uniqueness to Heraclius, whom he treats with full respect and deference. The patriarchs Sergius and Pyrrhus, on the other hand, are denied human uniqueness, and treated as deceivers. Likewise, the Roman public incur more blame than Heraclius for the crises befalling the empire. Sins and the passions were widely considered to be agents of causation in Christian Roman society; thus, a critique of behaviours of Roman citizens need not be a veiled critique of an emperor.

Christian Roman audiences found ontological narratives about divine punishment and good versus evil to be compelling explanations of the crises of the empire. For many authors, individual Roman emperors exemplified everything wrong with Byzantine society. For the opponents of Phocas, the usurper could be conceived of as inhuman, a drunken centaur, a mongrel, and a pestilence. For the Jews, Heraclius's anti-Jewish policies made him a demonic anti-messianic foe. Still, the approach was far from universal. Others, such as Maximus the Confessor was critical of imperial policies, but located blame for defeat in the sins and divisions of the empire.

In each case, dehumanised emperors, denied their human uniqueness and rendered bestial or monstrous, were emplotted into an ontological narrative, one which was providential in nature and saw God as the ultimate arbiter of defeat and the eventual deliverer. In apocalyptic discourse, evil emperors were pitted against heroes, and the suffering of the populace had a cause and served a divine purpose. Audiences could derive some assurance that tyranny would not exist forever, and that God would send a hero to restore his people to their rightful station.

IV. Dehumanisation of the Persians

The dehumanising portrayals of Phocas, and the blame placed upon his shoulders for the decades of war which followed his usurpation of the throne, indicate the terror the Romans experienced in the Persian invasions. It is difficult to overestimate the psychological impact of the losses upon the Byzantine public. However, despite heavy losses, in the case of the Persians, the Romans had an established knowledge of their enemy, and required little imagination to

understand the nature of the Sassanid threat. Most accounts considered here use Classical or Old Testament tropes to describe the Sassanid forces. However, even so, Roman authors found ways to dehumanise their Persian adversary.

As we have seen, George of Pisidia was particularly skilled in using poetic language to dehumanise imperial enemies. George's *Heracliad*, as discussed above, was written on the occasion of Heraclius's victory over the Sassanid Persian Empire. Throughout the work, George draws typological parallels between Heraclius and his Persian counterpart, as well as between the Roman and the Persian Empires more broadly. In each case, George casts Heraclius and the Byzantines as the *redivivae personae* of heroes of the past, while the Persians and Chosroes II are depicted as ancient villains.

One example of this strategy is George's use of the Old Testament Book of Daniel. In this passage, George combines the accounts of the three holy youths in the furnace with the account of Daniel in the lion's den.[399] George casts Heraclius in the role of both Daniel and the three holy youths, and Chosroes II in the role of the lion and Nebuchadnezzar's attendants who heated the furnace. He writes:

> πάλιν κάμινος Περσικὴ καὶ δευτέρα // δροσίζεται φλὸξ <τῷ> Δανιὴλ τῷ δευτέρῳ, // ἀνωφερὴς δὲ καίπερ οὖσα τὴν φύσιν // χεῖται κατ' αὐτῶν καὶ διώκει καὶ φλέγει // τοὺς τὴν πονηρὰν ἐκπυρώσαντας φλόγα· // πάλιν λεόντων ἠγριωμένων στόμα // εἰς γῆν δι' ὑμῶν Περσικὴν ἀνεφράγη·// πάλιν παροινεῖ δυσσεβῶς ὁ Χοσρόης // καὶ πῦρ θεουργεῖ καὶ θεὸς φαντάζεται, // ἕως σὺν αὐτῷ καὶ τὸ πῦρ ὑπερβράσαν // σὺν τῷ θεουργήσαντι συγκατεφθάρη
>
> Again, the Persian furnace and a second flame // bedews the Second Daniel, // And the flame, by nature, is ascendant, // It spreads over all of them [the Persians] // and chases, and burns up those who kindle the evil flame. // Again, the mouth of the ferocious lions, // because of you was stopped in the Land of the Persians, // Again the impious Chosroes played the drunkard, // and worshiped Fire and made himself into a god, // Until the heated fire with him, // and with the worshipper was destroyed.[400]

[399] Cf. Daniel 3 and 6 respectively.
[400] George of Pisidia, *Heraclias*, I.15-25 [Pertusi (1959), 194, 196]. See Chapter 3, 108 for discussion of this passage in relation to Heraclius.

In this passage, we find some familiar tropes, similar to those used in George's depiction of Phocas. George describes the adversary in animalistic terms, and depicts the enemy as a drunkard. Drawing further parallels with the Book of Daniel, Chosroes, who worshipped fire was finally consumed by that which he worshipped, just as the attendants of the furnace in which the holy youths were placed were consumed after the furnace was heated seven times hotter than normal.

George's dehumanisation of Chosroes II in this passage denies him the same degree of human uniqueness as Phocas. Chosroes, like Phocas, acts like a drunkard and is devoid of social niceties. Chosroes is reduced to a beast, and his behaviour is likened to that of a lion rather than a man, only a slight improvement on the depiction of Phocas as a centaur. However, as with Phocas, George does not allow Chosroes any degree of human nature and agency, which he abuses by his act of self-deification, and in his choosing to worship fire rather than the true God. For this grievous act, he bears full moral culpability and receives a just punishment.

In the passage above, George writes an ontological narrative which parallels Biblical history. Heraclius, his adversaries, and the conflict are emplotted within the providential narrative of scripture. This strategy immediately elevates the significance of the Romans, and recalls the Babylonian captivity, an event where God's chosen people were defeated for a time, but one where they were ultimately delivered by divine help. Moreover, this narrative sets the conflict with the Persians in a Biblical context. The Romans, like Daniel and the youths, had been tested for a time. However, God had shown his faithfulness by raising up Heraclius as emperor, who defeated the Persians just as God delivered Daniel from the lion and transformed the heat of the furnace into dew for the three youths.

George's narrative was not limited to drawing on Old Testament typologies. In one of the more famous and colourful passages in the *Heracliad,* George draws upon the Classical tradition, depicting the emperor Heraclius as a new and greater Heracles. It is then only natural that Chosroes II and the Persians are compared to the mythical beasts of antiquity defeated by Heracles in his trials. In the following passage, George writes:

> θαύμαζε μᾶλλον ὡς ἐν ἀνθρώποις ἕνα // τὸν κοσμορύστην εὐλόγως Ἡρακλέα. // κατῆλθεν οὗτος ἄχρι τῆς Ἅιδου θύρας, // τὴν λύτταν ἦγξε τοῦ κυνὸς τοῦ παμφάγου, // Ἄλκηστιν ἐξήγειρε τὴν οἰκουμένην, // ἀνεῖλε τὸν δράκοντα τὸν μιαιφόνον // καθεῖλεν ὕδραν μυριαύχενον βλάβην, ῥυπῶντα τὸν πρὶν ἐξεκόπρωσεν βίον, // ἔπνιξε τὸν λέοντα τὸν κοσμοφθόρον, // καὶ νῦν προῆλθεν Ἡρακλῆς τῷ πράγματι // λαβὼν τὰ χρυσᾶ μῆλα, τὰς πόλεις ὅλας.
>
> Rather marvel, reasonably, that there is one among men // Who is the deliverer of the World, Heraclius, // For he descended into the nethermost gates of Hades // And strangled the rage of the voracious dog // He raised up the Empire as Alcestis // He destroyed the bloodthirsty dragon // He subdued the hydra, the many-necked monster // He purged the life covered before with filth // He strangled the world-polluting lion // And now Heracles went forth into the State // Having taken the golden apples, the whole city.[401]

In this passage, George depicts Chosroes II and the Persians as voracious dog, a blood thirsty dragon, a many necked hydra, and a world polluting lion. Fittingly, each of these beasts correspond to beasts faced by Heracles in his labours, making the recapitulation of Heraclius's Classical namesake complete. With this passage, we see that George is comfortable with the Classical tradition, emplots the Byzantines not only into the narrative of scripture, but into the Classical tradition as well. The Persians are thoroughly dehumanised. while Heraclius is equated with one of the greatest heroes of antiquity. As in the parallel with Daniel, this depiction gives context to Byzantine suffering, and provides its own ontological narrative, one in which the Byzantines are the continuation of the Classical tradition, and one in which Heraclius takes his rightful place among the ranks of Classical heroes.

To describe the Persians as Classical monsters takes the level of dehumanisation a step further than George permitted even for Phocas. Here, George's denial of the Persians' human nature and human uniqueness are closer to the portrayal of Heraclius in the *Sefer Zerubbabel*. The Persians' human nature is translated into a monstrous nature, and they are bent entirely on the destruction of the empire. There is likewise no shred of human uniqueness, as the sole purpose of the Persians is to pollute and destroy the world. Here, as before, social psychology

[401] George of Pisidia, *Heraclias*, I.65-79 [Pertusi (1959), 198]. See Chapter 3, 118-9.

provides insights. The ingroup, namely the Romans, are able to completely dehumanise an entire nation, the Sassanid Persians, while simultaneously self-enhancing their own humanity.

While the choice of creatures used to dehumanise Chosroes II and the Persians may have been informed by the Classical and Biblical typology, the effect of this process goes beyond a clever literary device. Dehumanising the Persians, and doing so in terms familiar to George's audience, gives meaning to the crises which concluded with Heraclius's victory. The Romans were able to recover their confidence once more, supported by the knowledge that the empire had endured what their Classical and Biblical heroes had endured, and that their emperor was a hero who rivalled and even surpassed the ancients. All of this served to emplot the Romans and their Persian adversaries into the providential, ontological narrative of Biblical and Classical history.

V. Dehumanisation of the Arabs

Evil emperors and fire-worshipping Persians were well known foes of seventh-century Byzantines. Dehumanising such adversaries was a necessary process in Byzantine narrativity and authors had no shortage of tropes to employ in this task. However, defeat at the hands of the Arabs was a novel problem. Romans were faced not only with the challenge of explaining the implications of a devastating defeat in the wake of such a resounding success, but also with comprehending the nature of a new adversary, an upstart group of nomads united by a set of new beliefs which were poorly understood. Such circumstances forced the Byzantines to get creative and, in turn, Byzantine dehumanisation of the Arabs reached new levels and employed novel strategies.

What follows is an examination of the accounts of critical witnesses to the rise of the Islamic Arabs. Our first author, Sophronius, was a leader on the front lines who witnessed the earliest and most psychologically devastating defeats at the hand of Arab forces. The second, Maximus the Confessor, a disciple of the first, wrote from exile in North Africa and, while not encountering the Arab conflicts first hand, wrote down his reactions, as one the foremost intellectuals of his day. The final document, the *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius, is a

pseudonymous text detailing the experience of sustained Islamic hegemony in the Middle East, and reflecting upon the implications of life under permanent rule of the enemy. These three perspectives are fascinating glimpses into the narrative strategies employed to cope with the crisis of the Arab invasions.

a. Sophronius

The Patriarch Sophronius of Jerusalem is among our earliest and most significant witnesses to the Islamic Arab invasions. Elevated to the patriarchate in 634, Sophronius witnessed firsthand the slow and steady advance of Arab forces into Palestine and the subsequent losses of his episcopal territory to Islamic conquest. In 641, in an attempt to secure favourable terms for the inhabitants of his episcopal see, and perhaps at the behest of a population weary of war, Sophronius negotiated the terms of surrender for the city of Jerusalem to the Caliph Umar ibn al-Khattab.[402]

The Sophronius corpus provides an interesting survey of the earliest Roman reactions to their initial encounters with Islam. The following selection records an increasingly desperate response and what might be considered the patriarch's slow descent into despair. Here, we will examine three documents from Sophronius's own hand, as well as an account of the surrender of Jerusalem composed after his death, in order to understand Sophronius's increasingly dehumanising view of the Arab invaders.

Among the earliest recorded references to the Arab invasions is the so-called *Synodical Letter*, sent by Sophronius to his patriarchal colleague Sergius of Constantinople, upon his elevation to the Patriarchate of Jerusalem in 634. The *Synodical Letter* is often viewed as a defiant stance against the imperial prohibition of discussion of the number of energies in Jesus Christ. However, when one looks beyond the theological controversy, the letter also reveals a sincere concern for the welfare of the empire in the wake of a rapidly increasing Arab threat, which Sophronius was among the first to recognise from his vantage point on the front line. In

[402] For a detailed description of the sources related to this event, see Sahas, (2006).

the face of the dangers posed by the new invaders, Sophronius offers significant moral support for the emperor Heraclius, the same emperor whose *Ekthesis* resulted in the controversial religious policy which he so vocally opposed. Recalling the recent invasions to Sergius's mind, Sophronius requests the following prayer from his recipient:

> Τὴν ἴσην δὲ ὑμῖν πλουσίαν προσάγω παράκλησιν, ἵνα ἐκτενῆ ποιῆσθε καὶ ἄπαυστον τὴν πρὸς Θεὸν ἱκετείαν καὶ δέησιν ὑπὲρ τῶν φιλοχρίστων καὶ γαληνοτάτων ἡμῶν βασιλέων…, ὑμετέραις θεοδέκτοις εὐκαῖς μειλιττόμενος ἐτῶν μὲν πληθὺν αὐτοῖς πολλήν προσχαρίσηται, νίκας τε μεγίστας κατὰ βαρβάρων...καὶ σκῆπτρα παράσχοι κραταιὰ καὶ ἐνδύναμα βαρβάρων μὲν ἁπάντων, μάλιστα δὲ Σαρακηνῶν, ὀφρὺν καταθράττοντα, τῶν δι'ἁμαρτίας ἡμῶν ἀδοκήτως νῦν ἡμῖν ἐπαναστάντων καὶ πάντα ληϊζομένων ὠμῷ καὶ θηριώδει φρονήματι καὶ δυσσεβεῖ καὶ ἀθέῳ τολμήματι.
>
> I offer an equally profuse appeal to You, that You will make intense and unceasing plea and petition (cf. Eph. 6: 18) to God on behalf of our Christ-loving and most serene sovereigns… when he has been appeased by Your prayers which are acceptable to God, will bestow on them a large number of years, and grant them both the greatest victories over the barbarians, …and provide them with strong and mighty authority over all barbarians but especially the Saracens, destroying their pride. Through our sins, they [sc. the Saracens] have now unexpectedly risen up against us, and are carrying everything off as booty with cruel and savage intent and impious and godless daring.[403]

Sophronius puts aside any theological differences he may have with the Heraclian dynasty and with Sergius. Instead, the patriarch offers his full support against an increasingly effective enemy, and begs his colleague and theological rival to pray on behalf of the empire and its sovereigns.

Applying Haslam's principles to this letter, we are able to gain insights into Sophronius's state of mind at the outset of the Islamic invasions. From the very beginning, we see that Sophronius denies the Arabs their human uniqueness and human nature. The *Synodical Letter* contains the first expression of themes which Sophronius developed in later sermons as Arab forces encroached further into the territory of his flock. Sophronius denies the human uniqueness of the Arabs in noting their cruelty, savagery, and godlessness. The characteristics which separate humans from animals are lacking, and while Sophronius does not refer to the Arabs as animals in this instance, they embody bestial characteristics which are fuelled by their pride.

[403] Sophronius of Jerusalem, *Synodical Letter* 2.7.3 [Allen (2009), 152, 154]. Trans Allen (2009), 153, 155.

In this passage, we also find that Sophronius denies the human nature of the Arabs, employing a strategy which we have seen used by Theophylact Simocatta and George of Pisidia to explain Byzantine defeat at the hands of the Persians, and one which was used by nearly every seventh-century author who commented on the Islamic invasions. The strategy was to transfer the blame, and therefore the agency, of the Arabs to the sins of the Romans, and therefore indirectly to God, who permitted the Romans to be defeated as punishment for their sins. It is also worth noting who does not receive blame. As with the Arabs, Sophronius does not blame the emperor himself or his generals for Roman losses. Considering Sophronius's very vocal disagreement with imperial religious policy, one might expect some blame to be attached to the perceived heretical practises of Heraclius or Sergius, but such criticism is absent. In fact, Sophronius describes Heraclius, and his son and co-regent Heraclius Constantine, as "Christ-loving". Sophronius recognises how important imperial success was in preventing further Islamic advances and, as a result, withholds blame, even in this largely polemical missive.

Given Sophronius's proximity to the front line, it is no surprise that he would make an appeal to Constantinople to pray for the defeat of the Islamic invaders, even if the request was made only in passing. Even in the earliest stages of the invasion, Sophronius was in a key position to witness the steady advances of Arab forces. By Christmas of the same year, the threat grew even closer as Arab advances into Palestine rendered the traditional pilgrimage routes to Bethlehem impassable. Sophronius addressed the circumstances of the Arab occupation with his flock in his Nativity Sermon of 634. Preaching on the difficulties presented by the blockade, Sophronius discussed it in terms of divine causation:

> ἡμεῖς δὲ δι' ἁμαρτίας ἀπείρους καὶ παγχάλεπα πταίσματα ἀνάξιοι τούτων τῆς θέας γενόμενοι ἐκεῖσε παρεῖναι τοῖς δρόμοις εἰργόμεθα καὶ ἄκοντες μὴ βουλόμενοι οἴκοι μένειν ἀναγκαζόμεθα, οὐ δεσμοῖς σωματικοῖς συσφιγγόμενοι ἀλλὰ φόβῳ Σαρακηνικῷ συνδεσμούμενοι...
>
> Because of our innumerable sins and serious misdemeanours, we are unable to see these things, and are prevented from entering Bethlehem by way of the road. Unwillingly, indeed, contrary to our wishes, we are required to stay at home, not bound closely by bodily bonds, but bound by fear of the Saracens".[404]

[404] Sophronius, *Homily on the Nativity* [Usener (1886), 506]. Trans. Hoyland (1997), 70.

Once again, Sophronius blames "innumerable sins" for the present circumstances, sins which have bound the people in fear and restricted their movements. Continuing, the patriarch emplots the conquest of Bethlehem into the creation narrative of Genesis by comparing their circumstances to Adam's and Eve's expulsion from paradise, writing, "We do not see the twisting, flaming sword, but rather the wild and barbarous Saracen [sword], which is filled with every diabolical savagery".[405] In this short quote Sophronius dehumanises the Arab invaders, identifying them as barbarian and demonic savages, while emplotting them as the swords which prevent the residents of Jerusalem from returning to the paradise of Bethlehem.

Finally, Sophronius once more blames the Romans themselves and their sins for their defeat by the Islamic invaders. However, in this instance the blame is tempered by possible hope, in the event of Roman repentance. Sophronius offers the opportunity for redemption as follows:

> οὕτω γὰρ εἰ βιώσαιμεν ὡς φίλον ἐστὶ θεῷ καὶ ἐράσμιον, τῶν ἀντιπάλων ἡμῶν Σαρακηνῶν τὴν πτῶσιν γελάσαιμεν καὶ τὸν ὄλεθρον οὐκ εἰς μακρὰν ἐσαθρήσαιμεν καὶ τὴν τελείαν ἀπώλειαν ἴδοιμεν. ἥ τε γὰρ ῥομφαία αὐτῶν ἡ φιλαίματος εἰς τὰς καρδίας αὐτῶν εἰσελεύσεται, καὶ τὸ τόξον αὐτῶν συντριβήσεται, καὶ τὰ βέλη αὐτῶν αὐτοῖς ἐμπαγήσεται.
>
> If we were to live as is dear and pleasing to God, we would rejoice over the fall of the Saracen enemy and observe their near ruin and witness their final demise. For their blood-loving blade will enter their hearts, their bow will be broken and their arrows will be fixed in them.[406]

While the *Nativity Homily* of 634 employs familiar themes as found in the *Synodical Letter*, we find that the Arab invasions have captured Sophronius's full attention and have prompted a greater sense of urgency. Repeated are the themes of the Arab invaders' godlessness and bestial nature: the Arabs are wild and barbarous, filled with diabolical savagery, and wield blood-loving blades against the Christian Romans.

However, despite the dire picture he presents, Sophronius is not without hope. Sophronius once again locates the cause of imperial misfortune in the sins of the empire, not the Arabs

[405] "οὐ στρεφομένην ῥομφαίαν καὶ διάφλογον βλέποντες ἀλλὰ Σαρακηνικὴν καὶ θηριώδη καὶ βάρβαρον καὶ πάσης ὄντως διαβολικῆς ὠμότητος γέμουσαν". Sophronius, *Homily on the Nativity* [Usener (1886), 507]. Trans. Hoyland (1997), 70.
[406] Sophronius, *Homily on the Nativity* [Usener (1886), 515]. Trans. Hoyland (1997), 71.

themselves. Fortunately, the patriarch offers a solution to the trials suffered by the empire. These events could be quickly reversed if only the people "were to live as is dear and pleasing to God". Sophronius is clear that God would favour the Byzantines if only they were to repent. There is a sense at this early stage that the current state of affairs could be quickly reversed. Although Sophronius's outlook is dire, hope is the prevailing theme within the homily.

By analysing this passage using Haslam's categories of dehumanisation and, in comparison with the *Synodical Letter*, we find that Sophronius has reduced the level of both human uniqueness and human nature of the Arabs. Once again, the Arabs are depicted as savages, however we have the additional negative characteristics of barbarian and diabolical. In this way, the invaders are further contrasted with the more human Byzantines, and Sophronius passes beyond mere dehumanisation to active demonisation. This picture is enhanced by Sophronius's associating the Arabs with the sword, first in his analogy of the prevention of pilgrimage and the expulsion from paradise, and second in the promise of defeat after repentance.

The association of the Arab invaders with the tools of war further reinforces their association with death and destruction and, consequently, the dehumanising rhetoric of the homily. Moreover, we witness here an apparent decline in the Arabs' human nature when compared to Sophronius's earlier writings. Not only is Arab agency once again denied, and sin is seen as the true cause of defeat while the Arabs are mere instruments of wrath, Sophronius rejoices in the prospect of witnessing the bloody death of Arab armies. He considers the Arabs to be entirely devoid of humanity, and therefore outside the bounds of Christian charity.

Sophronius may have been hopeful in the earliest years of the Arab invasions of Palestine, but in the end the region fell to Islamic forces, and Sophronius was forced to preside over the final surrender of Jerusalem. In his *Epiphany Homily*, given on the occasion of the eponymic feast in 636 or 637, Sophronius offered his final, exasperated account of the Arabs. It is here that he paints the most vivid and dehumanising picture yet of the Islamic invaders. Moreover, the homily reveals the patriarch's frustration at the lack of repentance within the empire in the wake of what he considered to be manifest punishment. Placing the Arabs squarely in prophetic

history, Sophronius emplots their territorial advances into the book of Daniel. Employing apocalyptic discourse, Sophronius states:

> Σαρακηνοὶ θεομισεῖς καὶ ἀλάστορες καὶ αὐτὸ σαφῶς τὸ τῆς ἐρημώσεως βδέλυγμα, τὸ προφητικῶς ἡμῖν προλεγόμενον, καὶ τόπους, οὓς οὐ δεῖ, διατρέχουσι καὶ ἐκκλησίας ἁγίας φλογίζουσι, καὶ ἱερὰ μοναστήρια στέρφουσι καὶ παρατάξεσι ‘Ρωμαϊκαῖς ἀντιτάττονται, καὶ πολεμοῦντες ἐγείρουσι τρόπαια καὶ νίκαις νίκας συνάπτουσι καὶ μειζόντως ἡμῶν κατεπαίρονται καὶ τὰς εἰς Χριστὸν καὶ ἐκκλησίας βλασφημίας ἐπαύξουσι, καὶ κατὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ βλασφημοῦσιν ἀθέμιτα, καὶ τῶν ὅλων κρατεῖν οἱ θεομάχοι φρυάττονται, τὸν στρατηγὸν αὐτῶν ἀσχέτως Διάβολον μετὰ πάσης σπουδῆς ἐκμιμούμενοι κἀκείνου τὸν τύφον ζηλώασαντες, δι’ὃν ἀπ’οὐρανοῦ καταβέβληται καὶ σκότος ζοφερὸν ἀποδέδεικται.
>
> [T]he vengeful and God-hating Saracens, the abomination of desolation clearly foretold to us by the prophets, overrun the places which are not allowed to them, plunder cities, devastate fields, burn down villages, set fire to the holy churches, overturn the sacred monasteries, oppose the Roman armies arrayed against them, and in fighting raise up the trophies [of war] and add victory to victory. Moreover, they are raised up more and more against us and increase their blasphemy of Christ and the church, and utter wicked blasphemies against God. Those God-fighters boast of prevailing over all, assiduously and unrestrainedly imitating their leader, who is the devil, and emulating his vanity because of which he has been expelled from heaven and been assigned to the gloomy shades.[407]

This sobering account reveals in vivid detail the catastrophic nature of the Arab invasions and their impact on Palestine. Here, the Saracens are emplotted within the fulfillment of prophecy. They are a demonic scourge, blaspheming God, and led by the devil himself, destroying the holy places and waging war against God’s chosen people.

However, despite his foreboding, Sophronius still does not blame the Arabs for their success. In answer to the question of why these godless foes were able to prevail against the Christian Roman Empire, Sophronius offers the following explanation:

> ἅπερ οὐκ ἂν οἱ μιαροὶ διεπράττοντο, οὔτε τοσαύτη ἰσχὺν προσεκτήσαντο, ὡς τοσαῦτα πράττειν ἀθέσμως καὶ φθέγγεσται, εἰ μὴ πρῶτοι τὸ δῶρον ἡμεῖς ἐνυβρίσαμεν καὶ τὴν κάθαρσιν ἡμεῖς ἐμιάναμεν πρώτιστοι, καὶ ταύτῃ τὸν δωροδότην Χριστὸν λελυπήκαμεν καὶ πρὸς τὴν καθ’ ἡμῶν ὀργὴν αὐτὸν παρωτρύναμεν, ἀγαθόν τε ὂντα καὶ κακοῖς μὴ ἡδόμενον, φιλανθρωπίαν πηγάζοντα καὶ φθορὰν καὶ ἀπώλειαν ἀνθρώπων ἰδεῖν οὐ βουλόμενον. Ἀλλ’ὄντως ἡμεῖς τούτων ὅλων καθεστήκαμεν αἴτιοι καὶ λόγος οὐδεὶς πρὸς ἀπλογίαν εὑρεθήσεται· ποῖος γὰρ λόγος ἢ τόπος ἡμῖν πρὸς ἀπολογίαν δοθήσεται, τοσαῦτα παρ’αὐτοῦ λαβόντες δωρήματα καὶ πάντα ρυπάναντες καὶ πάντα μιαραῖς ἐκμιάναντες πράξεσιν;

[407] Sophronius of Jerusalem, *Homily on Epiphany* [Papadopoulos-Kermeus (1963), 166-167]. Trans. Hoyland (1997), 72-3.

> "these vile ones would not have accomplished this nor seized such a degree of power as to do and utter lawlessly all these things, unless we had first insulted the gift [of baptism] and first defiled the purification, and in this way grieved Christ, the giver of gifts, and prompted him to be angry with us, good though he is and though he takes no pleasure in evil, being the fount of kindness and not wishing to behold the ruin and destruction of men. We ourselves, in truth, are responsible for all these things and no word will be found for our defence. What word or place will be given us for defence when we have taken all these gifts from him, befouled them and defiled everything with our vile actions?[408]

In this sermon, the cautiously optimistic Sophronius of the Christmas homily has become the patriarch who is weary in the face of continued Islamic success and angry with his flock's apparent persistence in sin. Gone are simple descriptions of godless Saracens and blame being laid at the door of the sins of the people, and the encouragement that things will turn around soon once the empire repents. Here we find Sophronius's most developed thoughts on both subjects, and the patriarch at his least hopeful.

Returning to Haslam's categories, we find a surprising change in the depiction of Sophronius's audience. For the first time, we witness a slight drop in the level of human uniqueness granted to Sophronius's congregation. Sophronius begins to turn against his own people, describing them as unrepentant, and defilers of baptism itself. The sin of Sophronius's flock is so great that it has moved the all-merciful God to inflict the Arab invasions. While this has always been implicit in his call to repentance, this level of dehumanisation of his congregation, as opposed to that of individual Romans such as we have seen with evil emperors, is rare.

We also find that Sophronius's *Epiphany Homily* assigns the Arab invaders the lowest level of human nature and human uniqueness in any of the patriarch's works. Sophronius envisioned the Arab forces not as a human foe, but a demonic horde commanded by the devil himself. This represents an advance on the demonisation in the *Nativity Homily* which fully excludes the humanity of the adversary. Moreover, Sophronius enters further into the realm of apocalyptic discourse, when he goes beyond mere demonisation, to label the Arabs blasphemers

[408] Sophronius of Jerusalem, *Homily on Epiphany* [Papadopoulos-Kermeus (1963), 167]. Trans. Hoyland (1997), 73.

against God, and to identify the invaders as the "abomination of desolation" as predicted by the prophet Daniel.[409]

The final document related to Sophronius of Jerusalem discussed in this chapter is not from the patriarch's hand, but by the ninth-century historian Theophanes the Confessor. By means of an otherwise lost *Syriac Common Source* attributed to Theodore of Edessa (d. 785), Theophanes gives an account of the encounter between Sophronius and the Caliph 'Umar ibn al-Khattab on the occasion of the former's surrender of the city.[410] Regarding this meeting, Theophanes notes:

> εἰσελθὼν δὲ Οὔμαρος εἰς τὴν ἁγίαν πόλιν τριχίνοις ἐκ καμήλων ἐνδύμασιν ἠμφιεσμένος ἐρρυπωμένοις ὑπόκρισίν τε σατανικὴν ἐνδεικνύμενος τὸν ναὸν ἐζήτησε τῶν Ἰουδαίων, ὃν ᾠκοδόμησε Σολομών, προσκυνητήριον αὐτὸν ποιῆσαι τῆς αὐτοῦ βλασφημίας. τοῦτον ἰδὼν Σωφρόνιος ἔφη· "ἐπ' ἀληθείας τοῦτό ἐστι τὸ βδέλυγμα τῆς ἐρημώσεως τὸ ῥηθὲν διὰ Δανιὴλ τοῦ προφήτου ἐστὸς ἐν τόπῳ ἁγίῳ". πολλοῖς τε δάκρυσι τὸ Χριστιανῶν φῦλον ἀπωδύρετο τῆς εὐσεβείας ὁ πρόμαχος.
>
> Oumaros ['Umar] entered the Holy City dressed in filthy garments of camel-hair and, showing a devilish pretence, sought the Temple of the Jews—the one built by Solomon—that he might make it a place of worship for his own blasphemous religion. Seeing this, Sophronios said, "Verily, this is the abomination of desolation standing in a holy place, as has been spoken through the prophet Daniel". And with many tears the defender of piety bewailed the Christian people.[411]

Daniel Sahas contrasts this account with that of the tenth-century Melkite Patriarch of Alexandria, Eutychius Sa'id Ibn Batriq, who records a diplomatic encounter between equals displaying mutual respect, what could almost be considered a friendship.[412] Sahas suggests that these two documents "record two conflicting camps which Byzantine historiography, or imagination, wanted to preserve".[413] Sahas is certainly correct in his observation, as the differences between these accounts are stark indeed.

However, the similarities between the account preserved in Theophanes and Sophronius's *Epiphany Sermon* are striking. Both mourn the impending fall of Jerusalem, and both decry the Arab forces as the "abomination of desolation" predicted by Daniel. On the surface, makes

[409] Cf. Daniel 9:27, 11:31, and 12:11. See also Matthew 24: 15-16.
[410] Sahas (2006), 43.
[411] Theophanes the Confessor, *Chronographia* AM 6127 [de Boor (1883), 339]. Trans. Mango and Scott (1997), 471-2.
[412] Sahas (2006), 38.
[413] Sahas (2006), 43.

Theophanes's source credible, or at least betrays a familiarity with Sophronius's work. Theophanes's source goes a step beyond Sophronius to include a description of 'Umar, who is dehumanised through the denial of human uniqueness. His appearance is described in animalistic terms, and he is depicted as eschewing social norms such as cleanliness. Whether this is simply a desire by Theophanes's source to preserve this negative perception within the Byzantine imagination or reflects the reality of the encounter, it is a testament to the stability of the ontological narrative produced by Sophronius.

Sophronius's dehumanisation of the Arabs employed the techniques described by Haslam, and only increased as Muslim forces continued to make inroads into Palestine. Some aspects are consistent. The Arabs are continually denied their human uniqueness, being described as barbarous savages under demonic influence. The level of human uniqueness granted the invaders reaches its nadir in the *Epiphany Sermon* at which point the dehumanisation of the Arabs reaches its apex. It is here that the Arabs are emplotted into prophetic history, embodying the "abomination of desolation" predicted by Daniel. Whether historical or not, the sentiment is reflected in Theophanes's source at the meeting between Sophronius and the Caliph 'Umar.

The dehumanisation, or rather demonisation, of the Arabs by Sophronius served a familiar purpose. In the wake of an unstoppable and unknown force which threatened the very existence of Roman hegemony in Palestine, Sophronius sought to understand his foe in Biblical terms. This approach allowed his audience, namely clergy and churchgoing laity, to comprehend the threat and recognise the gravity of the situation.

By instilling a sense of danger, Sophronius's dehumanisation of the Arabs achieved a second purpose, namely, to inspire repentance. It is worth repeating that while the Arabs were dehumanised in horrific and demonising terms, their lack of human agency meant that Sophronius never actually blamed them for their success or for the woes of the empire. Instead, blame was reserved for the people themselves, who had incurred God's wrath for very specific sins against God and the sacraments. The gravity of the sin is demonstrated vividly in the *Epiphany Sermon*, where Sophronius takes the unusual step of turning on his audience and

arguing that they had provoked Christ, who is slow to anger, to visit the empire with his wrath through the Saracens.

The combination of dehumanisation, God's wrath, and the call to repentance fits within the paradigm of narrativity. In order to comprehend the situation at hand, as well as express the severity of the situation, while simultaneously offering hope, Sophronius emplotted the Romans, Arabs, sinners, and Christ into an ontological narrative of chastisement and the promise of restoration. Sophronius is more direct than most authors in suggesting that Christ himself had lost patience and was actively punishing the Romans, his writings fit well within the literary tradition current in the seventh century.

b. Maximus

If Sophronius made heavy use of Old Testament tropes to dehumanise the Arabs, his disciple Maximus the Confessor, for his part, preferred to liken the Islamic invaders to beasts. An early example can be found in his *Epistula* 8 written to Sophronius in the earliest days of Arab success. In this letter, Maximus obliquely referred to an apparent Arab threat as "the wolves of Arabia", a phrase found in the Septuagint. In this context, Maximus allegorises the Biblical wolves, and appears unconcerned, perhaps even unaware, of the serious nature of the Arab threat at this early stage.[414]

Maximus's perspective eventually changed, as is evidenced in *Epistula* 14 written to Peter the Illustris after the Islamic invaders continued to succeed against Byzantine forces. Dated by Jankowiak and Booth to 633, we find Maximus finally aware of the threat posed by the Arabs.[415] Speaking of the early invasions, Maximus writes:

> Τί γὰρ τῶν νῦν περιχόντων τὴν οἰκουμένην κακῶν περιστατικώτερον; Τί δὲ τοῖς ἠσθημένοις τῶν γινομένων δεινότερον; Τί δὲ τοῖς πάσχουσιν ἐλεεινότερον ἢ φοβερώτερον; Ἔθνος ὀρᾷν ἐρημικόν τε καὶ βάρβαρον, ὡς ἰδίαν γῆν διατρέχον τὴν ἀλλοτρίαν· καὶ θηρσὶν ἀγρίοις καὶ ατιθάσσοις, μόνης ἀνθρώπων ἔχουσι ψιλὸν σχῆμα μορφῆς, τὴν ἥμερον πολιτείαν δαπανωμένην.

[414]Maximus the Confessor, *Epistula* 8 [*PG* 91, 440C-445B]. For the fragmentary letter traditionally associated with *Epistula* 8, see R Devreesse (1937).
[415] Jankowiak and Booth (2015), 44-45. See also Sahas (2003), 103.

> For indeed, what is more dire than the evils which afflict the world today? For those who can discern what is more painful than the unfolding events? What is more pitiful and frightening to those who now endure them? To see a barbarous nation from the desert overrunning another's lands as if they were their own, and our way of life itself being ravaged by untamed beasts who are only bearing the mere resemblance of human beings.[416]

The dehumanisation of the Arabs is literal in this passage. Using Haslam's categories, Maximus fully denies the human uniqueness and human nature of the Arabs, stating that they only have the semblance of human beings, and ravage the land like untamed beasts. By calling the Arabs a "barbarous nation", Maximus places them well outside the ingroup of Byzantine society.

As grotesque as this bestial image is, like Sophronius he does not blame the Arabs themselves for their behaviour. Instead, like his mentor, Maximus blames Christian disobedience for imperial decline. Maximus states:

> Τί τούτων, ὡς ἔφην, Χριστιανῶν ὀφθαλμοῖς, ἢ ἀκοαῖς φοβερώτερον; Ἔθνος ἀπηνὲς καὶ ἀλλόκοτον, κατὰ τῆς θείας κληρονομίας ὁρᾷν ἐπανατείνεσθαι χεῖρας συγχωρούμενον. Ἀλλὰ ταῦτα τὸ πλῆθος ὧν ἡμάρτομεν συμβῆναι πεποίηκεν. Οὐ γάρ ἀξίως τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου τοῦ Χριστοῦ πεπολιτεύμεθα. Πάντες ἡμάρτομεν, πάντες ἠνομήσαμεν, πάντες ἀφήκαμεν τὴν ὁδὸν τῶν ἐντολῶν τὴν εἰποῦσαν, *Ἐγώ εἰμι ἡ ὁδὸς*, καὶ κατ' αλλήλων ἐθηριώθημεν, ἀγνοήσ αντες τῆς φιλανθρωπίας τὴν χάριν, καὶ τῶν ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν τοῦ σαρκωθέντος Θεοῦ καθημάτων τὸ μυστήριον.
>
> What is, as I said, more disastrous to the Christian eyes and ears? To see a pitiless and quaint nation allowed to raise its hand against the divine heritage! But all these things are happening because of the many sins we have committed. For we have not conducted ourselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ. We have all sinned, we all have been unlawful, we all have abandoned the way of the commandments which says, "I am the way", and we have attacked each other like beasts, ignoring the grace of love for humanity and the mystery of the sufferings of God who became flesh for our sake.[417]

This selection begins by with continued dehumanisation of the Arabs. Here, the human nature of the Arabs is further denigrated: Maximus describes them as "pitiless and quaint", in comparison with the Romans who represent the "divine heritage". However, in a surprising turn, Maximus reverses what was initially a lament for Byzantine defeat by Arab forces into a critique of the Roman population, particularly their intra-Christian conflicts. Maximus attacks the human

[416] Maximus the Confessor, *Epistula* 14, *PG* 91, 533B-543C, 540A. Trans. Sahas (2003), 103 (modified).
[417] Maximus the Confessor, *Epistula* 14 [*PG* 91, 541 BC]. Trans. Sahas (2003), 104.

uniqueness of the Romans, comparing them to beasts who attack each other. He draws parallels with his depictions of the Arabs, further highlighting the gravity of Christian sin.

Sahas considers this critique of Christian divisions to be a subtle attack on Heraclius for sowing division and causing fighting amongst Christians within the empire.[418] While this is not implausible, it seems to be a complicated interpretation of what had become a common trope in Roman narrativity. Regardless of whether the emperor was the intended recipient of critique it remains true that for Maximus, like Sophronius, the sins of the people, and in particular division and infighting within the empire, are the ultimate cause for the success of the Islamic invaders.

For Sophronius and Maximus, the dehumanisation of the Arab forces meant the denial of their human nature through the removal of agency. It is worth noting that, for both authors, the Jews receive more blame, accused of collusion and denial of Christ, than the Arabs themselves. The Arabs instead become a plot device, emplotted in an ontological narrative in which Muslim forces have no independent existence apart from their use as God's chastising rod to correct the empire for its sins. Indeed, for both the key to the empire's restoration is repentance. In other words, the Arabs are emplotted in a providential narrative in which an inhuman enemy is permitted to succeed against God's people, the Byzantines. The Byzantines, for their part, wait patiently for deliverance, promised in exchange for repentance. Sophronius and Maximus are firmly in the tradition of George of Pisidia and Theophylact Simocatta in their use of dehumanisation, within the context of apocalyptic discourse.

c. Pseudo-Methodius

Sophronius and Maximus were witnesses to the earliest years of the Islamic invasions before any outcomes were certain. By the end of the century, the rising spectre had conquered large areas of Byzantine territory. Unlike the Persian occupation, the Arab conquerors established permanent hegemony over Roman territory in the Middle East, quickly creating a bureaucratic structure which incentivised conversion by imposing heavy taxation upon

[418] Sahas (2003), 104.

Christians. In 691 the Caliph ‘Abd al-Malik erected the shrine of ultimate Islamic supremacy, the Haram al Sharif, or Dome of the Rock, upon the temple mount, dominating the Jerusalem landscape and architecturally symbolising Islam’s superiority over Christianity and Judaism.

The *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius, composed in this milieu, has loomed large in this thesis thus far. We have seen its depiction of the Last Roman Emperor, as well as the harsh predictions held for would-be apostates.[419] In what follows, we will revisit this esoteric text for its insights into the way in which Roman sympathisers under Islamic hegemony used apocalyptic discourse to dehumanise their adversaries, including the Arabs.

The following account is given of the rise of the Arab forces, beginning with their defeat of the Persians:

> In this last millennium, namely the seventh, in which the kingdom of the Persians will be uprooted, and in which the sons of Ishmael will come out from the desert of Yathrib, all of them will come together to Geb ‘ut Ramta. And there the word of Our Lord will be fulfilled, which says that they are “like the beasts of the field and the birds of the heavens”, and He will summon them: “Assemble and come, because I am providing a great slaughter for you today; eat the flesh of the fatling and drink the blood of the warriors”.[420]

This account given in the *Apocalypse* betrays a certain awareness of Islamic origins. The author is aware that the earliest Muslims originated in Yathrib, later renamed Medina in honour of the Prophet Muhammad, and that they claimed Abrahamic heritage through Ishmael. We also find dehumanising rhetoric which denies the human uniqueness of the Arab invaders by depicting them as wild animals with cannibalistic appetites.

The author continues by emplotting the occupied Christians into an apocalyptic narrative, complete with symbolic language and *vaticinia ex eventu*. The Arabs invaders are depicted as “four Captains”, and the cause of their devastation is described in the following passage:

> These four captains are to be sent at their head against all the earth: Ruin and the Destroyer, Desolation and the Spoiler. [Ruin] destroys any city he can find, and Desolation spoils everything. He said through Moses: “It is not because the Lord, your God, loved you, that he has introduced you into the land of the Gentiles so that you might inherit it; but it is because of the iniquity of its inhabitants [cf. Deuteronomy 9:5]”. So too with the sons of Ishmael, it is not because God loves

[419] Chapter 3 and 4.
[420] Pseudo-Methodius, *Apocalypse,* XI [Martinez (1985), 76-7]. Trans. Martinez (1985), 139-140.

> them that He allows them to enter into the kingdom of the Christians, but because of the iniquity and the sin that is being wrought by the Christians, the like of which has never been done in any of the former generations.[421]

The author emplots the Arabs, whom he refers to as the "Children of Ishmael", and the surviving Christians into an apocalyptic narrative. The characterisation of the Islamic armies as a four-headed beast, Ruin and the Destroyer, Devastation and the Spoiler is unique within seventh-century apocalyptic discourse, and is an escalation of the dehumanisation of the Arab invaders. While they are described as inhuman beasts, the author goes a step further suggesting they will eat the flesh of men and drink their blood. This description is a complete dehumanisation of the adversary. To use Haslam's terms, the author denies the Islamic invaders both their human nature and human uniqueness.

Perhaps most familiar of all is the fact that blame falls upon the people themselves for the destruction at the hands of the Islamic invaders. The author emplots the Christians into the narrative of Deuteronomy 9:5, in which it is written that the Israelites were given the land of the Gentiles because of the wickedness of the Gentiles. However, the writer inverts the text, and places the Christians in the role of the Gentiles. As the author notes, "it is not because God loves them", that they are successful, but because of the wickedness of Christians, wickedness which is described in detail. Once again, the Arab invaders are denied their human agency, while the Christians are morally culpable, and takes the blame for the success of their occupiers.

It is worth noting that, for Pseudo-Methodius, the Arab victories are only one stage in the apocalyptic narrative, which culminates in the restoration of the empire through the eschatological "Last Roman Emperor". Indeed, the woes of the Arab invasions will be surpassed when the unclean nations, Gog and Magog, are released from captivity and permitted to unleash havoc. Contrary to what one might assume, the *Apocalypse* is clear that the Arabs are only a temporary scourge. In the end, the lands under Arab occupation will be restored to Roman rule, and history will continue as before once the Arab forces are defeated and their abuses are

[421] Pseudo-Methodius, *Apocalypse,* XI [Martinez (1985), 77-8]. Trans. Martinez (1985), 140.

avenged. However, as for Sophronius and Maximus, there is the hope that once the people have learned their lesson and repented, their current struggles will be brought to an end.

VI. Gog and Magog

It is fitting to end our chapter with an examination of the eschatological nations of Gog and Magog, the unclean nations of the north first mentioned in the Book of Ezekiel.[422] Within the Syriac tradition, somewhere in the fourth or fifth centuries, Gog and Magog became associated with the increasingly popular genre of Alexander literature, best represented by the *Alexander Romance* by Pseudo-Callisthenes.[423] By the seventh century, a fully articulated apocalyptic tradition had been established, in which Alexander the Great had imprisoned the nations of Gog and Magog behind a magical wall or fence, which restrained them until an appointed time when God would allow them to wreak havoc upon the earth before the *eschaton*.

Gog and Magog loom large in the two major Syriac apocalyptic texts we have examined, namely, the *Alexander Legend*, and the *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius.[424] Both texts associate Gog and Magog's imprisonment with Alexander, and predict their eventual release at the end of time, and both describe the nations in vicious terms, which will be examined in detail below. What follows is a brief examination of the dehumanisation of Gog and Magog, and its larger purpose in seventh-century apocalyptic discourse.

a. Syriac *Alexander Legend*

Gog and Magog first appear in the *Alexander Legend* when Alexander the Great asks some local Persians to tell him about their military enemies. A local farmer responds by offering the following description of their adversaries:

> They wear dressed skins; and they eat the raw flesh of everything which dies of theirs; and they drink the blood of men and of animals…They are swifter than the wind that blows, and ere the rumour of their going forth to battle is heard, they outstrip the whole world; for they are sorcerers, and they run between heaven and earth, and their chariots and swords and spears flash like fearful lightnings…between fifty and sixty men, and they go before and after him, and the noise of each one's outcry is more terrible than the voice of a lion; for it is the will of God that delivers

[422] Cf. Ezekiel 38. On the theme of Gog and Magog, see Alexander (1985), 184-192, and Van Donzel and Schmidt (2010), esp. 16-56.
[423] Van Donzel and Schmidt (2010), 16-17.
[424] For the typology of Heraclius as the New Alexander, see Chapter 3, 109-13.

> the nations into each other's hands, and the terror of the Huns is fearful upon all creatures that see them, for they are no lovers of mankind. When they go forth to war, they fetch a pregnant woman, and pile up a fire, and bind her in front of the fire, and cook her child within her, and her belly bursts open and the child comes forth roasted.[425]

Alexander proceeds to lock the nations of Gog and Magog behind a magical gate, and inscribe a prophecy about their future release upon the gate. The prophecy foretells that Gog and Magog will be released at the end of time and will destroy the Persian empire.

Several physical features stand out in the description of the nations. Perhaps most glaring is their identification with the Huns. The association of Gog and Magog with the Huns in Syriac literature dates back to the end of the fourth century, when the Darial ravaged Northern Mesopotamia and Syria.[426] By the seventh century, this had become an established trope which in which Gog and Magog no longer corresponded to the actual Huns, and thus appears to have had little contemporary significance.[427]

Gog and Magog, identified as the Huns, display several features which deny them their human uniqueness and human nature. They are described as magicians with supernatural powers, lacking any human decency, and violating taboos by consuming human flesh, including that of infants in the womb. They are an entirely dehumanised race, created to inflict judgement on the world and, in particular, to destroy the Persians at the end of time.

The dehumanisation of Gog and Magog is different from our previous examples in the fact that they do not correspond to a contemporary Roman enemy. It is not possible to associate the unclean nations with the Persians, as the Sassanids are already represented. Likewise, the Avars, who would make another natural candidate for comparison, have no place in this narrative. The purpose of Gog and Magog in this narrative, aside from their association with Alexander's, seems to be to display Alexander, and by extension, Heraclius's strength. Both figures are able to subdue their adversaries. In the context of the Persian invasions, the purpose seems to be to

[425] *Alexander Legend*, [Budge (1889), 263]. Trans. Budge (1889), 150. See also Reinink (2002), 84-86.
[426] Van Donzel and Schmidt (2010), 16.
[427] Podskalsky (1972), 86-88. Reinink (2002), 85.

reassure Roman sympathizers of the impending demise of the Persians, first at the hands of the Romans, and once and for all by Gog and Magog.

b. Pseudo-Methodius

Pseudo-Methodius takes a different approach to the Gog and Magog theme, wherein the unclean nations play a more prominent role. They are introduced early on, and very briefly, in a summary of their imprisonment by Alexander. The writer then reminds the reader that they will be released at the end of the ages.[428] Beyond this, Gog and Magog fade into the background until the end of the narrative.

A casual reader would be forgiven for thinking that the unclean nations are simply a footnote to the *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius. However, as promised, they return to the scene in dramatic form. After the Arabs have been defeated, and the Christians have regained a peaceful existence, God will open Alexander's gates and release the captives. The Christians, as a result, will panic, as the following scene unfolds:

> Men will be terrified and flee and hide themselves in the mountains, the caves and the graves. They will die from fear and hunger and there will be nobody to bury them. They will be eaten in the sight of their parents while they are watching. For these peoples that will come out from the North eat human flesh, drink the blood of wild beasts, and eat the creeping things of the earth— mice, snakes and scorpions, and all the unclean, reptiles that creep on the ground, and even the bodies of abominable animals and the aborted of the cattle. They will slaughter the children and give (them) to their mothers and force them to eat the bodies of their sons. They even eat dead dogs and kittens and all kinds of abomination. They will destroy the earth, and nobody will be able to stand before them.[429]

Pseudo-Methodius's description is similar to that in the *Alexander Legend*. Both describe Gog and Magog as ravenous and cannibalistic, eating unclean creatures, human flesh, and children. Both are extremely destructive forces and, in the case of Pseudo-Methodius, they will only be defeated in the end by an angel.

As in the *Alexander Legend*, the Gog and Magog of the *Apocalypse* do not seem to correspond to any contemporary adversary. Pseudo-Methodius does not even associate them

[428] Pseudo-Methodius, *Apocalypse,* X [Martinez (1985), 70-1].
[429] Pseudo-Methodius, *Apocalypse,* XIII [Martinez (1985), 88]. Trans. Martinez (1985), 151.

with the Huns. It's important to note that the author avoids any association between Gog and Magog and the Islamic invaders, who might seem to be an obvious choice. Indeed, the unclean nations are only released after the Arabs have been defeated, and they are described as a much greater threat than the major contemporary enemies of to the Romans.

This, I would suggest, is the primary purpose of Pseudo-Methodius's dehumanisation of Gog and Magog. The author is making a conscious anti-eschatological choice to demonstrate that the end has not yet come, and that the Arabs be destroyed well before the *eschaton*. Although it may be counterintuitive, the description of Gog and Magog is a message of hope, telling the audience not to worry, for it will eventually get worse.

VII. Conclusion

The seventh century was a period of unprecedented invasions and defeats for the Romans. Upon Phocas's ascent to the purple through a murderous coup, the Romans were faced with a costly campaign against the Sassanid Persians which lasted the better part of three decades and saw Jerusalem under Zoroastrian rule. Heraclius's usurpation, only seven years after Phocas's own, provided a glimmer of hope, which was eventually realized when he defeated the Persian empire and returned the True Cross to Jerusalem. This respite proved all too brief, and contributed to the psychological trauma of defeat at the hands of an unknown enemy who captured Jerusalem permanently, along with the rest of the Middle East and North Africa.

The military crises of the seventh century brought with them a crisis of identity for the Byzantines. An empire whose status as God's chosen people was rooted in victory struggled to find meaning in defeat at the hands of the Arab hordes from the desert. One literary strategy was to emplot themselves, their enemies, their defeat, and future victory in a providential narrative, one in which defeat had a purpose, and one in which God would vindicate the empire and restore its former position.

Such a supernatural narrative required supernatural characters, both protagonists and antagonists. For the author of the *Life of Theodore of Sykeon*, George of Pisidia, and Theophylact Simocatta, one such antagonist was found in the emperor Phocas, whose bloody offence against

the divine order was seen as the cause of Persian success. For George, the Persians were permitted some agency in their success, and their downfall was a combination of their own arrogance coupled with the success and virtue of divinely chosen Heraclius. For the Jewish author of the *Sefer Zerubbabel*, the same Heraclius who was George's restorer of the Cosmos was a subhuman adversary whose sole mission was to destroy the Jews. The Arabs, known from Classical times as nomadic caravan traders, and even occasional Roman allies, were an inhuman and godless scourge. For Sophronius, they were godless demonic hordes, the abomination of desolation predicted by the Prophet Daniel. For Maximus, they were wolves and beasts from the desert who only appeared to be human, and for Pseudo-Methodius they were cannibalistic and bloodthirsty beasts who brought devastation and destruction.

Nick Haslam and his colleagues provide a useful way to categorise the dehumanisation of the numerous foes treated in our sources. Each of our authors denied their foes their human uniqueness, rendering human emperors and armies as animals and monsters, incapable of participating in the civilised culture of the Romans. Our earliest accounts of the Islamic invaders go a step further by denying the human agency of the adversary, rendering the strategic successes of the Arabs as mere instruments of a divine plan, the rod of God's just chastisement of the numerous sins of the empire. Gog and Magog are established as inhuman, eschatological foes, whose absence provided some reassurance that the end had not yet come. The Romans themselves were not entirely free of dehumanisation, as they received the actual blame for Arab success, depicted as unrepentant sinners, unmoved by the manifest punishment visited upon the empire.

The process of dehumanisation ended with the removal of the enemies' human agency, a mechanism by which an unknown adversary could be comprehended. Their victories were not their own, but were part of God's design to punish the Romans for their innumerable sins, and not evidence of God's love for the adversary. This distinction was critical, as the Byzantine triumphal worldview traditionally understood victory as evidence of divine favour, and no doubt there were many subjects who converted to Islam based for that reason. By emplotting the

Byzantines, their dehumanised adversaries, and their heroic emperors into an ontological narrative of chastisement and redemption, and by dehumanising the enemy, the writers could provide meaning amid unprecedented defeat.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

The seventh century was the crucible in which the Roman Empire was tried and tested. Roman identity, which understood victory and economic expansion as evidence of divine favour, was suddenly and dramatically challenged when the Persian and Islamic Arabs triumphed over imperial forces. Authors under Roman hegemony responded to this crisis of identity in a variety of ways. Some Christian Romans turned to *adversus Judaeos* literature to reinforce Christian identity by blaming the Jews for the disasters of the empire. Others appealed to apocalyptic discourse to comprehend the disasters which befell them. This approach had appeal across the cultural and religious boundaries of the empire.

The goal of this thesis has been to address how many subjects and outside supporters of the empire used apocalyptic discourse to transform Roman, as well as Christian and Jewish, identities in the face of unprecedented defeat. To answer this question, we applied a set of thematic questions to a wide cross-section of primary sources, written in a variety of languages and representing a range of literary forms. We concluded that many authors under Roman influence kept calm and carried on, in part under the influence of a renaissance of apocalyptic discourse which allowed them to reinterpret the crises of the empire as events in a providential narrative. The narrative was complete with spoilers, which revealed that God would avenge the crimes committed against their respective communities, either the Roman Empire or the Jews, and restore them to their proper place of power in due course.

Scholars have long recognised the popularity of apocalyptic discourse in early Byzantine literature. However, the tendency has been to focus on a single genre, which in turn has been judged to be primitive and superstitious. This has led to a jaundiced understanding of the nature and extent of apocalyptic speculation in the sixth and seventh centuries. This has been fuelled in large part by outmoded conceptions of high and low literature, in which classicising historiography and poetry, typically associated with the imperial court, have been considered superior to low, or religious and theological, literature. Associating apocalyptic speculation with

low literature has, consequently, led scholars to miss the extensive use of apocalyptic discourse by the so-called literary elite, and by a variety of authors in late-Roman society.

Studies of apocalypticism have also been limited by an undue focus on eschatology, and an assumption that authors who employed apocalyptic discourse believed that the end was at hand. Eschatology is certainly an important theme, and there were authors, especially in the sixth century, who did believe that the world would end in their lifetime. However, as this thesis argues, this was by no means a dominant theme, especially in the seventh century. Authors were primarily concerned with providing hope that contemporary disasters were not a sign of divine abandonment, but of God's restorative chastisement, and most importantly, that the crises would pass.

This thesis has pushed back against these traditional scholarly biases in an attempt to move the conversation forward. The primary way this has been done has been by abandoning the outmoded "generic approach" to the study of apocalypticism. Instead, this thesis has examined apocalyptic discourse as it appears in all seventh-century literary forms, not only in traditionally recognised apocalyptic texts, but in unexpected forms, such as poems, letters, saints' lives, and histories. We have also tried to listen to the view of scholars in parallel disciplines, adopting the insights of scholars in Biblical studies, as well as social scientific insights from sociology and social-psychology.

Chapter 1 placed the thesis in context by discussing the historical background and previous scholarship. Chapter 2 examined the sixth-century origins of the renaissance of apocalyptic discourse. The sixth century opened in the reign of the emperor Anastasius, who presided over 6000 *anno mundi*, an auspicious date in particular circles of Roman society. Influenced by the speculations of Hippolytus of Rome, many Romans believed that the world would end six millennia after its creation. Some, such as the author of the *Oracle of Baalbek,* believed that Anastasius was the antichrist who would usher in the world's destruction. Others, such as the pagan philosopher Simplicius, criticized Christians who believed the world would end without warning after a relatively short period.

This millennial thinking had repercussions throughout the sixth century. Chroniclers, such as John Malalas and John of Ephesus, began to take note of portentous phenomena, such as comets and eclipses. Natural disasters, particularly floods and earthquakes, were the result of God's wrath in response to sins, both general and specific. However, the event which sparked arguably the greatest apocalyptic response was the "Justinianic Plague". Many authors wrote first hand apocalyptic accounts of the plague, including both the comparatively subdued response of John Malalas and the overtly emotional lamentations of John of Ephesus. Others, such as Agathias and Procopius, recorded and criticized the apocalyptic responses of others.

Although Procopius was subdued in his accounts of the plague, and criticised the apocalyptic responses of others, he still managed to produce one of the most famous and enduring examples of apocalyptic discourse of the century. In his *Secret History*, the historian composed a salacious *Kaiserkritik* which depicted Justinian and Theodora as superhuman demonic (or perhaps, daimonic) figures, who conspired with Fortune to destroy the empire. In this account, Procopius attributed the disasters of Justinian's reign to the forceful and superhuman nature of the imperial couple.

The apocalyptic discourse of the sixth century laid the foundations and provided the vocabulary for seventh-century authors to comprehend their own disasters. The idea of disaster as punishment for sin was used extensively by authors addressing the Persian and Islamic invasions. The language used by the *Oracle of Baalbek* to dehumanise *Anastasius*, as well as the demonic *Kaiserkritik* of Procopius, bear striking similarities to the portrayals of Phocas by Theophylact Simocatta and George of Pisidia, and of Heraclius by the author of the *Sefer Zerubbabel*. However, the eschatological and millennial language of sixth-century apocalyptic discourse was largely replaced, though not entirely, by a more hopeful tone which sought to provoke repentance and reassure readers of God's imminent deliverance.

Chapter 3 carried us forward into the seventh century by examining the rhetoric of the cosmically potent emperor in apocalyptic discourse. Here, we discussed several themes in the larger categories of heroic and adversarial emperors. These themes were used to address how

seventh-century Roman authors conceived of the emperor as a supernaturally powerful figure, who could impact history, for better or for worse, depending on the proclivities of the person in office.

We began by discussing the evidence for a movement to venerate the emperor Maurice as a martyr, particularly by the historian Theophylact Simocatta, and to make Phocas the villain who murdered him. Sources such as the Syriac *Alexander Legend* and the poetry of George of Pisidia show Heraclius as a heroic deliverer, emplotting the emperor and his subjects into the narratives of Biblical and Classical history. The author of the *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius, writing under Islamic occupation, looked toward the prophesied Last Roman Emperor to defeat the empire's adversaries once and for all. Opponents of Phocas saw the usurper as a world-destroyer, while critics of Heraclius, such as Maximus the Confessor, conceived of the emperor's ability to bring about the apocalypse through his edict of forced baptism. In each situation, the authors under consideration believed that the imperial office held great power to advance or destroy the empire.

Chapter 4 addressed the topic of apostasy in seventh-century apocalyptic discourse. Apostasy, a topic which was rarely discussed in previous centuries, became an important subject in seventh-century literature. Its frequent appearance in *adversus Judaeos* literature, a genre known for promoting Christian superiority, suggests that widespread religious attrition was a major concern for seventh-century Romans. Saints' lives, such as *The Life of Theodore of Sykeon* and the *Life of George of Choziba* blame widespread apostasy for the disasters of the Arab and Persian invasions. For Maximus the Confessor, Heraclius's edict of forced baptism could bring about the apocalypse precisely because it could lead to the mass apostasy predicted in 2 Thessalonians. The *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius blamed the hardships under the Islamic invasions on the numerous apostates who joined Islam, without coercion, and lorded it over their former co-religionists.

For the authors considered in Chapter 4, apostasy was both a feature and a catalyst of apocalyptic discourse. It was a major feature in that apostates were emplotted into a narrative of

divine chastisement and restoration. The sin of apostasy was the gravest of all, and many authors blamed those who abandoned Christianity for the religion of the military adversary for Roman losses. Apostasy served as a catalyst, since a major purpose of apocalyptic discourse appears to have been to warn would-be apostates to remain loyal to Christianity, through vivid descriptions of divine punishment, coupled with the promise that Christianity would prevail again.

Finally, Chapter 5 addressed the dehumanisation of Roman adversaries in seventh-century apocalyptic discourse. Here we addressed the depictions of the Persians and the emperor Phocas by Theophylact Simocatta and George of Pisidia, who used the same language to portray imperial enemies in monstrous terms. The *Sefer Zerubbabel* dehumanised the emperor Heraclius, transforming him into an anti-messianic adversary who would wage war against the Jews. Sophronius of Jerusalem and Maximus the Confessor depicted the Muslims as scourges of God, while Sophronius preferred to demonise the Arabs, and Maximus described them as animals. Similar language was used by Pseudo-Methodius, who portrayed the Arabs as cannibals and monsters. We also considered the descriptions of the eschatological nations of Gog and Magog in the Syriac apocalyptic tradition, beginning with the *Alexander Legend* and concluding with the *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius.

In each situation, the purpose of the dehumanisation of adversaries in apocalyptic discourse was to remove their human agency, and thus, denying them ownership of their victories. Success against the Romans, or in the case of the *Sefer Zerubbabel*, the Jews, could be attributed to God's providential plan, and otherwise incomprehensible defeat could be understood. Under these circumstances, authors emplotted themselves and their dehumanised adversaries in a providential narrative of divine chastisement and deliverance. Readers could find solace in their imminent deliverance.

Thus, we return to the question posed by this thesis. How did many seventh-century Romans employ apocalyptic discourse to rhetorically transform their political and religious identities? Old paradigms of military and economic success as evidence of divine favour gave way to a new paradigm in which God punished his people for collective and individual sins

through the invasion of divinely raised enemies, who served as God's rod of chastisement. On the other hand, he also raised up heroes who would deliver his people from the enemies he imposed upon them. Sins were those of evil emperors, apostasy, or sexual sins, and deliverers were historical and eschatological emperors or, in the case of the *Sefer Zerubbabel*, a future messiah.

The above analysis can be understood using Margaret Somers's categories of emplotment and narrativity. Byzantine authors emplotted themselves and their adversaries into an ontological narrative of chastisement and restoration. Under these circumstances, the disasters of the seventh century were foreordained, and temporary. Religious and political identity could be preserved, since defeat did not indicate God's favouring the adversary, but rather his displeasure at his people. Most importantly, hope was offered through repentance, and through the predictions of future deliverers. The Romans only needed to be patient until God's promised deliverer arrived on the scene.

The seventh century was the beginning of a long history of the use of apocalyptic discourse in Medieval European literature. Later Byzantine authors would build upon the work of their seventh-century forebears through their own apocalyptic texts, including visions of the afterlife and tours of Hell. The *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius was swiftly disseminated throughout Europe, and was even used in the Russian *Primary Chronicle*. Apocalyptic discourse survives to this day, for example in evangelical Christianity and the millennial speculation which surrounded Y2K or the Mayan calendar.

I hope that this thesis opens new avenues to investigate Byzantine apocalyptic discourse by moving past outdated approaches which only serve to limit our understanding. By abandoning the generic approach to the study of apocalypticism, and dispensing with stereotypes which treat apocalyptic discourse as superstitious *Volksliteratur*, I hope to expand upon Paul Alexander's work of making apocalyptic a suitable source of historical inquiry. Furthermore, by recognising the hopeful nature of seventh-century apocalyptic discourse, perhaps we can shine some light on a period that is often called a "dark age".

Furthermore, this thesis serves as a starting point to examine the use of apocalypticism in identity formation. Traditional preoccupations with eschatology have prevented scholars from recognising the wealth of information contained in apocalyptic discourse. The interdisciplinary approach used in this thesis can serve as a starting point to consider late-Roman and Byzantine apocalypticism in new and creative ways.

There is certainly more work to be done. Within the seventh century alone, more sources remain to be examined from the perspective advocated here. This can be expanded further into the eighth and ninth centuries, as Christianity, Islam, and Judaism were forced to share and compete for territory, and as new controversies such as iconoclasm arose in an attempt to address concerns that God was punishing the empire for institutional sins. I hope this thesis can serve as a foundation on which scholars can stand to examine the relationship between apocalyptic discourse and imperial policy and theological controversy.

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