Medieval Apocalypses as Historical Sources

PAUL J. ALEXANDER*

T HE apocalypses contained in the Old and New Testaments, especially the Books of Daniel and of Revelation, as well as the many extant extracanonical apocalypses have been examined intensively by generations of scholars, most of them theologians.[1] The historian can learn much from such studies, yet their authors frequently concern themselves with historical matters only to the extent of explaining the historical allusions and prophecies *ex eventu* contained in these texts. The reverse problem—whether these ancient apocalypses may contain historical information not known from other historical sources—is rarely raised by modern scholarship, presumably because for the Jewish and early Christian periods when the best-known apocalypses were written, documentary and narrative sources provide fairly ample evidence. There is, consequently, little incentive to resort to such de-

[1] For Daniel, see, e.g., Otto Eissfeldt, *The History of the Formation of the Old Testament: An Introduction including the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, and also the Works of a Similar Type from Qumran* (Oxford, Eng., 1965), 512–29 (with full bibliography); on apocalypses outside the canon, see Emil Schürer, *Geschichte des Jüdischen Volkes im Zeitalter Jesu Christi* (4th ed., 4 vols., Leipzig, 1901–1909), III, 258–370; on Revelation, see A. H. McNeile, *An Introduction to the Study of the New Testament* (2d ed., Oxford, Eng., 1953), 260–65.

liberately obscure texts as apocalypses. It is surprising, however, that apoc-
alypses have not been used as historical sources for late ancient and early
medieval times for which the documentation is less satisfactory and where
every scrap of information must be used for the reconstruction of events.
May not apocalyptic texts fill some of the gaps left by more conventional
historical sources?

In all apocalypses, by the very nature of the genre, historical fact and
eschatological prophecy intertwine. To separate the two, a historian must
begin by asking a number of questions: Can he ascertain the date and place
of composition of apocalyptic texts? Were they more or less evenly distrib-
uted in time and place, or were some occasions and localities especially fa-
vorable for the production of such writings? In what circles did they orig-
inate, and to what audiences were they addressed? For what purpose or
purposes were apocalypses written, rewritten, copied, excerpted, and trans-
lated? What conventions did the writers follow? To what extent can
apocalypses be used by the historian to corroborate historical facts contained
in other, especially narrative, sources? What do they reveal concerning the
reactions of individuals and groups to historical events, their judgments on
the course of history, and their hopes and fears for the future? Only after
disposing of such preliminary questions can the historian undertake with
confidence the task of extracting from apocalyptic texts information un-
known from other sources or of reaching, with the help of these texts, his-
torical conclusions for which the evidence of the narrative sources is in-
sufficient.

This paper will illustrate these problems by referring to a particular body
of historical apocalypses, all of which are pseudonymous.[2] They claim to be
the words of an ancient worthy either of classical myth (for instance a
sibyl), or of the Biblical record (the prophet Daniel), or of the patristic
tradition (Methodius); the true authors, however, are normally unknown.
The texts were composed in what was, or had once been, Byzantine terri-
tory. They survive, or existed at one time, in the Greek language. All deal
with Byzantine wars against the enemies of the Empire, notably against
Persians and Arabs. In date of composition they extend from the early sixth
to the ninth century. Here is the list: the Oracle of Baalbek, a prophecy of a
Christian sibyl written in Greek prose at Baalbek in Phoenicia in the first
years of the sixth century;[3] Syriac Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius, com-

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[2] I call apocalypses "historical" if they recapitulate historical events in the guise of prophecy
(prophecies *ex eventu*), and I distinguish them from other apocalypses concerned primarily or
exclusively with religious topics such as the afterlife.

[3] The text is unedited. I am publishing the *editio princeps* under the title *The Oracle of
Baalbek, The Tiburtine Sibyl in Greek Dress,* "Dumbarton Oaks Studies," X (Washington,
D. C., 1967). Wherever in this paper the Oracle of Baalbek is referred to, the documentation

posed in the Syriac language in the seventh century;[4] First Greek Version of
Pseudo-Methodius' Apocalypse;[5] Second Greek Version of Pseudo-Metho-
dius' Apocalypse;[6] First Greek Vision of Daniel, of the ninth century;[7] Sec-
ond Greek Vision of Daniel, also composed in the ninth century;[8] Old
Church Slavonic Vision of Daniel, the translation of a lost Greek original
that was composed in the ninth century.[9]

Discussion of this corpus of apocalypses may well begin with the prob-
lem of dating. The answer to this problem seems at first simple enough.
Every apocalypse must have been written not long after the latest event to
which it alludes. The sibyl in the Oracle of Baalbek, for instance, refers in
detail to the defeats suffered by the Byzantine armies at the hands of the
Persians under Emperor Anastasius I in 502 and 503, but says nothing of the
military recovery of the period following the year 504, of the truce con-
cluded in 505, or of the peace treaty of 506. It follows that in its present form
the text was composed between 502 and 506, and this date is confirmed by
further internal evidence.

The question next arises: how does one recognize the latest historical
element referred to in an apocalypse? Usually it precedes immediately a
passage in which the author shifts from history to eschatology. Thus in the
Old Church Slavonic Vision of Daniel the author gives a long list of By-
zantine emperors. The last recognizable figure is Michael II of Amorion
(820–829). His reign is followed immediately by a series of eschatological
emperors, for instance, a tetrarchy of two Eastern and two Western rulers—

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will be found in my book. Latin versions of this work have been known for a long time; see
Ernst Sackur, *Sibyllinische Texte und Forschungen* (Halle, 1898; reprint, Turin, 1963), esp.
177–87.

[4] It is unpublished and occurs in *codex Vaticanus Syrus* 58, fols. 118–36, of the sixteenth
century; see Michael Kmosko, "Das Rätsel des Pseudo-Methodius," *Byzantion*, VI (No. 1,
1931), 273–96, and description of the Vatican manuscript in St. E. and J. S. Assemani,
Bibliothecae Apostolicae Vaticanae Manuscriptorum Catalogus (3 vols., Rome, 1756–59) II, 342.

[5] *Otkrovenie Mefodiia Patarskago i Apokrificheskiia Videnia Daniela v Vizantiiski i
Slaviano-Russkoi Literaturakh* [Revelation of Methodius of Patara and Apocryphal Visions of
Daniel in Byzantine and Slavo-Russian Literature], ed. V. M. Istrin, in the series *Chteniia v
Imperatorskom Obshchestvie Istorii i Drevnostei Rossiiskikh pri Moskovskom Universitetie*, Nos.
191 and 193 (Moscow, 1897). Istrin's work is divided into two parts, each with a separate
pagination: *Izsliedovie* [Research] and *Teksty* [Texts]. The First Greek Version of Pseudo-
Methodius' Apocalypse is printed in *Teksty*, 5–50.

[6] The variants of the Second Version from the First are noted by Istrin in the *apparatus
criticus* to his edition of the First Version.

[7] *Anecdota Graeca-Byzantina*, ed. Afanasii Vassiliev (Moscow, 1893), 33–38.

[8] *Ibid.*, 38–43.

[9] This text has been printed three times, first by P. S. Srechkovic, *Zbornik Popa Dragolia*,
Srpska Kralievska Akademija, *Spomenik*, V (1890), 10–11 (from a manuscript, now lost, once
No. 466 [632] of the Belgrade National Library, thirteenth century); then by Istrin, *Otkrovenie,
Teksty*, 156–58 (from *codex Athos Chilandar* 24, twelfth or thirteenth century); again by
P. A. Lavrov, *Apokrificheskie Teksty* [Apocryphal Texts], *Sbornik Otdeleniia Russkago Iazyka
i Slovesnosti Imp. Akad. Nauk*, LXVII, No. 3 (St. Petersburg, 1899), 1–5 (from the Chilandar
manuscript, with variants of the Belgrade codex noted in the *apparatus criticus*, but unfor-
tunately without the beginning which is missing in the Chilandar manuscript).

a feature to which no historical reality corresponded in the ninth century.[10] Consequently the list was composed under Michael II, for, if its author had lived under a later emperor, he would not have missed the opportunity of recording the reign of Michael's successors to authenticate his prophecies.

Sometimes the latest historical event is less easy to distinguish from genuine predictions. The Greek versions of Pseudo-Methodius' Apocalypse mention the Muslim invasion of Africa but not of Spain. Consequently scholars have concluded that the Apocalypse must be later than the beginning of the Arab raids against the province of Africa in 670 and earlier than the conquest of Spain in 711.[11] The difficulty, however, is that in other sections of his book Pseudo-Methodius also refers to Muslim raids against Sicily and Greece,[12] and these did not occur until much later than any scholar would allow for the composition of the work. Pseudo-Methodius clearly lived in the seventh century, was observing the rapid and irresistible advance of the Arab armed forces, and prophesied, on the analogy of past Arab progress, that even geographic areas that had not yet been exposed to Muslim attacks would soon succumb to the infidels. It will not do to interpret every apocalyptic prophecy as a *vaticinium ex eventu* and to base the date of apocalyptic documents on such an assumption. In interpreting an apocalypse the historian should never lose sight of the possibility that the author may have been an intelligent observer of current affairs and have at-

[10] I translate as literally as possible: ". . . And the horns that I saw are the Roman emperors. They will arise in the last days. The first [emperor] will lift his hand against the son, and afterward he will rule five years. Woe to Thee, Babylon of the Seven Hills [Constantinople], that in Thee the Amazon will rule. A second horn [or, scepter] will arise, another emperor from the Gothic race who has the number 812 [?], and his imperial power will be strong and powerful. In his days there will go forth a strong people and it will struggle with him. And that people will flee from his face, and afterward that people will return, for he [the angel] said: finally that emperor will weaken and become powerless and will give up his soul miserably. Then another horn [or, scepter] will arise from his seed. He will be short lived above all others. Another horn [or, scepter] will arise, his name will be angelic, and he will hold his [i.e., his predecessor's] throne. A fifth horn will arise and go forth seven years. And afterward there will arise another horn [or, scepter] from the first imperial letter. And while he occupies the throne, another horn [or, scepter] [will arise]. And they will blaspheme against the Highest [God]. And because of this blasphemy he will perish miserably and they will lead him to the *Kynēgion.*" The Byzantine emperors or empresses here referred to are Irene (797–802), who blinded her son Constantine VI; Nicephorus (802–811), killed on a campaign against the Bulgars; his son Stauracius (July 26–October 2, 811); Michael I (811–813); Leo V (813–820); Michael II (820–829), founder of the Amorian dynasty, a moderate iconoclast. The text probably also refers to Michael's son Theophilus who became coemperor in 821. All the emperors that follow in the text are the product of eschatological fantasy. The writer predicts that Michael II will be led to the *lovec* (literally, "hunter"), but this does not make sense. I interpret it as a literal translation of the Greek word *kynēgos* or *kynēgion,* meaning "hunter" or "hunt," respectively. These were also the designations of quarters of the city of Constantinople. In the *Kynēgion,* in particular, criminals were frequently executed (Raymond Janin, *Constantinople Byzantine* [2d ed., Paris, 1964], 376–77). Thus the author seems to predict a violent end for Michael II. In reality, Michael died a natural death, from a disease of the kidney, another indication that the author wrote under Michael II.

[11] First Greek Version of Pseudo-Methodius' Apocalypse, *Otkrovenie,* ed. Istrin, *Teksty,* 42, 8 (Africa); see Sackur, *Sibyllinische Texte,* 45–46.

[12] First Greek Version of Pseudo-Methodius' Apocalypse, *Otkrovenie,* ed. Istrin, *Teksty,* 29, 2–4; 42, 8.

tempted genuine prophecies of future happenings based on his appraisal of the direction in which events were moving.[13]

Another notorious difficulty in dating an apocalypse is the essential instability of numerals in apocalyptic texts. This is illustrated in crude and drastic fashion in the text tradition of the Oracle of Baalbek. The fourth-century source of the text predicted that the city of Byzantium, refounded by Constantine the Great at the beginning of the century, would cease to rule the Empire before sixty years had elapsed. A sixth-century editor at Heliopolis in Phoenicia, obviously perplexed that Constantinople was still the imperial capital, adjusted this figure to "thrice sixty years," and a medieval successor, active in or before the twelfth century, observing that even the "thrice sixty years" had elapsed and that Constantinople was tenaciously clinging to its imperial position, played it safe and resolutely changed the numerals into "thrice six hundred years." Undoubtedly, he would, had he lived long enough, have noted with satisfaction the captures of the city on the Bosporus by the Latin crusaders in 1204, by the Ottoman Turks in 1453, and by the Allied armies at the end of World War I.

Less transparent is another case of tampering with an apocalyptic time span. Pseudo-Methodius prophesied that Arab domination would end after the lapse of a certain number of "year-weeks" or intervals of seven years. This was the unit of time popular among apocalyptic writers because it was employed in the classical prototype, the canonical Book of Daniel (9:24). The number of year-weeks is given as "ten" in the only extant manuscript of the Syriac original of Pseudo-Methodius, as "seven" in some Greek manuscripts, and as "seventeen" in others.[14] Since Muslim rule in Mesopotamia ended neither after seven year-weeks, that is around 689, nor after ten year-weeks (around 710), nor indeed after the lapse of seventeen of these units (around 751), this is clearly a genuine prophecy that was not fulfilled. If it were not for the "numbers game" played by the copyists and editors of apocalypses, such an unfulfilled prophecy would furnish a valuable *terminus ante quem* for the composition of the original text. In fact, the more one studies apocalyptic writings, the more one comes to distrust numerals

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[13] When a series of events is mentioned in an apocalypse, it is sometimes difficult to decide whether the latest event, or events, in the series is historical. Thus it will be seen below that the Old Church Slavonic Vision of Daniel speaks of an unsuccessful Arab siege of Enna in Sicily, which must have taken place in 827 or 828. Now it is true that Enna did not fall to the Muslims until 859, but one wonders whether the mention of the Arab failure before Enna reflects historical fact or wishful thinking. In the latter case, the text was written while the siege was going on; in the former, at some time after the event.

[14] Syriac original of Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius, in *codex Vaticanus Syrus* 58, fol. 122 verso: "And after those ten weeks of years they [the Arabs] also will be overpowered and subjected to the Kingdom of Rome. . . ." First Greek Version of Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius, *Otkrovenie*, ed. Istrin, *Teksty*, 15, 10: seventeen weeks according to some manuscripts, seven weeks of years according to others.

indicating a time span even in cases where the surviving manuscript evidence does not point to the existence of textual variants.[15] The lapse of time and the course of historical events practically forced every copyist of apocalyptic numerals to turn editor if he had any respect for the prophetic merits of the author whose prophecies he was copying.

The emergence of apocalyptic texts, and especially their cumulation, at particular moments in history may interest the historian because it may serve as a kind of barometer for the measuring of eschatological pressures at a given time in history.[16] For example, no less than three apocalyptic writings were composed about A.D. 500: the Oracle of Baalbek; a "Seventh Vision of Daniel" preserved in Armenian only but derived from a lost Byzantine original;[17] and a "Very Brief Chronicle" referred to in the *Theosophy of Tübingen*.[18] Why did apocalyptic texts pile up at that particular time? The last of the three documents gives an answer. It stated specifically that the world would end six thousand years after its creation,[19] that is, either in 501 or 507–508 according to the chronological era used. Because certain millenarian circles around A.D. 500 expected the end of the world to occur momentarily, a considerable number of apocalypses were produced. This is not to say that apocalypses always or even regularly owed their composition to calculations of the end of the world, but the example may illustrate the general proposition that the mere fact of the emergence or of the copying of apocalyptic texts at any particular time may be a matter of historical interest.

As important for the historian as the date of an apocalyptic text is its place of composition. For while it is possible, or even likely, that an author writing in the area where particular historical events took place may have preserved reliable information on these happenings, it is, prima facie, less likely that such data may be found in a source written at the other end of the Empire. To events mentioned in an apocalypse the historian will therefore attach much greater weight if they took place in the vicinity of the

15 I am not referring here to the well-known tendency of all scribes of miscopying numerals by inadvertence. In apocalytic texts, numerals are exposed to the additional danger of deliberate changes.

16 On the famous question whether or not there was a general expectation in Western Europe that the world would end in the year 1000, see Alexander A. Vasiliev, "Medieval Ideas of the End of the World," *Byzantion*, XVI (No. 2, 1942–43), 462–502, esp. 478–87.

17 Most convenient translation into French by Frédéric Macler in *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, XXXIII (No. 6, 1896), 290–309.

18 *Fragmente Griechischer Theosophien*, ed. Hartmut Erbse, "Hamburger Arbeiten zur Altertumswissenschaft," No. 4 (Hamburg, 1941).

19 *Ibid.*, 2–3, 167, 15–20; see also Hilarianus, *De Cursu Temporum*, ed. Karl Frick, in *Chronica Minora* (Leipzig, 1893), 170–71, who wrote his treatise in A.D. 397 and expected the world to end after 101 years, that is, in 498. (Professor John Eadie of the University of Michigan furnished this information.) The passage shows that the expectation of the world ending around A.D. 500 existed at least a century prior to that year and was based primarily on chiliastic calculations and combinations, rather than on particular historical events in the late fifth or early sixth century.

author's place of residence rather than if they happened in an area beyond the reach of his sources of information. An apocalyptic description of political, economic, or religious conditions couched in general terms, moreover, becomes meaningful to the historian only if he can identify the areas about which the author is writing. Such descriptions are particularly notable in the Syriac and Greek texts of the Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius. It is therefore important to realize that the Syriac original was composed in Mesopotamia, as I hope to show elsewhere, rather than in Syria, as other students of the document thought probable.[20]

Frequently, therefore, it becomes imperative to identify the places and regions mentioned in a particular apocalyptic text, and this may also be a difficult or indeed a hopeless task. It would be important, for example, to identify some of the localities mentioned in the Second Greek Version of Pseudo-Methodius' Apocalypse. It is true that the author writes of Asia Minor, of Caesarea, and of the Maeander. He means presumably Asia Minor, Caesarea in Cappadocia, and the River Maeander. But where were the localities called Gephyra and Chortoranon (or Chartokoran or Chartokoranon, the spellings of other manuscripts) situated where an unnamed emperor would fight battles against the Arabs?[21] It would be interesting to clarify this problem, for the author seems here to preserve information on armed conflicts between Byzantines and Arabs that are not mentioned in the narrative sources of either side. Almost as difficult are certain place names mentioned in the Second Greek Vision of Daniel. It refers to two localities, Mariana and Elinia. Now the Old Church Slavonic Vision of Daniel, which, as mentioned before, derives from a lost Greek original, contains a passage mentioning these two localities, but in lieu of the mysterious toponym Elinia it reads "Enna," which when written in Greek uncial script invited corruption into something akin to Elinia.[22] Now Enna is the famous natural, steep, wind-swept fortress at the geographic center of Sicily. The other lo-

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[20] Sackur, *Sibyllinische Texte,* 53–55, who in 1898 was unaware of the Syriac text, considered either an Alexandrian or a Syrian origin, tended toward the latter alternative, but also realized the influence of Babylonian and Persian influences on the author. I have developed my reasons for the Mesopotamian origin of the text in a paper delivered before the Twenty-seventh International Congress of Orientalists in Ann Arbor, Michigan, in August 1967.

[21] The passage relevant in the present context will be found in *Otkrovenie,* ed. Istrin, *Teksty,* 41, in the *apparatus criticus.*

[22] Greek text, *Anecdota Graeca-Byzantina,* ed. Vassiliev, 39, 13: "And afterward the sons of Ismael [i.e., the Arabs] will be struck by fear and will cry out with a loud voice and will flee to Mariana. And afterward the sons of Ismael will once again attack the territory of Elinia." The corresponding passage in the Old Church Slavonic Vision of Daniel (*Apokrifiches-kie Teksty,* ed. Lavrov, 3, 4) reads: "And the Ismaelites will go forth into the extremity of the island and will take many prisoners until they will come to a place called Mariianii, and the rebel will install them in that place. And they will come to a place called Ienna, and they will come to its aid, and they will not capture it." Clearly in the Greek text a copyist misread the first uncial letter *ny* in the place name Enna for *lambda* plus *iota,* so that "Enna" was corrupted into "Elinia."

cality mentioned in the text, Mariana, cannot be identified, but it, too, must be situated in Sicily.[23] In addition, the Old Church Slavonic Vision of Daniel shows that two meaningless words in the First Greek Vision of Daniel are a corruption of the celebrated suburb of Syracuse, Achradina.[24] My point here is not so much that the Old Church Slavonic translation has preserved some Sicilian place names better than the Greek tradition, but rather that in the latter all Sicilian place names without exception have been corrupted beyond recognition. Without the Old Church Slavonic text not even the most ingenious historian could suspect that the Greek Visions of Daniel refer to Sicily. With the help of these identifications of place names in the Old Church Slavonic text, however, the Greek Visions of Daniel, as well as the Old Church Slavonic document itself, emerge as precious new sources for the history of the Muslim conquest of the island.[25]

Even this, however, is merely an instance of the miscopying of place names common in all classical or medieval texts. To such corruptions by scribal error should be added another kind of instability in nomenclature that was specific to apocalyptic texts. They were living texts, and each copyist was tempted to adapt geographical, as well as chronological, data to his own historical experience. A striking example occurs in the Old Church Slavonic Vision of Daniel dealing with the Arab invasion of Sicily. One of its manuscripts, of the thirteenth century, exhibits the disconcerting habit of adding to several Sicilian toponyms, without any kind of syntactical link, the name of a Slavic river or town. So far I have identified Dunaia (the Danube), Sredec (the modern Sofia), Pernik, Velbuzhd, and Strumica (all southwest of Sofia). The other localities mentioned (Glavinica, Mraky,

[23] In spite of much searching in works on the historical geography of Sicily, I have been unable to clear up this point. Place names ending with -ianum or -iana, so frequent on the Italian mainland and usually reflecting the previous existence of a Roman *fundus*, were much more frequent in Sicily before the Arab conquest than they are now. (See Adolf Holm in a review of Giovanni Flechia's *Nomi Locali del Napolitano derivati da gentilizi Italici*, in *Atti della reale accademia delle scienze di Torino*, X [No. 1, 1874], in *Bursian's Jahresbericht für die Fortschritte der Classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, IV [No. 2, 1877], 83–84.) One thinks naturally of the modern town of Marianopoli, west of Enna. It was founded in the nineteenth century, but its name may possibly derive from a village named after an (unattested) *fundus Marianus*.

[24] First Greek Vision of Daniel, *Anecdota Graeca-Byzantina*, ed. Vassiliev, 36, 21: καὶ τουτον κρατήσαντες ἀπάξουσιν αὐτὸν μέχρι δίνης κἀκεῖ χρίσουσιν αὐτὸν εἰς βασιλέα κτλ. The corresponding passage in the Old Church Slavonic Vision of Daniel runs in translation (*Apokrificheskie Teksty*, ed. Lavrov, 3, 20): "and they will lead him to Askrodun [variant, Akrodun] and forthwith they will anoint him emperor."

[25] Because the references to Sicilian place names in the Old Church Slavonic and Greek Visions of Daniel have not been recognized before, these texts have escaped the attention of historians of the Arab conquest of Sicily. Several years ago I called these texts to the attention of a historian of art, Signora Angela Daneu Lattanzi, who used them in her *Lineamenti di Storia della Miniatura in Sicilia* (Florence, 1965), 12–13. I plan to utilize these texts more fully in a separate study of the Muslim invasion of Sicily. In this paper only a few of the more obvious conclusions will be developed.

and Khlimy) presumably were also located in Bulgaria.[26] It is easy to imagine what happened. As the Slavonic text was copied and recopied, a scribe, either the individual whose copy is preserved or one of his predecessors, imagined that what was in fact a *vaticinium ex eventu* of the Muslim conquest of Sicily was a genuine prophecy and that this prophecy had found its fulfillment in events occurring in his native Bulgaria.[27] He marked this fulfillment in his manuscript by inserting, perhaps in form of marginal glosses, the Slavic names of the places where the fulfillment supposedly occurred. One shudders to think what was bound to happen in the process of further copying of the Slavonic text. Sooner or later the familiar Slavonic toponyms would inevitably displace the less familiar Sicilian place names, and the Old Church Slavonic Vision of Daniel would thus be deprived of much of its relevance to the historian.

It is not enough, of course, to know when and where a particular apocalypse was composed. The historian can evaluate the detailed information that it contains only if he also understands the purposes of the apocalyptic writer and the methods he employed. Only then can the historian discount the specific bias of the text.

Most apocalypses were written to provide comfort in time of tribulation, particularly during grave military crises. Such consolation may be material or otherworldly. Thus the Oracle of Baalbek was composed to announce that the disasters of the Persian War under Anastasius would be followed by the Second Coming of Christ. The First Greek Version of Pseudo-Methodius' Apocalypse in turn prophesied that the Arab domination of the Near East would be ended by a Roman or Byzantine emperor who would drive the Muslims back into the desert and impose upon them a yoke a hundred times heavier than had been that of Muslims over Christians.[28] Similarly the Greek Visions of Daniel knew of a last emperor of Rome who would defeat the Arabs in a great battle. Such references to military victories over a national enemy were meant to be expressions of hope and encouragement, especially if mentioned at the end of a long series of military disasters, and it would be an egregious error to interpret them as *vaticinia post eventum*.

Hopes for the redress of economic and fiscal evils, especially those caused by war, also played a role in some of the apocalypses. The First Greek Version of the Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius, for example, predicted that after the end of Arab domination prisoners made by the defeated enemy

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[26] The Balkan place names mentioned above in the text are inserted into the Belgrade manuscript of the Old Church Slavonic Vision of Daniel. (See the *apparatus criticus, Apokrificheskie Teksty*, ed. Lavrov, 2–3.)

[27] I have so far been unsuccessful in ascertaining which invasion of Bulgaria by which people the scribe had in mind.

[28] *Otkrovenie*, ed. Istrin, *Teksty*, 41, 1; 42, 1.

would return to their native places and recover their property.[29] Similarly, the Oracle of Baalbek knew of a messianic ruler who "will grant an exemption from paying a public tax and will restore all the people of the entire East and of Palestine."

This consolatory function of apocalyptic literature may on occasion be accompanied by another that may be as close to the heart of the writer. The Syriac and Greek Apocalypses of Pseudo-Methodius, for example, had, in addition, a polemical purpose. The author argued explicitly against anonymous opponents who interpreted Psalm 68:31 ("Ethiopia shall haste to stretch out her hands unto God") as indicating that liberation from the Muslim yoke would come from the ruler of Ethiopia.[30] Against their thesis the author established, with a wealth of Biblical and historical (or pseudo-historical) documentation, his own conviction that the Near East would be saved by a Byzantine ruler. This is all the more remarkable as the author of the Syriac original was a Monophysite.[31] Consequently, if doctrinal considerations had been all-important to him, he, like his opponents, should have relied for aid on the Monophysite ruler of Ethiopia rather than on the Chalcedonian monarch at Byzantium. Sectarian attitudes and polemics did indeed play a role in the sibyl's apocalypse of the early sixth century, but in the later texts doctrinal positions (Monophysitism, Monotheletism, Iconoclasm) were ignored. This may be due to either or both of two reasons. It may have been felt, in the circles to which the apocalyptic writers belonged and for whom they wrote, that sectarian differences separating the Christians should be ignored in face of the common Muslim danger. Alternately, these circles may have had little interest in theological controversy.

With regard to the procedures and methods employed by apocalyptic writers, mention has already been made of the tendency of apocalyptists to tamper with numerals and place names whenever the course of history seemed to prove that a prophecy had not been fulfilled during the period stipulated in the original text or had been fulfilled near the editor's place of residence. But this is only a particular application of a general principle governing the procedures of apocalyptic writers. Whenever later events seemed to fulfill an apocalyptic prophecy, the text of the apocalypse tended to be brought in harmony with its alleged fulfillment. Some of these changes

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[29] *Ibid.*, 42, 8.

[30] For the Greek text, see *ibid.*, 22, 16: "some persons (*tines*) supposed that Saint David, in saying this [Psalm 68:31], hinted at the kingdom of the Ethiopians. But those who thought so were in error. . . ." The Syriac original (*codex Vaticanus Syrus* 58, fol. 126 recto) is more explicit: "However, many brethren of the clergy suppose that the blessed David spoke this word [Psalm 68:31] concerning the kingdom of the Cushites. And those who think so err. . . ."

[31] The author's unnamed opponents must have been Monophysites as they pinned their hopes of liberation from Muslim domination on the only Monophysite ruler, the king of Ethiopia. Therefore the author, too, was a Monophysite as he referred to his opponents as "brethren of the clergy." (See note 30, above.)

were drastic. At some time prior to the twelfth century it must have proved embarrassing that in the seventh century the First Greek Version of the Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius had prophesied a final Byzantine victory over "Turks and Avars,"[32] for by the eleventh century a number of Turkish peoples (Pechenegs, Seljuks, and so forth) were harassing the Empire most effectively. But this situation was remedied easily enough, for when the book was translated for the first time into Old Church Slavonic, a particular Turkish tribe, the Ugurs, had been substituted for the Turks, and this Turkish people had indeed disappeared in the mid-Byzantine period.[33] Thus did a later editor safeguard the prophetic prestige of Pseudo-Methodius.

Yet even the Greek text of this apocalypse had adjusted certain prophecies of the Syriac original to the course of events. The Syriac text knew of an archetypal invasion of Israel by Midianites at the time of the Hebrew Judges and mentioned their four leaders in accordance with the Old Testament, Oreb and Zeêb, Zebel and Zalmunna (Judg. 8). Several manuscripts of the Greek translation, however, call these four Midianite leaders "sons of Umayya,"[34] obviously because the translator believed that Pseudo-Methodius' prophecy had found its fulfillment at the time of the Umayyad rulers of Damascus. Another instance of an older prophecy being adapted to later events occurs in the Oracle of Baalbek. Here a fragment originally referring to the activities of a Roman general at Hierapolis near the Euphrates under the Emperor Constantius II was in later versions lifted bodily from its fourth-century context and relocated in the reign of Theodosius II in the fifth century, presumably because the later author held that this "prophecy" had found its fulfillment during the Persian Wars under the later Emperor.

These examples may serve as illustrations for a type of *aggiornamento* wherein a later editor brought details of earlier prophecies into harmony with the course of history by tampering with the text. In other cases the text of an earlier apocalypse was brought up to date by the insertion of a larger or smaller body of historical events that occurred in the intervening years. The original Greek text of the Oracle of Baalbek, for example, had reached down to the reign of Theodosius the Great, but, when the text was re-edited in the early sixth century, the later editor inserted a brief chronicle of the period from Theodosius to Anastasius, that is, of roughly one century, couched *more apocalyptico* in the future tense.

The preceding remarks about the dating, geographic provenance, pur-

[32] *Otkrovenie*, ed. Istrin, *Teksty*, 26, 1.
[33] *Ibid.*, 92, 25.
[34] *Ibid.*, 14, 3, and *apparatus criticus*.

poses, and methods of apocalyptic writers naturally lead to the consideration of the historical information contained in apocalyptic texts. Without exception they recorded historical events in the guise of prophecy and thus confirmed data known from other sources. Thus the Oracle of Baalbek, as stated before, included a brief chronicle of the fifth century, especially of the invasion of Asia Minor by Persians and Isaurians and of the Balkan Peninsula by the Huns during the fifth century. The First Greek Version of Pseudo-Methodius' Apocalypse furnished some details on the Arab invasion of the Fertile Crescent, in particular on the Arab victory over the Byzantine armies in the Battle of the River Jarmuk in 636, and spoke in general terms about the Arab conquest of Sassanid Persia.[35] The Greek and Old Church Slavonic Visions of Daniel in turn concerned the Muslim advance in Sicily at the beginning of the ninth century.[36]

At least as interesting as corroborative evidence of this kind were the reactions to historical events expressed by apocalyptic writers, their judgments on the course of history, and their expectations for the future. In the early years of the sixth century the Oracle of Baalbek despaired of the cities destroyed by Isaurian raiders at the beginning of the preceding century ever being restored or of the city of Rome recovering its imperial position after the sack by the Vandals in 455. In the author's opinion the reign of Leo I marked the beginning of the end for the Roman Empire. Where the author attempted to give an explanation for the disasters of the fifth century, such as the depredations by Huns and Vandals, he expressed a simple kind of moralism by stating, for example, that such events were due to Roman treachery or greed or that emperors who espoused heretical positions lost their throne. According to the Greek Versions of Pseudo-Methodius' Apocalypse, the Roman Empire would last to the end of time because it possessed a powerful talisman, the relic of the true Cross on which Jesus was crucified and which bestowed victory upon its owner over all his enemies. The author explained the Muslim victories over the Byzantine armies not, as was apparently done in certain Christian circles in Mesopotamia whose faith was shaken by the military successes of the infidels, as acts of divine partiality for the Arabs, but by Christian iniquity and sinfulness. The Arabs would be God's tool for the punishment of the Christians, but after a period of 49 (or 70 or 119) years of their rule over Christians they would become overconfident, would publicly deny God's ability to deliver his flock, and would, because of this blasphemy, be defeated and subdued by a Christian

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[35] On the Battle of the Jarmuk, see *ibid.*, 26, 11 (the author localizes the battle at the nearby town of Gabaon), and Kmosko, "Das Rätsel des Pseudo-Methodius," 286.

[36] See pages 1003–1004, above.

emperor.[37] These naïve views about the irreversibility of the historical process, these moralist explanations of historical events as divine retribution for human sin, and this somewhat mechanistic pattern of military success breeding excessive self-confidence and blasphemy are features familiar from certain books of the Old Testament, for instance from Judges, and are faint echoes from Jewish prophecy and apocalyptic, the ultimate source of Eastern as well as Western Christian apocalyptic thought.

It is to be expected that in addition to confirming historical facts known from other sources and expressing their judgments and evaluations of historical events and situations, apocalyptic writers should on occasion mention historical information not discussed elsewhere. In this connection it is vital to grasp clearly the reason why apocalyptic writers normally prefaced their genuine prophecies of the future with *vaticinia ex eventu* referring to events of the past. The motive for this practice was invariably a desire to establish their prophetic authority and thus win credence for their genuine predictions. It follows that the historical information contained in *vaticinia ex eventu* cannot be of their own invention or knowingly incorrect, for they obviously would defeat their own purpose if they attempted to validate their prophecies by invented or consciously false data about the past.[38]

One example of new information occurred in the Oracle of Baalbek. Here the sibyl spoke of Constantine the Great rebuilding the city of Byzantium and predicted that the name of this city would be altered to Eudocopolis-Constantinopolis. To the best of my knowledge this double name for the new capital is unattested elsewhere, and as it stands this information cannot be correct. Eudocopolis was obviously a dynastic name and must have referred to Theodosius II's Empress Eudocia (who died in 460). It is impossible that Constantine the Great should have named his new city after a fifth-century empress. Yet it is quite plausible that a part of the city enclosed behind the new land and sea walls erected during the reign of Theodosius II should have been named after the Empress. These grandiose walls, which to the present day demonstrate the past might of the new capital on the Bosporus, protected a territory much larger than had the Constantinian walls of the preceding century.[39] The sea walls were built by a

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[37] *Otkrovenie,* ed. Istrin, *Teksty,* 23, 7 (Cross as talisman of Empire); see also *ibid.,* 15, 13; 27, 9 (Muslim successes not due to God's favor for Muslims but to Christian lawlessness); *ibid.,* 37–39 (Arab overconfidence and blasphemy).

[38] This does not imply, of course, that historical information contained in *vaticinia ex eventu* is always objectively correct. It merely indicates that such information has the same claim to serious consideration by the historian as do facts reported in the conventional sources such as histories, chronicles, letters, and so forth. Like data contained in other sources, it may turn out to be mistaken, biased, or confused.

[39] Raymond Janin, *Constantinople Byzantine* (2d ed., Paris, 1964), 32.

favorite of the Empress Eudocia, the city prefect (later also praetorian prefect of the East) Cyrus.[40] In fact, the Empress Eudocia played an important role in the history of later Roman urbanism. No less than three cities
in Asia Minor were named Eudocias after her, and upon her retirement to
Jerusalem in 443 she built a new southern wall for the sacred city.[41] It was a
custom in antiquity to give a new quarter of a city a dynastic name. Thus
it is indeed probable that the Oracle of Baalbek preserved a faint memory of
the Empress Eudocia's concern for the enlargement, protection, and beautification of the imperial capital.

The greatest amount of novel historical information, however, was contained in the Visions of Daniel and especially in the Old Church Slavonic
text. As I have already pointed out, this document gave, among other
things, an account of a Muslim invasion of Sicily; in fact, it referred to the
first years of the Muslim attack on the island, the period from 827 to 829.[42]
It is no exaggeration to say that this event can claim its place in world
history, for it resulted eventually not only in the Arab conquest of the entire
island but also in the Muslim occupation of considerable parts of southern
Italy and in the confrontation of Western and Arab civilizations in these
areas. It will therefore be worthwhile to recapitulate the present state of
knowledge concerning this event and then to discuss the contribution made
by the Old Church Slavonic Vision of Daniel.

Our knowledge of the invasion has come from two Arab historians,
Ibn-al-Athir (who died in 1233) and Nuwairi (who died in 1332); from
one Byzantine historical source of the tenth century, the so-called Continuator of Theophanes; and from two Latin chronicles written in Naples and
Salerno during the ninth and tenth centuries, respectively.[43] The principal
modern authorities are the great Sicilian historian Michele Amari, the late
Alexander A. Vasiliev, and J. B. Bury, none of whom used the Old Church

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[40] J. B. Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire* (reprint, 2 vols., New York, 1958), I,
72; Ernest Stein, *Histoire du Bas-Empire* (2 vols., Paris, 1949–59), I, 294.

[41] On cities in Asia Minor named after Eudocia, see A. H. M. Jones, *The Cities of the
Roman Provinces* (Oxford, Eng., 1937), 69, 109, 137, 144; on the southern wall at Jerusalem,
see Hughes Vincent and Félix Abel, *Jérusalem* (2 vols., Paris, 1914–26), II, 910–11.

[42] The principal reason for this statement is that the text mentioned a "rebel" facilitating
the Arab seizure of the town of Mariana (see note 22, above). The "rebel" cannot be anyone
but Euphemius who was assassinated during the Arab siege of Enna in 828–829. (Michele
Amari, *Storia dei Musulmani di Sicilia* [2d ed., 3 vols., Catania, 1933–39], I, 411–12; J. B.
Bury, *History of the Eastern Roman Empire* [London, 1912], 302; Alexander A. Vasiliev,
Byzance et les Arabes [2 vols., Brussels, 1935–50], I, 83–84.)

[43] Italian translation of the principal Arabic sources by Michele Amari, *Bibliotheca Arabo-
Sicula* (2 vols. and Appendix, Turin, 1880–89), I, 364–68; II, 113–17 (French tr. by Vasiliev,
Byzance et les Arabes, I, 356–59, 379–81); Theophanes Continuatus in *Corpus Scriptorum
Historiae Byzantinae* (49 vols., Bonn, 1828–78), 81–82; *Chronicon Salernitanum*, ed. Ulla
Westerbergh, "Studia Latina Stockholmiensia," No. 3 (Stockholm, 1956), 59; an earlier edition of the same text was that published in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores*, ed.
G. H. Pertz (32 vols., Hanover, 1826–1934), III, 498; Johannes Diaconus Neapolitanus, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores Rerum Langobardicarum* (Hanover, 1878), 429.

Slavonic Vision of Daniel.[44] They agreed that the Arab invasion of Sicily was the consequence of a Sicilian revolt against the Byzantine Emperor Michael II, but they differed about the chronology of this event. Amari was of the opinion that the Sicilian revolt began as early as 821 when Michael II was threatened by an even more dangerous rebellion in Asia Minor, that of Thomas the Slav. Around five years later, or about 826 according to Amari, the Emperor appointed a new governor of Sicily called either Constantine or Photinus who in turn entrusted a naval command to Euphemius. Amari thus postulated two stages in the Sicilian revolt, interrupted by an interval during which the island recognized the government of Michael II: one period beginning in 821 in which Euphemius played no role, and another starting in 826 in which he was the key figure. Later tradition telescoped these two stages into one.

Vasiliev rejected this view of Amari's as "fantastic," Bury held that Amari's proofs were insufficient, and both accordingly dated the beginning of the Sicilian revolt in 826–827. In that year, Euphemius, one of the Byzantine turmarchs or commanders stationed in Sicilian waters, was in danger of being arrested by the governor of the island on personal orders from the Emperor. He decided to revolt. The reason for the imperial order was not given in the Arabic sources, but the Greek and Latin historians told a romantic tale according to which Euphemius had married a nun, against her will and in violation of canonical and secular legislation. Neither Amari nor Vasiliev was satisfied that this story provided an adequate explanation for Euphemius' revolt and suspected that political considerations were the true reason for it.[45] Neither scholar nor anyone else, however, could specify what these political considerations might have been.

At any rate, Euphemius and some of his colleagues of the imperial navy seized Syracuse by a *coup de main* and defeated the governor in battle. The latter fled to Catania, but was captured and executed, and Euphemius was proclaimed emperor. In this capacity he rewarded some of his followers with administrative appointments. In particular he named a new governor of

[44] Amari, *Storia*, I, esp. 367–417; Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, I, 61–88; Bury, *History of the Eastern Roman Empire*, 294–308, 478–80; see also Adolf Holm, *Geschichte Siziliens* (3 vols., Leipzig, 1870–98), III, 327–33; Agostino Rossi, "Delle Cause della Sollevazione di Eufemio contro la Dominazione Bizantina in Sicilia," *Rendiconti della Reale Accademia dei Lincei, Classe di Scienze Morali Storiche Filologiche*, Ser. V, XIII (1904), 198–233; L. M. Hartmann, *Geschichte Italiens im Mittelalter* (4 vols., Gotha, 1897–1915), III, Pt. 1, 161–93; Biagio Pace, *Arte e Civiltà della Sicilia Antica* (4 vols., Rome, 1935–49), IV, 126–34. The work of Amari remains fundamental.

[45] See Amari, *Storia*, I, 378; Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, I, 71: "Il va de soi qu'il ne faut pas chercher la cause du soulèvement d'Euphémios dans son mariage romanesque. La politique, on s'en doute, primait ici . . ."; Bury, *Eastern Roman Empire*, 479, is aware that Amari and Vasiliev "think it likely that in his action in regard to Euphemius Michael was influenced by political reasons and used the matrimonial delinquency as a pretext," but does not press the matter further.

Sicily to whom the Arabic sources refer as Balata. Balata, however, played false and declared against Euphemius as the Arabic sources say, or for the Emperor Michael as the modern authors put it.[46] He assembled a large army, defeated Euphemius in battle, and forced him to leave Syracuse. Euphemius and a part of the navy then crossed the Sicilian Channel, which separates Sicily from North Africa, and asked the Aghlabid ruler of Kairouan to come to his aid. In consequence an Arab fleet landed in Mazara, at the western extremity of Sicily, on June 17, 827, and marched upon Syracuse. At Syracuse the Arabs failed after a long siege, mainly because of a famine and plague that harassed them. Their land army withdrew. One part of it, accompanied by Euphemius and his partisans, marched upon Enna and began the siege of that fortress. In the course of this siege, in 828–829, Euphemius was killed, according to the Arab chronicler, but one Greek source placed his assassination slightly earlier while the siege of Syracuse was still in progress. On this occasion the Arabs did not succeed in capturing Enna; in fact, the city successfully resisted a great number of Arab assaults until it was finally taken in 859. The last stages in the Arab conquest of Sicily were the fall of Syracuse in 878 and that of Taormina in 902.

Such in brief is the story of the Arab conquest of Sicily as it emerges from the narrative sources. The new data supplied by the Old Church Slavonic Vision of Daniel must now be fitted into this framework. It told the Sicilian story, in the form of a prophecy, in six acts, which may be summarized as follows:

Act I: The Byzantine Emperor sent messengers to the western provinces. They arrived at Syracuse, and the Emperor was insulted.

Act II: A rebellion occurred at Syracuse, and the rebels were killed.

Act III: Disorders erupted at Syracuse; two rebels arose and fought at Achradina.

Act IV: From Syracuse came a pregnant woman; her brother died, and she gave birth to a child and grieved.

Act V: The Arabs landed at the extremity of Sicily, ravaged the island, arrived at Mariana, and the rebel established them in that city.

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[46] Ibn-al-Athir (Amari, *Biblioteca,* I, 365): "il quale (Balatah) spiccossi da Eufemio e rivoltossi contro di lui"; Nuwairi (*ibid.,* II, 114): "Costui (Balatah) si spiccò [poscia] da Eufemio e [apertamente] gli si ribellò. . . ." Amari's remark (*Storia,* I, 380) to the effect that Balata and his cousin declared for Michael II is nothing but an inference, as are Vasiliev's (*Byzance et les Arabes,* I, 69) and Bury's (*Eastern Roman Empire,* 297) statements that Balata espoused the cause of Michael.

Act VI: From Mariana the Arabs marched upon Enna, but reinforce-
ments were sent, and they did not take the city.[47]

The author was here trying to tell the story of the first Arab invasion
of Sicily in 827-828. Not all the elements of his story can be identified,[48] but
many of them can be explained without too much difficulty. In Act III the
battle between the two rebels at Achradina, the famous suburb of Syracuse
known to all readers of Thucydides, must be that between Euphemius and
his disloyal governor Balata. In fact, the Slavonic text, in speaking of "two
rebels," corrected the modern historians on a detail of some importance: the
second of the Sicilian rebels, Balata, did not fight Euphemius because he
adhered to the Emperor Michael as the modern historians hold, but because
he, like Euphemius, repudiated Michael's authority and wished to gain con-
trol of Sicily for himself.[49] The Arab landing on the extremity of Sicily in
Act V is that of June 17, 827, when the forces of the Aghlabid ruler of
Kairouan disembarked at Mazara at the westernmost tip of the island. The
rebel who helped the Arabs to capture the Sicilian city of Mariana can be
none other than Euphemius.

Thus most, though not all, of the events narrated by the apocalyptic
writer under Acts III–VI can be accounted for, and in this portion of his

[47] In the following translation from the Old Church Slavonic Vision of Daniel I have
added numerals to mark the six "acts" mentioned in the text above: "[I] And he (the Em-
peror) will send envoys [or, to the forces and] to the western lands which in a similar
fashion [?] are faithful to themselves [?, to him ?]. And when they [the envoys] will have
reached the western lands, the [inhabitants] of the so-called Rebel City (τύραννος πόλις),
having rebelled, will sally forth and begin to insult him. [II] And afterward men who are
in that place will arise, and they will kill them with the sword. [III] And they will arise
against each other and will fight each other. And there will arise two rebels (τύραννοι), the
first from the east of that city and the other from the west. And they will encounter each
other in a place called Akrodunii [or, Krodunii] and will slay each other, so that the sea
will be mixed with their blood. [IV] And a woman who is with child will come from the
territory of that city where there stood in those days a sign [?]. And she will see her brother
lying dead [or, after having become a mother] and will beat her breast, and she will give
birth to her child and grief will overcome [or, her son will embrace] her for a long time.
[V] And the Ismaelites will go forth into the extremity of the island and will take many
prisoners until they will come to a place called Mariianii, and the rebel will install them in
that place. [VI] And they will come to a place called Ienna, and they will come to her aid,
and they will not capture her." Throughout this passage I have translated the verb *mąchiti*
and the noun *mąchitel* by "to rebel" and "the rebel," respectively. These words, which often
mean "to torture" and "torturer," are also used to render the Greek words *tyrannein* and
tyrannos, which in Byzantine Greek normally mean "to rebel" and "the rebel." The term
Rebel City (*tyrannos polis* or *polis tyrannou*) is also used in the Greek Visions of Daniel
(Vassiliev, *Anecdota Graeca-Byzantina,* 36, 15, 19; 39, 15, 19). Inasmuch as the Old Church
Slavonic text later mentions an "island" as well as a number of Sicilian place names (Achradina,
Enna), the Rebel City must be Syracuse.

[48] Thus I am at a loss to explain the remarks in Act IV on the pregnant woman from
Syracuse, her brother, and her child. Naturally, one thinks of the nun whom Euphemius
married, and the accounts about her mention that she and her brother had a child. Yet it is
doubtful that the author is here alluding to her, for none of the other sources mention her
brother's death. The identification with Euphemius' wife, moreover, does not explain the
author's remark about the "sign" in the city of Syracuse.

[49] See note 46, above.

"prophecy" the writer confirmed the data already known from the Arab, Greek, and Latin sources.[50] But what of Acts I and II? Here the apocalyptist wrote of the Emperor sending messengers to the western provinces, of their arrival at Syracuse, of the Emperor being insulted by the Syracusans, of the outbreak of a rebellion at Syracuse, and of the rebels being put to death. The question is unavoidable: why did he record all these Syracusan events before launching into the story of Euphemius and of the Arab invasion of Sicily? He wrote rather clumsily, but there can be no doubt that he was trying to give a continuous account of the Arab invasion of Sicily and to reproduce the causal connection between events. As pointed out above, modern scholars have been dissatisfied with the only reason adduced in the narrative sources for Euphemius' rebellion—his marriage to a nun—and both Amari and Vasiliev suspected a political motivation. The Old Church Slavonic Apocalypse, in its awkward way, seems to point to the events reported in Acts I and II as being the true cause of Euphemius' revolt. According to it, the Emperor Michael II sent emissaries to Syracuse, as well as to the other parts of his western dominions, he was insulted at Syracuse, and an unsuccessful local revolt followed. The Slavonic apocalypse did not specify, unfortunately, the content of the message sent by the Emperor to the people of Syracuse, but since it led to a revolution against the imperial authority, the Emperor must have made certain demands. Perhaps he asked for recruits for his armies, for military supplies, for new taxes, or for any combination of these items.[51] At any rate it is legitimate to infer from the Slavonic document that the principal cause of the abortive Syracusan revolt, of the later rebellion of Euphemius, and of the Arab invasion of the island were not the trite marital troubles of Euphemius but a demand by the Emperor addressed to the citizens of Syracuse that the latter deemed unacceptable.

This is a significant contribution made by the Slavonic text, but its interest does not end here. Two further features are noteworthy. In the first place messengers were dispatched not only to Syracuse but to all of the Emperor's western dominions. These included certainly the rest of Sicily

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[50] Three new details were added to the story of the Arab invasion of 827–828. The Slavonic text localizes the battle between Euphemius and Balata at Achradina. The Arabs captured the Sicilian town of Mariana (location unknown, see note 23, above) with the help of Euphemius and besieged Enna unsuccessfully.

[51] One other possibility comes to mind. It is known from a letter of Theodore of Studios (Bk. I, No. 190, in Migne, *Patrologiae Cursus Completus. Series Graeco-Latina* [166 vols., Paris, 1857–66], 99, 1577 D–1581 A) that there was considerable iconoclastic agitation in Sicily, and this letter is probably to be dated in the reign of Michael II. It is, however, highly unlikely that Michael, who in the eastern provinces where iconoclasm was still strong followed a conciliatory policy toward the iconophiles (Bury, *Eastern Roman Empire*, 110–13), should have officially promoted iconoclastic policies in Sicily where iconoclasm had never flourished before. The iconoclastic agitation of which Theodore complains is likely to have been undertaken on the private initiative of Byzantine officials, rather than as a result of an official communication from the Emperor.

and the Byzantine portions of southern Italy. Presumably the messengers transmitted demands similar to those sent to Syracuse. No such demands were, on the other hand, recorded for the core lands of the Empire, notably for Asia Minor. One suspects that the reason for this omission was that these core lands were undergoing a crisis of some sort and that the messengers had been sent to the western provinces to solicit aid for the eastern regions. Secondly, according to both Vasiliev and Bury, as stated above, Euphemius' revolt broke out in 826 and was followed in the next year by the Arab invasion. Amari, on the other hand, had conjectured that the Sicilian revolt began in 821, five years earlier, and his chronology now receives support from the Old Church Slavonic Vision of Daniel. He had based his opinion on several arguments. In the first place, the earlier date seemed more plausible on grounds of general probability, for by 821 the upstart Emperor Michael II, who owed his throne to the murder of his predecessor, was faced with a dangerous revolt in Asia Minor, that of Thomas the Slav, but Thomas' revolt was suppressed by 823.[52] Furthermore, the Latin chronicle of the bishops of Naples by John the Deacon written in the first half of the ninth century mentioned the revolt of "the Syracusans belonging to the party of a certain Euthimius [Euphemius]" immediately following Michael's accession in 820, and the Byzantine chronicle of Symeon Magister of the tenth century stated in so many words that the Arab conquest of Sicily began "when Michael was busy with the rebel Thomas."[53] Now, according to the Old Church Slavonic Vision of Daniel, the two rebels, that is, Euphemius and Balata, "arose" in Act III only. Their rebellion, however, was preceded in Acts I and II by an earlier revolt at Syracuse at the end of which the rebels were executed. According to this new Slavonic source, therefore, the Sicilian rebellion began before Euphemius assumed its leadership. John the Deacon and Symeon Magister were therefore correct in stating that the Sicilian revolt began soon after the accession of Michael II in 820, say in 821, and Amari's brilliant conjecture of two stages in the development of this revolt is thus confirmed by evidence unavailable to him.

Indeed, the demands made, according to the Old Church Slavonic Vision of Daniel, by the government of Michael through the messengers upon the citizens of Syracuse and upon the inhabitants of the other western provinces, rather than upon his subjects in Asia Minor, are more plausible while

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[52] On the revolt of Thomas the Slav, see Bury, *Eastern Roman Empire*, 84–110, 462–64; Franjo Barišić, "Deux versions sur Thomas chef de l'insurrection de 821–823," *Zbornik Radova Vizantoloshkog Instituta*, VI (1960), 145–69; Paul Lemerle, "Thomas le Slave," *Travaux et Mémoires*, I (1965), 254–97.

[53] John the Deacon, *Gesta Episcoporum Neapolitanorum, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores Rerum Langobardicarum* (Hanover, 1878), 429–30; Symeon Magister, 621–22, in Theophanes Continuatus, Bonn ed.

Michael was still fighting for his throne against Thomas the Slav. Thomas had rallied around him the partisans of religious images who had been persecuted by Leo V and parts of the population of Asia Minor which was heavily burdened with taxes. Thus the movement headed by Thomas had both a religious and a social character. In addition Thomas had at the beginning of his revolt succeeded in obtaining control of the tax revenue of Asia Minor.[54] It is entirely credible that in this grave crisis the Emperor Michael, who had himself reached the throne by usurpation and by the murder of his predecessor, should have asked the western parts of his realm, among them the city of Syracuse, to make extraordinary contributions of a military or fiscal kind for the suppression of Thomas' revolt.

If one accepts, then, the chronology for the Sicilian revolt first suggested by Amari and now supported by the Old Church Slavonic Vision of Daniel, one recognizes that there existed an essential connection between Thomas' revolt in Asia Minor and the Syracusan rebellion. In order to overcome the usurper Thomas who threatened the core lands of the Empire in Asia Minor and had seized most of their fiscal revenue, the upstart Emperor Michael II was forced to demand special contributions from the hitherto loyal provinces in the west. In a similar way, about a century earlier, the Byzantine Emperor Leo III, shortly after the Arab siege of his capital (717–718) and during the period of Muslim occupation of large parts of Asia Minor, had been driven to increase taxes and to insist on a more rigorous collection, with the ultimate result that Byzantium lost control of most of the Italian mainland.[55] Michael's action, about a hundred years later, led to the emergence of two sets of Sicilian rebels. The names of the earlier rebels are, unfortunately, unknown. The later leaders of the rebellion in its second stage were Euphemius and Balata.

Thus at the beginning of Michael's reign rebellion was ubiquitous. Michael had rebelled against his imperial master Leo V and had become emperor by murdering him. Thomas the Slav, whose friendship and association with the murdered Leo were long standing, had rallied behind him Asiatic circles loyal to the memory of Michael's victim. The first anonymous set of Sicilian rebels must have felt that the duel for power between Michael and Thomas in Asia Minor offered especially favorable circumstances for the

[54] Genesius, Bonn ed., 32; Theophanes Continuatus, Bonn ed., Bk. II, Chap. xi, 53.

[55] Pope Gregory II refused to pay the increased taxes on the properties of the Roman Church. His refusal in turn led later in the eighth century to the famous series of events culminating in the Frankish conquest of Italy and the foundation of the Papal State. (See the stimulating article by François Masai, "La politique des Isauriens et la naissance de l'Europe," *Byzantion,* XXXIII [No. 1, 1963], 191–221, esp. 191–99.) Both in the eighth and ninth centuries, then, the Byzantine government, in order to save the Asiatic core lands of the Empire, made exorbitant demands on the western provinces, with the result that it lost control of the Italian mainland in the eighth and of Sicily in the ninth century.

secession of Sicily. Thus in the years 821–823, if my reconstruction of the events based on the Old Church Slavonic Vision of Daniel is correct, at least two sets of rebels—Thomas the Slav and his associates on the one hand, the unnamed Sicilian rebels on the other—were competing with Michael II for power, and it was anything but a foregone conclusion who would ultimately be victorious. In the end Michael preserved his throne but at the price of losing Sicily to the Muslims whose aid had been invoked by one of the later Sicilian usurpers, Euphemius.

In attempting to summarize what has been learned about the historical value of medieval apocalypses it may be prudent to begin with the shortcomings peculiar to this type of source. In the first place, the dating of an apocalypse is not always an easy task because even specific factual details mentioned in an apocalypse may not be *vaticinia ex eventu* but genuine prophecies. Furthermore, numerals indicating time spans, which might otherwise offer clues for dating the document, are frequently altered by later editors. Secondly, it is often difficult to define the geographic region referred to in a particular apocalypse, not only because, as in all other medieval texts, outlandish place names have a tendency to be miscopied inadvertently but because a copyist of apocalypses is apt to change them deliberately, on the assumption that an earlier prophecy found its fulfillment in events occurring in his own neighborhood long after the original text was composed. A third possible pitfall in the historical interpretation of medieval apocalypses concerns the purpose for which a particular text is written. Detailed prophecies closely tied to this purpose, as, for example, of ultimate victories over the national enemy, may represent wishful thinking rather than historical fact. Finally, apocalypses are living texts and are subject to editorial tampering of all sorts in order to bring ancient prophecies in harmony with later events. To these four types of difficulties should be added the deliberate obscurity of apocalyptic documents, yet because the apocalyptist must strive to have his allusions understood by his contemporaries, it is rare indeed that the modern historian is unable to crack the apocalyptic code.

Once the obstacles to a historical interpretation and exploitation of apocalypses are removed, these texts may yield a rich crop of information of all kinds. Almost without exception they corroborate evidence already known from other, especially narrative, sources. Their authors express in concrete language the reactions of contemporaries to historical events, their usually primitive philosophies of history, their despair over the military situation or over the economic plight of the circles to which they belong or for which they write, and, above all, their expectations for a brighter future.

Sometimes apocalypses contain valuable new factual details, such as the name Eudocopolis for the part of the imperial capital enclosed within the new city walls during the first half of the fifth century. The accumulation of apocalypses at particular periods, for example around the year 500, permits inferences as to the intensity of eschatological expectations and thus provides a barometer of eschatological pressures at different moments in history. Finally, some apocalypses such as the Old Church Slavonic Vision of Daniel permit new inferences as to the causes and chronology of important developments in world history, in this case on the Muslim invasion of Sicily in the first half of the ninth century. Medieval apocalypses, then, are chronicles written in the future tense and deserve close attention on the part of historians of the Middle Ages.