

Emmanouela Grypeou
Stockholm University



“The Abomination of Desolation”: Eastern Christian Apocalyptic Literature and the Symbolic Construction of Islam¹

The Arab Muslim conquests of the Eastern provinces of the Byzantine Empire as well as of Persia were perceived by the local Christian population as events of a deep apocalyptic significance, according to the evidence of the contemporary literature. The writings in question constructed an image of the Muslim invaders and later rulers as the symbolic “Other” based on long-established cultural stereotypes and by making use of traditional apocalyptic topoi.

The texts in view are originally composed in Syriac and most probably in North Mesopotamia in the second half of the seventh century and/or the early eighth century. Apocalypses of the time and provenance include the Sermon of Pseudo-Ephraem,² *On the End of the World*, the so-called *Edessene Apocalypse*, the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*³ and the *Apocalypse of John the Little* that is included in the *Gospel of the Twelve Apostles*.⁴ These apocalyptic writings reflect Christian reactions to the Muslim conquests as well as to the transition of the local societies and lands into an established Muslim political rule.⁵ The

¹ I would like to thank Prof. Guillaume Dye for his valuable comments on previous drafts of this article. I am also indebted to Prof. Reuven Firestone, who pointed out to me my problematic use of the term “post-Islamic”, which was appeared in previous versions of this paper, presented at professional meetings and public lectures.

² Edmund Beck (ed.), *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Sermones* III (Louvain: Secretariat du Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, 1972), pp. 60-71 (text); pp. 79-94 (trans.).

³ For both the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* and the *Edessene Apocalypse*, see Francisco-Javier Martinez, “Eastern Christian Apocalyptic in the Early Muslim Period: Pseudo-Methodius and Pseudo-Athanasius” (Diss. Washington DC, 1985) (ed. and trans.)

⁴ James Rendel Harris, *The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles, together with the Apocalypses of Each One of Them* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1900), pp. 15-21 (text); pp. 34-39 (trans.).

⁵ Previous studies on this literary corpus include: Paul J. Alexander, “Historiens byzantins et croyances eschatologiques”, in *Actes du XIIe Congrès International des Études Byzantines* 2 (Belgrade: [Naučnodelo] 1964), pp. 1-8; Paul J. Alexander, “Byzantium and the Migration of Literary Works”, *Medievalia et humanistica* n.s. 2 (1971), pp. 47-68; Paul J. Alexander and Dorothe F de Abrahamse, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 13-60; Harald Suermann, *Die geschichtstheologische*

time-frame, the geographical location, the common language and culture and perhaps more importantly the common literary genre and agenda allows for the study of these texts as a specific body of literature. The shared literary discourse pertains to a long Jewish and Christian apocalyptic tradition evidenced in pre-Islamic apocalyptic texts, which serve as inspiration sources and literary models for the Christian literary production after the emergence of Islam. The texts in view share a common literary background and demonstrate certain literary and possibly also textual interdependence between them. Significantly, they are related to pre-Islamic apocalyptic texts, such as the *Syriac Daniel Apocalypse*,⁶ the *Syriac Testamentum Domini*⁷ and most importantly, the *Syriac Alexander Legend*⁸ and the *Syriac Song of Alexander*.⁹

Christian apocalyptic literature, which specifically reacts to the emergence and rule of Islam develops into a specifically anti-Islamic sub-genre. This literature may be regarded as a special category of apocalyptic writing that emerges first in the Syrian cultural space and Syriac language but expands rapidly to other regions and languages. “Anti-Islamic” apocalyptic texts also feature in Coptic, in Byzantine Greek, and Armenian but also soon in Arabic.¹⁰ Their popularity among Eastern Christians is attested at least until the tenth century.¹¹

Apocalyptic thinking permeates the literature of the time and is also documented in other literary genres, such as in contemporary homiletical and historiographical works. Significantly, Theophanes the Confessor in his Chronicle reports on the year AD 631/2:

Reaktion auf die einfallenden Muslime in der edessensischen Apokalyptik des 7. Jahrhunderts (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1985; F. J. Martinez, “La literatura apocalíptica y las primeras reacciones cristianas a la conquista islamica en Oriente”, in Gonzalo Anes y Alvares De Castrillon (ed.), *Europa y Islam*, (Madrid: Real Academia de la Historia, 2003), pp. 143-222; Robert Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It*, (Princeton NJ: The Darwin Press, 1997), pp. 257-306; Gerrit Reinink, “Early Christian Responses to the Building of the Dome of the Rock,” *Xristiansky Vostok* 2 (2001), pp. 224-241; Gerrit Reinink, “From Apocalypics to Apologetics: Early Syriac Reactions to Islam”, in W. Brandes-F. Schmieder (eds), *Endzeiten: Eschatologie in den monotheistischen Religionen* (de Gruyter: Berlin, 2008), pp. 75-87; Pablo Ubierna, “Recherches sur l’apocalyptique syriaque et byzantine au VII siècle: la place de l’Émpire romain dans une histoire du salut,” *Bulletin du Centre d’Études Médiévales d’Auxerre* 2 (2008), pp. 1-28.

⁶ See text and translation in: Matthias Henze, *The Syriac Apocalypse of Daniel. Introduction, Text, and Commentary*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001).

⁷ Ephrem Rahmani, *Testamentum Domini nostri Jesu Christi nunc primum editur, latine reddidit et illustravit*, (Mainz: Kirchheim 1899); J. Cooper-A. J. Mac Lean, *The Testament of Our Lord*, trans. into English from the Syriac with Introduction and Notes, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1902).

⁸ E. A. W. Budge, *The History of Alexander the Great being the Syriac Version of Pseudo-Callisthenes*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1899).

⁹ Gerard J. Reinink, *Das syrische Alexanderlied. Die Drei Rezensionen* (CSCO vol. 455- script. syr. 196), (Louvain: Peeters, 1983); Budge, *The History of Alexander the Great*, pp. 163-200.

¹⁰ On a collection and discussion of these texts, see Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, pp. 278-306.

¹¹ Interestingly, “anti-Islamic” apocalyptic writings seem to have experienced a renaissance at the time of the Crusades, see C. Conti Rossini, “Il libro dello Pseudo-Clemente et la crociata di Damietta”, *Rivista degli studi orientali* 9 (1921-23), pp. 32-35; Benjamin Weber, “Damiette, 1220. La cinquième croisade et l’*Apocalypse arabe de Pierre* dans leur contexte nilotique”, *Médiévales*, 79.2 (2020), pp. 69-90.

“At the same time an earthquake occurred in Palestine; and there appeared a sign in the heavens called *dokites* (δοκίτης) in the direction of the south, foreboding the Arab conquest. It remained for thirty days, moving from south to north, and was sword-shaped (ξίφοειδής)”¹²

Significantly, this information is almost paralleled by pseudo-Ephraem in the *Sermon on the End*, who writes, applying biblical symbolism: “A sign will appear in the heavens, the one our Lord spoke of in His gospel (Matthew 24:30) (...) Rulers will quake and tremble; the forces arrayed by them will fall. The peoples of the earth will be terrified when they behold the sign set in the heavens”¹³.

Biblical Ishmaelites

Political and historical concerns of the Christian communities were generally expressed in the familiar and commonly understandable biblical language and terminology. Consequently, when the Muslim armies invade the Byzantine and Persian provinces, they are primarily perceived as the biblical Ishmaelites, that is the non-Christian Arabs.¹⁴

¹² Similar signs in heaven, such as the appearance of comets were commonly understood as bad omens presaging natural and political disasters for the Roman Empire, see, *Oracula Sibyllina* III.672-674 on fiery swords falling from heaven as portents of the end times; cf. Josephus, *De Bello Judaico*. VI. 288-289; Lactantius, *Divinae Institutionae* VII.19.4-5; cf. John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans), 1998, p. 236; cf. the 5th century *Chronicle of Pseudo-Zachariah Rhetor*, Book X.6 (english translation: *The Chronicle of Pseudo-Zachariah: Church and War in Late Antiquity*, ed. G. Greatrex, trans. R. Phenix – C.B. Horn, [Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011], p. 413); cf. *The Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite*: “We also saw another sign in January (this time) due southwest, which looked like a spear. Some people said it was a broom of destruction, other a spear of war” [37] (trans. F.R. Trombley-J.W. Watt, [Liverpool University Press: Liverpool, 2000], p. 36); see also Trombley-Watt: “Great comets were frequently reported in the shape of spears, as for example the one that preceded the Muslim Conquest of the Near East in 634: ‘At this time something like the lance (*ar-rubm*) appeared in the sky [extending] from east to west. And it stayed in this manner for thirty-five nights”, *Chronique de Séert* II, ed. Scher, PO 13, 580) (no month given)” (*The Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite*, p. 37, n. 176); cf. John bar Penkaye, in Sebastian Brock, “North Mesopotamia in the Late Seventh Century: Book XV of John Bar Penkaye’s Rish Melle, “*Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 9 (1987), p. 63; see Mischa Maier, *Das andere Zeitalter Justinians: Kontingenzerfahrung und Kontingenzbewältigung im 6. Jahrhundert n. Chr.*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003), p. 307, p. 342 and esp. Anhang 7 for a list of references from the Greek Byzantine and Syriac literature; cf. Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* 5,23 on twin comets appeared in the sky in the year 728 divine signals of coming catastrophe ... announcing the Saracen invasions of Gaul (John Tolan, “A wild man whose hand will be against all: Saracens and Ishmaelites in Latin Ethnographic Traditions from Jerome to Bede,” in W. Pohl et al. (eds), *Visions of Community in the Post-Roman World* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), pp. 313-330, esp. 328; David Cook, “The Apocalyptic Year 200/815-6 and the Events Surrounding it,” in A. Baumgarten (ed.), *Apocalyptic Time* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), p. 42f.; about comets as portents of disasters in the Muslim apocalyptic literature.

¹³ Beck, *Des heiligen Ephraem*, Sermo V, 80.

¹⁴ Cf. John Lamoreaux: “The Christian authors, who first encountered the Muslims would not do so *tabula rasa*; rather they would bring to their first interpretation to Islam and its place in sacred history a whole

The negative portrayal of the nomadic “sons of Ishmael” dominated the Christian literature of Late Antiquity and is later projected onto the Muslim Arabs. In this context, the Muslims are called ‘the sons of Ishmael’ (Ishmaelites) or the ‘sons of Hagar’ (Hagarenes), terms which become interchangeable in Christian literature. Indeed, Mohammed was soon identified as a “man from the sons of Ishmael”, in several contemporary sources.¹⁵

The Apocalypse of John the Little explicitly links the Muslim rulers, with the prophecy spoken to Abraham by God in Genesis 17:20: “And every kingdom or people will be terrified at the report of this people (...) And twelve renowned kings shall rise up from that people according as it is written in the law when God talked with Abraham and said to him, ‘Lo! Concerning Ishmael your son I have heard you, and twelve princes shall he beget along with many princesses’; and he, even he, is the people of the land of the South”.¹⁶

Moreover, Ishmael is typically described as the “wild ass of the desert” following the Syriac Peshitta text of Genesis 16:12, in which Ishmael is called “a wild ass”.¹⁷ According to the Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius, the foraying Muslims are identified with “Ishmael, the wild ass of the desert, who will be sent with fierce anger against the whole earth: men, wild animals, domestic animals, and even trees and plants. It is to be a chastisement in which there will be no mercy”.¹⁸

Their obvious backwardness according to the Christian sources implicitly discredits them from the Abrahamic promise. This understanding is consistent with the biblical exegetical approach, which viewed Ishmael as an illegitimate son, the son of the foreign slave girl, placed him outside the promises, outside commonly accepted social norms and even outside the “civilized” world.¹⁹

According to Sozomen, the Ishmaelites adopted the name “Saracens” in order to conceal their illegitimate descent from the slave Hagar. Due to their common ancestry

series of unfavourable stereotypes.” (“Early Eastern Christian Responses to Islam,” in John Tolan (ed.), *Medieval Christian Perceptions of Islam: A Book of Essays*, [N.Y.: Garland, 1996], p. 11).

¹⁵ See for example, the mid-seventh century sources, such as the Armenian History attributed to Sebeos: “At that time a certain man from among those same sons of Ishmael, whose name was Mahmet, a merchant, as if by God’s command appeared to them as a preacher [and] the path of truth” ([135], trans. *Ps.-Sebeos, The Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos*, Robert W. Thomson, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999), p. 95; cf. the Chronicle of Khuzistan, in Theodor Nöldeke (ed.), ‘Die von Guidi herausgegebene syrische Chronik,’ *Sitzungsberichte der philosophisch-historischen Classe der kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften* 28 (1893), pp. 1-47.

¹⁶ Trans. Harris, *The Gospel of the 12 Apostles*, p. 37.

¹⁷ See Gerard J. Reinink, “Ismael, der Wildesel in der Wüste. Zur Typologie der Apokalypse des Pseudo-Methodius”, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 75.2 (1982), pp. 336-344.

¹⁸ Ch. XI, trans. Martinez, *Eastern Christian Apocalyptic*, p. 140.

¹⁹ See E. Grypeou – H. Spurling, *The Book of Genesis in Late Antiquity: Encounters between Jewish and Christian Exegesis*, (Leiden: Brill, 2013), pp. 274-275.

from Abraham, they share several customs and rites with the Jews.²⁰ Following this cultural stereotype, the Edessene Apocalypse, for example, recounts the oppression and the wrongdoings of the “Sons of Hagar”. The title “Sons of Hagar” is loaded with pejorative connotations in the biblically minded authors and audience of these writings. Hagar was associated with foreignness, slavery, inferior social status and most importantly idolatry.

The Apocalypse of Pseudo-Ephraem, probably the earliest apocalypse to be written in the aftermath of the Islamic conquest, mentions that they keep the “covenant of Abraham”.²¹ This specific reference may suggest Abrahamic associations.²² However, the “Abrahamic covenant” in this context most probably simply refers to the practice of circumcision that was observed by the Arabic tribes.²³

A People from the Desert

Ishmael and his descendants served as a prototype for desert nomads who were perceived as a threat to the settled people and ultimately to the civilised world.²⁴ The collective memory ascribed to the Muslims traditional cultural stereotypes, which are reflected in the apocalyptic writings and beyond. The most central and most characteristic signifier of the Muslims was for their Christian contemporaries their connection with the desert, that inhospitable place, from where they come.

From the fourth century onwards, the Christian literature identifies the descendants of Ishmael, the “sons of Ishmael” with the so-called Saracens, the nomadic Arab tribes of the

²⁰ HE VI.38; similarly, Epiphanius of Salamis identifies Ishmael and his twelve sons with the ancestors of the tribes known as Hagarenes or Ishmaelites, who are called Saracens in his time and practice circumcision (*Haer* 4.1.6-7; *Haer* 30.33.3).

²¹ Beck, *Des heiligen Ephrem*, V, p. 75. Beck remarks that it is clear, that the text here refers to the Muslim Arabs because this is a Qur’anic expression (*Des heiligen Ephrem*, V, p. 81).

²² See on this also Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, p. 261; G.J. Reinink thinks that this reference in the text on the observance of the covenant of Abraham is an allusion to the *Muslim* character of the conquests. More specifically, he argues that „Es darf also vorausgesetzt werden, dass PE (i.e. Pseudo-Ephrem) um den Monotheismus und vielleicht auch um gewisse Bräuche der muslimischen Araber wußte“ (“Pseudo-Ephraem’s ‘Rede über das Ende’ und die syrisch-eschatologische Literatur des siebenten Jahrhunderts,” *ARAM* 5 (1993), pp. 437-463).

²³ Already Josephus (*AI* 1.12.2) and later Sozomen (*HE* 6.38) and Epiphanius of Salamis have described the Arabs’ ‘Jewish’ customs in the context of the practice of circumcision (*Haer* 30.33.3). On the practice of male circumcision among pre-Islamic Arabs, see P.Crone-M.A. Cook, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 13; Kathryn Kueny, “Abraham’s Test: Islamic Male Circumcision as Anti-Ante-Covenantal Practice”, in J.C. Reeves, *Bible and Qur’an: Essays in Scriptural Intertextuality* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), pp. 161-182; Uri Rubin, “Hanifiyya and Kaba”, *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 13 (1990), pp. 96-112; Menachem J. Kister, “... And He was Born Circumcised ...”, in M. J. Kister, *Concepts and Ideas at the Dawn of Islam* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1997), pp. 10-30.

²⁴ On the pre-Islamic image of the Saracens in Christian literature in association with the biblical understanding of Ishmael, see Tolan, “A wild man whose hand will be against all”, pp. 313-330; cf. Suermann, *Die geschichtstheologische Reaktion*, p. 148.

desert. Ishmael and his descendants were linked with the wilderness of the desert from a geographical as well as from a cultural perspective.²⁵ Significantly, Jerome refers to the Saracens, “who wander with no fixed abode invade all the nations who border on the desert; and they are attacked by all”.²⁶ Jerome further describes in the *Life of Saint Malchus*, a monk of Nisibis, the Ishmaelites as riding horses and camels, donning long hair and headbands, half-naked, raiding in order to plunder and take captives. Their barbarism is underlined by their consumption of half-cooked meat and camel milk.²⁷

A detailed report about the customs of the “Saracens” is attested in Ammianus Marcellinus, the fifth-century historian, who calls them “rapacious kites”; “warriors of equal rank, half-nude, clad in dyed cloaks as far as the loins”, “without fixed abodes or lands” ... “always on the move.” He, further, stresses the lack of agriculture among them.²⁸

A negative perception of the nomadic Arab tribes as culturally inferior pervades the Christian literature in the centuries before the rise of Islam.²⁹ Moreover, the Christian writers of the 4th and 5th centuries would stress the barbarous custom of alleged human sacrifices – mainly of comely youths and maidens – as practiced among the pre-Islamic Arabs in honour of astral deities. Already Eusebius describes how these polytheistic barbarians practice human sacrifice.³⁰

²⁵ Israel Eph'al notes that, in the biblical narrative, Ishmael is associated throughout with the desert regions around Palestine and Egypt. Hagar, while pregnant with Ishmael, flees to the desert 'beside the road to Shur' (Gen 16:7); furthermore, when expelled from Abraham's household, Hagar and the child Ishmael flee to the desert of Beersheba (Gen 21:14). Grown-up Ishmael dwells in the desert of Paran, and his descendants live in the same area of Havilah to Shur (25:13); see Israel Eph'al, *The Ancient Arabs: Nomads on the Border of the Fertile Crescent, 9th-5th cent.*, (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1982), p. 234.

²⁶ *Quaestiones Hebraicae* 16.12.

²⁷ Cf. *Vita Malchi monachi captivi* 4; Jerome, *Commentarium in Isaiam* 5,21-13,17 on Saracens who live in tents and in the desert and live a pastoral life, cf. *Commentarium in Amos* 2,5,25-7. On Saracens as devotees of Lucifer, the morning star, see Jerome, *Vita sancti Hilarionis* 16; the 8th cent. CE writing, known as the *Chronicle of Zuqin* describes the pre-Islamic Arabs as demon-worshippers and idolaters (AG 932) (in Andrew Palmer (ed.), *The Seventh Century in the West- Syrian Chronicles*, [Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1993], p. 56). See also Julian the Emperor, *Or* 1.21B (1:52) on the “robbers of Arabia”. Similarly, Pseudo-Nilus reports of Saracens that make a living by “robbing people on roads that they watch in ambush” (*Narratio* III.1, ed. F. Conka, [Leipzig: Teubner, 1983]); This particular understanding of the Arabs as wandering plundering nomads that live in tents is already attested in Strabo, *Geographica* 16.1.27: Arabian scenitae being “a tribe of brigands and shepherds who readily move from one place to another when pasture and booty tend to become exhausted”, see Judah B. Segal, “Arabs in Syriac Literature Before the Rise of Islam,” in: *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 4 (1984), p.101.

²⁸ *Res Gestae*, 31.16.5-6 (3:501-503), see Segal, *Arabs in Syriac Literature*, p. 102; cf. Will Richter, “Die Darstellung der Hunnen bei Ammianus Marcellinus (31,2,1-11)”, *Zeitschrift für alte Geschichte* 23 (1974), pp. 343-377.

²⁹ See Elisabeth M. Jeffreys, “The Image of the Arabs in Byzantine Literature”, in *Seventeenth International Congress at Dumbarton Oaks* 1986, (New Rochelle, N.Y.: Caratzas, 1986), pp. 305-323; cf. Vassilios Christides, “Arabs as Barbaroi before the Rise of Islam”, *Balkan Studies* 10 (1969), pp. 315-324; Vassilios Christides, “Pre-Islamic Arabs in Byzantine Illuminations”, *Le Muséon* 83.1-2 (1979), pp. 167-181.

³⁰ *PE* IV.16-17; see also Procopius who notes that the most distant people in the desert is the “the man-eating Saracens” (*Bellis* I.19.8-16); on human sacrifice specifically, see Jacob of Sarug, “On the Fall of

The identification of the Ishmaelites with the desert and their fundamental antithesis to the “civilised” world is also stressed in several pre-Islamic Syriac texts. We find similar descriptions in the work of Isaac of Antioch in the mid of the 5th century CE, about “the heathen king in our borders, the locusts planted in our lands; the son of Hagar, a ravening wolf, (that) makes raids in the midst of our region”.³¹ Moreover, according to the same writer, the ‘Arabaye have disturbed the land in the portion of it that they have seized ... Furious are the wild asses, children of Hagar, and they have laid waste both good and bad ...’.³²

This brief survey of sources demonstrates the familiarity of the local population with the Arab nomads before the rise of Islam. Furthermore, it demonstrates the local negative perception of their customs and their presence in the vicinity of the “settled” world. The depiction of the fearful, uncivilised robbers that stubbornly prevails in these reports is consistent with the description of the early Muslims in the Christian apocalyptic literature of the same time. Accordingly, the earliest reactions to the Muslim invasions by the local population should be examined and evaluated in the context of the long-established negative perceptions (and possibly occasional negative experience) towards the Arab nomadic tribes. The realisation among the local Christians that the raids of the “ravening wolf” are not a temporary phenomenon but acquire the character of a permanent reign might have given rise to apocalyptic sentiments.

The signifier of the frightful desert follows the cultural description of the Arab Muslims throughout the Christian literature of the period. According to Pseudo-Sebeos’ History: “He (i.e. the Lord) clearly indicates that the fire was kindled in the desert, by saying: ‘You shall send nooses upon them, the wild beasts of the desert, who will drag them hither and thither across the earth’. (cf. Deut 23:24) Concerning this the prophet Daniel cried out: ‘The fourth wild beast, fearsome and astonishing ...’ (Dan 7:7).³³ And further: “... and in that direction (i.e. the south) the nations dwelling in the great desert who are the sons of Abraham born from Hagar and Keturah: Ismael, ... etc. (...) from the great and fearsome desert where Moses and the sons of Israel dwelt, whom the prophet described: “Like a

Idols,” 113f., *Homiliae Selectae*, ed. Bedjan, vol. III (Leipzig–Paris: Otto Harrassowitz, 1907); cf. Zacharias Rhetor, *Chronicle* II.77 and John Moschus, *Pratum Spirituale* 155 [PG 87.3:3024 AB] on human sacrifice among the Saracens, cf. Irfan Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century* (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1995); see also the Narrations of ps.-Neilos of Ancyra about the “savage Saracens” offering (good looking) youth as a sacrifice or the lack of human, camels that they hack to pieces and entirely consume afterwards (*Narr.* III.2-3; VII.3-9), and also John of Nikiou in his seventh century, *Chronicle* [LXXXIX.33-34], who describes raids of the Saracens against monks around the time of emperor Anastasius and calling them “impious barbarians, who eat human flesh and drink blood” cf. Daniel E. Caner, *History and Historiography from Late Antique Sinai*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), p. 95f.; cf. Joseph Henninger, “Menschenopfer bei den Arabern”, *Anthropos* 53 (1958), pp. 721-805.

³¹ De jejunio 105ff., ed. Bickell, *Isaaci Antiocheni, Opera Omnia I* (Gissae: Rickeri, 1873), p. 280

³² De expugnatione Beth Chur Urbis I.37, ed. Bickell, *Isaaci Antiocheni, Opera Omnia I*, 208; see Segal, “Arabs in Syriac Literature”, p. 107.

³³ Cf. Dan 7:7, *Ps.-Sebeos. The Armenian History*, p. 152.

tempest it shall run from the south, coming from the desert, an awesome place” (cf. Is 21:1). That is the great and fearsome desert whence the tempest of those nations emerged in a storm and occupied all the land, trampled and smote it. So the saying was fulfilled: “The fourth beast, the fourth kingdom will stand on the earth, which surpassed in evil all kingdoms, which made the whole earth a desert” (Dan 7:23).³⁴

The Muslim Arabs represented in the contemporary literature a non-urban culture par excellence. They were stereotypically described as the “threatening nomads”, ‘uncivilized’ desert-dwellers; the “outsiders” to the civilisation of the settled communities. This view is explicitly expressed by Maximus the Confessor, who writes between the years 630 and 640 and despairs over the present evils now encompassing the civilized world. ... To see a barbarious nation of the desert overrunning another land as if it were their own, to see civilization itself being ravaged by wild and untamed beasts whose form alone is human”.³⁵

Similarly, John bar Penkaye, writing in the late seventh century in North Mesopotamia, calls the Muslim Arabs the “barbarian people of the desert” – or the “barbarian kingdom of the sons of Hagar”– “a people that is not open to persuasion (cf. Is 65:2) which acknowledges no treaty or agreement, which affects no flattery or blandishment, whose comfort lies in blood that is shed without reason, whose pleasure is to dominate everyone, whose wish it is to take captives and to deport. Hatred and wrath is their food; they take no comfort in what they are offered”.³⁶

Following traditional imagery that understood the Ishmaelites as a people beyond the limits of the inhabited world, the apocalyptic literature of the period, draws a line between the “desert” of Yathrib and the civilised world.

Significantly, both Pseudo-Ephrem and Pseudo-Methodius begin their respective apocalyptic narratives about the time of the Muslims with those - nearly identical - words: “A people will emerge from the desert”.³⁷ Pseudo-Methodius stresses the antithesis between the desert and the civilisation (the inhabited world and the cultivated land) and the uncivilised Ishmaelites. Their barbarious customs underline their “primitive” nature. Accordingly: “They (i.e., the pre-Islamic Ishmaelites) fled from the desert of Yathrib and entered into the cultivated land. (...) They were like locusts; they used to walk naked; they ate flesh from vessels of flesh and drank the blood of animals.” And as the same text predicts: “In the future, however, they will come out and devastate the earth and rule over it.”³⁸

The reference to the consumption of flesh from vessels of flesh is probably an allusion to the consumption of raw meat, which was considered as a particularly barbarous custom

³⁴ Cf. Ps.-Sebeos, *The Armenian History*, p. 133.

³⁵ Epistel 14; PG 91:540- trans. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw it*, p. 77f.

³⁶ Brock, “North Mesopotamia”, p. 58.

³⁷ cf. Ps.-Methodius, trans. Martinez, *Eastern Christian Apocalyptic*, p. 139; Pseudo-Ephrem, in Beck, *Des heiligen Ephraem*, p. 73.

³⁸ Trans. Martinez, *Eastern Christian Apocalyptic*, pp. 128-129.

in Late Antique culture.³⁹ More specifically, the Greek version of Pseudo-Methodius remarks that they used to consume camel meat (*κρέας καμήλων*).⁴⁰ The consumption of camel meat was equally abhorrent. Interestingly, Theodoret of Cyrrhus praised Simeon the Stylite for having influenced the pagan Ishmaelites to renounce their ancestral custom of eating “wild asses and camels”.⁴¹

Theophanes in his Chronography informs that at the beginning of Muhammad’s advent “the misguided Jews thought he was the Messiah who is awaited by them, so that ten of their leaders joined him and accepted his religion (...) but when they saw him eating camel meat, they realised that he was not the one they thought him to be”.⁴²

The image of the barbarian desert dweller that walks around naked, consumes raw flesh, and raids the settled people develops into a persistent stereotypical motif assigned to the early Muslims by the Christian apocalypses.⁴³

The Unclean Nation

As observed, our sources describe their first encounter with the Muslim armies primarily as a cultural shock. The Ishmaelites dwell beyond the borders of civilisation and incorporate all the stereotypical traits of exotic but dreadful barbarians. Significantly, they will even be able to exercise super-human powers. The apocalypse of Pseudo-Ephraem clearly alludes to their super-natural abilities, describing how these robbers will fly across the gorges and over the peaks of the mountains.⁴⁴

Certain features attributed to the early Muslims reflect descriptions of the mythical eschatological unclean nations Gog and Magog as documented in the Syriac Alexander

³⁹ Jerome in the fourth century also notes that “all the barbarians of the desert live on the milk and flesh of camels (...). They regard it as a sin to eat the flesh of the pig” (“Adversus Jovinianum” II.7; *PL* 23: 294; 334; see Segal, “Arabs in Syriac Literature”, p. 104); cf. Jerome, *Vita Sancti Malchi*, §4-5 *PL* 23:55f, who specifies that the food habits of the „Ishmaelites“ consisted of half-raw meat and camel milk (in Segal, “Arabs in Syriac Literature”, p. 103).

⁴⁰ Trans. Benjamin Garstad, *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius. An Alexandrian World Chronicle*, (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012), p. 89.

⁴¹ *H.Rel.* (PG 82:1476); cf. Irfan Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fifth Century*, (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1988 [repr. 2006]), p. 150; cf. Brent Shaw, “Eaters of Flesh; Drinkers of Milk: the Ancient Mediterranean Ideology of the Pastoral Nomad,” *Ancient Society* 13/14 (1982/83), pp. 5-31.

⁴² Theophanes, *Chronicle* 333, 9-10 (trans. C. Mango- R. Scott, *The Chronicle of Theophanes* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997], p. 464), the eating of camel meat is forbidden in *Deut* 14:7.

⁴³ Cf. Patricia Crone, “Barefoot and Naked: What did the Bedouin of the Arab Conquest Look Like?”, *Muqarnas* 25 (2008) (FS Oleg Grabar), pp. 1-10.

⁴⁴ See Beck, *Des heiligen Ephraem*, p. 93.

literature.⁴⁵ Thus, they are further described as monstrous, impure and, once more, beyond the borders of civilisation.⁴⁶

Similar to the stereotypical description of the “mythical” nations of Gog and Magog, the Ishmaelites are perceived as deeply inhuman. Pseudo-Methodius describes how “these barbarian rulers are not men, but sons of destruction. They are spoilers, and they are sent for desolation. They are ruination and they come forth for the ruin of everything, being abominable people who love abomination. At the time of their coming forth from the desert (they will tear open pregnant women); and they will take babies by force from their mothers’ arms and dash them against the rocks like unclean animals”.⁴⁷

These atrocious crimes are an additional manifestation of their inhumanity and correspond to descriptions of the people of Gog and Magog in the earlier Syriac literature. According to the Syriac Song of Alexander, which was attributed to Jacob of Sarug, the people of Gog and Magog are: “filthy, haughty (...). They rend and devour the flesh of man and of beasts. They all wash in blood which has flowed from mankind”.⁴⁸ (...) “They shall fly and fill the face of earth with wars and slaughters”.⁴⁹ (...) “They shall dash weaned children on the stones without sparing and they shall rip women with child and cast them down with their offspring”.⁵⁰

Furthermore, their barbarian nature is also manifested in their physical appearance. In the Syriac Song of Alexander, the unclean nations are famously terrible of aspect.⁵¹ According to the Apocalypse of John the Little, the Ishmaelites is a people of deformed aspect and their appearance and manners resemble those of women.⁵² The physical deformity and unnatural appearance as a cultural feature is often attributed to exotic peoples beyond the limits of the civilised world.

⁴⁵ Theodoret of Cyrrihus preserves an allegedly Jewish tradition, according to which Gog and Magog will appear at the end of times (Interpretatio in Ezechielem, PG 81:1217); cf. John of Ephesus on the apocalyptic dimensions attributed to the invasions of the Huns (Lives of Eastern Saints, PO 17, 1923, 8).

⁴⁶ On Gog and Magog as impure and monstrous nations, cf. E. A. W. Budge, *The Alexander Book in Ethiopia: The Ethiopic Versions of Pseudo-Callisthenes, the Chronicle of Al-Makîn, the Narrative of Joseph Ben Gorion, and a Christian Romance of Alexander*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), pp. 231-233; See also William J. Aerts, “Gog, Magog, Dogheads and Other Monsters in the Byzantine World,” in A. A. Seyes-Gohrab et al. (eds.) *Gog and Magog: The Clans of Chaos in World Literature* (Indiana: Purdue University Press, 2007), pp. 23-35; Cf. Wilhelm Brandes, “Gog, Magog und die Hunnen: Anmerkungen zur eschatologischen ‘Ethnographie’ der Völkerwanderungszeit”, in Pohl, *Visions of Community*, pp. 477-498.

⁴⁷ Trans. Martinez, *Eastern Christian Apocalyptic*, p. 144f.; cf. Reinink, *Die Apokalypse des Pseudo-Methodius*, p. 52.

⁴⁸ Budge, *The History of Alexander the Great* [535-538], p. 192.

⁴⁹ Budge, *The History of Alexander the Great* [505], p. 190.

⁵⁰ Budge, *The History of Alexander the Great* [510], p. 191.

⁵¹ See Budge, *The History of Alexander the Great* [595], p. 195: “An ugly people, a people flayed and uprooted and full of blemishes”.

⁵² Harris, *The Gospel of the 12 Apostles*, p. 36.

The People of the Land of the South

The Christian texts read in the days of the Muslims the fulfilment of typical biblical prophecies about the end of the world. Most significantly, the Muslims become part of the Danielic apocalyptic scheme. The emergence of the Muslims is perceived as the fulfilment of the Danielic prophecy regarding the kingdom of the South, which will ultimately be defeated by the kingdom of the North. This pattern is perhaps most characteristically to be found in the Apocalypse of John the Little that prophesies the coming of the king of the North, who will devastate the Muslim armies. Accordingly: “Then suddenly the prophecy of Daniel shall be fulfilled: God shall send forth a mighty wind, the Southern one”.⁵³ Similarly, Pseudo-Methodius remarks that the sons of Ishmael were called by Daniel, the “arm of the South”.⁵⁴

As the Armenian History attributed to Sebeos, written c.660 CE, elucidates, there are four world empires, which correspond to the four cardinal points: the Greeks are in the West, the Sassanians are in the East, Gog and Magog in the North and finally, Ishmael in the South. Pseudo-Sebeos explicitly associates the Muslim Arabs with the fourth and most horrible beast from the prophecy of Daniel, which will appear in the South and ‘will consume the whole world’. As he further remarks: “They are as a storm which comes moving from the south, from the terrible desert” (cf. Is. 28:15, 18). “This fourth, arising from the south is the kingdom of Ishmael”.⁵⁵

The Forerunners of the Antichrist

Borrowing a very well-known motif from John’s Book of Revelation, the Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius envisions the final tyranny caused by the Ishmaelites as preceded by four disasters: death, destruction, ruin and desolation.⁵⁶

⁵³ Trans. Harris, *The Gospel of the 12 Apostles*, p.36; the gathering of the four winds of heaven is a common apocalyptic topos, see Dan 7:7; Dan 8:8; Zech 2:6; 6:5; Matt 24:31. In the apocalyptic literature they represent the four points of the compass, see 4 Ezra 13:5; 2Baruch 64:3; 1 Enoch 18:2; 76:14; 77:16.

⁵⁴ Pesh. Dan. 11:5. The identification of Ishmael with the South is here unambiguous. And further in the same text: “the people of the land of the South”, (trans. Martinez, *Eastern Christian Apocalyptic*, p. 139). On the reception and impact of this motif on the later understanding of the Muslims, see Bo Holmberg, “Ahl/fariq at-tayman – ein rätselvolles Epitheton,” *Oriens Christianus* 78 (1994), pp. 86-103.

⁵⁵ Trans. Thomson, *Ps-Sebeos. The Armenian History*, p. 105; four kingdoms not successive but associated with four quarters of the earth, see Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, p. 535; On the early identification of the foraying Muslims with the fourth beast from the Book of Daniel (7:23ff.), see the *Doctrine of Jacob Recently Baptised* V.16.209. As Thomson remarks: “The connection between Arab expansions and the end of the world is reinforced at the end of the main text (176-177) by the image of fire used of both, flaming up from God’s anger and kindled in the desert” (*Ps-Sebeos. The Armenian History*, p. lxxvi); cf. also: “who could describe the fearful calamity of the Ishmaelite brigand who set fire to sea and land? However, the blessed Daniel had earlier prophesied such a disaster which befell the land” (*Ps-Sebeos. The Armenian History*, p. 105).

⁵⁶ “These four captains of the chastisement: are to be sent at their head against all the earth; Ruin and the Destroyer, Desolation and the Spoiler” (Martinez, *Eastern Christian Apocalyptic*, p. 141); cf. Rev 6.

Most typically, however, the “Ishmaelites” are perceived to be the forerunners of the Antichrist. The idea that the “Muslims” are announcing the advent of Antichrist dominates the perception of the Muslims in contemporary literature.⁵⁷ In the *Chronicle* by Theophanes it is recounted how Oumaros (i.e. the Caliph Umar ibn al-Khattab) entered the Holy City dressed in filthy garments made of camel-hair. Accordingly, ‘Umar stood as the prototype of the uncivilised desert-dweller in front of the aged patriarch, Sophronios. As the story goes, “the patriarch asked him to accept a linen garment to wear until his own cloak was washed. ‘Umar (...) showing a devilish pretence, sought the Temple of the Jews - the one built by Solomon – that he make it a place of worship for his own blasphemous religion. Seeing this, Sophronios said, - in a much-quoted phrase-: ‘Verily, this is the abomination of desolation standing in a holy place, as has been spoken through the prophet Daniel’”.⁵⁸

In pre-Islamic Christian apocalyptic literature, the motif of the ‘presence of the abomination in the Holy Place’ is associated with the appearance of the Antichrist. Accordingly, whereas the Muslim rule is commonly understood as a precursor of the eschatological reign of the Antichrist, the description of the Muslim rule itself follows traditional apocalyptic motifs attributed to the times of the Antichrist. The reign of the Antichrist is typically depicted as a demonic, ungodly rule that will bring harsh persecutions and unprecedented tribulations on the faithful.

The capture of Jerusalem and the conquest of the Holy Land by the Muslims was most probably one of the main events that triggered apocalyptic anxieties among the local Christian population.⁵⁹ A crucial event was the construction of the Dome of the Rock by ‘Abd al-Malik, which was seemingly considered by the contemporaries as the re-building of the Temple;⁶⁰ an action that in the classical Christian apocalyptic discourse is commonly ascribed to the reign of the Antichrist.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Cf. implicitly in Maximus Confessor, Epistel 14 and explicitly in John of Damascus, *De haeresibus* 100; cf. Daniel J. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam: The “Heresy of Ishmaelites”*, (Leiden: Brill, 1972), p. 133.

⁵⁸ Theophanes, *Chronicle*, trans. Mango-Scott, pp. 471-472; cf. Dan 9:27; 11:31; 12:11; Matt 24:15.

⁵⁹ On the apocalyptic understanding of the building of the Dome of the Rock, see the Copto-Arabic Apocalypse of Shenoute, „and after that the sons of Ishmael will raise, ... they would wish to become the masters of the entire world, and rule over it and build the temple of Jerusalem ... then the end is near, ... this is the destruction of which the prophet Daniel spoke that will arrive at the holy place. (see Émile Amélineau, *Monuments pour servir à l'histoire de l'Égypte chrétienne aux IV^e et V^e siècles*, [Paris: Leroux, 1888], p. 341); on similar apocalyptic interpretations of the building of the Dome of the Rock by Jews and in a certain way by Muslims too, see Andreas Kaplony, *The Haram of Jerusalem (324-1099)*, (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2002); Guy G. Stroumsa, “Christian Memories and Visions of Jerusalem in Islamic Context”, in O. Grabar-B. Zeev Kedar (eds), *Where Heaven and Earth Meet: Jerusalem's Holy Esplanade* (Austin TX: University of Texas Press, 2009), pp. 321-33 and pp. 404-405.

⁶⁰ See also Ps.-Sebeos: “the rebellious Jews, who after gaining help from the Hagarenes for a brief while, decided to rebuild the temple of Solomon” (...) But the Ishmaelites being envious of them, expelled them from that place and called the same house of prayer their own” (trans. Thomson, *Ps.-Sebeos. The Armenian History*, pp. 102-103); cf. Gerrit J. Reinink, Einleitung in: *Die syrische Apokalypse des Pseudo-Methodius*, p. XXI. On the building of the Dome of the Rock, see O. Grabar, *The Dome of the Rock*, (Cambridge Mass.:

Signs or phenomena that are commonly mentioned in the pre-Islamic apocalyptic literature, for example in the Testament of our Lord, in connection with the rule of the Antichrist are stereotypically repeated in connection with the Muslim rule. Typical signs of the Muslim rule include serious draught, the dissolution of family bonds, the disturbance of the social order, et al. As in several other apocalyptic texts, these apocalypses stress that many people will wish their death.⁶²

According to the Edessene Apocalypse: “At that time, the rainfalls will decrease, the waters of the springs come to an end, and the fruits of the trees and all the bounty of the ground fail, from the impiety of the sons of Ismael”.⁶³ “There will be wars everywhere”.⁶⁴

Finally, these early Christian apocalyptic texts apply various scenarios about the end of the world followed by the end of the Islamic rule. Pseudo-Ephraem maintains that the Muslim conquests are a precursor for the final invasions of the apocalyptic nations that will be sent by God so that the earth will be cleansed from the impurity. In a way, the Arabs are the forerunner of the unclean nations and they are implicitly associated with them as an apocalyptic nation that has already invaded the earth announcing its final destruction.

According to the apocalyptic scenario developed by the Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius, the liberation from the Muslim oppression will be ushered through the emergence of the messianic figure of the Last Emperor, the “King of the Greeks”.⁶⁵

Harvard University Press, 2006); O. Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy: Early Islamic Jerusalem*, (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996); Chase F. Robinson, *ʿAbd al-Malik*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 71-75.

⁶¹ Hippolytus, *De antichristo* 6.5.11; Cyrill of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Homilies* 15.15; Latin Ps.-Ephrem, *Sermo de Fine Mundi* 7; Ephrem graecus, *Sermo de Adventu Domini* III.38c; see Wilhelm Bousset, *Der Antichrist in der Überlieferung des Judentums und des Neuen Testament und der alten Kirche*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1895), p. 105, who lists additional references. This motif is associated with the motif of the antichrist's session in the temple of Jerusalem, as Bousset remarks: “Soll the Antichrist sich im Tempel zu Jerusalem niederlassen, so muß dieser vorhanden sein, - aber nach der Zerstörung Jerusalem wieder aufgebaut werden” (ibid.); cf. Gregory J. Jenks, *The Origins and Early Developments of the Antichrist Myth*, (Berlin-N.Y.: de Gruyter, 1991).

⁶² Cf. *Apocalypse of Elijah* 25; Ps. Hippolytus, *De Consummatione Mundi* 33; Ephraem Graecus, *Sermo de Adventu Domini*, III.140; Josephus, *BJ* 2,84; 2Baruch 10,6.

⁶³ Martinez, *Eastern Christian Apocalyptic*, p. 232; On the motif of the eschatological drought, see Ps. John Apocalypse I.6; Lactantius, *Inst.* VII.66; Ps.-Hippolytus, *Antichrist De Consummatione Mundi* 27, Ps.-Ephraem *Sermo de Fine Mundi* 8. On similar phenomena in connection with the rule of the Antichrist, see Bousset, *Antichrist*, pp. 159-166.

⁶⁴ See Jes 19,2; Mich 7,9; 2Chr 15,6; SyrTestDom, 209 in: John Peter Arendzen, “A New Syriac Text of the Apocalyptic Part of the ‘Testament of the Lord’”, *Journal of Theological Studies* 2 (1901), pp. 401-416.

⁶⁵ On this apocalyptic figure, see: Paul J. Alexander, “Byzantium and the Migration of Literary Works and Motifs: The Legend of the Last Roman Emperor”, *Medievalia et Humanistica* 2 (1971), pp. 47-68; Paul J. Alexander, “The Medieval Legend of the Last Emperor and its Messianic Origin”, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 41 (1978), pp. 1-15; Paul J. Alexander, “The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition”, *Byzantion* 82 (2012), pp. 213-257; Gerrit J. Reinink, “Die syrischen Wurzeln der mittelalterlichen Legende vom römischen Endkaiser” in M. Gosman-J. Van Ost (eds), *Non nova, sed nove. Mélanges de civilisation médiévale dédiés à Willem Noomen*, (Groningen: Bouma's Boekhuis, 1984), pp. 195-209; Gerrit J. Reinink,

Pseudo-Methodius depicts the last Emperor, as someone who was asleep and will go out with great anger to destroy the Ishmaelites and to send them back to Yathrib, their homeland. The text stresses in particular their expulsion from the Promised Land, which is viewed as occupied by the Muslims.

“The king of the Greeks will come out with great anger and pour desolation and destruction in the desert of Yathrib. (...) The sons of the king of the Greeks will seize the regions of the desert and will finish by the sword any survivor left among them in the Promised Land. Fear will fall upon them from all sides. They will be given over to the sword, to destruction, captivity and slaughter”.⁶⁶ The Christian apocalyptic plan for the return of the Ishmaelites to ‘Yathrib’ implies a final restoration of the geopolitical order of the time, which was - according to these texts - disturbed after the Islamic conquests.

The Apocalypse of John the Little recounts how the king of the North will devastate their armies and captivate their sons. “Bitter wedlock and misery shall fall upon them. The Lord shall cause the spirit of the South to return to his homeland and shall bring to nought his name and fame. They shall enter again the place from whence they came out”.⁶⁷

The Christian apocalyptic texts hope for perfect peace and tranquillity during the last kingdom of the king of the Greeks. The vision of perfect peace paints a radically contrasting image to the previous sufferings and tribulations imposed by the Muslims.

The expulsion of the Muslim rulers according to the apocalyptic scenario of these texts will introduce the restoration of the natural and social order. Pseudo-Methodius hopes for a final unprecedented peace, during which the captives will return to their homes, the churches will be renovated, the cities rebuilt, and joy will prevail on the whole earth [XIII]. Similarly, the Edessene Apocalypse foresees the return of prosperity and abundance on earth. Then: “There will be peace and tranquillity in the whole creation, in every people and nation”.⁶⁸

Abstract: This article focuses on the Christian apocalyptic literature that was produced as a specific reaction to the
Resumen: Este trabajo se centra en la literatura apocalíptica cristiana que fue producida como una reacción específica al

“Pseudo-Methodius und die Legende vom römischen Endkaiser” in W. Verbeke-D. Verhelst-A. Welkenhuysen (eds), *The Use and Abuse of Eschatology in the Middle Ages: Proceedings of the International Colloquium Organized by the Instituut voor Middeleeuwse Studies of the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven*, May 14-16, (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1988), pp. 82-111; Harald Suermann, “Der byzantinische Endkaiser bei pseudo-Methodius” *Oriens Christianus* 71 (1987), pp. 140-155; András Kraft, “The Last Roman Emperor Topos in the Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition” *Byzantion* 82 (2012), pp. 213-257; Christopher Bonura, “When Did the Legend of the Last Emperor Originate? A New Look at the Textual Relationship between *the Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* and the *Tiburtine Sibyl*”, *Viator* 47.3 (2016), pp. 47-100.

⁶⁶ Trans. Martinez, *Eastern Christian Apocalyptic*, p. 149.

⁶⁷ Trans. Harris, *The Gospel of the 12 Apostles*, p. 38

⁶⁸ Trans. Martinez, *Eastern Christian Apocalyptic*, pp. 233-234.

emergence of Islam and the consolidation of the Islamic rule in the Eastern provinces of Byzantium. The discussion examines how these texts re-cycled, used and manipulated long established cultural stereotypes, biblical exegetical *topoi* and traditional apocalyptic motifs in order to construct an image of the Muslims as the symbolic “Other”.

Keywords: Apocalypticism; Early Islam; Eastern Christianity; Ishmaelites.

surgimiento del islam y la consolidación del dominio islámico en las provincias orientales de Bizancio. La discusión examina cómo estos textos reciclaron, usaron y manipularon estereotipos culturales arraigados, *topoi* exegéticos bíblicos y motivos apocalípticos tradicionales para construir una imagen de los musulmanes como el “otro” simbólico.

Palabras clave: Apocalíptica; Islam primitivo; Cristiandad oriental; Ismailitas.