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The Portents of the Hour: Eschatology and Empire in the Early Islamic Tradition

For much of the past century, scholarship on Muḥammad and the beginnings of Islam has shown a reluctance to acknowledge the importance of imminent eschatology in earliest Islam. One of the main reasons for this resistance to eschatology would appear to be the undeniable importance of conquest and political expansion in early Islam: if Muḥammad and his followers believed that the world would soon come to an end, why then did they seek to conquer and rule over so much of it? Nevertheless, there is no real contradiction between the urgent eschatology revealed by the Qur'an and other early sources on the one hand, and the determination of Muḥammad and his followers to expand their religious polity and establish an empire on the other. To the contrary, the political eschatology of the Byzantine Christians during the sixth and early seventh centuries indicates that these two beliefs went hand in hand, offering important contemporary precedent for the imperial eschatology that seems to have fueled the rise of Islam. Accordingly, we should understand Muḥammad's new religious movement within the context of this broader religious trend of Mediterranean Late Antiquity. Muḥammad's new religious polity seems to have been guided by the belief that through their conquests and expulsion of the Romans from the Holy Land and Jerusalem, their triumphs were inaugurating the events of the eschaton. *Therefore, Muḥammad's new religious movement should be seen as a remarkable instantiation of the political eschatology that we find expressed elsewhere in Jewish, Christian, and Zoroastrian writings of this era.*

For much of the past century, scholarship on Muḥammad and the beginnings of Islam has often shown an unfortunate aversion to eschatology. Instead, there is a marked tendency, particularly, but not exclusively, in English language scholarship, toward a view of earliest Islam as movement that was more "pragmatic" than "apocalyptic". Rather than finding a prophet and his community who believed themselves to be living in the shadow of the *eschaton*, Muḥammad and his earliest followers are presented as having pursued very practical goals that were directed toward effecting social change and building a political empire. Nevertheless, the eschatological urgency that pulses across the traditions of the Qur'an is simply too powerful to be ignored, and increasingly scholars are turning to recognise that imminent eschatological belief was a core principle of Muḥammad's religious movement. Indeed, when we read this evidence from the Qur'an alongside a number of early apocalyptic *ḥadīth*, it seems all but certain that Muḥammad and his followers

https://doi.org/10.1515/10.1515/9783110597745-011

were convinced that they would witness the end of the world in the Hour's sudden arrival seemingly in their own lifetimes.[1]

Yet not only Muḥammad's early followers were expecting the imminent end of the world: at the very same time they were seizing dominion over a great deal of it. In the earliest decades of its history, Muḥammad's community of the Believers spread rapidly across western Asia and North Africa, establishing in their wake what amounted to a new "Islamic" empire. Yet it would be wrong to imagine that the Believers' political success was somehow at odds with their eschatological expectations. Their impulse to rule the world was not, in fact, incongruous with their conviction that the same world was soon to pass away. To the contrary, it seems that faith in the impeding *eschaton* fueled their imperial ambitions. There can be no question that in addition to preaching the Hour's proximate arrival, Muḥammad also expected his followers to engage in *jihād* in the path of God (e.g., Q 4:75.95), which amounted to militant struggle on behalf of their divinely chosen community and its religious values. Of course, one must be careful not to project back onto the period of origins the classical doctrine of religious warfare formulated much later in the Islamic legal tradition. Yet at the same time, the Qur'an clearly enjoins the faithful to wage war on behalf of the community of the Believers as a religious duty. It is true that certain elements within the later Islamic tradition, including most notably Sufism, would seek to soften the militancy of *jihād*, which simply means "struggle" or "striving", by defining it instead in terms of spiritual struggle rather than actual combat.[2] But in the first Islamic century, *jihād* and the faith of the Believers entailed fighting to eliminate wickedness from the world and to establish the rule of their divinely ordered polity throughout the world.[3]

Although the Qur'an, to be sure, occasionally displays some diversity of opinion regarding the degree of militancy that was expected on behalf of the new religious movement, it is clear that by the end of Muḥammad's life the dominant attitude in the community had become the legitimation of, and the exhortation to pursue, ideological war against the "unbelievers". The community of the Believers thus was "a movement of militant piety, bent on aggressively searching out and destroying what they considered odious to God".[4] The establishment of a new righteous and divinely guided polity that would displace the sinful powers who ruled the present age was an essential part of this *jihād* in the cause of God.

1 For more on this topic, see Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet*, 118–196; Shoemaker, "Muḥammad and the Qurʾān," 1078–1080; Shoemaker, "The Reign of God Has Come," 514–58.

2 Cook, "Muslim Apocalyptic and *Jihād*," 77.

3 See, e.g., Tyan, "Djihād."

4 Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, 85.

1 Eschatology and Conquest in the Early Community of the Believers

The earliest known witness to the emergence of Muḥammad's community onto the world stage, the *Doctrina Iacobi nuper baptizati* ("Doctrine of Jacob the Newly Baptized"), paints a very similar picture of the Believers' movement. This seventh-century Greek text relates a series of debates that were supposedly held among the Jews of North Africa who recently had been forcibly baptised under Heraclius.[5] These debates supposedly took place in July, 634, just at the very moment when Muḥammad's followers had first begun to enter the Roman Near East. It is no mere coincidence, then, that the *Doctrina Iacobi* is the first text to describe this new religious movement. The text was likely written very soon after the events that it describes, as seems to be required by its concern to address the specific issue of the forced baptism of 632, as well as by references to contemporary political events that indicate a time just after the first Arab attacks on the Roman Empire.[6] Moreover, despite the many clichés and caricatures that too often typify Christian writings on Jews and Judaism, the *Doctrina Iacobi* defies most of the literary conventions – and conventional interpretations – of the *adversus Iudaeos* genre. It is, in this regard, as David Olster explains, "the exception that proves the rule".[7] Whereas most anti-Jewish literature from this period presents only a highly stereotyped construct that is rhetorically designed to demonstrate the superiority of Christianity, the *Doctrina Iacobi* instead presents what is judged to be a detailed and realistic depiction of late ancient Judaism.[8] The *Doctrina Iacobi* thus stands out within its genre for its careful and accurate representation of such historical details and, more remarkably, for the thorough and thoughtful contextualisation of its dialogue within this broader historical setting.[9] Therefore, despite the suspicions that such a text might potentially invite, historians of the early seventh century are generally agreed that this text

5 The most recent edition has been published by Dagron and Déroche, "Juifs et chrétiens dans l'Orient du VIIe siècle," 47–219. The edition has been recently republished with the rest of their article, with the same pagination, in Dagron and Déroche, *Juifs et chrétiens en Orient byzantin*, 47–219.

6 Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It*, 59. Here Hoyland argues persuasively against Dagron's suggestion that the text was composed sometime in the early 640s, which seems unlikely: Dagron and Déroche, "Juifs et chrétiens dans l'Orient du VIIe siècle," 246–247. See also McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy*, 179.

7 Olster, *Roman Defeat,* 175.

8 Olster, *Roman Defeat,* 159–164; cf. also Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It*, 56; Dagron and Déroche, "Juifs et chrétiens dans l'Orient du VIIe siècle," 240–46. The specific attention given to the cities of Ptolemais and Sykamine in Palestine leads Hoyland and Dagron and Déroche to conclude that the author is likely a native of their environs.

9 Olster, *Roman Defeat*, 158–159.

offers remarkable insight into the diversity and complexity of religious culture in this era.

The text identifies its author as Joseph, one of the participants in the dialogue, but its main character is Jacob, a Jewish merchant from Palestine who had recently been coerced into baptism while on an ill-timed business trip to Carthage. After several days of debate, about midway through the text, a new character enters the discussion, Justus, the unbaptised cousin of one of these new Jewish converts, who has recently arrived from Palestine. Justus is upset that his cousin and so many other Jews have accepted their Christian baptism, and he is persuaded to debate the issue with Jacob before the group. This being a Christian text, one is not surprised to learn that Justus is ultimately persuaded to himself become a Christian and receive baptism. Nevertheless, after his conversion, Justus reveals the contents of a letter that he had just received from his brother Abraham in Palestine. In it Abraham writes that "a prophet has appeared, coming with the Saracens, and he is preaching the arrival of the anointed one who is to come, the Messiah". Abraham reports that he consulted "an old man who was learned in the Scriptures" for his opinion on this new prophet. The sage replied that "he is false, for prophets do not come with a sword and a war-chariot", and he encouraged Abraham to look into the matter himself more carefully. Abraham then continues to relate the results of his inquiry: "when I investigated thoroughly, I heard from those who had met him that one will find no truth in the so-called prophet, only the shedding of human blood." For good measure, Abraham also reports that this prophet "says that he has the keys of paradise, which is impossible".[10]

According to Abraham's account of this new religion, Muḥammad's followers were proclaiming their faith in starkly eschatological terms, which Abraham's letter interprets in terms of Jewish apocalypticism – that the Messiah was soon to arrive. While it is not entirely clear whether Muḥammad and his earliest followers were actually expecting the appearance of a Messiah, they do seem to have believed that the world was soon to come to an end. The reference in this instance to the coming Messiah could simply reflect a refraction of Muḥammad's eschatological message through the lens of Judaism. In Jewish ears, sounding the *eschaton*'s impending arrival meant the Messiah's arrival as well. One imagines that the presence of many Jews within Muḥammad's early community of the Believers would have only amplified such potential messianic associations.[11] Moreover, as Sean Anthony recently explains, Muḥammad's alleged claim to possess the keys of paradise also reflects an element of early Islamic kerygma, as Cook and Crone first noted in *Hagarism*.[12]

10 *Doctrina Iacobi*, 5.16 (Dagron and Déroche, "Juifs et chrétiens dans l'Orient du VIIe siècle," 209–211).

11 See, e.g., Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet*, 22, 24, 32, 134, 205. See also Donner, "La question du messianisme dans l'islam primitif," 17–27; and Bashear, "The Title '*Fārūq*' and Its Association with ʿUmar I," 47–70.

12 Anthony, "Muhammad," 243–265; Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*, 4.

Obviously, as Anthony notes, this claim is eschatological, yet no less important is its strong association with the military campaigns of the Umayyads in the early Islamic historical tradition. Several traditions link the Umayyad conquest ideology with the keys of paradise, which suggests that this motif offers "an early testimony to the doctrine of *jihād* procuring believers access to paradise".[13] Therefore, we have in the *Doctrina Iacobi* evidence that as the Believers left the deserts of Arabia behind them, they entered the Promised Land with an eschatological fervor that was joined to the conviction that one was obligated to spread the dominion of their faith through warfare, a pious militarism that would ultimately be rewarded with entry into paradise.

Abraham's description of earliest is Islam is really not controversial, or at least, it should not be. The eschatological confidence of the Believers is amply displayed in the Qur'an, as we demonstrated elsewhere,[14] and so is the idea of *jihād* as warfare on behalf of God and God's community.[15] History shows us well enough that this martial piety was soon actualised through decades of conquest and the establishment of a new empire under the authority of the Believers and their "commander" (*amīr*). The Believers' urgent eschatology and their commitment to *jihād* were not disconnected, it would seem, and indeed, it would be rather strange to imagine them as such. Indeed, as Donner recently notes, "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."[16] Raiding for booty is easy enough to understand, but absent apocalypticism, why would Muḥammad's followers have made such a forceful push outside of Arabia in order to seize and occupy Roman and Sasanian territory? Why were they intent on the destruction of these empires and not content merely to plunder them? Clearly some sort of imperial eschatology must have been at work from the very early history of Muḥammad's new religious movement. As David Cook concludes of these invasions, "it would seem, then, that the conquests were seen as an integral part of the redemptive process which occurs just before the end of the world".[17]

Unfortunately, the Qur'an does not link its eschatological immediacy with its injunctions to expand the Believers' dominion by military force as explicitly as we might like. Nevertheless, both elements figure prominently in the Qur'an and thus were central tenets of Muḥammad's religious movement. One imagines that

13 Anthony, "Muhammad," 255–262, although Anthony's proposal for a later dating of the *Doctrina Iacobi* is not very convincing, in my opinion.

14 Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet*, 118–96; Shoemaker, "Muḥammad and the Qurʾān;" Shoemaker, "The Reign of God Has Come."

15 As, for instance, Anthony rightly notes: Anthony, "Muhammad," 247.

16 Donner, "Review of Robert Hoyland, *In God's Path*," 139–140.

17 Cook, "Muslim Apocalyptic and *Jihād*," 71.

Muḥammad's followers must have understood these two key principles of their religious worldview as correlative, so that they believed that the formation and expansion of their community through armed struggle were instrumental to the Hour's immediate advent. By piecing things together, it seems clear that the Qur'an effectively endorses such a worldview, even if it does not always do so directly. Perhaps such clarity is seemingly absent because, as Cook notes, "the Qur'an is an eschatological book and not an apocalyptic book".[18] The Qur'an is eschatology in action, not in the future; the Hour was already arriving even as the community was expanding. Thus, it was perhaps irrelevant to specify their linkage, which was in the moment self-evident. One did not need to explain how the world would come to an end when one was living out the Hour's approach on a daily basis, expecting it at any minute.

Nevertheless, there is some evidence to suggest that the Qur'an once unambiguously professed a direct link between the military success of Muḥammad's religious community and the arrival of the *eschaton*. The two ideas are joined together in a variant reading of Qur'an 61:6 said to derive from the codex of the Companion Ubayy b. Kaʿb (d. between 640 and 656), who according to the Islamic tradition was Muḥammad's scribe. In the *textus receptus*, this verse has Jesus predict that an apostle named Aḥmad will come after him, a prediction that meets with rejection. According to Ubayy b. Kaʿb's version, however, Jesus forecasts not only Aḥmad's appearance, but also that he would form a community that "will be the last one among the communities", that is, a community whose formation will inaugurate the End Times: "I am God's messenger to you, bringing you an announcement of a prophet whose community will be the last one among the communities (*ākhir al-umam*), and by means of whom God seals the messengers and prophets (*yakhtum allāh bihi al-anbiyāʾ wa'l-rusul*)."[19] According to this version, Muḥammad's followers would emerge as the final community in the world, whose formation and success would occasion its end.

18 The definition of apocalypticism is in fact a complex matter, although in the study of early Judaism and Christianity, a consensus has emerged around the idea that apocalypse is strictly speaking a literary genre, which often, but not always, involves eschatology. Nevertheless, as John Collins explains, "other material may be called 'apocalyptic' insofar as it bears some resemblance to the core features of the genre apocalypse". There is, he explains, a certain conceptual worldview, an apocalyptic perspective, that emerges from the early Jewish apocalypses but appears also in other texts that may justifiably be called "apocalyptic literature", even if they are not, strictly speaking, apocalypses. Likewise, Collins notes the presence of "apocalyptic eschatology" in texts belonging to other genres and further identifies "apocalypticism" as a broader phenomenon that describes "the ideology of a movement that shares the conceptual structure of the apocalypses". See specifically Collins, "What is Apocalyptic Literature?" 6–7, and Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 11–13. The foundational work on this matter, however, remains Collins, ed., *Apocalypse*. I follow this consensus of early Jewish and early Christian studies in my approach to apocalypticism and eschatology. For more discussion of this topic, see Shoemaker, *The Apocalypse of Empire*, 11–16.

19 Jeffery, *Materials for the History of the Text of the Qur'ān*, 170; Powers, *Zayd*, 120.

David Powers has proposed that Ubayy's version may indeed be the earliest form of this verse, and that its canonical equivalent is a later revision. When the *eschaton* failed to arrive quickly as expected, the prediction in Ubayy's version proved false, and so the passage in question was altered to its now canonical form, "I am God's messenger to you, confirming the Torah that was [revealed] before me, and giving you good tidings of a messenger who will come after me, whose name will be Aḥmad."[20] In such a case, the original imminent eschatology and the early community's role therein were replaced, once these points had been falsified, by a reference to Jesus' confirmation of the Torah. Although this explanation is admittedly speculative, it is easier to imagine a scenario where Ubayy's version is the original, and when its prediction is falsified by the *eschaton*'s abeyance, the now canonical version was introduced, which would obviate this difficulty. The alternative, that the canonical version was earlier, seems less likely, since it is hard to comprehend the introduction of such an eschatological prediction once it had become patently false. If this interpretation is correct, then the eschatological valence of the community's formation and expansion was once also advanced by the Qur'an, only to be removed and replaced once this no longer could be true.

Furthermore, we know from the Qur'an that the contemporary Byzantine tradition of imperial apocalypticism was known to Muḥammad and his earliest followers.[21] The story of Dhū al-qarnayn, that is, Alexander the Great, from sura 18:83–101, borrows directly from the *Syriac Alexander Legend*.[22] The Qur'an's adaptation of this Christian text affords definitive proof that Muḥammad and his followers were not only aware of, but were seemingly engaged with the tradition of Byzantine imperial eschatology. And, as Haggai Ben-Shammai argues, it would appear that the Qur'an regards Jewish and Christian apocalyptic writings as "scripture" on par with Torah, Gospel, and *Zabūr* (most likely the Psalms).[23] It is true that the Qur'an does not include specific references to the most obvious instances of imperial apocalypticism from the *Syriac Alexander Legend*. Nevertheless, the Qur'an's usage of the *Syriac Alexander Legend* is primarily eschatological, as it incorporates the traditions about Alexander building a wall to hold back the peoples of Gog and Magog until the final judgement, a brief account of which concludes Alexander's appearance in the Qur'an.[24]

20 Powers, *Zayd*, 121.

21 For more on the early Byzantine tradition of imperial eschatology, see Shoemaker, "The Reign of God Has Come," and now Shoemaker, *The Apocalypse of Empire*, 38–63. Essentially, imperial eschatology or imperial apocalypticism expects the eschaton's realisation through imperial triumph.

22 See van Bladel, "The Alexander Legend in the Qurʾān 18.83–102," 175–203; and Tesei, "The Prophecy of Ḏū-l-Qarnayn (Q 18:83–102)," 273–90. See also my recent monograph, Shoemaker, *The Apocalypse of Empire*, esp. 79–86.

23 Ben-Shammai, "*Ṣuḥuf* in the Qurʾān," 1–15. I thank Will McCants for this reference.

24 See Budge, *The History of Alexander the Great*.

There is, moreover, no reason to presume that only this part of the *Syriac Alexander Legend* was known to Muḥammad and his followers, assuming that the Qur'an is their collective work. Rather, the full version of the *Alexander Legend* was likely known, including Alexander's promise to send his throne along with his crown to Jerusalem for the Messiah to use and its forecast of Rome's eschatological triumph, along with the Persian emperor Tubarlak's related prophecy. It is perhaps understandable that the Qur'an failed to include these predictions of the Roman Empire's ultimate victory, particularly since they must have seen themselves and their divinely ordained empire instead in this role. Yet on the basis of this extraordinary literary relationship, we can be safe in assuming that Muḥammad and the Believers would have had direct contact from rather early on with Byzantine imperial apocalypticism. Therefore, we may take some confidence that this widely diffuse and popular theme from the religious cultures of the late ancient Near East influenced how nascent Islam understood itself, its expansion in the world, and its conviction that the Hour was soon to arrive.

Furthermore, the opening passage of sura 30, *Sūrat al-Rūm*, the sura of Rome (referring, of course, to the Roman Empire, which, although it was somewhat diminished in the western Mediterranean at the beginning of the seventh century, continued to have sovereignty over the eastern Mediterranean and much of Italy, including Rome itself, as well as all of North Africa and parts of Spain), resonates strongly with the traditions of Byzantine and Iranian imperial eschatology.[25] According to the conventional vocalisation of this passage, verses 2–5 note that "the Romans have been conquered in the nearest (part) of the land [i.e., the Holy Land]". Then follows a forecast that "after their conquering, they will conquer in a few years. The affair [or "rule" – *al-amr*] (belongs) to God before and after, and on that day the believers will gloat over the help of God."[26] The Qur'an's concern here with Rome's imperial fortunes is rather interesting, particularly since the Believers are said to rejoice at Rome's victory. The historical circumstances, according to this vocalisation, are seemingly Iran's invasion and occupation of the eastern Roman Empire, followed by Rome's triumph in 628. The traditional explanation for the Believers' sympathy toward the Romans here understands this conflict as a war between Iranian paganism and Byzantine monotheism, since the Christians were, after all, a "people of the book". Yet these same events were apocalyptically electric for both the Christians and Jews of Byzantium, and, one imagines, for the Iranians as well, particularly in light of the millennium's approaching end on their calendar.[27] Surely it is significant, then, that this prophecy, which is the only predictive passage in the

25 The traditions of Iranian imperial eschatology and their connections with other contemporary Mediterranean eschatological traditions are discussed in Shoemaker, *The Apocalypse of Empire*, 100–115.

26 Translation from Droge, ed., *The Qur'ān: A New Annotated Translation*, 264.

27 Again see Shoemaker, "The Reign of God Has Come." Again, regarding Iranian political eschatology in this period, see Shoemaker, *The Apocalypse of Empire*, 100–115.

Qur'an, concludes by invoking the *eschaton* – the "affair" or "command" of God, or perhaps even better, the "reign" that belongs to God. Thus, in Qur'an's sole reference to contemporary world affairs, it addresses the most eschatologically charged political events of the era, the last Roman-Persian war (602–628 CE), which excited apocalyptic expectations across the religious spectrum of the late ancient Near East. It is yet another sign that formative Islam, with its imminent eschatological hopes and a militant piety aimed at spreading its dominion throughout the world, was a movement fueled by the ideas of imperial apocalypticism that suffused its immediate cultural context.

An early variant reading of these verses, however, suggests this interpretation even more so. According to an alternative vocalisation, first attested by al-Tirmidhī (d. 892), the beginning of *Sūrat al-Rūm* instead remarks that "the Romans have conquered in the near part of the Land. They, after their victory, will be conquered in a few years. Reign [or "the command"] belongs to God before and after, and on that day the Believers will boast over the help of God."[28] According to this reading, the passage begins by noting the Byzantine victory over the Iranians in 628, followed by a prediction of their defeat several years later at the hands of Muḥammad's followers.[29] Although Theodor Nöldeke predictably rejected this reading, since he believed all of the Qur'anic text came directly from Muḥammad and "Muḥammad could not have foreseen this", Richard Bell and others have noted that, according to the standard vocalisation, "it is also difficult to explain Muḥammed's favourable interest in the political fortunes of the Byzantine Empire in this early period", as seemingly indicated in the final verse.[30] Alternatively, however, if the verse refers to the victory of the Believers over the Byzantines, their rejoicing makes perfect sense. Likewise, according to this reading, we find the Believers inserting their own triumph over the Byzantines into the eschatological war between the Roman and Iranian Empires. The victory of the Believers brings with it the reign or "affair" of God, thus identifying their devout polity as the apocalyptic empire that would usher in God's rule at the end of the age.

There is good reason to think that this alternate reading may have been the original, inasmuch as it can better account for the Believers' jubilation at the outcome. One suspects that a longstanding prejudice, ensconced by Nöldeke in particular, that the entire Qur'an must be assigned to Muḥammad is at least partly responsible for the traditional version's favor in much scholarship.[31] Nevertheless, it is long past time that scholarship should dispense with the encumbrance of this

28 Muḥammad ibn ʿĪsā al-Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmiʿ al-ṣaḥīḥ*, ed. ʿAwaḍ, 5: no. 3192.

29 See the discussion of the vocalization and interpretation of this verse in El-Cheikh, "Sūrat al-Rūm," 356–64. Edmund Beck suggests that the "Byzantine" victory refers to Muʾta, although I find this less likely: Beck, "Die Sura *ar-Rūm* (30)," 339.

30 Nöldeke and Schwally, *Geschichte des Qorāns*, vol. 1, 149 n. 7; Bell, *The Qurʾān*, vol. 2, 392.

31 Nöldeke and Schwally, *Geschichte des Qorāns*, vol. 2, 1–5; Nöldeke, *Orientalische Skizzen*, 56. See also Gilliot's critique of this position, in which he notes that even Nöldeke himself eventually came

dogmatic fossil, leaving open the possibility that this passage, as well as others, may in fact have originated within the community of the Believers even after Muḥammad's death.[32] Of course, if Muḥammad in fact survived to lead his followers' campaign in Palestine, as the very earliest sources report, then that could provide another explanation for this passage.[33] While one cannot entirely exclude the traditional vocalisation, even this readily shows concern with the rise and fall of contemporary empires as they related to eschatological expectation, here signaled in the reference to *amr allāh*, the reign of God.

Recently, Tommaso Tesei has convincingly demonstrated that this Qur'anic prediction must be understood in light of close parallels from several Christian and Jewish writings of the early and mid-seventh century that predict the eschaton's arrival as a consequence of Rome's victory over the Persians. These texts include the Khosrau's prophecy in Theophylact of Simocatta's *History*, the Syriac *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Ephraem*, the *Sefer Eliyahu*, the *Syriac Alexander Legend*, and the *Passion of St. Golinduch*.[34] Tesei's reading of the passage in this broader context, which I find highly persuasive, concludes that the while the Qur'an here predicts a Roman defeat and then a Roman victory, the rejoicing of the Believers that follows is not, actually, on account of Rome's triumph. Rather, he explains, the phrase "and on that day" in verse four refers not to the time of the Roman victory, but instead to the *eschaton* that would soon follow it: this expression, "and on that day" (*wa-yawma ʾḍin*), Tesei notes, generally signals the Day of Judgment in the Qur'an. Likewise, reference to God's promise (*waʿd*) in verse six has strong apocalyptic connotations, since this term usually indicates God's eschatological promise, and as noted above, the reference to *amr allāh* similarly directs the interpretation of this passage in an eschatological direction. Tesei further proposes that these eschatological prophecies regarding Rome's triumph in the final Roman-Persian war were likely transmitted to Muḥammad's early followers by former Arab confederates of the Byzantines who allied themselves with the Believers as they drew near to the Roman frontier. In such a way, this Byzantine wartime propaganda quickly reached Muḥammad's followers and was adapted into new version that replaced Rome's unique eschatological mission with simple conviction that the *eschaton* was imminent. Thus, according to such an eschatological reading, the Qur'an's reference to these events should perhaps be translated instead as follows: "The Romans have been defeated in the nearest (part) of the land [the Holy Land]. But after their defeat, they will triumph in a few years. The reign of God is before and after, and on the Last Day the believers

to concede the possibility of interpolations in the Qur'an: Gilliot, "Reconsidering the Authorship of the Qurʾān," 100.

32 Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet*, 136–196.

33 Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet*, 18–72, 197–265.

34 Tesei, "'The Romans Will Win!' Q 30:2–7 in Light of 7th c. Political Eschatology." These texts are also discussed in some detail in Shoemaker, *The Apocalypse of Empire*, 74–100, including the *Passion of St. Golinuch*, which Tesei does not mention.

will rejoice in the victory of God. The Promise of God!" Thus, the canonical version is equally compatible with the understanding that the Believers expected their apocalyptic hopes would soon to be realised through the conquest of the Abrahamic Promised Land in Palestine, along with its sacred center in Jerusalem "the apocalyptic city *par excellence*".[35] There, in anticipation of the Hour's imminent arrival, they would, among other things, restore worship to the Temple Mount as they awaited the Temple's impending divine restoration in the *eschaton*.

2 Eschatological War with Rome in the Early Islamic Apocalyptic Tradition

Among the most overlooked resources for studying the beginnings of Islam is its early apocalyptic literature, and this neglect is surely yet another symptom of the long-standing scholarly disregard for eschatology in the study of Islamic origins. Yet in these texts, what is often implicit in the Qur'an becomes explicit. The early Islamic apocalyptic tradition shows clear evidence of imperial eschatology at work, and from it we can see that the Believers clearly understood their war with the Roman Empire in eschatological terms, identifying the Romans explicitly as "the people of the End Times".[36] The symbiosis between *jihād* and eschatological conviction mentioned above is, not surprisingly, also in particularly high relief in this material, and Jerusalem likewise occupies a position of particular importance.[37] Yet, like so much of the early Islamic tradition, the apocalyptic traditions of formative Islam were collected only at a much later date, and accordingly it can sometimes be difficult to determine which traditions are only of more recent vintage and which reflect perspectives from the first decades of the community of the Believers as it was expanding across the Near East. It is not a hopeless task, however, and the good news is that a great deal of material can be assigned with confidence to the first Islamic century, as Wilferd Madelung, Suliman Bashear, and David Cook have each demonstrated.[38] Our main source for early Islamic apocalypticism is the *Kitāb al-Fitan* of Nuʿaym ibn Ḥammād, a massive collection of apocalyptic traditions largely from

35 McGinn, *The Meanings of the Millennium*, 10; cited in Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, 97, 248.

36 See Cook, "Muslim Apocalyptic and *Jihād*," 83–84, where references are also given. This should not be taken as suggesting, for instance, that one should therefore simply collapse the "Associators" of the Qurʾān with the Byzantines, therefore understanding the Qurʾān's call to action against the unbelievers as directed exclusively toward the Romans. Surely, however, the Romans figured very prominently among those unbelievers against whom Muḥammad's early movement struggled to bring righteousness into the world.

37 Cook, "Muslim Apocalyptic and *Jihād*," esp. 68–82.

38 Madelung, "Apocalyptic Prophecies," 141–185; Suliman Bashear, "Apocalyptic and Other Materials on Early Muslim-Byzantine Wars," 173–207; Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, esp. 330.

Syria that was compiled by this otherwise little-known figure in approximately 820.[39] Presumably most of these traditions received their present formulation largely during the later Umayyad period, and perhaps some even in the early ʿAbbāsid era. Nevertheless, as Madelung notes, the general content of much that Nuʿaym transmits is significantly older, and these apocalyptic traditions "reflect the situation under the early Umayyad caliphate before the battle of Marj Rāhiṭ", which took place at the beginning of the Second Civil War in 684.[40] Although a number of Nuʿaym's traditions survive also in other early *ḥadīth* collections, the vast majority does not, and accordingly his collection is the main font of the early Islamic apocalyptic tradition, both for historians and later Islamic apocalypticists alike. Indeed, a number of contemporary Islamist movements, including especially the apocalyptic Islamic State, have drawn significant inspiration from Nuʿaym's unequalled collection of early Islamic apocalyptic traditions.[41]

There is, as David Cook notes, in general strong continuity between early Islamic apocalypticism and the apocalyptic visions of late ancient Judaism, Christianity, and Zoroastrianism. Indeed, the influx of such religious culture to the nascent Islamic tradition "was no less important in quantity or significance than the transfer of scientific and philosophical material that took place during the eighth through tenth centuries".[42] The apocalypticism of the late ancient Near East was decidedly imperial in nature, and so it comes as no great surprise to find similar ideas expressed in the early Islamic apocalyptic tradition.[43] For the most part, the Qur'an and its vivid eschatological warnings are largely absent from early Islamic apocalyptic literature, which as Cook notes, is essentially free of Qur'anic citations. Instead, the imagery and vocabulary of pre-Islamic apocalypticism prevails.[44] This is surely in part because, once again, as noted above, "the Qur'an is an eschatological book and not an apocalyptic book". The message of the Qur'an is not to identify the signs that will presage the *eschaton*, but rather, "already its tokens have come" (Q 47:20). The end was at hand, and thus there was little point in outlining future events that would one day usher in the end of the world. But the Qur'an's absence from these traditions is also a good indicator of their relative antiquity. The early Islamic apocalyptic tradition took shape at a time, it would seem, before Qur'anic citation assumed special importance.[45]

39 Nuʿaym ibn Ḥammād Nuʿaym, *Kitāb al-Fitan*, ed. Zakkār. A complete translation of Nuʿaym's, Kitāb has now appeared, which I thank David Cook for sharing with me in advance of its publication: Cook, *The Book of Tribulations*.

40 Madelung, "Apocalyptic Prophecies," 180; so also Bashear, "Apocalyptic and Other Materials on Early Muslim-Byzantine Wars," 173.

41 McCants, *The ISIS Apocalypse*, 29, 143.

42 Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 2.

43 See Shoemaker, "The Reign of God Has Come;" Shoemaker, *The Apocalypse of Empire*, 146–179.

44 Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 2, 276, 300–303.

45 Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 305.

Unfortunately, early Islamic apocalypticism has been largely ignored by the Islamic tradition and modern scholarship alike. Aside from several articles by Madelung and Bashear,[46] the only major study is Cook's impressive monograph from 2002, which does an outstanding job of opening up this vast and complex literature for further scholarly analysis. An edition of Nuʿaym's essential collection was published only in 1993, so that Madelung and Bashear had to work from manuscripts in their influential studies. Nevertheless, Cook has now prepared a forthcoming translation of Nuʿaym's *Kitāb* that will soon make this fascinating corpus even more widely available to scholars of early Islam and Late Antiquity. As for the Islamic intellectual tradition, one can readily understand why it marginalised so much of this apocalyptic material. It is, after all, largely subversive, forecasting dramatic upheaval and change and identifying the present system as in some sense defective, even if at times various regimes could channel its energy to serve their interests.[47] The main sources for the early Islamic apocalyptic tradition are, like Nuʿaym's *Kitāb al-Fitan*, all Sunnī collections. A distinctively Shīʿī apocalyptic literature does not develop until ninth and tenth centuries, even if there are, to be sure, Shīʿī apocalyptic movements much earlier. Prior to the ninth century, Sunnī and Shīʿī apocalypticists shared an early "pan-Muslim" corpus of apocalyptic literature.[48] Moreover, distinctively Shīʿī apocalyptic traditions tend to eschew the historical apocalypses of imperial conquest that are so prominent in the early tradition. Instead, they express a more passive confidence that God will ultimately turn the tables on those in power in favor of the defeated and oppressed, no doubt a symptom of the Shīʿī's minority status within the Islamic world.[49] But in the core of early material shared by both Sunnī and Shīʿī alike, the realisation of the *eschaton* through apocalyptic imperial triumph is an especially prominent theme.[50]

Two sets of traditions in particular are especially relevant to this topic, the so-called "Portents of the Hour" traditions and another set of historical apocalypses collectively known as the "Aʿmāq Cycle", the name 'Aʿmāq' ("valleys") in this case referring specifically to the valleys of northern Syria on the frontier between Rome and the Caliphate. In the first set of traditions, Muḥammad outlines a series of

46 Madelung, "ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Zubayr and the Mahdi," 291–305; Madelung, "Apocalyptic Prophecies;" Madelung, "The Sufyānī between Tradition and History," 5–48; Bashear, "The Title '*Fārūq*';" Bashear, "Apocalyptic and Other Materials on Early Muslim-Byzantine Wars;" Bashear, "Riding Beasts on Divine Missions," 37–75; Bashear, "Muslim Apocalypses and the Hour," 75–100.

47 Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 312–313, 327–328. See, e.g., Sharon, *Black Banners from the East*; Yücesoy, *Messianic Beliefs and Imperial Politics in Medieval Islam*; Velji, *An Apocalyptic History of the Early Fatimid Empire*.

48 Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 190–194, esp. 192. On early Shīʿī apocalyptic movements, see Tucker, *Mahdis and Millenarians*; Anthony, "The Mahdī and the Treasures of al-Ṭālaqān," 459–483.

49 Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 192–193, 225–226.

50 As Cook succinctly observes, "the imperialist tendency is strong in Muslim apocalyptic": Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 5.

historical events, usually six, that will indicate the Hour's proximate arrival. This tradition is widespread in early Islamic literature, and Nuʿaym devotes an entire section of his collection to Muḥammad's enumeration of the Portents of the Hour, which includes more than thirty different traditions. The full extent of its prominence in the early Islamic tradition, however, is best appreciated through perusing the range of variants gathered by Bashear from a variety of collections.[51] Seemingly one of the oldest such traditions is the following *ḥadīth* from Nuʿaym's *Kitāb* attributed to the Companion of the Prophet ʿAwf b. Mālik al-Ashjaʿī (d. 73/692–693).

> The Messenger of God said to me: 'O ʿAwf, count six (events) before the Hour. The first of them will be my death.' I was moved to tears then until the Messenger of God began to silence me. Then he said: 'Say one. The second will be the conquest of Jerusalem. Say two. The third will be an epidemic death *(mawtān)* among my community like the murrain of sheep *(quʿāṣ al-ghanam)*. Say three. The fourth will be a tribulation *(fitna)* among my community.' And (the Prophet) described it as grave. 'Say four. The fifth will be that money will overflow among you, such that a man may be given a hundred dinars and he will get angry about it (deeming it little). Say five. The sixth will be a truce between you and the Banu ʾl-Aṣfar (= Byzantines). Then they will march against you and fight you. The Muslims will at that time be in a country called al-Ghūṭa in a town called Damascus.'[52]

As Madelung notes, this prediction almost certainly dates to sometime before the Second Civil War, which began in the early 680s, since this *fitna* would, "no doubt, have been mentioned, like the First, if it had already happened", since the fourth sign mentioned in this prophecy, "a tribulation (*fitna*) among my community", refers to the First Civil War (656–661).[53] The epidemic of death refers to the plague of Emmaus (ʿAmwās) in 638/9, which began in Palestine, killing some 25,000 soldiers at Emmaus before spreading more widely across Syria, Iraq, and Egypt. The abundance of money, as Madelung notes, indicates the prosperity enjoyed by the Believers following the First Civil War under the reign of Muʿāwiya (661–680).[54] The final sign, however, is a true prediction, forecasting the impending final conflict between the Believers and the Romans. We have here then a particularly early tradition, which identifies several significant events from early Islamic history as signs that the end would soon arrive: the death of Muḥammad (632–635), the conquest of Jerusalem (635–638), the plague of Emmaus (638–639), and the First Civil War (656–661).[55] The prosperity under Muʿāwiya presumably represents the time of the tradition's formation, after which the final apocalyptic conflict was soon expected. Thus, this tradition would seem to indicate that the imminent eschatological expectation of the Qur'an endured into the early Caliphate, as the Believers continued to

51 Bashear, "Apocalyptic and Other Materials on Early Muslim-Byzantine Wars," esp. 174–180.

52 Nuʿaym, *Kitāb al-Fitan*, 25, no. 57; translation is from Madelung, "Apocalyptic Prophecies," 146.

53 Madelung, "Apocalyptic Prophecies," 146–147.

54 Dols, "Plague in Early Islamic History," 371–383, 376–378; Madelung, "Apocalyptic Prophecies," 147.

55 Regarding the dates of the first two events, see Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet*.

that believe that the Hour would soon arrive. One imagines that Muḥammad's death and the capture of Jerusalem were in their moment once reckoned to be *the* omen of the *eschaton*. As I have argued elsewhere, it appears that Muḥammad's earliest followers did not expect him to die before the Hour's arrival, and so his passing surely must have triggered powerful expectations of the Hour's imminent approach.[56] Likewise, the capture of Jerusalem and the restoration of worship to the Temple Mount must have had many Believers awaiting the trumpet's call at any moment, especially those who were influenced by Jewish and Christian apocalyptic ideas. Indeed, one has the sense that perhaps this list of portents grew in number as these eschatologically charged moments passed and yet the end still did not arrive.

Before long, the conquest of Constantinople began to appear as one of the Hour's portents in some traditions.[57] Very likely, when the conquest of Jerusalem failed to yield the consummation of history soon thereafter, another eschatological objective had to be identified. If removing the impure Romans from the Holy Land and the world's apocalyptic epicenter did not usher in the Final Judgment, then perhaps only the total defeat of the Romans and their submission to the Caliphate's divinely elected empire would bring about the end of time. Yet even if their target had moved, the Believers' conviction that the *eschaton* would be realised through imperial conquest and their dominion remained unshaken. In this regard, however, the absence of Constantinople from the tradition cited above is surely significant. The conquest of Constantinople would appear to be an accretion to the list of portents, and so its absence here is presumably yet another sign of this tradition's relative antiquity. In addition to the Second Civil War's absence, the tradition's failure to identify Constantinople as the final apocalyptic objective suggests its formation at a time before this reorientation of Islamic eschatology had taken place. Concluding instead with mention of a truce with the Byzantines and their subsequent betrayal, this tradition seemingly reflects an expectation that the eschatological war between Rome and the Believers would be fought, if not for control of Jerusalem, then at least in Greater Syria.

With this final prediction, this early account of the Portents of the Hour opens toward the second set of early apocalyptic traditions, the Aʿmāq Cycle. This tradition too is widespread and is "fundamental to the study of Muslim apocalyptic, since the basic story line is repeated in most of the major traditions, or used as a hinge between stories".[58] The Aʿmāq Cycle is also quite early, probably originating in its basic form before the end of the seventh century, as, for instance, the terse allusion to its narrative as the final portent of the Hour would seem to confirm. In one of its simplest forms, the tradition is as follows:

56 Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet*, 178–188, 195–198, 261.
57 Bashear, "Apocalyptic and Other Materials on Early Muslim-Byzantine Wars," 175–180; Madelung, "Apocalyptic Prophecies," 155–159. See also El-Cheikh, *Byzantium Viewed by the Arabs*, 60–71.
58 Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 49.

> Then the Byzantines will send to you asking for a truce *(ṣulḥ/hudna*), and you will make a truce with them. On that day a woman will cross the pass (in the Tarsus Mountains, the area of the fiercest fighting) to Syria safely and the city of Caesarea in Anatolia will be built (rebuilt). During the truce al-Kūfa will be flattened like leather – this is because they refused (lit. left off) assistance to the Muslims (i.e. of Syria), and God knows whether, in addition to this desertion *(khidhlān),* there was another event that made attacking them permissible [religiously speaking]. You will ask the Byzantines for assistance against them, and they will assist you, and you will go until you camp [with them] on a plain with hills (*marj dhī tulūl)*. One of the Christians will say: 'By means of our cross you obtained the victory; therefore give us our share of the spoils, of the women and children.' You will refuse to give them of the women and children, so they will fight and then go and return [to the Byzantine Empire] and prepare for the final apocalyptic battle (*malḥama*).[59]

Numerous variants add details to this basic narrative, and Nuʿaym brings over two-hundred different traditions related to this eschatological battle between the Romans and the Believers, running almost sixty pages in the printed edition.[60] Generally, these traditions describe a war with the Byzantines that begins on the Syrian frontier, and this remains the primary theater of war in Islamic apocalyptic, so that even today, for instance, contemporary apocalyptic movements within Islam place a special emphasis on the city of Dābiq as the site of the final conflict. Their focus on this specific location in the valleys of northern Syria owes itself primarily to mention of this town in the version of the Aʿmāq Cycle included in Muslim's canonical collection of *ḥadīth*.[61] Nevertheless, a key battle in this war will also be fought in the Holy Land on the outskirts of Jerusalem, and its culmination will be the Islamic conquest of Constantinople, and with it, the fall of Rome. While Constantinople is unquestionably the ultimate prize in this final war, the main events still remain rooted in northern Syria, a sign, it would seem, of the tradition's formation in the early decades when this region was a hot zone of conflict between Rome and the Caliphate. The valleys of northern Syria thus will be the site of the last all-out battle not just with the Byzantines, but between Muslims and the entire Christian world.[62]

Although Bashear regards the conquest of Constantinople as fundamental to the early apocalyptic tradition, maintaining that its capture was "a corner-stone in Umayyad policy right from the start", I suspect, as indicated above, that this may not have been the Believers' original goal, particularly in the pre-Umayyad period.[63] Instead, the liberation of Jerusalem was likely their original apocalyptic objective. The conquest of Constantinople is not prominent, as we have noted, in the early Portents of the Hour traditions. These emphasise instead the liberation of Jerusalem

59 Nuʿaym, *Kitāb al-Fitan*, 268, no. 1225; trans. from Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 49–50.
60 Nuʿaym, *Kitāb al-Fitan*, 257–315, nos. 1214–1417.
61 al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, vol. 4, 1759–760 (34 [2897]). Most notable in this regard is the Islamic State, which has shown keen interest in controlling Dābiq and has even named its official magazine after the city.
62 Bashear, "Apocalyptic and Other Materials on Early Muslim-Byzantine Wars," 181–182, 205–206.
63 Bashear, "Apocalyptic and Other Materials on Early Muslim-Byzantine Wars," 190, 201.

and the coming war with Byzantium in northern Syria. In the bulk of these traditions, the conquest of Constantinople does not figure at all. For instance, only a single variant of the ʿAwf tradition cited above includes the conquest of Constantinople, and while this event appears in some other versions of this genre, these are distinctly in the minority.[64] Its absence from so many of these predictions suggests that it is likely an early accretion, and moreover it seems improbable that the conquest of Constantinople would have been erased from so many variants if it had in fact been a part of the tradition from the start. Furthermore, another early apocalyptic tradition also suggests that Constantinople was not originally in focus. According to this *ḥadīth*, "This matter/affair [*al-amr*] will continue with you until God will conquer the land of Persia, and the land of the Byzantines and the land of Ḥimyar [i.e., the Yemen], and until you will be [comprised of] three military districts [*ajnād*], a *jund* in Syria, a *jund* in Iraq, and a *jund* in Yemen".[65] As Cook notes, this tradition indicates that the groups that originally circulated these traditions "did not see further than the immediate conquests of the orthodox caliphs". There was no expectation of a "long-term process of conquest", because "the Day of Judgment was assumed to be so close that no further conquests could be made before it".[66] Likewise, the absence of Constantinople's conquest in more abbreviated versions of the Aʿmāq Cycle, such as the one cited above, could also suggest that this was a secondary addition to the Believers' vision of the End Times. It is true that this event may have been omitted from these traditions simply for the sake of brevity, but I suspect that such silence reflects instead an earlier tradition in which Constantinople was not yet the object of the Believers' eschatological ambitions.

Particularly intriguing in the Aʿmāq apocalypse is the alliance that the Muslims of Syria will forge with the Byzantines against what are apparently other Muslims in Iraq, because the latter refused to give aid to their Muslim brothers and sisters in Syria. Why the Muslims of Syria would imagine a future war in which they would ally themselves with the Byzantines against fellow Muslims for this reason is puzzling. To my knowledge, no such alliance occurred during the early history of Islam, and one would certainly be hesitant to posit an actual coalition of Romans and Syrians against the Iraqis on the basis of this apocalyptic vision. Yet what does this tradition say about the religious identity of the communities that produced and consumed this apocalyptic literature? Cook suggests that perhaps we find here "a unique glance into the final irrevocable split between Christianity and Islam, which may have been connected together by some common beliefs at a very early stage,

64 Bashear, "Apocalyptic and Other Materials on Early Muslim-Byzantine Wars," 174–177.

65 al-Bayhaqī, *al-Sunan al-kubrā*, ed. al-Mar'ashlī, vol. 9, 179; al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwah wa-ma'rifat aḥwāl ṣāḥib al-sharī'ah*, ed. Qal'ajī, vol. 6, 327. Trans. from Cook, "Muslim Apocalyptic and *Jihād*," 70. See also Sulaymān ibn Aḥmad al-Ṭabarānī, *Musnad al-Shāmīyīn*, ed. Salafī, vol. 3, 396, no. 2540 (I thank David Cook for this reference).

66 Cook, "Muslim Apocalyptic and *Jihād*," 70.

and by certain political ties as well".[67] Presumably, Cook has in mind here something along the lines of Donner's early community of the Believers, and such a Byzantine-Muslim alliance, even only an imagined one, does seem to fit this hypothesis. The prospect of Muslims going to war with Christians against other Muslims, simply for lack of support, suggests a time when the confessional boundaries between the two faiths may not have been as firm as they would eventually become. Perhaps the tradition itself arose right at a moment when the Believers were struggling with the limits of the community's boundaries. The Syrian Muslims, who undoubtedly represent the tradition's matrix, were likely more open to the involvement of Christians and possibly even Romans within their community than were their "Iraqi" opponents. Indeed, perhaps it was disagreement over this very issue that inspired the apocalypticist to imagine such a rift between Muslims – a debate about the relationship between their emergent faith community and the Christians of the Near East.

That this is in fact a conflict between Muslims is made clear by the outcome. After the Syrians and Byzantines triumph over the Iraqis, the Christians demand a share of the spoils, "of the women and children", arguing that this is due them because victory was achieved through the power of the cross. The result, we are told, is a disagreement with the Syrians, and the Romans retreat in order to prepare for what will be the final apocalyptic war. Yet other variants of the Aʿmāq Cycle explain even more clearly that the issue here is that many of the Iraqi captives are Muslims, and the Syrians will not allow their co-religionists to be taken captive by the Romans, even if they are political enemies. For instance, according to another version, the Byzantines demand, "'Divide with us those of your progeny [the Muslim captives] that you have captured', and they [the Muslims] will say: 'We will never divide with you the progeny of Muslims!'"[68] The Byzantines consider this a betrayal, and accordingly they return home to prepare for war with their former allies. When the Byzantine emperor is initially reluctant to attack, because the Muslims have enjoyed much past success against him in combat, they go instead to the ruler of "Rome" (the Pope?), whom they persuade to launch a campaign against Syria by sea, seizing control of all of Syria, except for Damascus and Mt. Muʿtaq, a mountain near Ḥimṣ on the Orontes.[69] After their initial success, the Byzantine Emperor then decides to send a large force of his own overland. Eventually, they meet a much smaller force of Muslims at Jerusalem, at which point the tide begins to turn in the latter's favor. From Jerusalem, the Muslims begin to push the Byzantines back, until both sides

67 Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 51.

68 Nuʿaym, *Kitāb al-Fitan*, 259, no. 1218; trans. Cook, "Muslim Apocalyptic and *Jihād*," 84.

69 Bashear proposes, somewhat questionably, that we should read in these apocalyptic accounts vestiges of actual historical events. The profound deficiencies of the early Islamic historical tradition inspire him to suggest this possibility. See Bashear, "Apocalyptic and Other Materials on Early Muslim-Byzantine Wars," esp. 173–174, 198–207.

face each other in a decisive battle in the Aʿmāq, or valleys, of northern Syria.[70] This region remains a focus of Islamic eschatological expectation, and even today, contemporary apocalyptic movements within Islam place a special emphasis on the city of Dābiq as the site of the final conflict.[71]

In a bloodbath, a third of the Muslim army is killed, and another third flees from the field. Of this third, one third joins the Byzantines, saying, "If God had any need of this religion [Islam], He would have aided it," while another third, the Bedouin, retreats into the desert, and the final third returns to their homelands, in Iraq, the Yemen, and the Ḥijāz. Yet the remaining third from the initial force will stand together with renewed resolve against the Byzantines, and God will send four angels with their hosts to aid them. With this divine assistance, they will defeat the Romans decisively, and press further into Byzantine territory. When they reach Amorium,[72] its citizens will surrender, but then they will betray the Muslims, alleging falsely that the Dajjāl, the Anti-Christ, had appeared in the Muslims' homelands. Many will turn back, and the Byzantines will take the opportunity to slaughter the Arabs that remained. Realizing that they have been duped, the others will return full of zeal for vengeance, and they will march steadily toward Constantinople, sweeping aside Byzantine armies and cities along their way. When they make camp across from Constantinople, the sea will miraculously withdraw, allowing them to take the city with ease, as the walls will crumble to shouts of *Allāhu akbar*. Then, the Dajjāl will actually appear at Constantinople, and together with Jesus the son of Mary, the Muslim army will defeat him.[73]

The conquest of Constantinople is thus the eschatological climax of this particular tradition, and as Cook notes, "the utter and complete confidence [...] that Constantinople will fall soon" in its many versions is yet another sign of its relatively early formation, at a time when this outcome seemed certain, rather than something that had still not occurred after a length of time.[74] Nevertheless, Jerusalem remains

70 Nuʿaym, *Kitāb al-Fitan*, 259, no. 1218; trans. Cook, "Muslim Apocalyptic and *Jihād*," 85.

71 Their focus on this specific location in the valleys of northern Syria owes itself primarily to mention of this town in the version of the Aʿmāq Cycle included in Muslim's canonical collection of *ḥadīth*: Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj, Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, vol. 4: 1759–60. Dābiq does not figure regularly, however, the bulk of the Aʿmāq traditions. Most notable in this regard is the Islamic State, which has shown keen interest in controlling Dābiq and has even named its official magazine after the city.

72 Amorium was first attacked by Muḥammad's followers as early as 644 and was briefly taken in 646, being captured by them twice more before 740. Nevertheless, Muḥammad's followers did not maintain a hold on the city and its fortress, which remained the capital of the province of Anatolikon and was an important military center for the Byzantines on the frontier in their conflicts with the Muslims in the centuries to come. From early on, it was a frequent target of Islamic raids into Roman territory, which probably accounts for its apocalyptic significant in this early eschatological tradition. It would fall only in 838 when the Abbasid caliph al-Muʿtaṣim directed a massive military campaign against it. See, e.g., Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century*, 107, 113, 216; Foss, "Amorion," vol. 1:79–80.

73 Nuʿaym, *Kitāb al-Fitan*, 260–261, no. 1218; trans. Cook, "Muslim Apocalyptic and *Jihād*," 86–88.

74 Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 62, 66.

particularly significant in this cycle, and in many respects it manages to retain its eschatological importance in the face of Constantinople's new prominence. As just seen, according to some versions of the Aʿmāq Cycle, the final eschatological triumph over Rome will effectively begin at Jerusalem, even if the most definitive engagements will take place in the valleys of northern Syria. The Muslims begin to prevail against the Byzantines only after being pushed back to Jerusalem, where they rally their forces. This element seems to echo another set of early Islamic apocalyptic traditions, which foretell a future Byzantine reconquest of Jerusalem just before the end of time. Of course, reconquest of Jerusalem was central to the Byzantine apocalyptic tradition, as evidenced, for instance, by the *Apocalypse of Ps.-Methodius*. But this was a matter of great concern in early Islamic apocalyptic as well, and the same theme figures prominently also in medieval Jewish apocalyptic literature, making for an apocalyptic tradition shared, in different ways, by all three faiths. In the Islamic tradition, however, the Byzantine reoccupation of Jerusalem will be very brief, lasting only forty days, at which point the Muslims will drive them out.[75] Moreover, these apocalyptic traditions also preserve an echo of the Byzantine legend of the Last Roman Emperor, who appears, albeit in a slightly different guise, in early Islamic traditions about an eschatological Roman emperor named Tiberius. This tradition too, then, seems to have made an impression on all three faiths.[76]

Paramount, however, for registering Jerusalem's abiding eschatological significance in the early Islamic apocalyptic tradition are the reasons given for the Believers' apocalyptic war against Rome and the capture of Constantinople. On the one hand, the Believers are charged with taking Constantinople as revenge for the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. No doubt, this motivation is an extension of the Believers' claim to the Abrahamic patrimony that they shared with the Jews. From this perspective, Rome's desecration of Jerusalem and the Temple was as much an affront to them as it was to the Jews, and therefore they claimed for themselves the right of vengeance, which they would exact through the destruction of Constantinople.[77] "Since one of the principal components of the messianic age is that of justice", as Cook observes, "old wrongs must be righted before this period can begin".[78] Even more telling, however, are the traditions that locate the eschatological motive for the conquest of Constantinople and the Byzantine Empire in the restoration of the stolen treasures of the Temple to Jerusalem, which were taken by the Romans in 70 CE and, accordingly, were believed to be still in their hands. Although most of these treasures, which included the Ark of the Covenant, the rod of Moses, and the earring of Eve, among other items, were thought to be in the city of

75 Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 75–77. E.g., Nuʿaym, *Kitāb al-Fitan*, 286–287, no. 1292.

76 Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 79–80. See also Cook, "The Heraclian Dynasty in Muslim Eschatology," 3–23.

77 See, e.g., Nuʿaym, *Kitāb al-Fitan*, 284, no. 1282; trans. in Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 60–61, where references to variants of this tradition in other sources can be found.

78 Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 65.

Rome, Constantinople and Antioch held some as well.[79] Undoubtedly Cook is right that the eschatological repatriation of the Temple treasures was linked to the Believers' determination to restore worship to the Temple Mount, and also to the notion of the Dome of the Rock as a prefiguration and place holder for the Temple's restoration at the Hour. Since this understanding of the Dome's significance presumably did not survive much beyond the first Islamic century, once again we can be sure that we are dealing here with particularly early traditions.[80] Thus, in these justifications for the apocalyptic conquest of the Roman Empire, we find powerful confirmation that Jerusalem, its liberation, and the restoration of worship to its Holy of Holies remained at the center of the early Believers' eschatological expectations, even as they turned their sights increasingly toward Constantinople.

3 Conclusion

While the early Islamic apocalyptic tradition may at times seem to place more emphasis on the conquest of Constantinople than on the capture of Jerusalem, there can be no doubting that the latter city loomed large in the eschatological hopes of the early Believers, even after they began to look toward the New Rome. The religious significance of Jerusalem for the early Believers is unmistakable, and indeed there is reason to suspect that initially it overshadowed even Mecca and Medina in their sacred geography. It was the original focus of their prayers and it remains to this day the "apocalyptic capital" of Islam, which surely is significant if Islam began, as seems to be the case, as a movement grounded in fervent eschatological expectation. Moreover, the importance of the Holy Land's liberation and its restoration to the descendants of Abraham, along with the renewal of worship on the Temple Mount reveal the importance of capturing and controlling Jerusalem for the early Believers. The eschatological charge of the Dome of the Rock's design and decoration along with the apocalyptic significance of the "Temple's" restoration signal that Jerusalem's capture was more than just another victory: it was object of their eschatological desires.[81] The fact that the conquest of Jerusalem is named as one of the Portents of the Hour and that Jerusalem remained important in the Aʿmāq Cycle attests to its enduring apocalyptic significance, even after its capture did not witness the Hour's imminent arrival. Indeed, as we have just seen, according to a number of traditions, the continued conquests and the anticipated capture of Con-

79 See, e.g., Nuʿaym, *Kitāb al-Fitan*, 272, no. 1252, and also the references to other such traditions in Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 56–57.

80 Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 54–55, 65–66; Cook, "Muslim Apocalyptic and *Jihād*," 93–94. See also Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet*, 218–240.

81 Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet*, 197–240.

stantinople and even Rome were undertaken primarily with the restoration of holy objects to the Temple in view.

Nevertheless, even if we were to remove Jerusalem completely from view, there can be no doubting that, based on the early Islamic apocalyptic tradition, the early Believers' movement was fueled by a powerful ideology of imperial eschatology. Their expectations of the Hour's impending arrival remained strong, as did their conviction that history would soon be fulfilled in the triumph of their divinely chosen polity over the ungodly powers of the world, among whom stood most notably, Rome. Through their striving on behalf of their community's military success, they were doing the work of bringing about God's divine plan for the apocalyptic redemption of the world.[82] Therefore, when we situate what we are able to know about earliest Islam within the religious landscape of the late ancient Near East, within which it formed and into which it emerged, we find it was an eschatological movement that is well in line with the imperial apocalypticism of the age. Indeed, perhaps we should best regard Muḥammad's new religious polity as a remarkable instantiation of the political eschatology that we find expressed elsewhere in Jewish, Christian, and Zoroastrian writings of this era.[83]

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82 Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 315.

83 I thank David Frankfurter in particular for suggesting the idea of early Islam as an "instantiation" of late ancient apocalypticism.

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