NOTES AND DISCUSSIONS

THE LAST OF THE OPTATIVES

Where are the blossoms of those summers!—fallen, one by one: so all of my family departed, each in his turn, to the land of spirits. I am on the hill-top, and must go down into the valley; and when Uncas follows in my footsteps, there will no longer be any of the blood of the Sagamores, for my boy is the last of the Mohicans.

James Fenimore Cooper, *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826)

1. PREAMBLE

Greek grammatical scholarship abounds in orthodox observations that reflect received wisdom and are increasingly overdue for reassessment. The sphere of verbal usage is rich in examples.[1] Many have been brought to light by the dynamic contemporary debate on the character of aspect and the structure of the verbal system. The present paper concerns a minor piece of verbal flotsam that constitutes one more such example. I shall reconsider the previous statements of grammarians concerning a single formulaic expression that happens to have survived from Classical Greek right through into the Modern language. This formula has attracted limited scholarly interest. What has been said is not entirely reliable.

Let us begin with some famous lines, the opening of Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes:*

Κάδμου πολῖται, χρὴ λέγειν τὰ καίρια
ὅστις φυλάσσει πρᾶγος ἐν πρύμνῃ πόλεως
οἴακα νωμῶν, βλέφαρα μὴ κοιμῶν ὕπνῳ.
εἰ μὲν γὰρ εὖ πράξαιμεν, αἰτία θεοῦ·
εἰ δ᾽ αὖθ᾽, ὃ μὴ γένοιτο, συμφορὰ τύχοι,
᾽Ετεοκλέης ἂν εἷς πολὺς κατὰ πτόλιν
ὑμνοῖθ᾽ ὑπ᾽ ἀστῶν φροιμίοις πολυρρόθοις
οἰμώγμασίν θ᾽, ὧν Ζεὺς ἀλεξητήριος
ἐπώνυμος γένοιτο Καδμείων πόλει.

1. Two recent studies illustrating the point are C. M. J. Sicking and P. Stork, "The Grammar of the So-Called Historical Present in Ancient Greek," in *Grammar As Interpretation: Greek Literature in Its Linguistic Contexts,* ed. E. J. Bakker (Leiden, New York, and Cologne, 1997), 131–68; and T. V. Evans, "Another Ghost: The Greek Epistolary Perfect," *Glotta* 75 (1999): 194–221.

Citizens of Cadmus, one who takes care of state affairs, wielding the helm at the city's stern, not lulling the eyelids with sleep, must say what is timely. For if we were to fare well, the credit would be a god's. But if on the other hand—may it not happen—misfortune were to come about, Eteocles would be the one much harped upon by the townsfolk throughout the city in threatening murmurs and lamentations, as to which may Zeus the Protector be true to his name for the city of the Cadmeans.

This short passage is full of material for the commentators. T. G. Tucker, for instance, devotes more than two pages of his 1908 commentary to its elucidation.[2] Reasonably enough, among so many points of interest, he passes over the expression ὃ μὴ γένοιτο ("may it not happen") in line 5. This, indeed, is a characteristic response. A survey of a number of the commentaries shows the following pattern of reactions. Some writers, like Tucker, simply ignore the expression, others offer us a few parallels, while others make brief mention of the relevant textual issue of ὅ versus ἅ.[3] Others in turn note that these words comprise a stock apotropaic,[4] echoing an observation already to be found in the scholia to this very line: οὕτως ἔθος ἀποτρέπεσθαι τὰ βλάσφημα ("in this way it is customary to turn aside the effects of ill-omened words"). All in all, the play's commentators find little to say about the formula. For the historian of the Greek language, however, it has considerable significance, since at its heart lies the optative form γένοιτο. This is the expression's earliest occurrence to which a chronological peg can be attached—the *Seven against Thebes* dates from 467 B.C.E.—and in the manifestation μὴ γένοιτο it has been said to be the only survival of the optative mood in Modern Greek.

2. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF μὴ γένοιτο

The post-Classical desystematization of the optative is well documented. As a category of the verbal system it becomes steadily rarer and disappears by the early medieval period. The optative's various functions decline at different rates, being replaced by the subjunctive and by periphrastic constructions.[5] Of its two basic types, the potential optative appears to be lost relatively early in the Koine period, while the volitive optative, expressing wishes for the future, persists longest of all. It is eventually restricted to fossilized expressions of an increasingly lexical, rather than grammatical, character. The μὴ γένοιτο formula is the most familiar of these and, remarkably, has lingered into the Modern language. Basil Mandilaras writes in his 1973 study *The Verb in the Greek Non-Literary Papyri* that γένοιτο "is the only attestation of the optative in Modern Greek and is due apparently to the language of the Church." He observes by way of support (in a footnote) that μὴ γένοιτο accounts for fifteen of thirty-eight examples of the volitive optative in the New Testament.[6]

2. T. G. Tucker, ed., *The* Seven against Thebes *of Aeschylus* (Cambridge, 1908), 8–10.

3. For this see J. Diggle, *Studies on the Text of Euripides* (Oxford, 1981), 104, on *Ion* 731.

4. I. Flagg, ed., *The* Seven against Thebes *of Aeschylus* (Boston, 1900), 51; G. Italie, ed., *Aeschylus'* Zeven tegen Thebe (Leiden, 1950), 27; G. O. Hutchinson, ed., *Aeschylus:* Septem contra Thebas (Oxford, 1985), 43.

5. On the desystematization see T. V. Evans, *Verbal Syntax in the Greek Pentateuch: Natural Greek Usage and Hebrew Interference* (Oxford, 2001), 175–78.

6. B. G. Mandilaras, *The Verb in the Greek Non-Literary Papyri* (Athens, 1973), §629. Mandilaras seems here to indicate that the positive manifestation of the formula, γένοιτο "may it happen," is still in use alongside μὴ γένοιτο. My own native-speaker informants tell me that it is rare and likely to occur only in very conservative speech (e.g., in forensic language) as a *katharevousa* feature. It is also worth noting a possible link here to biblical language; γένοιτο is used in the Septuagint as a rendering for אָמֵן (see, e.g., Evans, *Verbal Syntax* [n. 5 above], 83, 185), though it has to be observed that the transliteration ἀμήν also appears (J. Lust,

3. SURVIVALS OF THE ANCIENT OPTATIVE IN MODERN GREEK

Mandilaras' statement provides my point of departure. It ought to command a good deal of respect, since it comes from a native speaker of Greek. Nor does it lack support from other authorities.[7] Yet in its first limb it is not true. For we also have in Modern Greek θεός φυλάξοι ("God forbid!"; "Saints preserve us!")[8] This expression in fact appears to have more vigor than μη γένοιτο in the Modern vernacular (note that I employ the new monotonic system of accentuation for Modern Greek examples). My own informants report that θεός φυλάξοι is still used in Greece in everyday conversation, even by people of limited education, though it is apparently on the wane among younger elements of the population.[9] One individual, of mature years, sees no distinction in usage between μη γένοιτο and θεός φυλάξοι. A second informant, approximately thirty years his junior, describes μη γένοιτο to me as "more sophisticated" and significantly less frequent than θεός φυλάξοι (to which she ascribes a "dramatic" force). Since the influence of the *katharevousa* has abated, μη γένοιτο has in her opinion become less a part of ordinary language and is tending (more than θεός φυλάξοι) to be restricted to older speakers.[10] The latter assessment tends to support the view of some authorities that μη γένοιτο is in Modern Greek a somewhat "learned" expression.[11]

Thus, rather like Uncas among the Mohicans, μη γένοιτο turns out not to be the last of the optatives after all. We can dispose of that misrepresentation already. A stronger claim to the distinction can be advanced for θεός φυλάξοι, though μη γένοιτο remains alive to some extent and one should be wary of assuming the absolute "death" of any Greek lexical item.[12]

E. Eynikel, and K. Hauspie, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint,* 2 vols. [Stuttgart, 1992–96], s.v.) and becomes the standard liturgical term at an early period.

7. J. H. Moulton, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek,* vol. 1, *Prolegomena*[3] (Edinburgh, 1908), 194, with notes on pp. 240, 249; A. Debrunner, *Geschichte der griechischen Sprache,* vol. 2, *Grundfragen und Grundzüge des nachklassischen Griechisch* (Berlin, 1954), 123.

8. These glosses are from D. N. Stavropoulos, *Oxford Greek-English Learner's Dictionary* (Oxford, 1988), s.v. φυλά[γ]ω; see also A. Mirambel, *Grammaire du grec moderne,* new ed. (Paris, 1969), 164, followed by F. T. Gignac, *A Grammar of the Greek Papyri of the Roman and Byzantine Periods,* vol. 2, *Morphology* (Milan, 1981), p. 359, n. 7 (Gignac refers to Mirambel's 1949 edition). The form φυλάξοι is a hybrid, the -οι ending being attached to a first aorist stem. This is a characteristic type of morphological development and may have arisen quite early. Electronic searches of *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae,* CD-ROM E (University of California, 1999) and PHI Greek Documentary Texts, CD-ROM 7 (Packard Humanities Institute, 1991–96)—henceforth *TLG* and PHI 7—did not, however, reveal any examples. The expression apparently postdates the Koine period. Perhaps Mandilaras and others (n. 7) are thinking only of forms attested in the Classical language when citing μὴ γένοιτο as the last survival of the optative? The anonymous reader in fact speculates that φυλάξοι may be "a (very) late false archaism" built from the phonetically identical φυλάξει (see n. 9); this is certainly possible.

9. Variants of θεός φυλάξοι in which the optative form is replaced have, incidentally, been in use in the language for a considerable period, e.g., Θεός να σας φυλάει, "may God keep you safe/preserve you" (Stavropoulos, *Learner's Dictionary* [n. 8 above], 952; Kalomira Palli, a native speaker, notes also an aspectual alternative of the expression with φυλάξει). It is this type of construction that Moulton's informant W. H. D. Rouse, mentioning ο θεός να φυλάξη, took to be the Modern Greek equivalent of μὴ γένοιτο (Moulton, *Prolegomena* [n. 7 above], p. 249, n. to p. 240; see also p. 243, n. to p. 32, on Rouse).

10. For these observations I am grateful to Fr. Miltiades Chryssavgis and Kalomira Palli respectively.

11. See again Moulton, *Prolegomena,* p. 240, n. to p. 194, and p. 249, n. to p. 240; Debrunner, *Geschichte* (n. 7 above), 123; E. Schwyzer, *Griechische Grammatik auf der Grundlage von Karl Brugmanns Griechische Grammatik,* vol. 2: *Syntax und syntaktische Stilistik,* 3d impression, ed. A. Debrunner (Munich, 1966), p. 337 and n. 2.

12. John Lee has pointed out to me the remarkable capacity of old vocabulary items to survive and to resurface in the Modern Greek vernacular; cf. in general the study of G. P. Shipp, *Modern Greek Evidence for the Ancient Greek Vocabulary* (Sydney, 1979).

4. "THE LANGUAGE OF THE CHURCH"

What, then, of the second element of Mandilaras' comment, that the long survival of μὴ γένοιτο "is due apparently to the language of the Church"? This idea seems much more reliable, but is rather vague. What does "the language of the Church" mean exactly? Are we to think specifically of biblical language, or do Mandilaras' words take in the usage of the Church Fathers? Or do they have a broader reference again, embracing the massive corpus of liturgical texts that developed in the Byzantine era? It will be assumed here that he has in mind not only the New Testament usage that he specifically cites, but all these related writings as well. We next need to ask to what extent use of the apotropaic in these other works is influenced directly by the New Testament. Does it have any other motivation? And to what degree should "Church" language be distinguished from the general corpus of Koine Greek in this matter? We have seen at the outset—in the Aeschylean example cited—that μὴ γένοιτο has a pedigree extending back far beyond the composition of the Greek Bible.

It must be admitted at once that my study cannot address all the relevant materials. I shall attempt in the following sections to trace the history of μὴ γένοιτο in literary and documentary texts only as far as c. 400 C.E. This is a major task, but is made manageable by the advent of the *TLG* and PHI 7 databanks (see n. 8) and electronic search engines. Through a sensitive application of these tools it should in theory be more or less possible to identify all examples of μὴ γένοιτο in Ancient Greek. Accordingly, I shall seek to isolate, as far as possible, all occurrences of the formula down to the New Testament. For usage in texts postdating the New Testament I shall take a different approach. An exhaustive treatment would involve very great labor for small gain, and seems to me unnecessary (indeed, μὴ γένοιτο would be an appropriate response to the suggestion of such an undertaking). The requirement is to establish the key lines of historical development. I shall endeavor to achieve this by focusing on a selection of important authors and works in the period 100–400 C.E. I shall not pursue developments up to and beyond the "black hole" in the evidence at the end of the Koine period, when the nature of our sources becomes problematic. A treatment of μὴ γένοιτο in liturgical texts and sermons, a highly probable conduit for transmission of the formula into popular language, would probably yield interesting results, but lies beyond the competence of the present writer. In any case, I believe the significant points reveal themselves in the earlier material.

Before turning to the data, there is a need to define the formula as it is treated here. My counts are restricted to cases where μὴ γένοιτο appears either without externally expressed subject or with a neuter demonstrative or relative pronoun as subject. Thus I exclude examples like Demosthenes 9.65: καίτοι μὴ γένοιτο μέν, ὦ Ἀθηναῖοι, τὰ πράγματ' ἐν τούτῳ ("And yet, Athenians, may matters not turn out in this way"), where τὰ πράγματα is the subject. Only cases in which the verb is used absolutely are included, not similar instances where it is copulative. This accounts for omission of cases like *Odyssey* 7.316: μὴ τοῦτο φίλον Διὶ πατρὶ γένοιτο ("May this not be pleasing to father Zeus"). On the other hand, I include instances where the formula governs a dependent noun clause, for example, *I.Knidos* 1.147.23–25: καὶ μὴ γένοιτο | εὐειλάτ[ου] τυ|χεῖν Δάματρο[ς] ("And may it not happen that she encounter Demeter very merciful"); or adverbial clause, for example, Demosthenes 19.285: μὴ γὰρ οὕτω γένοιτο κακῶς τῇ πόλει ὥστ' . . . ("For may it not turn out so badly for the city that . . ."); or in turn where the verb takes adverbial modifiers, for example, Demosthenes 25.95: ὃ μήτ' ἰδίᾳ μήτε δημοσίᾳ γένοιτο ("May it not happen in private

or in public"). Others may well prefer definitions either narrower or broader. Both for this reason and others (for instance, problems of dating, for one example of which see n. 13) it is safest to take all my figures as approximate.

5. THE HISTORY OF μὴ γένοιτο TO THE NEW TESTAMENT PERIOD

In all literary and documentary sources predating the New Testament (c. 70–100 C.E.), my investigation reveals a total of only thirty-nine examples of μὴ γένοιτο.[13] We have already noted the earliest datable occurrence from the *Seven against Thebes*. Aeschylus provides another at *Agamemnon* 1249 in the slightly different manifestation ἀλλὰ μὴ γένοιτό πως ("But may it not happen at all"). From the first, μὴ γένοιτο shows a natural enough affinity with direct speech and analogous linguistic contexts. It is characteristically used to reinforce a rhetorical point, either statement or question, in the declamatory passages of the poets and orators. Dramatic poets—for whom ὃ μὴ γένοιτο has a metrically convenient shape—provide ten of the examples. Apart from Aeschylus, there are three in Euripides (*Heracl.* 714, *Ion* 731, frag. 953.28), three in Aristophanes (*Vesp.* 536, *Lys.* 147, *Thesm.* 714), one in Menander (*Dis Exapaton* 111), and one in Alexis (frag. 107.3). Among the orators there are eighteen examples: two in Lysias (19.38, 31.14); fifteen in Demosthenes (8.51; 10.27; 15.21; 19.149, 285; 25.30, 32, 75, 86, 95; 27.67; 28.21; 36.49; 40.56; *Letters* 3.33); and one in Dinarchus (1.66). Thus, the poets and orators together give us twenty-eight of the thirty-nine instances.[14] I also note a single example in Herodotus (5.111—in a speech), and another in Plato (*Leg.* 918d), along with two documentary cases. These come from a lead curse tablet from Knidos of the second or first century B.C.E. (*I.Knidos* 1.147, 23, cited in §4 above; the same expression is restored in *I.Knidos* 1.158, 5), and a contract on papyrus of 5 B.C.E. (*C.Pap.Gr.* 1.9, 11). In addition, there are seven examples of μὴ γένοιτο in the Septuagint (Genesis 44:7, 17; Joshua 22:29, 24:16; 3 Kingdoms 20:3 [Masoretic Text 1 Kings 21:3]; 1 Maccabees 9:10, 13:5). This group involves the special issues of translation Greek. In each case the apotropaic is used with dative of person and infinitive, except for Joshua 22:29, where we find accusative of person and infinitive, and 1 Maccabees 9:10, which has the infinitive only, without expressed pronoun. Thus Genesis 44:17: εἶπεν δὲ ᾽Ιωσήφ Μή μοι γένοιτο ποιῆσαι τὸ ῥῆμα τοῦτο ("And Joseph said 'May it not happen that I [lit. 'for me to'] do this thing.'"). Wherever a Hebrew original is available for comparison, the Greek construction renders the oath formula חלילה ל ("far be it from . . ."), plus infinitival clause.[15] Alongside these thirty-nine instances we should note an alternative manifestation of the formula with aspectual variation in an epigram traditionally attributed to Plato, namely *Palatine Anthology* 5.79, 3: ὃ μὴ γίγνοιτο, and apparently another

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13. Not included are the half-dozen examples in some recensions of the Alexander Romance. These date at least to the early centuries C.E., but may be as old as the late centuries B.C.E.

14. Not strictly relevant to this study but worth passing mention here are the rarer apotropaics ὃ μὴ τύχοι, which occurs some four times in Euripides, and ὃ μὴ συμβαίη, which occurs twice in Demosthenes. They are practically synonymous with ὃ μὴ γένοιτο, and occur in similar environments, but do not rival its popularity and persistence. A *TLG* search reveals a mere two additional examples of ὃ μὴ συμβαίη in the later language (in Aelius Aristides and the scholia to Aristotle).

15. There are alternative LXX renderings of חלילה ל, e.g., μηδαμῶς plus dative in 1 Kingdoms 24:7, 26:11, and observe the comments of J. W. Wevers (*Notes on the Greek Text of Genesis* [Atlanta, 1993], 743) on the usage at Genesis 18:25; he may well be correct in arguing that the Genesis translator distinguishes divine reference there by employing μηδαμῶς.

in *GDI* 2.1832, 24: ὃ μὴ γίνοιτο, a manumission decree of 173 B.C.E. from Delphi, written in Phocian dialect (on this example see the appendix).

The Septuagintal examples of μὴ γένοιτο bring us into the territory of biblical language and may return us to the fifteen New Testament cases mentioned by Mandilaras. The formula is admittedly hardly common here either, but there is an interesting concentration in Romans. Luke has one instance (20:16), while the other fourteen are in Paul's writings, ten of them in Romans (Romans 3:4, 6, 31; 6:2, 15; 7:7, 13; 9:14; 11:1, 11; 1 Corinthians 6:15; Galatians 2:17; 3:21; 6:14). Three significant points deserve notice with regard to the New Testament evidence. First, the specially argumentative style of Romans is the probable motivation for the formula's comparative frequency there. Paul is using the expression in the tradition of the Classical orators and the context of Romans is peculiarly suitable for it.[16] Second, throughout the New Testament we have the formula only as μὴ γένοιτο, never ὃ μὴ γένοιτο, which is common in the Classical writers. Of the thirty-nine earlier cases twenty-two are couched within parenthetic relative clauses. Third, Galatians 6:14 is the only example that has μὴ γένοιτο with dative of person and infinitive; ἐμοὶ δὲ μὴ γένοιτο καυχᾶσθαι εἰ μὴ ἐν τῷ σταυρῷ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ("May it not happen that I am [lit. "for me to be"] boastful, unless in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ"). It is thus alone in agreeing with the Septuagintal manifestation of the formula and in arguably being derived from it directly. A convincing argument can hardly be advanced that Luke and Paul are influenced more by the Septuagint than by the Classical tradition. In all the other New Testament examples μὴ γένοιτο is employed absolutely, as a flourish to reinforce a rhetorical question or statement, in a manner strongly reminiscent of Classical usage. Thus Romans 7:7 Τί οὖν ἐροῦμεν; ὁ νόμος ἁμαρτία; μὴ γένοιτο ("So what shall we say? Is the law sin? Surely not!").

6. USE OF μὴ γένοιτο IN THE PERIOD CIRCA 100–400 C.E.

We can now turn our attention to the history of μὴ γένοιτο after the New Testament (in this part of the analysis where thorough coverage of the evidence is no longer my purpose I shall not provide full documentation of the very numerous examples). If we trace developments in selected Patristic writers, some interesting patterns begin to appear. I have taken as my sample nine authors, namely Justin Martyr (c. 100–65), Clement of Alexandria (c. 150 to between 211 and 216), Origen (probably 184 or 185–254 or 255), Eusebius (c. 260–339), Athanasius (c. 295–373), Gregory of Nazianzus (329–89), Basil of Caesarea (c. 330–79), his brother Gregory of Nyssa (c. 330–95), and John Chrysostom (c. 354–407). My analysis yields the following distribution: Justin Martyr provides no examples of μὴ γένοιτο. Clement has three, all of which are New Testament quotations. In Origen I find twenty-nine examples. All but three of these are biblical quotations, a couple of them slightly modified. Eusebius has five examples, of which three are New Testament quotations. Of the other two, one has the relative pronoun as subject, thus ὃ μὴ γένοιτο, the type completely absent from the New Testament. In Athanasius μὴ γένοιτο has become something of a mannerism. He has some 136 examples, of which three appear as ὃ μὴ γένοιτο and two are New Testament quotations. Gregory of Nazianzus has seven examples of plain μὴ γένοιτο, all original. Basil has nineteen examples, of which four are New Testament

16. I thank Greg Fox for this observation.

quotations and three more have ὃ μὴ γένοιτο. Gregory of Nyssa has four examples of μὴ γένοιτο, of which one is a New Testament quotation. Finally, the highly productive John Chrysostom provides the remarkable figure of 399 examples, including twenty cases of ὃ μὴ γένοιτο and thirty-seven biblical quotations.

What do these figures tell us? They are, it needs to be said, potentially misleading in certain respects. The extreme difference between John Chrysostom's total and that of Clement, for instance, is inevitably influenced by significant differences in output and accidents of survival (we might compare the contrast between the two examples found in Lysias and the fifteen in Demosthenes' massive output). This is not in fact of great importance for the present purpose. It does, however, demand that due caution be exercised in observing an apparent diachronic increase in frequency of the formula outside biblical quotation and the remarkable penchant for it of Athanasius and John Chrysostom. Another minor issue that we can observe in passing is that my counts include instances from spurious works contained in the corpora of the authors studied. Some of these may have a quite late date.

Much more to the point, biblical, and especially Pauline, usage clearly influences the Patristic writers. Apart from direct quotation and paraphrase, they expand, in certain cases very freely, the employment of μὴ γένοιτο in the manner of Paul, for example, John Chrysostom *Homilies 1–55 on Acts* (Migne, *PG* 40.326, 45–47): Τί τοῦτό ἐστι; Παῦλος ψεύδεται; Ἄπαγε. Τί οὖν; οὐκ ἠρνήσατο; μὴ γένοιτο ("What is this? Does Paul lie? Get away! What then? Did he deny that he was [Christian]? Surely not!"). This pattern of usage certainly supports Mandilaras' ideas about transmission of the expression. The New Testament and the derivative writings of the Church Fathers are undoubtedly an important vehicle for preservation of μὴ γένοιτο. And figures like John Chrysostom played a central role in the development of the more "popular" Christian writings, often originating in the form of sermons, which reached the ears of the masses.[17]

Yet the linguistic situation is more complex. As observed, we also find in the Patristic authors the ὃ μὴ γένοιτο manifestation of the formula that is familiar from Classical writers and unknown in the New Testament, e.g., Basil *Letters* 116.1, 30 (Migne, *PG* 32.533, 5–6): εἰ δέ, ὃ μὴ γένοιτο, τὰ αὐτὰ μένει βουλεύματα ("But if— may it not happen—intentions remain the same"). In addition, there is frequent use of μὴ γένοιτο governing dependent noun clauses, e.g., John Chrysostom *Homilies 1–44 on I Corinthians* (Migne, *PG* 41.330, 20–21): Μὴ γὰρ δὴ γένοιτο ἡμᾶς πάντα παθεῖν, ὅσα δυνατὸν ἐνεγκεῖν ("For indeed, may it not happen that we suffer everything that it is possible to bear"). This usage too is absent from the New Testament. I would suggest that these factors at once show us that employment of the formula by the Church Fathers is not simply a "biblical" usage. It is a feature of "high" style, that is, an Atticism, part of that web of artificial linguistic phenomena employed in later Greek for their positive stylistic value.[18] In the fifth century B.C.E. ὃ μὴ γένοιτο

may well belong to everyday Attic speech. This is probably the conclusion to be drawn from Aristophanes' employment of the expression, though we cannot be entirely sure because of the artificial and metrical character of his diction.[19] Afterwards it always appears to be traveling toward a "learned" status in declamatory language. This is suggested for the post-Classical period by the evidence of non-literary sources. Here I find some seventeen more or less heavily restored examples, fourteen of them postdating the New Testament (for details see the appendix). Of these at least eleven have the form with relative pronoun. All belong to more or less formal contexts, especially contracts, wills, and other official documents. It seems to me that the Patristic writers too were using both ὃ μὴ γένοιτο and in part also plain μὴ γένοιτο because of their stylistic resonances. Indeed this, as already mentioned, appears to be a factor in Paul's own usage of μὴ γένοιτο.

We are fortunate to have a "control" of sorts for the New Testament and Patristic usage. The suggestion just advanced can be reinforced by examining the evidence of non-Christian writers in the early centuries C.E. Here again careful sampling is instructive. Plutarch (before 50 to after 120) provides two examples of μὴ γένοιτο in apophthegms, one quoted four times in his writings, the other twice. The former has dative of person and infinitive, the latter a dependent accusative and infinitive construction. Since they are attributed to a harpist addressing Philip II of Macedon and to an anonymous Spartan respectively, they may be genuinely old and not truly representative of late usage.

Epictetus, however (c. 55–c. 135, but his works apparently committed to writing only after his death by the hand of his admirer Arrian),[20] has thirty-two original examples, all used absolutely in the same manner found in Pauline style, for rhetorical emphasis. Lucian of Samosata (c. 120 to after 180) offers seven examples of μὴ γένοιτο, of which two appear as ὃ μὴ γένοιτο, while Athenaeus (floruit c. 200) has one example of plain μὴ γένοιτο, with dative of person and infinitive. Cassius Dio (c. 164 to after 229) has three examples in speeches, one as ὃ μὴ γένοιτο. Specially relevant is the usage of Libanius (314–c. 393), who was contemporary with, and influential upon, several of the Christian writers I have treated in this study. He certainly taught John Chrysostom, probably also Basil and Gregory of Nazianzus. Libanius provides twelve examples of our formula. Of these, ten appear as ὃ μὴ γένοιτο, the other two as μὴ γένοιτο. Of the latter, one has the construction with dative of person and infinitive. From 354 Libanius held a chair of rhetoric in Antioch, and he writes a labored Atticizing Greek (admired in Byzantine times, less so today). There is no question in these cases of Pauline influence.[21] So, for instance, Lucian *Dialogues of the Gods* 5.2: ΖΕΥΣ τοῦτο φῄς, ἐκπεσεῖσθαί με τῆς ἀρχῆς; ΠΡΟ-ΜΗΘΕΥΣ μὴ γένοιτο, ὦ Ζεῦ. πλὴν τοιοῦτό τι ἡ μίξις αὐτῆς ἀπειλεῖ ("Zeus: Are you saying this, that I shall be cast down from my sovereignty? Prometheus: Certainly not, Zeus. Only that union with her threatens something of this sort"); and *Dialogues of the Courtesans* 13.4: εἶτ' ἐγὼ τοιοῦτον ἄνδρα περιβάλλω καὶ φιλήσω; μή, ὦ Χάριτες,

19. Cf. Horrocks, *Greek*, 24.
20. Horrocks, *Greek*, 91.
21. The linguistic similarities between the writings of Epictetus and the New Testament are here taken to reflect their common milieu rather than to suggest direct influence (cf. R. Browning, *Medieval and Modern Greek* [Cambridge, 1983], 23; Horrocks, *Greek*, 92).

γένοιτο ("Am I to embrace and kiss such a man? Surely not, Graces!"). Atticism motivates the usage in this group of authors.[22]

7. CONCLUSION

Survival of the formula μὴ γένοιτο from Classical to Modern Greek is a remarkable phenomenon. It has tended to attract little more than passing notice from previous writers and has to some extent been a victim of misrepresentation. In this paper I have sought to nuance and where necessary correct the statements that do exist, in particular that of Mandilaras.

We have seen that μὴ γένοιτο (μη γένοιτο) is not in fact the last of the optatives. Nor is it likely to be. Although the expression persists, it is now rare. Θεός φυλάξοι, the other relic, seems to have greater vitality in the contemporary language. On the other hand, "the language of the Church" undoubtedly plays a crucial role in the long survival of μὴ γένοιτο. Biblical and especially Pauline usage fosters employment of the expression in the Church Fathers, who influence in turn the "popular" Christian writings that reached the masses directly. Nevertheless, we do not have here the full picture. This apotropaic is by no means purely a "Christian" feature in either the New Testament or the Patristic authors: it is to be associated with high style generally in the early centuries C.E. The usage of the non-Christian Atticizers sampled in the present study clearly suggests such a conclusion. And the language of the Church represents a major manifestation of that Atticism that more or less prevails among authors with literary pretensions in the later Koine period.

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APPENDIX: THE QUESTION OF ASPECT

The optative form at the heart of the formula μὴ γένοιτο is of course an aorist and so originally conveyed the perfective aspect. At what period that aspectual force became bleached out—an inevitable part of the lexicalizing process—is an interesting question, made all the more interesting by ambiguous nonliterary examples like *GDI* 2.1832, 24: ὃ μὴ γίνοιτο. In the course of my main argument (§5) this was taken to contain a present optative. My identification disagrees with the terse editorial directive "γένοιτο statt γίνοιτο."[23] This is apparently based on the assumption that we have here an example of the occasional post-Classical shift of ε to ι, associated (among other phonetic environments) with the position before or after a nasal.[24] The same inscription actually has the form γένοιτο in line 10, but similar fluctuations of a purely phonological nature do occur elsewhere within a single document.[25] It is

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22. Dio of Prusa, Josephus, Appian, and Herodian of Syria were also sampled, but provided no instances. This is hardly surprising in the case of the historians, where μὴ γένοιτο is only likely to occur in speeches, but given the associations of the formula with oratory it is interesting that there are no examples in Dio.

23. *GDI* 2, p. 288.

24. F. T. Gignac, *A Grammar of the Greek Papyri of the Roman and Byzantine Periods*, vol. 1, *Phonology* (Milan, 1976), 249–50.

25. Cf. E. Mayser, *Grammatik der griechischen Papyri aus der Ptolemäerzeit*, 2d ed. of vol. 1/1 by H. Schmoll (Berlin, 1970), 45.

certainly possible that the form γίνοιτο is in this instance really an aorist, and it is not the only such case in documentary sources.

The apotropaic occurs seventeen times in inscriptions and papyri (discounting the completely restored cases of *I.Knidos* 1.158, 5 and *IGLSyria* 4.1836, 1, the latter reconstructed as the popular quotation from Gal. 6:14). Apart from the *GDI* 2.1832 example of 173 B.C.E., the earliest instance, we have *I.Knidos* 1.147, 23 μὴ γένοιτο (Knidos, second or first century B.C.E., curse tablet); *C.Pap.Gr.* 1.9, 11 ὃ [μ]ὴ γένοιτο (Alexandria, 5 B.C.E., contract); *P.Ryl.* 2.153, 39 ὃ μὴ γέ[νοιτο] (Hermopolis, 138–61 C.E., will); *BGU* 3.741, 32 ὃ μὴ γένοι[το] (Arsinoite nome, 143–44 C.E., copy of a contract); *SB* 18.13176.3, 116 ὃ μ[ὴ γίν]οιτο (Hermopolite nome, 168 C.E. (?), petition); *P.Oxy.Hels.* 1.37, 7 ὃ μὴ γεί[νοιτο] (Oxyrhynchos, 176 C.E., freight contract); *BGU* 7.1651, 5 ὃ μὴ γένοιτο (Philadelphia, second century C.E., loan with *hypotheke*); *SB* 14.11705,13 ὃ μὴ γέ[νοιτο] (provenance unknown, 213 C.E., copy of a loan with *hypotheke*); *Stud.Pal.* 5.119.2, 22 [ὃ μὴ γ]είνοιτο (Hermopolis Magna, 266 C.E., application for a property lease); *Stud.Pal.* 20.63, 22 ὃ μὴ γείνοιτο (Hermopolis Magna, 266 C.E., application for a property lease); *P.Princ.* 3.151, 13–14 ὃ μὴ γίνη|το (Ibion (?), 341 C.E. or later, lease of slaves); *P.Muench.* 3–1.125, 10 μὴ γένοιτο (provenance unknown, fourth century C.E., private letter); *P.Cair.Masp.* 3.67312, 51 μὴ γέν[ο]ιτο (Antinoopolis, 567 C.E., will); *P.Cair.Masp.* 2.67151, 178 μὴ γένοιτο (Antinoopolis, 570 C.E., will); *P.Ness.* 3.24, 10 ὅπερ μὴ γένοιτο (Nessana, 569 C.E., notice to land office); and *P.Apoll.* 1.69, 18 [ὃ] μὴ γένοιτο (Apollonopolis Magna, 703–15 C.E., letter demanding justice).[26]

Among the fourteen cases where the reading is certain, five (including *GDI* 2.1832, 24) show in the first syllable of the verb -ι- or -ει- (I do not count the *P.Ryl.* 2.153 and *SB* 14.11705 instances, where the spelling could be reconstructed as either γέ- or γεί-, or that of *SB* 18.13176, where the entire first syllable is lost to the lacuna). Both spellings represent the phonetic value [i] in post-Classical Greek. So are they present or aorist forms?

To assume that the apotropaic becomes fossilized in its characteristic Classical form (ὃ) μὴ γένοιτο from an early period and that the ὃ μὴ γίνοιτο form merely reflects a phonetic change is an attractive interpretation. Since γίνοιτο is an element of a formulaic expression it might seem particularly prone to bleaching of its aspectual value. There are also grounds, however, for entertaining the opposite view, that we can observe genuine aspectual variation within the formula at least down to the fourth century C.E. To begin with, there is the sure case of a present optative in *Anth. Pal.* 5.79, 3 (ὃ μὴ γίγνοιτο, noticed in §5 above), where we have the unambiguous Classical form of the present stem. So we know that aspectual variation can occur within the formula, at least in the older language. Nor is such variation without parallel. The formula of politeness καλῶς ἂν ποιήσαις ("you would do well," i.e., "please") is familiar in third century B.C.E. papyri. The potential optative that it contains is usually an aorist, but in a handful of cases appears in the present tense, thus καλῶς

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26. Dr. Malcolm Choat has now drawn my attention to an eighteenth instance, the curious example τὸ μοί γένοιτο, where μοί is an orthographic variant of μή, at *SB* 16.12530, line 13 (Great Oasis, 4 July, 319 C.E., contract of partnership). One might restore a similar reading at *P.Genova* 1.21, line 16 (written a year later by the same author and scribe).

ἂν ποιοῖς (e.g., *P.Cairo Zen.* 1.59093, 19).[27] Now, both manifestations disappear by the beginning of the second century B.C.E., when they are superseded by the alternative form καλῶς ποιήσεις, containing a future indicative. This evidence may seem rather remote from the use of the volitive optative in μὴ γένοιτο several centuries later. Its relevance resides in the fact that the potential optative within a formula still displays aspectual variation shortly before its loss. Since aspect itself remains an integral feature of the Greek verbal system right through into the Modern language, it seems entirely possible that aspectual variation should also persist within formulae containing volitive optatives for a long period. We need to be cautious about dismissing the idea that our five cases of γίνοιτο and γείνοιτο are genuine present optatives.

In this connection it is worth noting approximately forty cases (some restored) of ὃ μὴ εἴη "may it not happen" in documentary sources and one in Origen *Exhortatio ad martyrium* 18.12. The verbs εἰμί and γίνομαι have overlapping semantic ranges and γίνομαι can arguably provide an aorist for εἰμί.[28] So it is possible to take ὃ μὴ εἴη too as an aspectual variant of ὃ μὴ γένοιτο. Certainly, it seems to have exactly the same lexical meaning as ὃ μὴ γένοιτο and belongs to similar settings of a more or less formal character. Thus *P.Oxy.* 12.1473, 11–12: ἐὰν δέ, ὃ μὴ εἴη, ἐκ διαφορᾶς | ἀπαλλαγῶσι ἀλλήλων ("But if—may it not happen—they part from each other because of a dispute") of 201 C.E. and the interesting late-third- or early-fourth-century example *P.Oxy.* 14.1680, 5–9: καὶ | γὰρ πρὸ τούτου σοι ἐδήλωσα λυπού|μενος ἐπὶ τῇ ἐν ἡμῖν σου ἀπουσίᾳ, | μήπως ὃ μὴ εἴοι (for εἴη) σοι γένοιτο καὶ μὴ εὕρωμέν σου τὸ σῶμα ("For also before this I have indicated to you my grief at your absence from among us, lest something dreadful" [lit. "lest that which may it not happen"] were to happen to you and we should not find your body"). In the latter instance notice in particular the lexical relationship between εἴοι and γένοιτο. The contrast of form may be no more than *variatio,* to avoid writing μήπως ὃ μὴ γένοιτό σοι γένοιτο. But perhaps aspectual variation of the μὴ γένοιτο formula may be fairly common after all. How we interpret this evidence will depend on the degree to which we believe the verbal component of the formula is fossilized.

It is impossible to offer a definitive conclusion on dating the loss of aspectual value in μὴ γένοιτο. The limited evidence available is open to both interpretations suggested above. We can only observe that the usual Classical form of the expression has an aorist optative and that there is only one certain case with a present form in all Greek. If γίνοιτο and γείνοιτο are taken to be post-Classical aorists, then there is no other sign at all of aspectual variation within the formula. If γίνοιτο and γείνοιτο really are present optatives, however, such variation is still to be seen in the mid-fourth-century case of *P.Princ.* 3.151. The four examples in very late papyri have the form γένοιτο found in the fully lexicalized modern survival of the apotropaic. There are several sixth-century instances of ὃ μὴ εἴη, which may conceivably come to replace ὃ μὴ γίνοιτο as the aspectually imperfective alternative, but this last point is a very unsound evidential plank indeed.[29]

27. On this formula, its other alternative forms, and related expressions, see H. A. Steen, "Les Clichés épistolaires dans les lettres sur papyrus grecques," *C&M* 1 (1938): 138–52.

28. Cf. Evans, *Verbal Syntax* (n. 5 above), 225–26.

29. In this paper, I have used for the citation of papyri J. F. Oates et al., *Checklist of Editions of Greek, Latin, Demotic, and Coptic Papyri, Ostraca, and Tablets*[5] (Oakville, Conn., 2001); for the citation of inscriptions, I have used G. H. R. Horsley and J. A. L. Lee, "A Preliminary Checklist of Abbreviations of Greek Epigraphic Volumes," *Epigraphica* 56 (1994): 129–69.