

CHRISTOPHER J. BONURA, *A Prophecy of Empire: The Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius from Late Antique Mesopotamia to the Global Medieval Imagination*. Oakland: University of California Press 2025. 372 pp. – ISBN 978-0-520-41825-7

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This monograph offers the first biography of the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodios*, a preeminent medieval text justly celebrated as ‘the crown of Eastern Christian apocalyptic literature’.¹ The book is divided into three parts, mapping out the text’s origin, content, and reception: it traces the millennium-long journey of the originally Syriac composition, showing how it was translated, adapted, and disseminated across Western Eurasia and North Africa from the late seventh through the late seventeenth centuries. The result is a fine study that pairs an integrated exegesis of the original Syriac text with fresh insights and a diligent synthesis of the existing scholarship. Its main novelty lies in the argument that *Ps-Methodios* forged a new political theology rooted exclusively in Syriac sources. Although carefully constructed, the argument is ultimately unconvincing.

Contents

The first three chapters contextualize the origin of *Ps-Methodios*.² BONURA follows SEBASTIAN BROCK and GERRIT J. REININK in dating the work to approximately 692 AD. He identifies the author of *Ps-Methodios* as a Mesopotamian monk who likely composed the text near Mount Qardu in modern-day southeastern Turkey. By doing so, BONURA challenges the traditional view that the text was produced at Mount Sinjar, a location specified only in the (sixteenth-century) cod. Vat. syr. 58. Relying instead on internal evidence, he argues for Mount Qardu, a relocation that allows him to support FRANCISCO JAVIER MARTINEZ’s suggestion to assign an East Syrian (Nestorian) confessional identity to the author (pp. 59, 265).

1. BERNARD MCGINN, *Visions of the End: Apocalyptic Traditions in the Middle Ages* (Records of Civilization, Sources and Studies 96). New York 1979, p. 70.

2. I follow BONURA’s nomenclature, using the italicized *Ps-Methodios* for the text rather than the pseudonymous author. In the citations that follow, the text is abbreviated as PsM.

Next, BONURA argues that the pseudonymous author relied solely on Syriac sources. The central thesis of the book emerges in chapter three: countering the scholarly consensus, BONURA asserts that the Eastern Roman Empire did not develop a definitive pro-imperial eschatology prior to the translation and dissemination of *Ps-Methodios* in the eighth century. Instead, Byzantium remained under the spell of Hippolytos' anti-Roman exegesis of the biblical Book of Daniel. Hippolytos of Rome, who lived a century before Constantine's conversion, was hostile to Roman power and interpreted the fourth Danielic beast as a diabolic and tyrannical Roman Empire. Only the Syriac world, BONURA contends, produced a definitive appreciation of Rome as 'the idealized kingdom' with a providential eschatological mission. He identifies the fourth-century Syriac author Aphrahat as the inventor of 'pro-imperial apocalypticism' (p. 104), casting the author of *Ps-Methodios* as his intellectual heir. We will return to this claim below. Chapters four and five analyze the contents of *Ps-Methodios*, examining its historical and prophetic sections in turn. BONURA demonstrates how the text constructs a coherent political theology that identifies the Roman Empire as God's ultimate vicarious kingship. Tracing its genealogy back to Nimrod, the mythical king of Babylon, the text shows how the scepter of divinely sanctioned worldly rule passed from the Babylonians to the Medes, then to the Persians, and finally to the Greeks (Greek-speaking Christian Romans). *Ps-Methodios* bases his political theology on a pro-imperial reading Dn 2 & 7, wherein Greece/Rome constitutes the fourth Danielic kingdom. BONURA highlights a novel element in the Ps-Methodian exegesis (pp. 122–124): the separation of the four beasts from the sea (Dn 7:3) from the four winds (Dn 7:2). While traditional exegesis equated the four winds with the four beasts, *Ps-Methodios* reinterprets the winds as the four distinct components of the fourth kingdom. This strategic shift allows the pseudonymous apocalypticist to reconcile the standard reading of Dn 7 with Ps 68:31 ('Kush will hand over to God'), a core proof-text of the apocalypse. Consequently, the reader is presented with a three-plus-four scheme that moves in linear, matrimonial succession from Babylonians, Medes, and Persians to the Greeks, who are further subdivided into Kushites (Ethiopians or Nubians), Greeks, Macedonians, and Romans. This succession offers a coherent, even if 'fantastical' (p. 267), genealogy that leaves no room for either Jewish kings, Persian shahs, or Umayyad caliphs. Ultimately, the only legitimate worldly power belongs to the Roman Empire, which is destined to hold it until the Second Coming.

The prophetic section of the apocalypse culminates in a vivid abdication

scene where Roman power is surrendered to its divine source, which, as BONURA argues, draws directly on the vocabulary of Aphrahat's *Fifth Demonstration* (p. 141). Specifically, he holds that the Syriac *Alexander Legend* as well as *Ps-Methodios* adopt Aphrahat's phrasing (Fifth Demonstration V.24) asserting that, at the Second Coming, the Romans 'hand over the deposit' (*mašlāmīn parāteqe*), meaning their kingdom, to God.³ It is true that all three sources use the same root verb *šlm*, 'to hand over, to surrender'. However, BONURA trivializes the fact that Aphrahat's expression both derives from and departs from 1 Cor 15:24 (*mašlem malkūtā*, 'He [Christ] hands over the kingdom'). Whereas Paul uses the singular to describe Christ, Aphrahat employs the plural to signify the Romans; furthermore, Paul explicitly names the 'kingdom,' whereas Aphrahat refers obliquely to a 'deposit' (*parāteqe*). In contrast, *Ps-Methodios* follows the Pauline verse verbatim in both grammatical number and diction (PsM XIV.3: *mašlem malkūtā*, 'he [the Roman king] hands over the kingdom'), thereby casting the abdicating Last Emperor as the typological prefiguration of Christ.⁴ *Ps-Methodios*' wording follows Paul, not Aphrahat. Indeed, the prophetic part of *Ps-Methodios*' is prefaced (PsM X.1–3) by an exegesis of Paul (2 Thess 2:1–8 & 1 Cor 15:24), establishing Paul – alongside David the Psalmist – as a primary biblical authority. BONURA's contention that *Ps-Methodios* was influenced by Aphrahat mediated through the Syriac *Alexander Legend*, rather than directly by the New Testament, is unnecessarily convoluted. This over-engineered trajectory violates Ockham's razor and appears designed solely to support the tenuous claim that *Ps-Methodios* relied exclusively on Syriac traditions.

The final part of the book (chapter six through eight) surveys the reception history of *Ps-Methodios* across Byzantium, the non-Greek East, and the Latin West. Although admittedly not a comprehensive study (p. 156), this section is the highlight of the book, synthesizing and expanding upon the scholarship by PAUL ALEXANDER, HANNES MÖHRING, and JAMES PALMER.⁵ Chapter six shows that the Syriac reception was largely con-

3. Cf. JEAN PARISOT, *Aphraatis Sapientis Persae Demonstrationes I–XXII* (Patrologia Syriaca 1,1). Paris 1894, p. 233 (V.24): *mašlāmīn parāteqe*.

4. This point was first made by MICHAEL KMOSKO, *Das Rätsel des Pseudomethodius*. Byzantion 6 (1931) pp. 273–296, at p. 285, and has been, to my knowledge, unanimously accepted in subsequent scholarship.

5. PAUL ALEXANDER, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, ed. Dorothy Abrahamse. Berkeley 1985, pp. 52–60; HANNES MÖHRING, *Der Weltkaiser der Endzeit: Entstehung, Wandel und Wirkung einer tausendjährigen Weissagung* (Mittelalter-Forschungen 3). Stuttgart 2000, pp. 332–349; JAMES T. PALMER, *The Apocalypse in the Early Mid-*

fined to East Syrian authors and to the period prior to the consolidation of patriarchal power in the Syriac Church during the late eighth century. In contrast, the Greek reception was inexorable. BONURA traces the transmission from the early eighth-century Greek translation to its integration into late sixteenth-century prophetic anthologies. He argues that *Ps-Methodios* gained immediate traction in the Hellenophone world and became favored by iconoclast emperors, who instrumentalized its political theology to defend their claim to legislate on the religious matter of icon veneration (pp. 176–178, 188). In the wake of the iconoclastic controversy, BONURA contends, iconodules tempered their opponent’s embrace of *Ps-Methodios* with Hippolytos’ anti-imperial stance. The view that post-iconoclastic apocalyptic literature ‘blended’ (pp. 178, *passim*) the pro-Roman eschatology of *Ps-Methodios* with the anti-Roman eschatology of Hippolytos runs like a threat through the rest of the book. The Armenian, Latin, and Slavic traditions, in turn, exhibit the same post-iconoclast oscillation between pro- and anti-Roman eschatologies.⁶ This reconstruction raises serious doubts, which are addressed below.

Chapter seven surveys the Armenian, African, and Slavic reception of *Ps-Methodios*. BONURA proposes that the apocalypse was translated not only into Greek and Latin in the early eighth century, but also into Armenian. As he concedes, however, this is hard to prove philologically, so that he cautiously reserves judgment on the issue (p. 191). Firm traces of *Ps-Methodios* in the Armenian apocalyptic tradition only begin to surface in the Crusader period, appearing in Matthew of Edessa’s *Chronicle* and in prophecies such as the *Vision of St. Nersēs* and the *Sermon on the Antichrist*. Regarding the African reception, BONURA rejects IRFAN SHAHÎD’s thesis that the *Kebrā Nagast*, the Ethiopian national epic, influenced *Ps-Methodios* (pp. 205–206). By doing so, he upholds his overarching theory that *Ps-Methodios* possesses exclusively Syriac roots and exerted a unidirectional influence on neighboring cultures. Next, the Slavic reception receives due consideration. BONURA traces the repeated translations of *Ps-Methodios* and the widespread adoption of its pro-Roman imperial eschatology across the Slavic world. He tracks this ideology trajectory from the Bulgarian Tsar Simeon

dle Ages. Cambridge 2014, pp. 107–129.

6. *Ps-Methodios* is said to have been ‘blended’ (pp. 178, 188, 237) or ‘mingled’ (p. 193) with Hippolytos. Medieval authors ‘could pivot between’ (pp. 196, 214) or ‘flip between’ (p. 214) the two paradigms. Elsewhere, *Ps-Methodios* is called a ‘counterbalance’ to Hippolytos (pp. 189, 198, 219, 239), a means to ‘counterblast’ the Hippolytan eschatology (pp. 155, 175), and a ‘radical alternative’ (p. 172).

I's (d. 927) claim to the mantle of the Last Emperor, all the way to Filofei of Pskov's (d. 1542) famous concept of Moscow as the Third Rome, identifying in the latter a direct continuation of *Ps-Methodios*' 'positive' eschatology (p. 216).

The eighth and longest chapter explores the Latin reception. BONURA follows MICHAEL HERREN in holding that the Latin translation was produced not in Merovingian Francia, as often assumed, but in Italy, spreading widely through the network of Columbanian monastic foundations (p. 221).⁷ Furthermore, he follows PALMER in asserting that 'it took some time for Western readers to engage with Pseudo-Methodius's political eschatology' (p. 220). PALMER argued that rather than engaging with its political theology, early Latin readers treated the text as a moralizing apocalypse reserved for private study and refectory reading.⁸ Indeed, the first Latin writers to cite *Ps-Methodios* were interested in the Gog and Magog motif rather than its political eschatology.⁹ BONURA pushes this argument further, maintaining that even the Carolingian kings showed no interest in *Ps-Methodios*, given that the prophecy seemed to concern 'a faraway Constantinopolitan ruler' (p. 229). The text was only interpreted as a political prophecy starting in the tenth century, as evidenced by its profound imprint on Adso of Montier-en-Der's *On the Antichrist*. BONURA glosses over the reception during the Crusades, focusing instead on its influence during the investiture controversy, when competing German emperors drew upon the Ps-Methodian script (p. 234). The rise of the Spiritual Franciscans in the thirteenth century marked a new chapter in this history. Alienated from the papacy, the Fraticelli espoused a vision of a Ps-Methodian Last Emperor who would forcefully reform the Church (p. 241). This notion that political kingship could catalyze decisive ecclesiastical reform was eventually abandoned during the Reformation (p. 245). Finally, BONURA shows how Habsburg (Catholic) monarchs seeking universal monarchy, specifically Maximilian I (d. 1519) and Charles V (d. 1558), actively leveraged the imperial eschatology advanced by *Ps-Methodios*.

7. MICHAEL W. HERREN, *The Revelations of Pseudo-Methodius in the Eighth Century*. In: GUY GULDENTOPS – CHRISTIAN LAES – GERT PARTOENS (eds.), *Felici curiositate: Studies in Latin Literature and Textual Criticism from Antiquity to the Twentieth Century in Honour of Rita Beyers* (Instrumenta Patristica et Mediaevalia 72). Turnhout 2017, pp. 409–418.

8. PALMER, *Apocalypse*, pp. 126–129.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 124–126. The *Cosmography* of Aethicus Ister and the *Commentary on Revelation* by Ambrosius Autpertus, both eighth-century works, are the first to include elements (pertaining to the Gog and Magog motif) from the Latin *Ps-Methodios*.

Discussion

BONURA offers a coherent survey of the Syriac origin, political theology, and dissemination of *Ps-Methodios*, synthesizing the vast scholarship surrounding this prominent early medieval apocalypse. The primary strength of the monograph lies in its integrated exegesis of the Syriac original and the *long-durée* survey of its millennium-long reception history. Yet, while the study is impressively broad, what it gains in scope it loses in argumentative depth. In particular, the volume suffers from two fundamental weaknesses. First, the reconstructed reception history is overdetermined, flattening historical complexities for the sake of conceptual simplicity. Second, the central thesis that *Ps-Methodios* transplanted pro-imperial eschatology (originating in Syriac exegesis) to Byzantium collapses when confronted with the full corpus of textual evidence. In the following, I address both points in turn.

1. The reconstruction of the Byzantine reception of *Ps-Methodios* would benefit from further nuance. BONURA argues that the text achieved immediate, unchallenged dissemination within the Roman *oikoumenē* following its eighth-century Greek translation and subsequent renderings into neighboring vernaculars. While *Ps-Methodios* is shown to have enjoyed a rapid but fleeting afterlife in the Syriac world, BONURA contends that it achieved immediate and continuous success in Byzantium. Concurrently, he argues that the Latin West hesitated to embrace its political theology until the tenth century. It is historically striking that a prophecy reputedly derived solely from Syriac sources would be adopted by the Byzantine world without reservation, but nowhere else. Furthermore, it is curious that BONURA follows PALMER's argument – that the Latin West read *Ps-Methodios* strictly as a moralizing apocalypse for more than two centuries – yet denies the possibility of a parallel reception in the East. Given that *Ps-Methodios* is shown to have originated in a foreign Syriac milieu, there is no self-evident reason why the Byzantine East would have received it any differently from the Latin West. After all, BONURA himself suggests that the Greek translation emerged from a Palestinian monastic context (either Mount Sinai or Mar Saba, pp. 168, 170), mirroring the very monastic networks responsible for its Latin transmission. Why Melkite monastic audiences in the East would have engaged with *Ps-Methodios* differently than Columbanian networks in the West remains a striking asymmetry that the book leaves unexplained. Furthermore, the monograph presents *Ps-Methodios* as a text of uncontested authority, an exceptional status for any non-canonical work. In re-

ality, various sources directly or indirectly challenge this presumption. To cite just one example, the historian Nikētas Chōniatēs (d. 1217) repeatedly ridicules those who took this apocryphal apocalypse seriously. First, he mocks Emperor Isaakios II's credulity regarding Patriarch Dositheos' predictions that the Crusaders would storm Constantinople through the Xylokerkos Gate, which the emperor subsequently walled up. The tradition that ascribes the breach of the Theodosian Walls to the Xylokerkos Gate originates precisely in the (first and second) Greek redaction of *Ps-Methodios*.¹⁰ Later on, Chōniatēs refers to the very same prophetic section to argue tacitly that (Ps-)Methodios' exegesis of the Dt 32:30 is gravely mistaken. Rather than foretelling the Constantinopolitans' miraculous triumph over their assailants, the historian notes that the biblical verse was fulfilled by the victory of the invaders.¹¹ His message is clear: apocryphal apocalypses like *Ps-Methodios* are dangerously spurious and untrustworthy. Instead, Chōniatēs urges reliance on canonical prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah.

The reception history of *Ps-Methodios* remains a complex terrain, where much work remains to be done. BONURA's survey offers a linear, teleological reading that treats the text akin to a 'great man' in a traditional biography. Consequently, this biography risks elevating *Ps-Methodios* to mythic status. It exaggerates the text's historical influence, treating it as an unparalleled Syriac work of global significance. Can it be that instead of an immediate and meteoric rise, like a 'great man' judged in hindsight, the *Apocalypse of Ps-Methodios* was received differently in different times and places? Indeed, if *Ps-Methodios* was an immediate sensation in Byzantium, how can one explain its meagre manuscript tradition (only three copies predate the fifteenth century, as properly noted on p. 179) and the scant references prior to the thirteenth century (and none whatsoever prior to the ninth century)?¹² Why does Photios, in the middle of the ninth century, fail to mention it in his four entries on the church father's writings (codices 234–237)?¹³ Why does the tenth-century Synaxarion omit any ref-

10. JAN L. VAN DIETEN (ed.), *Nicetae Choniatae Historia* (CFHB 11/1). Berlin – New York 1975, p. 404, alluding to PsM XIII.9. See further PAUL MAGDALINO, *Prophecy and Divination in the History*. In: ALICIA SIMPSON – STEPHANOS EFTHYMIADIS (eds.), *Niketas Choniates: A Historian and a Writer*. Geneva 2009, pp. 59–74, at pp. 66–69.

11. VAN DIETEN (ed.), *Choniatae Historia*, pp. 569.7–570.26, alluding to PsM XIII.10.

12. For the Greek manuscript transmission, see ANDRÁS KRAFT, *An Inventory of Medieval Greek Apocalyptic Sources (c. 500–1500 AD): Naming and Dating, Editions and Manuscripts*. *Millennium-Jahrbuch* 15 (2018) pp. 69–143, at pp. 81–84.

13. RENÉ HENRY (ed.), *Photius: Bibliothèque, Tome V: «Codices» 230–241* (Collec-

erence to the prophecy in the entry of Methodios (June 20).¹⁴ Most importantly, BONURA overlooks Brandes' argument that defamatory writings, including historical prophecies, faced imperial censorship.¹⁵ This omission leaves unexplored whether imperial censorship could have impeded the reception of *Ps-Methodios* in medieval Byzantium.

BONURA assigns great significance to the iconoclast period (c. 726–842). He contends that iconoclast emperors availed themselves of *Ps-Methodios* because of its overtly positive appreciation of the Roman emperor and his eschatological role in preparing for the Second Coming (pp. 176–178, 188). The victory of the iconodule faction, BONURA continues, led to a rebalancing of the *Ps-Methodian* pro-Roman eschatology with the Hippolytan anti-Roman eschatology. Both assertions remain unsubstantiated and appear untenable in light of the textual evidence. Granted, the sources stemming from the period of the iconoclast controversy are notoriously difficult, yet such a linear reading of an apocryphal apocalypse amidst the turmoil of the century-long debate seems overly simplistic. A systematic study of the use (and abuse) of prophetic lore by iconoclasts and iconodules remains a desideratum. WARREN TREADGOLD provides a crucial case study on this matter, which BONURA overlooks. TREADGOLD drew attention to the *Life of Euthymios* (BHG 2145), which asserts that the future Patriarch Methodios, the Bishop of Sardis Euthymios, and the Archbishop of Thessaloniki Joseph (all staunch iconodules) had composed defamatory prophetic pamphlets against iconoclast emperors. TREADGOLD argued that these pamphlets can be linked to a cluster of historical apocalypses heavily dependent on *Ps-Methodios*, commonly designated the 'Sicilian apocalypses'.¹⁶ This group of apocalypses presents the earliest datable evidence that po-

tion byzantine). Paris 1967, pp. 83–141.

14. HIPPOLYTE DELEHAYE (ed.), *Synaxarium ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae e codice Sirmondiano*. Brussels 1902, cols 757–758. See further below, n. 39.

15. WOLFRAM BRANDES, *Kaiserprophetien und Hochverrat: Apokalyptische Schriften und Kaiservaticinien als Medium antikaiserlicher Propaganda*. In: WOLFRAM BRANDES – FELICITAS SCHMIEDER (eds.), *Endzeiten: Eschatologie in den monotheistischen Weltreligionen* (Millennium-Studien 16). Berlin – New York 2008, pp. 157–200.

16. The text group was identified and dated by ALEXANDER, *Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, pp. 62–95. The group consists of four texts: *Slavonic Daniel* (CAVT 265), the *Vision of Daniel by Ps-Chrysostom* (BHG 1871), the *Vision of Daniel on the Last Times* (BHG 1872), and the *Prophecy of Daniel* (BHG 2036g). LUCIEN DABADIE recently identified a Latin translation of a related text in a fourteenth-century manuscript in Nuremberg. He introduced this discovery in June 2026 at the SMRS Conference in St Louis, presenting a paper titled 'A New Latin Daniel Apocalypse from Eastern Sicily'. He is currently preparing an edition and translation of this (first known) *Latin Vision of Daniel*.

litical prophecies directly borrowed from *Ps-Methodios*.¹⁷ Treadgold further highlighted that it is likely no coincidence that Patriarch Methodios (r. 843–847) chose as his patron saint a rare martyr, reputed to be the author of the *Apocalypse of Ps-Methodios*.¹⁸ Accordingly, iconodule monks, rather than iconoclast emperors, represent the earliest known proponents of *Ps-Methodios* in Byzantium.¹⁹

Furthermore, the notion that Hippolytan (anti-Roman) and Ps-Methodian (pro-Roman) eschatologies were ‘blended’ (pp. 178, *passim*) in the aftermath of the iconoclastic controversy fails to account for the wider textual evidence. Alternating series of good and bad emperors are already manifest in the Armenian *Seventh Vision of Daniel* (fifth century), the Greek *Tiburtine Sibyl* (sixth century), the Latin *Revelation of the Blessed John* (seventh century), and the Armenian *Vision of Enoch the Just* (eighth century).²⁰ All

17. The *Diegesis Danielis* is often considered another early Byzantine prophecy that shows traces of *Ps-Methodios*. BONURA (pp. 176–177) mentions this prophecy but glosses over the fact that it does not contain the emblematic *Ps-Methodian* Last Emperor motif. Moreover, its late manuscript transmission (all five known manuscripts date to the post-Byzantine period) raises doubts whether this text can really be assigned to middle Byzantine period. Furthermore, the argument (p. 177) that the *Diegesis Danielis* refers to Leo III (r. 717–741) repeats an old conjecture (held by WILHELM BOUSSET, KLAUS BERGER, CYRIL MANGO) that draws on a vague allusion in two copies (codd. Monspeliensis 405 and Meteorensis Metamorph. 338), which relates that the name of the savior-emperor begins with the twentieth Greek letter (κ). The oldest dated witness (cod. Athen. 1077, ann. 1460–1465) does not contain this detail, nor do the other two copies. Although the letter kappa may cryptically allude to Leo III, it more commonly signifies Constantine. On the manuscript copies and dating attempts, see KRAFT, Inventory, pp. 86–87.

18. WARREN TREADGOLD, The Prophecies of the Patriarch Methodius. *Revue des études byzantines* 62 (2004) pp. 229–237.

19. It remains unclear why BONURA assumes that the Spiritual Franciscans could endorse a Ps-Methodian political eschatology, one assigning a pivotal role to the emperor in enacting church reform (p. 241), while denying this very possibility within Byzantium. There is no self-evident reason why Byzantine monks could not have similarly supported the idea of a righteous emperor restoring a fractured Church.

20. For the Greek *Tiburtine Sibyl* (CAVT 275) and the Armenian *Seventh Vision of Daniel* (CAVT 264), see below n. 33 and 36. The Latin *Revelation of the Blessed John*, which is preserved in a single fifteenth-century Prague manuscript, appears to be a translation of an early seventh-century Greek original. See JEAN-DANIEL KAESTLI – GÉRARD POUPON, Une nouvelle Apocalypse apocryphe: la Revelatio Iohannis transmise dans le manuscrit latin de Prague, *Knihovna Metropolitní Kapituly*, N. LIV. Apocrypha 30 (2019) pp. 9–61, at pp. 43–47 (cap. IV). Similarly, the Armenian *Vision of Enoch the Just* (CAVT 74) derives from a lost, likely eighth-century Greek original. See SARGIS HOVSĒP‘EANTS‘, Անկանոն գիրք Հին Կտակարանաց [Apocryphal books of the

these texts predate iconoclasm. The ideal-type distinction between the Hippolytan and Ps-Methodian paradigms ignores the rich textual evidence of early Byzantine apocalyptic literature. While ambivalence toward the imperial office certainly existed, it originated neither with *Ps-Methodios* nor with the Triumph of Orthodoxy (843). In fact, since the rise of the Constantinian dynasty in the mid-fourth century, a permanent duality defined the Roman emperor, who was repeatedly cast as either an eschatological villain or a divinely appointed savior.

BONURA overlooks not only the role of imperial censorship, the significance of monastic prophecy-making, and the extensive textual tradition of early Byzantine apocalypticism, but also the reception history of Hippolytos of Rome (d. c. 235). His assumption that post-iconoclastic apocalyptists ‘blended’ (pp. 178, 188) *Ps-Methodios*’ pro-Roman eschatology with Hippolytos’ anti-Roman eschatology imposes a modern reading onto the latter author and disregards the fact that Hippolytos did not enjoy the reputation of an anti-Roman thinker. It is certainly true that Hippolytos famously identified the fourth Danielic kingdom with the Roman Empire in his *Commentary on Daniel* and that this reading became a commonplace. Yet it is also true that the *Commentary* survives in its entirety in a single Byzantine-era manuscript copy, the tenth-century cod. Vatopedinus 290. If this vitriolic text was indeed so profoundly influential, why is its manuscript footprint so meager? Why does Photios, whom BONURA cites in passing (p. 86), fail to mention Hippolytos’ anti-Roman stance, if it truly served as his central thought?²¹ In fact, BONURA oversimplifies the evidence when he asserts that the Byzantine (ostensibly Hippolytan) tradition prior to *Ps-Methodios* saw the fourth Danielic kingdom, i.e., Rome, only in negative terms (pp. 83–88). Early Church Fathers frequently ascribed a providential role to the Roman Empire, notwithstanding its contemporary hostility toward Christians. Crucially, even the widespread expectation that the Antichrist would rule as a Roman emperor did not mean the empire itself was viewed as inherently evil. This distinction is evident, for instance, in the *Catechetical Lecture 15* on the Second Coming (BHG 487b) attributed to Cyril of Jerusalem (d. 387), which explains that the Antichrist will ‘usurp’ (ἀρπά-

Old Testament]. Venice 1896, pp. 378–386, at pp. 383–386.

21. RENÉ HENRY (ed.), Photius: Bibliothèque, Tome III: «Codices» 186–222 (Collection byzantine). Paris 1962, pp. 101–102 (codex 202). Cf. GERHARD PODSKALSKY, Byzantinische Reicheschatologie (Münchener Universitätsschriften, Reihe der Philosophischen Fakultät 9). Munich 1972, p. 10: ‘sie [die Romfeindschaft des Hippolytos] wurde von seinen Nachfahren nur vereinzelt und abgewandelt übernommen’.

ζοντα, ἀρπάσας) the Roman throne through magic, disrupting traditional dynastic inheritance. Cyril conveys that the Roman Empire will fall victim to the Antichrist, who falsely presents himself as both a lawful emperor and the Messiah. Rather than portraying the Roman Empire as inherently evil, Cyril suggests it is a political vessel co-opted and corrupted by demonic power.²² Thus, to sustain his ideal-type thesis, BONURA must demonstrate the historical reality of his ‘Hippolytan’ tradition and map its actual dissemination (e.g., in *catenae*?).²³

Far more popular than Hippolytos was Ps-Hippolytos, whose work *On the End of the World* (CPG 1910) achieved widespread manuscript circulation, surviving in dozens of copies from the tenth to fifteenth centuries.²⁴ Ps-Hippolytos’ treatise follows Hippolytos in identifying the fourth Danielic beast with Rome (§ 16), but the text is less anti-Roman than anti-Judaic. Ps-Hippolytos emphasizes the Antichrist’s Jewish origin (§ 19), his following among the Jewish people (§ 23), and his establishment of a Jewish kingdom (§ 16). Hippolytos’ broader influence on Byzantine apocalyptic thought remains to be studied in detail, particularly with respect to the indirect Hippolytan tradition. But it is already safe to say that he did not enjoy the reputation of a subversive anti-Roman propagandist, and that Ps-Hippolytos secured a much larger footprint in Byzantium than Hippolytos’ original eschatological works. Consequently, BONURA’s thesis regarding a Hippolytan anti-Roman political eschatology presupposes what it seeks to prove, falling victim to a *petitio principii*. By ignoring the manuscript tradition of Hippolytos’ *Commentary on Daniel* yet postulating its unrivaled authority among Byzantine exegetes, he mistakenly argues that the Greek East adopted a Hippolytan anti-Roman reading of Dn 2 as ‘a standard interpretation’ (p. 84). This view is contradicted by the well-known evidence of Eusebios of Caesarea, Anastasios of Sinai, and Basil of Neopatras, all of whom differentiate Christian Rome from pagan Rome. This brings us directly to the second fundamental weakness of the monograph: the claim that *Ps-Methodios* revolutionized (p. 104) the Byzantine world with (pro-

22. JOSEPH RUPP (ed.), *Cyriilli Hierosolymorum archiepiscopi opera quae supersunt omnia*, vol. 2. Munich 1860, pp. 168–172 (*Catechesis XV ad illuminandos* §§ 11–13).

23. For a different conceptualization of and approach to the Hippolytan tradition, see PODSKALSKY, *Reichseschatologie*, pp. 8–10, 40–41, 95–98.

24. For an overview of the known manuscript copies, see PANAGIŌTIS C. ATHANASOPOULOS, Ψ.-Ιππολύτου Περὶ τῆς συντελείας τοῦ κόσμου: Κριτική έκδοση. 2d edn. (Bibliotheca Graecorum et Romanorum 6). Ioannina 2016, pp. 36–46 and KRAFT, *Inventory*, pp. 84–86. Cf. the *Pinakes* entry <https://pinakes.irht.cnrs.fr/notices/oeuvre/2318/> (last accessed 31/7/2026).

Roman) imperial eschatology.

2. The book's central thesis is that Syriac political theology transformed medieval political thought with a 'novel' pro-Roman reading of Daniel (pp. 79, 156), which was 'virtually unknown outside Syriac literature' (p. 267) prior to *Ps-Methodios*. This thesis directly challenges GERHARD PODSKALSKY and subsequent scholars like STEPHEN SHOEMAKER, who trace the origins of Roman imperial eschatology to the early fourth century, a formative era defined by Constantine the Great's conversion and Eusebios of Caesarea's panegyrics.²⁵ BONURA addresses Eusebios and late antique imperial eschatology in a separate article, also derived from his 2019 dissertation.²⁶ There, he argues that Eusebios did not promote a pro-Roman eschatology, claiming instead that attributing an imperial eschatology to him is a historiographical myth invented by Nazi-era scholars. I have refuted these arguments elsewhere.²⁷ Previously, SHOEMAKER challenged BONURA's dissertation thesis that imperial eschatology had not existed outside the Syriac world prior to the dissemination of *Ps-Methodios*.²⁸ Unfortunately, BONURA does not engage with SHOEMAKER's critique, despite acknowledging its existence (pp. 99, 103). Instead, he merely repeats his original thesis throughout the monograph (pp. 79, 127, 151, 156, 165, 170, 187, 189, 206, 239, 257f, *passim*). As a result, BONURA evades the ideological friction inherent in his thesis. By asserting that Hippolytos' anti-Roman eschatology was the standard among early medieval Christians, even post-Christianization (pp. 84–85), he tacitly saddles early Byzantine society with an untenable paradox, requiring them to view their own worldly prosperity and the global expansion of the Christian message through the lens of cultural self-loathing.

25. PODSKALSKY, *Reichseschatologie*, pp. 35–36, 38–39; STEPHEN J. SHOEMAKER, *The Apocalypse of Empire: Imperial Eschatology in Late Antiquity and Early Islam (Divinations: Rereading Late Ancient Religion)*. Philadelphia 2018, pp. 38–89.

26. CHRISTOPHER BONURA, *Eusebius of Caesarea, the Roman Empire, and the Fulfillment of Biblical Prophecy: Reassessing Byzantine Imperial Eschatology in the Age of Constantine*. *Church History* 90 (2021) pp. 509–536.

27. ANDRÁS KRAFT, *Byzantine Imperial Eschatology: A Reappraisal*. In: FERNANDO LÓPEZ SÁNCHEZ – MARISA BUENO (eds.), *New Children of Israel: Newcomers in Movement. From Constantine to Muhammad and beyond (Studia Historica 136)*. Rome – Bristol 2026, pp. 51–89.

28. STEPHEN J. SHOEMAKER, *Constantine and the Birth of Medieval Apocalypticism: Imperial Eschatology in Eusebius, Lactantius, Ephrem, Aphrahat, and the Tiburtine Sybil*. In: JAY RUBENSTEIN – ROBERT BAST (eds.), *Apocalyptic Cultures in Medieval and Renaissance Europe: Politics and Prophecy (Interdisciplinary Studies in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance 3)*. Turnhout 2024, pp. 29–54.

Late antique Roman history offers numerous examples that falsify this narrow view, with the reign of Justinian serving as a prime case in point.²⁹ Prokopios' notorious invective of Justinian as the Antichrist in the *Secret History* only makes sense if Justinian had previously positioned himself as a savior figure.³⁰ Otherwise, Prokopios' caustic mockery would be grossly out of touch with reality and would have only discredited the author. A clear witness to the belief that Justinian ruled during the messianic age is Malalas' *Chronography*. Malalas dates the start of Justinian's reign to around the year 6500 anno mundi, thereby placing his rule precisely at the midpoint of the seventh and last millennium. Malalas' apparent claim is that Christ's incarnation and crucifixion inaugurated the seventh millennium, and that Justinian's reign constitutes the peak of the millennial Christian era.³¹ Justinian's own legislation echoes this perspective. The *Novels*, promulgated progressively over the course of the mid-sixth century, stipulate the imperial prerogative to regulate both administrative and ecclesiastical matters. In the preface to *Novel 6*, Justinian famously outlines the ideal of harmony between the priesthood (*sacerdotium*, ἱερωσύνη) and empire (*imperium*, βασιλεία), framing them as two distinct yet indivisible gifts

29. Further evidence is discussed by PAUL MAGDALINO, *The History of the Future and Its Uses: Prophecy, Policy and Propaganda*. In: RODERICK BEATON – CHARLOTTE ROUECHÉ (eds.), *The Making of Byzantine History: Studies Dedicated to Donald M. Nicol*. Aldershot, 1993, pp. 3–34, at pp. 10–15; ALEXEI M. SIVERTSEV, *Judaism and Imperial Ideology in Late Antiquity*. Cambridge 2011; SHOEMAKER, Constantine. Imperial eschatology was not exclusive to the Roman Empire; it also manifested in Sasanian Persia, which BONURA acknowledges but seemingly dismisses on p. 133 (n. 16). For two recent and pertinent discussions, see ANDREA PIRAS, *Apocalyptic Imagery and Royal Propaganda in Khosrow II's Letter to the Byzantine Emperor Maurice*. *Journal of Persianate Studies* 14 (2021) pp. 178–195 and MATTHEW P. CANEPA, *Envisioning Dualism and Emplacing the eschaton: Apocalyptic Eschatology and Empire in Sasanian Iran*. In: JÖRG RÜPKE – MICHAL BIRAN – YURI PINES (eds.), *Empires and Gods: The Role of Religions in Imperial History (Imperial Histories: Eurasian Empires Compared 1)*. Berlin – Boston 2024, pp. 135–174.

30. This was first pointed out by ROGER SCOTT, *Malalas, the Secret History, and Justinian's Propaganda*. *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 39 (1985) pp. 99–109, at pp. 108–109. On Prokopios' depiction of Justinian as the Antichrist, see the balanced discussion by RYAN DENSON, *Procopius and the Lord of the Demons: The Synthesis of the Demonic Justinian*. *Journal of Late Antiquity* 15.2 (2022) pp. 494–518.

31. HANS THURN (ed.), *Ioannis Malalae Chronographia* (CFHB 35). Berlin – New York 2000, p. 357 (lib. XVIII.8). See further ELIZABETH JEFFREYS, *Chronological Structures in Malalas' Chronicle*. In: ELIZABETH JEFFREYS (ed.), *Studies in John Malalas (Byzantina Australiensia 6)*. Leiden 1990, pp. 111–166, at pp. 117–120, 164–165.

from God. Their shared divine origin provides the theological justification for the emperor's comprehensive oversight of both religious and civic domains. This theopolitical unity, the preface continues, serves the benefit of mankind. Essentially, Justinian's *Novel 6* stipulates that the imperial administration of the Christian Roman Empire typifies the Kingdom of God through its monarchical rule and true knowledge of God. It establishes the legal foundation of imperial eschatology.³²

Late Antique apocalyptic literature further corroborates this positive eschatological framing of the Roman emperor. Primary examples include the Greek *Tiburtine Sibyl* and the Armenian *Seventh Vision of Daniel*. Dating to the late fifth and early sixth centuries respectively, the two texts feature an eschatological king who overcomes a wicked enemy, rules righteously, and triumphs in war. The passage from the Greek *Tiburtine Sibyl* records this tradition as follows:

And after that another emperor will arise from the East, whose name is Olibos (?). He will seize the four kings who preceded him and will slay them. And he will grant an exemption from paying a public tax and will restore all the people of the entire East and of Palestine.³³

Styled a New Constantine, this eschatological ruler overcomes a tyrannical tetrarchy, grants tax exemption, and restores the East to the imperial center. He is followed by the Antichrist, the shape-shifting son of perdition.³⁴ The *Seventh Vision of Daniel* yields a similar reading:

And another tyrant³⁵ king will arise, and facing [him] in battle he will persecute him [a vain and bellicose Roman emperor], and with much sorrow and groaning he will take away his soul. And having become king, this one will hold the scepter that is in you, Seven-Hilled [City],

32. RUDOLF SCHÖLL – WILHELM KROLL (eds.), *Corpus iuris civilis*, Vol. 3: *Novellae*. Berlin 1912, pp. 35–36 (*Prologus Novellae VI*).

33. Translation by PAUL ALEXANDER, *The Oracle of Baalbek: The Tiburtine Sibyl in Greek Dress* (Dumbarton Oaks Studies 10). Washington DC 1967, p. 28. Edition *ibid.*, p. 20: καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα ἀναστήσεται ἄλλος βασιλεὺς ἀπὸ Ἀνατολῆς, οὗτινος τὸ ὄνομα ἐστὶ † Ὀλιβός. οὗτος λαμβάνει τοὺς τέσσαρας βασιλεῖς τοὺς πρὸ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀποκτενεῖ αὐτούς. καὶ δώσει ἀτέλειαν τοῦ μὴ παρασχέσθαι δημόσιον τέλος καὶ ἀνανεώσει πάντας τοὺς λαοὺς τῆς Ἀνατολῆς πάσης καὶ τῆς Παλαιστίνης.

34. See the reconstruction of the narrative by *ibid.*, pp. 57–58.

35. The oldest manuscript, cod. Londin. Bibliotheca Lambethana, arm. 1209, reads *ρῶλυωληρ* (rational, discursive) instead of *ρῆλυωληρ* (tyrannical, violent). I follow KALEMKIAR's editorial choice here to avoid selecting the reading most favorable to my argument.

and he will be great upon very great and magnificent thrones; and that man will be powerful *on the right and on the left* [cf. Ez 21:16, Zec 12:6].³⁶

The figure of a righteous Roman emperor who kills a wicked predecessor and rules supreme before the Antichrist emerges was a stock motif of the Byzantine apocalyptic tradition centuries before *Ps-Methodios* was composed. Already in the early fourth century, Lactantius had envisioned Constantine as the heavenly king who inaugurates an eschatological era of earthly righteousness as the prelude to Christ's millennial rule.³⁷ BONURA's omission of Byzantine apocalyptic literature before *Ps-Methodios*, alongside his neglect of foundational testimonies from Lactantius, Eusebios, and other Patristic authors, provides a distorted image of the eschatological discourse in the early Christian Roman Empire.

Ps-Methodios should not be viewed as a sudden Syriac antidote to centuries of Eastern Roman self-contempt. Byzantine apocalyptic literature was always fraught with ambiguity. Texts spanning the pre- and post-Pseudo-Methodian eras explicitly balance a hope for righteous kingship with a deep apprehension of tyrannical rule. Essentially, post-Constantinian Christianization transformed the Roman Empire from a diabolic kingdom into the principal theater of salvation history. Within this cosmic drama, Christ's incarnation and crucifixion, the rule of Christian monarchs, and the ultimate demonic tyranny of the Antichrist were all destined to unfold on a Roman stage. Driven by fourth-century shifts and amplified in the sixth century, a widespread civic consensus emerged: Rome uniquely unified the dreadful,

36. Translation by SERGIO LA PORTA, *The Seventh Vision of Daniel: A New Translation and Introduction*. In: RICHARD BAUCKHAM – JAMES R. DAVILA – ALEXANDER PANAYOTOV (eds.), *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: More Noncanonical Scriptures*, vol. 1. Grand Rapids 2013, pp. 410–434, at p. 431 (modified). Edition in GREGORIS KALEMKIAR, *Die siebente Vision Daniels*. *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 6 (1892) pp. 109–136, at pp. 130–131: Եւ յարիցէ այլ թագաւոր թոնաւոր յանդիման պատերազմեալ հալածեսցէ զնա եւ բազում տրտմութեամբ եւ հեծութեամբ հանցէ զհոգի նորա, եւ սա թագաւորեալ կալցի զգաւազանս որ ի քեզ եաւթնբլուրդ եւ եղիցի մեծ յաթոռս մեծամեծս եւ ի պայծառս, եւ այրն այն կորովի յաջմէ եւ յահեկէ, [...]

37. EBERHARD HECK – ANTONIE WLOSOK (eds.), *L. Caelius Firmianus Lactantius: Divinarum institutionum libri septem*, Fasc. 4: liber VII, appendix, indices (Bibliotheca scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana BT 2009). Berlin – Boston 2011, pp. 704–706 (*Div. Inst.* VII.17). See further ELIZABETH D. DIGESER, *Persecution and the Art of Writing between the Lines: De vita beata, Lactantius, and the Great Persecution*. *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire* 92.1 (2014) pp. 167–185.

incontestable power and the triumphant, providential role assigned to the fourth Danielic kingdom.

The true innovation of *Ps-Methodios* lay not in popularizing a pro-Roman eschatology rooted in Syriac exegesis, but in advancing a flattened, uncritical perspective that glosses over the ambiguity inherent to Christian Roman imperial eschatology. *Ps-Methodios* simplified and disambiguated the eschatological significance of the Roman Empire: it was no longer simultaneously savior and villain. The villainous part had been effectively usurped by the Ishmaelites, Jews, and Gog & Magog. Consequently, the Eastern Roman Empire was stripped of its capacity for moral ambivalence and relegated to a strictly benevolent role. I concur with BONURA that *Ps-Methodios*' political theology was designed to exclude nascent Islam from world history (pp. 115–121) by affirming that legitimate rulership resides exclusively in Roman rule. *Ps-Methodios*' disambiguation simultaneously downgraded Rome's imperial prowess and excluded Ishmaelites and Jews from the master narrative of world history. This uncritical, disambiguated version of imperial eschatology was likely a key factor in the text's eventual success.³⁸

Conceptually, BONURA's thesis reverses the argument advanced by SHOEMAKER over the past decade. SHOEMAKER has argued that imperial eschatology and the Last Emperor topos emerged in the fourth century, in the wake of Constantine's conversion to Christianity. In contrast, BONURA maintains that neither concept materialized prior to *Ps-Methodios* in the late seventh century. Neither view is convincing; rather, where Shoemaker is correct, BONURA is mistaken, and vice versa. I align with SHOEMAKER's position that Roman imperial eschatology traces back to the fourth century, most notably to Eusebios' panegyric works.³⁹ At the same time, I agree with BONURA that the specific literary motif of the Last Emperor is first attested in *Ps-Methodios* (pp. 131–133).⁴⁰ Briefly put, Byzantine (pro-

38. It is tempting to compare *Ps-Methodios* with the *Bahira Legend*. If the *Bahira Legend* caricatures Islam as 'Christianity for beginners', *Ps-Methodios* sketches the Roman Empire as 'political theology for beginners'. For advanced political theory, one had to look elsewhere.

39. SHOEMAKER, *Apocalypse of Empire*; IDEM, *Constantine*.

40. See further the arguments advanced by ANDRÁS KRAFT, Review of Stephen J. Shoemaker, *The Apocalypse of Empire*, 2018. *Plekos* 21 (2019) pp. 531–547, at pp. 533–540 and WOLFRAM BRANDES, *Das sog. Constans-Vaticinium und seine Datierung. Eschatologische Vorstellungen in der ersten Hälfte des 7. Jahrhunderts?* In: MEHMETCAN AKPINAR – FEDERICO MONTINARO (eds.), *Rethinking Conquest: Studies on the Late Antique Near East from Byzantium to Islam* (Millennium-Studien 116). Berlin – Boston

Roman) imperial eschatology did not develop concurrently with the Ps-Methodian Last Emperor motif. Roman imperial eschatology was a fourth-century solution to millenarianism, officially sanctioned by both church and state, while the motif of an abdicating Last Emperor was a reaction to seventh-century messianism. Conceptually, imperial eschatology does not require the Christ-like self-sacrifice of a Last Roman Emperor in Jerusalem, as envisioned by *Ps-Methodios*. Conversely, the Ps-Methodian motif of a wholly benevolent emperor does not exhaust the broader parameters of imperial eschatology.

Ultimately, BONURA's argument rests on a flawed premise, namely that early medieval apocalyptic literature remained a predominantly 'anti-imperial genre' (p. 10). Instead, apocalyptic literature in the Christian Roman world is inherently ambiguous, functioning as either pro-imperial or anti-imperial, where the 'or' ought to be understood inclusively (one, the other, or both). Typically, Byzantine political apocalypses balance imperial critique (*Kaiserkritik*) and the exaltation of Christomimetic monarchs. *Ps-Methodios* merely tipped the scales in favor of the latter, amplifying a pre-existing tradition rather than inventing it.

Minor Remarks

On a minor note, a few small inaccuracies and oversights found their way into an otherwise carefully written monograph. It is anachronistic to assume that the author of the *Apocalypse of Ps-Methodios* could have found information about the historical Methodios 'in a synaxarion' (p. 69), given that the genre of synaxaria emerged only in the tenth century.⁴¹ Furthermore, referencing a Danielic 'fifth kingdom' (pp. 85, 88, *passim*) is misleading, as the transcendent nature of the final, divine kingdom resists numerical indexing.⁴² While seemingly benign, this sequential numbering has serious implications. Taken literally, it obfuscates the potential overlap between the fourth Danielic kingdom (Rome) and the Kingdom of God; a convergence that lies at the very heart of Byzantine imperial eschatology. On p. 175, a typo misidentifies the manuscript for the *Admonition of an Old Man*

2026, pp. 79–120.

41. In fact, the mid-tenth century *Synaxarion of Constantinople* does not mention any prophetic work of Methodios (for the full reference, see n. 14 above). While the version published by FRANÇOIS COMBEFIS in 1644 (reprinted in PG 18, col. 25C and cited by BONURA on p. 15) mentions Methodios' apocalyptic prophecy, this reference stems from a later tradition, and it remains unclear exactly when the entry was updated.

42. KRAFT, *Byzantine Imperial Eschatology*, pp. 76–77.

(Νουθεσία γέροντος) as cod. Mosquensis gr. 365 rather than gr. 265. A minor oversight is the omission of SMOLLER 2022 from the bibliography, despite its being repeatedly cited (pp. 243, 250). A more substantial omission is the failure to link Ps 68:31 with Gn 10:8. BONURA properly highlights that Ps 68:31 is a pivotal proof-text in *Ps-Methodios* (pp. 125, 300), and he brilliantly reconstructs the importance of Nimrod as the first king, tracing back to the Syriac *Cave of the Treasures* and ultimately to Gn 10:8 (pp. 110–117). Curiously, however, he does not connect the two passages and refrains from commenting on the typological arch that *Ps-Methodios* spans between the protological Kush, Nimrod's father (Gn 10:8), and the eschatological Kush, the last king (Ps 68:31).

Regarding the bibliography, the reader may profit from several additional items. KARL-HEINZ UTHEMANN's foundational study on the works of Anastasios of Sinai provides an in-depth analysis of the interpolation that the Greek translator of *Ps-Methodios* drew from the *Disputation against the Jews* (CPG 7772). By defending the work's authenticity and showing that the interpolation justifies the downfall of the Hebrew kingdom, UTHEMANN enriches BONURA's discussion and proves that Byzantine imperial eschatology pre-dates the Greek translation of *Ps-Methodios*.⁴³ Another noteworthy item is the catalog by MARCO FANELLI, which outlines the contents and significance of cod. Marc. It. XI.6.⁴⁴ BONURA correctly notes that folios 126r–131r contain 'a shortened version of Pseudo-Methodius in vernacular Greek' (p. 184). However, the modification is more profound: the truncation of the text refashions the work into an exegetical commentary. Thus, noting that the narrative 'ends abruptly at XIV.5' with Ps 68:31 (p. 184) misses its circular structure. The version begins and ends with the exact same Psalm citation (ff. 126v, 131r), framing the whole text as an exposition of this biblical verse. Furthermore, readers would benefit from consulting the aforementioned study by TREADGOLD, along with the monograph by ANDREI TIMOTIN, in order to arrive at a more nuanced account of the reception of *Ps-Methodios* during the iconoclast controversy.⁴⁵

43. KARL-HEINZ UTHEMANN, *Anastasios Sinaites: Byzantinisches Christentum in den ersten Jahrzehnten unter arabischer Herrschaft* (Arbeiten zur Kirchengeschichte 125), 2 vols. Berlin – Boston 2015, pp. 583–714, esp. pp. 602–617.

44. MARCO FANELLI, *Cipro nella Biblioteca Marciana di Venezia. Manoscritti, testi e carte. Catalogo della mostra*. Venice 2022, pp. 122–126.

45. ANDREI TIMOTIN, *Visions, prophéties et pouvoir à Byzance. Étude sur l'hagiographie méso-byzantine, IX–XI siècles*. (Dossiers byzantins 10). Paris 2010, pp. 119–209.

Finally, BONURA could have profited from engaging CYRIL MANGO's dating of the *Life of Andrew the Fool*, a text he briefly mentions (pp. 177–178).⁴⁶ MANGO dated the *Life*, which contains a most influential historical apocalypse, to the latter half of the seventh century, making it contemporary with *Ps-Methodios*. While few scholars have accepted this early dating, MANGO's view implies that imperial eschatology developed independently of *Ps-Methodios*. Refuting MANGO's thesis could have served as an effective, if provisional, means for BONURA to uphold his core thesis. Likewise, he could have derived argumentative support by critically engaging with PIER FRANCO BEATRICE's homologous model. BEATRICE divides the Danielic exegetical tradition into Asiatic (cf. Hippolytan) and Syrian (cf. *Ps-Methodian*) strands. In his view, Kosmas Indikopleustēs, whom BONURA casually dismisses (p. 92), actually pioneered the positive reevaluation of the Roman Empire in Byzantium.⁴⁷ Overlooking BEATRICE's parallel interpretation leaves a critical vulnerability: BONURA does not explain why *Ps-Methodios*, rather than Kosmas, was the first to bridge the exegetical divide and introduce a pro-Roman exegesis that, while written in Greek, remained rooted in the Syriac tradition.

Conclusion

The monograph offers a meticulous survey of the vast literature on the *Apocalypse of Ps-Methodios*, providing a coherent exegesis of the Syriac work and tracing its reception from the late seventh-century Syriac world to the late seventeenth-century German orbit. BONURA succeeds in constructing the first 'biography' of *Ps-Methodios*, emphasizing its purportedly unique contribution to the global apocalyptic imagination. Unfortunately, the monograph's expansive scope ultimately sacrifices analytical depth for historical breadth. Hence, the claim that *Ps-Methodios* achieved immediate, widespread success and enjoyed centuries of uncontested influence appears overly teleological and reductive. More importantly, the core thesis that *Ps-Methodios* 'exported' a 'revolutionary' pro-Roman Daniel exegesis to the non-Syriac world (p. 104) is unconvincing. BONURA's selective survey results in a *petitio principii*: by limiting his analysis to the

46. CYRIL MANGO, *The Life of St. Andrew the Fool Reconsidered*. *Rivista di Studi Bizantini e Slavi* 2 (1982) pp. 297–313.

47. PIER FRANCO BEATRICE, *Pagans and Christians on the Book of Daniel*. *Studia Patristica* 25 (1993) pp. 27–45, at pp. 28–36.

text's immediate environment, he presupposes the very uniqueness he sets out to prove while ignoring broader textual evidence that undermines his claim.

On a broader note, the book stands in a long, respectable tradition of Protestant scholarship that attempts to de-Hellenize sacred Christian writings. Although *Ps-Methodios* is not a canonical text, as properly noted at the outset (p. 1), BONURA explicitly seeks to de-Hellenize it by completing K MOSKO's work to prove its Syriac origins (p. 13, cf. pp. 50, 73–79). Yet, as demonstrated above, *Ps-Methodios* is deeply embedded in a long tradition of Christian Roman imperial eschatology and should not be conceptually isolated from its Greco-Roman heritage. Genuine de-Hellenization belongs elsewhere. Instead of offering a standard apology for using the scholarly term 'Byzantium' (p. 165, n. 38), one could take *Ps-Methodios* seriously by conceptualizing Byzantium as the Christian Roman Empire that, qua fourth Danielic kingdom, confers salvational identity upon its citizens. Consequently, the hybrid Ethiopian-Macedonian-Greco-Roman identity promoted by *Ps-Methodios* signifies membership in the only legitimate earthly empire, allowing its subjects to participate in both worldly and otherworldly salvation. This identity transcends the narrow categories of ethnicity (Greek or Roman), language (Greek, Latin, Syriac), and confession (mia- or dyophysite), envisioning a meta-Hellenic community of the saved. Rather than reverting to a Protestant-style de-Hellenization, *Ps-Methodios* may be better understood as an attempt to *meta-Hellenize* the community of salvation. Its widespread dissemination and numerous translations stand as a testament to the enduring reception of this inclusive message.

In sum, the author deserves praise for producing a learned and thought-provoking survey of the origins, contents, and dissemination of *Ps Methodios*. Treating the work in its entirety (conceptually, philologically, historically) is precisely the right approach. Even if this volume will not be the final word on the subject, it marks a milestone by delivering the text's first modern biography. Operating within this genre, the book fulfills the core requirements of critical skepticism toward received wisdom, maintains a broad chronological scope from inception to obsolescence, and constructs a narrative arc that yields a compelling historical account. Close interpretation of the literary sources, even when unconvincing, lies at the heart of this textual biography. This interpretative outlook is epitomized by the 'critical English translation' in the appendix, which eclectically diverges from the Syriac critical edition to produce 'the best possible reading of the text'

(p. 274). The result is yet another new version of *Ps-Methodios*, demonstrating the ongoing fascination with making sense of this early medieval apocalypse.⁴⁸

Keywords

medieval political theology; apocalypticism; Daniel exegesis; Ps-Methodios

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