

7. Let us then return to what lies before of our narrative and inquiry. In the summer of the year 6962 a comet looking like a sword¹ began to appear out of the western parts of the horizon from the beginning of each evening, immediately after the setting of the sun; and, having approached (to) the moon, being full, an eclipse occurred by chance according to the order and orbit of the heavenly stars, as is the custom. But some, seeing the sword-shaped² comet, and its moving from the west and making its way to the east and having approached (to) the moon, and having seen the darkness of the eclipse,³ were considering that the sword-shaped comet and the darkening⁴ of the moon thus indicate that the Christians, perpetrators from the west, have come against the Turks, and will conquer them. The Turks were observing and they fell into not a little fear and reflections. But also those nights, being a full moon, flashes of lightning and thunders left no interval throughout each evening until even the second watch of the night. Moreover, early in the morning there were some light earthquakes for eighteen days. And there was not a little burning heat in those days.

But let us describe in part concerning the order of nature and flashes of lightning and thunders and origins; or at any rate of thunderbolts and an earthquake and fundamental principles; and I will explain⁵ to you as much as I am able. Therefore, listen.

8. Comets are said to be the visible appearances⁶ flowing from earth to heaven, the very things some say are stars; but they do not know what they say. Others say that they are evil spirits, not knowing themselves not only what they say, but they also blaspheme perilously. But as to whether they are stars or demon-possessed spirits; the demon possessed are not shining but darkened and unseen by human sight. Therefore those who say these things talk nonsense, sinning against God. But if, moreover, they are stars and were always falling⁷ from of old, the sky would remain starless. Therefore, they are neither stars nor evil spirits, but they are comets; for the comets come into being after this fashion. With the winds entering over the earth and in the ether,⁸ they bring the smallest material of the earth to the heavenly fire, and carried by force by the winds the material does not come down until the wind is silent. And then they fall down, the winds running riot, pouring out like a laurel-tree, as, being burned completely by the fire above, the wind is like a laurel-tree with the material; and thus they become comets. And if the

¹ The phrase ῥομφαία τινὶ ἐοικῶς.

² ξιφοειδής.

³ ἔκλειψις.

⁴ A different word than that used above the two times for the eclipse, but a synonym: σκότωσις.

⁵ Or, "let me explain."

⁶ τὰ φαινόμενα (neuter plural), the source of the Latin *phaenomenon*, as well as the English 'phenomenon'.

⁷ This is an imperfect periphrastic construction, πίποντα ἦσαν, emphasizing duration and repeated occurrence.

⁸ Or 'heaven', this is the word αἰθήρ. See f.n. 9 below.

heated wind falls down together with the frost, it again becomes mist and is mixed with air⁹ the like of it.

9. The flash of lightning does not happen in another way except when the winds change, and the clouds strike together, as, carried by force by the winds, a crash occurs, but in the crash the fire from the heavenly fire pours together. The first thunder of the lightning flash happens; but we having the more sharp sight consequently see first the lightning flash, and after these we hear the thunder, because we have slower hearing. See, I will prove to you by an example. You being distant from something from afar striking wood, you see the axe-head striking it, and then after a little you hear the crash.

⁹ ἀήρ, which in Homer and Hesiod always meant 'mist, haze'. For Aristarchus it (erroneously) meant 'lower air' in contradistinction to αἰθήρ, 'upper air'. In later writings such as the one here translated, ἀήρ came to mean simply 'air'.