Introduction

Between the fifth and the ninth century AD, the church in Constantinople commemorated nine earthquakes that struck the city, prescribing an elaborate liturgical rite annually for each occasion.[1] Worshippers sang specially composed hymns, heard carefully chosen passages from Scripture, and engaged in mass processions that retraced the steps of the city's earthquake evacuation route. The rite, in its original fifth-century form, communicated a theology of earthquakes as divine and terrestrial judgment for collective sin but showed confidence in the power of collective repentance to turn aside natural disaster and divine wrath. These and other rituals and prayers related to earthquakes in Byzantine Constantinople were means by which city-dwellers could make meaning from disaster and renegotiate their relationships to God and the land around them in the face of its most destabilizing ecological characteristic: its seismicity.

Located on the North Anatolian Fault, Constantinople (today Istanbul) has experienced countless earthquakes over the course of its history.[2] Rather than suffering from a lack of meaning, as natural disasters often do in the modern world, earthquakes in the ancient and medieval

[1] The earthquakes commemorated on the calendar of the Great Church: September 25, 438; January 26, 447; October 4 or 7, 525 or 526; August 16, 542; December 14, 557; October 26, 740; March 17, 780–97; January 9, 869; one earthquake was commemorated on a movable day, the first Monday after Pentecost, whose date is unknown. See Appendix A. Not all Christians in Constantinople belonged to the church supported by the imperial court, but it did comprise a significant majority by the middle of the fifth century.

[2] For an incomplete list of earthquakes in Byzantine Constantinople, see G. Downey, "Earthquakes at Constantinople and Vicinity, AD 342–1454," *Speculum*, 30 (1955), 596–600. See also M. Meier, *Das Andere Zeitalter Justinians. Kontigenzerfarhung und Kontigenzbewaltigung im 6. Jahrhundert n. Chr*, Hypomnemata 147 (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2003), 656–70, for a more detailed list of quakes in the Eastern Mediterranean from 500 to 565. For a broader catalogue of earthquakes in the Mediterranean region from antiquity into the Middle Ages, see E. Guidoboni, *Catalogue of Ancient Earthquakes in the Mediterranean up to the 10th Century* (Rome: Istituto Nazionale di Geofisica, 1994); E. Guidoboni and A. Comastri, *Catalogue of Earthquakes and Tsunamis in the Mediterranean Area from the 11th to the 15th Century* (Rome: Istituto Nazionale di Geofisica, 2005).

Mediterranean held a *surplus* of meaning.[3] Because of Constantinople's status as East Roman capital, its place as the seat of the Roman imperial court, and its self-consciousness as the center of the *oikoumene*, its local earthquakes were particularly freighted with significance, both theological and political. The church's earthquake rite offered a theological account of natural disasters that unfolded over the course of ritual performance, using language and symbols derived from Christian Scripture.[4] In liturgy, the church circumscribed the meaning of local earthquakes and raised them up to a universal plane by placing these seemingly random environmental events on a liturgical calendar that was populated with the most important moments of sacred history—the birth, death, resurrection, and glorification of Christ—as well as holy days celebrating the Virgin Mary and the saints. Placing natural disasters alongside moments of triumph, the church both acknowledged their misfortune and also searched for signs of redemption within them. Yet the meaning the church ascribed to local earthquakes was but one of many interpretations of natural disasters in the East Roman capital. Views on the meaning of earthquakes varied widely, and the church's rituals and prayers constituted a single yet important voice within a fierce cultural debate about the relationship of natural disasters to the city's—and the Roman Empire's—historical and eschatological destiny.

The story of earthquakes and liturgy in Constantinople is a story about what happens when ecological instability collides with a society whose shared world of meaning was highly structured by public ritual and whose view of its own identity and place in history reached the highest of stakes. This book seeks to answer two questions. First, what do rites and prayers surrounding earthquakes tell us about the entanglement of liturgy, the environment, and politics in Constantinople in the first millennium? And second, what can the story of earthquakes in Constantinople tell us about Byzantine understandings of the natural world? I argue that liturgical rites for earthquakes constructed Constantinople as a site of theophany and provided a means for the people of

[3] J. W. Belser writes of the world of Scripture and Mediterranean late antiquity, "In a world where all things could testify to God's presence, ordinary and unusual happenings alike might be charged with meaning, writ with what Peter Struck calls 'the ultrasignificant language of the divine'" (*Power, Ethics, and Ecology in Jewish Late Antiquity: Rabbinic Responses to Drought and Disaster* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015], 40, quoting P. T. Struck, *Birth of the Symbol: Ancient Readers at the Limits of their Texts* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004], 95). According to Patricia Cox Miller, attention to the material world as a vehicle for the divine was amplified in the fourth to sixth century, as Christian and pagan intellectuals took a "material turn." See P. C. Miller, *The Corporeal Imagination: Signifying the Holy in Late Ancient Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 3–7.

[4] I explain in greater detail what I mean by "performance" in a Byzantine liturgical context in Chapter 1.

"New Rome" to understand themselves as the biblical people of God by making local history into universal, sacred history. However, in framing the people as sinful rather than victorious, the church's earthquake rites threatened the foundations of Constantinopolitan self-identity as "New Rome" and the triumphant epicenter of Mediterranean political power. Yet earthquakes garnered conflicting interpretations. While the church's commemoration rite, in its original form, framed earthquakes in terms of divine wrath and chastisement, some objected to the theology of the rite, especially imperial rulers who saw it as politically disadvantageous and produced counter-interpretations and counter-rituals that framed local quakes not as manifestations of divine wrath but rather divine blessing on the city. Later, in the middle Byzantine period, the connection between earthquakes and the actions of the people of Constantinople was largely severed, even in the liturgy. Earthquakes became seen as outside threats unconnected to human sin but for which the protection of saints' intercessions was required. The history of earthquakes in Constantinople and the shifts in liturgical and other modes of response to them reveal that Byzantine understandings of the natural world were subject to change depending on historical and political circumstances and the agents interpreting them. Earthquakes were deeply meaningful for Constantinopolitans and shaped their worship, cosmology, and politics, but the relationship they revealed between the people, the earth, and God was highly contested and never definitively settled.

Earthquakes and the Study of Byzantine Liturgy

Earthquake rituals in Constantinople were part of a complex and multifaceted ritual system that liturgical scholars call the Byzantine Rite.[5] The church was not only a place where people went for special occasions like baptisms, marriages, and funerals. It offered, in its cycles of feasting and fasting, its blessings of water and harvest, and its rich artistic edifices and images, a particular vision of the world, God's action in history, and a way of finding one's individual and communal place in them. Liturgy was understood to make heavenly realities present on earth. As Andrew Mellas writes, they "were not simply a remembrance of biblical events or a theatrical display of divine things; they enacted a sacred drama that created a space of participation for the faithful in the mystery of salvation."[6] Rituals and

[5] R. F. Taft, *The Byzantine Rite: A Short History* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), 16.
[6] A. Mellas, *Liturgy and the Emotions in Byzantium: Compunction and Hymnody* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 19. Mellas' comments here refer to liturgical hymnography but apply equally to the various elements of Byzantine worship that comprise the rite.

prayers surrounding earthquakes were an important part of liturgy's symbolic world-making function in the context of the highly seismic ecology in which Constantinople was situated. Although scholars have long known about Constantinople's rituals and prayers for earthquakes, they have received very little focused attention.[7] This absence can be attributed to the fact that much of the scholarship on the Byzantine Rite has concerned itself with establishing the origins and historical evolution of the central sacraments of Eucharist and baptism, largely to the exclusion of more "peripheral" rites.[8] Using methods first formulated in the nineteenth century under the influence of German higher criticism, liturgiologists trace the origins and development of various liturgical "units"—prayers, ritual actions, feasts, fasts, and so on—and identify patterns of influence and cross-fertilization among various liturgical traditions to pinpoint a given rite's unique *lex orandi*: its ritual, textual, and theological core.[9] In recent years, scholars of Byzantine liturgy have expanded their theoretical toolbox to paint a more comprehensive picture of Christian worship in the East Roman capital, utilizing ritual theory alongside other cultural theories and methodologies to complement the traditional method of comparative liturgiology and focusing on rites in both the center and the periphery of Christian worship.[10] This is the first monograph-length

[7] John Baldovin merely notes that they testify to the uniqueness of Constantinople's practice of stational liturgy among that of other cities. J. Baldovin, *The Urban Character of Christian Worship: The Origins, Development and Meaning of Stational Liturgy*, OCA 228 (Rome: Pontifical Oriental Institute, 1987), 197. See also M. M. Morozowich, "Tradition and Natural Disaster: The Role of Liturgical Scholarship," in B. J. Groen and S. Hawkes-Teeples (eds.), *Inquiries into Eastern Christian Worship: Acts of the Second International Congress of the Society of Oriental Liturgy, Rome, 17–21 September 2008*, Eastern Christian Studies 12 (Leuven: Peeters, 2012), 1–18.

[8] See, however, recent publications by Gabriel Radle, for example, G. Radle, "The Veiling of Women in Byzantium: Liturgy, Hair, and Identity in a Medieval Rite of Passage," *Speculum*, 94 (2019), 1070–115; G. Radle, "When Infants Begin to Toddle: A Liturgical Rite of Passage in the Greco-Arabic Manuscript *Sinai NF / MG 53*," *Bollettino della Badia Greca de Grottaferrata*, 11 (2014), 159–68. See also the "Vienna Euchologia Project" underway at the Austrian Academy of Sciences, www.oeaw.ac.at/en/imafo/research/byzantine-research/communities-and-landscapes/euchologia-project.</color_Dark Yellow. This team of interdisciplinary researchers examines Byzantine *euchologion* prayer book manuscripts as reflections of regional communities that reveal the organization of lay piety, the history of education in churches, the experience of women in pregnancy and childbirth, and so on.

[9] P. F. Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship: Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 9. See the seminal work, A. Baumstark, *Comparative Liturgy* (Westminster, MD: Newman, 1958). For an excellent recent example of the continuing value of comparative liturgiology for research in liturgical history, see D. Galadza, *Liturgy and Byzantinization in Jerusalem* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

[10] Liturgiologists have long known that liturgies must be interpreted in context. As Baumstark wrote, "Indeed liturgical forms are so intimately bound up with the external history of the world and of the Church and with the development of religious sentiment, itself conditioned by historical happenings, that they are constantly being subjected to very great modifications." Baumstark, *Comparative*

historical study of the Byzantine Rite to combine liturgiology with methods from the environmental humanities.[11] As my primary data, I examine local rituals and prayers for earthquakes, which are found in abundance in the main kinds of sources consulted in liturgiological studies: liturgical manuscripts, homilies, theological treatises and letters, hymnography, hagiography, conciliar decrees, and historiographical texts. Drawing from research on seismology and ecological theory, this book also contextualizes liturgical and theological data within an ecology marked by a combustible mixture of orthodox Christianity, late Roman imperial ideology, and high seismicity.

Earthquakes in Constantinople: Ecology and Empire

Earthquakes are always inconvenient, but they were inconvenient in a special way for Constantinople. Just a half-century after the city of Byzantium's reestablishment by the Emperor Constantine (r. 306–337) in 330 as Constantinople, its bishop claimed the second place of authority in the Catholic Church after the Pope of Rome.[12] Over the course of late antiquity, the Roman imperial court, having relocated to Constantinople in the 380s, sought to make it the center of the *oikoumene*, the inhabited world.[13]

Liturgy, 1. For more recent approaches, see Mellas, *Liturgy and the Emotions*; A. W. White, *Performing Orthodox Ritual in Byzantium* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); D. Krueger, *Liturgical Subjects: Christian Ritual, Biblical Narrative, and the Formation of the Self in Byzantium* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014); N. Schibille, *Hagia Sophia and the Byzantine Aesthetic Experience* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2014); V. Marinis, *Architecture and Ritual in the Churches of Constantinople: Ninth to Fifteenth Centuries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); W. Woodfin, *The Embodied Icon: Liturgical Vestments and Sacramental Power in Byzantium* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); R. F. Taft, *Through Their Own Eyes: Liturgy as the Byzantines Saw It* (Berkeley: InterOrthodox Press, 2006).

[11] Landmarks in liturgical theology in conversation with ecology include L. E. Mick, *Liturgy and Ecology in Dialogue* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1997); B. M. Stewart, *A Watered Garden: Christian Worship and Earth's Ecology* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2011); and the collected volume, T. Berger (ed.), *Full of Your Glory: Liturgy, Cosmos, Creation* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2019). The latter contains some valuable historical studies that attend to liturgy and the natural environment.

[12] Council of Constantinople (381), Canon 3; in J. D. Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum* (Venice: 1759), vol. III, 560C; translation by H. Bettenson, in C. Maunder (ed.), *Documents of the Christian Church*, third edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 90. Before Constantine, bishops of Byzantium were suffragans of the Metropolitan of Heraclea in Thrace. See Taft, *Byzantine Rite*, 23. A helpful recent study has shown how contested Constantinople's rise to power was: J. M. Pigott, *New Rome Wasn't Built in a Day: Rethinking Councils and Controversy at Early Constantinople, 381–451* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2019).

[13] A. Kaldellis, "Did the Byzantine Empire Have 'Ecumenical' or 'Universal' Aspirations?" in C. Ando (ed.), *Ancient States and Infrastructural Power: Europe, Asia, and America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), 272–300; C. Mango, "Constantinople: Capital of the *Oikoumene*?" in

Constantinople's moniker "New Rome" encapsulated the ambitions of the imperial court and the imperial church. There was a difficulty, however, in making Constantinople a truly new Rome due to its lack of an illustrious past. Old Rome housed government institutions, aristocratic families, and symbolic monuments that made up a monumental landscape difficult to replicate elsewhere. Raymond Van Dam writes:

> The problem with Rome was that it had too much history that was now incompatible with the reality of barbarian invasions and the establishment of alternative imperial residences. The problem with Constantinople, however, was that it had no history. Emperors and historians hence had to construct a new past for the new capital. Even imaginary histories would be better than no history.[14]

As in Rome, Constantinople's system of symbolic monuments and public ritual came to serve as the primary means by which the people conceived of their shared Roman history and its ideologically organizing principle: eternal victory.[15] The imperial court imported public monuments and civil ceremonies from Rome and other cities around the empire that celebrated eternal victory, especially triumph in battle. For instance, one of the seven *pignora imperii*, material objects or charms that were thought to protect Rome, was secretly moved to Constantinople: the *palladium*, a wooden cult image said to have been stolen from Troy and taken to the future site of Rome by Aeneas.[16] Pagan writers had attributed to these objects a certain power and agency, an attribution that was ridiculed by Christian writers like Augustine of Hippo.[17] Nevertheless, the transfer of the *palladium* from Rome to Constantinople contributed to late antique traditions that Constantine had transferred the gods of Rome and

E. Chrysos (ed.), *Byzantium as Oecumene* (Athens: Institute for Byzantine Research, 2005), 319–24. On the rise of the concept of the *oikoumene*, see C. Rapp and H.A. Drake, "Polis—Imperium—Oikumene: A World Reconfigured," in C. Rapp and H. A. Drake (eds.), *The City in the Classical and Post-Classical World: Changing Contexts of Power and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 2–3.

[14] R. Van Dam, *Rome and Constantinople: Rewriting Roman History during Late Antiquity* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010), 52.

[15] J. Latham, *Performance, Memory, and Processions in Ancient Rome: The* Pompa Circensis *from the Late Republic to Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 71. On "eternal victory," see M. McCormick, *Eternal Victory: Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium, and the Early Medieval West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

[16] See C. Ando, "The Palladium and the Pentateuch: Towards a Sacred Topography of the Later Roman Empire," *Phoenix*, 55 (2001), 369–410; see also R. Praet, "Re-anchoring Rome's Protection in Constantinople: The *pignora imperii* in Late Antiquity and Byzantium," *Sacris Erudiri*, 55 (2016), 277–320.

[17] Ando, "Palladium and Pentateuch," 387; 394, quoting from Augustine, *De civ. D.*, 3.18.

guarantors of its empire to his new city.[18] Even more strikingly, the statue of Emperor Constantine located in the Forum of Constantine in the city's center was modeled on the god Apollo and was probably a repurposed ancient statue of the pagan deity.[19] With the god-emperor holding a spear in his right hand and a globe in his left hand, the statue could have signified not only that the city was the center of the world but that its rulers upheld the order of creation itself. Earthquakes, to the extent that they signaled divine displeasure on the people and places they struck, threatened this ideological narrative in New Rome, just as they had in Old Rome.[20] Especially troubling for Constantinople's bourgeoning ideological narrative was the Christian message of earthquakes as manifestations of the wrath of the all-powerful creator. Christians may well have recalled the words of Jesus about the signs of the last days, when the temple would be destroyed, and earthquakes and other signs would herald the end of the age: "When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birth pangs" (Mark 13:7–8). The pagan statuary that surrounded Christians in Constantinople may have led them to recall the great earthquake in the book of Revelation and the fall of the evil city of Babylon.[21]

Yet, as the imperial court imported pagan statues and monuments, it also collaborated with the church to import the relics of Christian martyrs and other holy objects from elsewhere in an effort to fashion Constantinople as a *Christian* metropolis, a "New Jerusalem."[22] The import of Christian relics and the building of churches and shrines corresponded to an expansion in public ecclesiastical ritual. After initially borrowing liturgical prayers and practices from Antioch and the greater West Syrian region under the

[18] Ando, "Palladium and Pentateuch," 398–9.

[19] J. Bardill, *Constantine: Divine Emperor of the Christian Golden Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 28–36. See also A. Kaldellis, "The Forum of Constantine in Constantinople: What Do We Know about Its Original Architecture and Adornment?" *GRBS*, 56 (2016), 714–39.

[20] See Chapter 3.

[21] See R. Bauckham, "The Eschatological Earthquake in the Apocalypse of John," *Novum Testamentum*, 19 (1977), 226.

[22] Van Dam, *Rome and Constantinople*, 63–6. The first mention of Constantinople as a "New Jerusalem" comes from *Life* of St. Daniel the Stylite (ca. 446), after which point the title appears with increasing frequency, although it never surpassed the title of "New Rome." See R. Ousterhout, "Sacred Geographies and Holy Cities: Constantinople as Jerusalem," in A. M. Lidov (ed.), *Hierotopy: The Creation of Sacred Spaces in Byzantium and Medieval Russia* (Moscow: Indrik, 2006), 98–109.

influence of bishops like Gregory of Nazianzus (Archbishop of Constantinople 379–381) and John Chrysostom (Archbishop of Constantinople 397–404), the church in Constantinople began to develop its own local liturgical practices in the late fourth century, in particular, stational liturgy.[23] Stational liturgy, in the words of Aidan Kavanagh, was worship "on the town."[24] In liturgical services, the worshipping congregation moved in procession outdoors along the streets and alleys to churches, shrines, and other sites for prayer and the celebration of the Eucharist. In his seminal study of stational liturgy *The Urban Character of Christian Worship*, John Baldovin argues that Constantinople's stational liturgy was an integral part of the city's self-understanding as New Rome, the permanent home of the emperor and his court:

> Christianity, therefore, represented the public religious life of the city by means of its cult. It made the *civitas* not only civilization, but also holy civilization, a civilization defended as much by icons and relics and processions as it was by walls and military and political power. Thus, the city as holy civilization was a concept that was expressed above all liturgically.[25]

According to Baldovin, the public, stational liturgy of Constantinople harmonized two worlds—church and Roman *civitas*—and integrated them symbolically into a single "holy civilization." Indeed, many lavish public ceremonies, in which the line between "Roman" and "Christian" blurred, communicated the notion that the emperor was a divinely chosen ruler and vicegerent of the Christian God.[26] They displayed a seemingly coherent, theocratic narrative that reconciled the Christian and Greco-Roman traditions, creating what ritual theorist Catherine Bell calls "a sense of cosmological fit" typical of grand political rituals.[27] However, despite Constantinople's highly structured, ornamental system of public ritual, the compatibility of Christianity with Romanity was much more contested than it may seem. Indeed, I argue that the earthquake commemoration rite, one of the most elaborate and lengthy stational liturgies of the year in Constantinople, seriously challenges the view that Byzantine

[23] Taft, *Byzantine Rite*, 29. On other liturgical rites borrowed from Antioch, see R. F. Taft, "St. John Chrysostom and the Byzantine Anaphora that Bears His Name," in P. F. Bradshaw (ed.), *Essays on Early Eastern Eucharistic Prayers* (Collegeville, MN: Pueblo, 1997), 195–226.

[24] Quoted by J. Baldovin, "Christian Worship to the Eve of the Reformation," in P. F. Bradshaw and L. A. Hoffman (eds.), *The Making of Jewish and Christian Worship* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), 165.

[25] Baldovin, *Urban Character*, 257.

[26] On this issue, see A. Kaldellis, *The Byzantine Republic: People and Power in New Rome* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 165–71.

[27] C. Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 128–35.

Constantinople's public ritual successfully "harmonized" the competing ideologies of the capital into a coherent whole.[28]

Major natural disasters have a way of provoking conflict and debate about societies' deepest concerns and identities. Hurricane Katrina, for example, the massive storm that struck New Orleans, Louisiana, in 2005 that resulted in the death and displacement of thousands of residents, prompted a nationwide debate about America's identity and history, especially in relation to its racial and ethnic minorities who comprised the majority of those most adversely affected by the hurricane.[29] In early Byzantine Constantinople, the ideological tensions between Christianity and Romanity frequently bubbled to the surface of social life but in no more dramatic fashion than in earthquakes.[30] As an apocalyptic attitude was increasingly taking hold among the population from the beginning in the sixth century, earthquakes and other catastrophes fueled speculation about the end of the world and the fall of the Roman Empire.[31] There was much agreement among the populace that Constantinopolitan earthquakes were extraordinarily meaningful events and that they communicated an important message about the role and fate of the city and the Roman Empire in the grand scheme of history.[32] Yet there was serious

[28] Apart from earthquakes, recent scholarship has shown that Baldovin's characterization is misleading, especially in the first millennium, when such attempts to harmonize Christianity and Greco-Roman culture into a "holy civilization" were hotly contested. Kaldellis, for example, has argued that Christianity and Greco-Roman ideology were never fully integrated into the Byzantine Empire. See *Byzantine Republic*, 6–9; 118–64.

[29] R. Eyerman, *Is This America? Katrina as Cultural Trauma* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015); on disasters and cultural trauma, see also A. Hashimoto, "The Cultural Trauma of a Fallen Nation: Japan, 1945," in R. Eyerman, J. C. Alexander, and E. Butler Breese (eds.), *Narrating Trauma: On the Impact of Collective Suffering* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 27–52. The ritual dynamics of disaster and social conflict are explored in P. Post, A. Nugteren, P. Petterson and H. J. Zondag, *Disaster Ritual: Explorations of an Emerging Ritual Repertoire* (Leuven: Peeters, 2003), 118–20. See now M. Hoondert, P. Post, M. Klomp, and M. Barnard (eds.), *Handbook of Disaster Ritual: Multidisciplinary Perspectives, Cases and Themes* (Leuven: Peeters, 2021).

[30] Earthquakes both signaled and produced cosmic, ideological, and political disharmony. For example, as Gilbert Dagron has noted, they gave rise to heated, sometimes violent, debates between pagan diviners, who explained these catastrophes via astrology, and Christian clergy and holy men, who explained earthquakes by citing the Bible, particularly the Old Testament. See G. Dagron, "Quand la terre tremble . . . " *Travaux et mémoires*, 8 (1981): 87–103.

[31] See S. J. Shoemaker, *The Apocalypse of Empire: Imperial Eschatology in Late Antiquity and Early Islam* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018); P. Magdalino, "The End of Time in Byzantium," in W. Brandes and F. Schmeider (eds.), *Endzeiten: Eschatologie in den monotheistischen Weltreligionen* (Berlin: De Gruyter: 2008), 119–31; M. Meier, "Perceptions and Interpretations of Natural Disasters during the Transition from the East Roman to the Byzantine Empire," *The Medieval History Journal*, 4 (2001), 179–202; P. Magdalino, "The History of the Future and its Uses: Prophecy, Policy and Propaganda," in R. Beaton and C. Roueché (eds.), *The Making of Byzantine History: Studies Dedicated to Donald M. Nicol on His Seventieth Birthday* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1993), 3–34.

[32] On world history as a historiographical category in antiquity, see P. Liddel and A. Fear (eds.), *Historiae Mundi: Studies in Universal History* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010).

disagreement about what that message was. For the church, especially in the early centuries of Constantinople, local earthquakes primarily signified divine judgment. Here, New Rome was not glorious; it was guilty. As New Israel, the city's collective sin had potentially disastrous ramifications for the success of God's coming Kingdom in their midst, a destiny they trusted was their own.[33] The attribution of sinfulness was magnified when earthquakes entered the liturgical calendar, which was the record and representation of sacred history, in participatory, repetitive form.[34] The commemorations placed Constantinople at the center of the story of God's providential action in history, the divine *oikonomia*.[35] Just as the city of Constantinople was beginning to understand itself as the center of the *oikoumene* in political terms, the church declared that it was the center of the *kosmos* in theological terms. Earthquake commemorations fit into this schema but in a condemnatory fashion, singling out the people for their sins rather than their triumphs.

However, one of earthquakes' often felicitous aspects is that they (eventually) come to a definitive halt. For this reason, the central meaning of a given earthquake could be located not in the fact that it *happened* but that it *stopped*—especially if the quake itself took few or no human lives. The inherently polysemantic nature of earthquakes afforded limitless possibilities for interpretation. While the church's early Byzantine liturgical commemoration of local earthquakes emphasized their violence and cast a dark shadow over imperial ambitions and values, the East Roman imperial court could focus on their cessation. Indeed, throughout the history of earthquakes in Constantinople, the imperial court at times seized upon the possibility of framing earthquakes (or, more precisely, their cessation) not as manifestations of divine wrath but of divine *blessing*. Divine blessing on Constantinople was a much easier thing to prove in the case of military victories, but because of earthquakes' multivocality, they too were sometimes able to be corralled into grand historical narratives of the city's, and the empire's, special election by God to incarnate his Kingdom on earth. Even the church, in later centuries, sometimes contradicted its own liturgical narrative of sin, wrath, repentance, and redemption by separating earthquakes from human sinfulness. In this way, these two poles of

[33] See Shoemaker, *Apocalypse of Empire*, 42.
[34] For more on commemorative rituals, see Chapter 1.
[35] For theories of divine providence in late antiquity and Byzantium, see K. Parry, "Fate, Free Choice, and Divine Providence from the Neoplatonists to John of Damascus," in A. Kaldellis and N. Siniossoglou (eds.), *The Cambridge Intellectual History of Byzantium* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 341–60; G. L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought* (London: SPCK, 1964), 57–68. For its implications in Constantinople, see S. MacCormack, "Christ and Empire, Time and Ceremonial in Sixth Century Byzantium and Beyond," *Byzantion*, 52 (1982), 287–309.