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THE LAST ROMAN EMPEROR AND THE MAHDĪ – ON THE GENESIS OF A CONTENTIOUS POLITICO-RELIGIOUS *TOPOS*

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Introduction

Sensitivity towards eschatological sentiment tends to increase during times of crisis, when suffering and disorder are semantically situated into a historical framework within which they are been given justification and purpose[1]. The 7th century was viewed by its contemporaries as such a time of crisis. Both, the epic struggle between Sasanian Persia and Byzantium, as well as the Arab conquest and the continued Arab rule over the Near East greatly intensified the sensitivity towards apocalyptic expectations, which can be witnessed across confessional borders. One important development of this period was the promotion of a divinely guided monarch, who would overcome the present tribulations and usher in a Golden Age. This notion was expressed in the apocalyptic motif of the Last Roman Emperor in the Christian milieu and in the figure of the Madhī in the Muslim one.

These literary figures were not mentioned explicitly in the Qur'ān or the Bible. They received their legitimacy through extra-Qur'ānic and extra-Biblical textual support. In Islam early traditions concerning the Mahdī notion were integrated into the prestigious genre of ḥadīth, while the Last Emperor *topos* gained near-canonical status through numerous pseudo-epigraphica that associated this *topos* with indisputable authorities such as the Church Father Methodius of Olympus (d. 311) or the Prophet Daniel. Through such authoritative provenance the notion of an eschatological monarch came to enjoy widespread circulation in medieval Christendom and Islam and was capable of exerting great political influ-

1. This does not mean, however, that crisis and apocalypticism are correlative terms. See Yücesoy (2009) 5–6 and Al-Azmeh (2007) 148.

ence stretching from local pro-'Alid revolts in Kūfa to the revolutionary ideology behind the 'Abbāsid movement[2] and from monastic denunciation of iconoclast emperors[3] to the idiosyncratic polices of Isaac II (r. 1185–1195, 1203–1204)[4].

It is a debated issue whether or not, and, if so, to what degree the term Madhī used during the Second Fitna (680–692) already possessed the messianic meaning which it most certainly enjoyed in later traditions. Equally debated is the messianic significance of the Last Roman Emperor *topos*. In what follows I will briefly address these issues before proposing a new perspective by investigating the conceptual constituents of these literary motifs. As we can tell today, these concepts were first expressed in the Syriac *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* and in the *Qatāda ḥadīth* respectively. If read together it becomes apparent that these literary models roughly correspond in structure and form. In this paper I argue that the incipient notions of the Last Roman Emperor and the Mahdī are structurally isomorphic *topoi*, a fact that determined their mutually exclusive character and, thus, generated a polemic attitude towards the other's use of the *topos* in the centuries to come.

The Judeo-Christian apocalyptic context

Much scholarly attention has been paid to early Christian reactions to the Arab conquests[5]. One of the most remarkable texts of the early period is the *Doctrina Jacobi*, an anti-Jewish polemic written somewhere after 634. It associates the decline of imperial power and the rise of a false prophet among the Saracens, i.e., Muḥammad, with the Danielic apocalyptic scheme[6]. That is, this text testifies for contemporary attempts to identify the Arab onslaught with an eschatological event.

This heightened apocalyptic sensitivity continued and culminated at the end of the 7th century in the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*[7]. Its pseudonymous

2. For a recent survey of the apocalyptic trajectory of the early 'Abbāsid Caliphate, see Yücesoy (2009).

3. See Brandes (2008) 184–186.

4. See Magdalino (2007) 93–106 (esp. 96–100).

5. For introductory literature on early Christian responses to Islam, see Kaegi (1969); Brock (1982); Suermann (1983); Griffith (1992); Guenther (1999); Lamoreaux (2000); Tolan (2002) 40–67. For a comprehensive overview, see Hoyland (1997) 53–335.

6. *Doctrina Jacobi* V 16-18; Cf. Dan 7:7-8.

7. The Edessan chronology puts the year of the Incarnation to AG 309. If one accepts Brock's

writer narrates an elaborate apocalyptic vision which follows a historical narrative that accounts for all of world history, starting with creation and leading up to the late 680s. The historical section of this apocalypse finishes with the description of the cataclysmic events of the Second Fitna, the *rage and raving* of the battling parties[8], the plague and famine of 686/687[9], as well as 'Abd al-Malik's oppressive taxation policy[10]. At the climax of this dramatic account Pseudo-Methodius puts one particular phrase into the mouth of the Muslim opponent: *They* (i.e., the Muslims) *will blaspheme saying, "The Christians have no Saviour"*[11]. This statement carries at least two highly polemic meanings. On the one hand, it negates Christ's soteriological capacity, while on the other, it professes that the Christian emperor, i.e., the Byzantine emperor, is ineffective and incapable to come to the rescue of his Christian flock. Pseudo-Methodius reacts to this vilification by prophesying the imminent appearance of a last Roman emperor who would defeat the Arabs, punish all Christian apostates, reinstate Christian worship throughout the re-conquered provinces and usher in the last earthly period of peace and prosperity.

This ambiguity and the circumstance that the Last Roman Emperor is mentioned immediately after the blasphemous exclamation suggest to the reader a strong resemblance between the Christian *Saviour* and the Last Emperor. This impression was clearly felt by contemporaries, which can be grasped from the Greek translation that attenuates the Syriac *pārūqā* and renders it to read *ἀνάῤῥυσις* (rescue)[12]. The Greek translator obviously preferred the rather abstract term *ἀνάῤῥυσις*, through which he not only reduced the polemical edge of the original proposition, but also denied the strong soteriological association of the Last Emperor[13].

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and Reinink's dating of the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* to the year CE 690/691, one arrives at the symbolically potent number AG 1000.

8. The *rage and raving* of the Midianites (Pseudo-Methodius V 5) is here understood to refer typologically to the event of the second Arab civil war. See Pseudo-Methodius (German) XIII. A more direct reference to Muslim factions battling each other can be found in *The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles*, which is contemporaneous with the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* and was – in all likelihood – influenced by it. See *The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles* 38.

9. For another contemporary account of these events, see Brock's translation of Book XV of John Bar Penkāyē's *History*: Brock (1987) 68–71.

10. See Brock (1982) 19 and Reinink (1992) 181.

11. Pseudo-Methodius (Syriac) 38 (XIII 6). The translation is by Sebastian Brock, see Palmer and Brock (1993) 237. For commentary, see Pseudo-Methodius (German) 60–61, n. 20.

12. Pseudo-Methodius (Greek) 170 ([13], 6).

13. There are further messianic connotations in the description of the Last Roman Emperor. For instance, the use of Ps. 78:65, which originally denotes God, is here reinterpreted to refer to the Last Emperor. Also, the notion of the emperor's rising after having been considered dead strongly reminds the reader of Christ's resurrection. For the text, see Pseudo-Methodius (Syriac) 38 (XIII 11). For more

Pseudo-Methodius' use of the polemic assertion that the *Christians have no Saviour* raises also the question: does any other community have a saviour? It is quite possible that Pseudo-Methodius uses this statement in order to allude to particular pretensions that assign soteriological capacities to figures within the emerging Muslim tradition. It has to be kept in mind that the pseudonymous Syriac writer gives no positive account of Muslim articles of faith[14]. Rather, by means of negations he tries to show that the Muslims were pagan unbelievers who did not possess a genuine faith of themselves. This argumentative technique is used as a polemic device to identify Muslims with long-known pagans, whose period in world history has already been superceded[15].

Thus, Pseudo-Methodius might covertly refer to messianic claims associated with Muslim rulers. Such claims most certainly circulated a generation earlier. There is some well known evidence that testifies for soteriological teachings and for messianic epithets that had been attributed to the Arab conquerors. The above mentioned *Doctrina Jacobi*, an anti-Jewish polemic, relates that Muḥammad preached on the approaching Messiah[16], while the Jewish apocalypse entitled the *Secrets of Rabbi Simon ben Yōḥay*, splendidly analyzed by Bernard Lewis[17], advances an exegesis of Isa 21:7 which attributes the salvation of Israel to the *troop of camels*, i.e., the Muslims[18]. Furthermore, the Muslim polymath al-Bīrūnī preserves a tradition that relates how the Jews of Damascus welcomed 'Umar to Syria by bestowing on him the epithet *fārūq*, a term that seems to connote redemption[19]. These unrelated instances give an impression of the prevalence of Jewish messianic expectations at the time of the Arab conquest[20]. Therefore, it is safe to say that the Arab elite came into contact with Jewish messianic thought at the latest during

discussion concerning the messianic character of the Pseudo-Methodian Last Emperor, see Alexander (1978); Alexander (1985) 174–184; Suermann (1985) 208–212; Reinink (1984); Suermann (1987) 145. Cf. Möhring (2000) 53 and Brandes (1991) 44. For an ambitious analysis of the generic layers of the Last Emperor notion, see Greisiger (2011) 81–178.

14. See Suermann (1985) 229–231.

15. See Pseudo-Methodius IX 9, where Arabs are considered to be pagan tyrants. See Reinink (1986) 165. On the subsequent development of this polemic *topos*, see Roggema (2003).

16. *Doctrina Jacobi* V 16. See further, Hoyland (1995), who reflects upon the account of the Armenian historiographer (Ps.-)Sebeos who associates Muḥammad with Jewish influence.

17. Lewis (1950).

18. Lewis (1950) 322. See also Crone and Cook (1977) 4–5.

19. Abū Rayḥān al-Bīrūnī 196.

20. There are various other writings that come down to us which further testify for Jewish apocalyptic sensitivity during the early 630s in Palestine such as *Sefer Zerubbabel* 40–66. See further Bamberger (1940) and Stemberger (1999).

the conquest of Syria/Palestine and that early Muslim rulers, particularly ʿUmar, were ascribed messianic functions by at least some Jewish communities. That being said, it is a rather different question what the Muslim elite made out of these attributions.

The messianic significane of the term 'Mahdī'

Suliman Bashear's careful investigation of the term *fārūq* in Muslim historiography and ḥadīth has shown the difficulty to assess this notion, since it appears that there were competing traditions at work. For once, there was the Jewish notion of a messianic figure which is related by al-Bīrūnī and al-Ṭabarī and supported by the soteriological cognate terms of *fārūq*. At the same time, there are certain Muslim traditions that attribute ʿUmar's *fārūq*-title to originate with his conversion in Mecca or with his involvement in the revelation of Qur'ān 4:60 playing upon the meaning of *fārūq* as being one who demonstrates a clear distinction between true faith and unbelief (in the Qur'ān *furqān* is given)[21]. Thus, one needs to appreciate that there was no uniform receptiveness of Jewish messianic expectations and that communities differed in their readiness to integrate such sentiment into the nascent traditions.

There has been much debate on whether there was any significant apocalyptic excitement in nascent Islam. Among the more persuasive arguments in favor of this view is David Cook's observation that apocalypticism and jihād were correlative terms among various Muslim groups of the first and second centuries AH. Cook argues that the early Muslim community designed specific means to legitimize its continuous conquests, since the Qur'ān remains silent on this matter. Therefore, the conquests were justified by invoking another indisputably authoritative reference: the end of time. Accordingly, various *aḥādīth* were attributed to the Prophet that associated the conquests with eschatological expectations. What is more, the conquests were esteemed a preeminent type of redemptive action, whose importance was greatly emphasized due to the anticipation of the approaching apocalypse. Thus, Cook argues, jihād ideology and apocalyptic sentiment were interconnected phenomena in nascent Islam[22]. More recently, Robert Hoyland promoted the notion that the first caliphs were essentially running a "*jihād* state", insofar as they were primarily interested in maintaining a politico-religious community that was aiming at the military expansion of the state and the promulgation

21. Bashear (1990).
22. Cook (1996) 69–73.

of a rather simplistic Islamic message[23]. This "*jihād* state" was further characterized by the reluctance to proselytize and by the condemnation of lavish constructions, which were regarded as distractions from moving unceasingly towards the *eschaton*[24].

Apart from apocalyptic militancy, the context of early converts to Islam presents another argument in support of early Muslims' receptiveness to eschatological expectations. As seen above, apocalyptic sensitivity among Jewish and Christian communities was most certainly elevated. There is no reason to assume that a conversion to Islam would have diminished such apocalyptic attentiveness. Accordingly, *mawālī* (non-Arab convert) spirituality as well as cohabitation with non-Muslims most certainly allowed for apocalyptic notions to be absorbed into early Muslim spirituality[25]. Thus, the heterogeneity particularly of Mesopotamian cities such as Kūfa was an important contributory factor that qualified the incipient notion of the Mahdī as it was used during the Second Fitna.[26] It is well known that al-Mukhtār in 66/685–686 in his rebellion against Umayyad rule bestowed the epithet Mahdī upon Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafiyya, a son of 'Alī, proclaiming him to be the rightful Imām, i.e., leader of the *ummah*. This epithet appears to have carried messianic characteristics, which Ibn al-Ḥanafiyya's party, the Kaysāniyya developed further[27].

On the other hand, there are arguments that caution against interpreting early uses of the Mahdī epithet as bearing eschatological connotations[28]. Jan-Olaf Blichfeldt, for instance, in his study on early Mahdism reduces its emergence ex-

23. Hoyland (2006) 409–410.

24. Cook (1996) 73, 82.

25. William Tucker has shown that numerous doctrinal elements from the earliest proto-Shīʿite messianic groups such as the Bayāniyya and the Mughīriyya can be derived from various Christian, Gnostic and Zoroastrian origins. Although not all doctrinal parallels that Tucker establishes do necessitate postulating any direct influence from non-Islamic sources, they still give a subtle impression of the proto-Shīʿite receptiveness towards *mawālī* spirituality. See Tucker (2008) 40–45, 61–62, 65, passim. In addition, Steven Wasserstrom stresses the common heritage of Jewish messianic paradigms and of proto-Shīʿite sects particularly in and around the anti-Umayyad opposition hotbed Kūfa, see Wasserstrom (1995) 47–89, esp. 55, 57.

26. Previously, the Mahdī was an epithet lacking eschatological connotation. It was an honorific title attributed, e.g., to the Abraham, to the Prophet or to al-Walīd. See Madelung's seminal encyclopedic entry: Madelung (1986a).

27. Arjomand (1998) 248–251. Later characteristics would include notions that the Mahdī receives divine prophecies (on the matter of prophethood after Muḥammad, see Cook [2002] 198–201) or that he possessed the "chair of 'Alī," a relic reminiscent of the Ark of the Covenant (Tucker [2008] 23–27).

28. See, for example, Morony (2005) 494–495.

clusively to socio-political conditions[29]. In essence, Blichfeldt proposes that the notion developed from early Arabian settlers who enjoyed little tribal backing and who – as a result of their political disadvantage – promoted an alternative notion of authority that sought a more egalitarian arrangement based on merit rather than tribal affiliation and became institutionalized in the Mahdī concept, which essentially stood for socio-political equity and justice[30]. Blichfeldt and others are right in pointing out that there is no positive proof of any messianic significance in early uses of the Mahdī epithet. This uncertainty is also characteristic of the Pseudo-Methodian Last Emperor *topos*[31]. In order to better understand this common problem and to formulate a new dimension of it, I will now turn to a conceptual analysis of these literary motifs focusing on their semantic resemblances.

Comparative Study

As is well known, there exists a great variety of traditions concerning the Mahdī figure. Generally, it can be said that there exist two basic branches that assign the origin of the Muslim Messiah either to the Ḥijāz or to the East. Both branches are present in Sunnī as well as in Shīʿī traditions. In fact, it needs to be emphasized that until the second-third centuries AH both factions drew their messianic and apocalyptic material from a common pool of *topoi*. Naturally, preferences and emphases differed, but until the early 9th century the same eschatological material was circulated and shared despite the confessional boarders[32].

One of the earliest traditions that prophesized the Mahdī to arrive from the Ḥijāz was identified by Dirk Attema in a ḥadīth related by Abū Dāwūd al-Sijistānī (d. Basra 275/889) in his *Kitāb al-Sunan*[33]. Attema realized that this ḥadīth contains historical information about ʿAbd Allāh ibn al-Zubayr, the anti-caliph in the Ḥijāz who revolted against Marwānid rule during the Second Fitna[34]. Based on this conclusion Wilferd Madelung continued investigating this tradition by studying its *isnād*s. He identified the common link of the chain of transmission to be a Baṣran traditionalist by the name of Qatāda b. Diʿāma (d. c. 735)[35]. Thus, he named this ḥadīth the *Qatāda ḥadīth*. For the sake of convenience I continue to use this des-

29. Blichfeldt (1985).
30. Blichfeldt (1985) 13, 43.
31. See *supra* n. 13.
32. Cook (2002) 192, 229.
33. Abū Dāwūd al-Sijistānī (no. 4286).
34. Attema (1942) 96–97.
35. Madelung (1981).

ignation although Madelung's argumentation and his reliance on *isnād* methodology have been thoroughly challenged[36]. As a result of this criticism all that remains certain is that this ḥadīth comes down in a number of versions that clearly recall events of Ibn al-Zubayr's career and that assign to him the restoration of the rightly held caliphate, the defeat of successive Umayyad contestants[37] and the establishment of a seven (or nine) year long period of prosperity and piety. These fundamental elements became integrate parts of the Madhī *topos* in both, Sunnī and Shīʿī, circles. All that can be said concerning its date is that this ḥadīth was most probably put out during Ibn al-Zubayr's revolt and that it predates his death in 692[38].

At about the same time, around the year CE 691, the pseudonymous writer of the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* portrayed the imminent arrival of a Byzantine emperor, who would, as mentioned above, appear at a moment of utmost distress resembling a *deus ex machina*[39]. He too would defeat all opponents, reestablish orthodoxy and justice and reign for a decade-long period of peace and prosperity. All that can be said about its provenance comes from the preamble of the text, which refers to Mount Sinjār in northern Mesopotamia. In the following I schematically summarize both narratives while organizing them under four common rubrics.

Topical comparison

	Qatāda ḥadīth (c. 680–692)[40]	*Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* (c. 691)[41]
Appearance	**Nomination by the Meccan people** [...] some of the people of Mecca will come to him and will make him rise in revolt against his will	***deus ex machina* appearance** He will be awakened against them [i.e., the Muslims] like *a man who has shaken off his wine* – someone who had been considered by them as though dead.

36. Cook (1992) 32–33, 36–38 and Cook (2002) 155.

37. One of these contestants is the Sufyānī, the archetypical enemy of the Mahdī. On this *topos*, see Madelung (1986b).

38. Cook (1992) 38.

39. For the Syriac text, see Pseudo-Methodius (Syriac) 38–45 (XIII 11–XIV 6).

40. The translation is by W. Madelung, see Madelung (1981) 291.

41. The translation is by S. Brock, see Palmer and Brock (1993) 237–240.

Military campaign	***khasf* (being swallowed up by the earth)** An expedition will be sent against him from Syria but will be swallowed up in the desert [...] **More followers gained** The righteous men of Syria and the troops of the people of Iraq will [...] pledge allegiance to him **An Umayyad contender will be defeated with great spoils of war** A man of the Quraysh will arise whose maternal uncles are of Kalb [...] and the disappointment will be for those who do not witness the spoils of Kalb.	**He attacks Medina from the Red Sea; together with reinforcements he annihilates the Muslims in Palestine** He will go forth against them from the sea of the Kushites [i.e., the Red Sea] and will cast desolation and destruction on the wilderness of Yathrib, and in the midst of their forefathers' dwelling place. And the sons of the kings of the Greeks will descend upon them from the countries of the west and finish off with the sword the remnant left over from them in the Promised Land.
Peaceful, prosperous rule	**Benevolence and justice** He will then divide the wealth and act among them according to the Sunna of their Prophet. **Time of orthodox worship** Islam will settle down firmly on the ground.	**Refugees return to their homes** Then the land which had been devastated of its inhabitants shall be at peace, and the remnant left over shall return, each to his own land [...] **Apostates are punished** And all the fury of the wrath of the king of the Greeks shall be completed upon those who have denied Christ. **Peace and prosperity** There shall be joy in all the land and people will live in great peace. **Gog/Magog invade** The gates of the north shall be opened and the armies of those people who had been confined there shall come forth [...]
Time span of rule, demise	**Seven-year rule** He will stay seven years and then die.	**The Last Emperor resides in Jerusalem for 10½ years before abdicating on Golgotha** Then the king of the Greeks will come down and reside in Jerusalem for one week and a half of a week, ten and a half years in number. [...] The moment the Son of Perdition appears, the king of the Greeks shall go up and stand on Golgotha and [...] hand over the kingdom to God the Father.

Despite specific differences in emphasis[42], one can observe in these two roughly contemporaneous texts, which both originated in Mesopotamia, a number of structural and conceptual parallels. They agree in portraying the rise and temporary rule of a competent military commander, whose military victories allow for his religious restoration policy and safeguard his peaceful and prosperous reign. In time, certain parallels emerged more clearly, such as the well-known notion of occultation (*ghayba*), i.e., the Mahdī being hidden prior to his appearance, which is paralleled by the sudden "awakening" of the Last Emperor. Also, Pseudo-Methodius' fantastic genealogy that relates the Byzantine Emperor to Alexander the Great *via* a Kushite (i.e., Ethiopian or Nubian) princess[43] is paralleled by the paramount attention paid to the genealogy of the Mahdī. While these short narratives do not yet give a titular description to this heroic monarch, they became the central core of the Mahdī and Last Emperor traditions. That is, the conceptual layers, which were later added, came to be structured around these generic notions. Therefore, it was the militarily victorious and religiously pious monarch who was subsequently characterized with references to name[44] and to physiognomic peculiarities[45].

These semantic similarities might be used in support of assigning (proto-) messianic significance to early uses of the Mahdī title. For if one considers the close association of the Pseudo-Methodian Last Roman Emperor with the soteriological term *pārūqā*, while agreeing with the structural isomorphism observed between the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* and the *Qatāda ḥadīth*, then soteriological connotations in both *topoi* become discernible. The marked increase of non-Islamic apocalypticism during the 7th century that assigned apocalyptic meaning to the Arabs might further support the thesis that these motifs are conceptual models that converge onto a messianic figure who – to varying de-

42. For instance, the *Qatāda ḥadīth* speaks proportionally more about the military campaign, while Pseudo-Methodius concentrates rather on the subsequent peaceful rule.

43. See Greisiger (2007).

44. For instance, the *Diegesis Danielis* 13 (§5.7), a probably early eight-century Byzantine apocalypse, relates that the Last Emperor's name will start with a *kappa*, while *Daniel καὶ ἔσται* 205 (§2.4), a mid-ninth-century apocalypse, provides the letter *lambda*. The ḥadīth scholar Nu'aym b. Ḥammād's (d. 229/844) relates that the Mahdī's name will be that of the Prophet, i.e., Muḥammad and that the name of the Mahdī's father will also agree with that of Muḥammad's father, i.e., 'Abd Allāh. See Nu'aym b. Ḥammād al-Marwazī 226.

45. The possibly thirteenth-century *Last Daniel* 133 (§47), for instance, relates that the eschatological emperor would be grey-haired, just, dressed in poor clothes, rough by appearance, but gentle in character. Al-Sulamī (d. 660/1261) relates that the Mahdī would have a bald forehead, an aquiline nose and bearing a mole on his right cheek. See al-Sulamī al-Maqdisī 99 (§53), 106 (§67).

grees – facilitates the upcoming eschatological redemption. This means that at the time of the Second Fitna apocalyptic speculations resulted in the promulgation of (proto-)messianic rulers who would overcome the challenges and tribulations of war, which could mean the struggle for the caliphal office for one party, while it could mean the repulsion of the Muslim occupation for another. Given the conceptual flexibility of apocalyptic language, the ideal of a messianic figure could easily be advanced within different confessional frameworks and with different emphasis[46].

The structural isomorphism, although initially rudimentary, developed and did not go either unnoticed, or unchallenged. In the end, the struggle for the prerogative of interpretation inevitably led to reflection on and polemic against the other's conceptual model spurring reinterpretation of the *topoi* involved. Therefore, it should come to no surprise that the ninth-century ḥadīth scholar Nuʿaym relates traditions that are fully cognizant of the Last Emperor *topos*[47]. Eventually, the *Baḥīrā Legend*, a ninth-century Christian apology, incorporates the Mahdī and other figures of the Muslim apocalyptic tradition within its own Christian eschatological narrative claiming that the Mahdī enjoys only a transient role and will ultimately be superseded by the Last Roman Emperor[48].

Christian and Muslim apocalyptic narratives were well aware of the other's eschatological scenaria. Thus, apocalyptic *topoi* should be considered as notions operating within a dialectic repertoire of apocalyptic traditions that ultimately condition one another. Consequently, the semantic resemblances of these literary figures qualified the trajectory of their subsequent development, which is a subject that deserves further study.

46. Unfortunately, the scarcity of the source material does not allow for a proof that would demonstrate any direct influence between the incipient uses of the two *topoi*. Cf. MÖHRING (2002) 205.

47. See, for instance, Nuʿaym b. Ḥammād al-Marwazī 257.

48. *Baḥīrā Legend* 260, 262 and 324 (§3.19-23), 278 and 348 (§15.4), 294, 296 and 366, 368 (§17.100-103, §17.115). The references given here are to the East-Syrian and West-Syrian redactions. The Syriac and the two Arabic recensions all agree in that the Last Roman Emperor will be the last legitimate earthly ruler.

ABSTRACT

In the late seventh century diverse prophetic texts promoted a divinely guided monarch, who would overcome the tribulations of the *second fitna* (680–692) and usher in a Golden Age. This notion was expressed in the apocalyptic motif of the Last Roman Emperor in the Christian milieu and in the figure of the Madhī in the Muslim one.

This paper reconstructs various aspects of the emergence and the common background of these two related notions and investigates their conceptual constituents. A topical comparison of the Syriac *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* and the *Qatāda ḥadīth* demonstrates that these literary models roughly correspond in structure and form. Based upon this observation I argue that the incipient notions of the Last Roman Emperor and the Mahdī are structurally isomorphic *topoi*, both converging on a (proto-)messianic ruler figure, a fact that determined their mutually exclusive character and, thus, generated a polemic attitude towards the other's use of the *topos* in the centuries to come.

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