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The Eschatological Program of the *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodios: Does it Make Sense?*

The object of my remarks, the *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodios,[1] a Syriac composition from the end of the seventh century, is a world classis. Few if any pieces of Syriac literature became so popular in the Christian Orient, in the Byzantine Orthodox world, and in the Latin West. Numerous translations testify to this enormous popularity: the first was made into Greek, probably as early as the first decade of the eighth century,[2] but was later heavily edited to the extent that as much as four Greek versions of the text are known to exist.[3] From the

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[1] [Pseudo-Methodios] *Die syrische Apokalypse des Pseudo-Methodius*, hrsg. [und übers.] v. G.J. Reinink, (Corpus Scriptorum Christanorum Orientalium [CSCO] 540–541, Scriptores Syri 220–221), Lovanii 1993. Two earlier editions are: F.J. Martinez, *Eastern Christian Apocalyptic in the early Muslim period: Pseudo-Methodius and Pseudo-Athanasius*, Washington 1985, (Diss., Catholic Univ. of America) p. 58–121, with an English translation, p. 122–201, and H. Suermann, *Die geschichtstheologische Reaktion auf die einfallenden Muslime in der edessenischen Apokalyptik des 7. Jahrhunderts*, (Europäische Hochschulschriften, Reihe 23: Theologie, Bd. 256), Frankfurt a.M. 1985, Syriac text with a synoptic German translation, pp. 34–87. A partial English translation has also been provided by S. Brock in: *The Seventh Century in the West-Syrian Chronicles*, intr., transl. and annot. by A. Palmer, *including two seventh-century Syriac apocalyptic texts*, intr., transl. and annot. by S. Brock..., (Translated Texts for Historians, 15), Liverpool 1993, pp. 222–242.

[2] [Pseudo-Methodios] *Die Apokalypse des Pseudo-Methodius: die ältesten griechischen und lateinischen Übersetzungen*, hrsg. von W.J. Aerts und G.A.A. Kortekaas, vol. I–II, (CSCO 569–570, Subsidia 97–98), Lovanii 1998, p. 16.

[3] *Die Apokalypse des Ps.-Methodios*, hrsg. v. A. Lolos (Beiträge zur klassischen Philologie 83), Meisenheim am Glan 1976; *Die dritte und vierte Redaktion des Ps.-Methodios*, [hrsg. v.] A. Lolos, (Beiträge zur klassischen Philologie 94), Meisenheim am Glan 1978.

earliest of them a Latin translation was made, probably as early as ca. 720.[4] From a Greek version also a Church Slavonic version derives,[5] whereas from the Latin some versions in vernaculars.[6]

But the popularity of P s e u d o - M e t h o d i u s' *Apocalypse* can also be measured by its influence on other texts of the same sort, as can be seen in such compositions as the Greek *Apocalypse* of Andreas S a l o s (in his *vita* of the tenth cent.),[7] the Latin *De ortu et tempore Antichristi* by Adso D e r v e n s i s (tenth cent.),[8] a whole series of apocalyptic writings from the Coptic Egypt such as *The Apocalypse of Samuel of Qalamun*, *The Letter of Pisentius* and *The second Arabic Apocalypse of Pseudo-Athanasius* (all three in Arabic).[9] Still another composition that seems to have been influenced by Pseudo-Methodios's is the national Ethiopic epos *The Glory of the Kings (Kǝbrä nägäst).*[10]

As far as Syriac literature is concerned, the following compositions can be named as having been influenced by the *Apocalypse*: the *Edessene Apocalypse*, or the *Edessene Ps.-Methodios* (end of the seventh cent.),[11] *The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles* (ca. 700),[12] *The Dispute between a Monk of the Monastery of*

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[4] A a r t s and K o r t e k a a s, op. cit., (note 2), vol, I, p. 57.

[5] Ed. by V.M. I s t r i n, *Otkroveniye Mefodiya Patarskogo i apokrifičeskiye Videniya Daniila v vizantiyskoy i slavyano-russkoy literaturakh*, Moskva 1897 (non vidi).

[6] E. H e y s e, 'Methodius, Pseudo-Methodius', *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, vol. VI, München–Zürich 1993, col. 581.

[7] According to L. R y d é n's dating (*Zum Aufbau der Andreas Salos-Apokalypse*, "Eranos" 66 (1968), pp. 101 (101–117); *The Andreas Salos Apocalypse*, Greek text, trans. and comm. L. Rydén, "Dumbarton Oaks Papers" 28 (1974), 201 (197–261).

[8] Adso D e r v e n s i s, *De ortu et tempore Antichristi*: necnon et tractatus qui ab eo dependunt, ed. D. V e r h e l s t, (Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis 45), Turnholti 1976.

[9] F.J. M a r t i n e z, *The King of Rūm and the King of Ethiopia in medieval apocalyptic texts from Egypt*, in: *Coptic studies: Acts of the Third International Congress of Coptic Studies, Warsaw, 20–25 August, 1984*, ed. by W. G o d l e w s k i, Varsovie 1990, pp. 247–259.

[10] *Kebra Nagast: Die Herrlichkeit der Könige...* hrsg. v./mit deutscher Übers. v. C. B e z o l d, (Abhandlungen der Bayerischen Akad. der Wissenschaften 23), München 1905; an English translation *The Queen of Sheba & her only son Menyelek...*, a complete translation of the *Kebra Nagast* with introduction, by E.A.W. B u d g e, London 1922; a Polish translation by S. S t r e l c y n: *Kebra Nagast czyli Chwała królów Abisynii: fragmenty*, Warszawa 1956. For Pseudo-Methodios' influence on *The Glory of the Kings* see I. S h a h î d, *The Kebra Nagast in the light of recent research*, "Le Muséon" 89 (1976), pp. 133–178; A. C a q u o t, *L'Éthiopie dans les Révélations du Pseudo-Méthode et dans le livre éthiopien de la Gloire des Rois*, "Revue de la Société Ernest Rénan" n.s. 39 (1989–90), pp. 53–65; D.W. J o h n s o n, *Dating the Kebra Nagast: another look*, in: *Peace and war in Byzantium: essays in honor of George T. Dennis*, ed. by T.S. M i l l e r and J. N e s b i t t, Washington D.C. 1995, pp. 197–208. This theme requires a separate study.

[11] Ed. by F. N a u, *Révélations et légendes: Méthodius — Clément — Andronicus: textes éd., trad. et annotés*, "Journal Asiatique" 11:9 (1917), pp. 425–443; see G.J. R e i n i n k, *Der edessenische Pseudo-Methodius*, "Byzantinische Zeitschrift" 83 (1990), pp. 31–45.

[12] *The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles together with the apocalypses of each of them*, ed. J.R. H a r r i s, Cambridge 1900; H.J.W. D r i j v e r s, *The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles: a Syriac*

Beth Hale with an Arab dignitary (beginning of the eighth cent.),[13] the *Bahira Legend* (second half of the eighth cent.),[14] *The Book of the Bee* by S o l o m o n of Basra (13th cent.).[15] P s e u d o - M e t h o d i o s is also known to Syriac historians M i c h a e l   t h e   E l d e r, better known as M i c h a e l   t h e   S y r i a n (12th cent.), and Grigoryos B a r ' E b h r a y a (Gregory Barhebraeus; 13th cent.).[16]

It should also be mentioned that its influence crossed not only all the confessional borders *within* Christianity but also inter-religious ones, since we find traces of it in medieval European Jewish literature, namely in the Hebrew *Chronicle* of Y e r a h m e ' e l (12th cent.).[17]

The *Apocalypse* was written in Syriac[18] in the 690's in Northern Mesopotamia, admittedly not far away from the Mount Singar (or Jabal Sinjar, today Iraq, close to the Syrian border), as can be deduced from the author's stating that he received his revelation on that mountain. He was most probably a monk or priest belonging to the Syrian Orthodox or Monophysite Church (other opinions on his Church affiliation have been uttered however).[19] He hid his name behind that of the fourth-century bishop of Patara (or of Olympos, both in Lycia, d. ca. 311), which he chose most probably due to M e t h o d i o s's chiliastic views. These must have appealed to Pseudo-Methodios since — although no trace of chiliasm can be found in his work — he organized it according to the millennial calculation of

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apocalypse from the early Islamic period, in: *The Byzantine and early Islamic Near East, I: Problems in the literary source material*: papers of the First Workshop on Late Antiquity and Early Islam, ed. by Averil C a m e r o n and L.I. C o n r a d, (Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam, 1), Princeton, NJ 1992, pp. 189–213.

[13] Not published, P. J a g e r, *Intended edition of a disputation between a monk of the Monastery of Bet Ḥale and one of the Ṭayoye*, in: *IV Symposium Syriacum 1984: Literary Genres in Syriac Literature (Groningen — Oosterhesselen 10–12 September)*, ed. by H.J.W. D r i j v e r s et al., (Orientalia Christiana Analecta 229), Rome 1987, p. 401f.; R e i n i n k, *Einführung* to his translation volume (see above n. 1), p. xliii, n. 154.

[14] R. G o t t h e i l [ed. and tr.], *A Christian Bahira Legend*, "Zeitschrift für Assyriologie" 13 (1898), pp. 189–242, 14 (1899), p. 203–268; 15 (1900), pp. 56–102; 17 (1903), pp. 122–166; S. G e r ö, *The Legend of the Monk Baḥīrā, the cult of the Cross and Iconoclasm*, in: *La Syrie de Byzance à l'Islam, VIIe - VIIIe siècles: Actes du Colloque international Lyon... Paris... 1990*, éd. P. C a n i v e t et J.-P, R e y - C o q u a i s, Damas 1992, pp. 47–58.

[15] [Solomon of Basra], *The Book of the Bee*, ed. ...with an English translation by E.A.W. B u d g e (Anecdota Oxoniensia: Semitic series vol. I, part 2), Oxford 1886.

[16] R e i n i n k, *Einführung* to his translation volume (note 1), pp. xli–xlv.

[17] This contains the Legend of Yonton, the fourth son of Noah, taken indirectly from the Latin translation of the Apocalypse, see W . W i t a k o w s k i, *Jonites i Nimrod w średniowiecznej hebrajskiej Kronice Jerahme'ela* (= Yonites and Nimrod in Yerahme'el's Mediaeval Hebrew Chronicle), "Studia Judaica" 3 (2000), forthcoming, [in Polish]; see too S. G e r o [Gerö], *The legend of the fourth son of Noah*, "Harvard Theological Review" 73 (1980), pp. 321–330.

[18] P.J. A l e x a n d e r, *The Syriac original of Pseudo-Methodius' Apocalypse*, [in:] *Proceedings of the 27th International Congress of Orientalists, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 13th–19th August 1967*, ed. by D. Sinor, Wiesbaden 1971, p. 106f.

[19] Reinink (as above in n. 1), p. XX–XXV.

time, as regards both history and the eschatological epoch, thereby showing that he accepted the idea of *Septimana Mundi*.[20]

The exact title of our text is *Memra*[21] *composed by the blessed Mar Methodios, bishop and martyr, on the succession of the kings and on the end of time*. As can be noticed, the word 'apocalypse' or 'vision' (Syr. *gelyānā*) does not appear in the title, but there is no doubt that the *Memra* belongs to that literary genre. As we are told at the beginning of our text, Methodios asked God "about the generations and the kingdoms" (title[22]), and the request was met in the form of revelation mediated by one of God's Powers.[23]

The seventh century seems to have been a propitious one for apocalyptic literature. We know of apocalyptic compositions of that period emanating from all the religious communities in the Near East: Jewish, Zoroastrian, Muslim and Christian. Although the coincidence in time is striking — and perhaps calls for a deeper analysis of the underlying common mentality of the epoch — at face value the apocalyptic writings of these communities do not seem to have much in common, each of them falling within its own sphere of apocalyptic imagery.[24]

The *Sitz im Leben* of Pseudo-Methodios's *Apocalypse* was determined by the fact that the Syriac (Aramaic) speaking Christians after ca. 60 years of living under the rule of Islam began to realize that the Muslim Arabs were not about

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[20] According to which the world would exist for seven millennia, that is as many as the days during which God created the world; see: W. Witakowski, *The Idea of Septimana Mundi and the Millenarian Typology of the Creation Week in Syriac Tradition*, [in:] *V Symposium Syriacum 1988, Katholieke Universiteit, Leuven 29–31 aout 1988*, ed. by R. Lavenant, (Orientalia Christiana Analecta 236), Rome 1990, pp. 93–109. The idea does not follow from chiliasm (belief in Christ's one thousand-year kingdom on the earth), but the chiliasts usually accepted it too.

[21] The word can be translated as 'homily', 'discourse' or 'treatise'.

[22] References will be made to the paragraphs of Reinink's edition of the Syriac. The translations are ours.

[23] A class of angels is meant, Syr. *hadh men haylawwātheh*.

[24] At the 1997 Middle Eastern Studies Association meeting a panel was devoted to it; see issue 3 of "Medieval Encounters" 4 (1998), with papers by M.G. Morony, *Apocalyptic expressions in the early Islamic world*, "Medieval Encounters" 4 (1998), p. 175–177; S. Campbell, *It must be the end of time: apocalyptic ahādīth as a record of the Islamic community's reactions to the turbulent first centuries*, ibid. pp. 178–187; T. Daryaee, *Apocalypse now: Zoroastrian reflections on the early Islamic centuries*, ibid., p. 188–202; C. Villagomez, *Christian salvation through Muslim domination: divine punishment and Syriac apocalyptic expectations in the seventh and eighth centuries*, ibid., pp. 203–218; J. Iskander, *Islamization in medieval Egypt: the Copto-Arabic "Apocalypse of Samuel" as a source for the social and religious history of Medieval Copts*, ibid., pp. 219–227; for Jewish apocalyptic of the period see: B. Lewis, *An apocalyptic vision of Islamic history*, "Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies" 13 (1949–50), pp. 308–338; G. Dagron, *Introduction historique: entre histoire et apocalypse* (intr. to: G. Déroche, *Juifs et Chrétiens dans l'Orient du VIIe siécle*), "Travaux et Mémoires" 11 (1991), pp. 38–43.

to disappear but would stay for good. Thus substantial segments of the Christian population decided to leave what they believed was a socially marginalised and economically disadvantageous situation of a subordinate community under Muslim authority, and consequently were in the process of converting to Islam. This was even accelerated by the erection of the Dome of The Rock by the Caliph ᶜAbd al-Malik Ibn Marwān in 691, which symbolically marked — and the message was understood by the Christians — that the believers of a new religion now took the upper hand in the Christian holy places in Jerusalem.[25] Pseudo-Methodios however wrote his *Memra* apparently in order to convince his Christian countrymen, no matter to which Church they belonged, that there was no point in apostasy: the rule of the Muslims was only of a transient nature, since clearly the End of the world was approaching.

Now the question arises what made him so sure of that? Before however we try to answer this question let us briefly present the scenario he envisaged.

The eschatological part of the *Apocalypse* (ch. 11, §1)[26] begins with the words "In this last millennium, which is the seventh, during which the kingdom of the Persians will be destroyed, and during which the Children of Ishmael will come out from the desert of Yathrib (i.e. Medina)..." Furthermore, we learn, the Children of Ishmael (Syr. *Bənay ᶜIšmāᶜē/īl*;[27] for Pseudo-Methodios does not use the ethnonym *Ṭayyāyē* — Syr. 'Arabs'), or the Ishmaelites, will defeat the kingdom of the Greeks at Gabhᶜoth (*Gbᶜwt*) Ramta[28] (11,1.3), whereupon tribulations will ensue for the Christians: heavy taxes will be exacted, even from the dead, the priests will be persecuted, and as a result many will fall away from the faith. It is not, we are told, because God loves the Ishmaelites that He will allow them to chastise the Christians, but "because of the iniquity and sins commited by the Christians, the like of which has not been commited in any previous generation." (11,5). These sins are interesting *per se*, and include not only such vices as the one that "men dressed themselves in the licentious clothes of harlots" (11,6), but also much worse abominations, all of them sexual in character.

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[25] G.J. Reinink, *Pseudo-Methodius: a concept of history in response to the rise of Islam*, [in:] *The Byzantine and early Islamic Near East, I: Problems in the literary source materia: Papers of the First Workshop on Late Antiquity and Early Islam*, ed. by Averil Cameron and L,I, Conrad, (Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam, 1), Princeton, NJ 1992, pp. 181–185.

[26] Three prophetic passages had already been inserted into the historiographic part of the *Apocalypse*.

[27] So called after the name of Abraham's and his Egyptian slave woman Hagar's son. In the *Old Testament* 'Ishmaelites' is a common name for mostly nomadic groups living to the south and east of Palestine.

[28] Cp. *Judges* 7:1 (Hebr. *Gibhᶜath*; Peshitta: *Gbᶜt Rmt'*); the toponym *Gabhᶜoth (Ramtā)* was chosen for its similarity to *Gəbhīthā*, a town not far from the site where in 636 the Battle of the River Yarmuk took place; S. Brock, op. cit. (n. 1), p. 230, n. 577.

The tribulations of the Christians will be intensified in the tenth week (13,2-10), to be understood in the Danielic sense (i.e. as seven years, not days), and the Ishmaelites will even blaspheme by saying that "the Christians have no Saviour" (*layt pārōqā la-khresṭǝyānē*; 13,6). But just as if to show how wrong they will have been, a king or an emperor (Syriac would not distinguish here) of the Greeks will suddenly rise and defeat the Ishmaelites, partly killing them and partly driving them back to the desert of Yathrib (13,11-13). Then he will punish the apostates, whereupon peace will return to the world (13,14-18).

But then again the Gates of the North (once built, according to a legend, by Alexander the Great to prevent the civilized world from being harassed by the barbarians from the North,[29] will be opened and the Enclosed Peoples will come out and cause the earth to shake with terror (13,19-20). This calamity will however be over after one week, for God will send against the barbarians, gathered in the valley of Joppa, one of the archangels who will destroy them in one hour (13, 21).

Then the Son of Perdition, or the False Messiah, will appear (13,21). In the same time the mission of the king of the Greeks will have been fulfilled: He will climb Golgotha (14,2), take off his crown and hang it on the Holy Cross, thus handing over his imperial power to God (14,6). This will fulfill the prophecy which the author has introduced in an earlier part of his composition (14,5), taken from *Psalm* 68,31, which reads "Ethiopia shall surrender (or: yield her power) to God". The king will then deliver his soul to God.

Soon thereafter the Son of Perdition will arrive in Jerusalem and sacrilegeously sit in the Temple, behaving like God (14,10), but at the Second Coming of Christ he will find his destruction in the "Gehenna of fire"[30] (14,13),

P s e u d o - M e t h o d i o s based his eschatological program partly on what was already known in Christian apocalyptic tradition; thus some constant elements of this tradition, such as the Enclosed Nations and the Son of Perdition, are present in his composition. There are however other elements in his eschatological scheme that are new. Especially intriguing is the figure of the Last Emperor who is Greek (i.e. Byzantine) but with an Ethiopian pedigree, as he is presented as a descendant of an Ethiopian princess.

The invention of this Ethio-Hellenic figure must have been stimulated, as far as I can see, by both "empirical" and "theoretical" factors.

The former was the role Ethiopia played in the mentality of the Syrian Orthodox of the epoch. The Syrian Orthodox Church was "Monophysite" in its

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[29] On which see: A.R. A n d e r s o n, *Alexander's Gate, Gog and Magog, and the Inclosed Nations*. "Monographs of the Mediaeval Academy of America", 5), Cambridge, Mass. 1932.
[30] Mt 5,22; 18,9; Mk 9,47.

theology, and as such regarded as heretical by Byzantine Orthodoxy. In the last centuries of Byzantine rule in Syria there were persecutions of the "heretics" which left a traumatic memory among the Syrians.[31] There seemed to be only one earthly power to which they could turn their hopes: the kingdom of Ethiopia, whose Christianity was also "Monophysite". It was in Ethiopia that many of the persecuted Syrian monks of that persuasion took refuge. Moreover the Syrians remembered Ethiopia's role in helping the Christians (probably also Monophysite) of Nadjran and South Arabia generally, who had been persecuted in the 520's by a king who had converted to Judaism.[32] This South Arabian connection brought the Syrians and the Ethiopians even closer, thus bringing about a flourishing relationship of which however only few traces remain to-day.[33]

But the expectations of the Syrians as regards Ethiopia had also another, theological, dimension, connected with the text of Ps. 68:31, which in one English translation reads "Ethiopia will stretch out her hands to God",[34] and in another "Let Nubia[35] stretch out her hands to God".[36]

However in the Syriac Bible (the *Peshitta*) this passage reads: *Kūš tašlem (')īdhā l-(')ălāhā* (14,5),[37] which includes an idiomatic expression *'ašlem (')īdhā* meaning 'surrender, yield'. The Syriac reading is regarded as idiosyncratic since, as it appears, it renders neither the Hebrew Masoretic trext as we know it, nor the *Septuagint*. The Syriac translator perhaps went his own way because he found his *Vorlage* difficult to understand. The Hebrew Masoretic text reads *Kūš tārīṣ yādhā(y)w l-(')elōhīm*. The verb *tārīṣ (hiph'il of rūṣ - 'to run')* means 'to bring something quickly', or 'to drive out', which in connection with *yādhā(y)w* — 'its (i.e. Ethiopia's) hands' does not make a clear sense.[38] The *Septuagint*, which in this case is, as it seems, based on the Masoretic reading, has (Ps. 67(!),31b): Αἰθιοπία προφθάσει χεῖρα αὐτῆς τῷ θεῷ (προφθάνω — 'to anticipate, be be-

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[31] For instance during the reign of Maurice ca. 400 monks were killed outside Edessa; J.B. Segal, *Edessa, 'the Blessed City'*, Oxford 1970, p. 131.

[32] Primary Christian sources for the history of this persecution are Syriac.

[33] Cp. W. Witakowski, Syrian influences in Ethiopian Culture, "Orientalia Suecana" 38-39 (1989-90), pp. 191-202.

[34] *The Jerusalem Bible*, gen. ed. A. Jones, Garden City, NY 1966.

[35] The Hebrew toponym *Kūš* referred to the region encompassing both Ethiopia and Nubia.

[36] *The New English Bible with the Apocrypha: Oxford study edition*, ed. S. Sandmel, M.J. Suggs, A.J. Tkacik, New York 1976.

[37] In the *Peshitta*, Ps. 68,32b; *Psalms*, prepared by D.M. Walter, in collab. with A. Vogel and R.Y. Ebied, (*The Old Testament in Syriac according to the Peshitta version*, pt. 2, fasc. 5), Leiden 1980, p. 75.

[38] Gesenius' dictionary suggests for the whole phrase: *Äthiopien bringt Gott eifrig Gaben*; (*Wilhelm Gesenius' Hebräisches und aramäisches Handwörterbuch über das Alte Testament*, bearb. v. F. Buhl et al., 17. Aufl., Berlin 1962, repr. of the ed. of 1915, p. 752).

forehand'),[39] which is not clear either.[40] Thus an emendation of the Hebrew text has been suggested according to which instead of the unclear *tārīṣ*[41] one should read *tārīm*[42] and the verse might then be understood as "Ethiopia shall raise her hands to God". Whichever verb the Syriac translator saw in the Hebrew text underlying the *Peshitta*'s, the Syriac one does not seem to translate it according to our understanding of the Hebrew. It seems however that the Syriac translator fastened his eye on the Hebrew *yādh* — 'hand', but took it in the metaphorical meaning of 'power',[43] and then chose a Syriac verb which to him best fitted the unclear meaning of the verb in the original. By so doing he added a new meaning to the verse, with a theological consequence that could not have come into being on the basis of his *Vorlage*. As a result the Syriac passage acquired the meaning: "Ethiopia shall surrender (or: yield her power) to God."

So was it of course understood by P s e u d o - M e t h o d i o s. Consequently, in order to make the historiographical facts[44] agree with the prophecy, he invented a genealogy which is totally fantastic, at least in our eyes, and in which he combined a Roman imperial lineage with an Ethiopian, both being — needless to say — quite unhistorical. P s e u d o - M e t h o d i o s tells us that Philip of Macedon married Kusheth (Syr. *Kwšt, Kwšyt*), the daughter of an Ethiopian king named Pil.[45] Alexander the Great was her and Philip's son. When both her husband and her son died Kusheth returned to Ethiopia, but soon she remarried, her second husband being Buz (in the Greek version: Byzas), the founder of the city of Byzantion. Now Kusheth gave birth to a daughter named Byzantia, who in her turn married Armalos, king of Rome. They had three sons: Armalos II who inherited Rome from his father, Urbanus who became king of Byzantion, which he inherited from his mother, and Claudius who received Alexandria as the her-

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[39] H.G. L i d d e l l and R. S c o t t, *Greek-English Lexicon*, a new ed. by H.S. J o n e s and R. M c K e n z i e, Oxford 1968, p. 1540.

[40] In an English translation of the LXX (*The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English*, [ed. and tr. by] L.C.L. B r e n t o n, Peabody, MA, 1987 (= London 1851), p. 737) it is rendered: "Ethiopia shall hasten to stretch out her hand readily to God." B r e n t o n 's italics mark his addition.

[41] On the basis of a similar expression in Akkadian the Hebrew should be corrected to: *tāraṣ yādhēyhā* - 'manum extendere'; *Biblia Hebraica [Stuttgartensia]*, ed. R. K i t t e l and P. K a h l e, Stuttgart, p. 1033.

[42] G e s e n i u s' *Handwörterbuch*, (n. 38) p. 752; L. K o e h l e r and W. B a u m g a r t n e r, *Lexikon in Veteris Testamenti libros*, Leiden 1951, p. 882. The English translations quoted above are based on this reading.

[43] G e s e n i u s' *Handwörterbuch*, p. 284; K o e h l e r and B a u m g a r t n e r, *Lexikon*, p. 363.

[44] By which term we understand "facts", or rather data provided by any historiographic (including pseudo- or quasi-historiographic) narrative which may or may not be true. Turning these 'historiographical' facts into 'historical', i.e. establishing truthfulness or reliability of the historiographic narrative containing such facts, requires the application of all the procedures of historical critique.

[45] Perhaps from *Poros*, Syr. *Pur*, of the *Alexander Legend*, C a q u o t, op. cit. (n. 10), p. 54.

itage from his maternal uncle, Alexander the Great. In this way the kingdoms of the Macedonians (Alexandria), the Romans (Rome) and the Greeks (Byzantion) were all ruled by a dynasty of (partly) Ethiopian descent. In the view of P s e u d o - M e t h o d i o s Kusheth's presence in the genealogy of the Last Emperor of the Greeks made him an Ethiopian, thus enabling him to fulfil the prophecy of Ps. 68,31.[46]

Now we may try to explain what in fact P s e u d o - M e t h o d i o s was seeking to do. There were certainly plenty of educated people among the Syrian Christian monks, priests or laity who would have laughed at him when they saw how far from historical reality, as it was known to them, his fantasy was taking him. Or would they?

The apocalyptic authors were more interested in things to come than in things past, and when they included historiographic sections in their compositions they did not do so without a reason. Their purpose was actually the same as that of modern (non-technical) historians, namely to present the past in interpretion — in such an interpretation as would make sense to their readers. A contemporary historian explaining the causes of the World War I, or of the French Revolution, would refer to political, economical, social, and ideological factors, but not to the action of demons, or of the Devil, or of people possessed, because in the former case the readers would understand these causes and accept them as parts of a reasonable explanation, while in the latter case they would not.

What is today regarded as a correct (reasonable) historical explanation would still be valid and acceptable even if parts of the source documentation were lost or had even been unavailable from the beginning, as is often the case in the field of ancient or medieval history. In such a situation the historian will put forward various hypotheses, the purpose of which is often just to fill the gaps in source evidence. This is a normal procedure and few of us would be so skeptical as to deny the usefulness of hypotheses, provided they are based on an acceptable methodology. Complete scepticism in such cases would be of course fatal to historical research generally, but we accept the hypotheses not because of the lack of an alternative, but simply because reasoning based on them usually makes sense.

Now what an ancient or medieval apocalyptician was doing when writing his apocalypse, this being more or less fantastic in our eyes, was exactly the same as the hypothetical reasoning of the modern historian. It is only the theoretical basis of the argument that was different for him. Instead of our knowledge of how, say, economic factors influence political ecvents, which we take for granted, he would take for granted to just the same extent one or other historiographic or prophetic passage of the Bible. Since he found in his Bible a statement that at the end of the ages Ethiopia would give up its earthly power to God, he, and his readers as

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[46] P.J. Alexander, *Byzantium and the migration of literary works and motifs: The Legend of the Last Roman Emperor*, "Medievalia and Humanistica", n.s. 2 (1971), p. 56.

well, had a perfect right to conclude that the last, eschatological, emperor would
be an Ethiopian.

P s e u d o - M e t h o d i o s should even be credited with a relatively critical eye.
He was not alone among the Syrians in his understanding of the role Ethiopia
was to play in the eschatological drama. He tells us that "many brethren from
among the children of the church thought that the blessed David said this about
the kingdom of the Ethiopians (*Kūšāyē*)." (9,7). Not so Pseudo-Methodios: he
understood that in his epoch, at the end of the seventh century, an Ethiopian
crusade with the purpose of liberating the Christians from the Muslim yoke was
not likely, even though he knew that in different conditions a similar expedition
had indeed been possible and in fact realised ca. 170 years earlier, when King
Caleb of Aksum intervened on behalf of the persecuted South Arabian Christians.

P s e u d o - M e t h o d i o s could not change the base of argumentation: *Psalm*
68:31 kept for him its validity as an unquestionable source of prophetic informa-
tion. Thus the only way to get out of this aporia was to put forward a hypothesis,
that is to fill a lacuna in the historiographic evidence as known to him with some-
thing that would at least be less impossible than questioning the hard evidence
of the *Psalm* passage.

Thus, what we have to do in order to take the apocalyptician seriously, to-
gether with what in our eyes are his sometimes wild inventions, is to understand
his mode of explanation. The axiom of his model of the course of history (or in
other words: the object of his beliefs) was the Danielic prophecy of the *traditio
imperii* according to which four successive empires would hold supremacy over
the *oikoumene*, together with the Christian reinterpretation of that prophecy to
the effect that the last of them would be Rome.[47]

Once we have realized this, it immediately becomes clear that in the perspec-
tive embraced by P s e u d o - M e t h o d i o s the Muslim Arabs could be carriers of
those plagues that God uses to discipline his people when they sin too much, or
one of those factors of social and political disorder that, according to the *Book of
Revelation*, were destined to contribute to the general disturbances expected to
precede the End, but surely no Arab world empire had a place on earth.

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[47] Rome seems to have been introduced into the four monarchy scheme for the first time
by H i p p o l y t u s of R o m e (ca. 170–235) in his *Commentary on Daniel*, 2,12, (Hippolyte,
Commentaire sur Daniel, ed. and tr. par M. L e f é v r e, (Sources chrétiennes; [14]), Paris 1947,
p. 144f).