

## **Late antique apocalyptic: a context for the Qur'an?**

In his succinct contribution to the recent *Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity*, entitled 'Early Islam as a late antique religion', Robert Hoyland devotes just over a page to the subheading 'Apocalypticism'.<sup>1</sup> He refers to apocalypticism as a 'spirit' (connected for instance with calculations about the 500<sup>th</sup> year after the Incarnation, supposedly marking 6000 years since Creation), which early Islam 'seems to have caught'. In the same volume Stephen Shoemaker asks the provocative question whether Muhammad was an eschatological herald or a social reformer, surveying the differing views among specialists as to how early and how central the eschatological emphasis was as part of Muhammad's teaching, and whether such passages are to be interpreted literally, as evidence of belief in an imminent judgement, or in a more generalized way.<sup>2</sup> Was the Hour really seen as imminent, or

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Hoyland, 'Early Islam as a late antique religion', in Scott Fitzgerald Johnson, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1053-77, at 1066-67; the pages on apocalypticism in his *Seeing Islam and Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* (Princeton: The Darwin Press, Inc., 1997), at 26-31, are deliberately cautious. For late antiquity and Islam see Averil Cameron, ed., *Late Antiquity on the Eve of Islam, The Formation of Classical Islam* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), Introduction, and see Garth Fowden, *Before and After Muhammad* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013). A version of this paper was delivered at the Kenyon Institute, Jerusalem, in June 2013, and I thank the Director, Dr Mandy Turner, for the invitation.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen J. Shoemaker, 'Muhammad and the Qur'an', in Johnson, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity*, 1078-1108; id., *The Death of a Prophet. The End of Muhammad's Life and the Beginnings of Islam* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), especially chapter 3.

was it rather sometime in the future, for which believers had to be prepared? Shoemaker draws an apt parallel with the seemingly contradictory references to the coming of the Kingdom in the teaching of Jesus, and opts for Muhammad as an eschatological prophet who preached the imminence of the Hour – a position which his followers, like the early Christians – had to modify or explain when the Hour did not come as expected.<sup>3</sup>

To return to the late antique context. For Fred Donner, in his recent book *Muhammad and the Believers*, 'apocalyptic ideas' were a particular feature of the religious climate of late antiquity, and had an obvious appeal, given the 'harsh' reality of life in the 'Byzantine domains'.<sup>4</sup> In John C. Reeves's useful guide to Jewish apocalypses, we read that the 'apocalyptic imagination', in the words of John C. Collins, operated 'more or less continuously within the broader ethnic or religious framework of the wider Near East', and that in the seventh and later centuries it was 'figured as a mentality';<sup>5</sup> while it would be foolish, he says, to deny that historical events play a role, apocalyptic was 'a type of narrative' within a 'formulaic set of

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 1094-96, 1099.

<sup>4</sup> Fred M. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers. At the Origins of Islam* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010), 14-17.

<sup>5</sup> John C. Reeves, *Trajectories in Near Eastern Apocalyptic. A Postrabbinic Jewish Apocalypse Reader* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 1-2.

conventions, tropes and figures'.<sup>6</sup> He goes on to claim that seventh-century apocalyptic springs from a 'seismic shift' in the location of authority and an enhanced role for the Bible, within the Abrahamic religious communities, emphasising the role of the Bible in the 'early Muslim appropriation of an apocalyptic discourse'.<sup>7</sup> Later in the introduction, he writes of the 'varied interdependencies and thematic echoes across the second half of the first millennium among Jews, Christians and Muslims'.<sup>8</sup>

It also seems to be generally assumed among scholars of late antiquity that eschatology was an important element in the period. However, these quotations leave one with many questions. I will leave for others the nature and centrality of eschatology in the Qur'an. But when Islamic scholars, in particular, write of 'late antiquity', is this the same as Reeves's 'wider Near East', or, as in the common formulation, as 'the eastern Mediterranean'? Should we suppose that broad apocalyptic trends evinced in written sources from Constantinople are relevant to emergent Islam? More fundamentally still, what is meant by 'apocalyptic', 'apocalypticism', and 'eschatology' in this context? A general awareness of the end of the world and the last judgement, or, as in the

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 5-6.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 23.

Qur'an, of the need for personal moral reform, is not the same as historical apocalyptic, envisaged as a political and historical scenario involving successive empires. I will argue in this paper that much more precision is needed before it can be argued that either late antique apocalyptic as a whole or any specific late antique texts had a direct influence on the emergence of Islam, or of Qur'anic eschatology.

The Jewish apocalyptic works of the seventh century have given rise to considerable discussion already, both in themselves and in their connection with the Persian capture of Jerusalem in AD 614, and I will not discuss them further here.<sup>9</sup> The apocalyptic overtones found in the sources for the Emperor Heraclius have also been well covered by others, notably Gerrit Reinink. Indeed, given Heraclius's almost miraculous return of the Cross to Jerusalem in AD 630 it would not be very surprising if this event was given an apocalyptic aura, although it does not seem to me likely that he himself knowingly

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<sup>9</sup> For which see now Alexei M. Sivertsev, *Judaism and Imperial Ideology in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, 2011), chaps. 4 and 5, arguing for the emergence of a Jewish concept of a 'messianic Jerusalem', with M. Himmelfarb on *Sefer Eliyyahu* in K. Holum and H. Lapin, eds., *Shaping the Middle East. Jews, Christians and Muslims in an Age of Transition, 400-800 CE* (Bethesda, ND: University of Maryland, 2011). For the Persian conquest see Yuri Stoyanov, *Defenders and Enemies of the True Cross. The Sasanian Conquest of Jerusalem in 614 and Byzantine Ideology of Anti-Persian Warfare*, Österreichische Akad. der Wiss., philosoph.-hist. Klasse, Sitzungsberichte 819 (Vienna, 2011), G.W. Bowersock, *Empires in Collision in Late Antiquity* (Waltham, Mass.: Brandeis University Press, 2012) and James Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses to a World Crisis. Historians and Histories of the Middle East in the Seventh Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

enacted the eschatological role ascribed to the Roman emperor in later texts.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, while Heraclius's admittedly sensational campaigns and his victory were presented by the Constantinopolitan poet and panegyrist George of Pisidia, deacon of Hagia Sophia, as a religious crusade, we also need to be precise about the dating of the individual poems and to remember that George's poems belong to the realm of official imperial panegyric. Indeed, their actual complexity has been well brought out in recent years by Mary Whitby.<sup>11</sup> George's poem, the *Hexaemeron* (predictably, from its title), envisages Heraclius's victory as a New Creation rather than a Last Judgment. And if George drew heavily on Old Testament imagery so after all had Eusebius already done for Constantine in the fourth century.

I will come back later to the issue of Heraclius and the Cross. One question however, as I have already

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<sup>10</sup> See G. J. Reinink, 'Heraclius, the new Alexander. Apocalyptic prophecies during the reign of Heraclius', in G.J. Reinink and B. H. Stolte (eds.), *The Reign of Heraclius. Crisis and Confrontation (610-641)* (Leuven: Peeters, 2002), 81-94; it seems to me more likely that the idea of the last emperor placing his crown on Golgotha followed rather than preceded Heraclius's restoration of the True Cross to Jerusalem in 630: see J.W. Drijvers, 'Heraclius and the *Restitutio Crucis*: notes on symbolism and ideology', *ibid.*, 175-90, at 184-90 and further below.

<sup>11</sup> Mary Whitby, 'A new image for a new age: George of Pisidia on the emperor Heraclius' in E. Dabrowa, ed., *The Roman and Byzantine army in the Near East* (Cracow, 1994) 197-225; ead., 'The devil in disguise: the end of George of Pisidia's *Hexaemeron* reconsidered', *JHS* 115 (1995), 115-29; ead., 'Defender of the Cross: George of Pisidia on the Emperor Heraclius and his deputies', in ead., ed., *The Propaganda of Power. The Role of Panegyric in Late Antiquity* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 247-73; ead., 'George of Pisidia's presentation of the Emperor Heraclius and his campaigns: variety and development', in Reinink and Stolte, eds., *The Reign of Heraclius*, 157-73; cf. C. Ludwig, 'Kaiser Herakleios, Georgios Pisides und die Perserkriege', in P. Speck, ed., *Poikila Byzantina* xi (Bonn 1991) 73-128

mentioned, is certainly whether Heraclius himself knew of the apocalyptic motif of the last emperor placing his crown on Golgotha, or whether this motif arose only later. Related to it is the further question whether, as Donner believes, the early 'Commanders of the Faithful', with the importance they attached to Jerusalem, also had in mind the apocalyptic theme of the last emperor and Jerusalem, where the Last Judgment would take place.<sup>12</sup>

I think we need some clarity.

Eschatological thinking had been part of Christian and Jewish assumptions from an early stage,<sup>13</sup> and early Christians lived in expectation of an imminent end. When this did not happen, various adjustments had had to be made, and this still continued in late antiquity in many different spheres<sup>14</sup> – certainly not without being contested and argued over. The same happened in the sixth century when the expected end soon after AD 500 did not happen. Eschatology and apocalyptic thinking were and had to be extremely malleable; they changed to suit the historical circumstances. Moreover, eschatology belongs

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<sup>12</sup> Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, 143-44.

<sup>13</sup> Jesus as an apocalyptic prophet: Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus, Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), and for discussion of the differing approaches, which also depend on assessments of the Jewish apocalyptic context, see C. Fletcher-Louis, 'Jesus and apocalypticism', in T. Holmén and S. E. Porter, eds., *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 3, 2877-2909.

<sup>14</sup> For eschatology in relation to the monastic life see D. Moschos, *Eschatologie im ägyptischen Mönchtum. Die Rolle christlicher eschatologischer Denkvarianten in der Geschichte des frühen ägyptischen Mönchtums und seiner sozialen Funktion* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010).

within a much wider complex of thinking about divine providence, theodicy, creation and the physical universe, and, for Christians, the question of what would happen to their bodies and souls after death. I began a paper on divine providence in late antiquity in 1993 with the words 'Monotheistic religions have a vested interest in asserting the omniscience of God: man is granted only partial knowledge, and on God's terms.' I went on to say that 'the rise of Islam brought an even stronger emphasis on the word of God and the authority of scripture.'<sup>15</sup>

Yet it is not for nothing that the title of Brian Daley's book on Christian eschatology up to our period now is *The Hope of the Early Church*.<sup>16</sup> Hope is also important: Christians knew that some would be punished, but they hoped for salvation, the return of Christ and a very personal salvation. Visual art in the patristic period did not dwell on Christ's suffering on the cross (indeed this was an issue which presented problems in patristic thinking), or even on judgment. The possibility of universal salvation was real, if difficult to envisage. However controversial the teachings of Origen on the subject, and despite the finding against Origenism

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<sup>15</sup> Averil Cameron, 'Divine providence in late antiquity', in Leo Howe and Alan Wain, eds, *Predicting the Future*, The Darwin College Lectures (Cambridge, 1993), 118-43, at 118.

<sup>16</sup> B.J. Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church. A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology* (Cambridge: CUP, 1991).

in 553, theologians of the eastern church such as Maximus and John of Damascus continued to offer hope to the individual Christian, with the ultimate goal of *theosis*, or union with God. How this was to be achieved in the context of an expected end was a question capable of many different answers.

We need to keep this wider complex in mind when approaching the question of a comparison or connection between Christian, Jewish and Qur'anic eschatology and apocalyptic in our period. In that connection the questions that seem to arise include the following:

Was there more apocalyptic speculation in late antiquity, specifically in the sixth century, than before?

If so, what form did it take?

What sort of works were produced and where did they circulate (if it is possible to know)?

What more general evidence is it reasonable to adduce in addition to the existence of actual apocalyptic texts?

Finally, how do Christian ideas compare with what is found in the Qur'an, and is it plausible to suggest that there was any linkage?

Much has been written already on this subject. Although I will mainly be dealing here with the Greek or 'Byzantine', material, a main question concerns the



connection, if any, between this and the Syriac works produced in closer juxtaposition to the Islamic milieu. The principal Syriac work for such comparison, though far from the only one, is the Apocalypse of Ps. Methodius, though it was produced, if we follow Gerrit Reinink, only in the context of 'fierce anti-Islamic polemics' at the end of the ~~sixth~~ century.<sup>17</sup> In a chapter with the title 'Apocalypse and the Arabs', Sidney Griffith makes the point that Christian reactions to the Arab conquests, both during and at the end of the seventh century tended to adopt an apocalyptic tone; however, these were, as he makes clear, reactions to something already happening, while it is clear that the later seventh-century writer Anastasius of Sinai already had some awareness of Qur'anic themes.<sup>18</sup> As stated earlier, the Jewish apocalyptic texts that belong in and around the period of the Persian invasion are also certainly part of the

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<sup>17</sup> G.J. Reinink, 'From apocalypics to apologetics: early Syriac reactions to Islam', in W. Brandes and F. Schmieder, eds., *Endzeiten: Eschatologie in der monotheistischen Weltreligionen*, Millenium Studien 16 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2013), 75-88.

<sup>18</sup> Sidney H. Griffith, 'Apocalypse and the Arabs', id., *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque. Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 23-44; the chapter's subtitle is 'The first Christian responses to the challenge of Islam'. For the other Syriac texts of the same general period as Ps. Methodius see 34 n. 35, and in general see also H. Suermann, *Die geschichtstheologische Reaktion auf die einfallenden Muslime in der edessischen Apokalyptic des 7. Jahrhunderts* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1985) and F.J. Martinez, 'La literatura apocaliptica y las primeras reacciones cristianas a la conquista islamica en Oriente', in Gonzalez Anes y Alvarez de Castrillón, ed., *Europa y el Islam* (Madrid: Real Academia de la Historia, 2003), 155-81. Like the article by Reinink cited in n. 16, all these contributions are cast in terms of the reactions of others to Islam, rather than the general late antique background.

material that needs discussion in a full treatment.

Whether and how all these different expressions may have been linked is exactly what now needs to be discussed.

To turn back to what I will call for convenience the 'Byzantine' evidence, it is worth drawing attention to some observations made by Paul Magdalino in an important article about apocalypticism in Byzantine history as a whole.<sup>19</sup> He remarks first that 'on the whole, Byzantine eschatology does not present a coherent prophetic vision. Its different strands are never united and its different opinions are never resolved'. To this he adds that there was a 'basic lack of cross-reference' between different types of text (meaning between the 'chronological' narratives and the more timeless prophetic texts). Elsewhere he writes: 'what changed was not the psychology, or the tools, but the materials: the numbers

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<sup>19</sup> Paul Magdalino, 'The history of the future and its uses: prophecy, policy and propaganda', in Roderick Beaton and Charlotte Roueché, eds., *The Making of Byzantine History. Studies presented to Donald M. Nicol* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1993), 3-34; cf. 29, 31. Other basic works include Paul J. Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, ed. D. deF. Abrahamse (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); id., *The Oracle of Baalbek. The Tiburtine Sibyl in Greek Dress* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1967); W. Brandes, 'Die apokalyptische Literatur', in F. Winkelmann and W. Brandes, eds., *Quellen zur Geschichte des fruhen Byzanz (4.-9. Jarhundert)* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1990), 305-70; G. Podskalsky, *Byzantinische Reichseschatologie: die Periodisierung der Weltgeschichte in den vier Grossreichen (Daniel 2 und 7) und dem tausendjährigen Friedensreiche (Apok. 20). Eine motivgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (München: W. Fink, 1972); W. Bousset, *The Antichrist Legend. A Chapter in Christian and Jewish Folklore*, Eng. trans. (London: Hutchinson, 1896). B. McGinn, *Visions of the End. Apocalyptic Traditions in the Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979) deals with the east up to John of Damascus, offering translated excerpts with introductions, but then focuses on the west; see also J. Verbeke, D. Verhelst and A. Welkenhuysen, eds., *The Use and Abuse of Eschatology in the Middle Ages* (Leuven, 1988).

and the exact identity of the apocalyptic signs'.<sup>20</sup> But he also refers to a 'dynamic phase' of Byzantine eschatology in the sixth and seventh centuries, followed by 'later, derivative phases'.<sup>21</sup> Writing with a stronger focus on the early medieval west, Jane Baun has broadened the enquiry and comments that 'we find recorded not only the opinions of eminent bishops, but also the visionary experience of humbler lay people and monastics, both male and female.'<sup>22</sup> We certainly need to distinguish between apocalyptic texts as such, and the common and much broader and overall assumptions about the end of the world, judgment and the Second Coming of Christ which are memorably described by Cyril Mango in a chapter entitled 'The future of mankind' in his 1980 book, *Byzantium. The Empire of New Rome*.<sup>23</sup> Homiletic and hagiography would be obvious genres where such assumptions might naturally be found. But whether Mango is right to deduce general 'Byzantine' beliefs from this is another question. But we can surely say that the idea of judgment and the fate of individual Christians after death were indeed built in – together with intense curiosity about the details – to

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<sup>20</sup> P. Magdalino, 'The end of time in Byzantium', in Brandes and Schmieder, eds., *Endzeiten*, 119-34, at 126.

<sup>21</sup> Magdalino, 'The history of the future', 31.

<sup>22</sup> Jane Baun, 'Last Things', in Thomas X. Noble and Julia M. Smith, eds., *Cambridge History of Christianity III: Early Medieval Christianities, c. 600-c.1100* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), ch. 29, 606-24, at 607.

<sup>23</sup> Cyril Mango, *Byzantium. The Empire of New Rome* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980), 201-17.

the development of Christianity from the early centuries and into the Byzantine period.

Paul Magdalino's emphasis on the actual variety of apocalyptic and eschatological texts and references is worth emphasising. One example of such texts lies in the work of the sixth-century traveller and writer Cosmas Indicopleustes, who inserts an excursus in his *Christian Topography* referring to the book of Daniel. Unlike many others, however, he interprets it symbolically rather than in terms of an approaching end, and sees the Christian Roman empire as eternal, part of the divine dispensation.<sup>24</sup> The first two known commentaries in Greek on the *Apocalypse* of John date from our period, and one at least is preserved in a large number of later manuscripts and with translations into Armenian, Georgian and Old Slavonic, although Shoemaker suggests that attention to the *Apocalypse* did not change significantly before the eleventh century.<sup>25</sup> Of the two authors,

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<sup>24</sup> *Christian Topography* II.73-75; see Sabine MacCormack, 'Christ and emperor, time and ceremonial in sixth-century Byzantium and beyond', *Byzantion* 52 (1982), 287-309, at 294-97; Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church*, 196; M. Meier, *Das andere Justinians. Kontingenzerfahrung und Kontingenzbewältigung im 6. Jahrhundert n. Chr.* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2003), 480.

<sup>25</sup> Andrew of Caesarea: ed. J. Schmid, *Studien zur Geschichte des griechischen Apokalypse-textes* (München: K. Zink, 1955-56), I.1; Oecumenius: ed. H.C. Hoskier, *The Complete Commentary of Oecumenius on the Apocalypse* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1928); for the reception of the *Apocalypse* in the Byzantine period and its awkward status in Orthodox and especially eastern Christian culture even today, see Stephen J. Shoemaker, 'The afterlife of the *Apocalypse* of John in Byzantium', in press, who also discusses the earlier reception of the *Apocalypse*, with detailed bibliography at n. 4; I thank Stephen Shoemaker for letting me see this paper in advance of publication.

Oecumenius may be identifiable as a correspondent of Severus of Antioch, and his work was translated into Syriac in the seventh century.<sup>26</sup> Andrew may have been bishop of Caesarea in the late sixth century.<sup>27</sup> However the modern editors of the two works confine themselves to textual matters rather than the contemporary context, and the commentaries themselves belong more to the field of exegesis and allegorical interpretation than to free-standing apocalyptic. Neither commentary fits the pattern of seventh-century historical apocalyptic. Oecumenius sees 'old Rome' as the persecutor of Christians, and 'new Rome', the empire of Constantinople, as pious and good, while Andrew has seven distinct periods, not four, as in the book of Daniel.<sup>28</sup> Probably not very relevant for us here is the Latin commentary on the book of Revelation composed by the North African bishop Primasius of Hadrumetum, one of the most active opponents of Justinian's Three Chapters decree in the 540s; as with the two Greek commentaries, it is mostly studied as a witness to the early Latin version of the book of

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<sup>26</sup> H.-G. Beck, *Kirche und theologische Literatur im byzantinischen Reich* (München: Beck, 1959), 417.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 418; against Mango's dating of the work to 630-37 ('Le temps dans les commentaires de l'Apocalypse', in *Le temps chrétien de la fin de l'antiquité au moyen âge, IIIe-XIIIe siècles* [Paris, 1984], 431-38, at 435) see W. Brandes, 'Anastasios *ho dikoros*. Endzeiterwartung und Kaiserkritik in Byzanz um 500 n. Chr.', *BZ* 90 (1997), 24- 63, an important article with very full bibliography, at 48, n. 164.

<sup>28</sup> See Podskalsky, *Byzantinische Reicheschatologie*, 84-87.

Revelation itself.<sup>29</sup> Oecumenius and Andrew do have something in common in that they both illustrate in different ways how some at least in the sixth century found it necessary to find ways of accommodating or dealing with both the 6,000 years between Creation and the end identified by Hippolytus of Rome and the thousand-year period of Christ's reign on earth found in John's *Apocalypse*.

John's *Apocalypse*, known in the western tradition as the Book of Revelation, had had a troubled reception, and this continued to be the case in eastern Christianity.<sup>30</sup> Especially after Dionysius of Alexandria in the late third century, its authenticity was challenged, and most Greek patristic writers did not include it among the canonical books, nor was it included in the Syriac New Testament. Apart from the question of whether or not it was the authentic work of John the apostle, there was also that of whether it should be understood in an allegorical or milleniarist way. In the second century Irenaeus linked the *Apocalypse* with the book of Daniel, but very soon its status and interpretation came under fire. Hippolytus's early third-century Commentary on Daniel combined the references in Ezekiel which lie

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<sup>29</sup> Ed. A.W. Adams, *CSCL* 92 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1985).

<sup>30</sup> Its earlier reception is discussed by D. Kyrtatas, 'The transformations of the text', in Averil Cameron, ed., *History as Text. The Writing of Ancient History* (London: Duckworth, 1989), 146-62; see also Podskalsky, *Byzantinische Reicheschatologie*, 79-90.

behind John's *Apocalypse*, the prophecies in Daniel 2 and 7 and the Synoptic Gospels, with the *Apocalypse*, and endorsed the idea of a delay of 6,000 years, so setting the scene for future historical/prophetic eschatology with an emphasis on Jerusalem and on the prophecy taken up in the Gospels about the Temple and the abomination of desolation.<sup>31</sup> But controversy about the *Apocalypse* was recorded by Eusebius<sup>32</sup> and this set the pattern thereafter. We know of no commentaries on the *Apocalypse* before the sixth century; why it aroused more interest then, and whether this is significant for our question, must as yet remain unclear.

The prospect of the fulfilment of the expected interval of 6,000 years since Creation gave rise to much agonizing, not least since views about the actual date of Creation varied.<sup>33</sup> The reign of Anastasius (491-518), during which the 6,000 years seemed likely to be about to be fulfilled, was key, and accordingly Paul Alexander dated the Greek Oracle of Baalbek, which he termed 'the Tiburtine Sibyl in Greek dress', to this period. However, contemporary opinions also differed on how to interpret the seeming signs of the end. Book VII of the Syriac chronicle of Ps. Zachariah Rhetor, part of which has

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<sup>31</sup> Matth. 24, Mk 13:3-27; Lk 21: 8-36.

<sup>32</sup> Eus., *HE* III.25.

<sup>33</sup> On these expectations around the year AD 500 see Brandes, 'Anastasios', with bibliography, at 29-32 and see below for his political interpretation; the theme of Constantinople as the 'new Jerusalem' also appears in the early sixth century: *ibid.*, 38.

recently been translated from Syriac in the Translated Texts for Historians series, and which was written in the later sixth century but drew on the earlier work of Zachariah of Mytilene, deals with the reign of Anastasius and the famine and plagues of 500–501.<sup>34</sup> The Chronicle of Ps. Joshua the Stylite, also of the early sixth century and translated in the same series,<sup>35</sup> records plagues and portents in relation to 502–3 AD, but also argues against those, as in the *Seventh Vision of Daniel* (a work from the same sort of period now extant in Armenian), who thought that the war between Byzantium and Persia spelled the end of the world:

‘if it had not been for the words of our Lord, we would have ventured to say that the end of the age had come, for many thought along these lines and said so. What [our Lord] said [was], “When you hear of wars and tumults, do not be afraid, for these things must first happen, but the end has not yet come” ... we also recalled the words of the Paul, in which he cautioned the Thessalonians about the coming of our Lord, saying that they should not be troubled by word or spirit or misleading epistle, as if it were from him, alleging that

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<sup>34</sup> *The Chronicle of Pseudo-Zachariah Rhetor. Church and War in Late Antiquity*, ed. Geoffrey Greatrex, trans. Robert R. Phenix and Cornelia B. Horn, with contributions by Sebastian P. Brock and Witold Witakowski, TTH 55 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011), VII, 231–32.

<sup>35</sup> Frank R. Trombley and John W. Watt, *The Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite*, trans., intro. and notes, TTH 32 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000).



the Day of the Lord had now arrived, and [showed] them that the end could not come until the false Christ had been revealed.'<sup>36</sup>

As Brandes points out, the writers mentioned all come from the eastern provinces, as do probably the two commentators on John's *Apocalypse*, whereas in contrast, the main chroniclers and historians of Constantinople did not register the impending end.<sup>37</sup> In fact Brandes can offer only a few scattered indications of such thinking in other kinds of literature in Greek, all of them from outside the capital.<sup>38</sup> At least as far as the turn of the fifth and sixth centuries were concerned, therefore, it would be going too far to claim that apocalyptic thinking was characteristic of the late antique world as a whole.

As we know, the world did not end in the early 500s. Later writers therefore had to adjust their thinking. To quote Magdalino, 'what changed was not the psychology, or the tools, but the materials: the numbers and the exact identity of the apocalyptic signs'.<sup>39</sup> In other words, we might conclude, the basic thinking was always there, but it only sometimes surfaced, and then in different ways. Mischa Meier argues for a considerable preoccupation with chronology and chronographical computation during the

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<sup>36</sup> c. 49, trans. Trombley; at n. 253 Trombley offers arguments for a later (seventh-century) date for the *Oracle of Baalbek*, and see his introduction, xx-xxi.

<sup>37</sup> Pointed out also by Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church*, 168-204.

<sup>38</sup> Brandes, 'Anastasios', 53-57.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

reign of Justinian, for example in the *Chronicle* of John Malalas, connected with a human need for mental adjustment in the face of difficulty or disaster.<sup>40</sup> Of the other examples commonly cited in support of the view that apocalyptic thinking was widespread in the sixth century, the liturgical poet Romanos, writing in Greek in Constantinople in the 550's, composed a hymn on the last judgement,<sup>41</sup> while the later historian Agathias claims that many in Constantinople thought the end of the world was coming when an earthquake struck the city in AD 557.<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless I am not sure that I agree with the emphasis that is laid on this passage by Magdalino and others.<sup>43</sup> Agathias's comments form a literary and historiographical set piece, part of a highly literary work; when writing of an earthquake at Alexandria Agathias also goes out of his way to discuss the merits and demerits of Aristotelian science, commenting on the proneness of human nature to adapt the facts if they do not fit the theory.<sup>44</sup> Agathias's comments need to be read in the wider context of other statements in his *Histories* about God's

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<sup>40</sup> Meier, *Das andere Justinians*, 443-470; Meier refers to the period around and after AD 500 as marked by 'virulenten endzeitlichen Prognosen', *ibid.*, 99.

<sup>41</sup> Magdalino, 'The history of the future', 6-7.

<sup>42</sup> *Hist.* V.4; see Brandes, 'Anastasios', 46.

<sup>43</sup> See on this Paul Magdalino, 'The end of time in Byzantium', in Brandes and Schmieder, eds., *Endzeiten*, 119-34, at 124-25, with 120 on the idea of 'cosmic weeks' and the dating of the Incarnation in the mid-sixth millennium. Magdalino, 'The history of the future', 8, even describes Agathias as 'the main source for sixth-century apocalyptic fever'.

<sup>44</sup> *Hist.* II.15; cf. Averil Cameron, *Agathias* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 94 and 113-14.

interventions; for instance, while recording differing explanations of plague, including its attribution to divine wrath, he also expressly declines to give his own view.<sup>45</sup>

As I suggested, Mischa Meier would like to see in these apparent examples of speculation about the end of the world in the second half of the sixth century manifestations of a contemporary existential anxiety in the face of the many natural disasters and the downturn in imperial fortunes that occurred in the later part of Justinian's reign.<sup>46</sup> Likewise Wolfram Brandes gives as a reason for apocalyptic thinking the occurrence of contemporary disasters such as earthquakes or traumatic events such as war.<sup>47</sup> Agathias may seem at first sight to testify that such reactions were common, yet the complexities of these passages alone surely stand as a warning that we should approach his comments with caution.

Magdalino also appeals to wider trends in the sixth century, which he claims demonstrate 'the idea that the Roman Empire and the Kingdom of Heaven were in the

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<sup>45</sup> *Hist.* V. 10.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 96 ff., a section headed 'Angst und Apokalyptik im 6. Jahrhundert'. Meier cites the work of U.H.J. Körtner, *Weltangst und Weltende. Eine theologische Interpretation der Apokalyptik* (Göttingen, 1988; Eng. trans. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995); cf. Meier, 100, where apocalyptic is described as 'Kompensation' for *Angst*.

<sup>47</sup> Brandes, 'Anastasios', 25; Brandes also wants to emphasise the collective and detach apocalyptic from personal anxieties about individual salvation, *ibid.*, 28, but see below.

process and on the point of becoming one'.<sup>48</sup> However this is not precise enough to be helpful to the question raised in this paper. And even leaving aside the methodological questions surrounding functionalist explanation of apocalyptic trends by reference to 'anxiety', there are also other problems with Meier's general portrayal of the sixth century as a period of disasters. Indeed, Meier's book focuses explicitly on calamities and disasters, plagues and earthquakes;<sup>49</sup> yet plagues and tidal waves, like other portents, happen in all periods and are the stock in trade of late antique and Byzantine literature, and of Christian literature in the widest sense, and do not tell us much that is specific. Referring to the reign of Anastasius, Brandes argues that apocalyptic texts also had political agendas, and memorably refers to the use of apocalyptic to criticize emperors as a *Spielart der Kaiserkritik*.<sup>50</sup> Surely we find the same phenomenon both in the famous comparison of Justinian with Antichrist in Procopius's *Secret History*,<sup>51</sup> and in Ps. Joshua's *Chronicle* discussed

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<sup>48</sup> Magdalino, 'The history of the future', 11.

<sup>49</sup> See also Brandes, 'Anastasios', 41-44, and cf. R. Scott, 'Malalas, The Secret History and Justinian's propaganda', *DOP* 39 (1985), 99-109; Peter Bell, *Three Political Voices from the Age of Justinian: Agapetus, Advice to the Emperor; Dialogue on Political Science; Paul the Silentary, Description of Hagia Sophia*, TTH 52 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009).

<sup>50</sup> Brandes, 'Anastasios', 63.

<sup>51</sup> *Anecd.* 12, on which see Brandes, 'Anastasios', 43; Procopius's comparison of Justinian to Domitian (*Secret History* 8), made with studied artlessness, is surely another such example. Magdalino, 'The history of the future', 8, is also cautiously

above. But when both Meier and Brandes connect apocalyptic references in the mid-sixth century with the oppositional politics of the reign of Justinian it seems to me that the value of such references as evidence of general thinking is somewhat undermined.

The question is also whether there were more catastrophes in the sixth century than at other times, or is it that more such events were recorded by contemporaries, perhaps because they wanted to make political points?<sup>52</sup> Certainly prodigies and prophecies can be found in the works of John Malalas, Procopius and other contemporary authors, as also in the later sixth century in the context of renewed war and uncertainty,<sup>53</sup> but such elements had also been standard in previous history-writing since the classical period. To be convincing, each of the sources on which the case for widespread genuine apocalyptic thinking rests needs at the very least to be subjected to close rhetorical analysis.

As for later periods, Magdalino makes the point that while apocalyptic thinking continued, and continued in

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skeptical about Procopius's comparison of Justinian to Antichrist, also noting that Procopius does not himself make the comparison explicit.

<sup>52</sup> M. Meier, *Das andere Zeitalter Justinians. Kontingenzerfahrung und Kontingenzbewältigung im 6. Jahrhundert n. Chr.* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2003); see also M. Meier, 'Eschatologie und Kommunikation in 6. Jahrh. N. Chr., oder: Wie Osten und Westen beständig aneinander vorbei redeten', in Brandes and Schmieder, eds., *Endzeiten*, 41-74.

<sup>53</sup> Brandes, 'Anastasios', 47-49, on Theophylact and the Georgian Passion of S. Golindouch.

many forms, despite the fact that the world had not ended when expected, later Byzantine apocalyptic was primarily interested in the fall of Constantinople. This is illustrated vividly in the final centuries of Byzantium before 1453, but nearer in time to our period, similar fears also showed themselves in connection with the Arab siege of Constantinople in 717.<sup>54</sup> In other words, apocalyptic thinking was highly flexible and highly adaptable to local circumstances.

Turning from Constantinople to Jerusalem, it would surely have been amazing if the events of the early seventh century had not given rise to apocalyptic expectations, hopes and fears. After all, the arrival of the Muslims and the surrender of Jerusalem were preceded by the almost equally extraordinary events of the Persian capture of the city, and the dangerous Avar and Persian siege of Constantinople in 626, followed against all expectations by the spectacular victory of Heraclius deep in Persian territory and his triumphant restoration of the True Cross.<sup>55</sup> Reversal followed success at dizzying speed. Central to the issues in Jerusalem was possession of the Temple Mount, and for the Jews, the possibility of building on it. In 630 Heraclius restored the True Cross to the very spot identified with Golgotha, just as the

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<sup>54</sup> See Brandes, 'Anastasios', 52.

<sup>55</sup> Brandes, 'Anastasios', 38, for Gog and Magog in the homily on the siege by Theodore Syncellus.

last emperor in the Apocalypse of Ps. Methodius places his crown there.<sup>56</sup> As argued above, if this story of the last emperor was really already in existence, Heraclius's action would indeed have been sensational. But while the story appears in (later) manuscripts of the Latin Tiburtine Sibyl, it is not in the Greek version, dated by Alexander to the early sixth century and connected by him with the expected expiry of the 6,000 years since Creation in the reign of Anastasius. It seems likely that the motif of the last emperor and Golgotha followed rather than preceded Heraclius's actions, and was a natural result of such climactic events. As for the anti-Jewish work known as the *Doctrina Jacobi*, probably of the early 640s, it reflects the rapidly changing circumstances after the restoration of the cross in 630, but while it does deal with the prophecies in Daniel, chapter 7, and the four kingdoms, with Rome as the fourth, it does not develop into full-scale apocalyptic. Brandes nonetheless sees this and other works, including

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<sup>56</sup> See on this Drijvers, 'Heraclius and the *restitutio crucis*', 186-87; Magdalino, 'The history of the future', 19; C. Mango, 'Deux études sur Byzance et la Perse sassanide', *Travaux et Mémoires* 9 (1985), 91-117; Christopher Bonura, 'The man and the myth: did Heraclius know the legend of the last Roman emperor?', *Studia Patristica* 62 (2013), 503-13; on the last emperor theme see A. Kraft, 'The last Roman emperor *topos* in the Byzantine apocalyptic tradition', *Byzantion* 82 (20102), 213-57, dealing with Ps. Methodius and its descendants and the related Syriac texts; P. Guran, 'Genesis and function of the last emperor myth in Byzantine eschatology', *Byzantinistica* 8 (2006), 292-96.

the Syriac Alexander legend (below, n. ) as influential on the later Ps. Methodius.<sup>57</sup>

Apocalyptic and prophecy are closely related themes, and as an example of *Adversus Iudaeos* literature, the *Doctrina Jacobi* naturally focuses on Christian interpretations of Scriptural prophecy. For apocalyptic to be accepted, the relevant prophet had to be a true prophet; thus while the *Doctrina* mentions the Saracens and their prophet, for the author of this work that prophet is false.<sup>58</sup> The identification of true and false prophets was indeed a shared but contentious theme within the worlds of Judaism, Christianity and Islam,<sup>59</sup> and the Qur'anic position on the status of Jesus as a prophet and its polemical implications are clear enough.<sup>60</sup>

By the end of the seventh century circumstances had changed dramatically, not least with the stronger policies of 'Abd al-Malik in relation to Christians in the Umayyad Caliphate. In this context what Reinink has called a 'sudden rise and rapid diffusion of Syriac

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<sup>57</sup> Brandes, 'Anastasios', 50.

<sup>58</sup> *Doctrina Jacobi* III.8-9 (Daniel); V.16 (the false prophet of the Saracens; eschatology in the *Doctrina*: V. Déroche, *Travaux et Mémoires* 11 (1991), 263-68.

<sup>59</sup> See Guy G. Stroumsa, 'False prophet, false Messiah and the religious scene in seventh-century Jerusalem', in M. Bockmuehl and J. Carleton Paget, eds., *Redemption and Resistance. The Messianic Hopes of Jews and Christians in Antiquity* (London: T. and T. Clark, 2008), 285-96.

<sup>60</sup> See 19:16: 'Jesus taught: I am a servant of Allah, He has given me the Book and has appointed me a Prophet. He has made me blessed wheresoever I may be, and has enjoined on me Prayer and almsgiving throughout my life. He has made me dutiful towards my mother, and has not made me haughty and graceless. Peace was ordained for me the day I was born, the day I shall die and the day I shall be raised up' (31-34).



apocalyptic'<sup>61</sup> becomes readily explicable, and at the same time indicates a wider Syriac diffusion by then of the motif of the last emperor and Golgotha. Like their counterparts in sixth-century Constantinople the Syriac apocalyptic texts of the late seventh century and early eighth were also nothing if not political. But they are also too late, and too different, to have been influential in the earliest emergence of Qur'anic eschatological thinking.

Strikingly different from the eschatological elements in the Qur'an and of course from the Qur'anic treatment of the crucifixion, Christian apocalyptic thinking in the seventh century gave great importance to the theme of the cross. We do not know exactly what form Heraclius's restitution of the cross actually took, though it seems likely, as Jan Willem Drijvers argues, that Heraclius's reference points were Old Testament and Davidic, as shown in the poetry of George of Pisidia.<sup>62</sup> But we see in this period a growing focus on the liturgical theology of the cross, with obvious resonance in the events of the Persian invasion and Heraclius's

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<sup>61</sup> See G.J. Reinink, 'The romance of Julian the Apostate as a source for seventh-century Syriac apocalypses', in P. Canivet and J. P. Rey-Coquais, eds., *La Syrie de Byzance à l'Islam* (Damascus, 1992), 75-86, at 80, and see Griffith, 'Apocalypse and the Arabs', 32-35; for translations of the *Apocalypse of Ps. Methodius* see now B. Garstad, ed. and trans., *Apocalypse Pseudo-Methodius. An Alexandrian World Chronicle*, Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library 14 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012).

<sup>62</sup> See Drijvers, 'Heraclius and the *restitutio crucis*', 184-86; for the Syriac Alexander Legend as a 'protoByzantine propaganda writing', from 629/30 in North Mesopotamia, see Brandes, 'Anastasios', 50.

restoration of the Cross to Jerusalem. The Christian sources on the Persian capture of Jerusalem in 614, when the True Cross had been removed to Ctesiphon, and the accounts of its restoration all lay enormous emphasis on its symbolism.<sup>63</sup> The Feast of the Elevation of the Cross on 14 September received much more emphasis from now on, and Sophronius, the future patriarch of Jerusalem, and author of poems dealing with the Persian capture, seems to have known of two others. Several homiletic texts about the cross date from the sixth and seventh centuries.<sup>64</sup> St Anastasius the Persian was said to have been converted by the cross, and the physical wood of the cross is an important topic in the *Adversus Iudaeos* texts of the seventh century, where it is cited as one of the material objects whose veneration by Christians has to be defended against charges of idolatry. Also now, the dead Christ on the cross begins to be depicted in images of the crucifixion, while in the late seventh century official Muslim policy forbade the display of crosses as

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<sup>63</sup> The great day of restoration, designated as 21 March, was hailed by Sophronius in Palestine (M. Gigante, ed., *Sophronii Anacreontica* [Rome: Gismondi, 1957], no. 18, and George of Pisidia in Constantinople.

<sup>64</sup> See e.g. R. Scott, 'Alexander the Monk, *Discovery of the True Cross*', Eng. trans. with notes, in Margaret Mullett, ed., *Metaphrastes, or, Gained in Translation* (Belfast: Belfast Byzantine Enterprises, 2004), 157-84; partial ed. and trans. J. Nesbitt, 'Alexander the monk's text of Helena's discovery of the True Cross (BHG 410)', in id., ed., *Byzantine Authors: Literary Activities and Preoccupations* (Leiden, 2003), 23-39; for a similar work in Syriac by Pantaleon (BHG 6430) see A. di Berardino, *Patrologia V* (2000), 299, and cf. BHG 427p.

the key marker of Christians.<sup>65</sup> The plain cross also gained particular salience during Byzantine iconoclasm, as the visual symbol preferred by the iconoclasts in place of figural images.<sup>66</sup> In the crucial seventh century the cross, so central to contemporary Christian apocalyptic, thus became a central and sharp point of tension between Christians and Muslims. This example of difference suggests caution in connection with generalizations about the emergence of Islam and about the Qur'an which appeal to a supposed emphasis in later antiquity on apocalypticism and eschatology. These were themes which surfaced in different ways and in different places, and which served different purposes. We do not help the case by glossing over the differences.

It is perhaps worth saying more in conclusion about the broader context of anxiety about the future life in Christian late antiquity, especially life beyond death. This could indeed take many forms, from the questions asked in the various sets of questions and answers from

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<sup>65</sup> G.R.D. King, 'Islam, iconoclasm and the declaration of doctrine', *BSOAS* 48 (1985), 267-77; Sidney H. Griffith, 'Images, Islam and Christian icons. A moment in the Christian/Muslim encounter in early Islamic times', in P. Canivet and J.-P. Rey-Coquais, eds., *La Syrie de Byzance à l'Islam. VIIe - VIIIe siècles, Actes du colloque international Lyon-Maison de l'Orient Méditerranéen, Paris-Institut du Monde Arabe, 11-15 septembre 1990* (Damascus: Institut Français de Damas, 1992), 121-38.

<sup>66</sup> For the theme in the seventh century see A. Kartsonis, *Anastasis. The Making of an Image* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), especially 40-63, and see Averil Cameron, 'The language of images: the rise of icons and Christian representation', in ead., *Changing Cultures in Early Byzantium* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1996), no. XII, at 37.

the sixth to eighth centuries<sup>67</sup> to fears expressed about the actual efficacy of the saints and their capacity to help the living.<sup>68</sup> At bottom, certainly, were anxieties and doubts about divine justice that we also find taken up so strongly in the Qur'an. Issues such as the afterlife, providence, creation, predestination and revelation also lay behind these texts, though they are not necessarily expressed in apocalyptic terms. We have focused here on the political and public expressions of apocalyptic, and indeed, Wolfram Brandes wishes to detach the theme of apocalyptic from the background of individual experience. I believe however that concerns about individual salvation were also a central element in late antiquity, perhaps indeed the more so, given Christian opposition to any hint of fatalism. For the eastern provinces this was a painful period, not only in terms of political events but also because of sharp inter-Christian divisions and the 'separation' of the churches. Getting doctrine right, or at least, belonging to the right group – about which it was not always easy to be sure – also carried a high level of personal

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<sup>67</sup> See Yannis Papadoyannakis, 'Instruction by question and answer: the case of late antique and Byzantine *erotapokriseis*', in S. Fitzgerald Johnson, ed., *Greek Literature in Late Antiquity: Dynamism, Didacticism, Classicism* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 91-103; G. Dagron, 'L'ombre d'un doute: l'hagiographie en question, VIe-XI siècles', *DOP* 46 (1992), 59-68. Recurring anxieties expressed in this literature concern the fate of souls after death and the reality of bodily resurrection.

<sup>68</sup> See Matthew Dal Santo, *Debating the Saints' Cult in the Age of Gregory the Great* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Peter Sarris, Matthew Dal Santo, Phil Booth, eds., *An Age of Saints? Power, Conflict and Dissent in Early Medieval Christianity* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

anxiety. It is often argued that doctrinal issues were not important because they did not touch the majority, who probably did not understand or even perhaps know about them. I want to argue in contrast that the concerns, arguments and tensions about Christian orthodoxy during late antiquity, and for the eastern Mediterranean in the period after the Council of Chalcedon in particular, also shaped general experience and historical development.

To repeat Brian Daley's words, Christianity in late antiquity was based on hope, the personal hope of salvation.<sup>69</sup> That hope could be easily dented. It might require the help of intercession, whether from the Virgin or the saints, or through relics, pilgrimage, or, increasingly, images, yet these too could arouse anxieties in the faithful. The scepticism and anxiety expressed by some about the power of saints after their deaths were responses to a much more widespread turn towards the help of saints, relics, and images for personal agendas in which a main issue was the salvation of the individual or those on whose behalf they prayed, yet when it was often difficult for individuals to be quite sure of where they stood.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church*.

<sup>70</sup> Matthew Dal Santo, 'Text, image and the "visionary body" in early Byzantine hagiography: incubation and the rise of the Christian image cult', *Journal of Late Antiquity* 4.1 (2011), 31-54. Meier, *Das andere Justinians*, places emphasis on an increase in piety in the late sixth century.

There is also in this period an abundance of evidence for Christian concerns about fate, astrology and prophecy. Two authors of the period – the early seventh-century historian Theophylact Simocatta and the early eighth-century patriarch of Constantinople, Germanos, both composed dialogues arguing against the fatalistic idea that God had ordained a fixed term of life for each individual.<sup>71</sup> Arguments against the power of astrology and of the heavenly bodies, and the idea of fate had long been standard in Christian writing, and continued to be so now.<sup>72</sup> At the end of the sixth century St Symeon the Younger is said to have debated with astrologers, who are thus linked with 'Hellenes' as the interlocutors of Christian holy men and saints.<sup>73</sup> Condemned as it was under various names in imperial legislation (*mathematici*, philosophers), astrology continued to be practised, and continued to be a subject of anxiety for Christians. Accordingly the sixth-century bureaucrat and exegete Junillus explicitly linked together 'Sibyls and

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<sup>71</sup> See Averil Cameron, *Dialoguing in Late Antiquity* (Washington, DC: Harvard University Press, 2014), chapter one.

<sup>72</sup> Averil Cameron, 'Divine providence in late antiquity'; that attitudes towards them were also ambivalent, even among Byzantine intellectuals, has been shown in an excellent recent study by Paul Magdalino, *L'orthodoxie des astrologues. La science entre le dogme et la divination à Byzance (VII-XIVe siècles)* (Paris: Lethielleux, 2006).

<sup>73</sup> P. Van den Ven, *La vie ancienne de S. Syméon Stylite le Jeune, 521–592*, 2 vols. (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1962–1970), I, 138–139.

philosophers' as targets of Christian condemnation.<sup>74</sup> Foretelling the future, prophecy, fate, were all topics that continued to engage Christians, just as the providence, and the judgment, of God, had been central issues in the sixth century in the debates about creation, cosmology and the eternity of the world, and works on the subject by Aeneas of Gaza, Zachariah Rhetor, John Philoponus and Cosmas Indicopleustes.<sup>75</sup>

There is no question that fears of the coming of Antichrist, or predictions of the end of the world, are common in late antique sources, as are concerns about divine justice and providence.<sup>76</sup> But the many such passages commonly cited in discussions of late antique apocalyptic are striking above all for their variety, and for their very varied literary contexts. I have not tried in this paper to make the necessary critical comparison between these and the eschatology we find in the Qur'an, but indeed the latter does indeed seem different, whether

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<sup>74</sup> Ed. M. Maas, *Exegesis and Empire in the Early Byzantine Mediterranean. Junillus Africanus and the Instituta Regularia Divinae Legis* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), II, 29, p. 232; II, 18-24 concern *praedictiones*, predictions, or 'foretellings'); cf. also Justinian persecuting astrologers: Proc., SH 11.37-40.

<sup>75</sup> Cameron, *Dialoguing in Late Antiquity*, chapter two; Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church*, 190-98.

<sup>76</sup> However, behind the passages about fate and *tyche* in classicizing historians like Procopius and Agathias discussed by A. Kaldellis, *Procopius of Caesarea: Tyranny, History and Philosophy at the End of Antiquity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004) and 'The historical and religious views of Agathias: a reinterpretation', *Byzantion* 69 (1999), 206-52, lie many precedents in classical historiography.

from the political-historical apocalypses and from the more diffuse Christian anxieties of the age. I would also like to emphasise yet again the sheer variety in the Christian material; *pace* Magdalino, cited above, not even the elements remained the same. Furthermore the apocalyptic works as such often have no clear context, even if we can agree that beyond them lay a complex and wide-ranging area of Christian hope and Christian anxiety. Given such a situation, identifying possible lines of influence in any more precise way between these highly fluid texts and ways of thinking and the Qur'anic message seems to be just as difficult as the other manifold problems with which the latter is surrounded. Yet it is easy to see the level of bewilderment and uncertainty which many Christians must have felt, as well as what must have seemed to many the overall lack of a clear message. Perhaps the idea of Islam as a reform movement against this confused background is a better explanation for its eschatological message than generalization about the possible influence of an 'apocalyptic spirit' that was somehow characteristic of 'late antiquity'.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> For related arguments see also my paper, 'Patristic studies and the emergence of Islam', forthcoming.



