Apocalyptic Discourse in Nikētas Chōniatēs' *History*: Andronikos I Komnēnos Revisited[1]

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Abstract: The paper examines the ambivalent portrayal of Andronikos I Komnēnos (r. 1183-1185) in Nikētas Chōniatēs' *History*. It is argued that the historian uses a variety of apocalyptic motifs and allusions that reflect different views on Andronikos' place in the apocalyptic imagination. In particular, Chōniatēs' account is shown to testify to the emperor's erstwhile messianic ambitions as well as to attempts by contemporaries to invert and reverse those aspirations. In addition, the historian himself is shown to have sought to downgrade and de-eschatologize the apocalyptically charged rhetoric surrounding the Komnēnian emperor. The ambivalent image of Andronikos as hero and villain, savior and antichrist, reformer and tyrant is due to the repeated reevaluation of his legacy in the late twelfth and early thirteenth century. Ultimately, the paper offers a supplement to recent studies on Chōniatēs by directing attention to the scriptural and apocryphal bedrock of the *History*.

Keywords: Messianism, Antichrist, Komnēnoi, Andrew the Fool, Pseudo-Hippolytos, oracular tradition

The *History* (*Χρονικὴ διήγησις*) of Nikētas Chōniatēs is a literary masterpiece laden with acumen, advice, and ambiguity. It is an erudite and multilayered work, which allows for different readings and approaches. Much scholarly attention has been paid to Chōniatēs' indebtedness to ancient Greek paideia. Homeric and

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Lucianic references abound throughout the *History*, and countless allusions to the giants of classical Hellenic culture, such as Aristophanes, Herodotos, and Plato, are seamlessly woven into the narrative. But Chōniatēs was also a Christian author. In fact, he made even greater use of the Bible than he did of the Greek classics. The Christian aspect is so obvious that it is easily overlooked. This paper offers a modest supplement to recent studies on Chōniatēs by drawing attention to the scriptural (and apocryphal) context of the *History*. In particular, the work will be read against the background of the apocalyptic tradition. The aim is to highlight explicit and tacit parallels between Chōniatēs' *opus magnum* and Byzantine apocalyptic literature. The analysis of the whole work would be too great a task for a short article. That is why, this paper focuses on the brief reign Andronikos I Komnēnos (r. 1183-1185), which provides a representative case study.

It is well known that the *History* is replete with reports on omens, prophecies, and divinations. Paul Magdalino reviewed Chōniatēs' account of the reign of Isaac II (r. 1185-1195, 1203-1204) and showed that the historian censured Isaac's gullibility and megalomania in assuming that he would be miraculously healed and transformed into a godlike man, whereupon he would unite the East and West and rule as universal monarch (v.D. 558).[2] The historian criticized Isaac's irresponsible use of prophecies, but he did not doubt the validity of predictions in general. In fact, Chōniatēs is shown to have taken prophecies "as seriously as any of his contemporaries".[3] Furthermore, Wolfram Brandes observed the conspicuous increase of apocalyptic tropes towards the end of the *History*.[4] The work incorporates many motifs from the synoptic apocalypse, such as the shortening of days (v.D. 307.66-68, cf. Matt. 24:22), the notion of love growing cold (v.D. 495.48-49, cf. Matt. 24:12), or the expression "abomination of desolation" (v.D. 575.54-55 & v.D. 315.80, cf. Matt. 24:15, Dan. 12:11). Furthermore, the historian saw in the Crusaders "the precursors of the Antichrist" (v.D. 573.7), in celestial apparitions the approaching consummation of the world (v.D. 575.51-54, cf. Matt. 24:29, Rev. 6:12), and in his wife's distress during pregnancy the fulfillment of Christ's prophecy hereof (v.D. 589.42-44, cf. Matt. 24:19-20). But references to the New Testament are dwarfed by Chōniatēs' use of the Old Testament. It has been estimated that about 75% of Chōniatēs' biblical quotes and allusions are to the Septuagint, mostly to the *Psalms* and the *Book of Isaiah*.[5] Theresa Urbainczyk proposed that Chōniatēs' frequent use of Isaiah reflects

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[2] J.-L. van Dieten, *Nicetae Choniatae Historia*, vol. I, Berlin, 1975 (CFHB 11/1). Abbreviated as 'v.D.'.

[3] P. Magdalino, "Prophecy and divination in the History", in A. Simpson and S. Efthymiadis (eds.), *Niketas Choniates. A historian and a writer*, Geneva, 2009, p. 59-74; quotation at *ibid*., p. 60.

[4] W. Brandes, "Konstantinopels Fall im Jahre 1204 und 'apokalyptische' Prophetien", in W. J. van Bekkum, J. W. Drijvers, A. C. Klugkist (eds.), *Syriac polemics. Studies in honour of Gerrit Jan Reinink*, Leuven, 2007, p. 239-259, at p. 242-245.

[5] P. Magdalino and R. Nelson, "Introduction", in eid. (eds.), *The Old Testament in Byzantium*, Washington, DC, 2010 (Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection), p. 1-38, at p. 9. Cf. the

his conviction that the Byzantines were undergoing the same hardship that the chosen people had suffered in ancient times.[6] Accordingly, the same prophetic promises that Old Testament prophets had given to the old Israel would apply to the New Israelites, i.e., the Christian Romans of Constantinople. It is evident that the Bible played a prominent role in the conception and writing of the *History*.

It is also well known that the *History* is not a unitary work and that Chōniatēs revised it more than once. The original and shorter – hence b(revior) – version was commenced sometime after the overthrow of Andronikos I (1185) and was largely written during the reign of Alexios III (r. 1195-1203). It was expanded after 1204 and continuously revised thereafter until the author's death in 1217. As one may expect, the final a(uctior) version sought to make sense of the catastrophe of 1204 and adds further nuance and a harsher, more judgmental tone to previous chapters.[7] That said, those revisions did not substantially change Chōniatēs' evaluation of Andronikos' reign. As will become apparent, the portrayal of Andronikos contains multiple layers, which were all already in place in version b. The later revisions merely accentuated particular ideas and reinforced them with supplementary expressions and episodes.[8] Thus, the analysis that follows is only marginally affected by the textual evolution of the *History*.

Andronikos is introduced early on by Chōniatēs. The very first mention exposes him as a tyrant (κατετυράννευσε, v.D. 50.58), and he is persistently called so throughout the work. Savvas Neocleous has shown that the notion of 'tyrant' had

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index locorum of the critical edition: J.-L. van Dieten, *Nicetae Choniatae Historia*, vol. II, Berlin, 1975 (CFHB 11/2), p. 127-143.

[6] T. Urbainczyk, *Writing about Byzantium: the History of Niketas Choniates*, London, 2018 (Birmingham Byzantine and Ottoman Studies, 23), p. 81-82.

[7] See J.-L. van Dieten, *Nicetae Choniatae Historia*, vol. I…, p. XCIX-CI, A. Simpson, "Before and after 1204: the versions of Niketas Choniates' Historia", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 60, 2006, p. 189-221, ead., "Introduction. Niketas Choniates: the historian", in A. Simpson and S. Efthymiadis (eds.), *Niketas Choniates. A historian and a writer*, Geneva, 2009, p. 13-34, at p. 16-24, and F. Spingou, "Classicizing visions of Constantinople after 1204", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 76, 2022, p. 181-220, at p. 183. Cf. Niehoff-Panagiotidis, "Narrative Bewältigungsstrategien von Katastrophenerfahrungen: das Geschichtswerk des Nikitas Honiatis", *Klio* 92, 2010, p. 170-211, at p. 186-191.

[8] See A. Simpson, *Niketas Choniates: a historiographical study*, Oxford Studies in Byzantium, Oxford, 2013, p. 165-170 and eadem, *Studies on the composition of Niketas Choniates' Historia*, Ph.D. dissertation, King's College London, 2004, p. 279-280, 283-286. It is uncertain whether there is a single, unifying theme behind all the subsequent additions to the account of Andronikos' reign. But it stands to reason that the unanticipated pillage and occupation of Constantinople in 1204 informed many of the additions. Chōniatēs certainly retrojected the horrors of 1204 into earlier material in the belief that the fall of the imperial city was a divine punishment (v.D. 569.7-10, 579.70-71, 635.93-95); a punishment partly due to the excessive cruelty that the Constantinopolitan populace displayed at Andronikos' execution (v.D. 452.4-8, cf. v.D. 581.30-582.39). In addition, version a(uctior) was written under fewer external constraints and with greater freedom of expression, as pointed out by A. Simpson, "Before and after 1204…", p. 203, 220.

two meanings in Byzantium. It denoted either an unsuccessful rebel or a cruel and unlawful emperor.[9] The first meaning does not apply because Andronikos succeeded in ascending the throne and ruled for two years as sole emperor. Thus, by calling Andronikos a tyrant, Chōniatēs' claim is that he was an unlawful ruler. It is striking that he calls only Andronikos a tyrant (τύραννος) *after his coronation*. That is, only Andronikos is presented as having been an illegitimate emperor, a pseudo-basileus.

Andronikos appears throughout the narrative on Manuēl's reign. He is the unrepentant villain who repeatedly uses deception and dissimulation to regain Manuēl's favor. At one point, the historian reckons that he must have been protected by God, who preserved him for the "day of wrath".[10] Paul's *Letter to the Romans* makes it clear that the Old Testament term "day of wrath" is synonymous with the "apocalypse".[11] The question arises whether the association of Andronikos with the consummation of the world early on in the *History* is merely a rhetorical exaggeration or whether it should be read as a sort of trigger warning that announces the apocalyptic dimension of Andronikos' reign. In the following, I explore the latter option, showing that Chōniatēs uses a variety of apocalyptic tropes and allusions that situate Andronikos within the apocalyptic tradition.

Chōniatēs sets the stage for Andronikos' accession with a bad omen. At the time of Manuēl's death in 1180, a disfigured child was born not far from the capital, which was seen as a portent of doom (v.D. 225.51-55). In the very next sentence, Chōniatēs introduces Andronikos' bid for the throne. He set out from Oinaion on the Black Sea coast and was welcomed in Paphlagonia as a God-sent savior.[12] When he seized the capital, further omens appeared that warned against the impending doom (v.D. 251-252): a serpent-shaped comet was visible in the skies for a whole day, and a hawk circulated the Great Palace as if pointing to the menace within. Chōniatēs then recalls the apocryphal story that when Andronikos visited Manuēl's tomb at the Pantokrator Monastery he promised to exert vengeance upon Manuēl's family for the hardships he had endured. The story contains a curious detail. Andronikos is quoted to have referred to Constantinople not as the Queen of Cities or the New Jerusalem but as the Seven-hilled megalopolis (v.D. 257.70-71: τὴν ἑπτάλοφον […] μεγαλόπολιν). The term Heptalophos, or Seven-hilled City, is derived from Rev. 17:9 and is an unambiguous reference to Constantinople as the

[9] S. Neocleous, "Andronikos I Komnenos: tyrant of twelfth-century Europe", *The Medieval History Journal* 22, nº 1, 2019, p. 92-130, at p. 93-95.

[10] v.D. 141.8-9: νῦν δὲ τοῦ θεοῦ τηροῦντος αὐτόν, ὡς ἔοικεν, εἰς ἡμέραν ὀργῆς καὶ τοῖς μετόπισθεν κακοῖς ταμιεύοντος, […] | But God protected him, it seems, he stored up [his] later evils for the day of wrath, […]

[11] Rom. 2:5. Cf. Rev. 6:17, 2 Pet. 3:7.

[12] v.D. 229.65-66: […] ἡ τῶν Παφλαγόνων μερὶς καὶ ὅσα καὶ σωτῆρα καὶ κατὰ θεῖον ἥκοντα προσδεχόμενον ἐριτίμως. | […] the region of the Paphlagonians receiving him with great honor so much as a savior who has come by divine interposition.

Great Whore of Babylon. Since at least the early sixth century, Constantinople had been identified with the Seven-hilled Babylon.[13] At the same time, the imperial capital was also viewed as the New Jerusalem.[14] This dual characterization imparts an axiological ambiguity that conveys the tension between the belief to be God's chosen people, on the one hand, and the experience of recurrent hardships, on the other. Consequently, the ambiguity of seeing Constantinople as the Seven-hilled Babylon *and* the New Jerusalem had the hermeneutical benefit to explain both catastrophe and prosperity. In the case of Andronikos, it explained catastrophe. Andronikos is quoted to have used the apocalyptic term "Seven-hilled megalopolis" because he is presented to have unfettered the City's apocalyptic potential, i.e., its destructive and corruptive aspect, which had previously been contained. In a way, Andronikos is shown to have played with apocalyptic 'fire' when he unleashed his campaign of vengeance.

In stark contrast to the historian's menacing prolepsis, Andronikos was welcomed as a 'God-sent savior' in Paphlagonia. The term savior (σωτήρ) has obvious messianic connotations. Chōniatēs quotes from a legal decree, which mentions that Andronikos later referred to himself as the "savior of the Romans" (Ἀνδρονίκῳ τῷ σωτῆρι Ῥωμαίων, v.D. 336.31). He also notes that the Constantinopolitan populace had 'praised him as savior'.[15] Moreover, we encounter a series of actions that would have been part of a concerted effort to live up to messianic expectations. Andronikos is said to have bestowed gifts upon the poor (v.D. 324.11), to have cracked down on abusive tax collectors (v.D. 325-326), to have outlawed the plunder of shipwrecks (v.D. 326-328), to have treated everyone with the full force of the law irrespective of their social status (v.D. 330.75-331.91), and to have restored the Church of the Forty Martyrs (v.D. 332). Andronikos famously added a mural painting of himself to the northern outer wall of that church. The painting depicted him as someone who is "much-enduring and energetic",[16] holding a mighty scythe (δρέπανον, v.D. 332.28)

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[13] P. Magdalino, "The Church of St John the Apostle and the end of Antiquity in the New Jerusalem", in K. M. Klein and J. Wienand (eds.), *City of Caesar, city of God: Constantinople and Jerusalem in Late Antiquity*, Berlin, 2022, p. 263-279, at p. 270-271. See further W. Brandes, "Sieben Hügel: die imaginäre Topographie Konstantinopels zwischen apokalyptischem Denken und moderner Wissenschaft", *Rechtsgeschichte* 2, 2003, p. 58-71.

[14] M.-H. Congourdeau, "Jérusalem et Constantinople dans la littérature apocalyptique", in M. Kaplan (ed.), *Le sacré et son inscription dans l'espace à Byzance et en Occident* : *études comparées*, Paris, 2001, p. 125-136.

[15] v.D. 350.21-22: ὡς σωτὴρ ὑμνούμενος ὑπὸ πάντων ἀνευφημούμενός τε καὶ προσκυνούμενος | he was praised as savior, acclaimed and venerated by all.

[16] v.D. 332.25: τινα πόλυτλαν ἐργατικὸν. I agree with A. Schminck, "Anmerkungen zur Beschreibung des Bildes Andronikos' I. an der Kirche der 40 Märtyrer in Konstantinopel", in J. Hallebeek, M. Schermaier, et al. (eds.), *Inter cives necnon peregrinos. Essays in honour of Boudewijn Sirks*, Göttingen, 2014, p. 687-697, at p. 689-691, who observed that πόλυτλας and ἐργατικός are both adjectives that together denote an emperor in action, who is much-suffering and dynamic

that ensnares a handsome lad. Chōniatēs immediately provides an interpretation of this unusual image: he contends that Andronikos boasted his achievement of having killed the young emperor Alexios II (v.D. 332.30-34). This was certainly not the original intention, as only a madman would be so bold (or autistic) to confess publicly to the murder of the designated heir.

Much ink has been spilled about this peculiar image.[17] The various interpretations share in common a general neglect of the biblical dimension of the imagery. The scythe (δρέπανον) is not only an agricultural tool and potential weapon of war, it is also an attribute of Christ. Rev. 14:14-16 visualizes Christ to be adorned with a golden crown on his head and a scythe (δρέπανον) in his hand, with which he reaps the earth in judgment.[18] The scythe connotes Christ the judge, who deals legitimate, retributive death; it holds messianic connotations. The mural painting – as described by Chōniatēs – does not depict Andronikos as Christ the glorious king *and* vengeful reaper. Andronikos does not wear the imperial attire or golden ornaments; he is shown as a humble but energetic lord. Only one messianic attribute of Christ is stressed: the scythe, which is a symbol of the apocalyptic harvest. After all, "[w]hat else shall a scythe produce than a harvest?" – to quote Arethas of Caesarea's comment on Rev. 14:14.[19] The image of Andronikos as scythe-bearer can be seen as a partial depiction of a well-known apocalyptic motif from the *Revelation of John*.[20] Additionally, Michael Grünbart has drawn attention to the testimony by Nikolaos

("vielleidenden [und] dynamischen"). The term πολύτλας is a Homeric epithet of Odysseus. I will return below to Chōniatēs' archaizing vocabulary.

[17] For a succinct overview of the various interpretations, see M. Grünbart, "Die Macht des Historiographen – Andronikos (I.) Komnenos und sein Bild", *Зборник радова Византолошког института* 48, 2011, p. 77-86, at p. 79. See also R. H. W. Stichel, "Ein byzantinischer Kaiser als Sensenmann? Kaiser Andronikos I. Komnenos und die Kirche 40 Märtyrer in Konstantinopel", *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 93, 2000, p. 588-608, at p. 595-602.

[18] Cf. C. Cupane, "Der Kaiser, sein Bild und dessen Interpret", in C. Sode and S. Takács (eds.), *Novum Millennium. Studies on Byzantine history and culture, dedicated to Paul Speck 19 December 1999*, Aldershot, 1999, p. 65-79, at p. 69, n. 26, who notes the parallel with Rev. 14:14 but tacitly dismisses its significance. Cupane prefers to interpret the image in the context of classical Greek mythology; she argues that the mural painting showed Andronikos as a new Perseus.

[19] J. A. Cramer, *Catenae Graecorum patrum in Novum Testamentum*, vol. VIII, Oxford, 1844, p. 397 (cap. 43): τί δ' ἂν ἄλλο δρέπανον παρέξει εἰ μὴ θερισμόν;

[20] The Byzantine reception history of *Revelation* still remains to be explored in full. Insightful but preliminary surveys are given by S. J. Shoemaker, "The afterlife of the Apocalypse of John in Byzantium", in D. Krueger and R. S. Nelson (eds.), *The New Testament in Byzantium*, Washington, DC, 2016, p. 301-316 and M. Sigismund, "Form und Funktion der Apk-Zitate bei Theodoros Studites", in M. Sigismund and D. Müller (eds.), *Studien zum Text der Apokalypse III*, Berlin, 2020, p. 109-124. The general assumption that *Revelation* was largely ignored in Byzantium needs to be reevaluated in view of the wide spectrum of Byzantine literature. The genres of hagiography, historiography, homiletics as well as pseudepigrapha (Ps-Johannine apocalypses) deserve particular attention in any such reevaluation. It is noteworthy that Chōniatēs refers to *Revelation* over a dozen times, see the *index locorum* in J.-L. van Dieten, *Nicetae Choniatae Historia*, vol. II…, p. 133-134.

Mesaritēs, a contemporary of Chōniatēs, according to whom the imperial crown (στέφανος) can also be called Zacharias' scythe (δρέπανον Ζαχαρίου).[21] Zechariah's prophecies were believed to have predicted the arrival and final return of Christ. Among others, he had a vision of a flying scythe (δρέπανον πετόμενον, Zech. 5:1-2), which kills thieves and perjurers.[22] Although Byzantine commentaries on *Revelation* do not mention it, it is likely that Zechariah's vision of the flying scythe (Zech. 5:1-3) was juxtaposed with John of Patmos' vision of the scythe-bearing Christ, who flies from heaven (Rev. 14:14). The juxtaposition of those visions and of Christ's apocalyptic attributes – crown and scythe – may be expressed, in a condensed form, in the image of Andronikos as scythe-bearer, whereby the scythe connoted the messianic function of administering judgment. Hence, even though the crown was visually absent from the painting, it was potentially present in the beholders' horizon of expectation.[23]

This positive interpretation goes well together with other elements of Andronikos' imperial image. He is said to have compared himself to David, who was forced to flee before the king (Manuēl being the new Saul).[24] While wandering around, he preached Christ to non-Christian nations like a new apostle (v.D. 333.61-334.70). Moreover, some unnamed flatterers predicted that Andronikos would unite the East and the West and establish universal peace, fulfilling Isaiah's prophecies "that spears would be beaten into plowshares and lambs would feed with lions".[25] Such grand ambitions are attributed first to Andronikos in the *History*.[26] The notion of cosmic

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[21] A. Heisenberg, *Nikolaos Mesarites. Die Palastrevolution des Johannes Komnenos*, Würzburg, 1907, p. 22. Cited by M. Grünbart, "Die Macht des Historiographen…", p. 84-85.

[22] See R. H. W. Stichel, "Ein byzantinischer Kaiser...", p. 597-598 and C. Cupane, "Der Kaiser…", p. 69.

[23] The proposed interpretation needs to address two further issues to be coherent, namely why Andronikos was not depicted in imperial dress and who the handsome lad is (cf. C. Cupane, "Der Kaiser…", p. 74). Both issues depend on the dating of the mural painting. Chōniatēs mentions the image towards the end of his account of Andronikos' reign in the encomiastic section. The historian lists Andronikos' various praiseworthy deeds, which include the renovation of the Church of the Forty Martyrs without, however, specifying their place in time. If we assume that the painting was set up during Andronikos' regency for Alexios II in 1183 then we can suspect that the lad represented the young Alexios II and that Andronikos did not appear in imperial dress out of humility vis-à-vis the young heir.

[24] See C. M. Brand, *Byzantium confronts the West, 1180-1204*, Cambridge, MA, 1968 p. 50 and C. Cupane, "Der Kaiser…", p. 72.

[25] v.D. 309.43-44: ὡς συγκοπῆναι τὰς ζιβύνας εἰς ἄροτρα καὶ συμβοσκηθῆναι ἄρνας τοῖς λέουσιν. Cf. Isa. 2:4, Mic. 4:3, and Isa. 11:6, 65:25.

[26] These ambitions are echoed in Michael Chōniatēs' *Address to Praitōr Dēmētrios Drimys*, which contains an encomium on Andronikos, see S. Lambros, *Μιχαὴλ Ἀκομινάτου τοῦ Χωνιάτου τὰ σωζόμενα*, vol. I, Athens, 1879, p. 171-172. I thank Stefanos Dimitriadis for having drawn my attention to this passage. Andronikos' messianic ambitions were later appropriated by Isaac II (v.D. 558.28-29). See below n. 59.

Roman rule, with the universal emperor in Constantinople and empire-wide peace is a standard text-block of the apocalyptic tradition.[27] A comparison with the mid-tenth-century apocalyptic vision of Andrew the Fool bears some conspicuous parallels.[28]

The apocalypse of Andrew the Fool predicts a series of alternating good and bad end-time rulers, who bring about the ultimate recovery and subsequent destruction of the Eastern Roman Empire. The first of these rulers is a savior-emperor, who appears miraculously from among the paupers, overcomes all enemies, and ushers in a time of prosperity, equality, and justice. It is worthwhile to quote the whole text-block (with some omissions).[29]

> In the last days the Lord God will raise up *an emperor from poverty and he will walk in great righteousness* and *put an end to every war and make the poor rich*, and it will be as in the years of Noah. […] men will become very rich and eat and drink in deep peace, marrying and giving in marriage […] As there is no war *they will beat their swords into sickles and their pikes and spears into farming tools*, […] And *the whole of Illyricum will be restored to the Roman Empire*. […] And he will put his right hand on the sea and *tame the fair-haired peoples* and subdue his enemies under his hands. […] In the twelfth year of his reign *he will not collect taxes* or receive gifts. Instead *he will restore holy churches and rebuild destroyed altars*. And there will be no more trials, nor any wrongdoer or victim of wrong, for *through fear* he will make the sons of men

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[27] See Z. Pogossian and S. La Porta, "Apocalyptic texts, transmission of topoi, and their multi-lingual background: the Prophecies of Agat'on and Agat'angel on the End of the World", in L. DiTommaso, M. Henze, and W. Adler (eds.), *The embroidered Bible. Studies in biblical apocrypha and pseudepigrapha in honour of Michael E. Stone*, Leiden, 2017, p. 824-851, at p. 825, who introduced the notion of "text-block", which is a rather coherent unit of various literary motifs.

[28] The apocalyptic section of the *Life of Andrew the Fool* has been selected for analysis because it is a historical apocalypse that is well attested for the middle Byzantine period. From among the 120 Greek manuscript copies, at least eight copies were produced in or before the thirteenth century, i.e., codd. Atheniensis 523 (s. XI), 1014 (s. XI), 2419 (s. XIII), Hierosolymitanus S. Sabae 264 (s. XIII), Parisinus gr. 1547 (s. XIII), Petropolitanus gr. 692 (s. XIII), Vaticanus gr. 1574 (s. XI/XII), 2010 (s. XII). See L. Rydén, *The Life of St Andrew the Fool*, vol. I, Uppsala, 1995 (Studia Byzantina Upsaliensia, 4/1), p. 151-152. Although the reception history of the *Life's* apocalyptic discourse still remains to be studied, it is already clear that the text was in circulation during the Komnēnian period.

[29] The translation and edition are by L. Rydén, *The Life of St Andrew the Fool*, vol. II, Uppsala, 1995, p. 260-263 (ll. 3824-3847): Ἀναστήσει κύριος ὁ θεὸς ἐν ταῖς ἐσχάταις ἡμέραις βασιλείαν *ἀπὸ πενίας καὶ πορεύσεται ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ πολλῇ* καὶ *πάντα πόλεμον παύσει καὶ τοὺς πένητας πλουτίσει* καὶ ἔσται ὡς ἐπὶ τοῦ Νῶε τὰ ἔτη. […] ἔσονται γὰρ οἱ ἄνθρωποι κατὰ τὰς ἡμέρας αὐτοῦ πλούσιοι σφόδρα καὶ ἐν εἰρήνῃ ἀπείρῳ τρώγοντες καὶ πίνοντες, […] Καὶ ἐν τῷ μὴ εἶναι πόλεμον *συγκόψουσι τὰς σπάθας αὐτῶν εἰς δρέπανα καὶ τοὺς κοντοὺς καὶ ζιβύνας εἰς ἐργαλεῖα γηπονικά*, […] Καὶ *ἀποκατασταθήσεται ἅπαν τὸ Ἰλλυρικὸν τῇ βασιλείᾳ Ῥωμαίων*. […] Καὶ θήσει τὴν χεῖρα αὐτοῦ τὴν δεξιὰν ἐπὶ τὴν θάλασσαν καὶ *ἡμερώσει τὰ ξανθὰ γένη* καὶ ταπεινώσει τοὺς ἐχθροὺς ὑπὸ τὰς χεῖρας αὐτοῦ, […] Τῷ δὲ δωδεκάτῳ ἔτει τῆς αὐτοῦ βασιλείας *κῆνσον* καὶ δόματα *οὐ λήψεται*, ἀλλ' *ἀναστήσει ναοὺς ἁγίους καὶ ἀνοικοδομήσει συντετριμμένα θυσιαστήρια*. Καὶ δίκη οὐκέτι ἔσται, οὔτε ὁ ἀδικῶν οὔτε ὁ ἀδικούμενος· *φόβῳ* γὰρ ποιήσει τοὺς υἱοὺς τῶν ἀνθρώπων σωφρονεῖν καὶ *τοὺς παρανομοῦντας τῶν μεγιστάνων ταπεινώσει καὶ θανάτῳ παραδώσει*. (emphasis mine)

learn moderation, and *those of his nobles who transgress the law he will humble and deliver up to death*.

Key motifs of the savior-emperor text-block reverberate in Chōniatēs' account of Andronikos' reign. Andronikos is said to have benefited the poor and destitute (v.D. 324-328), to have been expected to initiate a period of great peace (v.D. 309.43-44), and to reunite the Western provinces thereby subduing the fair-haired Latins (v.D. 309.39-43). He reduced oppressive taxation practices (v.D. 325.14-326.49), restored the Church of the Forty Martyrs (v.D. 332), and ruled with an iron fist, valuing justice above all (v.D. 330.75-91). The notion that the savior-emperor would humble those of his nobles who had transgressed the law echoes Andronikos' ostensible disregard for social status in legal arbitration. Moreover, Andronikos' reign of terror goes well together with the expectation that the messianic emperor would rule through fear (φόβῳ). In fact, Chōniatēs concedes that Andronikos' reign of terror resulted in a general peace and quiet, fulfilling the prediction of Mic. 4:4 (v.D. 325.17-19). Finally, the idea that the savior-emperor emerges from poverty could have been seen to correspond to the penury (πενία) that Andronikos had suffered as a prisoner, vagabond, and outsider. When taken together, the correspondences are striking. Chōniatēs' report has left sufficient details of Andronikos' imperial image to substantiate the impression that the latter entertained messianic pretensions. This impression is further strengthened by the fact that Andronikos had a secretary (by the name of Mamalos) publicly executed for spreading seditious prophecies (v.D. 310-312), which shows that the emperor vigorously defended against any competing claim.[30]

Chōniatēs fragments and disperses the different motifs throughout his narrative so as not to endorse Andronikos' savior image by simply reproducing it. But he goes even further than that. He actively debunks Andronikos' messianic claims. The mural painting at the Church of the Forty Martyrs presents Andronikos as a messianic scythe-bearer, but Chōniatēs contends that it really shows him as the executioner of his protégé, the young Alexios II. Andronikos aspired to be a benevolent yet righteous Christ-like basileus, but Chōniatēs calls him persistently a tyrant, i.e., a pseudo-basileus. Important

[30] Mamalos was a secretary (ὑπογραφεύς) of Alexios Komnēnos, an illegitimate son of Manuēl I. Mamalos was found guilty of having consulted and promoted a so-called basil(ei)o-grapheion, a predictive book that specifies the expected regnal length of rulers. For context, see W. Brandes, "Kaiserprophetien und Hochverrat. Apokalyptische Schriften und Kaiservaticinien als Medium antikaiserlicher Propaganda", in W. Brandes and F. Schmieder (eds.), *Endzeiten: Eschatologie in den monotheistischen Weltreligionen*, Berlin, 2008, p. 157-200, at p. 161-184 and P. Magdalino, "Prophecy and Divination…", p. 69. Andronikos himself consulted prophets and diviners (v.D. 309-310, 339-340). For Andronikos' use of dish-divining (λεκανομαντεία), see L. Œconomos, *La vie religieuse dans l'Empire byzantin au temps des Comnènes et des Anges*, Paris, 1918, p. 93-95, P. Magdalino, "Occult science and imperial power in Byzantine history and historiography (9th-12th centuries)", in P. Magdalino and M. Mavroudi (eds.), *The Occult Sciences in Byzantium*, Geneva, 2006, p. 119-162, at p. 150-151, and id., "Prophecy and Divination…", p. 63.

attributes of a Christ-like emperor are, among others, meekness and the readiness to protect his subjects. But Andronikos is said to have been all but "a meek emperor and savior" towards the Prusaean rebels after he had subdued them.[31] Likewise, Andronikos stands accused of having pretended to be merciful only to exert cruel retribution on the capitulating Nicaeans (v.D. 286). Clemency is a crucial imperial privilege. It was the emperor's prerogative and duty to exert clemency, which shows that he is above natural law and can correct it with his divine mandate whenever necessary. Eusebios of Caesarea, among others, stipulated that just rulership encompasses clemency.[32] The fact that Andronikos did not show mercy, disqualifies him as emperor. Chōniatēs calls him "merciless and relentless" (ἀτεράμονα καὶ ἄτεγκτον, v.D. 297.92), "harsh, inconvincible, and implacable" (ὁ τραχὺς οὗτος καὶ δυσεκβίαστος καὶ ἀπαραίτητος, v.D. 323.79), a "manslayer" (ἀνδροφόνος, v.D. 260.49), a "bloodthirsty soul" (αἱμοβόρον ψυχήν, v.D. 269.94), an "evildoer" (κακοεργός, v.D. 311.92), a "harsh and cruel character" (τραχὺ καὶ σκληρὸν τὸ ἦθος, v.D. 324.1), a "beast" (θήρ, v.D. 139.55, 254.15, 272.65, 278.80, 283.10, 288.55).[33] This barrage of insults makes any messianic claim look ridiculous.

But the historian goes even further. He inverts the messianic aspiration by portraying the emperor in reminiscence of the Antichrist. Probably the greatest authority on the Antichrist in Byzantium was Hippolytos of Rome (d. c. 235). Hippolytos' treatise *On the Antichrist* was a primary source of information on the Son of Perdition. Yet, the treatise itself is poorly attested. We only have four Greek manuscripts (and a few fragments).[34] Hippolytos' reception was decisively shaped by Ps-Hippolytos, whose treatise *On the end of the world* comes down in at least 60 manuscripts, of which 18 copies were produced in or prior to the thirteenth century.[35]

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[31] v.D. 288.52-54: *οὔθ' ὡς βασιλεὺς πραΰς καὶ σώζων* ὑπηκόοις οὖσι πάλαι καὶ αὖθις ἐσομένοις, κἂν πρὸς καιρὸν ἀπέστησαν, τοῖς Προυσαεῦσιν ἐχρήσατο, […] | he treated the Prusaeans, who were his former and again future subjects – even if they revolted for a while – *not like a meek emperor and savior* […] (emphasis mine).

[32] I. A. Heikel, *Eusebius Werke, vol. I, Über das Leben Constantins, Constantins Rede an die heilige Versammlung, Tricennatsrede an Constantin*, GCS, Leipzig, 1902, p. 193-259, at p. 203.30-31: […] καὶ θηρὸς μὲν ἀγρίου θυμὸν βασιλικῆς ἡμερότητος ἀντικαταλλαξάμενος | […] who exchanged the anger of a wild beast for royal clemency. Cited by S. Neocleous, "Andronikos I Komnenos…", p. 97.

[33] These and other descriptions are listed in *ibid*., p. 99. It should be noted that "manslayer" (ἀνδροφόνος, v.D. 260.49), "bloodthirsty" (αἱμοβόρον, v.D. 269.94), and "beast" (θήρ, v.D. 272.65, 283.10) are not contained in version b. On the bestial depiction of Andronikos, see further A. Littlewood, "Vegetal and animal imagery in the History of Niketas Choniates", in M. Grünbart (ed.), *Theatron: Rhetorische Kultur in Spätantike und Mittelalter*, Berlin, 2007, p. 223-258, esp. p. 234-237.

[34] On the manuscript transmission, see P. C. Athanasopoulos, *Ιππολύτου Ρώμης Περί του Αντιχρίστου – Κριτική έκδοση*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Ioannina, 2013, p. 76-105. See further I. I. Iliev, "Textological notes on De Christo et Antichristo by Hippolytus of Rome in the Greek and Slavonic manuscript tradition", *Scripta & e-Scripta* 18, 2018, p. 175-195.

[35] For the manuscript transmission of Ps-Hippolytos, see P. C. Athanasopoulos, *Ψ.-Ιππολύτου Περὶ τῆς συντελείας τοῦ κόσμου – Κριτική έκδοση*, second edition, Ioannina, 2016, p. 36-46 and A. Kraft, "An

Thus, the Ps-Hippolytan text is of even greater significance than Hippolytos when looking at the Byzantine reception of the Antichrist myth.[36]

A comparision of Ps-Hippolytos' description of the Antichrist and Chōniatēs' characterization of Emperor Andronikos reveal that both characters are described as quintessential charlatans. Ps-Hippolytos asserts that the Antichrist will emulate Christ in every respect (cap. 20) and use dissimulation to be made emperor (cap. 24.1-5). He calls the Antichrist an "impostor" (πλάνος, cap. 20.1, 25.13, 29.6, *passim*) and "deceiver" (δόλιος, cap. 24.1, 25.18, 29.9, *passim*).[37] Pseudo-Hippolytos does not tire of emphasizing that the Antichrist is a fraud. Likewise, Chōniatēs, repeats over and over again that Andronikos was a trickster.[38] He pretended to be the guardian of the underage Alexios II but then had his mother (Maria Xenē) and eventually the young prince himself executed (v.D. 268, 273-274). After he had become sole emperor, Andronikos continued to use dissimulation. As mentioned above, he pretended to be merciful when the Nicaeans abandoned their rebellion (v.D. 286) but then mercilessly punished their insurrection. Many more examples could be given. Thus, when Chōniatēs calls Andronikos a "dissembler" (κρυψίνουν, v.D. 256.50), a "wolf hidden in sheep's clothing" (τὸν ἐν δέρματι προβάτου κεκρυμμένον λύκον, v.D. 248.73-74),[39] a "snake" (ὄφις, v.D. 248.75, 296.74, 324.7), or a "chameleon" (χαμαιλέων, v.D. 353.39), he hints at the Antichrist legend.

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inventory of Medieval Greek apocalyptic sources (c. 500-1500 AD): naming and dating, editions and manuscripts", *Millennium* 15, 2018, p. 69-143, at p. 84-86. For a discussion of the influence of Ps-Hippolytos on the Armenian tradition, see Z. Pogossian, "The Armenian version of Ps.-Hippolytus De consummatione mundi and its impact on the Armenian apocalyptic tradition. A first appraisal", *Le Muséon* 133, nº 1-2, 2020, p. 141-163.

[36] The Ps-Hippolytan treatise relies heavily not only on Hippolytos but also on the Ephraem Graecus corpus. This corpus comprises a variety of texts written in Greek and attributed to Ephrem the Syrian (d. c. 373). A brief introduction to this corpus can be found in E. Lash, "The Greek writings attributed to Saint Ephrem the Syrian", in J. Behr, A. Louth, D. Conomos (eds.), *Abba: the tradition of Orthodoxy in the West. Festschrift for Bishop Kallistos (Ware) of Diokleia*, Crestwood (NY), 2003, p. 81-98. The authenticity, dating, and reception history of the eschatological works of Ephraem Graecus remain to be studied. For a recent investigation of one key text, see E. Grypeou, "Ephraem Graecus, 'Sermo in adventum Domini': a contribution to the study of the transmission of apocalyptic motifs in Greek, Latin and Syriac traditions in Late Antiquity", in S. Kh. Samir and J. P. Monferrer-Sala (eds.), *Graeco-Latina et Orientalia: studia in honorem Angeli Urbani heptagenarii*, Cordoba, 2013 (Series Syro-Arabica, 2), p. 165-179.

[37] Romanos the Melodist (d. after 555) called the Antichrist a deceiver (δόλιος) as well. See J. Grosdidier de Matons, *Romanos le Mélode. Hymnes*, vol. V, Paris, 1981 (SC 283), p. 250 (§12), 260 (§19).

[38] Cf. T. Labuk, "Andronikos I Komnenos in Choniates' History: a trickster narrative?", in Ch. Messis, M. Mullett, and I. Nilsson (eds.), *Storytelling in Byzantium: narratological approaches to Byzantine texts and images*, Uppsala, 2018, p. 263-285, who examines the trickster theme in Chōniatēs' description of Andronikos. The study focuses on parallels in classical Greek literature and disregards the biblical and apocryphal traditions. The present remarks about the Antichrist myth may thus serve as a supplement to Labuk's discussion.

[39] Cf. P. C. Athanasopoulos, *Ψ.-Ιππολύτου Περὶ τῆς συντελείας…*, p. 88 (cap. 20): Ἐδείχθη ὁ Σωτὴρ ὡς ἀρνίον καὶ αὐτὸς ὁμοίως φανήσεται ὡς ἀρνίον, ἔνδοθεν λύκος ὤν. | The savior was revealed as a

The Antichrist reference is made utterly clear by the report of the public rumor that mocked Andronikos' chief henchman, Stephanos Hagiochristophoritēs.[40] Chōniatēs relates that the Constantinopolitan populace ridiculed Hagiochristophoritēs by calling him Antichristophoritēs (v.D. 293.11), that is, the envoy or harbinger of the Antichrist.[41] Chōniatēs uses the term Antichrist only twice in the *History*. The second time is when he calls the Crusaders, who sacked Constantinople in 1204, "the precursors of the Antichrist" (οἱ τοῦ Ἀντιχρίστου πρόδρομοι, v.D. 573.7). But that section belongs to the revised a(uctior) version. Thus, Chōniatēs mentions the term 'Antichrist' only once in version b and only in connection with Andronikos' reign.

Are we to assume that Chōniatēs believed Andronikos to be the Antichrist? Certainly not. First of all, he knew that Andronikos did not match the full description of the Antichrist myth. Among other things, he did not have Jewish descent, nor did he enjoy a particular following among the Jews. Also, in hindsight, he knew that Andronikos was not denounced by the two witnesses, Enoch and Elijah. Nor was he the last ruler in Constantinople. That is, there were significant differences that disqualified Andronikos from being *the* Antichrist. But he qualified perfectly well for *an* antichrist, i.e., is for a typological precursor. The hyperbolic language that identifies Andronikos with the most ruthless man "ever" (πώποτε, v.D. 291.42, 311.95, 321.18-19) leaves room for further escalation;[42] Andronikos was the worst so far. Chōniatēs strikes a careful balance between two extremes: Andronikos' imperial image as the savior-emperor, on the one hand, and its popular inversion as

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sheep, and he [the Antichrist] will likewise appear as a sheep, but he is a wolf within.

[40] See A. G. K. Savvidēs, "Θερμουργὸς Αντιχριστοφορίτης, ἀνὴρ αἱμάτων. Η τύχη του Στέφανου Αγιοχριστοφορίτη, κύριου οργάνου του Ανδρόνικου Α' Κομνηνού", in S. N. Trōianos (ed.), *Έγκλημα και τιμωρία στο Βυζάντιο*, Athens, 1997, p. 67-95, who discusses the origin, career, deeds, and death of Hagiochristophoritēs.

[41] The fact that Eustathios of Thessaloniki and Ephraim of Ainos report the same cognomen (Antichristophoritēs) shows that Chōniatēs testifies to a widespread sentiment; see S. Kyriakidis, *Eustazio di Tessalonica. La espugnazione di Tessalonica*, Palermo, 1961, p. 44 (ll. 23-25) and O. Lampsides, *Ephraem Aenii Historia chronica*, CFHB 27, Athens, 1990, p. 187 (ll. 5171-5174). The anxiety that the Antichrist was near should not be underestimated. The fear was voiced, for instance, by an unknown scribe, who added a poem to a mid-fourteenth copy of the *History*, see D. Samara, "An unedited poem from codex Marcianus gr. 403", *Medioevo greco* 18 (2018), p. 245-252, at p. 251.25. This is not to say that apocalyptic anxieties were ubiquitous. For a different approach to come to terms with the horrors perpetrated by Hagiochristophoritēs, see L. Garland, "A treasury minister in hell: a little-known 'Dialogue of the Dead' of the late twelfth century", *Modern Greek Studies Yearbook* 16/17, 2000/2001, p. 481-499 and A. G. K. Savvidēs, "Θερμουργὸς Αντιχριστοφορίτης", p. 93-94, who discuss a contemporary satirical dialogue that taunts Andronikos' henchman in the afterlife.

[42] It should be noted that the passage v.D. 321.18-19 was not included in version b and presents a later addition. However, I do not see any qualitative change or new attitude in this later addition but merely a further accentuation of Andronikos' excessive wickedness. For a summary of the passage, which comprises the longest addition to Andronikos' reign, see A. Simpson, *Studies on the composition*…", p. 285 and ead., "Introduction. Niketas Choniates…", p. 21-22.

the Antichrist, on the other. The historian demotes Andronikos from an apocalyptic hero or villain to a mere typological precursor, who plays a subsidiary role in the history that precedes the Second Coming. He may have fulfilled some of Christ's prophecies about the end-times (v.D. 258.6-9, cf. Mark 13:12; v.D. 323.80-324.84, cf. Luke 17:34) and may have stirred up the apocalyptic potential of Constantinople, but he was not *the* Antichrist.

The depreciation of Andronikos' apocalyptic role is achieved by three means. First, Chōniatēs avoids using many of the key terms associated with the Antichrist myth.[43] Instead, he uses an archaizing vocabulary that includes a plethora of Homeric epithets, such as wily (πολύτροπος, v.D. 243.40, 288.62, 338.4), ingenious (πολύφρων, v.D. 131.90), or stout-hearted (ταλασίφρων, v.D. 142.38).[44] The *History* is written in Attic Greek and draws upon the standards of classical Greek historiography, whereby Homeric terminology is a generic requirement. The classicizing epithets do not invalidate the apocalyptic connotations but only deflate them, as the terms allow for a broader spectrum of meaning that is not restricted to an apocalyptic interpretation.[45] Second, the historian reports on the emperor's

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[43] For instance, Ps-Hippolytos describes the Antichrist, at one point, as follows (P. C. Athanasopoulos, *Ψ.-Ιππολύτου Περὶ τῆς συντελείας…*, p. 95 [cap. 26]): αὐστηρός, ἀπότομος, ὀργίλος, θυμώδης, δεινός, ἀκατάστατος, φοβερός, ἀειδής, μισητός, βδελυκτός, ἀνήμερος, ἀλάστωρ, πονηρός. From among these attributes, Chōniatēs applies only ὀργιλότης (irascibility) (v.D. 315.74-75, 324.1, 345.90) to Andronikos himself and δεινός (terrible) (v.D. 288.50, 315.88) and ἀνήμερος (savage) (v.D. 311.90) to his reign. Likewise, Chōniatēs refrains from calling Andronikos "a son of lawlessness" (τις υἱὸς τῆς ἀνομίας, in L. Rydén, *The Life of St Andrew the Fool*, vol. II, p. 262 [l. 3860]) or "the son of perdition" (ὁ τῆς ἀπωλείας υἱός, in P. C. Athanasopoulos, *Ψ.-Ιππολύτου Περὶ τῆς συντελείας…*, p. 91 [cap. 22], *passim*) but prefers to call him "the multiform Proteus" (τὸν πολύμορφον Πρωτέα, v.D. 245.78).

[44] On the Homeric epithets applied to Andronikos, see A. Vasilikopoulou, "Ἀνδρόνικος ὁ Κομνηνὸς καὶ Ὀδυσσεύς", *Ἐπετηρὶς Ἑταιρείας Βυζαντινῶν Σπουδῶν* 37, 1969-70, p. 251-259, N. Gaul, "Andronikos Komnenos, Prinz Belthandros und der Zyklop. Zwei Glossen zu Niketas Choniates' Χρονικὴ διήγησις", *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 96, nº 2, 2003, p. 623-660, R. Saxey, "The Homeric metamorphoses of Andronikos I Komnenos", in A. Simpson and S. Efthymiadis (eds.), *Niketas Choniates. A historian and a writer*, Geneva, 2009, p. 121-143.

[45] See *ibid*., 131-132 for another instance where biblical and Homeric reminiscences overlap. Chōniatēs' reticence to use epithets and designations from the extra-biblical (apocryphal) tradition recalls Prokopios' self-same reluctance in the *Secret History*. Prokopios refrained from explicitly calling Justinian the Antichrist, using instead the classicizing term "the lord of demons" (τῶν δαιμόνων τὸν ἄρχοντα, cap. 12.26, 12.32; edition in J. Haury and G. Wirth, *Procopii Caesariensis opera omnia*, vol. III, Leipzig, 1963 [BSGRT], p. 82, 83). Yet the hyperbolic descriptions of Justinian's demonic origin (cap. 12.18-19, 18.1), his superhuman wrongdoings, and dissembling nature (εἴρων, κατάπλαστος, cap. 8.24, 29.1) unmistakably evoke the Antichrist myth. See further B. Rubin, "Der Fürst der Dämonen. Ein Beitrag zur Interpretation von Prokops Anekdota", *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 44, nº 1-2 (1951), p. 469-481, id., "Der Antichrist und die 'Apokalypse' des Prokopios von Kaisareia", *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 110, 1961, p. 55-63, K. Gantar, "Kaiser Justinian als kopfloser Dämon", *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 54, 1961, 1-3, and R. D. Scott, "Malalas, the Secret History, and Justinian's propaganda", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 39, 1985, p. 99-109, at p. 108-109.

praiseworthy feats, such as his benefactions to the poor or the correction of abusive tax collection. Consequently, Andronikos is presented not only as a tyrant but also as a reformer.[46] This contrast is a deliberate textual strategy that not only expresses the historian's belief that he lived in an age of disorder,[47] but it also re-humanizes Andronikos; he is neither the personification of evil (Antichrist) nor a Christ-like sovereign (savior-emperor) but just a common man, who has some merit notwithstanding his many flaws. Third, Chōniatēs portrays Andronikos as the scythe-bearer (δρεπανηφόρος) of the oracular tradition. The *History* contains a series of quotations and allusions to the oracular collection that later came to be known as the *Oracles of Leo the Wise*.[48] The historian refers to this tradition three times in his account of Andronikos. The first instance is Andronikos' fear that Isaac Komnēnos, the ruler of Cyprus (1184-1191), would dethrone him because his name begins with an iōta (v.D. 292.60-61). The emperor is said to have believed in the so-called AIMA prophecy, which is an acronym that predicts the sequence of rulers who are identified by their initial letters.[49] The second reference reports that most

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[46] On Andronikos' reforms, see M. Syuzyumov, "Внутренняя политика Андроника Комнина и разгром пригородов Константинополя в 1187 году", *Византийский Временник* 12, 1957, p. 58-74, at p. 63-68, W. Brand, *Byzantium confronts the West*, p. 61-66, 74-75, J. Herrin, "Realities of Byzantine provincial government: Hellas and Peloponnesos, 1180-1205", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 29, 1975, p. 253-284, at p. 267-268, and A. Karpozēlos, *Βυζαντινοὶ ἱστορικοὶ καὶ χρονογράφοι. Τόμος Γ' (11ος-12ος αἰ.)*, Athens, 2009, p. 752-754.

[47] A. Kaldellis, "Paradox, reversal and the meaning of history", in A. Simpson and S. Efthymiadis (eds.), *Niketas Choniates. A historian and a writer*, Geneva, 2009, p. 75-99, at p. 90-98.

[48] The transmission history of the *Oracles of Leo the Wise* is complicated and much remains unknown. Originally, it consisted of six versified oracular units that use animal imagery to predict the sequence of good and bad rulers in Constantinople. Following the first halōsis of Constantinople in 1204, the oracular collection was expanded by another nine units and translated into Latin. Our best evidence for the original Greek text comes from Chōniatēs' testimonies and the Latin translations, given the fact that all extant Greek manuscripts that contain the *Oracles of Leo* were copied centuries later in the post-byzantine period. Chōniatēs quotes from the collection in v.D. 41.10-13, 222.68, 351.72, 355.8-15 and alludes to it in v.D. 332.28, 433.91-92. He also cites a verse oracle that allegedly circulated widely at the time but did not become part of the *Oracles of Leo* (v.D. 353.37-354.44); see further n. 51 below. See further C. Mango, "The legend of Leo the Wise", *Зборник радова Византолошког института* 6, 1960, p. 59-93, at p. 59-72, W. G. Brokkaar, *The Oracles of the Most Wise Emperor Leo & the Tale of the True Emperor* (Amstelodamensis graecus VI E 8), Amsterdam, 2002, p. 23-44, and M.-H. Congourdeau, "Les Oracula Leonis", in C. D. Fonseca (ed.), *Gioachimismo e profetismo in Sicilia (secoli XIII-XVI). Atti del terzo Convegno internazionale di studio Palermo-Monreale 14-16 ottobre 2005*, Rome, 2007, p. 79-91.

[49] The AIMA prophecy emerged during the reign of Manuēl I (r. 1143-1180), as pointed out by P. Magdalino, *The empire of Manuel I Komnenos*, 1143-1180, Cambridge, 1993, p. 200 and R. Shukurov, "Three lives of one prophecy", in *The humanities in Russia: Soros laureates*, Moscow, 1997, p. 87-91, at 81, 86. Chōniatēs refers to the AIMA prophecy several times throughout the *History*: v.D. 146.37-41, 169.1, 292.60-61, 425.82-426.86; the last two references pertain to Andronikos' use of the prophecy. Its relationship to the oracular tradition is suggested by Chōniatēs' frequent references to both, the AIMA prophecy and the oracular tradition, and by the

people at the time believed Andronikos to be the scythe-bearer and to face imminent death (v.D. 351.71-72); it contains a direct quotation from the oracular collection.[50] The third occurrence provides yet another quotation; this time of an oracle that was reputedly on everyone's lips. The oracle predicts that a "many-colored chameleon" (ποικίλος χαμαιλέων, v.D. 353.39) would come from a place full of wine (ἐκ τόπου πλήρους πότου, v.D. 353.37) – in which Chōniatēs sees a clear reference to Oinaion from where Andronikos had set out for Constantinople – and would commit murder only to die a violent death himself.[51] The oracle uses the allusive verb "to reap" (θερίζειν, v.D. 353.40-354.41), which reinforces the depiction of Andronikos as the scythe-bearing harvester. All three references integrate Andronikos into the oracular tradition, but they do not place him at the end of things. Instead, he is identified with the scythe-bearer, who is a mere precursor of the last emperor and the Antichrist.[52] This identification denied Andronikos eschatological prominence.

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fact that the word AIMA (blood) marks the title of the second oracle of the *Oracles of Leo the Wise*, see J. Vereecken, *Τοῦ σοφωτάτου βασιλέως Λέοντος χρησμοί. De Orakels van de zeer wijze keizer Leo. Editio princeps van de Griekse tekst en van de Latijnse bewerking, de Vaticinia Pontificum. Met historische inleiding, tekstgeschiedenis en commentaar*, vol. III.1, Ph.D. dissertation, Ghent University, 1986, p. 4-5. On the AIMA prophecy, see further C. Mango, "The legend of Leo the Wise", p. 63, C. Varzos, "La politique dynastique des Comnènes et des Anges, la prédiction AIMA (sang) et l'héritage des Grands Comnènes de Trébizonde et des Anges-Comnènes-Doukas d'Epire face aux Lascarides de Nicée", *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 32, nº 2, 1982, p. 355-360, P. Magdalino, "The history of the future and its uses: prophecy, policy and propaganda", in R. Beaton and Ch. Roueché (eds.), *The making of Byzantine history*. *Studies dedicated to Donald M. Nicol*, Aldershot, 1993, p. 3-34, at p. 27, and R. Shukurov, "Three lives". For earlier and later prophetic acronyms, see P. Magdalino, "Une prophétie inédite des environs de l'an 965 attribuée à Léon le Philosophe (MS Karakallou 14, f. 253^{r}-254^{r})", *Travaux et mémoires* 14, 2002, p. 391-402 and K. Moustakas, "Μαμάϊμι: συμβολή στη μελέτη της χρησμολογικής παράδοσης κατά την εποχή της Άλωσης", *Αριάδνη* 14, 2008, p. 119-155.

[50] v.D. 351.72: δρεπανηφόρε, τετράμηνόν σε μένει | scythe-bearer, four months remain to you.

[51] v.D. 353.37-354.44. The quoted oracle was not included in the *Oracles of Leo the Wise*, which indicates that it quickly fell into disuse. However, a text that resembles it was inserted in the oracular collection in Vindobonensis suppl. gr. 172, f. 72r, as noted by N. Kastrinakēs, *Εικονογραφημένοι χρησμοί του Λέοντος του Σοφού: Από τη βυζαντινή εποχή στην πρώτη έντυπη έκδοση (1596)*, 2 vols., Ph.D. dissertation, University of Crete, 2018, I, 380. Chōniatēs' use and interpretation of the quoted oracle is confirmed by an epigram that was appended to Chōniatēs' *History* in Vaticanus gr. 163, f. 168v – transcribed in the *apparatus* of van Dieten's edition – and that asserts that Andronikos received due punishment for his execution of Alexios II.

[52] The narrative sequence of the oracular tradition – as we know it from the *Oracles of Leo the Wise* – already existed by the time Chōniatēs started to work on the *History*. The oracular figures and their narrative sequence associated with John II, Manuēl I, Andronikos I, and Isaac II all correspond to those known from the *Oracles of Leo the Wise*. Cf. P. Karlin-Hayter, "Le portrait d'Andronic I Comnene et les Oracula Leonis Sapientis", *Byzantinische Forschungen* 12, 1987, p. 103-116, who inferred from the congruence that Isaac II had an oracular manual produced specifically to denounce Andronikos as the scythe-bearer (in which she sees the personification of death). In contrast, I find it more likely that the oracular collection pre-existed the Komnēnian period and was merely reinterpreted under

By repeatedly identifying Andronikos with the scythe-bearer,[53] the historian subscribed to Isaac II's policy to defame his predecessor and to claim the mantle of the savior-emperor for himself. That is why, Chōniatēs starts his account of Isaac's reign by quoting the oracle of the so-called bovine emperor (v.D. 355); a virtuous ruler to be succeeded only by the Antichrist. Of course, in hindsight the historian came to ridicule Isaac's delusion of grandeur, as mentioned above.[54] Yet, he chose to retain the oracular prediction and its interpretation as they were openly circulated by Isaac's faction. We thus have in the identification of Andronikos with the scythe-bearer a fossilized remnant of Isaac's apocalyptic image, which stems from his early reign.[55] The policy to deny Andronikos' messianic claims was as successful as the concurrent campaign to denounce him as a tyrant.[56]

In conclusion, Andronikos had grand ambitions. An old and marginalized man who ascends the throne was an ideal candidate for the savior-emperor as he was known from the apocalyptic tradition. Andronikos was hailed a savior early on, and he is shown to have entertained messianic ambitions himself. The story of Andronikos that we encounter in Chōniatēs' *History* is a distorted reflection of those ambitions. The historian fragments and refutes various elements of the emperor's messianic claims. Moreover, he sternly argues that Andronikos was a fraud through and through and that he came closer to the Antichrist than to the savior-emperor.[57]

Isaac II. The collection may well have originated in the early ninth century, as argued by Brokkaar, *The Oracles*…, p. 43.

[53] We should recall that Chōniatēs already described Andronikos as a scythe-bearer when discussing the mural painting at the Church of the Forty Martyrs (v.D. 332.28).

[54] Initially, Chōniatēs had presented Patriarch Dōsitheos' prophecies to Isaac II in dispassionate terms (version b), but later he added defamatory elements, e.g., v.D. 404.6-13, 408.87-90 (version a). See P. Magdalino, "Occult science…", p. 154, 160 and id., "Prophecy and divination…", p. 66-67.

[55] In this study, I do not distinguish sharply between oracular and apocalyptic traditions. While strictly speaking oracular predictions and apocalyptic prophecies belong to different literary genres, their contents, structure, and eschatological trajectory qualify them as closely related literary types. Cf. W. Brandes, "Konstantinopels Fall…", p. 244 and A. Kraft, "An inventory…", p. 71.

[56] For another (early to mid-thirteenth-century) prophecy that may identify Andronikos with the scythe-bearer, see A. Pertusi, *Fine di Bisanzio e fine del mondo. Significato e ruolo storico delle profezie sulla caduta di Costantinopoli in Oriente e in Occidente*, ed. E. Morini, Rome, 1988, p. 54-56, at p. 56.33-36. For commentary, see A. Kraft, "Prophecies as a resource of decision-making: the case of Alexios V Doukas Mourtzouphlos' execution at the Column of Theodosios", in M. Grünbart (ed.), *Unterstützung bei herrscherlichem Entscheiden: Experten und ihr Wissen in transkultureller und komparativer Perspektive*, Göttingen, 2021, p. 86-107, at p. 102-104. With regard to the unanimous condemnation of Andronikos as tyrant in both Byzantine and Western sources, see the overview by S. Neocleous, "Andronikos I Komnenos…" and the scholia edited by J. Bértola, "Ephraim of Ainos at work: a cycle of epigrams in the margins of Niketas Choniates", *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 114, nº 3, 2021, p. 929-1000, at p. 990-991.

[57] The ambiguity and potential permutation of apocalyptic roles is explicitly underlined by Chōniatēs' testimony of a prediction that Andronikos had given to Emperor Manuēl. Andronikos is said

The double nature of Andronikos is a due to the inversion of his messianic image. But the historical narrative deconstructs even the inverted (or counter-eschatological) contention. Andronikos was neither messiah nor antichrist; he was just a cruel man. To put it succinctly, Andronikos was first hailed the savior-emperor, then cursed as the Antichrist, thereupon equated with the scythe-bearer, and finally condemned a depraved tyrant. The final verdict was that whatever good intentions he may have had, they were invalidated by his excessive brutality. This is quite an anticlimax, when compared to the apocalyptic rhetoric during Andronikos' reign, of which Chōniatēs provides filtered and de-eschatologized snippets.

The different versions of the *History* all agree in the tendency to de-eschatologize Andronikos: at best, he was the scythe-bearer of the oracular tradition (version b), but more probably he was just a shameless tyrant (version a). The presumably oldest layer of the *History* had adopted Isaac II's interpretation of the oracular tradition, which demoted Andronikos from savior-emperor to scythe-bearer. It had recorded the transition from one messianic pretender to the next.[58] Although Chōniatēs seems to have initially supported Isaac's apocalyptic pretensions,[59] he eventually (already in version b) realized that messianic ambitions and its demonizing inversions raise the stakes too high and only lead to excessive violence. Thus, the account of Andronikos' multifarious character and reign can be read as an admonition not to abuse prophecies but to handle them cautiously and

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to have predicted that an emperor would end his reign by being hung up between two columns in the hippodrome. Chōniatēs emphasizes that the prediction applied to Andronikos and not – as originally intended – to Manuēl (v.D. 352.78–83). The anecdote (with the same emphasis on permutation) is reproduced in a versified chronicle (in cod. Marc. gr. Z. 408, saec. XIV, ff. 1r–13v, at f. 3r–v), see J. Müller, "Byzantinische Analekten", *Sitzungsberichte der kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-historische Classe* 9, 1853, p. 336–419, at p. 370.129–137 and C. Matzukis, *Ἡ ἅλωσις τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως: τέταρτη σταυροφορία. The Fall of Constantinople: Fourth Crusade*, Peristeri, 2004, p. 101.129–103.137.

[58] Cf. Stichel, "Ein byzantinischer Kaiser...", p. 598 and Cupane, "Der Kaiser…", p. 71-72, who suggested that the panegyric addressed to Isaac II was in part based on the one previously produced for Andronikos, and P. Magdalino, "Isaac II, Saladin and Venice", in J. Shepard (ed.), *The expansion of orthodox Europe: Byzantium, the Balkans and Russia*, Aldershot, 2007 (The Expansion of Latin Europe, 1000-1500), p. 93-106, at p. 96, 104, who argued that Isaac II inherited his ambitions for imperial restoration in Palestine from Andronikos.

[59] In his panegyric to Isaac II, Nikētas Chōniatēs uses the same apocalyptic imagery and prediction of imperial conquest that his brother, Michael Chōniatēs, had used in his encomium on Andronikos. See J.-L. van Dieten, *Nicetae Choniatae orationes et epistulae*, CFHB 3, Berlin, 1972, p. 94, cf. S. Lambros, *Μιχαὴλ Ἀκομινάτου*…, p. 172. For a discussion of Chōniatēs' eulogistic oration to Isaac II, see D. G. Angelov, "Domestic opposition to Byzantium's alliance with Saladin: Niketas Choniates and his Epiphany oration of 1190", *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 30, nº 1, 2006, p. 49-68. The apocalyptic overtones of Isaac II's reign are discussed in detail by Stefanos Dimitriadis in his forthcoming dissertation entitled "Rhomania in crisis: domestic politics in the late twelfth century (1180-1204)" (University of Münster).

responsibly.[60] Moreover, if we are to assume that Chōniatēs composed his account of Andronikos largely during the reign of Alexios III, then the balanced narrative may also have been intended to dissuade the overt use of apocryphal prophecy altogether. It is conspicuous that Alexios III is not associated with any oracles or prophecies – only with an inauspicious portent at the beginning of this reign (v.D. 457-458). It is for further research to show whether Alexios III – and Chōniatēs as his mouthpiece – pursued a policy of discreet but determined de-eschatologization.

[60] The reading proposed here does not challenge the approach to read Chōniatēs' *History* against classical Greek literature. Homeric formulaic vocabulary and Aristotelian literary aesthetics – see H. J. Magoulias, "Andronikos I Komnenos: a Greek tragedy", *Βυζαντινά Σύμμεικτα* 21, 2011, p. 101-136 – form an integral part of the *History*, just as biblical citations and apocalyptic imagery.