

Origins and Development of Apocalypticism and Messianism in Early Islam: 610-750 CE

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by

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Let me define the terms apocalypticism and Messianism. Apocalypticism, or the apocalyptic world-view, denotes the imminent expectation of the total transformation of the world. Messianism can be defined as the expectation of the appearance of a divine savior. Millennialism does not appear in this essay. In the literal sense of the expectation of a radical break with the present at the end of a thousand-year age, it cannot be found in early Islam. In the looser sense of the calculation of the time of the end and related numerological speculations, it does appear but after the period under consideration.

I

In the preface to Ancient Judaism, Max Weber (1952: 4) gave the following as the foremost reason for the world-historical significance of its subject:

For the Jew the religious promise was the very opposite [of that of Hinduism].

The social order of the world was conceived to have been turned into the opposite of that promised for the future, but in the future it was to be over-turned so that Jewry would be once again dominant... The whole attitude toward life of ancient Jewry was determined by this conception of a future God-guided political and social revolution.

Yet there is no word on the emergence of the apocalypticism in the Hellenistic era in the admittedly incomplete manuscript Weber left behind. Peter Berger (1969: 79) considers the

Christian theodicy of the crucifixion of the Son of God as the cause of other-worldly transposition of this revolution. He further states with some justice that, after the collapse of the Christian theodicy of suffering, the deeply rooted messianic vision of Ancient Judaism ushered in the era of modern revolution.

What Weber had in mind doubtless included Isaiah's vision of the redemption and restoration of Israel. That vision of restoration, however, lacked the apocalyptic dimension as we have defined it in that it did not amount to a new creation. The more radically transcendent promised order appears later in the form of the apocalyptic idea of the total transformation of the world. To be more precise, the prototype of the «conception of a future God-guided political and social revolution» is the apocalyptic vision of the fall of the last empire and the coming of God's as it developed in the Hellenistic era and was recorded at the time of the Maccabean revolt in the mid-second century BCE.

The apocalyptic perspective in ancient Judaism is itself not the product of any ancient revolution. More specifically, the apocalypticism of the Book of Daniel and the contemporary pseudepigrapha cannot be said to have been caused by any short-term political crisis and/or breakdown in the authority structure, such as the one that demonstrably precipitated the Maccabean revolt. (Bickerman 1979) It is now generally agreed that the earliest apocalyptic texts, especially early parts of the Book of Enoch, predate the mid-second-century BCE Maccabean revolt considerably.¹ At least some of the Zoroastrian apocalyptic ideas are older still. Let me mention the cosmological notion of the glorious renewal of the world (frasho-kereti) at the end of

¹ The discovery of its Aramaic version among the Dead Sea Scrolls, in particular, has been important for underlining the priority of the cosmic apocalypses over the historical and political ones. (Garcia Martinez 1992: 71)

time, the view of world history as the succession in world domination of the four empires in the Bahman Yasht, and the millennial division of time into twelve periods of a thousand years, each under the domination of an astral divinity of sign of the Zodiac. These Persian notions spread widely in the Hellenistic era and gave rise to an a particular oracular form of resistance to Hellenistic domination that was absorbed into intertestamental apocalypticism. (Boyce and Grenet 1991: 393-96).

The Maccabean revolt was the decisive historical matrix for the birth of the apocalyptic view of politics and of political Messianism, which were, interestingly, developed by the losing partners in the revolutionary coalition, the Essenes, who withdrew as «the exiles of the desert» to the Qumran settlement near the Dead Sea. (Arjomand, forthcoming, ch.). The Qumran settlement was destroyed by the Roman army of Vespasian some two centuries later, but the Messianism the sect had sustained in institutionalized form survived it, and was passed on to Christianity, Rabbinical Judaism and Islam. The broader apocalyptic vision was carried by other sectarian groups, notably the Enochic circles and the Christians. Many apocalyptic notions spread and coalesced with Messianism while undergoing extensions and elaborations. The eschatological prophet, for example, reappears in the apocalyptic reconstruction of Elijah as the returning prophet of the end of time.² The apocalyptic perspective of the Book of Daniel, which included the idea of the successive world domination of the four empires and the fall of the last empire, was especially privileged as the Maccabean winners of the revolutionary power struggle had appropriated it and assured its inclusion in the Old Testament canon. Apocalyptic worldview

² It was a very inconvenient idea from the Maccabean point of view, and was at best uneasily accommodated in the Essene thought. (Collins 1994; 1995: 116-23)

and political Messianism thus became an autonomous cultural form available for adaptation by future generations of millenarians and revolutionaries in the late antiquities.

In short, the apocalyptic world-view was historically prior to and presumed by political Messianism. Once the apocalyptic perspective is culturally available, one would certainly expect it to be drawn upon by revolutionaries; and that was certainly done by various coalition partners in the Maccabean revolt. This resort to the apocalyptic in revolutionary situations, however, is not inevitable. The apocalyptic world-view is compatible with revolutionary as well as quietistic political attitudes, with militancy as well as pacifism. Political Messianism, on the other hand, motivates militant activism.

The apocalyptic view of politics is particularly appropriate for the moment of revolutionary liminality, and can supply a powerful stimulus to what has been called «absolute politics,» when no boundaries are set to the political will and every aspect of the social order is seen as transformable by political action. (Pizzorno 1987: 27; 199?) The apocalyptic vision is a powerful means for transcendentalizing the normative order. Order is no longer identified with cosmos and nomos but requires a radical break with both; it therefore radically transcends the existing reality which is destined for cataclysmic destruction. By holding up the vision of the complete social and political transformation at an imminent point in history, political Messianism generates powerful motivation to absolute political action aiming the destruction and reconstruction of political order. Only political Messianism, established as a legitimate cultural form, can be regarded as the indispensable prerequisite for what Weber called the "conception of a future God-guided political and social revolution."

The rise of Muhammad in Arabia, whatever else it may have been, was a revolution by any reasonable definition of the term. It was sustained by a strong apocalyptic vision, and it claimed to be the realization of Messianism. Millennialism, however, was not present at its birth; the closest parallel we find to it in early Islam is the apocalyptic notion of the centennium.

The influence of the Book on Daniel on the origins of Islam has generally been overlooked. This may be due to the surprising fact that the Koran does not mention Daniel. Nevertheless, the Koran itself supplies unmistakable evidence of the influence of the Book of Daniel. The reference to Abraham as the friend of God (Dan. 3:35) is carried over to the Koran (4:124). Gabriel and Michael, the two archangels, who are introduced to the Hebrew Bible in the Book of Daniel, are both mentioned in the Koran.³ In fact, Gabriel's role in hierophany and audition (Dan. 10:4-11.1) becomes central in Islam, and the Islamic tradition sees Gabriel not only as the angel of revelation but also as Muhammad's frequent counselor. (J. Pedersen, "Djabr_'_1," *EI*, 2: 363.) Last but not least, the Danielic notion of setting the seal on prophecy (Dan. 9:24), as we shall see, crucially influenced Muhammad's idea of final prophecy.

³ Michael is mentioned once (Q. 2:92). Gabriel is explicitly named only three times (Q: 2:91-92, 66:4), but there are also several references to the [holy/trustworthy] spirit (*r_h_*) who brings down God's messages.

It is interesting to note that the legend of Daniel is traceable (S. Grotzfeld, "D_niy_l in der arabischen Legende," in W. Fischer, Festgabe für Hans Wehr, Wiesbaden, 1969, 84) to `Abd All_h b. Sal_m (d. 663), the learned rabbi who accepted Muhammad as the prophet of the end of time, the gentile "brother of Moses." (Life, 240) The earliest historical reference to Daniel occurs in the account of the conquest of Susa (Sh_sh) in 638, six years after Muhammad's death. After entering Susa in a suitably apocalyptic fashion to be described presently, the conquering Muslims were then shown the remains of Daniel and found a seal/signet ring depicting a man between two lions. The seal was first taken but was returned to the body by `Umar's order. The commander of the Muslim forces "had the body wrapped in shrouds and the Muslims buried it." (TTkh, 1:2567; English tr., 13: 147) According to a more interesting tradition, upon the conquest of Sh_shtar (Tustar), where the presumed tomb of Daniel is located, the Muslims found a book in the treasury of the Persian commander, Hurmuz_n, above the head of a corpse identified as Daniel. "They carried the book to `Umar who was the first Arab to read it and sent it to Ka`b who copied it in Arabic. In it was what will occur of civil disorders (fitan)." (Fitan, 18-19)

With the civil wars of 656-661, 683-92 and 744-50, the term fitan was soon to become synonymous with mal_h, im -- apocalyptic woes and tribulations on which a book is attributed to Daniel. These civil wars (fitan) of classical Islam are the easily recognizable context of a large number of apocalyptic traditions which usually take the form of "ex eventu prophecies." Furthermore, the Muslim-Byzantine wars constituted the generative historical matrix of a considerable number of apocalyptic traditions on the tribulations of the end of time. (S. Bashear, "Apocalyptic and Other Materials on Early Muslim-Byzantine Wars: A Review of Arabic Sources," Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, Series 3, 1.2 [1991]) As the events of these wars

underwent apocalyptic transformation and elaboration, however, the term fitna itself acquired the sense of pre-messianic tribulation and was included among the signs of the Hour. I suspect this tradition anachronistically renders malah, im as fitan. If so, its referent might be the apocalyptic battles of the Kings of the South and the North, and especially the battles of the end of time against earthly kings in which archangels Gabriel and Michael lead the army of angels against earthly kings. (Dan. 10:13-12:1) In any case, the use of the term malh, ama for the woes and tribulations of the end of time is striking. Its derivation from the Hebrew cognate, milh, m (war) clearly points to the influence of the apocalyptic War Rules in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the thus to the bearers of the Qumran apocalyptic tradition who also carried the Danielic one.⁴ (Rabin 1957: 118-19) Muslims later came to think Daniel's book also contained the eternal wisdom the father of mankind, Adam, had hidden in the Treasure-Cave mentioned in the Syriac texts soon to be translated into Arabic. (B_r_n_, 300)

The influence of the Book of Daniel is especially marked in the idea of Muhammad as the Seal of the Prophets. There can be little doubt that the notion of Seal (kh tam) is apocalyptic. The Hebrew cognate khotam is the messianic signet-ring of Haggai 2:23, where Yahwe declares to Zerubbabel: "I shall take you...and make you like a signet-ring; for I have chosen you." The

⁴ Rabin (1957: 119) also points out that the loan word harj, which occurs as a stage of the apocalyptic malhama, is evidently the Hebrew heregh (slaughter).

apocalyptic connotation of the term is made explicit, and is, furthermore, applied to prophecy by Daniel who speaks of the time for setting the seal on prophecy (Dan. 9:24) and is told by Gabriel to "keep the book sealed until the end of time." (Dan. 12:1) The basic tenet of primitive Islam, according to Casanova (1911, 8) was that "the time announced by Daniel and Jesus had come. Muhammad was the last prophet chosen by God to preside, at the end of time,... over the universal resurrection and Last Judgement." His argument for equating the expression "Seal of the Prophets" (kh tam al-nabiyy n) with "the prophet/messenger of the end of time" (nabiy/ras l khir al-zam n) is persuasive. (Casanova, 1911, 18, 207-13, 228) According to one well-known tradition, used by R_z_ in his commentary on Q. 33:40, the finality of Muhammad's prophecy itself is apocalyptic: "I am Muhammad, and I am Ahmad and I am the resurrector (h, __shir) --the people are resurrected upon my steps--and I am the final one--there is no prophet after me." (Ab_l-`Al_ b. al-H,_usayn al-Mas`_d_, Mur_j al-Dhahab, Ch. Pellat, ed., Beirut, 1970, 3: 7; TR, 9: 162; Concordance, 1: 470) Even more decisive is the epithet "Prophet/Messenger of the malh, _ama" attested for Muhammad in several early traditions. (Casanova, 1911, 49-53; Muhammad ibn Sa`d, Kit b al-T, _abaq t al-kab_r, E. Sachau, et al., eds., Leiden, 1904, 1: 65; Concordance, 6: 107)

Muhammad, the prophet of the end of time, did begin the conquest of Arabia as «the Messenger of the malh, _ama»: his apocalyptic battle was no other than the battle of Badr in 624, when God sent down three thousand angels to fight alongside his army (Q. 3: 123-25). The Muslim tradition follows Daniel in having Gabriel and Michael each lead a thousand angelic to the right and the left of Muhammad (and archangel Isr_f_l is added at the head of another thousand to reach the number given in the Koran) (Muh,_ammad b. `Umar al-Waqid_, Kit b al-

Magh_z_, J. Marsden Jones, ed., London: Oxford University Press, 1966, 1: 72-78; Ibn Sa`d, 3: 9), and considers the battle of Badr as "the day of redemption/deliverance (furq_n)" mentioned in Q. 8:41 as a parallel to Ex. 14:13. (K. Wagtendonk, "Muh,_ammad and the Qur'__n. Criteria for Muh,_ammad's Prophecy," in Liber Amicorum. Studies in Honor of Professor Dr. C.J. Bleeker, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1969, 261-62)

The Book of Daniel was influential in the Judaeo-Christian apocalyptic lore, as well as the Gnostic-Mandaeen literature (G. Widengren, The Ascension of the Apostle and the Heavenly Book, Uppsala: Uppsala Universitets Årsskrift, 1950, 59-61). Danielic apocalyptic notions were most probably introduced in Arabia by the anti-Rabbinic Jewish, Jewish Christian and Jewish Manichaeen sects.⁵ These sectarian groups have been identified as the bearers of the Qumran apocalyptic tradition. (Rabin 1957: 114, 126-29; Golb 1961) This identification has recently been reinforced through the connection established between the Zadokite (Sadducee) leadership and legal rite of the Qumran community and the Sadducee designation and legal rite of the medieval Karaites. (Erder 1994) Through the Karaite connection, the anti-Rabbinic Jews of the Yemen, who «have the knowledge» and accepted Muhammad as the expected gentile prophet,⁶ saying «the promise of our Lord is indeed fulfilled» (Q. 17:108), can now be confirmed as the heirs to the Essene apocalyptic tradition. According to the biography of the Prophet, his confirmation as the gentile prophet (al-nab al-umm_) by the Judaizing cousin of his wife was critical in boosting his resolve at the outset of his mission. (Ibn Ishaq, Life: ;Rabin 1957: 122-23) The learned Ka`b al-Ahb_r (d. 654), to whom the vast majority of the early Muslim apocalyptic traditions are

⁵ Gil (1992) identified the han_f community of Arab monotheists as Jewish Manichaeans.

⁶ Q. 7:156 mentions «the gentile prophet whom you find written in the Torah.»

traced, belonged to one such anti-Rabbinic Jewish group in the Yemen whose priests bore the title of bahr (Hebrew, h b r).⁷

⁷ Ka`b is referred to as Ka`b the habr in one atypical tradition (Ttkh, 1: 62), and a precious early poem refers to him as «Ka`b the brother/fellow (akh) of the ahb r (plural of habr).» (Mas`_d_, 3:277, #1946)

A rare apocalyptic figure named in the Koran is Idr_s. He is mentioned twice among the prophets (Q. 19:57, 21:85),⁸ and is an apocalyptic figure: "He was a true man (sidd_q), a Prophet; we raised him to a high place." (Q. 19:57) Idr_s is commonly identification in Sunni tradition with Enoch. He is, however, more likely a composite figure that combines Enoch, via Manichaeism, with the Zadokite D_r_sh ha-Torah (Interpreter of the Law) of the Essenes. The latter connection is strongly suggested by the «Zadokite» epithet, sidd_q, and by root drs common to Idr_s and D_r_sh.

Ezra is mentioned once in the Qur'_n in the diminutive form of `Uzayr. By the time of the Fourth Ezra and in the subsequent literature, Ezra the scribe had become Ezra the prophet. (M.E. Stone, "The Metamorphosis of Ezra: Jewish Apocalypse and Medieval Vision, Journal of Theological Studies, n.s., 33.1 [1982], 2) Ezra was identified with Enoch and appears as the key figure in the mystical speculations of the Jewish communities of Arabia. (G.D. Newby, A History of the Jews of Arabia, Columbia: University of Southern California Press, 1988, 60-61) At the beginning of Ezra IV, which circulated not only in Syriac but also in Arabic, Ezra is clearly presented as a Second Moses (4Ezra 14:1-6; M.A. Knibb, "Apocalyptic and Wisdom in 4 Ezra," Journal for the Study of Judaism, 13.1-2 [1982], 62); and it is as the messianic "prophet like Moses" that he enters into Islam. The assertion in the Qur'_n (9.30) that "the Jews say `Uzayr is the son of God as the Christians say the Messiah is the son of God" should be understood in this

⁸ In both instances, however, he is mentioned after Ishmael.

light. (TR, 9: 178) According to Ibn Hazm (Milal, 1:99, cited in Erder 1990:349), the Jews referred to in this Verse were the Sadducees of the Yemen who, as we have seen, were the bearers of the Essene apocalyptic tradition. Furthermore, the unnamed person, whom God caused to die on the outskirts of the ruined city but brought back to life a hundred years later to witness the resurrection of his donkey (Q. 2: 261), was commonly identified as Ezra (Lazarus-Yafeh, 1992, 56-58), even though Jeremiah was sometimes preferred as the ruined city was taken to mean Jerusalem. (TTkh, 1: 666; English tr. by M. Perlmann, 4: The Ancient Kingdoms, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987, 62) This Verse, as we shall see, formed the basis for the apocalyptic conception of the centennium in early Islam.

The tradition that secrets had been written in a book and kept secret also begins with 4Ezra. (Knibb, 1982, 65) In the later Judaeo-Christian lore, Ezra appears as the revealer of magico-astrological secrets. (Stone 1982: 16) Muslim tradition combined this with the legend of the book thrown to the sea by Daniel. (TTkh, 1: 2566-67; English tr. by G.H.A. Juynboll, 13: The Conquests of Iraq, Southern Persia and Egypt, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989, 147)

Messianism entered Islam also through Christianity. The Paraclete is referred to in the Verse 61:6 of the Koran, where Jesus son of Mary presents himself to the children of Israel as the messenger of God who confirms the Torah and is the "bearer of good tidings of a messenger who shall come after me and whose name shall be Ah,_mad (ismuhu ah,_madu)." W. Montgomery Watt ("His Name is Ah,_mad," Muslim World, 43 [1953], 110-17) has argued persuasively for an adjectival reading of the term ah,_mad. Given one possible meaning of the term as "greater in praising," the Koranic statement is a reasonable paraphrase of the promise of the coming of the

Paraclete in Jn 16:13-14: "when the Spirit of truth comes... he will not be speaking of his own accord but will only say what he has been told; and he will reveal to you the things to come. He will glorify me..." Quite apart from the identity of the terms for "praising" and "glorifying" the Lord, this passage is substantively important because it corresponds exactly to the Koranic concept of the revelation as the unaltered recitation, by the Prophet, of the divine words brought down by Gabriel (Q. 75:16-19; TZ, 4: 648-49; Gätje, 1996, 48) who is indeed the [holy/trustworthy] Spirit (r_h,_). (Q. 5:110[109], 16:102[104], 26:193) The Qur'_n (Recitation) is the latest revealed portion of the heavenly book, the Preserved Tablet (lawh,_mah,_f_z,_) (Q. 85:22). The influence of the Gospel of John may have been reinforced through Manichaeism. (G. Widengren, Muh,_ammad, the Apostle of God, and His Ascension, Uppsala: Uppsala Universitets Årsskrift, 1955, 58-62) Indeed, B_r_n_'s statement is a striking presentation of the great Babylonian prophet, M_n_ (d. 277) as the forerunner of Muhammad: "In his gospel... he says that he is the Paraclete announced by the Messiah, and that he is the seal of the prophets (i.e. the last of them)."⁹ (Ab_Rayh,_n al-B_r_n_, The Chronology of Ancient Nations, C.E. Sachau, tr. & ed., London, 1879, 190)

The Koran also adopted the apocalyptic belief in the second coming of Christ. Jesus "is the sign of the Hour." (Q. 43:61) The Prophet's companion, `Abd All_h b. `Abb_s, associates the

⁹ The Muslim tradition came to consider Ah,_mad a variant of Muh,_ammad and another name for the Prophet (TZ, 4: 513; Gätje, 1996, 69-70), and identified him with the Paraclete. (Ali [Ibn Rabb_n] Tabari, The Book of Religion and Empire, tr. & ed., A. Mingana, Manchester University Press, 1922,, 140-41) Ahmad and other variants of Muhammad were also identified with the Immanuel promised by Isaiah and the prophet whose coming was foretold by a host of other Prophets. The idea of the Paraclete is thus de-apocalypticized and historicized to celebrate triumphal Islam as "realized messianism." (Ibn Rabb_n, 95-138; H. Lazarus-Yafeh, Intertwined Worlds. Medieval Islam and Bible Criticism, Princeton University Press, 1992, ch. 4)

coming down of Jesus with the apocalyptic Smoke amidst which he herds people into the place of resurrection. (TR, 10: 115) Jesus will return to Jerusalem, and kill the Antichrist. This assures Jerusalem a central place in the topography of the Islamic apocalyptic tradition. The Sea of Tiberias, on whose shores Jesus had revealed himself to the disciples after crucifixion (Jn. 21), also figures in the Islamic apocalyptic topography. In one interesting set of traditions, Gog and Magog first appear there and drink its water dry." (Fitani, 356-60)

There can be no doubt that Muhammad himself set out to contain Messianic expectations pari passu his political success in the unification of Arabia. The very term 'Seal of the Prophets' occurs in a mundane, indeed defensive context. The final de-apocalypticization of political Messianism and its historicization into triumphal «realized Messianism» is documented in the remarkably coherent Victory Chapter of the Koran that celebrates the final conquest of Mecca in 630. The angelic army of the apocalyptic first battle of Badr is transformed into the divine succor in the form of Shechina descends upon the warriors of faith whose heart God knows. (46:19; 26) Those who obey God and his Messenger will enter «the garden underneath which rivers flow» (46:17) Whereas Jesus, as we have seen, had been the «bearer of the good tiding» of the coming of the Paraclete/Ahmad, Muhammad is «but the witness, the bearer of the good tiding (mubashshir) and the warner.» (46:8)

Muhammad's closure of the apocalyptic perspective and containment of messianic expectation was inconclusive, however. With the Messiah being identified with the historic Jesus and Islam's self-image as «realized Messianism», there remained a void for a distinctively Islamic savior figure at the end of time. Within half a century of Muhammad's death, the position was filled by the figures of the Qa'im and the Mahdi. (Although the savior figure of the Islamic

political Messianism was variously conceived as the Qa'im and/or the Mahdi, as the latter term is more general and better known, I will refer to it as Mahdism.) Later commentators accordingly modified the picture of the Second Coming to accommodate the celebration of Islam. After slaying the Antichrist (dajj_l), Jesus kills the swine and break the crosses, destroy churches and synagogues, but confirm the Muslim prayer leader and pray behind him. (Baid,__w_, translated in Gätje, 1996, 129) The Muslim prayer leader of the end of time is generally identified as the Mahdi.¹⁰ (Fitan, 352) Incidentally, the name of the Muslim Antichrist figure, Dajj_l, is a loan word from the Syriac dagg_l (liar). The prototype of Dajj_l,¹¹ who is now the Antichrist and Anti-Mahdi in one, is most probably the Essene «man of lies» who was the opponent of the Zadokite «Teacher of Righteousness.»¹² This significant detail points to the commingling of Christian and Essene influences on pristine Islamic apocalypticism.

The Second Civil War (680-692) marked the true birth of the messianic figure of the Mahdi. The term mahd_, meaning the «rightly-guided one,» was first used in a messianic sense during the rebellion of Mukht_r in Kufa in 683 on behalf of a son of `Al_, Muhammad b. al-Hanafiyya. Its novel messianic connotation probably came from two distinct groups of his supporters who became known as the Kays_niyya: southern Arabian tribes, and Persian clients

¹⁰ To suggest that most Jews and the Christians would find the final call of the Mahdi irresistible, one tradition predicts that he will recover the ark of covenant from Sea of Tiberias. (Fitan, 223)

¹¹ For its historical prototype, see Arjomand 1998: 248.

¹² Moreh ha-Sedheq. Rabin (1957:120) goes so far as to suggest a passive reading of the first term as mureh to establish it as the prototype of the mahd_ (rightly-guided).

(maw 1) who were new converts to Islam.¹³

Despite the failure of Mukht_r's rebellion, the Kays_niyya affirmed that they "hoped for a revolution (dawla) that would culminate in the Resurrection before the Hour." (Cited in S.A. Arjomand, "Crisis of the Imamate and the Institution of Occultation in Twelver Shi`ism: a Sociohistorical Perspective," International Journal of Middle East Studies, 28.4 (1996a), 492)

When Muh,_ammad b. al-H,_anafiyya died in the year 700, the Kays_niyya maintained that he was in concealment or occultation (ghayba) in the Rad,_wa mountains and would return as the Mahdi and the Qa`im. The Kays_n_ poet, Kuthayyar (d. 723), hailed him as " He is the Mahdi Ka`b the brother/fellow of the Ah,_b_r had told us about," and affirmed that "he is in vanished in

¹³The dispersal in the desert in 683 of an army sent by the Umayyad Caliph Yazid against the anti-Caliph `Abdall_h b. al-Zubayr upon hearing the news of the Caliph's death generated what may be the first ex eventu prophecy about an unnamed restorer of faith who was later taken to be the Mahdi. Two notable historical features of the event--the pledge of allegiance by the people of Mecca between the Rukn and the Maq_m, and the swallowing up (khasf) of an army in the desert [between Mecca and Medina]--were absorbed into the apocalyptic literature. See W. Madelung, "`Abd All_h b. al-Zubayr and the Mahdi," Journal of Near Eastern Studies, 40.4 (1981).

the Rad,_wa, not to be seen for a while, and with him is honey and water." (Mas`_d_, 3: 277)

When Muh,_ammad b. al-H,_anafiyya's son, Abu H_shim, who had succeeded him died childless in 717-18, some of his followers maintained that he was, like his father, the Mahdi and was alive in concealment in the Rad,_wa mountains. The Kays_niyya also spread the idea of raj`a, return of the dead, especially the Imams, with the help of such Qur'anic precedents as the resuscitation of the Companions of the Cave and the owner of the ass, be he Jeremiah or Ezra. Furthermore, it is very probably in connection with the expectation of the return of this Mahdi from occultation that the term al-q_`im (the Standing One, the Riser) became a major ingredient of the Shi`ite apocalyptic tradition. A valuable Syriac text, which predates Islam and is suggestive of the influence of Kays_n_ Persian clients on the development of the notion, foretell that the Dajj_l will beguile the Magi by telling them that Pash_tan, one of the Zoroastrian immortals, has awakened from his sleep, "and he is the Standing One (q_'em) before the Hurmizd, your God, who has appeared on earth." (J. Bidez & F. Cumont, Les Mages hellénisés, Paris, 1938, 2: 115; the significance of the term q_'em is lost in the French translation on the following page.) In any event, the notion of occultation soon acquired chiliastic connotations through its association with the manifestation or parousia (z,_uh_r), of the apocalyptic Qa`im.

Early Shi`ite traditions represent the Q_`im as the expected redresser of the cause of God (al-q_'im bi amr All_h) and the riser by the sword (al-q_`im bi'l-sayf) (Kash, 62, 72, 87-89; also Bih,_r, 51: 50), wearing the armor of the Prophet and wielding his sword, the dhu'l-fiq_r (Kashf, 34). This picture can be supplemented by the early Imami Shi`ite traditions which present the Qa`im as the redresser of the house of Muhammad (q_'im_l Muh,_ammad) (Bih,_r, 51: 53-54), modeled clearly on the Messiah as the restorer of the house of David. (Muh,_ammd b. al-H,_

asan al-S,aff_r al-Qumm_, Bas, a'ir al-Darajt, Qumm: Maktaba yatull_h al-`Uz,ma al-Mar`ash_al-Najafi, 1983-4/1404, 259). He is at the same time the Lord of the Sword (s,_h, ib al-sayf) (S,aff_r, Bas, 'ir, 151) and the avenger of the wrong done to the House of Muh,ammad by the usurpers of their rights: "The weapon [of the Prophet] with us is like the ark with the children of Israel." (several variants, S,aff_r, 176-189). The Qa'im will establish the empire of truth (dawlat al-h, aqq) (Bih, _r, 51: 62-63)

The messianic idea of the Mahdi spread widely beyond the Kays_niyya and other extremist Shi`ite groups, and as it became dissociated from its historical archetype, Muh,ammad b. al-H,anafiyya. Other groups projected the image of the Prophet unto him. An enormously influential tradition attributed to `Abd All_h b. Mas`d has Muhammad foretell the coming of a Mahdi coined in his own image: "His name will be my name, and his father's name my father's name." (Fitan, 227) Furthermore, widely spread traditions assert that the number of the Mahdi's companions in battle is exactly the same (usually put at three hundred and thirteen) as those of Muhammad in the apocalyptic battle of Badr. (Fitan, 213; Bih, _r, 51: 44, 55, 58) One Sunni tradition goes even further and affirms that "on his shoulder is the mark of the Prophet" (Fitan, 226), while some Shi`ite traditions have Gabriel to the right of the Mahdi on the battlefield and Michael to his left. (Bih, _r, 52: 311)¹⁴

¹⁴ It should be pointed out that political apocalypticism did have its opponents. The pious

opposition to the revolutionary Mahdism of the followers of Muh,_ammad b. al-H,_anafiyya found a resource in the belief in the Second Coming of Jesus. A tradition attributed to H,_asan al-Bas,_r_, who was a leading figure in this opposition, categorically states: "There will be no Mahdi other than Jesus son of Maryam." (Madelung, "Mahd_," EI, 5: 1234) This tradition has survived the avalanche of later traditions that affirm the return of both Jesus and the Mahdi.

In this final section of the paper, I would like to examine the apocalyptic world-view and political Messianism in the social revolution of Islam, the `Abbasid revolution, which came a century and a quarter after the death of the Prophet. This is all the more important because the intense apocalyptic character of the `Abbasid revolution (744-763) remains largely unrecognized.

The year 125 (743-4) was before long seen as the year of the fitna and of the mal_h, im: "Woe to the Arab after the year 125." (Fitan, 418-19) Nor are the traditions that tell of the turn in power of the House of `Abb_s (e.g., Fitan, 116) in substance anachronistic. According to the apocalyptic traditions, the Khurasanian partisans of the `Abbasid revolution, who fought under the messianic black banner, "have long hair, villages [and not tribes] are their genealogy, and their names are their patronymic titles (kun_)." (Fitan, 118) And they spoke Persian, some rare traditions: "Their slogan is 'bokosh, bokosh!'" (Kill,kill!) (Fitan, 118-19) Their leader, Ab_ Muslim, "a man from the maw_l who rises in Marw " (Fitan, 420) is the subject of several pejorative traditions: "Scoundrel son of scoundrel (laka` b. laka`) will conquer the world." "The Hour will not rise until scoundrel son of scoundrel is the happiest of the people." (Fitan, 115-16) These tradition place Khurasan firmly and conspicuously in the Islamic apocalyptic topography. (Fitan: 188-193)

The twelve kings of the fifth vision of Ezra (4Ezra 12:14), a remarkable text in political apocalypticism as the sequel to Daniel's vision of the fall of empires, was the likely source of inspiration for the particular tradition on the apocalyptic war (malh, ama) against the twelve kings, the least of whom is the king of Rome (Fitan, 293, also, 279), and more generally, for the

expectation that the Umayyad ruler after Yaz_d III would be the last. This expectation finds expression in a large number of traditions concerning "the Twelve Caliphs from the Quraysh," which were evidently first circulated by those who hoped there would be no more caliphs from the Quraysh. This political oracle in due course became an autonomous cultural form. It served as a source of speculation for many groups, and helped the Imami Shi`ites fix the number of their Imams at twelve. (Ibn B_b_ya, 272-74, 338-39)

By the time of the `Abbasid revolution in the year 750, Mahdism was already a known phenomenon. Traditions that show the `Abbasid leaders assumed the messianic titles of Saff_h, Mans,_r and Mahdi abound (Fitan, 52, 66-67, 97, 247, 424), and are supported by both literary and epigraphic evidence of the assumption of the title of the Mahdi by the first `Abbasid caliph, Ab_l-`Abb_s. (Mas`_d_, Tanb_h, 338; `A.-`A. al-D_r_, " al-Fikra al-mahdiyya bayn al-da`wa al-`abbasiyya wa'l-`as,_r al-`abb_s_ al-awwal," in Wad_d al-Q_d_i, ed., Studia Islamica and Arabica: Festschrift for Ih,_s_n `Abb_s, Beirut, 1981, 136). There is also evidence that he claimed to be the Qa'im, even though this evidence has been generally overlooked. (al-D_r_, 1981, 128; see also Ibr_h_m b. Muh,_ammad al-Fars_ al-Is,_takhr_, Mas_lik al-Mam_lik, M.J. de Goeje, ed., 2nd ed., 1927, 77n.e¹⁵) `Abd All_h b. `Al_, the winner of the decisive battle of Zab and the destroyer of Marw_n II and the Umayyads, was the original bearer of the title al-Saff_h (`A.-`A. al-D_r_ & `A.-J. al-Mut,_allab_, eds., Akhh_r al-Dawla al-`Abb_s_iyya, Beirut, 1971, 148), which was later anachronistically assumed to be the regnal title of the first `Abbasid caliph.

¹⁵ The medieval Persian translation of the manuscript quoted in that footnote is now published. (See, I. Afsh_r, ed., Mas_lik wa Mam_lik, Tehran, 1989/1368, 79)

IV

To conclude, the rise of Islam and the `Abbasid revolution were, to use Max Weber's terms, instances of «God-guided political and social revolution." Their origins, however, cannot be explained by the elements of ancient Judaism examined by Weber. Rather, they rest on two layers of presuppositions not known to or analyzed by him. The first layer is the apocalyptic world view, which derives from the oldest Enochic and Zoroastrian ideas, the second is the Messianism of the Qumran sect, overlappingly transmitted through Christianity.