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# Empire of Clay and Iron: Divisions in the Byzantine state ideology and Christian apocalyptic expectations from the reigns of Heraclius to Leo III (610-718)

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The Book of Daniel has been a recurrent source of apocalyptic imagery in Judaism and Christianity throughout the ages. Thematically dominated by the struggle between the eternal truth of God and the shifting historical realities during the lifetime of the prophet Daniel,[1] it contains two sets of visions of the future. The first one appears in a dream of the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar II but is interpreted by the prophet Daniel: a composite statue consisting of gold, silver, bronze, iron and clay is shattered by a rock that grows to fill the whole world, indicating how all terrestrial empires will one day be replaced by the eternal Kingdom of God.[2] Later on, Daniel has a series of visions of his own in which he is foretold the future of his life and the world up to the moment when the Archangel Michael will make way for

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[1] Each of its single episodes can be said to illustrate this pattern: the story of how the friends of Daniel are threatened by extinction in a fiery furnace because they refuse to worship a colossal statue of Nebuchadnezzar, and how their rescue at the intervention of God makes the king repent; the second dream of Nebuchadnezzar, in which a world-filling tree is cut down by an angel of God, precluding the madness with which the king will be punished for his hubris; the story of his successor Belshazzar and the mysterious writing on the wall that presages the imminent fall of the Babylonian kingdom to the Persians; and the story of how Daniel is saved from the lion's den where his new Persian master Darius has felt compelled to throw him when the prophet has declined to worship the king (*Dan*. 3-6).

[2] *Dan*. 1-2.

the resurrection of the dead and the Last Judgment. Here we encounter a more diverse imagery featuring four terrible beasts representing future kingdoms, the last one – marked by its ten horns – being the worst one, destroying true religion in Israel and making people go astray. [3]

The Book of Daniel is easily dated to the time of the Seleucid king Antiochus IV (d. 164 BC). The last kingdom in both visions is that of Alexander the Great: like iron it has shattered everything in its way; but it is mixed with clay, symbolising the decentralisation of the Hellenistic world. The ten horns on the fourth beast represent the ten Seleucid kings in the Near East, and the rock that will destroy the statue and grow until it fills the whole world refer to the Maccabean uprisings.[4] Unfortunately, the expectations do not match the actual outcome of the tumultuous decades in the mid-second century BC: whereas the Seleucid kingdom did indeed collapse after the death of Antiochus and paved way for the rise of Parthia, the new Jewish kingdom remained a tiny political entity that would soon be swallowed up by its former Roman ally.[5] This has called for innumerable re-readings of the apocalyptic text, in which the components of the statue and the beasts in the visions of Daniel have been identified as empires later and different than those that are in all probability referred to in the original. The most widespread re-reading makes use of the blurred border between the Median and Persian empires in order to fashion the empire of Alexander into the third kingdom and the Roman Empire into the fourth one. It is important to remember that the terminology of Daniel pervades the Synoptic gospels and provides an important ideological backdrop for the Early Christian movement in the wake of the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, and that it is particularly obvious in the *Revelation of John*, where the imagery from the Book of Daniel is further extended with hidden references to Rome.[6]

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[3] *Dan*. 7-12.

[4] Brown, Fitzmyer, Murphy (eds.), *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (1988) 408.

[5] Cf. Grainger, *Rome, Parthia & India: the Violent Emergence of a New World Order 150-140 BC* (Barnsley 2013) 51-87, 128-82.

[6] *Matth*. 10:5-38, 11:20-24, 12:46-50, 15:1-20, 16:27-28, 23:37-24:44, *Mark* 3:31-35, 8:34-9:1, 13:1-37, *Luk*. 9:23-27, 10:1-20, 12:8-12, 49-53, 13:1-4, 21:5-33, 22:35-38; *Rev*. 13-18.

The purpose here is not to study the correlation between Jewish and Christian apocalypticism but to focus on an epistemological division of the Late Ancient world that cuts straight through them both. The Constantinian association of Christianity with victory in general and that of the Roman Empire in particular may have made it suited to take up the terrestrial competition with Jewish and Pagan cults of the ancient world, but it also detached the fulfilment of its apocalyptic truth from the anticipation of an eschatological end to the world people knew.[7] The fact that the Christians could live and prosper on their own meant that the tribulations of the Pagan persecutions turned into a sacred past, whereas the tribulations foregoing the Last Judgment were pushed into an eschatological future. In fact apocalyptic and eschatological writings remained rare in the Eastern parts of the Roman Empire, even to the point that the canonical status of the *Revelation of John* was questioned, and the coming of the seventh Millennium in the late fifth century was either ignored or left uncommented.[8]

The most important point here is not how people perceived God and whether it made them fall under the theological definition of Jews or Christians, but whether they attributed any lasting importance to the world in which they lived. All religious or political ideologies are subject to this basic epistemological division. It is true that the Jews had a solution to the problem in that they could still place a Messianic era of terrestrial justice between themselves and the end of the world, whereas the Christians either lived in the Messianic era or had ceased expecting its advent upon earth from the time when they abandoned the temple. But in both cases it is the apocalyptic horizon, and not the belief in God, that explains the way in which the believers relate to the world. If the world is acknowledged merely as the inner reality of the believer and

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[7] Olster, *Roman Defeat, Christian Response, and the Literary Construction of the Jew* (Pennsylvania UP 1994) 30f. Cf. Herrin, *The Formation of Christendom* (Oxford 1987) 52f.

[8] Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology : Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes* (Fordham UP 1974) 7f; cf. Landes, "Apocalyptic Expectations" in: Verbeke, Verhelst, Welkenhuysen (eds.), *The Use and Abuse of Eschatology in the Middle Ages* 163; cf. Theophanes *Chronographia* AM 5999/6000.

his environment, or if it is acknowledged as a spatial whole but seen as a merely transient stage in time, it implies that what the believer does not perceive to be immediately or ultimately meaningful is not real. While extreme manifestations of such convictions are bound to run into trouble sooner or later – since they cannot both reject the world and live in it – it might be difficult to find any religious or political ideology that does not contain traces or reminiscences of such a wish for historical redemption;[9] the question is to what extent they are decisive to the actions of their believers and political agents.

It is therefore with the uttermost caution that one needs to approach the rise in both religious and apocalyptic arguments in the political ideology of the late Roman or Byzantine Empire of the seventh and eighth centuries. A main historical event that can be related to apocalyptic expectations is the 614 fall of Jerusalem to the Persians, a conquest that could have been facilitated, at least to some degree, by Jews waiting for the collapse of Roman power according to the four-empire prophecy of Daniel, and the rebuilding of the Temple.[10] Since the Temple was related to the prophecies of Jesus about the End of times, the point where history resumed for the Jews would have marked the point where the Christian found it replaced by an eschatological future, and there are some indications that the Persian conquest may have presented the Christian world with a considerable shock.[11] The capture of the True Cross, which had been intimately linked to the Constantinian ideology

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[9] John Gray, *Black Mass: Apocalyptic Religion and the End of Utopia* (London 2007) 1-49.

[10] Levi, "L'Apocalypse de Zorobabel et le roi de Perse Siroès" *Revue des Etudes Juives* 68 (1914) 129-60 esp. 150f; Wheeler, "Imagining the Sasanian Capture of Jerusalem", *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 57 (1991) 73ff., van Bekkum, "Jewish Messianic Expectations in the Reign of Heraclius" in: Reinink, Stolte (eds.) *The Reign of Heraclius: Crisis and Confrontation* (Leuven 2002) 95-112.

[11] Antiochus of Mar Saba (IX-XV in the Georgian text translated by Garitte, *La Prise de Jérusalem par les Perses en 614*, CSCO 203, Louvain 1960), Sophronius, *Anacreontica* XIV:60. Perhaps tellingly, later Persian tradition would confuse this event with the distant Persian victory over the Roman Empire in AD 260 (cf. Ferdowsi, *Shahname* 189). It may have left traces even in the Qur'an (30:2-5).

of terrestrial success,[12] added to the feelings of uncertainty and unrest that further poisoned the relationship between the Christians and Jews of Jerusalem.[13]

The Roman and Christian ideological rhetoric of the *Reconquista* of emperor Heraclius (610-41) during the war against Persia has come under renewed scrutiny in recent years.[14] Due to the rapidly changing fortunes of his reign, however, it remains difficult to assess the wider meaning of the symbols, images and narratives associated with his triumph. Beyond the hyperbolic imagery of George of Pisidia, which is focused on the person of Heraclius and less likely to reveal anything about feelings in the provinces and among the lower strata of the Eastern Roman Empire,[15] the coinage that was issued at the time of his initial triumph in Constantinople in 629 shows a tendency to associate the prevalence of the imperial office with Christ and the Cross, a rhetoric that was further heightened in his entry into Jerusalem in the year after, when the emperor carried the True Cross through the Golden Gate to reinstall it at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.[16] The nature of his subsequent actions, from his decision to evict the Jews from Jerusalem and order them to be forcibly baptised, to the effort to reconcile the Western and Eastern churches, may be interpreted as signs of an imperial ideology that has dropped all moorings to the secular world and entered a feverish mood of redemptory expectations.[17] Does it mean that the reign of Heraclius marks an ideological break with the Late Ancient empire?

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[12] Dinkler, "Das Kreuz als Siegeszeichen" *ZTK* 62 (1965) 9-13.

[13] *The Armenian History attributed to Sebeos*, transl. Thomson (Liverpool 1999) 68-70. See further Tsafrir, "The Temple-Less Mountain", in: Grabar, Kedar (eds.) *The Temple Mount: Jerusalem's Sacred Esplanade* (Jerusalem 2009) 99; Bowersock, *Empires in Collision* 32ff; Sarris, *Empires of Faith* 257f. Olster, *Roman Defeat, Christian Response, and the Literary Construction of the Jew* (Pennsylvania 1994) 42.

[14] Sarris, *Empires of Faith* (Oxford 2011) esp. 250f, 307ff., Kaegi, *Heraclius* 186.

[15] George of Pisidia, *Heraclias* 198, 327; *In rest. Crucis* 238, 242.

[16] Hrabanus Maurus, *Homiliae de Festis Praecipuis etc*., ed Migne, *PL* 110 (1864*)* 131ff. Mango, "The Temple Mount, AD 614-638", in: Raby & Johns (eds.) *Bayt al-Maqdis: Abd al-Malik's Jerusalem, Part One* (Oxford 1992) 15. Note the importance of the Golden Gate in *Hez*. 44:1-3.

[17] Olster, *Roman Defeat*, *Christian Response* 79-92 (cf. Sophronius, *Anacreontica* XVIII:85.)

It is important to note that the idea of a Divinely sanctioned victory upon earth was consistent to both Roman and Jewish narratives, at least for as long as it did not implicate itself with the question about a Messianic future. Heraclius' restoration of the Cross to Jerusalem might have been as much evocative of the victory of king David as of Constantine but still fully able of rendering the same message.[18] Emperor Titus had manifested the Roman victory over the Jews in AD 70 by bringing the Jewish Temple treasures to Rome and parading them in his triumphal procession; emperor Justinian I is reported to have obtained the same treasures from the Vandals in 533-34 and paraded them through Constantinople before he dispatched them to Jerusalem.[19] The numinousness of these objects did not reveal anything about Pagan, Jewish and Christian notions about the future. If Heraclius' restoration of the Cross to Jerusalem had a more problematic dimension it was because it implied that the Romans had replaced the Jews as God's chosen people and historical redeemers. The result of such a rhetoric would have effectively put the empire in opposition to what it had stood for in a secular sense. Perhaps tellingly, the main witness we have to the feelings of Jewish converts in the wake of the triumph, the *Doctrina Jacobi*, seems to conclude that Christianity will offer redemption whereas the Roman world is in a state of dissolution following the Danielic prophecies of the four empires of the world.[20] Similar convictions pervade even the historical chronicles that were composed in the imperial capital in the reign of Heraclius.[21]

The interesting fact that the rise and expansion of Islam took place in a world plunged in such a mood should not be overstated, but it is still noteworthy as scholars are increasingly prone to see a both ecumeni-

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[18] *II. Sam* (*II. Kings*) 5:6-9, 6:1-16. A son born to Heraclius in the year 630 was given the name David and a group of silver plates dating from the same period depict the Biblical king; see further Sarris, *Empires of Faith* 258 and Kaegi, *Heraclius: Emperor of Byzantium* (Cambridge 2003) 114, 198.

[19] Where they seem to have vanished, as no reference to them is made during the Persian conquest in 614. Cf. Procopius, *Vandal Wars* 2.9.

[20] *Doctrina Iacobi*, ed. Bonwetsch (Berlin 1910) III:9 p 62 l 6-12, V:16 p 86 l 17-21; cf. Olster, *Roman Defeat, Christian Response* 168.

[21] *Chronicon Paschale* 264:6-12, 365:6-8, Theophylactus Simocatta *Hist*. V 15:6-7.

cal and eschatological dimension in the early Islamic movement.[22] The conquest of Constantinople and the fall of the Roman Empire play an important role in later Islamic apocalyptic traditions, where the Romans are sometimes provided with the Danielic epithet "horned".[23] In some *hadiths* the conquest of the Roman capital will be accomplished by Jews united under the first half of the Muslim creed,[24] and there seems to exist a link to the Roman role in the destruction of Jerusalem that makes Constantinople into a new Babylon:

> God sent a prophet to the rubbish dump and said: "Rejoice, o Jerusalem! Faruq ['Umar, the Muslim conqueror of Jerusalem in 638] will come and cleanse you." He sent another prophet to Constantinople, who stood on its hills and said: "O Constantinople! What did your kinsmen do to My house? They laid it waste, and made you its equal instead … One day, I will make you barren and unfortified at the hands of Banu al-Qadhir, Saba and Waddan. Nobody will seek shelter from you and nobody will rest in your shade anymore."[25]

An important link between Roman and Muslim traditions is provided by the Syriac apocalypses of the seventh century. The triumph of Heraclius

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[22] Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers: at the Origins of Islam* (Princeton 2010) 108-118, Sarris, *Empires of Faith* (Oxford 2011) 266, Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* (Princeton 1997) 554-6. On the conquests from a Byzantine point of view, see Kaegi, "Initial Byzantine Reactions to the Arab Conquest", *Church History* 38:1969 and ibid., *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests* (Cambridge 2000).

[23] Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptics* (Princeton 2002) 60.

[24] Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ* V 766–7 (*hadiṯ* 37).

[25] Tabari, *Tārīḫ ar-rusūl wa l-mulūk* I 2409. This is said by the Yemenite Jew Ka'b when 'Umar is about to pray on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem; cf. *Rev.* 18:1-3, but also Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition* 66 on the Slavonic *Visions of Daniel* that seems to have been written in the wake of the Arab conquest of Crete. The connection between Constantinople and Babylon reappears in many later Byzantine traditions from this time: see Külzer, "Konstantinopel in der apokalyptischen Literatur der Byzantiner", *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 50 (2000) 51-76, and Brandes, "Die apokalyptische Literatur", in: Winkelmann, Brandes (eds.), *Quellen zur Geschichte des frühen Byzanz (4.-9. Jahrhundert). Bestand und Probleme*, (Berlin 1990) 305-322.

seems to have led some Syrian observers to conclude that a Messianic Age was about to dawn on earth, only to be ended by the eschatological invaders of Gog and Magog, which Alexander the Great had once banned to their mountainous homeland by an impenetrable wall.[26] A similar story is featured in the Qur'an, where it is said that *Ḏū l-Qarnayn* or "the one with two horns" had confined Gog and Magog behind a wall of copper and that people "will fall upon each other like breaking waves" when the wall collapses.[27] In the seventh-century Syriac *Apocalypse of Daniel*, attributed to the prophet Daniel, the Antichrist is supposed to open the "Gates of the North" and let out the armies of Gog and Magog, who will conquer the earth and pitch their tents outside of Jerusalem. However, since Antichrist will fail to raise the dead, God will intervene and send an angel to cut him in pieces.[28] It is important to note that the apocalypse postdates the Islamic conquests and yet makes no references to Arabs or Muslims of any kind.

This lack of interest in the invaders undergoes a decisive shift towards the end of the seventh century, some five decades after the Arabs took control over the Fertile Crescent. The Eastern Syriac or Nestorian work of John bar Penkaye, written at the time of the second *fitna* (680-92) in Iraq, claims that the Arab invasions are God's punishment over the Christians, especially due to the many heresies that have risen in the Roman West; on the other hand it interprets the reign of the 'Umayyad caliph Mu'awiya in almost Messianic terms as an era when "justice flourished" and "there was great peace in the regions under his control; he let everyone live as they wanted"; the only fact that troubled the author was that distinctions between Jews, Christians and "Pagans" had become meaningless.[29] It concludes from the events that are taking place in the time of the author that the "Arab kingdom" is about to be destroyed by the forces of the šurṭa, presumably the Shi'i movement of

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[26] Reinink, "Heraclius, the new Alexander" in: Reinink, Stolte (eds.) *The Reign of Heraclius* 81-94.

[27] Q 18:33.

[28] Henze, *The Syriac Apocalypse of Daniel* (Tübingen 2001) 11-15, 90-96.

[29] Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* 196.

Mukhtar in Iraq.[30]

Whereas John takes a neutral or even slightly benign stance towards the Arab conquerors, the Western Syriac apocalypticist known as Pseudo-Methodius of Edessa inserts a long *ex eventu* prophecy on the Arab conquests in his own prophecy on the End of times and describes them in unflattering terms taken from the New Testament *Revelation of John*.[31] In this version, the Arab conquests have nothing with heresy to do, and they are not so much a punishment as a chastisement. God has given power to the Arabs just as He once gave it to the Jews in the Old Testament: not because He loves them, but because of the sins of the people they conquer: because (as the author describes in great detail) Christian men and women go around drunk in the streets like prostitutes, commit adultery with each other and indulge in all kinds of impurity, God has left their land to the death and destruction at the hands of the Arabs, and these will rob them of what they have and lay heavy taxes upon them. This will inspire "false Christians" to abandon their faith and join the godless debauchery of the new rulers, thus leading to a religious purification of the existing communities that will prepare them for the eschatological invasions from Gog and Magog.[32]

The Syriac Pseudo-Methodius seems to date from around the year 690, before 'Abd al-Malik had made an end to the second *fitna* and regained the initiative on the Roman front, since it is from that direction that the Syrian author expects salvation to come.[33] It is notable that both

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[30] Reinink, "Pseudo-Methodius und die Legende vom Römischen Endkaiser", in Verbeke, Verhelst and Welkenhuysen (eds.), *The Use and Abuse of Eschatology in the Middle Ages* 84-94.

[31] "They resemble the beasts of the fields and the birds of heaven, and the Lord says to them: 'Come together for the great sacrifice I have prepared for you; eat the flesh of the fat and drink the blood of the heroes.'", *Rev.* 19:18. Cf. Suermann, *Die geschichtstheologische Reaktion auf die einfallenden Muslim in der edessenischen Apokalyptik des 7. Jahrhunderts,* (Frankfurt 1985) 60-62 (l 319-327).

[32] Suermann, *Die geschichtstheologische Reaktion* 60-76 (l. 319-327; 337-352; 352-426; 492-499; 427-459; 500-516; 516-539).

[33] Reinink, "Pseudo-Methodius und die Legende vom römischen Endkaiser" 95-6; ibid., "Pseudo-Methodios: A Concept of History in Response to the Rise of Islam", in: Cameron, Conrad (eds.) *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East I* (Princeton 1992) 141. On variations of this theme, see Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic*

Muslim and Christian apocalypticists around the year 700 may have expected the Roman emperor to embark upon a decisive counter-strike, and that later historiographers describe the resettlement policies of Justinian II in the borderland between the empire and the caliphate in Biblicised terms.[34] As it were, the policies turned out to be a failure, and the last years of the seventh century saw a decisive turn of fate in favour of the Caliphate, which conquered Carthage in 698. The early eighth century saw signs of a growing self-confidence among the Muslim rulers in Damascus,[35] a development that coincided with the first Muslim centennial drawing near.[36] When the apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius was translated into Greek during these years, it foresaw a Muslim conquest of Constantinople that would be reverted by the intervention of God:

> Woe is to you, Byzas, when Ishmael will catch up with you: for his horse overtakes everything. The first of his people will pitch his tent in front of you and the battle will commence, and they will shatter the gate of Xylokerkos and come as far as the Forum Bovis (…) But then a voice from the heavens will be heard saying: "Now the punishment is enough" and the Lord will take the fear of the Romans and put it in the hearts of the Arabs, and He will take the courage of the Arabs and put it in the hearts of the Romans. Turning around to flee, they will be cut down by their own (…) And the king of the Greeks, that is the Romans, will stand up in wild fury, like a man who has awoken after a long sleep, intoxicated by too much wine, and whom men had held to be like dead and of no use. He will evict them down to the Red Sea and plunge the sword of desolation into Yathrib [Medina], which is the land of their fathers (…) and they, and their women, and their

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Tradition (University of California Press 1985) 152ff.

[34] Theophanes, *Chronographia* AM 6178, 6184.

[35] Hoyland, *Theophilus of Edessa's Chronicle* (Liverpool 2011) 189; Schick, *The Christian Communities of Palestine from Byzantine to Islamic Rule* (Princeton 1995) 167.

[36] Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* 331-5; it is notable that the dead son of Justinian II seems to resurface in these Islamic traditions on the final battle. On Sulayman, see Shaban, *The Abbasid Revolution* (Cambridge 1970) 74; Eisener, *Zwischen Faktum und Fiktion: Eine Studie zum Umayyadenkalifen Sulaiman b. Abdalmalik und seinem Bild in den Quellen* (Wiesbaden 1987) 120-37; Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm during the Reign of Leo III* (Louvain 1973) 13-24.

children, and those who have cared for their offspring, and all their guardians in the lands of their fathers will be in the hands of the Roman emperor, and he will put them to the sword and in captivity and deliver them to death and ruin.[37]

There is a striking similarity between this description and the one that can be found in the Muslim apocalyptic tradition, which sees the Muslims entering Constantinople and sharing its booty when a voice from heaven tells them that the *Daǧǧal* or Antichrist has arrived, and they are leaving the city in haste. Conversely, the Muslim apocalypticists assume that the actual victory of Islam will only come by when the Muslims are in a minority and the Romans form a majority among the inhabitants on earth.[38] Only the most honest and self-sacrificing of Muslims will be prepared to defend the holy cities of the Prophet:

> The Last Hour will not come before the Romans land at A'maq or Dabiq (at the Red Sea). An army consisting of the best men of Medina will go out to meet them … They will fight, and a third will die fleeing – God will never forgive them – and a third, the best of martyrs for God, will die fighting, and a third, which will not give in, will win victory and conquer Constantinople.[39]

The 717-18 Muslim siege of Constantinople appears to mark a turning point in these expectations. Unfortunately it is extremely difficult to assert the relationship between these apocalypses and the historical outcome on the basis of the sources we have, as it can also be said to mark a historiographical forking point. In later Islamic historiography, the 'Umayyads who led the siege would sometimes be remembered as the "cursed tree" of Banu 'Umayya, a dynasty that had allowed itself to become absorbed and corrupted by the vanities of the Romans instead of fulfilling the fight for the Rule of God. The Roman or Byzantine hero of the day, emperor Leo III  would be depicted by later Byzantine

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[37] Pseudo-Methodios, *Apocalypse* 13, 9–12. The Xylokerkos gate is the present Belgrad kapısı; the Forum Bovis was located in the contemporary Aksaray area.

[38] Cf. Cook, *Understanding Jihad* 136-61.

[39] Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, V 747–8 (*hadiṯ* 31). Cf. Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic* 49-54.

chroniclers as the "forerunner of the Antichrist" and the instigator of Iconoclasm.

There are some signs that the caliphs that were directly involved in the siege – Sulayman and his successor 'Umar II – were associated with Messianic hopes for a rule of justice and piety;[40] and similarly, Armenian and Monophysite sources may have preserved a picture of Leo III that is truer to the context in which he came to power. In such sources Leo appears as a saviour of the Christian Constantinople: he is a new Moses who prays together with the clergy and the inhabitants of the city and sinks the Muslim fleet by touching the Bosporus with the Cross.[41] It makes it tempting to suggest that the events of the year 718 were accompanied by a deliberate use of apocalypticism within the state ideology of the two empires. Interestingly, Leo III and 'Umar II are both said to have exchanged letters in which they tried to defend their own faiths against the faith of the other.[42] Even if this exchange of letters never took place, it reveals some of the impressions that the two rulers appear to have made upon people far beyond their own capitals: the fullest version of the alleged letters is found in the eighth-century Armenian history of Ghewond.[43]

The question what impact such apocalyptic features of a state ideology and rhetoric really had is more sobering. The basic division remains an epistemological one, and in this concern there are very little signs of any apocalyptic transformations taking place that would have

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[40] Blankinship, *The End of the Jihad State : The Reign of Hisham ibn 'Abd al Malik and the Collapse of the 'Umayyads* (New York 1994) 31-5; Shaban, *The Abbasid Revolution* 76ff, Eisener, *Zwischen Faktum und Fiktion* 125-7.

[41] Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm during the Reign of Leo III* 36-43, Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others* Saw It 297-9, Haldon, Brubaker, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era* (Cambridge 2012) 73-5 and 272-5.

[42] Gaudeul, "The Correspondence between Leo and 'Umar", *Islamochristiana* 10 (1984); Hoyland, "The Correspondence of Leo III and 'Umar II" *Aram* 6 (1994) 168f; ibid., *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* 490-501; Meyendorff, "Byzantine Views of Islam", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 18 (1964) 125-129. Haldon and Brubaker remain sceptical on its veracity; cf. *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era* 115 n143.

[43] Jeffreys, "Ghevond's Text of the Correspondence between Leo III and 'Umar II", *Harvard Theological Review* 37 (1944).

corresponded to the expectations. Already the portrait of Heraclius reveals an enormous split between what the emperor is said to have tried to accomplish and how his efforts were actually received. Not only Jews and non-Roman Christians objected to the idea of a conversion of the Jews or a unification of the Roman and Oriental churches: Byzantine Christians who felt less attracted by end-time scenarios were sceptical about the conversion of people towards whom they had since long developed – or inherited – a set of cultural prejudices.[44] Those who opposed the imperial efforts to reconcile the Eastern Church revealed similar feelings that had little with theology to do.[45] Their objections reveal a grain of sense, for cultural differences were unlikely to disappear with the theological ones; and it is hard to see how people who had been forced to accept Christianity for political reasons would consider their baptisms as anything more than a simple survival strategy.

The same obstacles occur during the Muslim conquest. Even if it had attracted Jews and Christians driven by the apocalyptic hope for some kind of ecumenical unification of all Monotheists, it did not result in the whole Near East becoming one. The Believers might have felt well defined as long as they tried to assert themselves among polytheist Arabs; but what did it mean once they began to burst their native context and entered a world that already abounded with other believers of different Monotheist denominations? Some contemporaries would have been eager to join a movement that they identified as the fulfilment of an apocalyptic truth,[46] but others would have considered the same truth confined to their own religious communities and remained unresponsive to its appeal.[47] Peace treatises ensured the safety of the existing reli-

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[44] Maximos Confessor, *Epistolae*, *PG* 91:540-541. Cf. Olster, *Roman Defeat, Christian Response*, 91f., Sarris, *Empires of Faith* 260.

[45] Theophanes, *Chronographia,* ed. de Boor (Leipzig 1883) AM 6121. This is not the place to discuss the Christological overtones in the division, but see Winkelmann, *Der Monoergetisch-Monotheletische Streit* (Frankfurt 2001) 36-8 for a concise summary.

[46] On the ecumenical nature of the early Islamic movement, see Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers* 108-118, Sarris, *Empires of Faith* 266 and Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* 554-6.

[47] Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* 121, 468, 506, 537-8; *The Armenian History attributed to Sebeos*, 95-7; *The Chronicle of Zuqnin* (transl. Harrak) 142; John of

gious communities from further hostilities in exchange for taxes to the Arabs and submission to their authority; in this concern, the transferral of power must have been quite smooth, which explains why material evidence from the conquest shows few or no signs of great upheavals taking place, or lasting damage being done to the existing communities.[48] Practical issues made conquerors and conquered meet in a common field of understanding where a religious confrontation was unnecessary, and people might have given few thoughts to the wider implications of the mutual encounter once they saw that the peace agreements were functioning. Thus whereas the Believers took control over the region at a remarkable speed and with a success rate for which their conviction has to take no small credit, it was no religious war, for the religious incitement was one-sided. It did not face any ideological opposition from the local communities that were allowed to live on as before; and since it meant that the Arabs were neither Pagans among Monotheists nor Monotheists among Pagans, but Monotheists among Monotheists, their early status as Believers would have to be reinforced through a definition that expressed a commitment to their political status. A gradual shift from the more ecumenical term Believers to Muslims or "submitters" took place in the decades that followed the conquests and seems to have reached a final point of consolidation in the reign of ʿAbd al-Malik (685-705).[49]

This also makes it easier to explain why the Muslim Arabs make up little more than a subplot in the Syriac apocalyptic writings of the seventh century. They are totally absent in the *Apocalypse of Daniel*; they are mentioned by John bar Penkaye, but only as passive agents of a Divine decision; and even in the apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius, they are little more than God's tool of chastisements. They do figure as unjust rulers and tyrants, but only in a worldly sense. Although theo-

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Damascus, *De Haeresibus* (ed. Kotter 1981 IV 60); cf. also Wolf, "The Earliest Latin Lives of Muhammad" 99f.

[48] Pentz, *The Invisible Conquest: The Ontogenesis of Sixth and Seventh Century Syria* (Copenhagen 1992) 16ff; Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers* 106-118; Sarris, *Empires of Faith* 275-9.

[49] Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* 336-44, 545-56; Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers* 203-11.

logical definitions play a decisive role in both the Syriac and Muslim apocalypses (the Jews are victorious when they quote the šahhada; in the Syriac version of Pseudo-Methodius God intervenes when the Arabs "deny the existence of a Christian redeemer")[50] the battle is not taking place between Christianity and Islam. Confined to their own apocalyptic horizons, the two ideologies have no eyes for each other: their minds are wholly focused on the struggle between spiritual and physical realities. Perhaps pious Muslim or Arab concerns for conversions that were merely politically motivated[51] explains why the Muslim apocalyptic tradition is equally keen to stress that the true victory of Islam can only come by when the Romans are in a majority and all false Muslims will abandon the defence of Mecca and Medina. But whatever remained of such apocalyptic hopes seems to have decreased after 718.

Does this mean that apocalypticism had little or no significance in the Roman and Muslim political ideologies of the seventh and early eighth centuries? It is hardly an understatement to say that beliefs of this kind offer an unstable basis for a political system. Not only do they make certain long-time assessments hard to implement, they also present the authority with a multitude of counter-narratives in which the ruler, the collective and the world lose their common meaning. For all its long-time and all-encompassing claims, the apocalyptic horizon is extremely narrow: it creates a map of time and space where the most incoherent phenomena are simplified to fit with an abstract principle, and it normally refuses to admit its own incongruence. By denying the validity of the perceptible world and deferring its own verification to another world, it avoids the challenge of matching itself against the reality where it claims to be true. For the same reason, all apocalyptic movements and beliefs inevitably run into major crises once their purported goal has been fulfilled and it does not fully match what the followers have expected.

On the other hand, what the temporary attraction and impact of apocalyptic movements actually does reveal is the fact that there remained an element of openness in the political developments of the seventh cen-

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[50] Suermann, *Die geschichtstheologische Reaktion* 74 (1 498).
[51] Crone, *The Nativist Prophets of Early Islamic Iran* (Cambridge 2012) 10.

tury. The political ideology of the Christian Roman Empire was never so closed as to fail to attract Christians outside of the Roman area of political influence, and the early Islamic movement was never as homogenously Arab or "Muslim" as it appeared from a retrospective point of view. The schizophrenic legacy of the 'Umayyad and Isaurian dynasties in later Islamic and Byzantine historiography, finally, might actually indicate that it was this openness that later generations of Byzantines and Muslims found it so difficult to come to terms with. The prophecy of Daniel made a new turn: just as in the Hellenistic era, when it had failed to materialise, it would turn into an object of innumerable re-interpretations long into the modern era, re-interpretations that had long lost all memory of the first encounter between Christianity and Islam.