

# Tales from the Crypt: The *Scheintod* of Zeno and Anastasios, Reexamined

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SEVERAL NARRATIVES about Emperor Zeno's death on 9 April 491 were in circulation.<sup>1</sup> According to Malalas he died of dysentery.<sup>2</sup> According to many others, starting with Evagrius,<sup>3</sup> he perished instead from a particularly severe epileptic seizure. Later Byzantine historians, notably Psellos, Kedrenos, and Zonaras, assert that Zeno succumbed to a case of *Scheintod* (due to epilepsy or alcoholism) and was buried alive. Awakening in his sarcophagus, for days he cried out for help but the guards showed no mercy. In doing so, they followed the orders of Empress Ariadne who was already thinking of tying the knot with her lover Anastasios. For other sources, however, starting with Symeon Logothetes, the protagonist of the disturbing episode was Anastasios himself, who allegedly fell into a coma during a terrible thunderstorm in July 518.<sup>4</sup>

In neither case, however, do Malalas, Victor of Tunnuna, and Evagrius, the historians closest to the events, speak of ap-

<sup>1</sup> For the date see R. Kosiński, *The Emperor Zeno: Religion and Politics* (Cracow 2010) 222.

<sup>2</sup> *Chron.* 15.16, μετὰ δὲ ὀλίγον καιρὸν δυσεντερία ληφθεὶς ὁ αὐτὸς βασιλεὺς Ζήνων ἐτελεύτησεν; followed by *Chron.Pasch.* p.607 Dindorf and by Symeon Logothetes 101.4, μετὰ δὲ χρόνον ὀλίγον δυσεντερία ληφθεὶς ὁ Ζήνων ἐτελεύτησε, τῶν Ἀκεφάλων ὢν.

<sup>3</sup> *HE* 3.29, τοῦ Ζήνωνος τοῖνον ἄπαιδος τελευτήσαντος ἐπιληψίας νόσῳ μετὰ ἔβδομον καὶ δέκατον ἔτος τῆς αὐτοῦ βασιλείας κτλ.

<sup>4</sup> For the date of Anastasios' death (or apparent death) see F. K. Haarer, *Anastasius I: Politics and Empire in the Late Roman World* (Cambridge 2006) 246.

parent death. Everything suggests, in short, that we are dealing with a ‘migratory legend’ that was connected with these two emperors. But when was it born? Who was its first protagonist? Scholars have pondered this before, and now the time seems ripe to take up the subject again in light of new and more extensive documentation.

In this contribution I will first trace the historical sources relevant to Zeno’s and Anastasios’ apparent death, including some that remain unpublished and the neglected *Necrologium imperatorum*. This will make it possible to follow the development of the *Scheintod* rumors properly and to elucidate the contributions of individual authors. A complete motif-index for the two *Scheintode* will be given in the Appendix.

Then, through the analysis of a hitherto neglected source, the pseudo-Galenic treatise *De prohibenda sepultura*, datable to the sixth-seventh centuries, I will show that the story of Zeno’s *Scheintod* due to epilepsy was, quite possibly, already in circulation a few decades after his death, and was probably already known to the Emperor Herakleios (610–641). This will make it possible to overturn the assumption that these *Scheintod* stories are a later development, highlighting the potential of Psellos and especially Kedrenos to draw on earlier sources, probably dating (directly or indirectly) to the Late Antique period.

### 1. *Narratives about Zeno’s death*

Let us start with the sources that allege Zeno’s apparent death. This story experienced considerable popularity, especially in the West. It is the focus of the Latin tragedy *Zeno, sive ambitio infelix* (1631) by the English Jesuit Joseph Simons,<sup>5</sup> which enjoyed great success and was even translated into Greek.<sup>6</sup> Zeno’s terrible fate (taken from the *Annales* of Baronius, who in

<sup>5</sup> See B. Hoxby, “Baroque Tragedy,” in J. D. Lyons (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Baroque* (Oxford 2019) 516–539, at 527–528. The story was also later featured in an anonymous Italian tragedy: *Il Zenone imperadore di Costantinopoli. Tragedia* (Bologna 1735).

<sup>6</sup> See C. A. Trypanis, *Greek Poetry from Homer to Seferis* (Chicago 1981) 565.

turn had taken it from Zonaras) was also recalled in the eighteenth century by the French physician Jean-Jacques Bruhier in his pioneering treatise on apparent death,<sup>7</sup> from which it has flowed into later books up to the contemporary age.<sup>8</sup>

The first surviving Byzantine source to mention the episode is Michael Psellos (1018–ca. 1076) in his *Historia syntomos* 68 (p.52 Aerts).<sup>9</sup> Psellos gives drunkenness as the cause of the accident and insists on the intrigue that while the ruler was still alive linked Empress Ariadne to Anastasios:

Ζήνων. Ζήνωνι οὐχ ἡ ὄψις μόνη κακὴ, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ πονηρά. Πατρὸς γὰρ ἀποτεχθεὶς εὐσεβοῦς καὶ δέον τοῖς εὐσεβέσι καταριθμείσθαι αὐτὸς τῆς τῶν ἀκεφάλων ἐγεγόνει αἰρέσεως. Αἰριάδην δὲ γήμας ἀγαθὴν τὴν ὄψιν οὐ μόνον οὐδὲν ἐκείνης ἀπάνωτο, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀτυχέστατος ἐκεῖθεν πάντων ἐγεγόνει βασιλέων. Αὕτη γὰρ ἅπαξ ἰδοῦσα τὸν δίκωρον Ἀναστάσιον λογιώτατον ἄνδρα καὶ τοῖς ἐν τέλει κατηριθμημένον τὴν τε ὄψιν ἀκριβῶς διαλάμποντα, κατ' ἄκρας ἐαλώκει τὰνδρός. Καὶ ἐπειδὴ ὁ Ζήνων γαστρὸς ἤττητο καὶ φιλοποσίας καὶ πολλάκις τοὺς λογισμοὺς μεθῶν ἀπώλλυε καὶ ἔφκει νεκρῶ, ἅπαξ τοῦτο γενόμενον τῷ τάφῳ καταχωννύει ζῶντα. Ὁ δὲ ἀνανήψας φωνὰς μὲν ἠφίει καὶ ὠλοφύρετο, ἤγνε δὲ οὐδέν, ἀλλ' οὐ κέχωστο κακῶς ἀπεβίω.

Zeno. Not only Zeno's appearance was horrible, but he had also an evil soul. Though the son of an orthodox father and obliged

<sup>7</sup> J.-J. Bruhier, *Dissertation sur l'incertitude des signes de la mort et l'abus des enterremens, et embaumemens précipités*<sup>2</sup> I (Paris 1749) 24–27, 296.

<sup>8</sup> See, for instance, T. Braccini, “Morti due volte. Per una definizione antropologica della morte nel mondo bizantino e slavo,” in F. P. de Ceglia (ed.), *Storia della definizione di morte* (Rome 2014) 123–149, at 126–127; M. P. Donato, “La morte repentina, tra dubbi diagnostici e speranze di rianimazione (secc. XVII–XVIII),” in *Storia* 199–214, at 199. The story is also attested in popular essays, often given to exaggeration: see J. Bondeson, *Buried Alive: The Terrifying History of Our Most Primal Fear* (New York 2001) 54.

<sup>9</sup> Despite doubts raised in the past, the attribution of the work to Psellos prevails today: see W. Treadgold, *The Middle Byzantine Historians* (Basingstoke 2013) 282–289; L. Neville, *Guide to Byzantine Historical Writing* (Cambridge 2018) 15–16 and 144–145.

to side with the orthodox, he joined the heresy of the ‘acephals’. He married the beautiful Ariadne but she brought him no pleasure. On the contrary, she made him the unhappiest of all emperors. For no sooner had she seen Anastasios, a man with two differently coloured eyes, very erudite, belonging to the gentle ranks and really handsome, that she was absolutely fascinated by the man. And because Zeno was the slave of his belly and a dipsomaniac, and often got drunk out of his mind so that he resembled a corpse, she had him buried alive once, when he was in this condition. Sober again he cried and wailed, but in vain, and he died wretchedly where he was buried. (transl. W. J. Aerts)

Next, George Kedrenos (late 11<sup>th</sup> to early 12<sup>th</sup> cent.) gives this account of Zeno’s death (*Synopsis historion* I 622 Bekker = 388.18–36, pp.605–606 Tartaglia):

Τοιούτου γὰρ καὶ τοσούτου γεγονότος τοῦ Ζήνωνος ἔν τε φόνοις καὶ ἀθεμίτοις πράξεσιν, οὐκ ἠμέλησε τὸ θεῖον εἰς τὴν τούτου ἀναίρεσιν, ἀλλὰ σφοδραῖς καὶ ἀδιαγνώστοις ὀδύναϊς πᾶν τὸ σῶμα περιβαλὼν βιαίως τοῦ ζῆν ἀπεστέρησε. Λόγος δὲ ἐφέρετο, ὅτι ὡς ἕκ τινος θείας δυνάμεως ἀοράτως ἐκατατομήθη, μόνης τῆς δέρεως τῷ τραχήλῳ συνημμένης. Τῆς οὖν γαμετῆς αὐτοῦ καὶ τῶν θαλαμηπόλων τῆς οἰκείας ἀσφαλείας προνοουμένων, εἶασαν τὸν νεκρὸν κείμενον γυμνὸν ἐπὶ σανίδος καὶ μόλις ἀμφὶ τὸν ὄρθρον τῶν οὐ προσηκόντων τις ἔρριπεν αὐτῷ σινδόνα. Μετὰ δὲ τὸ κατατεθῆναι αὐτὸν ἐν τῷ τάφῳ ἔφασαν οἱ σωματοφυλακεῖν τεταγμένοι γοερὰν φωνὴν ἐπὶ δύο νύκτας ἀποδίδοσθαι ἐκ τοῦ μνήματος αὐτοῦ· “Ἐλεήσατε, ἐλεήσατε,” καὶ “ἀνοιξατέ μοι.” Τῶν δὲ εἰπόντων, ὅτι ἄλλος βασιλεύει, ἔφη “Οὐδέν μοι μέλει· εἰς μοναστήριον ἀπαγάγετέ με.” Τῶν δὲ μὴ ἀνοιζάντων, λέγεται μετὰ τινα χρόνον τὸ μνημεῖον ἀνοιγῆναι καὶ εὑρεθῆναι αὐτὸν ὑπὸ πείνης φαγόντα τοὺς βραχίονας αὐτοῦ καὶ τὰ καλήγια, ἃ ἐφόρει,<sup>10</sup> διὰ τὸ συχνῶς τῷ κατόχῳ νοσήματι κρατεῖσθαι, καὶ προφιλιοθῆναι ἔτι ζώντος αὐτοῦ τὴν Ἀρεάδην τῷ Ἀναστασίῳ, ὅθεν καὶ οἱ φύλακες τῶν βασιλικῶν μνημάτων

<sup>10</sup> L. Tartaglia, *Georgii Cedreni historiarum compendium* II (Rome 2016) 606, whose text I otherwise follow, postulates a lacuna at this point.

τῆ παραγγελία αὐτῆς πρὸς τὸ μὴ ἀνοιγῆναι τὸν Ζήωνα ἐτυπώθησαν ἕκτοτε.

Because of the enormity of Zeno's murders and lawless deeds, God did not fail to take his life, but after encompassing his body with excruciating and mysterious pains He forcefully deprived him of life. There was a rumor that he had been inexplicably beheaded by a divine force: only the skin kept his head attached to his neck. His wife and handmaids, concerned for their own safety, had left his naked corpse on a plank. It was only around dawn that a stranger threw a sheet over him. After he was buried, the guards stationed at the grave claimed that for two nights they had heard a wailing voice coming from his burial: "Have mercy, have mercy! Open it for me!" When the guards told him that now there was another emperor, he replied, "I don't care: take me to a monastery!" They did not open the tomb for him, however, and it is said that when it was later opened, it was discovered that due to hunger he had eaten off his arms and footwear, since he was often seized by catalepsy. It was also said that Ariadne was Anastasios' mistress while Zeno was alive, and it was because of this that, on her orders, the guardians of the imperial tombs had received orders not to release Zeno thereafter.

The passage, with its desultory structure, seems a conflation of different sources that will be discussed below. For now I merely draw attention to Zeno's "near-decapitation," a unique feature that is possibly connected to the latter's affinity with the heresy of the Akephaloi,<sup>11</sup> mentioned by Psellos (and Ps.-Symeon, as we shall see). The affair between Ariadne and Anastasios is also featured in Psellos' *Historia syntomos*. The cause of the coma, however, is different: a "cataleptic disease" according to Kedrenos, debauchery according to Psellos.<sup>12</sup> Later Byzantine

<sup>11</sup> Noted by the same Kedrenos at the start of his narrative on Zeno (I 615 Bekker = 384.1 p.600 Tartaglia): Ζήνων Ῥωμαίων βασιλεὺς ἔτη κζ' μῆνας δ', αἰρετικὸς τῆς συγχυτικῆς αἰρέσεως τῶν Ἀκεφάλων.

<sup>12</sup> Ancient physicians connected dietary excesses and epilepsy: see L. I. Conrad, "Zeno, the Epileptic Emperor: Historiography and Polemics as Sources of Realia," *BMGs* 24 (2000) 61–81, at 67–68.

authors (listed in the Motif-index in the Appendix) do not seem to provide anything new regarding Zeno's *Scheintod*. Even John Zonaras (*Epitome historion* III 132–133) seems merely to combine information found in Psellos<sup>13</sup> and Kedrenos (resort to οἱ μὲν... φασι... οἱ δέ... φασι is diagnostic).

This narrative, branded as a legend already by Sébastien Le Nain de Tillemont,<sup>14</sup> was analyzed some twenty years ago by Lawrence I. Conrad.<sup>15</sup> He proposed a series of conclusions that enjoyed some recognition:<sup>16</sup> Zeno's epilepsy had no real basis (nor *a fortiori* his apparent death); it was a contemporaneous rumor devised by the Chalcedonians against him. First mentioned by Evagrius at the end of the sixth century, epilepsy was probably hinted at already in Eustathios of Epiphaneia's *Chronological epitome*, written at the very beginning of the sixth century.<sup>17</sup> According to Conrad, Kedrenos derived this information—if his *κάτοχον νόσημα* is in fact epilepsy—from Ps.-Symeon, one of his main sources, who in turn derived it from Eustathios of Epiphaneia.<sup>18</sup> Finally, as John Lydos' mention of Zeno's "unfortunate end" shows,<sup>19</sup> the *Scheintod* story circulated as early as the sixth century.

<sup>13</sup> One of his sources: see Treadgold, *The Middle Byzantine Historians* 283 n.62.

<sup>14</sup> *Histoire des empereurs et des autres princes qui ont régné durant le six premiers siècles de l'Église VI* (Paris 1738) 525.

<sup>15</sup> *BMGS* 24 (2000) 61–81.

<sup>16</sup> See most recently P. Crawford, *Roman Emperor Zeno: The Perils of Power Politics in Fifth-Century Constantinople* (Barnsley 2019) 224–228.

<sup>17</sup> On Eustathios see Treadgold, *The Early Byzantine Historians* (Basingstoke 2007) 114–119, 250–256, 316–329.

<sup>18</sup> Conrad, *BMGS* 24 (2000) 73–74.

<sup>19</sup> *Mag.* 3.45.3, ἔσχε δὲ ὁμῶς καὶ αὐτὸς [scil. Zeno] ἀναίσιον πέρας. A. Bandy interprets this allusion as a reference to death on epilepsy: *Ioannes Lydus, On Powers* (Philadelphia 1983) 324, note to 202.19; Jacques Schamp, like Conrad, thinks that there is a connection to a "développement romanesque" such as the "légende monstrueuse" of the *Scheintod*: *Jean le Lydien, Des magistratures de l'état Romain II* (Paris 2006) C–CI and 99 n.157.

This interesting set of inferences, however, suffers from some shortcomings: the role of Psellos is completely ignored and the claim that Kedrenos derived his narrative from Ps.-Symeon must also be rejected (as already observed by Luigi Tartaglia).<sup>20</sup> The text of Ps.-Symeon's tenth-century chronicle is still largely unpublished<sup>21</sup> and survives chiefly in MS. *Paris.gr.* 1712, fols. 18<sup>v</sup>–272<sup>r</sup>.<sup>22</sup> Zeno's death is told on p.116<sup>v</sup> of the Paris MS.:<sup>23</sup>

ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ Ζήνων ἐπιληψία κατασχεθεὶς καὶ ἐπὶ στοματος φέρων ἀπαύστως τὴν Πελαγίου προσηγορίαν τοῦ παρ' αὐτοῦ ἀδίκως φονευθέντος, τελευτᾷ παῖδα μὴ καταλιπών. Ἐτέθη δὲ τὸ σῶμα αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ ναῶ τῶν ἁγίων Ἀποστόλων ἐν λάρνακι πρασίνη. Ἦν δὲ τῆς τῶν Ἀκεφάλων αἰρέσεως.

But Zeno himself also died, seized by epilepsy, bearing constantly on his lips the name of Pelagius, whom he had unjustly killed, leaving no children behind. His body was buried in the Church of the Holy Apostles in a green sarcophagus. He belonged to the heresy of the Acephalians.

This account has precise verbal correspondences with Theophanes (*Chron.* 135–136 de Boor), albeit with some curtailments, and does not mention the story of Zeno's *Scheintod*. If Kedrenos had Ps.-Symeon in mind,<sup>24</sup> he was certainly not his main source.

<sup>20</sup> Both in his edition (p.605) and “La morte dell'imperatore Zenone nella Cronaca di Giorgio Cedreno e nelle fonti bizantine,” in T. Creazzo et al. (eds.), *Studi bizantini in onore di Maria Dora Spadaro* (Acireale 2016) 429–434, at 431.

<sup>21</sup> See Treadgold, *The Middle Byzantine Historians* 217–223; Neville, *Guide* 121 (where the year “318” should be corrected to “813”).

<sup>22</sup> The beginning also survives in *Vat.gr.* 697, fols. 49<sup>r</sup>–134<sup>v</sup>. See S. Petalas, “Du nouveau sur la tradition manuscrite de la chronique du Pseudo-Syméon,” *TM* 24 (2020) 483–497.

<sup>23</sup> Consulted at <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b55013443j>. I have standardized the use of accents, punctuation, capitalization, and iota subscript.

<sup>24</sup> His mention of the κάτογον νόσημα could be a reworking of the phrase ἐπιληψία κατασχεθεὶς, derived in turn from Theophanes (p.135 de Boor).

## 2. *Narratives about Anastasios' death*

The same Ps.-Symeon, however, attributes a similar incident to Anastasios (*Paris.gr.* 1712, fol. 123<sup>v</sup>):

Τῷ δ' αὐτῷ ἔτει, ἰνδικτιῶνος ια', μηνὶ Ἀπριλλίῳ θ', βροντῶν καὶ ἀστραπῶν περὶ τὸ Παλάτιον εἰλουμένων, καὶ τοῦ βασιλέως μονωτάτου καταλειφθέντος καὶ φεύγοντος ἀπὸ τόπου εἰς τόπον, ἐν ἐνὶ τῶν κοιτωνίσκων τῷ λεγομένῳ Ὡάτῳ κατέλαβεν αὐτὸν ἡ ὀργή, ὥστε αἰφνίδιον εὔρεθῆναι νεκρόν. Καὶ ἐτέθη τὸ σῶμα αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ ναῷ τῶν ἁγίων Ἀποστόλων ἐν λάρνακι Ἀκιντιανῷ μετὰ Ἀρειάδνης τῆς αὐτοῦ γυναικὸς προτετελευτησάσης, ὅτι θείῳ σκηπτῷ κεραυνωθεὶς (κεραυνωθῆς MS.) ὁ δεῖλαιος ἐμβρόντητος γέγονεν. Φασὶ δὲ αὐτὸν μετὰ τὸ ταφῆναι μεθ' ἡμέρας τινὰς βοᾶν· “Ἐλεῆσατέ με” καὶ “ἀνοίξατε.” Τῶν μνημοραλίων δὲ εἰπόντων ὅτι ἄλλος βασιλεύει, ἔφη· “Οὐδέν μοι μελεῖ, εἰς μοναστήριον ἀπαγάγετέ με.” Οἱ δὲ εἶσαν (εἶσαν MS.) αὐτόν. Λέγεται δὲ μετὰ πολὺ τὸ μνήμα ἀνοιγῆναι καὶ εὔρεθῆναι αὐτὸν ὑπὸ πείνης φαγόντα τοὺς βραχίονας αὐτοῦ καὶ τὰ καλτικὰ ἃ ἐφόρει, διὰ τὸ εἶναι αἰρετικὸν Ἀναστάσιον.

In the same year, in the eleventh indiction, on April 9, while thunder and lightning surrounded the Palace, and the emperor, left completely alone, fled from room to room, [divine] wrath caught him in one of the rooms, the so-called Oaton, so that he was unexpectedly found dead. His body was laid to rest in the Church of the Holy Apostles, in an Aquitanian stone sarcophagus, together with his wife Ariadne, who had predeceased him, because the wretched man had been stupefied when struck by heaven-sent lightning. They say that a few days after the burial he cried out, “Have mercy on me, open [the tomb]!” When the guards said that another was reigning, he replied, “I don't care, take me to a monastery!” They, however, left him there. It is said that after a long time the tomb was opened and it was discovered that from hunger he had eaten his arms and the footwear he was wearing, since Anastasios was a heretic.

That Ps.-Symeon's text seems a conflation of different sources is evident from the sometimes rough transitions between periods. This excerpt is preceded by reports of premonitory dreams about the imminent end of the ruler. These dreams are remembered by Malalas (16.20), *Chronicon Paschale* (610–611),



and Theophanes (163–164 de Boor).<sup>25</sup> The latter features a text that is very close to Ps.-Symeon's.<sup>26</sup>

The story of the storm, Anastasios' terrified flight through the palace, and his death after being struck by "divine wrath" already recurs, almost verbatim, in Cyril of Scythopolis (d. ca. 559) and in some later chroniclers.<sup>27</sup> It is also reported by Victor of Tunnuna (d. shortly after 566), who in all likelihood derived it from Theodore Anagnostes.<sup>28</sup> The narrative of the lightning storm and the *Scheintod* is very close to Symeon Logothetes' (who takes the account of the terrified flight from Cyril<sup>29</sup> and, in turn, features a shortened version of the dream episode).<sup>30</sup> The date of the event and Ps.-Symeon's statement that

<sup>25</sup> See Haarer, *Anastasius I* 246–247. Anastasios' dream and his death from fear during a storm are also recalled by John Moschus in *Pratum spirituale* 38. See P. Allen, *Evagrius Scholasticus the Church Historian* (Leuven 1981) 169.

<sup>26</sup> The premonitory narrative has been studied by G. Fatouros, "Ἀπαλείφω δεκατέσσαρα, zu Johannes Malalas' Chronographie," in I. Vassis et al. (eds.), *Lesarten. Festschrift für Athanasios Kambylis* (Berlin 1998) 61–66.

<sup>27</sup> *Vita Sabae* p.162 Schwartz, τῆι νυκτὶ τῆς δεκάτης τοῦ Ἰουλίου μηνὸς καθ' ἣν ὁ μακάριος Ἡλίας τὴν ὄπτασίαν εἶδεν, βροντῶν καὶ ἀστραπῶν περὶ τὸ παλάτιον ἐνειλουμένων καὶ τὸν βασιλέα Ἀναστάσιον μονώτατον σχεδὸν καταβοσκομένων ἀδημονοῦντα αὐτὸν καὶ φεύγοντα ἀπὸ τόπων εἰς τόπους ἐν ἐνὶ τῶν κοιτωνίσκων κατέλαβεν ἡ ὄργη καὶ ῥίψασα ἀπέκτεινεν, ὥστε αἰφνίδιον εὐρεθῆναι νεκρὸν (= George the Monk p. 619 de Boor).

<sup>28</sup> Th. Mommsen, *Chronica minora II* (Berlin 1894) 196, ad a. 518: *Anastasius imperator intra palatium suum tonitruorum terrore fugatus et coruscationis iaculo percussus in cubiculo, quo absconsus fuerat, moritur et cum ignominia absque consuetis exequiis ad tumulum ducitur anno vitae suae LXXXVIII*. See also the entry in *Lib.pont.* 54: *percussus divino ictu fulminis Anastasius interiit* (p.101 Duchesne) and 54.V *nutu divinitatis percussus est fulmine divino Anastasius imperator et obiit* (p.270). Cf. G. C. Hansen, *Theodores Anagnostes, Kirchengeschichte<sup>2</sup>* (Berlin 1995) fr.77, p.151. See also A. Berger, *Untersuchungen zu den Patria Konstantinupoleos* (Bonn 1988) 266–267.

<sup>29</sup> Wahlgren speaks oddly of an "interesting ... as far as I know, unique addition": S. Wahlgren, *The Chronicle of the Logothete* (Liverpool 2019) 104 n.1.

<sup>30</sup> *Chron.* 102.5–7, καὶ βροντῶν καὶ ἀστραπῶν περὶ τὸ παλάτιον εἰλουμένων καὶ τοῦ βασιλέως μονωτάτου καταλειφθέντος καὶ φεύγοντος ἀπὸ τόπου εἰς τόπους ἐν ἐνὶ τῶν κοιτωνίσκων τῷ λεγομένῳ Ὠάτῳ κατέλαβεν αὐτὸν ἡ ὄργη,

Anastasios had been “stupefied” by “heaven-sent lightning” (θείῳ σκηπτῷ κεραυνωθείς ἐμβρόντητος γέγονεν) are precisely matched in Theophanes (*Chron.* 164). The word ἐμβρόντητος literally means “struck by lightning” or metaphorically “dumb-founded, unconscious.” Its use by Ps.-Symeon seems ambiguous, as if readying the transition to the *Scheintod* narrative that follows. Finally, the description of the sarcophagus seems to come from “a list of imperial tombs and obituaries that formed part of Constantine VII’s *On Ceremonies*”<sup>31</sup> (to which we return below).

The version that features Anastasios, though less known in the West, enjoyed wide circulation in the Byzantine world. In the twelfth and thirteenth century it is reported and explained, for example, by Neophytus Inklusos: Anastasios died of fear but with a suddenness that prevented his soul from leaving the body, especially since no angels or demons dared to approach the corpse for fear of divine wrath. Thus, his soul was buried with the body (ἐτάφη λοιπὸν τὸ σῶμα μετὰ ψυχῆς); after a few days the spirit regained its senses and began to cry out “through the body” (διὰ τοῦ σώματος).<sup>32</sup>

Chiefly responsible for the propagation of the Anastasios *Scheintod*-story was the chronicle of Symeon Logothetes and its reworkings (including Ps.-Symeon’s). However, these are not the only sources for this subject. While omitting the apparent death and largely deriving his narrative from Ps.-Symeon (including the dreams and the burial with Empress Ariadne),

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ὥστε αἰφνίδιον εὐρεθῆναι νεκρόν. Φασὶ δὲ αὐτὸν μετὰ τὸ ταφῆναι μεθ’ ἡμέρας τινὰς βοᾶν· ἐλεήσατε καὶ ἀνοίξατε. τῶν μνημοραλίων δὲ εἰπόντων, ὅτι ἄλλος βασιλεύει, ἔφη· οὐδὲν μοι μέλει· εἰς μοναστήριον ἀπαγάγετέ με. Οἱ δὲ εἶασαν αὐτόν. Λέγεται δὲ μετ’ οὐ πολὺ τὸ μνήμα ἀνοιγῆναι καὶ εὐρεθῆναι αὐτὸν φαγόντα τοὺς βραχίονας αὐτοῦ καὶ τὰ καλίγια, ἃ ἐφόρει. Διὰ τὸ εἶναι αἰρετικὸν Ἀναστάσιον Εὐφῆμιος πατριάρχης προσέκειτο τοῖς ἀντάρασιν κτλ.

<sup>31</sup> Treadgold, *The Middle Byzantine Historians* 219.

<sup>32</sup> *Or.* 22.27–28 in N. Papatiantaphyllou-Theodoridi and Th. X. Giankou, *Hagiou Neophytou tou Enkleistou Syngrammata III Panegyrike A* (Paphos 1999) 417–418, lines 261–295.

Kedrenos seems once again to offer some peculiar material (I 636 Bekker = 396.65–70, p.617 Tartaglia):

Ἐπεὶ δὲ κεκρημάτιστο διὰ πυρὸς αὐτὸν τὴν ἀμείλικτον αὐτοῦ ψυχὴν ἀπορρήξαι, τὴν ἐν τῷ Παλατίῳ κινστέρναν τὴν λεγομένην Ψυχρὰν εἰς πολλὰ στόμια διανοίξας καὶ κάδους ἐν ἐκάστῳ παραθεῖς ἔσπευδε τὴν τοιαύτην περὶ αὐτοῦ προφητείαν ψευδῆ ἀποδείξαι. Ἄλλ’ ἐματαιώθη διὰ κενῆς ὁ δαίμονος· καὶ γὰρ θεῖο σκηπτῷ κεραυνωθεὶς ἐμβρόντητος γέγονεν.

Because it had been foretold that he would let go of his cruel life through fire, he made many openings in the cistern in the Palace called “Cold”; and having placed jars by each he was eager to disprove that prophecy about himself. But the wretch was brought to naught through vanity, for he was thunderstruck by heaven-sent lightning.

The details of the precautionary firefighting measures seem to be an isolated feature of Kedrenos.<sup>33</sup>

Zonaras (III 143) in turn adds a few details to a description of the storm very close to the one found in Symeon Logothetes. He writes that Anastasios built a domed hall as protection from the lightning of the prophecy<sup>34</sup> (the *Tholoton*, corresponding to

<sup>33</sup> One may wonder if this is not an etiological tale contrived to explain features of the Grand Palace; see below for Zonaras’ tale about the Tholoton. The *Patria* 3.180 recalls Anastasios’ lightning strike (in terms close to Symeon Logothetes and Ps.-Symeon) in order to derive a paretimology for the Magnaura: ὅτε δὲ ἀπέθνησκεν, ἔβαλεν φωνὴν· “ὦ μάνα, ὑπὸ τῆς αὐρας ἀπόλλυμαι.”

<sup>34</sup> Ἐχων δὲ κεκρησμοδοτημένον ὁ Ἀναστάσιος ὅτι ἐκ κεραυνοῦ θανεῖται, τὸ λεγόμενον Θολωτὸν ἐδομήσατο καὶ ἐν αὐτῷ διήγεν, ἀλλ’ οὐδέν τι τούτου ἀπώνατο. Zonaras is followed by Ephraim of Ainos, *Historia chronica* 1096–1102. The lightning-proof building is mentioned by Nicholas Mesarites in *Description of the Church of the Holy Apostles* 39.9, in connection with the tomb of Anastasios. Cf. M. Meier, *Anastasios I: Die Entstehung des Byzantinischen Reiches* (Stuttgart 2009) 321. It is uncertain whether this story has any relation to the Ravenna legend about the Mausoleum of Theodoric, another domed building intended, in vain, to protect a ruler from divine lightning. One of the earliest attestations seems to be that of J. Addison, *Remarks on Several Parts of Italy* (London 1767) 78. There was a rumor as early as the sixth century that the king of the Ostrogoths had been killed by lightning: A. Goltz, *Barbar*

the *Oaton* or “egg-shaped” hall).<sup>35</sup> With Zonaras detailed narratives of Anastasios’ *Scheintod* come to an end (see the Appendix for the later retellings).

### 3. *The chronology of the Scheintod tales*

On the assumption that Anastasios’ version is first attested in the tenth century, while Zeno’s does not appear until the eleventh, scholars have long believed the former to be the original one, which developed not long before the time of Symeon Logothetes. The story would have been later applied to Zeno and adapted to his debauchery and epilepsy. From these ‘variations on a theme’ would derive in turn the narratives of Psellos and Kedrenos.<sup>36</sup>

But in fact the *Scheintod* of Zeno was probably attested in the tenth century. In all likelihood the core of the story was already in ch. II 42 of the *Book of Ceremonies* of Constantine VII, which featured a list of the tombs of the Byzantine rulers with information on their deaths. Except for some remnants in a palimpsest, this chapter is lost. But a close Latin translation of a lost Greek text (perhaps Constantine’s model, with some additions down to Alexius I Comnenus) survives in the thirteenth-century compilation *Chronicon Altinate*.<sup>37</sup> Here is the relevant

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- König -Tyrann: Das Bild Theoderichs des Großen in der Überlieferung des 5. bis 9. Jahrhunderts (Berlin 2008) 265–266 n.349, 424–425.

<sup>35</sup> See G. Dagron and B. Flusin, *Constantin VII Porphyrogénète, Le livre des cérémonies* V (Paris 2020) 77. Apparently the hall was built at the time of Theophilus (829–842) and its association with Anastasios is anachronistic.

<sup>36</sup> Already in E. Patzig, “Über einige Quellen des Zonaras,” *ByzZeit* 6 (1897) 322–356, at 349–350. Tartaglia, in *Studi bizantini* 430, 432–443, admits that Kedrenos had access to sources lost to us but still considers the Zeno story a later development that “does not date back much earlier than the 10<sup>th</sup> century.” Similarly, Meier, *Anastasios I* 429 n.224.

<sup>37</sup> See Ph. Grierson, “The Tombs and Obits of the Byzantine Emperors (337–1042); With an Additional Note by C. Mango et I. Ševčenko,” *DOP* 16 (1962) 1–63; *Constantin VII Porphyrogénète, Le livre des cérémonies* III 246–247 §12 (also for corrections and specifications to the text of the *Chronicon*), and IV.2 758–759 and 777.

passage of the so-called *Necrologium imperatorum*:<sup>38</sup>

*Mense aprilis, nono die, defunctus est Zeno imperator, et sepultus est in templo Sanctorum Apostolorum, in labro thesalonico. Vox autem audita est de sepulcro usque ad tercium diem: "Miseremini mei," propter quod, cum oderetur ab uxore sua Arthemia et omni populo, non est apertum sepulchrum ipsius. Regnavit ann. XVII.*

In April, on the ninth day, Emperor Zeno died and was buried in the Church of the Holy Apostles, in a stone sarcophagus from Thessalonica (i.e., Thessaly). For three days a voice was heard coming from the tomb, "Have mercy on me!" The tomb was not opened, however, because he was detested by his wife Arthemia (i.e., Ariadne) and all the people. He reigned for seventeen years.

Someone might argue that the *Chronicon Altinate* added the mention of the *Scheintod*. But this is not consistent with the *modus operandi* of the compiler. Where comparison with the Greek can be made, the *Necrologium* is seen to follow it slavishly. Rare discrepancies are omissions usually due to error.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, the recent critical edition of *De ceremoniis* seems to rule out interpolation for this section. The palimpsest remains for chapter II 42 (C<sup>c</sup> = Istanbul, Patriarchike Bibliothek, *Hagia Trias* 133) show that Zeno's entry occupied eight lines (his name, as in other cases, appears *in margine*). His was one of the longest entries, and it bears due proportion to its size in the *Chronicon Altinate*.<sup>40</sup> Without the *Scheintod*, however, it would be distinctly shorter than the rest. This strongly suggests that the *Scheintod* was already in the tenth-century source common to the *Chronicon* and the *Book of Ceremonies*.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Text from R. Cessi, *Origo civitatum Italiae seu Venetiarum (Chronicon Altinate et Chronicon Gradense)* (Rome 1933) 106.7–12.

<sup>39</sup> See Grierson, *DOP* 16 (1962) 62–63.

<sup>40</sup> See *Constantin VII Porphyrogénète, Le livre des cérémonies* III 247–259.

<sup>41</sup> As noted earlier, Ps.-Symeon adds a sentence about the sarcophagus of Anastasio that has been traced back to the *Necrologium imperatorum*. From this source, however, he draws only details about the burial; for the *Scheintod* he follows Symeon Logothetes and attributes it to Anastasio.

That this version, however, does not feature the details in Psellos and Kedrenos reopens the question of the sources and the ultimate origin of the narrative. Is it still possible to maintain that the story originated not shortly before the tenth century? As I noted earlier, Conrad took Lydos' mention of Zeno's "unfortunate end" as a sixth-century allusion to the *Scheintod* narrative. Although so vague a statement can hardly be considered probative, a hitherto ignored source renders it plausible that already in the sixth and seventh centuries a story circulated in the Byzantine world about an elderly emperor suffering from epilepsy who was allegedly buried alive. And there are strong hints that the story included screams coming from the sarcophagus.

#### 4. *The neglected testimony of Pseudo-Galen*

This source is *De prohibenda sepultura*, a spurious Galenic treatise extant in Arabic devoted to cases of apparent death.<sup>42</sup> Some attribute the translation to al-Biṭrīq, who lived in the second half of the eighth century. Others (including some manuscripts) to the Nestorian bishop of Harran and later Mosul, 'Abdīšū' ibn Bahrīz, who is said to have completed it (possibly from a Syriac source)<sup>43</sup> around the year 800.<sup>44</sup> The recent critical edition and translation by Oliver Kahl includes extensive commentary by the Nestorian physician 'Ubaidallāh Ibn Buḥtīšū', who lived in Baghdad and Maiyāfāriqīn ca. 980 to 1060.

Ps.-Galen opens the treatise with four causes of apparent death (§1, p.37 Kahl):

<sup>42</sup> O. Kahl, *ʿUbaidallāh Ibn Buḥtīšū' on Apparent Death* (Leiden 2018). The full title seems to be *Prohibition of burial before twenty-four hours and up to seventy-two hours* (§3, p.41 Kahl). Cf. H. Diels, *Die Handschriften der antiken Ärzte I Hippokrates und Galenos* (Berlin 1905) 148; and M. Ullmann, *Die Medizin im Islam* (Leiden 1970) 59 n.95, who reconstructs its Greek title as Περὶ τοῦ μὴ θάπτειν ἐντὸς μιᾶς ἡμέρας.

<sup>43</sup> Kahl, *ʿUbaidallāh* 9, 45.

<sup>44</sup> Kahl, *ʿUbaidallāh* 7–8, 44.

I have arranged this book of mine in four treatises: treatise one on who is buried due to (apoplectic) coma whilst alive; treatise two on who is buried alive due to heart attack; treatise three on who is buried alive due to fear, overwhelming sorrow or overwhelming joy; treatise four on who is buried alive due to the influence of narcotic (and) soporific drugs or (other forms of) deep sleep.<sup>45</sup>

With regard to seizure-induced comas the author remarks (§4, p.47):

Problems manifest in the brain can cause four (types of) death-like conditions, for which many Greeks and others have buried their offspring, their women, and their kings alive, in a hurry, (and) before they had a chance to regain consciousness.

The women and offspring referred to here may be private individuals, or even heroines of ancient novels who were protagonists of *Scheintod* episodes.<sup>46</sup> But who are the kings? The question was also raised by ‘Ubaidallāh Ibn Buḥtūšū‘ himself (§8, p.55):

As regards his remark about the Greeks and their kings, this is to announce that he composed the book in hand because of (certain) reports on the burial of a king which circulate among their legends, namely that (the king) was heard (shouting) with a horrible voice, and when (the people) opened his grave they found him sitting upright even though he had died a real death —this happened close to the age of Galen.

Kahl admits that he could not identify the ruler referred to.<sup>47</sup> The commentator has in mind a “legend” about a “Greek king” who cries out from the grave, a king who had fallen into a coma due to a brain condition. Elsewhere Buḥtūšū‘ notes that apoplexy, the condition in question, is a particularly severe form of epilepsy and melancholia.<sup>48</sup> Ps.-Galen himself provides

<sup>45</sup> Translations here and below are by O. Kahl.

<sup>46</sup> See G. W. Bowersock, *Fiction as History: Nero to Julian* (Berkeley 1994) 99–110.

<sup>47</sup> Kahl, *‘Ubaidallāh* 54 n.27.

<sup>48</sup> §11, p.59: “Galen ... shows us that apoplexy is in fact a total

further details about it (§23, p.77): “this disease mostly affects elderly people between the ages of sixty and eighty, especially those of a cold and wet constitution.”

Zeno and Anastasios are the two rulers about whom narratives of apparent death circulated in antiquity. That Ps.-Galen had either in mind is not certain, but it is possible. And of the two, Zeno is doubtless the better candidate. He perfectly fits Ps.-Galen’s description: he was a Byzantine (“Greek”) ruler who, according to Evagrius and others, had died of a particularly severe attack of epilepsy at about age 66. The same cannot be said of Anastasios, who fell into a coma at about 90<sup>49</sup> due to a thunderbolt or sheer fright—causes discussed in treatises two and three of *De prohibenda sepultura*.

This information, of significance to my argument, can be gleaned from the text of the Ps.-Galen alone. The commentary adds the story *in nuce* of the screams from the sarcophagus. Unfortunately, Buḥtīšū’ specifies no sources for it. As a learned Nestorian Christian, acquainted with Arabic, Syriac, and possibly Greek,<sup>50</sup> he may have come across it in his readings, perhaps in some edifying text. Such a source would predate Psellos and Kedrenos and may be contemporaneous with the Greek original of the *Necrologium imperatorum*. Buḥtīšū’ speaks of the story as having happened “close to the age of Galen,” but this may be a conjecture, since he believed that *De prohibenda sepultura* was genuine.<sup>51</sup> The attribution of the treatise to Galen, however, may be later than its composition. In fact, its Greek original has been dated to the sixth century,<sup>52</sup> though some

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obstruction of the cerebral nexus. Whenever the passages are completely obstructed, apoplexy results, and whenever they are (only) partially (obstructed), epilepsy or melancholia or another obstruction-induced illness arises.”

<sup>49</sup> See Haarer, *Anastasios I* 246.

<sup>50</sup> See Kahl, *ʿUбайдallah* 3–4.

<sup>51</sup> Kahl, *ʿUбайдallah* 9.

<sup>52</sup> Kahl, *ʿUбайдallah* 10, 12.



elements might place it in the seventh.<sup>53</sup> This takes us once again close to the time of Zeno and Anastasios. Buḥtūšūʿ adds that the spurious treatise had attracted the interest of Emperor Herakleios, “himself an excellent scholar,” who modified and clarified its title. A similar statement appears at the beginning of one of the manuscripts of *De prohibenda sepultura*.<sup>54</sup>

#### 5. Herakleios’ fear of premature burial

The image of Herakleios as a “scholar” may seem to us odd, but his portrayal in Byzantium and in the medieval West was different. Theophylaktos Simokattes celebrated him as a benefactor of history and philosophy,<sup>55</sup> the *Chronicle of Fredegar* described him (4.65) as *litteris nimium eruditus*, and astrological treatises had been ascribed to him.<sup>56</sup> His alleged interest in a pseudo-Galenic treatise would be in line with this portrait. Some accounts show him obsessed with death and terrified of water which according to an astrological prediction would

<sup>53</sup> Such as the citation of a “Pythagoras” who may have been a urological expert who lived in the seventh century. See Kahl, *ʿUбайдallah* 88 n.76 and *The Sanskrit, Syriac and Persian Sources in the Comprehensive Book of Rhazes* (Leiden 2015) 49–50.

<sup>54</sup> §3, p.45 Kahl: “Now, when king Heraclius, himself an excellent scholar, became acquainted with this book, he added to the title (the word) ‘alive’ whence it became *Prohibition to Bury the Living*, so as to prevent the reader of the unaugmented title, one who is not (yet) familiar with the purpose (of the book), from thinking that in Galen’s doctrine it is forbidden to bury the dead; and when (Heraclius) said ‘the living’, he (also) emphasized (the fact) that a deathlike appearance might have befallen them, but that one must not rush to their burial.” See also p.44 n.9.

<sup>55</sup> See the dialogue between History and Philosophy at the beginning of his *Histories* (pp.20–22 de Boor-Wirth). Cf. J. D. C. Frendo, “History and Panegyric in the Age of Heraclius: The Literary Background to the Composition of the Histories of Theophylact Simocatta,” *DOP* 42 (1988) 143–156, at 144–145; W. E. Kaegi, *Heraclius Emperor of Byzantium* (Cambridge 2003) 58.

<sup>56</sup> See Kaegi, *Heraclius* 31, 194, 313; also Psellos, *Historia syntomos* 76, p. 66.80–81 Aerts.

cause his death.<sup>57</sup> Of greater relevance for us is the report by Patriarch Nikephoros (ca. 757–828) in *Historia syntomos* 27 (p.76 Mango) that the emperor feared he would be buried alive. To avert this fate Herakleios resorts to measures not unlike the ones recounted by Ps.-Galen:<sup>58</sup>

θάπτεται δὲ ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ τῶν πανευφήμων ἀποστόλων, καὶ τρισὶν ἡμέραις ἀσκεπές, ὡσπερ ἦν διατάξας ἔτι περιών, τὸ ὑποδεξάμενον αὐτοῦ σῶμα διετέλει μνήμα, περικαθημένων αὐτὸ εὐνούχων ὑπηρετῶν.

He was buried in the church of the all-praised Apostles and for three days, as he had ordained while he was still alive, the tomb containing his body remained uncovered and attended by ministering eunuchs. (transl. C. A. Mango)

To account for the three-day wait<sup>59</sup> with the open sarcophagus and the presence of attendants, Cyril Mango surmised that “Herakleios was presumably afraid of being buried alive, as had allegedly happened to Emperor Zeno.”<sup>60</sup> Add to this that Ps.-Galen had prescribed the three-day probationary period, and that, being 66 at his death, Herakleios was at risk for apoplexy according to the treatise.

It is difficult to tell whether *De prohibenda sepultura* had actually passed through the emperor’s hands, or whether mention of him was a posthumous addition, a kind of ‘advertisement’ and seal of authority for the text. In any case, it seems fair to conclude that in the sixth and seventh centuries, *Scheintod* must have been a topical subject. Herakleios’ fear was likely fueled by legends and hearsay current at his time. We know that two of his predecessors, Zeno and Anastasios, had become pro-

<sup>57</sup> Kaegi, *Heraclius* 288–289; M. Papathanassiou, “Stephanos of Alexandria, a Famous Byzantine Scholar, Alchemist and Astrologer,” in P. Magdalino et al., *The Occult Sciences in Byzantium* (Geneva 2006) 163–203, esp. 189.

<sup>58</sup> See also Kaegi, *Heraclius* 290–291.

<sup>59</sup> Ps.-Symeon (*Paris.gr.* 1712, f. 184<sup>v</sup>), followed by Kedrenos (I 752–753 = 447.5, = p.715 Tartaglia), speaks of a four-day wait.

<sup>60</sup> C. Mango, *Nikephoros Patriarch of Constantinople, Short History* (Washington 1990) 191. See also Grierson, *DOP* 16 (1962) 48 n.94.

tagonists of such stories. And, as noted above, the reference in *De prohibenda sepultura* to kings who had died from apoplectic comas suggests specifically Zeno, who Evagrius reports suffered from epilepsy. It might be too that gossip caused by Zeno's epilepsy gave rise to rumors of his apparent death. Herakleios' fears certainly seem more reasonable if he had in mind Zeno's age-related catalepsy rather than Anastasios' fear-induced coma or thunderbolt strike.

To sum up: although certainty is not possible without a positive identification of the ruler in Ps.-Galen, it seems fair to claim that this text, perhaps written in part with the aim of capitalizing on Herakleios' fears and imperial legends, places the growth of stories about Zeno's *Scheintod* back into the sixth to seventh centuries. This in turn makes Lydos' enigmatic mention of Zeno's "unfortunate death" more interesting. Most significantly, it makes even more plausible that the notice in the *Necrologium imperatorum* already appeared in the *Book of Ceremonies* or in the list from which the latter drew.

#### 6. *Quellenforschung* for two *Scheintode*

The question of the sources used by Byzantine authors who dealt with the emperors' apparent death remains open. Perhaps a role in Psellos' treatment of Zeno's *Scheintod* was played by the mysterious source from which some say he drew anecdotes and apothegms of emperors ranging from Claudius II to Philippicus Bardanes.<sup>61</sup> It is true that the *Historia syntomos* does not quote Zeno's memorable words ("I don't care, take me to a monastery!") in connection with the cries from the tomb. But the *Historia* is compendious and Psellos may have chosen to report the bare fact alone.

As for Kedrenos, sometimes branded as "little more than a

<sup>61</sup> See W. J. Aerts, *Michaelis Pselli Historia syntomos* (Berlin 1990) XXIV. Treadgold, *The Middle Byzantine Historians* 284–285, perhaps too hastily believes that Psellos "simply seems to have invented most of these sayings to make his biographies more interesting and informative."

copyist,”<sup>62</sup> his skill at weaving sources has recently been highlighted. Roger Scott observes that “throughout his chronicle ... [Kedrenos] creatively worked in extra material beyond George and Pseudo-Symeon, drawn from his wide reading.”<sup>63</sup> He was especially fond of notes on monuments and works of art in Constantinople, and of moral and edifying exempla.<sup>64</sup> Perhaps Kedrenos derived his peculiar and unique details about Zeno’s death from a lost chronicle,<sup>65</sup> from a *versio auctior* of the *Necrologium imperatorum*, or from edifying sources that might have featured Zeno’s near-decapitation as a bloody *contrappasso* to his being an Acephalian.

As noted above, Conrad suggested Eustathios of Epiphaneia as the earliest source for the rumor of Zeno’s apparent death.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Treadgold, *The Middle Byzantine Historians* 339–340.

<sup>63</sup> R. Scott, “Narrating the Reign of Constantine in Byzantine Chronicles,” in A. Brown et al. (eds.), *Byzantine Culture in Translation* (Leiden 2017) 8–32, at 10; cf. 19 ff. for the original contributions in Kedrenos’ treatment of Constantine’s life. See also R. Scott et al., “Kedrenos’ Substitution for Theophanes’ Chronicle,” in L. James et al. (eds.), *After the Text: Byzantine Enquiries in Honour of Margaret Mullett* (London 2022) 95–114, at 95–96, 109–110. The presence of a lost source (perhaps from the Justinianic era) has also been plausibly postulated in connection with Kedrenos’ account of the sack of Rome in 410: U. Roberto, “Scipione Emiliano, Onorio e il sacco di Roma del 410. Un passo conservato da Giorgio Cedreno sulla fine degli imperi,” in E. Amato et al. (eds.), *Les historiens fragmentaires de langue grecque à l’époque romaine impériale et tardive* (Rennes 2021) 173–190. Others had previously assumed that Kedrenos’ peculiar details came from Olympiodorus of Thebes: G. Gaggero, “Il sacco di Roma e la gallina di Onorio: le fonti di Procopio, Cedreno e Zonara,” in F. Gazzano et al. (eds.), *Le età della trasmissione: Alessandria, Roma, Bisanzio* (Tivoli 2013) 327–341.

<sup>64</sup> R. Maisano, “Note su Giorgio Cedreno e la tradizione storiografica bizantina,” *RSBS* 3 (1983) 227–248, at 235–236.

<sup>65</sup> Over time, scholars have suggested a version of Ps.-Symeon different from the one in *Paris.gr.* 1712; and the so-called *Zwillingsquelle*, from which Zonaras would have drawn too: see Treadgold, *The Middle Byzantine Historians* 341; Tartaglia, *Georgii Cedreni* I 22; Scott et al., in *After the Text* 96.

<sup>66</sup> See esp. Conrad, *BMGS* 24 (2000) 68–73, who postulates Kedrenos’ dependence on Ps.-Symeon, and Xanthopoulos’ direct access to Eustathios.

A source for Malalas, John of Antioch, and Evagrius, Eustathios was very hostile to Zeno.<sup>67</sup> His candidacy is possible, though by no means certain. It is hard to imagine, however, that Kedrenos had direct access to the *Chronological epitome*, whose complete text apparently remained confined to Antioch and was lost by the ninth century.<sup>68</sup>

As for Anastasios' *Scheintod*, as we have seen, the first author to mention it explicitly seems to be Symeon Logothetes. For the historical period Treadgold suggested that Symeon had drawn specifically from Andronikos' continuation of Pano-dorus, which possibly ran from 408 to 527, and from the lost Epitome and continuation of Theophanes.<sup>69</sup> As things stand, these are interesting but unverifiable proposals, and the former seems at odds with what little we can reconstruct about Andronikos' work.<sup>70</sup>

We must reiterate, however, that the words used by Symeon Logothetes and Ps.-Symeon to describe the incident are almost the same as those used by Kedrenos to narrate Zeno's *Scheintod*. What explains this fact? Tartaglia postulated an adaptation by Kedrenos,<sup>71</sup> who would have used Ps.-Symeon's words about Anastasios to embellish his narrative and at the same time correct his main source along the lines of Psellos (and the *Necro-*

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Both premises are unacceptable. On the latter see Treadgold, *The Early Byzantine Historians* 116. Eustathios as the source of Evagrius is postulated also by Kosiński, *The Emperor Zeno* 197 n.122.

<sup>67</sup> See Treadgold, *The Early Byzantine Historians* 116. The fact that Eustathios wrote far from Constantinople may have favored his incorporating unreliable hearsay about rulers.

<sup>68</sup> See Treadgold, *The Early Byzantine Historians* 116, 119.

<sup>69</sup> Treadgold, *The Middle Byzantine Historians* 209–210.

<sup>70</sup> On Andronikos see P. Varona, "Chronology and History in Byzantium," *GRBS* 58 (2018) 389–422, at 399. A. Hilken, *The Anonymous Syriac Chronicle of 1234 and its Sources* (Leuven 2018) 191–228, esp. 226, believes that he wrote a chronicle "almost certainly" in Syriac, reaching "at least" to the reign of Constantius, son of Constantine, and containing lists of rulers "which may or may not have been accompanied by longer narratives."

<sup>71</sup> Tartaglia, in *Studi bizantini* 432.

*logium imperatorum*).<sup>72</sup> This kind of anticipation and adaptation would indeed be consistent with the chronicler's *modus operandi*.<sup>73</sup> Tartaglia, however, did not rule out the possibility that the same pericope had already been variously adapted before. Kedrenos might have already found it in the sources from which he derived his unique details about Zeno's demise.<sup>74</sup>

### 7. *The origin of the Scheintod tales*

As for the development of the *Scheintod* stories, an attestation in Ps.-Galen does not guarantee that Zeno's version, even if already extant in the sixth to seventh centuries, necessarily precedes the other. Several considerations, however, point in this direction. First, hearsay is more likely to circulate when its target is still at the center of controversy. It is more plausible that a story aimed at disparaging Zeno was later applied to Anastasios, when acrimony against him was at its peak, rather than that a story aimed at Anastasios was retroactively applied to Zeno who had been dead for decades.<sup>75</sup> Moreover, death by thunderbolt after fearful flight seems a suitable divine punishment; while death from debauchery or a seizure, though unpleasant and disgraceful, might be felt to need bolstering if it is to be recognized as the vehicle of divine wrath. Being buried alive seems a more than suitable reinforcement. Zeno's hasty funeral may also have fueled rumors in the immediate after-

<sup>72</sup> Conrad, *BMGS* 24 (2000) 72, ignores that Kedrenos quotes Symeon Logothetes and Ps.-Symeon verbatim on Anastasios and assumes that the horrific details of Zeno's *Scheintod* were "nothing more than a calque on a legendary report of how Zeno killed the usurper Basiliskos and his family by sealing them up in a tower in a Cappadocian fortress." But the sources on Basiliskos (including Marcellinus Comes, Prokopios, Malalas, and Theophanes) do not encourage any analogy with Zeno's (or Anastasios') *Scheintod*.

<sup>73</sup> See Scott et al., in *After the Text* 99, 109, 111.

<sup>74</sup> Tartaglia, in *Studi bizantini* 432–433 n.5.

<sup>75</sup> A. Laniado, "Some Problems in the Sources for the Reign of the Emperor Zeno," *BMGS* 15 (1991) 147–174, at 161, observes that interest in, and hostility toward, Zeno diminished with temporal distance.

math of his death.<sup>76</sup> Finally, in Zeno's version the stigma touches not only him but his entire family: the tyrant, his widow, and her lover. His is a most effective, almost novelistic version: it is no accident that a variant appears in the *Thousand and One Nights*.<sup>77</sup> Of course, these same piquant traits might have led someone to rework a pre-existing *Scheintod* story in just this way. But it is more economical to assume that it originated when the backbiting against Ariadne and her detested husband was at its peak, right after his death and her ensuing marriage to a man who was rumored to be her lover.

For similar reasons the growth of Anastasios' version should be placed soon after his death.<sup>78</sup> His opponents must have recycled, with suitable adaptation, the rumor about Zeno. Both versions remained in circulation as overlapping exempla, and later Byzantine historians sometimes mention both emperors as protagonists of a *Scheintod* story (see Appendix). This picture is consistent with the religious controversy that raged during the fifth to seventh centuries, during which Zeno and Anastasios were singled out and slandered as enemies by the most intransigent Chalcedonians.

Rumors of their horrible demise, especially of Zeno's death, may have prompted the circulation of *De prohibenda sepultura* and fueled Herakleios' taphophobic obsessions. Such rumors, dispersed among now untraceable chronicles, edifying exempla, and 'guidebooks', were recovered from the tenth century onward, first in the *Necrologium imperatorum*, then by Symeon Logothetes, Psellos, and Kedrenos, variously followed by later Byzantine historians. And at the end of their journey, these

<sup>76</sup> See *Constantin VII Porphyrogénète, Le livre des cérémonies* IV.2 777.

<sup>77</sup> H. El-Shamy, *A Motif-index of The Thousand and One Nights* (Bloomington 2006) 311, under heading S.123.1.1§ *Burial of alive person in shock (dazed, stunned, etc.)*, which refers back to the tale of Masrûr and Zayn al-Mawâsif (see the translation by R. F. Burton, VIII 262, night 863).

<sup>78</sup> According to Meier, *Anastasios I* 321, "in mittelbyzantinischer Zeit hätte niemand ein begründetes Interesse daran gehabt, neue Geschichten über Anastasios zu erfinden."

stories, long in circulation—much longer than has hitherto been assumed—entered the imagination of the West, from Baroque theater to today's lurid essays that appeal to the ancestral fear of being buried alive.<sup>79</sup>

#### APPENDIX: Motif-index<sup>80</sup>

##### Zeno

Sources: *Chronicon Altinate* (= *Necrologium imperatorum*) p.106 Cessi; *Chronicon Paschale* (607 Dindorf); Ephraim (*Chronographia* 1030–1047); Evagrius (*HE* 3.29); Glykas (*Biblos chronike* 492 Bekker); Kedrenos (*Synopsis chronike* I 622 Bekker = 388.18–36, pp.605–606 Tartaglia); Lydos (*Mag.* 3.45.3); Malalas (*Chron.* 15.16); Manasses (*Chronike synopsis* lines 3005–3023); Psellos (*Historia syntomos* 68); Skoutariotes (*Chronika* II 166); Ps.-Symeon (*Chronikon, Paris.gr.* 1712, fol. 123<sup>v</sup>); Symeon Logothetes (*Chronikon* 101.4); Theophanes (*Chron.* 135–136 de Boor); Xanthopoulos (*Ecclesiastical History* 16.24); Zonaras (*Epitome historion* III 132–133).

##### 1. *Circumstances preceding death or explaining the events*

1.1 Near his end, Zeno continually mentioned Pelagios, whom he had unjustly executed (Theophanes; Ps.-Symeon).

1.2 He belonged to the heresy of the Acephalians (Symeon Logothetes; Ps.-Symeon; Psellos; Kedrenos; Joel).

1.3 Empress Ariadne was the mistress of Anastasios (Psellos; Kedrenos).

##### 2. *Manner of death*

2.1 Zeno deservedly comes to a bad end (Lydos).

2.2 Zeno dies from dysentery (Malalas; *Chronicon Paschale*; Symeon Logothetes).

2.3 Zeno dies from epilepsy (Evagrius; Theophanes; Ps.-Symeon).

2.4 Zeno died tormented by severe and mysterious pains (Kedrenos).

2.5 By the will of God Zeno found himself mysteriously decapitated: his head remained attached only by the skin of his neck (Kedrenos).

<sup>79</sup> For instance, Bondeson, *Buried Alive* 54.

I would like to thank the journal's anonymous referees for their helpful comments and corrections, and José M. González for his very careful editorial work.

<sup>80</sup> Within each entry sources are given in chronological order.



### 3. *Burial*

3.1 The empress left her husband's naked corpse abandoned on the wooden floor until hours later a stranger covered it with a sheet (Kedrenos).

3.2 His body was buried in the Church of the Holy Apostles in a green stone sarcophagus (Ps.-Symeon).

### 4. *Reasons for the apparent death*

4.1 Zeno had gone into an alcohol-induced coma (Psellos; Zonaras; Ephraim; Xanthopoulos).

4.2 Zeno had slipped into a coma due to a seizure (Kedrenos; Zonaras; Manasses; Glycas; Skoutariotes; Ephraim; Xanthopoulos).

### 5. *Scheintod*

5.1 Empress Ariadne knew that her husband was not really dead, but she had him buried anyway (Psellos; Zonaras; Xanthopoulos).

5.2 Zeno begged to be freed from the sarcophagus to no avail (*Chronicon Altinate*; Psellos; Zonaras; Ephraim; Xanthopoulos).

5.3 After a few days he began to cry out, begging to be freed. The guards answered that now there was another emperor. Zeno replied that he did not care: he would go to a monastery if only they let him out. The guards did not listen to him (Kedrenos; Manasses; Skoutariotes).

5.4 Shouts could be heard coming from the sarcophagus, but when it was opened it was too late (Glycas).

5.5 Empress Ariadne made sure that the guards did not release Zeno once he regained consciousness (Kedrenos; Zonaras; Xanthopoulos).

5.6 After some time the tomb was opened and it was discovered that Zeno had eaten off his arms and shoes from hunger (Kedrenos; Manasses; Glycas, who mentions only the arms; Skoutariotes).

## Anastasios

Sources: *Chronicon Altinate* (= *Necrologium imperatorum*) p.106 Cessi; *Chronicon Paschale* (610–611 Dindorf); Cyril of Scythopolis (*V.Sabae* p.162 Schwartz); Ephraim (*Chronographia* 1096–1102); George the Monk (619 de Boor); Glycas (*Chronographia en synopsei* 492 Bekker); Joel (43–44 Bekker); Kedrenos (*Synopsis historion* I 635–636 Bekker = 396.57–397.3, pp.617–618 Tartaglia); Malalas (16.20, 22); Manasses (*Chronike synopsis* lines 2292–3020); Ps.-Symeon (*Chronikon, Paris.gr.* 1712, fol. 123<sup>v</sup>); Psellos (*Historia syntomos* 69); Skoutariotes (*Chronica* II .163–164, 166); Symeon Logothetes (*Chronikon*

102.5–7); Theophanes (*Chronographia* 163–164 de Boor); Victor of Tunnuna (*Chronica* ad a. 518, p.196 Mommsen); Zonaras (*Epitome historion* III 143).

### 1. *Circumstances preceding death or explaining the following events*

1.1.1 Anastasios saw a frightening man in a dream who, to punish him for his heterodoxy, erased fourteen years from the book of his life (Malalas; *Chronicon Paschale*; Theophanes; Symeon Logothetes; Ps.-Symeon; Kedrenos; Zonaras; Manasses; Glycas; Joel; Skoutariotes).

1.1.2 Anastasios' years were diminished because of his impiety (Psellos).

1.2 Prefect Amantius also had a disturbing dream; both were interpreted by the *oneirokrites* Proclus as an omen of impending death (Malalas; *Chronicon Paschale*; Theophanes; Ps.-Symeon; Kedrenos).

1.3 At that time the people rioted, displeased with the election of John the Cappadocian as patriarch of Constantinople (Theophanes; Ps.-Symeon).

1.4.1 There was a prophecy that Anastasios would die by fire (Kedrenos).

1.4.2 There was a prophecy that Anastasios would die by lightning (Zonaras, Ephraim).

1.5.1 Anastasios had made sure that in the so-called Cold Cistern of the Palace there were many openings equipped with jars to draw water in case of fire (Kedrenos).

1.5.2 To escape the prophecy Anastasios had the so-called Tholoton built and lived in it (Zonaras, Ephraim).

1.6 A lightning storm struck the palace. Terrified, Anastasios began to flee from room to room (Cyril of Scythopolis; Victor of Tunnuna; George the Monk; Symeon Logothetes; Ps.-Symeon; Zonaras; Joel).

1.7 He took refuge in a room called the Oaton (Symeon Logothetes; Ps.-Symeon; Joel).

### 2. *Manner of death*

2.1 He was seized by “divine wrath” and died (Cyril of Scythopolis; George the Monk; Symeon Logothetes; Ps.-Symeon; Joel).

2.2 Anastasios dies of fright during a thunderstorm (Malalas; *Chronicon Paschale*; Zonaras?; Ephraim).

2.3 Anastasios dies by lightning (Victor of Tunnuna; Theophanes?, *Chronicon Alinate*; Psellos; Kedrenos; Glycas; Skoutariotes).

### 3. *Burial*

3.1 Anastasios is buried abnormally and with ignominy (Victor of Tunnuna).

3.2 He was placed in an Akyntianes stone sarcophagus and laid to rest in the Church of the Holy Apostles, together with his wife Ariadne who had died earlier (Ps.-Symeon; Kedrenos; Skoutariotes, who speaks of a porphyry sarcophagus).

### 4. *Reasons for the apparent death*

4.1 He fell into a coma when struck by lightning (Theophanes?; Ps.-Symeon; Manasses).

4.2 Anastasios fell into a coma induced by an epileptic seizure (Glycas).

### 5. *Scheintod*

5.1 After a few days he began to cry out begging to be freed. The guards replied that now there was another emperor. Anastasios replied that he did not care: he would go to a monastery if only they let him out. The guards did not listen to him (Symeon Logothetes; Ps.-Symeon; Manasses; Joel; Skoutariotes).

5.2 Shouts could be heard coming from the sarcophagus, but when it is opened it was too late (Glycas).

5.3 When the tomb was later opened, Anastasios was found to have eaten off his arms and shoes in hunger (Symeon Logothetes; Ps.-Symeon; Manasses; Glycas, who mentions only the arms; Joel; Skoutariotes).

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