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# Manuel I Komnenos and Michael Glykas: A Twelfth-Century Defence and Refutation of Astrology

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Demetra George

## Part 3: Michael Glykas' Refutation of Astrology

**Abstract.** Michael Glykas is generally known as a learned conservative theologian who wrote a refutation of Byzantine Emperor Manuel Komnenos' defence of astrology in the latter half of the twelfth century. However there exists substantial evidence that Michael Glykas had a dual identity as the shadowy Michael Sikidites who in his youth was known for his occult interests, suspected of political sedition against Manuel, and imprisoned and blinded as punishment for sorcery. With skill and critical astuteness, Glykas directs his refutation not so much against Manuel's philosophical arguments as against the claims of his evidence, and thus seeks to cast doubt upon the moral and literary integrity of his Emperor in an attempt to redeem his own reputation. Within half a century of the reintroduction of astrology to the West, Glykas was the first person in many centuries to stir up all the old Christian objections against the fatalism of the stars.

A partial response to the letter, which has been put into my hands, by our strong and holy king, lord Manuel Komnenos, which was delivered against a certain monk who found great fault with him due to discipline of astrology, which contends that this discipline was established through natural and scriptural proofs.

I dare to make mention. The previous letter of your highness has just come into my hands also, and having first read it I embraced and cherished it warmly. Why? Because in a truly mild and gentle voice and in imitation of Christ who said, 'Learn from me that I am gentle and humble in heart',<sup>1</sup> your letter composed a reply to that monk who was inveighing so thoughtlessly against your crowned power. But afterwards I

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am amazed at the letter, at least in regard to the remarkable austerity and rhythm of its diction and the depth and complexity of the thoughts. Indeed when I encountered those thoughts, I hardly knew how to beg for a helping hand to be given to me and to be drawn back into an orderly manner before I was completely suffocated.<sup>2</sup> For at once I have difficulty concerning the Jew whom Basil the Great, at the time when he was departing for the Lord, thought worthy of sacred baptism. For my copy of my text explicitly states that the Jew was a physician and that he foretold the great man's death by feeling for the pulse of the saint.<sup>3</sup> Your letter that was put into my hand calls him an astrologer who told the death of the saint through the indications of the stars. And not only this, but also it introduces Basil the Great as agreeing with the astrological science of the Jew and calling it true, and both doing and saying more beyond these things of which my book is found to make no mention at all.<sup>4</sup> At any rate either its text is in error and nothing more, or I will demand this discrepancy to be remedied. For it is not on this evidence, I think, that the claims of astrology are firmly founded, even if the letter that was entrusted to me affirms confidently that this art is not prevented by God, indeed if it is even actually real. For if this were not the case, he would not have intimated through the stars his birth in the flesh and his voluntary suffering. But on the contrary we are reckless to trust those who speak about it. For how could we so readily be persuaded by this letter, when John Chrysostom in his sixth sermon on the gospel of Matthew clearly made a great attack on those who believe and speak in this way?<sup>5</sup> And how can we say that such an art is real if we see that it has been rejected on the very evidence from which it seems to acquire confirmation? And to pass over the rest, arguments about the Magi themselves and the divine Dionysus the Aeropagite, whom the letter introduces probably as speaking on his own behalf, they shout this most clearly. For the Magi, when they had abandoned their ancient practices with the stars and had come to the true knowledge according to Christ, could no longer bear to be involved with their former interests. Which practices, at any rate as your letter says, Christ by his birth confirmed how those people, when they had become believers, shook off these former beliefs?<sup>6</sup> Moreover if that star which incredulously indicated the birth of God's word in the flesh to the Magi shows the substantiality of astrology, it is entirely necessary that augury too is confirmed hereby if indeed by means of a dove flying down from above, the father indicated the son when he was being baptized in Jordan.<sup>7</sup> Also the very practice of necromancy would not seem to require rejection, if indeed many bodies

of those who are dead, when awoken from the dead in accordance with the saving passion, clearly agreed that he who suffered was God. And this in spite of the fact that the law from the books of Moses admonishes Israel about these things, 'Thou shalt not divine from omens and thou shalt not interpret the flight and cries of birds'.<sup>8</sup> For the gentiles, whom the Lord God will utterly blast out from his view, let these people hearken unto omens and prophecies, but you shall not.

So do not permit us to be thrown into confusion about these things too. For the controversy which arises from that source is not small, and especially as concerns the things the letter describes, that through the rising of such a star, indeed through the rising of that zodiacal sign in which such a star appeared above the horizon, that the Magi since they had accurate knowledge of such things knew that the same being was God and man, at the same time mortal and immortal, king and born in Jerusalem. These things even Ptolemy the most eminent of astrologers said that it was typical to declare so subtly about the matters of divine inspiration.<sup>9</sup> For if the Magi had discovered those things from the human art and not from the divine, they would not have gathered there. They would not have set out upon such a journey. They would not have acquired the star as a guide upon their way. If that star was standing still these men would not have been diverted from their path in Israel. And if it had been in motion and had been, as it were, indicating the way, would the Magi not have begun the journey? When they were in Jerusalem and had lost him completely, they would not have gone around in the streets saying, 'Where is he, the king who has been born?'<sup>10</sup> When they had seen him, they would not have forthwith rejoiced with great happiness. And so, it is clear from this, if I do not raise the specific problems, that there was some divine power compelling them to speak or do these things. For unless this were so, Basil the Great could not have said these things in addition to the others in his treatises on the birth of our lord Jesus Christ. 'Let no one apply the technique of astrology to the rising of that star. For those who had introduced the birth as indicated by the stars which were already in existence purport to predict the future. For no form of star then indicated the royal birth, as the star itself was not an ordinary star'.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore it was certainly not by following their own art, looking to the zodiacal signs and the stars, that the Magi came near to Jerusalem, but, just as the eminent holy man himself said this occurred by following thus the prophecy of Balaam which foretold that, 'A star will rise from Jacob and a man shall come forth from Israel'.<sup>12</sup> And since they remembered such a prophecy they searched Judea, wishing to learn the

location of the begotten king of the Jews. And so much concerning these things.

It is clear that the stated letter, which recalls the history of Abraham, struggles to confirm astrology from that evidence. And we are in great doubt concerning this issue. For if the most holy Abraham witnessed the Lord from his creations, why does the defender of this study introduce such an history in the middle? In what way will he contribute to advance his goal? For the man was truly a trustworthy astrologer, since he came from Chaldea. But having witnessed the creator from the creations, after the clearly divine revelation he later despised such practices. But also, in the case of Abimelech, when Abraham went down into Egypt he all together dishonored those who believed such doctrines.<sup>13</sup> I do not know, furthermore, whether the story of Abraham will advanced the proposed goal. I fear that also the proverbial saying achieves its ends, 'We had a dog and he was providing help to the wild beasts'.

There is not less of a problem in the prediction of that Greek who said, 'Christ was born from the virgin Mary and I believe in him. At the time of the holy sovereigns Constantine and Irene, you will see me again, o sun'. I hardly know what to say. I do not think that substantiality of the teaching is shown from this claim. A man reveals himself to be an accurate knower whether questioned by any casual person or by himself makes repeated inquiries when he is able to conjecture about the future in a broad manner granted that those men who are clever concerning such things define astrology as nothing other than a skilled guess. But for that Greek to have so paradoxically foretold an event that occurred more than one thousand years ago which represented Christ as being born and mention the sovereign by name and some such unspeakable things that could not have been, someone would certainly not say this sort of prediction is of a human art. Unless somehow we also mention the saying of the famous Sibylline priestess, 'At long last let someone march upon this manifold earth and without a fault he will become flesh,' and similarly the words of the prophet Balaam foretold according to the human art, 'The star rises from Jacob'. But this is not it, no. For these insights come from divine inspiration and through the godless Greeks, they reveal the human nature of our Savior. Moreover, they spoke not by human art, but moved by divine grace and they uttered what they themselves did not know. And in addition to the other proofs, the famous Cairphas also establishes the substance of the argument when he said: 'It is useful for one to die on behalf of the people'.<sup>14</sup>

That is how these things stand. But as for the matters the letter discusses, namely when God established the entire universe, or at any rate the first beginning of the universe, in Cancer which is clearly a tropical zodiacal sign, never standing still and always changing, he conceived the inconstancy of cosmic things and elemental change and dissolution again into nothing, I do not know how to respond.<sup>15</sup> From what evidence these claims are proved and where they have been written and which of the saints have affirmed them even up until today, I, an ignorant man, have not discovered that. Now Basil the Great, explaining the words of the prophet Isaiah, 'The heavens will be angry and the earth will be shaken out of its foundations',<sup>16</sup> also introduces the following saying that, 'the foundations of the earth are unknown to the nature of man'. He confirms his account through the words that the Lord said to Job when he was seeking to be answered, 'Where were you when I founded the earth? Tell me if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements? Or who stretched the line upon it?'<sup>17</sup> This is so if the Lord, indicating the incomprehensibility of the earth and, as it were, priding himself on this speaks to Job who is so confident of himself in his contention that he knows that first pattern of the cosmos, that is to say its first beginning. How and when it was introduced, and what zodiacal sign was on the ascendant, especially considering that the stars through which the zodiacal circle, as they say, is outlined were not yet introduced by the demiurge. And so it is impossible to say that the things that were introduced on the fourth day existed also on the first and were on the ascendant at that time. If these things are not, one could not know furthermore that hour when that first foundation of the cosmos came to pass. For if this were the case, Basil the Great would not have said that the foundations of the earth are unknown to the nature of man. Also granted that Cancer was ascending at that time, granted that it indicated the inconstancy of things introduced then and dissolution again and release into nothing, still at all events it clearly should have indicated the undoing of that first heaven at whose introduction it was ascending. And truly that cosmos will not pass away nor will wholly withdraw into dissolution as the Scriptures say, but rather its duration will be eternal. This is what the prophet Isaiah says concerning that heaven: 'And there will be a new heaven and a new earth'.<sup>18</sup> For when that which obscures the sight of that heaven has been removed, i.e., the very foundation, the stars, the elements and the rest, one after another, for also according to the utterance of Paul: 'He introduces the form of this world'<sup>19</sup> – that first heaven would appear as truly heaven, whose permanence for the most

part the entire Scripture proclaims. Thus that heaven ought to have passed into absolute dissolution, since the tropical zodiacal sign, clearly Cancer, was rising in the horoscope at the time of its introduction. But this is not so, it is not, as the argument has already first shown. For if, as the letter says, Cancer was rising at this time, and from this fact indicating an absolute dissolution of things, why do we not further consider the saying of Paul as full of error with respect to the argument: 'For creation awaits with eager longing the revealing of the sons of God'.<sup>20</sup> For that which withdraws into dissolution and is reduced to nothing is entirely not of such a nature as to receive any renewal. Why do we not admit the truth of the rest of the opinions of the heathen and conjecture, as they do, many renewals of the universe, at least in the revolutions and returns of the planets from the same position to the same position.<sup>21</sup> Moreover these things are invisible and hidden, as Basil the Great said, and are known only to God. For if though the letter confidentially affirms that art is proved as substantial from the Gospel for if this were not so, the star could not summon the Magi toward the knowledge of the truth. For the rest of the signs which followed that one then were sufficient. Still we offer no objection either way, but nevertheless we demand to know what were the signs that occurred and when and how, with the result that foreign men arose from Persia and came to Jerusalem. For if Chrysostom, before the crowd, confidentially affirmed that the star was seen by the Magi long before the birth of Christ, so as to cause them to fall down and worship Christ in swaddling clothes - for they were going to spend much time on the journey - it is not reasonable to say furthermore that signs which followed that one then were strong enough to draw the Magi?<sup>22</sup>

And this too has been stated distinctly by the letter along with the other claims. Anastasios of Sinai when he accurately examined certain natural phenomena, I suppose, clearly mixed astrological doctrines with them. But my book introduces the most holy Anastasios as teaching altogether wisely concerning certain natural things and especially concerning the formations and also combinations of man, but nevertheless at the end of his instruction revising and saying: '...even if the foolish astrologers attribute those things to the stars'.<sup>23</sup> Well then, I do not know whether the most holy Anastasios by writing such things will contribute in any way to the goal set forth.

The stated letter embraces the opinion that the figures of the stars are signs of certain outcomes, but not by necessity productive of certain results. And at this time since we are in doubt, we speak. If according to this inclusion in his letter, this is the case, why is that famous Valens

introduced in the middle, summoned, as they say, by the great Constantine, waiting patiently for the fourteenth year for the election of the foundation of the cities of this kingdom?<sup>24</sup> For it is quite clear that if he was waiting for an extent of such a long period of time, so that the city would always remain unconquered by enemies and would prosper in faith and in the other matters, he was waiting for the opportune time which would contribute to his goal, even though the letter does not mean to say this very clearly. For from this reasoning the stars are admitted to be unjust – not to say their creator – making by necessity some men adulterers, others murderers. And if it is necessary to say the truth, it was entirely unfitting to introduce Valens in the middle of the issue. For the claims of the astrology from that evidence even more are shown to be deceptive. For Valens himself, being a most wise astrologer at that with respect to these things, prophesied that this city would survive for six hundred years in addition to the ninety-six years, and thus, from the results, he demonstrated that the art had utterly failed.<sup>25</sup> But if someone should say that the aforementioned Valens had awaited the fourteenth year, but nevertheless for the sake of discovering the right time revealed certain good things for the city, we would accept his writing, but straightway we would be at a loss and say the following. Well then, if without being investigated and without the observations of Valens, the foundation of the city had been laid down, would it not have been destined to be as indeed it is today? We entreat you to not allow us to be tossed about helplessly concerning this. For either the matters of the city things were bound to happen thus, and that he waited in vain for so long a time, or it was not so bound. And why is it necessary to say more things? For it appears from this fact that the stars are not only indications but also necessary agents of results. For if this were so, the letter which you wrote in defence of that astrologer who was defending the individual things that unexpectedly happened to the city, specifically earthquakes, fires, and other such things, would not have explicitly stated verbatim: 'And the astrologer predicted this, for he was unable to wholly bring into accord all the larger and smaller variables, and to accomplish everything that was wanted by Constantine'. Now notice: if Valens had first taken everything into consideration, the greater and the smaller variables, and the Davidian psalm itself saying in reference to God, 'The Lord who looks upon the earth and makes it tremble',<sup>26</sup> he necessarily would have waited until that time to no avail, in as much as the accurate study of the expert averted the earth's turmoil. Moreover if at the hour coinciding with the beginning of the foundations of the city it is necessary that the faith increase and the



city itself remain unconquered by the enemy, it is certainly no thanks to the inhabitants of the city if they are so pious and are increased in each respect through love of Christ. But in vain we make petitions to the all blameless mother of God's word and we enlist her as our protectress, if indeed Valens undertook our salvation in the future through the indications of the stars. And so do not allow us still to be in such doubt and to be thrown into confusion by absurd arguments.

As for the theological comment set as a funeral oration for Basil the Great which said, 'Accepting so much of astrology and geometry, so as not be thrown into confusion by those who are clever about these things,' and similarly in the epistles of the Great Dionysius, in which that holy man deals with the unnatural eclipse which occurred at the time of the saving passion, what must one say?<sup>27</sup> Either the texts of our copy are utterly wrong and will be waste for fire, or the words of the text have speciously silenced the truth. For the meaning of the passage has been utterly destroyed, the text has been altered, and all the rest has been maliciously corrupted. They have been quoted for his own purpose and not according to their correct interpretation. For this reason I have feared that such a letter which has been propped up with a shaft of reed, should so easily be overturned by chance events, and for this reason it will fall forthwith having withstood no single attack from there.<sup>28</sup>

In addition to those things which have been stated distinctly above, the letter relates these things, 'Basil the Great in his discussion of the sixth day of God's creation said in regard to astrology that it is difficult to comprehend, but he does not demonstrate it to be heretical, because truly it does not cause results through invocations and enchantments. This the saint repudiates as unholy'. The letter relates thus; from which we wonder just a little at these things, since our book contains considerable disagreements in this respect also. Basil the Great clearly does not mention either any absurd invocations or enchantments in these treatises, but he shows that this apparatus and pursuit of astrology is exposed as bringing with itself 'much that is foolish, much that is unholy'.<sup>29</sup>

In order that I not mention the several individual points that are being criticized by me, the letter which has been cited many times used certain analogies, doubtless for the defence of astrology, stating, 'Just as the husband who has been joined to a wife by law of marriage is not guilty, but the one who surrendered himself to harlots is liable to penalties, so also the one who has made use of astrology not against the law, in accordance with the command of God will not be caught in error'. Now the elements of the analogy are such and have this manner, but to

my mind the analogy is very inept for his purposed aim, because we do not have a divine command that allows such a teaching in any way at all.

And why is it necessary to say more things? When I hear the letter stating, 'That the men who do not accept the truth of this teaching on the grounds that it is ill-omened are of contrary opinion to the holy fathers,' great wonder came upon me, since we find for the most part the entire holy Scripture all together speaking against astrology. For straightway since we agree to spend some time mentioning specific cases, we have the blessed Paul himself saying thus to the Galatians, 'Watch closely the days and months and years! I fear that somehow I have labored in vain without a plan for you'.<sup>30</sup> And so Chrysostom taking up from there says that to entrust human affairs to the cycles of the days is the work of the devil.<sup>31</sup> One day is not different from another. The great theologian Gregory, who wrote that the mysteries according to Christ are not like those of the Greeks, adds the following, 'Neither the Magis' divining art and haruspicy, nor the Chaldeans' astronomy and genethialogy by the motions of the planets agree with our doctrines since they are of people incapable of knowing whatever they themselves are or will be'.<sup>32</sup> In the funeral lamentation to Basil the Great these things also are said, 'Accepting so much astrology and geometry, to the extent that one is not confused by clever men concerning these things, he rejected any more as useless to those who desire to live piously'. Therefore if it is useless to those who desire to live piously, it is entirely clear that such a teaching also will be useful to as many people who do not desire to live piously. In the letter to his brother Caesarion the following words are found, 'While having chosen as much as is useful from geometry and astrology and the education dangerous to others, still it remained to wonder at the demiurge due to the suitability and arrangement of the heavenly bodies, how much of its harmfulness he escaped, by not ascribing to the motions of the stars the events that are and those that come to be'.<sup>33</sup> John Chrysostom, in his sixth homily on Matthew, related these things in accordance with the verse, 'Those who are zealous to show the substantiality of astrology from that star which was seen by the Magi in its rising and which was guiding them to Palestine are hateful of the truth and are inspired by the devil himself'.<sup>34</sup> In addition to these things, we have Basil the Great rejecting these claims and saying the following in his canons, 'The man who entrusts himself to prophets or to the like will himself be punished for as long a time as are murderers'.<sup>35</sup> The holy father himself rules upon these matters following by necessity the law which says, 'There shall not be in Israel a consulter of oracles or portents or

female prophetess'.<sup>36</sup> In accordance with these things the great Epiphanius called heretics those who pay attention to nativities and fate, astronomy and astrology.<sup>37</sup> The most holy among the patriarchs Nikephorus Constantine said these things, 'It is not necessary to accept the revelation of Paul and the thunder oracles and lunar omens. For these are unhallowed'.<sup>38</sup> In addition to these things we have the most divine Cyril<sup>39</sup> saying, 'God, when he spoke through the prophet Isaiah, 'let the astrologers of heaven stand forth and save you,' proved the accursed astral magicians worthy of laughter'.<sup>40</sup> Why is it necessary to say something concerning Basil the Great? For he said it is very foolish to consider entire calculation and construction of the so called nativity chart, but much more it is unholy.<sup>41</sup> And why is it necessary to say many things and to recount these things individually? Let the great Paul suffice in place of them all when he says, 'See to it that no one will rob you through philosophy and empty deceit according to the transmission of men, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ'.<sup>42</sup> For even if we grant that the matters of astrology have been permitted according to those men, still the Divine Word which is present to us through the flesh, did away with these such things as harmful in place of the others.<sup>43</sup> For even if this were not the case, he would not easily have dragged the Magi away from Persia and he would not have led them toward his knowledge. And hear what John Chrysostom says in his explanation of the Gospel according to Matthew that, 'When Christ was born he destroyed astrology and limited the powers of the demons, he destroyed fate and overturned all other magical trickery'.<sup>44</sup>

And the following are a few chosen from many possibilities. Wherefore, if it is not too daring to say, the arguments that recently have been put forward in the letter on behalf of astrology are unstable or, in truth, even unreliable. For as I think, one could not find the fathers holy, if they are opposed, as was said above, by those who do not accept this teaching on the ground that it is ill-omened. And the most eminent of the physicians, I mean Galen and Hippocrates, are surely not safely retained here as witnesses, that they do not entirely approve of this sort of teaching since they are for the most part natural philosophers and through great efforts have examined all the matters in regards to mortal bodies.<sup>45</sup> Indeed they said that the days of diseases have even been ordered in sequence, and that they return in determinate periods of time, namely when a certain force comes down from above, except not from necessity, as the letter says, but, as those men say, where the nature of the disease is found more powerfully than the matter. For at that time if the matter does

not get the upper hand, the nature of the disease acts in every way in accordance with its nature. For even if he says that these days possess a certain resemblance and commonalty with the lunar cycles, still they do not necessarily derive the regularity from that source. For if this were the case, the crises of the disease of the fourth day would not often be brought to crisis by the third or fifth day. And when matter rules supreme, the whole would not move in a disorderly manner. And so it is quite clear they set forth that their teachings not on the basis of astrological principles, but on natural principles. And so to pay attention to the risings and settings of the stars, as if it were for this reason that the environment alternates toward colder or warmer and thence hinders or promotes the medicines, even I know men who suggest this successfully and among them there is a determinate group who say, 'The medicines are troublesome at the time of the Dog Star and before the Dog Star'.<sup>46</sup> In no way would someone find these men agreeing with astrologies and genethliologies on the basis of which men who are clever about these matters seem to predict the events that occur unexpectedly in each person's life, I mean good things and bad, length of their lives and appointed times of their death. For how could they admit it, since in their writings they call the genethliologists magicians? And if both Galen and Hippocrates who were Greeks think and speak this way about these matters, by so much more do the Holy Fathers who have learned to speak as did David, 'Cast your concerns upon the Lord and he will support you'.<sup>47</sup>

For if the letter introduces John the Damascene, who is wise with respect to holy doctrines, as widely engaged in natural speculation concerning the position and arrangement of the heavens, and indeed about the universal indications of celestial phenomena on the basis of the verse which reads, 'And he placed these things for signs and for seasons and for years'.<sup>48</sup> However it is not on this basis that the divine man himself composed his doctrine of astrology. For how could he, since all the more he shows from this that the free will which has been given to us is annulled and that God himself has been proved on great evidence of being unjust? For if things that happen occur according to fate, how does it not destroy free will? And if God punishes those who do wrong from necessity, how will he not have been found more unjust than the wrongdoers, chastising afterwards the person who has been dragged involuntarily into evil? As for the rest, that holy man has not been correctly cited by the letter, since he writes such treatises against the astrological teaching.<sup>49</sup>

But that clever Leo, the so-called archbishop of Thessalonika, who was so wickedly appointed by that patriarch John the wizard who forthwith was condemned most heinously on the grounds that he was devoted to the war against the icons, should absolutely not have been cited by the letter as testimony.<sup>50</sup> For if the civil laws demand that those who bear testimony concerning someone be all together unassailable, by how much more are holy rules and sacred laws of the church. Therefore that aforementioned ought not to have been introduced as testimony. Even if he was an archbishop, even if he was engaged in the observation of the heavens, and even if he stopped the famine as they say when he persuaded the Thessalonikians to sow the seed at the rising of the stars, still we do not deem it right for this reason to turn to astrology, nor are we compelled to look towards such a person as a model, unless out of embarrassment we choose to say this proverb, 'When our priests are possessed, who will cure us?' For how are they not possessed, if they count as nothing the three hundred and sixth rule of the Council of Laodikaea which states, 'It is not permitted that priests be enchanters or astrologers',<sup>51</sup> and proceed despitefully against the proper decree? I am persuaded from this, most powerful king, that that monk should never cease from denouncing the doctrine, since the witnesses brought forth against him are rendered so easily inadmissible. And so much for that.

How must we respond that physical doctrine, according to which the planet Jupiter is called temperate by the Greeks and is shown forthwith from this fact to be beneficent because it lies between Saturn and Mars, since it seems that the implications of this theory are not sound? I summon this argument to be submitted to a thorough examination from many angles. They say that Saturn is very cold and that it is dry due to its great distance from the exhalations of the earth and because it lies quite a distance above the sphere of the sun, and for this reason it also causes malefic events because of its bad temperament. Mars is very hot and dry due to its proximity to the sun and partaking of its heat, and because of this it completely evaporates; thus it also is evil. Jupiter lying between these two and partaking of both qualities is temperate due to this fact and thus beneficent. If this is the case, as those men say, it is by all means appropriate to observe that from this fact that Jupiter is not correctly understood to be temperate. For if Jupiter is temperate because it lies between the heat of Mars and the cold of Saturn, it is all together necessary to say that it is bad tempered, in as much as it lies between two dry qualities. For not only is Mars hot, but also dry, and Saturn is not only cold, but also dry. And so it is quite clear from this fact that Jupiter

is not temperate, if indeed it partakes of dryness more than the others. Now if Saturn were cold and wet, they would have something to say. For then, Jupiter being mixed equally from opposite qualities of those planets on each side could be admitted to share in temperateness. But as it is, it is not truly temperate because it partakes of dryness more than others. For the equal portions of qualities are true temperateness according to Galen, who is wise with respect to such things. And why is it necessary to say more? If they had conjectured that this planet was in its own nature temperate, the falsehood of their tale would not have been as obvious. Just as we see many plants curing terrible illnesses, but by means of formulae entirely unspeakable. But if due to lying between Saturn and Mars, they set the planet in place so as to receive such a nature, nothing prevents them from saying that the late autumn is of a temperate nature, in as much it lies between summer and winter.

But if on the other hand Ptolemy says that such a planet is temperate because it is productive of heat, but on the contrary we do not readily accept the reasoning concerning this, because no one will agree that this kind of constitution, clearly being hot and moist, is temperate; nay much rather it is bad-tempered and from that fact subjects our bodies to many kinds of ills.<sup>52</sup> As for the conditions that are moist, hot, and wet, the meat itself when it is cured under these conditions gives credence to the argument. And in addition to these points, read the second or third Book of Epidemics of Hippocrates, and from this I would have you learn more accurately, that the hot and wet conditions are not productive of temperate qualities, but rather are part of the causes of putrefaction that happen to our bodies.<sup>53</sup> If this is the case, how, in the end, is Jupiter being hot and wet, said to strengthen our bodies through temperateness, whenever it conjoins the moon, and for this reason be detrimental to draughts of drugs, since the liquids are not easily drawn down due to the power that has been imbued into them from the planet. I demand to learn this along with the other matters. For I am not ashamed to admit my ignorance in these things. And to this extent: that it was not seemly for us who are ignorant of pagan matters to dwell upon this point further since we are wholly uninitiated in such things.

What is it necessary to say concerning that star which the Magi saw in their own country from which, as the letter says, the doctrines of astrology arise? For the matters that have been recounted by the letter in regard to this are for the most part obviously irreconcilable and inconsistent, especially since we do have John Chrysostom saying that the star is not truly a star, that a certain invisible power assumed this

visible appearance.<sup>54</sup> And not only saying, but also presenting this by undeniable proofs that it was not a star that roused the Magi to set forth, as he says, upon such a journey, unless God moved their souls to this. For the star, since it was solitary and appeared, at that, much before the time of the birth could not have led them to Jerusalem; the apparent star - if it was truly a star - could not have sunk downwards from on high and it could not have unexpectedly rested over the child that was born, and made everything clear to the Magi and would have not become invisible after the adoration of those men.<sup>55</sup> For when the one who was born led them in an orderly manner and caused them to stand at the manger and led them to true knowledge, he communicated the rest to them not through the star, but through the angel. 'For those who have received divine revelation, he says, according to a vision, they return home by another road'.<sup>56</sup> So it was some divine messenger that called the Magi from Persia at that time. And it was likely that those men were led up into Jerusalem by a more holy vision, but in order that those who were summoned upon seeing the unwonted and fearful sight stalked off in astonishment at the strangeness of the sight, as it seems the incorporeal nature changed entirely into the form of a star in an altogether deliberate manner. Also unless he had used such condescension, unless he revealed a familiar form to the astrologers, he would not have caught the prey so easily, he would have not led them to Jerusalem, since we are not otherwise able to draw up a fish from the ocean depths, unless we first hide the fishhook with some bait. The very great Paul also was found doing this when he started his discourse to the Athenians from the altar when they were busy doing business in the market place, and after circumcision making popular speeches to the Jews on the basis of circumcision.<sup>57</sup> For familiar things are dear to each person.<sup>58</sup> It is right to be persuaded by the facts themselves, if not by what is said. For when these men had come forth and had fallen down worshipping faithfully and had been made steadfast by the unchangeable knowledge according to Christ, that stellar form then grew dim, because there was no longer need for it, but instead that holy angel communicated to them through a dream and persuaded them to return by another road to their land, and to pay attention not to Magian theology and stars, as before this, but to loudly proclaim this presence of Christ.<sup>59</sup> The golden-speeched John explained these things in detail and more, but he did instruct about the doubt which befalls us, which we require to be dispelled. Granted this could not otherwise come about, unless I, through living speech as a slave and the least of slaves, undertook to explain.

### **Acknowledgment**

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### **References**

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1. *Matth. 2. 29.*
2. These opening statements illustrate Glykas' thinly veiled sarcasm and condescension towards Manuel's literary style and arguments. It parallels Manuel's opening statements criticizing the initial letter which he characterized 'as worthy of a simple monk'.
3. The story of the Jew is contained in Pseudo-Amphilochus' *Life of Saint Basil* (Migne, PG 29. 114 ff.). He is referred to as Joseph the Hebrew who is, as Glykas states, a physician who was an expert in diagnosis through the taking of pulses.
4. Throughout his refutation, Glykas repeatedly states that his texts do not contain the passages which Manuel cites. Granted that there existed different versions of the same manuscripts and there existed disagreement as to which texts were attributed to various authors; but the citations given by the editors Cumont and Eustratiades in Migne's PG, for the most part support Glykas' claims. However, it should be noted that Byzantine editors and copyists were likely to purge occult and pagan references that were abhorant to Christian beliefs from the manuscripts on which they were working. See the discussion of this practice in reference to the hermetic treatises by Brian P. Copenhaver, *Hermetica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), xl-xli.
5. John Chrysostom in his *Hom. on Matth. 6* (Migne, PG 57. col. 61ff.) was concerned to prove that the appearance of the star at Christ's birth was not to be taken as a confirmation of astrology.
6. The notion that the Magi forsook their astrological practices after coming to a knowledge of Christ began with Tertullian (*Idolol.* 9) and was an argument that was frequently repeated by Christian writers. See A. Bouche-LeClercq, *L'Astrologie Greque* (Paris, 1899), 609-27 for a thorough discussion of the early Church's opposition to astrology.
7. In Plotinus' discussion on the possibility of stars as signs, he states that all things are full of signs, and if a comprehensive principle of coordination can be



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established, then there exists a reasonable basis for the divination, not only by stars, but also by birds and entrails and other omens (*Enn.* 2.3.7).

8. *Levit.* 19. 26.

9. Ptolemy, discussing the ways in which the astrological art is seen to fail, said that many practitioners, for the sake of gain/finding, deceive the ignorant by seeming to foretell many things even about those matters that *do not* possess any nature at all subject to prognostication; while to the more inquisitive they equally provide an occasion for forming a judgment against those things that *do* have a nature subject to prophecy (*Tetra.* 1.2.6, trans., Robert Schmidt, Berkeley Springs, WV: The Golden Hind Press, 1994).

10. *Matth.* 2. 2.

11 Pseudo-Basil, *Homil. in gener.*, 5 (Migne, PG 31, 1469 A-1475A). It is disputed whether this is a treatise of Basil's.

12. *Num.* 24.17. In a spurious homily attributed to John Chrysostom (Migne, PG, 56. 637ff.), he repeated the suggestion made by others that the Magi knew of the star from the books of the diviner Balaam whose prophecy was also put into the Old Testament. Origen related that the Magi owned the written prophecies of Balaam because they were descended from him (*In Numeros Homilia* 13, Migne, PG 12, 675; and there is some speculation that Balaam himself was an astrologer. See Thorndike, *History* 1: 444, n.5).

13. See George, Demetra, 'Manuel I Komnenos and Michael Glykas: A Twelfth-Century Defence and Refutation of Astrology', *Culture and Cosmos*, Autumn/Winter 2001, Vol. 5, no 2, n. 39. Abimelech, who wished to have Sarah, Abraham's wife, for his harem was not a king in Egypt, but rather of Gerar in the land of the Philistines (*Gen.* 20. 1). There is no mention of Abraham dishonoring those who believed in astrology.

14. The Sibylline priestesses, said to be inspired by the god Apollo, foretold events of general significance which they uttered in verse. The *Oracula Sibyllina*, a collection of their prophecies, were assembled in their present form by some Byzantine scholar about the sixth century CE. See H. W. Parke, *Sibyls and Sibylline Prophecy in Classical Antiquity* (London & New York: Routledge, 1988). For Balaam, see note 12 above. Caiaphas, who was a high priest of the Pharisees, made an unconscious prophecy concerning the benefit of Christ's death for the safety of the Jewish nation (*John* 11. 50-51). The point that Glykas is making was one that was first defined by Plato (*Phaed.* 244c ) and later fully developed by Cicero (*Div.* 1.6;18) distinguishing between direct divination, such as prophecy and dreams which are inspired by the gods directly contacting

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the mind of the recipient and thus a divine art; and indirect divination which is based upon the observations of signs in nature such as augury, haruspicy, and the movements of celestial bodies, and thus a human art.

15. Glykas is referring to the *thema mundi*, the horoscope of the creation. However, Manuel did not made any mention of this topic in his treatise as Cumont found it. Unless we are missing a portion of Manuel's treatise, this section demonstrates that Glykas had quite a bit of astrological knowledge independent from responding to Manuel's points, as has been suggested in the introduction. The *thema mundi* had the 15th degree of Cancer as its rising sign and all the planets in the signs of their domicile rulerships (The Sun at the 19th degree of Aries, the Moon at the 15th degree of Cancer, Saturn at the 15th degree of Capricorn, Jupiter at the 15th degree of Sagittarius, Mars at the 15th degree of Scorpio, Venus at the 3rd degree of Libra, and Mercury at the 15th degree of Virgo as per Firmicus Maternus *Math* 3.1). It was quite ancient as attested to by the following authors: Antiochus, (*Introduction*, 2.1 in *CCAG* 8.3.112,120-26), Paulus Alexandrius (Chap. 37), Firmicus Maternus (*Math*. 3.1), Macrobius (*Somn*. 1.21;23) and Rhetorius. Firmicus Maternus said that the *thema mundi* was devised by Hermes, handed down to Asklepius and Hanubius, and adopted by Petosiris and Nechepso. Alternative traditions recorded by Paulus Alexandrinus places the Sun in Aries, the sign of its exaltation, and those of the Persian/Arabic literature place all of the planets in the signs of their exaltations.

16. *Isaiah* 13.13. Pseudo-Basil (Migne, PG 30.593).

17. *Job* 38. 4-6.

18. *Isaiah* 64.17.

19. *I Corin*.7.31.

20. *Romans* 8.19

21. This is the Stoic doctrine of the Great Year, periodic universal conflagration (*ekpyrosis*), and eternal recurrence. As articulated by Nemesius (*On Human Nature*, 38):

The Stoics say that when the planets return to the same point in longitude and latitude, where each was at the beginning when the cosmos was first formed, at specific periods of time they bring about a conflagration and destruction of the world, and then return the cosmos to the same state. When the stars are brought back to the same position everything that happened in the previous period is repeated in exactly the same way.

22. John Chrysostom in *Hom. on Matth.* 6. 2 (Migne, PG 57. col. 63).

23. George, 'Manuel I', Pt. 2, Autumn/Winter 2001, Vol. 5, no 2, n. 37.

24. Electing, i.e., choosing an auspicious time on which to begin an enterprise.

25. According to Pingree, the astrologer Demophilus cast the horoscope of Constantinople in about 990, and based upon the methods of Valens judged that that its end would occur in 1026 CE, 696 years after its founding. This prediction was attributed to Valens himself by twelfth century historians. See Pingree, *Prismata* and George, 'Manuel I', Pt. 2, Autumn/Winter 2001, Vol. 5, no 2, p. 39.

26. *Ps.* 104. 32.

27. *Letter to Polycarp*, no. 7, Migne, PG 3. col. 1081. The passage in question reads as follows:

What do you believe in regard to the disappearance of the sun which happened at the time of the crucifixion? For then we both were watching near Heliopolis being present and on the spot when in a wonderful manner the moon fell into the sun (and it was not the time for an eclipse), and was once more restored after the ninth hour of the afternoon in a supernatural manner, diametrically opposite the sun. Remember something else: he knows in what way we saw that conjunction of the moon beginning from the east and continuing on to the limit of the sun, and then at last leaping back again, and moreover it did not go forth and return from the same part of the sky, but from the opposite part of the sky. These are the things which came about at that time generally as contrary to nature and could happen only by the creator of all things Christ who makes things wonderful and amazing beyond number.

28. These two sentences contain Glykas' most scathing criticism, not about the relative merits of Manuel's arguments, but against Manuel himself whom he accuses of fabricating and deliberately misquoting evidence. It was this slander of the Emperor that had led some scholars such as Beck (see Glykas' biography in the introduction) to speculate that Glykas had been imprisoned because of this letter. Choniates corroborated Glykas' evaluation of Manuel's scholarship. In the midst of extolling Manuel's skill in letter writing and composing public sermons, he qualified it, saying:

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All this would have been praiseworthy ... if he had not distorted the meaning of the written word, as he often did, to accord with his own intent, providing definitions and giving exegeses of doctrines whose correct meaning the Fathers had formulated as though he fully comprehended Christ due to his having received from the Divine the most lucid instructions pertaining to the mysteries of his person (2. 7. 210).

29. Basil, *Hex.* 6. 5-8 (Migne, PG 29. col. 128- 132).

30. *Gal.* 4.10-11.

31. John Chrysostom, *In Calendas.* Migne, PG 1, col. 955.

32. Gregory of Nazianzus (329-390) Bishop of Constantinople was a close friend of Basil the Great. This passage *Or.* 39.5 (Migne, PG 36, col 340) is but one section of a long list of pagan mysteries which he is dismissing.

33. Gregory of Nazianzus, praising the intellectual skills of his brother Caesarius, wrote:

From geometry and astronomy, that science so dangerous to anyone else [i.e., astrology], he gathered all that was helpful (I mean that he was led by the harmony and the order of the heavenly bodies to reverence their Maker), and avoided what is injurious; not attributing all things that are or will be to the influence of the stars, like those who raise their own fellow servant, the creation, in rebellion against the Creator, but referring, as it reasonable, the motion of these bodies, and all other things, to God (*In laude. Caesar.*, 7, Migne, PG 35. col 761).

34. John Chrysostom in *Hom. on Matth.* 6.1 (Migne, PG 57. col. 61).

35. Basil, *Epist.*, 217. 72 (Migne, PG 32. col 802).

36. *Deut.* 18.10.

37. Epiphanius of Cyprus (315-403) in the *Medicine Chest for the Cure of All Heresies* made an extensive attack on all sorts of heretics, including astrologers. He denounced astral fatalism in the context of his attack upon the Stoics, stating, 'Rather than the man, who does the deed under necessity, the stars, which have imposed necessity, must pay the penalty (*Panarion* I. 5). He also denounced the Pharisees because 'fate and astrology meant much to them' (*Panarion* 1. 16, Migne, PG 41. col. 252).

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38. Nikephoros I, patriarch of Constantinople (806-813), was a historian and saint who was an anti-Iconoclast (*Iuris graeco-romani*, p. 169).

39. Cyril (378-444), patriarch of Alexandria, whose early years in office were marked by conflicts with Jews, Novatians, and pagans, including a suspicion that he was involved with the murder of Hypatia. (*In Es.*, 4. 3, Migne, PG 70. 1011).

40. *Isaiah* 48.13.

41. Basil, *Hex.* 6. 5-8 (Migne, PG 29. col. 128- 132).

42. *Ep. to Colossians* 2.8.

43. Tertullian asserted that astrology had been permitted until the time of the Gospel (*Idolol.* 9), and Ignatius argued that the birth of Christ destroyed all harmful magic and other evils (*Epist ad Ephes.*, 19).

44. John Chrysostom in *Hom. on Matth* 6.1(Migne, PG 57. col. 62).

45. Galen of Pergamum (129-?199/216) who had a spectacular career as a physician composed voluminous writings on the subject. While there is a lack of astrology in most of Galen's medicine, two treatises were devoted to astrological medicine. *The Prognostication of Disease by Astrology* discussed the planetary influences at the time the patient became ill and went to bed, by which to predict the course, treatment and duration of the illness (*Prognostica de decubitu ex mathematica scientia*, [*The Prognostication of Disease by Astrology*; literally *The prognostication of decumbiture from the mathematical science*] ed., Kuehn, 19: 529-573). The other treatise on critical days, based upon the premise that 'we receive the forces of the stars above,' discussed the particularly significant influences of the sun and moon on the course of disease (per kris€mvn ≤mer<n, 3 books, ed., Kuhn, 14: 298. 1 ff.) which was based on Hippocrates' doctrine of critical days. See 'On the Prognostics' in *The Genuine Works of Hippocrates*, trans., Francis Adams (New York: William Wood & Co) 1:208-09. Hippocrates is cited as having said that a study of geometry and astronomy (which also meant astrology) is essential in medicine (Hippocrates, *On Airs, Waters, and Places*, 2). See also Cramer, 188-190 and Thorndike, *History*, 1: 178 ff.

46. Hippocrates said that, 'About the time of the dog-days, and before it, the administration of purgatives is unsuitable' (*Aphorism.* 31.5 in the *The Genuine Works of Hippocrates*, trans., Francis Adams, 2 vols., New York: William Wood & Co). Galen also was concerned with the powers of the dog-star Sirius on the course of diseases and the preparation of drugs (*de theriaca ad Pisonem*, ed., Kuhn, 14:285). The belief that the rays from certain stars can make medicines

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more potent was held by the Babylonians. See Erica Reiner, *Astral Magic in Babylonia* (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1995).

47. *Ps.* 54.23.

48. *Gen.* 1.14.

49. John of Damascus in his treatise *Concerning light, fire, the luminaries, sun, moon, and stars* concluded his discourse on the precepts of astrology with a statement affirming human free will over the fatalism of stars, and that the stars are essentially only signs of meteorological change (*On Faith* 2. 7, Migne, PG 94. col. 885).

50. Leo the Mathematician served as archbishop of Thessalonica (840-843) having received the position due to the political influence of his cousin John VII Morocharzianus the Grammarian who had been patriarch (837-43). He was deposed when the iconodule Methodius I succeeded his iconoclast cousin John as patriarch in 843. See *Dictionary of Scientific Biographies*, 8:190-91.

51. In 365 the Council of Laodikaea forbade the clergy to be astrologers or magicians.

52. In the *Tetrabiblos* Ptolemy attempted to give astrology a rational foundation by proposing a physical explanation for the powers of the planets based upon Aristotle's theories of natural philosophy. In this passage to which Glykas is referring (*Tetra.* 1.3,18) and elsewhere Ptolemy made use of the four Aristotelian principles, hot, cold, wet and dry (*De generatione et corruptione*, 2.2.3).

53. Hippocrates, *Opera*, ed., Kuhlwein 1: 184 ff.

54. John Chrysostom, *Hom. on Matth* 6.1, Migne, PG 57. col. 62.

55. See George, 'Manuel I', Pt. 2, Autumn/Winter 2001, Vol.. 5 no 2, n 27, 28.

56. *Matth.* 2.12.

57. *Act. apost.* 17. 23.

58. *Epist. Rom.* 2. 25.

59. John Chrysostom, *Hom. on Matth* 6.1, Migne, PG 57. col. 62.