

AN ORACULAR INTERPRETATION
ATTRIBUTED TO GENNADIUS SCHOLARIUS

To Scholarius is attributed the interpretation of an oracle (itself often attributed to Leo the Wise) which is reprinted in Migne's *Patrologia Graeca* (160, 767-774). This oracular interpretation is to be found together with its attribution to Scholarius in at least fifteen manuscripts¹, most of which date from the

1. Namely the following codices (the numbers in square brackets are used for reference in subsequent notes):

Athous (Xeropotamou) 248 f. 509 [1]; cf. S. P. L a m b r o s, *Catalogue of the Greek Manuscripts on Mount Athos I* (Cambridge 1895) p. 218.

Berolinensis gr. 297 ff. 1^v & 12 [2]; cf. pp. 219-244 of Bees *Περὶ τοῦ ἱστορημένου χρησμολογίου τῆς Κρατικῆς Βιβλιοθήκης τοῦ Βερολίνου* in *Buz.-neugr-Jahrb.* 13 (1937) 203-244 λζ'.

Escorialensis Y-I-16 f. 1 [3]; cf. E. M i l l e r, *Catalogue des manuscrits grecs de la bibliothèque de l'Escorial* (Paris 1884) p. 192.

Hafniensis gr. 2147 [4]; cf. C. G r a u x, *Notices sommaires des manuscrits grecs de la Grande Bibliothèque Royale de Copenhague* (Paris 1879) p. 78.

Monacensis gr. 154 f. 342^r-343^v [5]; cf. I. H a r d t, *Catalogus codicum manuscriptorum graecorum Bibliothecae Regiae Bavaricae II* (Munich 1806) pp. 179-180.

Oxonienses Laudianus 27 f. 66 [6], Barocciani 145 f. 234 [7] and 170 f. 30 [8]; cf. H. O. C o x e, *Catalogi codicum manuscriptorum Bibliothecae Bodleianae I* (Oxford 1853) pp. 509, 249 & 285.

Taurinensis B V 27 ff. 20^r-21^r & 37^r [9]; cf. pp. 116-123 of Lambros-Dyovouniotes, *Τὸ ὑπ' ἀριθμὸν ΔΘ' κατάλοιπον* in *N. Ἑλλην.* 19 (1925) 97-124.

Veneti Marciani Cl. IV 38 (Nani 260) f. 29^v [10] and 46 (Nani 270) f. 322^v [11], Cl. VII 3 ff. 37^v-38^r [12]; cf. Lambros-Dyovouniotes *ibid.* 109-112.

Vindobonenses theol. gr. 24 ff. 25^r-26^r & 29^v [13] and 261 f. 261^r [14] suppl. gr. 172 ff. 29^r-30^v [15]; cf. D. de N e s s e l, *Catalogus... codicum manuscriptorum graecorum... Bibliothecae Caesariae Vindobonensis* (Vienna and Nuremberg 1690) I pp. 40-4, S. P. L a m b r o s - K. I. A m a n t o s, *Βραχέα χρονικά* (Athens 1932) pp. 68-9 and H. H u n g e r, *Katalog der griechischen Handschriften der österreichischen Nationalbibliothek: Supplementum Graecum* (Vienna 1957) p. 106.

More vague references to part or all of this oracular interpretation but without its attribution to Scholarius are even more numerous: e.g. Pseudo-Phrantzes, *Annales Georgii Phrantzae* (*Corpus Script. Hist. Byz.*, Bonn) p. 316.

sixteenth century but a few from earlier. It is accompanied in Migne by a few comments to the effect that the letters were graven on the marble tomb of Constantine the Great and the full interpretation made by Scholarius while he was still a layman and imperial judge¹; afterwards it is added that it was made 1101 years after the death of Constantine in 329². The variants in the text of the oracle are, for the most part, relatively unimportant. But some manuscripts³ distinguish between two similar oracles interpreted by Scholarius: one said to be found on a column in the Xerolophus⁴, according to which «the descendants of Mahomet will reign a little while», and the other to be found on the tomb of Constantine which asserts that there will be five Moslem Emperors before the Empire is restored to the Christians. These two sites for the oracle recur in various combinations, but normally there is little contradiction between their data.

The interpretation given in Migne is as follows:

«On the first of the Indiction the Kingdom of Ishmael, which is called Mahomet, will overthrow the race of the Palaeologi, will occupy the Seven Hills [i.e. Constantinople], and rule within. They will subdue very many nations and will devastate the islands as far as the Euxine Sea. They will conquer the dwellers by the Danube. On the eighth of the Indiction they will subdue the Peloponnese. On the ninth of the Indiction they will defeat the Dalmatians; they will return in the following year to raise a great war against the Dalmatians and will partially overcome them. The peoples and the tribes of the West will combine to make war by

1. He became a monk in 1450. He was καθολικός κριτής τῶν Ρωμαίων by the time of the Council of Florence (Ducas, *Istoria Turco-Bizantină*, ed. V. Grecu, Bucharest 1958, p. 267, 22).

2. This would give the date 1430 which is immediately suspicious. In fact Constantine died in 337, which would give the date 1438 and thus virtually agree with those manuscripts which say that Scholarius expounded the oracle at Florence (the Council of Ferrara-Florence transferred to the latter city in January 1439).

3. E.g. nos. 2 and 14.

4. See R. Janin, *La Constantinople Byzantine* (Archives de l'Orient Chrétien 4, Paris 1950) pp. 86-7; the column of Arcadius in the Xerolophus had spiral bas-reliefs representing the feats of Theodosius the Great and Arcadius, especially the campaign of Promotus on the Danube. Superstitious beliefs about this column are reported from the thirteenth century (see Diehl in *BZ* 30 [1929-30] 195-6).

land and sea and will defeat Ishmael. His descendants will rule a little longer. But the fair-haired race together with the original owners will defeat Ishmael completely, and will take the Seven Hills with their privileges. Then they will raise a fierce internecine war until the fifth hour, and a voice will cry 'Stand, stand with fear. Hasten swiftly to the right-hand side, where you will find a man, noble, wondrous and sturdy. Take him as lord; for he is my friend, and by receiving him my will is fulfilled'».

What is immediately striking about this is that, however vague and fantastic the end may be, the first half of it is reasonably clear and accurate. It records the Turkish capture of Constantinople (1453, Indiction 1) and the subsequent campaigns on the mainland of the Balkans and in the Aegean. The «dwellers by the Danube» would be the Serbs, whose kingdom was subdued in a series of campaigns culminating in the fall of Smederevo in 1459. An end was put to the agonies of the Byzantine Despotate of the Morea in 1460 (Ind. 8). The «northern parts» would be the southern coast of the Black Sea and, in particular, the Empire of Trebizond, which is scarcely «northern» from the point of view of Constantinople but more so from the Peloponnese (the phrase is any case vague and may connote little more than distance) and which was conquered in 1461 (Ind. 9). The term «Dalmatians» presents some difficulty: in the first place, if they were defeated by the Turks in one year, there would be scant call for another campaign in the following year; and, in the second place, the Turkish campaign of this period did not reach so far as Dalmatia proper. But I take the reference to be to the area immediately to the south-east of Dalmatia, namely Zeta (Montenegro), Bosnia and northern Albania, where the Turks conducted inconclusive fighting against Scanderbeg in 1462-3 (Ind. 10-11) and conquered Bosnia in 1463, while Zeta remained for the time being independent. Finally, reference is made to the beginning of the Veneto-Turkish war of 1463-79.

The only major textual variant that I have been able to discover is a change in the order of the sentences and hence also of the events recorded in some manuscripts. These read «. . . They will subdue very many nations. On the eighth of the Indiction they will subdue the Peloponnese. On the ninth of the Indiction they will campaign in the northern parts. On the tenth of the

Indiction they will defeat the Dalmatians and will devastate the islands as far as the Euxine Sea. They will conquer the dwellers by the Danube. They will return . . . »¹. In this case, then, the references to «the islands as far as the Euxine Sea» and to «the dwellers by the Danube» are postponed until 1452-3 (Ind. 10-11). The former I take to refer particularly to the capture of Lesbos in 1462 and the latter to the campaigns against Vlad of Wallachia in 1463.

But with the beginning of the Veneto-Turkish war the oracle loses touch with reality and takes refuge in traditional phraseology. The peoples of the West, the «fair-haired race», together with the *πρόκτορες*², will wage war by land and sea. This, then, would be some such a «Grand Alliance» as was aimed at by Venice at this time: according to Finlay³ she had support from the Pope, the King of Naples and the Catalan cities, while Hammer⁴ reports that at least one Greek served as captain under the Venetians; Lopez⁵, in a more modern study devoted to precisely this period, records that Venice was hoping for an alliance of all the Italian princes, together with Scanderbeg's Albanians and the local Greeks⁶,

1. Of the instances which I have been able to verify, nos. 5, 7 and 9 follow the order given in Migne whereas nos. 6 and 8 postpone the reference to «the dwellers by the Danube».

2. The manuscripts are undecided whether *προκτόρων* or *πρακτόρων* should be read. Of those cited in n. 6, nos. 5 and 6 give *προκτόρων*, nos. 7 and 9 give *πρακτόρων*, while in no. 8 the *o* appears to have been altered to an *a*. The former seems to be instead of *προκτητόρων* (the cod. *Musei Britannici Addit.* 28828 f. 449r, where the oracular interpretation is not attributed to Scholarius, actually reads *προκτητόρων*) and to be a reference to the local Greek lords («previous owners», 78 n. 103 of Mango, *The Legend of Leo the Wise*, in *Zbornik Rad. Srpsk. Akad.* 65 *Viz. Inst.* 6 [1960] 59-94; «past founders», *ibid.* 85, as a translation of a Russian version); while the latter would be a reference to foreign agents («avengers», *ibid.* 78, but this meaning was poetical even in classical times; cf. G. Th. Zoras, *Γεώργιος ὁ Τραπεζούντιος*, Athens 1954, p. 45).

3. G. Finlay, *History of Greece V* (Oxford 1877), p. 60.

4. J. von Hammer, *Geschichte des osmanischen Reiches*, II (Budapest 1828), p. 84.

5. *Il Principio della Guerra Veneto-Turca nel 1463*, in *Archivio Veneto*, Series 3, 15 (1934) 45-131.

6. These negotiations were virtually a continuation of those between the Moreot Despots and the Latins earlier in the century, although the initiative had by now passed to the West. For the relations of Thomas, one of

in a crusade against the Turks, and that in the autumn of 1463 a pact was made between Venice, the Pope and Philip of Burgundy for a campaign to open in the spring of 1464. Further, the fighting duly took place in the Aegean and in the Peloponnese, by land and sea as envisaged in the oracle. But the references to this war are on the whole vague; and its outcome, of course, bore no relation to that depicted in this oracle. The phrase «the fair-haired race» was already traditional in Byzantine oracular literature¹; so too was the loud cry² and the advent of the mysterious deliverer³. The significance of the «fierce internecine war until the fifth hour» escapes me⁴.

It will be evident from the above that the composition of this oracle may be safely attributed to around 1463-4. The writer seeks to give some credibility to his handiwork by means of accurate historical references clothed in oracular terminology; but when he passes from past events to his wishful thinking for the future, then he is obliged to have recourse totally to the commonplaces of Byzantine oracular literature. But if this piece may be so dated, then we may also glimpse something of the writer's

the last Despots, with the West right up to 1459 see D. A. Zakythinos, *Le Despotat grec de Morée*, I (Paris 1932), pp. 262-5.

1. Cf. Migne, P. G. 107, 1149; (ed.) E. Legrand, *Les Oracles de Léon le Sage* (Collection de monuments . . . N. S. 5, Paris 1875), pp. 39, 207, and 41, 245. The phrase seems originally to have referred to the Latins, but from the sixteenth century usually to the Russians (cf. Mango, *op. cit.* 67 n. 38). In the Russian translations of this oracle it is understood in the latter sense (cf. *ibid.* 85; V. M. Istrin, *Otkrovenie Mefodiya Patarskogo*, II, Moscow 1897, p. 240; M. Braun and A. M. Schneider, *Bericht über die Eroberung Konstantinopels*, Leipzig 1940, p. 33 n. 75, who mention also a Georgian version).

2. Cf. Migne, P. G. 107, 1137; Legrand, *op. cit.* p. 46.

3. This figure is generally known as «King John», a title under which he appears in some oracles. In the present case he remains anonymous, but is identified with King John by Paisius Ligarides in his «Χρησμολόγιον» (see Mango, *op. cit.*, 88-9; cf. Istrin, *op. cit.* pp. 291-2; Lambros-Dyovouniotes, *op. cit.* 122; G. E. Kourilas, *Τὰ χρυσόβουλλα τῶν ἡγεμόνων τῆς Μολδοβλαχίας καὶ τὸ σύμβολον τοῦ ἡ' Ἰωάννης*, in *Εἰς μνήμην Σπ. Λάμπρου*, Athens 1935, pp. 215-251; G. Nandris, *L'origine de Io dans le titre des souverains bulgares et roumains*, in *Rev. des Études Slaves* 40 [Mélanges Vaillant, 1964] 159-166).

4. But a «fierce serpent» appears in a similar context in the oracle published by Lambros-Dyovouniotes, *op. cit.* 123.

purpose. The purpose of Biblical apocalyptic was the encouragement of the faithful, and the purpose of this oracle is not so very different¹. Not all Byzantine oracles were optimistic, but those which predicted the advent of the deliverer and the recapture of Constantinople plainly carried a message of comfort and hope to a people whose «Great Idea» this was. In the present case these hopes are applied to a specific war instigated by Venice; so that it would be fair to add the implication that the Greeks were being encouraged to co-operate with the Latins, even if their ultimate deliverer was to be one of their own race. It might tentatively be suggested that it originated in a milieu, such as the Peloponnese², where Greeks were allied to Venetians in this war; or, to use the oracle's own terminology, among the *πρόκτορες*.

There remains the question of whether it could be an authentic work of Scholarius or whether the attribution to him, if indeed it was made in the original version, was not just another device to add a degree of respectability to the oracle. Jugie dismisses the suggestion brusquely: in his edition of Scholarius he simply says that it must be regarded as apocryphal³; later he gave as a reason for this the fact that the oracle announces that the end of the Ottoman Empire is «fort lointain», whereas Scholarius thought that the end of the world would come by 1494⁴. In fact, the attribution cannot be dismissed so lightly: in the first place the oracle plainly foresees the end of the Ottoman Empire as not far off at all, but as coming after «a little longer»; and, in the second place, it was composed at a time when Scholarius was both alive and active.

Several factors, however, weigh heavily and, I think, decisively against Scholarius' authorship. There is, in the first place, the demotic and paratactic style of the oracle: occasionally Scholarius does employ a modicum of demotic terminology⁵, but his style

1. The «encouragement of the righteous» is the explicit purpose of an oracle published *ibid.* 130.

2. Another oracle speaks of the deliverer as coming specifically «ἐξ νότου» (*ibid.* 109-121; Legrand, *op. cit.*, p. 46.)

3. *Oeuvres Complètes de Georges Scholarios*, ed. L. Petit, X. A. Siderides et M. Jugie (Paris 1928-36) IV Intro. XXIV n. 2.

4. *Dictionnaire de théol. catholique* 14, 1559.

5. E. g. *Oeuvres Complètes* IV 198-206; cf. Intro. XIII.

never approaches that of the oracle. Secondly, he never mentions it in his other works, although, if he had known of it, one would have expected to find a reference to it in his «*Chronography*»¹. Thirdly, it is highly improbable that he would have allowed his name to be connected with such an enterprise. He was not wholly averse to oracles: he believed, at least to a certain extent, in the validity of the «Sibylline» and pagan oracles, of which he speaks not infrequently²; he also refers, without disapproval, to current popular oracles³ and these facts may have contributed towards the subsequent attribution of oracular literature to him⁴. But the oracles in which he was interested concerned the coming of Christ, the fall of Constantinople and the end of the world. Not only does he never mention oracular predictions of the end of the Ottoman Empire and the recapture of Constantinople, but such expectations were remote from his whole way of thinking. Still less likely is it that he should hope for the recovery of Constantinople by the Latins or with their aid. Finally, the very fact that the oracle purports to have been interpreted by him at Florence is a patently false pretension and of itself casts doubt on the whole attribution. Scholarius may have been growing more superstitious and showing an increased interest in oracles in his old age, but it would be going much too far to accept his authorship for this piece. The date of its composition is, in fine, virtually the only factor which does not argue against its attribution to Scholarius.

1. Ibid. 504-512. A. Papadopoulos Kerameus, in 'Ἱεροσολυμητικὴ Βιβλιοθήκη III (St. Petersburg 1897), pp. 327-8, does describe a codex which contains both works of Scholarius and chresmological writings, but does not indicate any connection between the latter and Scholarius. Scholarius does mention Leo the Wise (in a letter cited by Theodore Agallianos; ed. Ch. G. Patrinoelis, 'Ὁ Θεόδωρος Ἀγαλλιανός... καὶ οἱ ἀνέκδοτοι λόγοι αὐτοῦ, Athens 1966, p. 148) but only in order to adduce his fourth marriage as a precedent for a case of οἰκονομία.

2. Oeuvres Complètes I 146, 32-6; III 284-6; 376, 32; 443, 5-14; 457, 9-15; 466-7. The late date of most of these references (only one of them comes from before the fall of Constantinople) is probably due to the subject-matter of the works in which they are contained: he made use of such references primarily in his Christian apologetics to Jews and Moslems written only after 1453.

3. Ibid. IV 214, 6 cf. 216, 4-6.

4. Cf. A. E. Vakaliopoulos, 'Ἱστορία τοῦ Νέου Ἑλληνισμοῦ, II (Thessalonica 1964), p. 156.

We are therefore reduced to the conjecture that it was put about, possibly already under his name, during his lifetime and perhaps at a time when he was Patriarch. This again would point away from Constantinople as a probable place of origin. The interpretation of this oracle has a semi-political purpose¹ which was alien to Scholarius but germane to certain Greek circles, namely the *πρόξτορες* themselves.

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1. For another example of the use of an oracle for political purposes see *Zakynthios* in *Mélanges Merlier III* (Athens 1957), pp. 60-63.