

Natural Omens in Byzantine Literature: An Unpublished Translator's Preface to a Brontologion (*Petrop. Bibl. Publ.* 575)

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BYZANTINE AUTHORS reflect the popular belief that God communicated with man through natural events, if only human understanding could discern the message. Several writers of the tenth century illustrate this attitude by presenting unusual natural events as a metaphor or as a predictive indicator of human events. Theophanes Continuatus, for example, describes the appearance of a remarkable star or comet at the birth and death of Constantine the Porphyrogenetos.¹ Similarly, at the beginning of his *History* Leo the Deacon notes the coincidence of disruptive events in both the natural and the political spheres. Astral portents, earthquakes, lightning, and torrential rain simultaneous with many wars and the abandonment of cities and whole regions motivated the popular inference that the Second Coming was imminent.² In the *Life of St. Basil the Younger*, the narrator Gregory notes that the sun appeared to drip blood when the rebel followers of Constantine Doukas (d. 913) entered Constantinople, predicting great slaughter.³

Although Christian Byzantium scorned pagan superstition

¹ Theoph. Cont. 6.48, in D. Sullivan, *The Rise and Fall of Nikephoros II Phokas: Five Contemporary Texts in Annotated Translations* (Leiden 2019) 49–51. I am grateful to Prof. Sullivan for this reference.

² A.-M. Talbot and D. Sullivan with G. Dennis and S. McGrath, *The History of Leo the Deacon: Byzantine Military Expansion in the Tenth Century* (Washington 2005) 55–56. Cf. Matt 4:6–8, Mk 13:7–8, Lk 21:10–11, and Acts 2:19–20.

³ D. Sullivan, A.-M. Talbot, and S. McGrath, *Life of St. Basil the Younger* (Washington 2014) 1.16.

and the Church officially limited the use of magic and divination,⁴ passages like these rest firmly upon beliefs shared with the ancient literary tradition inherited by Byzantium, for the fundamental texts of the classical past and of Christianity establish a clear link between the natural world and the intervention of divinity; in the Homeric epics, in the Hebrew Bible, and in the New Testament the presence and will of gods or of God is revealed through portentous natural events.⁵

Both classical literature and divine scripture thus supported the authority of natural phenomena as signs of divine will and intention. A sign might be ambiguous, however, and might require the services of an acknowledged expert to be interpreted correctly. An intriguing passage of Anna Comnena's *Alexiad* describes just such an incident.⁶ When a huge comet crossed the sky for forty consecutive nights, terrified public speculation about its significance prompted Emperor Alexios I Komnenos (1081–1118) to request a scientific explanation of the phenomenon from “those adept in such matters,” in particular from his trusted advisor Basil the Eparch. Basil observed the phenomenon, unsuccessfully tried to account for it by undertaking scientific calculations, and finally fell asleep. In a dream so vivid that it seemed real, St. John the Evangelist appeared: “He said that this comet foretells the movement of the Franks. ‘Its disappearance in the East indicates that they will be destroyed in the selfsame place’.” Anna’s account demonstrates the Byzantine assumption that the significance of a particular portent might be accessible only to an expert.

In the absence of a learned astronomer or a saint, it was also possible to turn to an authoritative text. Niketas Choniates (ca. 1155 to 1215/6) describes an incident in which an interpretive

⁴ See H. Maguire, *Byzantine Magic* (Washington 1995) 6–7.

⁵ E.g. *Il.* 11.54–55 (rain dripping with blood to signal disaster), Exod 19:16–19 (God’s presence indicated on Mt. Sinai in thunder, lightning, and earthquakes), and Acts 2:19–20 (blood, fire, solar and lunar portents as signs of the Second Coming).

⁶ *Annae Comnenae Alexias* 12.4.1–2 (pp.307–308 Kambylis/Reinsch).

text treating thunder and earthquakes successfully predicted human activities during a doctrinal dispute in the reign of Manuel I Komnenos (1143–1180).⁷ After a huge clap of thunder sounded unseasonably and portentously, it gained such notoriety that the emperor turned to Elias, a specialist in omens who was attached to the army. He “opened and consulted a book that thoroughly treated the subject of thunder and earthquakes and examined the particulars pertaining to the exact time at which thunder occurred; he said that he reached this insight: ‘Wise men shall fall.’” Since Choniates introduces Elias by crediting him with “success beyond many” in his art, apparently in this case his interpretation of the portentous thunder prompted some significant solution to the doctrinal dispute that Choniates does not discuss.

Elias’ book belongs to a genre that purported to translate natural prodigies into predictions of specific human political and social events. Such texts derive ultimately from the Babylonian *Enuma Anu Enlil* and represent a vast medieval multi-lingual and multicultural literature that survives not only in Greek but also in Arabic, Persian, Latin, Hebrew, and Slavic. Through translation and cross referencing, the strands of these traditions became thoroughly interwoven during antiquity and the middle ages; unfortunately, the identification and publication of relevant texts has not advanced sufficiently to trace definitive relationships among them.⁸ A subset of texts within this body of pseudo-scientific literature treats thunder omens of the sort described by Choniates. Surviving among them surprisingly is a Latin brontologion translated from Gaelic (*de Scotticho/Scotico sermone*) and

⁷ *Nicetae Choniatae historia* 211.9–16 van Dieten; cf. P. Magdalino, “Occult Science and Imperial Power in Byzantine History and Historiography (9th–12th Centuries),” in P. Magdalino and M. Mavroudi (eds.), *The Occult Sciences in Byzantium* (Geneva 2006) 152–153. For a full translation of Choniates see H. Magoulias, *O City of Byzantium: Annals of Niketas Choniates* (Detroit 1984)

⁸ See D. Pingree, *From Astral Omen to Astrology, from Babylon to Bikaher* (Rome 1997) 63–77, and “Legacies in Astronomy and Celestial Omens,” in S. Dalley (ed.), *The Legacy of Mesopotamia* (Oxford 1998) 125–138, at 134.

demonstrating a uniquely insular format of this genre, which derived from the Etruscan tradition exemplified by Nigidius Figulus' sample preserved by John Lydus.⁹

Alexios

The tradition of a book of portents already translated into Greek in antiquity found a place in the translator's preface to the so-called *Apocalypse of Daniel*, a Greek translation from Arabic made in 1245 by the otherwise unknown "Alexios the Byzantine."¹⁰ The title Alexios applied to his translation, *Apocalypse of Daniel*, covers a type of predictive text validated by association with the biblical figure of the prophet Daniel.¹¹ The text translated by Alexios is actually a compilation of forecasts based on astronomical and meteorological events represented in various versions by at least thirteen Greek manuscripts and termed more accurately the *Praedictiones Danielis* by Lorenzo DiTommaso in his wide-ranging investigation of such texts; DiTommaso traces branches of this entirely eastern tradition in Syriac, Persian, and Arabic literature.¹²

⁹ David Juste and Hilbert Chiu, "The *De tonitruis libellus* Attributed to Bede: An Early Medieval Treatise on Divination by Thunder Translated from Irish," *Traditio* 68 (2013) 97–124, at 101–108.

¹⁰ I.e. "Alexios of Constantinople." Pingree cited this translation and its preface in *The Legacy of Mesopotamia* 133–134. Maria Mavroudi summarizes its contents in *A Byzantine Book on Dream Interpretation: The Oneirocriticon of Achmet and its Arabic Sources* (Leiden 2002) 410 n.60. Greek text: P. Boudreaux, *CCAG* VIII.3 (Brussels 1913) 171–172. I am grateful to Denis Sullivan, Alice-Mary Talbot, Manoulis Patedakis, and Stratis Papaioannou for their help in translating Alexios' preface: E. Fisher, "Alexios of Byzantium and the Apocalypse of Daniel: A Tale of Kings, Wars, and Translators," in S. Dogan et al. (eds.), *Bizans ve Çevre Kültürler / Byzantium and Neighboring Cultures* (Istanbul 2010) 177–185, at 179; cf. J. Aitken, "The Septuagint Translation Legend in a Byzantine Prognosticon," *Bulletin of Judaeo-Greek Studies* 43 (2008/ 9) 32–35.

¹¹ The Book of Daniel contains the only example of apocalyptic literature in the Hebrew Bible (ch. 7–12), referred to and endorsed by Jesus in Matt 24:15.

¹² L. DiTommaso, *The Book of Daniel and the Apocryphal Daniel Literature* (Leiden 2005) 279–286, 299.

In his preface, Alexios treats the text as a legitimate extension of the canonical *Book of Daniel*, associates the original Greek text with Ptolemy's Septuagint translators, and attributes the Arabic translation of the *Apocalypse of Daniel/Praedictiones Danielis* to the patronage of a second victorious general, the 7th-century Caliph Mu'awiya. Alexios claims that he obtained the Arabic text while a prisoner of the Arabs, recognized its importance for Byzantines, and translated the text back into Greek. He seems eager to impress the readers of his Greek translation with the venerable pedigree of the text he has translated, a pedigree that must have been current among the Arabs and conveyed to Alexios either orally or in some sort of written introduction accompanying the Arabic text. He harmonized this tradition with Christian traditions surrounding the Septuagint. He alludes to the legend of miraculous inspiration preserved in the 2nd-century (BCE) Letter of Aristeas, adjusting its details to suit his own purposes.¹³ According to Alexios, the original Hebrew text came into Greek at the behest of a victorious general, Ptolemy Philadelphos, who conquered and enslaved the Jews, then compelled seventy Hebrew scholars to translate their holy texts into Greek. This version of the *Apocalypse/Praedictiones Danielis* survived for nine centuries before a second victorious general, the Arab Caliph Mu'awiya, captured it and, like Ptolemy, caused a version of the text to be produced in his own language.¹⁴ Alexios thus associates the *Apocalypse/Praedictiones Danielis* with two successful generals and two major empires, while claiming greater longevity for the Greek version (900 years) than for the Arabic translation derived from it (600 years). Clearly, Alexios valued this text very highly; he describes the work not only as "marvelous" (θαυμαστή) but also as "authoritative" (ἐγκριτος). He apparently

¹³ Aitken, *Bulletin of Judaeo-Greek Studies* 43 (2008/9) 32–35, discusses Alexios' use of this legend and its implications for his presentation of the Jews; for another interpretation see Fisher, in *Bizans* 180.

¹⁴ As Maria Mavroudi observes, Alexios' explanation of how the Arabic version of this text came to be is not necessarily historical: *A Byzantine Book* 410 n.69.

expects that his own translation of the text back into Greek will provide a valuable resource for Byzantium.

Alexios' preface contains few biographical clues beyond his assertion that he was a captive of the Arabs in the mid-13th century. Under Koranic law prisoners of war, both civilians and combatants, were enslaved in domestic or administrative service. Since exchange of prisoners was a regular part of warfare, it did not normally occasion comment either in Byzantine or in Arab sources. One can only speculate that such circumstances may indeed have brought the Arabic version of the *Apocalypse/Praedictiones Danielis* into the hands of its translator, the former slave Alexios, in Anatolia during the conflicts with Seljuks and Ayyubids. Alexios may have returned to Byzantine territory with the *Praedictiones* in the sort of Byzantine/Arab prisoner exchange that occurred in earlier centuries and continued through the Abbasid period of their rule in Anatolia (8th–13th centuries).¹⁵ Further speculation belongs to the category of historical fiction rather than scholarly discussion.

Alexios' intellectual capabilities could have been useful to his Arab captors, for he was a cultured and somewhat sophisticated person, competent at some level of Arabic and clearly literate and even educated in Greek. His rather stilted Greek style is typical of the middle stylistic register appropriate for a didactic work like this translation and his preface, but it does not reach the learned level of a Constantinopolitan scholar. Alexios' Greek resembles that in vernacular translations of official Arabic correspondence with Byzantium surviving from the 14th century, prepared in accordance with the diplomatic convention that required a Greek version of a document to accompany its Arabic

¹⁵ M. Campagnola-Pothitou, "Les échanges de prisonniers entre Byzance et l'Islam aux IX^e et X^e siècles," *Journal of Oriental and African Studies* 7 (1995) 1–55, at 3–23. See also H. Kennedy, "Byzantine-Arab Diplomacy in the Near East from the Islamic Conquests to the Mid-eleventh Century," in J. Shepard et al. (eds.), *Byzantine Diplomacy* (Aldershot 1992) 133–143, at 139–140, and Y. Rotman, *Byzantine Slavery and the Mediterranean World* (Cambridge [Mass.] 2009) 25–81.

original. Dimitri Korobeinikov characterizes these translations as “a strange mixture of classical and modern Greek,”¹⁶ which is also a fair description of Alexios’ style in his preface and translation. The historical information that he includes is essentially accurate and betrays some acquaintance with Byzantine literary sources, for his phrase “Constans himself, rescued with difficulty, returned to the city of Constantinople in disgrace” (ὁ δὲ αὐτὸς Κώνστας μόλις διασωθεὶς ὑπέστρεψεν ἐν τῇ πόλει μετ’ αἰσχύνης) closely parallels the vocabulary and structure of the account of this event by George Kedrenos (late 11th–early 12th century) and his source Symeon the Logothete (mid-10th century): ὁ δὲ βασιλεὺς μόλις διασωθεὶς ὑπέστρεψε μετ’ αἰσχύνης ἐν Κωνσταντινουπόλει.¹⁷ Alexios surely read this sentence and either remembered it with extraordinary accuracy or closely paraphrased a copy he had before him. A little more information about Alexios can be gleaned from his preface; he was probably a Christian or perhaps a Jew, for “He prays that his desire to bring this project to conclusion be granted him by God. Amen.” His distaste for the Arabs and their language is evident in his remark that he “chokes off the pedestrian language of the Arabs” (ἄγχων τὴν τῶν Ἀράβων πεζικὴν γλῶτταν).

The retranslator

Alexios belongs to a company of scholars who translated astronomical/astrological and other sorts of predictive omen texts from Arabic into Greek as early as 1000 CE.¹⁸ Pingree notes that the 13th-century Greek translations from Arabic are less grammatically and technically correct than those of preceding centuries,¹⁹ an assessment confirmed in the case of

¹⁶ D. Korobeinikov, “Diplomatic Correspondence between Byzantium and the Mamluk Sultanate in the Fourteenth Century,” *Al-Masaq* 16 (2004) 53–76, at 66.

¹⁷ *Georgius Cedrenus Ioannis Scylitzae opera* 756.15–16 Bonn; *Leonis Grammatici chronographia* 158.8–10 Bonn.

¹⁸ Pingree, *From Astral Omen* 67.

¹⁹ Pingree, *From Astral Omen* 74.

Alexios by an anonymous scholar who knew Alexios' translation and sharply criticizes it in his own preface to his re-translation of the same text already translated by Alexios. Alexios and his anonymous re-translator are very unusual among Greek translators from Arabic because neither had a patron for his work; each decided to undertake his demanding project on his independent initiative.²⁰ The re-translator offers the surprising information that he himself actually learned Arabic in order to provide a correct retranslation of the *Apocalypse/Praedictiones Danielis*.

This unpublished translator's preface to his re-translation of the work survives only in a single 17th-century manuscript now in the Public Library of St. Petersburg (*Petropol. Bibl. Publ.* 575 fol. 46^r–47^r). F. Sangin recognized the second translator's preface in 1936 but edited and published only the segment related to Alexios and his translation.²¹ A critical edition of the preface follows, accompanied by an annotated English translation:²²

[Fol. 46^r 6] Ἀρχὴ σὺν θεῷ ἀγίῳ τοῦ βροντολογίου
 Γίνωσκε γνῶσιν ὅτι ἡ παροῦσα βίβλος ἐστὶν ὄρασις τοῦ
 προφήτου Δανιήλ, ὅπου ἀπεκάλυψεν ὁ θεὸς ὁ ἅγιος ἐν τοῖς
 χεῖλεσιν αὐτοῦ τῶν ποιητῶν· ἐπληρώθησαν ἐν ἡμέραις Ἀλεξ-
 5 ἀνδρου βασιλέως Μακεδόνων· καὶ ἐγγραφὲν ἐν στοιχείοις καὶ
 ἐξισώμενον ἐλληνιστί, καὶ ἐδόθη ὑποδείξει τῷ κόσμῳ. μετὰ
 δὲ ταῦτα εὐρόντες ταύτην τὴν βίβλον οἱ Ἀραβῖτες μετέθηκαν
 αὐτὴν λόγου αὐτῆς καὶ ἐξίσασαν ταύτην καὶ ἐποίησαν τὴν
 ἀραβικὴν· ἐν δὲ τῷ καιρῷ ἐκείνῳ τοῦ Ψηγῆ' ἔτους καλὸς

²⁰ See M. Mavroudi, *A Byzantine Book* 420.

²¹ F. Sangin, *CCAG XII* (Brussels 1936) 153. I am grateful to Stratis Papaioannou for obtaining for me a copy of the second translator's preface in manuscript form during a visit to the Public Library of St. Petersburg.

²² The manuscript is rife with scribal errors; following Sangin's practice and in order to achieve some economy of presentation, I have not included in the apparatus every instance of dittography, itacism, confusions between long and short vowels, or confusions among long vowels and diphthongs, but I have indicated Sangin's corrections in the apparatus criticus. I am grateful to Alice-Mary Talbot for her perceptive corrections to my first version of the Greek text and its translation; any errors remaining are my own.

Ἀλέξιος καὶ ἐκ τοῦ προκειμένου ὡς ἐγεγόνει ἔπεσε, πόθεν ἐπέ-
 10 στρεψε τήνδε βίβλον εἰς γράμματα ἑλληνικὰ ἤτοι ῥωμαϊκὰ·
 διότι οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν ταύτῃ τῇ βίβλῳ νόθον οὐδὲν ὅ τι ὀρθοῖ,
 καὶ γὰρ πλεῖστα ἐμόχθησα τοῦ μαθεῖν τὰ γράμματα τῶν Ἀράβων
 σαφῶς, καὶ ἔστω γνωστὸν πρὸς ὑμᾶς, [46^v] ὡσπερ οὐ με διέ-
 λαθεν, ὅτι ὁ πάντων πλάστης θεὸς ὁ πλάσας τὰ ὀρατὰ καὶ τὰ
 15 ἀόρατα διὰ τοῦτο ἔπλασε τὸν ἄνθρωπον θείῳ φυσήματι, εἰς
 τὸ ἐρευνᾶν τὰς ἑαυτοῦ δυνάμεις καὶ κρίσεις, καθὼς φησιν ὁ
 Δαβὶδ ὁ μελωδός· *ἐθαυμαστώθη ἡ γνώσις σου ἐξ ἐμοῦ*. Ἰστέον
 ὅτι ὁ ἄνθρωπός ἐστιν ἐπίγειος θεὸς καὶ εἰκὼν τοῦ κτίσαντος
 αὐτοῦ τὸ σῶμα, ἔχων δωδεκάμηνον κατηρητημένον εἰς ὄρ-
 20 μους τρεῖς, ὡς καὶ ὑποκρίτης γράφει· *τρία δὲ εἰσιν κατ' οὐσίαν*
ἀγνώριστα τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἢ ἀόριστα· θεός, ἄγγελος, ψυχή.
Τὸν δὲ θεόν, ἔφη ὁ σοφώτατος Σολομών, εἶναι ἀκοινωνήτον
ὄνομα, μῆτε ἀγγέλους μῆτε ἀνθρώπους ἀκουσθὲν ἢ ἐννοηθὲν.
 25 *διττῶς δὲ ἐν τῇ γραφῇ εἴρηται· φύσει καὶ σχέσει· φύσει μὲν*
καὶ ποιητῆς, σχέσει δὲ καὶ χάριτι ὡς καὶ οἱ δίκαιοι πολλακίς
ὡς θεοὶ λέγονται. Γίνωσκε γινώσιν ὅτι ἡ παρούσα δέλτος ἄρ-
 χεται ἀπὸ τὸν Ὀκτώβριον μῆνα· οὕτως γὰρ ἐκτιθέασιν ταύτην
 οἱ ποιηταὶ καὶ διδάσκαλοι, ὡς ἔστιν ἀρχὴ τοῦ φθινοπώρου
 30 Ὀκτώβρις, Νοέμβρις, καὶ Δεκέμβρις· χειμῶν δὲ Ἰανουάρις,
 Φεβρουάρις, καὶ Μάρτις· χειμῶν δὲ καλεῖται διὰ τὸ ἐκχεῖσθαι
 τοὺς ποταμούς· ἔαρ μηνὰς γ'· Ἀπρίλις, Μαΐς, Ἰούνις· ἔαρ
 αὐτοὺς ὠνόμασαν διὰ τὸ ἀνοίγειν τὴν ἑαυτῆς δύναμιν ἐν τῷ
 λιβάνῳ καὶ ἐν τοῖς δένδροις· [47^r] θέρος μηνὰς γ'· Ἰούλις,
 35 Αὐγούστος, καὶ Σεπτέμβριος· οὕτως δὲ ἐκλήθησαν διὰ τὸ
 θερίζειν τοὺς καρπούς, καὶ ἦσαν οἱ ἄνθρωποι εἰς ἐργασίαν·
 ἐπειράσθη γὰρ τοῦτο δηλῶσαι πρὸς ὑμᾶς τὰ τοιαῦτα δὲ ὥστε
 γίνωσκον, ὅτι καὶ φανῆ ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐν τῇ γῆ σημεῖον
 ἀνάγγελλον, ἔστι τοῦ ἀναπτύξαι τὴν παρούσαν βίβλον· καὶ
 40 ἐὰν ἐνδειξίς καλῶν ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ γένεσθαι μέλλη, ὀφείλομεν
 ποιεῖν εὐχαριστίας καὶ ὕμνους εἰς θεόν· ἐὰν δὲ ἀπόδειξις
 κακοῦ, μέλλομεν ἀπέχειν ἀπὸ ἐχθρας καὶ ἐτέρων κακῶν· καὶ
 ποιεῖν δεήσεις ὑπὲρ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν.

Abbreviations: Fr.: Fisher; Sgn.: Sangin, *CCAG* XII 153; Sull.: Denis
 Sullivan; Tlbt.: Alice-Mary Talbot; An. Sin.: Anastasios of Sinai *Viae*
dux 2, 6–7 (ed. Uthemann)

1 Γίνωσκε Fr. Γηνόσκον MS. | ἡ παρούσα Fr. ὑπαρούσα MS. 5
 ἐξισώμενον Fr. εξισμον MS. 7 αὐτῆς Fr. αὐτῶν MS. | ἐξίσασαν Fr.
 ἐξίσαν MS. 8 ζ Sull. λγ MS. | καλὸς Sgn. καλὸν MS. 9 ἐπέστρεψε

Sgn. ἐπίστρεψε MS. 10 βίβλον Sgn. βύβλον MS. 11 ὀρθοῖ Fr. ορθῆ MS. ὀρθωθῆ Sgn. 12 πλείστα Fr. πλήστη MS. 13 ὑμᾶς Sgn. ἡμᾶς MS. | με Tlbt. μῆ MS. 18 εἰκὼν Fr. οἰκόνα MS. 19 δωδεκάμηνον Fr. δόδεκαμελῶν MS. 20 ὑποκρίτης Fr. Ἰπποκράτης Tlbt. ὑποκράτης MS. 22 ἀκοινώνητον Fr., An. Sin. 7 ἀκηνώνιτον MS. 24 ἐννοηθέν Fr., An. Sin. 8 ἐννοήσθαιν MS. 25 φύσει Fr., An. Sin. 9 φήσι MS. 26 ποιητής Fr., An. Sin. 10 ποιῶτης MS. 27 Γίνωσκε Fr. (cf. 1, 38) Γηνόσκον MS. | ἡ παροῦσα Fr. (cf. 1) ὕπαροῦσα MS. 29 φθινοπόρου Fr. χήνοπορου MS. 30 Δεκέμβρις Fr. δικεύρις MS. 31 Φεβρουάρις Fr. φευράρις MS. 36 ἦσαν Fr ἦν MS. 37 ἐπειράσθην Tlbt. επιράσθην MS. | δηλώσαι Tlbt. δελόσε MS. | ὑμᾶς Tlbt. ἡμᾶς MS. 39 ἔστι Fr. ἔστη MS. | ἀναπτύξει Tlbt. αναπτίξει MS. 40 μέλλη Fr. μέλλιν MS. 41 ἀπόδειξις Tlbt. ἀπόδεξις MS. 43 τῶν Fr. τον MS.

Beginning of the Brontologion, with God the Holy

Know for a fact that the present book is the vision of the Prophet Daniel, when God the holy revealed upon Daniel's lips some of the things that He made;²³ they were fulfilled in the days of Alexander, king of the Macedonians. Both recorded in the letters of Hebrew and translated into equivalent Greek,²⁴ the text also was given forth to the world as a teaching. Thereafter the Arabs found this book and changed it from its language, and they translated this into an equivalent Arabic text.²⁵ But in that time, during the year 6753 (=1245 CE), noble Alexios encountered it, and from the existing Arabic version, as it had come to be, he turned this book into a Greek—that is, a Byzantine—text. Because Alexios failed to correct any of the translation errors in the Arabic text,²⁶ I labored mightily to learn the written language of the Arabs with skill, and let it be known to

²³ I.e., Daniel's revelation explains the hidden meaning of natural occurrences.

²⁴ Literally, "made equivalent in Greek."

²⁵ Literally, "made this equivalent (to the Greek) and made the Arabic (text)."

²⁶ Literally, "because there is nothing bastardized in this text that (Alexios) corrected." νόθος ("bastard, spurious") apparently refers to parts of the Arabic translation that were erroneous and not legitimately or accurately descended from the original Greek text; the second translator complains that Alexios failed to recognize as "bastard" and to correct these Arabic sections.

you, [46^v] just as it most assuredly did not escape my notice, that God, the maker of all, who made *things seen and unseen* (Col 1:16), for this reason made mankind by His divine breath (cf. Gen 2:7), so that mankind could discover His powers and judgments; as David the melode says, *The knowledge of Thee is too wonderful for me* (Ps 138:6a [transl. Brenton]).²⁷ Note that man is an earthly god²⁸ and the likeness of the creator in his bodily form (cf. Gen 1:26). Man has a year of twelve months arranged in a string of 365 days;²⁹ as also the expounder of Scripture writes,³⁰ *Three things are in their essence impossible for mankind to know and to determine: God, an angel, a soul.*³¹ However,³² *the most wise Solomon said, “God” is an “incommunicable name”* (Wisd Sol 14:21 [Brenton]) *heard and understood neither by angels nor by men. In two ways God is specified in Scripture: by His nature and by His relationship to mankind; creator by nature, but also by relationship and grace, since also the just among men often are described as gods* (cf. Ps 81 [82]:6).

²⁷ To its translator this brontologion evidently represents progress over the Psalmist’s resources for discerning the messages God expresses in nature.

²⁸ The phrase ἐπίγειος θεός occurs frequently in various recensions of the enormously popular *Alexander Romance* of ps.-Callisthenes (3rd century CE); it occurs also in ps.-Macarius in the 4th-century *Apothegmata* (PG 34 253.23) and in later theological writings as well.

²⁹ Cf. T. Gaisford, *Eusebii Pamphili episcopi Caesariensis eclogae propheticae* (Oxford 1842) 153.3. Since this predictive text is arranged according to a seasonal calendar of 365 days, its translator apparently chooses to refer to it as one of the tools man possesses to discover and understand God’s workings on earth.

³⁰ Alice-Mary Talbot suggested in a personal communication that the MS. reading ὑποκράτης may be a corruption of Ἰπποκράτης, an otherwise unknown biblical exegete.

³¹ Cf. ps.-Athanasius *Liber de definitionibus* PG 28 536A.9–10, an abridgement of Anastasius of Sinai: K.-H. Uthemann, *Anastasioi Sinaitae viae dux* (Turnhout 1981) 2.1.51–53.

³² From this point to the end of the paragraph, the author quotes and abridges Anastasius of Sinai *Viae dux* 2.2.6–7. His readings differ from Uthemann’s text in two details that reflect *Cantab. Add.* 3049 (= Uthemann witness C): εἶναι τὸν θεὸν Uthemann, τὸν θεὸν εἶναι C (18–19) and ἀνθρώποις – ἀγγέλοις Uthemann, transp. C (19). A colophon in C indicates that Nikolaos, son of Papagregorios, completed this text in Klarentza (Peloponnesos) on 4/26/1336; see P. E. Easterling, *Scriptorium* 16 (1962) 31–32.

Know for a fact that the present text begins from the month of October, for in this way the poets and teachers set this forth, that autumn governs October, November, and December, but winter is January, February, and March. “Winter” is so called because the rivers flow forth.³³ Spring has three months, April, May, June; they termed these months “spring” because it opens up its own power³⁴ in the frankincense and the trees. [47^r] Summer has three months: July, August, and September; they were called by these names because they reaped the harvest³⁵ of the fruits of the earth, and men went to labor (cf. Ps 103 [104]:23).

I have tried to reveal to you such things indeed, so it is known that if a portent bringing news appears in heaven and on earth, it is possible to open and read out the present book; and if an indication of good is destined to come about in the world, we ought to render thanks and hymns of praise to God; but if a disclosure of evil, we must refrain from hatred and other evil actions and make entreaties because of our sins.

The personality of the re-translator is visible in broad outline even though the manuscript witness is corrupt and the structure of the re-translator’s argument is at times loose and associative rather than logical. He was an educated Byzantine acquainted not only with the Bible but also with less familiar writers like the 7th-century theologians Anastasios of Sinai and ps.-Athanasios of Alexandria, whose works he quotes and abridges to illustrate the nature of God. The quotation of Anastasios of Sinai’s *Viae dux* provides the only clue to the re-translator’s date, for it represents a branch of the textual tradition first attested in the mid-14th

³³ Like Anastasios of Sinai, this author demonstrates great respect for etymology as a guide to true meaning. See A. DiBerardino, *Patrology: The Eastern Fathers from the Council of Chalcedon (451) to John of Damascus (†750)* (Cambridge 2008) 323–324. The author derives “winter” (χειμῶν) from the root χέω, “pour/flow.” Cf. A. de Stefani, *Etymologicum Gudianum* II (Leipzig 1920) 563.58, and John Lydus *De mens.* 4.3.13.

³⁴ The author relates “spring” (ἔαρ) to the root ἐάω, “allow/let.”

³⁵ The author relates “summer” (θέρως) to θερίζω, “do summer work/reap.”

century.³⁶ 1350 is thus a rough *terminus post quem* for the retranslation of the *Apocalypse/Praedictiones*; the 17th-century date of *Petrop. Bibl. Publ.* 575 provides an approximate *terminus ante quem*.

In his preface, the re-translator emerges as an energetic scholar sufficiently confident in his intellectual and linguistic abilities to conclude that Alexios had unwittingly translated a flawed Arabic version that did not reflect the divinely inspired *Apocalypse/Praedictiones Danielis* translated into Greek by the Septuagint translators. In effect, the re-translator claimed such superior expertise in the interpretation of natural omens that he could detect spurious content in Alexios' Greek text. Resolving to correct this situation, the re-translator then mastered Arabic to a fairly advanced level of competence and mustered the resources to obtain a teacher of Arabic and to locate an Arabic text of the *Apocalypse/Praedictiones Danielis*.³⁷ He may have worked in Constantinople, an international environment where Greeks might encounter Arabic-speaking scholars, travelers, diplomats, missionaries, and traders,³⁸ and where imperial, patriarchal, and private libraries could have offered him access to Alexios' translation and preface as well as to the Arabic version. A second possible venue for the re-translator is Trebizond, where the astronomer and translator Gregory Chioniades had worked.³⁹ After the death of Chioniades ca. 1320, the 14th-century astronomer George Chrysokkokes claims that he found in Trebizond

³⁶ Cf. n.32 above.

³⁷ Since the re-translator does not use Alexios' title for the work but rather titles it "Brontologion," I assume that he found this title in the Arabic manuscript he used for his translation. This manuscript has not been identified.

³⁸ For a discussion of Arabs resident in Constantinople see S. Reinert, "The Muslim Presence in Constantinople, 9th–15th Centuries: Some Preliminary Observations," in H. Ahrweiler et al. (eds.), *Studies on the Internal Diaspora of the Byzantine Empire* (Washington 1998) 125–150.

³⁹ For Chioniades' career see L. Westerink, "La profession de foi de Grégoire Chioniadès," *REByz* 38 (1980) 233–245, and more recently B. Bydén, *Theodore Metochites' Stoicheiosis Astronomike and the Study of Natural Philosophy and Mathematics in Early Palaeologan Byzantium* (Gothenburg 2003) 242–248.

both an Arabic instructor and the original Arabic texts translated into Greek by Chioniades.

There is evidence that the re-translator knew the translator's preface provided by Alexios, although he did not replicate it. Both translators describe the contents of the work they translated in very similar terms. Alexios begins by referring to the legendary activities of the translators of the Septuagint and explains that other works were translated by them as well:⁴⁰ ἐν τούτοις ἅπασιν ἦν καὶ ἡ βίβλος ἣδε Δανιήλ τοῦ προφήτου ὀπτασίαν ὑπάρχουσα βίβλος ("Among all these texts was also this book consisting of the vision of the prophet Daniel"). The re-translator begins his preface by adapting Alexios' phraseology: ἡ παροῦσα βίβλος ἐστὶν ὄρασις τοῦ προφήτου Δανιήλ ("the present book is the vision of the Prophet Daniel"). Alexios then explains how the original Greek translation passed into Arabic under the sponsorship of the victorious general Mu'awiya who defeated the Emperor Constans; the re-translator summarizes Alexios' rather detailed digression briskly: μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα εὐρόντες ταύτην τὴν βίβλον οἱ Ἀραβίτες μετέθηκαν αὐτὴν λόγου αὐτῆς καὶ ἐξίσασαν ταύτην καὶ ἐποίησαν τὴν ἀραβικὴν ("Thereafter the Arabs found this book and changed it from its language, and they translated this into an equivalent Arabic text"). Both translators next record the particulars of the medieval Greek translation from Arabic, specifying the date of the translation and name of the translator in nearly the same words: Alexios observes, ἐν δὲ τῷ Ϛψνγ' ἔτει ἐντυχῶν τήνδε Ἀλέξιός τις ἀπὸ Βυζάντιον ("chancing upon this in the year 6753 [= 1245 CE] a certain Alexios of Byzantium [i.e. Constantinople]") and continues to explain his personal circumstance, to commend his own translation skills, and to express his distaste for the Arabic language. The re-translator closely replicates Alexios' phraseology as he dates the translation and names the translator: ἐν δὲ τῷ καιρῷ ἐκείνῳ τοῦ Ϛψνγ' ἔτους καλὸς Ἀλέξιος ("But in that time,

⁴⁰ Alexios' Greek text published by Boudreaux, *CCAG* VIII.3 171–178; text and English translation of the his preface available in Fisher, in *Bizans* 178–179.

during the year 6753, noble Alexios”) before expressing his low opinion of Alexios’ version and identifying its inaccuracy as the motivation for his own translation.

Alexios and the anonymous re-translator were very different scholars whose translations of the *Apocalypse/Praedictiones Danielis* represent quite different stylistic levels.⁴¹ Although both observe the rules of classical Greek grammar, each translation gives a distinctive ‘voice’ to the contents of the predictive text. This distinction is evident even from the two short examples of their translations published by Sangin (*CCAG* XII 153–154). The translations begin with the month of October:

Alexios’ version: Ἐὰν τῷ παρόντι μηνὶ τῷ Ὀκτωβρίῳ ἐκλείψῃ ὁ Ἥλιος, ἔνδειξιν ποιεῖ ὅτι ἄρχοντες τῆς στρατείας μετὰ στρατιωτῶν κατὰ τῆς βασιλείας αὐτῶν μούρτον ποιήσωσι, ἀλλὰ τραπήσονται ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ καὶ χαωθήσονται· καὶ ἀκρις φανῆται καὶ ἀνομβρία τριμηναῖος⁴² καὶ εἰς τὰς χώρας τῶν Ἀράβων καὶ Ἰδουμαίας ἐπιδρομαὶ ἔσονται καὶ θόρυβος κοσμικὸς ἐν ταύτῳ τῷ χρόνῳ τούτῳ.

If in the current month of October the sun suffers eclipse, it makes a sign that the commanders of the army with the soldiers might make mutiny against the rule of the king over them, but they will be defeated by him and thrown into chaos. A plague of locusts may also occur and a drought of three months duration and there

⁴¹ *Petrop. Bibl. Publ.* 575 folia 46–64^v contains the only witness known to me of the re-translator’s preface and version of the omens (Sangin, *CCAG* XII 32). With the exception of the two excerpts totaling 38 lines as published by Sangin and discussed below, the remaining omens translated by the re-translator are still unpublished. I do not plan to edit and translate in full his version of the omens as my interest here and in previous studies on Byzantine translation focuses upon the translator’s persona as revealed by his preface and translation style. See E. Fisher, “Arabs, Latins and Persians Bearing Gifts: Greek Translations of Astronomical Texts, ca. 1300,” *BMGS* 36 (2012) 161–177; “Planoudes’ *De trinitate*, the Art of Translation, and the Beholder’s Share,” in G. Demacopoulos et al. (eds.), *Orthodox Readings of Augustine* (Crestwood 2008) 41–61; “Manuel Holobolos, Alfred of Sareshal, and the Greek Translator of ps.-Aristotle’s *De Plantis*,” *ClMed* 57 (2006) 189–211; “Planoudes, Holobolos, and the Motivation for Translation,” *GRBS* 43 (2002) 77–104.

⁴² τριμηναῖος Sgn. τριμήνον MS.

will be attacks against the lands of the Arabs and Idumeans and also universal disorder in this same time.

Alexios' version of the passage is direct but rather stilted and somewhat colorless because of his affection for passive verbs. His choice of vocabulary represents a colloquial level of style from the very beginning of the translation, for he favors the expression τῷ παρόντι μηνί ("in the current month"—i.e. "in this month") to introduce the omens he translates. A search for the phrase in the TLG indicates that it occurs some twenty times in the *Apocalypsis/Praedictiones* but is relatively infrequent in previous texts, appearing in a fourth-century text of John Chrysostom and in the writings of the 12th/13th-century ecclesiastical author Neophytus Inclusus. This sporadic pattern in the literary canon suggests that τῷ παρόντι μηνί may be informal in tone and linguistic register. An additional colloquialism in this section of the translation is μούρτον or μούλτον/μούλτος ("mutiny/rebellion"), a vernacular word derived from Latin *tumultus*⁴³ that occurs in Byzantine texts of the ninth century and later, such as the *Oneirokritikon* of Achmet (9th century), Theophanes Continuatus (10th century), Kekaumenos (11th century), and the 14th-century *Chronica byzantina breviora*. In the final sentence of the translated omen, Alexios includes a phrase derived from the Septuagint, εἰς τὰς χώρας τῶν Ἀράβων καὶ Ἰδουμαίας; Idumea is the biblical land of Edom, which bordered Arabia. Invoking the Septuagint here is a nice literary touch, since the legendary Hebrew scholars who translated the Septuagint into Greek allegedly translated the *Apocalypse/Praedictiones Danielis* as well.

Version of the re-translator: Ἐὰν τῷ παρόντι μηνὶ ἀμαυρώση⁴⁴ καὶ κρατηθῆ ὁ Ἥλιος, ἔχε κανόνα⁴⁵ τῆς ἀποδείξεως ὅτι τριστάτες μετὰ στρατιωτῶν σύνδεσμον ποιήσουσιν κατὰ τῆς βασιλείας αὐτοῦ καὶ ὁ αὐτὸς βασιλεὺς στρέψει αὐτοὺς καὶ ὑποτάξει· φανήσεται δὲ καὶ ἀκρις πολλή, καὶ τριμηνάιους⁴⁶ ὑετὸς οὐ

⁴³ E. Trapp, *Lexikon zur byzantinischen Gräzität* (Vienna 2001) s.v. μούλτον.

⁴⁴ ἀμαυρώση Sgn. ἀμαυρόσεος MS.

⁴⁵ κανόνα Sgn. κανῶν MS.

⁴⁶ τριμηνάιους Sgn. τρίμηνον MS.

φανήσεται, καὶ εἰς τὰς χώρας τῶν μερόπων ἐπιδρομὴ ἀλλοφύλων, φόβος καὶ στενοχωρία ἔσται.

If in the current month the sun becomes dim and is overpowered, take it as a rule from the sign that captains close to the king will form a conspiracy with the soldiers against his rule, and the same king will defeat and subdue them. And both a great plague of locusts will occur and rain will not occur in a three-month period, and there will be an attack by foreign people upon the lands of men, fear, and distress.

The re-translator has retained Alexios' introductory phrase τῶ παρόντι μηνί, perhaps because it is a Greek expression equivalent to a phrase in the original Arabic text. He has eliminated Alexios' colloquial μοῦρτον and rephrased its sense by designating the anti-royal uprising as a σύνδεσμον, the Septuagint's term for a conspiracy.⁴⁷ He has also elaborated the opening of the omen and established an authoritative tone and the connotation of a firm and set principle by inserting a formulaic phrase used in the *Basilics* and Chrysostom, ἔχε ... κανόνα ... ὅτι ("take it as a rule that").⁴⁸ The re-translator further elevated the vocabulary of his version by eliminating Alexios' pedestrian ἄρχοντες τῆς στρατείας and substituting τριστάτες, a word especially used in the Septuagint and in ecclesiastical and theological texts.⁴⁹ This gives his version of the passage a slightly negative connotation and a tone consistent with the Septuagint, where the term is associated with a foreign ruler, the Egyptian Pharaoh⁵⁰ and with

⁴⁷ E.g. 4 Ki 11:14, etc.

⁴⁸ *Basilica* 10.2.24, 10.36.3; ps.-Chrysostom *In sanctum pascha* 17 (ed. Floëri/Nautin).

⁴⁹ Hesychios offers this definition (ed. Cunningham/Hansen): τριστάται οἱ παρὰ χεῖρα τοῦ βασιλέως, ἔχοντες ἀνὰ τρεῖς λόγγασι ("those at the right hand of the king with command over three companies of fighters"). This definition is repeated verbatim by Photios, the *Etymologicum Magnum*, and the *Suda* and is closely paraphrased by the *Lexica Segueriana*. The TLG supplies 124 occurrences of the word, predominately from the Septuagint, hymns, monastic acts, and prayers; it also occurs occasionally in secular scholia and authors (e.g. Prodrornos, Manuel Philes).

⁵⁰ Exod 14:7, 15:4; also Odae 1:4.

idolatrous rulers of Israel.⁵¹ The re-translator also sets the grammatical level of his version at a sophisticated level. Alexios' simple sentence of subject and predicate adjective καὶ ἀνομβρία τριμηναῖος becomes an active sentence τριμηναῖοις ὑετὸς οὐ φανήσεται with an archaizing dative construction to designate time (τριμηναῖοις "in a three month period") displacing Alexios' adjective τριμηναῖος. The re-translator evidently knew Alexios' version well and consciously set his own version at a higher stylistic level. He also corrected what he identified as an error made by Alexios in his translation. He banished the Arabians and Idumeans imported by Alexios from a Syriac version of the Septuagint and restructured the sentence to describe a generic attack by foreign people upon inhabited lands, thus making the omen applicable in a variety of contexts.

In his version of the second omen each scholar displays a formulaic style that he has already established in the first omen. Both use ἐὰν τῷ παρόντι μηνί to introduce the omen, then each turns to an individual construction familiar from his version of the first omen.

Alexios' version: Ἐὰν τῷ παρόντι μηνὶ ἔκλειψις Σελήνης γένηται, ἔνδειξιν ποιεῖ ὅτι εἰς τὰ μέρη τῆς δύσεως φόβος καὶ στένωσις γένηται καὶ θνήσις λίαν· εἰς τὸ μέρος δὲ Βαβυλῶνος ὑετὸς χιονώδης καὶ ἡ σπορὰ βλαβήσεται ἐκ ψύχους καὶ ὁ βασιλεὺς Βαβυλῶνος σκυθρωπάσῃ καὶ θορυβηθῆ ἔνεκεν ἐχθρῶν ἐνανάστασιν καὶ θνήσις ἀνθρώπων καὶ ἐρπετῶν καὶ ἰχθύων καὶ πόνος ὀμμάτων καὶ ῥήψεις καὶ πληγαὶ ἐν ἀνθρώποις καὶ ἀνὰ μέσον τῶν δυτικῶν καὶ ἀνατολικῶν ἀρχόντων στρεβλώσεις καὶ ἔχθραι φηήσονται, καὶ εἰς τῶν ἀρχόντων ἀντάρη κατὰ τῆς βασιλείας τῆς δύσεως καὶ τὸ βασιλείον ἔσται σφετεριζόμενος.

If in this month an eclipse of the moon comes to pass, it makes a sign that fear and privation may come to pass into the territories of the West and death to a great degree. Rain mixed with snow <may come to pass> into the territory of Babylon and the sown seed will be damaged as a result of the cold and the king of Babylon may be vexed and thrown into disorder because of his enemies. Therein will arise both the death of men and of reptiles

⁵¹ 2 Ki 7:2, 7:17–19, 9:25, 10:25, 15:25.

and of fish and <there will be> ocular pain and discharges and wounds among men; also among the rulers of West and East quarrels and hostilities will spring up and one of the rulers may make war against the kingdom of the West and will claim the capital for his own.

Version of the re-translator: Ἐὰν τῷ παρόντι μηνὶ ἀμαυρώσῃ καὶ κρατηθῇ ἡ Σελήνη, ἔχε κανόνα⁵² τῆς ἀποδείξεως, ὅτι εἰς [fol. 48^v] τὸ μέρος τῆς δύσεως φόβος καὶ στενοχωρίαὶ καὶ θάνατος πολὺς γίνεται καὶ εἰς τὰ μέρη τῆς Βαβυλῶνος ὑετὸς καὶ χιῶν λεπτὸς πολὺς ὥστε καὶ τὴν σπορὰν βλάψαι φθάσει⁵³ ἐκ τοῦ ψύχους καὶ τὴν βασιλείαν τῆς αὐτῆς Βαβυλῶνος, δι' ὃ λογισμοὶ⁵⁴ πολλοὶ καὶ ἔννοιαὶ ἐπέλθουσι⁵⁵ διὰ τὸ ἐπαναστῆναι ὑπ' αὐτῶν ἐχθροὶ πολλοί, καὶ θάνατος ἀνθρώπων καὶ θνήσις ἐρπετῶν καὶ ἰχθύων γενήσεται, ὁμοίως καὶ ὀφθαλμῶν ὀδύνη καὶ τραύματα ἐπὶ τὰς σάρκας τῶν ἀνθρώπων γενήσεται καὶ μετὰ τῶν ἐν τῇ ἀνατολῇ καὶ δύσει ἔχθρα καὶ ὄχλησις γενήσεται καὶ ἄνθρωπος μέγας ἀποστασίαν ποιήσει καὶ γυρεύσει τὴν βασιλείαν τῆς δύσεως.

If in this month the moon becomes dim and is overpowered, take it as a rule from the sign that into the territory of the West fear and hardship and much death are coming to pass as well as rain and much light snow into the territories of Babylon so that first harm will befall the sown seed because of the cold and also the kingdom of <this> same Babylon, wherefore many interpretations and notions may suddenly come to be; because of their rising in contention, many enemies <may suddenly come to be>, the death of men and the perishing of reptiles and fish will come to pass at the same time as diseases of the eyes and wounds upon the flesh of men will come to pass, and after hostilities of those in East and West also disturbance will come to pass and a great man will cause a falling away and will encircle the Kingdom of the West.

⁵² ἔχε κανόνα Sgn. ἔχεκα κανών MS.

⁵³ βλάψαι Sgn. βλάψει MS. The classical verb φθάσει (“be first”) completed by an infinitive rather than a participle is a late Greek usage; using the verb here to express priority of action elevates the tone of the text. I find the impersonal construction awkward.

⁵⁴ δι' ὃ λογισμοὶ Sgn. διὰ λογησμοί MS.

⁵⁵ ἔννοιαὶ ἐπέλθουσι Sgn. ἔννοιαὶ ἐπέλθουσι MS.

Alexios sets his formula for translating an omen by repeating ἔνδειξιν ποιεῖ ὅτι, a circumlocution for the classical verb ἐνδείκνυμι with ὅτι that is attractive because it enables the translator to avoid using a classical form of a -μι verb. The re-translator sets his distinctive formula for translating an omen by repeating his authoritative phrase ἔχε κανόνα τῆς ἀποδείξεως, ὅτι. Both translators continue with a string of clauses in simple parataxis, which probably echoes the structure of the original Arabic text. The re-translator imports a sophisticated tone into his version by altering this simple pattern with two subordinate clauses, a result clause (ὥστε καὶ τὴν σπορὰν βλάψαι φθάσει ἐκ τοῦ ψύχους καὶ τὴν βασιλείαν τῆς αὐτῆς Βαβυλῶνος) and a relative clause explaining further repercussions of crop failure caused by unseasonable cold. Consistent with the religious concerns he expressed in his preface, the re-translator suggests that religious controversy will lead to dissention and disease (δι' ὃ λογισμοὶ πολλοὶ καὶ ἔννοιαι ἐπέλθωσι διὰ τὸ ἐπαναστῆναι ὑπ' αὐτῶν ἐχθροὶ πολλοί, καὶ θάνατος ἀνθρώπων), an implication missing in Alexios' version. Perhaps this is an example of the content correction that Alexios failed to make, as the re-translator complained in his preface. The re-translator may be making a similar content correction in the closing line of the omen, where he chooses ἀποστασία ("revolt, apostasy") to represent the activities of a leader in a time of trouble between East and West. Again, Alexios' version does not touch upon religious matters. The translations also disagree about the final outcome of this episode. Alexios sees the loss of a capital or palace (τὸ βασίλειον), while the re-translator mentions an attack on the kingdom of the West (τὴν βασιλείαν τῆς δύσεως). Without access to the original Arabic of the omen, it is not possible to assess the accuracy of these two versions.

There is fragmentary evidence of a third translation of the *Praedictiones* related to Alexios' particular version but representing a different tradition of interpreting a portent. This third tradition survives only as a thunder oracle preserved in a 15th-century manuscript now in Berlin (*Berol.phil.* 1577 fol. 71). The manuscript contains Mazaris' *Journey to Hades* (fol. 1–42) as well

as astrological and magical texts that include eighteen omens from the *Apocalypse/Praedictiones Danielis* (fol. 69–72). Among them, the thunder oracle adopts the phraseology familiar from Alexios' translation of the omens (Ἐὰν τῷ παρόντι μηνὶ ... ἔνδειξιν ποιεῖ ὅτι) but follows a different formula for interpretation that resembles an insular tradition originating in the West during the 11th and 12th centuries. In this mode of interpretation, a natural phenomenon like thunder is chronologically connected to the hour of the day, the day of the week, or the day of the month when it occurs.⁵⁶ The Berlin brontologion connects the day of the month when thunder occurs with its interpretation. To illustrate this format unusual in Byzantine texts interpreting omens, I cite the opening section of omen 13 (fol. 71):⁵⁷

Ἐκ τῶν ἀποκαλύψεων τοῦ προφήτου Δανιήλ
 ιγ'. Περὶ βροντισμοῦ ἄγαν
 Ἐὰν ἐν τῷ παρόντι μηνὶ βροντισμὸς ἄγαν γένηται, ἔνδειξιν ποιεῖ,
 ὅτι ἐὰν εἰς τὴν α' ἢ εἰς τὴν δ' ἡμέραν τοῦ παρόντος μηνὸς βρον-
 τήση, ὅτι ἄνθρωπος μέγας θανεῖται ἢ ἀφανισθῆ. εἰ δὲ εἰς τὴν ε'
 ἡμέραν τοῦ παρόντος μηνὸς ἢ εἰς τὴν ς' ἢ εἰς τὴν ζ' βροντισμὸς
 γένηται, ὅτι οἱ τριστάται καὶ οἱ σατράπαι τῷ αὐτῷ χρόνῳ ἅμα
 συντριβήσονται· ὀπώρα δὲ σῖτος καὶ κριθὴ καὶ ὄσπριον πολὺ
 γένηται ἢ καὶ τὰ κλήματα τῆς ἀμπέλου εὐτυχήσουσιν. εἰ δὲ εἰς
 τὴν η' αὐτοῦ βροντήση, ἢ ὀπώρα ἐν τοῖς δένδροις πληγήσεται. εἰ
 δὲ εἰς τὴν θ' αὐτοῦ βροντήση, οἱ ἄνθρωποι εἰς ταραχὰς καὶ
 πάθος ἔσονται·

From the Apocalypse of the Prophet Daniel

13. Concerning a great amount of thunder

If in the current month a great amount of thunder occurs, it makes a sign: if on the first or fourth day of the current month it thunders, that a great man will die or may disappear. But if on the fifth day of the current month or the sixth or seventh thunder occurs, that the captains close to the king and the satraps at the same time together will be crushed; in autumn, moreover, grain and barley and legumes may become abundant or the branches of the grape vines will also flourish. But if on the eighth day of the

⁵⁶ Juste and Chiu, *Traditio* 68 (2013) 106.

⁵⁷ F. Boll, *CCAG* VII (Brussels 1908) 173.

month it thunders, the fruit on the trees will be violently stricken. But if on the ninth day of the month it thunders, mankind will be in disorder and distress.

Although the Berlin fragment is unique in Greek in its use of chronological indicators, it also resembles the Greek translations of the *Praedictiones*. Both types combine predicting political disturbances like the loss of a leader, a palace revolt, a foreign attack, warfare, or general disorder with forecasting natural events like good or poor crops, a plague of locusts, or death and disease among humans and animals.

In conclusion, this sample of the only published and available predictions contained in the *Apocalypse/Praedictiones Danielis* reflects in form and content the prognoses in the earliest surviving ancestor of the genre, the second millennium BCE Babylonian *Enuma Anu Enlil*.⁵⁸ A 7th-century BCE Neo-Assyrian tablet preserves this useful comparative text:

If a fog rolls in in Nisan, the population density of the land will become high ... If a fog rolls in in Ajjar, (there will be) an attack by the enemy against the land.

The same pattern emerges in both the Greek and the Babylonian traditions. A natural event is dated in terms of the month of its occurrence, followed by a prediction of its significance for the social or political life of man, and both traditions rest upon the same assumption: heaven reveals the fate of man in extraordinary signs from nature.

The extraordinary longevity and appeal of this ancient genre is evident in the strenuous efforts of Alexios the prisoner of war and of two other Byzantine translators to make a text revealing the will of heaven available to Greek speakers. However flawed Alexios' 13th-century version may have been, it survived in Byzantium for a century or more before the time of the anonymous re-translator. He produced a second translation because he considered Alexios' version an intolerably inadequate vehicle

⁵⁸ E. Gehlken, *Weather Omens of Enuma Anu Enlil: Thunderstorms, Wind and Rain* (Leiden 2012) 1–7 and 188.

to carry essential truth. This second translation of an omen text survived into our own age of science and technology only because a 17th-century scribe of minimal ability but great energy copied it. We owe him our grudging thanks.⁵⁹

August, 2019

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⁵⁹ I am grateful to the editor and anonymous readers of *GRBS* for frank, perceptive, and helpful suggestions leading to a greatly improved revision of this article. They benefited the final version immeasurably.