

# THE PROPHECIES OF THE PATRIARCH METHODIUS

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In 1960 Jean Gouillard published a study on the then still unpublished *Life of St Euthymius of Sardis*, of which his posthumous first edition appeared in 1987. This *Life* is a ninth-century text of unusual interest. Although its unique manuscript names no author, Gouillard used parallels of style and content to attribute it to the Patriarch Methodius before his patriarchate. Gouillard's stylistic parallels with St. Methodius' known works are convincing, and the similarity of circumstances between Methodius and the author of the *Life* seem to make the identification certain.<sup>1</sup> Some scholars have nonetheless raised objections, based largely on some remarkable consequences that would follow from accepting Methodius' authorship.

The author of the *Life of Euthymius* describes himself as an iconophile priest who was living outside the empire when Leo V died in 820. The author then came to the empire and was arrested by Michael II (820-29). Michael incarcerated him with another prisoner, a layman, in a tomblike cell in a monastery on the island of St. Andrew, southeast of Chalcedon.<sup>2</sup> In this same cell Euthymius of Sardis was also briefly imprisoned by the emperor Theophilus (829-42), until Euthymius died after a severe beating by imperial agents in 831. Within forty days of the martyr's death, the author, still held in the same cell, composed the *Life of Euthymius*.

The anonymous and undated *Life of St Methodius* attests that at the time of Leo V's death Methodius was an iconophile priest living in Rome, and so outside the empire like the author of the *Life of Euthymius*. Also like that author, Methodius returned to the empire and was imprisoned by Michael II in a tomblike cell on the island of St. Andrew with another prisoner, a layman. Methodius remained in this cell until he was moved to the imperial palace in the middle of Theophilus' reign (after, of course, the *Life of Euthymius* had been written). The identification of the author of the *Life of Euthymius* with Methodius seems further confirmed by the fact that Methodius is the only leading iconophile known to have been imprisoned between Michael II's amnesty of iconophiles in 821 and Euthymius' arrest in 831.

1. See J. GOUILLARD, Une œuvre inédite du patriarche Méthode: La Vie d'Euthyme de Sardes, *BZ* 53, 1960, p. 36-46, and IDEM, La vie d'Euthyme de Sardes († 821) : une œuvre du patriarche Méthode, *TM* 10, 1987, p. 1-101, esp. p. 11-16. Cf. A. KAZHDAN, *A History of Byzantine Literature (650-850)*, Athens 1999, p. 375-77.

2. For the island and monastery, see R. JANIN, *Les églises et les monastères des grands centres byzantins*, Paris 1975, p. 53-55 (with map).

Two objections to this identification have however recently been raised by Beate Zielke in a collaborative work on the Byzantine patriarchs of the iconoclastic period.<sup>3</sup> First, Zielke observes that according to the *Life of Methodius* Methodius was released from his cell in 829 in an amnesty proclaimed by Michael II on his deathbed, while the author of the *Life of Euthymius* implies that his own imprisonment on St. Andrew continued without interruption up to early 832, when he wrote.<sup>4</sup> Yet the short and vague *Life of Methodius*, which appears to have been written long after Methodius' death, is a later and less reliable source than the detailed and contemporary *Life of Euthymius*, whose author (whoever he was) was certainly not released in any general amnesty in 829.<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, the author of the *Life of Euthymius* (like Methodius) may simply have been ordered by Michael II to remain in the Monastery of St. Andrew, rather than being imprisoned there under a sentence for a crime. As a monk, the author (or Methodius) could be relegated to a monastery without formally being a prisoner, and his cell may not have been quite the hellhole that the sources depict. Although the *Life of Euthymius* describes it as small, stuffy, dark, dirty, vermin-infested, cold in winter, and hot in summer, such conditions were not uncommon in Byzantine monastic cells (or other residences). This cell was well enough lighted and furnished that the author could write Euthymius' elegant and detailed biography in it.<sup>6</sup> Under such circumstances, an amnesty for regular prisoners would not have released the author (or Methodius), though he might have been allowed more freedom within the monastery.

Zielke's second objection is an alleged discrepancy between the age of Methodius and that of the author of the *Life of Euthymius*. The author of the *Life* writes that his young mother had not yet given birth to him at the beginning of the Second Council of Nicaea (24 September-13 October 787), which Euthymius attended.<sup>7</sup> Because the author wished to emphasize how much younger he was than the venerable Euthymius, this statement only means that the author was born after 24 September 787. In fact, since it does not even say that his birth occurred after the council, he could have been born before 13 October 787.

Although Methodius' birthdate is not otherwise known, in a letter addressed to him in Rome, probably in 818, Theodore of Studius calls him an abbot.<sup>8</sup> Byzantine abbots were supposed to be priests, and priests were supposed to be at least thirty years old, as Methodius would have been in 818 if he had been born in late 787

3. B. ZIELKE, Methodios I., in R.-J. LILIE, ed., *Die Patriarchen der ikonoklastischen Zeit: Germanos I.-Methodios I. (715-847)*, Frankfurt 1999, p. 187 n. 14 and p. 188 (cf. my review in *Catholic Historical Review* 86, 2000, p. 491-92).

4. *Life of Methodius*, ed. J.-P. MIGNÉ, PG 100, 1249B, followed by TREADGOLD, *The Byzantine Revival*, Stanford 1988, p. 258 and n. 362 and p. 259 and n. 363 (which was sent to press before the text of the *Life of Euthymius* appeared in 1987).

5. The *Life of Methodius* "appears to be late" according to I. ŠEVČENKO, Hagiography of the Iconoclast Period, in A. BRYER and J. HERRIN, eds., *Iconoclasm*, Birmingham 1977, p. 116 and n. 22. According to KAZHDAN, *History of Byzantine Literature*, p. 368, "probably, it was written long after 847."

6. *Life of Euthymius*, chap. 16, 43-45 (with chap. 13, 41 on his writing the *Life* there).

7. *Life of Euthymius*, chap. 3, 23; on the council, see TREADGOLD, *Byzantine Revival*, p. 82-89.

8. Theodore of Studius, *Letters*, n° 274, ed. G. FATOUROS, Berlin 1992, II, p. 405-6.

or early 788. Zielke nonetheless argues that because Methodius had already become a monk before he left Byzantium in 815, and monks were not supposed to move from one monastery to another, he must have become an abbot by 815 in Byzantium, not in 818 in Rome. Moreover, according to her, the example of Theodore of Studius implies that normally anyone made an abbot should already have been a priest for at least five years, so that Methodius should have been at least thirty-five in 815 and therefore born before 780.<sup>9</sup>

These objections, however, disregard Byzantine monastic practice and the Byzantines' general readiness to make exceptions to canon law.<sup>10</sup> At least three contemporary Byzantines became abbots not only before the age of thirty-five, but after changing monasteries more than once. St. John of Cathara was no older than thirty-three when he became an abbot in 804, after being ordained priest some time before and changing monasteries twice.<sup>11</sup> St. Hilarion of Dalmatus was thirty-one when he became an abbot in 807, after being ordained priest some time before and changing monasteries three times.<sup>12</sup> St. Peter of Atroa was thirty-two when he became an abbot in 805, after changing monasteries twice and being ordained priest apparently in his twenties.<sup>13</sup> In the late sixth century, St. Theodore of Syceon was ordained priest, no doubt exceptionally, at age eighteen.<sup>14</sup> While the possibility cannot be excluded that Methodius became an abbot before he was thirty, this would have been unusual. The most likely conclusion is that he was born in late 787 or early 788 and became a priest and abbot at Rome in late 817 or early 818.

The main reason for Zielke's skepticism is probably that admitting Methodius' authorship of the *Life of Euthymius* leads to consequences she firmly resists: that Methodius composed prophecies, had a reputation as a prophet, and because of that reputation was brought from his cell on St. Andrew by the superstitious emperor Theophilus and installed in the imperial palace. The *Life of Euthymius*

9. ZIELKE, Methodios, p. 188.

10. Recently on the application of Byzantine canon law, see I. M. KONIDARIS, *The Ubiquity of Canon Law*, in A. LAIOU and D. SIMON, eds., *Law and Society in Byzantium: Ninth-Twelfth Centuries*, Washington 1994, p. 131-50.

11. See *Synaxarium Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae*, ed. H. DELEHAYE (Propylaeum ad Acta Sanctorum Novembris, Brussels 1902), p. 631-34. John was born no earlier than 771, because at age 9 he entered a monastery outside Constantinople as an iconophile (thus not before 780). In 787 he moved to the Monastery of Dalmatus in Constantinople, where he was ordained priest. He became abbot of Cathara in Bithynia in 804, because he had been abbot for a little over ten years when he was deposed at the beginning of Iconoclasm early in 815.

12. See *Synaxarium*, p. 731-34. Hilarion was born in 776, because he died at the age of 70 three years after recovering his monastery at the restoration of the icons in 843. At the age of 20, therefore in 796, he entered the Monastery of Xerocopium in Constantinople, but soon moved for ten years (ca. 796-806) to the Monastery of Dalmatus, also in Constantinople, where he was ordained priest. Next he moved to the Monastery of Cathara, then became abbot of Dalmatus in 807, since he had been abbot for eight years when he was deposed in 815.

13. See V. LAURENT, ed., *La vie merveilleuse de Saint Pierre d'Atroa († 837)*, Brussels 1956, esp. p. 26-27 and 29-31, for Peter's birth in 773 and wanderings – in 791/92 to a hermitage on Bithynian Mt. Olympus, in 794 to another hermitage in Phrygia, where he was ordained priest, and then, after an abortive pilgrimage to Jerusalem, to the new Monastery of Atroa on Mt. Olympus, where after six months he became abbot at age 32 in 805.

14. See A.-J. FESTUGIÈRE, *Vie de Théodore de Sykéôn I*, Brussels 1970, chap. 21, 18-19.

connects Euthymius' arrest and martyrdom with the appearance of three pamphlets prophesying the deaths of Leo V, Michael II, and Theophilus. The *Life's* author says that the first pamphlet appeared under his own name, since at the time he lived outside the empire and was safe from punishment. This pamphlet predicted the death of Leo eight months before it happened (on Christmas 820), and was itself dated (thus to April or May 820). The second pamphlet, which predicted the death of Michael II five months before it occurred (on October 2, 829), was anonymous. Since the author professes ignorance of whether it was dated or not he implies that he had not written it, even though he knew when it was written, which must have been April or May 829. But Michael II assumed that this pamphlet too was the work of the author, then already confined on St. Andrew, and had him interrogated and beaten, evidently without eliciting a confession. The third pamphlet, which predicted the death of Theophilus, led to the arrest of Euthymius, apparently on suspicion that he had helped distribute it, because Euthymius was repeatedly interrogated about his associates.<sup>15</sup>

Without giving reasons, Zielke finds it almost inconceivable that anyone would let such a prophecy appear under his own name. Yet the *Life of Euthymius* explicitly states that this was the case, whether or not Methodius was the author. She also rejects three independent sources (the *Life of Methodius*, the Pseudo-Symeon, and Genesisius, the last agreeing with Theophanes Continuatus) which say that Theophilus transferred Methodius to the palace in order to benefit from his knowledge while keeping him under strict surveillance.<sup>16</sup> She argues that these sources show their ignorance of Theophilus' real reasons by ascribing to him two possible motives: wanting Methodius' advice and wanting to detain him securely. Yet these motives are stated as facts, not as possibilities, and they are fully compatible with each other.<sup>17</sup>

In reality, Methodius was exactly the name that one would expect to find attached to a Byzantine prophecy at this time. Since the seventh century, the Byzantines had been fascinated by an apocalyptic prophecy of Byzantine victories over the Arabs purporting to be the work of St. Methodius of Olympus, a fourth-century martyr. This Pseudo-Methodian prophecy, originally composed in Syriac in the mid-seventh century, was soon translated into Greek and became the basis of most middle Byzantine prophetic literature.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, the earliest piece of this literature that survives today, the so-called *Slavonic Daniel*, is almost certainly a Slavonic translation of the very pamphlet mentioned in the *Life of Euthymius* as predicting the death of Michael II.

15. *Life of Euthymius*, chap. 13, 39-41.

16. *Life of Methodius*, ed. Migne, *PG* 100, 1252B-C; Pseudo-Symeon, in Theophanes Continuatus, ed. I. BEKKER, Bonn 1838, p. 644-45 (discussed below); Genesisius, ed. A. LESMÜLLER-WERNER and J. THURN, Berlin 1978, p. 53; Theophanes Continuatus (in the edition just cited for Pseudo-Symeon), p. 116. (Genesisius and Theophanes Continuatus are not independent of each other.)

17. ZIELKE, Methodios, p. 212-13 and 214-15.

18. P. ALEXANDER, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, Berkeley 1985, esp. p. 13-60. Cf. KAZHDAN, *History of Byzantine Literature*, p. 21-22.

The *Slavonic Daniel* claims to describe a revelation of the angel Gabriel to the prophet Daniel, although the text refers to Daniel in the third person. It adapts a shortened form of the prophecies of the Pseudo-Methodius to the emperors from Leo III (717-41) to Michael II, with special reference to the Arab invasion of Sicily that began under Michael in 827. Paul Alexander has demonstrated, by explaining several problematic passages as mistranslations, that the *Slavonic Daniel* was translated into Slavonic from a Greek text. For example, the text says of Michael II, “they will lead him to the Hunter,” which Alexander interprets as a mistranslation of the Greek for “they will take him to the Kynegion”—the disused arena for hunting games where criminals were executed in Constantinople. In other words, the Greek original predicted that Michael II would be executed. Alexander dated the original text between 827 and 829, because its author knew of the Arab invasion of Sicily but was unaware that Michael would die of natural causes on October 2, 829. Alexander concluded from the author’s interest in and knowledge of Sicily that the text was written on the island.<sup>19</sup>

Alexander however failed to notice that the author of the *Slavonic Daniel* was aware of the expedition sent from Constantinople to relieve the Arab siege of Henna in spring 829, but unaware of the death of the rebel Euphemius on Sicily in the meantime. Consequently, the *Slavonic Daniel* must have been written precisely in the spring of 829, by someone living not in Sicily but in the East, probably in Constantinople.<sup>20</sup> Yet the author could nonetheless have been of Sicilian origin. His knowledge and interest are concentrated not merely on Sicily but particularly on Syracuse, the home town of the ninth-century Methodius. *The Life of Euthymius* dates its pamphlet prophesying the death of Michael II to April or May of 829. This would have been precisely the date – just after the expedition left for Sicily – of the Greek original of the *Slavonic Daniel*.

We can doubt that the pamphlet mentioned in the *Life of Euthymius* is the same as the *Slavonic Daniel* only if we are ready to believe that two separate prophetic pamphlets were composed in spring 829, both predicting the death of the emperor Michael II. We could hardly suppose such a coincidence without very strong reasons for not identifying the two texts, and there are none. Once this identification is accepted, the obvious interest in Syracuse on the part of the writer of the *Slavonic Daniel* becomes still another reason for attributing the *Life of Euthymius* to the Syracusan Methodius.

The statement in the *Life of Euthymius* that its author was ignorant of whether this prophecy was dated or not (the *Slavonic Daniel* is undated in its present form) seems a transparent subterfuge, since the author does know that the text appeared

19. ALEXANDER, *Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, p. 62-72 (a description and annotated translation of the “Slavonic Daniel”).

20. For the references to the relief expedition for Henna and to the “rebel” (Euphemius) as still alive, see ALEXANDER, *Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, p. 68-69 (where “Mariana” is presumably the nearby town of Menaenum, which had become an Arab base). For the events, cf. TREADGOLD, *Byzantine Revival*, p. 254-55. Methodius seems to have guessed correctly that Henna, which was almost impregnable, would not fall, but he was unaware of the defeat of the Byzantine expedition before Henna later that spring.

five months before Michael's death. Yet Methodius, writing after he had already suffered a beating rather than admit his authorship of the pamphlet, had good reason not to admit his authorship in the *Life of Euthymius* which he knew might be discovered in his cell. Of course, if Methodius could write the *Life of Euthymius* in his cell, he should also have been able to write a prophetic pamphlet there.

That the future patriarch Methodius had the same rare name as St. Methodius of Olympus, whom Byzantines believed to be the author of the Pseudo-Methodian prophecies, can scarcely be a coincidence. The ninth-century Methodius, as a monk, would have chosen his monastic name in honor of a saint he particularly revered; that saint was obviously St. Methodius of Olympus, the supposed author of the Pseudo-Methodian texts. The ninth-century Methodius set about emulating his name-saint by composing prophecies, like his first pamphlet predicting the death of Leo V.<sup>21</sup> If, as seems almost certain, the second pamphlet was the original of the *Slavonic Daniel*, the *Life of Euthymius* understandably suppresses not only that Methodius was the pamphlet's author but that the pamphlet prophesied Michael would be executed, not die of disease as he actually did. Since the *Life of Euthymius* never as much as hints that Methodius did not write the third, similar pamphlet predicting the death of Theophilus, his authorship of it seems clear.

The three pamphlets that Methodius wrote while living in Rome or detained on St. Andrew quickly came into circulation in Constantinople, because they were soon discovered by the three emperors whose doom they predicted. The texts must therefore have been distributed by other iconophiles, including at least one who had access to Methodius on St. Andrew and presumably gave him news of the Sicilian war. Apparently Euthymius was suspected of being one of the iconophiles who had helped in distributing the third pamphlet. When interrogated about his associates by the Postal Logothete, the imperial minister responsible for internal security who at this time was probably a certain Arsaber the Patrician, Euthymius named just one visitor, the mother-in-law of both the Logothete and the emperor Theophilus. Theophilus' and Arsaber's mother-in-law was Theoctista, who was an iconophile; so were her daughter Theodora and Theophilus' stepmother Euphrosyne.<sup>22</sup> Presumably these three iconophile members of the imperial family had other iconophile associates.

Among those iconophile associates was probably the imperial chamberlain John who, according to the Pseudo-Symeon, was responsible for Theophilus' transferring Methodius to the palace in 838 or 839. Pseudo-Symeon's account, which Zielke dismisses without argument as legendary, is that "by the providence

21. The possibility that the first pamphlet was attributed to Methodius of Olympus rather than to the ninth-century Methodius should however be rejected, because the author of the *Life of Euthymius* says that he had no reason to suppress his name because he was outside the empire. A pamphlet attributed to Methodius of Olympus in the ninth century would either have been considered anonymous or, if considered genuine, would have rendered its author immune from punishment not because he lived outside the empire but because he had been dead for more than six centuries. Nor could a pamphlet attributed to Methodius of Olympus have been dated to April or May of 820.

22. See *Life of Euthymius*, chaps. 14 and 18-19, 41-43 and 45-49; cf. TREADGOLD, *Byzantine Revival*, p. 431 n. 371 (on Arsaber) and 268-71 (on Euphrosyne, Theodora, and Theoctista).

of God” Theophilus found in the palace library an obscure document that disturbed him so much that he became unable to eat. He consulted the patriarch of Constantinople John the Grammarian (838-842) and the imperial professor Leo the Mathematician, neither of whom could explain the text. But the imperial chamberlain John assured the emperor that Methodius could interpret it, and offered to visit him secretly on St. Andrew. Theophilus agreed. As John approached the monastery, he heard Methodius call him by name and profess knowledge of his mission. Asking for paper and ink, the saint wrote an explanation of the text “with three solutions (ἐπὶ τρισὶν λύσεσι)” which John brought back to the emperor. Having read and admired Methodius’ response, the emperor had him brought to the palace and kept in a building called the Sigma in order to consult him on difficult points.<sup>23</sup> After Theophilus died in 842, the empress Theodora released Methodius and chose him to become patriarch of Constantinople at the time of the restoration of the icons in 843.

Pseudo-Symeon must have excerpted his source rather clumsily, because he never explains why the text vexed Theophilus or why it required three solutions. Yet that Theophilus was superstitious and relied on the divination of John the Grammarian and the astrology of Leo the Mathematician are independently attested facts.<sup>24</sup> Genesisius and Theophanes Continuatus record that Theophilus brought Methodius to the palace specifically in order to profit from his advice on occult matters.<sup>25</sup> Although John the Chamberlain obviously meant to demonstrate Methodius’ prophetic powers by telling how Methodius already knew the reason for his coming to St. Andrew, probably Methodius did already know about John’s mission and the text, because he had arranged the whole business with John in advance.

This story strikingly resembles another account, which is found not only in the Pseudo-Symeon but in the considerably earlier *Life of Ignatius* by Nicetas the Paphlagonian. These two sources describe how, around 872, the deposed and exiled Patriarch Photius tricked the emperor Basil I.<sup>26</sup> Writing in old-fashioned uncial letters on ancient parchment which he bound in the cover of an ancient book, Photius fabricated a genealogy making Basil’s father (really an Armenian of peasant stock) into a descendant of Tiridates, the first Christian king of Armenia. Photius’ text prophesied a long and prosperous reign for the next member of the family, named Beclas – an acronym of Basil, his wife Eudocia, and their sons Constantine, Leo, Alexander, and Stephen. Photius gave this book to a friend of his, the imperial chaplain Theophanes, whom he later rewarded by making him

23. Pseudo-Symeon, p. 644-45, and ZIELKE, *Methodios*, p. 210 n. 116, who is unaware that the chronology of the Pseudo-Symeon is worthless; cf. TREADGOLD, *The Chronological Accuracy of the Chronicle of Symeon the Logothete for the Years 813-845*, *DOP* 33, 1979, p. 160 and n. 5. For the actual date, see TREADGOLD, *Byzantine Revival*, p. 308 and n. 424 (with p. 441 n. 406 on the date of John the Grammarian’s accession as patriarch).

24. See TREADGOLD, *Byzantine Revival*, p. 307-8.

25. Genesisius, p. 53; Theophanes Continuatus, p. 116.

26. R. J. H. JENKINS, A Note on Nicetas David Paphlago and the *Vita Ignatii*, *DOP* 19, 1965, p. 241-47, dates the *Life of Ignatius* to ca. 907, while the Pseudo-Symeon must be later (though probably not much later) than 963, when its account ends. For recent scholarship on Nicetas, see P. YANNOPOULOS, *Autour de Nicetas le Paphlagonien*, *Byz.* 69, 1999, p. 599-602.

bishop of Caesarea. Theophanes pretended to find the book in the palace library, brought it to the emperor, and recommended the exiled Photius as the only one who could interpret it. Basil summoned Photius to the palace, was delighted with Photius' solution to the mystery, and restored him to favor.<sup>27</sup>

This account in Nicetas and the Pseudo-Symeon is partly corroborated by the appearance of Basil's fabricated genealogy from Tiridates in the official histories of the Macedonian dynasty.<sup>28</sup> Another confirmation is that Photius had in his youth been a protégé of the Patriarch Methodius.<sup>29</sup> Presumably Photius, having heard confidentially from Methodius the story of his rehabilitation under Theophilus by means of a book in the palace library, made use of the same sort of deception more than thirty years later, when Photius, like Methodius before him, needed to persuade an emperor to recall him from exile. In literary terms, as transmitted to us, the two stories are quite different in purpose, the first being told to glorify Methodius and the second to denigrate Photius. The full similarity appears only when the incidents are recognized as historical and compared with each other. Then the more complete account of what Photius did can clarify what Methodius had done to inspire him.

Evidently Methodius prepared Theophilus' puzzling and vexatious text himself, probably with some such trappings of antiquity as Photius later employed, and had John the Chamberlain place it in the palace library where Theophilus would be likely to find it. The text was presumably prophetic in nature. The reference to its three solutions may well mean that it combined and adapted Methodius' three earlier pamphlets predicting the deaths of Leo V, Michael II, and Theophilus, with further amplification and mystification. The horrified Theophilus would therefore have believed the text to be independent confirmation that the three previous pamphlets had been correct, and that his own death was imminent. Methodius however explained the text in such a way as both to reassure the emperor and to convince him of his need for Methodius' advice in the future.<sup>30</sup>

Of course, adopting such an explanation of Methodius' prophecies requires no belief in the supernatural, and no discredit to Methodius. Just as the Pseudo-Methodius had made his original prophecy in the sincere belief that God would not allow Muslims to triumph over Christians indefinitely, Methodius of Syracuse made his prophecies in the sincere belief that God would in due course punish the iconoclasts Leo V, Michael II, and Theophilus. Because everyone dies eventually, Methodius knew that a prophecy of any emperor's death would be fulfilled sooner or later. In the meantime, Methodius doubtless believed that whatever his writings

27. *Life of Ignatius*, ed. MIGNE, PG 105, 565C-568C; Pseudo-Symeon, p. 689-90.

28. Genesis, p. 76; Theophanes Continuatus, p. 212-16.

29. On Photius' association with Methodius, see C. MANGO, The Liquidation of Iconoclasm and the Patriarch Photios, and P. KARLIN-HAYTER, Gregory of Syracuse, Ignatios, and Photios, both in BRYER and HERRIN, *Iconoclasm*, p. 139-40 and 141-45, and TREADGOLD, Photius Before His Patriarchate, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 53, 2002, p. 14.

30. Methodius' reassurances may possibly have helped to rouse Theophilus from the melancholy that beset him between the fall of Amorium in summer 838 and his campaign against the Arabs in summer 839; cf. TREADGOLD, *Byzantine Revival*, p. 305-12 (though at 308 my discussion of Methodius' prophecy fails to consider this possibility).

could do to hasten the fall of Iconoclasm would be beneficial. While his motives for concocting a prophecy to trick Theophilus into bringing him to the palace may seem less disinterested, Methodius presumably thought that he could do more for the iconophile cause in the palace than on St. Andrew. Photius too must have believed that his exile was unjust and that arranging a harmless deception to escape from it was justified.

Like Photius, Methodius was a clever and learned man who exploited the superstitions of others less clever and learned than he. In his *Life of Euthymius* Methodius ridicules Theophilus for his furious reaction to the third prophetic pamphlet, observing that if its prophecy was true it could not be averted by retaliation, and if it was false it could be ignored.<sup>31</sup> Yet Theophilus had every reason to regard those who circulated such a pamphlet as undermining his authority and possibly even plotting against him. Methodius' prophecies would have distressed iconoclasts and heartened iconophiles. Eventually they also gained Methodius admittance to the palace, where he formed the connection with Theodora that later secured him the patriarchate.<sup>32</sup> Thus Methodius' prophecies had some practical motives, and achieved some practical success.

The main, if unspoken, reason for rejecting this reconstruction of events would be a belief that Byzantium was such a rational and enlightened place that no people of consequence, and certainly no emperors or patriarchs, were superstitious or exploited superstition. Yet this highly rational Byzantium, which would have been unlike almost every other culture in history, is not what is found in Byzantine sources. In a skeptical Byzantium, texts like the *Life of Euthymius*, the Pseudo-Methodius, the *Slavonic Daniel*, or any other Byzantine prophecies or most other Byzantine saints' lives or chronicles, could never have been written at all, because they would have been considered absurd by both their authors and their readers, who were among the best educated Byzantines. The sources agree that Methodius, Photius, John the Grammarian, and other patriarchs made prophecies, and that Michael II, Theophilus, Basil I, and other emperors believed in prophecies. All this would remain true even if we were ready to assume that by means of several astounding coincidences the author of the *Slavonic Daniel* and the three pamphlets described in the *Life of Euthymius* could be someone other than Methodius.

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31. *Life of Euthymius*, p. 39-41.

32. Theodora's reasons for choosing Methodius are admittedly somewhat obscure. See most recently D. AFINOGENOV, *The Great Purge of 843: A Re-Examination*, in *Leimôn: Studies Presented to Lennart Rydén on his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*. *Studia Byzantina Upsaliensia* 6, Stockholm 1996, p. 79-91, esp. p. 90-91.