

# The Apocalypse of Empire

Imperial Eschatology in  
Late Antiquity and Early Islam

STEPHEN J. SHOEMAKER



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DIVINATIONS: REREADING LATE ANCIENT RELIGION

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# THE APOCALYPSE OF EMPIRE

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in Late Antiquity and Early Islam

Stephen J. Shoemaker

**PENN**

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PHILADELPHIA

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*For Elizabeth A. Clark*

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## Introduction

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In many respects, this book follows as a natural successor to my previous study, *The Death of a Prophet: The End of Muhammad's Life and the Beginnings of Islam*, and it proceeds from the same methodological principles that guided this earlier work. These are, in brief, that the emergence of Islam must be situated within the broader religious context of the late ancient Near East and likewise that it must be investigated using the same historical-critical methods and perspectives that have guided the study of early Judaism, Christianity, and other religions for well over a century now. In the present volume, I further develop in particular the idea that earliest Islam was a movement driven by urgent eschatological belief that focused on the conquest—or liberation—of the biblical Holy Land. Yet the primary inspiration for this book came largely through giving lectures at various universities based on the research that I had done for *Death of a Prophet*. In a number of different contexts, I was generously invited to present my understanding of Muhammad as an eschatological prophet, whose early followers believed that the end of the world would arrive very soon. On occasion, some members of the audience would express skepticism that this could even be possible, since Muhammad and his followers were clearly determined to conquer and rule so much of the world that was then known to them. How is it conceivable, they asked, that the early Believers would strive so vigorously to expand their dominion in the world if, at the same time, they believed that the present world would soon come to an end? When I tried to explain that in the late ancient Near East, ideas of imperial conquest and eschatological expectation often went hand in hand, my answer often met with only more skepticism. It became clear that I needed to write another book that could fill this lacuna in our understanding of both early Islam and late ancient apocalypticism.

Other colleagues asked, more constructively, if, in light of the evidence for imminent eschatological expectation within earliest Islam, it would be possible to situate this belief within a broader cultural context of apocalyptic

anticipation, as is the case, for instance, with earliest Christianity. My response, at the time, was that while there had been a lot of work on Christian eschatological expectations as a reaction to the Islamic conquest, the apocalypticism of the sixth and early seventh centuries was much less explored, particularly in relation to the development of early Islam. Nevertheless, as I increasingly came to discover, there is ample evidence of eschatological expectation on the eve of Islam, not only from late ancient Christianity but from contemporary Judaism and Zoroastrianism as well. This was yet another lacuna in our understanding of early Islam's "sectarian milieu" that needed significant attention. My interest in this particular aspect of late ancient religion was further piqued when I was asked to contribute an article, eventually titled "The Afterlife of the Apocalypse of John in Byzantine Apocalyptic Literature and Commentary," to the 2013 Dumbarton Oaks Byzantine Symposium, "The New Testament in Byzantium," now published in *The New Testament in Byzantium*.<sup>1</sup> Inasmuch as the two earliest and most important Byzantine commentaries on the Apocalypse of John are from the sixth century, I began to look even more closely at apocalypticism in this era. There I found, as readers will discover, a relatively well-known body of evidence indicating that this was a time of heightened eschatological expectation in both the Byzantine Empire and elsewhere in the late ancient Near East. Yet perhaps the most significant outcome of this endeavor was my enlightening discovery of the *Tiburtine Sibyl*, a text that was previously unknown to me (and many of my colleagues as well). This early Byzantine vision of imperial eschatology and the Last Roman Emperor's ultimate triumph is crucial for understanding the fusion of apocalypticism and imperialism that characterizes so much late ancient thinking about the *eschaton*.

There is still one more topic that this study engages, and it has less to do with the rise of Islam than with the history of apocalypticism in Judaism and Christianity more generally. In scholarship on apocalyptic literature in early Judaism and Christianity, one meets not infrequently with assertions that the apocalyptic genre is somehow in its very nature decidedly anti-imperial. Thus, for instance, one finds titles such as that of Anthea Portier-Young's excellent study of early apocalyptic literature, *Apocalypse Against Empire: Theories of Resistance in Early Judaism*. Even more so, it would seem, anthropological and sociological perspectives on "millenarian" movements (as these disciplines commonly designate apocalyptic groups) regularly presume that apocalypticism is somehow inherently anti-imperial. While I certainly have no wish to dispute that early Jewish apocalyptic literature frequently shows a

strong anti-imperialist tendency, which it does, this quality is not characteristic of apocalypticism at all times and in all places. Accordingly, this study also offers something of a corrective to an often overdetermined perspective on apocalypticism that views it as fundamentally aligned with resistance to temporal authorities. In Mediterranean late antiquity and the European Middle Ages, apocalypticism was, to the contrary, regularly joined to ideas of imperial expansion and triumph, which expected the culmination of history to arrive through the universal dominion of a divinely chosen world empire.

This study, it should be noted, is primarily a work of synthesis that takes a wide scope in looking at the relation between eschatology and empire across a broad span of times, places, cultures, and religious traditions. Accordingly, it often will depend on the achievements of many scholars who have come before me in these various areas of scholarship. Likewise, it will not always engage in detailed analysis of all of the many primary sources involved. This simply would not be possible in every instance, and in the case of many sources, particularly those addressed in the first chapter of this study, the majority of these texts are fairly well-known and have been well studied already by experts in the field. I will rely often on the findings of such experts, and only in those cases where I think it necessary to challenge what seems to be the *opinio communis* on a given point or where such consensus seems lacking will I engage in more technical discussions. Instead, the primary purpose of this study is to synthesize scholarship from a number of related fields that are only very rarely placed in dialogue with one another, crossing boundaries from biblical studies and Christian late antiquity through Sasanian Zoroastrianism and late ancient Judaism into the beginnings of Islam. Such a synthesis, I would argue, is badly needed, and indeed such need has often been expressed by other scholars in these fields. It is therefore anticipated and even hoped that such a synthesis will invite critique particularly from specialists in the different areas of scholarship, thereby pushing conversations across disciplinary boundaries in late antiquity further along.

The book begins by addressing this last issue first, namely, the relation between ancient apocalypticism and empire. The opening chapter examines the emergence of apocalyptic literature in early Judaism while also looking to the broader context of similar traditions within the other religions of the ancient Mediterranean and Near East. It is unquestionably true that many early Jewish apocalypses, including the biblical book of Daniel and some of the apocalypses now collected in *1 Enoch*, express anti-imperial sentiments. They hope for the day when God will soon intervene in history and strike

down the wicked and haughty empires that were afflicting God's people. Yet in this opening chapter we also find that ancient apocalyptic literature is not monolithically anti-imperial. A number of other early apocalypses, such as the *Astronomical Apocalypse* from *1 Enoch*, are largely unconcerned with the political events of their era, focusing instead on the disclosure of cosmic mysteries and other issues relevant to the community (such as, in this case, the calendar). More important, however, a number of ancient apocalyptic and oracular traditions take a much more positive view of the role that empires and other earthly authorities will have in the divine consummation of history. Many writings envision a succession of empires, often four, that will culminate in a final empire under whose dominion the world and its history would come to completion. Likewise, we also encounter an expectation that the *eschaton* will be ushered in through imperial renewal at the end of time. Frequently such visions also foretell of a great king or emperor who will rise up to lead this revival and establish the empire's universal dominion in advance of ultimate divine intervention at the end of time. Thus even if much early Jewish apocalyptic literature frequently offers a sharp critique of imperial authority, at the same time, the apocalyptic traditions of the ancient Mediterranean world were more diverse, and in them we find already the basic building blocks of what would become a potent and popular ideology of imperial eschatology in late antiquity.

Chapter 2 examines the development of imperial eschatology specifically within late ancient Christianity. The main roots of this ideology lie in a widely held belief that Rome, and more especially Christian Rome, was destined to be the last world empire, and accordingly, at the end of time it would hand over authority directly to God. The notion that Rome and its empire had an eternal destiny was of course not new to Christianity, and classical authors would occasionally express similar confidence that Rome would be the world's greatest and final empire. In the context of the Christian Empire, however, such ideas began to take on new life. With the conversion of Constantine and then the empire during the fourth century, not only was the empire gradually Christianized, but certain aspects of Christian theology were increasingly imperialized. Eusebius of Caesarea, not surprisingly, was particularly influential in this regard, and his writings set the tone for the ideological fusion of empire and ecclesia that would follow. Many other early Christian intellectuals shared his vision of Rome as a divinely favored empire that in some sense had already begun to realize the Kingdom of God on earth. Rome's ultimate triumph in the world was secured by its divine favor,

and it was uniquely destined to hold dominion on God's behalf until it yielded sovereignty to God directly on the last day.

This view was seemingly not limited to the intelligentsia alone, and we find it expressed even more vividly and concretely in the apocalyptic imagination of late ancient Christianity. The most important witness to this tradition is the previously mentioned *Tiburtine Sibyl*, a fourth-century apocalyptic text. Most notably, the *Tiburtine Sibyl* concludes with the earliest known version of the wildly popular legend of the Last Roman Emperor, which was a cornerstone of medieval Christian eschatology. According to the Sibyl's vision, after a series of wars and disasters, a new emperor will emerge triumphant and lead a revival of the empire, extending its dominion throughout the world just before the end of time. He will convert the pagans and Jews by force and then will lay down his diadem and royal garments in Jerusalem, thereby handing over authority to God in advance of the *eschaton*. This legend was influential on a number of other late ancient apocalyptic writings, both Christian and Jewish, but it is perhaps most well-known through its adaptation shortly after the Islamic conquests by the author of the *Apocalypse of Ps.-Methodius*. This text, originally written in Syriac, was quickly translated into Greek and Latin and was enormously popular throughout the Christian world in the Middle Ages. Yet with respect to the Last Emperor, Ps.-Methodius further develops the *Tiburtine Sibyl's* account to comport with certain traditions specific to his Syriac milieu. Indeed, comparison of Ps.-Methodius's Last Emperor with the Sibyl's version confirms that the latter was in circulation already before the Islamic conquests, a point that is otherwise fairly obvious from the content of the legend itself.

Not only was eschatology imperial in Christian late antiquity, but as we move closer and closer to the events of the Islamic conquest, it becomes increasingly active within the religious cultures of the Mediterranean world. The third chapter investigates the heightened eschatological expectations among the Christians of Byzantium during the sixth and early seventh centuries. The sixth century opened to widespread expectations that the world was nearing an end, since the year 500, according to contemporary calculations, marked the beginning of the seventh millennium since the creation of the world. The end of course did not arrive, but its delay did little to deflate eschatological anticipations, which remained strong, it would seem, throughout the sixth century. Numerous sources of various genres and from various places indicate that Christians of the sixth century were expecting to witness the End very soon. These eschatological expectations reached their peak,

however, in the early seventh century, just at the moment that Muhammad's new religious movement was coming into its own. The tumult of the last Roman-Persian war stoked eschatological hopes across the Near East, and for the Christians, Heraclius's crushing defeat of the Persians and his restoration of the True Cross to Jerusalem intensified convictions that the end of the world was at hand. The literature of this era speaks with newfound urgency about the *eschaton's* near approach, and one of the most significant such texts, the *Syriac Alexander Legend*, was the source of the Qur'an's traditions about Alexander the Great. From this borrowing we may conclude that Muhammad and his followers seem to have had direct contact with the Byzantine tradition of imperial eschatology.

The Jews and Zoroastrians of late antiquity, for their part, shared in the eschatological enthusiasm of the age, which is the topic of Chapter 4. Messianic expectations rose sharply among the Jews of Palestine during the early seventh century, largely in reaction to Persia's "liberation" of Jerusalem and the Holy Land from the Romans and perhaps a temporary revival of Jewish autonomy. As with the Christians of Byzantium, imminent eschatological expectations were both prominent and powerful within contemporary Judaism. The Jewish apocalypticism of this period, and of late antiquity in general, also envisions worldly empires as having a positive role to play in the events of the end times. In this respect, late ancient Judaism, at least in the Roman Empire, appears to have been influenced by the apocalyptic views of its Christian overlords. Nevertheless, at the same time this Jewish apocalypticism often subverts the Roman triumphalism of the Christian narratives, imagining instead that Rome's power and prosperity, although divinely ordained, were only temporary. Rome enjoyed divine favor only so that it could yield its power to the Messiah at the end of time and allow the final restoration of the kingdom of Israel. Other apocalyptic narratives hope for Israel's liberation through the providential triumph of another empire over the Romans, in some cases the Iranian Empire, in others the Ishmaelites. Yet in nearly every instance, *eschaton* will arrive through the triumph of some empire or another.

Eschatological expectations were also at a peak in the Sasanian Empire during the late sixth and early seventh centuries: according to the Zoroastrian calendar, the millennium of Zoroaster would come to an apocalyptic end at the middle of the seventh century. Moreover, Zoroastrian eschatology was also thoroughly imperial in nature. Iran's rulers had been chosen to play a special role in the cosmic battle between good and evil, between Ohrmazd

and Ahriman. All faithful Zoroastrians were expected to participate in this struggle by resisting evil and doing good. This obligation extended no less so to the ruling authorities, who were uniquely positioned to effect good in the world, and from Zoroastrianism's mythic foundation, kings were believed to play a significant part in overcoming evil. As a Zoroastrian polity, the Sasanian Empire was a powerful agent of Ohrmazd in the world and was thus one of the most potent vehicles for mobilizing humankind in the struggle against Ahriman and his minions. As in the Roman version of imperial eschatology, Sasanian Zoroastrianism believed that the Iranian Empire would ultimately emerge triumphant and hold universal sovereignty in the world just prior to the end of the millennium. At this point, much like the Last Emperor legend, a mythic king would appear to lead the Iranian Empire in its final triumph over the forces of evil, at least for this millennium. The most important of these Zoroastrian messiahs is a figure known as Kay Bahrām, and as we will see, at the end of the sixth century a usurper named Bahrām VI Čōbīn briefly came to power with the claim that he was in fact the long-awaited apocalyptic ruler. The end of the millennium, after all, was known to be coming in the very near future. Thus we find in Zoroastrianism an actual mobilization of imperial eschatology not long before Muhammad began to organize his new religious polity. Islam, then, it would seem, emerged into a world that was permeated by eschatological anticipation and furthermore expected the end of the age to arrive through the triumph of a divinely chosen empire.

The final two chapters engage early Islam directly, and the fifth chapter considers the substantial evidence that Muhammad and his earliest followers were expecting the end of the world at any moment, seemingly in their own lifetimes. The Qur'ān, as I have argued before, is replete with imminent eschatological expectation, and indeed, if there is one thing that we can say about Muhammad with a high degree of historical probability, it is that he proclaimed, and his followers believed, that the end of the world was nigh. Although there is a strong tendency in much recent scholarship to interpret Muhammad as a more practically minded social reformer or the great organizer of an Arab empire, such portraits generally overlook or even exclude the powerful evidence that Muhammad and his followers were expecting the Hour at any minute. Muhammad's movement was driven by eschatological urgency, and a number of early eschatological *ḥadīth* confirm this fact. Furthermore, it seems likely that Muhammad's followers understood that in some sense the *eschaton* had already begun and was starting to be fulfilled in

the very formation and success of their community of the Believers. The dramatic expansion of their righteous polity was preparing the way for the restoration of divine rule to the world and the Final Judgment. Undoubtedly, this urgent eschatological belief was a driving force behind the Islamic conquest of the Near East, or as Fred Donner more appropriately names these events, the “expansion of the Believers’ rule.”<sup>22</sup>

The eschatological nature of these conquests is the subject of the sixth and final chapter. As we will see, there is evidence from the Qur’ān itself that Muhammad and his followers were aware of and engaged with the imperial apocalypticism of late antiquity. More specifically, this imperial apocalypticism was joined to a fervor to liberate the biblical Holy Land and Jerusalem from their occupation by infidels, namely, the Romans. Jerusalem seems to have been an especially important sacred center for the early Believers, and indeed, most likely it was originally the most important. Both the Qur’ān and the invaluable report from Sebeos’s near contemporary Armenian chronicle reveal that the liberation of the Holy Land was fundamental to the early Believers’ faith. Militant struggle to eliminate the Romans and other wicked powers from the world was equally central to their faith. Furthermore, the fact that Jerusalem and its Temple Mount remain center stage for the events of the end times even in contemporary Islam is a sure sign of Jerusalem’s eschatological importance in the early Believers’ worldview. Likewise, the Believers’ keen interest in restoring worship to the Temple Mount almost immediately after the liberation of Jerusalem indicates the religious significance of their conquests. The eschatological links between the Dome of the Rock and the anticipated restoration of the Temple further indicate the apocalyptic context of Jerusalem’s liberation by the Believers, as do the peculiar rituals that the Believers observed in the Dome during its early years.

The early Islamic apocalyptic tradition confirms this apocalyptic understanding of the conquests, and, moreover, it reveals that ideas of imperial eschatology continued to fuel the Believers’ faith throughout the seventh century. As Olof Heilo observes, whatever practical, terrestrial aims the early “caliphs” may have had in mind, they were nonetheless “dragged along by the apocalyptic beliefs that were inherent in the conquest that had brought them to power.”<sup>23</sup> The Portents of the Hour tradition, for instance, which dates in its earliest versions to before the beginning of the Second Civil War in the early 680s, includes the liberation of Jerusalem as one of the main signs that the end had drawn near. Its final portent, however, will be an eschatological war between the Believers and Rome in Syria that will herald the Hour’s

arrival. The details of this final apocalyptic conflict between the Believers and Christendom are outlined in another set of early eschatological traditions known as the A'māq Cycle, so called on account of the importance that they give to the *a'māq*, or "valleys," of northern Syria as the site of this final combat. These traditions also appear to have originated before the Second Civil War, and they imagine a series of engagements between the Believers and the Byzantines, beginning at Jerusalem and concluding at Constantinople, with the decisive engagements in the valleys of the Syrian frontier. In these apocalyptic narratives, the Believers' imperial triumph over the Byzantines is essential to *eschaton's* arrival and the ultimate restoration of divine rule. Yet at the same time, Jerusalem and its Temple Mount remain the primary object of the Believers' eschatological desires. The conquest of Constantinople and Rome is undertaken, we are told, as retribution for the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE and likewise for the purpose of restoring the Temple treasures that the Romans took back with them. Rome's defeat, then, is ultimately all about righting the wrongs that had been committed against the Holy City and preparing for the coming eschatological restoration of the Temple.

Therefore, as we continue to seek links between the beginnings of Islam and the religious cultures of the late ancient Near East, we would do well to recognize, I think, the importance of apocalypticism, and more specifically, imperial eschatology, for situating earliest Islam within the matrix of its origin. Imminent eschatological expectation was widespread in the Near East at the time of Islam's genesis, as was the belief that the ultimate restoration of divine rule would come about through the apocalyptic triumph of an empire at the end of time. Such views fit remarkably well with what we are able to know about earliest Islam. Its adherents were confident that the End was at hand, and they believed that they had a religious duty to expand their polity through warfare. Moreover, they believed that the liberation of Jerusalem and the Holy Land from the occupation of infidels and the restoration of the Temple were essential goals of their apocalyptic empire. All of these ideas find strong parallels in the apocalyptic worldviews of contemporary Christianity, Judaism, and Zoroastrianism. Accordingly, imperial eschatology holds one of the most promising avenues for understanding the emergence of Islam within the broader religious milieu of the late ancient Near East. It is my hope that such a perspective will be able to shed some additional light on the dimly lit history of earliest Islam.

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## Chapter 1

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# Apocalypse Against Empire or Apocalypse Through Empire?: The Shifting Politics of the Apocalyptic Imagination

“‘Apocalyptic’ texts are not about the end of the world but the end of empires.” So Richard Horsley begins his monograph on early Jewish apocalyptic literature, *Revolt of the Scribes: Resistance and Apocalyptic Origins*.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, Horsley’s characterization of apocalypticism may come as something of a surprise to many scholars of late antiquity and the Middle Ages, who are perhaps more familiar with apocalyptic visions that hope for the ultimate climax of empire rather than expressing anti-imperial resistance. Indeed, from late antiquity onward, apocalyptic texts generally manifest the conviction that God is working *through* imperial power rather than against it and, moreover, that the fulfillment of the ages will be achieved through the triumph of imperial power rather than its eradication. There is perhaps some truth, admittedly, in Horsley’s maxim, at least with regard to the earliest history of Jewish apocalyptic literature. But it does not apply to many apocalyptic texts of more recent vintage. In order to understand the imperial eschatology that characterized much late ancient and medieval apocalyptic literature, we must first consider how what was once an anti-imperial genre and worldview transformed to express instead confidence that a divinely guided empire would bring about the end of the world through conquest and dominion.

Horsley’s claim that apocalyptic texts are “not about the end of the world” is certainly overstated, if not outright wrong, and this provocative statement is only made possible by his idiosyncratic view of apocalyptic literature, which deliberately distances itself from a well-established and carefully

determined tradition of scholarship on the topic. Instead of following the painstaking literary analysis that other scholars have used to conceptualize the category of apocalyptic literature, Horsley alternatively proposes to define his corpus of texts based on their response “to the same definable historical circumstances.”<sup>2</sup> These circumstances, it turns out, are the imperial domination of Palestine by the Hellenistic kingdoms and then the Roman Empire. One can see, then, that Horsley has effectively defined his data set in a manner that will inevitably confirm his conclusions about the nature of apocalyptic literature. Even so, his readings of the selected texts as lacking any interest in the end of the world are often not persuasive. Horsley occasionally reaches this conclusion through the observation that a given text does not envision the *eschaton* as imminent, yet the absence of imminent eschatological belief is certainly not the same as a disinterest in the events of the end of time.<sup>3</sup> Likewise his frequent reinterpretation of the promise of divine punishment of the wicked and God’s rule over the earth as merely a symbolic forecast of the elimination of imperial domination founders if one examines these ideas within the broader corpus of apocalyptic traditions.<sup>4</sup> Quite to the contrary, a focus on eschatology, urgent or otherwise, is one of the hallmarks of apocalyptic literature, at least when defined on the basis of textual analysis.<sup>5</sup>

As for the “end of empires,” resistance to imperial rule is indeed a common theme in early Jewish apocalypses, as specialists on the topic have often noted. Apocalyptic literature is in fact broadly understood as a literature of resistance that responds to some sort of “crisis” or “distress,” and not infrequently a specific political crisis from the history of early Judaism is in view.<sup>6</sup> As early as 1961 Samuel Eddy brought specific attention to the apocalyptic genre as a mode of literary resistance to imperial domination.<sup>7</sup> Likewise, several decades ago Jonathan Z. Smith similarly explained the revelatory literature of the ancient Near East as products of scribes writing in response to foreign domination.<sup>8</sup> Yet in recent years this aspect of early Jewish apocalypticism has come into greater focus, in part perhaps, as John Collins notes, because of the “uncomfortable reality that modern America is most often perceived as an empire in the tradition of the Seleucids” and the expectation that this literature can “help us understand the motives of people who resist imperial domination and are often labelled as terrorists.”<sup>9</sup> No doubt the fact that modern anthropologists and sociologists also tend to identify apocalypticism (or “millenarianism”) as inextricably linked with political revolution against oppression has contributed to this tendency.<sup>10</sup> As Philip Esler notes, there has been “an explosion of interest” in apocalyptic resistance to empire

in early Judaism and Christianity, so much so that he expresses concern that the “focus on empire is now becoming somewhat exaggerated, and will soon need to share the billing with other concerns.”<sup>11</sup>

There is certainly a risk that recent scholarship has now overstated the prevalence of this theme in early Jewish apocalyptic literature. For instance, Horsley asserts that “no Second Temple Judean text classified as ‘apocalyptic’ has survived that does *not* focus on imperial rule and opposition to it,” a claim that Anthea Portier-Young repeats with approval in her recent book, *Apocalypse Against Empire*.<sup>12</sup> To be sure, this will be the result if one determines the corpus of apocalyptic literature, as does Horsley effectively, based on the presence of a clear response to the historical circumstances of Hellenistic and Roman rule over Palestine. In such a case this prophecy will be self-fulfilling. Yet a deeper problem lies in the fact that we can often only be certain of an apocalyptic text’s Judean origin when such elements are present; otherwise, the provenance must be left relatively uncertain. Consider, for instance, the *Astronomical Apocalypse* from *1 Enoch* (72–82). This text is widely regarded as one of the two oldest apocalypses, composed at approximately the same time as the *Book of the Watchers* (*1 En.* 1–36), the third century BCE. Although its provenance is not certain, it would seem that, like the rest of *1 Enoch*’s constituent parts, this apocalypse was most likely also composed in Palestine.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, there is no evidence of any concern with imperial rule or opposition to it in this early apocalypse. Indeed, as Portier-Young more recently observes on the basis of this text, “not all apocalyptic literature is resistance literature.”<sup>14</sup>

Likewise, a similar critique pertains to Horsley’s related claim “that we do not have any Second Temple Judean texts that are classified as ‘apocalyptic’ that are thought to have originated between the Maccabean Revolt and the imposition of direct Roman rule in the early first century C.E.”<sup>15</sup> That is, according to Horsley, there are no apocalyptic texts from the period when the Jews of Palestine were able to exercise self-governance, between their subjection to the Seleucid and Roman empires. Even if this is perhaps true, what is one to make then of the community at Qumran, which Horsley situates rather neatly within the Roman period of his analysis? This apocalyptic community began, it would appear, during the reign of Alexander Janneus (103–76 BCE), if not even earlier under John Hyrcanus (134–104 BCE), that is, during the period of Jewish independence: What sort of imperial oppression fueled this apocalyptic movement? Even if the community did not produce many original texts that properly fit the apocalyptic genre, its worldview was

clearly apocalyptic and its library reveals that earlier apocalyptic writings were highly valued by the community.<sup>16</sup> It was possible simply to reuse these older texts in new contexts since early Jewish apocalyptic literature usually did not refer to historical figures and events directly or by name but instead used a rich palate of symbols and imagery. This meant that an apocalypse written in response to a specific set of historical circumstances could easily be reinterpreted and reapplied to subsequent situations.<sup>17</sup> Thus the same apocalyptic response to a particular crisis could easily be made to speak to a newer one, as the multiple copies of Daniel and *1 Enoch* at Qumran attest,<sup>18</sup> not to mention Daniel's continued currency today in contemporary Christian apocalypticism.<sup>19</sup> Likewise, the Qumranites composed and reworked during this period a remarkable corpus of "war texts" that described the protocols for the coming eschatological war between the forces of light and darkness, a war in which the members of the community themselves would participate.<sup>20</sup> In fact, roughly two-thirds of the Aramaic texts discovered at Qumran "contain portions of either formal apocalypses or texts that are otherwise informed by the fundamental axioms of apocalypticism."<sup>21</sup> Clearly apocalypticism was not in abeyance in this era of independence despite the absence of an oppressive empire.

Lorenzo DiTommaso is thus right to conclude that "apocalyptic literature could precipitate from various *Sitze-im-Leben*," and "that while apocalypticism might correlate to typical societal contexts, it could not be restricted to a single social movement or milieu. In other words, the element of social setting cannot define either the genre or the worldview."<sup>22</sup> At the same time, there is no denying that resistance to imperial domination constitutes a major theme of early Jewish apocalyptic literature. If some apocalypses may seem unconcerned with imperial oppression, there certainly is no apocalypse from this early period that is unabashedly pro-imperial, as is common in late ancient and medieval apocalyptic. It bears further mention that most of the early Jewish apocalypses that respond directly to imperial oppression with a call to resistance fall into the category of "historical apocalypses," one of several literary subgenres identified by Collins and others. Historical apocalypses "include a review of history, eschatological crisis and cosmic and/or political eschatology." While this type of apocalypse is perhaps the most familiar, it is not the only kind. For instance, another large category of apocalypses relates the otherworldly journey of a revered religious figure, in the course of which the mysteries of the cosmos are revealed. While these otherworldly journey apocalypses often address political issues as well, many focus instead on the

revelation of heavenly secrets and describe only a personal, rather than political, eschatology.<sup>23</sup> Historical apocalypses, however, show a clear tendency as a whole toward engaging the history and status of worldly empires: charting the succession and fate of individual empires lies at the heart of their historical review. This focus is also characteristic of the late ancient apocalyptic traditions to be considered in the pages to follow. In this period the eschatological valence of empire and empires remains very much to the fore, although, as we will see, these apocalypses generally have a very different estimation of imperial power's role in the final triumph of good over evil.

Introduction of these different literary types inevitably raises the broader issue of the apocalyptic genre, which has stood squarely at the center of so much research on early apocalyptic literature over the past several decades. According to what has become a widely received definition, an apocalypse is a text in which an otherworldly figure mediates a revelation to a human recipient that is set within a broader narrative framework. The revelation itself always concerns future eschatological salvation and the disclosure of present otherworldly realities, so that the content moves along both a historical and a spatial axis. Usually, but not always, the recipient is a pseudonymous, venerable figure from the past, who invests the new mysteries with authority and antiquity. No sooner was this definition in place, however, than scholars began to struggle with the problem that many seemingly "apocalyptic" texts did not strictly fit the definition. Accordingly, right from the start exceptions were made, and closely related genres and traditions have regularly been included in the broader discussion of "apocalypticism."<sup>24</sup> For instance, according to Collins "other material may be called 'apocalyptic' insofar as it bears some resemblance to the core features of the genre apocalypse." There is, he explains, a certain conceptual worldview, an apocalyptic perspective, that emerges from the early Jewish apocalypses but appears also in other texts that may justifiably be called "apocalyptic literature," even if they are not, strictly speaking, apocalypses.<sup>25</sup> Likewise Collins notes the presence of "apocalyptic eschatology" in texts belonging to other genres and further identifies "apocalypticism" as a broader phenomenon that describes "the ideology of a movement that shares the conceptual structure of the apocalypses."<sup>26</sup> Thus, despite the existence of a fairly precise generic definition, the study of apocalyptic traditions in early Judaism has long recognized the diffuse nature of apocalypticism and has welcomed the necessity of blurred boundaries.

There is, moreover, an awareness among those who have adopted this definition that it pertains especially to the specific context of early Judaism.

Since it was determined on the basis of a specific corpus of Jewish and early Christian texts, there is no assumption that the same definition would adequately apply in other contexts. A subsequent effort to define the apocalyptic genre with reference exclusively to early Christian materials, for instance, resulted in some minor adjustments to the previous definition.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, in 2007 at a session on “Islamicate Apocalypsis” at the American Academy of Religion annual meeting, Collins suggested that Islamicists should presumably come up with their own definition of the apocalyptic genre to suit their material, rather than adopting the definition that was based on early Jewish materials. Yet the category of apocalypticism, it seems, is both sufficiently precise and malleable to be of enormous use for investigating this phenomenon in the religious cultures of the Mediterranean world. We will not in this book undertake the heavy work of creating a definition of apocalypse that would be suitable for the literatures of late antiquity (including early Islam), although this would be a worthwhile project, to be sure. Rather, in this study we will largely follow the definitions and principles established by Collins and others for our investigation of apocalyptic literature in late antiquity. The model is not only well proven but also flexible enough to be adapted to a wide range of related texts and ideas.<sup>28</sup>

### Visions of Resistance: Early Jewish Apocalypses and Anti-Imperialism

Just a single apocalypse survives in the Bible—at least according to the Hebrew canon—the book of Daniel, and not surprisingly, Daniel’s visions have cast a long shadow over modern study of apocalyptic literature. Nevertheless, it was the West’s discovery of *1 Enoch*, which is canonical only in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, during the early nineteenth century that awakened scholars to the broader phenomenon of apocalypticism as an important new development within early Judaism. Other early apocalypses also survive in the Ethiopian canon, namely *4 Ezra* and *Jubilees*, and while the latter does not strictly conform to the apocalyptic genre, it has strong affinities with other more properly apocalyptic texts. *4 Ezra* was of course long known in the West, where it belonged to the Greek and Latin canons as 2 Esdras 3–14, and the Syrian Orthodox Church includes *2 Baruch*, another early apocalypse, as a part of its canon. The *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs*, which includes the apocalypse the *Testament of Levi*, was a part of the Armenian canon, while the

*Testament of Abraham* is regarded as scriptural in Ethiopian Judaism (along with *1 Enoch* and *Jubilees*). Altogether, this accounts for most of the early Jewish apocalypses, meaning that the genre was not always as marginal to the biblical canon as is often thought. Indeed, of the early texts considered by Collins in the foundational *Semeia* volume, *Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre*, only *2 Enoch*, *3 Baruch*, and the *Apocalypse of Zephaniah* remain, and all three of these appear to be comparatively more recent works.

### *The Astronomical Apocalypse and the Book of the Watchers*

The two oldest Jewish apocalypses, it would seem, are both preserved in *1 Enoch*, which has long been recognized as a composite work containing no less than five early Jewish apocalypses. Both of these earliest apocalypses, the *Book of the Watchers* (1–36) and the *Astronomical Apocalypse* (72–82), are otherworldly journeys, rather than historical apocalypses, and so their interest in the political affairs of the day is, not surprisingly, comparatively minimal. In the *Astronomical Apocalypse*, which dates most likely to the third century BCE, such concerns are entirely absent, as already noted.<sup>29</sup> Instead, the *Astronomical Apocalypse* is engrossed with another topic that vexed the religious leaders of early Judaism: calendrical error. As Enoch tours the heavens in this apocalypse, the heavenly bodies—the sun, the moon, and the stars—are revealed to him, and from their movements he learns that the year is in fact 364 days long. When he later explains his vision to Methuselah, Enoch rails against those who are “sinners in the computation of days” by observing only a 360-day yearly calendar.<sup>30</sup> Yet their sin is quite peculiar, since, as Collins observes, we have no evidence of anyone ever having used a 360-day calendar in early Judaism.<sup>31</sup> Despite this very specific focus, all of the formal elements of an apocalypse are present, including references to an eschatological judgment, in which these calendar-shortening sinners will presumably meet with the recompense for their heinous omission.

Roughly the same age is the *Book of the Watchers*, also an otherworldly journey apocalypse dating most likely to the third century BCE, if not even earlier. The *Book of the Watchers* is itself widely regarded as a composite work, and so its individual elements are likely earlier still.<sup>32</sup> It shares with the *Astronomical Apocalypse* a strong interest in knowledge of the cosmic order, although it apparently has no stake in the calendrical debates of early Judaism. Most interesting for the present purposes, however, is the middle section, which tells the story of the Watchers, itself seemingly an assemblage of much

older traditions. The myth of the Watchers elaborates on the tradition of the “sons of God” in Genesis 6, who “went in to the daughters of humans, who bore children to them.” According to *1 Enoch*, the Watchers are angels who were to watch over humankind but fell from their appointed task and created mischief instead. *1 Enoch* refers to two different leaders of the Watchers—a sign that it draws here on multiple earlier traditions. One leader, Šemiḥazah, leads the Watchers to marry human women and beget a race of giants, who bring violence and destruction upon the human race, while the other, ‘Aśa’el, is accused of giving an inappropriate revelation. In these figures, and especially in Šemiḥazah, scholars have understood the representation of some sort of crisis faced by the community, and more specifically, some sort of political or cultural threat. The wars among the Hellenistic princes who succeeded Alexander, some sort of immorality within the priesthood, or more generally “culture shock in Israel” under the new circumstances of Hellenistic rule have all been suggested as possibilities, and as Collins rightly observes, it may have been some combination of all three.<sup>33</sup> In any case we find here a negative reaction to the conditions of foreign domination in one of the two earliest apocalypses. Even if the call to resistance is not here completely explicit, some sort of opposition to these disruptive developments seems implied. Thus, while we do not find here the kind of direct resistance to imperial rule and oppression that characterizes many of the later historical apocalypses, the seed of this idea is clearly in place.

### *The Book of Daniel*

Such concerns come very much to the fore in what is almost certainly the most popular and influential early Jewish apocalypse, the book of Daniel. Although its revelations are set in the time of the Babylonian Captivity, already as early as the third century CE, the Greek philosopher and anti-Christian polemicist Porphyry recognized it for what it was: a response to the tumultuous events of the reign of the Seleucid king Antiochus IV Epiphanes (r. 175–164 BCE). In what has ever since become a standard principle of historical criticism, particularly with respect to apocalyptic literature, Porphyry noted that Daniel’s remarkable powers of prognostication suddenly departed him right at this particular moment, a sure sign of the text’s composition in this era.<sup>34</sup> Modern critics divide Daniel into two main parts, a section of tales (1–6) and a section of visions (7–12). Most likely the tales of Daniel 1–6 are slightly older than the visions, although just how much so has been a

matter of some debate. The first six chapters of Daniel relate a series of “court-tales,” some perhaps from as early as the Persian period. These folk-tales initially circulated independently of one another but were woven together around the figure of Daniel sometime during the Hellenistic period but well before the crisis precipitated by Antiochus IV Epiphanes. Of these court-tales only one bears any relation at all to apocalyptic, that being chapter 2, in which Daniel reveals and then interprets Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of the statue according to an eschatological progression of empires.<sup>35</sup> Daniel’s section of visions, however, is an apocalypse in the purest sense, and for much of history it served as “the paradigmatic apocalypse.”<sup>36</sup> The visions are a historical apocalypse and seemingly the earliest exemplar of this subgenre, composed during the Maccabean revolt of 167–164 BCE, at which point they were added to the tales. Daniel’s visions bear the strong imprint of these historical events, and accordingly, they show little interest in revealing the mysteries of the cosmos (as the two Enochic apocalypses considered above), focusing their attention instead on imperial oppression and the need for resistance.<sup>37</sup>

Imperial domination is a theme of the court-tales as well as the visions, yet as scholars have often noted, the tales present the foreign rulers in a much more benign light than do the visions. For the last several decades, scholars have largely followed the lead of W. Lee Humphreys, who interpreted the first half of Daniel as modeling “a life-style for the Diaspora.”<sup>38</sup> Here we see Daniel and his companions rising to the highest levels of the Babylonian administration while holding fast to their faith. In each tale, although tensions arise between the protagonists and the rulers, they are happily resolved by the story’s end, and there is no hint of rebellion. All in all, the system seems to be working fairly well in these tales, even if there are some signs of discontent and resistance to imperial authority.<sup>39</sup> The second court-tale, in chapter 2, however, offers something resembling a historical apocalypse in Daniel’s interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of the statue, even if it is Daniel, rather than a heavenly being, who does the interpreting. As Daniel explains, the statue in the king’s dream, which is composed of four successively devalued metals, represents four successive empires. The image is, as Collins and many others have noted, a very old literary trope, beginning with Hesiod’s description of the four declining ages of humankind: gold, silver, bronze, and finally iron.<sup>40</sup>

The formula of four successive kingdoms to be followed by a fifth and final empire has a long and diffuse history in ancient Near Eastern literature, including, as we will see, late antiquity. Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and Daniel’s

interpretation of it have adapted this traditional schema, so that the fourth kingdom, which is “strong as iron,” symbolizes the Hellenistic rule of the redactor’s age. The stone that finally shatters the statue is almost certainly a Jewish addition, pointing in the direction of the coming apocalyptic destruction of worldly power. Nevertheless, other formulations of the four-kingdom schema conclude with a much more positive assessment of the final empire, and thus of empire in general, than we find in Daniel. Likewise, some of these visions of imperial succession foretell the rise of a final king who will inaugurate the reign of the eschatological empire.<sup>41</sup> This formula of a divinely guided sequence of cosmic powers would be adopted with great enthusiasm in the Christian Roman Empire, which would embrace its more positive estimation of imperial power’s role in God’s plan, as well as the hope in a final king, whose triumph would lead the earth and its peoples into God’s glory.

Daniel’s second half, however, offers an entirely different assessment of empire and, as noted above, is thoroughly if not classically apocalyptic in its opposition to imperial oppression. As Collins notes, “The Gentile kingdoms were no longer seen as potential servants of God. Instead they were rebellious monsters that could only be destroyed.”<sup>42</sup> Here Daniel, rather than the king, has the visions, and he requires an angelic interpreter in order to understand their meanings. In another version of the four-kingdoms motif, which has been combined with elements of ancient Near Eastern chaos myths, Daniel here beholds four monsters who come up from the sea. Then, “one like the son of man,” seemingly an angelic power, arrives to slay the fourth monster, which represents Hellenistic rule and oppression under Antiochus IV Epiphanes, and thus he brings the horror of imperial domination to an end.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, as Porphyry was the first to note, this second half of Daniel is filled with illusions to Antiochus’s persecution of the Jews and his profanation of the Temple. In the final chapters, which interpret the visions, we find that the struggle between the faithful Jews and their imperial overlords is paralleled by a simultaneous battle taking place in the spiritual realm between the angelic forces led by Gabriel and Michael and the “princes” of Persia and Greece, that is, their national gods. Thus the struggle against empire on the earth is mirrored in the divine realm. Nevertheless, although the heavenly powers are at war, Daniel’s visions do not recommend violent resistance to imperial persecution and desecration. Rather, they offer a message of nonviolent resistance through being willing to sacrifice one’s life for the faith. Militancy belongs strictly with the angels in the realm of the divine, who will

ultimately deliver the faithful.<sup>44</sup> Other contemporary apocalyptic responses to these circumstances, however, would not be nearly so meek.

### The *Apocalypse of Weeks* and the *Animal Apocalypse*

Two other historical apocalypses embedded within *1 Enoch*, the *Apocalypse of Weeks* (*1 En.* 93:1–10 and 91:11–17) and the *Animal Apocalypse* (*1 En.* 85–91), are roughly contemporary with the second half of Daniel, and yet these visions respond to the same events of Seleucid oppression and desecration of the Temple with expectations of violent resistance.<sup>45</sup> Although the *Apocalypse of Weeks* is quite brief, it covers a lot of territory in its sixteen verses, schematizing all of history into a series of ten successive “weeks.” The turning point of history, however, comes during the seventh week, which clearly is the era in which the text’s author believed himself to live. The seventh week would see the emergence of “the chosen righteous” (*1 En.* 93:9–10), followed then by the excision of the “roots of iniquity” and the destruction of sinners by the sword (*1 En.* 91:11). The last three weeks are all eschatological in nature, as divine judgment is unleashed against various foes of God and God’s people, culminating in the world’s destruction and heaven’s replacement by a new heaven in which “there will be many weeks without number forever in goodness and in righteousness” (*1 En.* 91:17). In the eighth week, however, “a sword will be given to all the righteous, to exact a righteous judgment from all the wicked, and they shall be delivered into their hands” (*1 En.* 91:12).<sup>46</sup> Thus those guilty of oppressing the righteous, the Seleucids and their allies, will meet with divinely ordained execution at the hands of those who remained faithful. These events seemingly lie in the author’s future, although perhaps they are a reference to the Hasmonean revolt that was about begin or had in fact just recently begun. In any case, we see here a very different perspective from Daniel’s message of nonviolent resistance. According to the *Apocalypse of Weeks*, God would empower the righteous to slaughter the wicked on God’s behalf in the events of the *eschaton*, and through their militancy, God’s kingdom would triumph.<sup>47</sup>

The *Animal Apocalypse* sits within a larger section of *1 Enoch* known as the “Book of Dreams” (*1 En.* 83–91), of which this vision constitutes the bulk. This fourth Enochic apocalypse, also from the time of the Maccabean revolt, retells biblical history as an allegory in which the main figures are

represented by animals. Starting with Adam, the vision continues up until the time of the kingdoms, at which point the “sheep,” that is the Israelites, are blinded and go astray. At first the sheep are handed over to wild animals, but before long God appoints seventy shepherds to watch over the sheep and also to destroy some of them. These shepherds, it would seem, are “the angelic patrons of the nations.”<sup>48</sup> The shepherds are grouped into four different periods, which correspond, very roughly, with the rule of the Babylonians, Persians, Ptolemies, and Seleucids. As the third period comes to an end, “small lambs were born from those white sheep, and they began to open their eyes, and to see, and to cry to the sheep” (*1 En.* 90:6).<sup>49</sup> The lambs are the faithful of Israel, the “chosen faithful” of the *Apocalypse of Weeks*. One of these lambs, we are told, was slain: this can only be a reference, it would seem, to the murder of the high priest Onias III during the reign of Antiochus IV Epiphanes. Then horns grew on the sheep, and a big horn grew on one of them and their eyes were opened (*1 En.* 90:9). Undoubtedly this is a reference to the Maccabean revolt, and the sheep with the big horn is none other than Judas Maccabee.<sup>50</sup> As the sheep begin to suffer violence at the hands of other animals, supernatural forces, including the Lord of the sheep, become involved, and at this point the vision shifts from a review of history to a forecast of future eschatological events. As in the *Apocalypse of Weeks*, “a big sword was given to the sheep, and the sheep went out against all the wild animals to kill them” (*1 En.* 90:19).<sup>51</sup> Thus, with God’s intervention, the righteous of Israel will take up arms and slay their oppressors, and their triumph in battle will then bring about the final judgment of the Watchers, the “shepherds,” and the unfaithful Jews and the eschatological transformation of the land of Israel.

### Preparations for Eschatological War at Qumran

The Dead Sea Scrolls, which were discovered in 1948 at Qumran, reveal what has often been called “an apocalyptic community” living in the Judean Desert between the reign of the Hasmonean ruler John Hyrcanus (134–104 BCE) and the Jewish revolt of 66–70 CE, when the community was destroyed by the Roman army. Although the sectarian library recovered at the site includes a wide range of different types of religious literature, apocalyptic literature is in abundance. It is true, as noted above, that the community does not seem to have produced any original apocalypses (strictly speaking), but as Collins

notes, its authoritative writings are suffused with an apocalyptic worldview. The absence of new apocalyptic texts may possibly reflect the authority of the enigmatic “Teacher of Righteous,” who seems to have provided the community with direct revelation.<sup>52</sup> Nonetheless, a hallmark of the community’s apocalyptic worldview is the cosmic dualism that permeates its literature, an element that Collins persuasively suggests may have its origins in Persian religion. In the Dead Sea Scrolls, the forces of Light and Darkness are contending for control of the universe, and the faithful at Qumran viewed themselves as the advance guard of the Spirit of Light within the realm of humankind. They were expecting a final eschatological battle in which they, the Sons of Light, would fight against the Sons of Darkness, the wicked Jews and gentiles, defeating them in the ultimate triumph of Light.<sup>53</sup> The writings from Qumran also reveal an understanding of history as being divided into several periods, a common feature of apocalyptic literature. Judging from these texts, the community members believed that they were living in the final age, often referred to in the writings as “the end of days.” The end of days, however, was not a particular point in time. Rather, it referred to the eschatological era, in which the events of the end of time were being played out. In contrast to many of the apocalyptic texts considered so far, the community at Qumran does not seem to have believed that this eschatological cataclysm was looming just over the historical horizon; rather, they saw themselves as actually living in the end of days and playing a key role in its events.<sup>54</sup>

The community was awaiting the impending arrival of two messiahs who would lead them to victory over the Sons of Darkness in this final age and restore the proper observance of the Law and the Temple cult. Indeed, revival of messianic expectations is characteristic of Jewish apocalypticism during the first centuries BCE and CE, as we will see from other texts, but the anticipation of two messiahs was slightly (although not completely) unusual. One of these messiahs would be a Davidic, warrior messiah, a figure that is fairly well attested in other Jewish writings of this era. Nevertheless, in addition to this “royal” messiah, the Qumranites were also expecting a priestly messiah descended from Aaron, and of the two, this priestly messiah seems to have been understood as having the greater authority. The priestly messiah’s role would be to atone for the people by restoring the sacrifices.<sup>55</sup> The royal messiah, however, who is also named “the Son of God,” would lead the Sons of Light in battle against the wicked. “The great God will be his help. He will make war for him. He will give all peoples into his hand and all of them he will cast down before him. His sovereignty is everlasting sovereignty.” Likewise, he

will “establish the kingdom of his people forever” and “will judge the earth in truth and all will make peace.”<sup>56</sup> Thus we see here that at Qumran, as well as elsewhere, the idea of an eschatological king who would rise up to defeat the enemies of God and establish an eternal kingdom had already emerged within Judaism by the first century BCE. This royal messiah from early Judaism seems to be an important precursor to the figure of the Last Emperor, who would emerge with a similar profile in late ancient Christianity.

This martial eschatology finds its clearest expression, however, in an assortment of related texts from Qumran known collectively as the “War Texts” (or alternatively, the “War Scroll” or “War Rule”). These documents describe in considerable detail the plans and preparations for the eschatological war that would soon take place between the forces of Light and Darkness. Not only does this final battle appear more imminent than in most other apocalyptic texts, but the Qumran War Texts also describe the active role that human beings will play in this conflict in far greater detail. Their regulations for the conduct of war are highly ritualistic and draw heavily on the biblical tradition: prayers play a significant role, as do ritual purity and the services of the Temple cult. Purity is especially important since the Qumran community believed that the angels were already dwelling in their midst, and they would fight at their side against the forces of Darkness.<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless, the influence of Hellenistic and Roman tactical manuals and military strategy is also discernable. Accordingly, while some scholars have sought to interpret these texts as primarily symbolic of the final conflict or having only a liturgical purpose, their knowledge and description of real military strategy indicate that they were not mere apocalyptic fantasies but had actual combat in view. In fact, so detailed are the descriptions of weapons and tactics that these have proven one of the most effective means of dating the texts.<sup>58</sup> Even if perhaps the community viewed the ritualistic and purity directives of these manuals as ultimately of greater importance, it seems clear that these are tactical manuals, admittedly of a special kind, with a genuine interest in military strategy that would be needed for the coming eschatological war.

While the forces of Light and Darkness wage war on the spiritual plane, their allies on earth join in the fray, as the Sons of Light engage Belial’s worldly allies, including Edom, Moab, the sons of Ammon, the Philistines, and the “Kittim.” The Kittim are something of a cipher in Jewish literature of this period. The name originates from the city Citium in Cyprus, and originally it was applied to all of the eastern Mediterranean islands and maritime communities. In Daniel 11, Kittim is used in reference to the Romans,

while in 1 Maccabees, Macedonia is the land of the Kittim. In the Qumran War Texts, either referent is theoretically possible, and given the strong literary connections between Daniel 11–12 and certain sections of the War Texts, perhaps the Kittim originally referred to the Greek kingdoms of the Near East and the Seleucids in particular. Nevertheless, as Collins rightly notes, Kittim in the War Texts appears to signify “the consummation of Gentile hostility in the end time.”<sup>59</sup> Thus, even if the Kittim may have originally referred to the Seleucids, following the dramatic rebirth of the holy war tradition in the Maccabean revolt, with the arrival of the Romans, they and their allies among the Jewish leadership would have emerged as the main hostile force. The righteous and their heavenly allies would take on the full might of the Roman Empire and triumph, or so it was believed. Whether this apocalyptic script actually inspired the members of the Qumran community to rise up against Rome in the revolt of 66–70 CE remains unknown, although it is certainly not out of the question.<sup>60</sup> The destruction of the Qumran settlement by the Roman army in 68 could suggest as much, but there is no way to know for sure. In any case, we find in the writings from Qumran, and especially in the War Texts, an apocalyptic program for the realization of God’s eschatological reign through military victory over God’s worldly foes, led by a divinely appointed warrior king. It is, again, strong precedent for many of the key elements of late antiquity’s imperial apocalypticism, and the militant apocalypticism of the Qumran community certainly moved things further in this direction.

### Anti-Imperialism in Roman-Era Jewish Apocalyptic

A similar anti-Roman messiah is envisioned in the *Psalms of Solomon*, even though these poems from the mid-first century BCE are otherwise fairly remote from the world of apocalyptic literature and apocalypticism. The *Psalms* foretell a Davidic messiah who will bring about the restoration of Jerusalem by defeating one who had conquered it, presumably a reference to Roman general Pompey’s conquest of Jerusalem in 63 BCE. Nevertheless, this messiah will also bring retribution against some of the Jews, who had fallen into sin, not the least of which was having established a king who was not from the line of David, presumably a reference to the Hasmonean dynasty.<sup>61</sup> This is the extent of the *Psalms*’ apocalypticism, but here again we see the familiar themes of resistance to imperial domination and an eschatological “king”

(messiah) who will effect the political changes leading to a restoration of divine rule.

The *Testament of Moses* is also, strictly speaking, not an apocalypse, since in it Moses speaks directly about the future, rather than receiving a revelation that is mediated by a heavenly being. Nevertheless, at one point Moses predicts a period of occupation and persecution by a foreign power that would ultimately lead to an eschatological conflict in which the oppressors are defeated. In its current redaction, these oppressors are clearly presented as the Romans, but in its earliest form, the *Testament of Moses* appears to have addressed the crisis introduced by Antiochus IV Epiphanes.<sup>62</sup> In this older material the *Testament of Moses* offers its most vivid formulation of Jewish anti-imperial resistance in the story of Taxo and his sons. Their resistance is, however, nonviolent, even though it will ultimately result in divine destruction of their oppressors. Taxo and his sons vow to die rather than transgress the Lord's commands, and in recompense for their faithfulness, God will avenge their blood.<sup>63</sup> The *Testament of Moses* thus would appear to stand in the nonviolent tradition of resistance established by Daniel's visions, and it shows that despite the rise of militancy in other apocalyptic texts, these ideas retained currency also in the Roman era, when new prophecies were added to adapt Moses' final predictions to a new circumstance of imperial domination.

The only true apocalypse from the Roman period prior to the first Jewish revolt is the *Similitudes of Enoch*, the fifth apocalypse contained within *1 Enoch* (37–71). The *Similitudes* are a heavenly journey apocalypse, and as such their three lengthy parables have the events of worldly history and politics less in view than other more historical apocalypses. Their focus is instead on the final judgment and the destiny of the righteous.<sup>64</sup> Nevertheless, the text frequently makes negative reference to “the kings and the mighty,” and so it is not completely devoid of political concerns.<sup>65</sup> Thus, while the *Similitudes* do not appear to respond directly to any particular historical crisis of the first century, they regularly address the oppression of the righteous by impious rulers, be they the Romans or the Herodians of the author's age. Accordingly, the *Similitudes* “offered to the powerless the assurance of a special destiny guaranteed by a heavenly patron.”<sup>66</sup>

Jewish apocalyptic texts composed in the wake of the first rebellion and the destruction of the Temple tend to relinquish the theme of resistance and to focus instead on mourning and consolation for what had been lost.<sup>67</sup> Nevertheless, according to Josephus, apocalypticism played an important role in sowing the seeds of this revolt. He writes, “What more than all else incited

them to the war was an ambiguous oracle, likewise found in their sacred scriptures, to the effect that at that time one from their country would become ruler of the world."<sup>68</sup> As Josephus then continues to explain, the leaders of the revolt misinterpreted the prophecy, which instead referred to the Roman emperor Vespasian, who had been appointed emperor while in Judea. It is not at all clear where this "scripture" came from, but its role in fomenting the uprising is certainly evidence of the significance that apocalyptic and messianic expectations played for many of those involved.

In the period after the Temple's destruction, two closely related apocalypses from the later first century CE, *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch*, briefly address the issue of imperial domination. The relationship between these two historical apocalypses is still not completely settled, although there is broad agreement that one made use of the other: for the moment, the evidence seems to lean slightly in favor of *4 Ezra's* priority.<sup>69</sup> *2 Baruch* has very little to say regarding the circumstances of imperial domination, noting only toward the end of its concluding "epistle" that "now we see the greatness of the prosperity of the nations, though they have acted wickedly. But they will be like a vapor."<sup>70</sup>

*4 Ezra* is more specifically anti-Roman. Chapter 11 begins with the vision of "an eagle coming up out of the sea; it had twelve feathered wings and three heads" (11:1). The eagle is obviously Rome, and the three heads most likely symbolize the three Flavian emperors Vespasian (69–79 CE), Titus (79–81), and Domitian (81–96), while the twelve wings represent the twelve emperors from Caesar to Domitian.<sup>71</sup> A roaring lion then dashes forth from the forest and rebukes the eagle: "The Most High says to you, 'Are you not the one that remains of the four beasts which I had made to reign in my world, so that the end of my times might come through them? You . . . have conquered all the beasts that have gone before; and you have held sway over the world with much terror, and over all the earth with grievous oppression.'" The lion continues, warning the eagle that it will soon be made to disappear, "so that the whole earth, freed from your violence, may be refreshed and relieved, and may hope for the judgment and mercy of him who made it."<sup>72</sup> In the following chapter, *4 Ezra* explains more clearly that the eagle is the fourth beast of Daniel 7, while the lion is "the Messiah whom the Most High has kept until the end of days."<sup>73</sup> Not only will the messiah reprove the ungodly, but he will destroy them (12:33). The next vision then describes a messiah figure who also emerges as "something like the figure of a man" from the sea, and when a multitude of the wicked comes against him, he

scorches them with his fiery breath: “when he saw the onrush of the approaching multitude, he neither lifted his hand nor held a spear or any weapon of war; but I saw only how he sent forth from his mouth as it were a stream of fire . . . and [it] fell upon the multitude which was prepared to fight, and burned them all up” and annihilated them.<sup>74</sup> Both visions conjure the idea of a warrior messiah, as we have seen before, who will destroy the Roman oppressors and liberate the faithful of Israel. Once again, apocalypticism is linked here with resistance to imperial impression, and while humankind does not seem to have a direct role in the final battle, the violent destruction of empire is anticipated, in this case by God’s anointed king, the messiah.

### Eschatology and Empire in Christian Judaism

Christian Judaism believes of course that God’s messiah has come, in the figure of Jesus of Nazareth. Nevertheless, Jesus bore little resemblance to the messianic warrior king anticipated in many of the texts that we have considered so far. It seems very likely, however, that already during his ministry Jesus was regarded as the messiah by his followers, and the term itself, which means “anointed,” has implications of kingship. In fact, according to the gospels Jesus was put to death by the Romans in part for claiming, perhaps only indirectly through the title “messiah,” to be the king of the Jews.<sup>75</sup> Likewise there can be little doubt that Jesus preached the coming Kingdom of God, an eschatological restoration of divine rule and judgment that he seemingly believed was already beginning to emerge in the formation of his new community.<sup>76</sup> There is no denying that proclaiming the imminent arrival of God’s Kingdom held an implicit challenge to Roman authority, and certainly that is how the Roman officials and their Jewish allies perceived Jesus and his movement.

At the same time, there is little sense that Jesus was directly political in his aspirations. Although biographies of Jesus as a social and political revolutionary are not uncommon and indeed are often quite popular, there is very little evidence that would suggest Jesus was actively fomenting an uprising against Roman authority or that he had intentions of establishing himself as a political leader, let alone the actual “king,” of the Jews.<sup>77</sup> Nonetheless, much of the teaching ascribed to Jesus directly challenges the status of the wealthy and powerful and promises a reversal of worldly status so that “the

last shall be first" (Matt. 19:30). There was a critique of social and economic oppression that went hand in hand with the apocalyptic eschatology of Jesus' message. Missing, however, is a clear message of resistance to political domination, as one finds in much of the early Jewish apocalyptic literature. This is because the answer to the crisis of imperial domination was already underway according to Jesus' preaching. The Kingdom of God, which would break into history at any moment and had already begun to unfold in the events of Jesus' ministry, would soon solve the problem. The end times had begun, and there was little to do besides turn to God with faith and wait just a little bit longer.<sup>78</sup> Accordingly, while Jesus preached a message critical of the exploitation of the weak by the powerful, there is no direct call to organize any sort of resistance to the forces of oppression outside of the community.

Paul too had an apocalyptic worldview, and like Jesus, he was expecting the Kingdom of God to bring the world to an end very soon. Nevertheless, it is quite clear that Paul's apocalypticism did not inspire ideas of resistance to imperial rule. Paul himself in Romans 13:1–2 writes in quite unmistakable terms, "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment." Despite such apparent clarity, recent years have seen a number of studies seeking to argue that, to the contrary, Paul actively "challenged, to the point of 'subverting,' the imperialism of ancient Rome."<sup>79</sup> These studies aim to avoid the uncomfortable dissonance between Paul's endorsement of the imperial powers and modern ideas about the proper relation between the governed and the government. They seek instead to transform Paul's thought into something that can be used "to challenge hegemonic ideologies of today, for example, American imperialism."<sup>80</sup> In order to achieve this they must argue that Romans 13:1–7 is an interpolation, or is designed to address a specific movement of tax resisters in Rome, or is meant ironically, or that it utilizes a "hidden transcript" to communicate resistance while saying exactly the opposite in the text itself.<sup>81</sup> None of these arguments is very persuasive, and all seem to involve some form of special pleading. Indeed, it seems quite clear that Paul's apocalypticism did not encourage resistance to imperial rule but was compatible with it, and rather than contest Rome's discourse of power, Paul instead appropriated it to bolster his own authority rhetorically.<sup>82</sup>

The Apocalypse of John, however, in stark contrast to the gospels and to Paul, clearly urges its readers to resist imperial oppression. It is no secret to

even the most casual reader that the Apocalypse often seethes with only thinly veiled hostility to Rome, the empire, and those in political authority. The Apocalypse was of course composed in the context of persecution and martyrdom at the hands of the Roman authorities, and accordingly it is unyielding in its denunciations of the empire and bold in forecasting its imminent devastation and judgment. Under the guise of “Babylon the great, mother of whores,” the Apocalypse heaps vituperations on Rome, condemning not just the city itself but the empire as well and its authorities who have been actively persecuting the author’s Christian community (Apoc. 17–18).<sup>83</sup> The Apocalypse proclaims an abiding acrimony between the followers of Christ and the empire that would endure until the end of time and warns of God’s ultimate and utter condemnation of the empire.<sup>84</sup> When Christ returns, he will come with the armies of heaven to judge and make war, and he will strike down the nations with a sharp sword from his mouth (Apoc. 19:11–15). Nevertheless, until such a time the faithful are to resist nonviolently in the manner of Daniel’s visions; unlike the War Texts and a number of other apocalypses, the Apocalypse of John does not envision a martial role for Christ’s followers in the final conflict.<sup>85</sup> In its concern with political resistance, however, the Apocalypse of John is highly exceptional within early Christian apocalyptic literature. According to Adela Collins, it is “the only Christian text of this type where such an interest is clearly present.”<sup>86</sup> Politically oriented apocalyptic literature would only return to the Christian tradition in the fourth century, at which point it would take on a decidedly pro-imperial cast.

### Eschatology and Empire Among the Nations

Daniel was not the first, as we have noted, to discern the succession of four declining empires to be followed by a fifth that would fill the earth and stand forever. The idea had currency in the ancient Near East well before the story of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, and in this regard, we would do well, as Jonathan Z. Smith (and before him Hans Dieter Betz) advised, to no longer look at apocalypticism as a phenomenon primarily belonging to early Judaism. Rather we must examine these biblical and extrabiblical traditions within the broader interreligious milieu of the ancient Near East and the Hellenistic world.<sup>87</sup> We have also already mentioned Hesiod’s account of the four declining ages of humankind, as symbolized by different metals, along with his implication that

something better would follow. Yet the earliest such imperial schema seems to have envisioned just three successive empires: the Assyrian, the Median, and the Persian. Both Herodotus (ca. 484–425 BCE) and Ctesias (fl. ca. 400 BCE) report this idea, which seems to have had a Persian origin, inasmuch as it clearly favors their hegemony.<sup>88</sup> Following the Greek conquest of the Near East, including Persia, Macedonia was added to the list as a natural fourth. In this context, then, the four-empire schema would emerge as a vision of “Near Eastern resistance to Hellenism in Alexander” in Daniel as well as other contexts.<sup>89</sup> As Swain writes, “The three empires of the old story had been oriental; they had been cited to glorify the oriental Persian kings; and the oriental peoples associated this succession with their former kings. But the rulers of the fourth empire were foreigners: the Orientals then began to look forward to a fifth empire from which the Greeks would be expelled, and under which the old oriental system would return.”<sup>90</sup>

The same theory of four successive kingdoms survives in a Babylonian prophecy from the Hellenistic period known as the *Dynastic Prophecy*, where it seems to reflect Babylonian hopes for the downfall of the Seleucids.<sup>91</sup> Elsewhere in Babylonian prophecy we also find the notion of an apocalyptic king who will rise up and establish a dynasty that will last forever.<sup>92</sup> Likewise, the Persian *Zand ī Wabman Yasn*, a Middle Persian apocalyptic text, relates a sequence of four kingdoms that are correlate with four different metals, much as Daniel does.<sup>93</sup> Nevertheless, while this structure corresponds with the broader Zoroastrian concept of four ages of history, the text itself dates only from the early Islamic period, and it is difficult to be certain if these ideas go back into the Hellenistic era or earlier.<sup>94</sup> Indeed, while there is a significant corpus of Persian apocalyptic literature that was collected and copied in the Sasanian and early Islamic period, which we will consider in the fourth chapter, the antiquity of this material is the subject of considerable debate among specialists. Yet this fourfold structure of history is attested in Plutarch’s (ca. 46–120 CE) account of Persian religion in his *On Isis and Osiris*, which purportedly draws on earlier sources from the fourth century BCE.<sup>95</sup> Therefore, it seems clear that this particular idea at least extends far back into the early history of Persian eschatology.

In Roman hands, this forecast of four successive empires to be followed by a fifth that would rule the world and never be defeated took on new meaning. Not surprisingly, Rome and its supporters saw in the fifth empire the Roman Empire, which was indeed greater than anything the world had known before. Already in the Hellenistic period, the seeds of this idea were

sown in the *Alexandra* or *Cassandra*, a notoriously difficult Greek poem written by Lycophron during the third century BCE. Here Cassandra, the daughter of Priam, prophesies that in recompense for Troy's humiliation, its descendants, the Romans, would be exalted to an unprecedented glory at the end of time.<sup>96</sup> Rome's succession to the previous four empires, presumably then as the world's final empire, is first attested in a fragment from the Roman historian Aemilius Sura, who wrote in the second century BCE: "The Assyrians were the first of all races to hold power, then the Medes, after them the Persians, and then the Macedonians. Then, when the two kings, Philip and Antiochus [III], of Macedonian origin, had been completely conquered, soon after the overthrow of Carthage, the supreme command passed to the Roman people."<sup>97</sup>

The same sequence would recur among Roman historians from the late second century BCE through the second century CE. Polybius, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Tacitus, and Appian all reproduce the same structure with Rome as the fifth and final empire.<sup>98</sup> They praise Rome as greater in extent and more enduring than its ancient predecessors: by comparison only Rome was truly a world empire. The literature of the Roman period frequently describes Rome as an eternal and divinely ordained final world empire, whose emperor is specially consecrated to care for and even save the world.<sup>99</sup> In the rise of Rome, Virgil saw a restoration of the world to the state of its lost Golden Age (as was foretold, he notes, in an oracle of the Cumaean Sibyl), a development that is closely linked in his poem to the expected appearance of an ideal monarch.<sup>100</sup> This ideology would persist even down to the very end of the empire in the West, when the court poet Claudian (d. ca. 404 CE), who remained a pagan as the empire increasingly embraced Christianity, praised Rome as the fifth empire, universal and eternal. Rome, as he writes, "found her strength in the oracles of the Sibyl."<sup>101</sup> Only a little later, in 416 CE, the poet Rutilius Namatianus, who also resisted conversion to Christianity, could still envision Rome's eternity even after its sack by the Goths in 410.<sup>102</sup> Yet as we will see, in an increasingly Christian Roman Empire, the idea of Rome's eschatological valence came to be embraced with newfound vigor and conviction. Indeed, as Oliver Nicholson observes, the classical belief in a Golden Age left a strong imprint on Christian eschatology in late antiquity, as writers expressed hopes for the imminent return of an age of peace and prosperity ruled over by a wise and just emperor.<sup>103</sup>

In early Jewish literature, the topos of successive empires leading up to the final judgment is not limited to the book of Daniel; it also appears among

the Jews of the Diaspora in several of the *Sibylline Oracles*, where it is often expanded to include even more empires, frequently as many as ten. Although the *Sibylline Oracles* are, like a number of texts that we have considered, not strictly speaking apocalypses, they share strong common interests with many historical apocalypses in the political developments that would lead to the end of the world. In contrast to apocalyptic literature, however, the *Sibyllines* operate only along a “horizontal” axis without the “vertical” axis that characterizes apocalyptic literature. That is, the focus is strictly historical, while the angels, demons, and heavenly mysteries of the apocalypses are absent. Inasmuch as these *Oracles* are the product of Hellenistic Judaism during the Hellenistic and Roman periods, it is certainly no surprise to find that they especially reflect the development of eschatological periodizations evident in Greco-Roman literature. Indeed, the twelve Jewish and Christian *Sibylline Oracles* were particularly influenced by the Greek and Roman oracular traditions. Unlike the Greco-Roman traditions, however, the early *Sibylline Oracles* are generally anti-Roman. The only exceptions are *Sibylline Oracle* 11, probably from the first century CE, and *Oracles* 12–14, which are from the third century and later. These later *Oracles* reflect a pro-Roman stance to differing degrees, and although they share the political interests of the other *Sibyllines*, they generally do not predict an impending political upheaval.<sup>104</sup> Yet at the other extreme we find *Sibylline Oracle* 2, which forecasts the future eschatological rule of the Hebrew people.<sup>105</sup> Despite their often divergent visions of the future, the *Sibylline Oracles* always seem to have politics clearly in view.

Only *Sibylline Oracle* 4 adheres strictly to the four-empire schema, at least in its original form. The four empires rule over a series of ten generations, the Assyrians for six, the Medes for two, the Persians for one, and the Macedonians come to power in the final tenth generation. Logic would suggest that after the Macedonians should follow the final eschatological kingdom. Instead, in the text’s current state the Roman Empire emerges next, but it is not integrated into the numerical sequence, nor is it reckoned as the final, eternal world empire. Presumably the original version of this oracle concluded with the Macedonians, after which the end of time and final judgment were expected to commence soon. Rome, we must assume, was added only later as a sort of update to the text. This oracle, then, was composed originally in the context of Near Eastern resistance to Hellenistic rule but was later revised into its present anti-Roman guise. The addition (vv. 102–51) includes references to the Roman destruction of the Temple, the Emperor Nero’s (legendary)

flight to the Persians, and the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 CE, which is described as punishment for Jerusalem's destruction. As for Nero's flight, at the time of his death there was widespread speculation that he had not in fact died but had fled to the Parthians and would soon return leading a force of Persian soldiers. Others, it seems, believed that he had died but would nonetheless soon come back from the dead. Within this immediate context, the fourth *Sibylline's* addendum predicts Nero's imminent return, at which point the *eschaton* will begin and Rome will receive its recompense.<sup>106</sup>

Similar themes characterize *Sibylline Oracle 5*, which is even more forcefully anti-Roman, more so, Collins observes, than any of the other *Sibyllines*. The *Oracle's* vision rebukes a number of different nations for their wickedness, but none with the vituperation that it has for Rome. Nero's return is also brought into greater relief, and he appears as the great eschatological adversary of the righteous in the final conflict. Accordingly, the fifth *Sibylline* seems to advocate resistance to oppression by the wicked nations and to Rome especially. Inasmuch as this *Oracle* does not seem to envision any otherworldly salvation but focuses instead squarely on political events in the world, Collins tentatively suggests that it may have had some link to the Jewish uprising under Trajan in the Diaspora at the beginning of the second century CE.<sup>107</sup> Yet perhaps most intriguing in this *Oracle* is the prediction of "a certain king sent from God" who will rise up as a savior figure to defeat "the Persian," that is, Nero.<sup>108</sup> While this savior is never identified as a "messiah," Davidic or otherwise, we find here yet another intriguing ancestor of the Last Emperor who would so define late antiquity's imperial apocalypticism. The roots of this idea would seem to be much deeper and broader than merely the Jewish messianic tradition alone.

The role of a final, eschatological king figures even more prominently in *Sibylline Oracle 3*, which, as it turns out, appears to be the oldest of these *Oracles*. This *Oracle* is widely recognized as a composite work, but in its earliest redactional layers, the "main corpus" from the mid-second century BCE, four different oracles concern the anticipated arrival of an eschatological king or kingdom that will deliver the people from their current plight. In one instance (vv. 196–294), this kingdom describes the restoration after the return from Babylonian exile. In another (vv. 657–808), when the armies of the gentiles attack the Temple, God will defeat them and establish an eschatological kingdom in which Jews and gentiles will live together on a restored earth with a restored Temple.<sup>109</sup> One of these oracles, however, in verses 162–95, looks for deliverance by "the young seventh king of Egypt . . . numbered

from the dynasty of the Greeks" (192–93), a figure who also appears elsewhere in this main corpus (vv. 318, 608).<sup>110</sup> After suffering affliction under the rule of several kingdoms, the last of which is Rome, this Egyptian king, who is clearly one of the Ptolemies, most likely Ptolemy VI Philometor or his son Ptolemy VII Neos Philopator, will once again make the people of God strong. Thus while Rome is here viewed again in a very negative light, the Jewish community behind this oracle believed that God would raise up a king from the Greeks as their savior from Roman oppression. In the final oracle, this savior king is described as "the king from the sun, who will stop the whole earth from evil and war, killing some, imposing oaths of fidelity on others. He will not do all these things by his own plans, but in obedience to the noble teachings of the great God."<sup>111</sup> The "king from the sun," as Collins observes, is an old pharaonic title, here reused in a Jewish eschatological scenario. Accordingly the king from the sun is unquestionably to be linked with the seventh Greek king of Egypt, so that "the king who will stop the earth from war must be presumed to be the same as the one in whose reign war will cease." Thus the third *Sibylline Oracle* expects God to raise up an earthly king, from the line of the Ptolemies, to deliver the Jews and bring all war to an end. Most likely this *Oracle* was composed either during the Maccabean revolt or in its immediate aftermath and expresses the hope of the Jews of Egypt that the Ptolemies would come to the aid of the Jewish people.<sup>112</sup>

The "king from the sun" finds its most direct and significant parallel in an Egyptian oracle from the second century BCE, the so-called *Oracle of the Potter*. Although it survives only in several copies from the second and third century CE, the oracle relates a prophecy in which a potter tells Pharaoh Amenhotep about the future affliction of the Egyptian people under the rule of a foreign power, the "belt-wearers," that is, the Greeks. Deliverance from this time of chaos and violence will come through the emergence of a new Egyptian king, who is the king from the sun. "And then Egypt will increase, when the king from the sun, who is benevolent for fifty-five years, becomes present, appointed by the greatest goddess Isis."<sup>113</sup> Thus native Egyptians of the Hellenistic period were also awaiting a divinely guided king who would free them from the oppressive rule of the Ptolemies, remove their affliction, and bring resurrection of the dead and lasting peace and prosperity to the world. Apparently this hope remained current into the early Christian period, as evidenced by the oracle's survival in multiple papyrus copies from the period. The same is also indicated by this motif's reuse in the Christian

*Apocalypse of Elijah*, a work from the later third century CE that was composed in Egypt. Here again we find the notion of an eschatological king, named the king “from the city of the sun.” In the *Apocalypse of Elijah*, this king appears as the penultimate savior, and after him will follow the trials of the Antichrist, who will finally be defeated by God and his angelic hosts. This figure, and the king from the sun more generally, “no doubt forms one of the major sources of the ‘Last Emperor’ tradition in Byzantine apocalypticism: a human ruler whose beneficent accession and dominion would paradoxically usher in the period of the Antichrist,” as David Frankfurter observes.<sup>114</sup>

In Egypt, this idea of an eschatological king who will arise in a time of turmoil, violence, and affliction to restore order and righteousness is quite old. It appears at least as early as the *Prophecy of Neferti*, which is dated to sometime between 1991 and 1783 BCE. In this oracle, at a time of famine, social disorder, and foreign invasion, “Re will withdraw from mankind: though he will rise at his hour, one will not know when noon has come.” Then, deliverance will come when “a king will come from the South, Ameny, the justified by name, . . . He will take the white crown, he will wear the red crown. . . . Rejoice, O people of his time, the son of man will make his name for all eternity! . . . Then Order will return to its seat, while Chaos is driven away.”<sup>115</sup> A little bit later is the *Admonitions of Ipuwer*, which, although it does not have the appearance of a specific eschatological king in view, describes a time of chaos, suffering, and death that will only be remedied by the reign of an ideal, righteous king.<sup>116</sup> Likewise, in the *Demotic Chronicle*, a work of the early Ptolemaic period, we find the prophecy of a righteous, eschatological king who will deliver the people from affliction and oppression and restore an era of justice and prosperity to Egypt.<sup>117</sup> The *Oracle of the Lamb*, another political prophecy from the Hellenistic period, envisions a period of over nine hundred years of distress and disorder that would finally come to an end with “the rule of the one with 55 years,” a vague reference that nonetheless obviously refers to the same “king from the sun” mentioned by the roughly contemporary *Oracle of the Potter*.<sup>118</sup> In Egypt, then, the idea of an eschatological king maintained a long currency, from the *Prophecy of Neferti* during the twelfth dynasty up to the eve of the Constantinian revolution in the *Apocalypse of Elijah*.

This idea was not limited to Egypt, however. The Babylonian *Dynastic Prophecy*, an Akkadian text from the early Hellenistic period mentioned briefly above, expresses a similar belief. This prophecy predicts the final

emergence of an everlasting kingdom that will be founded through the emergence of an eschatological king, who “will arise as king in Uruk and his dynasty will last forever. The kings of Uruk will exercise authority like gods.”<sup>119</sup> The Persians too had a similar idea, as known primarily through a now lost Persian prophecy, the *Oracle of Hystaspes*, which, although it dates most likely to the first or second century BCE, is known particularly through references to it by several early Christian writers. The most significant of these is Lactantius (ca. 250–325), whose *Divine Institutions* is our main source for this text. There we find that the *Oracle of Hystaspes*, foretold “long before the founding of the Trojan nation, that the Roman empire and name would be taken away from the world,” and also that the final battle would be won by a “great king” sent from heaven “to rescue and free them, and destroy all the wicked with fire and sword.”<sup>120</sup> Here, it is also worth noting, Lactantius enlists this ancient text to advance his own late ancient vision of anti-Roman imperial eschatology.

The recurrence, then, of this idea of an eschatological king across a number of ancient cultures, as well as the notion of a progression of empires leading to a final, eternal empire, forms an important basis for any understanding of the rise of imperial eschatology in Christian late antiquity. The Last Emperor of Christian apocalypticism had deep roots in the various cultures that preceded it and shaped its vision of the world and its final dissolution. The belief that the final triumph of Good over Evil would be accomplished at least in part through earthly warfare by the righteous goes back at least as far as Qumran, if not, perhaps, even earlier in Persian religion. The appearance of a final righteous king and a final empire are also current in early Judaism, particularly in Hellenistic Judaism, which would have a strong influence on the shape of early Christianity. Yet these ideas were not limited to Judaism; they were an equally important part of Greco-Roman and ancient Near Eastern visions of the end of the world. All of these different influences, one imagines, fed into the emergence of a distinctively Christian imperial apocalypticism that began to emerge already in the fourth century, alongside the Christianization of the Roman Empire.

## Chapter 2

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# The Rise of Imperial Apocalypticism in Late Antiquity: Christian Rome and the Kingdom of God

As noted in the preceding chapter, early Christian apocalypticism before the fourth century appears to have remained largely apolitical, with of course the important exception of the Apocalypse of John. Likewise, Christian apocalyptic writings from this period show little interest in reviewing historical events to set the stage for the coming end of history, as Adela Collins observes. Instead, we find more emphasis placed on the destruction and renewal of the cosmos and personal eschatology.<sup>1</sup> Why these two issues, politics and history, which often feature prominently in early Jewish apocalypticism, should be so marginalized in the early Christian apocalyptic imagination is something of a mystery. Perhaps this tendency draws on the similarly restrained apocalypticism expressed in the gospels and by Paul. Or maybe it reflects a Christian interest in coexisting with the powerful empire that it had little hope of overturning. Possibly the increasingly “Roman” (gentile) constituency of the early Christian community may have played a role. In any case, for whatever reason, early Christian apocalyptic writings from before the fourth century on the whole share a political quietism that distinguishes them from the anti-imperial ambitions present in many of their early Jewish ancestors.<sup>2</sup>

The main exceptions to this rule, other than the Apocalypse of John, are to be found in certain closely related “oracular” traditions, which, as Collins notes, do not fit the apocalyptic genre strictly speaking. Several Christian adaptations of earlier Jewish *Sibylline Oracles* envision the coming *eschaton*

within broader historical perspective, and at least one, *Oracle* 8, assigns an eschatological valence to the Roman Empire, noting its emergence at the end of time, oppression under its rulers (particularly Nero), and its eventual destruction in the final conflagration.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, a Christian interpolation to the *Ascension of Isaiab*, which also lacks the formal features of an apocalypse, foretells a persecution under Beliar, who is Nero, at the end of time. The eventual defeat of Beliar and his kings would seem to forecast Rome's eschatological destruction.<sup>4</sup> The third-century *Apocalypse of Elijah*, however, which we mentioned at the end of the last chapter, is of a slightly different nature. Although its visions of political eschatology are more oracular than apocalyptic in nature, they contain the DNA of the Christian Last Emperor and a blueprint for the consummation of the world through the triumph of empire.

### The Roman Empire and the Kingdom of God

As early as Origen of Alexandria (d. 254), Christian exegetes began to take a more positive view of the Roman Empire, through whose existence Divine Providence had afforded conditions of peace and stability in which the Christian mission could be fulfilled.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps it was not entirely a coincidence that around this same time many early Christians began to express doubts about the canonicity of the Apocalypse of John, with its seething condemnation of the Roman Empire. To be sure, the primary concerns expressed at the time focused on doubts about the Apocalypse's attribution to the Apostle John on the basis of its content and style rather than its anti-Roman vitriol.<sup>6</sup> Yet one also wonders if perhaps its unyielding denunciations of the Roman Empire and boastful prediction of Rome's imminent devastation and judgment may have contributed to its sudden lack of popularity in this era. Certainly the first Greek commentaries on the Apocalypse, which admittedly date only to the sixth century, show a great deal of concern to minimize the text's hostility and vituperations against the empire. Whether or not there was a similar impulse at work in the third-century questions about the Apocalypse of John's authority, it is certainly significant that even in the face of imperial persecution (or perhaps because of it?), Christians in the eastern Mediterranean during the third century were increasingly turning away from this older model of antagonism between Church and Empire, so that serious doubts about the Apocalypse's authenticity would persist into the Middle Ages in the Greek world.<sup>7</sup>

The real watershed moment, however, came of course with the conversion of Constantine and, ultimately, the empire to Christianity during the fourth century. In this context Eusebius of Caesarea emerged as the architect of a political ideology that would have far-reaching consequences for the history of Christian Rome. Even before the rise of Constantine, Eusebius viewed the Roman Empire in its triumph and universal dominion “as God’s instrument in effecting salvation history.”<sup>8</sup> By the end of Constantine’s reign, the Kingdom of God and the Roman Empire had become virtually one. Drawing on the classical tradition of Rome’s eternal dominion and fusing it with biblical eschatology, Eusebius articulated a new mixture of divine authority with political authority that focused on the person of the emperor and the role of the Christian Empire as a divinely elected polity that would fulfill the culmination of history. The Romans were now God’s chosen people, through whom God’s rule would extend throughout the earth, so that by the sixth century, the Byzantines had even come to call themselves the “new Israel.”<sup>9</sup> The result, as Gerhard Podskalsky explains, was effectively to merge the Roman Empire with the Kingdom of God: while the two were not exactly one and the same, the empire in some sense overlapped with and had inaugurated God’s Kingdom.<sup>10</sup> This vision is most vividly related in Eusebius’s *Panegyric on Constantine*, in which, as Timothy Barnes summarizes, “the empire of Constantine is a replica of the kingdom of heaven, the manifestation on earth of that ideal monarch which exists in the celestial realm.”<sup>11</sup> Eusebius here equates Constantine with Christ, and likewise, the empire with Christ’s heavenly Kingdom. In effect, the coming Kingdom of God that Christ promised has now been realized, according to Eusebius, in the Roman Empire.<sup>12</sup>

Eusebius also drew inspiration from the prophecies of Daniel, which perhaps more than any other text influenced the development of Byzantine eschatology. He identified Rome with the fourth kingdom, the kingdom of iron, from Daniel 2, explaining that it would be the last world empire, after which would follow the Kingdom of God.<sup>13</sup> Cyril of Jerusalem likewise believed that the Roman Empire was the fourth Danielic kingdom, which would fall only to the Antichrist at the end of time.<sup>14</sup> The same is true of a commentary on Daniel ascribed to John Chrysostom, which, if not by him, seems to come from a very close associate. Here Rome stands as the fourth kingdom of iron and stone at the completion of history, and as in Cyril, it will fall only to the Antichrist in the last days.<sup>15</sup> Closely related to the commentary attributed to Chrysostom is Theodoret of Cyrhus’s *Commentary on Daniel*, which echoes similar ideas about Rome’s eschatological status. For

Theodoret too Rome is the fourth kingdom of iron and clay and similarly the fourth beast of Daniel 7. Accordingly, it is the final earthly empire and will endure until the *eschaton*, when Christ will establish his eternal reign.<sup>16</sup> Chrysostom himself and Jerome also identify Rome as the fourth Danielic kingdom by understanding it as the “one who restrains” the Antichrist in 2 Thessalonians 2:6–7, an interpretation first proposed by Tertullian around the turn of the third century. Other church fathers similarly maintain that only at the end of time will Rome’s “withholding power [*katechon*]” finally be overcome by the Antichrist, who will then be destroyed by Christ.<sup>17</sup> Nor were such sentiments limited to the Greek world. Early Armenian writers largely embraced this model of the empire and emperor as divinely elected to rule in the world.<sup>18</sup> Ephrem the Syrian, who lived on the Roman frontier with Persia, likewise had “an almost Eusebian doctrine of the church of the empire,” according to Sidney Griffith.<sup>19</sup> And Aphrahat, the Persian Sage, wrote from Adiabene in the early fourth century that Rome was the fourth Danielic kingdom, and as such it would remain unvanquished until the Second Coming of Christ. God, he explains, had given over his rule to the Romans (“the children of Esau”), and accordingly God will preserve Rome until the end of time, when “He should come Whose it is” and the Romans “will deliver up the deposit to the Giver.”<sup>20</sup>

The myth of Rome’s eternal victory was in fact a cornerstone of late ancient and early medieval political ideology.<sup>21</sup> Not surprisingly then, the idea that Rome was the last worldly empire, uniquely chosen to pave the way for the Kingdom of God, became a centerpiece of Byzantine eschatology, even among writers who did not identify Rome with the last of Daniel’s four kingdoms.<sup>22</sup> One of the most famous such individuals was Kosmas Indikopleustes, an early sixth-century Alexandrian merchant and geographer, who articulated the union between the empire and the Kingdom of God perhaps more emphatically than any other early Byzantine thinker since Eusebius. While Kosmas did not see Rome in any part of the statue from Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, he nonetheless found Rome elsewhere in Daniel’s prophecy, in the divine kingdom that God will establish Godself, “a kingdom that will not be destroyed forever” (Dan. 2:44). “But he [Daniel] says ‘God will raise up a Kingdom of Heaven which will not be corrupted unto eternity.’ Speaking here about the Lord Christ, he cryptically includes the kingdom of the Romans which arose at the same time as Christ our Lord. . . . The Empire of the Romans shares in the honours of the Kingdom of Christ Our Lord, surpassing all other kingdoms as far as is possible in this life, and remaining

undefeated until the end. . . . For I would venture to say that, although barbarian enemies may rise up against the Roman Empire for chastisement on account of our sins, yet by the strength of the preserving power, the empire remains undefeated, so that Christianity may not be confined, but spread.”<sup>23</sup> While Kosmas is perhaps more direct in relating the empire to the Kingdom of Christ than some of his contemporaries, his views are by no means idiosyncratic. Quite to the contrary, Paul Magdalino maintains that Kosmas here reflects the “official” imperial position on the eschatological connection between the empire and the coming Kingdom of Christ, which is simultaneously “both imminent and immanent.”<sup>24</sup>

Around this same time we also begin see the first expressions of the idea that the Christian Roman Empire is the “New Israel” and Constantinople its “New Jerusalem.” Increasingly during the sixth century Byzantine writers saw their empire and its Christian inhabitants as the new chosen people of God. God now is active in history no longer through the Jews, as in the past, but instead through the Roman Empire. First articulated in the early sixth-century *Life of Daniel the Stylite*, it would seem, this topos became a staple of Byzantine literature and its imperial eschatology.<sup>25</sup> On the eve of Islam, for instance, Theodore Synkellos proclaims Rome the New Israel, underlining its sacred and eternal character in the aftermath of the Avar siege of Constantinople (626).<sup>26</sup> As Wolfram Brandes notes, this identification of the Roman Empire and Constantinople as New Israel and New Jerusalem, respectively, signals an eschatological elevation of the Christian polity that coincides with its identity as the final world power that will ultimately hand over power to God at the *eschaton*.<sup>27</sup> This claim to be God’s chosen people, as David Olster writes, “was not simply an echo of the new Israel rhetoric justifying Gentile appropriation of Jewish prophetic and especially messianic promises, but was a claim that the prophecies that pertained to the kingdom of Israel now properly belonged to the Christian empire of the Romans.”<sup>28</sup>

### A Late Ancient Imperial Apocalypse: The *Tiburtine Sibyl* and the Last Roman Emperor

Belief in the Roman Empire’s effective merger with the Kingdom of Christ and its endurance until the end of the world was certainly not limited to the thought world of early Byzantine intellectuals.<sup>29</sup> In the apocalyptic literature of early Byzantium, this eschatological vision of the empire and emperor as

earthly precursors of the Kingdom of God is, not surprisingly, even more vivid. Perhaps the most important witness to this late ancient apocalyptic tradition is a text known as the *Tiburtine Sibyl*, yet another among the number of early Jewish and Christian *Sibylline Oracles* that were cast after the model of the ancient Greek and Roman Sibyls. Although this Sibylline apocalypse remains fairly obscure today, even among scholars of late antiquity and Christian apocrypha, during the Middle Ages its influence surpassed that of the canonical Apocalypse, and its influence on medieval Christianity was perhaps exceeded only by the Bible and the writings of the church fathers.<sup>30</sup> At the climax of the *Tiburtine Sibyl's* imperial vision of the End stands the mythical figure of the Last Roman Emperor. The Last Emperor was another centerpiece of medieval Christian eschatology, both East and West. In the end times, he will rise up to restore the Christian Empire's greatness just before the Second Coming of Christ. This future emperor, it was believed, will subdue or convert all of the Christian faith's enemies and opponents and establish righteousness on the earth. Then he will travel to Jerusalem, where he will lay down his crown and imperial garments, yielding sovereignty to God, and thus bringing an end to the Christian Roman Empire and setting in motion the events of the *eschaton*. The conclusion of the *Tiburtine Sibyl* preserves the earliest known version of this apocalyptic legend, dating most likely to the later fourth century, and in this regard as well as many others, it forms one of the foundational texts of Roman imperial eschatology.

### *The Textual Tradition and Its Date of Composition*

At present the *Tiburtine Sibyl* is best known from the Latin edition by Ernst Sackur, which seems to preserve the earliest version of the text. Sackur was able to identify several different Latin recensions of the text, of which his edition published the oldest on the basis of the manuscripts then known to him.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, despite Sackur's remarkable achievement, it is clear that a more comprehensive critical edition is needed, not only in light of the abundance of the manuscript tradition<sup>32</sup> but also because the later Latin recensions were not dependent on the version edited by Sackur, and so they occasionally preserve some elements of the ancient text that were for some reason left out of the oldest extant recension. The potential value of these later versions has been demonstrated in part by the discovery and publication of a Greek version of the *Tiburtine Sibyl*, which contains some important parallels to these other Latin versions, indicating that the passages in question must have once stood

in their common Greek source.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, even though Greek was the original language of the *Tiburtine Sibyl's* composition, it is widely agreed that the Latin translation preserves an earlier version than we have in the now extant Greek. The Greek version's editor, Paul Alexander, convincingly demonstrates that this version was redacted at the very beginning of the sixth century, judging from the historical events and individuals to which it refers.<sup>34</sup> Like so many other apocalyptic texts, the prophecies of the Greek *Tiburtine Sibyl* juxtapose a rehearsal of recent historical events with what amount to genuine predictions of events to come that will soon usher in the *eschaton*. Not surprisingly, as the text transitions from its historical section to forecasts of the future, the seer's prognostic powers suddenly depart, and in this seam we can identify a fairly reliable date for the text's composition. As Alexander elsewhere observes, "Every apocalypse must have been written not long after the latest event to which it alludes," and so in the case of the Greek *Tiburtine Sibyl*, this locates its production—or rather, its redaction—sometime between 502 and 506.<sup>35</sup>

Despite some minor complications, the same principles can convincingly date the Latin version over a century earlier, to the end of the fourth century. The main issue is that this earliest Latin version, as preserved in its oldest manuscripts, includes an editorial update designed to refresh its prophecies for more recent generations by inserting a list of Lombard and German rulers from the sixth through the eleventh century near the end of its historical section.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, these medieval interpolations are rather obvious and easy to isolate from the much earlier text in which they are embedded, so that there is solid consensus that the *Tiburtine Sibyl* as preserved in this Latin translation is indeed a late ancient text. Leaving these medieval insertions to the side (they are italicized in the edition), Sackur's painstaking analysis of the text demonstrates that the latest historical events to which the original Latin *Tiburtine Sibyl* refers are from the later fourth century, a point on which there also has been broad scholarly agreement.<sup>37</sup> Excepting the medieval interlopers, the latest figures to which Sackur's edition of the *Tiburtine Sibyl* clearly refers are Constantine and his sons, and the text likewise shows a fairly detailed knowledge of events in the eastern provinces at the end of Constantius II's reign.<sup>38</sup> Through comparison of the Latin versions with the Greek, Alexander has also demonstrated that a passage found in certain Latin manuscripts referring to the death of the emperor Valens (d. 378) likely appeared in the original Latin translation and its Greek model, thus postponing the date of composition a little later.<sup>39</sup> In view of this fact one might

also wish to reconsider Sackur's conclusion that the *Tiburtine Sibyl* shows no knowledge of Julian's apostasy to paganism. While there is no unmistakable reference to this dramatic turn of events, perhaps the *Tiburtine Sibyl's* concern to confront paganism should be understood in this light, and likewise its notice that "another . . . king will arise, a mighty man and a warrior, and many neighbors and relatives will become indignant with him" may possibly refer to Julian's apostasy.<sup>40</sup>

Alexander's careful analysis of the Greek and Latin versions likewise identifies another passage from the later Latin versions that also seems to have been part of the original text, a prediction he names the "Constantinopolitan Oracle." In the Greek version, the account of Constantine's reign concludes with a reference to Byzantium's elevation as a new imperial capital named Constantinople, followed by a forecast that warns, "Do not boast, city of Byzantium, thou shalt not hold imperial sway for thrice sixty of thy years!"<sup>41</sup> As Alexander notes, this amounts to 180 years, an interval of time consistent with the Greek version's redaction sometime between 502 and 506: according to such reckoning, the Greek *Tiburtine Sibyl* expects Constantinople's downfall roughly in 510, soon after its composition, presumably with the end of the world not long thereafter. Although Sackur's edition contains no equivalent passage, several of the later Latin versions preserve a strikingly similar prediction, albeit one that is well suited to the earlier date of the Latin translation and its Greek original. In these manuscripts, following the description of Constantine and a reference to his new city, the Sibyl warns, "Do not rejoice with joy: they will not rule from Byzantium within 60 years."<sup>42</sup> As with the Greek version, the interval again fits perfectly with the date of the text as determined on the basis of its most recent historical references. The fall of Constantinople is thus forecast for the year 390, and since this prophecy did not in fact come true, it would appear that the Latin version of the *Tiburtine Sibyl*, or more precisely, its Greek source, must have been composed sometime between 378 and 390. Indeed, even in the absence of the Greek parallel, there would be good reason to suppose that this prophecy belonged to the original text. The fact that it was not fulfilled makes it very unlikely that a medieval redactor would have added the prophecy to the text centuries later, while its evident falsification presents a powerful motive for its elimination by a later editor. The Greek version simply reflects a different strategy for overcoming this difficulty: its reviser has extended the deadline by just over a century in order to place the fall of Constantinople again on the immediate horizon. Thus Alexander's recovery of this prophecy,

which has been excised from the version edited by Sackur, adds important confirmation of the *Tiburtine Sibyl's* composition in the later fourth century, after which time this prophecy would have soon been falsified.

At a more general level, structural comparison of the Latin version with the now extant Greek also demonstrates the former's relative antiquity, revealing that the Greek version has revised an earlier source that now largely survives in the Latin translation. There are, to be sure, some significant differences between the Greek and the Latin, but as Alexander notes, they "tell essentially the same story," one the Greek has adapted to meet the circumstances of elapsed time.<sup>43</sup> In essence, the Greek version updates the events of the Latin version's historical section, leaving out some elements entirely, in order to make room for more than a century of new events that had elapsed by the time of its redaction. By compressing the time between the Sibyl's prognostications and the appearance of Constantine and also by eliminating much of the Latin version's detail concerning the later fourth century, the Greek editor opens up space in the prophetic vision to introduce the history of the fifth century before the events of the *eschaton* are unleashed.

### *The Sibyl's Vision*

The *Tiburtine Sibyl* begins sometime back in the mists of early Roman history, during the reign of the "Trojan" emperor, a reference, as Sackur rightly concludes, to Rome's legendary foundation by Aeneas and other Trojan refugees.<sup>44</sup> When the leading citizens of Rome learn of the Sibyl's great prophecies, they persuade the emperor to bring her to Rome with great honor. We then learn that in one night one hundred men from the Roman senate had the same dream. It was a vision of nine different suns, each one having specific qualities that distinguished it from the others. The men approach the Sibyl, seeking the meaning of their dream, and she explains to them that "the nine suns that you saw prefigure all future generations. Truly the differences that you see among them will also be a different life for humankind."<sup>45</sup> The Sibyl then begins to reveal the future, describing each of the nine generations to come. The first two ages will be idyllic, while things begin to take a turn for the worse in the third, when "nation will rise up against nation, and there will be many battles in Rome."<sup>46</sup> The fourth generation will witness the birth of Christ, and here the Sibyl accordingly relates what Alexander calls the "Sibylline Gospel." This brief account of the birth, crucifixion, and resurrection of Christ draws the ire of some of "the priests of the Hebrews," whom the

Sibyl is quick to silence.<sup>47</sup> The fifth generation will witness the spread of the gospel by the apostles, and the sixth, seventh, and eighth generations will see continued turmoil in the Roman Empire. Then, in the ninth generation, after the rule of four kings (i.e., the Tetrarchy), there “will arise another king, with the name C [Constantine], mighty in battle, who will reign for 30 years and will build a temple to God and will fulfill the law and establish justice on the earth for God’s sake.”<sup>48</sup> The “Constantinopolitan Oracle” then seemingly follows as does the reference to Valens.

At this point a lengthy insertion concerning the Lombard and German kings intrudes, eventually yielding to a forecast of war, famine, and natural disasters, as well as political corruption and religious persecution, although this section itself is also briefly interrupted twice with notices concerning later medieval kings.<sup>49</sup> These calamities are the events that Sackur correlates so convincingly with the reign of Constantius II, but in the *Tiburtine Sibyl* they clearly appear also as portents of the impending end of the world. Then as things reach a fever pitch, with “afflictions such as there have not been since the beginning of the world” and the world completely abandoned to the wicked and unjust,<sup>50</sup> the figure of the Last Emperor makes his dramatic appearance: “And then will arise a king of the Greeks, whose name is Constans, and he will be king of the Romans and the Greeks. He will be tall in stature, handsome in appearance, shining in countenance, and well put together in all of his bodily features. And his reign will end after 112 years.” His reign will witness great wealth and abundance, and this king will have before him a “scripture” or “writing” that says, “The king of the Romans will claim the entire kingdom of the Christians for himself.” Then he will “devastate all the islands and cities of the pagans and destroy all the temples of idols. He will call all the pagans to baptism, and the Cross of Jesus Christ will be erected in all the temples,” and “the Jews will be converted to the Lord.” At this time the Antichrist will then arise and lead many astray, and “the most unclean nations that Alexander, the Indian king, enclosed, Gog and Magog, will arise from the north.” After the Last Emperor annihilates the peoples of Gog and Magog, “then he will come to Jerusalem, and there having laid down the diadem from his head and all his royal garb, he will hand over the kingdom of the Christians to God the Father and Jesus Christ his Son.”

With the Roman Empire now having come to an end, “the Antichrist will be openly revealed,” and the apocalypse then concludes with his defeat “by the power of the Lord by the Archangel Michael on the Mount of Olives.”<sup>51</sup> This conclusion reflects perfectly, one should note, the eschatological

role of Rome as envisioned by Eusebius, Jerome, John Chrysostom, Cyril of Jerusalem, and other church fathers of this era as discussed above: since Rome was identified as the “withholding power [*katechon*]” of 2 Thessalonians 2:6–7, its fall would occasion the Antichrist’s appearance. The Sibyl’s reference to the Antichrist here as “the Son of Perdition,” a title taken from the same biblical passage (2 Thess. 2:3), makes this linkage unmistakably clear.<sup>52</sup> The Roman Empire and its emperor were thus envisioned by the *Tiburtine Sibyl* as agents of Christian deliverance that would emerge resurgent at the end of time. It offers a particularly dramatic articulation of the widespread Christian belief that the Roman Empire and its emperor had been divinely appointed to subdue and defeat the enemies of Christ in order to prepare for his Second Coming.

### Receiving the Last Emperor in the Early Middle Ages: *The Apocalypse of Ps.-Methodius*

In the *Tiburtine Sibyl* the enemies of Christ are the pagans and the Jews, as one would certainly expect from a late fourth-century composition. Nevertheless, as this legend of the Last Emperor transitioned into the Middle Ages, the face of the Roman Empire’s enemies predictably would change, particularly with the effective elimination of “paganism” from the Mediterranean world.<sup>53</sup> Perhaps even more important, however, was the emergence of Islam during the seventh century as a new and formidable threat to the Christian Empire’s position in the world. Indeed, with the Islamic conquest of the Roman Near East, North Africa, and the Sasanian Empire, the majority of the world’s Christians suddenly found themselves living not under the protection of the Christian Empire and its emperor but instead under the rule of Muslim infidels.<sup>54</sup> In this new geopolitical and religious order, Islam and the Arabs quickly emerged as the primary foes of Christ and his chosen empire. This animosity reconfigured Christian imperial eschatology almost immediately, as we see in the Syriac *Homily on the End* attributed to Ephrem and most especially in the *Apocalypse of Ps.-Methodius*. In these two apocalypses from the mid-seventh century, the “Hagarenes” or the “Ishmaelites” have now become the ultimate enemies whom the Christian Empire must defeat before Christ returns to reign.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, like the *Tiburtine Sibyl*, the *Apocalypse of Ps.-Methodius* draws its focus on a final “emperor of the Greeks” who will fulfill this task, offering a rather distinctive version of the Last Emperor myth

that differs significantly from the *Tiburtine Sibyl* but also has important points of contact.<sup>56</sup>

The *Apocalypse of Ps.-Methodius* was originally written in Syriac in northern Mesopotamia sometime between 644 and 670. Although certain specialists on Syriac literature, most notably Sebastian Brock and Gerrit Reinink, have recently proposed a date toward the end of the seventh century, the internal evidence provided by the textual tradition seems to favor instead an earlier dating, as Alexander and Harald Suermann both recognized.<sup>57</sup> Brock and Reinink base their determination on the reading of a single manuscript that predicts that the Muslims will rule for ten weeks of years,<sup>58</sup> which they take to mean that almost seventy years had elapsed from the beginnings of Islam until the time of the *Apocalypse's* composition. Thus they conclude that the text was written just a little before 692.<sup>59</sup> Nevertheless, with the exception of this one Syriac manuscript, all of the other witnesses to this text forecast instead that Muslim rule will last for seven weeks of years, which, following the same principles, would place the anticipated turn of events in 671. This would seem to exclude the possibility of the *Apocalypse's* composition after 670. Brock and Reinink give no clear reasons for adopting the unique reading of this single manuscript (which was long the only known Syriac manuscript), and in fact Brock, in his own translation of the final sections of *Ps.-Methodius*, actually translates "seven" weeks of years, noting "ten" as a variant that occurs only in this single manuscript.<sup>60</sup> Robert Hoyland proposes that the "substitution" of seven weeks instead of ten "is easily explained as the preference for a more charismatic number and symmetry with the seventh millennium."<sup>61</sup> Yet such charisma and symmetry seem just as likely to have influenced the original author to set a deadline of forty-nine years; moreover, one must not overlook the fact that seventy (ten weeks) is itself a pretty charismatic and symmetrical number whose charms could also have easily swayed a later editor. To the contrary then, it seems more likely that "ten" has been substituted here by someone not long after the text's composition but after the forty-ninth year had passed, in order to extend the deadline. The single Syriac manuscript preserving this variant likely reflects changes of this sort in its earliest antecedent. It certainly makes more sense to suppose that this one manuscript reflects an alteration of the original text, rather than assuming that the other Syriac manuscripts and both the Greek and Latin translations (which also have seven weeks of years) have all somehow uniformly deviated from the original for some unexplained reason.<sup>62</sup> Alexander recognized this even before the Syriac manuscripts reading seven weeks had been discovered,

and it is not at all clear to me why these other scholars disregard his compelling reasoning, particularly in light of the new evidence confirming it.<sup>63</sup>

The *Apocalypse of Ps.-Methodius* was quickly translated into Greek and Latin, and through these translations it made a deep and lasting impact on medieval Christian eschatology throughout Europe. The Latin translation was made from the Greek, and since we have a Latin manuscript dating to the early eighth century, both translations must have been realized quite rapidly. The recent editors of both versions estimate a date of 710–20 for the Latin translation and 700–710 for the Greek, although they are prevented from going any earlier by Reinink's late dating for the Syriac original.<sup>64</sup> Yet in light of the very short interval between the Syriac original's composition and the first Latin manuscript, it would seem that a slightly earlier date for the Syriac also would fit much better with such rapid transmission into Greek and then Latin. Therefore, we should consider the possibility that these translations may have been produced a little earlier than their editors suggest. In any case, as it passed into these new cultural contexts, the *Apocalypse of Ps.-Methodius* met with enormous popularity. In Byzantium it circulated widely, and its profound influence is evident in all of the subsequent Byzantine apocalyptic tradition.<sup>65</sup> In the Latin West, the text was even more enthusiastically received. Over two hundred Latin manuscripts are presently known, in addition to even more copies surviving in vernacular translations.<sup>66</sup> Indeed, its impact on medieval culture was such that one can equally say of the *Apocalypse of Ps.-Methodius*, as was similarly noted concerning the *Tiburtine Sibyl* above, that "scarcely any other text of the Middle Ages had such universal influence, excepting the canonical Scriptures and the Church Fathers."<sup>67</sup> Perhaps nowhere is this influence more evident than with respect to the Last Emperor. Ps.-Methodius's vision of the Last Emperor's triumph over the sons of Ishmael and his final surrender of authority to God at Jerusalem largely determined the shape of these traditions in the Christian East, and in the West its distinctive account of these events rivaled the parallel version offered by the *Tiburtine Sibyl*.<sup>68</sup> Eventually, even the *Tiburtine Sibyl* itself would come partly under Ps.-Methodius's influence, so that in a later version the Last Emperor—perhaps also for obvious historical reasons—defeats not the Jews and Pagans but the Saracens instead.<sup>69</sup>

In light of the substantial influence that the *Apocalypse of Ps.-Methodius* had on medieval eschatology in the Christian West, some scholars have even gone so far as to suggest that the myth of the Last Emperor is in fact the genius of its author. The most aggressive of these hypotheses argue that the

legend of the Last Emperor was not actually present in the original fourth-century version of the *Tiburtine Sibyl*, but instead it is a medieval interpolation that has been introduced on the basis of the *Apocalypse of Ps.-Methodius*, which is credited with the legend's invention.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, certain specialists on Syriac and *Ps.-Methodius* have, for whatever reason, seemingly ignored the *Tiburtine Sibyl* altogether, without affording it any consideration, simply assuming that the legend originates with *Ps.-Methodius*.<sup>71</sup> The only exception to this seems to be a recent article by Christopher Bonura, who maintains that the *Tiburtine Sibyl's* Last Emperor legend is an interpolation made directly from *Ps.-Methodius*, although I do not find the argument persuasive.<sup>72</sup> The reason for the oversight of other scholars is not entirely clear: one suspects that they may have similarly assumed that the Last Emperor tradition is a medieval insertion into the late ancient text of the *Tiburtine Sibyl*, and accordingly it does not merit consideration, although this is never stated.<sup>73</sup>

It certainly is not entirely out of the question that the *Tiburtine Sibyl's* Last Emperor tradition may be a later interpolation, and comparison of the Latin with the Greek version possibly could suggest this. Nevertheless, the evidence afforded by the account itself seems to secure its antiquity as well as its presence in the original late fourth-century version of this influential apocalypse. Yet even if by some odd chance the Last Emperor legend was not a part of this earliest version, there can be little question that the *Tiburtine Sibyl's* account of the Last Emperor myth belongs to late antiquity, antedating significantly both the *Apocalypse of Ps.-Methodius* and the Islamic conquests.<sup>74</sup> Admittedly, one of the most puzzling aspects of the *Tiburtine Sibyl's* transmission history is the Last Emperor's near absence from the early sixth-century Greek version, and the same is similarly true of the more recent Arabic, Karshuni, and Ethiopic versions that have been published to date, all of which seem to derive from this later Greek redaction. It is largely on this basis that a few scholars have raised doubts regarding the textual status of the Last Emperor tradition: the silence of the Greek especially has invited suspicion of an interpolation. There are, however, some apparent vestiges of the Last Emperor myth in these more recent versions, as others have also noted. For instance, in the Greek, just before the Antichrist's appearance, a final emperor is identified who will arise and defeat the king of the East. Then, like the Last Emperor of the Latin version, his reign will be marked by abundance and prosperity, until his defeat and murder by the Antichrist.<sup>75</sup> The same is also true of the Arabic, Karshuni, and Ethiopic versions, which similarly describe an era of great prosperity under the final emperor before the

Antichrist's appearance.<sup>76</sup> Although many important elements of the Latin version are clearly lacking, René Basset concludes that these texts preserve here an abridged version of the same Last Emperor tradition.<sup>77</sup> Indeed this does seem to be the case, but it is certainly a little curious that the Greek editor would have redacted the legend so dramatically.

Nevertheless, despite the significant differences between the Latin *Tiburtine Sibyl's* legend of the Last Emperor and these more recent versions, the internal evidence of the legend itself offers compelling proof of its late ancient origin and its independence from the *Apocalypse of Ps.-Methodius*. The most decisive feature in this regard is the complete absence of any mention of the Muslims or the Islamic conquests, which are defining features of *Ps.-Methodius* and the rest of the post-Islamic apocalyptic tradition.<sup>78</sup> Instead we find the Last Emperor confronting pagans and Jews, who here constitute the main rivals of the Christian faith. Pagans in particular figure prominently in the Last Emperor's actions, and he will devastate their "islands and cities," call them to baptism, and establish the cross in all of their temples, so that they will be eradicated or converted to Christianity. The Sibyl additionally cites a slight variation on Psalm 68:31, "Egypt and Ethiopia will hasten to offer their hand to God," as affording biblical proof of the Last Emperor's anticipated success against the pagans. It is quite difficult to imagine such pronounced concern with subduing the pagans—and none whatsoever for the Muslims—in a text composed only after the Islamic conquests.<sup>79</sup>

Bonura, who dates the *Tiburtine Sibyl's* Last Emperor tradition to around the year 1000, maintains to the contrary that "it is unthinkable that violent extermination of all pagans and Jews would have been within the imaginative horizons of Christians of the fourth century."<sup>80</sup> Nevertheless, such a judgment seems to miss the all-important apocalyptic context of this pronouncement, and I think that Bonura makes the mistake of reading a bit too literally here. To be sure, one might be surprised to find a political or military treatise advancing this idea. But forecasts that one's opponents will meet with ultimate demise at the *eschaton* are in fact routine in apocalyptic texts: they are a staple of the apocalyptic imagination and were so long before Christianity even existed. Therefore, a prediction that the pagans and Jews, Christianity's main religious rivals in the fourth century, were destined for destruction in the end times is exactly what one would expect in an apocalypse of this era. Likewise, it is very difficult to imagine that a medieval interpolator would have eliminated the Muslims from an existing tradition in order to replace them with pagans and Jews, as dependence on the *Apocalypse of Ps.-Methodius*

would require. Accordingly, the *Tiburtine Sibyl's* focus on the defeat and conversion of pagans and Jews, rather than Muslims as in *Ps.-Methodius*, seems to require the legend's composition if not in the later fourth century then sometime in late antiquity, as is the prevailing opinion of most scholarship on this text.

Other specific features of the *Tiburtine Sibyl's* Last Emperor similarly fit much better with a late fourth-century context than with a medieval interpolation. For instance, the reference to Psalm 68:31 appears to be a reference to the recent conversion of Egypt and especially Ethiopia from paganism to Christianity in the fourth century. Eusebius of Caesarea offers a roughly contemporary witness to the interpretation of this passage as a prophecy of pagan conversion in his influential *Church History*.<sup>81</sup> Moreover, Sackur and others after him have noted that in the *Tiburtine Sibyl* the Last Emperor is said to lay down the "diadem of his head" in Jerusalem rather than a "crown," as in *Ps.-Methodius*. This detail seemingly reflects the custom of the late ancient emperors who wore on their heads a diadem, an adorned headband, as opposed to the medieval Latin kings who instead favored crowns.<sup>82</sup> Judging on the whole then, the *Tiburtine Sibyl's* account of the Last Emperor appears to be solidly late ancient in its content. Direct comparison with the Last Emperor traditions of the *Ps.-Methodius* apocalypse only strengthens this conclusion.

### Ps.-Methodius's Adaptation of the *Tiburtine Sibyl's* Last Emperor Traditions

Careful comparison of the *Tiburtine Sibyl* with the Last Emperor traditions of the *Apocalypse of Ps.-Methodius* reveals almost no chance that the former depends on the latter, while also confirming that the traditions of the *Tiburtine Sibyl* are undoubtedly older.<sup>83</sup> These two versions of the Last Emperor myth are so strikingly different from one another that, as Alexander concludes, the Sibyl's Last Emperor simply "cannot be interpolated from Pseudo-Methodius where the details given differ on a number of points." There is in fact nothing at all to indicate that the *Tiburtine Sibyl's* account has borrowed anything from the *Apocalypse of Ps.-Methodius*.<sup>84</sup> Yet influence in the opposite direction not only seems possible but in fact highly probable. In several instances it would appear that *Ps.-Methodius* has developed earlier traditions about the Last Emperor that appear in the *Tiburtine Sibyl* and adapted them

to his Syriac cultural milieu and to the circumstances of Islamic hegemony. This is particularly true of Ps.-Methodius's account of the Last Emperor's person and his actions, his (re)interpretation of Psalm 68:21, and his description of Gog and Magog, all of which seem to reflect the use of earlier traditions about the Last Emperor found in the *Tiburtine Sibyl*.

### *The Figure of the Last Emperor and His Abdication*

One important difference between the *Tiburtine Sibyl*'s Last Emperor and his appearance in *Ps.-Methodius* and the later apocalyptic tradition is that the Sibyl assigns him multiple tasks. He brings prosperity and defeats paganism by force, calling the pagans to conversion so that Egypt and Ethiopia will offer their hand to God. He also converts the Jews and then defeats Gog and Magog before finally surrendering power to God at Jerusalem. By contrast in the *Apocalypse of Ps.-Methodius* and other later texts "the Last Emperor is severely specialized and limits himself to the defeat of the unbelievers (Muslims) and the surrender of his rule." As Alexander notes, the *Tiburtine Sibyl*'s Last Emperor stands out against this later tendency toward narrowing his role.<sup>85</sup> Moreover, the *Tiburtine Sibyl* is the only text to assign the Last Emperor the task of defeating Gog and Magog, which in the later apocalypses instead falls to an angel. In the *Apocalypse of Ps.-Methodius* and the subsequent tradition, the Emperor's victory over the peoples of Gog and Magog has been displaced by his military triumph over the Muslims, leaving this eschatological conquest instead to supernatural forces.<sup>86</sup>

The later tradition also mythologizes the figure of Last Emperor in comparison to the *Tiburtine Sibyl*. Whereas the Sibyl knows this emperor's name and describes his personal appearance, the later apocalyptic tradition has lost these elements. In the *Apocalypse of Ps.-Methodius* and other more recent texts, the Last Emperor appears less as an actual historical figure "comparable to the Roman emperors of the past and present" and instead more as a shadowy, mythological figure who stands on the margins of history. His rise to power is also cast in more mythic and even supernatural terms.<sup>87</sup> According to the *Tiburtine Sibyl*, this Last Emperor will like others before him simply "arise" (*surget*), a verb applied routinely to the many kings and emperors mentioned in her vision.<sup>88</sup> Nevertheless, the *Apocalypse of Ps.-Methodius* adds considerable mystique and moment to the Last Emperor's appearance: not only will he go forth against the Arabs, but "he will be awakened against them like 'a man who has shaken off his wine'—someone who

had been considered by them as though dead.”<sup>89</sup> Here Ps.-Methodius associates the Last Emperor with the Lord by invoking Psalm 78:65, which reads in the Peshitto, “The Lord was aroused like a sleeper and like a man who shakes off his wine.”<sup>90</sup> Reinink has persuasively demonstrated that the introduction of this biblical citation (which is absent from the *Tiburtine Sibyl*) to the Last Emperor myth derives specifically from the author’s Syriac cultural context, in this case from the early sixth-century *Cave of Treasures*.<sup>91</sup> This same reference also resounds in the Byzantine apocalyptic tradition, and as it passed into Greek through the translation of the *Apocalypse of Ps.-Methodius*, misunderstandings of the Syriac original only “served to intensify the aura of paradox and mystery created by the citation of the Psalm,” as Alexander notes.<sup>92</sup>

Other differences between the *Tiburtine Sibyl* and the *Apocalypse of Ps.-Methodius* seem to reflect the latter’s efforts to adapt earlier traditions concerning the Last Emperor to the contours of its Syriac cultural milieu. For instance, according to the *Sibyl*, the Last Emperor “will come to Jerusalem, and there having laid down the diadem of his head and all his royal garb, he will hand over the kingdom.” Nevertheless, Ps.-Methodius relates these same events much more elaborately, with greater drama and specificity. In the Ps.-Methodius *Apocalypse*, the Emperor will finally “go up and stand on Golgotha and the holy Cross shall be placed on that spot where it had been fixed when it bore Christ. The king of the Greeks shall place his crown on the top of the holy Cross, stretch out his two hands towards heaven, and hand over the kingdom to God the Father. And the holy Cross upon which Christ was crucified will be raised up to heaven, together with the royal crown.”<sup>93</sup> As Sackur noted over a century ago, this scene seems to depend on a similar narrative from the late fifth- or early sixth-century *Syriac Julian Romance*: there, following Julian’s death, the imperial crown is placed atop the army’s standard Cross, from which it miraculously descends to rest upon Jovian’s head. In similar fashion, the *Cave of Treasures* relates that the world’s first king, Nimrod, received his crown through its miraculous descent from heaven. Thus the specific details concerning the crown’s placement on the Cross and its ascent into heaven seem to have been added to the Last Emperor legend by Ps.-Methodius on the basis of these traditions specific to his Syriac cultural context, as Reinink also concludes.<sup>94</sup> Moreover, in conjunction with this new focus on the Cross, the *Cave of Treasures* also seems to have inspired the location of these events at Golgotha. While the *Tiburtine Sibyl* merely notes that this Last Emperor will hand over power in Jerusalem,

Ps.-Methodius has further developed this tradition by specifying Golgotha as the site of the Emperor's abdication.<sup>95</sup> As Reinink and others have noted, "In locating the abdication of the Last Emperor on Golgotha, ps.-Methodius depends on traditions related to the Cross and Golgotha in the *Cave of Treasures*."<sup>96</sup> And so this addition too seems to derive from the author's Syriac cultural heritage.

### *Psalm 68:31 and Ethiopia*

As Ps.-Methodius continues, he begins to expound the significance of the Cross and its ascent to heaven with the crown, and before long he introduces a reference to Psalm 68:31, cited here in a slightly different context from the *Tiburine Sibyl* and also according to certain nuances that are present only in the Syriac version of this passage. Here again, comparison of the references to this psalm in the *Tiburine Sibyl* and the *Apocalypse of Ps.-Methodius* indicates that the latter has seemingly adapted an earlier tradition to fit its Syriac cultural context.<sup>97</sup> The *Tiburine Sibyl* introduces this passage immediately after the Last Emperor's conversion of the pagans, so that it stands as a prophecy of their conversion, as represented by Egypt and Ethiopia. When the Sibyl predicts the conversion of the Jews immediately thereafter, she invokes Jeremiah 23:6 ("In those days Judah will be saved and Israel will dwell in confidence"), thus making the meaning of the psalm even more clear through the parallel structure.<sup>98</sup> Ps.-Methodius, however, takes this passage in a decidedly different direction, which is directly connected with the elaborate speculations concerning the Ethiopian lineage of the Greek kings that dominate the first part of this work. Moreover, this interpretation is made possible only by certain ambiguities present in the Syriac version of the psalm that are absent from the Greek. For Ps.-Methodius this verse stands not as a prophecy of the pagans' conversion but instead as a forecast of the Last Emperor's abdication, which will fulfill the psalmist's prediction (in 68:31) that "Kush [Ethiopia] will hand over power to God, . . . for a son of Kushyat, daughter of Pil, king of the Kushites [Ethiopians], is the person [i.e., the Last Emperor] who will 'hand over power to God.'"<sup>99</sup>

In offering this alternative interpretation, Ps.-Methodius explicitly acknowledges and rejects an already established tradition of interpreting this verse as a reference to the kingdom of Ethiopia and its conversion, insisting instead that this prophecy concerns the kingdom of the Greeks (i.e., Byzantium).<sup>100</sup> In order to justify this peculiar interpretation, the *Apocalypse of*



*Sibyl* but also reinterprets this verse in a manner specific to the nuances of the Syriac translation again seems to indicate that he has developed an earlier tradition in some new directions. In this instance as well then, the *Apocalypse of Ps.-Methodius* seems to have adapted earlier traditions about the Last Emperor that are witnessed in the *Tiburtine Sibyl* in order to adjust them to a seventh-century Syriac milieu.

### *Gog and Magog*

The *Tiburtine Sibyl* and the *Apocalypse of Ps.-Methodius* also share a tradition concerning Alexander the Great's enclosure of the twenty-two peoples of Gog and Magog, and here again Ps.-Methodius's description of Gog and Magog and their role in the events of the *eschaton* appears to be much more developed and recent in comparison with the *Sibyl's*. Sackur was seemingly the first to notice this relationship, and he considered it one of the clearest indications of the *Tiburtine Sibyl's* independence from the *Apocalypse of Ps.-Methodius* and other later apocalyptic texts. The key difference, according to Sackur, is that the *Tiburtine Sibyl* names only Gog and Magog, whereas Ps.-Methodius provides a list identifying each of the twenty-two peoples that Alexander enclosed. On the basis of this difference as well as the Last Emperor's removal from Gog and Magog's defeat, Sackur concludes that Ps.-Methodius has adapted here an earlier tradition from the *Tiburtine Sibyl*.<sup>106</sup> Yet in other ways as well Ps.-Methodius shows evidence of having expanded the significance of Gog and Magog in this eschatological narrative. For instance, the account of their enclosure by Alexander behind a bronze gate occupies a significant portion of the *Apocalypse of Ps.-Methodius's* historical section, essentially all of book 8. By contrast the *Tiburtine Sibyl*, which mentions no gate, merely notes their enclosure, their appearance at the end of time, and their defeat by the Last Emperor all in just a few lines.<sup>107</sup> Likewise the *Apocalypse of Ps.-Methodius* and other later traditions describe the savagery and cruelty of these peoples in some detail, as well as the terror and plight of their victims. The *Tiburtine Sibyl* has none of this, noting only that these nations are "unclean" (*spurcissime*),<sup>108</sup> and as Reinink has demonstrated, Ps.-Methodius had drawn all of this additional information concerning Gog and Magog primarily from the *Syriac Alexander Legend*.<sup>109</sup> Once again, it would appear that here also Ps.-Methodius has developed earlier traditions present in the *Tiburtine Sibyl* by expanding them and adapting them to his Syriac cultural context.

Nevertheless Paul Alexander, in a marginal note added to his posthu-

mously published book, remarks that “the combination of Gog and Alexander is not attested before the seventh century.” On this basis he suggests there that the Last Emperor’s abdication in the *Tiburtine Sibyl* is possibly an interpolation, which “if not derived from Pseudo-Methodius, is contemporary with it, or possibly may have a common source.”<sup>110</sup> Yet even if it were true that Alexander (the Great) is not linked with Gog and Magog prior to the seventh century, this small point certainly would not be sufficient to justify eliminating the entire Last Emperor episode from the *Tiburtine Sibyl*, particularly in light of all of the evidence just considered. Indeed, as Paul Alexander himself notes elsewhere with unmistakable clarity, in light of the differences between the two traditions, it simply does not seem possible that the *Tiburtine Sibyl* could depend on the *Apocalypse of Ps.-Methodius*.<sup>111</sup> Yet much more importantly, it is clear that the tradition of Alexander’s enclosure of Gog and Magog in the north is in fact earlier than the seventh century and even earlier than the late fourth century, the time of the *Tiburtine Sibyl*’s composition.<sup>112</sup>

Already at the beginning of the Christian era, Hellenized Jews in Alexandria had begun to merge the biblical traditions of Gog and Magog “with stories of how, during his military campaigns, Alexander the Great built enormous iron gates in order to prevent barbarous incursions from the north.”<sup>113</sup> Josephus is an early witness to this emergent tradition: in his *Jewish War* he refers to the “Scythians” as enclosed behind “the pass which king Alexander had closed with iron gates,” while elsewhere in the *Antiquities* he equates the Scythians with Gog and Magog.<sup>114</sup> Jerome also seems to know a similar tradition concerning a place in the north “where the gates of Alexander keep back the wild peoples behind the Caucasus.”<sup>115</sup> Sackur for his part does admit some concern regarding the mention of twenty-two peoples in the *Tiburtine Sibyl*, inasmuch as Josephus and Jerome do not indicate any particular number, and accordingly he allows for the possibility that the sentence specifying their number may be an interpolation.<sup>116</sup> Nevertheless, the earliest version of the *Alexander Romance*, from the third century if perhaps not even earlier, concludes with the notice that Alexander “overcame twenty-two barbarian peoples.”<sup>117</sup> Undoubtedly this tradition is the source of the number twenty-two in the *Tiburtine Sibyl* and in later apocalyptic texts as well.<sup>118</sup>

## The *Tiburine Sibyl* and Late Roman Political Eschatology

Comparison of the Last Emperor traditions from the *Tiburine Sibyl* and the *Apocalypse of Ps.-Methodius* thus shows not only that the former is not dependent on the latter, but to the contrary, if anything Ps.-Methodius has further developed earlier traditions that are found in the Sibyl's prophecies. No part of the Sibyl's predictions concerning the Last Emperor requires the *Apocalypse of Ps.-Methodius* to explain its presence, and other much earlier sources provide strong precedent for most of the legend's content. As noted in the previous chapter, the basic building blocks of the Last Emperor tradition had in fact already found expression in the apocalyptic and oracular literature of antiquity.<sup>119</sup> Likewise, the late third-century *Apocalypse of Elijah*, as we have mentioned, offers striking parallels with the *Tiburine Sibyl*, particularly in its eschatological king from the "City of the Sun." Moreover, again as already noted, the ideology of the Roman Empire as a divinely elected polity was well established by the later fourth century, as was the notion that as the last of Daniel's four kingdoms, Rome was destined to be the last world empire, after which would follow the Antichrist and then the Kingdom of God. It certainly is no great leap to combine this ideology with the idea of a final eschatological king such as we find in the *Apocalypse of Elijah*, not to mention other earlier eschatological traditions about similar figures, to yield the myth of the Last Roman Emperor. The *Tiburine Sibyl's* Last Emperor tradition effectively translates Eusebius's vision of the unity between the empire and emperor and the Kingdom of Heaven into the vivid language of apocalypticism. In the process a new politics took hold of Christian apocalypticism, so that going forward the *eschaton* would not bring the downfall of unrighteous and oppressive imperial rule, as in much early Jewish apocalyptic literature, but instead the realization of God's reign through the triumph of the Christian Empire.

The idea of a Last Emperor was thus already implicit in the eschatology and political ideology of fourth-century Christianity: all the *Tiburine Sibyl's* author had to do was pull these two related themes together. Only the means by which this Last Emperor would relinquish authority remained to be imagined.<sup>120</sup> That Jerusalem would be the site is certainly to be expected, given the Holy City's paramount significance in Jewish and Christian eschatology.<sup>121</sup> As for the Emperor laying down his diadem, the symbolism of this deed is fairly obvious, and its inclusion does not require much imagination. Yet this act too is not without precedent: as Sackur notes, the tradition of

hanging “crowns” in holy places is an ancient custom, and Constantine himself had his diadem hung in Hagia Sophia.<sup>122</sup> There was also a late ancient practice of sending royal headgear to Jerusalem, as witnessed by the Piacenza Pilgrim, who saw imperial crowns hanging from the Holy Sepulcher in the later sixth century.<sup>123</sup> King Kaleb of Ethiopia affords a specific example of this practice: after defeating the Himyarites in Yemen at the beginning of the sixth century, Kaleb abdicated his rule in order to enter a monastery, sending his crown to Jerusalem to hang before the door of the Holy Sepulcher.<sup>124</sup> Thus the basic elements of the *Tiburtine Sibyl*'s Last Emperor traditions all seem to have been in place long before the *Apocalypse of Ps.-Methodius* was translated into Greek and Latin.

Nevertheless, the question still remains as to why this Last Emperor legend is so attenuated in the Greek version of the *Tiburtine Sibyl*, and the answer admittedly is not entirely clear. Some of the most basic elements of the Last Emperor tradition, as we have noted, do in fact appear, reflected in the promised reign of prosperity under the final emperor, just prior to the Antichrist's manifestation. But much more is lacking, including the description of the Last Emperor's physical appearance and his name, his subjugation and conversion of the pagans and Jews, his defeat of Gog and Magog, and his deposition of his diadem and royal garb at Jerusalem. If these themes belong to the earliest layer of the textual tradition, why are they missing from the Greek? It certainly is possible that for some reason these traditions were absent from the particular version of the *Tiburtine Sibyl* that this Greek redactor used: perhaps it was a slightly older redaction that did not yet have the Last Emperor traditions included, which could also explain the absence of many references to fourth-century events. Alternatively, these elements may have been deliberately left out by the Greek redactor, as Rangheri and Möhring have proposed.<sup>125</sup> Possibly the legend's specific links to the fourth century, and especially the Last Emperor's name “Constans” and its focus on converting the pagans, seemed less relevant to the sixth-century editor. Rangheri and Möhring both additionally suggest that this legend of the Last Emperor may have been a separate early tradition that was added to the Latin version of the *Tiburtine Sibyl* at the time of its translation from Greek during the later fourth century.<sup>126</sup>

There certainly is no way to exclude entirely the possibility that the Last Emperor tradition may have been interpolated into the Latin *Tiburtine Sibyl*, perhaps even sometime after its translation from Greek into Latin. Yet there are no obvious textual signs of an interpolation, and the legend seems to fit

its context rather well. And if it is an interpolation, it does not depend on the *Apocalypse of Ps.-Methodius*, which it clearly predates. Not only are there too many differences between the accounts to imagine that the *Tiburine Sibyl's* version could possibly derive from Ps.-Methodius, but the content of the Sibyl's prophecies concerning the Last Emperor clearly marks them as late ancient and pre-Islamic. Moreover, it would seem that despite their preservation now only in Latin, these early traditions of the Last Emperor were circulating broadly in the eastern Mediterranean world prior to the advent of Islam. Their adaptation by Ps.-Methodius itself offers compelling evidence of this fact. Equally important is the appearance of the Last Emperor in an Ethiopic apocalypse that seemingly dates to the early seventh century,<sup>127</sup> as well as significant echoes of this myth that register in Jewish apocalyptic literature from the same era, as we will see in Chapter 4,<sup>128</sup> both of which appear to confirm the legend's broader cultural currency. Consequently there can be little doubt that the final triumph and abdication of the Last Emperor had entered into the Christian eschatological imagination sometime before the Islamic conquests, and already in late antiquity this myth formed an important part of the Byzantine apocalyptic tradition.

Yet the emergence of this legend prior to the rise of Islam holds significance beyond merely refining our knowledge of early Byzantine apocalypticism and imperial eschatology. The circulation of the Last Emperor myth in late antiquity is equally important for understanding the broader religious milieu that gave rise to the Islamic tradition. Byzantine apocalypticism, and the Last Emperor tradition in particular, can help illuminate the apocalyptic political ideology that seems to have fueled formative Islam.<sup>129</sup> In contrast to the somewhat different memories of Islamic origins that were canonized by the classical Islamic tradition during the later eighth and ninth centuries, earliest Islam appears to have been an eschatological movement focused on Jerusalem, as we will see in the final two chapters. There, it would seem, Muhammad and his followers expected their righteous polity to triumph over the infidels and liberate the Promised Land, thus ushering in the Final Judgment of the Hour and the eschatological reign of God.<sup>130</sup> Although the sixth and early seventh centuries were generally an age of intense and intensifying eschatological expectation in Byzantium, as we will see in the following chapter,<sup>131</sup> the legend of the Last Emperor in particular offers important precedent for early Islam's vision of an eschatological imperial triumph that would be fulfilled in Jerusalem.

Yet even absent the anticipation of the Last Emperor, the broader

tradition of imperial eschatology in Christian late antiquity would warrant a reading of the rise of Islam in light of this popular ideology.<sup>132</sup> Likewise, other sources from the period, especially Jewish ones, similarly envision the *eschaton's* arrival through an imperial victory over the enemies of God in the Holy Land. But the *Tiburtine Sibyl's* prophecy of deliverance at the end of time by the Last Emperor represents in effect a distillation of the ideas that were current among the Christians of late antiquity. The myth of the Last Emperor then was not something new that first emerged only in the wake of the Islamic conquests, as some studies of this tradition in Syriac especially could seem to suggest. Rather, it reflects an already established apocalyptic political ideology that was an important facet of early Byzantine imperial eschatology. The Last Emperor's appearance in the *Apocalypse of Ps.-Methodius* and other related texts thus reflects the reinvigoration of an already established tradition in reaction to the ascendancy of Islam. Consequently, we should understand this influential theme from the Byzantine apocalyptic tradition not merely as a response to Islamic dominion but also as an important element of the immediate religious context that gave birth to the Islamic tradition itself.

## Chapter 3

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# Awaiting the End of the World in Early Byzantium: Shifting Imperial Fortunes and Firm Eschatological Faith

As Glen Bowersock notes, the sixth century saw a “surge of imperialist ambition” along the shores of the Red Sea that was a major force in determining the politics and religion of the world into which Muhammad was born.<sup>1</sup> Yet more important, the sixth and early seventh centuries also saw the steady rise of increasingly intense eschatological expectations in the Byzantine world and beyond, a fact that in itself forms an important backdrop for the urgent eschatology of early Islam. In particular, the end of the fifth century after the birth of Christ saw a sharp spike in eschatological anticipation among Christians of Rome and beyond. For many Christians, the beginning of the sixth century also marked the end of the sixth millennium since the creation of the world. According to a widely held belief adopted from early Judaism, the world was expected to last for six “days” of a thousand years each, following the analogy of the six days of creation and the Bible’s remark that a day is like a thousand years in God’s sight. Since Christ had been born in the middle of the last day, according to the prevailing chronology, this meant that the beginning of the sixth century would also occasion the end of the world. There is in fact significant evidence that many Christians expected to witness the end of the world in the opening decade of the sixth century.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, as the world endured into its seventh millennium, imminent eschatological expectation did not abate but instead even intensified: as Paul Magdalino notes, “the turn of the cosmic millennium [in 500] was not a single crisis moment, but marked the entry into a time zone where the end would come at any

moment.”<sup>3</sup> Throughout the sixth century, and particularly during the reign of Justinian, eschatological expectations remained high. Yet in the early seventh century, this eschatological anticipation reached its peak, with the Persian capture of Jerusalem, its liberation by Heraclius, and his restoration of the True Cross. Not surprisingly, the Christians of this era were expecting the end of the world with newfound urgency and intensity.<sup>4</sup>

As we will see in this chapter and the one to follow, the “sectarian milieu” of the late ancient Near East pulsed with apocalyptic anticipations that were linked to ideas of empire and conquest. There was a powerful eschatological current flowing through the religious cultures alongside of which (or perhaps within which) Muhammad’s new religious movement took shape, a context that is too often overlooked or ignored in many studies of formative Islam. To be sure, other scholars have previously drawn attention to the rise of imminent eschatological expectations in late antiquity and even on occasion noted their importance for understanding earliest Islam. Nevertheless, usually the backdrop of late antique apocalypticism is merely observed rather than explored with regard to Islamic origins. Robert Hoyland, for instance, briefly describes apocalypticism as a “spirit” characteristic of late ancient religion that Islam “seems to have caught.”<sup>5</sup> Not only is the relationship insufficiently developed in this (admittedly brief) article, but it is also underestimated. Early Islam did not merely “catch” the spirit of eschatological urgency but rather seems to have been fueled by this potent religious ideology from the start. Fred Donner likewise suggests that early Islam should be understood at least in part as a movement arising out of late antique apocalypticism, but again this connection remains largely undeveloped.<sup>6</sup>

Averil Cameron, however, has recently questioned whether there even was in fact such a surge in eschatological expectation during late antiquity, thereby casting some doubt on the prospect that we might interpret the Qurʾān and early Islam against this backdrop. In many respects her arguments call to mind similar objections by certain Western medievalists who dispute the significance of apocalypticism during the Middle Ages.<sup>7</sup> While her article is indeed provocative and corrects some occasional overstatements of the evidence in previous scholarship, the evidence of rising eschatological expectation in the sixth- and seventh-century Near East seems unmistakable. Among other things, Cameron challenges scholars of late ancient religion to pay more careful attention to exactly where and in what contexts we find such urgent eschatology. Attention to such details certainly may mitigate some of the more sweeping claims advanced in previous scholarship on late ancient

apocalypticism. Yet the evidence of prevalent eschatological expectation in the broader late ancient Near East is more than sufficient to provide a meaningful and elucidative background for understanding the rise of Islam. Indeed, as Olof Heilo observes, “the spiral of apocalyptic expectations that transformed the world of Justinian I into the world of Heraclius thus offers an important backdrop to the rise of what we have come to know as Islam, and could explain the ideological appeal that the early Muslim movement exerted.”<sup>8</sup>

### Eschatological Anticipation in the Sixth-Century Near East

Among the many questions raised by Cameron in her article, she asks whether there was indeed “more apocalyptic speculation in late antiquity, specifically in the sixth century, than before.”<sup>9</sup> It is a fair question that deserves an answer, even if it is difficult to answer definitively. Is there really a notable spike in eschatological expectation at the beginning of the sixth century, or is widespread apocalypticism an effectively permanent quality of late ancient Christianity and Judaism? With respect to the latter position, one certainly cannot deny the persistence of a dynamic apocalypticism in both traditions even until the present: the biblical texts and other early Jewish and early Christian writings offer an enduring font of apocalyptic ideas. And as we have just seen with the *Tiburine Sibyl*, some were expecting the end of the world in the later fourth century. Likewise, Bruno Bleckmann maintains of the following century that “without a doubt the early fifth century is one of those periods about which one can say that there was a generally widespread expectation of the end times.”<sup>10</sup> The migrations of the Germanic peoples and their impact on the Roman Empire particularly in the West understandably led many people to conclude that the end of time would soon arrive. Perhaps then we should conclude, as Cameron’s question could imply, that imminent apocalyptic expectation has remained a persistently prominent factor in Judaism and Christianity up until the present day. Johannes Fried, for instance, maintained that in the medieval West “the end of times was *the* fundamental interpretive category for all humanity, belief, knowledge, and action, even if it was not always and by everyone and in every deed made explicitly.”<sup>11</sup> Yet if we conclude that immanent eschatological expectation was a more or less permanent feature of Christianity and Judaism, then it seems all the more necessary to understand earliest Islam as a religious movement largely defined by an

eschatological urgency that it inherited from the Jewish and Christian traditions. If apocalyptic expectation on the level that we find in sixth- and seventh-century Christianity and Judaism is more or less a constant in these two traditions, then surely the eschatological immediacy of the Qurʾān must share in this same persistent trajectory.

Nevertheless, it does appear that the sixth and seventh centuries were a time of mounting eschatological expectations, as a number of other scholars have previously noted. Admittedly, it is difficult to make any sort of quantitative comparison between this period and the fourth and fifth centuries. Yet from the beginning of the sixth century, apocalyptic speculations appear to have grown steadily in intensity and frequency, reaching a climax in the early seventh century and in the aftermath of the Islamic conquests of the Near East. The turning of the seventh millennium in the year 500, as noted already, excited a noticeable rise in eschatological expectations. This point has been well documented in any number of studies already, and there seems to be little point in repeating the range of evidence here.<sup>12</sup> The passing of this “deadline,” however, did not bring an end to eschatological anticipation, as one might expect. Instead, it would appear, as Magdalino observes, that the transition to a new millennium marked the onset of the end times, a period in which the *eschaton* was beginning to unfold itself and could be expected to arrive at any moment in the near future.

The wide range of sources from the sixth and early seventh centuries that express urgent apocalyptic expectations reveals the extent to which eschatological hopes and fears had taken hold of the Byzantine world at this time. For instance, the sixth-century historians take note of famines, pestilences, earthquakes, and other disasters to a degree that is seemingly unprecedented. This tendency, Magdalino concludes, is a sign that such events “were being chronicled precisely because people were watching for them” as portents of the end times.<sup>13</sup> The reign of Justinian, from 527 to 565, was particularly tumultuous. It was a time of wars, as the Roman Empire reasserted its might against the Germanic states in the West, regaining much of the empire’s territory that had been lost during the previous century. Not only then were there “wars and rumors of wars” (Mark 13:7), but the empire was newly resurgent, visibly manifesting its divine election to rule until the end of time, which could not come unless Rome held dominion. There were also famines, new foreign invaders, earthquakes, and the first epidemic of bubonic plague in the major cities of the eastern Mediterranean. It would seem that all that Christ had foretold about the end times had come to pass, and as Mischa

Meier argues at some length, these calamities added fuel to the eschatological expectations that had been introduced by the beginning of the seventh millennium. Indeed, Meier has thoroughly catalogued each of these various catastrophes and the apocalyptic responses that they generated.<sup>14</sup>

One example, from the sixth-century historian Agathias, serves as a particularly vivid witness to the apocalyptic public response generated by such disasters, in this case, several earthquakes in 557 in Constantinople.

Immediately fantastic and fallacious pronouncements began to circulate, to the effect that the whole world was on the point of perishing. For certain deceivers, behaving like self-inspired oracles, prophesied whatever came into their heads and terrified all the more the populace who were already thoroughly disposed to be terrified. These men, by simulating madness and pretending to be demon-possessed, announced yet more terrible things as if they had been taught the future by their indwelling phantoms. They positively exulted in the general distress. Others, considering the movements and configurations of the stars, hinted darkly at worse disasters to come, and an all but total confusion of the world's affairs. It is usual for men of this sort to swarm in times of trouble. But it was a good thing for them that their prophecies turned out to be false. For there had to be some way for those who dreamed up these prophecies to escape the charge of impiety [which they invited in] leaving nothing but knowledge to a higher power.

At the time, however, there was no-one who was not greatly shocked and afraid. Litanies and hymns of supplication were everywhere to be heard, with everyone joining in. And things which are always promised in words, but never carried out in deeds, were at that time readily performed. Suddenly all were honest in their business dealings, so that even public officials, putting aside their greed, dealt with law-suits according to the law, and other powerful men contented themselves with doing good and abstaining from shameful acts. Some, changing their life-style completely, espoused a monastic and mountain way of life, renouncing money and honours and all the other things most pleasing to men. Many gifts were brought to the churches, and by night the most powerful citizens frequented the streets and cared for those wretched and pitiful people who lay crippled on the ground, providing all that

they needed in food and clothing. But all this was limited to that fixed space of time in which the terror was endemic. As soon as there was some respite and relief from danger, most people reverted to their normal ways.<sup>15</sup>

Although Agathias seems to indicate that such reactions to disaster were widespread, and other sources confirm a heightened attention to catastrophic signs of the time, Cameron remains somewhat skeptical about these reports and about Agathias in particular. Ancient historians often recorded such cataclysmic events, she notes, and so in and of themselves, they do not indicate a rise in eschatological expectation. Only a rhetorical analysis of each of the reports could provide this, she maintains.<sup>16</sup> The point is well made, and yet it does seem that either this was an unlucky age in which such calamities were frequent or else writers were especially attentive to record such disasters.<sup>17</sup> In either case, these reports of catastrophes and their apocalyptic interpretation indicate an era in which the end was perceived as being threateningly near. Moreover, Meier's careful analysis of these reports suggests that something beyond mere reportage is active in shaping the sixth-century "literature of catastrophe."<sup>18</sup> The eschatological expectation unleashed by the turn of the seventh millennium, it would appear, continued to color the interpretation of natural wonders and disasters in much sixth-century literature. Despite Cameron's words of caution, it does seem that in this era catastrophes were often noted with special attention as signs of the impending *eschaton*.<sup>19</sup>

Yet such responses to historical calamities are not the only evidence of apocalyptic hopes and anxieties in the sixth century. The fact that many other aspects of early Byzantine culture also indicate belief in the impending end of the world serves as important confirmation of the apocalyptic responses to catastrophe that Magdalino, Brandes, Meier, and others have identified. The reign of Justinian was especially marked by concern for the approaching end of the world, it would seem, and eschatological apprehensions appear in a variety of different literary genres, ranging from historiography to philosophy, as well as in the liturgy and iconography.<sup>20</sup> Perhaps there is no finer example of this apocalyptic *Zeitgeist* than Romanos the Melode's hymn *On the Ten Virgins*, composed in the middle of the 550s: "The last day is nigh, Now we behold those things; they are not at the door, they are the very doors. They have arrived and are present. Nothing is lacking of which Christ told."<sup>21</sup> All that Christ foretold in the gospels had come to pass, the hymn explains, in the famines, pestilence, and earthquakes that had

recently befallen the empire and its capital city. Likewise, we find here not only an eschatological immediacy but also an understanding that the *eschaton* had somehow already arrived and was present: the end was already beginning to unfold. In another hymn, written around the same time, *On the Second Coming*, Romanos dwells at some length on the events leading up to the Second Coming and Final Judgment, events that have seemingly already been set in motion. While the eschatological urgency here is not as direct as in *On the Ten Virgins*, it is nonetheless present, as Romanos “invites his audience to identify these apocalyptic prophecies with real events occurring in their own lifetimes.”<sup>22</sup> Romanos seems to expect here that the end will come soon, as indicated especially by his petitions that God would grant enough time to repent before the Final Judgment.<sup>23</sup> We shall return to these two hymns in a moment.

As for Justinian himself, Roger Scott proposes that nearly every aspect of Justinian’s imperial policy and propaganda seems to reflect concern with the impending end of the world. Justinian, Scott suggests, tapped into the eschatological fervor of the sixth century, and many of his grand projects should be understood as efforts to reform the world in preparation for the Second Coming. According to Scott, Justinian sought “to promote his reign (possibly entirely sincerely), if not quite as the Second Coming, then at least as the moment of rebirth and renewal” that would precede it.<sup>24</sup> Thus Justinian’s campaigns to regain the Roman Empire’s lost territory in the West, his efforts at legal reform, and his ambitious building program across the empire, among other things, all find ready explanation in a larger plan to prepare the world and the people of God to meet the Final Judgment. The integrity of the empire had to be restored since, as seen in the previous chapter, the Romans believed that their empire would be the last on the earth and that it was destined to hand over authority to God on the last day. Justinian’s efforts to end schism within the church, first with Rome and then (less successfully) with the miaphysites, show a similar concern for imperial unity. The legal reforms would ensure the proper conduct of God’s chosen people, and in these reforms, marriage laws, which impacted Christian morality directly, received particular emphasis. Likewise, the grand new churches, Hagia Sophia, the Nea, and others, provided opportunities for the faithful to worship God and progress in faith. Justinian’s closing of the Academy in Athens can similarly be understood in this light, not only as a purge of the last vestiges of “paganism” before the Second Coming but also to silence those Greek philosophers who persisted in maintaining the eternity of the cosmos, an

issue about which there was a lively debate at the time. His campaigns against various Christian heresies, the Jews, the Samaritans, and Manichaeans were perhaps aimed to purify the empire before delivering it to God at the end of time. Indeed, the promotion of religious and moral reform remained a constant focus of Justinian's long reign.<sup>25</sup>

Despite what may have been the best of intentions, however, many of Justinian's subjects appear to have interpreted his actions in a completely opposite manner. Rather than purifying the world and preparing it for conveyance to divine rule, some seem to have understood him as the Antichrist, who would subject the world to great trials before its final deliverance at the Last Judgment. It was widely expected in Byzantine eschatology that the Antichrist would initially appear as an emperor, who in the guise of piety would claim to purge the world of its evils and would also build a great church. Justinian, of course, fit the bill perfectly: "an emperor who really was a zealous Christian, energetically involved in making his empire a better place with a series of moral and religious reforms."<sup>26</sup> Some contemporary writings, particularly from the early part of his reign, praise Justinian for his pious efforts on behalf of the empire. But when things began to go bad—when the plague, earthquakes, and other disasters struck—many people began to take a decidedly different opinion of the emperor. Likewise, many of Justinian's actions were socially unsettling: as the laws were changed, old customs were abandoned; there were public riots in opposition, such as the Nika riots; the Persians invaded and sacked many of Syria's major cities while the empire's armies were occupied elsewhere; and the protracted and expensive wars in the west also took a toll on the populace and the emperor's popularity. Accordingly, many began to wonder if, with the turning of the new millennium, the Antichrist had appeared in Emperor Justinian himself in advance of the approaching *eschaton*.<sup>27</sup>

The most famous—and commented upon—indications that some saw Justinian as the Antichrist appear in Procopius's *Secret History*, where he reports that a certain holy man was able to see a demon in Justinian's place whenever he was in the emperor's presence. That Procopius calls him a demon rather than the Antichrist here, Scott suggests, has to do with his classicizing style: "Antichrist," after all, is not a classical word. In the same text, written toward the end of Justinian's reign, Procopius also relates that Justinian's mother believed that she had conceived her son by a demon that came upon her. Likewise, some court officials said that at night Justinian would appear as a phantom and his head would separate from his body.<sup>28</sup> A

contemporary writer, John Lydus, also calls Justinian a demon in criticizing what he believed were his disastrous legal reforms, although admittedly the use is perhaps more rhetorical in nature.<sup>29</sup> It is possible that Procopius too does not literally believe that Justinian was a demonic force, as Cameron in particular has argued. Nevertheless, as Annamma Verghese and Scott rightly note, the presence of similar ideas in some of Romanos's hymns provides important confirmation that at least some of Justinian's subjects may have believed him to be the Antichrist.

Romanos's previously mentioned kontakion *On the Second Coming*, written toward the end of Justinian's reign, appears to be a critique aimed directly at the emperor himself, effectively identifying him with the Antichrist. This hymn also shares important links with the hymn *On the Ten Virgins*, as well as with another hymn, *On Earthquakes and Fires*. The latter is an earlier composition, written most likely in the 530s, in which Romanos praises Justinian for his building activities and his efforts to help the empire's citizens in their times of affliction.<sup>30</sup> By contrast, however, when he later addresses similar events in *On the Ten Virgins*, there is no praise of the emperor for providing aid. Rather, now "it is not possible to be saved anywhere, . . . nowhere is there a refuge. . . . The gate has been closed, mercy has been sealed."<sup>31</sup> *On the Second Coming* seems to be roughly contemporary with *On the Ten Virgins*, and it too mentions calamities of drought, earthquakes, pestilence, and "every kind," such as had befallen the city and empire during Justinian's reign. Here these disasters are specifically linked to the rule of the Antichrist, who likewise builds a great church and will lead many astray into perdition by feigning piety and humility.<sup>32</sup> Thus, whereas in *On Earthquakes and Fires* the people are delivered from disaster by the emperor's aid, in the two later hymns, these contemporary catastrophes have instead become signs of the impending apocalypse and the rule of the Antichrist.<sup>33</sup> Even if, as Scott allows, one is not persuaded that these texts identify Justinian with the Antichrist, they nonetheless evidence concerns that the Antichrist and the end were both at hand, themes echoed also in John Malalas's sixth-century *Chronicle*, even though Malalas himself was not sympathetic to this point of view.<sup>34</sup>

The reign of Justinian also sparked eschatological expectations within the miaphysite communities that were opposed to the two-natures Christology of the Council of Chalcedon (451). Although the council's outcome was initially explosive in the eastern Mediterranean, for much of the later fifth and early sixth centuries, under the emperors Zeno (474–75, 476–91) and

Anastasius (491–518), it looked as if the divisive Fourth Council might be forgotten in favor of imperial and Christian unity. Yet when Emperor Justin (518–27) and his nephew Justinian (527–65) came to power and sought to mend the schism with Rome, the price of reconciliation was acceptance of Chalcedon's two-natures doctrine. The opponents of Chalcedon found themselves newly alienated from the imperial authorities and the official church, despite Justinian's repeated efforts to find some compromise that could bring the miaphysites back within the imperial church. In the Syrian east, resistance to Chalcedon and the imperial church took many forms, and in at least one instance, the so-called *Syriac Julian Romance*, these Christians expressed their disaffections by retelling the life of the anti-Christian emperor Julian in a coded narrative that promises future vindication of the miaphysite cause and restoration of "orthodox" rule to the empire. The apostate Julian stands in here for the Chalcedonian authorities and their church, and his demise portends a similar eschatological fate that would soon befall the ungodly rulers of the text's era, seemingly the early sixth century.<sup>35</sup>

The text's hero is not surprisingly the emperor Jovian (363–64), who was proclaimed emperor on the battlefield following Julian's death and restored the Christian faith to the empire, only to die eight months later before he could reach Constantinople. In the *Julian Romance* Jovian is something of a messianic figure who is able to perform miracles. He represents for the text's audience the coming righteous emperor who would restore the true faith "as the eschatological fulfillment of the Christian imperial ideal."<sup>36</sup> This future emperor will restore the Constantinian ideal, a concept that the text develops in its opening sections, through eschatological triumph over the anti-Christian—in this case, Chalcedonian—emperor.<sup>37</sup> As noted in the preceding chapter, this sixth-century Syriac vision of an eschatological emperor was especially influential on Ps.-Methodius's reshaping of the *Tiburine Sibyl's* account of the Last Emperor legend. Following Julian's death, the soldiers placed his crown on top of a cross in order to cleanse it from his paganism, and although Jovian at first refuses the crown, it miraculously descends from the cross and comes to rest on his head.<sup>38</sup> This linkage of the crown with the cross apparently inspired Ps.-Methodius to introduce the cross to his version of the Last Emperor legend, as Gerrit Reinink concludes.<sup>39</sup> Thus the *Julian Romance* forms an important bridge in the transmission of the Last Emperor tradition during late antiquity.

The evidence, then, that eschatological expectation persisted throughout the sixth century is significant, even if it is not always as obvious and

abundant as we might like. The turn of the seventh millennium (or so it was thought) in 500 CE certainly was a source of widespread eschatological anticipation, and as Magdalino and others have persuasively demonstrated, it did not abate with the passing of this deadline. Rather, there seems to have been a broad sense that with this moment the world crossed into an apocalyptic frontier, in which the *eschaton* could be expected to break forth at any moment. Magdalino presses further still, arguing that the liturgification of public life, the introduction of the *Cheroubikon* to the liturgy, the refinement of Christian neo-Platonism, the rise of intercession, the prevalence of icons of Christ, and the appearance of wonders in this age all indicate a culture permeated by eschatological urgency, in which the Kingdom of Heaven and the Roman Empire were becoming one.<sup>40</sup> Here Magdalino overreaches, I think, and Cameron's argument does seem to have some merit. It is certainly an overstatement to characterize every single aspect of late ancient Christianity as suffused with an apocalyptic spirit or to maintain that "apocalyptic thinking was characteristic of the late antique world as a whole."<sup>41</sup> To be sure, apocalypticism is not a defining element of all sixth-century religious culture. Yet at the same time, eschatological expectations are particularly prominent in this era, seemingly more so than in certain other periods. Indeed, at one point in her article, Cameron underscores the variety with which these eschatological anticipations were expressed during the sixth century, yet rather than undermining the presence of a strong apocalyptic current, to the contrary, such diverse expression seems to indicate its vitality and prevalence. Thus while the sixth century was perhaps not an age defined by ubiquitous apocalypticism, it was a time when eschatological expectations seem to have been particularly intense, and both Rome and its emperor were expected to play central roles in the impending climax of history.

### Eschatological Anticipation in the Early Seventh-Century Near East

By the first decades of the seventh century, the eschatological apprehensions of the previous century had intensified. On the eve of Islam, apocalypticism—and more importantly, imperial apocalypticism—suddenly becomes more prevalent and pronounced. Whatever one may conclude with regard to the sixth century, there can be little dispute that the beginning of the seventh century saw a dramatic surge in apocalyptic expectations.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, as

Cameron herself notes even while questioning apocalypticism's currency in late antiquity, "it would surely have been amazing if the events of the early seventh century had not given rise to apocalyptic expectations, hopes and fears." Moreover, she remarks, "if this story of the last emperor was really already in existence, Heraclius's action [of restoring the Cross in Jerusalem] would indeed have been sensational."<sup>43</sup> And yet, as we have now seen, this legend was almost certainly in place well before Heraclius even came to the throne. Indeed, Lutz Greisiger proposes just such an interpretation of Heraclius's activities as closely and deliberately aligned with the prophecies regarding the Last Emperor from the *Tiburtine Sibyl*.<sup>44</sup> The tumultuous events of the seventh century did in fact give rise to heightened eschatological expectations, not only among the Christians of the eastern Mediterranean but also among the Jews and Zoroastrians, as we will see in the following chapter. Likewise, in the West at this time, Gregory the Great was sounding the approaching end of the world, proclaiming that it was no longer merely being hinted at but had in fact already begun to show itself forth.<sup>45</sup> For Gregory, a figure who in many ways straddles the Christian East and West, the end was in sight: as Robert Markus observes, "his sense of its nearness is unequalled since the fading of the early Christians' eschatological expectations."<sup>46</sup>

In the early seventh century, Christian eschatological anticipation seemingly reached its peak, culminating in the dramatic events of the emperor Heraclius's reign. Heraclius came to the throne by rescuing the empire from the illegitimate and severe rule of Phocas (602–10), only to face the dire threats posed by the Persian and Avar invasions. The Persians in particular took advantage of the political chaos in Byzantium during the first two decades of the seventh century, so that by 620 they were in control of Syria, Palestine, Egypt, and parts of Asia Minor. Surely among the most traumatic events of the Persian invasion must have been the capture of Jerusalem in 614 and the resulting Persian seizure of the True Cross. The Christian Holy City had fallen into the hands of infidels, through the connivance of the Jews (or so the reports indicate), and the Cross, the symbol of the Christian Empire, had been hauled off to the Persian capital. Many Christians understandably began to expect the end of the Roman Empire, and with it, the end of the world. Eschatological fervor grew even more pitched, and several contemporary sources forecast the world's impending doom with newfound urgency.<sup>47</sup>

In response to the chaos of Persia's invasion and Rome's retreat, several early seventh-century hagiographical writings proclaim that the end of the world was at hand. For instance, the *Life of Theodore of Sykeon*, from central

Anatolia, has Theodore predict the proximate downfall of the Roman Empire and the impending advent of the Antichrist. The Palestinian *Life of George of Choziba* similarly sees the Final Judgment at hand, and the *Life of Mibr-Mah-Gushnasp*, a work about a Persian convert and martyr, interprets the turmoil of the early seventh century as evidence that the world is hastening toward its end.<sup>48</sup> No doubt these texts are but the tip of the iceberg, and numerous other Christians in Asia Minor, Palestine, Mesopotamia, and elsewhere must have felt the end closing in upon them as the Roman Empire, God's chosen New Israel, was collapsing and the "pagan" Persian Empire swept across much of the Near East.

Not surprisingly, Heraclius's dramatic victory over the Persians and his restoration of the True Cross to Jerusalem further stoked eschatological expectations. Heraclius's campaign began in earnest in 622 with a crushing defeat of the Persians, and after some delays occasioned by the need to deal simultaneously with the Avars, the Byzantine army began its invasion of Persia. In 628 the Persians surrendered to Heraclius, who had reached Seleucia-Ctesiphon, giving him the relic of the True Cross that they had stolen. Heraclius returned to Constantinople with the Cross in triumph. Then in what Cyril Mango describes as "a deliberately apocalyptic act," Heraclius journeyed to Jerusalem to restore the True Cross to Golgotha.<sup>49</sup> In doing so his actions must certainly have called to mind the apocalyptic legend of the Last Roman Emperor, who at the end of time would surrender his earthly authority to God by laying down his diadem at Golgotha, just before the Antichrist's appearance and Second Coming of Christ. The date that Heraclius chose for this restoration, 21 March, was itself particularly significant. As Jan Willem Drijvers notes, this date "corresponds with the day of creation of the luminaries of the sun and moon, or, in other words, the beginning of time." Thus the restoration of the Cross on this date "marks a new era in the history of the Creation."<sup>50</sup> With Heraclius's victory, there was a sense that the conquered Persians would now be converted from "paganism" to Christianity, so that the gospel will have gone forth to all the nations and the End will come (cf. Matt. 24:14).<sup>51</sup> The forced baptism of the Jews seems to have been undertaken with similar eschatological expectations in mind.<sup>52</sup>

Indeed, Heraclius's victory and his actions thereafter convinced many that the end of time had truly come upon them. We see as much, for instance, in Theophylact of Simocatta, a historian of the emperor Maurice's reign (582–602) who wrote under Heraclius. Theophylact records a prophecy, surely a *vaticinium ex eventu*, attributed to the Persian king Khosrow II

(590–628) that foretells the impending end of the world. Near the beginning of his reign, Khosrow II had fled for refuge to Rome, where, according to Theophylact, he met the Roman general John Mystacon and told him the following:

But since you are proud in present circumstances, you shall hear what indeed the gods have provided for the future. Be assured that troubles will flow back in turn against you Romans. The Babylonian race will hold the Roman state in its power for a threefold cyclic hebdomad of years. Thereafter the Romans will enslave the Persians in the fifth hebdomad of years. When these very things have been accomplished, the day without evening will dwell among men and the expected fate will achieve power, when the transient things will be handed over to dissolution and the things of the better life hold sway.<sup>53</sup>

The prophecy is a bit cryptic, but clearly it is meant to refer to the events of the last Roman-Persian war, in which Rome emerged triumphant. The gist seems to be that soon after Rome's victory over the Persians, the end of the world was expected, which is undoubtedly the meaning of the "day without evening" when the "transient things will be handed over to dissolution."<sup>54</sup> With Rome's imperial power restored and its ancient foe at last vanquished, the empire had served its divine purpose, and the time had come for it to yield authority to God in the *eschaton*.

Things become significantly more complicated, however, as we try to pin down exactly which years Khosrow's prophecy seems to describe. One possibility, favored by Paul Alexander and Cyril Mango, presumes that the first "threefold hebdomad" begins in the year that Khosrow is alleged to have uttered his prophecy, 591. In this case, the first period would come to an end in twenty-one years, in 612. The fifth hebdomad would then be from 619 to 626, when the Romans conquered Persia under Heraclius's leadership.<sup>55</sup> These dates do not fit the historical events of the last Roman-Persian war very well, but other alternatives do not fare much better. Michael and Mary Whitby have instead proposed an initial first hebdomad of peace, prior to the three hebdomads, which allows the fifth hebdomad to correlate more neatly with Heraclius's campaign (622–28).<sup>56</sup> Reinink suggests instead that the prophecy perhaps envisions the first hebdomad as beginning in 603, the actual year of the Persian invasion, or 604, the year of the first important

Persian victory, making this first period equal to 603/4–624/25. More to the point, however, are Reinink's remarks that "the hebdomad system requires some flexibility on our part in fixing dates, and one cannot exclude the possibility that they indicate the period of Persian successes and military supremacy only roughly." These hebdomads are meant instead "to show the relativity and short-term impact of both the Persian and Roman military successes" and, even more important, to present this final conflict between Rome and Persia as the beginning of the eschatological process that will bring about the eternal Kingdom of Christ.<sup>57</sup>

Several decades earlier, we find a similar apocalyptic prophecy linking Khosrow's reign with the impending *eschaton* in the *Passion of St. Golinduch*, which was about a Persian noblewoman who converted to Christianity. According to this *Passion*, which was originally written in Syriac around the turn of the seventh century, Golinduch, like Khosrow II, had taken refuge in Roman territory, and toward the end of her life she even met the Persian king. Golinduch tells the exiled king, "The king of the Greeks will establish you in your land, but the kingdom of the Persians will remain yours.' Then she also spoke about the Antichrist, for his arrival has drawn near, and he is standing at the very doors (cf. Matt 24.33), and also about the kingdom of the Greeks, what will befall it, which she kept silent and did not tell anyone."<sup>58</sup> Golinduch's prophecy seems to predate the Roman-Persian war of the early seventh century, but nevertheless she (or her biographer) believed that the end had drawn nigh. Indeed, earlier in the same text Golinduch makes a similar forecast to an elderly monk, telling him likewise that the end was at hand and "the Antichrist's arrival has drawn near, and he is standing at the very doors."<sup>59</sup>

Even more extraordinary, however, is the similarity of Khosrow's prophecy to the opening verses of *sūra* 30 in the Qurʾān (30:2–5): "The Romans have been conquered in the nearest (part) of the land [i.e., the Holy Land], but after being conquered, they will conquer in a few years. The affair (belongs) to God before and after, and on that day the believers will gloat over the victory of God."<sup>60</sup> Although the reference to "the affair" is perhaps a bit cryptic here, it is worth emphasizing that the Arabic word, *al-amr* ("dominion, reign"), is a Qurʾānic term for the *eschaton*. The parallels between this prophecy from the Qurʾān and a Byzantine history written around 630 are certainly remarkable. It would seem to imply some sort of cultural contact between the world of the Qurʾān and contemporary Byzantine literature, and if nothing else, this correspondence at the very least shows how widespread

eschatological anticipation had become in the context of Rome's triumph in the last Roman-Persian war. Indeed, as Stoyanov notes, "these apocalyptic prophecies forged in Byzantine wartime propaganda inevitably develop the scenario of a Roman victory setting the stage for the advent of the eternal kingdom of Christ."<sup>61</sup>

Court poetry is another area where the apocalypticism of the early seventh century finds expression. In his panegyrics on Heraclius, George of Pisidia paints his patron's triumph in deep eschatological hues. George celebrates Heraclius not so much for his military prowess but rather "for the salvation which he has brought to the universe as God's faithful agent on earth."<sup>62</sup> Through his victory Heraclius has shown himself to be the "savior of the world" (*kosmorystēs*) and the "Noah of the new world." The latter is perhaps intended to echo Matthew 24:37: "For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man."<sup>63</sup> A new life, another world, and a new creation have now begun.<sup>64</sup> In his poem on the restoration of the Cross, George styles Heraclius as a messiah by describing his arrival in Jerusalem with language reminiscent of Palm Sunday, and he links this restoration with the renewal of the world, the resurrection of the dead, and the Final Judgment.<sup>65</sup> George and other writers portray Heraclius as the new David, an association that also seems to underlie the famous David plates, a set of silver produced during Heraclius's reign.<sup>66</sup> No doubt these connections with David also served to evoke messianic associations for Heraclius and his reign. Indeed, it seems likely that Heraclius's decision to switch the imperial title to "king" (*basileus*) rather than "emperor" (*autokratōr*) reflects this messianic tendency and the eschatological expectations of the age.<sup>67</sup> Moreover, in his *Hexaameron*, George draws a deliberate comparison between Heraclius's six-year campaign and the six days of creation. Christian Rome's triumph on the sixth "day" had begun now a seventh "day" that was a new age. Heraclius's imperial triumph thus brought the universe to a new threshold in history, on the verge of the Second Coming and the Kingdom of God.<sup>68</sup>

### The *Syriac Alexander Legend* and the *Syriac Alexander Poem*

Some of the most significant evidence of imminent eschatological expectation during the reign of Heraclius comes from certain traditions about Alexander the Great that were circulating at this time. Indeed, these texts, one of which we mentioned briefly in the previous chapter, have special importance for the

present topic, not only for their expressions of imperial eschatology but perhaps even more so on account of their direct literary link with the Qurʾān, as Kevin van Bladel and Tommaso Tesei have both convincingly demonstrated.<sup>69</sup> Both texts in question survive in Syriac, and they reflect developments of older traditions about Alexander that first came together in the third century as the so-called *Alexander Romance*. One of these texts is a prose composition generally known as the *Syriac Alexander Legend*, while the other is a verse homily attributed to Jacob of Sarug that often bears the title the *Syriac Alexander Poem*.<sup>70</sup> Of these two texts, the *Legend* is more important for the present topic, since it foretells the impending end of the world through the triumph of the Roman Empire. There is no question that the two texts are closely related, although the precise nature of their relationship is not as clear as some scholars have often maintained. Both the *Legend* and the *Poem*, at least in their present forms, seem to have been composed shortly after Heraclius's victory in 628, and most likely after the restoration of the cross in the following year.<sup>71</sup> Yet the direct influence of these traditions on the Qurʾān indicates that they cannot have been written too long thereafter, especially if one adheres to the Islamic tradition's relatively early dating of the Qurʾānic text,<sup>72</sup> which, admittedly, does not deserve the amount of confidence that it often is given in modern scholarship.

Over the course of more than a century, scholars have proposed several possible relationships between these two texts, although some of these hypotheses have become untenable since it is now recognized that the *Syriac Alexander Poem* is not actually by Jacob of Sarug. There is a strong consensus, however, among all of these proposals that the *Syriac Alexander Legend* does not depend on the *Poem*. Much less certain is whether the *Poem* depends directly on the *Legend* or if perhaps they share instead a common source. At present, Reinink's view that the *Poem* makes direct use of the *Legend* seems to hold sway, but the evidence for such dependence is hardly decisive in my view, and the likelihood that they share a common source, as previously proposed by a number of scholars, seems more probable.<sup>73</sup> Indeed, the scenario proposed by Reinink demands a rather tight production schedule.

According to Reinink, the *Syriac Alexander Legend* was composed after 628, most likely around 630, but before the Islamic conquest of Mesopotamia in 636, which the text does not seem to know. The *Poem* also must date before 636 for the same reason, but since it depends on the *Legend*, it must have been written after it. This means we must assume that within a period of five

years or less the *Legend* was composed and then taken by another author (seemingly in a different confessional community from the *Legend's* author)<sup>74</sup> and transformed into a new verse version. Moreover, if one assumes that Muhammad is the sole author of the Qurʾān (which I do not), then this same text must also have somehow influenced Muhammad in Medina before the traditional date of his death in 632. All of this of course is not impossible, but it requires some very specific, and unlikely, circumstances. There is, on the other hand, no good reason to exclude the possibility that the *Legend*, the *Poem*, and possibly even the Qurʾān shared an earlier source. The similarities of the two Alexander texts are not such that one must have used the other directly, and I see no compelling reason to assume that this was the case. Accordingly, it seems that the least complex and also the least stringent explanation would be shared dependence on an earlier tradition, which was almost certainly a written source.

There is, moreover, significant evidence that this earlier source was composed shortly after the year 515 CE. Indeed, even if one were to suppose that the *Poem* depends directly on the *Legend*, as does Reinink, it would appear that in its current form the *Legend* almost certainly updates an older version of the *Legend* that was composed in the early sixth century. Theodor Nöldeke was the first to notice this fact from Alexander's prophecy in the *Legend* that "at the conclusion of eight hundred and twenty-six years, the Huns shall go forth by the narrow way which goes forth opposite Halôrâs."<sup>75</sup> As Nöldeke notes, the text here refers to the invasion of the Sabir Huns through the Caucasus in 514/15 CE, which corresponds to the year 826 on the Seleucid calendar, an event that receives special notice here presumably because it had only recently transpired when the text was composed.<sup>76</sup> Alexander then continues his prophecy with a forecast that "after nine hundred and forty years there will be another king, when the world will come to an end by the command of God the ruler of Creation."<sup>77</sup> The year 940 on the Seleucid calendar corresponds with 628/29 CE. According to Nöldeke, this represents an effectively arbitrary ("willkürlich") date, "ein Phantasiegebilde," that the sixth-century author has chosen to imagine sometime in the future.<sup>78</sup>

Nevertheless, as Wilhelm Bousset was the first to notice, the two dates in this passage seem to reflect redaction of the text at two different times. While 514/15 corresponds neatly to the Sabir invasion of that year, and presumably indicates the production of an earlier version of this text at that time, Bousset also maintains that the reference of 628/29 is not merely some arbitrary date in the future, but instead this date is a sign of the text's

subsequent redaction after Heraclius's victory. In this context, Bousset argues, the *Legend's* earlier reference to the Sabir Huns is redirected so that it indicates the movement of the Turks (sometimes also identified as Khazars) through the Caucasus at this time, when they served as allies of the Byzantines against the Persians.<sup>79</sup> Together the Turks and the Byzantines laid siege to Tbilisi, after which Turkish Khan reportedly gave Heraclius forty thousand troops for his army as they continued their march down through Mesopotamia to Seleucia-Ctesiphon.<sup>80</sup> According to a seventh-century Armenian chronicle (now preserved in Movses Kaghankatvatsi's *History of the Caucasian Albanians*), the Khazars treated the local population ruthlessly, in a manner befitting the description of the *Syriac Alexander Legend*.<sup>81</sup> A number of other scholars have followed Bousset's lead in understanding these two dates as evidence of an earlier sixth-century composition that was updated in the apocalyptic excitement following Heraclius's victory. Indeed, a clear majority has considered the reference to 514/15 CE as evidence that the original version of the *Legend* took shape in the early sixth century, with Károly Cze-glédy offering the most recent and thorough argument for this position.<sup>82</sup>

Despite this apparent consensus to the contrary, Reinink's view of the *Legend* as a new composition of the early seventh century presently enjoys relative acceptance. Yet in those instances where Reinink argues for such a dating, he oddly fails to address the text's reference to 514/15: although he notes how other scholars have interpreted this date as indication of sixth-century composition, he does not himself offer any explanation for why this date appears in a text first written, according to him, around 630.<sup>83</sup> It is, one must note, a very peculiar omission in the argument, and the absence of any explanation for the reference to 514/15 severely hinders his proposed dating of the text to sometime after 628. Reinink often notes Budge's observation that the state of the text itself is somewhat problematic at this point, as if this might somehow validate his dating, but to the contrary, such textual trouble seems to be a sure sign of an interpolation. Therefore, in the absence of any explanation for this date, I see little reason to abandon the earlier consensus that the *Syriac Alexander Legend* was initially composed sometime shortly after 515 CE in the context of the invasion of the Sabir Huns, and in its current form it has been revised to address the new circumstances of the early seventh century. Van Bladel, who accepts Reinink's dating, does offer an explanation for this date, but it is not a very convincing one. Van Bladel proposes that the text's mention of the 515 invasion of the Sabir Huns, "which holds no importance in the narrative, serves just as a key for the

contemporary [i.e., seventh-century] audience of the text that they can use to verify the accuracy of the second, more elaborate prophecy, associated with a later date [i.e., 628/29 and what is said to follow].<sup>84</sup> Tommaso Tesei also does not find van Bladel's argument very persuasive and similarly concludes that the *Alexander Legend* must have used an earlier source, at the very least for this prophecy.<sup>85</sup> Indeed, this prophecy's circulation in the sixth century is seemingly confirmed by contemporary reference to an apocalyptic revelation predicting the invasion of the Huns in John of Ephesus's sixth-century *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, as Czeglédy has noted.<sup>86</sup> One imagines that John of Ephesus is aware of this *Alexander Legend*, to which he here refers.

The only question then is how much of the *Syriac Alexander Legend* was extant in this early sixth-century version. Both Czeglédy and Tesei seem to think not very much, while other scholars following Bousset seem to estimate that it was indeed most of the text and that the seventh-century revision involved only minor changes. The latter position seems more likely, in my opinion, and I suspect that most of the *Legend* was already extant largely in its present form when John of Ephesus seemingly refers to either the *Legend* or a similar tradition. The *Legend* itself is not a particularly long text, amounting to only fourteen pages in its English translation, and unless specific arguments can be advanced for the later introduction of particular elements to the *Legend* (such as the reference to 628/29), we should assume that the text as we have it mostly reflects the sixth-century version. Furthermore, it is much easier to understand the *Legend's* influence on the *Syriac Alexander Poem* and the Qurʾān if the *Legend* had begun to circulate in the first part of the sixth century, rather than only around 630. Czeglédy, for instance, found Nöldeke's proposal that the *Legend* of ca. 515 could have influenced Jacob, who died in 521, highly improbable, since there was so little time.<sup>87</sup> By the same token, Reinink's suggestion that a *Legend* composed ca. 630 formed the basis for a *Poem* written before 636 allows very little time for the process of dissemination, response, and revision. The time frame, while not impossible, seems too narrow to be very plausible.

As for the *Legend's* influence on the Qurʾān, which seems unmistakable, it was most likely the sixth-century version of the *Legend*, rather than the seventh-century revision, that was used for the Qurʾān's account of Alexander the Great (Dhū al-qarnayn, "the two horned one") in *sūra* 18. Nevertheless, I would not entirely exclude the possibility that the seventh-century version lies behind this section of the Qurʾān, particularly since the Qurʾānic text probably was not completely fixed until the later seventh century.<sup>88</sup> In any

case, the *Syriac Alexander Legend* offers invaluable evidence of direct contact between earliest Islam and the late ancient tradition of imperial apocalypticism. In its vision of the quickly approaching end times, the *Legend* both echoes the *Tiburine Sibyl* and foreshadows the *Apocalypse of Ps.-Methodius*. In the *Legend*, Alexander, who here as in other related texts prefigures the Roman emperor, promises that if the Messiah does not come in his days, he will “carry this throne, which is a seat of silver upon which I sit, and will place it in Jerusalem, that, when the Messiah comes from heaven, He may sit upon my kingly throne.” Likewise, Alexander decrees that when he dies, his “royal crown shall be taken and hung upon the seat which I have given to the Messiah,” as is to be done with the crowns of all the kings that will follow him.<sup>89</sup> The links between imperial authority, royal headgear, Jerusalem, and the coming Kingdom of God are all on display here. In addition, the *Legend* shares the prophecy of Gog and Magog, who were identified with the Huns, predicting that they will break forth from the north through the Caspian Gates and ravage the land just before the appearance of a final king and the end of time.<sup>90</sup> Then, the *Legend* maintains, “so shall the power of the kingdoms melt away before the might of the kingdom of the Greeks which is that of the Romans . . . ; and what remains of them the kingdom of the Romans will destroy . . . ; and there shall not be found any among the nations and tongues who dwell in the world that shall stand before the kingdom of the Romans.”<sup>91</sup>

The *Legend* then concludes on this same note with a prophecy given by the court astrologers of Tubarлак, Alexander’s Persian opponent. The astrologers warn their king “that at the final consummation of the world the kingdom of the Romans would go forth and subdue all the kings of the earth; and that whatever king was found in Persia would be slain, and that Babylonia and Assyria would be laid waste by the command of God.” Tubarлак writes the prophecy down and gives it to Alexander, with a prediction “that Persia should be laid waste by the hand of the Romans, and that all the kingdoms be laid waste, but that that [kingdom of the Romans] should stand and rule to the end of time, and should deliver the kingdom of the earth to Christ who is to come.”<sup>92</sup> The name “Tubarлак” appears to be unique to this text, and according to Reinink, this prophecy was composed specifically with reference to Heraclius and his recent victory over Persia, with Tubarлак standing in for Khosrow II. This certainly is a possibility, but I am not convinced that it is the only one, and other scholars, particularly those who would date the text to the sixth century, have not reached the same conclusion as Reinink. It

certainly may be that this prophecy was specifically added to the *Legend* in the light of Heraclius's recent victory. But it could just as well have been part of the sixth-century version, inasmuch as it comports with other elements of the text's imperial eschatology and with the historical Alexander's victory over the Persians. In this latter case, one imagines that the prophecy would have taken on new meaning in the context of Heraclius's triumph, when the earlier text was revised. Indeed, perhaps this prophecy was not so much inspired by the last Roman-Persian war, but instead the war itself inspired newfound interest in this text following Rome's triumph.

In these ways, then, the *Syriac Alexander Legend* retrojects the eschatological role of the Roman Empire, its emperor, and its victories back into the life of Alexander, the original king of the Greeks (and Romans). Alexander's kingdom, as a symbol of Rome, will bridge the present world with its eschatological future, delivering the kingdom of the world up to Christ.<sup>93</sup> Since the *Legend* was most likely composed in the early sixth century, it offers further evidence of imminent eschatological expectation in this period. Yet the *Legend's* revision at the beginning of the seventh century also makes it relevant to the dramatic increase in eschatological urgency and imperial eschatology in the wake of Heraclius's victory over the Persians and the restoration of the Cross. One finds similar ideas in another roughly contemporary apocalypse, the Latin Ps.-Ephrem *On the End of the World*. In this text the conflict between Rome and Persia is once again painted in eschatological colors, and the end of the world is identified with the completion of the Roman Empire, so that the consummation of the world will come "when the kingdom of the Romans begins to be fulfilled by the sword."<sup>94</sup> Even in the kingdom of Axum, it would seem, on the eve of Islam there is evidence of belief in imperial eschatology, in the so-called *Vision of Baruch* or *5 Baruch*. This apocalyptic vision of the end times, which Pierluigi Piovanelli has convincingly dated to the early seventh century, concludes with the emergence of a righteous emperor, whose reign intersects with the rule of the Antichrist. Once God has removed the Antichrist, after he has ruled for seven years, this righteous emperor then "will say to the Cross: 'Take away all this,' and the Cross will take it and ascend to Heaven."<sup>95</sup> Then after a period of rule by the demonic powers, Michael will finally sound the horn, and the dead will be resurrected to meet their reward or punishment.

These texts, along with the other evidence considered above, reveal that at the very moment when Muhammad's religious movement was coming into its own, there was simultaneously a dramatic surge of belief that the

Kingdom of God would soon be established on the earth and would be ushered in through imperial triumph, in this case the victory of the Roman Empire. On its own this development in the religious culture of late antiquity would surely be significant. Yet the fact that we can demonstrate the direct influence of the *Syriac Alexander Legend* on the traditions of the Qurʾān leaves little doubt that Muhammad's new religious movement was aware of and in contact with the imperial eschatology of Christian late antiquity. The patterns of agreement between the *Legend* and Qurʾān 18:83–102 make any explanation other than direct influence highly improbable.<sup>96</sup> Accordingly, the *Legend* provides, as it were, a very important “smoking gun,” indicating a direct connection between late ancient imperial eschatology and formative Islam.

### Imperial Eschatology and Roman Defeat

Not surprisingly, on the other side of the Islamic conquests, we continue to find apocalyptic expectations that the world was about to end. Maximus the Confessor, for instance, one of the first writers to report the events of the Islamic invasion of the Near East, is convinced that these events will soon usher in the advent of the Antichrist.<sup>97</sup> Moreover, conviction that the triumph of the Roman Empire was still destined to play an instrumental role in the *eschaton's* arrival remained strong in the aftermath of these events. Although there is sometimes a tendency in scholarship on this period to see the apocalypticism of the middle and late seventh century as something that emerged largely in response to the Islamic conquests, this view is clearly shortsighted. While the Arab invasions may have given new impetus to urgent eschatological expectation, one must recognize the very real and significant continuity between the apocalyptic writings of the later seventh century and the apocalypticism of late antiquity, particularly during the reign of Heraclius. Such continuity, rather than the eruption of a dramatically new religious perspective, becomes quite clear when one looks at the apocalyptic traditions on both sides of the Islamic conquests.

As much is evident, for instance, in another apocalypse attributed to Ephrem, the *Syriac Ps.-Ephrem Homily on the End*, a text composed just after the conquests had begun, sometime around 640.<sup>98</sup> This apocalypse begins with the war between the Romans and the Persians, noting that after Rome's victory the descendants of Hagar, the Ishmaelites, will drive the Romans from the Holy Land. The peoples of Gog and Magog will then be

unleashed, and after their defeat by the archangel Michael, “once again the empire of the Romans will spring up and flourish in its place.” Then, with the Roman Empire resurgent and “possessing the earth and its boundaries” and with “no one existing who opposes it,” the Antichrist will appear, setting in motion the final events of the *eschaton*.<sup>99</sup> The apocalyptic script of Roman imperial triumph remains here essentially unchanged from what we have seen before—only the opponents have changed to reflect new historical circumstances. In the decades that followed, conviction that the Roman Empire’s triumph and dominion would inaugurate the end of the world remained powerful and if anything gained strength in territories of the emerging Islamic Empire. So one finds not only in the *Apocalypse of Ps.-Methodius*, mentioned in the previous chapter, but also in other related texts that soon would follow it, such as the *Edessene Ps.-Methodius Fragment* and the *Apocalypse of John the Little*, both from around the turn of the eighth century. Drawing their inspiration from Ps.-Methodius’s vision of the Last Emperor, these two texts similarly portend eschatological fulfillment and deliverance through the Roman Empire’s victory and sovereignty.<sup>100</sup>

We gain a slightly different perspective on this same phenomenon from another early seventh-century text, the *Doctrina Iacobi nuper baptizati*, an account of several debates held among the Jews of North Africa who recently had been forcibly baptized under Heraclius.<sup>101</sup> The debates supposedly took place in July 634, at the very moment when Muhammad’s followers had first begun to enter the Roman Near East. It is no mere coincidence, then, that the *Doctrina Iacobi* is the first text to mention the appearance of this new religious movement and to give a response. No less important, however, it shows the prominence of both apocalyptic expectation and imperial eschatology right at the very moment of transition from a Roman to an Islamic Near East. The text was most likely written very soon after the events that it describes, as seems to be required by its concern to address the specific issue of the forced baptism of 632, as well as by references to contemporary political events that indicate a time just after the first Arab attacks on the Roman Empire.<sup>102</sup> Moreover, despite the many clichés and caricatures that too often typify Christian writings on Jews and Judaism, the *Doctrina Iacobi* defies most of the literary conventions—and conventional interpretations—of the *adversus iudaeos* genre. It is, in this regard, as David Olster explains, “the exception that proves the rule.”<sup>103</sup> Whereas most anti-Jewish literature from this period presents only a highly stereotyped construct that is rhetorically designed to demonstrate the superiority of Christianity, the *Doctrina Iacobi*

instead presents what is judged to be a detailed and realistic depiction of late ancient Judaism.<sup>104</sup> The *Doctrina Iacobi* thus stands out within its genre for its careful and accurate representation of such historical details and, more remarkably, for the thorough and thoughtful contextualization of its dialogue within this broader historical setting.<sup>105</sup> Therefore, despite the suspicions that such a text might potentially invite, historians of the early seventh century are generally agreed that this text offers remarkable insight into the diversity and complexity of religious culture in this era.

The text identifies its author as Joseph, one of the participants in the dialogue, but its main character is Jacob, a Jewish merchant from Palestine who had recently been coerced into baptism while on an ill-timed business trip to Carthage. After several days of debate, about midway through the text, a new character enters the discussion, Justus, the unbaptized cousin of one of these new Jewish converts, who has recently arrived from Palestine. Justus is upset that his cousin and so many other Jews have accepted their Christian baptism, and he is persuaded to debate the issue with Jacob before the group. This being a Christian text, one is not surprised to learn that Justus is ultimately persuaded to become a Christian himself and receive baptism. In the course of Jacob's debate with Justus, however, the topic of Rome's eschatological significance comes up. After Justus identifies Rome with the last of Daniel's four kingdoms, Jacob asks his Jewish opponent to consider the present state of the Roman Empire. Justus notes that, while perhaps it is presently a little diminished, Rome is destined to rise again to greatness, since as the final empire it must endure until the end, when the Messiah will appear. Yet the Christian Jacob, by contrast, believes that the Roman Empire is presently on the verge of collapse, to be followed very soon by the end of the world. As Jacob reminds Justus, the Roman Empire once spanned the world from Scotland to Persia: "but now, we see Rome humiliated," he explains, having lost most of its western territories and very recently suffered occupation of much of the east by Persia.<sup>106</sup> Eventually, following his conversion, Justus too professes the imminent eschatology of his newfound faith: the end of the world will soon arrive, and Rome's impending decline will pave the way for Christ's coming reign.<sup>107</sup> Thus, on the very cusp of transition from Roman to Islamic rule, the *Doctrina Iacobi* sustains the apocalyptic expectation of the sixth and early seventh centuries, as well as the conviction that the fortunes of the Roman Empire will play an essential role in ushering in the divine rule of the *eschaton*. Here yet again, the empire is to serve, as Alexei Sivertsev observes, "as the receptacle of eternity."<sup>108</sup>

As we will see in the next chapter, these North African converts were not the only Jews who believed that the end times had come upon them and likewise that the fate of the Roman Empire was intimately intertwined with the world's eschatological consummation. Imminent eschatological expectations were also on the rise among the Jews of late antiquity, particularly in the early seventh century, as was the idea of imperial eschatology, including even the figure of the Last Emperor, it would seem. But not to be missed before we move on to that topic in the following chapter is the "stop press" report of the arrival of Muhammad's followers in the Holy Land that interrupts the *Doctrina Iacobi*. After his conversion, Justus reveals the contents of a letter that he had just received from his brother in Palestine. In this letter, his brother, Abraham, reports that a false prophet had appeared in the land, and this prophet, who is clearly Muhammad, was preaching that the Messiah was about to appear.<sup>109</sup> While it is not entirely clear whether Muhammad and his earliest followers expected the appearance of a messiah, they do seem to have believed that the end of the world was about to dawn upon them, a point this early report from Palestine would seem to confirm. Reference here to the coming Messiah could possibly reflect a refraction of Muhammad's eschatological message through the lens of Judaism. In Jewish ears, sounding the *eschaton's* impending arrival meant the Messiah's arrival as well, and one imagines that the presence of many Jews within Muhammad's early community of the Believers would have only amplified such potential messianic associations.<sup>110</sup> In this one text, then, written at the very moment that Muhammad's new faith entered the sectarian milieu of the late ancient Near East, we find evidence not only of Christian eschatological anticipation but seemingly also the imminent eschatological expectations of late ancient Judaism and earliest Islam.

## Chapter 4

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# Armilos and Kay Bahrām: Imperial Eschatology in Late Ancient Judaism and Zoroastrianism

Imperial eschatology was not something peculiar only to the Christians of late antiquity. Rather, Jews and Zoroastrians of this era also embraced this apocalyptic ideology, albeit in a slightly different fashion in each case. We have just seen some hint of this at the end of the preceding chapter, in the *Doctrina Iacobi*. There Rome's eschatological status is an important crux of the debate among a group of North African Jews, and in his arguments with Justus about the truth of the Christian faith, Jacob maintains that Rome's present decline must be understood as a sign that the end of the world would soon arrive. Therefore, he argues, the Messiah must have already come in Jesus of Nazareth, since the end times had presently arrived. When Justus decides to embrace Christianity, he too professes belief that Rome's collapse is a sign of the world's impending demise. Yet the *Doctrina* is of course a Christian writing, whose protagonists are Jewish converts. Fortunately, we possess more direct evidence for imminent eschatological expectations among the Jews of the late ancient Near East, and in Palestine in particular. And as other scholars have observed, this Jewish apocalypticism also frequently envisions the forces of empire as playing an instrumental role in the *eschaton's* impending arrival. Although Jewish apocalyptic literature from this period usually inverts the Roman triumphalism of contemporary Christian eschatology, the Roman Empire generally remains a central actor in the restoration of divine rule over the earth. As such, these reconfigurations often

present a sort of apocalyptic “counterhistory” intended to subvert the Christian scripts and transform them into prophecies of Jewish vindication and victory.

Likewise, the Zoroastrian apocalypses of the later Sasanian Empire, such as they can be known, show a similar conviction that the end of the world would soon be realized through imperial triumph. In this case, of course, it is the Persian Empire, rather than the Roman, that is destined to realize the end of history and restore the earth to divine rule. Unfortunately, these Zoroastrian apocalyptic texts survive only in more recent redactions that were made during the early medieval period. There is a general consensus, however, among experts on early Iranian religion that the apocalyptic traditions witnessed by these early medieval versions are in fact ancient, even if certain references to more recent events have been added over the centuries. Indeed, many scholars maintain that these traditions are old enough to have exercised a transformative influence on early Judaism, most notably in the development of such doctrines as the resurrection of the dead, a personified cosmic evil, and the apocalyptic genre. Other scholars have questioned whether the core structure and ideas found in these texts can in fact be dated so early, particularly given their relatively late final redaction. Yet even among such skeptics there is widespread agreement that the eschatological scenarios described in these Zoroastrian apocalypses attained their present form by the late Sasanian period.<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, these texts are entirely relevant for understanding the broader religious landscape of the Near East on the eve of Islam. In these writings we find a distinctively Zoroastrian imperial eschatology, in which Ohrmazd’s eschatological triumph over Ahriman will be achieved in large part through the earthly triumph of Persia’s kings. Moreover, at the end of the sixth century, these apocalyptic traditions were suddenly brought to life in the revolt of Bahrām VI Čōbīn, who briefly held power as emperor of Iran from 590 to 591.<sup>2</sup> At the time, many of Bahrām’s supporters believed him to be the messianic king foretold by these visions, whose victory would usher in the apocalyptic end of the millennium.<sup>3</sup> Thus, in Sasanian Zoroastrianism as well, imperial eschatology held a potent currency that was highly active on the eve of Islam. As we will see in this chapter, then, the notion that the end of the world would soon arrive through imperial triumph seems to have permeated the religious cultures of the late ancient Near East, among which, I would argue, we should also include formative Islam.

## Eschatology and Empire in Late Ancient Judaism

At the beginning of seventh century, messianic expectations began to escalate within the Jewish communities of Byzantium, and as with the Christians of this era, the Jews too were expecting the imminent end of the world.<sup>4</sup> The Persian invasions in particular seem to have stoked the Jewish apocalyptic imagination, and the “liberation” of Jerusalem especially sparked a renewed interest in restoration of the Temple. According to Christian sources, the Persians expelled the Christians from Jerusalem and left the Jews in charge of the city for the first several years after their conquest in 614.<sup>5</sup> Some scholars have even suggested that during this time the Jews restored the sacrificial cult to the Temple Mount and were led by a messianic figure.<sup>6</sup> Unquestionably, the return of Jewish hegemony and the Temple cult to the Holy City would have inspired powerful messianic hopes and confidence that the end had drawn nigh. Yet there is considerable doubt that the Jews either regained sovereignty or were able to restore the Temple sacrifices following the Persian victory, and in fact both seem rather unlikely.<sup>7</sup>

Nonetheless, the tumultuous events of the early seventh century did indeed excite apocalyptic expectations. Several Jewish apocalyptic texts from both immediately before and shortly after the Islamic conquests reveal belief in the impending *eschaton*, an event that would be inaugurated not by Rome’s victory but rather by its defeat and expulsion from the land that had been promised to Abraham and his descendants: precisely the inverse, in effect, of the Roman view of the empire’s eschatological valence. Two important Jewish apocalypses can be securely dated to the pre-Islamic period, the *Sefer Eliyyahu* and the *Sefer Zerubbabel*, both of which seem to have been composed in the early seventh century.<sup>8</sup> Likewise, *3 Enoch* appears to belong to the early Byzantine period: according to Klaus Hermann, this apocalypse reflects the “renewed interest in eschatological expectations that gave rise to new apocalyptic writings” at this time.<sup>9</sup> There are also a number of apocalyptic *piyyutim* from this era, that is, Jewish liturgical poems, along with other apocalypses that seem to preserve some pre-Islamic eschatological traditions and still others that respond directly to the new conditions of dominion by Muhammad’s community of the Believers. All of these writings reveal a conviction that the end times were at hand and that imperial victory, yet not necessarily always by Rome, would play a key role in realizing the restoration of divine rule.

The first of these apocalypses, the *Sefer Eliyyahu*, seems to know the Christian tradition of the Last Emperor, which it relates according to its own peculiar version. The text begins with a brief cosmic tour, before turning to describe the events that will precede the end of time. The Archangel Michael, who is Elijah's guide, describes a king who will arise in the last days and fight an eschatological war. At first this king is identified as "Armilos," a common figure in medieval Jewish apocalyptic, who more or less corresponds with the Antichrist of the Christian tradition. The name most likely derives from Romulus, the legendary founder of Rome, and in late ancient Jewish apocalyptic Armilos is understood as the "terrifying final ruler of 'great Rome,'" a figure whose representation seems to have been inspired especially by Heraclius.<sup>10</sup> Like the Christian Last Emperor, as Alexei Sivertsev notes, "Armilos is both the last ruler of Rome and the reincarnation of Rome's founder Romulus."<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, the *Sefer Eliyyahu* quickly introduces some significant uncertainty about this ruler's identity by raising the question of the king's name. Several alternatives are considered that would identify him as possibly either Roman or Persian, and ultimately the text seems to decide in favor of a Persian king—undoubtedly a sign of the turbulent political circumstances in which the text was produced. Yet at the same time one must also bear in mind the significance of a similar final ruler in Zoroastrian apocalyptic, to be discussed below, a tradition that had only been recently been mobilized in the rebellion of Bahrām VI Čōbīn at the end of the sixth century. This feature of Sasanian religion has possibly also contributed to the text's ambiguity and confusion here. In the end, however, according to the text, this last Persian king will war against the last Roman king, whose hideous appearance is described in terms suggestive of the Antichrist, and he will defeat the Romans, who are identified with Daniel's fourth beast, "the most oppressive of empires, which precedes the eschaton." Then the messiah's appearance soon will follow, along with the descent of the heavenly Jerusalem complete with a restored Temple.<sup>12</sup>

The second pre-Islamic apocalypse, the *Sefer Zerubbabel*, was similarly composed in response to the historical circumstances of the last Roman-Persian war, although it is both more forceful in its criticism of Rome than the *Sefer Eliyyahu* and more explicit in assigning the empire and its emperor specific eschatological roles. The apocalypse begins as Zerubbabel asks to know "[how will] the form of the Temple come into existence," and in response God brings him to Rome (i.e., Constantinople), where he meets the first of the text's two messiahs, in this case the Davidic messiah.<sup>13</sup> The

Archangel Michael then comes to reveal to him Rome's starring role in the eschatological drama that is soon to unfold. Before long, Michael leads Zerubbabel to a "house of filth," that is, a church, where he beholds "a marble statue in the shape of a maiden: her features and form were lovely and indeed very beautiful to behold," presumably a statue of the Virgin Mary, as others have noted.<sup>14</sup> Michael explains, "This statue is the [wife] of Belial. Satan will come and have intercourse with it, and a son named Armilos will emerge from it. . . . He will rule over all (peoples), and his dominion will extend from one end of the earth to the other. . . . No one will be able to withstand him, and anyone who does not believe in him he will kill with the sword. . . . He will come against the holy people of the Most High."<sup>15</sup> Here once again, and even more clearly than in the *Sefer Eliyyahu*, we find the figure of the Last Emperor, albeit as seen through the inverted lens of Jewish apocalyptic in the guise of Armilos.

In the end times, this eschatological emperor will defeat the king of Persia and "ascend with his force and subdue the entire world. . . . [H]e will begin to erect all the idols of the nations on the face of the earth and . . . will take his mother—the statue) from whom he was spawned—from the 'house of filth' of the scorned ones, and from every place and from every nation they will come and worship that stone, burn offerings before her, and pour out libations to her. . . . Anyone who refuses to worship her will die in agony (like?) animals."<sup>16</sup> Particularly interesting here and elsewhere in the apocalypse is the close association of this Last Emperor and Rome with the Virgin Mary, who had recently emerged as the patroness of both Constantinople and Rome.<sup>17</sup> Apparently her new imperial status was not lost on the Jews of the empire, so that the Virgin Mary was also drawn into the Jewish apocalyptic imaginary as an eschatological symbol of Rome.<sup>18</sup> Armilos then will kill the messiah descended from Joseph, but the Davidic messiah will raise him up and then slay Armilos by breathing in his face, setting in motion the final conflict, in which God will destroy the forces of Armilos together with Gog and Magog. Then with the Romans defeated and destroyed, "Israel will take possession of the kingdom," and "the Lord will lower to earth the celestial Temple which had previously been built," allowing for the resumption of sacrifice to the Lord.<sup>19</sup>

As Sivertsev has recently demonstrated, the *Sefer Zerubbabel*, in its vision of the end times, stands Rome's imperial eschatology on its head and subverts it to a Jewish end. In particular, Sivertsev identifies a number of similarities between the *Sefer Zerubbabel* and the Last Emperor legend from the

*Apocalypse of Ps.-Methodius* that he concludes must derive from a shared common tradition—not necessarily a written source, but rather the same broader theme of late ancient eschatology has informed both texts.<sup>20</sup> Imperial renewal as a harbinger of the *eschaton* is the guiding thread of both apocalypses: in one through the rise of the Last Emperor and the universal reign of the Greco-Roman Empire, and in the other through the appearance of the Davidic messiah and his restoration of the kingdom of Israel. In both texts the final ruler will arise suddenly from helpless, lowly circumstances “in response to the persecutions and blasphemies of an eschatological enemy.”<sup>21</sup> Both rulers revive a declining and crumbling empire to a state of greatness and triumph as a precursor for the ultimate restoration of divine rule. This stands in marked contrast, one should note, to the anti-imperialism of earlier Jewish (and Christian) apocalyptic, in which the downfall of a mighty earthly power, rather than its triumphant restoration, will usher in the end of days. Yet the *Sefer Zerubbabel* directly undermines the Roman triumphalism of Christian apocalypticism by setting its two messiahs in direct confrontation with Armilos, the eschatological symbol of Roman might and malice. One messiah falls victim to Armilos, while the other destroys him. According to Zerubbabel’s vision, this emperor will seek to impose his blasphemous faith on the world, much as Heraclius himself had recently done in the forced baptism of the Jews and as the legendary Last Emperor was expected to force conversion on the pagans and Jews, as indicated in the *Tiburtine Sibyl*. The *Sefer Zerubbabel* also seems to appropriate Christian rhetoric and imagery for the Antichrist in its description of Armilos, turning Christian motifs to its own eschatological and polemical purposes.<sup>22</sup> Surely it is not entirely coincidental, one might add, that many Christians also expected that the Antichrist would rule for a time as Roman emperor.<sup>23</sup> Thus Rome’s greatness will play an important role in the lead-up to the *eschaton* but primarily as a wicked forerunner that prepares the way for the kingdom of Israel’s victory and renewal.

In this regard, it is certainly no accident that the *Sefer Zerubbabel*’s messianic renewal begins with the appearance of its first messiah in Rome. This setting links the narrative with a broader tradition in late ancient Judaism that saw Rome as having temporarily assumed a sort of divine favor and as guardian of the divine presence in Rome until Israel’s messianic restoration.<sup>24</sup> The Roman Empire, which is identified with Esau, Jacob’s brother, is in this understanding both a successor and forerunner of Israel and is charged with preparing the way for its eschatological restoration. Together, Jacob and Esau, Israel and Rome, shared a destiny to rule the world.<sup>25</sup> Rome’s

possession of Solomon's throne and the Temple vessels was also a sign of its special status in the eschatological process.<sup>26</sup> Rome's final victory in the world was a prerequisite for the Messiah's appearance, and Roman universalism was essential for the eschatological restoration of divine rule in many Jewish eyes. Some rabbis, alternatively, envisioned the Persian Empire in this role, a difference of opinion that we find expressed, as we have just seen, in the *Sefer Eliyyahu*. Yet regardless of whether it will be Persia or Rome, the *eschaton* will come only through the ultimate triumph of a world empire, and Rome and Persia both similarly estimated their roles in the consummation of the world. Thus the *Sefer Zerubbabel* begins with its first messiah in Constantinople, the New Rome and the seat of the Roman Empire, although before long he travels to the Holy Land. Then, at the end, the second messiah himself defeats and slays Armilos, the Roman emperor, so that he effectively inherits and assumes the emperor's authority in reestablishing the kingdom of Israel.<sup>27</sup>

Another significant apocalypse in this regard is the *Signs of Rabbi Shim'on b. Yoḥai*, a collection of ten "signs" (*otot*) that will precede the Messiah's appearance, which, unfortunately, is very difficult to date. As it now stands, the text clearly refers to the Ishmaelites in terms that seem to indicate the emergence of Islam. Nevertheless, the text predicts that after Rome's defeat at the hands of the Ishmaelites, the Roman emperor will return victorious and lay down his crown on the "foundation stone," that is, the foundation stone of creation that lay within the Holy of Holies while the Temple still stood. Arthur Marmorstein, the text's initial editor, thought this prophecy was a *vaticinium ex eventu* and accordingly proposed that the Ishmaelites in this case actually refer to the Persians, so that the text would date before Islam to sometime between 628 and 638.<sup>28</sup> While some have followed Marmorstein's dating, others have noted the improbability and lack of precedent for this reading, and it seems most likely that this list of eschatological signs was compiled in the later seventh century or at the beginning of the eighth in the wake of the Islamic conquests.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, Sivertsev and Ra'anán Boustan have both proposed, with good reason, that even though the collection seems to have received its final redaction only around the turn of the eighth century, many of its traditions are likely significantly older, developing in the early seventh century or perhaps even in the late sixth within the broader context of increased eschatological expectations at this time.<sup>30</sup> Most notably, the seventh sign of the Messiah relates the legend of the Last Roman Emperor, which it seems to know from a version similar to the one used by the *Apocalypse of Ps.-Methodius*.<sup>31</sup>

In this seventh sign, the apocalypse relates that the king of Edom, that is, the Roman emperor, will come to Jerusalem. The sons of Ishmael will initially flee before him, but after regrouping at “Teman” they will ride forth under a king named Ḥōṭer, a name meaning “shoot” that has strong messianic associations in early Judaism.<sup>32</sup> The king of Edom will hear of this and will ride forth against them, and they will battle at Boşra, perhaps a reference to the fall of Bostra in 634.<sup>33</sup> Ḥōṭer and the Ishmaelites will slay many of the Edomites, and the king of Edom will flee. “But Ḥōṭer will die, and the king of Edom will return to Jerusalem a second time. He will enter the sanctuary, take the golden crown off his head, and place it on the foundation stone. He will then say, ‘Master of the Universe! I have now returned what my ancestors removed.’”<sup>34</sup> The similarities of this seventh sign to the Last Emperor legend are fairly obvious, and here the *Signs*’ author renders it in Jewish form, no doubt drawing on a version of the legend that was circulating among late antique Christians. Its Jewishness becomes most apparent in the eighth “sign” that follows. After the Last Emperor’s victory, the messiah from the lineage of Joseph will suddenly arise, Nehemiah b. Hushiel. This messiah will do battle with the king of Edom and defeat him. Then he will take up for himself the crown that the Roman emperor had returned to the sanctuary in Jerusalem. In the roughly contemporary version of the Last Emperor legend from the *Apocalypse of Ps.-Methodius*, the crown miraculously ascends to heaven after the emperor places it on the Cross. But here the Jewish twist is that instead the crown now belongs to the Jewish Messiah, who will inaugurate the restoration of the kingdom of Israel.<sup>35</sup> Thus the Messiah claims for Israel the legacy of the Roman Empire and shows himself to be the emperor’s legitimate successor. Once again we see the logic of Rome’s eschatological bond with Israel at play, so that Roman imperial eschatology is adapted and subverted to a vision of Jewish vindication and triumph.<sup>36</sup>

Similar themes have also been identified in several *piyyutim* from the early seventh century. One anonymous *piyyut*, for instance, describes an eschatological war between “the king of the West and the king of the East,” in which the armies of the former “will show strength in the land.” The last Roman emperor, “Harmalyos,” will stab the Messiah, but then “the [other] Messiah will come and he will revive him,” and Israel will no longer be “kept far from the house of prayer,” and the kings of Edom, that is, Rome, “will be no more.”<sup>37</sup> The details of this battle, allusive as they are, clearly reference the eschatological conflict between Rome and Israel’s messiahs seen above in the *Sefer Zerubbabel* and the *Signs of Rabbi Shim’on b. Yoḥai*. Another *piyyut* by

the early seventh-century hymnist Elazar Qilir proclaims that the time has come for the messiah to rise up against Rome, “[and Ass]ur will come over her, and will plant its tabernacle in her territory. . . . And the holy people will have some repose because Assur allows them to found the holy Temple; and they will build there a holy altar and offer sacrifices on it. But they will not be able to erect the sanctuary because the ‘staff from the holy stump’ has not yet come.”<sup>38</sup> A different sort of imperial eschatology emerges from a *piyyut* by the seventh-century hymnist Yohanan ha-Kohen. Yohanan’s hymn does not envision Rome’s messianic defeat and Israel’s assumption of its universal rule. Instead, we find hope of eschatological liberation from Rome through the rise of another empire that would defeat them: “Dispossess the mountain of Seir and Edom, speak to Assur: he has to make haste and hurry, to plough down a godless nation by your mighty scepter, to tread them down by the kingdom of the wild ass.”<sup>39</sup> Whether or not Assur is Persia or the Arabs who would follow them a few years later is not entirely certain. What is clear, however, is the faith in a messianic liberation from the Romans, through the military intervention of another empire, along with a related hope for the restoration of the Temple. Similar sentiments perhaps lie behind another anonymous seventh-century *piyyut* titled “On That Day.” Here the Roman-Persian war and the Roman defeat by the Ishmaelites are again described in apocalyptic hues, leading up to the appearance of the Messiah, who is expected seemingly soon after the Romans’ defeat.<sup>40</sup>

The notion of Jewish eschatological liberation from Rome through a new Ishmaelite empire stands at the core of another contemporary apocalypse, the *Secrets of Rabbi Shimʿon b. Yoḥai*. This text ascribes the rise of the “Kingdom of Ishmael” and its rule over the Holy Land to Divine Providence, seeming to draw on an earlier source that originally interpreted the Islamic conquest within a messianic context.<sup>41</sup> Although in its present form this apocalypse dates to sometime around the ʿAbbāsīd revolution, scholars are largely agreed that its account of the Islamic conquests preserves a much earlier source that is seemingly contemporary with the invasion itself. The rather positive assessment of Muhammad and his followers in this initial section seems to demand such an early composition, as does the contrast with more negative complaints against the oppressive rule of the Muslims later in the document. As the vision begins, the angel Metatron explains that “the Holy One, blessed be He, is bringing about the kingdom of Ishmael only for the purpose of delivering you from that wicked one (i.e., Edom [Rome]). He shall raise up over them a prophet in accordance with His will, and he will

subdue the land for them; and they shall come and restore it with grandeur. Great enmity will exist between them and the children of Esau.”<sup>42</sup> When Rabbi Shim‘ōn asks for further clarification, the angel explains by invoking the traditional messianic interpretations of Isaiah 21:6–7 and Zechariah 9:9 concerning “the rider of an ass” and “the rider of a camel” so that they reveal this Ishmaelite prophet as a messianic deliverer.<sup>43</sup> The angel continues to explain that a “second king who will arise from Ishmael will be a friend of Israel,” apparently referring to ‘Umar, and here we see again apocalyptic hopes for the restoration of the Temple. “He will repair their breaches and (fix) the breaches of the Temple and shape Mt. Moriah and make the whole of it a level plain. He will build for himself there a place for prayer [שתחוויה] upon the site of the ‘foundation stone’ [אבן שתיה].”<sup>44</sup> The vision then continues to recount the rule of the Umayyads, ending with a reference to the ‘Abbāsid revolution and the fallen dominion of “the children of Ishmael in Damascus.” After this will follow a brief period of rule by the “wicked kingdom” (i.e., Rome), which will see several messiahs arise to defeat “Armilos” (Rome) in a final confrontation, resulting in a two-thousand-year messianic rule that will end in the Final Judgment.<sup>45</sup>

The Jews of the later Roman Empire and the early Islamic period thus shared with their Christian neighbors the conviction that they were living in the last days, on the verge of the climax of history. Jerusalem would be the main stage for this emerging apocalyptic cycle, and the city’s eschatological significance was such that in Jewish apocalyptic literature Jerusalem’s fortunes and the events that would take place there commanded even more attention than the actual process of redemption itself.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, like the Christians, the Jews similarly believed that the Roman Empire and its emperor would play central roles in the eschatological restoration. Of course, in Jewish eyes, the empire and the emperor were maleficent actors, opposed to the divine will and doomed to destruction. Nevertheless, as in Christian eschatology, both were central to the unfolding divine plan for the end of time. More specifically, Rome, or Esau, had temporarily usurped divine favor and universal rule from its brother Israel, but at the *eschaton*, following Rome’s final triumph, these would ultimately return to the restored kingdom of Israel. Rome and Israel shared an apocalyptic destiny as fraternally related eschatological kingdoms. Likewise, we find in Jewish eschatology an expectation of divine deliverance through the military intervention of another people, whom God would raise up to liberate them and their land from Roman oppression. This, they believed, would ultimately lead to the

restoration of the Temple, the eschatological reign of God, and the Final Judgment.

In contrast, then, to earlier apocalyptic texts such as *I Enoch* and Daniel, which regard empires negatively, Jewish apocalypticism in late antiquity on the whole took a relatively positive view of empires. The culmination of history and the restoration of divine rule will come not through the destruction of empires but through an imperial triumph. A universal empire at the end of time will provide the means by which rule is ultimately handed over to God. And as in Christian apocalypticism, so also in Jewish texts the Roman Empire has an essential role to play in restoring the world to God. To be sure, the Roman Empire does not appear in an altogether positive light. Its rulers are wicked, and they persecute the Jewish people. But in eschatological terms, Rome is destined to make an essential contribution to the restoration of the kingdom of Israel. The Roman Empire and the kingdom of Israel share an eschatological synergy. Rome has held Israel's place for centuries, but ultimately it will return to Israel the universal dominion that is its true destiny, as its Anointed king will take over from the Last Emperor in a particularly Jewish form of supersessionism. Alternatively, some apocalyptic visions from this era looked instead for another empire that God would raise up to free Israel from Roman domination. In place of restoration through Jacob's brother Esau, some Jews seem to have believed that the sons of Ishmael might serve the divine purpose in restoring Abraham's patrimony. Yet in this case too, empire was not something negative that had to be destroyed in order to realize the return of divine rule and justice. Empire and imperial conquest were instrumental in bringing about the *eschaton* through their triumph and dominion.

### Zoroastrian Eschatology in the Sasanian Empire

Imperial eschatology was equally prominent in Sasanian religion, at least if we are to judge by the Zoroastrian apocalyptic literature that has survived.<sup>47</sup> There is at present a scholarly consensus that, despite their commitment to writing only in the ninth century, the apocalyptic traditions in these texts are significantly older. Indeed, as we noted in the first chapter, reference to some of the basic ideas found in these writings by ancient Greek and Latin sources seems to indicate their circulation as early as the fourth century BCE.<sup>48</sup> While we will leave aside the thorny and much-debated question of whether Persian

apocalypticism inspired the development of similar ideas within early Judaism,<sup>49</sup> there is little question that these apocalyptic texts reflect the eschatological beliefs of late ancient Zoroastrianism. The period of Sasanian rule was the time when the most important concepts of the Zoroastrian faith received their final formulation, and it is also a time when our evidence for reconstructing Iranian religious faith and practice is particularly good.<sup>50</sup> And as was the case with Christianity in Byzantium, so in Sasanian Iran Zoroastrianism was—for the most part—closely aligned with imperial authority.<sup>51</sup> According to the *Denkard*, a religious compendium first compiled under the Sasanians, “kingship is religion and religion is kingship . . . kingship is arranged based on religion and religion based on kingship.”<sup>52</sup> While there may have been more religious diversity in actual faith and practice than the Sasanian rulers would have liked, they nevertheless promoted an official version of the faith in which religion was closely intertwined with imperial rule. The official political ideology, at least, seems to have been one in which religion and the state were one.

Eschatological expectation was seemingly central to Zoroastrianism from its very earliest history. According to its various cosmogonic myths, the fate of the universe was fixed at the time of its creation for a period of either 9,000 or 12,000 years, although some reports instead propose 7,000 years.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, these apocalyptic hopes were grafted to a political ideology that envisioned the universal rule of a Zoroastrian empire, both at the beginning and at the end of history. If kingship and religion were one, so too were eschatology and cosmogony: as Anders Hultgård notes, “there is an inner coherence between the beginning and the end that is unique to the Iranian worldview.”<sup>54</sup> In truth, it is often difficult to study the history of Zoroastrianism, since the state of the relevant sources and their transmission are notoriously complex. Likewise, it seems that there was frequently more diversity of belief and practice involved than we can accurately gauge from these sources.<sup>55</sup> Nevertheless, we can with some confidence describe the basic mythological principles of Zoroastrian cosmogony and eschatology, particularly in the Sasanian period, on the basis of the various Middle Persian texts that were committed to writing in the early centuries of Islamic rule.<sup>56</sup>

According to Zoroastrian belief, the world came into existence over the course of several millennia as the result of a cosmic conflict between two eternal principles, Ohrmazd (Ahura Mazda in Avestan, which means “Lord Wisdom”), whom the Zoroastrians serve, and his ignorant, maleficent counterpart, Ahriman (Angra Mainyu in Avestan, meaning “Evil Spirit”).<sup>57</sup>

Although these two powers were both limitless, they were nonetheless separated by a void. Since Ohrmazd was omniscient, he knew not only that this other destructive and deficient spirit existed but also that he would attack the realm of light, where Ohrmazd dwelled. Ohrmazd recognized that the only way to rid the universe of Ahriman and of evil was to engage this wicked god and his forces in battle and defeat them. Being wise and knowledgeable, Ohrmazd determined to engage Ahriman on favorable terms, and so he created the universe as an arena and an instrument for their combat. Initially Ohrmazd created the universe in an ideal, spiritual form, and for three thousand years it remained in this immaterial state. Ahriman, for his part, similarly fashioned “a terrible counter-creation” filled with demons and evil spirits that would serve him in the coming battle.<sup>58</sup> Near the end of this three-thousand-year period, Ahriman approached the realm of light with his demonic host and threatened to destroy Ohrmazd’s spiritual creation. Ohrmazd knew that he would have to fix a time limit for their battle, since otherwise it would be impossible to be rid of Ahriman and evil for good. Ohrmazd “therefore offered him peace and proposed a treaty, knowing that thereby he would make the Evil Spirit powerless in the end. To that purpose Ohrmazd created out of eternal boundless Time historical time, which was to be limited in extension (also called ‘time of long dominion’). The decisive battle would be postponed for nine thousand years, and during that limited time the sovereignty would be shared between Ohrmazd and Ahreman.”<sup>59</sup>

Ahriman accepted the terms, since, in his ignorance, he did not know that the outcome would be his defeat and destruction. When Ohrmazd revealed to him that this agreement had sealed his ultimate demise, Ahriman fell into a stupor that lasted for another three thousand years. It was at this point, then, that Ohrmazd gave the universe its material form, as an arena for temporal battle between good and evil. He established at the center of this creation humankind, endowed with an immortal soul and the free will to choose between good and evil. When Ahriman awoke from his slumber, he attacked Ohrmazd’s material creation, which up until this point had existed in a state of purity and perfection. Thus began the state of “mixture,” that is, the temporal mixture of good and evil in the arena of the material creation that is the present state of our existence. The creation, which, as the work of Ohrmazd, is inherently good, itself resists the invasive forces of evil, and Ohrmazd invites human beings to join him in the struggle against evil. The Zoroastrian faith, then, is the means by which humankind cooperates with Ohrmazd and his host of righteous powers to fight against evil, in order to

achieve its ultimate destruction through the created universe. This state of mixture lasts for another three thousand years, at which point the prophet Zarathustra, or Zoroaster as he is known from Greek sources, appears and sets in motion the final period of three thousand years that will culminate in the destruction of evil, the resurrection of the dead, and the restoration of the world to its original purity and perfection. This last millennial cycle, which includes the present age, is the era of eschatology, during which the Zoroastrian vision of the end of history and the destruction of evil is being played out, albeit over the course of three thousand years. This final age of the world's existence is itself divided into three discrete eschatological periods, each of which will last for a thousand years and will culminate with the appearance of three different savior figures, all of whom are Zoroaster's descendants. Slowly but steadily these three ages march toward the fulfillment of the created order's purpose: the ultimate and complete annihilation of evil.

The first of these eschatological millennia, which includes the present era, began with Zoroaster's revelation, and during this age the defeat of Ahri-man and his demons is starting to be realized. This millennium is further subdivided into four successive and declining "metallic ages," a feature that has invited comparison with the very similar schema found in the biblical apocalypse of Daniel. The initial golden age commenced with Zoroaster and the enlightened rule of his imperial patron, Wištāsp, one of the last rulers from the primeval and revered Kayāniān (or Kayanid) dynasty, who accepted Zoroaster's teaching. The three remaining ages are linked with the Sasanian dynasty, which is not surprising since this was the time when these texts seem to have been redacted into versions very closely resembling their current form. The silver age began with the establishment of the Sasanian dynasty (in 225 CE), and the steel age belongs to king Khosrow I (531–79), after whom would follow an age of iron mixed with clay, during which the demons and the wicked people who served them would seem to gain the upper hand. This time will see Iran invaded and dominated by foreign powers, along with great social upheaval and disorder.<sup>60</sup> Toward the end of this final period, however, certain messianic figures were expected to appear, in advance of the expected savior of this age.

The first forerunner of the savior's appearance and the end of the era is a figure named Bahrām, or more properly Kay Bahrām: his title identifies him with the mythical Kayāniān rulers of old, who would reappear near the millennium's end.<sup>61</sup> Following soon after him will be another messianic figure named Pišōtan, who is the eschatological son of Zoroaster's royal patron

Wištāsp.<sup>62</sup> Together Kay Bahrām and Pišōtan will overcome the foreign powers and forces of evil, preparing the way for the appearance of this millennium's savior, Zoroaster's son Ušedar, who will then inaugurate the second eschatological millennium. Since the present world stands at a rather late moment within the millennium of Zoroaster, according to the Sasanians and modern Zoroastrians alike, these are the most immediately anticipated eschatological events, expected to take place in the near future.<sup>63</sup> The appearance of Kay Bahrām and Pišōtan will mark the decisive turning point of history, and because Kay Bahrām was the first eschatological figure to emerge, his arrival "was the most important event expected by Zoroastrians" on the eve of Islam.<sup>64</sup>

According to the *Zand ī Wahman Yasn*, one of the most important Zoroastrian apocalypses,<sup>65</sup> near the end of the present millennium a large army of the Greeks (Romans/Byzantines) will come upon Iran, along with Turks and Huns, bringing with them great afflictions for its people.<sup>66</sup> There will be three great battles, resulting in the Iranian Empire's defeat and its submission. Just when things look especially bleak, however, Kay Bahrām will be born under the sign of a falling star. Once he reaches the age of thirty, he will gather a band of virtuous men. Riding forth from the east, they will enter the Iranian lands with banners held high, and after defeating the Greeks and the other invaders, they will restore the sovereignty of the Iranian Empire.<sup>67</sup> Kay Bahrām will, according to another closely related tradition in the *Bundahišn*, "grab authority over *Hind*, Byzantium, *Turkestān*, and every and each region."<sup>68</sup> The similarities between this Iranian eschatological ruler and the *Tiburtine Sibyl's* Last Emperor are certainly striking, to say the least. After Kay Bahrām's victory over Iran's enemies and his establishment of its universal reign, Ohrmazd will then call forth Pišōtan, Kay Wištāsp's immortal son who has been waiting in hiding at Kangdez, the mythical and paradisiacal stronghold of the ancient Kayāniāns. Ohrmazd will instruct him to ride forth into the Iranian lands in order to purify the holy places that had been desecrated and to restore the worship of Ohrmazd, which he will accomplish with the help of 150 righteous men. Then, with the Iranian Empire and its religion properly restored, the first of the three eschatological saviors, Ušedar, will appear and usher in a new age.<sup>69</sup>

When Ušedar arrives, Kay Bahrām and Pišōtan will have already done most of the heavy lifting, as it were. They will have saved Iran from its foreign and demonic enemies and restored it to its destined greatness. With the Iranian Empire now rightfully regnant in the world, Ušedar will then appear

as more of a spiritual, rather than political, figure. He will once again reveal the true religion that Zoroaster had taught before him and begin the process of leading the world back to its final perfection. The forces of evil will be in retreat, until a final calamity erupts toward the end of this second millennium, when one of the demons will bring affliction to humankind and the rest of creation. Nonetheless, there seems to be some significant variation among the different apocalypses as to how this millennium will end and the final one begin, in both the timing of this calamity and its cause. Indeed, some accounts do not envision any calamity at all in the transition to the last millennium.<sup>70</sup> Some texts, however, expect the appearance of another primordial king at the end of this era, Kay Khosrow, who, like Kay Bahrām and Pišōtan before him, belongs to the ancient Kayāniān dynasty. Kay Khosrow will play a key role in events leading up to the transition and the emergence of the new millennium's savior, the second of Zoroaster's savior-sons, Ušedarmāh.<sup>71</sup> Like Ušedar before him, Ušedarmāh will again bring a revelation from Ohrmazd, and according to some accounts Pišōtan will reappear to serve as his priestly counselor.<sup>72</sup> With this, the third and final millennium begins, and near its end, the ferocious dragon Azdahāg, who had been imprisoned for thousands of years, will break free and devour one-third of humankind and one-third of the earth's animals. Ohrmazd will then awaken the legendary Karsāsp, who will slay the dragon, so that the final of Zoroaster's savior-sons will appear, Sōšāns.<sup>73</sup> At this point things will progress rather quickly to the End. After a final fifty-seven-year eschatological battle, the forces of evil and evil itself will be eliminated from the world, which will be restored to its original perfection, and the righteous dead will be resurrected to inhabit the renewed world in eternal bliss.<sup>74</sup>

### The Sasanian Empire and Zoroastrian Eschatology

The Sasanians came to power in part on a platform of religious reform, promising to restore the ancient teachings and practices of the Zoroastrian faith to a chosen empire that had strayed from these original ordinances.<sup>75</sup> There is some dispute, it is true, as to whether the religious program that the Sasanians advocated was actually a restoration of traditional Zoroastrianism or instead a new "orthodoxy" that was imposed on the empire with some resistance.<sup>76</sup> Nevertheless, it is clear that from beginning to end the Sasanians sought to harness traditional religious ideology in service to the political fortunes of

their dynasty. In late ancient Iran there was a deliberate fusion between religion and political authority, and as in late ancient Christianity and Judaism, *mutatis mutandis*, this involved a decisive eschatological role for the Iranian Empire. Following the eschatological narrative outlined above, the empire and its ruler were destined to play a pivotal part in the transition from the present millennium of Zoroaster to the new millennium that would begin with the appearance of Ušedar. Iranian triumph and universal sovereignty in the world were essential for these eschatological events to transpire.

As Richard Payne has recently explained, Zoroastrian “political cosmology” played a fundamental role in how the Sasanians governed the empire and projected their authority and legitimacy to its citizens. As he notes, the significance of this religious vision for understanding the politics and society of the Iranian Empire cannot be overestimated: “The empire was conceived as a vehicle—akin to Ohrmazd’s original creation—for organizing collective actions to maximize the contribution of humanity to the cosmological struggle. . . . Ērānšahr [i.e., the Iranian Empire] anchored what was a global restorative project in the territories that the Sasanians ruled.”<sup>77</sup> This political cosmology was thus also a political eschatology, since, as Payne also recognizes, in Sasanian religion “cosmological ideas were fundamentally intertwined with eschatology.”<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, this Zoroastrian political eschatology expected, much like the contemporary Roman version, a universal Iranian empire that would play a central role in unleashing the final events of history. The Iranian kings were heirs to the primordial kings of the earth, namely, the hoary Kayāniān rulers. Their conflation with Zoroaster’s primeval royal collaborators was itself a sign that at the end of this pivotal millennium, history was moving back toward the beginning, and thus, to its end. Moreover, the Sasanians understood themselves to be the rightful kings of not only Ērān (Iran) but also Anērān, that is, “non-Iran.” In Sasanian apocalypticism, it is expected that at the end of time all the kings of the earth will be brought into submission to the Iranian “king of kings” (Šāhān Šāh). This Sasanian idea of a cosmological kingship, as Payne explains, “was conceived historically and eschatologically as a mission stretching from the origins to the ends of the universe.”<sup>79</sup>

In late antiquity, it was important for the Sasanians to demonstrate the global purview of their authority as well as fulfillment of their cosmological obligation to spread good works in the world. One of the main ways that they achieved this, as Payne argues, was to provoke the Byzantines with repeated incursions so that they would be willing to pay a nominal sum for

peace. The Sasanians then would invoke these payments as evidence of Rome's submission to their universal authority. In this way, Sasanian hegemony was manifest without any need to conquer and subdue Rome.<sup>80</sup> Iran's cosmological kingship also found more concrete material expression in the famous early Sasanian reliefs at Naqš-e Rostam. These reliefs establish a clear visual parallel between the Sasanian kings and Ohrmazd, representing the king's triumph as paradigmatic of Ohrmazd's ultimate victory over evil. In the relief commemorating Ardašir's investiture, for instance, his victory over the last Arsacid king Ardawān, which began the Sasanian dynasty, is portrayed next to a representation of Ohrmazd riding his horse over a defeated Ahriman. As Matthew Canepa notes, "According to the composition's stark symmetry, Ardašir's victory over Ardawān in the worldly realm [*pad gētīg*] was not only an analogous prefiguration of Ohrmazd's final victory over Ahreman at the end of time, but in purifying the existence of this noxious evil audaciously implies that in doing so he in fact hastens that ultimate apocalyptic victory and return to the unmixed state."<sup>81</sup> The Iranian king's victory thus participates in and brings about Ohrmazd's final defeat of Ahriman. Similar compositions representing Ardašir's son Šāpūr are found in reliefs at Bīšāpūr and at Naqš-e Rostam, indicating the continued importance of this image in Sasanian monumental art. In Sasanian visual culture as well, then, the idea of the Iranian Empire's role in bringing about the *eschaton* was a significant theme.

By the later sixth century, however, this notion of the Iranian Empire as an active eschatological agent was no mere abstraction, not something imagined for some time in the far distant future. To the contrary, at the end of the sixth century and in the early seventh, the Sasanians were expecting these final events to be set in motion at any moment. By this point it had already in fact been more than a millennium since Zoroaster's prophecy, although by Sasanian reckoning, the current millennium was just about to come to a close. When the Sasanians came to power in 225 CE, there was a broad consensus that Zoroaster had lived a little over 300 years before Alexander. Since Alexander had lived 513 years before the first Sasanian king, Ardašir, this left precious little time for the new dynasty to exert itself, less than 200 years. Thinking that this was insufficient for his progeny to achieve their full greatness in the world, and also hoping to quell eschatological expectations that were in the air at the time, Ardašir decided to allow a couple more centuries before the coming change of millennia. Therefore, upon his accession to the throne, he proclaimed to his subjects that his rule began in the 260th year since Alexander. This meant, according to the new calculus, that the end of

Zoroaster's millennium was expected in 659 CE.<sup>82</sup> Of course, before the new millennium could begin, Kay Bahrām would appear to defeat Iran's enemies and restore its universal sovereignty. And then Pišōtan would need to emerge from hiding before Ušedar could usher in the new millennium. Such an eschatological timetable meant that in order for the millennium to end on schedule, Kay Bahrām could be expected to appear sometime around the turn of the seventh century to prepare the way. No doubt the social and political turmoil of the late sixth- and early seventh-century Near East fanned the flames of such expectations, as the centuries-old conflict between Rome and Iran grew increasingly hot.

Accordingly, it is not surprising in the least to find that near the end of the sixth century, a Persian nobleman named Bahrām VI Čōbīn seized the Iranian throne, and in doing so, he channeled the powerful—and looming—eschatological expectations that were linked to the Iranian king and empire, as Károly Czeglédý convincingly demonstrated over fifty years ago.<sup>83</sup> In the eyes of many contemporaries, Bahrām VI Čōbīn was “the Messiah promised in the sacred books of the Persians.”<sup>84</sup> The remnants of this apocalyptic coup survive especially in the Middle Persian text known as the *Jāmāsp Nāmag*, the “Story of Jāmāsp” (Jāmāsp was a legendary nobleman in Kay Wištāsp's court), but also in the *Zand ī Wahman Yasn* and the *Bundabišn*. The *Jāmāsp Nāmag* is itself part of a larger text known as the *Ayādgar ī Jāmāspīg*, a dialogue between Wištāsp and Jāmāsp in which the *Jāmāsp Nāmag* appears as the sixteenth chapter. The chapter's topic is the woes that will beset Iran toward the end of Zoroaster's millennium and Iran's deliverance from them by a royal savior. The general narrative structure is familiar from what we have already seen in the *Zand ī Wahman Yasn* and the *Bundabišn*. The Romans, Turks, and Arabs together will devastate the land, and the holy places will be desecrated. A savior king will then arise to liberate Iran and defeat its enemies, thus setting in motion the final events of the present millennium. Yet as Czeglédý demonstrates, in the *Jāmāsp Nāmag* these events are heavily overlaid with *vaticinia ex eventu* taken from the events of Bahrām VI Čōbīn's successful rebellion against the Sasanians in 590.

The arguments of Czeglédý's article are both complex and learned: the study of Middle Persian literature is, as is well known, an extremely difficult enterprise, owing largely to the problems of its highly deficient script. Compounding the difficulty is the fact that most of our information concerning Bahrām VI Čōbīn's rebellion in Persian sources has been subject to heavy pro-Sasanian redaction. Comparison with Greek, Armenian, and Chinese

sources is therefore essential. Bahrām's moment came late in 588, when the Hephthalites, the White Huns, invaded the eastern provinces of Iran.<sup>85</sup> Bahrām was chosen to lead the Iranian forces against these invaders, and his campaign was an overwhelming success. Bahrām first defeated the Western Turks, the main patrons of the Hephthalites, and then occupied the Hephthalite lands. For good measure, he continued his march to the land of the Eastern Turks, where he won a decisive victory, slaying the Turkish leader with his own bow. Bahrām returned home triumphant, bringing with him a seasoned force of veterans and an enormous treasure that required 250,000 camels to transport, at least according to the Middle Persian *Book of Kings* (*Khvatāy-nāmak*).<sup>86</sup> While this is surely an exaggeration, both the *Armenian Chronicle of 661* attributed to Sebeos and Theophylact of Simocatta similarly report Bahrām's acquisition of a vast treasure as a result of the campaign.<sup>87</sup> The emperor at the time, Hormozd IV, had recently instituted several measures that alienated many of the Iranian elites, and feeling threatened by the return of the victorious Bahrām, he removed him from his post and "sent him a chain and a spindle to show that he regarded him as a low slave 'as ungrateful as a woman.'"<sup>88</sup> Bahrām was at the moment immensely popular not only with his troops but with the public as well, and so he marched on the capital, Seleucia-Ctesiphon. Before he could arrive, a group of nobles staged a coup, slaying Hormozd and attempting to replace him with his son, Khosrow II Parvīz. Khosrow was no match for Bahrām, however, and he had to flee to Byzantine territory for his life as Bahrām and his forces entered the capital.

Bahrām, who was not a member of the Sasanian dynasty, proclaimed himself the king of kings in the summer of 590, claiming that the Sasanids had unjustly usurped rule from the Arsacids, the dynasty from which the Sasanids had seized power and to which Bahrām belonged.<sup>89</sup> Moreover, Bahrām shrewdly mobilized the potent eschatological expectation that was in the air to support his claim to the throne. The millennium of Zoroaster would soon come to a close, according to the established calendar, and Zoroastrian apocalyptic foretold deliverance through a savior figure who would be victorious over the Romans and Huns. Bahrām VI Čōbīn thus declared himself to be this messianic figure, identifying himself as the awaited savior, Kay Bahrām Varjāvand ("the glorious"): by restoring the Arsacid empire, he would inaugurate the new millennium with a renewed dynasty. As Payne observes, "Wahram VI Chobin introduced not merely a new dynasty, but also a restoration and re-inauguration of the cosmological order."<sup>90</sup> Moreover, it seems

likely that Bahrām also maintained descent from the ancient Kayāniāns, since a Kayanid lineage would have been essential for anyone who tried to rule the Iranian Empire at this time.<sup>91</sup> Nevertheless, the odds were stacked against Bahrām, and his messianic reign proved to be short-lived. Despite popular support from a number of quarters, many among the nobility and the clerical elites refused to recognize his legitimacy. Yet ultimately the Byzantine army was the source of Bahrām’s defeat. While in exile in Roman territory, Khosrow II secured Byzantine military support in exchange for territorial concessions. With an army of 40,000 Byzantine troops, 12,000 Armenians, and 8,000 Iranians, according to the various sources, he marched against Bahrām in 591, engaging him and defeating him near Urmia. Bahrām fled into exile among the Turks, whose ruler welcomed him into his service. Before long, however, Khosrow II had Bahrām assassinated, although many of his followers believed instead that he had gone into hiding and would one day return.<sup>92</sup>

Although it was relatively brief, Bahrām’s reign left a lasting and significant imprint on Iranian apocalyptic literature, surely a consequence of his efforts to herald his triumph over Iran’s enemies and the illegitimate Sasanians as the fulfillment of Zoroastrian political eschatology and the beginning of the new millennium. Czeglédy identifies what appear to be three separate *vaticinia ex eventu* in the *Jāmāsp Nāmag* that reflect the events of Bahrām VI Čōbīn’s attempt to proclaim himself the messianic king of the new millennium. Not surprisingly, however, these accounts often cast Bahrām in a negative light, reflecting the political interests of the Sasanians, whose legitimacy he tried to challenge. His failed effort to seize the reins of power and of history was turned into an apocalyptic prophecy that was itself a sign that the end of the millennium had drawn near, as was indeed the case according to the Sasanian calendar. The fact that the *Jāmāsp Nāmag* preserves three separate prophecies reflecting Bahrām’s reign is not surprising. The *Jāmāsp Nāmag* collects a variety of late Sasanian apocalyptic traditions, and its compiler, who was working in the early Islamic period, was likely not aware that each of these prophecies referred to the same events.<sup>93</sup>

The first such prophecy foretells the appearance of a “false pretender” near the end of the millennium. This “insignificant and obscure” man will rise up from the land of Khorasan, a region in Central Asia on Iran’s northern and eastern frontier, and he will seize power but will disappear soon thereafter in the middle of his reign. Iran will then be taken over by foreigners but will emerge resurgent and conquer many Roman territories under a

“victorious” king. When this victorious king dies, however, a state of decline and misery follow just before the end of Zoroaster’s millennium, as the Romans, Turks, and Arabs will devastate Iran. Then the eschatological battle between Mihr (i.e., Mithra) and Khesm (“Anger”) begins, as the millennial wheel makes its turn. Bahrām VI Čōbīn was the false pretender who arose from Khorasan in these last days only to disappear shortly thereafter. The subsequent conquest by foreigners refers to Khosrow II’s restoration to power by the Byzantine army. Khosrow II Parvīz, “the victorious,” would eventually return the favor by conquering and occupying much of the Roman Empire at the beginning of the seventh century. But these gains were short-lived, and as the prophecy predicts, the dissolution of the Iranian Empire soon followed, first as a result of Heraclius’s campaign and then as a result of the Islamic conquests.<sup>94</sup> A second brief prophecy about this “false pretender” follows immediately, although in this case the usurper will come from “the south.” Nevertheless, as Czeglédý explains, this too is a reference to Bahrām VI Čōbīn, whom many believed had actually come from Fārs in the south. Furthermore, this usurper will rally his army in Zabulistan, a region in today’s central Afghanistan, a reference to Bahrām’s victories in the land of the Hephthalites, whence he rode forth to claim the throne.<sup>95</sup> As Czeglédý notes, a similar prophecy about the false pretender Bahrām appears also in the *Bundahišn*.<sup>96</sup>

The *Jāmāsp Nāmag*’s third vaticination about Bahrām, however, is the most extraordinary, particularly since it not only regards Bahrām positively but also predicts his victory over Khosrow II and the Byzantines. We have here, it would seem, an actual prophecy from Bahrām’s reign that reflects the apocalyptic idiom of his rule and is relatively free from Sasanian redaction. According to this prophecy, Mihr (Mithra) will appear to a man in Padiškhwārgar (Tabaristan, on the Caspian Sea), directing him to deliver a message to the king of Padiškhwārgar.<sup>97</sup> Mihr will instruct the messenger to ask the king why he supports the “deaf and blind king” and to urge him to take up arms and seize power, as his ancestors had done. The king of Padiškhwārgar will respond by asking, “How should I be able to exercise dominion, since I have not the troops and army and treasure and generals such as my father and forefathers?”<sup>98</sup> The envoy will then deliver the treasure and wealth of his ancestors to the king, the treasure of Afrāsīyāb, a primeval king of ancient Tūrān in the Zoroastrian tradition. Tūrān, it so happens, is a region in Central Asia that corresponds roughly with the lands in which Bahrām VI Čōbīn campaigned. After obtaining this treasure, the king of

Padiškhwārgar will raise up an army in Zabulistan, again in this same area of Central Asia, and will march against his enemies. When the Turks, Arabs, and Romans learn of this great treasure, they will join forces in an attempt to seize them from the king. The king of Padiškhwārgar will then march with his army into the heart of the Iranian Empire and meet his enemies on the very plain where Kay Wištāsp long ago fought against the White Huns, that is, the Hephthalites, “in a white forest.”<sup>99</sup> The king of Padiškhwārgar will triumph, killing so many of the enemy that it will be impossible to count them, after which Pišōtan will appear from Kangdez, so that Zoroaster’s millennium will end and Ušedar’s will begin.

The stamp of Bahrām VI Čōbīn’s messianic reign on these traditions is unmistakable. Bahrām’s ancestral homeland lay in immediate proximity to Padiškhwārgar, which surely is no coincidence. Likewise, the messenger urges the king of Padiškhwārgar to seize power because his ancestors had been kings, undoubtedly an allusion to Bahrām’s Arsacid lineage, as Czeglédý notes. The fact that the reigning king was “deaf and blind” is apparently a reference to the fact that Hormozd IV was blinded when he was removed from the throne. The king of Padiškhwārgar’s acquisition of the great treasures of Afrāsiyāb is a clear reference to “the vast booty that Bahrām acquired after the defeat of the Hephthalites and Turks.”<sup>100</sup> The similarities between this king of Padiškhwārgar and Bahrām VI Čōbīn are indeed striking, although there is one substantial difference. In contrast to the actual Bahrām VI Čōbīn and the “false pretender” of the other prophecies, the king of Padiškhwārgar actually succeeds in fulfilling the messianic expectation by delivering Iran from its enemies and restoring a legitimate kingship. In this prophecy Bahrām, as the king of Padiškhwārgar, is not a false pretender but the eschatological emperor.<sup>101</sup> In the promise of his triumph, we meet, Czeglédý explains, a genuine prediction, which, it turns out, guessed the outcome wrongly. Yet in the eyes of this prophet, “the victorious Prince of the Last Days, the King of Patašxwārgar, *alias* Bahrām Čōbīn, is the heir to the legitimate reign of the Kayanians.”<sup>102</sup>

Perhaps most extraordinary, however, is the name given to this king of Padiškhwārgar. Although the *Jāmāsp Nāmag* does not provide a name, the equivalent prophecies in the *Zand ī Wabman Yasn* and the *Bundabišn* identify the eschatological king of Padiškhwārgar as none other than Kay Bahrām, the mythic forerunner of the apocalypse mentioned above.<sup>103</sup> In this name, Czeglédý notes, “the motifs of Bahrām’s history and the ancient apocalyptic elements are most perfectly fused. Of course, no plainer allusion to Bahrām’s

history is conceivable, while, at the same time, the name *Vabrām* (*Vərəṭragna*), in the ancient apocalyptic nomenclature, is the customary and well-known expression of hope that the eschatological victory will be achieved for Ērān by the Genius of Victory himself, Vahrām.” Furthermore, “the prophecy concerning Kay Vahrām, as it does not betray a knowledge of Bahrām’s defeat, must have been composed under the impression of Bahrām’s overwhelming victory, in 590, very probably in the circle of Bahrām’s Mobad partisans.”<sup>104</sup> Quite possibly, when Bahrām fled into Turkish exile, his devout followers believed that he had merely gone into hiding and would soon return to fulfill his eschatological role. Such expectation would only have added to his identification with the messianic figure Kay Bahrām, who would soon reappear along with Pišōtan.<sup>105</sup>

## Conclusion

Imperial eschatology was therefore not limited to the Christians of late antiquity. Rather, it was a pervasive element of the religious cultures of the late ancient Near East, especially in the late sixth and early seventh centuries. The Jews of the later Roman Empire and the early Islamic period shared with the Christians a conviction that they were living in the last days, on the verge of the climax of history. Jerusalem was the main stage for this emerging apocalyptic cycle, and much like the Christians, the Jews similarly believed that the Roman Empire and its emperor had pivotal roles to play in the eschatological process. Even if Rome regularly oppressed and persecuted the Jews, in Jewish as in Christian eschatology, the Roman Empire’s victory was often central to the unfolding divine plan for the end of time. In many Jewish texts, we find a somewhat more positive estimation of Rome’s eschatological role, in which the Roman Empire, as Jacob’s brother Esau, is regarded as a sort of eschatological caretaker, whose imperial triumph would pave the way for God’s divine rule and Israel’s restoration under the Messiah. Although Rome had temporarily usurped God’s favor and universal rule from its brother Israel (thus reversing, if only for a time, Jacob’s deceptive theft of Esau’s birthright), Rome and Israel shared a common apocalyptic destiny. Other Jewish sources expect deliverance through the triumph of another people, who by Divine Providence will liberate them and their land from Roman oppression. In some cases, as in the *Sefer Eliyyahu*, it was the Iranian Empire that was expected to bring about Israel’s redemption, while in others, as in the *Secrets of*

*Rabbi Shim'on b. Yoḥai*, Muhammad's community of the Believers was imagined in this role.

In Zoroastrian apocalypticism, the Iranian Empire was destined to play a central role in the cosmic struggle between good and evil. Indeed, Iran's ultimate triumph and universal rule were necessary to move the cycle of the ages from Zoroaster's millennium, the present era, to the next millennium of the savior Ušedar. Thus the end of this age would not come through the destruction of empire; in Iranian eyes, as for contemporary Christian and Jews, the empire's success was essential to achieving the divine will in the climax of history. The Iranian Empire, as we have seen, would play a pivotal role in Ohrmazd's ultimate triumph over Ahriman. In the final years of the sixth century, Bahrām VI Čōbīn came to power by claiming to restore legitimate dynastic rule and imperial revival in advance of the impending end of the age. While many of Bahrām's compatriots obviously refused to recognize his messianic claims, his following was such that it left a significant impact on the apocalyptic traditions of late Sasanian Zoroastrianism. And on the whole, these apocalyptic traditions reveal a powerful sense that the end of the millennium had come and that a victorious Iranian Empire would soon lead the transition into the new millennium.

If we may assume, then, that Muhammad and his early followers were at all influenced by the religious and political ideas current among the Christians and Jews of Byzantium and the Zoroastrians of late ancient Iran, these undoubtedly must have included both imminent eschatological belief and an eschatological understanding of empire. For over a century before the rise of Islam the Byzantine Christians had been expecting the impending end of the world, and they believed that this would be achieved through the triumph and expansion of the Christian Roman Empire. During the years in which Muhammad was active in founding his new religious movement, these beliefs had only intensified, reaching their peak, it would seem, during the reign of Heraclius. The same is equally true of Judaism in this age, which saw in the dramatic victories of the Iranian, Roman, and Arab empires evidence that the Messiah would soon appear to restore the kingdom of Israel. In Iran, the date of the millennium's close was just decades away, and accordingly, the empire's revival and global hegemony were destined to commence at any moment. Bahrām VI Čōbīn's brief messianic reign and Iran's conquest and occupation of the Roman Near East under Khosrow II fueled expectations that the Iranian Empire was fulfilling its eschatological destiny. Even among the Mandaeans we find contemporary expectations of the *eschaton's* impending arrival through imperial triumph.<sup>106</sup>

To be sure, there were no doubt those in this period who did not succumb to the eschatological anticipations evident in these sources. For example, as we saw in the previous chapter, the sixth-century historian Agathias explicitly rejected the apocalyptic expectations of his fellow citizens even as he catalogued them for posterity. Likewise, the two commentaries on the Apocalypse of John from this period, the early sixth-century commentary by Oikoumenios and the commentary of Andrew of Caesarea from around the turn of the seventh century, both agree in emphasizing that the end of the world was in fact not at hand.<sup>107</sup> Nevertheless, there is at the same time persistent and diffuse evidence in western Asia and the eastern Mediterranean world of widespread belief that the *eschaton* would soon arrive and furthermore that it would be ushered in through the triumph of a divinely chosen empire. Such expectations seem only to have intensified as we move closer in time to the emergence of Islam, and the fusion of these eschatological beliefs with the recent conflict between Rome and Persia seemingly ensures that this apocalyptic conviction was not merely the opinion of a handful of individuals but was being played out in broad strokes on the world stage for all to see. Therefore, we may be safe in assuming, it would seem, that the immediate political and religious context offered by the Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians of the late ancient Near East for the beginnings of Islam indicates that both imminent eschatology and belief in the realization of eschatology through empire and conquest were widely prevalent.<sup>108</sup> One would therefore only expect that these ideas had a significant impact on the eschatological beliefs of Muhammad and his early followers, as well as on their understanding of the religious significance of their empire and conquests.

## Chapter 5

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# “The Reign of God Has Come”: Eschatology and Community in Early Islam

For much of the past century, scholarship on Muhammad and the beginnings of Islam has shown something of an aversion to eschatology.<sup>1</sup> Despite the eschatological urgency that pulses across the Qurʾān, scholars have often been reluctant to embrace its persistent forecast of impending judgment and the end of the world. There is instead a marked tendency to view earliest Islam as a movement that was more “pragmatic” than “apocalyptic.” Rather than finding a prophet and his community who believed themselves to be living in the shadow of the *eschaton*, Muhammad and his earliest followers are often presented as having pursued very practical goals that were directed toward effecting social and political change. They aimed to root out social and economic injustice from their city, or to organize an Arab “nativist” movement,<sup>2</sup> or to build an empire, or some combination of these civic achievements. To be sure, there were religious aspirations as well, and they were certainly important, but these beliefs were thoroughly enmeshed in broader social concerns, focusing primarily on monotheism and the social ethics of a life and a community that are righteous before God. Indeed, in some modern interpretations, Muhammad’s religious ideas seem not infrequently subordinate to his broader social agenda.

It is worth noting, however, such was not always the case. Many of the earliest Western scholars of formative Islam, including Snouck Hurgronje, Frants Buhl, Tor Andrae, and, most notoriously, Paul Casanova, saw the imminent judgment of the Hour as the fundamental core of Muhammad’s

religious message.<sup>3</sup> Hurgronje, for instance, concluded that the early Muslims regarded Muhammad’s appearance itself as a sign that the end of the world was at hand and did not believe that Muhammad would die before the Hour’s arrival. Accordingly, Hurgronje and many others after him identified the coming end of the world as the primary inspiration and the fundamental theme of Muhammad’s preaching. Other elements of his message were “more or less accessories” to his pressing concern with the world’s impending judgment and destruction, which was “the essential element of Muhammad’s preaching.”<sup>4</sup> Indeed, in much Western scholarship from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there is a clear tendency toward viewing Muhammad primarily as an eschatological prophet, culminating in Paul Casanova’s unfortunately neglected study, *Mohammed et la fin du monde*, an admittedly flawed work that nonetheless overflows with profound insight concerning the beginnings of Islam.<sup>5</sup> Only now after many decades of dismissal has this monograph finally begun to receive the attention that it deserves, as a handful of scholars have reconsidered the unmistakable and pervasive evidence of imminent eschatological belief lying at the very heart of earliest Islam.<sup>6</sup>

Nevertheless, recognition of the confidence that Muhammad and his earliest followers appear to have held in the impending final judgment could seem to stand at odds with their obvious political ambitions and achievements. How, one might ask, could it have possibly made sense for the members of this new religious movement to pledge their lives to the development and expansion of their nascent polity in the world if in fact they believed that the world itself was soon to pass away? What indeed would be the point of all the toil and bloodshed involved in building an empire that they were certain would soon vanish with the coming reign of God? For similar reasons, no doubt, the contemporary revival of Islamic imperial apocalypticism in the “Islamic State” (i.e., ISIS) can seem equally puzzling to outsiders. As William McCants notes in his recent study, “The Islamic State combined two of the most powerful yet contradictory ideas in Islam—the return of the Islamic Empire and the end of the world—into a mission and a message.”<sup>7</sup> Yet as contradictory as these two convictions may seem to many people in the modern West, when considered within the broader religious context of Mediterranean late antiquity, not only are they seen to be complementary, but they are in fact two sides of the same coin. Early Christianity in many respects affords an important analog for understanding the eschatology of formative Islam, not in the least for its notion of an impending reign of God that was

already beginning to unfold in the formation of the community. Yet even more immediately relevant is the imperial understanding of eschatology that, as we have seen in the preceding chapters, was widely embraced by the Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians of late antiquity. It was relatively commonplace in the late ancient Near East to believe that the *eschaton* would be realized through imperial triumph and, moreover, that the end of history was threateningly imminent. Given the prevalence of such eschatological expectations among contemporary Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians, it certainly comes as no surprise to find that earliest Islam also was largely defined by a fusion of these two principles: eschatology and empire.

### The Practical Muhammad: Social Reformer, Political Organizer, Empire Builder

The twentieth century's turn away from the urgent eschatology of the Qur'an and other early materials seems to have begun especially with Richard Bell's 1925 Gunning Lectures at the University of Edinburgh, subsequently published as *The Origin of Islam in Its Christian Environment*.<sup>8</sup> Bell's influential study radically diminishes the role of eschatology in Muhammad's preaching in order to conjure forth instead a pragmatic and profound prophet of ethical monotheism, whose timeless message did not concern the imminent end of the world but was rather a call "to recognize and worship the one true God and show thankfulness for His bounties." According to Bell, Muhammad admittedly did experiment for a brief time with eschatological warnings, hoping that they might frighten the Meccans into following him, but this too was all part of his rational and pragmatic strategy for spreading the message of ethical monotheism. Once he had successfully achieved authority over a community of followers in Medina, any concern with the last judgment passed "into the realm of assured dogma in Muhammad's mind."<sup>9</sup> In this way Bell demotes the powerful eschatological urgency of the Qur'an to mere remnants of a passing phase in Muhammad's ministry, making them vestiges of this "pragmatic-minded" prophet's strategic effort to persuade his audience to embrace his message.

Many other scholars since Bell have similarly imagined Muhammad as a pragmatic and eschatologically patient social reformer who sought primarily to spread belief in a benevolent creator and to promote the virtues of an ethical life lived in accordance with God's merciful providence. Nevertheless, it is

perhaps Bell’s pupil Montgomery Watt who bears the most responsibility for the prevalence of this non-eschatological portrait of Muhammad. Watt follows his *Doktorvater* closely in assigning a decidedly minimal role to eschatology in Muhammad’s religious system. Like Bell, Watt identifies a handful of Qur’anic passages as the earliest, and on this basis he determines that Muhammad’s original—and thus most authentic—teachings concerned the benevolence and power of the Creator, without any warnings of proximate divine judgment.<sup>10</sup> And when Muhammad would later turn to address the theme of divine judgment, according to Watt the passages in question do not expect its imminent arrival but rather describe either temporal chastisements or a distant final judgment that will come “at some unspecified future time.”<sup>11</sup> Watt’s effective erasure of imminent eschatology from the Qur’ān thus allows him to transform its eschatological herald into the prophet of social reform for which his work is so well known. Rather than warning before the world’s imminent judgment and destruction, Watt’s Muhammad instead advanced a vision for the world’s transformation and improvement that aimed to bring social and economic justice to those on the margins of society.

Watt’s views have particularly taken hold over much Western scholarship on early Islam, to the effect that they reflect a kind of “secular vulgate” concerning the period of origins,<sup>12</sup> and countless authors have continued to replicate his portrait of Muhammad as a social and economic reformer with little real concern for an imminent final judgment. F. E. Peters and Tilman Nagel, for instance, in their biographies of Muhammad both present him as pursuing a primarily social agenda, interpreting the Qur’ān’s statements about eschatology as referring to events that will take place only in the distant future. It is in fact rather remarkable—and also quite telling—that Peters does not even once mention the eschatological Hour in his study *Muhammad and the Origins of Islam*.<sup>13</sup> This tendency is even more pronounced in more popular works on Muhammad and early Islam, by authors such as Karen Armstrong, Tariq Ramadan, Omid Safi, and Asma Afsaruddin, where the Qur’ān’s emphasis on imminent eschatology has often been obscured to the point of invisibility. For instance, Tariq Ramadan’s *In the Footsteps of the Prophet* mentions the Hour only once, in a *ḥadīth* that is cited as evidence of Muhammad’s concern for the environment and his advocacy of an “upstream ecology.”<sup>14</sup> Safi’s biography identifies Muhammad as the initiator of “the Muhammadi Revolution,” a revolution of spiritual awakening and social reform that aimed to transform first the heart and then the social order. This Muhammad was not, it seems, especially concerned with the impending

Hour but rather with “the suffering of the poor and downtrodden in his society.”<sup>15</sup> Likewise, Afsaruddin identifies Muhammad’s clear and persistent message as a call for “egalitarianism and social justice” and a concern for “the suffering of the poor and downtrodden in his society.”<sup>16</sup> One would never know from reading such books that the impending judgment of the Hour is in fact the second most prominent theme of the Qur’ān.<sup>17</sup>

This persistent representation of Muhammad as a champion of social and economic reform at the expense of strong Qur’ānic evidence indicating belief in impending final judgment is highly reminiscent of the nineteenth-century “Liberal” biographies of Jesus, as I have noted elsewhere.<sup>18</sup> Presumably these portraits of Muhammad arise from a similar concern to discover a figure who can be more immediately relevant to the modern age, offering an inspiring call to oppose social injustice and establish economic equality instead of a mistaken forecast of impending doom. Yet as Robert Hoyland remarks, “Such opinions reflect an attempt to present Islam more positively in a world in which Islamophobia has been growing. But such apologetic aims, though noble, are out of place in works of history.”<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, the study of early Islam has thus far been largely shielded from the kind of historical criticism and skepticism that characterizes the study of formative Christianity and Judaism (among other religions). When we apply identical approaches to the eschatological traditions of the Qur’ān, it becomes rather clear that Muhammad and his earliest followers, like Jesus and the earliest Christians, seem to have believed that they were living in the final moments of history, at the dawn of the *eschaton*. And as is the case with the eschatological sayings of Jesus, the Qur’ān’s imminent eschatology, when examined using similar criteria, offers one of the most promising avenues for reconstructing the teachings of the “historical Muhammad” and the religious beliefs of the community that he founded.

Other scholars, however, have advanced a slightly different model for discovering a non-eschatological Muhammad, whom they present more in the mold of a political visionary and empire builder rather than a prophet of social justice. A number of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scholars, for instance, saw in Muhammad and his followers an Arab nationalist movement in which religion played a merely accidental role. “Traditionally,” as Peter Webb has recently noted, “early Islam has been interpreted as an Arab ‘national movement,’ its success explained by assuming the existence of pre-Islamic Arab communal cohesion, under the speculation that religious belief of itself would not have facilitated the unprecedentedly rapid ‘Arab conquests’

in the decades after Muhammad.<sup>20</sup> In its crudest terms, this perspective imagines Muhammad as crassly using religion to manipulate the Arabs into uniting under his leadership and making war to expand the Arab empire.<sup>21</sup> Of course, the two views of Muhammad as a social reformer and an empire builder are not entirely incompatible, and many scholars, such as Watt, have offered some combination of these perspectives.<sup>22</sup> Yet in many respects this political perspective has a great deal in common with the idea of Muhammad as a champion of social and economic justice. Muhammad and his early followers still have as their principal goal a very “this-worldly” program that aims at lasting change within the existing social and political order. In this case, rather than seeking primarily to uplift the poor and oppressed, Muhammad is instead cast as a cunning political operator, whose wildly successful plan was to unify the Arabs of the Arabian Peninsula into a powerful polity, with aspirations of empire just over the horizon if not already present in his agenda. While there is perhaps some question as to whether Muhammad had such a vision of Arab political unity while he was still in Mecca, with his move to Medina, according to such interpretations, his political genius quickly began to emerge.<sup>23</sup>

A recent example of this more “secular” understanding of Muhammad’s polity and its expansion appears, albeit with significantly more nuance, in Hoyland’s study of the Islamic conquests, *In God’s Path*. According to Hoyland, the conquests were (despite the book’s title) driven not by so much religious beliefs but instead primarily by political and economic interests. Hoyland explains the rise of what would become the Islamic polity largely without reference to religious belief, maintaining that the expansion and success of Muhammad’s followers should be understood as something akin to the Germanic migrations (i.e., “barbarian invasions”) in late ancient Europe. The “so-called” Islamic conquests,<sup>24</sup> then, were not in fact inspired by the religious convictions of Muhammad and his followers. Rather, they were the result of Arabian ethnogenesis and a vacuum of power in the early seventh-century Near East that was itself largely a result of the final wars between Rome and Iran. Therefore Muhammad’s religious teaching, while not entirely unimportant, was ultimately no more significant in inspiring his followers to push northward into Syria and Palestine than was the Arian faith of the Goths in driving them to invade the Roman Empire.<sup>25</sup> While Muhammad’s religious message likely played a supplemental role in the community’s formation, providing it with cohesion through a new monotheist ideology and comprehensive social ethics, in such a view Muhammad’s preaching had

very little to do with the expansion of his followers outside of the Arabian Peninsula and their emergence as an empire.

To be sure, there is no doubt that protracted wars between Rome and Iran during the late sixth and early seventh centuries had much to do with the success of Muhammad's followers in invading the Near East. Rome had effectively destroyed the Iranian Empire and in the process had weakened itself significantly. The Roman Empire was more vulnerable than it had been for some time as a result of dealing Iran a knockout blow and was not in a strong position to defend its eastern frontier. Likewise, the coalescence and consolidation of a great number of previously divided Arab tribes around Muhammad's leadership certainly played a key role in his community's victory. Yet these reasons for their success do not necessarily explain why they chose to invade the Roman and, soon thereafter, Iranian Near East. Was booty their only motive, or was something more ideological at work as well? While the former can readily explain a pattern of systematic raiding, can it also explain the interest in building an empire or in restoring worship to the Temple Mount? One must imagine that Muhammad's prophetic leadership was itself a crucial element in the establishment of this new polity and its expansion.

Fred Donner, in his recent review of Hoyland's book, identifies many such problems with its efforts to minimize the role of religious belief in the Islamic conquests. The Gothic incursions, for instance, produced no new Gothic scripture comparable to the Qur'an, nor was there a "Gothic caliph" equivalent to the "commander of the Believers." In short, there was no new religion as a result of the Germanic migrations, but in the case of Muhammad and the Arabs, there certainly was. Should we assume this to be a mere coincidence? Likewise, the polity that Muhammad founded defined itself from early on using religious slogans on coins, inscriptions, and documents. The Goths did no such thing. Even more to the point, however, social, economic, and political explanations for the Islamic conquest generally "neglect completely the possibility that apocalyptic eschatology . . . may have played a part in its dynamism," a proposal that seems increasingly to be more than just a mere possibility.<sup>26</sup> Yet much more problematic for such ethnopolitical explanations of Muhammad's movement and its success is the fact that there simply was no such thing as an Arab ethnos or Arab ethnic identity in the seventh century that could possibly have provided the basis for Muhammad's new community. As Webb persuasively demonstrates, Arab ethnic identity did not emerge until the eighth century, and this Arab ethnogene-

sis was itself consequent to the prior formation of Muhammad’s religious community.<sup>27</sup>

Indeed, most scholars today would agree that, at the very least, Muhammad’s religious teachings played a significant ancillary role in his community’s political success and expansion. According to the most minimal view, religious faith served as an important catalyst that energized the movement politically, so that, as James Howard-Johnston has suggested, “religion acted as a supercharger” and a “bonding agent” in the formation and expansion of the early Islamic polity.<sup>28</sup> Yet others, such as Patricia Crone, have noted that it is a mistake to attempt to divide religion from politics in understanding early Islam. Muhammad was not, as she explains, “a prophet who merely happened to become involved with politics. His monotheism amounted to a political program.”<sup>29</sup> Earliest Islam was a movement whose core beliefs were both political and religious, and the expansion of the community and the pursuit of conquest and even empire were seemingly matters of fundamental religious conviction. Thus Muhammad’s new religious movement professed a creed that enjoined his monotheist followers to subdue and permanently transform the world according to their religious vision.

There is certainly no disputing that conquest and expansion and even imperial ambition were central tenets of early Islam. The events of the Near Eastern conquests themselves unmistakably reveal such aspirations at the core of its political and religious ideology. While some have questioned whether Muhammad himself actually envisioned the campaigns against Rome and Persia that his followers would soon undertake,<sup>30</sup> most scholars, including Donner, Crone, Garth Fowden, Glen Bowersock, and even Watt, would identify Muhammad as both the architect and the inspiration behind the early Islamic Empire.<sup>31</sup> Reports from Muhammad’s earliest biographies of campaigns directed toward Syria even during his lifetime would certainly seem to indicate as much.<sup>32</sup> Likewise, the persistent reports from outside the Islamic historical tradition associating Muhammad with the invasion of Syria and Palestine (whether or not they are accurate) would seem to confirm that his preaching advanced the vision of an “Islamic” empire.<sup>33</sup> Yet even if Muhammad did not himself harbor imperial ambitions for his new polity, almost immediately after his lifetime—at least according to the traditional narratives—the pursuit of empire had in large part come to define the movement that he founded. As Shahab Ahmed notes, “From its very outset, Islam was an imperial religion the articulation of whose truths took place in a context charged with the demands of imperial power.”<sup>34</sup> Moreover, these

same traditional narratives are at one in locating the origins of the Near Eastern conquests in Muhammad's prophetic mission.<sup>35</sup> Consequently, if Muhammad's early followers were driven to establish themselves as an empire, and this impulse came from the very core of their religious faith, how could one imagine them simultaneously believing that they would soon see divine judgment and destruction come upon the world, thus bringing their divinely ordained empire quickly to naught? The widespread visions of an imperial eschatology in late antiquity would appear to hold the answer.

### The Qur'ān and Imminent Eschatology in Early Islam

The compelling evidence that Muhammad and his early followers believed in the imminent end of the world is not so easily shoved aside as many accounts of Islamic origins might suggest. If we look primarily to the traditional Islamic biographies of Muhammad, the *sīra* and *maghāzī* collections, then this apocalypticism is indeed easy to miss. Not surprisingly, the later Islamic tradition chose not to remember Muhammad as an apocalyptic prophet but instead as a great teacher of ethical monotheism and social justice and as a ruthlessly successful military leader. Yet unfortunately these traditional biographies are of extremely limited value for reconstructing the beginnings of Islam.<sup>36</sup> The collections are themselves arrestingly late, made over a century after Muhammad's death and known only in redactions by even more recent authors. Accordingly, there is widespread recognition in Western scholarship on Islamic origins that almost nothing conveyed by the early Islamic sources about this period can be taken at face value, and indeed most of what these narratives relate concerning Muhammad and his earliest followers must be regarded with deep suspicion.<sup>37</sup> As no less of an authority than Marshall Hodgson concludes, "On the face of it, the documentation transmitted among Muslims about his life is rich and detailed; but we have learned to mistrust most of it; indeed, the most respected early Muslim scholars themselves pointed out its untrustworthiness."<sup>38</sup> Therefore, we must rely primarily on the Qur'ān for our knowledge of earliest Islam. By almost universal agreement, the Qur'ān is the oldest surviving piece of Islamic literature, and its traditions date to sometime in the seventh century. It is admittedly not clear whether all of the Qur'ān comes from Muhammad himself, and parts of it may be older while others are more recent additions.<sup>39</sup> Yet in any case, this text presents a

precious witness to Muhammad’s religious beliefs as interpreted by his earliest followers. Thus the Qur’ān offers the most promising chance of peering behind the veil of the Islamic myth of origins to reconstruct the earliest history of Muhammad’s new religious movement.

In order to do so, one must read the Qur’ān against, rather than with, the traditional narratives of Islamic origins, in the hopes of excavating an older stratum in the development of the Islamic faith. This endeavor, of course, is not simply a matter of interpreting the Qur’ān at every instance in a manner opposite to the received tradition merely for the sake of doing so. Rather, the aim is to locate, following approaches that have long been used in biblical studies, places where the text of the Qur’ān appears to be in tension with the traditional accounts of Islamic origins, while searching for parallel anomalies in the early tradition that similarly resist interpretive closure. By finding such hermeneutic gaps between the sacred text and tradition, we discover a space that invites the potential discovery of a different sort of Islam at these earliest stages, a religious movement perhaps not completely discontinuous from what would follow but that has a distinctive character nonetheless.

With this as our goal we need to approach the Qur’ān not with the presumption that it is a unitary text, the product of a single author, Muhammad, that arose from a specific historical context revealed by the (much) later Islamic historical tradition. In truth, we know precious little about the historical context in which the Qur’ān came to be, as noted above. While we may assume with some level of certainty that the traditions of the Qur’ān characterize the faith and practice of Muhammad’s earliest followers, we should not always presume that he or even they were the creators of all of its individual parts. By contrast, traditional scholarship on the Qur’ān (and not just traditional Islamic scholarship) has regularly interpreted the Qur’ān through the lens of Muhammad’s traditional biographies. These approaches exemplify perfectly the “author function” identified by Michel Foucault. Assigning the complete text to Muhammad’s authorship provides an interpretive foundation for constructing unity and coherence out of the Qur’ān’s rather disparate and often opaque contents.<sup>40</sup> Muhammad’s life and personality become a site that allows hermeneutic closure of the text: his biography presents a metanarrative within which to fix its contents and provide them a rational ordering. To be sure, the Qur’ān as we now have it does in places show signs of literary unity, but these qualities, such as its various rhyme

schemes, for instance, were seemingly introduced to the text by the early compilers who stitched together shorter units of tradition into larger blocks with more literary character.<sup>41</sup>

Accordingly, we need a different approach to the text, one that will loosen the interpretive framework to focus much less on reading it according to the traditional mythologies of Islamic origins or the legendary biographies of Muhammad, both of which have been shown to lack solid historical foundation. Likewise, we must dispense with the idea that the Qurʾān should be read as a literary unity, so that one would use the Qurʾān to interpret the Qurʾān, as it were, following the traditional Christian practice of reading the Bible. We will assume that the meaning of certain key terms can vary in different passages throughout the Qurʾān, so that *al-amr* or *al-arḍ*, for instance, will not be required to have the same meaning in every Qurʾānic occurrence. Rather, we will approach the Qurʾān with a general understanding that individual pericopes may have developed not only during Muhammad's ministry but also after his death and in some cases potentially even before his prophetic calling.<sup>42</sup>

With regard to eschatology specifically, then, it is abundantly clear to even the most casual reader that the Qurʾān is rife with warnings of the impending judgment and destruction of the Hour: one passage after the next repeatedly heralds that the Hour has drawn near or is imminent.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, the Qurʾān itself defines the very subject of its revelation as “knowledge of the Hour—do not doubt concerning it” (43:61).<sup>44</sup> “Nigh unto men has drawn their reckoning,” warns another passage (21:1), while one verse declares that “God’s command [*amr*] comes,” or even more literally, “God’s reign has arrived” (16:1). Such pronouncements certainly recall the declaration with which Jesus allegedly began his ministry: “the Kingdom of God is at hand” (Mark 1:15 and par.). Likewise, the Qurʾānic “parable of the two men” (18:31–44) resembles Jesus’ parable of the rich fool (Luke 12:13–21), particularly in its emphasis on the short eschatological window that remains. Not long thereafter in the same *sūra*, the Qurʾān promises its addressee, Muhammad, at least according to tradition, that “On that Day when We shall cause the mountains to move,” he will himself “see the earth coming forth” (18:47).<sup>45</sup> “The matter of the Hour is as a twinkling of the eye, or nearer” (16:79), warns the Qurʾān elsewhere. The coming judgment is “imminent” (40:18), or, with even greater force, “the Imminent is imminent” (54:57).<sup>46</sup> The “Lord’s chastisement”—or “judgment” or “the terror”—“is about to fall” upon the world; “none denies its descending,” and “there is none to avert it”

(52:7–8, 51:6, 56:1–2). The chastisement is indeed near (78:40; cf. 27:72, 36:49), and the Qurʾān promises that the punishments of Hell and the bliss of paradise will soon be known “with the knowledge of certainty” (102:3–5). The Qurʾān also threatens that all who disregard its warnings will soon behold the Hour and its punishments with their own eyes (19:75).

Other passages refer to certain astronomical events that will signal the Hour’s arrival: “surely that which you are promised is about to fall! When the stars shall be extinguished, when heaven shall be split, when the mountains shall be scattered and when the Messenger’s time is set, to what day shall they be delayed? To the Day of Decision” (77:7–13; see also 45:17, 52:9, 75:7–9, 81:1–2, 82:1–2). Many such signs had already occurred “in the heavens and on the earth” and yet had gone unheeded (12:105): “The Hour has drawn nigh: the moon is split. Yet if they see a sign they turn away” (54:1–2; cf. 69:16). Presumably, as David Cook suggests, these and other passages refer to some remarkable astronomical event that Muhammad and other inhabitants of the Ḥijāz had recently witnessed.<sup>47</sup> The Qurʾān often refers to such signs in order to refute the doubts of skeptics regarding the Hour’s immediacy: “Are they looking for aught but the Hour, that it shall come upon them suddenly? Already its tokens have come” (47:20).

Other passages similarly respond to disbelief in the Hour and its imminent arrival: “soon they shall know!” warns the Qurʾān. “Already Our Word has preceded to Our servants. . . . So turn thou from them for a while, and see them; soon they shall see! What, do they seek to hasten Our chastisement?” (37:170–79). In the face of such doubts the Qurʾān counsels the faithful, “be thou patient with a sweet patience; behold they see it as far off; but We see it is nigh” (70:5–7); similar sentiments are echoed in a number of other passages (e.g., 15:3, 36:49, 75:34–35, 78:4–5, 79:46). When the unbelievers ask to know precisely when the Hour will arrive, the Qurʾān declares that knowledge of the Hour lies with God alone (7:187, 31:34, 41:47, 43:85). Nevertheless, this acknowledgment of the limits to human knowledge does not necessarily indicate weakening of belief in the Hour’s immediacy. Although “the knowledge is with God,” the Qurʾān rebuffs its audience, “assuredly you will soon know who is in manifest error” (67:26–29; cf. 33:63, 79:44–46). Yet perhaps such uncertainties are also an early sign of efforts to accommodate the Hour’s unanticipated delay: while the Hour is still believed to be nigh, it has not arrived with the haste that was initially anticipated.

Other passages betray this redactional tendency more clearly. For instance, the Qurʾān explains that although the Hour is imminent, one should

recall that for God a day is a thousand years (22:47; cf. 32:5) or even fifty thousand years (70:4). Yet despite the difference between divine and mortal calendars, belief in the Hour's impending arrival remains constant in these passages: "they see it as if far off, but We see it is nigh" (70:6–7; cf. 22:55). In a few places the Qur'an proclaims the Hour's imminence with slightly more hesitancy: "It is possible [*ʿasā an*] that it may be nigh," but when it comes "you will think you have tarried but a little" (17:51–52). Indeed, "it may be [*ʿasā an*] that riding behind you already is some part of that which you seek to hasten on" (27:72). Although God alone knows when the Hour will descend, "Perhaps [*laʿalla*] the Hour is nigh" (33:63; cf. 42:17). Various other passages urge persistence in light of the Hour's unexpected delay (e.g., 11:8, 40:77), but only once does the Qur'an allow even the possibility that the *eschaton* may in fact not be imminent. Despite its pervasive and fervent warnings of the Hour's threatening immediacy, only a single passage equivocates, conceding, "I do not know whether that which you are promised is nigh, or whether my Lord will appoint it for a space" (72:25).

Bell, Watt, Régis Blachère, and others adduce these latter passages as evidence of Muhammad's evolving eschatological timetable, using them to relegate any concern with the Hour's fearful imminence to a mere passing phase in Muhammad's religious development.<sup>48</sup> Although Muhammad for a time experimented with ideas that he borrowed from Jewish and Christian apocalypticism, as Bell suggests, primarily in an effort to win converts, once he achieved power over Medina, this perspective was abandoned as no longer useful. At this point, the Hour was increasingly pushed into the distant future, and this new orientation can be detected in the Qur'an's occasionally more guarded forecast of the Hour's impending arrival. Such passages are understood as Muhammad's direct cancellation of his earlier focus on eschatological immediacy. In this way, the Qur'an's ethical teaching and its program for the early Islamic community are made to emerge as the true core of Muhammad's message. Admittedly, this hypothesis effectively resolves an apparent tension within the Qur'an: its frequent warnings of impending eschatological doom can seem difficult to reconcile with the parallel concern to define the nature and structure of the early community. Such attention to details of social and political order would appear to be contradicted by the belief that the world itself would soon pass away, a dissonance that Bell, Watt, and others have chosen to resolve by determining the priority of the former. Yet a comparison with formative Christianity suggests that in this case as well any such conflict may be more imagined than real: the writings

of the New Testament often show concern for defining and maintaining a well-ordered community even in the face of the world’s impending judgment and destruction.<sup>49</sup> One would assume such ideas could similarly coexist in earliest Islam.

Perspectives from New Testament studies are also helpful for understanding the different shades of urgency with which certain passages from the Qurʾān proclaim the Hour’s impending arrival. The sayings of Jesus occasionally exhibit similar ambivalence regarding the Kingdom’s proximity: although most statements about the Kingdom of God proclaim its immediacy, a minority tradition suggests that its coming should be expected farther into the future. Innumerable studies have examined this eschatological tension in the gospels, with the clear majority concluding that the historical Jesus preached the world’s imminent judgment, heralding the *eschaton*’s arrival within the life span of his earliest followers.<sup>50</sup> By applying the same principles to analysis of the Qurʾān, one finds that Muhammad and his earliest followers seem to have similarly believed that their generation would live to see the end of the world.<sup>51</sup> Although the Qurʾān reflects some diversity of opinion regarding the timing of the Hour’s arrival, as with the Jesus traditions, one eschatological position clearly predominates, namely, the Hour’s pressing imminence.<sup>52</sup> Likewise, the response of the unbelievers as depicted by the Qurʾān suggests that Muhammad’s preaching had led them to believe that they would soon behold the Hour’s arrival for themselves (e.g., 19:75, 37:170–79, 102:3–5). More importantly, however, it seems highly unlikely that this prevailing voice, warning of the Hour’s immediate approach, is the invention of the later Islamic community, inasmuch as such promises were soon falsified by the passing of Muhammad and his early followers. The criteria of embarrassment and dissimilarity (i.e., dissimilarity with the experience of the early community)—two fundamental methodological principles in the study of the historical Jesus—leave little doubt that the Qurʾān’s eschatological urgency must have originated with Muhammad and the formative community.<sup>53</sup> To be sure, a strong eschatological perspective would persist in later Islam (as it did in Christianity), but it seems highly improbable that later Muslims would insert traditions into the Qurʾān wrongly predicting the Hour’s appearance in the immediate future.<sup>54</sup>

Qurʾānic traditions that may seem to suggest a less narrow eschatological horizon are, like similar elements in the New Testament, the result of efforts to accommodate the primitive kerygma of the impending Hour to the passage of time. For instance, as noted above, the Qurʾān occasionally maintains,

particularly in responding to its critics, that knowledge of when the Hour will arrive belongs to God alone. While some Western scholars have appealed to such statements as evidence that the early Muslims did not in fact expect the Hour's arrival within their lifetime,<sup>55</sup> again, comparison with the Jesus traditions suggests otherwise. Jesus seems to have similarly preached that the timing of the Kingdom's arrival was known by the Father alone, while insisting simultaneously that its appearance was imminent.<sup>56</sup> Far from contradicting the Hour's immediacy, these passages instead complement the Qur'<sup>ān</sup>'s emphasis on its sudden and unexpected appearance. Admittedly, however, it is certainly not out of the question that such sentiments first arose shortly after Muhammad's lifetime, as the early community struggled to make sense of the Hour's protracted delay.

As the writings of the New Testament evidence, the early Christians adopted a variety of hermeneutic strategies to "correct" Jesus' inaccurate forecast of impending doom,<sup>57</sup> and one should expect to find similar tendencies at work in the early Islamic tradition. The gulf between divine and human perceptions of time, for instance, explained the *parousia*'s delay for many early Christians (cf. 2 Pet. 3:8, referring to Ps. 90:4), and the Qur'<sup>ān</sup> likewise invokes this contrast on occasion. While the Qur'<sup>ān</sup> situates such reflections within the context of the Hour's immediacy, these passages seem designed possibly to soften the blow of the Hour's delay, and as even Bell observes, they have the appearance of interpolations, added by the early Islamic community "to obviate the difficulty of the delay in the coming event."<sup>58</sup> Likewise, those verses introducing a note of hesitancy regarding the Hour's imminence probably reflect the perspective of the early community rather than Muhammad's preaching: often by adding only a single word or two, statements heralding the Hour's imminent arrival could easily be qualified to meet the inconsistencies of its continued delay. One should note, however, that such alterations of the text need not be crudely judged as acts of "forgery" somehow inconsistent with the Qur'<sup>ān</sup>'s status as divine revelation. To the contrary, insofar as the primitive Islamic community treasured the Qur'<sup>ān</sup> as God's infallible revelation through Muhammad, it would be absolutely essential that its contents should comport with the reality of continued existence. If, as appears to be the case, Muhammad warned his initial followers that the Hour would arrive very soon, a more conditional tone would have to be discovered in order to make sense of this eschatological promise for future generations. As in the New Testament, then, but to an even more limited extent, the Qur'<sup>ān</sup> shows traces of the early community's efforts to adjust

Muhammad’s eschatological warnings to the persistence of human history. Nevertheless, like the canonical Christian gospels, this correction is not thoroughgoing but piecemeal, so that the original eschatological urgency abides and clearly prevails.

It is particularly important that the Qur’ān’s imminent eschatology finds significant confirmation in a number of early *ḥadīth*, that is, the teachings ascribed to Muhammad and other early authorities by the Islamic tradition. For instance, at the end of Ibn Ishāq’s biography, when Muhammad dies, ‘Umar, the future caliph, refuses to accept Muhammad’s death, swearing, “by God he is not dead: he has gone to his Lord as Moses b. ‘Imrān went and was hidden from his people for forty days, returning to them after it was said that he had died. By God, the apostle will return as Moses returned and will cut off the hands and feet of men who allege that the apostle is dead.”<sup>59</sup> When ‘Umar is later asked to clarify his behavior, he explains that he truly believed that Muhammad would remain with the people until the Hour to serve as a witness for them regarding their final deeds, citing Qur’ān 2:143,<sup>60</sup> while in another account he justifies himself “because he [Muhammad] said that he thought that he would be the last of us [alive].”<sup>61</sup>

Other early traditions describe Muhammad as having been “sent on the breath of the Hour,” noting that his appearance and that of the Hour were concomitant to the extent that the Hour had almost outstripped his own arrival.<sup>62</sup> According to another tradition, Muhammad offered his followers a promise (reminiscent of Matt. 16:28, 24:34) that the Hour would arrive before some of his initial followers died.<sup>63</sup> In yet another tradition, Muhammad responds to questions about the Hour’s timing by pointing to the youngest man in the crowd and declaring that “if this young man lives, the Hour will arrive before he reaches old age.”<sup>64</sup> One senses here the beginnings of a process of chronological extension, the growth of which can be seen in a promise that “at the end of one-hundred years there will be no one alive on the earth.”<sup>65</sup> Yet as this deadline and still others passed, new predictions continued to arise, refreshing the Hour’s immediacy for each generation.<sup>66</sup> And as with the eschatological predictions assigned to Jesus, it is difficult to imagine the fabrication of such eschatological urgency by the later Muslim community, let alone its attribution to Muhammad. The same can be said of certain traditions concerning the first mosque at Medina: as Meir Kister observes, Muhammad’s instruction not to build a roof for the structure “because the affair [*al-amr*] will happen sooner than that” seems to suggest a primitive belief in the Hour’s imminence.<sup>67</sup> The dissonance of such material with the

Hour's manifest delay speaks very strongly in favor of its antiquity if not even authenticity. When joined with the Qur'ān's unmistakable warning that the end of the world had come upon its audience, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Muhammad and his earliest followers ardently believed themselves to be living in the shadow of the *eschaton*, in the waning moments of human history.

Consequently, the present "quest for the historical Muhammad" finds itself confronted by a dilemma rather similar to the one identified by Albert Schweitzer in his seminal study of the "historical Jesus": one must choose to follow either a "thoroughgoing skepticism" or a "thoroughgoing eschatology."<sup>68</sup> Like the Christian gospels, the earliest narratives of Islamic origins are heavily determined by the theological interests of the later community (i.e., "salvation history"), inviting the conclusion, with John Wansbrough, that all "historical" knowledge of Muhammad and the origins of Islam has in fact been lost, obscured by the imagination of medieval Islam. Alternatively, however, one may adopt the position of "thoroughgoing eschatology," which reveals a historically probable Muhammad, who, like Jesus, was an eschatological prophet of the end times. The imminent eschatology of the Qur'ān and many early *ḥadīth* invites the recovery of this apocalyptic preacher who, with his followers, expected to see the end of the world very soon, seemingly even in his own lifetime. The preservation of such material against the interests of the later tradition suggests that it provides a credible approximation of the *ipsissima vox Machometi*. While such an image of Muhammad will perhaps be of little relevance for modern believers, much like Schweitzer's Jesus, it nevertheless presents a plausible reconstruction worthy of standing alongside the historical Jesus, having been recovered using comparable methods and assumptions.

### Eschatology and the Expansion of the Community of the Believers

With this conclusion, however, the question still remains: Why on earth would Muhammad's followers spill blood to establish their dominion over a world that they believed was soon to pass away? One possible explanation is that these two ideas reflect different phases in the historical development of Muhammad's religious movement. As noted already, many scholars believe that Muhammad's political ambitions were not yet evident during the Meccan phase of his prophetic career. Only after his move to Medina, they propose,

did his agenda shift more decidedly in the direction of forming a polity and expanding it through conquest. Perhaps then one might imagine that while in Mecca Muhammad had originally preached an eschatological message warning of the Hour’s impending arrival, only to shift focus dramatically in Medina to advance a program of establishing God’s rule in the world through the expansion of his new community. In this way, then, the political agenda could be understood as having superseded an earlier eschatological orientation that subsequently was more or less abandoned, as some scholars have suggested.<sup>69</sup> It is of course equally possible that the apparent tension between imminent eschatology and political ambition remained unresolved, so that the juxtaposition of these different perspectives may simply reflect the rapidly unfolding development of a new religious movement that was not particularly concerned with harmonizing such dissonances. Only with the passage of time and the expansion of the community did it eventually become necessary to somehow reconcile these two divergent impulses.<sup>70</sup>

Nevertheless, Donner points the way to a better solution, I believe, in his recent provocative and insightful work, *Muhammad and the Believers*. Here Donner briefly suggests an understanding of the conquests that renders any supposed tensions between eschatology and empire in earliest Islam more apparent than real. In doing so he posits a rather different motivation for the Near Eastern conquests from what has generally been assumed both in the traditional sources and in traditional scholarship. Donner’s interpretation of the conquests relies to a certain extent on his understanding of earliest Islam as an interconfessional “community of the Believers” that welcomed Jews and even Christians to full membership, requiring only a simple profession of faith in “God and the last day.” While this hypothesis is not entirely unproblematic, in my opinion it presents a much more persuasive synthesis of the earliest evidence than the traditional Islamic accounts provide. Indeed, Donner himself acknowledges many problems with the evidence, yet more traditional models of the early community are no less problematic on this front—indeed, they are more so, as Donner convincingly explains. Therefore, despite admitted infelicities, Donner’s hypothesis provides, *faute de mieux*, the most persuasive reconstruction of the nature of the earliest community.

According to Donner, Muhammad and his followers did not initially conceive of themselves as “a separate religious confession distinct from others” during the first several decades of the movement’s existence.<sup>71</sup> Rather, the earliest “Islamic” community appears to have been a loosely organized confederation of Abrahamic monotheists “who shared Muhammad’s intense

belief in one God and in the impending arrival of the Last Day, and who joined together to carry out what they saw as the urgent task of establishing righteousness on earth—at least within their own community of Believers, and, when possible, outside it—in preparation for the End.”<sup>72</sup> This new religious movement was not, as Donner explains, so much “a new and distinct religious confession” as a “monotheistic reform movement” committed to advancing personal and communal piety in the face of a swiftly approaching final judgment.<sup>73</sup>

We know that something like this was true of Islam in its earliest stages, at least for a while, as evidenced by the so-called Constitution of Medina, or as Donner prefers to call it, “the *umma* document.”<sup>74</sup> There is near unanimous consensus among scholars of early Islam that this text is indeed a very early source, probably from the time of Muhammad, primarily because its content has dramatic discontinuity with the ethnic and religious boundaries established in later Islam. The Constitution of Medina preserves an agreement between Muhammad and the Jews of Medina, wherein certain Jewish tribes were incorporated within Muhammad’s new religious polity, although they were allowed to retain their Jewish identity and follow the Jewish law. In defining the relations between two groups identified as the Believers (Mu‘minūn) and the Muslims (Muslimūn), the Constitution declares the Jews to be “a people (*umma*) with the Mu‘minūn, the Jews having their law (*dīn*) and the Muslimūn having their law. [This applies to] their clients (*mawālī*) and to themselves, excepting anyone who acts wrongfully (*ḡalama*) and commits crimes/acts treacherously/breaks an agreement, for he but slays himself and the people of his house.”<sup>75</sup> In addition, the Jews are expected to “pay [their] share,” while the Constitution’s only doctrinal condition mandates profession of belief “in God and the Last Day.”<sup>76</sup> In this passage as well as in others, the Constitution seems to define precisely the sort of interconfessional community that Donner proposes, and even the Islamic tradition itself does not deny that the Jews were initially welcomed into the “Islamic” community on such terms, at least for a brief period.<sup>77</sup>

Nevertheless, according to the Islamic tradition, the Constitution reflects a short-lived experiment that Muhammad allowed with the assumption that the Jews would quickly see the light and decide to become Muslims. When this did not happen, so we are told, Muhammad changed his mind and expelled the Jews from his community of Believers, unless they converted.<sup>78</sup> Yet as Donner demonstrates, there is much evidence in the Qurʾān and elsewhere to indicate that this was not just an abruptly abandoned

experiment. Rather, he argues that Muhammad’s community of the Believers remained confessionally diverse for several decades, including Jews as well as Christians, even into the Umayyad period.<sup>79</sup> Indeed, only under ‘Abd al-Malik do we begin to see the clear consolidation of Islam as a distinctive and separate religion and the promotion of “a distinctly Islamic idiom” of rule.<sup>80</sup> This would seem to coincide, as Webb has recently demonstrated, with the formation of a new Arab ethnic identity that would distinguish the followers of this nascent faith from those other monotheists among whom they lived and over whom they ruled.<sup>81</sup> The Arabian Peninsula and the Ḥijāz in particular were identified as the cradle of this newly imagined Arab ethnos, offering an “empty” and “hermetically sealed receptacle to project Arab origins.”<sup>82</sup> This was a territory largely unknown to the other cultures of late antiquity, if its near total absence from our surviving sources offers any reliable indication. It was, in essence, as John Wansbrough once provocatively suggested, effectively a void within which a new distinctly Arab and Islamic past could be imagined. Accordingly, the turn away from the biblical Holy Land in this period to invent instead a new distinctively Islamic Holy Land would appear to coincide with the creation of Arab ethnic identity at this time. Webb’s compelling archaeology of Arab ethnogenesis thus breathes new life into Wansbrough’s hypothesis that the myth of Islam’s Ḥijāzī origins was a product of the “sectarian milieu” of the eighth-century Near East, and Iraq in particular.<sup>83</sup> Indeed, the formation of a sectarian Islamic identity, an Arab ethnicity, and the Ḥijāzī Holy Land that gave birth to both were seemingly interrelated developments of the second Islamic century.

With such a religiously complex formative community in mind, Donner identifies the underlying motive behind the “expansion of the Believers’ rule” (as he renames the “Islamic conquests”) not in zeal for spreading a new “Islamic” religious confession, since, as he argues, in these early decades the movement was “not yet a ‘religion’ in the sense of a distinct confession.”<sup>84</sup> In fact, the remarkable success that Muhammad’s followers experienced as they began to expand their community beyond the Arabian Peninsula likely had much to do with the nonsectarian nature of the community. As Donner observes, “If the Believers already embraced a clearly defined and distinct new creed and had tried to demand that local communities observe it, those populations of the Fertile Crescent would have resisted their arrival stubbornly.” Estimates of the number of Muhammad’s followers who actually settled in the newly conquered lands range from one hundred thousand to an absolute maximum of five hundred thousand—this in a region with a total population

of between twenty and thirty million non-“Muslim” inhabitants.<sup>85</sup> The fact that such a small number of Believers were able to subdue and maintain authority over such a large and diverse population suggests that they were not seeking to introduce a new religious confession, which presumably would have met with greater resistance. Instead, it would appear that the Believers were seeking to extend their political hegemony to include new populations, “requiring them to pay taxes, and asking them, at least initially, to affirm their belief in one God and the Last Day, and to affirm their commitment to living righteously and to avoid sin.”<sup>86</sup>

This model can also explain the relatively nondestructive transition to Islamic rule that apparently took place in much of the Near East. Although the Islamic and non-Islamic literary sources alike are replete with reports of widespread massacres and violent destruction of churches, monasteries, and even cities, the archaeology of this period seemingly contradicts these accounts. Judging from the archaeological record alone, there is almost no material evidence to suggest a period of violent conquest and destruction of property, such as the literary tradition imagines.<sup>87</sup> The Islamic conquest is practically invisible in the archaeological record, a point that stands in some contrast to the Sasanian invasion and occupation just decades before. The literary sources for the Iranian invasion also report wanton destruction of lives and churches, particularly in Jerusalem, some of which has been confirmed through excavations.<sup>88</sup> Indeed, several mass graves in the Jerusalem area have been discovered that appear to confirm the literary accounts of wholesale slaughter of Christians during the Sasanian occupation.<sup>89</sup> By comparison, the expansion of the Believers into the Roman and Iranian Near East seems to have occasioned less violence, judging at least from the material remains for this period.

Why then do the literary sources describe these events otherwise? As Donner explains, the reports of extensive violence and destruction in these texts largely reflect certain identifiable tendencies. In the Islamic sources, the devastation was exaggerated in order to lionize ancestors or to highlight the miraculous nature of the Believers’ victory against all odds. As for the non-Islamic sources, most of which are Christian, the events of the transition were often embellished for dramatic effect, to emphasize the nature of this invasion as divine punishment for disobedience. In other cases, these Christian accounts may have projected the stricter conditions of later centuries onto the seventh, or their reports of marauding Arabs may refer to groups that actually had little or nothing to do with the early Believers.<sup>90</sup> Neverthe-

less, at the same time, it is difficult to explain the earliest accounts of the conquests and their reports of slaughter according to such tendencies. For instance, an eyewitness account written down in Syriac in 637, that is, in the very context of the Believers' invasion, describes the slaughter of entire villages across Palestine by Muhammad's followers.<sup>91</sup> Likewise, Thomas the Presbyter's Syriac *Chronicle of 640*, written just a few years after the events of the conquest, reports that Muhammad's followers killed some four thousand villagers in Palestine—Christians, Jews, and Samaritans alike—in addition to massacring monks in the monasteries of northern Mesopotamia.<sup>92</sup> Despite the silence of the archaeological record, we should not erase the eyewitness memories preserved by these sources out of some sort of peculiar materialist bias. Even if the architecture may have been largely spared, there was undoubtedly significant and often horrific loss of life as Muhammad's followers seized control of the Near East from the Romans. Perhaps someday we may discover the mass burials that will confirm it.

Of course, as Donner acknowledges, there was certainly violence involved in this transition. Much of it presumably took place in direct engagements between the Byzantine army and Muhammad's followers. No doubt there were also additional acts of violence and property destruction that were perpetrated by those who took advantage of the chaos of the moment. And surely there were occasional atrocities committed by the soldiers on both sides, as is all too familiar from events of our own age. But on the whole, as Donner notes, the violence attributed to the invading Arabs in these Christian sources generally does not surpass the violence that the Byzantines themselves had previously exercised against the local population from time to time. There are also, one should note, some Christian sources that describe a relatively nonviolent transfer of power from Byzantine to Islamic rule.<sup>93</sup> This placid transition is most easily understood if, as Donner suggests, the early community of the Believers included both Jews and Christians. Such confessional inclusion would likely have made their rule less objectionable, particularly for the Jewish and non-Chalcedonian Christian communities that had recently suffered state persecution at the hands of the Roman Empire. An interconfessional monotheistic reform movement striving for an increase in piety would presumably have offered little to which these religious communities would have objected. The message that history would soon come to an end through the triumph of a divinely ordained polity would have fallen on many welcome ears. And on the whole, it would appear that at the local level there was very little change in the administrative structures of civic life.<sup>94</sup>

In contrast, then, to the more secular or politically oriented accounts of the rise of Islam, Donner maintains that “the early Believers were concerned with social and political issues but only insofar as they related to concepts of piety and proper behavior needed to insure salvation,” thus inverting the relationship assumed by many other scholars.<sup>95</sup> Thus the early community’s expansion was not undertaken for either conquest or conversion. Instead, concern for the impending judgment, rather than raw lust for political power or plunder, seems to have inspired Muhammad and his followers to expand their “community of the saved, dedicated to the rigorous observance of God’s laws as revealed to His prophets.” Their goal was not so much to acquire earthly might and glory but rather to attain individual and collective salvation in the swiftly approaching judgment of the Hour. In Muhammad God had raised up one final prophet to warn of the impending last day, and it was thus imperative to spread his message of pious submission to God’s commandments as quickly as possible to as many people as possible, by expanding this interconfessional movement to include righteous members from the other monotheist communities of the late ancient Near East. Likewise, the Believers were committed to struggle against those who were unbelievers and the wicked, in order to eradicate sinfulness from the earth and to establish obedience to God’s law in advance of the imminent judgment through the dominion of their faithful polity. Through these actions and their successes, the early Believers seem to have understood that the events of the *eschaton* were in fact already beginning to unfold even in the very formation and expansion of their righteous community.<sup>96</sup>

At one point Donner suggests that this “sounds like a program aimed at establishing ‘God’s kingdom on Earth,’ that is, a political order (or at least a society) informed by the pious precepts enjoined by the Qur’an and one that should supplant the sinful political order of the Byzantines and Sasanians.”<sup>97</sup> Nevertheless, Donner is quick to remark that the Qur’an never uses the phrase “kingdom of God,” and with that he more or less abandons this proposal. It is certainly worth noting, however, that both the Qur’an and the Islamic tradition frequently name the *eschaton* the “*amr* of God.”<sup>98</sup> Although this phrase is usually translated as “God’s command,” or sometimes “the affair,” the word *amr* can also mean “rule” or “dominion” or even “empire,” so that this term could equally be rendered as “God’s rule” or “the empire of God.”<sup>99</sup> With this phrase, then, *amr allāh*, the Qur’an refers to the *eschaton* using language that sounds very much like “the Kingdom of God.” Given the fact that after Muhammad’s death his followers were led by someone with

the title *amīr al-mu'minin*, or “commander of the Believers,” or possibly even “emperor of the Believers,”<sup>100</sup> it seems even more likely that the swiftly approaching *amr allāh* signifies something along the lines of God’s coming eschatological “reign” or “kingdom.” Such language certainly suggests that the early Believers would have understood the success and the rapid expansion of their devout polity not merely as a sign of divine favor but also as events that marked the “beginning of the end” and were actually inaugurating the eschatological rule of God. Even if the Qur’ān’s traditions do not always use the word *amr* consistently in this manner, this by no means precludes such a reading in other instances. One should not suppose that its meaning is somehow fixed across all of the traditions of the Qur’ān, although there is in fact wide recognition that *amr* generally refers to the *eschaton* in the Qur’anic traditions. We should not make the mistake of trying to create a systematic theology of the end times out of the Qur’ān’s desperate and often ecstatic pronouncements, and accordingly, variations in the term’s usage should not be unexpected, particularly when dealing with topics as notoriously slippery as apocalypticism and eschatology.

There is much to recommend this eschatological interpretation of the Near Eastern conquests. More than likely, it was not a mere coincidence that Muhammad’s followers made their first push outside of the Arabian Peninsula into the Holy Land in Palestine and toward its sacred center at Jerusalem. Jerusalem is of course the eschatological nexus of the Abrahamic traditions, including Islam, where the Final Judgment is expected to take place, culminating in the restoration of divine rule. There the Jews of Muhammad’s era expected the Messiah to restore the Davidic kingship, return Jewish sovereignty to the Promised Land, and rebuild the Temple. The Christians for their part were awaiting the “Last Emperor,” who would vanquish Christianity’s foes, establish righteousness on the earth, and then hand over imperial authority to God at Jerusalem. One would imagine that these contemporary apocalyptic scripts exercised a powerful influence over Muhammad and his followers, and the fact that Islamic eschatological expectations remain to this day firmly soldered to Jerusalem is surely no mere coincidence: Jerusalem’s abiding eschatological significance undoubtedly preserves a vestige of Jewish and Christian influence on emergent Islam. Thus Donner suggests that “the Believers may have felt that, because they were in the process of constructing the righteous ‘community of the saved,’ they should establish their presence in Jerusalem as soon as possible.” There, he proposes, they perhaps expected “that the *amīr al-mu'minin* [the commander

of the Believers], as leader of this new community dedicated to the realization of God's word, would fulfill the role of that expected 'last emperor' who would, on the Last Day, hand earthly power over to God."<sup>101</sup> Indeed, given the centrality of Jerusalem in the eschatological imagination of late ancient Judaism and Christianity, it is only to be expected that Muhammad and his followers would have likewise set their sights on the Holy Land, where their eschatological hopes would soon meet fulfillment in the coming climax of history, as we will consider further in the following chapter. Their arrival there must have seemed, as Jay Rubenstein remarks of the western Crusaders, as if "they were stepping into the Apocalypse."<sup>102</sup>

### Eschatology and Community in Earliest Islam

Donner additionally suggests that Muhammad and his earliest followers saw the formation of their community and its expansion as the beginning of an eschatological process whose realization was simultaneously imminent and immanent. They likely saw "the Believers' sweeping victories during the *rida* wars and early conquests in Syria, Iraq, and adjacent lands as events of the End-time itself. That is, the End-time was no longer something anticipated, but was actually underway. In this case, they may have viewed the community of the Believers as the physical manifestation on earth of the 'new era.'"<sup>103</sup> This proposal is not as strange as it may seem, and here once again, Jesus and the early Christian movement offer very helpful points of comparison for understanding the apocalyptic faith of Muhammad and his earliest followers. We noted earlier the chronological tension present in the teachings ascribed to Jesus about the Kingdom of God, with the majority proclaiming the Kingdom's imminent advent, while a minority tradition reflects more uncertainty about its immediacy. There is, however, another minority tradition in which Jesus relates that the Kingdom of God had already come upon his audience and was manifest particularly in his miraculous works (esp. Matt. 12:28// Luke 11:20, Matt. 11:2–6). New Testament scholars are generally agreed that the sayings in question most likely go back to Jesus himself: The only question is, what could they mean?

Many scholars, following in the tradition of Albert Schweitzer, have tended to focus instead on the prevailing sentiment that the Kingdom's arrival was expected in the immediate future, and accordingly they interpret these particular sayings as further indication of the Kingdom's imminence.<sup>104</sup>

Others, however, have followed C. H. Dodd’s lead in the other direction,<sup>105</sup> by assigning these few passages a hermeneutic privilege so that the Kingdom is understood as having already been realized somehow in Jesus’ own ministry. An alternative approach, which at the moment seems to reflect a fairly broad consensus, combines the two perspectives. While Jesus undoubtedly preached that the *eschaton* was to be expected in the immediate future, at the same time Jesus and his followers also seem to have believed that the beginning of the Kingdom was already present in his teachings and miracles.<sup>106</sup> Thus these verses indicate not so much the full presence of the Kingdom in Jesus’ ministry, since clearly for Jesus the Kingdom was soon to come with power (Mark 8:38). Nevertheless, the Kingdom’s arrival was also believed to be so imminent that in some sense it had already begun, and with his words and deeds Jesus himself was inaugurating the eschatological reign of God. It was as if it had not yet arrived into the world, but the process of its birthing had begun, or like a dawn that had broken with the sun still yet to rise. Something similar was also true, as we noted in the first chapter, of the Qumran community’s eschatological perspective: the “end of days” for them was a period that had already commenced, and their community was playing a pivotal role in its realization.

The similarities, then, between the eschatology of primitive Christianity and the Qumran community and what Donner has proposed for the early Believers are significant. Like the Qumranites, Jesus, and the earliest Christians, Donner suggests that Muhammad and his *umma* saw themselves as harbingers of the *eschaton*, who through the formation of their community and its progress and advancement of righteousness in the world were actually initiating the events of the Hour’s arrival. The roots of such an idea lay deep within Islam’s ancestral faiths of Judaism and Christianity, and so it is likely that Muhammad and his followers would have also possessed a similar understanding of their role in the eschatological cycle that was starting to unfold through their actions. The Qur’ān itself suggests as much, for instance, with its clear echo of Jesus’ proclamation that “the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Matt. 12:28/Luke 11:20) in the opening words of *sūra* 16: “the reign of God has come.” Likewise it warns that the portents of the Hour had already come, according to *sūra* 47:20, and among these tokens surely must have stood the splitting of the moon that had recently been witnessed, as related in *sūra* 54:1. Thus the heavens themselves were telling that the End had in fact begun.

Indeed, it would seem that the Qur’ān once professed such a view of

Muhammad's religious community as coterminous with and as commencing the events of the *eschaton*. David Powers draws our attention to a variant reading of Qur'an 61:6 said to derive from the codex of the Companion Ubayy b. Ka'b (d. between 640 and 656), who according to the Islamic tradition was Muhammad's scribe. In the *textus receptus*, this verse has Jesus predict that an apostle named Aḥmad will come after him, a prediction that meets with rejection. According to Ubayy b. Ka'b's version, however, Jesus forecasts not only Aḥmad's appearance but also that he would form a community that "will be the last one among the communities," that is, a community whose formation will inaugurate the end times: "I am God's messenger to you, bringing you an announcement of a prophet whose community will be the last one among the communities (*ākhir al-umam*), and by means of whom God seals the messages and prophets (*yakhtum allāh bihi al-anbiyā' wa'l-rusul*)."<sup>107</sup> As Powers notes, in this version, the community itself will be final, and so the end of the world will automatically render Muhammad as the seal of the prophets.

Powers further proposes that Ubayy's version may indeed have been an earlier form of this verse than its canonical equivalent. Yet when the *eschaton* failed to arrive as quickly as expected, the prediction in Ubayy's version proved false, and so the passage in question was altered to its now canonical form, "I am God's messenger to you, confirming the Torah that was [revealed] before me, and giving you good tidings of a messenger who will come after me, whose name will be Aḥmad."<sup>108</sup> In such a case, the original imminent eschatology and the early community's role therein were replaced, once these points had been falsified, by a reference to the confirmation of the Torah. Although this is admittedly speculative, it is easier to imagine a scenario where Ubayy's version is the original, and when its prediction is falsified by the *eschaton*'s abeyance, the now canonical version was introduced to obviate this difficulty. The alternative, that the canonical version was earlier, seems less likely, since it is hard to comprehend introduction of such an eschatological prediction once it had become patently false. If this interpretation is correct, then the eschatological valence of the community's formation was once also advanced by the Qur'an, only to be removed and replaced once this no longer could be true.

As before with imminent eschatology of the Qur'an, in this case a number of early eschatological *ḥadīth* offer perhaps even more compelling evidence that Muhammad and his followers understood his prophetic mission to be concurrent with the Hour's arrival. Muhammad himself is alleged to

have said as much, declaring according to a number of sources, as noted earlier, that “My coming and that of the Hour are concomitant; indeed, the latter almost arrived before me.” This *ḥadīth* is often coupled with the similar statement by Muhammad that he had been “sent on the breath of the Hour.”<sup>109</sup> A passage from Ibn Sa‘d’s *Ṭabaqāt* similarly notes of Muhammad that “he has been sent with the Hour, in order to avert you from a severe punishment.”<sup>110</sup> In other traditions Muhammad proclaims that he “was sent in the presence of the Hour.”<sup>111</sup> Yet perhaps the most well-known of these eschatological *ḥadīth* is the widely circulated one of the “two fingers.” According to this tradition, as cited by Ibn Ḥanbal for instance, Muhammad said to the faithful, “‘The hour has come upon you; I have been sent with the Hour like this,’ and he showed them his two fingers, the index finger and the middle finger,” joining them together to illustrate their coincidence.<sup>112</sup> The two-fingers *ḥadīth* also often circulated together with Muhammad’s statement that he had been “sent on the breath of the Hour,” as well as his remark that the Hour was so near that it had nearly outstripped his own arrival.<sup>113</sup> Another tradition, identified by Suliman Bashear, reports that Muhammad described himself in relation to the Hour as “somebody sent to his people as a watchman. Seeing a sudden swift raid already on the move and worrying that he would be surpassed by it, he started to wave his shirt/sword to his people.”<sup>114</sup> Muhammad then continues to explain again that the Hour had nearly outstripped his own arrival.

There is little question that these *ḥadīth* are early, probably originating within the first decades of the community if not even from Muhammad himself. It is highly improbable that someone from a later generation would have invented such pronouncements and placed them in Muhammad’s mouth, when they were so plainly contradicted by the flow of history. Only shortly after his death this melding of the Hour with Muhammad’s mission would have already become sharply dissonant with the reality of the Hour’s delay. Yet the endurance of such traditions is itself a testament to the currency of this idea within earliest Islam, corroborating the similar evidence from the Qur’ān.<sup>115</sup> Moreover, the incongruity of such proclamations that the Hour’s arrival had already begun with the later tradition would certainly have discouraged their preservation, making it all the more remarkable that these traditions have slipped past the censors’ filter. For comparison, in the gospels, as already noted, there similarly are only a couple of passages suggesting that the Kingdom was becoming present through Jesus’ ministry, and yet it is precisely the exceptional status of these passages that alerts scholars to their

special historical value. Likewise, while some of these eschatological *ḥadīth* may appear in only a handful of sources, their occasional exclusion from the canonical collections is again quite understandable, and their survival at the margins of the tradition affords invaluable evidence of the early community's belief that final events of the Hour had indeed begun in Muhammad's preaching and the victories of their righteous polity against its sinful opponents. Thus Donner's suggestion stands as more than a mere possibility. There is in fact significant evidence from the early Islamic tradition, from both the Qur'an and early *ḥadīth*, indicating that Muhammad and his followers seem to have understood the formation and success of their community as having already set into motion the final judgment of the Hour.

Accordingly, we may take even greater confidence that Muhammad and his followers saw themselves as living in the waning moments of history and believed that the Hour's arrival would soon be upon them. As we have seen, belief in the impending end of the world was widespread in Byzantium on the eve of Islam, among both Christians and Jews, as well as among the Zoroastrians of the Sasanian Empire, so that imminent eschatological expectation permeated the religious atmosphere within which Islam formed. On general principles alone one would almost expect this new religious movement to share in the prevailing mood of the times, and the Qur'an certainly does not disappoint. Moreover, as Donner suggests, it seems rather likely that Muhammad and his followers understood the formation of their righteous community as actually initiating the events that would lead to the *eschaton*. The eschatology of Jesus and his early followers offers important precedent for the Qur'an's proclamation that God's reign had already come as well as for Muhammad's assertions that he and the Hour were concomitant. In a somewhat similar fashion, Byzantines also believed that their empire intersected and was inaugurating God's Kingdom, and certain emperors, including Justinian and even more probably Heraclius, seem to have understood their actions as playing a role in the unfolding arrival of the Kingdom of God. The Sasanians too believed that their empire held an eschatological destiny that would soon be realized.

As Sean Anthony has recently noted, "The broad currents of Late Antique apocalypticism did not disappear with the rise of Islam. Indeed, the Islamic conquest harnessed and reinvigorated these currents in unanticipated ways."<sup>116</sup> Furthermore, it would appear, as Haggai Ben-Shammai argues, that the Qur'an considers Jewish and Christian apocalyptic writings as "scripture" on par with Torah, Gospel, and *Zabūr* (most likely the Psalms).<sup>117</sup> Given this

immediate cultural context, then, Muhammad and his followers surely must have understood their conquests and the expansion of their polity into an empire as eschatologically active, serving to advance righteousness throughout the world ahead of the impending judgment. Moreover, the fact that Muhammad and his followers had set their sights from early on toward the Roman Empire and more specifically on the Holy Lands in Palestine undoubtedly shows the influence of contemporary Christian and especially Jewish eschatology. As we have seen, Jewish apocalyptic writings of this era often anticipated divine deliverance at the hand of another people, whom God would raise up to expel the Romans and liberate the children of Abraham and their Promised Land from Roman oppression. The early Believers' focus on the religious significance of Jerusalem and Palestine is itself evidence that the sons of Ishmael seem to have shared in the Jewish reverence for the Promised Land and in the hope of its liberation from the rule of the unrighteous, themes to which we now turn in the final chapter.

## Chapter 6

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# From Jerusalem to Constantinople: Imperial Eschatology and the Rise of Islam

Muhammad's early followers were not only expecting the imminent end of the age; at the same time they were also expanding rapidly across western Asia and North Africa and establishing in their wake what amounted to a new "Islamic" empire. The Believers' political success was not, however, as we have argued, somehow in tension with their eschatological beliefs. Their impulse to rule the world was not, in fact, incongruous with their conviction that the same world was soon to pass away. To the contrary, it seems that faith in the impending *eschaton* fueled their imperial ambitions. There can be no question that Muhammad expected his followers to engage in *jihād* in the path of God (e.g., Qurʾān 4:75, 95), which amounted to militant struggle on behalf of their divinely chosen community and its religious values. Of course, one must be careful not to project back onto the period of origins the classical doctrine of religious warfare formulated much later in the Islamic legal tradition. Yet at the same time, the Qurʾān clearly enjoins the faithful to wage war on behalf of the community of the Believers as a religious duty. It is true that certain elements within the later Islamic tradition, including most notably Sufism, would seek to soften the militancy of *jihād*, which simply means "struggle" or "striving," by defining it instead in terms of spiritual struggle rather than actual combat.<sup>1</sup> But in the first Islamic century, *jihād* and the faith of the Believers entailed fighting to eliminate wickedness from the world and to establish the rule of their divinely ordered polity throughout the world.<sup>2</sup> Although the Qurʾān occasionally displays some diversity of opinion regarding

the degree of militancy that was expected on behalf of the new religious movement, it is “clear that by the end of Muhammad’s life the dominant attitude had become the legitimation of, and the exhortation to pursue, ideological war” against the “unbelievers.” The community of the Believers thus was “a movement of militant piety, bent on aggressively searching out and destroying what they considered odious to God.”<sup>3</sup> The establishment of a new righteous and divinely guided polity that would displace the sinful powers who ruled the present age was an essential part of this *jihād* in the cause of God. Indeed, as Sophronius of Jerusalem remarks in a homily delivered in Jerusalem on 6 January 636, the Arabs were boasting that they were destined to rule the entire world.<sup>4</sup>

The earliest known witness to the emergence of Muhammad’s community on the world stage, the previously discussed *Doctrina Iacobi*, paints a very similar picture of the Believers’ movement. The text’s letter from Abraham in Palestine reports that “a prophet has appeared, coming with the Saracens, and he is preaching the arrival of the anointed one who is to come, the Messiah.” Abraham consulted “an old man who was learned in the Scriptures” for his opinion on this new prophet. The sage replied that “he is false, for prophets do not come with a sword and a war-chariot,” and he encouraged Abraham to look into the matter himself more carefully. Abraham then continues to relate the results of his inquiry: “when I investigated thoroughly, I heard from those who had met him that one will find no truth in the so-called prophet, only the shedding of human blood.” For good measure, Abraham also reports that this prophet “says that he has the keys of paradise, which is impossible.”<sup>5</sup> In Abraham’s account we find confirmation that Muhammad’s followers were proclaiming their faith in starkly eschatological terms, which, as we have noted already, Abraham’s letter interprets in terms of Jewish apocalypticism—that the Messiah was soon to arrive. As Sean Anthony has recently explained, Muhammad’s alleged claim to possess the keys of paradise also seems to reflect an element of early Islamic kerygma, as Cook and Crone first noted in *Hagarism*.<sup>6</sup> Obviously, as Anthony notes, this claim is eschatological, yet no less important is its strong association with the military campaigns of the Umayyads in the early Islamic historical tradition. Several traditions link the Umayyad conquest ideology with the keys of paradise, which suggests that this motif offers “an early testimony to the doctrine of *jihād* procuring believers access to paradise.”<sup>7</sup> This ideology of martial martyrdom was seemingly anticipated, it is worth noting, or perhaps inspired, by similar concepts of martyrdom in holy war employed during the last

Persian war under Heraclius, as Tommaso Tesei has recently argued.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, we have in the *Doctrina Iacobi* evidence that as the Believers left the deserts of Arabia behind them, they entered the Promised Land with an eschatological fervor that was joined to the conviction that one was obligated to spread the dominion of their faith through warfare, a pious militarism that would ultimately be rewarded with entry into paradise.

Abraham's description of earliest Islam is really not controversial, or at least, it should not be. The eschatological confidence of the Believers is amply displayed in the Qurʾān, as we have seen, and so is the idea of *jibād* as warfare on behalf of God and God's community.<sup>9</sup> History shows us well enough that this martial piety was soon realized through decades of conquest and the establishment of a new empire under the authority of the Believers and their "commander" (*amīr*). These conquerors seem to have identified themselves not only as Believers but also as *muhājirūn*, that is, "Emigrants" who had undertaken the religious obligation of *hijra*. As other scholars have noted, beginning with Patricia Crone and most recently Ilkka Lindstedt and Peter Webb, in the first century, *hijra* did not refer specifically to Muhammad's migration to Medina. Rather, it was an act to be undertaken by all of his followers, a "religiously motivated migration (*hijra*) during the conquests" to the lands recently seized from the Romans and Persians.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the Believers' urgent eschatology and their commitment to *jibād* were not disconnected, it would seem, and indeed, it would be rather strange to imagine them as such. Indeed, as Donner has recently noted, "unless we assume something like eschatological enthusiasm, it is difficult to understand what would have motivated the early believers to embark on the conquests in the first place. The apocalyptic spark seems most likely to be what ignited the sudden burst of expansionist conquest that we associate with the eventual emergence—almost a century later—of Islam."<sup>11</sup> Raiding for booty is easy enough to understand, but absent apocalypticism, why would Muhammad's followers have made such a forceful push outside of Arabia in order to seize and occupy Roman and Sasanian territory? Why were they intent on the destruction of these empires and not content merely to plunder them? Clearly some sort of imperial eschatology must have been at work from the very early history of Muhammad's new religious movement. As David Cook concludes of these invasions, "It would seem, then, that the conquests were seen as an integral part of the redemptive process which occurs just before the end of the world."<sup>12</sup>

It is true that the Qurʾān does not link its eschatological immediacy with

its injunctions to expand the Believers' dominion by military force as explicitly as we might like. Nevertheless, both elements figure prominently in the Qurʾān and thus were central tenets of Muhammad's religious movement. One imagines that Muhammad's followers must have understood these two key principles of their religious worldview as correlative, so that they believed that the formation and expansion of their community through armed struggle were instrumental to the Hour's immediate advent. By piecing things together, it seems clear that the Qurʾān effectively endorses such a worldview, even if it does not always do so directly. Indeed, as Olof Heilo similarly notes, "this connection between *jihād* and eschatology offers some of the most important clues we have to the ideology of early Islam, and it finds strong backing in the Qurʾān and the vast *hadith* literature with traditions on the sayings and doings of the prophet."<sup>13</sup> And even if this ideology is not always directly evident in the Qurʾān, once we shine the light of late ancient apocalypticism on its traditions, we find a document that is easily aligned with this perspective. Indeed, when read on its own, the Qurʾān is a rather puzzling text, and the meanings of its many passages can be determined only once one determines the context in which to read it. For instance, reading the Qurʾān in harmony with the eighth- and ninth-century biographies of Muhammad will yield an altogether different understanding of the text than will a reading done in light of late ancient apocalypticism. Furthermore, it may be that more direct expressions of imperial apocalypticism are seemingly scarce because, as Cook notes, "the Qurʾān is an eschatological book and not an apocalyptic book." The Qurʾān is eschatology in action, not in the future; the Hour was already arriving even as the community was expanding. Thus it was perhaps irrelevant to specify a direct linkage between the rapidly expanding empire of Muhammad's followers and the *eschaton*'s advent, since their fusion was in the moment self-evident. As Jay Rubenstein writes of the Crusaders some five hundred years later, "They were waging an apocalypse."<sup>14</sup> So it must have been for Muhammad's early followers: there was no need to explain how the world would come to an end when one was living out the Hour's arrival on a daily basis, expecting the conclusion of history at any moment.

Nevertheless, there is some evidence to suggest that the Qurʾān once unambiguously professed a direct link between the military success of Muhammad's religious community and the arrival of the *eschaton*. As much is indicated by the variant reading of Qurʾān 61:6 from the codex of the Ubayy b. Kaʿb, mentioned in the previous chapter. According to this variant, which I suspect is likely the original reading, Muhammad's followers are identified

as the final community in the world, whose formation and success would occasion its end. Again, as Powers notes, when this did not happen, it is easy to imagine how the verse would need to be revised somehow to comport with reality, so that the original imminent eschatology and the early community's role therein were replaced with reference to Jesus' confirmation of the Torah.<sup>15</sup> Likewise, we know from the Qurʾān that the Byzantine tradition of imperial apocalypticism was current among Muhammad and his earliest followers. The story of Dhū al-qarnayn, that is, Alexander the Great, from *sūra* 18:83–101, borrows directly from the *Syriac Alexander Legend*, as discussed already in Chapter 3.<sup>16</sup> The Qurʾān's adaptation of this Christian text affords definitive proof that Muhammad and his followers were not only aware of but seemingly engaged with the tradition of Byzantine imperial eschatology. And, as noted in the previous chapter, there is evidence to suggest that the Qurʾān regards Jewish and Christian apocalyptic writings as "scripture" on par with Torah, Gospel, and the Psalms.<sup>17</sup>

Admittedly, the Qurʾān does not include specific references to the most obvious instances of imperial apocalypticism from the *Syriac Alexander Legend*. Yet the Qurʾān's usage of the *Syriac Alexander Legend* is primarily eschatological, as it incorporates the traditions about Alexander building a wall to hold back the peoples of Gog and Magog until the final judgment, a brief account of which concludes Alexander's appearance in the Qurʾān. There is, moreover, no reason to presume that only this part of the *Syriac Alexander Legend* was known to Muhammad and his followers, assuming that the Qurʾān is their collective work. Rather, the full version of the *Legend* was likely known, including Alexander's promise to send his throne along with his crown to Jerusalem for the Messiah to use and its forecast of Rome's eschatological triumph, along with the Persian emperor Tubarlak's related prophecy. It is perhaps understandable that the Qurʾān failed to include these predictions of the Roman Empire's ultimate victory, particularly since they must have seen themselves and their divinely ordained empire instead in this role. Yet on the basis of this extraordinary literary relationship, we can be safe in assuming that Muhammad and the Believers would have had direct contact from rather early on with Byzantine imperial apocalypticism. Therefore, we may take some confidence that this widely diffuse and popular theme from the religious cultures of the late ancient Near East influenced how nascent Islam understood itself, its expansion in the world, and its conviction that the Hour was soon to arrive.

Moreover, the opening passage of *sūra* 30, *Sūrat al-Rūm*, the *sūra* of

Rome, also resonates strongly with the traditions of Byzantine and Iranian imperial eschatology. According to the conventional vocalization of this passage, verses 2–5 note that “the Romans have been conquered in the nearest (part) of the land [i.e., the Holy Land].” Then follows a forecast that “after their conquering, they will conquer in a few years. The affair [or “rule”—*al-amr*] (belongs) to God before and after, and on that day the believers will gloat over the help of God.”<sup>18</sup> The Qur’ān’s concern here with Rome’s imperial fortunes is rather interesting, particularly since the Believers are said to rejoice at Rome’s victory. The historical circumstances, according to this vocalization, are seemingly Iran’s invasion and occupation of the eastern Roman Empire, followed by Rome’s triumph in 628. The traditional explanation for the Believers’ apparent sympathy toward the Romans in this passage understands this conflict as a war between Iranian paganism and Byzantine monotheism, since the Christians were, after all, a “people of the book.” Yet as we have seen in the previous chapters, these same events were apocalyptically electric for both the Christians and Jews of Byzantium, and, one imagines, for the Iranians as well, particularly in light of the millennium’s fast-approaching end on their calendar. Surely it is significant, then, that this prophecy, which is the only predictive passage in the Qur’ān, concludes by invoking the *eschaton*—the “affair” or “command” of God, or perhaps even better, the “reign” that belongs to God. Thus, in the Qur’ān’s sole reference to contemporary world affairs, it addresses the most eschatologically charged political events of the era, the last Roman-Persian war, which excited apocalyptic expectations across the religious spectrum of the late ancient Near East. It is yet another sign that formative Islam, with its imminent eschatological hopes and a militant piety aimed at spreading its dominion throughout the world, was a movement fueled by the ideas of imperial apocalypticism that suffused its immediate cultural context.

An early variant reading of these verses, however, suggests this interpretation even more so. According to an alternative vocalization, first attested by al-Tirmidhī (d. 892), the beginning of *Sūrat al-Rūm* instead remarks that “the Romans have conquered in the near part of the Land. They, after their victory, will be conquered in a few years. Reign [or “the command”] belongs to God before and after, and on that day the Believers will rejoice at the victory of God.”<sup>19</sup> According to this reading, the passage begins by noting the Byzantine victory over the Iranians in 628, followed by a prediction of their defeat several years later at the hands of Muhammad’s followers.<sup>20</sup> Although Theodor Nöldeke predictably rejected this reading, since “Muhammad could

not have foreseen this,” Richard Bell and others have noted that, according to the standard vocalization, “it is also difficult to explain Muhammed’s favourable interest in the political fortunes of the Byzantine Empire in this early period,” as seemingly indicated in the final verse.<sup>21</sup> Alternatively, however, if the verse refers to the victory of the Believers over the Byzantines, their rejoicing makes perfect sense. Likewise, according to this reading, we find the Believers inserting their own triumph over the Byzantines into the eschatological war between the Roman and Iranian empires. The victory of the Believers brings with it the reign or “affair” of God, thus identifying their devout polity as the apocalyptic empire that would usher in God’s rule at the end of the age.

There is some reason to think that this alternate reading may have been the original, inasmuch as it can better account for the Believers’ jubilation at the outcome. One suspects that a longstanding prejudice, ensconced by Nöldeke in particular, that the entire Qur’ān must be assigned to Muhammad is at least to some degree responsible for the traditional version’s favor in much scholarship.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, it is long past time that scholarship should dispense with the encumbrance of this dogmatic fossil, leaving open the possibility that this passage, as well as others, may in fact have originated within the community of the Believers even after Muhammad’s death.<sup>23</sup> Of course, if Muhammad in fact survived to lead his followers’ campaign in Palestine, as the very earliest sources report, then that could provide another explanation for this passage.<sup>24</sup> At the same time, one cannot entirely exclude the traditional vocalization, and there are certainly good arguments in its favor.<sup>25</sup> Yet even the canonical version shows strong concern with the rise and fall of contemporary empires as they related to eschatological expectation, here signaled particularly by the reference to *amr allāh*, the reign of God. Indeed, once we look more carefully at this passage in its immediate religious context, the eschatological valence of the traditional reading becomes much clearer.

As Tesei convincingly argues, this Qur’ānic prediction must be understood in light of close parallels from several Christian and Jewish writings of the early and mid-seventh century that predict the *eschaton*’s arrival as a consequence of Rome’s victory over the Persians. These texts include Khosrow’s prophecy in Theophylact of Simocatta’s *History*, the Syriac *Apocalypse of Ps.-Ephrem*, the *Sefer Eliyyahu*, the *Syriac Alexander Legend*, and the *Passion of St. Golinduch*, all of which we have already mentioned.<sup>26</sup> Tesei’s reading of the passage in this broader context, which I find highly persuasive, concludes that while the Qur’ān here predicts a Roman defeat and then victory, the

rejoicing of the Believers that follows is not, actually, on account of Rome's triumph. Rather, he explains, the phrase "and on that day" in verse 4 refers not to the time of the Roman victory but instead to the *eschaton* that would soon follow it: this expression, "and on that day" (*wa-yawma 'din*), Tesei notes, generally signals the Day of Judgment in the Qur'an. Likewise, reference to God's promise (*wa'd*) in verse 6 has strong apocalyptic connotations, since this term usually indicates God's eschatological promise, and as noted above, the reference to *amr allāh* similarly directs the interpretation of this passage in an eschatological direction. Tesei further proposes that these eschatological prophecies regarding Rome's triumph in the final Roman-Persian war were likely transmitted to Muhammad's early followers by former Arab confederates of the Byzantines who allied themselves with the Believers as they drew near to the Roman frontier. In such a way, this Byzantine wartime propaganda quickly reached Muhammad's followers and was adapted into a new version that replaced Rome's unique eschatological mission with simple conviction that the *eschaton* was imminent. Thus, according to such an eschatological reading, the Qur'an's reference to these events should perhaps be translated instead as follows: "The Romans have been defeated in the nearest (part) of the land [the Holy Land]. But after their defeat, they will triumph in a few years. The reign of God is before and after, and on the Last Day the believers will rejoice in the victory of God. The Promise of God!"

As one begins to look at the Qur'an more broadly, then, in light of the political eschatology that permeated its religious milieu(x), many passages now seem to take on new possibilities of meaning. For instance, *sūra* 110, whose name derives from its opening reference to divine victory (*naṣr*): "When the victory of God comes, and the conquest, and you [sing.] see the people entering into the religion of God in crowds, glorify your Lord with praise and ask forgiveness of him. Surely he turns (in forgiveness)."<sup>27</sup> This passage has conventionally been interpreted, in the context of Muhammad's traditional biographies, as a reference to the conquest of Mecca. Nevertheless, elsewhere in the Qur'an (e.g., 32:28–29), such reference to "conquest" (*fatḥ*) clearly indicates not just an earthly triumph but the impending *eschaton*, a combination that invites a rather different interpretation in concert with the tradition of imperial eschatology. In this case, the victory that comes with God's assistance will be the triumph of God's people, the polity of the Believers, an event that is itself fused to the *eschaton's* arrival. Through their conquest, the world will be brought into submission to God's divine rule, as throngs of people turn to embrace the faith of Muhammad and his

followers and offer their praises to God, inaugurating the final events of the Hour. For good measure, we are told, these events will be witnessed personally by the Qur'an's addressee, Muhammad, according to traditional interpretation. Presumably the Believers expected that such apocalyptic hopes would soon be realized through the conquest of the Abrahamic Promised Land in Palestine, along with its sacred center in Jerusalem, "the apocalyptic city *par excellence*."<sup>28</sup> There, in anticipation of the Hour's imminent arrival, they would, among other things, restore worship to the Temple Mount as they awaited the Temple's impending divine restoration in the *eschaton*.

### The Land That God Has Chosen: Jerusalem and the Biblical Holy Land

One of the most important sources for understanding the synergy between eschatology and imperial conquest among the Believers is the anonymous *Armenian Chronicle of 661*, which is much better known by its (entirely inaccurate) attribution to a certain Sebeos.<sup>29</sup> Whoever its author may have been, Sebeos's history is one of the most valuable sources for understanding the history of the Near East in the early seventh century. As James Howard-Johnston estimates its worth, "Sebeos' contribution to our knowledge of the ending of classical antiquity is greater than that of any other single extant source."<sup>30</sup> Moreover, this chronicle is especially valuable for its account of the rise of Islam, since it is the first source "to present us with a theory for the rise of Islam that pays attention to what the Muslims themselves thought they were doing."<sup>31</sup> The chronicle's author, however, was not himself responsible for this remarkable account. Rather, this report about Muhammad's prophetic career and the formation of the community of the Believers derives from an even earlier document that was composed in Jerusalem during the first decades of Islamic rule.<sup>32</sup> In addition, this source, written in Jerusalem during the reign of 'Umar or 'Uthmān, identifies its basis in interviews with "men who had been taken as captives from Arabia to Khuzistan, and having been eyewitnesses of these things themselves, they told us this account."<sup>33</sup> It is extraordinary and merits quoting in full.

When the twelve tribes of all the clans of the Jews went forth, they gathered at the city of Edessa. When they saw that the Persian army had fled away from them and had left the city in peace, they

shut the gate and fortified themselves within it. And they did not allow the army of the Roman Empire to enter among them. Then the king of the Greeks, Heraclius, gave the order to lay siege to it. And when they realized that they could not resist him in battle, they sought peace from him. Opening the gates of the city, they went and stood before him. Then he ordered them to go and remain in their own dwelling place, and they went away. Travelling on desert roads, they went to Tachkastan,<sup>34</sup> to the sons of Ishmael. They called on them to help them and told them of their hereditary kinship in the testament<sup>35</sup> of the Scripture. Yet although they were able to persuade them of their close kinship, they could not achieve agreement within their multitude, because their religious practices divided them from each other.

At that time a man appeared from among these same sons of Ishmael, whose name was Muhammad, a merchant, who appeared to them as if by God's command [*al-amr?*] as a preacher, as the way of truth. He taught them to recognize the God of Abraham, because he was especially learned and well informed in the history of Moses. Now because the command was from on high, through a single command they all came together in unity of religion, and abandoning vain cults, they returned to the living God who had appeared to their father Abraham. Then Muhammad established laws for them: not to eat carrion, and not to drink wine, and not to speak falsely, and not to engage in fornication. And he said, "With an oath God promised this land to Abraham and his descendants after him forever. And he brought it about as he said in the time when he loved Israel. Truly, you are now the sons of Abraham, and God is fulfilling the promise to Abraham and his descendants on your behalf. Now love the God of Abraham with a single mind, and go and seize your land, which God gave to your father Abraham, and no one will be able to stand against you in battle, because God is with you."<sup>36</sup>

According to Sebeos, Muhammad's movement began amid the disorder following Rome's victory over Iran, along the margins of these empires and in a mixed community of Arabs and Jews. At this moment, when eschatological expectations were at a peak in the Near East, a group of Jews sought refuge in Edessa between the Iranian withdrawal in 629 and Heraclius's arrival with

a substantial Roman force in 630. When the Romans expelled them, they fled for refuge among the desert Arabs, whom they tried to convince, at first unsuccessfully, that they shared kinship and so should also share a common faith grounded in the scriptures. The Arabs, however, remained divided into different “cults,” until Muhammad appeared and persuaded his fellow Arabs to recognize the God of Abraham, enjoining them to observe divine law and to make common cause with their Jewish kin. He exhorts them to rise up together and claim their shared right of inheritance to the Abrahamic Promised Land by expelling the wicked Romans from their unjust occupation of the Holy Lands. Thus “all the remnants of the people of the sons of Israel gathered and united together; they formed a large army.”<sup>37</sup> Before invading, however, they sent a letter to the Roman emperor, informing him that “God gave that land to our father Abraham and to his descendants after him as a hereditary possession. We are the sons of Abraham. You have occupied our land long enough. Leave it in peace, and we will not come into your land. Otherwise, we will demand that possession from you with interest.”<sup>38</sup> The emperor, of course, refuses, claiming that the land is his, which is not surprising, given that the Byzantines had come to identify themselves as the New Israel and God’s chosen people. He reminds these children of Abraham that the desert is their inheritance, advising them to go in peace. Yet they do not, and the Believers’ conquest of Palestine follows immediately.

Perhaps most extraordinary in this account of the beginnings of Islam is the emphasis placed on reclaiming the Abrahamic patrimony as the defining idea of Muhammad’s new religious movement. His followers, an alliance of Jews and Arabs, share in Abraham’s inheritance, and together they must liberate it from the unjust occupation of the Romans. There is, admittedly, nothing especially eschatological about this account, yet we know already from the Qur’ān itself and other sources that formative Islam was gripped by fervent expectation of the *eschaton*’s proximate arrival. The particular value of this source lies in the clarity that it provides regarding the Believers’ intent on conquering the Holy Land in order to claim their common birthright.<sup>39</sup> This is, of course, a theme known also from the Qur’ān, which confirms the importance for Muhammad and his early followers of liberating the Holy Land and restoring it to Abraham’s descendants. For instance, *sūra* 33:27 proclaims that “He made you heirs to their land [*arḍabum*] (of the ‘people of the Book’) and their dwellings and to a land which you have not yet trodden,” a land named elsewhere in the Qur’ān as “the Holy Land” (*al-arḍa al-muqaddasata*).<sup>40</sup>

The explicit identification of the owners of this land with “the people of the Book,” that is, Jews and Christians, clearly points to the Holy Land.

*Sūra* 10:13–14 likewise relates: “We destroyed generations before you when they acted oppressively while their apostles brought them proofs, yet they did not Believe. Thus do we repay a guilty people. Then we made you successors in the land [*al-ardī*] after them, so we may see how you behave.”<sup>41</sup> The “apostles” in question here, one suspects, are Moses and Jesus. Similarly, *sūra* 21:105–6, citing Psalm 37:29, promises, “We wrote in the Psalms, as We did in [earlier] Scripture, ‘My righteous servants will inherit the land [*al-arda*].’ There truly is a message in this for the servants of God!”<sup>42</sup> In each of these passages, the Qurʾān addresses Muhammad’s followers as chosen by God to liberate the biblical Holy Land and take possession of it as rightful heirs, events that *sūra* 10:14 oddly seems to relate as having already occurred. Likewise, in *sūra* 17:104, the Qurʾān seems to foretell that at the end of time the people of Israel will be restored to the Land: “After that We said to the Sons of Israel, ‘Inhabit the land, and when the promise of the Hereafter comes, We shall bring you (all together) as a mob.’”<sup>43</sup> It would appear, then, from these verses that Muhammad likely exhorted his followers to rise up and seize the Holy Land, as Sebeos reports, which was their rightful inheritance as descendants of Abraham.

Qurʾān 2:114 seems to reflect this tradition as well: its condemnation of “those who prohibit the mention of God’s name in His places of worship and strive to have them deserted” is almost certainly a reference to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem.<sup>44</sup> As Suliman Bashear notes, the early Islamic commentaries regularly interpret this passage as a denunciation of the Byzantines, who were preventing the Believers from entering the Jerusalem sanctuary, in this case, presumably Jews who were banned from entering the Temple precinct or Jerusalem.<sup>45</sup> It is true that some authorities sought to locate the reference in a Meccan context instead, identifying the malefactors as members of Muhammad’s tribe, the Quraysh, who were preventing him and his followers from observing the *hajj*. Yet Bashear is surely correct that the Jerusalem setting was almost certainly the original context. It is relatively easy to imagine the later interpretive tradition seeking to correct an earlier association with Jerusalem that was dissonant with the Hijāzi holy land of classical Islam. The alternative explanation is hard to accept. Surely if this verse were bound to the Meccan sanctuary from early on, we would not find a widespread reinterpretation that moved it to Jerusalem. Moreover, the reference

to the “destruction” of these holy places fits well with the Jerusalem Temple, which lay in ruins in the early seventh century. As such, this verse also affirms the Believers’ concern for Jerusalem and its sanctuary, as well as, presumably, their determination to liberate both from Byzantine mistreatment. To be clear, however, this tradition does not allow us simply to conclude that the sanctuary mentioned elsewhere in the Qur’ān is to be identified with the Jerusalem Temple rather than Mecca—although this possibility certainly should not be excluded. Instead, this passage and its early interpretation invite us to recognize that the sacred geography of the Qur’ānic traditions and the early Believers was in fact complex and seems to have been significantly different from that of the later tradition, particularly with regard to the status of Jerusalem.

Uri Rubin has also identified a number of early Islamic traditions that witness to a primitive concern to liberate the Holy Land from Roman occupation. Through a careful and convincing analysis, Rubin concludes that these traditions in fact reflect the earliest recoverable stratum of Islamic self-identity. They envision a religious community that includes both Jews and Arabs, who “share the sacred mission of carrying out the divine scheme, which is to renew the ancient Exodus and to drive the Byzantines out of the Promised Land. The messianic goal is shared with the Arabs not only by contemporary ‘Judeo-Muslims,’ but also by the Biblical Children of Israel,” who are expected “to assist the Muslims in the eschatological anti-Byzantine holy war.”<sup>46</sup> It is true that many of the traditions identified by Rubin survive only in more recent sources, yet their aberrant identification of the Holy Land as the main focus of early Islamic religious aspirations surely signals their early formation. Likewise, we find similar vestiges of a Jewish-Arab alliance to liberate the Holy Land in the Jewish apocalyptic tradition, most notably in the *Secrets of Rabbi Shim’ōn b. Yoḥai* mentioned in Chapter 4, in which God raises up “the kingdom of Ishmael” in order to deliver Israel from the “wicked one,” in this case, Rome. Under the guidance of a new prophet, the Ishmaelites will subdue the land for them, and “they shall come and restore it with grandeur. Great enmity will exist between them and the children of Esau.”<sup>47</sup> In both cases, these memories stand in such sharp dissonance with the later Islamic and Jewish traditions that their survival must reflect the importance of these ideas within the early community of the Believers. Otherwise, again, it is rather difficult to imagine such traditions being invented much beyond the seventh century. Therefore, although the traditional accounts of Islamic origins from the eighth and ninth centuries generally tell

a rather different story, the restoration of the children of Abraham to the Promised Land was likely a “pillar” of early Islamic belief.

We may add to this a number of important early traditions indicating in various ways that Jerusalem was much more important for the early Believers than the later Islamic tradition saw fit to acknowledge. For instance, as is well known, the original direction of prayer for the Believers was not Mecca but Jerusalem. The Qurʾān itself bears witness to the fact that there was at some point a change in the direction of prayer, the *qibla* (2:142–44), although as is so often the case with this text, the reference is quite vague. There is no indication of either the occasion for the change or the original direction, and the new direction is named only as “the sacred place of worship” (*al-masjid al-ḥarām*), which of course the later tradition confidently identifies with the Meccan Kaʿba. Numerous traditions from Muhammad’s early biographies, however, indicate that Jerusalem was the original focus of prayer, and the direction was eventually changed to Mecca only through divine concession, after Muhammad had repeatedly appealed to God for such a reorientation. Yet there is evidence to suggest that a Jerusalem *qibla* was observed by at least some of the Believers even beyond Muhammad’s lifetime.<sup>48</sup> One would expect that members of the community from a Jewish background may have been at least partly responsible for its persistence. Jerusalem’s importance as a focus of early Islamic pilgrimage also testifies to its exalted status, as do subsequent efforts by the later tradition to diminish its sanctity, as Meir Kister has demonstrated. While many of the pertinent traditions clearly aim to subordinate Jerusalem to Mecca and Medina, a number of reports revealingly assert Jerusalem’s equality with Mecca and superiority over Medina.<sup>49</sup>

Many of the most important witnesses to an early tradition of Jerusalem’s preeminence come from a collection known as the *Merits of Jerusalem*, the *Faḍāʾil al-Quds*, whose contents serve to exalt Jerusalem as a sacred center of the Islamic tradition. Although the collection is medieval, a number of recent studies have convincingly argued that many of its traditions go back to the seventh century, inasmuch as their high estimation of Jerusalem’s exceptional sanctity stands sharply at odds with more recent traditions seeking to put Jerusalem, so to speak, in its place.<sup>50</sup> Many of the *Merits of Jerusalem*’s traditions focus on the unique holiness of the Temple Mount, whose sacred rock is the center of the earth as well as a part of Paradise.<sup>51</sup> The restoration of the Temple is also a prominent theme, and this event, one tradition maintains, “will be the destruction of Yathrib,” that is, Medina.<sup>52</sup> The fact that many traditions seemingly expect the Temple’s reconstruction in the near

future likely identifies them with the middle of the seventh century, and undoubtedly the Dome of the Rock, which was built on the site of the Temple's Holy of Holies, must be understood in this context, a topic to which we will turn momentarily.<sup>53</sup> But the *Merits of Jerusalem* is particularly rich in eschatological traditions, and repeatedly it joins the events of the anticipated Hour to Jerusalem and its Temple Mount. And for understanding the apocalyptic expectations of Muhammad and the early Believers, these early Islamic traditions regarding Jerusalem's unique eschatological status hold paramount significance.

Jerusalem was and is, as David Cook notes, the eschatological "capital" of the Islamic tradition.<sup>54</sup> The fact that even still today the events of Islam's eschatological drama remain fused to Jerusalem and its Temple Mount, rather than Mecca or Medina, is undoubtedly a sign of Jerusalem's apocalyptic significance in the earliest tradition. Unless the Believers had from the very beginning fixed their eschatological hopes to Jerusalem, it is difficult to understand how this biblical Holy City, rather than Mecca or Medina, came to be the eschatological nexus of the Islamic tradition. If Islam's eschatological vision had crystallized only sometime later, as so many of its other traditions, it is hard to imagine how these events could have become inseparably joined with Jerusalem instead of the sacred cities of the Ḥijāz. Jerusalem's persistent identification as the site of God's final intervention in history is no doubt a vestige of the early Believers' faith. The Islamic tradition routinely relocated biblical traditions from the life of Abraham to the Ḥijāz and likewise transferred traditions from the Temple to the Ka'ba,<sup>55</sup> and so it is surely significant that its eschatological traditions could not be similarly dislodged, despite repeated efforts. Only an especially early and forceful connection between Jerusalem and the events of the Hour could have resisted the powerful draw of the Ḥijāz in the centuries to come. These traditions, as David Cook observes, seemingly arose from an early conviction that there was "an inevitable train leading from the capture of Jerusalem and its rebuilding straight to the apocalyptic wars."<sup>56</sup>

In the Islamic apocalyptic tradition, the Rock of Jerusalem, the foundation stone of the Creation according to both Jewish and Islamic tradition, occupies center stage.<sup>57</sup> At the final judgment God will place God's foot on the Rock and it will be God's Throne of Glory. Likewise the angel Isrāfil will sound the final trumpet from upon the Rock, calling all living creatures to assemble in Jerusalem.<sup>58</sup> East of the Rock, in the Valley of Joshaphat, or Gehenna, Hell will open up, reflecting older Jewish traditions, while Paradise

will open beneath the al-Aqṣā mosque to the south.<sup>59</sup> Then Jesus the son of Mary will return to Jerusalem to defeat the *dajjāl*, the Antichrist, and here as elsewhere in the Islamic apocalyptic tradition, the central role of Jesus in the events of the *eschaton* seems to reflect a particularly early stratum. Indeed, as Cook observes, Jesus was in all likelihood the first messianic figure in Islam. Otherwise, it is once again difficult to understand why his return occupies such a prominent role in Islamic eschatology to this day. The fact that the later tradition shows significant concern to diminish his eschatological role also seems to signal its antiquity.<sup>60</sup> Even the Qurʾān itself would seem to confirm Jesus' early messianic role in *sūra* 43:61, where, according to an early alternative vocalization, Jesus is identified as “a sign [*ʿalam*] of the Hour,” rather than the more traditional reading that he is “knowledge [*ʿilm*] of the Hour.” Sean Anthony has recently identified the former reading as most likely the primitive one, and with good reason: not only does it make more sense of the passage, but its dissonance with the later Islamic tradition and its agreement with the tendencies identified by Cook in the early apocalyptic tradition vouch for its antiquity.<sup>61</sup> Accordingly, perhaps we should reconsider the proposal originally advanced by Crone and Cook in *Hagarism* that the early Believers, as the *Doctrina Iacobi* reports, believed that the Messiah (Christ) would soon arrive.<sup>62</sup> In any case, following Jesus' eschatological triumph, on the day of resurrection, according to the *Merits of Jerusalem*, the Ka'ba “will be conducted to Jerusalem like a bride conducted to her husband,” and both ascend together to heaven with their inhabitants.<sup>63</sup> Once again, Jerusalem's role here as the Ka'ba's “husband” must reflect a very early tradition from a time when it was still conceivable to imagine Jerusalem as superior to Mecca.

### The Temple's Restoration and the Dome of the Rock

In material terms, the Dome of the Rock stands as an enduring monument to the eschatological hopes of the early Believers and their focus on Jerusalem and its Temple Mount, adorning the Jewish Temple's Holy of Holies in seeming anticipation of its divine restoration.<sup>64</sup> The Temple's restoration figured prominently in the eschatological faith of the early Believers, which is not at all surprising. After all, the Temple's restoration was a cornerstone of contemporary Jewish apocalypticism, particularly during the recent period of Persian rule in Jerusalem. It would persist under the Believers' rule, as evidenced by

the previously mentioned *Secrets of Rabbi Shim'on b. Yoḥai*, which foretells: “a second king who will arise from Ishmael will be a friend of Israel,” apparently the caliph ‘Umar. “He will repair their breaches and (fix) the breaches of the Temple and shape Mt. Moriah and make the whole of it a level plain. He will build for himself there a place for prayer [שתחוויה] upon the site of the ‘foundation stone’ [אבן שתייה].”<sup>65</sup> In similar fashion another Jewish apocalypse from the seventh century identifies Mu‘awiya as the one who, under divine guidance, “will restore the walls of the Temple,” and ‘Abd al-Malik is forecast as the leader who “will rebuild the Temple of the eternal God of Israel.”<sup>66</sup> Presumably, under the guidance of such Jewish apocalyptic traditions, the early Believers too looked toward the Temple’s impending restoration as a sign of the *eschaton*’s near approach. Of course, it must be clear that the Dome of the Rock, peculiar monument that it is, was certainly not envisioned as a restored Temple. Rather, it represents the culmination of a series of efforts by the early Believers to restore worship and dignity to this most holy place as they awaited the Temple’s divine restoration in the events of the impending Hour.

According to one apocalyptic tradition, mentioned in part above, “the building of *Bayt al-Maqdis* (*bunyān bayt al-maqdis*) is the destruction of Yaṭrib [Medina], and the destruction of Yaṭrib is the coming of the *malḥama* [i.e., the apocalyptic battle], and the coming of the *malḥama* is the conquest of Constantinople, and the conquest of Constantinople is the coming out of the *daḡḡāl*.”<sup>67</sup> While “Bayt al-Maqdis” often designates the city of Jerusalem in the Islamic tradition, the name in fact derives from the Hebrew name for the Jewish Temple, Beit HaMikdash, “the Holy House,” and the word *bunyān* here specifically identifies the Bayt al-Maqdis as a particular building rather than the city itself. Thus we have in view here the apocalyptic restoration of God’s Holy House to the Temple Mount, an event that will occasion the destruction of the prophet’s city, Medina, and initiate the final eschatological war between the Believers and Rome. Other early traditions directly link the Temple’s renovation with the Jewish tradition. For instance, Ka‘b al-Aḥbār, a legendary early Islamic authority on Jewish traditions, is alleged to have discovered “in one of the books,” presumably a Jewish writing, the following prediction of the Temple’s restoration under the Believers: “Rejoice, Jerusalem (‘Irūšalāyim), that is to say *bayt al-maqdis* and the Rock (*al-ṣakbra*) and it is called the Temple [*al-baykal*: *bekhal* in Hebrew]. I will send you my servant ‘Abd al-Malik and he will build you and embellish you, and I shall restore *bayt al-maqdis* to its former sovereignty (*mulk*) and I shall crown it

with gold and silver and pearls, and I shall send you to my people, and I shall place my throne on the Rock, and I am God, the Lord, and David is the king of the sons of Israel.”<sup>68</sup> Another tradition, also ascribed to Ka’b, reports that “God revealed himself to Jacob and said: I shall send from your descendants kings and prophets, till I send the Prophet of the *ḥaram* whose nation will build the Temple (*baykal*) of Jerusalem, and he is the seal of the prophets and his name is Aḥmad,” that is, Muhammad.<sup>69</sup>

Very soon after their arrival in Jerusalem, the Believers set about constructing a place of worship on the Temple Mount. According to a particularly early tradition that survives only in Georgian, the “Saracens” moved quickly to the Temple Mount after taking the city. There, “they took some men, some by force and some willingly, to clean the place and to build that cursed thing, which is for prayer and which they call a mosque [*mizgit’ay*].”<sup>70</sup> According to this report, these events took place during the Patriarchate of Sophronius, who died in 639, and the tradition itself dates to sometime before 668.<sup>71</sup> Thus it would appear that the Dome of the Rock was not the first Islamic building on the Temple Mount, and almost immediately after their capture of Jerusalem, the Believers sought to restore worship to the site of the Jewish Temple. The *Armenian Chronicle of 661* attributed to Sebeos confirms this early building activity on the Temple Mount, and as was the case with its account of the rise of Islam, here once again the information derives from an earlier Palestinian source, written in Jerusalem during the first decades of Islamic rule. According to Sebeos’s source, soon after Jerusalem’s liberation from the Romans, the Jews initially began to construct an edifice on the site of the Temple’s Holy of Holies, with support from the Hagarenes. The Hagarenes, however, grew jealous and then seized the building as a house of prayer for themselves.<sup>72</sup> Perhaps there is in this story some vestige of the interreligious nature of the early community of the Believers and its gradual transformation into a distinct monotheist confession. Anastasius of Sinai likewise reports around the year 660 that he witnessed additional construction work on the Temple Mount, claiming that he saw demons assisting the Saracens in their efforts.<sup>73</sup> Just a little later, around 680, the English pilgrim Arculf visited Jerusalem, reporting that he saw on the Temple Mount a large rectangular building that could hold at least three thousand people. The “Saracens” regularly used this building for some sort of worship, and he describes the structure as an *orationis domus*.<sup>74</sup> Thus, from their initial arrival in Jerusalem through the end of the seventh century, the Believers showed

persistent interest in restoring a shrine and regular worship to the Temple Mount, activities that seem to have been linked with their imminent eschatological expectations.

The Dome of the Rock, completed under ‘Abd al-Malik in 691, is the culmination of this building program. At the time of its construction, many of the Believers seem to have understood that their new shrine was in some sense a restoration of the Jerusalem Temple, and a number of early Islamic traditions seem to indicate that this was in fact ‘Abd al-Malik’s intent.<sup>75</sup> The later Islamic tradition, of course, identifies this shrine and its site as the location from which Muhammad ascended for his heavenly tour, following his night journey from Mecca to Jerusalem. Nevertheless, it is abundantly clear that this is a more recent reinterpretation of the Dome’s significance. The oldest traditions regarding Muhammad’s night journey do not link his miraculous travel with either Jerusalem or its Temple Mount.<sup>76</sup> Indeed, the earliest interpretations of Qur’ān 17:1, which mentions the servant of God’s “journey by night from the holy place of prayer to the farthest place of prayer [*masjid al-aqṣā*],” understood the latter not as a specific mosque in Jerusalem but rather as a heavenly temple.<sup>77</sup> Moreover, the absence of this Qur’ānic verse from the Dome’s inscriptions is itself further evidence that the building was not originally intended to commemorate this event.

Some early accounts allege instead that ‘Abd al-Malik built the Dome in order to divert pilgrimage from Mecca to Jerusalem, not only because the Umayyads seem to have favored the lands of Syria and Palestine over the Ḥijāz but also because for a time during his reign pilgrimage to Mecca was not possible, since it was under the control of the rival caliph ‘Abd Allāh Ibn al-Zubayr during the Second Civil War.<sup>78</sup> It is true that the Dome, like the Ka’ba, seems to be designed “for circumambulation around a sacred rock,” and later traditions explicitly forbid such practice.<sup>79</sup> Nevertheless, the accusations against ‘Abd al-Malik are almost certainly the product of a pronounced anti-Umayyad bias in the traditional narratives of early Islamic history, as well as a related and persistent tendency to diminish Jerusalem’s sacred status in favor of a distinctively Islamic sacred geography that was increasingly defined strictly within the confines of the Ḥijāz. The Islamic historical tradition, which first began to form as we now have it under the Abbāsids, is markedly hostile to the Umayyads, who are regularly accused of impiety and un-Islamic behavior.<sup>80</sup> Among their greatest sins was an illegitimate propaganda campaign to elevate the sanctity of Jerusalem and the Holy Land to parity with the Ḥijāz.<sup>81</sup> Although much early Western scholarship on the

beginnings of Islam was initially swayed by these anti-Umayyad and anti-Jerusalem tendencies of the sources,<sup>82</sup> scholars have since come to recognize the distorted and polemical nature of these accounts. As we now realize, the special sanctity of Jerusalem and Palestine was in fact central to the religious convictions of the early Believers, even if the later tradition often aggressively seeks to conceal this fact.<sup>83</sup> Thus the original significance of the Dome must be sought in something other than a nefarious attempt to divert the *hajj* and reinvent Islam's sacred landscape.

We are fortunate that the *Fadā'il al-Quds* collections preserve an elaborate description of early rituals that were performed in the Dome of the Rock, an account that also survives almost identically in the thirteenth-century chronicle *Mir'āt al-Zamān* (*The Mirror of the Age*) by Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī.<sup>84</sup> The ceremonies that these texts describe are so anomalous with the later traditions of the Dome of the Rock and subsequent Islamic practice that they must reflect primitive rites that were observed only during the early decades of the shrine's existence. It is extremely difficult to imagine their observance at any later date, and likewise there is no good reason to suspect that someone has invented a completely fictitious set of detailed rituals for the Dome of the Rock that deviate so significantly from later Islamic tradition and practice. Almost certainly then, we have in these accounts a description of rites that were observed at the Dome of the Rock in the period following shortly after its construction. Their survival in only a handful of sources is once again to be expected, given their sharp dissonance with the received tradition, and the very existence of these accounts is itself incomprehensible unless they report actual ritual practices that were observed at the Dome soon after its completion.

According to these descriptions, the shrine and its sacred rock were served by a large staff, including three hundred ritual "attendants" (*khadam*) and two hundred gatekeepers, ten for each of its twenty gates, as well as a crew of Jews and Christians who cleaned the sacred precincts and attended to its lamps and sacred vessels.<sup>85</sup> The public was allowed to worship in the Dome only on Mondays and Thursdays; on other days only the staff were allowed inside. The rituals for these days commenced in the evening, the customary beginning of the day in Jewish and Christian liturgical time, as the Dome's attendants prepared a complex perfume that would sit overnight. In the morning, the attendants purified themselves with ritual washing and put on special ceremonial garments. They began the ceremonies by rubbing the Dome's sacred rock with the fragrant perfume and burning incense all around

it. Then they lowered the curtains that surrounded the rock, “so that the incense encircles the *Ṣakbra* [the Rock] entirely and the odour [of the incense] clings to it.”<sup>86</sup> Once the rock and its surroundings were suffused with intense fragrance, the curtains were lifted, and a crier went out to the market calling the faithful to come to the rock for prayer. The public was allowed in only for a short time, however, allowing for just two *rakʿas* (prayer cycles), or maybe four if one was quick, according to the account in Wāsiṭī’s *Fadāʾil al-Bayt al-Muqaddas*. Wāsiṭī then concludes with a description of the Dome’s purification following the public’s departure, which seems to mark the end of these ceremonies.<sup>87</sup>

The meaning of these rituals is admittedly not entirely clear, and unfortunately no explanation is given. To my knowledge, only Moshe Sharon has ventured an interpretation of these practices, which he understands in relation to Jewish traditions about the Temple and its impending eschatological restoration.<sup>88</sup> This certainly would seem to be the most plausible explanation for such veneration of the Temple Mount’s sacred Rock by the early Believers, among whom, it would seem from these accounts, were also to be found Jews and Christians. In any case, these practices indicate that from the start the Dome was no ordinary place of prayer, and indeed, it has never been identified as a mosque. It is something else entirely, a special locus of great sanctity, whose original purpose is now largely obscured by later Islamic traditions about Muhammad’s Night Journey and the alleged impiety of the Umayyads. Yet thanks to the fortuitous survival of these archaic rites, along with other traditions associating the Dome of the Rock with the Temple’s restoration, we now have a much better perspective on the significance of this first Islamic monument during the early years of its existence.

The focus of these rituals is obviously the rock itself, which, as is well known, had been a central feature of both Jewish Temples. From the *Mishnah* we know that in Jewish tradition this rock was revered as the “foundation stone” of the Creation, and originally the Ark of the Covenant rested on it within the Temple’s Holy of Holies. After the Ark was removed, the rock continued to be revered, and on the holiest day of the year, Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, the high priest would enter the Holy of Holies to place incense on the rock.<sup>89</sup> According to an anonymous fourth-century Christian pilgrim from Bordeaux, this practice continued even after the Temple’s destruction: in his *Itinerary* he reports that once a year the Jews anointed the stone, while mourning and rending their garments.<sup>90</sup> Thus the early Believers appear to have adopted and adapted an earlier Jewish practice of venerating

the Temple's sacred stone with incense and anointing, even in the absence of the Temple itself. Certainly these rituals have little to do with the Meccan Ka'ba, and they instead show the strong affinity that the early Believers had for the Jewish Temple, whose sacred stone they revered with prayer and perfume. The Dome of the Rock, then, was not built to replace Mecca's shrine. The Dome and its rock instead had their own unique sanctity for the early Believers, which was rooted in reverence for the Jewish Temple and commemorated through biweekly services that continued older Jewish practices of reverence for its sacred stone.

The Dome of the Rock was thus genetically linked with the Jewish Temple, as both the early traditions of the *Faḍā'il al-Quds* literature and contemporary Jewish apocalyptic writings confirm.<sup>91</sup> Yet the Dome was not a simple restoration of Temple, particularly since there were no sacrifices involved. Instead, the Dome most likely served as a kind of ersatz Temple whose purpose was to restore dignity to the site of the Temple, which had lain in a state of humiliating devastation for almost six hundred years when the Believers took possession of its sacred precincts. Undoubtedly it was meant as a symbol of the Temple, which, according to Jewish tradition, could only be built by the Messiah. The sacrifices could not be resumed, but as the Believers awaited the Temple's divine restoration at the *eschaton*, the long disgraced sacred rock that once stood in its Holy of Holies could be adorned with a fittingly splendid shrine and revered therein with incense, perfume, and prayer.<sup>92</sup>

Therefore, while the Dome of the Rock certainly should not be understood as a formal restoration of the Jewish Temple, the building's location and its ritual practices indicate instead a sort of "renewal" or "reformation" of the Temple tradition in an "Islamic" guise. It was a monument charged with eschatological significance, a precursor for the restored Temple soon to be realized in the Hour's arrival. The Believers knew that the end of days was at hand, and so they hastened to renew worship on the Temple Mount, ultimately erecting a magnificent edifice on its most sacred spot. The Dome's architecture and decoration reflect this eschatological context: its motifs invoke both late ancient and Qur'ānic notions of Paradise, the Heavenly Jerusalem, and the Final Judgment.<sup>93</sup> Originally its decorative program also included pictures of *al-Ṣirāt* (i.e., the bridge to Heaven), the Gate of Paradise, and the Valley of Gehenna, as was befitting what was to be the site of the Final Judgment.<sup>94</sup> Perhaps the Dome of the Rock was then not merely a placeholder for the Temple, but, as Fred Donner proposes, "the Dome of the Rock and attendant buildings may have been constructed to provide a suitably magnificent

setting for the events of the Judgment—particularly, to be the locale in which ‘Abd al-Malik (or one of his successors), as leaders of the righteous and God-fearing empire of the Believers, would hand over to God the symbols of sovereignty at the moment the Judgment was to begin.”<sup>95</sup> Thus the Dome can also be understood as an architectural expression of the Believers’ political eschatology, a testament in stone to their faith that through imperial triumph their polity would soon yield power to the reign of God in Jerusalem.

### Eschatological War with Rome in the Early Islamic Apocalyptic Tradition

Among the most overlooked resources for studying the beginnings of Islam is its early apocalyptic literature, and this neglect is surely yet another symptom of the longstanding scholarly disregard for eschatology in the study of Islamic origins. Yet in these texts, what is often implicit in the Qurʾān becomes explicit. The early Islamic apocalyptic tradition shows unmistakable evidence of imperial eschatology at work, and from it we can see that the Believers clearly understood their war with the Roman Empire in eschatological terms, identifying the Romans explicitly as “the people of the end times.”<sup>96</sup> The symbiosis between *jihād* and eschatological conviction mentioned above is, not surprisingly, also in particularly high relief in this material, and Jerusalem likewise occupies a position of particular importance.<sup>97</sup> Nevertheless, like so much of the early Islamic tradition, the apocalyptic traditions of formative Islam were collected only at a much later date, and accordingly it can sometimes be difficult to determine which traditions are only of more recent vintage and which reflect perspectives from the first decades of the community of the Believers as it was expanding across the Near East. It is not a hopeless task, however, and the good news is that a great deal of material can be assigned with confidence to the first Islamic century, as Wilferd Madelung, Suliman Bashear, and David Cook have each demonstrated.<sup>98</sup> Our main source for early Islamic apocalypticism is the *Kitāb al-Fitan* of Nuʿaym ibn Ḥammād, a massive collection of apocalyptic traditions largely from Syria that was compiled by this otherwise little-known figure in approximately 820.<sup>99</sup> Presumably most of these traditions received their present formulation largely during the later Umayyad period, and perhaps some even in the early ‘Abbāsīd era. Nevertheless, as Madelung notes, the general content of much that Nuʿaym transmits is significantly older, and these apocalyptic traditions “reflect the situation

under the early Umayyad caliphate before the battle of Marj Rāhit,” which took place at the beginning of the Second Civil War in 684.<sup>100</sup> Although a number of Nu‘aym’s traditions survive also in other early *ḥadīth* collections, the vast majority do not, and accordingly his collection is the main font of the early Islamic apocalyptic tradition, for both historians and later Islamic apocalypticists. Indeed, a number of contemporary Islamist movements, including especially the apocalyptic Islamic State, have drawn significant inspiration from Nu‘aym’s unequalled collection of early Islamic apocalyptic traditions.<sup>101</sup>

There is, as Cook notes, in general strong continuity between early Islamic apocalypticism and the apocalyptic visions of late ancient Judaism, Christianity, and Zoroastrianism. Indeed, the influx of such religious culture to the nascent Islamic tradition “was no less important in quantity or significance than the transfer of scientific and philosophical material that took place during the eighth through tenth centuries.”<sup>102</sup> The apocalypticism of the late ancient Near East was, as we have seen, decidedly imperial in nature, and so it comes as no great surprise to find similar ideas expressed in the early Islamic apocalyptic tradition. For the most part, the Qur’ān and its vivid eschatological warnings are absent from early Islamic apocalyptic literature, which, as Cook notes, is essentially free of Qur’ānic citations. Instead, the imagery and vocabulary of pre-Islamic apocalypticism prevail.<sup>103</sup> This is surely in part because, once again, “the Qur’ān is an eschatological book and not an apocalyptic book.” The message of the Qur’ān is not to identify the signs that will presage the *eschaton*, but rather, “already its tokens have come” (47:20). The end was at hand, and thus there was little point in outlining future events that would one day usher in the end of the world. But the Qur’ān’s absence from these traditions is equally a good indicator of their relative antiquity. The early Islamic apocalyptic tradition formed at a time, it would seem, before Qur’ānic citation assumed special importance.<sup>104</sup>

Unfortunately, early Islamic apocalypticism has been largely ignored by the Islamic tradition and modern scholarship alike. Aside from several articles by Madelung and Bashear,<sup>105</sup> the only major study is Cook’s impressive monograph from 2002, which does an outstanding job of opening up this vast and complex literature for further scholarly analysis. An edition of Nu‘aym’s essential collection was published only in 1993, so that Madelung and Bashear had to work from manuscripts in their influential studies. Nevertheless, Cook has now published a translation of Nu‘aym’s *Kitāb* that will make this fascinating corpus even more widely available to scholars of early Islam and late antiquity.<sup>106</sup> As for the Islamic intellectual tradition, one can

readily understand why it marginalized so much of this apocalyptic material. It is, after all, largely subversive, forecasting dramatic upheaval and change and identifying the present system as in some sense defective, even if at times various regimes could channel its energy to serve their interests.<sup>107</sup> The main sources for the early Islamic apocalyptic tradition are, like Nu‘aym’s *Kitāb al-Fitan*, all Sunnī collections. A distinctively Shī‘ī apocalyptic literature does not develop until the ninth and tenth centuries, even if there are, to be sure, Shī‘ī apocalyptic movements much earlier. Prior to the ninth century, Sunnī and Shī‘ī apocalypticists shared an early “pan-Muslim” corpus of apocalyptic literature.<sup>108</sup> Moreover, distinctively Shī‘ī apocalyptic traditions tend to eschew the historical apocalypses of imperial conquest that are so prominent in the early tradition. Instead they express a more passive confidence that God will ultimately turn the tables on those in power in favor of the defeated and oppressed, no doubt a symptom of the Shī‘ī’s minority status within the Islamic world.<sup>109</sup> But in the core of early material shared by both Sunnī and Shī‘ī alike, the realization of the *eschaton* through apocalyptic imperial triumph is an especially prominent theme.<sup>110</sup>

Two sets of traditions in particular are especially relevant to this topic, the “Portents of the Hour” traditions and another set of historical apocalypses collectively known as the “A‘māq Cycle,” the name “A‘māq” in this case referring specifically to the “valleys” of northern Syria on the frontier between Rome and the Caliphate. In the first set of traditions, Muhammad outlines a series of historical events, usually six, that will indicate the Hour’s proximate arrival. This tradition is widespread in early Islamic literature, and Nu‘aym devotes an entire section of his collection to Muhammad’s enumeration of the Portents of the Hour, which includes more than thirty different traditions. The full extent of its prominence in the early Islamic tradition, however, is best appreciated through perusing the range of variants gathered by Bashear from a variety of collections.<sup>111</sup> Seemingly one of the oldest such traditions is the following *ḥadīth* from Nu‘aym’s *Kitāb* attributed to the Companion of the Prophet ‘Awf b. Mālīk al-Ashja‘ī (d. 73/692–93): “The Messenger of God said to me: ‘O ‘Awf, count six (events) before the Hour. The first of them will be my death.’ I was moved to tears then until the Messenger of God began to silence me. Then he said: ‘Say one. The second will be the conquest of Jerusalem. Say two. The third will be an epidemic death (*mawtān*) among my community like the murrain of sheep (*qu‘āṣ al-ghanam*). Say three. The fourth will be a tribulation (*fitna*) among my community.’ And (the Prophet) described it as grave. ‘Say four. The fifth will be that

money will overflow among you, such that a man may be given a hundred dinars and he will get angry about it (deeming it little). Say five. The sixth will be a truce between you and the Banu '1-Aṣfar (= Byzantines). Then they will march against you and fight you. The Muslims will at that time be in a country called al-Ghūṭa in a town called Damascus.”<sup>112</sup>

As Madelung notes, this prediction almost certainly dates to sometime before the Second Civil War, which began in the early 680s, since this *fitna* would, “no doubt, have been mentioned, like the First, if it had already happened.”<sup>113</sup> The epidemic of death refers to the plague of Emmaus (‘Amwās) in 638–39, which began in Palestine, killing some twenty-five thousand soldiers at Emmaus before spreading more widely across Syria, Iraq, and Egypt. The abundance of money, as Madelung notes, indicates the prosperity enjoyed by the Believers following the First Civil War under the reign of Mu‘āwiya (661–80).<sup>114</sup> The final sign, however, is a true prediction, forecasting the impending final conflict between the Believers and the Romans. We have here then a particularly early tradition, which identifies several significant events from early Islamic history as signs that the end would soon arrive: the death of Muhammad (632–35), the conquest of Jerusalem (635–38), the plague of Emmaus (638–39), and the First Civil War (656–61).<sup>115</sup> The prosperity under Mu‘āwiya presumably represents the time of the tradition’s formation, after which the final apocalyptic conflict was soon expected. Thus this tradition would seem to indicate that the imminent eschatological expectation of the Qur’ān endured into the early caliphate, as the Believers continued to believe that the Hour would soon arrive. One imagines that Muhammad’s death and the capture of Jerusalem were in their moment once reckoned to be *the* omen of the *eschaton*. As I have argued elsewhere, it appears that Muhammad’s earliest followers did not expect him to die before the Hour’s arrival, and so his passing surely must have triggered powerful expectations of the Hour’s imminent approach.<sup>116</sup> Likewise, the capture of Jerusalem and the restoration of worship to the Temple Mount must have had many Believers awaiting the trumpet’s call at any moment, especially those who were influenced by Jewish and Christian apocalyptic ideas. Indeed, one has the sense that perhaps this list of portents grew in number as these eschatologically charged moments passed and yet the end still did not arrive.

Before long, the conquest of Constantinople began to appear as one of the Hour’s portents in some traditions.<sup>117</sup> Very likely, when the conquest of Jerusalem failed to yield the consummation of history soon thereafter, another eschatological objective had to be identified. If removing the impure

Romans from the Holy Land and the world's apocalyptic epicenter did not usher in the Final Judgment, then perhaps only the total defeat of the Romans and their submission to the Believers' divinely elected empire would bring about the end of time. Yet even if their target had moved, the Believers' conviction that the *eschaton* would be realized through imperial conquest and their dominion remained unshaken. In this regard, however, the absence of Constantinople from the tradition cited above is surely significant. The conquest of Constantinople would appear to be an accretion to the list of portents, and so its absence here is presumably yet another sign of this tradition's relative antiquity. In addition to the Second Civil War's absence, the tradition's failure to identify Constantinople as the final apocalyptic objective suggests its formation at a time before this reorientation of Islamic eschatology had taken place. Concluding instead with mention of a truce with the Byzantines and their subsequent betrayal, this tradition seemingly reflects an expectation that the eschatological war between Rome and the Believers would be fought, if not for control of Jerusalem, then at least in Greater Syria.

With this final prediction, this early account of the Portents of the Hour opens toward the second set of early apocalyptic traditions, the A<sup>ʿ</sup>māq Cycle. This tradition too is widespread and is "fundamental to the study of Muslim apocalyptic, since the basic story line is repeated in most of the major traditions, or used as a hinge between stories."<sup>118</sup> The A<sup>ʿ</sup>māq Cycle is also quite early, probably originating in its basic form before the end of the seventh century, as, for instance, the terse allusion to its narrative as the final portent of the Hour in the tradition just considered above would seem to confirm. In one of its simplest forms, the tradition is as follows:

Then the Byzantines will send to you asking for a truce (*ṣulḥ/budna*), and you will make a truce with them. On that day a woman will cross the pass (in the Tarsus Mountains, the area of the fiercest fighting) to Syria safely and the city of Caesarea in Anatolia will be built (rebuilt). During the truce al-Kūfa will be flattened like leather—this is because they refused (lit. left off) assistance to the Muslims (i.e. of Syria), and God knows whether, in addition to this desertion (*kbidhlān*), there was another event that made attacking them permissible [religiously speaking]. You will ask the Byzantines for assistance against them, and they will assist you, and you will go until you camp [with them] on a plain with hills (*marj dhī tulūl*). One of the Christians will say: "By means of our cross

you obtained the victory; therefore give us our share of the spoils, of the women and children.” You will refuse to give them of the women and children, so they will fight and then go and return [to the Byzantine Empire] and prepare for the final apocalyptic battle (*malḥama*).<sup>119</sup>

Numerous variants add details to this basic narrative, and Nuʿaym brings over two hundred different traditions related to this eschatological battle between the Romans and the Believers, running almost sixty pages in the printed edition.<sup>120</sup> Generally these traditions describe a war with the Byzantines that begins on the Syrian frontier, and this remains the primary theater of war in Islamic apocalyptic, so that even today, for instance, contemporary apocalyptic movements within Islam place a special emphasis on the city of Dābiq as the site of the final conflict. Their focus on this specific location in the valleys of northern Syria owes itself primarily to mention of this town in the version of the Aʿmāq Cycle included in Muslims’ canonical collection of *ḥadīth*.<sup>121</sup> Nevertheless, a key battle in this war will also be fought in the Holy Land on the outskirts of Jerusalem, and its culmination will be the Islamic conquest of Constantinople, and with it, the fall of Rome. While Constantinople is unquestionably the ultimate prize in this final war, the main events remain rooted in northern Syria, a sign, it would seem, of the tradition’s formation in the early decades when this region was a hot zone of conflict between Rome and the caliphate. The valleys of northern Syria thus will be the site of the last all-out battle not just with the Byzantines but between Muslims and the entire Christian world.<sup>122</sup>

Although Bashear regards the conquest of Constantinople as fundamental to the early apocalyptic tradition, maintaining that its capture was “a corner-stone in Umayyad policy right from the start,” I suspect, as indicated above, that this may not have been the Believers’ original goal, particularly in the pre-Umayyad period.<sup>123</sup> Instead, the liberation of Jerusalem was likely their original apocalyptic objective. The conquest of Constantinople is not prominent, as we have noted, in the early Portents of the Hour traditions. These emphasize instead the liberation of Jerusalem and the coming war with Byzantium in northern Syria. In the bulk of these traditions, the conquest of Constantinople does not figure at all. For instance, only a single variant of the ʿAwf tradition cited above includes the conquest of Constantinople, and while this event appears in some other versions of this genre, these are distinctly in the minority.<sup>124</sup> Its absence from so many of these

predictions suggests that it is likely an early accretion, and furthermore it seems improbable that the conquest of Constantinople would have been erased from so many variants if it had in fact been a part of the tradition from the start. Moreover, another early apocalyptic tradition also suggests that Constantinople was not originally in focus. According to this *ḥadīth*, “This matter/affair [*al-amr*] will continue with you until God will conquer the land of Persia, and the land of the Byzantines and the land of Ḥimyar [i.e., the Yemen], and until you will be [comprised of] three military districts [*ajnād*], a *jund* in Syria, a *jund* in Iraq, and a *jund* in Yemen.”<sup>125</sup> As Cook notes, this tradition indicates that the groups originally circulating these traditions “did not see further than the immediate conquests of the orthodox caliphs.” There was no expectation of a “long-term process of conquest” because “the Day of Judgment was assumed to be so close that no further conquests could be made before it.”<sup>126</sup> Likewise, the absence of Constantinople’s conquest in more abbreviated versions of the A’māq Cycle, such as the one cited above, could also suggest that this was a secondary addition to the Believers’ vision of the end times. It is true that this event may have been omitted from these traditions simply for the sake of brevity, but I suspect that such silence instead reflects an earlier tradition in which Constantinople was not yet the object of the Believers’ eschatological ambitions.

Particularly intriguing in the A’māq apocalypse is the alliance that the Muslims of Syria will forge with the Byzantines against what are apparently other Muslims in Iraq, because the latter refused to give aid to their Muslim brothers and sisters in Syria. Why the Muslims of Syria would imagine a future war in which they would ally themselves with the Byzantines against fellow Muslims for this reason is puzzling. To my knowledge, no such alliance occurred during the early history of Islam, and one would certainly be hesitant to posit an actual coalition of Romans and Syrians against the Iraqis on the basis of this apocalyptic vision. Yet what does this tradition say about the religious identity of the communities that produced and consumed this apocalyptic literature? Cook suggests that perhaps we find here “a unique glance into the final irrevocable split between Christianity and Islam, which may have been connected together by some common beliefs at a very early stage, and by certain political ties as well.”<sup>127</sup> Presumably Cook has in mind here something along the lines of Donner’s early community of the Believers, and such a Byzantine-Muslim alliance, even only an imagined one as we find here, does seem to fit this hypothesis. The prospect of Muslims going

to war with Christians against other Muslims, simply for lack of support, suggests a time when the confessional boundaries between the two faiths may not have been as firm as they would eventually become. Perhaps the tradition itself arose right at a moment when the Believers were struggling with the limits of the community's boundaries. The Syrian Muslims, who undoubtedly represent the tradition's matrix, were likely more open to the involvement of Christians and possibly even Romans within their community than were their "Iraqi" opponents. Indeed, perhaps it was disagreement over this very issue that inspired the apocalypticist to imagine such a rift between Muslims—a debate about the relationship between their emergent faith community and the Christians of the Near East.

That this is in fact a conflict between Muslims is made clear by the outcome. After the Syrians and Byzantines triumph over the Iraqis, the Christians demand a share of the spoils, "of the women and children," arguing that this is due them because victory was achieved through the power of the cross. The result, we are told, is a disagreement with the Syrians, and the Romans retreat in order to prepare for what will be the final apocalyptic war. Yet other variants of the A'māq Cycle explain even more clearly that the issue here is that many of the Iraqi captives are Muslims, and the Syrians will not allow their coreligionists to be taken captive by the Romans, even if they are political enemies. For instance, according to another version, the Byzantines demand, "Divide with us those of your progeny [the Muslim captives] that you have captured, and they [the Muslims] will say: We will never divide with you the progeny of Muslims!"<sup>128</sup> The Byzantines consider this a betrayal, and accordingly they return home to prepare for war with their former allies. When the Byzantine emperor is initially reluctant to attack, because the Muslims have enjoyed much past success against him in combat, they go instead to the ruler of "Rome" (the pope?), whom they persuade to launch a campaign against Syria by sea, seizing control of all of Syria, except for Damascus and Mt. Mu'taq, a mountain near Ḥimṣ on the Orontes.<sup>129</sup> After their initial success, the Byzantine emperor then decides to send a large force of his own overland. Eventually they meet a much smaller force of Muslims at Jerusalem, at which point the tide begins to turn in the latter's favor. From Jerusalem, the Muslims begin to push the Byzantines back, until both sides face each other in a decisive battle in the *a'māq*, or valleys, of northern Syria.<sup>130</sup>

In a bloodbath, a third of the Muslim army is killed, and another third flees from the field. Of this third, one-third joins the Byzantines, saying, "If

God had any need of this religion [Islam], He would have aided it," while another third, the Bedouin, retreats into the desert, and the final third returns to their homelands, in Iraq, the Yemen, and the Ḥijāz. Yet the remaining third from the initial force will stand together with renewed resolve against the Byzantines, and God will send four angels with their hosts to aid them. With this divine assistance, they will defeat the Romans decisively and press further into Byzantine territory. When they reach Amorium, its citizens will surrender, but then they will betray the Muslims, alleging falsely that the Dajjāl, the Antichrist, had appeared in the Muslims' homelands. Many will turn back, and the Byzantines will take the opportunity to slaughter the Arabs that remained. Realizing that they have been duped, the others will return full of zeal for vengeance, and they will march steadily toward Constantinople, sweeping aside Byzantine armies and cities along their way. When they make camp across from Constantinople, the sea will miraculously withdraw, allowing them to take the city with ease, as the walls will crumble to shouts of "Allāhu akbar." Then the Dajjāl will actually appear at Constantinople, and together with Jesus the son of Mary, the Muslim army will defeat him.<sup>131</sup>

The conquest of Constantinople is thus the eschatological climax of this particular tradition, and as Cook notes, "the utter and complete confidence . . . that Constantinople will fall soon" in its many versions is yet another sign of its relatively early formation, at a time when this outcome seemed certain, rather than something that had still not occurred after a length of time.<sup>132</sup> Nevertheless, Jerusalem remains particularly significant in this cycle as well, and in many respects it manages to retain its eschatological importance even in the face of Constantinople's new prominence. As just seen, according to some versions of the A'māq Cycle, the final eschatological triumph over Rome will effectively begin at Jerusalem, even if the most definitive engagements will take place in the valleys of northern Syria. The Muslims begin to prevail against the Byzantines only after being pushed back to Jerusalem, where they rally their forces. This element seems to echo another set of early Islamic apocalyptic traditions, which foretell a future Byzantine reconquest of Jerusalem just before the end of time. Of course, reconquest of Jerusalem was central to the Byzantine apocalyptic tradition, as evidenced, for instance, by the *Apocalypse of Ps.-Methodius*. But this was a matter of great concern in early Islamic apocalyptic as well, and the same theme figures prominently also in medieval Jewish apocalyptic literature, making for an apocalyptic tradition shared, in different ways, by all three faiths. In the Islamic tradition, however,

the Byzantine reoccupation of Jerusalem will be very brief, lasting only forty days, at which point the Muslims will drive them out.<sup>133</sup> Moreover, these apocalyptic traditions also preserve an echo of the Byzantine legend of the Last Roman Emperor, who appears, albeit in a slightly different guise, in early Islamic traditions about an eschatological Roman emperor named Tiberius. This apocalyptic tradition too, then, seems to have made an impression on all three faiths.<sup>134</sup>

Paramount, however, for registering Jerusalem's abiding eschatological significance in the early Islamic apocalyptic tradition are the reasons given for the Believers' apocalyptic war against Rome and the capture of Constantinople. On the one hand, the Believers are charged with taking Constantinople as revenge for the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. No doubt, this motivation is an extension of the Believers' claim to the Abrahamic patrimony that they shared with the Jews. From this perspective, Rome's desecration of Jerusalem and the Temple was as much an affront to them as it was to the Jews, and therefore they claimed for themselves the right of vengeance, which they would exact through the destruction of Constantinople.<sup>135</sup> "Since one of the principal components of the messianic age is that of justice," as Cook observes, "old wrongs must be righted before this period can begin."<sup>136</sup> Even more telling, however, are the traditions that locate the eschatological motive for the conquest of Constantinople and the Byzantine Empire in restoration of the stolen treasures of the Temple to Jerusalem, which were taken by the Romans in 70 CE and, accordingly, were believed to be still in their hands. Although most of these treasures, which included the Ark of the Covenant, the rod of Moses, and the earring of Eve, were thought to be in the city of Rome, Constantinople and Antioch held some as well.<sup>137</sup> Undoubtedly Cook is right that the eschatological repatriation of the Temple treasures was linked to the Believers' determination to restore worship to the Temple Mount, and also to the notion of the Dome of the Rock as a prefiguration and placeholder for the Temple's restoration at the Hour. Since this understanding of the Dome's significance presumably did not survive much beyond the first Islamic century, once again we can be sure that we are dealing here with particularly early traditions.<sup>138</sup> Thus, in these justifications for the apocalyptic conquest of the Byzantine Empire, we find powerful confirmation that Jerusalem, its liberation, and the restoration of worship to its Holy of Holies remained at the center of the early Believers' eschatological expectations, even as they turned their sights increasingly toward Constantinople.

## Conclusion

Although the early Islamic apocalyptic tradition may at times seem to place more emphasis on the conquest of Constantinople than on the capture of Jerusalem, there can be no doubting that the latter city loomed large in the eschatological hopes of the early Believers, even after they began to look toward the New Rome. The religious significance of Jerusalem for the early Believers is unmistakable, and indeed there is good reason to suspect that initially it overshadowed even Mecca and Medina in their sacred geography. It was the original focus of their prayers and it remains to this day the “apocalyptic capital” of Islam, which surely is significant if Islam began, as seems to be the case, as a movement grounded in fervent eschatological expectation. Moreover, the importance of the Holy Land’s liberation and its restoration to the descendants of Abraham, along with the renewal of worship on the Temple Mount, reveal the importance of capturing and controlling Jerusalem for the early Believers. The eschatological charge of the Dome of the Rock’s design and decoration along with the apocalyptic significance of the “Temple’s” restoration signal that Jerusalem’s capture was more than just another victory: it was the object of their eschatological desires. The fact that the conquest of Jerusalem is named as one of the Portents of the Hour and that Jerusalem remained centrally important in the A‘māq Cycle attests to its enduring apocalyptic significance, even if after its capture the Hour did not arrive. Indeed, as we have just seen, according to a number of traditions, the continued conquests and the anticipated capture of Constantinople and even Rome were undertaken primarily to avenge the Temple’s destruction and to restore its holy objects.

Nevertheless, even if we were to remove Jerusalem completely from view, there can be no doubting that, based on the early Islamic apocalyptic tradition, the early Believers’ movement was fueled by a powerful ideology of imperial eschatology. Their expectations of the Hour’s impending arrival remained strong, as did their conviction that history would soon be fulfilled in the triumph of their divinely chosen polity over the ungodly powers of the world, among whom stood, most notably, Rome. Through their striving on behalf of their community’s military success, they were doing the work of bringing about God’s divine plan for the apocalyptic redemption of the world.<sup>139</sup> Therefore, when we situate what we are able to know about earliest Islam within the religious landscape of the late ancient Near East, within

which it formed and into which it emerged, we find it was an eschatological movement that is well in line with the imperial apocalypticism of the age. Indeed, perhaps we should best regard Muhammad's new religious polity as a remarkable instantiation of the political eschatology that we find expressed elsewhere in Jewish, Christian, and Zoroastrian writings of this era.<sup>140</sup> As Heilo similarly concludes, "Perhaps it was logical that the terrestrial universalism of Christian Rome was surpassed by an agent that had taken its apocalyptic promise to its logical end."<sup>141</sup>

## Conclusion

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Earliest Islam, or more properly, the community of the Believers, was a religious movement that arose within the broader context of widespread imminent eschatological anticipation across the late ancient Near East. Moreover, Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians of this age alike believed that the ultimate triumph of an earthly empire would play an essential role in bringing about the consummation of the ages. Not surprisingly, the early Believers seem to have been following a largely identical script, according to which the expansion of their divinely chosen polity through armed struggle against the infidels would soon culminate in the Final Judgment of the Hour. That Jerusalem and the biblical Holy Land were the original object of their eschatological desires is to be expected, not only on account of their significance in Jewish and Christian eschatology but also because these Ishmaelites were conscious of their identity as descendants of Abraham and thus as co-heirs to his Promised Land. This is, admittedly, a very different understanding of earliest Islam from what one generally finds in both the Islamic tradition and in modern scholarship alike. Nevertheless, unlike these other perspectives, it places earliest Islam in meaningful continuity with the various other religious traditions of the late ancient Near East, as one would expect. And, given the arrestingly late development of the traditional narratives of Islamic origins, which first take shape only around the beginning of the second Islamic century, we must look elsewhere to reconstruct the earliest history of the Believers' movement. The striking correspondence between the imperial apocalypticisms of late antiquity and what we are able to know about the Believers from the Qur'an and other seventh-century sources suggests that such an ideology offers one of the best paradigms for understanding the rise of Islam.

Thus we may conclude not only that the faith of Muhammad and his earliest followers was apocalyptic but also that they believed that the *eschaton* would soon be fulfilled in their community's triumph through violent struggle against the infidels. Most notably, Rome is singled out as the Believers'

preeminent eschatological adversary, and its final elimination at the hands of their righteous polity was essential to the fulfillment of God's plan for the universe. Such findings, to be sure, go against the grain of much that contemporary scholarship on Islamic studies has proposed about the beginnings of Islam. Indeed, we have addressed some of these issues already in Chapter 5. Over the last century, and even more so during the last decade or so, many studies on Muhammad and the beginnings of Islam have sought in various ways to separate Muhammad from apocalypticism and, perhaps more important, violent struggle against those considered to be infidels. Instead, Muhammad is portrayed above all else as a great advocate for social and economic justice, for the poor and downtrodden. He is a great teacher of spiritual awakening. Other interpretations would instead separate religion from the violence of the Near Eastern conquests in a different way. These conquests were not motivated by any religious doctrine, such advocates maintain, but instead the transition to Islamic dominion in the Near East originally began simply as an ethnic migration from the deserts to seize control of a defeated Sasanian Empire and significant parts of a militarily exhausted Roman Empire. According to this perspective, Islamic religious belief actually had little to nothing to do with conquests, and so in its origins Islam is kept separate from the violence of these events. Thus the battles against Rome in the seventh century were driven not by religious faith but instead by more mundane urges for land, power, and wealth.

In many cases, such interpretations, particularly those of Muhammad as champion of the oppressed, seem to be offered with the deliberate purpose of presenting Islam's founding prophet in a more positive light, and more specifically, in a manner that corresponds more closely with the values of modern liberalism.<sup>1</sup> Not infrequently, these explanations of Islamic origins lack a critical perspective on the traditional Islamic sources, which they treat as if they were essentially unproblematic records of Muhammad's life and teachings. Yet, at the same time, these accounts often ignore or marginalize the violence that such sources routinely attribute to Muhammad and the early Islamic polity. The aim is seemingly to develop a narrative about Muhammad and the origins of Islam that can ground more liberal understandings of Islam in the present. On the one hand, I must say that I am deeply sympathetic to these efforts at reinventing the memory of Islamic origins to comport more with the values of modern liberalism. Such an endeavor seems essential for Islam to be able to fully engage the principles of Western modernity and the Enlightenment, if that is one's goal. Yet on the other hand, it is

essential that we not confuse such remythologization of the period of origins with critical history. To quote Robert Hoyland once again, “Such opinions reflect an attempt to present Islam more positively in a world in which Islamophobia has been growing. But such apologetic aims, though noble, are out of place in works of history.”<sup>2</sup>

Much that we have concluded in this study about the beginnings of Islam stands at odds with important elements of these more “liberal” portraits of Muhammad and his earliest followers. Indeed, I suspect that many readers may instead discern some similarities between this apocalyptic understanding of early Islam and more radical and militant versions of contemporary Islam, including, for instance, the Islamic State, or ISIS. Of course, in these movements we find nothing at all resembling the interconfessional openness of the early community of the Believers. Yet at the same time, it is hard to miss the resemblances to the Believers’ powerful apocalyptic conviction, their commitment to warring against the infidels to expand their polity, and their belief that the *eschaton* would soon be ushered in through their decisive defeat and subjugation of “Rome,” that is, the powers of Christendom.<sup>3</sup> I can only imagine that some readers might be dismayed at these conclusions, since in certain quarters it has become de rigueur to insist that the violent apocalypticism of such Islamist movements and their calls to wage war against infidels are not genuinely Islamic, but rather these positions reflect perversions of “true” Islam by individuals with other, often psychopathic, motives. While I certainly wish that such a view were correct, as a historian of religion I find it hard to accept such interpretations of the Islamic tradition’s early history. It of course is not my place, as a non-Muslim, to pronounce what is “true” Islam and what is a perversion of truth. The struggle to define such normative claims belongs to members of the Islamic faith alone and is (or should be) entirely foreign to the scholarly discourse of religious studies. Nevertheless, at the same time, many of the views expressed by militant Islamist groups are unfortunately well-grounded in the early history of the community and Islamic traditions about Muhammad.<sup>4</sup> I think that we all, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, do ourselves a great disservice by failing to acknowledge the real presence of these more troubling ideas at the core of the tradition. Ignoring them and pretending that they do not exist only gives them power. These elements are not missed by Islamic fundamentalists, to be sure, who are often careful readers—in their own fashion—of traditional materials. So long as we refuse to acknowledge and address these more “illiberal” elements at the foundation of the Islamic tradition, they will continue to

thrive in the minds of those fanatics who believe it is essential to follow the tradition exactly as Muhammad taught it and as his earliest followers observed it.

The image of Muhammad as an often brutal warlord is ensconced in his traditional biographies—there is simply no avoiding this fact. For this reason, D. S. Margoliouth, an early twentieth-century scholar of early Islamic history, once proposed that Muhammad's portrayal in these biographies must be accurate because they cast him so often in a negative light. No faithful Muslims, he suggested, would make up such unsavory things about their founding prophet.<sup>5</sup> Yet this judgment, which admittedly contains a fair amount of anti-Islamic prejudice, misses perhaps the most significant point: both Muhammad and his earliest biographers simply did not have modern liberal values, and it is a fundamental mistake to imagine that they would have or even could have shared them. Muhammad and his biographers reflect the premodern values of the early medieval cultures of the Near East and the Mediterranean world. These values, one must emphasize, were by no means unique to Muhammad or the early Islamic tradition, and accordingly, it is unfair to judge early Islam and its founder as somehow especially violent in their actions and aspirations. The Christian Empire of late antiquity was often equally brutal in the name of the Christian faith, as was the Sasanian Empire in the service of Zoroastrian truth, and even Judaism, in Yemen on the eve of Islam, showed itself no less susceptible to outbursts of religious violence. Yet in all of these instances such activities were justified according to values of ancient or medieval civilizations, not post-Enlightenment modern liberalism. We must, then, come to view the religious violence advocated by Muhammad and enacted in early Islam in the same light: as the actions of premodern people with premodern values. Indeed, we should not expect otherwise.

Although it is perhaps not my place to say, scholars and activists who are working to develop and promote more liberal versions of Islam would be better served by acknowledging these often disquieting elements of early Islamic history rather than ignoring or obscuring them. Instead, they should be explicitly acknowledged and rejected for what they are: reflections of premodern values that should not be normative in the context of post-Enlightenment liberalism. Such acknowledgment and rejection have been essential for the progress of liberalism with Christian tradition, for example, as it continues to negotiate the reconciliation of its history with modern liberal values. There is no question, for instance, that the Bible condones

slavery and has very illiberal views on gender and sexuality. In these areas liberal Christians have often had to acknowledge a significant difference between the values of the world of the Bible and their own modern values, generally deciding in favor of the latter. It seems to me, on the basis of this comparison, that it will be essential for modern (or postmodern, for that matter) Islamic liberalism to similarly acknowledge and directly reject the religious violence expressed in parts of the Qurʾān and Muhammad's biographies. Simply ignoring these elements or denying their very existence will not, I think, solve the problem, as we have unfortunately seen, or so it would seem, in recent developments within global Islam. Instead, we must confront the past for what it was and in some instances refuse to allow its antiquated and often severe values to define modern norms.

# Notes

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## Abbreviations

<i>BSOAS</i>	<i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies</i>
CSCO	Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium
CSEL	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<i>JSAI</i>	<i>Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam</i>
LCL	The Loeb Classical Library
PG	J. P. Migne, ed. <i>Patrologiae cursus completus, Series graeca</i> . 161 vols. Paris: Excecu- debat et venit apud J.-P. Migne, 1857–.
SLAEI	Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam
Teubner	Bibliotheca scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana

References to biblical texts and other related early Jewish and Christian texts are indicated using the system of abbreviations outlined in Patrick H. Alexander, *The SBL Handbook of Style for Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Early Christian Studies* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), 69–89.

## Introduction

1. Shoemaker, “Afterlife of the Apocalypse.” My special thanks to the organizers, Derek Krueger and Robert S. Nelson, and Margaret Mullett for this inspiring invitation.
2. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, 90.
3. Heilo, *Eastern Rome*, 69.

## Chapter 1

1. Horsley, *Revolt of the Scribes*, 1.
2. *Ibid.*, 7.
3. E.g., *ibid.*, 61.
4. E.g., *ibid.*, 79, 138–40.
5. E.g., Collins, “Toward the Morphology,” 9; Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 6. In this chapter I will refer often to the works of Collins, since a more thorough engagement with the vast scholarly literature on early apocalypticism would be quite difficult, and Collins and his writings are widely regarded as authoritative on this subject. Indeed, this chapter is not intended to offer a critical intervention in the field of early Jewish apocalyptic literature so much as provide needed background for the subsequent development of imperial apocalypticism in the Christian tradition.

6. Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 38, 41–42.
7. E.g., Eddy, *The King Is Dead*, 183–256.
8. Smith, “Wisdom and Apocalyptic”; reprinted in Smith, *Map Is Not Territory*, 67–87.
9. John J. Collins, foreword to Portier-Young, *Apocalypse Against Empire*, xii–xiii.
10. E.g., Lanternari, *Religions of the Oppressed*; Worsley, *Trumpet Shall Sound*; Mühlmann, *Chiliasmus und Nativismus*; and Adas, *Prophets of Rebellion*. See more recently Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization*, 62–66. Regarding some important differences between the “millenarianism” of the modern social sciences and early medieval apocalypticism, see Palmer, *Apocalypse*, 9–19.
11. Esler, “Social-Scientific Approaches,” 132. See also Esler’s own contribution regarding the politics of early Jewish apocalypses: Esler, “Political Oppression.” From a rather different perspective, see Rowland, “Book of Daniel.”
12. Horsley, *Revolt of the Scribes*, 3; Portier-Young, *Apocalypse Against Empire*, xv. In all fairness, however, Portier-Young’s work fares much better in this regard, since she limits herself to only three of the earliest apocalypses that were produced in Hellenistic Palestine and do in fact focus on imperial rule and resistance to it.
13. Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:8; Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 70. See also DiTommaso, “Apocalypticism and the Aramaic Texts,” 464.
14. Portier-Young, “Jewish Apocalyptic Literature,” 154–56.
15. Horsley, *Revolt of the Scribes*, 159.
16. Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 146–48. See also Collins, *Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls*.
17. Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 51, 102; Collins, *Daniel*, 61.
18. Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 146.
19. See Collins, “What Is Apocalyptic Literature,” 10; and Rowland, “Book of Daniel,” which looks at the interpretation of Daniel in service to a radical critique of empire during the early modern period. See now also Rowland, “Apocalypticism and Radicalism.”
20. Duhaime, *War Texts*. See also Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 166–71; and Collins, *Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 91–109.
21. DiTommaso, “Apocalypticism and the Aramaic Texts,” 456.
22. *Ibid.*, 464.
23. See esp. Collins, “Toward the Morphology,” 12–15; and Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 10, 13.
24. E.g., Collins, “Toward the Morphology,” 18.
25. Collins, “What Is Apocalyptic Literature,” 6–7.
26. Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 11–13.
27. Collins, “Early Christian Apocalypticism,” 7; Aune, “Apocalypse of John,” 86–87. Cf. Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 42n141.
28. Those more familiar with scholarship on apocalypticism in the medieval West may notice some differences in terminology. Western medievalists tend to follow modern anthropological and sociological concepts and categories in their approach to eschatology and apocalypticism. In the present book, we adhere instead to terminology derived from the historical study of early Jewish apocalypticism, as is more common in the study of early and late ancient Christianity and Judaism. For a discussion of the terminology favored by Western medievalists, see, e.g., Palmer, *Apocalypse*, 9–19.
29. Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 59; Milik, *Books of Enoch*, 7.

30. *1 Enoch* 82:4–6; cf. 75:1–2 (Knibb and Ullendorff, *Ethiopic Book of Enoch*, 1:240–41, 271–73, 2:167, 188; trans. Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:61).

31. Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 61.

32. *Ibid.*, 43–44.

33. *Ibid.*, 50–51. Horsley presents a much stronger reading, maintaining that the *Book of the Watchers* offers “a sharp prophetic condemnation of the imperial violence and oppression” of Hellenistic rule, which is symbolized in the Watchers and their actions. See Horsley, *Revolt of the Scribes*, 47–62, esp. 47.

34. See, e.g., Wilken, *Christians*, 137–43.

35. Collins, *Daniel*, 35–52.

36. Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 85.

37. Collins, *Daniel*, 58–70.

38. Humphreys, “Life-Style.” See also Collins, *Daniel*, 38–52; Wills, *Jew in the Court*.

39. In this regard, see Collins, “Apocalypse and Empire,” 5–8.

40. Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 106–201. Nevertheless, Hesiod mentions five ages altogether, and the fifth is associated with iron, while the fourth has no association with any metal. See Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 92–93.

41. The classic study of this motif remains Flusser, “Four Empires.” Also important is the earlier study by Swain, “Theory of the Four Monarchies.” See also Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 93–98.

42. Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 98.

43. *Ibid.*, 98–107.

44. *Ibid.*, 108–12, 114; Collins, “Mythology of Holy War,” 600–603; Portier-Young, *Apocalypse Against Empire*, 235–42, 387.

45. Regarding the historical context for both works, see Portier-Young, *Apocalypse Against Empire*, 315–19, 347–52.

46. Knibb and Ullendorff, *Ethiopic Book of Enoch*, 1:344–46, 351, 2:218–21, 224–25; Milik, *Books of Enoch*, 266–67.

47. I do not find very persuasive Portier-Young’s conclusion that this simply refers to “capital punishment” that will be enacted by the righteous against the wicked: Portier-Young, *Apocalypse Against Empire*, 388. This interpretation seems to derive from an interest in separating apocalyptic resistance from militant revolt.

48. Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 68–69.

49. Knibb and Ullendorff, *Ethiopic Book of Enoch*, 1:327, 2:212–13.

50. Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 69–70.

51. Knibb and Ullendorff, *Ethiopic Book of Enoch*, 1:332, 2:214.

52. Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 145–48. The chapter on Qumran in this volume is largely a summary of the same author’s more detailed study, Collins, *Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls*.

53. Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 153–55, 169–70; Collins, *Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 38–51, 101–3.

54. Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 155–57; Collins, *Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 52–70.

55. Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 158–61; Collins, *Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 75–90.

56. The quotations and translations are from Collins, *Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 82, which one should consult for further details.

57. Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 166–71; Collins, *Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 93–99. For more on the various texts and the relations of the different versions to one another, see Duhaime, *War Texts*, 12–44.

58. See Duhaime, *War Texts*, 56–60, 83–97; Duhaime, “War Scroll”; and Yadin, *Scroll of the War*, esp. 4, 147, 174–75. See also Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 167; Collins, *Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 95–96, 99.

59. Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 168–69; Duhaime, *War Texts*, 77–81.

60. Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 170–71; Collins, *Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 108–9.

61. Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 143–44; Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2:639–46. See also *Psalms of Solomon* 2:1–2, 25–26, 8:16–18, 17:6–7, 12, 20 (Wright, *Psalms of Solomon*, 58–59, 68–71, 118–19, 178–83, 186–87).

62. Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 128–33; Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:919–23.

63. *Testament of Moses* 6:8–9, 8–10 (Charles, *Assumption of Moses*, 76–77, 80–91; trans. Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:930–92).

64. Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 177–81.

65. E.g., *1 Enoch* 38:5 (Knibb and Ullendorff, *Ethiopic Book of Enoch*, 1:110, 2:126).

66. Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 191.

67. Daschke, *City of Ruins*, 103–86.

68. Josephus, *Jewish War* 6.5.4 §§312–13 (Niese, *Flavii Iosephi opera*, 6:554; trans. Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 194).

69. Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 212–13, 223–24.

70. *2 Baruch* 82:3 (Gurtner, *Second Baruch*, 130–31, 133). On the relation between the apocalypse and the letter, see Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:615–16.

71. Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 196, 206.

72. *4 Ezra* 11:37–46 (Fischer, *Biblia sacra*, 1960; trans. Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:549).

73. *4 Ezra* 12:11, 31–32 (Fischer, *Biblia sacra*, 1961; trans. Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:550).

74. *4 Ezra* 13:3, 9–11 (Fischer, *Biblia sacra*, 1963; trans. Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:551).

75. Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 263; Sanders, *Historical Figure of Jesus*, 248, 264–65, 273. There is, however, some dispute as to whether the title “messiah” was applied to Jesus in his lifetime; Sanders, for instance, argues that the title was given by his followers only after his death.

76. The idea that Jesus preached the Kingdom’s arrival in the immediate future while at the same time believing that the beginning of the Kingdom was already present in his teachings and miracles seems to represent a fairly broad consensus. The first to propose this seems to have been Kümmel, *Promise and Fulfilment*, first published in 1945. More recently, see, e.g., Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2:237–506, esp. 451–54, 1042–46; Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 466–67; and Theissen and Merz, *Historical Jesus*, 252–78. Sanders allows that it is certainly possible that Jesus believed this about himself and his ministry, but he maintains that the evidence cannot establish it as probable: Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 131–41; Sanders, *Historical Figure of Jesus*, 175–78. Regarding the status of this view as reflecting the current consensus, see Theissen and Merz, *Historical Jesus*, 244; and Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 467.

77. The argument that Jesus was actually a social and political revolutionary who aimed at overthrowing Roman rule received its best presentation in Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots*. Nevertheless, the thesis was refuted decisively in Hengel, *Zealots*, 337–41. Brandon's thesis has recently been revived, albeit without much added nuance, in Aslan, *Zealot*. Dominic Crossan presents Jesus as a revolutionary in a slightly less “political sense” in Crossan, *Jesus*: the argument is lively but ultimately not very persuasive. Likewise, Horsley interprets Jesus as interested primarily in organizing social reform among the peasants and in the villages of Galilee in Horsley, *Spiral of Violence*. Nevertheless, on both accounts, see Ehrman, *Jesus*, 127, 190.

78. See, e.g., Ehrman, *Jesus*, 123–62.

79. Harrill, “Paul and Empire,” 281.

80. *Ibid.*, 282.

81. E.g., Kallas, “Romans XIII.1–7”; Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 661–76; Hurley, “Ironie dramatique”; Horsley, *Hidden Transcripts*.

82. Harrill, “Paul and Empire,” esp. 283, 293–95. See also Harrill, *Paul the Apostle*, 76–94.

83. See, e.g., Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 272–73, 276; Collins, “Political Perspective”; Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 116–24; and Frilingos, *Spectacles of Empire*, 1, 13, 58–61.

84. Mango, *Byzantium*, 203; Bousset, *Antichrist Legend*, 26, 126; Wortley, “Literature of Catastrophe,” 7; Magdalino, “History of the Future,” 9–10.

85. Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 276–78; Collins, “Political Perspective.”

86. Collins, “Early Christian Apocalypses,” 83.

87. Smith, “Wisdom and Apocalyptic,” 131, citing Betz, “Zum Problem,” 409.

88. Herodotus, *Histories* 1.95 (Rosén, *Herodoti Historiae*, 66–67); Ctesias in Diodorus Siculus, *Historical Libraries* 2.32–34 (Dindorf et al., *Diodori Bibliotheca historica*, 1:223–27). See also Flusser, “Four Empires,” 153–54; and Swain, “Theory of the Four Monarchies,” 5–7.

89. Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 97.

90. Swain, “Theory of the Four Monarchies,” 9; cf. Flusser, “Four Empires,” 154, 157. On the acceptance of Swain's hypothesis, see Collins, *Daniel*, 167n146.

91. Grayson, *Babylonian Historical-Literary Texts*, 14–15, 17. See also Hasel, “Four World Empires”; and Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 96.

92. Kaufman, “Prediction, Prophecy, and Apocalypse in the Light of New Akkadian Texts,” 224; see also Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 97.

93. Cereti, *Zand ī Wabman Yasn*.

94. In favor of its antiquity, see Hultgård, “Bahman Yasht: A Persian Apocalypse”; against, see Gignoux, “L'apocalyptique iranienne” (1999). See also Flusser, “Four Empires,” 154; and Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 30–31, 94–95.

95. Plutarch, *On Isis and Osiris* 47 (Vernardakēs, *Plutarchi Chaeronensis Moralia*, 2:520–21). See also Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 31, 169.

96. Lycophron, *Alexandra* 1226–31, 1446–50 (Holzinger von Weidich, *Lycophron's Alexandra*, 152–53, 162–63). There is some dispute about the authenticity of the poem's attribution, particularly in light of the high regard it holds for Rome. Nevertheless, for a recent defense of the attribution's accuracy, see Jones, “Lycophron's *Alexandra*.”

97. The excerpt is found in a historian from the very beginning of the first century CE, Velleius Paterculus, *Compendium of Roman History* 1.6.6 (Halm, *C. Vellei Paterculi*; trans. Swain, “Theory of the Four Monarchies,” 2).

98. Polybius, *The Histories* 38.22 (Paton et al., *Polybius: The Histories*, 6:438–39); Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities* 1.2.2–4 (Jacoby, *Dionysi Halicarnasensis Antiquitatum*, 1:3–4);

Tacitus, *The Histories* 5.8–9 (Fisher, *Cornelii Taciti Historiarum libri*); Appian, *Roman History* Preface, 9 (Mendelssohn, *Appiani Historia romana*, 1:8–9).

99. See Christ, *Die römische Welt Herrschaft*, esp. 59–71, 91–123, 155–68, 177–79; Instinsky, “Kaiser und Ewigkeit”; Ivánka, *Rhömäerreich und Gottesvolk*, 13–49.

100. Virgil, *Eclogue* 4.5.10 (Greenough, *Bucolics, Aeneid, and Georgics of Virgil*, 1:11). Cf. Collins in Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:320.

101. Claudian, *De consulatu Stilichonis* 3.159–66 (Platnauer, *Claudian*, 2:54–55).

102. Rutilius Namatianus, *De Reditu Suo* 83–86, 137–40 (Duff and Duff, *Minor Latin Poets*, 770–71, 774–75). Regarding his religious identity, see Cameron, *Last Pagans*, 217.

103. Nicholson, “Golden Age.”

104. Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 116–18, 125–27, 234, 238. See also *Sibylline Oracles* 11–14 (Geffcken, *Oracula sibyllina*, 174–226).

105. *Sibylline Oracle* 2.154–76 (Geffcken, *Oracula sibyllina*, 34–35).

106. *Sibylline Oracle* 4 (Geffcken, *Oracula sibyllina*, 91–102, esp. 96–99). See also Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 235, 240–41; and Flusser, “Four Empires,” esp. 148–53.

107. *Sibylline Oracle* 5 (Geffcken, *Oracula sibyllina*, 102–29); Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:391; Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 234–36; Collins, *Sibylline Oracles*, 73–95, esp. 94–95.

108. *Sibylline Oracle* 5.108–78 (Geffcken, *Oracula sibyllina*, 109–12). For more on this “savior king,” see Collins, *Sibylline Oracles*, 87–92.

109. *Sibylline Oracle* 3.196–294, 657–808 (Geffcken, *Oracula sibyllina*, 58–63, 82–90). See also Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:354–56; and Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 118–19. Regarding the composition and date of the third *Oracle*, see Collins, *Sibylline Oracles*, 21–33.

110. *Sibylline Oracle* 3.193, 318, 608 (Geffcken, *Oracula sibyllina*, 58, 64, 79). For more on this “savior king,” see Collins, *Sibylline Oracles*, 38–44.

111. *Sibylline Oracle* 3.652–56 (Geffcken, *Oracula sibyllina*, 82).

112. Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 121–22; Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:354–57. See also *Sibylline Oracle* 3.286–94 (Geffcken, *Oracula sibyllina*, 63); and Collins, *Sibylline Oracles*, 40–44.

113. *The Oracle of the Potter* (Koenen, “Prophezeiungen,” 207; trans. Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 121). Regarding the date, see Koenen, “Prophezeiungen,” 186–93.

114. *Apocalypse of Elijah* 2:46–3.1 (Steindorff, *Die Apokalypse des Elias*, 84–87; trans. Frankfurter, *Elijah in Upper Egypt*, 311–13). On the relation to the Last Emperor, see also *ibid.*, 24, 202; and Alexander, *Oracle of Baalbek*, 60, 137.

115. *Prophecy of Neferti* (Helck, *Die Prophezeiung des Nfr.tj*, 41–47, 51–57; trans. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 1:143–44). Regarding the date, see Frankfurter, *Elijah in Upper Egypt*, 168.

116. *Admonitions of Ipuwer* (Gardiner, *Admonitions*, 78–83).

117. *Demotic Chronicle* 2.25–3.22 (Spiegelberg, *Die sogenannte demotische chronik*, 10–11, 15–17).

118. *Oracle of the Lamb* 2.5 (Zauzich, “Das Lamm des Bokchoris,” 166, 168). On the relation to the *Oracle of the Potter*, see Koenen, “Supplementary Note.”

119. Grayson, *Babylonian Historical-Literary Texts*, 14–15, 17.

120. Lactantius, *Divine Institutes* 7.15–17 (Brandt, *Lactantii Opera omnia*, 632–40; trans. Coxe, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 7:212–15). Regarding the date and the other sources for this text, see Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 32.

## Chapter 2

1. Collins, “Early Christian Apocalypses,” 66–68, 83, 95.
2. This is true also of the apocalypses discovered with the Nag Hammadi texts. These are discussed in this context in Fallon, “Gnostic Apocalypses.”
3. *Sibylline Oracle* 8 (Geffcken, *Oracula sibyllina*, 142–44, 146, 148–50, 152). See also Collins, “Early Christian Apocalypses,” 97–98, concerning *Oracles* 1–2 and 7.
4. *Ascension of Isaiah* 4 (Bettiolo and Norelli, *Ascensio Isaiæ*, 1:64–73).
5. Podskalsky, *Byzantinische Reichseshatologie*, 11.
6. An excellent discussion of the Apocalypse’s reception during the first Christian centuries can be found in Constantinou, “Andrew of Caesarea,” 1:52–84, which can be downloaded at <http://archimede.bibl.ulaval.ca/archimede/fichiers/25095/25095.pdf>. A revised version has recently been published as Constantinou, *Guiding to a Blessed End*. Nevertheless, both these works and the same author’s introduction to her recent translation of Andrew’s commentary are a bit too enthusiastic and apologetic in their advocacy of Andrew’s commentary: see, e.g., Constantinou, “Andrew of Caesarea,” 1:188; and Constantinou, *Guiding to a Blessed End*, 169. See also Constantinou, “Apocalypse Patchwork.” Likewise, her frequent—and unwarranted—denigration of Oikoumenios and his commentary is unfortunate. See also Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.28, 7.25; Kretschmar, *Offenbarung des Johannes*, 69–79; Daley, *Hope of the Early Church*, 17–18, 21, 31, 49, 60–61; Wilken, *Land Called Holy*, 55–56, 76–78; and Podskalsky, *Byzantinische Reichseshatologie*, 79–90. On apostolicity as a criterion for canonicity, see Metzger, *Canon of the New Testament*, 253.
7. For more concerning the Apocalypse of John and its reception, see Shoemaker, “Afterlife of the Apocalypse.”
8. Schott, *Christianity, Empire*, 155.
9. Olster, “Byzantine Apocalypses,” 53–55.
10. Podskalsky, *Byzantinische Reichseshatologie*, 11–12.
11. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 254; cf. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Panegyric on Constantine* 2–6 (Heikel, *Eusebius Werke*, 1:199–212; trans. in Drake, *In Praise of Constantine*, 85–94).
12. See also, e.g., Bardill, *Constantine*, 338–95; Van Dam, *Roman Revolution*, 291–92; Chesnut, *First Christian Histories*, 139–42, 164–71; and Oort, *Jerusalem and Babylon*, 154–57.
13. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Demonstratio Evangelica* 15, frag. 1 (Heikel, *Eusebius Werke*, 6:493–94).
14. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catecheses* 15.11–13 (Reischl and Rupp, *Cyrelli Hierosolymarum*, 2:168–71).
15. (Ps.-?) John Chrysostom, *Commentary on Daniel* 2 (PG 56, 207–9). Regarding the attribution to Chrysostom and its close connection to him, see Podskalsky, *Byzantinische Reichseshatologie*, 19–20.
16. Theodoret of Cyrhus, *Commentary on Daniel* 2; 7 (PG 81, 1304–9; 1436–37; see also Hill, *Theodoret of Cyrus*, 56–63, 200–205).
17. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 2 Thessalonians* 4 (Field, *Ioannis Chrysostomi interpretatio*, 4:471–73); Jerome, *Letter 121 to Algasia* (Hilberg, *Sancti Eusebii Hieronymi Epistulae*, 3:53–54); Tertullian, *Apology* 32.1, 39.2 (Dekkers, *Apologeticum*, 143, 150). See also Podskalsky, *Byzantinische Reichseshatologie*, 55, 55n332; Brandes, “Anastasios ὁ δίκωπος,” 25; and Magdalino, “History of the Future,” 4. Bonura maintains that the *Tiburine Sibyl*’s identification of the Son of Perdition from 2 Thessalonians 2:3 with the Antichrist indicates “that it was using material from the eighth century or later”: Bonura, “When Did the Legend,” 85–86. Nevertheless, just prior to making this

judgment, Bonura notes that already in the later second century Irenaeus and Hippolytus had identified these two figures. He dismisses the significance of this evidence by confining these authors to the “western tradition,” so that they could not influence the *Tiburtine Sibyl’s* author. This is not very persuasive, however. Not only is it somewhat problematic to draw sharp boundaries between east and west in the early Christian centuries, but Irenaeus was from Asia Minor, and both he and Hippolytus wrote in Greek.

18. Prieser-Kapeller, “Between ‘New Jerusalem,’” esp. 51–75.

19. Griffith, *Ephraem, the Deacon of Edessa*, esp. 48.

20. Aphrahat, *Demonstration 5: On Wars* 13–14, 24 (Graffin et al., *Patrologia syriaca*, 1:207–12, 233–34; trans. Schaff and Wace, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 13:361). See also Morrison, “Reception,” 79; and Ubierna, “Syriac Apocalyptic,” 149–54.

21. McCormick, *Eternal Victory*, esp. 3.

22. Sivertsev, *Judaism and Imperial Ideology*, 9–14; Olster, “Byzantine Apocalypses,” 54.

23. Kosmas Indikopleustes, *Christian Topography* II.73–75 (Wolska-Conus, *Cosmas Indicopleustès, Topographie chrétienne*, 1:387–91; trans. Magdalino, “History of the Future,” 11).

24. Magdalino, “History of the Future,” 11.

25. *Life of Daniel the Stylite* 10 (Delehay, *Les saints stylites*, 12). See also Magdalino, “History of the Future,” 11–12.

26. Theodore Synkellos, *Homily on the Siege of Constantinople* (Sternbach, *Analecta Avarica*, e.g., 298–301). See also Alexander, “Heraclius,” 222–23.

27. Brandes, “Anastasios ὁ δίκωρος,” 38–39; see also the copious notes on these pages.

28. Olster, “Byzantine Apocalypses,” 53–54. See also Magdalino, “History of the Future,” 3.

29. Magdalino, “History of the Future,” 11.

30. Cohn, *Pursuit of the Millennium*, 32–33. See also Olster, “Byzantine Apocalypses,” 51–52; Magdalino, “History of the Future,” 20.

31. Sackur, *Sibyllinische Texte*, 126–37; see also Alexander, *Oracle of Baalbek*, 3–5, 60–62. Note that the remainder of this chapter largely reproduces material from an earlier article: Shoemaker, “The *Tiburtine Sibyl*, the Last Emperor.”

32. Holdenried, *The Sibyl and Her Scribes* has laid important groundwork for a new edition in this regard.

33. See, e.g., Alexander, *Oracle of Baalbek*, 53–55, 63–64, examples that are also noted below.

34. *Ibid.*, 41–47, 75–105. Concerning the original language, see *ibid.*, 60–65.

35. Alexander, “Medieval Apocalypses,” 998–99, 1009.

36. Sackur, *Sibyllinische Texte*, 129–37, 181–84; Alexander, *Oracle of Baalbek*, 60–62.

37. See, e.g., Bousset, *Antichrist Legend*, 45–49, 62–65; Bousset, “Antichrist,” 1:580; Kampers, *Die deutsche Kaiseridee in Prophetie und Sage*, 18–19; Sackur, *Sibyllinische Texte*, 162–63; Konrad, *De ortu*, 43–53; Alexander, *Oracle of Baalbek*, 49–65; Alexander, “Byzantium and the Migration,” 67n35; Alexander, “Medieval Legend,” 14–15; Alexander, “Diffusion,” 56–57; Alexander, *Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, 162–63, 171–72, esp. 172n74; Podskalsky, *Byzantinische Reichschatologie*, 55n333; Rangheri, “La ‘Epistola ad Gerbergam,’” 708–9n79; Wortley, “Literature of Catastrophe,” 16–17; McGinn, *Visions of the End*, 43–44; McGinn, “*Teste David cum Sibylla*,” 26–28; McGinn, “Oracular Transformations,” 612–13; Brandes, “Die apokalyptische Literatur,” 309; Möhring, *Weltkaiser der Endzeit*, 35–44, 49; and Greisiger, *Messias*, 103–4. Note that while some of these scholars have on occasion expressed doubt as to whether the Last Emperor tradition was a part of this late fourth-century *Tiburtine Sibyl* (a point discussed in some detail below), they are agreed that the text otherwise—excepting the medieval king lists—dates to this time. A

peculiar outlier is Petre Guran, who dates this text to the tenth century and incorrectly maintains that Paul Alexander argued that it could not date to the fourth century: Guran, “Genesis and Function,” 298–99.

38. Sackur, *Sibyllinische Texte*, 157–62; see also Alexander, *Oracle of Baalbek*, 49–65.

39. Alexander, *Oracle of Baalbek*, 63–64; for the text, see *ibid.*, 14. See also McGinn, “Oracular Transformations,” 640.

40. Sackur, *Sibyllinische Texte*, 183; cf. *ibid.*, 160–62.

41. Alexander, *Oracle of Baalbek*, 14; trans. 25.

42. *Ibid.*, 53–55; for the Latin text, see Sackur, *Sibyllinische Texte*, 128n4; and Alexander, *Oracle of Baalbek*, 14. See also McGinn, “Oracular Transformations,” 640.

43. Alexander, *Oracle of Baalbek*, 48–55, 63–64.

44. Although some manuscripts read instead “Traiani,” it does not seem possible to identify this figure with Trajan, since the Sibyl subsequently explains that the nine suns represent “all future generations,” with the fourth generation witnessing the birth of Christ. Accordingly, some manuscripts read here instead “of their king Romulus” or “of the consul, whose name was Trojanus” or “of the senators.” Sackur explains, however, that “Troiani” is in fact the correct reading and is a reflection of the traditions that the Romans were descended from the Trojans, and so their ancestral king is here named Trojanus: see Sackur, *Sibyllinische Texte*, 172–73.

45. *Ibid.*, 179. See also my forthcoming translation of the *Tiburtine Sibyl*, which will be the first English translation of the oldest version edited by Sackur: Shoemaker, “The *Tiburtine Sibyl*: Translation.”

46. Sackur, *Sibyllinische Texte*, 179.

47. *Ibid.*, 179–80. Alexander considers the peculiarities of this “Sibylline Gospel” in *Oracle of Baalbek*, 67–74. David Flusser has proposed on the basis of this Sibylline Gospel that the core of the *Tiburtine Sibyl* goes back to the late first century CE, although I do not find the argument very persuasive: Flusser, “Early Jewish-Christian Document,” esp. 168–69, 176–78.

48. Sackur, *Sibyllinische Texte*, 181.

49. *Ibid.*, 181–84.

50. *Ibid.*, 184.

51. *Ibid.*, 185–86.

52. The fact that the use of this title here reflects the general structure of Rome’s eschatological role as envisioned by Christian writers of the fourth century seems to belie Bonura’s claim that the *Tiburtine Sibyl*’s identification of the Son of Perdition from 2 Thessalonians 2:3 with the Antichrist indicates “that it was using material from the eighth century or later”: Bonura, “When Did the Legend,” 85–86. The church fathers of the fourth century repeatedly identified Rome as “the withholding force,” after which the “Son of Perdition” would immediately follow.

53. On this topic, see now Cameron, *Last Pagans*.

54. See, e.g., Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque*, 11.

55. Ps.-Ephrem, *Homily on the End* 8 (Suermann, *Die geschichtstheologische Reaktion*, 25). There has been some debate as to whether the bulk of Ps.-Ephrem’s *Homily* may in fact be even earlier, and some scholars have proposed that the section concerning Islam was later inserted into an apocalyptic homily from the later fourth century. Nevertheless, there is a fairly broad consensus that the work as it presently stands was produced ca. 640. The main exception to this consensus would seem to be Reinink (and Hoyland?), who considers 640 a *terminus post quem*, finding a *terminus ante quem* in 683. See Reinink, “Pseudo-Ephraems ‘Rede,’” esp. 439–41, 455–63; and Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 261–63.

56. *Apocalypse of Ps.-Methodius* 13.11–14.6 (Reinink, *Die Syrische Apokalypse*, 38–45 [Syr] and 63–74 [Germ]; trans. in Palmer, *Seventh Century*, 237–40).

57. Alexander, *Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, 24–28; Suermann, *Die geschichtstheologische Reaktion*, 159–61.

58. *Apocalypse of Ps.-Methodius* 5.9, 10.6, 13.2 (Reinink, *Die Syrische Apokalypse*, 11, 23, 35 [Syr] and 15, 39, 57 [Germ]), although according to the edition the manuscripts read in the third instance “in the last week” rather than “in the tenth.” The Greek and Latin persistently have seven weeks of years in all three instances, and the edition indicates that the other Syriac manuscripts either read seven weeks or are lacking the passage in question (as the apparatus seems to indicate in 5.9).

59. E.g., Brock, “Syriac Views,” 19; Palmer, *Seventh Century*, 225; Reinink, “Ps.-Methodius: A Concept of History,” 150, 178–84; cf. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 264n17.

60. Palmer, *Seventh Century*, 230, 236, although Brock translates “seventh” in the second instance instead of “last,” presumably for consistency with the first passage.

61. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 264n17.

62. *Apocalypse of Ps.-Methodius* 10.6, 13.2 (Reinink, *Die Syrische Apokalypse*, 23, 35 [Syr] and 39, 57 [Germ]; Aerts and Kortekaas, *Die Apokalypse des Pseudo-Methodius*, 1:134–35, 164–65).

63. Alexander, “Medieval Apocalypses,” 1001; Alexander, *Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, 52–53. See also Martinez, “Apocalyptic Genre,” 340–41n9. Brock and Reinink also point to eschatological fervor, the threat of apostasy, and tax increases as motives for the *Apocalypse’s* composition. Yet eschatological fervor and the threat of apostasy seem just as relevant to the middle of the seventh century as the end, and the suggestion of a response to ‘Abd al-Malik’s tax increases, while not impossible, is highly speculative. It is perhaps worth noting, however, that taxation is a theme seemingly common to the Last Emperor traditions, as evidenced in the Greek version of the *Tiburtine Sibyl* and also the *Apocalypse of Elijah*, an already mentioned text that seems to have strongly influenced the *Tiburtine Sibyl* and the Last Emperor tradition. Perhaps this tendency offers a better explanation. See Alexander, *Oracle of Baalbek*, 21, 29; and Steindorff, *Die Apokalypse des Elias*, 86; trans. Frankfurter, *Elijah in Upper Egypt*, 312.

64. Aerts and Kortekaas, *Die Apokalypse des Pseudo-Methodius*, 16, 30, 57.

65. See, e.g., Alexander, *Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, 13–14; Podskalsky, *Byzantinische Reicheschatologie*, 53–56; Aerts and Kortekaas, *Die Apokalypse des Pseudo-Methodius*, 16–18; and Garstad, *Apocalypse Pseudo-Methodius*, ix–x.

66. Aerts and Kortekaas, *Die Apokalypse des Pseudo-Methodius*, 19.

67. Sackur, *Sibyllinische Texte*, 6.

68. See, e.g., Alexander, *Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, 152–84; Alexander, “Byzantium and the Migration,” esp. 53–62; Alexander, “Diffusion”; McGinn, “Oracular Transformations,” 604–12; and Kraft, “Last Roman Emperor.”

69. McGinn, “Oracular Transformations,” 631, 642.

70. Alexander, “Byzantium and the Migration,” 67n35; Wortley, “Literature of Catastrophe,” 16–17; McGinn, *Visions of the End*, 44; McGinn, “*Teste David cum Sibylla*,” 26–27; McGinn, “Oracular Transformations,” 607, 609, 613.

71. Most recently, for instance, Penn, *Envisioning Islam*, 30, although here clearly Penn stands under the influence of Reinink and others.

72. Bonura, “Man and the Myth.” Bonura’s two main arguments concern the placement of the emperor’s crown on the cross and the citation of Psalm 68:31. Nevertheless, in both cases comparison of the two texts supports instead not only the independence of the *Sibyl’s* account but

*Ps.-Methodius's* probable dependence on the *Sibyl*. Bonura's arguments are specifically addressed in the notes below as the appropriate issues are discussed.

73. E.g., Reinink, "Die syrischen Wurzeln"; Reinink, "Pseudo-Methodius und die Legende," esp. 82–83; Reinink, "Ps.-Methodius: A Concept of History," esp. 153–55, 165–78; Suermann, *Die geschichtstheologische Reaktion*, 208; Suermann, "Der byzantinische Endkaiser," esp. 144–45; Kraft, "Last Roman Emperor," although see 217n18. Guran, to his credit, excludes the *Tiburtine Sibyl* on the basis of his dating of it, rather oddly, to the tenth century: Guran, "Genesis and Function," 298–99.

74. A recent challenge to this consensus has been posed by Potestà, "Vaticinium of Constans," who argues that this final section of the *Tiburtine Sibyl* was composed early in the reign of Constans II (641–68), although I do not find the arguments very persuasive. Several key points are addressed in the notes below, but one should additionally note here Potestà's argument that the identification of this eschatological figure as a "king" requires a date sometime after Heraclius, since he was the first to adopt this title. To the contrary, it seems much more probable that the *Tiburtine Sibyl's* account of the Last Emperor here borrows this title from the eschatological language of the Bible: see, e.g., Daniel 2 and 7–8.

75. Alexander, *Oracle of Baalbek*, 21, 29.

76. Schleifer, *Die Erzählung der Sibylle*, 38–41, 66–67. This similarity in particular suggests the dependence of these versions on the Greek one edited by Alexander, although as he notes, they have been subjected to a tremendous amount of editing during their subsequent transmission: see Alexander, *Oracle of Baalbek*, 5–6n9.

77. Basset, *La sagesse*, 19.

78. Alexander, *Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, 156; more recently, Greisiger, *Messias*, 103–4. Sackur's edition does refer twice to the Hagarenes, but these are clearly medieval interpolations of the late ancient text related to the medieval kings who have been added.

79. Potestà, "Vaticinium of Constans" does not address this issue directly, which in my opinion severely weakens the argument for a later dating. This is also a major flaw in Bonura's proposal (in "Man and the Myth"), which similarly fails to offer an explanation for this difference. If the *Sibyl* depends on *Ps.-Methodius*, then there must be a very convincing explanation for why such a change was made.

80. Bonura, "When Did the Legend," 75.

81. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Church History* 2.1.13 (Winkelmann, *Die Kirchengeschichte*, 1:108). Potestà, "Vaticinium of Constans," 282–83 argues that this citation cannot refer to the conversion of Egypt and Ethiopia from paganism in the fourth century, since this had already been accomplished by the reign of Constantius II. Nevertheless, one should consider two factors: first, the events in question are here adduced as portents that the end was soon at hand, and so even by Potestà's estimation they still seem sufficiently proximate to be relevant as such in the era of Constantius II; second, the conversion of Egypt and Ethiopia to Christianity was in a very real sense still ongoing at the time of Constantius II and had not been fully accomplished by any means. Potestà's suggestion that Egypt and Ethiopia here instead refer to the conversion of these two lands from a miaphysite Christology to a Neo-Chalcedonian one is at best highly speculative.

82. Sackur, *Sibyllinische Texte*, 167–68. See also Konrad, *De ortu*, 46–47; and Möhring, *Weltkaiser der Endzeit*, 42; cf. McGinn, *Visions of the End*, 295n9.

83. Even Potestà, despite his later dating of the *Tiburtine Sibyl's* Last Emperor traditions, also concludes that the Last Emperor traditions of the *Apocalypse of Ps.-Methodius* clearly depend on the account now extant in the Latin *Tiburtine Sibyl*: Potestà, "Vaticinium of Constans," 286–87.

84. Alexander, “Diffusion,” 58, 63–64, and esp. 93–94n9; so also Sackur, *Sibyllinische Texte*, 170; and Rangheri, “La ‘Epistola ad Gerbergam,’” 708–9n79.

85. Alexander, “Diffusion,” 58, 63–64.

86. Alexander, *Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, 156, 158, 163, 166; Alexander, “Diffusion,” 63–64.

87. Alexander, *Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, 152–53, 166–67.

88. Sackur, *Sibyllinische Texte*, 185.

89. Reinink, *Die Syrische Apokalypse*, 38 (Syr); trans. Palmer, *Seventh Century*, 237.

90. Trans. in Alexander, *Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, 166.

91. Reinink, “Ps.-Methodius: A Concept of History,” 152–53.

92. Alexander, *Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, 167.

93. Reinink, *Die Syrische Apokalypse*, 44 (Syr); trans. Palmer, *Seventh Century*, 240.

94. Sackur, *Sibyllinische Texte*, 44. See also Konrad, *De ortu*, 48; Reinink, “Die syrischen Wurzeln,” 202; Reinink, “Ps.-Methodius: A Concept of History,” 170–74; Reinink, “Romance of Julian,” Martinez, “Apocalyptic Genre,” 349–50; and Potestà, “Vaticinium of Constans,” 287. For the passage from the *Syriac Julian Romance*, see Hoffmann, *Iulianos der Abtruennige*, 200–201. For the Syriac *Cave of Treasures*, see *Cave of Treasures* 24.24–26 (Ri, *La caverne des trésors*, 192–95 [Syr], 74–75 [Fr]).

95. Bonura mistakenly argues that since the crown’s placement on the Cross at Golgotha depends specifically on Syriac traditions, the *Tiburtine Sibyl’s* account must depend on *Ps.-Methodius*. The main problem, however, is that neither a crown nor a diadem is placed on the cross at Golgotha or anywhere else for that matter in the *Tiburtine Sibyl*. Rather, the Last Emperor lays down his diadem and royal garb in Jerusalem. On the contrary, then, the absence of these features, which derive from Syriac cultural traditions, in the *Tiburtine Sibyl* strongly suggests that *Ps.-Methodius* has added them to the *Sibyl’s* more minimalist account, as argued below. Moreover, Bonura does not offer any explanation for why these elements would have been removed from the *Sibyl’s* account, which seems to be necessary to explain dependence on *Ps.-Methodius*, but his argument seems to miss the fact that these features are not in fact present in the *Tiburtine Sibyl*. See Bonura, “Man and the Myth,” 509–10. The same critique applies to the similar arguments in Bonura, “When Did the Legend,” 82–85.

96. Reinink, “Ps.-Methodius: A Concept of History,” 176–77. See also Konrad, *De ortu*, 47–48; Reinink, “Die syrischen Wurzeln,” 201; and Martinez, “Apocalyptic Genre,” 351.

97. In addition to the following discussion, see also Sackur, *Sibyllinische Texte*, 170–71; and Alexander, *Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, 167–69. Bonura argues that the fairly loose citation of the verse in the *Sibyl* is a result of the interpolator’s misunderstanding of the ambiguities present in the Syriac version of this verse (Bonura, “Man and the Myth,” 510–12). Yet this makes little sense. There are other medieval versions of the *Tiburtine Sibyl* that do in fact show influence from *Ps.-Methodius* at this point, no doubt because of the latter’s immense popularity alongside the *Sibyl*. Yet these cite the psalm exactly as it was translated in the Latin version of *Ps.-Methodius*, which is indeed a clear sign of their dependence on this account, it would seem. Moreover, the Latin version of *Ps.-Methodius* translates this verse in a way that perfectly reflects one meaning of the Syriac, the one that *Ps.-Methodius* seemingly intended (see below). Therefore, it is not clear why, if this version of the *Tiburtine Sibyl* depends on the Latin version of *Ps.-Methodius*, this oldest version of the *Tiburtine Sibyl* did not similarly adopt the text of this psalm as it was translated in the Latin *Ps.-Methodius* but instead changed its wording. Surely we are not to imagine that the *Sibyl’s* supposed Latin interpolator was using the original Syriac and was confused by the ambiguities of the Syriac!

Since any such interpolation would almost certainly have been made from the Latin translation of *Ps.-Methodius*, I do not see how the difference in the wording of this verse in the *Tiburtine Sibyl* could possibly support its dependence on *Ps.-Methodius*. Again, to the contrary, it is one of many signs of the independence of the *Sibyl's* account, since it does not reflect *Ps.-Methodius* on this point. The fact that the *Sibyl's* citation does not match exactly any of the Latin versions of the Bible that have come down to us is also not a sign of its dependence on *Ps.-Methodius*. Early Christian writers would often tweak biblical passages either to suit the context or perhaps as the result of a less than perfect memory. Furthermore, the quotation's deviance from the received versions is at the same time also a likely indicator of its antiquity: the variation perhaps reflects a time before the text of the Bible had become more formally standardized.

98. Sackur, *Sibyllinische Texte*, 185. Bonura, "Man and the Myth," overlooks this important point in his interpretation of the psalm and its presence in the *Sibyl*.

99. Reinink, *Die Syrische Apokalypse*, 44–45 (Syr). My translation, although see also *ibid.*, 73–74 (Germ); Reinink, "Ps.-Methodius: A Concept of History," 161–62; and Palmer, *Seventh Century*, 240.

100. Reinink, *Die Syrische Apokalypse*, 19–20 (Syr) and 29–34 (Germ).

101. See, e.g., Reinink, "Ps.-Methodius: A Concept of History," 161–68; and Reinink, "Alexander the Great," 175–76.

102. Alexander, *Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, 168.

103. Brock's translation of this text and his introduction appear in Palmer, *Seventh Century*, with this comment at 223.

104. According to Bonura, "Man and the Myth," 510–11, *Ps.-Methodius* reflects here a distinctive Syriac tradition of interpreting Psalm 68:31, and somehow this too indicates that the *Sibyl* depends on *Ps.-Methodius* in its citation of this psalm. However, I am not aware of any prior Syriac tradition of reading the psalm in this way. To the contrary, *Ps.-Methodius* himself directly acknowledges that the tradition reflected in the *Tiburtine Sibyl* is in fact the established interpretation of the verse at the time. Moreover, *Ps.-Methodius's* extended exegesis of this verse across his apocalypse is so peculiar and idiosyncratic that it seems easier to understand it as a necessary reinterpretation of a verse that was already associated with the Last Emperor so that it would comport better with the historical circumstances of his time, when Egypt and Ethiopia had been converted already for some time. Elsewhere, Bonura maintains that *Ps.-Methodius* introduces this interpretation "because he needed to show that this prophecy being repeated by his 'brothers of the clergy' applied to the Greeks/Romans—that they would be the final empire that surrendered power to God": Bonura, "When Did the Legend," 87–88. Nevertheless, there is no explanation for why the author would take the very unusual and idiosyncratic step of making this point by identifying Rome with Egypt and Ethiopia. It seems much easier to understand the introduction of this—seemingly new—interpretation as resulting from a need to reinterpret a verse that was already associated with the Last Emperor's appearance that no longer made sense in the author's seventh-century cultural milieu. In this case, the rather creative exegesis of Rome as somehow being Egypt and Ethiopia, in combination with the multiplicity of meaning in the Syriac version, was seemingly the solution.

105. Martinez, "Apocalyptic Genre," 347–38; Greisiger, "Ein nubischer Erlöser-König," 195.

106. Sackur, *Sibyllinische Texte*, 171–72.

107. Reinink, *Die Syrische Apokalypse*, 13–17 (Syr) and 19–26 (Germ); Sackur, *Sibyllinische Texte*, 186, lines 2–5.

108. See Alexander, *Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, 187.

109. See Reinink, *Die Syrische Apokalypse*, 21–26 and 67–68 (Germ), esp. 21n4, 67n2.
110. Alexander, *Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, 163n44.
111. Alexander, “Diffusion,” 58, 63–64, and esp. 93–94n9; cf. Alexander, “Medieval Legend,” 15; Sackur, *Sibyllinische Texte*, 170.
112. Möhring, *Weltkaiser der Endzeit*, 44. See also Brandes, “Anastasios ó δίκωπος,” 37–38. Bonura, however, argues against this evidence that “there was no good reason why the two traditions needed to be combined”: Bonura, “When Did the Legend,” 80. Indeed, this is in a certain sense correct, but the fact is that these ideas were combined, either by the author of the *Tiburtine Sibyl* or by the author of the *Syriac Alexander Legend*. I see no reason to presume, as Bonura seemingly does, that while it was possible (or there was some good reason) for the *Syriac Alexander Legend* to combine these traditions in the seventh century it was not possible (or there was no good reason) for the author of the *Tiburtine Sibyl*’s Last Emperor tradition to have done so. The important point here is that the two traditions were already available for the latter to combine just as much as they were for the former. Therefore, this point is not decisive, and other elements of these accounts, which we discuss above, should decide the question.
113. Van Donzel, Schmidt, and Ott, *Gog and Magog*, 9; see also Pfister, *Alexander der Grosse*, 319–27.
114. Josephus, *Jewish War* 7.7.4 (Thackeray, *Josephus: The Jewish War*, 3:574–75); *Antiquities of the Jews* 1.6.1 (Thackeray et al., *Josephus: Jewish Antiquities*, 1:58–61).
115. Jerome, *Letter* 77, 8 (Hilberg, ed., *Sancti Eusebii Hieronymi Epistulae*, 2:45).
116. Sackur, *Sibyllinische Texte*, 172.
117. Kroll, *Historia Alexandri*, 146; trans. Stoneman, *Greek Alexander Romance*, 159. This passage is also confirmed by the Latin and Armenian translations, both of which were realized very early: Kübler, *Iuli Valeri*, 168; Wolohojian, *Romance of Alexander*, 158. Concerning the date and these versions, see Zuwiyya, *Companion to Alexander Literature* 2–3, 5–6; and Stoneman, *Greek Alexander Romance*, 8–14.
118. For this reason the arguments for a later date in Potestà, “Vaticinium of Constans,” 286 on the basis of this number are a bit peculiar and not very persuasive. Likewise, Bonura’s contention that this evidence is insignificant because it occurs as “but one number in a list” of numbers is not very persuasive: Bonura, “When Did the Legend,” 82n146.
119. Sivertsev also concludes that the *Sefer Zerubbabel* and the *Apocalypse of Ps.-Methodius* share a common source for their knowledge of this tradition: Sivertsev, *Judaism and Imperial Ideology*, 139, 145–53.
120. See here also the arguments of Guran, “Genesis and Function,” 277–85.
121. See, e.g., Alexander, “Medieval Legend,” 5–7.
122. Sackur, *Sibyllinische Texte*, 165.
123. Antonius of Piacenza, *Itinerarium* 18 (Geyer, *Itineraria*, 138).
124. *Martyrdom of St. Arethas and His Companions* 39 (Detoraki, *Le martyre de Saint Aréthas*, 284–85).
125. Rangheri, “La ‘Epistola ad Gerbergam,’” 708–9n79; Möhring, *Weltkaiser der Endzeit*, 43.
126. Rangheri, “La ‘Epistola ad Gerbergam,’” 708–9n79; Möhring, *Weltkaiser der Endzeit*, 43–44. Cf. Alexander, *Oracle of Baalbek*, 63–65.
127. 5 Baruch (Halévy, *Těžžâza sanbat*, 95–96; trans. in Leslau, *Falasha Anthology*, 75–76). Regarding the date, Pierluigi Piovanelli recently presented his arguments in a paper titled “The Visions of Baruch and Gorgorios: Two ‘Moral’ Apocalypses in Late Antique Ethiopia,” at the 2012 Annual Meeting of the Society for Biblical Literature in Chicago. The foundation of the argument

is the text's failure to mention the Islamic conquests or any other event beyond the end of the sixth century.

128. See, e.g., van Bekkum, "Jewish Messianic Expectations," 107–8; Reeves, *Trajectories*, 20, 31–39, 58–66; Stoyanov, *Defenders and Enemies*, 53–54; and Himmelfarb, "*Sefer Eliyyahu*," 229–30. See also Suermann, "Der byzantinische Endkaiser," 148–55.

129. For more on this topic, in addition to what follows, see Shoemaker, "The Reign of God."

130. See, e.g., Shoemaker, *Death of a Prophet*.

131. See also Mango, *Byzantium*, 203–4; Magdalino, "History of the Future," 4–5; Alexander, *Oracle of Baalbek*, 118–20; Brandes, "Anastasios ὁ δίκωπος," 26–32, 39–40, 53–63; Ashbrook Harvey, "Remembering Pain," 298–302; Nicholson, "Golden Age"; Brandes, "Die apokalyptische Literatur," 308; and Stoyanov, *Defenders and Enemies*, 55, 62.

132. Bonura suggests that Donner and I depend on the late ancient tradition of the Last Emperor to be able "to posit a Christian/Roman influence on Islamic interest in Jerusalem, emphasizing both the eschatological impact on the early Islamic faith and Islam's place in a greater late antique context": Bonura, "When Did the Legend," 73–74. As I hope this study will make clear, the evidence in support of such a hypothesis is significantly broader than just the Christian tradition of the Last Emperor.

### Chapter 3

1. Bowersock, *Empires in Collision*, 6, 18.

2. Mango, *Byzantium*, 203–4; Magdalino, "History of the Future," 4–5; Alexander, *Oracle of Baalbek*, 118–20; Alexander, "Historiens byzantins"; Brandes, "Anastasios ὁ δίκωπος," 26–32, 39–40, 53–63; Landes, "Lest the Millennium," 156–65; Palmer, *Apocalypse*, 42–50; Ashbrook Harvey, "Remembering Pain," 298–302; Nicholson, "Golden Age"; Brandes, "Die apokalyptische Literatur," 308; Meier, *Das andere Zeitalter*, esp. 11–22; Stoyanov, *Defenders and Enemies*, 55, 62.

3. Magdalino, "Year 1000," 238. See also Scott, "Justinian's New Age," esp. 4–5.

4. Magdalino, "History of the Future," 18–19; Reinink, "Heraclius"; Mango, "Le temps," 435–36.

5. Hoyland, "Early Islam as a Late Antique Religion," 1066–67.

6. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, 14–17, 81–82, 96–97, 125, 143–44.

7. See the helpful discussion in Palmer, *Apocalypse*, 4–9.

8. Heilo, *Eastern Rome*, 124.

9. Cameron, "Late Antique Apocalyptic: A Context for the Qur'an?" I thank Professor Cameron for sharing this article with me before its publication.

10. Bleckmann, "Apokalypse," 13. See also Landes, "Lest the Millennium," 156–65.

11. Fried, *Aufstieg aus dem Untergang*, 37; trans. from Palmer, *Apocalypse*, 2. Palmer's study argues, against those scholars who would minimize the significance of apocalypticism in the late ancient and early medieval West, that apocalyptic thought was both "mainstream" and highly influential on political ideology and religious faith and practice.

12. See the various studies cited above in n. 2.

13. Magdalino, "History of the Future," 5; so also Brandes, "Anastasios ὁ δίκωπος," 44.

14. Meier, *Das andere Zeitalter*.

15. Agathias, *Histories* V.5 (Keydell, *Agathiae*, 169–70; trans. Magdalino, "History of the Future," 6). See also Brandes, "Anastasios ὁ δίκωπος," 46.

16. Cameron, "Late Antique Apocalyptic: A Context for the Qur'an?"

17. See, e.g., the extensive survey in Patlagean, *Pauvreté économique*, 74–92.

18. Wortley, “Literature of Catastrophe.”
19. See esp. Brandes, “Anastasios ὁ δίκωπος,” 43–47.
20. Magdalino, “History of the Future,” 5–9, 15–18; Brandes, “Anastasios ὁ δίκωπος,” 39–46; Scott, “Malalas, *The Secret History*,” 107–9.
21. Romanos the Melode, *Hymn 51: On the Ten Virgins* 4 (Grosdidier de Matons, *Romanos le Mélode: Hymnes*, 5:302; trans. Magdalino, “History of the Future,” 6). On eschatology in Romanos’s hymns, see also Brandes, “Anastasios ὁ δίκωπος,” 41–43; and Meier, *Das andere Zeitalter*, 77–84. Regarding the date, see Magdalino, “History of the Future,” 6; Scott, “Justinian’s New Age,” 16; and Brandes, “Anastasios ὁ δίκωπος,” 41.
22. Verghese, “Kaiserkritik,” 397.
23. Romanos the Melode, *Hymn 50: On the Second Coming* 23–24 (Grosdidier de Matons, *Romanos le Mélode: Hymnes*, 5:264–67). See also Meier, *Das andere Zeitalter*, 79. Regarding the date, see Scott, “Justinian’s New Age,” 17.
24. Scott, “Malalas, *The Secret History*,” 108.
25. Scott, “Justinian’s New Age,” 6–9.
26. *Ibid.*, 11.
27. Scott, “Malalas, *The Secret History*,” 108–9; Verghese, “Kaiserkritik”; Scott, “Justinian’s New Age,” 11–21.
28. Procopius, *Secret History* 12.18–27 (Dewing, *Procopius: The Anecdota or Secret History*, 148–53). See also Scott, “Malalas, *The Secret History*,” 108–9; and Scott, “Justinian’s New Age,” 12–13. In addition, see Brandes, “Anastasios ὁ δίκωπος,” 43; Meier, *Das andere Zeitalter*, 86–89; Rubin, “Fürst der Dämonen”; Rubin, *Das Zeitalter Iustinians*, 441–54; Rubin, “Antichrist”; and Gantar, “Kaiser Justinian.” Note, however, Cameron’s dissenting view of these reports: Cameron, *Procopius*, 56–59.
29. John Lydus, *De Magistratibus* 3.12 (Wünsch, *Ioannis Lydi De magistratibus*, 98–99).
30. Romanos the Melode, *Hymn 54: On Earthquakes and Fires* 13.3–7, 23.1–8 (Grosdidier de Matons, *Romanos le Mélode: Hymnes*, 5:484–85, 496–97). Regarding the date, see Scott, “Justinian’s New Age,” 14.
31. Romanos the Melode, *Hymn 51: On the Ten Virgins* 4 (Grosdidier de Matons, *Romanos le Mélode: Hymnes*, 5:302–3; trans. Carpenter, *Kontakia*, 171).
32. Romanos the Melode, *Hymn 50: On the Second Coming* 9–10 (Grosdidier de Matons, *Romanos le Mélode: Hymnes*, 5:246–49).
33. See Verghese, “Kaiserkritik” and Scott, “Justinian’s New Age,” 14–19 for fuller discussion of these hymns.
34. John Malalas, *Chronicle* 18 (Dindorf, *Ioannis Malalae chronographia*, 425–96). See also Scott, “Justinian’s New Age,” 19–21; and Scott, “Malalas, *The Secret History*,” 107–9.
35. See Wood, “*We Have No King*,” 132–62, esp. 133; and Schwartz, “Religious Violence,” esp. 568.
36. Schwartz, “Religious Violence,” 583–84.
37. *Ibid.*, 585–86.
38. *Syriac Julian Romance* (Hoffmann, *Iulianos der Abtruennige*, 200–201).
39. Reinink, “Romance of Julian.” See also Sackur, *Sybillinische Texte*, 44.
40. Magdalino, “History of the Future,” 11–17.
41. Cameron, “Late Antique Apocalyptic: A Context for the Qur’an?”
42. Heilo, *Eastern Rome*, 70.
43. Cameron, “Late Antique Apocalyptic: A Context for the Qur’an?”

44. Greisiger, *Messias*, 103–80.
45. E.g., Gregory the Great *Dialogues* III.38.3 (Vogüé, *Dialogi*, 2:430). See also Palmer, *Apocalypse*, 56–68; and Dagens, “La fin des temps.”
46. Markus, *Gregory*, 51–54, esp. 51.
47. Magdalino, “History of the Future,” 18–19; Reinink, “Heraclius”; Mango, “Le temps,” 435–36.
48. *Life of Theodore of Sykeon* 134 (Festugière, *Vie de Théodore de Sykéôn*, 106, 110–11); *Life of George of Choziba* 4 (Houze, “Sancti Georgii Chozebitae confessoris et monachi vita,” 117); *Life of Mibr-Mab-Gusmasp* (Bedjan, *Histoire de Mar-Jabalaba*, 475–77). The references are from Reinink, “Heraclius,” 82–83.
49. Mango, *Byzantium*, 205; Reinink, “Heraclius,” 83–84.
50. Drijvers, “Heraclius and the *Restitutio Crucis*,” 186–87.
51. Mango, “Deux études,” 117; Magdalino, “History of the Future,” 19.
52. Magdalino, “History of the Future,” 19; Dagron and Déroche, “Juifs et chrétiens,” 29, 42 (NB: this same article was recently republished with the same pagination in Dagron and Déroche, *Juifs et chrétiens*); Reinink, “Alexander the Great,” 160.
53. Theophylact of Simocatta, *History* V.15 (de Boor and Wirth, *Theophylacti Simocattae Historiae*, 216–17; trans. Whitby and Whitby, *History of Theophylact*, 153). See the discussions of this prophecy in Alexander, “Historiens byzantins,” 4–5; Reinink, “Alexander the Great,” 159–60; and Stoyanov, *Defenders and Enemies*, 63–64.
54. In this I agree with Reinink, “Heraclius,” 88, although I am not entirely convinced, as Reinink suggests, that this is incompatible with the view expressed by Michael and Mary Whitby that the prophecy predicts a “messianic Golden age” will follow. This too could be part of the eschatological process of history’s conclusion.
55. Alexander, “Historiens byzantins,” 4–5; Mango, *Byzantium*, 205.
56. Whitby and Whitby, *History of Theophylact*, 153n80.
57. Reinink, “Heraclius,” 87, 89.
58. *Passion of St. Golinduch* 17 (Kekeliže, ეტიუღებო, 3:226). For a Latin translation, see Garitte, “La Passion géorgienne de sainte Golindouch,” 438–39. Regarding the original language of composition and the antiquity of the Georgian version in relation to the Greek, see *ibid.*, 407–25. I have prepared an English translation of the Georgian version, which will be published with translations of the hagiographical writings of Eustratius Presbyter by Averil Cameron and Phil Booth. The volume will appear in the Translated Texts for Historians published by the University of Liverpool Press.
59. *Passion of St. Golinduch* 15 (Kekeliže, ეტიუღებო, 3:223). For a Latin translation, see Garitte, “La Passion géorgienne de sainte Golindouch,” 437.
60. Translation from Droge, *Qur’an*, 264, slightly modified.
61. Stoyanov, *Defenders and Enemies*, 63–64.
62. Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses*, 22.
63. I thank Philippe Buc for this suggestion.
64. George of Pisidia, *Heraclius* I.65–70, 82–84 (Pertusi, *Giorgio*, 243–44); *In Bonum Patri-cium* 7 (*ibid.*, 163).
65. George of Pisidia, *On the Restoration of the Cross* 1–8, 109–10 (Pertusi, *Giorgio*, 225, 229).
66. See esp. Alexander, “Heraclius.”
67. Shahid, “Iranian Factor,” esp. 307–8; Stoyanov, *Defenders and Enemies*, 66–67; Magdalino, “History of the Future,” 19.

68. See George of Pisidia, *Hexaemeron* (PG 92, 1425–1578, esp. 1575–76). Mango, *Byzantium*, 205; Reinink, “Heraclius,” 83–84; Shahid, “Iranian Factor,” 307–8.

69. Van Bladel, “Alexander Legend”; Tesei, “Prophecy.”

70. Both texts have been published with English translation in Budge, *History of Alexander*. Gerrit Reinink has more recently produced a critical edition of the *Poem*: Reinink, *Das syrische Alexanderlied*.

71. Reinink, “Alexander the Great,” 151–65; Reinink, “Die Entstehung,” 279–80; Reinink, *Das syrische Alexanderlied*, 2:1–11.

72. Indeed, it seems largely for this reason that Stephen Gerö rejects the possibility that the *Legend* could possibly be the source of the Qur’ān’s traditions: Gero, “Legend of Alexander.”

73. For Reinink’s arguments to this effect, see Reinink, *Das syrische Alexanderlied*, 2:11–15.

74. See, e.g., Reinink, “Alexander the Great,” 166–67.

75. Budge, *History of Alexander* 268 (Syr) and 154 (Eng).

76. Nöldeke, *Beiträge*, 31.

77. Budge, *History of Alexander* 269 (Syr) and 154 (Eng); my translation.

78. Nöldeke, *Beiträge*, 31.

79. Bousset, “Beiträge,” 114–15.

80. Kaegi, *Heraclius*, 143–45; Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses*, 104–28.

81. Movses Kaghankatvatsi, *History of the Caucasian Albanians* 2.11 (Aḡak’elyan, ՄՈՒՆԷ ՎԱՊԱՆՆԿԱՍՏՈՒԱՅԻ [Movsēs Kaghankatuats’i], 135–37; trans. Dowsett, *History*, 83–84). Regarding the date, see Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses*, 108–13.

82. This is evident from the survey of scholarship in Reinink, *Das syrische Alexanderlied*, 2:1–11, where references to these other studies can be found. For Czeglédý’s main contribution, see Czeglédý, “Syriac Legend.”

83. Reinink, “Alexander the Great,” 155–65; Reinink, *Das syrische Alexanderlied*, 2:1–11; Reinink, “Die Entstehung,” esp. 268–70n27. In the lengthy note of the final article, Reinink discusses other scholars’ conclusions about this date, as he does in his introduction to his edition of the *Alexander Poem*. Yet he does not offer an explanation for why this date would be in a seventh-century text here or anywhere else to my knowledge.

84. Van Bladel, “Alexander Legend,” 183.

85. Tesei, “Prophecy,” 284.

86. Czeglédý, “Syriac Legend,” 240–41. Cf. John of Ephesus’s *Lives of the Eastern Saints* (Brooks, *John of Ephesus*, 1:78).

87. Czeglédý, “Syriac Legend,” 246.

88. As discussed in Shoemaker, *Death of a Prophet*, esp. 136–58.

89. Budge, *History of Alexander* 257–58 (Syr) and 146–47 (Eng).

90. *Ibid.*, 268–69 (Syr) and 154 (Eng).

91. *Ibid.*, 270 (Syr) and 155 (Eng).

92. *Ibid.*, 275 (Syr) and 158 (Eng, slightly modified). See also Reinink, “Die Entstehung,” esp. 268–79; Reinink, “Heraclius,” 84–86; and Reinink, “Alexander the Great,” 158–61.

93. See Sivertsev, *Judaism and Imperial Ideology*, 35.

94. Ps.-Ephrem *On the End of the World* (Verhelst, “Scarpsum de dictis,” 523). Concerning the date, see esp. Alexander, *Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, 142–47; and McGinn, *Visions of the End*, 60. Reinink maintains that this text shows clear dependence on the *Apocalypse of Ps.-Methodius*, an opinion previously expressed very briefly by Sackur: Reinink, “Pseudo-Ephreman ‘Sermo de Fine Mundi’”; Sackur, *Sibyllinische Texte*, 93n3. Nevertheless, I do not find Reinink’s argument very

persuasive. First, the emphasis in this text on the conflict between Rome and Persia very strongly suggests its composition in the immediate context of the dramatic war between these two powers during the early seventh century. Second, there is no mention at all of the Arabs or anything to indicate their significance in the unfolding eschatological drama. I find these qualities extremely hard to reconcile with the hypothesis that this text was composed only well after the Islamic conquests and under the direct influence of the *Apocalypse of Ps.-Methodius*. It is perhaps also worth mentioning that two of the manuscripts preserving this Latin text are themselves from the eighth century. According to Reinink et al., the *Apocalypse of Ps.-Methodius* was written only at the end of the seventh century, and then it was translated first into Greek and then later into Latin during the eighth century (see the discussion in Möhring, *Weltkaiser der Endzeit*, 101–4). Furthermore, Reinink identifies this allegedly clear dependence in Ps.-Ephrem *On the End of the World* 4–5 and the *Apocalypse of Ps.-Methodius* 13.19–14.5. Despite some similarities in expression, I simply do not see clear evidence of any dependence, and I would invite readers to compare the passages for themselves. In particular, Reinink calls attention to Ps.-Ephrem's use of the phrase *Christianorum imperium* and the implicit reference to 1 Corinthians 15:24 in section 5 as “decisive” evidence of borrowing. Nevertheless, while Ps.-Methodius does frequently use the term “kingdom of the Christians,” it is seemingly significant that the text does not use this phrase in the passage that was supposedly borrowed, nor is this decisively distinctive jargon, in my opinion. Moreover, if we are to suppose that Ps.-Ephrem could not have independently derived the idea of this kingdom being handed over to God the Father from 1 Corinthians 15:24 (cf. Alexander, “Byzantium and the Migration,” 67n35), then it seems reasonable that he could have derived both this interpretation and the language “*Christianorum imperium*” from the equivalent traditions of the *Tiburine Sibyl*, which, as noted above, clearly seem to be older than the *Apocalypse of Ps.-Methodius*. Here one finds “*relinquet regnum christianorum Deo patri*”: Sackur, *Sibyllinische Texte*, 186. Finally, one should generally note that Reinink's work shows a clear tendency—rightly or wrongly—to relate and subordinate many of these early medieval apocalypses to the *Apocalypse of Ps.-Methodius*, which he edited, and, secondarily, to the Alexander legends, on which he has also published significantly.

95. 5 Baruch (Halévy, *Tē'ēzāza sanbat*, 95–96; trans. in Leslau, *Falasha Anthology*, 75–76). See Chapter 2, n. 127.

96. Van Bladel, “Alexander Legend”; Tesei, “Prophecy.”

97. Maximus the Confessor, *Letter 14* (PG 91, 540B).

98. There is some debate as to whether the bulk of this text may in fact be even earlier. See Chapter 2, n. 55.

99. Ps.-Ephrem *Homily on the End* 8 (Suermann, *Die geschichtstheologische Reaktion*, 25).

100. Texts and translations in *ibid.*, 86–97, 98–109. Concerning the texts and their dates, see *ibid.*, 162–91; Reinink, “Der edessenische Pseudo-Methodius”; Drijvers, “Gospel of the Twelve Apostles”; Kraft, “Last Roman Emperor,” esp. 219–23; and Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 267–70.

101. The most recent edition has been published by Dagron and Déroche, “Juiifs et chrétiens,” 47–219. Again, as noted above, the edition has been recently republished with the rest of this article, with the same pagination, in Dagron and Déroche, *Juiifs et chrétiens*, 47–219.

102. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 59. Here Hoyland argues persuasively against Dagron's suggestion that the text was composed sometime in the early 640s, which seems unlikely: Dagron and Déroche, “Juiifs et chrétiens,” 246–47. See also McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy*, 179.

103. Olster, *Roman Defeat*, 175.

104. *Ibid.*, 159–64; cf. also Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 56; and Dagron and Déroche, “Juiifs et chrétiens,” 240–46. The specific attention given to the cities of Ptolemais and Sykamine in

Palestine leads Hoyland and Dagron and Déroche to conclude that the author is likely a native of their environs.

105. Olster, *Roman Defeat*, 158–59.

106. *Doctrina Iacobi nuper baptizati* III.8–12 (Dagron and Déroche, “Juifs et chrétiens,” 164–73). See also the commentary on the text’s eschatological views in *ibid.*, 263–68. Also, Sivertsev, *Judaism and Imperial Ideology*, 39n90; Brandes, “Anastasios ó δίκωπος,” 50; and Podskalsky, *Byzantinische Reichseschatologie*, 48.

107. *Doctrina Iacobi nuper baptizati* V.18 (Dagron and Déroche, “Juifs et chrétiens,” 212–13).

108. Sivertsev, *Judaism and Imperial Ideology*, 35.

109. *Doctrina Iacobi nuper baptizati* V.16 (Dagron and Déroche, “Juifs et chrétiens,” 209–11).

110. See, e.g., Shoemaker, *Death of a Prophet*, 22, 24, 32, 134, 205. See also Donner, “La question du messianisme”; and Bashear, “The Title ‘Fārūq.’”

#### Chapter 4

1. See, e.g., Shaked, *Dualism*, 29–30; Boyce, “On the Antiquity”; Hultgård, “Persian Apocalypticism,” 64; and Gignoux, “L’apocalyptique iranienne” (1999). While Gignoux seems to acknowledge that these apocalyptic traditions go back to the Sasanian period, he has emerged as the main skeptic of their greater antiquity. See also Gignoux, “Nouveaux regards”; and Gignoux, “L’apocalyptique iranienne” (1988).

2. It should be clear that here and elsewhere the term “Iran” does not refer to the modern nation-state but rather to “Ērānshahr,” the Sasanian Iranian Empire. Regarding the designation “Ērānshahr” and its meaning as “Iranian Empire,” see especially Payne, *State of Mixture*, 6–10; and Payne, “Cosmology,” 6.

3. See esp. Czeglédy, “Bahrām Čōbīn”; and Pourshariati, *Decline and Fall*, 404–14.

4. An earlier version of some of the material in this section appears in Shoemaker, “The Reign of God.”

5. See, e.g., Avi-Yonah, *Jews of Palestine*, 265–68; more recently, Greisiger, *Messias*, 46–63, who suggests that the Jews in Jerusalem were led by a figure who was believed to be the Messiah. See also Sivan, “From Byzantine to Persian,” 286–93, which leans in this direction as well.

6. Fleischer, “New Light on Qiliri.” See also Dagron and Déroche, “Juifs et chrétiens,” 26–27; and Sivan, “From Byzantine to Persian,” 291.

7. See, e.g., Wilken, *Land Called Holy*, 213; Cameron, “Blaming the Jews,” 63; and Himmelfarb, “*Sefer Eliyyabu*,” 224.

8. Concerning the dating of these texts, see, e.g., Wilken, *Land Called Holy*, 207; Grossman, “Jerusalem in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature,” esp. 300–301; Stemberger, “Jerusalem in the Early Seventh Century,” 266–70; van Bekkum, “Jewish Messianic Expectations,” 106–11; Himmelfarb, “*Sefer Eliyyabu*,” 224–25; and Himmelfarb, *Jewish Messiahs*, 13–34.

9. Hermann, “Jewish Mysticism,” 94–95. I thank Annette Yoshiko Reed for providing me with this reference.

10. See, e.g., van Bekkum, “Jewish Messianic Expectations,” 107–8; Reeves, *Trajectories*, 20; and Stoyanov, *Defenders and Enemies*, 53–54.

11. Sivertsev, *Judaism and Imperial Ideology*, 154.

12. Himmelfarb, “*Sefer Eliyyabu*,” 229–30; van Bekkum, “Jewish Messianic Expectations,” 107–8; trans. in Reeves, *Trajectories*, 31–39.

13. Reeves, *Trajectories*, 51–54.

14. E.g., Lévi, “L’Apocalypse de Zorobabel,” 58–61; Himmelfarb, “Sefer Zerubbabel,” 68–69; and Himmelfarb, *Apocalypse*, 121–22. See now also Himmelfarb, *Jewish Messiahs*, 35–59.

15. Reeves, *Trajectories*, 58–59.

16. *Ibid.*, 65.

17. E.g., Cameron, “Theotokos in Sixth-Century Constantinople”; Cameron, “Images of Authority,” 22–23; Cameron, “Virgin’s Robe”; and Limberis, *Divine Heiress*.

18. See also now Sivertsev, *Judaism and Imperial Ideology*, 93–104, which offers the most thorough consideration of this topic.

19. Reeves, *Trajectories*, 62–63, 66.

20. Sivertsev, *Judaism and Imperial Ideology*, 139, 145–53.

21. *Ibid.*, 146.

22. Biale, “Counter-History,” 138.

23. Alexander, *Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, 203–5.

24. Sivertsev, *Judaism and Imperial Ideology*, 149.

25. Lange, “Jewish Attitudes,” 269–71; Cohen, “Esau as Symbol,” 25–26; Feldman, “Some Observations,” 46–48; Yuval, *Two Nations*, 10–20; Schremer, *Brothers Estranged*, 126–34; Sivertsev, *Judaism and Imperial Ideology*, 14–20.

26. Boustan, “Spoils,” 363–66.

27. Sivertsev, *Judaism and Imperial Ideology*, 37–39.

28. Marmorstein, “Les signes du Messie,” 177–80.

29. See, e.g., Sivertsev, *Judaism and Imperial Ideology*, 50–51; Stemberger, *Die römische Herrschaft*, 141; Dagron and Déroche, “Juifs et chrétiens,” 41; Olster, *Roman Defeat*, 174; Reeves, *Trajectories*, 113; Möhring, *Welikaiser der Endzeit*, 396–70; and Boustan, “Spoils,” 364. Greisiger has recently argued in favor of Marmorstein’s dating, but the argument is not persuasive and does not establish sufficient precedent or probability for reading the Ishmaelites as the Persians: Greisiger, *Messias*, 159–60. Hoyland dates the text to the eleventh century, but this is an outlier and seems improbably late: Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 318.

30. Boustan, “Spoils,” 364; Sivertsev, *Judaism and Imperial Ideology*, 38, 50–51, 125, 149.

31. Sivertsev, *Judaism and Imperial Ideology*, 155.

32. We follow the readings of the New York manuscript of this text, published in Higger, *Halakhot ve-agadot*, 115–23, which, for reasons explained by Sivertsev, seems to preserve the earliest version of the two extant redactions of this passage: Sivertsev, *Judaism and Imperial Ideology*, 49–50. On the messianic associations of Ḥōṭer, see Reeves, *Trajectories*, 113n37.

33. Reeves, *Trajectories*, 113n38.

34. Higger, *Halakhot ve-agadot*, 121; trans. Reeves, *Trajectories*, 113.

35. Higger, *Halakhot ve-agadot*, 121; trans. Reeves, *Trajectories*, 113–14.

36. See also Sivertsev, *Judaism and Imperial Ideology*, 52–58, 84–86.

37. Yahalom, “‘Al Toqpan shel Yetsirot Sifrut ke-Maqorle-Berur She’clot Historiyot,” 130–32; trans. in van Bekkum, “Jewish Messianic Expectations,” 108.

38. Cited in Stemberger, “Jerusalem in the Early Seventh Century,” 268; see additional references there.

39. Cited in van Bekkum, “Jewish Messianic Expectations,” 110; see additional references there.

40. Lewis, “On That Day.” See also Himmelfarb, *Jewish Messiahs*, 52–55.

41. Lewis, “An Apocalyptic Vision”; Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*, 4–5; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 308–12.

42. *Secrets of Rabbi Shim'on b. Yoḥai* (Jellinek, *Bet ha-midrash*, 3:78; trans. Reeves, *Trajectories*, 78–80, slightly modified).

43. *Secrets of Rabbi Shim'on b. Yoḥai* (Jellinek, *Bet ha-midrash*, 3:78; trans. Reeves, *Trajectories*, 80). See also in this regard Bashear, “Riding Beasts.”

44. *Secrets of Rabbi Shim'on b. Yoḥai* (Jellinek, *Bet ha-midrash*, 3:79; trans. Reeves, *Trajectories*, 81–82).

45. *Secrets of Rabbi Shim'on b. Yoḥai* (Jellinek, *Bet ha-midrash*, 3:79–80; trans. Reeves, *Trajectories*, 84–85).

46. Grossman, “Jerusalem in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature,” 298.

47. My thanks especially to Michael Penn for first suggesting that I should examine the Zoroastrian traditions in commenting on an earlier version of this project.

48. See, e.g., Duchesne-Guillemin, *La religion*, 343–54; Boyce, “On the Antiquity”; and Hultgård, “Persian Apocalypticism,” 64.

49. See, e.g., Hultgård, “Persian Apocalypticism,” 64–81; and Widengren, Hultgård, and Philonenko, *Apocalyphtique Iranienne*.

50. Shaked, *Dualism*, 10.

51. E.g., Daryae, *Sasanian Persia*, 69–97.

52. Cited in *ibid.*, 81. For the Pahlavi text, see Madan, *Dinkard*, 47. See also Shaked, “From Iran to Islam,” 37–40.

53. Shaked, *Dualism*, 6, 13, 16.

54. Hultgård, “Persian Apocalypticism,” 44.

55. See, e.g., Shaked, *Dualism*, 73–100; and Daryae, *Sasanian Persia*, 69–97.

56. For a brief description of these sources, see Hultgård, “Persian Apocalypticism,” 40–43.

57. The following summary of Zoroastrian cosmogony and eschatology is based on three excellent surveys of these topics, all of which relate more or less the same information: Kreyenbroek, “Millennialism”; Hultgård, “Persian Apocalypticism,” 44–60; and Moazami, “Millennialism.”

58. Hultgård, “Persian Apocalypticism,” 45.

59. *Ibid.*

60. Kreyenbroek, “Millennialism,” 38; Moazami, “Millennialism,” 4.

61. This figure will be discussed in further detail below, but see also the discussion of his role in Zoroastrian apocalyptic in Hultgård, “Persian Apocalypticism,” 51; Moazami, “Millennialism,” 6–7; and Cereti, “Central Asian,” 198–200.

62. The most thorough study of this figure is in Boyce, “On the Antiquity,” 59–70.

63. Hultgård, “Persian Apocalypticism,” 51; Moazami, “Millennialism,” 4.

64. Moazami, “Millennialism,” 7.

65. According to Dan Shapira, it is “the most important Zoroastrian apocalyptic composition of all”: Shapira, “Banners,” 40.

66. On the specific peoples mentioned in this apocalypse and in other related traditions, see, in addition to Cereti’s edition of *Zand ī Wabman Yasn*, Cereti, “Central Asian,” 196–98.

67. *Zand ī Wabman Yasn* 6.1–7.17 (Cereti, *Zand ī Wabman Yasn*, 108–17, 140–43, 160–63).

68. *Bundahišn* 33.20–28 (Anklesaria, *Zand-Ākāsh*, 276–79; trans. Cereti, “Central Asian,” 200–201).

69. *Zand ī Wabman Yasn* 7.18–8.6 (Cereti, *Zand ī Wabman Yasn*, 117–25, 143–45, 163–66).

70. See, for instance, the different accounts in Hultgård, “Persian Apocalypticism,” 52–53; and Moazami, “Millennialism,” 7–10.

71. Hultgård, “Persian Apocalypticism,” 53–54. See the discussion of Kay Khosrow and his eschatological role in Moazami, “Millennialism,” 8–10.

72. Kreyenbroek, “Millennialism,” 38–39.

73. Hultgård, “Persian Apocalypticism,” 53–54; Moazami, “Millennialism,” 10; Kreyenbroek, “Millennialism,” 39.

74. Hultgård, “Persian Apocalypticism,” 54–60; Moazami, “Millennialism,” 10–15; Kreyenbroek, “Millennialism,” 39.

75. See, e.g., Boyce, *Zoroastrians*, 101–9.

76. Shaked, *Dualism*, esp. 112–19; Daryace, *Sasanian Persia*, 69–72, 81–86.

77. Payne, *State of Mixture*, 29. Payne actually writes that its significance cannot be “underestimated,” but certainly one must understand that “overestimated” is actually meant here.

78. Payne, “Cosmology,” 8.

79. *Ibid.*, 7, 32.

80. *Ibid.*, 11–17.

81. Canepa, *Two Eyes*, 59–62, quotation on 60.

82. Shapira, “Studies in Zoroastrian Exegesis,” 156–57. See also Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth*, 34.

83. Czeglédy, “Bahrām Čōbīn.” More recent endorsements of his arguments have been made in Shahbazi, “Bahrām VI Čōbīn”; Pourshariati, *Decline and Fall*, 404–14; Cereti, *Zand ī Wabman Yasn*, 26–27; and Payne, “Cosmology,” 24–30. Only Hans Kippenberg, to my knowledge, has challenged Czeglédy’s interpretation of these traditions, but his alternative explanation is less convincing: Kippenberg, “Geschichte,” esp. 62–63. Sean Anthony has also recently expressed some skepticism regarding Czeglédy’s interpretation, but his objections also are not especially persuasive: in particular, Czeglédy convincingly explains why Bahrām Čōbīn is identified as obscure or lowly, and the apparent “blip” in chronology that Anthony notes is not entirely unexpected in an apocalyptic text. See Anthony, “Chilastic Ideology,” 649–50. Nevertheless, in another study published in the same year, Anthony is wholly accepting of Czeglédy’s interpretation, noting that it has been further strengthened by new arguments in Cereti, “Central Asian,” 198–200: see Anthony, “Mahdi,” 476.

84. Czeglédy, “Bahrām Čōbīn,” 21.

85. The best synthesis of the various sources concerning Bahrām VI Čōbīn’s rule is Shahbazi, “Bahrām VI Čōbīn.” See also Pourshariati, *Decline and Fall*, 122–30.

86. A now lost source whose content is known indirectly from a number of later sources; the reference is from Czeglédy, “Bahrām Čōbīn,” 24.

87. Sebeos, *History* 10 (Abgarian, Պատմութիւն Սերբութի, 73–74; trans. Thomson and Howard-Johnston, *Armenian History*, 1:15); Theophylact of Simocatta, *History* III.6 (de Boor and Wirth, *Theophylacti Simocattae Historiae*, 122; trans. Whitby and Whitby, *History of Theophylact*, 81).

88. Shahbazi, “Bahrām VI Čōbīn.”

89. In relating the events of Bahrām’s reign, we continue to follow Shahbazi’s reconstruction.

90. Payne, “Cosmology,” 25.

91. Again see Czeglédy, “Bahrām Čōbīn,” here esp. 27–28. We will turn to some of Czeglédy’s arguments in more detail below.

92. Shahbazi, “Bahrām VI Čōbīn”; Czeglédy, “Bahrām Čōbīn,” 40.

93. Czeglédy, “Bahrām Čōbīn,” 34.

94. *Ayādgār ī Jāmāspīg* 16.27–37 (Agostini, *Ayādgār ī Jāmāspīg*, 80–82, 111–12, 183–85, 190–91). See also Czeglédy, “Bahrām Čōbīn,” 33–34; and Pourshariati, *Decline and Fall*, 406–7.

95. *Ayādgār ī Jāmāspīg* 16.41–42 (Agostini, *Ayādgār ī Jāmāspīg*, 83, 112–13, 186, 191). See also Czeglédý, “Bahrām Čöbîn,” 33–34; and Pourshariati, *Decline and Fall*, 407–8.

96. Czeglédý, “Bahrām Čöbîn,” 35–36. See *Bundabišn* 33.25 (Anklesaria, *Zand-Ākāsīh*, 278–79).

97. For what follows, see *Ayādgār ī Jāmāspīg* 16.43–51 (Agostini, *Ayādgār ī Jāmāspīg*, 186–87, 191–92, 113). See also Czeglédý, “Bahrām Čöbîn,” 36–37; and Pourshariati, *Decline and Fall*, 408–9.

98. Trans. from Bailey, “Zamasp Namak II,” 584.

99. On the mythical significance of the white forest, see Czeglédý, “Bahrām Čöbîn,” 38.

100. *Ibid.*

101. See Payne, “Cosmology,” 26.

102. See Czeglédý, “Bahrām Čöbîn,” 37–38, quotation on 38; and Pourshariati, *Decline and Fall*, 409–10.

103. *Zand ī Wabman Yasn* 6.1–7.17 (Cereti, *Zand ī Wabman Yasn*, 108–17, 140–43, 160–63); *Bundabišn* 33.20–28 (Anklesaria, *Zand-Ākāsīh*, 276–79).

104. Czeglédý, “Bahrām Čöbîn,” 39–40.

105. See *ibid.*

106. Shapira, “Kings and on the Last Days.”

107. Shoemaker, “Afterlife of the Apocalypse,” 306–13.

108. See also Anthony, “Muḥammad, Menaḥem.”

## Chapter 5

1. An earlier version of some of the material in this chapter appears in Shoemaker, “The Reign of God.”

2. As, for instance, Crone suggests in *Meccan Trade*, 231–50. See also Donner, “Background to Islam,” 516.

3. See, e.g., Shoemaker, *Death of a Prophet*, 121–27; and Shoemaker, “Muḥammad and the Qur’ān,” 1090–94.

4. Hurgronje, “Une nouvelle biographie de Mohammed,” 161–62.

5. Casanova, *Mohammed*.

6. This is argued extensively in Shoemaker, *Death of a Prophet*, esp. 118–96, and more succinctly in Shoemaker, “Muḥammad and the Qur’ān,” 1090–99. See also the brief remarks in Cook, “Muslim Apocalyptic and *Jihād*,” 66; Cook, “The Beginnings of Islam as an Apocalyptic Movement”; Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 30; Donner, “From Believers to Muslims,” esp. 10–13; Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins*, 30n78, 46; Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, esp. 79–82, 97; Ayoub, *Crisis of Muslim History*, 145–46; and Hoyland, “Early Islam as a Late Antique Religion,” 1066. See now also van Reeth, “La typologie,” esp. 104–5; and Cuypers, *Une apocalypse coranique*, esp. 47–48, 335.

7. McCants, *ISIS Apocalypse*, front flap. See also McCants’s broader discussion of ISIS’s apocalypticism in *ibid.*, 99–119, as well as Stern and Berger, *ISIS: The State of Terror*, 219–31, and Ryan, “Hot Issue.”

8. For a more in-depth analysis of this turn away from eschatology in modern biographies of Muhammad, see Shoemaker, *Death of a Prophet*, 118–36; and Shoemaker, “Muhammad.”

9. Bell, *Origin of Islam*, 102–7, quotation on 107.

10. Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*, 62–65.

11. *Ibid.*, 66.

12. Van Sivers, “The Islamic Origins Debate Goes Public,” 3.
13. Peters, *Muhammad and the Origins of Islam*, 152–56; Peters, *Jesus and Muhammad*, 105–23, esp. 110–11, 113, 115, 123; Nagel, *Mohammed*, e.g., 462–63, 844, 909–10.
14. Ramadan, *In the Footsteps*, 202–3. The *ḥadīth* in question teaches that “If the hour of Judgment Day comes while one of you holds a sapling in his hand, let him hurry and plant it.” For comparison, the book’s index includes nineteen different subheadings under the entry for “social justice and equity.”
15. Safi, *Memories of Muhammad*, e.g., 33, 97–101, 115, 123.
16. Afsaruddin, *The First Muslims*, 3; Safi, *Memories of Muhammad*, e.g., 33, 97–101, 115, 123; Armstrong, *Muhammad*, 91–107, esp. 91.
17. Bell and Watt, *Introduction to the Qurʾān*, 158; more recently, see Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, esp. 58–59.
18. Shoemaker, *Death of a Prophet*, 132–33; Shoemaker, “Muḥammad and the Qurʾān,” 1093–94. On the portrayal of Jesus in nineteenth-century Protestant Liberalism, see, e.g., Baird, *History of New Testament Research*, 2:85–136; and Kümmel, *The New Testament*, 162–84. Regarding Liberalism’s strong resistance to the idea of Jesus as an eschatological prophet, see the chapter “The Struggle Against Eschatology” in Schweitzer, *Quest of the Historical Jesus*, 242–69.
19. Hoyland, *In God’s Path*, 63, where he writes regarding a similar tendency to mollify the violence of the Islamic conquests.
20. Webb, *Imagining the Arabs*, 8.
21. Donner, *Early Islamic Conquests*, 270; Crone, *God’s Rule*, 11. See, e.g., Caetani, “The Art of War”; Lammens, *Le berceau*, 116–21, 174–77; Becker, “Der Islam als Problem”; and Lewis, *The Arabs in History*, 55–56.
22. Consider, for instance, the title of one of Watt’s books: *Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman*.
23. Compare, for instance, the different perspectives on Muhammad as primarily a political leader in Bell, *Origin of Islam*, 102–8, 121–24; Buhl, *Das Leben Muhammads*, 196–97; Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*, 152–53; Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, 143–46; Paret, *Mohammed und der Koran*, 151–52, 163–65; Brown, *World of Late Antiquity*, 191–92; Hodgson, *Venture of Islam*, 170–80; Donner, *Early Islamic Conquests*, 52–75; and Peters, *Jesus and Muhammad*, 137–42.
24. For reasons that will be clear below, the term “Islamic conquests” is problematic, although in any case it is preferable to the alternative used by Hoyland and others, “Arab conquests.” See Donner, “Visions,” 9; and Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, 90, as well as the discussion below.
25. Hoyland, *In God’s Path*, esp. 5, 16–30, 56–65.
26. Donner, “Review of *In God’s Path*,” 139–40, quotation on 139. Another recent study, arguing that the conquests were religious and, more specifically, eschatologically motivated, has been published by Whealey, “Muslim Motives for Conquering.”
27. Webb, *Imagining the Arabs*, esp. 8.
28. Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses*, 459–60.
29. Crone, *Meccan Trade*, 241, 244–45; Crone, *God’s Rule*, 11. See also, e.g., Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, 146–47; Cook, *Muhammad*, 51.
30. E.g., Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief*, 146. Peters, *Jesus and Muhammad*, 141, seems to suggest that Muhammad established his polity and empire almost by accident. See also Hoyland, *In God’s Path*, 37–38, which suggests something similar.
31. Donner, *Early Islamic Conquests*, 8, 52–82, 90, 101–11; Crone, *Meccan Trade*, 241–50;

Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth*, 6, 18; Bowersock, *Empires in Collision*, 59; Watt, *Mubammad at Medina*, 105–17. See also, e.g., Brown, *World of Late Antiquity*, 192; Kennedy, *The Prophet*, 40–49, 53; Gabriel, *Mubammad*, e.g., xx; Robinson, “Rise of Islam,” 192–93.

32. Shoemaker, *Death of a Prophet*, 106–17.

33. *Ibid.*, 18–72.

34. Ahmed, *Before Orthodoxy*, 5.

35. Robinson, “Rise of Islam,” 192.

36. For a more detailed discussion of the problems with these collections as historical sources, see Shoemaker, “In Search of ‘Urwa’s Sira”; and Shoemaker, *Death of a Prophet*, e.g., 73–90, 99–106.

37. E.g., the article on “sira” in the second edition of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* evaluates these biographical traditions as essentially useless for knowledge of either the historical figure of Muhammad or the rise of Islam: Raven, “Sira,” 662. See also Buhl, *Das Leben Muhammeds*, 372–77; Rodinson, *Mohammed*, xi; Wansbrough, *Sectarian Milieu*; Crone, *Slaves on Horses*, 3–17; Crone, *Meccan Trade*, 214–30; Peters, “Quest of the Historical Muhammad,” 301–6; Hawting, “John Wansbrough, Islam, and Monotheism”; Hawting, *Idea of Idolatry*; Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, 8–25; Robinson, “Reconstructing Early Islam,” 121–24.

38. Hodgson, *Venture of Islam*, 160. On the medieval Islamic tradition’s suspicion of these biographical traditions, see also Brown, *Misquoting Muhammad*, 232.

39. For further discussion of the nature of the Qur’an and its compilation, see Shoemaker, *Death of a Prophet*, 136–58. On the possible derivation of parts of the Qur’an from earlier written material, see also Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, 56.

40. Foucault, “What Is an Author?” esp. 111–12, 118–20.

41. See, e.g., Bell and Watt, *Introduction to the Qur’an*, 38–39, 89–98; de Prémare, *Aux origines du Coran*, 29–45.

42. For more regarding such an approach to the Qur’an and for further arguments regarding its necessity, see Shoemaker, *Death of a Prophet*, 136–57; and Shoemaker, “Method and Theory in the Study of Islamic Origins.”

43. For a more detailed discussion of eschatology in the Qur’an, see Shoemaker, *Death of a Prophet*, 158–71. An earlier version of some of the material in this section appears in Shoemaker, “Muhammad and the Qur’an,” 1094–99.

44. Unless otherwise indicated, translations of the Qur’an are from Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*. Nevertheless, I have followed the Egyptian system of numbering the verses for easier reference to the Arabic text.

45. Trans. from Droge, *Qur’an*, 188, who also suggests this interpretation in n. 50.

46. Alternatively one might translate the passage as: “the hastening [Hour] is at hand.”

47. Cook, “Messianism and Astronomical Events.”

48. E.g., Bell, *Origin of Islam*, 86–90, 102–7; Bell and Watt, *Introduction to the Qur’an*, 54; Blachère, *Le problème de Mabomet*, 43–51; Blachère, *Introduction au Coran*, 22–24; Rodinson, *Mohammed*, 120–3.

49. As much is reflected in the very title of John Gager’s influential study *Kingdom and Community*: Gager, *Kingdom and Community*. See also, e.g., Martin, *The Corinthian Body*; Theissen, *Social Setting of Pauline Christianity*; Overman, *Matthew’s Gospel and Formative Judaism*; Saldarini, *Matthew’s Christian-Jewish Community*; Balch, ed., *Social History of the Matthean Community*; Neyrey, ed., *Social World of Luke-Acts*.

50. While a small minority of New Testament scholars continue to argue that Jesus’ message

was non-eschatological, Bart Ehrman dispenses with such hypotheses both swiftly and judiciously: Ehrman, *Jesus*, 132–34.

51. For comparison, e.g., Kümmel, *Promise and Fulfilment*, 15–87 and Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 123–56, although one could still explore Weiss, *Die Predigt Jesu vom Reiche Gottes* or Schweitzer, *Quest of the Historical Jesus*, 330–97 on this topic with profit, even at such a chronological distance. For more popular presentations of the same ideas, see Sanders, *Historical Figure of Jesus*, 169–88 and Ehrman, *Jesus*, 125–39.

52. Cf. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 152–53; Sanders, *Historical Figure of Jesus*, 176–77.

53. For a brief presentation of the criterion of embarrassment and the related criterion of discontinuity, see Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 1:168–74. For a more popular presentation, see Ehrman, *Jesus*, 91–94. For a more thorough discussion of these criteria and their history within biblical studies, see Theissen and Winter, *Quest for the Plausible Jesus*, esp. 1–171.

54. Cf. Schweitzer, *Quest of the Historical Jesus*, 360–63; and Sanders, *Historical Figure of Jesus*, 180.

55. E.g., Rüling, *Beiträge zur Eschatologie*, 11; and Smith, “Eschatology,” 46.

56. E.g., Matthew 24:32–25:12; cf. Schweitzer, *Quest of the Historical Jesus*, 239.

57. E.g., Sanders, *Historical Figure of Jesus*, 179–82.

58. Bell, *The Qurʾān*, 2:604.

59. Ibn Hishām, *Kitāb sirat Rasūl Allāh*, 1:1012; trans. Guillaume, *Life of Muhammad*, 682–83.

60. Ibn Hishām, *Kitāb sirat Rasūl Allāh*, 1:1017–18.

61. Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 2:2:56; cf. al-Ṭabarī, *History of al-Ṭabarī: Volume IX*, 200n1328.

62. Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 4:1794–95. See also the various other examples of this tradition cited in Casanova, *Mohammed*, 15–17, 196–99; and Bashear, “Muslim Apocalypses,” 76–80.

63. E.g., Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf*, 15:135, 168; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 1:195; and trans. Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 4n7, where other sources are indicated. See also Livne-Kafri, “Some Notes on the Muslim Apocalyptic Tradition,” 76n22.

64. E.g., Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf*, 15:168; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 3:192, 213, 228, 269–70, 283; and Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 4:1795–96.

65. Bashear, “Muslim Apocalypses,” 87–92; Cook, “The Beginnings of Islam as an Apocalyptic Movement.”

66. Bashear, “Muslim Apocalypses,” 92–98.

67. Kister, “A Booth Like the Booth of Moses,” 150.

68. Schweitzer, *Quest of the Historical Jesus*, 330–403.

69. E.g., Bell, *Origin of Islam*, 102–8, 121–24; Bell and Watt, *Introduction to the Qurʾān*, 54; Buhl, *Das Leben Muhammads*, 196–97; and Paret, *Mohammed und der Koran*, 151–52, 163–64.

70. See for comparison Allison, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 114–15. Here Allison notes that it is not at all uncommon for religious communities to believe that the end is near and simultaneously to be concerned with long-term issues regarding the regulation of the community, providing some specific examples.

71. Donner, “From Believers to Muslims,” 9. More recently, Michael Penn has drawn attention to the significant evidence in Syriac texts that suggests the boundaries between Christians and Muslims were often quite fluid during the early period. See Penn, *Envisioning Islam*, esp. chaps. 2 and 4. Nevertheless, Penn refrains from drawing any firm conclusions about the nature of the earliest “Islamic” community on this basis. He does note, quite correctly, that it seems that the boundary between these two faiths remained porous even beyond the seventh century. In so doing,

however, Penn aims to draw a clear boundary between his own views and those of scholars, like Donner and me, who view the early community of the Believers as having been interconfessional in a significant sense. The difference, according to Penn, is that Donner and others suppose that Christians were suddenly removed from the *umma* of the Believers at the close of the seventh century, bringing the early mixture “neatly” to an end. But this is not the case. Although I can speak only for myself in this regard, there is no assumption that in this moment a firm and fast boundary was established between Christians and Muslims. Rather, this model envisions that only at this time, the end of the seventh century, did the Believers/Muslims begin to think of themselves as a community separate from the Christians. This, then, was not the point when the boundary was established, but it is instead the moment when it was first conceived and when it began to form. Efforts to police this border, with more or less success, would only have begun in earnest at this time.

72. Donner, “From Believers to Muslims,” 10–11. Hints in certain early Islamic apocalyptic traditions of a primitive self-identity as a sort of “new Israel” also could suggest such a community: Livne-Kafri, “Some Notes on the Muslim Apocalyptic Tradition,” 85–86.

73. Donner, *Mubammad and the Believers*, 87.

74. For text, translation, and analysis of the most important version, see Lecker, *The “Constitution of Medina.”* See also Wensinck, *Mubammad and the Jews of Medina*; Watt, *Mubammad at Medina*, 221–60; Serjeant, “The *Sunnah, Jāmi’ah*”; and Donner, *Mubammad and the Believers*, 227–32.

75. Citing Donner’s slight modification of Serjeant’s translation: Donner, “From Believers to Muslims,” 30–31; cf. Serjeant, “The *Sunnah, Jāmi’ah*,” 27.

76. Donner, “From Believers to Muslims,” 38. See also Donner, *Mubammad and the Believers*, 230–31.

77. See the discussion of other relevant passages in Donner, “From Believers to Muslims,” 30–33.

78. See, e.g., the summary in Watt, *Mubammad at Medina*, 192–220; also Paret, *Mohammed und der Koran*, 113–24.

79. See, e.g., Donner, “From Believers to Muslims,” 12n2; and Donner, *Mubammad and the Believers*, 212–14. For a more detailed discussion of this hypothesis and the evidence to support it, see Shoemaker, *Death of a Prophet*, 199–218.

80. E.g., Robinson, ‘Abd al-Malik, 103. See also Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 551–56; Hoyland, “New Documentary Texts,” 397, 409–10; and Donner, *Mubammad and the Believers*, 194–224.

81. Webb, *Imagining the Arabs*, 139–41.

82. *Ibid.*, 38.

83. *Ibid.*, 129; Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 43–56, 122–48, 179. See also Wansbrough, *Sectarian Milieu*, esp. 15–24, 38–45, 98–129.

84. Donner, *Mubammad and the Believers*, 87.

85. Tannous, “Syria Between Byzantium and Islam,” 3.

86. Donner, *Mubammad and the Believers*, 108–10.

87. The most recent and thoroughgoing assessment of the evidence is Avni, *Byzantine-Islamic Transition*. See also Pentz, *Invisible Conquest*; and Magness, *Archaeology of the Early Islamic Settlement*.

88. Schick, *Christian Communities of Palestine*, 33–39, 47–48. Nevertheless, see now Avni, *Byzantine-Islamic Transition*, 302–11, which minimizes the significance of archaeological evidence for the destruction of churches. The evidence is, as he remarks, “ambiguous,” despite the confidence that earlier archaeologists have placed in associating evidence of burning with the Persian

conquest (305). Nevertheless, Avni allows that it is quite possible that the evidence for such destruction is now obscured due to extensive restoration work that followed soon after the Persian occupation, as a number of contemporary sources report, a view also favored by Phil Booth: see Avni, “Persian Conquest,” 43–44, where other more recent examples of such rapid urban restoration are noted; Avni, *Byzantine-Islamic Transition*, 310–11; and Booth, *Crisis of Empire*, 94–95, 97–98. Given the importance of Christian pilgrimage to these holy sites for the local economy of Jerusalem, such rapid restorations would hardly be surprising.

89. Most notably, Nagar, “Human Skeletal Remains.” See also, however, Avni, *Byzantine-Islamic Transition*, 306–7, where many other mass burials from this period are identified.

90. Donner, “Visions,” 15–21.

91. Brooks, *Chronica minora II*, 1:75. Nevertheless, one must also see now the translation in Palmer, *Seventh Century*, 2–3, which draws on an improved reading of the manuscript by Sebastian Brock that has not been published, although the translation is sufficiently technical and annotated that it can easily be compared with Brooks’s edition.

92. Thomas the Presbyter, *Chronicle of 640* (Brooks, *Chronica minora II*, 1:147–48).

93. Donner, “Visions,” 20–28.

94. The latter point is borne out most recently and thoroughly in Avni, *Byzantine-Islamic Transition*, esp. 344–53.

95. Donner, *Mubammad and the Believers*, xii.

96. *Ibid.*, 80–82, quotation on 80.

97. *Ibid.*, 85.

98. E.g., Qur’ān 10:24, 11:48, 16:1; Kister, “A Booth Like the Booth of Moses.”

99. See Lane and Lane-Poole, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 1:96c; Steingass, *Arabic-English Dictionary*, 76a; and Biberstein-Kazimirski, *Dictionnaire arabe-français*, 1:54a. David Cook similarly translates *amr allāh* as “the direct rule or regime of God,” noting also that *amr*’s usage in later texts should not control how we interpret this word in the Qur’ān: see Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 272; and Cook, “Muslim Apocalyptic and *Jibād*,” 72. See also Blankinship, “Imārah,” 27. I thank my colleague Sean Anthony for the latter reference.

100. As Sean Anthony notes in a forthcoming article, the most direct translation of *amīr* would be *imperator* or “emperor.” See Anthony, “Abrahamic Dominion, Umayyad Rule.” I thank Professor Anthony for sharing this article with me before its publication.

101. Donner, *Mubammad and the Believers*, 16, 81–82, 96–97, 125, 143–44; quotations at 97 and 144.

102. Rubenstein, *Armies of Heaven*, 78.

103. Donner, “Piety and Eschatology,” 18.

104. Perhaps the best examples are Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 131–41; and Sanders, *Historical Figure of Jesus*, 175–78.

105. See esp. Dodd, *Parables*.

106. The first to propose this seems to have been Kümmel, *Promise and Fulfilment*, first published in 1945. More recently, see, e.g., Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2:237–506, esp. 451–54, 1042–46; Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 466–67; and Theissen and Merz, *Historical Jesus*, 252–78. Sanders allows that it is certainly possible that Jesus believed this about himself and his ministry, but he maintains that the evidence cannot establish it as probable: Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 131–41; and Sanders, *Historical Figure of Jesus*, 175–78. Regarding the status of this view as reflecting the current consensus, see Theissen and Merz, *Historical Jesus*, 244; and Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 467.

107. Jeffery, *Materials*, 170; trans. from Powers, *Zayd*, 120.

108. Powers, *Zayd*, 121.
109. E.g., Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 4:1794–95. See also the various other examples of this tradition cited in Casanova, *Mohammed*, 15–17, 196–99; and Bashear, “Muslim Apocalypses,” 76–80.
110. Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:1, 65.
111. E.g., Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 2:50, 92; trans. Bashear, “Muslim Apocalypses,” 80, where other sources are indicated.
112. Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 3:310–11.
113. Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 4:1794–95. See also the various other examples of this tradition cited in Casanova, *Mohammed*, 15–17, 196–99; and Bashear, “Muslim Apocalypses,” 76–80.
114. E.g., Ibn al-Mubārak, *Kitāb al-zuhd*, 554; trans. Bashear, “Muslim Apocalypses,” 79, where other sources are indicated.
115. The fact that the Qurʾān describes the Hour’s actual arrival in only a few passages is not especially unusual, particularly given that the contents of the Qurʾān generally do not concern themselves with the affairs of Muhammad and the early community. E.g., “Muḥammad and his prophethood are very much in the background in the Qurʾān, overshadowed by other figures and themes”: Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins*, 51.
116. Anthony, “Muḥammad, Menaḥem,” 272.
117. Ben-Shammai, “*Ṣuḥuf* in the Qurʾān.” I thank Will McCants for this reference.

#### Chapter 6

1. Cook, “Muslim Apocalyptic and *Jibād*,” esp. 77.
2. See, e.g., E. Tyan, “*Djihad*.”
3. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, 85.
4. Sophronius of Jerusalem, *Homily on the Epiphany* 10 (Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Ἀνάλεκτα Ἱεροσολυμιτικῆς* 5, 167).
5. *Doctrina Iacobi* V.16 (Dagron and Déroche, “Juifs et chrétiens,” 209–11).
6. Anthony, “Muhammad”; Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*, 4.
7. Anthony, “Muḥammad,” 255–62, quotation on 255, although Anthony’s proposal for a later dating of the *Doctrina Iacobi* is not very convincing, in my opinion.
8. Tesei, “‘The Romans Will Win.’” See also Tesei, “Heraclius’ War Propaganda.” I thank Dr. Tesei for sharing these articles with me in advance.
9. As, for instance, Anthony rightly notes: Anthony, “Muhammad,” 247.
10. Crone, “*Hiḡra*”; Lindstedt, “*Mubājirūn*”; Webb, *Imagining the Arabs*, quotation on 141.
11. Donner, “Review of *In God’s Path*,” 139–40.
12. Cook, “Muslim Apocalyptic and *Jibād*,” 71.
13. Heilo, *Eastern Rome*, 69.
14. Rubenstein, *Armies of Heaven*, 126.
15. Powers, *Zayd*, 120–21.
16. See van Bladel, “Alexander Legend”; and Tesei, “Prophecy.”
17. Ben-Shammai, “*Ṣuḥuf* in the Qurʾān.”
18. Trans. from Droge, *Qurʾān*, 264.
19. Al-Tirmidhī, *Al-Jāmiʿ al-ṣaḥīḥ*, 5:3192.
20. See the discussion of the vocalization and interpretation of this verse in El-Cheikh, “*Sūrat al-Rūm*.” Edmund Beck suggests that the “Byzantine” victory refers to Muʿta, although I find this less likely: Beck, “Die Sura *ar-Rūm*,” 339.
21. Nöldeke and Schwally, *Geschichte des Qorāns*, 1:149n7; Bell, *The Qurʾān*, 2:392.

22. Nöldeke and Schwally, *Geschichte des Qurāns*, 2:1–5; Nöldeke, *Orientalische Skizzen*, 56. See also Gilliot's critique of this position, in which he notes that even Nöldeke himself eventually came to concede the possibility of interpolations in the Qur'an: Gilliot, "Reconsidering the Authorship of the Qur'an," 100.

23. Shoemaker, *Death of a Prophet*, 136–96.

24. *Ibid.*, 18–72, 197–265.

25. See, e.g., Sinai, "Closure? Part II," 515n23.

26. Tesei, "The Romans Will Win." Again, I thank Dr. Tesei for sharing this article with me in advance of its publication. Tesei does not include the *Passion of St. Golinduch*, however.

27. Trans. from Droge, *Qur'an*, 455, slightly modified. I thank my colleague David Hollenberg for suggesting this interpretation of this *sūra*.

28. McGinn, *Meanings*, 10; cited in Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, 97, 248.

29. On this attribution, its history, and its inaccuracy, see now Thomson and Howard-Johnston, *Armenian History*, 1:xxxiii–xxxviii. See also Greenwood, "Sasanian Echoes," esp. 325–26. Much of the material in this section and the following one has been previously discussed at greater length in Shoemaker, *Death of a Prophet*, 197–240.

30. Thomson and Howard-Johnston, *Armenian History*, 1:lxxvii. On the reliability of Sebeos in general, see Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses*, 94–99.

31. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 128.

32. Thomson and Howard-Johnston, *Armenian History*, 1:lxviii–lxx, 102n634, 2:238–40; Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses*, 85–86. See also Greenwood, "Sasanian Echoes," 365–66.

33. Abgarian, ed., Պատմութիւն Մերէնոյ, 139.

34. I.e., the land of the Tachiks, who were nomadic Arabs.

35. The word translated here as "testament" relates to the idea of inheritance and can also mean "will."

36. Abgarian, Պատմութիւն Մերէնոյ, 134–35. A similar account, which appears to depend on Sebeos, can be found in Thomas Artsruni's Armenian chronicle: Patkanean, Պատմութիւն տասն Արծրունեաց, 98–103; trans. Thomson, *History of the House of the Artsrunik'*, 164–69.

37. Abgarian, Պատմութիւն Մերէնոյ, 135

38. *Ibid.*, 135–36. In Artsruni's account, Muhammad himself sends the letter to Theodore, the brother of Heraclius: Patkanean, Պատմութիւն տասն Արծրունեաց, 101; trans. Thomson, *History of the House of the Artsrunik'*, 167. There is a parallel Islamic tradition that Muhammad sent a letter to Heraclius, demanding that he convert to Islam or lose his lands. Although Conrad dates this letter to "the mid-Umayyad period, perhaps too early in the career of al-Zuhri," it is clear that a basic form of this tradition was known to Sebeos in the middle of the seventh century. See Conrad, "Heraclius," 125–30.

39. Rubin, *Between Bible and Qur'an*, 11–35, esp. 35. See also Shoemaker, *Death of a Prophet*, 218–40.

40. Hoyland, "Sebeos," 97, citing Hoyland's translation. Cf. *sūra* 5:21.

41. Trans. from Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, 81.

42. Trans. Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an*, 208, slightly modified: Abdel Haleem writes instead, "My righteous servants will inherit the earth," which disguises the connection to the biblical land of Israel. Psalm 37:29 in the NRSV reads: "The righteous shall inherit the land [רָצָה], and live in it forever."

43. Trans. Droge, *Qur'an*, 183. I thank Will McCants for drawing my attention to this passage.

44. Trans. Abdel Haleem, *The Qurʾān*, 14.
45. Bashear, “Qurʾān 2:114 and Jerusalem,” 215–22.
46. Rubin, *Between Bible and Qurʾān*, 11–35, esp. 35.
47. Jellinek, *Bet ha-midrash*, 3:78; trans. Reeves, *Trajectories*, 78–80, slightly modified.
48. Shoemaker, *Death of a Prophet*, 223–28.
49. Kister, “You Shall Only Set Out”; Kister, “Sanctity Joint and Divided.” See also Shoemaker, *Death of a Prophet*, 228–30.
50. See Kister, “A Comment on the Antiquity.” See also Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition*, 74, 162–63, esp. 163n4; Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem*, 13–22, 162; Elad, “The Muslim View of Jerusalem,” 365–67; Sharon, “Praises of Jerusalem”; and Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 54–55, 172–73, 177.
51. Wāsiṭī, *Faḍāʾil al-Bayt al-Muqaddas*, 22–23; Ibn al-Murajjā, *Faḍāʾil Bayt al-Maqdis*, 147; trans. Livne-Kafri, “Jerusalem: The Navel of the Earth,” 47.
52. Kister, “A Comment on the Antiquity,” 185; Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 172–73.
53. Kister, “A Comment on the Antiquity.” See also Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem*, 162; Livne-Kafri, “A Note on Some Traditions,” 80–83; Livne-Kafri, “Some Notes on the Muslim Apocalyptic Tradition,” 84; Livne-Kafri, “Jerusalem in Early Islam,” 384–85; Sharon, “Praises of Jerusalem,” 59–66; and Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 54–55, who similarly date these Temple traditions to the first Islamic century.
54. Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 172, 177.
55. See, e.g., Rubin, *Between Bible and Qurʾān*, 37; see also 61–63, 89–95, 233–39; Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, e.g., 53–58, 62, 72, 79, 122–26, 179; Hawting, “The Origins of the Muslim Sanctuary at Mecca”; Hawting, “The Disappearance and Rediscovery”; Hawting, “We Were Not Ordered”; Wansbrough, *Sectarian Milieu*, 47–48; van Ess, “Abd al-Malik,” 100; Bashear, “Abraham’s Sacrifice,” 265; and Calder, “From Midrash to Scripture.”
56. Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 172–73.
57. Al-Ṭabarī, *Jamīʾ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, 16:212; Wāsiṭī, *Faḍāʾil al-Bayt al-Muqaddas*, 70–71; Ibn al-Murajjā, *Faḍāʾil Bayt al-Maqdis*, 104.
58. Ibn al-Murajjā, *Faḍāʾil Bayt al-Maqdis*, 111, 240, 261; Wāsiṭī, *Faḍāʾil al-Bayt al-Muqaddas*, 88–89.
59. Ibn al-Murajjā, *Faḍāʾil Bayt al-Maqdis*, 254.
60. Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 79, 170–73, 178, 202, 212–13, 323–24.
61. Anthony, “Muhammad,” 248n13. Cf. al-Khaṭīb, *Muʿjam al-qirāʾat*, 8:392–93. As Anthony notes, in light of this evidence it may be necessary to rethink the arguments presented in Donner, “La question du messianisme.”
62. *Doctrina Iacobi* V.16 (Dagron and Déroche, “Juifs et chrétiens,” 209–11). Cf. Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*, 3–6.
63. Ibn al-Murajjā, *Faḍāʾil Bayt al-Maqdis*, 93, 211; Wāsiṭī, *Faḍāʾil al-Bayt al-Muqaddas*, 40, 92–93. See also Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 177.
64. In other areas of material culture, most notably coinage and inscriptions, there is unfortunately little evidence of urgent eschatological belief, which is not entirely surprising. Although early Islamic coinage has much to reveal about the evolving nature of the Believers’ cultural and religious identity, particularly vis-à-vis the Byzantine and Sasanian empires, I have found no evidence on the early coins for any sort of eschatological belief. The literature on early Islamic coinage is vast. The main reference work remains Album and Goodwin, *Sylloge of Islamic Coins*. For some

recent studies, see also Heck, “First-Century Islamic Currency”; and Heidemann, “Evolving Representation.” As for early inscriptions, most of which are actually graffiti made by laypeople rather than monumental inscriptions, in an earlier article Robert Hoyland suggests that a few inscriptions seem to indicate a concern with the Hour’s arrival: Hoyland, “Content and Context,” 85. Nevertheless, more recent research in this area and the availability of more early inscriptions has led to the conclusion that the Believers’ imminent eschatology is not reflected either in inscriptions or in other types of documentary evidence. While these sources often bear evidence of eschatological concern, it is generally of a more personal nature rather than about the coming climax of history. Nevertheless, as Ilkka Lindstedt rightly concludes in his forthcoming survey of this evidence, this absence certainly does not mean that the early Believers did not hold such views. Indeed, other types of evidence make it quite clear that they did. See Lindstedt, “Arabic Rock Inscriptions.” I thank Dr. Lindstedt for sharing this work in advance of its publication.

65. Jellinek, *Bet ha-midrash*, 3:79; trans. Reeves, *Trajectories*, 81–82.

66. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 311–12, 317; Lévi, “Une apocalypse judéo-arabe,” 178–79.

67. Ibn al-Murajjā, *Faḍā’il Bayt al-Maqdis*, 209; Wāsiṭī, *Faḍā’il al-Bayt al-Muqaddas*, 54; trans. Livne-Kafri, “Jerusalem in Early Islam,” 399, where other sources are indicated at n. 90.

68. Ibn al-Murajjā, *Faḍā’il Bayt al-Maqdis*, 63–64; Wāsiṭī, *Faḍā’il al-Bayt al-Muqaddas*, 86; trans. Livne-Kafri, “Jerusalem in Early Islam,” 385.

69. Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1.1:107; trans. Livne-Kafri, “Jerusalem in Early Islam,” 385–86.

70. Abulaḷe, ԾԹՃԵ ԹԹԽԹ, 100–102, quotation at 100. Abulaḷe’s text is reproduced with French translation and commentary in Flusin, “L’esplanade du Temple,” 19–21.

71. Regarding the date of the material in this appended collection, see Garitte, “Histoires édifiantes géorgiennes,” 403–6; and Flusin, “L’esplanade du Temple,” 18–19.

72. Abgarian, Պատմություն Մերձուխի, 139. Regarding the Palestinian source, see Thomson and Howard-Johnston, *Armenian History*, 2:249. See also Busse, “Omar b. al-Ḥaṭṭāb.”

73. Text and commentary published in Flusin, “L’esplanade du Temple,” 22–31; see also Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 101.

74. Adomnán, *De locis sanctis* 1.1.14 (Bieler, *Itineraria et alia geographica*, 186).

75. See Sharon, “Praises of Jerusalem,” 59–66; Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem*, 161–62; and Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 54–55, who all note that the traditions signaling this connection almost certainly date to the first Islamic century. See also Rubin, *Between Bible and Qur’an*, 19–20; Hawting, *First Dynasty of Islam*, 60–61; Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*, 10; Flusin, *Saint Anastase*, 2:408; and Déroche, “Polémique anti-judaïque,” 158. Likewise, Heribert Busse and Oleg Grabar conclude that the Dome of the Rock was built as a successor to the Jewish Temple: Busse, “The Sanctity of Jerusalem,” 454–60; Grabar, “The Umayyad Dome of the Rock.” Regarding ‘Abd al-Malik’s intent, see Soucek, “The Temple of Solomon”; Busse, “Monotheismus und islamische Christologie”; and Busse, “Tempel, Grabeskirche und Ḥaram.”

76. In a recent article, Angelika Neuwirth proposes that the Temple Mount should be identified as the original referent of the *masjid al-aqṣā* in *sūra* 17. Nevertheless, I find no argument in the article that would support this identification, merely an assertion that it is so. Accordingly, the position is not very persuasive. Her assumption that the Qur’an should be read as “an authentic testimony from the years 610 CE to 632” is also problematic. See Neuwirth, “From the Sacred Mosque.”

77. E.g., Schreike, “Isrā’”; Schreike, “Mi’rāj”; Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 69; Hasson, “The Muslim View of Jerusalem,” 355; and van Ess, “Sūrat a-Najm.” Mourad also argues, following slightly different evidence and reasoning, that the association of the Night Journey and Ascension

with Jerusalem developed only later: Mourad, “Symbolism of Jerusalem,” 97–99. The translation is my own.

78. E.g., Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, 2:44–47; Caetani, *Annali dell’Islām*, 3:773; and Elad, “Why Did ‘Abd al-Malik Build,” 40–48.

79. See Robinson, *‘Abd al-Malik*, 99; and Kister, “You Shall Only Set Out,” 193–96. See also the sources discussed in Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, 2:44–46; Goitein, “The Sanctity of Jerusalem,” 135–38; and Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem*, 52–54.

80. See, e.g., Hawting, *First Dynasty of Islam*, 2–3, 11–18; Crone, *Slaves on Horses*, 3–8; and Hodgson, *Venture of Islam*, 247–51.

81. E.g., Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, 2:44–47; Caetani, *Annali dell’Islām*, 3:773; Elad, “Why Did ‘Abd al-Malik Build,” 40–48.

82. Although others had proposed this explanation before him, Ignác Goldziher is perhaps most closely associated with this hypothesis, and it was primarily through his influence that it came to prevail: Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, 2:44–47. See also Caetani, *Annali dell’Islām*, 3:773; and Elad, “Why Did ‘Abd al-Malik Build,” 40–48.

83. As was first demonstrated in particular by Goitein, “The Sanctity of Palestine”; and Goitein, “The Historical Background.” These two articles form the basis of Goitein, “The Sanctity of Jerusalem.” The acceptance of this view as a new *status quaestionis* can be seen, e.g., in the following studies: Hirschberg, “The Sources of Moslem Tradition,” 319–21; Grabar, “The Umayyad Dome of the Rock,” 36, 45; Busse, “Der Islam und die biblischen Kultstätten,” 124; Busse, “The Sanctity of Jerusalem,” 454; Kessler, “‘Abd al-Malik’s Inscription,” 11; Peters, *Jerusalem and Mecca*, 94–95; Rosen-Ayalon, *Early Islamic Monuments*, 14; and Gil, *History of Palestine*, 93n105. The only major dissent to this consensus comes in Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem*, 147–63, but see Shoemaker, *Death of a Prophet*, 242–57.

84. Text and translation of the relevant passage from Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī’s *Mir’āt al-Zamān* with extensive analysis can be found in Elad, “Why Did ‘Abd al-Malik Build.” Much of this publication is reproduced in Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem*, 51–61, which lacks the Arabic text, however. See also Sharon, “Praises of Jerusalem,” 60; and Elad, “Pilgrims and Pilgrimage,” esp. 300–302.

85. Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem*, 51; Sharon, “Praises of Jerusalem,” 60. See also Elad, “Pilgrims and Pilgrimage,” esp. 300–302.

86. Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem*, 55.

87. Wāsiṭī, *Faḍā’il al-Bayt al-Muqaddas*, 82–83. Wāsiṭī’s account is translated in Sharon, “Praises of Jerusalem,” 60.

88. Sharon, “Praises of Jerusalem,” esp. 64–65.

89. *Mishnah*, Moed, Yoma 5:1–2 (Blackman, *Mishnayot*, 2:293–95); cf. *Jerusalem Talmud*, Yoma 5:3; *Babylonian Talmud*, Yoma, 52b, 53b, 54b.

90. Geyer, *Itineraria*, 16.

91. Sharon, “Praises of Jerusalem,” 59, 62–63.

92. *Ibid.*, 65.

93. Rosen-Ayalon, *Early Islamic Monuments*, 46–69.

94. Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidāyah*, 8:280–81; trans. Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem*, 57. See also Elad, “Why Did ‘Abd al-Malik Build,” 51–52.

95. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, 202.

96. See Cook, “Muslim Apocalyptic and *Jihād*,” 83–84, where references are also given. This should not be taken as suggesting, for instance, that one should therefore simply collapse the “Associators” of the Qur’ān with the Byzantines, therefore understanding the Qur’ān’s call to action

against the unbelievers as directed exclusively toward the Romans. Surely, however, the Romans figured very prominently among those unbelievers against whom Muhammad's early movement struggled to bring righteousness into the world.

97. *Ibid.*, esp. 68–82.

98. Madelung, "Apocalyptic Prophecies"; Bashear, "Apocalyptic"; Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, esp. 330.

99. Nu'aym ibn Ḥammād, *Kitāb al-Fitan*.

100. Madelung, "Apocalyptic Prophecies," 180; so also Bashear, "Apocalyptic," 173.

101. McCants, *ISIS Apocalypse*, 29, 143.

102. Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 2.

103. *Ibid.*, 2, 276, 300–303.

104. *Ibid.*, 305.

105. Madelung, "Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr"; Madelung, "Apocalyptic Prophecies"; Madelung, "Sufyāni"; Bashear, "The Title 'Fārūq'"; Bashear, "Apocalyptic"; Bashear, "Riding Beasts"; Bashear, "Muslim Apocalypses."

106. Cook, *Book of Tribulations*. I thank Professor Cook for sharing his translation with me in advance of its publication.

107. Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 312–13, 327–28. See, e.g., Sharon, *Black Banners*; Yücesoy, *Messianic Beliefs*; and Velji, *Apocalyptic History*.

108. Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 190–94, esp. 192. On early Shī'ī apocalyptic movements, see Tucker, *Mabdis and Millenarians*; and Anthony, "Mahdī."

109. Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 192–93, 225–26.

110. As Cook succinctly observes, "The imperialist tendency is strong in Muslim apocalyptic": *ibid.*, 5.

111. Bashear, "Apocalyptic," esp. 174–80.

112. Nu'aym ibn Ḥammād, *Kitāb al-Fitan*, 25, no. 57; trans. from Madelung, "Apocalyptic Prophecies," 146.

113. Madelung, "Apocalyptic Prophecies," 146–47.

114. Dols, "Plague," 376–78; Madelung, "Apocalyptic Prophecies," 147.

115. Regarding the dates of the first two events, see Shoemaker, *Death of a Prophet*.

116. *Ibid.*, 178–88, 195–98, 261.

117. Bashear, "Apocalyptic," 175–80; Madelung, "Apocalyptic Prophecies," 155–59. See also El-Cheikh, *Byzantium*, 60–71.

118. Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 49.

119. Nu'aym ibn Ḥammād, *Kitāb al-Fitan*, 268, no. 1225; trans. from Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 49–50.

120. Nu'aym ibn Ḥammād, *Kitāb al-Fitan*, 257–315, nos. 1214–1417.

121. Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 4:1759–60 (34 [2897]). Most notable in this regard is the Islamic State, which has shown keen interest in controlling Dābiq and has even named its official magazine after the city.

122. Bashear, "Apocalyptic," 181–82, 205–6.

123. *Ibid.*, 190, 201.

124. See *ibid.*, 174–77.

125. Bayhaqī, *Al-Sunan al-kubrā*, 9:179; Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwah*, 6:327. Trans. from Cook, "Muslim Apocalyptic and *Jihād*," 70. See also Ṭabarānī, *Musnad al-Shāmiyin*, 3:396, no. 2540 (I thank David Cook for this reference).

126. Cook, “Muslim Apocalyptic and *Jihād*,” 70.
127. Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 51.
128. Nu‘aym ibn Ḥammād, *Kitāb al-Fitan*, 259, no. 1218; trans. Cook, “Muslim Apocalyptic and *Jihād*,” 84.
129. Bashear proposes, somewhat questionably, that we should read in these apocalyptic accounts vestiges of actual historical events. The profound deficiencies of the early Islamic historical tradition inspire him to suggest this possibility. See Bashear, “Apocalyptic,” esp. 173–74, 198–207.
130. Nu‘aym ibn Ḥammād, *Kitāb al-Fitan*, 259, no. 1218; trans. Cook, “Muslim Apocalyptic and *Jihād*,” 85.
131. Nu‘aym ibn Ḥammād, *Kitāb al-Fitan*, 260–61, no. 1218; trans. Cook, “Muslim Apocalyptic and *Jihād*,” 86–88.
132. Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 62, 66.
133. *Ibid.*, 75–77. E.g., Nu‘aym ibn Ḥammād, *Kitāb al-Fitan*, 286–87, no. 1292.
134. Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 79–80. See also Cook, “Heraclian Dynasty.”
135. See, e.g., Nu‘aym ibn Ḥammād, *Kitāb al-Fitan*, 284, no. 1282; trans. in Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 60–61, where references to variants of this tradition in other sources can be found.
136. Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 65.
137. See, e.g., Nu‘aym ibn Ḥammād, *Kitāb al-Fitan*, 272, no. 1252, and also the references to other such traditions in Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 56–57.
138. Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 54–55, 65–66; Cook, “Muslim Apocalyptic and *Jihād*,” 93–94.
139. Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 315.
140. I thank David Frankfurter in particular for suggesting the idea of early Islam as an “instantiation” of late ancient apocalypticism.
141. Heilo, *Eastern Rome*, 124.

### Conclusion

1. For more on this particular tendency, see Shoemaker, “Muhammad.”
2. Hoyland, *In God’s Path*, 63.
3. See, once again, McCants, *ISIS Apocalypse*.
4. See also, in this regard, Hughes, “ISIS: What’s a Poor Religionist to Do?”
5. Margoliouth, “Muhammad.”

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I also wish to thank two of my most important mentors for their specific contributions. David Brakke suggested that my interpretation of Muhammad and the beginnings of Islam through the lens of eschatology could be strengthened if it were possible to identify strong currents of apocalypticism and eschatological expectation that were circulating in the late ancient Near East, much as was the case, for instance, with context that saw the emergence of Jesus and earliest Christianity. When I wrote *The Death of a Prophet*, I was still under the illusion that urgent eschatology and apocalypticism among the Jews and Christians of this era were primarily a product of the rise of Islam, a view that one encounters with some regularity in the literature on this subject. I came to realize that this was a question that I had not in fact investigated sufficiently on my own, and doing so would be an important next step. This opportunity came from Derek Krueger, who generously invited me to contribute a study of the Apocalypse of John in Byzantium for a symposium and volume on the New Testament in Byzantium, organized through Dumbarton Oaks. This was a topic that I knew next to nothing about at the time, but it was an appealing topic for several reasons, and one well suited to my interests. In doing the research for this project, partly in conversation with Derek, I began to explore Byzantine apocalypticism more thoroughly, where I discovered significant evidence that eschatological fervor was in fact a potent element of Byzantine religious culture during the sixth century, growing ever stronger, it would seem, toward the end of that century and especially at the beginning of the seventh. This apocalypticism was, moreover, decidedly imperial in nature, providing a perfect laboratory for the fusion of eschatology and empire evident in nascent Islam. As I continued to explore the apocalypticisms of late antiquity more thoroughly, I soon found that this eschatological spirit figured prominently not only in Christianity but among the Jews and Zoroastrians of the age as well. More and more, Muhammad’s apocalyptic polity appeared almost emblematic of the religious culture of this era.

I published an article outlining the core of this argument in *Arabica* several years ago, and many helpful responses from colleagues to that piece helped shape the present monograph. At that point, I began working in

earnest on the history of early Byzantine apocalypticism, and on the *Tiburtine Sibyl* in particular. In addition to the Dumbarton Oaks Symposium on the New Testament in Byzantium, I gave presentations on this topic to a number of audiences, and again I thank the organizers and audiences for the beneficial dialogues that these occasions provided: the North American Patristics Society; the first York Christian Apocrypha Symposium at York University; the Orthodox Christian Studies Center at Fordham University; the Eastern Orthodox Studies Group of the AAR; and the conference titled “Ancient Christian Apocryphal Literature and Its Reception” at the Faculty of Theology, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki.

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