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Introduction: Approaches to Medieval Cultures of Eschatology

1. Medieval Apocalypticism and Eschatology

In all religions, ideas about the past, the present and the future were shaped and made meaningful by beliefs and expectations related to the End Times. Such beliefs in the Last Things, *ta eschata*, have been integral to Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism, especially in the pre-modern era,[1] and range from the final battle between good and evil and the dawn of a new, divine order to death, divine judgment and eternal afterlife. They also include the dreadful tribulations that every human will supposedly have to face before salvation. In the medieval West as in the East,[2] eschatology seems to have been part of the foundation upon which societies were built.[3] This period is often associated with anticipation of the Second Coming of Christ (*parousia*) or the advent of messianic figures such as the Hindu

1 This is well exemplified in the range of contributions to Walls, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology*, comprising articles about Jewish, Christian, Islamic, Buddhist and Hindu eschatology.

2 In spite of various efforts on the part of – mainly – Indian scholars to accommodate the notion of "medieval" to South Asia, its relevance remains highly questionable, as is that of "Indian feudalism" and many scholars' inclination to interpret, mostly for nationalistic reasons, Gupta India as a golden age not unlike Greek and Latin Antiquity. The use of categories such as "(early) medieval (India)", though very often uncritical, is a matter of convention rather than conviction, and such it should probably remain. On the presuppositions and dangers of the use of "(early) medieval", see Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism*, 28, and Wedemeyer, *Making Sense of Tantric Buddhism*, 58–66. Thus, we are aware that the concept "medieval" does not apply to all past communities under scrutiny here. It is therefore rather understood as a loose technical term and rough historical periodisation that can facilitate comparison; on trans-cultural comparison and comparative methodology see Pohl, "Introduction: Meanings of Community in Medieval Eurasia," and Pohl, Gingrich, "Medieval Worlds."

3 For recent appraisals of the extent to which apocalyptic thinking was prevalent in the Middle Ages see: Landes, *Heaven on Earth*; Bynum, Freedman, eds., *Last Things*; Fried, *Aufstieg aus dem Untergang*; Palmer, *The Apocalypse in the Early Middle Ages*; Rubenstein, *Nebuchadnezzar's Dream*; Ryan, ed., *A Companion to the Pre-Modern Apocalypse*; Lawson, *The Quran, Epic and Apocalypse*; Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*; Shoemaker, *The Apocalypse of Empire*.

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Kalkin and the Buddhist Maitreya that could bring both hope and fear.[4] There was also a strong concern with the dates and exact circumstances of these events. In Islamic eschatology, stories about death, the afterlife, and the end of the world play a vital role in the Qur'an and *ḥadīth* literature,[5] as almost "every *sūrah* refers to eschatology, particularly to the physical rewards and punishments of heaven and hell"[6], reminding believers that earthly deeds had an everlasting impact on the fate of the soul. From an anthropological and phenomenological point of view at least, this belief has much in common with Hindu and Buddhist conceptions about retribution for actions and the type of punishment or reward one can expect to experience in hell or in heaven.[7] Parallels to the Christian expectation of Christ's Second Coming can be found in the prediction that the community of Muḥammad would last for 167 years and thirty-one days after his death, creating a general atmosphere of expectancy or fear.[8] Quite similarly, Hindus and Buddhists throughout Asia engaged in sophisticated calculations concerning the beginning and end of the *kaliyuga*, the advent of Maitreya or the final demise of Buddhism.

In Jewish, Christian, Islamic, Buddhist and Hindu theologies, ideas regarding the end of the world and the advent of messianic figures developed alongside chronological models, revelatory literature, apocalyptic imagery from holy texts and the ongoing process of commenting on them, particularly in exegetical and historiographical works.[9] These visions can not only be seen in a wide variety of theological and historiographical sources but also in hagiography, sermons and poems, and even in sources that we would nowadays group under the moniker of "pragmatic texts", such as charters and maps. In the Bible, the Books of Daniel and Ezekiel, the

4 On the expectations of Christ's return and the belief in the resurrection of all people, which are well exemplified in 1 Corinthians 15:51–57, 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 and 5:1–11, Matthew 24:42–44, 2 Peter 3:10, Revelation 3:3 and 16:15, see Walls, "Introduction," 3; Yarbro Collins, *Apocalypticism and Christian Origins*; Bynum Walker, "Introduction;" Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church*. On the advent of the Hindu and Buddhist messiahs see Deeg, "Das Ende des Dharma und die Ankunft des Maitreya;" Zürcher, "Eschatology and Messianism in Early Chinese Buddhism," and Zürcher, "Prince Moonlight."

5 See Chittick, "Muslim Eschatology," and the comprehensive collection on paradise in Islam in Günther, Lawson, eds., *Roads to Paradise*, in particular, Günther, Lawson, "Introduction," and Lawson, "Paradise in the Quran and the Music of Apocalypse." See further the studies by Lange, *Paradise and Hell in Islamic Traditions,* and Lange, "Introducing Hell in Islamic Studies."

6 Waldmann, "Eschatology: Islamic Eschatology." See also Lawson, *The Quran, Epic and Apocalypse*, and Sinai, "The Eschatological Kerygma of the Early Qur'an."

7 Chappell, "Early Forebodings of the Death of Buddhism."

8 Cook, "The Apocalyptic Year 200/815–16;" Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*.

9 For a discussion of apocalyptic time, in particular on the apocalyptic significance of specific dates in Western European history, see besides the works of Richard Landes and Johannes Fried: Brandes, "Endzeiterwartung im Jahre 1009 A.D?," (especially on the discussion about the importance of the year 1000), and in general Pezzoli-Olgiati, "Im Spannungsfeld zwischen Weltende und Offenbarung." For a treatment of this topic in Islam see n. 8 and Hoyland, "Early Islam as a Late Antique Religion," and in Judaism see Novak, "Jewish Eschatology."

Revelation to John, and in the Qur'an, sura 18, 33, 41 and 81–84, which all mention the Last Judgment and the Hour among other things, offered key tools to decode God's plan for the community of believers. This plan would be revealed at the end of time, but would also be presaged on earth by signs and wonders. These texts provided central models for the medieval perception of the world and its peoples,[10] for the interpretation of socio-political changes, for the understanding of astronomical and natural phenomena,[11] and for the individual's path to salvation.[12] In much the same way, narrative and/or normative Hindu literature such as the *Manusmṛti*, the *Mahābhārata* and the Purāṇas record End-Time-related interpretations of the health and morality of Brahmanical society, the legitimacy and relevance of royal policies, taxes, life expectancy, and cosmic and military events etc. At the same time, these bulky documents provided the Brahmanical elites with a rich repertoire of ready-to-use images and symbols that could give meaning to people's social, economic, political and religious experiences.[13] This also applies to Buddhist canonical literature, which the Buddhist literati constantly resorted to in order to locate the present on the "timetables of decline"[14], to find criteria to estimate the degree of the community's degeneration and to develop potent rhetorical tools to enjoin its repristination.

Texts containing divine mysteries and knowledge that could only be obtained and understood by true believers or insiders are central aspects of Jewish and Christian apocalypses, a Greek word referring to a divine secret (about the imminent end of time and of history, and the fate of the dead) that has to be revealed.[15] Thus, in the context of Jewish and Christian apocalypses, the term "apocalypse" refers to both a particular prophetic literary genre in the widest sense incorporating specific textual phrases and motives, and a scenario that gradually unfolds at the end of time.[16] This concept of a divine truth that is revealed to a prophet can also be found

10 See the contributions in Voß, Brandes, Schmieder, eds., *Peoples of the Apocalypse*, and in Seyed-Gohrab, Doufikar-Aerts, McGlinn, eds., *Gog and Magog*.

11 Palmer, "Climates of Crisis;" Wieser, "The Chronicle of Hydatius of Chavez."

12 See the contributions in Bynum, Freedman, eds., *Last Things*; for the role of eschatology in early ascetic life see Moschos, *Eschatologie im ägyptischen Mönchtum*, and Brown, *The Ransom of the Soul*.

13 Eltschinger, "Apocalypticism, Heresy and Philosophy," 29–85, and González-Reimann, *The Mahābhārata and the Yugas*.

14 Nattier, "Buddhist Eschatology," and Nattier, *Once upon a Future Time*.

15 See Collins, McGinn, and Stein, "General Introduction;" Webb, "Apocalyptic," and the contribution of Heil in *Cultures of Eschatology*, vol. 1.

16 See the influential attempt to define apocalypse as a literary genre in Collins, "What is Apocalyptic Literature?," with a later reappraisal in Collins, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, 150: "An apocalypse is a supernatural revelation, which reveals secrets of the heavenly world, on the one hand, and of eschatological judgment on the other." On the establishment of "apocalypse" as a narrative and literary genre see besides the works of John J. Collins and Adela Yarbro Collins: Reeves, *Trajectories in Near Eastern Apocalyptic*, and Frankfurter, "Early Christian Apocalypticism." On the creation of the corpus of apocalyptic literature and nineteenth-century efforts, see Collins, "What is Apocalyptic Literature;" Zolles, Zolles, Wieser, "Einleitung;" Donner, "Typology of Eschatological Concepts."

in the Qur'an, and is known and referred to as *The Revelation (al-tanzīl)*, God's message sent down to Muḥammad.[17]

In both Islamic and Christian theology, eschatology is bound up with a linear understanding of time, colliding at the end of the world.[18] 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 events. To be sure, stories about the rise and fall of any empire could be framed with dates and decisive events, or according to the success or failure of its political and military leaders. However, the same stories could also be told as part of an apocalyptic scenario, as can be observed for the Late Roman Empire or in contemporary Byzantine commentaries on the expansion of Islam.[19]

The Christian centuries have seen many different ways of proclaiming that the end was nigh, that the world was teetering on the brink of disaster or on the edge of a new epoch. Declarations of this type were the subject of numerous controversies over the course of medieval history, which connected religious authorities, theologians, ascetics, historians, radical thinkers, rulers, reformers or prophets of doom. The calculation of the end of the world using passages from the Bible or the interpretation of the Book of Revelation and its integration into the developing Christian canon were – and would remain – highly controversial issues.[20] Central to many of these medieval debates was the question of whether apocalyptic visions or motifs were to be interpreted in a literal or in a spiritual sense. The belief in the imminence of the end of the world reverberated persistently throughout the Middle Ages and found its most prominent expressions in the expectation of the real advent of a messianic age coinciding with the return of Christ and the establishment of a one-thou-

17 Although in recent scholarship the apocalyptic aspects of the Qur'an have been discussed more prominently, the Qur'an and Islam have not, in general, received that much attention in the field of apocalyptic scholarship; for a detailed discussion including the different approaches of modern scholarship, see Lawson, "Paradise in the Quran and the Music of Apocalypse," 93–136; Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet*, 118–136.

18 For an overview, see the contributions in Baumgarten, ed., *Apocalyptic Time*, analysing Jewish and Christian apocalyptic calculations as well as apocalyptic concepts of time in Islam and in Buddhism. See further Eco, "Die Zeit ist eine Erfindung des Christentums?," 241–245, and Sherwood, "'Napalm Falling like Prostitutes'," esp. 39–44.

19 See for instance Brandes, "Gog, Magog und die Hunnen," for the final years of the Western Roman Empire; Meier, "Eschatologie und Kommunikation im 6. Jahrhundert n. Chr.," and Cameron, "Late Antique Apocalyptic," for Islam and the Byzantine Empire.

20 On the topic of calculating the end of the world, see Palmer, *The Apocalypse in the Early Middle Ages*, 1–24, 42–50; Palmer, "The Ordering of Time," 605–618; Landes, "Lest the Millennium Be Fulfilled;" Landes, "Millenarismus absconditus;" Fried, "Endzeiterwartung um die Jahrtausendwende;" Fried, *Dies irae*, 86–94.

sand-year-long saintly reign on earth,[21] which, in Muslim belief, has its equivalent in the appearance of the Mahdī[22] and in the idea of paradise on earth.[23] These concepts encouraged the establishment of parallels between apocalyptic motifs, such as the Antichrist/*al-Masīḥ al-Dajjāl*[24] and Gog and Magog, and real-world events or peoples, creating an apocalyptic topography spanning from Jerusalem via Dabiq to the Caspian Gates, where the various prophesied End-Time scenarios could eventually unfold.[25] Much the same can be said of Indo-Tibetan ideas pertaining to the city of Shambhala as it appears in Kālacakra literature. Here, the dominant apocalyptic narrative, Kalkin's destruction of Muslim troops in Mecca, could be interpreted exoterically as referring to future events in the macrocosm and esoterically as reflecting processes at work at the level of the devotee's subtle physiology. And although apocalyptic ideas have often been held to convey dread and terror, destruction and devastation, their use and interpretation in reference to contemporary circumstances was not merely a theological reaction to political events.[26] Apocalyptic imagery also concerned the very souls of believers living through what was thought to be the End Times and could be a driving force behind movements of reform as well as of personal transformation.[27]

A question that occupied the minds of many medieval religious authorities was how to integrate apocalyptic imagery into religious identity. This need not have stemmed from a conscious decision on the part of the authorities to control "the" apocalyptic discourse but rather from an awareness of potential spiritual challenges

21 On millenarianism or millennialism as the umbrella term for various Christian beliefs, see the contributions in Wessinger, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Millennialism*; influential is the work of Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*; a comprehensive overview and analysis is provided by Landes, *Heaven on Earth*, and also McGinn, "Wrestling with the Millennium." One of the most prominent representatives of this belief in the Christian Middle Ages was Joachim of Fiore. On the role of messianic figures in Judaism and Christianity in general, see Ehrmann, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium*, and Yarbro Collins, Collins, *King and Messiah as Son of God*.

22 Filiou, *Apocalypse in Islam*, 30–65.

23 On the belief in Sunni Islam that the heavenly Jerusalem would be realised on earth, see Lange, *Paradise and Hell in Islamic Traditions*, esp. 246–256.

24 See the contributions in Brandes, Schmieder, eds., *Antichrist*; McGinn, *Antichrist*, and Filiou, *Apocalypse in Islam*, 104–121.

25 Lange, *Paradise and Hell in Islamic Traditions*, 245–266. On the role of peoples and otherness in apocalyptic, political narratives see also the upcoming volume of the 2019-conference "Politics – History – Eschatology. Functional, Inter(con)textual, Structural, and Comparative Approaches to Gog and Magog," organised by Georges Tamer, Lutz Greisiger, Julia Wannenmacher at the University of Erlangen-Nürnberg: https://www.zfl-berlin.org/veranstaltungen-detail/items/politics-history-eschatology-functional-intercontextual-structural-and-comparative-approaches-to-gog-and-magog.html [last accessed 1 March, 2020].

26 Reeves, *Trajectories in Near Eastern Apocalyptic*, esp. 4–6, stresses the function of apocalypse as a specific narrative and mindset.

27 Gabriele, Palmer, eds., *Apocalypse and Reform*; Brown, *The Ransom of the Soul*; Nattier, *Once Upon a Future Time*; Baun, "Last Things."

facing the community.[28] In general, pondering the relevance of apocalyptic notions to medieval societies belonged not only to intellectual controversies and doctrinal disputes but was also a matter of establishing authority and orthodoxy (if not orthopraxy), of balancing political power and social cohesion.[29] Apocalyptic literature certainly contains a clear revolutionary potential, with its visions of the destruction of earthly powers and its promise of divine justice and liberation from oppression (Rev. 20; Dan. 2).[30] These texts not only depicted scenarios of crisis and violence but could also be used to instigate political action, social change or revolutionary violence in pursuit of the millennium.[31] In medieval Christian and Islamic communities, conquest, mission and expansion would be grounded in eschatology, with the crusades and *jihād* being the most prominent examples.[32] On the other hand, apocalyptic literature could also be used to express and overcome trauma, and to find relief and consolation.[33]

Eschatology is often perceived as being inextricably connected to monotheistic religions, especially to the revelatory religions of the Book and their linear concept of time. However, eschatology and the drive to give history meaning by reference to existing prophecies and scenarios of the end are also integral to Hinduism and Buddhism, in spite of the fact that these religions operate with cyclic time. For, cyclic as time may be, the periods in which it unfolds are so big that their repetition makes no difference in terms of the devotee's and the community's conception of their present-day experience: that Maitreya will discover and preach Buddhism anew in a few billion years does not make the imminent loss of Buddhism less dramatic; that a new *kṛtayuga* or "golden age" will rise at the consumption of the present *kaliyuga* or "iron age" does only little to alleviate the miseries of those suffering from terrible illnesses, the ferocity of soldiers, natural cataclysms and unrighteous kings. In other

28 Buc, *Holy War, Martyrdom, and Terror*, 140.

29 Pagels, *Revelations*, on the potential of the Revelation to John against opponents; Landes, *Heaven on Earth*, 37–88; Fried, *Dies irae*, 148–155; Doniger O'Flaherty, "The Origin of Heresy in Hindu Mythology."

30 Schüssler-Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*.

31 Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 111–164; Wessinger, "Apocalypse and Violence;" Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*. On the radical social aspects in apocalyptic traditions, see also Rowland, Bradstock, "Christianity: Radical and Political;" Collins, "Radical Religion and Ethical Dilemmas of Apocalyptic Millenarianism," and Arjomand, "Messianism, Millennialism and Revolution in Early Islamic History."

32 For a reappraisal of the connection between apocalypse and violence, see Buc, *Holy War, Martyrdom, and Terror*; Rubenstein, *Nebuchadnezzar's Dream*; Whalen, *Dominion of God*; Cook, *Understanding Jihad*; Cook, "Muslim Apocalyptic and Jihād," and Bashear, "Apocalyptic and Other Materials on Early Muslim-Byzantine Wars." On the concept of *jihād* and its significance in medieval society, see also the contributions by Buc, Christys and Shoemaker in *Cultures of Eschatology*, vol. 1.

33 On the question of trauma – both individual and collective – and prophecy in the Book of Revelation, see Pagels, *Revelations*, and Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 99–104; for the Book of Ezekiel, see Poser, *Das Ezechielbuch als Trauma-Literatur*. On the social-psychological interpretation of apocalyptic thought in general, see Wilson, "The Biblical Roots of Apocalyptic."

words, the cyclic time of dogmatic cosmologies is by no means incompatible with the linear time of human experience.[34] Buddhists reckon with cosmic eras or eons organised into smaller periods, during which human life expectancy increases from ten to 80,000 years, before decreasing back to ten. According to their dogmatics, the final phase of a period of decrease is characterised by a set of five "degenerations" or "corruptions" (*kaṣāya*), which operate at the level of cosmic conditions (warfare, illnesses, famine), life-span, morality, wrong opinions and defilements. Down to the present, these five *kaṣāya*s have been read as unmistakable signs of the End whenever Buddhist communities going through times of crisis and hardship thought that they perceived them in their immediate environment. *Mutatis mutandis*, the same can be said of the imagery of the "demise of the good law (= Buddhism)" (*saddharmavipralopa* in Sanskrit; 末法, *mofa* in Chinese and *mappō* in Japanese), perhaps the most central motif of Buddhist apocalypticism, according to which Buddhism, the very means of human salvation, is going to disappear after a period of gradual decline of 500, 1,000, 1,500, 5,000 etc. years.[35] Again, that a new cycle will start, or that Buddhism will be "renovated" after a period of extinction, does not make those events less dramatic and their experience less linear.[36]

Given this plethora of topics and different approaches, eschatology and apocalypticism constitute a dynamic field of research and have received much scholarly attention over the past forty years, especially from the beginning of the new millennium onwards. The results of this renewed interest appear in a number of important publications combining studies in the literary traditions of apocalypticism with research on the social functions and cultural history of and the theological elaborations on apocalyptic imagery. For example, the three volumes of *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism* (1998), the *Oxford Handbook of Eschatology* (2007), the *Oxford Handbook of Millennialism* (2011), the compendia *Abendländische Apokalyptik* (2013) and *Penser la fin du monde* (2014), and the *Oxford Handbook of Apocalyptic Literature* (2014) offer systematic, encyclopedic treatments of eschatology and apocalypticism from the ancient world up to the present day, from Jewish and Christian traditions to secular, post-apocalyptic appropriations. Building on the results of these substantial studies, the present volumes aim to introduce new, pre-modern perspectives to the field by comparatively addressing eschatology and apocalypticism in Christian, Islamic and Buddhist communities.[37] While many studies so far have focused primarily on Europe, *Cultures of Eschatology* actively engages in cross-cul-

34 Nattier, *Once upon a Future Time*; von Stietencron, "Kalkulierter Religionsverfall."

35 Eltschinger, "Apocalypticism, Heresy and Philosophy."

36 Nattier, *Once upon a Future Time*; Seiwert, "End of Time and New Time in Medieval Chinese Buddhism."

37 See also the upcoming volume of the 2017-conference "End(s) of Time(s)" at the University of Erlangen-Nürnberg, organised by Klaus Herbers, Christian Lackner, Hans-Christian Lehner with a similarly comparative approach, including Christian, Islamic and Far Eastern traditions: https://www.hsozkult.de/conferencereport/id/tagungsberichte-7622 [last accessed 1 March, 2020].

tural comparison in order to shed light on specific literary, iconographic, intellectual and religious traditions. Apocalyptic thought is analysed from a multi-disciplinary and "trans-areal" angle, including contributions from history, social anthropology, religious studies, Christian theology, art history and philology. Through expanding the geographical scope from medieval Europe to the Mediterranean world, the Near East and Asia, including India, Tibet, China and Japan, the contributions seek to come closer to an understanding of: how apocalyptic thought influenced and factored into the political and religious perception and self-definition of communities; what role it played in the construction of a community's identity or in the perception of an "other"; how eschatology contributed language, images, metaphors and models for framing history; how it impacted on individual perspectives on life, the world and the afterlife. Bringing together scholars with different research backgrounds provides a unique opportunity to reflect on the various ways in which divine presence was felt in the course of history.

The volumes *Cultures of Eschatology* paint a multi-faceted picture of End-Time scenarios in medieval communities. While providing their readers with a wealth of information and a broad array of source material, these volumes also testify to the scholars' ongoing efforts to address the theoretical, methodological and terminological challenges of dealing with eschatology/apocalypticism. The terms "eschatology" and "apocalypse" have been subject to many scholarly debates in the past, and all attempts at providing them with generally applicable definitions remain controversial and problematic.[38] Furthermore, even if Christian eschatology is not the primary focus of our volumes, we are aware that the terms and concepts we use in order to describe apocalyptic traditions and phenomena, including non-Judeo-Christian ones, are deeply rooted in Jewish and Christian cultures and scholarly traditions,[39] as well as in the traditions of an "enlightened Bible"[40]. Therefore, it is important to emphasise that, in general, we are using eschatology and apocalypticism as low-threshold terms in order to allow for a more pragmatic approach to comparison,[41] even though some authors engage actively with the question "what is eschatology/apocalypse/apocalypticism?" from the perspective of their respective fields of research (Appel, Bergmeier, Günther, Heil, Lobrichon, Shoemaker, Zolles).

However, the heterogeneous understanding of "eschatology" and "apocalypse" may reflect not only different scholarly traditions but also the polyvalent and polysemic character of apocalypticism/eschatology itself in its different historical con-

38 See Webb, "Apocalyptic;" Collins, "What is Apocalyptic Literature?," and the contribution of Heil to *Cultures of Eschatology*, vol. 1.

39 Nattier, "Buddhist Eschatology."

40 On the establishment of an academic programme for interpreting and appropriating the Bible in the 18th and 19th centuries, see Legaspi, *The Death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical Studies*, 28–33.

41 See Gingrich, "Medieval Eurasian Communities by Comparison."

texts.[42] Our aim is thus not to generate new and disputable definitions or to advocate hermeneutic unity but to provide concretised perspectives. We therefore focus on five important features of pre-modern eschatology that could serve as vantage points for comparison in all religions under scrutiny and that are reflected in the individual sections of the volumes:[43] first, collective eschatology provided medieval societies with a hermeneutic tool for understanding and deciphering the past, the present and the future, a universal and "divinely" foreordained framework for history and historiography, in which socio-political events were thought to unfold. Unravelling the meaning of historical events, change and crises often involved bringing the exegesis of holy scriptures, symbols and prophecies to ever deeper levels, the revealed texts being in turn, as it were, validated by history. Second, and in close connection to the above, eschatological scenarios tended to generate and to structure conceptions of cosmological time, be it linear (with or without Final Judgment and like events) or cyclic (often involving a degeneration process). Third, eschatology defined and transformed space, differentiating between otherworldly and thisworldly dimensions and bringing together the universal/cosmic and the local. This could comprise a cosmic as well as a concrete earthly dimension, as when cosmic entities such as angels or demons were believed to interfere in earthly events or otherworldly, divine places were sought to be located or established on earth. Fourth, eschatology had a strong bearing on the constitution and strengthening of communities, providing them with powerful tools for identifying and fighting against disruptive forces, threats and enemies and expressing their concerns about their fate (salvation or restoration of a nation, a people or a group). Fifth, eschatology is not only concerned with the fate of empires and nations but also of individuals. All religions provide scenarios and itineraries for the personal afterlife that are mapped onto traditional, at times mystical cosmologies (certain areas of which can be strongly debated, such as Purgatory or some "karmic" destinies) and are conditioned by divine or purely mechanical retribution for individual deeds. Ideas of retribution and redemption combine the fear of death and salvation with ideas of judgment, repentance, reward or punishment in the hereafter.

Keeping these intersections in mind, we are not looking for direct parallels and *prima facie* similarities between Christian, Islamic, Hindu and Buddhist eschatology. This is important insofar as the establishment of literary traditions, which could flourish for centuries, and the (re-)use of similar apocalyptic motifs and language over a longer period of time could result in longue-durée patterns of apocalyptic thought emerging that might at the same time obscure changing underlying concepts of time, identity and community at a specific point in history. Therefore,

42 Zolles, Zolles, Wieser, "Einleitung," and recently the overview in Donner, "A Typology of Eschatological Concepts."

43 Sherwood, "'Napalm Falling Like Prostitutes'," 39, provides a lucid summary of the concept of apocalypse, which is reflected in our features for comparison.

our aim is to trace the social dynamics and discursive strategies behind phenomena that either actually were or could be subsumed under the heading "apocalyptic" in order to construe heuristic hypotheses regarding possibly overlapping/converging scenarios, motifs and strategies.[44]

2. The Contents of the Volumes: An Overview

The present volumes explore the many ways apocalyptic thought and eschatological visions intersected with the development of medieval political and religious communities, with social changes and with the emergence of new intellectual traditions. The chronological range runs from the early Christian communities of the first century through the times of the Islamic invasion and the Crusades and up to modern receptions in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The geographical focus spans from Carolingian Spain to the Byzantine Empire and from South Yemen to the legendary Caspian Gates, and also encompasses the Hidden Lands of Tibetan Buddhism and Japanese Shintō culture. The contributions bring together topics that are central to eschatology, such as death, resurrection and afterlife, the end of time and musings about the transience of the world or of an empire, and consider them all as elements integral to visions of the Last Things rather than as separate phenomena.

The case studies draw on material from various historical contexts. They include the results of new fieldwork carried out in Tibet, India, Italy, Greece and Turkey (Bergmeier, Eltschinger, Gelle), as well as new findings from the study of ancient and medieval manuscripts – such as translations of newly found or underappreciated sources as well as a first critical edition of one recension of a well-known apocalyptic text – or of material culture (Chen, Däumer, Dunn, Grifoni/Gantner, Heiss/Hovden, Kramer, Lobrichon, van Oort, Warntjes). While some contributions offer overarching perspectives on the different types of apocalyptic thinking in different religions (Appel, Buc, Chen, Doufikar-Aerts, Dunn, Günther, Lobrichon, Scheid, Tiefenauer, Zolles), others present in-depth case studies of a single source, of an individual's approach (Christys, Czock, Lucas, Sommer, Treml), of the use of a particular apocalyptic motif (Afentoulidou, Gelle, Heiss, Tealdi, Tiefenauer, Tottoli) or of a specific local context which helps to further elucidate the concept of eschatology/apocalypse at a specific point in history (Günther, Heil, Kramer, Palmer, Shoemaker, Ward).

While comparison is an important aspect of our analytical approach, it does not play an equally important role in all contributions. In some, comparison is the central starting point of the analysis, either cross-culturally or within a specific context (Buc, Palmer, Ward). In other instances, comparison is carried out through examin-

44 See Standen, "Introduction: Towards a Global Middle Ages," on exploring medieval global phenomena with a focus on social interactions.

ing how ideas of eschatology were introduced into different (religious) communities (Chen, Dunn, Scheid), how apocalyptic images and texts travelled (Bergmeier, Doufikar-Aerts, Grifoni/Gantner, van Oort) or how intertextual relations were established (Däumer, Eltschinger, Heil, Sommer).

The first volume, *Empires and Scriptural Authorities*, starts by examining the formation of literary and visual apocalyptic traditions and considering how these were embedded into religious communities and how they reacted to social developments and political life. The section *Literary and Visual Traditions* brings together overarching perspectives from medieval Christian, Islamic, Buddhist and Hindu communities. This first section starts with Guy Lobrichon's chapter on the overall role and pastoral function of the Church with regard to questions of the Last Judgment and salvation. Taking a closer look at the reception of the Book of Revelation and its medieval commentaries between the ninth and twelfth centuries, Lobrichon examines the various possibilities for interpreting its apocalyptic message, either in a literal or in a spiritual sense, which could in turn lead to the formation of radical ideas or result in attempts by the church authorities to channel the apocalyptic discourse. Lobrichon shows how, in the Carolingian era, Christian literary production, specifically of apocalyptic literature, became the task of ecclesiastical elites, while in later centuries apocalyptic discourse coalesced with the writing of history, most prominently in the works of Joachim of Fiore. Turning to Antiquity, Uta Heil argues in her chapter that in early Christian communities apocalyptic writing, specifically apocryphal apocalyptic texts, was primarily part of a literary tradition rather than an expression of cultural-historical notions. These texts, which were still being produced after the formation of the Biblical canon had been completed, did not deal with the end of the world and with apocalypticism as a cultural phenomenon, but had, as for instance the *Didaskalia*, a specific function in ecclesiastical practice and law.

Muslim apocalyptic literature, its rhetoric and imagery are analysed in Sebastian Günther's chapter. While the production or proliferation of apocalyptic texts is often related to an atmosphere of crisis or an event perceived as a catastrophe, Günther shows that apocalyptic ideas were inextricably embedded in a broad medieval Islamic discourse. This resulted in the development of a rich body of Arabic literature discussing topics that are central to eschatology.

Surprisingly, eschatological concepts entered the realm of visual arts relatively late in the medieval West and Byzantium. The complex relationship between text and image is addressed in Armin Bergmeier's chapter, which shows that medieval textual and visual discourse on the End Times did not develop synchronically. While images referring to the Book of Revelation had been in use since Late Antiquity, it was not until the high Middle Ages that a distinctive eschatological visual tradition emerged. Bergmeier discusses a rich corpus of Last Judgment iconography, introduces new perspectives on its interpretation and offers insights on recent scholarly debates on eschatology in art history. The development of Hindu and Indian Buddhist eschatological doctrines, literature and cosmologies is discussed in

Vincent Eltschinger's article. It deals with the most significant instances of the Indian Buddhist appropriation of the *kaliyuga* – a central aspect of orthodox Brahmanical/Hindu apocalyptic prophecies – and engages in a detailed discussion of the question of whether and in which circumstances *buddhas* appear in the End, be it only of a single cycle.

Questions about the reinterpretation and recontextualisation of apocalyptic texts from a philological perspective are brought to the fore in the cluster on *Scriptural Traditions and their Reinterpretations*. This cluster deals with the question of how apocalyptic texts were rewritten over the course of time, how they were introduced into different communities and new contexts, how intertextual links to previous traditions were established and how new meanings were generated. The section starts with Michael Sommer's chapter, which analyses the intertexts in the Book of Revelation. Introducing different scholarly approaches and readings, Sommer examines the issue of the text's authorship and intended audience, and shows how various scholarly prophetic traditions, debates over religious identity and the text's political dimension coalesced into a complex system of intertexts. Two centuries later, in the third century, Jewish-Christian communities, especially the Elcesaites, and their lively prophetic traditions provided a fertile ground for the development of the gnostic movement of Manichaeism, centred on the eschatological prophet Mani. Manichaean eschatological thinking spread from Mesopotamia as far as Roman Africa and Spain in the West and China in the East. In his chapter, Johannes van Oort argues that the newly discovered manuscripts of the Mani Codex demonstrate that various religious traditions, Iranian as well as Jewish and Christian, influenced the features of Manichaean eschatology.

One of the most famous early medieval apocalyptic texts were the *Revelationes* of Pseudo-Methodius, a world history that locates the events of the Islamic expansion within the context of Christian salvation history. Originally composed in northern Mesopotamia (Iraq) in the late seventh century, the text was quickly translated from Syriac into Greek and Latin, and a high number of medieval Latin manuscripts testify to its wide distribution and influence. One reason for its popularity was its multifunctionality. Examining the different redactions of the Third Recension, Cinzia Grifoni and Clemens Gantner show how the *Revelationes* could be easily adjusted to the interests of a Latin Western audience. A first critical edition of the Third Recension, using a newly discovered witness, is included. Questions of textual authority and community are also addressed in Matthias Däumer's analysis of the apocryphal *Book of Watchers*, which traces its images and ideas – such as the motifs of forbidden knowledge and forbidden gifts – from the Qumran fragments to chronological religious works from the high Middle Ages. Focusing on textual traditions, Däumer argues that eschatological motifs drawn from apocryphal literature could traverse different literary genres, such as the otherworldly journeys of Enoch that were revived and integrated in the popular genre of *Jenseitsreisen* in the high Middle Ages.

Apocalyptic texts such as the *Revelationes*, which emphasised and discussed scenarios of threat and crisis, played an important role as vehicles for propaganda, for defining a community's religious and political enemies and for rallying people behind a joint cause. The cluster *Empires and Last Days 1* analyses the role of empires in medieval apocalyptic literature and examines how musings about the stability or continuity of political communities, the perception of enemies, conflicts over religious orthodoxy, or acts of violence could be connected to ideas of the imminence of the end. Philippe Buc offers a comparative analysis of the role of eschatology in provoking violence and martyrdom in medieval Japan, Catholic Europe and the Islamic world. He shows how, during the First Crusade, biblical motifs of martyrdom and divine revenge were enacted in armed violence and in the liturgy, as people were convinced that they were living through the Last Days. The central role of imminent eschatology in early Islam is examined more closely in Stephen Shoemaker's chapter, which anchors this notion in a broader trend in the Mediterranean world of Late Antiquity, specifically in the political eschatology of the Byzantine Christian communities. Imperial eschatology played a significant role in the apocalyptic thinking of the time and finds an echo in Muḥammad's teachings and the beginnings of Islam. The Islamic conquests, in particular, were often connected to eschatological hopes and ideas of inaugurating the events of the *eschaton*. Ann Christys' chapter zooms in on the question of how the expansion of Islam and the conquest of Spain were narrated in the works of the ninth-century Andalusi scholar Ibn Ḥabīb. Christys shows that in his *History*, which ends with an account of the rise of the Umayyads and a prediction of their downfall, apocalyptic *ḥadīth* traditions are elements integral to the narration of historical events. Moral commandments and warnings that sinful behaviour would bring about the Hour stand at the centre of Ibn Ḥabīb's eschatological approach towards history. A complementary perspective on events in medieval Spain from the Christian communities is provided in James T. Palmer's chapter, which examines three different case studies concerning Christian writers in Iberia and Francia in the eighth and ninth centuries: the Adoptionist debate, the conflict over the martyrs of Córdoba and the *Chronica Prophetica* of 883. Palmer shows how apocalyptic thought offered a conceptual yet flexible repertoire to define Christian identity, to establish orthodoxy and to express ideas of inclusion and alterity with regard to heretical beliefs.

The contributions in the last section, *Apocalyptic Cosmologies and End Time Actors*, examine the connection between cosmological concepts, natural phenomena and political prophecy, and consider how they were embedded into apocalyptic discourse. In Tibetan Buddhist cosmology and eschatology, the tradition of treasure texts (*gter ma*), their revelation and the prophecies of the Hidden Lands all played an important role. Analysing the example of the Hidden Land of Yolmo, a mountainous area in Nepal northeast of Kathmandu, Zsóka Gelle shows how warnings of future decline, foreign invasion and catastrophes were interwoven with moral and salvific guidelines and ideas of a safe haven for an idealised version of Tibetan soci-

ety to create a complex eschatological tradition. Faustina Doufikar-Aerts then examines on a broad level the motif of the apocalyptic peoples of Gog and Magog, which is central to medieval Jewish, Christian and Islamic apocalyptic discourse. She investigates its development and dissemination in medieval literary sources and cartography as well as in religious traditions, and shows that it was not only restricted to the medieval world but was also used in early modern times to signify struggle against imperialism, colonialism and political injustice. The apocalyptic interpretation of natural phenomena in Islam is examined in the chapter of Johann Heiss and Eirik Hovden, who analyse a story about a hailstorm hitting a village in the southwest corner of the Arabian Peninsula with regard to its religious and political implications. They show how apocalyptic interpretations were instrumentalised by Zaydī authorities in order to legitimate their war against the Muṭarrifiyya and to draw boundaries of inclusion and exclusion within the community of believers. The close reading of this case study allows us to arrive at a more nuanced understanding of a specific branch of Islamic eschatology and cosmology that has yet to be studied closely. In medieval apocalyptic literary traditions, not only Gog and Magog, unusual natural phenomena and the Antichrist have a prominent role but also the figure of the End Times emperor. The chapter of Elena Tealdi examines the depiction of the latter in the prophetical commentaries and works of the Friar Minor John of Rupescissa. Written against the background of the changing political landscape in Western Europe, his comprehensive œuvre is characterised by a belief in the imminence of a millennial reign of peace. Tealdi examines the development of Rupescissa's prophetic concept and its transformation over the course of time.

The second volume, *Time, Death and Afterlife*, focuses on key topics of eschatology: death, judgment, afterlife and the perception of time and its end. The first cluster *Death and Last Judgment* starts with Roberto Tottoli's discussion of eschatological topics in *ḥadīth* literature and in the stories of the prophets, focusing on how prophets were depicted facing death and reacting to the Angel of Death in Islam. These episodes touch on important theological aspects in Islamic thinking, such as the tension between confidence in God and fear of the Last Judgment. Tottoli's analysis underlines the significance of eschatological and apocalyptic beliefs in early Islam. While discussions of medieval apocalyptic thought often revolve around the development of computistic, astrological and cosmological ideas, Pia Lucas shows in her article that devotion and fear of God's Judgment played a vital role and could be factored into historiographical concepts. In the works of Gregory of Tours, written in early medieval Francia, the cult of the saints and their relics served as a sort of preview of the Last Things, making tangible fundamental Christian doctrines such as the afterlife of the soul, the resurrection of the body and the Last Judgment. By bringing the Last Things into the here and now, the cult of the saints reminded believers of the imminence of the end.

In the Carolingian world, biblical exegesis on the Book of Revelation and a general discussion of ideas about the future in times of political crisis could be con-

nected to concerns about salvation and personal betterment. Miriam Czock's case study of Dhuoda's *Liber manualis* and her exhortations to her son to lead a pious Christian life examines the complicated nexus of temporal models, biblical revelation and exegesis, and assesses its impact on the discourse of Carolingian *correctio*, an issue neglected up to now. It shows how admonitions associated with specific ideas about both the future within the world and the spiritual future were set out in relation to ideas about redemption and the Last Judgment. In Japanese cultural history, fears and taboos related to death pollution are a pervasive motif. While Shintō deals with life and the concerns of this world, Japanese Buddhism specialised in religious services for the dead. In his chapter, which examines sources from the seventh to tenth centuries, Bernhard Scheid shows how Buddhist clerics became specialists in dealing with death and the ensuing pollution.

The idea that the souls of the deceased would undertake a journey and had to meet obstacles on their way was common to many religions and is examined in the cluster *Afterlife and Otherworld Empires*. Studying textual and visual sources, Marilyn Dunn examines the role of the belief in Last Judgment and an afterlife of souls in the process of the Christianisation of Anglo-Saxon England and considers how problems were addressed and adjustments made in order to accommodate eschatological beliefs. In early medieval Anglo-Saxon society, the deposition of grave goods with the bodies of recently baptised Christians shows how their previous belief in funerary ritual as a rite of transition to a relatively undifferentiated afterlife remained prevalent after their conversion to Christianity. The idea of "otherworld passports" also existed in the Chinese Buddhist afterlife, which was created, as Frederick Shih-Chung Chen argues, as a mirror-image of the living world, where the otherworld authority is modelled on a pre-modern Chinese bureaucratic empire and ruled by Indian Buddhist and local Chinese deities. Using mortuary texts and archaeological material, Chen shows that the adoption of imperial metaphors for the otherworld went hand in hand with the unification of Chinese feudal states during the Qin-Han period. Similarly, in Byzantine Christianity, the literary afterlife traditions and imagery reflected earthly political and administrative structures, as Eirini Afentoulidou shows in her chapter. Adverse powers such as military opponents or tollkeepers were part and parcel of these literary traditions, which were widespread in the Byzantine Church. In India, the development of hell as a place of judgment and torment went hand in hand with the emergence of ascetic religious movements and an increase in the range of divinities that promised salvation to their devotees. In his chapter, Marc Tiefenauer examines the development of the concept of hell in Hindu literature which went hand in hand with the emergence of ascetic movements, of Buddhism and Jainism, in the fifth century BCE. This concept can be found in particular in the Purāṇas, which cover all cosmological topics.

The cluster *Empires and Last Days 2* revisits the questions of the role of empires in medieval apocalyptic literature. It starts with an in-depth case study of aspects of the Gog and Magog story, which is analysed more broadly in the first cluster. Jo-

hann Heiss' chapter examines how different literary traditions were generated at certain points in the history of Arab peoples in northern as well as in southern Arabia. Heiss analyses, for instance, the work of Ibn Khurradādhbih, which describes a mission undertaken to the dam against Gog and Magog under the caliph al-Wāṯiq. The other contributions in this cluster examine the nexus between the concept of linear time, apocalyptic expectations of Christ's Second Coming and the development of chronographical models, and the influence of ecclesiastical elites. Immo Warntjes' chapter on early medieval countdowns to the end of the sixth millennium examines both the complex traditions of the early medieval calculation of the date of Easter and the development of the incarnation era in the light of the religious, moral, intellectual and political interests of a Christian elite. In the Carolingian world, the eschatological understanding of empire played an important role in the formation of Christian identity. In his chapter, Graeme Ward examines three different Carolingian commentaries on the Gospel of Matthew, paying special attention to their use of the late antique historiographical work of Orosius, which was a valuable source of information for the birth of Christ. The text's focus on Roman imperial eschatology, advocating a succession of world empires, was transferred to the Church in Carolingian exegetical works. Ward shows how the great temporal distance between the works and the profound political changes that had taken place in the meantime led to different interpretations. Rutger Kramer then presents an in-depth case study of the enigmatic *Chronicle of Moissac* and examines the issue of the Carolingian reinterpretation and adaptation of earlier historiographical works. The composition of this text, which was based on a plethora of earlier works, reflects the interest of Carolingian intellectuals in the Apocalypse and emphasises the interdependence of Church and Empire at that time.

The final section, *The Afterlife of Eschatology*, examines modern readings and interpretations of eschatology, focusing in particular on the eschatological concepts of time, history and messianism in the works of three widely received and important contemporary thinkers, Giorgio Agamben, Jacob Taubes and Michel Foucault. Kurt Appel examines Agamben's analysis of apocalyptic thought and the corresponding concepts of time on the basis of his interpretation of Paul's Epistle to the Romans and the Book of Revelation. He demonstrates Agamben's influence on the genesis of the essential Western concepts, categories and constellations of eschatology and highlights their political and noetic significance for the present age. Appel considers the development of current concepts of time and traces key categories of Agamben, who responded to today's virtualisations with the concept of messianity. Martin Treml examines Jacob Taubes' eschatological thinking and political theology and shows how his study of religious and biblical texts was interwoven with events in politics and with ideas of salvation and redemption. On a political level, Treml highlights two strands of Western religious thought, which were still influential during the Age of Enlightenment: revolution and its repression on the one hand, and the apostle Paul as role model and guide to an eschatological *Lebensform* on the other.

Finally, Christian Zolles analyses the correspondences between Jacob Taubes' and Michel Foucault's respective theories about Jewish and Christian apocalypticism and touches upon what could have been illuminating discussions between the two on "the use and abuse of history". After providing an overview of the apocalypse as a historical concept, the common characteristics of Foucault's theory of genealogy and Taubes' conception of eschatology are outlined.

Most of the scholars involved in the making of these volumes, especially those who took part in the three-day conference in Vienna, remember warm and fruitful discussions between representatives of widely different disciplines and areas. In one way or another, these exchanges helped to shape the final form of the essays summarised above. Some of us also recall the medievalists' openness to enriching their apocalyptic and eschatological repertoire with non-Western materials. We editors hope that the present two books have remained true to this original spirit and that they will strengthen the belief of specialists in the strong heuristic value of the comparative approach to the study of apocalypticism, messianism and eschatology.

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