THE ARCHANGEL MICHAEL BEYOND ORTHODOXIES

History, Politics and Popular Culture

Edited by Alexandros Tsakos & Marie von der Lippe

BLOOMSBURY

The Archangel Michael
Beyond Orthodoxies

The Archangel Michael Beyond Orthodoxies

History, Politics and Popular Culture

Edited by
Alexandros Tsakos and Marie von der Lippe

BLOOMSBURY ACADEMIC
LONDON • NEW YORK • OXFORD • NEW DELHI • SYDNEY

BLOOMSBURY ACADEMIC
Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 50 Bedford Square, London, WC1B 3DP, UK
Bloomsbury Publishing Inc, 1385 Broadway, New York, NY 10018, USA
Bloomsbury Publishing Ireland, 29 Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin 2, D02 AY28, Ireland

BLOOMSBURY, BLOOMSBURY ACADEMIC and the Diana logo are trademarks of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

First published in Great Britain 2025

Cover design: Elena Durey
Cover image © *Liturgischer Apostolos*, 2022 (Cod. Slav. 6, fol, 172r)
© Austrian National Library

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

ISBN: HB: 978-1-3503-0269-3
ePDF: 978-1-3503-0268-6
eBook: 978-1-3503-0270-9

Typeset by Deanta Global Publishing Services, Chennai, India

For product safety related questions contact productsafety@bloomsbury.com.

To find out more about our authors and books visit www.bloomsbury.com and sign up for our newsletters.

Contents

Figures

Contributors

George D. Chryssides is an honorary research fellow at York St John University (UK) and formerly head of Religious Studies at the University of Wolverhampton. His principal research interest is in Jehovah's Witnesses, on which he has written extensively. His most recent publications include *Fieldwork in New Religious Movements* (2023) and *Jehovah's Witnesses: A New Introduction* (2022). He was president of the International Society for the Study of New Religions from 2019 until 2022.

Roland Clark is Professor in Modern European History at the University of Liverpool (UK). His research focuses on fascist movements, antisemitism, religion, theology and the Holocaust in East-Central Europe, especially in Romania. He has written *Holy Legionary Youth: Fascist Activism in Interwar Romania* (2015), *Sectarianism and Renewal in 1920s Romania: The Limits of Orthodoxy and Nation-Building* (2021) and edited *European Fascist Movements: A Sourcebook* (2022) as well as numerous journal articles and book chapters. He hosts the *New Books Network* podcast and publishes in *Fair Observer*, *Open Democracy* and *Rantt Media*.

Cecilie Endresen (PhD) is Associate Professor in the Study of Religion at the Faculty of Humanities, University of Oslo (Norway). Her research encompasses Christianity, Islam and new religious movements in relation to nationalism, globalization and pluralism, most notably in the book *Is the Albanian's Religion Really 'Albanianism'? Religion and Nation According to Muslim and Christian Leaders in Albania* (2012). She has also explored topics such as myth and conspiracy theories in emergent and hybrid religiosities in the Balkans and beyond. In her current research, Endresen studies questions of religious and political authority and intra-Christian complexities in the Philippines.

Camilla Stabel Jørgensen is Professor of Religious and Philosophical Education at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology. Her research interests are student and teacher students' writing in religious education, excursion

didactics for religious education and democracy learning. She has published several chapters and articles, including 'Lived Religion in the Graveyard: Critical Disciplinary Literacy in Tasks for Pupils on Religious Education Excursions' (2023) (with Lars Unstad) and 'Ethical Excursions and Philosophical Dialogues in Teacher Education. A Waste of Time or a Wise Way to Necessary Knowledge?' (2018). She has also published on monthly and annual festivals in Steiner schools (2019) (with Anne-Mette Stabel).

James A. Kapaló is Senior Lecturer in the Study of Religions at the University College Cork (Ireland). His research interests include material religion, archives and religion and state security in Central and Eastern Europe. From 2016 to 2021 he was principal investigator of the European Research Council project *Hidden Galleries* (project no. 677355). He is the author and editor of several books including *Hidden Galleries: Material Religion in the Secret Police Archives in Central and Eastern Europe* (with Tatiana Vagramenko, 2020) and *The Secret Police and the Religious Underground in Communist and Post-Communist Eastern Europe* (with Kinga Povedák, 2022).

Marie von der Lippe is Professor in the Study of Religion at the University of Bergen (Norway). Her research focuses on religion, youth, diversity and controversial issues, and she has worked extensively on issues concerning religious education in public schools. She has published several chapters and articles and is the editor of several journal issues and books, including *Fordommer i skolen: Gruppekontruksjoner, utenforskap og inkludering* (2021), *Religion and Dialogue in the City: Case Studies on Interreligious Encounter in Urban Community and Education* (2018) and *Religion i skolen: Didaktiske perspektiver på religions- og livssynsfaget* (2017).

Ovidiu Olar (PhD, École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris) is senior researcher at the 'N. Iorga' Institute of History of the Romanian Academy (Bucharest) and principal investigator in the ERC Starting Grant 'Orthodoxies and Politics' hosted by the Institute for Habsburg and Balkan Studies of the Austrian Academy of Sciences (Vienna). He has authored the book *La boutique de Théophile: Les relations du patriarche de Constantinople Kyrillos Loukaris (1570–1638) avec la Réforme* (2019). His research interests include the confessional 'Cold War' of the seventeenth century, the history of political ideas and Jazz in Communist Romania.

Emanuela Timotin is head of the Philology Department at the Institute of Linguistics of the Romanian Academy and chair of the Committee on Charms, Charmers and Charming (International Society for Folk Narrative Research). Between 2021 and 2023, she led the AKATHYMN project, carried out at New Europe College, Institute of Advanced Studies, Bucharest. Her research areas are Romanian philology, charms and apocrypha. Her most recent book (co-authored with Michael E. Stone) is *The Cheirograph of Adam in Armenian and Romanian Traditions: New Texts and Images* (Turnhout, 2023).

Alexandros Tsakos (PhD), is Academic Director of Manuscripts and Rare Books Collection at the University of Bergen Library (Norway). His main research field is the writing cultures of Christian Nubia, as well as Christianity in the Nile Valley more generally, with a focus on the cult of the Archangel Michael. He has published several studies on the cult of the Archangel Michael in Christian Nubia and has co-edited the volume 'The Archangel Michael in Africa: History, Cult and Persona'. Since he assumed his current position, his research on the Archangel Michael encompasses European Christianity and other Abrahamic religions.

Acknowledgements

This book is the outcome of a three-year collaboration between researchers from different disciplines who share a common interest in Michael the Archangel. This collaborative work has yielded eight original case studies that explore Michael beyond established religious institutions. Inspired by Jonathan Z. Smith's spatial model for mapping religion and Ingvild S. Gilhus's development of a fourth category, we searched for Michael 'here', 'there', 'anywhere' and 'everywhere'. At one point, one of the authors even felt that Michael was stalking her, as he seemed to appear everywhere she travelled.

Michael's appearances have indeed been manifold through history, and this book can claim to be only an eclectic selection of studies investigating such appearances. On the front cover, a manuscript illumination depicting the archangel Michael as 'captain of the heavenly host' (ÖNB/Wien Cod. Slav. 6: 172r) makes the archangel appear in an easily recognizable iconographic type, whose details nevertheless deviate from several norms and traditions, thereby serving as an excellent example of the character of this volume. We wish to thank Ovidiu Olar for obtaining permission to use this image (courtesy of the Austrian National Library, Vienna).[1]

Of course, thanks go to all authors for their solid academic contributions and excellent collaboration despite the frequently demanding conditions for a project carried out throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. Most of the collaboration took place via Zoom and email exchanges, although some contributors also had the chance to meet at conferences. In addition, thanks to funding from the Department of Archaeology, History, Cultural Studies, and Religion (AHKR) of the University of Bergen (UiB), we were able to organize a two-day hybrid workshop in Bergen on Michaelmas in September 2022. This workshop proved to be a milestone in the project and was crucial to the book's outcome.

The UiB is the academic base of both of this volume's editors, and this coexistence certainly facilitated the editorial process. UiB, AHKR and the research group 'The Ancient World' at AHKR also funded editing and open access, for which we are grateful. We also extend our thanks to the contributors' institutions for funding open access for their respective chapters.[2]

Finally, we would like to express our gratitude to those who edited individual chapters, especially Dimitri Kakos for editing five chapters and greatly contributing to ensuring consistency throughout the volume.

In many ways, this volume serves as a continuation of the earlier collective work *The Archangel Michael in Africa: History, Cult and Persona* (2019), also edited by UiB scholars. We hope that this is not the end of the line.

Alexandros Tsakos and Marie von der Lippe,
Bergen, 12 December 2024

Notes

1 Extracts from the following sources are not covered by the book's Creative Commons licence. All rights in this material are reserved. For permission to reuse, please contact the copyright holder.

Alexandru Culeac (1924); Antonova (1966); Benson (1846); Art Museum, Râmnicu Vâlcea; Biliuță (2020); Biliuță (2013); Caldwell (2017); Codreanu (1927); Codreanu (1934); Codreanu (1999); Costică Fircă (n. d.); Dirven (1999); Dumitru I. Roitcu (n. d.); Edwards (1738); Elliot (1884); Evghenia (2013); Gorovei (1931); Hampton (n. d.); Hampton (2018); Hengstenberg (1851); Henry (1712); Hulubaș (2012); Iordachi (2023); Ivan Shvedov (1959); James A. Kapaló (2023); Johnson (2021); Karpunina and Sibiriakov (1959); Likhachov (1972); Lange (1869); Lenz (1981); Luther (1545); Melanchthon (1543); Milligan (1889); Morris (2017); National Christian Union (1922); Newton (1710); Pamfile (1999); Radu Gyr and Ion Mânzatu (1940); Romanian Academy Library in Bucharest; Rutherford (1937); Rydelnik (2014); Skaare (2003); Timotin (2015); University of Bergen; Watch Tower (1987); Watts (1795); Wegge (1998).

2 This work is published open access with funding from University of Bergen, University of Oslo, University College Cork, University of Liverpool, the Austrian Academy of Sciences and the New Europe College. Institute for Advance Study in Bucharest.

Introduction

The archangel Michael beyond orthodoxies

Marie von der Lippe and Alexandros Tsakos

Intermediate beings are the necessary in-betweens in the communicative dimension of religions. They are placed by believers between their world and the world of their gods to make this communication possible. In Christianity, this role is fulfilled by creatures called angels, from the Greek word for 'messenger' (*angelos*). Angels have been venerated since the earliest times of Christianity across traditions and denominations, as well as in Judaism and Islam. There is a multitude of such angels in Christian metaphysics, and their hierarchy in its simplest form sets archangels above angels. Archangels vary in number between the various traditions, but there is only one who ever assumes the role of leader of the angelic host: the archangel Michael. Perhaps this role explains why Michael is the only intermediate being in the Christian pantheon who has received a special liturgical day in the calendar of Christian churches called Michaelmas. He is also the only angel who has been sanctified and has hence been called Saint Michael.

Michael's special position can perhaps explain why so many studies have been dedicated to his cult and persona. This book is positioned in the long line of this scholarly tradition. However, it does not aim to describe the cult of the archangel Michael across the Abrahamic religions (Agamben and Coccia 2009) or in a specific region or period (Arnold 2013), nor does it focus on a specific means of artistic representation of the archangel's nature (Peers 2001; Lauritzen 2021). Rather, it attempts to unravel some of the numerous unexpected roles that the archangel Michael has assumed in the course of his cult history: from alternative Michaelmas celebrations to his use as a symbol of fascist movements; from his role in charms and Letters from Heaven to his function as a healer and saviour; and from his role as messenger of the Apocalypse to his fusion with one person of the Holy Trinity. It is perhaps these roles that render the archangel

Michael one of the most popular and venerated figures in Christianity – and not only.

Finally, it is a paradox of the studies presented in this book that they allow the focal point – that is, the archangel Michael – to somehow withdraw into the backdrop of the narrated histories. The focal point becomes human activities in the context of which the archangel is invoked. Thanks to his popularity, some of the roles given to Michael go far beyond what is expected from him based on the ways in which he is mentioned in the Bible and offer humans important benefits: by invoking the archangel, humans can receive a message, find assistance in all sorts of battles – even those against evil forces – regain their health and attain salvation. Most often, these invocations take place outside the framework of church, dogma, orthodoxy and orthopraxis. The study of the cult and persona of the archangel Michael outside the boundaries of conventional religious traditions presented in this book provides insights into human behaviour, social structures and religious expectations that may otherwise remain unseen.

The one who is like God

Michael, whose name means 'who is like God', has the highest status among angels in the Jewish, Christian and Islamic traditions. The etymology seems to imply that his nature is like God's nature; he is not God, but he is *like* God. His name assigns him a special position among intermediate beings. He is also known by many titles: 'chief of the archangels', 'prince of the presence', 'ruler of the fourth heaven', 'commander of the heavenly host' and, not least, 'conqueror of Satan' (Oliver and Lewis 2008: 248). He is first mentioned by the name Michael in *1 En.* 1.36, dating from the third century BCE, and reappears a century later in Dan. 10.13, 10.21 and 12.1. The authors of these texts do not introduce the archangel in any special way, which suggests that his representations as chief of the angels and protector of Israel were already well-known. His name is mentioned again in Rev. 12.7-12, where we are told that war broke out in heaven, and 'Michael and his angels battled against the dragon'.

In the few instances in which Michael's name appears in biblical texts, his primary mission is to fight Satan and his evil forces, and unsurprisingly, he emerges victorious, taking the lead among the angels. Moreover, when the first-born angel refuses to obey God and is expelled from heaven, he is replaced by the archangel 'who is like God'. Michael is perceived as the protector of and mediator for humans and God's most formidable warrior – the *archistrategos*

(commander-in-chief) of the angelic army. This role is explicitly mentioned in Rev. 12.7-12 and can be thought to inspire the perception of Michael as a symbol of warriors who wage just wars on earth.

In the Epistle of Jude and the book of Daniel, the battle against the devil is set in specific circumstances. In Jude 1.9, Michael grapples with the devil over the fate of the body of Moses, thus assuming the role of psychopomp (conductor of the souls of the pious to heaven). Here, he can easily be identified with other pre-Christian deities who had similar functions in their respective pantheons, like the Egyptian god Thoth and the Greek god Hermes. Michael's many faces in Christianity clearly reflect influences from other traditions, and his role as psychopomp is reminiscent of popular religious beliefs in regions of the Near East and the Mediterranean (Innemée 2019: 35).

In the syncretistic context of Hellenistic and Roman religions, gods like Thoth could be melded with gods like Hermes, creating new superhuman entities (such as Hermes Trismegistus) that appealed to the cultural contexts in which believers postulated their existence, their roles and the places of their apparitions. These syncretistic processes may account for other roles that Michael assumed in the centuries that followed his incorporation into the Christian pantheon, such as protector of merchants and trade, following in the footsteps of Hermes, or promoter of knowledge through script in an imitation of Thoth's properties.

In the rabbinic tradition, Michael took on roles that Christians later used in the descriptions of their Messiah, such as the Son of God, the Son of Man and the theanthropos. The book of Daniel (10–12) also played a crucial role in these amalgamations through its descriptions of Michael, especially that of the great prince who will arise at the End of Days. The theological debate on whether Michael is a prefiguration of Jesus Christ later came to play an important role in various Protestant movements, among Jehovah's Witnesses and in Anthroposophy. In other traditions, Michael may also be identified with the Holy Spirit.

In addition to his apocalyptic role, Michael assumes the role of saviour. In this capacity, he is present not only at the end of time but in every perilous moment of humans' uncertain, mortal life. In the book of Daniel, an unnamed angel delivers salvation to the Three Youths in the Fiery Furnace. Later on, this intervention was attributed to the archangel Michael. Such attributions are examples of how popular imagination went hand in hand with theological speculations that placed Michael in these narratives, as if recognizing his popularity and the reverence due to his person, even in episodes in which he was not originally named. His presence adds value to these episodes and expands his realm,

giving his personality new characteristics: he becomes a protector and helper and is incomparably more effective in these roles than any other angel. Notably, Pope Pius XII officially named Michael the patron saint of the police due to his traditional role as protector and defender (Oliver and Lewis 2008: 250).

Michael as an intermediate being

The archangel Michael shares the roles of messenger and mediator with other angels. He is also perceived as a helper and healer, extending his blessings beyond the pious individual to the pious community. Not only does he protect the frontiers of states, he is also of almost Promethean importance to humans, as he supports the battle of the civilized world against wilderness. He assumes the responsibility of drying swamps and lakes, changing river courses and guaranteeing good inundations for farmers, depending on what is needed in a given natural landscape. Michael is here, there, anywhere and everywhere (Smith 2003; Gilhus 2013).

An angel can be defined as an 'intermediary being' who bridges the gap between humans and the divine. As a general category, intermediate beings are often portrayed as servants, messengers and agents of gods and appear in several religious traditions as devas, *gandharva*s (celestial beings in Dharmic religions), djinns, demigods, demons, aliens, spirits and fairies. The specific concept of angels originates from Zoroastrianism and is mostly present in the religious narratives of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The Greek term *angelos* has its semantic origins in the Hebrew word *mal'ak*, and the Arabic term for 'angel', *mala'ika*, also means 'messenger'. In the Jewish, Christian and Islamic traditions, God's interaction with humans occurs exclusively through messengers, and angels play crucial roles in all three religions.

The notion of divine messengers sent by God on various missions to protect or destroy can be found in several biblical stories. Christians inherited their angels from Judaism, and in the New Testament, angels came to play a key role in critical events, such as the Annunciation and the birth and death of Jesus (Gilhus 2017: 181). In antiquity, angels could reveal themselves to humans, communicate with them, guide them and sometimes even act as their trusted companions. According to Muehlberger, angels mattered to Christians of the time because they were 'real' in the sense that they were 'culturally operational' (2013: 19): they could make things happen. These figures sometimes inspired humans to try to emulate angelic qualities, but they could also act as judges when someone committed a sin (Gilhus 2017).

When we think of angels today, we often imagine them with large wings. The long prehistory of depictions of winged intermediate beings may explain the dominance of this iconographic tradition. However, in the Hebrew Bible, angels do not have wings. According to Gilhus (2019: 12), the concept of 'angel wings' emerged during Roman times, probably influenced by Greek religious ideas and mythological figures, such as Nike and Eros. The attribution of wings to angels transformed them into hybrid beings with both humanlike and superhuman qualities. Another characteristic of angels is the light that often surrounds them, which is expressed through halos, shiny costumes and depictions of luminous fiery creatures (Gilhus 2019: 12–13). These characteristics are also present in the frequent depictions of Michael with large, majestic wings that symbolize his divine character. As a warrior angel, he is also frequently portrayed in armour and holding a sword, and one of the most common painted or sculpted representations shows him standing triumphantly over a defeated dragon, symbolizing the victory of good over evil. In some traditions, Michael is also portrayed as a judge with a scale in his hand, weighing souls to decide their fate in the afterlife. The traditional role of angels as judges has diminished in favour of their roles as benevolent helpers, companions, healers and therapists (Gilhus 2017). This is also the case with Michael, and the various case studies in this volume illustrate how cultural and societal transformations have influenced the ways in which he has been perceived and portrayed throughout history.

Beyond Christian orthodoxies

In this book, we explore perceptions of Michael outside mainstream Christian traditions. As the book's title indicates, our aim is to investigate how the archangel has been meaningful to individuals and groups practising religion outside 'orthodoxies', in the term's etymological meaning as 'correct beliefs'. In early Christianity, it was the prerogative of ecumenical synods to define 'orthodoxy' in opposition to 'heresies' – that is, beliefs and practices that deviate from the official creed. Interestingly, the major divide between Orthodox and Catholic Christianity did not prevent either from using the respective terms. Orthodox Christianity claims to be 'catholic', meaning universal, and Catholic Christianity claims that its beliefs are 'orthodox' – that is, correct. This underlines the relativity of the term 'orthodoxy', which is further highlighted by the Armenian, Coptic, Ethiopic, Greek, Romanian, Russian, Serbian and other churches' claims to orthodoxy. Of course, there are variations in beliefs and practices between

these orthodoxies, such as the use of different calendars, the veneration of icons or relics and the roles accorded to saints and angels. Such variations are often due to substrata of ancient cults surviving primarily in so-called folk beliefs and magical rituals. Other times, they appear in apocalyptic literature aimed at serving the political aspirations of the leaders of various movements. The archangel Michael has often occupied a central position in this literature. In more recent times, technological means, such as photography and the internet, have been used to achieve the goals of groups with such aspirations. Finally, the appearance of new gospels, holy writs, ritually powerful formulae and religious laws may lead to the creation of new religions, 'heresies', or popular cults. All these tendencies are represented in the various case studies included in this volume. Their commonality lies in the fact that they pivot around the persona and cult of the archangel Michael.

It is not difficult to apprehend the danger to 'orthodoxy' posed by the cult of an angel whose Hebrew name means 'who is like God'. Already in the New Testament, Paul (Col. 2.18) and the author of the book of Revelation (22.8-9) warned against the cult of angels. The fear of such practices was based not only on the diffusion of ancient cults through the veneration of Christian intermediary beings but also on the lack of dogmatic formulations concerning the relationship between God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son (see Arnold 2013: 55–62). Christ was often subordinated to God the Father and confused with angelic beings – especially with Michael because he had been the archon of the subordinate beings since his victory over the first-created angel. The formulation of the Trinitarian doctrine resolved the early uncertainties surrounding the distinction between the Son, who was begotten of the Father, and Michael. However, the begotten Son could perhaps be thought of as not existing with, in or as God from the beginning. This potential doubt was resolved by the idea of the Son's consubstantiality with God, which made him essentially different from Michael, who was simply the chief of the angelic host. By placing Jesus in equality with the Father, Michael's role was subordinated to the Trinity.

To achieve this equilibrium, the Church had to integrate the thaumaturgical powers assigned to Michael through episcopal blessing and imperial patronage. The former guaranteed his role in the Church edifice; the latter legitimated his cult in localities where ritual power and efficiency – primarily in the form of healing – were linked to the archangel's appearance or constant presence by building churches to venerate him (a church dedicated to Michael was often called Michaelion). The archangel's popularity did not diminish but was subordinated to the 'orthodoxy' of a given time and locality – but only temporarily. Michael's

thaumaturgic nature often liberated his power from the auspices of church and state, creating the necessary space for him to thrive beyond orthodoxy.

Outline of the book

This book consists of eight case studies, each exploring how the archangel Michael is interwoven with various beliefs and practices. Using a variety of sources and methods, they illuminate Michael's many faces and the ways in which they play out in different social, cultural and political contexts.

In Chapter 1, James Kapaló examines how a Moldovan peasant boy, Alexandru Culeac, after several visions of the archangel, declared himself the 'Holy Spirit of the Archangel Michael' and established a new religious movement known as Archangelism. Kapaló explores how Culeac distributed photographs ('icons') depicting him as the archangel to consolidate his status as a mediator between the earthly and heavenly realms and how he used his political persecution as proof of his archangelic identity.

In Chapter 2, Roland Clark examines the fascist Legion of the Archangel Michael in 1920s Romania. He describes how its members used the archangel to present the movement in more-than-human terms, to distinguish themselves from other antisemitic politicians, to cast their enemies as evil and to offer hope during periods of persecution by the Romanian state.

In Chapter 3, Ovidiu Olar explores the iconographic development of the archangel Michael in early modern South-Eastern Europe based on a Church Slavonic manuscript produced in the scriptorium of the Moldavian monastery of Dragomirna in 1610. He links these changes to the expectation of Judgement Day, emphasizing the dynamic interplay between text and images in shaping the narratives about the 'captain of the heavenly host'.

In Chapter 4, Emanuela Timotin discusses the role of the archangel Michael in Romanian amulets and uncovers narratives not found in canonical texts. She examines the archangel's multifaceted presence at the individual, family and community levels, emphasizing the role of clergy and laity in the transmission of these narratives and their transformation into texts of ritual power. When written down, these texts would turn the objects that contained them into charms imbued with magical effectiveness.

In Chapter 5, Alexandros Tsakos traces the tradition of Letters from Heaven revealed by the archangel Michael, focusing on the post-Reformation Norwegian version known as *Himmelbrev*. He examines this tradition using a

small but representative collection of nineteenth-century *Himmelbrev* kept at the Special Collections of the University of Bergen Library. These Letters from Heaven illustrate the veneration of Michael in networks of Christian groups, in which his role was deemed necessary for the good conduct and, hence, salvation of their members.

In Chapter 6, George D. Chryssides discusses Jehovah's Witnesses' controversial equation of the archangel Michael with Jesus Christ and traces its theological basis in the Protestant tradition, from which Jehovah's Witnesses distance themselves. He considers historical perspectives from Luther to contemporary doctrines and explores Michael's role in Watchtower theology and its implications for the movement's key Christian doctrines.

In Chapter 7, Camilla Stabel Jørgensen and Marie von der Lippe examine Michaelmas celebrations at Steiner schools in Scandinavian countries, tracing their development from the 1930s to 2022. Using a ritual theory approach, they describe these celebrations as hybrid products situated between theatre and play, between fun and seriousness and – not least – between religion and non-religion.

Finally, in Chapter 8, Cecilie Endresen examines the role of the archangel Michael in contemporary American angel spirituality, highlighting his transformation into a versatile figure who offers guidance, healing and protection. Against the backdrop of alternative religious developments in the United States since the early twentieth century, Endresen illustrates how Michael has become a commodity in the 'spiritual supermarket'.

As the diverse topics of the eight chapters suggest, this volume aims to bring together various examples of how Michael has been perceived in different historical, cultural and societal contexts; how communication with him has been established; how this communication has led to or has been initiated by God; and how he has occupied a major place in various belief systems, hierarchies, religious groups and political orders. The backdrop to these examples consists of European and American religious movements and groups over the past 500 years. By focusing on Michael outside institutionalized religion, the contributors to this volume attempt to uncover the archangel's presence in politics, popular religion, new religious movements and educational practices. In doing so, they unveil Michael's manifestations in myriad forms, including amulets, photos, heavenly letters, icons, YouTube channels and ritual-like performances. As Gilhus (2017: 181) remarks, 'Angels travel light and easily slip through the cultural net.' Michael is obviously no exception, and his remarkable ability to change and adapt makes his presence in diverse contexts worth exploring. A common denominator of all the case studies included in this volume is Michael's

conspicuous presence outside conventional religious institutions: not only does he travel light, but he also seems to thrive in the most unexpected and obscure places.

By following a religious figure like Michael in different historical, geographic and social contexts, this book offers new insights not only into the many attributes of the archangel but also into how religion is closely intertwined with other social, cultural and political phenomena across time and space.

References

Agamben, G. and E. Coccia, eds. (2009), *Angeli: Ebraismo, Cristianesimo, Islam*, Vicenza: Neri Pozza.

Arnold, C. (2013), *The Footprints of Michael the Archangel: The Formation and Diffusion of a Saintly Cult c. 300–c. 800*, New York: Palgrave-MacMillan.

Gilhus, I. S. (2013), '"All over the Place": The Contribution of New Age to a Spatial Model of Religion', in S. J. Sutcliffe and I. S. Gilhus (eds), *New Age Spirituality: Rethinking Religion*, 35–49, Bristol: Acumen.

Gilhus, I. S. (2017), 'Angels, Animals and Religious Change in Antiquity and Today', in C. Bochinger and J. Rüpke (eds), *Dynamics of Religion: Past and Present; Proceedings of the XXI World Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions,* 171–89, Berlin: De Gruyter.

Gilhus, I. S. (2019), 'On the Category of Angels', in I. S. Gilhus, A. Tsakos and M. C. Wright (eds), *The Archangel Michael in Africa: History, Cult and Persona*, 11–21, London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Innemée, K. (2019), 'The Archangel Michael as Psychopomp in Christian Iconography in Egypt', in I. S. Gilhus, A. Tsakos and M. C. Wright (eds), *The Archangel Michael in Africa: History, Cult and Persona*, 35–50, London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Lauritzen, D., ed. (2021), *Inventer les anges de l'Antiquité à Byzance: Conception, représentation, perception*, Travaux et mémoires, vol. 25, no. 2, Paris: Association des Amis du Centre d'Histoire et Civilisation de Byzance.

Muehlberger, E. (2013), *Angels in Late Ancient Christianity*, New York: Oxford University Press.

Oliver, E. D. and J. R. Lewis (2008), *Angels A to Z*, 2nd edn, Canton: Visible Ink Press.

Peers, G. (2001), *Subtle Bodies: Representing Angels in Byzantium*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

Smith, J. Z. (2003), 'Here, There, and Anywhere', in S. Noegel, J. Walker and B. Wheeler (eds), *Prayer, Magic, and the Stars in the Ancient and Late Antique World*, 21–36, University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.

1

‘The archangel Michael looked just like me’

The iconization of the archangel Michael in twentieth-century Moldova

James A. Kapaló

Introduction

> Do you want to know what the archangel Michael looks like? Certainly, he is a very burly old man, though not of biblically ancient age, but neither of young age, he is sixty. His fat, puffy face bristles with grey stubble. Lazy in his old age, the archangel has, apparently, changed his custom of visiting the hairdresser everyday. . . . In search of the place of residence of the holy messenger of Almighty God, do not rush to point a finger at the sky. His exact address is wholly knowable by following the conventional coordinates of this sinful earth: The Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic, Telenești district in the village of Vaduleca. (‘Karera arhangela Mihaila’ 1959: 3)[1]

This extract comes from an anti-sect propaganda article in a 1959 issue of the newspaper *Sovetskaya Kultura* mocking the leader of a so-called dangerous anti-Soviet sect called Archangelism that had emerged in the 1920s in the Romanian region of Bessarabia (today’s Republic of Moldova). The Soviet newspaper describes the all-too-human appearance of Alexandru Culeac, then in his sixties, who as a young man and the leader of the Archangelist movement had been iconized as and took on the persona of the archangel Michael (see Figure 1.1).

Alexandru Culeac was from an Orthodox family of rural peasant background in north-eastern Bessarabia. Following a series of visions in the 1920s he was recognized by his followers as the archangel Michael on earth. Together with his brothers, Grigore and Ion, he went on to establish a movement that came to be referred to as Archangelism by its detractors. Alexandru Culeac declared himself

Figure 1.1 Painted photo-icon of Alexandru Culeac as the archangel Michael (ANRM-TMC3A 738-1-6846). This image was distributed widely and features as the frontispiece of *A vision that appeared in 1920* (*O vedenie 1924*). Source: © National Archive of the Republic of Moldova.

to be the third person of the Trinity in the form of a new hypostatic union of the Holy Spirit and the archangel Michael or *Duhul Sfîntului Arhangelul Mihail* (the Spirit of Saint Michael the Archangel), as he expressed this in the published version of his vision text in Romanian (*O vedenie* 1924). Although Archangelists consider themselves to be true and devout Orthodox Christians, their belief that Alexandru Culeac was the archangel Michael himself constitutes one of the principal reasons that they have been viewed as heretical sectarians by the Orthodox Church in Moldova.

This chapter explores how, for a large following of enthusiastic Orthodox believers in interwar Bessarabia, Alexandru Culeac was able to establish his

identity as the archangel Michael. My analysis of this phenomenon is based on an examination of the relationship between the visual means by which this was achieved and the vernacular textual sources on which Alexandru Culeac based his understanding of the role of Michael in the eschatological drama of the End of Days. By inserting himself into eschatological narratives from local folklore and apocryphal legend, and by generating images of himself that functioned as icons of a living and breathing Michael, Alexandru Culeac collapsed the events surrounding his persecution at the hands of the Romanian authorities into the sacred narrative of the End of Days.[2]

In the first part of this chapter, I demonstrate that the particular image and persona of the archangel that Alexandru inhabited was shaped by the vernacular religious resources available to him. I argue that the widespread understanding of Michael's eschatological role from vernacular narrative, in turn, made it possible for him to appear *as* the archangel with the aid of photographic technology and creative graphic techniques. The popular legends and apocryphal narratives presented later in the chapter shaped Alexandru's visions and his subsequent iconization as his archangelic self. My aim therefore is to demonstrate why the movement came to be centred on particular ideas of the archangel Michael as a key actor in the drama at the End of Days and how a young man in rural Bessarabia could become an archangel and what kind of Michael figure Alexandru Culeac was destined to be.

The research for this chapter was both archival and ethnographic. The chapter draws on archival collections produced both in the interwar period in Romania and in Soviet-era Moldova by the state security services of these states, which were tasked with repressing and eliminating undesirable religious groups. Some of the images reproduced in this chapter were confiscated from Archangelist communities during the course of police and secret police operations and placed in these hostile archives (see Figures 1.1 and 1.4). They represent the unexpected, and somewhat paradoxical, result of the state's attempts to exercise full control over the religious sphere and today stand testimony to the creativity and tenacity of religious communities in the face of state-sponsored brutality and repression.[3] My archival research was preceded by ethnographic fieldwork among Archangelist communities. Having evolved as underground networks during both the interwar and wartime periods in Romania and under Soviet rule, Archangelist communities remain extremely wary of outsiders. Consequently, they have not pursued official recognition as a religious community in the post-Soviet era. There are no official statistics concerning them and no recognized public places of worship, and there are only occasional references to their existence in public

discourse. Nevertheless, members of the community very generously invited me into their homes to give their stories and explain their beliefs. They also permitted me to photograph some of their sacred texts and icons of their leaders, some of which also appear in this chapter (see Figures 1.3 and 1.5).[4]

Archangelist beliefs in relation to Michael the Archangel go far beyond the bounds permitted by mainstream Orthodox Christian thought. The reality for Archangelists of Michael's spiritual and bodily incarnation in the person of Alexandru Culeac has historically been ascribed to the backwardness and credulity of the Moldovan peasantry, the result of their marginalized and impoverished position in society. They were ridiculed by the Soviet state for the central object of their belief system (as the opening quote of this chapter illustrates) and reviled by Romanian theologians and nationalist politicians for the same reason. Very rarely in their 100-year history has their belief in the incarnation of the archangel Michael been taken seriously by scholars. Researching the beliefs of marginalized or minority groups, of course, does not imply any judgement in relation to religious truths but rather seeks to explore them as genuine, legitimate expressions of a world view that is worthy of the same levels of respect afforded to other old or new Christian traditions.

'The archangel Michael looked just like me'

Towards the end of his life, after several arrests and a period of time in the Soviet Gulag, Alexandru Culeac was forced to make a confession in an anti-sect propaganda publication, in which he credited the success of his movement partly to the production of an icon of himself:

> I decided then to make an icon with my image. I commissioned it from a painter who painted the *Day of Judgment* and the *Ascension of the Archangel Michael*, as well as my ascension to heaven. The icon was a success. And the archangel Michael looked just like me. I declared this icon holy. And it started here. People threw themselves down on their knees in front of the icon. They kissed it and prayed to it to heal them from illness. I don't know if the icon cured anyone but in exchange, we received a handsome income. They brought us cereals, money, carpets, and cattle. (Karpunina and Sibiriakov 1959: 28)

The icon 'that looked just like me' from this account was one of a number of images that circulated widely and are frequently included as evidence in Romanian and Soviet state security files from the 1920s to the 1950s.[5] This image and others

like it discussed later, as Alexandru himself indicates, hold at least part of the key to understanding how he was able to manifest as the archangel Michael. While the icons of Michael that Alexandru produced relied on established Orthodox Christian ideas about the relationship between representation and subject, between hagiography and icon and between saintly identity and holy presence, they used innovative creative photographic techniques.[6]

Processes of visualization and mediation are intrinsic to religions offering one of the powerful means by which they manifest and spread. The adoption of new media in modernity, however, dramatically increased the potential to radically reconfigure established religious ideas (see Meyer 2006: 431–2), including the relationship between the image and the real presence of the divine or the unseen in icons. The Orthodox tradition of icon paintings, while claiming an unchanging pedigree, has nevertheless evolved over the centuries to incorporate new pictorial formats, materials and visual techniques of communication. These changes in the way in which saints are depicted have had quite profound implications for the relationship between 'vision, representation and sanctity' (Chaterjee 2014: 1) in Orthodox Christian belief. Such innovations in terms of the media and visual language of icons have, in turn, prompted new reflections on the way in which icons act to unveil, legitimize and generate sanctity. The invention of photography in the nineteenth century, in particular, triggered a significant turning point in the 'representational economy' (see Keane 2002) of religions, offering communities new ways of imagining and imaging (Meyer 2006: 432) themselves and the cosmos. Photography brought to religious images the possibility of creating the ultimate likeness of the individual giving birth to new forms of devotional art representing living leaders, gurus and prophets (see e.g. Harris 2004) while also creating challenges for established traditions such as icon painting (see Hydal Christensen 2018).

The icons of Alexandru Culeac (discussed in more detail later in this chapter) pushed beyond the established boundaries of the use of icons in the establishment of a saintly identity (see Chaterjee 2014: 2). His self-iconizations created images of the archangel Michael that, through their photographic likeness to him, determined how he was perceived during his lifetime. The icons of Alexandru Culeac, however, did not operate in isolation; they worked 'across modes' (Hyldal Christensen 2018: 133) in ways similar to canonical icon traditions. Alexandru's published visions (discussed in more detail later in this chapter) worked similarly to the hagiographies of saints offering examples from his life that demonstrated his special identity as someone who suffered for his faith, an imitator of Christ in the classic saintly mode. The persona and deeds of

Alexandru Culeac, as portrayed in his vision text, were themselves shaped by a diverse range of vernacular narratives and apocryphal legends that featured the deeds of Michael. Alexandru, through the icons he produced, not only looked like Michael but also acted like the archangel Michael of popular legend.

Alexandru Culeac's *Visions and Deeds*

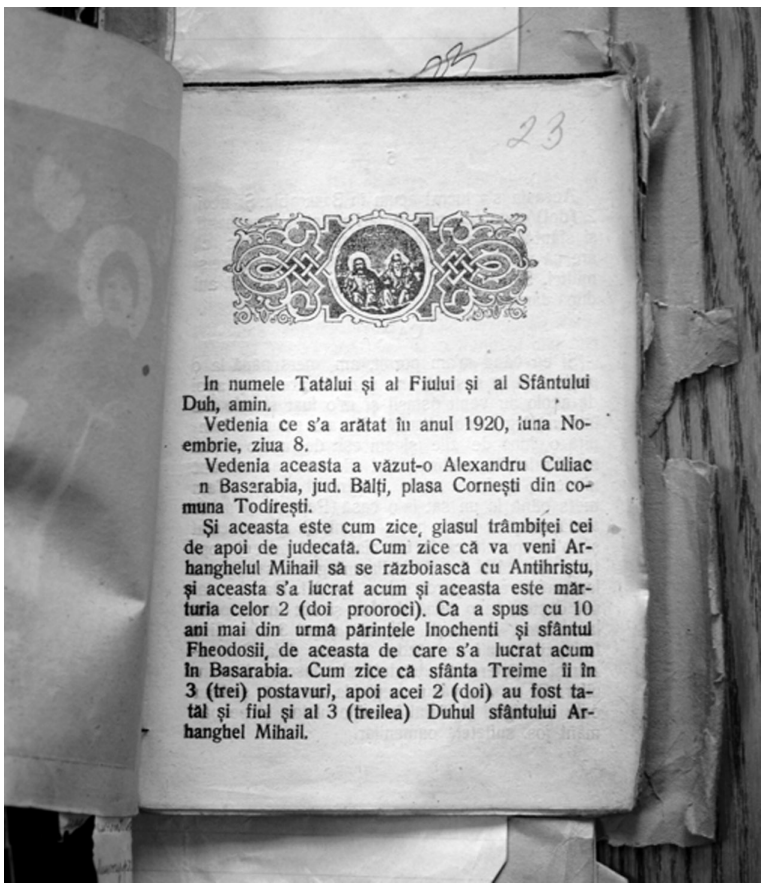
The Culeac brothers were born into a poor, Orthodox Christian, peasant family in northern Bessarabia. The region had been heavily influenced by the spiritual movement initiated by Inochentie of Balta (see Kapaló 2019a), which attracted large numbers of followers in the first two decades of the twentieth century.[7] In the religious and political turmoil of the end of the tsarist empire and the arrival of Romanian rule, the Culeac brothers were attracted by Inochentie's movement that preached repentance and abstinence and practised exorcism and mass baptism in preparation for the End of Days. Two of the brothers, Alexandru and Grigore, experienced visions in the early 1920s, which came to them while facing harassment at the hands of Romania's rural police force, the gendarmerie. The events that ensued established them as some of the most influential charismatic leaders of the broad-based spiritual movement that had been started by Inochentie of Balta some ten years earlier.

Alexandru Culeac, in particular, through his assumption of the persona of the archangel Michael, took the movement in markedly new directions. The choice of the archangel Michael as the figurehead for the movement, and for Alexandru Culeac's heavenly persona, can be traced to important ideas and narratives relating to Michael that feature prominently in Romanian folk legend and belief. Archangelism shared the figurehead of the archangel Michael with another contemporaneous – but very different – movement that also emerged in Romania's eastern provinces in the 1920s: the fascist youth movement, the Legion of the Archangel Michael (see Chapter 2). Although the Legion also drew heavily on peasant culture and Orthodox aesthetics, it espoused very different aims. Archangelism, unlike its fascist political contemporary, eschewed political engagement, preached pacifism and rejected altogether the Romanian national project. While remaining the archangel who battles Satan at the End of Days, the Michael of Archangelism pursued a spiritual rather than military mission, preaching fasting, penance and retreat from the world.

The Culeac brothers' networks, which became widespread throughout Bessarabia, were harshly dealt with by Romanian and Soviet authorities. The

brothers' violent treatment and imprisonment at the hands of the Romanian gendarmerie contributed to the expectation that the End of Days were at hand while also encouraging a vernacular belief in redemption through suffering, with the brothers consciously portraying themselves as Christ-like in their actions.

Alexandru's visionary career began in 1920 when he was probably twenty-nine years of age.[8] He first published his visions, which he later retitled as his 'Deeds', in a Romanian-language thirty-six-page chapbook-style booklet in 1924 under the title *O vedenie ce s'a arătat în anul 1920* (A vision that appeared in the year 1920; *O vedenie* 1924) (see Figure 1.2).[9] The booklet contains sixteen chapters, each recounting a visionary episode, followed at the end of the booklet by three hymns to the archangel Michael, presumably composed by Alexandru



23

În numele Tatălui şi al Fiului şi al Sfântului Duh, amin.

Vedenia ce s'a arătat în anul 1920, luna Noembrie, ziua 8.

Vedenia aceasta a văzut-o Alexandru Culiac n Basarabia, jud. Bălţi, plasa Cornești din comuna Todirești.

Şi aceasta este cum zice, glasul trâmbiței cei de apoi de judecată. Cum zice că va veni Arhanghelul Mihail să se războiască cu Antihristu, şi aceasta s'a lucrat acum şi aceasta este mărturia celor 2 (doi prooroci). Ca a spus cu 10 ani mai din urmă părintele Inochenti şi sfântul Fheodosii, de aceasta de care s'a lucrat acum în Basarabia. Cum zice că sfânta Treime îi în 3 (trei) postavuri, apoi acei 2 (doi) au fost tatăl şi fiul şi al 3 (treilea) Duhul sfântului Arhanghel Mihail.

Figure 1.2 The opening page of the 1924 edition of Alexandru Culeac's visions entitled *A vision that appeared in the year 1920* (*O vedenie 1924*) (ANRM-TMC3A 738-1-6849). Source: © National Archive of the Republic of Moldova.

or his close followers. A re-edited two-language Romanian and Russian version with the new title *Lucrările care s'au lucrat în anul 1920* (The deeds that were done in the year 1920; *Lucrările* n.d.), which included minor changes to the original text plus four additional chapters with new visions dated up to 1927, was published later but with no date given in the publication.

The opening passages of his text (*O vedenie* 1924: 5) reveal some of the key ideas that helped situate his life and deeds within a narrative frame of the End of Days. These lines indicate the signs of the arrival of the Eschaton, reference to the prophetic lineage that foretold them and state what Michael's role will be in the events that were unfolding in Bessarabia and his place in the heavenly order:

> This vision was seen by Alexandru Culiac in Bessarabia, in the county Bălți, in Cornești, in the village of Todirești. And this is how it is said, the trumpet of the Final Judgment. As he sayeth, the archangel Michael will come and will battle with the Antichrist, this he does now, and this is the testimony of the two (the two prophets). As it was foretold ten years ago by Father Inochentie and Saint Feodosie, which has now happened in Bessarabia. As he sayeth, the Holy Trinity has three material forms, then [in the past] there were two there was the Father and the Son and the third the Spirit of Saint Michael the Archangel. (*O vedenie* 1924: 5)

The archangel Michael of folk eschatology

The significance and power of this opening passage can only be understood in the light of the popular belief about the sequence of events at the end times and the role that Michael was foretold to play in relation to the two prophets, Inochentie and Feodosie, that are referred to here. Inochentie of Balta was widely believed by his followers to have been the prophet Elijah who, alongside Enoch, according to popular legend was one of the 'two witnesses', mentioned in the book of Revelation, also referred to as the 'two lamp stands' or 'two olive trees' (11.3-12). In the Eastern Orthodox tradition, this understanding was reinforced by their naming in one of the most popular apocryphal apocalypses, the Pseudo-Apocalypse of John the Theologian, as the prophets Elijah and Enoch.[10] Revelation foretells that the two witnesses will prophesy for 1,260 days before being killed by the Beast from the Abyss, and, after three days, rise up on a cloud to heaven. This episode is central to many folk legends about the End of Days in Romania and across Orthodox Eastern Europe and the Balkans (see Pamfile 1997; Jiga Iliescu 2023) and ends with the Antichrist killing the prophets

and causing Elijah's fiery blood to reign down on earth presaging the end of the world.

According to these same legends, it is during this time of struggle against the Antichrist, who has caused a great drought and famine and has attracted followers by offering them silver and gold or breadcrumbs soaked in water that fail to quench their thirst or hunger, that divine and heavenly persons, including Jesus Christ, the Mother of God, John the Baptist and – most significantly for this study – the archangels, will walk the earth, quenching the thirst and relieving the hunger of those they meet. Finally, the archangels will then sound their trumpets and the dead will rise from the grave to be judged according to their deeds (Hasdeu 2017; Pamfile 1997).

In the context of these legendary ideas about the End of Days, the Culeac brothers presented themselves in their vision texts taking on the attributes and performing the deeds of archangels. In doing so, they draw on elements from these oral legends as well as from a whole range of manuscript and chapbook texts that were in wide circulation in Bessarabia. Alexandru Culeac's understanding of Michael relied on the persona and role he plays in these apocryphal and folk texts, which were the result of dynamic exchange between oral and literary culture.

In the premodern era, the cult of the archangel Michael on the territory of what was the Principality of Moldavia was influenced by a range of sources. Alongside the New Testament appearances in Heb. 1.9 and Rev. 12.7-9 were those in the Jewish Apocrypha, the *book of Enoch* and Christian apocryphal literature. These sources establish Michael in his multiple roles, as military commander of the heavenly host, protector of the people, intercessor, psychopomp and healer, and shaped the image of the archangels that appears in Orthodox liturgical celebrations and their associated miracles stories (see Bedros 2011).[11] Often derived from the Slavonic and Romanian manuscript traditions of Orthodox monasteries, apocryphal tales were later adapted and published in chapbooks and came to constitute some of the most widespread, and powerful, narratives that shaped Bessarabian religious beliefs. As a consequence, vernacular ideas about the approaching End of Days tended to take far less from biblical texts such as the book of Revelation, which was not read in the Orthodox liturgical cycle, instead being suffused with characters and images from apocryphal sources.

Two of the most popular texts that occur in religious-themed chapbooks that feature Michael are worth mentioning here. The first is *Epistolia a Domnului nostru Isus Hristos ce a trimis-o Dumnezeu din cerul* [*sic*] (The Epistle of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was sent by God from heaven), also commonly referred to

as *Legenda Duminicii* (Legend of the Sundays). In one of the most commonly occurring variants of the tradition in Moldova, Michael appears in the form of his icon. This text, which belongs to the so-called heavenly letter tradition, tells how a stone fell from heaven, small in size but extremely heavy.[12] A patriarch of Church – in this version the Patriarch of Jerusalem – calls a meeting of the Church hierarchs to decide what to do with the stone and while they are praying for guidance a voice from heaven instructs them to break open the stone, inside which they find a letter from Christ. The letter vilifies all those who do not respect Sunday according to Christian teachings. Those who follow Christ's instructions will be rewarded; those who do not heed his words shall be punished.[13] The archangel Michael's role in the text appears minimal, consisting of the lines 'This book was shown in front of the elders on the Mount of Olives in front of the Icon of the Saint Archangel Michael'; significantly it reinforces the connection between Michael and the Mount of Olives, where Jesus is said to have been raised to heaven (Acts 1.9-12) and where Jesus also revealed details of the drama that will unfold at his Second Coming (Mk 13.1-37). In this sense, the Mount of Olives is not only a symbolic site of hope but also a location where the events of the Eschaton will unfold with Michael playing a key role in Christ's victory over Satan and in announcing the Final Judgement.

This heavenly letter is very commonly accompanied in copybooks by a so-called later-apocalypse originally dating from the eighth or ninth century (Schneemelcher 1992), 'Apocalypse of the Mother of God'.[14] The text recounts how Mary, the Mother of God, prays to her son requesting that he reveals to her the sufferings of hell and the afterlife. The archangel Michael then appears and takes her to the four corners of hell, showing her the torments of all those who suffer there. Distraught at the suffering she witnesses, Mary pleads to all the saints to intercede on behalf of Christians and in response, Jesus Christ appears and grants the days of Pentecost as a period of respite to those suffering the torments of hell.

Such texts featuring Michael were frequently copied multiple times by hand into copybooks and formed some of the most readily available religious texts in the local vernacular in rural Bessarabia (see Kapaló 2011; Kvilinkova 2012, 2017). The copybooks also contained a whole host of pseudo-canonical prayers, folk curses and charms that were used by local communities to ward off evil and treat illnesses. Like the apocryphal apocalypses, Michael is also often the main protagonist of such texts (see Chapter 4). In the early twentieth century, the Romanian folklorist Tudor Pamfile pointed to the power and significance of

copybooks with texts featuring Michael, noting that they would often include an image of the archangel Michael:

> Every household should have in their home a book of the grip [*o carte de strânsură*] with an image in which the archangel Michael is seen piercing Avestița or Satan's wing. The book is bought or someone in the village makes it. (Pamfile 1999: 171–3)

Here Pamfile refers to the widely studied charm tradition of the child-stealing demon, who often goes by the name of *Avestița* (see Gaster 1900; Pócs 2002; Kapaló 2011: 169–70, 221–3; Toporkov 2019; see also Chapter 4).[15] The narrative of the charm recounts how the archangel Michael, after descending from the Mount of Olives, encounters the demon and overpowers her and in so doing prevents the demon from stealing the newborn Jesus. Through this act Michael is responsible for safeguarding the salvation of the whole of mankind. The opening passage of the charm (taken from the manuscript shown in Figure 1.3) sets the scene for this encounter.

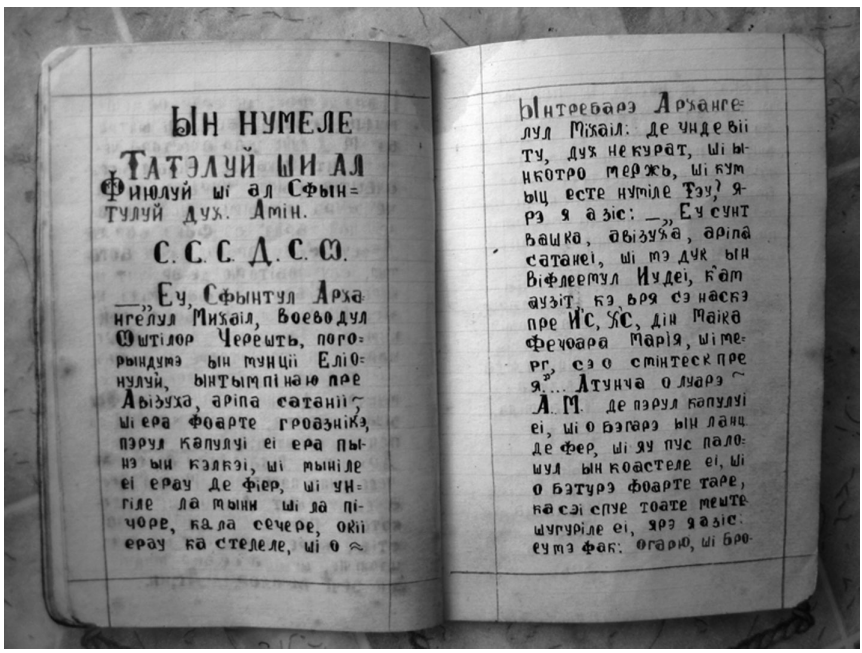


Figure 1.3 Manuscript charm that features the archangel Michael overpowering the child-stealing demon Avizuhii (village of Avdarma, southern Moldova). Source: © James A. Kapaló (private collection).

> In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.
>
> S. S. S. D. S. O[16]
>
> I, the archangel Michael, General of the heavenly host, descending from Mount of Olives came face to face with *Avizuha,* the Wing of Satan, and She was very ugly, the hair of her head came down to her heels, her hands were of iron, her fingernails and her toenails like a sickle, her eyes were like stars, and the archangel Michael asked: 'Where are you coming from you unclean spirit, and where are you going, and what is your name?' I'll say it again: 'I am vashka, Avezuha, the Wing of Satan, and I am going to Bethlehem of the Jews, because I heard that Jesus Christ would be born from the Virgin Mary, and I am going there to deceive her.' Then, the archangel Michael took her by the hair of her head, and stabbed her in the ribs with his sword, and beat her very hard in order that she tell him all her tricks.

In numerous copybooks, this charm is followed by an exorcism text that also invokes the name of the archangel Michael. *Afurisenile Arhangelului Mihail* (The curses of the archangel Michael) is a series of curses reviling Satan designed to banish him to a 'desolate, waterless place where people do not live'.

These diverse texts, often gathered together into copybooks such as the one shown in Figure 1.3, when viewed together outline the crucial role that the archangel Michael would play, according to vernacular belief, in battling the Antichrist and his minions, relieving the suffering of mankind, securing mankind's salvation and heralding the Final Judgement. The use of these diverse materials by the Moldovan peasantry – although often frowned upon by the clergy – did not represent a direct challenge to core aspects of Orthodox belief yet nevertheless offered the contours to a distinctive End of Days imaginary. In the context of the dramatic events that swept Bessarabia at the beginning of the twentieth century, the representations of Michael available in these vernacular texts formed a central element of Alexandru Culeac's visions. In the published version of his visionary experiences, he weaves numerous elements from these sources throughout the text, which takes many allusive twists and turns, from his descent into hell, where he witnesses the sufferings of sinners reminiscent of scenes from 'The Journey of the Mother of God into Hell', to an ascent to heaven and numerous battles with the Antichrist. In the course of one of these visionary battles, Alexandru encounters the demon *Avizuha*, 'and *Avizuha*, her with nineteen names, was shown passing over the bodies searching for souls. And there was a dragon wounded by an arrow and I saw a great battle in heaven' (*O vedenie* 1924: 17). Alexandru also opens the Great Hymn of the archangel

Michael, *Cântecul cel mare a* [*sic*] *lui Arhangelul Mihail*, which follows at the end of his vision, with the same legendary meeting in Bethlehem between Michael and *Avizuha* but whereas in the charm Michael prevents *Avizuha* from abducting Jesus, in the hymn the archangel casts the demon down and releases Adam's soul from hell:[17]

Merge Arhangelul Mihail	The archangel Michael goes
De la Răsărit cu crucea	From the east with the cross
Cu trâmbița fluerând	With the trumpet blowing
La nuntă în Galileia	To the wedding in Galilee . . .
În Viflia în Iudeea	In Bethlehem in Judea
Întâmpinatu pe Avizuha	He meets with Avizuha
Cu papucelul urnia	With his foot he moves [holds] her
Și cu săgeala îi trântea	And pierces her with a spear
Și paioșul i-l punea	And stabs her with his sword
Talpa iadului a sdrobit	The depths of Hell he destroyed
Și pe Adam a slobozit	And Adam was released.

Alexandru's vision text, full of widely recognizable episodes from and references to vernacular beliefs, did not stand alone; by 1924 when he first published his visions, Alexandru had already learned to harness the potential provided by creative visual techniques in order to help reveal and cement his true identity.[18]

From text to icon and back

On the frontispiece to Alexandru Culeac's *O vedenie ce s'a arătat în anul 1920* (1924), the archangel Michael is pictured with a flaming sword, a shield and a dove at his heart to indicate the identification of Holy Spirit with Michael (see Figure 1.1), but Michael's face is unmistakably Alexandru's. The significance of icons depicting Alexandru Culeac as the archangel Michael in the early years of the movement is clear from Romanian gendarmerie reports in the 1920s that frequently list such images and from the many Military Court penal files that contain reference to them and examples of them. In the case of this most widespread image, the icon achieves its power through its perceived likeness to both Michael and Alexandru Culeac by his followers. The image, which has some of the formal characteristics of an icon, appears to be based on a photograph of Alexandru Culeac that has been overpainted and reproduced photographically to create a hybrid photo-icon, which could then be mass-produced.

The term 'icon', which derives from the Greek *eikon*, meaning 'image', 'resemblance' or 'likeness', suggests that the very nature of an icon requires that it be a likeness to some person, usually a saint. The advent of photography in the nineteenth century carried the potential to usurp, or at least trouble, the established means of capturing a likeness in the icon painting tradition. The goal of an icon was to 'show the eternal, transfigured image of the saint' (Hyldal Christensen 2018: 140) rather than the worldly likeness encountered in everyday life. In the modern era, where a photograph of a saint exists, contemporary icon painters, such as those interviewed by Hyldal Christensen, expressed the fear that the photograph could 'interfere with the icon painters' perception of the "true" saintly image' they wished to capture (Hyldal Christensen 2018: 121). In the case of the photo-icons of Alexandru Culeac as Michael, we encounter the photograph *as* icon rather than as simply the source of a likeness to enable the production of an icon. Archangelist photo-icons possess the sensory and aesthetic quality of icons but they also work as an index in the Peircean semiotic sense (Hyldal Christensen 2018: 121; see also Peirce [1897] 1932). While taking on the aura of the iconic through their formal characteristics, their indexical relationship to Alexandru Culeac is reinforced through the physical relationship necessary for photographic acts. Alexandru Culeac was very much alive when he commissioned images of himself as Michael; he could stand before his iconized self as proof not only of his likeness to Michael but also his physical contiguity with him in the here and now.

The ontological complexity of the identity of saints – of which there is an array of types in the Christian tradition, including martyrs, virgins, children, bishops and emperors – is partly made possible by the visual mediation of icons. Saints connect the human and divine realms (Chaterjee 2014: 3), both simultaneously *representing* holiness or divine grace and *partaking* in it. Alexandru Culeac, through his adoption of the formal characteristics of canonical icons and the authenticity they convey, and the incorporation of photographic likeness with its unique stamp of the physical, could achieve his ontological transformation. Icons, however, do not work in isolation; they traditionally work across modes together with hagiography and hymns in the production of sainthood (Hyldal Christensen 2018: 133). As we have seen above, Alexandru Culeac's identity as Michael rested also upon his vision narrative of the End of Days into which his actual deeds could be inserted. The interplay of texts and icons of Alexandru as Michael were crucial in the establishment of the physical link between the person as image in the photo-icon and the unseen attributes of the archangel

as living icon. A short passage from his vision text illustrates how this could be achieved:

> And it was shown [in the vision] that they will take me out [of the cellar] and he came and the people of the village took me to the town hall and they tied me with my arms in a cross and gave me a wheel in one hand and in another crutches and said that this is the archangel Michael. (*O vedenie* 1924: 7)

Here, Alexandru Culeac's gendarme captors taunt him in a scene recalling Christ's treatment at the hands of the Roman soldiers who crowned him with thorns in mockery of his kingship (Mt. 27.29; Mk 15.17; Jn 19.2, 19.5). In Alexandru's vision, which may recall his actual treatment at the hands of the gendarmerie, in the place of the crown of thorns the Romanian gendarmes place a cartwheel and crutch in his hands. These items are in place of the shield and flaming sword that Michael holds in the photo-icon of the archangel that appears as the frontispiece of the *O vedenie* (see Figure 1.1). Mirroring the gospel narrative, which uses an inversion to affirm the opposite of what the soldiers intended – that is, that Christ really is King – Alexandru Culeac's unseen iconic attributes that help us identify the archangel Michael are revealed. In this way, Alexandru's vision text, his icon and the actual events from his life that he presents as real-time prophesy work across modes (see Hyldal Christensen 2018: 133–41) and across time. The icon and vision text create a powerful fusion of present reality with sacred time.

In the 1950s, when Archangelism became a central target of antireligious propaganda in the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic (MSSR),[19] media reports and anti-sect publications continued to draw attention to the significance of the production and distribution of religious images for the success of the Archangelist movement. In a 1959 issue of the newspaper *Moldovskaya Kultura* (Moldovan Culture), the author mocks the crudity of the images produced by Archangelists: 'The sectarians produced their icons in this way. On a picture torn from a church book is pasted a photograph of Alexander Culiac; thus, we obtain the "archangel Michael"' (Shvedov 1959: 3). In Figure 1.4, we see an example of Alexandru Culeac and his followers' use of such 'crude' collage and overpainting techniques. Here Alexandru is transformed into the archangel with the addition of wings and halo surrounded by cherubs. He is placed next to Inochentie of Balta (on his left) as a visual reminder of the prophecy and authority of Inochentie of Balta as the Elijah heralding his coming in popular legend and his brother Ion (on his right). Although to the contemporary eye, the techniques employed here

Figure 1.4 Photo-collage image of Alexandru Culeac as the archangel Michael (centre), Ion Culeac or Wise Father John (*Tătunea Ion*) and Inochentie of Balta (ANRM-ASISRM - 019520, vol. 1). Source: © National Archive of the Republic of Moldova.

may seem quite crude, we should not underestimate the power of this new visual economy for those encountering it at the time.

The images in Figures 1.1 and 1.4 belong to Alexandru Culeac's early career in the 1920s and were inspired by the vernacular textual tradition available to him that provided an image of the archangel in suitably combative mode equipped for battle at the End of Days (see Figure 1.1) and surrounded by some of the other key protagonists in the events leading to the Final Judgement (see Figure 1.4). Later images, however, show him in a different guise. Alexandru Culeac was arrested and imprisoned a number of times during his career. In the post-war Soviet context, he was arrested for the first time in 1945 when he was sentenced to five years' exile for anti-Soviet sectarian activity (ASISRM-KGB 022997, 2:209–10). He was deported to Kazakhstan; however, he managed to slip back secretly to MSSR but was arrested again on 27 September 1947 (ASISRM-KGB 022997, 1:7). This time he was convicted by the Supreme Court of the MSSR and sentenced to ten years' imprisonment, with expropriation of his property and disfranchisement (ASISRM-KGB 022997, 2: 209–10). He was finally released following Stalin's death as part of a general amnesty. The photo-icon of the archangel Michael in Figure 1.5 comes from this later period and shows him crowned as emperor, the text on the right of image even reads

Figure 1.5 Photo-icon of the archangel Michael crowned emperor. Source: © James A. Kapaló (private collection).

'Emperor A[rhangelul] Michael'. Distinctly different from the earlier image that portrayed Michael in a way recognizable as the commander of the heavenly host, this later image has Michael in full imperial regalia. During the early Soviet era, first Inochentists and later Archangelists were accused of being 'tsarists' intent on reinstating the tsar, his family and imperial rule.

Following the 1917 Revolution, the belief that the tsar had been deposed by the 'forces of evil' and had suffered martyrdom was held by large numbers of Orthodox believers. Inochentie of Balta had prophesied that the tsar would be raised up 'in this life or the next', and many followers of Inochentie, who also formed the core of the Alexandru Culeac's movement, continued to expect the return of the tsar. Walter Kolarz, citing a case from 1945–6, states that Inochentists were charged with preaching the restoration of the Romanov Dynasty, with one member of the sect 'posing as Czarevich Aleksei and another as Grand Duchess Anastasia. The two wore special 'imperial' garments and the

rank-and-file members of the sect fell on their knees before them and kissed their hands and feet' (Kolarz 1961: 366). The followers of Alexandru Culeac, while drawing on these widespread monarchist traditions among Inochentists, may also have been influenced by another contemporaneous religious movement that emerged in the Voronezh region of Russia. Led by Fedor Rybalkin, the movement that became known as the Fedorovtsy had emerged just prior to the October Revolution and, like the Culeacs, preached that the time of the Antichrist had already begun and that the archangel Michael, in the guise of Grand Duke Michael, the youngest brother of Tsar Nicholas, would fight alongside Christ (Fletcher 1970: 373–4).

The icons of the archangel Michael aged with him, his features on the icons mirroring the changes that came with Alexandru Culeac's old age thus reinforcing the indexical link between the physical Michael on earth and the transcendent archangel. Today, followers of Alexandru Culeac display images of their leader on home altars and in icon corners in a way that was unthinkable during their underground existence in Soviet times.[20] Although extremely wary of speaking to outsiders, on one occasion an elderly Archangelist 'sister' offered this brief testament of faith in Michael during our conversation:

> We say that the Holy Spirit came in body to earth. The Holy Spirit, we call him Father Michael. Like in heaven, where from the beginning there was the Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, at all times they came to live on earth; first God the Father worked with Abraham and Moses, . . . later the Holy Mother of God gave birth to Jesus Christ, and finally the Holy Spirit awoke. They say that it is new [our belief in the Holy Spirit on earth] but it is not new, the Holy Father Inochentie taught that the Holy Spirit Michael at the End of Times will teach the correct way. . . . Prince Michael will remain at the End. (Interview with Evghenia, 'Cavarlac', 10 July 2013)

This formulation of Archangelist belief suggests some parallels with thirteenth-century apocalyptic thinker Joachim of Fiore's idea of the three ages in which he engages Trinitarian theology in order to make sense of human history (see Bloomfield 1957). The Archangelist belief was worked out in the context of the bloody conflict, political change and social upheaval that accompanied the end of the Russian Empire and the forging of a new Romanian nation state. Alexandru Culeac made use of the vernacular resources available to him in the form of apocryphal and folk legend, which suggested that the heavenly commander at the end of time should be no other than the archangel Michael. That Michael should also represent the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit in the flesh, was something inherited from Inochentie of Balta and his followers. When

Inochentie passed away in 1917, with many of his followers believing that he had in fact been the Holy Spirit embodied, this opened the way for Alexandru Culeac to follow next in the 'cycle of deification' (Vasilache 1928: 57).

Conclusion

The 'anthropomorphization' of the archangel Michael, traceable through history in the appearance of his footprints, heavenly clothing and healing waters and celebrated through hagiography and church feasts (Arnold 2013: 7), in a sense reached its ultimate form in twentieth-century Bessarabia when the archangel Michael appeared clad in human form. In the turmoil that engulfed this remote corner of the Russian Empire, relations between angelic and human, between this world and the next and between the material and immaterial were reimagined and recast.

In the first section of this chapter, I illustrated the range of vernacular resources that Alexandru Culeac drew on when envisioning himself as the archangel Michael. Besides publishing his cycle of visions, however, he also commissioned icons of Michael that became a powerful means by which the presence of the archangel was perceived as uniquely real by his followers. The form that these icons of Michael took, blending icon tradition with photography, resulted in uniquely powerful images that reflected the ontological complexity (Chaterjee 2014: 1) of the divine status of Alexandru Culeac as Michael the Archangel, third person of the Trinity. In line with Orthodox belief and practice, the icons of Alexandru Culeac were revered as the living holy person, both in his lifetime and following his death.

Within the Orthodox world, the dangers associated with the veneration of icons had been recognized and debated, especially during the periods of iconoclasm in the eighth and ninth centuries. The introduction of protocols in the production of icons such as special prayers and preparatory steps as well as the strict conventions imposed on artists were designed to prevent them becoming the mere product of 'individual artists imagination' (Luehrmann 2019: 200). The incorporation of photography into this visual economy challenged these conventions head-on. Recognizing the power of photography, Alexandru Culeac created the ultimate likeness of the archangel Michael through the power intrinsic to icons. Archangelists lived the reality that icons can be persons and that living persons they depict can therefore be divine.

Alexandru Culeac understood what he should look like in order to be recognized and to become the archangel Michael. This image was shaped by the vernacular narrative tradition of the Bessarabian peasant community in which Alexandru

and his brothers grew up and was further enriched by the prophetic tradition associated with Inochentie of Balta and the desire to see the return of an emperor figure following the fall of the tsar. We can only speculate at the profound awe and emotions experienced by believers when the photo-icons of the archangel Michael that were presented to believers by the archangel himself stood before them.

As Bedros has argued in relation to the premodern era, the rich tradition of the archangel Michael in Moldavian Orthodoxy is sometimes 'inclined to practices, which from the point of view of Orthodox dogma, go to the verge of heterodoxy or heresy' (Bedros 2011: 96). Alexandru Culeac, inspired by some of the same texts as his medieval and early modern forebears, assimilated an image of the archangel that afforded him *the* crucial role in the drama of the End of Days and an 'enormous authority' (Arnold 2013: 10) reminiscent of, and even transcending, Michael's status in some early Christian circles.

Notes

1 All translations from Romanian are my own. I would like to thank Dumitru Lisnic for his invaluable advice regarding local Moldovan expressions and variants.
2 Some of the points I make in this chapter have been developed from ideas initially outlined in Kapaló (2019a).
3 I address some of the ethical and interpretational challenges faced by the researcher when working with state security materials in Kapaló (2019b).
4 I conducted fieldwork in villages with Archangelist communities in the south of the Republic of Moldova between 2006 and 2014. To protect the identity of those I spoke with, I have changed their names and given each village a pseudonym. Archangelists do not permit outsiders to participate in their services, but on a number of occasions, I was invited to visit the homes of believers on Sundays after their liturgical gatherings had finished. Not all members of the communities I spoke to were sure that the time had yet come to speak openly about some of their beliefs and practices that outsiders find controversial. This is in large part due to ongoing societal prejudice towards them inspired by Soviet-era anti-sect propaganda that accused them of horrific crimes. (In regard to the cases I was able to trace in the archival record, they were exonerated of these crimes by judicial review after the fall of Soviet power.) In my conversations with Archangelists today, it also became clear that certain aspects of their faith are guarded as secret and are only revealed through membership and participation.
5 The image that Culeac was referring to is most probably the image reproduced in Figure 1.1. Although there is no way of knowing for sure that this is the precise image, it is the one that appears in the frontispiece to his 1924 edition of his visions (*O vedenie* 1924) and also appears to have been mass-produced as a postcard-style icon.

6 Although in the extract quoted from the anti-sect propaganda publication (Karpunina and Sibiriakov 1959: 28) Culeac states that he commissioned a painter to create icons of himself, many of the extant images also required the use of photographic techniques. We do not know precisely who he commissioned to do this and to what extent he had a role to play himself in the creative process.

7 Inochentie of Balta (1875–1917) was a monk and priest of the Russian Orthodox Church. He was of Bessarabian peasant origin but spent several years in monasteries across Russia and Ukraine before returning to the town of Balta in the Odesa region of today's Ukraine, close to his homeland of Bessarabia. There, he encouraged the cult that had emerged around the relics of a holy man, Feodosie Levitsky (1791–1845), and began preaching an intensely apocalyptic message of repentance. Balta became a site of mass pilgrimage under his influence before the local Church leaders became concerned about his growing following among the mainly Moldovan-speaking peasantry. In 1912, he was sent into internal exile to do penance in a prison monastery in the Russian far north before being released in the months before the Bolshevik revolution in May 1917 when he returned to Balta. In his absence, his followers had established a utopian community called the Garden of Paradise. Inochentie died there later the same year (see Kapaló 2019a).

8 Official sources conflict with the claim he makes to have been nineteen years of age in 1920.

9 Referred to as *cărți poporane* in Romanian, chapbooks were cheaply produced booklets, typically of less than forty pages, that were sold for popular consumption. Produced from the sixteenth century on, they contained diverse genres including ballads, nursery rhymes and children's stories, poetry and religious texts.

10 The tradition of associating the two witnesses with Elijah and Enoch is widespread from the Balkans to Russia. See, for example, Heretz (2008); Pokrovskii (2010); Jiga Iliescu (2023). For a detailed account of the roots of the association of Enoch with the Apocalypse, see Badalanova Geller (2010: 22). These two Old Testament prophets are peculiarly powerful figures as they were carried up bodily into heaven without dying, giving them the power to return and intervene directly in human affairs. Also drawing on the biblical canon, and on Orthodox liturgical and patristic traditions, Elijah is expected to return twice as messenger or forebear: the first time in the person of John the Baptist (Mt. 17.10-13) and the second to herald Christ's second coming (Mal. 3.1; Jiga Iliescu 2023).

11 According to Bedros, the collection of Metropolitan Macarie of Moscow, who served in the second half of the sixteenth century, contains the richest selection of texts which relate to the liturgical cycle. Included in this collection are the texts for the celebration of the 'Feast of the archangels Michael and Gabriel and all the heavenly powers' (Romanian: *Soborul Sfinților Arhangheli Mihail și Gavriil și al tuturor cereștilor puteri*; 8 November) and the most important Byzantine text on the miracles of the archangels, *The story of the miracles of the precious archangel Michael*, ascribed to Pantaleon, Deacon and Chartophylax of the Great Church. There were,

however, numerous other texts in circulation. The circulation of these texts has not been studied, and the manuscript tradition is both extensive and polyglot, with many texts having spread in Slavonic. In his final assessment, Bedros proposes that the fundamental text for this hagiographical cycle in Moldavia was the homily of Pantaleon entitled 'Accounts of the miracles of the glorious archangel Michael' (Romanian: *Povestire despre minunile preamăritului arhanghel Mihail*). The traces of this textual tradition have been preserved, according to Bedros, in Moldavian icons of the archangel Michael dating from the sixteenth century (see Bedros 2011).

12 The tradition of heavenly letters has a long genealogy but probably became popular in Eastern Europe under the influence of the flagellants from the fourteenth century onwards. The miraculous letters, purportedly written by God or Christ, were inspired by the need for repentance in the expectation of the approaching Final Judgement and most commonly call on believers to observe Sunday and religious holidays. On the particular significance of the tradition of copying heavenly letters, see Smith (2006); Zayarnyuk (2006); Kapaló (2011); and Berg (2019).

13 The strict observance of Sunday as prescribed in the heavenly letter is one of the characteristics of Archangelist practice that differentiates them from their Orthodox neighbours and co-villagers.

14 *Călătoria Maicii Domnului la Iad* (The Journey of the Mother of God into Hell), as it is known in Romanian, first appears in Romanian manuscript form in the sixteenth century. Hasdeu published this version in his two-volume collection of Romanian popular literature in 1878–81 (Hasdeu 1984: 229–94).

15 The demon's name has several permutations. In the example given here in Figure 1.3, she appears as *Avizuhii* but is also frequently given as *Avestița* or *Avizuha*.

16 These are the initial letters of the Sanctus or Hymn of Victory in Romanian, *Sfânt, Sfânt, Sfânt, Domnul Savaot*, or Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord of Hosts, with the final letter *o* representing the final syllable of *Savaot*. Elsewhere in the manuscript, *Savaot* appears as two words, *Sava Of*. Placing of the Hymn of Victory before the charm text may serve to emphasize Michael's role as commander of the heavenly host. Many thanks to Dumitru Lisnic for our discussions on abbreviations of liturgical prayers in Romanian.

17 In Orthodox belief, this act is associated with Jesus himself, who descends to hell to rescue the souls of the righteous before the resurrection.

18 For a fuller account of the Culeac's vision texts and how they relate to Moldovan folk eschatology see Kapaló (2022).

19 After the Second World War, Bessarabia was reincorporated as one of the republics of the Soviet Union. In the post-war context, operations against so-called sectarians such as Jehovah's Witnesses, Pentecostals and Inochentists, among others, began immediately, especially in the new western border regions of the Soviet Union, and continued into the late 1950s during the Khrushchev era.

20 It is very difficult to estimate how many Archangelists continue to revere Alexandru Culeac today and observe his teachings. In the villages where I was able to meet

members of the community, there appeared to be few members under the age of fifty. At its peak given the movement's geographical reach across the whole of Moldova, it would be reasonable to estimate that numbers today are in the low thousands nationally.

References

Arnold, J. C. (2013), *The Footprints of Michael the Archangel: The Formation and Diffusion of a Saintly Cult c. 300 – c. 800*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Badalanova Geller, F. (2010), *2 (Slavonic Apocalypse of) Enoch: Text and Context*, Berlin: Max Planck Institute for the History of Science.

Bedros, V. (2011), 'Cultul arhanghelilor – surse literare și iconografie: Moldova secolelor XV–XVI', in *Arhangheli și îngeri*, Sibiu: Deisis.

Berg, S. F. (2019), 'The Proof of the Original is in the Copying: Heavenly Chain Letters', in B. Brenna, H.D. Christensen and O. Hamran (eds), *Museums as Cultures of Copies. The Crafting of Artefacts and Authenticity*, 211–23, London and New York: Routledge.

Bloomfield, M. W. (1957), 'Joachim of Flora: A Critical Survey of his Canon, Teachings, Sources, Biography and Influence', *Traditio*, 13: 249–311.

Chaterjee, P. (2014), *The Living Icon in Byzantium and Italy: The Vita Images, 11th to 13th Centuries*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Fletcher, W. (1970), 'Underground Orthodoxy: A Problem in Political Control', *Canadian Slavonic Papers/Revue Canadienne des Slavistes*, 12 (4): 363–94.

Gaster, M. (1900), 'Two Thousand Years of a Charm against the Child-Stealing Witch', *Folklore: Transactions of the Folklore Society*, 11 (11): 129–62.

Harris, C. (2004), 'The Photograph Reincarnate: The Dynamics of Tibetan Relationships with Photography', in E. Edwards and J. Hart (eds), *Photographs, Objects, Histories: On the Materiality of Images*, 132–47, London: Routledge.

Hasdeu, B. P. (1984), *Cuvente den Bătrini Vol II: Cărțile Poporane ale Romanilor in Secolul XVI in Legătură cu Literatura Poporană Nescrisă*, Bucharest: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică.

Hasdeu, B. P. (2017), *Lumea de apoi (Sfîrșitul lumii): Ediție critică, prefață și anchetă mitologică contemporană, privitoare la sfîrșiyul lumii de I. Oprișan*, Bucharest: Editura Saeculum I.O.

Heretz, L. (2008), *Russia on the Eve of Modernity: Popular Religion and Traditional Culture under the Last Tsars*, Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press.

Hyldal Christensen, K. (2018), *The Making of the New Russian Martyrs: Soviet Repression in Orthodox Memory*, New York: Routledge.

Jiga Iliescu, L. (2023), *Monografia tipologică a personalului legendar Sfantul Ilie. Tipologie, comentarii, corpus de texte*, Bucharest: Institutul de Etnografia și Folclor Constantin Brăiloiu al Academiei Române.

Kapaló, J. A. (2011), *Text, Context and Performance: Gagauz Folk Religion in Discourse and Practice*, Leiden: Brill.

Kapaló, J. A. (2019a), *Inochentism and Orthodox Christianity: Religious Dissent in the Russian and Romanian Borderlands*, London: Routledge.
Kapaló, J. A. (2019b), 'The Appearance of Saints: Photographic Evidence and Religious Minorities in the Secret Police Archives in Eastern Europe', *Material Religion*, 15: 82–109.
Kapaló, J. A. (2022), 'Eschatology and Peasant Visions in Moldovan Folk Religion', in Margaret Hiebert Beissinger (ed.), *Handbook of Slavic and East European Folklore*, 399–425, Oxford and London: Oxford University Press.
Karpunina, I. B. and I. Sibiriakov (1959), 'Pocăința unui păcătos', in *Materiale în ajutorul lectorului ateist*, 27–30. Chișinău: Societatea pentru Răspindirea Conoștințelor Politice și Științifice a R.S.S. Moldovenești.
Keane, W. (2002), 'Sincerity, "Modernity," and the Protestants', *Cultural Anthropology*, 17 (1): 65–92.
Kolarz, W. (1961), *Religion in the Soviet Union*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
Kvilinkova, E. N. (2012), Апокрифы в зеркале народной культуры гагаузов, Kishinev and Blagoevgrad: Labirint.
Kvilinkova, E. N. (2017), 'Gagauz Religious Manuscript Tradition in the Context of Moldavian Ethnic and Cultural Influence (on the Example of the Origin of the Gagauz Version of the Epistle on Sunday)', *Revista de Etnologie și Culturologie*, 2: 29–35.
Luehrmann, S. (2019), 'Moulded Imaginaries: Icons, Idols and the Sensory Environments of Eastern Orthodoxy', in B. Meyer and T. Stordalen (eds), *Figurations and Sensations of the Unseen in Judaism, Christianity and Islam: Contested Desires*, 198–212, London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
Meyer, B. (2006), 'Religious Revelation, Secrecy and the Limits of Visual Representation', in *Anthropological Theory*, 6 (4): 431–53.
O vedenie ce s'a arătat în anul 1920 (1924), Iași: Institutul de Arta Grafice 'Versuri și Proză.'
Pamfile, T. (1997), *Sărbătorile la Român*, Bucharest: Editura Saeculum I.O.
Pamfile, T. (1999), *Boli și leacuri la oameni, vite și păsări după datinele și credințele poporului roman*, Bucharest: Editura Saeculum I.O.
Peirce, C. S. ([1897] 1932), 'Division of Signs', in *Collected Papers*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Schneemelcher, W., ed. (1992). *New Testament Apocrypha, Revised Edition of the Collection initiated by Edgar Hennecke*, 2 vols., Cambridge: James Clark.
Shvedov, I. (1959), 'Karera arhangela Mihaila', *Sovetskaya Kultura*, April 4: 3.
Smith, S. (2006), 'Heavenly Letters and Tales of the Forest: "Superstition" against Bolshevism', *Forum for Anthropology and Culture*, 2: 316–39.
Toporkov, A. L. (2019), 'St Sisinnius' Legend in Folklore and Handwritten Traditions of Eurasia and Africa (Outcomes and Perspectives of Research)', *Studia Litterarum*, 4 (2): 312–41.
Vasilache, M. (1928), '*Geneza rătăcirilor inochentiene*', *Misionarul*, 1 (1): 51–9.
Zayarnyuk, A. (2006), 'Letters from Heaven: An Encounter between the "National Movement" and "Popular Culture"', in J.-P. Himka and A. Zayarnyuk (eds), *Letters from Heaven: Popular Religion in Russia and Ukraine*, 165–200, Toronto: Toronto University Press.

2

‘Latent archangels’

The archangel Michael in Romanian fascism

Roland Clark*

Introduction

Between 1927 and 1941, members of the fascist Legion of the Archangel Michael, also known as the Iron Guard, used the archangel Michael to express a militant, exclusivist nationalism that apparently had God’s unconditional support.[1] They argued that the archangel’s patronage guaranteed their victory over Jews and other national enemies, describing their martyrs as ‘latent archangels’ (Protopopescu 1937).[2] Such imagery endeared them to priests and to a public that saw religious language as proof of social respectability. Rather than taking speech about the archangel Michael as evidence of a single ideology or theology shared by all legionaries, this chapter examines how legionaries spoke about the archangel for a variety of reasons and how their ideas changed over time.

Historians and the archangel

The archangel Michael mattered to the Legion more than just as its namesake. His image adorned their publications and building projects and they claimed that the archangel was fighting on their behalf. Large numbers of Orthodox priests supported the movement, as did a significant group of bishops and higher clergy (Bănică 2007; Schmitt 2016). While earlier historians described the Legion as ‘a religious revival, or, perhaps more correctly, a revivalist movement with strong

* I would like to thank Andrew Redden, the editors and the participants of the Bergen workshop for their helpful comments and suggestions on earlier drafts of this chapter and Philippe Henri Blasen and Bronwyn Cragg for helping me find some of the materials.

religious overtones' (Weber 1965: 534), more recent scholars have approached it as a 'social movement and political organisation' (Heinen 1986). Thinking about the Legion as a movement comprised of a disparate collection of activists reminds us that people joined for a variety of different reasons, from diverse backgrounds and with differing levels of commitment. Not every legionary believed the same things, which is partly why legionary ideology continues to generate debate among historians. Rebecca Haynes (2008: 29) argues that legionary practices were typical of Orthodox Christianity and claims that 'the "cult of death" had its roots in popular conceptions of Orthodoxy which the Legion successfully incorporated into its nationalist ideology'. Radu Ioanid (2004), Mihai Chioveanu (2006) and Mihai Stelian Rusu (2016), on the other hand, analyse the Legion as a 'political religion', which is to say, as a group of people who worshipped the nation state. Radu Harald Dinu (2013) disagrees, suggesting that the Legion's religious 'credo' was primarily a celebration of youth and a critique of political corruption. Traian Sandu (2014) and Constantin Iordachi (2004) emphasize the cult of the leader as a core legionary idea, describing it as 'a flight into charismatic hypnosis'. Valentin Săndulescu (2010) shows how the Legion attempted to reshape its members' hearts and minds through 'songs, religion, art and culture', writing that 'the legionaries asserted that a reformation of the soul was necessary. They considered the human soul as something that could be worked on and molded, and the Legion's goal was to do just that'. Finally, Oliver Jens Schmitt (2017a, b) treats the Legion's religious rhetoric as cynical and Romanians as credulous, citing the pilgrimages to Maglavit in 1935 as evidence that peasants were 'superstitious' and thus easily manipulated by religious demagoguery.

Only two historians – Constantin Iordachi and Ionuț Biliuță – have made a concerted attempt to reconstruct a distinctive legionary theology, which they argue permeated the movement. Iordachi (2023: 93) writes that 'the essence of the Legionary ideology was a kenotic vision of palingenesis centred on the idea of regeneration through sacrifice, following the model of *imitatio Christi*'. Biliuță (2013: 28, 192), on the other hand, identifies an 'archangelic theology', which 'hybridized the Christian theology of martyrdom with the fascist cult of those fallen for the movement into a new sacrament of immortality, the martyrdom for [the] Fatherland'. Talk about national regeneration and martyrdom can be found in legionary speeches and writings and was more common than mentions of the archangel, who plays a marginal role in the theologies elaborated by Iordachi and Biliuță. The symbol of the archangel Michael was both less specific and more pregnant than discourses about national regeneration and martyrdom, giving the legionaries more flexibility with how they used it.

It was also less metaphysical. Despite the flowery language used in legionary newspapers, day-to-day activism was characterized more by violence, hate speech and clandestine organizing than by church services and prayers (Clark 2015: 95–121). This was not a religious movement in the sense that contemporaries understood religion. Legionaries did not engage in pilgrimage or hope for supernatural healing from physical ailments the way that visitors to Maglavit did (Schmitt 2017b). They did not abstain from alcohol and swearing or preach repentance from sin the way that members of the Lord's Army (Romanian: Oastea Domnului) did (Clark 2021: 143–67). Nor did they worry about individual conversion like followers of Teodor Popescu and Dumitru Cornilescu (Clark 2021: 169–91). They lacked the concern with charity as a Christian duty that characterized Social Christianity and the Romanian Christian Students Association (Clark 2021: 38–49). They did not believe that the end of the world and the return of Christ was imminent, as Inochentists did, and they were not fighting for the right to worship in particular ways, as Old Calendarists were (Kapaló 2019; Mureşan 2012; Kaltenbrunner 2022). In fact, the Legion had very little in common with other Orthodox and near-Orthodox parachurch movements of their day. Whereas these other movements were primarily concerned with how people related to God, the Legion's major goals were political reform and ethnic cleansing. The religious language of legionaries often focused on diabolical themes, with Codreanu (1999: 56, 121) describing Jewish actors as 'the artists of Satan' and the writings of Jews as having 'Satanic origins'. Codreanu (2010: 107) also distanced the Legion from the Romanian Orthodox Church, writing that 'we acknowledge that we are sinners . . . but it seems to me that the Church (i.e., its people and representatives) have strayed from the line of the Church in their actions'.

In this chapter, I analyse legionary newspapers, songbooks, circulars and pamphlets as speech acts designed to achieve particular goals in concrete situations, rather than as expressions of an unchanging ideology (Skinner 1969). Such material can be found in archives and libraries across Romania. In many cases, it was confiscated by police and used as evidence against legionaries facing trial. Written sources show the face that the movement wished to present to the world and unfortunately hide the conflicts and competing ideas that undoubtedly existed within the movement. My approach emphasizes change over time and is limited to what can be demonstrated from the written sources without extrapolating from our broader knowledge of archangelic traditions that legionaries may or may not have been aware of. At the same time, legionaries' words were embedded in specific cultural contexts that interpreted speech about angels in a variety of

ways, which is why I refer to writings about angels from interwar Romania but not more broadly (LaCapra 1980). Finally, I draw on Valerie Hobbs's (2021) approach to theolinguistics to explain what functional uses talking about the archangel Michael had for legionaries. Investigating the function of the archangel Michael in the movement helps to explain why he was so important to legionaries and why they made such extensive use of religious language and symbolism without assuming that they all had faith in Michael as a supernatural being. This chapter also contributes to debates over fascism as a political religion by explaining how fascists could speak about religious themes and recruit large numbers of clergymen without seeking to empower the Church or to establish a theocracy.

The archangel and political antisemitism, 1880–1922

The Legion emerged out of a long tradition of organized political antisemitism. Orthodox priests and deacons were instrumental in stirring up violence against Jews during the late nineteenth century and took part in the antisemitic congresses organized from the 1880s onwards (Onac 2017: 110–34; Irimia 2019–20). At the same time, prominent urban antisemites prided themselves on being atheists, saying that their atheism grounded their antisemitism in reason and science (Protopopescu n.d.: 4; Volovici 1991: 23). Founded in 1895, the Antisemitic Alliance brought together Bucharest elites in a secret organization influenced by Freemasonry, welcoming 'any good Romanian Christian' who agreed with its antisemitic principles. Maria Mădălina Irimia (2019–20: 56) writes: 'Members of the Alliance who fulfilled the missions given to them with distinction could obtain, at a fee and after a year of service, a diploma of antisemitism. Those who were particularly worthy could receive the "Order of the Cross", then those of "Antisemitic Knight" and "Saint Michael"'. Michael was not Romania's only antisemitic saint though, and in 1910, the famous historian Nicolae Iorga and a law professor from Iași, A. C. Cuza, used an image of Saint George on their banner when they formed the Democratic Nationalist Party as the first explicitly antisemitic political party in the country (Oprițescu 2000: 35). Their propaganda focused primarily on the supposed oppression of the Romanian people by Jews, although some of their younger supporters described the party as 'a movement of national reawakening' ('Pe drumul' 1912). The archangel Michael had been associated with movements of national renewal in various parts of East-Central Europe since the eighteenth century, so the use of his name by the Antisemitic Alliance was not a great innovation (Iordachi 2020: 163).

Similarly, in Russia during this period Vladimir Purishkevich led an antisemitic political movement called the Union of the Archangel Michael. Purishkevich's movement focused on electing antisemites to the State Duma, published prolifically and agitated against left-wing currents in the universities. It received funding from the government for its publications, and one of its rallies was even permitted an audience with the Tsar (Kellogg 2005; Langer 2006). The Union, and political antisemitism more generally, was particularly strong in Bessarabia in the early twentieth century, which came under Romanian rule after the First World War. Antisemitism in Bessarabia included violent pogroms, Romanian nationalist demonstrations and was supported by bishops and other clergy in the Russian Orthodox Church (Gilbert 2016; Zipperstein 2018).

In Bucharest, the celebrated physiologist Nicolae Paulescu (2001) argued that both antisemitism and science were integral to Christianity and that antisemitism was a Christian duty. Student violence in the universities during 1922 brought political antisemitic onto the front pages of the major newspapers, encouraging Cuza and Paulescu to establish the National Christian Union that April. Their manifesto stated:

> The purpose of the Union is to fight, through all legal means, for the reinforcement of Romanian economic, political, and cultural interests against the Yids. With this goal in mind, we will begin by editing a periodical that will defend the nationalist, democratic, and Christian ideas that we have in common, binding us in support of this activity to the limits of our strength and our means. ('Act constitutiv' 1922)

Cuza had renounced his atheism in 1887 but did not make Christianity the cornerstone of his antisemitism until the mid-1920s (Blasen 2022). When he did, he was heavily criticized by theologians such as Iuliu Scriban and Petre Chiricuță, who objected to Cuza's arguments that the God of the Old Testament was 'the Son of Darkness' whose aim was to oppress non-Jewish peoples and that Jesus, who apparently was not Jewish, had set out to oppose Judaism (Drăguşin 2021). Even when they embraced political antisemitism, most Romanian theologians continued to insist that the Old Testament constituted a crucial part of the Christian Scriptures (Biliuță 2016).

The student movement that Paulescu and Cuza hoped to exploit organized itself first through regional student societies such as the Christian Students Association in Iaşi and from 1925 onwards through the National Union of Christian Students in Romania (Nastasă 2011: 83–97). Despite their names, these were not religious associations. Rather, as did many people in interwar

Romania, the students equated 'Christian' with 'ethnic Romanian', using the label to contrast themselves with Jews (Zissu 1923). Raised on the rhetoric of Romantic nationalism, they portrayed themselves as 'great apostles' of the Romanian nation (Şiciovan 1923) engaged in an avant-garde movement of 'cultural fascism' (Crețu 1923).

It is debatable to what extent antisemites and fascists believed in the archangel Michael as a real heavenly being. According to a survey conducted by the Institute of Psychology at the University of Cluj during the late 1920s, only 55.8 per cent of men and 72.2 per cent of women reported believing in angels (Bologa 1930: 180). The Institute's survey does not give us a completely accurate reflection of popular belief because the design of the questionnaire and the social class of the interviewers and interviewees would have shaped responses, but it is noteworthy that educated young men were the demographic least likely to believe in angels at all and the group most likely to think of them as useful metaphors rather than as supernatural beings.

Identifying a patron saint, 1923

The Legion's founders first came together in 1922 as leaders of the antisemitic student movement, and in October 1923 six of them, including Corneliu Zelea Codreanu and Ion Moța, were arrested and charged with planning to assassinate a number of leading individuals within Bucharest's Jewish community. They were incarcerated in Bucharest's famous Văcărești prison, and their trial was widely celebrated by the antisemitic community. Collectively they became known as the 'Văcărești' (Livezeanu 1995: 245–96). Writing to one of their supporters from prison, Codreanu (1998: 35–6) argued: 'our only salvation in these hard times is none other than the unification of all good people around the entire country to achieve the elimination of the Yids'. Romanians had to take action, he said, 'lest God judge the Romanian nation, that which now grows in the forests, on the hills, mountains, and valleys, which grows vengeful, having the sword of the archangel in its hand!'[3] This may have just been an offhand remark and is the only written evidence that Codreanu mentioned the archangel Michael before he established the Legion in 1927. Nonetheless, the reference to the archangel echoes a later tradition recorded in Codreanu's prison diary ten years later.

Sitting in prison after Duca's murder, in February 1934 Codreanu fasted and reflected on churches that had been important to him over the years. He wrote:

> In the church in Văcăreşti prison [in 1923], we worshipped every morning for six months, and [Ion] Moța for a year. There, we pondered about the youth organization; there, we found the icon of the holy archangel Michael; there, in the shadow of this icon, we, who were to be condemned to at least five years of hard labor, bound ourselves to one another and have stayed together in the service of the same holy cause to this day. (Codreanu 1934: 124)

Codreanu was presumably referring to the nineteenth-century icon that is currently held by the Museum of the Municipality of Bucharest, which shows Michael gazing serenely up and to his right while floating above red flames, a thin sword of light held in one hand and a large round shield raised in the other (Muzeul Municipiului Bucureşti 2000: 28). Codreanu repeated a similar story about the icon at Văcăreşti in his memoirs, published in 1936. According to Codreanu, on 8 November 1923 – the day on the Orthodox calendar for celebrating the archangels Michael and Gabriel – the Văcăreşteni 'were discussing what name to give this youth organization'. Codreanu suggested the name 'the archangel Michael'. His father pointed them to an icon of the archangel in the prison chapel, and Codreanu wrote:

> We looked and were genuinely amazed. The icon showed us an unparalleled beauty. I was never attracted to the beauty of an icon. But now I felt bound to it with all my soul and it gave me the impression that the holy archangel was alive. From then on, I began to love icons. Whenever we found the church open, we would go in and venerate the icon. It filled the soul with peace and joy. (Codreanu 1999: 138)

If this did indeed happen in November 1923, it is curious that Codreanu did not mention it when he founded the Legion in 1927 or in fact in any extant sources until February 1934 when, incidentally, he once again found himself in prison.

The potential sources that legionaries might have drawn on when choosing Michael as their patron saint all point to the archangel's military attributes, but these were not the only ways that Romanians thought about angels and archangels in the 1920s and 1930s. In fact, they had a multilayered and complex palimpsest to draw on. Children's prayers saw angels as beings who took care of babies and infants. Numerous icons hanging in churches, businesses, homes and on gravestones featured images of angels, including of the archangel Michael. Michael and Gabriel appear as a pair in many Orthodox icons, usually pictured near the top of the icon, looking down on the main saints or divine figures being portrayed. They symbolize not only protection and benevolence but also

the gaze and support of heaven, whose inhabitants are shown to be watching over believers. When Michael appears by himself in icons, he is always shown to be carrying a sword and with a strong, confident bearing (Mărculescu-Popescu 1999).

Although no one has openly cast doubt on Codreanu's story about his prison experience, historians have suggested other possible sources that might also have inspired his passion for the archangel Michael. Constantin Iordachi (2023: 96) has suggested one particularly intriguing genealogy for the Legion's patron saint, arguing that 'the Romanian Legion's cult of the Archangel Michael was directly linked to the tradition of Romantic nationalism initiated by [Ion] Heliade'. Codreanu (1999: 111) mentioned Heliade only once in his writings, quoting one of his descriptions of Jews as 'the angels of Satan', and he never explicitly discussed Heliade's use of the archangel Michael in his poetry. Iordachi (2023: 96) is referring to a more general nationalist tradition, however, writing that 'Codreanu fully internalized the charismatic scenario of Heliade's *Mihaida*, having as main components the hero's prophetic dream, the icon of the revelation, and the cult of Archangel Michael linked with Michael the Brave's divine mission of bringing unity to the Romanian people'. The *Mihaida* is an epic poem written in 1844 that commemorates the achievements of a sixteenth-century ruler who has been celebrated by nationalists since the nineteenth century as the first person to unite all of the territories incorporated in present-day Romania under a single ruler (Boia 2001). In the poem, Michael the Brave (Romanian: Mihai Viteazu) dreams about the archangel Michael and then sees an icon which inspires him to set out on his wars of conquest. The tradition that the archangel Michael gave Michael the Brave the victory goes back to Michael's sixteenth-century chroniclers, but it was revived and inscribed within the mythology of modern nationalism by Heliade (Antohi 1999: 30–8; Olar 2004: 257–61). Iordachi (2023: 96) also points out that there is a fresco of the archangel Michael opposite the tomb of Michael the Brave near the Dealu Military Academy, where Codreanu was a student. In support of this theory, Ionuț Biliuță adds:

> While being in Botoșani Military School, Codreanu may have attended on 8 of November 1918 a special commemoration of the Wallachia's Prince Mihail Viteazu in Jassy. In the presence of King Ferdinand, the Metropolite of Moldavia, the Prime Minister, members of the Parliament, and the cadets of the Botoșani Military School, the skull of the former prince was brought out for a solemn commemorat[iv]e religious service performed by Metropolite Pimen Georgescu of Moldavia on the occasion of [the] Orthodox feast of archangels Michael and

> Gabriel. The event was followed by a series of conferences on Romanian unity and the importance of Mihai Viteazu for Romanian history. (Biliuță 2013: 202–3)

Iordachi (2023: 192) also notes that a large fresco of the archangel adorns the Mausoleum of Mărășesti, one of the most important memorials to those who perished in the First World War. The connection is tenuous because Codreanu never spoke about Heliade's poem and rarely if ever mentioned Michael the Brave and the archangel Michael in the same breath, but the archangel Michael had been the patron saint of chivalry and soldiers since the Middle Ages and also served as the patron first of the Holy Roman Empire and then of the modern German state (Rojdestvensky 1922).

Introducing the archangel, 1927–8

After supporting A. C. Cuza's National Christian Defense League (Romanian: Liga Apărării Național Creștine; LANC) from 1922 to 1927, Codreanu and the other Văcărești broke with Cuza in July 1927 to create the Legion, identifying Michael as their patron. Even if Codreanu did not read poetry, the archangel Michael had been used by the Antisemitic Alliance, by Purishkevich's Union of the Archangel Michael, and was one of the patron saints of the Coronation Cathedral at Alba Iulia. When Codreanu and his friends launched the Legion of the Archangel Michael in 1927, they made explicit reference to the Coronation Cathedral. The front page of their first newspaper, *Pământul strămoșesc* (The Ancestral Land), featured a copy of the icon from Văcărești and the words 'I extend my sword toward those unclean hearts that enter the holy house of God', which were written on an icon of the archangel Michael found in the Coronation Cathedral. The cathedral stood on the same site as a sixteenth-century stone church erected by Michael the Brave and had been used for the coronation of King Ferdinand and Queen Marie in 1922. It represented the creation of the Greater Romanian state, as Alba Iulia was where the union of Transylvania and Romania's Old Kingdom was proclaimed on 1 December 1918 (Iulean and Iulean 2018: 81–110). The citation thus focused the archangel's persona on his sword as a weapon of judgement upon those who were unwelcome in a particular place. As such, Michael represented the perfect patron for a movement intent on driving Jews out of the country.

They also apparently developed rituals around icons. As Codreanu and the Văcărești had all been actively involved in LANC and the student movement,

the students held an emergency meeting in August 1927 to discuss the split. Elinor Usatiuc, one of Cuza's supporters, spoke at this meeting, saying that:

> In the mind of Mr. Codreanu arose – due to reasons that concern him, personally – the faith that the Archangel Michael is the protector of peoples, a fact which prompted him to establish a militant organization, under the protection of this mystical faith. In their center (at the Christian Cultural House Iași), they brought a blessed icon of the Archangel Michael, guarded permanently by a team made up by members of the organization (each serving shifts of three hours). (Iordachi 2023: 70)

If Usatiuc's account is accurate, Codreanu used the archangel to argue that the Legion was simultaneously militant and mystical, violent and devoted to Romanian Orthodox Christianity as well as creating unique, non-Orthodox rituals around the icon. The first issue of the Legion's newspaper did not attempt to explain their choice of patron saint. Instead, it focused primarily on the reasons for their split with LANC. After poor results in the 1927 elections, they accused Cuza of having betrayed the antisemitic movement by using it for his own political advancement. The antisemitic movement now stood in need of 'purification', they said, and claimed that the soil of their ancestors – in which Michael the Brave rested – cried out for justice. Separating themselves from the older generation of LANC deputies, they wrote that:

> If the elders did not understand that they needed to unite during hard times in the face of the enemy, whatever personal or other issues divided them, they did not deserve either our encouragement or that of the people. So, we did not participate in the elections, we did not vote, we did not do propaganda. Instead, we stayed in the church, praying for the forgiveness of sins for them all. (Codreanu et al. 1927)

Buried on page nine of the first issue of the Legion's newspaper was an article by Ion Moța, Codreanu's closest collaborator and a well-known student leader in his own right. The son of a prominent priest and nationalist publicist from Transylvania, Moța was well versed in the theology and vocabulary of Orthodoxy (Ghitta 2006; Cârstocea 2017). He framed the new movement as 'rejuvenation to a life as God wanted it: a life of truth, justice, and virtue' (Moța 1927a). Contrasting the legionaries with the LANC deputies who were involved in political infighting, Moța claimed that 'we do not do politics, and we have never done it for a single day in our lives. . . . We have a religion, we are slaves to a faith'. He argued that only a supernatural solution to 'the Yid problem' was possible, and only God could save Romania. Moța went on to

say that Codreanu had been appointed as their leader 'by a mysterious force', and that 'we believe adamantly in *unimaginable victories and heavenly miracles* and see them on the horizon of the path we tread'.[4] Finally, he enigmatically stated that they had 'set off from the icon' and were relying on the icon for their success. Moța never explained which icon he was talking about, but his reference to 'the icon' reinforces the story from Codreanu's prison diary that an icon of the archangel Michael had inspired the movement and echoes Codreanu's (1999: 232) claim from 1936 that in the Legion's early years it was faith in the supernatural that had sustained them against 'satanic powers gathered to destroy us'.

According to the prison diary, the icon from Văcărești prison continued to play an important role throughout the movement's early years. Codreanu wrote:

> We made several copies of the icon from Văcărești. One half a meter in length. This was kept at the Saint Spiridon Church in Iași from April 1924 until June 1927. From there, blessed [*sfințită*], it was brought to our [Christian Cultural] Center in Iași. Another smaller icon I gave to my mother as a gift. I borrowed it from her and took it to Bucharest when we blessed our first office in the capital. . . . Another smaller icon I made for myself. It watched over [us] throughout the building of the house in New Bucharest. (Codreanu 1999: 232)

The next explicit mention of the archangel Michael came in the fifth issue of the Legion's newspaper, in October 1927, where Moța (1927b) wrote about him as 'the prince of the heavenly powers'. Moța elaborated a number of miracles attributed to the archangel, reproducing word for word the entry on the archangel Michael from a 1901 edition of *The Lives of the Saints* (Bălan 2005, 1: 93–105). These included a miracle at Colossae in Asia Minor, where pagans had redirected a river to destroy a church dedicated to the archangel but Michael cracked open a rock which absorbed the river; a battle at Sipontum in Italy, where the archangel Michael protected the town from invading pagans by throwing lightning bolts at them; and a miracle at the Docheiariou monastery on Mount Athos, where the archangels Michael and Gabriel saved a boy who was being drowned by monks trying to steal his treasure. As Moța pointed out, these miracles proved that Michael 'intervened directly with his powers in human battles, in earthly happenings, destroying criminal hosts, shattering the Satanic efforts of men'. In venerating the archangel, legionaries were thus building on traditions from across the Orthodox world that honoured him as someone who saved Christian lives here on earth, in both military and private contexts, while destroying the ungodly. There is also a clear argument in these writings that the archangel

attacks human individuals, rather than fighting sin and death in a metaphorical sense.

As time passed the archangel Michael appears to have inspired other legionaries beyond just Codreanu and Moța. A certain Colonel Blezu wrote to them that 'the archangel Michael must strike without hesitation and without mercy. . . . Neither Satan nor his helpers can run to the voice of the archangel' ('Cum e primită' 1927). At the beginning of 1928, Jesus appeared to legionary students imprisoned for their involvement in a pogrom in Oradea Mare. Reporting on the vision, *Pământul strămoșesc* wrote:

> You, Archangel Michael, who with your sword shut down the gates of Eden, letting the thief carrying the cross on his shoulders to go to heaven and you who defeated Satan, please send to our Captain in Iași a drop from the fire of your sword for him to defeat Satan's descendants with celestial help and the help of the legionaries. (Biliuță 2013: 110)

As did other Orthodox believers, legionaries celebrated 6 September as a day when they remembered the archangel Michael's miracles and 8 November as the feast day of both Michael and Gabriel. On 8 November 1928, *Pământul strămoșesc* tells us, legionaries wearing national costume celebrated 'the day of our angel, who directs our steps and carries us towards the victory of our host' ('8 Nov.' 1928).

Rural propaganda, 1928–32

Known for their hooliganism and violence, in the late 1920s legionaries focused their propaganda on isolated rural areas and campaigned on an anti-corruption platform, distancing themselves from the country's 'respectable' but dishonest political class. It would be interesting to know what Romanian peasants made of these young intellectuals talking about archangels. Some insights into how people in rural Romania understood angels come from research carried out by second- and third-year students at the University of Bucharest during the mid-1930s. Their professor, Ion Aurel Candrea, instructed them to conduct open-ended interviews with older people in their villages during the summer holidays, asking about things like how the world was created, volcanoes, echoes, fish, beliefs about water, fire, the sun and moon, plants and animals, Bible stories, songs, customs and folk medicine.[5] When asked about angels, Dumitru I. Roitcu from Hotărani village in Romanați county answered that 'the angels are God's

helpers. They stay in his presence. Everyone has an angel. If a person's angel is weak, the unclean one [the Devil] accuses that person and makes him worthless'.[6] He went on to explain that 'the archangel is a saint who rides a horse and is powerful. He takes the days of a person without them expecting it. He is God's man; it is written about him in church books. He is called the holy archangel' (Petre n.d.: 29). Another informant, Costică Fircă, a 75-year-old woman from the village of Grecești in Mehedinți county, reported that:

> Everyone has an angel, which encourages them to be good in all they do. Angels give people courage. Suckling babes who die become angels. It's not how they are dressed, at death they break in half, from top to bottom, so that they can fly. If you threaten someone with a knife your angel will flee. (Cioculescu n.d.: 109)

When asked about archangels, she said, 'the archangel is the greatest angel, he is the commander of the heavenly armies'. These informants echoed some of the apocalyptic imagery about the archangel Michael as he was represented in the Bible and in esoteric writings, combining it with the majesty and power expressed in icons.

The legionaries' audience would also have known about angels and archangels through church liturgy. There are a number of references to angels in the liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom (2015), which is frequently used in Romanian Orthodox churches. As the Gospel is brought into the church, the priest prays: 'O Lord our God and Master, who ordained in heaven ranks and companies of angels and archangels for the service of your glory: grant that, as we enter in, there may enter with us your holy angels, to serve with us and glorify your goodness.' After the chalice with incense has passed around the church during the Hymn of the Cherubim, the choir reminds worshippers that God 'comes invisibly borne aloft by the angelic hosts'. During the Offertory Litany the deacon asks God to send 'an angel of peace, a faithful guide, a guardian of our souls and bodies'. And finally, the priest tells God that 'there stand before You thousands of archangels and myriads of angels, the cherubim and the seraphim, six-winged, many-eyed, who soar aloft upon their wings, singing the triumphal hymn'. Regular churchgoers would thus have known of angels and archangels as beings who accompanied God and represented his glory. The presence of angels in the liturgy speaks of the coming of God and of his awesome majesty, which should be both feared and worshipped.

Despite these clues, we do not know what rural audiences thought about legionary uses of the archangel Michael, as no reliable sources on their attitudes exist. At the very least, they appear not to have been offended by these references,

as the Legion did well in rural by-elections during the early 1930s. Adopting a fascist aesthetic and organizational structure almost immediately, in 1930 the legionaries created a paramilitary wing called the Iron Guard. It was banned in 1933, but the name stuck, and most people referred to them as legionaries or guardists interchangeably. The Legion faced harsh police repression during its campaign in the national elections of 1933, and when large numbers of legionaries were arrested just days before the elections, they struck back by assassinating the newly elected prime minister, Ion Gheorghe Duca. The subsequent arrests and trial hardened the resolve of veteran legionaries as well as attracting many new supporters. Codreanu consolidated his authority during the mid-1930s by reorganizing the movement's hierarchy and assassinating one of his leadership rivals, Mihail Stelescu. Together with a group of young intellectuals who had joined the Legion during 1933, he also reoriented the Legion's rhetoric away from violence and antisemitism.

Building projects, 1928–37

From 1935 onwards, legionaries spoke more about national renewal, creating 'new men', and organized voluntary building projects in summer work camps as 'schools' for creating these new men. Codreanu and his followers had been making bricks at Ungheni since 1924. Originally, they used them to build a 'Christian Cultural Center' for their gatherings and for some members to live in, but the owner of the land was a supporter of Cuza and evicted them soon after they founded the Legion ('O nedreptate' 1927; Codreanu 1928a). Undeterred, in June 1928 Codreanu announced that they would build a new headquarters, which they named Saint Michael's Castle. Supporters sent donations to buy building supplies, and young legionaries travelled from all around to work on this 'antisemitic university' where voluntary labour doubled as training for activism (Codreanu 1928b). One legionary (Tanasachi 1928) wrote that the castle was 'our hope, the blessed sanctuary where, driven out of the world, faith, honesty, work, truth, and justice will find shelter, together with the whole ideal of a generation that does not wish to lose its soul and that of the entire nation'. Despite the high hopes for it, the legionaries abandoned Saint Michael's Castle after only a few months and almost never mentioned it in their writings again.

The archangel Michael continued to be associated with legionary building projects between 1933 and 1937. Reflecting on their work building a dam and a rest house, Mihail Polihroniade likened the legionaries themselves to archangels,

writing that 'our Romanian people can . . . be redeemed only by a legion of archangels dressed in the cloth of immaculate purity, handling without mercy the fiery whips of purification' (Biliuță 2013: 148). Ionuț Biliuță points out that the archangel Michael was the patron saint of Arnota Monastery, where legionaries did building work, as well as of churches built or restored by legionaries at Giuleşti, Muscel, Cosciusca Veche, Movileşti, Aciliu, Marca, Mănăstirişţea, Cotiungeni Mari and Rădăuți. His icon was also displayed at many of these work camps, alongside a candle and a Gospel, thus simulating makeshift altars where prayers were conducted by theology students (Biliuță 2013: 162–76). A woodcut of the archangel adorns the cover of a photo album dedicated to these work camps. Drawn by Alexandru Basarab in a stark modernist style, Michael glares directly into the eyes of the viewer, holding a large shield in front of him and a flaming sword in his right hand. Inside the album, photos of the chapel at the Rarău camp feature an icon of the archangel, just as one of a building legionaries erected around a natural spring in Ciclova shows an icon of the archangel embedded in the masonry (Polihroniade 1936: 20, 53). Other legionary publications also represented the archangel using a modernist aesthetic, such as a songbook from 1937 where Michael is portrayed charging forward while waving a sword above his head (Clark 2013: 261). As Constantin Iordachi (2023: 89) notes, far from all of the images of the archangel legionaries used were Orthodox. One particularly popular picture of Michael found in legionary flyers and pamphlets was a seventeenth-century painting by the Italian artist Guido Reni.

Michael's was not the only symbol displayed at legionary events. Michael the Brave or Stephen the Great were referenced at least as often in legionary contexts as the archangel was. Swastikas or framed photographs of Codreanu appear much more often in pictures of the work camps than images of the archangel (Polihroniade 1936). Michael was far from omnipresent in the Legion, where a fascist aesthetic was prized more heavily than an Orthodox one. He failed to make an appearance at all in a photo album dedicated to a legionary congress held at Târgu Mureş in 1936 (Gârniceanu 1936), and the archangel can be seen in the background of only four photos out of over a hundred in a commemorative photo album produced in 1940 (*Kampf und Sieg* 1940).

The leader cult, 1930–8

During the 1930s legionaries began describing themselves, in particular Codreanu and Ion Moța, as archangels, and by 1930 the archangel Michael had

become closely associated with Codreanu as the movement's chosen leader. A pamphlet by the student Ion Banea (1930) began by warning that 'our existence is threatened by this same foreign, invading people which has annihilated Maramureș: the Jews'. But just as the reader feels that all is lost, Banea introduces 'the well-known fighter' Corneliu Zelea Codreanu and his 'Christian soldiers' who are leading the battle against the Jew while 'the archangel with the fiery sword lights the way'. Legionaries referred to Codreanu as the 'Captain', which was an interesting choice of words given that almost all other European fascist movements chose some variant of the term 'leader' (German: *Führer*) for their leaders. Whereas 'leader' evokes the image of first among equals, 'captain' suggests a military rank, and that Codreanu led the legionary army in the same way that the archangel Michael commanded the angelic armies in the heavens. In 1934 the theologian Liviu Stan described Codreanu as:

> An archangel with a sword of fire [who] had come to strike the beast preparing our grave, to sound the alarm with the trumpets of hope as through the power of his actions to gather around him all that had a clear conscience and a heroic will from the swamp in which we dwell for almost twenty years. To this 'sign' started under the flag of [the] Archangel Michael, the head of the celestial powers, stood against all the organized forces of Satan and all the satanic instruments rose against him. (Biliuță 2020: 110)

A clear cult of Codreanu as a leader with near-mystical qualities had developed by 1934 and continued until his death in 1938. Legionaries obeyed him almost without question, although there is no evidence that anyone expected him to perform miracles or to exhibit supernatural powers. Descriptions of him as the embodiment of the archangel Michael were hyperbole – metaphors like those used by poets to express the belief that Codreanu represented the nation's only hope.

Martyrdom, 1933–7

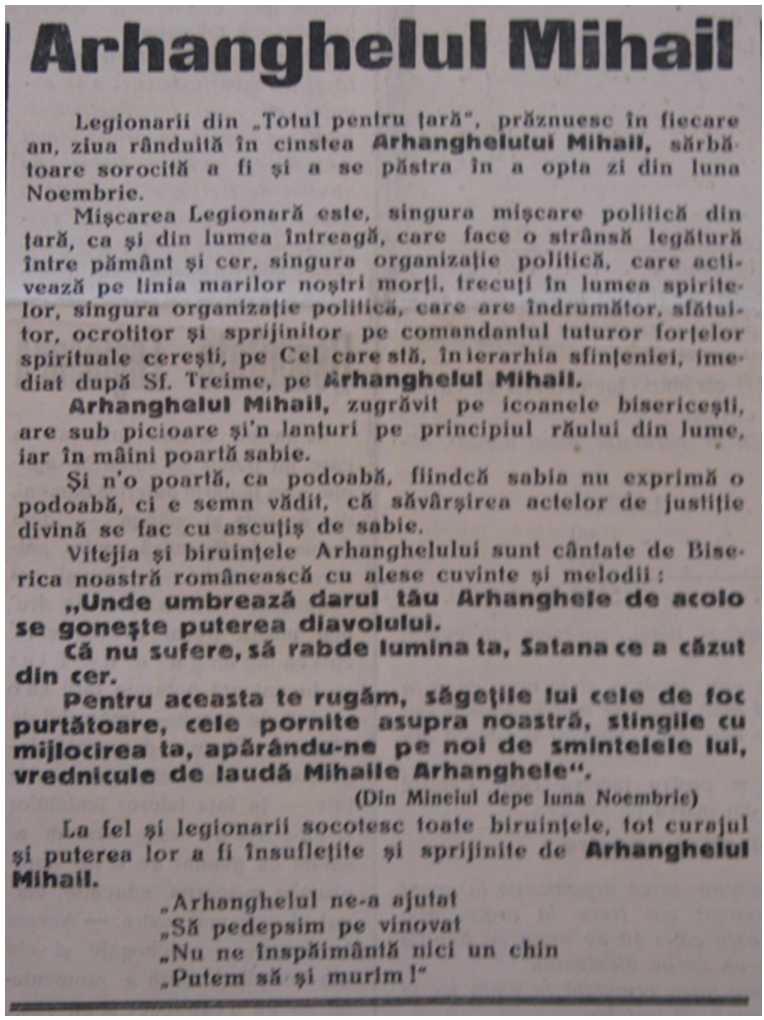
Legionary nationalism also spoke extensively about the spiritual significance of those who had died for their country, particularly in the First World War. The legionary priest Florea Mureşanu (1934, 1935) described this as 'nationalism enlightened from above' or 'nationalism made holy by the spirit of religious piety'. In 1933 a group of legionaries attempted to erect a cross over the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Bucharest's Carol Park, despite having been forbidden

to do so by both the state and the Church. They were shot at by police and one of the priests involved, Father Georgescu-Edinți, was wounded. Legionaries described the incident as a 'sacrilege against the cross and against a servant of God' ('Preotul Georgescu-Edineți' 1933). Sacrifice and the idea that the enemies of the Legion – particularly Jews – were genuinely evil loomed particularly prominently in legionary rhetoric. One newspaper ('Tărie de credință!' 1936) told its readers that 'the legionary victory depends on strong faith, in preparing spiritually to stand firm, to guard and fight for the legionary faith without fear, even under threat of death'. The key, it said, was 'to strengthen and prepare ourselves spiritually for the days of wrath, both from the example of the fallen legionaries and from the example of the strength and suffering of those Christians who lived during times of persecution!'

Michael is associated with the apocalyptic both in the Bible and in subsequent Christian literature (Hannah 1999; Olar 2004). In Chapter 1, James Kapaló analyses apocryphal writings, curses, charms, letters from heaven and esoteric texts, which circulated in Moldavia during the early twentieth century, demonstrating that there were also much more developed and complex traditions surrounding the archangel Michael. These texts situated the archangel Michael as the leader of God's angelic armies, as the destroyer of evil and as a key figure in the battles to accompany the end of the world. A synthetic analysis of Romanian folk beliefs written by the folklorist Theodor Fecioru (1939: 203–4) confirms the importance of Michael as an apocalyptic figure: he was the archangel who threw Lucifer from heaven after he revolted against God and is the defender of humans against evil spirits. According to Fecioru, Michael also takes the souls of the dead to heaven and will blow the trumpet at the End of Days, calling the dead to rise for the Final Judgement. Similar stories were collected by folklorists elsewhere in East-Central Europe during this period (Lammel and Nagy 2005: 65–7).

The archangel Michael represented a heavenly warrior at the top of a hierarchical organization and embodied ideas about bold struggle against absolute evil that would require sacrifice but for a cause whose victory was certain. Figure 2.1 represents a newspaper article from 1935 explaining that '**The archangel Michael** has the principle of evil in chains under his feet and carries a sword in his hands. And he doesn't carry it for decoration, because the sword is not an ornament, but is proof that acts of divine justice are done with the blade of a sword'.[7]

Talk about death and a willingness to die for the cause dated from May 1933, when Codreanu created 'death teams' (Romanian: *echipe morții*) of legionaries who were ready to be killed while doing propaganda. Codreanu (quoted in



Arhanghelul Mihail

Legionarii din „Totul pentru țară", prăznuesc în fiecare an, ziua rânduită în cinstea **Arhanghelului Mihail**, sărbătoare sorocită a fi și a se păstra în a opta zi din luna Noembrie.

Mișcarea Legionară este, singura mișcare politică din țară, ca și din lumea întreagă, care face o strânsă legătură între pământ și cer, singura organizație politică, care activează pe linia marilor noștri morți, trecuți în lumea spiritelor, singura organizație politică, care are îndrumători, sfătuitori, ocrotitori și sprijinitori pe comandantul tuturor forțelor spirituale cerești, pe Cel care stă, în ierarhia sfințeniei, imediat după Sf. Treime, pe **Arhanghelul Mihail.**

Arhanghelul Mihail, zugrăvit pe icoanele bisericești, are sub picioare și'n lanțuri pe principiul răului din lume, iar în mâini poartă sabie.

Și n'o poartă, ca podoabă, fiindcă sabia nu exprimă o podoabă, ci e semn vădit, că săvârșirea actelor de justiție divină se fac cu ascuțiș de sabie.

Vitejia și biruințele Arhanghelului sunt cântate de Biserica noastră românească cu alese cuvinte și melodii:

„Unde umbrează darul tău Arhanghele de acolo se goneşte puterea diavolului.

Că nu sufere, să rabde lumina ta, Satana ce a căzut din cer.

Pentru aceasta te rugăm, săgeţile tui cele de foc purtătoare, cele pornite asupra noastră, stingile cu mijlocirea ta, apărându-ne pe noi de smintelele lui, vrednicule de laudă Mihaile Arhanghele".

(Din Mineiul depe luna Noembrie)

La fel și legionarii socotesc toate biruințele, tot curajul și puterea lor a fi însuflețite și sprijinite de **Arhanghelul Mihail.**

„Arhanghelul ne-a ajutat
„Să pedepsim pe vinovat
„Nu ne înspăimântă nici un chin
„Putem să și murim!"

Figure 2.1 Article from a legionary newspaper celebrating the feast day of the archangel Michael and elaborating on the archangel's connection with the Legion. Photo: Roland Clark.

Scurtu 2000, 3:185) said that these men had decided '*to receive death*. They decided to move forward, passing through death.'[8] Death became a regular theme in legionary songs from the 1930s, reflecting an idea that renewal would come through sacrifice (*Cântece legionare* 1940).

When Romanian poets wrote about angels in the 1920s and 1930s, they frequently associated them with the passage into the afterlife, making them perfect vehicles for talking about martyrdom. In his 1927 collection *Poeme cu*

îngeri (Poems with Angels), the modernist poet Vasile Voiculescu, who made extensive use of religious metaphors in his work, described the death of a girl as her transformation into an angel. In another poem, he wrote about someone who wished to become an angel but instead decomposed underground when they died. Other poems by Voiculescu spoke of angels guarding the gateway to paradise and threatening to strike down the poet if he came too close, of the poet begging God to send an angel with a scythe to put an end to his dark thoughts and of an angel coming to take the dying poet into the afterlife. Voiculescu's angels reflected the poet's openness to the supernatural. They lived on the threshold between this world and the next, between life and death and between God and man. They were to be feared because their appearance might mean the end of one's earthly life but also welcomed because they brought humanity into contact with God. A 1936 collection by the poet Anton Gurgu Delafântânele entitled *Îngeri albi* (White Angels) also dwelled extensively on death, and in poem after poem, the poet begs to be allowed to live just a little longer so that he can continue to worship God on earth. Death comes on wings in Delafântânele's poems but so do the blessings of the Virgin Mary. Both Voiculescu and Delafântânele moved in the same circles as legionary poets, such as Nichifor Crainic and Radu Gyr, and Delafântânele published poetry praising Codreanu (Coban 1936; Gyr 1932; Micu 1975: 513–40).

Talk about death and martyrdom intensified in 1937, after two prominent legionaries – Ion Moța and Vasile Marin – died fighting in the Spanish Civil War. The bodies were brought back to Romania with much ceremony and were buried next to the Legion's headquarters in Bucharest (Săndulescu 2007). Their grave became a pilgrimage site for some legionaries, and they celebrated it as a miracle when the wooden cross remained undamaged after the shrine was struck by lightning ('Minunea dela Mausoleul' 1937). Church newspapers honoured them as martyrs who had voluntarily laid down their lives for Christendom ('Cronica internă' 1937; Dragan 1937). Some went even further. The priest Valeriu Voineag (1937) wrote that 'with the voice of archangels they call all Christian people under the sign of the cross to topple the Communist beast'. Another theologian, George Racoveanu (1937), argued that 'the men fell; but the archangels in them triumphed over Lucifer'. However strange it may sound to readers familiar with seeing archangels as heavenly beings who are fundamentally different to humans, the idea that legionaries could be 'indwelt' by the archangel and Racoveanu's argument about Moța being transformed into an archangel resonated with popular beliefs about believers becoming angels after they die. One popular legionary song by Radu Gyr and Ion Mânzatu (*Carte de cântece* 1940: 33), 'The Hymn of the Heroes Moța and Marin', intoned:

Moța, archangel and mountain,
Marin who is like a great flame
With the Captain in front
Lead us into a sun storm
'Captain, create a country
Like the holy sun of Heaven'.

Despite being an archangel, in Gyr and Mânzatu's song Moța was still behind Codreanu who, 'in front', was the movement's true leader.

The National Legionary State, 1940–1

The Legion won the third largest share of the votes in the national elections of December 1937, but King Carol II was disinclined to appoint any of the three most popular parties to government, so he chose the fourth contender, the National Christian Party, led by Octavian Goga and A. C. Cuza, instead. After forty days of sweeping antisemitic reforms and unstable government, the king abolished democracy altogether, announcing a royal dictatorship that kept most of the antisemitic measures introduced by Goga and Cuza but banned all political parties, including the Legion. Codreanu was arrested on libel charges in April 1938, and in November of that year, he was murdered by police while in prison. Many legionaries fled to Germany as the police carried out widespread arrests and murders of legionaries over the next twelve months, including a teacher by the name of Horia Sima who assumed formal leadership of the movement after Codreanu's death. Carol II's royal dictatorship exploited a number of strategies that had previously been used by the Legion to gain support, including the archangel himself. Reflecting on Carol II's return to the throne in 1930, one newspaper headline proclaimed that 'Coming down out of the clouds, like an archangel of salvation, His Majesty King Carol II renewed the continuity of the dynastic line' ('Coborind din văzduh' 1939). A 100 lei jubilee coin minted in 1939 also featured the King's head on one side and the archangel Michael on the other, standing with wings outstretched behind the Romanian coat of arms (MA Shops).

Horia Sima returned to Romania in June 1940 and took power in September of that year, together with General Ion Antonescu in a collaboration between the Legion and the military known as the National Legionary State. The alliance collapsed when the Legion rebelled against Antonescu in January 1941. Large numbers of legionaries found themselves in prison following the rebellion,

and Antonescu became the country's sole dictator. Some legionaries continued organizing illegally after they were released from prison, but most either quietly tried to erase their pasts or joined the army and fought alongside Nazi Germany in Antonescu's genocidal war against the Soviet Union.

Hagiographies of dead legionaries became even more popular after Codreanu's death and after the Legion came to power in September 1940. Writing in a pro-legionary newspaper, Petre Panaitescu (1940) admitted that the Romanian Orthodox Church would probably never acknowledge the Legion's martyrs as official saints but nonetheless expressed pride that Romania was 'capable of producing events and individuals like those [saints] of the medieval West' and compared the sufferings of legionaries during 1938 and 1939 with the Roman persecution of the Early Church. As they did earlier in the decade, during the National Legionary State legionaries spoke far more often about human leaders like Codreanu and Moța than they did about the archangel Michael, but they still remembered their heavenly patron on his saint's day on 8 November ('Mărturisirea legionară' 1940; 'Plecarea delegațiilor' 1940).

Reimagining the antisemitism and violence of the early legionaries as a spiritual struggle in which love was their only weapon, George Racoveanu (1940) wrote that 'protected under the wings of the holy archangel, they set out to battle with the sword of love. The love that overcomes selfishness. The love that gives rise to the sacrifice of self'. Racoveanu's reinterpretation of the Legion as a spiritual movement of loving self-sacrifice for one's neighbour was a radical departure from the hate-filled, exclusionary and violent speech that had characterized legionary writings between 1927 and 1936. It was nonetheless a logical end result of the talk about sacrifice and Christianity that accompanied the mourning for Moța and Marin. At the same time, Șerban Milcoveanu (1940) spoke about being driven by 'the archangel of Justice (Romanian: *Dreptății*)', and Gheorghe Butnariu (1940), a parish priest, wrote that the Legion had preserved the true Orthodox faith when the official church had been mired in corruption. Drawings in newspapers ('Desgroparea camarazilor' 1940) pictured dead legionaries as angels carrying their crosses up to heaven, and Virgil Popescu (1940) reflected that 'out of [the legionaries'] world of peace and righteous rest came martyrs too, forming the invisible troop of the archangel'. Antisemitic violence and exclusionary laws continued under the National Legionary State, but they were accompanied by a profound rewriting of the movement's history that used the archangel Michael to legitimate the new regime as a peaceful and just expression of the Romanian church and nation. In January 1941, a legionary almanac asked, 'Why did Michael, the archangel and great prince, take the Legion under the shadow of

his eternity?' Because the legionaries faced God just as Michael stands before his throne, it answered, explaining that the Legion defended the Romanian nation just as Michael is the protector of nations, that the legionaries fought for justice just as Michael is the guardian of justice and that the legionaries 'determined to pierce the hydra of speculation and the snake of tyranny with their devotion' just as Michael 'is the champion of the wrath of God' ('Mihail Arhanghel' 1941).

Conclusion

How the archangel Michael shaped the Legion was not preordained. As a herald of God's glory, he could have centred legionary activity around prayer and worship. As a key actor in the book of Revelation, he could have convinced them that the end of the world was nigh. As a benevolent protector of the innocent, he could have encouraged a trustful pacifism that accepted the world as it was in the knowledge that the worst would never happen. Instead, the archangel provided religious legitimacy for a violent struggle against Jews and the major political parties. His holiness cast the Legion's struggle in black and white terms, contrasting the absolute purity of the Legion with the unqualified evil of their enemies. If the archangel opposed Jews, Freemasons, Communists and politicians, then they must be servants of the devil. As a patron saint whose cult was linked with national heroes such as Michael the Brave, the archangel welcomed Codreanu into the pantheon of great Romanian leaders, providing a spiritual foundation for his authority. As the one who carries the souls of the dead into heaven, the archangel watched over legionaries who were killed for their involvement in the movement, providing comfort and fortitude for their loved ones and for the community which mourned them. As the righteous dead were able to become angels themselves, the archangel provided the model according to which the 'latent archangels' hidden inside legionaries were released by their martyrdom. Finally, as a representative of Christianity, the archangel Michael served as a simulacrum through which the Legion's history was transformed under the National Legionary State into a movement of love, peace and self-sacrifice for God and country.

The transformation and elaboration of the archangel Michael between 1923 and 1941 reveals how legionary discourse instrumentalized religious language and how this changed over time. Despite claims by scholars such as Rebecca Haynes that the Legion reflected mainstream Romanian Orthodox spirituality, the flexibility with which legionaries used the image of the archangel suggests that in most cases they were not attempting to use the archangel as a way of grounding

their movement in Orthodox doctrine. They did quote Orthodox liturgy and devotional manuals on the lives of the saints, but references to legionaries as 'latent archangels' and to popular beliefs that dead spirits become angels took them well beyond the teachings of the official church. Nor was the Legion a 'political religion', as the term is usually defined. Legionary veneration focused less on the nation state than on values that the archangel Michael represented, such as charismatic leadership, retributive violence and the destruction of evil. Nor was their theology limited to martyrdom and kenotic palingenesis. Rather, legionary thinking about the archangel Michael evolved over time, moving from religious visions and metaphors of the nation to the purification of the nation from evil, political martyrdom and personal charity within an authoritarian state.

Speech about the archangel was consistently emotional. It allowed the speaker to perform sincerity and fervour without appearing delusional or fanatical. By applying religious language to secular concerns, legionaries were able to present themselves as having transcended the self-serving world of politics. When Ion Moța contrasted religion with politics in his seminal article from 1927, he successfully cast the legionaries in a positive light and reflected negatively on Cuza and other politicians. Talking about the archangel Michael provided hope for legionaries in prison or for the families of the bereaved, which was crucial given how little chance most people thought the movement had of success. 'The holy archangel Michael the victor', Codreanu (2010: 29) wrote, 'faces his enemies today [who are] astounded and crushed by the greatness of his victory.' Trust that the Legion's heavenly patron would not let them down undoubtedly gave some legionaries the will to keep fighting when all seemed lost, and Codreanu (2010: 68) explicitly told his followers that 'someone with faith in God cannot doubt'. At some times legionaries related to the archangel Michael as a patron saint who they thought would intervene in human affairs and at others speech about the archangel appears to have belonged to the realm of metaphor and parallelism. Given the variety of people who belonged to the movement and the diverse contexts in which speech about the archangel appeared, it is likely that the archangel Michael meant different things to different people but was cherished by all as the embodiment of their hopes and dreams.

Notes

1 There are a number of good surveys of the Legion's history, including Heinen (1986), Veiga (1989), Ioanid (1990), Sandu (2014), Clark (2015), Schmitt (2017a) and Iordachi (2023).

2 Unless otherwise stated, all translations from Romanian are my own.
3 Legionaries consistently referred to the archangel Michael, not Gabriel, whenever they mentioned archangels.
4 Emphasis in the original.
5 These are unpublished manuscripts, but I. A. Candrea's name appears as 'Professor' on the title page of several of the manuscripts.
6 Emphasis in the original.
7 Boldface in the original.
8 Emphasis in the original.

References

'Pe drumul cel nou' (1912), *Unirea: Foaie Naționalist-Democrata*: January 1: 1.
'Act constitutiv al "Uniunei Naționale Creștine"' (1922), *Apărarea națională*: October 1: 26.
Pământul strămoșesc (1927): August 1: 1.
'Cum e primită revista noastră și cu ea Legiunea "A.M."?' (1927), *Pământul strămoșesc*: September 1: 13.
'O nedreptate strigătoare la cer' (1927), *Pământul strămoșesc*: December 1: 3.
'8 Nov. Sf. Arh. Mihail și Gavril' (1928), *Pământul strămoșesc*: November 1: 1.
'Preotul Georgescu-Edineți' (1933), *Axa*: February 5: 2.
'Arhanghelul Mihail' (1935), *Brațul de Fier*: November: 1.
'Tărie de credință!' (1936), *Brațul de Fier*: March: 2.
'Cronica internă' (1937), *Luminătorul*: February: 125–6.
'Minunea dela Mausoleul legionarilor Moța și Marin' (1937), *Ardealul*: June 23: 2.
'Coborind din văzduh, ca un arhanghel al mântuirii, M.S. Regele Carol al II-lea a reinodat firul continuității dinastice' (1939), *România*: June 9: 12.
Cântece legionare (1940), Bucharest: I. E. Torouțiu.
Carte de cântece (1940), Bucharest: Editura FDC.
Kampf und Sieg (1940), n.p.: n.p.
'Desgroparea camarazilor căzuți la Vaslui' (1940), *Buna vestire*: October 25: 2.
'Mărturisirea legionară a cetății Iașului' (1940), *Buna vestire*: November 10: 1.
'Plecarea delegațiilor' (1940), *Cuvântul*: November 10: 1.
'Mihail Arhanghel al Legiunei Noastre' (1941), *Almanahul Cuvântul*: January: 15–16.
Antohi, S. (1999), *Civitas Imaginalis*, Bucharest: Polirom.
Bălan, I. (2005), *Viețele sfinților*, 2nd ed., 12 vols., Vânători: Mănăstirea Sihăstria.
Banea, I. (1930), *Cauzele mișcării din Maramureș*, Iași: Tipografia Cooperativa 'Trecerea Munților Carpații'.
Bănică, M. (2007), *Biserica ortodoxă română: Stat și societate în anii '30*, Bucharest: Polirom.

Biliuță, I. (2013), 'The Archangel's Consecrated Servants: An Inquiry in the Relationship between the Romanian Orthodox Church and the Iron Guard (1930–1941)', PhD diss., Central European University, Budapest.

Biliuță, I. (2016), 'Arianizarea studiilor biblice în perioada interbelică. O polemică în studiile biblice românești', in A. Ioniță (ed.), *Interpretarea Biblică între Biserică și Universitate: perspective interconfesionale*, 9–31, Sibiu: Andreiană.

Biliuță, I. (2020), 'Fascism, Race, and Religion in Interwar Transylvania: The Case of Father Liviu Stan (1910–1973)', *Church History*, 89: 101–24.

Blasen, P. H. (2022), 'A.C. Cuza, German Antisemitism, and the Swastika', *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai, Historia*, 67 (1): 21–58.

Boia, L. (2001), *History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness*, Budapest: Central European University Press.

Bologa, L. (1930), *Psihologia vieții religioase*, Cluj: Tip. Cartea Românească.

Butnariu, G. (1940), 'Biserica în fața Legiunii', *Buna vestire*: September 13: 2.

Cârstocea, R. (2017), 'Native Fascists, Transnational Anti-Semites: The International Activity of Legionary Leader Ion I. Moța', in A. Bauerkämper and G. Rossoliński-Liebe (eds), *Fascism without Borders: Connections and Cooperation between Movements and Regimes in Europe from 1918 to 1945*, 216–42, New York: Berghahn.

Chioveanu, M. (2006), 'Religious Politics and Politics of Religion in 1930s Romania: The "Redemptive" Hyper-Nationalism of the Legion of "Archangel Michael"', *Studia Hebraica*, 6: 163–78.

Cioculescu, V. (n.d.), 'Chestionar folcloric, jud. Mehedinți', Unpublished MS, Biblioteca Centrală Universitară Carol I, A60283.

Clark, R. (2013), 'Collective Singing in Romanian Fascism', *Cultural and Social History*, 10 (2): 251–71.

Clark, R. (2015), *Holy Legionary Youth: Fascist Activism in Interwar Romania*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Clark, R. (2021), *Sectarianism and Renewal in 1920s Romania: The Limits of Orthodoxy and Nation Building*, London: Bloomsbury.

Coban, G. V. (1936), 'Cronica', *Grai moldovenesc*, 5 (26): 189.

Codreanu, C. Z. (1928a), 'Răutatea omenească', *Pământul strămoșesc*: September 15: 4–5.

Codreanu, C. Z. (1928b), 'Dare de seamă rezumativă', *Pământul strămoșesc*: November 1: 1.

Codreanu, C. Z. (1934), *Jurnalul căpitanului din Prigoanei anilor 1933–1934*, unpublished manuscript, Arhivele Consiliului Național pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securității, Fond Penal, dosar 11784, 13: fol. 116–34.

Codreanu, C. Z. (1998), *Scrisori studențești din închisoare: Văcărești, 9 octombrie 1923–30 martie 1924*, Bucharest: Editura Ramida.

Codreanu, C. Z. (1999), *Pentru legionari*, Bucharest: Editura Scara.

Codreanu, C. Z. (2010), *Circulări și manifeste (1927–1938)*, Bucharest: Editura Blassco.

Codreanu, C. Z., I.I. Moța, I. Gârneață, C. Georgescu and R. Mironovici (1927), 'Pământul strămoșesc', *Pământul strămoșesc*: August 1: 3–5.
Crețu, N. N. (1923), 'Fascismul Cultural', *Cuvântul studențesc*: January 19: 1.
Delafântânele, A. G. (1936), *Îngeri albi*, Iași: Institutul de Arte Grafice 'Presa Bună'.
Dinu, R. H. (2013), *Faschismus, Religion und Gewalt in Südosteuropa: Die Legion Erzengel Michael und die Ustasa im historischen Vergleich*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
Dragan, C. (1937), 'Lacrimi în amintirea eroului Ionel Moța', *Telegraful român*: January 31: 1.
Drăgușin, N. (2021), 'A Battle of Words: Petre Chiricuță's Reply (1926) to A. C. Cuza's Religious Antisemitism (1925)', *Review of Ecumenical Studies*, 13 (2): 317–39.
Fecioru, T. (1939), *Poporul romîn și fenomenul religios: Studiu pe marginea producțiunilor folklorice*, Bucharest: Editura Librăriei Teologice.
Gârniceanu, P. (1936), *'Dezordinile' dela Târgu Mureș*, n.p: n.p.
Ghitta, M. (2006), 'Interwar Anti-Semitic Ideologists in Transylvania: A Professor and a Student', *Transylvanian Review*, 15 (3): 89–109.
Gilbert, G. (2016), *The Radical Right in Late Imperial Russia: Dreams of a True Fatherland?* London: Routledge.
Gyr, R. (1932), 'Cântec de grădinar', *Grai moldovenesc*, 1 (2–3): 4.
Hannah, D. D. (1999), *Michael and Christ: Michael Traditions and Angel Christology in Early Christianity,* Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.
Haynes, R. (2008), 'Orthodox Rituals of Revolution and Rebirth in Interwar Romania', in L. Péter and M. C. Rady (eds), *Resistance, Rebellion and Revolution in Hungary and Central Europe: Commemorating 1956*, 129–42, London: Hungarian Cultural Centre.
Heinen, A. (1986), *Die Legion 'Erzengel Michael' in Rumänien: soziale Bewegung und politische Organisation: Ein Beitrag zum Problem des internationalen Faschismus*, München: Oldenbourg.
Hobbs, V. (2021), *An Introduction to Religious Language: Exploring Theolinguistics in Contemporary Contexts*, London: Bloomsbury.
Ioanid, R. (1990), *The Sword of the Archangel: Fascist Ideology in Romania*, Irvington, NY: Colombia University Press.
Ioanid, R. (2004), 'The Sacralised Politics of the Romanian Iron Guard', *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions,* 5 (3): 419–53.
Iordachi, C. (2004), *Charisma, Politics and Violence: The Legion of the 'Archangel Michael' in Inter-War Romania*, Budapest: Trondheim Studies on East European Cultures and Societies.
Iordachi, C. (2020), 'Nationaler Messianismus und die Sakralisierung von Politik: Der Doppelkult des Fürsten Michael des Tapferen und des Erzengels Michael in der rumänischen nationalen Ideologie', in L. Berezhnaya (ed.), *Die Militarisierung der Heiligen in Vormoderne und Moderne*, 161–204, Berlin: Duncker & Humblot.
Iordachi, C. (2023), *The Fascist Faith of the Legion 'Archangel Michael' in Romania, 1927–1941: Martyrdom and National Purification*, London: Routledge.

Irimia, M. M. (2019–20), 'Violența antisemită în a doua jumătate a secolului al XIX-lea: Pogromul de la Iași din 1899', *Revista de istorie a evreilor din România*, 4–5 (20–1): 45–93.

Iulean, D.-I. and D. Dana Iulean (2018), *Catedralele Unirii la vest de Carpați / The Cathedrals of the Great Union to the West of the Carpathians*, Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană.

Kapaló, J. A. (2019), *Inochentism and Orthodox Christianity: Religious Dissent in the Russian and Romanian Borderlands*, London: Routledge.

Kaltenbrunner, A. (2022), *Für den Glauben, gegen den Staat: der Altkalendarismus in Rumänien (1924–1936)*, Oldenbourg: De Gruyter.

Kellogg, M. (2005), *The Russian Roots of Nazism: White Émigrés and the Making of National Socialism, 1917–1945*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

LaCapra, D. (1980), 'Rethinking Intellectual History and Reading Texts', *History and Theory*, 19 (3): 245–76.

Lammel, A. and I. Nagy (2005), *La Bible Paysanne: Contes et légendes*, trans. Joëlle Dufeuilly, Budapest: Bayard.

Langer, J. (2006), 'Fighting the Future: The Doomed Anti-Revolutionary Crusade of Vladimir Purishkevich', *Revolutionary Russia*, 19 (1): 37–62.

Livezeanu, I. (1995), *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania: Regionalism, Nation Building and Ethnic Struggle, 1918–1930*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

MA Shops, 'Rumänien 100 Lei 1939 Carol II. 1930–1940. UNC'. Available online: https://www.ma-shops.com/pater/item.php?id=2111203573 (accessed 7 December 2024).

Mărculescu-Popescu, G. (1999), *Icoane românești / Icônes roumaines / Romanian icons*, Bucharest: Editura Royal.

Micu, D. (1975), *'Gândirea' și gândirismul: Momente și sinteze*, Bucharest: Editura Minerva.

Milcoveanu, Ș. (1940), 'Religia cinstei', *Buna vestire*: September 10: 1.

Moța, I. (1927a), 'La icoană!' *Pământul strămoșesc*: August 1: 9–10.

Moța, I. (1927b), 'Sfântul Arhanghel Mihail: Voevodul puterilor cereşti', *Pământul strămoșesc*: October 1: 10–12.

Mureșan, R. P. (2012), *Stilismul în România (1924–2011)*, Sibiu: Agnos.

Mureșanu, F. (1934), 'Naționalism Religios', *Glasul strămoșesc*: December 16: 1.

Mureșanu, F. (1935), 'Religia naționalismului', *Glasul strămoșesc*: January 20: 1.

Nastasă, L. (2011), 'Antisemitismul universitar în România (1919–1939). Studiu introductiv', in L. Nastasă (ed.), *Antisemitismul universitar în România (1919–1939): mărturii documentare*, 13–98, Cluj-Napoca: Editura Institutului pentru Studierea Problemelor Minorităților Naționale.

Olar, O.-V. (2004), *Împăratul înaripat: Cultul arhanghelului Mihai în lumea bizantină*, Bucharest: Anastasia.

Onac, I. (2017), *'In der rumänischen Antisemiten-Citadelle': Zur Entstehung des politischen Antisemitismus in Rumänien 1878–1914*, Berlin: Metropol.

Oprițescu, M. (2000), *Partidul Național Democrat condus de Nicolae Iorga (1910–1938)*, Bucharest: Neva.
Panaitescu, P. P. (1940), 'Sfinții în istoria românilor', *Cuvântul*: October 22: 1.
Paulescu, N. (2001), *Spitalul, Coranul, Talmudul, Cahalul, Francmasoneria,* Filipeștii de Târg, Prahova: Antet XX Press.
Petre, C. V. (n.d.), 'Chestionar folcloric, cules din comuna Hotărani, județul Romanați, 1936', Unpublished MS, Biblioteca Centrală Universitară Carol I, A60252.
Polihroniade, M. (1936), *Tabara de munca*, Bucharest : Tipografia Ziarului 'Universal'.
Popescu, V. (1940), 'Arhanghel a fost printre noi', *Buna vestire*: November 10: 1.
Protopopescu, D. (1937), 'Era un arhanghel latent', *Buna vestire*, February 22: 2.
Protopopescu, I. D. (n.d.), *Pericolul Ovreesc*, Craiova: Editura Ramuri.
Racoveanu, G. (1937), 'Ion Moța și Vasile Marin', *Predania*: February 15: 8.
Racoveanu, G. (1940), 'Minunea Sfântului Arhanghel', *Cuvântul*: November 9: 1.
Rojdestvensky, O. (1922), *Le culte de Saint Michel et le moyen âge latin*, Paris: A. Picard.
Rusu, M. S. (2016), 'The Sacralization of Martyric Death in Romanian Legionary Movement: Self-sacrificial Patriotism, Vicarious Atonement, and Thanatic Nationalism', *Politics, Religion & Ideology*, 17 (2–3): 249–73.
Saint John Chrysostom (2015), 'The Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom', in Dan Juncu (ed.), *The Divine Liturgies of Saint John Chrysostom and Saint Basil the Great*, trans. D. L. Frost, 11–60, Cambridge: Institute for Orthodox Christian Studies.
Sandu, T. (2014), *Un fascisme roumain: histoire de la Garde de fer,* Paris: Perrin.
Săndulescu, V. (2007), 'Sacralised Politics in Action: The February 1937 Burial of the Romanian Legionary Leaders Ion Moța and Vasile Marin', *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 8 (2): 259–69.
Săndulescu, V. (2010), '"Taming the Spirit": Notes on the Shaping of the Legionary "New Man"', in T. Sandu (ed.), *Vers un profil convergent des fascismes? 'Nouveau consensus' et religion politique en Europe Centrale*, 207–16, Paris: Cahiers de la Nouvelle Europe.
Schmitt, O. J. (2016), 'Clerul ortodox și extremă dreaptă în România interbelică', *Archiva Moldaviae*, 8: 95–116.
Schmitt, O. J. (2017a), *Corneliu Zelea Codreanu: ascensiunea și căderea 'Căpitanului'*, Bucharest: Humanitas.
Schmitt, O. J. (2017b), '"Das "rumänische Lourdes": Der gute Hirte von Maglavit zwischen Medialisierung und Politisierung', in M. Thomsen (ed.), *Religionsgeschichtliche Studien zum östlichen Europa: Festschrift für Ludwig Steindorff zum 65. Geburtstag*, 263–75, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag.
Scurtu, I., ed. (2000), *Ideologie și formațiuni de dreapta în România*, 6 vols. Bucharest: Institutul Național Pentru Studiul Totalitarismului.
Șiciovan, S. (1923), 'Înainte', *Apărarea națională*: May 15: 21–2.
Skinner, Q. (1969), 'Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas', *History and Theory*, 8: 3–53.

Tanasachi, M. (1928), 'Ce văd eu în Cetatea Sf. Mihaiu', *Pământul strămoşesc*: July 15: 5.
Văcăreşti icoane recuperate (2000), Bucharest: Muzeul Municipiului Bucureşti.
Veiga, F. (1989), *La mística del ultranacionalismo: historia de la Guardia de Hierro, Rumania, 1919–1941*, Bellaterra: Publicacions de la Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona.
Voiculescu, V. (1927), *Poeme cu îngeri*, Bucharest: Colecție Enciclopedica Editata de Fundația Culturală Principele Carol.
Voineag, V. (1937), 'Martirii Credinții', *Lumina satelor*: February 7: 1.
Volovici, L. (1991), *Nationalist Ideology and Anti-Semitism: The Case of Romanian Intellectuals in the 1930s*, Oxford: Pergamon Press.
Weber, E. (1965), 'Romania', in H. Rogger and E. Weber (eds), *The European Right: A Historical Profile*, 501–74, Berkeley: University of California Press.
Zipperstein, S. J. (2018), *Pogrom: Kishinev and the Tilt of History*, New York: W. W. Norton.
Zissu, A. L. (1923), 'Către studențimea creştină din Cluj', *Cuvântul studențesc*: January 28: 2.

3

‘Menacing, powerful and frightful captain of the heavenly host’

The archangel Michael in early modern Eastern and Southeastern Europe

Ovidiu Olar

Introduction

In March 1610, Anastasie Crimca (Crimcovici), archbishop of Moldavia and metropolitan of Suceava, dedicated a liturgical manuscript containing the Acts and Epistles of the Apostles, called ‘Praxapostolos’, to Dragomirna Monastery, a ‘very recent’ foundation of his (Bogdan 1968: 505–10; Birkfellner 1975: 113–16)[1] (Figure 3.1). The gesture was quite common: a new monastery needed liturgical books, and it was only normal for the founder to provide them. Complying with this sacred duty, and in memory of his parents, Anastasie offered Dragomirna codices, sacred vessels, embroideries and icons. The manuscript donations started in September 1609, when the monastery’s main church was completed and consecrated, and were interrupted by Anastasie’s death twenty years later. They included several Gospels, ‘Apostles’, Divine Liturgies and Psalters (Turdeanu 1985; Gorovei 2014). However, unlike an undated ‘Praxapostolos’ and the ‘Apostles’ donated in 1609 and 1611–12, the 1610 codex – now kept in the Austrian National Library in Vienna – was lavishly illuminated.

The manuscript has received significant attention in modern scholarship because of one of its colophons, which contains Dragomirna’s foundation deed. Issued and signed by Anastasie in the name of all the founders, it specifically prohibited the dedication of the monastery to Mount Athos or the Holy Sepulcher of Jerusalem, demanded that it remain exempt from the jurisdiction of any patriarch or metropolitan and requested that the monks

Figure 3.1 Anastasie Crimca and his foundation. 'Praxapostolos', 1610 (ÖNB/Wien Cod. Slav. 6: 75r). Courtesy of the Austrian National Library (Vienna). Located in northern Moldavia (modern-day Suceava County, Romania), Dragomirna Monastery has a very rich history. A small church funded by Anastasie and two major Moldavian boyars – the grand logothete Lupu Stroici and his brother, the grand treasurer Simion Stroici – was consecrated in July 1602. It was dedicated to the righteous Enoch, Prophet Elijah, and John the Theologian. First mentioned in 1605, the monastery's main church was dedicated to the Descent of the Holy Spirit. It soon became – and still is – one of the most important Moldavian monasteries (Gorovei 2017).

Figure 3.2 The archangel Michael as 'captain of the heavenly host' (ÖNB/Wien Cod. Slav. 6: 172r). Courtesy of the Austrian National Library (Vienna).

and hegumen be Moldavian (Bogdan 1968: 505–6; Székely 2014: 443–5; Kitromilides 2017: 24–5). However, the miniatures are even more spectacular (Popescu-Vîlcea 1972: 11, 20–1, 2014: 293–304; Costea 1992; Prolović 2013). One of the most – if not the most – unusual is a peculiar depiction of the archangel Michael as mounted captain of the heavenly host – a hapax in the entire Romanian religious art (Figure 3.2).

Completely unknown to the Byzantines, this iconographic type of Muscovite origin rose to popularity in the Russian iconographic tradition from the second half of the seventeenth century onwards, mostly due to dissenters – some of whom identified as Old Believers – who rejected Patriarch Nikon's religious reforms. It even inspired early-twentieth-century avant-gardist painters, such as Natal'ia Goncharova (Gurianova 2017). Perhaps nothing captures this impressive versatility better than one of the closing scenes of Mikhail Bulgakov's (1992) *The Master and Margarita*. In the 1930s, the prince of evil disguised as one Professor Woland and his entourage, which includes a huge black talking cat, wreak havoc in Moscow. When the party is over, Woland and the demons leave the city on 'magical dark horses', flying over the sunset and into the beyond. The author does not reveal whether the steeds have wings (the riders clearly do not). Nevertheless, this 'cavalcade' bears some striking resemblances to an upside-down heavenly host. Woland, who announces the departure with a 'terrible' voice 'like the blast of a trumpet', sometimes looks like a dark archangel Michael. Capable of moving beyond worlds, delivering justice – he even bears a sword of steel – and redeeming the procurator of Judea Pontius Pilate, Bulgakov's almighty creature may be seen as an (involuntary) literary homage to the 'menacing, powerful and frightful captain' (Bulgakov 1992). By no means a loser, Woland is much more than an avatar of the Christian Satan (Curtis 2019: 61–71; Culianu 1977: 551). Still, the reference to 'captain' Michael cannot be missed.

However, despite the fame this iconographic type gained, its one-time occurrence in the Moldavian manuscript commissioned by Metropolitan Anastasie has received limited attention. Thus, the aim of this chapter is to fill this gap by placing the depiction – the first of its kind to have survived – in its codicological, liturgical and cultural contexts. What was the rationale behind the choice? How may the scene have resonated with the beholders? Why was it never replicated in Moldavia? Why did this iconographic type never gain acceptance among believers in Southeastern Europe and the Middle East? Although icons of the 'captain of the heavenly host' made their way through the Balkans to Constantinople in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the theme remained 'largely incomprehensible' to Christians in the area (Boycheva 2016: 13).

To answer these questions, I introduce the 1610 depiction of the angelic horseman and compare it with representations of Michael in illuminated codices produced at the request of Metropolitan Crimca (northern Moldavia, *c.* 1609–16) and several later portrayals of the 'captain of the heavenly host' (Russia, seventeenth–nineteenth centuries). The location at the crossroads of

the Greek and Slavic cultural spheres, translated into the use of Church Slavonic in the liturgy and eclectic artistic production, makes the choice of a Moldavian starting point suitable. I then conjure texts and images related to the cult and iconography of angels in late Byzantium and early modern Slavia Orthodoxa. Based on this corpus, I argue that the depiction of the archangel Michael as 'captain of the heavenly host' is indicative of a major shift that occurred after the fall of Constantinople within Eastern Christians' veneration of the angelic leader: from Constantinople to Moscow and beyond, in a range of variations often bordering on heresy, the protector of Israel's Chosen People became the angel of death, the Judgement and the Apocalypse.

Menacing Michael and his flying white horse[2]

The 'Praxapostolos' offered by Anastasie Crimca to his beloved foundation in 1610 has a troubled history. Plundered by the Cossacks in 1653, it was ransomed and returned to the monastery, only to leave for Vienna, probably in 1785 (Turdeanu 1997: 366–8; Gorovei 2015: 112–16). The manuscript consists of a foreword attributed to Epiphanius of Salamis, the Acts of the Apostles, the twenty-one Catholic and Pauline epistles – all with introductions – and the full apparatus related to its liturgical use. Although the structure is quite common, the iconography is not: at the end of each textual unit (including the appendix), the scribe inserted miniatures.

Twenty-one of these miniatures occupy an entire page each. The introduction to the Acts is preceded by the Tree of Jesus with Apostles and deacons. The Acts, Jacob, 1 John, Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, Titus, Philemon and Hebrews are preceded by portrayals of four of the assumed authors – namely Luke, James, John and Paul (once writing, once inspiring Saint John Chrysostom and nine times preaching). Peter and Judah are also present, but given the former's connection with Rome and the latter's betrayal of Jesus, their portraits are smaller. The introductions to 1 Corinthians and Philippians are followed by miniatures representing Dragomirna's patron saints (Enoch, Prophet Elijah and Saint John the Theologian). The introductions to 2 Thessalonians and Hebrews are followed by illustrations of two Great Feasts, the Ascension and the Annunciation. A third Great Feast, the Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem, and the Crucifixion mark the end of the Apostolic corpus and the beginning of the liturgical paratext.

Besides the large miniatures, the 1610 'Viennese Praxapostolos' features thirty-seven groups of smaller illuminations. The first depicts Saints Joachim and Anna, the parents of the Mother of God, feted on 9 September – that is, at the beginning of the liturgical year. The last depicts the Tree of Jesus with the Apostles and the founding fathers of Christian monasticism (Antonios, Pachomios, Sabbas, Chariton, Athanasios and Euthymios). Considering the headpieces, the adorned initials and the frames of the two colophons, we can appreciate how ambitious the decoration was compared to the norm; the 1609 'Apostle' depicts only Peter, John and Paul (Panaitescu 1959: 35–6).

This unique iconographic programme unfolds along three major lines that complete each other. The first line is that of the Christ-empowered Apostles/authors: Luke (the alleged writer of the Acts), James and Judah are depicted once, Peter twice, John thrice and Paul no less than fifteen times. The second line is that of the prophets who heralded the Messiah (from Moses and Aaron to Zachary and Amos), the saints who followed Christ's example (from George and John the New to Demetrios) and the Old Testament messengers and guardians who relentlessly continued to serve God and humanity under the New Covenant (angels, archangels and seraphim). The third line leads from the Incarnation to the Crucifixion: the holy patrons of Dragomirna Monastery, the prophets and the Apostles bow before the Mother of God, whose birth is foretold by the presence of her parents and whose maternity shaped the future of humankind. As for Anastasie Crimca, he is depicted kneeling in front of his foundation below a depiction of Abraham and the three angels sent by God to announce the birth of his son (Gen. 1.18) (Figure 3.1).

Some of these themes can be found in other manuscripts commissioned by Anastasie. Many subjects are specific to Anastasie's cultural milieu: the righteous Enoch, Prophet Elijah and Saint John the Theologian do not appear anywhere else in this particular formula (Poirot 2008). Most iconographic options are imaginative and versatile (Costea 1992, 1994, 1996; Voinescu 2014).

The depictions of the archangel Michael fall into the last category. The leader of the angelic cohort first appears at the end of Peter's second Epistle, together with Gabriel, Raphael and Joel (Cod. Slav. 6: 97v). He then features at the end of the introduction to Paul's second Epistle to the Corinthians as a rider trampling Satan. Finally, with the sword in his hand, he stands at the end of the introduction to Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews (Cod. Slav. 6: 269v).

The four archangels of 2 Peter play a decorative role, frequently also ascribed to seraphim. Nevertheless, the presence of Joel among them is intriguing, as it points to a non-biblical literary source. The most probable candidate is the

Slavonic Life of Adam and Eve. This apocryphal work has Joel pleading with God not to cast Adam out of paradise, praying unceasingly until Adam and Eve are given the seventh part of heaven, informing Adam that he must differentiate and name all creatures and begging for the absolution of the deceased Adam (Jagić 1893: 91, 93, 99; Timotin 2015: 152). In the 1616 Psalter, Dragomirna's holy patrons, the just Joachim, Raphael and Joel, pray that God confirms Anastasie's donation (*Dragomirna* 115: 197r). In the 'Praxapostolos', Joel may have had the symbolic task of intervening with God on behalf of Adam and Noah, humanity's forefathers, depicted together (Cod. Slav. 6: 300r).

Except for the archangel's non-military attire, the pose in Hebrews recalls the representation of Michael as an armed guardian of the sanctuaries, omnipresent in contemporary icons and frescoes in the variant imposed by Cretan painters, such as Michael Damaskinos (*c*. 1530–*c*. 1592) (Charchare 2008). It also resembles that of an unnamed archangel portrayed together with two other anonymous archangels and three military saints in the 1616 Psalter (*Dragomirna* 115: 180r). The Psalter's archangel, dressed in Roman armour, holds a sword in his right hand and tramples a naked man. He does not carry a soul in his left hand as in many Cretan icons of the time, he does not weigh souls on a scale and it is unclear whether the anonymous victim is Satan, a sinner or the personification of death. Still, the composition clearly evokes Michael's psychopomp and eschatological role (Chatzidakis and Katerini 2005; Leontakianakou 2009; Parpulov n.d.). The 1610 'Viennese' archangel carries no souls to the afterworld and stamps on no creature, but his connection to the Epistle to the Hebrews equally points to judgement and reckoning. According to the Epistle to the Hebrews, God has spoken to humankind 'in these last days' not by prophets but through his son, 'whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds' (Heb. 1.2). Seated at the right hand of God, eternal and exalted above angels, the son was destined to cleanse humanity's sins. Yet, his 'crowning with glory and honor' inextricably followed death (Heb. 2.9). His suffering made 'the captain of salvation' perfect and able to help the afflicted believers (Heb. 2.10). His sacrifice was both necessary and exemplary. On the one hand, it made Jesus 'perfect', superior to the Jewish prophets and high priests, and a unique 'author of eternal salvation' (Heb. 5.9-10). On the other hand, it enabled a new, sin-free covenant between God and his people. Consequently, the letter's recipients are urged to persist in their Christian faith, follow Christ's self-sacrificial model and nurture the expectation of a life in heavenly Jerusalem, the city of God. The message was full of hope: 'Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but for the salvation

of those who eagerly wait for him' (Heb. 9.27). But hope was only one side of the coin. Since neglecting such a salvific message would have incurred dire consequences for everyone, the Epistle's author warned listeners about the many hazards associated with such neglect: passive dangers (sluggishness), active dangers (apostasy) and external pressures (persecution) (Ellingworth 1996: 78–80).

To render the exhortations even more compelling, the 1610 'Praxapostolos' added a depiction of the archangel Michael in military posture. Coherent from a liturgical point of view – a lection from the Epistle to the Hebrews was read on the feast of Michael's miracle at Chonai (6 September) and on the feast of the Incorporeal Ones (8 November) – the archangel's presence had a pronounced eschatological undertone. The inscription on Michael's scroll, though not very clear, seems to point in the same direction: 'so that one does not commit sin'. The 'chief of the hosts' and Israel's guardian angel reminded the new chosen people that God's judgement was nigh.

The second Epistle to the Corinthians also speaks about judgement: 'For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad' (2 Cor. 5.10). And when it comes to divine retribution, who else may inflict it more effectively than Michael? Metropolitan Anastasie could not think of anyone better, but he – or the painter, or both – chose to depict the archangel in a way never seen before in Moldavia. Mounted on a white-winged horse, a crowned, golden-winged Michael flies over the clouds and under a rainbow. He strongly blows a trumpet that floats in the air, holds a censer and a book in his left hand and spears Satan with his right hand. Hit, the dark angel falls into turbulent blue waters that have just destroyed a city, uselessly clinging on to his staff. Standing before an altar and a cross, a radiant Christ Emmanuel blesses the scene (Figure 3.2).

The inscriptions clearly identify the protagonist: the archangel Michael, 'menacing, powerful frightful captain of the heavenly host, who stands before the throne of your glory's majesty'. The hints to the book of Revelation, the final book of the New Testament, seem obvious: trumpet, censer, angel clothed in a cloud, rainbow, war in heaven, casting out the Evil One, book – it is all there (Rev. 8.1-5, 10.1, 12.7-9, 14.6). Michael's unnamed enemy looks like Satan, not like an apocalyptic dragon, but identifying the clash is difficult, as the legend (23.10) is not transparent.[3] Later icons, which include textual explanations, sometimes very comprehensive, place near the scene a Psalm verse: 'Endless ruin has overtaken my enemies, you have uprooted their cities; even the memory

of them has perished' (Psalm 9.7; Antonova 1966, 1:120–1, 2:116). The laconic inscription in the 1610 'Praxapostolos' apparently fits the scenario. Since Sodom and Gomorrah perished by fire, the best contender for the flooded city is the 'great' Babylon, the 'dwelling place of demons' (Rev. 18). Nevertheless, as I will soon argue, one should be very cautious about extrapolating from later sources.

The Apocalypse does not explain everything. The book of Revelation was part of Dragomirna's liturgical practice, as shown by another gift of Anastasie to his monastery, a Menologion containing vitae and sermons related to the saints celebrated yearly from May to August. For 8 May, the feast of Saint John the Apostle and Evangelist, the manuscript's compiler inserted the entire text of the Apocalypse, which was generally attributed to John (Palade 2018).[4] However, the codex is not illuminated; in fact, no earlier or contemporary illuminated Moldavian manuscript of the Apocalypse or commentary on the Apocalypse is known, and the iconographic cycles of the Apocalypse are not attested earlier than the second half of the seventeenth century.[5] Even if it had been illuminated, no painter would have chosen a depiction of the archangel Michael as 'captain of the heavenly host'. Judging by the extant Greek and Slavonic manuscripts, books, icons and frescoes illustrating the book of Revelation, the fight against Satan and his forces would have been carried out by a group of archangels, winged on wingless horses, who would have defeated both the demons and the dragon. An archangel would have locked the chained beast in the abyss, but his name would not have been revealed (Katsioti 2011; Anufrieva and Pochinskaya 2014; Chinyakova 2017). Therefore, the Revelation alone cannot provide an explanation for Anastasie's choice. One needs to look elsewhere, relying on two major invoked but insufficiently explored indications: the circumstances surrounding the genesis of this intriguing iconographic type and the history of Michael's fight with the Devil.

The Czar and the Old Believers

The origins of the iconographic type of the 'captain of the heavenly host' are obscure (Tychinskaia 2010, 2012a, b). However, many scholars trust that one should look for them in the reign of Ivan the Terrible (r. 1533–84). Alongside the book of Revelation, they identify as a main textual source the *Canon to the Menacing Angel*, which survived in a couple of late-sixteenth- and several seventeenth-century manuscripts (Ostapenko 2011). Attributed to a certain Parfenii the Holy Fool – a pseudonym of the czar himself, according to some

– and hypothetically dated 1572, the *Canon* begged the 'captain and guardian of all people' to show mercy to the penitent sinners in the hour of their death and on the day of the Last Judgement. The epithets associated with the angel abound: 'frightful and menacing', 'holy angel of Christ', 'menacing captain', 'frightful and menacing messenger of the highest king', 'captain of the heavenly king', 'menacing captain and warrior of the king of kings' (Likhachov 1972).[6] These epithets resonate with the legends of the 1610 Moldavian miniature and extant Russian icons:

Canon to the Menacing Angel: 'Captain of the heavenly King and messenger of the divine throne and doer of Lord's will and executor of His commandments' (Likhachov 1972).	1610 'Praxapostolos': 'Menacing, powerful, frightful captain of the heavenly host, who stands before the throne of Your glory's majesty'.	Icon in the Korin collection: 'And Lord Jesus Christ had a holy Archistrategos Michael, menacing and frightful captain and messenger of the divine throne, doer of the Lord's will and executor of His everywhere consecrated commandment' (Antonova 1966: I:121).[7]

The *Canon*'s Angel of Death is unnamed, and there is no indication of chivalric appearance. However, Michael's popularity had been steadily rising in Muscovy; the increasing number of iconographic cycles of archangels is a reliable indicator (Gabelić 2004: 200–11; Samoilova 2014; Yakovleva 2017). In a letter to Ivan IV, Metropolitan Makarii (1482–1563) asked God to send the archangel and other incorporeal beings to help the good Muscovite army against the agents of evil, the Tatars, as in biblical times (Rowland 2020: 134–5). In a letter to Prince Andrei Kurbskii, the czar himself voiced Michael's pre-eminence as protector and intercessor: 'the archangel Michael stood before Moses and Joshua the son of Nun and all Israel; he also stood invisibly before the first Christian tsar, Constantine, in the piety of his newly gained grace. The archangel Michael moved before his army and defeated all his enemies, and from that time even until the present day he aids all pious tsars' (Hunt 1993: 802).[8]

Consequently (and of mutual benefit to state and church), Michael played an important role in Muscovite state ideology. In the monumental *Blessed Be the Host of the Heavenly Tsar* icon from the Dormition Cathedral of the Moscow Kremlin, usually associated with the fall of the Khanate of Kazan in 1552 but recently linked to the reign of Grand Prince Vasilii III (r. 1505–33)

(Samoilova 2020; Shalina 2021), the archangel leads an army, which includes Emperor Constantine the Great, mounted on a winged horse. On the great banner (probably) used by Ivan IV's detachment in the early Northern Wars (1558–9), he leads Christ and an army of angels, the celestial counterpart of the earthly Muscovite host, also mounted on a winged horse (Bogatyrev 2009). These compositions have an eschatological and apocalyptic meaning (the banner quotes the book of Revelation), in line with the ruler-centred 'attenuated apocalyptic, millennial mode' of the time (Flier 2003: 128–9).

The winged archangel on a winged horse represents a rare variant of the 'angel on horse' motif. First attested in the Buslaev Psalter, copied in the 1480s at the court of Ivan III (r. 1462–1505), it features in an icon of the Second Coming of Christ and a vita icon of Saint Nicholas of Zaraysk (Garidis 1972; Tychinskaia 2013; Shalina 2021). The motif may have served as an iconographic source for the 'captain of the heavenly host' (Tychinskaia 2012a, b, 2014). Therefore, this outstanding new type may illustrate, as Alpatov believed, a widespread 'belief in divine punishment', although it is not a creation of 'popular imagination' – at least not exclusively (Alpatov 1978: 16–17, 197, 323). It may be linked to the Moscow Kremlin, the heart of the Muscovite state, and may be related to the idea of Muscovy as the new God-chosen Israel triumphing over evil.

The 1610 'Praxapostolos' supports the 'aulic' hypothesis. Very little is known about the relations between Muscovy and Moldavia; the Moldavian documents in the old Moscow archives were lost in a fire in 1626 (Ciobanu 2017). However, in 1625, Metropolitan Crimca asked Patriarch Filaret to send him an icon depicting the Descent of the Holy Spirit for Dragomirna, his 'new monastery' (Gorovei 1994: 604–5, 608–9; Pascal 2018: 243–5). It is therefore fairly safe to assume that the Moldavian painter's source of inspiration was a Muscovite icon, possibly offered as an official gift. If this was the case, the iconography was canonical; in 1629, Patriarch Filaret blocked two 'inappropriated' icons commissioned by the Moldavian prince Miron Barnovski (Firea 2021).

The icon has not survived. This increases the importance of the 1610 miniature for the study of the motif's origins – all the more so since the 'captain of the heavenly host' type was not present in the icons and frescoes decorating the Kremlin's Annunciation Cathedral and the Golden Hall, which State Secretary Ivan M. Viskovatyi criticized as unorthodox in the early 1550s. Likewise, it could not be found in the frescoes of the Kremlin's Archangel Cathedral, the dynasty's burial church, adorned with murals in 1564–5 (Gabelić 2004: 252–7; Samoilova 2014). Moreover, only one cycle of archangels included the scene – namely an icon in Moscow's Andrei Rublev Museum originating in the Volga region and

tentatively dated to the first half of the seventeenth century (Gabelić 2004: 224–7). In fact, no dated examples survive from the sixteenth century and the first half of the seventeenth century, and the few items ascribed to this period on stylistic grounds exhibit considerable differences from the Moldavian 1610 miniature (Wild 1946: figure XII; Chatzidakis and Djurić 1968: figure 141). An icon in the Andrei Rublev Museum dated *c.* 1624, which may have been a gift from Czar Mikhail Fedorovich and Patriarch Filaret to the Dormition Cathedral in Dimitrov, near Moscow, puts reins, a censer, a spear and instruments of Passion in Michael's right hand. The scenography includes the sun and the moon, and Christ Emmanuel is represented in bust (Sorokaty 2000: 319, figure 18). A heavily repainted 1640 fresco in the Church of Saint Nikolai Nadein in Yaroslavl has no inscriptions and lacks main elements: the archangel does not wear a crown and does not pierce Satan with a spear, Christ Emmanuel is missing and the horse has no wings (Tychinskaia 2010: 26–7, 2012a: 168). An icon in the Korin collection colours the archangel and the horse red, which may allude to Heb. 1.7: 'who makes His angels spirits and His ministers a flame of fire' (Antonova 1966, 2:116).[9] In the same vein, Satan and the Sodom-and-Gomorrah-like city fall in a blaze, which stands in stark contrast with the 1610 'Praxapostolos'.

The inscriptions also present significant variations. The Moldavian miniature labels the composition, names the protagonists (Jesus Christ and the archangel Michael) and places a cryptic reference near the central scene. The Dimitrov icon in the Andrei Rublev Museum provides a similar general title: 'Archistrategos Michael, strong, powerful, frightful heavenly captain of the Heavenly King'. Three lines above Christ echo Heb. 1.8: 'Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom'. A legend accompanies the rainbow, paraphrasing Gen. 9.13: 'I set My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be for the sign of the covenant between Me and the earth'. A quote from Ps. 9.7 ('Endless ruin has overtaken my enemies') completes the set of explanations (Tychinskaia 2010: 25, 2012a: 166). The icon in the Korin collection, as already shown, opts for a partial textual frame consisting of a slightly longer title equally inspired by the *Canon to the Menacing Angel* at the top and a reference to Ps. 9.7 at the bottom.

All these iconographic and textual differences are indicative of two morphologically related but notably dissimilar types, which would go on to generate several hybrid types: the 1610 Dragomirna miniature reflects the first type – perhaps the 'original', Muscovite one, while the icon in the Korin collection mirrors the second, non-aulic type. Nevertheless, in both cases, the inscriptions are extracted not from the book of Revelation but from the *Canon*

to the Menacing Angel and, at times, from biblical texts other than the book of Revelation.

Later icons, such as the 1671 icon of the Lelikozero chapel, which includes sixteen angelic miracles, are laconic (Tychinskaia 2011a, b). Others, such as the one in the Pskov Museum, offer extensive Scripture-based references for both the scene as a whole and the relevant iconographic elements: altar, rainbow, Gospels, censer and instruments of the Passion (the spear is missing) (Vasileva 2006: 458) (Table 3.1).[10]

The motif soon showed remarkable versatility. Its popularity, especially in Pomor'e, the Upper Volga region, the Ural region and western Siberia, was equally impressive (*Невьянская икона* 1997: 99, 163, 172, 194, 204, 205; Bentchev 2002: 65–9, 2005: 71–2, 94; Nechaeva 2002: 157, 158, 161, 162; Neubauer 2007: 29–31, 162–3; Ostapenko 2011). It even generated the legend of the late-sixteenth-century conquest of Siberia under a banner depicting the 'captain of the heavenly host' (Tychinskaia 2012a: 165–6). Nevertheless, one should be wary of interpreting early-seventeenth-century items – in this case, the 1610 Moldavian miniature – through the prism of elaborate inscriptions and the complex iconography of later icons.

The blooming of the multifaceted 'captain of the heavenly host' type was mainly a by-product of the religious reforms of Patriarch Nikon of Russia (1652–8; †1681) and the emergence of dissenting communities, such as the Old Believers (Michels 1999). Once elected patriarch, Nikon gave new impetus to a church reform favoured, among others, by Czar Aleksei Mikhailovich Romanov

Table 3.1 Early Iconographic Types

Elements	1610 'Praxapostolos'	Icon in the Korin Collection	Icon in the Pskov Museum
Christ	Right corner, standing in front of the altar, winged	Left corner, seated at the altar, bust	Right corner, bust to the altar's left, in medallion
Gadgets	Trumpet, spear (right hand), censer and book (left hand)	Trumpet, instruments of Passion (cross, sponge on reed and spear), spear (left hand), book (right hand)	Trumpet, instruments of Passion (right hand), censer and book (left hand)
Horse	White, facing left	Red, facing right	Red, facing left
Scenery	Satan (holding a crocked staff) falls into a water abyss that has flooded a city	Satan (no staff) and a city succumb to a rain of fire	Satan (no staff) sinks into a water abyss that has flooded a city

Source: Synopsis by Ovidiu Olar.

(r. 1645–76; †1676). He advocated and imposed a revision of liturgical texts and ecclesiastical ceremonies according to the habits and practices of other parts of the Eastern Orthodox world. The resulting transformation was the most serious attempt to fully integrate the Muscovite Church into the family of Eastern churches. The effects were colossal. The patriarch's reforms triggered dissent that led to schism (*raskol*), as Russia transformed into a 'persecuting society' in which religious dissenters were both heretics and enemies of the state.

Quite surprisingly, the turmoil proved beneficial to the 'captain of the heavenly host' iconographic type. Officially, the Church discarded both this iconographic type and the *Canon to the Menacing Angel* as unnecessary and unacceptable novelties, since they were sixteenth-century compositions that did not draw on Byzantine models. In reaction, communities that rejected Nikon's reforms considered them 'traditional' and reproduced them in a small format suitable for domestic and on-the-move devotion, thus ensuring their survival. In fact, many of the late examples originated in Old Believer milieus (Ostapenko 2011), which were permeated by apocalyptic ideas. They believed that the Antichrist had arrived, that Russia was his kingdom and that the end of the world and the Last Judgement were imminent (Tarasov 2002: 144–67). They held the book of Revelation in high esteem, copying and illuminating it separately from the rest of the New Testament, often together with commentary by Andrew of Caesarea, and they continued to use the *Canon to the Menacing Angel*. Consequently, for Old Believers who considered Ivan IV the first pious czar, the depiction of the archangel Michael as 'captain of the heavenly host' combined the idea of royal power, the image of a legitimate ruler and the struggle to prepare for the end of time (Ostapenko 2011).

A 1719 icon from Znamenskii Monastery in Irkutsk placed the fall of evil on the margin (Komashko 2006: 262, 335). However, most items depict triumph, not combat: Michael marches over the 'loser' Satan, who is powerless in front of God (Franklin 2002). In a 'world without grace', in Tarasov's (2002) words, dissenters fled persecution, tried to escape the state and eternal damnation and placed their trust in the 'menacing, powerful and frightful' angel. If the trumpet triggered resurrection and judgement, Michael would take away the fear by 'joyously' busting the hope of salvation.

The complicated and heterogeneous history of Russian dissent and Old Belief accounts for the iconographic type's numerous variants, which should be studied separately – in their specific, local contexts – and not used to reconstruct an ideal icon that includes all possible iconic and textual details but never circulated in reality. These late developments add a riveting layer to the story:

a court-related iconographic type became a favourite of state-defiant groups. It provides only indirect and limited access to the rationale behind Anastasie Crimca's iconographic choice, but it offers a first set of answers to the question of the reluctance of Moldavian – and, by extension, Southeast European – cultural milieus to adopt it.

The Chosen People and the fall of Satan

Although the two Testaments barely mention him and the Church fathers never gave him credit for fighting the dragon, which they interpreted as a spiritual endeavour, Michael steadily rose to fame in Byzantium (Olar 2004). In Egypt, he was celebrated as a guide of souls in the hereafter, protector of the Nile's flood and successor to the fallen devil as an angelic leader (Innemée 2019; D'Agostino 2019; Lundhaug 2019). In Syria, the archangel's sanctuary at Ḥūarte/Hawarte prospered because of a cult of relics (Canivet 1980). In Asia Minor, home to the pilgrimage site of Germia, Michael – worthy heir to the ancient gods – enjoyed widespread veneration as a healer (Niewöhner 2018). Soon, with imperial support, the divine archangel, vanquisher of Lucifer, great commander of the incorporeal beings and effective protector of humankind, became widely celebrated across the empire. His miracle at Chonai was feted each 6 September, while the fall of Satan was commemorated on 8 November (Zanetti 1994). By the ninth century, the variegated local forms of veneration – suspect in the eyes of the Church – had turned into a 'real cult' (Martin-Hisard 1994: 362–5; Dobjanschi, Cernea and Tănăsoiu 2008: 18, 29).

A sermon composed and delivered by a certain Pantaleon, deacon and chartophylax of Hagia Sophia during the reign of Michael III (r. 843–67) and his mother Theodora (regent, 843–56), offers an extended 'account of the miracles of the all-great archangel' (Martin-Hisard 1994: 367–70; Skowronek 2008: 71–80). It starts with the creation of the angels and the fall of Satan, which resulted in Michael taking over as protector of Israel, and proceeds with a list of biblical miracles, identifying Michael with the Angel of the Lord. While Gabriel only heralds the births of John the Baptist and Christ and Raphael cures Tobit's blindness, Michael gets additional credit for a series of historical miracles, beginning with the foundation of the Anaplous shrine by Constantine the Great and ending with a contemporary feat: the pious Marcianus, candle bearer of Pantaleon's church, is restored to health after being anointed with oil from the lamp burning in front of Michael's icon. To Marcianus, Michael appears as a

'terrifying man' mounted on a 'terrible white steed' (Halkin 1963: 149–50). Is this a reference to the 'fearsome rider' who expels Heliodorus from the Temple (2 Macc. 3.25)? Is it an allusion to the horseman of the Apocalypse? It is difficult to tell. At any rate, Pantaleon ends his *Account* by highlighting the archangel's role at the End of Days: to announce the end by blowing his resounding trumpet and to resurrect the dead for the (Last) Judgement and just retribution. The circle is thus completed: from Adam's expulsion from paradise to the author's days and from the fall of angels to the Last Judgement, Michael – 'he who is like God' – protects Israel (old and new), Jerusalem (old and new) and the Chosen People (old and new).

Pantaleon's *Account*, also available in an abbreviated version, was highly popular (Martin-Hisard 1994: 372). It was translated into Georgian, Latin, Church Slavonic and Russian. The Russian translation was included in the 'great' collection of monthly readings commissioned by Metropolitan Makarii (*Великія минеи четьи* 1897: 243–82). By acquiring official liturgical status in Muscovy, the *Account* fuelled once more the idea that Michael protected a new Israel (Muscovy), a new Jerusalem (Moscow) and a new chosen people – neither Jews nor *Romaioi* (Romans, as the 'Byzantines' called themselves) but Muscovites. Conversely, the Slavonic translation is attested by a sole (Wallachian) manuscript, probably because the Romanian principalities and the Slavic Balkans fancied a *Sermon* by Bishop Clement of Ohrid (830–916) dedicated to the archangels Michael and Gabriel (Skowronek 2008: 24–34).

Both Pantaleon's *Account* and Clement's *Sermon* were delivered on 8 November, the feast day of Michael and the 'bodiless powers'. Many other texts were composed for the same occasion (Snipes 1988; Matantseva 1996; Skowronek 2010). Still, the fall of the angelic Satanael and his transformation into the devilish Satan, which was the major achievement of the incorporeal beings, never received detailed treatment. An *Encomium to Michael* also attributed to Pantaleon stated that the archangel, 'protector and savior' of the children of Israel, cast the proud Satan and his accomplices out of heaven. Once the rebel fell, Michael, who stood by the divine throne, took over as leader of the heavenly host. The 'god-like taxiarch of the angelic armies' gathered the loyal angels, reminded them of their role and sung the Trisagion hymn in honour of the Lord. The feast of the Synaxis of the Archangels triggered a reflection 'on the origins and still current efficacity of the archangel' (Martin-Hisard 2014: 462, 464–5, 470–1). Clement of Ohrid briefly mentioned the hubris of the chief rebel angel and his subsequent transformation into a devil and hailed Michael, who could not stand his arrogance, as the one who 'trampled the lord of darkness'

and 'stood before God's throne' (Clement of Ohrid 1970: 282). Metrophanes, bishop of Smyrna in the second half of the ninth century, paired Michael with Gabriel and asked them to 'deliver us all from evil and rage of crooked Satan, who fights against God and hates men' but did not mention Satan's fall at all (Gielen and Van Deun 2015: 668–9). Theophanes Kerameus and Niketas Choniates did mention it – the latter also quoted the Apocalypse – but focused on the event's consequences (Gabelić 1993–4: 65).

To fill this gap, apocryphal texts provided details on the archangel's fight with Satan (Turdeanu 1995). According to the Slavonic *Homily of John Chrysostom on How the Archangel Michael Defeated Satanail*, which was translated into Romanian in the seventeenth century, the 'most cunning' Satanael refused to bow before the newly Christ-created Adam (Minczew 2011). He convinced several archangels and angels to join him, left the 'seven heavens', imperfectly replicated the Lord's creation and placed his own throne 'on heavenly clouds'. The Father summoned the 'terrifying' Michael, Gabriel, Uriel and Raphael, asking them to retrieve the insignia that Satanael had stolen – that is, 'the divine-woven garments, and the most holy divine-woven wreath of the sceptre of the ranks of archangels'. Gabriel hesitated, but Michael valiantly accepted the task. With God's permission, he tricked Satanael into believing that he was his ally and convinced him to bathe in a refreshing lake. While the Antichrist fought a dragon 'on the bottom of the abyss', Michael froze the lake, killed all the fallen angels and snatched the stolen items. Chased by an enraged Satanael, who even managed to grab his feet, the archangel asked God's permission to destroy the pursuer. The request was denied. 'Then the Archangel took his lethal sword and struck him [Satan] on the top of his head; and the treacherous one fell, and the cunning Satanail became powerless and went down to the Abyss, ashamed and naked, and bereft, as it was supposed to be'. Michael returned to heavenly Jerusalem, receiving praise from all angelic beings (Badalanova Geller 2017). A similar Greek text transmitted by a manuscript copied in 1542 even claims that God rewarded Michael by appointing him 'second God, judge, helper, and commander of the armies' (Afinogenova 2006: 340). The statement's audacity is a sign of the archangel's popularity. Despite his popularity, however, the non-biblical confrontation between the two major heavenly beings – the faithful and the rebel – was rarely depicted in Eastern Christian art. It appears only at Lesnovo, and it is highly marginal in the specialized cycles of archangels (Gabelić 1993–4: 69–70, 2004: 94–5, 240, 284–6). This has less to do with the tale's pseudo-canonical character – the Slavonic version quotes the Bible and the Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom, which points to 'liturgization' and homiletic

use (Minczew 2011: 28, 31, 47–50, 53) – and more with the inconsistent, fluid nature of the 'Byzantine devil' (Gabelić 1993–4: 71).

Could, then, the *Homily on How the Archangel Michael Defeated Satanail* count among the sources of the Muscovite 'captain of the heavenly host' (Prolović 2013: 223)? Obviously not. In Western Europe, Michael was traditionally represented as vanquishing Satan, who often assumed the form of a serpent. Until late, Eastern Christianity never fancied this iconographic option. Michael's credentials as demon-fighter were undisputed: neither lesser malevolent spirits, like Gylou or Avestița, nor more dangerous representatives of evil resisted him, and he was often asked to 'exile every horrible thing' and protect the believers (Gabelić 1996: 353). Still, there were other ways to depict the fall of Satan: by showing an archangel standing triumphant over an abyss as demons fall; by displaying victorious archangels standing over the abyss, some hitting demons with spears; and by showcasing assembled angels celebrating the defeat of the forces of evil, sometimes in combination with the fall of Satan (Gabelić 1991: 50–8, 1993–4; Dobjanschi, Cernea, and Tănăsoiu 2008: 152, 158).

Moldavia favoured the last option, which was in line with both Pantaleon's *Account* and liturgical practice. The iconographic cycles of archangels were numerous: Rădăuți (fresco, *c*. 1480–1500), Pătrăuți (fresco, post 1487), Bălinești (fresco, post 1500), Mășcătești (icon, 1525–7), Humor (icon, second quarter of the sixteenth century; fresco, 1535), Moldovița (fresco, 1537), Neamț (fresco, sixteenth century, heavily repainted in the nineteenth century), Sucevița (fresco, *c*. 1596; icon, 1595–1606) (Gabelić 2004: 158–79; Dragnev 2006, 2022a, b; Bedros 2011). Most of them included the 'pure' Synaxis of the Archangels. However, the cycles of Rădăuți and Bălinești also feature a rather peculiar type of the fall of Satan: in military garb and with a drawn sword in his right hand, an anonymous archangel, similar to Michael as he appeared to Joshua (Josh. 5.13-15), together with a group of 'civilian' angels, watches the demons fall from the skies (Dragnev 2022a: 23, 34). Were the painters inspired by the splendid Slavonic Gospels codex commissioned in 1355–6 by the Bulgarian czar Ivan Aleksandăr (r. 1331–71) (Dragnev 2019: 23)? The hypothesis is supported by the model's presence in Moldavia during the reign of Stephen 'the Great' (r. 1457–1504) (Gorovei and Székely 2005: 216–18). However, the archangel's martial posture, indicating that the scene takes place on Earth (not in heaven), contradicts it.

A Gospel book commissioned by Metropolitan Anastasie is much closer to the 'original' (Akc. 10788). This lavishly illuminated manuscript, copied by the monk Theofil of Voroneț in 1614 and painted by Ștefan from Suceava in 1616–

17, is one of the 'Slavonic parallels' of an eleventh-century Constantinopolitan codex (Der Nersessian 1973; Costea 2013). Just like its (unknown) prototype and its relatives, which include Czar Ivan Aleksandăr's Gospels, a paper copy made for the Wallachian prince Alexandru II Mircea (r. 1568–77) and a parchment copy made for the Moldavian prince Ieremia Movilă (r. 1595–1606, with a short interruption), the Gospel book illustrates Lk. 10.18 by showing dark demons falling into the abyss (Dragnev 2004: 125–6). Like Jesus tells his disciples that he witnessed Satan being thrown into hell – 'And He said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven"' – an archangel in imperial garb, unnamed but very Michael-like, stands triumphant in heaven as the rebels are cast away and angels rejoice (Akc. 10788: 358).

The frescoes of Dragomirna Monastery depict the episode in a similar vein: the angels of the Lord triumph, while the rebel angels fall (*Frescele Mănăstirii Dragomirna* 2015: 174). An actual fight does not feature in the manuscript's two depictions of the Last Judgement either, which show angels roll up the vault of the sky, herald the resurrection, weigh the souls of the departed and tend to the righteous. A battle is only implied, since the focus is on the judgement performed by the Son of Man, the punishing of the wicked and the rewarding of the righteous with eternal life (Akc. 10788: 143, 254).

From the fifteenth century onwards, Last Judgement icons of the northern Rus' included the fall of Satan's angels (Himka 2009: 43). The earliest extant Last Judgement icons in the Carpathians, those of Vanivka (Węglówka), Poliana (Polana) and Mshanets, also showcased angels spearing devils and driving them out of heaven (Berezhnaya and Himka 2014: 2–19). The frequent fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Moldavian depictions of the Last Judgement, usually placed on the outside western wall of churches, did not include the fall of Satan but bestowed a greater belligerent role on the angels and archangels against the demons (Stănculescu 2001: 81–3). A Gospel book commissioned by Prince Movilă, which is sometimes attributed to Anastasie Crimca, also featured angelic beings confronting demons for humans' souls in its two Last Judgement scenes (*Sucevița* 24: 73v; *Tetraevanghelul Sucevița 24*: 73v). However, unlike later Cretan versions of the theme clearly influenced by Western European models, none of the Moldavian compositions ascribed a leading role to the archangel Michael.

The Last Judgement and the cycle of archangels, which usually adorned funerary spaces, were closely linked (Bedros 2011: 120). Michael had a recognizable role in both contexts despite theologians' efforts to portray him as one among many angelic beings. The scenarios were eschatological and

'optimistic'. Rather than fuelling a 'chosen people' ideology, they focused on Christ's Second Coming, his millennial reign and the salvation of the righteous, and they did not take an apocalyptic turn, as the end of time was inevitable but not imminent and definitely not gracelessly violent, nor did they favour new iconographic types, such as the 'captain of the heavenly host'.

In Moldavia, Michael could be seen mounted on a horse as early as the fifteenth century (Garidis 1972).[11] A fresco in the Church of the Holy Cross in Pătrăuți, built in 1487, showed him riding in front of the 'great emperor Constantine' and his soldiers, heading towards the sign of the Cross. Michael and his horse are present in sixteenth-century frescoes depicting the Tree of Jesse (at Moldovița, both are red as fire). However, the steed never grew wings, and the archangel never became an apocalyptic rider in Moldavia – or the Balkans or Crete. The cultural environment simply did not favour such an iconographic development. The book of Revelation had been treated with suspicion, failing until late to find its way into monumental, icon or manuscript illumination.[12] Moreover, no Moldavian ruler – not even Stephen 'the Great', the father-in-law of Ivan III, who invited Muscovite painters to Putna Monastery (Smirnova 2010) – and no Moldavian metropolitan – not even Macarie (†1558), constantly associated with the iconographic programmes of several major Moldavian monasteries (Ulea 1985) – ever constructed and promoted symbolic agendas like those of the Muscovite czars and metropolitans.

The archangel Michael was associated with the cult of the dead in both Muscovy and Moldavia, as testified by the royal mausolea of the Moscow Kremlin (Archangel Cathedral) and Rădăuți (Church of Saint Nicholas) (Bedros 2011; Soldat 2011). In Moldavia, numerous funerary spaces were dedicated to Michael. Nevertheless, neither the expectation of the end of time in the year 7000 since the creation of the world (1492 since the Incarnation of Christ) nor the 'wave of apocalyptic fears' that swept the neighbouring Ruthenian lands at the turn of the seventeenth century favoured the invention or adoption of the 'captain of the heavenly host' type. Likewise, the prophecy-generating advance of the Ottomans, which triggered millenarian expectations, neither engendered nor encouraged such iconographic solutions.

The late-sixteenth-century Moldavian cycles of archangels feature scenes specific to Muscovy (Bedros 2011: 116, 199–200). Since the 'captain of the heavenly host' did not enjoy a similar development, we can safely assume that Moldavia, as well as Southeastern Europe, preferred different scenarios about Michael's clash with Satan and the end of time.

Conclusion: Waiting for the Judgement

The Moldavian Metropolitan Anastasie Crimca remains a mysterious personality despite his prominent position and all the remarkable scholarly efforts to pin him down.[13] Dragomirna Monastery is an artistic masterpiece, but it has not revealed all its secrets; for example, we do not know why its iconographic programme was never completed. The manuscripts copied and illuminated for Anastasie's foundation are a treasure trove, yet many are unsure whether they were the product of an individual, a scriptorium or scribes and painters contracted by a patron. We still ponder where to look for their liturgical and iconographic models. It also remains uncertain why the illumination process stopped around 1616 even though Anastasie continued to commission manuscripts until his death in 1629. Neither the 'tension specific to his personality' between the initial iconographic effervescence and the subsequent complete refrainment from image nor the 'personality full of contradictions' invoked by some scholars is convincing (Costea 1994: 18; Mitric 2014: 142).

This research was triggered by a puzzle: a miniature in a manuscript offered by Crimca to Dragomirna Monastery that unexpectedly depicts the archangel Michael, winged on a winged horse, blowing into an apocalyptic trumpet, crushing Satan and throwing him into the abyss. Since this peculiar 'captain of the heavenly host' iconographic type was very popular in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Russia but remained completely unknown elsewhere, attempts have been made to decipher its sources. However, no one has managed to locate the Moldavian image – the earliest surviving – in its immediate context. At first, the context seems rather confusing. More than any other illuminated manuscript commissioned by Anastasie, the 1610 'Praxapostolos' breaks with tradition by multiplying images, combining them in creative ways and drawing upon different iconographic and textual sources, including apocryphal ones. Undoubtedly, the metropolitan was 'an inventive lover of image' (Costea 1994: 17, n. 4), but was there a theological rationale behind the 'captain of the heavenly host', which was clearly a shiny object? Dragomirna's illuminated manuscripts are careful with angelic names and attributes. In the 1616 Psalter, two scenes, one in which an angel menaces King David and one in which angels kill 70,000 people as divine punishment for David's sins, are clearly ascribed to the Angel of the Lord. However, Anastasie resists the widespread temptation to attribute them to Michael (*Dragomirna* 115: 145v). In the 1610 'Praxapostolos', the archangel's iconographic types are coherently used. Based on this evidence, it

is safe to assume that the 'Praxapostolos' made an informed choice about the illumination of Paul's second Epistle to the Corinthians. Above, a youthful Christ Emmanuel, whose sacral name is abbreviated to IC XC, stands at the altar and blesses by making a three-fingered sign of the Cross – just as in the frescoes decorating the apses of Sucevița and Dragomirna Monasteries. In front of the altar is an eight-ended crucifix. On the altar, there are the chalice containing the consecrated wine, the paten containing the consecrated bread and the Gospels. Below, mounted on a white-winged steed, the archangel Michael blows the trumpet, holds the censer and the Gospels and pierces Satan with his spear. The instruments of the Passion are not yet present, but the meaning of the composition is obvious: Michael heralds Christ's Second Coming, defends the enemy and prepares the Lord's throne for the Judgement. As for the mysterious numbers accompanying the main scene, they may be a reference to Psalm 23.10: 'the Lord of Hosts, he is the King of Glory'. Therefore, the 'captain of the heavenly host' offers an eschatological understanding of the Divine Liturgy, which is celebrated by Christ, the eternal high priest.

Why prefer a 'new' iconographic type? One cannot be absolutely sure, but it fit very well in a manuscript donated to a monastery dedicated to three 'eschatological' patrons: the righteous Enoch, Prophet Elijah and John the Theologian (Costea 1992; Poirot 2008; Velculescu and Stănculescu 2017: 227–36). It also supported a more 'individualistic' interpretation of the conflict between the angelic powers than other, 'corporate' types. Satan and Michael each decided their faiths. Satan opted for rebellion and sin; Michael chose loyalty and virtue. The Lord had made it crystal clear that all evildoers would be punished, and only the faithful would be rewarded. An 'eschatological' archangel annihilating the Lord's foe in a one-on-one loud, incense-smelling and dynamic confrontation ensured the optimal delivery of the message. The second Epistle to the Corinthians warns against false prophets by reminding the faithful that Satan had masqueraded himself as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11.14). The 1610 'Praxapostolos' showcases the True Light.

Such a deluxe codex undoubtedly had limited circulation. Nevertheless, viewed against the background of Metropolitan Anastasie's manuscript corpus, it provides important insight into its donor's ambitions and hopes. In Crimca's case, the redemption of his parents, Ioan and Cristina, mentioned in every dedication, and the preparation for the Last Judgement were paramount.[14]

In Moldavia, the 'menacing, powerful and frightful captain of the heavenly host' remained confined to the 1610 'Praxapostolos'. The local iconographic traditions were too strong, and the potential agents of change were too weak for

it to become mainstream. The Apocalypse was suspicious in the eyes of many, and the Last Judgement possessed special iconographic charm. Conversely, in Russia, the 'eschatological' Michael played a major role in divergent millennial and apocalyptic scenarios. 'Bright as a folk song', the angelic horseman became iconic (Alpatov 1985: 61). After all – at least according to Bulgakov's (1992) *The Master and Margarita* – as the foxtrot played at Griboyedov House at the stroke of midnight goes, 'Satan lies a-waitin' and creatin' skies of gray / But hallelujah, hallelujah, helps to shoo the clouds away'.

I would like to thank the editors, the friends-in-Michael present in this volume, Nikolaos A. Chrissidis, Mădălina Doroftei, Andrei Dumitrescu, Kevin M. Kain and Iulia Nițescu for their valuable comments and suggestions.

This research was funded by the European Research Council under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (ORTHPOL project; grant agreement no. 950287).

Notes

1 In an 'Apostolos', the text of the Acts and Epistles is continuous. In a 'Praxapostolos' – that is, an 'Apostolos' lectionary – the text is organized into readings that follow the annual cycle of feasts.
2 The description is an adaptation from David (2014).
3 These numbers appear in the margin with no explanation. It is therefore unclear to which biblical – or other – text they refer.
4 The book of Revelation also features in a manuscript copied by the hieromonk Iacov for Putna Monastery in 1474 and in a sixteenth-century codex that belonged to Moldovița Monastery (Iufu and Brătulescu 2012: 165–70).
5 The oldest seems to be the one at Cetățuia Monastery, founded in 1672. The date of the cycle painted on the porch of Sucevița Monastery is controversial.

6 The contested issue of the *Canon*'s authorship lies beyond the scope of this chapter.
7 According to Antonova, the icon in Moscow's Pavel D. Korin collection dates from the first half of the seventeenth century and originated in the Volga region. Alpatov (1978: 16–17, 197, 323) dates the icon in the Korin collection to the mid-seventeenth century, while other scholars opt for the second half of the seventeenth century (Ostapenko 2011).
8 The contested authenticity of the correspondence is irrelevant for the present argument.
9 Later icons, such as a 1719 icon from Znamensky Monastery in Irkutsk, provide the quotation (Komashko 2006: 262, 335).
10 Vasileva (2006: 458) dates the icon to the second half of the seventeenth century. Tychinskaia (2010: 32, 2012a: 171) believes it had a sixteenth-century model.
11 Previously, he had done it in the Balkans – most famously in Lesnovo, Serbia – and in Crete.
12 In Moscow, it made an early entry: Theophanes the Greek painted an apocalyptic cycle in the Kremlin's Annunciation Cathedral in 1405, while an icon of the Apocalypse in the Kremlin's Dormition Cathedral dates from *c.* 1500 (Willson Anderson 1977).
13 To the question of what we know about Anastasie Crimca, Ștefan S. Gorovei, by far the best connoisseur of the topic, gave an 'unsettling' answer: 'We do not know much' (2014: 338).
14 Cristina was buried at Pătrăuți in 1594 under the protection of the Holy Cross and the Archangel Michael, who leads a host of holy warriors in a successful combat against evil.

References

Afinogenova, O. (2006), 'Греческий вариант апокрифа о борьбе архангела Михаила и Сатанаила', *Scripta e-scripta*, 3–4: 329–48.

Акс. 10788, Polish National Library.

Alpatov, M. (1985), 'Gli angeli nell'iconografia', *L'Altra Europa*, 10 (2): 44–62.'

Alpatov, M. V. (1978), *Древнерусская иконопись/Early Russian Icon Painting*, trans. N. Johnstone, Moscow: Искусство.

Antonova, V. I. (1966), *Древнерусское искусство в собрании Павла Корина*, 2 vols., Moscow: Искусство.

Anufrieva, N. V. and I. V. Pochinskaya (2014), *Лицевые апокалипсисы Урала: Православная традиция и элементы европейского культурного влияния*, Ekaterinburg: Издательство Уральского университета.

Badalanova Geller, F. (2017), 'Slavonic Redactions of the Apocryphal Homily of John Chrysostom on How Archangel Michael Defeated Satanail: Some Considerations', in L. DiTommaso, M. Henze and W. Adler (eds), *The Embroidered Bible: Studies in Biblical Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha in Honour of Michael E. Stone*, 96–131, Leiden: Brill.

Bedros, V. (2011), 'Cultul arhanghelilor – surse literare și iconografie: Moldova secolelor XV–XVI', in *Îngeri și arhangheli*, 96–129, Sibiu: Deisis.

Bentchev, I. (2002), *Engelikonen im Ikonen-Museum Recklinghausen*, with contributions by T. Daiber and E. Haustein-Bartsch, Recklinghausen: Bitter.

Bentchev, I. (2005), *Иконы ангелов: Образы небесных посланников*, Moscow: Интербук-бизнес.

Berezhnaya, L. and J.-P. Himka (2014), *The World to Come: Ukrainian Images of the Last Judgment*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Birkfellner, G. (1975), *Glagolitische und Kyrillische Handschriften in Österreich*, Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences.

Bogatyrev, S. (2009), 'The Heavenly Host and the Sword of Truth: Apocalyptic Imagery in Ivan IV's Muscovy', in V. Kivelson, K. Petrone, N. Shields Kollmann and M. S. Flier (eds), *The New Muscovite Cultural History: A Collection in Honor of Daniel B. Rowland*, 77–90, plates 8–12, Bloomington, IN: Slavica.

Bogdan, I. (1968), 'Câteva manuscripte slavo-române din Biblioteca imperială de la Viena', in G. Mihăilă (ed.), *Scrieri alese*, 491–511, Bucharest: Romanian Academy.

Boycheva, Y. (2016), 'Introduction', in Y. Boycheva (ed.), *Routes of Russian Icons in the Balkans (16th–early 20th Centuries)*, 11–27, Seyssel: La pomme d'or.

Bulgakov, M. (1992), *The Master and Margarita*, trans. M. Glenny, with an introduction by S. Franklin, New York: Knopf.

Canivet, P. (1980), 'Le *michaelion* de Ḥūarte (V^{e} s.) et le culte syrien des anges', *Byzantion*, 50 (1): 85–117.

Charchare, E. T. (2008), 'Osservazioni sull'iconografia dell'arcangelo Michele nella pittura postbizantina: Un'icona ignota di Franghias Kavertzas', *Θησαυρίσματα*, 38: 337–48.

Chatzidakis, M. and V. Djurić (1968), *Les icones dans les collections suisses*, Bern: Benteli.

Chatzidakis, N. and E. Katerini (2005), 'Η εικόνα του αρχαγγέλου Μιχαήλ με δώδεκα σκηνές του κύκλου του στην Καλαμάτα: Ένα άγνωστο έργο του Γεωργίου Κλόντζα', *Δελτίον της Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας*, 26: 241–62.

Chinyakova, G. P. (2017), *Древняя Русь и Запад: Русский лицевой Апокалипсис XVI–XVII веков: Миниатюра, гравюра, икона, стенопись*, Moscow: БуксМАрт.

Ciobanu, M. A. (2017), 'Documente moldovenești din vechi arhive moscovite', *Analele Putnei*, 13 (2): 55–68.

Clement of Ohrid (1970), *Климент Охридски – Събрани съчинения*, vol. 1, ed. B. St. Angelov, K. M. Kuev and Hr. Kodov, Sofia: Bulgarian Academy of Sciences.

Cod. Slav. 6, Austrian National Library.

Costea, C. (1992), 'Ilustrația de manuscris în mediul cărturăresc al mitropolitului Anastasie Crimcovici: *Apostolul* (Viena, Nationalbibliothek, cod. sl. 6)', *Studii și cercetări de istoria artei – Artă plastică*, 39: 41–57.

Costea, C. (1994), 'Ilustrația manuscriselor slavone în mediul cărturăresc al mitropolitului Anastasie Crimcovici – *Psaltirea* (Mânăstirea Dragomirna, cod. sl. TD 6/1934 <345-32>', *Studii și cercetări de istoria artei – Artă plastică*, 41: 17–41.

Costea, C. (1996), 'Ilustrația de manuscris în mediul cărturăresc al mitropolitului Anastasie Crimcovici – *Liturghierul*', *Studii și cercetări de istoria artei – Artă plastică*, 43: 19–35.

Costea, C. (2013), 'Une nouvelle réplique slavonne du Paris.gr.74: Seven Decades After', *Series Byzantina*, 1: 113–26.

Culianu, I. P. (1977), 'Nota di demonologia bulgakoviana', *Aevum*, 51 (5–6): 548–51.

Curtis, J. A. E. (2019), *A Reader's Companion to Mikhail Bulgakov's The Master and Margarita*, Brookline: Academic Studies Press.

D'Agostino, P. (2019), 'On the Liturgical Memories of the Archangel Michael in the Coptic Church and their Link with the Nile's Rise: Some Reflections', in I. S. Gilhus, A. Tsakos and M. C. Wright (eds), *The Archangel Michael in Africa: History, Cult, and Persona*, 51–8, London: Bloomsbury.

David. (2014), 'Terrible Michael and His Flying Red Horse', *Icons and Their Interpretation: Information for the Objective Student of Russian, Greek, and Balkan Icons* (blog), *WordPress*, June 9. Available online: https://russianicons.wordpress.com/2014/06/09/terrible-michael-and-his-flying-red-horse-2/ (accessed 12 December 2024).

Der Nersessian, S. (1973), *Études byzantines et arméniennes*, 2 vols., Louvain: Imprimerie orientaliste.

Dobjanschi, A., E. Cernea and C. Tănăsoiu (2008), *The National Museum of Art of Romania: Medieval and Early Romanian Art*, trans. M. Hulea, Bucharest: The National Museum of Art of Romania.

Dragnev, E. (2004), *O capodoperă a miniaturii din Moldova medieval: Tetraevanghelul de la Elizavetgrad și manuscrisele grupului Parisinus græcus 74*, Chișinău: Civitas.

Dragnev, E. (2006), 'Primul ciclu cunoscut al arhanghelului Mihail din pictura murală a Moldovei medievale', *Analele Putnei*, 2 (1–2): 111–26.

Dragnev, E. (2019), 'Noi reflexe miniaturistice în pictura murală din Moldova medievală. Cazul bisericii Sf. Nicolae din Rădăuți', in C. Manolache (ed.), *Historia est magistra vitæ: Civilizație, valori, paradigme, personalități. In honorem profesor Ion Eremia*, 93–104, Chișinău: Central Scientific Library.

Dragnev, E. (2022a), 'Observații și precizări privind ciclul *Faptelor Arhanghelului Mihail* de la biserica "Sfântul Nicolae" din Bălinești după restaurarea picturilor din pronaos', in L.-V. Lefter, A. Ichim and A. Gorea (eds), *Monumentul XXIII: Lucrările Simpozionului Internațional Monumentul – Tradiție și viitor. Ediția a XXIII-a, Iași, 2021*, 13–38, Iași: Doxologia.

Dragnev, E. (2022b), 'Poziționarea iconografică a icoanei Arhanghelilor Mihail și Gavriil cu faptele', *Buletin informativ al Simpozionului Național Rolul Mănăstirii Secu în viața religioasă a Țării Moldovei VIII* (Piatra Neamț: Cetatea Doamnei): 47–54.

Dragomirna 115, Dragomirna Monastery.

Ellingworth, P. (1996), *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans.

Firea, E. (2021), 'Icons on Trial: Negotiations between Moscow and Moldavia over Some 'Noncanonical' Icons in the First Decades of the 17th Century', *Museikon*, 5: 31–46.

Flier, M. (2003), 'Till the End of Time: The Apocalypse in Russian Historical Experience Before 1500', in V. A. Kivelson and R. H. Greene (eds), *Orthodox Russia: Belief and Practice under the Tsars*, 127–58, University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.

Franklin, S. (2002), 'Nostalgia for Hell: Russian Literary Demonism and Orthodox Tradition', in S. Franklin (ed.), *Byzantium – Rus – Russia: Studies in the Translation of Christian Culture*, 31–58 (no. XIX), Aldershot: Ashgate.

Frescele Mănăstirii Dragomirna (2015), Suceava: Mitropolit Iacov Putneanul.

Gabelić, S. (1991), *Циклус арханђела у византијској уметности*, Belgrade: Serbian Academy of Science and Arts.

Gabelić, S. (1993–4), 'The Fall of Satan in Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Art', *Зограф*, 23: 65–74.

Gabelić, S. (1996), 'The Archangelos Xorinos, or the Banisher', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 50: 345–60.

Gabelić, S. (2004), *Византијски и поствизантијски циклуси Арханђела (XI–XVIII век): Преглед споменика*, Belgrade: Institute of Art History.

Garidis, M. (1972), 'L'ange à cheval dans l'art byzantin', *Byzantion*, 42: 23–59.

Gielen, E. and P. Van Deun (2015), 'The Invocation of the Archangels Michael and Gabriel Attributed to Metrophanes Metropolitan of Smyrna (BHG 1292)', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 108 (2): 653–71.

Gorovei, Ș. S. (1994), 'Relații bisericești româno-ruse în secolele XV–XVIII', *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie 'A. D. Xenopol'*, 31: 601–9.

Gorovei, Ș. S. (2014), 'Anastasie Crimca: Noi contribuții', in *Dragomirna: Istorie, tezaur, ctitori*, vol. 2, 107–28 (and bibliographical notes on 334–5), Mitocu Dragomirnei: Holy Dragomirna Monastery.

Gorovei, Ș. S. (2015), 'Patrimoniul nostru istoric. Studiu de caz: mănăstirea Dragomirna', in *Dragomirna: Ctitori și restauratori*, vol. 1, 105–32, Mitocu Dragomirnei: Holy Dragomirna Monastery.

Gorovei, Ș. S. (2017), *Dragomirna Monastery: The Memories of a Place of Remembrance*, trans. Alice Isabella Sullivan, Putna: Mitropolit Iacov Putneanul.

Gorovei, Ș. S. and M.-M. Székely (2005), *Princeps omni laude maior: O istorie a lui Ștefan cel Mare*, Putna: Holy Putna Monastery.

Gurianova, N. (2017), 'Re-imagining the Old Faith: Goncharova, Larionov, and the Cultural Traditions of Old Believers', in L. Hardiman and N. Kozicharow (eds),

Modernism and the Spiritual in Russian Art: New Perspectives, 129–48, Cambridge: Open Book Publishers.

Halkin, F. (1963), *Inédits byzantins d'Ochrida, Candie et Moscou*, Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes.

Himka, J.-P. (2009), *Last Judgment Iconography in the Carpathians*, Toronto: Toronto University Press.

Hunt, P. (1993), 'Ivan IV's Personal Mythology of Kingship', *Slavic Review*, 52 (4): 769–809.

Innemée, K. (2019), 'The Archangel Michael as Psychopomp in Christian iconography in Egypt', in I. S. Gilhus, A. Tsakos and M. C. Wright (eds), *The Archangel Michael in Africa: History, Cult, and Persona*, 35–50, London: Bloomsbury.

Iufu, I. and V. Brătulescu (2012), *Manuscrisele slavo-române din Moldova: Fondul Mănăstirii Dragomirna*, ed. O. Mitric, Iași: 'Alexandru Ioan Cuza' University Press.

Jagić, V. (1893), 'Slavische Beiträge zu den biblischen Apocryphen: Die altkirchenslavischen Textes des Adambuches', *Denkschriften der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften – Philosophisch-Historische Classe*, 42: 1–104.

Katsioti, A. (2011), *Ο εικονογραφικός κύκλος της Αποκάλυψης στο ναό της Κοίμησης της Θεοτόκου στο Ασκληπειό της Ρόδου (1676–7)*, Athens: Academy of Athens.

Kitromilides, P. M. (2017), 'In the Pre-modern Balkans...: Loyalties, Identities, Anachronisms', in Dimitris Tziovas (ed.), *Greece and the Balkans: Identities, Perceptions and Cultural Encounters since the Enlightenment*, 19–29, London: Routledge.

Komashko, N. (2006), *Русская икона XVIII века: Столичная икона. Провинциальная икона. Народная икона*, Moscow: Агей Томеш.

Leontakianakou, I. (2009), 'Une création post-byzantine: L'archange Michel triomphant et psychopompe', *Зограф*, 33: 145–58.

Likhachov, D. S. (1972), 'Канон и Молитва Ангелу Грозному, воеводе Парфения Уродивого (Ивана Грозного)', in *Рукописное наследие Древней Руси: По материалам Пушкинского Дома*, 10–27, Leningrad: Наука.

Lundhaug, H. (2019), 'Textual Fluidity and Monastic Fanfiction: The Case of the Investiture of the Archangel Michael in Coptic Egypt', in I. S. Gilhus, A. Tsakos and M. C. Wright (eds), *The Archangel Michael in Africa: History, Cult, and Persona*, 59–73, London: Bloomsbury.

Martin-Hisard, B. (1994), 'Le culte de l'archange Michel dans l'Empire byzantin (VIII–XI siècles)', in C. Carletti and G. Otranto (eds), *Culto e insediamenti micaelici nell'Italia meridionale fra tarda antichità e Medioevo: Atti del Convegno Internazionale Monte Sant'Angelo, 18–21 novembre 1992*, 351–73, Bari: Edipuglia.

Martin-Hisard, B. (2014), 'Hagiographie et liturgie: Pantoléon et l'*Enkômion* pour l'archange Michel (BHG 1289)', in D. Afanassova and T. Chronz (eds), *Σύναξις καθολικὴ: Beiträge zu Gottesdienst und Geschichte der fünf altkirchlichen Patriarchate für Heinzgerd Brakmann zum 70. Geburtstag*, vol. 2, 451–76, Vienna: LIT.

Matantseva, T. (1996), 'Éloge des archanges Michel et Gabriel par Michel le Moine (BHG 1294a)', *Jahrbuch der österreichischen Byzantinistik*, 46: 97–155.

Michels, G. B. (1999), *At War with the Church: Religious Dissent in Seventeenth-Century Russia*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Minczew, G. (2011), 'John Chrysostom's Tale on How Michael Vanquished Satanael – a Bogomil text?' *Studia Ceranea*, 1: 23–54.

Mitric, O. (2014), 'Un nou manuscris din 'școala' de caligrafi și miniaturiști de la Mănăstirea Dragomirna (1627)', in *Dragomirna: Istorie, tezaur, ctitori*, vol. II, 141–8 (and bibliographical notes on 336), Mitocu Dragomirnei: Holy Dragomirna Monastery.

Nechaeva, G. G. (2002), *Ветковская икона*, Minsk: Четыре четверти.

Neubauer, A., ed. (2007), *Himmelsstreiter: Schätze der Ikonenkunst vom 12.–20. Jh. aus deutschen Privatsammlungen*, Frankfurt am Main: Ikonen-Museum.

Niewöhner, P. (2018), 'Healing Springs of Anatolia: St. Michael and the Problem of the Pagan Legacy', in B. Pitarakis and G. Tanman (eds), *Life is Short, Art Long: The Art of Healing in Byzantium. New Perspectives*, 97–124, Istanbul: Istanbul Research Institute.

Olar, O.-V. (2004), *Împăratul înaripat: Cultul arhanghelului Mihail în lumea bizantină*, Bucharest: Anastasia.

Ostapenko, S. (2011), 'Царское моление Ангелу Грозному', *Антиквариат: Предметы искусства и коллекционирования*, 84 (3): 6–18.

Palade, G. V. (2018), 'Din bibliografia mitropolitului Anastasie Crimca. Mineiul nr. 2 din Lvov', *Teologie și viață*, n.s., 28 (1–4): 113–35.

Panaitescu, P. P. (1959), *Manuscrisele slave din Biblioteca Academiei RPR*, vol. 2, Bucharest: The Printing Press of the Academy of the Romanian Popular Republic.

Parpulov, G. R. (n.d.), 'Death and the Archangel: An Icon at Yale', in M. A. Rossi and A. I. Sullivan (eds), *Mapping Eastern Europe*. Available online: https://mappingeasterneurope.princeton.edu/item/death-and-the-archangel-an-icon-at-yale.html (accessed 12 December 2024).

Pascal, A. (2018), 'O scrisoare a mitropolitului Anastasie Crimca adresată patriarhului Moscovei Filaret Nichitici', *Analele Putnei*, 14 (1): 237–64.

Poirot, É. (2008), 'Le juste Hénoch, le saint prophète Élie et saint Jean le Théologien dans l'œuvre du Métropolite de Moldavie Anastase Crimca', *Ars Transilvaniæ*, 18: 133–44.

Popescu-Vîlcea, G. (1972), *Anastasie Crimca*, Bucharest: Meridiane.

Popescu-Vîlcea, G. (2014), 'Școala miniaturistică de la Dragomirna', in *Dragomirna: Istorie, tezaur, ctitori*, vol. 2, 189–355, Mitocu Dragomirnei: Holy Dragomirna Monastery.

Prolović, J. (2013), 'Die künstlerische Ausstattung des Apostolos des Anastasie Crimca aus dem moldauischen Kloster Dragomirna (cod. vindob. slav. 6)', in J. Reinhart (ed.), *Hagiographia Slavica*, 217–34, Munich: Otto Sagner.

Rowland, D. B. (2020), 'Biblical Military Imagery in the Political Culture of Early Modern Russia: The Blessed Host of the Heavenly Tsar', in D. Rowland (ed.), *God,*

Tsar, and People: The Political Culture of Early Modern Russia, 127–54, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Samoilova, T. E. (2014), 'Цикл 'Чудеса Архангела Михаила' в росписи Архангельского собора', in *Московский Кремль XVI столетия: Древние святыни и исторические памятники*, vol. 1, 248–69, Moscow: БуксМАрт.

Samoilova, T. E. (2020), *Благословенно Воинство Небесного Царя*, Moscow: Прогресс-Традиция.

Shalina, I. A. (2021), 'Икона 'Благословенно воинство Небесного Царя...' из Успенского собора Московского Кремля – программный памятник эпохи Василия III', *Искусство христианского мира*, 15: 175–94.

Skowronek, M. (2008), *'Świat cały ma Cię za obrońcę': Michał Archanioł w kulturze Słowian prawosławnych na Bałkanach*, Łódź: University of Lodz Press.

Skowronek, M. (2010), 'Урвишкият (Кокалянският) сборник и локалният култ на Св: Архангел Михаил в Кокалянския манастир', *Palæobulgarica/ Старобългаристика*, 34 (3): 49–85.

Smirnova, E. (2010), 'Icoane ale maeștrilor ruși din secolul al XV-lea la Mănăstirea Putna: Registrul *apostolilor* și *prăznicarele*', *Analele Putnei*, 6 (1): 7–32.

Snipes, K. (1988), 'An Unedited Treatise of Michael Psellos on the Iconography of Angels and on the Religious Festivals Celebrated on Each Day of the Week', in J. Duffy and J. Peradotto (eds), *Gonimos: Neoplatonic and Byzantine Studies Presented to Leendert G. Westerink at 75*, 189–205, Buffalo, NY: Arethusa.

Soldat, C. (2011), 'Sepulchral Monuments as a Means of Communicating Social and Political Power of Nobles in Early Modern Russia', in M. P. Romaniello and C. Lipp (eds), *Contested Spaces of Nobility in Early Modern Europe*, 103–26, London: Routledge.

Sorokaty, V. M. (2000), 'Произведения слободских иконников Троице-Сергиева монастыря первой половины XVII в. в собрании Музея им. Андрея Рублева', in *Троице-Сергиева Лавра в истории, культуре и духовной жизни России: Материалы международной конференции (29 сентября–1 октября 1998 г.)*, 309–26, Moscow: Подкова.

Stănculescu, I. (2001), *Il Giudizio Universale nella pittura murale esterna del nord della Moldavia/The Last Judgement: External Mural Paintings from the Northern Part of Moldavia,* Bologna: Aspasia.

Sucevița 24, Sucevița Monastery.

Székely, M.-M. (2014), 'Mănăstirea Dragomirna – ctitorie boierească', in *Dragomirna și ctitorii ei: Actele Colocviului din 20–23 iulie 2009*, 435–47, Mitocu Dragomirnei: Holy Dragomirna Monastery.

Tarasov, O. (2002), *Icon and Devotion: Sacred Spaces in Imperial Russia*, trans. R. Milner-Gulland, London: Reaktion Books.

Tetraevanghelul Sucevița 24 (2018), Sucevița: Holy Sucevița Monastery.

Timotin, E. (2015), *Adam și Eva în literatura română veche (secolele al XVI-lea – al XVIII-lea): Texte canonice, scrieri apocrife și credințe populare*, Bucharest: Museum of Romanian Literature.

Turdeanu, É. (1985), 'Le métropolite Anastase Crimca et son œuvre littéraire et artistique', in É. Turdeanu, *Études de littérature roumaine et d'écrits slaves et grecs des Principautés roumaines*, 226–42 (and bibliographical notes on 444–7), Leiden: Brill.

Turdeanu, É. (1995), 'Le mythe des anges déchus: Traditions littéraires de l'Europe Occidentale et Orientale', in É. Turdeanu and L. Turdeanu-Cartojan (ed.), *Studii și articole literare*, ed. M. Anghelescu, 3–48 (and bibliographical notes on 259), Bucharest: Minerva.

Turdeanu, E. (1997), 'Manuscrise robite de cazaci în 1653', in E. Turdeanu, *Oameni și cărți de altădată*, ed. Ș. S. Gorovei and M.-M. Székely, 353–84, Bucharest: Editura enciclopedică.

Tychinskaia, P. A. (2010), 'К вопросу о времени формирования иконографии архангела Михаила – грозных сил воеводы', *Аспирантский сборник* (Moscow – State Institute for Art Studies), 6: 21–34.

Tychinskaia, P. A. (2011a), 'Обонежские иконы архангела Михаила – грозных сил воеводы: северный вариант столичной иконографии', *Вестник Православного Свято-Тихоновского гуманитарного университета* V – *Вопросы истории и теории христианского искусства*, 2 (5): 119–37.

Tychinskaia, P. A. (2011b), 'Особенности иконографии "Архангел Михаил – воевода" в иконописи Обонежья', *Рябининские чтения – 2011: Материалы VI конференции по изучению и актуализации культурного наследия Русского Севера*, 185–9, Petrozavodsk: Karelian Research Centre of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

Tychinskaia, P. A. (2012a), 'Древнейшие изображения Архангела Михаила – грозных сил воеводы', *Известия Российского государственного педагогического университета им. А.И. Герцена*, 133: 164–75.

Tychinskaia, P. A. (2012b), 'Образ конного архангела в византийском и поствизантийском искусстве и его связь с русской иконографией "Архангел Михаил – грозных сил воевода"', in A. V. Zakharova (ed.), *Актуальные проблемы теории и истории искусства: Сборник научных статей*, vol. 2, 189–94, St. Petersburg: NP-Print.

Tychinskaia, P. A. (2013), 'Архангел на коне в византийском, поствизантийском и русском искусстве', in *Греческие иконы и стенописи XII-XVI вв: Сборник статей*, 111–29, Moscow: ЦМиАР.

Tychinskaia, P. A. (2014), 'Конный архангел в искусстве Московской Руси XVI века: "Великий стяг" царя Ивана Грозного и формирование иконографии архангела Михаила грозных сил воеводы', in *Московский Кремль XVI столетия: Древние святыни и исторические памятники*, vol. 2, 314–29, Moscow: БуксМАрт.

Ulea, S. (1985), 'O surprinzătoare personalitate a Evului Mediu românesc: Cronicarul Macarie', *Studii și cercetări de istoria artei – Artă plastică*, 32: 14–49.

Vasileva, O. A. (2006), *Иконы Пскова*, Moscow: Северный паломник.

Velculescu, C. and I. Stănculescu (2017), 'Anastasie Crimca: Texte și imagini – direcții de citire' (II)', *Lumina lumii*, 26: 225–36.

Voinescu, T. (2014), 'Contribuții la studiul manuscriselor ilustrate din mânăstirile Sucevița și Dragomirna', in *Dragomirna: Istorie, tezaur, ctitori*, vol. 1, 149–87, Mitocu Dragomirnei: Holy Dragomirna Monastery.

Wild, D. (1946), *Ikonen: Kirchliche Kunst des Ostens*, Bern: Hallwag.

Willson Anderson, C. (1977), 'Image and Text in the Apocalypse Icon of the Dormition Cathedral of the Moscow Kremlin', PhD diss., University of Pittsburgh.

Yakovleva, A. I. (2017), 'Почитание Архангела Михаила в Москве эпохи Ивана Грозного и Троицкая икона Архистратига Михаила с деяниями ангелов', *Искусство христианского мира*, 14: 229–47.

Zanetti, U. (1994), 'Fêtes des anges dans les calendriers et synaxaires orientaux', in C. Carletti and G. Otranto (eds), *Culto e insediamenti micaelici nell'Italia meridionale fra tarda antichità e Medioevo: Atti del Convegno Internazionale Monte Sant'Angelo, 18–21 novembre 1992*, 323–49, Bari: Edipuglia.

Великія минеи четьи, собранныя всероссійскимъ митрополитомъ Макаріемъ: Ноябрь, дни 1–12 (1897), St. Petersburg: Imperial Academy of Sciences Press.

Невьянская икона/Nevyansk Icon (1997), Ekaterinburg: Urals University Press.

4

Can a celestial warrior become a healer? The archangel Michael in the manuscript and oral traditions of Romanian charms*

Emanuela Timotin

Introduction

In this chapter, I aim to shed light on the presence of the figure of the archangel Michael in charms, a literary genre that conveys various beliefs marginal to official religion but deeply anchored within popular religion. Although the Church explicitly rejected charms, charmers and the practice of charming through works written by authoritative Christian authors, in legislative writings, indexes of forbidden books, sermons, iconography and so on,[1] charms continued to convey the hopes for love, good health or protection against evil of numerous categories of users, from different environments and of various educational levels.

The Romanian charm tradition represents the core of this study. The research into this tradition serves the goals of this study for at least two reasons. First of all, it is intimately connected with other charm traditions, particularly Greek and Slavonic, which have had an important influence in a large part of Europe and on many charm traditions. Thus, in this chapter, I reveal the dynamics of such transfers.

* This work was supported by a grant of the Romanian Ministry of Education and Research, CNCS – UEFSCDI, project number PN-III-P4-ID-PCE-2020-0995, within PNCDI III. I am grateful to Mrs Gabriela Dumitrescu, head of the Manuscript Department of the Romanian Academy Library in Bucharest, and to the Museum of Vâlcea for the permission to publish the images and for their most valuable comments.

Moreover, I focus on Romanian charms in *longue durée* by surveying both charms preserved in manuscripts, which were edited by philologists mainly during the past decades, and charms collected by folklorists since the second half of the nineteenth century. In the former category are curative and apotropaic charms preserved in manuscripts (approximately 135 charms, see Timotin 2010, 2015a, 2021; Urs 2011: 262, 272; Mareș 2012; Panaitescu and Mihail 2018: 380). All these charms were written between the middle of the sixteenth century and the middle of the nineteenth century. Charms are thus among the oldest Romanian texts, since the first texts in Romanian to have survived date from the beginning of the sixteenth century (Timotin 2015b). Several anthologies of charms collected by folklorists in all Romanian regions, between the end of the nineteenth century and the last decades of the twentieth century, represent the corpus of charms of oral tradition analysed in this chapter (approximately 500 charms; see Gorovei 1931; Tocilescu and Țapu 1981; Marian 1996; Ciubotaru 2009). This research into Romanian charms both from manuscripts and from oral tradition provides a solid perspective on how the figure of the archangel Michael has been integrated into the repertoire of Romanian charms.

In this chapter, I do not consider charms that mention the archangel Michael but do not grant him a specific function in the charm scenario (see Timotin 2015a: 79). Instead, I focus on charms in which he plays an active part and will thus reveal whether he is a frequent character in such texts, will disclose his roles in these texts and will attempt to explain them. I also describe the tasks that he shares with other (supernatural) beings and the roles assigned to him alone, analysing whether these roles were stable or not. In addition, I inquire to what extent beliefs regarding the archangel Michael conveyed by Romanian charms overlap with beliefs regarding this figure in other literary genres that transgress canonical boundaries, such as apocryphal texts.[2]

The charm tradition discussed here flourishes in a region that lacks relics related to the archangel,[3] public devotional objects praising his power (Cheynet 2001; Caseau and Cheynet 2021) and cryptograms and monograms invoking him engraved on stones and buildings (Tsakos 2021; Łaptaś 2021: 491, 504). Most Romanians are Eastern Orthodox Christians; hence, their calendar does not include the 'Fast of Saint Michael', which Catholic Christians observe between the Assumption of the Virgin and 29 September, following thus in the steps of Saint Francis of Assisi (Vauchez 2007: 347). The Romanian language has no terms corresponding to *Michaelion* (sanctuary dedicated to the archangel Michael; Canivet 1980: 89–90), to *Michaelmas* (Feast of the Archangel Michael) and other events associated with it (Campione 2022: 150) or to *Micholets*

(nowadays *Miquelets*), a French diminutive plural of *Michel*, which designates a group of pilgrims from Solignac who were going to the Monastery of Mont-Saint-Michel (Julia 2003: 319–20; Vincent 2022: 160).

The plan to study Michael's presence in charms is based on the numerous roles the archangel has fulfilled over the course of centuries, among which the role of healer has been attested since the beginning of his Christian cult (Janin 1934: 28; Rohland 1977: 75–104; Gabelić 1996; Jolivet-Lévy 2002: 415–30; Olar 2004: 135–52, 173–98; Wright 2019; Salsano 2021: 394–5).

Michael's virtues as a healer were held in high esteem in the region of Colossae in Asia Minor, especially in the sanctuary of Chonai.[4] According to an anonymous narrative, a healing spring rose in that place after the archangel's intervention. Many sick people acquired the long-desired healing thanks to their faith in the Holy Trinity and in the archangel Michael. Christians built a sanctuary dedicated to Michael there, and the archangel miraculously prevented pagans from destroying it by changing the course of two rivers (Rintelen 1968: 22–33; Otranto 2022: 27). Michael was venerated as miracle worker and as healer in a large area, including Egypt, Syria, Greece and Asia Minor. In Bithynia there was a sanctuary dedicated to him in the proximity of thermal waters. Pilgrims, especially from Constantinople, went there for healing (Rintelen 1968: 32–3; Saxer 1985: 400). In Constantinople, a Michaelion consecrated by Emperor Constantine the Great in the fourth century became famous because of the archangel's apparitions and miracles (Rintelen 1968: 34–7; Jeffreys, Jeffreys and Scott 1986: 38). In the fifth century, sick people practised incubation in the Michaelion and sought healing from various diseases, including fever (Otranto 2022: 29). In another church in Constantinople dedicated to the archangel, the oil placed in a jar near Michael's icon had curative virtues (Rintelen 1968: 40–1).[5]

The first phase of the Michaelic cult in Monte Sant'Angelo in Gargano also had a significant medical dimension (Otranto 2003: 49–50): the water springing from the rock healed pilgrims. Miraculous healings occurred especially on the feast of the church, when the health of many patients suffering from fever was restored, just like in Constantinople.

Various magical texts also portrayed Michael as a main healer (Rohland 1977: 76–80; Olar 2004: 75–8; Dosoo 2021: 425). In these contexts, he often appears in the standard archangelic tetrarchy, close to Gabriel, Raphael and Uriel,[6] or close to Gabriel and Raphael (Franz 1960: 2:483, 508), or close to more archangels.[7] In the eighth century, the monks of Tallaght Monastery, who chanted the oldest Irish hymn dedicated to the archangel many times a day, referred to it as to 'the circle of protection of Michael', showing that they believed in a sort of

quasi-magical protection by the archangel (Picard 2007: 139–40). A Byzantine pierced coin showing Michael and Emperor Isaac II was carried as an amulet (Morrisson 2014: 425, figure 10). In the premodern period, coins with Michael's effigy, touched by the king, were considered efficient amulets against scrofula (Bloch 1924: 377; Campione 2022: 150). Russian and Belarusian charms against snakebite portray him as healer as well (Vaitkevičienė 2013: 226–7).

The archangel Michael and migraine

The archangel Michael appears in one of the oldest Romanian curative charms to have survived. The charm was meant to heal headaches, explicitly migraine. This disease was considered to be life-threatening, which explains the variety of charms and amulets for healing it in antiquity, the Middle Ages and premodern times.[8] In the eighteenth century, some Romanian charms referred to it as to 'the root of all the misdeeds and of all the diseases' (Timotin 2013: 246).

The charm was written in the margin of a Slavonic liturgical manuscript of Ukrainian origin (Romanian Academy Library in Bucharest, Sl. MS 418: 380v–382v), compiled by an anonymous scribe in the sixteenth century, to be used between Good Friday and Pentecost (Panaitescu 2003: 232–3). The magical text was partially destroyed during the binding of the manuscript. The scribe of the charm was not the copyist of the manuscript but another anonymous person. He must have been a clergyman since he had access to the liturgical codex. The linguistic and palaeographic features of the charm show that it was written by a scribe from northern Romania at the beginning of the seventeenth century.

The text (Timotin 2015a: 21), titled *Rugă cându doare capul* (Prayer against headache), is composed of two juxtaposed pieces: a Gospel fragment that presents a miraculous healing by Christ and an encounter charm (Ohrt 1935–6, 1936) that describes the encounter between the archangel Michael and other supernatural beings:[9]

> Rugă cându doare capul
> Veni Isus în casa lui Petru şi vădzu pre {. . .} de foc şi de boală şi să atinsă di-nsa. Iară ea să tămădui şi să sculă de-i sluji ea svenţieei sale. Aşea Doamne, Isuse Hristoase, vino acmu şi te atinge de şerbul lui Dumnedzeu имр[10] [să se] scoale să-ţi slujască svenţieei tale cu tot darul şi acmu şi pururea şi întru veacii veacilor adevăr.
> Mergea [ş]eapte î[n]geri şi şeapte arhangheli şi [ţ]inea şeapte făclii aprin[s]e şi şea[p]te cuţite ascuţite. Şi dzisă Mihail arhanghel:

– Unde mergeți, șeapte îngeri și șeapte arhangheli?
Iară ei dziseră lui:
– Meargem [la] șerbul lui Dumnedzeu имр,[33] nejitul {. . .} să i-l tăiem din cap și din toate mă[dularele].

(Prayer against headache
Jesus came into Peter's house and he saw . . . with fever and disease, and he touched her. And she healed and got up and began to wait on His Holiness.
God, Jesus Christ, come in the same way now and touch the servant of God (say his name), so he could get up and wait on Your Holiness with all reverence and now and for ever and ever, truth.
Seven angels and seven archangels were walking and holding seven torches and seven sharp knives.
And the archangel Michael said:
'Where are you walking, seven angels and seven archangels?'
And they said to him:
'We are going to the servant of God (say his name), to cut migraine of his head and of all his limbs.')

The Gospel fragment describes the miraculous recovery of Peter's mother-in-law, who was suffering from fever (Mt. 8.14-15; Mk 1.29-32; Lk. 4.38-39). The narrative is one of the seven gospel texts read during the service for the anointing of the sick, which is a sacrament in the Eastern Orthodox Church. At the same time, it was occasionally used in other Romanian manuscript charms that healed fevers (Timotin 2015a: 82–4, 109–11). Because the biblical narrative mentions that the apostle's mother-in-law suffered from fever, the present charm modifies the canonical text to fit its new function, that of a text meant to heal headache. Following this mutation, Christ is said to have seen Peter's relative suffering not only from fever but from 'fever and disease'. Due to this small addition to the Gospel text, it becomes efficient against any disease, including headaches. The modification of Gospel texts to fit into curative magical rituals is a rare phenomenon in Romanian charms. Only a few charms against fever include Gospel fragments slightly reworked to adapt them to their new functions (Timotin 2015a: 82–4, 109–11).

The archangel Michael appears in the second part of the charm, which is fragmentary. He encounters a large group of angelic beings, composed of seven archangels and seven angels,[11] who tell him that they are to heal the patient's migraine (Romanian: *năjit*).[12] The explicit reference to migraine connects the

second part of the charm with the title, thus indicating that the whole text had the aim of healing this disease. The presence of the archangel Michael and of more unidentified celestial beings with warrior appearance and healing role hints at how dreadful migraine was considered to be. This attitude towards migraine was not uniquely manifested in this text. The same fears are echoed in another charm-type against this particular headache, which enjoyed a significant transmission in medieval and premodern Eastern Europe, in Greek, Slavonic and Romanian charm traditions. It featured the encounter between the migraine demon and Christ himself, who was portrayed as the only one able to confront and vanquish the terrible demon (Kotansky 1994; Radenković 1997: 159; Timotin 2013, 2015a: 38–48).

In the present charm, Michael is the sole celestial being who is identified. The other seven archangels form a homogenous group. By their presence, together with Michael's, this charm resembles other magical texts that reveal the archangels' role in healing headaches.[13] The number of the non-identified archangels, seven,[14] differs however from the number usually acknowledged in the approved texts of the Church.[15]

The archangel Michael has an implicit authority over the angels and archangels whom he encounters: he notices their wandering, probably during the night, because the text stipulates that they were carrying torches; he enquires them about the reason of their march and receives an immediate answer. These details reveal that the magical text relies on beliefs regarding Michael's authority over other angelic beings. At the same time, the charm parallels the Slavonic magic tradition, which often depicts archangels as the main opponents of the migraine demon inflicting the homonymous disease. For example, a Serbian charm narrates that Saint Michael-Gabriel went hunting, encountered the demon *năjit* and chased it to the mountains (Pypin and Spasović 1881: 121), while an eighteenth-century Slavonic charm depicts the two archangels confronting the same evil being (Atanassova 2003: 191). Echoes of the confrontation between Michael and the headache demoness can be found in a twelfth-century Greek exorcism preserved in the Sinai monastery (Arnaud 1913: 293; Kotansky 1994: 63). In several manuscripts of the *T. Sol.* 18:5, the archangel Michael is the only being who can stop the migraine demon, called Ruax (McCown 1922: 52*; Busch 2006: 224; Colceriu 2010: 100).[16]

In the Romanian manuscript tradition of charms, the motif of the encounter between a high-ranked supernatural being (the archangel Michael in this charm) and other supernatural beings who are about to perform a healing (the seven archangels and seven angels here) is present only in this text. It is more

frequent in charms of oral tradition, where the main healing role is not assigned to Michael but to the Virgin.[17]

As preliminary conclusion, this migraine charm, one of the oldest Romanian curative charms, assigns the healing role to two figures: Christ, who healed the fever and, implicitly, proved his authority over any disease, and the archangel Michael, who supervised other angelic beings involved in the healing ritual. By assigning this function to Michael, the Romanian charm continues the Slavonic and Greek magic traditions, which often grant an archangel, mainly Michael or Michael-Gabriel, with the power to defeat the migraine/headache demon and to heal the homonymous disease.

The archangel Michael, healer and protector of newborn babies and women in labour

The role of the archangel Michael as a healer and as a protector has been enhanced by firm and continuous beliefs, attested since antiquity in a wide area, regarding the existence of a protean demon, usually a female one, which harms and kills newborn babies, as well as pregnant women and women in childbirth. The defeater of this strong demon is an exceptional warrior.[18] In the Romanian manuscript tradition two main types of this mythological narrative can be encountered. One of these is particularly relevant for the present study as it emphasizes the archangel Michael's exceptional powers.[19]

The first Romanian type does not mention Michael. Its hero is Saint Sisinie (sometimes Sisoie or Sisinnios). This type, which I refer to as *The Legend of Saint Sisinie*, is inspired by the Slavonic tradition and attested since the late sixteenth century. Its plot can be summarized as follows: while Sisinie was fighting as a brave soldier in Arabia, the devil kidnapped the children of his sister Melentia. When she became pregnant again, she retreated to a marble column by the sea. An anonymous angel revealed Sisinie that God had entrusted him with the tasks of saving Melentia's children and of killing the devil. When the saint entered his sister's hermitage, the devil transformed into a grain of millet, sneaked in and kidnapped Melentia's seventh child at midnight. Eventually Sisinie saved all Melentia's children and punished the demon. As a result, the unclean spirit swore to stay away from the house that preserved the story of its defeat and where the saint's name would be uttered.

The second Romanian type of the narrative praises Michael's protective powers. It appears in sixty-one manuscripts written since the second half of the eighteenth century in all Romanian-speaking regions and can be divided into two subtypes. According to the first subtype, which I refer to as *Avestița–Sisinie*, Saint Sisinie witnessed the encounter between the archangel Michael and a female demon of frightful appearance whose name was Avestița.[20] The female demon wanted to attack the newborn Jesus. The story continues with a description of Sisinie's actions to save his sister's children from the devil.

The second subtype, which I refer to as *Avestița*, preserves only the narrative about the encounter between the archangel and the demon. The texts describe the frightful Avestița, present how Michael ties her and report the subsequent dialogue between them. The archangel asks her who she is and where she heads to, and she answers that she goes to harm the Virgin Mary who is about to give birth to Christ. The archangel then inquires how she can enter one's house to harm women, inflict diseases and kill babies, and she reveals that she can take various forms and has many names, which she enumerates carefully.[21] She also discloses that she cannot harm the houses where her names are written. The archangel concludes the dialogue and orders her not to draw close to a specific house.

Both in *Avestița–Sisinie* texts, and in *Avestița* texts, the archangel Michael is the main opponent of the female demon and becomes, implicitly, the protector of the Virgin and of newborn Jesus whom the evil spirit was to attack. In Eastern Christianity there has been a strong tradition of beliefs regarding malefic attacks to which the Virgin and baby Jesus were submitted. Indicative of it are the depictions of Mary and of Christ protected against the evil eye in the cave of Bethlehem (Foskolou 2005) and modern Greek charms that narrate that the Virgin suffered from the evil eye after she gave birth to Christ, with the result that her milk ceased (Passalis 2020: 20). The legend studied here echoes these beliefs and suggests a specific outcome: the Virgin and the child remained safe thanks to the archangel's victory over the demon. The function of protector of women in labour and newborn babies assigned to Michael may have been inspired by Rev. 12.1–7, which portrays him as protector of the lady in labour pain against the dragon.[22] He fulfils the same role in apocryphal literature: he was the one who, according to the Latin tradition of *LAE* 21.1-3, comforted Eve, while she was in labour pain, and he helped her give birth to her first-born Cain (Anderson and Stone 1999: 23–5; Pettorelli 2012: 324, 326).

The titles of the texts, though highly variable, emphasize the archangel's authority: *Avestița, aripa Satani<i> celui mare, când s-au întâlnit cu arhanghel*

Mihail, voievodul îngesc, pe munte (The Encounter between Avestița, the Wing of Great Satan, and the Archangel Michael, the Prince of the Heavenly Armies, on the Mountain; MS 1739). However, in MS 4833, he is accompanied by four other archangels. Occasionally, he is substituted by the archangel Gabriel (MS 2188).[23]

Sometimes, the archangel Gabriel joins Michael on his mission (e.g. MS 4862; MS 3479: 73r, 74r, 84r, 88r–v). Some texts have titles that reflect the angelic association: *Cuvânt pentru sfinții voievozi Mihail și Gavril* (Oration on the Holy Princes Michael and Gabriel) (MS 3479: 84r). Sometimes, the title emphasizes the angelic victory over the female demon and the allegiance she made with the two celestial beings: *Zapisul Samcăi, ci l-au făcut, cu mare frică, la mâna sfântului și marelui arhaghel Mihail și Gavriil, voievozii cetilor îngerești, pentru ca să o slăboade de strâmtimea legăturii ce o legasă* (The Contract of Samca,[24] which she wrote with great fear and gave to the saint and great archangel Michael and Gabriel, princes of the heavenly armies, so that they loosen the ties they had tied her with) (MS 3479: 44v–48r).

Belief in the existence of a powerful female demon, which harms and kills women in childbirth and babies, and in the successful protective intervention of the archangel Michael who stops the malefic spirit is deeply rooted in the Romanian tradition. The archangel, protector of the Virgin and of baby Jesus, becomes a protector of families. The high number of texts containing this encounter narrative between Michael and the female demon testify to this great success. At the same time, the legend circulated in various forms and media, the richness of which can hardly be grasped.

A protective amulet for each home

The enumeration of the female demon's names and the explicit suggestion to have them carefully preserved in the house, as powerful protection devices, transform the legend about the archangel Michael and the female demon into an amulet. The whole narrative or the names themselves are enough to keep the protean demon away.

The titles of some manuscripts are explicit in this respect (e.g. *Numele Avestiței* (The Names of Avestița) in MS 1166). MS 3479: 37v mentions that the efficiency of the narrative and of the list of names was stronger if the amulet contained a drawing of Avestița: *Și pă unde sânt numele mele și chipul meu scris, acolo nu mă pot apropiia de o milă de loc* (I stay a mile away from any house where my name and my portrait are written).

The text encouraged the multiplication of the legend, and its prescriptions were deemed to be very authoritative: any pregnant woman could ask for a copy of the text to be written for her specific use (e.g. MS 4400: 11v). Under these circumstances, the practice of copying such texts continued. The text has been frequently recorded by Romanian folklorists since the late nineteenth century (Marian 1892: 28; Cristescu 2003: 253–5; Fochi 1976: 263–4). In twentieth-century Moldova, mothers still placed such amulets in the cradle of their newborn babies (Hulubaș 2012: 227).

The more personal the use of the narrative became, the more obscure was the social profile of the scribes. It is however certain that priests and clergymen were involved in the transmission of the apotropaic story (Ene 1982; Mazilu and Timotin 2017, 2018). Sometimes they read it together with a short liturgical piece dedicated to Michael, the troparion of the archangel (MS 3479: 71v).

Drawing and icon

Various manuscripts mentioned that a drawing of Avestița could protect one's house from the female demon and from diseases and the harm which she inflicted. Such drawings had a textual source: information on what this malefic spirit looked like can be found in both *Avestița–Sisinie* and *Avestița* texts. The texts sketched a terrifying portrait of the female demon: she had long dishevelled hair, frightening eyes, claws like a wild beast and long, sharp nails:

> Avezuha, aripa Satanei, așa de minunată, cu mâinile lungi de un stânjenu, părul pi cap și pi trup până în călcâiu, cu unghii la mâni și la picioare ca niște săceri și cu un pruncu în mânile-i, sfărâmat și zgâriet cu unghiile ei.
>
> (Avezuha, the Wing of Satan, so exceptional, with one-fathom-long hands, with hair covering her head and her body down to the heels, with her finger- and toenails looking like sickles and with a baby in her hands, entirely lacerated and scratched by her nails.) (MS 3479: 87r)

Her frightening pictorial features were emphasized in a codex copied by the nun Theodosia at Neamț Monastery (northeast Moldavia) in 1831:

> Pogorându-să sfântul arhanghel Mihail din muntele Eleonului, întâlni un duh necurat, foarte groaznic, cu părul capului până la călcâi, cu țițile până la genunche, cu mâinile și picioarele de fier, cu gura ca de leu, cu ochii ca de bou, cu limba în gură de foc, cu coada ca la balauru, rădicată pi spate și încolătăcită pe la grumaz.

> (When the archangel Michael descended from the Mount of Olives, he encountered an evil and most frightening spirit, whose hair fell over the heels and breasts reached the knees, with iron hands and legs, with the mouth of a lion, the eyes of an ox, a flaming tongue, a dragon's tail stuck straight up and curled against her neck.) (MS 1619: 3v)

Several manuscripts in the Romanian Academy Library in Bucharest preserve drawings of Avestița. They are often very simple and bring to mind other depictions of hers preserved in various traditions (e.g. Spier 2014: 53; Toporkov 2017a, mainly plates 1–29) or the portraits of other demons which feature on Aramaic incantation bowls or on Greek magical papyri (Vilozny 2013; Betz 1996). This simplicity shows that artistic criteria were not necessarily required while crafting magical protective devices (see also Vilozny 2013: 36). At the same time, these sketches also reveal that such images encapsulated the whole story about the combat between the demon and the archangel Michael and embodied the hopes of all those who were seeking for angelic protection.

A couple of them feature the demon alone, showing her in a frontal position. In one of them, she is naked and has a monstrous appearance, long finger- and toenails like claws of a bird of prey, crooked nose and dishevelled hair which reaches her heels. She is winged, a pictural detail which corresponds to one of her names, *Aripa Satanei* (The Wing of Satan). Her ankles and her chest are bound, which shows that she was already defeated by the archangel (MS 3479: 38r; see Figure 4.1). Another illustration is placed after a text describing her malignant actions. She is depicted standing on the top of a hill, an allusion to the Mount of Olives, where her encounter with the archangel took place. She has a devilish form: she has dark wings, horns, a long snout, long finger- and toenails like claws, her long hair reaches her heels, her breath seems to emanate fire. She is chained, a detail which emphasizes her demonic character and shows that the archangel defeated her. Her name is written above: Avestița (MS 3479: 71v; see Figure 4.2).

Although the archangel is not present in these illustrations, everyone who looks at them is aware of his beneficent role: he is the one who chained the frightful being and prevented her from harming those who commissioned the drawings.

Some illustrations depict both the archangel Michael and Avestița, at the end of the text describing their encounter. Once again, her appearance is monstrous: she has long toenails, like claws of a bird of prey, long dishevelled hair. Above her and on her right, the following words appear: *Sanca, adecă numele duhului necurat* (Sanca, that is the name of the unclean spirit). The archangel Michael is shown in a frontal position, providing a full view of his face. He is engaged

Figure 4.1 Avestița, Rom. MS 3479, 38r. Romanian Academy Library in Bucharest.

in fighting her: his left hand is on the demon's head, his right hand seems to carry something, probably a sword, directed at Avestița. He has large wings, wears a robe and boots and carries a crown with a cross (MS 3479: 83r; see Figure 4.3). He is clearly identified by the note above: *Mihail arhanghel* (the archangel Michael).

Such drawings executed on paper were meant to be kept in a certain place of the house or in the proximity of those who were in need of protection from the

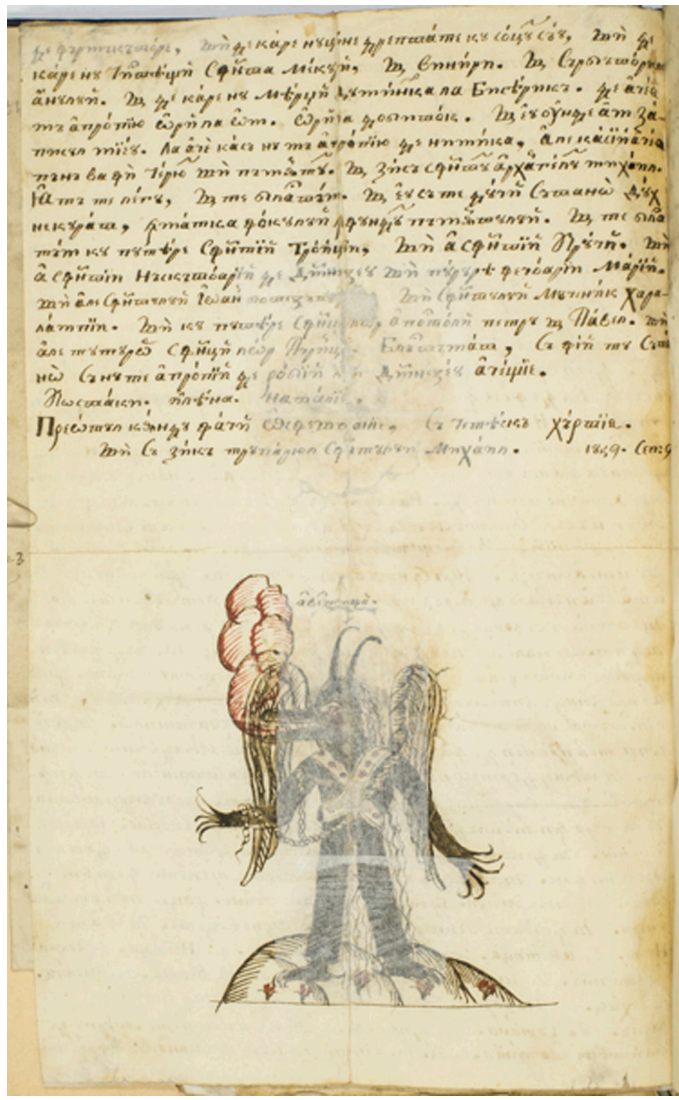


Figure 4.2 Avestița, Rom. MS 3479, 71v. Romanian Academy Library in Bucharest.

demonic assault: women in labour and newborn babies. Because only several pieces of this kind of figurative magic devices have survived, it is difficult to determine the extent of its usage.[25] It must have been significant, however, as testified by the images discussed below.

One of them was drawn by Radu, an icon painter who worked in Wallachia in the second half of the eighteenth century (Voinescu 1978; Dumitrescu 2018).

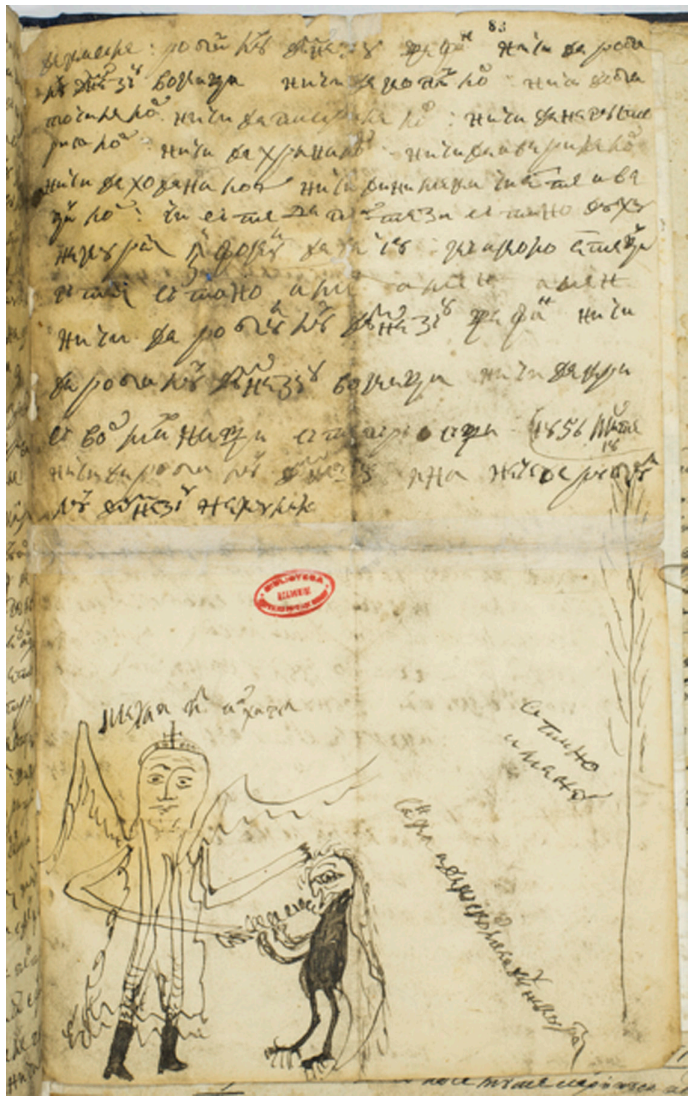


Figure 4.3 The archangel Michael and Avestița (= Samca), Rom. MS 3479, 83r. Romanian Academy Library in Bucharest.

It is part of his manuscript of models. It was an icon model (MS 5307: 20v; see Figure 4.4).

This image shows Avestița in the centre, with her name written above her, in a hilly surrounding. She has a monstrous, devilish appearance: she is black-coloured, has horns, red wings and eyes, finger- and toenails like claws and her hands and feet are chained. She is naked, only her long hair covers her hairy skin. She is

Figure 4.4 The archangel Michael, Avestița and Saint Sisoie (= Sisinie), icon model, Rom. MS 5307. Romanian Academy Library in Bucharest.

standing near an archangel whose name is clearly marked: *arhanghel Mihail* (the archangel Michael). He has large yellow wings, is dressed like a warrior saint and wears boots. He pulls the demon's hair with his left hand and raises up his sword in his right hand menacingly. On the right side of the icon, a haloed person watches the scene. The note above him identifies him as S. Sisoie (Saint Sisoie (= Sisinie)). God the Father blesses the scene from above. The crystallization of the drawings presenting Avestița and the archangel in the form of an icon model shows that there was an important demand for such images and for their standardization.

The icon model has not remained confined to manuscripts; it is present on wooden icons too. Several icons displaying the legend, executed between the

second half of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century, have been inventoried so far (Ene 1982).[26]

In what follows I will present an icon preserved in the Art Museum in Râmnicu Vâlcea (inventory number 209), which was previously studied by Ioana Ene (1982). One side of it is divided into two sections (see Figure 4.5). The upper section shows Avestița laying on the ground, with her name written above her. She has a monstrous appearance: she is red-skinned, and her nails are like claws. She is dragged on the ground by an archangel, who has large wings, is dressed like a warrior saint and wears boots. He pulls the demon's hair with

Figure 4.5 The archangel Michael, Avestița, Saint Sisoie (= Sisinie) and Saint Stylianos, icon, recto. Art Museum, Râmnicu Vâlcea.

his left hand. In his right hand he carries a whip with which he beats the demon and raises up his right hand menacingly. His name is clearly marked: *arhanghel Mihail* (archangel Michael). On the right side of the icon, two haloed persons watch the scene: Saint Sisoie (= Sisinie) is standing near the demon, he carries a rod and points with his right hand to the fight between the archangel and Avestița. The other saint carries a baby in his arms: he is Saint Stylianos, whose main attribute is the protection of babies.

The representation corresponds to *Avestița-Sisinie* texts, which describe how Saint Sisinie witnessed the archangel Michael's encounter with the female demon. The lower part of the icon presents the *Avestița–Sisinie* text. It continues on the verso of the icon (see Figure 4.6). The text specifies the owners' names (Ene 1982: 250), which shows that the icon has become a sort of a talisman of their house.[27] The text was written on 15 May 1875.

This icon embodies an attempt at changing the status both of the narrative about the encounter between the archangel Michael and the female demon and of the magical protective drawings. The transformation of an artistic magical device into an icon implies the acceptance of its contents as canonical or at least as licit.[28] This representation differs from the manuscript drawings and illuminations in the following: it is no longer crafted on a very fragile medium (paper); it focuses on the archangel Michael's warrior powers and depicts him in the well-known warrior attire; it displays other holy figures (Saint Sisinie and Saint Stylianos), who watch the archangel's victory and become thus a credible witness to Michael's exploit.

This transfer must have been enhanced by the fact that after the second half of the nineteenth century, there was an increasing publication of books with high print runs, which included the text on Michael and Avestița, as well as drawings of it. A book printed in Bucharest in 1869, for example, included a depiction featuring the archangel Michael spearing the female demon and Saint Sisinie carrying a baby. The drawing was accompanied by the following note, which was meant to support its orthodoxy: *Desemnul acestui tablou original s-a găsit de un călugăr bătrân la monastirea Sf. Athos, făcut încă din vechime* (The drawing of this original painting was found by an old monk in Saint Athos Monastery, and it was drawn in olden times; Mazilu 2017: 359). Lastly, the Romanian icon painters might have been acquainted with the Russian iconographic tradition, which often features Saint Sisinie watching Michael's victory over more fever demons (Toporkov 2011, 2017b: 653–72).

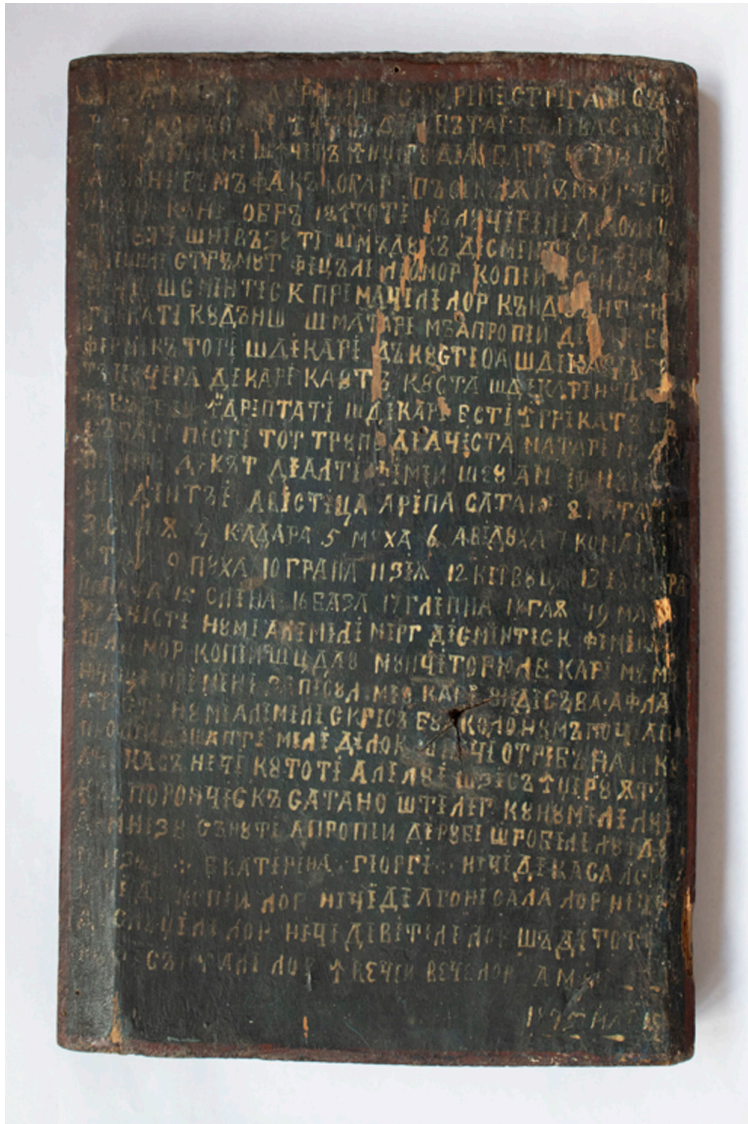


Figure 4.6 The archangel Michael, Avestița, Saint Sisoie (= Sisinie) and Saint Stylianos, icon, verso. Art Museum, Râmnicu Vâlcea.

The legend of a combat between a warrior holy figure and a female protean demon which attacks women in childbirth and newborn babies enjoyed a large transmission in various cultures during a long period and was rooted in Romanian culture of the eighteenth–nineteenth centuries mainly as a story with the archangel Michael as its central figure. The narrative, though written in prose

and highly variable, gradually became part of the charm repertoire. The legend explicitly portrayed Michael as the protector of the Virgin and of baby Jesus, hence he became a protector of all women in childbirth and of newborn babies.

The narrative has had not only a rich textual tradition but also a figurative one. The illustrations consisted mostly of simple drawings of Avestița bound alone or of Michael and Avestița in combat. These drawings must have been produced extensively.

The protection which the archangel Michael extended over mothers and newborn children made him implicitly a protector of the domestic realm, at least on specific occasions. Those who sought his protection must have considered the legend of his victory over the demonic figure as 'orthodox'. These beliefs and the increasing transmission of depictions of the narrative through printed books at accessible prices explain the emergence, at the end of the nineteenth century, of wooden icons presenting the archangel Michael's victory over the female demon. This transfer, from amulet to icon, shows that carrying depictions inspired by the legend by pregnant women, secretly or hiding them in baby cradles, was no longer deemed adequate. The legend about the archangel's victory had to be exposed visibly in the house and venerated overtly. These icons represent therefore a new attempt to include the archangel's non-canonical achievements in the realm of the canon.

The archangel Michael and the demon of hail

It is the Slavonic tradition again which nourished the emergence of another type of Romanian manuscript charms, with an archangel, most often Michael, as its main figure. An example of this type, an exorcism against hail, was transmitted exclusively in manuscripts (Timotin 2022: 270–5). I identified it in three seventeenth-century and five eighteenth-century manuscripts preserved in libraries from Bucharest and Cluj,[29] which were written by scribes and belonged to owners from Transylvania and Crișana in western Romania (Timotin 2015a: 206–9). The texts were transmitted mainly in a clerical milieu: some were copied by priests, while others were part of manuscripts that belonged to clergymen and were written next to writings copied by clergymen.

The exorcism begins with a para-biblical narrative about the archangel Michael's power over the demon which provokes hailstorms and continues with a series of conjurations with similar patterns. Each part of this repetitious structure begins with a performative verb in the present tense, which expresses

the conjuror's intention to stop the demon and the malevolent action. The verb is followed by a pronominal clitic in the accusative, which refers to the malefic agent and which reveals the exorcist's ability to address the demon directly, as well as by the name of the malefic agent in the vocative. This structure comprising the verb, the pronoun and the name of the malefic agent is followed by a large enumeration of various figures and symbols of Christianity.[30]

It is specific to this type of exorcism to present hail as the result of an evil action of a devil who has the power to rule over the rivers. According to the non-canonical narrative placed at the beginning of the text, this aquatic devil is confronted by the archangel Michael who is charged by God himself with guarding the rivers[31] so that the devil can no longer dwell there and harm people. Michael is portrayed as guardian archangel of rivers in four manuscripts (MS 10, 34, 4254 and 5911). In one case, the function is assigned to the archangel Gabriel (MS 2267).[32]

Here is the beginning of an exorcism that depicts Michael's action:

> Aceastea rugăciuni să cete<sc> la holde sau l[a] vii
>
> Adevărat destoinicu şi dreptu pentru frumus[e]ţea Domnului nostru, a lui Isus Hristos ce pusă Mihail arhanghel să străjuiască râurile apelor cum di[a] volul să n-aibă puteare pre roada creştinilor. Domnul veni cu puteare mare şi cu giurământ tare, cu Tatăl şi cu Fiiul şi cu Duhul Sfânt, cum pre diavolul să-l întărească despre râur[ile] apelor, cu Sfânta Troiță, cum să n-aibă putear[e] pre roada creştinilor a ploaia cu ploi răci şi cu [vi]coale. Oprescu-te, diavole, cu cel Dumnezău viu şi adevărat, ce-au rodit ceriul şi pământul şi p[rea]cinstită Maica Născătoare Domnului, Mari[a], giurata lui Iosif!
>
> (These prayers are to be read upon fields of grain and vineyards
>
> Truly powerful and just, for the beauty of our Lord, of Jesus Christ, who entrusted the archangel Michael with guarding the waters of the rivers, so that the devil cannot have power over Christians' fruits. God came with strong power and strong covenant, with the Father and the Son to cast away the devil from the waters of the rivers, and with the Holy Ghost, so that the devil cannot have power to rain cold rain and snow storms over the fruits of the Christians. I stop you, devil, with the true and living God, who created the sky and the earth, and with pure Mary, the mother of His Holiness, Joseph's fiancée!) (MS 5911: 4r–5v)

Beliefs that the devil could dwell in the waters were current both in the Romanian ecclesiastical milieu and in folk religion (Fecioru 1939: 113–14; Pamfile 1997:

248, 250; Cantemir 2006: 330). In contrast, Romanian tradition does not preserve any other trace of the main specific motif of this exorcism: that of the angelic battle between the archangel Michael and the evil aquatic being, master of hail. Yet the conjunction between archangels and hail has a long history. Clement of Alexandria establishes a relation between hail and the wrath of evil angels in his *Stromata* 6.31.1 (Clement of Alexandria 1999: 147). In magical texts which emphasize the power of archangels over (hail)storms, the archangel Michael is said to carry hailstones with him (Fernández Nieto 2010: 573).

The same association between hail and the conflict between an archangel and a demon has been attested in Greek and Latin magical texts since antiquity (Gómez-Moreno 1954: 53; Timotin 2015a: 336–9), as proven by a limestone from Sicily dating from the fifth/sixth century, which was meant to protect vineyards from hail.

A similar conjunction of archangels and demons who stir up rain is present in a sixth-century lead tablet discovered near Zagreb. The tablet is engraved with an exorcism against Tartaruchus, the devil who provokes hail and whose actions are prevented by the archangel Gabriel (Fernández Nieto 2010: 566–7; Timotin 2015a: 216–17).

Another tablet against hail from Sicily begins with the invocation of God and ends with the invocation of the archangels Michael and Gabriel (Fernández Nieto 2010: 566). In the early Middle Ages, Michael and seven other archangels are depicted as masters of the clouds who can keep hail away (Fernández Nieto 2010; Barbato 2019: 12–16).

The Romanian exorcisms follow the Slavonic magic tradition and echo a long-lasting Greek and Latin magic tradition that depicted archangels as protectors against hail and combatants against a demonic aquatic figure, master of hail. The Romanian texts most often assign this role to Michael and rarely to Gabriel. Unlike the previously discussed charm, which depicted the archangel as protector of individuals afflicted by serious diseases, this exorcism type emphasizes the attributes of Michael as protector of Christians' harvests and, implicitly, as protector of communities.

The archangel Michael, assistant of the charmer

A charm collected from a woman living in Bolotești (Vrancea, Moldavia), in 1971, features the archangel Michael in a new role: he is the charmer's assistant

(Ciubotaru 2009: 322–3). The disease is called *ceasul-rău* (literally 'evil-hour') and it designates a children's disease (Gorovei 1931: 272; Hulubaș 2012: 222).

De ceasul-rău
S-o sculat arhanghelul Mihail / Azi dimineață, / Sfânta luni, / Și a plecat la plug / Cu cuțitu la brâu, / Cu plugul negru, / Cu boii negri. / Iar eu l-am întrebat: /
– Unde ai plecat, Arhanghele Mihaile, / Azi, sfânta zi dimineață, / Cu cuțitu la brâu, / Cu plugul negru, / Cu boii negri? /
– Am plecat la movila lui Ierusalem, / S-o ar și s-o brăzdez. /
– Nu te mai duce, Arhanghele Mihaile, / Azi, / Sfânta luni dimineață, / Cu cuțitu la brâu, / Cu plugul negru, / Cu boii negri, / La movila lui Ierusalem, / S-o ari și s-o brăzdezi, / Aleargă curând la . . . cutare, / De ară ceasul cel rău: / Din inimă, / de sub inimă, Din rânză / Din osânză, / Din fața obrajilor, / Din sfârcul nasului, / Din vederile ochilor, / Din auzul urechilor, / Până-n tălpile picioarelor, / Că eu cu frigarea l-oi frigări, / L-oi înțepa, / Cu mătura l-oi mătura, / Cu roș l-oi lega, / Peste 99 de mări l-oi arunca. / Acolo să lăcuiască, / Acolo să băcuiască / Și să rămâie cutare gras / Și sănătos . . . / Să-l lase curat, / Luminat, /
Cum Dumnezeu din cer l-o lăsat. / Descântecul de la mine / Și leacul de la Dumnezeu.

(Against the children's disease
The archangel Michael woke up / this morning, / on a blessed Monday, / and set off to plough, / with a knife at his waist, / with a black plough, / with black oxen. / And I asked him:
'Where are you heading for, / archangel Michael, / today, in a blessed morning, / with a knife at your waist, / with a black plough, / with black oxen?' /
'I am going to the hill of Jerusalem, / to plough and work it.'/
'Archangel Michael, no longer head / for the hill of Jerusalem, / to plow and work it, / today, / in a blessed Monday morning, / with a knife on your waist, / with a black plow, / with black oxen. / Run quickly to N [the patient], / and plow the evil-hour: / from the heart, / from beneath the heart, / from his maw, / from his grease, / from his cheeks, / from the tip of his nose, / from the sight of his eyes, / from the hearing of his ears, / to the plants of his feet, / and I will impale it [the children's disease] with a skewer, / I will sting it, / I will sweep it with a broom, / I will tie it with

> a red thread, / I will throw it over ninety-nine seas, / for it to settle there and live there . . . / May N [the patient] remain pure, / clean, / as God from heaven left him, / the charm from me, / the remedy from God.')

The charm describes how the archangel sets off to plough at the beginning of the week ('on a blessed Monday'). The charmer sees him and asks him where he is heading for, and the archangel answers promptly that he is going to plough the hill of Jerusalem. The charmer stops him and tells him to go to remove the children's disease from the patient's body. The charmer will send it away afterwards, and the patient's health will be fully restored. The charm is unique in the Romanian magical literature, as it is the only one to my knowledge which presents a Christian figure (the archangel Michael) as an assistant of a human being, though initiated (the charmer).

Despite this striking feature, the charm has many motifs which prove its strong connection with the Romanian charm tradition. The archangel has a black plough and black oxen, a detail common in Romanian charms of oral tradition, which often emphasize verbally the monochromatic (usually black or red) objects or animals related to the characters of charms.[33] Michael carries a knife at his waist, which corresponds not only with his usual warrior attributes but also with the charm tradition, in which sharp objects, mainly knives, are commonly used by the healer. The seven archangels in the migraine charm presented above also carry knives and so do healers in other charms (Timotin 2015a: 229–30, 238–45).

The main healer acts like other healers, supernatural or human: the charmer is aware of the patient's disease, has the ability to find her assistants, to persuade them to get involved in the healing process (see for comparison the migraine charm) and can cast away the disease using various ritual (sharp) objects and healing words (Timotin 2009: 191–2).

The conjunction between the presence of the archangel in this charm and the disease it is meant to heal – a children's disease – suggests that the charm was nourished by the legend of Michael's victory over the female demon attacking women in labour and newborn babies and proves once again how rooted it was in folk beliefs. The striking hierarchy which it displays, according to which the archangel Michael is no longer the key healer but the charmer's assistant, derives, in my view, from a modification of the charmer's status in Moldova in the second half of the twentieth century. My previous research into a large corpus of charms against spells used in Moldova between the

eighteenth and the twentieth century allowed me to reveal an important shift regarding the status of the healer. The healer was always a supernatural being (the new moon) in manuscript charms, dating to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and was always the charmer assisted by a supernatural being (the new moon) in charms of oral tradition, collected in the second half of the twentieth century (Timotin 2015a: 312–15). In my opinion, the same shift is at work in the charm against the children's disease: in the modern practice of charming, the charmer is more important than the charm scenario, and therefore the supernatural and Christian beings involved in the magical scenario turn into his/her assistants.

Conclusion

The archangel Michael is an important figure in the Romanian magical tradition. He features as the main character in various texts that emphasize his commitment to healing and protecting the faithful. These texts convey narratives about the archangel that can be found neither in canonical texts (Bible, *Miracles of the Archangel*) nor in apocryphal literature.

The archangel's acts are threefold, and he is alternatively active at the individual, domestic and community levels: he is healer of a most dreadful disease, migraine; protector and healer of mothers and newborn babies in a liminal period of their lives; protector of Christians' fields and vineyards. The present analysis, though focused on Romanian charms, showed that the archangel has had the same roles in Slavonic and Greek traditions.

Thanks to his triple beneficent action, Michael has a unique profile among healers in the Romanian charm tradition. The extent of his actions exceeds those of any other (supernatural) healer in Romanian charms.

Michael appears in one of the oldest Romanian curative charms preserved until the present, hence, chronologically, he and Christ are the first Christian figures who play an active role in a Romanian charm. While Jesus's miraculous intervention is inspired by a biblical fragment, Michael's acts correspond to those of any healer of encounter charms.

The narratives which, in the Romanian charm tradition, feature Michael as protagonist have an ancient history. In the Christian tradition, they were known in a large area: in northern Mediterranean and East European regions or mainly in Eastern Europe. For a long period, these traditions (Greek, Latin and Slavonic)

portrayed mainly Michael but also Gabriel, sometimes even Michael-Gabriel as main healer/protector. In the Romanian tradition, though the oscillation between Michael and Gabriel continued to exist and sometimes they acted together as positive characters, Michael was the most recurrent angelic figure with curative/protective attributes, sometimes the single one.

Michael's roles relate to the primary concerns of the faithful. His involvement relieves their distress and, at the same time, normalizes their beliefs about the power of strong demons or evil archangels, which can inflict diseases or threaten family or community life. This double function of the archangel – to protect the recipients of the charms and to standardize beliefs regarding evil spirits – explains the steady, even exclusive involvement of priests and clergymen in the transmission of some charms. Less is known about their involvement in the transmission of the *Avestița–Sisoie* and *Avestița* texts, but it is obvious that they attempted to turn the apotropaic legend about the archangel's victory over the female demon into a text praising Michael. Thanks to the impressive transmission of the text, the legend of the archangel's victory over the female demon has moved towards the realm of orthodoxy, as the late-nineteenth-century icon testifies.

Priests are not the only mediators between charms and their recipients. Lay charmers are, as well. In the second half of the twentieth century, they seemed eager to take on an active part not only in the practice of charming but also in the magical scenarios of charms. New versions of charms emerge with lay charmers as main healers and the archangel Michael relegated to the position of their assistant. With these, the charmers place the practice of charming once again outside of Orthodoxy.

The narratives that portray the archangel Michael as main healer have not survived in the oral tradition of Romanian charms. This is due not only to the change of the charmer's status just mentioned but also because in this tradition it is mainly the Virgin Mary who governs healings.

Notes

1 From a vast bibliography, see Ryan (1999); Bózoky (2003); Filotas (2005); Timotin (2010: 16–22); Spieser (2014); Maguire (1995a, 2014); Barbato (2019: XXVII–XXX).

2 The roles which the archangel Michael, sometimes in conjunction with other archangels, undertakes in apocrypha still need to be investigated further; see, however, Michl (1962); Rohland (1977: 1–49); Rouche (1989: 551–4); Infante (1997); Johnson (2005); Stone (2016: 65–111); Dosoo (2021); Infante (2022: 19).

3 The Monastery of Mont-Saint-Michel in Normandy (France) traditionally preserved two important relics brought from Gargano: a piece of the marble on which the archangel allegedly stood during his appearance in Gargano and a piece of the archangel's red mantle he is supposed to have left there; see *Revelatio ecclesiae Sancti Michaelis*, Lectio 6, in Bouet, Otranto and Vauchez (2003: 14). It also preserved two other relics: a sword and a shield, with which Michael is supposed to have defeated a serpent which was devastating the kingdom of King Elga in Ireland (Neveux 2003: 251). Towards the end of the eighth century, some Irish monks, who had a strong veneration for the archangel, founded the Monastery of Tallaghat dedicated to Michael only after they miraculously received a letter and a clod of earth from him (Picard 2007: 138).

4 For this shrine of the archangel and other Byzantine shrines, see Janin (1934); Rintelen (1968: 34–41); Peers (1996); Otranto (2022: 27–33).

5 For other icons with curative virtues of the archangel, see Olar (2004: 129, 134, 173, 183, 192).

6 See, for example, an amulet against epistaxis described in Sorlin (1891); the amulets listed in Maltomini (1982: 167); the amulet discovered in the imperial tomb of Maria, wife of Honorius, discussed, along with other examples, in Kotansky (1994: 104–6); and an amulet with psalm fragments presented in Spier (2014: 48).

7 See, for example, Kotansky (1991); PGM XLIII.1–27, against shivering fits and fever, in Betz 1996: 281; PGM CVI.1–10, against shivering fits and fever, in Betz 1996: 310–11; Dosoo 2021: 426–7.

8 See Kotansky 1994: 58–71; PGM VII.199–201 (Betz 1996: 121); PGM LXV.4–7 (Betz 1996: 296); PGM XCIV.39–60 (Betz 1996: 305); PGM CXXII.1–55 (Betz 1996: 317); Radenković (1997: 159–62); Kotansky (2001); Timotin (2013); Timotin (2013 and 2015a: 21–58). One of the oldest Armenian magical scrolls to have survived also includes a migraine charm (Loeff 2002). I am grateful to Professor Michael E. Stone, who informed me about Y. Loeff's MA thesis. For charms and amulets against headache, see also PGM XX.13–19 (Betz 1996: 259); Feydit (1986: 43, 44, 66, 71, 279); Faraone (2012: 51–66).

9 The Romanian manuscripts were written in Cyrillic letters; they are rendered here in phonetic interpretative transcription, according to the standards of modern Romanian philology (Mareș 2015). In the manuscript charms presented here, I use {. . .} for missing letters, [xxx] for restored letters and <xxx> for scribal omissions. All translations of Romanian charms are mine.

10 In Slavonic, 'Say his name'.

11 In a late Byzantine prayer, the archangel Michael asks a similar group, composed of seven archangels and seven angels, to protect the vineyards and the harvest from evil forces and from beasts, but each angel has a specific name (Maltese 2006: 90–1; Olar 2004: 204). For a Coptic prayer, the *Praise of Michael*, in which Michael is

accompanied by seven archangels with specific names, and for the representation of this text, see Dosoo (2021: 412–15).

12 For the etymology and meanings of the word, see Timotin (2013: 239–41).

13 Gabriel and Uriel appear on a second-century amulet against headache, but they do not play any role in the magical scenario (Kotansky 2001: 44).

14 Tb. 15:12. Cf. PGM IV.1810–20, where Michael is one of the seven archangels whose names are to be inscribed on a gold tablet (Kotansky 1994: 106; Betz 1996: 70–1). In the chronicle of the foundation of Mont-Saint-Michel, *Revelatio archangeli sancti Michaelis*, Michael is the single identified archangel of the seven ones who assist God (Bouet, Otranto and Vauchez 2003: 10).

15 The Church did not succeed in establishing a firm tradition about the archangels to be venerated. One of the capitularies issued in 789 CE exhorted Christians living in the Carolingian Empire to venerate solely three archangels: Michael, Gabriel and Raphael (Rouche 1989: 554). Still, the veneration towards more archangels continued to be attested. Sometimes, Uriel was replaced with another archangel, who could be Souriel (Sijpesteijn 1981: 112) or Anael (Kotansky 1991: 276); other archangels join Michael in Irish narratives (Rouche 1989: 551–3), in Latin exorcisms (Franz 1960, 2:592) and in Armenian amulets (Feydit 1986: 212–25, 230–3). In northern Moldova, that is in the very region where the charm in question here was written, other archangels are occasionally mentioned in literary and artistic works produced between the fifteenth and the seventeenth century: the archangel Ioil appears in the Slavonic tradition and in the first Romanian recension of the *Life of Adam and Eve*; see Turdeanu (1981: 110); Anderson and Stone (1999: 79, 95); Timotin (2016: 44–5, 47). In the same region, one of the domes of the fifteenth-century church of Voroneț displays six archangels, each one with his own name; Iacubovschi (2021) presented a yet unpublished paper on this topic.

16 Other manuscripts of the *Testament of Solomon* present Ruax not as the migraine demon but as the headache demon (McCown 1922: 52*; Busch 2006: 224; Łaptaś 2019: 106).

17 Here is a charm against an ocular disease (a sort of leukoma), in which the Virgin encounters nine girls who go to the fountain of Jordan, to clean it and to restore the patient's health: 'Sculatu-s-a trei fete ficioare / . . . S-o sculat cu nouă măture li, / Cu nouă lopățeli / Pe cali, pi carari, / . . . / Numai Maica Domnului / Le-o văzut / Și le-o-ntrebat: / "Unde vă duceți voi, fetilor? / Cu nouă măture li, / Cu nouă lopățeli?" / "La fântâna lui Iordan /, S-o rânim di mucigai / Și di putrigai; / Cu lopățelile rădem, / Cu măturile o măturăm, / Și Ion să rămâie curat / Și luminat"' (Tocilescu and Țapu 1981: 98). (Three virgin girls woke up . . . / They set off carrying nine small brooms / And nine small shovels / On the way, on the trail / . . . Only the Virgin / Saw them / And asked them: / 'Where are you heading for,

girls? / With nine small brooms / And nine small shovels?' / 'To the fountain of Jordan, / To clean it from mold / And from rottenness. / We cut them off with the small shovels, / And clean it with the brooms. / May John remain pure / And clean').

18 There is an extremely rich bibliography on the topic; readers can refer to Toporkov (2017a).

19 The first part of this subchapter relies on Mazilu and Timotin (2017, 2018).

20 The name of the demon comes from the old Slavonic **veštica* (witch; cf. the Bulgarian word *veštica*; Candrea 1999: 189). For further information about the etymology of the name *Avestița*, see Badanova Geller (2015: 178, n. 7).

21 Romanian tradition usually assigns Avestița nineteen, thirteen or eighteen names (Mazilu 2017). Sometimes, two lists of names appear to increase the efficacity of the amulet (Mazilu 2017: 358–9). In some Greek texts, for instance, there are twelve and a half (Gaster 1983: 261) or between twelve and seventy-two names (Passalis 2014: 112). Numerous lists of the demon's names in various traditions were published in Toporkov (2017a).

22 See also Juhel and Vincent (2007: 198), who convincingly argue that in medieval France, Michael's protection of the Virgin, as mentioned in Rev. 12, nourished the emergence of cultic places that included two chapels in immediate vicinity: one dedicated to the Virgin and the other one to Michael.

23 The archangel Michael is also sometimes replaced by other characters in Greek texts (Patera 2006–7: 317).

24 Samca is another name of the demon, which is probably derived from the Bulgarian word *sěnka* (shadow, ghost) (Candrea 1999: 189).

25 Another drawing of the encounter between Michael and Avestița can be seen in MS 2248: 39v. This image is coloured, which shows that the owner of the text could afford to ask for a proper illumination. Unfortunately, it was damaged and poorly restored. The archangel Gabriel replaces the archangel Michael and is depicted close to Avestița in an illumination attached to an *Avestița–Sisinie* text (MS 3479, 84r, published in Toporkov 2017a: plate 23).

26 Another wooden icon, which was graciously brought to my attention by Dr Ovidiu Olar, was sold at an art auction in 2021. Available online: https://www.artmark.ro/ro/licitatie/licitatia-de-arta-sacra-2021/lot/icoana-pe-lemn-arhanghelul-mihail-ajutandu-l-pe-sfantul-sisoe-in-lupta-cu-diavolul-scoala-romaneasca-1878-piesa-rara-de-colectie-ro-55174 (accessed 12 December 2024).

27 For a Romanian charm against spells with talismanic value, see Timotin (2015a: 268–9).

28 For similar conversions regarding Byzantine and Russian images, see Maguire (1995b) and Toporkov (2011), respectively.

29 Four manuscripts have been preserved at the Romanian Academy Library in Bucharest (MS 447: 76r; 4254: 155v–156v; 5910, first interior cover; 5911: 4r–5v).

The other texts can be found in Cluj at the 'Lucian Blaga' University Library (MS 2267: 54r; 3137: 208r–209v), at the Romanian Academy Library (MS 10: 185–8) and at the Institute of Linguistics and Literary History 'Sextil Puşcariu' (MS 34: 16r–20v).

30 Other Romanian exorcisms against hailstorm refer to other biblical episodes in order to reinforce their efficacy of the exorcism (Timotin 2022). For other ancient and medieval charms against hail, see Fernández Nieto (2010: 561).

31 For Michael's association with water in various apocryphal texts, see Johnson (2005: 151). In the Coptic tradition, he was sometimes portrayed as the master of waters (Rohland 1977: 82). In the Armenian tradition, the archangel who protects waters is Mełkisn (Stone 2016: 70) or Elk'os (Stone 2016: 111). For the archangel Michael's power over waters in the Byzantine tradition, see Olar (2004: 182); Gielen and Deun (2015). In the fourteenth century, the archangel is portrayed as an exorcist by the water in Lesnovo Church in North Macedonia (Gabelić 1996: 357–8).

32 Three manuscripts are acephalous and do not preserve the narrative of the archangel's battle with the demon of hail.

33 Here are several examples: 'S-o luat omul negru / Ponegru, / De la casă neagră, / Poneagră, / Şi s-o dus la pădurea neagră, / Poneagră, / Cu topor negru, / Ponegru, / Şi-o tăiat lemn negru, / Ponegru.' (A black, very black man set off, from the black, very black forest, with a black, very black ax, and he cut a black, very black wood) (Marian 1996: 121); 'S-o dus omul negru / Cu boii negri, / Cu plugul negru, / . . . Cu jugul negru . . .' (A black man set off, with black oxen, with a black plough, with a black yoke) (Gorovei 1931: 261–2).

References

Anderson, G. A. and M. E. Stone (1999), *A Synopsis of the Books of Adam and Eve*, Atlanta: SBL Press.

Arnaud, L. (1913), 'L'exorcisme κατὰ τῆς ἄβρας attribué à saint Grégoire', *Échos d'Orient*, 16:292–304.

Atanassova, D. (2003), 'The Amulet-Prayerbook of Niketa (No. 646 NBKM): A Case Study', *Scripta & e-Scripta: The Journal of Interdisciplinary Medieval Studies*, 1: 187–96.

Badalanova Geller, F. (2015), 'Between Demonology and Hagiology: Slavonic Rendering of Semitic Magical *Historiola* of the Child-Stealing Witch', in J. C. Johnson (ed.), *In the Wake of the Compendia*: *Infrastructural Contexts and the Licensing of Empiricism in Ancient and Medieval Mesopotamia. Science, Technology, and Medicine in Ancient Cultures*, 177–206, Berlin: De Gruyter.

Barbato, M. (2019), *Incantamenta latina et romanica. Scongiuri e formule magiche dei secoli V – XV*, Rome: Salerno Editrice.

Betz, H. D. (1996), *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation*, *Including the Demotic Spells*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Bloch, Marc M. (1924), *Les rois thaumaturges. Étude sur le caractère surnaturel attribué à la puissance royale, particulièrement en France et en Angleterre*, Paris: Armand Colin.

Bouet, P., G. Otranto and A. Vauchez, eds. (2003), *Culte et pèlerinages à Saint Michel en Occident. Les trois monts dédiés à l'archange*, Rome: École française de Rome.

Bózoky, E. (2003), *Charmes et prières apotropaïques*, Turnhout: Brepols.

Busch, P. (2006), *Das Testament Salomos. Die älteste christliche Dämonologie, kommentiert und in deutsche Erstübersetzung*, Berlin: De Gruyter.

Campione, A. (2022), 'Le culte de saint Michel en Angleterre', in G. Otranto and S. Chierici (eds), *Saint Michel*, 143–53, Paris: Les éditions du Cerf.

Candrea, I.-A. ([1944] 1999), *Folclorul medical român comparat. Privire generală. Medicina magică*, ed. L. Berdan, Iași: Polirom.

Canivet, P. (1980), 'Le 'Michaelion' de Hūarte (Ve s.) et le culte syrien des anges', *Byzantion*, 50: 85–117.

Cantemir, D. (2006), *Descriptio antiqui et hodierni status Moldaviæ*, ed. D. Sluşanschi, Bucharest: Institutul Cultural Român.

Caseau, B. and J.-C. Chaynet (2021), 'La place des anges dans l'iconographie des sceaux', in D. Lauritzen (ed.), *Travaux et mémoires*, vol. 25, no. 2: *Inventer les anges de l'Antiquité à Byzance: conception, représentation, perception*, 307–38, Paris: Association des Amis du Centre d'Histoire et Civilisation de Byzance.

Cheynet, J.-C. (2001), 'Par saint Georges, par saint Michel', in V. Deroche, D. Feissel, C. Morrisson and C. Zuckerman (eds), *Travaux et mémoires*, vol. 14: *Mélanges Gilbert Dagron*, 115–34, Paris: Association des Amis du Centre d'Histoire et Civilisation de Byzance.

Ciubotaru, S. (2009), *Folclorul medical din Moldova. Tipologie și corpus de texte*, Iași: Editura Universității 'Alexandru Ioan Cuza'.

Clement of Alexandria (1999), *Les stromates: Stromate VI*, introduction, text, commentary, translation and notes P. Descourtieux, Paris: Les éditions du Cerf.

Colceriu, Ș. (2010), *Testamentul lui Solomon. Regele, demonii și zidirea Templului*, Bucharest: Humanitas.

Cristescu, Ș. ([1984] 2003), *Descântatul în Cornova – Basarabia*, ed. S. Golopenția, Bucharest: Paideia.

Dosoo, K. (2021), 'Ministers of Fire and Spirit: Knowing Angels in the Coptic Magical Papyri', in D. Lauritzen (ed.), *Travaux et mémoires*, vol. 25, no. 2: *Inventer les anges de l'Antiquité à Byzance: conception, représentation, perception*, 403–34, Paris: Association des Amis du Centre d'Histoire et Civilisation de Byzance.

Dumitrescu, G., ed. (2018), *Radu Zugravu. Caiete de modele*, facsimile edition of manuscripts 4602 and 5307 of the Romanian Academy Library, Bucharest: Editura Excelența prin Cultură.

Ene, I. (1982), 'Un document etnografic foarte rar – tableta apotropaică din colecția Muzeului Județean Vâlcea', *Buridava*, 4: 247–51.

Faraone, C. A. (2012), *Vanishing Acts on Ancient Greek Amulets: From Oral Performance to Visual Design*, London: Institute of Classical Studies, University of London.

Fecioru, T. (1939), *Poporul român și fenomenul religios. Studiu pe marginea producțiunilor folklorice*, Bucharest: Editura Librăriei Teologice.

Fernández Nieto, F. J. (2010), 'A Visigothic Charm from Asturias and the Classical Tradition of Phylacteries against Hail', in R. L. Gordon and F. M. Simón (eds), *Magical Practice in the Latin West*, 551–600, Leiden: Brill.

Feydit, F. (1986), *Amulettes de l'Arménie chrétienne*, Venise: St. Lazare.

Filotas, B. (2005), *Pagan Survivals, Superstitions and Popular Cultures in Early Medieval Literature*, Toronto: Pontificial Institute of Medieval Studies.

Fochi, A. (1976), *Datini și credințe populare de la sfîrșitul secolului al XIX-lea. Răspunsurile la chestionarele lui Nicolae Densusianu*, Bucharest: Minerva.

Foskolou, V. (2005), 'The Virgin, the Christ-child and the Evil Eye', in Maria Vassilaki (ed.), *Images of the Mother of God. Perceptions of the Theotokos in Byzantium*, 251–62, Aldershot: Ashgate.

Franz, A. ([1909] 1960), *Die kirchlichen Benediktionen im Mittelalter*, 2 vols., Graz: Akademische Druck-U. Verlagsanstalt.

Gabelić, S. (1996), 'The Archangelos Xorinos, or the Banisher', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 50: 345–60.

Gaster, M. ([1883] 1983), *Literatura populară*, ed. Mircea Anghelescu, Bucharest: Minerva.

Gielen, E. and P. van Deun (2015), 'The Invocation of the Archangels Michael and Gabriel attributed to Metrophanes Metropolitan of Smyrna (BHG 1292)', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 108 (2): 653–71.

Gómez-Moreno, M. (1954), 'Documentación goda en pizarra', *Boletín de la Real Academia Española*, 34: 25–58.

Gorovei, A. (1931), *Descântecele românilor. Studiu de folklor*, Bucharest: Regia M.O., Imprimeria Națională.

Hulubaș, A. (2012), *Obiceiuri de naștere din Moldova. Tipologie și corpus de texte*, Iași: Editura Universității 'Alexandru Ioan Cuza.'

Iacubovschi, O. (2021), 'The Names of the Angels – the Expanded List: Literary and Artistic Routes of Dissemination in Late Fifteenth-Century Moldavia'. Paper presented at the workshop Manuscript Tradition and Visual Culture. Circulating Models and their Reception in South-Eastern Europe, 14th-18th c., New Europe College, November 26, 2021, Bucharest.

Infante, R. (1997), 'Michele nella letteratura apocrifa del guidaismo del Secondo Tempio', *Vetera christianorum*, 34: 211–17.

Infante, R. (2022), 'Saint Michel dans la littérature juive et chrétienne ancienne', in G. Otranto and S. Chierici (eds), *Saint Michel*, 13–21, Paris: Les éditions du Cerf.

Janin, R. (1934), 'Les sanctuaires byzantins de saint Michel (Constantinople et banlieue)', *Échos d'Orient*, 33: 28–52.

Jeffreys, E., M. Jeffreys and Roger Scott (1986), *The Chronicle of John Malalas. A Translation*, Byzantina Australiensia, 4, Melbourne: Australian Association for Byzantine Studies.

Johnson, R. F. (2005), *Saint Michael the Archangel in Medieval English Legend*, Woodbridge: The Boydell Press.

Jolivet-Lévy, C. (2002), 'Culte et iconographie de l'archange Michael dans l'Orient byzantin: Le témoignage de quelques monuments de Cappadoce', in C. Jolivet-Lévy, *Études cappadociennes*, 413–46, London: The Pindar Press.

Juhel, V. and C. Vincent (2007), 'Culte et sanctuaires de saint Michel en France', in P. Bouet, G. Otranto and A. Vauchez (eds), *Culto e santuari di san Michele nell'Europa medievale. Culte et sanctuaires de saint Michel dans l'Europe médievale*, Atti del congresso internazionale (Bari – Monte Sant'Angelo, 5–8 aprile 2006), 183–207, Bari: Edipuglia.

Julia, D. (2003), 'Le pèlerinage au Mont-Saint-Michel du XV^{e} au XVIII^{e} siècle', in P. Bouet, G. Otranto and A. Vauchez (eds), *Culte et pèlerinages à Saint Michel en Occident. Les trois monts dédiés à l'archange*, 271–320, Rome: École française de Rome.

Kotansky, R. (1991), 'Two Inscribed Jewish Aramaic Amulets from Syria', *Israel Exploration Journal*, 41: 267–81.

Kotansky, R. (1994), *Greek Magical Amulets: The Inscribed Gold, Silver, Copper, and Bronze Lamellae. Part I: Published Texts of Known Provenance*, Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag.

Kotansky, R. (2001), 'An Early Christian Gold Lamella for Headache', in P. Mirecki and M. Meyer (eds), *Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World*, 37–46, Leiden: Brill.

Łaptaś, M. (2019), 'The Position of the Archangel Michael within the Celestial Hierarchy: Some Aspects of the Manifestation of His Cult in Nubian Painting', in S. I. Gilhus, A. Tsakos and M. C. Wright (eds), *The Archangel Michael in Africa. History, Cult and Persona*, 95–107, London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Łaptaś, M. (2021), 'The Apotropaic Function of the Archangels in Nubian Art', in D. Lauritzen (ed.), *Travaux et mémoires*, vol. 25, no. 2: *Inventer les anges de l'Antiquité à Byzance: Conception, Représentation, Perception*, 479–520, Paris: Association des Amis du Centre d'Histoire et Civilisation de Byzance.

Loeff, Y. (2002), 'Four Texts from the Oldest Known Armenian Amulet Scroll: Matenadaran 115 (1428) with Introduction, Translation', MA Thesis, Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

Maguire, H., ed. (1995a), *Byzantine Magic*, Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection.

Maguire, H. (1995b), 'Magic and the Christian Image', in H. Maguire (ed.), *Byzantine Magic*, 51–71, Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection.

Maguire, H. (2014), 'Magic and Sorcery in Ninth-Century Manuscript Illumination', in V. Dasen and J.-M. Spieser (eds), *Les savoirs magiques et leur transmission de l'Antiquité à la Renaissance*, 397–408, Florence: Sismel/Galluzzo.

Maltese, E. V. (2006), *Dimensioni bizantine. Donne, angeli e demoni nel Medioevo greco*, Alessandria: Universitas.

Maltomini, F. (1982), 'Cristo all'Eufrate P.Heid.G.1101: Amuleto Cristiano', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, 48: 149–70.

Mareș, A. (2012), 'Note privind vechi descântece manuscrise (1. Două descântece de gușă inedite; 2. Observații pe marginea unui descântec de la începutul secolului al XVII-lea; 3. Metamorfozele lui *laur* în unele descântece de șarpe; 4. Formule magice)', *Limba română*, 61: 329–36.

Mareș, A. (2015), 'L'édition des textes roumains anciens', in D. Trotter (ed.), *Manuel de la philologie de l'édition*, 95–130, Berlin: De Gruyter.

Marian, S. F. (1892), *Naşterea la români*, Bucharest: Carol-Göbl.

Marian, S. F. ([1886–93] 1996), *Descântece poporane române. Vrăji, farmece și desfaceri*, Bucharest: Coresi.

Mazilu, M. (2017), 'Numele Avestiței în tradiția românească manuscrisă și tipărită', *Limba română*, 66: 355–68.

Mazilu, M. and E. Timotin (2017), 'Легенда о святом Сисинии в румынской традиции', in A. Toporkov (ed.), *Сисинева легенда в фолклорных и рукописных традициях Ближнего Востока, Балкан и Восточной Европы*, 409–55, Moscow: Indrik.

Mazilu, M. and E. Timotin (2018), 'The Romanian Tradition of *The Legend of Saint Sisinie* (the 16th–19th centuries): Typology and Manuscript Variation', *The Journal of Ethnography and Folklore*: 190–218.

McCown, C. C. (1922), *The Testament of Solomon*, Leipzig: J.C. Hinrinch'sche Buchhandlung.

Michl, J. (1962), 'Engel VII (Michael)', in T. Klauser (ed.), *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, vol. 5, col. 243–51, Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann.

Morrisson, C. (2014), 'Monnaies et amulettes byzantines à motifs chrétiens. Croyance ou magie?', in V. Dasen and J.-M. Spieser (eds), *Les savoirs magiques et leur transmission de l'Antiquité à la Renaissance*, 409–29, Florence: Sismel/Galluzzo.

Neveux, F. (2003), 'Les reliques du Mont-Saint-Michel', in P. Bouet, G. Otranto and A. Vauchez (eds), *Culte et pèlerinages à Saint Michel en Occident. Les trois monts dédiés à l'archange*, 245–69, Rome: École française de Rome.

Ohrt, F. (1935–6), 'Segen', in E. Hoffmann-Krayer and H. Bachtold-Staubli (eds), *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens*, vol. 7, col. 1582–619, Berlin: De Gruyter.

Ohrt, F. (1936), 'Über Alter und Ursprung der Begegnungssegen', *Hessische Blätter für Volkskunde*, 35: 49–58.

Olar, O. V. (2004), *Împăratul înaripat. Cultul arhanghelului Mihail în lumea bizantină*, Bucharest: Anastasia.

Otranto, G. (2003), 'Genesi, caratteri e diffusione del culto micaelico del Gargano', in P. Bouet, G. Otranto and A. Vauchez (eds), *Culte et pèlerinages à Saint Michel en Occident. Les trois monts dédiés à l'archange*, 43–64, Rome: École française de Rome.

Otranto, G. and S. Chierici, eds. (2022), *Saint Michel*, Paris: Les éditions du Cerf.

Pamfile, T. ([1916–24] 1997), *Mitologie românească*, ed. M. Al. Canciovici. Bucharest: Allfa.

Panaitescu, P. P. (2003), *Catalogul manuscriselor slavo-române și slave din Biblioteca Academiei Române*, vol. 2, ed. D.-L. Aramă, Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române.

Panaitescu, P. P. and Z. Mihail (2018), *Catalogul manuscriselor slavo-române și slave din Biblioteca Academiei Române*, vol. 3/no.1, Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române.

Passalis, H. (2014), 'From Written to Oral Tradition. Survival and Transformation of St. Sisinnios Prayer in Oral Greek Charms', *Incantatio*, 4: 111–38.

Passalis, H. (2020), 'The Virgin Mary (Panagia/Theotokos) in Modern Greek Incantations: The Sacred Afflicted', *Incantatio. An International Journal on Charms, Charmers and Charming*, 9: 7–41.

Patera, M. (2006–2007) 'Gylou, démon et sorcière du monde byzantin au monde néogrec', *Revue des études byzantines*, 64–5: 311–27.

Peers, G. (1996), 'Apprehending the archangel Michael: Hagiographic Methods', *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, 20: 100–21.

Pettorelli, J.-P. (2012), *Vita latina Adae et Evae*, cura et studio; adiuvante et opus perficiente J.-D. Kaestli, synopsis *Vitae Adae et Evae* latine, graece, armeniace et iberice cura A. Frey, J.-D. Kaestli, B. Outtier et J.-P. Pettorelli, Corpus christianorum *Series apocryphorum*, 18–19, Turnhout: Brepols.

Picard, J.-M. (2007), 'La diffusion du culte de Saint Michel en Irlande médiévale', in P. Bouet, G. Otranto and A. Vauchez (eds), *Culto e santuari di san Michele nell'Europa medievale. Culte et sanctuaires de saint Michel dans l'Europe médievale*, Atti del congresso internazionale (Bari – Monte Sant'Angelo, 5–8 aprile 2006), 133–46, Bari: Edipuglia.

Pypin, A. N. and V. D. Spasović (1881), *Histoire des littératures slaves*, Paris: Ernest Leroux Éditeur.

Radenković, L. (1997), 'Apocryphal Prayers and Apotropaisms among Southern Slavs', *Balcania*, 28: 151–63.

Rintelen, W. Von (1968), 'Der Kult des Erzengels Michael in Süditalien und dessen Zusammenhang mit seiner Verherung in Phrygien und Konstantinopel', in W. Von Rintelen, *Kultgeographische Studien in der Italia Byzantina: Untersuchungen über die Kulte des Erzengels Michael und der Madonna di Constantinopoli in Süditalien*, 3–55, Meisenheim am Glan: Verlag Anton Hain.

Rohland, J. P. (1977), *Der Erzengel Michael Arzt und Feldherr. Zwei Aspekte des vor- und frühbzyantinischen Michaelskultes*, Leiden: Brill.

Rouche, M. (1989), 'Le combat des saints anges et des démons: la victoire de saint Michel', in *Santi e demoni nell'alto Medioevo occidentale (secoli V–XI)*, vol. 1, 533–60, Spoleto: Settimane di Studio del Centro italiano di studi sull'alto Medioevo.

Ryan, W. F. (1999), *The Bathhouse at Midnight. An Historical Survey of Magic and Divination in Russia*, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press.

Salsano, A. (2021), 'The Archangel Michael in Coptic Homilies', in D. Lauritzen (ed.), *Travaux et mémoires*, vol. 25, no. 2: *Inventer les anges de l'Antiquité à Byzance: conception, représentation, perception*, 383–401, Paris: Association des Amis du Centre d'Histoire et Civilisation de Byzance.

Saxer, V. (1985), 'Jalons pour servir à l'histoire du culte de l'archange Saint Michel en Orient jusqu'à l'iconoclasme', in *Noscere sancta. Miscellanea in memoria di A. Amore O.F.M. (†1982)*, 357–426, Rome: Ed. Pontificium Atheneum.

Sijpesteijn, P. J. (1981), 'Objects with Script in the Collection Moen', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, 42: 111–12.

Sorlin, A. (1891), 'Phylactère alexandrin contre les épistaxis', *Revue des études grecques*, 4: 287–96.

Spier, J. (2014), 'An Antique Magical Book Used for Making Sixth-Century Byzantine Amulets?', in V. Dasen and J.-M. Spieser (eds), *Les savoirs magiques et leur transmission de l'Antiquité à la Renaissance*, 43–66, Florence: Sismel/Galluzzo.

Spieser, J.-M. (2014), 'Christianisme et magie du III^{e} au VII^{e} siècle', in V. Dasen and J.-M. Spieser (eds), *Les savoirs magiques et leur transmission de l'Antiquité à la Renaissance*, 333–51, Florence: Sismel/Galluzzo.

Stone, M. E. (2016), *Armenian Apocrypha Relating to Angels and Biblical Heroes*, Atlanta: SBL Press.

Timotin, E. (2009), '*Irodia, doamna zânelor*. Notes sur les fées roumaines et leur cohorte fantastique', in K. Ueltschi and M. White-Le Goff (eds), *Les entre-mondes. Les vivants, les morts*, 179–94, Paris: Klincksieck.

Timotin, E. (2010), *Descântecele manuscrise românești (secolele al XVII-lea – al XIX-lea)*, Bucharest: Editura Academiei.

Timotin, E. (2013), 'The *năjit* between Prayers and Charms. A Study on the Romanian Manuscript Tradition', in J. Kapalo, É. Pócs and W. F. Ryan (eds), *The Power of Words. Studies on Charms and Charming in Europe*, 239–56, Budapest-New York, CEU Press.

Timotin, E. (2015a), *Paroles protectrices, paroles guérisseuses. La tradition manuscrite des charmes roumains (XVII^{e} – XIX^{e} siècle)*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de Paris Sorbonne.

Timotin, E. (2015b), 'Le roumain ancien', in M. Iliescu and E. Roegiest (eds), *Manuel des anthologies, corpus et textes romans*, 595–611, Berlin: De Gruyter.

Timotin, E. (2016), *Adam și Eva în literatura română veche (secolele al XVI-lea – al XVIII-lea). Texte canonice, scrieri apocrife și credințe populare*, Bucharest: Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române.

Timotin, E. (2021), 'Două descântece românești inedite pe marginea unui *Acatist al Născătoarei de Dumnezeu* tipărit în a doua jumătate a secolului al XVII-lea', in C.-I. Dima, A.-M. Gherman and G. Mihăilescu (eds), *De rebus Philologiae mirabilibus. In honorem Mihai Moraru*, 243–58, Bucharest: Editura Muzeului Literaturii Române.

Timotin, E. (2022), 'East European Christian Prayers against Hailstorms. Aquatic Demons and Divine Powers in Canonical and Apocryphal Contexts', in É. Pócs and A. Zempléni (eds), *Spirit Possession. Multidisciplinary Approaches to a Worldwide Phenomenon*, 263–78, Budapest: CEU Press.

Tocilescu, G. G. and C. N. Țapu ([1900] 1981), *Materialuri folcloristice*, vol. 3, ed. I. Datcu, Bucharest: Minerva.

Toporkov, A. (2011), 'Visual Representations of Charms against Fever on Russian Icons', in T. Mikhailova, J. Roper, A. Toporkov and D. Nikolayev (eds), *Oral Charms in Structural and Comparative Light*, 173–9, Moscow: Probel-2000.

Toporkov, A., ed. (2017a), *Сисинева легенда в фолклорных и рукописных традициях Ближнего Востока, Балкан и Восточной Европы*, Moscow: Indrik.

Toporkov, A. (2017b), 'Сисиниева легенда и заговоры от лихорадки у восточных славян', in A. Toporkov (ed.), *Сисинева легенда в фолклорных и рукописных традициях Ближнего Востока, Балкан и Восточной Европы*, 553–688, Moscow: Indrik.

Tsakos, A. (2021), 'Invoking the Archangels Graphically: the Archangel Michael in Christian Nubia as a Case Study', in D. Lauritzen (ed.), *Travaux et mémoires*, vol. 25, no. 2: *Inventer les anges de l'Antiquité à Byzance: conception, représentation, perception*, 461–78, Paris: Association des Amis du Centre d'Histoire et Civilisation de Byzance.

Turdeanu, É. (1981), 'La *Vie d'Adam et Eve* en slave et en roumain', in É. Turdeanu, *Apocryphes slaves et roumains de l'Ancien Testament*, 75–144, Leiden: Brill.

Urs, O. (2011), *Catalogul cărții românești vechi din Biblioteca Academiei Române Filiala Cluj-Napoca*, Cluj-Napoca: Mega.

Vaitkevičienė, D. (2013), 'Baltic and East Slavic Charms', in J. Kapalo, É. Pócs and W. F. Ryan (eds), *The Power of Words. Studies on Charms and Charming in Europe*, 211–36, Budapest: CEU Press.

Vauchez, A. (2007), 'Saint Michel dans la spiritualité des laïcs au Moyen Âge', in P. Bouet, G. Otranto, and A. Vauchez (eds), *Culto e santuari di san Michele nell'Europa medievale. Culte et sanctuaires de saint Michel dans l'Europe médievale*, Atti del congresso internazionale (Bari – Monte Sant'Angelo, 5–8 aprile 2006), 339–48, Bari: Edipuglia.

Vilozny, N. (2013), 'The Art of the Aramaic Incantation Bowls', in S. Shaked, J. N. Ford and S. Bhayro (eds), *Aramaic Bowl Spells. Jewish Babylonian Aramaic Bowls*, vol. 1, 29–37, Leiden: Brill.

Vincent, C. (2022), 'Le culte de saint Michel en France', in G. Otranto and S. Chierici (eds), *Saint Michel*, 155–65, Paris: Les éditions du Cerf.

Voinescu, T. (1978), *Radu Zugravu*, Bucharest: Meridiane.

Wright, M. C. (2019), 'Relationships with the Archangel Michael: Materiality and Healing among Ethiopian Orthodox Christians in Contemporary Addis Ababa', in S. I. Gilhus, A. Tsakos and M. C. Wright (eds), *The Archangel Michael in Africa. History, Cult and Persona*, 115–26, London: Bloomsbury Academic.

5

Letters from Heaven

The archangel Michael as God's messenger in Western Christianity

Alexandros Tsakos

Introduction

The archangel Michael is, etymologically speaking, the one 'who is like God'. He is the leader of the heavenly host, the supreme angel and therefore the perfect manifestation of the angelic nature. Angels are intermediary beings whose main role is to act as mediators between the divine and human realms, at least according to the etymological meaning of the ancient Greek word *angelos*: 'messenger'. In Christian traditions, this role is exemplified by the appearance of angels at crucial moments when God delivers a message to humans. The archangel Gabriel seems to occupy a particular place as a messenger since he is the one who delivers the news to the Virgin Mary that she will bear the Son of God. However, other angels, including Michael, also deliver divine messages. Notably, in the tradition of the so-called Letters from Heaven, Michael is always the one who delivers the divine message. This tradition has been recorded in several regions of the Christian ecumene and spans almost the entire Christian era.

In this chapter, after discussing the general characteristics of religious communication through script, I explain the appearance of the phenomenon of Letters from Heaven in Western Christianity, focusing on the Norwegian tradition of *Himmelbrev* (meaning 'Letter from Heaven' in Nordic languages),[1] which came to Scandinavia in the post-Reformation era.[2] I also consider the possible reasons for the archangel Michael's special role in this tradition. To this end, I use the five original *Himmelbrev* kept at the University of Bergen Library as case studies. Three of them are identical (apart from some colouring and the

frame around the text) and were produced in the printing house of Frands Dekke Beyer in Bergen, which operated under this name between 1846 and 1857. The other two contain identical texts in different layouts, but their content differs from that of the first three from Beyer's printing house. All these *Himmelbrev* almost certainly date from the nineteenth century, and apart from one (*Himmelbrev* 3), they must have been collected in Western Norway, from where the Bergen Museum has procured its manuscript and rare print possessions.[3] The content and form of these *Himmelbrev* are representative of the wider phenomenon of Letters from Heaven and offer insights into the historical and religious contexts of their production and use.[4]

Religious communication through script

The term 'religion' derives from the Roman word *religio*, which has been etymologically analysed in a twofold manner (Hoyt 1912). It may derive from *relegere* (to read repeatedly), implying the repetitive character of rituals based on specific storytelling or myths. Alternatively, it can be explained as a derivative of the verb *religare* (to connect), indicating the distance between the world of humans and that of culturally postulated superhuman beings, to use Spiro's (1966: 96) definition of religion.

Against this background, it seems that adherents of religious traditions tracing their origins back to the Roman ecumene and the Middle East may believe that communication between the human and superhuman worlds is established through the exchange of verbal and/or visual messages, primarily scripts inspired divinely or sent from the heavens and their performative reading in the context of ritualized cult, whether private or public. In Judaism, Christianity and Islam, these exchanges are typified in the manner in which God communicated his laws and teachings to humans through his angels, crystallized in the Torah, the Bible and the Quran, and in the ways in which humans use these texts in synagogues, churches, mosques or elsewhere.

Apparently, delivering a divine message is not an act performed only once. The variety of narratives about angels/messengers of God appearing to humans at various stages of their history – and subsequently in the revelation of the Holy Scripture – may suffice to make this point. This is particularly evident in the case of the Christian religion, as is testified by canonical texts (e.g. the Revelation), apocryphal narratives (e.g. the *book of Enoch*) and the religious iconography decorating the pages of manuscripts and the walls of churches, where angels are

depicted bearing divine messages. The messages delivered are often more than just repetitions of texts included in the Bible; rather, they are 'new messages from God'.

Moreover, after the Old Testament was accepted as the foundation of the Christian faith and as a prophecy for the New Testament stories, written divine messages delivered by angels also became the topic of apocalyptic and apocryphal literature and were linked to unorthodox beliefs and practices.[5] Nevertheless, not all phenomena that go beyond orthodoxy have been rejected outright by the official Church. Sometimes, and in some places, they have also been used by the Church to communicate innovative messages, including instructions of a social and moral character rather than dogmatic utterances and aphorisms on Church matters. Such messages have an ambivalent relationship with the orthodoxies of a given time and space. Letters sent to humans from the heavens constitute a good example.

From Christian epistolography to Letters from Heaven

The tradition of communication between humans and the divine realm through written correspondence could be traced back to the famous letter that Abgar, king of Osroene during the first half of the first century CE, allegedly received from Jesus. Although the authorship of this apocryphal text has been assigned to a divine person, the correspondence took place inside the human realm of earthly existence since Jesus was still incarnate when he supposedly wrote this letter. Moreover, the letter seems to be a continuation of the apostolic tradition of epistolary activities aimed at evangelizing a city or region.

Paul's letters are foundational to these epistolary practices. Moreover, the pseudepigraphic attribution of some letters to Paul illustrates the intention of assigning them a lineage of authority as venerable as possible. The popularity of the eight letters sent from Seneca to Paul and the latter's six replies to the former exemplify how devoutly early Christians cherished these traditions (Mitchell 2010). Christians of the first centuries made subtle use of the tools of both epistolary communication and pseudepigraphic assignation to authoritative figures of the new faith. Of course, it cannot be ruled out that Jesus himself engaged in such epistolary activities during his lifetime. However, it has been well established that the letter to Abgar cannot be dated before the third century, suggesting that it was an effort to attribute the foundation of Christianity in the Kingdom of Osroene to the earliest possible time (i.e. Jesus's lifetime) and as

high as possible in the Christian hierarchy – that is, to one of the persons of the Trinity (Camplani 2009).

Early Christians took the exploitation of the epistolary traditions to a new level when the first copies of an 'original' Letter from Heaven started to circulate. In this correspondence, the sender was not present on earth but was a superhuman agent inhabiting the divine realm. This 'original' Letter from Heaven has often been called an 'apocryphal' text, apparently based on an understanding of the term used to distinguish such texts from the 'canonical' texts of a given Church. However, there is a more restricted definition of the term 'apocrypha' as only those texts that elaborate on a narrative from the biblical world.[6] In this sense, the Letter from Heaven cannot be considered an apocryphon because, although its content is rather didactic, it resembles a sermon, it appears to be prophetic and it touches on the genre of apocalypses, it does not elaborate on a biblical narrative.

The definition of their genre notwithstanding, these letters' content can be summarized as a set of rules for the observance of Sunday that Jesus himself wrote and a list of punishments for those who do not comply. For this reason, Letters from Heaven have also been called Sunday Letters. In most cases, they were introduced by a short narrative explaining their appearance in a certain place and the lineage that linked the specific copy to the postulated original. Of particular importance to this study is the topos that Letters from Heaven were either delivered to humans by an angel or were miraculously present in a sacred place, where they were discovered by an angel.[7]

The observance of Sunday became important for Christians early on. The most ancient reference to the topic is arguably in *Did*. 14.1 (Milavec 2003), dated to *c*. 100 CE. From *Did*. 8.2, one can infer that the choice of fasting days was made in contrast to the choices made by 'the hypocrites', apparently the Jews, since the observance of Sabbath is explicitly mentioned, although it was only in 363 CE that the Council of Laodicea prohibited the observance of Sabbath. One may surmise that the first witnesses of a Letter from Heaven supporting the observance of Sunday appeared during this period.

Nevertheless, the complexity of manuscript witnesses across a wide variety of languages renders the task of identifying the origins of the tradition of the Letters from Heaven rather difficult. Two major hypotheses have been put forward. Some earlier scholars, such as Hasdeu (1879) and Delehaye (1899), argued for an origin in Rome since the 'original' letter is said to have appeared on Peter's tomb. More recently, Deletant (1977) also argued for a similar provenance after examining several manuscript witnesses and even proposed a plausible stemma

for the various recensions. On the other hand, scholars such as Basset (1893) and Bittner (1906) favoured Oriental origins (Greek and Arabic, respectively). Importantly, Jerusalem appears in many witnesses as the place where the letter was 'delivered'.[8] Although it is outside the scope of this study to make a choice between the two options, it is important to note that there seem to be marked differences between the Greek and Latin versions. As the latter encompasses the earliest known witnesses of a Letter from Heaven (Palmer 1986), for a case study of *Himmelbrev*, which are situated within Protestantism in Northern Europe and thus probably derive from earlier Catholic traditions, it is legitimate to examine the Latin version. Most importantly, it is in this version and its various recensions that the archangel Michael plays an important role.

From the Latin version of the Sunday Letter to the *Himmelbrev*

No known original letters have been preserved among medieval Latin sources. The most ancient witnesses from the Catholic Middle Ages are three indirect references in other written sources. The first is found in a correspondence dating from before 584 CE, in which Licinianus, bishop of Carthage, replied to a letter sent to him by Vincent, bishop of Ibiza, who shared his knowledge of the existence of a Sunday Letter, along with his belief in the letter's authenticity. Licinianus tried to refute his claim, citing a Letter from Heaven that supposedly appeared miraculously on Saint Peter's grave in Rome. The passages quoted by Licinianus reveal that it was believed that the letter was written by Jesus himself, who gave strict orders to observe Sunday, supplemented by other detailed restrictions.[9]

The next time a Letter from Heaven is recorded in Latin sources is during the first half of the eighth century (Arnold 2013: 122–31). This instance is linked to the controversial figure of Aldebert, bishop of Verdun, who was denounced by Saint Boniface for his heretical views before Pope Zachary at the Lateran Council of 745 CE. Some of these views were related to the cult of angels and the use of their names as tokens of ritual power for healing and salvation purposes. The cult of the angels and archangels was not sanctified in the West during that time, and Aldebert was excommunicated.[10] Among other things, a copy of a Letter from Heaven was brought forward as proof of his guilt.[11] The relevance of this letter to the accusations against him was that it was initially discovered thanks to an angel's intervention. Specifically, the archangel Michael found the letter in Jerusalem, where it was copied by a priest named Icore. Three other priests in three different places copied it before it arrived at the 'Holy Mountain

of the archangel Michael', certainly to be identified with Monte Gargano, the most ancient and important cult site of the archangel in the West (Arnold 2013: 67–92). Finally, an angel brought the letter to Saint Peter's grave in Rome. It is tempting to identify this angel with Michael as well. Apart from the importance of Michael's role in this recension, it should also be emphasized that, even though it places the letter's discovery in Jerusalem, it eventually rejoins the recensions referring to its miraculous appearance on Peter's grave.

The third known reference to a Letter from Heaven from the European Middle Ages is preserved in the correspondence between Ecgred, bishop of Lindfarde, and Wulsfig, archbishop of York (Delehaye 1899: 162), dating from the ninth century (830–5 CE). This correspondence concerned an itinerant priest who, invoking the vision of an Irish monk, predicted that great catastrophes would befall Christians if they continued to fail to observe Sunday, as they had been ordered by Christ through a letter sent from the heavens and written with golden letters. Besides the similarities with the two earlier references, the tradition that the Letter from Heaven was written with golden letters is present in a large group of recensions and witnesses and, along with Michael's special role, constitutes a characteristic of *Himmelbrev* as well, as will be discussed later.

In the eleventh century, the first complete Letters from Heaven appear in both Latin and vernacular languages. Interestingly, these first witnesses do not contain an introductory narrative about the circumstances of the letter's discovery. However, in at least one instance, it is mentioned that there had been two earlier letters sent by Christ and that this third letter would be the last one. One should be cautious about assigning particular significance to things appearing three times in different witnesses of the same story. However, since the number *three* has been of great symbolic value across cultures, including Christianity, it is noteworthy that in the introductory narratives of many *Himmelbrev*, the letter is presented three times to the human who is assigned the task of promulgating it by an angel.

More witnesses of the Sunday Letter appear in the following centuries. The letter gained momentum in the fourteenth century, when it was apparently modified and used by the sect of the Flagellants. It should also be noted that in Fritsche Closener's chronicle of Strasbourg, written in German during that time (Deletant 1977: 437), Friday was also to be observed along with Sunday.[12] Some *Himmelbrev* also contain orders to venerate more days.

Towards the end of the Middle Ages, one particular recension seems to have gained popularity, at least in Northern and Eastern Europe. In Latin, German,

Polish, Hungarian, Ukrainian and Romanian versions, the letter appeared in Bethania (or 'Britania') next to an icon of Saint Michael. It was written with golden letters, and it would descend to anyone who wished to read it (Timotin 2006: 549–56). This agency assigned to the Letter from Heaven is repeated in the introductory section of a category of *Himmelbrev*.

In the early seventeenth century, the German version introduces a further element of 'Michaelic' interest: that the icon of Saint Michael in Bethania was actually in Michaelsburg, near Freiburg. This localization is repeated, in the form *Míkilborg*, in an Icelandic version preserved in a text that claims that the Sunday Letter was brought to Iceland in 1648 to aid in the propagation of the Catholic faith. The way in which 'Michaelsburg' is written in Icelandic retains the proximity to the word used in Old Norse for Constantinople – Miklagarðr – but shows that the propagation of the Letter from Heaven is understood as linked to the cult of the archangel Michael. The connection of its appearance in Iceland to evangelizing missions is a further point of similarity with the *Himmelbrev*, as will be discussed below, and is important for understanding how Norwegian readers conceptualized the miraculous provenance of these Letters from Heaven.

The Letters from Heaven as chain letters

Before examining the *Himmelbrev* more closely, it is worth making another set of observations on the Latin version of the Sunday Letter that Aldebert possessed. The letter allegedly reached him after passing from Jerusalem to Geremia, from Geremia to Arabia, from Arabia to Vetfania, from Vetfania to the Holy Mountain of the archangel Michael and from there to Rome. This itinerary is preceded by an explicit reference to the archangel as the one who found the letter in Jerusalem. Geremia can thus safely be considered part of the Michaelic ecumene since the name is most probably a corruption of the toponym 'Germia', another very popular cultic place of the archangel. Moreover, the name 'Vetfania' is possibly a corruption of 'Bethania', which was already known as a key location of one of the recensions of the Latin version of the Sunday Letter – in fact, the one most directly associated with Michael. A Latin witness of the letter dating from the twelfth century details an almost identical sequence of transmission. This witness mentions Bethania, followed by the explicit identification of the Holy Mountain with Mount Gargano (Deletant 1977: 435). Against this

background, Arabia could also be seen as a Michaelic cult place, although no obvious identification can currently be proposed.

The text preserved in Boniface's letter to Zachary also alludes to the method by which the Letter from Heaven travelled through Christendom. After it first appeared in Jerusalem, a priest named Icore made a copy (Et per manus sacerdotis nomine Icore epistola ista fuit relecta ipsa exemplata[13]) and sent 'ipsam epistolam' (the same letter) to the priest Talasio in Geremia. Talasio sent 'ipsam epistolam' to Arabia, where it reached a priest named Leoban, who sent 'epistolam ipsam' to Macrius in Vetfania.[14] Macrius sent 'ipsam epistolam' to Gargano, from where the archangel Michael himself brought 'ipsam epistolam' to Rome, where it appeared on Peter's grave and was celebrated by no fewer than twelve popes. Even if the named priests were obviously far inferior to Michael, they were apparently nodes of a Michaelic network, the complexity of which has yet to be fully grasped.[15] This network had the responsibility of transporting Jesus's letter that Michael discovered in Jerusalem across Michaelic cultic centres until it reached the Holy See itself. Apart from the observation that Aldebert perhaps wanted to link his cult of angels to this Michaelic network, another question arises: Why does the text repeatedly state that what the individuals involved transported 'ipsam epistolam'? The logical assumption would be that the letter that appeared on Saint Peter's grave in Rome with Michael's intervention was not a copy but the original Letter from Heaven. However, the first priest copied this 'original' letter before sending it to the second priest, and this must be what all the priests subsequently did to disseminate the newly revealed divine words to their congregations.

The circulation of such a text in a Christian community bears significance. In some cases, it becomes fundamental to an entire sect or church denomination; in others, it may even be placed beside the canonical literature and gain similar status. It is unknown whether a Letter from Heaven achieved such recognition at any point or whether the proposed Michaelic network played a special role. This is certainly worthy of investigation.

More important for this case study is to understand the circulation of Letters from Heaven as examples of 'chain letters', referring to the practice by which each person possessing a copy of a letter made as many copies as possible and spread its message as widely as possible. Unsurprisingly, in these chains of transmission, the text was altered, either by mistake or purposefully, to be adapted to the conditions of the time and space in which it appeared. But the expectation that the Letter from Heaven should set in motion the production of chain letters also

guaranteed that, even if a message handwritten with golden letters and sent to humans by Jesus was transmitted through hundreds, if not thousands, of *printed* copies, these copies did not lose their significance as tokens of faith for the pious person who possessed one and respectfully read and abided by its commands – let alone for the copyist and/or printer involved. The mostly printed Norwegian *Himmelbrev* undoubtedly gained popularity due to such an understanding of the power imbued into chain letters.

Himmelbrev as descendants of the medieval Latin version of the Sunday Letter

The dissemination of Letters from Heaven in several copies, both printed and handwritten, is the reason for the alternative name by which they are known in the literature: 'heavenly chain letters'. The issue of copying these letters is, of course, primarily relevant in the context of a single language, although their appearance in different linguistic environments shows that a translation process was often also involved in their transmission. Notably, it has been possible to trace the origins of the tradition in a certain language back to a *Vorlage* (the prior witness of a given text) from which it was 'initially' translated into that given language – for example, from Polish into Romanian (Timotin 2006).

In this section, I discuss the Norwegian tradition of *Himmelbrev* more thoroughly. The *Himmelbrev* in question were, in fact, written in Danish, which was used in most written communication in Norway in the early modern period. Some of the preserved Norwegian *Himmelbrev* have their origins in a Danish version of 1720, which was, in turn, a translation of a German text (see below).[16] The Norwegian tradition is part of a broader Nordic tradition, which, as I will explain later, can also be found in other places and languages (Berg 2013: 112).

It is worth noting that *Himmelbrev* are already known from Old Norse poetry, namely a reference in *Leidarvisan* dating from the mid-twelfth century (Paasche 1914: 102). Although nothing is known about their content, it cannot be ruled out that they were comparable to those circulating in other parts of Western and Northwestern Europe during the early Middle Ages.

Regarding the Latin version of the Sunday Letter, the points that are directly relevant to the case study of *Himmelbrev* and the archangel Michael's role can be summarized as follows:

1. The locality of the letter's disclosure to humans is related to the cult of the archangel because he either finds or reveals it, because of its proximity to his icon or because the site is dedicated to him.
2. The letter was written with golden letters by Jesus himself.
3. The letter would enable anyone who believed in its power and wanted to read and/or copy it to do so.
4. Apart from the observance of Sunday, more days were to be venerated (Friday in some Latin and Romanian versions).
5. There is occasional mention of several letters sent by Jesus before the present one.

To better situate these similarities, it is necessary to present a Norwegian *Himmelbrev* text. The content variations between *Himmelbrev* would require the collation of a representative sample of *Himmelbrev* and a thorough philological analysis. Because this task exceeds the scope of this study, I selected a type of *Himmelbrev* that is sufficiently representative of the material known to date. This is the text – translated into English by me[17] – of the three identical *Himmelbrev* printed in Bergen in the mid-nineteenth century (see Figures 5.1–5.3). All three *Himmelbrev* explicitly focus on the archangel Michael, who is depicted at the centre of their top half, and exhibit the first three characteristics listed above, as well as some additional characteristics that make their content particularly interesting.

Below the image of the archangel

A letter at the church in Saint Germana, translated to Danish from German
Year 1720
Michael

Whoever will try to get hold of this letter,
it turns away from him.
But whoever will copy it, to him
it bows and opens up.

On the left side of the archangel

A serious warning
to the raving fool on the brink of the abyss
if he can still be helped.

Figure 5.1 An example of a popular *Himmelbrev* printed in Bergen between 1846 and 1857. In the top half of the print, the archangel Michael's figure is depicted (coloured in the original). Note the label identifying the archangel. The framework around the text area is only found in this example. Photo: University of Bergen Library. https://marcus.uib.no/instance/document/ubb-librar-box-008-04.html (last accessed 12 December 2024).

Melody: The Magnificent Sun, etc.

O, look up, you fool, shaken by sin!
Don't you see the great risk for your soul?
O, don't you see the mouth of the abyss?
Soon you will fall. Who will help you rise again?
Is there really any exit to expect
from Hell?

Figure 5.2 An example of a popular *Himmelbrev* printed in Bergen between 1846 and 1857. In the top half of the print, the archangel Michael's figure is depicted. Note the label identifying the archangel. The framework around the text area is the same as around *Himmelbrev* of Figure 5.3. Photo: University of Bergen Library. https://marcus.uib.no/instance/document/ubb-librar-box-008-02.html (last accessed 12 December 2024).

O you, who walks on the night tracks of sin
and is overturned in the dirty beds of the burdens,
you are afraid of the blissful light of day,
you throw yourself into the arms of the faithless prostitute
without considering the fire and the heat of Hell
that awaits you.

O, couldn't you go there and rest
your tired body and see God's angel smile

Figure 5.3 An example of a popular *Himmelbrev* printed in Bergen between 1846 and 1857. In the top half of the print, the archangel Michael's figure is depicted (coloured in the original, as well as the sunny sky behind him). Note the label identifying the archangel. The framework around the text area is the same as around *Himmelbrev* of Figure 5.2. Photo: University of Bergen Library. https://marcus.uib.no/instance/document/ubb-bob-plv-002-01.html (last accessed 12 December 2024).

about a bed and resting place so mild and blissful?
And after a reinvigorating calm and night's rest
follow the just ways of your call and duty
in high spirits.

Where will you go when everything on earth dwindles?
When you no longer find the strength to commit sins?
When lust and games and everything abandons you?
Where will you go, you poor and fool sinner?
When you are carried on death's bed?
Where will your soul go?

On the right side of the archangel

Indeed, it is simple and very easy to expect that –
the one you faithfully served during the time you were allotted here –
that you will receive your salary and your rent from him.
For every laborious step on the path of sin,
He will repay you with the dark abode of Hell.

Who shines a light for you out in the dark of night?
Who gives you the power and the hellish strength
to challenge God and all of God's orders?
Who wanders with you when the others sleep?
Who asked you to go and weave the shameless deed?
What is his name?

Yes, it is him, the black dragon of Hell,
who makes plans to take you one day
and throw you down into eternal darkness,
where you will sow the fruit of your toil,
where never again will your lustful eye
see an exit.

O, turn around! It is your own ship,
and let yourself receive even as late as now advice
to protect your precious soul.
Where will you go when you fly away from here?
Will you then make such a bad deal?
Think about this well!

O, listen, my friend! And hear one word in good time!
See the sun of mercy, how quickly it can slide down
and all the doors can be locked for you.
Embrace your God with prayer and the arms of faith
so that his mild heart will have mercy on you
and grant you salvation.

This letter was written by God himself and sent down to earth via the archangel Michael. It is with gilded letters and can be seen in the Church of Saint Germain (also called Grondoria), where the same letter hangs over the baptismal font.

Main text

> He who works on Sunday is condemned. Therefore, I exhort you not to work on Sunday, either on your property, or doing any other job; but you should diligently go to the church and read with devotion, without adorning your faces or rippling your hair, or again indulging in haughtiness; but share your riches with the poor, and believe that I have sent this letter with my divine hand from Jesus Christ so that you do not act like irrational animals. I give you six days a week to work and Sunday to go to church early and hear God's Word with devotion. If you do not do this, I will punish you with pestilence and war and dire times. I exhort you not to work late on Saturday so that all of you, old and young, go to church early on Sunday and pray for your sins; pray that you are forgiven for your sins. Do not swear in my name with anger, do not long for silver and gold, and do not seek carnal pleasures and greediness. For just as I have created you, so can I destroy you.
>
> Moreover, I say: one will not strike the other, neither with hand nor with tongue; do not be untrue to your neighbor in his absence; do not be glad of your property and wealth; respect your father and mother; do not give false testimony against your neighbor. Then I will give you health and peace. But he who does not believe in this letter and obey it is condemned and will have neither happiness nor blessing. I tell you this: I, Christ, wrote this letter with my own hand, and whoever speaks against it is abandoned by me and cannot ever expect any help. One will share copies of this letter with another, and if you have committed as many sins as the sand grains in the sea and as many as the leaves on the trees – indeed, as many as the stars in the sky – they will be forgiven if you follow my commandments. Believe earnestly in what this letter teaches and tells you. He who does not believe will die! Repent wholeheartedly if you do not wish to be punished eternally. For when I will judge you on the last day, then you cannot excuse your sins.
>
> Everyone who has this letter in their own house and carries it in their own heart will not be affected by lightning, nor will thunder do them harm, and they will be spared the catastrophes of fire and water. Every wife who carries this letter and follows its orders will bring a much wanted and blessed fruit to the world!
>
> Keep the commandments that I have sent to you through my Angel Michael. I, I, Amen, Amen.

This *Himmelbrev* lacks an important section that is one of the most characteristic elements of the Norwegian tradition of Letters from Heaven: the historiola that explains the letter's miraculous appearance. This *Himmelbrev* offers only a brief

Figure 5.4 A *Himmelbrev* signed as 'Ordered for print by S.H.L.D'. The initials remain undeciphered. The print must date from the nineteenth century. Photo: University of Bergen Library. https://marcus.uib.no/instance/document/ubb-librar-box-008-01.html (last accessed 12 December 2024).

description ('This letter was written by God himself and sent down to earth via the Archangel Michael. It is with gilded letters and can be seen in the Church of Saint Germain [also called Grondoria], where the same letter hangs over the baptismal font'). On the other hand, a historiola is present – and identical – in the other two original *Himmelbrev* kept at the University of Bergen Library (see Figures 5.4 and 5.5), which most probably also date from the nineteenth century.

Historiola in *Himmelbrev* 4 and 5

> Near a city and a village, it so happened a mile away from Copenhagen that an angel came to a man called Just and spoke to him on two occasions. The first and second times, he was in a peasant's clothes and had no buttons on his shirt, and

Figure 5.5 A *Himmelbrev* signed in handwriting with blue ink as belonging to 'Thea Andersen'. The person remains unidentified. The print must date from the nineteenth century. Photo: University of Bergen Library. https://marcus.uib.no/instance/document/ubb-librar-box-008-03.html (last accessed 12 December 2024).

he said, 'Go to the priest and say to him that God cannot have peace in Heaven because of the poor men's sickness and cries.' When the priest heard this, he said that this was a ghost. So, he came a third time and said to him that he was an angel of God and opened his shirt, and he shone like a flame. But the man could not set his eyes on him because of the shining, and he feared him, and the angel said to him, 'Fear not, for I will defend you and take care of you.' And the angel said, 'You will go again to the priest and say to him that God cannot have peace because of the poor men's sickness and cries. They will pay for the earth in which they will be buried and for their great sins that go wild and the great haughtiness that men carry with them.' And in the end, he said that the city of Copenhagen was the most sinful place in all of Christianity. And this letter that God sent down to that place, written with gilded letters, is the one that follows herein.

These two *Himmelbrev* also share the same text in the main body of the Letter from Heaven. Undoubtedly, they stem from the same tradition. The archangel's role is stated in the opening of the main text with the following words: 'Whoever works on Sundays or holy days is cursed and condemned. He says that himself through his angel Michael.'

In these two *Himmelbrev*, we also find the other two elements that link the Norwegian tradition to the Latin tradition, namely the letter's appearance three times (the angel comes to Just twice, and only after his third visit is the letter accepted by the local priest) and the insistence on the veneration of more holy days than just Sunday (although Friday is not explicitly mentioned).

A question that arises is how one can better contextualize the *Himmelbrev* tradition in nineteenth-century Norway, given the accusation that the Danish capital is the most sinful place in all of Christianity. At first glance, one may suppose that this accusation contradicts the links between the two Protestant states of Norway and Denmark. However, in the nineteenth century, Norway came out of the Napoleonic Wars in a union with Sweden, and this period was marked by the constant demand for Norwegian independence until it was gained in 1905. Therefore, it seems paradoxical that the accusation is still directed against the Danish capital and not the Swedish one. This will be explained in the next section. Suffice it to state here that we witness how the religious tradition of the *Himmelbrev* stemming from the antique and medieval Christian past meets the political realities of post-Reformation Scandinavia and adapts (albeit selectively) to the Zeitgeist of the centuries that follow.

Himmelbrev in the Nordic Protestant tradition

The difference between the first three *Himmelbrev* from Bergen and the other two of unknown provenance also distinguishes the former from most *Himmelbrev*, which feature the introductory narrative of the angel visiting a man called Just three times. It should be reminded that Just must convince the priest of the letter's authenticity and have him read it in the church. This would offer God 'peace of mind', which he lost by seeing all the suffering of the poor due to the disorder caused by human (religious) behaviour. This last detail is not strange to post-Reformation ideas, according to which poor people and laity can assume important roles in religious matters.

The structure of the rest of the text is identical in all the *Himmelbrev* examined here. It begins with an exhortation to refrain from sinful acts and thoughts and

to observe Sunday (and other holy days), even abstaining from work on that day since people had been given six days a week for this purpose. Then, a repetition that Jesus himself wrote the letter is followed by threats against those who fail to follow the letter's orders – both individuals and the entire human race. In contrast, those who believe in the letter's authenticity, follow its orders and copy it will have their sins forgiven, will be protected from dangers and will be blessed for eternity. The respect for both the structure and the content of what was deemed to be the original Letter from Heaven has been extensively discussed in the literature (see Berg 2018). What should be underlined here is that the claim that this was a copy of the original Letter from Heaven enhanced the object's ritual effectiveness while giving both the copyist/printer and the purchaser/reader extra credit for their salvation.

The oldest example of this type of text has been identified in a manuscript that bears the date 1604. The date is contested because the text was written on paper dating from the last quarter of the seventeenth century. Perhaps the date was added to link the preserved copy to its alleged original. The copyist himself claims that he followed divine orders when producing the copy because the original Letter from Heaven 'bends and unfolds for those who want to write it, but for those who want to take it, it withdraws and flies away'.[18] The original letter, 'hung in the outer city of Mikkelsborg', meaning that it was hanging in the air, is supposed to have been copied verbatim in a sort of continuation of the medieval practice of *vidisse* – that is, charters that claim to have 'seen' the originals that they copied between opening and closing formulae.

The popularity of *Himmelbrev* in Norway was impressive. Their use peaked in the nineteenth century, not unrelated to the proliferation of local printing houses, and continued into the twentieth century. However, their origins in the Nordic world can be traced back to the first years after the Reformation, as indicated by the manuscript of 1604 (?) and the existence of a very different and much longer *Himmelbrev*, *Eyn Mandat Jhesu Christi, an alle seyne getrewen Christen* (A mandate from Jesus Christ to all his faithful Christians), published by Nicolaus Hermann in 1524. It is seventeen pages long, whereas all other Nordic *Himmelbrev* are one-page pamphlets. Moreover, its text bears no similarities to those examined here, apart from the general idea that Jesus is unhappy with humans' conduct. Interestingly, in this *Mandat*, divine anger is directed at the clergy (twice), thus situating this text in the context of ideas and practices brought to Northern Europe with the Reformation. Given that some Norwegians were still clinging to the Catholic faith and practices (Laugerud 2018), the circulation of *Himmelbrev* in Norway after the imposition of Protestantism by the Danish

kings may be seen as an effort to urge Norwegians to continue going to church on Sunday despite the change in priests and cults.

In *Himmelbrev 4* and 5, we find accusations against Copenhagen as the most sinful city in the world. While this may seem paradoxical, given that both Denmark and Norway had become Protestant long before the nineteenth century, it must be seen as a change in the way in which religious practices were legitimized in the centuries that followed the first conflicts between the Catholic past and post-Reformation ideals in Norway. When the *Himmelbrev* under scrutiny were published, Norway was in a union with Sweden, and one may read the accusation against Copenhagen as a way of legitimizing the political and religious links between Norway and Sweden. This was indeed a strategy of the Swedish crown, which led, however, to the emergence of a fierce national identity struggle for the liberation of Norwegians in both the secular and religious spheres. The contextualization of *Himmelbrev* in nineteenth-century Norway can be seen as evidence of the latter.

The pietistic movements of this period seem to have provided fertile ground for the propagation of *Himmelbrev*. Although this is beyond the main focus of this study, a working hypothesis regarding their popularity during this period can be put forward. The pietistic Haugean movement, with its focus on the priesthood of all believers for the renewal of the Christian faith to revitalize the Church of Norway, can be seen as the backdrop to a kind of new revelation offered by *Himmelbrev*. With their emphasis on the importance of reading and erudition, the teachings of Hans Nielsen Hauge (1771–1824) could be propagated through the easy-to-print, cheap, popularly appealing and ritually efficacious *Himmelbrev*.[19]

Similar adaptations to the Zeitgeist of the nineteenth century can be gleaned from the content of *Himmelbrev* 1, 2 and 3: women are warned against 'rippling' their hair, a fashion that dominated the nineteenth century,[20] from which these *Himmelbrev* date. In earlier versions, the warning was against raising the hair in 'fontange' style, which was abandoned in the early eighteenth century (Sherrow 2006: 134).

There is one more reference to women in these *Himmelbrev*: 'Every wife who carries this letter and follows its orders will bring a much wanted and blessed fruit to the world.' This promise indicates that women were seen as a target group by the producers and sellers of *Himmelbrev* and illustrates that the *Himmelbrev* were imbued with ritual power.

Concerning the ritual power of the *Himmelbrev*, it should also be noted that among the threats against those who did not believe in the letter's authenticity, Jesus counted even death, as can be seen in the main body of *Himmelbrev* 4 and

5: 'There will be such disease and pestilence that he who goes to sleep in the evening will drop dead the next morning.'[21] Such phrasing caused the printer Jacob Wulfsberg, who notoriously became rich by selling such prints, serious problems with the law in 1853, when cholera afflicted Eastern Norway, with thousands dead. The Zeitgeist made it inevitable to condemn this phrasing in Wulfsberg's *Himmelbrev* as blasphemy. His *Himmelbrev* were destroyed, and Wulfsberg was imprisoned and forced to pay an enormous fine (see Berg 2021).

The examination of the content of the five *Himmelbrev* in question shows that their texts both clung to medieval traditions and kept up with the contemporary developments of the society that they targeted. Especially one element of the Nordic *Himmelbrev* tradition seems to have remained constant and even accentuated in the nineteenth-century examples from Bergen: the archangel Michael's role.

The archangel Michael's role in the *Himmelbrev*

The Norwegian insistence that the angel involved in the delivery of the Letter from Heaven was Michael is particularly evident in the three letters from Bergen kept at the University of Bergen Library. One more identifier of Michael can be seen in these *Himmelbrev*: a stamp with his name below the image of the angel dominating the upper half of the print. The same image of an angel was used in other *Himmelbrev* but without a legend identifying the angel with Michael.[22] Apparently, the cult of the archangel was particularly strong in Bergen, and the producers and sellers of *Himmelbrev* expected to earn larger profits by identifying the angel in the Letter from Heaven with Michael.

The commentary of Norwegian dramaturgist Ludvig Holberg, born in Bergen but mostly active in Copenhagen, who expressed scepticism towards *Himmelbrev* in 1723, serves as an eloquent example of their popularity in Bergen. In his comedy *Barselstuen*, in which we see women in Copenhagen attending a 'baby shower' and chatting, a printer's wife admits that it was simple men who wrote and translated the *Himmelbrev* that earned her family the highest profits, having sold 4,000 copies. Perhaps Holberg had this version in mind, which apparently became very popular in his hometown, especially among the 'folk'.

An element of the decoration of these *Himmelbrev* shows both their popularity and their importance to their owners. Two of the three *Himmelbrev* from the University of Bergen Library have different decorative frames around the text. This suggests that the printing house produced at least two series of

these *Himmelbrev*, each time changing this decorative element, and that these *Himmelbrev* were in high demand among the inhabitants of Bergen and its surroundings. Regarding the importance that their owners attached to them, it is noteworthy that hand-colouring was added to the figure of the archangel in at least two instances, apparently because these objects served as both decorative items and tokens of religious effectiveness in the owners' homes.

The main form of *Himmelbrev*'s 'effectiveness' should be understood in terms of ritual power. We have seen how the text itself underlines the letter's apotropaic character for those who keep it in their homes, believe in its authenticity and obey its orders. It was also expected to have more direct positive effects, most characteristically by blessing the children born to women venerating the *Himmelbrev*. It cannot be ascertained whether this effect was due to respect for the letter's content, its display in the home or its close keeping on the pious individual's body. However, it is known that *Himmelbrev* were kept folded in their owners' clothes or fixed to the lids of their suitcases during travels and even on the bodies of soldiers as late as during the Second World War (Berg 2018: 221). The archangel Michael has been considered the most effective superhuman agent against all threats from evil powers since his biblical fight against the Devil over the body of Moses (Jude 1.9) and the one who will overpower the Adversary at the end of times (Rev. 12.7-12). His interference in human affairs protects mortals from the dangers lurking in the acts of the Devil. Especially in premodern societies, in which the absence of systematic medical treatment made bacterial infections fearsome attacks against human well-being, any infection could be seen as the work of evil powers. The archangel's intervention was believed to not only defeat invisible maleficent powers but also protect against such threats to human health. His healing powers are variously discussed in this volume. Here, suffice it to underline the importance of script in such acts – for example, through charms, as discussed in Chapter 4. The archangel has also been invoked against illnesses since antiquity, and he would appear in dreams to give advice of a medical character, which was transmitted through texts that can be characterized as magical (see Rohland 1977). Thus, the insistence on the archangel Michael's role in the transmission of *Himmelbrev* must be seen as a crucial additional element of the ritual power of these objects.

An interesting detail in some *Himmelbrev* is related to the fame of Mediterranean Christianity among people in the north. As noted in the previous section, the 1604 (?) *Himmelbrev* claimed that the original Letter from Heaven was miraculously hanging in the air in a place called Mikkelsborg, which has

been tentatively identified with Constantinople, called Miklagarðr in Old Norse (meaning 'the big wall'). As previously mentioned, a corruption of the Old Norse name in favour of a locality obviously linked to the archangel Michael (i.e. Míkilborg) is also found in the Icelandic tradition. In the north of Europe, the Michaelic network of Adelbert's time was still very much alive. The cult of the archangel Michael was deeply rooted, and his persona remained venerated and perhaps even feared.

Particularly revealing of Protestant Norwegians' deep veneration of the persona of Michael is the phrasing used in one of the two *Himmelbrev* kept at the State Archive in Oslo, which is dated to 1648: 'And it was sent down by God's Son, the angel Michael' (Paulsen 2001: 217). Although this confusion has ancient roots (see Hannah 1999), it is not found as explicitly elsewhere in the *Himmelbrev* corpus, which suggests that it was either a mistake of the scribe or the intrusion of a personal belief witnessing the continuation of ideas going back to the founding fathers of Protestantism. However, the strange phrasing in the three identical *Himmelbrev* from Bergen ('I have sent this letter with my divine hand from Jesus Christ') may indicate similar beliefs finding their way in these texts. The conflation of the personae of Michael and Jesus was indeed recognized in Luther's, Calvin's and other Reformation theologians' exegeses of biblical texts. George Chryssides makes good use of this information in Chapter 6. Suffice it to note here that the appearance of such beliefs situates the popularization of *Himmelbrev* in the learned Protestant tradition of the nineteenth century, as is fitting in the context of the Haugean movement. Moreover, it shows the variety of practices and beliefs among Protestants that can be traced back to the earliest phases of Christianity. Throughout the two millennia of its existence, the archangel Michael has been a deeply and variably venerated holy figure, with his properties constantly adapted to the religious expectations of a given Zeitgeist, participating in the definition of orthodoxy but also challenging its limits.

Postscript

The first three *Himmelbrev* from the Special Collections of the University of Bergen Library open with a hymn that is otherwise unknown but was expected to be chanted to the melody of a well-known psalm composed by Thomas Kingo (1634–1703), a very popular Norwegian psalmist. In the context of

this book project, Alf Tore Hommedal (archaeologist, University of Bergen Museum), Stig Wernø Holter (professor emeritus of church music at the University of Bergen, organist and composer) and I travelled to the city of Voss and recorded Hommedal singing this hymn to Kingo's melody played by Wernø Holter on the organ of the local church, which is dedicated to the archangel Michael. This recording can be found at https://marcus.uib.no/search/?q=himmelbrev or by following the QR-code below.

Notes

1 Since in Norwegian there is no distinction between the singular and plural forms of the indefinite form of the neutral substantive, the neutral substantive 'brev' can mean both 'letter' and 'letters'. In this chapter, the term 'Himmelbrev' is used to refer to the Norwegian Letters from Heaven, while 'Letter from Heaven' is used for the rest of the traditions discussed here.

2 These *Himmelbrev* have been quite well studied but mainly from the perspective of book history. For an overview and relevant bibliography, see Berg (2018).

3 The largest part of the manuscript collection was assembled by the founders of the Bergen Museum who, starting in 1825, travelled across Western Norway, collecting both antiquities and documents. The latter were subsequently donated to the University of Bergen upon its foundation right after the end of the Second World War, becoming part of its library's Special Collections.

4 All five original *Himmelbrev* along with their transcriptions and translations can be found at https://marcus.uib.no/instance/collection/ubb-himmelbrev (accessed 12 December 2024).

5 This criticism was intensified by the conflicts about whether the Old Testament should be part of the Christian canon at all. However, this topic is beyond the scope of this analysis.

6 I follow the definition used by the European Research Council-financed project APOCRYPHA; see Lundhaug (2022: 140 and n. 5).

7 See also Chapter 1 in this volume. It should be noted that there are exceptions to this topos. For instance, a patriarch is also attested as the person discovering such a letter, which can be attributed to the Catholic tradition, in which the priesthood is endowed with such powers. In Protestantism, on the other hand, the priesthood has

no special powers. Therefore, instead of a priest, the Letters are always presented by an angel or through a miracle.

8 Van Esbroeck (1989) even attempted to situate the genesis of the tradition in ecclesiastical politics in Jerusalem in the mid-fifth century.

9 The quotation was published by Priebsch (1936) based on a work by Stephanus Baluzius (1630–1718). For this information, see Van Esbroeck (1989: 271).

10 Interestingly, there are other traditions of Letters from Heaven dating from the eighth century – for example, the legend of the foundation of the Abbey of Saint Hubert in Belgium (diocese of Namur), whose locality was allegedly chosen when Plectrude, the consort of Pepin of Herstal, saw a script sewn with golden threads fall from the sky. Pepin asked his chaplain Bérégise to interpret the text, and the choice of God himself conveyed therein was included in the foundation charter that Pepin issued for the abbey, with Bérégise becoming the leader of the local religious community and subsequently a saint. See *Acta Sanctorum Octobris* (1765: 494–5).

11 It should be noted that what is preserved from Aldebert's letter does not explicitly mention the observance of Sunday, but it has been presumed to refer to it in the literature. See, for example, Deletant (1977: 433).

12 The veneration of Friday is exemplified in the cult of the Twelve Fridays, which is closely connected to the Heavenly Letters in Romanian manuscript traditions, in which a text dedicated to the Twelve Fridays often follows a Heavenly Letter. See Kapaló (2011: 136, 268).

13 'And by the hand of a priest named Icore, this letter was reread [i.e. copied] as it was modeled' (my translation). For the Latin text, see Deletant (1977: 433).

14 In the different editions of Saint Boniface's letter that preserved the knowledge of Aldebert's Letter from Heaven, variant spellings of the names of the priests who relayed the 'original' letter have been observed. See Deletant (1977: 433 and n. 10).

15 A recent publication about Saint Michael's cult in the most renowned Michaelic centres of Europe (Mount Gargano, Saint-Michel-de-la-Cluse and Mount Saint-Michel in Normandy) puts forward the idea that pilgrimage exchanges between these centres created a network of faith across the continent (Otranto and Chierici 2022: 7–8), albeit within the context of Catholicism and not as evidence of an early Christian group with a Michaelic focus, as I suggest for the discerned network underlying the stations of transportation of the Letter of Heaven from Jerusalem and the East to Italy and the West.

16 This *Himmlebrev* is available online: https://www.kb.dk/e-mat/dod/11050200083E.pdf (accessed 12 December 2024).

17 For the transcription of the original texts of the *Himmelbrev* at the University of Bergen Library and for the interpretation of some difficult terms, I would like to thank my colleagues Marianne Paasche and Ola Søndenå.

18 The translation is a slight paraphrase of the Norwegian text transcribed by Berg (2017).

19 The possible links of *Himmelbrev* to the Haugean movement were first noted by Fet (1995: 247) (my translation), who situated the production of *Himmelbrev* and visionary literature, especially in the case of the printing houses in Volda, in the general climate of 'Haugean awakenings and missionary enthusiasm . . . the demand for scripts [as] apparently an expression of a deeper religious need among the folk'.

20 'Rippling' was apparently an evolution of a women's hairstyle appearing after the French Revolution that consisted in wearing at least part of the hair loose, forming ringlets around the face. See Sherrow (2006: 386–7). The style was dubbed 'Marcelling' after the 1870s due to a new curling iron introduced by Marcel Grateau (1852–1936), who is perhaps responsible for the fashion that dominated the 1920s (Sherrow 2006: 257–8).

21 For the complete texts, see https://marcus.uib.no/instance/collection/ubb-himmelbrev (accessed 12 December 2024).

22 An example of a Norwegian *Himmelbrev* printed in Germany bearing the figure of the angel without a name was sold online at through www.finn.no. The present owner of that Himmelbrev is the National Library of Norway.

References

Acta Sanctorum Octobris, vol. 1 (1765), Antwerp: Apud Petrum Joannem Vander Plassche. Available online: https://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/04z/z_1643-1925__Societe_des_Bollandistes__Acta_Sanctorum_10_Octobris_Tomus_01_1765__LT.pdf.html (accessed 12 December 2024).

Arnold, C. (2013), *The Footprints of Michael the Archangel: The Formation and Diffusion of a Saintly Cult c. 300 – c. 800*, New York: Palgrave-MacMillan.

Basset, R. (1893), *Les apocryphes éthiopiens, traduits en français*, vol. 2: Mas´h´afa Tómar, Paris: Librairie de l'art indépendant.

Berg, S. F. (2013), 'Himmelbrav i reproduksjonens tidsalder', in A. M. B. Bjørkøy, R. Hemstad, A. Nøding and A. B. Rønning (eds), *Litterære verdensborgere: Transnasjonale perspektiver på Norsk bokhistorie 1519–1850*, 109–36, Oslo: Nasjonalbiblioteket.

Berg, S. F. (2017), 'Den som tror, skriver av: Et himmelsk kjedebrev (ukjent sted, ukjent år)', in *Fortidens stemmer: Brev fra Nasjonalbibliotekets samlinger 1378–1776*, vol. 1, 106–7, Oslo: Nasjonalbiblioteket.

Berg, S. F. (2018), 'The Proof of the Original Is in the Copying: Heavenly Chain Letters', in B. Brenna, H. D. Christensen and O. Hamran (eds), *Museums as Cultures of Copies: The Crafting of Artefacts and Authenticity*, 211–23, London: Routledge.

Berg, S. F. (2021), 'Himmelbrev i koleraens tid', *Michael*, 18 (3): 307–24.

Bittner, M. (1906), 'Der vom Himmel gefallen Brief in seinen morgenländischen Versionen und Rezensionen', in *Denkschriften der kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften: Philosophisch-historische Klasse*, vol. 51, 1–240, Vienna.

Camplani, A. (2009), 'Traditions of Christian Foundation in Edessa: Between Myth and History', *Studi e materiali di storia delle religioni*, 75 (1): 251–78.

Delehaye, H. (1899), 'Note sur la légende de la *Lettre du Christ tombée du ciel*', *Bulletin de l'Académie Royale de Belgique*, *Classe des Lettres*, 2: 171–213.

Deletant, D. (1977), 'The Sunday Legend', *Revue des études sud-est européennes*, 15 (fasc. 3): 431–51.

Eyn Mandat Jhesu Christi, an alle seyne getrewen Christen (1524), edited by N. Hermann, Wittenberg: Lukas Granach and Christian Döring. Available online: https://books.google.no/books?id=U5tbAAAAcAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_atb&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false (accessed 12 December 2024).

Fet, J. (1995), *Lesande bønder: Litterær kultur I norske allmugesamfunn før 1840*, Oslo: Scandinavian University Press.

Hannah, D. D. (1999), *Michael and Christ: Michael Traditions and Angel Christology in Early Christianity*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.

Hasdeu, B. P. (1879), *Cuvente den bătrâni*, II, *Cărțile poporane ale românilor în secolul XVI în legătură cu literatura poporană cea nescrisă*, Bucharest: Noua Tipografie Națională C.N. Rădulescu Bucuresci.

Hoyt, S. F. (1912), 'The Etymology of Religion', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 32 (2): 126–9.

Kapaló, J. A. (2011), *Text, Context and Performance: Gagauz Folk Religion in Discourse and Practice*, Leiden: Brill.

Laugerud, H. (2018), *Reformasjon uten folk: Det katolske Norge i før- og etterreformatorisk tid*, Oslo: St. Olav forlaget.

Lundhaug, H., (2022), 'Apocryphal Literature in Coptic', in S. Moawad (ed.), *Coptic Literature: Proceedings of the Ninth International Symposium of Coptic Studies by Saint Mark Foundation, Monastery of St. Bishoi–Wadi al-Natrun, 10–14 February 2019*, 139–53, Cairo: Saint Mark Foundation.

Milavec, A. (2003), *The Didache: Text, Translation, Analysis, and Commentary*, Collegeville: Liturgical Press.

Mitchell, D. (2010), *Legacy: The Apocryphal Correspondence between Seneca and Paul*, Philadelphia: Xlibris.

Otranto, G. and S. Chierici, eds. (2022), *Saint Michel*, Paris: Les éditions du Cerf.

Paasche, F. (1914), *Kristendom og kvad: En studie I norrøn middelalder*, Kristiania: Aschehoug & Co.

Palmer, N. F. (1986), 'Himmelsbrief', in H. R. Balz, S. G. Hall, B. L. Hebblethwaite, R. Hentschke, W. Janke, G. Lanczkowski, J. Mehlhausen, C. H. Ratschow, K. Schäferdiek, H. Schröer, G. Seebaß and C. Thoma (eds), *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, vol. 15, 344–6, Berlin: De Gruyter.

Paulsen, H. (2001), 'Himmelbrevene', *Norsk Arkivforum* 16 *(Arkivfagets profesjonalisering: Festschrift til Jørgen H. Marthinsen)*: 208–28. Kristiansand: Norsk Arkivarforening.

Priebsch, R. (1936), *Letter from Heaven: On the Observance of the Lord's Day*, Oxford: Blackwell.

Rohland, P. (1977), *Der Erzengel Michael Artz und Feldherr: Zwei Aspekte der vor- und frühbyzantinischen Michaelskultes*, Leiden: Brill.

Sherrow, V. (2006), *Encyclopedia of Hair: A Cultural History*, Westport: Greenwood Press.

Spiro, M. E. (1966), 'Religion: Problems of Definition and Explanation', in M. Banton (ed.), *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*, 85–126, London: Routledge.

Timotin, E. (2006), 'Une version roumaine inconnue de la *Lettre du Christ tombée du ciel*', in *Byzance, les Balkans, l'Europe: Études en honneur du Prof. Vasilka Tăpkova-Zaimova*, Sofia: Institut d'Études Balkaniques.

Van Esbroeck, M. (1989), 'La lettre sur le Dimanche, descendue du ciel', *Analecta Bollandiana*, 107: 267–84.

6

‘Who is Michael?’

Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Protestant tradition

George D. Chryssides

Introduction

Michael is mentioned five times in scripture, and invariably in its most obscure passages – three times in the book of Daniel, once in Revelation and once in the Epistle of Jude, where there is an enigmatic allusion to his engagement in a dispute with the devil regarding Moses’s body. His lack of introduction indicates that the readership of these books would understand who he is, but the passage of time and the unclear context of these references makes it difficult for the modern reader to comprehend the authors’ intended meaning. In what follows, I hope to explain how Jehovah’s Witnesses understand Michael’s identity and, in particular, why they believe he is to be equated with Jesus Christ. This identification inevitably provokes hostile opposition from mainstream Christians, particularly Protestant evangelicals, yet it is ironic that the Jehovah’s Witnesses’ teachings on Michael come from that same tradition. In what follows, I shall endeavour to trace the tradition that identifies Michael with Christ.

The Watch Tower organization

A brief introduction to Jehovah’s Witnesses may be helpful at this juncture. They adopted the name in 1931, although their legally incorporated title is The Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society. It was founded by Charles Taze Russell (1852–1916) for the production and distribution of Bibles and religious tracts, which were used by a variety of sympathetic congregations. Russell’s successor Joseph Franklin Rutherford (1869–1942) transformed the assortment of independent

congregations into a unified society, bringing in many of the features with which Jehovah's Witnesses are associated today. Jehovah's Witnesses are particularly known for their house-to-house evangelism, their opposition to war and their refusal to accept blood transfusion. All their beliefs and practices are firmly grounded in the Bible, which they regard as inerrant, and they do not accept the subjection of scripture to 'higher criticism', which is characteristic of most present-day scholarship and which casts doubt on its veracity. The early Church described in the Bible is regarded as the paradigm of a religious organization, and Jehovah's Witnesses believe that at an early stage, its leaders departed from the model of the first generation of apostles, introducing 'pagan' beliefs and practices, such as the Trinity doctrine, the celebration of festivals such as Christmas and Easter and the creation of an ecclesiastical hierarchy with priests and bishops. Jehovah's Witnesses are therefore an entirely lay movement, led by a governing body, and with elders and ministerial servants as office bearers within congregations, in line with what they believe to have been the Church's original practice.

Basing their beliefs and practices entirely on the Bible, they do not accept any extra-biblical revelation, such as visions, angelic visitations or additional scriptures. In this regard they differ from organizations such as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, whose inception purportedly derived from a visitation to Joseph Smith from the angel Moroni, who revealed a new set of scriptures in the form of the Book of Mormon. As Jehovah's Witnesses acknowledge, the Greek word *angelos* literally means 'messenger', and in numerous passages angels – in the plural – are referred to as messengers of God, or as supernatural attendants, for example, when Jacob sees them ascending and descending the heavenly stairway (Gen. 28.12). Angels, of course, are mentioned in the Bible, and are recorded as making numerous appearances to ancient Hebrew and early Church leaders, but Jehovah's Witnesses hold that such phenomena died out with the death of the first generation of apostles. Any understanding of angels must therefore be firmly based on scriptural evidence. Unlike the Latter-day Saints, who equate Michael with Adam, Jehovah's Witnesses find no biblical warrant for such a doctrine. Instead, the Watch Tower Society regards Michael as Jesus Christ in his spiritual pre-existent and post-resurrection form (Watch Tower 1988d: 393). Although the Bible does not explicitly make this equation, Jehovah's Witnesses hold that this conclusion can be reached by putting together several biblical statements. They reason that, since Michael is depicted in the book of Revelation as engaging in a final combat with Satan at Armageddon, he must be Jesus Christ, since Armageddon

is a battle between Christ and Satan. This is reinforced by the statement in 1 Thessalonians, where Paul mentions 'the Lord' descending in heaven's clouds and Jesus Christ catching up the faithful into heaven. I shall discuss this further below.

The name Michael means 'who is like God', thus implying a close association between Michael and Jehovah (Watch Tower 1988d: 393). Dan. 10 portrays him as a foremost prince, and Dan. 12.1 describes a final cosmic battle, which is again mentioned in Rev. 12, where the combatants are identified as Michael and the Dragon, who is overtly equated with the serpent – recounting the temptation in the Garden of Eden – and Satan, who is not explicitly mentioned in the Genesis account (Watch Tower 1984: 28). The Letter of Jude also places Michael in opposition to Satan, describing him as 'the archangel', thus asserting his angelic status as well as his uniqueness, since the word 'the' indicates that he is the only one. The word 'archangel' is only mentioned in one other place in the Bible, and this time the equation with Christ ('the Lord') is explicit: his commanding call is with an archangelic voice (1 Thess. 4.16). Thus, by theological addition of these various verses, the identification of the two beings is held to be proved.

The biblical evidence

First, we need to set out the biblical evidence regarding Michael. Apart from a namesake who is mentioned in various genealogical tables, and is therefore irrelevant to this discussion (Num. 13.13; 1 Chron. 6.40, 7.3, 8.16, 12.20, 15.13-14; 27.18; 2 Chron. 21.2, 27.18; Ezra 8.8), Michael features only five times in the Bible (Dan. 10.13, 21; 12.1; Jude 9; Rev. 12.7). It may be helpful to set out these passages in full.[1]

> But then Michael, one of the foremost princes, came to help me; and I remained there beside the kings of Persia. (Dan. 10.13)
>
> I will tell you the things recorded in the writings of truth. There is no one strongly supporting me in these things but Michael, your prince. (Dan. 10.21)
>
> During that time Michael will stand up, the great prince who is standing in behalf of your people. And there will occur a time of distress such as has not occurred since there came to be a nation until that time. And during that time your people will escape, everyone who is found written down in the book. (Dan. 12.1)

> But when Michael the archangel had a difference with the Devil and was disputing about Moses' body, he did not dare to bring a judgment against him in abusive terms, but said: 'May Jehovah rebuke you.' (Jude 9)

> And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels battled with the dragon, and the dragon and its angels battled but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them any longer in heaven. So down the great dragon was hurled, the original serpent, the one called Devil and Satan, who is misleading the entire inhabited earth; he was hurled down to the earth, and his angels were hurled down with him. (Rev. 12.7-9).

Additionally, we must note Paul's description of the Second Coming in 1 Thessalonians, although Michael is not explicitly mentioned here:

> The Lord himself will descend from heaven with a commanding call, with an archangel's voice and with God's trumpet, and those who are dead in union with Christ will rise first. (1 Thess. 4.16)

Michael does not appear alone in scripture; the books of Daniel and Revelation mention a number of characters, who need to be taken into account when interpreting Michael's identity and role. There is Gabriel, a man – or men – dressed in fine linen robes, a 'son of man' who approaches the 'Ancient of Days', 'one who looked like a man', a (or the) Messiah who will be 'cut off', the chief princes, the 'holy ones', the Dragon, a woman 'clothed with the sun', angels and an archangel. Also relevant, but not mentioned in Daniel or Revelation, is the 'angel of the Lord' ('Jehovah's angel' in the Society's *New World Translation*), who may have been the angel who guided Moses and the Israelites to the promised land (Watch Tower 1988d: 393). These are the characters that are most relevant to our discussion; there are many more strange humans and beasts in Daniel and Revelation, who are described with obscure imagery. Apart from interpreting what these descriptions mean, there is the added difficulty of determining whether some of these may be identical with each other.

Some preliminary comments about some of these may be helpful. Jehovah's Witnesses endeavour to reflect what the Bible says, uninfluenced by popular piety, which is often at variance with biblical teaching. For example, Gabriel, who offers Daniel support (Dan. 8.16, 9.21), is never described as an archangel – a title reserved exclusively for Michael. Indeed, Gabriel's angelic status is not affirmed by Daniel (Dan. 8.16, 9.21), but his identity does not emerge until the New Testament (or Christian Greek Scriptures, as Jehovah's Witnesses prefer to call them), when an angel introduces himself as Gabriel to Zechariah, who is

about to become the father of John the Baptist, and subsequently to the Virgin Mary at the Annunciation (Lk. 1.19, 26-27, Watch Tower 1988c).

Two hermeneutical standpoints

Jehovah's Witnesses' interpretation of scripture contrasts with that of most present-day biblical scholars, apart from a few fundamentalist commentators. Generally, Daniel is regarded as a late piece of writing, belonging to the second or first centuries BCE, and possibly the last work to be included in the Jewish-Christian canon. Thus, the book belongs to a much later period than the Babylonian exile, in which the narrative and prophetic visions are set. It was written to encourage Jews who were being persecuted by Antiochus, and the author – or authors – use the Babylonian exile as a kind of backdrop, demonstrating that the Jewish people stood firm against opposition in the past and therefore can do so in this later wave of persecution. There is more consensus between the Watch Tower Society and modern scholarship regarding the book of Revelation, where there is no reason to disbelieve that the author is writing in Patmos and addressing several early Christian communities in the face of Roman opposition. Jehovah's Witnesses take the view that the author, John, is one and the same as the fisherman–disciple whom Jesus called, and that he is in exile. The book does not explicitly state that he is exiled there, however, and scholars regard the attribution of authorship to the early disciple as highly unlikely.

Watch Tower publications assign firm dates and definite (mainly single) authors to each biblical book (Watch Tower [1963] 1990: 12). These authors are precisely those who make claim to authorship. Daniel, for example, identifies himself as the book's author and the recipient of the divine visions, as is evidenced by the repeated use of the expression 'I, Daniel' (Dan. 7.15, 28; 8.1, 15, 27; 9.2; 10.2, 7; 12.5), and his narrative covers the reigns of the Babylonian kings Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar and the Persian king Cyrus. Where the book of Daniel appears to refer to events that occur later than his time of writing, this is attributed to prophetic insight (Watch Tower 2007). The conservative Christian view of prophecy is that it is capable of being predictive.

Jehovah's Witnesses firmly reject 'higher criticism' of the Bible, seeing it as an unwelcome endeavour which undermines the authority of scripture. Their stance lies within pre-Enlightenment Protestant biblical exegesis, which can be traced back to the Protestant Reformers, such as Luther, Melanchthon and

Calvin. In line with the Protestant tradition, they believe in *sola scriptura*: the Bible (by which they mean the Protestant canon) is inerrant, and no further sources of authority are required to establish true doctrine. Although they have sometimes been described as fundamentalists, this is not strictly accurate, since biblical inerrancy is only one of a number of principles of fundamentalism, not all of which are accepted by the Watch Tower organization (Watch Tower 1997: 6). Witnesses also view scripture as a unity: in line with the Protestant tradition, scriptural passages are to be understood in the light of each other, and where there is a lack of clarity, some other part of scripture may be invoked to determine its meaning. It is also inaccurate to state that they take the Bible literally. Jehovah's Witnesses acknowledge that the Bible contains imagery, symbols, metaphors, parables and other figures of speech. They especially note that the opening verse of the book of Revelation explicitly notes that his revelation came from Jesus Christ, who 'sent his angel and presented it in signs through him to his slave John' (Rev. 1.1).

It has sometimes been remarked that Jehovah's Witnesses text-hop from one part of the Bible to another to justify their position. In contrast with sermons in mainstream churches,[2] where the preacher typically provides a sustained interpretation of one or two lectionary passages, anyone who has attended a Kingdom Hall Bible study meeting will observe that the presiding elder will take a *Watchtower* article, which typically directs its readers to various scriptural references and requests the congregation to look up numerous verses in often widely different parts of scripture. This is justified on the grounds that scripture is held to be a unity and, in line with traditional Protestant exegesis, one passage of scripture helps to clarify another. However, although the practice at Kingdom Hall meetings, in contrast with mainstream Christianity, does not involve the formal reading of scripture lessons, the Society publishes short volumes, which have in the past been used for home study groups and which focus on specific books of the Bible. Such books have included *Revelation – Its Grand Climax at Hand!* (1988) and *Pay Attention to Daniel's Prophecy!* (1999), both of which provide sustained exegesis of these texts. However, these are not studied congregationally.

Daniel in the Protestant tradition

Although Jehovah's Witnesses' identification of Michael with Christ has been much criticized in Protestant evangelical circles, Jehovah's Witnesses were by no

means the first to suggest such an identification, and it has in fact a substantial history following the Protestant Reformation (Preus 2016: 257). Both Luther and Calvin suggested an equation between the two. The Protestant Reformers acknowledged the predictive character of the books of Daniel and Revelation but were more concerned about applying their prophecies to the Church and its internal disputes.

For Luther and Melanchthon, the 'war in heaven' was to be interpreted, not as an eschatological cosmic battle at the end of time but rather as a war within the Church. This war was between the Reformers and those whose ideas were unacceptable to them, such as the Anabaptists, the pope and those who believed in the efficacious nature of icons, relics, indulgences and sacraments that were not scripturally warranted. The war was a battle on earth, not in heaven, and in interpreting John's reference to a heavenly conflict, they noted that he was recounting a vision, not necessarily a physical reality.

Luther's identification of Michael and Christ is found in a sermon which he preached on Michaelmas Day, 29 September 1544. The text alternates between Latin and German, making an English rendering difficult, but the following is a rough translation of the relevant section:

> Angels indeed have a name. But here the creator himself is Michael, and alone properly bears the name 'Michael', 'like God'. Who [is] like God? [There is] one, who is like God. This [name] belongs to no one but Christ. It is a remarkable thing, that he is the same. Someone who is like God, or as God. Therefore this [name] belongs to the only Son of God. Elsewhere 'the image of God' [is] simply invisible to us. But angels see, and we shall see. The son is in everything alike. So, in Daniel Michael is a prince. Again, in Daniel he goes forth, as would the Son of God. He has shown himself as an angel, as he came to Abraham in Gene: 18. In the same manner he fought with Jacob. Angels, like us, were created from nothing. But he is the creator who fights. See, what a comfort! Truly the baptized are blessed, transported into the kingdom of heaven, without which we do not see him, except by faith. And yet, such a kingdom has the Devil fighting beneath it against the Word. (Luther 1544: 578)

As is apparent from this passage, Michael is to be equated not only with Jesus Christ but also with the Angel of the Lord who appears in the book of Genesis and elsewhere in scripture.[3]

Luther's fellow Reformer Philipp Melanchthon shared this view of Michael:

> Therefore, I said above, the Son of God is always present to his church. For that reason, here he is called 'the great leader Michael', for thus it [the Bible?] names

> the Son of God. The name is known. 'Who is like God', that is, how great is he who is like God, who is the image of the eternal Father, powerful, merciful, the liberator and vindicator. (Melanchthon 1543: 144)

Again, John Calvin drew a similar conclusion regarding Michael's identity. In his *Commentaries* he acknowledges some ambiguity, however, speculating that Christ might have delegated his authority to Michael, who is superior to the other created angels and to whom alone the Bible ascribes the status of archangel. However, he wrote: 'Michael may mean an angel; but I embrace the opinion of those who refer this to the person of Christ, because it suits the subject best to represent him as standing forward for the defense of his elect people' (Calvin [1561] 1847–50: 369–70).

Like Luther, Calvin does not view Michael as the warrior–leader in the Battle of Armageddon: in fact, Calvin's extensive Bible commentaries do not include the book of Revelation. The Daniel prophecy, Calvin contends, is not about an eschatological battle but foretells a period of tribulation within the Church, which, he believed, was occurring in his own time. The Protestant Reformers not only experienced tribulation regarding the Church of Rome but also from those who wanted to take the Reformation beyond acceptable boundaries. In this regard, in his Commentary on Dan. 12, Calvin gives vent to his anger against 'that foul hypocrite Servetus', who applied the chapter's opening verse ('Daniel will stand up') to himself. Michael Servetus (*c.* 1511–1553?) is regarded in Unitarian circles as one of their precursors, and his forename suggested such an identification. In the first page of his *Christianismi Restitutio* [The Restitution of Christianity] (published posthumously in 1551–3), the text is cited and applied to himself at various junctures. Calvin later condemned Servetus to be burned at the stake.

Although outside the mainstream Christian tradition, mention should also be made of Isaac Newton (1643–1727), who wrote:

> That Iesus is the seed of the woman who should bruise the serpents head, the Shiloh predicted by Iacob, the Prophet predicted by Moses, the Paschal Lamb, the son of David whose throne should be established for ever, the son of God mentioned in the Psalms, the son of Man predicted in Daniels prophesy of the four Beasts, the Messiah predicted in Daniels prophesy of the weeks, the Prince of Princes predicted in Daniels prophesy of the Ram & He Goat, the great Prince Michael mentioned in the end of Daniel & in the Apocalyps, & the Word or Oracle of God whose testimony is the spirit of prophesy. (Newton 1710)

After the Reformers

In the wake of the Protestant Reformation, a number of biblical scholars identified Michael with Christ.

Other biblical commentators supported the identification. Matthew Henry (1662–1714) writes:

> Christ is that great prince, for he is the prince of the kings of the earth, Rev. i. 5. And, if he stand up for his church, who can be against it? But this is not all: At that time (that is, soon after) Michael shall stand up for the working out of our eternal salvation; the Son of God shall be incarnate, shall be manifested to destroy the works of the devil. (Henry 1712: 1711)

Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758), the American revivalist preacher, noted for his role in the Great Awakening, wrote:

> That war which the devil maintains against God is represented by the devil and his angels fighting against Michael and his angels (Rev. 12:7). This Michael is Christ (Dan. 10:21 and 12:1). (Edwards [1738] 1979: 606)

Sometime later, the Congregationalist minister and theologian Isaac Watts (1674–1748), who is popularly known for his many hymns, wrote:

> It is also very probable, that Michael is Jesus Christ because he is called 'your prince', that is, the Prince of the Jews, and one of the 'first of the Princes', that is, the prime archangel. And in Dan. xii. I. he is called 'Michael the great prince, which standeth for the children of thy people', that is, the Prince or 'King of the Jews', for such was Jesus Christ under the ancient dispensation; this was the known character of the Messiah among the Jews . . . What confirms this sentiment is, that in Rev. xii. 7, when 'there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels fought against the dragon and his angels', Christ as the head of the good angels, and Satan as the head of the evil angels maintained war in heaven, i.e. in the church, till the 'great dragon was cast out of the church', 'that old serpent called the devil and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world'. (Watts 1795: 53–4)

In his lengthy study of biblical apocalyptic literature *Horae Apocalypticae* (1884–5), the English clergyman E. B. Elliott (1793–1875) also supports the identification:

> It may perhaps be inferred that under the name Michael, (which means Who is like God?) Christ himself is here signified in that particular character. (Elliott 1844–51, part 4: 30, n. 1)

Again, the *Expositors' Bible* (1896) endorses this view:

> For, as to the first of these two points, it is even in itself probable that the Leader of the hosts of light will be no other than the Captain of our salvation, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. (Milligan 1889: 125)

One *Watchtower* article cites three Protestant scholars who identify Michael as Christ – Joseph Benson (1749–1821), E. W. Hengstenberg (1802–1869) and Johann Peter Lange (1802–1884) – as follows:

> Back in the early 1800's, Bible scholar Joseph Benson stated that the description of Michael as found in the Bible 'manifestly points out the Messiah'. Nineteenth-century Lutheran E. W. Hengstenberg agreed that 'Michael is no other than Christ'. Similarly, theologian J. P. Lange, when commenting on Revelation 12:7, wrote: 'We take it that Michael . . . is, from the outset, Christ in warlike array against Satan'. Does the Bible support this identification? Yes, it does. (Watch Tower 1987: 17; ellipsis in the original)

Jehovah's Witnesses seldom draw on religious writings that come from outside the organization, since they belong to an apostate form of Christianity which they regard as part of Babylon the Great. On the few occasions when they do so, the sources tend to be dated and somewhat conservative by mainstream Christian standards. In this instance, the Society's predilection for these authors is no doubt because Benson, Hengstenberg and Lange do not accept the emergent 'higher criticism' which was part of the European Enlightenment. However, these commentators do not wholly support the Watch Tower view of Michael; indeed Joseph Benson (1749–1821) is taken slightly out of context. He wrote:

> The word Michael signifies, Who is like God? which name, with the title here given him, The great prince which standeth for the children of thy people, manifestly points out the Messiah, and cannot properly be understood of a created angel. (Benson [1846–7] 2002)

According to Watch Tower teaching, Michael is a created angel, albeit the first created being (Col. 1.14, NWT; Watch Tower 1988b: 106–8).

Johann Peter Lange (1802–1884) suggests that Michael ensured the Church's continuing purity, which Jehovah's Witnesses deny. He writes:

> We have shown elsewhere that the Archangel Michael is an image of Christ victoriously combatant. Christ is an Archangel in His quality of Judge; and He appears as Judge, not only at the end of the world, but also in the preservation of the purity of His Church (Acts v.1 sqq.; 1 Cor. v.1 sqq.). That Christ has

> His angels also – those that war with Him – not merely in the evening of the world, but from the beginning, is a fact which John has previously intimated in his Gospel (ch.i: 51); they are the principles and spirits which are with Him absolutely. (Lange 1869: 238)

E. W. Hengstenberg (1802–1869) was a German Protestant theologian, who wrote:

> The answer is, the name Michael points to this, that the work, which is here under consideration, the decisive victory over Satan, belongs to Christ, not after his human, but only after his divine nature – comp. 1 John iii. 8. (Hengstenberg 1851: 467)

The view that Michael is Christ was not, of course, unanimous, and one can find numerous commentators who adopt the opposite position, for example, the scholar J. A. Seiss (1823–1904), who contended that the identification militated against Christ's deity and that the expression 'like God' was not a Christological title (Seiss 1882: 347–51). A. R. Fausett (1821–1910) suggests that the language used by Michael in Jude is more appropriate to an archangel than to the Son of God (Fausset 1911: 472).

The identification of Michael with Christ is still found occasionally among mainstream commentators. Thus, Michael Rydelnik, commenting on the book of Daniel, writes in *The Moody Bible Commentary*:

> Although some have maintained that the Son of Man is the archangel Michael or even just a collective personification of the 'saints of the Highest One' (7:18), this one is none other than the divine Messiah Himself. Jesus understood it to be a messianic title (see the comments on Mt 8.18-22; Mk 14.61-62) and used it to speak of Himself. The high priest considered Jesus' usage of the title to be blasphemy (Mk 14.64), demonstrating that it was a term for deity. Later Rabbis saw it as one of the names of the Messiah (*b. Sanhedrin* 98a). The phrase Son of man is used of the Messiah because He will fulfill the destiny of humanity (Ps 8; Heb 2.5-18) while at the same time being deity. (Rydelnik 2014: 1299–1300)

The Moody Bible Institute is a conservative Christian evangelical college, committed to biblical inerrancy. Ironically, one of its pamphlets which aims to correct Jehovah's Witnesses on their doctrines lists the identification of Michael with Christ as one of their false teachings (Zuck 2000: loc. 44, 72, 195).

Adventism

The tradition within Protestantism that I have outlined above has largely been forgotten among present-day scholars and critics of the Watch Tower Society

and tends to be particularly associated with the Adventist tradition. William Miller (1782–1849), often referred to as the 'Father of Adventism', commenting on Dan. 12.1, wrote: 'Michael, in this passage, must mean Christ; He is the great Prince, and Prince of princes' (Miller [1840] 1842: 108).

Miller believed that Michael's role in 'standing up' was in opposition to Napoleon Bonaparte, whose defeat in 1815 was held to mark the end of papal power. Miller contended that this interpretation was confirmed by Daniel's prophecy that 'he shall go forth with great fury to destroy, and utterly to make away many' (Dan. 11.44), which he believed was accurately described by Bonaparte's campaign in Russia (Miller [1840] 1842: 210). The defeat of Napoleon, for Miller, was part of an eschatological calendar, based on numbers and dates suggested by the books of Daniel and Revelation, culminating in 1843, which Miller initially believed would witness Christ's return. (Some of Miller's followers subsequently revised the date to 1844.) Miller was thus moving towards an association of Michael's role with the end times, although, in common with the Protestant Reformers, he held that this role was the defence of the Church.

Uriah Smith (1832–1903), who became the first secretary of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists at its inception in 1863, was one of Miller's followers who was part of the Great Disappointment of 1844. Nonetheless, in common with many of Miller's supporters, he firmly believed in Christ's imminent return and the use of scripture to suggest a calendar of end-time events. Among his voluminous writings, his *Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation* (1884) was endorsed by Ellen G. White (founder of the Seventh-day Adventists) in 1899 and has much to say about the identity and work of Michael.

Smith refers to Dan. 8, in which Daniel has a characteristically strange vision, in which he sees two 'saints' speaking to each other. One says, 'How long shall be the vision concerning the daily sacrifice, and the transgression of desolation, to give both the sanctuary and the host to be trodden under foot?' The other replies: 'Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed' (Dan. 8.13-14). Daniel then hears a man's voice saying: 'Gabriel, make this man to understand the vision' (Dan. 8.16). The Bible later identifies Gabriel as an angel, and the fact that this other speaker can command him suggests that he is superior; hence it can be inferred that the speaker is a superior angel, and who else but Michael, or Christ? The word 'archangel' only occurs in two places in the Bible (1 Thess. 4.16 and Jude 9), and in the singular in both locations. The archangel is the chief angel and hence must be unique (Smith 1884: 238). In 1 Thess. 4.16, the archangel's voice is connected with the final resurrection, and Smith notes that a similar association is made in John's gospel when the Son of

God's voice is similarly associated (Jn 5.25), again, as Smith believes, confirming the identification.

Smith reiterates the Reformers' observation that the name Michael means 'who is like God?' noting that the description of Michael as a Prince is a title that is also given to Christ (Acts 3.15, 5.31). Michael is called 'Your Prince' and 'the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people' (Dan. 10.21, 12.1). What is meant by Michael 'standing up'? The prophecies of Daniel and Revelation predict a time of trouble or 'tribulation'. Such a period occurred when the Church was dominated by papal power, but, as Smith points out, this is now in the past. Daniel, he believes, was therefore not speaking of a period of religious persecution but rather of national calamity (Smith 1884: 241). This is associated with the Turks, who were expected to be forced to leave Europe and establish themselves in Jerusalem. Such events would culminate in the standing up of Michael (Christ), who will intervene to claim his kingdom and begin his rule. Although Christ already has dominion in heaven, his Second Coming will bring about his dominion over all the kingdoms of the earth, when he will assume the throne of his ancestor King David, and rule over an everlasting kingdom. 'His priestly robes are laid aside for royal vesture. The work of mercy is done, and the probation of our race is ended' (Smith 1884: 392).

Smith and subsequent Adventists taught that the role of Michael/Christ after his ascension into heaven is to prepare a place for his followers. After relinquishing his bodily form at the Ascension, Michael/Christ re-entered heaven, becoming the advocate and intercessor, making salvation possible. As the Letter to the Hebrews states, he acts as the high priest in the heavenly temple (Heb. 6.20). Although his death on the cross was the atoning sacrifice for sin, the sins of each individual human needed to be expunged, making this heavenly sanctuary pure. Christ is believed to have entered the heavenly sanctuary in 1844 – the year originally assigned by Miller's supporters for his return, arrived at by calculating years suggested by the book of Daniel. Adding Daniel's 2,300 'days' (by which Adventists understand years) to the date of the Persian king Cyrus's decree that the exiled Jews in Babylon could return to their homeland, reckoned to be 457 BCE, the year 1844 is suggested. From the year 1844 Christ has commenced his 'investigative judgement': this is a role specifically assigned to Christ, and not God the Father (Jn 5.22), and involves removing the sins of each individual, thus cleansing the heavenly sanctuary of the sin that has remained in it. Although the identification of Michael with Christ is not one of Adventism's official 28 Fundamental Beliefs, the doctrine is consistently accepted among Seventh-day Adventists.

The Watch Tower position

When we turn to the Watch Tower Society we find a somewhat different view of Michael's position in human history, a position that has undergone some changes over the years. Charles Taze Russell was a prolific writer, and his publications include six substantial volumes, initially entitled *Millennial Dawn* but subsequently renamed *Studies in the Scriptures*. All but the first of these mention Michael. Russell discusses Miller and proposes a number of significant changes to Miller's understanding of the end times. He notes that Miller's calculations were wrong, as was evident in 1844, but Russell nonetheless commends Miller for arousing interest in matters relating to the end times and for commencing a correct understanding of the topic by attempting to define dates. He agrees that Daniel serves as the key to understanding these matters: Daniel is instructed to 'seal the book until the time of the end' (Dan. 12.4), by which he infers that the prophet's meaning can only become clear in humanity's last days. This contrasts with the book of Revelation, in which John the Revelator is instructed to open all the seven seals that conceal the contents of the scroll (Rev. 5.5). It is only now, with the inception of Jehovah's true Society, that the definitive meaning can be understood.

Russell's own interpretation of Daniel's time periods suggested to him the date of 1874, extending to 1914, rather than the Millerites's 1843/4 dates. He agrees with the Adventists that Michael and Christ are to be identified, and in common with the Adventists, he points to the meaning of Michael's name, which he renders as 'he who is like God', 'the God-like one' or 'God's representative' (Russell 1890b: 126). Michael is the first and only archangel and is Christ in his pre-existent pre-human form. However, Russell departs from the Adventist understanding by regarding Michael as God's created being: although he is prepared to use the biblical expression 'only-begotten Son', Michael is created, not begotten, and came into being in time, albeit before the rest of creation (Russell 1897: 84).

In contrast with the Adventists, Russell's theology drops the notion of the investigative judgement. He sees no purpose in this, since Christ already has knowledge of humankind's deeds (Russell 1890a: 137–8). Christ paid the ransom sacrifice for sin by dying on the cross and subsequently rose from the dead in spirit form. Christ/Michael in his spirit form ascended to heaven forty days later, and his purpose is to present that sacrifice to God, just as the high priest in the Jerusalem Temple presented the sacrifices. Since the Ascension was not a dramatic and publicly visible event, neither will Christ's

second coming be, or – as Russell prefers to call it – his second presence. After Michael has conquered Satan at the Battle of Armageddon, the general resurrection will occur, in which the entirety of humankind will be brought back to life, apart from those whom God has already judged and pronounced irredeemable. There then follows the 'Day of Judgement', which will not be a single twenty-four-hour day but rather a long period of probation of 1,000 years, in which the resurrected ones will be given a further opportunity to demonstrate their obedience to God (Russell 1890a: 138–9). There then follows a second judgement, after which the wicked will be assigned to a state of oblivion, not a fiery hell, and the redeemed will inhabit a renewed earth, which will be brought to perfection.

The early teachings of the Watch Tower Society have important points in common with the Protestant Reformers: Daniel's prophecy was related to the political events of the times and set against the supposedly false teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. Additionally, Michael, being the traditional guardian of Israel, was associated with Zionism, which Russell staunchly supported. These were times of trouble for the Jews, and Michael would stand up for his people by ensuring a return to their promised land. It was expected that they would then accept the truth of the gospel, and all other nations would spiritually become part of Israel, God's chosen people. Russell regarded Michael as the antitypical Abraham, Moses, Melchizedek and David (Russell 1910: 137), implying that the Jews were the culmination of God's covenant, law, priesthood and kingdom.

Since Russell held that Daniel's prophecies could only be understood at the time of the end (Dan. 12.9), he believed that humankind had now reached the time of fulfilment of the assurance that 'at that time Michael, the great Prince who protects your people, will arise' (Dan. 12.1). This raises the question of what time Daniel is referring to. The key is found in Daniel's assertion that a fourth 'beast' – meaning kingdom – will arise on earth: 'He will speak against the Most High and oppress his holy people and try to change the set times and the laws. The holy people will be delivered into his hands for a time, times and half a time' (Dan. 7.25). The explanation for Russell's conclusion, which continues to find acceptance among present-day Jehovah's Witnesses, is complex and beyond the scope of this discussion.[4] Suffice it to say that the fourth kingdom is believed to be Rome, whose rule superseded that of Babylon, Medo-Persia and Greece (Watch Tower 1999: 139), and that the expression 'time, times, and half a time', which recurs in Rev. 12.14, is taken to refer to the period of 1,260 years of papal power, reckoned to have begun in 539 and ended in 1799. The Roman Catholic

Church was reckoned to be the 'abomination', which Daniel mentions, and the 'daily sacrifice' was equated with the Mass (Dan. 12.11).

The statement that 'Many will go here and there to increase knowledge' (Dan. 12.4) was taken to refer to the technological innovations of Russell's time: Russell mentions the steamboat, the 'steam car' and the telegraph and marvels at the prospect, predicted by Isaac Newton many years previously, that humans might be able to travel as fast as fifty miles an hour! (Russell 1890b: 63). These are the phenomena that we can expect to herald Michael standing up. The period of the papacy's power was held to be a period of ignorance, false teaching and confusion, from which God's true people would emerge. Daniel refers to a time of great trouble when people will 'run to and fro' and when that will be an increase in knowledge. The 'running to and fro' is interpreted as referring to the Church's past confusion about the meaning of the book and its multiplicity of interpretations. It would also be a period of turmoil, with physical conflict, which would culminate in Armageddon. However, this would happen in God's own time, not that of humanity. This is evidenced in Michael's statement to the devil (Jude 9). By saying, 'The Lord rebuke you!' he means that it is God's prerogative to deal with evil, and that in the meantime God's people should endeavour to save others from the impending conflict. God's people will be spared this final cosmic battle, which will only commence once they have been 'sealed' and 'gathered' – in other words, transported into heaven, either after death or being raptured (Russell 1897: 548).

Under Joseph Franklin Rutherford's leadership, certain modifications in the organization's doctrines can be seen. Like Russell, Rutherford wrote prolifically, although slightly more accessibly for the wider reader. Of his twenty-two books, slightly over half make some reference to Michael, whom, in common with Russell, Rutherford identifies as the one who is like God, the Logos and the Son of God. Rutherford refers to two 'morning stars' mentioned in the Bible, one of whom is Michael and the other Lucifer.[5] This observation sets the scene for the cosmic conflict between the two 'mighty beings of heaven'. As previously noted, angels are messengers and are commissioned to communicate on God's behalf and to perform designated assignments. They can be God's messengers of war: although they are characteristically invisible, they can at times manifest themselves in human form, as happened to Joshua before his capture of Jericho (Josh. 5.13-15). When Joshua asks a man bearing a sword whether he is on the side of the Israelites or their enemies, he replies: 'Nay; but as captain of the host of the Lord am I now come', whereupon Joshua bows down in worship. This scene illustrates four features which Rutherford identifies as belonging to angels:

they are normally invisible (as mentioned above); their presence confirms God's favour with his people; they show disfavour to God's enemies; and they are attended by God's glorious presence (Rutherford 1930: 173–5).

The book of Revelation depicts a scene in which six horrendous and hostile angels release a further four angelic beings who have been bound in the Euphrates River and are led by Abaddon (Apollyon in Greek), together with an army of 200,000 men, to slay a third of the human race. At this juncture a 'mighty angel' descends from heaven (Rev. 10.1). Rutherford believes that this is none other than Michael, as is confirmed by several features: he is enveloped in a cloud; he bears a rainbow on his head; his face is like the sun; and his feet are like fiery pillars. The reference to the cloud alludes to the notion that Christ (Michael) will return on a heavenly cloud, and the rainbow is a recapitulation of Ezekiel's vision:

> As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. And when I saw it, I fell upon my face, and I heard a voice of one that spake. (Ezek. 1.28)

As Rutherford also notes, the allusion to the rainbow is a reminder of God's everlasting covenant, first given to Noah (Gen. 9.13), thus providing reassurance that in the forthcoming cosmic battle between Michael and Satan, God's people can be assured of protection (Rutherford 1930: 172–3).

There are several respects in which Rutherford's expectations regarding the final battle differ from Russell's. As we have seen, Russell regarded Michael as standing up against the Roman Catholic Church and associated this with the fall of the papacy in 1799. Rutherford, however, defines a somewhat different target, as history has moved on. Rutherford is writing not long after the First World War, having strongly encouraged non-participation in armed combat, a stance for which he and several other Watch Tower leaders were imprisoned. Rutherford accused the clergy of being complicit in their prosecution, and his antagonism was not confined to Roman Catholicism but to mainstream Christianity more widely (Rutherford 1921: 247). Religion was only one component of 'Babylon': also opposed to Jehovah's kingdom were the world's political and economic systems, which had rejected Christ. Rutherford agreed with Russell that part of the end-time calendar involved Satan's expulsion from heaven. Satan had reigned over heaven, until 1914, at which time Christ re-entered the heavenly realm and cast him down to earth, as described in Rev. 12.9. Satan was now in a position to rule the world, as was confirmed by the outbreak of the Great War in that year.

The ending of the war witnessed the creation of the League of Nations, which came into being in 1919. This, Rutherford believed, was part of Satan's creation, and he equated it with the 'abomination' mentioned by Daniel (Dan. 9.27; Mt. 24.15). An anti-Catholic stance nonetheless remained in Rutherford's thinking: part of his objection to the League is that the Roman Catholic Hierarchy sought a place at the conference that established the organization. Catholicism is the harlot which the book of Revelation depicts and who has been riding on the back of the 'beast [who] came up out of the pit' (Rev. 17.8):

> Therefore the 'abomination that maketh desolate' is the League of Nations and is labeled by organized religion 'the political expression of God's kingdom on earth'. Organized religion, with the Roman Catholic Hierarchy in the lead, is the binding tie and the chief part constituting the League of Nations, which claims the right and which attempts to rule the world in the place and stead of Christ. (Rutherford 1937: 284)

The League, he predicted, would not succeed, being an attempted human solution to the world's problems, which could only be solved by supernatural intervention. It was against these religious, economic and political systems that Michael would stand up.

Rutherford also associated Michael's standing up with the end of the Gentile Times. The Watch Tower Society has consistently maintained a view of history that divides it into a number of dispensations – an idea that originated from John Nelson Darby (1800–1882). God's favour was bestowed on the Jews until the time of the Babylonian Exile, which the Society dates to 607 BCE, and is characterized by the Jews' forfeiting their homeland. By calculation of dates and times, Rutherford identified the 1917 Balfour Declaration, which promised the Jewish people the return of their own country, as signalling the end of the 'Gentile Times', during which God's favour had turned away from the Jews. Michael was thus 'standing up' for God's people, beginning in 1914, although this was expected to herald a time of great tribulation (Rutherford 1925: 45, 1928: 178).

> 'And at that time [at the birth of the man child, the kingdom] shall Michael stand up, the great [heavenly] prince which standeth for [ruler of] the children of thy people; and there shall be a time of trouble [in heaven and also on earth], such as never was' (Dan. 12.1). That trouble in heaven ended with the casting out of Satan; and the time of trouble on earth was halted for a season, in which time the witness work must be done, and then shall come the final end (Matt. 24.14, 21, 22). (Rutherford 1930: 240; Rutherford's parentheses)

Some further changes in the understanding of Michael's 'standing up' can be detected in the post-Rutherford era. Russell associated it with opposition to the papacy and the protection of the Jews with the promise of returning to their homeland. Rutherford associated it with opposition to the League of Nations. More recent Watch Tower literature, however, suggests that there are two aspects of Michael's standing. First, he 'is standing' in the sense of some continuous action, stemming from his assumption of heaven's throne, which took place when Satan was cast down to earth in 1914. However, there is also a future aspect of Michael's work: he will stand up with his heavenly army to fight against the Dragon (Satan) at the Battle of Armageddon (Watch Tower 1999: 289). The Society teaches that the opening verse of Dan. 12 alludes to both, since the text contains two occurrences of 'standing' (Watch Tower 1988d: 393–4). The original Hebrew text reads, *uva'eth hahi' ya^{k}mod mikhael hasar haggadol ha'omed 'al-b^{e}ne 'ammekha*, and it should be noted that the words *ya^{k}mod* and *ha'omed* are derived from the same root (*'md*), the former literally meaning 'the one who stands' and the latter 'who is standing' or 'who will stand'. The New World Translation renders the verse as 'During that time Mi′cha·el will stand up, the great prince who is standing in behalf of your people'. Modern translators, in the interests of stylistic elegance, avoid the repetition of 'stand/standing' – for example, the New International Version, where the verse appears as 'At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise'. Only a small number of older translations, such as the King James Version and Young's literal translation (1862), use the same word at both occurrences. Thus, the Society concludes that two 'standings' can be attributed to Michael: his elevation to his throne in heaven in 1914 and his leading the angelic hosts and the 144,000 at the future Battle of Armageddon.

Angelology and Christology

This analysis raises the issue of how we are to understand the relationship between the archangel Michael and the human Jesus. How does an archangel become human, and vice versa? In order to determine this, it is necessary to examine the Watch Tower Society's view of angels.

Angels are spirits, who are invisible and are created by God before all other beings and entities (Job 38.4-7). They are ungendered and cannot reproduce. They are created as servants of God, delivering messages, announcing important events and offering protection to God's people. Despite their intended purpose,

they are capable of disobedience, and hence there are fallen angels, whose leader is Satan, who currently rules the world. There are ranks of angels, although Jehovah's Witnesses do not accept the structured hierarchy (the 'choirs of angels') that developed later in Judaism and Christianity, since that scheme is not biblically warranted. The Society regards Michael, the Archangel, as the chief of the ranks of angels, with cherubs and seraphs (whom the Bible never mentions in conjunction) below him, followed by myriads of other angels: we are told of 'a thousand thousands that kept ministering to [God], and ten thousand times ten thousand that kept standing right before him' (Dan. 7.10; Heb. 12.22; Jude 14; Watch Tower 1988b: 106). Humans have been created later and 'a little lower than the angels' (Heb. 2.7). Angels are involved in the final battle between Michael and the Dragon, being part of the celestial hosts that engage in combat, and they are instrumental in the Final Judgement.

According to Watch Tower teaching, Christ in his spirit form as Michael entered Mary's womb in his pre-existent form and was miraculously born as a human being, without any human father. It is noted that the Bible plainly affirms that Mary was a virgin (Mt. 1.18-25; Lk. 1.26-35), thus implying that Jesus's conception was unlike any other. Jesus's resurrection is reckoned not to have been a physical one; his resurrection body was a spirit one, and his physical body miraculously dematerialized in the tomb: 'He was put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit' (1 Pet. 3.18). Angels are capable of materializing, for example, when the three visitors appear to Abraham and Sarah, and in the material form are capable of engaging in human actions such as eating and drinking (Gen. 18.1-15). Similarly, Jesus in his resurrected spirit form is able to eat fish at the lakeside with his disciples (Jn 21.11-14), and on a later occasion he invites Thomas to feel his wounds (Jn 20.24-29). His body, being spiritual rather than physical, enables him to pass through locked doors (Jn 20.19-23).

The function of the Ascension in Watch Tower theology is the completion of Christ's sacrifice. The key doctrine for Jehovah's Witnesses is that Christ is the 'ransom sacrifice', offering his perfect life in place of Adam's sinful one, which merited death (Watch Tower 1991: ch. 116). Although Christ's ascension begins with his physical form, 'flesh and blood cannot inherit God's kingdom' (1 Cor. 15.50), and hence his materialized body is transposed once again into a spiritual one. As John states, 'no man has ascended into heaven but he that descended from heaven, the Son of man' (Jn 3.13). The author of Hebrews (whom Jehovah's Witnesses believe to be Paul) views Christ's ascension as a counterpart to the Jewish priestly sacrifices: he is the high priest who offers his own self as the atonement for sin. However, Jesus Christ will not take up his rightful place in

the heavenly sanctuary until Satan is expelled – a happening that would not take place until 1914, when the war in heaven takes place and Michael hurls down the great Dragon (Rev. 12.7-9).

The body of Moses

Mention should be made of Michael's dispute with the devil over the body of Moses (Jude 9). The controversy which Jude describes is puzzling. Modern commentators believe that the text alludes to the Assumption of Moses, a lost piece of first-century Jewish writing, of which only fragments are accessible. However, the precise nature of the dispute is unclear; it is possible that Satan is contending that Moses's body is inadequate to be transported into heaven. Michael's reproach, 'May the Lord rebuke you', demonstrates Michael's refusal to take God's name in vain by giving a direct divine rebuke but asserts that God will chastise in his own time the blasphemers to whom Jude alludes.

Watch Tower literature has relatively little to say about this dispute. Russell argued that Michael displayed patience, leaving God to judge Satan, that one should emulate Michael's example and avoid strife (Russell 1910: 608). Watch Tower literature from Rutherford onwards suggests that the incident demonstrates that Satan still retained some authority at the time of the incident, which occurred before he was cast out of heaven. One *Watchtower* article suggests that the quarrel about Moses's body was a dispute about relics. Satan, evidently, wanted to use his body for the purposes of veneration and thus promote 'false religion' (Watch Tower 1991b: 4). In line with most of the Protestant tradition, Jehovah's Witnesses are aniconic and totally opposed to the use of relics as aids to devotion: a hint of opposition to Catholicism remains.

Armageddon

The final battle of Armageddon will conclude the present 'system of things' – the Society's expression for our present system of politics, religion and commerce. Because of the belief that humanity is currently living in the last days, Daniel is regarded as particularly significant. He receives the instruction: 'As for you, Daniel, keep the words secret, and seal up the book until the time of the end. Many will rove about, and the true knowledge will become abundant' (Dan. 12.4).

Traditionally, Michael has been regarded in Jewish thought as the protector of Israel and commander of the heavenly armies, and Daniel describes him as a prince and a heavenly son of God, who defends God's people in moments of need. God's people now extends beyond the Jewish nation and denotes the entire Christian community, hence Michael must be one and the same as Jesus Christ. The archangel's place is in heaven, and the Christ/Michael identification serves to explain the action that is expected during the end times. In the twelfth chapter of Revelation, immediately before Michael fights against the Dragon, John portrays the woman, who is 'clothed with the sun' and who is confronted by a dragon who threatens to devour her offspring at the moment of his birth. This child, who is set to rule over all the nations, is snatched up to heaven, whereupon the woman flees into the desert and is taken care of for 1,260 days (Rev. 12.1-6). This happening is believed by Jehovah's Witnesses to have taken place in 1914, ensuring that Satan has lost his place in heaven, falling down to earth and thus allowing Christ/Michael to take his legitimate place in heaven. There remains the final cosmic battle between Christ/Michael and Satan, when Christ, together with the 144,000 who have taken their place in heaven, will engage in the final conflict against Satan, paving the way for the final paradise on earth.

Mainstream criticism

Jehovah's Witnesses therefore embrace a 'low' Christology. Although Christ is acclaimed as the highest of the angels, the Son of Man, the Son of God, the Saviour and the one who successfully defeats Satan in cosmic battle, his status falls short of that which is embraced by most mainstream Christians. Although he is no ordinary human being, he is not regarded as God the Son: he is accorded divinity but not deity. Angels are portrayed as God's creation, whereas traditional Christianity has insisted that Jesus Christ is 'eternally begotten of the Father'; as the famous Christian hymn puts it, 'begotten not created'. Mainstream Christian doctrine deifies Christ, whereas Watch Tower theology denies his deity. Further, to conceive of Christ as an angel, even if he is the leader of the angelic hosts, is nonetheless to diminish his status: Christ is held to be above the angels, not one of them.

Further, the notion that Christ presents his sacrifice to God after his ascension, and must wait until 1914 to secure his rightful place in heaven, suggests that his sacrifice on the cross (or 'torture stake', as Jehovah's Witnesses

prefer to call it) was incomplete. By contrast, Christian orthodoxy insists that Christ's death on the cross was in itself the final act of atonement for the sins of the world.

In his detailed analysis of Jehovah's Witnesses' use of scripture, David A. Reed makes three substantial criticisms of the Watch Tower Society's interpretation of Michael and Christ. First, he contends that the identification of the two figures is not explicitly stated in the Bible but is only inferred by a complex process of deduction. Second, the statement in 1 Thessalonians that Christ descends with the voice of an archangel does not imply that he is an archangel, any more than the reference to the trump of God implies that God is a trumpet. Third, Jesus Christ is no mere angel, since the Bible teaches that he is above all angels. Reed cites the opening chapter of the Letter to the Hebrews:

> The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.
>
> For to which of the angels did God ever say, 'You are my Son; today I have become your Father?' Or again, 'I will be his Father, and he will be my Son?' And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says, 'Let all God's angels worship him.' (Heb. 1.3-6)

Watch Tower literature typically does not respond to critics, since its purpose is spiritual edification rather than debate. However, in conversation with Jehovah's Witnesses, the following pieces of clarification have emerged. The equation of Christ with an angel, even though it is the highest-ranking angel Michael, might seem to imply angel worship. However, Jehovah's Witnesses do not worship any angels, not least Michael, since they regard only Jehovah as a being worthy of worship. They do not worship Jesus Christ or pray to him. Prayers, which are invariably extempore, typically end with expressions like 'We ask this in the name of Jesus'. Prayers are addressed through Jesus, never to him. While Witnesses deny Jesus's deity, their translation of the opening verse of John's gospel is taken to suggest that he is one of a number of angelic beings. 'The Word was a god' (Jn 1.1) is not taken to imply polytheism, as critics have sometimes suggested, but rather that there are many supernatural beings who carry out Jehovah's purpose and who are led by the archangel Michael, who is Christ in his pre-existent and post-resurrection form.

Conclusion

Academic scholarship will, of course, continue to regard the various sources which mention Michael as coming from different backgrounds and time periods and see no particular need to harmonize the Bible's various references to Michael. By contrast, Jehovah's Witnesses impose constraints on biblical interpretation, namely their insistence on scriptural inerrancy and unity, the use of one scriptural passage to interpret another and the need to harmonize apparent inconsistencies. The Watch Tower Society presents a complex, but nonetheless ingenious, interpretation of the status of Michael that endeavours to harmonize the various seemingly conflicting strands. Where mainstream Protestant evangelical critics attempt to show how the Watch Tower position diverges from mainstream Christian theology, this only serves to highlight irreconcilable differences. Jehovah's Witnesses feel no compelling need to satisfy the demands of a Church, which they believe to have departed from biblical teaching, and to have become corrupted by illicitly adding creeds and confessions of faith that introduce extra-biblical ideas.

Notes

1 The translation is the Watch Tower Society's *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*.
2 By 'mainstream', I mean those branches of the Christian Church which are Trinitarian and belong to ecumenical bodies, such as the World Council of Churches, or which accept the traditional Christian creeds, such as the Nicene Creed.
3 However, this identification is not accepted by the Watch Tower Society. As Rutherford noted, the 'Angel of the Lord' (or 'Jehovah's Angel') who appears to Zechariah and to Mary is Gabriel, not Michael (Lk. 1.11, 26).
4 For a more detailed analysis, see Chryssides (2010).
5 The Watch Tower Society no longer regards Lucifer as identical to Satan.

References

Benson, J., ed. ([1846–7] 2002), *Benson's Commentary of the Old and New Testaments,* New York: G. Lane & C.B. Tippett. Available online: www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/rbc/daniel-12.html (accessed 12 December 2024).

Calvin, J. ([1561] 1847–1850), *Commentaries on the Prophet Daniel*, vol. 2, Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society. Available online: www.sacred-texts.com/chr/calvin/cc25/cc25006.htm (accessed 12 December 2024).

Chryssides, G. D. (2010), 'How Prophecy Succeeds: Jehovah's Witnesses and Prophetic Expectations', *International Journal for the Study of New Religions*, 1 (1): 27–48.

Edwards, J. ([1738] 1979) [Lecture], 'Christ Exalted, or Jesus Christ Gloriously Exalted above All Evil in the Work of Redemption', reprinted in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards.* Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust.

Elliott, E. B. ([1844–51] 1862), *Horae Apocalypticae, or A Commentary on the Apocalypse, Critical and Historical*, 5th ed., 4 vols., London: Seeley, Jackson and Halliday.

Fausset, A. R. (1911), *Bible Cyclopedia, Critical and Expository,* Hartford: S. S. Scranton.

Hengstenberg, E. W. trans. P. Fairbairn (1851), *The Revelation of St John, Expounded for those Who Search the Scriptures*, Edinburgh: T & T Clark.

Henry, M. (1712). *Commentary on the Whole Bible,* Vol. IV (Isaiah to Malachi), London: Marshall.

Lange, J. P. (1869), trans. Philip Schaff. *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Critical, Doctrinal and Homiletical: The Revelation of John*, New York: Charles Scribner & Co.

Luther, M. (1544), Predigt am Michaelistage (29 September) in Martin Luther, translated for the author by M. Z. Wilkins, *Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, Weimar: H. Böhlau, vol. 49: 570–87.

Melanchthon, P. (1543), *In Danielem Prophetam Commentarius,* Wittenberg: Lufft.

Miller, W. ([1840] 1842), *Evidence from Scripture and History of the Second Coming of Christ*, Boston: Joshua V. Himes.

Milligan, W. (1889), *The Book of Revelation, (The Expositors' Bible,* vol. 6), New York: Hodder and Stoughton. Available online: https://www.gutenberg.org/files/42251/42251.txt (accessed 12 December 2024).

Newton, I. ([*c*. 1710] 2004), *Drafts on the History of the Church (Section 4)*, Yahuda Ms. 1.1, National Library of Israel. Available online: https://www.newtonproject.ox.ac.uk/view/texts/normalized/THEM00135 (accessed 12 December 2024).

Preus, C. A. (2016), 'Michael as Christ in the Lutheran Exegetical Tradition: An Analysis', *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, 80 (3–4) July/October: 257–68.

Russell, C. T. (1890), *The Divine Plan over the Ages*, London: International Bible Students Association.

Russell, C. T. (1890), *Thy Kingdom Come*, London: International Bible Students Association.

Russell, C. T. (1897), *The At-one-ment between God and Man*, London: International Bible Students Association.

Russell, C. T. (1904), *The New Creation*, London: International Bible Students Association.

Russell, C. T. (1910), 'Comfort Ye My People', in *Pastor Russell's Convention Discourses.* Accessible online: http://www.mostholyfaith.com/beta/bible/CRS/1910a.asp#CR103:1 (accessed 12 December 2024).

Rutherford, J. F. (1921), *The Harp of God*, Brooklyn: Peoples Pulpit Association.
Rutherford, J. F. (1925), *Comfort for the Jews*, Brooklyn: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society.
Rutherford, J. F. (1928), *Government*, Brooklyn: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society.
Rutherford, J. F. (1930), *Light*, vol. 1 Brooklyn: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society.
Rutherford, J. F. (1937), *Enemies*, Brooklyn: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society.
Rydelnik, M. and M. Vanlingham, eds. (2014), *The Moody Bible Commentary*, Chicago: The Moody Bible Institute.
Seiss, J. A. (1882), *The Apocalypse: A Series of Special Lectures on the Revelation of Jesus Christ*, London: James Nisbet & Co.
Servetus, M. (1553), *Christianismi Restitutio*, Vienna: B. Anrollat.
Smith, U. (1884), *Thoughts, Critical and Practical, on the Books of Daniel and the Revelation*, Battle Creek: Review and Herald Publishing Association.
Watch Tower ([1963] 1990), *All Scripture Is Inspired of God and Beneficial*, Brooklyn: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania.
Watch Tower (1984), '"Michael the Great Prince" – Who Is He?' *The Watchtower*, December 15: 26–9.
Watch Tower (1987), 'Michael the Great Prince Stands Up', *The Watchtower*, July 1: 15–20.
Watch Tower (1988a), *Revelation – Its Grand Climax at Hand!* Brooklyn: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania.
Watch Tower (1988b), 'Angel', *Insight*, 1: 106–8.
Watch Tower (1988c), 'Gabriel', *Insight*, 1: 876.
Watch Tower (1988d), 'Michael', *Insight*, 2: 393–4.
Watch Tower (1991a), *The Greatest Man Who Ever Lived*, Brooklyn: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania.
Watch Tower (1991b), 'Does Devotion to Relics Please God?' *The Watchtower,* November 15: 4–6.
Watch Tower (1997), 'The Spread of Fundamentalism', *The Watchtower,* March 1: 3–7.
Watch Tower (1999), *Pay Attention to Daniel's Prophecy!* Brooklyn: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania.
Watch Tower (2007), 'Highlights from the Book of Daniel', *The Watchtower,* September 1: 17–20.
Watts, I. (1795), *The Glory of Christ as the God-Man Displayed, In Three Discourses*, Boston: David West.
Young, R. (1862), *The Holy Bible Containing the Old and New Covenants, Literally and Idiomatically Translated out of the Original Languages*, Edinburgh: A. Fullerton & Co.
Zuck, R. B. (2000), *An Open Letter to a Jehovah's Witness*, Chicago: Moody Bible Institute (Kindle).

7

Playing with the dragon

Michaelmas celebrations in Steiner schools

Camilla Stabel Jørgensen and Marie von der Lippe

Introduction

'St. Michael, heavenly Hero. Give to us your strength and power. Give to us your strength and power. Into our hearts, into our hearts.'[1] Every year at the end of September, Steiner schools all over the world celebrate Michaelmas. In the weeks before, teachers prepare the festival together with their pupils, and when the day finally dawns on 29 September, pupils, teachers and sometimes parents gather in the schoolyard, singing songs together. These songs, like the one quoted above, are often tributes to the archangel Michael.

Another characteristic of the Michaelmas celebrations at Steiner schools is the performance of a dragon play, in which each class plays a part that is passed down from grade to grade year after year (see Figure 7.1):

> When the blacksmith forging St. Michael's sword asks, 'Who will fight Michael's battle against the dragon?' the little knights, the fifth graders, reply, 'We will!' Suddenly, the large, terrifying dragon emerges from the forest. The eighth graders make up the dragon's body, holding the large, creatively designed dragon head with a large gaping mouth and searching in vain for the princess. When the dragon leaves, the princess asks who can save her from the dragon. Knight George, one of the secondary school students, arrives, receives a newly forged sword, and asks for Michael's protection before the dragon thunders forward again. George and the little knights fight bravely, real flames blowing across the battlefield. Finally, George delivers the fatal blow to the dragon. The people – pupils and teachers together – cheer and shout, 'Dead is the dragon, slain and beaten, bold is he who kills the dragon!' (Morris 2017)

Figure 7.1 Michaelmas celebrations and dragon play at a Steiner school in Fredrikstad, Norway. Photo: Dane Morris.

This narrative is a somewhat contracted version of a text written by a Steiner school teacher about the Michaelmas celebration and the dragon play at a Norwegian Steiner school. The text was published in the Danish/Norwegian educational journal *Steinerbladet* (Steiner Journal), which is a rich source of descriptions of educational practices related to the archangel Michael at Steiner schools.

Despite differences in practices between Steiner schools, there seem to be striking similarities in how Michaelmas is – and has been – celebrated within Waldorf education (Hoffmann 2016). According to Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925), the founder of Anthroposophy and the Steiner school, the archangel Michael

had a cosmic mission on Earth. He emphasized that Michael was the angel of our present age and advocated for the importance of celebrating Michaelmas as an annual festival in September. According to Steiner, this was important for balancing earthly and cosmic forces and allowing people to participate in a future festival of fellowship (Steiner [1946] 2012).

When the Steiner school movement marked the 100th anniversary of Waldorf education in 2019, more than 1,100 schools and 2,000 kindergartens worldwide took part in vivid celebrations.[2] The movement started as a pedagogical reform initiative by Steiner, financed by Emil Molt, the director of the Waldorf-Astoria Cigarette Company in Stuttgart.[3] In line with pedagogical reform currents of the time, the Waldorf school was open to all students, regardless of socio-economic background, offered a twelve-year curriculum and had a non-denominational religious orientation (Uhrmacher 1995: 383). The main aim was to develop the child as a whole, not just the intellect (Uhrmacher 1995: 392). However, due to their Anthroposophical basis, Steiner's pedagogical ideas differed from other contemporary pedagogical reform trends. In his courses for the teachers of the first Waldorf school, Steiner linked pedagogy and methodology to a greater cosmic order. For instance, he divided the child's development into three phases – one to seven years, seven to fourteen years and fourteen to twenty-one years – and believed that each phase provided the pedagogical directions for what the child needed to develop physiologically, psychologically and spiritually (Uhrmacher 1995: 389; Frisk 2014: 49). Steiner also emphasized the rhythmic aspect of education in daily, monthly and yearly activities at school. As part of these rhythmic yearly activities, he encouraged teachers to celebrate annual festivals, such as Michaelmas, Advent, Easter, Saint John's Day and Pentecost, with the pupils (Uhrmacher 1995: 394; Stabel and Jørgensen 2019).[4] Despite this emphasis on religious festivals, Steiner did not envision a religious school or a school that taught Anthroposophy (Uhrmacher 1995; Frisk 2014; Hoffmann 2016; Stabel and Jørgensen 2019). On the contrary, in his lectures and conversations with the first collegium of Waldorf teachers, he was adamant that children should not *learn about* Anthroposophy at school but that the teachers should be *inspired by* Anthroposophy and let it work through their teaching.

In this chapter, we attempt to make sense of the Michaelmas celebrations in Scandinavian Steiner schools as presented in articles published in *Steinerbladet* from 1931 to 2022. Our aim is twofold. First, we analyse representations of Michaelmas in the journal to investigate how the feast has been celebrated and how the activities have been connected to Steiner's perceptions of Michael and Michaelmas. Second, based on Cathrine Bell's (1997) concept of 'ritual-like

actions' and Ronald Grimes's (2014) 'ritualization', we examine the festivals as examples of rituals in the making, standing between religion and non-religion.[5]

A new Michael mythology

According to Swartz and Hammer (2022: 24), Steiner's emphasis on archangels and Michael's importance was one of his major innovations. Therefore, to understand why Michaelmas seems to be such an important event in Steiner schools, Steiner's view of Michael constitutes an important backdrop. Before Steiner founded the Anthroposophical Society in 1912, he held a privileged position in the Theosophical Society as head of the German division. However, after bitter controversies with the international leadership, he cut ties with the mother organization. In the following years, the Anthroposophical Society grew rapidly, and a new Anthroposophical centre, Goetheanum, was established in Dornach, Switzerland. Despite Steiner's conflict with the Theosophical Society, he developed Anthroposophy in strong connection with Theosophical doctrines (Asprem 2016; Swartz and Hammer 2022; Zander 2019). As in Theosophy, Steiner believed that the present Earth was preceded by earlier incarnations (Swartz and Hammer 2022: 24). His previous contributions to Theosophy became important in the development of Anthroposophy, which was characterized by a mixture of esoteric 'orientalism' and Western Christology (see, for instance, Zander 2007). However, instead of placing the centre of the wisdom tradition in 'oriental' cultures, as in the doctrine of the Theosophical Society, Steiner emphasized Western tradition to revitalize European Christianity as a new spiritual path (Gilhus 2014: 238; Swartz 2022: 28).

Steiner's depictions of the higher worlds included detailed descriptions of spiritual beings and hierarchies, angels, demons and – not least – archangels (Staudenmaier 2010: 26). Michael was given a unique status and an extraordinary role, as his influence was 'said to be particularly important in our present age' (Swartz and Hammer 2022: 24). According to Steiner, humanity's earthly development was divided into different epochs, each of which was dominated by the influence of an archangel, such as Gabriel, Uriel, Raphael and Michael, whose guidance was repeated cyclically. The latest Michael epoch began in the late 1800s – more precisely, in November 1879: 'I have drawn your attention to the fact that, since November 1879, Michael must be as it were the ruler and guide for all those who seek to bring to humanity the forces necessary to its healthy progress' (Steiner 1919, 'The Michael Path to Christ', in Barton 1996:

385). The year 1879 marked the beginning of a new era in which Michael, 'the archangel of the sun', would play a special role as 'the angel of our time', with a close relationship to Christ: 'The Michael experience and the Christ experience can thus stand side by side. Michael will guide us in the right way to a supersensible experience of nature, and this outlook on nature will be able to take its place, undistorted, alongside a spiritual view of the world and of the human being as a universal being' (Steiner 1924, from the 'Michael letters', in Bamford 1994: 292).

Profoundly affected by the Great War, Steiner became increasingly politicized, and according to Asprem (2014: 489), his 'esoteric speculations' were heavily influenced by the political climate and the 'historic clash of Europe's great empires'. During the war and the Russian Revolution, Steiner recurrently referred to the 'Michael Age' as a new period in man's earthly history, and his interest in Michael grew towards the end of his life. In the months before he died, he wrote fourteen letters to the Anthroposophical Society, known as the 'Michael letters', in which he described the mission of the archangel Michael on Earth.[6] Michael's role as both a warrior and a protector, helper and healer and his image as the dragon killer were essential. The dragon fight motif became a recurring topic in several books, articles and lectures, and Michael the dragon slayer was given special status. According to Steiner, the fight between Michael and the Ahrimanic forces[7] represented in the dragon fight first took place in the spiritual world. Steiner believed that, due to Michael's victory in the spiritual world, the Ahrimanic forces were sent out of heaven and down to Earth, and the battle against the dragon was no longer only a cosmic fight but also an earthly struggle in which every human being had to participate. Steiner emphasized the importance of celebrating annual festivals and reinstating Michaelmas as one of them for keeping the Earth and the cosmos in balance. Although he never dictated the form that such a festival should take, in several lectures, he encouraged the members of the Anthroposophical Society to develop a festival in which Michael's qualities and powers could be acquired.[8] Michaelmas later became one of the most prominent annual celebrations at Steiner schools.

Representations of Michaelmas celebrations in *Steinerbladet*

Our analysis of Michaelmas celebrations at Steiner schools is based on representations of the archangel and the festival in *Steinerbladet*'s online archive (https://steinerbladet.no).[9] *Steinerbladet* is jointly published by the

Norwegian Association of Steiner Schools (Norwegian: *Steinerskoleforbundet*) and its Danish counterpart, the Association of Steiner Schools in Denmark (Danish: *Sammenslutningen af Steinerskoler i Danmark*). The journal publishes articles about Steiner pedagogy and pedagogical praxis in both languages[10] in four yearly issues, with 9,000 copies distributed to parents and employees at Steiner schools in the two countries. The aim of our archival study was to examine representations and narratives of Michaelmas in a longer time frame and to include a greater diversity of schools than would have been possible in an ethnographic study, as the festival occurs only once a year.

The archive also contains articles published in *Steinerbladet*'s predecessors: the pedagogical journals *Mennesket* (Human), published in Bergen from 1938 until 1977, and *Ny skole* (New School), published in Oslo from 1952 to 1965, when its name was changed to *Steinerskolen* (The Steiner School). In 1977, the Bergen and Oslo journals merged into a single *Steinerskolen* publication. The cooperation between the Norwegian and Danish associations was initiated in 2002 and expanded to include Steiner kindergartens in 2017. Accordingly, the journal's name was changed to *Steinerbladet* (Steiner Journal).

The selected articles, mainly written by and for Steiner schoolteachers and parents, contain descriptions of Michaelmas celebrations and reflections on educational practices. We performed a close hermeneutical reading of the material in a process that can be better described as iterative than linear-sequential (Sporre et al. 2022: 89).

We conducted the main search in the spring of 2021 and a supplementary search in the fall of 2022. To retrieve all the archival material associated with Saint Michael, we used three alternative ways to spell the archangel's name in Norwegian as search terms: 'Mikael', 'Mikkel' and 'Michael'. We entered all returned texts into a database. The searches yielded about 250 texts. Among them were duplicates and texts about or written by Mikaels, Michaels or Mikkels other than the archangel. After we eliminated the duplicates and irrelevant texts, about 100 texts remained. A chronological sorting of these texts revealed that articles mentioning the archangel Michael had been published more or less continuously since 1955, the year of publication of the oldest retrieved text. In terms of issue distribution, the fall issues contained the largest number of texts about Michael. This is unsurprising, considering that Michaelmas is celebrated in September.

Our first reading of the material resulted in tentative coding and categorization of the texts into several topics. Although they were all published

in the journal, not all of them were journal articles, strictly speaking. Based on content, we distinguished between legends, hymns, poems, school curricula, speeches, practice narratives and interpretations of Michael according to Steiner (and/or the texts' authors). Legends, hymns and poems were sometimes published as stand-alone texts but frequently occurred as parts of speeches, practice narratives (descriptions of practices related to the celebration of Michaelmas at schools and kindergartens) and interpretations. Through a closer reading and thematic analysis of the texts, we identified three themes for closer examination: (1) re-enactments of the fight between Michael and the dragon in plays and games, (2) development of courage through embodied activities and (3) understandings of the archangel as a guiding angel and role model.

Re-enactments of the fight between Michael and the dragon in school plays and games

A recurring theme in Steiner's mythology is Michael's fight against the dragon. Steiner understood this not only as a cosmic struggle but also as an earthly and individual struggle in which every human being had to engage. This interpretation of the dragon fight is also common in teachers' narratives of the Michaelmas celebrations. These texts reveal a wide variety of ways in which re-enactments of the dragon fight are represented in songs, verses, fairy tales, stories, plays and games. A common activity is the performance of a dragon play or a dragon role-playing game. In these plays and games, pupils and teachers take part in various activities. An important aspect of the plays seems to be that they involve a large proportion of the pupils and teachers. Most often, the older pupils play the dragon, younger pupils play the dragon fighters and the youngest play the roles of angels and princesses (see Figure 7.2). Equally important are the entire production of the play and its consistency from year to year, which makes it a predictable event for all participants.

> The blacksmith beats the anvil, and the middle school marches in from two sides, serious, with their torches. They line up and sing the first verses of 'Surrounded by Enemies', which they have done every year at our school for more than twenty years. Then, everyone sings 'When the Golden Leaves Fall'. . . . Fourth-grade pupils dance in front of the crowd and throw the autumn leaves into the air above them. The play unfolds as class after class emerges and says their fixed lines. (Morris 2017)[11]

Figure 7.2 Pupils from the lower grades dressed up as knights in different colours, training for the big fight against the dragon at a Steiner school in Fredrikstad, Norway. Photo: Dane Morris.

The preparations, rehearsals, learning of songs and creation of props, costumes and dragon heads seem to be viewed by the teachers as pedagogically valuable in themselves. While the dragon play is a planned and rehearsed performance about the fight between Michael and the dragon, re-enactments in the dragon role-playing game bear similarities to the outdoor sports game 'capture the flag'. The game requires one group of pupils to be 'dragons', one to be 'humans' and one to be 'angels'. The dragons guard a treasure and capture 'humans', while 'humans' must accomplish the task of defeating the 'dragons' through clever cooperation and undergo trials if captured by the 'dragons'. The youngest pupils are often 'angels' who free the captured 'humans' and help them fight the 'dragons'. Thus, the game is a form of re-enactment of the cosmic battle between Michael and the Ahrimanic forces. Unlike the play, there are no spectators at the games.

According to Grimes (2014: 196), rituals are unlike any other activity; they are 'embodied, condensed, and prescribed enactment[s]'. Grimes argues that, despite strong similarities between rituals, plays and games, an important distinction is that participants in rituals do not see them as pure fiction. In the representations of the dragon plays and games, the *Steinerbladet* material contains no references to pupils' perceptions of the performativity of these activities. However, the views reported by teachers suggest that the plays and games are considered more

than fictional stories and pedagogical activities. Teachers emphasize both the predictability and rhythmic aspects of celebrating the annual festival and the overall aim of developing pupils' strength and courage. While some elements of both the dragon plays and the dragon games seem to be rather fixed, others are more dynamic and exhibit degrees of ritualization (Grimes 2014: 193). According to a teacher at a Swedish school[12] (Wegge 1998b), the purpose of this dynamic renewal of the activities is to avoid routinization and to keep pupils engaged in the dragon game:

> The game has evolved through many stages and is still in transition. In the morning meetings, new ideas are added. In the past, it was more theatrical, with processions of solemnly clad angels, princesses, and knights through the forest. One year, the entire school formed a ring around the dragon and simply sang it to death! Another time, the dragon hid a long rope that humans had to find and tie the beast with. (Wegge 1998b)

A Norwegian teacher shows the same openness to change: 'We try a lot of different things at the Steiner school in Bergen. We have a play that has been a tradition for many years, *George Who Slays the Dragon* (the teachers perform this for the students), but it has been reworked several times' (Skaare 2003).

Teachers' reports suggest that the activities during the festival are constantly in the making, and the practices seem to move between continuity and change. Several articles in *Steinerbladet* testify to teachers' willingness to adjust the planned courage-inspiring activities, plays and games and to develop or reinvent the ways in which they are carried out to engage pupils in what appears to be embodied re-enactments of Michael's struggle against the dragon. Both the dragon plays and the dragon games can be characterized as fluid processes in which activities are constantly invented and reinvented (Grimes 2014).

Development of pupils' courage through embodied activities

The dragon plays portray courage as a quality of the archangel Michael and Saint George, a human hero who takes on the fight against the dragon but fails until he receives help from Michael. In some dragon play descriptions, we even find a multitude of human knights willing to fight the dragon who receive help from Michael. In articles about Michaelmas, 'courage' stands out as a key theme and a key virtue. This is in line with previous research conducted in a different geographic and cultural context. In an ethnographic study of a Steiner school in

Nairobi, Kenya, Hoffmann (2016) describes Michaelmas as a 'festival of courage'. She paints a vivid picture of the various activities and describes how teachers and pupils prepare for the festival in the weeks before. According to Hoffmann, the most prominent feature of this festival is a strong emphasis on the virtue of courage. Students are told about the legend of Saint George and his fight against the dragon, with an emphasis on this 'universal virtue' (2016: 98). The teachers also prepare various activities that make students 'struggle with feelings of reluctance and possibly even anxiety' to 'activate their individual willpower to overcome those inner hindrances' (2016: 98). This interpretation of the activities is also reported by teachers in *Steinerbladet*, who present the virtue of courage as a quality of those fighting the dragon. In the dragon games, Michael's courage is not *presented* to the pupils but *exercised* by them through their participation in various, often embodied, activities:

> The princess had arrived in a boat down by the fjord, and the poor knights had to get into the water to save her from the dragon, although they didn't really dare. . . . Another year, the knights began to negotiate with the dragon. They ended up selling the princess to save their own skin. The point of the parody is to evoke the counterimage, as everyone knows deep down what the bargaining shows. You laugh because you know that it is not knightly. (Wegge 1998b)

In this example, we see how the pupils are physically challenged by being forced into the cold water. The role-playing nature of the dragon game also offers the possibility of changing the 'script' – in this case, by bargaining with the dragon instead of killing it. Courage may also be practised through challenges assigned in the dragon games as a way for pupils captured by 'dragons' to free themselves. Courage tests also appear to be integrated into the celebrations at schools where dragon plays are performed. These tests are part of the activities taking place before or after the play, not of the re-enactment of the celestial struggle:

> On Thursday night at sunset, we have our colorful school play about the princess, George, and the dragon. The next day, hot dogs are grilled before courage tests are assigned to all pupils, not by age but by how brave they dare to be. There is a rich selection of tests assigned by the adults with acting and humor, but with one important goal: the children should feel that they are truly courageous – that they push their limits – in a safe environment. Then, when the day is over, we all stand in a circle holding hands, and they all carry visible evidence of courage around their wrists![13] (Morris 2017)

The various descriptions of physical courage tests by teachers in *Steinerbladet* reveal a 'rich selection' of challenges that pupils are invited to take on. These

can be, for example, picking beautiful stones out of flames,[14] balancing on a thin plank across a small river, getting into icy water or having buckets of water emptied over their heads. What all of them have in common is that they are physical, material and sensory experiences that, while they pose no real danger, challenge the pupils to dare and risk discomfort.

A notable feature of the texts describing the celebrations is the enthusiasm displayed by the teachers. The courage tests are presented as a predictable carnivalesque happening during the school year, invigorating both pupils and teachers (Bendixen 1995; Morris 2017; Skaare 2003; Wegge 1998a). Some teachers also emphasize that preparing, setting up and dismantling the courage test paraphernalia require considerable work on their part, who 'are often absolutely exhausted after these celebrations' (Bjønnes 2009).

Michael as a guiding angel and role model

While some teachers provide detailed descriptions of the celebrations and *what* they do, others seem to be more concerned with *why* they do what they do (Bell 1997: 83). As part of the Michaelmas celebrations in Scandinavian countries, traditional songs and verses, like the one quoted at the beginning of this chapter, and quotes from authors such as Nordahl Grieg, Arne Garborg and Henrik Ibsen are used to call on Michael for help. Several texts in *Steinerbladet* concern Michael's virtues in ways that are supposed to inspire human development in pupils, teachers and parents alike. This can be seen in songs, hymns, stories and legends, as well as in prose explaining and discussing Steiner's understanding of Michael. Some songs praise Saint Michael as a heavenly hero: strong, courageous and helpful to people who struggle against a mighty evil enemy. Three songs, in particular, are mentioned in several articles: 'St. Michael, Heavenly Hero', 'Invincible Hero' and 'When the Golden Leaves Fall'. The first is a prayer to Michael asking him to bestow his strength and power upon 'us'. In the second, Michael is asked to help 'us' fight the evil forces. In the third, the act of taking part in the celebration of Michael is understood to 'light the candle in your soul'. As this third song focuses on autumnal changes in nature and on farming activities, the inner light that is evoked contrasts with the diminishing daylight. The translations of an old hymn to Michael (published three times in *Steinerbladet*) also mention his strength and connect him to light. This text also mentions his beauty, his role as a leader and his connection to God (see Figure 7.3).

Figure 7.3 Michael fighting the dragon, painted in watercolour. For exhibition in a classroom at a Steiner school in Trondheim (Rotvoll) in the weeks before Michaelmas. The picture was painted by arts and crafts teacher Elisabeth Ulsund. Photo: Camilla Stabel Jørgensen.

Stories about Michael published separately from descriptions of the Michaelmas celebrations convey a slightly different image of Michael from those presented in the old poems and the songs and stories that are integrated into the celebrations. In one of these texts (Holmsen 1988), Michael is cunning and cheats the devil into defeat. In others, he infuses nature with joy ('Sankt Mikael på månesigden' 1971) or acts as a judge, saving a man's soul thanks to his good deeds (Lindholm 1977). We also find the stories of Michael's and Saint George's battles against the dragon told separately but with content that resembles the stories included in descriptions of celebrations.

Michael's images are interpreted with surprising consistency, though with different foci and weights. One teacher puts it this way: 'Michael's time – yes, it is a challenge to the individual to be alert and see and act at the right moment. It reminds me to look around. The times we live in require a lot of initiative, action, and courage. And luckily, we see a lot of that, too: associations of people

acting' (Skaare 2003). This emphasis on the need to act resonates with Steiner's call for action in his lectures on Michael. Another interpretation of this call for action can be found in a description of how Michaelmas is celebrated over a whole month, with rehearsals for a dragon play and the preparation of a hot meal harvested from the school's own garden. The month is spent developing 'courage. Will. Endurance. . . . Imagine every day helping with the dishes, every day setting the table with plates and cutlery, picking herbs, watering flowers, wiping the board, cleaning the wardrobe, sweeping the floor, finding particularly beautiful autumn leaves. A real exercise of will that allows for inner overcoming, power and joy' (Bendixen 1995).

In a speech published in *Steinerbladet* (Lindholm 1963), there is also a direct appeal to pupils to engage: 'He who gets everything served on a silver plate and never has to do anything himself becomes neither strong nor capable. On the contrary, he becomes weak and soft.' Another text that refers to Saint George's fight to rescue the princess from the dragon is directed towards adults, probably teachers and parents:

> It is important for adults themselves to know the primordial images in such a scene. The princess is a symbol of the soul that has received the self and is persecuted by the engrossing violence that the selfish dragon nature possesses. Only the knight in Michael's service – the hero of man, his true, higher, un-egoistic self – can liberate the soul and overcome evil. But the lower self (the cowardly and lying figure) penetrates and will chain the soul to it. But in the end, the lower must give way to the higher. (Lenz 1981)

This interpretation of Michael echoes Steiner's depictions of Michael as a guiding angel. Descriptions of Michael's characteristics emphasize his power, will and courage and how he intervenes both in time and place. Michael is also portrayed as a light bearer and a role model that pupils can look up to and learn from. In some texts, Michael is seen as a guiding angel, advising and supporting the individual in the ongoing fight against the dragon and the Ahrimanic forces within themselves. Three texts published by three different teachers in 1963, 1981 and 2003 express the widespread understanding of Michael as a reminder that they themselves as well as the pupils ought to be alert, active, strong, capable, unselfish and courageous and should resist the inclination to be lazy, lying, weak and cowardly. This can also be seen as a backdrop for the courage tests that the pupils undertake during the Michaelmas celebrations.

Some texts refer to Steiner and his Michael mythology more explicitly than most. In an article written by a former teacher (Kvalvaag 2003), Michael is

connected to Christ. Connecting with the 'Michael impulse' is perceived as a 'preparation for a larger meeting because Michael is also called the face of Christ' (Kvalvaag 2003). This text resonates with Steiner's perception of the relationship between Michael and Christ and explains that Michael's task was once to prepare Christ's birth on Earth, while his task in the present age is to prepare the birth of Christ in everyone's heart (Kvalvaag 2003). A recurring theme in these articles is the need for every individual to fight the 'Ahrimanic forces' under Michael's guidance (see also Lenz 1981; Smit 1958; Smit and Smit 1985).

Another text discusses the purpose of and reasons for celebrating Michaelmas and points to the lack of and need for courage in modern society: 'One purpose of Michaelmas – for adults – must be to overcome this fear [of thinking thoughts about a spiritual reality] and to be free to think all possible thoughts' (Øgaard 2003). This ambition to be freethinkers and to transform the world into a better place is also found in other texts (Bjønnes 2009; Carlsen 2003; Iversen 1984; Skaare 1999; Smit 1958; Stockmarr and Skaare 2003). One representation that stands out is the rendering of a female form of Michael, Michaela, which was reproduced as the front cover of S*teinerbladet*'s 1999 spring issue. This Michaela image was inspired by the previous year's Michaelmas celebrations, but in contrast to the conventional depictions of Michael and the dragon, Michaela invites the dragon to dance. According to the editor, this female representation of Michael provoked very different reactions among readers, from acknowledgement to sharp criticism, such as, 'Are we going to dance with the devil now?' (Stockmarr and Skaare 2003). In a later (2003) issue, the editorial (Stockmarr and Skaare 2003) refers to the controversy: 'Whether we fight or argue, the dialogue – or the dance – is an endeavor to take us a small step forward – hopefully toward awareness, toward brotherhood' (Stockmarr and Skaare 2003). These texts thus show the practice of interpreting the central Michael myth (about the dragon fight) in a contemporary context and a willingness, but also resistance, to reinterpret and play with the image of the archangel's fight with the dragon.

A reinvented calendrical rite

One of the characteristics of Steiner schools is the emphasis on rhythm, whether it is daily recitations, monthly gatherings or annual festivals. The school year is closely linked to the seasons and Christian annual festivals, and in many schools, Michaelmas in September is the first annual festival and marks the start of the

school year. Then come Saint Martin's Day in November, Christmas celebrations in December, Carnival in February, Easter in March/April, Pentecost in May/June and Saint John's Day (Midsummer) at the end of the school year. To provide a religious dimension, Steiner suggested that students should work practically and artistically on the annual festivals, but, as in the case of Michaelmas, his instructions were vague (Stabel and Jørgensen 2019: 78). It is therefore interesting to see the striking similarities between the festival activities in Scandinavian Steiner schools as represented in *Steinerbladet*.

According to Hoffmann (2015), the special focus on festivals at Steiner schools can be linked to a series of lectures held by Steiner at Goetheanum in 1923. In these lectures, called *Der Jahreskreislauf als Atmungsvorgang der Erde und die vier grossen Festeszeiten* (The cycle of the year as the breathing process of the Earth and the four great festive seasons; Steiner 1985), Steiner presented the annual festivals in a seasonally and globally encompassing context (Hoffmann 2015: 112). Steiner perceived the Earth as a living organism and described the cycle of the year as Earth's breath: breathing certain cosmic powers in and out. He believed that the processes taking place in nature during the four seasons affected human consciousness. These visions of Earth's breathing were linked to the 'four cosmic imaginations' of Gabriel, Raphael, Uriel and Michael, with each archangel associated with one of the four Christian festivals: Christmas – Gabriel, Easter – Raphael, Saint John's Day/Midsummer – Uriel and Saint Michael's Day – Michael. While Christmas, Easter and Midsummer were established festivals at the time, Steiner's introduction of Michaelmas can be interpreted as the cultivation of a previous Michaelmas celebrated in the Middle Ages as a harvest festival or as the reinvention of a calendrical rite (Bell 1997).

In ritual theory, annual festivals are often referred to as 'calendrical rites'. These rites occur periodically and predictably and can be divided into commemorative and seasonal celebrations (Bell 1997: 103). While commemorative celebrations include activities that recall historic events, seasonal rites most often follow seasonal changes and agricultural activities, such as sowing and harvesting. Bell (1997: 103) argues that calendrical rites are like rites of passage 'that impose cultural schemes on the order of nature'. In many cultures, these schemes seem to be attempts to control nature or to harmonize human activity with the rhythm of the year and the cosmos through various practices (Bell 1997: 103). Calendrical rites 'give socially meaningful definitions to the passage of time, creating an ever-renewing cycle of day, months, and years' (Bell 1997: 102). In the Christian tradition, the annual Michaelmas festival is a typical example of

a calendrical rite. Falling at the end of September, it was traditionally a harvest feast in the Northern Hemisphere. As part of the public holiday reform of 1770 in Denmark–Norway, Michaelmas – along with other holidays regarded as remnants of the Catholic past – was removed from the Church's yearly festivals. In 1999, the Church of Norway reintroduced Michaelmas as one of the yearly festivals connected to Thanksgiving (Gilhus 2014: 233). It is interesting to see that Steiner schools seem to have celebrated Michaelmas continuously and independently of the official feast calendar.

The Michaelmas celebrations at Steiner schools can be characterized as both seasonal and commemorative. Like seasonal festivals, Michaelmas takes place at the same time every year and is closely related to nature. Preparing a meal based on seasonal vegetables from the school garden (which is common at Steiner schools) may be an integral part of the celebrations. In the classrooms, there will be a 'seasonal table' decorated with leaves and vegetables and often a drawing or a painting of Michael (like Figure 7.3). However, saints' days usually fall into the commemorative group of calendrical rites, as they provide the opportunity to commemorate – usually saints' deaths. Although this is certainly not the case with Michaelmas, the emphasis on Michael and the memory of his cosmic battle against the dragon can also be considered a kind of commemoration.

Rituals in the making

Although calendrical rites play an important role in Steiner education (Stabel and Jørgensen 2019), there are few empirical studies on calendrical festivals at Steiner schools. An exception is Hoffmann's ethnographic study of two Steiner schools in Kenya and Peru. Hoffmann (2016) discusses the potential to develop place-based celebrations of annual festivals. She contends that new schools outside Europe have been strongly influenced by the Central European Waldorf movement (2016: 101) and that, because of these influences, local professionals have failed to see how they could develop more locally adapted forms of Waldorf educational practices, such as festivals. According to Hoffmann, there are still many examples of 'Waldorf Eurocentrism' in Steiner schools outside Europe. The findings from her study in Kenya and Peru show the potential to decolonize the festivals – to transform, adapt or even replace them with local alternatives through cultural, natural and/or traditional approaches (Hoffmann 2016: 89). Although she finds support for the local creation of new festivals in Steiner's writings (Hoffmann 2016: 92), she argues that festivals at Waldorf schools

have often been expressions of a Christian orientation (2016: 103). While this is partly in line with our findings, we argue that Michaelmas celebrations at Steiner schools go beyond 'orthodoxy'. The main themes emerging from the *Steinerbladet* texts about this annual celebration are power – good against evil – and the virtue of courage. Thus, the commemorative aspect – remembering Michael's courageous fight against the dragon – is the most important element of Michaelmas celebrations.

Looking at various performances represented in *Steinerbladet*, the Michaelmas celebrations can be characterized as ritualized actions consisting of elements that are fixed to varying degrees. The understanding of the Michael motif endures across time, and the celebrations are presented as strongly bodily enacted. Whether they are also viewed as something else, or something more than fiction or games, is hard to say, but the way in which the school communities, consisting of pupils, teachers and sometimes parents, do *what* they do and *how* they do it resonates with Bell's understanding of ritual-like activities and rituals in the making (Bell 1997: 81–3).

The accompanying songs, praises and prayers for help from Michael, the telling of heroic stories and the emphasis on the archangel's virtues indicate an understanding of the plays and games as not just fiction or mere games but something between pedagogical and ritual-like activities. The interpretation of how the dragon game played out when the knights sold the princess – invoking the counterimage of knighthood – may be perceived as indicating a certain formalism (concerning the possible content of the celebration) prominent in ritual-like activities (Bell 1997: 139). Bell (1997: 167–8) also notes that 'the highly orchestrated activities of ritualization appear to be the appropriate thing to do, if not the easiest', which explains the willingness to do all the preparations for – and the dismantling of – the courage test paraphernalia, as described by Bjønnes (2009).

In our analysis, we separated the dragon plays from the dragon games, arguing that they follow two different strands of dramatic performance and ritual enactment. In practice, however, these distinctions are not always clear, and most likely, the boundaries between the rehearsed play and the 'live' role-playing game are blurred. In his study of rituals and performance, Grimes refers to various historical cases in which these boundaries were blurred, such as classical Greek theatre and the mystery and morality plays of the Middle Ages: 'These were times of ritualized drama and dramatized rituals' (Grimes 2015: 610). Another example of such blurred boundaries is found in studies of school rituals (von der Lippe and Undheim 2019). In an ethnographic study of Saint

Lucy parades in Norwegian state schools, Undheim (2019) argues that the pupils' white clothing, the lit candles and the songs that they sing in the parade constitute clear boundary markers, separating the participants (pupils) from the spectators (parents). At the same time, there are examples of parents joining the children in the parade, thereby crossing the boundaries. To explain this ambiguity, Undheim borrows Kraft's concept of 'hybrid product', which she uses to explain New Age products that are 'open to different interpretations – with or without religious references, and [in which the product] is attributed to at least one function of a more prosaic or secular character' (Kraft 2011: 78, in Undheim 2019: 190). According to Undheim, it is the various semiotic resources combined, 'the group's joint movements, the songs, the colors, the costumes, and the lights that, together with the predictable repetition the same day every year, make it possible to call what happens a ritual' (Undheim 2019: 182, our translation). These observations resemble certain aspects of the Michaelmas celebrations at Steiner schools: the costumes, movements and storyline make the activity a ritual, while spectators (parents) may be invited to cross the boundary and become participants by joining the pupils in singing. Like the Saint Lucy parades, the practice is open to religious and non-religious interpretations, with the development of courage serving as an example of a prosaic, secular function. More than ordinary actions, ritualized actions are extraordinary and tightly packed. Rituals are prescribed enacted (inter)actions informing people what to do or not to do. Thus, ritual action is something special, like acting – something put into play. At the same time, these actions are not considered pure fiction or games by the participants. Grimes (2015: 593) argues that, although ritual and performance are not the same, they bear striking similarities: 'They are both ways of "acting," and they are both closely related to other "actions," such as play, sports, dance, healing, and music'.

Spiritual, hybrid and (dis)connected

The Anthroposophical and religious dimensions of Steiner education have been a recurring topic in recent research (Frisk 2014; Hoffmann 2016; Pearce 2019). According to Pearce (2019), Steiner schools fall between, or outside, traditional categories such as 'denominational' and 'nondenominational'. Based on observations and interviews with teachers and students, she argues that Waldorf education can be better understood as 'spiritual education' in a broad sense. In the same vein, Frisk (2014) argues that Waldorf education is best characterized by Kraft's concept as a 'hybrid product' in which the line

between religious and non-religious is often blurred. In her study of Swedish Steiner schools, Frisk (2014: 59) found that teachers had opportunities to relate educational methods to Anthroposophical frameworks – for example, the recitation of a verse every morning – but also to disconnect them ideologically. She also found that, although a spiritual inner orientation was important to many teachers, they did not perceive it as religious but rather as something akin to an incorporated attitude. In another study conducted in Sweden, Dahlin (2017) notes that Waldorf education is obviously based on a spiritual view of humanity and the world. Although Steiner emphasized that Waldorf schools should not be *Weltanschauungsschulen* (world view schools), his ambition for them was to educate the child as a whole: 'In the early school years, children should learn to love the world and to feel gratitude to life and all that it brings. Teachers, on their part, should look upon their work as a sort of "service of God" (*Gottesdienst*)' (Steiner, in Dahlin 2017: 138). This, according to Dahlin, illustrates that Steiner's idea of religiosity was spiritual and not tied to any religious tradition. At the same time, Steiner school representatives and teachers have often been reluctant to admit the spiritual basis of their educational practice (Dahlin 2017: 138).

Other studies have examined the role of Christianity in Steiner education. Stabel and Jørgensen (2019: 79) found that the monthly and annual celebrations at Steiner schools were characterized by both a general form of humanism and a culture-specific version of Christianity, which has been perceived by others as Western and Eurocentric (Hoffmann 2016). However, the spread of Steiner schools throughout the world, including Africa, the Americas, Asia and Oceania, has provoked new discussions about Steiner's Eurocentrism in Waldorf education circles and has raised questions about Steiner education, Anthroposophy and Christianity in a postcolonial context (Boland 2014).

Several aspects of the Michaelmas celebrations at Steiner schools as represented in *Steinerbladet* resonate with Steiner's ideas of Michael and Michaelmas. Since they are annual celebrations, the rhythmic element is obvious. The age-specific roles in plays and games also seem to be consistent with Steiner's ideas about different foci at different developmental stages of the child, although the exact relationship may not be entirely clear in our data. The interpretations of Michael and his battle against the dragon appear to be in line with Steiner's ideas about Michael and Michaelic times. This is exemplified by the emphasis on courage, strength and active engagement for the betterment of the world. Steiner's idea about the connection between Michael and Christ is also reflected in our data. As some texts explicitly refer to Steiner, there is no reason to doubt the importance of his ideas for the understandings and practices reflected in the

material. Nevertheless, the Michaelmas celebrations can be characterized as both spiritual, ritual-like activities and hybrid products that are sometimes connected and sometimes completely disconnected from Steiner's Michael mythology.

Conclusion

Some scholars have argued that the practical applications of Anthroposophy have been far more influential than Steiner's philosophical and religious ideas (Gilhus 2016: 54; Staudenmaier 2014: 1). According to Staudenmaier (2014: 1), 'Even those acquainted with anthroposophy's public face – through experience with Waldorf schools, biodynamic farming, Camphill communities, [and] Weleda or Demeter products – are sometimes surprised to learn of the esoteric doctrine on which these institutions are built.' On the other hand, critics have argued that Steiner education is an activity within Anthroposophy, and in both Sweden and Norway, parents of Steiner school pupils have published critical books on their experiences of Steiner education, claiming that, while pretending to be religiously neutral, the schools build on Steiner's 'spiritual science' (Frisk 2012).[15] As Anthroposophy is obviously the basis of Steiner education, it makes sense to discuss whether Michaelmas celebrations at Steiner schools are religious or not. However, our findings provide no definitive answer.

Our analysis of the *Steinerbladet* material suggests that the Michaelmas celebration at Scandinavian Steiner schools can be interpreted as a way of raising awareness of Michael and his role as a guiding angel and role model. However, Steiner never provided clear instructions on how Anthroposophists or Steiner schools should celebrate Michaelmas. Nevertheless, the *Steinerbladet* material reveals striking similarities in the activities taking place during the festival, both between schools and over time. One explanation for the similar practices of dragon plays, games and courage tests may be the close cooperation between schools and teachers in Scandinavian countries. They may even be related to the representations of the Michaelmas celebrations in *Steinerbladet*, as these texts may be a source of inspiration for teachers in Norway, Denmark and Sweden. We also found similarities with the Michaelmas celebrations in Kenya and Peru described by Hoffmann (2016), whose characterization of Michaelmas as 'the festival of courage' is also applicable to Scandinavian Steiner schools. As Steiner education has spread from Europe to various parts of the world, European traditions have influenced schools in other countries. Nevertheless, Steiner's understanding of Michael and Steiner schools' celebration of Michaelmas

transcends traditional Christian interpretations. A more precise (than 'Christian') description of the activities taking place during the festival is 'hybrid products' in the making: between ritual and performance, between theatre and play, between fun and seriousness and – not least – between religion and non-religion. From a classic Durkheimian perspective, this ritualization may also be interpreted as an attempt to maintain cohesion within the school community.

By emphasizing Michael as the most important angel of our time and introducing annual Michaelmas celebrations, Steiner can be seen as a religious entrepreneur who took ownership of a Christian festival. Just as he developed a new, radical Michael mythology, he developed new interpretations of Christian traditions, including religious festivals. Steiner reinvented Michaelmas as one of the most important calendrical rites within Anthroposophy by linking Michaelmas to Christmas, Easter, Midsummer and the archangels. At a time characterized by deep political, social and economic crises, he undertook several initiatives to change society through a new understanding of science, religion, biodynamic agriculture and holistic medicine. In this larger project, he considered both Michael and education to be of paramount importance. This makes Steiner pupils' play with the dragon more than just a game.

Notes

1 The song is often sung in the respective national language. The following is a Norwegian translation of the same lyrics: *Sankt Mikael, himmelske helt, send til oss din kraft og styrke, send til oss din kraft og styrke, i våre hjerter, i våre hjerter*. The song is published on the Steiner School in Stavanger's website as part of a longer text about the Michaelmas celebration written by Kjerstin Barkved: https://www.steinerskolen-stavanger.no/mikaeli-ny/.

2 More information on the 100-year anniversary can be found at https://www.waldorf-100.org/en/.

3 Steiner schools are also known as Waldorf schools, so named after the first school in Waldorf. In Scandinavian countries, *Steinerskoler* (Steiner school) is more commonly used, and this is the term that we use in this chapter. We also use Waldorf school/Waldorf education when referring to sources that use these terms.

4 Uhrmacher (1995) lists Michaelmas, Advent, Easter and Saint John's Day as 'seasonal benchmarks', while Stabel and Jørgensen (2019), referring to a Norwegian translation of Stockmeyer ([1969] 1985), mention Pentecost as one of the major Christian holidays celebrated at Steiner schools.

5 Despite their clear anchoring in Christian traditions and Anthroposophical ideas, the Norwegian state does not consider Steiner schools to be 'worldview schools', which constitute a different category by law, but an alternative pedagogical offer, like Montessori schools. At the same time, Christian holidays occupy a central place in Steiner schools, and the festivals play an important role both in annual planning and in everyday school life, especially for the youngest pupils (Stabel and Jørgensen 2019). Despite demands for adaptation to the public school system and educational reforms, the Steiner school movement has maintained a strong position in Norwegian society (Stabel 2016). Today, more than 5,000 pupils attend a total of thirty-one schools. Based on population density, this makes the Steiner school movement in Norway the largest in the world. According to Gilhus (2014: 238), the fact that approximately 2 per cent of the Norwegian population has been affected by Steiner education may have a certain influence on the general population's perceptions of angels.

6 For a collection of the 'Michael letters', see Kovacs (2021). As part of the Michael impulse, Steiner held nineteen 'esoteric lessons' known as the First Class of the School for Spiritual Science, which he understood as an earthly reflection of a spiritual gathering initiated by Michael (Haakstad 2011).

7 In Steiner's writings, Ahriman is synonymous with Mephistopheles. Both are dark, destructive forces that exaggerate the importance of matter and technology at the expense of spirit and empathy (Steiner [1909] n.d.).

8 See Steiner (2012). This is an archival edition of four lectures on Michaelmas that Steiner gave between 27 September and 1 October 1923.

9 We are grateful to the current Norwegian editor of *Steinerbladet*, Ninon Onarheim, for granting us access to the archive.

10 All quotes from *Steinerbladet* are our own translations.

11 In the digital *Steinerbladet* archive, the texts are labelled with the publication year and issue, but page numbers are not available.

12 In 2021, Jasper Lake released a documentary about this Swedish school, Solvikskolan, criticizing teachers and their practices based on testimonies of pupils who did not experience the care and consideration that they expected from their teachers, instead feeling belittled and/or harassed (Lake 2021). Although this school is in Sweden, the Norwegian Association of Steiner Schools has issued a statement distancing Steiner pedagogy from the methods described in the documentary (Steinerskoleforbundet 2021).

13 The 'evidence' is a thin cotton thread tied around the pupils' wrists after they have completed the assigned challenges.

14 The flames are not so hot, created by burning methylated spirit, and do not hurt a quick hand. (Flammable textiles, however, are to be avoided.)

15 See, for instance, Wilson (1990); Sandberg and Kristoffersen (2010).

References

Asprem, E. (2014), 'Perceiving Higher Worlds: Two Perspectives', in E. Asprem (ed.), *The Problem of Disenchantment*, 481–533, Leiden: Brill.

Asprem, E. (2016), 'Steiner and the Theosophical Current', in C. Clement (ed.), *Schriften – Rudolf Steiner Kritische Ausgabe: Band 6: Schriften zur Anthropologie – Theosophie – Anthroposophie. Ein Fragment*, 1–12, Stuttgart: Frommann–Holzboog Verlag.

Bamford, C., ed. (1994), *The Archangel Michael: His Mission and Ours – Selected Lectures and Writings by Rudolf Steiner*, New York: Anthroposophic Press.

Barton, M. (1996), *The Festivals and Their Meaning: Selected Lectures by Rudolf Steiner*, Essex: Rudolf Steiner Press.

Bell, C. (1997), *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bendixen, G. (1995), 'Mikaeltidens prøvelser', *Steinerskolen*, no. 3. Available online (access permission required*; accessed 12 December 2024).

Bjønnes, A. (2009), 'Er steinerskolen integrert i lokalmiljøet?' *Steinerskolen*, no. 2. Available online (access permission required*; accessed 12 December 2024).

Boland, N. (2014), 'Sticking Wings on a Caterpillar?' *Journal of Waldorf/Rudolf Steiner Education*, 16 (2): 8–9.

Carlsen, J. (2003), 'Mikael inspirerer meg', *Steinerskolen*, no. 3. Available online (access permission required*; accessed 12 December 2024).

Dahlin, B. (2017), *Rudolf Steiner: The Relevance of Waldorf Education*, Cham: Springer.

Frisk, L. (2012), 'The Anthroposophical Movement and the Waldorf Educational System', in C. Cusack and A. Norman (eds), *Handbook of New Religions and Cultural Production*, 192–211, Leiden: Brill.

Frisk, L. (2014), 'Waldorfpedagogiken – Religion eller inte?' *DIN – Tidsskrift for religion og kultur*, no. 1: 48–68.

Gilhus, I. S. (2014), 'Angels in Norway: Religious Border-Crosses and Border-Markers', in M. Bowman and U. Valk (eds), *Vernacular Religion in Everyday Life*, 230–45, New York: Routledge.

Gilhus, I. S. (2016), 'Anthroposophy in Norway', in H. Bogdan and O. Hammer (eds), *Western Esotericism in Scandinavia*, 53–7, Leiden: Brill.

Grimes, R. L. (2014), *The Craft of Ritual Studies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Grimes, R. L. (2015), 'Ritual and Performance', in G. Laderman and L. León (eds), *Religion and American Culture: Tradition, Diversity, and Popular Expression*, 593–611, Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO.

Haakstad, H. (2011), 'Den frie høyskole for åndsvitenskap – idé, situasjon, mulighet. Forsøk på et overblikk', *Antroposofi i Norge*, no. 3: 38–47.

Hoffmann, V. (2015), 'Annual Festivals in Waldorf Schools in Multi-religious or Non-Christian Cultural Settings: "She Showed us the Fish but Didn't Teach us How to Do the Fishing"', MA diss., Rudolf Steiner University College, Oslo.

Hoffmann, V. (2016), 'Creating Place-Based Waldorf Festivals: An Ethnographic Study of Festivals in Two Non-European Walford Schools', *RoSE (Research on Steiner Education)*, 7 (2): 88–104.

Holmsen, C. (1988), 'Mikaelslegender fra Normandie', *Steinerskolen*, no. 3. Available online (access permission required*; accessed 12 December 2024).

Iversen, R. (1984), 'Litt om å fordøye inntrykk', *Steinerskolen*, no. 1. Available online (access permission required*; accessed 12 December 2024).

Kovacs, C. (2021), *The Michael Letters of Rudolf Steiner: The Mission of Archangel Michael,* Edinburgh: Floris Books.

Kraft, S.-E. (2011), *Hva er nyreligiøsitet?* Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.

Kvalvaag, J. (2003), 'Mikael i vår tid – Rudolf Steiners bidrag til en moderne mytologi', *Steinerskolen*, no. 3. Available online (access permission required*; accessed 12 December 2024).

Lake, J. (2021), *Dokument inifrån: De utvalda barnen*, [Video] SVT Play. Available online: https://www.svtplay.se/dokument-inifran-de-utvalda-barnen (accessed 12 December 2024).

Lenz, F. (1981), 'Hvordan feirer vi michaelsfest med våre barn?' *Steinerskolen*, no. 3. Available online (access permission required*; accessed 12 December 2024).

Lindholm, D. (1963), 'Jern skal jern befri – tale til barna på Rudolf Steinerskolen – mikaelsdagen 29/9', *Ny Skole*, no. 3. Available online (access permission required*; accessed 12 December 2024).

Lindholm, D. (1977), 'Leif Wærenskjold til minne', *Steinerskolen*, no. 3. Available online (access permission required*; accessed 12 December 2024).

Morris, D. (2017), 'Mikaeli på Steinerskolen i Fredrikstad', *Steinerbladet*, no. 4. Available online: https://steinerbladet.no/?s=Mikaeli+p%C3%A5+Steinerskolen+i+Fredrikstad (accessed 12 December 2024).

Øgaard, A. (2003), 'Hvorfor feire mikaelsfesten?' *Steinerskolen*, no. 3. Available online (access permission required*; accessed 12 December 2024).

Pearce, J. (2019), 'From Anthroposophy to Non-confessional Preparation for Spirituality? Could Common Schools Learn from Spiritual Education in Steiner Schools?' *British Journal of Religious Education*, 41 (3): 299–314.

Sandberg, K. and T. Kristoffersen (2010), *Det de ikke forteller oss: Steinerskolens okkulte grunnlag*, Oslo: Cappelen Damm.

'Sankt Mikael på månesigden' (1971), Mennesket, no. 3. Available online (access permission required*; accessed 12 December 2024).

Skaare, H. T. (1999), 'Leder: Dragedreperskolen?' *Steinerskolen*, no. 1. Available online (access permission required*; accessed 12 December 2024).

Skaare, H. T. (2003), 'Mikael, Mikael – gjør meg sterk, gjør meg sæl – intervju med 3 lærere', *Steinerskolen*, no. 3. Available online (access permission required*; accessed 12 December 2024).

Smit, J. (1958), 'Dragebeseireren', *Mennesket*, no. 3. Available online (access permission required*; accessed 12 December 2024).

Smit, P. and M.-L. Smit (1985), 'Fra sanseiakttagelse til billdeopplevelse. Årsløpets forvandling', *Steinerskolen*, no. 4. Available online (access permission required*; accessed 12 December 2024).

Sporre, K., C. Osbeck, A. Lilja, D. Lifmark, O. Franck and A. Lyngfelt (2022), 'Fiction-Based Ethics Education in Swedish Compulsory School – Reflections on a Research Project', *Nordidactica: Journal of Humanities and Social Science Education*, 12 (2): 84–107.

Stabel, A.-M. (2016), *Hva skal vi med skole? Steinerskolens historie i Norge 1926–2016*, Oslo: Pax forlag.

Stabel, A.-M. and C. S. Jørgensen (2019), 'Om månedsfester og årstidsfester i Steinerskolen', *DIN – Tidsskrift for religion og kultur*, no. 2: 49–85.

Staudenmaier, P. (2010), 'Between Occultism and Fascism: Anthroposophy and the Politics of Race and Nation in Germany and Italy, 1900–1945', PhD diss., Cornell University, Ithaca.

Staudenmaier, P. (2014), *Between Occultism and Nazism: Anthroposophy and the Politics of Race in the Fascist Era*, Leiden: Brill.

Steiner, R. ([1909] n.d.), 'The Deed of Christ and the Opposing Spiritual Powers (GA 107): II. Mephistopheles and Earthquakes', *The Rudolf Steiner Archive*. Available online: https://rsarchive.org/Lectures/GA107/English/AP1954/19090101p01.html (accessed 12 December 2024).

Steiner, R. ([1946] 2012), *Michaelmas and the Soul-Forces of Man*, New York: Anthroposophic Press.

Steiner, R. (1985), *Der Jahreskreislauf als Atmungsvorgang der Erde und die vier grossen Festeszeiten* (GA 223), Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag.

Steinerskoleforbundet (2021), 'Uttalelse vedrørende dokumentar om Solvikskolan i Sverige', *Steinerskoleforbundet*. Available online: https://www.steinerskole.no/uttalelse-vedrorende-dokumentar-om-solvikskolan-i-sverige (accessed 12 December 2024).

Stockmarr, I. and H. T. Skaare (2003) 'Leder' [Editorial], *Steinerskolen*, no. 3. Available online (access permission required*; accessed 12 December 2024).

Stockmeyer, E. A. K. ([1969] 1985), *Rudolf Steiner's Curriculum for Waldorf Schools*, trans. R. Everett-Zade, Sussex: Steiner Schools Fellowship Publications.

Swartz, K. (2022), 'Management Matters: Organisational Storytelling within the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden', PhD diss., Åbo Akademi University, Turku.

Swartz, K. and O. Hammer (2022), 'Soft Charisma as an Impediment to Fundamentalist Discourse: The Case of the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden', *Approaching Religion*, 12 (2): 18–37.

Uhrmacher, P. B. (1995), 'Uncommon Schooling: A Historical Look at Rudolf Steiner, Anthroposophy, and Waldorf Education', *Curriculum Inquiry*, 25 (4): 381–406.

Undheim, S. (2019), 'Med tente lys inn i varmen: Lucia-tog i norske skoler og barnehager', *DIN – Tidsskrift for religion og kultur*, no. 2: 166–97.

Von der Lippe, M. and S. Undheim (2019), 'Religionsvitenskap, ritualer og ritualisering i skolen', *DIN – Tidsskrift for religion og kultur*, no. 2: 5–17.

Wegge, L. (1998a), 'Drageleken', *Steinerskolen*, no. 2. Available online (access permission required*; accessed 12 December 2024).

Wegge, L. (1998b), 'Tanker om og bak drageleken – Et intervju med Pär Ahlbom', *Steinerskolen,* no. 2. Available online (access permission required*; accessed 12 December 2024).

Wilson, G. (1990), *Jag trodde på Waldorfskolan: En inträngande analys av Waldorfpedagogiken*, Örebro: no publisher.

Zander, H. (2007), *Anthroposophie in Deutschland: Theosophiische Weltanschauung und gesellschaftliche Praxis 1884–1945*, 2 vols., Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

Zander, H. (2019), *Anthroposophy: Rudolf Steiner's Ideas from Esotericism to Weleda, Demeter and Waldorf Education,* Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh.

*Articles published prior to issue no. 2 of 2012 require researcher access permission from the journal.

8

‘Mr. fix-it archangel’

Michael in American New Age spirituality

Cecilie Endresen

Introduction

In American New Age spirituality, Michael has been reinvented as a handsome, handy helper, protecting and healing Americans in their daily lives and in times of crisis. Unlike his traditional Christian counterparts, this particularly syncretic spiritual figure appears in unconventional practices, settings and mythologies. Deeply embedded in American culture and consumerism, the US version of the archangel is unusually accessible and customer-friendly, with a strong digital presence.

In this chapter, I explore how the archangel Michael has been reshaped from a Christian figure to a New Age icon to fit modern Americans. The following quotation from the marketing material of the spiritual entrepreneur Kelly Hampton, who claims to ‘download’ insights and energies from the archangel, is representative:

> This is the opportunity to SPEAK to a Higher intelligence that provides tangible and practical divinely given answers for you. Are YOU ready to make the changes in your life NOW? Sit in the energy of Archangel Michael and you will never be the same. (Hampton n.d.-b)

One of Hampton’s (n.d.-b) offers is a ‘1-on-1’ Skype meeting with the archangel for $117. For $199, you can have an additional ‘alchemy retreat’ with him on Mount Shasta, a sacred portal in California, which will increase the ‘pure love vibration of Gaia, Mother Earth’. Participation is also possible online, which means that you can be enlightened by the archangel ‘in the comfort of your own home’ (Hampton n.d.-b).

This description of the archangel Michael epitomizes the hybrid, non-denominational, gender-fluid figure often found in New Age religion, an umbrella term that encompasses a broad range of occult practices, such as clairvoyance, crystal magic and astrology. With its syncretistic nature and lack of centralized authority, this diffuse postmodern form of religion is hard to define. However, a 'tenet' is that people are encouraged to find their own truth, which may involve anything from auras to dolphins. Another characteristic is that the field is generally dominated by women as clients and consumers, ritual experts and charismatic leaders.

The Michael-centred ideas and practices discussed in this chapter represent a form of New Age religion with a strong Christian connection and a particular type of 'angel spirituality'. Almost all the authors referred to in this chapter are white, presumably middle-class women with Christian family backgrounds, and their engagement with Michael can be considered a subtype of 'angel spirituality'. In this field, numerous Michael mediums and channelers broadcast messages from the archangel via a combination of digital and traditional media, transforming his 'energies' into commodities aimed at spiritual development and personal growth.

Unlike the 'biblical' archangel, 'New Age' Michael is part of an alternative cosmology inhabited by intermediary beings imported from various religions. As such, he is a highly syncretic figure influenced by both the globalized world and specific American concerns, persons and places. His influence is felt in a range of 'unorthodox' settings, from tarot readings to house cleansing and goddess worship. Whether in kundalini yoga classes in New Jersey or in crop circles, in live streaming from Sedona or Stonehenge, or in podcasts with aliens, Michael is *everywhere*.[1]

Chapter outline

What roles does the archangel Michael play in New Age spirituality, and why does he resonate with spiritual entrepreneurs and their followers? Is he a reconfiguration of a cult figure from Christian folklore, a New Age synthesis of various religious traditions or both?[2] To answer these questions, I scoured the internet and religious bookstores for Michael-oriented material published in the United States or by Americans. To my surprise, I found a substantial volume,[3] with many publications and posts attributing their authorship to the archangel. My analysis revealed consistent themes, strong intertextuality and practices

representing a distinct religious genre that has been overlooked in research, which I dubbed 'Michael spirituality'. I identified certain patterns that could be traced to two influential religious movements from the early-twentieth-century United States. From all this emerged a remarkably Americanized version of the archangel in terms of not only cultural outlook and topics but also his association with specific places.

Trying to make sense of today's Michael spirituality, I first outline some of its more 'unorthodox' features. I then trace its historical roots, starting with a brief overview of Michael in Christian traditions, his transformation in nineteenth-century esoterism and his role in the teachings and practices of twentieth-century spiritual entrepreneurs. Subsequently, I take a closer look at the main features of modern Michael spirituality and use a case study of the above-mentioned medium Kelly Hampton to discuss significant features of this spirituality.

A divine playmate: The New Age archangel

Americanization, anthropomorphism and digitization

Michael spirituality can be characterized as an emotional form of religiosity and must be understood in relation to a more general shift towards alternative and 'paranormal' ideas and practices (Bader, Mencken and Froese 2007). In this context, central beliefs about Michael are unmistakably influenced by conventional Christian doctrines and symbols but instead of Jesus, sin and salvation, the New Age cult of Michael is tied to an immanent and pantheistic concept of God – and to America.

The Americanization of the archangel Michael takes many forms, from his association with landmarks and landscapes to the protection of the nation and his attention to everyday concerns, casual tone and customer-friendly forms of communication. The most salient adaptation pertains to the market economy and American consumer culture, which have transformed the archangel into a religious commodity in the spiritual marketplace.

Situated within a pantheistic cosmology, Michael has evolved into a religiously inclusive figure. The time-honoured archangel is not only globalized but also digitalized. New Michael mediums have a global following, and certified angel therapists are found worldwide. As part of the gig economy, the Americanized archangel is flexible, positive and service-minded, offering 'light and love' to anyone anytime – often just a click away.

This accessibility is visually reflected in the pastel-hued archangel encountered on New Age websites and self-help literature, where he characteristically appears as a strong, handsome, smiling, sun-kissed, blue-eyed handyman who can mend a cell phone or a broken heart. He is a 'girl's best friend', a comforting companion who provides emotional and practical support in everyday life – in the kitchen or in the driveway – and heals pets, souls, marriages and the economy.

Channelling

A key feature of Michael spirituality is channelling, an important practice in twentieth-century esotericism (Bjorling 1992: 99–142). The term refers to the idea that special individuals, often called mediums, can receive messages from other-worldly sources – in this case, the archangel Michael – that reveal higher truths. Channelling is closely related to charismatic authority, which refers to a special quality recognized in an individual by their followers – often a leader who is believed to have the ability to tap into invisible sources, such as gods, spirits, masters or other mythical beings (Wessinger 2012: 81–2). Access to Michael forms the basis of the authority of the mediums and channelers discussed in this chapter – entrepreneurs who turn their connection to superhuman powers into commodities.

Michael is described not only as adept but also as the most approachable archangel, with an emphasis on his human form and style. His manner of speech is colloquial and cheerful, sprinkled with terms such as 'hi!' and 'OK' (Ocean 2016). The following post on a spiritual healing blog is a typical example of Michael's new style: 'Hello, hello, hello. I am the Archangel Michael. Archangel Michael is usually known as a guide who can protect you from negativity, but I also have other attributes that I can bring to bear to help you and your life' (Davies 2022).

Still, the Americanized archangel has retained his warrior qualities, battling a wide spectrum of cosmic powers and serving humanity alongside a colourful congregation of deities, prophets and extraterrestrials. He can also help purge people and the planet of negative energies, build self-confidence or put you in touch with deceased family members.

Michael's religious background

A legacy of Christianity is the idea that angels are benevolent protectors and guides who can offer healing and spiritual awakening. However, a striking feature

of today's Michael spirituality is the archangel's non-denominational nature and position in a broader, individualized and spiritualized, framework than that of 'traditional' Christianity (Gilhus 2014: 242). The Americanized New Age archangel is a conspicuously hybrid figure. From his integration into Theosophy in the nineteenth century, he inherited many idiosyncratically reinterpreted features from Asian traditions, such as the Indian concepts of karma and chakras (energy centres in the body). Nevertheless, as indicated by his name, the archangel Michael also remains strongly attached to Christian apocalyptic ideas. In this section, I describe this process of religious transformation and Americanization. But first, let us have a look at some statistics.

Angel beliefs: Demography

In a May 2023 poll, 69, 67 and 74 per cent of surveyed Americans reported believing in angels, heaven and God, respectively – all aspects of Christianity that overlap with Michael spirituality (Gallup 2023).[4] As Gilhus (2014: 241) remarked, many find the idea of mild-mannered ethereal helpers, such as angels, more 'user-friendly' and 'saleable' than the punitive aspects of the Christian tradition. Another reason for angels' popularity in New Age milieus is that they are 'not theologically well defined' and fluctuate 'between reality and metaphor' (Gilhus 2014: 242).

The belief in angels in the United States today is found across the population but is more frequent among regular churchgoers. It also appears more often among Protestants than Catholics and among women, middle-aged and older people and individuals with lower income and education levels. Moreover, the belief in angels is 1.7 times more prevalent among white than non-white Americans. There is also a noteworthy ideological and political disparity: conservative Americans are twice as likely as liberals to believe in angels and 1.5 times as likely to vote Republican than Democrat (Gallup News Service 2023).

Considering the above, it seems reasonable to assume that many of the individuals involved in Michael spirituality have a Christian affiliation, although the primary sources rarely reveal details about the political or ideological leanings of Michael entrepreneurs or their followers. Also unclear is how New Age beliefs and practices affect other areas of life.

The Christian connection

In Christian traditions, angels are typically seen as other-worldly beings who serve as intermediaries between God and humans – that is, between the

Creator and his Creation. Angel spirituality draws on such traditional features as intermediaries between humans and a higher power (e.g. a guardian angel, a personified angelic protector who still plays an important role in unofficial Catholic folk piety). New Age Michael retains these features, including his function as a helper, but in a different context.

Although Christian elements abound in the New Age universe, its undergirding cosmology differs greatly from that of traditional Christianity in several fundamental ways. Whereas the Christian universe is hierarchical, with a radical dichotomy between the transcendent God and the world (his creation), the New Age world view is based on an immanent concept of God. In this esoteric universe, where the divine is an immanent force and humans, accordingly, have divine potential, everything is interconnected in magical and mysterious ways through 'energies, frequencies, vibrations, dimensions' (Hammer 2004: 236–7).

As a superhuman agent in a holistic, pantheistic cosmology unbounded by traditional Christian categories, New Age Michael moves across dimensions and boundaries, as well as between religions, allied with humans and mythological agents from all over the world. As one of the 'superpower saints' (Caldwell [2017] 2021: 96), he often acts as a solo agent instead of a deputy sent by God to accomplish a task. Like the other archangels, Michael can be summoned when you are 'going through a tough time in life and feel you could use a pair of divine hands to help you fix your things' (Silva 2021).

Angel spirituality can be seen as a quest to re-enchant the world through everyday miracles (Alver 1999). From this perspective, the archangel Michael is that guy who gets things done 'in matters great and small – from fixing the economy, cleaning up the environment, or preventing terrorism to comforting a child, healing a loved one, or finding us the perfect job', as one of the most prolific Michael mediums put it (E. C. Prophet 2014). Such 'minor' angel miracles are again related to the therapeutic turn in Western culture and holistic healing practices in New Age spirituality, which many women in Western secular societies find appealing.

Michael spirituality from Theosophy to Anthroposophy

Michael spirituality and the New Age movement have roots in the Western esoteric and occult traditions that emerged in the late nineteenth century. Amid rapid globalization and change, modern America became a fertile ground for new and alternative philosophical, religious and ideological currents, resulting

in an almost unparalleled number of groups and individuals experimenting with religious alternatives.

One of the most important religious precursors of Michael spirituality and the New Age movement was Theosophy, which emerged during a century of industrial, colonial and cultural shifts and religious exploration. As the appeal of traditional religions waned, new spiritual alternatives surfaced. The teachings of the Theosophical Society, founded in New York in 1875, were primarily based on the writings of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831–1891), a travelling spiritualist, occultist and clairvoyant. Under the leadership of a handful of charismatic leaders, including the enigmatic Blavatsky and later the social reformer Annie Besant (1847–1933), the society was the most influential organization of this period.

Theosophy, 'God wisdom', was a magnet for the nineteenth-century upper middle class, which was open to novel concepts and religious experiments. A basic tenet was that all religions shared a secret core of knowledge that had become distorted through the ages but was still available through revelations from 'Ascended Masters', a class of enlightened spiritual beings. Once recovered, the old religious secrets could be unified with modern science and philosophy to accelerate human progress. Many found such beliefs irresistible.

A related idea was that patriarchal religious institutions, most notably the various Christian churches, had suppressed ancient feminine wisdom. This paved the way for women to act as channels and mediums who could convey spiritual messages from the Masters, thereby directing human evolution by transmitting secret knowledge to select individuals. Most prominently, Blavatsky (1877, 1888) claimed that the Masters had initiated her in the mysteries and guided her work.

Within Theosophical cosmology, the archangel Michael was construed as a universalist and syncretistic figure, a benevolent 'psychopompic genius' who guided souls to their designated places in the afterlife (Blavatsky 1887). Referring to Christianity, Blavatsky described him as the 'prince of the face of the Lord', the earthly counterpart of Christ and a foe of demons who vanquished Lucifer (Blavatsky 1887). She emphasized Michael's pagan features, such as 'a friend of the Sun', which she associated with the Roman god Mercury, Mithra (Zoroastrianism), Hermes Anubis (Egyptian) and Hermes Christos (Gnosticism).

An important offshoot of Theosophy and predecessor of Michael-oriented angel spirituality is also found in the Anthroposophical teachings of the Austrian esotericist and former Theosophist Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925). Anthroposophy, 'human wisdom,' was closer to Christianity than Theosophy,

and Steiner's influence on modern Michael spirituality was mainly associated with Michael the warrior. In Steiner's theology, Michael is a cosmic ruler, an expression of Christ and the archangel of the sun, who safeguards mankind's spiritual evolution by battling forces that prevent humans from accessing the secret powers buried deep inside them (see also Chapter 7).

Importantly, the archangel is involved in worldly affairs. In Steiner's own account, Michael fought the dragon from the 1840s until his victory against 'certain' dark powers in 1879 (Steiner 1917). Steiner's portrayal of Michael as the angel of our time became very influential in the American esoteric circles that spawned Michael spirituality.

Ascended Master and America's archangel

While Michael played no major role in Blavatsky's texts, he was identified as an important master by other Theosophists early on. Blavatsky's reconfiguration of Michael was thus just the beginning of the intense syncretization that Michael underwent in the American offshoots of Theosophy, which successively redefined his qualities and capacities, adding new layers and bolstering his Legion with new and unorthodox characters, from the Founding Fathers in the 1930s to extraterrestrials in the 1950s.

In the United States, several Theosophy-inspired movements under charismatic leadership paved the way for American angel spirituality and New Age more broadly. From the 1920s onwards, the spirit of religious experimentation intersected with Christian archangel traditions and evolved in a way that appealed to modern Americans. Michael became an important Ascended Master dedicated to enlightening humanity by imparting higher truths to spiritually fit individuals.

Thus, in the post-Theosophical American context, the archangel Michael underwent a significant transformation, becoming conceptualized as an Ascended Master deeply involved in both the spiritual and worldly concerns of postmodern Americans. Two post-Theosophical movements were particularly important in this process: the 'I AM' Activity movement during the interwar period and its successor, The Summit Lighthouse/Church Universal and Triumphant, during the Cold War.[5] In these movements, Michael rose to a position of prominence in new practices aimed at retrieving the Masters' divine wisdom, and female Michael mediums became charismatic leaders. Messages from the archangel channelled through such leaders linked Michael to American lore and landscapes.

The new Michael-centric practices and narratives were also intertwined with other sociopolitical motifs, notably American exceptionalism and anti-communism. Michael became a heavenly ally in new struggles invoked in times of political and economic crisis: the Great Depression, the Second World War and the Cold War.

Although the 'I AM' Activity and The Summit Lighthouse/Church Universal and Triumphant paved the way for the New Age movement of the 1960s, which was generally associated with hippies and counterculture, their ideological orientation and values were not. On the contrary, both drew a socially conservative audience and had right-wing political inclinations, engaging in a larger battle against communism and the Soviet Union, America's atheist enemy. Thus, Michael's martial and apocalyptic aspects came to the foreground.

Founded by Guy Ballard (1878–1939), the 'I AM' Activity was the first and most seminal post-Theosophical movement in which Michael rose to prominence. In 1929, after the stock market crash, Ballard encountered his first (but not last) Ascended Master, Saint Germain, who initiated him in the 'Great Laws of Life' on Mount Shasta. In 1930, Ballard and his wife Edna founded the religious organization 'I AM' Activity, acting as its charismatic leaders and the only accredited messengers of the Ascended Masters. They also became important religious entrepreneurs promoting their own religious brand through the strategic use of modern communications, including radio broadcasts, to disseminate the Masters' messages to millions of Americans. Contemporary Michael mediums continue this tradition when they publish mystical insights from the archangel online.

By locating the Ascended Masters on Mount Shasta[6] (and a few other places, such as Yellowstone), the 'I AM' Activity Americanized Theosophy (Brown 1997: 106). Borrowing from other influential currents in the United States during the same period, it also emphasized human potential and positive and magical thinking (Rudbøg 2013). At the centre of its activities were the 'dictations' from the Masters, who had united with the so-called 'I AM' Presence, the source of divinity. Such divine unification was also the proclaimed goal of the 'I AM' Activity, and new rituals centred on the channelled messages, akin to mantras. The idea was that rhythmic chants and repetition created vibrations that enabled people to connect with their divine spark and manifest changes in the physical world.

During the Great Depression, such overwhelmingly optimistic teachings appealed to many Americans, and Ballard's books about his visions became bestsellers.[7] By the end of the 1930s, the 'I AM' Activity had around one million

followers (Barrett 1996: 191; Brown 1997: 196). The style and expressions used in many 'dictations' had much in common with those in contemporary Michael meditations.

From 1938 onwards, the Ballards received hundreds of 'dictations' from the archangel Michael (King 2001). Like Steiner's archangel, the 'I AM' version of Michael was believed to shape human fate and intervene in worldly affairs. Although Michael was not the most important Master, he was still a paramount figure in this new American mythology. Many of the new 'I AM' Masters, such as George Washington and Columbus, had patriotic and nationalistic significance and were related to the 'I AM' idea that America had a special 'occult mission and destiny' (Rudbøg 2013: 158). In the Ballards' holistic blend, which included many Christian symbols, the archangel Michael became particularly important for the protection of America, which, with its liberty, would serve as a spiritual beacon for the world.

Michael's 'dictations' were often apocalyptic and had political overtones. For example, he told Americans to resist 'the hordes of evil' that were about to destroy their nation and offered his sacred flame for protection (King 2001: 190, 181). He also created a spiritual defence system of supercharged places across the country that could annihilate the evil forces if needed (King 2002: 169, 190–1). The main idea was that both the nation and each soul were under attack and that purification was needed.[8] Michael thus became a prominent figure in the articulation of millenarian and conspiratorial beliefs in the 'I AM' Activity.

Into the New Age: The Summit Lighthouse/ Church Universal and Triumphant

After Guy Ballard's death in 1939, the 'I AM' Activity faced a series of fraud-related charges and slowly fell apart over the following decades. Meanwhile, there had been many offshoots. A major successor was The Summit Lighthouse,[9] founded by Mark Prophet (1918–1973) in Washington, DC, in 1958, which aimed to foster spiritual development by connecting with the Masters, particularly through meditation, prayer and visualization.

Through the charismatic leadership of Mark Prophet and later his wife Elizabeth Clare Prophet (1939–2009),[10] The Summit Lighthouse provided another arena for women acting as religious authorities and Michael messengers. Elizabeth's charismatic authority was legitimized through autohagiographic accounts (cf. Hammer and Swartz 2020: 9, n. 7): While waterskiing in New Jersey at the age of eighteen, she 'entered another dimension' and returned with

mystical insights: angels were like family members and 'spiritual companions' (E. C. Prophet 2023). Most contemporary Michael books convey similar stories, emphasizing that life-changing angelic encounters can take place anywhere, even in mundane settings, and that women are entitled to speak on Michael's behalf.

Towards the end of the Cold War, Elizabeth increasingly associated the biblical myth of the archangel and the Apocalypse with the geopolitical concerns of the day: the scenario of a Soviet attack and nuclear war. Following a vision in 1986, she described the battle against communism as one of cosmic proportions in which the archangel would intervene. Later, she declared Michael an ally in the fight against terrorism (E. C. Prophet 2008: 39).

Elizabeth's Michael is related to her distinction between conventional and esoteric interpretations of the Bible. She accepts the version of the heavenly war as it is 'recorded' in the Revelation – that Lucifer, the fallen angel and his followers were cast out from heaven by the archangel Michael (E. C. Prophet 2014: 4). However, the most significant part of the story is what happened afterwards – the 'unrecorded' and 'esoteric' part: since the fallen angels continued their war against God's children on earth, Michael took on a human form to teach, protect and care for them (4).

The emphasis on the Masters' human side is an essential feature of Michael spirituality, another legacy of the 'I AM' Activity, which differed from the Theosophical Masters. The Masters were made more accessible and immediate, with a more active role as guides in human life and in religious practices centred on invocation. Elizabeth's angel lessons were step-by-step guides attuned to American consumers in search of efficient and reliable methods for invoking 'heavenly assistance' (E. C. Prophet 2008: 71). A tenet was that everyone had 'a hidden portion of God', and with Michael's help, everyone could get in touch with it.

Another important legacy is Michael's association with other supernatural entities borrowed from various religious traditions and his new positions within a broader, individualized and spiritualized, framework than that of 'traditional' Christianity. The archangel played a prominent role in nascent New Age churches – a fact that research has largely overlooked. Many of the most influential charismatic leaders were also Michael mediums, and involved the archangel in many of the teachings and practices that they developed, serving to legitimize their authority and probably to broaden their appeal. As a figure familiar to most Americans from Christian teachings, Michael's inclusion as an Ascended Master probably made many who were exploring alternatives to

their traditional 'church' religion more accepting of syncretistic and polytheistic spiritual alternatives. The archangel's Christian/non-Christian ambiguity may explain his appeal in a competitive multireligious market.

As shown in other chapters of this volume, the archangel Michael is associated with millenarian expectations and is 'activated' in times of uncertainty, crisis and conflict – times when new charismatic authorities tend to emerge (E. Prophet 2016: 27). Twentieth-century developments repeatedly demonstrated this association. The messages of seminal Michael mediums resonated because they addressed the collective anxieties, hopes and fears of contemporary Americans: the crisis was one of cosmic significance and a sign that a blissful new age was imminent. Under the guidance of Michael and other spiritually dedicated individuals, Ascension could be accelerated, spearheaded by anyone who unleashed their innate divine potential through positive thinking and simple ritual techniques.

Michael spirituality: United States today

The Summit Lighthouse[11] continued to publish Elizabeth's teachings posthumously, and her books have sold millions of copies and have been translated into more than thirty languages. Over the past two decades, numerous new Michael mediums have burst onto the New Age scene. Most contemporary material draws heavily on the style and content of their predecessors, most visibly in the numerous 'I AM' formulations and direct references to the movement, but also in styles, themes and practices.

While the archangel Michael is still imagined as a male figure and God's warrior in New Age contexts, he has also acquired many 'female' features as a modern 'conscious individual who displays emotions, a sense of reason, intelligence, and a complex psychology' (Grace 2020: 5). Most of the material analysed here consists of testimonies about his exceptional qualities, including his looks: tall, blond and blue-eyed, he is 'more beautiful, more radiant, more light than any movie star' (Caldwell [2017] 2021: 11), and the light that he emanates is usually blue, violet and white. Even when in human form, however, the archangel is perceived as a superhuman being – 'especially pretty, yet terror inducing' (Grace 2020: 3) – and a male figure who appears 'kind, fair and full of tough love' (StMichael 2012). He easily swaps his armour and sword for coveralls and tools – for example, when he comes to the rescue of someone facing a plumbing emergency. Virtue (2009: 121) seems to acknowledge that her descriptions of

Michael's features might be perceived as unorthodox: 'For the open-minded, it's fun to picture Michael in his service hat and uniform pulling up at your house in a heavenly repair van with a celestial tool kit. He clearly helps us with household needs.'[12] According to Newbury (2011: 36), Michael also offers spiritual support to people who are too busy with the 'washing-up and the making of sandwiches'.

The archangel is thus portrayed as a handsome stranger and a divine playmate,[13] as well as a caring, supportive partner who helps and 'a girl's best friend' who helps and heals women in distress and in everyday situations. On many levels, Michael spirituality represents a particularly feminized form of religion, and the relationship between women and the archangel is depicted as extremely fulfilling.

Deep, sweet archangel love: Healing and enchanted bodies

In Michael spirituality, the archangel offers holistic healing of 'the body, mind, and spirit' (Grace 2020: 3). Multiple online sources feature angelic wisdom combined with healing sounds and soft music, and images depict him as a radiant force of light who offers his wings and sword for comfort and protection.

Michael's therapeutic and thaumaturgic aspects are particularly important and involve typical New Age practices, such as affirmations, manifestation and visualization,[14] based on the belief that the power of the mind can affect personal and physical realities. The Michael-centric version of such techniques is a ritual legacy of the 'I AM' Activity and The Summit Lighthouse. Another popular method is meditation aimed at establishing a connection with the archangel, which often overlaps with the above-mentioned techniques. This fusion is also reflected in books that contain various meditation exercises, channelled messages, revelations, devotional manuals and mantras.

The descriptions of Michael's manifestations as both sensual and intimate are striking. A distinguishing feature of channels in the 'I AM' tradition has been the 'erotically charged androgyny' that they offer (Brown 1997: 106). The following book excerpt is characteristic of this:

> We are now going to spend some time with the beautiful, magnificent Archangel Michael. Visualize. . . . Feel that delicious blue ray caressing your energy field . . . a blend of the God/dess force with the female-male aspects . . . watching you in a mothering/fathering way. . . . Archangel Michael wants you to get so cozy. . . . Archangel Michael . . . standing before you now in all their brilliance . . . perfect in physique. . . . This beautiful, Divine Being is looking upon you with such sweet Divine Love. . . . Rays of blue ray light igniting all

> of your being. . . . Feel that beautiful, beautiful love. Yes. Just relax and float into this love. . . . Archangel Michael stares deep into your eyes . . . you feel such tingles and such waves of light and love that you can't even think. All you can do is feel this deep, sweet, Divine Love as Archangel merges with you now and gives you all the Love that you've ever desired, that you've always craved. . . . deep throughout every Cell in your mind-body and your spirit . . . feel it waving through your body. Smile. Yes. Feel Archangel Michael's celestial Love filling you so deeply that you start to glow and levitate a bit and smile. Feel it. Yes . . . strong arms covered in muscles, arms gorgeous and strong, holding that beautiful sword of light. . . . Mm-hmm, beautiful light. (Caldwell [2017] 2021: 9–18)

Narratives of such overwhelming encounters can be understood as reports of mystical experiences, which meditation is meant to invoke. This bodily sensation in interactions with the archangel, verging on a love story, represents a subtle form of possession. This is typical: in New Age, angels are *felt* (Utriainen 2013: 244–5). In a channelled 'guide for lightworkers', the archangel Michael emphasizes that 'it is really of no consequence if you understand what is going on' (Ocean 2016: 46).

Meeting Michael is transformative, and bodies are enchanted. This is important in Michael-centred healing. The examined material abounds with such testimonies – for example, that of a woman recalling a healing session when the archangel suddenly appeared, and she experienced 'a powerful protective feeling that washed over her, followed by a sensation of lightness' (Johnson 2021). Such embodied aspects of Michael spirituality can be regarded as examples of 'everyday mysticism' and highlight the imagistic character of New Age spirituality (Hammer 2013: 225).

As already mentioned, the archangel Michael is a syncretic deity, as are his cult and the common New Age practices associated with it. Mediation, primarily associated with Buddhism, often involves Gaia and Goddess worship inspired by indigenous pre-Christian religions and modern paganism. Reiki healing, drawing on Japanese traditions, and yoga and chakra healing, drawing on Indian religions, are manifested in modern spiritual movements and occult practices that coalesced in the United States in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (see, e.g., Rudbøg 2013). Also present is the deification of the Self, but in addition to the usual New Age tropes about the divine soul and the inner Goddess involved in practices such as meditation, Michael also deifies his followers' bodily existence by engaging them in a loving, healing relationship.

Epiphanies and Michael 'on demand'

The archangel Michael intervenes when needed, especially during hardships and emergencies, such as a car breakdown. He safeguards drivers and is seen as a swift first responder arriving with his 'blue-lightening angels' (E. C. Prophet 2014: 30). He also prevents tragedies – for instance, by gently reminding a sleeping woman to turn off an overheating dryer (Virtue 2009: 39–40).

Numerous books provide detailed guidance on how to effectively harness Michael's abilities for practical applications and why. In a chapter titled 'Mr. Fix-It Archangel', Virtue (2009: 114) tells the story of a woman who called on him after dropping her cell phone in water: 'Archangel Michael, please fix my phone.' The archangel obliged. However, asking for help serves a higher purpose. Virtue elaborates: 'When we ask Archangel Michael to fix an electronic device or home appliance, it's part of God's plan of peace' (114).

The archangel's sudden appearance can be seen as a form of epiphany, a manifestation that can happen anywhere. A crystal healer in Pennsylvania provides a characteristic description:

> [Michael once] swooped in during a Reiki session with a client, holding a flaming sword and dressed in full regalia as if ready for battle. I was surprised and quite taken aback by his powerful and unexpected presence. . . . Michael stated that he came to assist in my healing endeavors wherever necessary. . . . And then he swept out as quickly as he arrived. (Johnson 2021)

Such encounters can be seen as 'momentary micro-ritualizations' or 'momentary religion', and Michael is one of those 'momentary gods' who can be present at specific moments but are otherwise not present (Gilhus 2014: 226). In emic terms, 'Archangel Michael is always at our side. He simply wants our call, and he may not intercede unless he is asked' (E. C. Prophet 2014: 48). He is an archangel 'on demand' (StMichael 2012).

Purification as protection

Even in these 'unorthodox' settings, Michael's functions as a powerful protector, healer and helper remain fundamentally unchanged. A related aspect is purification. A common trope is the archangel's ability to 'eradicate all forms of fear and negativity' from earth. For example, a Michael healer in Detroit advocates a form of 'energy clearing', such as removing 'toxic energetic debris from your life', as a means of stopping a 'psychic attack' (Hall n.d.). Such formulations are common in the discourse and illustrate the influence of modern psychology, as

well as the holistic melding of healing, protection and purification in the New Age 'energy' paradigm, and Michael spirituality revolves around the belief in the archangel's ability to control these energy flows.

Another frequent topic related to Michael spirituality is health and dietary advice. The use of herbal remedies or green smoothies is casually attributed to the archangel, but food-related questions can also have cosmic proportions. In a video titled *Archangel Michael Speaks about the Implications of Our Dietary Choices*, he urges his audience to opt for a vegan diet to 'develop a full relationship with Gaia' (Starmer 2016: 11:15). Michael is typically cast as a protector of animals who urges people not to consume them. However, the diet prescribed by the archangel is first and foremost spiritual: the topic is 'flesh', traditionally a metaphor for human weakness, sin and separation from the divine. In this context, his message reflects a tendency in New Age circles to hierarchize types of food according to their salvific function and to characterize people who follow such diets as 'more spiritual' (Crockford 2021: 128–35). It is also related to conspiracy narratives about nefarious forces that 'pollute' food, the air, the body and the mind (128–35). Thus, avoiding 'impure' food offers a form of spiritual protection, and Michael's advocacy of a vegan diet can therefore be seen as a form of apotropaic kitchen magic. Moreover, as is usually the case with online posts in Michael's name, comments suggest that these messages are perceived as authentic and urgent,[15] demonstrating the millenarian aspects of Michael spirituality.

Michael's medium in Missouri

In this section, I take a closer look at contemporary archangel spirituality by focusing on a representative case: Kelly Hampton, a middle-aged white woman residing in St. Louis, Missouri. Hampton is one of the many spiritual entrepreneurs in the United States who systematically focus on the archangel Michael:

> During an angelic session, Kelly will hear the guidance from beloved Archangel Michael who weilds [*sic*] his sword of love and kindness. He helps save lives, protects our bodies, vehicles and belongings, and oversees our Divine Life Missions. (Hampton 2023c)

Hampton is one of many Michael mediums who directly invoke the 'I AM' tradition: 'Hi, I'm Kelly Hampton. I AM a channel for Christ Consciousness'

(Hampton n.d.-a). She also seems to identify the 'AM' in 'I AM' with the archangel Michael's initials. She sometimes identifies him with Christ as well as with herself.

Hampton claims to have had this authentic charisma since her childhood, when she 'saw the face of Christ (Master Sananda)[16] in a glass of water' (Hampton 2023e). A recurring narrative is that the archangel, to whom she often refers as 'AAMichael' or just 'AAM', first contacted her in 2003. Since then, she has channelled messages from him, which have been published in three books and disseminated through videos, podcasts and social media, as well as through a range of spin-off merchandise and services.

With a headline promising that 'THE UNCONDITIONAL LOVE, HEALING, AND WHOLENESS YOU DESERVE IS WITHIN REACH!' (Hampton n.d.-c), Hampton's media outlets constitute an almost textbook example of holistic New Age discourse. Even the brief sentence defining her as 'a conduit for the divine' encapsulates its fundamental beliefs and practices and exemplifies charismatic authority and spiritual entrepreneurship.

Michael joins the show

From the Christian archangel to the Ascended Master of Theosophy, Michael has been adapted to various contexts but has, to some extent, remained recognizable. With the emergence of Michael spirituality in the current New Age context and the gig economy, he has evolved into an up-to-date version of himself ready to communicate with modern people – including online. New technologies shape both the form and content of Michael's messages. Some of Hampton's videos, posts and podcasts are channelled 'predictions' and 'prophecies', often including vague remarks about current affairs or comments on technological developments, such as artificial intelligence (Hampton 2023a, f).

One of Hampton's new means of spreading Michael's messages is her podcast series *What Goes On in Heaven* (2015–17). In some episodes, she channels the messages as a monologue. In others, she assumes the roles of both the host and the channel and fields calls from listeners. These episodes usually begin with a prayer of invocation, continue with a description of her mediumship and a presentation of the celestial cohort and its whereabouts and conclude with a presentation of her angelic products and services. Hampton then transitions into a phase of 'energy work' and channelling (e.g., Hampton 2016a: 1–15), with 'AAM' on standby, ready to provide guidance. 'I'm a pretty quick channel' (Hampton 2016a: 17:00), she asserts, validating her proficiency and competitive edge.

Unlike conventional Christian communication with Michael, Hampton's exchanges with 'AAM' are light-hearted and humorous. While listening to Michael's messages in silence, she sometimes giggles and says, 'He is funny', but without divulging the inside joke. The omission is crucial because it displays the foundation of Hampton's charismatic authority: she can perceive something that others cannot. It is 'proof' of her spiritual superiority and elucidates the rules of the game: by withholding some messages, Hampton demonstrates that she is their 'conduit for the divine' (Hampton n.d.-c). Moreover, she piques her audience's curiosity, implicitly urging them to return for more, at the very least through ongoing interaction with her content through downloads or digital 'likes', which boost her advertising value ('keep this channel going'). More profitably, they return as customers or clients, paying for products or services such as private channelled readings (Hampton 2023c).

In such interactive episodes, Hampton moves back and forth between the human and angelic spheres, notifying her audience of changes ('Let's just hold the theme and get back to him'), as if she were toggling between phone calls. Her listeners' questions span a variety of dilemmas, often related to employment and personal finances. The responses are couched in ambiguous terms, such as 'soul purposes' and 'earth time' (Hampton 2016a: 19:25–30:00), and 'AAM's' advice is usually open to interpretation. For example, Hampton (2015: 15:50–16:00) tells a man applying for a position at Walmart that the archangel says he should not pursue it because 'it appears to be below [his] true potential'. However, Michael's channel also points out some of the obvious advantages, like the salary, and says, 'It might be worth considering' – at least temporarily. In any case, she urges him to reflect on his 'soul themes', reminds him that it is not necessary to 'limit [himself] to just one job or one place' and helps him explore other options (Hampton 2015: 16:15–27:20). Throughout the conversation, the caller, who seemingly needs but does not desire the Walmart position, exhibits more optimism about work prospects and his own potential, suggesting that he will perceive either a job offer or a rejection as a meaningful opportunity.

Indeed, vague and all-encompassing statements render the messages difficult to falsify. After all, Hampton's selling point is that she is a 'highly accurate and detailed clairaudient channel' (Hampton 2023c). Her followers need to believe in her, which is, in essence, the basis of her spiritual enterprise. If they perceive her as an incompetent medium, she loses credibility and customers. Callers, on the other hand, usually have little to lose besides potential financial costs. Seeking answers in New Age practices is relatively non-committal but may offer

considerable benefits for individuals seeking advice, as long as they feel they are guided and supported in decision-making.

Michael and the market

While Hampton's popularity cannot be compared to that of more well-known angel authors, such as E. C. Prophet or Virtue, tens of thousands of people have engaged with her content. She remains active and continues to develop her catalogue of 'AAM' commodities, which suggests that her enterprise is sufficiently successful for her to stay in business. In essence, Hampton is the charismatic leader of a small but global religious movement based on her broadcasting of the archangel's messages through multiple channels from her St Louis home.

Michael's guidance is also promoted as beneficial for others who want to build a similar business:

> Join Me.....and I will Personally Instruct You to Learn One of The Most Powerful and Revolutionary 5thD[17] Healing Systems on Our Planet! Given to me by Archangel Michael in 2010, this system will enable you to heal more people, and build a thriving healing practice or expand your present practice. (Hampton n.d.-a)

In Hampton's universe, the archangel Michael is relevant and influential 'everywhere' – on the astral plane, in nature, at the workplace or in Japan, where she has some followers and certified practitioners. This East Asian connection is an example of the 'Asiafication' process that the archangel continues to undergo in the American context. As mentioned above, his messages to Hampton are sprinkled with terms from Eastern religious traditions, such as nirvana, yin and yang and namaste (Hampton 2010: 13, 46; 2022c: 04:00), and Hampton also offers customized content in Japanese. Moreover, as a gesture to potential Muslim followers, the archangel has revealed a protective prayer to Allah that Muslims can use (Hampton 2007: 86–7). On the global market, a non-denominational, positive and service-minded archangel has a competitive advantage.

Michael spirituality is strongly influenced by commercialization and consumer capitalism (Mikaelsson 2013). In fact, these are probably the conditions that allow Michael entrepreneurs to construe themselves as spiritual authorities and acquire an audience in the first place. Contact with Michael represents some sort of 'currency'.

Many products rely on the logic of contact magic. In Hampton's case, the invisible substance, energies and insights that she receives from the archangel

are sacred resources that she controls and can transfer to others through healing or consultations. As a special gift, she guarantees that each product is 'blessed by Archangel Michael and [herself]' before being shipped. Attuned to her customers' needs, Hampton offers a variety of products, including paintings infused with 'Michaelic vibrations' and a 'prosperity cell phone dust plug' for $28 (Hampton n.d.-d). These products are promoted as 'evidence you can touch' to know when 'AAM' is present, in effect constituting a version of well-known forms of contact magic from Christian cults of relics and amulets.

The marketing of Michael commodities is similar to other American marketing strategies, with texts sprinkled with superlatives and boasting fantastic results and customer satisfaction. It also includes special offers, such as 'personalized' experiences, 'Angelic Upgrades' (Caldwell 2021) and bonus material, urging potential customers to 'BUY NOW!!!'. The use of trademarks,[18] copyrights, licence agreements, consent forms and disclaimers by Michael mediums and entrepreneurs further signals serious business and illustrates that Michael spirituality is an integral part of the American market economy.

Although many Michaelic products appear to be new and different, they can mostly be classified as modernized talismans and apotropaic amulets. A spiritual Michaelic stone 'that protects from both physical and psychic attacks' (Center for the New Age n.d.) is not fundamentally different from the amulets used by Christians in medieval Romania (see Chapter 4), and 'AAM's' recommendation about using garlic, crosses and special prayers to God as protection against evil (Hampton 2007: 86–7) can be considered an old Christian tradition.

Communication, charisma and authority

In addition to her special access to 'AAM,' Hampton claims to be in direct contact with God, other angels and saints (Hampton 2023c). She also communicates with historical persons (living and dead) from other religions who are believed to be spiritually awakened and active in other dimensions, such as the Dalai Lama and the Prophet Muhammad. Her universe is populated by spiritually advanced beings from Theosophy and the broader New Age gallery, such as Gaia, Annunaki, indigo children, fairies and dolphins. A frequent topic is Michael's role as a protector of animals, both pets and 'extinct' creatures, such as 'rainbow-colored' dinosaurs (Hampton 2016b).

Like many other Michael mediums, Hampton also employs the archangel for telepathic healing and spiritism, an occult practice involving communication with the spirits of the dead. She claims to facilitate contact with dead relatives

and pets and to be guided by her mother 'from the other side' (Hampton 2007: iii), another one of her charisma claims.

Hampton (n.d.-b) proclaims that she can bridge the gap between heaven and earth. She places great emphasis on the 'astral' dimension, and her descriptions of Michael's universe are similar to those of many UFO religions.[19] She defines herself as a 'starseed', a form of alien, and claims to communicate with technologically inspired creatures, such as 'DNA light bodies', and a panoply of extraterrestrials. One of these characters is Ashtar, the fleet commander of the galactic forces, who in a 'galactic message for humanity', or revelation, refers to 'my colleague Archangel Michael' (Hampton 2022b: 12:44–12:46). Hampton can also contact the mythical ancient Lemurians, believed to reside under Mount Shasta, with its healing 'rainbow energy' (Hampton 2022c). In her universe, her 'team' consists of positive forces that rely on each other, and everything is interconnected, especially through her.

Hampton's contact with this vast array of beings serves as a selling point: 'If you're new here, I channel various beings of light, including angels, Ascended Masters, intergalactic beings, and even Mother Earth. Today, we have Archangel Michael as our guide. Let's start!' (Hampton 2023b: 00:35–01:12).

Hampton does not merely channel intermediary beings; she is one herself. Moreover, she transforms into the beings that she channels. Other claims to perform miracles are more mundane, such as curing herpes (Hampton 2023d). In matters big or small, her charismatic authority is based on her followers' expectation that she will perform something extraordinary. Therefore, for an entrepreneur like Hampton, communication with her followers is paramount, and the relationship is partly formalized in subscriptions, positive reviews and testimonials of her paranormal powers. It is a communicative spiral that starts with Hampton's demonstration of her supernatural abilities, verified by testimonies – for example, when one healer trained by Hampton describes her as 'GOD ENERGY' and another reportedly has seen her 'shapeshift into Archangel Michael, Christ, then Ashtar' (Hampton n.d.-b: A-5). Other testimonies credit her and the archangel Michael for remotely healing a cat with arthritic hips in Michigan (Hampton 2023g).

Although Hampton describes herself as a medium with special access to Michael, she does not claim to have an access monopoly. This means that, to some extent, her inner circle can 'share' her charisma by following her teaching programme to become 'certified Star Healing Intergalactic Energy Practitioners™' (Hampton n.d.-b), who secure her spiritual lineage. However, Hampton remains the authority.

'Save me from all evil': Millenarianism, the apocalypse and conspirituality

The discourse of contemporary Michael mediums is mostly light-hearted and positive, but Michael's revelations are also darker and apocalyptic. For example, in 2010, Hampton channelled that, as of 2012, 'the world as you know it is coming to an end' due to shifting, conscious, loving 'energies' against 'the vibration of cruelty' and the 'frequency of negativity' (Hampton 2010: 12–13). The archangel predicted that the coming years would be a 'time of Nirvana' (Hampton 2010: 12), with less war, hatred, poverty and disease and no more 'germ warfare' (Hampton 2010: 12–13).

Since Hampton's first publication in 2007, the archangel has revealed that 'it is important to destroy evil' and has spoken about dark, sinister entities (Hampton 2007: 83). These inimical forces are active in both spiritual and earthly battles – for example, at the Crucifixion, in daily life and in world events (Hampton 2007: 83). Evil comes in different shapes and sizes, most notably as the Antichrist surrounded by perverse black creatures (86).

In Michael spirituality, millenarian and apocalyptic themes are intimately linked to a conspiratorial scenario of the 'us versus them' binary and frequently refer to evil, secretive forces operating behind the scenes. The basic narrative is that 'Mother Earth' is engaged in a cosmic struggle – a largely invisible battle between light and darkness, between Michael and his army of 'lightworkers' and those who 'manipulate mankind' (Hampton 2022a: 01:40–10:04). Revelations like this from 2018 are typical:

> We stand united against darkness. We stand united against evil. We stand united in our love for each other and within each other. We stand united in a cosmic dimensionality. We stand united with Master Christ energy, Blue Ray, the great central sun. We stand united in disarming armies of darkness with love and kindness. . . . It's imperative, if not urgent, during these last final days of the unseen spiritual battle known as ascendancy to speak even more fully about protection and why this is necessary – more necessary than ever before. (Hampton 2018: 05:57–06:37)

Such fusion of the predominantly female-centric New Age emphasis on the transformation of the self and the more male-driven conspiracy theories about global politics, which has been coined 'conspirituality' (Ward and Voas 2011: 103), is deep-seated among American spiritual entrepreneurs and their followers (Crockford 2021: 153–78).

Like medieval Christian folk traditions, Hampton believes that the archangel can protect people from natural disasters. She blames evil forces for extreme

weather, and in messages from Michael, the frequent 'hurricanes, floods, tornadoes, tsunamis' (Hampton 2010: 13) are associated with a spiritual battle of cosmic significance and millenarian expectations.[20] For example, she asserts that many forest fires in North America in recent years 'have been intentionally set by nefarious races to scatter the remaining Lemurians' (Hampton 2022a: 09:10–09:58). The latter are a mythological, crystalline, spiritually advanced people who are believed by many in American New Age circles to have created a now lost civilization on the American continent long before Native Americans (Crockford 2021: 50–1).

Thematically, many of Hampton's narratives reflect the conspiracy mentality often found in New Age circles – for example, about 'mind control' and elites poisoning people with 'chemtrails', biomedicine or 5G technology. Some recurrent topics are associated with right-wing conspiracy theories, such as Hampton's alternative theories about the origins of Covid-19 and her claim that Michael dismisses global warming as 'propaganda' (Hampton 2022a: 10:49–10:53). Such rejection of scientific consensus and established knowledge also reflects distrust in established authorities more generally. While Hampton consistently emphasizes positivity, peace, love, light, healing and kindness, conspiracy tropes abound, most obviously in 'AAM's' revelations about topics such as the 'financial climate, Ukraine and viruses' (Hampton 2023f). Thus, Michael's messages to Hampton appear to have acquired a darker tone over the years.

Afterthoughts: 'Both a warrior and a healer'

The transformation of the archangel from a Christian to a syncretistic figure in the New Age landscape goes hand in hand with his Americanization. Michael rose to a prominent position in the most important nascent New Age churches of the twentieth century early on, in parallel with the general religious trajectory from Theosophy to New Age. Influential leaders were also seminal angel authors and Michael mediums. Most Michael entrepreneurs uphold this tradition and creatively expand their scripts and techniques. There is also a certain institutional continuity from the first and most seminal post-Theosophical movements and the more network-based Michael mediums of today, as well as possible political and ideological continuities that are worthy of further exploration.[21]

The new constructions of the archangel Michael have retained many of his defining characteristics, both a warrior and a healer.[22] Christian references

still abound, and his classic attributes are still prominent in both iconography and metaphors. The same is true for his two core functions in traditional folk piety, protection and healing, which are interconnected: healing is needed when something or someone has been harmed, while protection is preventive. Michael also combines these roles in hypermodern America. He also illustrates that 'angels travel light and easily slip through the cultural net' (Gilhus 2019: 14). Like Darwin's species, angels 'adapt' to their surroundings, and the versions of Michael discussed in this chapter are tuned to the lifeworld of hypermodern Americans.

The archangel is not only a figure of apocalyptic significance but also a steady companion in mundane activities. A general tendency is that Michael's 'presence' is associated with crises, big or small, real or hypothetical. When his warrior-like, apocalyptic features are accentuated, this indicates that the spiritual battle is intensifying and that inimical forces have become more threatening. In such cases, Michael is invoked, for example by a medium who begs him to 'Save me from all evil' (Silva 2021: 72).[23] The 'enemy' can be defined in psychological, political, material or metaphysical terms as a negative energy in various guises: as foreign states, institutions, diseases or inharmonious homes and relationships. The 'enemy' can be big or small, and the definition depends entirely on perspective. Nevertheless, the basic idea is the same: Michael has the power to protect and heal his believers. Portrayed as a radiant warrior, he protects what is most valuable to his followers.

Spurred on by ideas of an imminent global collapse or individual inconveniences, the archangel, with his mighty sword, consuming flame of divine love, and 'Legion of Light' (Beckler 2021: 123), will cast out fear and negativity. Michael mediums and their followers convey a consistent message across the board: 'Archangel Michael has your back' (Caldwell [2017] 2021: 19), whether your quest is to find truth, happiness or your car keys.

Notes

1 To paraphrase Gilhus's (2014: 71) observation that contemporary religion is everywhere.

2 I am grateful to Karen Swartz, Anne Stensvold and the editors of this volume for their invaluable feedback on earlier drafts of this chapter.

3 I analysed tens of books and a plethora of digital content dedicated to the archangel Michael, including websites, blogs, videos, podcasts and promotional material for Michael-centric activities provided by angel practitioners (and excluding the extensive content on TikTok). The sources include Kelly Hampton's works and digital presence since 2020, encompassing her books, websites and social media.

4 Half (51 per cent) of the American population believe in all five, while only a small proportion (11 per cent) do not.

5 Little research has been dedicated to these movements, with only a few short references to Michael's role. My analysis is based on studies by Bjorling (1992: 99–107), Brown (1997: 105–6), Melton (1994), Barrett (1996: 192–7), Starrs and Wright (2005: 98), Whitsel (2003: xii, 7–8), Rudbøg (2013) and E. Prophet (2016, 2021). I also studied primary sources by the movements' founders, primarily Ballard aka King (2001) and E. C. Prophet (2014, 2023).

6 Mount Shasta has attracted occultists in search of ancient wisdom, higher insights and lost civilizations since the nineteenth century and is now a New Age hub with many Michael-centred activities. Inserting the archangel Michael of Christian folklore into the American landscape can be considered a way of claiming spiritual ownership of Native Americans' ancestral land seized by European settlers. For a discussion of such political aspects of New Age spirituality, see Crockford (2021: 51).

7 Published under the pseudonym Godfré Ray King.

8 This idea and many formulations thereof, especially the association between ideological and spiritual attacks and the call for national purification of internal, inimical forces and renewal through a cleansing fire, are reminiscent of the ideas of many fascist movements, particularly the Romanian Legionary Movement (Endresen 2010) and the Iron Guard (see Chapter 2).

9 The number of members both then and now is uncertain.

10 Not to be confused with her daughter, the researcher Erin Prophet (2016, 2021). To distinguish between the Prophets, I refer to them by their first names in the text. Elizabeth Clare Wulf joined the movement in 1961, later married Mark and became a messenger. After her husband's death in 1973, she became head of the church and the principal medium.

11 The Summit Lighthouse was the name of the church founded by Mark and of the publishing wing of Church Universal and Triumphant, to which the church was renamed during Elizabeth's leadership. Its profile and activities today and Michael's role in it can be seen, for example, in The Summit Lighthouse (2022, 2023).

12 Virtue (2020) later retracted her angel lessons, claiming that she had been deceived by New Age spirituality, and warned against calling on angels because they could be demons in disguise.

13 The characterization is from Caldwell (2021).

14 Manifestation refers to consciously focusing one's thoughts on a desired outcome – related, for instance, to finances or love life – to miraculously make it happen. Visualization is the repeated, systematic envisioning of oneself as already possessing or being what one desires, such as imagining oneself healthy when ill. Affirmation is a form of positive thinking that consists in repeatedly stating one's desires until they materialize.

15 'Tantri Vegan', for example, thanks him for clarifying 'what we need to do as humans'. Another viewer, who has been vegan for some months, states that the message moved her to tears.

16 Master Sananda is an ascended master often associated with Jesus in New Age spirituality.

17 '5thD' in New Age discourse is the 5th Dimension referring to a higher spiritual level, beyond the physical reality of the 3rd Dimension.

18 Hampton's trademarks include Star Healing Intergalactic Energy, Ascended Spaces for creating abundance through home space attuning and an 'astrology-astronomy' system revealed by Michael called Dominion (Hampton 2015, n.d.-b).

19 The UFO cults that emerged after the Second World War were related to millenarian expectations of advanced extraterrestrial beings contacting earth, heralding the advent of a 'new age' of spiritual emancipation for humanity.

20 On Michael's protection against rain and storms in medieval Romania and his battle against demonic beings associated with various water and weather phenomena, see Chapter 4.

21 Michael spirituality occasionally intersects with far-right conspiracy theories, such as QAnon, and support for Donald Trump (president of the United States 2016–2020 and 2024–). For instance, the book cover of *Spiritual Warfare in the 21st Century* (MacFarlane 2018) depicts Michael as a celestial warrior with Trump's face, fighting the Jewish philanthropist George Soros as Satan. Similarly, retired Lieutenant General Michael Flynn, a prominent QAnon figure and leader of Trump's 'Stop the Steal' campaign to overturn the 2020 electoral results, spoke of 'legions' and 'sevenfold rays' at a post-electoral church event in Nebraska (Bartholomew 2021), in a prayer almost identical to one of the invocations to the archangel Michael by E. C. Prophet and Church Universal and Triumphant. Thus, a noteworthy feature of the American Michaelic traditions discussed in this chapter is that similar Michael 'mantras' are used both in political-spiritual mobilization against satanic communists, liberals and Democrats alike and in angel journals encouraging young women to tidy up their rooms or visualize blue and pink energy bubbles.

22 The characterization is from Grace (2020: 1).

23 The phrase is from Silva (2021: 72).

References

Beckler, M. (2021), *Archangel Michael Speaks: 33 Living Transmissions from the Archangel of the Sun*, Monee: Swell Press.

Blavatsky, H. P. (1877), *Isis Unveiled: A Master-Key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Theology*, Internet Sacred Text Archive. Available online: https://sacred-texts.com/the/iu/index.htm (accessed 12 December 2024).

Blavatsky, H. P. (1887). 'The History of a Planet', *Universal Theosophy*. Available online: https://universaltheosophy.com/hpb/the-history-of-a-planet/ (accessed 12 December 2024).

Blavatsky, H. P. (1888), 'The Secret Doctrine: The Synthesis of Science, Religion and Philosophy', *Universal Theosophy*. Available online: https://universaltheosophy.com/hpb/secretdoctrine.html (accessed 12 December 2024).

Caldwell, K. ([2017] 2021), *Michael Protection: If You Call Them They Will Come. Bonus Archangel Journal to Personalize your Experience*, Coppell: Together Publishing.

Caldwell, K. (2021), 'Call for Archangel Help with Our Audios, Books and More', *Archangelology*. Available online: https://archangelology.com/ (accessed 12 December 2024).

Center for the New Age (n.d.), 'Archangel Michael Amulet'. Available online: https://sedonanewagestore.com/product/archangel-michael-amulet/ (accessed 12 December 2024).

Davies, S. (2022), 'How to Manifest with Angels', *Spiritual Healing Blog*, Seek within You. Available online: https://www.seekwithinyou.com/blogs/author/638-stephan (accessed 12 December 2024).

Grace, A. (2020), *Archangelology: Michael Protection and Secret Angelic Codes*, Self-published.

Hall, S. (n.d.), *Psychic Protection with Archangel Michael*, [Video] Insight Timer. Available online: https://insighttimer.com/sarahhall444/guided-meditations/psychic-protection-with-archangel-michael (accessed 12 December 2024).

Hampton, K. (2007), *Into the White Light: The Revelations of Archangel Michael*, n.p.: Blue Moon Publishing.

Hampton, K. (2010), *2012 and Beyond: The Truth from Archangel Michael*, Bloomington: Balboa Press.

Hampton, K. (2015), 'Ascension, Angels, Star Healing Intergalactic Energy™', [Podcast] *Archangel Michael: What Goes On in Heaven w Kelly Hampton*, Castbox. Available online: https://castbox.fm/vb/115327349 (accessed 12 December 2024).

Hampton, K. (2016a), 'Cruise into Spirit with Archangel Michael', [Podcast] *Archangel Michael: What Goes on In Heaven w Kelly Hampton*, Castbox. Available online: https://castbox.fm/vb/115327364 (accessed 12 December 2024).

Hampton, K. (2016b), *The Book of Animals*, n.p.: Mira Digital Publishing.

Hampton, K. (2018), 'August 8, 2018 Golden Dome Process and Other Spiritual Protection from AAM and Kelly Hampton', [Video] *YouTube*. Available online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jEjWdt1gj4c (accessed 12 December 2024).

Hampton, K. (2022a), 'Are Global Disasters, Natural like Hurricane Ian that affected Cuba and Florida? Part 1', [Video] *YouTube*. Available online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p4rsfuvoEJ8 (accessed 12 December 2024).

Hampton, K. (2022b), 'Channeling Ashtar Sheran with Important Messages Including Future Predictions / with Kelly Hampton', [Video] *YouTube*. Available online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MeXGpq6ST_o (accessed 12 December 2024).

Hampton, K. (2022c), 'Using Rainbow Energy from Mt. Shasta for Healing', [Video] *YouTube*. Available online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=8e8QJIMaY8A (accessed 12 December 2024).

Hampton, K. (2023a), 'Archangel Michael on A. I. Is It Legal?' *YouTube*. Available online: https://www.youtube.com/@KellyHampton/community (accessed 12 December 2024).

Hampton, K. (2023b), 'Archangel Michael Predictions for June-September 2023', [Video] *YouTube*. Available online: https://youtu.be/euYBi9pKiPY (accessed 12 December 2024).

Hampton, K. (2023c), 'What is an Angelic Reading?' *Kelly Hampton Online*. Available online: https://kellyhamptononline.com/reading-services/private-channeled-reading/ (accessed 12 December 2024).

Hampton, K. (2023d), 'What Is Star Healing Intergalactic Energy™?' *Kelly Hampton Online*. Available online: https://kellyhamptononline.com/healing_services/private-star-healing-session-for-adults/ (accessed 12 December 2024).

Hampton, K. (2023e), 'Who Is Kelly Hampton?' *Kelly Hampton Online*. Available online: https://kellyhamptononline.com/about-kelly-hampton/ (accessed 12 December 2024).

Hampton, K. (2023f), 'World Prophecies for 2023 from Archangel Michael / Financial Climate, Ukraine and Viruses', [Video] *YouTube*. Available online: https://youtu.be/pid-3rU8oUc (accessed 12 December 2024).

Hampton, K. (2023g), 'Why Is Star Healing Intergalactic Energy™ Valuable for Small Animals and Equines?' *Kelly Hampton Online*. Available online: https://kellyhamptononline.com/healing_services/private-star-healing-for-small-animals-and-equine/ (accessed 12 December 2024).

Hampton, K. (n.d.-a), 'Join Me.....and I will Personally Instruct You to Learn One of the Most Powerful and Revolutionary 5thD Healing Systems on Our Planet!' *Kelly Hampton Online*. Available online: http://kellyhamptononline.com/illuminatedlightschool/ (accessed 12 December 2024).

Hampton, K. (n.d.-b), 'Kelly Hampton: Prophecy, Prayer, Prosperity and Peace with Archangel Michael Package (S11)', *Beyond the Ordinary Show*. Available online: https://beyondtheordinaryshow.com/meet-the-guests/kelly-hampton/divine-you/ (accessed 12 December 2024).

Hampton, K. (n.d.-c), 'The Unconditional Love, Healing, and Wholeness You Deserve is Within Reach!' *Kelly Hampton Online*. Available online: http://kellyhamptononline.com/illuminatedlightschool/ (accessed 12 December 2024).

Hampton, K. (n.d.-d), 'Powerful Healing Products Using Light Language from Archangel Michael!' *Kelly Hampton Online*. Available online: https://kellyhamptononline.com/starcodecreations-the-light-way-to-heal/ (accessed 12 December 2024).

Johnson, K. (2021), 'Archangel Michael in the Reiki Session', *Reiki Rays*. Available online: https://reikirays.com/87365/archangel-michael-in-the-reiki-session/ (accessed 12 December 2024).

King, L. R. (2001), *Beloved Archangel Michael Speaks on the Angelic Host / by Beloved Archangel Michael through Lotus Ray King*, Chicago: Saint Germain Press.

Macfarlane, R. (2018), *Spiritual Warfare in the 21st Century: Donald Trump vs the New World Order*, Mission, BC: Greater Mysteries Publications.

Newbury, L. (2011), *An Angel's Guide to Working with the Power of Light*, Washington DC: Sixth Books.

Ocean, S. (2016), *A Guide for Lightworkers by Archangel Michael*, Middletown: Balboa Press.

Prophet, E. C. (2008), *I Am Your Guard: How Archangel Michael Can Protect You,* Gardiner: Summit University Press.

Prophet, E. C. (2014), *Talk with Angels: How to Work with Angels of Light for Guidance, Comfort & Healing*, Gardiner: Summit University Press.

Prophet, E. C. (2023), 'Learn How to Improve Your Life and Make the World a Better Place with the Help of the Seven Archangels', *Archangel Lessons*. Available online: https://www.archangellessons.com/ (accessed 12 December 2024).

Silva, M. (2021), *Archangels*. Monee: Self-published.

Starmer, M. (2016), 'Archangel Michael Speaks about the Implications of Our Dietary Choices', [Video] *YouTube*. Available online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YxN96Gmbb5o (accessed 12 December 2024).

Steiner, R. (1917), 'The Fall of the Spirits of Darkness/GA 177: 9. The Battle between Michael and "The Dragon"', *The Rudolf Steiner Archive*. Available online: https://rsarchive.org/Lectures/19171014p01.html (accessed 12 December 2024).

StMichael, S. (2012), 'Archangel Michael', *Mystical Mind, Angelic Heart*. Available online: https://mysticalmindangelicheart.wordpress.com/all-about-archangels/archangel-michael/ (accessed 12 December 2024).

The Summit Lighthouse (2022), 'Archangel Michael and Faith: Archangel Michael and the Guardian Angels'. Available online: https://www.summitlighthouse.org/archangel-michael-faith/ (accessed 12 December 2024).

The Summit Lighthouse (2023), 'Free – Teachings of the Ascended Masters'. Available online: https://www.summitlighthouse.org/ascended-master-teachings-free/ (accessed 12 December 2024).

Virtue, D. (2009), *The Miracles of Archangel Michael*. New York: Hay House.

Virtue, D. (2020), 'Why We Should Never Call upon Angels', *Doreen Virtue*. Available online: https://doreenvirtue.com/2020/11/06/why-we-should-never-call-upon-angels/ (accessed 12 December 2024).

Secondary sources

Alver, B. G. (1999), 'Fra englevagt til englevinger', in B. G. Alver, I. S. Gilhus, L. Mikaelsson and T. Selberg (eds), *Myte, magi og mirakel i møte med det moderne*, 183–99, Oslo: Pax.

Bader, C. D., F. C. Mencken and P. Froese (2007), 'American Piety 2005: Content and Methods of the Baylor Religion Survey', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 46 (4): 447–63. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468–5906.2007.00371.x.

Barrett, D. V. (1996), *Sects, 'Cults' & Alternative Religions: A World Survey and Sourcebook*, London: Blandford.

Bartholomew, R. (2021), 'Mike Flynn Gets Evangelical Crowd to Recite Adapted Elizabeth Clare Prophet Prayer', *Bartholomew's Notes*. Available online: https://barthsnotes.com/2021/10/07/mike-flynn-gets-evangelical-crowd-to-recite-adapted-elizabeth-clare-prophet-prayer/ (accessed 12 December 2024).

Bjorling, J. (1992), *Channeling: A Bibliographic Exploration.* London: Routledge.

Brown, M. F. (1997), *The Channeling Zone: American Spirituality in an Anxious Age*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Crockford, S. (2021), *Ripples of the Universe: Spirituality in Sedona, Arizona*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Endresen, C. (2010), '"The Legionaries Rise!" The Neo-Legionary Movement in Post-Communist Romania', *Südost-Forschungen*, 69/70: 284–317.

Gallup (2023), 'Religion'. Available online: https://news.gallup.com/poll/1690/Religion.aspx (accessed 12 December 2024).

Gallup News Service (2023), 'Gallup Poll Social Series: Values and Beliefs'. Available online: https://news.gallup.com/file/poll/508925/230725BeliefReligiousEntities.pdf (accessed 12 December 2024).

Gilhus, I. S. (2014), 'Angels in Norway: Religious Border-Crossers and Border-Markers', in M. Bowman and Ü. Volk (eds), *Vernacular Religion in Everyday Life: Expressions of Belief*, 242–57, Abington: Routledge.

Gilhus, I. S. (2019), 'On the Category of Angels', in I. S. Gilhus, A. Tsakos and M. C. Wright (eds), *The Archangel Michael in Africa: History, Cult and Persona*, 11–21, London: Bloomsbury.

Hammer, O. (2004), *Claiming Knowledge: Strategies of Epistemology from Theosophy to the New Age*, Leiden: Brill.

Hammer, O. (2013), 'Cognitively Optimal Religiosity: New Age as a Case Study', in S. J. Sutcliffe and I. S. Gilhus (eds), *New Age Spirituality: Rethinking Religion*, 212–26, Durham: Acumen.

Hammer, O. and K. Swartz (2020), 'Altered States of Consciousness and Charismatic Authority: The Case of Judith von Halle', *Aura*, 11(1): 4–22. https://doi.org/10.31265/aura.356.

Melton, J. G. (1994), 'The Church Universal and Triumphant', in J. Lewis and J. G. Melton (eds), *Church Universal and Triumphant in Scholarly Perspective*, 1–20, Stanford: Center for Academic Publication.

Mikaelsson, L. (2013), 'New Age and the Spirit of Capitalism', in S. J. Sutcliffe and I. S. Gilhus (eds), *New Age Spirituality: Rethinking Religion*, 160–73, Durham: Acumen.

Prophet, E. (2016), 'Charisma and Authority in New Religious Movements', in J. R. Lewis and I. Tøllefsen (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of New Religious Movements*, vol. 2, 36–49, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Prophet, E. (2021), 'Church Universal and Triumphant and The Summit Lighthouse', in J. Crossley and A. Lockhart (eds), *Critical Dictionary of Apocalyptic and Millenarian Movements*. Available online: https://www.cdamm.org/articles/CUT-TSL (accessed 12 December 2024).

Rudbøg, T. (2013), 'The I AM Activity', in O. Hammer and M. Rothstein (eds), *Handbook of the Theosophical Current*, 151–72. Leiden: Brill.

Starrs, P. F. and J. B. Wright (2005), 'Utopia, Dystopia, and Sublime Apocalypse in Montana's Church Universal and Triumphant', *Geographical Review*, 95 (1): 97–121. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1931–0846.2005.tb00193.x.

Utriainen, T. (2013), 'Doing Things with Angels: Agency, Alterity and Practices of Enchantment', in S. J. Sutcliffe and I. S. Gilhus (eds), *New Age Spirituality: Rethinking Religion*, 242–55, Durham: Acumen.

Ward, C. and D. Voas (2011), 'The Emergence of Conspirituality', *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 26 (1): 103–21. https://doi.org/10.1080/13537903.2011.539846.

Wessinger, C. (2012), 'Charismatic Leaders in New Religions', in O. Hammer and M. Rothstein (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to New Religious Movements*, 80–96, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Whitsel, B. C. (2003), *The Church Universal and Triumphant: Elizabeth Clare Prophet's Apocalyptic Movement*, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.

Index*

* The index was compiled as per standard conventions of Bloomsbury.