

ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis ISLAMIC APOCALYPTIC: ITS ROOTS,
CHARACTERISTICS AND EARLY HISTORY

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Apocalypticism is a vitally important and essential element for understanding the background, origin and development of Islam, and continues to have a major impact on the Islamic world to this very day. Apocalyptic beliefs have been a driver of change throughout Islamic history from the beginning of the Prophet's mission, impelling wars of conquest, igniting rebellions often on a large scale, and causing the rise and overthrow of dynasties. The waves of apocalyptic beliefs have varied in intensity and importance over the centuries of Islam's existence; however I contend that these expectations were especially strong and absolutely central in early Islam. In addition, narratives about the End Times have been a factor in promoting the widespread view in Islam of the steep decline in the state of the Umma since prophetic times thereby serving to undermine the legitimacy of rulers, as well as that of the clerics with governmental connections. Furthermore, apocalyptic narratives have been instrumental in shaping Muslims' gender and ethnic views. This paper will examine the nature of the early Islamic apocalyptic, its roots and history, with a focus on those traditions which led to changes in leadership in the central Islamic lands, into the second century of the Abbasid period with the Caliphate of al-Ma'mūn, who, as the evidence strongly indicates, allowed apocalyptic concepts especially in the form of Messianism to guide his actions, one of which, his

attempt to establish himself as a doctrinal as well as a political ruler, would have repercussions for centuries.

ISLAMIC APOCALYPTIC: ITS ROOTS, CHARACTERISTICS AND EARLY HISTORY

by

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Introduction

Apocalypticism is a vitally important and essential element for understanding the background, origin and development of Islam, and continues to have a major impact on the Islamic world to this very day.¹ Apocalyptic beliefs have been a driver of change throughout Islamic history from the beginning of the Prophet's mission,² impelling wars of conquest, igniting rebellions often on a large scale, and causing the rise and overthrow of dynasties.³ The waves of apocalyptic beliefs

¹ The Islamic State's open use of apocalyptic narrative to further its cause, win recruits and bolster morale of its fighters has been widely reported, not least in William McCants best seller *The ISIS Apocalypse: The History, Strategy, and Doomsday Vision of the Islamic State* (Picador, 2016)

² It should be noted that the degree and manner of this effect remains a matter of scholarly debate, both in the Islamic world and the West.

³ This does not mean that apocalypticism has been the sole factor in effecting change in the Islamic world over the long reach of its history. Some historians of Islam have often proposed monocausal engines of change such as class conflict and climate change. (As an example of climate change as the sole causative force see: Andrey Korotaev, Vladimir Klimenko and Dmitry Proussakov "Origins of Islam: Political-Anthropological and Environmental Context" *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, Vol. 52, No. 3/4 (1999), pp. 243- 276) I modestly propose that the concept of the "Hour" could often be a highly significant factor in Islamic history. Aziz Amanat has made a similar observation: "It is primarily [the] shared apocalyptic legacy of salvation in Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity and Islam that helped shape not only the theological perspective and eschatology of these religious communities, but also served as a driving force behind major currents in human history from the rise of new institutional religions to political revolutions and intellectual movements." Aziz Amanat "Introduction: Apocalyptic Anxieties and Millennial Hopes in the Salvation Religions of the Middle East" in Amanat, Abbas and Bernhardsson, Magnus, editors, *Imagining the End: Visions of Apocalypse from the Ancient Middle East to Modern America* (New York, I. B. Taurus, 2002) p. 1f Along similar lines, Hayrettin Yücesoy invokes Messianism, a

have varied in intensity and importance over the centuries of Islam's existence; however I contend that these expectations were especially strong and absolutely central in early Islam.⁴ In addition, narratives about the End Times have been a factor in promoting the widespread view in Islam of the steep decline in the state of the Umma since prophetic times,⁵ thereby serving to

major subset of the apocalyptic, in the first page of the Introduction to *Messianic Beliefs and Imperial Politics in Medieval Islam: The Abbasid Caliphate in the Early Ninth Century*. (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2009) "Messianic and apocalyptic aspects of Islam date back to its rise in the seventh century. During the early period of Islam, messianic beliefs emerged as a resilient form of thought that affected the religious and political evolution of Muslim society. These beliefs repeatedly interrupted political life and administrative routine and provoked, on popular as well as institutional levels, renewed demands for social and political change. This tension between institutionalization and charismatic leadership remained strong in public life throughout the medieval centuries, receding at times and advancing at others."

⁴ Nonetheless, after this time, apocalyptic and messianic movements would continue to arise among various Muslim peoples creating different polities, some of them large and long-lasting. In more recent times the incursions of the West hatched Mahdist movement in North Africa and elsewhere. Perceived Western attacks on Islam in our own led to the birth of the Islamic State, among other armed groups.

⁵ Speaking of the period up to 50AH, Fred Donner writes, "Muslims of all eras have tended to see this era as a golden age, and to look back to the beliefs and actions of their spiritual forefathers from it for guidance in living their own lives." *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writings* (Princeton: The Darwin Press 1998) p. 115 On his part, Azmeh states, "we have here the common pietistic discourse on *faṣād al-zamān* corruption of the present time. It contains the familiar polemic against the inversion of order and the restatement of aversion to social life as actually experienced in the fullness of its transformations. The elements of this polemic are here fully recuperated into the apocalyptic register." *The Times of History: Universal Topics in Islamic Historiography* (Central European University Press 2003) p. 153 Humphreys invokes an "almost universally shared myth Covenant, Betrayal and Redemption" noting that after the second civil war between Amīn

undermine the legitimacy of rulers, as well as that of the clerics with governmental connections. Furthermore, apocalyptic narratives have been instrumental in shaping Muslims' gender and ethnic views. This paper will examine the nature of the early Islamic apocalyptic, its roots and history, with a focus on those traditions which led to changes in leadership in the central Islamic lands, into the second century of the Abbasid period with the Caliphate of al-Ma'mūn, who, as the evidence strongly indicates, allowed apocalyptic concepts especially in the form of Messianism to guide his actions, one of which, his attempt to establish himself as a doctrinal as well as a political ruler, would have repercussions for centuries.

Apocalypses in general can be viewed as attempts to give meaning to traumatic events, including foreign oppression, and social injustice especially at the hands of governments and its officials, but also to the sufferings of everyday life.⁶ Its traditions generally display pessimism about the

and al Ma'mūn, Muslims saw it as a betrayal of God's Covenant with the Umma. Such a dilemma might only be resolved through some savior figure. R S Humphreys Humphreys RS "Qur'ānic Myth and Narrative Structure in Early Islamic Historiography" .F. M. Clover , R. S. Humphreys in *Tradition and Innovation in Late Antiquity* (Wisconsin Studies in Classics 1989) p. 278ff Cook *Studies* p. 231 (T)he belief that earlier ages were better than the present is virtually ubiquitous, and strongly supported by the ḥadīth literature. Speaking of the early Abbasids Yücesoy p. 71 states that they "saw sociopolitical and military conflicts as part of a cosmic drama that had begun some time in the past and would continue into the future — a future that now appeared imminent. This ideology committed two powerful messages. First, history was nothing but a perpetual and moral decline after the Prophet Muhammad...Second, history was imminently approaching its end.

⁶ Along these lines Yücesoy. writes "[For] most people ... during the time of crises, messianic beliefs remained for many a frequent means of not only coping with sociopolitical reality but also of changing the status quo." Yücesoy p. 6

present, but despite this are intended to give the Faithful encouragement.⁷ In this way they can be seen as a variety of political propaganda and a way of giving meaning to the world.⁸ For these reasons they remain cogent long after the crises leading to their composition were no longer relevant, as further crises arose. Along the same lines, they can be reassurances to the faithful to remain constant in anticipation of the future deliverance soon to come.⁹ Furthermore, in attempts to foment change, apocalyptic narratives have the advantage of great flexibility as generalized visions of the apocalypse can be adjusted easily to fit diverse historical realities.

Bruce Lincoln has made the interesting observation that according to Clifford Geertz religion offers both a "model of" and a "model for" existence. In the apocalyptic tradition the "model of" existence is a hopelessly flawed world, in which righteous must live, while the "model for" is set in the future, and stands as a denunciation of the world as it is, ruled by

⁷ John Collins. "From Prophecy to Apocalypticism: The Expectation of the Ending" *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism* McGinn, Barnard, Collins, John Joseph, and Stein, Stephen J. editors (Continuum Intl Pub Group 1998) p. 159

⁸ Nadia Maria El-Cheikh *Byzantium viewed by the Arabs*. Cambridge, Mass: (Distributed for the Center for Middle Eastern Studies of Harvard University by Harvard University Press 2000) p. 66 "In propagandistic apocalyptic aḥadīth...people are enjoined to support a cause which is presented as the cause of righteousness and is described well enough so that people would recognize it even though it was described in apocalyptic terms" Sandra Campbell "It Must Be the End of Time: Apocalyptic Ahadith as a Record of the Islamic Community's Reactions To the Turbulent First Centuries" *Medieval Encounters* (January 1998 4 (3) p. 176. Example of these propagandistic Hadith will be found throughout this document,

⁹ Robert G. Hoyland *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It : A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam (Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam)* (Princeton 1997) p. 257

foreigners, or the immoral. This gives hope to the hopeless¹⁰ and the belief that they can rebel and win. Should they fail as most rebellions do, their text may survive to be picked up, reedited and recontextualized by other peoples at other times.¹¹

¹⁰ Bruce Lincoln “Apocalyptic Temporality and Politics in the Ancient World” in *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism* McGinn, Barnard, Collins, John Joseph, and Stein, Stephen J. (editors) (Continuum Intl Pub Group 1998. p. 467

¹¹ Lincoln. p. 469 I would note that in the case of Islam, apocalyptic rebellions have succeeded on more than a few occasions, with a failure to meet expectations occurring at some later point.

Chapter 1: Apocalypticism in the Context of Early

Islam

Beginning in the latter part of the 20th century, an upsurge in studies dealing with the apocalyptic across history, regions and religions has occurred, which accelerated with the coming of the third millennium. Although there had been long standing interest in the phenomenon in biblical studies, only relatively recently did scholars in general realize how deeply the concept was embedded in world cultures, including the West.¹² Islamic studies of this phenomenon have not lagged far behind. The varieties of the Islamic apocalyptic may naturally be expected to have commonalties with worldwide apocalyptic movements and more so with the forms found in its region of origin, dating from texts written in cuneiform from Mesopotamia up through the age of the great empires of Rome and Iran, as will be discussed below.

In the troubled times which plagued the early Muslim community in the form of civil wars, assassinations and backsliding, prophecies of the Hour were especially prime targets for fabrication by dissident groups. Hopes of respite from chaos and misrule would easily have summoned forth movements against established rulers, often led by Mahdist or Messianic figures, or at least those claiming to speak for them and to lead Believers in their name. Each of the contenders for power needed to justify their policies and opposition to other groups by

¹² For example, Eugen Weber in *Apocalypses: Prophecies, Cults, and Millennial Beliefs through the Ages* (Harvard University Press 2000) points out that persons such as Isaac Newton, Christopher Columbus, and Tycho Brahe were obsessed with the End Times. Columbus foresaw his voyage as part of fulfilling prophecies of the recovery of Jerusalem. The pioneer in studies of apocalypticism beyond Christian biblical exegesis was Norman Cohn's 1957 study, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*.

churning out “proofs” of their Divinely ordained victory despite all odds against a demonized enemy. These proof texts were to be found in the vast Ḥadīth literature, both in the canonical collections, and in oral traditions. The apocalyptic in Islam relies to a great extent on these Ḥadīth. The Arabic histories of the life of the Prophet and early Islam, which were written more than the century after his death, were based on these narratives. Thus, our understanding of the Prophet and his teachings is largely dependent on the quality of the memories of the earliest followers.¹³ The value of these recollections is complex, some memory science shows that on one hand after a relatively short time details of spoken utterances become lost or corrupted.¹⁴ On the other hand, other studies indicate that oral traditions can be very stable on time.¹⁵ Furthermore, Gregor Schoeler has made the point that communication of narratives could have

¹³ Muhammad and the Qur’ān” in *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity*-(Oxford University Press 2012) p 1389

The Ḥadīth are prefaced by *isnad* “a pedigree that purports to record the chain(s) of transmitters by which a given tradition eventually reached a particular collector” Stephan Shoemaker “Muhammad and the Qur’ān” p 1390)

¹⁴ Stephen Shoemaker *Creating the Qur’an : a Historical-critical study* (University of California Press, 2022) p. 150f He quotes Maurice Halbwachs that the collective memory”does not preserve the past but reconstructs it with the aid of the material traces, rites, texts, and traditions left behind by that past” Lindstedt in *Muhammad and His Followers* p. 30f applies Halbwachs to early Islamic history “(N)arratives about the prophet can be understood as the community’s endeavor to connect themselves to the memory about the prophet.” By for example retrojecting matters of concern at their time to the prophetic age,

¹⁵ Innes has shown that orality and literacy are not necessarily opposed, but often interconnected. Matthew Innes “Memory, Orality and Literacy in an Early Medieval Society” in Matthew Innes: *Past & Present* , Feb., 1998, No. 158 (Feb., 1998), pp. 3-36 Assmann has also theorized that social memory connects historical narratives with cultural continuity and communal identity. Jan Assmann *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination* (Cambridge University Press, 2011) p 2.

been “aural” in which traditions were taught by a teacher reading from a notebook of some sort to students who would take probably abbreviated notes.¹⁶

There was a veritable flood of prophecies, initially short,¹⁷ but over time woven into sometimes quite lengthy narratives. In the successive periods of *fitna*, strife or tribulation,¹⁸ each side in the bitter struggles would have found it useful to trot out putative proclamations of the Prophet which would clearly, or with a little interpretation, demonstrate their inevitable victory. Furthermore, apocalyptic visions are endlessly fungible.¹⁹ Long after the initial crisis had

¹⁶ Gregor Schoeler *The Genesis of Literature in Islam: From the Aural to the Read* (The New Edinburgh Islamic Surveys 2008) p. 36f

¹⁷ “The generally fragmented, almost atomistic quality of much of this material is one of its most distinctive qualities” Fred Donner “Some Formal and Structural Characteristics of Early Islamic Historiography” in “*Narratives of Islamic Origins*”(Gerlach Press 2021 p 253

¹⁸ Donner points out: “The basic meaning of Arabic *fitna* is “temptation,” particularly either sexual or political; the First and Second Civil Wars, which pitted Believers against one another, is pejoratively termed *fitna* by orthodox tradition because much of the squabbling arose from the temptation to seize mundane power.” *Narratives* p. 187. (Qur’an (2:191) plainly states “*Fitna* is worse than killing”) On his part Yücesoy. p. 37 points out that although the word is common in the Qur’ān, it is never associated with the End of Time. The implication of sexual temptation may be an echo of the Hebrew bible, where for example God accuses Israel of whoring after foreign gods, as in Deuteronomy 31:16 “And the Lord said unto Moses, Behold, thou shalt sleep with thy fathers; and this people will rise up, and go a whoring after the gods of the strangers of the land, whither they go [to be] among them, and will forsake me, and break my covenant which I have made with them.”

¹⁹ Fred Donner “Source of Islamic Conceptions of War” In John Kelsay and James Turner Johnson (eds.), *Just War and Jihad: Historical and Theoretical Perspectives on War and Peace in Western and Islamic Traditions* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1991 p. 44 Furthermore. “the interests of sundry literary, juristic and socio-

passed, with one party or the other defeated, the narratives of the prophecies remained, perhaps modified to a certain extent, to live another day as ammunition in another context; and yet again to provide hope for those faced with apparently overwhelming odds.²⁰ It should also be noted that the prophecies often carry ambiguous elements, which in addition to adding to their mystery, make them more difficult to refute.²¹ Those which could not be recycled would tend to vanish from the scene, or be ignored. In examining the surviving traditions, it is always necessary to ask *cui bono* in an effort to determine their ultimate origin, within their historical context,²² and bearing in mind their often tendentious nature, designed to justify later religious politics.²³

political concerns. The self-contained nature of these units, often devoid of any temporal or spatial location, meant that they could be employed in a variety of different contexts and serve a number of different ends” Hoyland *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* p.38

²⁰ Donner *ibid.* p. 45

²¹ Yücesoy p. 15

²² It may be noted that the pioneering Arabist Joseph Schacht in his *Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1950) pointed that much of classical *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) was based on fabricated Ḥadīth developed by jurists to justify the versions of Sharia they were creating.

²³ Robert G. Hoyland “Reflections on the Identity of the Arabian Conquerors of the Seventh-Century Middle East,” *Al-‘Uṣūr al-Wuṣṭā* 25 (2017) p. 114. Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p 3. Herbert Berg, *The Development of Exegesis in Early Islam: The Authenticity of Muslim Literature from the Formative Period* (Routledge Studies in the Qur’ān 2009 p 9 -16 Antoine Borrut *Between Memory and Power The Syrian Space under the Late Umayyads and Early Abbasids (c. 72–193/692–809)* Translated by Anna Bailey Galletti (Brill, 2023) p.1 This lack of documents has led some few scholars to go so far as to doubt that Muhammad who is not mentioned until nearly half a century after his assumed death, actually existed, an assertion which forcibly brings to mind the saying, “absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.”

As Aziz al Azmeh expresses it, in Islam “time is .. cleft between origins and corruptions, between authenticity and the snares of enemies.”²⁴ For him, eschatology and the apocalyptic are a sub-species of salvation history.”²⁵ One effect of this was that, given this opinion of constant decline, apocalypses could always be recycled again and again. In addition to criticizing the actions of the Muslim population in general, the apocalypticists would often condemn Muslim rulers, despite certain well known Ḥadīth urging obedience to the Powers that Be.²⁶ In the early centuries of Islam, writers would attack both the Umayyads and Abbasids.²⁷ Nor do they spare

²⁴ Azmeh *Emergence*. p. 42

²⁵ “As a scheme for conceiving the past, present and future, eschatology and the apocalyptic constitute a sub-species of salvation history whose differentia is the construal of selected events as mystical signs presaging an eschatological time that terminates human history. Broadly speaking, eschatology can in terms of its socio-political moorings be divided into the apocalyptic and the conventional. By eschatological convention I understand a schema of salvation history in which the history of the past and the history of the future are conjoined in the perspective of a quietist determinism without reference to the imminence of the End, and unlike chiliasm and various forms of messianism in the activist mode.” Aziz al Azmeh “God’s Chronography and Dissipative Time: in Classical and Medieval Muslim Apocalyptic Traditions” *The Medieval History Journal*, 7, 2 (2004) p. 201. Reprinted in *The Times of History: Universal Topics in Islamic Historiography* (Central European University Press, 2003) p 140 f. He further notes that immanent apocalypses are not always linked to the disenfranchised and that there is “no necessary correlation between crisis and apocalypse.” *ibid*.

²⁶ “The Messenger of God said, Whosoever obeys me, obeys Allah; and he who disobeys me, disobeys Allah; and whosoever obeys the Amir (leader), in fact, obeys me; and he who disobeys the Amir, in fact, disobeys me.”

<https://sunnah.com/riyadussalihin:670>

²⁷ For example: The black banners will appear from the east ; the first of them and the last of them are cursed. Do not aid them; God will not aid them! Who are beneath one of their flags, God will place him in hell on the Day of

their fellow Ulama, who are blamed for closeness to the rulers.²⁸ From this it seems likely that these traditions were aimed towards a non-elite class, who may already have beliefs that they were in the last days.²⁹

Given that apocalyptic texts are usually sourced to some sacred person or being, in the case of Islam, generally but not exclusively the Prophet,³⁰ determining who their actual composers were is extremely difficult, if not absolutely impossible, except in rare cases where fabricating provocateurs are unmasked.³¹ David Cook opines that the composers of apocalypses seem to have had little knowledge of the workings of the governments they were rejecting, but reflected the masses' resentment of petty injustices.³² On the other hand, Yücesoy states:

Rising. They are the worst of God's creation, and their followers are the worst creation! They claim that they are from me [Muhammad] - no! I am dissociated from them and they are disassociated from me" David Cook "Moral Apocalyptic in Islam" *Studia Islamica*, 1997, No. 86 (1997) p. 50

²⁸ "The 'ulama' become dependent upon the rulers permitting for them the forbidden and forbidding for them the permitted, and furnishing them with legal opinions according to their desire." Quoted in David Cook *Moral* p 5

²⁹ Cook *Studies* p. 2

³⁰ Other possibilities are the earliest Muslims, the Companions, or such personages as Ka'b al Aḥbār, discussed below, a Jewish convert, seen as a conveyer of Jewish prophecies.

³¹ An exception is one 'Abd al-Karim ibn Abi al-Awja' executed by the Caliph al-Mahdī on charges of *zandaqa*. He is recorded to have boasted as he faced death "I have composed for you four thousand traditions forbidding through them what is lawful and sanctioning what is unlawful." Mahmood Ibrahim "Religious Inquisition as Social Policy in the Early Abbasid Caliphate" *Arab Studies Quarterly* Vol. 16, No. 2 (Spring 1994), p. 67.

³² "ibid p. 231 ff. In one Ḥadīth", Every community has a disaster to corrupt it, and the disaster of this community is the Umayyads." Nu'aym, p. 55

These prophecies represent a body of thought produced by urban elite who had access to information and power....Because the carriers of knowledge belonged to the learned class of their societies, messianic beliefs remained influential on and relevant to the social, intellectual, and cultural life of the Umayyad and 'Abbasid societies.³³

The apocalypticists would have possessed sufficient knowledge of the language of the Hadith and existing apocalyptic traditions, and of sound *isnāds* to support their own narrative to produce acceptable versions of prophecies, impelled by the resentment they felt towards the ruling powers, and their failure to rule righteously.³⁴ This feeling extended to those scholars associated with them.³⁵ In addition, there would naturally have been propagandists of various religio-political movements, such as the Abbasids, and allied anti-Umayyad groups churning out Ḥadīth serving their cause, as doubtlessly were their opponents.³⁶ There is also the likelihood that tales of the End of Days were circulating among the believing masses, and could be picked

³³ Yücesoy p. 11.

³⁴ Cook *Studies* p. 234 This feeling can be seen in the widely disseminated Ḥadīth “If only one day of this time remained, God” would raise up a man from my family who would fill this earth with justice as it has been filled with oppression.” Abu Dawud Book 31, Number 4270:

³⁵ This is reflected in the writings of Muslim scholars who often attack their fellow Ulema for their proximity to the Power that Be. There is even the saying “If you see the scholar often associating often with the Sultan, know that he is a thief” (<http://hdith.com/hdith.php?s=73m3>).

³⁶ Yücesoy, p. 11, asserts: “Ultimately, these prophecies represent a body of thought produced by urban elite who had access to information and power,...Because the carriers of knowledge belonged to the learned lass of their societies, messianic beliefs on and relevant to the social, intellectual, and cultural life of the Umayyad and 'Abbasid societies”.

by the literate and “polished” to fit within the existing apocalyptic corpus, with the advantage of having a degree of the familiarity among potential recruits to politico-religious movement

On the question of when the texts were created, it has been noted that apocalypses by their very nature mix historical fact, which gives them a degree of veracity, with their vaticinia ex eventu predictions of future event which had already happened. prophecies.³⁷ Thus, the traditions claim to have been revealed in an earlier age, and predict events which have actually taken place.³⁸ In the Islamic case this would often be their purposed date of revelation, which tends to cluster around particular dates, such as the beginning of the Faith. Given the fact that the traditions astonishing accuracy in foretelling events of their supposed future times ceases at some point, we can obtain some inkling of their date of composition. Furthermore, if several such texts emerge at some given point in history, they can give an idea of the pressures society was experiencing then. They might also cluster around particular dates, such the beginning of Islamic centuries. Apocalypses have been well described as “chronicles written in the future tense.”³⁹

In addition, prophecies which patently did not come to pass could be explained away. For example, one Sound Ḥadīth predicts, “When Khosrau is ruined, there will be no Khosrau after him; and when Caesar is ruined, there will be no Caesar after him.”⁴⁰ Later commentators

³⁷ Paul J. Alexander, “Medieval Apocalypses as Historical Sources” *The American Historical Review* 73/4 (1968), p. 1007.

³⁸ Andreas Görke, “Eschatology, History, and the Common Link: A Study in Methodology,” in Herbert Berg (ed.), *Method and Theory in the Study of Islamic Origins* (Leiden 2003) p. 180.

³⁹ Alexander p. 1018

⁴⁰ Bukhārī 3120

asserted that what was meant was the conquered territories once held by both emperors.⁴¹

Another Ḥadīth which was widely reported through various *isnāds*,⁴² has the Prophet literally indicating that the Hour is near with two fingers touching. Tabari explained it away with some clever reckoning that the two fingers trope does not indicate an imminent eschaton, but a comfortable margin of several hundred years from the Prophet's time.⁴³ And, of course, such prophecies could be just erased from the record, or conveniently forgotten.⁴⁴

Topologies of the Islamic Apocalyptic

Fred Donner has offered useful topologies for describing Islamic apocalypse in comparison and in contrast with other forms.⁴⁵ Like most other traditions, the Muslim strains hold that there will come a time when the world will be transformed and a new era begun. In

⁴¹ See for example Yusuf al-Hajj Ahmad *The Unchallengable Miracles of the Quran* (Darusslam) p. 64-66.

⁴² *Isnāds* are a chain of transmitters of a Ḥadīth over the generations. "(I)n the science of *ahadjth*, confirmation of authenticity was to be had not so much by analysing the text as by knowledge of the men who had transmitted it." Robert Hoyland "History, fiction and authorship in the first centuries of Islam" in *Writing and Representation in Medieval Islam*. (Routledge. 2006) p. 21

⁴³ -Tabari, Abu Ja'far Muhammad, *The History of Tabari*, Vol 1 Translated by Franz Rosenthal Sony Series in Near Eastern Studies, 1989 p. 182 R. S. Humphreys discusses this in detail in "Concepts of Time in Early Islamic Historiography: The Case of Abu Ja'far al-Tabari" <https://networks.h-net.org/tabari-and-apocalyptic-thought>

⁴⁴ It may be noted that David Cook has pointed out that many Ḥadīth predicting the ending of the world during AH 60 or 70, or 100 remained available long after they were disconfirmed. "Some commentators averred that the Prophet was speaking of the lifespans of then members of his Community, See Mishkat al-Masabih 5279, 8/3303 <https://sunnah.com/mishkat/19>

⁴⁵ Fred Donner "A Typology of Eschatological Concepts," in *Roads to Paradise Eschatology and Concepts of the Hereafter in Islam* Sebastian Günther and Todd Lawson editors (Leiden, Brill, 2017) p, 772 -775

this new world-to-come all is changed, which often means that the downtrodden are now in power, in many cases under the the leadership of the Mahdī (the (rightly) guided one).⁴⁶ There exists a profound duality between the Now and the Then. Islamic eschatology unlike some other, non Abrahamic versions as witnessed in Hinduism and Buddhism is not cyclical but is linear leading to a great and final conclusion.⁴⁷

On his part, David Cook in his magisterial *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic* offers as a definition of the Islamic form of the apocalyptic “a genre of literature presented in the form of a Ḥadīth⁴⁸ purporting to convey information, about the period of time leading up to the end of the

⁴⁶ It appears that early on Jesus was considered the “guided one” who would usher in the Messianic kingdom.

However, David Cook points out the polemical relationship between Muslims and Christians led to the diminishment of His role (Cook, “The Birth of Islam as an Apocalyptic Movement.” in Glen S. McGhee and Stephen P. O’Leary eds *Heaven/Heaven on Earth: Theories of the Apocalyptic* (Acumen Publishing, 2005)” p 83). As one early tradition states, “The Mahdī, Jesus, will send to fight the Byzantines.” Nu’aym b. Hammad al-Marwazi *the Book of Tribulations”: The Syrian Muslim Apocalyptic Tradition: An Annotated Translation by David Cook*(Edinburgh University Press; 2017) p. 220. Another interpretation of the title is “the one who guides” “He is only called the Mahdī because he guides to a hidden matter, so he will bring out the Torah and the Gospel from a land called Antioch.” Nu’aym p. 20 This being is discussed at length below.

⁴⁷ Donner “Typology” p 75 Veronica Wieser, and Vincent Eltschinge in “ Introduction: Approaches to Medieval Cultures of Eschatology” in *Cultural History of Apocalyptic Thought/ Kulturgeschichte der Apokalypse Volume 1* p. 4 note that “Time, history and the world itself, individuals and earthly powers, kingdoms and nations were thus subject to a divine plan. Eschatological ideas on temporal mutability, the transience of the world and political communities were often used to explain periods of political transition, scenarios of social decline or catastrophic event”

⁴⁸Initially short saying attributed to the Prophet or other important personages through a series of intermediaries across several generations.

world.” To this he adds, “It is placed always in the prophetic future, which is assumed here to be *ex post facto*, but may have some genuine predictive elements. While directed towards the future, it usually makes use of past events with a cyclical view of history in order to interpret this “future history.”⁴⁹ He also divides Islamic apocalyptic into four major categories:

— Historical in which may be found recognizable historical figures, with historical sequences of events, which spin off at some point into realms beyond known reality. The apocalypticists often employ allegory or skim over events which do not fit their vision of history with the aim of fitting the narrative to the theological and political they seek to achieve;⁵⁰

—Metahistorical Apocalypses leave behind historical events, to concentrate on an eschatological future, although they might refer to some actual events, or mention historical personalities disguised in some fashion;⁵¹

— Messianic cycles are the very heart and soul of the Muslim apocalyptic. In them are found the concept strongly asserted that righteousness and justice can be restored to the world, through the aid of a messianic and militant figure;⁵² and

— Moral apocalypses attack the failings of current society, which neither the religious elite nor the government seek to remove.⁵³ While apocalypticists are often portrayers of cosmic battles in the End of Days, many used their work to condemn the ills of society, its rulers, and its religious leaders. Their prophecies are a clarion call to reform. They are supported in

⁴⁹ Davis Cook *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic* (Princeton: The Darwin Press, Princeton 2002) p. 1

⁵⁰ *ibid*, p, 34 For example one Ḥadīth concerning the Umayyads states “Those people will continue to grab the center of this rule as long as they do not differ between themselves. When they differ between themselves, it will depart from them, and not return until the Day of Resurrection.” Nu’aym p. 94

⁵¹ *ibid*, p. 92

⁵² *ibid*. p 137 For example “The sign of the Mahdī is that he will be harsh upon the governors, generous with wealth, merciful towards the indigent poor.” Nu’aym p. 205

⁵³ *ibid* p. 231 ff In one Ḥadīth “Every community has a disaster to corrupt it, and the disaster of this community is the Umayyads. Nu’aym” p, 55

this by the widespread belief in Muslim societies that earlier times were better than the present;⁵⁴

Moral apocalypses are conjecturally the most important variety in affecting the course of Islamic history, by means of causing political unrest, often resulting in changes of regime in the Islamic world; through spreading the narrative that the Umma and its leader are corrupt and sinful, undermining the rulers' legitimacy, which can be fanned into revolutionary fervor. Islam speaks of earlier religions such as Judaism and Christianity becoming corrupt, obliging God to send a new prophet to renew the faith. In Islam Muhammad is the final prophet, and there cannot be another. However, the task of reformation of Islam could be the task of the Maḥdi, or some similar figure.⁵⁵ Once the moral apocalypse has laid the groundwork, messianic cycles would have the greatest impact in inciting violent political movements against authority.

Livne-Kafri has noted that while the Muslim apocalyptic is heterogeneous, the traditions all tend to deal with issues such as "reward and punishment, this world and the world to come, heaven and hell, resurrection and the day of judgment, messianism."⁵⁶ While the Islamic tradition has Jewish and Christian roots in many aspects, it always reflects the concerns of the Umma at a given time.⁵⁷ In Israelite times, a true prophet made himself known by the vision(s)

⁵⁴ *ibid.* p. 92

⁵⁵ Cook *Studies* p. 23 It is also possible that failed would be Maḥdīs were reinterpreted as Mujaddids. Discussed in Elia Landau-Tasseron, "The "Cyclical Reform: A Study of the Mujaddid Tradition," *Studia Islamica* 70 (1989), pp. 79-117.

⁵⁶ Ofer Livne-Kafri "Some Notes".

⁵⁷ *ibid.* p. 72. The direction of influence was not always one way. Judeo-Arablic apocalyptic literature from Yemen also drew on Muslim traditions. Yemen itself provided 'Abd Allah b. Saba and Wahb b. Munabbih, of Jewish

of the Divine he received, as in Ezekiel 1. In Islam the Prophet's Night Journey was held to be a proof of his divine mission.⁵⁸ While the *mi'raj* is not strictly an apocalypse, it does have some elements of the genre. Its roots have been found in Zoroastrianism and Jewish apocalyptic narratives of journeys to the Heavens, such as that of Enoch.⁵⁹

Apocalypticism in the Islamic context may broadly be said to involve Jihad of the Sword,⁶⁰ in which the Believers fight alongside the Forces of Light.⁶¹ This apocalyptic militancy

origin, who contributed to the Muslim Apocalyptic. Yosef Tobi "Judaeo-Arabic and Muslim apocalyptic visions in the Yemen". Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies, 1997, Vol. 27, Papers from the thirtieth meeting of the Seminar for Arabian Studies held in London, 18-20 July 1996 p. 236. Munabbih also served as a conduit for many Tradition about Enoch. See John Reeves and Annette Yoshiko Reeves *Enoch from Antiquity to the Middle Ages: Sources from Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Oxford University Press 2018)

⁵⁸ See Brooke Olson Vuckovic, *Heavenly journeys, earthly concerns: the legacy of the mi'raj in the formation of Islam* (Routledge, 2005); Cook Studies p. 230.

⁵⁹ *ibid* p. 18

⁶⁰ This is employing the typology Ulema devised over time to describe the various types of Jihad, as a matter of convenience. Worth mentioning is the statement of 'Ali in *The Book of Tribulations*, p. 26 "I will tell you of the types of jihad that predominate among you: There is the jihad with your hands, there is the jihad with your tongues, there is the jihad with your hearts, since whichever heart does not approve the good, and does not forbid the evil and does not forbid the evil its top becomes its bottom" Furthermore, Michael Bonner in writes "It is noteworthy that at least from the second century of the Hijra/eighth centuryCE onward, Islamic tradition considered these matters under two different . under two different rubrics, fitan (wars of the Last Days) and jihad" (*Jihad in Islamic History: Doctrines and Practices* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 9.

⁶¹ Phillippe Buc, "Eschatologies of the sword, compared: Latin Christianity, Islam(s), and Japanese. in Wieser Veronika, Eltschinger Vincent and Heiss, Johann (eds) *Cultures of Eschatology*, Volume 1 (De Gruyter, 2020) p.

may reach back to early Islam, in view of several well-known Ḥadīth.⁶² For example: the Prophet is related to have said, "Know that Paradise is under the shades of swords,"⁶³ and "Behold, God sent me with a sword just before the Hour."⁶⁴ In the early Ḥadīth collection, The Book of Tribulations we find "The Mahdī will... return the Muslims in their entirety to jihad."⁶⁵ In addition, there are well known verses in the Qur'ān dealing with fighting.⁶⁶ The apocalyptic literature is replete with detailed descriptions of malāḥim, epic battles, with strong eschatological overtones.⁶⁷ In Christian eschatology, humans either die as martyrs, or join the angelic armies of Christ to help purge the world of evil. The martyrdom trope is also present in Islam,

⁶² Militancy per se well antedates the rise of Islam "Islam arose in an environment where warfare-or at any rate, armed violence with some degree of organization and planning— was a characteristic of everyday life" 'Bonner, p. 7.

⁶³ Al-Bukhārī 2818

⁶⁴ Abdallah b. al-Mubarak (d. 791), *Kitab al-Jihad* (Beirut: n.p., 1971), 89-90 (no. 105) Cited and translated by Cook The Beginnings of Islam as an Apocalyptic Movement." in Glen S. McGhee and Stephen P. O'Leary eds *War in Heaven/Heaven on Earth: Theories of the Apocalyptic* (Acumen Publishing, 2005)" p. 93 Note that this Ḥadīth implies that the Hour is imminent,

⁶⁵ Nu'aym p. 317 The Ḥadīth can also be found in Sunan Ibn al Majah 261.

⁶⁶ Such as 2:191 "Kill them where you meet them, and expel them from whence they expelled you; discord (*fitna*) is worse than killing."

⁶⁷ Ofer Livne-Kafri 'Some Notes Concerning Muslim Apocalyptic Tradition: *Quaderni di Studi Arabi* 17 (1999),p.

especially in Shi'ite eschatology, but is by no means absent among the Sunni, as attested in the Book of Tribulations.⁶⁸

As regards the motivations to accept and act upon apocalyptic narratives, David Cook notes:

Then as now, people desired to see meaning in the suffering and uncertainty that they experience constantly. If one knows that suffering is leading somewhere and is part of some divine plan, and then it becomes bearable..Muslim apocalypses are designed to encourage and to warn the believer, and to show him his place in that plan. The material here is also designed for those who are pessimistic about the ability of Islam to change the world in the short term...to believe that the world is coming to an immediate end—it is a given that the present form of religion is insufficient for the purposes of achieving one's goals. The very adoption of a worldview that leads to a messianic future implies that the present system is at least partially a failure⁶⁹.

Certain elements mark out the apocalyptic traditions from other literary genres Muslims have produced. For example, there are about a hundred stock phrases, rarely seen outside the tradition, such as those showing the deprivations of the End Time in which people need to sell their kith and kin into slavery, and mention of “black banners.”⁷⁰ Themes include moral decay, and natural and supernatural disasters. In keeping with the apocalyptic ethical dualism, there are

⁶⁸ eg Nu'aym p. 304 “The best of the martyrs in God's sight are the martyrs of the sea, the martyrs of the valleys, and the martyrs of the Dajjāl.” David Cook *Studies* p.256 “Tarsus is noted for being a city from which groups (of soldiers) will go forth to fight the Dajjal , and twelve *zimras* (groups) of 100,000 will be raised from it,” Of the course the Qur'an in several places speaks of being killed “in God's path” will yield a great reward. e.g. Qur'an 3:195

⁶⁹ Cook *Studies* p, 312

⁷⁰ Cook. *Studies*, 9-12.

sharp distinctions between the true believers and all others, who often join the forcers of evil. Certain figures are common, such as al- Dajjāl.⁷¹ (discussed below)

Development of Scholarly Studies in the Islamic Apocalyptic

The apocalyptic thrust of Muhammad's message is so obvious⁷² that it requires some justification to account for modern historians neglect of this fact.⁷³ In the middle of the 19th

⁷¹ Cook ibid p. 93.

⁷² Among many examples, Qur'ān 81: When the sun is rolled up./When the stars are dimmed./When the mountains are set in motion./ When the relationships are suspended./When the beasts are gathered.When the oceans are set aflame./When the souls are paired./ When the girl, buried alive, is asked:/For what crime was she killed?/When the records are made public./When the sky is peeled away./ When the Fire is set ablaze./ When Paradise is brought near./Each soul will know what it has readied

⁷³ Stephen Shoemaker "The Portents of the Hour: Eschatology and Empire in the Early Islamic Tradition" in n Wieser Veronika, Eltschinger Vincent and Heiss , Johann (eds. *Cultures of Eschatology* (München ; Wien : De Gruyter Oldenbourg, [2020] p 294; Stephen Shoemaker "The Reign of God Has Come": Eschatology and Empire in Late Antiquity and Early Islam" *Arabica* (2014), 515. Arjomand, Said Amir, "Islamic Apocalypticism in the Classical Period" in *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism* McGinn, Barnard, Collins, John Joseph, and Stein, Stephen J, editors(Continuum Intl Pub Group 1998) "There is ample evidence of apocalypticism in the early, Meccan, verses of the *Qur`ān* which speak of the coming of the Hour as the prelude to Resurrection." Aziz al Azmeh has pointed out that Muhammad is commonly referred to as a "Warner" in the Qur'ān, especially in its earlier parts. (Azmeh *Emergence* p.281, 307). See Stephen Shoemaker *Death of a Prophet* p. 146 "As even the most superficial reading of the Qur'ān will disclose, the Islamic sacred text is suffused with eschatology. Although not every sūra manifests the same level of concern with the coming climax of history, themes of divine judgment, the rewards of the just, and the punishments awaiting the wicked, occasioned by the end of the world, comprise one of the two most prominent topics of Qur'ānic discourse, rivaled only by its doctrine of God. It may be noted that as long ago as 1886, the well known scholar Snouck Hurgronje noted imminent eschatology at the heart of Muhammad's

century the famous scholar Ernest Renan confidently claimed that unlike most other religions, Islam was born “in the full light of history,”⁷⁴ and that concerning Muhammad “we can follow year by year the fluctuation of his thoughts, his contradictions, his weaknesses.”⁷⁵ More than this, Renan in the same document confidently asserted: “We arrive, then, from all parts at this singular result: that the Mussulman movement was produced almost without religious faith.”⁷⁶

The first modern interest in the Muslim Apocalyptic in the West arose with the 1881-1898 Mahdist revolt in the Sudan but this faded.⁷⁷ Later, in 1911, Paul Casanova wrote about

message. Shoemaker “Muhammad and the Qur’ān” *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity*-(Oxford University Press 2012) p 1389f): p. 1403 In 1911 Finally to quote Sebastian Günther : Concepts of the apocalypse, in its specific meaning of “uncovering”, “disclosing”, or “revealing” (hidden) knowledge of a large-scale catastrophe that ends the world as we know it, are a distinctive feature of Islam. Indeed, throughout Islamic history apocalyptic perceptions have served as the foundations of religio-politically motivated hopes for salvation and visions of an ideal “new world” promised by God.” “When the Sun is Shrouded in Darkness and the Stars are Dimmed” (Qur’an 81:1–2). Imagery, Rhetoric and Doctrinal Instruction in Muslim Apocalyptic Literature” in *Cultural History of Apocalyptic Thought/ Kulturgeschichte der Apokalypse* vol 1 edited by Catherine Fei, Veronika Wieser, Christian Zolles. Martin Zolles p. 66

⁷⁴ Ernest Renan *Études d'histoire religieuse* *Études d'histoire religieuse* (Paris : M. Lévy frères 1857)

p. 220

⁷⁵ “Nous pouvons suivre année par année les fluctuations de sa pensée, ses contradictions, ses faiblesses” Ernest Renan : “Mahomet et les origines de l'islamisme” *Revue des Deux Mondes* December 15, 1851 Vol. 12, No. 6 p.. 1065

⁷⁶ “Nous arrivons donc de toutes parts à ce résultat singulier: que le mouvement musulman s'est produit presque sans foi religieuse” *ibid* p. 1083

⁷⁷ David Cook *Studies* p. 29f

Muhammad and the end of the world.⁷⁸ However, his conclusions were soon discarded.⁷⁹ This situation has greatly changed in more recent times. Scholars have often fallen into the trap common to all students of history in viewing the past through the lenses of current interests. This has led them to ignore the eschatological urgency which should have been apparent throughout the Qur'ān, in favor of positing Muhammad as a social activist, empire builder, Arab nativist, or some admixture thereof.⁸⁰ For example, the distinguished scholar Montgomery Watt in his

⁷⁸Paul Casanova *Mohammed et la fin du monde: étude critique sur l'Islam primitif*. (Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1911)

The very first words of his book are “La thèse que je soutiens est, je crois, entièrement nouvelle” His chapter begins “Ma conclusion est donc que Coran comme les livres de *malahim* au moins dans toute sa première parte... c'est une révélation sur la fin du monde. p. 68)

⁷⁹ An early review of his book baldly states. “I have ventured to dwell upon some of the points in regard to which it seems impossible to agree with the learned author:” “Richard Gottheil “ The Beginnings of Islam “ *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* 1914 p 141-145 It may be noted that Bernard Lewis pointed this out more than half a century ago, that messianic hopes suffused the religious atmosphere of the peoples subject to the Arabs. Lewis. Bernard, “An Apocalyptic Vision of Islamic History” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* , 1950, Vol. 13, No. 2 (1950), p 308

⁸⁰ Donner *The Study of Islam's Origins* p. 2. Shoemaker *Apocalypse* p. 119 The contribution of religion to the Conquests was also downplayed, *ibid.* p. 3 Which of course was “was doing what almost everyone else did “ *ibid* It is also worthwhile to quote Leone Caetani “The true reasons for the violence with which the Arabs burst forth from the confines of the parched desert were practical and material ones, to a large part due to the deep economic misery, the last result, that is to say, of the impoverishment of which we have spoken” in “The Art of War of the Arabs, and the Supposed Religious Fervour of the Arab Conquerors” *The Expansion of the Early Islamic State* Fred Donner ed (Routledge 2008) It may be noted that as long ago as 1981 Fred Donner wrote in his *Early Islamic Conquests* p. 270 “there is the possibility that the ideological message of Islam itself filled some or all of the ruling elite with the notion that they had an essentially religious duty to expand the political domain of the Islamic state as

interpretation of the Prophet's life emphasized economic and social developments in Mecca to explain Muhammad's mission, with relatively little attention paid to his religious ideas, much less apocalypticism. Thus, the Islamic State's revival of Islamic imperial apocalypticism was greeted with bewilderment — much as the Islamic Revival of the last century stunned scholars who thought that the Muslim world was inevitably undergoing the secularization the West had — supposedly — gone through. Beyond this there has been in religious studies in general to “privilege” the views of believers.⁸¹ An interest in the Islamic form of the apocalyptic was also part a revival of interest in the the topic of apocalypticism in general coincident with the beginning of the Third Millennium. It may also be noted that there has been an effort to present Islam positively to ward off any accusations of Islamophobia, either from a desire not to add fuel to the fire, or a prudent desire to avoid accusations which could be career damaging. As Robert Hoyland has cogently stated, “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.”⁸²

The Book of Tribulations

The compilation of Ḥadīth *Book of Tribulations* is a treasure trove of relatively early apocalyptic traditions collected c. 200 AH, and offers a window on apocalyptic Ḥadīth

far as practically possible; that is, the elite may have organized the Islamic conquest movement because they saw it as their divinely ordained mission to do so.”

⁸¹ Shoemaker *Creating the Qur'an* p. 4

⁸² Robert Hoyland, *In God's Path :The Arab Conquests and the Creation of an Islamic Empire*(NewYork:Oxford University Press, 2015) p. 69 quoted in Shoemaker *Apocalypse* p. 120

circulating in late Umayyad Syria and elsewhere.⁸³ It is as close as we can get to the earliest such traditions to be found during the Umayyad and early Abbasid periods, and can be viewed as indicative of apocalyptic trends, if considered carefully. Many of the sayings recorded here never appeared in the six canonical Sunni books of Ḥadīth compiled from roughly 250 to 300 AH. The author Nu'aym ibn Hammad al-Marwazi was well travelled but spent considerable time in Syria, which was the “key area for apocalyptic speculation” at the time.⁸⁴

The region had witnessed the production of a significant amount of Jewish and Christian apocalypses which could be passed to the Arabian rulers.⁸⁵ Many of his informants appear to come from Ḥims, which became an early center of Islamic learning including the development of a school of Ḥadīth. One group especially cultivated apocalyptic and eschatological prophecies, apparently deriving from the predictions of the South Arabian Jewish convert Ka'b al-Aḥbār.⁸⁶ The people of Hims tended to oppose the prominence of the Quraysh.⁸⁷ This is reflected in

⁸³ Nu'aym in Cook, Michael “An Early Islamic Apocalyptic Chronicle” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, Jan., 1993, Vol. 52, No. 1 (Jan., 1993), pp. 25- 29 Antoine Borrut *Entre Mémoire et Pouvoir: L'Espace syrien sous les Derniers Omeyyades et les Premiers Abbassides* (v. 72-193/692-809) (Leiden Brill;(November 11, 2010) p. 132 David Cook in “Early Islamic” 2016) points out that the book contains many traditions left out of the canonical collections p. 270 Given its early date, I am privileging Nu'aym's collection, bearing in mind that other, early canonical collections are likely to provide Ḥadīth extant in the first two Hijra centuries.

⁸⁴ Cook Studies. p. 21

⁸⁵ Cook ibid p. 14. Ka'b al Aḥbār, discussed below, resided for many years in Hims Ofer Livne- Kafri p. 80

⁸⁶ Madelung “Prophecies” . p143

⁸⁷ This is reflected in Nu'aym p. 101: The Messenger of God said: What do I have to do with the Abbasids? They have divided my community, forced them to wear black clothes. So may God force them to wear clothes of fire.

prophecies of the Yemeni messianic figure of the Qaḥṭānī, who would rule after the end of the Quraysh.⁸⁸ Despite this, there are some pro-Umayyad Ḥadīth in evidence, including those proclaiming the Sufyānī, who appears in many Ḥadīth within *The Book of Tribulations*.⁸⁹ This personage seems to have begun as the Syrian/Umayyad version of the Mahdī, and remained so in certain circles.⁹⁰ There are indications that the origins of this being are to be found in the uprising of Umayyad prince Abū Muḥammad al-Sufyānī against the newly triumphant Abbasids.⁹¹ However, among anti-Umayyads such as the early Shiites⁹² and pro-Abbasids, he

Also Nu'aym p 109 "A man from the east will appear calling for the family of Muḥammad, but he will be the farthest of people from them. They will raise black signs, the first of which is victory, the last of which is unbelief. The Arabs 'garbage, the lowest of the *mawali*, runaway slaves, and the disobedient ones of all the horizons.

⁸⁸ *ibid.* p. 151f One South Arabian rebel actually presented himself as the Qahtani during an uprising in 81-84 AH.

Bashear p. 342. Nu'aym records the prophecy "The Hour will not come until a man from Qaḥṭān will emerge driving the people with his staff." p. 218

⁸⁹ For example "The Sufyānī will kill all who disobey him, sawing at them with saws, and cooking them in pots for six months. He said: Then the easterners and westerners will meet [in battle]. Nu'aym p. 40 David Cook *Studies* notes that this figures does not appear in the canonical Ḥadīth collections.

⁹⁰ This would include the Sufyānid branch of the Umayyads, who resented the assenting to power of the Marwanid branch of the family. "Early Islamic and Classical Sunni and Shiite Apocalyptic Movements]" in *The Oxford Handbook of Millennialism* (Oxford University Press,, 2016) p 267-283.

⁹¹ Shaddel, Mehdi "The Sufyānī in Early Islamic Kerygma: An Enquiry into His Origins and Early Development" (JRAS 3, 27, 3 (2017) pp 403-434 Wilferd Madelung "The Sufyānī between Tradition and History," *Studia Islamica* 63 (1986) p. 14

⁹²The Sufyānid Caliph Yazid was responsible for 'the death of Ali's grandson al-Husayn David Cook : "Apocalyptic year" p. 49. It may be noted that there is an account that a Sufyānid tried to united supportser of the Umayyds with "Alid groups to oppose the Abbasids He also claimed decent from Ibn al-Hanafiyya *ibid* p. 50f

degenerated into an evil figure working in the conjunction with the Muslim AntiChrist Dajjāl, and remained so long after the Syrian dynasty passed from the scene.⁹³ Given his origins, it is no surprise that unlike the Dajjāl he is a human.⁹⁴ In 195/809 during the Fourth Fitna (discussed below) there was large scale revolt in Syria led by a Sufyānī.⁹⁵ It may also be noted that Nu’aym lists a number of other figures involved in apocalyptic conflict such as “the Yamani, Qurayshi, Hashimi, Sakhri, etc

Dramatis Personae of the Islamic Apocalyptic

The apocalyptic narratives in Islam have many personages active in the End of Days. I will discuss those beings who had an effect on Muslim history as well as Muslims views of Others, including women. The Mahdī has already been discussed.. His most deadly enemy is expected to be the Muslim Antichrist fittingly named al Masih al Dajjāl, the deceitful Messiah/Christ, who apparently originated early in Islam. Dajjāl derives to come from the Syriac word *daggal-a* and the concept entered into Islam bearing traces of the stories of the

⁹³ e.g. Nu’aym p. 173-4 “The Sufyānī will enter Kūfa and take captives in it for three days, and kill 60,000 of its people, then stay in it eighteen nights dividing its wealth. His entrance into Kūfa will be after he will fight the Turks, the Byzantines and Carchemish. Then a crack will open up behind them, so a group of them will return to Khurāsān, so the horsemen of the Sufyānī will advance, destroying fortresses until they enter Kūfa. They will seek the Khurāsānis, and a group will appear in Khurāsān calling for the Mahdī. David Cook in “The Apocalyptic Year” p.50 notes that the figure of the Sufyānī arose relatively early. Madelung attributed the demonization of the Sufyānī to Shiite circles “The Sufyānī between Tradition and History,” *Studia Islamica* 63 (1986) The Mahdī will slay him Cook *Studies* p. 133f

⁹⁴ Cook *Studies* p, 122 lists some descriptions of him in the literature.

⁹⁵David Cook :”Apocalyptic year” p. 49

Antichrist in Christianity.⁹⁶ One Ḥadīth quotes the Prophet as saying that some who have seen him would live to see the Dajjāl. It is highly unlikely that such a tradition would have originated after the death of the last surviving Companion Anas bin Malik (d. 93 AH.)⁹⁷ One common description of the Dajjāl is that he is one eyed, or blind in one eye. There are several possible explanation for this defect. It may be to distinguish him from God. As one Ḥadīth states “Indeed, God is not one-eyed while al Masih al Dajjāl is one eyed.”⁹⁸ Another possibility is word play on Masih. Some Traditions state that one of the Dajjāl’s eyes is wiped away (*mamsuh*.)⁹⁹ The other eye is described as “like a protruding grape.”¹⁰⁰

A number of traditions attach a Jewish ethnicity to the Dajjal.¹⁰¹ Several Ḥadīth identify him with a Jewish contemporary of Muhammad, a certain Ibn Ṣayyād. It appears possible that this person, who in the sources is described as having converted to Islam and lived until AH 63,

⁹⁶ Cook *Studies* p. 93 Said Arjomand conjectures that the “prototype” of the Dajjāl may be the “Man of Lies” in the Qurman documents. Messianism, Millennialism and Revolution in Early Islamic History” Amanat, Abbas and Bernhardsson, Magnus, editors, *Imagining the End: Visions of Apocalypse from the Ancient Middle East to Modern America* (New York, I. B. Taurus, 2002) p. 113

⁹⁷ Cook *Studies* p. 4

⁹⁸ Sahih Al-Bukhāri 7407

⁹⁹ Sahib Muslin 2934 Cook *Studies* p. 98

¹⁰⁰ Sahih Al-Bukhāri, Book 97, Ḥadīth 36 “inbatun tafiyatun” The adjective has also been translation as “floating” like a dead fish on water. See Lane’s Lexicon https://lexicon.quranic-research.net/data/16_T/055_Tfw.html

¹⁰¹ Cook *Studies* p.93

is an historical personage.¹⁰² Most of the Dajjāl's followers will be members of marginalized groups. These include 70,000 Jews from Isfahan, Bedouin, Turks ("A people will follow him whose faces are similar to hammered shields,")¹⁰³ and the children of prostitutes.¹⁰⁴ Of all those, the most loyal to him will be the Jews, who will consider him God on earth. Some writers claim that women being defective in religion will be attracted to him despite his physical appearance.¹⁰⁵ These followers will not be able to see the letters K F R (indicative of kāfir, infidel) on his forehead, but will be induced to follow him, by his apparent ability to perform miracles through sorcery, such as rising the dead, moving mountains and make the sun stand still in the sky.¹⁰⁶

Fighting on the side of the Forces of Good will be Jesus/'Isa/Masih/the Messiah. He will convert the Christians to Islam, and will kill the Dajjāl and his followers, including 70,000

¹⁰² David Halpern "The Ibn Sayyād Traditions and the Legend of al-Dajjāl" *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Apr. - Jun., 1976, Vol. 96, No. 2 (Apr. - Jun., 1976), pp. 213-225 David Cook *Studies* p. 111 believes that this figure was designed to be an apocalyptic opponent to Muhammad in his own lifetime. Robin *Les Signes* p.439ff. Gerald Hawting, "Were There Prophets in the Jahiliyya?" in Carol Bakhos (ed.), Michael Cook (ed.) *Islam and its Past: Jahiliyya, Late Antiquity, and the Qur'an* (Oxford University Press, 2017) p. 204ff Cook *Studies* p. 110ff

¹⁰³ Tirmidhi 2237

¹⁰⁴ Cook *Studies* p. 99 gives a compilation of these followers

¹⁰⁵ *ibid*

¹⁰⁶ Cook *Studies* p. 100f

Jews,¹⁰⁷ and then break the cross and kill all swine.¹⁰⁸ Having accomplished this he will “judge between the people of the Torah according to their Torah and between the people of the Gospel by their Gospel”¹⁰⁹ Having accomplished this he will create a Peaceable Kingdom similar to that depicted in Isaiah:¹¹⁰ “A boy will be able to put his hand on a serpent, and it will not harm him, and a girl will be able to meet a lion, and it will not harm her.”¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ Lawrence I Conrad has noted the ubiquity of the number 7 and its multiples in Islamic narratives. “Seven and the Tasbī‘: On the Implications of Numerical Symbolism for the Study of Medieval Islamic History” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 1988, Vol. 31, No. 1 (1988), pp. 42-73 In addition, David Cook attributes one reason for the unease about the apocalypse in Muhammad’s time to the fact that seven centuries had passed from the time of Jesus. in Cathrine Wessinger ed. *The Oxford Handbook of Millennialism* (Oxford University Press) p. 268 As regards anti Jewish Ḥadīth, there is the notorious Ḥadīth “The last hour would not come unless the Muslims will fight against the Jews and the Muslims would kill them until the Jews would hide themselves behind a stone or a tree and a stone or a tree would say: Muslim, or the servant of Allah, there is a Jew behind me; come and kill him; but the tree Gharqad would not say, for it is the tree of the Jews. (Sahih Muslim 2922)”

¹⁰⁸ Arjomand “Messianism” p. 113 Bukhārī :2476 “The Hour will not be established until the son of Mary (i.e. Jesus) descends amongst you as a just ruler, he will break the cross, kill the pigs, and abolish the Jizya tax.” Islamic tradion related these events to Qur’ān 43:61 “He will be a sign of the Hour.” Roberto Tottoli, “Death and Eschatological Beliefs in the Lives of the Prophets according to Islam” in Wieser Veronika, Eltschinger Vincent and Heiss, Johann eds_ *Cultures of Eschatology* (München; Wien: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2020) p 475

¹⁰⁹ Nu’aym

¹¹⁰ Isaiah 11:6 “The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them.”

¹¹¹ Nu’aym p. 351

Many other beings populate the realm of Apocalyptic narrative. In terms of their impact on Islamic society over the course of its history the most discussed in the literature of the Muslim peoples are Gog and Magog. Following the Alexander Romance, the Qur'an notes that they are held back for a wall, but come the Hour, they will be freed.¹¹² One likely reason for the focus on them is that the other figures of the Final Cosmic Battle are not in our reality at the moment. Only Gog and Magog are in the Here and Now, or at least they were until the modern world, when knowledge of the land surface of the Earth became much more complete. Nu'aym relates over 40 Ḥadīth about these entities and their hordes, but does not link them to any specific ethnicity.¹¹³ So strong was the legend of the Wall that the Umayyad prince Maslama b. 'Abd al-Malik. was often described as restoring the wall to hold off the forces of Gog and Magog.¹¹⁴

In later periods, they were connected to the Turks or Mongols, or in recent times to the West. As is the case with the Dajjal, relating these apocalyptic figures to such peoples is of course a way to demonize them and see them as enemies of the Believers to be opposed, if possible. One Ḥadīth has the Prophet speaking of the breaching of Alexander's wall built to protect civilized lands from this grave danger, "Woe to the Arabs from the great evil that has approached."¹¹⁵

In what follows I will discuss how the Islamic apocalyptic draws upon typologies common to the Faith's region of origin, as they developed over the centuries prior to the Mission

¹¹² Qur'an 18: 94-99

¹¹³ Nu'aym p. 367 lists 15 peoples, most of them difficult to identify from Pseudo-Methodius t

¹¹⁴ Borrut *Memory* p.232-238

¹¹⁵ <https://sunnah.com/bukhari:7135>

of the Prophet. Next I will examine Muhammad as an apocalyptic and eschatological figure drawing upon and shaping what had been given before him. After his death it will be seen how the Believers adopted the apocalyptic message to spread their beliefs especially through conquest. This impetus continued after the Rāshidūn Caliphs into the Umayyad era, beginning with a series of fitnas, which ultimately led to the overthrow of the Syrian dynasty. It will be demonstrated how the succeeding dynasty, the Abbasids came to rulership in an apocalyptic wave. The power of the apocalyptic will be shown to have influenced the politico- religious policies of al Ma'mūn, which shaped the form of Sunni Islam to the present day. The influence of apocalyptic thought would wane after this, but would remain in the background where depending on factors such as gross misrule or colonialism, it could spark uprising or even change of dynasties.

Chapter 2: The Historic Roots of Islamic Apocalyptic

The origins of Islamic apocalyptic traditions lie deep in the past. Cosmic battles between gods are part of many mythologies. Importantly, the Ancient Near East also had such myths, which appear in its earliest literature.¹¹⁶ These stories often tell how one god out of a pantheon is able to defeat a monster and become chief of the gods, and then engage in the act of creating this world.¹¹⁷ Alongside this, texts from as long ago as the second millennium BCE speak of a king or dynasty arising to end a time of troubles, using vaticinia ex eventu predictions of a future event that has already happened.¹¹⁸ The apocalyptic literature in the Near East before and during the period in which Islam arose generally includes a time of tribulation, the coming of a savior figure, the judgment of the evil and the creation of a new and glorious world, all expected in the very near future.¹¹⁹ For example, Akkadian texts describe disasters resulting from the rule of an evil king, followed by omens in which the gods demand that the people repent. The populace ignores the signs and suffers at the hands of invaders. A new ruler blessed by the gods arises to

¹¹⁶ Richard Clifford “The Roots of Apocalypticism in Near Eastern Myth” in *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism* McGinn, Barnard, Collins, John Joseph, and Stein, Stephen J. (editors)(Continuum Intl Pub Group 1998) p. 3

¹¹⁷ *ibid.* p 19

¹¹⁸ Wessinger “Millennialism” p/ 10

¹¹⁹ Bruce Lincoln “Apocalyptic Temporality and Politics in the Ancient World “ in *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism* McGinn, Barnard, Collins, John Joseph, and Stein, Stephen J. (editors)(Continuum Intl Pub Group 1998 p. 457

restore order.¹²⁰ Under Macedonian rule, there appeared texts in Mesopotamia and Egypt, in which allegedly ancient prophecies foresaw the overthrow of the foreign kings.¹²¹

Judaism inherited the divine combat myths of the ancient Near East, developing them to become a celebration of God's defeat of the forces of chaos, and later to project the conflict into the future and widen God's triumph to include foreign nations oppressing the Chosen People as well as Israel itself when they had failed to keep their Lord's covenant.¹²² In the later prophetic writings there is a tendency to picture the future in cosmic terms, with less specific reference to the concrete realities of the prophet's own time than was the case in earlier proclamations.¹²³ Then, in the Hellenistic period arose the belief in the judgment of the dead in Judaism, with the

¹²⁰ David Cook "Akkadian and Babylonian Apocalypses" in Landes, Richard A., Editor *The Encyclopedia of Millennialism and Millennial Movements* (Routledge, 2002) p. 19 A similar type of text is found in Egypt where sometime in the second millennium BC appeared the *Prophecy of Neferti*, in which an eschatological king restores righteous and order. Stephen J. Shoemaker *The Apocalypse of Empire Imperial Eschatology in Late Antiquity and Early Islam* (University of Pennsylvania press 2018) p. 36

¹²¹ Robert Gnuse "Ancient Near Eastern Millennialism" in *The Oxford Handbook of Millennialism* (Oxford University Press, 2016) p. 239f. He refers to this as Culture Clash Millennialism

¹²² John J. Collins, "From Prophecy to Apocalypticism: The Expectation of the Ending" in *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism* McGinn, Barnard, Collins, John Joseph, and Stein, Stephen J. (editors) (Continuum Intl Pub Group 1998 p/ 130

¹²³ e.g. Isaiah 13:9-12 9 Behold, the day of the Lord cometh, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate: and he shall destroy the sinners thereof out of it. 10 For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light: the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine. 11 And I will punish the world for their evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; and I will cause the arrogancy of the proud to cease, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible.

hope for happiness in the Hereafter . In the future the climax of history would be reached with all nations being judged.¹²⁴ The 2nd century BC Book of Daniel is a fully developed apocalypse which would become very influential in Christianity and Islam, especially in its visions of successive worldly kingdoms.¹²⁵

In the Classical world the Greeks and Romans had their own eschatology. Some of the themes known to them recur in the apocalypses of late antiquity after the triumph of Christianity. Most importantly, the Sibyls viewed history as a series of catastrophes, with invasion and the destruction of cities and realms. The overthrow of Rome itself is the object of some of these prophecies, which were taken up in Jewish apocalyptic.

Christian apocalypses like those of Judaism patently fed into the creation of the Muslim tradition. Jesus 'beliefs about the End of Days have been a matter of controversy.¹²⁶ However, the modern consensus is that He spoke about the End as near at hand. It has been pointed out that a denial of eschatological thinking among Jesus and the earliest Christians may have has more to do with modern theology than the evidence of ancient literatures.¹²⁷ (Similarly, the denial of Muhammad's eschatological thinking, as passed on to the early Muslims, in the light

¹²⁴ Collins. p 157

¹²⁵ Hubert Cancik. "The End of the World, of History, and of the Individual in Greek and Roman Antiquity," in *Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, 1.p. 94

¹²⁶ Dale C Allison, Jr. "The Eschatology of Jesus " in Jerry L. Walls, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) p. 267

¹²⁷ Richard A. Horsley "The Kingdom of God and the Renewal of Israel: Synoptic Gospels, Jesus Movements, and Apocalypticism " in Jerry L. Walls, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) p. 303

of prevailing historiographical trends, as discussed above.) The theme of these earliest Christian apocalypses can be described as a means of directing the Faithful to acts of helping the poor and afflicted, which maintaining an independent community under an oppressive government.¹²⁸ The summit of this first century CE narrative is the Book of Revelation. After the conversions of the Emperors to Christianity, there were still concerns, about the End of Time, despite the end of persecution of government approved Christians at least..

John C. Reeves finds many commonalities among Near Eastern Abrahamic apocalypses, stating that “Near Eastern Jewish, Christian, and Muslim apocalypses of late antiquity and the early medieval era exhibit a series of remarkable structural correspondences that reach across the permeable boundaries of ethnic and religious affiliation. Despite the inevitable individual doctrinal variations, these apocalypses reveal a number of common motifs, dramatis personae, and discursive sequences.” These include:

The deterioration of society and nature;

Wars between kingdoms;

Pestilence, famine, earthquakes, etc;

Gog and Magog; and

Advent of Antichrist/Armilos¹²⁹/Dajjal, Many are deceived by him¹³⁰

¹²⁸ ibid p. 343

¹²⁹ Armilos is the Jewish equivalent of Antichrist. The name apparently comes from Romulus, the legendary founder of Roma.

¹³⁰ John C. Reeves “Introductory Essay to Trajectories in Near Eastern Apocalyptic” in *Trajectories in Near Eastern Apocalyptic: A Postbiblical Jewish Apocalypse Reader* (Society of Biblical Literature (October 24, 2005) p. 20

Iranian apocalypticism apparently had a strong influence on the Jewish and Christian traditions, and through them or directly on the Islamic view.¹³¹ The extent of influence, or even if it existed at all, has been a topic of heated scholarly debate.¹³² The issue is much complicated by the fact that most of the early sources are lacking, the texts having disappeared after the Islamic conquest of the Sassanian Empire, although descriptions of its eschatology are known from the early Islamic period.¹³³ Furthermore, the antiquity of the Iranian vision is attested by the Greek writings especially that of Plutarch from around 100 AD.¹³⁴ There was a grand cosmological myth which envisioned an assault by the forces of Evil on a good creation, with the eventual elimination of Evil, after which the Good is restored. Some scholars have posited that Zoroastrianism may have influenced the development of savior figures in later Near Eastern

¹³¹ David Cook *Studies* p, 316 finds Iranian descriptions of End-Time battles as especially influential.

¹³² Anders, Hultgard "Persian Apocalypticism" in *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism* McGinn, Barnard, Collins, John Joseph, and Stein, Stephen J. (editors) (Continuum Intl Pub Group 1998) p .48

¹³³ ibid p. 40 Discussed at length in Philip G. Kreyenbroek, "Millennialism and Eschatology in the Zoroastrian Tradition" in Amanat, Abbas and Bernhardsson, Magnus, editors, *Imagining the End: Visions of Apocalypse from the Ancient Middle East to Modern America* (New York, I. B. Taurus, 2002) p. 33-55

¹³⁴ "But a destined time shall come when it is decreed that Areimanius, (i.e Ariman, the evil god) engaged in bringing on pestilence and famine, shall by these be utterly annihilated and shall disappear ; and then shall the earth become a level plain, and there shall be one manner of life and one form of government for a blessed people who shall all speak one tongue." Plutarch, De Iside et Osirid [http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A2008.01.0239%3Asection%3D47)

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A2008.01.0239%3Asection%3D47>

religions.¹³⁵ It is possible to speculate that the Arabs up to Muhammad's time were acquainted with the apocalyptic beliefs of Manichaeism and various Gnostic sects on the fringes of Arabia, but the matter appears obscure.¹³⁶ Some Arabic historians have stated that a number of Arabs adopted Zoroastrianism before Islam. In addition, there are reports of *zandaqa* among the Quraysh, a term which seems to mean Manichaeans.¹³⁷ David Beck has made the interesting point that certain passages of the Qur'ān reflect late Manichaean eschatology.¹³⁸ In addition, Gilles Courtieu has demonstrated that much of the Quranic descriptions of Paradise in the Qur'ān comes from Iranian sources. The gateway for this influence would in his view have been

¹³⁵ "The rebirth, an essential notion of Zoroastrian eschatology, is firmly tied to the advent of a charismatic figure who becomes the prototype for saviours in other religions of Middle Eastern origin. The Saoshyant who is of sacred origin, divine mandate and miraculous powers, epitomizes the forces of good and leads the armies of his human and angelic supporters in a cosmic battle that ends with the destruction of evil and the reconstitution of the original and lasting order." Abbas Amanat "Introduction: Apocalyptic Anxieties and Millennial Hopes in the Salvation Religions of the Middle East" in Amanat, Abbas and Bernhardsson, Magnus, editors, *Imagining the End: Visions of Apocalypse from the Ancient Middle East to Modern America* (New York, I. B. Taurus, 2002) p. 7

¹³⁶ A long, detailed argument has been made that Qur'ān 43:31 "They say: 'Why was this Qur'ān not sent down upon some great man from the two cities?'" refers to Mani and the cities of Ctesiphon-Seleucia. Gilles Courtieu and Carlos A. Segovia Q 2:102, 43:31, and Ctesiphon-Seleucia New Insights into the Mesopotamian Setting of the Earliest Qur'ānic Milieu in *The Study of Islamic Origins New Perspectives and Contexts* Edited by Mette Bjerregaard Mortensen, Guillaume Dye, Isaac W. Oliver, and Tommaso Tesei (de Gruyter 2021) p. 203-231

¹³⁷ 'Abdullāh Ibn Qutaybah al-Dīnawārī, *Kitāb al-ma'ārif* (Cairo: al-Hay' al 'Ammā al-Misriyya, 1992), 621; "There were al Majusia in Tamim" "There were zandaqa in Quraysh, and they took it from al Hira."

¹³⁸ David A. Beck "The Astral Messenger, The Lunar Revelation, The Solar Salvation: Dualist Cosmic Soteriology in The Early Qur'ān" in Carlos A. Segovia ed *Remapping Emergent Islam: Social Worlds of Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Amsterdam University Press, 2017) p.85-110

the sophisticated Arab inhabited city of al-Ḥīra in Mesopotamia.¹³⁹ As Isabel Toral-Niehof writes “Close commercial and political ties linked al-Ḥīra and the Ḥijāz. In the rivalry between Persia and Byzantium...it is likely that reports about the Iranized and Christianized Arabs of al-Ḥīra should have reached and left an impression on the earliest community of Muhammad.”¹⁴⁰

In the troubled times at the time of the beginnings of Islam with its military and political chaos, there were heightened feelings of apocalyptic fears.¹⁴¹ There were the devastating incursions of the Sassanians, which Emperor Heraclitus was able to turn back in a great counter-campaign recovering the True Cross, whose loss could be perceived as a disaster of cosmic proportions. Existing messianic and millennial traditions held by followers of the region’s religions became more influential in the thoughts of the various peoples.¹⁴² These ideas came to include the belief that certain chosen believers would attain a “cosmocratic rule: in the world’s

¹³⁹ Gilles Courtieu "The Keys of the Quranic Paradise" in Carlos A. Segovia ed *Remapping Emergent Islam: Social Worlds of Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Amsterdam University Press, 2017) p p. 149 177.

Lesław Kawalec, in “A Picture of the Possible Origins of Islam in the Light of Early Material Sources: Why Digging at Al-Hira is Key Conference: "Religion and beliefs of prehistoric and early mediaeval societies in the light of early archaeology and art" on 31 August, 2021 At: Biskupin, Poland has pointed out the importance of Hira as a conduit for Persian and other concepts into the Arabian Peninsula

¹⁴⁰ Isabel Toral-Niehof “The ‘Ibād of al-Ḥīra: An Arab Christian Community in Late Antique Iraq” in *The Qur’an in Context – Entangled Histories and Textual Palimpsests*, eds. Angelika Neuwirth, Michael Marx, Nicolai Sinai, Berlin 2010, p/ 324

¹⁴¹ David Cook *Studies* p. 4 fasa

¹⁴² Jonathan Berkey, *The Formation of Islam Religion and Society in the Near East, 600–1800* (Cambridge University Press 2003) p. 52 Shoemaker *The Apocalypse of Empire* p. 75

last days.¹⁴³ Apocalyptic narratives could easily be used to put a “transcendent scheme of meaning “ on contemporary event making them comprehensible.¹⁴⁴

Around the 7th century AD appeared the very popular text the *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius. In this telling of future events, an eschatological figure, the King of the Greeks, fights and defeats the enemies of the Faith; establishes himself in Jerusalem and engages in the Final Battle with the Antichrist in Jerusalem; and then come the kingdom of the Messiah.¹⁴⁵ It has been suggested that this text formed the core of the Mahdī as an apocalyptic figure.¹⁴⁶

The first descriptions of Muslims — who were never referred to as such in the earliest reports¹⁴⁷ — were often in the form of apocalypses composed by conquered Christians, who had already been subject to the trauma of the Byzantine-Persian wars. As in the case with many other examples of the genre in other times, they sought to ameliorate the pain of being ruled by foreigners. The texts often resort to the age-old trope of a battle between the Forces of Light and

¹⁴³ Tommaso Tesei ““The Romans Will Win!” Q 30:2–7 in Light of 7th c. Political Eschatology”” *Der Islam* 2018; 95 (1) p. 2

¹⁴⁴ Hoyland *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* p. 26

¹⁴⁵ As summarized in Ilkka Lindstedt “ The Last Roman Emperor, the Mahdī, and Jerusalem” in *Understanding the Meaning of Jerusalem in Three Abrahamic Religions* (Brill, 2019) p. 205-225.

¹⁴⁶ Lindstedt p. 215 Ofer Livne-Kafri also finds influences of the *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius in the Islamic tradition in “Is there a Reflection of the Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius in Muslim Tradition?” *Proche-Orient Chretien* Vol 56 2006 p. 108-119

¹⁴⁷ Terms such as “Saracen” were used. In Syriac the word *mhaggrāye* appears which has been translated either as Emigrants from the Arabic *Muhajirun*, Emigrants, or Hagarenes. Ilkka Lindstedt. “*Muhajirun* as a Name for the First/ Seventh Century Muslims” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, Vol. 74, No. 1 (April 2015) p. 69

of Darkness, heralded by various portents.¹⁴⁸ Colorful and vivid references to significant numbers or celestial beings are added to the mix. In the end, Good — as it must — triumphs. Such visions of the Arabs as agents of Darkness would discourage familiarity with them, which could explain why it took so long for conquered Christians to understand them.¹⁴⁹ (On the other hand, at least some Jews welcomed the Arabians as apocalyptic liberators from the Byzantine rulers, as is seen in the “Secrets of Rabbi Simon ben Yohay.”)¹⁵⁰ Despite all this, Christians would over time and for various reasons convert to Islam, bringing with them the tales of the apocalypse they had heard and remembered perhaps in a garbled form to share with their new coreligionists to shape the collective memory.

Pre-Islamic Arabia and Late Antiquity

Abbasid era writers in their development of the concept of Arabness helped put forth this idea by encouraging the view that pre-Islamic Arabians were at least to a large part pagans, when

¹⁴⁸ For example in “The Young Daniel: this prophet foresees the coming of a people, obviously the Arabs, send to chastise the world in the apocalypse “He will incite men, one against another, and he will raise many up (as) he strikes with a single tribe; and with it he will separate out the world, and fight (using) it with many peoples; and they will grow their hair like that of women, and their clothing will be like sackcloth. And he will chasten the world (using) them; He will bring them out of their region and convey them to other regions.” Sebastian Brock ““The Young Daniel”: A Little Known Syriac Apocalyptic Text. Introduction and Translation” in *Revealed Wisdom : Studies in Apocalyptic in Honour of Christopher Rowland* John Aston editor, (Brill, 2014) p. 275

¹⁴⁹ Robert Hoyland *In God's Path* p. 255ff

¹⁵⁰ Metatron the prince of the countenance answered and said : 'Do not fear, son of man, for the Holy One, blessed be He, only brings the kingdom of Ishmael in order to save you from this wickedness. He raises up over them a Prophet according to His will and will conquer the land for them and they will come and restore it in greatness, and there will be great terror between them. Cook and Crone p. 4

in fact Judaism and Christianity had penetrated deeply into the Peninsula, if not necessarily in their “orthodox” forms.¹⁵¹ Yet, even in places where Christianity could not be found in an established form with churches and monasteries, there were doubtlessly, as in other parts of the region, ascetic preachers wandering around or dwelling in caves, as well as missionaries sent by bishops in the border areas where the religion had deeper roots.¹⁵² Local Arabians would have sought recourse to these holy men, to seek advice, and importantly to seek the exorcism of demons.¹⁵³ Such would have come to the attention of dwellers in the Hejaz, even if only on

¹⁵¹ Peter Webb *Imagining the Arabs Arab Identity and the Rise of Islam* Edinburgh University Press (2017) p.

261 Aziz al Azmeh *Emergence* p. 265 Among these sects may have been some Judeo-Christian groups which would have been unwelcome in the Eastern Roman Empire. Nevo and Koren have noted that none of these groups accepted the divinity of Christ, while accepting His prophethood. Yehuda D. Nevo, and Judith Koren, *Crossroads to Islam: The Origins of the Arab Religion and the Arab State* (Prometheus 2003) p. 193

¹⁵² “Where the Byzantine state did not establish religious presence, holy men filled gaps as warners, ascetics, miracle-workers, and arbiters. The time which Muhammad spent in isolation in a cave near Mecca when he had his first experience of a revelation also conforms to this pattern, although once again the possibility of a later provenance of this information needs to be kept in mind... But there was an important difference between these holy men and Muhammad. None of them founded a community like the one described in the Constitution of Medina.” in Anna Aysę Akasoy “Muhammad’s Movement and Leadership” *The Wiley Blackwell History of Islam* e/ edited by Armando Salvatore, Roberto Tottoli, Babak Rahimi, M. Fariduddin Attar, Naznin Patel. (Hoboken, NJ : John Wiley & Sons, 2018.) p. 105

¹⁵³ Olof Heliu *Eastern Rome and the Rise of Islam History and Prophecy* (Routledge, 2016) p. 90

trading expeditions.¹⁵⁴ Hawting has argued that the Mushrikin¹⁵⁵ the Qur'ān attacks were in fact monotheists whose practices were considered lacking in true monotheism.¹⁵⁶

Christian Julien Robin has offered an excellent overview of the religious landscape of the Arabian Peninsula, along with neighboring Ethiopia before the Prophet.¹⁵⁷ In the southwest of the peninsula, the kings of Himyar around 280-300 CE had adopted Judaism, as attested in Arab histories and epigraphic evidence. By the middle of the 4th century the kingdom had expanded into the Hijaz, and the Najd, and beyond. Unfortunately, while this would have expanded knowledge of Judaism in the center of the peninsula, details are lacking. Inscriptions show that God was referred to as Raḥmānān, obviously close to the common Quranic, *al-Rahman*, but which seems to often indicate a kind of nonsectarian monotheism.¹⁵⁸ Himyar persecuted some

¹⁵⁴ al Azmeh ibid p. 268f

¹⁵⁵ A word often translated as polytheists, but which Hawling chooses to render “associators.”

¹⁵⁶ G. R. Hawting *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam: From Polemic to History* (Cambridge University Press 1999) Said Amir Arjomand on his part avers that the term refers to Arabian pagans who “admitted the supreme authority of Allah but associated other tribal deities with him.” “Revolution in Early Islam: The Rise of Islam as a Constitutive Revolution” in *Islam in Process Historical and Civilizational Perspectives* (Yearbook of the Sociology of Islam 7, 2007) p. 127

¹⁵⁷ Christian Julien Robin, “Arabia and Ethiopia,” in Johnson, Scott Fitzgerald *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity* (Oxford University Press 2015 p 247-33

¹⁵⁸ Christian Julien Robin “Judaism in Pre-Islamic Arabia” in *The Cambridge History of Judaism* (Cambridge University Press, 2021) Norbert Nebes “The Martyrs of Najrān and the End of the Ḥimyar: On the Political History of South Arabia in the Early Sixth Century,” in: A. Neuwirth, N. Sinai, M. Marx (Ed.), *The Qur'an in Context. Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'anic Milieu*, Leiden 2010, p. 35f. Lindstedt Muhammad and his Followers p. 179

Christian groups, apparently in connection with a war with Ethiopia.¹⁵⁹ Ethiopia's subsequent occupation of the Yemen seems to have contributed to an Ethiopian influence in the formation of Islam. It is not clear what kind of Judaism the kingdom of Himyar practiced, but it was apparently non-normative, non-Rabbinic.¹⁶⁰ Aaron Hughes posits that in late pre-Islamic Arabia, as in much of the Late Antique world, religious identity was fluid, with the boundaries between Arabian Christianity, Judaism and what would become Islam ambiguous. He holds in common with others in the study of Islamic origins that the religion evolved slowly from a blending of existing monotheisms and Arab culture.¹⁶¹

The Peninsula was home to Christians of several denominations, or varieties. Both Byzantium and Sassanid Persian were interested in Arabia, including the use of client kingdoms on their borders, which were generally Christian. Archaeological studies of temples and epigraphic inscriptions have shown that by the time of Muhammad polytheism was in retreat over much of the Peninsula. In this atmosphere Arab could either convert to some Abrahamic religion, or adapt their ancestral beliefs to monotheism. The evidence indicates that by the sixth

¹⁵⁹ The Christian attacked had apparently revolted for political reasons, having taken the sides of Aksum and Byzantium. Robin "Judaism in Pre-Islamic Arabia" p. 319 Lindstedt Muhammad and his Followers p 78

¹⁶⁰ Hughes, Aaron W. "South Arabian 'Judaism', Himyarite Rahmanism, and the Origins of Islam" in Carlos A. Segovia ed *Remapping Emergent Islam: Social Worlds of Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Amsterdam University Press, 2017) p. 15-44. See also Iwona Gajda "Remarks on Monotheism in Ancient South Arabia". in Carol Bakhos (ed.), Michael Cook (ed.) *Islam and its Past: Jahiliyya, Late Antiquity, and the Qur'an* (Oxford University Press, 2017) p. 247f

¹⁶¹ Aaron W Hughes "South Arabian 'Judaism', Himyarite Rahmanism, and the Origins of Islam" in Carlos A. Segovia ed *Remapping Emergent Islam: Social Worlds of Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Amsterdam University Press, 2017) p. 15

century most of the inhabitants of the Peninsula were Christians, Jews or some type of monotheists.¹⁶²

Stephen Shoemaker has written that “ the emergence of Islam must be situated within the broader religious context of the late ancient Near East” and be investigated using the same methods applied to other religions of the region and period.¹⁶³ Drawing upon his knowledge of the late antique world, and the Near Eastern religions of the period, he has shown how the atmosphere of the Near East in which Islam arose, its “sectarian milieu,” was saturated with apocalyptic ideas developed over the centuries. He provides evidence that this was a time of “heightened eschatological expectation.”

Along these lines, Islamic tradition mentions several false prophets before and during Muhammad’s ’life. Qur’ān 5:19 states “O People of the Book! Our Messenger has indeed come to you, making things clear to you after an interval between the messengers so you do not say, ‘There has never come to us a deliverer of good news or a warner.’” This presumably

¹⁶² Ilkka Lindstedt—*Muhammad and his Followers in Context: The Religious Map of Late Antique Arabia*. Islamic History and Civilization: Studies and Texts 209 (Brill 2023) p. 3. It may be noted that search for epigraphic evidence from the vicinity of Mecca and Medina has not yet taken place, which limits our understanding of the religious makeup of these particular areas, *ibid.* footnote 5 p. 3f. Hoyland provides a listing of evidence of a Jewish presence in the Hijaz, Robert G. Hoyland “ The Jews of the Hijaz in the Qur’ān and in their inscriptions,” in Gabriel Said Reynolds (ed.), *New perspectives on the Qur’an: The Qur’an in its historical context* 2, London: Routledge, 2011, 91–116 Lindstedt also admits “there might have been pockets of polytheism and related phenomena.” p. 127. Yet, even these seem to have adopted Allāh as the supreme lord over lesser deities. *Ibid.* p 133 An indication of this comes from Qur’an 43:15 which mockingly speaks of God having daughters. *Ibid* p. 188

¹⁶³ Shoemaker *Apocalypse* p. 1 Other scholars have made similar statements.

means that there had been no true prophets between Jesus and Muhammad.¹⁶⁴ According to Muslim historians most of them claimed to be prophets of single tribes, unlike Muhammad's universal claims. One Musaylima proclaimed a god named al-Rahman from whom he received revelations through the Angel Gabriel, and recorded in a book he called the Qur'ān.¹⁶⁵ He was one of the chief leaders of the *Ridda* wars after the death of Muhammad.¹⁶⁶ It may be noted that Yamama the region in which he lived had closer ties to the outside world than the Hijaz¹⁶⁷ Tradition records verses of this "lying" Prophet, whose literary qualities Arab literati of the

¹⁶⁴ Gerald, Hawling, "Were There Prophets in the Jahiliyya? in Carol Bakhos (ed.), Michael Cook (ed.) *Islam and its Past: Jahiliyya, Late Antiquity, and the Qur'an* (Oxford University Press, 2017) p. 188

¹⁶⁵ M J Kister "The Struggle Against Musaylima and the Conquest of Yamama *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 27 (2002): 1-56 An example of his supposedly ludicrous proclamations was "'Oh frog, daughter of a frog, croak what you croak, your upper part is in the water and your lower part in the mud, do not bar any person drinking, nor make the water turbid." in Fred Donner, translator *The History of Al-Tabari: The Conquest of Arabia: The Riddah Wars, A. D. 632-633/A. H. Vol X* p.109 (The Tabari Translation Project 1993) The original Arabic can be found inter alia at https://ahl-alquran.com/arabic/show_article.php?main_id=2050 If these lines are in fact authentic they may be part of an animal parable, since erased to smear the false prophet Al-Balādhurī reports that he called himself, Rahman al-Yamama. while another would be prophet, and former Kāhin called himself Rahman alAnsi, Ahmad bin Yahya al-Balādhurī, Hugh Kennedy, translator *History of the Arab Invasions: The Conquest of the Lands: A New Translation of al-Balādhurī's Futuh al-Buldan* (I.B. Tauris 2022) p.119 Robin *Les Signes* p445

¹⁶⁶ Robin *Les Signes* p436f notes that false prophets "furent des adversaires politiques, particulièrement actifs pendant la brève période d'«apostasie» (*ridda*) qui suit la mort de Muḥammad en 632

¹⁶⁷ al Makin *Representing the Enemy: Musaylima in Muslim Literature* (European University Studies, 2010) p, 118. Nu'aym p. 321 The Messenger of God said before his death by a month: Before the Hour there will be liars, among the lord of the Yamāma,

classical period mocked.¹⁶⁸ There is also the case of Khālīd b. Sinān who preached against Arabian paganism in the period before Muhammad.¹⁶⁹ Notably, none of these lesser prophets seem to have proclaimed an eschaton. Such a proclamation combined with his literary gifts would have assisted in the triumph of Muhammad over any potential competitors.

The Qur'ān mentions several extra-biblical Arabian prophets such as Hud, Salih and Shu'ayb.¹⁷⁰ All three preached monotheism and justice to their peoples, and when they did not listen to the prophet's teaching were destroyed. They could well have been early examples of Arabians influenced by surrounding monotheisms, stories of whose lives were embroidered over the centuries.¹⁷¹ There is no indication that they were proclaimers of the approaching the End of Time, but rather warners of God's wrath on specific groups of evil doers. The universalizing of the Message would be the project of the Messenger of God.

¹⁶⁸ Musaylima married Sajah bint Ḥarīth, who proclaimed herself a prophet, but after her husband's death embraced Islam. She is also reported to have attempted to imitate the Qur'ān. Some of her poetry has been reserved through Kitab al Aghani see: <https://www.aldiwan.net/poem87175.html> al Balādhurī p. 113

¹⁶⁹ His aged daughter is reported to have met with the Prophet. , Christian J. Robin (2012). Les signes de la prophétie en Arabie à l'époque de Muḥammad (fin du vie et début du viie siècle de l'ère chrétienne). in *La Raison des signes Présages, rites, destin dans les sociétés de la Méditerranée ancienne* (Brill, 2012)

¹⁷⁰ The exegetes also mention persons such as Ḥanzāla b. Ṣafwān said to have preached to his people and being killed before being destroyed themselves (See. Ḥanzālab.Ṣafwān in *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, Second Edition)

¹⁷¹ For example al Kisa'i reports that Salih claimed to have received his apostleship from Gabriel al-Kisa'i Qisas al Anbiya', ed. I. Eisenberg (Leiden: Brill, 1922-3), trans. W. M. Thackson Jr. as *The Tales of the Prophet of al-Kisa'i* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1978) p 120

Chapter 3: Muhammad the Apocalyptic Prophet

All the above created an atmosphere of apocalyptic expectations which according to all indications greatly influenced the Prophet, and later followers of his teachings.¹⁷² Some scholars have often assumed that the Hijaz was some kind of forsaken backwater,¹⁷³ and the Qur'ān could not have been composed there, nor could Muhammad have been influenced by intellectual currents outside his native region, including, of course, those of the apocalyptic.¹⁷⁴ At the same time,

¹⁷² “Muslim apocalypses are a continuation of and a modification of the classical Jewish and Christian apocalyptic heritage of Late Antiquity. A continuation of this heritage in the sense that many of the themes and some of the actors involved remain the same, but a modification in the sense that the Qur'ān and early Islam does introduce new language and some different lines of apocalyptic development.” David Cook “Early Muslim Apocalypses and Their Origins ” in *Eschatology in Antiquity: Forms and Functions*, Vol 1. (CTC Press 2021) Hilary Marlow. Karla Pollmann Helen Van Noorden (eds) p.528-

¹⁷³ Against this, Guy G. Stroumsa writes, “In particular we have learned to recognize that the Arabian peninsula, considered previously to have been located on the margins of the *oikoumene* and to have played a rather limited historical and cultural role, must now be considered to have been an integral part of the world of late antiquity. This is particularly true, in our present context, in the realm of religious ideas and practices.” Guy G. Stroumsa “Jewish Christianity and Islamic Origins” in *Islam Cultures, Islamic Contexts Essays in Honor of Professor Patricia Crone* (Brill, 2014) p. 78 Aaron Hughes has noted that the “trope of a desert people wandering in darkness and receiving a divine message is certainly a common one in ancient Near Eastern religious cultures” This trope misses the active involvement of the pre-Islamic Arabs with nearby empires, The myth of isolation served and serves to preserve the belief in the uniqueness of the Prophet's message. Hughes *Theorizing Islam: Disciplinary Deconstruction and Reconstruction* (Routledge, 2010) p. 37

¹⁷⁴ Robert Hoyland notes in “New Documentary Texts and the Early Islamic State” in *Bulletin of SOAS*, 69, 3 (2006), 395–416. “Most of the impetus for such radical theories stems from the sense that a major world religion

many accounts of the pre-islamic Hejaz have gravely erred in portraying Mecca as a wealthy entrepôt.¹⁷⁵ Nonetheless, the city lies in a barren terrain unsuitable for agriculture, even with its perpetual Zamzam spring, and could not have survived without trade links outside its region, even if it was largely restricted to pastoral products such as camel leather.¹⁷⁶ In addition, depending on the condition of the customary trade routes, aromatics such as frankincense, might

could not have been born in such a remote corner of the Middle East and from a desire to root Islam's origins and early development more fully within the world of late antiquity, and so to argue against the traditional Muslim perspective that Islam's birth was ontogenetic, untainted by alien wisdom and foreign creeds."

¹⁷⁵Henri Lammens in his 1924 *La Mecque à la Veille de l'Hégire* has been "credited" with inventing the myth of Mecca as the center of a vast international trading network based on spices. See. Shoemaker *Creating the Qur'an*. Patricia Crone in her tour de force examination of the economics of the Hejaz, *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam*, (Princeton University Press, 1987) has shown that the view of Mecca as an trading city, with wealthy merchants, and an impoverished lower class was useful for those wishing to portray Muhammad as a prophet preaching social justice"

¹⁷⁶Fred Donner "Mecca's Food Supplies and Muhammad's Boycott" *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* vol 20 no3 (1977): p. 254 Crone *Meccan Trade* p, 98ff. Patricia Crone pointed out the many verses of the Qur'ān including those considered Meccan link agriculture to the Mushrikin. She ascribes this to gardens in Ta'if held by Meccans. "How Did the Quranic Pagans Make a Living" *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* Vol. 68, No. 3 (2005), p. 387-399 As for the camel leather hypotheses see: Patricia Crone "Quraysh and the Roman Army: Making Sense of the Meccan Leather Trade" *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* Vol 70, No. 1 (2007), pp. 63-88. Not only does Muslim tradition describe Muhammad as a merchant, but a similar claim was made in the earliest non-Arabic source, such as the "Armenian Chronicle of 661" At that time a man appeared from among these same sons of Ishmael, whose name was Muhammad, a merchant." Shoemaker *The Death of a Prophet* (University of Pennsylvania Press 2012) p. 64f

have passed through the Hejaz.¹⁷⁷ There are also a number of references to seafaring in the Qur'ān, which might be unexpected in a document revealed in an isolated desolation. The fact is that Mecca and Medina are not that all that far from the seacoast. In addition, the Sira reports that persecuted Muslims emigrated from Mecca to Ethiopia, just across the Red Sea.¹⁷⁸

Testifying to the Hejaz's interaction with the outside world is the telling observation of Sydney Griffith, "the most basic thing one notices about the Qur'ān and its interface with the Bible is the Islamic scripture's unspoken and pervasive confidence that its audience is thoroughly familiar with the stories of the biblical patriarchs and prophets, so familiar in fact that there is no need for even the most rudimentary form of introduction."¹⁷⁹ Thus, Patricia Crone wrote:

¹⁷⁷ Patricia Crone makes the sweeping statement that the Yemeni incense trade was wholly maritime, and in any case the Roman demand had ceased to exist by the time of Muhammad's revelations. *Meccan Trade* 29. Contrary to this, Mikhail D. Bukharin holds that ships carrying goods from India for the Classical world, had no room for taking on aromatics, which needed to proceed overland to the Mediterranean, passing through, among other places, Mecca, and with the agency of Meccan merchants in addition to other persons. Mikhail D. Bukhari "Mecca On The Caravan Routes In Pre-Islamic Antiquity" in A. Neuwirth, N. Sinai, M. Marx (Ed.), "The Qur'ān in Context. Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'ānic Milieu", (Leiden 2010) p. 115-134

¹⁷⁸ Lindstedt *Muhammad and his Followers* p 187

¹⁷⁹ Sydney Griffith "The Bible in Arabic: The Scriptures of the "People of the Book"" in *the Language of Islam. Jews, Christians, and Muslims from the Ancient to the Modern World*, edited by Michael Cook, William Chester Jordan, and Peter Schäfer.(Princeton University Press, 2013) p. 24. Elsewhere he writes "Indeed, on its own terms the Qur'ān presumes the precedence of the Torah and the Gospel in the consciousness of its audience, and insists that in reference to the earlier divine revelations it is itself "a corroborating scripture in Arabic language to warn wrong doers and to announce good news to those who do well." (46:12) In the Qurhan, the voice of God even

the facts remain that the Qur'ānic pagans were semi-believers who did not apparently have any trouble understanding the Qur'ānic references to the Biblical tradition; that the Messenger himself regarded the earlier recipients of the scripture as authoritative to the point of regarding them as able to sit in judgement on the validity of his own revelations; that he assumed his audience to share this view; and that he was eager to have them, or a particular group (or groups) of them, on his side, even depicting himself as emerging from an Israelite milieu. On this basis it seems reasonable to conclude that both he and the pagans who opposed him had grown up as God-fearers.¹⁸⁰

Nearly, a century ago Tor Andrae held that Syriac speakers' forms of Christianity influenced the Prophet's eschatological piety, meaning his thoughts about "last things" such as final judgment.¹⁸¹ It has also been noted that Jacobite Christianity may have influenced the Prophet's understanding of Christianity in their reliance on the Syriac *Diatessaron*, an early Gospel harmonization, given that the only Old Testament figures named in the Qur'ān also appear in that document.¹⁸² Jaakko Hameen-Anttila on his part asserts that the older sections of the Qur'ān demonstrate Muhammad's original message was not biblically inspired. Rather, his original followers accepted him as divinely inspired as a result of traditions of non-Biblical

advises the Muslims, "If you are in doubt about what We have sent down to you, ask those who were reading scripture before you" (10:94). *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque_ Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam*-Princeton University Press 2008) p. Similarly, Jonathan P. Berkey writes "it is certain that the new faith can only be understood against the background of Jewish messianism and, more broadly, of the religious turmoil which characterized the Near East at the end of late antiquity." Berkey, p. 53. Aziz al Azmeh on his part describes the Hejaz as "a pagan reservation that had been largely passed by developments occurring elsewhere," (Aziz Al Azmeh, *Emergence* p 40 Hawting takes exception to this statement in his review in *Journal of Qur'ānic Studies* Vol. 17, No. 1 (2015), pp. 114-118 (5 pages).

¹⁸⁰ Patricia Crone *The Qur'anic Pagans and Related Matters: Collected Studies in Three volumes* (ihr 129), ed. Hanna Siurua, 3 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

¹⁸¹ Griffith *The Bible in Arabic* p, 111.

¹⁸² Griffith *ibid* p. 112

prophets such as Hud and Salih, as well as indigenous beliefs in seers, known as *kāhin*¹⁸³ These seers are recorded as giving their prophecies in *saj'*, rhymed prose, as does the Qur'ān.

However, it is impossible to know if Muhammad was speaking in the style of the *kāhin*, or that later chroniclers in their reporting what the *kāhin* allegedly said, decided to cast their words in what they assumed would be the proper style.¹⁸⁴ It may be noted that at least one of the soothsayers is described as wrapping himself in a cloth while prophesying, which may have been the practice of Muhammad.¹⁸⁵ Based on this early lack of biblical material, Anttila posits that

¹⁸³ Jaakko Hameen-Anttila “Arabian Prophecy” in Martin Nissinen ed *Prophecy in Its Ancient Near Eastern Context: Mesopotamian, Biblical, and Arabian Perspectives* (Sbl Symposium Series 2000) In the Qur'ān Muhammad is accused of being a *kāhin* as well as someone possessed by one of the 'Jinn : “So admonish. By your Lord's blessing, you are not a soothsayer, [kāhin-in] nor mad.[majnun-in] (Our'an 52:29) “It is not the speech of a *Sha'ir*, Nor the speech of a *Kāhin*” [Qur'ān 69:41-42] According to Hameen-Anttila in the context of the time of the Prophet's mission *Sha'ir* did not mean just ‘poet’ as it did subsequently but implied that it referred to someone literally inspired by a familiar spirit. The Companion of the Prophet ,the poet Hassan bin Thabit reportedly received inspiration when one day he was walking in Medina and a female Jinni sat upon his chest and would not let him up until he recited several verses. A. S. Tritton :”Spirits and Demons in Arabia” in *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (Oct. 1934), p 723 A question which might be raised is were Hud and Salih and the like early examples of persons preaching their own vision of the divine under the influence of Christianity and/or Judaism and/or Persian religion Burt adapted to Arabian beliefs. After their unsuccessful careers legends would have grown.

¹⁸⁴ Hameen-Anttila p. 124

¹⁸⁵ Hameen-Anttila *ibid* p. 133 See Qur'ān 73:1 “You! Wrapped one” and 74:1. “You! Cloaked one”. On the other hand. Daniel Beck links the term to the “Syriac Christian concept of putting on the robes of glory ... a divination that enables the servant to stand before the deity's presence in pre-eschatological time.” Daniel Beck *Evolution of the Early Qur'ān (Apocalypticism)* (Peter Lang; New edition 2018)

Muhammad started as an “itinerant prophet before eventually finding a community in Yathrib.”¹⁸⁶ Once there he became strongly influenced by Bible based traditions. Angelika Neuwirth, dismisses this view as an “anachronistic” view of the Hijaz as culturally underdeveloped and asserted that the Qur’ān even in its earliest parts reflects the religious beliefs of Late Antiquity.¹⁸⁷

External Influences on the Qur’an?

There arises the question of who or what were Muhammad’s “informants” concerning religious concepts, including those of the Hour, held in the regions surrounding the Hejaz, and the Arabian Peninsula as a whole.¹⁸⁸ The external influences on the Qur’ān have been seen to range from an established Christian church in Mecca to pervasive Judaism — although it surely

¹⁸⁶ *ibid.* p 125f 132 Yathrib came to be known as al Madina, the city from *madinatt al Nabi* (city of the Prophet) Another possibility is that the word *madina* is derived from the Aramaic as spoken by the Jews of Yathrib. See Marco Scholler “Medina” in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’an* (Brill 2001)

¹⁸⁷ Angelika Neuwirth, *The Quran and Late Antiquity: A Shared Heritage* Translated by Samuel Wilder (Oxford University Press, 2019) p.108

¹⁸⁸ This question arose within the lifetime of the Prophet cf. Qur’ān 16:103 “We know that they say, “A human is teaching him; the tongue they refer to is non-Arabic (‘*ajami*). This (the Qur’ān) is clear Arabic.” Noted in Claude Gilliot in “On the Origins of the Informants of the Prophet.” In *The Hidden Origins of Islam: New Research into its Early History* (Prometheus Books, 2009) p. 153 - 187 Also Qur’ān 24:4,5 The disbelievers say, “This ‘Quran’ is nothing but a fabrication which he made up with the help of others.” Their claim is totally unjustified and untrue. And 8:31 they say, ““These revelations are only’ ancient fables which he has had written down, and they are rehearsed to him morning and evening.” And Whenever Our revelations are recited to them, they challenge ‘you’, “We have already heard ‘the recitation’. If we wanted, we could have easily produced something similar. This ‘Quran’ is nothing but ancient fables!”

appears that they were not “normative,” such as Rabbinic Judaism and Imperial Christianity, or even that of the better known Christian “heresies.”¹⁸⁹ While there are no indications that the Bible had been translated into Arabic by the Prophet’s time, in the multilingual milieu of his time that would not by no means been an insurmountable obstacle to his awareness of material in that Book.¹⁹⁰ In fact, in late Antiquity, many Jews and Christians would have learned what they knew of the Bible through recitations and interpretations in their places of worship.¹⁹¹ Robert Hoyland has pointed out that “all ...pre-Islamic Arabic inscriptions have a connection with Christianity”¹⁹² This leads to the implication that Christian missionaries were using Arabic in

¹⁸⁹ José Costa has speculated that [the early layers of the Qur’ān contain a non-messianic eschatology, and the late layers a non-eschatological Messiah. The former may be related to a Jewish background, the latter connected to Ebionite Christology.” Such an assertion must be considered in the light of the admixture of religions with their various apocalyptic and eschatological visions. “Early Islam as a Messianic Movement: A Non-Issue?” in Carlos A. Segovia ed *Remapping Emergent Islam: Social Worlds of Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Amsterdam University Press , 2017) p. 45-81

¹⁹⁰ Gerhard Böwering “Recent research on the construction of the Qur’ān”. in Reynolds, Gabriel Said (ed.). *The Qur'an in its Historical context*. (Routledge. 2008) p. 70. “There is no evidence that he used foreign written source materials for the composition of the Qur’ān” *ibid* p. 83 I would also note that there is a longstanding tradition that Muhammad was illiterate, based on Qur’an 7:157 which refers to him as "al-nabī al-ummī," which is often considered to mean “The illiterate prophet.” However a possible alternate meanings is “the gentile Prophet.” Uri Rubin *The Eye of the Beholder: The Life of Muhammad as Viewed by the Early Muslims A Textual Analysis* (Gerlach Press, 2024) p23f

¹⁹¹ Michael Pregill “The Hebrew Bible and the Quran: The Problem of the Jewish ‘Influence’ on Islam” *Religion Compass* 1/6 (2007) p. 645

¹⁹² Robert Hoyland “The Birth of Arabic in Stone.” in *By the Pen and What they Write: Writing in Islamic Art and Culture*, edited by Sheila Blair and Jonathan Bloom (53–67. (New Haven Yale University Press, 2017) p. 59

their proselytizing endeavors.¹⁹³ Thus Muhammad probably have received this information in some form of Arabic.¹⁹⁴ It may also be noted that in Late Antiquity there was no “Bible” as such, instead numerous spiritual traditions circulated widely.¹⁹⁵ In addition, the large number of foreign words in the Qur’ān shows the presence of extra-Peninsular influences.¹⁹⁶ Furthermore, it appears from the Qur’ān that many of its Biblical narratives were already known to his early hearers.¹⁹⁷ Some writers have surmised that the Prophet received his knowledge of Biblical

¹⁹³ Antoine Borrut, “Towards an Arabic Cosmopolis:” in *Navigating Language in the Early Islamic World – Multilingualism and Language Change*. Antoine Borrut, Manuela Ceballos, and Alison M. Vacca (Breopolis, 2024)

¹⁹⁴ An interesting but unprovable Tradition holds that Muhammad spoke Ethiopic. Nonetheless this could well reflect Ethiopia’s role in the beginnings of Islam, Manfred Kropp “Beyond single words: *Ma’ida – Shaytan – jibt* and *taghut*. Mechanisms of transmission into the Ethiopic (Ge’ez) Bible and the Qur’ānic text” in Gabriel Said Reynolds (ed.). *The Qur’an in its Historical context*. (Routledge. 2008) p. 223

¹⁹⁵ Pregill *ibid*

¹⁹⁶ Böwering p.70 Claude Gilliot “Creation of a fixed text” *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur’an* (Cambridge, 2016) p. 43. Beyond this “many of their (major pre-Islamic Syriac religious figure) standard themes and characteristic turns of phrase at various points” echo passages of the Qur’ān. Sydney Griffith “Christian Lore and the Arabic Qur’ān: the “Companions of the Cave” in *Sūrat al-Kahf* and in Syriac Christian tradition” in Gabriel Said Reynolds (ed.). *The Qur’an in its Historical context*. (Routledge. 2008) p. 109. It may also be noted that Ethiopian influence would have been enhanced by an occupation of Yemen and other parts of the Peninsula.

¹⁹⁷ See Qur’ān 25:4-5 And those who disbelieve say, "This [Qur’ān] is not except a falsehood he invented, and another people assisted him in it." But they have committed an injustice and a lie/ And they say, "Legends of the former peoples which he has written down, and they are dictated to him morning and afternoon.” Gillot “Reconsidering the Authorship of the Qur’ān: is the Qur’ān Partly the Fruit of a Progressive and Collective Work? In Reynolds, Gabriel Said (ed.). *The Qur’an in its Historical context*. (Routledge. 2008) p. 89. In addition there are

stories from Jewish (or Jewish Christian) sources noting that Old Testament characters appear in the Qur'ān more often than New Testament figures. However, Robert Hoyland has pointed out that narratives about Old Testament personalities “are closer to versions found in late antique Christian commentaries and homilies than to those occurring in the Old Testament itself or in late antique rabbinic works.”¹⁹⁸ Nonetheless, others have maintained that tales of the prophets in the Qur'ān could have come from oral sources which would come to form the basis of the Midrash.¹⁹⁹ In any case, Muḥammad's abilities to creatively weave his source materials into memorable lessons should not be neglected.²⁰⁰

several Ḥadīth reported in Tabari and elsewhere that Muhammad was in touch with Christian slaves in Mecca who told him stories from the Old and New Testaments. cf. Gilliot “Origins” p. 154 ff

¹⁹⁸ Robert Hoyland “The Jewish and/or Christian Audience of the Qur'ān and the Arabic Bible” in *Jewish Christianity and the Origins of Islam* Papers presented at the Colloquium held in Washington DC, October 29-31, 2015 (8th ASMEA Conference) p. 31-40

¹⁹⁹ Pregill, Hebrew Bible p. 649. Jillian Stinchcomb finds the Qur'ānic story of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba which is decidedly different from the relation in the Book of Kings as derivative from an oral tradition related to that found in the Targum Sheni Esther “The Queen of Sheba in the Qur'ān and Late Antique Midrash. in. *The Study of Islamic Origins* p. 85-96. On his part, Isaac W. Oliver in “Standing under the Mountain: Jewish and Christian Threads to a Qur'ānic Construction” *The Study of Islamic Origins New Perspectives and Contexts* Edited by Mette Bjerregaard Mortensen, Guillaume Dye, Isaac W. Oliver, and Tommaso Tesei (de Gruyter 2021) p.97- 153 finds the Qur'ān's statement that Mount Sinai floated in the air above the Israelites to have roots in a number of mostly canonical Jewish and Christian sources.

²⁰⁰ *ibid.* p. 654

Early Traditions speak of Muḥammad interacting with other mortals who influenced his religious development. For example, the Prophet is said to have met a certain Ḥanīf²⁰¹ Zayd bin ‘Amr ibn Nawfal who directed him from the worship of idols.²⁰² Another widely reported story speaks of Waraqa ibn Nawful, a relative of Muḥammad’s first wife Khadīja, who confirmed the Prophet’s mission. There are several traditions of Christians In Mecca.²⁰³ It is not clear exactly how the Prophet developed his eschatological message; according to the *Sira*, the biography of the Prophet, he received a divine command to openly preach to the people of Mecca: “And warn ‘all, starting with’ your closest relatives”²⁰⁴ This warning was of course of the impending eschaton.

Foreign influences in the Qur’ān are evident in the many stories taken from Jewish and Christian writings, although not necessarily in the form of the canonical texts known in the orthodox forms of these religions.²⁰⁵ Although the impact of Judaism and Christianity is clear,

²⁰¹ Roughly, pre-Islamic Arabian monotheists, not connected to the Abrahamic religions

²⁰² Uri Rubin *The Eye of the Beholder*: p. 79

²⁰³ For example: Now a ship belonging to a Greek merchant had been cast ashore at Jidda and became a total wreck. They took its timbers and got them ready to roof the Ka’ba. It happened that in Mecca there was a Copt who was a carpenter, so everything they needed ready at hand.. in ibn ‘Ishāq *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ibn ‘Ishāq’s Sirat Rasul Allah*, (Oxford University Press, 1955) p. 84-5 Gilliot “On the origins “ p. 154ff quotes several of the traditions.

²⁰⁴ Qur’an 26:214

²⁰⁵ It might be noted that for at least a century it has been recognized that the names of biblical personages in the Qur’an are mostly derived from their Syriac, rather than Hebrew or Greek, forms. See Alphonse Mingana “Syriac influence on the style of the Kuran” *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* Volume 11: Issue 1 p. 77-98

there seems to be only one direct translation from the normative Bible.²⁰⁶ The Qur'ān's discussion of Jesus shows the strong influence of the extra-canonical Gospels, including a denial of the crucifixion and the story of the infant Jesus making living birds out of clay.²⁰⁷ The Qur'ān in general does not paint a favorable or even well informed picture of Christianity. An instance of external borrowing is the Alexander Romance, which relates among other things how the Macedonian built a wall against an invasion of Gog and Magog, entities mentioned in the Jewish and Christian bibles (Ezekiel 38-39 and Revelations 20:8) in addition to a number of extra-biblical apocalypses.²⁰⁸ It may be noted that early narratives about the Muhammad assert that his coming was foreseen in the Jewish and Christian scriptures.²⁰⁹ Thus a widespread story has the young Muhammad traveling on caravan to Syria, where the monk Baḥira recognizes him as a prophet.²¹⁰

²⁰⁶ Qur'ān 21:105 "Indeed, We have written in Psalms (al-Zabūr) after the Reminder (al-ḏikr) that my Worshippers (Ibād-i) will inherit the Earth ('arḍ = land, Earth) . See Psalms 37:29 "The Righteous shall inherit the land" (יְרַשׁוּ = land, Earth). David Cook "The Qur'ān and Other Scriptures" in Berg, Herbert, editor *Routledge Handbook on Early Islam* (Routledge 2018) p. 30

²⁰⁷ *ibid.* p. 31

²⁰⁸ Cook *ibid.* Shoemaker "Portents" p. 300f Kevin van Bladel has demonstrated a close relationship between the language of the Quran's version of the Legend, and that of the Syriac version "The Alexander Legend in the Qur'ān 18:83-102" in *The Qur'an in its historical context.* (Routledge. 2008) p. 175-203

²⁰⁹ Ka'b bin al Ahbar is the putative source of many of such assertions,

²¹⁰ For example, Uri Rubin *The Eye of the Beholder:* p. 52ff Hoyland Seeing Islam as Others Saw It p.270ff., 476 ff

The Prophet by all indications came to believe that he was living in the End Times, and had been sent to prepare the world by preaching the True Religion.²¹¹ Thus, in Qur'ān 40:18, God orders Muhammad to “Warn them of the Day,” for, “the Hour is surely coming, ’(Qur'ān 20:18) The most important theme of the apocalyptic verses of the Qur'ān is embodied in the word *sa'a the Hour*, which occurs more than 40 times in the Book.²¹² The event is coming soon.²¹³ Nonetheless, there will be Signs or Portents of the End, which will announce its sudden advent.²¹⁴ Many may doubt that the Hour is forthcoming.²¹⁵ This will be to their detriment.²¹⁶ The very vividness of the imagery would inspire the Islamic apocalyptic narrative for centuries to come.²¹⁷ There are also many references to the related concept of *yawm al- din* (Day of

²¹¹ Buc p.28

²¹² Cook Studies p. 271

²¹³ For example Qur'ān 16:77 God has (knowledge) of the unseen of the Heavens and the Earth; and the matter of the Hour is naught save the blink of an eye or closer

²¹⁴ Qur'ān 7:187 “Its knowledge is only with God , but most of the people do not know.” and Qur'ān 36:50 “and they will not even be able to make a testament, nor to return to their households.”

²¹⁵ Qur'ān 21:1 Closer unto men is their reckoning: and they are stubbornly heedless. 42:18 Those who dispute have gone far astray/

²¹⁶ See for example. Qur'ān 13-15 When the Trumpet is sounded a single time, when the earth and its mountains are raised high and then crushed with a single blow, on that day the Great Event will come to pass

²¹⁷ Qur'ān 82:15 Where the sun breaks apart/When the planers are scattered/When the oceans are drained/When the graves are scattered /A soul will know what it has advanced, and what it has postponed

Judgment) or *yawm al- qiyāma* (Day of Rising/Resurrection), that is, the Last Judgment.²¹⁸

These are especially to be found in the verses usually considered among the earliest of the Revealed Text. Unfortunately, it is exceedingly difficult to recover the exact importance of the imminent Hour in the preaching of the Prophet and its reception during his lifetime, given the problem of the discerning the reliability of the reverent ḥadīth. The apocalyptic idea of the imminent end to time then had a drastic and far-reaching effect on the history of Islam, as one party after another jockeyed for the role of leader of the Umma, or even parts of it, with rivers of bloodshed. This also doubtlessly led to the creations of fresh Ḥadīth in which the Prophet more or less clearly expressed approval of further Muslim rulers. Numerous alternate future histories could be created, based on the history of empires around the world throughout history.

A Community of Believers

There is evidence that Muhammad and his early followers thought of themselves as a community of believers who have faith in one God, and the imminent arrival of the Hour.²¹⁹ As

²¹⁸ Isaac Hasson, "Last Judgment." *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*. general Editor: Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Georgetown University, Washington dC. Brill, 2011. brill Online. BRILL demo user. 15 July 2011 <http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=q3_CoM-00105>

²¹⁹ "Though the study of early Islamic identity continues to be a debated field, quite a few scholars have of late suggested that the processes of articulating a clear-cut identity distinct from those of other faiths were complex and took some time, with the year 70 CE or thereabouts often offered as a possible date for the parting of the ways between Muslims, on the one hand, and other religious communities, on the other." Ilkka Lindsted "Reconsidering Islām and Dīn in the Medinan Qur'ān" *Al-'Usur al-Wusta* 31 p 7. Nicolai Sinai for one has taken exception to the position of Donner on what Sinai calls the "Supra-Confessional Character of the Believers' Movement" holding that Medinan Suras of the Qur'ān show "an incipient demarcation of the Messenger's adherents as a distinct religious

such, this pious body was “originally conceptualized as something independent of confessional identities.”²²⁰ The Prophet therefore sought to welcome pious Christians and Jews willing to affirm the Oneness of God, and the imminence of the Hour into their pietistic and apocalyptic movement.²²¹ In fact, a close reading of the Qur’ān makes it appear that the Prophet did not intend to create a new religion; rather he intended to remind his hearers of basic truths.²²² They did not initially identify themselves as Muslim, nor were they labeled as such by the peoples outside the Peninsula who came to be under the rule of the Arabian invaders. Michael Penn has pointed to strong evidence from Syriac texts that the boundaries between Muslims and Christians tended to fluidity in the immediate post-Conquest period, and even beyond the seventh century,

community.” “The Unknown Known: Some Groundwork for Interpreting the Medinan Qur’ān” *Mélanges de l’Université Saint-Joseph Volume LXVI* – 2015-2016 p. 47-96. David Cook has made the observation that Muslim apocalyptic beliefs are an outgrowth of the early development of Ḥadīth and the failure of the cataclysmic apocalypse that is foreseen in the Qur’ān. “Early” p.267 Fred Donner has also stated “Another feature of the early Believers’ movement, and one central to its evident dynamism and ability to mobilize its participants, was its eschatological orientation *Muhammad and the Believers* p. 78

²²⁰ Fred Donner “From Believers to Muslims: Confessional Self-Identity in the Early Islamic Community” *al-Abhath* vol 50-51 p 11

²²¹ Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*:. p. 41 Michael E. Pregill “Blurred Boundaries and Novel Normativities: The Jews of Arabia, the Quranic Milieu, and the “Islamic Judaism” of the Middle Ages* IAI- ‘Usur al-Wustā 29 (2021): 256-302

²²² David Cook “The Beginnings” p. 80. The text speaks more of reminding its audience of essential truths rather than bringing an entirely new ideology to the fore (Qur’ān 88.21: ‘Remind [the people] for you are only one who reminds’ among many examples).

when confessional boundaries began to form, and slowly harden.²²³ In the early period of blurred confessional identities, apocalyptic traditions originating from outside the Peninsula would have entered the Muhammadan movement to join with its strongly eschatological message.

One important document strongly supports the conjecture of the ecumenical nature of earliest Islam: the so-called Constitution of Medina, an apparently authentic collection of treaties between the Prophet and the various peoples of Yathrib (later Medina), which mentions Jews as an *umma* along with the Believers.²²⁴ The content of these documents show “dramatic discontinuity with the ethnic and religious boundaries established in later Islam.”²²⁵ The “Constitution” proclaims itself as “a writing from the prophet Muhammad between the Believers and the Muslims of Quraysh and Yathrib, and those who follow them, join with them and fight alongside them” The text then describes the duties and rights of the muhājirūn (Emigrants) of Quraysh demonstrating a link between the concepts of Emigrants and Believers

²²³ Michael Penn *Envisioning Islam: Syriac Christians and the Early Muslim World*. Divinations: Rereading Late Ancient Religion. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015.

²²⁴“These documents with their archaic language, obscure references and divergences from later Islam are almost universally viewed as authentic,” Donner “From Believers to Muslims’ p. 30f. Shoemaker *Death* p. 206. Donner has elsewhere noted the lack of mention of the three main Jewish tribes prominent in the Traditions, the Qaynuqā’ Naḍīr and Qurayza, as well as of Christians, which “has not, to date, been satisfactorily, explained.” in Herbert Berg, editor *Routledge Handbook on Early Islam* (Routledge 2018) p. 178. “The Constitution of Medina is preserved in Ibn ‘Ishāq in which it sticks out like a piece of solid rock in an accumulation of rubble” Patricia Crone *Slaves on Horseback: The Evolution of the Islamic Polity* (Cambridge University Press 1980) p. 7

²²⁵ Stephen J. Shoemaker *The Apocalypse of Empire* p. 134

from a very early point.²²⁶ The only requirement for the signatories of the document was that they “affirm in this document and believe in God and the Last Day.”²²⁷ This of course clearly demonstrates how the eschaton was an essential belief of the Believers community in its earliest stages.

Michael Cook and Patricia Crone have boldly stated “There is no good reason to suppose that the bearers of this primitive identity called themselves “Muslim.”²²⁸ It appears that the Qur’ān only uses the word “Muslim” to indicate the act of submitting to God, rather than to denominate members of a well defined group.²²⁹ Aziz al Azmeh refers to this period in a felicitous turn of phrase as Paleo-Islam.²³⁰ He envisions the Paleo-Muslims as a group held together not so much by religious doctrine, but as the followers of a charismatic leader, the Prophet.²³¹ It is also significant that an early observer of the Muslim community in the 680’s the North Mesopotamian monk John bar Penkaye write that "there was no distinction between pagan

²²⁶ Lindstedt, Ilkka-“*Muhajirun* as a Name for the First/ Seventh Century Muslims” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, Vol. 74, No. 1 (April 2015), p. 69

²²⁷ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* : p. 555. Also see Qur’ān 5:69 “or, verily, those who have attained to faith [in this divine writ], as well as those who follow the Jewish faith, and the Sabians, and the Christians - all who believe in God and the Last Day and do righteous deeds - no fear need they have, and neither shall they grieve”

²²⁸ David Cook and Patricia Crone *Hagarism*:p.8

²²⁹ Robert Hoyland, “Reflections”(2017) p130

²³⁰ David Cook in *Theories* p. 69 prefers the term proto-Muslims “ Because it is difficult to know what precisely the first Muslims believed, although most probably their beliefs differed from the normative Islam of the eighth century onwards, we will refer to the Muslims of the seventh century as ‘proto-Muslims.’”

²³¹ al-Azmeh, *Emergence* p. 358 ff

and Christian, the believer was not known from a Jew.”²³² Indicative of the slow evolution of the sense of Islam as a separate religion can be found in the writings of St. John of Damascus (c. 675-749), who held an important post in the Umayyad government, considered Islam a Christian heresy.²³³

An important aspect of what may loosely be called the “ecumenical” nature of early Islam for the development of apocalyptic beliefs is that those joining the Community of Believers would bring in their own concepts of the End, to add to the proclamations of the Holy Text.²³⁴ These could have come from any number of variants of Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, and Manicheanism, picked up by Arabians, some of them with significant periods of residence outside the Hejaz.²³⁵ Later when identities hardened and suspicions grew about the beliefs of Others, the apocalyptic concepts of converts were more likely to be accepted,

²³² Hoyland, *Seeing Islam* p.11

²³³ David Cook “The Beginnings p. 81 He also points out that there were few polemic against Islam in the early period “most uncharacteristic silence from a community, which had long specialized in polemic, apologetic and heresiography.” op cit Hoyland, *Seeing Islam* p480ff

²³⁴ Lindstedt “Who is In who is out? Early Muslim identity through epigraphy and theory| *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 46 p. 149 mentions the “the fluidity of the religious identities of Jews, Christians and others” in Late Antiquity

²³⁵ “(W)hat we may well have is groups of social actors, only subsequently defined as Jewish, Christian, and/or Muslim, who inhabited a shared social and intellectual space in which a wide variety of ideas – including messianism and apocalypticism in response to growing political instability, the religious contours of law, a belief in one deity, and so on – were widely distributed.” Aaron Hughes “The Current Status and Problems of Islamic Origin” in *The Study of Islamic Origins: New Perspectives and Contexts* (De Gruyter 2021)

and transmitted to other members of the Islamic community, as fitting within the primal Islamic demand that the followers of Muhammad believe in the Unity of God, and the Last Day.

Chapter 4: Apocalyptic in the Post-Prophetic Period

Faith Inspired Conquests?

There have been many theories about the success of the Arabian conquests after Muhammad. Early claims that it was religious fervor which inflamed the Arab tribes fell by the wayside in modernity. Nonetheless, David Cook has shown how apocalyptic beliefs would have inspired the warriors, stating that “the intensity of the belief in the coming Judgment and the essentially spiritual nature of the fighting during the early period” as a major factor in the success of the Arab Conquests.²³⁶ In addition, it is likely that the spectacular success of the early conquests would have inspired many soldiers to see the victories as a sign of Divine favor.²³⁷ Cook gives as evidence the earliest surviving treatise on Jihad written by ‘Abdallah b. Mubarak (d. 797) which contains the tradition in which the Prophet said, “ Behold! God sent me with a sword, just before the Hour, and placed my daily sustenance beneath the shadow of my spear,

²³⁶ David Cook “Beginnings” p. 89. Along similar lines Fred Donner writes “Such apocalyptic convictions may have been the force that impelled some Believers to abandon their usual day-to-day concerns and enlist in the distant and arduous campaigns to spread the writ of God's word that are usually called the "Islamic conquests." The pull of material incentives must also have played an important part in drawing people into the movement, of course, but would mainly have come into play after the process of expansion had developed obvious momentum; so it seems likely that the ideological motive— fear of the impending Last Judgment— was paramount in the movement’s early years and only tapered off slowly. *Muhammad and the Believers*” p. 198f

²³⁷ Donner *Muhammad and the Believers* p 199

and humiliation and contempt on those who oppose me.”²³⁸ Shoemaker on his part states concerning the conquerors “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....(T)he 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.”²³⁹ In addition, he presents a considerable body of evidence that the original Umma expected the Hour at any moment, and concludes that the expansion of the Arabians out of the Peninsula arose from a desire to restore divine order to the world.²⁴⁰ A strong indication of the Arabian invaders’ apocalyptic ideas appears in the earliest known mention of the Believers

²³⁸ David Cook “The Beginnings”p. 88

²³⁹ Shoemaker *The Apocalypse of Empire* p. 198 He is following Fred Donner’s conclusions in *Muhammad and the Believers*

²⁴⁰ Shoemaker “Portents” p. 295 Shoemaker *Apocalypse* p.140 On the other hand, relying largely on archaeological evidence and the more or less contemporary reports of the conquered peoples Nevo and Korn have leaped to the conclusion that the Arabian invaders were pagan and only later developed a kind of monotheists which developed into Islam. Nevo and Koren p. 11f. Against this, Fred Donner observes “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.” Review of Robert Hoyland’s *In God’s Path: The Arab Conquests Al-‘Uṣūr al-Wuṣṭā Vol. 23 No. 1 (2015)* p, 134-140 He also writes in *Muhammad and the Believers* p. 85 “By the end of Muhammad’s life, then, the believers were to be not merely a pietist movement with an emphasis on ethics and devotion to God, but a movement of militant piety, bent on aggressively searching out and destroying what they considered practices odious to God (specially polytheism) and intent on spreading rigorous observance of God’s injunction”

outside Arabia. the *Doctrine Iacobi super Baptizati* (“Doctrine of Jacob the Newly Baptized”)

At one point in the text the recently forcibly converted Jew of the title says “a prophet has appeared, coming with the Saracens, and he is preaching the arrival of the anointed one who is to come, the Messiah”²⁴¹

David Cook correctly notes that it is impossible to know how many of the fighters were sincere Believers, and not adherents of other faiths interested in plunder, but posits that the army camps engaged in intense religious indoctrination, which won the hearts and minds of men who were otherwise booty seekers, especially given the widespread apocalyptic beliefs permeating the Near East, of which the warriors were doubtlessly aware to a greater or lesser extent.²⁴² As might be expected, the Christian Arab tribes, which were generally on the borders and who had historically served as auxiliaries for the rival Byzantine and Sassanian empires, that is, in territories where the conquests began, took part in these wars, both on the side of the Arabians and the imperial powers.²⁴³ In addition, there are reports some non-Arabian non-believers joined in, such as an elite calvary unit of the Sassanian after the defeat of the Empire at the battle of al-

²⁴¹ Shoemaker *Portents* p. 297 Hoyland *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It*. p. 55ff

²⁴² *ibid.* p. 89. There are a humber of Ḥadīth in which the Prophet forbade the use of non-Muslims in his army; alongside others in which he allowed it. The majority of jurists came to accept this participation, even if reluctantly. Wadād al-Qāḍī “Non-Muslims in the Muslim Conquest Army in Early Islam” in *Christians and Others in the Umayyad State* Antoine Borrut and Fred M. Donner, eds (Chicago: The Oriental Institute, 2016) p. 84-87

²⁴³ al-Qāḍī p. 88-93 An early Nestorian monk’s description from the late 680’s mentions of the Arabian invaders.

“Their armies used to go in each year to distant lands... There were among them Christians, not a few of them with the heretics (the non-Nestorians) and some with us. Donner “From Believers” p. 44

Qadisiyya.²⁴⁴ All of these soldiers would have mingled with the Believers in the armies to sow the seeds of their own religions' apocalyptic beliefs, all the while learning about the faith of the Believers, and their own ideas about the eschaton.

The Conquerors among the Conquered

The triumphant Believers found themselves living amid a sea of Christian and Jewish communities, with long traditions of written scriptures, apparently different from the forms of these religions they had known in the Ḥijāz.²⁴⁵ In this case their memories would undoubtedly been influenced by their new religious environs, if nothing else to help fill in the gaps in their knowledge of the traditions about other Abrahamic faiths mentioned in the Qur'ān.²⁴⁶ In addition, there is ample evidence that in early time Believers shared churches for the purposes of worship, or had their mosque adjacent to churches, one indication of the fluidity of confessional identification in early Islam.²⁴⁷ This would have provided yet another locus for sharing apocalyptic narratives. Converts brought in their own beliefs from the vast body of apocalyptic inherited from the Late Antique world, both pagan and Judeo-Christian. A number of them actually viewed that conquest in apocalyptic terms, seeing it as an indication of God's wrath for their sins.²⁴⁸ Others such as Jews and non Chalcedonian Christians were of the opinion that the

²⁴⁴ al-Qadi p. 94

²⁴⁵ David Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic* (Princeton: The Darwin Press, Princeton 2002) p. 1

²⁴⁶ Shoemaker *Creating* p. 198f

²⁴⁷ Donner *Muhammad and the Believers* p. 304f

²⁴⁸ Hoyland *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It*. p 524f

invaders were divinely inspired deliverers.²⁴⁹ At the same time the small Arab ruling elite felt a lack of political security which came to be expressed through apocalypses.

While the Qur'ān is definitely apocalyptic, with its emphasis on the eschaton, references to the End are scattered throughout the Text and can be cryptic. Therefore Ḥadīth needed to be “found” in accord with ever developing apocalyptic and messianic thought.²⁵⁰ Many of these narratives speak of situations contemporary to the target audience as setting the stage for the Hour, thus adding to a sense of urgency, however, given the nature of apocalyptic literature, such details are often not be readily discernible by readers centuries after the original appearance of the texts. In the terms of the subject under discussion, the impact of the Islamic apocalyptic, what is most important about certain Ḥadīth was that a sufficiently large number of people, for whatever reasons, gave them credence, and possessed the abilities to jointly act upon them.

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²⁴⁹ *ibid.* p. 526ff

²⁵⁰ Yücesoy. p. 36

²⁵¹ Donner *Muhammad and the Believers* p. 304f

²⁵² Hoyland *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It*. p 524f

that the invaders were divinely inspired deliverers.²⁵³ There do not seem have been any translations of prior apocalypses into Arabic. Instead the traditions would have been passed on orally in a multilingual society to the less educated. This often meant that even without word-for-word transference of the texts, their themes were preserved.²⁵⁴ The conquerors tended to dwell in their own *amṣār*, cantonments, separate from the people they ruled.²⁵⁵ Nonetheless, they would have interacted to some extent with members of the larger and more theologically developed Abrahamic faiths, doubtlessly coloring their own recollection of what the Prophet said, or they had learned second or third hand.²⁵⁶ In addition, the Qur'ān contains stories about

²⁵³ *ibid.* p. 526ff

²⁵⁴ Cook *Studies* p. 2. The Syriac *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius in particular may have influenced the idea of the Mahdī through its motif entering into the Ḥadīth literature. See. Ilkka Lindstedt The Last Roman Emperor, the Mahdī, and Jerusalem the Spiritual Meaning of Jerusalem” in *Three Abrahamic Religions . Studies on the children of Abraham* , no. 6 (Leiden , Briil 2019) pp. 205-225 Griffiths The Bible in Arabic p. 42f

²⁵⁵ Hoyland has noted that it has been claimed that the so-called Pact of ‘Umar which imposed a number of rules for social conduct on non-Muslims may had been intended for the benefits by allowing them to distinguish themselves from the ruled, and to prevent their assimilation, (Robert Hoyland “Early Islam as a Late Antique Religion” in Johnson, Scott Fitzgerald *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity* (Oxford University Press 2015) p. 1366f

²⁵⁶ Shoemaker *Creating the Qur'an* ` David Cook has pointed out that in not long after the first Conquest there existed “The Early Ecumenical State of Islam” At this stage Islam had not yet become fully defined, and the boundaries between the Abrahamic faiths were much more porous than they would later become. David Cook”the Beginnings” p. 79-94 Cook quotes Qur'ān 3:64” Say, ‘O Prophet,’ ‘O People of the Book! Let us come to common terms: that we will worship none but God, associate none with Him, nor take one another as lords instead of Allah.” But if they turn away, then say, “Bear witness that we have submitted `to God alone’.” See also Ilkka Lindstedt. “” One Community to the Exclusion of Other People”: A Superordinate Identity in the Medinan Community” in *The*

Biblical prophets, and Believers would likely have wanted to have these tales fleshed out by Jewish and Christian informants.²⁵⁷ While all this was going on, there existed a polemical atmosphere among the religious communities which often employed the apocalyptic.²⁵⁸ This background entered into the Muslim tradition, often embodied in Ḥadīth, to be added to the already available eschatological statements much in evidence in the Qur'ān.

In the early Islamic centuries, there existed a dialog between Muslim apocalyptic and Jewish biblical materials. The books of Daniel and other material sourced to the Hebrew prophet were especially important. Nu'aym reports that the Arabian conquerors of Iran opened the grave of prophet Daniel and found there a book which the Jewish convert to Islam Ka'b bin al Ahbar translated into Arabic that the behest of the caliph 'Umar bin al Khattab.²⁵⁹

Nu'aym was a Hadith scholar of the stricter kind, Yet not only did he not object to including a wealth of material from biblical sources into his works but he also defended his action. Despite that many doubted or even ridiculed the authority of monotheistic scriptures in matters of future knowledge the cross-confessional borrowing continued in large volume during the seventh and eight centuries.²⁶⁰

Study of Islamic Origins) p. 321-37 In addition Robert Hoyland *In God's Path* p. 2 has pointed out." Muslims and non-Muslims inhabited the same world, interacted with one another and even read one another's writings."

²⁵⁷ Shoemaker *Creating the Qur'an*

²⁵⁸ Hoyland *Seeing Islam as Others Saw it* p.32f

²⁵⁹ Also, Said Arjomand "Origins and Development of Apocalypticism and Messianism in Early Islam: 610-750 CE " Prepared for the *Congress of the International Committee of the Historical Sciences* Oslo, August 2000 p. 6.

²⁶⁰ Yücesoy p.34f

Cities Conquered and Unconquered in the Early Apocalyptic

Jerusalem occupies an important place in the early apocalyptic tradition.²⁶¹ Shoemaker has persuasively argued that the city occupied central importance in the imperial eschatology of early Islam — and not just as the First Qibla.²⁶² Jerusalem is not explicitly mentioned in the Qur'ān. Qur'ān 17:1 speaks of the Further Mosque;²⁶³ however, the verse is quite obscure and it took later traditions to weave increasingly elaborate stories of a Night Journey.²⁶⁴ It has been

²⁶¹ Ofer Livne Kafri—“Jerusalem in Early Islam: The Eschatological Aspect” *Arabica* T. 53, Fasc. 3 (Jul., 2006), pp. 38 She points out that there is an entire literary genre of the sanctity of Jerusalem fada'il al-Quds (The Praises of Jerusalem) mostly dated to the seventh and eighth centuries. Boris Havel “Jerusalem in Early Islamic Tradition” *Miscellanea Hadriatica et Mediterranea* Vol 5. No 2018 p113-179. Donner “Muhammad and the Believers” p. 78

²⁶² Stephen J. Shoemaker, *The Apocalypse of Empire* p 146ff According to Islamic tradition Believers first prayed in the direction of Jerusalem, as the Qibla. Later, they were admonished to pray towards the Mecca, specifically the Ka'ba, the sacred structure there. Similarly Fred Donner writes, “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.” Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, “p. 97 Concerning the supreme importance of the city, Shoemaker writes [”Not surprisingly, in these Jewish and Christian eschatological scripts, Jerusalem is center stage, and its conquest is pivotal in the final events before the eschaton” “Syriac Apocalypticism and the Rise of Islam” in: B. Bitton-Ashkelony, M.L. Hjälml and R.A. Kitchen (eds.), *The Third Lung: New Trajectories in Syriac Studies. In Honor of Sebastian P. Brock* (Eastern Christian Studies 33; Leiden: Brill, 2023), 325f

²⁶³ “Holy is He Who carried His servant by night from the Holy Mosque to the farther Mosque (whose surroundings We have blessed that We might show him some of Our Signs. Indeed He alone is All-Hearing, All-Seeing.”

²⁶⁴ Although many Western scholars believe that al-Masjid al Aqsa refers to a heavenly site not necessarily related to Jerusalem, Uri Rubin in “Muḥammad’s Night Journey (Isra’) to al-Masjid al-Aqṣā. Aspects of the Earliest Origins of the Islamic Sanctity of Jerusalem” *Al Qantara* May 2008 29(1):147-164 Rubin holds that it is in fact located in

noted that the Umayyads sought to sanctify Jerusalem and Syria-Palestine, their power base.²⁶⁵

There are traditions that the Rock on which the Dome of the Rock stands will be the place where the Last Trumpet will sound.²⁶⁶ In addition, it is here that Jesus will defeat the Dajjāl in one tradition.²⁶⁷ Furthermore, God will destroy Gog and Magog there; and He will set His seal on Judgment Day in Jerusalem.²⁶⁸ Shoemaker avers that “it was not a mere coincidence that Muhammad’s followers made their first push outside of the Arabian Peninsula into the Holy

Jerusalem and resembles a vision in the Book of Enoch. *Muḥammad’s Night Journey (Isra’) to al-Masjid al-Aqṣa. Aspects of the Earliest Origins of the Islamic Sanctity of Jerusalem*. Available from: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/272721044_Muhammad’s Night Journey Isra’ to al-Masjid al- Aqsa: Aspects of the Earliest Origins of the Islamic Sanctity of Jerusalem](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/272721044_Muhammad’s_Night_Journey_Isra’_to_al-Masjid_al-Aqsa:_Aspects_of_the_Earliest_Origins_of_the_Islamic_Sanctity_of_Jerusalem)

²⁶⁵ Ofer Livne-Kafri “Jerusalem” p. 40 It might also be noted that it was in Jerusalem that during the First Fitna, that Mu‘āwīya conducted the ceremonies where he received the *bay’a* (pledge of allegiance) from his followers making him essentially the Caliph. See: Andrew Marsham “The Architecture of Allegiance in Early Islamic Late Antiquity: The Accession of Mu‘āwīya in Jerusalem, ca. 661 CE” in *Court Ceremonies and Rituals of Power in Byzantium and the Medieval Mediterranean: Comparative Perspectives* Edited by Alexander Beihammer, Stavroula Constantinou, Maria Parani (Brill 2013) p 87-114. Hoyland *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* 135f

²⁶⁶ibid p. 38

²⁶⁷ There has not been a *Fitna* on earth since God raised the offspring of Adam greater than the *Fitna* of al Dajjāl. God did not send a prophet without warning his Umma of al Djjal Antichrist, and I am the last of theand you are the last of the Ummas He will inevitably come out among you.... Jesus, peace be upon him, will say open the gate (of Jerusalem) , and it will be opened, and behind it is al Dajjāl, with him is seventy thousand Jews, all of them with a finely woven sword. When al Dajjāl looks at Him, he will melt as salt dissolves in water/ [My translation] Al-Maqdisī, Abū al-Ma‘ālī al-Musharraf b. al-Murajjā b. Ibrāhīm *Kitab Fada'il Bayt al-Maqdis wa-al- Khalil wa-Fada'il al-Sham* edited by Ofer Livne-Kafri (1995, Al-Mashreq)

²⁶⁸ Hasson "Last Judgment." *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*

Land in Palestine and toward its sacred center at Jerusalem.”²⁶⁹ A literary genre mainly compiled in the seventh and eighth centuries was *Faḍā’il Bayt al-Maqdis* (The Virtues/Praises of Jerusalem) Works of this type often include reports of the city’s essential role in eschatological time.²⁷⁰

There are also a large number of traditions dealing with the Byzantines and their wars with the Muslims. This is especially notable in the Book of Tribulations, whose author drew heavily on Syrian material, at a time when campaigns against Byzantine territory would often take place twice as year.²⁷¹ As Hoyland puts it, Muslims worried about how to maintain their empire especially as they repeatedly failed to capture Constantinople. Viewing these attempts as part of an apocalyptic struggle in which they would inevitably triumph gave meaning to their endeavors.²⁷² The continued failures of often large scale attempts would lead to prophecies postponing this conquest until the End of Days.²⁷³ One tradition has the Prophet proclaims “As for Persia, one or two blows, and then there is no Persia; after the many- horned Byzantines— every time a horn goes, another horn replaces it. Masters of stone and sea, how far they proceed

²⁶⁹ Shoemaker *Apocalypse* p. 139 He adds “Jerusalem’s abiding eschatological significance undoubtedly preserves a vestige of Jewish and Christian influence on emergent Islam.”

²⁷⁰ Livne-Kafri “*Jerusalem*” p. 382 “Suleiman A. Mourad “The Faḍā’il of Jerusalem Books as Anthologies” in *Approaches to the Study of Pre-modern Arabic Anthologies* (Brill 2021) p. 267-277

²⁷¹ Mehdy Shaddel, *Apocalypse, Empire, and Universal Mission at the End of Antiquity: World Religions at the Crossroads* (Leiden University, 2024) p. 132

²⁷² *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It*. p. 27f

²⁷³ Borrut *Memory* p. 240

to the end of time!”²⁷⁴ Interestingly, this greatest of all *Malḥama* will put Muslims to the test, with a third defecting and a third fleeing, leaving only a final third of the Faithful to stand fast.²⁷⁵ This of course reflects the apocalypticists view oof the decline of Islam from the imagined Golden Age. With God on their side the Remnant triumphs

Studies have shown that Jewish converts to Islam were an important source of Muslim apocalyptic traditions. John Reeves has spoke of an “Abrahamic lexicon” from which Jews, Christians, and Muslims “created and used during late antiquity to augment and interpret their respective canons and to forge successively their separate religious identities.”²⁷⁶ In addition to bringing in their own apocalyptic literature, they had knowledge which could help interpret otherwise obscure verses of the Qur’ān, or identify sacred sites.²⁷⁷ Tradition points to the shadowy Ka’b al-Aḥbār as the main conduit for such information. He was reportedly from Ḥimyar, arriving in Medina and converting to Islam not long after the death of the Prophet, and impressed the Believers with his scriptural and exegetical skills, coming under the patronage of caliph ‘Umar.²⁷⁸ Ka’b allegedly discovered in Jewish writings divine recognition of Muhammad

²⁷⁴ Nu’aym p. 292

²⁷⁵ Nu’aym p. 246f

²⁷⁶ John Reeves “Jewish Apocalyptic Lore in Early Islam: p. 200 This of course fits in with the nondenominational character of the Believers Movement.

²⁷⁷ Livne-Kafri Jerusalem p. 384; John C Reeves Jewish Apocalyptic Lore in Early Islam: Reconsidering Ka’b Al-Aḥbār.” in *Revealed Wisdom: Studies in Apocalyptic in honour of Christopher Rowland* (Brill, 2014) p. 200-216. Emeri Van Donzel and Andrea Schmidt, Andrea (*Gog and Magog in Early Eastern Christian and Islamic Sources* (Leiden, Brill 2010) p. 168

²⁷⁸ Reeves, “ Jewish Apocalyptic Lore”p. 203

as a Prophet, which were otherwise deliberately deleted from the Scriptures.²⁷⁹ He is credited with providing details about the lives and teachings of the prophets before the Prophet.²⁸⁰ In addition his name often appears as the transmitter of apocalyptic narratives.²⁸¹ He and other former Jews helped imbue the importance of Jerusalem in Islam including the spread of apocalyptic traditions about Jerusalem.²⁸² This was significant in the city becoming the most important place in Islamic eschatology. Busse has noted that “most of the features of the story of *isra*’ and *mi’raj* derived from Jewish apocrypha.”²⁸³ It may be noted that unlike the apocalypses in other Abrahamic religions, the Islamic form does not have a large number of tales of journeys in heaven and hell, except for the Traditions of the Night Journey.²⁸⁴ This may have been due to the copious verses describing the Afterlife in the Qur’ān itself.²⁸⁵

²⁷⁹ *ibid*

²⁸⁰ *ibid* p. 204

²⁸¹ His name appears in well over a hundred traditions in Nu’aym

²⁸² Ka’b allegedly passed on traditions that the Roman’s destruction of Jerusalem would be revenged on Constantinople. *ibid* p. 210f

²⁸³ Ofer Livne-Kafri “Some Observations on the Migration of Apocalyptic Features in Muslim Tradition” *Acta Orientalia* 60(4) p 467 -477 “Christian Attitudes Reflected in the Muslim Literature in Praise of Jerusalem” in *Proche-Orient Chretien* Vol 54 No. 3-4 2004 p. 348-376

²⁸⁴ Cook *Studies* p. 230

²⁸⁵ See Todd Lawson “Paradise in the Quran”

As is obvious, the Qur'ānic image of the apocalypse expanded in the post Prophetic period with materials reflecting the concerns of the Muslim community in its first centuries.²⁸⁶ Apocalypses were not only weaponized to foment civil strife, they could over time also serve to denigrate certain ethnic and religious groups. These narratives would have reflected attitudes, contemporary with their appearance on the scene, while at same time, intensifying these prejudices. For example, Muslim literature in praise of Jerusalem includes Ḥadīth in which Jesus in End Times first appears in Damascus where he chooses Muslims over Jews and Christians. Later He breaks the symbols of Christianity including the cross.²⁸⁷ Other groups attacked include the Berbers and Turks, both elements which proved disruptive in Arab lands, and would be politically useful to place on the wrong side of the Good.²⁸⁸ Also doubtlessly concocted among disgruntled *malawi* are Ḥadīth about the fates of the Arabs at the End of Time, Among the signs of the approach of the Hour is the destruction of the Arabs.²⁸⁹ In other Ḥadīth large numbers of Arabs will be contingents in the Dajjal's army. Many Ḥadīth from early collections

²⁸⁶ Ofer Livne-Kafri "Some Observations on the Migration of Apocalyptic Features in Muslim Tradition" *Acta Orientalia* 60(4) p 467 -477 "Christian Attitudes Reflected in the Muslim Littérature in Praise of Jerusalem" in *Proche-Orient Chretien* Vol 54 No. 3-4 2004 p. 348-376

²⁸⁷ Livne-Kafri "Attitudes" p 353

²⁸⁸ See Nu'aym p. 140 "The Prophet said: There is no creation under the canopy of the heavens worse than the Berbers' and Nu'aym p. 114 You are right, the black banners will continue to be victorious over all who oppose them until the Turks enter through the Gate of Armenia."

²⁸⁹ Tirmidh 3929'

single out Ethiopians as antagonists in the End Times.²⁹⁰ They will go so far as to capture Mecca, and destroy the Ka'ba.²⁹¹ It is difficult to say whether the presence of the Ethiopians in the narratives is due to some kind of ethnic or racial prejudice, or the rest of a group memory of the time when the Abyssinians were major — and threatening — power in the Peninsula.²⁹²

Byzantium also looms large in the Muslim apocalyptic, with its conquest seen as a major Sign of the Hour. Many Ḥadīth attributed to Ka'b al Aḥbār report in great detail the course of the great battle.²⁹³ The many traditions about the Muslims undertaking and succeeding in this feat, would have spurred military expeditions during the Umayyad and Abbasid Caliphates — and for some time afterwards. Beyond the usual desire for booty, and the warring against the infidels promoted in other Traditions, these apocalyptic narratives would influence Islam for centuries, as various dynasties adopted them as one major factor in their campaigns against Constantinople.²⁹⁴

²⁹⁰ Suliman Bashear “Apocalyptic Insecurities” in *Arabs and Others Early Islam* (Princeton, the Darwin Press, 1997) p.94-111

²⁹¹ Nu'aym p. 414-418 records several dozen Ḥadīth concerning the incursions of the Ethiopians. including “The Prophet said: The Ethiopians will come and destroy the House (Ka'ba) completely, such that it will not be inhabited again, and they are the ones who will take out its treasures.” *ibid.* p 415

²⁹² Bashear *ibid* “Summary Discussion and Concluding Notes.” p. 123-f

²⁹³ *eg.* Nu'aym p280ff

²⁹⁴ “By the time Islam claimed its role in the world , Constantinople had already been recognized as an eschatological city in Christian and Jewish apocalyptic thought as the New Jerusalem where the Messiah would reign. Soon after the rise of Islam, the city of Constantinople secured a similar place in Muslim apocalyptic imagination” Yücesoy p. 47

From the earliest days of Islam there has been a connection between astronomical occurrences and the apocalypse.²⁹⁵ These events such as comets and supernovae, which unexpectedly appear from time to time, have historically been associated with catastrophic events.²⁹⁶ David Cook has insightfully suggested that knowing the dates of these extraterrestrial events could be used to date the beginnings of apocalyptic or messianic movements. Unfortunately, these were not always recorded at the time. One exception is the regular return of Halley's Comet, whose appearances can be calculated accurately even if unrecorded. They can easily be taken as Portents to be attached to existing traditions. In fact, David Cook has noted a seventy year cycles to Muslim apocalyptic movements, coincident with the appearance of Halley's Comet. This is in addition to the 200 year cycle long known; Chinese and Byzantine records of the period do make references to comets and novae which have been linked to the beginnings of apocalyptic movements.²⁹⁷ One comet appeared in 100 AH, a year in which much messianic ideas were attached to Umar II.²⁹⁸ (Furthermore, he was, including the Prophet, the

²⁹⁵David Cook, 'Messianism and Astronomical' p. 29 Also David Cook. "The Apocalyptic Year 200/815-16 and the Events Surrounding it" in *Apocalyptic Time* (Leiden, Brill, 2000) Pp 43ff

²⁹⁶ See the etymology of the word *disaster* "ill-starred"

²⁹⁷ In addition the Syriac *Chronicle of Zuqnin* reports on several astronomical phenomena cf. Neuhäuser, D.L.; Neuhäuser, R.; Mugrauer, M.; Harrak, A.; Chapman, J. (August 2021). "Orbit determination just from historical observations? Test case: The comet of AD 760 is identified as 1P/Halley". *Icarus*. 364:

²⁹⁸ Cook *Messianism*. p. 36. Patricia Crone notes that Umar I had earlier received the designation *Furaq* a title of Messianic import in Syriac. However, the word was reinterpreted in Arabic to lack this meaning. Crone *Hagarism* p.5

twelfth ruler of the Umma, where the number appears in apocalyptic literature, as the Cycle of Twelve Rulers.)²⁹⁹

The first two Hijra centuries were afflicted with four major fitnas, each of which was productive of fresh apocalyptic narratives picked up, adapted or invented at the hands of combatants, resulting in apocalyptic expectations becoming successively more important.³⁰⁰ As each one ended, new groups were afflicted with feelings of victimization at the hands of demonized groups in power, who themselves would likely produce or publicize Ḥadīth predicting their triumph. It may be worth pointing out in passing that sociologists have attributed the attraction of contemporary apocalyptic cults to feelings of “relative deprivation” in which “the susceptible audience... perceive themselves as lacking that power that is rightfully theirs.”³⁰¹ Such feeling would naturally be intensified among those living in an atmosphere suffused with religion, and the desire for salvation. It may be also noted that the established powers could attempt to counter apocalyptic calls to rebel against unjust authorities with their own Ḥadīths, such as “Whoever obeys me obeys God, and whoever disobeys me disobeys God. Whoever obeys the ‘Amir obeys me. An Imam is nothing but a shield to fight behind, by which calamities

²⁹⁹David Cook *Studies* p. 36 f

³⁰⁰ Yücesoy p. 19

³⁰¹ Wayne A. Meeks “Apocalyptic Discourse and Strategies of Goodness” in *The Journal of Religion* , Jul., 2000, Vol. 80, No. 3 (Jul., 2000), pp. 462 Also or example Farhad Khosrokhavar “The Psychology of Global Jihadists” in *The Fundamentalist Mindset: Psychological Perspectives on Religion, Violence, and History* (Oxford University Press, 2010) p 139-155. Eric Davis “Ideology, Social Class and Islamic Radicalism in Modern : in *From Nationalism to Revolutionary Islam* in Saïd Amir Arjomand (Editor) SUNY Press (June 30, 1985) pp 134-157. Charles B. Strozier “The Apocalyptic Other”. p. 62-70 in Charles B. Strozier et al (Oxford University, 2010)

are avoided; and if he orders you to abstain from that which is unlawful, he will have great regard; but if he enjoins that which God has forbidden, he will bear the punishment of his own acts.”³⁰² It is probable that there were many more messianic movements in early Islam than have come down to us. Our sources for much of these period such as Al-Tabari and Ibn Kathir were members of the elite, and heavily focus on the major cities in which they lived.³⁰³

A major, if not *the* major, cause of the fitnas was the sudden demise of the Prophet “intestate.” Fred Donner has noted

The likelihood that Muhammad himself believed that the world was very soon to come to its final end in the imminent Last Judgment may ultimately underlie the Qur’ān’s silence on such issues as political succession; for if the Believers thought the world was soon going to end, worrying about long-term leadership (as opposed to the immediate issue of living righteously to attain salvation) was simply irrelevant.³⁰⁴

Umayyad *Fitnas*

The Umayyads came to power through the First Fitna (656-661.) The inevitable consequence was the creation of large groups of the disgruntled among those overcome in battle. In a region full of peoples with very longstanding apocalyptic traditions, their worldview would have led to speculations, which would have generated multitudes of Ḥadīth, with or without

³⁰² Al-Bukhāri, “T’isam,” 2

³⁰³ David Cook “Messianic Movements and Islamic Tradition” in *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée* 91-94(20000715): 29-52

³⁰⁴ Donner *Origins* p. 48. David Cook writes, “(O)ne cannot help but notice that the question of why Muhammad did not designate a successor is frequently asked. Perhaps the answer lies in the fact the he genuinely did not believe that there would be time enough before the end of the end of the world for *anyone* to succeed him. The very fact of some sort of will would have shown some lack of faith in the immediacy of the End.” Cook *Studies* p.4 Shoemaker *Apocalypse* p. 131 Lindstedt *Muhammad and His Followers* p. 272

pristine *isnāds*, and eventually become full blown narratives. Prominent among the defeated were the followers of Ali, who would evolve into the Shiites, with their own rich traditions of the apocalyptic.

It may be noted that the *Book of Tribulations* has Ka'b al-Aḥbār's informant reportedly foreseeing this *Fitna* based on readings of the Jewish apocalyptic materials:

The mill of the Arabs will turn twenty-five [years] after the death of your Prophet, (35AH/656CE) then a dissension will develop— there will be —there will be killing and fighting in it—then you will return to security and calm until you will be in [a state of] constant stability meaning Mu'awiya, then tribulation will develop — there will be killing and fighting in it — find it in the Book of God to be the dark-night one which bends everyone possessed of pride.³⁰⁵

The Second Fitnas (680-692) with the bitter warfare of the Umayyads against the Zubayrids, Alids et alia was widely seen as a prelude to the Hour.³⁰⁶ This Tribulation appears to have been “the true birth of the figure of the Mahdī as a messianic figure.”³⁰⁷ The ‘anti-Caliph’

³⁰⁵ Nu'aym p. 19

³⁰⁶ Donner *Narratives*. p. 390 In *Muhammad and the Believers* p. 191f he points out that “the Believers ’movement, even as late as the Second Civil War, brought with it the conviction that routine social injustices and oppression were no longer acceptable, that a new and more just order was attainable.

³⁰⁷ Arjomand *Messianism* p.113 There was considerable opposition to assigning the term to ordinary mortals, as can be seen in Ḥadīth proclaiming that there will be no Mahdī save ‘Isa son of Maryam, Yücesoy p, 40F Nonetheless, Umayyad court poetry often uses the term to describe the reigning Caliph with “terms that can only be characterized as messianic: they dispersed darkness,, made the blind see, made the road plain, loosened burdens, healed sicknesses of the breast, slaked people's thirst, filled the earth With mercy, justice, and light” Patricia Crone *God's Rule - Government and Islam: Six Centuries of Medieval Islamic Political Thought* (Columbia University Press 2005) p. 41/ also p/ 75

Ibn al Zubayr was considered by some as the Mahdī.³⁰⁸ For example, there has come down to us a lengthy Ḥadīth with obvious references to the situation at that time in which the Prophet spoke of someone under whom “Islam will settle down on the ground.”³⁰⁹ The Tradition does not mention a Mahdī, but later Ḥadīth compilers placed it in their chapters given over to that personage.³¹⁰ Furthermore there is a well known Ḥadīth found in several collections in which the Prophet said, “The wheel of Islam will turn in the years 35, 36, and 37.”³¹¹ As well as, “If you perish you will be like other nations, but if you survive, that will be for seventy years.”³¹² A pro-Alid al-Mukhtar ibn Abi Ubayd al-Thaqafi had temporarily allied himself with the rebellion of

³⁰⁸ Wilferd Madelung “Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr and the Mahdī.” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 40 (1981) p291–306. Hoyland *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It*. p. 332f

³⁰⁹ Ahmad b. Hanbal *Musnad* vol. 6, p. 316 translated in Wilferd Madelung “‘Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr and the Mahdī.” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 40 (1981) 291–306. “Eschatology and the Dating of Traditions” in Harald Motzki ed *Ḥadīth Origins and Developments* (Routledge, 2016) p. 217-234. The full Ḥadīth is: There will arise a difference after the death of a caliph, and a man of the people of Medina will go forth fleeing to Mecca. Then some of the people of Mecca will come to him and will make him rise in revolt against his will ... An expedition will be sent against him from Syria but will be swallowed up ... in the desert between Mecca and Medina. When the people see this, the righteous men ... of Syria and ... Iraq will come to him and pledge allegiance to him. Thereafter a man of the Quraysh will arise whose maternal uncles are of Kalb. He will send an expedition against them, but they will defeat them ... He will then divide the wealth and act among them according to the Sunna of their Prophet. Islam will settle down firmly on the ground ... He will stay seven years and then die, and the Muslims will pray over him. (Ahmad b. Hanbal *Musnad* d (Cairo 1313/1895-96), vol. 6,

³¹⁰ Madelung p. 291.

³¹¹ That is, the time of the First Fitna. See Nu’aym p. 19

³¹² Bashear “Apocalypses” p. 88

Ibn al Zubayr. When that alliance collapsed, he went to Kufa where he had formerly resided, and announced that he was fighting on behalf of a son of the Caliph Ālī by a wife other than the Prophet's daughter Fatima, Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafīyya whom he called the Mahdī, apparently without the latter's consent.³¹³ The title perviously seems to be something of an honorific attesting to his learning and piety.³¹⁴ At his base in Kufa, al-Mukhtar held a ceremony in which he paraded a version of the Ark of the Covenant containing Āl's stool.³¹⁵ After Mukhtar's defeat and death in battle, there may have developed the idea that Ibn al-Hanafīyya was the Mahdī in more or less the later messianic sense.³¹⁶ Some groups held that Alī had appointed him as his successor, and that he had never died but had entered into concealment and would return to

³¹³ Moshe Sharon, *Black Banners from the East* (Brill, 1983) p. 106f, William F. Tucker *Mahdīs and Millenarians: Shi'ite Extremists in Early Muslim Iraq*. (Cambridge University Press, 2008) p. 19 ff Mukhtar even accepted the oath of allegiance (*bay'ah*) on behalf of ibn al-Hanafīyya Crone *God's Rule* p. 77 Berkey p.89 Arjoman "Messianism" p. 113a

³¹⁴ Hylén, Torsten "Mukhtār and the Mahdī: a critical inquiry into the sources" in *Tidsskrift for religion og kultur*, (1): 0, 143 Donner *Muhammad and the Believers* p. 183 Sharon p. 105

³¹⁵ Crone *God's Rule* p. 78

³¹⁶ Several writers disagree with Hylén's assertion that the Messianic meaning of Mahdī came later, e.g. Donner. *Muhammad and the Believers*) p. 183f and Sean W. Anthony. *The Caliph and the Heretic: Ibn Saba' and the Origins of Shi'ism*. (Brill, Leiden, 2012) 'On the other hand, Hugh Kennedy writes "This seems to have been a novel concept in Islam, but the idea of the *Mahdi* was widely accepted and was to provide the ideological inspiration for many subsequent movements and rebellions." *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphs* (Routledge, 2023) p. 86

restore justice to the world.³¹⁷ These groups apparently ceased to exist after a few centuries but their ideas persisted.³¹⁸ On the Umayyad side, the term came to be especially attached to the Caliphs Sulaymān who came to power in 96 AH, and was expected to still be in power in the apocalyptic year of 100.³¹⁹ When he died in AH 99, ‘Umar II became Caliph, who was also designated as rightly guided.³²⁰ His reigning in AH 100, in addition to reports of unusual piety, would come to earn him the title of Mujaddid.³²¹ In addition, several apocalyptic Ḥadīth were circulating which claimed that there would be twelve caliphs from Quraysh in all.³²² Various calculations of rulership succeeded in making ‘Umar this epic personage.

David Cook has noted that there has survived a large number of unfulfilled apocalyptic traditions which foresee the End in 70 AH or 100 AH.³²³ He finds a “striking correlation”

³¹⁷ Sharon p. 116f Tucker p. 30 ff Said Amir Arjomand “Messianism” p 114; Yücesoy. p.24 Shahrastānī reports in Book of Sects and Creeds that a poet wrote of him that he: shall not taste death till he advances at the head of his cavalry with his banner before him. He has gone into concealment at Radwa, where he lives on honey and water, and for a while he will not be seen amongst men.

³¹⁸ Torsten “p. 138-157; Sharon.p. 86

³¹⁹ The court poet al-Farazdaq proclaimed “He answered our prayer and saved us from evil through the caliphate of the Mahdī.” Crone and Hinds *God’s Caliph* p. 37

³²⁰ Patricia Crone, and Martine Hinds *God’s Caliph*: p. 36 Nu’aym p. 51 has Caliph ‘Umar I (Umar II’s great great grandfather) stating “There will be a man from my progeny...who will rule, then fill it [the earth] with justice.”

³²¹ Crone *God’s Rule* p, 76ff. Borrut *Memory* p. 115, 256 ff

³²² eg This rule, glorious, will not abate until there are twelve Caliphs. Nu’aym p 40. Quoting Ka’b “In the Torah there are twelve lords.” Ibid p. 41

³²³ See also Borrut *Memory* p. 258ff

between these two datable predictions and great thrusts of conquest. He believes that this indicates that the early Muslims believed that they had a limited amount of time to unite the world under correct Belief, establishing a messianic kingdom Jesus will rule until the Final Judgment.³²⁴ A striking example of how widespread the belief in 100 AH as apocalyptic can be found in a letter Ghurek, king of Samarkand wrote to the Tang emperor, asking for help against the Umayyads stating, “As regards these Arabs, they are only supposed to be in power for a total of 100 years.”³²⁵

After his triumph in the Fitna, ‘Abd al Malik, having securely established himself as *amīr al-mu’minīn*, seems to have adopted an apocalyptic stance. As Fred Donner has posited, “He may even have wanted to advance for himself the claim to being that final, just ruler in whose day the Judgment would begin and who would deliver to God sovereignty over the world.”³²⁶ As part of this program of laying the groundwork for this Kingdom was the construction of the Dome of the Rock as a suitable site for the coming Hour, which many Ḥadīth stated would climax in Jerusalem.³²⁷ Interestingly, Tabari records a tradition that Ka’b al-Aḥbār advised ‘Umar soon after the Caliph arrived in Jerusalem that an ancient prophecy had predicted that he would clear the former site of the Second Temple from the rubbish the Byzantines had

³²⁴ Cook *Beginnings* p. 85. Cook also notes that many Ḥadīth about these two dates survived in large numbers “long after the obvious disconfirmation discrediting the original prediction” indicating the strong belief theses predictions held in the Umma.

³²⁵ Said Reza Husein “The Rebellion of al-Ḥārith b. Surayj” *Al-‘Uṣūr al-Wuṣṭā* 30 (2022) p. 539 Crone *God’s Rule* p. 76 Yücesoy p.55

³²⁶ Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers* p. 199

³²⁷ *ibid.* p. 202

allowed to be placed on the site, and pray there where the Dome would be late erected.³²⁸ Many of the inscriptions in the structure mention Jesus, generally denying His trinitarian nature. Eliminating this belief would remove elements of Christianity offensive in Muslim eyes, and emphasize the man who would establish the messianic kingdom soon to come. The apocalyptic literature speaks of the implements of the Temple as well as the Ark of the Covenant, implying that the early Believers thought that the role of the conquests was to find these items in either Rome or Constantinople, and return them to Jerusalem when Jesus could employ them in worshipping God.³²⁹

‘Abd al Malik’s reforms helped to strengthen the Umayyad state. However, discontent continued, and grew, especially in distant parts of the Empire such as Khurāsān, a region well known for its Messianic movements, from pre-Islamic times onwards,

Chapter 5: The Abbasid Apocalyptic

The Third Fitna

The Abbasids came to power with a wave of apocalyptic prophecies in a series of civil wars.³³⁰ They were able to take advantage of the flexibility of the apocalyptic and messianic narratives created for earlier crises to make them suit their interests.³³¹ Many of these are in the form of

³²⁸ *The History of al-Tabari*, vol. XII, Albany: State University of New York Press 2007, pp. 194-195

³²⁹ *ibid.* p. 86

³³⁰ Arjomand “Messianism,” p. 115

³³¹ Yücesoy p. 40. Borrut *Memory* p.332ff. A number of apocalyptic Hadith make mention of the Family of the Prophet (Ahl al Bayt) coming to power. The Abbasids were able to convince many that as Hashimites, this referred to them.

Ḥadīth speaking of Black Banners coming from Khurāsān, which of course could be either Abbasid propaganda or ex post facto justification for their dynasty.³³²

Yūsuf b. `Abdallāh b. Salām (d. c. 720) passed by the house of Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam, then said: “Woe to the community of Muḥammad from the people of this house! until the black banners appear from Khurāsān.”³³³

“Woe to the Arabs after 125” (743 CE)³³⁴

“The black banners of the `Abbāsids will appear until they descend upon Syria, and so God will kill by their hands every stubborn tyrant”³³⁵

As Patricia Crone succinctly expressed it, the Abbasid takeover:

was an apocalyptic event, a millenarian turn of fortune which had eliminated the Umayyad usurpers, avenged the Prophet's family, restored the rightful dynasty and filled the earth with justice: the black banners of the avenging armies, the violence with which they treated the members of the offending dynasty, the messianic names of the early caliphs, and the analogies between the revolution and the rise of Islam were all so many proclamations that political redemption had come.³³⁶

It has been noted that in the Sassanian Empire at the end of the sixth century a certain Bahrām VI Čōbīn briefly usurped power claiming to be the apocalyptic ruler. This happened not

³³² David Cook notes: The Messiah Arriving from the East: It is really quite difficult to tell whether this cycle is an old one that has been used extensively by the ‘Abbasids or whether this is a pure ‘Abbasid cycle.” Cook *Studies* p. 147. It may also be noted that the Abbasids seem to have circulated astrological calculations that they were destined to come to power. See Dimitri Gutas *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early ‘Abbasid Society (2nd-4th/5th-10th c.)* Routledge; 1st edition (June 25, 1998) p. 108-110. The famous astrologer Māshāallāh had projected that the Abbasid caliphate would collapse in 195/811 and rulership “transferred from one house to another the fourth year of the conjunction. [of 809]” Yücesoy p. 65f

³³³ Nu’aym p. 106 David Cook “Early Islamic”p. 273

³³⁴ Nu’aym p. 102

³³⁵ ibid p 106

³³⁶ Crone *Slaves on Horsebacks* p. 65

long before the Prophet undertook his mission, and would have contributed to the eschatologically suffused atmosphere of the time.³³⁷ His career may also have contributed to the idea of a redeemer coming from the East, which the Abbasids exploited.³³⁸

As stated above, the uprising against the Umayyads arose to a large part from those *Mawali* with feelings of relative deprivation.³³⁹ Among the supporters of the Abbasids in the uprising along with other parties such as those who have been called proto-Shiites, in addition to the *Mawali*. After the death of Ibn al- Hanafiyya some of his followers transferred their allegiance to his son Abu Hashim. This Hashimiyyah movement soon became dormant, but the Abbasids took it over, as a way to establish their credentials as pro-Shiite.³⁴⁰ The Abbasids spread their message, *da'wah*³⁴¹ clandestinely to prepare the ground work for an anti-Umayyad

³³⁷ Shoemaker *Apocalypse* p, 7, 108ff

³³⁸ Cook *Studies* p. 148

³³⁹ Crone and Hinds *God's Caliph* p. 85 "The social and economic grievances of at least some non-Arab Muslims, the *Mawali* served to add these people to the ranks of the anti-Umayyad movements. In upholding a policy of non-assimilation, the Umayyads not only condoned discrimination against non-Arabs; a number of the caliphs and their entourages actively engaged in it." William Tucker *Mahdīs* p.4 In addition the Umayyad state relied heavily of Syrian soldiers of tribal origins, who many other Muslims found "insufferable: Crone *God's Rule* p. 85

³⁴⁰ Sharon. p. 85 Yücesoy p. 59.

³⁴¹ In earlier Islam the word was commonly used to describe the Prophet's call, or summoning to Islam. It came to acquire a "politico- religious" meaning with the Abbasids using the word to summon the people to go back to the original Islam abandoned by the Umayyads Sharon p. 20ff

uprising.³⁴² They argued that the abandoning of the Prophet’s teachings and *sunnah* had resulted in the disunity of the Umma. Indeed, the Umayyads had opposed the Prophet and his values in his lifetime, and were continuing to do so.³⁴³ The Abbasids seem to have chosen the frontier province of Khurasan as an important base for a number of reasons: the area had not identified with any other mass movements;³⁴⁴ as an active front with the Turks the Muslims there were battle hardened soldiers;³⁴⁵ and, the province was governed from Iraq, the original home of many of Khurāsān’s Arab tribes, and where there was bad blood with Syria.³⁴⁶ Furthermore, unlike in the rest of the early Arabic empire, the Arabs settled in Khurāsān were dispersed among the local population, rather than in garrison towns.³⁴⁷ This led to a fairly rapid assimilation with the local Iranian majority. Also, importantly Khurāsān and Transoxania were “hotbeds of numerous religio-political movements with messianic overtones” ripe to be lured into an Abbasid led uprising, with its own messianic pretensions.³⁴⁸

³⁴² A possible example of their message was Ḥadīth such as “When you see the black banners have come forward from Khurasan, then go to them even if you have to crawl over snow, for among them is God’s Caliph, the Mahdī. Nu’aym p. 175

³⁴³ Sharon p. 22

³⁴⁴ Sharon p. 51f quoting Balādhurī’s *Ansab al-Ashraf* III, 198. David Cook notes that apocalyptic groups were often of the fringe of the Islamic empires. “Their world view would seem to include the premises that the center of the empire was corrupt and ready to fall to the first temptations of the End times. *Studies* p. 319

³⁴⁵ Sharon p. 53

³⁴⁶ *ibid.* p 62f Tucker *Mahdīs* p. 5f

³⁴⁷ See Nu’aym p. 104 “their black banners will advance from the East....their genealogies are to their villages.”

³⁴⁸ Yücesoy p. 25

Another rebellion, that of Abu ‘Isa, may have shaped the apocalyptic narrative. He was a self proclaimed Jewish prophet from Isfahan who led a revolt against the government, which lasted from the final days of the Umayyad Caliphate until the reign of al Mansur (d. 775 CE)³⁴⁹ As mentioned above, Ḥadīth speak of the Dajjāl having in his army, 70,000 Jews from Isfahan . Another, Shiite tradition ascribed to ‘Alī bin Abi Talib, states that the Dajjāl will emerge from Isfahan.³⁵⁰

There were also Ḥadīth which actually counseled avoiding participation in civil strife. Nu’yam devotes an entire chapter to “Those who Believed in Withdrawal during Tribulations.”³⁵¹ For example, “There will be tribulations, so stay close to the ground, and let each of you stay attached to his house. None will gush forth for the [tribulations] without them destroying it.”³⁵² Such Ḥadīth, or at least some of them probably generated by established authorities and others by persons dismayed by the bloodshed of the Fitnas,³⁵³ would eventually be absorbed in Sunni fiqh embodied within such maxims as "We do not take up the sword against commanders even when they are unjust.”³⁵⁴

³⁴⁹ Alexandra Cuffel, “Jewish Tribes and Women in the Genesis and Battle of the Dajjāl: Nu‘ayim ibn Ḥammād al-Khuzā‘ī al-Marwzi’s Kitāb al-Fitan” in *Peoples of the Apocalypse* (DeGruyter, 2016) p. 139

³⁵⁰ Berjei p. 94f

³⁵¹ Nu‘am p 92-100

³⁵² ibid. p 92

³⁵³ For example, “If two Muslims confront each other with swords, both the killer and the killed will be in Hellfire.”

Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 6672

³⁵⁴ Campbell footnote 1

The Abbasid Messianic Self Images

Once in power the Abbasids endeavored with a good deal of success to seize the narrative, manipulating history to establish their legitimacy. A strategic part of this effort involved emphasizing the “strong messianic dimension” of the new rulers.³⁵⁵ The early Abbasids upon assuming control introduced the custom of member of the dynasty adopting a *laqab*, an honorific or personal title, by which he would thenceforth be known, a practice not found among earlier Islamic rulers, nor the Byzantines or Sassanids.³⁵⁶ The earliest Abbasids all assumed titles with strong Messianic significance. This is especially clear with the titles of the third and fourth Caliphs, al-Mahdī and al-Hadi. The titles of the first and second rulers, al-Saffāḥ and al-Manṣūr at first do not seem to fit this pattern. However, it appears that al-Saffāḥ was a posthumous title, imposed by historians who felt that the founder of the dynasty needed his own title.³⁵⁷ Mas‘ūdī reports that he had been known as al-Mahdī, and in fact, there is textual evidence in his own inscriptions, such as a milestone from Northern Jordan dated 752–753 CE and in a building inscription of the Great Mosque of San’a.³⁵⁸ As for al-Manṣūr, the title was originally a Yemeni tribes’ messianic epithet.³⁵⁹ Textual evidence indicates that this title was in

³⁵⁵ Antoine Borrut “Vanishing Syria: Periodization and Power in Early Islam” *Der Islam* 2014; 91(1) p. 55

³⁵⁶ Bernard Lewis “The Regnal Titles of the First Abbasid Caliphs” in Bernard Lewis *Political Words and Ideas in Islam* p. 87f. Borrut *Memory* p. 125f, 332ff

³⁵⁷ “The surname al-Saffāḥ means “the blood thirsty” or “the generous”.” Moscati, S., “Abu ‘l-‘Abbās al-Saffāḥ”, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs.

³⁵⁸ Lindsted. p. 215 Borrut *Memory* p.333

³⁵⁹ Lewis *Regnal* p.93f Sharon Black Banners footnote 70

response to a challenge to Abbasid rule by some Alids.³⁶⁰ This was the time of the “true birth of the messianic figure of the Mahdī,” according to Said Arjomand.³⁶¹ Furthermore, al-Manṣūr reportedly had a dream in which the Prophet gave him a flag to fight the Dajjāl.³⁶² Unlike subsequent Abbasid rulers, who assumed their titles upon succeeding to the caliphate, or, as was often the case when designated as heir of the office, al Mansur’s son Muhammad adopted the title al Mahdī before being officially named the successor, and he and his fathers assumed their titles apparently at the same time.³⁶³ Textual and numismatic evidence indicates that the Muhammad named himself al Mahdī while governor of Khurasan, and after having achieved victory over an Alid challenger.³⁶⁴ He was also able to take advantage of a prophecy that the Mahdī would have the the same name as the Prophet himself.³⁶⁵

³⁶⁰Michael I. Bates, *Khurāsānī Revolutionaries and al-Mahd’is Title*” in Daftary Farhad and Meri, Joseph W. editors, *Culture and Memory in Medieval Islam* (London : I. B. Tauris, 2003) p, 279-317, Arjomand p.115, 118

³⁶¹ Arjomand *Messianism* p.113 There was considerable opposition to assigning the term to ordinary mortals, as can be seen in Ḥadīth proclaiming that they’re will be no Mahdī see ‘Isa son of Maryam, Yücesoy p, 40f

³⁶² Cook *Studies* p. 145 citing al-Balādhurī

³⁶³ Bates p. 282

³⁶⁴Michael I. Bates, *Khurāsānī Revolutionaries and al-Mahd’is Title*” in Daftary Farhad and Meri, Joseph W. editors, *Culture and Memory in Medieval Islam* (London : I. B. Tauris, 2003) p, 279-317, Arjomand p.115, 118

³⁶⁵ “If there was only a day left of this world, Allāh would extend it until He would send a man who is from me; or from my family. His name will be the same as my name and his father’s name will be the same as my father’s name. He will fill the world with fairness and justice just as it will be filled with tyranny and injustice”. [Sunan Abū Dāwūd: 4282] Bates *ibid* p. 297

The Fourth *Fitna*

The Abbasid Second Civil War was the strife between Hārūn al-Rāshīd's elder sons Amīn and Ma'mūn. Hārūn had divided his realm among his sons before this death in 194/809.³⁶⁶ His passing coincided with many apocalyptic prophecies foreseeing the imminent end of the dynasty to be followed by a messianic kingdom.³⁶⁷ In addition, there were eclipses and earthquakes in various parts of the Caliphate.³⁶⁸ Nu'aym records a detailed prophecy foreseeing this event:

A man of the descendants of Abbas will settle in Raqqa, and stay there two years. Then he will attack the Byzantines, [though] his affliction of the Muslims will be worse than his affliction of the Byzantines. Then he will return from the raid to Raqqa, and [news] which he dislikes will come to him from the east, and he will return back to the east, and not return from it. His son will rule after him, and during his time will be the appearance of the Sufyāni and the end of their rule.³⁶⁹

³⁶⁶ According to the standard narrative, he apportioned Amin his first successor, to be followed by Ma'mun, who would be given the governorship of greater Khurāsān in the interim, while a third brother, who would bear the laqab Muta'min upon accession to the caliphate, would assume the office upon agreement of the caliph in office at the time. Yücesoy p. 62

³⁶⁷ David Cook "The Apocalyptic Year 200/815-16 and the Events Surrounding it" in *Apocalyptic Time* (Leiden, Brill, 2000) p. 41 Yücesoy p. 50 Sharon p. 75ff

³⁶⁸ Yücesoy p. 13

³⁶⁹ Nu'aym, *Tribulations* p. 181 recorded in David Cook "Year 200" p. 46. Like many such prophecies, it is accurate until the very end. Another lengthy, prediction demonstrates the apocalyptic traditions associated with the third Islamic century: In the 220s: here will be death among the religious leadership of the world-until none are left...in the 230s the sky will rain hail like eggs and the cattle will perish, in the 240s the Nile and the Euphrates will cease to flow, so that they will sow in their river-courses, in the 250s there will be brigandage, wild animals will dominate humans and everybody will stay in their own towns, in the 260s the sun will cease (shining) for half an hour and half

Among the parties holding these expectations were various Shiite groups, and Syrian supporters of the Umayyads. Their hopes grew when Ma'mūn defeated and slew his brother in 198/813, and appointed the Eighth Imam of the Twelver Shiites 'Alī al-Ri 'ḍāas his successor. This appointment may have been the result of the approaching apocalyptically charged year of 200/815-16.³⁷⁰ Furthermore, it was 70 years from the beginning of the Abbasid uprising, a number considered significant in apocalyptic narratives.³⁷¹ This succession plan continued until al-Riḍā died, and Ma'mūn appointed an Abbasid as his heir. This action caused Shiite messianic hopes to dim, to be restored to a certain extent when a total eclipse of the sun occurred on June 26, 819 a few months after the Imam's death, demonstrating yet again that people's apocalyptic hopes remain strong despite disappointment.³⁷²

Al-Ma'mūn and his Messianic Persona

The civil war showed that the messianic beliefs which had brought the Abbasids to power were still fully operational.³⁷³ Al-Ma'mūn adopted messianic beliefs to buttress his secular and

of humanity and *jinn* will perish, in the 270s no-one will be born, and no female will be pregnant, in the 280s women will be like donkeys—so that 40 men will have intercourse with one woman and no one will think anything of it, in the 290s the year will be like a month, the month like a week, the week like a day, the day like an hour, an hour like the burning of an ulcer such that a man would leave his house and not arrive at the city gate until sunset and in 300 the rising of the sun from the west. Nu'aym p. 427

³⁷⁰ Cook Studies. p 42 F Yücesoy p, 50) states “a new orientation of prophecies on the dawn of the third Islamic century focused on the cosmic significance of “Abbasid sociopolitical life.”

³⁷¹ Cook *ibid*.

³⁷² *ibid* p. 66-7 This was also the day al Ma'mūn entered Baghdad, transferring his capital from Merv. Yücesoy. p. 97.

³⁷³ Yücesoy p. 28 See Patricia Crone *God's Rule* p.133-9 for a copy of the letter

religious policies, as is evinced by this calling himself Imām al-Hudā, the Imam of Guidance.³⁷⁴

Ma'mūn's naming of Alī al Riḍā as his heir has been the topic of much scholarly work. The 1993 publication of Wilfred Madelung's "New Documents Concerning al-Ma'mūn, al-Faḍl b. Sahl and Ālī al-Riḍā" raised the possibility of the decision being related to an apocalyptic narrative.³⁷⁵

In this letter to the "Abbasids in Baghdad," al-Ma'mūn asserted that his father Harūn had claimed on the authority of his ancestors and other sources that the 'Abbasid imperium would not continue for long. There would be an era of turbulence to be followed by the arrival of the Mahdī.³⁷⁶ It may also be noted that the year 200 AH was approaching.³⁷⁷

Al-Ma'mūn apparently felt that his triumph over his brother demonstrated his divinely sanctioned legitimacy and entitled him to take unprecedented actions. Thus, the Caliph exerted efforts to expand the empire which had been stalled for some time, his messianic inclinations apparently spurring his expeditions against the Byzantines. It appears that in the course of one of these campaigns he may have had the name 'Abd al Malik on the Dome of the Rock overwritten with his own name. One possible reason for this move was the presence of prophecies that

³⁷⁴ Yücesoy. p. 3 and p. 87 where he notes that Ma'mud took this step after Amin had ordered his governors to stop mentioning his brother's name in the Friday sermon. Ma'mun was also the first Abbasid to adopt the title Imam Kennedy p.132

³⁷⁵ "Wilferd Madelung "New Documents Concerning al-Ma'mūn, al-Faḍl b. Sahl and 'Alī al-Riḍā" *Studia Arabica* and *Islamica Festschrift for Ihsan 'Abbas*, ed. Wadād al-Qāḍī, American University of Beirut, Beirut 1981, p. 345-346 Yücesoy op. 92

³⁷⁶ Yücesoy p. 28 See Patricia Crone *God's Rule* p.133-9 for a copy of the letter

³⁷⁷ Nu'aym. writing before that date recorded the Ḥadīth "The Mahdī will appear during the year 200." P. 188 "The rule of the Abbasids will be disunited in the year [1]97 or [1] 99, and the Mahdī will arise in the year 200. P426

during the Apocalypse, one of the few places safe from the depredations of the Dajjāl will be the al-Aqsa Mosque, or on a larger scale, Bayt al Maqdis as a whole³⁷⁸. At the same time he encouraged the ongoing translation movement.³⁷⁹ This would have established the caliphate as a successor to the grand empires of the past, especially the Greek and the Persian.³⁸⁰ Holding religious and intellectual discussions at the royal enabled him to establish himself as a man of learning, and one able to independently interpret the tenets of Islam— and enforce them.³⁸¹.

In addition to calling himself Imam al-Huda,³⁸² Ma'mūn after the end of the civil war took the title of God's Caliph.³⁸³ In Baghdad he would exert religious authority in addition to political rule. This would lead to the Miḥna ("ordeal," or in this instance "inquisition"), in which he attempted to enforce the idea that the Qur'ān was uncreated, having existed for all eternity.³⁸⁴

³⁷⁸ Yücesoy p. 108

³⁷⁹ El Hibri points out that al Ma'mūn's role as a pioneer of the movement has been overemphasized, since the Abbasids has patronized translation from beginning of the movement. Tayeb El-Hibri, *The Abbasid Caliphate A History* (Cambridge University Press, 2021) p 118

³⁸⁰ Yücesoy p. 108

³⁸¹ *ibid.* p. 128

³⁸² Imam of Guidance. Huda and Mahdī share the same root.

³⁸³ *ibid.* p. 116 Crone and Hinds p. 21 have noted that the Ulema after Ma'mūn's attempt to decree religious doctrine failed largely rejected this title. "which, if taken seriously. leaves no room for the 'ulamā'" They have also shown that this title was used before Ma'mūn by the Umayyads and their successors." Al-Walid even dispatched a letter "devoted to the supreme importance of obedience to God's caliphs" *ibid.*p. 26ff

³⁸⁴ As Ma'mūn wrote "God has made it incumbent upon the imams of the Muslims. their caliphs, to strive for the maintenance of the religion of God with which He has entrusted them, the heritage of prophethood of which He has

He seems to have viewed himself as a Mujaddid.³⁸⁵ As such he had the messianic idea of purifying the faith.³⁸⁶ It has been noted that al Ma'mūn launched this program while he was encamped on the frontier readying to advance on Byzantium, apparently in the hopes of fulfilling the many prophecies linking the conquest of Constantinople to the Hour.³⁸⁷ The persecution ended after 15 years, in time leading to better defined boundaries between the authority of the State and the Ulema. Ironically one of the victims of the Miḥna was none other than the collector of apocalyptic Ḥadīth Nu'aym b. Hammad al-Marwazi, who died in prison of refusing to aver the createdness of the Qur'ān. One of the predictions he records states:

The Prophet said: The seventh of the 'Abbāsids will call the people to unbelief (i.e. the issue of the nature of the Qur'ān) but they will not follow him, so the people of his house will say: Do you want to eject us from our livelihoods? So he will say: I am acting towards you like Abū Bakr and 'Umar. But they will refuse him, then an enemy of his from the family of the Hashemites will kill him. When they attack him, they will differ among themselves—so he mentioned a long difference until the appearance of the Sufyānī.³⁸⁸

Following the early Abbasid period, around 250 AH/864 AD fewer apocalyptic traditions appeared at least in Sunni circles, perhaps coincident with the crystallization of the canonical

made them legatees, and the transmission of knowledge which He has committed to their care ... " Crone and Hinds p. 96. The reasons for the Miḥna are examined closely in John Nawas The Miḥna of 218 A. H./833 A. D. Revisited: An Empirical Study" Journal of the American Oriental Society, Oct. - Dec., 1996, Vol. 116, No. 4 (Oct. - Dec., 1996), pp. 698-708

³⁸⁵ Yücesoy p. 123 "God will raise for this community at the end of every 100 years the one who will renovate its religion for it." Abu Dawood Book 37: Kitab al-Malahim [Battles], Ḥadīth Number 4278 There have of course been other interpretations of the Miḥna as outlined in Yücesoy p. 13ff

³⁸⁶ Yücesoy p. 4

³⁸⁷ Yücesoy ibid

³⁸⁸ Nu'aym p. 111

Ḥadīth collections, and the “theological organization of the faith.”³⁸⁹ Most of the Ulema came to view the Hour as lying in the distant future. (See al Tabari’s dissection of the Prophet’s two fingers proclamation, discussed above.) Apocalyptic and messianic movements would continue to arise among Muslim peoples, both Sunni and Shiite, none of them as sweeping throughout the totality of the Islamicate and occupying its central locales of power, as had been the case in the first Hijra centuries, as this paper has demonstrated.

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³⁸⁹ Cook *Studies* p. 303 It may be noted that Ma’mūn was the last of the Abbasids to assume an apocalyptic regnal title. Cook “the Apocalyptic Year” p. 59 Lewis “Regnal Titles” p13ff

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