



THE PUBLIC DEFENSE OF THE DOCTORAL DISSERTATION OF

ANDRÁS KRAFT

ON

**THE APOCALYPTIC HORIZON IN BYZANTIUM:
PHILOSOPHY, PROPHECY, AND POLITICS DURING THE ELEVENTH
THROUGH THIRTEENTH CENTURIES**

WILL BE HELD ON

TUESDAY, 18 DECEMBER 2018, AT 11:00

IN THE

**SENATE ROOM – MONUMENT BUILDING
CENTRAL EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY (CEU)**

BUDAPEST, NÁDOR U. 9.

EXAMINATION COMMITTEE

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EXTERNAL READERS	Paul Magdalino, Emeritus (University of St Andrews), present Christophe Erismann (University of Vienna), not present

The doctoral dissertation is available for inspection on the CEU e-learning site.

Should you wish to access it, please contact Csilla Dobos (dobos@ceu.edu)

SUMMARY OF THE DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

The dissertation scrutinizes the Byzantine apocalyptic horizon of expectations as it can be reconstructed from textual sources dating, first and foremost, to the eleventh through thirteenth centuries. The underlying research questions pertain to the theoretical legitimacy of this horizon, the literary and hermeneutical structure thereof, as well as its utility and impact on Byzantine history. The thesis consists of three parts: Part I establishes the validity of the horizon's existence, Part II analyzes the literary thought-world thereof, while Part III discusses instances when the apocalyptic horizon came to inform and shape the historical present.

Part I investigates the middle Byzantine reception history of the philosophical debate over an eternal world. Following some preliminary remarks, chapter 1 sketches the major developments of the eternity debate in late antiquity and draws attention to its revival in the eleventh-century, when Michael Psellos and Symeōn Sēth dedicated short discussions to it in their compendia. Psellos' treatment was limited to a very brief presentation of the Christian, Aristotelian, and Platonic view on the creation of the world. He endorses the Christian view without much argument. In contrast, Sēth succinctly refutes eternalism by drawing upon the infinity argument that he probably knew from the works of the sixth-century philosopher John Philoponos. The discussion was continued by John Italos, who was condemned in 1082 for a series of heterodox views including the thesis that the visible world was eternal. However, a treatise of Italos has been transmitted in which he refutes the idea of an eternal kosmos and argues for its createdness in the beginning of time. Chapter 2 provides a new critical edition of the Greek text of Italos' treatise (*Quaestio 71*), provided with an English translation and followed by a commentary that develops Italos' main arguments and identifies his main sources. I have argued that Italos sincerely defended an anti-eternalist standpoint by adopting Philoponian arguments. Moreover, Italos seems to react in *Quaestio 71* to

specific charges that had been attributed to him during his repeated synodal investigations in 1076/77 and 1082. His treatise against eternalism appears to be a comprehensive apology of his orthodoxy. Chapter 3 investigates the aftermath of Italos' synodal condemnation and establishes that the eternity debate ceased to be openly discussed for as long as the Komnēnian dynasty ruled; the debate was reopened only by Nikēphoros Blemmydēs in the middle of the thirteenth century. The abrupt discontinuation of the eternity debate after 1082 indicates that the *Synodikon* anathemas had legal ramifications that prohibited further debate. In conjunction with chapter 8, I suggest that this prohibition was enforced by the imperial administration because of the politically precarious implication that eternalism negates the apocalyptic horizon.

Part II reconstructs the Byzantine apocalyptic horizon of expectations based on a holistic reading of Medieval Greek apocalypica. Chapters 4 through 7 assess how the literary techniques of end-time narratives shape the conception of apocalyptic time. Apocalyptic narratives are mostly concerned with the period that precedes the Last Judgment. Furthermore, they enumerate future events in clear linear succession. The patterned flow of the anticipated history of the future is conditioned by fluctuating narrative speeds that evoke reader responses that range from disorientation and bewilderment to fascination and insubordination. The notion of apocalyptic time is further conditioned by the expectation of the shortening of days, a biblical motif that supposes time to undergo ultimate distortion, with its sequenced regularity being unraveled. More importantly, the chronological sequence of apocalyptic events is transcended by a typological superstructure. Byzantine apocalypses organize the history of the future along typological patterns, which continue the historical interconnections between Old and New Testament characters and events. The typology of the future introduces non-linear interweavings that turn the two-dimensional arrow of time into a three-dimensional spiral. The reader/listener is transferred from his or her contemporary world to, e.g., the antediluvian age, or to the period of the Egyptian captivity, or to

the days of the Incarnation while, at the same time, picturing the events to come. He/she becomes a spiritual time traveler into the past and back into the future. Finally, it is argued that apocalypses portray greater interest in the contemporaneous environment than in the past; the historiographical epicenter of Byzantine apocalypses lies in the present. Their various revisions and translations testify to their repeated reuse and widespread popularity, which was not a function of the narratives being historically accurate but of the typological patterns being persistently pertinent in bestowing meaning to the ever-escalating present. As a result, Medieval Greek apocalypses reflect a *longue durée*—social as well as political—horizon of expectations which was rooted in a historical understanding that revolves around the typologically modeled present.

Part III demonstrates that the apocalyptic horizon served as a prototypical reference system with normative value. Chapter 8 focuses on Alexios I Komnēnos' appreciation of apocalyptic expectations. Historiographical testimonies of messianic aspirations assigned to Alexios and to his contemporary counterparts abroad form one type of evidence. The lack of anti-imperial prophecies forms another. The remarkable *hiatus* of apocalyptic narratives from Alexios' reign and for much (if not all) of the Komnēnian period suggests effective imperial censorship. The show trial instigated against Italos and the condemnation of eschatological heterodoxies as pronounced in the *Synodikon* anathemas further testify to an agenda that vindicates the imperial monopoly on the apocalyptic horizon. Chapter 9 argues that the public execution of the dethroned emperor Alexios V Doukas Mourtzouphlos should be seen in an apocalyptic context. Mourtzouphlos' death at the hands of the Latin conquerors of Constantinople reflects a competition for the prerogative of interpretation as to how to explain the capture of the Queen of Cities in 1204. Although no prophecy has come down to us that predicts Mourtzouphlos' innovative execution, its apocalyptic significance can be fathomed from indirect sources. It is argued that the death sentence was intended to nullify a preexisting Greek prophetic tradition and to replace it with a pro-Latin

oracular context. Subsequent Byzantine apocalypses advanced counter-narratives that, in turn, contested the Latin ‘fabrication.’ The final chapter continues to investigate Medieval Greek prophetic writings from the thirteenth century. It reconstructs the Byzantine apocalyptic response to the fall of Constantinople in 1204. It is argued that apocalypticists as well as historians advanced a typologically structured historiography that necessitated the recapture of Constantinople. Based on Old Testament precedents, in particular with regard to the *Book of Isaiah*, thirteenth-century apocalyptic thought defined an irredentist horizon of expectations. These case studies show that prophecies played a not insignificant role in the ideological struggle and the decision-making process in the Eastern Roman Empire of the late Middle Byzantine period.

The thesis closes with an Appendix that surveys fifty Byzantine apocalyptic texts with regard to the manuscript tradition, modern editorial work, and dating attempts thereof. I suggest a relative chronology of the surveyed material through the order of presentation. Moreover, I establish that c. 70% of all manuscripts containing Medieval Greek apocalyptic sources originate from the post-Byzantine period.

The outcomes of this doctoral research can be briefly summed up as follows: Part I: a contribution to the understanding of Christian Platonism through a survey of the eternalist debate during the Middle Byzantine period and through a new critical edition of Italos’ *Quaestio* 71, which is supplemented with the first English translation and a comprehensive commentary. Part II: a literary analysis of Byzantine apocalypses that establishes the standardized narrative structure, draws attention to the employment of alternating narrative speeds, and reconstructs the pervasive use of exegetical typology. Part III: three case studies that show how the apocalyptic horizon shaped political strategies. Appendix: an extensive survey of Byzantine apocalyptic sources that identifies new textual witnesses of published Byzantine prophecies, a relative chronology of the surveyed material, and a statistical estimation of the manuscript distribution across centuries.

CURRICULUM VITÆ

EMPLOYMENT

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EDUCATION

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FELLOWSHIPS AND AWARDS

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THESIS-RELATED PUBLICATIONS

- 2019 “Prophecies as a resource of decision-making: The case of Alexios V Doukas Mourtzouphlos’ execution at the Column of Theodosios.” In *Supporting Sovereign Decision-Making: Experts and their Knowledge in a Transcultural and Comparative Perspective*, ed. Michael Grünbart. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht (forthcoming)
- 2018 “Typological Hermeneutics and Apocalyptic Time: A Case Study of the Medieval Greek Last Vision of the Prophet Daniel.” In *Όψεις του Βυζαντινού Χρόνου. Πρακτικά Διεθνούς Συνεδρίου, Αθήνα, 29–30 Μαΐου 2015*, ed. Elenē G. Saradē, Aikaterinē Dellaporta, and Theōnē Kollyropoulou, 180–194. Kalamata: Πανεπιστήμιο Πελοποννήσου/Χριστιανικό και Βυζαντινό Μουσείο.
- 2018 “An inventory of Medieval Greek apocalyptic sources (c. 500–1500 AD): Naming and dating, editions and manuscripts.” *Millennium* 15: 69–143.

- 2018 (with István Perczel) “John Italos on the Eternity of the World.” *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 111/3: 659–720.
- 2018 “Miracles and Pseudo-Miracles in Byzantine Apocalypses.” In *Recognizing Miracles in Antiquity and Beyond*, ed. Maria Gerolemou, 111–130. Trends in Classics, Supplementary Volumes 53. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- 2017 “Living on the Edge of Time: Temporal Patterns and Irregularities in Byzantine Historical Apocalypses.” In *The Fascination with Unknown Time*, ed. Sibylle Baumbach, Lena Henningsen, Klaus Oschema, 71–91. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

THESIS-RELATED BOOK REVIEWS

- 2018 Sergei Mariev (ed.). *Byzantine Perspectives on Neoplatonism* (Byzantinisches Archiv. Series Philosophica 1). Boston/Berlin: de Gruyter 2017. In *Plekos* 20: 41–51 (URL: <http://www.plekos.uni-muenchen.de/2018/r-mariev.pdf>)
- 2017 Wolfram Brandes, Felicitas Schmieder, Rebekka Voß (ed.). *Peoples of the Apocalypse. Eschatological Beliefs and Political Scenarios* (Millennium-Studien 63). Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter 2016. In *Plekos* 19: 7–19 (URL: <http://www.plekos.uni-muenchen.de/2017/r-brandes-schmieder.pdf>)