

The Roman Empire of the Apocalypse:
History, Eschatology, and the Four Kingdoms of Daniel in Late Antiquity,
the Early Medieval Middle East, and Byzantium

By

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A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

History

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

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Summer 2019

Abstract

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This dissertation explores how late Roman and Byzantine Christians conceptualized the role of their empire in the consummation of history and the events of the end times, and suggests that their views on this subject have larger ramifications for the study of Byzantine political thought. It examines how the citizens and subjects of history's first Christian empire reconciled the distinctly anti-imperial apocalyptic literature of the Bible with the needs of imperial ideology. It pursues this question by studying how Latin, Greek, and Syriac writers in late antiquity and the early medieval period interpreted the apocalyptic prophecies in the Old Testament Book of Daniel, which were hostile to the imperial order of the time.

The Danielic prophecies divided history into four successive kingdoms, of which the fourth and last was the most wicked, ruled by an evil and persecuting king. It prophesied that in the near future this evil kingdom would be destroyed and replaced by an eternal and holy fifth kingdom. Scholars have long recognized that ancient Jews and early Christians denounced the Roman Empire as the persecutory fourth kingdom of Daniel. Nonetheless, most modern scholarship claims that after the conversion of Constantine, Roman Christians sought to reconcile Christian empire with scripture, either by stripping the fourth kingdom of its negative associations and celebrating it as the polity which would help usher in the God's eternal kingdom, or by identifying the empire with that eternal kingdom, Daniel's fifth kingdom. These mistaken conclusions stem from a conflation of Byzantine and Syriac eschatological literature. Some Syriac sources, produced in the imperial borderlands or within the Persian and, later, Arab empires, did glorify the Roman Empire from afar as a virtuous fourth kingdom; however, this literature exercised a major influence within the empire only from the eighth century onwards.

In addressing past misconceptions, this dissertation proposes a new narrative of the development of late Roman and Byzantine political eschatology. It argues that while Christianity was still illegal within the Roman Empire, Christians formulated a *common political-eschatological scenario*; that is, a shared narrative of the political events that they believed would take place in the time leading up to the end of history. According to this scenario the Roman Empire, identified as the fourth kingdom of Daniel, would at some point in the future fall into the hands of the Antichrist, who would reign as the last emperor and use the Roman state to persecute Christianity. Despite the Christianization of the Roman Empire, this scenario remained largely unchallenged through the seventh century. This indicates that late Romans were far more pessimistic for far longer about the future of the empire than most scholarship suggests.

Next, the dissertation argues that divergent interpretations of the four kingdoms of Daniel and Rome's eschatological role did develop within Syriac literature. This was the result of textual differences in the Syriac version of the Book of Daniel, different traditions of Biblical exegesis favored by Syriac Christians, and the unique political circumstances under which Syriac Christians lived. One such tradition, first attested in the Syriac *Demonstrations* (composed c. 337 AD by the Persian Christian Aphrahat), held that God had tasked the Roman Empire, as a righteous fourth kingdom, with ruling the earth as Christ's proxy until his second coming. According to this theory, when Christ returned the Romans would peacefully restore the kingship to him. Aphrahat's understanding of Rome's eschatological role was somewhat popular among Syriac Christians until the late sixth or early seventh century. After that time, Syriac eschatology became far more ambivalent towards the Roman Empire—likely as a result of the Roman persecution of the Church of the East and the Syriac Orthodox Church. Such ambivalence was exacerbated by the seventh-century Arab conquests, which shattered the grandiose expectations for the Roman Empire. A major exception to this ambivalence was the Syriac *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* ("Pseudo-Methodius"), composed c. 690, which resuscitated and adapted Aphrahat's eschatological views to the political circumstances after the Arab conquests. The author of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* invented a literary figure commonly called the Last Roman Emperor (or "King of the Greeks") to act out Aphrahat's interpretation of the Danielic prophecies: this emperor would bring all the world under Roman rule and would later surrender his kingship to God in advance of Christ's second coming.

Finally, the dissertation argues that the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, which was translated into Greek c. 700 AD, introduced to Byzantium the idea that its empire was a good fourth kingdom of Daniel, and provided an alternative to the earlier political-eschatological scenario. As the empire teetered on the brink of collapse in the eighth century and the status of the emperor faced new challenges, Syriac political eschatology provided a more hopeful message in the face of Byzantine concerns about the future of the empire. Nonetheless, the earlier, more pessimistic political-eschatological scenario was never fully displaced, and many Byzantines continued to suspect that the Byzantine state would succumb to evil in the final days of history.

In setting forth a new narrative of the development of Byzantine eschatology, this dissertation challenges many old assumptions. Contrary to received wisdom, the late Romans and Byzantines did not believe that their empire was the manifestation of God's kingdom on earth or a forerunner to Christ's eschatological kingdom. Rather, longstanding traditions of Christian eschatology taught them to be wary of the Roman state and suspicious of the powers of the emperor (even if not all late antique Christians heeded these lessons). This finding problematizes traditional portrayals of Byzantine political thought as a Christianized doctrine of divine kingship stressing unconditional loyalty to the emperor as God's representative on earth. Moreover, his dissertation demonstrates that a positive appraisal of the empire's eschatological role was not imposed through imperial court propaganda as modern scholars often suggest, but rather developed from the ground up, emerging from the imperial periphery or from outside the empire. This suggests that emperors and their spokesmen had far less influence in shaping ideology than is often assumed, and exposes weaknesses in the top-down historical narratives that predominate in the field. Further, this dissertation challenges the long-held assumption that Syriac apocalypticism developed out of Byzantine imperial ideology, and shows instead that Syriac eschatology actually shaped Byzantine ideas and indeed exerted a major influence on Mediterranean-wide discourses on empire and kingship. Such insights emphasize the connectedness of the late antique and medieval worlds, and argue for a history of the Byzantium that privileges cross-cultural links over strict disciplinary boundaries.

For Maria Mavroudi
and Jessica Yao

“Westward the course of empire takes its way;
The four first acts already past,
A fifth shall close the drama with the day:
Time’s noblest offspring is the last.”

— Lines quoted at the foundation of the University of California, which supposedly inspired the naming of the university for their author, the Irish philosopher Bishop George Berkeley; now emblazoned on the seal of Berkeley, CA

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Acknowledgments

Writing a dissertation is by its nature a solitary process, and so it can be easy to forget the enormous investment of the resources (graduate stipends, travel and research funding, opportunity costs) and labor (discussion, feedback, and comments from advisers, teachers, colleagues, and peers) made by other that are necessary to make it possible. I have been extremely lucky in the people around me though this process and I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to so many.

First and foremost I must thank my adviser, Maria Mavroudi, who took a chance in accepting me as her student. Not only did she initiate me into the world of Byzantine studies, but she went above and beyond the typical duties of an adviser, giving emotional support and reassuring me whenever I felt overwhelmed or doubted myself. During a period of ill health and no doubt with her own concerns and burdens, she continued as before as an attentive mentor. Even when exhausted from the effects of chemotherapy, she read the chapters I sent her in minute detail. She has always been there for me, and never despaired, and never let me despair. I truly would not have finished this dissertation without her encouragement. For this reason, I dedicate this dissertation to her. I only hope the time and work I have put into this research has done some good, or has made some contribution, to justify all the time and work she has invested in me.

My deep thanks also to my dissertation committee for their support and feedback: Susanna Elm, Geoff Koziol, and Diliانا Angelova. I have been privileged to learn enormously from each of them. And all of them have been extremely flexible as my plans changed and I burdened them with a lot of reading at the last minute. The history department staff, especially Todd Kuebler, Erin Leigh Inama, and Mabel Lee, did so much work, and saved me many times when I forgot forms or completely failed at using the CalCentral computer system.

I was extremely fortunate to be at the University of Florida as an undergraduate at a time when an amazing constellation of late antique and medieval scholars were teaching there; it's little wonder that, as a directionless undergrad who decided to dabble in some history classes, I got swept up in ancient and medieval history. First, I would like to thanks Andrea Sterk, my adviser at the UF, who has done so much for me over the years. Even after I went to Berkeley, she has continued to read my work, give feedback, advocate for me, and to provide me with wise advice. She, and her husband Howard Louthan, have both been extremely kind to me, and they have saved the day during many conference mishaps. I owe Howard for not letting me leave Florida without having experienced a trip to Waffle House.

Several other people did so much for me during my time at UF. Florin Curta first got me excited in the middle ages; later, it was in one of his seminars that I made the first, blind stabs at dealing with Byzantine apocalyptic literature. Bonnie Effros was a great teacher, and I look back on the time I worked for her at the UF Center for the Humanities and the Public Sphere with immense fondness. Nina Caputo was a source of support, encouragement, and guidance in navigating the world of academia.

Moreover, none of this dissertation would have been possible without the various language teachers at various institutions who either instructed me classes, let me sit in on their classes, or who tutored me. These are Andrew Nichols, Alexandros Alexakis, Stratis Papaioannou, Tom Recht, Father Ephraim Ashur Alkhas, Scott Fitzgerald Johnson, Adam McCollum, and Aaron Butts. Every one of them taught be an enormous amount and were all

exceedingly patient with me. Columba Stewart was a welcoming presence at the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library, and extremely generous with his time and insights.

Several organizations made the research for this dissertation possible. First and foremost, I am grateful to the UC Berkeley Department of History for its continuous support of my work. Dumbarton Oaks Museum and Research Library provided me a yearlong junior fellowship, which brought with it the time and resources by which the ideas in this dissertation began to take shape. Gennadius Library of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens and the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library provided me with important summer fellowships. The Paul Alexander Memorial Scholarship, the Medieval Academy, and Friends of the Princeton Library have all provided research support. Travel funding from the Byzantine Studies Association of North America permitted me to share my research.

Many people discussed my research with me and provided vital feedback and ideas, or showed extreme generosity in sharing their own work with me, often in the form of early drafts and other unpublished material. These include Jack Tannous, Averil Cameron, James Palmer, Gian Luca Potestà, Ivan Biliarsky, Nancy Sevcenko, Muriel Debié, Alan Walmsley, Derek Krueger, Jeffery Wickes, David Devore, Tomasso Tesei, David Gyllenhaal, John Glynias, Dawn Teresa LaValle, Sergei Minov, Bryan Kozik, Doug Whalin, Ryan Strickler, András Kraft, Stephen Shoemaker, and Wolfram Brandes. At Dumbarton Oaks Nancy Sevcenko, Henry and Eunice McGuire, and Joel Kalvesmaki all provided feedback and insights.

I would be remiss if I didn't think all the librarians whose labors made this dissertation possible. Joshua Robinson at Dumbarton Oaks, especially, was always a friendly presence in the library and quick to help with my research needs. Dave Jenkins at the Princeton library was full of wisdom and good humor, and was always there when I needed to find something or just wanted to discuss some ideas.

Many friends and colleagues, at Berkeley and beyond, provided intellectual insights, aided my research, and made my years of grad school more fun. I was extremely fortunate to have Patrick Clark as a roommate and friend. I cherish all the time we spent discussing history and politics, and helping each other out of ridiculous situations. All of my best memories of grad school feature Patrick in some way.

Other friends and colleagues at Berkeley to whom I owe thanks include (though I'm sure I must be missing people!): Norman Underwood, Joel Pattison, Christopher Blunda, Jesse Torgerson, James Morton, and Andrew Griebler. At Princeton, David Gyllenhaal, especially, welcomed me, provided feedback and ideas, and during times of doubt helped me see that maybe I really might be on to something with my research. At Berkeley *and* Princeton, Caroline Chung and Molly Horne have been constant friends. Rosemary Daniels, Emerson S. F. Richards, and Brad Johnson, are friends from Gainesville who have all made me a better person and encouraged me to keep going, and I'm immensely lucky that our friendships have continued after we have all left Florida. Anna Lankina has been a great friend and colleague, who showed me how to get through grad school without going insane. And Anna, along with Rebecca Devlin and Robert McEachnie have made many conferences much more fun. Katja Weidner and Baukje van den Berg were good friends and sounding boards at important times. Polina Ivanova, Courtney Tomaselli, and Kyle Shimoda provided both encouragement and a sense of Byzantine companionship. My colleagues at Dumbarton Oaks contributed much to my productivity and made the time there a lot of fun—especially Alex Vukovich, Jake Ransohoff and Ivan Marić. The members of the First Millennium Reading Group (formerly WARBLS) and Syriac reading

group, notably Pamela Klasova and Josh Mugler, made me feel welcome in Washington D.C. and provided intellectual stimulation outside the ivory tower of DO.

I obviously owe an enormous debt of gratitude to my parents: my father Joseph Bonura, stepmother Victoria Bonura, mother Donna Murray, and stepfather Tom Murray... Look Ma, I finished the damn paper!

Finally, the person most deserving of thanks is Jessica Yao, who has been the best of friends and an exceedingly patient partner while I wrote this dissertation. She has probably heard far more than she wanted about Byzantine eschatology, but she provided wise advise and always pushed me to tackle big questions. For all that she has done for me, I also dedicate this dissertation to her, with love.

Note on Translations, Transliterations, Etc.

All translations in this dissertation, unless stated otherwise, are my own. Where I have quoted from translations, I have tried as often as possible to check them against the original language to ensure that the translation is correct, and I note where I have made emendations to these.

For the most part, I have left words in Greek, Hebrew (or Aramaic in Hebrew characters), and Syriac untransliterated. This dissertation is intended for experts who will presumably have a reading knowledge of Greek and Syriac. Latin transliterations of Greek tend to be frustrating to those who read Greek, and are useless to those who do not. Moreover, there are certain difficulties with transliterating Syriac, not the least of which is that East Syrian and West Syrian pronunciations differ. Rather than show a preference for one or the other it is easier to keep Syriac words in Syriac characters. For Syriac throughout I have used a classical, unaccented Estrangela (Estrangelo) font, even when transcribing text from editions and manuscripts that use other scripts. Microsoft Word for Mac (with which I wrote this dissertation) is still poorly equipped for Syriac word processing, and I apologize for any errors that have crept into this dissertation, either thanks to technological glitches or my own mistakes.

I have transliterated words in other, less used languages, such as Arabic, Armenian, Coptic, and Pahlavi. In the interest of a clean, easy to read text, I have avoided excessive diacritical marks in the transliterations in the body of this dissertation, except where I quote from the work of others who have used them.

In the body of the dissertation, I have often Latinized the spellings of names, though I retain other spellings where I quote from the work of others. Where Latinizations differ significantly from the original language, I have tried to provide the original name in parentheses at the first reference.

In general when verses from the Bible, I have used the New Revised Standard Version. However, in cases where I cite a specific translation of the Bible, such as the Vulgate, Septuagint, or Peshitta, I provide my own translation of the verses, with references and original text in the footnotes.

Introduction

In the fourth century AD, the Roman Empire became history's first Christian empire. Though the Christian Roman Empire would stand only a short while in the West, the Eastern Roman Empire lived on as the Byzantine Empire, preserving the traditions of Christian empire through the middle ages. Throughout this millennium of Byzantine history, the Christian faith and the inheritance of Roman imperialism functioned as the twin foundations of the empire.

The reconciliation of Christianity with the Roman imperial state at times entailed a great deal of improvisation. Perhaps one of the greatest challenges involved navigating the ways that the Roman ideology of empire was at odds with the sensibilities of the new faith. Indeed, a strong anti-imperial messages run through the Old and New Testaments. In the gospels Jesus had instructed his followers to put their hopes in a coming kingdom of heaven; even though they were to render unto Caesar, their true loyalty was to be to a kingdom not of this world. Though many of Old Testament books were centered on a Jewish political entity, the Davidic kingdom, these holy books that the Christians had inherited from the Jews also exhibited a great hostility toward the gentile empires.

This anti-imperial attitude is perhaps most apparent in the Book of Daniel. Here, two prophetic visions suggest a historical scheme of four successive worldly kingdoms or empires. The fourth and last of these kingdoms is most wicked: a kingdom that opposes God and his saints. Thus, in Daniel 7, where Daniel receives a prophetic vision of the four kingdoms each symbolized by a mythological animal, the fourth kingdom is represented by a terrifying horned beast with teeth of iron: "it shall devour the whole earth, and trample it down, and break it to pieces" (Daniel 7:23). Its leader "shall speak words against the Most High" and wage war upon God's holy people (Daniel 7:25). In punishment for its war against the saints, the Book of Daniel makes clear, God will destroy the fourth kingdom, and give its power to the saints so that they may reign in a fifth, just and eternal kingdom (Daniel 7:26–27).

Already in the first century Josephus attested to the fact that many Jews identified Rome with the fourth kingdom of Daniel.¹ Most of the ancient fathers of the church adopted a similar view, enshrining in Christianity a common association of the fourth kingdom of Daniel with the Roman Empire. They understood the persecution inflicted upon them as the war against God's holy people, and believed that the fifth kingdom would begin with the eschatological return of Christ.

How did the champions of Christian empire cope with this apocalyptic indictment of Rome's empire? The most common explanation is that the Christians of the late Roman Empire and its Byzantine successor state interpreted Daniel's visions altogether differently than their forbearers had. As one modern scholar has asserted: "The Byzantines applied the Daniel prophecy of the four empires to themselves so that they became the [fourth and] last empire, the

¹ Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, X.276. For more information, see chapter 1, below.

empire that prepared the way for Christ's return.”² According to another scholar: “The myth that Rome was the last worldly empire, uniquely chosen to pave the way for the Kingdom of God, became a centerpiece of Byzantine eschatology.”³ Thus, the Byzantines supposedly no longer understood the fourth kingdom as an evil kingdom that must be destroyed to make way for God’s eternal kingdom, but instead as a precursor kingdom privileged by its penultimate place in the historical scheme.

When did this change take place? Was this a gradual evolution in thinking or a rapid change? Did all late Roman and Byzantine Christians embrace it, or did some still hold to the more traditional interpretation of the meaning of the fourth kingdom? This dissertation will seek, in part, to provide answers to these questions, for which no comprehensive answer has been given in previous work.

These findings will have larger implications. The kingdoms of Daniel provide an ideal, though often overlooked, window into how Christian thinking about empire changed in the Christian Roman Empire and its Byzantine successor state. The development of the positive reinterpretation of the fourth kingdom of Daniel encapsulates a larger issue which this dissertation will also seek to understand: when and how did the Roman Empire, the principle antagonist and evil force in early Christian eschatology, the persecutory state *non pareil*, come to assume a positive role in Christian eschatology? When, in the words of one scholar, did Rome transform “from ‘the beast from the abyss’ into the *imperium Christianum*,” from the Satanic enemy to the focus of Christian hopes?⁴ Did this take place before the conversion of Emperor Constantine to Christianity, during the reign of Constantine, later in the Byzantine centuries, or perhaps ever at all?

The changing place of the Roman Empire’s in Christian eschatology has been dealt with before, if often only obliquely. One view, popularized by the German political theorist Carl Schmitt in a series of publications mostly concerned with the modern politics of the state, held that the Roman Empire was already imbued with a positive place in Christian eschatology from a very early point. Schmitt pointed to the fact that St. Paul, in his Second Epistle to the Thessalonians (chapter 2:6–7), spoke of a *katechon* (alternatively τὸ κατέχον, and ὁ κατέχων), a restraining force that keeps back the coming of the Antichrist. At least as early as the writings of Tertullian (d. c. 240 AD) this force was identified as the Roman Empire and its emperor. According to Schmitt, this role as *katechon* was the key theory that gave the Roman Empire—as well as the Byzantine and Holy Roman empires that inherited its status—divine legitimation and providential purpose in the eyes of Christians.⁵

² David Olster, “Byzantine Apocalypses,” in *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, vol. 2: *Apocalypticism in Western History and Culture*, ed. Bernard McGinn (New York: Continuum, 1998), 54.

³ Stephen Shoemaker, *The Apocalypse of Empire: Imperial Eschatology in Late Antiquity and Early Islam* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 41.

⁴ The quotation is from Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 154.

⁵ Carl Schmitt lays out his political concept of the “*katechon*” in pieces throughout several of his works, and his ideas clearly developed and changed over time. He introduced the concept in his *Land und Meer: Eine*

Nonetheless, even though many (though by no means all) Roman Christians identified Rome and its emperor as the *katechon*, this does not mean that those Christians had any love for the empire. Schmitt and his followers take for granted that Christians regarded the coming of the Antichrist and the end of the world as events to be postponed as long as possible, much like modern secular thinkers might regard climate catastrophe or an asteroid hurdling toward the earth. However, for Christians, the end of days was not necessarily a doom to be feared, but potentially the first painful steps in a process that would bring about a new heaven and a new earth, the coming of God's eternal kingdom. Thus, Rome's status as *katechon* could be viewed positively or negatively. Tertullian took the position (an unusual one, and notably in a Christian apology aimed at a Roman audience) that Christians should pray that the empire remained strong so as to keep back the Antichrist,⁶ but others could conclude equally logically that only the destruction of Rome's empire could lead the way to the realization of God's kingdom. The twelfth-century churchman Otto of Freising could assert that Paul had resorted to such enigmatic language about the *katechon* without explicitly naming what it was, "lest he appear to have uttered a calumny against the Roman Empire."⁷

In this sense, the meaning of Rome's status as *katechon* was even more ambiguous than its status as the fourth kingdom of Daniel, open from the beginning to a positive or negative interpretation. Indeed, as this dissertation will show, the question of Rome's role as *katechon* and its status as the fourth kingdom of Daniel were often explicitly linked in the writings of Christian thinkers. The heavenly kingdom of the saints, the fifth kingdom of Daniel, could not arrive until the fourth kingdom passed away, so in this sense the Roman Empire did act as a *katechon* holding back the events of the end times (though the place of the Antichrist's rise in all of these events was a constant question). Thus, only in connection with the development of the Christian understanding of Rome's place as the fourth kingdom of Daniel can Rome's place in the theory of the *katechon* be fully understood.

An alternative view, found more commonly in the works of scholars from the fields of history and religious studies, locates the shift in Christian eschatological conception of the Roman Empire—when it transformed from an evil empire into the kingdom that prepared the

weltgeschichtliche Betrachtung (Leipzig: Philipp Reclam, 1942). Here, he described the British Empire as a *katechon* in a negative sense, as it clung to an outdated world order, but he also described past *katechons* in positive terms, such as the Byzantine Empire, which he argued became the *katechon* after the fall of the Western Roman Empire because it defended Europe from Islam. His most detailed description of his *katechon* theory is found in his *Der Nomos der Erde im Völkerrecht des Jus Publicum Europaeum* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1950); he discussed the concept further in idem, *Politische Theologie II: Die Legende von der Erledigung jeder politischen Theologie* (Munich: Duncker & Humblot, 1970). For a thorough exploration of the concept, see Felix Grossheusch, *Carl Schmitt und die Lehre vom Katechon* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1996); Julia Hell, "Katechon: Carl Schmitt's Imperial Theology and the Ruins of the Future," *Germanic Review*, vol. 84 (2009), 283–326; Michele Nicoletti, "Religion and Empire: Carl Schmitt's *Katechon* between International Relations and the Philosophy of History," in *International Law and Religion: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. M. Koskeniemi, M. García-Salmones Rovira, P. Amorosa (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 363–379.

⁶ Tertullian, *Apologeticus*, xxxii; see chapter 1, below

⁷ Otto of Freising, *The Two Cities*, VIII.2; ed. Adolph Hofmeister, *Ottonis episcopi Frisingensis Chronica, sive Historia de duabus civitatibus* (Hannover: Hahn, 1912), 395: *ne videlicet Romano imperio...calumpniam intulisse videretur*.

way for Christ—in the time of Emperor Constantine’s conversion to Christianity in the fourth century. There is a strong common sense basis to this theory. Christian attitudes about the Roman Empire were undeniably affected by the conversion of the empire’s rulers, under whom the empire was Christianized. The Christian church attained protection and patronage, and gradually became enmeshed in the Roman state. Christianity became the official faith of the empire, and the emperors came to play an important part in the church as patrons and defenders against heresy.

Nonetheless, though scholars have sought to find indications of a changed role of the Roman Empire in the eschatology of the fourth through sixth centuries, their arguments are based on a very shaky evidentiary base (see below, chapter 3). Moreover, they overlook the persistence of eschatological fears that the emperors could (or, according to some, already had) turn from defenders against heresy to propagators of heresy, and that the empire was destined to one day become the great persecutor once again. The four kingdoms of Daniel scheme provides insight that has mostly been overlooked. As this dissertation will show, late antique Roman Christians, even those who can be classified as staunchly “pro-Roman,” continued to regard the empire as the fourth kingdom of Daniel, and made no attempts to invert the negative connotations of this associations. Instead, to one degree or another they all subscribed to what this dissertation will call the “common political-eschatological scenario,” a narrative based heavily on the Book of Daniel that detailed how in the time of the Antichrist the Roman Empire would once again persecute the faithful and suffer righteous destruction at Christ’s second coming (see below, chapter 2). The notion that, as the fourth kingdom of Daniel the Roman Empire somehow “prepared the way for Christ’s return,” was completely unknown in the age of Constantine the Great and his successors, except among a small group of Christians.

This small group consisted of a few adherents to an eschatological program that developed in the Syriac-speaking borderlands between the Roman and Sasanian Persian empires. It was in these borderlands, starting in the work of the fourth-century Christian named Aphrahat, who lived not in the Roman but in the Persian Empire (and yet awaited Roman liberation from his “pagan” rulers), that a positive reinterpretation of the fourth kingdom of Daniel came into being. This interpretation of Daniel, and indeed the larger idea that developed out of it which held that the Roman Empire had a positive role to play in the unfolding of the end times, was further developed in the late seventh-century *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, a Syriac apocalypse written by another Christian from beyond the frontier who hoped for liberation by the Romans (in this case, from the rule of the Arab Umayyad Caliphate).⁸ This outsider perspective

⁸ Here I purposely eschew the titles commonly given to this apocalypse in modern scholarship, just as the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* or the *Revelations of Pseudo-Methodius*. No one in the medieval or early modern periods would have recognized the name “Pseudo-Methodius,” and to say that a scribe or writer was reading or copying or citing “Pseudo-Methodius” misrepresents what these pre-modern people understood themselves to be doing. For one thousand years the work was called the *Homily*, or *Book*, or *Tractatus*, or *Revelations*, or *Apocalypse* of Methodius of Patara, and no one seriously doubted that the historical bishop, martyr, and saint, Methodius of Patara, had written it. Indeed, pseudonymous apocalypses attributed to figures such as Enoch, Daniel, Ezra/Esdra, John of Patmos, Peter, Paul, Merlin, and Emperor Leo VI “the Wise,” are discussed in modern literature without appending “pseudo-” to their names, and without causing any confusion. The title *Apocalypse of Methodius of*

only became widespread in the Roman Empire (or “Byzantium”) at the point when the empire nearly collapsed in the eighth century. It became accessible through the translation into Greek of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*.

This dissertation is concerned with a question at the intersection of theology and political theory; namely, the Roman Empire’s place in Christian political eschatology. Still, it may necessarily be asked, why does it matter what late antique, medieval, and early modern Christians thought of the future of the Roman Empire? Why pay attention to their superstitious expectations about the end of time, the Antichrist, and coming of God’s kingdom?

Political eschatology is important because it serves as a prism for political philosophy: the fate one expects of political institutions reflects beliefs about the correct political situation in the present. This may seem strange in discussing the alien thought world of pre-modern Christians, but becomes clearer when viewed in the context of modern political ideologies.

Indeed, notions descended from Christian eschatology are present in many—though by no means all—modern political ideologies: a legacy of the Enlightenment, when the Christian political eschatology was secularized. For example, Immanuel Kant (d. 1804) suggested the possibility of “philosophical chiliasm”—that humans can create for themselves the much-awaited kingdom of the saints (the fifth kingdom of Daniel’s historical model) through the creation of a universal world state governed on a rational basis.⁹

More teleological formulations are found in the thought of many of Kant’s intellectual scions. Famously G. W. F. Hegel (d. 1831) imagined history guided by the *Weltgeist*, the “world-spirit,” through a progression of rising and falling states moving toward human freedom, which became manifested on earth, at least from Hegel’s perspective in 1806, in the universal empire of Napoleon.¹⁰ The most famous student of Hegel, Karl Marx, understood history as a teleological force progressing through several stages, culminating with the dissipation of the state, of class, and of property, that is, the dawn of Communism, a sort of secularized kingdom of the saints at the end of history.¹¹ On the other side of the ideological coin, Francis Fukuyama has articulated an eschatological framework for Liberalism, which holds an inevitable progression of states through stages of industrialization and capitalism, potentially leading to “the end of history,”

Patara is even less likely to cause confusion because modern scholarship tends to refer to the genuine writings of Methodius as the works of “Methodius of Olympus” (Methodius of Olympus and Methodius of Patara were the same person, and either appellation is acceptable).

⁹ This view is most clearly expressed in Kant’s *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft* (Königsberg: F. Nicolovius, 1793). For an exploration of the concept, see Alice Kuzniar, “Philosophic Chiliasm: Generating the Future or Delaying the End?” *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 19, no. 1 (1985), 1–20. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology* (London: SCM Press, 1996), 184–192, provides an overview of the Enlightenment secularization of eschatology.

¹⁰ G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Bamberg: Goebhardt, 1807).

¹¹ Marx did not set out his theory of history in a single work, but indications are found spread across several of his works, most notably Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Die deutsche Ideologie* (Berlin: Marx-Engels-Verlag, 1932), written in 1845 but long unpublished, and the preface to *Zur Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie* (Berlin: Franz Duncker, 1859). A detailed and comprehensive description of, and case for, the Marxist view of history is made in Gerald A. Cohen, *Karl Marx’s Theory of History: A Defence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978).

which Fukuyama at one time envisioned as “the endpoint of mankind’s ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government.”¹²

Even if such views are dismissed by sanguine historians as teleological and unhistorical, they nonetheless have consequences. Modern political eschatology influences how believers see the world and make decisions. For example, should the nationalization of an industry be viewed as a step toward the final stage of history in which the workers own the means of production, or as a lamentable step back in progress toward global free market capitalism? When is it legitimate to invest certain powers in individuals or institutions in order to bring about desired historical ends, and when is that tyranny?

Eschatology matters. Thus, in the pre-modern world, was the edict of the emperor the command of a tyrant and enemy of God, or the decree of the God’s chosen earthly ruler? What loyalty did Christians owe to the empire? The ways in which pre-modern Christians related to the state and emperor cannot be understood without understanding what they thought about the future of the political institutions.

Moreover, the way in which premodern Christians thought about the role of the state or empire in general had in bringing about the end of history matters because some modern theorists have appealed directly to medieval Christian eschatological concepts. For example, Carl Schmitt, whose theory of the *katechon* has been described above, tried to translate the *katechon* into a modernized theory for the role of the state. If liberals and Marxists await an eschatological end to history, the Catholic Hegelian Schmitt reasoned, the conservative Christian political order he advocated should take up the mantle of the *katechon* inherited from the Christian empire and so act as the restraining force keeping back such revolution.¹³ Thus, in Schmitt’s work, modern Christian European civilization derived its *raison d’etre* from late antique political eschatology.

Whatever the merits of the modern applications of Schmitt theory of the state as *katechonic* restraining force, he was wrong about its origins in pre-modern eschatology. He held up the early Christian writer Tertullian as the genius of the katechonic theory and thus the architect of the Christianity’s embrace of Rome’s empire, and dismissed most other eschatology

¹² Francis Fukuyama “The End of History?” *The National Interest*, vol. 16 (1989), 3–18. Fukuyama elaborated on these ideas in idem, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992). Notably, Fukuyama has partially disavowed these ideas recently.

¹³ As noted above, the exact meaning of the *katechon* in Schmitt’s thought is difficult to pin down and evolved over time. Initially, in *Land und Meer*, he derided the British Empire as a *katechon* and suggested that it held back Nazi Germany’s complete fulfillment of its role as a sort of heavenly fifth kingdom; thus in idem, *Völkerrechtliche Großraumordnung mit Interventionsverbot für raumfremde Mächte: Ein Beitrag zum Reichsbegriff für Völkerrecht* (Berlin: Deutscher Rechtsverlag, 1941), 298; Schmitt places the German Reich in a scheme of successive empires, following the canonical progression from the Book of Daniel, in which it follows the Babylonian, Persian, Macedonian, and Roman empires. Later, after the Second World War and, Schmitt’s description of the *katechon* became unambiguously positive as that which prevented the extinction of Christian history; he also maintained that people, in addition to states, could act as *katechon*: thus, in the interwar period Marshal Piłsudski of Poland and the Czechoslovak Prime Minister Masaryk were *katechons* because they stood in the way of Communism’s path to Germany.

of late antiquity as inconsequential, including one apocalypse that he dismissed as “the murky oracles of Pseudo-Methodius” (*den trüben Orakeln des Pseudomethodius*).¹⁴

Little did Schmitt know, these murky oracles—that is, the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*—holds an important key for understanding how and why late ancient and medieval expectations about the Roman’s role in the end times changed. This apocalypse was the vector by which Syriac ideas about Rome’s eschatological destiny were disseminated into the wider Christian world of late antiquity and the middle ages. This dissertation will show that many of the eschatological ideas associated with the Christianization of the Roman Empire in the age of Constantine actually originated in Syriac Christianity; they simply did not exist in the Roman Empire or its Byzantine successor until the appearance of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*.

This dissertation will link Syriac literature, an often marginalized and overlooked topic of study, to larger European political and eschatological concerns. It will show that political eschatology, rather than originating among emperors and their courts as scholarship almost always assumes, often emanated instead from the ground up. Finally, it will show that it took much longer for Christians to conceive of the Roman Empire as a providential power with an important place in the consummation of history than is often believed by modern scholars, and that this process was never quite complete.

This dissertation makes its argument in seven chapters. In the first chapter explores the original context of the four-kingdom scheme in the Book of Daniel and its subsequent adaptation by later generations of Christians and Jews. The second chapter of the dissertation demonstrates that, prior to the late seventh century, Roman Christians maintained a pessimistic view of the future of the Roman Empire and its role in the *eschaton*. They constructed a common political-eschatological scenario, a detailed explication of what would happen to the Roman Empire, based on the assumption that the empire was the fourth kingdom of Daniel and thus destined to oppose God’s saints and suffer annihilation as punishment. The third chapter disputes common assertions in secondary scholarship that already at some point between the fourth and seventh century Romans/Byzantines had adopted a more positive concept of the empire’s role as the fourth kingdom of Daniel, or that they identified it with the heavenly fifth kingdom, or with the related concept of the golden age of the Millennium described in the Book of Revelation. The fourth and fifth chapters will show that a very different understandings of Rome’s eschatological role developed within Syriac thought, in part because of the unique political situation of Syriac Christians and the different interpretative possibilities provided by the Syriac version of scripture. One strain of thought, developed in the writings of the fourth-century Persian Christian Aphrahat, made the fourth kingdom of Daniel a precursor to God’s kingdom, ruling the earth on God’s behalf. The sixth chapter will show how these ideas were further developed in the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*. Finally, the seventh chapter will show that the translation of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* into Greek introduced these new ideas about the kingdoms of Daniel and the eschatological role of empire to the wider Byzantine world, and

¹⁴ Schmitt, *Der Nomos der Erde*, 30.

thereby informed the broader Christian idea of providential empire. Nonetheless, it shows that this glorification of the empire was always balanced by competing eschatological pessimism about the empire's fate, which persisted throughout Byzantine history.

CHAPTER 1: THE FOUNDATIONS OF POLITICAL ESCHATOLOGY: APOCALYPTIC RESISTANCE TO EMPIRE AND THE FOUR-KINGDOM SCHEMA OF DANIEL

Introduction: Apocalypses, Empire, and Terminology

The four-kingdom scheme from the Book of Daniel has provided one of the most enduring models for organizing the history of empire. In the words of the great German Biblical scholar Julius Wellhausen: “[The Book of Daniel] laid the foundations for Christian universal history. The Book of Daniel is as significant for the science of history as the Book of Genesis is for the natural sciences.”¹ At the same time, as a Biblical prophecy, it has remained one of the key texts for Jews and Christians for extrapolating the fate that will one day befall earthly empire.

It is important, therefore, that the four-kingdom scheme in Daniel implicitly critiques the imperial order. The oppressive, grasping, destructive fourth kingdom in the Book of Daniel is the last of the historical empires, and so it could be readily identified with whatever empire currently ruled. The fifth kingdom was the opposite in every way—the ideal kingdom of the saints—but it existed always in the future, outside of historical time. In this way, the four kingdom scheme contrasted the existing order with a more perfect kingdom that had not yet arrived.

Scholars have long discussed the anti-imperial context in which the apocalyptic genre emerged. Ancient apocalypses were often written in opposition to empire, and never to support the claims of an existing empire. Before proceeding to explore this issue, it is necessary to provide a clarification of definitions. The study of eschatology and apocalypticism has often been marred by the use of imprecise or unclear language. Thus, to avoid such pratfalls, it is useful to establish precise definitions of terminology as early as possible.

The study of eschatology relies heavily on texts known as “apocalypses.” This scholarly use of the word “apocalypse” as a text written in the apocalyptic genre is distinct from the more idiomatic use of “apocalypse” to signify the events of the end times. An exact definition of the apocalyptic genre has been a contentious issue in modern scholarship. “Apocalypse” was long used loosely to mean any text that bore a resemblance to the *Apocalypse of John*, the first work to call itself an *apokalypsis* (ἀποκάλυψις).² Not coincidentally, the *Apocalypse of John*, also called the Book of Revelation (“Revelation” being the Latin version of the Greek *apokalypsis*; I prefer here to call it the Book of Revelation for the sake of clarity and consistency), was the one

¹ Julius Wellhausen, *Israelitische und jüdische Geschichte* (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1894), 286: “[Das Buch Daniel] der christlichen Universalhistorie den Grund gelegt hat. Das Buch Daniel hat dieselbe Bedeutung für die Geschichtswissenschaft wie die Genesis für die Naturwissenschaft.”

² Andrew Steinmann, *The Shape of Things to Come: The Genre of the Historical Apocalypse in Ancient Jewish and Christian Literature* (PhD dissertation: University of Michigan, 1990), 10–12.

apocalypse enshrined as part of the New Testament canon in Roman Catholic and Protestant Christianity (though it is absent from the canon of many Eastern traditions) and so heavily informed how European and American scholars thought about apocalypses. Nonetheless, the Book of Revelation was clearly not the first example of a new sort of literature; rather it was written according to expectations of a popular preexisting genre that had been popular in Second Temple Judaism (i.e., Judaism from 515 BC to 70 AD).³ For example, the Book of Revelation was heavily influenced by the four-kingdom imagery found in the Book of Daniel (an important fact dealt with in more detail later in this chapter), written more than two centuries earlier.

By the second half of the twentieth century, scholars endeavored to provide a more refined definition of apocalyptic literature that embraces the larger tradition that originated in ancient Judaism (and which itself likely developed out of earlier Near Eastern literatures).⁴ Supernatural elements, concern with salvation, and pseudonymity—that is false attribution to a famous, and often ancient, figure (such as Daniel or Methodius of Patara)—have been recognized as common characteristics of apocalyptic literature.⁵ The most widely accepted description of the genre has been provided by John J. Collins in his introduction to a 1979 collection of essays devoted to the topic called *Apocalypse: Morphology of a Genre*, who defines it as such: “a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.”⁶

Both the temporal and spatial categories of Collins’ definition are found in the Book of Revelation, but in general most other apocalypses fall into one or the other category, corresponding to two major subsets within the genre: otherworldly “journey apocalypses,” usually visions of heaven or of the underworld, and “historical apocalypses,” which concern the

³ John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, second edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 3; idem, “The Genre Apocalypse Reconsidered,” *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum*, vol. 20 (2016), 23–25.

⁴ An early discussion of the apocalypses as a class of texts is found in Friedrich Lücke, *Versuch einer vollständigen Einleitung in die Offenbarung Johannis und in die gesamte apokalyptische Literatur* (Bonn: Weber, 1832). However, the efforts at defining the apocalyptic genre really began in the 1960s and greatly expanded in the 1970s and 80s.

⁵ See the definitions provided in Klaus Koch, *Ratlos vor der Apokalypitik* (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1970); English translation in *The Rediscovery of Apocalyptic*, transl. Margaret Kohl (Naperville: Allenson, 1972); and in D. S. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic 100 BC–AD 100* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), 104–139. Nonetheless, the Book of Revelation is not considered pseudonymous since it is generally accepted that its author really was a man named John writing on the island of Patmos.

⁶ John J. Collins, “Introduction: Toward the Morphology of a Genre,” in *Semeia, Volume 14: Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre*, ed. J. J. Collins (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1979), 1–19, with quotation on 9. This volume contains several articles by leading scholars of ancient apocalyptic devoted to forming a comprehensive definition of the genre. Collins definition is repeated in idem, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 2–11, and in idem, “The Genre Apocalypse Reconsidered,” 21–40, both with an overview of the questions and evaluation of more recent attempts to provide a definition of the genre. An even more detailed overview is provided by Lorenzo DiTommaso, “Apocalypses and Apocalypticism in Antiquity (Part 1),” *Currents in Biblical Research*, vol. 5 no. 2 (2007), 235–286.

present world and the end of its history.⁷ Historical apocalypses are characterized by *vaticinia ex eventu*—that is, historical events presented in the form of prophecy (in pseudonymous works, *vaticinia ex eventu* are information that the supposed author, living centuries earlier, would presumably have been able to know only through supernatural means, but which the reader would have recognized in recent past events)—which serve to validate the apocalypse’s prophetic accuracy, followed by genuine predictions about future events up to the end of time. Many of the sources discussed in this dissertation are historical apocalypses: the Book of Daniel contains some of the earliest historical apocalypses; the Book of Revelation adapted this literary form to the concerns of the early Christian community; the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* represents the late antique/medieval incarnation of the historical apocalypse.⁸

Nonetheless, this dissertation is not just about apocalypses. Its primary concern is with political eschatology, that is, theories about what would happen to kingdoms, empires, and other political institutions leading up to the end of time.⁹ In this sense, political eschatology is a type or

⁷ Steinmann, *The Shape of Things to Come*, 13–24.

⁸ The place of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* in the apocalyptic genre has long been accepted with little controversy; see, for example, Francisco Javier Martinez, “The Apocalyptic Genre in Syriac: The World of Pseudo-Methodius,” in *IV Symposium Syriacum 1984: Literary Genres in Syriac Literature*, ed. H. J. W. Drijvers, R. Lavenant, C. Molenberg, et al (Rome: Pontificium Institutum studiorum orientalium, 1987), 337–352. Nonetheless, recently, the suitability of the term “apocalypse” to describe the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* has been questioned based on a strict reading of Collins’ definition. Lorenzo DiTommaso, “The *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius: Notes on a Recent Edition,” *Medioevo greco: Rivista di storia e filologia bizantina*, vol. 17 (2017), 311 n.1, argues that the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* is not an apocalypse: “The *Revelations* of Ps.-Methodius would be a better title, since the text is not an apocalypse proper.” While DiTommaso does not explain his reasoning, it is clear that the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* falls short of this standard definition of an apocalypse established by Collins in one major criteria: it is not presented as revelation provided by an otherworldly being. Though a variety of audiences and copyists, no doubt influenced by the conventions of the apocalyptic genre, assumed that the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* derived from secret knowledge provided to St. Methodius by an angel, there is nothing internal to the work to suggest this. The title in the sixteenth-century manuscript cod Vatican Syr. 58, which presents Methodius as having received the revelations on Mount Singar from an angel, but this is almost certainly a later addition. Latin manuscripts and printed editions present Methodius as having received his revelations from an angel while in prison awaiting execution, but these too are later additions.

Nonetheless, I believe excluding the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* from the apocalyptic genre on account of the lack of an explicit mention of an otherworldly source for its eschatological narrative is unduly rigorous. Indeed, in the same volume in which Collins lays out his definition of the apocalyptic genre, in his article “Jewish Apocalypse,” 28, he provides a grid of twelve distinct features of apocalypses: 1) cosmogony, 2) primordial events, 3) recollection of the past, 4) *ex eventu* prophecy, 5) persecution, 6) other eschatological upheavals, 7) destruction of the wicked, 8) destruction of the world, 9) destruction of otherworldly beings, 10) cosmic transformation, 11) resurrection, 12) other forms of afterlife. Some works classified as apocalypses by Collins, such as the *Apocalypse of Zephaniah*, the *Testament of Abraham*, and 3 *Baruch* contain only two of these twelve. The *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* contains ten of these (numbers 2–11). It also shares the quality with all these apocalypses, not included in the list, of being pseudonymous. Thus, it is hard to accept the disqualification of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* from the apocalyptic genre.

⁹ I use here the term “political eschatology,” in place of the conventional “imperial eschatology,” often used in the context of pre-modern eschatology concerning the Roman Empire, though “Political eschatology” tends to be used in scholarship on the early modern and modern periods; see Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “The Politics of Eschatology: A Short Reading of a Long View,” in *Historical Teleologies in the Modern World*, ed. Henning Trüper, Dipesh Chakrabarty, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 25–45. I prefer “political eschatology” for two reasons. The first is that political eschatology applied not just to empires, but also to kingdoms, states, dynasties, and other political institutions. Second, “imperial eschatology” tends to be used with the implication that the eschatology is pro-imperial, that the eschatology seeks to glorify the empire in an eschatological

subset of “apocalyptic eschatology,” which is, according to John Collins, “the kind of eschatology that is found in apocalypses.”¹⁰ Nonetheless, political eschatology can be found outside of the apocalyptic genre. Thus, though there is an affinity between the two, not all apocalypses are about political eschatology, and not all political eschatology is found in apocalypses. “Journey apocalypses” very rarely touch on future historical events, and even among historical apocalypses some focus, for example, on the natural disasters that will befall the world leading up to the end of time, without ever touching on political institutions. At the same time, political eschatology can be found in non-apocalyptic sources, such as, for example political treatises (like that of Wagenfels discussed in the introduction) or scriptural exegesis (such as commentaries that sought to interpret the meaning of the prophecies in the Book of Daniel or Book of Revelation, and to make more concrete predictions based on the imagery in those apocalypses).

Scholarship sometimes conflates eschatology with *millennialism* or with *millenarianism*. *Millennialism* was a very specific eschatological belief, held by some but by no means all or most Christians in various time periods, derived from the Book of Revelation, that Christ would rule on earth with his saints in the last millennium at the end of history. *Millenarianism* is a term derived from this Christian belief but refers more generally to any similar eschatological theory or hope for a better world that will dawn at the end of history. Adding to the confusion, these two terms are sometimes used interchangeably. To avoid such confusion, in this dissertation I eschew the term “millennialism” for its Greek-derived equivalent, *chiliasm*, which means the same thing; I avoid “millenarianism” as a term as much as possible since it only muddles matters by associating the very common phenomena of hopeful eschatology with a rare, specifically Christian belief in the Millennium.

The four-kingdom scheme was millenarian in its hope for a ideal future kingdom, and it was compatible with millennialism/chiliasm, though the latter only developed much later. First and foremost, the four-kingdom scheme was a facet of political eschatology. It originated in, or at least was popularized by, a historical apocalypse; namely, that found in chapters 2 and 7 of the Book of Daniel. From the Book of Daniel, the four-kingdom scheme was picked up, adapted, and reinterpreted by a number of apocalypses and other political-eschatological literature.

With this in mind, it is necessary to turn back to the question of how the original anti-imperial valence of the four kingdom scheme was reinterpreted in order to glorify worldly empire. In order to do so, it is necessary to understand the background of the four-kingdom model found in the Book of Daniel. For this reason, this chapter will focus on the development of that model. Drawing on existing research, it will show that the four-kingdom schema operated as part of the Book of Daniel’s larger anti-imperial message, which was a characteristic of Jewish apocalypticism of the Second Temple period (515 BC–70 AD) in general. The Book of Daniel was specifically concerned with Hellenistic empires, and in the original four-kingdom

context. Nonetheless, throughout this dissertation I discuss both pro- and anti-imperial eschatology; to refer to the eschatology in the Book of Daniel, for example, as “imperial eschatology” would be misleading, but it can justifiably be called “political eschatology.”

¹⁰ J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 11.

schema the evil fourth kingdom was identified as that established by Alexander the Great and continued under the heirs of Alexander's general Seleucus. This chapter will show how, over time, this opposition to empire refocused on resistance to Roman imperial hegemony, and Rome came to be envisioned as the evil fourth kingdom. Finally, it will explore why the radical break from this anti-imperial tradition has so far been poorly understood, despite the current preoccupation with empire in scholarship on apocalyptic literature.

Part I: The Origins of the Four Kingdom Scheme

Around the year 165 BC, a Jewish author composed a set of prophecies relevant to his own time, but which he attributed to the ancient figure of Daniel, a legendary Jewish sage during the Babylonian Exile in the sixth century BC.¹¹ The attribution to Daniel lent authority to a collection of *vaticinia ex eventu* written to address the persecutions of the Jews by Antiochus IV Epiphanes, king of the Hellenistic Seleucid Empire, the most powerful of the successor states of the empire of Alexander the Great, and which ruled over Syria, Mesopotamia, and Iran.

Antiochus III, the father of Antiochus IV, had expanded the empire by conquering Judea from the rival Ptolemaic dynasty based in Egypt, and confirmed the right of the Jews to live there by their ancestral laws.¹² His ill-starred attempt to conquer Greece and potentially reunite Alexander's empire led to a devastating defeat at the hands of the Roman Republic at the Battle of Magnesia in 190 BC, after which the Romans curtailed Seleucid power and imposed upon them a crippling war indemnity. In order to pay this crushing debt, the Seleucids were forced to plunder temple treasuries throughout their empire (Antiochus III was killed attempting to despoil a temple in Persia in 187 BC), including, around 178 BC, the temple in Jerusalem.¹³

By this time, Judea had already become a hotbed of dissent between the Jews who favored and those who opposed Hellenization. Elites among the high-priestly families attempted to establish a Greek polis within Jerusalem, governed by Greek, not Jewish, law, alienating more traditional Jews and sparking revolt in the countryside. At the same time, machinations over the Jewish high priesthood among those same elite families added another dimension to the civil

¹¹ Daniel himself may or may not have been a historical figure. It is possible that Daniel, or Dan'el, had an origin as a mythical figure in the ancient Near East—the Bronze Age texts discovered at Ugarit include a “Legend of Dan'el.” In the Book of Ezekiel, written earlier than the Book of Daniel but set in the same period (during the Babylonian Exile), Ezekiel rhetorically asks the king of Tyre (at 28:3) if he is as wise as Daniel, implying that Daniel was already a legendary figure known for his wisdom. On these questions, see John Day, “The Daniel of Ugarit and Ezekiel and the Hero of the Book of Daniel,” *Vetus Testamentum*, vol. 30 (1980), 174–84; John J. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, ed. Frank Moore Cross (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 1–2. It is clear that by the time of the composition of the Book of Daniel, the figure of Daniel was well understood among the Jews as a wise and righteous Jew during the Babylonian Captivity.

¹² Eric Gruen, “Hellenism and Persecution: Antiochus IV and the Jews,” in *Hellenic History and Culture*, ed. Peter Green (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 238–264. Anthea Portier-Young, *Apocalypse Against Empire: Theologies of Resistance in Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans: 2011), 62–73 attempts to revise this notion and stress the negative aspects of Antiochus III's rule, such as the costs imposed by his wars with the Ptolemaic Egypt and with Rome, but perhaps goes too far in this revisionism.

¹³ Referenced in 2 Maccabees 3. For an analysis of this event in light of the later crisis of Antiochus IV, see Portier-Young, *Apocalypse Against Empire*, 78–91.

strife in Jerusalem and its surroundings. Antiochus IV profited from his rule over the Jews (and could work toward restoring Seleucid finances) by selling the high priesthood to the highest bidder. However, in 168 BC, when his candidate was ousted by a rival, the Seleucid king—probably looking for an easy victory after the Romans had forced him to abandon an invasion of Egypt earlier that year—marched on Jerusalem.¹⁴

Either that year or the following, Antiochus, likely in an attempt to forcibly pacify the Jews, enacted harsh Hellenizing measures, restricting Jewish ceremonies, banning circumcisions, and erecting a statue of Zeus in the Jewish temple. In response, a rebellion flared up in the countryside, led by Judah Maccabee and his brothers. The supporters of the Maccabees, and even many other Jews who did not take up arms, seem to have hoped that the time was nearing when the Greek ruler would be punished by God and the Jewish people might regain their political independence. These expectations inform a great deal of the Book of Daniel.

The Book of Daniel is included in the *Ketuvim* (“Writings”), the final section in the Hebrew Bible, and was one of the last books to be added to the Jewish canon of scripture.¹⁵ Later, it came to be part of the Christian body of scripture, where it is included among the Major Prophets of the Old Testament. The Book of Daniel, as it now exists in Jewish and Christian canon, took shape at some point during the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, in part from earlier stories associated with the figure of Daniel.¹⁶ The first six chapters of the Book of Daniel are classified as the “court tales,” and probably originate from some time before the Antiochene crisis.¹⁷ Through a series of stories of Daniel’s travails at the court of Babylon, these chapters provide a model of how a righteous Jew should live under gentile rule.¹⁸

¹⁴ For the background of the melding of political events and apocalyptic expectations from the beginning of Seleucid rule of Judea to the imposition of Antiochus’ edicts, see Portier-Young, *Apocalypse Against Empire*, 49–216.

¹⁵ I use here the term “Book of Daniel,” to refer to the chapters 1–12 of Daniel, according to the Aramaic/Hebrew version. The earliest manuscript of this version, with Masoretic vocalization, is preserved in Cod. Leningrad B 19A, copied in 1008/9 AD, but earlier fragments survive from the Geniza, and among the Dead Sea Scrolls in Qumran. The Qumran texts, some of which date to the late second century BC, are over one thousand years older than the Leningrad text, but besides a few minor differences, especially of vocalization, they are remarkably similar; see Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 2–3. Additional material—the prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men (inserted in chapter 3) and the stories of Bel and the Dragon and of Susanna (chapters 13 and 14)—were added in the Greek (both Septuagint and Theodotion) at a later date. It should be noted that the Theodotion Greek translation of Daniel superseded that of the Septuagint, with the result that only one manuscript copy of the Septuagint version of Daniel has survived, and in other copies of the Septuagint the Theodotion version of Daniel is present in place of the Septuagint version; see J. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 3–12.

¹⁶ Indeed, the Book of Daniel is probably just one of many collections of stories about Daniel that circulated in antiquity. As Lorenzo DiTommaso, *The Book of Daniel and the Apocryphal Daniel Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 40 points out, the Book of Daniel “simply represents one stage—albeit the most important stage—of an ongoing and frequently overlapping dynamic process wherein the story of Daniel was told and, in the telling, employed as a vehicle to relate various messages.” Nonetheless, the Book of Daniel came to be the canonical collection of Daniel stories (though as noted in the previous footnote, even this canonical version expanded with the inclusion of new material).

¹⁷ Harold Henry Rowley, “The Unity of the Book of Daniel,” in *The Servant of the Lord and Other Essays on the Old Testament*, ed. H. H. Rowley (London: Lutterworth, 1952), 237–268, argues that the court tales in the Book of Daniel also originate in the time of the Antiochus’ persecution. The wider consensus, however, holds that the court tales were earlier, though probably revised in the time of the crisis under Antiochus, a point that has been forcefully argued by see John J. Collins in his *The Apocalyptic Vision of the Book of Daniel* (Missoula: Scholars

The second six chapters of Daniel (chapters 7–12) are the apocalyptic visions concerned with the crisis sparked by Antiochus’ laws (with chapter 7 providing a stylistic and thematic bridge of sorts between the two halves). These chapters describe the supposed prophetic visions of Daniel and their meaning (explained to Daniel in each case by an angel). The series of prophecies overlap thematically and chronologically, beginning with an overview of empires in history and gradually narrowing down to affairs in the Near East in the second century BC.

I.1: Daniel 2 and 7: The Four Kingdoms of History and the Eternal Fifth Kingdom

Perhaps the most influential of the prophecies in the Book of Daniel are those found in Daniel 2 and 7. It is here that the Book of Daniel develops its historical model of the four kingdoms. These prophecies are written not in Hebrew like the other visions in the Book of Daniel, but in the vernacular of Aramaic (some of the only Aramaic in the Hebrew Bible). The first of these visions is found inserted in one of the court tales, in chapter 2 of the Book of Daniel. Unlike the later visions, this one is not received by Daniel, but by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar.

In this chapter, Daniel is called upon to identify and interpret a dream in which Nebuchadnezzar saw a great statue—its head made of gold, arms and chest of silver, belly and thighs of bronze, and legs of iron with feet of iron mixed with clay—destroyed by a giant stone which then became a mountain and grew to fill the world. Daniel tells the king that the segments of the statue are the four successive kingdoms of the world, and the giant stone is an everlasting kingdom that God will raise up: “The kingdom will not be left to another people, but will grind up and destroy all these kingdoms, and it will stand forever” (Daniel 2:44).

Daniel explicitly identifies the first kingdom, symbolized by the head of gold, as the Babylonian Empire of Nebuchadnezzar, but leaves the identity of the other kingdoms unstated. Nonetheless there are enough textual clues to understand that the kingdoms represented by the arms and chest of silver represent the kingdom of the Medes, the belly and thighs of bronze the Persians, and the legs of iron the Greco-Macedonian Empire created by Alexander the Great when he overthrew the Persians.¹⁹ The feet of mixed iron and clay are Alexander’s successors,

Press, 1977), 3–8; idem, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 88–90; idem, *Daniel*, 29–38.

¹⁸ W. Lee Humphreys, “A Life-Style for the Diaspora: A Study of the Tales of Esther and Daniel,” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, vol. 92 no. 2 (1973), 211–223; Porter-Young, *Apocalypse Against Empire*, 224.

¹⁹ See, for example, C. C. Caragounis, “History and Supra-History: Daniel and the Four Empires,” in *The Book of Daniel: In the Light of New Findings*, ed. A. S. van der Woude (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1993), 387–397. This identification runs counter to the one presented by Jay Rubenstein, *Nebuchadnezzar’s Dream* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 5, who claims that the first beast was the intended to be the Babylonians, the second the Persians, the third the empire of Alexander, and the fourth the empire of Alexander’s successors; Rubenstein’s interpretation is closer to that offered by Aphrahat, discussed below in chapter 4. That the first three empires are the Babylonians, Medes, and then Persians is confirmed in the structure of the Book of Daniel. Daniel begins at the court of Nebuchadnezzar and then of his “son” Belshazzar, Babylonian kings (chapters 1–5). In chapter 6, Daniel is tossed in the lion’s den by the new king, “Darius the Mede.” This chapter ends by noting that Daniel prospered during the rest of the reign of Darius, and afterward under Cyrus the Persian. The major prophecies in the Book of Daniel, chapters 7–12, each begin by dating the visions by the reigns of these kings. The visions in chapters 7 and 8 are dated to the reign of “Belshazzar king of Babylon”; chapter 8 to the reign of “Darius the Mede”; and

the *Diadochi* (such as the Seleucid and Ptolemaic kings), who squabbled for control of his empire and ultimately divided it into several smaller and weaker states.

The dream of Nebuchadnezzar in the Book of Daniel ends with the destruction of the statue that represents the gentile imperial world order (the statue itself being evocative of their idolatry) by God, who raises up a new, fifth kingdom. Breaking with the pattern of progressively inferior kingdoms, this kingdom is superior to all the others and it will never be conquered. It is evident that this was meant to represent a renewed Jewish kingdom, which the author of the vision in the Book of Daniel suggests will be superior to all the previous world monarchies, will encompass the whole world, will not be given to any other people, and will not be defeated. It is the articulation of the political-eschatological hopes of a Jew in the time of Antiochus IV Epiphanes.²⁰

This prophecy is likely an adaptation of a vision or parable that had been circulating through the ancient Near East, which periodized historical ages or kingdoms or dynasties according to metals of successively decreasing quality.²¹ It is possible that an earlier version of the court tales about Daniel, before the addition of the visions inspired by the persecutions of Antiochus, included the dream and interpretation in this earlier context. However, in the surviving, Biblical form of the Book of Daniel, redacted in the time of Antiochus IV, it has been repurposed to articulate the hopes of second century Jews for a free Jewish kingdom. Such meaning would have been clear to contemporary Jewish readers during the crisis provoked by the laws of Antiochus.²²

A somewhat similar prophecy makes up chapter 7 of the Book of Daniel. This chapter has much in common with the visions written in Hebrew in the following chapters, but like Daniel 2 and the other court tales, this chapter is written in Aramaic. Thus, it is possible that an earlier story—perhaps a “combat myth” of the sort attested in ancient near eastern legends concerning a god battling chaos monsters from the sea—has been revised here to bring it in line

chapter 10 to the reign of “Cyrus king of Persia.” Thus, the author of the prophecies in the Book of Daniel clearly understands three major kingdoms or empires preceding the conquest of Alexander the Great: the Babylonians, the Medes, and the Persians. This chronology of imperial succession is historically inaccurate and has bedeviled modern scholars who have tried to glean historical information from the Book of Daniel. The figure of Darius the Mede, for example, has caused enormous confusion because the Medes never ruled over Babylon or over the Jews, while “Darius” was the name of three Persian kings who reigned after Cyrus (most notably Darius I, r. 522–486 BC), but not of any Median king. However, the bulk of the Book of Daniel was composed or redacted in the second century BC, and reflects only a historical memory of the Babylonian Exile written under Seleucid rule, so historical inaccuracies should not be surprising.

²⁰ Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 97, drawing on evidence from surviving ancient Babylonian prophecy, suggests that the original tradition predicted the restoration of the Babylonian monarchy, but the Jewish redactor of the Book of Daniel subverted this expectation with the idea of the eternal Jewish kingdom, and this is why it is necessary to stress that the kingdom will not be given to another people (Daniel 2:44).

²¹ See J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 90–92. Scholars have noted the similarity of this sequence of metals of decreasing value with the ages of the world in Hesiod’s *Works and Days*, lines 106–201, and with Persian texts that present the historical dynasties of Persia with metals of decreasing value. For the parallels between the Book of Daniel and other near eastern texts, see below.

²² See J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Vision of the Book of Daniel*, 153–162.

with Jewish concerns of the time of Antiochus IV.²³ This chapter concerns Daniel's dream in which he sees the four winds stir the sea, and then four beasts—a winged lion, a bear, a winged leopard, and an iron-toothed beast—emerge from the sea.²⁴ The final beast is described in explicitly negative terms. It devours its victims with large iron teeth and tramples what is left underfoot.²⁵ It has ten horns, until a little horn appears upon it, which uproots three of the other horns and speaks boastfully. An ancient figure (עתיק יומין, “ancient of days,” in the Aramaic idiom) appears and sits upon a fiery throne in judgment with his court. They condemn the fourth beast to death and its body burned up in a river of fire. Then, a figure in the form of a man (“like a son of man”; אנוש כנר), contrasting with the inhuman beasts out of the sea, comes from heaven, and he is led before the ancient figure, who invests him with authority to establish a kingdom that will never be destroyed.²⁶

When Daniel awakes, an angel explains to him that the beasts are the four successive kingdoms of the earth (they almost certainly were intended to represent the same four empires as the metal parts of the statue in chapter 2). In this way, Daniel 7 suggests that the empire established by Alexander and inherited by the persecutor Antiochus Epiphanes is the terrifying fourth beast that will soon face divine judgment and punishment. This becomes all the more clear in further elucidation provided by the angelic interpreter.

The angel explains to Daniel that the ten horns on the fourth beast represent its ten kings, and the little horn is the final evil king who “shall wear out the holy ones of the Most High, and shall attempt to change the sacred seasons and the law” (Daniel 7:25). The oppression, the angel states, will last three and a half years. However, after this duration the evil king and his kingdom

²³ For the Akkadian or Ugaritic combat myth as potentially at the root of the symbolism in Daniel 7, see John Day, *God's Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea: Echoes of a Canaanite Myth in the Old Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 151–177; John Collins, “Stirring Up the Great Sea: The Religio-Historical Background of Daniel 7,” in *The Book of Daniel: In the Light of New Findings*, ed. A. S. van der Woude (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1993), 121–136; John H. Walton, “The Anzu Myth as Relevant Background for Daniel 7?” in *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception*, vol. 1, ed. J. J. Collins and P. W. Flint (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 69–89.

²⁴ These four beasts likely allude to Hosea 13:7–8, in which God tells the Israelites that since they have embraced other gods he will assail them like a lion, and like a leopard, and like a bear, and like a wild beast.

²⁵ These details about the fourth beast may well allude to the Seleucid military, which relied primarily on the Macedonian-style phalanx, in which serried rows of soldiers carried notably-long iron-tipped pikes, and on war elephants used to trample enemy soldiers. The elephant became a sort of dynastic symbol of the Seleucids. Urs Staub, “Das Tier mit den Hörnern: Ein Beitrag zu Dan 7,7,” *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie*, vol. 25 (1978), 351–397, has suggested that the fourth beast was intended to be a elephant; this idea has been reintroduced by Paul Kosmin, *Time and Its Adversaries in the Seleucid Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), 151; while this cannot be certain, it makes far more sense than the theory of David Flusser, “The Fourth Empire—An Indian Rhinoceros?” in *Judaism and the Origins of Christianity*, ed. David Flusser (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1988), 176–183, who claims that the fourth beast was intended to be a rhinoceros (a creature with no connection to the Seleucid dynasty and hardly known in the Near East of the second century BC).

²⁶ The symbol of the man probably represents literally the future Jewish kingdom, much like the stone and mountain in Daniel 2. Some scholars, no doubt influenced by later Jewish and Christian readings of Daniel, have identified this figure with the messiah. Collin, Daniel, 304–10; and idem, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 103–104, identifies the figure as an angel; Himmelfarb, *The Apocalypse: A Brief History* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 38, considers this possibility and leaves the question open, since either interpretation would fit and not alter the meaning of the passage. For an in-depth exploration of these questions, see Maurice Casey, *Son of Man: The Interpretation and Influence of Daniel 7* (London: SPCK, 1979).

will be destroyed forever. “The kingship and dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the holy ones of the Most High; their kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey them” (Daniel 7:27).

While the exact kings the ten horns are supposed to represent remains a matter of debate, the little horn is quite evidently Antiochus IV. For his arrogance and impiety, God, the ancient one, will destroy his kingdom, and replace it with a fifth kingdom that will rule for all of eternity. This fifth kingdom, like the stone/mountain in Daniel 2, signifies the expected Jewish kingdom, which will have no end in history.

I.2: The Hebrew Visions: The Little Horn, the Weeks of Years, and the Evil King

The Book of Daniel contains three more prophetic visions. While the textual history of the Book of Daniel, including the authorship of the various court tales and visions, is a fraught question, these visions are generally recognized as the work of a single author writing c. 165 BC. Written in Hebrew, they appear to be new compositions, not revised stories, and directly address the contemporary persecution by Antiochus IV. The same author who composed them may have been responsible for redacting the Aramaic visions in Daniel 2 and 7 to bring them in line with similar concerns, although this remains uncertain.²⁷ Although the Hebrew visions do not explicitly deal with the four kingdom scheme, they build from the earlier prophecies in Daniel 2 and 7, and later interpreters used them to shed light on the meaning of the four kingdom prophecies.

In chapter 8, Daniel receives a vision in which a ram is trampled by a goat with one horn, and then the goat’s horn shatters and is replaced by four new horns. Out of one of these horns sprouts a little horn, which grows taller and taller, and challenges God in heaven. After Daniel awakes, the angel Gabriel comes to interpret the dream for him: the ram represents the kings of Persia and the goat that overpowers it is the “King of the Greeks” (quite clearly Alexander the Great), and the four horns the four kingdoms into which his kingdom will be divided. At the end of their rule, an evil king—the little horn found here and in Daniel 7—will arise and persecute the “Holy People,” and yet, “he will be destroyed, but not by human power” (Daniel 8:25). The Little Horn is clearly Antiochus IV, and so the vision predicts his coming destruction when God will overthrow his kingdom and replace it with a Jewish kingdom.

Chapter 9 of the Book of Daniel is another prophecy delivered to Daniel by an angel. It is related to a prophecy from the Book of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 29:10) that predicted the end of the Babylonian Captivity of the Jews after a period of seventy years. Indeed, the Jews remained in Babylon for about that length of time before Cyrus the Great of Persia allowed them to return to Judea. To the author of Daniel, however, the literal end of the Babylonian Captivity clearly did not mark the end of the oppression of the Jews, and a new captivity of sorts had arisen under Antiochus Epiphanes.²⁸ Thus, in this vision, an angel explains to Daniel the true prophecy:

²⁷ Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 37–39; idem, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 107–108.

²⁸ See Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 108–109; Himmelfarb, *The Apocalypse*, 40–44.

Israel's oppression will last not seventy years but seventy *weeks* of years (i.e. seventy periods of seven years each). This places Antiochus' persecution toward the end of the period, a final hurdle before God liberates the Jewish people.²⁹

A final vision makes up chapters 10–12. First Daniel encounters the archangel Michael, who tells him that the conflict between Jews and gentiles reflects a parallel battle in heaven, and promises to reveal to him the future (Daniel 10). Michael begins by describing a succession of kings of Persia, who will be defeated by the “King of the Greeks,” whose empire will be divided between the four winds (Daniel 11:1–4), echoing much of the prophecy in chapter 8. Then Michael relates the wars and marriage alliances between the kings of the South and the kings of the North, clearly referring to the two most important rival Hellenistic dynasties—the Ptolemaic kings of Egypt and Seleucid kings of Syria and Mesopotamia, respectively. These prophecies are *vaticinia ex eventu* descriptions of the affairs between the two kingdoms from shortly after the death of Alexander down to the time of Antiochus IV (Daniel 11:5–30). Next, Michael describes (as another *vaticinium ex eventu*) Antiochus's persecution of the Jews (Daniel 11:30–37). Michael does not name Antiochus, but describes him as an evil king who will bring an end to the rites performed in the temple, and profane it by setting up an “abomination of desolation” (מְשׁוּמֵם הַשְּׁקִיזָן) (probably the statue of Zeus erected in the temple), and flatter and reward those who would break the covenant.

This is followed by an account of the king's further exploits. He will invade and conquer Egypt and subjugate the Ethiopians and Libyans, Michael reports. Then, returning east, the king will encamp before the holy mountain (i.e. near Jerusalem), where he will die. Antiochus IV did none of these things, and so these appear to be genuine predictions by the author of the prophecy about what he believed would befall Antiochus in the future.

The Book of Daniel ends with Michael prophesying to Daniel the resurrection of the dead and the end of the world (Daniel 12). Some of the resurrected dead will be rewarded with everlasting life, others punished with everlasting shame. Michael instructs Daniel to seal up the prophecies, so that they remain secret until the last days. When Daniel asks when the persecution of God's people will end and dead will be resurrected, Michael tells him that it will end approximately three and a half years after the abomination of desolation is set up (the same number given in Daniel 7).

Thus, the Book of Daniel suggests that the persecutions of Antiochus were the final hurdle in history for the Jewish people. Though they narrate world history from the Babylonians down to the middle of the second century BC, the visions in the Book of Daniel were primarily a response to the Antiochus' anti-Jewish laws. Each vision builds on the previous ones, focusing ever more closely on the conflict between Antiochus and the Jews. The visions articulate the view that Antiochus is an enemy of God and part of a long trial for Jews that had begun with the

²⁹ If the period of seventy weeks of years (490 years) begins with the destruction of the First Temple in 587 BC, this would place the redemption of Israel prophesied in Daniel 9 in the year 97 BC, a full seventy years after the author of the Book of Daniel wrote. However, elsewhere Daniel predicts the Jewish victory over the gentile oppressors will come soon, so that Antiochus IV will himself be punished. This chronological problem has long baffled Old Testament scholars. It is possible the author of Daniel 9 made some sort of chronological error.

Babylonian Captivity. However, God will soon intervene directly in order to destroy Antiochus and his kingdom—and indeed all gentile powers—and pass rule over the world to the Jews, whose kingdom will necessarily be holy and, for that reason, never come to an end.

I.3: The Book of Daniel as Political Eschatology

The prophecies in the Book of Daniel were likely written, or revised to their current form, shortly before Judah Maccabee and his followers defeated the Seleucid army, captured Jerusalem, and cleansed the temple in 164 BC. This is clear because author of the visions has no knowledge these things would happen, and expected that the liberation of the Jews would come not from military victories but through God's direct intervention. The author must also have been unaware of the death of Antiochus IV since the prophecy about his later deeds (predicting his conquest of Egypt, Libya, and Ethiopia) and death near Jerusalem (between the sea and the temple mount) in Daniel 11 never happened. He never conquered Egypt, Libya, or Ethiopia, and he died in 164 BC while he was far away from Jerusalem campaigning against the Parthians. Thus, the visions in the Book of Daniel were a product of the difficult time in which Antiochus IV's attempts to eradicate Jewish practice appeared as if they might be successful, before those efforts were halted by the victory of the Maccabees.

The author of the prophecies in the Book of Daniel was not a necessarily a supporter of the Maccabean revolt, as the prophecies encourage patient resolve until God intervenes directly to alleviate the suffering of the Jews.³⁰ However, with the success of the Maccabean revolt, it is easy to comprehend how the prophecies might have seemed to have been fulfilled, and so came to be regarded as divinely inspired. Judah Maccabee succeeded in regaining Jerusalem and the temple, and after his death in battle his brothers established an independent Jewish kingdom under their Hasmonean dynasty. The fourth kingdom had been defeated, and the new Jewish kingdom might be imagined as the fifth, eternal kingdom.

Nonetheless, reality proved far messier than the idealized fifth kingdom. Judah Maccabee's brothers styled themselves high priests, a title bestowed by the Seleucid kings with whom they began to cooperate. Later, the rulers of the Hasmonean dynasty began to call themselves kings, though the family was not of a royal Davidic lineage, angering some portion of their subjects. Moreover, as the kingdom remained only a regional power it could not but disappoint lofty hopes for a kingdom that would exceed all previous empires. As time marched on, it became harder and harder for Jews to accept that this was the promised kingdom foreseen in Daniel's visions.

Those who suspected that the Hasmonean Kingdom was not the fifth kingdom could have found confirmation in the fact that the prophecies of the Book of Daniel had not been completely fulfilled. Since Antiochus IV had not conquered Egypt, Libya, and Ethiopia and had not died outside of Jerusalem, it could be believed the prophecies referred to another evil king who was

³⁰ John Collins, *The Apocalyptic Vision of the Book of Daniel*, 206–210.

still to come. The Dead Sea Scrolls provide evidence that such an eschatological reading of the Book of Daniel was already widespread by the c. 100 BC.

Some of the earliest copies of the Book of Daniel are preserved among the Dead Sea Scrolls from the Jewish ascetic community at Qumran, which had separated itself from Hasmonean Kingdom because they regarded it as corrupt. This community appears to have looked to the Book of Daniel, as well as other, similar apocalypses, as a guide to the imminent events of the end times, for which they were preparing. In the words of a modern commentator on Daniel: “The Qumran community believed that the visions in Daniel, which had patently not been completely fulfilled in the downfall of Antiochus Epiphanes, were about to be fulfilled in their own days.”³¹ The messianic community that produced the Dead Sea Scrolls seems to have expected that the fifth, eternal kingdom of the Jews soon would be established under the leadership of the messiah—the true Jewish king who, unlike the Hasmoneans, would be descended from King David’s royal line. They expected an imminent battle between good and evil, when the messiah would destroy the gentile nations and establish the Jewish world empire with their aid.³²

Such an eschatological interpretation of Daniel remained a powerful current in late Second Temple Judaism, and came to influence Christianity. Indeed, in the gospels, Jesus himself warns his disciples that a sign of the end times will be the setting up in the temple of the “abomination of desolation” foreseen by Daniel (Mark 13:14; Matthew 24:15; Luke 21:22). The implication is that the prophecy of the desecration of the temple mount in Daniel did not refer a deed of Antiochus IV, but to something that would happen in the future. The gradual decline of the Jewish kingdom, and finally its destruction by the Romans in 70 AD, would seem to have proved once and for all that it had not been the fifth kingdom, and so if the prophecies in the Book of Daniel were genuine, they must refer, at least in part, to events that had not yet transpired.

Still, the original context of the Book of Daniel was not forgotten, a fact made clear in the Roman period by the pagan philosopher Porphyry (d. c. 305 AD) in his *Against the Christians* (Κατὰ Χριστιανῶν). Though *Against the Christians* is lost, Porphyry’s arguments are known in detail because they were so often the subject of Christian rebuttals. Around the year 400 AD, the Christian writer Jerome summarized Porphyry’s argument on Daniel in a preface to his own rebuttal:

Porphyry wrote the twelfth book [of *Against the Christian*] against the prophecy of Daniel, denying that it was composed by that person to whom it is ascribed in name, but rather by someone who was in Judea in the time of the Antiochus Epiphanes, and [argued that] Daniel had not so much spoken of what is to come than describe the past. Finally,

³¹ J. E. Goldingay, *Daniel* (Dallas: World Books, 1989), xxvii. For the Book of Daniel in the Qumran community, see J. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 72–79; idem, *Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (London: Routledge, 1997), 15–18; Eugene Ulrich, “The Text of Daniel in the Qumran Scrolls,” in *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception*, vol. 2, ed. John J. Collins and Peter Flint (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 573–585; and Klaus Koch, “Stages in the Canonization of the Book of Daniel,” 427–432 in the same volume.

³² For a detailed examination of the eschatology in the Qumran community, see Collins, *Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, esp. 91–109.

[Porphyry wrote] that whatever he [Daniel] spoke of up to the time Antiochus contained real history, whereas anything he may have conjectured after [that time], since he did not know the future, was false.³³

Porphyry clearly had argued that Daniel's visions were not real prophecies, but *vaticinia ex eventu* that were falsely attributed to the historical Daniel. Here Porphyry made a case for the authorship of the prophecies in the Book of Daniel that would come to form the basis of the modern historical understanding of the book's authorship.

However, the widespread acceptance of Porphyry's arguments had to wait for the secular inquiry of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Until then, they were widely rejected out of hand.³⁴ For Porphyry, the fact that the prophecies in the Book of Daniel were fabricated after the fact was a major part of his larger anti-Christian polemic. If Jesus were truly the messiah or even God, as the Christians maintained, how could he not know that the prophecies of Daniel were forgeries? As a result, for Christians in the Greek and Latin tradition, in which Porphyry's arguments were well known, it became a major apologetic concern to disprove Porphyry and demonstrate that the visions in the Book of Daniel were really the work of the prophet Daniel and referred, at least in part, to events that had not yet transpired, that is, to the eschatological future.

I.4: Daniel Against Empire

Modern scholarship has come to accept that Porphyry had been largely correct that the visions of Daniel were *vaticinia ex eventu* written in response to the persecutions of Antiochus IV (even if he made some mistakes in the details of his argument).³⁵ As a result, scholars have sought to better understanding the Book of Daniel in its historical context. A repeated theme in such scholarship is that the Book of Daniel can be classified as resistance literature, written in opposition to an oppressive empire. As Anatheia Portier-Young states unequivocally in her 2011 *Apocalypse Against Empire*: "No book of the Hebrew Bible so plainly engages and opposes the project of empire as Daniel."³⁶ It denounced the reigning Seleucid Empire as illegitimate, as opposed to God, and soon to be overthrown. As a result, an enormous body of scholarship exists

³³ Jerome, *Commentary on Daniel*, prologue; *S. Hieronymi Presbyteri Opera, Pars I, Opera Exegetica 5: Commentariorum in Daniele Libri III*, ed. Franciscus Glorie (Turnhout: Brepols, 1965), 771: *Contra prophetam Danielem duodecimum librum scribit Porphyrius, nolens eum ab ipso cuius inscriptus est nomine esse compositum sed a quodam qui temporibus Antiochi, qui appellatus est Epiphanes, fuerit in Iudaea, et non tam Danielem ventura dixisse quam illum narrasse praeterita; denique quidquid usque ad Antiochum dixerit, veram historiam continere, siquid autem ultra opinatus sit, quae futura nescierit esse mentitum.*

³⁴ Hugo Grotius, in the seventeenth century, adopted some of Porphyry's arguments in a Protestant Christian context to argue that Daniel's prophecies had already been fulfilled, against his coreligionists who awaited the imminent fulfillment of the prophecies; this will be discussed further below, in chapter 4. However, Grotius and his followers still believed that the prophecies were spoken by a fifth-century BC prophet Daniel, and so sidestepped the more radical implication of Porphyry's argument.

³⁵ Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 121.

³⁶ Portier-Young, *Apocalypse Against Empire*, 223.

which attempts to understand the book of Daniel in this anti-imperial context.

Starting in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, scholars sought to contextualize Daniel in the general atmosphere of native opposition to Hellenistic rule throughout the Mediterranean world in the aftermath of the conquests of Alexander the Great. Scholars noticed such opposition in Egypt, for example in stories that claimed that the last native Pharaoh, Nectanebo, was the real father of Alexander the Great.³⁷ Further discoveries were made in papyrus fragments recovered in Egypt, which revealed prophecies and proto-apocalyptic literature from over the course of foreign rule: Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman. Many of these fragments contained narratives expressing hopes for a native Pharaoh who would expel the foreigners from Egypt.³⁸ There were obvious parallels between this ancient Egyptian literature and the experience and hopes of the Jews preserved in the Book of Daniel and elsewhere in scripture.

Further connections were made with Persian texts. Already in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, orientalist scholars noticed the similarity between the four kingdoms in Daniel and the *Bahman Yast* (or the *Zand ī Wahman Yasn*, as more recent scholarship calls it), a Zoroastrian text preserved in Persian manuscripts from the tenth century AD and later. Here, Zoroaster dreams of a tree with the same four metals as the statue in Daniel 2, and is told that the metals represent the three dynasties of Persia (Pishdadian, Kayanid, Sasanian), followed by a fourth, represented by iron, made up of foreign non-Zoroastrian people who will cause the true religion to nearly cease (whom additional details imply are Muslim Arabs and Turks).³⁹ It also looked forward to a future king, Bahram/Wahram, who would expel the Muslims and establish a fifth, holy Zoroastrian kingdom.⁴⁰ Obviously, this is a medieval Persian apocalypse, but scholars have long speculated that the *Bahman Yast* originated as an ancient Persian or even Babylonian tradition (the surviving versions of which had been interpolated over the centuries to bring it up to date) and which informed the Jewish writer responsible for the visions in the Book of

³⁷ See, for example, D. G. Hogarth, "Nectanebo, Pharaoh and Magician," *The English Historical Review*, vol. 11 no. 41 (1896), 1–12.

³⁸ See David Frankfurter, *Elijah in Upper Egypt: The Apocalypse of Elijah and Early Egyptian Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 159–194. Jan Assmann, "Konigsdogma und Heilserwartung: Politische und kultische Chaosbeschreibungen in ägyptischen Texten," in *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East: Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Apocalypticism, Uppsala, August 12–17, 1979*, ed. D. Hellholm (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1989), 345–377. One of the most important such prophecies is the so-called *Oracle of the Potter*, on which, see Ludwig Koenen, "Die Prophezeiungen des 'Topfers'," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, vol. 2 (1968), 178–209; idem "The Prophecies of a Potter: A Prophecy of World Renewal Becomes an Apocalypse," in *Proceedings of the Twelfth International Congress of Papyrology*, ed. D. H. Samuel (Toronto: A.M. Hakkert, 1970), 178–209; Frankfurter, *Elijah in Upper Egypt*, 176–182.

³⁹ The most recent edition and translation has been published by Carlo Cereti, *Zand ī Wahman Yasn: A Zoroastrian Apocalypse* (Rome: Istituto italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1995). The dream of the tree of four metals is contained in chapter 1 on ibid, 36 (manuscript facsimile), 133 (transcription), and 149 (English translation). A more complex and detailed version of the dream, perhaps a later elaboration, in which the tree has branches of seven metals, is found in chapter three.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 74 (manuscript facsimile), 145 (transcription), and 165–166 (English translation).

Daniel.⁴¹

In 1961, Samuel Eddy united this material into a coherent picture when he published a book-length study that placed Jewish opposition to Seleucid rule within of larger narrative of Persian, Anatolian, and Egyptian resistance to Hellenistic empire.⁴² He also included a translation of the *Bahman Yast* in which he sought to provide the “original” text by excising mention of Sasanian figures and removing all references to Arabs and Islam, thus manipulating the text so that the eschatological invasion of the fourth, iron dynasty represented that of the Macedonians/Greeks (thereby matching the iron kingdom of the Book of Daniel).⁴³ This methodology is highly questionable, but scholars now largely accept the broader strokes of Eddy’s argument: the Book of Daniel drew on a common, near eastern theme of successive kingdoms, of which the fourth kingdom represents oppressive foreign rule.⁴⁴

In 1940, Joseph W. Swain published an article in which he suggested evidence of this near eastern theme in early Latin literature: he pointed out that the silver-age Roman writer Velleius Paterculus quoted from the earlier, lost and otherwise unknown chronicle of Aemilius Sura to the effect that four empires had ruled the world: Assyria, the Medes, the Persians, and the Macedonians, similar to the sequence implied in the Book of Daniel. Swain estimated that Sura composed his chronicle a decade or so before Antiochus’ anti-Jewish edicts, and so his statement must predate the Book of Daniel.⁴⁵ Swain thus suggested that the model of four empires found in

⁴¹ Edward W. West, *Sacred Book of the East, volume 5: Pahlavi Texts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1880), lvi-lviii; Eduard Meyer, *Ursprung und Anfänge des Christentums*, vol. 2 (Stuttgart: Cotta 1921), 189; Wilhelm Bousset, *Die Religion des Judentums im Späthellenistischen Zeitalter* (Berlin: Reuther & Reichard, 1903), 508.

⁴² Samuel K. Eddy, *The King is Dead: Studies in Near Eastern Resistance to Hellenism, 334-31 BC* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961).

⁴³ Eddy’s translation, based on a fifteenth-century New Persian translation, is found on *ibid*, 334–349. He notes on 334: “We are justified in thinking that beginning in Sassanid times the original four-monarch prophecy underwent revision on at least four occasions, ... Alteration continued until approximately the thirteenth century, as shown by E. W. West, being made necessary by the Muslim and Turkish invasions of Iran.”

⁴⁴ John Collins, in his important studies on the Book of Daniel, accepts the idea of such influence from Persian religious literature. Such ideas are also accepted by Tord Olsson, “The Apocalyptic Activity: The Case of Jāmāsp Nāmāg,” in *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East: Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Apocalypticism, Uppsala, August 12-17, 1979*, ed. D. Hellholm (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1989), 21–50, but he notes on *ibid*, 26, that some Iranian scholars had questioned that the very late Pahlavian work could have any relation to a much older work that would have influenced the Book of Daniel. Jacques Duchesne-Guillemin, “Apocalypse juive et apocalypse iranienne,” in *La soteriologia dei culti orientali nell’Impero Romano*, ed. U. Bianchi and M. J. Vermaseren, (Leiden: Brill, 1982), 753–759, has made the important observation that the vision in *Bahman Yast* could well depend on the Book of Daniel instead of the other way around. Carlo Cereti, “On the Date of the Zand ī Wahman Yasn,” in *The K.R. Cama Oriental Institute Second International Congress Proceedings*, ed. H. J. M. Desai and H. N. Modi (Bombay: K.R. Cama Oriental Institute, 1996), 243–258, makes a strong case for an early medieval date for the text. Philippe Gignoux, “L’Apocalyptique iranienne est-elle vraiment ancienne? Notes critiques,” *Revue de l’Histoire des Religions*, vol. 216 (1999), 213–227, also argues forcefully that the *Bahman Yast* in no way antedates the Sasanian period.

⁴⁵ Swain makes his conjecture about the date of Aemilius Sura’s chronicle based on the fact that Sura asserts that the Roman Empire succeeded the Macedonian Empire after the Roman victory over Philip V in the Second Macedonian War (197 BC) and over Antiochus III at the Battle of Magnesia (190 BC), but does not seem to have known about the Third Macedonian War (171–168 BC), when the Romans again invaded Macedonia. Nonetheless, it should be noted that Sura may simply have meant that with these victories over Philip V and Antiochus III Rome became the chief Mediterranean superpower (which indeed it did) and does not preclude

the Book of Daniel and in Sura's chronicle had a common source in anti-Seleucid resistance literature (picked up by the Romans during their eastern campaigns against the Seleucid king Antiochus III) in which a fourth kingdom of foreigners would one day be replaced by a fifth kingdom "from which the Greeks would be expelled, and under which the old oriental system would return."⁴⁶ All of this served to present the Book of Daniel as part of a larger phenomenon of native resistance to Hellenistic rule, a potent image for scholars working in an era when old colonial empires were collapsing.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, Swain underrated the importance of the Book of Daniel in later centuries; even if the Book of Daniel was but one expression of a fairly common theory of four world empires (to be followed by a fifth), it was the single example (at least outside the Persian tradition) that lived on to exert a major influence in later centuries after the Hellenistic kingdoms were long gone.⁴⁸

Perhaps the most important recent scholar of the Second Temple apocalyptic and the Dead Sea Scrolls, John J. Collins, has integrated these perspectives into his more literary readings of Daniel. Collins accepted the Book of Daniel as part of "the anti-Hellenistic resistance literature of the Near East."⁴⁹ Nonetheless, Collins' focus has largely been on the Book of Daniel's place in the distinctly Jewish genre of apocalyptic literature.

Recently, work on the Book of Daniel and Second Temple apocalyptic literature in general has taken a theoretical turn. Scholars, especially in departments of theology and religious studies, have sought to read the Book of Daniel and other contemporary Jewish apocalyptic works from the perspective of post-colonial criticism in order to understand how the language and narrative techniques of such apocalypses function as resistance to empire. According to this work, though proto-apocalypses survive from earlier (the apocalyptic "Book of the Watchers" is believed to date from the third century BC, but is preserved only in a collection with later material in the Book of Enoch), apocalyptic literature as a genre was largely born out of the need to formulate a response to the oppressive rule of Antiochus IV.

The boldest proponent of this approach, Richard Horsley, in his 2010 *Revolt of the Scribes*, argued apocalyptic literature should not be viewed as a genre at all, but that apocalypses,

knowledge of later military interventions in Macedonia; thus Swain's dating for Sura must remain conjectural, and no real certainty can exist as to when Aemilius Sura lived.

⁴⁶ J. W. Swain, "The Theory of the Four Monarchies: Opposition History under the Roman Empire," *Classical Philology*, vol. 35 (1940), 1–21.

⁴⁷ Swain, in *ibid*, 9, directly ties the four kingdom model with the larger phenomenon of revolts against Seleucid rule: "The fact that these revolts started in Bactria and Parthia and gradually advanced westward lends further plausibility to the suggestion that the theory of the four monarchies was itself of Persian origin: the theory advanced with the revolts."

⁴⁸ For example, Swain, in *ibid* 19–21, argues implausibly that since the Christian scholars Jerome and Orosius, when discussing the concept of the four empires, identified the first empire as that of the Assyrians instead of the Babylonians this meant that they must have been dependent not on the Book of Daniel but on a source that was "pagan rather than of Christian origin." Roman writers often treated the Assyrians and the Babylonians interchangeably, however, and there is no reason to believe that the rather obscure history of Velleius Paterculus would have been better known, or treated more authoritatively, by these Christian authors than the Biblical Book of Daniel.

⁴⁹ John Collins, *The Apocalyptic Vision of the Book of Daniel*, 191.

especially historical apocalypses, are simply a subset of resistance literature.⁵⁰ According to Horsely's Marxist reading, apocalyptic works such as the Book of Daniel are couched in religious symbolism and allegory, but these are simply a means for expressing hope for the destruction of empires and for political liberation. Thus, according to Horsely, when apocalypses speak of cosmic destruction, they are really discussing the destruction of the established imperial world order; when they speak of the resurrection of the dead, they actually mean the politically dead (the oppressed) regaining agency. In this vein, Horsely declares: "As exemplified in the vision and interpretation of Daniel 7, 'apocalyptic' texts are not about the end of the world, but about the end of empire."⁵¹

Horsely's approach has been rightly criticized.⁵² Indeed, by boiling down all aspects of apocalyptic literature to political resistance, Horsely undermines any understanding of the message and beliefs that ancient apocalyptic authors sought to convey. Fortunately, subsequent work on empire in ancient apocalypticism has been more careful. A year after Horsely's book, Portier-Young published her *Apocalypse Against Empire*, which took a more nuanced approach toward reading Daniel and other Second Temple apocalypses in light of postcolonial criticism. Not all apocalyptic texts are about the end of empire, according to Portier-Young, but the genre conventions of historical apocalypses, originating as resistance literature from the period of Seleucid domination of Judea, did develop specifically to oppose the hegemonic claims of empire:

Empire claimed the power to order the world. It exercised power through force, but also through propaganda and ideology. Empire manipulated and co-opted hegemonic social institutions to express its values and cosmology. Resisting imperial domination required challenging not only the physical means of coercion, but also the empire's claims about knowledge and the world. The first apocalypses did precisely this.⁵³

In short, according to Portier-Young, historical apocalypses developed out of a specific need to oppose the project of empire, and so the characteristic narrative elements—such as divine knowledge imparted by supernatural beings, struggle between good and evil, and the hope for a perfect kingdom and world order at the end of history—arise from this need.

Further work in the field has refined such ideas. Alexandria Frisch's 2017 *The Danielic Discourse on Empire* explores how the Book of Daniel understood empire. According to Frisch, before the Hellenistic period, Jews conceived of empires as creations of God, and even bad empires were under God's control as tools of his divine punishment. The Jewish experience

⁵⁰ Richard Horsely, *Revolt of the Scribes: Resistance and Apocalyptic Origins* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), see esp. 193–207.

⁵¹ Horsely, *Revolt of the Scribes*, 1.

⁵² Stephen Moore, *Empire and Apocalypse: Postcolonialism and the New Testament* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2006), 122, criticizes Horsely's categorical focus on empire. Collins, "Empire and Apocalypse," 12, objections to the anachronism of Horsely's Marxist perspective and asserts that he "shows his failure to grasp the logic of Daniel in his zeal to reduce everything to political and economic terms." Philip Esler, "Social-Scientific Approaches to Apocalyptic Literature," in *The Oxford Handbook of Apocalyptic Literature*, ed. J. J. Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 135, is similarly critical.

⁵³ Portier-Young, *Apocalypse Against Empire*, xxii.

under Antiochus' Seleucid Empire upset this view, and the apocalyptic writers, of whom the author/redactor of the Book of Daniel was one, advocated a view of empire as a rebellion against God, part of a larger cosmic battle between good and evil; God will eventually triumph, they promised, and return the power usurped by the gentile empires to the Jews.⁵⁴ Even more recently, Paul Kosmin, a classicist specializing in Seleucid history, has explored the connection of apocalyptic literature and Seleucid notions of open-ended, linear time (embodied in the Seleucid calendar), arguing that the development of the former represented a rebellion against the latter.⁵⁵

Thus, the Book of Daniel has gradually been accepted as a thoroughly anti-imperial work, and as one of the founding works in a genre (apocalyptic literature) that developed specifically in opposition to imperial rule over the Jews (namely that of the Macedonian Seleucids). Nonetheless, the anti-imperial orientation of the visions of Daniel was no secret to ancient Jewish and Christian readers. The four-kingdom model was redeployed in anti-imperial rhetoric through antiquity, as we shall see.

Conclusions: The Meaning of the Four-Kingdom Model

The four-kingdom model in the Book of Daniel provided an important, interpretively flexible system of conceiving history, but Daniel's importance goes beyond this scheme. Its inclusion, late though it was, in the *Ketuvim* ("Writings") of the Hebrew Bible meant that a work of apocalyptic literature had become part of the canon of scripture deemed the inspired word of God by Jews and Christians. Earlier books of the Old Testament, such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, have early forms of the characteristics of apocalyptic literature and thus might be considered forerunners to the genre, but, in the words of John Collins, "The book of Daniel contains the only full-blown example of apocalyptic literature in the Hebrew Bible."⁵⁶ As a result, a version of political eschatology was enshrined for believers as the inspired word of God. Vitality, that vision was openly hostile toward the claims of worldly empire.

Part II: Rome Becomes the Fourth Kingdom

In his Greek-language history of Jewish people, the first-century Jewish historian Josephus discusses the visions of Daniel, and while commenting on the prophesied persecution by the Little Horn, he notes: "And indeed it so came to pass, that our nation suffered these things

⁵⁴ Alexandria Frisch, *The Danielic Discourse on Empire in Second Temple Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 2017). Esler, "Social-Scientific Approaches to Apocalyptic Literature," 135–136, criticized both Horsely and Portier-Young for failing to model the concept of empire in their studies.

⁵⁵ Paul Kosmin, in *Time and Its Adversaries in the Seleucid Empire*, with a discussion of the visions of Daniel on 143–161. Kosmin notes that the Seleucid calendar (the same calendar in use in the Syriac Christian world as the "Year of the Greeks), counted time not cyclically by regnal years of monarchs, or by other related systems, as had always been done before, but as continuous, irreversible, accumulating, starting with Seleucus I's entry into Babylon in 312/311 BC. According to Kosmin, the anti-Hellenistic Jews, including the author of the Book of Daniel, opposed this system, and rebelled by treating history as closed and subject to an impending end.

⁵⁶ J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 85.

under Antiochus Epiphanes, according to Daniel's vision, and what he wrote many years before came to pass; in the same way Daniel also wrote concerning the empire of the Romans, and that our country should be made desolate by them.”⁵⁷ Josephus thus saw in Daniel's visions not just a prediction of Jewish persecution under Antiochus, but also later suffering inflicted by the Romans.

Josephus had participated in the Great Jewish Revolt of 66–73 AD against Rome, during which he had been captured by the Romans, and became the slave and later freedman of Emperor Vespasian, under whom he enjoyed imperial patronage. As such, his view of the Roman Empire must have been complicated. Though Josephus' does not explore further the implication of the idea that the Roman Empire was foreseen in the Book of Daniel, and indeed softens the negative descriptions of the fourth kingdom (Josephus excludes details such as the toes of iron and clay and any mention of the frightening fourth beast), several scholars have proposed that he was subtly suggesting to any Jewish readers that the Roman Empire, as the fourth kingdom, would soon suffer God's wrath.⁵⁸ Whatever the case, it is notable that for Josephus the prophecies of Daniel could apply as much to the Romans as they did to Antiochus. This emerged as a very common understanding of the visions, and indeed the Romans soon came to supplant the Macedonian Seleucids as the final, evil kingdom. Of course, nowhere in the Book of Daniel is it made clear that the target of its apocalyptic polemic is the Seleucid Empire: doing so would have been too direct and shatter the illusion that the visions originated in the fifth century BC. Thanks to the cryptic language of Daniel's visions the Roman Empire could be accommodated into the sequence of four empires.

Though the Roman Republic was already beginning to dominate the Western Mediterranean by the time of the composition of the Book of Daniel, outside a few vague allusions the Romans are not mentioned in its prophetic visions.⁵⁹ Only as Roman political control expanded further east and began to be more keenly felt by the Jews did the Danielic schema of history require some revision.

⁵⁷ Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, X.276, ed. Benedictus Niese, *Flavii Iosephi opera*, vol. 2 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1888), 391: καὶ δὴ ταῦτα ἡμῶν συνέβη παθεῖν τῷ ἔθνει ὑπὸ Ἀντιόχου τοῦ Ἐπιφανοῦς, καθὼς εἶδεν ὁ Δανιήλος καὶ πολλοῖς ἔτεσιν ἔμπροσθεν ἀνέγραψε τὰ γενησόμενα. τὸν αὐτὸν δὲ τρόπον ὁ Δανιήλος καὶ περὶ τῆς Ῥωμαίων ἡγεμονίας ἀνέγραψε, καὶ ὅτι ὑπ' αὐτῶν ἐρημωθήσεται.

⁵⁸ Geza Vermes, “Josephus' Treatment of the Book of Daniel,” *Journal of Jewish Studies*, vol. 42 (1991), 149–166; Steven Mason, “Josephus, Daniel, and the Flavian House,” in *Josephus and the History of the Greco-Roman Period: Essays in Memory of Morton Smith*, ed. F. Parente and J. Sievers (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 161–191; Louis Feldman, *Josephus' Interpretation of the Bible* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 649–656; Per Bilde, “Josephus and Jewish Apocalypticism,” in *Understanding Josephus: Seven Perspectives*, ed. S. Mason (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 35–61. Frisch, *The Danielic Discourse on Empire*, 184–192, argues that Josephus weaves “simultaneously between an overt acceptance of present Roman power and a hidden challenge to that power,” and makes her point using of the concept of the “hidden transcript,” that is, the idea of veiled language of resistance embedded in seemingly inoffensive and highly-scripted public speech, as popularized in the work of the anthropologist James C. Scott.

⁵⁹ The ships of Kittim in Daniel 11:30 are widely understood as a reference to the Romans, who intervened to prevent Antiochus IV's conquest of Egypt in 164 BC (the so-called “Day of Eleusis”); on this Roman intervention, see Polybius, *Histories*, XXIX.27; Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita*, XLV.12. Kittim (כִּי־תִים) was an old Hebrew name for Cyprus, which came eventually to stand for the West in general.

In 63 BC, Pompey Magnus, in a wider campaign that asserted Roman control over the Eastern Mediterranean, had dissolved the Seleucid Empire, besieged and captured Jerusalem, desecrated the temple, and turned the Jewish Kingdom into a Roman client state. In 37 BC, the Romans replaced the Hasmonean dynasty with King Herod (who proceeded to massacre the surviving Hasmoneans) and his line. Tensions between the Jews and Romans grew ever more strained as the Romans taxed the Jews, and often dealt clumsily with the unfamiliar Jewish religion. It appears that already the Romans were becoming the new enemies of God in Jewish apocalypses of the first century BC.⁶⁰ The final straw came when the Jews rebelled against Roman rule. In 70 AD, in putting down the rebellion, a Roman army sacked Jerusalem and razed the Jewish Temple, a shocking deed that far outweighed any crimes committed by the Seleucid Empire of Antiochus IV.

The Jews struggled to make sense of the failure of this rebellion. In response, they turned to the apocalyptic genre, and to political eschatology. As implied by Josephus, the flexibility of the prophecies in the Book of Daniel could accommodate the new phenomenon of Roman rule. New apocalypses were written to revise and update the political eschatology found in the Book of Daniel. The result was a new body of apocalyptic material that would shape notions of political eschatology for several centuries to come.

II.1: Rome in the Sibylline Oracles

After the sack of Jerusalem, the need to accommodate Rome into Jewish political eschatology, and the schema of empires articulated in the Book of Daniel in particular, resulted in several different solutions. In some cases Rome was grafted onto preexisting prophecies. This is evident in several prophetic works composed mostly by Jews in antiquity but written in Greek and attributed to the pagan Sibyl (probably in order to lend them credibility outside the Jewish community) and collected together in the Christian period as a unity called the *Sibylline Oracles*.⁶¹

⁶⁰ See Himmelfarb, *The Apocalypse*, 53–54; Horsley, *Revolt of the Scribes*, 107–175; Frisch, *The Danielic Discourse on Empire*, 153–180.

⁶¹ Although the *Sibylline Oracles* are numbered in manuscripts 1–15, all fifteen do not appear together in any manuscript. Rather, they survive in two groups. The first, referred to as group A (and sometimes subdivided into two further groups: Φ and Ψ), extant in eight manuscripts from the fifteenth century and later, which contain a preface and oracles 1–8, all of which are very different compositions, ranging from political apocalyptic to odes to God. Group B (or Ω), found in five different manuscripts (dating from the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries) contains oracles 9–15. Of the oracles in this collection, modern edition omit 9, 10, and 15; this is because the *Ninth Sibylline Oracle* is a pastiche of material found on oracles 6 and 8, the *Tenth Sibylline Oracle* is the same text as the *Fourth Sibylline Oracle*, and the *Fifteenth Sibylline Oracle* is simply a short excerpt from the *Eighth Sibylline Oracle*. The rest of collection B—oracles 11–14—are made up of oracles which give *vaticinium ex eventu* historical predictions from a monotheistic (mostly Jewish, but with occasional lines that suggest the author or authors were Christian, or a Christian had made interpolations into the text). Together, they mostly form a coherent historical narrative from the Biblical Flood down to the third century AD. See Aloisius Rzach, *Χρήσμοι Σιβυλλιακοὶ* (Vienna: Tempsky 1891), v–xvi; Johannes Geffcken, *Die Oracula sibyllina* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1902), xxi–liii; John J. Collins, “The Sibylline Oracles: A New Translation and Introduction,” in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, vol. 1: Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments*, ed. James Charlesworth (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1983), 320–321; David S.

The *Third Sibylline Oracle*, clearly written by a Jew in Egypt but difficult to date, contains perhaps the most detailed vision of the end times, and intermingles denunciations of Alexander's Greeks and Macedonians and of the Romans. They are all treated as impious invaders, barely distinguished from one another. Some scholars believe that this oracle was written around the time of the Book of Daniel and later updated with references to the Romans when they became the new oppressors; others believe that it is a literary unity produced entirely after the Roman conquest of Egypt. If the former are correct, little care was taken by the later redactor to distinguish the Romans as a new oppressor distinct from the old Hellenistic monarchies.⁶²

The *Fourth Sibylline Oracle* shows a somewhat neater intrusion of the Roman Empire into the old paradigm. This oracle organizes world history into a schema of ten generations and four empires, clearly related to the succession of kingdoms in the Book of Daniel. It explicitly identifies these kingdoms as the Assyrians (which it says will govern humanity for six generations), the Medes (to which it assigns two generations), Persians (one generation), and Macedonians (one generation). Thus, all of human history, every generation, is governed by empires in a continual line of succession. While this may have formed the basis of an earlier core of the oracle, the text concludes with the description of a final empire:

Nor will the power of Macedonia survive, but from the west / a great Italian war will bloom under which the world / will serve, bearing the yoke of slavery for the Italians. / You also, miserable Corinth, will one day behold your capture. / Carthage, your tower will also bend the knee to the ground.⁶³

This is clearly a reference to the conquests of Rome (the armies of which sacked both Corinth and Carthage in 146 BC), introduced after the four kingdoms. The rest of the *Fourth Sibylline Oracle* impugns Rome for the impious destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem, and describes the civil war that resulted from the fall of Emperor Nero in 68 AD, before concluding with the chaos of the last days and the resurrection of the dead.

Thus, in *Fourth Sibylline Oracle*, Rome and its destruction of the Temple are reconciled with Daniel's four-kingdom scheme by simply grafting the Roman Empire onto the preexisting four kingdoms. It is hardly a fifth kingdom as described in the Book of Daniel, but closer to an extension of the evil fourth kingdom. The fact that the Roman Empire falls outside the ten generations that the *Fourth Sibylline Oracle* had assigned human history indicates that the

Potter, *Prophecy and History in the Crisis of the Roman Empire: A Historical Commentary on the Thirteenth Sibylline Oracle* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 161–162.

⁶² On the *Third Sibylline Oracle*, see John Collins, "The Sibylline Oracles," 354–361, who believes that the oracle was composed in the second century BC and updated to account for the Romans; Rieuwerd Buitenwerf, *Book III of the Sibylline Oracles and Its Social Setting* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), who argues that the oracle is a unified composition from the period of Roman occupation of Egypt; and John Collins, "The Third Sibyl Revisited," in *Things Revealed: Studies in Early Jewish and Christian Literature in Honor of Michael E. Stone*, ed. E. G. Chazon, D. Satran, and R. A. Clements (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 3–19, responds in turn to Buitenwerf.

⁶³ *The Fourth Sibylline Oracle*, lines 102–106; ed. Geffcken, *Die Oracula sibylline*, 96–97: οὐδὲ Μακεδονίης ἔσται κράτος· ἀλλ' ἀπο δυσμῶν / Ἰταλὸς ἀνθήσει πόλεμος μέγας, ᾧ ὑπο κόσμος / λατρεύσει δούλειον ἔχων ζυγὸν Ἰταλίδησιν. / καὶ σύ, τάλαινα Κόρινθε, τεῖν ποτ' ἐπόνει ἄλωσιν. / Καρχηδών, καὶ σεῖο χαμαὶ γόνυ πύργος ἐρείσει. Translation from J. Collins, "The Sibylline Oracles," 386.

material about Rome was a later addition to the text. It is likely that a redactor adapted an earlier version of the oracle, which used the scheme of four empires established in the Book of Daniel, and simply added the Roman Empire into the prophecy.⁶⁴

II.2: Rome as the Fourth Beast

Other works of political eschatology went to more creative lengths to accommodate the Roman Empire to the sequence of empires in Daniel. Instead of simply appending the Roman Empire onto the sequence of empires implied in Daniel, a growing opinion held that the Roman Empire was in fact the fourth kingdom of Daniel. By reworking the sequence of kingdoms, the Medes and Persians were combined into a single kingdom (a change that could be justified by the fact that the Median Empire never ruled over Judea, and because the Persian king Cyrus the Great had been half Mede), thereby making the Macedonian kingdom of Alexander the third kingdom and Rome the fourth kingdom.

This new interpretation of Daniel's four-kingdom scheme held wide currency in Jewish exegesis on Daniel and apocalyptic literature after the destruction of the Second Temple.⁶⁵ One such example is the Jewish apocryphal 4 Ezra (or Esdras), also called the *Jewish Apocalypse of Ezra*, composed sometime after the Roman sack of Jerusalem, probably c. 100. It was probably originally written in Hebrew, but it survives only in Syriac and Latin, preserved in one copy—albeit one of the oldest and most important manuscripts—of the Peshitta (the standard Syriac translation of scripture) and in many copies of the Latin Vulgate (the standard Latin translation of scripture).⁶⁶ In this work, Ezra, a contemporary of Daniel, receives his own visions and angelic interpretations, including his own version of the Danielic beast dream. In a dream Ezra

⁶⁴ Noted in David Flusser, "The Four Empire in the Fourth Sibyl and in the Book of Daniel," *Israel Oriental Studies*, vol. 2 (1972), 150–153; John J. Collins, "The Place of the Fourth Sibyl in the Development of the Jewish Sibyllina," *Journal of Jewish Studies*, vol. 25 (1974), 365–380.

⁶⁵ On Rome as the fourth kingdom in Jewish exegesis, see Casey, *Son of Man*, 80–92; Uwe Glessmer, "Die 'vier Reiche' aus Daniel in der targumischen Literatur," in *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception*, vol. 2, ed. J. J. Collins and P. W. Flint (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 468–489.

⁶⁶ The Latin text of 4 Ezra has been edited from early copies of the Vulgate by Robert Lubbock Bensly, *The Fourth book of Ezra: The Latin Version* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1895). For more information on the date and original language, see Michael Stone and Matthias Henze, *4 Ezra and 2 Baruch: Translations, Introductions, and Notes* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 2–3; for an English translation, see *ibid* 19–81. Another English translation, with an extensive introduction, has been provided by B. M. Metzger, "The Fourth Book of Ezra," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, Vol. 1: Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments*, ed. J. W. Charlesworth (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1983), 517–559. Notably, the version in the Vulgate is not a translation by Jerome, who rejected the authority of 4 Ezra, but a separate Latin translation that was later included within the Vulgate, probably on account of the importance of 4 Ezra to the writings of Ambrose of Milan; see Karina Martin Hogan, "The Preservation of 4 Ezra in the Vulgate: Thanks to Ambrose, Not Jerome," in *Fourth Ezra and Second Baruch: Reconstruction after the Fall*, ed. M. Henze, G. Boccaccini (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 381–402. The Syriac 4 Ezra survives in the Codex Ambrosianus (Cod. Milan, Ambrosian Library B 21, sometimes referred to as 7a1), from the late sixth or early seventh century, the oldest manuscript that contains the entirety of the Old Testament, and the basis for the Leiden critical edition of the Peshitta. As a result of its inclusion in this important manuscript but nowhere else, 4 Ezra is commonly deemed deuterocanonical within the Syriac tradition. An edition of the Syriac 4 Ezra is found in *The Old Testament in Syriac according to the Peshitta Version: Sample Edition: Song of Songs; Tobit; 4 Ezra*, ed. J. A. Emerton, J. C. Lebram, and R. J. Bidawid (Leiden: Brill, 1966).

sees a beast rise from the sea, much like the vision in chapter 7 of Daniel, but in this case the beast is an eagle—an unsubtle reference to the Roman Empire. It has three-heads and twelve-wings, and, like Daniel’s fourth beast, it is described as terrifying. Ezra sees a lion confront and denounce the eagle: “You, the fourth [beast] that has come, have conquered all the beasts that have gone before; and you have held sway over the world with much terror, and over all the earth with grievous oppression. . . And the Most High has looked upon his times, and behold, they are ended, and his ages are completed! Therefore you will surely disappear, you eagle.”⁶⁷ Like Daniel’s fourth beast, the eagle is burned up in the end as punishment for its crimes.

The angelic interpreter tells Ezra: “The eagle which you saw coming up from the sea is the fourth kingdom which appeared in a vision to your brother Daniel. But it was not explained to him as I now explain it to you.”⁶⁸ The angel tells Ezra that the eagle’s many wings represent the various rulers of the empire (similar to the horns on Daniel’s beast), and the three heads are the recent rulers.⁶⁹ The lion is the messiah, who will lead the Jewish people to victory over the kingdom of the beast. Thus, the meaning of the vision is similar to its model in the Book of Daniel, but now the identities of the final kingdoms are changed. The fourth beast has become the Roman Empire, and the expected fifth kingdom is explicitly identified as that led by the Jewish messiah (an eschatological figure not referenced in the Book of Daniel).

A similar revision of the Danielic schema of kingdoms is found in 2 Baruch, also called the *Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch* (it survives only in the same important early Syriac Peshitta manuscript that preserves 4 Ezra, though its original language may have been Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek), originally composed probably around 100 AD.⁷⁰ Set in the time of the destruction of the first temple by the Assyrians, like 4 Ezra this apocalypse is actually concerned with the circumstances of the Roman destruction of the second temple. In it Baruch has a vision of forest where all the trees disappear except a cedar tree, and a vine grows up and rebukes the wickedness of the cedar. Then the cedar is burned and the vine grows around its remains.

⁶⁷ 4 Ezra 11:40; ed. Bensly, 58: *Et quartus veniens devicit omnia animalia quae transierunt, et potentate tenens saeculum cum tremor multo et omnem orbem cum labore pessimo*. Translation in Stone and Henze, *4 Ezra and 2 Baruch*, 67–68.

⁶⁸ 4 Ezra 12:11–12; ed. Bensly, 59: *Aquilam quam vidisti ascendentem de mari, hoc est regnum quantum quod visum est in visu Danielo fratri tuo. Sed non est illi interpretatum quomodo ego nunc tibi interpretor*. Translation in Stone and Henze, *4 Ezra and 2 Baruch*, 68.

⁶⁹ The conventional dating of 4 Ezra to c. 100 (for this date, see Metzger, “The Fourth Book of Ezra,” 520) means that the three heads of the eagle probably represent Emperor Vespasian and his sons Titus and Domitian, for Vespasian and Titus were responsible for the destruction of the Temple. Alternatively, Lorenzo DiTommaso, “Dating the Eagle Vision of 4 Ezra: A New Look at an Old Theory,” *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 20 (1999), 3–38, has suggested that 4 Ezra dates to the end of the first century, and that the heads represents Emperor Septimius Severus and his sons Geta and Caracalla.

⁷⁰ An edition of the Syriac had been made by Sven Dederling, *Apocalypse of Baruch: According to the Peshitta Version* (Leiden: Brill, 1973). For the date of 2 Baruch, see Stone and Henze, *4 Ezra and 2 Baruch*, 6–7. An English translation is found on 83–141. Also for background and English translation, see A. F. J. Klijn, “2 (Syriac Apocalypse of) Baruch,” in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, Vol. 1: Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments*, ed. J. W. Charlesworth (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1983), 615–652. An older English translation was made by R. H. Charles, *The Apocalypse of Baruch: Translated from the Syriac* (London: A. & C. Black, 1896). Though 2 Baruch does not seem to have enjoyed the same popularity in the early church as 4 Ezra, an Arabic translation survives at St. Catherine’s in Sinai from the ten or eleventh century.

An angelic interpreter explains that a succession of four kingdoms will rise up, each destroying the previous (oddly, the first three kingdoms are not correlated with any symbol from the dream), and the last, more wicked than the others, was represented by all the trees. The cedar is the last of its rulers, and vine that challenges it is the messiah, who will conquer the fourth kingdom, slay its armies, and capture its ruler: “The last ruler, who will then be left alive when the multitude of his host will be destroyed, will be bound, and they will take him up unto Mount Zion. And my Messiah will reprove him on account of all his evil deeds, and he will assemble and set before him all the deeds of his host. And after this, he will kill him.”⁷¹ Here, the Roman emperor (ruler of the fourth kingdom) and the messiah (who will rule the fifth kingdom) are placed in direct conflict, and the prophecy promises (in a scene reminiscent of the judgment of the fourth beast in the Book of Daniel) that the messiah will literally imprison, convict, and execute the emperor, and in so doing bring Rome’s empire to an end.

It is clear that the kingdom scheme developed in the Book of Daniel (four earthly kingdoms, the last of which is opposed to God, followed by a future holy fifth kingdom) remained an enduring *topos* in apocalyptic and eschatological Jewish literature. Its flexibility in accommodating the Roman Empire allowed it to appear relevant and meaningful long after the circumstances in which the Book of Daniel was composed had passed. In the words of Alexandria Frisch: “When the events of the first century CE threatened the end of Jewish life in Judea and even Judaism itself, the Danielic discourse was so well established that it presented a ready discourse to combat Roman hegemony when the Jews needed one the most.”⁷²

II.3: The Apocalypse of the New Testament: The Book of Revelation

A member of the nascent Christian community likewise adapted the visionary imagery of the Book of Daniel articulate Christian concerns under the Roman Empire. The Book of Revelation, or the *Apocalypse of John*, also probably written in the Flavian period (most likely in the reign of Emperor Domitian), blends imagery and themes from the various Old Testament prophets, of which Daniel is perhaps the most prominent.⁷³ Like the Book of Daniel, Revelation is not one continuous narrative, but a series of nested visions dense with allegory and symbolism.⁷⁴

Throughout, John receives visions of evil beasts similar to the fourth beast of Daniel. A dragon, representing Satan, with seven heads and ten horns, appears in Revelation 12, leading the

⁷¹ 2 Baruch, 40.1–2, ed. Dederling, *Apocalypse of Baruch*, 20: וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׁמַע הַמֶּלֶךְ הַיּוֹדֵם אֶת כָּל אֵלֵּי הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת כָּל אֲדָמָה וְאֶת כָּל הַיָּם וְאֶת כָּל הַבְּרִיָּה וְאֶת כָּל הַחַיָּה וְאֶת כָּל הַצִּמְצִימִים וְאֶת כָּל הַמִּצְרִים וְאֶת כָּל הַמִּשְׁתַּחֲוִּיִּים וְאֶת כָּל הַמִּשְׁתַּחֲוִּיִּים וְאֶת כָּל הַמִּשְׁתַּחֲוִּיִּים Translation in Stone and Henze, *4 Ezra and 2 Baruch*, 107.

⁷² Frisch, *The Danielic Discourse on Empire*, 212

⁷³ On the date of the Book of Revelation, see Adela Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), 54–83. A few scholars have argued with a date in the reign of Nero, but this position has not been widely accepted.

⁷⁴ Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1976), suggests that the narrative structure of the Book of Revelation is not disorganized, but based on that of ancient near-eastern combat myths.

war in heaven against the angels and being cast down by them. In the following chapter, John has a revelatory vision even more evocative of Daniel:

And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads; and on its horns were ten diadems, and on its heads were blasphemous names. And the beast that I saw was like a leopard, its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth. And the dragon gave it his power and his throne and great authority. One of its heads seemed to have received a death-blow, but its mortal wound had been healed. In amazement the whole earth followed the beast. (Revelation 13:1–3)

This beast is quite clearly a composite of all the beasts in Daniel 7. It is as if all the previous kingdoms have come together in one hideous monster empowered by Satan (the dragon). The beast is to make war on the holy ones for forty-two months, equivalent to the three and a half years that the little horn will make war on the holy ones in Daniel 7 and Daniel 12. There can be little doubt that this beast represents the Roman Empire.⁷⁵

In the next lines (Revelation 13:11–18) a second beast arises. This beast has two horns and outwardly appears as a lamb, it “exercises all the authority of the first beast on its behalf,” makes all the inhabitants of the earth worship the first beast, performs false miracles, and marks with a stamp or brand (χάραγμα) anyone who would buy or sell (the number 666). Thus, while the first beast represents the Roman Empire, the second is its representative, perhaps a priest of imperial cult, or (as later Christian interpreters suggested) its evil, final ruler—the king formerly understood as Antiochus and now perhaps identified with the Emperor Nero.⁷⁶ Indeed, despite the suicide of this persecuting emperor in 68 AD, legends circulated that Nero had not died but escaped East, and it is possible that the Book of Revelation was composed during a period in which the Parthian Empire in Persia supported a man claiming that he was Nero, a claim that threatened the legitimacy of Emperor Domitian.⁷⁷

The same or a similar beast as the seven-headed one from the sea reappears in Revelation 17, ridden by a whore, drunk on the blood of the saints, dressed in scarlet and purple robes. She is marked on the forehead with the word “Babylon,” a not-so-veiled reference to Rome, for Rome had become the new Babylon, both by destroying the temple and by inflicting on God's chosen a new captivity.⁷⁸ Indeed, both the whore and the beast appear to represent the Roman

⁷⁵ Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation*, 175: “The beast in Rev. 13:1–10 is best understood as the fourth kingdom of Daniel, reinterpreted to refer to Rome.” See also Frisch, *The Danielic Discourse on Empire*, 208–209.

⁷⁶ Revelation at various points appears to allude to a well-known myth (attested also in the *Third and Fourth Sibylline Oracles*) that Nero would return to Rome at the head of a Parthian army, or would return from the dead to take up power. Revelation thus makes Nero the evil foil for Christ: he similarly was killed, will return from the dead, and participate in events of the last times. See Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation*, 174–186; Richard Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (London: T&T Clark, 1993), 384–452. On the false Nero in the reign of Domitian, see Brian Jones, *The Emperor Domitian* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 158–159; Jones suggests that Domitian was sufficiently concerned about this false Nero that he moved several legions east to prepare for war with Parthia.

⁷⁷ J. Nelson Kraybill, *Imperial Cult and Commerce in John's Apocalypse* (Sheffield: Sheffield, 1996), 26; Steven Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John: Reading Revelation in Ruins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 159.

⁷⁸ Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 57–58.

Empire.⁷⁹ Like the former beasts, the one ridden by the whore has seven heads and ten horns, and John's angelic interpreter explains the symbolism: the seven heads are seven mountains [i.e. hills] on which the woman is seated; also, they are seven kings, five of whom have already reigned. The ten horns on the beast are likewise described as kings, but unlike in the Book of Daniel where they were implied to be the kings who preceded Antiochus Epiphanes, according to John's angelic interpreter these ten kings have not yet received their kingdom, but will rule with the beast in the future and eat the flesh of the whore.⁸⁰

Much of the symbolism of the Book of Revelation is obscure and continues to be the subject of speculation and debate, but its evocation of the Roman Empire as a beast along the lines of Daniel 7 is clear, just as 4 Ezra makes a similar connection. Moreover, just as in Daniel and in the later apocalypses of 2 Baruch and 4 Ezra, the Book of Revelation culminates in the destruction of the symbols of imperial power. Though John does not describe how Babylon (i.e. Rome) is destroyed, in Revelation 18 he provides an image evocative of the stone destroying the statue in the Daniel 2: John describes an angel hurling a great millstone into the sea and declaring that Babylon is destroyed. A chorus of voices follows, some from the kings and the wealthy lamenting Babylon's demise, but most celebrating that Babylon had been sunk into the sea, all of its evils drowned in one moment. In the following chapter, the *Logos* of God arrives to defeat the two beasts in combat, throwing their bodies in a lake of fire. In this way, the Book of Revelation places the completion of Rome's downfall—indeed, that of all worldly powers—in the moment of Christ's second coming,

Still, crucially for later Christian eschatology, Revelation implies a last cosmic battle between good and evil that will take place later. At Christ's second coming, in Revelation 20, an angel imprisons Satan for one thousand years, and the saints killed by the beast return to life to reign with Christ. When the thousand years are completed, Satan escapes but is defeated in a final battle, after which all the dead are resurrected and receive judgment. The earth is remade and the righteous enter a New Jerusalem. The millennium in Revelation 20 thus provides a period of rule for the fifth kingdom, which, according to the Book of Daniel, must reign upon the earth for a long time before the destruction of the world. The meaning of this double *eschaton* would become a contentious issue in Christian eschatology, however, when later the fifth kingdom and the kingdom of heaven (the New Jerusalem) came to be identified with one another.

Nonetheless, the Book of Revelation can be said to express in symbolic and allegorical

⁷⁹ A common interpretation holds that the whore represents the city of Rome and the beast is Rome's empire. Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 343, alternatively suggests that the beast represents Roman military power, and the whore that rides it is Roman civilization, so that the corrupting influence of the latter is supported (and thus rides upon) the former.

⁸⁰ The meaning of the ten kings here is obscure, and the notion that one set of symbols for Rome (the kings and the beast) destroy another symbol of Rome (the whore) has troubled scholars. Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation*, 175, and Richard Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 429–438, think that the kings represent the Parthian leaders who were expected to accompany Nero in his return from the East and sack Rome. Some suggestion of this is provided in Revelation 16:12–16, where an angel pours out the sixth of seven bowls containing disasters, this one causes the river Euphrates to dry up, “in order to prepare the way for the kings from the east.”

terms an expectation of the coming annihilation of the Roman Empire, now understood as the fourth kingdom of Daniel and imbued with its power by Satan. As Frisch puts it, “the writer of Revelation demonstrated that Daniel continued to be used by early Christians to promote an understanding of empire as a rebellious force that was in opposition to God.”⁸¹

Indeed, according to the Book of Revelation, the Roman Empire receives its power from Satan. However, it suggests that soon God will destroy it in a great deluge, and the Christian messiah, like the Jewish messiah in 2 Baruch, will come to slay its evil ruler.

The Book of Daniel and the Book of Revelation in particular would become the building blocks from which a distinctly Christian political eschatology would be created. Grounded in the historical schema of the Book of Daniel, this eschatology held that the world was in the grip of the fourth and last of the earthly kingdoms—the Roman Empire—and that after its destruction the righteous would inherit kingship over the world.

II.4: Resistance Literature and the Roman Empire

It is clear that into the first century or so AD, apocalyptic literature, especially “historical apocalypses,” continued to oppose imperial power. After the rise of Roman imperial might in the Near East, Rome’s empire became the primary antagonist in such literature. The four-kingdom scheme of the Book of Daniel remained central to the eschatological rejection of the legitimacy of earthly empire, and Rome came to be widely recognized as the evil fourth kingdom.

The *Fourth Sibylline Oracle* and apocalypses of 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch indicate this assimilation of Rome into the four-kingdom scheme in Jewish apocalyptic literature. The latter two apocalypses further expanded upon the Danielic narrative by identifying the son of man in Daniel 7 with the messiah, a human king who will lead the Jewish people in destroying the fourth kingdom and establishing the fifth kingdom.⁸² The Book of Revelation provides a Christianized version of this eschatological narrative, wherein the Christ of the Christians returns to deliver the deathblow upon the Roman Empire, and his fifth kingdom is imagined as a millennium during which resurrected martyrs live in peace upon the earth. As a result, as in Jewish apocalypticism, the ruling empire is irredeemably evil, and God’s kingdom will come only in the future, and will manifest as a perfect kingdom under the messiah.

Postcolonial approaches to these works are rarer than for Second Temple Jewish apocalypses, with the exception of the Book of Revelation. For Adela Yarbro Collins, one of the foremost scholars of the Book of Revelation, John’s apocalypse “is clearly a text that is political as well as religious... The book of Revelation expresses and elicits uncompromising resistance to Rome.”⁸³ Nonetheless, it is notable that a number of recent works have raised concerns over reading Revelation purely as resistance literature.

One factor in this has been the observation, most notably raised by Yarbro Collins, that,

⁸¹ Frisch, *The Danielic Discourse on Empire*, 211.

⁸² Himmelfarb, *The Apocalypse*, 60–68.

⁸³ Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 167–168.

unlike the Book of Daniel, Revelation was not written in a time of particular persecution. Instead, it appears to have been written in the reign of Emperor Domitian, a period during which Christians were mostly left alone by the Roman state.⁸⁴ One response to this observation about the context of Revelation has been to focus on how it responds to wider concerns of imperial domination.⁸⁵ Thus, according to Steven Friesen, in an examination of the imperial cult in the Book of Revelation, for John, or whoever actually wrote the Book of Revelation, “there was no legitimate place for earthly empire. His religious criticism was specially aimed at Roman imperialism, but the character of his critique had broader implications. John was not just anti-Roman; he was anti-empire.”⁸⁶ Another response has been to focus on concerns other than empire, such as how the Book of Revelation may actually reflect conflicts within the Christian movement, such between different prophetic authorities, of which John was one, and social tensions between rich and poor.⁸⁷

Moreover, there has been a general backlash by scholars of a postcolonial perspective against an older tendency to view the *entire* New Testament as anti-imperial resistance literature.⁸⁸ Several scholars have attempted to show, instead, ideological support for imperialism in the New Testament. Such scholars integrated the Book of Revelation into such studies by

⁸⁴ Ibid, 69–77.

⁸⁵ This is the explanation provided by Yarbrow Collins in *Crisis and Catharsis*, 89–106. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), argues, however, that the idea that no persecution took place under Domitian is a view shaped by Roman sources, which are insufficient for understanding the daily lives of the empire’s Christians subjects and the injustices they may have faced. Leonard Thompson, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), in contrast, suggests that Christians enjoyed peace and prosperity within the Roman Empire, and that John was a sort of moralizing prophet who wrote in order to shake Christians from their comfortable coexistence within the empire.

⁸⁶ Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John*, 208.

⁸⁷ J. Kraybill’s, *Imperial Cult and Commerce in John’s Apocalypse* argues that John was writing to encourage Christians to avoid economic ties with the Roman Empire because the imperial cult was bound up in all commerce within the empire. Robert Royalty, *The Streets of Heaven: The Ideology of Wealth in the Apocalypse of John* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1998), combines similar notions with the idea of John as a charismatic prophet, arguing that John wrote to promise his followers that the wealth he offered through God’s kingdom was greater than they could ever expect to gain from Rome. A similar argument that John’s rival Christian prophets were his main targets, with less of a focus on wealth, is found in Greg Carey, *Elusive Apocalypse: Reading Authority in the Revelation to John* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1999). The economic angle was played up again in Paul Duff, *Who Rides the Beast? Prophetic Rivalry and the Rhetoric of Crisis in the Churches of the Apocalypse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), which argues that John sought the support of manual laborers, unemployed, and otherwise disadvantaged Christians by stoking resentment toward the richer Christians of the merchant class who were collaborating economically with the Roman Empire. This approach centered on John’s hostility toward other Christians, however, has been subjected to criticism for losing sight of the beasts and the whore—the representatives of the Roman Empire—that so haunt John’s visions; see for example David A. Desilva, “What has Athens to Do with Patmos? Rhetorical Criticism of the Revelation of John (1980–2005),” *Currents in Biblical Research*, vol. 6 no. 2 (2008), 256–289; Robyn J. Whitaker, *Ekphrasis, Vision, and Persuasion in the Book of Revelation* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 23.

⁸⁸ Shane J. Wood, *The Alter-Imperial Paradigm: Empire Studies and the Book of Revelation* (Leiden, Brill, 2015) 57, thus raises the concern that: “the general trajectory of Empire Studies has been to look for ‘anti-imperial’ elements under every exegetical rock and ignore any complicit tendencies of the documents altogether.” Such an approach is most notably found in Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and Empire: The Kingdom of God and the New World Disorder* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), a forerunner to his *Revolt of the Scribes* dealing with the New Testament, in which he portrays Jesus as a political revolutionary, and reads the gospels through a Marxist lens.

examining how it exhibits hybridity and mimicry of the imperial system in which it was produced, and so patterned the Kingdom of Christ on the violent and exploitative Roman Empire.⁸⁹

Of course, opposition to empire often is couched in terms that coopt and subvert the very discourses of imperialism. Nonetheless, it is difficult to deny that the Book of Revelation denounced and subverted the Roman Empire and more generally opposed the claims of empire. Like the Book of Daniel, it critiqued the current political order by contrasting it with an idealized one that would come in the future. A prominent strand of scholarship on Revelation continues to make this point.⁹⁰ In 2014, Steven Friesen could still call Revelation “the most strident anti-imperial text in the surviving early Christian literature, and perhaps the most striking piece of extant resistance literature from the first-century Mediterranean world.”⁹¹

Conclusions: Christianity’s Apocalyptic Inheritance

Such, then, was Christianity’s apocalyptic inheritance. Though 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch were Jewish apocalypses, they survive because they were evidentially considered meaningful and authoritative to Christian readers and were for this reason integrated into Christian collections of scripture (even if only in among deuterocanonical books). 4 Ezra in particular was extremely popular in the Christian church through late antiquity.⁹² The *Sibylline Oracles*, which also originated in Jewish eschatology, were highly regarded by generations of Christians, frequently quoted by the church fathers, and survive because they were transmitted through a Byzantine manuscript tradition.⁹³ As is well known, the place of the Book of Revelation in the scriptural canon was long a matter of controversy, but it was accepted early on in the Latin tradition and

⁸⁹ Concerns with hybridity and mimicry in such scholarship are heavily influenced by the work of Edward Said and Homi Bhabha. Stephen Moore, *Empire and Apocalypse: Postcolonialism and the New Testament* (Sheffield: Sheffield, 2006), 13, responds to Horsely and his imitators for their view of the New Testament as purely resistance literature and failing to appreciate how it is complicit in empire and imbued with imperial ideology. Thus, it follows that in *ibid*, 98ff, Moore provides a study of Revelation that highlights its imperialist characteristics (though Moore is excessive in this regard). In 1990, Leonard Thompson, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire*, had already discussed how the Book of Revelation presents an image of the kingdom of God that was a sort of better version of the Roman Empire. Christopher A. Frilingos, *Spectacles of Empire: Monsters, Martyrs, and the Book of Revelation* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), read Revelation as a work of Roman literature, and argues that it adopts an imperialist worldview from Rome by transforming its enemies into the Other and relishing the hope of seeing them killed like criminals in the arena. More recently, Wood, *The Alter-Imperial Paradigm*, making heavy use of critical theory, has argued that the Roman Empire is the primary target of the invective in Revelation, both instead the larger empire of Satan, against which John constructs an “alter-empire” of God. For an extensive overview of this issue in the study of the Book of Revelation, see Steven Friesen, “Apocalypse and Empire,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Apocalyptic Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 163–179.

⁹⁰ J. Nelson Kraybill, *Apocalypse and Allegiance: Worship, Politics, and Devotion in the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2010); Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse*, esp. 172–211; Frisch, *The Danielic Discourse on Empire*, 205–211.

⁹¹ Steven Friesen, “Apocalypse and Empire,” 172.

⁹² Stone and Henze, *4 Ezra and 2 Baruch*, 6–7.

⁹³ David Potter, *Prophets and Emperors: Human and Divine Authority from Augustus to Theodosius* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 86–91.

largely accepted the Greek tradition by the sixth or early seventh century, thus becoming the only scriptural apocalypse other than the Book of Daniel. Even in traditions where Revelation was not ranked among scripture, such as in Syriac (where it was excluded altogether from the Peshitta, though it was included in the seventh-century Harklean version of the Bible), it was nonetheless influential.⁹⁴

Thus, Christianity was bequeathed a tradition of apocalypticism and of political eschatology that was deeply hostile toward empire, and for which the Roman Empire had become the embodiment of unjust worldly empire as the fourth kingdom of Daniel. This tradition would long permeate the Christian view of empire.

Part 3: The Exoneration of the Fourth Kingdom

As we have seen, the four-empire model in the Book of Daniel was originally devised in opposition to the Macedonian Seleucid Empire, but a major reinterpretation took place in the first centuries BC and AD, by which Rome came to be regarded as the evil fourth kingdom. This dissertation is concerned, however, with a second major reinterpretation that took much later, by which the fourth kingdom came to be regarded as a positive force in history.

This second reinterpretation is far less studied in modern scholarship. Nonetheless, it would prove crucial in how Christians came to regard empire. Therefore, the question of the development of the positive conception of the fourth kingdom of Daniel is ripe for new investigation. As stated in the introduction, this dissertation argues that the idea of a positive fourth kingdom of Daniel developed within Syriac eschatological literature. It was then exported via the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* in the seventh century, introducing the Mediterranean world to a new understanding of the Daniel's prophecies. In this sense, it turned the apocalyptic genre and the thought world of political eschatology on their heads.

Writing at the end of the seventh century, author of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* was leveraging one empire (the old Christian Roman Empire) in resistance to a new empire (the Islamic empire of the Arabs). Nonetheless, rather than urging readers to put their faith in the fifth kingdom, the kingdom of the next world, the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* attached hope to a worldly empire, the Roman Empire, and gave it a new role in eschatology. The author of the *Apocalypse* does not hesitate to identify the Roman Empire as the fourth kingdom, but now reimagined the fourth kingdom in an entirely positive light, as a forerunner to the fifth kingdom, preparing the way for it.

This is a new answer. The Syriac eschatological tradition has been mostly sidelined in the study of late antique and medieval eschatology. Aphrahat is little discussed outside of the field of Syriac studies. The *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* is well known thanks to its translation into most of the languages of medieval Christianity, but scholarship has focused on its

⁹⁴ For example, the Book of Revelation had a strong influence on the early seventh-century Syriac *Apocalypse of Daniel*; see Matthias Henze, *The Syriac Apocalypse of Daniel* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 18–22.

conception of the Arabs and Islam, and its presentation of the heroic Last Roman Emperor (or “Last World Emperor”); its engagement with the Book of Daniel has been either overlooked or mischaracterized.

How was the change in the meaning of the four-kingdom model of Daniel understood in previous scholarship? How was this related to the larger mutation of the apocalyptic genre away from its anti-imperial origins? Why has the role of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* been overlooked in this process? It is necessary to survey past scholarship on the development of the four-kingdom scheme in the Christian Roman Empire of late antiquity and in the middle ages. It will soon become clear that this scholarship is built upon several misconceptions and false assumptions.

III.1: Byzantine Apocalyptic and Eschatological Literature

Despite the rise of late antiquity as a field of study, scholarship on political eschatology, and even on apocalypticism more generally, remains very much divided between ancient and medieval fields. The former tends to terminate its inquiry around 100 AD, with the Book of Revelation and the Jewish apocalyptic responses to the destruction of the Second Temple.⁹⁵ Medieval scholarship on Christian eschatology begins with the Christianization of the Roman Empire in the fourth century AD. It is inclusive of late antiquity, but seldom deals with the period before the Christianization of the empire⁹⁶

Moreover, scholarship on late antique and medieval apocalypticism is rarely in dialogue with that on ancient Jewish and early Christian apocalypticism. This intellectual isolation has had major consequences. If work on ancient Jewish and early Christian apocalyptic literature has focused increasingly on the anti-imperial rhetoric, a very different approach is found in the scholarship on apocalyptic and political-eschatological literature produced under the Christian Roman Empire and its Byzantine successor state. Such work has focused on how apocalyptic literature functioned as a pro-imperial genre, how it supported, rather than opposed, empire, and on how it provided prophetic approval and ideological justification for imperial rule.

Such work treats political eschatology as mostly an extension of imperial ideology. Probably influenced by the prominent place individual emperors are given in historical narratives, this scholarship tends to portray eschatology as a facet of a given emperor’s propaganda, or at the very least influenced by their policies and actions. In such a context, it might appear unthinkable that political eschatology could ever oppose the project of empire. As a result, the original meaning of the four-kingdom scheme is often overlooked in scholarship on late antique and medieval eschatology.

⁹⁵ A major breaking point for both Jewish and Christian political eschatology is placed at the Bar Kokhba Revolt in 132–136 AD, a Jewish uprising led by a self-proclaimed messiah that ended disastrously, and thus seems to have temporarily put an end to any hopes of effective resistance to Roman imperial rule.

⁹⁶ There is more continuity with the past in the study of medieval Jewish apocalypticism. This is probably a natural consequence of the fact that the position of Jews within the Roman Empire did not radically change at any point in the same way that it did for Christians.

Most of the assumptions that dominate the field of late antique and Byzantine political eschatology took shape in Gerhard Podskalsky's 1972 *Byzantinische Reichseschatologie*, a study of the Byzantine reception and interpretation of the four-kingdom scheme in the Book of Daniel and the notion of the thousand-year earthly reign of the saints under Christ suggested in the Book of Revelation. A Byzantinist who worked extensively on the empire's Slavic-speaking sphere of influence, Podskalsky's primary aim was to trace how these traditions were transmitted from their Jewish and Judeo-Christian origins, via Byzantium, to the medieval Slavs. According to Podskalsky, starting from the Christianization of the Roman Empire in the fourth century, elite Roman Christians transformed the early church's utopian political-eschatological hopes for the end of earthly empire into "imperial eschatology" (*Reichseschatologie*) which was in reality nothing more than imperial ideology (*Reichsideologie*), intended to justify imperial domination. Thus, according to Podskalsky, there was no question of a positive fourth kingdom because, starting with Emperor Constantine's supporter and biographer, Eusebius of Caesarea, the Romans identified their state with the heavenly fifth kingdom of Daniel and with the thousand-year earthly kingdom of the saints from the Book of Revelation.⁹⁷

Paul Alexander's posthumous *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, published in 1984, is the other major book-length study on Byzantine eschatology. Since this book was incomplete at the time of its author's death, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition* lacks a strong unifying argument and should be understood in the context of Alexander's larger body of work. Alexander had been a leading authority on medieval apocalyptic literature, and his publications were devoted to the use of apocalypses as historical sources, characterizing them as "chronicles written in the future tense."⁹⁸ In this sense, Alexander was interested less in eschatology proper (that is, what the authors of his sources believed would occur at the end of history), but in the use of the *ex eventu* prophecies common in apocalypses (for example, the details about the reign of Antiochus IV described in the future tense in the Book of Daniel, or the description of the oppressive policies of the Arabs described in the future tense in the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*) as a source for historical data. Thus, in contrast to Podskalsky, Alexander was not interested in how ideas from ancient eschatology were interpreted in medieval sources. He was looking for allusions to political concerns contemporary to their authors.

Alexander was, nonetheless, genuinely interested in the figure of the Last Emperor from the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* and its implications for Christian eschatology. Alexander argued that this defender of Christianity was simply the Jewish messiah, the conqueror and destroyer of the gentile nations, adapted to a Roman/Byzantine imperial context (curiously, Alexander brings up, but does not attempt to resolve, the problem that Roman and Byzantine

⁹⁷ Gerhard Podskalsky, *Byzantinische Reichseschatologie: die Periodisierung der Weltgeschichte in den vier Grossreichen (Daniel 2 und 7) und dem tausendjährigen Friedensreiche (Apok. 20). Eine motivgeschichtliche Untersuchung*. (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1972), 10–16, 70–76.

⁹⁸ Paul Alexander, "Medieval Apocalypses as Historical Sources," *The American Historical Review*, vol. 73 no. 4 (1968), 997–1018, with quotation on 1018.

Christians regarded Jesus Christ as the messiah).⁹⁹ Moreover, according to Alexander, the expectation of a one thousand year kingdom under Christ on earth found in the Book of Revelation was revised by Roman Christians into the millennial rule of the Roman Empire under the Last Roman Emperor: “A Last Roman Emperor served as substitute for the rule on earth of Christ and his saints.”¹⁰⁰ Even though Alexander’s thesis of a direct Jewish origin for the Last Emperor has been roundly rejected, Alexander’s work has been used to confirm Podskalsky’s assertion that the Romans viewed their empire as the fifth kingdom of Daniel, and that the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* was simply one more text (that happened to be written in Syriac instead of Greek or Latin) confirming this belief.¹⁰¹

Recent scholarship on late Roman and Byzantine political eschatology and apocalypticism have largely followed from the work of Podskalsky and Alexander, and so view such eschatology as an extension of imperial ideology intended to glorify the empire as the messianic kingdom or as prophetic propaganda. One modification of this view, however, is found in the work of Paul Magdalino. Magdalino allows for a more drawn out process of imperial coopting of Christian eschatology, maintaining its beginning in the fourth century under Emperor Constantine but placing its culmination in the sixth century under Emperor Justinian (and he suggests that it continued in the seventh century under Emperor Heraclius).¹⁰²

Magdalino further observes that the anti-imperial sentiments of the Book of Daniel, and the more specific anti-Roman sentiments of the Book of Revelation, were not forgotten under the Christian empire, but that they existed side by side with revised, pro-imperial interpretations. For this reason, the four-empire scheme in the Book of Daniel could be called upon to glorify the empire when the occasion called for it, or to condemn it when that was necessary. “On the whole,” Magdalino declares, “Byzantine eschatology does not present a coherent prophetic vision. Its different strands are never united and its different opinions are never resolved.”¹⁰³ This was possible, according to Magdalino, because the late Roman Empire preceded, and the Byzantine Empire failed to develop, the highly structured harmonizing of knowledge that characterized the scholasticism of the medieval Latin West: “Like Eastern Orthodoxy in general, the Byzantine vision of the future survived without a major crisis of conscience because it did not over-systematize, by attempting to iron out contradictions or push definitions to their logical conclusion. Its ancient, rambling, crumbling structure was maintained because it was satisfying to live in, as a repository of materials that could be stored for use and re-use, or just quietly

⁹⁹ Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, 174–184. This argument is put forth in more detail in idem, “The Medieval Legend of the Last Roman Emperor and Its Messianic Origin,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 41 (1978), 1–15.

¹⁰⁰ Alexander, “The Medieval Legend of the Last Roman Emperor,” 13.

¹⁰¹ Podskalsky, *Byzantinische Reichseschatologie*, 53–56, 101; Robert Lerner, “Millennialism,” in *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism, Volume 2: Apocalypticism in Western History and Culture*, ed. Bernard McGinn (New York: Continuum, 2000), 329–332.

¹⁰² These ideas are summed up in Paul Magdalino, “The *History of the Future* and its Uses: Prophecy, Policy and Propaganda,” in *The Making of Byzantine History. Studies Dedicated to Donald M. Nicol on his Seventieth Birthday*, ed. R. Beaton and C. Roueché (Aldershot: Variorum, 1993), 3–34.

¹⁰³ Magdalino, “The History of the Future,” 29.

ignored.”¹⁰⁴

Magdalino is certainly correct that anti-imperial and pro-imperial apocalypses or interpretations of scriptural passages such as the four kingdoms of Daniel could exist in a society and culture side by side (though it is wrong to attribute this to intellectual incoherence). As this dissertation will make clear, that was almost certainly the case. Nonetheless, in explaining the emergence of the pro-imperial interpretation of eschatology, Magdalino resorts to the same explanation as Podskalsky, attributing it to imperial propaganda, especially propaganda produced in the reigns of Constantine and Justinian, which, according to Magdalino, needed to cleanse eschatology of its anti-imperial associations.¹⁰⁵

Petre Guran has more recently tried to periodize Byzantine eschatological literature. He has theorized four distinct phases: late antique eschatology that glorified the empire; a subversive, anti-imperial phase that begins around the time of the iconoclast controversy; a third phase interested primarily with the eventual destruction of Constantinople; and a final late/post Byzantine phase of “secular eschatology” concerned with the future liberation of the Greek nation.¹⁰⁶ This organization is more orderly than that of Magdalino (perhaps artificially orderly), but Guran does not convincingly explain why eschatological tendencies came in such distinct waves. He also takes for granted that eschatology began as a tool to glorify the empire, ignoring its anti-imperial history.

Stephen Shoemaker has recently provided an important step in addressing the contrary anti-imperial and pro-imperial notions of apocalyptic literature, bridging the divide between scholarship on ancient Jewish and early Christian apocalypticism on the one hand and that of the Christian Roman and Byzantine empires on the other. In the first chapter of his 2018 *The Apocalypse of Empire* he directly responds to Horsely’s *Revolt of the Scribes* and Portier-Young’s *Apocalypse Against Empire*, taking aim at the assertion that apocalypses are by definition opposed to imperial ideology. The apocalyptic genre, he justifiably argues, can be used to support and uphold the hegemonic claims of empires.¹⁰⁷

However, Shoemaker goes too far in his opposition to the views propagated by scholars of Second Temple Judaism, and, in doing so, in a sense confuses the fourth and fifth kingdoms of Daniel and what they represent. While Shoemaker accepts that Jewish apocalypses that awaited the kingdom of the messiah were written in opposition to the ruling Seleucid and Roman empires, he characterizes local anti-Hellenistic and anti-Roman prophecies from Babylon and Egypt as pro-imperial because they looked forward to the dawning of an idealized native empire.¹⁰⁸ He overlooks how such expectations were analogous to the kingdom of the messiah in Jewish eschatology, and misses that these non-Jewish eschatological fantasies implicitly critique the current ruling regime just as much as the Jewish Book of Daniel. Moreover, Shoemaker

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 32.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 8–11.

¹⁰⁶ Petre Guran, “Historical Prophecies from Late Antique Apocalypticism to Secular Eschatology,” *Revue des Études Sud-Est Européennes*, vol. 52 (2014), 47–62.

¹⁰⁷ Stephen Shoemaker, *The Apocalypse of Empire: Imperial Eschatology in Late Antiquity and Early Islam* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), esp. 11–16.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 34–37.

overlooks the fact—central to the inquiry of this dissertation—that the meaning of the fourth kingdom of Daniel changed over time in Christian discourse and that they initially shared the negative characterization inherited from Jewish eschatological literature. Thus, he anachronistically assumes that whenever Christians called the Roman Empire the fourth kingdom of Daniel they meant it as a compliment.¹⁰⁹

In addition, on the topic of eschatology in the Christian Roman Empire and its Byzantine successor state, Shoemaker returns to the views of Podskalsky (whom he cites heavily), and so represents a step back from the more nuanced work done by Magdalino. Shoemaker considers the eschatology of Christian Rome and Byzantium as thoroughly supportive of empire, and provides his own truncated version of Podskalsky's narrative of rapid imperial coopting of Christian eschatology.¹¹⁰ Shoemaker argues that, with the exception of the Book of Revelation, "early Christian apocalyptic writings from before the fourth century on the whole share a political quietism that distinguishes them from the anti-imperial ambitions present in many of their early Jewish ancestors."¹¹¹ When Constantine converted to Christianity in the fourth century, according to Shoemaker, the Book of Revelation was sidelined and the Christian quietists were quickly cowed by Roman imperial triumphalism. Following Podskalsky, Shoemaker sees Eusebius of Caesarea as a fundamental figure, one who spearheaded this change because he "equates Constantine with Christ, and likewise, the empire with God's heavenly kingdom."¹¹²

Thus, nearly all the recent scholarship on late antique and Byzantine political eschatology has focused on "imperial eschatology." In so far as scholars have attempted to explain the shift from the anti-imperial messages clearly conveyed in the apocalypses of the Bible (exemplified in the four-kingdom model in the Book of Daniel) to the pro-imperial, pro-Roman of "imperial eschatology," they attribute it to the influence of imperial intervention and propaganda beginning under Constantine in the fourth century.

The next two chapters of this dissertation will expose the weaknesses in this narrative. For now, it is necessary to point out that narrative is distorted by the limited role it gives to the Syriac eschatological tradition. None of the aforementioned scholars considers whether the political eschatology in Syriac literature was any different from that found in the Greek and Latin traditions. They cite Syriac authors, such as Aphrahat, side by side with Roman writers such as Eusebius, reading them together in order to describe a common, late antique Christian notion of eschatology, without considering the different traditions they represent.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 39–42.

¹¹⁰ Notably, however, whereas Podskalsky considers the pro-imperial eschatology as an un-Christian corruption of the utopian eschatology preached by Christ and the early church, Shoemaker appears to regard affinity for empire, or at the very least passivity toward empire, as a characteristic of Christian eschatology.

¹¹¹ Shoemaker, *The Apocalypse of Empire*, 38.

¹¹² Ibid, 40.

¹¹³ See, for example, Shoemaker, *The Apocalypse of Empire*, 41.

III.2: Syriac Apocalypticism and Eschatology

The problem with this tendency to treat the Syriac eschatological tradition as an integrated part on the Byzantine apocalyptic tradition has been raised by Francisco Javier Martinez, who specifically took issue with Paul Alexander's treatment of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* in such a context: "The attempts by P. J. Alexander to read [the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*] from the point of view of Byzantine *Reichseschatologie* or from Jewish apocalyptic ideas are utterly misleading, since they contribute to perpetuating the idea that Syriac apocalypticism does not represent a distinctive branch of apocalypticism in Christianity."¹¹⁴ Martinez worked to establish Syriac eschatology as its own distinctive tradition, independent of Jewish and Byzantine thought. He noted that the thematic essays in the important 1979 *Apocalypse: Morphology of a Genre* (discussed above, in the introduction to this chapter) excluded Syriac apocalypticism, and so Martinez attempted to both supplement and correct the definitions and generalizations put forward in that volume in light of the Syriac evidence.¹¹⁵

Martinez's approach is vital for understanding Syriac eschatology as a tradition with its own trajectory of development. On the other hand, in severing the Syriac tradition from its Jewish inheritance and its interaction with the Byzantine tradition, he goes too far and treats Syriac eschatology in sterile isolation. As a result, Martinez notes that the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* and other Syriac apocalypses engage with the four-kingdom model from the Book of Daniel, but does not notice how their interpretation of this schema differs from that found in Greek and Latin writers. At the same time, in rejecting the influence of the Jewish tradition, he overlooks the anti-imperial origins of the four-kingdom schema in Daniel, and so misses the novelty of the pro-imperial approach found in the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* and other Syriac works.

Martinez's scholarly publication ended when he took up a leadership position in the Catholic Church, but in his 1984 PhD dissertation he already pointed the way forward for future scholarship, pointing to Gerrit Reinink as a positive example for the field, asserting that his publications "repair the damage caused by Alexander's interpretation" in so far as Reinink has "shown that his [the author of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*] exegesis and his use of typology to be specifically Syriac."¹¹⁶ In subsequent work, Reinink has treated the Syriac

¹¹⁴ Martinez, "The Apocalyptic Genre in Syriac," 340. Martinez here echoes a statement made in his PhD dissertation, idem, *Eastern Christian Apocalyptic in the Early Muslim Period: Pseudo-Methodius and Pseudo-Athanasius* (PhD dissertation, Catholic University of America, 1985), 7: "[Paul Alexander's] attempt to interpret the work from the point of view of Byzantine *Reichseschatologie*, or as derived from Jewish Messianic ideas, obscure the dependence of [the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*] on Syriac traditions and ideas."

¹¹⁵ Francisco Javier Martinez, "The Apocalyptic Genre in Syriac," 337–340. *Semeia, Volume 14: Apocalypse: Morphology of a Genre* ed. J. J. Collins, included essays on ancient Jewish apocalypses, and Persian apocalypticism (both essays by John Collins), early Christian apocalypses (by Adela Yarbro Collins), Gnostic apocalypses (by Francis T. Fallon), Greco-Roman apocalypses (by Harold W. Attridge), and rabbinic apocalypses (by Anthony J. Saldarini). Martinez, in considering Syriac apocalypses, notes that they are closer to the ancient Jewish examples (and to Persian apocalyptic) than the early Christian apocalypses in that they are intensively interested in history and the succession of empires.

¹¹⁶ Martinez *Eastern Christian Apocalyptic*, 8.

eschatological tradition on its own terms in line with the position advocated by Martinez, while at the same giving necessary attention to influence and interaction with Byzantine eschatology.

Nonetheless, this has allowed the assumptions prevalent in work on Byzantine eschatology to filter into Reinink's analysis. He has suggested that the pro-imperial ideology in the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* originated in the earlier *Syriac Alexander Legend*, which he suggests was produced as propaganda for the Emperor Heraclius (r. 610–641): "Though the political success story of the 'most pious and God-guarded emperor' Heraclius was only short-lived, its literary form in the *Alexander Legend* generated by the end of the seventh century one of the most influential innovations in imperial eschatology in the East and the West: the Legend of the Last World Emperor."¹¹⁷ Thus, for Reinink, even if Syriac apocalypticism represented a distinctive tradition, the conception of empire in its eschatology was merely an extension of Byzantine imperial eschatology, propagated through the propaganda of a Byzantine emperor.

Subsequent work has echoed these assumptions. Wido van Peursen has noticed the pro-Roman eschatological ramifications of the Syriac interpretation of the kingdoms of Daniel, but, relying heavily on Podskalsky for a comparison with the Byzantine world, he regards it as a result of the influence of Byzantine "imperial eschatology" on Syriac literature.¹¹⁸ Lutz Greisiger, in his dissertation-turned-book *Messias-Endkaiser-Antichrist*, published in 2014, largely agrees with such views. He suggests that a complex interaction between Jewish eschatology, Byzantine imperial eschatology, and the "messianic" propaganda of Emperor Heraclius gave birth to the Last Emperor and general support for the Roman Empire in the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* and other Syriac apocalypses.¹¹⁹ This is exactly the methodology Martinez had decried in 1984, erasing all distinctions between separate Jewish, Byzantine, and Syriac traditions. It also once again places extreme emphasis on individual emperors and their propaganda as the supposed source of eschatological ideas.

This dissertation takes a different approach, arguing that the Syriac eschatological tradition developed along a somewhat different path than eschatology in Greek and Latin. There are certainly limits to this approach. Syriac was not the language of a completely distinct culture, especially in late antiquity, but instead one of the many languages of the late Roman/ early Byzantine Empire. This cannot be forgotten. At the same time, however, it was also one of the languages of the Sasanian Persian Empire, and of the Arab Caliphate after it. Syriac authors wrote under both Christian and non-Christian empires. This made for a pluralism of political assumptions and expectations among authors who wrote in the same language. Moreover, these authors depended on a Syriac version of scripture (one that provided a different translation of the Book of Daniel that necessitated a different reading of the four-kingdom schema, and which

¹¹⁷ Gerrit J. Reinink, "Heraclius, the New Alexander: Apocalyptic Prophecies During the Reign of Heraclius," in *The Reign of Heraclius (610-641): Crisis and Confrontation*, ed. G. J. Reinink and B. H. Stolte (Leuven: Peeters, 2002), 81–94, with quotation on 94.

¹¹⁸ Wido van Peursen, "Daniel's Four Kingdoms in the Syriac Tradition," in *Tradition and Innovation in Biblical Interpretation: Studies Presented to Professor Eep Talstra on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. W.Th. van Peursen and J.W. Dyk (Leiden, Brill, 2011), 189–207, esp. 201–202.

¹¹⁹ Lutz Greisiger, *Messias-Endkaiser-Antichrist: Politische Apokalypitik Unter Juden und Christen des Nahen Ostens am Vorabend der Arabischen Eroberung* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag 2014), esp. 159–180.

excluded the Book of Revelation from scripture), and on a distinctive tradition of exegesis.

At the same time, the consequences of translation, especially the translation of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* into Greek and Latin, allowed for the interaction of the Syriac tradition with the Byzantine and post-Roman Latin eschatological traditions. Thus, while scholars have long assumed that the “imperial eschatology” found in Syriac literature originated in Greek and Latin eschatological thought and was transmitted into Syriac via translations from Greek, this dissertation argues for the opposite: that such political-eschatological glorification of the Roman Empire originated in Syriac and was transmitted into Greek and Latin. As such, it gives a major role to Syriac eschatology, as a distinctive branch of the Christian eschatological tradition, in a larger story of the evolution of Christian political eschatology.

Conclusions: In Search of a New Narrative of Political Eschatology

“In order to understand the imperial eschatology that characterized much late antique and medieval apocalyptic literature, we must first consider how what was once an anti-imperial genre and worldview transformed to express instead confidence that a divinely guided empire would bring about the end of the world through conquest and domination.”¹²⁰ Thus Stephen Shoemaker defines one of the objectives of his *The Apocalypse of Empire*. This is a goal shared by this dissertation, but the theory presented here sharply contrasts with that proposed by Shoemaker.

In many ways, Shoemaker’s narrative is the culmination of work on late antique and Byzantine Christian political eschatology. It makes the conversion of Constantine the most important event for the formation of Christian political eschatology, and in general places enormous emphasis on the roles of emperors on its continued development. In doing so, he follows closely the work of Podskalsky, Alexander, and Magdalino. Such “imperial eschatology” formulated by emperors and their propagandists, according to Shoemaker, filtered into all the late ancient Mediterranean cultures and languages, including Syriac literature (and into Arabic, and so influenced the formation of Islam).

This dissertation proposes a new narrative. It will show that the same anti-imperial notions that informed the Book of Daniel and the Book of Revelation persisted in political eschatology up to the seventh century AD. It will show that the primary elements of “imperial eschatology” developed in Syriac eschatological literature, not in “propaganda” formulated at imperial courts. The reinterpretation of the meaning of the fourth kingdom of Daniel developed out of Syriac eschatological ideas that had been developing mostly in isolation from Greek and Latin eschatology. These ideas were transmitted to Greek and Latin eschatology via the translation of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*. Thus it will show how Syriac exegesis informed the political theology at the heart of medieval Christian imperial ideology. In this way, this dissertation will decenter political eschatology from the imperial capitals and from imperial “propaganda”—a nebulous term never sufficiently explored or carefully defined—and relocate it

¹²⁰ Shoemaker, *The Apocalypse of Empire*, 11.

in the provinces and, indeed, in the imperial borderlands often outside the political control of the Roman/Byzantine Empire. It will show how these traditions from the periphery were absorbed by the cultures of the imperial centers.

Chapter Conclusions

The Book of Daniel, in the form in which it is preserved in Jewish and Christian scripture, was written, compiled, or redacted in response to the persecutory laws the Seleucid king Antiochus IV Epiphanes directed at his Jewish subjects. Perhaps the most important prophecies in the Book of Daniel are the visions of four kingdoms found in Daniel 2 (where they are symbolized by parts of a statue) and 7 (where they are represented by beasts emerging from the sea). In the historical context in which the Book of Daniel was written, the iron legs and feet of iron and clay in the statue from Nebuchadnezzar's dream represented the Macedonian/Seleucid Empire. Likewise, the fourth beast in Daniel's dream was meant to represent the Seleucid Empire and the Little Horn represented king Antiochus. Responding to the persecution inflicted by Antiochus, the Book of Daniel looks forward to the end of the oppressive Seleucid Empire (the fourth kingdom) and the birth of a free Jewish kingdom (the fifth kingdom).

Once the Roman Empire displaced the Seleucid Empire in the Eastern Mediterranean, and especially after a Roman army destroyed Jerusalem and its temple in 70AD, Jewish literature identified the Roman Empire as the fourth kingdom described in the Book of Daniel. This view was inherited by the Christian community that emerged from Judaism. Nonetheless, as the fourth kingdom, the Roman Empire was regarded as evil and opposed in every way to the heavenly fifth kingdom.

Most secondary scholarship on Christian eschatology holds that all this changed after the conversion of Emperor Constantine in the early fourth century, when the understanding of Rome's place in the final events had to change. It assumes that, in light of the new cooperation between the church and the Roman state, Christian thinkers began to assign the Roman Empire a positive eschatological role.

As the next chapter will show, Christians into the fourth century actually continued to hold that the Roman Empire was the fourth kingdoms of Daniel. The following chapter will show why the arguments that a shift in Christian eschatological thinking took place in the reign of Constantine, especially in the work of Eusebius of Caesarea, are mistaken. Then, two further chapters will show that the new, positive understanding of the fourth kingdom of Daniel, and the identification of the Roman Empire as that exalted kingdom, originated in an interpretation of Daniel dependent on Syriac thought. The remainder of the dissertation will show how these ideas were developed in and disseminated by the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*. Hopefully these observations will serve as an invitation for a greater awareness of the way in which Syriac exegesis informed the political theology at the heart of late antique, medieval, and early modern Christian imperial ideology.

CHAPTER 2: **THE ROMAN EMPIRE AT THE END OF TIME:** **THE CHRISTIAN POLITICAL-ESCHATOLOGICAL SCENARIO**

Introduction: Looking Beyond the Apocalyptic Genre

Ancient Christians believed that they knew what the future held. The Roman Empire would collapse in a civil war of unparalleled violence between ten leaders hailing from the different regions and peoples of the empire. An eleventh ruler—by some accounts born among the Jews, perhaps in the Persian Empire—would appear and defeat three of the rival warlords. The other seven would surrender and pledge themselves to him, and in this moment of triumph he would be proclaimed emperor. He would rebuild the temple in Jerusalem and begin to call himself the messiah; indeed, to the Jews he would appear to be the awaited messiah building the fifth kingdom prophesied by Daniel in the wreckage of Rome’s fourth kingdom. They would be deceived, however, for this false messiah would have only revived Rome’s fourth kingdom and would rule it as its new emperor. He would use his new authority to institute a worldwide persecution unlike any before against all who deny his messianic claims. The deceived would realize their error only after three and a half years, when Christ would return in glory to kill the tyrant and violently destroy the fourth kingdom. Then, the righteous among the dead would rise and hail Christ their king, initiating the true fifth and final kingdom.

These are the rough outlines of what I term the “common Christian political-eschatological scenario.” It is how Christians in the Roman Empire, starting in the late second or early third century, believed history and politics would reach their culmination. This is not to suggest that the narrative was fixed, or that every point was agreed upon. But if individual authors and commentators chose to stress different aspects, to shuffle the order of events somewhat, or to introduce new elaborations, nonetheless the basic elements—the civil war of ten kings, the triumph of the evil eleventh king, the last great persecution, the final victory at Christ’s second coming—remained extraordinarily consistent from one source to the next. In this sense, the common political-eschatological scenario represents a shared early Christian narrative of the future, cobbled together from the Book of Daniel, the Book of Revelation, and other Biblical prophecies.

This narrative was largely hostile toward the Roman Empire, identifying the empire as the evil fourth kingdom prophesied in the Book of Daniel and the vehicle by which the last great persecutor—the Little Horn mentioned in Daniel, a new Antiochus Epiphanes—would make war on Christians. In this way, the Christian eschatological scenario was an elaboration upon the anti-imperial Jewish apocalypses that had identified Rome as the fourth beast of Daniel. Indeed, since Christian political eschatology developed in a context in which persecution by the Roman state was a constant threat, it is not surprising then that Christians continued to view the Roman

Empire as the evil fourth kingdom of Daniel, and looked forward to its destruction, after which those who remained steadfast in their faith in Christ, the new “saints of the Most High,” would inherit Rome’s forfeited power and live under the eschatological fifth kingdom ruled over by Christ.

I have invented the term “common Christian political-eschatological scenario” because no name for this shared perception of the future course of events exists so far in secondary scholarship. In order to understand how Christians in the Roman Empire conceived of the events leading up to the end of the world up to the seventh century, it is necessary to understand this eschatological narrative, and its enduring influence. Thus it is necessary to name and define it. There are a number of reasons why this has not been done in the past.

Most scholarship on eschatology, especially pre-modern Jewish and Christian eschatology, has focused primarily on works that fit the definition of apocalypses. The most common definition is that provided by an expert on Second Temple Jewish apocalypticism, John Collins (explored in more detail in the introduction of chapter 1 of this dissertation): revelations either of a spatial (usually in the form of information about heaven) or temporal (historical events, in the form of *ex eventu* prophecies, and genuine predictions of the future up to the end of the world) provided by otherworldly figures to a (usually famous) human. Especially important for political eschatology are the apocalypses that rely on temporal revelations, and which are commonly called “historical” apocalypses.

Thus, the major works on Christian political eschatology in late antiquity and Byzantium—Paul Alexander’s 1984 *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, Stephen Shoemaker’s 2018 *The Apocalypse of Empire*—mostly limit themselves to apocalypses, especially apocalypses of the “historical” type, as their source base. Podskalsky’s 1972 *Byzantinische Reichseschatologie* is a rare exception in that he deals with both apocalypses and other genres of Christian theological literature. However, he treats them as separate categories, and resists putting them in dialogue with one another. His monograph largely treats each author or work in isolation and without chronological cohesion, and draws on secondary scholarship that is by now outdated. Podskalsky, Alexander, and Shoemaker have articulated narratives that stress a sharp break in Christian political eschatology during the reign of Constantine, and have overlooked any continuous political eschatological narrative. This is a result of their exclusive use, or decontextualized use, of apocalypses in crafting a narrative of Christian political eschatology.

The framing of a continuous historical narrative of Christian political eschatology based on apocalypses is a necessarily a skewed exercise: as scholars of early Christian apocalypticism often point out, *ex eventu*, “historical” apocalypses in the model of the visions in the Book of Daniel largely die out among Christians after the composition of the Book of Revelation. Thus, David Frankfurter, in an overview of early Christian apocalyptic literature, can assert: “This compositional style of *vaticinia ex eventu*, so popular in Daniel, the *Sibylline Oracles*, and some Byzantine apocalypses, is often assumed to operate throughout apocalyptic literature. But for the

early Christian apocalypses nothing could be further from the truth.”¹ Instead, Frankfurter argues:

It is quite evident that any broad ‘apocalypticism’ that we might care to posit was, in its early Christian form, consistently assimilated to the kinds of immediate circumstances that only rarely required eschatological resolution or a historical self-definition that transcended the immediate orbit of the charismatic martyr or prophet. It was more important to define oneself as the ‘Elect’ of this world than to project oneself desperately into the end-times.²

In other words, Christian apocalypses were less concerned with questions of the future of empire or world politics in general than in secret wisdom, competition between rival holy men, and knowledge of which of the many Christian groups led by such holy men were damned and which were elect in the final judgment.

Since “historical” apocalypses were exceedingly rare in early Christianity, if the evidence for political eschatology is limited to such apocalypses much will be missed and generalizations will abound. For example, Shoemaker’s notion, discussed in the previous chapter, that quietist Christians, whose apocalyptic writings had become “apolitical” and passive toward the empire, were easily swayed by imperial ideology during the Christianization of the empire, results from the fact that he limited his inquiry mostly to the very few surviving Christian apocalypses of the period.³ On this limited evidentiary basis, he concludes that the hostility toward the Roman Empire found in the Book of Revelation did not have much long-term influence and that “Christians in the eastern Mediterranean during the third century were increasingly turning away from this older model of antagonism between Church and Empire.”⁴ However, if one takes into account additional sources, it becomes clear that early Christian eschatology was hardly apolitical or passive toward empire. To understand how Christians conceived of the nature and future of empire, it is necessary to look beyond apocalypses, to other possible sources for information about political eschatology.

The common Christian political-eschatological scenario is found in commentaries and exegeses on the earlier apocalypses, particularly the two deemed Christian scripture: the Book of Daniel and the Book of Revelation (though the place of Revelation in the canon was long a matter of some dispute). It is likely that once the Book of Daniel and the Book of Revelation

¹ David Frankfurter, “Early Christian Apocalypticism: Literature and Social World,” in *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, vol. 1: *Origins of Apocalypticism in Judaism and Christianity*, ed. John J. Collins (New York: Continuum, 1999), 433. A similar view is expressed by Adela Yarbo Collins, “The Early Christian Apocalypses,” in *Semeia*, Volume 14: *Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre*, ed. John J. Collins (Missoula, Scholars Press, 1979), 61–121, esp. 66–68. Lorenzo DiTomasso makes the same point, with reference to these two scholars, in his “Apocalypses and Apocalypticism in Antiquity: Part II,” *Currents in Biblical Research*, vol. 5 no. 3 (2007), 406–407.

² Frankfurter, “Early Christian Apocalypticism,” 442.

³ Shoemaker makes this point in Stephen Shoemaker, *The Apocalypse of Empire: Imperial Eschatology in Late Antiquity and Early Islam* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 38–42. In fact, on *ibid.* 38, Shoemaker notes that “exceptions to this rule” of Christian passivity toward empire exist, but quickly glosses over them because they “do not fit the apocalyptic genre strictly speaking.”

⁴ *Ibid.* 39.

were enshrined in the Biblical canon, the composition of new apocalypses became less important than correctly understanding those apocalypses already determined to be the inspired word of God. In fact, it is possible that the interpretation of these canonical apocalypses replaced the need to compose new historical apocalypses about the fate of kingdoms and empires. It is therefore necessary to look at these interpretations to understand the common Christian political-eschatological scenario.

Though a larger concept of a common political-eschatological scenario is not explored in modern scholarship, aspects of it have been discussed. Theologians, especially, have had a keen interest in the eschatology of the church fathers. Since many of the church fathers discussed the common political-eschatological scenario in the context of exegesis on Daniel and Revelation, it might seem inevitable that the contours of the political-eschatological scenario would have been described in such modern scholarship. Nonetheless, this theological scholarship tends to overlook political eschatology in favor of focusing on individual eschatology; that is, on the opinions of the church fathers on topics such as the fate of the soul between death and the last judgment and the nature of the afterlife. The views of late antique Christian thinkers, especially the fathers of the church, on the future fate of the Roman Empire is simply not relevant to theologians of modern times and, worse, could appear unsuitably “superstitious” and thus embarrassing in the works of such giants of Christian theology. Recently some scholarship has discussed the eschatological scenario of individual church fathers, but no attempt has been made to connect this back to a more widely held conception of political eschatology.⁵

The purpose of this chapter, then, is to outline the political-eschatological narrative that persisted in Greek and Latin authors in the Roman Empire from the third to the seventh century, and to demonstrate that this scenario was the primary way in which Roman Christians into the seventh century thought about the events that they believed would lead up to the end of empire and the second coming. It will explore how the narrative evolved with the changing contemporary religious and political circumstances. Beginning with the origins of the narrative in early Christianity, it will trace how the eschatological scenario adapted to the Christianization of the Roman Empire and then to the fall of the Western Roman Empire and the diminution of the empire in the East. This will provide a necessary context for understanding the change in understanding about the fourth kingdom of Daniel that came about later.

⁵ Brian Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), does occasionally touch on the political eschatology of the patristic figures he surveys, but he focuses far more on their views of individual eschatology and of chiliasm/millennialism. Likewise, Eugenia Scarvelis Constantinou, *Guiding to a Blessed End: Andrew of Caesarea and the Apocalypse* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2013), occasionally talks of her subject’s “eschatological scenario,” particularly on 238–234, but she remains mostly interested in Andrew of Caesarea’s pastoral, liturgical, and sacramental messages.

Part 1: Political Eschatology in Early Christianity

It is unclear when the common Christian political-eschatological scenario began to take shape. According to the gospels, Jesus had preached an apocalyptic message (Matthew 24–25; Mark 13; Luke 21), in part influenced by the Book of Daniel. Nonetheless, he was quite hazy about the precise details about what would happen. Later generations of Christians, drawing on writings attributed to Paul and on the Book of Revelations, could begin to sketch a more detailed scenario.

The first glimpses of the narrative are discernable in the sources of the late second and especially of the third century. The tract *Against Heresies* (*Adversus haereses*) by Irenaeus, bishop of Lugdunum (Lyons) (d. 202), provides some of the earliest details that suggest a developed political-eschatological scenario. However, the dispersed predictions of Irenaeus' are organized into a more coherent narrative in the Greek writings attributed to his protégée, Hippolytus of Rome (d. c. 235 AD). Later in the century similar scenarios are discussed by two Latin authors, Victorinus of Pettau and Lucius Caecilius Firmianus Lactantius.

The narratives found in these sources share many similarities, but also differ on a number of points. It therefore appears likely that the political-eschatological scenario was still in flux through the early fourth century. Christians from various communities around the Mediterranean seem to have put forth their own variant eschatological narratives, though those that survive show extensive overlap in the ways in which Biblical prophecies were interpreted. Probably by the early to middle fourth century, several interrelated political-eschatological scenarios had slowly coalesced into a single, more uniform Christian understanding about what the future held.

I.1: Hippolytus' Scenario on the Roman Empire's Collapse

Sometime in the first two or so decades of the third century, Hippolytus wrote a treatise in Greek, *On Christ and the Antichrist*, and some time after, probably after 223 AD, he wrote his *Commentary on Daniel*, also in Greek.⁶ Though the authorship of the Hippolytan corpus has long been a matter of dispute—numerous theories conflict on whether the works attributed to him

⁶ The Greek text of Hippolytus' *Commentary on Daniel* and of his *On Christ and the Antichrist*, were first edited, along with the Slavonic version of the former and with German translations, in Gottlieb Bonwetsch and Hans Achelis, *Hippolytus Werke, vol. 1: Exegetische und homiletische Schriften* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1897). Maurice Lefèvre, *Hippolyte: Commentaire sur Daniel*, Sources chrétiennes no. 14 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1947), provided a newer edition, with French translation, of the *Commentary on Daniel*. Marcel Richard and Albrecht Dihle, *Hippolytus Werke, vol. 1: Kommentar zu Daniel* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2000) provided an improved edition, incorporating new findings from Mt. Athos. An English translation of the latter has been made by T. C. Schmidt, *Hippolytus of Rome: Commentary on Daniel and 'Chronicon,'* (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2017), 35–189. Here I have used the edition by Richard and Dihle. The edition of Bonwetsch and Achelis of Hippolytus' *On Christ and the Antichrist* has also been surpassed, first by Enrico Norelli, *Ippolito: L' Antichristo* (Firenze: Nardini, 1987); and in a more recent edition, with extensive introductory materials and a modern Greek translation, in Panagiotis Athanasopoulos, *Ιππολύτου Ρώμης περί του Αντιχρίστου: κριτική έκδοση* (PhD dissertation: University of Ioannina, 2013). All these editions mentioned here use Cod. Vatopedi 1213, an eleventh-century codex that contains both the *Commentary on Daniel* and *On Christ and the Antichrist*, as their base text.

were all composed by a single Hippolytus, or were the work of multiple authors, or a combination of the work of Hippolytus and his students—there is no dispute that *On Christ and the Antichrist* and the *Commentary on Daniel* were the work of the same author (who for convenience I will refer to as Hippolytus, even though it is possible that this was not his real name).⁷ The two works together present a consistent view of political eschatology, with the latter work referring back at points to the former. These works of Hippolytus proved extremely influential on Christian political eschatology, and so probably provided a model for the common political-eschatological scenario as it was further developed in later sources.⁸

According to Hippolytus, the Roman Empire was the fourth of the kingdoms foreseen in the statue dream of Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 2 and the beast dream in Daniel 7 (the kingdoms were, according to Hippolytus, the Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans).⁹ The identification of Rome with the fourth kingdom, which, as we have seen, became widespread in Jewish apocalypticism in the aftermath of the destruction of the Second Temple, had thus been readily inherited by Christian eschatology.

As the fourth kingdom, the Roman Empire was, according to Hippolytus, opposed in everyway to God and was the persecutor of Christians. Indeed, for Hippolytus, Christians and Romans were in natural opposition to one another. The birth of Christ, coinciding with the reign of the first Roman emperor, split the world in two, and so all nations were given a choice of joining one of these two universal communities. Whereas kingdoms and empires in the past had been of one people, spoke one tongue, and were ruled by a single ethnic group, the Christians and Romans were each multiethnic confederations, according to Hippolytus, and thus rivals in their quests for converts.

The Christians had become a kingdom unto themselves made up of people of all nations and all languages, the humble and the good, united in their pious belief in God, said Hippolytus. “In the same manner, the present kingdom that counterfeits [it], and which rules ‘according to the operation of Satan,’ likewise also collects those who are most wellborn from all nations and prepares them for war, calling them Romans.”¹⁰ The Romans were powerful in the present, but their empire will be destroyed, and the Christian kingdom—the kingdom of the saints spoken of by Daniel—will replace Rome’s empire at the second coming of Christ.

Hippolytus was confident that he knew exactly when the Roman Empire would fall—its end would come five hundred years after the time of Emperor Augustus. “For since the Persians reigned for two hundred thirty years, and after them the Greeks, insomuch as they were more

⁷ Schmidt, *Hippolytus of Rome*, 2–14. On the dates of the works, see Brent, *Hippolytus and the Roman Church in the Third Century*, 278–279.

⁸ The works of Hippolytus were influential in the Greek speaking East, and, thanks to the influence they had upon Jerome, who wrote a commentary on Daniel in Latin (discussed below), had a strong, indirect influence on Latin eschatology.

⁹ Hippolytus, *Commentary on Daniel*, IV.3.2–IV.5.2; idem, *On Christ and the Antichrist*, 25.

¹⁰ Hippolytus, *Commentary on Daniel*, IV.9.2; ed. Richard and Dihle, *Kommentar zu Daniel*, 214: τῷ αὐτῷ τρόπῳ ἀντεμιμήσατο ἡ βασιλεία ἡ νῦν, ἣτις κρατεῖ "κατ' ἐνέργειαν σατανᾶ," ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ αὕτη ἐκ πάντων τῶν ἐθνῶν συλλέγουσα τοὺς γενναιοτάτους καταρτίζει εἰς πόλεμον, Ῥωμαίους τοῦτους ἀποκαλοῦσα. See Schmidt, *Hippolytus of Rome*. 139.

glorious, for three hundred years, it is absolutely necessary that the fourth beast be stronger and greater than all of those before it and [therefore] to reign five hundred years.”¹¹

Hippolytus found confirmation of this view in the dating of the world used by millenarians, or chiliasts. This belief, which held that Christ would reign on earth for a thousand years before its destruction, as we have seen above (chapter 1, part II.3), was suggested in the Book of Revelation, and was evidently widely held among early Christians, including by Hippolytus’ likely teacher Irenaeus. The *Epistle of Barnabas*, the earliest surviving work to articulate chiliasm/millennialism, interpreted the statement in Psalm 90:4 that a thousand years are like a day in the sight of God in light of the story of the seven days of creation. The *Epistle of Barnabas* concluded that the universe will last for seven thousand years (each millennium representing a day of the week), with the final thousand years being a millennial Sabbath of peace and rest.¹² Like the Jews who expected in the fifth kingdom a renewed Israel under the messiah, these Christians chiliasts expected an earthly kingdom under Christ the messiah that would reign upon the earth for one thousand years, the final millennium of history.¹³

It is unlikely that Hippolytus subscribed to a literal form of such views, for he nowhere suggests that the fifth kingdom will last only one thousand years. He seems to have believed that the thousand years of the millennial Sabbath was figurative, and that it would actually last forever.¹⁴ Nonetheless, like the chiliasts, he did believe that the world would last six thousand years in total before the second coming and the dawn of the fifth kingdom (the “world week” view of history, so-called because it divided history into seven millennia), and, like Irenaeus and many other Christians of the period, believed that the start of the fifth kingdom could be calculated.

The gospels state that Christ was crucified at the sixth hour of the day (noon). When read in the context of the six thousand-year days of the “world week” as advocated by proponents of chiliasm and adopted by Hippolytus, this could be interpreted to mean that Christ’s crucifixion took place halfway through the current millennium. Thus, in his *Commentary on Daniel*, Hippolytus provided an exact date for the birth of Christ and correlated it with the beginning of the Millennial Sabbath:

The first coming of our Lord in the flesh, in which he was born in Bethlehem, happened

¹¹ Hippolytus, *Commentary on Daniel*, IV.24.7, ed. Richard and Dihle, *Kommentar zu Daniel*, 250: ἐπειδὴ γὰρ οἱ μὲν Πέρσαι διεκράτησαν βασιλεύοντες ἔτη διακόσια πριάκοντα, καὶ μετὰ τούτος οἱ Ἕλληνες ἄτε δὴ ἐνδοξότεροι ὑπάρχοντες ἐπὶ ἔτη τριακόσια, ἐξ ἀνάγκης δεῖ τὸ τέταρτον θηρίον ὡς ἰσχυρόν καὶ μείζον πάντων τῶν ἔμπροσθεν αὐτοῦ γενομένων βασιλεῦσαι ἔτη πεντακόσια.

¹² The *Epistle of Barnabas* probably dates to the late first or early second century, but the oldest copy survives in the fourth-century Codex Sinaiticus Bible. On the *Epistle of Barnabas*, see James Carleton Paget, *The Epistle of Barnabas: Outlook and Background* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994); Reidar Hvalvik, *The Struggle for Scripture and Covenant: The Purpose of the Epistle of Barnabas and Jewish-Christian Competition in the Second Century* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996).

¹³ For a detailed study of early Christian millennialism, see Charles Hill, *Regnum Caelorum: Patterns of Millennial Thought in Early Christianity*, second edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

¹⁴ Charles Hill, *Regnum Caelorum*, 160–169, disputes the common notion that Hippolytus was a chiliast, and provides a bibliographic overview of the question. Schmidt, *Hippolytus of Rome*, 18–20, agrees with Hill that Hippolytus was not a chiliast.

on the eighth of the Kalends of January, a Wednesday, in the forty-second year of the reign of Augustus, 5500 years after Adam. And he suffered in his thirty-third year, on the eighth of the Kalends of April, a Friday, in the eighteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, in the consulship of Rufus and Rubellius. And so it is absolutely necessary for six thousand years to be fulfilled, so that the Sabbath rest may come, the holy day, in which “God rested from all his works which he began to do.” The Sabbath is a type and an image of the future kingdom of the saints, when they will co-reign with Christ, when he arrives from heaven, as also John describes in his Apocalypse.¹⁵

By this calculation, Hippolytus could claim quite precisely that Daniel’s fifth kingdom will begin in the five hundredth year after the birth of Christ. Hippolytus was confident that the visions of Daniel (and the Book of Revelation) provided details about what must happen in the nearly three centuries that remained between him and that time. He thus laid out a political-eschatological scenario covering that period based on his readings of those prophecies.

Quite clearly, for the kingdom of Christ to dawn, the Roman Empire had to be destroyed. Hippolytus identified in the Book of Daniel the cause of Rome’s coming collapse. Just as the fourth kingdom, in Daniel 2, is made up of iron and unmixed clay, he believed the multiethnic nature of the Roman Empire would be its downfall. For soon the Roman Empire will collapse, Hippolytus said, with its constituent peoples “dividing the empire among themselves according to nation.”¹⁶

Hippolytus believed the empire would be literally carved up into ten kingdoms or rival states. Daniel 2 spoke of ten toes on the statue, the fourth beast in Daniel 7 had ten horns, and the beasts in Revelation ten horns and ten crowns. He believed that these all confirmed the collapse of the Roman Empire into ten rival ethnic states as a divine retribution upon the empire. He described this division of the empire with allusions to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and lines lifted from Jesus’ prophecy in the gospels about the end of the world (Matthew 24:14 and Luke 21:9): “For just as with Sodom, when their transgressions were full, fire immediately descended upon them and they were wiped out, so too will it be now, when lawlessness increases in the world and the present iron beast is divided into ten horns and ‘anarchy’ occurs, as well as discord, and when others here and there tear the empire apart, ‘then shall come’ upon them ‘the end.’”¹⁷

¹⁵ Hippolytus, *Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, IV.23.3–5, ed. ed. Richard and Dihle, *Kommentar zu Daniel*, 244–246: Ἡ γὰρ πρώτη παρουσία τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν ἡ ἔνσαρκος, ἐν ἣ γεγέννηται ἐν Βηθλεέμ, ἐγένετο πρὸ ὀκτῶ καλανδῶν ἰανουαρίων, ἡμέρα τετράδι, βασιλεύοντος Αὐγούστου τεσσαρακοστὸν καὶ δεύτερον ἔτος, ἀπὸ δὲ Ἀδὰμ πεντακισχλιοστῶ καὶ πεντακοσιοστῶ ἔτει· ἔπαθεν δὲ τριακοστῶ τρίτῳ ἔτει πρὸ ὀκτῶ καλανδῶν ἀπριλίων, ἡμέρα παρασκευῆ, ὀκτωκαιδεκάτῳ ἔτει Τιβερίου Καίσαρος, ὑπατεύοντος Ρούφου καὶ Ρουβελλίωνος. Δεῖ οὖν ἐξ ἀνάγκης τὰ ἑξακισχίλια ἔτη πληρωθῆναι, ἵνα ἔλθῃ τὸ σάββατον, ἡ κατάπαυσις, ἡ ἀγία ἡμέρα, ἐν ἣ «κατέπαυσεν» ὁ θεὸς «ἀπὸ πάντων τῶν ἔργων αὐτοῦ, ὧν ἤρξατο ποιεῖν.» Τὸ σάββατον τύπος ἐστὶν καὶ εἰκὼν τῆς μελλούσης βασιλείας τῶν ἁγίων, ἡνίκα συμβασιλεύσουσιν τῷ Χριστῷ, παραγινόμενου αὐτοῦ ἀπ’ οὐρανῶν, ὡς Ἰωάννης ἐν τῇ Ἀποκαλύψει αὐτοῦ διηγείται.

¹⁶ Hippolytus, *Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, IV.7.6; ed. Richard and Dihle, *Kommentar zu Daniel*, 210: καὶ ἑαυτοῖς τὸ βασίλειον κατὰ ἔθνη διαιρουμένων.

¹⁷ Hippolytus, *Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, IV.6.4; ed. Richard and Dihle, *Kommentar zu Daniel*, 208: . In this regard he built upon his teacher, Irenaeus, who had made clear in his own more schematic take on the

According to Hippolytus, once the Roman Empire is no more these ten kings would be subdued by an eleventh, the Little Horn of Daniel 7, who is the same as the evil king from Daniel 11.¹⁸ According to Hippolytus, this Little Horn was not King Antiochus IV.¹⁹ While Hippolytus knew that much of the material about evil king in Daniel 11 corresponded to Antiochus IV, he also realized, as had many before him, that certain prophecies—the king’s invasion of Egypt and Libya and Ethiopia, and his death before Jerusalem—had not been accomplished by Antiochus. Antiochus never conquered Egypt, Libya, or Ethiopia, and he died far from Jerusalem. Thus, those prophecies remained unfulfilled. This meant that Antiochus had simply prefigured a future evil king who had not yet arrived. This evil king, the “Little Horn” of Daniel 7, was the Antichrist.

In describing the Antichrist, Hippolytus once again relied heavily on his teacher, Irenaeus, whose conception of the Antichrist was built on the fusion of the Little Horn/evil king of the Book of Daniel with material from the New Testament. The epistles of John (1 John 2:18–22; 1 John 4:3; 2 John 7) state that whoever denies Christ is an antichrist, and that the deceit which antichrists are perpetrating upon the faithful is a sign that the last hour has arrived. 2 Thessalonians, an epistle of Paul, spoke alternatively of the “lawless one,” or the “Son of Perdition,” who would come in the future and use signs and wonders to deceive the faithful, but will be overthrown by Christ upon his second coming. Irenaeus recognized the similarities between this figure and the second beast in chapter 13 from the Book of Revelation, who appeared like a lamb but exercised authority on behalf of the first beast and deceived the world with great signs and forced its followers to receive a brand of 666. Thus, according to Irenaeus, the Little Horn and evil king of Daniel, the Son of Perdition of 2 Thessalonians, the antichrists of 1 John, and the second beast of Revelation 13 all referred to the same figure—the Antichrist.²⁰ Irenaeus believed that, as the evil counterpart to Jesus, the Antichrist would not be a gentile like Antiochus, but a Jew. The tribe of Dan had been excluded from the list of Jewish tribes in the Book of Revelation, and for Irenaeus this appeared to be a vital clue: the Antichrist would come from the tribe of Dan. This was confirmed by the hostility toward the tribe of Dan expressed in the books of Genesis and Jeremiah.²¹

eschatological future in his *Against Heresies (Adversus haereses)*, V.26.1, that the horns on the fourth beast in Daniel were equivalent to the ten crowns on the beast in the Book of Revelation, and that these represented the ten kings at the end of time. Irenaeus, however, made no mention of the Roman Empire and is unclear about how and where the ten kings will arise.

¹⁸ Hippolytus, *Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, IV.12.4; idem, *On Christ and the Antichrist*, 25.

¹⁹ According to Hippolytus, the Little Horn from Daniel 7 was not Antiochus IV; however, Hippolytus admits that the Little Horn mentioned in Daniel 8 was Antiochus. In this sense, Antiochus was the first Little Horn and served as a precursor to the future Little Horn described in Daniel 7.

²⁰ For the development of the Antichrist, see Wilhelm Bousset, *Der Antichrist in der Überlieferung des Judentums, des neuen Testaments und der alten Kirche ein Beitrag zur Auslegung der Apokalypse* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1895); Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 193–225; McGinn, *Antichrist: Two Thousand Years of the Human Fascination with Evil* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); G. W. Lorein, “The Antichrist in the Fathers and their Exegetical Basis,” *Sacris erudiri*, vol. 42 (2003), 5–60.

²¹ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, V.30.2.

Hippolytus agreed on this account with Irenaeus, marshaling the evidence from the Book of Genesis: “Just as Christ was born from the tribe of Judah, the Antichrist will be born from the tribe of Dan. Is this not what was meant when Jacob said: ‘Let Dan be a serpent, lying upon the ground, biting the horse's heel’?”²² Hippolytus adds that, as an evil doppelgänger to Christ, the Antichrist will be a Jewish king (though one who reigns on earth, not in heaven): “Christ is king, and so on earth the Antichrist is a king. The Savior was manifested as a lamb and so in the same way he [the Antichrist] will appear as a lamb, though within he is a wolf. The Savior came into the world circumcised, and he [the Antichrist] will come likewise.”²³ In a sense then, the Antichrist of Hippolytus was a perverted reimagining of the Jewish messiah, an earthly Jewish ruler who will seize control of world empire.

Thus, Hippolytus made clear that the Antichrist will be a Jew from the tribe of Dan who will rise to power upon the collapse of the Roman Empire into the ten rival states. According to Daniel 7:8, the Little Horn will uproot three of the horns that came before it; in Daniel 11:43, the evil king will conquer Egypt, Libya, and Cush (Ethiopia).²⁴ Hippolytus reasoned that these two passages must refer to the same event, when the Antichrist will conquer three of the ten rival kings. Then, submitting the other seven to his will, the Antichrist will rule unopposed and inaugurate a persecution of the saints throughout the world.²⁵ Enoch and Elijah (the two witnesses mentioned in Revelation 11) will return to oppose the Antichrist, but the Antichrist will nonetheless inflict his persecution for three and a half years (the length of time the abomination of desolation will remain in the temple according to Daniel 12).²⁶

Hippolytus explicitly compared the Antichrist's persecution to the one imposed by Antiochus IV upon the Jews: “For, being treacherous and exalting himself above the servants of God, and wanting to attack them and persecute them out of existence for not giving him glory, [the Antichrist] will order everyone to set up altars for burnt offerings everywhere, so that none of the saints may buy or sell anything, unless they first make sacrifice... For in this same way Antiochus Epiphanes, who became king of Syria as a descendant of Alexander of Macedon, contrived [a persecution] against the Jews.” Hippolytus thus suggested that the Antichrist will be a sort of typological successor to Antiochus.²⁷ But whereas history continued after Antiochus' persecution, the apocalyptic vision of Daniel will be fulfilled in the time of the Antichrist, when

²² Hippolytus, *On Christ and the Antichrist*, 14, ed. Athanasopoulos, *Ἰππολύτου Ρώμης*, 147: ὥσπερ γὰρ ἐκ τῆς Ἰουδα φυλῆς ὁ Σοτήρ γεγέννηται, οὕτως ἐκ τῆς τοῦ Δάν φυλῆς ὁ Ἀντίχριστος γεννηθήσεται. ὅτι δὲ οὕτων ἔχει, τί φησιν Ἰακώβ; «γεννηθήτω Δάν ὄφις ἐφ' ὁδοῦ κατήμενος δάκνων πτέρναν ἵππου.»

²³ Ibid, 6, ed. Athanasopoulos, *Ἰππολύτου Ρώμης*, 142: Βασιλεὺς ὁ Χριστὸς καὶ βασιλεὺς ἐπίγειος ὁ Ἀντίχριστος. Ἐπείχθη ὁ Σοτήρ ὡς ἀρνίον καὶ αὐτὸς ὁμοίως φανήσεται ὡς ἀρνίον ἐνδοθεν λύκος ὢν. Ἐπμερίτομος ἦλθεν ὁ Σοτήρ εἰς τὸν κόσμον καὶ αὐτὸς ὁμοίως ἐλεύσεται.

²⁴ Hippolytus, *Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, IV.12.4; *ibid*, IV.49.4; *idem*, *On Christ and the Antichrist*, 52.

²⁵ Hippolytus, *Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, 4.12.4–5.

²⁶ *Ibid*, IV.35.3; *ibid*, IV.50.2; *ibid*, IV.52.6

²⁷ Hippolytus, *On Christ and the Antichrist*, 49; ed. Athanasopoulos, *Ἰππολύτου Ρώμης*, 177: δόλιος γὰρ ὢν καὶ ἐπαιρόμενος κατὰ τῶν δούλων τοῦ θεοῦ, βουλόμενος ἐκθλίβειν καὶ ἐκδιώκειν αὐτοὺς ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου διὰ τὸ μὴ δίδοναι αὐτοὺς αὐτῷ δόξαν, κελεύει πάντας πανταχοῦ θυμιατήρια τιθέναι, ἵνα μηδεὶς δύνηται τῶν ἁγίων μήτε ἀγοράσαι τι μήτε πωλῆσαι, ἐὰν μὴ πρῶτον ἐπιθύσῃ... Οὕτω γὰρ ἐτεχνάσατο κατὰ τῶν Ἰουδαίων καὶ Ἀντίοχος ὁ Ἐπιφανὴς ὁ τῆς Συρίας γενόμενος βασιλεὺς ὢν ἐκ γένους Ἀλεξάνδρου τοῦ Μακεδόνα.

Christ will return to bring the downfall of the Antichrist, to resurrect the dead, and to establish the kingdom of the saints.²⁸

Thus, Hippolytus' eschatological scenario provided a Christianized version of the expectations that had developed from the Book of Daniel. His eschatological interpretation is intensely anti-Roman, though the main antagonist emerges as the Antichrist. He did not explicitly identify the Antichrist as Roman, but instead said that he will be a Jew from the tribe of Dan. Nonetheless, to understand the extent of Hippolytus' polemic against the Roman Empire, the relationship of the Antichrist to the Roman Empire in Hippolytus requires some further clarification.

1.2: The Roman Empire: Fourth Beast or the Restraining Force?

One line from scripture proved particularly difficult in understanding the relationship between the Antichrist and the earthly powers. In 2 Thessalonians, Paul references an earlier discussion with the recipients of his letter concerning a force that was preventing the Son of Perdition from appearing. His description of this restraining force (2 Thessalonians 2:6–7) is far from clear, but a very literal translation could read as follows: “And now you know what the thing restraining (τὸ κατέχον) is, in order for him to be revealed in his proper time. For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; only the one restraining (ὁ κατέχων) just now (ἄρτι) [will continue to do so] until he is taken out of the midst.”²⁹

The identity of the “restraining force,” the *katechon*, has long baffled readers of the epistle. Confusingly, Paul refers to it first in the neuter case, and then again in the masculine case, suggesting that perhaps it is both a thing and a person. One interpretation that appealed to early Christian readers held that the *katechon* (κατέχον, neuter sing.) was the Roman Empire and the *katechōn* (κατέχων, masculine sing.) was its emperor. This is the interpretation that Hippolytus favored, and it made good sense: had not Jesus predicted that the end times would be characterized by nation rising against nation and kingdom against kingdom (Mark 13:8; Matthew 24:7; Luke 21:10)? How could this happen in a unified Roman world? And how would the ten kings mentioned in Daniel and Revelation rise up when there was but one Roman emperor? Only the destruction of the Roman Empire and the fragmentation of the emperor's power would allow for these circumstances.³⁰

Thus, Hippolytus clearly considered the Roman Empire (as a political entity and as represented in the person of the emperor) to be the restraining force described in 2 Thessalonians 6–8: “So who is ‘He who restrains [ὁ κατέχων] until now,’ except the fourth beast, from which,

²⁸ Hippolytus, *Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, IV.57.3; idem, *On Christ and the Antichrist*, 64–66.

²⁹ *Novum Testamentum Graece*, ed. K. Aland, E. Nestle, and E. Nestle (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1979), 539–540: καὶ νῦν τὸ κατέχον οἶδατε, εἰς τὸ ἀποκαλυφθῆναι αὐτὸν ἐν τῷ ἑαυτοῦ καιρῷ. τὸ γὰρ μυστήριον ἤδη ἐνεργεῖται τῆς ἀνομίας· μόνον ὁ κατέχων ἄρτι ἕως ἐκ μέσου γένηται.

³⁰ Hippolytus, *Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, IV.17.7–9.

after it is removed and taken out of “the midst”, the deceiver shall come?”³¹ In other words, the Roman Empire—the fourth beast—restrains the Antichrist, and when its power fails the Antichrist will arise.

If this is indeed the case, should not Christians view the Roman Empire as a force for good, and even pray for its continued strength? This is the point made by Hippolytus’ contemporary, the North African Christian Tertullian (d. c. 240), in his Latin *Apology*. In arguing that Christians are good citizens of the empire, Tertullian claimed that Christians prayed for the emperor and the continuance of the empire, and not just because political upheaval would bring misfortune to the Christians too, but because the empire acted as the *katechon*: “There is also another greater necessity for us to pray for the emperors, even for the whole state of the empire and for all of Rome’s affairs, because we know that the great force which is threatening the whole world and the very end of history, threatening terrible afflictions, is being kept back by the respite of the Roman Empire.”³² To modern ears, used to the positive evaluation of the *katechon* popularized in the twentieth century by Carl Schmitt (discussed in the introduction to this dissertation), it may seem natural that Christians must have been positively disposed toward the *katechon*.

However, Hippolytus did not share Tertullian’s more conciliatory view toward the Roman Empire (and, needless to say, Hippolytus’ view of the *katechon* has nothing to do with the conception popularized by Schmitt eighteen centuries later). For Hippolytus, the Roman Empire’s role in keeping back the Antichrist did not absolve it from its status as the great persecutor and enemy of God. It remained the fourth beast that must be burned up before God’s kingdom could reign.

Nonetheless, this raises many problems. If the Roman Empire is the fourth kingdom and therefore opposed to God, how can it also be the restraining force keeping back the Antichrist? How could the Little Horn, the Antichrist, rule over the fourth kingdom if the fourth kingdom restrained his appearance? And if the Antichrist will be a Jewish king from the tribe of Dan how can he also rule the Roman Empire? Moreover, the destruction of the fourth kingdom should lead directly to the dawning of the fifth kingdom—would a powerful empire ruled by the Antichrist after Rome’s fall not represent some new kingdom in between?

Hippolytus provided a solution to these problems in his *Treatise on Christ and the Antichrist*: the Antichrist will reconstitute the Roman Empire with his victory over the ten kings. Hippolytus found evidence for this in the description of the beast that emerged from the sea in Revelation 13:3: “And I saw one of his [the first beasts’] heads as it were wounded to death; and his deadly wound was healed.” Hippolytus believed this referred to the restoration of the Roman Empire by the Antichrist. This appeared to be confirmed in the chapter’s description of the

³¹ Ibid, IV.21.3; ed. Richard and Dihle, *Kommentar zu Daniel*, 214: τίς οὖν ἐστὶν «ὁ κατέχων ἕως ἄρτι,» ἀλλ’ ἢ τὸ τέταρτον θηρίον, οὗ μετατεθέντος καὶ «ἐκ μέσου» γεναμένου ἐλεύσεται ὁ πλάνος. Note that the phrasing of the quotation from 2 Thessalonians by Hippolytus is not exactly identical to the phrasing printed in Nestle-Aland.

³² Tertullian, *Apologeticus*, xxxii; ed. Henry A. Woodham, *Tertulliani Liber Apologeticus* (Cambridge: Deighton, 1850), 114: *Est et alia maior necessitas nobis orandi pro imperatoribus, etiam pro omni statu imperii rebusque Romanis, qui vim maximam universo orbi imminentem ipsamque clausulam saeculi acerbitates horrendas comminantem Romani imperii comiteatu scimus retardari.*

second beast: “[The second beast] exercises all the authority of the first beast on its behalf, and it makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound had been healed” (Revelation 13:12). Hippolytus explains the verse thus:

This means that, according to the law of Augustus, by whom the Roman Empire was established, likewise he [the Antichrist] will command and rule, ratifying everything, thus accruing greater glory for himself. For this is the fourth beast, whose head was wounded and then healed again because it [the head] was broken up and dishonored and divided into ten crowns, so that the cunning [Antichrist] would seem to [ὥς as a clause indicating subjectivity] heal and restore it [the head].³³

The Antichrist will appear to restore the head of the beast by reconstituting the Roman Empire. In this way, the Roman Empire, the fourth kingdom, will cease to function as the *katechon* when divided by the ten kings, allowing for the rise of the Antichrist, but then it will be rebuilt by the Antichrist so that a renewed fourth kingdom will reign until Christ’s second coming.³⁴ Other material in Revelation seemed to confirm this. One symbol of Rome, the whore of Babylon, is destroyed in Revelation 17, but the seven-headed beast she rode upon is not destroyed until the return of Christ in chapter 19. Thus, the Roman Empire must be destroyed, reconstituted, and destroyed again.

When Hippolytus said that the Antichrist will rule “according to the law of Augustus,” his implication was that the Antichrist will be a Roman emperor. His teacher Irenaeus had already hinted at this idea by pointing out that the word *Lateinos* (ΛΑΤΕΙΝΟΣ), for “Latin man,” adds up in Greek numerals to 666. Hippolytus repeated this point as explicit confirmation for his theory that the Antichrist will restore the Roman Empire.³⁵

The Antichrist, then, will bring about a nightmarish fusion of the two principle enemies of Christianity as Hippolytus understood them—the Jews and the Romans. The Antichrist will be a Jew of the tribe of Dan who, after defeating the ten rival kings in an empire-wide civil war, will rule over a reconstituted Roman Empire. In this way, Hippolytus suggested that the Roman Empire had to survive until the end of history and Christ’s return, when the Antichrist would be punished and the body of the fourth beast (the empire) burned up, as Daniel foresaw in his dream. Thus, Hippolytus unambiguously established the Roman Empire as a force for evil.

³³ Hippolytus, *On Christ and the Antichrist*, 49, ed. Athanasopoulos, *Ιππολύτου Ρώμης*, 176: τοῦτο σημαίνει ὅτι κατὰ τὸν Αὐγούστου νόμον, ἀφ’ οὗ καὶ ἡ βασιλεία Ῥωμαίων συνέστη, οὕτω καὶ αὐτὸς κελεύσει καὶ διατάξει ἅπαντα ἐπικυρῶν διὰ τούτου δόξαν ἑαυτῷ πλείονα περιποιούμενος. τοῦτο γὰρ ἐστὶ τὸ θηρίον τὸ τέταρτον, οὗ ἐπλήγη ἡ κεφαλὴ καὶ πάλιν ἐθεραπεύθη διὰ τὸ καταλυθῆναι αὐτὴν καὶ ἀτιμασθῆναι καὶ εἰς δέκα διαδήματα ἀναλυθῆναι, ὥστε πανούργος ὢν ὡς περιθεραπεύσειν αὐτὴν καὶ ἀνανεώσειν.

³⁴ Gregory Jenks, *The Origins and Early Development of the Antichrist Myth* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1991), 109–112, argues that this idea of a reconstituted Roman Empire meant that Hippolytus was at pains to make clear that the Antichrist would not rule the real Roman Empire, but merely an ersatz imitation, thus exonerating Rome. However, Jenks’ argument fails to consider the reference to Augustus (though he includes it in a long quotation) and the clear sense in which Hippolytus shows that the kingdom of the fourth beast (the Roman Empire) will be the kingdom of the Antichrist.

³⁵ Hippolytus, *On Christ and the Antichrist*, 50. Irenaeus had suggested this and other meanings for the number of the beast in his *Against Heresies* (*Adversus haereses*), V.30.3.

Moreover, he planted the seed of a belief that would come to blossom in later writers: the Antichrist will be a Roman emperor.

I.3: Other Early Christian Eschatological Scenarios: Tertullian, Victorinus and Lactantius

Hippolytus' hostile position toward the Roman Empire in his political eschatology contrasts naturally with that of his contemporary, Tertullian, who stressed that Christians could be good citizens of the empire and, as we have seen, should pray for the empire because it was the *katechon*. For this reason, Tertullian has been called "pro-Roman," though such a characterization certainly goes too far.³⁶ Despite the fact that he was less openly antagonistic toward the Roman Empire and argued that Christians deserved toleration in the empire, Tertullian still viewed the Roman Empire as a hostile, potentially persecutory force, recognizing it in the allegory of the sin-ridden city of Babylon in the Book of Revelation.³⁷ A chiliast, Tertullian believed in a coming kingdom of Christ upon the earth, which would replace the Roman Empire.

Over the course of the next century, as the Roman state inflicted harsher and more systematic (albeit still intermittent) persecution upon Christians, the eschatological visions found in surviving Christian sources became all the more hostile. The two most complete articulations of Christian political eschatology from this period are both works written in Latin around the year 300.

The first of these sources is the Latin commentary on the Book of Revelation composed by Victorinus of Pettau/Poetovio (d. 304), the earliest surviving commentary on John's apocalypse.³⁸ Here, Victorinus derives from the Book of Revelation a schema of future events very similar to that which Hippolytus had interpreted in the Book of Daniel. Nonetheless, Victorinus, working in Latin, does not appear to have been dependent on Hippolytus, and so attests to the fact that many Christians, even in this early period, had very similar eschatological expectations about the fate of the Roman Empire.

³⁶ Gregory Jenks, *The Origins and Early Development of the Antichrist Myth*, 102; Shoemaker, *The Apocalypse of Empire*, 41.

³⁷ Tertullian makes this clear in a chapter showing the Biblical use of place names as symbols, in his *Against Marcion*, 13.10, ed. Ernest Evans, *Tertullian: Adversus Marcionem* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1972), 210: *Sic et Babylon etiam apud Ioannem nostrum Romanae urbis figura est, proinde magnae et regno superbae et sanctorum dei debellatricis*.

³⁸ Victorinus' *Commentary on Revelation* was redacted in c. 400 by Jerome (discussed below), and while Jerome's version survives in numerous manuscript copies, the unredacted version survives only in the fifteenth century manuscript Cod. Vatican Ottob. Lat. 3288A, and its apographs, Cod. Vatican Ottob. Lat. 3288B, and Cod. Vatican Lat. 3546. The most recent edition, which places the text of Victorinus' *Commentary on Revelation* side by side with Jerome's revision, is Roger Gryson, *Victorini Poetovionensis: Opera quae supersunt* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017), 10–291. An earlier edition, part of the Sources Chrétiennes series (no. 423), with French translation, was made by M. Dulaey, *Victorin de Poetovio: Sur l'Apocalypse*, (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1997). The editions of Gryson and Dulaey largely agree, but they use entirely different numbering systems: Gryson labels by sections in and line numbers in the oldest manuscript of Victorinus' commentary, while Dulaey organizes his edition by chapter of the Book of Revelation; for the sake of completeness, I provide Gryson's numbering with that of Dulaey in parentheses. An older edition was made by Johannes Haussleiter, *Victorini Episcopi Petavionensis Opera* (Vienna: Tempsky, 1916).

Victorinus asserted that the plagues and upheavals found in the Book of Revelation referred to the future events that will attend “the destruction of Babylon, that is, the city of the Romans.”³⁹ Like Hippolytus, Victorinus suggested that the Roman Empire would in the future be divided among ten rival rulers, who would then be opposed by an eleventh king, the Antichrist. Thus, the beasts with seven heads and ten horns from Revelation 13 (coming out of the sea) and Revelation 17 (ridden by the whore) were, according to Victorinus, allegories for the Roman Empire: “The seven heads are the seven Roman kings [from Galba to Nerva], among whom is also the Antichrist, as we have said above. The ten horns are the ten kings of the last times.”⁴⁰

Much like Hippolytus, Victorinus predicted the ten kings would be defeated by the Antichrist, who would reunify and rejuvenate the Roman Empire. Indeed, according to Victorinus, the head of the beast that was wounded and healed again in Revelation 13:3 was not just the Roman Empire—as Hippolytus interpreted it—but literally Emperor Nero. Victorinus suggested that the Antichrist would be revealed as none other than the resurrected Nero: “For it is certain that when [Nero] was pursued by the cavalry sent by the senate, he cut his own throat. Therefore God will send this worthy king (worthy in the way Jews and persecutors deserve) and messiah to the Jews and the persecutors of Christ.”⁴¹ Not only would the Antichrist be a Roman emperor, he would be the worst of all emperors, the greatest of persecutors.

Though Victorinus suggested a Neronian Antichrist, like Irenaeus and Hippolytus he also believed that the Antichrist will be a Jew. Victorinus solved this odd contradiction over the nature of the Antichrist by suggesting that the risen Nero will force Christians into following Jewish rites, compelling them to accept circumcision.⁴² Victorinus’ Antichrist was thus a risen Nero who will use his power to enforce Jewish law—and in this way Nero will fool the Jews into believing that he is the messiah.

Victorinus was an unabashed chiliast, and thus believed an earthly Millennium was explicitly described in Revelation 20. According to Victorinus, the destruction of the Antichrist’s Roman Empire, allegorically called Babylon, must lead to Christ’s kingdom on earth, so that Antichrist the emperor will give way to Christ the emperor. Here, under the fifth kingdom, Christ and his resurrected saints, and the Christians who survived the Antichrist’s persecution, will be literally the new masters: they will “reign with Christ over the earth and over all the nations.”⁴³ Satan will be loosed after the thousand years and will be defeated, after which

³⁹ Victorinus, *Commentary on Revelation*, III.46 (8.2); ed. Gryson, 194 (ed. Dulaey, 88): *...ruina Babilonis, id est civitatis Romanae.*

⁴⁰ Ibid, IV.43–45 (12.3); ed. Gryson, 222 (ed. Dulaey, 102): *‘Septem capita,’ septem reges Romanos, ex quibus et Antichristus in priore dicemus. ‘Cornua decem,’ decem reges in novissimo tempore.*

⁴¹ Ibid, IV.117–121 (13.3); ed. Gryson, 232–234 (ed. Dulaey, 106): *Constat enim, cum eundem insequeretur equitatus missus a senatu, ipsum sibi gulam succidisse. Hunc ergo deus suscitatum mittere regem dignum dignis, Iudeis et persecutoribus Christi, <et Christum> talem qualem meruerunt persecutores et Iudei.*

⁴² Ibid, 127–128 (13.3); ed. Gryson, 234 (ed. Dulaey, 106): *denique sanctos non ad aliud compellet, nisi ad circumcisionem accipiendam.*

⁴³ Ibid, V.39–40 (20.2); ed. Gryson, 256 (Dulaey, 116): *regnare cum Christo super orbem super gentes universas.*

all the dead will be resurrected and endure the Last Judgment, the earth will be destroyed, and Christ will reign for all eternity in heaven.

Victorinus' understanding of the common political-eschatological scenario was in some ways even more anti-Roman than that of Hippolytus. For him, the Book of Revelation described in prophetic terms the Christian struggle against the Roman state, as well as the Christian hope for the coming annihilation of that state by divine judgment and the reward of a new kingdom in which the balance of power was reversed. This view probably reflects the circumstances under which he wrote—Victorinus lived under, and was eventually killed in, the Great Persecution initiated by Emperor Diocletian in 303.

A final, idiosyncratic version of the common political-eschatological scenario is provided by the North African-born rhetorician Lactantius (d. 325) in his *Divine Institutes* (*Institutiones Divinae*).⁴⁴ Lactantius, who would eventually become tutor to Constantine's son, wrote the *Divine Institutes* shortly before the legalization of Christianity (though an addendum addressed to Constantine, probably later added by Lactantius, is extant in a few manuscript copies), and in appealing to a pagan audience he relies less on Biblical scripture than pagan sources, including sibylline literature. Thus, where Lactantius wrote about what was to come, he attempted to harmonize the Book of Daniel and Book of Revelation with the *Sibylline Oracles* and with another non-Christian apocalypse, the *Oracles of Hystaspes*, attributed to Zoroaster's patron Hystaspes (*Vishtāspa*) (though scholars now believe that it was likely written in the first century BC).⁴⁵

According to Lactantius, all of these sources made clear that the Roman Empire would soon collapse. This was only natural, as all empires decay and collapse. Following classical Roman authors such as Sallust, Livy, Tacitus, and Seneca, he identified the cause of Rome's decay as its mastery of the Mediterranean world after the Punic Wars, which instilled greed and weakness and brought about the fall of the republic. He expressed an affinity for the Roman Republic—Regulus, Cicero, Pompey, and Cato the Younger are some of the few Romans for whom Lactantius expresses admiration—but the fall of the republic accelerated Rome's decline: "For when the liberty that [Rome] had preserved through Brutus' leadership and encouragement was gone, it grew old...but if that is the case, what is left to follow old age except death?"⁴⁶

The empire that replaced the republic, Lactantius repeatedly demonstrates to his readers, had become impious, violent, exploitative, and socially and economically unjust. Even so, Lactantius suggested that he believes the Roman Empire is the *katechon*, its existence keeping

⁴⁴ The *Divine Institutes* of Lactantius has been edited in four volumes by Eberhard Heck and Antonie Wlosok, *Lactantius: divinarum institutionum Libri septem* (Berlin, De Gruyter, 2005).

⁴⁵ Scholars generally hold the view that the *Oracles of Hystaspes* originated in Anatolia during the Mithridatic Wars of Republican Rome (88–63 BC) as anti-Roman prophecies; this view was proposed by Hans Windisch, *Die Orakel des Hystaspes* (Amsterdam: Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen, 1929), and has been accepted by Geo Widengren, *Die Religionen Irans*, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1965), 199–207; and Werner Sundermann, "Hystaspes," *Encyclopædia Iranica*, vol. 12, fasc. 6, ed. Ehsan Yarshate (London: Routledge, 2004), 606–609.

⁴⁶ Lactantius, *Divine Institutes*, VII.15.16, ed. Heck and Wlosok, *Lactantius*, vol. 4, 700: *amissa enim libertate, quam Bruto duce et auctore defenderat, ita consenuit...quodsi haec ita sunt, quid restat nisi ut sequatur interitus senectutem?*

the Antichrist at bay: “That city, that is the city that has so far sustained everything, and we must pray to and worship God in heaven, so that, if his statutes and appointments can be deferred, that the awful tyrant does not come sooner than we think.”⁴⁷ Still, the destruction of Rome’s empire, according to Lactantius, was inevitable, and would necessarily bring about the violent upheaval, chaos, and persecutions of the last days and allow for the rise of the Antichrist: “The cause of this devastation and confusion will be this, the Roman name, which now rules the world—my soul shudders to say this, but I say it because it will happen—will be removed from the earth.”⁴⁸

Lactantius demonstrated that Christian and non-Christian prophets alike agreed its destruction would soon arrive: “The Sibyls say openly that Rome will perish and that this will happen by God’s judgment because it hated his name and as enemy of justice killed the people brought up in the truth.”⁴⁹ Likewise, the Persian Hystaspes foresaw the destruction of Rome: “Long before the Trojan race was founded he announced that the Roman Empire and its name would be removed from the world.”⁵⁰

Lactantius provides perhaps the most detailed—and idiosyncratic—account of early Christian authors about how he believed the Roman Empire would collapse. “First Rome’s rule will be increased, and her supreme authority will be dispersed among many and, being broken up, will diminish. Then, civil strife will be constantly sown and there will not be any rest from destructive wars, until there are at once ten rulers who will divide the world, not to govern it but to ruin it.”⁵¹ Though he does not say so explicitly, Lactantius surely derives this notion of the ten kings dividing the Roman Empire, like Irenaeus, Hippolytus, and Victorinus, from the ten horns on the beasts in the Book of Daniel and the Book of Revelation.

According to Lactantius, the ten kings will devastate the world with their wars, during which their recruitment of massive armies will result in the abandonment of agriculture and, as a result, starvation and social collapse. “Then a very powerful enemy will suddenly rise up against them from the distant north, who, after destroying the three of those kings who control Asia, will

⁴⁷ Ibid, VII.25.8, ed. Heck and Wlosok, *Lactantius*, vol. 4, 727: *Illa, illa est civitas quae adhuc sustentat omnia, precandusque nobis et adorandus est deus caeli, si tamen statuta eius et placita differri possunt, ne citius quam putamus tyrannus ille abominabilis veniat.*

⁴⁸ Ibid, VII.15.11, ed. Heck and Wlosok, *Lactantius*, vol. 4, 698: *Cuius vastitatis et confusionis haec erit causa, quod Romanum nomen, quo nunc regitur orbis—horret animus dicere, sed dicam, quia futurum est—tolletur e terra.*

⁴⁹ Ibid, VII.15.18, ed. Heck and Wlosok, *Lactantius*, vol. 4, 700: *Sibyllae tamen aperte ‘interituram esse Romam’ loquuntur ‘et quidem iudicio dei, quod nomen eius habuerit invisum et inimica iustitiae alumnum veritatis populum trucidarit.’*

⁵⁰ Ibid, VII.15.19, ed. Heck and Wlosok, *Lactantius*, vol. 4, 700: *‘sublatuiri ex orbe imperium nomenque Romanum’ multo ante praefatus est quam illa Troiana gens conderetur.* Since the *Oracles of Hystaspes* are lost, is difficult to know what Lactantius takes from that source, and whether this is an accurate summary of its content; however, if the *Oracles of Hystaspes* were indeed polemical anti-Roman political prophecies written in the time of Mithridates the Great, it is not unlikely that Lactantius is accurately representing their content.

⁵¹ Ibid, VII.16.1, ed. Heck and Wlosok, *Lactantius*, vol. 4, 701: *in primis multiplicatur regnum et summa rerum potestas per plurimos dissipata et concisa minuetur. Tum discordiae civiles in perpetuum serentur nec ulla requies bellis exitiabilibus erit, donec reges decem partier existant, qui orbem terrae non ad regendum, sed ad consumendum partiantur.*

be taken into alliance by the rest and will be established chief of all.”⁵² Thus, Lactantius follows other Christian writers in reading the Little Horn from the Book of Daniel as a new ruler who will subject the ten kings, killing three and pacifying the other seven.

However, unlike Hippolytus, Lactantius does not identify this eleventh ruler with the Antichrist. Instead, “another king, born of an evil spirit, will arise from Syria, a subverter and destroyer of the human race.”⁵³ This Syrian king will destroy the previous evil king and then fulfill the functions of the Antichrist, calling himself God, branding his followers with a mark, and reign for forty-two months. “This is the one called Antichrist, but he will pretend he is Christ and will fight against the truth.”⁵⁴ Lactantius probably specified this separate, Syrian Antichrist, distinct from the Little Horn, in order to reconcile a prophecy in Micah 5:5–6, which suggests that the messiah will triumph in a war against the Assyrians.

Lactantius completes his discourse on the future with a scene that has no basis in scripture, but which he indicates he derived from the *Oracles of Hystaspes*. He contends that the few Christians who survive the persecutions of the Antichrist will flee to a mountain, where the armies of the Antichrist will surround them. “When they see that they are truly closed in and besieged on all sides, they will call out to God with a great voice and beg for heavenly aid, and God will hear them and send the great king from heaven, who will rescue and free them and destroy all the impious with sword and fire.”⁵⁵ Lactantius clarifies that this great king from heaven is Christ, though pagan readers of the *Oracles of Hystaspes* had failed to realize it. This scene in the *Oracles of Hystaspes* was thus a Persian prophecy confirming the second coming of Christian messiah.⁵⁶

Lactantius provides more specific details than the previous authors about what he believes will happen next. Christ and the resurrected saints will reign over the earth for the

⁵² Ibid, VII.16.3, ed. Heck and Wlosok, *Lactantius*, vol. 4, 701: *tum repente adversus eos hostis potentissimus ab extremis finibus plagae septentrionalis orietur, qui tribus ex eo numero deletis, qui tunc Asiam obtinebunt, adsumetur in societatem a ceteris ac princeps omnium constituetur.*

⁵³ Ibid, VII.17.2, ed. Heck and Wlosok, *Lactantius*, vol. 4, 704: *alter rex orietur e Syria malo spiritu genitus eversor et perditor generis humani.*

⁵⁴ Ibid, VII.19.6, ed. Heck and Wlosok, *Lactantius*, vol. 4, 709–710: *hic est autem qui appellatur Antichristus, sed se ipse Christum mentietur et contra verum dimicabit.* Elizabeth Depalma Digeser, “Persecution and the Art of Writing between the Lines: *De vita beata*, Lactantius, and the Great Persecution,” *Revue belge de philologie et d’histoire*, vol. 92 no. 1 (2014), 172–176, suggests that Lactantius’ division of the Antichrist’s role into two figures is evidence that he identified the two eschatological tyrants with two of the persecuting tetrarchs, Diocletian and Gelarius respectively. This is hardly convincing, and it remains more likely that Lactantius was drawing rather from the *Oracles of Hystaspes* (read in light of the books of Daniel and Revelation) for the idea of two evil kings.

⁵⁵ Lactantius, *Divine Institutes*, VII.17.11, ed. Heck and Wlosok, *Lactantius*, vol. 4, 705–706: *illi vero ubi se clausos undique atque obsessos viderit, exclamabunt ad deum voce magna et auxilium caeleste implorabunt, et exaudiet eos deus et mittet regem magnum de caelo, qui eos eripiat ac liberet omnesque impios ferro ignique disperdat.*

⁵⁶ According to Digeser, “Persecution and the Art of Writing between the Lines,” 176–181, “those readers, auditors and courtiers who knew how to read it,” the heavenly king described by *Divine Institutes* here actually meant Emperor Constantine, because Lactantius “identif[ied] Constantine as the heavenly king, indeed the incarnation of Christ.” This assertion is extremely unlikely, and is an example of the problematic historiographic tendency that reads Christian eschatology as imperia propaganda, an issue with which the next chapter of this dissertation deals.

millennium as the Danielic fifth kingdom. Theirs will be a very real, earthly kingdom, just like the one predicted by Victorinus. The Roman world order will simply be inverted, so that the Christian kingdom of Christ will rule as imperial masters: “Not all nations will be wiped out altogether, but some will be left for God’s victory, so that they may be triumphed over and subjected to perpetual slavery by the just.”⁵⁷ After one thousand years of this *pax Christiana*, Satan will be loosed and stir up warfare and fill the world with destruction. His final defeat by Christ will mark the destruction of the earth and the general resurrection, when the just will take the form of angels and enter heaven, and the evil are cast into hell.⁵⁸

Though the exact details differ, Lactantius, in the *Divine Institutes*, follows other Christian authors of the pre-Constantinian period in arguing that the violent destruction of the Roman Empire is a necessary prerequisite for the completion of God’s plan of salvation and for the dawning of the kingdom of the saints. It is notable that Lactantius’ Antichrist is not Roman, but a Syrian. Indeed, in another work, his *On the Death of the Persecutors*, Lactantius explicitly rejects the popular belief that Nero will return as the Antichrist.⁵⁹ Still, though Lactantius makes adaptations and changes on the basis of non-biblical apocalyptic texts, the primary elements of the common political-eschatological scenario remain constant in his account.

Conclusions: The Beginnings of the Political Eschatological Scenario

Before the reign of Constantine, Christians across the Roman Empire had developed similar political-eschatological scenarios based primarily on the Book of Daniel. From the Jewish tradition out of which the Christian church emerged, these writers took the idea that the Roman Empire was the fourth beast from the Book of Daniel, but embroidered this tradition with new elements derived from Christian writings, especially the Book of Revelation, and the growing theology about Christ’s evil counterpart, the Antichrist.

These accounts differed in some respects. Victorinus and Lactantius expected the fifth kingdom to manifest as an earthly Christian empire under Christ’s rule that would literally rule for one thousand years, while Hippolytus seems to have envisioned it more abstractly as an eternal heavenly kingdom. Victorinus envisioned the Antichrist as a risen Nero, while Hippolytus and Lactantius did not. Lactantius added further details to his version of the scenario, such as the besieging of the Christians by the Antichrist’s armies, based on non-Christian prophecies.

In spite of the variations, one theme above all was constant: all these authors expected the violent destruction of the Roman Empire. They believed that the empire would be divided between ten rival warlords, then conquered by the Antichrist, reconstituted, and used to persecute the righteous once again throughout the world. Such eschatological expectations did not require a further leap of imagination from them. They lived under a Roman state that remained hostile

⁵⁷ Ibid, VII.24.4; ed. Heck and Wlosok, *Lactantius*, vol. 4, 722: *gentes vero non extinguuntur omnino, sed quaedam relinquuntur in victoriam dei, ut triumphentur a iustis ac subiugentur perpetuae servituti.*

⁵⁸ Ibid, VII.26.5–6.

⁵⁹ Lactantius, *On the Deaths of the Persecutors*, chapter 2.

towards Christians and intermittently persecuted them. Both Hippolytus and Victorinus were ultimately killed in these persecutions. However, events of the fourth and fifth centuries would provide an interpretative challenge to this belief.

Part 2: Political Eschatology in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries

Emperor Constantine's embrace of Christianity, beginning in 312 and accelerating over the course of his reign, brought major changes and new possibilities for the Christian church. One might expect that in this environment, the such political-eschatological scenarios—which emphasized on the collapse of the Roman Empire, its hijacking by the Antichrist, and its final destruction to make way for the fifth kingdom—would decline into obscurity. Indeed, as discussed in the previous chapter, most scholars of eschatology have assumed that the anti-imperial, anti-Roman eschatology disappeared soon after Constantine took control over the Roman world (an assumption discussed in the next chapter of this dissertation). For now it is sufficient to show that this was not the case. The eschatological anticipation of the empire's collapsed remained a powerful current. In fact, it is possible in this period to talk of a common political-eschatological scenario, as the teachings of Hippolytus, Victorinus, and Lactantius were reconciled and became fundamental to the exegetical tradition of reading the Book of Daniel and Book of Revelation. This provided a basic narrative through which Christians interpreted what they believed would happen to the empire up to the end of time.

Now that the Roman state was no longer violently persecuting Christians, and indeed the emperor himself had become a Christian, what relevance did the common political-eschatological narrative hold? Why did it persist? Three reasons will emerge in this section. First, even after the end of persecution by pagans, the Roman state persecuted those Christians it deemed heretics. Moreover, the increasing role of the emperor in the formation of orthodoxy invited criticism from any Christians who disagreed with his rulings; the language of the common political-eschatological scenario provided a continued basis for challenging imperial assertions of orthodoxy by those who held conflicting theological views. Second, even for Christians who ended up on the winning side of the battles over orthodoxy, a received tradition about the meaning of the prophecies in the Book of Daniel and the Book of Revelation continued to influence them, for the writings of Hippolytus in Greek and Victorinus and Lactantius in Latin were foundational for the thought of the post-Constantinian church. Third, with the increasing influence of Neoplatonism on late antique Christianity, writers regarded Rome's prophesied fate less as the just destruction of a persecutory state at war with God, and more as the necessary yielding of the fallen, material kingdom that ruled the physical world to the perfected and eternal kingdom that ruled in heaven.

Thus, in the midst of the Christianization of the Roman Empire, the Christian expectations about the impending disintegration of the empire (and its eventual reunification under the Antichrist) adapted but persisted, becoming enshrined in the common political-eschatological scenario. Despite all the good that Christian emperors might accomplish in the

near term, the surviving late Roman Christian sources all held that the Roman Empire was the fourth kingdom of Daniel and that eventually the machinery of the Roman state would once again be turned against the faithful.

II.1: The Common Political-Eschatological Scenario in Fourth-Century *Kaiserkritik*

The Christianization of the Roman Empire was a fraught process, one in which Christians battled each other for influence over the emperor as they endeavored to make their own theological interpretation state-supported orthodoxy. In this context, the common Christian political-eschatological scenario remained relevant because not all Christians could be contented with the direction the Christianization of the Roman Empire had taken. This is exactly how the Christian political-eschatological scenario is used in the first mentions of it in the Christian Roman Empire, during the reign of Constantine's controversial son and successor, Constantius II (r. 337–361).

After gaining control over the entirety of his father's empire, Constantius II attempted to enforce a compromise between the Nicaeans who identified Christ with God and the Arians who believed them separate. For this, the Nicæan faction denounced Constantius as an "Arian" heretic himself.⁶⁰ Though he did not enforce his definition of orthodoxy with naked violence, Constantius resorted to exiling the leaders of the Nicæan party. The sources we possess from this period are written by these opponents of Constantius, the hardline Nicæans led by Athanasius of Alexandria (d. 373). The common political-eschatological scenario was loudly trumpeted in political discourse during the period that they remained out of power, before their triumph at the end of the fourth century.

In his *Letter to the Bishops of Egypt and Libya*, Athanasius suggested that the "Arians," led by the emperor, were fulfilling the prophecies of Revelation in their persecution of the orthodox.⁶¹ This idea became all the more explicit in Athanasius' *History of the Arians*, composed for his fellow Egyptian monks and clergy during one of his exiles imposed by Constantius II.⁶²

Here, Athanasius explicitly compared Emperor Constantius II to the Antichrist: "What of the Antichrist's actions has this man omitted? What would the Antichrist do, when he comes, beyond what that this man has done?"⁶³ In support of this assertion, Athanasius cited Daniel 7, associating Constantius with Daniel's Little Horn:

⁶⁰ Constantius supported a *homoiousian* position, which held that God the Father and Christ the Son were of similar essence, a compromise between the *homoousian* position that ultimately prevailed (holding that the Father and the Son were of the same essence), and the *heteroousian* position (that the Father and Son were of different essence) advocated by Arius and denounced at the Council of Nicæa.

⁶¹ Athanasius, *Letter to the Bishops of Egypt and Libya*, chapter 22.

⁶² Athanasius' *History of the Arians* has been edited by Hans-Georg Opitz, *Athanasius Werke*, vol. 2.1 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1935), 183–230. Here I have followed the translation in Richard Flower, *Imperial Invectives against Constantius II* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016), 39–114.

⁶³ Athanasius, *History of the Arians*, 76.1; ed. Opitz, *Athanasius Werke*, 225: Τί οὖν οὗτος τοῦ ἀντιχρίστου παραλέλοιπεν; ἢ τί πλεον ἐκεῖνος ἐλθὼν τούτου ποιήσειεν;

Does the vision of Daniel not identify the Antichrist in this way, saying that “he will make war with the saints and prevail against them,” and will surpass in evils all those before him; and “he shall subdue three kings and he shall speak words against the most High, and think to change times and laws?” Who has ever attempted to do these things except Constantius? For he is the kind of person that the Antichrist would be: he speaks words against the most High when he supports this impious heresy [Arianism] and he makes war against the saints by exiling bishops... After he deposed the three kings Vetrano, Magnentius and Gallus, he immediately gave support to impiety. And, like a giant, he has in his arrogance dared to rise up against the most High. He has thought to change laws by annulling the instruction that the Lord gave through the apostles, changing the customs of the church and himself devising a new form of appointments.⁶⁴

Several lines later Athanasius identified Constantius as the “abomination of desolation” from Daniel 11.⁶⁵

It is not entirely clear how much of this is sincere eschatology and how much is the rhetoric of invective. Athanasius was inconsistent, sometimes calling Constantius II the precursor to the Antichrist, suggesting that he merely resembles the Antichrist, and sometimes claiming that the emperor literally is the Antichrist.⁶⁶ It is possible that Athanasius identified Constantius simply as *an* antichrist, as 1 John 2:22 identified all deniers of Christ as an antichrist. However, by relating events from the reign of Constantius to concrete Christian expectations about *the* Antichrist—i.e. the Little Horn of Daniel—such as his defeat of three kings (the usurpers Vetrano and Magnentius, and his treacherous nephew Gallus), Athanasius seems to suggest that Constantius may be the literal Antichrist carrying out the predicted political-eschatological scenario. It is possible he intended for this ambiguity, raising real parallels between Constantius and the Antichrist without making a final ruling.

Athanasius was not alone in his accusations against Constantius II. The Gallic bishop Hilary of Poitiers (d. 367) expressed the same sentiments in his Latin denunciation *Against Constantius (In Constantium)*. The tract begins: “It is time for speaking up, since the time for silence has now passed. Let Christ be expected, because the Antichrist has prevailed.”⁶⁷ With

⁶⁴ Ibid, 74.2–5; ed. Opitz, *Athanasius Werke*, 224: οὐχ ἡ ὄρασις τοῦ Δανιὴλ οὕτως σημαίνει τὸν ἀντίχριστον ὅτι «ποιήσει πόλεμον μετὰ τῶν ἁγίων καὶ ἰσχύσει πρὸς αὐτοὺς » καὶ ὑπεροίσει ἐν κακοῖς πάντας τοὺς ἔμπροσθεν «καὶ τρεῖς βασιλεῖς ταπεινώσει καὶ λόγους πρὸς τὸν ὕψιστον λαλήσει καὶ ὑπονοήσει τοῦ ἀλλοιωῶσαι καιρὸν καὶ νόμον»; τίς οὖν ἄλλος πώποτε τοιαῦτα ἐπεχείρησε πράξαι ἢ μόνος Κωνσταντῖος; οὗτος γὰρ τοιοῦτος ἐστίν, οἷος ἂν ἐκεῖνος γένοιτο. λαλεῖ γὰρ λόγους πρὸς τὸν ὕψιστον προιστάμενος τῆς ἀσεβοῦς αἰρέσεως καὶ πρὸς τοὺς ἁγίους ποιεῖ πόλεμον ἐξορίζων τοὺς ἐπισκόπους...καὶ τρεῖς βασιλεῖς Βρετανίωνα καὶ Μαγνέντιον καὶ Γάλλον καθελὼν εὐθὺς προέστη τῆς ἀσεβείας. καὶ ὥς γίγας πρὸς τὸν ὕψιστον ἐτόλμησεν ἐπαρθῆναι τῇ ἀλαζονείᾳ. οὗτος ὑπενόησεν ἀλλοιωῶσαι νόμον παραλύνων τὴν μὲν τοῦ κυρίου διὰ τῶν ἀποστόλων διάταξιν, τὰ δὲ τῆς ἐκκλησίας ἀλλάττων ἔθῃ καὶ καινὸν αὐτὸς ἐπινοῶν τρόπον τῶν καταστάσεων.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 77.1.

⁶⁶ As the most recent translator of the *History of the Arians*, Flower, *Imperial Invectives Against Constantius II*, 115 n.2, summarizes: “Athanasius discusses resemblances between Constantius and the Antichrist, sometimes identifying the two, sometimes saying that the former is preparing the way for the latter.”

⁶⁷ Hilary, *Against Constantius*, 1; ed. André Rocher, *Hilaire de Poitiers: Contre Constance* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1987), 166: *tempus est loquendi, quia iam praeteriit tempus tacendi. Christus expectetur, quia obtinuit antichristus.*

this statement, Hilary launches into his indictment of Constantius as a heretic and tyrant. The emperor, he asserts, may not persecute with the violence of the pagan emperors, but that does not mean he is not a persecutor, for his milder touch and use of bribery to get his way was in fact proof of his greater insidiousness: “But now we are fighting against a beguiling persecutor, a flattering enemy, Constantius the Antichrist, who does not stab in the back, but rather rubs the belly.”⁶⁸ After laying out the crimes of Constantius, Hilary addresses the emperor directly: “If my account is a lie, Constantius, then you are a sheep; but if these are truly your actions, then you are the Antichrist.”⁶⁹

Hilary proceeds to reflect on the seeming excess of his invective: “But perhaps some will think me reckless, because I say that Constantius is the Antichrist.”⁷⁰ In response, Hilary defends himself by comparing Constantius II to Antiochus IV, who, as we have seen, was widely understood as the typological predecessor of the Antichrist due to his relationship with the prophecies in Daniel. As with Athanasius, it is unclear to what degree Hilary believed Constantius was the actual Antichrist or whether the emperor was a “precursor of the Antichrist.” Still, it is a testament to the continuing viability of anti-imperial, anti-Roman Christian eschatology scenario in an age when the persecutions of pagan emperors had come to an end.

Nonetheless, the common political-eschatological scenario did not simply persist for its usefulness for *Kaiserkritik*. By the end of the fourth century, the supporters of Nicaea had prevailed, and such eschatological imperial criticism is not to be found in the surviving sources.⁷¹ However, the eschatological scenario continued to be discussed and refined outside the genre of invective.

II.2: The Common Political-Eschatological Scenario in the Age of the Theodosians

In 379, Emperor Theodosius I came to power and enforced Nicaean orthodoxy on the Roman Empire. Despite the Roman defeat at the hands of the Goths in Adrianople (which caused the death of Emperor Valens and paved the way for the ascent of Theodosius) as well as continuing bouts of civil war, the Eastern half of the empire entered an age of relative prosperity and productive cooperation between the Christian church and the Roman state. This would continue into the reigns of Theodosius’ son Arcadius (r. 395–408) and grandson Theodosius II (r. 408–450). In the West, continuous instability and barbarian invasion culminated, in 410 under

⁶⁸ Hilary, *Against Constantius*, 5; ed. Rocher, 176: *at nunc pugnamus contra persecutorem fallentem, contra hostem blandientum, contra Constantius antichristum, qui non dorsa caedit, sed ventrem palpat.*

⁶⁹ Ibid, 11, ed. Rocher, 192: *Haec, Constanti, si ego mentior, ovis es, si vero tu peragis, antichristus es.*

⁷⁰ Ibid, 6, ed. Rocher, 178: *Sed temerarium me forte quisquam putabit, quia dicam Constantium antichristum esse.*

⁷¹ Philostorgus, whose fourth-century anti-Nicene *Church History* has been preserved in some form in an epitome by Photios in the ninth century, regards the reign of Theodosius as the beginning of the end of the world. Such views may have been widespread and developed more in line with the common political-eschatological scenario, but we know little besides what is in Philostorgus, since his is one of the precious few non-Nicene sources that survives in some form.

Theodosius I's younger son Honorius (r. 395–423), in the sack of Rome by the Goths under Alaric.

A look at the sources for political eschatology in the late fourth and early fifth century reveals the continuing appeal of the common political-eschatological scenario on both of these environments. Roman Christians in the East and the West continued to expect a violent breakup of Roman authority, followed by the reunification of the empire under the Antichrist, who would mobilize the resources of the Roman state for a last great persecution. In this way, the views espoused by Hippolytus of Rome in Greek and Victorinus of Pettau in Latin remained the basis of political eschatology in the later Greek and Latin church fathers. Indeed, these eschatological views appear to have been taught as a basic element of Christian doctrine.

In his catechetical lectures delivered to new members of the church, Cyril, bishop of Jerusalem from c. 350 to 386 AD, told the catechumens that there was no doubt regarding the identity of the fourth kingdom of Daniel: “The exegetes of the church teach that this is the Roman Empire.”⁷² He made clear that this was a received tradition from the “exegetes of the church,” which he was in turn handing down to a new generation of Christians. It is not clear if Cyril was familiar with Hippolytus or any of the other authors mentioned above. Nonetheless, as his own lecture demonstrates, it was not necessary to read a commentary on the Book of Daniel or Revelation to be exposed to the idea that the Roman Empire was the fourth kingdom of Daniel; it was a basic teaching that was communicated, at least in late fourth-century Jerusalem, to new members of the church.

Further discoursing on the ten horns and the Little Horn of Daniel 7, Cyril gave additional details from the political eschatological scenario: “There will arise together ten emperors of the Romans, in different places perhaps, yet all will be reigning at the same time; and after these an eleventh, the Antichrist, by evil practice of magic will take over Roman authority. He will reduce three of those who reigned before him, enlisting the other seven under himself.”⁷³ New members of the church were being taught, well over a generation after Constantine, probably during the reign of Theodosius I, that the evil fourth kingdom in the Book of Daniel was the Roman Empire and that they should expect the Antichrist in the form of a Roman emperor.

Sulpicius Severus (d. 430), a Roman aristocrat turned priest who wrote from Gaul, reports in his *Dialogues* that his monastic mentor, Martin of Tours, had taught that the Roman Empire was the fourth kingdom of Daniel, the feet of iron and clay in Daniel 2 represented the mixing of Romans and foreign peoples. These ideas closely follow what was expressed by

⁷² Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, XV.12; ed. Joseph Rupp, *Cyrrilli Hierosolymorum archiepiscopi opera quae supersunt omnia*, vol. 2 (Munich: E. Stahl, 1860), 170: ταύτην δὲ εἶναι τὴν Ῥωμαίων οἱ ἐκκλησιαστικοὶ παραδεδώκασιν ἐξηγηταί.

⁷³ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, XV.12; ed. Rupp, *Cyrrilli Hierosolymorum*, vol. 2, 168: δέκα μὲν ὁμοῦ Ῥωμαίων ἐγείρονται βασιλεῖς, ἐν διαφόροις μὲν ἴσως τόποις, κατὰ δὲ τὸν αὐτὸν βασιλεύοντες καιρόν. μετὰ δὲ τούτους ἐνδέκατος ὁ Ἀντίχριστος ἐκ τῆς μαγικῆς κακοτεχνίας τὴν Ῥωμαϊκὴν ἐξουσίαν ἀρπάσας. τρεῖς μὲν τῶν πρὸ αὐτοῦ βασιλευσάντων ταπεινώσει, τοὺς ἑπτὰ δὲ τοὺς ἐπιλοιπούς ὑφ' ἐαυτὸν ἔχων.

Hippolytus.⁷⁴ The account Sulpicius Severus attributes to Martin is idiosyncratic, but its roots in the thought of Hippolytus and Victorinus of Pettau are evident: Martin reportedly taught that at the end of time Nero will return and rule over the Western Roman Empire while the Antichrist will rule over the eastern half of the empire; eventually the Antichrist will kill Nero and take over all the world.⁷⁵ Martin added that the Antichrist had already been born: “He is now a child, when he comes of age will take over the empire.”⁷⁶ Martin of Tours’ lessons apparently continued to warn that the Antichrist must reign over the Roman Empire.

A more comprehensive guide to how Christians c. 400 conceived of the future of the Roman Empire and the end of the world is provided by the great scholar Jerome, who produced commentaries of both the Book of Revelation and the Book of Daniel. Notably, Jerome’s commentary on the Book of Revelation was a revision of a commentary written by Victorinus of Pettau, intended, according to Jerome, to cleanse that valuable commentary of certain heterodox elements. Jerome’s revisions to Victorinus’ commentary involved the removal of the Millenarian interpretations of the thousand years in the Book of Revelation, which Jerome in general found highly problematic (a concern addressed in the next section of this chapter), in favor of a more allegorical interpretation. However, Jerome did not change Victorinus’ assertions that Babylon, the beast, and the whore were all symbols for the Roman Empire and did not dispute the notion that the ten horns would be future rulers who will ruin the empire, and that the Antichrist himself would be (literally or figuratively) Nero restored to power over the empire.⁷⁷

Jerome reiterated these ideas in his commentary on the Book of Daniel.⁷⁸ Originally conceived around 399 as a one-book tract *On the Antichrist (de Antichristo)* focused on Daniel 11, Jerome subsequently added (perhaps c. 407) three more books to dispute Porphyry’s claim

⁷⁴ Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogues* 1.2.14, ed. Karl Halm, *Sulpicii Severi libri qui supersunt* (Vienna 1866) 197.

⁷⁵ Ibid.; *ipsum denique Neronem ab Antichristo esse perimendum, atque ita sub illius potestate universum orbem cunctasque gentes esse redigendas*. The Christian poet Commodian reflects a similar tradition, though the dating of his writings presents some problems. Scholars continue to debate whether he was writing in the third century or the fifth century, and whether he was writing from North Africa, Gaul, and Syria. Commodian, *Carmen de duobus populis* 933-935, ed. by Martin, *Studien und Beiträge Erklärung und Zeitbestimmung Commodians* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1913), 107: *nobis Nero factus antichristus, ille Judaeis* Whatever the case, according to Commodian, Nero will return and become emperor, reigning with two other emperors. The true Antichrist will arise in the Persian Empire from the tribe of Dan: “Nero is made antichrist for us, he for the Jews.” (ed. by Martin, *Studien und Beiträge*, 107: *nobis Nero factus antichristus, ille Judaeis*) Eventually the Eastern Antichrist will invade the Roman Empire and kill Nero.

⁷⁶ Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogues* 1.2.14, ed. Halm, *Sulpicii Severi*, 197: *iam in annis puerilibus constitutus, aetate legitima sumpturus imperium*.

⁷⁷ Gryson, *Victorini Poetovionensis*, 10–291, places an edition Jerome’s revised version beside his edition of Victorinus commentary; Haussleiter, *Victorini episcopi Petavionensis opera*, does the same. Dulaey, *Victorin de Poetovio*, provides an edition and translation of the introduction and last chapters in Jerome’s version (the portions that underwent substantial revisions) as an appendix to his edition of Victorinus.

⁷⁸ *S. Hieronymi Presbyteri Opera, Pars I, Opera Exegetica 5: Commentariorum in Daniele Libri III*, ed. Franciscus Glorie (Turnhout: Brepols, 1965). For an overview of Jerome’s commentary, his sources, and important themes, see Régis Courtray, “Der Danielkommentar des Hieronymus,” in *Die Geschichte der Daniel-Auslegung in Judentum, Christentum und Islam: Studien zur Kommentierung des Danielbuches in Literatur und Kunst*, ed. K. Bracht and D. S. du Toit (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2007), 123–150.

that the prophecies in the Book of Daniel were written during the Maccabean revolt.⁷⁹ Though he wrote in Latin, the multilingual Jerome drew on a number of Greek sources, including the writings of Hippolytus, and now lost tracts by Eusebius of Caesarea, Apollinarius of Laodicea, and Methodius of Olympus. Here, Jerome identifies the four kingdoms of Daniel 2 and 7 with the empires of Babylon, Persia, Macedonia, and Rome. By the early fifth century, Hippolytus' claim that the feet of iron and clay represented the coming destruction of the Roman Empire, divided among various nations, could only have seemed more likely, as Jerome expresses: "For just as at first there was nothing stronger or sturdier than the Roman Empire, likewise in the end times there is nothing more feeble, since in both civil wars and wars against foreign nations we require the assistance of barbarian tribes."⁸⁰

Arguing against Porphyry's historical assertion that the fourth beast is the Macedonian Empire, that the ten horns of the fourth beast represent Hellenistic rulers, and that the Little Horn was Antiochus IV, Jerome asserted that Daniel 7 is a prophecy of the future destruction of the Roman Empire. Importantly, he stressed that his interpretation is in agreement with the universal teaching of the church on political eschatology:

Therefore, we proclaim what all the commentators of the Church have taught: that at the end of the world, when the Roman Empire is destroyed, there will be ten kings who will partition the Roman world among themselves. And a little, eleventh king will rise up, he will overcome three of the ten kings—that is, the king of Egypt, the king of Africa, and the king of Ethiopia, as we shall describe more clearly in our later discussion—and after they have been slain, the seven other kings also will bow their necks to the victor.⁸¹

Thus, a common teaching held that the future would bring the collapse of Roman power and its division among ten kings or rival emperors.⁸² The eleventh king, the "Little Horn", will emerge victorious from this internecine warfare. Jerome is clear who this eleventh king will be: "For this is the man of sin, the Son of Perdition."⁸³

⁷⁹ Some manuscript copies contain *On the Antichrist* as book iv of Jerome's *Commentary on Daniel*, while in others it is copied in isolation; on the history of the Jerome's commentary, see Glorie, *Commentariorum in Danielelem*, 757–759. On a 407 date for the complete commentary, see Courtray, "Der Danielkommentar des Hieronymus," 123–124. Here I treat the commentary as a unified work, with *On the Antichrist* as the fourth book as Jerome seems to have intended it.

⁸⁰ Jerome, *Commentary on Daniel*, I.2: 31–35; ed. Glorie, *Commentariorum in Danielelem*, 794–795: *sicut enim in principio nihil Romano imperio fortius et durius fuit, ita et in fine rerum nihil imbecillius, quando et in bellis civilibus et adversum diversas nationes aliarum gentium barbararum indigemus auxilio.*

⁸¹ Jerome, *Commentary on Daniel*, II.7:8; ed. Glorie, *Commentariorum in Danielelem*, 844: *Ergo dicamus quod omnes scriptores ecclesiastici tradiderunt: in consummatione mundi, quando regnum destruendum est Romanorum, decem futuros reges qui orbem romanum inter se dividant, et undecimum surrecturum esse parvulum regem qui tres reges de decem regibus superaturus sit, id est Aegyptiorum regem et Africae et Aethiopiae sicut in consequentibus manifestius discimus, quibus interfectis etiam septem alii reges victori colla submittent.*

⁸² In Latin the ten kings and the Antichrist are referred to as "kings" (*reges*). However, by the fourth or fifth century "king" had lost much of its old, negative associations as "tyrant" or "petty ruler," and was used to refer to emperors; S. Fanning, "Emperors and Empires in Fifth-Century Gaul," in *Fifth-Century Gaul: A Crisis of Identity?* ed. John Drinkwater, Hugh Elton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 288–287, provides a list of such examples from the fourth to the eighth centuries.

⁸³ Ibid: *Est enim homo peccati, filius perditionis.*

Jerome solved many of the questions raised by the common political-eschatological scenario in the same way as Hippolytus—probably because he relied on Hippolytus. Jerome had to concede that many of the prophecies in the Book of Daniel were about the persecutions of the Jews by Antiochus IV. Nonetheless, since Jerome (unlike his interlocutor, Porphyry) believed Daniel was genuinely a prophet, this could not be a complete explanation. Too many of the prophecies remained unfulfilled. Thus, he followed Hippolytus and concluded that Antiochus IV was a typological precursor to the Antichrist: “Much of what is subsequently read and explained by us fits the person of Antiochus; he is to be regarded as a type of the Antichrist, and what was accomplished by him in part is to be completed by the Antichrist in whole. This is the way of holy scripture—it prefigures the reality of the future by typology.”⁸⁴ Like his forbearers, Jerome specified that the Antichrist would be a Jew (some manuscripts of the *Commentary*, but not all, add “of the tribe of Dan”).⁸⁵ He is the Little Horn because he will arise from a small nation (the Jews) and even among his people he will be at first despised.

Jerome emphasized the Jewish over the Roman character of the Antichrist, perhaps to soften the anti-Roman rhetoric found in Hippolytus and Victorinus. Though Jerome drew parallels between the Antichrist and emperors Nero and Julian, his description of the Antichrist’s coming rise to power portrays him more as the destroyer of the Roman Empire than its ruler.⁸⁶

By means of artifice and deceit he will obtain the government, and the arms of the fighting Roman people will be subdued and broken by him, and he will do this so that he might pretend to be the leader of the covenant, that is, the law and testament of God. And he will enter into the richest cities and will do what neither his fathers nor his fathers' fathers ever did, for none of the Jews except the Antichrist has ever ruled over the whole world.⁸⁷

As in Hippolytus, Jerome’s Antichrist appears like a twisted version of the Jewish messiah, fulfilling the visions of Daniel in a carnal sense by building a world empire on the wreckage of Rome’s. However, Jerome does depart from Hippolytus in suggesting that the Antichrist will have to use violence against the Roman state, and that he will break the Roman armies.

⁸⁴ Jerome, *Commentary on Daniel*, IV.11:21; ed. Glorie, *Commentariorum in Daniele*, 915: *cumque multa, quae postea lecturi et exposituri sumus, super Antiochi persona conveniat, typum eum volunt fuisse Antichristi, et quae in illo ex parte praecesserint, in Antichristo ex toto esse complenda, et hunc esse morem scripturae sanctae: ut futurorum veritatem praemittat in typis.*

⁸⁵ Ibid, ed. Glorie, *Commentariorum in Daniele*, 917, with apparatus.

⁸⁶ For the parallels between the Antichrist and Nero, see Ibid, IV.11:30; ed. Glorie, *Commentariorum in Daniele*, 920; for those with Julian, see Ibid, IV.11:36, ed. Glorie, *Commentariorum in Daniele*, 925. Jerome, in fact, believed that the Roman intervention led by Gaius Popilius Laenas that prevented Antiochus IV from conquering Egypt (in 168 BC) was a typological precursor to a future Roman intervention that would seek to arrest the power of the Antichrist. See Jay Braverman, *Jerome’s Commentary on Daniel* (Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1978), 115–118. Indeed, in the Vulgate, Jerome translates *Kittim* (כְּתִים) in Daniel 7:30, the “westerners” who intervene to prevent the king of the north from conquering Egypt, as “Romans” (*Romani*).

⁸⁷ Ibid, ed. Glorie, *Commentariorum in Daniele*, 917: *et per insidias et fraudulentiam obtineat principatum; et brachia pugnantis populi romani expugnentur ab eo et conterantur; et hoc faciet quia simulabit se esse ducem foederis, hoc est legis et testamenti Dei. Et ingreditur urbes ditissimas, et faciet quae non fecerunt patres eius et patres patrum illius—nullus enim Iudaeorum absque Antichristo in toto umquam orbe regnavit.*

Still, for Jerome, like Hippolytus, the Roman Empire cannot be completely destroyed by the Antichrist, for it is the fourth kingdom, and as such it must survive in some form up to the second coming, when the prophecies in Daniel pertaining to the stone that destroyed the statue and to the burning of the fourth beast will be fulfilled. Rather, the Antichrist's reestablished Roman Empire will conquer the world before being punished by God: "The judgment of God comes for the humbling of pride. For this reason, the Roman kingdom will be destroyed, because of that horn speaking loftily... Because of the blasphemy of the Antichrist, all the kingdoms, in one Roman Empire, will be destroyed simultaneously."⁸⁸ It will be succeeded, says Jerome, not by an earthly empire, but by the heavenly kingdom of saints, inaugurated by the triumphant *adventus* of the new ruler, the Son of God.⁸⁹

Thus, by the fifth century it appears that a general orthodoxy had emerged concerning the future fate of the empire. Cyril and Jerome indicated that the authorities of the church handed down this version of future events (οἱ ἐκκλησιαστικοὶ παραδεδώκασιν ἐξηγηταί; *omnes scriptores ecclesiastici tradiderunt*), and Cyril himself taught it to new Christians in his catechetical lectures. Sulpicius Severus attributes a similar teaching to his master, Martin of Tours.

If the common political-eschatological scenario was church teaching and could not be easily abandoned, it could be read in new ways. Indeed, that is exactly what occurred. To understand the changing relevance of the political-eschatological scenario, it is necessary to briefly explore how changing attitudes toward chiliasm in Christian eschatological thought influenced the political-eschatological scenario.

II.3: Clarifying the Fifth Kingdom: The Question of the Millennium

The third major reason for the continued vigor of the common political-eschatological narrative within the Christian Roman Empire was its new relevance in the face of the Christian rejection of chiliasm (or "millennialism"), the belief that Christ's thousand-year rule on earth will precede the end of the world. In this new intellectual environment, the common political-eschatological scenario functioned not as a subversive prophecy predicting the fall of an evil empire, but as proof of the inferiority and doomed nature of earthly power and the superiority of the heavenly kingdom.

In the late second century, Irenaeus of Lyons had argued forcefully that the fifth kingdom would manifest as the millennial kingdom of Christ on earth. He regarded chiliasm as orthodoxy, and those who denied it were venturing dangerously close to heresy.⁹⁰ Though chiliasm to Irenaeus was a central tenet of the faith, his defense of it indicates that a good number of

⁸⁸ Ibid, II.7:11–12; ed. Glorie, *Commentariorum in Daniele*, 847: *Dei iudicium venit propter humiliandam superbiam. Idcirco romanum delebitur regnum: quia cornu illud loquitur grandia...in uno romano imperio propter Antichristum blasphemantem omnia simul regna deleta sunt.*

⁸⁹ Ibid, II.7:12; ed. Glorie, *Commentariorum in Daniele*, 917: *Et nequaquam terrenum imperium erit sed sanctorum conversatio et adventus Filii Dei triumphantis.*

⁹⁰ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, V.34–35.

Christians in his time did not agree. Nonetheless, chiliasm was apparently a strong current in the early Christian movement. We have seen that the major pre-Constantinian writers on the common Christian political-eschatological scenario all endorsed it. The possible exception was Hippolytus, who nonetheless followed the historical timeline of the chiliasts that expected the kingdom of God's coming in the six thousandth year of creation (the so-called "world-week" model of history).

Opposition to chiliasm began to grow in the third century. Perhaps the most vigorous attack on chiliasm came from Origen (d. c. 253), who objected to Christians who read Revelation 20 and other scripture in a literal manner and thus took a worldly, carnal view of the holy "kingdom of the saints." A Christian disciple of Platonism, Origen rejected the notion that the perfect kingdom could exist within the material world. In his *On First Principles*, written around 229, Origen asserts that those who believed that there could be a worldly kingdom under Christ, with eating, drinking, and sex, or with Christians ruling over gentiles, were in error: "Such then are the views of those who do indeed believe in Christ, but, in understanding the divine Scriptures in a sort of Jewish sense, derive from them nothing worthy of divine promises."⁹¹ Origen argued instead for an allegorical interpretation of eschatological prophecy. Most later Christian theologians found that his extreme allegorical reading—such as his denial of any bodily resurrection—went too far. Still, Origen made an influential case that spread further as Platonic philosophy exerted increased influence upon Christianity in late antiquity. For Christian Platonists, the perfect final kingdom could only come from union with God outside the physical world.

This more metaphysical, Platonic interpretation of the fifth kingdom also complemented an eagerness by Christians to distinguish their faith from Judaism. Origen stressed that the literal interpretation of the messianic kingdom derived from a "Jewish" reading of scripture. This fit neatly with the notion of the "carnal Jew": Jews read scripture literally, which led them to miss its philosophical and allegorical meaning and focus on the body at the expense of the soul.⁹² If the Jews expected that the fifth kingdom would be a Jewish kingdom under the messiah in which Jews would rule over the earth, and Jewish-minded Christians advocated a Christianized version of this idea based on the millennial kingdom described in Revelation 20, true Christians, according to Origen and his intellectual successors, realized that the fifth kingdom, the kingdom of the saints, will not be of this earth.

Chiliasm appears to have already been in sharp decline by the time of Origen's death in the regions most influenced by Alexandrian Biblical exegesis with its symbolic and Platonic interpretation of scripture (the intellectual tradition from which Origen emerged). Eusebius of

⁹¹ Origen, *On First Principles*, II.11.2. The original Greek text of Origen's *On First Principles* is lost save for a few fragments, but has been preserved in the fourth-century Latin translation of Rufinus (another, more literal Latin translation by Jerome is mostly lost). I use here the edition of John Behr, *Origen: On First Principles*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2017), 270: *Haec ita sentiunt qui Christo quidem credunt, Iudaico autem quodam sensu scripturas divinas intellegentes, nihil ex his dignum divinis pollicitationibus praesumpserunt*. I have modified Behr's translation, on *ibid*, 271.

⁹² For these ideas of the "carnal Jew" in Origen, see Susanna Drake, *Slandering the Jew: Sexuality and Difference in Early Christian Texts* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 38–58.

Caesarea, in his *Church History*, records an incident in which Dionysius (d. 264), the bishop of Alexandria, learned that the bishop of the town of Arsinoë in the Fayuum oasis had been teaching his flock chiliasm. Eusebius noted with approval that Dionysius was so concerned that he traveled to Arsinoë and convened a meeting in which he publicly refuted the “Judaizing” heresy. According to Dionysius, who published his refutation as a book from which Eusebius later quoted, the fifth kingdom would not be the earthly realm predicted by the Jews and Jewish-minded Christians, full of “the delights of the belly and of sexual passion,” but rather it would be a heavenly, otherworldly state under Christ’s eternal rule after the end of time.⁹³

Such a view spread quickly in the fourth and fifth centuries. The leading theologians of this period appear to be uniform in their opposition to chiliasm. The idea of Christ and his saints ruling over the world as imperial masters, enslaving the nations, as predicted by Victorinus and Lactantius, simply lost its appeal, and seemed too similar to the earthly eschatological hopes of the Jews. Thus, in his commentary on Daniel, Jerome argued that, unlike the preceding kingdom, the fifth kingdom cannot exist on the earth, and he bluntly dismissed millennialism: “The four kingdoms, which we spoke about above, have been earthly, ‘For everything which is of the earth will return to earth.’ But in no way will the saints possess an earthly kingdom, only a heavenly one. Enough, then, with the fable of the Millennium!”⁹⁴ As mentioned above, his redaction of Victorinus’ *Commentary on Revelation* was aimed at removing the chiliastic ideas from what Jerome considered an otherwise useful interpretation of John’s apocalypse.

The longest hold that Chiliasm maintained was perhaps in Roman North Africa—“the ‘bible-belt’ of the Mediterranean,” as one scholar has put it.⁹⁵ Thus, Quintus Julius Hilarianus, who wrote from North Africa c. 397, is the last surviving author to express a belief in a millennial kingdom on earth—such beliefs would be voiced again only several centuries later. The survival of chiliasm in North Africa has been associated with the separatist Donatist church that flourished there, but the Donatist theologian Tyconius (d. c. 390) wrote an influential commentary on the Book of Revelation that argued against chiliasm.⁹⁶ His ideas were taken up Augustine of Hippo (who admitted to being a chiliast in his young years) and popularized his ideas in his *City of God*. While some scholars argue, largely from silence, that the repeated objections to chiliasm mean that it must have remained widespread among the masses, there is really no reason to doubt that by the fifth century chiliasm had been largely suppressed or abandoned.⁹⁷

⁹³ Eusebius, *History of the Church*, VII.25.3.

⁹⁴ Jerome, *Commentary on Daniel*, II.7.17, ed. Glorie, *Commentariorum in Daniele*, 848: *Quattuor regna, de quibus supra diximus, fuere terrena: ‘Omne enim quod de terra est revertetur in terram,’ sancti autem nequaquam habebunt terrenum regnum sed caeleste. Cessat ergo mille annorum fabula.*

⁹⁵ Paula Fredriksen, “Tyconius and Augustine on the Apocalypse,” in *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, ed. R. K. Emmerson and B. McGinn (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 21.

⁹⁶ A thorough critique of the notion that the Donatist Church—or the extremist circumcellions associated with the church—embraced chiliasm is found in Jesse A. Hoover, *The Donatist Church in an Apocalyptic Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

⁹⁷ The chief proponent of a steady and unremitting interest in chiliasm among the lower orders is Richard Landes, who makes his most detailed argument concerning the late antique period in “Lest the Millennium be Fulfilled: Apocalyptic Expectations and the Pattern of Western Chronography: 100–800 CE,” in *The Use and Abuse*

Chiliasm had never been an essential component of the common political-eschatological scenario. While Victorinus and Lactantius had interpreted the fifth kingdom as an earthly political entity under which the risen Christ and the saints would rule over gentiles and enjoy the fruits of an abundant earth, it was not necessary to view it in this manner. Hippolytus had preferred to view it as the kingdom of eternal life in heaven that the righteous would enjoy after the Last Judgment. This was the view that ultimately prevailed.⁹⁸ Thus, the anti-chiliasts maintained a belief in the destruction of the fourth kingdom and the arrival of the fifth kingdom after the second coming, though this fifth kingdom was no longer regarded as a literal, earthly kingdom.

Nonetheless, the rejection of chiliasm and the more metaphysical interpretation of the fifth kingdom did have some major implications for the understanding of the fourth kingdom in the common political-eschatological scenario. In the third century, Hippolytus offered a moral binary: the fourth kingdom, the Roman Empire, was pure evil, but the fifth kingdom would be entirely good. The fourth kingdom was pagan, while the fifth kingdom would see the rule of Christians under Christ. In Victorinus and Lactantius, the fifth kingdom was a literal Christian world empire. However, with the Christianization of the Roman Empire, the primary distinction between the fourth and fifth kingdoms could no longer be the latter's Christian character. The fourth kingdom had taken on the defining characteristic of the fifth kingdom.

In light of this, the increasingly spiritual interpretation of the fifth kingdom provided a new contrast with the fourth kingdom. Thus, if the fifth kingdom was otherworldly and spiritual, the fourth kingdom was its worldly, material opposite. The destruction of the Roman Empire and the coming of Christ's fifth kingdom need no longer be interpreted as the destruction of the evil, persecutory empire and the rise of the Christian kingdom on earth. Instead, it signifies the yielding of the kingdom of the transient, material world (the fourth kingdom) to the otherworldly kingdom of heavenly eternity (the fifth kingdom).

It is probably in this sense that we should understand the place of the common political-eschatological scenario in the writings of loyal Romans such as Sulpicius Severus (a Gallic aristocrat) and Jerome. For example, Jerome expressed real anxiety at the decline of the Western Roman Empire, even as he believed that this was part of the necessary progress of the eschatological scenario. Writing to a virgin, he encourage her chastity by assuring her that there was not much time left for the world: “‘The one restraining’ has been taken ‘from the midst,’ and yet we do not recognize the approach of the Antichrist.”⁹⁹ He cited as proof of the Antichrist's coming the collapse of the empire, but this was hardly a cause for celebration:

From the Pontic Sea to the Julian Alps, all that once was ours is no longer ours. And because of the penetration of the Danube frontier, [war] has been fought for thirty years in the heartlands of the Roman Empire. [Only] long exposure [to this] has dried our

of Eschatology in the Middle Ages, ed. W. Verbeke, D. Verhelst, and A. Welkenhuysen (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1988), 137–211.

⁹⁸ See Hippolytus, *Commentary on Daniel*, IV.14.3.

⁹⁹ Jerome, Epistle 123. 15 ; ed. Isidor Hilberg, *Sancti Eusebii Hieronymi Opera: Epistularum Pars III* (Vienna: Tempsky, 1918), 91: *Qui tenebat, de medio fit, et non intellegimus adpropinquare antichristum.*

tears... The poet [Lucan], passionately describing the power of the city of Rome, says: “What can satisfy, if Rome is not enough?” We may change his phrase and say: “What can be saved, if Rome perishes?”¹⁰⁰

As we have seen, even during the Great Persecution Lactantius had found the idea of the collapse of the Roman Empire, which he regarded as a force for evil in the world, frightening. For Christians of later generations like Jerome, for whom *Romanitas* and *Christianitas* were mutually compatible, the idea of the fall of the Roman Empire was positively traumatic.

Nonetheless, it had to happen, not just because it was decreed in prophecy, but also because it was the necessary precondition for humanity to be subsumed into God’s heavenly kingdom. The Christian Roman Empire had to give way to an empire not of the world. The transition from the earthly to the heavenly was by necessity painful. But there is no reason to believe that Christians like Jerome denied the truth of such prophecies because they involved the fall of the Roman Empire.

Conclusions: Old Traditions and New Relevance

Clearly the conversion of Constantine and the Christianization of the Roman Empire did not mean that the common Christian political-eschatological scenario had become outmoded. Indeed, its continued use in political invective (especially in the fourth century), its transmission in the teachings of generation after generation of important Christian intellectuals, and its new use in Neoplatonic critiques of chiliasm ensured that Christians continued to subscribe to this scenario even after the conversion of the Roman Empire. All of the surviving authors of the fourth and fifth centuries who discussed political eschatology regarded the Roman Empire as the fourth kingdom, and thus doomed to eventual destruction. They may not have basked in the idea as had Christians in the age of persecution, but they considered it a necessary part of God’s plan for history as revealed to humanity through divine prophecy.

Part 3: The Common Political-Eschatological Scenario and the Growing Divide Between East and West

It is often stated in modern scholarship that from the beginning of the fifth century, the eastern and western parts of the Roman Empire began to diverge on the issue of political eschatology. Further, it is often stated that in the Latin West the disintegration of the Western Roman Empire did not generate a turn to eschatology thanks to the influence of Augustine of Hippo. In contrast, in the East, where the empire and the church began to identify ever more

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 123.16 ; ed. Hillberg, *Epistularum Pars III*, 93 : *olim a mari Pontico usque ad Alpes Iulias non erant nostra, quae nostra sunt, et per annos triginta fracto Danubii limite in mediis Romani imperii regionibus pugnabatur. aruerant vetustate lacrimae...potentiam Romanae urbis ardens poeta describens ait : quid satis est, si Roma parum est ? quod nos alio mutemus elogio : quid saluum est, si Roma perit ?*

closely with one another, eschatology became more focused on the positive role of the empire in the end times.¹⁰¹

This narrative has some major problems, especially regarding the development of eschatology in the East. Nonetheless, the influence of Augustine did lead to a gradual shift away from the political-eschatological narrative in the Latin West; and indeed, the Greek East did continue to be interested in political eschatology. However, Eastern political eschatology did not become friendlier toward the empire, but still closely followed the narrative handed down from the days of Hippolytus. The dynamics of this divergence of political-eschatological views in the East and West would have important consequences.

III.1: Augustine of Hippo's Challenge to the Political-Eschatological Narrative

Augustine of Hippo (d. 430) is perhaps the most important Latin Christian writer of late antiquity, and his writings on eschatology have been regarded as the major turning point for political eschatology in the thought of Latin writers. Nonetheless, Augustine appears to have accepted the common political-eschatological scenario, or at least several major aspects of it. Paradoxically, however, he took the implications of the common political-eschatological narrative to their logical extreme, while at the same time he also rebuked the importance of the narrative.

In his *City of God*, Augustine developed the concept of a heavenly city, always in opposition to the earthly city (identified implicitly with the Roman Empire).¹⁰² While Augustine analogized the heavenly city at times as Jerusalem, and understood its present iteration as the Church, his concept of the heavenly city was also inherently eschatological. He held that Christians are truly citizens of the kingdom of heaven that will arrive with the second coming of Christ. The heavenly kingdom was superior to all earthly kingdoms and would arrive only after those kingdoms had passed away.

Thus, Augustine suggested that the Roman Empire was the fourth kingdom of Daniel (he lists the four kingdoms as the Assyrians, Persians, Macedonians, and Romans), and indeed, recommends Jerome's *Commentary on Daniel* to readers for a fuller understanding of Rome's place in Daniel's visions.¹⁰³ The fourth kingdom, the Roman Empire, was destined to be taken over by the Antichrist, and then replaced by the kingdom of heaven: "[Daniel] had seen four beasts, signifying four kingdoms, and the fourth kingdom taken over by a certain king, who is recognized as the Antichrist, and after this the eternal kingdom of the Son of Man, who is

¹⁰¹ See, for example, James Palmer, *The Apocalypse in the Early Middle Ages*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 42–54; Brett Whalen, *The Dominion of God: Christendom and the Apocalypse in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 15–18.

¹⁰² Here I cite from the critical edition of Bernhard Dombart and Alfons Kalb, *Sancti Aurelii Augustini Episcopi De civitate Dei Libri XXII*, 2 volumes (Leipzig: Teubner, 1928–1929).

¹⁰³ Augustine, *City of God*, XX.23; ed. Dombart and Kalb, *De civitate Dei*, vol. 2, 465: *Quam vero conuenienter id fecerint, qui nosse desiderant, legant presbyteri Hieronymi librum in Daniele satis erudite diligenterque conscriptum.*

understood to be Christ.”¹⁰⁴ Here, Augustine appears to accept the basics of the common political-eschatological scenario. Rome’s status as the fourth kingdom only confirmed Augustine’s thesis, for this meant that the Roman Empire would become the kingdom of the Antichrist and then would be destroyed and replaced by the heavenly kingdom. It would thus be entirely wrong for Christians to place their loyalty in the Roman Empire, but should instead place it in the coming fifth kingdom.

While Augustine recommended Jerome’s commentary, he went much further than Jerome in recognizing the implications of the common political-eschatological narrative for the allegiance Roman Christians owed to their empire. While Jerome could talk of weeping at the fate of Rome’s empire, Augustine came to regard such sentiments as misplaced. The conversion of the Roman emperors and much of the empire to Christianity was a good thing no doubt, but not of epochal importance, and perhaps only temporary. In the end, for Augustine, Rome was simply a kingdom of the fallen world, and Christians must face the inevitable destruction of this earthly kingdom with equanimity. Such were the implications of the Book of Daniel, the full force of which Jerome had shied away from.

Augustine’s ambivalence toward the Roman Empire is often credited to the influence exercised on his thought by the separatist, persecuted Donatist Church of his native North Africa.¹⁰⁵ However, there is no need to look for the influence of his Donatist opponents on these views when the common political-eschatological scenario had been teaching essentially this very point to Christians of all denominations for centuries.¹⁰⁶ It was obviously not the only source for Augustine’s complex doctrine of the two cities, but it did provide a basis for the eschatological aspect of his argument.

Augustine, nonetheless, made an important new argument: Christians did not need to wait for the second coming of Christ to count themselves as members of the fifth kingdom. According to Augustine, the first stage in the coming of the kingdom of heaven, and its reflection in the earthly realm, was the Church. This view was supported by Augustine’s ingenious reading of Revelation 20 (adapted from the Donatist theologian Tyconius): Christ’s first coming, not his future second, according to Augustine, marked the start of the Millennium, which was thus now underway. However, this was not the literal, carnal thousand-year kingdom imagined by the chiliasts, because Christ’s kingdom on the earth was the Church, and the resurrection of the saints had taken place in heaven, where they could intercede with Christ their king for those who

¹⁰⁴ Ibid; ed. Dombart and Kalb, *De civitate Dei*, vol. 2, 463: “*quattuor bestias significantes quattuor regna vidisset, ipsumque quartum a quodam rege superatum, qui Antichristus agnoscitur, et post haec aeternum regnum filii hominis, qui intellegitur Christus.*”

¹⁰⁵ See, for example, Robert Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St Augustine*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 55–56.

¹⁰⁶ This is acknowledged in Johannes van Oort, *Jerusalem and Babylon: A Study into Augustine’s City of God and the Sources of his Doctrine of the Two Cities* (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 290–300, surveys the influence of Victorinus, Lactantius, and Commodian, Tertullian, Cyprian, and Tyconius, and concludes: “There is every reason to believe that Augustine learned extensively from predecessors . . . The spirit found in their theology is the same one that occurs, for example, in that of the Roman presbyter Hippolytus (died 235). He fiercely denounced the idolatrous and persecuting *imperium*. Like his contemporary Tertullian, he saw it as the harlot of the *Apocalypse of John*.” Nonetheless, van Oort also credits the influence of the Donatists for a major part of Augustine’s view of Rome.

prayed to them. The millennium would last until the second coming, though it was not literally one thousand years long; the thousand years represented an unknown but very long period between the first and second comings of Christ.

In this way, Augustine separated the millennial kingdom—which he suggested reigned in the present through the Church on earth and the saints in heaven—from the eternal kingdom that would come in the future. It is often wrongly stated in modern scholarship that for this reason Augustine rejected eschatology. However, this fallacy arises from the misconception that, when arguing that the millennial kingdom had arrived, Augustine meant that the kingdom of heaven had already arrived, or that it did not need to come. Rather, in chapter 9 of Book 20 in the *City of God*, Augustine carefully distinguished between the millennial kingdom of the present, and the future, eternal kingdom in which heaven and earth would be merged. Unlike Victorinus and Lactantius, Augustine regarded the millennial kingdom and the fifth kingdom as two distinct entities. Still, as we have seen, Augustine believed that the future fifth kingdom would arrive after the unfolding of the eschatological scenario in which the Antichrist would take control of the fourth kingdom, persecute Christians, and then be killed by Christ. Augustine's position toward eschatology is thus not as radical as it is often portrayed.

Nonetheless, while accepting the broad strokes of the eschatological scenario, Augustine expressed skepticism about the specificity of the common political-eschatological narrative outlined by other writers. He warned that the prophecies in Daniel and Revelation are obscure, and that people who confidently claimed to know their exact meaning risked either making false predictions that would discredit all Christians, or worse, might cause future Christians to overlook the Antichrist even when he was under their noses. Thus, Augustine takes aim at some of what he considers the more ridiculous claims, such as the belief that Nero would return from the dead to rule as the Antichrist. This was simple absurdity. But Augustine was also troubled by the interpretations of more learned exegetes. Augustine accepted the possibility that the Roman Empire is the *katechon* of 2 Thessalonians 2:6–7, but added that no one could say for sure, concluding his discussion of the passage as follows: “I openly confess that I do not understand what [Paul] is saying.”¹⁰⁷ The meaning of the *katechon* was simply too obscure to be guessed in advance.

Likewise, though Augustine endorsed Jerome's writings on the Book of Daniel, he added the caveat that Jerome was too literal in claiming that there would be ten kings who would divide up the Roman Empire in the time of the Antichrist. “[The Antichrist] may come unexpectedly while there are not that number of kings in the Roman world.”¹⁰⁸ The ten kings may not literally rule simultaneously, Augustine suggested, or, since scripture sometimes uses numbers figuratively (such as the thousand years of the millennium signifying a long time), there may be

¹⁰⁷ Augustine, *City of God*, XX.19; ed. Dombart and Kalb, *De civitate Dei*, vol. 2, 450: *Ego prorsus quid dixerit me fateor ignorare.*

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., XX.23; ed. Dombart and Kalb, *De civitate Dei*, vol. 2, 465: *atque ita ille inopinatus adveniat, non existentibus tot regibus in orbe Romano.*

several rival kings but not precisely ten.¹⁰⁹ Reading the ten horns or any other details too literally risked remaining off guard and thus making oneself vulnerable to exactly the sort of deception that the Antichrist would use to lead Christians astray. According to Augustine, Christians should not venture to guess how or when the end of the world would take place, but simply have faith that it would happen somehow someday.

III.2: Political Eschatology in the Time of the Barbarian Kings (c. 430–565)

Augustine's apprehension toward political eschatology would prove influential, but its impact would not be immediately felt in the thought world of Latin late antiquity. Augustine died on the eve of the Vandal conquest of Africa, and in the years following his death it must have seemed like the iron fourth kingdom had truly become the kingdom of iron mixed with clay. Barbarian peoples, even if they aspired after *Romanitas*, had begun to carve up the empire into separate realms. Moreover, though most of these barbarians were Christian, they were largely adherents of the Arian position opposed to the Council of Nicaea. Where the new peoples conquered and settled (the Vandals in Africa, the Visigoths in Gaul and Spain, the Ostrogoths in Italy), they set up or patronized Arian churches and clergy, and sometimes enacted what Nicene Christians interpreted (reasonably or unreasonably) as persecution. In light of these developments, the common political-eschatological narrative remained a useful explanatory system for making sense of history as it unfolded. Just as in the time of Constantius II, the common political-eschatological scenario could also be deployed in order to criticize the new rulers.

Perhaps the most important writer to address the expectations for the end times after Augustine was his friend and correspondent Quodvultdeus (d. c. 450), who later became bishop of Carthage until he was exiled after the Vandal conquest and lived out the rest of his life in Italy.¹¹⁰ Quodvultdeus, as several scholars have noted, did not share Augustine's general

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. Moreover, Augustine notes that the expectation of the ten kings is problematic because it is highly unusual to find ten people ruling simultaneously in the Roman world.

¹¹⁰ Many of the texts now attributed to Quodvultdeus were believed in the middle ages to be the work of St. Augustine or others. The idea of Quodvultdeus as a literary figure and the author of the works now attributed to him emerged only in the early twentieth century when Germain Morin, in "*Pour une future édition des opuscules de saint Quodvultdeus, évêque de carthage au Ve siècle*," *Revue Benedictine*, vol. 31 (1914), 156–162, argued that twelve homilies attributed to Augustine were actually the work of a slightly later author, and based on the common style, themes, and influence from Augustine that they must have been written by a single author, whom he identified as Quodvultdeus. He then argued several other surviving works should be attributed to Quodvultdeus, including the *Liber promissionum* (the Book of Promises), which had up to then been attributed to Prosper of Aquitaine. Morin pieced together details of the life of Quodvultdeus from various references. Quodvultdeus was first mentioned by Augustine around 427, in his *Epistles* 222–224 (CSEL 57.446–454), referring to him as "Beloved Son and Fellow Deacon," in response to a request from Quodvultdeus for a Latin book on heresies to equal the Greek Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis. The result was Augustine's *De haeresibus ad Quodvultdeum*, ed. Migne, PL, 42.21–50. Many decades later, Victor of Vita, in his *Historia persecutionis africanae provinciae*, 1.15, in CSEL 7:8 that the Vandal king Gaiseric exiled the bishop of Carthage, Quodvultdeus, and many other members of the clergy to Naples. Manlio Simonetti, "*Studi sulla letteratura cristiana d'Africa in età vandalica*," *Rencidonti del R. Istituto Lombardo de Scienze e Lettere*, vol. 83 (1950), 407–424; idem, *La Produzione letteraria Latina fra Romani e barbari (sec. V–VIII)* (Rome: Augustinianum, 1986), 35–39, however, has asserted that there is no reason to assume

cautiousness about eschatological predictions.¹¹¹ Nonetheless, Quodvultdeus was not breaking new ground but hewed closely to the common political-eschatological narrative.

Quodvultdeus' eschatological views are found in his *Book of God's Promises and Predictions* (*Liber promissionum et praedictorum Dei*), composed from exile. It formed a mosaic of biblical citations, upon which he provided a commentary explaining each passage as a divine promise or prediction and describing how it was fulfilled, usually in Christ or the Church.¹¹² Here, addressing the visions in the Book of Daniel of the four kingdoms, he asserted that they had been fulfilled in the four kingdoms of the world. The African bishop accepted an idiosyncratic interpretation of the kingdoms of Daniel (as we shall see, shared by his contemporary and fellow student of Augustine, Paulus Orosius), holding that they are the Babylonian, Macedonian, Punic (Carthaginian), and Roman.¹¹³ However, in all other respects Quodvultdeus followed closely the interpretations of his predecessors such as Jerome. Christ was the stone that smashed the statue from the dream of Nebuchadnezzar, and so with his second coming the fourth kingdom would be destroyed. "Indeed, with all kingdoms void, the kingdom of Christ the Lord will arise, which 'will not be relinquished to another people' since it will last for eternity."¹¹⁴

Two additional books in the *Book of Promises*, which act as appendices of sorts, titled *Dimidium temporis in signis antichristi* and *De gloria regnoque sanctorum*, considered prophecies from scripture that remained unfulfilled and which Quodvultdeus believed would come to pass in the time of the Antichrist and the reign of God's kingdom, respectively. In the former, Quodvultdeus discussed the fate of the "fourth beast"—he never explicitly named it as

that the Quodvultdeus who wrote to Augustine was the same man as the future bishop of Carthage, and further that the works that Morin attributed to Quodvultdeus are inconsistent in style and theology, and likely the work of multiple authors. Nonetheless, Morin's views have largely prevailed in scholarship. In 1976 a critical edition of the works of the Quodvultdeus corpus was published as part of the *Corpus Christianorum series: Opera Quodvultdeo Carthaginiensi episcopo tributa*, ed. René Braun, (Turnholt: Brepols, 1976); on *ibid*, xl-cvi, Braun renews the argument for the attribution of these works to Quodvultdeus.

¹¹¹ For Quodvultdeus breaking from Augustine's eschatological caution, see Bernard McGinn, *Visions of the End: Apocalyptic Traditions in the Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 51–55; Brian Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church*, 152–154; Palmer, *The Apocalypse in the Early Middle Ages*, 37–39; Daniel Van Slyke, "Is the End of Empire the End of the World? Exegetical Traditions," in *Theology and Sacred Scripture*, ed. Carol Dempsey and William Loewe (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002), 85–102.

¹¹² Quodvultdeus' *Book of Promises* had been edited by René Braun, *Opera Quodvultdeo Carthaginiensi episcopo tributa* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1976) 1–223. The *Book of Promises* was long attributed to Prosper of Aquitaine, but has now been widely accepted as a work of Quodvultdeus (see previous note). Even if Prosper or some other fifth century author were responsible for the *Book of Promises*, it would not substantially alter the arguments made here. The author of the *Book of Promises* mentions that he was writing under Valentinian III, and that Leo was the Pope. Since Leo's pontificate began in 440, and Valentinian III was assassinated in 455, the work can be dated to 440–455; see Daniel Van Slyke, *Quodvultdeus of Carthage: The Apocalyptic Theology of a Roman African in Exile* (Strathfield: St. Pauls, 2003), 37–41.

¹¹³ Quodvultdeus, *Book of Promises*, II.34 (74), ed. Braun, *Opera Quodvultdeo*, 140. See also Van Slyke, *Quodvultdeus of Carthage*, 212–215; Hervé Inglebert, "Un exemple historiographique au V^e siècle: La conception de l'histoire chez Quodvultdeus," 314–315.

¹¹⁴ Quodvultdeus, *Book of Promises*, Book II, 34.74, ed. Braun, *Opera Quodvultdeo*, 140: *Vacuatis enim omnibus regnis, regnum Christi domini exsurget quod nulli alteri populo relinquetur quoniam permanebit in aeternum.*

the Roman Empire—which in the future would persecute the saints, fulfilling the role of Babylon and the whore in Revelation.¹¹⁵ Indeed, persecution is a recurring theme in Quodvultdeus' comments on the common political-eschatological narrative.

He affirmed that the fourth beast is the *katechon*, and did not doubt that ten future kings would divide it up and thus enable the rise of the Antichrist.¹¹⁶ Quodvultdeus added a timely addition to this traditional interpretation by asserting that the ten kings would be Arians; that is, of the same heretical creed as the Vandals and other barbarian tribes that were dividing up the Western Roman Empire in the fifth century. Quodvultdeus may have seen the Vandal conquest of his native Africa, which ended his episcopacy in Carthage, as the beginning of the division of the Roman Empire among the ten horns, and yet he was clear that he expected the rise of the Antichrist in the relatively distant future, beyond his own lifetime.¹¹⁷

In piecing together the identity of the final enemy from Biblical prophecies, Quodvultdeus followed a long tradition in envisioning the Antichrist as a Jewish Roman emperor. He followed Victorinus in relating the Antichrist to the emperor Nero, though he was less literal: the Antichrist may take the form of Nero, he said, or else would share the characteristics of Nero. At the same time the Antichrist would be a Jew from the tribe of Dan.¹¹⁸ All of this is perfectly in line with the eschatological expectations that had prevailed for the previous two centuries.

Still, some were willing to ascribe to the Vandals a larger role in the eschatological drama. Hydatius (d. c. 469), whose chronicle is a vital source on his native Gallaecia and the broader Iberian Peninsula during the fifth century, seemed to believe he was living in the last days and witnessing the final collapse of earthly authority as the Germanic barbarians carved up the Western Empire. He reinterpreted the rival kings of the north and the kings of the south in Daniel 11 so that they would no longer be the Hellenistic Seleucid and Ptolemaic monarchs, but instead the rulers of the Germanic barbarians and the Roman emperors. Thus, when writing on the marriage of Galla Placidia, daughter of Emperor Theodosius I, to the Visigothic king Athaulf, he commented: “By this event it is thought that the prophecy of Daniel was fulfilled, according to which the daughter of the king of the south was to be united with the king of the north, but no offspring of his by her was to survive.”¹¹⁹ Significantly, the evil king of Daniel 11

¹¹⁵ Quodvultdeus, *Dimidium temporis*, 9.17, ed. Braun, *Opera Quodvultdeo*, 202, makes this explicit: “Indeed, it is necessary to note that all these things are going to come about after the beast, that is, after the kingdom is removed on which the woman sits ‘drunk with the blood of the saints’” (*Notandum sane post bestiam haec omnia esse ventura, id est sublato regno in quo mulier sedet ebria sanctorum sanguine*). See also Van Slyke, *Quodvultdeus of Carthage*, 116: “Quodvultdeus understands the whore or Babylon the great to be the Roman empire.”

¹¹⁶ Quodvultdeus, *Dimidium temporis*, 7.14, ed. Braun, *Opera Quodvultdeo*, 200; see Van Slyke, *Quodvultdeus of Carthage*, 116–118.

¹¹⁷ Quodvultdeus, *Dimidium temporis*, 12.21, ed. Braun, *Opera Quodvultdeo*, 206, makes clear that he wrote his book in order that “they who will be after us might know that the Antichrist is not Christ” (*intellegant qui post nos futuri sunt Antichristum non esse Christum*). Thus his very project is predicated on his belief that the end of time would not come in his own lifetime or during that of his contemporary readers.

¹¹⁸ Quodvultdeus, *Dimidium temporis*, 9.17, ed. Braun, *Opera Quodvultdeo*, 202.

¹¹⁹ Hydatius, *Chronicle*, 49; ed. and trans. R. W. Burgess, *The 'Chronicle' of Hydatius and the 'Consularia Constantinopolitana': Two Contemporary Accounts of the Final Years of the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 84–85: *in quo profetia Danihelis putatur inpleta, ut ait, filiam regis austri sociandam regi aquilonis,*

(Antiochus IV or the Antichrist) was from among the kings of the north, who in Hydatius' formulation are the barbarian kings. Hydatius seems to follow the implications of this when reporting on the Vandal capture of Carthage: "With overweening impiety King Geiseric (or Genseric) drove the bishop and clergy of Carthage from that city and, as was prophesied by Daniel, corrupted the ministries of the holy places and handed over the orthodox churches to the Arians."¹²⁰ Thus, Hydatius suggests that Geiseric was fulfilling the role of persecutor from Daniel 11, the typological successor of Antiochus IV, whom most exegetes understood as the Antichrist.

Still, it is not entirely clear that Hydatius literally viewed Geiseric as the Antichrist. It is quite possible that he only sought to emphasize the enormity of Geiseric's crimes against the church with reference to scriptural prophecy. In other words, Hydatius displays the same ambiguity as the one found in the invectives of Athanasius of Alexandria and Hilary of Tours against Emperor Constantius II.

However, there is some evidence for a belief among Nicene Christians that the Vandal king was perhaps literally the Antichrist. One copy of Victorinus' commentary on the Revelation contains an interpolation among Victorinus' list of possible interpretations of the Antichrist's number 666: the interpolated passage notes that the name ΓΕΝΣΕΡΙΚΟΣ, the Vandal king's name transliterated into Greek, also adds up to 666.¹²¹ Another fifth-century work from North Africa, the Donatist *Book of Genealogy* (a guide to the generations of the Old Testament) concluded with a discussion of the Antichrist. One of its existing recensions repeated these assertions and attributed them to Victorinus, adding: "For he [the Antichrist] will come with a changed name and will assume for himself two names; Antemus in Greek and Gensericus in Gothic, so that, no doubt, he might seduce many races."¹²² Thus, there seems to have been a tradition that the Antichrist could somehow be both Roman emperor and Vandal king (just as many believed he would be both a Roman emperor and a Jew).

The very idea of a barbarian Antichrist was new. It was clearly the result of Nicene Christians reckoning with a new persecution under a state that was no longer Roman. Such eschatology could function to encourage Nicene opposition to the political and theological authority of Arian rulers. Given an opportunity to develop further, this may have led to new directions in political eschatological thought, similar to the impact of the later Arab conquests on Christian apocalyptic thought. However, no such development took place. In 534 North Africa

nullo tamen eius ex ea semine subsistente.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 110, ed. and trans. by Burgess, *The 'Chronicle' of Hydatius*, 94-95: *Gaiseric rex elatus impie episcopum clerumque Carthaginis depellit ex ea et iuxta prophetiam Danihelis demutatis ministeriis sanctorum ecclesias Catholicas tradidit Arrianis.*

¹²¹ Haussleiter, *Victorini Episcopi Petavionensis*, 125–127; summarized in Thomas Kitchen, "Apocalyptic Perceptions of the Roman Empire in the Fifth Century A.D." in *Abendländische Apokalypik: Kompendium zur Genealogie der Endzeit*, ed. C. Feik, L. Schlöndorff, V. Wieser, C. Zolles, and M. Zolles (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), 654.

¹²² "Liber genealogus," in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Auctores Antiquissimi*, vol. 9: *Chronica minora*, ed. Theodore Mommsen (Berlin: Weidmann, 1894), 194: *in mutato enim nomine veniet et duo sibi nomina inponet Antemus Graece et Gensericus Gotice, scilicet ut multas gentes seducat.* See Kitchen, "Apocalyptic Perceptions of the Roman Empire in the Fifth Century," 653–654.

was reconquered by the armies of Emperor Justinian. After more bitter fighting, the Ostigothic kingdom in Italy was slowly conquered, too. Latin writers never quite abandoned the notion that the Antichrist would rule the world, and now once again there were no real alternatives for such a ruler other than the title of Roman emperor.

III.3: Creeping Augustinianism: The Decline of Political Eschatology in the West

From the sixth century onward, the common political-eschatological scenario largely disappeared from Latin literature. The reason for this is probably related to the growing popularity of Augustine's thought. The caution he urged in the *City of God* seems to have made an impression. Perhaps the continued vitality of the Roman Empire under Justinian also discredited any expectations of the impending downfall of the empire, thus proving Augustine's caution about reading current events in light of apocalyptic prophecies well founded. Further, it is possible that the quiet passing of the eschatologically charged year 500 had an effect, especially if any chiliasts were still holding out in that last bastion of North Africa. On the other hand, a backlash toward chiliasm in the West probably proved more decisive: if Augustine's solution to the millennium in Revelation 20 (borrowed from Tyconius) was to call it allegory, did that not mean all of Revelation could be read as allegory?

A series of new commentaries on the Book of Revelation in Latin were produced in the sixth century and took the allegorizing tendencies of Augustine and Tyconius to their logical end. They read the Book of Revelation not as prophecy about the future of the Roman Empire, but as a non-linear series of images about the spiritual battle within the church against heretics and other corrupters.¹²³ Thus, the passages about the beasts and Babylon that had for so long been used to support the common political-eschatological narrative were instead read as allegories: the beasts as the corrupting influence that earthly rulers had upon the church, and Babylon as a symbol of confusion within the church (a claim that found support in the similarity of its name to the Hebrew verb בלבל, "to confuse"). In this way, the common political-eschatological narrative became less important, at least in relation to the Book of Revelation.

These tendencies are evident in the *Commentary on Revelation* by the great Gallic preacher and ascetic, Caesarius of Arles (d. 542).¹²⁴ Here, Caesarius adopted from Augustine the notion that numbers and images in prophecies should not be understood literally, but rather in more general, symbolic terms. Thus, the beasts of Revelation no longer represented Rome in a literal sense, but the power of earthly rulers in general: "The heads are kings, and the horns are in fact kingdoms, for in the seven heads [John] speaks of all kings, and in the ten horns he speaks of

¹²³ See E. Ann Matter, "The Apocalypse in Early Medieval Exegesis," in *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, ed. R. K. Emmerson and B. McGinn (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 38–50.

¹²⁴ The commentary on Revelation by Caesarius of Arles was long attributed to Augustine. Just as he had established Quodvultdeus as author of several works attributed to Augustine, Germain Morin established Caesarius' authorship of the Revelation commentary and edited it in *Sancti Caesarii Arelatensis Opera*, vol. 2 (Maretioli: Desclée, 1942).

all the kingdoms of the world.”¹²⁵ There is thus no mention of ten kings dividing up the Roman world or of the relevance of this for the rise of the Antichrist. Following Augustine, Caesarius eschewed any ability to make predictions about what would happen before the second coming.

Likewise, Caesarius ignored the common association of the whore of Babylon or Babylon itself with Rome, preferring a more allegorical interpretation. The beasts in Revelation 13 and 17 represent heretics who assail the church, and the whore represents hypocrites within the church. The destruction of Babylon will not be the literal destruction of Rome or any other city, Caesarius asserted. How could any one city contain every single demon and unclean spirit, and how could all these evils be removed from the earth in the ruin of a single city? “Whenever you hear the name ‘Babylon,’ beloved brothers, do not comprehend a city made of stone. For ‘Babylon,’ as many have said, translates to ‘confusion.’ But know that the name of this [city] signifies proud men, thieves, the luxurious, and the impious, carrying on in their evil.”¹²⁶ Thus for Caesarius, the destruction of Babylon does not represent a political event in the end times, but the removal of heresy, weakness, and evildoers from the church.

Another commentary written around 540 by Primasius of Hadrumetum (d. 565) is also strongly influenced by Augustine, but does not go as far as Caesarius in his allegorical reading of Revelation. Little is known about Primasius except that he attended the Fifth Ecumenical Council called by Justinian in Constantinople in 553, and that he became a bishop on his return to Africa—perhaps this familiarity with Roman Empire inspired him to temper the allegorical reading of Revelation with political eschatology. Primasius could still recognize that the seven-headed beast and Babylon were intended to invoke the image of Rome; nonetheless, he still claimed that this was allegory because Rome represented earthly power in general.¹²⁷ He maintained a belief in the ten kings who would divide earthly power, represented by the ten horns of the beast, though he did not dwell on the exact course of eschatological events.¹²⁸ Thus, even though Primasius included this vestige of the common political-eschatological narrative, his commentary primarily focused on the meaning of Revelation for the church.

A similar approach to the common political-eschatological scenario is found in the writings of Pope Gregory I “the Great” (r. 590–604). Gregory appears to have been convinced that the events of the last times were unfolding in his own time: “The world no longer foretells

¹²⁵ Caesarius of Arles, *Commentary on Revelation*, ix; ed. Morin, *Sancti Caesarii*, vol. 2, 242: *Capita reges sunt, cornua vero regna: in septem enim capitibus omnes reges, in decem cornibus omnia regna mundi dicit.*

¹²⁶ Ibid, xvi, ed. Morin, *Sancti Caesarii*, vol. 2, 260: *Quotiens Babyloniam nominari auditis, fratres carissimi, nolite civitatem de lapidibus factam intellegere, quia Baylonia confusio interpretatur, sicut saepe dictum est: sed homines superbos, raptore, luxuriosos et impios, in malis suis perseverantes.*

¹²⁷ Primasius of Hadrumetum, *Commentary on Revelation*, ed. A. W. Adams, *Primasius Episcopus Hadrumetinus: Commentarius in Apocalypsin* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1985), 238: *Propterea autem septem capita septem montes per sapientiae sensum monet consequentur intellegi, ut Romam quae super septem montes praesidet significans quae omni quondam orbi monarchiae praefuit dominatu, ad istorum regnum similitudinem adduxisset, et in Romae nomine totius terreni regni potentiam figuraret.*

¹²⁸ Primasius of Hadrumetum, *Commentary on Revelation*, ed. A. W. Adams, *Primasius Episcopus Hadrumetinus: Commentarius in Apocalypsin* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1985), 238: *Persecutione novissima properante, decem reges futuros sancti quoque Danihelis prophetia testatur.*

its coming end, but shows it forth,” he wrote in 593.¹²⁹ This was a conviction he repeated “in several different registers,” in letters to the empress in Constantinople, to the barbarian king in Britain, to aristocratic ladies, to a governor of Sicily, and in sermons delivered in Rome.¹³⁰ Nonetheless, when Gregory talked about eschatology, he mentioned the Roman Empire little, and instead concerned himself with the fate of the church.

Such sentiments are found in Gregory’s monumental, 35 book commentary, *Morals in Job* (*Moralia in Iob*). In the trials that afflicted Job, Gregory read an allegory for the great suffering that the Church must suffer before the coming of the kingdom of heaven, including the upheavals of the end time.¹³¹ In this context, he spoke much of the coming persecution by the Antichrist and Satan, supplementing Job with references from Daniel and Revelation. Gregory saw scripture as possessing simultaneous literal and allegorical meaning, and thus the Antichrist—who, he suggested, is allegorized as the beast Behemoth in Job—is at different times a collective body of evil within the church and also the literal evil ruler who will come at the end of time.

Like Primasius, Gregory evidently knew the common political-eschatological scenario and made allusions to it, especially in his references to the visions of Daniel. He spoke of the Antichrist as the typological successor of Antiochus IV. He mentioned that the ten horns on the beast in Daniel 7 represent kingdoms, and the three uprooted by the little horn are those that the Antichrist would conquer in an eschatological war.¹³² However, Gregory paid much more attention to an allegorical reading of the visions. The Antichrist is the little horn, the eleventh horn, because eleven is symbolic of imperfection.¹³³ The Antichrist will be a liar, a corrupter, a heretic, a persecutor, and a murderer, but Gregory avoided any specifics about the circumstances of the Antichrist’s rise or rule. He mentioned several times that the Antichrist would be an earthly ruler, but said no more on the subject.¹³⁴ Gregory reported that some say the Antichrist would be of the tribe of Dan, but rendered no verdict of his own.¹³⁵ These details do not seem to be particularly important to him.

Thus, Gregory remained mostly unconcerned with political eschatology. A devotee of Augustine, Gregory appears to subscribe to his position that it is folly to believe anyone was capable of knowing in detail what was going to happen in advance based on Biblical prophecy. His focus is instead squarely on the mission of the church in the last days, on bringing as many people as possible into the church through preaching, and in purifying the church from within through asceticism. Gregory thus represents the diminished status of the common political-

¹²⁹ Gregory the Great, *Dialogorum libri iv de miraculis partum italicorum*, III.38.3.

¹³⁰ For examples, see Jane Baun, “Gregory’s Eschatology,” in *A Companion to Gregory the Great*, ed. B. Neil and M. J. Dal Santo (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 157–160 and 164–168, with quotation on 158.

¹³¹ Gregory’s *Morals in Job* has been edited in three volumes by Marc Adriaen, *S. Gregorii Magni Moralia in Iob* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1979–1985). For an overview of Gregory’s commentary, see Mark Larrimore, *The Book of Job: A Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 65–77.

¹³² Pope Gregory I, *Moralia in Iob*, XXXII.27.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid, XXXII.15.25.

¹³⁵ Ibid, XXXI.24.43.

eschatological scenario as Latin eschatological literature became increasingly concerned about the church as an institution, at the expense of concern over the Roman Empire.

Thus, as the opposition to chiliasm that had begun in the East took hold in the West, the consequence was a larger rejection of political eschatology in general. If the kingdom of the saints on the earth spoken of in Revelation 20 was simply an allegory for the church, it soon followed that much of the rest of Revelation was also allegory about the church. Taken to its logical end, this meant that no information about the future of political history could be found in Revelation.

Still, this did not mean the Latin Christians completely foreswore political eschatology. The Book of Daniel was never submitted to the same radical reinterpretation as Revelation. Jerome's *Commentary on Daniel* appears to have remained popular, and the fact that no new commentaries of the Book of Daniel survive from the next few centuries may indicate that his interpretation of Daniel was not regarded as out of date. Nonetheless, references to the common political-eschatological scenario become very rare in Latin from the sixth century. Why would this be the case? The reason most appealing to common sense is that the Western Roman Empire had collapsed, and so the place of empire in eschatology ceased to be such an important concern. Instead, the church became the center of hopes and expectations about the future.

The obvious objection to this reasoning is the continued, if diminished, presence of imperial institutions and influence in the West. As James Palmer states: "Even as the daily reality of the empire had started to fade in the West, the persistence of the Eastern entity and the allure of the ideal affected politics."¹³⁶ For example, it cannot be said that the Roman Empire was a relic of the past for Gregory the Great. As bishop of Rome, Gregory was not just a spiritual leader, but also in effect the head magistrate of the city—since the time of Justinian governorship of cities had been devolved to the local bishop—and as such he worked within the upper echelons of the imperial administration. Moreover, he spent many of his younger years in Constantinople, where he began writing his *Morals in Job*, and maintained afterwards a friendship with the Emperor Maurice, with whom he regularly corresponded on matters both personal and of policy.

Nonetheless, while the empire remained standing, from Gregory's perch in Rome it was not the only important power in the world. He also had to deal with Lombard kings in Italy, Saxon kings in Britain, and Visigothic kings in Spain. In the absence of a universal empire, the only universal institution was the church. Gregory may have been an imperial functionary, but he was also the head of his own parallel ecclesiastical administration. Any enthusiastic reader of Augustine's *City of God* (among whom we can certainly number Gregory) knew that it was in this organization that Christians should make the greater investment.

As the Eastern Roman Empire receded even more from the Latin West in the century after Gregory, this tendency away from political eschatology would only intensify. Thus, the common political-eschatological scenario succumbed in the Latin West not to the "imperial

¹³⁶ Palmer, *The Apocalypse in the Early Middle Ages*, 34.

eschatology” of a triumphant Christian empire, but to the irrelevance of that empire as it slowly disintegrated.

III.4: “The Antichrist will Come Forth as an Emperor of the Romans”: The Persistence of the Common Political-Eschatological Scenario in the Greek East

Despite the growing influence of Augustine’s resistance toward political eschatology in the West, the importance of the political-eschatological scenario remained undiminished in the East. Works from the fifth through the seventh centuries largely echo the same scenario as Hippolytus had outlined centuries earlier. Eschatological works in Greek from the fifth through the seventh centuries do seem to attempt to mitigate the anti-Roman nature of the common political-eschatological scenario, but nonetheless remained ambivalent about the empire’s future.

Such a view can be found in the commentary on Daniel written about a generation after Augustine and on the other side of the Mediterranean by Theodoret of Cyrrhus (d. c. 460), an Antiochene perhaps best known for his *Church History*, but also author of commentaries on many books from the Bible.¹³⁷ In his *Commentary on Daniel*, Theodoret, like other exegetes, identified the four kingdoms as the Babylonians (or, as he sometimes called them, the Assyrians), the Persians, the Macedonians (or Greeks), and the Roman Empire.¹³⁸ Theodoret’s commentary accepted entirely the details of the common political-eschatological scenario.

Like Jerome, Hippolytus, and others, Theodoret asserted that while some of the events foreseen in the visions in the Book of Daniel were accomplished under Antiochus IV, the prophecies would truly be fulfilled in the time of the Antichrist: “The Antichrist is the archetype of Antiochus, and Antiochus the image of the Antichrist.”¹³⁹ Thus, according to Theodoret, though much of Daniel 11 concerned Antiochus IV, the prophecies in it that remain unfulfilled—the evil ruler’s conquest of Egypt, Libya, and Ethiopia, and his death outside Jerusalem—apply to the Antichrist: “Thus none of these things have been fulfilled, so they will happen under mankind’s common enemy.”¹⁴⁰

Likewise, Theodoret advocated the narrative of the destruction of the Roman Empire in line with the common political-eschatological scenario: the empire will become the realm of the Antichrist at the end of time, and will need to be destroyed by God. First the empire will be

¹³⁷ In the absence of a modern critical edition of Theodoret’s commentary on Daniel, I use the edition of J. L. Schulze reprinted in Migne, PG, vol. 81, 1256–1546. This edition has been subsequently reprinted, with an English translation, by Robert C. Hill, *Theodoret: Commentary on Daniel* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006). Here provide the page numbers from the PG and from Hill’s reissue, though I have provided my own translation.

¹³⁸ Theodoret, *Commentary on Daniel*, in PG, vol. 81, 1299 (Hill, *Theodoret*, 48). It is here that Theodoret identifies the Assyrians with the Babylonians: ἡ τῶν Ἀσσυρίων, εἶπουν Βαβυλωνίων βασιλεία.

¹³⁹ Ibid, 1524 (Hill, *Theodoret*, 304).

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 1532, (Hill, *Theodoret*, 48). Theodoret may have been directly influenced by Hippolytus, as he repeats some unusual assertions by Hippolytus, such as the claim that Daniel did not associate the fourth beast with a single animal (unlike the previous beasts which were described as a lion, bear, and leopard, respectively) because the Roman Empire is made up of many diverse peoples.

divided among ten kings, thus removing the restraining force (the *katechon*).¹⁴¹ The Antichrist will emerge from among the Jews, and will rise to power, and become the Roman emperor: “At the end the Antichrist will rise up, take control of the empire, make war upon them [the ten kings], and destroy three of them.”¹⁴²

Still, Theodoret, reflecting the Christian age in which he lived, refused to accept that all citizens and subjects of Rome would suffer in its coming destruction. According to Daniel’s prophecy, the body of the fourth beast would be burned; Theodoret asserted that Daniel’s emphasis on the body was not accidental:

Since by “the beast” [Daniel] referred to the whole empire, and some people in the empire are committed to piety while others are evildoers, and we are accustomed, as divine scripture suggests, to call the former “spiritual” and the latter “physical,” [Daniel] was right not to say the beast was given over to the burning fire, but *the body of the beast*, that is, the more material, bodily parts, those not interested in spiritual matters.¹⁴³

Theodoret accepted that the Roman state was the fourth kingdom but rejected the pre-Constantinian views of Hippolytus that Romans and Christians were opposed camps between which all people must choose. Theodoret insisted that some people who, within the confines of history, call themselves Romans will participate in the fifth kingdom, even if the Roman Empire itself would be destroyed.

This suggested a certain continuity between the fourth and fifth kingdoms. Still, Theodoret believed that the violent destruction of the Roman Empire under the rule of the Antichrist was necessary for the coming of Christ’s fifth kingdom. The Christianization of the Roman Empire was beginning to pose challenges to the old interpretation of the kingdoms of Daniel and the common political-eschatological scenario, but the full implications of that challenge had yet to be grappled with.

About a century after Theodoret, the first known Greek commentary on the Book of Revelation was produced by a certain Oikoumenios (sometimes transliterated as Ecumenius).¹⁴⁴ Only one manuscript of this text survives, and little is known about the author, except that he composed his commentary sometime in the sixth century and may have been a Miaphysite.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 1437, (Hill, *Theodoret*, 202); ibid, 1529 (Hill, *Theodoret*, 308).

¹⁴² Ibid, 1431–1432 (Hill, *Theodoret*, 194): ἔσχατον δὲ τὸν Ἀντίχριστον ἀνιστάμενον, καὶ τῆς βασιλείας ἀντιλαμβάνομενον, πολεμήσειν μὲν αὐτοῖς φησι, τρεῖς δὲ ἐξ αὐτῶν καταλύσειν.

¹⁴³ Ibid, 1424 (Hill, *Theodoret*, 188): Ἐπειδὴ γὰρ διὰ τοῦ θηρίου πᾶσαν τὴν βασιλείαν αἰνίττεται, ἐν δὲ τῇ βασιλείᾳ οἱ μὲν εὐσεβείας τρόφιμοι, οἱ δὲ κακίας ἐργάται, καὶ τοὺς μὲν πνευματικούς, τοὺς δὲ σαρκικούς προσαγορεύειν εἰώθαμεν, τῇ θεῇ Γραφῇ πειθόμενοι, εἰκότως οὐκ εἶπε τὸ θηρίον δοθῆναι εἰς καῦσιν πυρός, ἀλλὰ τοῦ θηρίου τὸ σῶμα, τούτέστι, τοὺς παχυτέρους, καὶ σαρκικούς, καὶ πνευματικὸν πεφρονηκότας οὐδέν.

¹⁴⁴ The commentary of Oikoumenios survives in nine known manuscripts, and two fragmentary manuscripts; it was edited most recently by Marc de Groote, *Oecumenii Commentarius in Apocalypsin* (Louvain: Peeters, 1999); an older edition was produced by H. C. Hoskier, *The Complete Commentary of Oecumenius on the Apocalypse: Now Printed for the First Time from Manuscripts at Messina, Rome, Salonika, and Athos* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1928). A fragment of a Syriac translation is preserved in a Miaphysite catena of the seventh century (this is one of the same catenae explored in a previous chapter of this dissertation because it also preserves an extract from the Symposium of Methodius of Olympus).

¹⁴⁵ John C. Lamoraеux, “The Provenance of Ecumenius’ Commentary on the Apocalypse,” *Vigilae Christianae*, vol. 52 (1998), 88–108, esp. 96–98, argues that the commentary was written between 508 and 518, and

The allegorizing of political eschatology found in contemporary Latin commentaries on the Book of Revelation is mostly absent from Oikoumenios.

Though Oikoumenios' interpretations can be contradictory, and the format of his commentary does not always clearly convey Oikoumenios' own views (he listed lines of scripture from elsewhere in the Bible relevant to each passage from Revelation, with only light explanation), it is clear that he maintained the common political-eschatological scenario. He asserted that, as in the Book of Daniel, the ten horns on the beast represent the rulers who would wreck the Roman Empire in their future confrontation: "Concerning these ten kings, or horns, the very wise prophet Daniel remarked, saying that they would arise out of Roman authority in the last days, and the Antichrist will arise from their midst."¹⁴⁶ Babylon is the city of Rome, and so the prophecy of Babylon's destruction will be fulfilled in the devastation inflicted upon Rome as it changes hands in the wars of the ten kings.¹⁴⁷

Some scholars have asserted that since Oikoumenios identified Babylon with Old Rome in Italy, he attempted to remove Constantinople and the eastern empire from eschatological doom. It is true that when he discussed the lamenting and rejoicing over the fall of Babylon in Revelation 18, Oikoumenios suddenly shifted his interpretation of Babylon away from the Roman Empire, arguing that here "Babylon" is intended in the spiritual, allegorical sense, meaning "confusion."¹⁴⁸ As Stephen Shoemaker has pointed out, "This was an important rhetorical move, inasmuch as it enabled Oikoumenios to avoid what would otherwise appear to be the jubilation of the righteous at God's devastation of the Roman Empire."¹⁴⁹ Once again, we see that the common political-eschatological scenario was beginning to pose challenges and raise questions in an empire that increasingly identified *Romanitas* and *Christianitas* with one another.

Nonetheless, these references to the city of Rome and the Roman Empire are made in passing, and Oikoumenios was more concerned with more technical matters such as making sense of difficult phrases and confusing grammar. Stephen Shoemaker has argued that

that Oikoumenios is to be identified with a correspondent of the Miaphysite leader Severus of Antioch. William Weinrich, *Ancient Christian Texts: Greek Commentaries on Revelation* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2011), xxi–xxv, disputes the notion that Oikoumenios was a Miaphysite and instead argues that the Christology expressed in the Revelation commentary is perfectly in line with the Chalcedonian position. Constantinou, *Guide to a Blessed End*, 61, argues against identifying Oikoumenios with the correspondent of Severus, and argues for a date at the end of the sixth century, but nonetheless, states on *ibid*, 61, that "He probably was a Miaphysite and probably had Origenist leanings," justifying this on *ibid*, 99–103, with a demonstration that certain passages of his commentary are distinctly anti-Chalcedonian. Stephen Shoemaker, "The Afterlife of the Apocalypse of John in Byzantium," in *The New Testament in Byzantium*, ed. D. Krueger and R. Nelson (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library, 2016), 308, disagrees, stating that any apparent Origenism in Oikoumenios is a result of the influence of Gregory Nazianzus, and that "the commentary may rightly be characterized as neo-Chalcedonian in its christology, yet it nowhere endorses the Chalcedonian definition nor is there anything at all to be found that would preclude its composition by a miaphysite."

¹⁴⁶ Oikoumenios, *Commentary on Revelation*, chapter 9, lines 291–294; Hoskier, 189; de Groote, 224: *περὶ τούτων τῶν δέκα βασιλέων ἥτοι κεράτων ὁ σοφώτατος προφήτης Δανιὴλ διείληφεν, ἐκ τῆς Ῥωμαίων ἀρχῆς λέγων αὐτοὺς ἀνίστασθαι ἐν τοῖς ἐσχάτοις χρόνοις· ὧν ἐν μέσῳ ὁ ἀντίχριστος ἀναστήσεται.*

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid*, chapter 9, lines 331–333; Hoskier, 191; de Groote, 226: *ἐν τῷ οὖν περὶ αὐτῆς πολέμῳ ἐπάναγκες αὐτὴν ἄθλον νίκης κειμένην ὑπὸ πάντων ἀσχεῖν κακῶς, πυρρουμενὴν καὶ ἐρημουμένην.*

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*, chapter 8; See Constantinou, *Guide to a Blessed End*, 98–99.

¹⁴⁹ Shoemaker, "The Afterlife of the Apocalypse," 311.

Oikoumenios' focus on philological matters may have been an attempt to distract from the anti-Roman message of Revelation, but does not consider that this may simply have been the goal of Oikoumenios' commentary.¹⁵⁰ Indeed, considering his interests lay elsewhere, Oikoumenios should perhaps be understood as a passive transmitter of the common political-eschatological scenario, one not particularly interested in delving into its details or implications. He makes no effort to address the changed circumstances in which Constantinople, the New Rome, had become the imperial city, and in which the Roman Empire had become Christian.

These issues were much more directly addressed in the Revelation commentary of Andrew of Caesarea, likely composed in the early seventh century.¹⁵¹ This commentary quickly overshadowed that of Oikoumenios, and indeed, played a major role in the gradual acceptance of the Book of Revelation as a canonical book of the Bible in the Byzantine world.¹⁵² Here, Andrew made adjustments to the common political-eschatological scenario to reflect the changed political circumstances of his day.

He drew a sharp distinction between Old Rome, representing the persecuting pagan Roman Empire, and New Rome, Constantinople, the seat of the Christian empire. Thus, according to Andrew, the seven heads on the beast in Revelation 17 represent a succession of kingdoms (more complete than the four provided in Daniel): the Assyrians, Medes, Babylonians, Persians, Macedonians, the pagan Roman Empire, and finally the Christian Roman Empire.¹⁵³ Thus for Andrew, the Christian Roman Empire was a separate kingdom, the last of the seven in history. In making room for the Christian Roman Empire in the prophecies of the Book of

¹⁵⁰ Thus, in *ibid*, Shoemaker asserts that Oikoumenios “dodged the political difficulties of Rome's divine judgment by diverting attention to a pedantic philological matter...One has the sense here that Oikoumenios might have been trying to avoid a delicate subject.”

¹⁵¹ Andrew's *Commentary on Revelation* is edited in *Studien zur Geschichte des griechischen Apokalypse Textes*, vol. 1, ed. Josef Schmid (Munich: Karl Zink, 1955). I cite Andrew's commentary here according to Schmid's chapters, with the lines of Revelation in question in parentheses. Translations into English may be found in Weinrich, *Greek Commentaries on Revelation*, 113–208; and Eugenia Constantinou, *Andrew of Caesarea: Commentary on the Apocalypse* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2012). All translations from the commentary here, however, are my own. On the date of the commentary, see Adele M. Castagno, “Il problema della datazione dei Commenti all'Apocalisse di Ecumenio di Andrea di Cesarea,” *Atti della Accademia delle Scienze di Torino*, vol. 114 (1980), 1–24; Constantinou, *Guide to a Blessed End*, 61–70. Constantinou suggests that Andrew composed his commentary in the early stages of the war between the Eastern Roman Empire and the Persian Empire of Khusrau II, as there may be allusions to the fate of Andrew's home city of Caesarea in the war, which passed back and forth between the Romans and Persians.

¹⁵² Constantinou, *Guide to a Blessed End*, 86–88, points out that the commentary of Oikoumenios survives only in one complete manuscript and a few partial manuscripts, while the commentary by Andrew of Caesarea survives in eighty-three complete copies and in Latin, Georgian, Armenian, and Slavonic translations, and moreover, about one third of Greek manuscripts of the Book of Revelation circulated with Andrew's commentary. In *ibid*, 298–310, Constantinou assesses the major role of Andrew's commentary in the acceptance of the Book of Revelation in the Greek Orthodox canon.

¹⁵³ Andrew of Caesarea, *Commentary on Revelation*, chapter 55 (17:9–10), ed. Schmid, *Studien zur Geschichte*, 186–189. Revelation 17:9 says that the seven heads also represent seven kings, so Andrew asserts that these are the founders of each of the seven kingdoms he lists (in opposition to previous commentators who believed that they were Roman emperors). The following verse of Revelation (17:10) states that five have fallen, one is, and one is to come, and so Andrew argues that this confirms that the heads must refer to kingdoms: John wrote the Book of Revelation under the pagan Roman Empire, when five of those seven kingdoms had fallen, and the last (the Christian Roman Empire) was still to come.

Revelation, and distinguishing old pagan Rome from the new Christian Rome, Andrew could discuss the hostility toward pagan Rome found in Revelation while keeping it distinct from the Christian Roman Empire.

Nonetheless, Andrew no longer believed that the beast with seven heads or the whore of Babylon that rides upon it symbolized Rome in Italy. “Some consider this harlot to be Old Rome, since she sits on seven hills,”¹⁵⁴ he wrote, perhaps referring, among others, to Oikoumenios. Andrew asserted that this position is mistaken: “for Old Rome lost the power of empire a long time ago, unless we suppose that the ancient rank might return to it again.”¹⁵⁵ Thus, the destruction of Babylon prophesied in Revelation would not happen to the city of Rome in Italy, but to some other city.

If not Rome, what city could be said to be, like the whore, “drunk on the blood of the saints,” and in what city, like in Babylon, “was found the blood of prophets and of saints”? Andrew presented a few possibilities. Perhaps Babylon in Revelation 17 was the actual city of Babylon in the Persian Empire, by which Andrew meant the Sasanian Empire (and probably its capital Ctesiphon, built near the site of ancient Babylon), because of the persecution of Christians in the Persian Empire. He next suggested as more likely that Babylon was not one city or empire, but represented any and all persecutors of Christians: Babylon was Old Rome during the persecutions of Diocletian, it was New Rome (Constantinople) when Julian and the Arians persecuted the church from there, and it is Persian Babylon (i.e. Ctesiphon) when the Persians persecuted the Christians.¹⁵⁶

Andrew returned to this problem in Revelation 18, when commenting on the scene of rejoicing at the fall of Babylon. Once again, Andrew suggested that Babylon here may refer to Persia, putting this forth as the most enticing possibility: “And this is the fulfillment of prayer for us, that it [Persia] receive its prophesied recompense for arrogance toward Christ and his servants.”¹⁵⁷ A Biblical prophecy about the destruction of the Sasanian Persian Empire, the main rival of the Eastern Roman Empire, would indeed have been reassuring, especially if, as has been suggested, Andrew wrote during the invasion of the Eastern Roman Empire by the Persian king Khusrau II, which began in 602. Thus, according to Stephen Shoemaker, Andrew “subverted the *Apocalypse's* anti-Romanism by diverting it toward Persia.”¹⁵⁸

However, Andrew made clear that this is not how the passage is usually interpreted: “But it seems this opinion is opposed by that of the ancient teachers of the church, who say that these things are prophesied against the Babylon among the Romans, because the ten horns were seen

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, chapter 53 (17:1–3), ed. Schmid, *Studien zur Geschichte*, 181: Ταύτην τὴν πόρνην τινὲς εἰς τὴν παλαιὰν Ῥώμην, ὡς ἐπάνω ἐπτά ὁρέων κειμένην.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, ed. Schmid, *Studien zur Geschichte*, 181: ἡ γὰρ παλαιὰ Ῥώμη ἐκ πολλοῦ τὸ τῆς βασιλείας κρατος ἀπέβαλεν, εἰ μὴ ὑποθώμεθα εἰς αὐτὴν τὸ ἀρχαῖον πάλιν ἀναστρέφειν ἄξιωμα.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, chapter 54 (17:6–7), ed. Schmid, *Studien zur Geschichte*, 183–184.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, chapter 55 (18:21–24) ed. Schmid, *Studien zur Geschichte*, 201–202: καὶ τοῦτο ἡμῖν εὐχῆς ἔργον, ταύτην τὰ προφητευθέντα δέξασθαι τῆς κατὰ Χριστοῦ καὶ τῶν αὐτοῦ δούλων ἀλαζονείας ἐπίχειρα.

¹⁵⁸ Shoemaker, “The Afterlife of the Apocalypse,” 312.

[by Daniel] on the fourth beast, that is, upon the dominion of the Romans.”¹⁵⁹ Like Cyril of Jerusalem and Jerome in the fourth century, Andrew yields to the teaching that had been handed down by the church, which identified Rome as the fourth kingdom of Daniel. If the Romans inhabited the fourth kingdom, it was hard to avoid the conclusion that the Book of Revelation described the coming destruction of their empire.

According to Shoemaker, Andrew presented conflicting possibilities about the identity of Babylon because he was obfuscating the obvious anti-Roman implications of Revelation.¹⁶⁰ This is hardly the case, however, and Andrew arrived at his point at the end of the passage. Here, he returns to the notion of multiple Babylons at different times, each of which persecute the church, and then are destroyed as punishment. Babylon may well be Persia at present, doomed to destruction for its misdeeds toward Christians.¹⁶¹ However, the final Babylon in history must be New Rome, Constantinople: “The passage on the universal Babylon would well be completed in this city [i.e. Constantinople, New Rome] which rules until the Antichrist.”¹⁶² It was hard to avoid the conclusion that, as the capital of the Christian Roman Empire, the last of all earthly kingdoms, Constantinople was to be the final Babylon, and its destruction was the punishment prophesied in both Daniel and Revelation.

Indeed, earlier in the commentary Andrew had established that the Roman Empire must be the fourth kingdom of Daniel. He understood the beast from the sea in Revelation 13:2—with its characteristics of a lion, bear, and leopard—as a reference to the beasts of Daniel 7, and he provided the traditional Christian interpretation of Daniel: “The kingdom of the [ancient] Greeks is signified by the leopard; the kingdom of the Persians is signified by the bear; the kingdom of the Babylonians is signified by the lion, and the Antichrist, coming as the emperor of the Romans and destroying their dominion, will rule over them.”¹⁶³ He was hardly diverting or obfuscating the Roman Empire’s antagonistic eschatological role.

In fact, Andrew largely reiterated the common political-eschatological scenario. The ten horns on the beast in Revelation 17, he repeats at several points, must refer to the same future rulers as they do in the Book of Daniel: they are the ten kings who will divide earthly rule and so plunge the empire into chaos. The Antichrist will subject the ten kings, destroying three and making the remaining seven subordinate themselves to him.¹⁶⁴ In language similar to that of

¹⁵⁹ Andrew of Caesarea, *Commentary on Revelation*, chapter 55 (18:21–24), ed. Schmid, *Studien zur Geschichte*, 202: ἀλλ’ ἐναντιοῦσθαι πως δοκεῖ τῇ ὑπολήψει ταῦτα τὸ ἐκ τῶν ἀρχαίων τῆς ἐκκλησίας διδασκάλων κατὰ τῆς παρὰ Ῥωμαίοις Βαβυλῶνος ταῦτα φάναι προφητεῦσθαι διὰ τὸ ἐν τῷ τετάρτῳ θηρίῳ ἐωρᾶσθαι τὰ δέκα κέρατα, τουτέστιν ἐν τῇ Ῥωμαίων ἀρχῇ.

¹⁶⁰ Shoemaker, “The Afterlife of the Apocalypse,” 312.

¹⁶¹ Andrew of Caesarea, *Commentary on Revelation*, chapter 55 (18:21–24), ed. Schmid, *Studien zur Geschichte*, 202.

¹⁶² Ibid, chapter 54 (17:9), ed. Schmid, *Studien zur Geschichte*, 189: εὖ ἂν ἔχοι ὁ τῆς παγκοσμίου Βαβυλῶνος λόγος εἰς τὴν μέχρι τοῦ ἀντιχρίστου βασιλεύουσιν πόλιν ἀπαρτιζόμενος.

¹⁶³ Ibid, chapter 36 (13:2), ed. Schmid, 136–137: διὰ μὲν τῆς παρδάλεως ἡ Ἑλλήνων, δια δὲ τῆς ἄρκου ἡ Περσῶν, δια δὲ τοῦ λέοντος ἡ Βαβυλωνίων βασιλεία σημαίνεται, ὃν κρατήσει ὁ ἀντίχριστος ὡς Ῥωμαίων βασιλεὺς ἐλευσόμενος καὶ τὴν τούτων ἀρχὴν καθαιρήσων.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, chapter 36 (13:1), ed. Schmid, *Studien zur Geschichte*, 136; ibid, 54 (17:12), Schmid, *Studien zur Geschichte*, 189–190; ibid, 55 (18:21–24), Schmid, *Studien zur Geschichte*, 202.

Hippolytus, he suggested that the head of the beast from the sea whose mortal wound is healed refers to the Roman Empire.¹⁶⁵ Thus, the Antichrist will rule over the seven surviving kings as the Roman emperor¹⁶⁶: “And when the emperor of the Romans comes under the pretense of assisting and helping their rule, he actually comes to bring about their utter ruin.”¹⁶⁷ Andrew was unambiguous about the form in which the Antichrist will come, repeating elsewhere: “he will come forth as an emperor of the Romans for the defeat and destruction of those who believe in him.”¹⁶⁸ The common political-eschatological scenario concerning the Roman Empire’s destruction did not change in Andrew; the destruction Hippolytus had envisioned for the pagan Roman Empire four centuries earlier Andrew now believed would befall the Christian Roman Empire.

Thus, Andrew of Caesarea demonstrates that, three centuries after the conversion of Constantine, Christians still held to the basic elements of the common political-eschatological scenario. He held that the Roman Empire was the evil fourth kingdom from the visions in the Book of Daniel, that its capital (now Constantinople) was Babylon from Revelation, and that imperial office would eventually fall into the hands of the Antichrist. Though Shoemaker has argued that Andrew tried to subvert and distract from the anti-Roman message of the Revelation, raising the possibility that Babylon means Persia or that it represents any and all persecutors, this view is undermined by the centrality of the common political-eschatological scenario to Andrew’s interpretation of the relevant chapters of Revelation. Paul Magdalino is more accurate when he states: “[Andrew] of Caesarea is hardly more optimistic about the Christian Roman Empire than earlier commentators on St John’s Apocalypse had been about its pagan predecessor. He more than once infers that Antichrist will come in the form of a Roman emperor ... Although he would clearly like to believe that Babylon the Great is the Persian capital, he has to conclude that the indications point overwhelmingly to Constantinople.”¹⁶⁹

Thus, at the start of the seventh century, at least in the Greek-speaking portions of the Roman Empire, the political-eschatological scenario remained as vital as ever. Though the intellectual divide between the eastern and western halves of the Mediterranean world in this period is sometimes exaggerated, and eschatology in Latin and Greek probably remained in constant dialogue and exerted influence on one another—for example, Andrew of Caesarea

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, chapter 36 (13:3), ed. Schmid, *Studien zur Geschichte*, 137; he offers another explanation, however, that the healed head may also to a false miracle the Antichrist will perform on a person, not the empire, pretending to raise someone from the dead.

¹⁶⁶ At *ibid*, chapter 27 (9:13–6), ed. Schmid, *Studien zur Geschichte*, 124, and *ibid*, chapter 51 (16:2), ed. Schmid, *Studien zur Geschichte*, 175, Andrew suggests that the Antichrist will be born of the Jewish tribe and Dan in Persia and enter the Roman Empire by crossing the Euphrates, as suggested by the prophecies concerning the Euphrates in Revelation.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, 55 (18:21–24), Schmid, *Studien zur Geschichte*, 202: καὶ ὡς βασιλέα Ῥωμαίων ἐλεύσεσθαι προσήματι μὲν τοῦ θάλλειν καὶ συγκροτεῖν τὴν ἀρχὴν αὐτῶν, τῇ δὲ ἀληθείᾳ τοῦ τελείαν αὐτῆς λύσιν ἐργάσασθαι.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, chapter 54 (17:11), ed. Schmid, *Studien zur Geschichte*, 189: ὡς Ῥωμαίων βασιλεὺς ἐπὶ καταλύσει καὶ ἀπωλείᾳ τῶν αὐτῷ περὶ τοὺς μὲν ἐλεύσεται.

¹⁶⁹ Paul Magdalino, “History of the Future and its Uses: Prophecy, Policy and Propaganda,” in *The Making of Byzantine History. Studies Dedicated to Donald M. Nicol on his Seventieth Birthday*, ed. R. Beaton and C. Roueché (Aldershot: Variorum, 1993), 10.

seems to follow Augustine when he asserts that the Millennium in Revelation 20 refers to the long period of undetermined length between Christ's first and second coming¹⁷⁰—nonetheless, the decline of the common political-eschatological scenario in the West did not affect its popularity in the East. The assertion that the Roman Empire would become the kingdom of the Antichrist and suffer destruction did raise some difficult questions about the Christian Empire, as the caveats provided by Theodoret and Oikoumenios about the nature of the fourth beast and about Babylon, respectively, show. However, no convincing, well-developed alternative was available. Andrew of Caesarea had entertained other possible interpretations of the relevant prophecies, but returned to the common political-eschatological scenario as the most convincing.

Chapter Conclusions

It can be said that by the third century, Christian exegetes in the Roman Empire had developed a detailed political-eschatological scenario, based primarily on the Book of Daniel and the Book of Revelation and supplemented by other passages from scripture, that could account for what would happen through the remainder of history up to Christ's second coming. This narrative largely focused on the fate of the Roman Empire. Over the next few centuries, the common political-eschatological narrative became ever more standardized. It became the most widely held understanding of political eschatology in the Latin West up to the beginning of the sixth century, and in the Greek-speaking East into the seventh-century and beyond.

The political-eschatological scenario developed a strong internal consistency and incorporated diverse and otherwise difficult to understand prophecies from the books of Daniel and Revelation. It held that the Roman Empire was the fourth kingdom of Daniel—and therefore the last earthly kingdom—and as the end of the world approached it would be divided by ten rival rulers (the ten toes of the statue in Daniel 2 and the ten horns on the fourth beast in Daniel 7). Just as in Revelation 17:16 John sees the beast and its ten horns burn and devour the flesh of the whore of Babylon (i.e. Rome), the kings will wreck the empire and devastate its capital in a civil war of unparalleled violence. By so devastating the Roman Empire in their struggle for power, these rulers will remove the *katechon*, the restraining force described in 2 Thessalonians 2:6–7, thus allowing the Antichrist to arise.

Just as Daniel saw the Little Horn uproot three other horns on the fourth beast, the emergent Antichrist will kill three of the ten imperial rivals (the rulers of Egypt, Africa, and Ethiopia, thus fulfilling also the prophecy of Daniel 11:43), and make the others subject to himself. Thus, the Antichrist will be the eleventh ruler (the Little Horn of Daniel 7), and also fulfill the prophecy of Revelation 17:11: “it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven,” because the Antichrist will be the eighth king ruling over the surviving seven. In that moment, the Antichrist will have reconstituted the Roman Empire and will rule as the uncontested emperor, fulfilling the

¹⁷⁰ Andrew of Caesarea, *Commentary on Revelation*, chapter 60 (20:1–3), ed. Schmid, *Studien zur Geschichte*, 215–216.

prophecy in Revelation 13:3 that the head of the beast (understood now as the empire) will be mortally wounded but then healed.

Once in power, the Antichrist will persecute the church, fulfilling the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation that the fourth kingdom will make war against the saints and thus incur the judgment of God. In this sense, the Antichrist will be a typological successor of Antiochus IV, and so will recreate his persecutions on a global scale. Finally, Christ will return in majesty, kill the Antichrist, and in doing so destroy the Roman Empire and all earthly authority, thus fulfilling the prophecy of the stone that destroys the statue in the dream of Nebuchadnezzar, the burning of the fourth beast in the dream of Daniel, and Christ's slaying of the beast in Revelation 19. With the resurrection of the dead and the end of history, the fifth, eternal empire, the kingdom of heaven spoken of by Jesus in the gospels, will begin and last for all time.

Developing out of the four kingdoms scheme in the Book of Daniel, which originated in the apocalyptic genre of the Second Temple Judaism (see previous chapter), the common Christian political-eschatological scenario was in general anti-imperial. Shaped by the Book of Revelation and the early experience of the Christian church with persecution by the Roman state, it was specifically hostile toward the Roman Empire.

Once Christianity became the religion of the Roman state, the prominence of this scenario did not simply fade away. The common political-eschatological narrative was confirmed by the teaching of generation after generation of Christian authorities, and could not simply be dispensed with. Moreover, it continued to have practical use. It remained a prominent part of Christian rhetoric critiquing ruling power, especially when one group of Christians perceived themselves as suffering persecution at the hands of another creed (such as the Nicene Christians during the rules of Constantius II and the "Arian" Vandal kings of Africa). As chiliasm faded and a more Platonic concept of Christ's kingdom became mainstream, the common political-eschatological scenario also provided a stark contrast between earthly rule and the eternal, heavenly rule of God.

The prominence of the political-eschatological scenario has major implications for political thought. The view, long associated with Augustine of Hippo, that Christians should not be too invested in loyalty to the Roman Empire, may not have been as radical as it seems, and far more common in the eastern half of the empire than has previously been assumed, despite the fact that the East remained under the control of the empire and emperor. The fact that the majority of Christians in the Roman Empire seemed to have believed, throughout the late antique period, that the Antichrist would rule as Roman emperor has been little remarked upon in modern scholarship. What implications did this have for the relationship of Christians to the Roman state? Did this have a role in the widespread opposition to imperial theological formulations such as the *Henotikon* of Emperor Zeno (482), the banning of the Three Chapters by Emperor Justinian (c. 544), and the monoenergist and monothelite Christologies of Emperor Heraclius (638)? These are important questions beyond the scope of this dissertation, but hopefully this chapter can serve as a starting point for future investigations.

Such questions have been overlooked because they do not fit well with the consensus on eschatology in this period. As we have seen in the previous chapter, most secondary scholarship on political eschatology in late antiquity focuses on the idea of “imperial eschatology” or “imperial apocalypticism,” a system of eschatological thought that gave the Roman Empire a central positive role in the consummation of history, and which held that “the Roman Empire’s triumph and dominion would inaugurate the end of the world.”¹⁷¹ Was such eschatology a common feature of late antique Christian thought in the Roman Empire? It would obviously be very much at odds with the Christian understanding of eschatology described in this chapter, but as Magdalino has demonstrated, it is possible for both anti-imperial and pro-imperial interpretations of Biblical prophecy to exist side by side in the same society. Nonetheless, if such “imperial eschatology” existed in the Roman Empire during the seventh century or before, it would invalidate the argument of this dissertation that such “imperial eschatology” originated in Syriac literature and was introduced in the Eastern Roman Empire and the Latin West by the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*. The object of the next chapter, therefore, is to explore whether such imperial eschatology existed within the Roman Empire before the end of the seventh century, and on what basis modern scholars have for so long asserted its presence.

¹⁷¹ Shoemaker, *The Apocalypse of Empire*, 87.

CHAPTER 3: THE SEARCH FOR IMPERIAL ESCHATOLOGY IN LATE ANTIQUITY

Introduction: The Tricennial Oration and the Fifth Kingdom

In the summer of 336 AD, officials and churchmen from all over the Roman world gathered in Constantinople to celebrate the thirtieth regnal year of the namesake of that city. Constantine's three decades on the throne was the longest reign of any emperor save Augustus. And there was a whiff of something evocative of Augustus at that event, of the inauguration of a new order—at least in the one surviving document from that occasion, the panegyric delivered in the presence of the emperor and his household at the closing ceremony by Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea.¹

Here, in his Tricennial Oration, Eusebius put forth a new vision of empire and the imperial office fit for the new, Christian imperial era, embedding in his praise for the emperor the outlines of a theory of Christian monarchy. Eusebius had survived the Great Persecution, when emperors had made war on the Church. Now, confronted with a Christian Roman emperor, Eusebius jumped at the opportunity to redefine the imperial office in a Christian context.

Borrowing from theories of kingship originating in the Hellenistic period, Eusebius suggested that Constantine possessed special access to the *Logos*, understood in Hellenistic philosophy as the force of reason that orders the universe, but implied by Eusebius to be Christ. As the intercessory force that provides humanity a glimpse of the otherwise inaccessible kingdom of God, the *Logos* provided Constantine guidance in ordering the state, and Constantine's sole rule of the Roman world allowed him to imitate the single Godhead of Christian faith. Constantine's government was thus, according to Eusebius, the earthly manifestation of God's heavenly kingdom.²

¹ Eusebius' Tricennial Oration, Εἰς Κωνσταντῖνον τὸν βασιλέα τριακονταετηρικός as it is titled in the manuscripts (or, as it is sometimes called in secondary scholarship, *Oratio de laudibus Constantini*, or, sometimes in English, *In Praise of Constantine*), survives attached to a number of the manuscript copies of Eusebius' *Life of Constantine* (and indeed, Eusebius notes in the *Life* that he intends to append the text of this oration for his readers). A detailed study, with English translation, has been made by H. A. Drake *In Praise of Constantine: A Historical Study and New Translation of Eusebius' Tricennial Orations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976). Drake's translation is based on the edition of Ivar Heikel, *Eusebius Werke*, vol. 1 (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1902), 195–259.

² The importance of the Tricennial Oration to Christian-Roman and Byzantine notions of rulership, and its basis in Hellenistic philosophy, was first proposed by Norman Baynes, "Eusebius and the Christian Empire," *Annuaire de l'institut de philologie et d'histoire orientales*, vol. 2 (1933), 13–18; reprinted in *Byzantine Studies and Other Essays*, ed. Norman Baynes (London: Althone Press, 1955), 168–172. The origins of this thought in the Hellenistic period, as philosophic support for the reigns of the successors of Alexander the Great, is explored by Francis Dvornik, *Early Christian and Byzantine Political Philosophy: Origins and Background*, vol. 2 (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Center for Byzantine Studies, 1966), 205–277. In *ibid*, vol. 2, 611–658, Dvornik discusses in detail Eusebius' use of such Hellenistic political theory.

Eusebius undoubtedly presented a new Christian theory of politics, but many scholars have also considered Eusebius' Tricennial Oration the turning point in Christian political eschatology. If Christ the *Logos* rules through Constantine on earth, does that not mean that the Roman Empire had become Christ's kingdom? If Constantine's empire reflects the heavenly kingdom, does it not mean that, according to Eusebius, the fifth kingdom had dawned in Constantine?³ Should this not be considered the start of a new tradition in political eschatology that rejected the notion of the Roman Empire as Daniel's fourth kingdom in favor of one that understood Rome as the promised fifth kingdom? This is the basis of the idea, so prominent in modern scholarship on political eschatology, that Eusebius introduced "imperial eschatology," a system of eschatological thought that replaced the kingdom of heaven with the Roman Empire, substituting the hope in a heavenly kingdom with a justification for imperial hegemony and the continuation of the state.

The concept of "imperial eschatology" has been popularized in scholarship on the apostle Paul, whose eschatological pronouncements about the glorious *adventus* of Christ at his second coming is contrasted with the pagan notion of the *apostheosis* of the emperor.⁴ In this sense, Christian eschatology is contrasted with pagan "imperial eschatology." Thus, as one study on Paul summarizes: "Roman imperial eschatology was the increasingly popular notion that the emperor was a god, and that since the time of Augustus the new age had dawned, bringing the fulfillment of divine prophecy and the divine plan for humankind."⁵ When scholars allege that Eusebius formulated Christian "imperial eschatology" they suggest that he provided a new Christian veneer to this old pagan concept, identifying Constantine with Christ, and associating his reign with the fulfillment of Biblical prophecy about the dawning of the kingdom of heaven.⁶

Supporters of this interpretation look to one particular line of the oration as confirmation, where Eusebius praises Constantine for raising up his sons as his dynastic heirs:

And He [God] allows him [Constantine] to carry out every one of his celebrations with great relief from the burden of sole rule, having readied some one of his sons for partnership in the royal throne at each tenth anniversary...And so, by the appointment of

³ See, for example, David A. Lopez, *Separatist Christianity: Spirit and Matter in the Early Church Fathers* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 145–147.

⁴ See, for example, James Harrison, *Paul and the Imperial Authorities at Thessalonica and Rome: A Study in the Conflict of Ideology* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 88–89; J. Brian Tucker, "Remain in Your Calling": *Paul and the Continuation of Social Identities in 1 Corinthians* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 201–208.

⁵ Ben Witherington, III, *The Paul Quest: The Renewed Search for the Jew of Tarsus* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 149.

⁶ Though most scholars attribute the beginning of such Christian "imperial eschatology" to Eusebius, Elizabeth Depalma Digeser, "Persecution and the Art of Writing between the Lines: *De vita beata*, Lactantius, and the Great Persecution," *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire*, vol. 92 no. 1 (2014), 167–185, suggests that Lactantius, in his *Divine Institutes* (written about thirty years before Eusebius' Tricennial Oration) identified Constantine as the second coming of Christ. However, she comes to this conclusion by reading Lactantius' version of the common political-eschatological scenario as a sort of *roman à clef* for the Great Persecution, wars of the Tetrarchy, and the rise of Constantine's imperial ambitions.

the Caesars, He [God] fulfills the predictions of the divine prophets, which ages and ages ago proclaimed that “the saints of the Most High shall take up the kingdom.”⁷

This quotation at the end of Eusebius’ statement is from the Book of Daniel (chapter 7), referencing the fifth kingdom that will be inherited by the saints. Thus, Eusebius’ statement might be taken to imply that Constantine’s reign marked the transition from the evil fourth kingdom to the saintly fifth kingdom.

This is exactly how D. S. Wallace-Hadrill interprets it in his classic study on Eusebius.⁸ The idea that Eusebius proclaimed the arrival of the fifth kingdom has since become a common interpretation of his eschatological views, and accepted as the widespread understanding of Christians throughout the Roman world for at least the next century.⁹ Scholars have thus largely adopted a narrative in which the old hostility toward Rome was immediately replaced by “the Eusebian vision of the Christian Roman Empire as a vehicle or manifestation of the Kingdom of God.”¹⁰

This view has been inherited by the nascent field of scholarship on ancient and medieval political eschatology. In his important study of late Roman and Byzantine political eschatology, Gerhard Podskalsky points to the Tricennial Oration as turning point at which Christian political eschatology was transformed into Byzantine political ideology (*Reichsideologie*), exchanging the

⁷ Eusebius, *Tricennial Oration*, III.1–2, ed. Heikel, *Eusebius Werke*, vol. 1, 200–201: παρέχει τε παντοίας ἐορτὰς ἐκτελεῖν σὺν πολλῇ ῥαστώνῃ τῆς μοναρχίας, ἐφ’ ἐκάστη περιόδῳ δεκαετοῦς πανηγύρεως ἓνα τινὰ τῶν αὐτοῦ παίδων ἐπὶ τὴν τοῦ βασιλικοῦ θρόνου κοινωνίαν προχειρίζομενος ... καيسάρων τε ἀναδείξεισι θεῶν προφητῶν ἀποπληροῖ θεσπίσματα, ἃ δὴ πάλαι καὶ πρόπαλαι ὧδέ πη ἐβόα· ‘καὶ διαλήψονται τὴν βασιλείαν ἅγιοι ὑψίστου.’ Translation in Drake, *In Praise of Constantine*, 86–87.

⁸ D. S. Wallace-Hadrill, *Eusebius of Caesarea* (London: Mowbray, 1960), quotes Eusebius’ allusion to Daniel 7 on 186; Wallace-Hadrill concludes in *ibid.*, 186–189: “[Eusebius’] theme is the fulfillment of the Promise that the chosen people shall exercise territorial rule, and in the empire under Constantine he sees the Promise fulfilled in what was an extension of the Kingdom of Heaven upon earth... For him, the last things had, up to a point, already begun... Some kind of end of human history, teleologically speaking, is achieved for him in the fulfillment of the Promise.”

⁹ Glenn F. Chesnut, *The First Christian Histories: Eusebius, Socrates, Sozomen, Theodoret and Evagrius* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1977), 168–169: “The *Pax Romana* was identified as the predicted eschatological Kingdom of Peace, the very last and greatest of the world empire, to which there would be no successor in this space-time continuum... Eusebius believed that the successive rulers of the Constantinian dynasty, ‘the saints of the Most High’ in Daniel’s vision of the Four Beasts, were to reign as the eschatological emperors.” Significantly, in *ibid.*, Chesnut admits that Eusebius also likely believed that “at the very end, of course, this Kingdom of Peace would change its character completely,” and that the Roman Empire would “fight on Satan’s side in the battle of Armageddon.” Chesnut makes no attempt to reconcile these two seemingly conflicting eschatological views he ascribes to Eusebius. Michael Hollerich, “Religion and Politics in the Writings of Eusebius: Reassessing the First ‘Court Theologian,’” *Church History*, vol. 59 no. 3 (1990), 310 n3, points out that Chesnut’s reading implies that Eusebius based his views heavily on the Book of Revelation, while in reality Eusebius was largely ambivalent toward John’s apocalypse.

¹⁰ Quotation from Francis Oakley, *Empty Bottles of Gentilism: Kingship and the Divine in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages (to 1050)* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 111. Such views can be found in Raffaele Farina, *L’impero e l’imperatore cristiano in Eusebio di Cesarea: La prima teologia politica del Cristianesimo* (Zurich, PAS, 1966), 161–163; Jean Sirinelli, *Les vues historiques d’Eusèbe de Césarée durant la période prénicéenne* (Dakar: Université de Dakar, 1961), 455–486; Hans-Georg Opitz, “Euseb von Caesarea als Theologe: Ein Vortrag,” *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der Älteren Kirche*, vol. 34 (1935), 1–19.

hope in a heavenly kingdom for a justification for the continuation of the imperial state.¹¹ This view has been echoed recently by Stephen Shoemaker: “Eusebius here [in the Tricennial Oration] equates Constantine with Christ, and likewise, the empire with Christ’s heavenly Kingdom. In effect, the coming of the Kingdom of God that Christ promised has now been realized, according to Eusebius, in the Roman Empire.”¹²

The assumption that this eschatology attributed to Eusebius became the common view of late Roman and Byzantine Christians is reflected even in the more nuanced work Paul Magdalino, who has argued that the political ideology of the Christian empire “equated the empire not with the fourth and last in the succession of world empires foretold in the Book of Daniel, but with the heavenly kingdom which would supersede the rise and fall of earthly realms.”¹³ Elsewhere Magdalino suggests that this “interpretation of the Four Kingdoms prophecy in the Book of Daniel... had been hinted at by Eusebius in the fourth century.”¹⁴

According to this view, the reevaluation of Rome’s eschatological role was forced not by Syriac eschatological thought but by pagan Greek philosophical ideas about divine kingship that originated in the Hellenistic period and were introduced to Christianity by Eusebius. This suggests a rapid about-face during the reign of Constantine when Christian eschatology is considered to have been instantly transformed by its encounter with imperial support for Christianity and Hellenistic philosophy. As James Palmer sums it up in his 2014 *The Apocalypse in the Early Middle Ages*: “The empire which had seemed so at odds with Christianity now embraced it... And with that, the eschatology of empire had changed.”¹⁵ The shift is made to seem like the flip of a switch, both immediate and all encompassing. A sharp line is drawn between Christian political eschatology before Constantine and Eusebius and eschatology after them.

Some scholars, such as Podskalsky, hold that the late Romans and Byzantines continued to view the empire as the fifth kingdom of Daniel. Others, such as Shoemaker, hold that the notion of the Roman Empire as the fifth kingdom quickly transformed into a common belief that the Roman Empire was a positive fourth kingdom, preparing the way for the fifth kingdom and destined to hand over its power peacefully to Christ at the end of time.

¹¹ Gerhard Podskalsky, *Byzantinische Reichseschatologie: die Periodisierung der Weltgeschichte in den vier Grossreichen (Daniel 2 und 7) und dem tausendjährigen Friedensreiche (Apok. 20). Eine motivgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1972), 12: “Eusebios scheut sich nicht, den Vers „Die Heiligen des Höchsten werden das Reich empfangen“ (Daniel 7,18) in seiner Tricennatsrede auf den Herrschaftsantritt Konstantins zu beziehen... Damit ist zwar nicht in Worten, aber in der Sache das römische Reich mit dem Reich Christi verschmolzen.”

¹² Stephen Shoemaker, *The Apocalypse of Empire: Imperial Eschatology in Late Antiquity and Early Islam* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 40.

¹³ Paul Magdalino, *Byzantium in the Year 1000* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 250.

¹⁴ Paul Magdalino, “The History of the Future and its Uses: Prophecy, Policy and Propaganda,” in *The Making of Byzantine History. Studies Dedicated to Donald M. Nicol on his Seventieth Birthday*, ed. R. Beaton and C. Roueché (Aldershot: Variorum, 1993), 10. Nonetheless, Magdalino dates the proper formulation of the theory of Rome as the fifth empire two centuries later, in the writings of Cosmas Indicopleustes. The political eschatology of Cosmas will be dealt with in the next chapter.

¹⁵ James Palmer, *The Apocalypse in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 29.

All of this stands in stark contrast to the evidence explored in the previous chapter for a consistent political-eschatological narrative that held with remarkable continuity from the early third to the seventh century, whereby the Roman Empire was the fourth kingdom of Daniel, and as such it remained doomed to destruction before the arrival of the fifth kingdom under Christ. Is it possible that Eusebius introduced a new, parallel tradition that glorified the Roman Empire? Had he even—as many of the above-quoted scholars have suggested—somehow overturned the political-eschatological scenario in Christian thinking? Had he replaced it with the “imperial eschatology” (*Reichseschatologie*) described by Podskalsky, a doctrine of political eschatology that made the empire the key to the realization of God’s kingdom?

Eusebius did no such thing. The arguments in modern scholarship suggesting that he did originate in a misinterpretation of Eusebius’ thought which, in turn, produced a distortion of late antique Christian political eschatology. Nonetheless, the idea of a “Eusebian shift” dominates modern historical narratives on Christian political eschatology. More mistaken ideas have been erected upon this edifice. Scholars have built upon it to contend that the Last Emperor, the central eschatological character in the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* who surrenders the fourth kingdom’s power to Christ, actually originated in the thought world of Hellenistic concepts of kingship propagated within the Christian Roman Empire by Eusebius. They have argued, moreover, that numerous late antique Roman emperors, up to the seventh century, continued to encourage the idea that the Roman Empire was the millennial kingdom of God upon the earth, or that it was their responsibility, as the Last Emperor, to deliver the kingdom to Christ.

As a result, the place of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, and Syriac eschatology more generally, within that tradition has been misunderstood. If in the first half of the fourth century Eusebius of Caesarea had already forced a reevaluation of the Roman Empire’s place in the Christian eschatology, the Syriac eschatological sources such as the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* had no real role to play. As one scholar has put it explicitly: “What we have before us in Pseudo-Methodius’ narrative...obviously is an updated version of a prophecy that had most likely been put in circulation by the Byzantine imperial propaganda at a time when there was no Arab threat to be seen on the horizon yet.”¹⁶ The political eschatology in the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* is therefore considered simply a warmed-over version of the same political eschatology that had been in circulation since the time of Eusebius. Scholars such as Shoemaker thus argue, for example, that the Last Emperor did not originate in the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, but must have been in circulation for centuries earlier. If this were the case, the *Apocalypse* had nothing new to say about the Roman Empire’s eschatological fate. No wonder the *Apocalypse*’s importance and influence has long elicited scholarly confusion.

¹⁶ Lutz Greisiger, “The End is Coming—To What End? Millenarian Expectations in the Seventh-Century Eastern Mediterranean,” in *Apocalypticism and Eschatology in Late Antiquity: Encounters in the Abrahamic Religions, 6th-8th Centuries*, ed. H. Amirav, E. Grypeou, Emmanouela, and G. G. Stroumsa (Leuven: Peeters, 2017), 100. Greisiger dates this supposed “Byzantine imperial” prophecy to the time of Heraclius in the early seventh century, but on *ibid.* 106 he makes clear that he considers it a reuse of the political eschatology of Constantine and Eusebius

This chapter will demonstrate that the supposed Eusebian shift in political eschatology is a historiographic myth, a mirage that quickly dissipates when the primary sources are critically examined. First, the notion that Eusebius viewed the empire as the fifth kingdom of Daniel cannot be sustained. Moreover, it will argue that related notions, such as the belief that the Roman Empire had a positive eschatological role to play as “the empire that prepared the way for Christ's return,” or that it would be ruled by a messianic “Last Emperor,” had simply not developed before the seventh century.¹⁷

Instead, as explored in the previous chapter, the Roman Empire's violent destruction was widely regarded as a necessary prerequisite to the eschatological dawning of the heavenly fifth kingdom. It was regarded as the fourth kingdom of Daniel, the kingdom that that would make war upon the saints. The last emperor would not be a good, messianic king; he would be the Antichrist.

Admittedly, attempts were made to reconcile traditional Christian political eschatology with optimism about the Christian Roman Empire. However, these eschatological revisionists did not comprehensively reinterpret of the Danielic scheme of historical kingdoms, and therefore failed to upend the political-eschatological scenario. Such a shift in political eschatology came only with the translation of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* into Greek and Latin, because it provided the first fully-elaborated and viable alternative to the traditional political-eschatological scenario.

Part I: Eusebius, and the Use and Abuse of Eschatology in Late Antiquity

The very idea that Eusebius could have promulgated a sort of imperial propagandist line that the Roman Empire was the fifth Danielic kingdom relies on an outdated and incorrect understanding of Eusebius. It assumes that the bishop of Caesarea served as a mouthpiece for a Christianized Roman imperial project under Emperor Constantine, and that Eusebius' writings established a normative political theory for Byzantium. While scholars of eschatology continue to portray Eusebius as Constantine's court publicist and “founding father” of Byzantine thought, the recent work of experts on Eusebius has stressed both Eusebius relative remoteness from Constantine and his ambivalence toward the Roman Empire.

Anthony Kaldellis has plausibly questioned the influence of Eusebius' political writings.¹⁸ Moreover, in 1981 Timothy Barnes already put to rest the notion that Eusebius was particularly close to Emperor Constantine or in any way acted as an adviser or spokesman: “[Eusebius] probably met and conversed with the emperor on no more than four occasions.”¹⁹ Rather, Barnes

¹⁷ Quotation from David Olster, “Byzantine Apocalypses,” in *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, vol. 2: *Apocalypticism in Western History and Culture*, ed. Bernard McGinn (New York: Continuum, 1998), 54.

¹⁸ Anthony Kaldellis, *The Byzantine Republic: People and Power in New Rome* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 177: “In fact it does seem that Eusebius' Constantinian writings were not popular in Byzantium, which was skeptical of them. All told, there are many reasons to stop treating Eusebius as the Founding Father of Byzantine thought.”

¹⁹ Timothy Barnes, *Eusebius and Constantine* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 266.

points out, Eusebius was a provincial bishop who mostly worked far from the capital and who wrote for his own purposes.

Building on Barnes' work, Aaron Johnson has demonstrated that Eusebius was not only far from "a blithering panegyrist and imperial theologian," but also displayed a marked ambivalence toward the Roman Empire through the course of his literary career.²⁰ Eusebius, he shows, regarded Christians as a distinct *ethnos* from the Romans. Though the rise of Constantine inspired optimism on Eusebius' part for productive cooperation between Christians and the empire, Eusebius' primary interest was in the autonomy of the Christian church, and was less concerned with glorifying the empire: "It was the Church that deserved allegiance and that was changing the lives of people from all social and ethnic categories; if the emperor joined himself to the Church, so much the better."²¹ For Eusebius, there remained "a sharp distinction between Christianity and the forces of Rome."²²

Eusebius has long been portrayed as an apologist not just for Constantine, but for the imperial project in general. Much has been made by modern scholars of the important place of Emperor Augustus in Eusebius' *Preparation for the Gospel* (*Praeparatio Evangelica*). Here, Eusebius suggests that Augustus' victory over all rival powers and unification of the world under his sole rule facilitated the spread of the gospels and prefigured Christ's elimination of all rival gods. Did this not make a Roman emperor an integral part of salvation history?²³ True, Eusebius did have a high opinion of Augustus, and seems to have regarded him as a model good ruler, he was but one in a long history of good and bad rulers. As Aaron Johnson has pointed out, Roman emperors remained ambivalent figures in Eusebius' work, and the good that Eusebius attributes to Augustus' rule was offset by subsequent bad emperors: "Rome, though producing an environment conducive to the spread of Christianity through its political unification of the *oikoumenē*, nonetheless [in Eusebius' work] plays the role of the enemy of piety and overtly attacks the church. There is a sharp distinction between Christianity and the forces of Rome."²⁴

²⁰ Aaron Johnson, *Ethnicity and Argument in Eusebius' Praeparatio evangelica* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 153–197, with quotation on 195–196. In idem, *Eusebius* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2014), 143–169, Johnson makes a similar argument.

²¹ Ibid, 193.

²² Ibid, 179.

²³ Many modern scholars have suggested that Eusebius attempted to Christianize Roman imperial ideology because he gave an important place to Emperor Augustus in his *Preparation for the Gospel*, whose unification of the world under his sole rule made way for Christ's elimination of pagan polytheism; see, for example, Chesnut, *The First Christian Histories*, 76–78; Oakley, *Empty Bottles of Gentilism*, 89–116; Paul Alexander, "The Strength of Empire and Capital as Seen Through Byzantine Eyes," *Speculum* 37, no. 3 (1962), 353–354; Hervé Inglebert, *Les Romains Chrétiens face à l'Histoire de Rome* (Paris: Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 1996), 165–167.

Nonetheless, as Aaron Johnson, *Ethnicity and Argument*, 174–185, has pointed out, Augustus remained a tool of God in Eusebius' account, and that this in no way implied that the Roman Empire was a holy kingdom; as Johnson states in ibid, 179: "Rome, though producing an environment conducive to the spread of Christianity through its political unification of the *oikoumenē*, nonetheless plays the role of the enemy of piety and overtly attacks the church." James Corke-Webster, *Eusebius and Empire: Constructing Church and Rome in the Ecclesiastical History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 249–279 has recently demonstrated that emperors were simply good or bad in Eusebius' reckoning based on how they treated Christianity; just because Augustus was a good emperor did not mean that the Roman Empire was uniformly a positive force.

²⁴ Johnson, *Ethnicity and Argument*, 179.

With this in mind, it is possible to turn back to the Tricennial Oration and read its eschatological statements with fresh eyes. It will become clear that in no way did Eusebius suggest that Rome was the heavenly kingdom on earth. Moreover, by surveying Eusebius' use of the four kingdom scheme of Daniel in other of his works, it will become clear that Eusebius more or less adhered to the traditional political-eschatological scenario.

I.1: Contextualizing Eusebius' Eschatology

Eusebius' statement in his Tricennial Oration equating the heirs of Constantine with the saints who will inherit God's kingdom seems to identify Constantine's empire with the fifth kingdom of Daniel—and, as we have seen, this is indeed how most scholars have interpreted it. However, it is vital to remember that Eusebius' statement is delivered in the rhetorical context of a panegyric, designed to use a range of literary touchstones, including scripture, to praise Constantine. The emphasis placed on Eusebius' statement to make it a proclamation of “imperial eschatology” strips it entirely of this context. Both in the larger message of the Tricennial Oration and in the body of his other work, Eusebius makes clear that Constantine's empire was emphatically not the fifth kingdom.

In the Tricennial Oration, Eusebius never directly identified Constantine's kingdom with the kingdom of heaven. True, Eusebius suggested that Constantine's unique relationship with the *Logos* enabled him to run his empire on the model of the perfected heavenly kingdom. However, his empire was precisely that: a *mimesis*, an earthly reflection, and not the actual heavenly kingdom. In other words, Constantine, as a pious Christian emperor, could govern his realm more like the perfected kingdom that God governed, but this in no ways implies that Constantine's realm was that perfect kingdom.

Eusebius made this abundantly clear only two paragraphs after the questionable sentence about Constantine's heirs. Here he alluded to a passage in Plato's *Republic* wherein Socrates unfavorably contrasts democracy with the rule of a philosopher king, comparing them, respectively, with an untrained crew of a ship and with the ship's captain. In the metaphor, the untrained sailors (representing the voters of a democracy) do not know how to steer a ship and cannot even comprehend that when the captain stares at the sky he is not an idle stargazer but in fact guiding the vessel by practicing the art of navigation.²⁵

This allusion fits perfectly with Eusebius' argument that one God in heaven and one emperor on earth represent the perfect order. Eusebius builds on Plato's imagery: Constantine as captain gazes at the heavens, according to Eusebius, not to read the stars, as Plato implied, but to view the workings of the heavenly kingdom and imitate the divine order administered by God, so that he is able to steer “according to the archetypal form” (κατὰ τὴν ἀρχέτυπον ἰδέαν).²⁶ This statement calls to mind another aspect of Platonic philosophy—the world of the forms.

²⁵ Plato, *Republic*, VI. 488d–e.

²⁶ Eusebius, *Tricennial Oration*, III.5, ed. Heikel, 204. Translated in Drake, *In Praise of Constantine*, 87.

The kingdom of heaven is the ideal form, the perfect archetype. According to Eusebius, while steering the ship of state Constantine is “dressed in the image of the kingdom of heaven” (τῆς οὐρανίου βασιλείας εἰκόνι κεκοσμημένος).²⁷ The kingdom of heaven is the archetype, and the empire of Constantine the form. They will only merge, if at all, at the completion of history, when the archetypal heavenly kingdom dawns on earth.²⁸

It is true that Eusebius remained an outspoken supporter of the collaboration between Christianity and the Roman state, and when Constantine died Eusebius wrote a biography of Constantine that depicted him as an ideal facilitator of this coexistence. As noted above, he repeated the formulation of his intellectual forbearers—Philo, Miletus of Sardis, and Origen had all made the same claim in some way—that Christ’s birth during the reign of the first emperor, Augustus, was no coincidence because the unification of the world under Roman rule set the necessary circumstances for the spread of the gospel. This stands in sharp contrast with Hippolytus, according to whom Christ and Augustus were opposed to one another. However, there is considerable difference between the belief that God saw fit to allow the Romans to unify the world in order to better spread his gospel, and the belief that the Roman state had become God’s kingdom or a precursor to God’s kingdom.

Indeed, Eusebius was quite aware that he lived within the bounds of history and under a government of fallible humans. Constantine (like Augustus) was a good emperor, but no cosmic savior; the Roman Empire had become just and well governed under his rule, but it was no heavenly kingdom. In the Tricennial Oration, Eusebius asserts that Constantine longs and prays for the kingdom of heaven: “He cherishes in his heart an indescribable longing for the lights there, by comparison with which he judges the honors of his present life to be no more than darkness. For he recognizes that rule over men is a small and fleeting authority over a mortal and temporary life.”²⁹ Eusebius clearly contrasts the present earthly realm with the kingdom of heaven. In an important but often-overlooked article, Frank Thielman has shown that such contrasts in the Tricennial Oration, and in other of Eusebius’ writings, between the transient earthly things of the present with the eternal kingdom of heaven implies that the latter would come sometime in the future: “The emphasis on the heavenly hope and separation from earthly existence does not dwell happily with the notion ... that for Eusebius Constantine had ushered in the eternal kingdom.”³⁰

Likewise, Hazel Johannessen has observed that Eusebius envisioned the world after the conversion of Constantine as full of demons: “the widespread idea that Eusebius viewed

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ F. E. Cranz, “Kingdom and Polity in Eusebius of Caesarea,” *Harvard Theological Review*, vol. 45, no. 1 (1952), 59, suggests that Eusebius viewed the Roman Empire and the Christian Church as two separate earthly images of the kingdom of heaven, and he believed that over time, as these two grew closer together and eventually became one, the result would be the heavenly fifth kingdom. Even if this is an accurate explication of Eusebius’ political theology, it places the fifth kingdom in the future. The perfection of the Church and of the Roman Empire was an ongoing process, not yet completed.

²⁹ Eusebius, *Tricennial Oration*, V.5.

³⁰ Frank Thielman, “Another Look at the Eschatology of Eusebius of Caesarea,” *Vigiliae Christianae*, vol. 41 (1987), 226–237, with quotation on 231. Johnson, *Eusebius*, 149–152, makes a similar point, though with less emphasis on eschatology.

Constantine as a victorious eschatological figure fails to take account of the continuing presence of hostile demons in Eusebius' understanding of the universe." She concludes that Eusebius viewed Constantine "not as the triumphant eschatological figure envisaged in previous scholarship," but simply as a good king striving for the good in a world haunted by evil.³¹ Eusebius remained very aware that he lived in a fallen world, not the kingdom of heaven.³²

In fact, all evidence suggests that Eusebius' understanding of political eschatology deviated little from the Christians of the pre-Constantinian period. A look at his larger body of work makes clear that Eusebius could not have envisioned the Roman Empire under Constantine as the fifth kingdom. Rather, in several of his works Eusebius expresses an expectation that the kingdom of heaven would arrive at the second coming of Christ; that is, in the future, and in a far more absolute and eschatological form than the Christian Roman Empire.

Some scholars, such as Wallace-Hadrill and Podskalsky, have argued that Eusebius' views changed over time as he substituted his hope in the Roman Empire for his former expectation in Christ's second coming. They admit that in his *General Elementary Introduction to the Gospel*, which he composed during the Great Persecution, Eusebius expected the imminent second coming to bring about an end to the persecution inflicted by the Roman authorities.³³ Still, they argue that with Constantine's gradual embrace of Christianity Eusebius replaced Christ with Constantine, so to speak, holding that the eschatological kingdom had arrived with the Christianization of the Roman Empire.³⁴ However, these scholars overlook works produced later in Eusebius' career, which reveal that he had not wavered in his expectation that the fifth kingdom would dawn only with Christ's second coming. These indications are often overlooked because they survive only in fragments.

Some of these indications are found in Eusebius' *Demonstrations of the Gospel* (*Demonstratio Evangelica*), likely written in the early 320s, well after Constantine's famous victory at the Milvian Bridge and shortly before his final victory over his last opponent (Emperor Licinius). While only the first ten of the 20 total books of the *Demonstrations of the Gospel* survive,³⁵ fragments of book 15 are preserved in a catena of excerpts from various Greek church

³¹ Hazel Johannessen, *The Demonic in the Political Thought of Eusebius of Caesarea* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 172–173. My thanks to David DeVore for this reference.

³² See also Michael Hollerich, "Religion and Politics in the Writings of Eusebius," 309–325, who more or less accepts the view of the Eusebian shift in political eschatology, but nonetheless raises some concerns based on his readings of Eusebius' *Commentary on Isaiah*, and notes on idid, 317: "Eusebius's eschatology is a complex subject which cannot be understood without a careful contextual reading of the many passages in which he uses eschatological language and symbols."

³³ On the *General Elementary Introduction to the Gospel*, see Aaron Johnson, *Eusebius* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2014), 54–63.

³⁴ Podskalsky, *Byzantinische Reichseschatologie*, 35–36; Wallace-Hadrill, *Eusebius*, 177. Thielman, "Another Look," 227–229, effectively criticizes this idea of Eusebius' changed position. For the idea of Constantine replacing Christ in Eusebius' eschatology, see the introduction to the French translation of Eusebius' Tricennial Oration: Pierre Maraval, *La théologie politique de l'Empire Chrétien: Louanges du Constantin (Triakontaëtérkos)* (Paris: Éditions de Cerf, 2001), 66.

³⁵ Timothy D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 182, asserts that the missing books begin with the Resurrection (where the surviving text breaks off), and proceeds through the rest of history, and "included a substantial discussion of the end of the world and of the second coming of the Lord in glory and for judgment."

fathers on the Book of Daniel compiled by a certain John the Drungarios in the seventh-century (an important source for a wide range of otherwise lost writings about the visions in the Book of Daniel to which we shall return).³⁶ In these fragments, Eusebius discusses Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the statue according to the standard interpretation of the four kingdoms: that the four kingdoms are the Babylonians, Mede-Persians, Greeks, and Romans, while the stone that smashes the statue is the kingdom of God (i.e., the fifth kingdom), which will replace all authority at the end of time.³⁷

Indeed, earlier, in one of the surviving books of the *Demonstrations of the Gospel* (book 7), Eusebius notes that Biblical prophecies were cloaked in coded and enigmatic language and never mentioned the Roman Empire explicitly so as to avoid angering the authorities, since such prophecies would come to circulate widely within the Roman Empire and “the books of the prophets would be popular within the city of Rome itself and among all the peoples under Roman rule.”³⁸ Of the prophecies whose true meaning would upset the Roman rulers, Eusebius singles out “especially [those] in the visions of Daniel.”³⁹ If Eusebius believed that the visions of the Daniel proclaimed Rome the heavenly fourth kingdom he had no reason to suspect that they would upset the Roman authorities. Rather, his statement strongly implies that the visions of Daniel meant that Rome was the evil fourth kingdom whose tyranny would precede Christ's second coming. In another of the surviving books of the *Demonstrations of the Gospel*, Eusebius equates Rome with Gog of the eschatological Gog and Magog.⁴⁰

Moreover, Eusebius wrote either a commentary on the Book of Daniel, or a refutation of Porphyry's interpretation of Daniel—or both—that is also mostly lost except for a few short fragments.⁴¹ In one fragment, Eusebius identifies the “son of man” who represents the fifth kingdom in Daniel 7 with Christ at his second coming, and thus the “kingdom of the saints of the Most High” with the kingdom of Christ.⁴²

³⁶ The catena is preserved in Cod. Vatican Ottob. Gr. 452; unfortunately the only edition and study of this document is the confusing and difficult early nineteenth-century version of Angelo Mai, *Scriptorum veterum nova collectio e vaticanis codicibus*, vol. 1, no.2 (Rome: Burliaeuum, 1825), 105–221.

³⁷ Mai, *Scriptorum veterum*, 173–175; these fragments are also provided in the critical edition of the *Demonstrations of the Gospel* by Ivar A. Heikel, *Eusebius Werke*, vol. 6 (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1913), on 493–494.

³⁸ Eusebius, *Demonstrations of the Gospel*, 7.1 (323 a–b); ed. Heikel, *Eusebius Werke*, vol. 6, 310: οἶμαι δι' οὐδέν ἕτερον μὴ ὀνομαστί τῶν Ῥωμαίων μνημονεύσαι τὰ προφητικά λόγια ἢ διὰ τὸ μέλλειν ἐπὶ τῆς Ῥωμαίων βασιλείας τὴν τοῦ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ διαλάμπειν εἰς πάντας νθρώπους διδασκαλίαν, καὶ τὰς προφητικὰς γραφὰς ἐπ' αὐτῆς γε τῆς Ῥωμαίων πόλεως καὶ ἐν πᾶσι τοῖς ὑπὸ Ῥωμαίους ἔθνεσιν δημοσιεύεσθαι.

³⁹ Ibid: οὐ μὴν ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐν ταῖς τοῦ Δανιὴλ θεωρίαις

⁴⁰ Ibid, 8.3 (424 a–b); ed. Heikel, *Eusebius Werke*, vol. 6, 409. For discussion, see Johnson, *Ethnicity and Argument*, 181–183.

⁴¹ These fragments can be found in Migne, PG 24, 525–528. On Eusebius refutation of Porphyry, see John Granger Cook, *The Interpretation of the Old Testament in Greco-Roman Paganism* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 187–188. We know from Jerome that Eusebius argued passionately against Porphyry's historical interpretation of Daniel, and it seems quite likely that Eusebius put forth the traditional eschatological view that Rome was the fourth kingdom.

⁴² Eusebius, *On Daniel*, fragment 3, ed. Migne, PG 24, 525: μετὰ δὲ τὴν τῶν τετελευτηκότων ἀναβίωσιν, καὶ μετὰ τὴν κατὰ πάντων κρίσιν, ὁ ἑωραμένος τῷ Δανιὴλ Υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου ἐπιστήσεται ἐπὶ νεφελῶν, τὴν κατὰ πάντων τῶν λαῶν καὶ φυλῶν ὑπὸ τοῦ Πατρὸς ἐξουσίαν, τὴν καὶ βασιλείαν ἀγήρω καὶ ἀτελεύτητον παραληψόμενος.

Perhaps most telling, in the next fragment Eusebius discusses the very “saints of the Most High” whom in his panegyric to Constantine he associated with Constantine and his heirs: “Who are these heirs of God, these co-heirs of Christ? To them [God] has promised the kingdom of heaven, a kingdom that will be established after the four kingdoms, as seen by the prophet [Daniel].”⁴³ Eusebius uses the future tense, and implies that the history of the four kingdoms had not yet come to an end (and, as mentioned above, identified Rome as the fourth kingdom in his *Demonstrations of the Gospel*). The fifth kingdom remained in the future, a kingdom of the saints after the second coming of Christ—not the Roman Empire under Constantine.⁴⁴ The fragment concludes with Eusebius stating definitively that Daniel’s visions “concern the Antichrist, and the establishment of the kingdom of our glorious savior.”⁴⁵ Eusebius does not dwell on what the Roman Empire’s status as the fourth kingdom means for his optimistic appraisal of the empire, but he leaves no doubt that it remained the fourth, not the fifth, of Daniel’s kingdoms.⁴⁶

Eusebius did break with many of his pre-Constantinian forbearers one major facet of eschatology—he fiercely opposed chiliasm (millennialism), i.e., the belief that the fifth kingdom would be manifested for one thousand years upon the earth. For Eusebius, who was deeply influenced by the teachings of Origen, the concept of the Millennium of Christ ruling on earth trivialized the fifth kingdom. Quoting Dionysius of Alexandria approvingly, Eusebius asserts: “it leads [believers] to hope for small and mortal things in the kingdom of God and for things such as exist now.”⁴⁷ Eusebius was outspoken that the fifth kingdom was not the earthly realm predicted by the Jews and Jewish-minded Christians, full of “the delights of the belly and of sexual passion,” but rather that it will be a heavenly, otherworldly state under Christ’s eternal rule after the end of time.

This was all the more reason that for Eusebius the Roman Empire could not be the fifth kingdom, for Eusebius did not believe that the fifth kingdom would exist on earth. If there would be no earthly millennium, the fifth kingdom had to be the eternal heavenly reward of the righteous after the Last Judgment. Thus, we can be virtually certain based on his writings that Eusebius would have regarded the notion of the Roman Empire as the Danielic fifth kingdom often attributed to him as, if nothing else, a Judaizing heresy.

⁴³ Eusebius, *On Daniel*, fragment 5, ed. Migne, PG 24, 525: τίνες δ’ ἂν εἶεν οὗτοι, ἢ οἱ κληρονόμοι τοῦ Θεοῦ, συγκληρονόμοι δὲ Χριστοῦ; οἷς καὶ ἐπηγγέλται, τὴν βασιλείαν τῶν οὐρανῶν, βασιλείαν ἐπιστησομένην τὴν μετὰ τέσσαρας βασιλείας, τὰς τῷ προφῆτῃ ἑωραμένας.

⁴⁴ Emmanuel Papoutsakis, *Vicarious Kingship: A Theme in Syriac Political Theology in Late Antiquity* (Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 46, notes the incongruity between Eusebius’ conviction in the fragment that fifth kingdom will come in the future and his supposed assertion in the Tricennial Oration that the current Roman Empire was the fifth kingdom.

⁴⁵ Eusebius, *On Daniel*, fragment 5, ed. Migne, PG 24, 528: τὰ διὰ τοῦ προφήτου Δανιὴλ περὶ τοῦ Ἀντιχρίστου, καὶ τῆς τοῦ Σωτῆρος ἡμῶν ἐνδόξου βασιλείας τεθεσπισμένα πιστούμενος.

⁴⁶ Podskalsky, *Byzantinische Reicheschatologie*, 35–36, discusses these fragments and has trouble reconciling them with the viewpoint of Eusebius from the Tricennial Oration; not only does he accept that Eusebius here identifies Rome with the fourth kingdom, but he concedes “daß Eusebios dem römischen, vierten Reich keine Sonderrolle zuerkennt.”

⁴⁷ Eusebius, *History of the Church*, VII.24.

The fifth kingdom in Eusebius' theological writing remains the eschatological kingdom of heaven that will dawn once the Antichrist is defeated at the second coming of Christ, when all of creation was consigned to oblivion and the righteous proceeded to heaven to dwell with God. It was not the Roman Empire. His statement in the Tricennial Oration that the sons of Constantine were Daniel's "saints of the Most High," must be recognized as a literary allusion embedded in a panegyric, a genre in which Biblical quotations were used to heap praise. Eusebius was perhaps engaged in a bit of sly flattery, but he was not making a statement of theological or political theory.

It might still be argued that even if Eusebius did not actually believe that the Roman Empire had become Daniel's fifth kingdom, that nonetheless his suggestion in the Tricennial Oration disseminated such a view. Perhaps contemporaries read the Tricennial Oration and arrived at this conclusion? Nonetheless, there is no evidence that this was the case. No one else before the sixth century comes even close to making a suggestion that the Roman Empire represented the fifth kingdom of Daniel. When this idea did appear much later, it originated in no way from Eusebius.

I.2: Imperial Eschatology between Eusebius and Augustine

Why, then, have scholars been so eager to read a major shift in eschatological thinking into Eusebius' Tricennial Oration? Why is Eusebius cast as the father of Christian "imperial eschatology" and associated with the idea that the Roman Empire was the fifth kingdom? Part of the explanation must be discerned in a strand of Protestant historiography in which Eusebius came to be viewed as a sort of crypto-pagan who manipulated Christianity to justify Constantine's rule.⁴⁸ In the nineteenth century, the great theologian Franz Overbeck dismissed Eusebius as the "dresser to the emperor's theological hairpiece."⁴⁹ The Swiss historian Jakob Burckhardt, who famously characterized Constantine as a political opportunist and Eusebius as his pet liar, associated them with "Byzantinism" (*Byzantinismus*), oriental despotism with a thin Christian veneer.⁵⁰ These claims gave birth to the mistaken idea, finally put to rest by Timothy Barnes (see above) that Eusebius acted as Constantine's ecclesiastical spokesman. A persistent notion, born of such thought, held that Eusebius introduced pagan philosophical notions to Christianity, and thus corrupted its original essence.

In light of all this, it is easy to see why many scholars were inclined to interpret Eusebius' eschatology simply as imperial propaganda, as the old pagan "imperial eschatology" with new a Christian face. Another element was introduced to such lines of thinking in the twentieth century when eschatology came to be associated with totalitarian ideology. National Socialism and

⁴⁸ See Gilbert Dagron, *Emperor and Priest: The Imperial Office in Byzantium*, transl. Jean Birrell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 284–286.

⁴⁹ Franz Overbeck, *Christentum und Kultur: Gedanken und Anmerkungen zur modernen Theologie* (Basel: Benno Schwabe, 1919), 209: "Eines Friseurs an der theologischen Perücke des Kaisers." Overbeck here was comparing Eusebius' relationship to Constantine with that of Adolf von Harnack and Kaiser Wilhelm II.

⁵⁰ Jacob Burckhardt, *The Age of Constantine the Great*, trans. Moses Hadas (New York: Pantheon, 1949), 260–283.

Soviet Marxism-Leninism were imbued each with their own sort of millenarianism that sought the creation of racial or class utopias, and the attempt to realize these had involved the worst repression and mass killings of human history. Some scholars seeking to understand what could have motivated such crimes looked back to the legacy of Christian eschatology.⁵¹ In this light, Eusebius went from a dishonest “theological hairdresser” to something more sinister.

The roots of such an interpretation of Eusebius are evident in the Erik Peterson’s *Monotheism as a Political Problem* (*Der Monotheismus als Politisches Problem*), published in 1935 in Germany. A brief outline of the issues involved is necessary to understand the place of Eusebius in Peterson’s arguments. Peterson was responding to Carl Schmitt’s 1922 *Political Theology*, in which Schmitt asserted, in the opening line, that the sovereign is he who can make an exception; in other words, he who can abrogate the law. Schmitt had explained contemporary controversy over sovereignty through the lens of the title concept, “political theology” (*politische Theologie*): his assertion that all political theory is secularized theology. Sovereignty, according to Schmitt, is a Christian concept originating in the middle ages, when the role of the king was modeled on the Christian monotheistic concept of God, the single ruler who could operate outside the rules of nature. Modern secular liberals, however, who did not believe in a God who operates outside the rules of the universe, according to Schmitt, applied their theology to politics, and so sought a state in which there was no ability to act outside the law. Schmitt appealed to Christian theology to emphasize the need for a sovereign who in the face of emergency can act outside the law; if not a monarch than a dictator who, when necessary, could institute a “state of exception” (*Ausnahmezustand*).⁵²

Peterson, a Catholic convert, objected to Schmitt’s argument by attacking its basis in history and Catholic theology. This was not simply a theoretical disagreement.⁵³ Peterson and Schmitt had been friends and colleagues at the University of Bonn (Peterson was professor of the New Testament; Schmitt was professor of law), but a political rift had divided them. By the time Peterson wrote, Schmitt had found the embodiment of his “state of exception”; in 1933 he provided the Nazi party, of which he soon became a member, the legal framework for their seizure of power and, as head of the National Socialist Lawyers Association, he provided legal justifications, bound up in sovereignty, for the Night of the Long Knives and the Nuremberg Race Laws.⁵⁴ In short, he sought to reconcile Nazism with Catholicism.⁵⁵ Peterson, in contrast,

⁵¹ Especially prominent in this category is Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1957).

⁵² Carl Schmitt, *Politische Theologie: Vier Kapitel zur Lehre von der Souveränität* (Munich: Duncker & Humblot, 1922).

⁵³ For the larger debate between Schmitt and Peterson, see György Geréby, “Political Theology versus Theological Politics,” *New German Critique*, issue 105, vol. 35 no. 3 (2008), 7–33; idem “Carl Schmidt and Erik Peterson on the Problem of Political Theology: A Footnote to Kantorowicz,” in *Monotheistic Kingship: The Medieval Variants*, ed. A. al-Azmeh and J. M. Bak (Budapest: Central European Univ. Press, 2004), 31–61.

⁵⁴ E.g. Carl Schmitt, “Der Führer schützt das Recht,” *Deutsche Juristen-Zeitung*, vol. 39 (1934), 945; idem, “Die Verfassung der Freiheit,” *Deutsche Juristen-Zeitung*, vol. 39 (1935), 1133–1135.

⁵⁵ Bernard Bourdin, “Carl Schmitt: un contre-messianisme théologico-politique?,” *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques*, vol. 98 no. 2 (2014), 241–259; Reinhard Mehring, “A ‘Catholic Layman of German Nationality and Citizenship’? Carl Schmitt and the Religiosity of Life,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Carl Schmitt*,

opposed Nazism on religious grounds; he resigned his university position and moved to Rome, where he was unemployed at the time he wrote *Monotheism as a Political Problem*.

Peterson sought to undermine Schmitt's arguments by asserting that Christianity could not form a basis for a political theology of sovereignty, and historically had not served as one, because Christianity was not monotheistic but Trinitarian.⁵⁶ The pagan philosophers of the Hellenistic period, Peterson admitted, had tried to model kingship on their concept of the divine. Hellenizing Jews, like Philo of Alexandria, reading such philosophical notions in line with the Jewish monotheistic God, had done so as well. Christians, however, had closed off that road thanks to their attachment to the Trinity. Any attempt at modeling a political theory of rulership on the triune God would have been incoherent. In order to make his point, Peterson set up a juxtaposition of Eusebius and St. Augustine that would have a major influence on how later scholars viewed Eusebius and his eschatology.

Before the Trinity was fully accepted, Peterson argued, there had been attempts to create a Christian theory of sovereignty extrapolated from the monotheistic idea of God, the prime example of which was Eusebius in his *Life of Constantine* and his Tricennial Oration (Peterson also relied extensively on Eusebius' *Preparation for the Gospel* and *Demonstrations of the Gospel*). With his Arian sympathies and reliance on Hellenistic philosophy, Eusebius had, according to Peterson, tried to justify Constantine's rule in monotheistic terms, to craft a "political theology" in which the emperor's power was modeled on God's. This political use of Christianity made Eusebius dangerous, but ultimately, in Peterson's judgment, Eusebius' effort ended in failure. Christian theology had been saved from contamination with politics by St. Augustine of Hippo. Indeed, Augustine emerges as the hero of Peterson's narrative (Peterson dedicated the book to him, and in the first edition began his argumentation with a short prayer to Augustine).

Much emphasis has been placed on the importance of the Trinity in Peterson's narrative, but he suggested a second major factor that inhibited a Christian theological basis for politics: eschatology. He quotes at length Hippolytus' *Commentary on Daniel* and other works of political eschatology to the effect that Christians had long rejected the full authority of earthly kingdoms and empires because Christian eschatology held that the perfect kingdom, and the only one to which they owed their full loyalty, will come only at the end of time. No Christian ruler, but only

ed. J. Meierhenrich and Oliver Simons (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 73–95; Nikolaus Lobkowicz, "Carl Schmitt—ein katholischer Faschist?" in *Das Christentum und die totalitären Herausforderungen des 20. Jahrhunderts: Russland, Deutschland, Italien und Polen im Vergleich* ed. Leonid Luks (Cologne: Böhlau, 2002), 73–102.

⁵⁶ Erik Peterson, *Der Monotheismus als Politisches Problem: ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der politischen Theologie im Imperium Romanum* (Leipzig: Hegner, 1935), and reprinted as a long essay in Peterson, *Theologische Traktate* (Munich: Kösel, 1951), 49–147. *Der Monotheismus als Politisches Problem* is an expansion on two earlier articles, Erik Peterson, "Göttliche Monarchie," *Theologische Quartalschrift*, vol. 112 (1931), 537–564; and idem, "Kaiser Augustus im Urteil des antiken Christentums: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der politischen Theologie," *Hochland*, vol. 30 (1932–33), 174–180.

the Antichrist, when he seizes political power at the end of history, would dare imitate the sovereignty of God.⁵⁷

If Christians had momentarily lost sight of this in the euphoria of Constantine's conversion, and followed Eusebius in giving the Roman Empire a special place in history because Christ had been born under the peace established by Emperor Augustus, they were set straight, says Peterson, by St. Augustine's model of the two cities in the *City of God*. By reasserting the divide between the earthly and heavenly kingdoms, Augustine had articulated in unambiguous terms that no earthly political entity could serve as a model or imitation or precursor to the kingdom of heaven.

Thus, for Peterson, Christian belief in the Trinity and in the coming Kingdom of Heaven had prevented Christians from modeling any state or ruler on a divine model:

The doctrine of the divine Monarchy was bound to founder on the Trinitarian dogma, and the interpretation of *Pax Augusta* on Christian eschatology. In this way, not only was monotheism as a political problem solved and the Christian faith freed from concatenation with the Roman Empire, but a fundamental break was made with every "political theology" that misuses the Christian message as justification for a political cause. Only on the basis of Judaism and paganism can such a thing as "political theology" exist.⁵⁸

Thus, when Carl Schmitt argued that Christian notions of sovereignty derived from political theology, Peterson implies, he was not upholding but deviating from Christian civilization in order to justify his political cause.

Peterson, in making his argument, set out a compelling ideological contrast between Eusebius and Augustine. In his belated response to Peterson, Schmitt pointed out that Peterson's characterization of Eusebius is simplistic and owes much to the characterizations of nineteenth-century Protestant historiography.⁵⁹ Nonetheless, the influence of Peterson's short book on the field of late antique political thought is hard to underestimate.⁶⁰ It has long shaped perceptions of Eusebius, with the result that scholarship in the next half-century or so not only failed to clarify Eusebius' ideas on politics, but further dissolved them into caricature.

Still, though eschatology was important to his argument, Peterson said nothing of Eusebius' eschatological views. Unlike later scholars, he did not attribute to Eusebius the

⁵⁷ As György Geréby, "Political Theology versus Theological Politics," 24, has summarized: "For Peterson, the public representation of the eschatological kingdom of God requires rejecting any and every attempt to identify this kingdom with a secular empire. No political utopia can masquerade as the heavenly Jerusalem outside of the final dystopia of the Antichrist."

⁵⁸ Peterson, *Der Monotheismus als Politisches Problem*, 99 (104–105 of reprinted version): "Damit ist nicht nur theologisch der Monotheismus als politisches Problem erledigt und der christliche Glaube aus der Verkettung mit dem Imperium Romanum befreit worden, sondern auch grundsätzlich der Bruch mit jeder „politischen Theologie“ vollzogen die die christliche Verkündigung zur Rechtfertigung einer politischen Situation mißbraucht. Nur auf dem Boden des Judentums oder Hidentums kann es so etwas wie eine „politische Theologie“ geben."

⁵⁹ Carl Schmitt, *Politische Theologie II: Die Legende von der Erledigung jeder politischen Theologie* (Munich: Duncker & Humblot, 1970). This response was published after Peterson had died.

⁶⁰ The most nuanced adoption of his views is found in Dvornik, *Early Christian and Byzantine Political Philosophy*, vol. 2, esp. 611–622 and 724–728.

identification of the Roman Empire with the kingdom of heaven. Eusebius' sin, to Peterson, had been his suggestion of some connection between Christianity and the Roman imperial project (begun by Augustus and perfected under Constantine) of a world monarchy under a single ruler. Indeed, limiting himself to material up to the fifth century, Peterson saw no evidence of Christian "imperial eschatology," and his argument implied that any such eschatology could not be truly Christian.

Later scholars, building on Peterson's juxtaposition between Augustine and Eusebius, however, would begin to attribute to Eusebius an eschatology that could serve as a contrast with Augustine's. The result was to make Eusebius even more of a straw man against which to contrast Augustine.⁶¹ The seeds of this approach are found in Robert Markus' extremely influential 1970 study of Augustine's thought, which drew heavily from Peterson's *Monotheism as a Political Problem*.⁶²

For Markus, Christian political eschatology could be divided into two rival camps, represented on the one hand by Eusebius and on the other by the Donatists of North Africa (the latter he understood as the last surviving bearers of the anti-Roman eschatology found in Hippolytus and the Book of Revelation): "Of the two traditions represented in Christian thinking, the Eusebian and the apocalyptic, as we might refer to them for the sake of convenience, Augustine followed neither... He could accept neither the hostility and opposition to Rome inculcated by the apocalyptic view, nor the near-identification of Christianity and the Roman Empire involved in the Eusebian view."⁶³ In this sense, according to Markus, Augustine forged a middle ground between the subversive eschatology of the Donatists (which supposedly preserved the views of the early church) and that of Eusebius which, according to Markus, understood the peace established by Constantine as an eschatological fulfillment of messianic prophecies.⁶⁴ By mentioning these prophecies, Markus implies that Eusebius propagated an eschatology that served as the antithesis of Augustine's eschatological focus on the role of the church in the *City of God*. Nonetheless, Markus is very careful to make clear: "Eusebius, naturally, stops short of pressing the implications of this messianic conception to its limits: Constantine is not actually the saviour, nor is his Empire actually the Kingdom of Christ."⁶⁵

Others would not be so careful. Influenced by the general antipathy for Eusebius

⁶¹ A notable exception is Theodor Mommsen, "St. Augustine and the Christian Idea of Progress: The Background of the City of God," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 12 no. 3 (1951), 346–374, which succeeds in contrasting the thought of Eusebius and Augustine without involving mistaken notions of Eusebius' eschatology.

⁶² Robert Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St Augustine*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970). He cites Peterson frequently, and on *ibid*, 47, calls *Monotheism as a Political Problem* a "characteristically perceptive essay."

⁶³ Markus, *Saeculum*, 56.

⁶⁴ Here Markus appears to be building on Peterson. According to Peterson, *Der Monotheismus als Politisches Problem*, "In his The Proof of the Gospel (3 .2.37), Eusebius takes up the prophecy in Genesis 49:10, according to which the ruler will not fail from the tribe of Judah, who is the expectation of the nations. The text had already played a role in Christian proofs from prophecy. *Eusebius refers this prophecy to Christ*, who appeared at the time that the Jewish kingdom came to an end" (emphasis mine). According to Markus, *Saeculum*, 49, in Eusebius, "verses which had traditionally been interpreted in the Church in a messianic sense, are now boldly referred to the person of Constantine."

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 50.

exemplified in Overbeck and Burkhardt, prominent theologians, especially of left-wing Protestantism, harboring similar concerns about the alliance of Christianity with right-wing politics that had motivated Peterson, associated Eusebius with the corruption of the purity of the early church (the state of which Restorationist Protestant denominations seek to recover). Thus, in their work the Eusebian shift in eschatology came to be understood as part of the larger historiographical notion of the “Constantinian shift.” The prominent Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder, who popularized the notion of the “Constantinian shift,” wrote extensively of a widespread heresy he called “Constantianism,” the roots of which he associated with Eusebius (though his concerns were twentieth-century politics); this heresy supposedly replaces the second coming of Christ with the reign of an earthly ruler and identified the kingdom of God with the ruling state.⁶⁶

Such ideas were taken in even more extreme directions by one of the most important theologians of the late twentieth century, the Calvinist Jürgen Moltmann who, like Peterson, was shaped by his experiences with Nazism. He derived from Peterson’s *Monotheism as Political a Problem* the notion that Trinitarian dogma and Christian eschatology are the two forces that counteract any authoritarian coopting of Christianity. However, he took a more pessimistic view of their effectiveness.⁶⁷ Unlike Peterson, who was a Catholic and thus inclined to see a continuity between the early church and that of the middle ages, Moltmann asserted that Trinitarianism and Christian eschatology had been suppressed already in late antiquity, and so the true faith had been thoroughly corrupted by the era of Constantine the Great.⁶⁸

Diverging from Peterson’s idolization of Augustine, Moltmann criticizes Augustine for identifying the Millennium of Revelation 20 with the era of the church. Moltmann calls this “presentative millenarianism,” the position that the Millennium had already begun, which he

⁶⁶ John Howard Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1984), 135–150; For a detailed analysis, see Craig A. Carter, *The Politics of the Cross: The Theology and Social Ethics of John Howard Yoder* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2001), 155–178, where Carter identifies eight aspects of Yoder’s conception of New Testament eschatology and shows how Yoder considered Constantianism violated each one. A theological and historical criticism of Yoder’s concept of Constantianism is found in Philip LeMasters, *The Import of Eschatology in John Howard Yoder’s Critique of Constantinianism* (San Francisco: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992).

⁶⁷ Moltmann served in the German army in World War II and experienced a religious conversion while a prisoner of war. Like Peterson, he was horrified by the fascist use of Christianity, and so in “Christian Theology and Political Religion” in *Civic Religion and Political Theology*, ed. Leroy Rouner (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1986), 42, declared of his generation: “Political religion is dead to us and we are dead to its claims.”

⁶⁸ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 197: “The expansion of the doctrine of the Trinity in the concept of God can only really overcome this transposition of religious into political monotheism, and the further translation of political monotheism into absolutism, by overcoming the notion of a universal monarchy of the one God. Historically speaking, however, the doctrine of the divine monarchy did not in fact ‘run aground’ on the Trinitarian dogma, as Erik Peterson maintains, because in the early church Trinitarian dogma left this particular dogma untouched...It is only when the doctrine of the Trinity vanquishes the monotheistic notion of the great universal monarch in heaven, and his divine patriarchs in the world, that earthly rulers, dictators and tyrants cease to find any justifying religious archetypes any more.” Original German in idem, *Trinität und Reich Gottes* (Munich: Christian Kaiser, 1980). In response, Moltmann advocates for a sort of liberation theology of human-built millennialism of the sort championed by Kant and Hegel grounded in non-hierarchical power structures inspired by the Trinity.

regards as dangerous because it holds that the present is the best the world can become, and thus strips Christian eschatology from its utopian aspirations to transcend the current order. Yet if Augustine believed that the Millennium had begun in the church, Moltmann adds, Eusebius embraced an even more dangerous “presentative millenarianism” that identified God’s kingdom with the empire.

He echoes the commonly held misapprehension about Eusebius: “In his oration at the *tricennalia*, Eusebius interpreted Constantine's rule in an entirely apocalyptic sense by citing the words of Dan. 7.18: ‘The saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom.’ The Roman empire which had now become Christian was itself nothing less than the universal kingdom of Christ.”⁶⁹ Thus, Moltmann fosters the notion of the Eusebian shift in eschatology, and like many others, finds its source in the Tricennial Oration. However, Moltmann goes further still, associating this idea with the Millennium:

Many Christians, together with Eusebius of Caesarea, welcomed the turning point under Constantine as the transition from suffering with Christ to ruling with him, and hence as the dawn of the Thousand Years’ empire. When the Roman empire transformed itself from “the beast from the abyss” into the *imperium Christianum*, and persecuted Christianity became the empire's dominant religion, presentative millenarianism sprang up: the *Imperium Sacrum* was held to be already the Thousand Years’ empire of Christ heralded in Revelation 20, and the divine universal monarchy of Daniel 2 and 7.⁷⁰

Of course, Eusebius did nothing of the sort; instead, he had made clear that he considered the Millennium a fable and that he believed that the fifth kingdom was the eternal state that would dawn with Christ’s second coming. However, it is easy to see how this misconception would spring forth from reading Eusebius’ opposition to chiliasm from the hindsight of Augustine’s response to chiliasm.⁷¹

As we have seen, both Eusebius and the mature Augustine opposed the belief in Christ’s thousand-year earthly rule with similar vehemence. However, whereas Eusebius simply dismissed the Millennium as a false doctrine and questioned the canonicity of the texts that supported it (particularly the Book of Revelation), Augustine argued that the true meaning of the Millennium described in those texts had simply been misunderstood. Augustine argued that the Millennium actually referred to the period between Christ’s first and second coming, that is, the age of the Church (see above, chapter 2, section III.1). Moltmann is not the only one to make the logical leap (wrong though it is) that if the anti-chiliasm Augustine believed that the Millennium had begun in the Church, the anti-chiliasm Eusebius must have believed that the Millennium had begun in the empire.

In Moltmann’s formulation, the growing opposition to chiliasm resulted not from a growing Neoplatonic influence on Christianity (in favor of which I have argued in the previous

⁶⁹ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 161.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 154.

⁷¹ Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 161, takes Markus’ statement that Eusebius identified Constantine as a messiah to its logical extreme: “The pax Romana instituted by Augustus and completed by Constantine is the realization of the pax messianica and therefore of the ‘Thousand Years’ empire.”

chapter of this dissertation), but from the Roman state's coopting of Christian eschatology: "The Constantinian imperial churches condemned early Christian millenarianism only because they saw themselves in the Christian imperium as 'the holy rule' of Christ's Thousand Years' empire. So every future hope for a different, alternative kingdom of Christ was feared and condemned as heresy."⁷² Thus, Eusebius' argumentation that Constantine's empire acted as a *mimesis* of the kingdom of heaven is misrepresented as a sort of totalitarian party line that identified the empire with the kingdom of heaven and thus with the kingdom of the Millennium, in clear contravention to Eusebius' actual opposition to chiliasm.

Though Moltmann is critical of both Augustine and Eusebius in his work, they nonetheless remain ideological foils, imbuing "presentative millenarianism" in the church and the state, respectively. In this sense, he implies that they set their Latin and Greek traditions on separate paths. Augustine set the stage for a Western Europe dominated by the Catholic Church, while Eusebius was the precursor to the totalitarian East. He characterizes Eusebius' views thus: "Rome lost the character given to it in Revelation 13. It was no longer anti-God and Antichrist. It now became a power in salvation history, an instrument for realizing the kingdom of Christ on earth. The apocalyptic city of the godless became the city of eternal salvation. This was the beginning of the theo-political doctrine of the eternal city: first Rome, second Byzantium, third Moscow."⁷³

Indeed, historians and scholars of the social sciences interested in the development of European political thought have found the juxtaposition of Eusebius and Augustine a neat model for the divergence of East and West. As the intellectual historian F. Edward Cranz wrote: "The contrast between Eusebius and Augustine is historically significant as broadly typical of the contrast between Greek East and Latin West. In Byzantium, and even in later Russia, men thought fundamentally in terms of a single, all-embracing Christian society under the headship of emperor or czar. But in the West, throughout the ancient period, the city of God and the empire were kept distinct."⁷⁴

Such a contrast between East and West was not intended by Peterson; he identified a western counterpart to Eusebius in the person of Orosius, and he credited the uncompromising Trinitarian theology of the Cappadocian Fathers nearly as much as Augustine's eschatology in discrediting political theology.⁷⁵ However, the ideological battle between Eusebius and Augustine set up by Peterson, when grossly simplified and received second or third hand, fit neatly with ideas about the divergent paths of the Orthodox East and the Catholic West. Thus

⁷² Ibid, *The Coming of God*, xv. On ibid, 181, Moltmann repeats this formulation in different words: "Once the Christian imperium and the Christian empires themselves become millenarian, they can obviously no longer tolerate any futurist millenarianism; they are bound to see this as profoundly calling in question their own existence, and put an extinguisher on such a hope as heretical."

⁷³ Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 161.

⁷⁴ F. Edward Cranz, "De civitate Dei, XV, 2, and Augustine's Idea of the Christian Society," *Speculum*, vol. 25 (1950), 221.

⁷⁵ Likewise, Markus, *Saeculum*, 49 n.2, in setting out the eschatological divide between the views of Eusebius and Hippolytus, criticizes W. H. C. Frend's *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church: A Study of Conflict from the Maccabees to Donatus* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1965), for being "a little too ready to align the two attitudes to the Empire with an East-West divide."

Augustine, by stressing the separation of the earthly from the heavenly city, presumably set the Western tradition on the path to the separation of church and state. Eusebius, on the other hand, is supposed to represent thinly Christianized oriental despotism and the source of caesaropapism. Peterson's claims about Christianity's immunity to political theology thus could be amended: Western Christianity had avoided concatenation with the state, while Eastern Christianity became a tool of the Byzantine Empire.⁷⁶ If Augustine liberated western thought from this absolutist theology, Eusebius, as father of "Byzantinism," left the East mired in it.

Indeed, such scholarship proliferated in the era of the Cold War, when Western European and American scholars eagerly plumbed the history of Eastern Orthodoxy for the intellectual roots of the ideology of the Soviet Union, a state one Russian historian has described as "the Russian Empire run by a millenarian sect."⁷⁷ Like Moltmann, several such scholars saw a straight line from the Soviet Union back to fifteenth-century Moscow (as the Third Rome), and from it back to the Byzantine state upon which it was modeled, and from Byzantium finally back to Eusebius himself.⁷⁸

It is from this historiographical tradition that Podskalsky's influential *Byzantinische Reichseschatologie* emerged. Anticipating Moltmann's criticism of "presentative millenarianism," Podskalsky asserts that, in contrast to the apocalypses of the Bible which looked forward to the end of the current order and the dawning of the kingdom of heaven, in Byzantine eschatology, "the focus of expectation is thus not the reversal of power relations, nor a revolutionary utopia as an anarchic alternative to hierarchical structures, but prolongation, consolidation, and expansion—in short, the immortalization—of that which already exists."⁷⁹ Writing in 1972, Podskalsky makes Eusebius a cipher not for Schmittian fascism, but for Soviet ideology, which coopted the utopian eschatology of Marx by transforming its promise of the eventual abolition of the state into the ideology of a totalitarian state.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ See Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, 287–288.

⁷⁷ Quotation from Yuri Slezkine, *The House of Government: A Saga of the Russian Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 182.

⁷⁸ Cyril Toumanoff, "Moscow the Third Rome: Genesis and Significance of a Politico-Religious Idea," *The Catholic Historical Review*, vol. 40 no. 4 (1955), 411–447, associates Eusebius repeatedly with the origins of Byzantine "monism," which he regards as a thinly Christianized relic of paganism. In *ibid*, 433 n.55, he calls Mongol political ideology, that other influence on Moscow, "not unlike Eusebius of Caesarea's." Finally, he concludes on *ibid*, 447: "Even today, the dominant Marxist ideology of Russia has not destroyed the ancient tradition. It has merely merged its own antagonism to religion and its expansionist materialistic millenarianism with the hatred of the True Rome and messianic expansion inherent in the 'Third Rome'." See also *idem*, "Caesaropapism in Byzantium and Russia," *Theological Studies*, vol. 7 (1946), 213–243, where Toumanoff argues that the continuation of the Roman power in the East stunted its political development: "From this point of view, the Empire's eastern (Byzantine) continuation was a sort of anomalous survival; it, too, should have vanished. And an anomaly will indeed be revealed in an examination of its Caesarian ideology... Hence, the Roman state of the post-Constantinian period was afflicted from the very start with what has been called *le mal byzantin*. From the beginning it evinced the confusion of the two powers—spiritual and temporal." Thus, Russia was "child of a sick mother."

⁷⁹ Podskalsky, *Byzantinische Reichseschatologie*, 102: "Im Brennpunkt der Erwartung lag darum nicht die Umkehr der Herrschaftsverhältnisse, nicht revolutionäre Utopie als anarchisches Korrektiv hierarchischer Strukturen, sondern Prolongation, Festigung, und Ausbau, kurz: Verewigung des schon Realisierten."

⁸⁰ Though he is not explicit in paralleling Byzantine eschatology with Marxism-Leninism, Podskalsky, *Byzantinische Reichseschatologie*, 1, makes clear that his project originated as a search for the Byzantine roots of

Reflecting on his *Byzantinische Reichseschatologie* thirty years later, and not long after the breakup of the Soviet Union, Podskalsky reemphasized the important distinction between the “true” Christian eschatology preached by Jesus and found in the Book of Revelation, and Byzantine imperial eschatology embodied by Eusebius of Caesarea. Making explicit use of Peterson, he characterized the latter as “political theology,” with roots are in pagan philosophy, so that it “ultimately opposes Christianity...” and “it means a perversion of the Christian faith.” He concludes his contrast of Christian eschatology with Byzantine eschatology with a warning: “The experience of modern European dictatorships suggests that the concepts should be clearly demarcated as a matter of principle in order to resist new seductive impulses.”⁸¹ Whether the analogy was with fascism or Communism, Eusebius (and thus Byzantine eschatology more generally) had come to represent the dangerous way totalitarianism could twist utopian hopes.

Obviously, the tendency to treat Eusebius in this way is highly anachronistic. He was an optimist about the potential of the close relationship between Christianity and the Roman Empire, but he was not invested in transforming eschatology to serve the ideological needs of a totalitarian state. Unfortunately, the anachronistic view of Eusebius’ eschatology has become a widely adopted historiographic cliché that has colored scholarship on the Christian eschatology of the late Roman and Byzantine empires in general. The prominence of Podskalsky’s study in the field of late antique and Byzantine studies has served to perpetuate these views among some of the finest scholars of late antiquity and the Byzantine Empire.

Dimiter Angelov and Judith Herrin have largely accepted Podskalsky’s view.⁸² Gilbert Dagron, in his important study of the imperial office in Byzantium, reveals similar ideas in his description of late Roman and Byzantine ideology: “The Roman empire... was part of an eschatological schema which gave it a meaning and an end; it was the last of the great universal monarchies predicted by the prophet Daniel (2 and 7) and St John, the last day of the worldly week of 7,000 years, a day which would never end and would lead to the establishment on earth of the kingdom of God.”⁸³ Paul Magdalino likewise contended that the late Roman forbearers of

the eschatological tradition that motivated the October Revolution, and that it had developed from his earlier MA thesis (*Lizenziatsarbeit*) on the thought of Vladimir Lenin.

⁸¹ Gerhard Podskalsky, “Politische Theologie in Byzanz zwischen Reichseschatologie und Reichsideologie,” in *Christianità d’Occidente e Christianità d’Oriente (secoli VI–XI)* (Spoleto: Presso la sede della Fondazione, 2004), 1421–1433; quotations on 1431–1432: “Reichsideologie, die sich letztlich dem Christentum entgegenstellt. Die byzantinische, apokalyptische Literatur stellt also eine Mischung von reichseschatologischen und reichsideologischen Elementen dar... Das Spannungsfeld erstreckt sich von der christlichen Exegese bis hin zur „politischen Theologie“, die in Wirklichkeit aber eine Perversion des christlichen Glaubens bedeutet. Die Erfahrung der europäischen Diktaturen der Neuzeit legt es nahe, die Begriffe klar zu trennen, um neuen verführerischen Anwendungen prinzipiell zu widerstehen.” Later on the same page he refers to “diese ‘Untiefen’ der byzantinischen Reichseschatologie.

⁸² Dimiter Angelov and Judith Herrin, “The Christian Imperial Tradition: Greek and Latin,” in *Universal Empire: A Comparative Approach to Imperial Culture and Representation in Eurasian History*, ed. P. F. Bang and D. Kołodziejczyk (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 171–172. Here, they comment that “Byzantine authors consistently saw their own empire as Daniel’s fourth kingdom,” but Angelov and Herrin anachronistically interpret this as a positive association. They add: “Another eschatological interpretation, which emerged in the Greek East starting with Eusebius in the fourth century, was that Byzantium was Christ’s universal and eternal kingdom on earth, that is, the empire was identified with the fifth, extra-historical empire.”

⁸³ Gilbert Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, 156.

the Byzantines “envisaged an earthly millennium of messianic imperial rule, or ... expected that the Second Coming was shortly to occur in Constantinople... [they] saw the Kingdom of Heaven as being both imminent and immanent in the Christian Empire.”⁸⁴

Nonetheless, as we have seen, Eusebius’ work reveals no evidence of such views. They have been ascribed to Eusebius, and read into certain of his statements, by modern scholars driven by their own assumptions and expectations about the father of Byzantine political ideology. Undoubtedly, Eusebius forged a political rhetoric designed to glorify the emperor and empire in Christian terms. Unlike Augustine, however, Eusebius based his ideology not on Millenarianism or the eschatological future, but in the circumstances of the triumphalist present. Eusebius could glorify Constantine and his state precisely because he did not dwell, at least in his celebratory Tricennial Oration or in his *Life of Constantine*, on its destiny as the fourth kingdom of Daniel. Nonetheless, there is no doubt that Eusebius and his Christian contemporaries had not rejected the notion that Rome was the fourth kingdom and all the implications that this view carried with it. Eusebius’ views were complicated and nuanced, and cannot simply be boiled down to a glorification of the empire and boundless optimism for its past, present, and future.

I.3: Ignoring Eschatology: Eusebius and Orosius on the Fourth Kingdom

If Eusebius did not view the Roman Empire as the fifth kingdom of Daniel, is it not possible that he viewed it as a sort of positive version of the fourth kingdom? Could he have expected that the Roman Empire would act as a fourth kingdom that prepared the way for the coming of Christ’s fifth kingdom? After all, he suggested that under Constantine’s enlightened rule the empire had become an earthly reflection of the heavenly fifth kingdom. Could this not be the origin of the notion in the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* that the Roman Empire’s role as fourth kingdom was to prepare the way for and hand over power to the fifth kingdom?

It is very difficult to determine the answer to this question, because Eusebius did not explore the implications of the idea that the Roman Empire was the fourth kingdom of Daniel. This in itself seems to be the method by which he coped with the fundamental challenge that the tradition political-eschatological narrative posed for his optimism regarding the Roman Empire under Constantine. He did not address the eschatological implication of his stance on the Roman Empire. Instead, he remained focused on the present (and on the past, by presenting Christianity as a religion with a rich past within the Roman Empire).⁸⁵ Perhaps he did believe, like many of his contemporaries, that the Antichrist would become emperor one day long after Constantine’s reign had ended, but this was not his immediate concern. Whatever the case, his exact views on Rome’s eschatological future as the fourth kingdom of Daniel are not clear in his surviving works.

⁸⁴ Magdalino, “The History of the Future,” 11.

⁸⁵ On Eusebius’ concern for the present, and use of eschatology for contemporary concerns, see—Clementina Mazzuco, “Eusèbe de Césarée et l’Apocalypse de Jean,” *Studia Patristica*, vol. 17 no. 1 (1979), 317–324. On Eusebius vision of Christianity’s Roman past, see James Corke-Webster, *Eusebius and Empire*, 249–279.

If it is not possible to fully recover how Eusebius viewed the role of the Christian Roman Empire in light of the kingdoms of Daniel, it is possible to look to how similar thinkers solved the same problem. Peterson had singled out Paulus Orosius (d. c. 420) as Eusebius' Latin counterpart in his views toward the relationship of the Christian church to the Roman state. Though he lived almost a century later than Eusebius, there are indeed major similarities in their thought. Since Orosius, in his *Books of History against the Pagans* (*Historiae Adversus Paganos Libri VII*), addressed these questions of Christian Rome's eschatological role in more detail than Eusebius (though he was still evasive about some of the major implications), he may help shed some light into how Eusebius may have understood the Roman Empire's eschatological role.⁸⁶

In the *Seven Books of History*, Orosius responded to pagans who claimed that the empire-wide embrace of Christianity had brought about unprecedented catastrophe (notably, the sack of Rome by the Goths in 410 AD) by arguing that all of history had been filled with violence and disaster, and that Christianity, rather than bringing about a decline, had actually mitigated such disasters and generally improved humanity's lot. In this way, Orosius' project had a similar rhetorical aim to Augustine's *City of God* (and, indeed, Orosius dedicated the *Seven Books of History* to Augustine), but he ended up at odds with his teacher on the question of the Roman Empire. While Augustine, who completed his *City of God* after Orosius finished his *Seven Books of History*, stressed the separation of the earthly and heavenly cities, Orosius proclaimed natural partnership between Christianity and the Roman Empire. This partnership, according to Orosius, facilitated the tangible improvement that Christianity brought to humankind.

Still, Orosius did not hesitate to affirm that the Roman Empire is the fourth kingdom of Daniel.⁸⁷ Indeed, he provides a new understanding of the succession of kingdoms, further telescoping the eastern empires in order to accommodate Rome's old enemy, the Carthaginian Empire. Under his scheme the four kingdoms also represent rulership from the four cardinal directions: "four chief kingdoms preeminent in distinct stages, namely: the Babylonian kingdom in the East, the Carthaginian in the South, the Macedonian in the North, and the Roman in the West."⁸⁸ Orosius appears to be the first author to associate the four kingdoms of Daniel with cardinal directions, though this would eventually become a common trope (perhaps inspired by Daniel 11, where the rival kings are described as Kings of the North and Kings of the South).

These kingdoms mirror one another. The second and third kingdoms—Macedon and Carthage—were short-lived and transitional, while the first and last kingdoms—Rome and Babylon—were enduring and powerful. Thus, Rome is the typological successor of Babylon.

⁸⁶ Here I use the edition of Marie-Pierre Arnaud-Lindet, *Orose: Histoires Contre les Païens*, 3 volumes (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1990–1); I have used the English translation in A. T. Fear, *Orosius: Seven Books of History against the Pagans* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010).

⁸⁷ Swain, "The Theory of Four Monarchies: Opposition History under the Roman Empire," *Classical Philology*, vol. 35 (1940), 20–21, claims that Orosius envisioned the Christian Roman Empire as the fifth kingdom, but there is no evidence within the text of the *Seven Books of History* to support this assertion. Equally unlikely is Swain's argument that Orosius' use of the four-kingdom scheme is not derived from the Book of Daniel, but classical pagan notions of a succession of five empires.

⁸⁸ Orosius, *Seven Books of History against the Pagans*, II.1.5, ed. Arnaud-Lindet, *Histoires*, vol. 1, 85: *quattuor regnorum principatus distinctis gradibus eminentes, ut Babylonium regnum ab oriente, a meridie Carthaginiense, a septentrione Macedonicum, ab occidente Romanum.*

According to Orosius' chronological calculations, both powers' histories mirrored one another: Rome arose at the same year Babylon fell, it expelled its ruling kings the same year Babylon was seized by foreign kings, and as of the year 410 they reigned an equal amount of time.⁸⁹

Whereas Augustine used similar calculations to demonstrate that Rome was the new Babylon, Orosius saw Babylon as a contrast to Rome because their paths had diverged: "Behold, how Babylon and Rome had a similar beginning, similar power, a similar size, a similar age, similar goods, and similar evils, but their end and decline are not similar. Babylon lost her kingdom; Rome retains hers."⁹⁰ The reason for this difference, according to Orosius, was that in Babylon "there was no reverence for religion," while in Rome the true religion spread, and the rulers became Christians.⁹¹

Both Babylon and Rome suffered sacks in their 1164th year, which is where Orosius claimed their histories diverged. According to Orosius, the sack of Babylon led to the collapse of its empire, but Christianity had prevented the Gothic sack of Rome in 410 from turning into a calamity: the Christian Goths had destroyed pagan monuments and left the churches standing, so the sack was in a sense fortunate, for it was merely the final bloody expurgation of paganism from Rome. Rather than collapse, as had been the case for Babylon, Rome's future was uncertain but more promising than ever.

Thus, Orosius invoked the four kingdoms in Daniel, but did not mention their apocalyptic end. He made no mention of the evil nature and violent fate of the fourth kingdom. For Orosius, Daniel's four kingdoms were an organizing scheme for the past, not a vision of the future.⁹² He compared Rome with Babylon, but made no mention of the apocalyptic Babylon (or the whore of Babylon) of the Book of Revelation long identified with the Roman Empire. Orosius did make some brief allusions to the end of the world, but it is not at all clear exactly how he envisioned the last days will play out. He suggested that there will be a great persecution under the Antichrist, which he implicitly compared to the one instituted by Diocletian.⁹³ Does that mean the Antichrist will come to rule over the Roman Empire and use the organs of state to impose this persecution? Orosius does not say.

Surely, however, Orosius must have known the eschatological valence of the four kingdoms from the Book of Daniel. Does he remain willfully blind to the implications for the

⁸⁹ According to Orosius, the Babylonian (or Assyrian) kingdom fell the same year Procas, the great grandfather of Romulus and Remus, became king of the Latins, and it was no coincidence that "the seed of the future Rome" was sown in the same year Babylon fell. Moreover, Orosius claimed that the final conquest of Babylon by Cyrus the Great occurred in the year that the Romans expelled the Tarquin kings and established the republic. Later, in VII.2.3, he compares the freedom of the Jews gained from Cyrus with the freedom the Roman gained with end of the monarchy and the birth of the republic. Finally, according to Orosius, II.3.2–3, Babylon ruled for 1,164 years before it was sacked by the Medes, and Rome ruled the same number of years before it was sacked by Alaric's Goths.

⁹⁰ Orosius, *Seven Books of History against the Pagans*, II.3.6; ed. Arnaud-Lindet, *Histoires*, vol. 1, 89: *Ecce similis Babyloniae ortus et Romae, similis potentia, similis magnitudo, similia tempora, similia bona, similia mala; tamen non similis exitus similisue defectus. illa enim regnum amisit, haec retinet.*

⁹¹ Ibid., II.3.7.

⁹² See Peter Van Nuffelen, *Orosius and the Rhetoric of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 49–50, who relates Orosius' use of the Book of Daniel scheme to the ordering of empires in classicizing historians.

⁹³ Ibid., VII.27.15–16.

Roman Empire? In a study of Orosius' understanding of history, Peter Van Nuffelen provides a convincing explanation. Orosius drew so much attention to the parallels between Rome and Babylon in order to show that the Roman Empire had been on the path to becoming the fourth beast, the kingdom of the Little Horn, foreseen in the Book of Daniel. In the words of Peter van Nuffelen:

Orosius emphasizes the historical necessity of the fall of Rome in the light of the 'theory of the four empires', in order to draw attention to its miraculous saving... the 'four empire theory' is an edifice constructed by Orosius to demonstrate that God is the ultimate arbiter of things and can go against the order of history, even if he has arranged that order himself.⁹⁴

In other words, while the Roman Empire remained the fourth kingdom in Orosius' eyes, its embrace of Christianity had delayed the terrible fate that the Book of Daniel promised for it.

Nonetheless, Nueffelen adds, this did not mean that Orosius thought Rome was permanently saved from becoming the kingdom of the Little Horn or from the resulting destruction it must face: "Rome will not escape that fate and is not eternal. When it will happen, one cannot tell. As any Roman, Orosius might have hoped that Rome would last for a long time, but he was very much aware of the spectre of Babylon: Rome's survival is conditional on its morality. Christianity and morality have saved Rome: unlike Babylon, Rome is free, but only on parole."⁹⁵

Thus, while Orosius engaged with the tradition that the Roman Empire was the fourth kingdom of Daniel, he pushed aside the eschatological implications for the time being. Yet even this exposes the limits to the imaginative horizons of fifth century Roman Christians on the issue of political eschatology. There was no notion that the Roman Empire had become the Kingdom of God or a fourth kingdom that would prepare the way for, and hand over power to, the fifth kingdom. At best, the Roman Empire had delayed its fate. Perhaps that fate could even be judged uncertain in light of the empire's embrace of Christianity. But no alternative political eschatology was advanced.

Obviously, we cannot determine whether Eusebius shared Orosius' views. Nonetheless, Orosius' formulation provides a general model for how a Christian-Roman triumphalist like Eusebius could have viewed the empire in relation to the end of history. While the empire embraced Christianity under a good emperor like Constantine, it could become a reflection or image of the fifth kingdom on earth and put off its ultimate fate. One day the Antichrist would arrive, the empire would be destroyed, and Christ would return to bring the Kingdom of Heaven. But that was a long way off.

⁹⁴ Van Nuffelen, *Orosius and the Rhetoric of History*, 51.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 53.

Conclusions: The Absence of Imperial Eschatology in the Fourth Century

The idea that Eusebius had formulated an “imperial eschatology” that elevated the Roman Empire to the fifth kingdom of Daniel or the millennium of Revelation is based on long-held but faulty assumptions about the father of church history. Eusebius consistently viewed the Roman Empire as the fourth kingdom of Daniel. Unlike Augustine—who would later argue that the millennium had arrived in the church but that this millennium was separate from and preceded the fifth kingdom—Eusebius did not believe in any sort of millennium, either preceding or contemporary with the fifth kingdom. He never contradicts the standard beliefs of the common political-eschatological scenario described in the previous chapter, even if that scenario was inconvenient to him. Eusebius handled this inconvenience by dedicating little discussion to it.

The rest of this chapter will show that “imperial eschatology” is likewise absent from all surviving sources through the seventh century. The widespread assumption that Eusebius had pioneered a Christian “imperial eschatology” has provided the groundwork for arguments about the manifestation of such thought in late antique apocalypticism and imperial propaganda. However, with that groundwork removed, it will become clear that these arguments rest of very flimsy foundations indeed.

Part 2: Apocalypses and the Last Emperor

Even if Eusebius did not herald a change in political eschatology concerning the Roman Empire, one may still argue that Eusebius was but one voice, and an elite voice at that. More popular literature, such texts that belong to the genre of apocalypses, might express very different views.⁹⁶ As noted in the previous chapter, past studies on late antique political eschatology have relied too heavily on apocalypses, which is why this and the previous chapter of this dissertation have focused on other, non-apocalyptic sources for political eschatology. Nonetheless, having surveyed the other sources, it is now necessary to examine the apocalyptic sources in search of “imperial eschatology.”

Several scholars have suggested that surviving apocalypses provide evidence of a Eusebian shift in political eschatology, that they attest that already by the fourth century the Roman Empire was regarded as a positive eschatological force preparing the way for the fifth kingdom. For example, Stephen Shoemaker, whose work leans heavily on the apocalyptic sources, argues that late antique apocalypses demonstrate that “from the fourth century onward, Christians increasingly looked to the Roman Empire and its emperor as having been divinely appointed to subdue and defeat the enemies of Christ in order to prepare for his Second

⁹⁶ Richard Landes suggests just this sort of divide between elite and popular eschatology in his “Lest the Millennium be Fulfilled: Apocalyptic Expectations and the Pattern of Western Chronography: 100–800 CE,” in *The Use and Abuse of Eschatology in the Middle Ages*, ed. W. Verbeke, D. Verhelst, and A. Welkenhuysen (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1988), 137–211; as does Shoemaker, *The Apocalypse of Empire*, 42.

Coming.”⁹⁷ Most commonly it is argued that these apocalypses developed a political theology focused largely on the figure of the Last Roman Emperor—a messianic eschatological ruler who will defeat the enemies of the empire and surrender his power to Christ. Thus, Norman Cohn, in his classic 1957 *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, claimed: “There had been Hellenistic kings who carried the title ‘Saviour’ and Roman Emperors who were accorded divine honours in their lifetime. It was therefore not surprising that, as soon as Christianity joined forces with the Empire, Christian Sibyllines should greet Constantine as the messianic king. After Constantine’s death the Sibyllines continued to attach eschatological significance to the figure of the Roman Emperor.”⁹⁸

In the many decades since Cohn wrote, this claim has gone largely unchallenged. Recently, for example, Richard Landes, one of the foremost scholars of medieval apocalypticism, has claimed: “The fantasy Eusebius and Constantine had aroused proved astoundingly durable, and, in an imperial parallel to the ‘Second Coming,’ Christendom developed beliefs about a once-and-future ‘Last Emperor’ who has already come and would return to conquer the world and bring all within the just confines of true Christianity.”⁹⁹ Stephen Shoemaker has actively argued that the myth of the Last Emperor “developed in the context of Constantine’s conversion and the Christianization of the Roman Empire during the fourth century.” Like Landes, Shoemaker associates the concept of the Last Emperor with the supposed shift in eschatology inaugurated by Eusebius, claiming that the “Last Emperor tradition effectively translates Eusebius’ vision of the unity between the empire and emperor and the Kingdom of Heaven into the vivid language of apocalypticism...the idea of the Last Emperor was thus already implicit in the eschatology and political ideology of fourth-century Christianity.”¹⁰⁰ The idea of the Last Emperor as rooted in the fourth century is thus inextricably tied to the mistaken notion of a Eusebian eschatological shift. As a result, the Last Emperor legend has become a major factor in scholarship on imperial eschatology. However, this scholarship has used the Last Emperor legend in a sort of circular reason. The Last Emperor must be dated to the fourth century the argument goes, because that is the point in which Christian “imperial eschatology” emerged, and then the existence of Christian “imperial eschatology” in the fourth century is justified by the supposed existence of the Last Emperor tradition already in this time.

In fact, no such Last Emperor legend yet existed in the fourth century. The idea of the heroic Last Roman Emperor is actually an invention of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*,

⁹⁷ Stephen Shoemaker, “The Tiburtine Sibyl, the Last Emperor, and the Early Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition,” in *Forbidden Texts on the Western Frontier: The Christian Apocrypha in North American Perspectives*, ed. Tony Burke (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2015) 218–244, with quotation on 227.

⁹⁸ Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1957), 30–31.

⁹⁹ Richard Landes, *Heaven on Earth: The Varieties of the Millennial Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 24.

¹⁰⁰ Shoemaker, *The Apocalypse of Empire*, 60.

and was primarily a response to an eschatological crisis in the seventh century.¹⁰¹ The evidence adduced in favor of a fourth-century tradition on the Last Emperor in the fourth century comes from later, medieval apocalypses which, when first studied during the nineteenth and early twentieth century, were dated far too early. More recent scholars have taken this earlier work at face value and have continued to retroject the legend of the Last Emperor centuries before it was first dreamed up. A more careful examination of the Last Emperor tradition, and the larger tradition of late antique Christian apocalypse writing, will show that in reality no “imperial eschatology” is found before the seventh century.

II.1: Rethinking Late Antique Apocalypses

The anachronistic placement of the messianic Last Emperor in the age of Constantine originated in a misuse of historical sources. The sort of pseudonymous, narrative apocalypses that are so common in the literature of the medieval and early modern periods—and the bread and butter of modern scholarship on those subjects—largely do not survive in the state they originally had in late antiquity. As noted at the beginning of the previous chapter, the composition of new “historical apocalypses” seems to have slowed in the early Christian period, as Daniel and Revelation became the canonical apocalypses. However, it is likely that the production of apocalypses slowly picked up again over time, even if these new works lacked the prestige of a place in the canon. This does not mean apocalypses were not written in that period, for they surely were, but only a handful of manuscripts of any kind survive from the late antique period (mostly in the dry climate of Egypt), and no rediscovered trove like Qumran or the Geniza exists for late antique Christian apocalypses. Therefore, by necessity scholars look to works preserved in later, medieval manuscripts.

These methods are imported from the fields of classical philology and Biblical criticism, but they are highly problematic when dealing with medieval apocalypses, which are more textually open. Ancient apocalypses such as the Book of Daniel, the Book of Revelation, 4 Ezra, and 2 Baruch are preserved in manuscripts copied centuries after these apocalypses reached their final form (for example, the earliest manuscript, outside fragments from Qumran, of the original Hebrew/Aramaic Book of Daniel dates to the early eleventh century), and yet these manuscripts are reliable witnesses because the texts had become fixed when they entered Christian canon (or deuterocanon). Medieval apocalypses experienced no such standardization.¹⁰² Scribes routinely added, subtracted, and rewrote large portions of the medieval pseudonymous apocalypses in

¹⁰¹ For a more detailed demonstration of this point, see Christopher Bonura, “When Did the Legend of the Last Emperor Originate? A New Look at the Textual Relationship Between the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* and the *Tiburtine Sibyl*,” *Viator*, vol. 47 no. 3 (2016), 47–100.

¹⁰² Note that even the Book of Daniel, for example, probably mutated substantially until a specific version was accepted as a part of the canon (in the Greek and Latin traditions, the Theodotion translation of the Aramaic-Hebrew redaction from the time of Antiochus IV, plus the stories of Susanna and Bel and the Dragon).

order to bring them up to date with their own present circumstances.¹⁰³

The nineteenth-century tendency to date works as early as possible has heavily distorted understandings of evidence from medieval apocalypses. In the course of scholarly efforts to uncover a late antique stratum, lines in the apocalypses that clearly referred to events in the medieval period were dismissed as later interpolations as scholars sought to uncover a late antique stratum in apocalyptic texts. The older a work, the more valuable it was considered as a source, which provided an incentive to argue for very early dates on the basis of flimsy evidence (concrete example will be discussed below).

The problems caused by these methods are discernable in scholarship on the two apocalypses (which, not coincidentally, often accompany the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* in Latin manuscripts). These apocalypses are help up as examples for a fourth-century conception of the Roman Empire as an earthly kingdom that prepares the way for the kingdom of heaven. While there is good reason to believe that these two works were influenced by the ideology of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholarship argued that they were far older than the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, claiming that they must date to the fourth century, and attempted to uncover a late antique textual core.

The first of these is the Latin *Tiburtine Sibyl*, which tells of a group of Roman senators who have the same dream of nine suns. The dream is interpreted by the Sibyl of the Tibur, who explicates the suns as the nine ages of the world, providing the frame for an apocalyptic discourse on history. The Latin *Tiburtine Sibyl* indeed seems to include material originally composed in the late fourth century, perhaps during the reign of Theodosius I (r. 379–395). However, it survives only in manuscripts from the late eleventh century and later, and includes layers of interpolations, such as mentions of Charlemagne and the affairs of the Salian and Saxon kings of Italy. It also includes an ending (which modern scholarship now usually treats as a separate work called the *Vaticinium of Constans*) that follows the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* very closely. The ending asserts that a Last Emperor (here given the name “Constans”) will arise and defeat the enemies of the faith (typically called Saracens but, crucially for those that would maintain a fourth-century origin, in one recension described as pagans and Jews), followed by the invasion of Gog and Magog through the Gates of the North, and finally the surrender of power by the Last Emperor in Jerusalem.

The first editor of the Latin *Tiburtine Sibyl*, Ernst Sackur (in the same 1898 volume in which published his edition the Latin *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*), asserted that the entirety of the *Tiburtine Sibyl* was written in the fourth century, in spite of obvious interpolations like the mention of the medieval Germanic kings. He argued that the Last Emperor of the *Vaticinium of Constans* referred to Constantine’s son, Emperor Constans I (r. 337–350). According to Sackur, when in 350 AD the “Arian” (*homoean*) heretic Constantius II took over the provinces of his deceased brother Constans, who had been a supporter of the Council of

¹⁰³ On open vs. closed texts in medieval manuscripts, see Hans-Georg Beck, “Überlieferungsgeschichte der byzantinischen Literatur,” in *Geschichte der Textüberlieferung der antiken und mittelalterlichen Literatur*, vol. 1, ed. Herbert Hunger (Zurich: Atlantis, 1961), 423–510.

Nicaea, an outraged Nicene Christian (of the party of Athanasius of Alexandria and Hilary of Poitiers) must have written the whole of the *Tiburtine Sibyl* to express hope that Constans would return from the dead to restore the Nicene definition of faith and prepare the way for the Second Coming.¹⁰⁴

It appears, however, that the *Vaticinium of Constans* was actually one of the medieval interpolations added to the *Tiburtine Sibyl*. Since the time of Sackur, versions of the *Tiburtine Sibyl* have since been discovered in Greek, Garshuni (Arabic written in Syriac characters), Old Church Slavonic, and Ethiopic, all of them lacking the *Vaticinium of Constans*.¹⁰⁵ As I have demonstrated in detail elsewhere, the argument for a fourth-century date of the *Vaticinium of Constans* is untenable. It must have been added to the Latin version of the *Tiburtine Sibyl* in the eleventh century, and its composition was influenced (perhaps through the intermediary of a Byzantine apocalypse) by the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*.¹⁰⁶

The second work that has contributed to similar misconceptions is a Latin apocalypse attributed in manuscript copies to the great Syriac theologian and hymnographer, Ephrem the Syrian (d. 371), which circulated in several eighth and ninth-century codices alongside the Latin *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*. This work, which modern scholars have called by a number of different titles but which I will call (to avoid confusion with other apocalypses falsely attributed to Ephrem) the *Scarpsum of Saint Ephrem*, will be discussed in greater detail in a later chapter.¹⁰⁷ Here, it is sufficient to note that although it only survives in Latin, the *Scarpsum of*

¹⁰⁴ Ernst Sackur, *Sibyllinische Texte und Forschungen: Pseudomethodius Adso und Die tiburtinische Sibylle*. (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1898), 158–163. Since there were no references to Julian the Apostate and his abandonment of Christianity, Sackur believed that the text must have been written sometime between the death of Constantine and the reign of Julian; see *ibid.*, 162.

¹⁰⁵ The Greek version of the *Tiburtine Sibyl* is discussed in detail below. For the Garshuni version, see J. Schleifer, *Die Erzählung der Sibylle: Ein Apokryph nach den karschunischen, arabischen und äthiopischen Handschriften zu London, Oxford, Paris und Rom* (Vienna: Alfred Hölder 1910); E. Y. Ebied and M. J. L. Young, “An Unrecorded Arabic Version of a Sibylline Prophecy,” *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 43.2 (1977) 279–307; Mark N. Swanson, “The Arabic Sibylline Prophecy,” *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History, volume 1 (600–900)*, ed. David Thomas and Barbara Roggema (Boston 2009) 492–497. For Ethiopian versions, see René Basset, *Les apocryphes éthiopiens X: La sagesse de Sibylle* (Paris: Bibliothèque de la haute science, 1900). For the Slavonic version, see Vasilka Tăpkova-Zaimova and Anisava Miltenova, *Historical and Apocalyptic Literature in Byzantium and Medieval Bulgaria* (Sophia: Iztok-Zapad, 2011), 469–506. This Slavonic version, which makes the nine suns represent peoples/nations instead of ages, does mention that the Tatars (the ninth and final nation) will be destroyed by a man named Michael. This figure is possibly related to the Last Emperor (named Michael in several Bulgarian apocalypses), see Tăpkova-Zaimova and Miltenova, 506 n. 37, but clearly this is a late addition, as anything related to the Tartars can date only to the thirteenth century or later. A Romanian version, perhaps derived from the Slavonic, also survives: see M. Gaster, “The Sibyl and the Dream of One Hundred Suns: An Old Apocryphon,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, vol. 42 (1910), 609–623.

¹⁰⁶ Bonura, “When did the Legend of the Last Emperor Originate?” 47–100. Stephen Shoemaker, *The Apocalypse of Empire*, 51–52 (with more extensive arguments in the endnotes on 191–199), disputes my points in order to once again argue for a fourth-century date for the *Vaticinium of Constans* in the *Tiburtine Sibyl* and thus a fourth-century Last Emperor. However, it should be noted that he wrongly states that I assert that the *Vaticinium of Constans* was influenced by the Latin *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* and raises weaknesses with this point, when in reality my argument depends upon the idea that the *Vaticinium of Constans* relied on the Greek version (or an intermediary Byzantine apocalyptic source that was using the Greek version).

¹⁰⁷ This work survives in five manuscripts, three of which date to the eighth century. It has been edited, on the basis of two manuscripts, by Claus Caspari, *Briefe, Abhandlungen und Predigten aus den zwei letzten*

Saint Ephrem appears to be a translation from Greek (which itself could possibly be a translation from Syriac), and it talks of the Roman Empire as willingly transferring its power to Christ at the end of time.

While few scholars have been willing to accept the *Scarpsum of Saint Ephrem* as a genuine work by Ephrem the Syrian, several have claimed that there is nothing to exclude that it was written shortly after his death. It mentions two brothers ruling the Roman Empire, which has been taken as an indication that it was written during the reign of the brother emperors Valentinian (r. 364–375) and Valens (r. 364–378). Claus Caspari, who edited the *Scarpsum of Saint Ephrem* in the 1890, recognized that certain details in the apocalypse could not have been written prior to the seventh century, but argued that a fourth-century original composed in the reign of Valentinian and Valens had been interpolated in the seventh century. Five years later, in his influential work on the history of the legend of the Antichrist, Wilhelm Bousset stated unequivocally that this apocalypse dated to the fourth century.¹⁰⁸

As in the case of the *Vaticinium of Constans* in the Latin *Tiburtine Sibyl*, the argument for a fourth-century date in the case of the *Scarpsum of Saint Ephrem* is no longer tenable. Gerrit Reinink has made a compelling case that it was actually composed c. 700, and that it drew heavily on the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*.¹⁰⁹ Indeed, as will be discussed in a later chapter, it survives in the same Latin manuscripts as many of the earliest copies of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* probably because it was written as a supplement to the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*.

Thus, thanks to this recent scholarship, it has become clear that the *Vaticinium of Constans* in the Latin *Tiburtine Sibyl* and the *Scarpsum of Saint Ephrem* did not predate the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, but were in fact inspired by it. The implications of these reevaluations have yet to sink into the larger scholarly narrative on political eschatology. Indeed, it is hard to underestimate the distorting effect that the excessively early dating of these two texts has had on the study of the development of political eschatology in late antiquity.

Jahrhunderten des kirchlichen Alterthums und dem Anfang des Mittelalters (Christiania : Mallingsche Buchdruckerei, 1890), 208–220, with a commentary on 429–472. A newer edition, based on all five manuscripts, is provided by Daniel Verhelst “Scarpsum de dictis sancti Efre[m] prope fine mundi,” in *Pascua Mediaevalia: Studies voor Prof. Dr. J.M. de Smet*, ed. R. Lievens, E. van Mingroot, Jozef-Maria de Smet, and Werner Verbeke (Belgium: Universitaire pers Leuven, 1983), 518–528. This work has gone by various titles in modern scholarship. Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, 136–147, calls it “Pseudo-Ephraem,” and Reinink, “Pseudo-Methodius and the Pseudo-Ephremian ‘Sermo de Fine Mundi,’” 317–321, calls it the *Sermo de Fine Mundi*. However, these titles are likely only to increase the already rampant confusion in scholarship between this Latin work and the Syriac *Homily on the End*, also attributed to Ephrem. The title used by Daniel Verhelst, *Scarpsum de dictis sancti Efre[m] prope fine mundi*, which he took from the *incipit* of the perhaps the earliest manuscript (Cod. Paris Bibliothèque National, Fonds latin 13348), is probably the best title and avoids such confusions. In one of the early manuscripts (Cod. St. Gall Stiftsbibliothek 108), it is attributed to Isidore of Seville, with the title: *Sermo sancti Ysidori de fine mundi*, but the others attribute it to Ephrem.

¹⁰⁸ Wilhelm Bousset, *Der Antichrist in der Ueberlieferung des Judentums, des neuen Testaments und der alten Kirche* (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1895), 21–27; in the English translation, *The Antichrist Legend: A Chapter in Christian and Jewish Folklore*, transl. A. H. Keane (London: Hutchinson, 1896), 33–41.

¹⁰⁹ Gerrit Reinink, “Pseudo-Methodius and the Pseudo-Ephremian ‘Sermo de Fine Mundi,’” 317–321

In his 1985 *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, Paul Alexander placed the birth of pro-Roman political eschatology in the fourth century, not on the basis of Eusebius' Tricennial Oration, but on the Latin *Tiburtine Sibyl* and the *Scarpsum of Saint Ephrem*: "An eschatological identification between Roman and Christian Empire occurs in Pseudo-Ephraem [i.e., the *Scarpsum of Saint Ephrem*], which probably belongs to the fourth century. It is therefore not unreasonable to surmise that during the reign of Constantine the Great at the latest, in Christian eschatology a Last Roman Emperor took the place held in Late Jewish apocalyptic by a Jewish king."¹¹⁰

In 2000, Hans Möhring published a monograph dedicated to chronicling the history of the legend of the Last Emperor from late antiquity to the dawn of the early modern period. Here, Möhring accepted the idea that the *Vaticinium of Constans* in the Latin *Tiburtine Sibyl* dates to the fourth century, which caused him to place the turn in imperial eschatology in the fourth century.¹¹¹ Likewise, in a 2006 article, Bill Leadbetter used the Latin *Tiburtine Sibyl* in order to portray the reign of Constantine as the critical junction for Christian political eschatology: "No longer could Christian apocalypticists perceive Rome as the enemy. Now the Empire was both eternal and good, the institution central to God's saving and redemptive intention."¹¹² In 2018, Stephen Shoemaker made the presumed presence of the Last Emperor in a fourth-century version of the *Tiburtine Sibyl* the centerpiece of his argument for pervasive Christian "imperial eschatology" in the fourth century.¹¹³

Bernard McGinn, in a long series of books and articles on medieval apocalyptic thought, has been more circumspect about the dating of texts and considers the possibility of both early and late dates for these two apocalypses. Nonetheless, he began his influential sourcebook of medieval apocalyptic literature with the *Tiburtine Sibyl*—including a translation of the *Vaticinium of Constans*—and placed the *Scarpsum of Ephrem* before the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*. The order in which he placed these apocalyptic works implies a narrative whereby the Roman Empire and its emperor had assumed a positive eschatological role early in the history of the Christian Empire.

¹¹⁰ Paul Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 184.

¹¹¹ Hannes Möhring, *Der Weltkaiser der Endzeit: Entstehung, Wandel und Wirkung einer tausendjährigen Weissagung* (Stuttgart: Thorbecke, 2000), 45: "Unverkennbar dagegen versucht der Verfasser [der Tiburtinische Sibylle] ursprünglich aus christlicher Sicht bestehende Gegensätze zwischen dem Christentum und dem römische Reich als antichristlicher Macht zu überbrücken."

¹¹² William Leadbetter, "A Byzantine Narrative of the Future and the Antecedents of the Last World Emperor," in *Byzantine Narrative: Papers in Honour of Roger Scott*, ed. John Burke, Ursula Betka, and Roger Scott (Melbourne: Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, 2006), 368–382, with quotation on 379. Though Leadbetter notes that Eusebius did not portray Constantine in an apocalyptic light, and recognizes the difficulties surrounding the date of the *Vaticinium of Constans* portion of the *Tiburtine Sibyl*, Leadbetter nonetheless notes that the *Tiburtine Sibyl* references Constantine in a positive light in one of its *vaticinia ex eventu*, and so this must indicate a Christian reevaluation of the eschatological role of Roman emperors in the fourth century; he does not seem to consider that a Christian author could consider Constantine an ideal emperor without upending traditional political-eschatological expectations.

¹¹³ Shoemaker, *The Apocalypse of Empire*, 42–63.

Late antique apocalypses are important sources, but they need to be submitted to a level of care and critical scrutiny that scholars have generally avoided. Too often scholars have dated them based on the earliest indication, and regarded any material that seemed to conflict with such conclusions as later interpolations. I suggest, instead, that such apocalypses need to be treated as discrete and whole works, reflecting the period of the *latest* interpolation to the text.

There are a few historical apocalypses that meet these criteria, either because late antique copies do happen to survive, or because the texts preserved in later manuscripts show no signs of interventions from after the seventh century. Nonetheless, though my method severely limits the number of apocalypses that can be used as sources from the period from the fourth to seventh century, those that can be used are far more reliable as sources for late antique mentalities.

When limited to this source base, it soon becomes clear that triumphalist “imperial eschatology” does not feature in the apocalyptic works of this period. The eschatological scenario found in such apocalypses is instead similar to the common political-eschatological scenario described in the previous chapter. For example, the *Apocalypse of Thomas*, one of the few apocalypses that survives in medieval Latin manuscripts that may originate in the late antique period (it contains no clear references to events later than the early fifth century) describes a succession of kings making war on each other. These are alternatively good and bad kings, but there is no “Last Emperor” figure, no hope for a renovation of the Roman Empire or its glory in the *eschaton*.¹¹⁴ The future is one of civil war, followed by the coming of the Antichrist, who will reign until the second coming of Christ.

A very similar eschatological scenario is found in three other apocalypses, surviving in Greek, Coptic, and Armenian. These three are connected by common features and parallel passages, and require a more thorough examination, especially because previous scholarship on them has often been informed by the usual assumptions about late antique political eschatology.

II.2: The Coptic Apocalypse of Elijah

It is no surprise that the earliest surviving late antique Christian apocalypse is from Egypt, where the climate has allowed the preservation of manuscripts from much earlier periods than anywhere else. The *Apocalypse of Elijah*, a Coptic apocalypse, survives in manuscripts from the fourth and fifth century, including an early fourth-century copy from the White Monastery in Upper Egypt, though it was probably composed at least a century earlier.¹¹⁵ In his book-length

¹¹⁴ The earliest text of the *Apocalypse of Thomas* was discovered in a palimpsest in Vienna, cod. Vienna Palatinus 16, dating to the fifth century. An edition of it has been provided by E. Hauler, “Zu den neuen lateinischen Bruchstücken der Thomasapokalypse und eines apostolischen Sendschreibens in Cod. Vindob. Nr. 16,” *Wiener Studien*, vol. 30 (1908), 308–340. A longer version, found in several manuscript copies, the earliest being Cod. Munich Clm. 4585, dating to the ninth century, was edited by F. Friedrich Wilhelm, *Deutsche Legenden und Legendare: Texte und Untersuchungen zu ihrer Geschichte im Mittelalter* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1907), 40–42. An introduction and English translations of both version are provided by M. R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, (Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1924), 555–562.

¹¹⁵ The *Apocalypse of Elijah* survives in five whole or fragmentary copies, four in Sahadic (the standard Coptic dialect of Upper Egypt associated with Thebes), and one in Akhmimic (the dialect of Panopolis, further to the south). The earliest manuscript, the Akhmimic from the White Monastery (Berlin, Staatliche Museen, Abteilung

study of this apocalypse, David Frankfurter dated it to c. 250 AD, to the time of the Decian persecution, on account of its intense focus on martyrdom.¹¹⁶ It is strongly influenced by the Book of Revelation, and predicts a millennial kingdom of Christ on earth, features that would have been out of place in the fourth century.¹¹⁷

The *Apocalypse of Elijah* is firmly centered on Egypt. It outlines an eschatological scenario characterized by a succession of alternatively good and bad kings who will rule over Egypt in the time preceding Christ's second coming. This begins with an evil Assyrian king, who will be killed by a "King of Peace." This good king will venerate the Christian holy places and saints, but will be murdered by his evil son.¹¹⁸ On account of this new king's wars, boys as young as twelve will be forced into military service and pregnant women will be seized and forced to suckle vipers to produce poison for arrows. The Nile will turn to blood.¹¹⁹ Then, a good king will arise from Heliopolis. He will rebuild the holy places, honor the saints, close pagan temples, and exempt his people from taxes for three and a half years.¹²⁰ Though there will be a great peace, in this period the Antichrist will arise. The Antichrist will call himself the messiah and become king.¹²¹ He will do battle with the saints, and turn the earth into a desert. Finally, with the return of Christ, the Antichrist will be defeated and the Millennium will begin.¹²²

The last good king before the Antichrist, the one who comes from Heliopolis, has been cited as a potential origin for the Last Emperor. According to Frankfurter: "This penultimate savior in the *Apocalypse of Elijah* no doubt forms one of the major sources of the 'Last Emperor' tradition in Byzantine apocalypticism: a human ruler whose beneficent accession and dominion would paradoxically usher in the period of the Antichrist."¹²³ Shoemaker and others have in turn cited Frankfurter as evidence for an early origin for the Last Emperor.¹²⁴ Building on such ideas Bill Leadbetter has suggested that the Last Emperor was thus a facet of Pharaonic ideology adopted by the supporters of Constantine.¹²⁵ However, before accepting this suggestion for the

P.1862), dates to the early fourth century. The Sahadic witnesses (the most complete of which is P. Chester Beatty 2018) are all dated on paleographic grounds to the fourth or fifth century. A small fragment is also extant in Greek, which has led to the belief that Greek was the original language. On the complicated manuscript/papyrus tradition, see David Frankfurter, *Elijah in Upper Egypt: The Apocalypse of Elijah and Early Egyptian Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 21–23. The standard edition of the *Apocalypse of Elijah* is Albert Pietersma, Susan Turner Comstock, and Harold A. Attridge, *The Apocalypse of Elijah: Based on Pap. Chester Beatty 2018* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1981). The *Apocalypse of Elijah* has been translated numerous times; here I use the translation of *Elijah in Upper Egypt*, 299–328, which provides a synoptic presentation Sahadic and Akhmimic (and Greek where relevant) side by side.

¹¹⁶ Frankfurter, *Elijah in Upper Egypt*, 20.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 8–21, 36–37.

¹¹⁸ The *Apocalypse of Elijah*, II.3–24; translation in Frankfurter, *Elijah in Upper Egypt*, 306–308.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., II.35–44; translation in Frankfurter, *Elijah in Upper Egypt*, 309–311.

¹²⁰ Ibid., II.46–49; translation in Frankfurter, *Elijah in Upper Egypt*, 311–312.

¹²¹ Ibid., III.1; translation in Frankfurter, *Elijah in Upper Egypt*, 313.

¹²² Ibid., IV.24–V.39; translation in Frankfurter, *Elijah in Upper Egypt*, 320–328.

¹²³ Frankfurter, *Elijah in Upper Egypt*, 202.

¹²⁴ Shoemaker, *The Apocalypse of Empire*, 36, and again on 60. Leadbetter, "Byzantine Narratives of the Future," 379–382.

¹²⁵ Leadbetter, "Byzantine Narratives of the Future," 382: "There are any number of contexts in which a Last World Emperor might have emerged into eschatological narratives... a most plausible version is the transmission of an Egyptian royal ideology into Christian narratives... the ideology of a divinely appointed ruler

Last Emperor's origin, it is necessary to look at the context of the *Apocalypse of Elijah*.

As David Frankfurter has shown in his extensive study, the *Apocalypse of Elijah* adapts the native Egyptian tradition of apocalyptic resistance literature, centered on the hope for a native Pharaoh who will drive the Greek and Roman foreigners out of Egypt, into a Christian context.¹²⁶ For example the *Apocalypse of Elijah* bears strong resemblances to the *Oracle of the Potter*, a work that survives in Greek papyri (perhaps translated from Egyptian) which purports to be a prophecy spoken by a potter to an ancient Pharaoh, but which actually appears to have been written in the second-century BC in opposition to Macedonian Ptolemaic rule.¹²⁷ The *Oracle of the Potter* in turn draws on similar prophecies and apocalypses predicting the liberation of Egypt, going back to the time of Achaemenid Persian rule over Egypt.¹²⁸ The *Oracle of the Potter* talks of the invasion of the belt-wearing servants of Typhon (the Greek translation of Egyptian chaos god Seth¹²⁹), who will build a foreign city in Egypt by the sea (clearly Alexandria). However, the foreigners will destroy themselves, their city will be reduced to a mere fishing village, and Memphis, the ancient Egyptian capital, will take its place once again as the center of Egypt. Then, a Pharaoh will come from the sun (i.e. from the god Ra) and rule over a time of peace and renewal in Egypt.¹³⁰

This idea of a Pharaoh born of the sun/Ra is a common theme in the Egyptian apocalypses written during Hellenistic and Roman rule. He is the Egyptian equivalent of the Jewish messiah, an idealized king and liberator. Indeed, the “king from the sun” appears in the

who would defeat the mortal enemies of the land and re-establish a period of just rule is consistent from the [Egyptian] Middle Kingdom through to the Byzantine period.”

¹²⁶ Frankfurter calls this type of apocalyptic literature *Chaosbeschreibung*, a term he takes from Jan Assmann, “*Königsdogma und Heilserwartung: Politische und kultische Chaosbeschreibungen in ägyptischen Texten*,” in *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East: Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Apocalypticism, Uppsala, August 12-17, 1979*, ed. D. Hellholm (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1989), 345–377.

¹²⁷ The *Oracle of the Potter* survives only in Greek papyri but presumably goes back to an Egyptian original. One of these papyri dates to the second century AD (P. Vienna Graf G. 29787), the other four to the third century AD, though these are all somewhat fragmentary and attest to different recensions that at points diverge significantly. Ludwig Koenen, the foremost expert on the *Oracle*, distinguishes between an “anti-Alexandrian” recension and a “pro-Heliopolitan” recension. Despite these textual difficulties, Ludwig Koenen has attempted an edition in “*Die Prophezeiungen des ‘Töpfers’*,” *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, vol. 2 (1968), 178–209; and another edition, taking into account more textual witnesses, along with a German translation, in idem, “*Die Apologie des Töpfers an König Amenophis oder das Töpferorakel*,” in *Apokalyptik und Ägypten: Eine kritische Analyse der relevanten Texte aus dem Griechisch-römischen Ägypten*, ed. A. Blasius and B. U. Schipper (Leuven: Peeters, 2002), 139–187. For an overview of the *Oracle*, see idem, “The Prophecies of a Potter: A Prophecy of World Renewal Becomes an Apocalypse,” in *Proceedings of the Twelfth International Congress of Papyrology*, ed. D. H. Samuel (Toronto: A.M. Hakkert, 1970), 178–209. The *Oracle of the Potter* has been translated into English in A. Kerkeslager, “The Apology of the Potter: A Translation of the Potter’s Oracle,” in *Jerusalem Studies in Egyptology*, ed. Irene Shirun-Grumach (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1998), 67–79. On these editions and translations, and the textual problems with the *Oracle*, see Stefan Beyerle, “Authority and Propaganda: The Case of the Potter’s Oracle,” in *Sibyls, Scriptures, and Scrolls: John Collins at Seventy*, ed. J. J. Collins, J. S. Baden, H. Najman, and E. J. C. Tigchelaar (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 167–184.

¹²⁸ Frankfurter, *Elijah in Upper Egypt*, 174–183.

¹²⁹ See David Potter, *Prophets and Emperors: Human and Divine Authority from Augustus to Theodosius* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 194.

¹³⁰ For a discussion, see Potter, *Prophets and Emperors*, 192–199.

Third Sibylline Oracle, which was written by an Egyptian Jew sometime either in the Ptolemaic or Roman period. In the *Third Sibylline Oracle*, this king rules over a period of peace before upheavals of the end of the world.¹³¹ Thus, the “king from the sun” is an artifact of ancient Egyptian yearnings for an end to foreign rule and the coming of a great native king that was transmitted into many apocalypses.

In adapting ancient Egyptian apocalypses, Jewish and Christian authors had to adapt this royal son of a god to their monotheistic worldview. Avoiding the notion—which would have been troublingly pagan—of a king from the sun, the *Apocalypse of Elijah* makes the king from “the city of the sun,” i.e. Heliopolis. Moreover, his rule does not signify a cosmic renewal as in the pagan Egyptian apocalypses, because only Christ can bring about such renewal. As Frankfurter points out: “The *Apocalypse of Elijah* stands apart [from pagan Egyptian apocalypses] not so much by its obviously Christian passages as by its addition of another period of sorrows and decline after the accession of a ‘king from the sun.’ It is, therefore, Christ whom the text envisions as the real solar pharaoh.”¹³² Thus, in the *Apocalypse of Elijah*, the seemingly prosperous reign of the “king from the city of the sun” actually brings about the Antichrist, whom only Christ can defeat.

The “king from the city of the sun” plays none of the important roles of the Last Emperor. This legendary Egyptian king does not rule over the fourth kingdom of Daniel, nor does he protect Christians from persecution, nor hand over power to Christ’s fifth kingdom. Rather, the “king from the city of the sun,” is a mere transitional ruler in the Christian narrative. He is not even the last earthly ruler, because the Antichrist will succeed him as king.¹³³

There is simply no good reason to assume that the “king from the city of the sun” is an early version of the Last Emperor. True, the *Apocalypse of Elijah* says the Antichrist will arise during the reign of the “king from the city of the sun”, just as the Antichrist will arise during the reign of the Last Emperor in medieval apocalypses. However, this similarity is not enough evidence to imply any real connection. Further, the “king from the city of the sun” and the Last Roman Emperor are also both liberating kings. Yet this theme cannot be construed as evidence for a real connection because it is one of the most common themes in political eschatology, and in legend in general: it is exemplified in the Jewish messiah, King Bahram of Persian eschatology, and even King Arthur in Britain —is one of the most common themes in political eschatology and legend in general. but this theme—exemplified in the Jewish messiah, King Bahram of Persian eschatology, and even King Arthur in Britain.

¹³¹ On this figure in the Third Sibylline Oracle, and a comparison to the version in the *Oracle of the Potter*, see John J. Collins, “The Sibyl and the Potter: Political Propaganda in Ptolemaic Egypt,” in *Religious Propaganda and Missionary Competition in the New Testament World: Essays Honoring Dieter Georgi*, ed. Dieter Georgi, L. Bormann; K. D. Tredici, and A. Standhartinger (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 57–69.

¹³² Frankfurter, *Elijah in Upper Egypt*, 194.

¹³³ The Antichrist is explicitly called king in the *Apocalypse of Elijah*, IV.24; translation in Frankfurter, *Elijah in Upper Egypt*, 320.

II.3: The Greek *Tiburtine Sibyl*

Two other late antique apocalypses are somehow connected to the Coptic *Apocalypse of Elijah*, though this link is not well understood. The first of these apocalypses is the Greek version of the *Tiburtine Sibyl*.¹³⁴ Like the Latin version—and indeed, the Slavonic and Garshuni versions—the original fourth-century version of the *Tiburtine Sibyl* appears to have been subjected to heavy intervention and updating. However, although the Greek version only survives in manuscripts from the twelfth century and later, it appears that scribes had ceased to alter the text around c. 500, preserving a version that reflects an outlook from late fifth century.¹³⁵ Paul Alexander, who devoted a book-length study to this Greek work, believed that the latest stage of redaction was made by a Levantine scribe (or scribes), because, like the *Apocalypse of Elijah*, it mentions the “king from the city of the sun,” though this is now identified not with the Egyptian but the Lebanese Heliopolis (also known as Baalbek). Alexander believed that a scribe from Baalbek must have reused material from a source shared with the *Apocalypse of Elijah*, but reinterpreted it to his home environment—for which reason Alexander called the Greek *Tiburtine Sibyl* the “Oracle of Baalbek.”

As already mentioned, in the *Tiburtine Sibyl*, one hundred Roman senators have the same dream of nine suns, which they ask the Sibyl to interpret. She explains that the suns represent the nine ages of the world. The first five ages are explained without much detail in the Greek *Tiburtine Sibyl*, except the fourth age. This is the period in which the Sibyl places the life of Christ and uses this opportunity to describe his Jesus’ life, ministry, and death (the “Sibylline gospel”).¹³⁶

The remaining ages are described with reference to a succession of Roman emperors, often mentioned by name. Constantine reigns at the beginning of the sixth age, which ends with Theodosius I (r. 382–395). The seventh age lasts from Theodosius’ sons Arcadius and Honorius

¹³⁴ The Greek *Tiburtine Sibyl* survives in three manuscript copies: Cod. Athos 1527 (Karakallou 14), from the twelfth century; Cod. Vatican Gr. 1120, from the fourteenth century; and Athens, Εθνική Βιβλιοθήκη της Ελλάδος 2725 (Suppl. 7 25), of the fifteenth or sixteenth century. An edition, with English translation and extensive commentary, was made by Paul Alexander, *The Oracle of Baalbek: The Tiburtine Sibyl in Greek Dress* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1967). A new translation has been made by Rieuwerd Buitenwerf, “The Tiburtine Sibyl (Greek): A New Translation and Introduction,” in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: More Noncanonical Scriptures*, vol. 1, ed. R. Bauckham, J. R. Davila, and A. Panayotov (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 176–188. For further discussion, see also Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 179.

¹³⁵ It is an interesting question why the Greek version of the *Tiburtine Sibyl* was not heavily interpolated or revised after the sixth century in the same way as the *Tiburtine Sibyl* was interpolated in the other languages in which it survives. The Greek manuscript copies date from the Byzantine period, and it is possible that the circumstances of the sixth century empire seemed relevant enough to a Byzantine audience, in a way it could not in the Middle East or the Latin West. Moreover, it appears that the circulation of the Greek Tiburtine Sibyl was far more limited than the Latin version: not only do far fewer manuscripts survive (not entirely unexpected considering the lower rate of survival of Greek manuscripts versus Latin ones) but its influence in the Greek world was far more limited (whereas in Latin references to the Tiburtine Sibyl abound in other literature). Generally, as is known from other genres, works in limited circulation tended to have fewer interpolations.

¹³⁶ See Anke Holdenried, *The Sibyl and Her Scribes: Manuscripts and Interpretation of the Latin Sibylla Tiburtina, c. 1050–1500* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006) 61–62, 93–97.

to the sack of Rome by the Vandal Gaiseric (455 AD). The eighth generation begins with the reign of Leo I (457–474). It devotes some time to a civil war between Emperor Zeno (r. 474–491) and the pretender Basiliscus, though it is hostile to both of them. The surviving version was almost certainly redacted around the year 500 AD, as it names Emperor Anastasius (r. 491–518) as the last emperor before the breakup of the empire among rival kings.¹³⁷

In the ninth and last age the *Tiburtine Sibyl* moves out of *vaticinia ex eventu* and describes its vision of the end of the world. It narrates the collapse of the Roman Empire and earthly authority as a succession of kings vie for power. Here, the similarities with the *Apocalypse of Elijah* are apparent. At first, four kings will arise: two from an unspecified place in the East, and two from Syria. They will destroy the eastern provinces in their wars with one another, while an army of Assyrians will invade and bring only further destruction. “After that another king will arise from the East, his name will be Olibos; he will take the four kings who preceded him into captivity and kill them.”¹³⁸ He will be a good king who will grant tax exemptions, but he will be opposed by a sixth, evil king, who will rebuild the altars of Egypt (thus, by implication, he must be pagan). Just like the evil king in the *Apocalypse of Elijah*, he will conscript twelve-year olds and force pregnant women to suckle snakes to make poison, and the Nile will turn to blood.¹³⁹ A seventh king will arise from Heliopolis, a good one who grants tax exemptions and brings prosperity, though hardly anyone is left to enjoy it. He will be killed by the final king, “the ruler of destruction,” who will perform false miracles, and will be opposed by the returned Enoch and Elijah, and defeated at the second coming of Christ, “who will come with great power and glory to judge the nine generations.”¹⁴⁰ With this, the Greek *Tiburtine Sibyl* ends.

This apocalyptic vision at the end of the Greek *Tiburtine Sibyl* is in more or less in line with the Christian common political-eschatological scenario, as it describes the collapse and division of the Roman Empire among rival kings of different nationalities. The carving up of the empire makes way for the reign of the Antichrist. There is no triumphalist “imperial eschatology” here, but the same ambivalence toward the fate of the empire as found in the common political-eschatological scenario.

It has been argued that the Greek *Tiburtine Sibyl*, though it lacks any explicit mention of the Last Emperor, perhaps acted as an intermediary for the transmission of the idea of the “king from the city of the sun” to the Latin *Tiburtine Sibyl* (as found in its earliest surviving

¹³⁷ A date of around 500 for the surviving version of the Greek *Tiburtine Sibyl* is confirmed by a passage at lines 94–95 (Alexander, *Oracle of Baalbek*, 14) in which the sibyl addresses Constantinople: “Do not boast, city of Byzantium, you will not rule thrice sixty years” (μὴ καυχῶ, Βυζαντία πόλις, τρις γὰρ ἐξηκοστὸν τῶν ἐτῶν σου οὐ μὲ βασιλεύσεις); that is, 180 years. If, as is very likely the case, the author was counting Byzantium’s rule from the refounding of the city by Constantine (in 330 AD), this means it was predicting the destruction of Constantinople sometime before the year 510; see Alexander, *The Oracle of Baalbek*, 49, 53–54.

¹³⁸ The Greek *Tiburtine Sibyl*, lines 186–188; ed. Alexander, *Oracle of Baalbek*, 20: καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα ἀναστήσεται ἄλλος βασιλεὺς ἀπὸ Ἀνατολῆς, οὗτινος τὸ ὄνομα ἐστὶ Ὀλιβός. οὗτος λαμβάνει τοὺς τέσσαρας βασιλεῖς τοὺς πρὸ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀποκτενεῖ αὐτούς. On the name Olibos, see Alexander, *The Oracle of Baalbek*, 112 n.50.

¹³⁹ The Greek *Tiburtine Sibyl*, lines 193–212.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, lines 214–225, ed. Alexander, *Oracle of Baalbek*, 22: καὶ τότε ἥξει ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ μετὰ δυνάμεως καὶ δόξης πολλῆς εἰς τὸ κρῖναι τὰς ἐννέα γενεάς.

manuscript, which was copied in the eleventh century), and that at some point in between the “king from the sun” became the Last Emperor. However, as noted in the previous section, the “king from the sun” has none of the vital attributes of the Last Emperor in the Latin *Tiburtine Sibyl* as found in the earliest surviving manuscripts, which were copied in the eleventh century. These exist as such only in *the Apocalypse of Methodius*, and for this reason this latter work is far more likely the source for the Last Emperor.

II.4: The Armenian Seventh Vision of Daniel

A closely related text, originally composed in Greek but surviving only in Armenian translation, purports to be a vision given to the Prophet Daniel by the archangel Gabriel not recorded in the Book of Daniel. It is conventionally called the *Seventh Vision of Daniel*, and it is one of the earliest surviving examples of such new revelations attributed to Daniel (its prophecies are concerned with political events in the late fifth century).¹⁴¹ Here, Gabriel provides Daniel with a prophecy on the birth of Christ, and proceeds to describe Rome’s conquest of the east, including of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Antioch, Alexandria, and many other cities and regions.

While the Greek *Tiburtine Sibyl* reflects an interest in the city of Heliopolis, the *Seventh Vision of Daniel* is mostly concerned with Constantinople. It briefly describes the foundation of the Greek city Byzantium, and then describes Constantine the Great’s rebuilding of the city, and his discovery of the Cross of Christ and nails of the Cross. Then the *Seventh Vision of Daniel* provides the description of the reigns of several eastern emperors from Theodosius I down to Zeno (r. 474–491), at times echoing the same language as the Greek *Tiburtine Sibyl*. Like the Greek *Tiburtine Sibyl*, it gives a detailed description of the reign of Zeno and his civil war with Basiliscus (which took place 474–475). Since it makes no reference to Anastasius I, the Greek model of the Armenian translation was probably composed a few years earlier than the surviving redaction of the Greek *Tiburtine Sibyl*.¹⁴²

The *Seventh Vision of Daniel* predicts the death of Zeno and then describes the reigns of various fictional successors. A certain Orloghios (probably the same as Olibos from the *Tiburtine Sibyl*) will rule in Constantinople but another king will defeat him. Earthly power will be torn up between a succession of rulers. Here there is no king from Heliopolis, nor any good kings at all. Instead, the rulers are all described, briefly, in starkly negative terms. The last of these will be

¹⁴¹ The *Seventh Vision of Daniel* survives in five manuscripts, dating from the early thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries. The Armenian text has been edited by P. Gr. Kalemkiar, “Die siebente Vision Daniels,” *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes*, vol. 6 (1892): 109–136; he provides a German translation in an article of the same name on pages 227–240 of the same volume. An English translation with introductory materials has been published by Sergio La Porta, “The Seventh Vision of Daniel: A New Translation and Introduction,” in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: More Noncanonical Scriptures*, vol. 1, ed. R. Bauckham, J. R. Davila, and A. Panayotov (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 410–434.

¹⁴² On the close relationship between the Greek *Tiburtine Sibyl* and the *Seventh Vision of Daniel*, see Alexander, *The Oracle of Baalbek*, 118–120. Alexander suggests that the two works reflect apocalyptic concerns related to the approach of the 500th year after Christ’s birth, thus the beginning of the seventh millennium.

the Antichrist, who will reign for three and a half years and lead many astray. There are further descriptions of the ruin of the earth, which again follow the text of the Greek *Tiburtine Sibyl* very closely.¹⁴³

The *Seventh Vision of Daniel* and the sixth-century interpolations into the *Tiburtine Sibyl* may have drawn on a shared source, perhaps one originating in the civil war between Zeno and Basiliscus. It is notable that once again the *Seventh Vision of Daniel* is largely ambivalent toward the fate of the Roman Empire in the last days. The empire represents, as in the *Tiburtine Sibyl*, earthly authority destined to be destroyed at the end of the world. A succession of evil kings divide up the empire, and thus make way for the Antichrist. This narrative that basically follows the common political-eschatological scenario. There is no figure with even remote similarity to the Last Emperor. The Roman Empire does not play any active, positive role in preparing the way for the kingdom of heaven. Its destiny is calamity and destruction.

Conclusions: Chasing the Shadow of the Last Emperor

There must have been a vibrant Christian late antique apocalyptic tradition, as attested by the interrelated Coptic, Greek, and Armenian apocalypses, but little of it survives. In order to fill in this void, scholars have looked to medieval apocalypses, trying to identify in them a late antique core, or have argued that they were preserved unchanged from late antiquity. Thus, the Last Emperor, a clear manifestation of Christian “imperial eschatology” found in these apocalypses, has been dated to late antiquity, and associated with the supposed Eusebian shift in Christian eschatology.

Nonetheless, no Last Emperor is attested in any of the apocalypses that actually appear to have been written before the seventh century. It is perfectly possible that there existed late antique Christian legends about future good kings or emperor, such as the “king from the city of the sun/Heliopolis.” However, crucially, such legends did not include the notion that the king was the ruler of the fourth kingdom of Daniel, nor that he would surrender that kingdom’s power to Christ at the end of time. These are innovations introduced in the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, and are therefore ideas that originated in the seventh-century and only reached the Byzantine Empire in the eighth.

Part 3: Roman Emperors in Pursuit of the Millennium?

There remains little good reason to maintain the existence of a Eusebian shift in Christian political eschatology, that is, to suppose that the Roman Empire’s eschatological role as the doomed fourth kingdom of Daniel was reevaluated (by Eusebius or anyone else) at all in the fourth or fifth centuries. Nonetheless, is it possible that a similar sort of shift occurred somewhat later? Since the Christian religion and the Roman state had been united for so long by the sixth or

¹⁴³ La Porta, “The Seventh Vision of Daniel,” 431–432.

seventh century, that one might expect that an alternative political-eschatological narrative must have developed, perhaps one that gave the Roman Empire an unambiguously positive role in the final events.

Scholars have certainly assumed that this must be the case. They have looked to the emperors of the sixth and seventh centuries and their spokesmen for evidence of such a glorification of the Roman Empire in political eschatology. Unfortunately, all such claims are based to some degree on the mistaken assumptions that the Roman Empire has already been identified with the fifth kingdom and kingdom of the Millennium, or that there existed a popular Last Emperor figure that could have inspired the conduct of the actual rulers in Constantinople, or both. As we have seen, these propositions are both false.

Nonetheless, scholars continue to propagate theories that emperors of the sixth and seventh century, especially emperors Justinian and Heraclius, envisioned their empire as the kingdom of heaven upon the earth. In the modern historical periodization, these rulers mark the transition from the Roman to Byzantine empire, which aids the perpetuation of old conceptions—and oversimplifications—about Byzantium. Thus, emperors Justinian and Heraclius are portrayed as eastern despots, embodying “Constantinianism,” and “Byzantinism,” holding themselves up as messiahs lording over the eternal kingdom on earth. We have already seen the weak foundation these notions are based upon. An examination of such arguments about “imperial eschatology” propagated by the emperors of the sixth and seventh centuries also suggests similar weaknesses.

III.1: Political Eschatology in the Time of Emperor Justinian

The reign of Emperor Justinian (r. 527–565) represents the highpoint of the Eastern Empire’s imperial fortunes, and Justinian remained an extremely active ruler over the course of his long rule. He propagated new legal codes designed to standardize Roman law, convened synods and an ecumenical council aimed at enforcing theological unity, built the great church of Hagia Sophia, and launched an ambitious military campaign that reclaimed many lost territories for the empire—particularly Italy and North Africa—for the empire. In the end his plans were perhaps too grandiose, and new barbarian invasions, a reinvigorated Sasanian Persian Empire, one of history’s worst outbreaks of plague, and a spate of city-wrecking earthquakes hampered the full realization of his ambitions. Nonetheless, already in the middle ages he was counted among the great emperors, and modern assessments tend to agree with the medieval ones.

For Paul Magdalino, who argued that Eusebius had invented the notion of the Roman Empire as Daniel’s fifth kingdom, the supposed Eusebian shift in eschatology truly came to be widespread in the Eastern Roman Empire during the age of Justinian, whom Magdalino says promoted Eusebius’ view.¹⁴⁴ Magdalino freely admits that political eschatology with a dismal

¹⁴⁴ Magdalino, “The History of the Future,” 10–15. This is a judgment shared by Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 164: “What began with Constantine reached its brilliant climax with Justinian (527–565). State and church fused into a millenarian unity.”

view of the empire's future and role in the last things persisted into the Byzantine era, alluding to the common political-eschatological scenario described in the previous chapter: "In so far as Byzantine eschatological literature offers a precise and coherent vision of the Last Things, that vision is deeply pessimistic about the empire," he writes. Nonetheless, Magdalino asserts that the regime of Justinian consciously countered this scenario with eschatological propaganda designed to glorify the Roman Empire:

The very notion that the empire was mortal and its current ills were terminal was embarrassing to the exalted imperial image promoted by Justinian. The only eschatology which imperial ideology could accept was one which played down the significance of the events between the fall of the empire and the Second Coming but stressed, instead, the extent to which the Kingdom of God was already being anticipated, or even realized, in the Roman Empire.¹⁴⁵

The act of downplaying the eschatological scenario was nothing new—as we have seen, it is exactly what Eusebius and Orosius did. Is there any indication, however, that the regime of Justinian promoted the idea that the fifth kingdom, the Kingdom of God, was "anticipated or even realized" in the Roman Empire?

The one source Magdalino cites as evidence is the *Christian Topography*, written in the reign of Justinian by the Red Sea spice merchant turned Egyptian monk Cosmas Indicopleustes. In this unusual work—part travelogue, part geographical treatise—Cosmas does indeed at one point explicitly say exactly what scholars had wrongly attributed to Eusebius: according to Cosmas, the Roman Empire is the fifth kingdom of Daniel.¹⁴⁶

However, Cosmas was a monk from the Church of the East, a member of the tiny minority community of radical dyophysites—followers of the theology of Nestorius and Theodore of Mopsuestia—in Alexandria, and student of a future *Catholicos* of Ctesiphon (the head of the Christian church in Persia). Though he wrote in Greek, Cosmas' thought clearly developed out of the theology of the Syriac-speaking church in the Persian Empire; for this reason his ideas will be explored in far more detail in the following chapter. Here, it is necessary to question whether as such Cosmas could represent a prominent strand of eschatological thinking within the Roman Empire.

Magdalino has argued that Cosmas' views represent an official eschatology of the Constantinopolitan government under Justinian, and moreover a prevalent view in the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Empire from that point on.¹⁴⁷ While this is belied by the fact that Cosmas

¹⁴⁵ Magdalino, "The History of the Future," 10.

¹⁴⁶ Cosmas Indicopleustes, *The Christian Topography*, II.74; ed. Wanda Wolska-Conus, *Topographie Chrétienne, Tome I: Livres I–IV* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1968), 388–389.

¹⁴⁷ Paul Magdalino, "The History of the Future," 10–11, suggests that Cosmas must be a transmitter for imperial propaganda coming out of Constantinople, because he was "something of an outsider to both the political and the religious establishment," and yet at the same time, "he says things that no imperial spokesman could have put better. It may therefore be taken as a reflection of the imperial position on the passing of the sixth millennium and the contemporary portents of Christ's Second Coming ... It might have envisaged an earthly millennium of messianic imperial rule, or (and I think more likely) it might have expected that the Second Coming was shortly to occur in Constantinople." Such an emphasis on Constantinople and the imperial position is surely misplaced. It is

had no connection to the imperial court —indeed, he was a member of a Christian church deemed heretical by Justinian’s government—Magdalino seizes on this as justification that Cosmas must be a transmitter for Justinian’s imperial propaganda: even though Cosmas “was something of an outsider to both the political and the religious establishment,” Magdalino writes, “he says things that no imperial spokesman could have put better.”¹⁴⁸ Thus, according to Magdalino, Cosmas must be repeating imperial propaganda.

However, Magdalino fails to take into consideration that Cosmas’s interpretation was so unusual precisely because he was such an outsider—and because he drew on a distinctly Syriac interpretation of the Book of Daniel.¹⁴⁹ It is notable that the idea of the Roman Empire as the fifth kingdom appears in few other Greek sources, and none other before the eighth century. The fact that Cosmas’ *Christian Topography* continued to be copied suggests that his idiosyncratic views (which extended not just to the sequence of world empires, but also to the shape of the earth, the location of paradise, and the history of Atlantis) remained a source of interest in the Byzantine world, though it is uncertain how many readers looked to the *Christian Topography* specifically for its short passage on the interpretation of the kingdoms of Daniel.¹⁵⁰ Still, it is difficult to imagine that the eschatology expressed by a “Nestorian” monk reflected common views within the Roman Empire, not to mention the imperial line coming out of Constantinople.

Was there any evidence of a pro-Roman political eschatology in the writings of more mainstream Christians in the Roman Empire, or better yet, in writers associated with the imperial court? Roger Scott, in an article preceding Magdalino’s by several years, offers up just such a source: the greatest author of the reign of Justinian, Procopius of Caesarea. In his scurrilous denunciation of Justinian in his *Secret History*, Procopius cites testimony that Justinian was secretly a demon prince bent on destroying the Roman Empire. According to Scott, Procopius was here accusing Justinian of being the Antichrist (Scott argues, with some merit, that as a classicizing historian emulating the style of Herodotus and Thucydides Procopius would have foregone using the word “Antichrist” as it was too Christian). Taking a logical leap, Scott argues that Procopius must have been responding to and subverting imperial propaganda that portrayed Justinian as a triumphant eschatological king in the vein of the Last Emperor.¹⁵¹

precisely because Cosmas was such an outsider that his interpretation was so unusual. His position would likely have struck the emperor and his court as embarrassing and dangerously unachievable. And certainly there is nothing in Cosmas to suggest that he believed in a millennium of earthly messianic rule.

¹⁴⁸ Paul Magdalino, “The History of the Future,” 10–11.

¹⁴⁹ This case is made in Maurice Casey, “The Fourth Kingdom in Cosmas Indicopleustes and the Syrian Tradition,” *Rivista di storia e letteratura religiosa*, vol. 25 no. 3 (1989), 385–403, and will be explored in more detail in the next chapter of this dissertation.

¹⁵⁰ Two Greek sources that show evidence of influence from Cosmas concerning their understanding of eschatology and the kingdoms of Daniel are: an anti-Jewish disputation text probably written by Anastasius of Sinai, which will be discussed in a later chapter (chapter 8, section I), and the unedited tenth-century commentary on Daniel written by a certain Basil of Neopataras (preserved in Cod. Patmos, Monastery of John the Evangelist, 31, fols. 243r–246v; and Cod. Vatican Gr. 1687, fols. 198r–208v). On these two sources, see Podskalsky, *Byzantinische Reicheschatologie*, 38–39 and 43–45; Magdalino, *Byzantium in the Year 1000*, 251–253.

¹⁵¹ Roger Scott, “Malalas, the Secret History, and Justinian’s Propaganda,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, vol. 39 (1985), 99–109; repeated in idem, “Justinian’s New Age and the Second Coming,” in *Byzantine Chronicles and the Sixth Century*, ed. Roger Scott (Farham: Ashgate Variorum, 2012), 11–12.

Going a step further, Scott cites a calendric statement in the world chronicle of John Malalas, composed during the reign of Justinian, that the sixth millennium had already passed when Justinian came to the throne in order to suggest that the coming of the new millennium inspired Justinian to portray his reign as the coming of the millennial kingdom: “Given the prevalence of [millennial] thinking (and it was widespread), what an opportunity it provided for Justinian to promote his reign (possibly entirely sincerely), if not quite as the Second Coming, then at least as the moment of rebirth and renewal.”¹⁵² Scott thus suggests that, in the minds of many contemporaries, “Justinian was God's representative, preparing the way for the Second Coming.”¹⁵³

The arguments Scott uses to attempt to establish a positive political eschatology in the reign of Justinian are problematic. Scott's source, Malalas, was a chronicler invested in dates, and while comparing systems of chronology he notes that although different authorities came up with different dates for the creation of the world, they were all close enough to one another to place Justinian's accession after the sixth millennium.¹⁵⁴ In context, there is nothing eschatological about this statement. There is no indication in Malalas or any other source contemporary with Justinian to suggest that anyone believed that the year 6000 had brought the earthly millennium or the kingdom of God.

Thus, Scott's argument about imperial millenarianism not only derives from silence, but also from the assumption that the year 500 provoked a widespread sense of eschatological expectation among Justinian's subjects (and one that lingered until at least the start of his reign twenty-seven years after the crucial date). This would mean that long-condemned millennial formulations still had wide currency. It is hardly worthwhile to open up the question of “terrors of the year 500” similar to the acrimonious debate on the “terrors of the year 1000” that has so long persisted in medieval studies, but it is worth noting that the existence of such lively millenarianism in the time of Justinian—after centuries of denunciations and anathemas by all the major theologians—is far from proved.¹⁵⁵ The one source from Justinian's reign to engage with chiliasm, the Greek commentary on the Book of Revelation by Oikoumenios (described in detail in the previous chapter) identified the Millennium of Book of Revelation with the period from Christ's birth to his crucifixion—an odd interpretation, no doubt, but one that certainly precludes the notion that Justinian ruled over a the kingdom of the millennium.¹⁵⁶ Even if

¹⁵² Scott, “Malalas, the Secret History, and Justinian's Propaganda,” 108.

¹⁵³ Ibid, 109. In idem, “Justinian's New Age and the Second Coming,” 6, Scott likewise suggests that “Malalas' rejection of the year 6,000 as marking the end of the world...may reflect an imperial attempt to dowse what may have been widespread (and dangerous) anxiety in his realm about the end of the world.”

¹⁵⁴ Malalas, *World Chronicle*, XVIII.428.17–18.

¹⁵⁵ Mischa Meier, “Eschatologie und Kommunikation im 6. Jahrhundert n. Chr., Oder: Wie Osten und Westen beständig aneinander vorbei redeten,” in *Endzeiten: Eschatologie in den monotheistischen Weltreligionen*, ed. W. Brandes and F. Schmieder (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008), 41–74, makes the case that Western concerns about the coming of the year 6000, based on the Eusebian reckoning of the age of the world, were little understood in Justinian's Constantinople, where the traditional Christian age of the world was maintained and so the year 6000 had passed without incident.

¹⁵⁶ Oikoumenios, *Commentary on Revelation*, chapter 11, lines 116–121; H. C. Hoskier, *The Complete Commentary of Oecumenius on the Apocalypse: Now Printed for the First Time from Manuscripts at Messina*,

perhaps others, whose voices are now lost, did subscribe to chiliasm, the idea that Justinian used such an expectation to promote his political aims, or that they acted as the impetus of his policy, requires yet another speculative leap.

There is good reason (though hardly proof) to suspect that some of Justinian's subjects—including Procopius—viewed Justinian as the Antichrist, or attempted to link him to the Antichrist in their criticism of his policies, just as we have seen Athanasius of Alexandria and Hilary of Poitiers had done in the time of Constantius II.¹⁵⁷ Scott himself points to the hymns of Romanos the Melodist, who suggested that the Antichrist will come in the form of an emperor. However, this likely has far less to do with expectation of the arrival of the Millennium or the use of millenarianism in the propaganda of Justinian than it does with the long tradition of the common political-eschatological narrative and its abiding concern over the Antichrist's eventual seizure of control over the empire.

Nonetheless, Stephen Shoemaker, in his effort to prove the longstanding existence of Christian "imperial eschatology," builds on Roger Scott to claim Justinian's military and theological policies resulted from Justinian's conviction that he was the Last Emperor, destined to transfer power from the fourth to the fifth kingdom:

The integrity of the empire had to be restored since... the Romans believed that their empire would be the last on the earth and that it was destined to hand over authority to God on the last day. Justinian's efforts to end schism within the church, first with Rome and then (less successfully) with the Miaphysites, show a similar concern for imperial unity... His campaigns against various Christian heresies, the Jews, the Samaritans, and Manicheans were perhaps aimed to purify the empire before delivering it to God at the end of time.¹⁵⁸

There is, however, no proof for this anachronistic characterization of Justinian's self conception and eschatology.

Though there is evidence that fear and speculation about the end of the world, motivated by increasing seismic activity and the outbreak of the devastating Justinianic plague (and perhaps, though by no means certainly, by the passing of the year 6000 of the Byzantine calendar), was widespread in the time of Justinian, there is in general a lack of engagement with political eschatology in the sources contemporary with his reign.¹⁵⁹ This has led to wild speculation about what the subjects of Justinian, and the emperor himself, thought about the eschatological role and future of the empire and the imperial office. Scholars operating from

Rome, Salonika, and Athos (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1928), 221; also ed. Marc de Groote, *Oecumenii Commentarius in Apocalypsin* (Louvain: Peeters, 1999), 255.

¹⁵⁷ Stephen Shoemaker, *The Apocalypse of Empire*, 71–72, provides some good evidence for this.

¹⁵⁸ Shoemaker, *The Apocalypse of Empire*, 70–71.

¹⁵⁹ Agathias *Histories*, V.5. On the disasters in the reign of Justinian feeding anxieties about the end of the world, see Mischa Meier, *Das andere Zeitalter Justinians: Kontingenzerfahrung und Kontingenzbewältigung im 6. Jahrhundert n. Chr.* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), 84–100. Scott, "Justinian's New Age and the Second Coming," 12–22, attempts to link the seismic activity and outbreak of plague with political eschatology (namely, heightened Byzantine speculation about the coming of the Antichrist), but any such connection remains speculative.

mistaken assumptions about late antique political eschatology—such as the idea that Constantine had been hailed as the bringer of the fifth kingdom or that a tradition about a good Last Emperor was a staple of late antique apocalypses—have imported these ideas into the time of Justinian in order to fill the silence. Similar problems have afflicted the scholarship on eschatology in the reign of the next great figure to occupy the imperial office in Constantinople—Emperor Heraclius.

III.2: Eschatology and Military Victory: The Era of Heraclius

The reign of Heraclius (r. 610–641) was one of the great turning points for the Eastern Roman Empire. Heraclius came to power in the midst of a bitter war with the Persian Empire, which had been instigated when a military coup led by Phocas murdered Emperor Maurice and his family; the Persian Empire of Khusrau II, who owed his throne to the intervention of Maurice, launched an invasion of the Roman Empire under the justification of avenging Maurice. Heraclius overthrew Phocas, but the war with Persia continued badly: in 614 the Persian sacked Jerusalem and triumphantly carried away the revered relic of the True Cross; the following year the Persian army encamped on the Bosphorus opposite Constantinople, while in 626 their Avar allies from the steppe besieged Constantinople.

Heraclius turned the tide of the war in a stunningly bold campaign. As a result, in 628 a coup in Ctesiphon overthrew Khusrau II and replaced him with a son willing to make peace on terms favorable to Constantinople. The True Cross was returned to Heraclius, who in 630 entered Jerusalem in triumph to restore the relic, an act symbolizing his restoration of the empire's territorial cohesion. Nonetheless, within a few years all the territories he fought so long to recapture were lost again to a new invader—the Arabs. Exhausted by the war with Persia, the empire could not marshal the resources to halt the Arabs, and by the end of Heraclius' reign it was reduced to a truly precarious state.

Some scholars have sought in the reign of Heraclius the same sort of triumphalist eschatology associated with Justinian, and have looked especially toward the period of Heraclius' triumph, in the period from 628, when he pressured the Persians to make peace, to 634 or so, when the Arabs first began to overrun the frontiers. This was a moment of opportunity, when it appears Heraclius really did try to use the symbolic capital he gained through his military victory to make major reforms, particularly the unification of the church after centuries of schisms over Christological disagreements. However, in recent scholarship these actions have been imbued with eschatological meaning.

For example, Yuri Stoyanov, in a monograph on Heraclius' return of the True Cross, suggests that Heraclius pursued “a conscious imperial millenarian agenda” that built on the tradition supposedly established by Eusebius in the fourth century. Thus he claims that Heraclius “envisage[ed] Christ's thousand year reign on earth to be manifested through the Christian Roman empire which thus was to merge with the divinely-founded ultimate kingdom of the Danielic schema.” Likewise, linking the supposed eschatology of Eusebius to Heraclius, Lutz Greisiger has argued that Heraclius' regime declared the Eastern Roman Empire the millennial

kingdom on earth: “we may conclude that Heraclius and his officials propagated a post-millenarian golden age of the Empire.”¹⁶⁰ Stephen Shoemaker echoes these sentiments: “Heraclius’s imperial triumph thus brought the universe to a new threshold in history, on the verge of the Second Coming and the Kingdom of God.”¹⁶¹

As we have seen, these notions that the Christian Romans maintained a “presentative millennialism” that identified the empire with millennial kingdom is a historiographical fallacy. Nonetheless, it is worth exploring briefly the arguments put forward by those who read such expectation into the regime of Heraclius. Such scholars point to four developments associated with Emperor Heraclius just after his victory over Persia that would seem to confirm these notions: the promulgation of eschatological prophecies of Roman triumph in imperial propaganda, the adoption of the title *basileus* by Heraclius in his legislation, his return of the True Cross to Jerusalem, and his attempted forced conversion of the Jews. None of these phenomena self-evidentially suggest that Heraclius was striving to turn the empire into some sort of eschatological Danielic fifth kingdom as has been suggested and, indeed, an analysis of the developments will reveal that such associations are completely misplaced.

The Propaganda of Heraclius: The argument that Heraclius’ court promulgated eschatological literary propaganda has been detailed most fully in articles by Gerrit Reinink and Michael Whitby. They both make similar arguments, on the basis of similar evidence, for a turn in eschatological thinking similar to the one Magdalino placed in the reign of Justinian. According to Reinink, after Heraclius’ victory over Persia, “apocalyptic eschatology which predicted the end of the Roman empire was supplanted by imperial ideology using eschatological imagery in order to typify the auspicious new beginning of the empire.”¹⁶² Michael Whitby lays out the foundation of this argument: “The Romans’ reward for their divinely ordained victory was to be a golden age of world rule, a promise that is contained in three contemporary works: George of Pisidia’s *Hexaemeron*, the revised version of the Syriac *Romance of Alexander*, and an astrological prediction attributed to Khusrō II and preserved in Theophylact.”

It is possible that authors associated with Heraclius and his court couched the emperor’s military victories in eschatological language, but this is very different from arguing that the Roman Empire or its emperor would play a positive role in the eschatological events. This is clear in the first source mentioned by Whitby, George of Pisidia’s *Hexaemeron*. Though ostensibly a treatise on God’s creation of the world, recent scholarship has called attention to its

¹⁶⁰ Greisiger, “The End is Coming—To What End?” 103—106, with quotation on 103. Greisiger specifies that Heraclius’ supposed eschatology was “post-millenarian” according to “modern typology, as yet applied predominantly to North-American Protestantism from the eighteenth century onwards;” i.e. if the Roman Empire represents the kingdom of the Millennium, then the second coming takes place after the Millennium. Greisiger has to use the terminology of modern-day Protestantism for a reason, however: postmillennialism did not exist in late antiquity, it is a feature of certain strains of American Protestantism; applying this concept to the rhetoric of Heraclius’ court is highly anachronistic to say the least.

¹⁶¹ Shoemaker, *The Apocalypse of Empire*, 79.

¹⁶² Gerrit J. Reinink, “Heraclius, the New Alexander: Apocalyptic Prophecies during the Reign of Heraclius,” in *The Reign of Heraclius (610-641): Crisis and Confrontation*, ed. G. J. Reinink and B. H. Stolte (Leuven: Peeters, 2002), 84.

glorification of Heraclius.¹⁶³ A prayer at the end of the poem that alludes to Heraclius, beseeching God that “the deliverer of the world, the pursuer of Persia, or rather the one who saved even Persia, should rule all places under the sun. Show that the earth imitates the heaven, with one sun ruling also the parts below.”¹⁶⁴ Thus, George expresses the desire that the earth resembles the heavens: just as there is one God in heaven there should be one emperor on earth (i.e. Heraclius). This is a far cry from asserting that Heraclius had established an eschatological kingdom, or even that Heraclius aspired to rule the world. Rather, George’s heavenly appeal is perfectly in line with political thought laid out by Eusebius and with the convention of panegyric.

George did have enormous hopes for the future after Heraclius’ military victory over the Persians, and in this poem and elsewhere he makes the point that Heraclius fought in the field against Persia for six years and thanks to his victory could rest in the seventh year, just as God had created the universe in six days and rested in the seventh. He then relates military victory over earthly foes to spiritual victory Christians must win over sin to attain immortality in heaven. Nonetheless, as Reinink admits, “even though George applies eschatological language to describe the universal renewal, the eschatological themes mainly remain metaphors of the new age which has come in the history of the world.”¹⁶⁵ George is not characterizing Heraclius as a Last Emperor or his victory as marking the transformation of the empire into the fifth kingdom of Christ; George looks forward to a new era of opportunity under a reinvigorated Roman Empire. As Averil Cameron points out, George of Pisidia’s poetry in general “envisages Heraclius’s victory as a New Creation rather than a Last Judgment.”¹⁶⁶

The second source mentioned by Whitby and Reinink, the *Syriac Alexander Legend* (or *Romance of Alexander* as Whitby calls it), probably composed in the early sixth century but surviving in a form probably redacted c. 630, is very clear in giving a vital eschatological role to Greek kingdom of Alexander the Great (which it identifies with the Roman Empire). Reinink has argued that for this reason this Alexander romance, in the form in which it survives, must have been produced as propaganda for Heraclius.¹⁶⁷ However, like the *Christian Topography* of

¹⁶³ See David Olster, “The Date of George of Pisidia’s *Hexaemeron* Reconsidered,” *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, vol. 115 (1995), 172: “The *Hexaemeron*, therefore, was not a ‘theological’ work, nor was its intent and design anything but political... The religious patina of George’s work should remind us that the Byzantines were masters at misleading the unwary with their polished rhetoric.” Mary Whitby, “The Devil in Disguise: The End of George of Pisidia’s *Hexaemeron* Reconsidered,” *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, Vol. 115 (1995), 115–129, disputes the notion “that political interests are always paramount in George,” and resists reading the entire poem as political propaganda; nonetheless she agrees that the struggle between Christ and Satan at the end of the poem was an allegory for Heraclius’ conflict with Khusrau II.

¹⁶⁴ George of Pisidia, *Hexameron*, lines 1800–1804 (lines 1846–1850 of the version printed in Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, vol. 92, 1575); ed. Luigi Tartaglia, *Carmi di Giorgio di Pisidia* (Torino, UTET, 1998), 418–420: τὸν κοσμορύστην, τὸν διώκτην Περσίδος, / μᾶλλον δὲ τὸν σώσαντα καὶ τὴν Περσίδα / ὅλων κρατῆσαι τῶν ὑφ’ ἡλίον τόπων. / δεῖξον δὲ τὴν γῆν οὐρανὸν μιμουμένην, / ἐνὸς κρατοῦντος ἡλίου καὶ τῶν κάτω. Translation in Whitby, “The Devil in Disguise,” 119.

¹⁶⁵ Reinink, “Heraclius, the New Alexander,” 84.

¹⁶⁶ Averil Cameron, “Late Antique Apocalyptic: A Context of the Qur’an?” in *Visions of the End: Apocalypticism and Eschatology in the Abrahamic Religions*, ed. H. Amirav, E. Grypeou, G. G. Stroumsa (Leuven: Peeters, 2017), 4.

¹⁶⁷ Gerrit Reinink, “Die Entstehung der syrischen Alexanderlegende als politisch-religiöser Propagandaschrift für Herakleios’ Kirchenpolitik,” in *After Chalcedon Studies in Theology and Church History*:

Cosmas Indicopleustes in the reign of Justinian, there is nothing connecting it to the imperial court nor does it say anything explicitly about Heraclius. Like the *Christian Topography*, it expresses traditions that had been developing within Syriac eschatological thought, and as such will be dealt with in the next chapter of this dissertation.

This leaves the last source cited by Whitby and Reinink, the “astrological prediction” in the history of Theophylact Simocatta. This passage has attracted the most attention in scholarship on Heraclius’ supposed eschatological program. Theophylact Simocatta includes this prediction in his classicizing history of the reign of Emperor Maurice (r. 582–602), written in the time of Heraclius. Here, Theophylact sets a scene when Khusrau II was a young man fighting for his throne with Roman military support. According to Theophylact, after a Roman general insulted him by suggesting that he would be helpless without Roman aid, Khusrau responded with a prophecy he derived from his skill in astrology:

If we were not subject to the tyranny of the occasion, you would not have dared, general, to strike with insults the king who is great among mortals. But since you are proud in present circumstances, you shall hear what indeed the gods have provided for the future. Be assured that troubles will flow back in turn against you Romans. The Babylonian race will hold the Roman state in its power for a threefold cyclic week of years. Thereafter you Romans will enslave Persians for a fifth week of years. When these very things have been accomplished, the day without evening will dwell among mortals and the expected fate will achieve power, when the forces of destruction will be handed over to dissolution and those of the better life hold sway.¹⁶⁸

Though attributed to the Persian king, this prophecy seems to recall the visions in the Book of Daniel by speaking of the Persians as “Babylonians” and measuring time in the Danielic “weeks of years.” Given the language and the source in which it is preserved (a Roman history of the seventh century), and its ultimate expectation of Roman military victory, it is hard to imagine that the prophecy was actually spoken by the Persian king. Michael and Mary Whitby have interpreted it instead as a pro-Roman composition by Theophylact, predicting the ultimate victory of Heraclius, but put into the mouth of the Persian king.

Though they disagree on what the periods in the conflict with Persia the different year weeks represent, both Reinink and Whitby suggests that the prophecy was propaganda for Heraclius, designed to cast his reign as “a messianic golden age.” Yet such a conclusion rests on

Offered to Professor Albert van Roey for his Seventieth Birthday, ed. C. Laga; J. A. Munitiz; and L. Van Rompay (Leuven: Peeters 1985); idem, “Alexander the Great in Seventh-Century Syriac ‘Apocalyptic’ Texts,” *Byzantinorossika*, vol. 2 (2000), 150–178, esp. 152–158; idem, “Heraclius, the New Alexander,” 84–86.

¹⁶⁸ Theophylact 5.15.5–7; *Theophylacti Simocattae historiae*, ed. K. de Boor, revised by P. Wirth (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1972), 216–217: εἰ μὴ περ ὑπὸ τοῦ καιροῦ ἐτυραννοῦμεθα, οὐκ ἂν ἐθάρρησας, στρατηγέ, τὸν μέγαν ἐν ἀνθρώποις βασιλέα βάλλειν τοῖς σκώμμασιν. ἐπεὶ δὲ τοῖς παροῦσι μέγα φρονεῖς, ἀκούσῃ τί δῆτα τοῖς θεοῖς ἐς ὕστερον μεμελέτῃται. ἀντικαταρρεῦσει, εὖ ἴσθι, ἐς τοὺς Ῥωμαίους ὑμᾶς δεινά. ἔξεται δὲ τὸ Βαβυλώνιον φύλον τῆς Ῥωμαϊκῆς πολιτείας κρατοῦν τρίτην κυκλοφορικὴν ἐβδομάδα ἐτῶν. μετὰ δὲ τοῦτο πεμπταίαν ἐβδομάδα ἐνιαυτῶν Ῥωμαῖοι Πέρσας δουλαγωγήσῃτε. τούτων δὲ διηνυσμένων, τὴν ἀνέσπερονήμεραν ἐνδημεῖν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις καὶ τὴν προσδοκωμένην λῆξιν ἐπιβαίνειν τοῦ κράτους, ὅτε τὰ τῆς φθορᾶς παραδίδεται λύσει καὶ τὰ τῆς κρείττονος διαγωγῆς πολιτεύεται. English translation in Michael and Mary Whitby, *The History of Theophylact Simocatta: An English Translation with Introduction and Notes* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986), 153 (I have modified this translation).

an evidentiary basis as fragile as the modern scholarly interpretations of Eusebius' brief statement in the Tricennial Oration as apocalyptic.

The scholars who would read the prophecy as proof of a program of eschatological propaganda under Heraclius assume that the prophecy was written by Theophylact c. 630, at the triumphal moment after Heraclius' defeat of the Persians but before the invasion of the Arabs. However, scholarship on Theophylact has suggested that he may have been writing later, after the Arab conquest of Syria. If it were written while the eastern provinces were falling to the Arabs, it is hard to imagine that the prophecy was meant to suggest the arrival an eschatological age of eternal peace through Heraclius.¹⁶⁹

Rather, the golden age of peace "when the forces of destruction will be handed over to dissolution" described at the end of the prophecy may symbolize simply that: the end of the destructive war between the Roman and Persian empires. Indeed, Stephanos Efthymiadis has convincingly placed the prophecy in the larger context of Theophylact's political message in his history: the violence caused by imprudent imperial competition is "the root of all contemporary evil," while a good ruler aspires for peace.¹⁷⁰ Heraclius' victory thus brought an end to the cycle of imperial conflict between Rome and Persia and inaugurated a golden era of peace, though not necessarily an eternal or heavenly one.

It is true that Theophylact's "day without evening" would continue to intrigue later generations of Byzantine readers, all of whom understood it as the dawning of God's heavenly kingdom.¹⁷¹ It is possible that this is how Theophylact intended it. Even so, this would simply mean that he suggested that the end of history was approaching. Even in this light it would give the Roman Empire an almost entirely passive role, for nowhere does it suggest that the empire will actively bring about the kingdom of heaven or become the kingdom of heaven. It is a short prophecy that does not attempt to take a detailed position on political eschatology.

The change in imperial title: Another argument often made in favor of Heraclius' supposed eschatological agenda is related to a law issued by Heraclius and his son Heraclius Constantine in the year 629 that styles the rulers as "the Christ-believing kings (βασιλεῖς) Heraclius and Heraclius the New Constantine" (Ἡράκλειος καὶ Ἡράκλειος νέος Κωνσταντῖνος πιστοὶ ἐν

¹⁶⁹ Peter Schreiner, *Theophylaktos Simokates: Geschichte* (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1985), 2–3 n.591 states that Theophylact's wrote his history after 636, and probably shortly before the death of Heraclius in 641; Thérèse Olajos, *Les sources de Théophylacte Simocatta historien* (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 11, places the date of composition of Theophylact's history after the Arab conquests; likewise, Stephanos Efthymiadis, "A Historian and his Tragic Hero: A Literary Reading of Theophylaktos Simokates' *Ecumenical History*," in *History as Literature in Byzantium*, ed. Ruth Macrides (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 180, dates the History of Theophylact to between 638 and 642 on the basis of possible allusions to the Arab conquest of the Persian Empire.

¹⁷⁰ Efthymiadis, "A Historian and his Tragic Hero," esp. 177–181.

¹⁷¹ Ihor Ševčenko, "The Decline of Byzantium Seen Through the Eyes of Its Intellectuals," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, vol. 15 (1961), 183, discusses Theophylact's "day without evening" in the thought of the first Patriarch under Ottoman rule, Gennadius Scholarius. This passage from Theophylact, removed from its context, is also found in several post-Byzantine manuscripts, along with an "interpretation" which uses it as the basis to calculate the end of the world and the dawning of the kingdom of heaven; these manuscripts are Cod. Copenhagen Gr. 2174 (fols. 12r–13r); Cod. Vienna, Suppl Gr 172 (fols. 39v–40v); Cod. Vienna, Theol. Gr. 203 (fols. 306v–307v).

Χριστῷ βασιλεῖς).¹⁷² While the term βασιλεύς —king—had long been the conventional word used for the Roman emperors in Greek literature, official documents (such as laws of this kind) previously used more traditional titles such as *imperator*, *Caesar*, or *Augustus* (or their Greek equivalents: αὐτοκράτωρ, καῖσαρ, and αὐγουστος). Heraclius' law of 629 marks the beginning of a new trend in which emperors used the title βασιλεύς in their official titulature.

Was Heraclius making some sort of eschatological claim by adopting the title βασιλεύς? After all, in the Book of Revelation, when Christ arrives to slay the beast with ten horns, he bears the inscription on his body Βασιλεὺς βασιλέων καὶ κύριος κυρίων, “king of kings and lord of lords” (Revelation 17:14 and 19:16). In light of this, in an important article on this shift in terminology, Irfan Shahîd has suggested that Heraclius may have adopted the new title for many reasons, including his growing “messianic self-image” after his victory over Persia: “Heraclius might very well have thought he was opening the last phase of the millennium as a *praeparatio* for the Second Coming. The assumption of the *basileia* in 629 may be related to these hopes.”¹⁷³

Citing this, Greisiger claims that when Heraclius “gave up the title *imperator* and instead acted as ‘faithful king in Christ’” it was to “hint at the notion of an imperial redemption, ushering in a millennium of quite a peculiar kind.”¹⁷⁴ Stoyanov claims that Heraclius' assumption of the new title was meant to indicate a new era “when the expected Second Coming would initiate the joint rule of Christ and the ‘faithful *basileus* in Christ’ over the empire, which was finally to be assimilated to the eschatological thousand-year kingdom.”¹⁷⁵ Likewise, for Paul Magdalino, Heraclius' new title could only suit the ruler of the fifth kingdom: “From 629 the Roman emperor signed himself ‘faithful *basileus* in Christ.’ The merger between the empire and the Kingdom of Heaven was now official.”¹⁷⁶

These scholars have read the phrase πιστοὶ ἐν Χριστῷ βασιλεῖς not as “Christ-believing kings” (or more literally, “kings having faith in Christ”), but as “faithful kings *within* Christ” to imply that somehow the imperial office had assimilated with Christ. However, there is no reason to believe that it was meant that way. Nor is it at all clear that there was eschatological meaning behind the change in the title. Scholars have offered an array of other explanations. Despite his offhanded mention of millenarian associations, Shahîd ultimately attributes Heraclius' use of βασιλεύς to the abandonment of the pre-Christian Roman mindset in which kings were considered illegitimate, and to Heraclius' desire to emphasize his supposed ancient royal ancestry.¹⁷⁷ Several others have suggested that Heraclius was taking over the title “great king”

¹⁷² The law can be found in Ioannes and Panagiotes Zepos, *Jus Graecoromanum, vol. 1: Novellae et Aurae bullae imperatorum post justinianum* (Athens: Fexis, 1931), 36. Louis Bréhier was the first to note the importance of this titulature in his “L'origine des titres impériaux à Byzance,” *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, vol. 15 (1906), 173.

¹⁷³ Irfan Shahîd, “The Iranian Factor in Byzantium during the Reign of Heraclius,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, vol. 26 (1972), 307–308.

¹⁷⁴ Greisiger, “The End is Coming—To What End?” 102–103. See also similar sentiments in idem, *Messias-Endkaiser-Antichrist*, 131.

¹⁷⁵ Yuri Stoyanov, *Defenders of the True Cross: The Sasanian Conquest of Jerusalem in 614 and Byzantine Ideology of Anti-Persian Warfare* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2011), 67.

¹⁷⁶ Magdalino, “The History of the Future,” 19.

¹⁷⁷ Shahîd, “The Iranian Factor,” esp. 312–317.

usually reserved for the Persian ruler after his victory over Persia.¹⁷⁸ Alternatively, Georg Ostrogorsky has regarded Heraclius' adoption of the new title as a simplification of the imperial titulature as the court abandoned the use of Latin.¹⁷⁹ Evangelos Chrysos has regarded it as a manifestation of the growing influence of Hellenistic concepts of kingship on Byzantine political thought.¹⁸⁰ Chrysos further points out that the imperial title “Christ-believing king” is attested in at least one imperial inscription before the time of Heraclius.¹⁸¹ In sum, a number of explanations are possible for this change in imperial titulature, many of which appear more likely than the notion that Heraclius intended to style himself as an eschatological king or a messiah “in Christ.”

The Return of the True Cross: The third important act of Heraclius that scholars have interpreted in an eschatological light is Heraclius' triumphal return of the True Cross relic to Jerusalem. Cyril Mango has suggested that it was a “deliberately apocalyptic act.”¹⁸² Mango does not elaborate, but presumably he is referencing the similarity of Heraclius' ceremony in Jerusalem to the prophecy of the Last Emperor's surrender of his crown upon the cross in Jerusalem. Indeed, Jan Drijvers and Paul Magdalino both suggested the possibility—which Lutz Greisiger and Stephen Shoemaker have subsequently asserted as a certainty—that Heraclius was attempting to emulate the prophecy of the Last Emperor.¹⁸³

The notion that Heraclius was seeking to fulfill the role of the Last Emperor cannot be sustained—as noted numerous times above, the legend of the Last Emperor originated in the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* and was not in circulation in the lifetime of Heraclius.¹⁸⁴ Still, is it at all possible that there was a more general eschatological intention in Heraclius' ceremony in Jerusalem? Greisiger has suggested that Emperor Heraclius entered Jerusalem in

¹⁷⁸ This is the opinion of J. B. Bury, *A History of the Later Roman Empire*, vol. 2 (London: Macmillan, 1889), 242; and of Alexander Vasiliev, *History of the Byzantine Empire, 324–1453* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1952), 199.

¹⁷⁹ George Ostrogorsky, *The History of the Byzantine State* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press 1957), 106–107, with additional analysis in n.2.

¹⁸⁰ Evangelos Chrysos, “The Title Βασιλευς in Early Byzantine International Relations,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, vol. 32 (1978), 29–75; on 31–34 Chrysos provides a summary of the historiography on the question of the meaning of the change in the imperial title.

¹⁸¹ Ibid, 72–73.

¹⁸² Cyril Mango, *Byzantium: The Empire of New Rome* (New York: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1980), 206. Bernard Flusin, *Saint Anastase le Perse et l'histoire de la Palestine au début du VIIe siècle, Tome 2 : Commentaire* (Paris: Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1992), 314–315, likewise states: “La reposition de la Croix a Jérusalem marque le début d'un nouvel âge dans l'histoire de la Création.”

¹⁸³ Jan Drijvers, “Heraclius and the *Restitutio Crucis*: Notes on symbolism and ideology,” *The Reign of Heraclius (610–641): Crisis and Confrontation*, ed. G. J. Reinink, Bernard H. Stolte (Leuven: Peeters, 2002), 186–188. Paul Magdalino, “The History of the Future,” 19, where he cautiously states “It is not entirely clear whether [Heraclius] was inspired by, or inspired, the apocalyptic legend of the Last Emperor.” An extreme adoption of these ideas is found in Greisiger, *Messias-Endkaiser-Antichrist*, 132–139; Stephen Shoemaker, *The Apocalypse of Empire*, 75.

¹⁸⁴ As Averil Cameron, “Late Antique Apocalyptic: A Context of the Qur'an?” 14, summarizes: “if this story of the last emperor was really already in existence, Heraclius's action would indeed have been sensational. But ... it seems more likely that the motif of the last emperor and Golgotha followed rather than preceded Heraclius's actions.” I make this case in detail in Christopher Bonura, “Did Heraclius Know the Legend of the Last Roman Emperor?” *Studia Patristica*, vol. 62 (2013), 503–514.

triumph in order to try to convince the Jews that he was the messiah—this proposition, however, is rather hard to believe.¹⁸⁵ Nonetheless, a royal entry into Jerusalem is not entirely devoid of messianic associations.

However, if Heraclius did have a messianic or eschatological goal in going to Jerusalem with the relic of the True Cross, we should expect some indication of it in the poem written by George of Pisidia to celebrate the event. George's poem, after all, is the main source for the event, and it is a panegyric by Heraclius' court poet. This is exactly where Shoemaker looked for confirmation of the messianic theory: "In his poem on the restoration of the cross, George of Pisidia styles Heraclius a messiah by describing his arrival in Jerusalem in language reminiscent of Palm Sunday, and he links this restoration with the renewal of the world, the resurrection of the dead, and the final judgment."¹⁸⁶

This formulation misrepresents the content of George's poem. George makes no attempt to portray Heraclius as the literal messiah or to connect the return of the cross to the end of the world. Rather, George notes that news of Heraclius' entry into Jerusalem reached him (in Constantinople) on Lazarus Saturday (the day before Palm Sunday)—thus he talks of the celebration of Heraclius' triumph being marked with palm branches. He also notes that this was a fitting occasion to hear about the return of the cross since just as the feast of Lazarus celebrated Christ's raising of Lazarus from the dead, the cross will appear at the general resurrection at the end of the world (a reference to Matthew 24:30).¹⁸⁷ Thus, George was reading symbolic meaning into the time news reached him about Heraclius' *adventus* in Jerusalem. He may have intended some parallels between Christ's entry into Jerusalem and that of Heraclius (he was, after all, writing a panegyric for the latter), but this hardly implies that Heraclius was actually the messiah. Moreover, George certainly did not claim that Heraclius' translation of the relic back to Jerusalem heralded the arrival of God's kingdom.

The Conversion of the Jews: Shortly after the return of the True Cross to Jerusalem, Heraclius introduced a program of forcibly converting the Jews. This effort yielded only modest results, and was interrupted by the Arab invasions, but such an effort was largely unprecedented within Roman history. Could the motivation have been an effort to transform the Roman Empire into

¹⁸⁵ Greisiger bases this suggestion on the idea that Heraclius did not return the True Cross relic to Jerusalem in 630, but in 629, following a dating proposed by Paul Speck (and roundly rejected by other scholars). Speck's dating would place Heraclius' entry into Jerusalem on Rosh Hashana, and Greisiger sees this as an indication of Heraclius' messianic intention.

¹⁸⁶ Stephen Shoemaker, *The Apocalypse of Empire*, 79.

¹⁸⁷ George of Pisidia, "On the Restoration of the Holy Cross," lines 105–110, ed. Luigi Tartaglia, *Carmi*, 229: εἰς καιρὸν εὐπρόσδεκτον, εἰς νικηφόρον, / ὅτε προσελθὼν τοῖς τυράννοις τῶν τάφων / ὁ τὴν καθ' ἡμᾶς οὐσίαν ἀναπλάσας / ζωὴν ἐφῆκε τῷ νεκρῷ τοῦ Λαζάρου—/ ἔδει γὰρ, οἶμαι, τῇ νεκρῶν ἀναστάσει / σταυροῦ γενέσθαι καὶ πάλιν μηνύματα—/ ὅλη συνῆλθεν εἰς ἑαυτὴν ἡ Πόλις. The lines about the palm fronds in the celebration is found on line 7–8, ed. Tartaglia, *Carmi*, 225: νέους προευντρέπειε φοινίκων κλάδους / πρὸς τὴν ἀπαντὴν τοῦ νέου νικηφόρου. The fact that the news of the return of the cross relic to Jerusalem reached George of Pisidia in Constantinople on Lazarus Saturday has been an important factor in determining the year in which Heraclius' ceremony in Jerusalem took place: see Constantin Zuckerman, "Heraclius and the Return of the Holy Cross," *Travaux et Mémoires*, vol. 17 (2013), 197–217, esp. 201–203.

the millennial fifth kingdom, or else make it appear that he had? After all, according to Romans 11:25–26, once the full number of gentiles entered the church at the end of time, “all Israel will be saved.” Was Heraclius trying to force the fulfillment of this prophecy?

This is how Stoyanov has interpreted the policy: “It does not seem coincidental that Heraclius' anti-Jewish decree followed on and effectively served as the concluding deed of a series of public imperial acts which appear to have been intended to enact (or to be seen as enacting) an eschatological scenario.”¹⁸⁸ According to Greisiger, if Heraclius “was to convince the populace that living under his rule was actually living in the earthly millennium, he could hardly avoid the *obligation* of converting the Jews.”¹⁸⁹

However, there were numerous other reasons why the emperor may have sought to convert the Jews: importantly, during the war with Persia, the Jewish subjects of the Roman Empire had openly collaborated with the Persians. Most notably, they had helped the Persians capture Jerusalem, and, at least according to Christian hagiographic accounts, attempted to force the Christian prisoners to convert to Judaism. Forcing the Jews to convert to Christianity may well have been an attempt to eliminate a potential fifth column within the empire while at the same time settling scores. In addition, in the aftermath of the war with Persia, Heraclius was attempting to enforce religious unity within his empire, and the conversion of the Jews would be a major accomplishment in this direction.¹⁹⁰

There may have been further reasons for Heraclius's attempt to force the conversion of the Jews. However, there is no evidence that eschatological motives played any role and there is no reason to assume that his efforts were in any way related to imperial eschatology. As we have seen, the notion of an earthly millennium had long been condemned and abandoned in Christian theology. Furthermore, the notion that the earthly millennium had arrived in the Roman Empire never existed. Thus the idea that Heraclius believed, or wanted others to believe, that he ruled over the millennial kingdom on earth is a modern historiographical construct and can only obstruct a proper understanding of how Christian eschatology developed.

III.3: The Persistence of the Common Political Eschatological Scenario

Another work written immediately after the Heraclius' war with Persia does briefly touch on political eschatology. It is called the *Doctrine of Jacob the Newly Baptized*, a Christian apologetic presented as a disputation between a Jew newly converted to Christianity (he was forced to convert by a imperial authorities carrying out Heraclius edict, but soon became a sincere Christian) and his former coreligionists. It is possible, but not certain, that an actual Jewish convert to Christianity wrote it. It is also one of the earliest texts to mention the Prophet

¹⁸⁸ Stoyanov, *Defenders and Enemies of the True Cross*, 70.

¹⁸⁹ Greisiger, “The End is Coming—To What End?” 104. See also idem, *Messias-Endkaiser-Antichrist*, 97–106.

¹⁹⁰ On the Jews in seventh-century Byzantium in general, and Heraclius' forced conversions in particular, see David Olster, *Roman Defeat, Christian Response, Literary Construction of the Jew* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), esp. 84–92; and Averil Cameron, “Byzantines and Jews: Some Recent Work on Early Byzantium,” *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, vol. 20 (1996), 249–274, who critiques Olster's narrative.

Muhammad. Since it states that Muhammad's followers had recently conquered Palestine, it likely dates to the late 630s.¹⁹¹

Reflecting on the upheavals of the past decades, the Jews in the *Doctrine of Jacob the Newly Baptized* recall a conversation they had on the eve of the outbreak of the long and destructive war with Persia. They had heard news that Emperor Maurice had been murdered, an event that gave the Persian king Khusrau II his excuse to invade the Roman Empire:

After the death of Emperor Maurice we were standing below the house of lord Marianus at Sycaminum, and the first of us Jews spoke, saying: "Why do the Jews rejoice that the Emperor Maurice is dead and Phocas has seized the throne through bloodshed? Truly we are to see a diminution of the empire of the Romans. And if the fourth kingdom, that is the Roman kingdom, has declined and been broken up and shattered, as Daniel said, then there is nothing left except the ten toes and ten horns of the fourth beast, and finally the little horn which changes all knowledge of God, and immediately the end of the world and the resurrection of the dead."¹⁹²

In the context of the Christian apology, this statement is designed to show that the Jews had missed the messiah, since the prophecies of Daniel were already mostly fulfilled. "If this is true," the Jewish speaker adds, "we erred in not perceiving the Christ that came."¹⁹³ The Jews should know, it suggests, that the fourth kingdom is crumbling and that they must convert to Christianity if they want to secure a place in the fifth kingdom.

At least one scholar has expressed puzzlement at this passage, describing it as a uniquely pessimistic view of the Roman Empire's future and evidence that defeats at the hands of the Persians and Arabs had finally shattered the old Eusebian triumphalist eschatology. How could such a negative eschatological conception of the empire be expressed in Greek as late as the seventh century?¹⁹⁴ However, by now it should be clear that such a statement should hardly be surprising.

¹⁹¹ The critical edition of the *Doctrine of Jacob the Newly Baptized*, with French translation, can be found in G. Dagron and V. Déroche, "Juifs et chrétiens dans l'Orient du VII^e siècle," *Travaux et Mémoires* 11 (1991), 68–273, with an introduction on 17–46.

¹⁹² *Doctrine of Jacob the Newly Baptized*, III.12, ed. Gilbert Dagron and Vincent Déroche, "Juifs et Chrétiens dans l'Orient du VII^e siècle," *Travaux et Mémoires*, vol. 11 (1991), 70–219, with quotation on 171: μετὰ τὸ ἀποθανεῖν Μαυρίκιον τὸν βασιλέα κάτωθεν τοῦ οἴκου τοῦ κυροῦ Μαρριανοῦ ἰστάμεθα, καὶ ἐξηγήσατο ὁ πρῶτος ἡμῶν τῶν Ἰουδαίων λέγων· « τί χαίρονται οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι, ὅτι ἀπέθανεν Μαυρίκιος ὁ βασιλεὺς καὶ ἐβασίλευσε Φωκάς δι' αἱμάτων; ὄντως μείωσιν τῆς βασιλείας τῶν Ῥωμαίων ἔχομεν ἰδεῖν. Καὶ ἐὰν τὸ τέταρτον βασιλεῖον τουτέστιν ἡ Ῥωμανία μειωθῇ καὶ διαιρεθῇ καὶ συντριβῇ, καθὼς εἶπεν Δανιήλ, ὄντως οὐδὲν ἄλλο γίνεται, εἰ μὴ τῶν δέκα δακτύλων, τὰ δέκα κέρατα τοῦ θηρίου τοῦ τετάρτου, καὶ λοιπὸν τὸ κέρας τὸ μικρὸν τὸ ἀλλοιοῦν πᾶσαν θεογνωσίαν, καὶ εὐθέως ἡ συντέλεια τοῦ κόσμου καὶ ἡ ἀνάστασις τῶν νεκρῶν.»

¹⁹³ Ibid, ed. Dagron and Déroche, "Juifs et Chrétiens," 172–173: καὶ ἐὰν τοῦτο γένηται, ἐπλανήθημεν μὴ δεξάμενοι τὸν ἐλθόντα Χριστόν.

¹⁹⁴ According to David Olster, *Roman Defeat, Christian Response*, 168, no other contemporary sources assumed that the Roman Empire would decline and fall in the run up to the end of time: "They asserted, in fact, just the opposite, that the Roman Empire, after severe trials, would emerge victorious, and its victory would announce the apocalypse." For this assertion, Olster can only cite later works, namely the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, demonstrating the common conviction that Byzantine political thought and political eschatology were static and unchanging.

This passage from the *Doctrine of Jacob the Newly Baptized* simply echoes the expectations generated by the common political-eschatological scenario described in the previous chapter. There are no notions of “imperial eschatology.” The fate of the Roman Empire is to be division, as it is partitioned between ten kings (symbolized in the ten toes of the statue in Daniel 2 and the ten horns of the beast in Daniel 7), collapse, and finally the reign of the Antichrist (the little horn).

True, the continued persistence of the traditional political-eschatological scenario does not necessarily mean that an alternative pro-imperial eschatological tradition had not developed in parallel. But no evidence of such a tradition can be found in Greek or Roman writers in the seventh century or before. There are no signs that during the reigns of Justinian or Heraclius there existed a widespread belief that the empire was the kingdom of God or the earthly Millennium, or that the emperors would yield the empire back to Christ. On the contrary, their spokesmen often portrayed them as heralding a renewal of the Christian empire, if anything giving the empire a new lease on life and further delaying the doom that would inevitably befall it at the end of history. Justinian and Heraclius were compared not with a legendary Last Emperor (this figure was only introduced to Christian eschatology by the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* at the end of the seventh century), but with the great monarchs of the past: with King David, and Solomon, and Constantine. They promised a return to the glorious past, not the eschatological future.

Chapter Conclusions

“In no way will the saints possess an earthly kingdom, only a heavenly one. Enough, then, with the fable of the Millennium!”¹⁹⁵ This statement by Jerome, already quoted in the previous chapter of this dissertation, sums up the prevailing late antique Christian attitudes toward millennialism, especially from the fifth century onwards. As we have seen, Eusebius already echoed this sentiment in the early fourth century. In the sixth and seventh centuries, the Greek commentaries on the Book of Revelation by Oikoumenios and Andrew of Caesarea (discussed in the previous chapter) provided a slightly different take on the millennium: they held that it had begun with the birth of Christ, and was manifest either as his ministry (the view of Oikoumenios) or the church (the view of Andrew). However, such views excluded the possibility that the Roman Empire was the kingdom of the millennium.

There is no evidence that the Roman Empire was assigned a positive eschatological role among the Christian populace of the Roman Empire in late antiquity. Instead, the political-eschatological scenario, which identified the Roman Empire as the fourth kingdom of Daniel,

¹⁹⁵ Jerome, *Commentary on Daniel*, II.7.17, ed. Franciscus Glorie, *S. Hieronymi Presbyteri Opera, Pars I, Opera Exegetica 5: Commentariorum in Daniele Libri III* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1965), 848: *Quattuor regna, de quibus supra diximus, fuere terrena: ‘Omne enim quod de terra est revertetur in terram,’ sancti autem nequaquam habebunt terrenum regnum sed caeleste. Cessat ergo mille annorum fabula.*

destined to be ruled by the Antichrist and destroyed by Christ at his second coming, remained the primary lens through which Roman Christians understood their empire's fate.

In later centuries traditions are found in both the Byzantine and Holy Roman Empire that the empire would play an important eschatological role in bringing about Christ's kingdom. Both these empires maintained a belief that a Last Emperor would arise at the end of time, conquer the persecutors of the church, and surrender the crown to Christ in Jerusalem, thus allowing the fifth kingdom to begin. It is hard to blame scholars who look to Eusebius, the *Tiburtine Sibyl*, and the reigns of Justinian and Heraclius for the origins of this pro-Roman political eschatology. A pro-Roman shift certainly took place, and it is in the nature of scholarly endeavor to trace origins. However, previous scholarship has fallen short in considering the Syriac evidence. This is the evidence that the next chapter will examine.

CHAPTER 4: THE DISTINCTIVE PATH OF LATE ANTIQUE SYRIAC POLITICAL ESCHATOLOGY

Introduction: The Eschatology of Aphrahat

Eusebius' 336 Tricennial Oration to Constantine was not the source of a major change in Christian political eschatology, as we have seen in the previous chapter. Still, the groundwork for the eschatological shift was laid only about one year later, in a source that has received far less scholarly attention. It was delivered not in any imperial audience hall like Eusebius' panegyric—it was likely recited in a mud brick church in Persian Northern Mesopotamia, if it was delivered at all. It is found in the *Demonstrations* (ܕܡܢܝܫܬܐ), twenty-three homilies expounding on various topics important to the Christian faith written between the years 337 and 345 by Aphrahat (ܐܦܪܗܬܐ), also known as the “Persian sage.”¹

Aphrahat, a subject of the Sasanian Persian Empire in the first half of the fourth century, is the earliest Syriac writer to address the kingdoms of Daniel and political eschatology. He provides an exegesis on the visions of Daniel that contrasts sharply with any we have seen in the Greek and Latin authors of late antiquity.

In his Fifth Demonstration, “The Demonstration on Wars” (ܕܡܢܝܫܬܐ ܕܡܠܚܬܐ), composed in 337/338, around the time of the death of Emperor Constantine, Aphrahat argues that a looming Persian attack on the Roman Empire—known from other historical sources as a campaign by shah Shapur II (r. 309–379) to seize Armenia and portions of Northern Mesopotamia from Roman control—was doomed to defeat.² The Fifth Demonstration begins as an indictment of the

¹ The text of the *Demonstrations* has been edited, with Latin translation, by Jean Parisot, *Aphraatis Sapientis Persae Demonstrationes* (Paris, Firmin-Didot, 1894). An older edition was produced by William Wright, *The Homilies of Aphraates, the Persian Sage* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1869). In the quotations from the *Demonstrations* below, I quote from the English translation of Parisot's edition by Adam Lehto, *The Demonstrations of Aphrahat, the Persian Sage* (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2010).

² Timothy D. Barnes, “Constantine and the Christians of Persia,” *Journal of Roman Studies*, vol. 75 (1985), 126–136, dates the Fifth Demonstration to late in the year 337, after Constantine had died but before word had reached the Persian frontier. However, Barnes assumes that Aphrahat was writing in expectation of an invasion by Constantine aimed at liberating the Christians of Persia. Likewise, Craig E. Morrison, “The Reception of the Book of Daniel in Aphrahat's Fifth Demonstration ‘On Wars,’” *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies*, vol. 7, no. 1 (2004), 57, states: “Aphrahat preached the [Fifth Demonstration] in hope that the Roman Emperor would soon bring his protection to the Christians in Persia living under Shapur II.” Kyle Smith, *Constantine and the Captive Christians of Persia: Martyrdom and Religious Identity in Late Antiquity* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), 103–109, argues persuasively that this was not the case, that no such liberation was expected, and instead Aphrahat was writing in response to the mobilization of the Persian military for an attack on the Roman Empire. Still, Smith, *ibid*, 107, states that the Fifth Demonstration “may have been written in the late 330s,” and does not seem to realize that Aphrahat provides the date of composition in the Twenty-Second Demonstration, where he states he composed the first ten Demonstrations in the Year of the Greeks 648 (that is, 337/338 AD) and the following twelve in the Year of the Greeks 655 (344/345 AD): Aphrahat, *Demonstrations*, 22.25, ed. Parisot, 1044 (Lehto, 477–478).

Persian king's arrogance, pointing out that the arrogant have always been humbled and vanquished. Aphrahat finds confirmation of the Persian king's looming defeat through an extended exploration of the prophecies in the Book of Daniel.

Aphrahat does not state his argument directly, but slowly unwinds it over the course of the Fifth Demonstration. He begins by citing Daniel 8, Daniel's vision of the goat, representing the kingdom of the Greeks, defeating the ram that represents the Persian Empire of Darius. Aphrahat suggests that the Sasanian Persian Empire is a continuation of the ancient (Achaemenid) Persian Empire described in that passage, carrying on in diminished form since Alexander's conquest.³ By preparing for war against the Roman Empire, says Aphrahat, Shapur seemed to be attempting to regain some measure of the Persian kingdom's former status, though this was necessarily a vain effort:

Though his horns have been broken, [the ram] raises himself up and exalts himself against the fourth beast, who is strong and powerful, with teeth of iron and hooves of bronze. [This beast] devours and breaks [things] into pieces, and whatever is left over he tramples with his feet. O ram, whose horns have been broken, draw back from the beast and do not irritate it, or it may devour you and grind you into pieces!⁴

Here, Aphrahat makes clear that the Persians, in attacking the Roman Empire, will be confronting the fourth beast from the Book of Daniel. The ram, Persia, cannot hope to defeat the fourth beast, Aphrahat claims: “For the beast will not be killed until the Ancient of Days sits on the throne and the Son of Men comes before him and is given authority.”⁵ Thus, the Roman Empire, as the fourth beast, is a powerful foe, and one that will exist up to the end of history.

At this point, Aphrahat does not yet explicitly name the Roman Empire as the fourth kingdom. However, as he proceeds to examine the statue dream of Nebuchadnezzar from Daniel 2, he again suggests Rome's place in the four-kingdom scheme: "The image represents the whole world: its head is Nebuchadnezzar; its chest and arms represent the king of Media and Persia; its belly and thighs represent the King of the Greeks; its calves and feet represent the kingdom of the descendants of Esau."⁶ It was quite common among Jews to identify the Romans as the descendants of Esau (in opposition to themselves as descendants of Jacob). Thus it appears that, like the Greek and Latin authors studied in the previous chapters of this dissertation, Aphrahat views the Roman Empire as the legs and feet of iron from Daniel 2 and the fourth beast from Daniel 7; that is, the fourth kingdom.

However, while Aphrahat identifies the third beast as the kingdom of the Greeks under

³ See discussion in Manolis Papoutsakis, *Vicarious Kingship: A Theme in Syriac Political Theology in Late Antiquity* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 42.

[illegible]

⁵Ibid; ed. Parisot, *Aphraatis Sapientis*, 196 (English translation in Lehto, *The Demonstrations of Aphrahat*, 152): ܕܠܝܬܐ ܡܠ ܡܢܚܝܬܐ ܕܥܪܦܐ ܕܐܒܝܗܘܢ ܕܡܨܝܬܐ ܕܠܐ ܕܩܬܐ ܡܢܚܐ ܕܫܠܐ ܕܟܠܐ ܕܠܝܬܐ ܡܠ ܝܬܝ ܕܫܠܐ.

[illegible]

However, this *translatio imperii* concerning the fourth kingdom is actually central to Aphrahat's larger argument.⁹ Thanks to this innovative interpretation, Aphrahat can attribute all the negative qualities associated with the fourth kingdom in the Book of Daniel to the Seleucid Empire, while arguing that the Roman Empire continued the fourth kingdom in a redeemed state. This becomes key to the notion of a positive fourth kingdom.

[The Jews] rested a little from the burden of kings and princes, from after the death of Antiochus until the completion of the sixty-two weeks [of years, i.e. the amount of time before the end of persecution predicted in Daniel 9]. Then the Son of Man came to liberate them and gather them together, but they did not accept him.¹¹

⁷ Ibid; V.19.

⁹ Pablo Ubierna, "Syriac Apocalyptic and the Body Politic," *Imago Temporis Medium Aevum*, vol. 6 (2012), 150–152, has already suggested this idea, arguing against the notion that Aphrahat was clumsily combining traditions.

¹⁰ Aphrahat, *Demonstrations*, V.20.

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different from the earthly fifth kingdom promised to the Jews. In the meantime, as a result of this lengthening of history, Christ allowed the fourth kingdom to continue under the aegis of the Romans.

Thanks to God's amendment of his providential plan, Aphrahat suggests that the Romans received that which was promised to the Jews. Aphrahat expands upon the "parable of the wicked husbandmen" from the gospels (Matthew 21:33–46; Mark 12:1–12; Luke 20:9–19), in which husbandmen lease a vineyard but proceed to abuse the landowner's messengers and kill his son, prompting the owner to punish the husbandmen and lease the vineyard to others. While a long Christian hermeneutic tradition cites this passage to support the notion that the Jews forfeited their place as God's chosen people and have been replaced by the Christians, Aphrahat explains it slightly differently. For Aphrahat, the vineyard is the eschatological world empire. He states: "[One] vineyard has come into being instead of [another] vineyard. [Christ] handed over the kingdom (ܡܠܟܘܬܐ) to the Romans, who are called the descendants of Esau. These descendants of Esau will keep the kingdom (ܡܠܟܘܬܐ) for its giver."¹² Thus, Aphrahat suggests, the Romans have inherited the powerful kingdom that God had initially promised to give the Jews at the end of time.

Nonetheless, somewhat confusingly, for Aphrahat the Roman Empire remained the fourth kingdom. The fifth kingdom would arrive only with Christ's second coming. As Christ's temporary proxies, the Romans enjoyed the benefits that would have accrued to the Jewish fifth kingdom while remaining a continuation of the fourth. Aphrahat makes this point by appealing to the text of Daniel 7, which in the Syriac Peshitta version says that the holy ones of the Most High will receive the "kingdom under heaven" (ܠܡܠܟܘܬܐ ܕܬܗܡܢܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ), and later that they will receive an "eternal kingdom" (ܠܡܠܟܘܬܐ ܥܠܡܐ). Aphrahat decides to interpret these as two separate kingdoms: the "kingdom under heaven" is the earthly empire promised to the Jews but given instead to the Romans. The "eternal kingdom," on the other hand, is the kingdom of heaven—in other words the fifth kingdom, which all Christians could attain through baptism and piety.¹³

In this way, Aphrahat solved an interpretive problem concerning the Book of Daniel: in his dream, Daniel had seen the fourth beast and its Little Horn judged and destroyed and the Son of Man invested with the eternal kingdom. From Aphrahat's vantage point, the time of the Little Horn (King Antiochus IV) had passed but the Son of Man had not yet established his eternal kingdom. Thus, it was clear that Daniel's prophecy had been amended; the fourth beast now served God and acted as his kingdom under heaven, while those judged and punished were the Jews. In other words, in Aphrahat's view, the fourth kingdom was not the evil enemy of God's holy people as it was under Antiochus, but now ruled the world on God's behalf. As a result, God now protected the Roman Empire from the Persians and all other enemies. In fact, the messiah had even seen fit to be born and live under Roman rule: "Investigate [the matter] and see

¹² Aphrahat, *Demonstrations*, V.22; ed. Parisot, *Aphraatis Sapientis*, 229–232 (English translation: Lehto, *Demonstrations of Aphrahat*, 165): ܠܗܘܢ ܡܫܬܪܟܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܚܝܒܐ :ܠܗܝܥ ܩܠ ܠܗܝܥ ܦܥܡ ܩܠ ܕܡܨܬܪܟܐ ܕܚܝܒܐ ܕܡܨܬܪܟܐ ܕܚܝܒܐ ܕܡܨܬܪܟܐ ܕܚܝܒܐ ܕܡܨܬܪܟܐ ܕܚܝܒܐ.

¹³ Aphrahat's point here is explored in detail by Papoutsakis, *Vicarious Kingship*, 43–50.

that [Jesus] was also recorded with them in the census, and just as he was recorded with them in the census, he will also come to their aid.”¹⁴

Of course, Aphrahat knew the Romans had not embraced Christianity right away. They also did not win all their wars against Persia. In some previous conflicts, Aphrahat says, the Romans had suffered defeat at the hands of the Persians (Aphrahat was likely referring to the defeat and capture of Emperor Valerian by Shapur I in 260 AD) because “they did not want to take with them to war the man who was recorded with them in the census.”¹⁵ The Romans lost because they were still pagans. However, now that the Romans had embraced Christianity and proudly displayed symbols of Christ, their victory was guaranteed: “His banner is everywhere in that place; they are clothed with his armor and will not be defeated in war.”¹⁶ Looking on at Constantine’s Roman Empire as an outsider, the Persian Christian Aphrahat saw it as an ideal Christian state, destined to triumph over the heathen Sasanian Empire under which he lived as a persecuted minority.

Thus, in the final analysis, Aphrahat concluded, the Shah Shapur and his Persians must inevitably fail in their attack on the Roman Empire. The Romans were now the stewards of the kingship, and so their rule must thus last until the second coming: “For this reason, the kingdom of the descendants of Esau will not be delivered into the hands of the gathered armies who wish to go up against it; since the kingdom is being kept for its giver, and he will keep it.”¹⁷ Instead they will last to the end of history, when Christ returns to take back the kingship from the Romans and inaugurate the fifth kingdom. “They [the Romans] will hand over the deposit to the one who gave it, and will not withhold [any] of it.”¹⁸ This, however—contrary to what the common political-eschatological scenario envisioned for the end of the fourth kingdom’s rule—will not be a violent annihilation of the empire as punishment for sin:

For when he comes, he will bring an end to the kingdom, so that he might not come to them with anger. When he to whom the kingdom belongs comes for the second time, he will take back whatever he has given. He will be king for ever and ever, and his kingdom will not pass away, since it is an eternal kingdom.¹⁹

¹⁴ Aphrahat, *Demonstrations*, V.24; ed. Parisot, *Aphraatis Sapientis*, 233 (English translation: Lehto, *Demonstrations of Aphrahat*, 167): אר עממא דעזי ממשא דחבא נאכא: חבא עממא דעזי ממשא אר, ואו, חבא דחבא.

¹⁵ Ibid; ed. Parisot, *Aphraatis Sapientis*, 236 (English translation: Lehto, *Demonstrations of Aphrahat*, 167):
ܠܗ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܚܝܬܢ ܕܟܪܝܫܬܐ ܕܩܪܒܐ ܕܘܨܬܐ ܕܦܪܓܐ ܕܛܪܝܩܐ ܕܣܰܪܳܦܶܪܺܝܽܬܳܐ.

¹⁶ Ibid.; ed. Pariset, *Aphraatis Sapientis*, 233 (English translation: Lehto, *Demonstrations of Aphrahat*, 167):

[illegible]

¹⁸ Ibid.; ed. Pariset, *Aphraatis Sapientis*, 233 (English translation: Lehto, *Demonstrations of Aphrahat*, 166):

[illegible]

When Christ returns at his second coming, he will peacefully reclaim lordship over the earth from the Romans.²⁰

Thus for Aphrahat, the Roman Empire's future did not spell disintegration and weakening but steadfastness fortified by Christ. How could the Roman Empire grow weaker when it had divine approval to rule for the time being on Christ's behalf? Indeed, Aphrahat, seeking evidence for his interpretation in the Biblical text, reinterpreted the feet of iron and clay related to the fourth kingdom in Daniel 2 so that it no longer indicates the weakness of the kingdom. Instead, the mixture of iron and clay represents one of the strengths of the Romans, namely their lack of a system of dynastic succession. The Romans had a senate (ܨܢܬܐ; i.e. βουλή), which (at least according to Aphrahat) would choose the wisest man to govern them. Thus, instead of a dynastic line of kings, the Romans had a mixed and differentiated series of rulers: iron mixed with clay. By choosing the most qualified person to reign, the Roman kingdom will not be lost by a bad ruler as Babylon's kingdom was lost by Belshazzar in chapter 5 of Daniel.²¹ Thus, Aphrahat does all he can to make the fourth kingdom, which the Book of Daniel suggest is weak and wicked, appear pious and strong.

Therefore, for Aphrahat, the Antichrist would not rule over the Roman Empire. The prophetic passages from Daniel used by Greek and Latin authors such as Hippolytus, Jerome, and Andrew of Caesarea to assert that the Antichrist would rule as emperor were, in Aphrahat's interpretation, fulfilled by Antiochus IV. Instead of history heading toward one final persecution, the Roman Empire was now "clothed with [Christ's] armor." In the words of Timothy Barnes, for Aphrahat, "the central fact of Roman imperial history is the conversion of the empire to Christianity."²² Now the Romans, having embraced Christianity, were protecting the kingship until Christ's return.

Aphrahat may have been drawing on a preexisting tradition for these ideas, but more likely he came up with this political eschatology, including his reading of the four kingdoms of Daniel, on his own. Considering he was writing within a few months of the death of the first Christian emperor and at the outset of the first major conflict between the Sasanian Empire under which he lived and Christian Rome, he likely was attempting to make sense of the kingdoms of Daniel in a new context in which a great Christian empire existed. Considering the strong ties with Judaism that likely existed within Aphrahat's early Christian community, his arguments were likely targeted at Jews who awaited the kingdom of the messiah that would destroy the Roman Empire and rule the earth.

The fact that this early Syriac Christian writer takes such a divergent interpretation of Rome's place in the Danielic scheme of empires from that expressed by Christian teachers in Latin and Greek is an early indication of the distinctness of Syriac political eschatology. The common political-eschatological scenario discussed in the previous two chapters has left no trace of any influence in Syriac. Instead, Syriac eschatology in late antiquity, starting from Aphrahat,

²⁰ See Ubierna, "Syriac Apocalyptic and the Body Politic," 149–151.

²¹ Aphrahat, *Demonstrations*, V.13.

²² Barnes, "'Constantine and Christians of Persia,'" 134.

was informed by this notion of Rome's providential role in the end times. "Imperial eschatology" was not invented by Eusebius of Caesarea or propagated by emperors such as Justinian and Heraclius, but originated in Syriac theology as Christians within the Persian Empire glorified the Constantinian Roman Empire from afar.²³

Nonetheless, such positive eschatological expectations about the Roman Empire did not enter Latin and Greek literature directly through Aphrahat. Aphrahat was completely unknown among Greek and Latin writers, and the *Demonstrations* were unknown to Western scholars in general until their rediscovery in the nineteenth century. Since then, Aphrahat has been embraced as one of the great Syriac theologians and literary stylists. Still, as we shall see, his influence on the late antique and medieval Syriac tradition seems to have been relatively limited, and nonexistent outside it.

Thus, the political eschatology that had originated in Aphrahat was not transmitted by his writings but by the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*. It is unlikely that the author of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* knew Aphrahat's writing directly. Instead, between the fourth and seventh centuries the eschatological ideas suggested by Aphrahat developed into a Syriac political-eschatological scenario that had an independent life of its own. This scenario, completely different from the common political-eschatological scenario found in Greek and Latin authors, was adopted by a resurgent Syriac apocalyptic genre in the seventh century.

This chapter will show how and why this happened. It will make clear that the political-eschatological scenario which remained virtually unchallenged in Greek and Latin Christian eschatological writing never took hold in Syriac. Instead, Aphrahat's eschatology was more influential because it was better suited to Syriac scripture, traditional methods of exegesis, and the political realities of the border lands between the Roman and Persian empires where most Syriac-speaking Christians lived. This chapter will follow the transmission and evolution of Aphrahat's political eschatology in later authors writing in Syriac or from a Syriac background (such as Cosmas Indicopleustes). Finally, it will show how, by the sixth or seventh century, Aphrahat's views were adapted into a distinctly Syriac political-eschatological scenario that differed entirely from the common scenario found in Greek and Latin. This scenario, the earliest surviving attestation of which is Aphrahat's Fifth Demonstration, provided the starting point for the eschatology of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*.

Part I: Making Sense of the Four Kingdoms of Daniel in the Syriac Lands

Aphrahat's writings propose an understanding of political eschatology that made the Roman Empire a positive version of the fourth kingdom of Daniel, a kingdom tasked with holding Christ's kingship over the world in the period between his first and second coming. This must have been an unusual view for its time because it is not widely attested in Syriac literature.

²³ An unmitigatedly positive view of the Christian Roman Empire is also entirely consistent with the fact that, in Aphrahat's time, the ecclesiastical schisms that would sunder the church in the Persian Empire and the imperial borderlands from the church of the Roman Empire had not happened yet.

However, as we shall see, it did have some influence. But before tracing this influence, it is necessary to account for the vacuum of eschatological thought it filled.

One might expect that Aphrahat's idiosyncratic eschatological views would be swept aside by the growing popularity of the common political-eschatological scenario. After all, this is what happened to the more peculiar elements of Lactantius' account of the end of history; for example, his separation of the roles of Little Horn and Antichrist between two kings and the details that he gleaned from the *Oracles of Hystaspes* were quietly forgotten. This did not happen with Aphrahat, however, because the common political-eschatological scenario failed to take root in Syriac. In fact, political eschatology in Syriac literature from before the seventh century is quite rare in general. In light of this, for readers of Syriac, Aphrahat was a rare source that provided workable eschatological explanations for the four-kingdom scheme from the Book of Daniel and therefore a plausible scenario about how history would reach its conclusion.

Why did the common political-eschatological scenario never catch on in Syriac? The answer is that, in the Syriac tradition, the fourth kingdom of Daniel was widely held to be the Macedonian empire of Alexander the Great, not the Roman Empire.

Indeed, in the oldest surviving commentary on the Book of Daniel in Syriac, which is largely accepted as a composition from the late fourth century and is sometimes (probably falsely) attributed to Ephrem the Syrian, the prophecies of Daniel are taken as historically fulfilled in the triumph of the Maccabees over Antiochus IV.²⁴ The fourth kingdom, the commentary states, is that of the Macedonians, the Little Horn is Antiochus IV, the fifth kingdom was established by the Maccabees, and the resurrection of the dead is a metaphor for the liberation of the Jews from Greek tyranny. The commentary gets around the frequent objection to this interpretation—that the Hasmonean kingdom of the Maccabees did not last forever as it should if it were really the fifth kingdom—by asserting that Daniel's prophecy was in fact fulfilled twice. The victory of the pious Maccabees over the impious Greeks prefigured (ܕܡܬܝܕܝܠܐ) the more complete fulfillment of the prophecy in the birth of Christ. Indeed, it cites the gospel of Luke, where at the Annunciation the angel tells Mary that Jesus' kingdom will have no end (Luke 1:32–33), to imply that Jesus' birth marks the true fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy about the eternal fifth kingdom.²⁵

By this reading, the stone not made by human hands that smashes the statue in the dream of Nebuchadnezzar was both the Maccabees and the Virgin, while the kingdom that fills the world is both the Jewish kingdom founded by the Maccabees and the Gospel, which spread

²⁴ The only edition of this commentary is provided in Josephus Assemanus and Petrus Benedictus, *Sancti Patris Nostri Ephraem Syri Opera Omnia*, vol. 2 (Rome: Typographia Vaticana, 1740), 203–233. For an overview of the commentary, see Phil J. Botha, "The Relevance of the Book of Daniel for Fourth-Century Christianity According to the Commentary Ascribed to Ephrem the Syrian," in *Die Geschichte der Daniel-Auslegung in Judentum, Christentum und Islam: Studien zur Kommentierung des Danielbuches in Literatur und Kunst*, ed. K. Bracht and D. S. du Toit (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2007), 99–122; idem, "The Reception of Daniel 2 in the Commentary Ascribed to Ephrem the Syrian, Church Father," *Acta Patristica et Byzantina*, vol. 17 (2006), 119–143.

²⁵ Pseudo-Ephrem, *Commentary on Daniel*, 7:43; ed. Assemanus and Benedictus, *Sancti Patris Nostri Ephraem*, 206.

through the world after Christ.²⁶ This is a thoroughly Christian interpretation of the visions of Daniel that drains them of their eschatological weight: the fifth kingdom is not the kingdom of Christ after his second coming, but the kingdom of Christ established in the Christian church.

This interpretation of the visions in the Book of Daniel would be repeated by later Syriac authors. Theodore bar Koni, writing shortly before the year 800, echoes the interpretation of the commentary attributed to Ephrem.²⁷ Isho'dad of Merv, who composed commentaries on nearly all the books of the Bible in the middle of the ninth century, produced a commentary on Daniel that followed closely the commentary attributed to Ephrem: he identified the fourth kingdom as that of the Macedonians; the Little Horn of Daniel 7 and evil king of Daniel 11 were Antiochus Epiphanes; the resurrected dead were the Maccabees.²⁸ The Christian Ibn-Tayyib (d. 1043), who wrote in Arabic but came out of the Syriac tradition as a member of the “Nestorian” Church of the East, similarly identified Daniel’s fifth kingdom with the empire of Alexander the Great.²⁹

Members of the rival Syriac Orthodox Church seem to have held similar views. The commentator Dionysius bar Silibi knew and quoted from Hippolytus of Rome’s *Commentary on Daniel* and *On Christ and the Antichrist*, and yet nonetheless concluded that the kingdom of Alexander the Great was Daniel’s fourth kingdom.³⁰ In the thirteenth century, Bar Hebraeus, the Syriac Orthodox Bishop of Persia (*Maphrian*) and the last of the great Syriac authors, likewise repeated this interpretation of the kingdoms of Daniel.³¹

This tradition did not come out of nowhere. As we have seen (chapter 1, part I), in the Hellenistic context in which the Book of Daniel was written, the fourth kingdom represented the Macedonian Empire, founded by Alexander the Great, and the Seleucid successor state inherited by the great villain Antiochus IV. In Syriac exegesis, this remained the standard view. The adaptation of the prophecies from Daniel in order to accommodate Rome as the fourth kingdom never seems to have happened in Syriac literature the way it had in Greek and Latin exegesis. As a result, since Rome was not the fourth kingdom of Daniel, there was no basis on which to support the common political-eschatological narrative as it became current in Greek and Latin sources.

²⁶ See Botha, “The Reception of Daniel 2 in the Commentary Ascribed to Ephrem,” 128–129.

²⁷ Theodore Bar Koni, *Scholia*, ed. Addai Scher, *Theodore bar Koni: Liber Scholiorum*, vol. 2 (Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1910), 343.

²⁸ The Daniel commentary of Isho'dad of Merv has been edited by Ceslas van den Eynde, *Commentaire d'Išo'dad de Merv sur l'Ancien Testament*, vol. V: *Jérémie, Ézéchiel, Daniel* (Louvain: CSCO, 1972), 101–134; discussion of the fourth kingdom on *ibid.*, 104 and 112–114; discussion of the Maccabee victory as the resurrection of the dead on *ibid.*, 133–134.

²⁹ Jack Tannous, “Romanness in the Syriac East,” in *Transformations of Romanness: Early Medieval Regions and Identities*, ed. C. Gantner, C. Grifoni, W. Pohl, and M. Pollheimer-Mohaupt (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 469 n.77, documents this, citing Cod. Mardin, Chaldean Cathedral 474, fol. 272r.

³⁰ Tannous, “Romanness in the Syriac East,” 470 n.85. On the influence of Hippolytus on Dionysius bar Salibi, see Pierre Prigent, “Hippolyte, commentateur de l'Apocalypse: le commentaire de l'Apocalypse de Denys bar Šalibi,” *Theologische Zeitschrift*, vol. 28 (1972), 391–412.

³¹ Jacob Freimann *Des Gregorius Abulfarag, gen. Bar-Hebräus, Scholien zum Buche Daniel* (Brno: B. Epstein, 1892.), 8 (German translation on *ibid.*, 42). See also Wido van Peursen, “Daniel’s Four Kingdoms in the Syriac Tradition,” in *Tradition and Innovation in Biblical Interpretation: Studies Presented to Professor Eep Talstra on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. W.Th. van Peursen and J.W. Dyk (Leiden, Brill, 2011), 197; Tannous, “Romanness in the Syriac East,” 470.

This raises yet another question: why did the common political-eschatological scenario fail to spread or develop within Syriac Christian literature? Three factors can account for this vast difference in the reception of the Danielic prophecies in Syriac on the one hand and Greek and Latin in the other: Syriac Christianity favored exegetical traditions that eschewed apocalyptic interpretation; the Syriac version of scripture did not support eschatology; and an eschatological reading of Daniel and Revelation did not accord well with the political environment in which Syriac Christians lived.

I.1: Political Eschatology and the Antiochene School

“Leaving aside criticism of the Jews for the time being, I for my part am quite surprised at some teachers of religion (τῆς εὐσεβείας) referring to the Macedonian Empire as the fourth beast,” Theodoret of Cyrrhus (d. 458) writes in his Greek *Commentary on Daniel*.³² He repeatedly takes issue with other, unnamed authors who identified the fourth kingdom of Daniel as the Macedonian kingdom built by Alexander the Great instead of Rome’s empire. Thus, earlier in his exegesis on the statue dream of Nebuchadnezzar, Theodoret likewise states: “Some historians, then, claim that the fourth kingdom—namely the iron one—is Alexander the Macedonian; its feet and the toes of the feet were a mixture of iron and clay—namely the Macedonians ruling after him, successors of Ptolemy, Seleucus, Antiochus, and Demetrius.”³³ According to Theodoret, these historians and Christian teachers are mistaken: “They need, therefore, to understand and grasp from the numbering and from the factors outlined that the third kingdom, of bronze, is that of the Macedonians, and the fourth, of iron, is that of the Romans.”³⁴

As we have seen above (chapter 3, section III.3), Theodoret follows the common political-eschatological scenario found in Latin and Greek sources that identified the fourth kingdom of Daniel as the Roman Empire, and expected its decline in civil war, capture by the Antichrist, and eventual destruction at the second coming. In contrast with Cyril of Jerusalem, Jerome, and Andrew of Caesarea who suggested that all teachers of the church accepted the fourth kingdom in Daniel as a reference to the Roman Empire, Theodoret suggested the circulation of alternative traditions. Theodoret, who was writing in Antioch and was closely associated with the network of Christian teachers there, mentions (and rejects), an interpretation of the Macedonian Empire as the fourth kingdom. Theodoret attests to the fact that, at least in the

³² Theodoret, *Commentary on Daniel*, ed. J. L. Schulze in Migne, PG, vol. 81, 1436; reprinted, with English translation, in Robert C. Hill, *Theodoret: Commentary on Daniel* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006), 200–201: Ἐγὼ δὲ τῶν Ἰουδαίων κατηγορίαν ἐπὶ τοῦ παρόντος ἀφείξ, θαυμάζω κομιδῇ τῶν τῆς εὐσεβείας διδασκάλων τινὰς Μακεδονικὴν βασιλείαν τὸ τέταρτον θηρίον ἀποκαλέσαντας.

³³ Theodoret, *Commentary on Daniel*, in PG, vol. 81, 1307 (Hill, *Theodoret*, 58): Τινὲς τοίνυν τῶν συγγραφέων τὴν τετάρτην βασιλείαν, τουτέστι τὸν σίδηρον, Ἀλεξάνδρον ἔφασαν εἶναι τὸν Μακεδόνα· τοὺς δὲ πόδας καὶ τοὺς δακτύλους τῶν ποδῶν ἐκ σιδήρου καὶ ὀστράκου συγκειμένους, τοὺς μετ’ αὐτὸν βασιλεύσαντας Μακεδόνας, Πτολεμαίους, καὶ Σελεύκους, καὶ Ἀντιόχους, καὶ Δημητρίους.

³⁴ Ibid, 1307–1308 (Hill, *Theodoret*, 58): Ἐδει τοιγαροῦν αὐτοὺς πρῶτον μὲν ἐκ τοῦ ἀριθμοῦ, καὶ τῶν παραηλωθέντων πραγμάτων συνιέναι, καὶ μαθεῖν, ὡς τρίτη ἐστὶν ἡ τῶν Μακεδόνων βασιλεία, τουτέστιν ὁ χαλκός· τετάρτη δὲ ἡ Ῥωμαίων, τουτέστιν ὁ σίδηρος.

fifth century, there was controversy in Antioch over the identity of the four kingdoms in Daniel. An examination of this controversy among Greek exegetes can shed light on the interpretation of the kingdoms of Daniel in Syriac.

One might assume that Theodoret was objecting to the view of non-Christians who followed the third-century pagan philosopher Porphyry. As we have seen, Porphyry and his followers attempted to discredit Christian prophecies by arguing that the prophecies of Daniel were simply *vaticinia ex eventu* written at the time of the Maccabean revolt. Indeed, many of the Christian commentaries on the Book of Daniel, such as the lost commentary of Methodius of Olympus and the extant commentary by Jerome, were written to rebut Porphyry (see above, chapter 1, section I.3).

However, it is unlikely that Theodoret had Porphyry or other pagans in mind. He described those who espoused the view that the Macedonian Empire was the fourth kingdom as “teachers of religion” This term could only apply to other Christians.³⁵ Theodoret did not concretely identify who these misguided Christians teachers were. However, it is plausible that his comments were directed against his fellow Antiochene exegete and older contemporary, Theodore of Mopsuestia (Theodore of Antioch) (d. 428), or Theodore’s brother, Polychronius of Apamea (d. c. 430). Theodore of Mopsuestia produced commentaries on many books of the Bible and founded what is generally termed the Antiochene school of Biblical exegesis. Theodore of Mopsuestia probably produced a commentary on the Book of Daniel, but it is entirely lost. Nonetheless, his brother Polychronius certainly wrote a commentary on Daniel, of which fragments survive in the original Greek.³⁶

The fragments of Polychronius’ commentary are preserved in a seventh-century Byzantine catena of excerpts from various church fathers on the Book of Daniel (including those of Eusebius discussed in the previous chapter).³⁷ From these passages, it is clear that Polychronius makes the very case found in Syriac commentaries on Daniel, and which Theodoret vehemently opposed. In Polychronius’ analysis of Daniel 7, the fourth kingdom is that of the Macedonians, the Little Horn is king Antiochus IV, and all the prophecies in Daniel had been fulfilled with the successful rebellion of the Jews under the Maccabees. Polychronius interpreted

³⁵ See Hill, *Theodoret*, 201 n.175.

³⁶ Collins, *A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, 116, takes for granted that Theodore of Mopsuestia did write a commentary on Daniel and that it is lost. Pier Franco Beatrice, “Pagans and Christians on the Book of Daniel,” *Studia Patristica*, vol. 25 (1993), 32, agrees, though he adds that Polychronius is “probably the undeclared target of Theodoret’s polemical darts.” Jack Tannous, “Romanness in the Syriac East,” in *Transformations of Romanness: Early Medieval Regions and Identities*, ed. C. Gantner, C. Grifoni, W. Pohl, and M. Pollheimer-Mohaupt (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 470 n.82, adduces evidence not only that Theodore wrote a commentary on Daniel, but that it was available in Syriac in the medieval period. However, since so trace of this commentary by Theodore of Mopsuestia survives, it must be sufficient to address the commentary written by Polychronius, which undoubtedly expressed a viewpoint in line with that of his brother Theodore.

³⁷ The fragments of Polychronius’ commentary can be found in Angelo Mai, *Scriptorum veterum nova collectio e vaticanis codicibus*, vol. 1, no.2 (Rome: Burliaeuum, 1825). The fragments were apparently reprinted by Migne in the supplemental volume 162 of the *Patrologia Graeca*, but owing to a fire at Migne’s press, copies of volume 162 are either very rare or nonexistent. The best overview of Polychronius and his writing remains Otto Bardenhewer, *Polychronius: Bruder Theodors von Mopsuestia and Bischof von Apamea* (Freiburg: Herder, 1879). In *ibid.*, 58–87, Bardenhewer provides a detailed analysis of the fragments of Polychronius’ Daniel commentary.

the resurrection of the dead in Daniel 12 not as an eschatological event, but as a metaphor for the liberation of the Jews from Greek rule.³⁸

Like the Syriac commentary attribute to Ephrem, Polychronius asserted that there was nonetheless a second layer to the prophecies of Daniel that had been hidden from the Jews: the prophecies reached a second, more meaningful fulfillment with the incarnation of Christ, when the Kingdom of God swept away the old kingdoms and all humankind was liberated. Thus, the fifth kingdom had a double meaning: it was both the Jewish kingdom established by the Maccabees, and the church established by Christ.³⁹ Thus, Polychronius argued in Greek for the same view of the kingdoms of Daniel found in the Syriac commentaries on Daniel.⁴⁰

Nonetheless, this does not seem to have been a popular view among Greek Christian authors. Theodoret was not alone in objecting to the interpretation voiced by Polychronius. According to an excerpt in the catena, Polychronius' explanation was directly addressed by another commentator often cited in the catena, a certain Eudoxius the Philosopher, who responded with hostility: "But Eudoxius said, 'Polychronius, the interpretation you speak of is the foolishness of Porphyry.'"⁴¹ It seems that Polychronius' interpretation of the Book of Daniel was tainted by its close parallels with the attack on Daniel by the pagan philosopher Porphyry.

Some modern scholars have accepted Eudoxius' claim that Polychronius' position in the surviving fragments echoed Porphyry. Further, some have claimed that Porphyry's position and that of Polychronius derived from a common Syriac source, or even that Polychronius' position was adopted from Porphyry.⁴² However, it is necessary to carefully delineate the views of Porphyry and Polychronius. It is true that both positions were distinct from the eschatological interpretation, which identified the Roman Empire as the fourth kingdom and understood the

³⁸ Mai, *Scriptorum veterum*, vol. 1, no.2, 156. See discussion in Bardenhewer, *Polychronius*, 85–87; and in Beatrice, "Pagans and Christians on the Book of Daniel," 33.

³⁹ Mai, *Scriptorum veterum*, vol. 1, no.2, 126.

⁴⁰ Bardenhewer, *Polychronius*, 71–79, compares Polychronius' interpretation to that of various other commentators, the closest of which is the Syriac commentary attributed to Ephrem.

⁴¹ Ibid: Ἀλλὰ Εὐδόξιος τὴν ὑπὸ σοῦ ῥηθεῖσαν ἐρμηνείαν, Πολυχρόνιε, Πορφυρίου ἔφησεν εἶναι τοῦ ματαιόφρονος. The identity of this Eudoxius is unknown. Mai, in ibid, xxxiv, suggests that he is the prominent Arian Eudoxius of Antioch (d. 370), who became bishop of Constantinople under Constantius II. However, this does not appear possible, since the Eudoxius in the catena clearly wrote after and responded to Polychronius' fifth-century Daniel commentary. On what can be gleaned from the catena by Eudoxius, see Michael von Faulhaber, *Die Propheten-Catenen nach römischen Handschriften* (Freiburg: Herder, 1899), 183–185: Eudoxius apparently wrote a detailed commentary on Daniel from which only snippets survive in the catena, he appears to have known Hebrew, he had a keen interest in and knowledge of history and chronology.

⁴² Casey, *Son of Man*, 59–70, suggests that both Porphyry and Polychronius derived their views from the tradition of the Syriac church (which they presumably accessed through knowledge of Syriac), which kept alive the original second century BC anti-Seleucid spirit of Daniel thanks to its close contact with the Jews (Casey's position, pertaining to the Syriac church, is discussed in further detail below). Richard Taylor, "The Interpretive Glosses in Syriac Manuscripts of Peshitta-Daniel," *Parole de l'Orient*, vol. 36 (2011), 469–492, esp. 476–478, raises important objections to Casey's thesis—noting that Porphyry probably spoke some dialect of Aramaic, but not Syriac as Casey claims, so it is uncertain if he could have derived his understanding from the Syriac church; and that Aphrahat's interpretation of the kingdoms of Daniel (which Casey cites as an important indication of the prevalent view of the Syriac church) is more different from that of Porphyry than Casey implies—but Taylor offers an even less credible explanation: namely, that Porphyry himself invented the notion that the fourth kingdom symbolized the Greeks/Macedonians, and that Polychronius and the Syriac church derived this interpretation from him.

visions in the Book of Daniel as prophecies of events that will transpire up to the end of history. Otherwise, however, they were at variance. Porphyry's interpretation (similar to that of modern scholarship on the Book of Daniel) held that the Book of Daniel was not a divinely inspired prophecy but a collection of *vaticinia ex eventu* composed or modified in response to the emergency generated by the laws of Antiochus IV in the second century BC.⁴³ This collection was falsely attributed to the Jewish wise man Daniel in order to give them greater credibility. For convenience, we may call Porphyry's position the "historical-critical interpretation."

In contrast, the position of Polychronius may be called, to borrow from modern eschatological terminology, the "preterist interpretation." The "preterist interpretation" held that the Book of Daniel accurately recorded authentic visions interpreted or received by Daniel in Babylon in the fifth century BC, but that all events prophesied in these visions had come to pass in the triumph of the Maccabean revolt against Antiochus IV and the establishment of the Jewish kingdom (and again in the birth of Christ).

Some modern scholars have perhaps confused the preterist with the historical-critical interpretation of Daniel because of the two were conflated in early modern thought. The arguments of Porphyry were reintroduced to the West by Hugo Grotius in the seventeenth century. Nonetheless, Grotius was a devout Christian who believed that Daniel had been a true prophet. He argued for a Protestant version of the preterist position: Grotius suggested that the prophecies from Daniel had been fulfilled in the time of the Maccabees, and cited Porphyry's views in support of this argument. Thus, Grotius elided that Porphyry's ultimate conclusion that the prophecies had not been written by a historical Daniel.⁴⁴ Ever since Grotius' conspicuous use of Porphyry, the pagan philosopher was long associated with preterist interpretations of Daniel. Only in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was Porphyry's historical-critical interpretation adopted more fully by the "higher critics" of the burgeoning academy.⁴⁵ Though Porphyry helped spur the formulation of a preterist position in the early modern period, the same is not necessarily true of late antiquity. Instead, the historical-critical view and the preterist view were distinct and opposed to one another.

Thus, it is possible to conclude, as did Pier Beatrice, that, "we do not consider it to be legitimate to deduce, on the basis of Eudoxius' defamatory innuendo, that Polychronius had really drank Porphyry's poison."⁴⁶ Polychronius' position was very different from that of Porphyry. Nonetheless, despite the clear differences, Eudoxius' comment reveals that ancient

⁴³ See Adela Yarbro Collins, "The Influence of Daniel on the New Testament," in John J. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, ed. Frank Moore Cross (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 121–123.

⁴⁴ Hugo Grotius, *Opera omnia theologica* (London: Mosem Pitt, 1679), 27–29. Grotius developed the preterist view of the Book of Daniel from Porphyry, arguing that the prophecies had been fulfilled in the Maccabean revolt, in order to counter the common view among fellow Protestants that the Little Horn, read as the Antichrist, was the Papacy. Such Preterist interpretation was common among within the Counter-Reformation for just this reason, and developed especially among the Jesuits, whose views may have influenced Grotius; see Collins, *The Book of Daniel*, 121.

⁴⁵ See, for example, Samuel R. Driver, *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1891), 467–483. In the nineteenth-century academic study of the Book of Daniel, Porphyry could be seen as a "rational" pagan, opposed to Christian "superstition".

⁴⁶ Beatrice, "Pagans and Christians on the Book of Daniel," 33.

Christians, like modern scholars, had difficulty distinguishing Polychronius' pious preterist interpretation from Porphyry's historical-critical attack on Christian prophecy. Or perhaps Christians writing in the Greek and Latin traditions simply found the preterist position simply too close to that of Porphyry, despite the vastly different basis for them. Either way, this accounts for why the eschatological interpretation was preferred by all the Greek exegetes on Daniel whose commentaries survive in full. Nonetheless, Polychronius' interpretation did take root in the Syriac tradition. Here, the association of the preterist view with Porphyry does not seem to have been much of a problem.

As we have seen, the commentary attributed to Ephrem, the oldest surviving commentary on the Book of Daniel in Syriac, asserted a preterist reading of Daniel nearly identical to that of Polychronius.⁴⁷ It even echoes the argument that the resurrection at the end of the Book of Daniel refers not to an eschatological resurrection, but symbolically refers to the liberation of the Jews. As mentioned above, the preterist interpretation of the visions in the Book of Daniel would be repeated by later Syriac authors through the middle ages.

Why was the preterist interpretation of Daniel's visions so common among Syriac exegetes? In a monograph on the reception of the Book of Daniel, Maurice Casey has suggested an explanation that has since gained wide acceptance: a "Syrian tradition," so-called because it is found in Greek writers from Syria and in Syriac authors, of interpreting the Book of Daniel maintained a memory of the original, anti-Seleucid purpose of the Book of Daniel down through the generations. This tradition remained distinct from what Casey calls the "Western tradition" (and others have called the "Asiatic tradition," because of its supposed roots in the early church of Asia Minor, or the "Roman tradition") that identified the fourth kingdom of Daniel with the Roman Empire, though the two traditions were cross-contaminated in authors who knew of both, such as Aphrahat (who, as we have seen, identified the successors of Alexander and the Romans as the fourth kingdom).⁴⁸ Ultimately, according to Casey, the prominence of the "Syrian tradition" in Syriac was a result of Jewish influence, especially in the city of Edessa, the literary center of Syriac: "Edessa is the obvious center for a whole area where Jewish communities are known from pre-Christian times. Some of their members converted to Christianity, and the Jewish communities continued alongside the newly formed Christian groups. Hence the Syrian Churches had so much more exegetical material in common with the Jews than did the churches of the West. This is the path traveled by the authentic interpretation of the Book of Daniel."⁴⁹

Casey's explanation, however, does not take into account that, as we have seen in a previous chapter (chapter 1, sections II.1–2), the Jews did not statically preserve the original interpretation of the kingdoms of Daniel, but also came to regard the Roman Empire as the fourth kingdom of Daniel (especially after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 AD).

⁴⁷ See note 24, above.

⁴⁸ Beatrice, "Pagans and Christians on the Book of Daniel," 27–45, follows Casey while revising some aspects of his argument, and uses the term "Asiatic tradition." Van Peursen, "Daniel's Four Kingdoms in the Syriac Tradition," 195–199, uses the term "Roman tradition."

⁴⁹ Casey, *Son of Man*, 59. Though Beatrice, "Pagans and Christians on the Book of Daniel," 40–45, raises problems with some of Casey's narrative, such as his association of Porphyry with the "Syrian tradition," he nonetheless follows Casey in attributing the "Syrian tradition" to the influence of Judaism on Syriac Christianity.

Casey also does not explain why Polychronius decided to accept the preterist interpretation of Daniel, besides the rather prosaic reasoning that he did so because he was from Syria, and therefore may have been influenced by the “Syrian tradition” and presumably the Syriac church. The question of whether any ideological or theological reasoning can account for this preference remains unaddressed. Similarly, Casey acknowledges that several Syriac authors who repeat the “Syrian tradition” also clearly knew of the “Western tradition” that identified the fourth kingdom as the Roman Empire.⁵⁰ Why did they prefer the “Syrian tradition”? It cannot simply be because they lived in the vicinity of Syria.

An alternative explanation is possible: it seems probable that the preterist interpretation of Daniel was transmitted by Polychronius or his brother, Theodore of Mopsuestia, to Syriac literature, and not the other way around. In order to understand why, it is necessary to realize that Polychronius’ interpretation of Daniel is perfectly in line with the exegetical methods of his brother Theodore of Mopsuestia and the larger Antiochene school of which Theodore was considered the founder. The Antiochene school tended to take a literal, historical interpretation of the Old Testament, in contrast to the rival Alexandrian school in Egypt, which believed that the Old Testament prefigured the history of the church.

As we have seen, Greek (and Latin) exegesis on Daniel was often read in light of the common political-eschatological scenario, so that the visions were taken to refer to the fate of the Roman Empire at the end of history. Such an interpretation, however, ran absolutely counter to Antiochene exegetical thought. The Antiochenes preferred to understand all Old Testament prophecies as having been fulfilled in the history of the Jewish people and in the lifetime of Christ.⁵¹ They avoided eschatology and apocalypticism, and rejected the place of the Book of Revelation in the canon.⁵²

One of the core features of the common political-eschatological scenario, the belief that Antiochus IV had been a typological precursor to the Antichrist, could not be sustained in Antiochene exegesis because the Antiochenes thoroughly rejected the notion that the Old Testament simply prefigured the New Testament and the history of the Christian church. In the words of Adam Becker: “In contrast to the Alexandrians, who more fully mapped the New Testament over the Old, the Antiochenes attributed greater independence and *meaningful* integrity to the biblical text and the narrative within it.”⁵³ Thus, by the Antiochene understanding, the Little Horn in the Book of Daniel had to be Antiochus IV alone, because the Book of Daniel was about the struggle of the Jews against the oppression of Antiochus. The persecution inflicted by Antiochus was not some instrument by which God had foreshadowed the

⁵⁰ Ibid, 69.

⁵¹ According to Robert Hill in *Theodore of Mopsuestia: Commentary on the Twelve Prophets* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2004), 17, one of the characteristics of Theodore of Mopsuestia’s interpretation is “his inability—or refusal—to recognise apocalyptic.”

⁵² On the rejection of the Book of Revelation by the Antiochene school, see J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrine*, fifth edition (London: Continuum, 1977), 60.

⁵³ Adam Becker, *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom: The School of Nisibis and the Development of Scholastic Culture in Late Antique Mesopotamia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 118.

eschatological future; rather, it had been historically and spiritually important in itself for the history of the Jews, a history that Christianity had inherited.

In light of the utter unsuitability of the political-eschatological scenario to Antiochene sensibilities, an alternative interpretation for the visions of Daniel was necessary. The preterist “Syrian tradition” embodied by the Antiochene interpreter Polychronius did not preserve “the authentic interpretation of the Book of Daniel” as Casey would have it, but instead offered a new alternative to the prevalent eschatological interpretation. This reading of Daniel did not require them to follow Porphyry or some ancient tradition preserved by the Syriac church; as we have seen, even supporters of the common political-eschatological scenario (such as Hippolytus, Jerome, Theodoret, and Andrew of Caesarea) understood that certain portions of the prophecies in Daniel referred to the persecution of Antiochus IV. However, whereas these other exegetes held that Antiochus had prefigured the Antichrist and read the prophecies in the Book of Daniel in light of the Book of Revelation, the Antiochene school rejected this as exegetically unsound and excluded the Book of Revelation from the canon. Consequently, the Antiochenes had to accept that the prophecies of Daniel were fulfilled through the Maccabees and the birth of Christ.

Not even everyone associated with the Antiochene school accepted this explanation of Daniel’s visions. It was rejected by Theodoret, who otherwise embraced Antiochene exegetical methods in his commentaries (Theodoret’s Daniel commentary is known to have been translated into Syriac, though it does not survive in that language).⁵⁴ Nonetheless, the preterist interpretation of the Antiochenes was embraced within the Syriac tradition.

The popularity of the preterist interpretation in Syriac is almost certainly the result of the enormous influence of the Antiochene school, and especially Theodore of Mopsuestia, in Syriac. Already in the fourth century there had been strong exegetical ties between Antioch and Edessa.⁵⁵ After the condemnation of Theodore’s protégée, Nestorius, as a heretic by the Third Ecumenical Council at Ephesus in 431, and after the further posthumous condemnation of Theodore himself (along with certain writings of Theodoret and Ibas of Edessa) at the Fifth Ecumenical Council at Constantinople in 553, Antiochene theologians gravitated toward the Syriac-speaking Christian church in Persia. Most of Theodore’s writings (which, on account of their condemnation, barely exist in Greek) survive in Syriac translations (and a few Latin translations).⁵⁶

Thus, the similarity between the fragments of Polychronius’ commentary on Daniel and the Syriac commentary attributed to Ephrem makes sense. It is generally assumed that the Syriac commentary, although not actually written by Ephrem, is a little bit older than that of Polychronius. However, it is not necessary to assume that one was the source of the other.

⁵⁴ Robert Hill, in *Theodoret*, xxiii–xxv; and in idem, “The Commentary on Daniel by Theodoret of Cyrus,” in *Die Geschichte der Daniel-Auslegung in Judentum, Christentum und Islam: Studien zur Kommentierung des Danielbuches in Literatur und Kunst*, ed. K. Bracht and D. S. du Toit (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2007), 151–166, argues that Theodoret, as an adherent of the Antiochene school, was uncomfortable with an eschatological interpretation of Daniel. This is not entirely convincing, however, since Theodoret does adopt the basic narrative of the common political-eschatological scenario.

⁵⁵ Becker, *Fear of God*, 117.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 113–125.

Rather, they both draw from the same Antiochene exegesis on the Book of Daniel. The later commentary of Isho'dad and the writings of Theodore bar Koni and Bar Hebraeus likely followed this tradition of exegesis because it had become engrained in interpretations of Daniel within the Syriac literary tradition.

This preterist interpretation of Daniel's visions left no room for the common political-eschatological scenario as it was found in the Greek and Latin writers outside the Antiochene school. Thus, one of the reasons why the common political-eschatological scenario failed to take hold in Syriac must be that Syriac exegesis on Daniel was deeply influenced by the one Christian interpretative tradition that rejected political eschatology and which had, as a result, developed an alternative understanding of Daniel's visions.

Nonetheless, the influence of the Antiochene school cannot be the only reason for the failure of the political-eschatological scenario to take hold in Syriac literature. The preterist interpretation of Daniel was eventually embraced by Syriac authors who rejected the Antiochene school, such as Dionysius bar Salibi and Bar Hebraeus (members of the "Jacobite" Syriac Orthodox Church, which coalesced in the late sixth century and which rejected Antiochene theology). Antiochene theology may have provided an impetus for the popularity of the preterist interpretation in Syriac, but other factors clearly must have reinforced this interpretation.

I.2: The Book of Daniel in the Peshitta

Another basic impediment to the spread of the common political-eschatological scenario in Syriac literary culture was the Syriac scriptures themselves. In the Peshitta (i.e. the second-century Syriac translation of the Bible most used as canon and the only translation available before the sixth century), the Book of Revelation was excluded. The first known translation of Revelation into Syriac was produced only in the sixth century. Without the Book of Revelation as part of the canon, many of the explicit ties between the Little Horn in Daniel and the Antichrist had no basis.

The Peshitta posed another, even more substantial impediment to the spread of the common political-eschatological scenario to Syriac. The common political-eschatological scenario relied on the long-held notion that the Roman Empire is the fourth kingdom of Daniel. Thus, the fourth beast in the dream in Daniel 7 is understood as a symbol for the Roman Empire, the Little Horn that sprouts upon it is understood as the Antichrist who will rule the empire, and the judgment and destruction of the beast represents the eschatological destruction of Rome's empire at the second coming.

Crucially, however, the Peshitta version of Daniel 7:4 contains section headings that serve as glosses, explicitly identifying the kingdoms represented by each of the beasts of Daniel's vision: they are labeled, respectively, as the Kingdom of the Babylonians (ܡܠܟܘܬܐ ܕܒܒܝܠܐ), the Kingdom of the Medes (ܡܠܟܘܬܐ ܕܡܕܝܐ), the Kingdom of the Persians (ܡܠܟܘܬܐ ܕܦܪܫܝܐ), and the Kingdom of the Greeks (ܡܠܟܘܬܐ ܕܓܪܝܩܝܐ). Both the passage in which Daniel sees the Little Horn on the fourth beast in his dream and the passage in which the angel interprets

the Little Horn receive the heading “Antiochus” (ܐܢܬܝܘܚܝܫ).⁵⁷ Chapter 8 of Daniel also includes similar headings in the Peshitta, as does chapter 11, though the glosses in the latter are only present in copies of the Peshitta dating to the eleventh century and later, and may therefore represent a later stage of scribal intervention to clarify the text.⁵⁸

Scholars have provided varying theories on the origin of these headings. Scholars disagree as to whether they were included in the original second-century version of the Peshitta, or were added later.⁵⁹ They are already incorporated into the text as section headings in the earliest manuscripts of the Peshitta (from the sixth or seventh century AD) and may have originated as marginal glosses that eventually migrated into the body of the text. It seems unlikely that they were present in the Peshitta from the beginning because Aphrahat, who used the Peshitta, did not seem to know them (thus, he identified the third beast as the kingdom of Alexander and the fourth beast as the kingdom of Alexander’s successors and of the Romans).⁶⁰

The Syriac Peshitta made clear to readers that the fourth kingdom of Daniel cannot have been the Roman Empire, because the fourth beast is explicitly labeled as the “Kingdom of the Greeks,” i.e. the Macedonian or Seleucid Empire. The Little Horn cannot be interpreted as the Antichrist because the gloss explicitly identifies it as a symbol for Antiochus IV. Thus, the Peshitta glosses enshrined in Syriac scripture the historical or preterist, rather than eschatological, interpretation of Daniel. Anyone consulting the Book of Daniel in Syriac would be hard pressed to avoid the conclusion that Daniel did not receive and interpret prophecies about the future of the Roman Empire up to the end of time, but that they were about the time of Antiochus IV and the Maccabean revolt.

Richard Taylor, who called attention to the existence of these glosses and dated their addition to the Peshitta to the fifth century, has explained their inclusion in the Peshitta as potentially resulting from an attempt to deny Rome a place in the Book of Daniel because Syriac-speaking Christians no longer considered it relevant to political eschatology: “Apparently in the East history had taken certain turns by the fifth century that made the Roman view of Daniel’s fourth empire no longer seem relevant. With the decline of Rome as a world empire,

⁵⁷ For the Peshitta text with the headings, see “Daniel and Bel and the Dragon,” ed. Peshitta Institute, in *The Old Testament in Syriac According to the Peshitta Version*, Part III, fasc. 4 (Leiden: Brill, 1980), 27–29. On these glosses, see Richard Taylor, *The Peshitta of Daniel* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 200–201; idem, “The Interpretive Glosses in Syriac Manuscripts of Peshitta-Daniel,” 469–492; Konrad D. Jenner, “Syriac Daniel,” in *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception*, ed. John J. Collins and Peter W. Flint (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 633; Arie van der Kooij, “The Four Kingdoms in Peshitta Daniel 7 in the Light of the Early History of Interpretation,” in *The Peshitta: Its Use in Literature and Liturgy*, ed. R. B. Ter Haar Romeny (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 123–129.

⁵⁸ A list of these later glosses is provided in “Daniel and Bel and the Dragon,” ed. Peshitta Institute, xviii–xx.

⁵⁹ That the glosses were present in the original, second-century Peshitta text was first proposed by Abraham George Kallarakkal, “The Peshitto Version of Daniel: A Comparison with the Masoretic Text, the Septuagint and the Theodotion” (PhD dissertation: University of Hamburg, 1973), and has been revived by Van Peurson, “Daniel’s Four Kingdoms in the Syriac Tradition,” 195–199. Taylor, “The Interpretive Glosses in Syriac Manuscripts of Peshitta-Daniel,” 469–492; and Arie van der Kooij, “The Four Kingdoms in Peshitta Daniel 7,” 128–129, argue more convincingly that the glosses were inserted in the fifth century.

⁶⁰ For the fact that Aphrahat used the Peshitta version of Daniel, see Morrison, “The Reception of the Book of Daniel in Aphrahat’s Fifth Demonstration,” 57–60.

and the rise of new national threats in the East, biblical expositors turned their attention to fresh readings of Daniel.”⁶¹ However, the idea that Rome’s role as a world empire would have seemed to be on the decline from the perspective of the Syriac-speaking East in the fifth century is untenable. Though the Western Roman Empire fell in the fifth century, the Eastern Empire remained strong and prosperous. Barbarians like the Huns did ravage the Balkans, but elsewhere, such as the provinces that contained significant Syriac-speaking populations, the fifth century was the high water mark of Roman imperial rule. The population of the empire likely expanded, the economy grew, and there were hardly any military conflicts with the Sasanian Empire for the whole fifth century.⁶² No one could have suspected that the Roman Empire ceased to be a world power.

More likely, the glosses resulted from the same influence as the preterist commentaries on Daniel in Syriac: that of the Antiochene school of exegesis.⁶³ For the Antiochenes, the very notion that the vision in Daniel referred to the eschatological future was problematic. The glosses did not exclude Rome because it was weak but because, unlike the bygone Greco-Macedonian Empire, the Roman Empire remained powerful. Consequently, its inclusion in Daniel’s visions would mean that the visions of the end of empire were necessarily eschatological. Thus, the glosses sought to set Daniel’s prophecies in a proper preterist context, making clear that the destruction of the fourth kingdom had already happened. As a result, the common political-eschatological scenario became untenable in a Syriac tradition that looked to the Peshitta as holy scripture.

I.3: The Succession of Kingdoms in the East

A final likely reason why the common political-eschatological scenario failed to take hold in Syriac is its unsuitability to the Syriac milieu. It did not fit the realities of the political situation where Syriac-speaking Christians lived. The common political-eschatological scenario was predicated on the notion that the Roman Empire represents earthly authority, the fourth and last of the great kingdoms in history. However, this idea must have made far less sense when viewed from the perspective of Christians who lived on the periphery, if not outside, the empire.

Scholars have been puzzled as to why contemporary circumstances did not impel Syriac commentaries on Daniel did not identify Rome as the fourth kingdom of Daniel. This is

⁶¹ Richard Taylor, “Glosses in Peshitta Daniel,” 487–488. Taylor further suggests that the glosses were following the views of Porphyry; as examined in the context of the Syriac commentaries on Daniel above, this is surely incorrect, as Porphyry’s view was hostile to the Christian faith. Instead, the glosser almost certainly adopted the preterist positions that the visions in the Book of Daniel were true prophecies that had been historically fulfilled in the time of Antiochus IV.

⁶² See, for example, Raymond Van Dam, “Big Cities and the Dynamic of the Mediterranean during the Fifth Century,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Attila*, ed. Michael Maas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 80–97.

⁶³ Arie van der Kooij, “The Four Kingdoms in Peshitta Daniel 7,” 128–129, briefly raises the possibility of an Antiochene influence on the Peshitta glosses, but does not explore the point in detail, and ultimately returns to the common assertion that the glosses were influenced by Porphyry, as he conflates Porphyry’s position with the preterist interpretation.

especially the case after the Christological controversies of the fifth through seventh centuries resulted in Roman persecution of the two major break-away churches (the “Nestorian” Church of the East and the “Jacobite” Syriac Orthodox Church) to which most Syriac Christians belonged: “For Christians who were being treated violently as heretics by the Roman government, identifying the fourth beast and the little horn with their imperial persecutors might seem to have been a tempting choice.”⁶⁴ However, they did not do so. Identifying the Romans as the fourth kingdom implied that it was the last of a series of world empires, and moreover the most persecutory of those empires. The prominent place of the Sasanian Persian Empire in the world of Syriac Christianity belied both of those ideas.

The heartland of Syriac Christianity was Northern Mesopotamia, the expanse of land between the Tigris and the Euphrates, and ringed to the north by the Armenian Taurus Mountains, referred to sometimes in Syriac as “the island” (ܐܕܝܢܐ), *al-Jazira* as it eventually came to be known in Arabic. This region made up the borderlands between the (Eastern) Roman and Sasanian Persian empires.

Northern Mesopotamia was heavily Christianized since fairly early in the religion’s history. Legend stated that King Abgar V of Edessa, or Urhay (ܐܘܪܝܗܐ) as it was known in Syriac, was the first monarch to embrace Christianity, having personally corresponded with Jesus. By late antiquity Edessa had become the spiritual and literary center of Syriac Christianity, with the Edessene dialect of Syriac becoming a Christian *koiné* from the Mediterranean coast all the way to Central Asia. Further east, Nisibis could compete with Edessa as a thriving center of Christianity.

Under Abgar’s dynasty, Edessa had ruled the Kingdom of Osroene, which achieved independence with the breakup of the Seleucid Empire. It then became a Roman protectorate and in the third century was incorporated into the Roman Empire as a province. When the Sasanian Persian Empire arose as a major rival of Rome in the middle of the third century, the region became a site of constant conflict between the two powers, as the Persians made aggressive military incursions aimed at wresting this land from the Romans. Still, Northern Mesopotamia remained generally in Roman hands until 363 AD, when Emperor Julian the Apostate’s invasion of the Persian Empire faltered and the emperor was killed. His luckless successor, Jovian, was forced to cede the eastern portion of this territory, Nisibis and its environs, to the Persians in order to extricate his beleaguered army from enemy territory. The most important city surrendered, Nisibis, was already home to an important Christian theological school, though its teachers, including Ephrem the Syrian, preferred to remain in a Christian Empire, and left to relocate the school in Edessa.⁶⁵ For nearly three centuries afterwards (until the Arab conquest) the border remained more-or-less fixed, with Northern Mesopotamia divided between the two empires. Edessa on the Roman side of the boarder and Nisibis on the Persian side both flourished as centers of Syriac Christianity.

⁶⁴ Tannous, “Romanness in the Syriac East,” 468–469.

⁶⁵ Becker, *The Fear of God*, 77–97; Gerrit J. Reinink, “‘Edessa Grew Dim and Nisibis Shone Forth’: The School of Nisibis at the Transition of the Sixth-Seventh Century,” in *Centers of Learning*, ed. J. W. Drijvers and A. A. MacDonald (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 77–89.

The Christian church in Persia experienced fluctuations between toleration and persecution. Recent scholarship has cast doubt on any fourth-century Sasanian persecution of Persian Christians, though this perhaps goes too far in its revisionism.⁶⁶ Even before the embrace of Christianity by Constantine, the Sasanian monarchs, committed to the enforcement of a Zoroastrian orthodoxy, persecuted Christians for following a “demonic doctrine.” As the Roman Empire identified itself more and more with the Christian faith, the Persian government feared that domestic Christians represented a potential fifth column that might collude with the Christian Roman Empire during times of war between Rome and Persia. The natural result, in the fourth and fifth centuries, was sporadic persecution, especially in times of war with the Roman Empire. This accounts for Aphrahat’s generally hostile view of the Persian Empire and his idealization of the Christian Roman Empire. At least until the sixth century, the Sasanian Empire had to be judged a far more antagonistic empire to Syriac Christians than the Roman Empire.

Nonetheless, in the 409 the Persian king Yazdegerd I officially recognized the right of Christians to exist and worship, and in the following year, at a council held in the Sasanian capital of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, the Persian Church was organized under the authority of the bishop of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, who took the title *catholicos*.⁶⁷ This was the birth of the Church of the East, which expanded to include bishoprics in India, Central Asia, and by the seventh century, China (where Christianity was associated with Persia).⁶⁸ Though there are obviously no hard statistics, scholars can confidently assert that by the sixth century Christians constituted the largest single religious group in all of Mesopotamia.⁶⁹

Though sporadic persecutions continued, over time the Sasanians became more accommodating of the Church of the East. The Persian kings came to play a role in the selection of the *catholicos*, and in turn expected the *catholicos* to maintain the loyalty of the Christians to the Persian state.⁷⁰ With royal approval, the church set up major schools in the Persian Empire, where a Syriac curriculum based heavily on the exegesis of Theodore of Mopsuestia was taught to prepare students to enter the priesthood and growing bureaucracy under the *catholicos* of Seleucia-Ctesiphon.

As we have seen, the influence of Theodore of Mopsuestia’s teaching on the Syriac church played a role in the rejection of the common political-eschatological scenario in favor of a preterist reading of the Book of Daniel. However, there were further, practical reasons to find the common political-eschatological scenario unconvincing. For such Christians living in the

⁶⁶ Smith, *Constantine and the Captive Christians of Persia*, has been particularly skeptical of Sasanian persecution of Christianity.

⁶⁷ For the acts of the council, see Jean Baptiste Chabot, *Synodicon orientale, ou, Recueil de synodes nestoriens* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1902), 17–36 (Syriac), 253–275 (French translation). Canon XII, *ibid*, 26–27 (Syriac), 266 (French translation), declared the metropolitan bishop of Seleucia-Ctesiphon the *catholicos*. The standard work on the Church of the East in the Sasanian period remains Jérôme Labourt, *Le christianisme dans l’empire perse sous la dynastie sassanide (224–632)* (Paris: Lecoffre 1904).

⁶⁸ See the abundant scholarship on the “Nestorian” stele in China.

⁶⁹ Michael Morony, *Iraq after the Muslim Conquest* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 332.

⁷⁰ Sebastian Brock, “Christians in the Sasanian Empire: A Case of Divided Loyalties,” *Religion and National Identity*, vol. 18 (1982), 1–19.

Persian Empire, or even those who inhabited the borderlands between the Roman and Persian empires, the notion that Rome was the fourth and last of earthly kingdoms would have been difficult to comprehend. Worldly political authority was instead very evenly divided between the two major empires, the “two eyes of the earth,” as they were poetically called.

In this environment, none of the details of the common political-eschatological scenario would have made sense. While Christian commentators further west believed that the Antichrist would be a Roman emperor, this was because the emperors represented earthly power; this view simply overlooked the existence of the Persian shah. From the perspective of Christians living deep within Rome’s borders, the Antichrist’s great persecution had to be undertaken through his power over the Roman state because they could imagine no other institution having the same power and reach; Persian Christians knew otherwise, and were more likely to imagine the Sasanians as persecutors (at least up to the sixth century). If in Greek and Latin authors, such as Jerome and Theodoret, the Roman Empire represented earthly authority, which by necessity would collapse in the face of the end times, a Persian Christian would have perceived instead that the waning of Roman power would mean the waxing of Persian authority. Augustine, taking the implications of the common political-eschatological scenario to their logical ends, could set out in his *City of God* a simple binary between the city of Rome and the city of God, between which one must choose one’s loyalty. The web of loyalties in the East was far more complicated.

There was perhaps another practical reason for Syriac Christians to gravitate toward the preterist reading of Daniel characteristic of the Antiochene school. On the charged political environment of the borderlands between Rome and Persia, the preterist reading had the benefit of being safe: if the prophecies in the Book of Daniel were all fulfilled in the era of the Maccabees, no claims could be made about the future rise and fall of empires.

In short, Syriac Christians, who lived in or near the Sasanian Persian Empire, lived in a different political world than Christians further West, with the likely result that the political eschatology coming out of the heart of the Roman Empire was less appealing or meaningful to them. The political–eschatological scenario had developed in the writings of Christians who lived in a thoroughly Roman world. There is little reason to wonder why Syriac Christians did not adopt that scenario in eschatological thought.

Conclusions: The Unsuitability of the Common Political-Eschatological Scenario

The reasons why the political-eschatological scenario that we have found in Greek and Latin Christian literature was unworkable in Syriac which were explored in this chapter can be summarized as follows: it ran counter to the important tradition of Antiochene exegesis (as found in the Syriac commentaries on Daniel), which adopted a preterist interpretation of the visions of Daniel. It was also directly contradicted by the Syriac version of scripture, the Peshitta, which contained glosses that explicitly identified the Greek empire under Antiochus as the fourth

kingdom of Daniel, and excluded the Book of Revelation from the canon. Finally, the notion, so central to the common political-eschatological scenario, that the Roman Empire was the last kingdom upon the earth, and that it could persecute all peoples and that all authority would come to an end with its destruction, simply made little sense in the world of Syriac Christianity, where the Sasanian Persian Empire loomed large.

It is therefore reasonable that we find no trace of the Christian political-eschatological scenario in Syriac. Instead, the preterist interpretation of Daniel, which held that the visions of Daniel were not eschatological but referred to the event leading up to the Maccabean revolt (as well as the birth of Christ), remained the most common in Syriac literature, particularly Syriac commentaries on Daniel. This is probably the result of the influence of Theodore of Mopsuestia and the Antiochene exegetical tradition he represented, which strenuously avoided eschatology and apocalypticism.

Nonetheless, as political eschatology has a strong appeal throughout history, it seems unreasonable to assume that no Christian raised in the tradition of Syriac scripture and exegesis would have been interested in trying to divine the future of history and the fate of empire through Biblical prophecies. If the political-eschatological scenario found in Greek and Latin was not viable in Syriac, what option did such Syriac Christians have? They had Aphrahat.

Part II: The Influence of Aphrahat's Eschatology in the Syriac Tradition

With the failure of the common political-eschatological scenario to take hold in Syriac, thanks to the lasting legacy of the Antiochene school, the preterist view of the Book of Daniel remained the most prominent. Nonetheless, one alternative to this interpretation was possible: the eschatological approach of Aphrahat. Unlike the common political-eschatological scenario, Aphrahat's eschatology could be reconciled to some degree with the preterist interpretation of Daniel. He accepted that the visions of Daniel referred to the struggle of the Jews in the time of the Maccabees, that Antiochus had been the Little Horn, and that his Seleucid Empire was the fourth kingdom. Nonetheless, Aphrahat's interpretation also made room for the Roman Empire and eschatology.

There were some problems with Aphrahat's views. Since Aphrahat probably wrote before the inclusion of the glosses to Daniel 7 in the Peshitta, he adopted a more expansive interpretation of the fourth kingdom of Daniel. Whereas the Peshitta glosses state explicitly that the third kingdom was the Kingdom of the Persians and the fourth kingdom was the Kingdom of the Greeks, Aphrahat suggested that the third kingdom had been Alexander's kingdom and the fourth kingdom was that of his Greek/Macedonian successors and of the Romans. Later authors would have to make sense of these discrepancies.

Likewise, since Aphrahat wrote at a time of likely persecution of Christians by the Sasanian Empire, he could treat the Persians in a wholly negative light and the Romans in a purely positive light. As we have seen, the position of Christians within the Persian Empire

improved, especially as the Church of the East progressively gained greater recognition by the Sasanian state. Later authors would have to make better sense of the place occupied by the Persian Empire in the kingdoms of Daniel.

II.1 The Influence of Aphrahat

The influence of Aphrahat's eschatological views on later authors has received no attention in modern scholarship. This is so for good reason; as noted above, he was unknown in Greek and Latin sources, and even in the Syriac tradition he was not particularly influential. Nonetheless, it is necessary here to ask whether Aphrahat's eschatological views could have influenced later authors. What evidence is there that he was read by later generations?

Aphrahat's *Demonstrations* survive in two Syriac manuscripts, both from the sixth century, both surviving from the Dayr al-Suryan, the Syrian monastery in Egypt, where these ancient manuscripts were preserved by the dry climate. If the two copies had not been kept in the library of this monastery, Aphrahat's work in the original Syriac would today be lost. Thus, there seems to have been little initiative to produce new copies of Aphrahat's writing after the sixth century.⁷¹ Even Aphrahat's name appears to have been mostly forgotten by later Syriac writers; the *Demonstrations* were commonly attributed to the "Persian sage" (ܣܚܝܬ ܦܪܫܝܢܐ); the name "Aphrahat" is not attested until around the ninth century.⁷²

However, this is not to say that Aphrahat was unknown in later Syriac literature. Manolis Papoutsakis has shown that Aphrahat's Fifth Demonstration had a major influence of Ephrem the Syrian (d. 373). However, Ephrem developed Aphrahat's ideas in a different direction. The Syriac word for "kingdom" is the same as the word "kingship" (ܡܠܟܘܬܐ), and so where Aphrahat suggested that the Romans had inherited the kingdom (ܡܠܟܘܬܐ) promised to the Jews—that is, the world empire implied in the Book of Daniel—Ephrem contends that the Romans inherited the kingship (ܡܠܟܘܬܐ) that Genesis 49:10 promised to the kings of Judah for

⁷¹ These manuscripts are described in Lucas Van Rompay, "Aphrahat, 'A Student of Holy Scriptures': The Reception of his Biblical Interpretation in Later Syriac Tradition," in *Storia e pensiero religioso nel Vicino Oriente: l'Età Bagratide, Maimonide, Afraate*, ed. C. Baffioni, R. B. Finazzi, A. P. Dell'Acqua, and E. Vergani (Roma: Bulzoni, 2014), 256–257. The only complete manuscript witness is British Library Add. 14,619 (A in Parisot's edition), datable from paleography to the sixth century. The second manuscript, British Library 17,182 (B in Parisot's edition) is in fact two independent manuscripts of different dates that contain the first ten (B, fols. 1–99) and last ten (B, fols. 100–175) of the *Demonstrations*, combined in a single codex. B contains a colophon that places its composition in Edessa in fall 474; the colophon in B dates it to 512. All of these manuscripts were recovered from the Dayr al-Suryan, the Syrian monastery in Egypt; having almost certainly been acquired for the monastery in the tenth century by Mushe of Nisibis; on Mushe's collection of manuscripts see Monica Joan Blanchard, "Moses of Nisibis (fl. 906–943) and the Library of Deir Suriani," in *Studies in the Christian East in Memory of Mirrit Boutros Ghali*, ed. Leslie MacCoull, (Washington, D.C.: Society for Coptic Archaeology, 1995), 13–24; Sebastian Brock, "Without Mushê of Nisibis, Where Would We Be? Some Reflections on the Transmission of Syriac Literature," *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies*, vol. 56 (2004), 15–24. Later manuscript copies containing the Twenty-Third Demonstration survive, one from the fourteenth century, and two from the nineteenth century, see Rompay, "Aphrahat, 'A Student of Holy Scriptures,'" 256 n5.

⁷² Manuscript B attributes the *Demonstrations* to "Jacob the Persian Sage" (ܝܥܩܒ ܣܚܝܬ ܦܪܫܝܢܐ).

all time.⁷³

Material from others of Aphrahat's *Demonstrations* appears to have been used by later writers such as Philoxenus of Mabbug (d. 523) and Isaac the Syrian (d. c. 700).⁷⁴ Moreover, translations were made of the *Demonstrations* in late antiquity and the early middle ages. They were translated into Armenian in the fifth century. Some time later, the Fifth and Eighth Demonstrations (both eschatological in character) were translated into Ethiopic.⁷⁵ A few of the *Demonstrations* were translated into Arabic in the ninth century, and one of the *Demonstrations* was translated into Georgian in the tenth century, though the Fifth Demonstration is not extant in either of the two languages.⁷⁶

An illustrative example of Aphrahat's later reception is provided by a surviving letter of George, the Miaphysite bishop of the Arabs, written in the year 714 in response to a hermit who had written to him for clarifications on the *Demonstrations*. George asserted that while the "Persian sage" was a "sophisticated thinker" (سازگار و متفکر), he also did not have the benefit of proper instruction in the scriptures, relied on outdated translations, and read scripture too literally, all causing him to commit "many errors" (بسیار خطا).⁷⁷

Aphrahat was no doubt known to educated Syriac Christians, but they treated him cautiously, because at times Aphrahat strayed dangerously close to heresy (even if at the end of the twelfth century Michael the Syrian asserted that the author of the *Demonstrations* was orthodox).⁷⁸ Still, Aphrahat was also a respected figure because of the antiquity of his writings,

⁷³ Papoutsakis, *Vicarious Kingship*, 36–58. On the shifting meaning of **ܡܠܟܐ**, see ibid 43: “*malḳā* with Aphrahat appears primarily to mean ‘kingdom,’ the actual realm, be it heavenly or earthly. By contrast, with Ephrem *malḳūtā* primarily denotes ‘kingship’ the imperial office, either that of Christ or that of the Roman emperors.” Robert Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 240, discussing the meaning of God’s kingdom in Syriac thought, notes: “The theme of the kingdom in Aphrahat well illustrates the impossibility of rendering *malḳūtā* in one word. It means sovereignty as it is exercised in this world as well as the eschatological kingdom.”

⁷⁴ On more general influences of Aphrahat on later Syriac authors, see Van Rompay, "Aphrahat, 'A Student of Holy Scriptures,'" 257–258; Phil Botha, "A Comparison of Ephrem and Aphrahat on the Subject of Passover," *Acta Patristica et Byzantina*, vol. 3 (1992), 46–62; Adam Lehto, "Aphrahat and Philoxenus on Faith," *Journal of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies*, vol. 4 (2004), 47–59; Grigory Kessel, "A Note on One Borrowing from Aphrahat," *Parole de l'Orient*, vol. 31 (2006), 295–307.

⁷⁵ The Ge'ez text of Aphrahat's Fifth Demonstration survives in two manuscripts, of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It has been published by Francisco Maria Estêves Pereira, "Jacobi, episcopi Nisibine, Homilia de adventu regis Persarum adversus urbem Nisibis," in *Orientalische Studien: Theodor Nöldeke zum siebzigsten Geburtstag*, vol. 2, ed. C. Bezold (Giessen: Alfred Töpelmann, 1906), 877-892. On the Eighth Demonstration in Ge'ez, see Enrico Cerulli, "De resurrectione mortuorum, opuscolo della Chiesa etiopica del sec. XIV," in *Mélanges Eugène Tisserant. vol. 1: Écriture Sainte—Ancien Orient*, ed. E. Tisserant (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1964), 1-27.

⁷⁶ Only the Sixth Demonstration survives in Georgian; see Victoria Jugeli, “Homilies of Aphrahat the Persian Sage and Their Georgian Translations,” *Phasis: Greek and Roman Studies*, vol. 18 (2015), 111–129. Demonstrations 2–4 (in incomplete form), 6 and 9 survive in Arabic. See Sebastian Brock, “Aphrahat,” in *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage*, ed. S. P. Brock, A. M. Butts, G. A. Kiraz, and L. Van Rompay (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2011), 24–25.

⁷⁷Cod. British Library Add. 12,154, fol. 250b, See Tannous, "Syria between Byzantium and Islam," 393–394; Van Rompay, "Aphrahat, 'A Student of Holy Scriptures,'" 256–257.

⁷⁸ The *Chronicle of Michael the Syrian*, ed. Jean-Baptiste Chabot, *Chronique de Michel le Syrien, Patriarche jacobite d'Antioche*, volume 4 (Paris: Leroux, 1910), 135: ܡܕܬܬܐ ܕܡܝܚܐܝܠ ܕܡܝܚܐܝܠ ܕܡܝܚܐܝܠ ܕܡܝܚܐܝܠ.

and because he was often associated with the revered Ephrem the Syrian. In the words on one modern Syriac scholar: “Aphrahat, while not being prominent, was not forgotten in the later tradition.”⁷⁹

Thus, Aphrahat’s influence on later authors who wrote in or knew Syriac should not be underrated. As we shall see, Aphrahat’s Fifth Demonstration appears to have had a so-far overlooked impact on a few late antique writers. The eschatological views it expresses provided an alternative to the preterist interpretation of the vision of Daniel. Notably, the first known author that seems to have done so did not write in Syriac, but in Greek.

II.2: Cosmas Indicopleustes and the Fifth Kingdom

The succession of kingdoms in Daniel is discussed in detail in the late sixth-century *Christian Topography* (Χριστιανική Τοπογραφία), written by an author known as Cosmas Indicopleustes.⁸⁰ Cosmas, though writing in Greek from within the Roman Empire, had long inhabited and made his living in the empire’s eastern border zones. Before settling down to a life of religious contemplation in Egypt, Cosmas had been a spice merchant and travelled extensively in the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf, experiences he drew on in his writing.⁸¹ Moreover, theologically he was a “Nestorian,” devoted to the Antiochene theology of Theodore of Mopsuestia that was becoming increasingly central to the Syriac-speaking Church of the East in Persia (though during Cosmas’ time the theological orthodoxy of the Church of the East was not as rigorously defined as it would soon become).⁸² In fact, Cosmas studied the theology of Theodore of Mopsuestia under the tutelage of the Persian scholar Patricius, who would later

ܐܦܪܗܬܐ ܕܥܦܪܝܡ ܕܫܪܝܝܢ [ܐܦܪܐܬܐ] ܕܥܦܪܝܡ It is unclear how Aphrahat’s name was garbled here to “Bouzites,” but the other information indicates that Michael must have meant Aphrahat.

⁷⁹ Van Rompay, “Aphrahat, ‘A Student of Holy Scriptures,’” 270.

⁸⁰ The text of the *Christian Topography* (Χριστιανική Τοπογραφία) has been edited, with an extensive introduction and French translation, by Wanda Wolska-Conus in three volumes in the Sources Chrétiennes. All the material I use here is from the first volume: Wanda Wolska-Conus, *Topographie Chrétienne, Tome I: Livres I–IV* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1968). She provided an even more extensive overview of the *Christian Topography* in her published dissertation, Wanda Wolska, *La Topographie Chrétienne de Cosmas Indicopleustes: Théologie et Science au VI^e siècle* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1962).

⁸¹ On the life and travels of Cosmas, see Wolska-Conus, *Topographie Chrétienne*, vol. 1, 13–19. Cosmas describes in the *Christian Topography* his travels to Palestine and Sinai, and over the Red Sea to Axumite Ethiopia, to Socotra, and around Arabia; nonetheless, while he records stories he had heard from others about the Malabar Coast of India and of Sri Lanka (Ταπροβανή), it is uncertain if he actually travelled to any of the regions that would be recognized today as India. On Cosmas’ retirement to Egypt, see Milton V. Anastos, “The Alexandrian Origin of the ‘Christian Topography’ of Cosmas Indicopleustes,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, vol. 3 (1946), 73–80, who makes a compelling case, based on clear references in the *Christian Topography*, that Cosmas wrote from Alexandria, against Karl Krumbacher, *Geschichte der byzantinischen Litteratur*, second edition (Munich: Beck, 1897), 412, and others, who had suggested that Cosmas was a monk on Mt. Sinai.

⁸² On the influence of Theodore of Mopsuestia and the exegesis of the School of Nisbis on Cosmas, see Wolska-Conus, *Topographie Chrétienne*, vol. 1, 38–40; specifically on its influence of his interpretation of the Book of Daniel, see Maurice Casey, “The Fourth Kingdom in Cosmas Indicopleustes and the Syrian Tradition,” *Rivista di storia e letteratura religiosa*, vol. 25, no. 3 (1989), 385–403.

become *Catholicos* of the Church of the East as Aba I (r. 540–552).⁸³ As was mentioned in the previous chapter, Cosmas was hardly a typical Roman, and though he wrote in Greek his thought was steeped in the Syriac tradition. It is perfectly plausible then, even if no scholar has suggested it before, that the eschatological thought of Comas could have been influenced by Aphrahat.⁸⁴

At the urging of a friend, Cosmas composed his *Christian Topography*, an important source for its insight into the worldview of a well-traveled and educated eastern Christian of the sixth century, though it is often overlooked or dismissed because modern sensibilities find its central thesis risible; Comas contests the prevailing notion of a spherical earth and argues instead that the earth is the flat floor of a cosmos shaped like the Biblical Tabernacle.

Cosmas brings up the prophecies of the four kingdoms in the context of describing a monument he visited in the Kingdom of Axum (Ethiopia) built by Ptolemy III, whom he identifies as one of the kings briefly referenced in the Book of Daniel. Cosmas takes this opportunity to discuss Nebuchadnezzar's statue dream and Daniel's beast dream from the Book of Daniel. Cosmas follows the traditional Syriac interpretation of the four metals/beasts as the Babylonians, Medes, Persians, and finally the Greeks of Alexander (Cod. Laurentianus, Plut. IX.28, fol. 42v–43r, of the eleventh century, and Cod. Vatican Gr. 699, fol. 75r, from the ninth century, both contain a drawing of Daniel visited by an angel with the four beasts; these may have originated in Cosmas' own illustration).⁸⁵ Thus Cosmas follows the Peshitta scheme, though it remains uncertain whether the glosses on Daniel 7 in the Peshitta were in place when he wrote. Rather, he may have been drawing directly on the traditional Antiochene exegesis. He could have learned this from his teacher Patricius, an expert on Antiochene theology who had translated many of Theodore of Mopsuestia's works from Greek into Syriac.

In many respects, Cosmas' interpretation of the visions of Daniel follows the preterist, Antiochene model as exemplified in the commentary attributed to Ephrem and other writings on Daniel influenced by the Antiochenes. He is unambiguous that Alexander's Macedonian empire had been the fourth kingdom of Daniel: "And so, again, in the legs of iron in the statue, and in the terrible and dreadful beast with claws of brass and teeth of iron in the vision, he [Daniel] signifies the Macedonian empire—that is Alexander—breaking into pieces and subduing kingdoms ... The little horn speaking great things, which was in the midst of the ten horns, represents Antiochus Epiphanes, who waged war against the Jews in the time of the Maccabees."⁸⁶

⁸³ Cosmas apparently studied with Patricius while the latter was visiting Alexandria. Patricius stayed for some time in Alexandria, before the local pressure forced him to depart the traditionally Miaphysite city; see Wolska-Conus, *La Topographie Chrétienne de Cosmas Indicopleustes*, 63–73.

⁸⁴ Beatrice, "Pagans and Christians on the Book of Daniel," 35, notices the influence of Aphrahat on Cosmas, but Beatrice is influenced by popular theories about imperial eschatology described in the previous chapter of this dissertation, and so also attributes the pro-Roman eschatology in Cosmas to the influence of Eusebius of Caesarea.

⁸⁵ Cosmas Indicopleustes, *The Christian Topography*, 2.66; Wolska-Conus, *Topographie Chrétienne*, vol. 1, 380–383.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 2.67–68; Wolska-Conus, *Topographie Chrétienne*, vol. 1, 383: Εἴτα πάλιν ἐν μὲν τῇ εἰκόνι κνήμας σιδηρᾶς, ἐν δὲ τῷ ὁράματι θηρίον ἑκθαμβόν καὶ φοβερόν, ὄνυχας χαλκοῦς καὶ ὀδόντας σιδηροῦς ἔχον, τὴν μακεδονικὴν ἀρχὴν δηλοῖ, τουτέστιν Ἀλεξάνδρον, λεπτύνον καὶ δαμάζον τὰς βασιλείας...Τὸ δὲ κέρασ τὸ μικρόν τὸ

Here Cosmas seems to be in agreement with the Peshitta and “Syrian tradition.” None of the four beasts in Daniel’s vision represented the Roman Empire. Nor can Cosmas accept that the Roman Empire was, as Aphrahat claimed, a continuation of the Macedonians represented in the fourth beast:

For nothing is overtly written by the prophet [Daniel] about the Roman Empire, for it is not from the succession of Nebuchadnezzar; nor does it fit with the polity of the Jews, that is to say, with their observance of the law, but rather is destined to be their destroyer; nor did it succeed the kingdom of the Macedonians.⁸⁷

However, if Cosmas believes that the Roman Empire was nowhere mentioned overtly in Daniel, he finds a rather surprising hidden reference to it in Daniel’s scheme of successive empires:

Rather, [Daniel] says: “The God of Heaven shall set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed.” Speaking here of the Lord Christ, he cryptically includes the Roman Empire, which came into being with Christ the Lord. For when Christ was still forming in the womb, the Roman Empire received its power from God in order to be the servant of the dispensation that Christ introduced. For also in that very time the eternal [line of] Augusti was proclaimed, and ruling over the whole world they made a census of it.⁸⁸

Cosmas is here clearly building on an idea found in Syriac exegesis, including the commentary on Daniel attributed to Ephrem, that the fifth kingdom began with the birth of Christ. However, for Cosmas this does not mean the fifth kingdom is the gospels or the church, as Polychronius and the commentary attributed to Ephrem held. Cosmas latches on the old correspondence between the birth of Christ and the reign of Augustus, a common trope since the time of Origen, but takes it much further. For Cosmas, Rome is actually the fifth kingdom, God’s eternal kingdom. This is a truly remarkable claim about the status of the Roman Empire.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the view of Paul Magdalino that Cosmas reflected the official line on eschatology from Justinian’s government cannot be sustained.⁸⁹ Cosmas was

λαλοῦν μεγάλα, τὸ ἀναμέσον τῶν δέκα κεράτων, Ἀντίοχον σημαίνει τὸν Ἐπιφανῆ, τὸν πολεμήσαντα τοὺς Ἰουδαίους ἐπὶ τῶν Μακκαβαίων.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 2.74; Wolska-Conus, *Topographie Chrétienne*, vol. 1, 388–389: Περὶ γὰρ τῆς Ῥωμαίων βασιλείας ἐν μὲν τῷ προφήτῃ οὐ φανερώς γέγραπται· οὐδὲ γὰρ ἐκ διαδοχῆς ἐστὶ τοῦ Ναβουχοδονόσορ, οὐδὲ ἀρμοδία τῇ τῶν Ἰουδαίων πολιτείᾳ, ἥγουν εὐνομία, ἀλλὰ μᾶλλον καὶ καθαιρετική, οὐδὲ ἐκ διαδοχῆς ἐστὶ τῶν Μακεδόνων.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 2.74; Wolska-Conus, *Topographie Chrétienne*, vol. 1, 388–389: Ἀλλὰ φησιν· «Ἀναστήσει ὁ Θεὸς τοῦ οὐρανοῦ βασιλείαν, ἣτις εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα οὐ διαφθαρήσεται.» Ἐνταῦθα μὲν λέγων περὶ τοῦ Δεσπότη Χριστοῦ, αἰνιγματωδῶς δὲ συμπεριλαμβάνει καὶ τὸ τῶν Ῥωμαίων βασιλεῖον συνανατεῖλαν τῷ Δεσπότη Χριστῷ. Τοῦ γὰρ Χριστοῦ ἔτι κυοφορουμένου, κράτος ἐδέξατο παρὰ Θεοῦ ἢ τῶν Ῥωμαίων βασιλεία, ὡς ὑπέρετις οὐσα τῶν τοῦ Χριστοῦ οἰκονομιῶν· ἐν αὐτῷ γὰρ τῷ καιρῷ καὶ αἰώνιοι Αὐγουστοὶ προσηγορεύθησαν καὶ εἰς πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν ἀπογραφὴν ὡς κρατοῦντες ἐποιήσαντο.

⁸⁹ Paul Magdalino, “The History of the Future,” 11, suggests that Cosmas must be a transmitter for imperial propaganda coming out of Constantinople, because he was “something of an outsider to both the political and the religious establishment,” and yet at the same time, “he says things that no imperial spokesman could have put better. It may therefore be taken as a reflection of the imperial position on the passing of the sixth millennium and the contemporary portents of Christ’s Second Coming ... It might have envisaged an earthly millennium of messianic imperial rule, or (and I think more likely) it might have expected that the Second Coming was shortly to occur in Constantinople.” Such an emphasis on Constantinople and the imperial position is surely misplaced. It is precisely because Cosmas was such an outsider that his interpretation was so unusual. His position would likely have struck the emperor and his court as embarrassing and dangerously unachievable. And certainly there is nothing in Cosmas

clearly writing within a tradition coming out of the Syriac-speaking church. The influence of both the preterist view of Daniel found in the Syriac commentaries and eschatological views of Aphrahat are both palpable in Cosmas. Indeed, he follows Aphrahat closely in assigning a special significance to Christ's inclusion in the Roman census of Augustus: "Christ the Lord was both born in a Roman land and thought it worthy to be enrolled [in the census] of the Roman Empire."⁹⁰ Thus, the Roman Empire's special historical role was indicated by the fact that the messiah chose to become a Roman subject. Such claims, long viewed in scholarship as Roman propaganda, take on a different light when Aphrahat's influence is recognized. Cosmas seems to be building on Aphrahat's case for Rome's eschatological role.

Still, it is necessary to be cautious about the implications of Cosmas' claim. For Cosmas, Rome's status as the fifth kingdom does not mean it is the truly eternal kingdom of heaven, but rather it is a precursor that will continue until the second coming. "The Roman Empire thus participates in the dignity of the Kingdom of the Lord Christ, seeing that it transcends, as far as can be in this state of existence, every other power, and will remain unconquered until the final consummation, for he says that "it shall not be destroyed forever."⁹¹ Thus, the Roman Empire as the fifth kingdom will not be destroyed—it is eternal within the bounds of secular time—but at the second coming its power will be transferred to the Kingdom of Christ the Lord (βασιλεία τοῦ Δεσπότης Χριστοῦ). There is much in common here with the thesis of Aphrahat, but where Aphrahat saw the Roman Empire as an exalted continuation of the fourth kingdom, Cosmas adjusts the thesis somewhat to make Rome the beginning phase of the fifth kingdom. This was perhaps a necessary innovation if Cosmas knew of the Peshitta glosses (the earliest manuscripts of the Peshitta include the glosses and are roughly contemporary with Cosmas), which would have contradicted Aphrahat's assertion about the identities of the four kingdoms.

There were other ways in which Cosmas had to update Aphrahat's interpretation of the kingdoms of Daniel. While Aphrahat wrote at the time of Constantine's death, when the notion of a Christian Roman emperor was a very new phenomenon, Cosmas had to contend with the imperfection of the Christian Roman Empire, with its military defeats and periods of impiety. He thus suggests a sort of divine economy by which God continues to protect the Roman Empire as long as it acts for the good of the true faith: "For I proclaim confidently that, even if in order for the chastisement of our sins hostile barbarians rise up for a short time against *Romania*, yet by the power of the Almighty the empire will remain unconquered as long as it does not restrict but widens the course of Christianity."⁹² Even though Cosmas saw the Roman Empire as the first

to suggest that he believed in a millennium of earthly messianic rule.

⁹⁰ Cosmas Indicopleustes, *The Christian Topography*, 2.74; Wolska-Conus, *Topographie Chrétienne*, vol. 1, 388–389: ὁ Δεσπότης Χριστὸς ἐγεννήθη καὶ εἰς τὴν τῶν Ῥωμαίων γῆν καὶ βασιλείαν ἡξίωσεν ἀπογραφῆναι.

⁹¹ Ibid, 2.75; Wolska-Conus, *Topographie Chrétienne*, vol. 1, 390–391: Μετέχει οὖν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν Ῥωμαίων τῶν ἀξιομάτων τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ Δεσπότης Χριστοῦ, πάσας ὑπεραίρουσα ὅσον ἐνδέχεται κατὰ τὸν βίον τοῦτον, ἀήττητος διαμένουσα μέχρι τῆς συντελείας. «Εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα γάρ, φησὶν, οὐ διαφθαρήσεται.»

⁹² Ibid, 2.75; Wolska-Conus, *Topographie Chrétienne*, vol. 1, 390–391: Θαρρῶν γὰρ ἀποφαίνομαι ὅτι, εἰ καὶ διὰ τὰς ἡμετέρας ἀμαρτίας πρὸς παιδείαν ὀλίγον ἐχθροὶ βάρβαροι τῇ Ῥωμανίᾳ ἐπανίστανται, ἀλλὰ τῇ δυνάμει τοῦ διακρατοῦντος ἀήττητος διαμένει ἡ βασιλεία, ἐπὶ τὸ μὴ στενοῦσθαι τὰ τῶν χριστιανῶν, ἀλλὰ πλατύνεσθαι.

phase in the realization of the fifth kingdom, he conceded that it was still susceptible to setbacks and defeats like any other kingdom when it strayed from God's will.

Finally, with respect to the Persian Empire and the divided political rule of the East, Cosmas breaks again from Aphrahat, this time in a way that perhaps reflects his education under a luminary of the Church of the East. Second only to the Roman Empire in glory, Cosmas asserts, is the Sasanian Persian Empire. Whereas Aphrahat believed that the Sasanian state was a continuation of the Persian Empire of Daniel, Cosmas argued that Alexander the Great destroyed the third kingdom (the Achaemenid Persian Empire,) and that the Sasanians represented an entirely new empire. In fact, Cosmas (wrongly) claimed, the Sasanian royal family was not even ethnically Persian, but descended from the Parthian magi.⁹³

Rather than the Persian Empire, Cosmas asserted, the Sasanian polity should more accurately be called the "Kingdom of the Magi" (ἡ βασιλεία τῶν Μάγων). The Sasanian Empire was accorded second position to the Roman Empire because the magi had adored Christ at his birth, and Christianity had spread to Persia soon after it was established in the Roman Empire. He highlights the role of St. Thaddeus (Mar Addai), the progenitor of the Syriac churches, in converting Persia, and cites 1 Peter 5:13 for the assertion that the church in Babylon ranks alongside the church in Rome.⁹⁴

The influence of Patricus/Aba I was likely at play here. By this assertion about Persia it was possible to both glorify the Roman Empire for its divinely-bestowed eschatological role, while also giving a near equal weight to the Sasanian Empire. For the Christian church in Persia, such conciliatory rhetoric would have been politically astute, and even necessary in times when the church fell under the shah's suspicion. Such arguments would eventually become standard in the Church of the East's claims to primacy.⁹⁵

This leads to another question. Cosmas' interpretation of the Roman Empire as the Danielic fifth kingdom is striking, but was this a widespread view within the Church of the East, or a unique spin given by Cosmas on the long-attested Antiochene interpretation? Maurice Casey has suggested that Cosmas' interpretation of Daniel was fairly standard for Persian Christians of his time, who sought to synthesize the "Syrian tradition" with the more western interpretation of Rome as the fourth kingdom, and that Cosmas was restating what Patricus/Aba must have taught him.⁹⁶

However, it is by no means certain that Patricus himself taught that the Roman Empire was the fifth kingdom. It is possible that the understanding of Rome's place in the kingdoms of Daniel was a common adaptation of Aphrahat's arguments to fit the Peshitta scheme. On the other hand, this may well have been Cosmas' own contribution in trying to accommodate the Roman Empire into the schema of empires held by the Persian Christians outside the Roman

⁹³ Ibid, 2.76.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 2.76–77; Wolska-Conus, *Topographie Chrétienne*, 3 vol. 1, 90–393.

⁹⁵ The logical end of these arguments are found in the writings of the eight-century *catholicos* Timothy I, who asserted the primacy of Ctesiphon over all the Patriarchates; see his Epistle 26; discussion in Garth Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth: Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1993), 122.

⁹⁶ Maurice Casey, "The Fourth Kingdom in Cosmas Indicopleustes," 385–403.

also exerted a noticeable influence upon other Syriac apocalypses written in the seventh century, including the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*.¹⁰⁰

As discussed in the previous chapter, a number of scholars have argued that the *Syriac Alexander Legend* must have been political propaganda written by a partisan of Emperor Heraclius to lend support to the return of Roman rule to Northern Mesopotamia after the long Persian occupation. G. J. Reinink, who has written extensively on the *Syriac Alexander Legend*, dates it to c. 630, just after Emperor Heraclius' victory over the Persians, arguing that its pro-Roman eschatology must have been imperial propaganda designed to encourage Syriac Christians (particularly Miaphysite Christians, whose theology was deemed heretical by the imperial church) to welcome back Roman rule after a long period of occupation by the Persians.¹⁰¹ Reinink here buys into the notion that any Syriac writer who would assign such a positive eschatological role to the Roman Empire must be a propagandist for the imperial court. However, as we have seen, a positive eschatological role for the Roman Empire corresponds to a prominent strain of Syriac thought originating in Aphrahat. Without noticing the influence of Aphrahat, it is easy to miss the fact that the *Syriac Alexander Legend* was clearly engaging with a long Syriac tradition that attempted to understand the place of the Roman Empire in the schema of empires presented in the Book of Daniel.

Moreover, though it certainly appears that the *Syriac Alexander Legend*, in the form that it survives, was redacted around the time of Emperor Heraclius' military victory over Persia, there is good reason to believe that it was first composed in the early sixth century. In the *Syriac Alexander Legend*, Alexander the Great prophesies an invasion by the Huns that will breach the gate he had built and devastate the world in 826 years; then, in a somewhat garbled passage, he says they will invade again in 940 years. It is likely that these numbers should be taken as dates according to the conventional Syriac dating system, the "Era of the Greeks," especially since this calendar was often mistakenly called the "Era of Alexander" (in reality it counted years from the foundation of the Seleucid Empire). The "Year of the Greeks" 826 corresponds to the year 514/515 AD and the "Year of the Greeks" 940 corresponds to the year 628/629 AD.

Reinink seized upon the latter date, which fits with his thesis that the *Syriac Alexander Legend* was written as propaganda for Emperor Heraclius. However, as Stephen Shoemaker

¹⁰⁰ The heavy dependence of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* on the *Syriac Alexander Legend* has been demonstrated in G. J. Reinink, "Die syrischen Wurzeln der mittelalterlichen Legende zum römischen Endkaiser," *Non Nova, sed Nove: Mélanges de civilisation médiévale dédiés à W. Noomen*, ed. M. Gosman and J. van Os (Groningen: Bouma's Boekhuis, 1984) 203–205; idem, "Alexander the Great in 7th-century Syriac 'Apocalyptic' texts," *Byzantinorossika*, vol. 2 (2003) 171–178.

¹⁰¹ Gerrit Reinink, "Die Entstehung der syrischen Alexanderlegende als politisch-religiöser Propagandaschrift für Herakleios' Kirchenpolitik," in *After Chalcedon Studies in Theology and Church History: Offered to Professor Albert van Roey for his Seventieth Birthday*, ed. C. Laga; J. A. Munitiz; and L. Van Rompay (Leuven: Peeters 1985), 263–281; idem, "Alexander the Great in Seventh-Century Syriac 'Apocalyptic' Texts," *Byzantinorossika*, vol. 2 (2000), 150–178, esp. 152–158; idem, "Heraclius, the New Alexander: Apocalyptic Prophecies during the Reign of Heraclius," in *The Reign of Heraclius (610-641): Crisis and Confrontation*, ed. G. J. Reinink and B. H. Stolte (Leuven: Peeters, 2002), 84–86. Reinink's views are repeated by Lutz Greisiger, "The Opening of the Gates of the North in 627: War, Anti-Byzantine Sentiment and Apocalyptic Expectancy in the Near East Prior to the Arab Invasion," *Peoples of the Apocalypse: Eschatological Beliefs and Political Scenarios*, ed. W. Brandes, F. Schmieder, and R. Voß (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 63–79.

points out, Reinink's theory does not account for the presence of the 515 AD date. Thus, Shoemaker has proposed that the *Syriac Alexander Legend* was first written around 515, and redacted around 629. Tommaso Tesei thus convincingly argues that the *Syriac Alexander Legend* was composed slightly later, but within lived memory of the 515 raid, probably in the time of Emperor Justinian.¹⁰²

Indeed, the defense of the Caspian passes was an important political issue in the sixth century. Persian diplomatic efforts aimed at extracting Roman financial support for the maintenance of fortifications in these passes since the Romans benefited just as much as the Persians from the security these defenses afforded. The Romans resisted out of apprehension that they would be paying tribute and thus subservient to the Persians. Nonetheless, as part of treaty negotiations of the so-called "Eternal Peace," in the year 532 Justinian agreed to pay the Sasanian Empire a contribution to support their defense of the Caucasus passes (and again in 562 in the so-called "Fifty-Year Peace"). Possibly the *Syriac Alexander Legend* was aimed, in part, at providing a Greco-Roman, rather than Persian, origin for those defenses. Indeed, at its conclusion, Alexander and the Persian king agree to both send men at their own expense to guard the defensive gate, and so suggested that the Greeks and Romans had just as much a role in defending the Caspian passes as did the Persians.

Thus, it is likely that the *Syriac Alexander Legend* was composed in light of Persian appeals for Roman financial aid, or Justinian's granting of funds to them. Nonetheless, it was redacted, or at least interpolated with a new date for the breaching of the defensive gate, in the reign of Heraclius, when war between the Romans and Persians, and the invasions of steppe tribes (this time the Göktürks), were once again major concerns.

The *Syriac Alexander Legend* would have had an enduring appeal beyond the era of diplomatic wrangling over the cost of the Caucasian defenses because it celebrates Greco-Roman history, embodied by Alexander the Great, and denigrates the Persians. Nonetheless, the *Legend* need not be regarded as simply a work of Byzantine propaganda, whether a product of the court of Justinian or Heraclius.¹⁰³ Rather, the *Legend* should be understood as a literary composition meant to provide an edifying account of the conquests of Alexander the Great for a Syriac Christian audience living in the borderlands between the Roman and Sasanian empires. Moreover, it sought to situate Alexander's conquests in the succession of earthly kingdoms and to clarify the relationship between Alexander's empire and the Roman Empire for the purposes of political eschatology. Ultimately, it is a pro-Roman story, one that claimed Alexander for the Roman Empire and sought to draw parallels between his wars against Persia and the Roman conflicts with Sasanian Persia. This was not a novel idea; John Malalas, in his world chronicle, also written in the reign of Justinian, presents Alexander as a liberating king who "returned to the

¹⁰² Tommaso Tesei makes his argument in his forthcoming monograph on the *Syriac Alexander Legend*, a draft of which he kindly shared with me.

¹⁰³ Shoemaker suggests that the entirety of the surviving text of the *Syriac Alexander Legend*, besides the interpolated seventh-century date, was composed in the early sixth century; more caution is warranted, however, since we do not know for sure what else may have been interpolated or changed in the seventh century redaction.

Romans all that they lost.”¹⁰⁴ Nonetheless, the *Syriac Alexander Legend* makes this point by way of political eschatology that could have scarcely have been understood by readers unfamiliar with the arguments from the Fifth Demonstration of Aphrahat; namely that the Persians could defeat neither Alexander nor the Romans because they both were part of the fourth kingdom of Daniel, which cannot be defeated and must survive until the end of time.

The *Syriac Alexander Legend* portrays Alexander as a proto-Christian king and narrates a series of fictitious exploits. After setting forth from Alexandria in Egypt with his armies and traveling to the distant east, reaching the burning land from which the sun rises and the stinking sea at the end of the earth that no one can cross, Alexander travels back across Armenia to the lands of the North. He is trespassing here on lands that belong to the Persian king. While the Persian king—inexplicably named Tubarlaq (ܬܒܪܠܩ) in the *Syriac Alexander Legend*, though more historically called Darius in the version of the legend in the *Zuqnin Chronicle*—gathers his forces for war, Alexander remains busy exploring. He reaches a mountain of enormous length, probably intended to represent the Caucasus Mountains, beyond which live the terrifying Huns.

Three hundred native elders come to Alexander, and describe to him the Huns and the horrors they inflict. The Huns eat the flesh of dead things and drink blood. They murder women and children. When they go to war they cook a pregnant woman until her fetus comes forth and liquefies and becomes a potion into which they dip their weapons, with the result that they each warrior appears to be accompanied by thousands of demons. The elders show Alexander the mountain pass through which the Huns come forth to raid. Though fortifications had been built, they had failed to contain the fearsome Huns: "These ruined fortresses in our lands and in the lands of the Romans were ruined by them, and these towers have been uprooted by them; when they go forth to plunder, they ravage the land of the Romans and the land of the Persians."¹⁰⁵

Though the *Syriac Alexander Legend* is set in the time of Alexander the Great, references to political geography like this reflect that of late antiquity, with Armenia divided between Roman and Persian empires, and gives further evidence of its late antique composition. The reference to Persia suggests that, unlike Cosmas, the author of the *Syriac Alexander Legend* viewed the Sasanian Empire of his own time as simply a continuation of the ancient Achaemenid Persian Empire described in the Book of Daniel and conquered by Alexander.

Once fully informed about the Huns, Alexander resolves to end the devastating attacks by erecting a great gate in the pass to wall the Huns off behind the mountain: “And Alexander said to his troops, ‘Do you want to do something wonderful in this country?’ They said to him, ‘As your majesty commands!’ The king said, ‘Let us make a gate of copper and close up this

¹⁰⁴ John Malalas, *Chronicle*, VIII.1; ed. Ludwig A. Dindorf, *Ioannis Malalae chronographia* (Bonn: Weber, 1831), 193: [Ἀλεξάνδρος] ἀποδοὺς Ῥωμαίοις πάντα ἃ ἀπόλεσαν.

[illegible]

Romans tribute for fifteen years. Both kings agree to send men at their own expense to jointly guard the gate against the Huns. Thus, Alexander does not destroy the Persian Empire, but allows it to continue in a weakened state. Once again, the *Syriac Alexander Legend* addresses the question of the Persian Empire's place in the succession of kingdoms by suggesting a continuity between the ancient Achaemenid Persian Empire and the Sasanian Persian Empire in late antiquity, in contrast with Cosmas' insistence that they were completely separate entities.

And [the astrologers] told [Tubarlaq] that at the final consummation of the world the kingdom of the Romans will go out and subdue all the kings of the earth; and that whatever king was found in Persia will be killed, and that Babylonia and Assyria will be laid waste by the command of God... The king and his nobles prophesied that Persia will be laid waste by the Romans, and that all the kingdoms will be laid waste, but that it [the kingdom of the Romans] will last and rule to the end of times and that it will deliver the kingdom of the earth to Christ, who is to come.¹¹⁰

Thus, the *Syriac Alexander Legend* carries on the idea, first encountered in Aphrahat, that the Roman Empire holds a special status in governing on Christ's behalf, and must therefore last until the end of history, when it will return that authority to Christ. While it is implied that the "kingdom of the Greeks and Romans" is the fourth kingdom, there is no mention of any negative attribute from the Danielic description of the fourth kingdom: no "little horn," and no persecution of God's holy ones.

[illegible]

¹¹² Ibid.

The *Syriac Alexander Legend* makes a new innovation in asserting that Alexander the Great founded the fourth kingdom. As we have seen, a unity between the Hellenistic kingdoms and the Roman Empire was already suggested by Aphrahat. Indeed, in his *Demonstrations*, Aphrahat provided a date for his work according to the “Era of the Greeks,” which he elaborates as that “of the kingdom of the Greeks and the Romans, which is the kingdom of Alexander.”¹¹³ Nonetheless, as we have seen, Aphrahat considered Alexander’s kingdom to have been the third kingdom of Daniel, while the reigns of Alexander’s successors, through the Roman emperors, constituted the fourth.

Conclusions: Adapting Aphrahat's Eschatology in the Sixth Century

Cosmas and the author of the *Syriac Alexander Legend* resolved both of these questions in completely different ways. According to Cosmas, the Roman Empire participates in Christ's fifth kingdom as a steward of God's kingship. In this way it acted as a temporary earthly manifestation of that kingdom. At the same time, Cosmas asserted that the Sasanian Empire was

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also a holy kingdom, second only to Rome and outside the four kingdoms mentioned by Daniel. The *Syriac Alexander Legend*, more in line with Aphrahat, suggested that the Roman Empire remained the fourth kingdom because it was a continuation of the empire founded by Alexander the Great. The *Syriac Alexander Legend* also implied that the Sasanian Persia remained a vestige of the ancient Persian kingdom of the time of Daniel and Alexander the Great; in other words, it was still the third kingdom of Daniel.

Despite these differences, it is important to stress Aphrahat's influence on both. Scholarship has neglected this influence, but it is not surprising: since Cosmas wrote in Greek, his *Christian Topography* is often treated as a Byzantine source and viewed outside the context of Syriac thought.¹¹⁴ Likewise, the *Syriac Alexander Legend* is regarded as a piece of Byzantine propaganda that happened to be written in Syriac for the purpose of swaying a Syriac-speaking audience, and moreover a popular work of a low register, not on the same intellectual level as Aphrahat. However, by looking at these sources as part of the same broader intellectual universe, it becomes possible to trace the path through which Aphrahat's eschatological views were transmitted through late antiquity.

Part III: The Eschatological Invasions: A Novel Feature of Syriac Eschatology

A final point must be made about the prophecy about the end times found in the *Syriac Alexander Legend*. As alluded to above, it suggested a coming invasion of savage people, the Huns of Gog and Magog, who had been imprisoned behind a mountain gate by Alexander the Great. It used the concept of this invasion to expand upon the eschatological role Aphrahat had given to the Roman Empire. The relevance of the invasion of Gog and Magog to Rome's mission in the end time needs to be explored carefully because it has been a subject of keen interest in modern scholarship, but such scholarship has propagated some confusing mistakes about where this story came from and what it means. Therefore, I devote this final section of the chapter to explaining its origin and relevance of the invasion of Gog and Magog in the *Syriac Alexander Legend*.

The invasion of the Huns of Gog and Magog was not based on the prophecies of the Book of Daniel or the Book of Revelation (the sources for the common political-eschatological scenario found in Greek and Latin works), but on those of the prophet Ezekiel. The Book of Ezekiel was written from the perspective of a Jew during the Babylonian captivity (like Daniel, Ezekiel was a Jewish wise man in Babylon), when the Jewish people had been dispersed and their kingdom destroyed. In chapters 38 and 39, Ezekiel provides a prophecy about how the Jews will be freed from their captivity. According to Ezekiel, fierce nations from the north, led by a prince called Gog from the land of Magog (Genesis 10:2 had named Magog among the

¹¹⁴ Beside the use of Cosmas by Paul Magdalino cited above, also notable is Roger Scott, "Justinian's New Age and the Second Coming," in *Byzantine Chronicles and the Sixth Century*, ed. Roger Scott (Farham: Ashgate Variorum, 2012), 2–4, who places Cosmas' comments about the Book of Daniel in the context of Greek philosophical debates over the eternity of the universe.

descendants of Noah's son Japheth), will overrun civilization, destroying all kingdoms. Only the Jews will be spared, thanks to the intervention of God. The Jews will defeat Gog and return to Israel, where God will provide them with a new temple. This expectation of liberation through barbarians invasion likely originated during the Babylonian captivity, but was preserved long after that captivity had ended by very different means (though Cyrus the Great's repatriation of the Jews). In such new circumstances, later generations of Jews and Christians were apparently unsure of the meaning of these prophecies about Gog from the land of Magog.

The author of the *Syriac Alexander Legend* nonetheless seized upon this prophecy from Ezekiel, at least partly because he found a way to make it fit his Aphrahatian concept of political eschatology. Just as Aphrahat had argued that the Persian armies could not defeat the Romans because the Roman Empire must last until the end of time to surrender kingship to Christ, the author *Syriac Alexander Legend* argued that likewise the armies of Gog and Magog could not defeat the Romans. As a result, the author suggested that the Roman Empire had taken the place of the ancient Jews as the people God would protect from this great eschatological invasion, implying Roman supersession of the Jewish kingdom.

This point has been lost in modern scholarship, not least because such scholarship often overlooks or disputes the distinctly Syriac origins of the story of Gog and Magog's breaching of Alexander's gate. Once again, Stephen Shoemaker has been prominent in making this case, since he prefers to view the expectation for the destruction of all kingdoms except the Roman Empire by the armies of Gog and Magog as yet another manifestation of the "imperial eschatology" supposedly promulgated in the fourth century by the likes of Emperor Constantine and Eusebius. Thus, he views it much like he does the legend of the Last Roman Emperor: a tradition with roots in pre-Constantinian Christianity which he believes became part of fourth-century imperial eschatology.¹¹⁵ If that were true, the story of the invasion of the people of Gog and Magog could have no connection to Aphrahat's eschatology.

Here the focus will be on showing that the eschatological struggle between the Roman Empire and the forces of Gog and Magog did originate in Syriac eschatology.¹¹⁶ Although this *topos* had its roots in a tradition widely attested across the ancient Mediterranean world—namely

¹¹⁵ Stephen Shoemaker, *The Apocalypse of Empire: Imperial Eschatology in Late Antiquity and Early Islam* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 58–59; idem, "The Tiburtine Sibyl, the Last Emperor, and the Early Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition," in *Forbidden Texts on the Western Frontier: The Christian Apocrypha in North American Perspectives*, ed. Tony Burke (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2015), 238–240. As proof of an early origin for the story, Shoemaker cites the familiarity of Josephus in the first century with the legend that Alexander the Great built a mountain fortification. Shoemaker further argues that the story that the forces of Gog and Magog would breach Alexander's gate in the end times originated in the lost fourth-century version of the *Tiburtine Sibyl*. I have argued, in turn that this scene in the surviving eleventh-century Latin *Tiburtine Sibyl* is based on the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* and could not have been part of the lost fourth century version of the text (notably, it is absent in the early sixth-century Greek version); see Christopher Bonura, "When Did the Legend of the Last Emperor Originate? A New Look at the Textual Relationship Between the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* and the *Tiburtine Sibyl*," *Viator*, vol. 47 no. 3 (2016), esp. 78–82. Shoemaker has responded to some of these arguments in his *The Apocalypse of Empire*, 198 n.122 and n. 118.

¹¹⁶ For my arguments, see Christopher Bonura, "When Did the Legend of the Last Emperor Originate? A New Look at the Textual Relationship Between the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* and the *Tiburtine Sibyl*," *Viator*, vol. 47 no. 3 (2016), 78–82.

that Alexander the Great had built a mountain barrier to block the advance of barbarian peoples—Syriac eschatological literature first associated this legend with the prophecy from the Book of Ezekiel about the invasion of Gog and Magog. Thus, it should be seen as part of the glorified eschatological role attributed to the Roman Empire in the distinctly Syriac tradition based on the writings of Aphrahat.

III.1: Gog and Magog and the Barbarians

The legend of Gog and Magog grew in Jewish and early Christian apocalyptic writing beyond the prophecy of the Book of Ezekiel. Already in the *Third Sibylline Oracle*, Gog and Magog are no longer spoken of as a king and his land, but as two associated peoples.¹¹⁷ The Book of Revelation, with its eclectic recombination of prophecies from the Hebrew Bible, places the invasion of Gog and Magog at the end of time. In the Revelation they no longer come from the North but from “the four corners of the world,” and they accompany Satan as his army in the final battle at the end of time (Revelation 20:17–10).

Except for the reference to it in the Book of Revelation, Ezekiel’s prophecy of Gog and Magog does not seem to have attracted much attention among early Christians. As Sverre Bøe has pointed out in his monograph on the tradition: “There are very few references to the names Gog and/or Magog in Christian writings from the second, third and fourth century C.E. Gog and Magog does not seem to have been central to the eschatology of the early church.”¹¹⁸ It is likely that the prophecy of deliverance through violent invaders who will upend the political order had little relevance to the eschatology of early Christianity with its focus on Christ’s second coming as the source of earthly salvation.

Moreover, early Christian writers who referenced Gog and Magog drew from the Book of Revelation; as long as chiliasm remained popular Gog and Magog fell outside the realm of political eschatology because Revelation makes clear that Gog and Magog will come after the millennium of Christ’s rule on earth. Thus, Lactantius, one of the few early Christian authors to deal with the prophecy from Ezekiel, in his *Divine Institutes* has the invasion of Gog and Magog bring an end to the thousand years of earthly peace inaugurated by Christ’s second coming.¹¹⁹ In this way, for the early church, Gog and Magog were a people confined to the realm of the distant future, to a time after empire and politics.

As the notion of the earthly Millennium fell out of favor, the invasion of Gog and Magog had to be relocated to before Christ’s second coming. Once placed within the bounds of history, these invaders could be discerned in contemporary peoples. Thus, unsurprisingly, Christian references to Gog and Magog increase in the late fourth and fifth century, exactly when chiliasm sharply declined. The prophecy of Gog and Magog from Ezekiel may have seemed relevant

¹¹⁷ The *Third Sibylline Oracle*, lines 319–320; ed. Johannes Geffcken, *Die Oracula sibyllina* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1902), 64.

¹¹⁸ Sverre Bøe, *Gog and Magog: Ezekiel 38-39 As Pre-Text for Revelation 19,17-21 and 20,7-10* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 218.

¹¹⁹ Lactantius, *Divine Institutes*, VII.26.2–4.

because the notion of invaders from the north had parallels with the various “barbarian” peoples who had begun to overwhelm the Roman *limes*.

The ethnographical associations of Gog and Magog in Greek have their origins in the first-century AD writings of Josephus, who had reconciled ethnic groups discussed by classical Greek historians such as Herodotus with the various nations mentioned by the Hebrew Bible. Josephus had identified the Biblical Magog with the Scythians.¹²⁰ Many of the barbarian peoples who assailed the Roman Empire in late antiquity—the Goths, the Huns, and the Avars, to name just a few—were described in classicizing terms as Scythians because they originated from the same general region as had been occupied by Herodotus’ Scythians in the fifth century BC. As a result, late antique Roman Christians, referencing Josephus, could associate these barbarian tribes that attacked the lands of the empire with Gog and Magog.

Late Roman Christian rhetoricians at times invoked the triumph of the Israelites over the armies of Gog from Magog in anticipation or celebrating Roman victories over the barbarians. Ambrose of Milan, in a religious work dedicated to Emperor Gratian (r. 367–383) as he was setting out to fight the Goths, told the emperor that his victory was promised in Ezekiel.¹²¹ Likewise, according to the church historian Socrates, the Patriarch of Constantinople Proclus (d. 447 AD) delivered a much-applauded sermon that suggested that a recent failed invasion of the empire by the Huns had fulfilled Ezekiel’s prophecy.¹²² In the seventh century, a churchman named Theodore the Syncellus delivered a homily in celebration of the deliverance of Constantinople from siege by the nomadic Avar confederation in which he declared the defeat of the Avars the fulfillment of the prophesied invasion from Ezekiel.¹²³ None of these authors suggested that the world was soon to end. The scene from Ezekiel was a rhetorical trope unconnected to eschatology.

In the seventh century, Isidore of Seville (d. 636) turned this formulation on its head. Isidore wrote in praise of the Visigothic rulers of Spain whom he connected to Gog and Magog not to disparage them but to give them an exalted ancestry going back to the Old Testament.

¹²⁰ Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, 1.123; ed. Benedictus Niese, *Flavii Iosephi opera*, 22: Μαγώγης δὲ τοῦς ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ Μαγώγας ὀνομασθέντας ᾤκισεν, Σκύθας δὲ ὑπ’ αὐτῶν [i.e. Ἑλλήνων] προσαγορευομένους. Indeed, the concept of Gog, king of Magog, may have been inspired by a nomadic steppe people related to the Scythians that invaded the Near East and made inroads near Israel in the sixth century BC; this early invasion is attested by the town called Scythopolis in antiquity (modern Bet She'an), just north of Jerusalem, where Scythians may have settled.

¹²¹ Ambrose, *De fide ad Gratianum*, 2.16. Here, Ambrose assures the young ruler, who was embarking to fight the Goths soon after their crushing defeat of the Eastern Roman field army at Adrianople in 378, that his victory over the barbarians was prophesized by Ezekiel, for the Romans were Israel and the Goths were Gog. See also, Arne Søby Christensen, *Cassiodorus, Jordanes and the History of the Goths: Studies in a Migration Myth* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2002), 44–45. The identification of the Goths with the eschatological invaders was aided by the fact that Gog, rendered in Greek as Γῶγ, was occasionally also spelled Γῶθ.

¹²² Socrates Scholasticus, *Church History*, VII.43. The invasion dissipated thanks to an outbreak of plague in the invaders’ ranks, a result, Proclus asserted, of the emperor’s prayers.

¹²³ This homily, by has been edited by Leo Sternbach, *Analecocta Avarica* (Krakow: Academiae Litterarum, 1900), 298–342; Sternbach’s edition is reprinted with a French translation and commentary in Ferenc Makk, *Theodorus Syncellus : traduction et commentaire de l’homélie écrite probablement par Théodore le Syncelle sur le siège de Constantinople en 626* (Szeged: Attila József University, 1975).

Thus, according to Isidore: “The Goths are descended from Magog, the son Japhet, and are shown to have sprung from the same origin as the Scythians, from whom they do not differ greatly in name.”¹²⁴

There is good reason that the invasion of Gog and Magog did not become more central to the political eschatology of Roman Christians in late antiquity. Nearly all Latin and Greek authors who discussed political eschatology, as we have seen, were invested in the common political-eschatological scenario, based on the four kingdoms of the Book of Daniel, in which there was little place for Gog and Magog in the unfolding of the end times.

This is not to say that there were no Christians who saw the barbarian invasions of the Roman Empire as the fulfillment of the prophecies about Gog and Magog from the books of Ezekiel and Revelation. Indeed, Augustine of Hippo found it necessary, in those passages of his *City of God* where he criticizes reading the fulfillment of eschatological prophecy in contemporary events, to argue against the association of Gog and Magog with the Getae and the Massagetae, two barbarian peoples. Augustine simply has to point to the description of Gog and Magog from the Book of Revelation to argue that Gog and Magog are not present invaders but future persecutors who will be loosed by Satan from hell at the end of the world.¹²⁵ Still, the fact that he had to make this point suggests there were some who believed that Gog and Magog had truly arrived.

One such Christian was Augustine’s protégée, Quodvultdeus, who in his *Book of Promises* evidences the most eschatological treatment of the barbarians as Gog and Magog found in late antique literature outside of Syriac. He states that: “Gog and Magog, as some say, are the Goths and the Moors, or the Getae and the Massagetae, by whose savagery the devil himself already lays waste the Church, and later will persecute it more.”¹²⁶ Quodvultdeus does not endorse this view himself, attributing it to “some” (*quidam*). But he does not object to it either. He lived in a different world than Augustine, being an exile from Africa after the Vandal conquest, and in this work and several others he is concerned with the persecution of Nicene Christians by the Arian Vandals. Thus it fit his polemical purpose to suggest that barbarian nations, like the Moors and Goths (and, by extension, the Vandals) may act as Gog and Magog from Revelation, serving as the armies of Satan (and the Antichrist) in the last days. Nonetheless, there is no mention in Quodvultdeus that the barbarians had burst through a gate built by Alexander, nor that their coming would bring an end to earthly kingdoms.

¹²⁴ Isidore of Seville, *The History of the Goths*, 66; ed. Adalbert-G. Hamman and printed in Migne, PL 83, 1075, : *Gothorum antiquissima origo de Magog filio Japhet fuit, unde et Scytharum genus exstitit. Nam idem Gothi Scythica probantur origine nati. Unde nec longe a vocabulo discrepant.*

¹²⁵ Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, 20.11; ed. Bernhard Dombart and Alfons Kalb, *Sancti Aurelii Augustini Episcopi De civitate Dei Libri XXII*, vol. 2 (Leipzig: Teubner, 1929), 434: *Gentes quippe istae, quas appellat Gog et Magog, non sic sunt accipiendae, tamquam sint aliqui in aliqua parte terrarum barbari constituti, sive quos quidam suspicantur Getas et Massagetas propter litteras horum nominum primas, siue aliquos alios alienigenas et a Romano iure seiunctos.* The Getae and Massagetae were, like the term “Scythian,” classicizing names applied to late antique barbarians such as the Goths and Huns.

¹²⁶ Quodvultdeus, *Dimidium temporis*, 13.22; in *Opera Quodvultdeo Carthaginiensi episcopo tributa*, ed. René Braun (Turnholt: Brepols, 1976), 207: *Gog et Magog, ut quidam dixerunt, Gotos et Mauros, Getas et Massagetas, per quorum saevitiam ipse iam diabolus ecclesiam vastat et tunc amplius persequetur.*

Seleucid calendar, the prophecy holds that the Huns will go forth first in the year 514/515, and again, in the final invasion the Gate of the North would open in 628/629. Tomasso Tesei also points out that the regions and fortresses devastated by the Huns that Alexander surveys in the *Syriac Alexander Legend* correspond closely with the areas raided by the Huns in the 515 attack. It is probable, then, that some original version of the *Syriac Alexander Legend* was composed not long after 515, in response to the invasion of the Sabir Huns; perhaps, as Tesei suggest, it was composed during the reign of Justinian during a period of conflict between the Sasanian and Roman empires. Though this early form of the *Legend* is now lost, the surviving version, composed shortly after 629, preserves evidence of it, which indicates that a Syriac tradition about the invasion of the Huns as Gog and Magog was taking shape in the early sixth century.

Shoemaker, in arguing that the Gog and Magog tradition in Syriac must have originated earlier than the seventh century, has argued in favor of this point in detail. In this respect he is correct, and the Syriac tradition probably began to take shape in the early sixth century.¹³⁶ He also plausibly suggests that this earlier version came to be known in Arabia and inspired the story of the imprisonment of *Ya'juj* and *Ma'juj* (Gog and Magog) by *Dhul-Qarnayn* in chapter 18 of the Qur'an.¹³⁷ If true, this means that by the early sixth century a new element of the legend had been adopted: the story that the armies of Gog and Magog had been imprisoned behind Alexander's gate.

III.2: The Development of Alexander's Gate

The idea that Gog and Magog are imprisoned behind the Gates of the North seems to appear for the first time in the *Alexander Legend*. This element draws on a tradition that was common in the ancient Roman world, that Alexander built a gate or mountain barrier in the north to hold back barbarian peoples. Still, the *Alexander Legend* is the first known work to set the Gate of Alexander in an eschatological context and combine it with the Gog and Magog story. A crucial point overlooked in earlier scholarship is that before the appearance of the *Syriac Alexander Legend*, the people imprisoned by Alexander were mundane, real world "barbarians." The idea that Alexander imprisoned peoples identified with the Biblical Gog and Magog was a later development, first attested in Syriac literature.¹³⁸

¹³⁶ Here I emend the position I advocated in Bonura, "Where did the Legend of the Last Emperor Originate?" 80, that there is no evidence of this tradition before the seventh century; there remains no direct evidence, but Shoemaker does provide good circumstantial evidence that some version existed in the sixth century.

¹³⁷ Shoemaker, *The Apocalypse of Empire*, 80–84. Shoemaker, who doubts that much of the Qur'an was the work of the historical Muhammad, equivocates on this point, but if the traditional dating of the Qur'an is retained, it seems to me hard to deny that some form of the *Syriac Alexander Legend* must have been circulating before the victory of Heraclius over the Persians c. 628.

¹³⁸ For example, Shoemaker, "The *Tiburtine Sibyl*, the Last Emperor, and the Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition," 238–240, assumes that the idea that Alexander imprisoned Gog and Magog could have originated as early as the time of Josephus. Shoemaker, *The Apocalypse of Empire*, 198 n.112, responding to objections to this that I raised elsewhere, says: "I see no reason to presume, as Bonura seemingly does, that while it was possible (or there was some good reason) for the *Syriac Alexander Legend* to combine these traditions in the seventh century it was not possible (or there was no good reason) for the author of the *Tiburtine Sibyl*...to have done so [in the fourth

The first association of a mountain gate with Alexander the Great can be found in Josephus' *Jewish War* (c. 75 AD). Here Josephus describes a recent rebellion in Hyrcania, the territory on the southern shore of the Caspian Sea, against the rule of the Parthian dynasty ruling Persia at the time. The rebellious Hyrcanians, Josephus states, controlled the mountain pass "which the King Alexander had shut with iron gates," thus obstructing the invasions of barbarian tribes. However, the Hyrcanians had allowed the Alans, a tribe Josephus identifies with the Scythians, to pass through the gates so that they could launch a devastating raid upon their mutual Parthian enemy.¹³⁹

It is unclear what fortifications Josephus had in mind here. There were numerous fortifications around the Caspian Sea in antiquity. On the western side of the Caspian, in the Caucasus Mountains, the Dariel and Derbent passes were fortified probably long before the time of Alexander. On the eastern side of the Caspian, the Great Wall of Gorgan extended from the shores of the Caspian to the mountains of northeastern Iran.¹⁴⁰

It is important to note that Josephus' account of the Alan tribe moving through the gates of Alexander is presented as a historical episode, one that took place just a few years before Josephus recorded it. Given that, as we have seen, Josephus asserted that the Scythians were descended from the Biblical Magog, some scholars, viewing the Alan episode in Josephus in a hindsight colored by the later traditions, have suggested that Josephus saw the Alan raid as the fulfillment of Ezekiel's prophecy about Gog and Magog.¹⁴¹ Rather, Josephus simply described a notable recent conflict in the Parthian Empire, and located the origin of Alan raiders by referencing a mountain pass with a legendary history.

Pliny the Elder (d. 79 AD), a contemporary of Josephus, in his *Natural History* (VI.15), addresses "a mistake of many people" (*error multorum*) by which they confused the Caspian Gates, on the eastern side of the Caspian Sea in Central Asia, with the Caucasian Gates on the

century]." My point here, however, is that the *Tiburtine Sibyl* was written either in Greek or Latin, and the combination of the invasion of Gog and Magog with Alexander's wall appears to be a distinctly Syriac innovation.

¹³⁹ Josephus, *The Jewish War*, 7.244-246: Τὸ δὲ τῶν Ἀλανῶν ἔθνος ὅτι μὲν εἰσι Σκύθαι περὶ τὸν Τάναϊν καὶ τὴν Μαῖωτιν λίμνην κατοικοῦντες, πρότερόν ποιν δεδηλώκαμεν, κατὰ τοὺς χρόνους διανοηθέντες εἰς τὴν Μηδίαν καὶ προσωτέρω ταύτης ἔτι καθ' ἄρπαγὴν ἐμβαλεῖν τῷ βασιλεῖ τῶν Ὑρκανῶν διαλέγονται· τῆς παρόδου γὰρ οὗτος δεσπότης ἐστίν, ἣν ὁ βασιλεὺς Ἀλέξανδρος πύλαις σιδηραῖς κλειστήν ἐποίησε.

¹⁴⁰ The Wall of Gorgan was conventionally known as *Sadd-ī Iskandar*, the "Wall of Alexander," though this was likely a medieval development, and not the origin, of the legend about Alexander's great gates to which Josephus alludes. See Touraj Daryaee, "If these Walls Could Speak: The Barrier of Alexander, Wall of Darband and Other Defensive Moats," *Eurasiatica*, vol. 5 (2016), 79–88.

¹⁴¹ For example Friedrich Pfister, *Alexander der Grosse in den Offenbarungen der Griechen, Juden, Mohammedaner und Christen* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1956), 319–327; and Károly Czeglédy, "Syriac Legend Concerning Alexander the Great," *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, vol. 7 (1957), 234, who states: "although the above-quoted two references [in Josephus] to the iron gates [of Alexander] and to the Scythian descendants of Magog are apparently unrelated, we could advance to the further assumption, that already in the mind of Josephus, the apocalyptic people confined by Alexander the Great were identical with the Scythians." In contrast, a correct view is articulated by Sverre Bøe, *Gog and Magog*, 222: "Josephus does not combine his historical note about the Scythian tribe called the Alani and Alexander's Wall with the biblical Gog and Magog. Nor does he signify any eschatological overtones to this point of his report." E. J. van Donzel, Andrea B. Schmidt, and Claudia Ott, *Gog and Magog in Early Eastern Christian and Islamic Sources: Sallam's Quest for Alexander's Wall* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 9–11, come to the same conclusion

western side of the Caspian Sea. The only useful information to distinguish the two fortifications, says Pliny, came “from the companions of the deeds of Alexander the Great” (*comitatu rerum alexandri magni*). It is possible that one of the many accounts written by men who accompanied Alexander on his campaigns, none of which survive, mentioned some Achaemenid Persian fortifications, or even suggested that Alexander played some part in renovating them, and this may be the origin of the legend of Alexander’s gate that was in place by the end of the first century AD.

After the Great Hunnic raid of 395, the people obstructed by Alexander’s gate came to be identified with the Huns. In one of his letters, a eulogy for the lady Fabiola written in 399, Jerome records that the saintly woman, who had been living in Bethlehem, had returned to Rome four years earlier in part because of the approaching Hun armies. Jerome states: “the hordes of Huns poured forth from furthest Maeotis, between the icy Tanais River and the savage people of the Massagetae, where the gates of Alexander hold back ferocious peoples behind the Caucasus cliffs.”¹⁴² Like Josephus, Jerome seems to have believed that there was a gate that Alexander had built (which he locates in the Caucasus Mountains). Also like Josephus, Jerome elsewhere identifies the Scythian peoples of Greek geographers with the Biblical Gog.¹⁴³ Nonetheless, nowhere does he suggest that the invasion of the Huns had anything to do with the Biblical prophecies about Gog and Magog.

This tradition of Alexander’s gate remained well known in the late ancient Mediterranean world up to the seventh century. Isidore of Seville, in his *Etymologies*, mentions Alexander’s Gate, but again it is unconnected with Gog and Magog (whom, as we have seen, he associated with the Goths), and he follows Jerome’s wording closely:

The Hugnians were formerly called Huns, and afterwards—after the name of their king—Avars, and they first lived in farthest Maeotis, between the icy Tanais and the savage peoples of the Massagetes. Then, with their nimble horses, they burst forth from the cliffs of the Caucasus, where Alexander’s Gates had been keeping the fierce nations back.¹⁴⁴

Thus, Isidore still associated the people behind Alexander’s gate with the Huns, but updated the story by claiming that they were also called the Avars, as in the seventh century the Avars were the most threatening and prominent nomadic steppe tribe.

¹⁴² Jerome, *Epistle 77*, in *Sancti Eusebii Hieronymi Epistulae, pars 2*, ed. Isidorus Hilberg, and Margit Kamptner (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1996), 45: *Ab ultima Maeotide inter glaciale Tanain et Massagetarum inmanes populos, ubi Caucasi rupibus feras gentes Alexandri claustra cohibent, erupisse Hunnorum examina.*

¹⁴³ Jerome, in his c. 411 commentary, *Commentariorum in Hiezechielem, libri XIV*, ed. Francois Glorie (Turnhout: Brepols, 1964), 525, mentions: “The people the Jews and the judaizers among us know Gog are the Scythians” (*Judaei et nostri judaizantes putant Gog gentes esse Scythicas*).

¹⁴⁴ Isidore of Seville, *The Etymologies*, IX.ii.66; ed. Wallace R. Lindsay, *Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi Etymologiarum sive originum: Libri XX* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1911), vol. 1, 352; translated in Stephen Barney, W. J. Lewis, J. A. Beach, and Oliver Berghof, *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 195: *Hugnos antea Hunnos vocatos, postremo a rege suo Avars appellatos, qui prius in ultima Maeotide inter glaciale Tanaim et Massagetarum inmanes populos habitaverunt. Deinde pernicious equis Caucasi rupibus, feras gentes Alexandri claustra cohibente, eruperunt.*

None of these authors appears to be familiar with the idea that the barbarian peoples beyond the gate built by Alexander would fulfill the prophecy of Gog and Magog in the end times. Indeed, if Alexander had imprisoned certain tribes of the Scythians or Huns behind a great gate to keep them away from civilization, it stood to reason that those tribes would not be the same ones that, as Gog and Magog, would invade the civilized world at the end of time. After all, they were imprisoned. It took a new innovation—one for which there is no evidence before the seventh century—that God would open Alexander’s gate at the end of time, in order to merge the two traditions. It is likely that that development took place not in Latin or Greek, as several scholars have asserted, and not in the fourth century, but in the sixth century in the *Syriac Alexander Legend*.¹⁴⁵

This innovation probably took place because the notion of a gate built by Alexander fit well with the *Syriac Alexander Legend*’s solution to the question of the fourth kingdom’s identity. As we have seen, the *Syriac Alexander Legend* makes Alexander the Great the founder of the “Kingdom of the Greeks and the Romans,” building on Aphrahat’s understanding that the fourth kingdom of Daniel consisted in Alexander’s successors and the Romans after them. By locating the Huns of Gog and Magog behind Alexander’s gate, and by making Alexander the source of the prophecy about their escape, the *Alexander Legend* builds a neat eschatological system around Alexander the Great, and one which can be suitably communicated in the genre it is written, as an Alexander romance. Thus, the story that the savage peoples of Gog and Magog will breach of Alexander’s gate by did not originate in a Greek or Latin apocalypse of the fourth century, but in an Alexander romance that sought to locate Alexander in a system of Syriac eschatology originating in Aphrahat.

III.3: The Eschatological Invasion and the Eschatological System of Aphrahat

With the distinctly Syriac genesis of the story of Gog and Magog breaching Alexander’s gate established, it is now possible to move on and explore how the author of the *Syriac Alexander Legend* used the story to support his Aphrahatian understanding of Rome’s eschatological destiny. In the *Alexander Legend* the Huns stand in for Ezekiel’s armies from Magog, and so the Kingdom of the Greek and Romans act as the Jews in the Book of Ezekiel, implying that they had become a new chosen people of God. While Christian supersession of Judaism is a common theme in Christian thought, the notion that the Roman Empire had inherited the status of the Jews is less common. Such an idea was gaining traction in Byzantine thought in the sixth and seventh century.¹⁴⁶ Accordingly, statements such as this in the *Alexander*

¹⁴⁵ Pace Shoemaker, “The *Tiburtine Sibyl*, the Last Emperor, and the Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition,” 238–240. Shoemaker, *The Apocalypse of Empire*, 198 n.112, responding to my assertion of this point elsewhere, says: “I see no reason to presume, as Bonura seemingly does, that while it was possible (or there was some good reason) for the *Syriac Alexander Legend* to combine these traditions in the seventh century it was not possible (or there was no good reason) for the author of the *Tiburtine Sibyl*...to have done so [in the fourth century].” My point here, however, is that the *Tiburtine Sibyl* was written either in Greek or Latin, and the combination of the invasion of Gog and Magog with Alexander’s wall appears to be a distinctly Syriac innovation.

¹⁴⁶ See Shay Eshel, *The Concept of the Elect Nation in Byzantium* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), esp. 26–39.

Legend has led modern scholars to regard it as a work of imperial propaganda. However, as discussed above, Aphrahat had made such a suggestion centuries earlier, when he asserted that the Romans had inherited the world rulership that had originally been promised to the Jews.

The *Alexander Legend* appears to have adopted Aphrahat's view that the Roman Empire had replaced the Jews as God's chosen kingdom. For this reason, the invasion of the Huns of Gog and Magog plays a vital part in the destiny of the kingdom. Thus, in the prophecy that Alexander inscribes on the gate in the *Alexander Legend*, the Huns, led by Gog and Magog, will destroy all earthly authority except for the Roman Empire:

And when the Huns have gone forth according to God's command, the kingdoms of the Huns, and of the Persians and of the Arabs—the twenty-four kingdoms that are written in this book— will come from the ends of the heavens and they will fall upon one another, and the earth will putrefy in the blood and shit of men. Then the Kingdom of the Greeks will stir, and it will come and take a hammer of iron in its right hand, and a hammer of brass in its left, and the Kingdom of Greeks will smite the hammers one upon the other. And just as iron is melted by fire and brass boils in the flame, so will the power of the kingdoms melt away before the might of the Kingdom of the Greeks which is that of the Romans.¹⁴⁷

Just as Aphrahat had promised his audience that the looming Persian attack on the Roman Empire was doomed to fail because the Roman Empire acts as a steward of Christ's kingship and thus the recipient of God's protection, the *Alexander Legend* likewise suggests that the Roman Empire will be protected from the Huns for the same reason. It must remain standing, so that it can return the power Christ had loaned to it when he returns at the second coming (prophesied by the Persian king's astrologers at the end of the *Legend*). In this sense, the eschatological invasion allows the *Alexander Legend* to reconcile the prophecies of Daniel and of Ezekiel.

Thus, according to the *Alexander Legend*, after all other kingdoms are annihilated, primarily at the hands of the Huns, the Kingdom of the Romans will rule the world. Indeed, King Alexander continues his prophecy by stating that after the Persians and Huns annihilate one another,

...what remains of them the Kingdom of the Romans will destroy. And my kingdom—which is called the house of Alexander the son of Philip the Macedonian—will go forth and devastate the earth and the ends of the heavens; and there will not be found any among the nations and tongues who dwell in creation that will stand before the Kingdom of the Romans.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁷ Budge, *The History of Alexander the Great*, 269–270 (English translation on ibid, 155; I have modified this translation):
...what remains of them the Kingdom of the Romans will destroy. And my kingdom—which is called the house of Alexander the son of Philip the Macedonian—will go forth and devastate the earth and the ends of the heavens; and there will not be found any among the nations and tongues who dwell in creation that will stand before the Kingdom of the Romans.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 270; (English translation on ibid, 155; I have modified this translation):
...what remains of them the Kingdom of the Romans will destroy. And my kingdom—which is called the house of Alexander the son of Philip the Macedonian—will go forth and devastate the earth and the ends of the heavens; and there will not be found any among the nations and tongues who dwell in creation that will stand before the Kingdom of the Romans.¹⁴⁸

Thus, since the Huns sweep away every other kingdom except that of the Roman Empire, the Romans will rule all the world. They are the last kingdom not only in the sequence of kingdoms from the Book of Daniel, but also literally the last kingdom left on the earth. Though this destruction of all other kingdoms goes beyond anything Aphrahat had predicted, there is a logic to it.

As we have seen, one of the most vexing questions concerning political eschatology in the works of Syriac authors, who largely inhabited the borderlands between the Roman and Sasanian empires, was the division of political authority between the two powers. For Aphrahat's eschatology concerning the Roman Empire to make sense, it required Rome to have a claim of universality it lacked in this region of the world. Indeed, in the sixth century and, even more so in the early seventh century, the Sasanian Persian Empire was exhibiting a renewed ability to challenge the Roman Empire militarily. Moreover, the Arab kingdoms of the Ghassanids and the Lakhmids, semi-autonomous vassals of the Roman and Persian empires, respectively, reached the height of their powers in the border regions in this same period, further complicating the political landscape.

The invasion of the Huns, in fulfillment of the prophecy of Gog and Magog from Ezekiel, thus provided a neat solution. All these other powers will be swept away, leaving only the Roman Empire, which must survive as the Aphrahatian proxy for Christ's kingdom and in order to hand their kingdom over to Christ at his second coming. Whereas in the Greek and Latin common political-eschatological tradition there was no real place for Gog and Magog, in Syriac eschatology they play a key role. The annihilation of all other powers by the Huns of Gog and Magog becomes fundamental to the *Legend's* understanding of how the Roman Empire functions as the fourth and last of the Danielic kingdoms.

It appears that, thanks to the Syriac *Alexander Legend*, the invasion of Gog and Magog through Alexander's gate became a widely adopted (and adapted) tradition in Syriac apocalyptic literature. As we shall see in the next chapter, numerous Syriac sources adopted this tradition. Two Syriac works from the first half of the seventh century—another Alexander romance, conventionally called the *Alexander Poem*, and the *Syriac Apocalypse of Daniel*—describe the breaching of Alexander's gate by the savage peoples (though in these two works they are not called Huns, but, ܐܓܘܓ ܡܥܘܓܐ; the "race" or "people" of "Agog and Magog"). In the late seventh century, a Syriac apocalypse attributed to Ephrem the Syrian and the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* also include the eschatological breaching of Alexander's gate by the armies of Gog and Magog. This Syriac tradition appears to have also influenced Chapter 18 (83–101) of the Qur'an, wherein a man called in Arabic *Dhul-Qarnayn* ("the one with two horns") travels to the land where the sun rises, and builds a wall in a mountain pass to keep back Gog and Magog (*Ya'juj wa-Ma'juj*); he prophesies that at the end of time Gog and Magog will break free and devastate the world.

Thus it was that Aphrahat's pro-Roman political eschatology entered a mainstream of Syriac apocalyptic thought. Before its transmission to Greek and Latin via the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, this scenario was distinctly Syriac (though it evidently did migrate

independently into Arabic by the early seventh century, which is not surprising considering the close linguistic and cultural connections between Syriac and Arabic). In this way, Aphrahat's concept of Rome's eschatological role became imbedded in Syriac eschatology, and transmitted by Syriac apocalypses by authors and for readers who may never have known of Aphrahat in the first place. It was probably in this form that it was received by the author of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*.

Chapter Conclusions

The common political-eschatological scenario encountered in previous chapters in Latin and Greek did not translate well into Syriac. The four-kingdom scheme from the Book of Daniel, which was central to the common political-eschatological scenario, did not have the same meaning in Syriac. The preterist interpretation of Daniel championed by the Antiochene school, which held that all of the prophecies in Daniel were fulfilled by the Maccabean revolt and the birth of Christ, remained popular among Syriac authors, and the Book of Daniel in the Syriac Peshitta included headings or glosses that likewise supported only the preterist interpretation. The other major source for the common political-eschatological scenario, the Book of Revelation, was not regarded as canonical (and indeed, the first known Syriac translation of it did not appear until the later sixth or early seventh century). Finally, the idea that the Roman Empire was the fourth and last in a series of world monarchies was undermined by the presence of a powerful Persian Empire.

Nonetheless, a political-eschatological scenario, one very different than that found in Greek and Latin, did develop within the Syriac tradition. This Syriac political-eschatological scenario originated in the fourth-century eschatological writings of Aphrahat (specifically his Fifth Demonstration), which assigned the Roman Empire an important positive role in the eschatological events. Aphrahat argued that the Jews had forfeited the kingdom promised to them in the Book of Daniel, and instead the Romans had inherited this kingdom. Nonetheless, the Roman kingdom remained a continuation of the fourth kingdom of Daniel that held power with God's approval until the second coming of Christ. At the second coming, the Romans would willingly yield back the kingdom, and Christ would inaugurate the eternal fifth kingdom.

Aphrahat's eschatological ideas were further developed in later centuries, as evidenced by the *Christian Topography* of Cosmas Indicopleustes and the *Syriac Alexander Legend*. The latter developed a more complete eschatological scenario. It also made significant use of the invasion of Gog from Magog prophesied in the Book of Ezekiel. Thus, it suggested that an invasion of barbarian peoples locked behind the barrier built by Alexander would destroy all kingdoms except for the Roman Empire, which would then fulfill the destiny promised by Aphrahat by yielding back its authority to Christ.

This eschatological scenario was a product of the world of Syriac literature and Biblical exegesis. It would find its way into medieval Greek and Latin apocalyptic literature, but only because the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* transmitted these ideas when it was translated in the early eighth century.

CHAPTER 5: THE CRISIS OF EMPIRE IN SYRIAC CHRISTIANITY, AND ITS ESCHATOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES

Introduction: Syriac Apocalypses in the Seventh Century

The seventh century saw a sudden outpouring of Syriac apocalyptic literature. Whereas very few historical apocalypses survive in Syriac from before this period, there are at least five extant historical apocalypses that date to the seventh century (or within a decade or so of the seventh century—dating is not always exact).¹ As Javier Francisco Martinez has noted in his study of Syriac apocalyptic: “A good number of Syriac apocalypses are related to the great historical crises of the seventh century.”² Moreover, eschatological concerns are a major theme in other genres of literature produced in Syriac in that century (such as Alexander romances and world histories).

Within the seventh century, the most fruitful period for Syriac political eschatology appears to have been the last decade of the century. This is the period when the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*—which will be a main concern of the next chapter of this dissertation—was composed. However, it also saw the composition of several other apocalypses, and other works concerned with the future and end of history. These documents have been studied as valuable sources for Christian attitudes in the period, though the actual content of their eschatological message is usually given little attention.

Unfortunately, modern scholarship tends to mischaracterize the bulk of the apocalypses from the late seventh century. They have often been read, like a great deal of other late antique Christian eschatology, as pro-Roman sources meant to legitimize imperial rule, or to promise its return to regions and people that had been conquered by the Roman Empire’s adversaries. According to Gerrit J. Reinink, who has edited several Syriac sources from this period, the apocalypses of the late seventh century were written to assure Christians under Arab rule that the Byzantine emperor in Constantinople would soon liberate them and punish anyone who had converted to Islam.³ According to Stephen Shoemaker, these apocalypses “portend

¹ These five are: the *Syriac Apocalypse of Daniel* (early seventh-century), the *Homily on the End* (or “Pseudo-Ephrem”) (c. 690), the *Apocalypse of John the Little* (c. 690s), the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* (c. early 690s), and the *Edessene Apocalypse* (c. 690s). Bibliographic information on these apocalypses will be provided in the relevant sections below. A chart of the late seventh-century apocalypses can be found below, at the being of part III).

² Francisco Javier Martinez, “The Apocalyptic Genre in Syriac: The World of Pseudo-Methodius,” in *IV Symposium Syriacum 1984: Literary Genres in Syriac Literature*, ed. H. J. W. Drijvers, R. Lavenant, C. Molenberg, et al (Rome: Pontificium Institutum studiorum orientalium, 1987), 340.

³ Gerrit J. Reinink, “East Syrian Historiography in Response to the Rise of Islam: The Case of John Bar Penkaye’s *Ktābā d-Rēš Mellē*,” in *Redefining Christian Identity: Cultural Interaction in the Middle East since the Rise of Islam*, ed. J. J. van Ginkel; H. L. Murre-van den Berg; T. M. van Lint (Leuven: Peeters, 2005), 88–89; idem,

eschatological fulfillment and deliverance through the Roman Empire's victory and sovereignty."⁴

In the case of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, and the closely related *Edessene Apocalypse*, these characterizations are largely accurate. However, in painting with a broad brush these scholars mischaracterize all the other contemporary apocalypses. In fact, with the exception of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* and the *Edessene Apocalypse*, eschatological writings from the seventh century were actually either suspicious toward empire or simply ignored it.

This, therefore, was a new phenomenon. These works did not ignore or downplay eschatology as had the preterist readings of Daniel common in the Syriac tradition. Nonetheless, their perspectives contrasted sharply with the views we have seen in the previous chapter in the *Fifth Demonstration* of Aphrahat and in the *Syriac Alexander Legend*. Syriac eschatology of the seventh century largely resuscitated the anti-imperial tendencies of apocalyptic writing from the Hellenistic and early Christian periods. Why did this sudden change take place in Syriac eschatological thought?

This chapter will show that the seventh-century Syriac apocalypses and other eschatological sources were responding to major changes that permanently reconfigured the political and religious landscape of the near eastern heartland of Syriac Christianity. It will suggest that a crisis of empire engulfed Syriac Christianity in this period, and this crisis is crucial to understanding changes in eschatological thought.⁵ The Syriac crisis of empire had its roots in the Christological controversies that began in the fifth century AD, which bitterly divided Eastern Christianity. Syriac Christians were divided into three predominant camps, all of which claimed to be the true "orthodox," and two of which rejected the authority of the imperial-sponsored church of the Roman Empire. This Syriac crisis of empire began in earnest in the sixth century with the Eastern Roman state's repression of the dissident churches. Though the persecution of Christianity by the Sasanian state began to subside in this period, nonetheless many Syriac Christians came to be alienated by both of the empires. As a result, Syriac Christians began increasingly to build identities that were neither Roman nor Sasanian, but instead stressed that they stood apart from the great earthly empires.

Subsequent events in the seventh century accelerated this process. This century saw tumultuous violence, as the rivalry between the Eastern Roman and Sasanian Persian empires culminated in a last, extremely destructive war. In the wake of this conflict, Arab invaders from Hijaz dismembered the two empires. The new Arab rulers soon plunged into a bout of civil wars. Syriac Christians, buffeted in these conflicts, came increasingly to see inter-imperial rivalry as a danger, and viewed all empires—Roman, Persian, and Arab—as hostile forces.

"From Apocalyptic to Apologetics: Early Syriac Reactions to Islam," in *Endzeiten: Eschatologie in den monotheistischen Weltreligionen*, edited by W. Brandes and F. Schmieder (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008), 86; idem

⁴ Stephen Shoemaker, *The Apocalypse of Empire: Imperial Eschatology in Late Antiquity and Early Islam* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 87.

⁵ I borrow this term from Phil Booth, *Crisis of Empire: Doctrine and Dissent at the End of Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), who writes about such a crisis in Chalcedonian Christianity in the seventh century. I suggest that a similar crisis took place earlier in non-Chalcedonian Christianity.

In this environment, Aphrahat's eschatological glorification of the Roman Empire carried little weight. In its place, Syriac Christians could continue to rely on the safe preterist reading of Daniel, which held that all the prophecies had been fulfilled already. Nonetheless, some Syriac Christians responded with anti-imperial eschatology. Syriac Christians came to develop a sense of history similar to that of the Jews of the Exilic and Hellenistic periods who had composed much of the prophetic literature of the Old Testament. In the face of mighty empires, they looked to the eschatological kingdom to come (though, in contrast to the ancient Jews, they did not believe that this would be an earthly kingdom, but rather the heavenly kingdom of Christ). Some, ignored the earthly kingdoms, or minimized their importance and predicted their downfall. Others, as we shall see, sought to use the Book of Daniel and other Old Testament prophecy to build a model by which they understand the course of political history, where it was going, and why God had allowed his chosen people (now identified as the "orthodox" church, a status each Syriac-speaking church claimed for themselves) to suffer occupation and humiliation at the hands of the sinful empires.

This chapter will provide a historical narrative of the religious and political changes that took place within seventh-century Northern Mesopotamia combined with close analysis of eschatological sources from the period. It will demonstrate that, contrary to the arguments of Shoemaker and Reinink, these sources reflect a Syriac crisis of empire and exhibited deep ambivalence toward the Roman Empire. Only once this is understood can the resuscitation of the radically pro-Roman eschatology of Aphrahat by the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* (explored in the next chapter) be understood in its proper context.

Part I: The Church in the Shadow of Empire

While the previous chapter of this dissertation already dealt with the complicated and often divided loyalties of Syriac Christians in the fourth through sixth centuries, this section will follow developments from the sixth to the end of the seventh centuries. It will show that the theological and political situation of Syriac Christians became ever more complex, and loyalty to the Roman Empire became gradually more difficult for them.

The church councils of Ephesus (in 432 AD) and Chalcedon (451) had sought to define Christ's nature, but they generated controversy that divided Eastern Christianity. By the beginning of the seventh century, Syriac Christians had split into three primary rival churches. Some, called "Melkites," remained loyal to the imperial church with its Chalcedonian theology (though they were divided by further schism in middle of the seventh century over Heraclius' monothelite doctrine—on this, see below, chapter 7). A larger number joined the break away Syriac Orthodox Church, which rejected the theology of the Council of Chalcedon in favor of Miaphysite Christology. Many others, especially those who lived in the Sasanian Empire, were members of the Church of the East, which rejected the Roman councils and especially objected to the Council of Ephesus.

I.1: The Church of the East: Negotiating Roman and Persian Identity

In the fourth century, Aphrahat, who was a subject of the Sasanian Empire, expressed unalloyed enthusiasm for the Roman Empire and denigrated his own Persian rulers. The Roman Empire, for Aphrahat, was the most important political entity because it was the Christian empire. Aphrahat was the product of a time in which Christians were persecuted by the Persian state, and before any schisms had developed between the Christians of the Persians Empire and those who inhabited the Roman Empire. Over the next few centuries, however, much changed.

Over time, after its official organization at the Council of Seleucia-Ctesiphon in 410 AD, the Christian church in Persia evolved into a centralized, hierarchical organization quite separate from the church in the Roman Empire. It developed its own distinct theology (derived from Antiochene thought), emphasizing a dyophysite Christology (that is, understanding of Christ as having two distinct natures—both man and God). Though derisively called the “Nestorian” church, the Church of the East was more heavily influenced by Nestorius’ teacher, Theodore of Mopsuestia.⁶ As explored in the previous chapter (chapter 4, section I.3), the Church of the East experienced alternating periods of persecution and official support by the Sasanian state. Nonetheless, the Christians of Persia also maintained a complicated relationship with the Roman Empire, especially after the third ecumenical council, the Council of Ephesus held in 431, which had anathematized Nestorius, a student of Antiochene Christian theology, and dyophysite Christology as Nestorius had expressed it.

Though the Council of Chalcedon in 451 moderated the Christological position of the Roman church in an attempted compromise, a century later, Emperor Justinian, in an attempt to appease the Miaphysites, anathematized Theodore of Mopsuestia, and certain works of Theodoret of Cyrrus and Ibas of Edessa (provoking the Three Chapters Controversy in the Roman Empire). All of three, and especially Theodore, had been advocates of Antiochene theology and were leading luminaries of the Church of the East. The fifth ecumenical council, held in Constantinople in 553, confirmed these anathemas. In short, the third and fifth councils declared that the Christian teachers most revered within the Church of the East were heretics.

However, the ecumenical councils of the Roman Empire had no standing in the Persian Empire.⁷ Thus, a breach opened, and slowly grew, between the theological positions of the church in the Roman Empire and that of the Church of the East. In 489 the theological school at Edessa was pushed out by the Roman government for its Antiochene teachings and returned to Nisibis, within Persian borders. By the beginning of the sixth century this school reached a

⁶ Sebastian Brock, “The ‘Nestorian’ Church: A Lamentable Misnomer,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, vol. 78, no. 3 (1996) (special edition titled *The Church of the East: Life and Thought*, ed. J.F. Coakley, Kenneth Parry Parry), 23–35; Nikolai N. Seleznyov, “Nestorius of Constantinople: Condemnation, Suppression, Veneration With Special Reference to the Role of His Name in East-Syriac Christianity,” *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies*, vol. 62, issue 3–4 (2010), 165–190; Wilhelm Baum and Dietmar W. Winkler, *The Church of the East: A Concise History* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003), esp. 19–21.

⁷ Sebastian Brock, “The Christology of the Church of the East,” in *Traditions and Heritage of the Christian East*, ed. D. Afinogenov and A. Muraviev (Moscow: Izdatelstvo, 1996), 161.

newly level of prominence under the protection of the Persian kings, educating generations of young men in Antiochene theology and preparing them for careers in the Church of the East.⁸

It should be emphasized that though Antiochene theology was widely taught within the Church of the East, up to the seventh century the Church of the East was defined not theologically, but simply as the Christian churches in the Persian Empire and further east, which were under the authority of the *catholicos* of Seleucia-Ctesiphon. This began to change when the Syriac Orthodox Church, with its diametrically opposed Miaphysite Christology, began to make inroads into the Persian Empire in the sixth century. Beginning at the end of the sixth century the Church of the East began to enshrine its Antiochene Christology, and the authority of Theodore of Mopsuestia, in a series of church councils, though there was still a great deal of internal conflict over Christology within the Church of the East into the seventh century.⁹

Beyond theological reasons, other causes led the Syriac-speaking Christians of Persia to gradually grow disenchanted with the Roman Empire. Organized under the hierarchy of the *catholicos* of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, the Christians of the Persian Empire did not need the Roman Empire and could forge an independent identity. As Kyle Smith has summarized:

Before the sixth century, because Christians had not yet begun to articulate a *Persian* Christian identity, they may have been able to imagine their identity only as Roman. Yet by the sixth century, once theological, ecclesiastical, and political divisions had further separated Christians in the East from their co-religionists in the West, the Christians of Persia could more readily ignore the Roman Empire and begin to create a religious identity that was tied to the holy places in the land of Iran. In doing so, they could begin to categorize Christianity not as a foreign cult of “Roman captives” but as a system of worship that was fully imbricated within a local Iranian milieu and Persian discourse of religiosity.¹⁰

Thus, the sympathy toward and idealization of the Roman Empire expressed by the Persian Christian Aphrahat in the fourth century would no longer have been common among the sixth-century Christians of the Sasanian Empire.

Still, tensions continued into the seventh century. Henana of Adiabene famously tried to reconcile the teachings of Theodore of Mopsuestia and the Church of the East with the theology of Chalcedon and thus bringing the church closer in line with the church of the Roman Empire. Henana was excommunicated for his teachings by the *catholicos*, but thanks to the support of the medical community in the court of Khusrau II, Henana stayed on as the director of the school

⁸ For the School of Nisibis, see Arthur Vööbus, *History of the School of Nisibis* (Leuven: Peeters, 1985); Adam Becker, *Sources for the History of the School of Nisibis* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008); Gerrit J. Reinink, “‘Edessa Grew Dim and Nisibis Shone Forth’: The School of Nisibis at the Transition of the Sixth-Seventh Century,” in *Centers of Learning*, ed. J. W. Drijvers and A. A. MacDonald (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 77–89.

⁹ See Gerrit J. Reinink, “Tradition and the Formation of the ‘Nestorian’ Identity in Sixth- to Seventh-Century Iraq,” in *Church History and Religious Culture*, vol. 89 (2009), 217–250.

¹⁰ Kyle Smith, *Constantine and the Captive Christians of Persia: Martyrdom and Religious Identity in Late Antiquity* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), 152–153.

until his death, though all but a small handful of students abandoned the school as a result.¹¹ In 628, the *catholicos* Isho'yahb II appeared open to a reconciliation of churches proposed by Emperor Heraclius, though hostility among his bishops effectively aborted the attempt.¹²

Nonetheless, Henana and Isho'yahb II were likely outliers. Many members of the Church of the East, such as the theologian Babai the Great (d. 628), understood the Roman Empire as a persecutor of the “orthodox” and moved the church to a well-integrated minority group within the Persian Empire. Such Christians presumably wanted to distance the faith from the Roman Empire, either out of a calculated effort to insulate their community from persecution of the Zoroastrian state, or out of theological outrage at the condemnation by the councils convened by Roman emperors that anathematized the leading lights of the Antiochene school that proved so influential in East Syrian theology.

To some degree this involved a self-representation as Sasanian subjects. When the Sasanian Empire fell, however, all that remained was their identity as East Syrian Christians; that is, as Christians who opposed any notion that Christ has a single nature and so as opponents of the doctrine that God had suffered at the crucifixion or was capable at all of suffering. The Church of the East has never been integrated within a Christian empire, and with the disappearance of the Christian Roman Empire from Northern Mesopotamia in the seventh century, East Syrian Christians were well equipped to deal with life under non-Christian rulers.

I.2: The “Frontier *Politeia*”: The Syriac Orthodox Church

The other great Syriac church, the so-called “Jacobite” or Syriac Orthodox Church, with its Miaphysite theology (asserting a single, unmixed nature for Christ), was born within the Roman Empire. Its origins lay in the opposition to the fourth ecumenical council, the Council of Chalcedon of 451 (which had established that Christ had a human and divine nature mixed in a single union), which adherents of the Alexandrine school interpreted as too much a concession to Antiochene theology. For a long time the Miaphysites (or “monophysites,” as they are called in older scholarship) viewed their creed as the once and future orthodoxy of the Roman Empire. These opponents of Chalcedon widely believed that the emperors would soon accept their views, in the same way that the supporters of the Council of Nicaea had to overcome a brief period of “Arian” emperors before becoming the orthodoxy of the empire. Nonetheless, slowly, over the course of the sixth and seventh centuries such hopes began to fade.

This process did take a very long time. The Miaphysite position, despite its condemnation by the Council of Chalcedon in 451, remained widespread in the empire’s eastern provinces.

¹¹ The most important source for the Church of the East in this period, the *Chronicle of Seert*, ed. (with a French translation) Addai Scher, “Histoire nestorienne inédite: Chronique de Séert. Seconde partie (II),” *Patrologia Orientalis*, vol. 13, no. 4 (1919), 509–512, discusses Henana of Adiabene; on Henana, see also Reinink, “Tradition and the Formation of the ‘Nestorian’ Identity in Sixth- to Seventh-Century Iraq,” 221–228. On the *Chronicle of Seert*, see Philip Wood, *The Chronicle of Seert: Christian Historical Imagination in Late Antique Iraq* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

¹² *Chronicle of Seert*, xcvi; ed. Scher, “Histoire nestorienne inédite: Chronique de Séert. Seconde partie,” 582–583.

Persecution of the Miaphysites by the Roman state did not begin until the sixth century. Miaphysitism even achieved imperial support under Emperor Anastasius (r. 491–518). However, after Anastasius' death, Emperor Justin I (r. 518–527) began a new effort to enforce Chalcedonian orthodoxy.

When Justin came to power in 518, the foremost Miaphysite personality, Severus the Patriarch of Antioch (d. 538), who had been raised to his position as bishop over the traditionally dyophysite see with the backing of the pro-Miaphysite emperor Anastasius, fled to Egypt.¹³ Severus chose exile over arrest and torture by imperial troops. In the following three years, under great pressure from the government in Constantinople, fifty-four other Miaphysite bishops abandoned their sees, fleeing into monastic exile.¹⁴ They were replaced by Chalcedonians appointed from Constantinople. These new bishops in turn expelled vocally Miaphysite monks from their monasteries and began to forcefully impose Chalcedonian Christology.¹⁵

The Chalcedonians likely expected that now with the bishoprics in Chalcedonian hands the Miaphysite movement would wither as its exiled leadership aged and died off.¹⁶ Indeed, instead of forming a unified front against the Chalcedonians, the exiled and beleaguered Miaphysite leaders collapsed into theological infighting. Severus of Antioch, from his exile in Egypt, clashed with a fellow exile, Julian of Halicarnassus (d. c. 528), over the finer details of Christ's nature and the future of their movement, creating a schism that would last centuries (the position of Severus ultimately prevailed, and the "Julianists" came to be regarded as heretics within the Syriac Orthodox Church).

In this moment of great uncertainty, one of the exiled bishops and followers of Severus, John of Tella, began to ordain clergy in around 522/523, and over the next fifteen years created thousands of priests and deacons, first from the displaced non-Chalcedonian monks but later from a growing base of popular support. Living as a nomadic ascetic, he evaded authorities as he established a new church in the lawless borderlands between the Roman and Persian empires.¹⁷ This church rejected as heretics both the Chalcedonian establishment under the Patriarch of Constantinople in Roman lands and the Church of the East under the *catholicos* of Seleucia-Ctesiphon in the Sasanian Empire.

John's priests followed his highly mobile lifestyle, offering the sacraments in portable tent churches so that their supporters throughout the frontier did not need to go to the Chalcedonian-controlled churches.¹⁸ This nomadic "missionary church" naturally appealed to the

¹³ Volker Menze, *Justinian and the Making of the Syrian Orthodox Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 44; rumor spread that the count tasked with arresting him intended to have Severus' tongue cut out.

¹⁴ Volker Menze, "Jacob of Sarug, John of Tella and Paul of Edessa: Ecclesiastical Politics in Osrhoene 519–522," in *Malphono w-Rabo d-Malphone: Studies in Honor of Sebastian P. Brock*, ed. George Kiraz (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2008), 438.

¹⁵ Menze, *Justinian and the Making of the Syrian Orthodox Church*, 106–144; idem, "The *Regula ad Diaconos*: John of Tella, his Eucharistic Ecclesiology and the Establishment of an Ecclesiastical Hierarchy in Exile," *Oriens Christianus*, vol. 9 (2006), 72.

¹⁶ Menze, "The *Regula ad Diaconos*," 71.

¹⁷ Menze, *Justinian and the Making of the Syrian Orthodox Church*, 175–186; idem, "Jacob of Sarug, John of Tella, and Paul of Edessa," 421–438.

¹⁸ Menze, "The *Regula ad Diaconos*," 82.

Arabs and other nomads of the border zone. John of Tella established himself on Mount Sinjar in the Persian Empire and made inroads among Persian Christians, but he was eventually arrested by the Persian authorities, extradited to the Roman Empire, and died in captivity in Antioch in 538. However, his work was taken up by Jacob Baradaeus (d. 578), the bishop of Edessa, under a more centralized organization. For this reason, the Syriac Orthodox Church is referred to, often pejoratively, as the “Jacobite” church. The efforts of John of Tella and Jacob Baradaeus created a parallel church hierarchy outside the imperial “Melkite” church centered on Constantinople.

By the seventh century the Syriac Orthodox Church had made major inroads, particularly outside the Roman Empire. Though in the sixth century the Persians persecuted the Syriac Orthodox as a threat to the legitimacy of the state-supported Church of the East, by the seventh century the Miaphysites had made significant progress in the Sasanian Empire. Khusrau II’s influential physician was a Miaphysite, and his famous Christian wife (immortalized in Persian poetry), Shirin, was born in the Church of the East but converted to the Syriac Orthodox.¹⁹ The Ethiopian kingdom of Axum joined the Syriac Orthodox Church, as did a great many Arabs, including the Ghassanid confederation that guarded the Roman eastern frontier. Sister churches, namely the Armenian Church and the Coptic Church of Egypt, also rejected the Roman Empire’s Chalcedonianism in favor of the Miaphysite position.

Thus, it appeared that the Miaphysitism might indeed emerge as the true orthodoxy in the Roman Empire. However, as time went on, and it expanded outside the Roman Empire—to the Persian Empire, Arabia, and Ethiopia—the Syriac Orthodox Church grew increasingly independent from the Roman Empire. Neither Roman nor Persian, this church could provide a common focus of loyalty to Christians divided between the Byzantine Roman and Sasanian Persian empires. It became the church of the imperial borderlands, a “frontier *politeia*” that built a unified community among the disputed lands and peoples long polarized by Roman and Persian interests.²⁰

Despite the seemingly anti-Roman nature of the Miaphysite project, with its creation of a separate church, it is important to note that the first few generations of its leaders were Roman citizens who did not see themselves as opponents of the empire. Most would have conceived of themselves as loyal subjects of the emperor, laboring to set the empire back on the right course. In the words of the historian Garth Fowden, the founding generation of the Syriac Orthodox Church “no more wished to leave the empire than Constantinople dreamed of expelling them.”²¹

Loyalty to the Roman Empire is a theme that runs through the thought of Severus of Antioch, the forefather of the Syriac Orthodox Church. As Yonatan Moss has demonstrated in a recent monograph: “Rather than break away from the imperial church by setting up a new anti-Chalcedonian hierarchy, Severus maintained the hope of converting the imperial establishment

¹⁹ Wilhelm Baum, *Shirin, A Woman of Late Antiquity: Historical Reality and Literary Effect* (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2004), 41–46.

²⁰ Nathanael J. Andrade, “The Syriac Life of John of Tella and the Frontier *Politeia*,” *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies*, vol. 12, no. 2 (2009), 199–234.

²¹ Garth Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth: Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1993), 127.

back to [Miaphysite] orthodoxy.”²² John of Tella, who began the project of building a parallel church hierarchy might be seen as more of a radical than Severus, and yet even he maintained that he was loyal to the emperor.²³ One of the leaders and best-documented members of the following generation of the Miaphysite movement, John of Ephesus (d. c. 590), maintained roughly the same outlook. John was the author of a church history in Syriac and a collection of hagiographies of Miaphysite holy men, but he also served the imperial government in Constantinople. Philip Wood, in a monograph on the Miaphysite movement, characterizes John of Ephesus thus: “For John, Miaphysitism never ceased to be an orthodoxy in waiting for the Roman empire, and the Roman empire remains the most powerful important force in his history.”²⁴

In the same monograph, however, Wood has explored the very slow but inexorable parting of ways between the increasingly frustrated Syriac Orthodox Church and the Roman Empire. In place of the emperor in Constantinople, the Miaphysites could look to new leaders from the states of the imperial limitrophe. These leaders included Kaleb Ella Atsbeha, the king of Ethiopia, who had been an early supporter of the Miaphysites, and had launched a military campaign ostensibly to rescue Arabian Christians from Jewish persecution in Arabia, and Arab Ghassanid kings, who were pious patrons of the Miaphysite movement.

Such rulers could act as protectors, patrons, and ultimately new models of rulership. As Woods summarizes: “The monopoly of the Roman emperors as sole Christian rulers was broken in this development of Miaphysite political thought, in which an international Miaphysite community that straddled many states and empires sought protectors and adjudicators for its internal schisms.”²⁵ A church without a state posed problems, the solutions to which could be found in the patronage of non-Roman rulers and elites (who were themselves probably attracted to the a more politically neutral form of Christianity that Miaphysitism presented).

Various Roman emperors attempted to the broker a reconciliation with the Miaphysites, but none were effective.²⁶ Others attempted to eliminate the Syriac Orthodox Church through

²² Yonatan Moss, *Incorruptible Bodies: Christology, Society, and Authority in Late Antiquity* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017), 142. Moss in fact associates Severus with a more conciliatory wing, and Julian and with the extremist, separatist wing of the Miaphysite movement. However, as the expected repudiation of Chalcedon and recall of Severus from exile never materialized, Moss argues, a younger generation, embodied by John of Tella, was won over to Julian’s more radical approach, even if, as in the case of John of Tella, in strictly theological matters they followed Severus and condemned Julian as a heretic. Thus for Moss, *ibid.*, 148, John of Tella and the followers he ordained were “Severian in name but Julianist in conviction.”

²³ Menze, *Justinian and the Making of the Syrian Orthodox Church*, 231; Andrade, “The Syriac Life of John of Tella,” 203–204; Andrew Palmer, “Saint’s Lives with a Difference: Elijah on John of Tella (†538) and Joseph on Theodotos of Amida (†698),” in *Literary Genres in Syriac Literature*, ed. H. J. W. Drijvers (Rome: Pont. institutum studiorum orientalium, 1987), 203–216, esp. 209–211.

²⁴ Philip Wood, “*We Have No King but Christ*”: *Christian Political Thought in Greater Syria on the Eve of the Arab conquest (c.400-585)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2011), 256. For the radical audience of John of Ephesus, see Menze, *Justinian and the Making of the Syrian Orthodox Church*, 246.

²⁵ Wood, *We Have No King but Christ*, 20.

²⁶ Fowden, *From Empire to Commonwealth*, 126: “The attempt to find compromise formulas to reconcile Chalcedonians and [Miaphysites] remained one of [Constantinople’s] highest political priorities up to the Arab conquests.”

state persecution. Emperor Heraclius, in the first half of the seventh century, at first attempted to end the schism by propagating his compromise monothelite doctrine, but when this failed to gain support among the Miaphysites, he attempted to stamp out Miaphysitism. These efforts not only failed, but served to radicalize the Miaphysite Christian hostility toward the empire.²⁷

Finally, the Arab conquests largely put an end to the attempts by the Roman government to reach a solution to the Miaphysite problem. The most stridently Miaphysite regions of the Roman Empire were those that were lost to the Arabs. Though the Syriac Orthodox by no means welcomed the invaders, it gradually became clear that the church was the primary beneficiary of the loss of Roman state support for the Chalcedonians and the tacit support the Persians had given the Church of the East. In the more level playing field under the Arabs, the Syriac Orthodox Church flourished for generations.

I.3: Imperial Identity and Syriac Ethnogenesis

Syriac Christian members of both the Church of the East and of the Syriac Orthodox Church gradually decoupled their Christian identity from a Roman identity. Both churches rejected the definition of orthodoxy promulgated by the emperors in Constantinople, and found support from non-Roman rulers. The Arab conquests marked a major turning point for both churches, since they resulted in the Roman Empire becoming all the more remote, and more of the remaining ties to it were severed.

The uncertainty these developments generated and the improvisation they demanded is evident, for example, in the life of the late seventh-century polymath of the Syriac Orthodox Church, Jacob of Edessa (ܝܥܩܒ ܕܥܕܝܣܐ) (d. 708). While his learning brought him great fame in his day, his attachment to Greek (and by extension, Roman) culture was not always enthusiastically accepted by members of his church.²⁸ After his career as a bishop he retired to the monastery of Eusebona near Antioch in order to revive Greek learning there, but within a few years he was expelled. Apparently some of the other monks believed that Greek learning, and the Byzantine-inflected cultural heritage that came with it, had no place in a Syriac Orthodox

²⁷ In the words of David Taylor, “The Psalm Commentary of Daniel of Salah and the Formation of Sixth-Century Syrian Orthodox Identity,” *Church History and Religious Culture*, vol. 89 (2009), 80, imperial persecutions of Miaphysites were: “never systematic or sustained enough simply to wipe out all clerical resistance, but instead served to radicalize the Syrian Miaphysites. [The emperor’s] brutal agents, both clerical and military, provided the Miaphysites with numerous martyrs for their cause, and alienated whole regional populations through their oppressive measures and the heavy-handed deployment of imperial troops.”

²⁸ A polymath and extensive translator, among other pursuits, Jacob produced a continuation of the Chronicle of Eusebius of Caesarea, he translated Aristotle and Christian religious texts from Greek into Syriac, and he produced a *Hexaemeron* (a work on the six days of creation) that attempted to reconcile Greek knowledge of philosophy and natural science (especially from Plato, Aristotle, and Ptolemy) with the Genesis story; see Dirk Kruisheer, “A Bibliographical Clavis to the Works of Jacob of Edessa (revised and expanded),” *Jacob of Edessa and the Syriac Culture of His Day*, ed. R. B. Ter Haar Romeny (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 265–293.

monastery.²⁹ Though members of the same church, Jacob and his monastic brothers fell on opposite sides of this divisive issue.

As the anecdote about Jacob of Edessa indicates, non-Chalcedonian Syriac Christians faced difficult and divisive questions in regard to the Greek/Roman/Byzantine political and cultural legacy. In the place of Roman identity, certain Syriac Christians, Miaphysites and “Nestorian” dyophysites alike, experimented with new concepts of identity. This process already had its roots in the period before the Arab conquests, especially within the “frontier *politeia*” Syriac Orthodox Church. In some areas, especially the Northern Mesopotamian borderlands between the Roman and Persian Empires, a regional identity was emphasized over identity as imperial subjects. Philip Wood has explored the coalescence in sixth and seventh-century of a *Suryaya*—that is, Syriac-speaking Christian—identity. This identity drew on the notion of a close connection between the Syriac-speaking peoples and Christianity, spread by Mar Addai (St. Thaddeus), and supposedly adopted, long before Constantine, by King Abgar of Edessa. It stressed that Syriac-speaking Christians were descended from the ancient kings and inhabitants of Mesopotamia.

One text that Wood cites as evidence for the development of the *Suryaya* identity is the *Cave of Treasures* (ܬܝܒܐ ܕܚܝܝܬܐ).³⁰ Falsely ascribed to Ephrem the Syrian, the *Cave of Treasures* provided a history from Adam and Eve to the crucifixion, retelling Old Testament Jewish history within a distinctly Christian framework.³¹ The framing element, the eponymous “cave of treasures” is located on a mountain outside Paradise, and became the place where Adam and Eve lived after their expulsion, and to which they brought the treasures of gold, myrrh, and incense from out of Paradise. The cave became a house of prayer, and the burial place of Adam and all

²⁹ The biography of Jacob of Edessa is provided in the chronicle of Michael the Syrian, ed. Jean-Baptiste Chabot, *Chronique de Michel le Syrien, Patriarche jacobite d'Antioche*, volume 4 (Paris: Leroux, 1910), 445–446 (for full overview of this source, see below, n.106).

³⁰ Wood, *We Have No King but Christ*, 117–124.

³¹ The *Cave of Treasures* survives in 34 Syriac manuscripts, all from the sixteenth century and later. An even greater number of manuscripts (46) survive of an Arabic translation; a different Arabic translation, in Garshuni characters, survives in a single manuscript. The Syriac text of the *Cave of Treasures* has been edited by Su-Min Ri, *Caverne des Trésors: les deux recensions syriaques*, CSCO 486 (Leuven: Peeters, 1987), with a French translation, CSCO 487. Ri also published an extensive historical and source critical commentary, *Commentaire de la Caverne des Trésors: étude sur l'histoire du texte et de ses sources* (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), which, despite its comprehensiveness, has been subsequently rendered obsolete by new research, most prominently Sergei Minov, “Syriac Christian Identity in Late Sasanian Mesopotamia: The *Cave of Treasures* in Context” (PhD dissertation: Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2013). An English translation of the *Cave of Treasures*, based on British Museum (MS. Add. 25875, copied the year 1709, but informed by Ri’s edition, is provided by Alexander Toepel, “The Cave of Treasures: A New Translation and Introduction,” in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: More Noncanonical Scriptures*, ed. Richard Bauckham, James Davila, and Alexander Panayotov (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 531–584. An earlier, outdated English translation was made of the same manuscript was made by E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Book of the Cave of Treasures: Translated from the Syriac* (London, The Religious Tract Society: 1927). The first critical edition of the *Cave of Treasures*, both the Syriac and Arabic versions, with a German translation published beforehand, was made by Carl Bezold, *Die Schatzhöhle, 1: Übersetzung* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1883); idem, *Die Schatzhöhle, 2: Nach dem syrischen Texte der Handschriften zu Berlin, London und Rom nebst einer arabischen Version nach den Handschriften zu Rom, Paris und Oxford herausgegeben* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1888). However, whereas Bezold sought to reconstruct an *Ur* version of the text, Ri’s edition provides parallel editions of the two major surviving recensions.

Later on, at Christ's birth, the magi brought him the gold, myrrh, and incense from the cave, connecting Christ to the story of the cave. The *Cave of Treasures* demonstrated that Christ was Adam's typological parallel and the redeemer of the sin of Adam and Eve. When Christ was crucified on the very spot Adam was buried, his blood, soaking into the earth, baptized Adam. The *Cave of Treasures* closes with Christ's descent to Sheol and redemption of the Jewish Patriarchs.

The *Cave of Treasures* is filled with details evidently aimed at the construction of a *Suryaya* identity rooted in the Biblical past. It asserted that Syriac was the original language spoken before the confusion of tongues when the Tower of Babel fell: “From the time of Adam until the tower, [everyone] spoke the Syriac language, which is the most widespread and extensive of all languages; it is also called Aramaic, and it is the king of all languages.”³⁵ Thus, the *Cave of Treasures* made Syriac a holy language, and its speakers bearers of the most ancient of traditions.

³² See Minov, “Syriac Christian Identity,” 272–277. Minov has repeated this dating in several subsequent publications on the *Cave of Treasures*. Toepel, “The Cave of Treasures,” 535–536, argues convincingly that the *Cave of Treasures* was written early in the reign of Khusrau II (r. 591–628). Earlier, Clemens Leonhard, “Observations on the date of the Syriac Cave of Treasures” in *The World of the Arameans*, vol. 3, P. M. Michèle Daviau; John William Wevers; Michael Weigl; Paul-Eugène Dion (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 255–293, suggested that the *Cave of Treasures* was written in the late fifth or early sixth century, a position followed by Wood, *We Have No King But Christ*, 118. Most of this work was produced in response to Ri, who in his *Commentaire de la Caverne des Trésors* suggests that the *Cave of Treasures* was written in the third century, a position that can no longer be upheld. Still, a later date was already suggested in Albrecht Götze, *Die Schatzhöhle: Überlieferung und Quellen* (Heidelberg: Winters, 1922).

³⁴ See Minov, “Syriac Christian Identity,” 272–277; Toepel, “The Cave of Treasures,” 535–536, ventures that it was written in an “East Syriac context,” since it was composed in the Persian Empire, but makes no assertions about the Christological allegiance of its author. Su-Min Ri, in a critical edition, distinguished two recensions, a West Syriac (Syriac Orthodox) and East Syriac (Church of the East), which he edited separately and published side-by-side.

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not party to [the shedding of] Christ's blood."³⁶

The *Cave of Treasures* also emphasized that the lineage of the *Suryaye* went back to the ancient kings of Mesopotamia, who ruled long before the Roman or the Sasanians. It described the ancient king Nimrod as the founder of Edessa, Nisibis, and Harran, three important cities associated with Syriac Christianity.³⁷ Tracing the history of such cities back to Nimrod deemphasized their Persian, Roman, and Hellenistic pasts, allowing for narratives of independent history that began just after the Biblical flood. This independent descent continued through King Abgar, who ruled independently in Edessa and was held to be an early follower of Christ.³⁸

Thus, the *Cave of Treasures* is an early witness to a slow attempt to build a Syriac Christian identity unmoored to allegiances either with the Roman or Persian empires. In the words of Philip Wood:

“In Edessa and in Sasanian ‘north Iraq,’ Christian missionary stories and foundation legends allowed some claim to cultural independence from the empires of Rome and Persia ... in the case of the author of the *Cave of Treasures* at least, [these stories and legends coalesced] into a sense of a ‘Suryaya’ *ethnie* built around language, script, religious practice, a homeland in the land of the Old Testament patriarchs and the cities built by Nimrod, and the significance of all of the former as indicators of supposed descent.”³⁹

This is not to suggest that a fully formed *Suryaya* identity existed by the seventh century. The building of a Syriac-Christian ethnic identity was a gradual process that took many centuries. Moreover, it was likely a fraught and controversial process. Nonetheless, it had already begun in the late sixth or seventh century, motivated, at least in part, by the religious break from the Roman church. The favor that the *Cave of Treasures* found among members of both the Church of the East and the Syriac Orthodox Church suggests that interest in building such identity could be found in both of these Syriac churches.

I.4: Apocalypses without Empire: Two Case Studies

These emerging views about empire among Syriac Christians seem to be reflected in two apocalyptic sources that survive from around the late sixth or early seventh century. Both downplay the importance of empire in history and at the end of time. Though they are less often studied than the apocalypses of the end of the seventh century, they anticipate the ideas and themes of these later works.

³⁶ The *Cave of Treasures*, LIII.21; Ri, *La Caverne des Trésors*, 450, includes a simplified version of this passage in the text of his edition, I use here the longer version he prints in the apparatus, but which is present in seven of his nineteen manuscripts: *Ḳṣṭānān ʿam ʾam ḥayy ʾifṭ. Ḳṣṭānān wafṭa ʾm ḥayy ʾl ḥayy ʾm ʾifṭ. Ḳṣṭānān ʾm ʾm ḥayy ʾm ʾifṭ.*

³⁷ The *Cave of Treasures*, XXX.19; Ri, *La Caverne des Trésors*, 238–239.

³⁸ The *Cave of Treasures*, LIII.26–27.

³⁹ Wood, *We Have No King but Christ*, 125–126.

elders, as in the *Syriac Alexander Legend*, but here he requests that they guide him to the Land of Darkness. Nonetheless, after much effort he fails find to the enchanted spring. This quest for eternal life makes up the first third of the *Alexander Poem* (lines 27–404 in Recension 1).⁴³ Leaving the Land of Darkness and returning to the mountain, Alexander asks the elders to tell him who lives on the other side. Like in the *Syriac Alexander Legend*, they tell him of the fierce tribes beyond the mountain (though here they are not called Huns, but “Agogites and Magogites”), prompting him to build the mountain barrier. The construction of Alexander’s gate makes up the second third of the *Alexander Poem* (lines 205–404 in Recension 1). When the gate is completed, King Alexander is visited in his sleep by an angel, who prophesies the opening of the gate at the end of time. This prophecy makes up the final third of the *Alexander Poem* (lines 405–684 in Recension 1).

The *Alexander Poem*’s inversion of the pro-Roman themes from the *Syriac Alexander Legend* are most evident in this third and final part. For example, in the *Alexander Poem*, after Alexander defeats the Persian Tubarlaq and his army (which happens at a different point in the story in the *Alexander Poem*) there is no scene involving the Persian soothsayers prophesying to Alexander about the glorious future of his kingdom. Instead, the angel who visits King Alexander in his dream instructs him on the peace terms God bids him make with the Persian king. The angel commands Alexander to take from the Persian king Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Cilicia, Cappadocia, Asia Minor, and Mesopotamia; that is, all the lands that made up the seventh-century Roman Empire.⁴⁴ Instead of conquering the known world, Alexander here divides it between Roman and Persian spheres. He is commanded by the angel to fix the border at the river Kallath, that is, a small river which indeed marked the border between the Eastern Roman and Sasanian Empires in the Northern Mesopotamia in the seventh century: “Take his dominion [in these places] and set the river Kallath as a boundary for yourself. And let neither of you pass over this border that you set.”⁴⁵ In contrast to the prophecy of Roman world domination in the *Alexander Legend*, here the border between the Roman and Persian empires is decreed by God; it is a divinely ordained division of power, and God forbids either empire from trying to conquer any of the lands of the other. The world does not belong to any one kingdom or people. Whereas in the *Syriac Alexander Legend* Alexander the Great represents Greco-Roman military ambitions and acts as founder of the last kingdom to dominate the earth, the *Alexander Poem*

⁴³ The story of Alexander’s search for the spring of eternal life is found in other Alexander romances in various languages, but not in the *Syriac Alexander Romance*. The author of the *Alexander Poem* must have been relying on a different source for this part of the *Poem*, or else on a lost version of the *Syriac Alexander Legend* that included Alexander’s search for the spring.

⁴⁴ *Alexander Poem*, Rec. 1 lines 416–420; Reinink, *Das syrische Alexanderlied*, vol. 1, 84.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, lines 422–423; Reinink, *Das syrische Alexanderlied*, vol. 1, 84: ܡܕ ܕܥܠܝܬܐ ܕܡܨܪܝܬ ܕܥܝܪܐ ܕܟܠܬܐ. The river Kallath, known in Greek as the *Nymphios* (Νυμφίος), is the modern Batman River in Turkey. Other recensions make the border the Tigris. Reinink, *Das syrische Alexanderlied*, vol. 2, 105 n.45, notes that “Tigris” may be more original. However, the earliest manuscript contains “Kallath,” (ܟܠܬܐ) and it is easy to imagine how this obscure tributary would be corrected, by later scribes, to a better-known river, the “Tigris” (ܬܝܓܪܝܣ).

Next, the angel tells Alexander of the future invasion when the Agogites and Magogites break free from the gate. This serves as a sort of apocalypse within the *Alexander Poem*. The *Syriac Alexander Legend* had suggested that the invasion of the Huns of Gog and Magog would sweep away all powers except for the Roman Empire. Only the Roman Empire would last to the end of the world, when it would fulfill its role in handing over the kingship to Christ. In contrast, in the *Alexander Poem* the angel makes clear to Alexander that the invasion will not clear the way for the world domination of the Roman Empire. Quite the opposite: “The peoples and all the lands will anger the Almighty Lord, and his anger will rise and wipe out the earth with an evil sword. Great Rome from her greatness will be thrown down to the depths.”⁴⁶ The equivalent lines in Recension 2 (lines 585–587) are even more explicit about the fate of Rome: “His [God’s] anger will rise and wipe out Great Rome with the sword. He will plunge it from the heights to the depths, and throw down all the lands of Rome upon the earth.”⁴⁷ No kingdom will be spared from the invasion: “The burning army and hosts of the sons of Magog will arise, and the whole of creation will become and remain a ruin.”⁴⁸ The only places that will survive the destruction will be Jerusalem and Mt. Sinai.⁴⁹

Thus, the *Alexander Poem* placed no hope in earthly institutions of empire and its protagonist, King Alexander, was ultimately fatalistic in his outlook. Like his failed quest for immortality, the future destruction of his kingdom revealed the ultimate vanity of the present life. Reinink has summarized it thus:

[illegible][illegible]

⁴⁸ Ibid, Rec. 1, lines 561–564; Reinink, *Das syrische Alexanderlied*, vol. 1, 106: **ܡܨܚܝܡ ܫܬܠܗ ܥܬܝܗ ܥܠ ܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ**. I have reversed the order of the last two verbs in my translation to better communicate the sense of the sentence.

⁴⁹ Ibid, Rec. 1, lines 630–635; Reinink, *Das syrische Alexanderlied*, vol. 1, 114–116; see also idem *Das syrische Alexanderlied*, vol. 2, 145 n72.

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kingship, including his own, is transient and that mankind can expect to receive the better life of immortality only in the heavenly kingdom of God.⁵¹

Thus the *Alexander Poem* emphasizes that no worldly thing lasts, and kings and their kingdoms alike are doomed to perish. The great empires, that is, the Romans and the Sasanians, should live in peace until the end of history, when both empires will cease to exist. At that time, the eschatological kingdom—the fifth kingdom, the kingdom of heaven, the only important kingdom—will arrive. This position appears to be an explicit rejection of the *Alexander Legend*'s focus on the future of world empire and Rome's political and military power. The *Poem* seems to have purposely recast and repudiated the pro-imperial, pro-Roman eschatology of the *Syriac Alexander Legend*.

A similar outlook is found in a Syriac apocalypse titled “The Revelation which was Revealed to Daniel the Prophet in the Land of Persia and Elam” (ܬܠܬܐ ܕܪܝܬܐ ܕܕܢܝܐ ܕܢܒܝܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܝܪܐܢ ܕܥܝܠܡܐ), and conventionally called the *Syriac Apocalypse of Daniel*, which appears to date to roughly the same time as the *Alexander Poem*.⁵² It begins with Daniel narrating a first person summary of the events in the Book of Daniel. Daniel says that he interpreted, among many other visions, the statue dream of Nebuchadnezzar, and says that he himself had received visions about “that which is yet to come and which is hidden to be revealed at the end of days.”⁵³ However, the *Syriac Apocalypse of Daniel* makes no mention of the contents or interpretation of any of these dreams or visions, nor does it make any reference to the four kingdoms.

The remainder of the apocalypse is presented as an additional vision about the end of the world received by Daniel. Here it follows the basics of the Syriac eschatological scenario. It describes the rise of the Antichrist at the end of time. He is aided by the Unclean Peoples:

The Gates of the North will open before him / the army of Mabagbel [Magog?]⁵⁴ will come out / and the multitude of Agogites and Magogites, / enormous in their statures / and mighty in their strength / and numerous in their hosts. / They will take control of the world, the expanse of the earth, / to march from sea to sea, / and from one end of the sky

⁵¹ Reinink, “Alexander the Great in 7th-century Syriac,” 167.

⁵² This apocalypse is preserved in a manuscript from the twelfth or thirteenth century (cod. Harvard Ms Syr. 42, fols. 117r–122v) and another from the fifteenth century (Mardin, Church of the Forty Martyrs, cod 281, fols. 201r–218v; dated 1474/5). It has been edited on the basis of the Harvard manuscript, with substantial introduction and an English translation, in Matthias Henze, *The Syriac Apocalypse of Daniel: Introduction, Text, and Commentary* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001). On *ibid*, 11–16, Henze makes a case for its seventh-century date. Like Reinink's dating of the *Alexander Poem*, Henze's dating is based on the notion that the Syriac Apocalypse of Daniel was written before the Arab conquests, but after the *Syriac Alexander Legend*, which influenced its concept of Alexander's gate; though Henze accepts a seventh-century date for the *Syriac Alexander Legend*, the fact that it actually probably dates to the sixth century means that the *Syriac Alexander Legend* could possibly also date to the sixth century.

⁵³ The *Syriac Apocalypse of Daniel*, XIII; ed. Henze, *The Syriac Apocalypse of Daniel*, 39 (English translation on *ibid*, 75): ܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܥܝܪܐܢ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܝܠܡܐ ܕܢܒܝܐ ܕܕܢܝܐ ܕܢܒܝܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܝܪܐܢ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܝܠܡܐ

⁵⁴ Though Henze, *The Syriac Apocalypse of Daniel*, 93 n.139, notes that the name Mabagbel (or the like; the Syriac is unvocalized) is unattested elsewhere and does not know what to make of it, ܡܒܒܓܒܠ seems to me a corruption of Magog (ܡܓܓܓ), especially since the manuscript is written in Serto characters, where the letter *gamal* can easily be mistaken for a final *lamad*.

In the *Syriac Apocalypse of Daniel*, the destruction that the Agogites and Magogites will inflict is described in local terms; they will devastate villages and harm people, but there is no mention of larger political entities.

The *Syriac Apocalypse of Daniel* is a surprising phenomenon: a historical apocalypse that has no interest in kingdoms or empires. Whereas the *Alexander Poem* deemphasized empire and kingship, the *Syriac Apocalypse of Daniel* had no place at all for them in its vision of the end of the world. Its focus was on spiritual preparation for the end and on the coming kingdom of heaven in the New Jerusalem. Next to these things, the earthly kingdoms of the world were of little importance.

Conclusions: Christological Controversy and Alienation from Rome

One can easily imagine that Syriac Christians, skeptical of the role afforded to the Roman Empire in the *Demonstrations* of Aphrahat and the *Syriac Alexander Legend* responded with their own apocalypses, surviving examples of which survive in the *Alexander Poem* and the

⁵⁶ For the influence of 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch on this apocalypse, see Henze, *The Syriac Apocalypse of Daniel*, 18–22.

Syriac Apocalypse of Daniel. These fit with the growing tendency among Syriac Christians to view themselves as athwart from the great empires.

Still, it is impossible to characterize any one of the Syriac churches as anti-Roman or pro-Roman. The conflicting perspectives on the empire found in, for example, the *Syriac Alexander Legend* and the *Alexander Poem*, probably reflect internal debates within the churches. These polemic battles over the proper relationship of Christians toward empire, and specifically the Roman Empire, were waged through the offering competing visions of the end of history.

Part 2: The Breakdown of the Imperial Political Order

The Sasanian capital of Seleucia-Ctesiphon fell to the Arabs in 637 AD. The Sasanian king, Yazdegerd III, fled to his eastern provinces, where he raised a new army. A final decisive battle took place in Persia in 642, at a place called Nahavand, where the Arabs smashed the Persian army and effectively put an end to the Sasanian Empire.

An anonymous Armenian historian (long falsely identified with a bishop named Sebeos), writing some two decades later, reflected on the historical meaning of this event. It necessitated new considerations about the identities of the kingdoms of Daniel:

Who could describe the fearful calamity of the Ishmaelite brigand who set fire to sea and land? However, the blessed Daniel had earlier prophesied such a disaster which befell the land. Through four beasts he indicated the four kingdoms which would arise on earth. First of all the kingdom of the west, the beast in human form, which is that of the Greeks.⁵⁷

Like Syriac authors, the Armenian historian called the Romans “Greeks,” and so he meant that the Byzantine Empire was the first kingdom of Daniel. This strange claim was supported by his rather idiosyncratic notion that the four kingdoms of Daniel were not a succession of ruling powers, but simultaneous kingdoms, identifiable with the four cardinal directions.⁵⁸ He goes on:

And behold the second beast was like a bear, and it stood to one side to the east; he [Daniel] means the Sasanian kingdom... Now the third beast was like a leopard; there were four wings of a bird on it, and the beast had four heads. He means the kingdom of the north, Gog and Magog and their two companions... The fourth beast was fearful and amazing, and its teeth were of iron, and its claws of bronze. It ate and broke in pieces, and crushed the remnants under foot. This fourth, arising from the south, is the Kingdom of Ishmael, just as the archangel explained: “The fourth beast, the fourth kingdom, shall arise, which shall be greater than all [other] kingdoms; and it will consume the whole

⁵⁷ Pseudo-Sebeos, *History*; ed. Gevorg V. Abgaryan, *Patmowt'iwn Sebeosi* (Erevan: Gitouthjounneri Akademiaji, 1979), 141; translated in R. W. Thomson, *The Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999), 105.

⁵⁸ That pseudo-Sebeos described this beast as a human, instead of a lion who turns into a human, must either be because he was simplifying the passage from Daniel, or because confused the four beasts with the four winged creatures in Ezekiel 1 and Revelation 4, of which the first is a human

earth.”⁵⁹

Thus, according to the formulation of pseudo-Sebeos, there had existed three kingdoms foreseen by Daniel—the Romans (or Byzantines), the Sasanian Persians, and Gog and Magog (by which he likely means steppe peoples like the Avars, Khazars, Bulgars, and Goktürks)—all of whom were conquered by the Ishmaelites, the fourth kingdom. Later he promised his readers that the eschatological destruction of the fourth kingdom, the Kingdom of the Ishmaelites, was close at hand.⁶⁰ This is a strange interpretation of the kingdoms of Daniel, but it reflects the experimentation with new solutions in light of Arab conquests. For the first time since the Jews of the first century adjusted the interpretation of the fourth kingdom in light of the Roman sack of Jerusalem, a wholly new empire had arisen that somehow had to be accommodated into the Danielic schema

In the seventh century, the Arabs established a new empire on the wreckage of the Roman and Persian empires. By the time pseudo-Sebeos wrote, their empire stretched from the Oxus River on the northern border of Persia to the southern reaches of modern Tunisia. It expanded even further in the following few decades, to Spain and Central Asia. How could such a great empire not be among those foreseen by Daniel? Some explanation for the Arabs was necessary. Pseudo-Sebeos had come up with a logical reordering of the kingdoms of Daniel that accounted for them.

Such pressures to rethink history and eschatology was just as prevalent among the Syriac Christians of Syria and Northern Mesopotamia, who fell under the rule of the Arabs. As we shall see, they sought to situate the Arab conquests and rise of the Arab Empire in history, and at times they likewise resorted to the model of the kingdoms of Daniel. It is important, however, to understand the historical context in which these new eschatological models of history were formulated. The Arab conquests accelerated the Syriac crisis of empire by revealing the weakness of the Roman and Sasanian empires, and the rise of the forthrightly Muslim empire of the Arabs by the 690s meant that Syriac Christians were faced with a political institution from which they were more alienated than ever. This is the necessary background for comprehending the Syriac apocalypses of the end of the century.

II.1: The Collapse of the Political Order: 590–634 AD

The Arab conquests probably would not have been possible had the Eastern Roman Empire and the Sasanian Persians not exhausted themselves in a long and particularly brutal war at the beginning of the seventh century. The seeds of this terrible conflict were sewn in early March, 590 AD, when the Persian king Khusrau II presented himself, along with his wives and

⁵⁹ Pseudo-Sebeos, *History*; ed. Abgaryan, *Patmowt'iwn Sebeosi*, 141–142; translated by Thomson, *The Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos*, 105–106. An analysis of this passage is provided by Robert Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 2007), 534–535.

⁶⁰ Ibid, ed. Abgaryan, *Patmowt'iwn Sebeosi*, 177; translated by Thomson, *The Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos*, 152.

retinue, to the Roman border guards on the Northern Mesopotamian frontier. The flight of Khusrau II to the Roman Empire set in motion a course of events that would bring ruin to both empires and mark the end of the political order that had persisted in the Near East for centuries.

Khusrau's father, the Persian king Hormozd IV had been overthrown in 589 after the rebellion of one of his generals, Bahram Chubin, caused the bureaucrats and nobles at the capital of Seleucia-Ctesiphon to lose faith in his leadership. They eliminated Hormozd and rallied around his son, who was subsequently crowned Khusrau II. The flimsy regime of the new king could not defend the capital from the experienced general Bahram Chubin, however, and so Khusrau and a small band of followers sought refuge in Roman territory.⁶¹

From the Roman frontier city of Circesium, Khusrau II sent a letter to the Roman Emperor Maurice asking for aid in regaining his throne, promising to make major territorial concessions once restored to power. After some deliberation, Maurice accepted the deal and dispatched a Roman army to restore Khusrau. This army decisively defeated Bahram Chubin in battle and installed Khusrau back on the throne in Persia, and gave the Roman the lands he promised them.⁶² In 602, however, Emperor Maurice was overthrown in an army mutiny. Khusrau's used the murder of his protector as a justification to invade the Roman Empire and retake the territories he had ceded twelve years earlier.⁶³

The initial battles of Khusrau II's invasion were fought in Northern Mesopotamia as the Persian armies overwhelmed the Roman frontier fortresses.⁶⁴ Though the remaining stages of the war took place outside Northern Mesopotamia, the effects of these battles would have long-standing consequences for the region. Most immediately, Northern Mesopotamia became devoid of any Roman authority for the next two and a half decades.

Indeed, as Khusrau's generals met with unexpected success, at some point the Persian king emended his plan to a full-scale conquest of the Eastern Roman Empire. Even after Phokas, the usurper whose murder of Maurice had provided Khusrau with his *casus belli*, was himself overthrown in 610 by a self-proclaimed avenger of Maurice, the Emperor Heraclius, Khusrau nonetheless continued the war. By 615 a Persian army was encamped outside the Asian suburbs of Constantinople, while another conquered Jerusalem and carried off the relic of the True Cross.⁶⁵ Three years later the Persians conquered Egypt.⁶⁶ In Constantinople, the Emperor

⁶¹ See Theophylact Simocatta, *History*, IV.5–10; Pseudo-Sebeos, *History*; ed. Abgaryan, *Patmowt'iwn Sebeosi*, 72–75; translated by Thomson, *The Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos*, 14–18.

⁶² Theophylact Simocatta, *History*, V.6–7; Pseudo-Sebeos, *History*; ed. Abgaryan, *Patmowt'iwn Sebeosi*, 76–84; translated by Thomson, *The Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos*, 18–29.

⁶³ For the overthrow of Emperor Maurice, see Theophylact Simocatta, *History*, VIII.1–44.

⁶⁴ For a narrative for this stage of the war, with long excerpts from primary sources, see Geoffrey Greatrex and Samuel Lieu, *The Roman Eastern Frontier and the Persian Wars: A Documentary History, Part II: 363–630* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 182–189; a general history is provided by James Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses to a World Crisis: Historians and Histories of the Middle East in the Seventh Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 436–445; a more detailed narrative is forthcoming in idem, *The Last Great War of Antiquity*.

⁶⁵ The relevant primary sources on these events are collected in Greatrex and Lieu, *The Roman Eastern Frontier and the Persian Wars*, 190–195.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 196–197. See also Ruth Altheim-Stiehl, "The Sasanians in Egypt— Some Evidence of Historical Interest," *Bulletin de la Société d'Archéologie Copte*, vol. 31 (1992), 87–96; Evangelos Venetis, "The Sassanid

Heraclius was increasingly hemmed in; the Persians on the opposite shore of the Bosphorus refused to negotiate, a resurgence of the plague swept through the city, probably brought on by the influx of refugees, and emperor considered abandoning the capital to its fate and reforming his government at Carthage.⁶⁷ To make matters worse, the Avars, a steppe people with whom the Romans frequently fought on their northwestern front, made an alliance with the Persians in a bid to annihilate the Roman Empire.⁶⁸

However, in a series of campaigns from 622–628, Heraclius launched a daring series of campaigns into Persian territory, fighting a war of attrition probably designed to destabilize the Persian Empire. An Avar assault on Constantinople in 626 failed. In the meantime, Emperor Heraclius found steppe allies of his own. Heraclius made a military alliance with the Göktürk Khaganate, a steppe confederation that had in recent years come to dominate the entire Eurasian steppe from the Black Sea to the northern borders of China and Korea. In 627 Heraclius' overtures (which included promising one of his daughters in marriage) bore fruit, and the Göktürk khaghan dispatched an army to help attack the Persian Empire.⁶⁹ The destruction caused by Roman and Göktürk armies in Sasanian territory, mostly in the Caucasus region, succeeded in destabilizing the regime of Khusrau II. In 628 Khusrau was overthrown in a palace coup and his son and successor made peace with the Heraclius, restoring the old balance of power and even making some territorial concessions to the Romans.⁷⁰

Though peace was achieved, this great war between the Eastern Roman and Sasanian Persian empires devastated both powers. The summary here is by necessity rather truncated, but it is important to note that the war lasted twenty-six years; it was a generation-long conflict. The destruction and weakness engendered by this war is widely regarded in modern scholarship as paving the way for the conquests of both empires by the Muslim Arabs.⁷¹ The historian James

Occupation of Egypt (7th Cent. A.D) According to Some Pahlavi Papyri Abstracts," *Graeco-Arabica*, vols. 9-10 (2004), 403–412.

⁶⁷ This detail is provided by the ninth-century patriarch and chronicler Nikephoros, *Breviarium*, 8; edited and translation by Cyril Mango, *Nikephoros, Patriarch of Constantinople: Short History* (Washington DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1990), 48–49.

⁶⁸ On the Avars, see Walter Pohl, "A non-Roman empire in Central Europe: The Avars," in *Regna and gentes; The Relationship Between Late Antique and Early Medieval Peoples and Kingdoms in the Transformation of the Roman World*, ed. Hans-Werner Goetz, J. Jarnut, and W. Pohl (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 571–595.

⁶⁹ For the chronology of the Turkic invasion, which is somewhat muddled in the primary texts, see James Howard-Johnston, "Heraclius' Persian Campaigns and the Revival of the East Roman Empire, 622–630," *War in History*, vol. 6 no. 1 (1999), 40–42.

⁷⁰ Greatrex and Lieu, *The Roman Eastern Frontier and the Persian Wars*, 209–225; Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses to a World Crisis*, 444; idem, "Pride and the Fall: Khusro II and his Regime, 626–628," in *East Rome, Sasanian Persia and the End of Antiquity: Historiographical and Historical Studies*, ed. J. Howard-Johnston (Aldershot: Ashgate Variorum: 2006), 93–113.

⁷¹ For example, Robert Hoyland, *In God's Path: The Arab Conquests and the Creation of an Islamic Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 8–30; Glenn Bowersock, *Empires in Collision in Late Antiquity* (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2012), 55–77; Clive Foss, "The Persians in Asia Minor and the End of Antiquity," *The English Historical Review*, vol. 90 (1975), 721–747.

Howard-Johnston regards this conflict as precipitating a “world crisis,” one which caused “the breakdown of the late antique world order.”⁷²

The military conflict between the two great empires may have been more a symptom than a cause of the great changes that were taking place, a culmination of increasingly instability that had been afflicting the late ancient world. According to Robert Hoyland: “Plausibly there were climatic and/or environmental stresses affecting large parts of Eurasia that were putting empires under strain and leaving them more exposed to the predations of steppe and desert peoples around them.”⁷³ Recently Kyle Harper has embarked on a detailed study of these environmental factors, and associated it with the “apocalyptic mood” so evident in the seventh-century sources: “In the sixth and seventh centuries, the concatenation of plague and climate deterioration spawned an age of eschatology.”⁷⁴ These disasters included the Plague of Justinian, which recurred from the sixth to the eighth century and decimated the population base of the empires, “an unusually violent spasm of earthquakes” that destroyed many cities, and a global drop in temperature that killed crops and brought floods to urbanized Anatolia while creating droughts in the breadbaskets of Egypt and the Levant.⁷⁵

Of course the bouts of plague and environmental stresses did not alone inspire the greater interest in eschatology. Nonetheless, an indirect link is probable. War and environmental calamity brought about the downfall of the established political order, which required new interpretations of eschatology that accounted for changed circumstances. As old certainties broke down, eschatology provided possible answers as to where history was heading. Old schemes had to be revised, especially in light of the coming of a new imperial power.

II.2: The Arab Conquest of Northern Mesopotamia

A series of invasions of Arabs from the Hijaz, beginning in the early 630s, completely remade the map of the near east, disrupting the balance of power that had existed since the third century, and bringing about a great new empire.⁷⁶ In 637, the same year that the Persian capital

⁷² Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses to a World Crisis*, 1–15; idem, “The Destruction of the Late Antique World Order,” in *Recent Research in Sasanian Archaeology, Art and History*, ed. D. Kennet and P. Luft (Oxford: BAR, 2008), 79–85, with quotation on 83.

⁷³ Hoyland, *In God’s Path*, 62–63.

⁷⁴ Kyle Harper, *The Fate of Rome: Climate, Disease, and the Fate of an Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), quotations on 249.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 246–287.

⁷⁶ Scholars have debated what to call these invasions, opting generally to refer to refer to them as the “Islamic conquests” or the “Arab conquests.” Both terms, as many scholars have pointed out, are problematic. “Islamic conquest” fails to acknowledge that not all the people who embarked on these conquests were Muslim (many, indeed, were likely Christians). Moreover, it is not at all clear what Islam meant in the first few decades after the death of the prophet Muhammad. Just a sample of the historiography on this question Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, *Hagarism: the Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976); Fred McGraw Donner, “From Believers to Muslims: Confessional Self-Identity in the Early Islamic Community,” *Al-Abhath*, vo. 50-51 (2002-2003), 9–53; idem, *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010); and the review of the latter work by Jack Tannous in *Expositions*, vol. 5, no.2 (2011) 126–141. The term “Arab conquest” is also problematic, since it is unclear that the conquerors had yet come

fell to the Arabs, Jerusalem surrendered to the invaders. The Sasanian Empire soon collapsed, and though the Eastern Roman Empire survived the Arab onslaught, many of its provinces were permanently lost.

Many scholars have associated the Arab conquests with the outpouring of Syriac eschatology in the seventh century. True, these Syriac eschatological sources were preoccupied with the Ishmaelites (the term they used for the Arabs). Nonetheless, this connection is overly simplistic. As the next few sections will show, it was not the Arab conquests in the middle of the seventh century that called for a revision of the old eschatological models and thus an outpouring of new works, but the establishment of a strong, centralized Arab empire at the end of the seventh century.

Northern Mesopotamia was conquered by the Arabs shortly after Roman Syria. Around the year 637, in the aftermath of an Arab victory at Yarmouk that forced an evacuation of the Roman army in Syria, John Kataias, the Roman governor of the province of Osrhoene (governing from Edessa) agreed to pay the Arab general in northern Syria, ‘Iyab ibn Ghanm al-Fihri, a large yearly tribute of 10,000 gold coins in exchange for the Arabs agreeing not to cross over to the eastern side of the Euphrates. John paid the first installment, but when Emperor Heraclius learned of this he angrily dismissed John, and replaced him with a military appointee named Ptolemy (Πτολεμαῖος), who refused to pay the next year’s tribute.⁷⁷

Thus, in 639/640 AD, ‘Iyab ibn Ghanm al-Fihri, having not received the second year’s tribute from Ptolemy, crossed the Euphrates with an army and approached Edessa. The

to think of themselves as Arabs; on this question, see Peter Webb, *Imagining the Arabs: Arab Identity and the Rise of Islam* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017). Nonetheless, Jack Tannous, *The Making of the Medieval Middle East: Religion, Society, and Simple Believers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 525–531, provides a convincing riposte to Webb’s arguments and argues for the applicability of the term “Arab conquest.” Indeed, even the concept of a “conquest” raises problems, as the conception of the conquest is based on the ninth-century Abbasid historians who depicted a conquest of Arabs from the Hejaz entering and taking control of provinces that had previously been controlled by the Roman and Persian Empires. However, many of the conquered territories, including Northern Mesopotamia, had long been home to substantial Arab populations. In the end, I use the term “Arab conquests.” As Brock, “Syriac Views of Emergent Islam,” in *Studies on the First Century of Islamic Society*, ed. G.H.A. Juynboll (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1982), 14, notes: “Syriac sources of this period see the conquests primarily as Arab, not Muslim.” Since this brief narrative is meant to provide the point of view of Syriac Christians, it seems best to use the terminology closest to their own. The term “conquest” need not imply that all the conquerors hailed from foreign lands; Arabs from Syria and Mesopotamia could well have participated in the conquest of their own home regions.

⁷⁷ The relevant primary sources are excerpted in Robert Hoyland, *Theophilus of Edessa's Chronicle and the Circulation of Historical Knowledge in Late Antiquity and Early Islam* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011), 118–121. The replacement of John Kataias seems to be part of a larger policy of Heraclius, who did the same when his government in Egypt also decided to pay the Arabs off. He rejected any negotiations with the Arabs on the part of his representatives, and replaced those who had made *ad hoc* agreements with military men who could be counted on to resist and not make deals. In the end, this was a disastrous policy, for if anything the broken agreements only gave the Arabs a further justification to attack the regions that had reneged on their agreed tribute. For a modern reconstruction of events, see Walter Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 159–171: Kaegi debates whether the agreement between John Kataias and ‘Iyad was a one-year treaty, expected to be renewed yearly, or had provisions for both; in the end it makes little difference to the outcome of events. For the similar agreement negotiated between the Patriarch of Alexandria in Egypt and the Arabs, see Nikephoros, *Breviarium*, 23–26; ed. and transl. in Mango, *Nikephoros*, 71–75; see also Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 574–590.

Edessenes quickly capitulated, in exchange for their safety. All were spared, Ptolemy was given safe passage back to Roman territory, and ‘Iyad collected his 10,000 gold coins from Edessa. The whole region submitted to him, with the exception of the cities of Tella/Constantia and Dara. ‘Iyad swiftly took these cities by siege, and executed their small Roman garrisons. The cities on the Persian side of the frontier, such as Nisibis, probably capitulated at this point as well. This rapid and unspectacular campaign completed the conquest of Northern Mesopotamia, and ‘Iyad either died or soon returned to Syria.⁷⁸

In the meantime, the Arabs left the local elites of Northern Mesopotamia to govern the cities and their hinterlands.⁷⁹ Northern Mesopotamia remained so peripheral that it did not even adopt the coins minted by the Arabs. Rather, actual Roman currency was still used; at first coins that came over the border and then, when those dried up, coins minted locally but patterned on the Roman issues made within the Byzantine Empire.⁸⁰ Churches continued to be built, and in grand late antique style.⁸¹ The people of Northern Mesopotamia continued to live in a splendid post-Roman late antiquity.

All of this was a consequence of the fact that the Arab Empire was still very much in its infancy, and probably lacked many institutions of governance, and those that did exist were likely concerned primarily with maintaining the armies of conquest.⁸² Even so, Northern Mesopotamia remained even less affected by the conquests than were other regions conquered by the Arabs. The garrison towns (*amsar*) that were established in the Levant, Egypt, North

⁷⁸ Relevant primary sources on these events are collected in Hoyland, *Theophilus of Edessa's Chronicle*, 120–121. Another, independent Syriac source, the *Zuqnin Chronicle*, ed. Jean Baptiste Chabot, *Incerti auctoris chronicon Pseudo-Dionysianum vulgo dictum*, vol. 2 (Louvain: Secrétariat du CSCO, 1933), 150, tells virtually the same story about the conquest. For a modern reconstruction of the events, see Hoyland, *In God's Path*, 54–55.

⁷⁹ Robert Hoyland, “Jacob and Early Islamic Edessa,” in *Jacob of Edessa and the Syriac Culture of His Day*, ed. R. B. Ter Haar Romeny (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 13, summarizes the situation this way: “Existing patterns of government and tax-collection were left mostly intact, entrusted to the same local aristocracies in former Sasanid territory and still the preserve of Greek-educated Christians in ex-Byzantine lands.” See also Chase Robinson, *‘Abd al-Malik* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2005), 63–65.

⁸⁰ Chase Robinson, *After the Muslim Conquest: The Transformation of Northern Mesopotamia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 51–52; Stefan Heidemann, “The Merger of Two Currency Zones in Early Islam: The Byzantine and Sasanian Impact on the Circulation in Former Byzantine Syria and Northern Mesopotamia,” *Iran*, vol. 36 (1998), 97–99. Heidemann asserts that the Byzantine supply of copper coins dried up in the late 650s; gold coins from Roman Empire had been rare even earlier.

⁸¹ See Marlia M. Mango, “The Continuity of the Classical Tradition in the Art and Architecture of Northern Mesopotamia,” in *East of Byzantium: Syria and Armenia in the Formative Period*, ed. N. G. Garsoian, et al. (Washington DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1982), 115–134; Robinson, *Empire and Elites*, 13. Robinson notes that Islamic jurists considered the building of new churches illicit, but this points only more strongly to the fact that Northern Mesopotamia was only lightly integrated into the Arab Empire.

⁸² I avoid here the term “Caliphate” as an anachronism, since the title “caliph” does not appear to have been widely adopted yet. The question of just how strong was the governing apparatus of the Arab Empire in this early period has been a matter of debate. Clive Foss, “A Syrian coinage of Mu’awiya,” *Revue Numismatique*, vol. 158 (2002), 353–365, has argued that there is evidence of a strong bureaucratic state already under the Arab ruler Mu’awiya (r. 661–680); however, this argument has been countered by Jeremy Johns in “Archaeology and the History of Early Islam: The First Seventy Years,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, vol. 46 (2003), 411–436. Robert Hoyland, in “New Documentary Texts and the Early Islamic State,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, vol. 69, no. 3 (2006), 395–416, reconciles the two in favor of a stronger bureaucratic mechanism under Mu’awiya.

Africa, and Iraq, and which eventually developed into important metropolises in their own right, were absent in the Jazirah.⁸³ This is not to say that the leaders of the early Arab Empire did not want to impose strong rule on the area. The empire was simply too weak to impose itself and relied on preexisting structures to maintain order.

There were of course Arabs in Northern Mesopotamia, but they appear to have had few connections to the Muslim Arab conquerors who ruled first from Medina and then from Damascus. The most important Arab tribe in the Northern Mesopotamia, the Banu Tahglib, were Miaphysite Christians. They clung to this faith for a very long time; only by the ninth century had they mostly converted to Islam, and there was still a bishop for the tribe in the tenth century.⁸⁴ They continued to live nomadic lives on the desert margins, while the cities remained under the control of the old local elites who had served the Roman and Persian governments.

In this environment, those local elites in cities such as Edessa and Nisibis enjoyed an almost unprecedented level of independence into the 680s. While the great empires vied with one another, the elites of Northern Mesopotamia had gotten used to looking after their own affairs. Roman rule was a distant memory, and the Arabs were too distracted to interfere. In the words of Chase Robinson, in this period “the cities [of Northern Mesopotamia] entered an Indian summer of *de facto* autonomy.”⁸⁵ Thanks to the Arab conquests, most Syriac Christians could now live outside of imperial authority.

The Arabs were preoccupied not just with their wars of conquest against the Romans and Persians, but also with internal power struggles. In 656–661, the burgeoning Arab empire was riven by civil war (called the “First Fitna”) between Mu’awiya, the Arab governor of Damascus in Syria, and ‘Ali, the son-in-law of the prophet Muhammad, based in Kufa in Iraq. The civil war, though fought largely in Northern Mesopotamia, is little noticed in Christian sources, and many of the major battles and summits may have taken place in remote areas away from the Christian urban centers. The victor, Mu’awiya, established the Umayyad dynasty, and his reign was an important touchstone in Christian sources.

The East Syrian monk John bar Penkaye, in his *Book of Main Points* (ܕܬܝܒܝܢ ܕܡܝܢ ܢܝܨܝܒܝܢ) written at his monastery at Mt. Qardu near Nisibis around years 687–689 AD, looked back fondly on this period, reporting: “But when Mu’awiya reigned, there was peace throughout the world such that those like us had never seen or heard, nor had our fathers’ grandfathers.”⁸⁶

⁸³ Hoyland, “Jacob and Early Islamic Edessa,” 13. In *Ibid.*, 15, Hoyland notes that the Banu Arqam, a branch of Kindites, settled near Edessa region during the reign of Mu’awiya, but this seems more the exception that proves the rule. The famous Christian Arab poet al-Akhtal was Taghlibi from the Jazira, and became a fixture of the court in Damascus.

⁸⁴ Robinson, *Empire and Elites*, 60–61;

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁸⁶ John bar Penkaye’s *Book of Main Points* has not been edited yet. It survives in over a dozen manuscripts, all dating to the late nineteenth or twentieth century. Books X–XV have been edited, with a French translation of Book XV, by Alphonse Mingana, *Sources syriaques*, vol. 1 (Leipzig, Harrassowitz: 1908), part 2, 2–203. Book XV has been translated into English, with a detailed introduction, by Sebastian Brock, “Northern Mesopotamia in the Late Seventh-Century: Book XV of John Bar Penkāyē’s Riš Mellē,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, vol. 9 (1987), 51–75; and again in Penn, *When Christians First Met Muslims: A Sourcebook of the Earliest Syriac Writings on Islam* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), 85–107. Despite the lack of a critical edition, a very

Yazid moved quickly to try to snuff out opposition to his rule and eliminate potential rival claimants to power by instigating the massacre of ‘Ali’s son Husayn along with his supporters and family at Karbala outside Kufa (which had earlier served as ‘Ali’s capital).⁹¹ This event, which precipitated the split between Sunni and Shi’ite Islam that persists to this day, did nothing to avert renewed civil war, and only further discredited Yazid. With ‘Ali’s family effectively out of the way, opposition to Yazid came primarily from ‘Abd Allah ibn al-Zubayr, a man of impeccable Islamic pedigree and reputation who had established himself as a rival ruler in Mecca. Ibn al-Zubayr seems to have promised a return to the purity of the early Islamic community.⁹²

While Yazid at first had the upper hand when fighting broke out, he died suddenly in 683. At this point most of the Arab Empire recognized Ibn al-Zubayr as the rightful ruler. Nonetheless, in Damascus a distant member of the Umayyad family named Marwan received the support of the military elites. Marwan died after only nine months in power, but he was succeeded by his son, ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan (r. 685–705 AD), an extremely capable ruler who proved a match for Ibn al-Zubayr, revived the fortunes of the Umayyads, and instituted the true rise to power of the Marwanid branch of the Umayyad dynasty.⁹³

Soon a third side in the war emerged, one that would have a great impact on the Christian cities of Northern Mesopotamia. Despite the massacre of ‘Ali’s family, Umayyad authority continued to be opposed in the city of Kufa, and in 685 Mukhtar ibn Abi ‘Ubayd al-Thaqafi led an uprising there aimed at avenging the Umayyad murder of ‘Ali’s son and other family members. Mukhtar’s ultimate goal was to install Muhammad Ibn al-Hanafiya (ibn Ali ibn Abi Talib), an illegitimate son of ‘Ali, as ruler. While Ibn al-Hanafiya was a lukewarm participant in this rebellion carried out in his name, Mukhtar and his followers hailed him as the Mahdi, an eschatological ruler who would renew the corrupted Islamic community.⁹⁴

Most of Mukhtar’s followers apparently were not themselves Arabs. The ranks of his army were mostly made up of *mawali*, non-Arab Muslims, many of them prisoners of war who had converted to Islam to escape slavery.⁹⁵ They were heavily outnumbered and poorly armed,

⁹¹ Hawting, *The First Dynasty of Islam*, 50–51; Marsham, *Rituals of Islamic Monarchy*, 91–92. Ali’s eldest son, Hasan, had given up any claim to power and submitted to Mu’awiya upon ‘Ali’s death.

⁹² On Ibn al-Zubayr, see especially Robinson, *‘Abd al-Malik*, 31–39, who argues that Ibn al-Zubayr should be considered one of the caliphs. For the promise of a return to purity, see Wilferd Madelung, “‘Abd Allāh B. Al-Zubayr and the Mahdi,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, vol. 40, no. 4 (1981), 291–305.

⁹³ Hawting, *The First Dynasty of Islam*, 58–61; Robinson, *‘Abd al-Malik*, esp. 39–48.

⁹⁴ William Frederick Tucker, *Mahdis and Millenarians: Shiite Extremists in Early Muslim Iraq* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 19–33; Sean Anthony, *The Caliph and Heretic: Ibn Saba’ and the Origins of Shi’ism* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 257–277; Hawting, *The First Dynasty of Islam*, 51–53. Torsten Hylén, “Mukhtar and the Mahdi: A Critical Inquiry into the Sources,” *DĪN: Tidsskrift for religion og kultur*, vol. 1 (2018), 138–157, problematizes the idea that Mukhtar proclaimed the Mahdi.

⁹⁵ The Arabic name given to Mukhtar’s followers, *khashshābiya*, “club-bearers,” indicates their rather poor equipment. It is also worth noting that at this point that it was possible for *mawālī* to be non-Muslims of a favored position: see Crone, *Slaves on Horses*, 237 n358; idem, “The Significance of Wooden Weapons in al-Mukhtār’s Revolt and the ‘Abbāsid Revolution,” in *Studies in Honour of Clifford Edmund Bosworth*, vol. 1, ed. Ian R. Netton (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 174–187.

‘Abd al-Malik’s government attempted to associate itself with Islam and the prophet, particularly through public works inscribed with proclamations of the Islamic profession of faith.¹¹⁵ While Ibn al-Zubayr’s governors were the first to mint coins inscribed with the Islamic statement of faith (*shahada*) ‘Abd al-Malik imitated them and soon bested them, first issuing his own coins with the statement of faith and, later, coins which broke from earlier Roman and Persian designs.¹¹⁶ He asserted Islam’s claim over Jerusalem with the construction of the Dome of the Rock, decorated with inscriptions that explicitly challenge the religious doctrines of Christianity.¹¹⁷

‘Abd al-Malik’s reforms were keenly felt in Northern Mesopotamia. An Arab governor was appointed over the region. The first, ‘Abd al-Malik’s half-brother Muhammad ibn Marwan, established a *jund*, a garrison of Arab military settlers, in Northern Mesopotamia.¹¹⁸ Muslim Arabs evidentially became an inescapable daily presence, not only in the government but also simply on the streets of many cities. Church canons speak to concerns over the Muslim presence. Doors were to be locked during church services to keep out the Muslims who might wander in and disturb the holy mysteries. Contemporary church canons addressed the question whether one could use textiles embroidered with the *shahada* in a church or for ecclesiastic garments. There was concern over the use of altars contaminated by the Muslims. The canons speak to the fact that already some women were marrying Arab Muslims, and even converting to their husbands’ religion.¹¹⁹

Perhaps most galling, the Arabs began to impose new taxes on Northern Mesopotamia,

¹¹⁵ In no surviving source promulgated by the Arab state before the Second Fitna — neither in inscriptions, documentary papyri, or elsewhere — is there any mention of Muhammad. There are, however, an abundance of inscriptions from the year 691 and later on milestones, buildings, textiles, coins, and other media proclaiming that there is one God and Muhammad is his prophet. See Robinson, ‘*Abd al-Malik*’, 113–121; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 550–551; Patricia Crone and Martin Hinds, *God’s Caliph: Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 24–25; Jeremy Johns, “Archaeology and the History of Early Islam: The First Seventy Years,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, vol. 46 (2003), 416.

¹¹⁵ Robinson, *Empire and Elites*, 52.

¹¹⁶ Clive Foss, *Arab-Byzantine Coins: An Introduction, with a Catalogue of the Dumbarton Oaks Collection* (Washington DC: Dumbarton Oaks Byzantine Collection, 2009), 57–69; Luke Treadwell, “Abd al-Malik’s Coinage Reforms: The Role of the Damascus Mint,” *Revue numismatique*, vol. 165 (2009), 357–381.

¹¹⁷ Gerrit J. Reinink, “Early Christian Reactions to the Building of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem,” *Xristianskij Vostok*, vol. 2 (2000), 229–241, views the building of the Dome of the Rock as the catalyst for the composition of Syriac apocalypses at the end of the seventh century. The construction may indeed have had some influence on the composition of apocalypses in this period, but the direct evidence of influence is quite weak. For the Arabic text of the inscriptions of the Dome of the Rock, see Christel Kessler, “‘Abd Al-Malik’s Inscription in the Dome of the Rock: A Reconsideration,” *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, no. 1 (1970), 2–14. There have been various translations, and controversy over some translations, of the inscriptions, including in Donner *Muhammad and the Believers*, 234; and Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 696–699. The scholar writing under the pseudonym Christoph Luxenberg has published a very different and more questionable version of the inscriptions, which he claims actually advocate an anti-trinitarian form of Christianity, in his article “Neudeutung der arabischen Inschrift im Felsendom zu Jerusalem,” in *Die dunklen Anfänge: neue Forschungen zur Entstehung und frühen Geschichte des Islam*, ed. Karl-Heinz Ohlig and Gerd-R. Puin, (Berlin: Schiler, 2005), 124–147.

¹¹⁸ There is much that is unknown about how Northern Mesopotamia was administered at this time. While the region still lacked a *misr*, a Muslim garrison city, there seems instead to have been a peripatetic administration under the governor (in this period, the feared Muhammad ibn Marwan). See Robinson, *Empire and Elites*, 52.

¹¹⁹ See Penn, *When Christians First Met Muslims*, 160–174.

The reaction to the tax and census is well recorded in Syriac historical sources. According to the *Zuqnin Chronicle*, listed under the year 1003 of the Seleucid Era (691/2 AD): ‘Abd al-Malik made a census among the *Suryaye*. He issued a swift decree stating that every person must go to his country, village, and paternal house to register his name and that of his father, as well as his vineyards, olive trees, cattle, children, and all that he owned. From this time, the poll tax (ܥܡܠܐ) began to be levied on men’s heads, and all the calamities began to emerge against the Christian people. Previously, kings used to levy tribute on land (ܕܝܪܝܐ ܥܡܠܐ) not men. From this time onwards the Sons of Hagar began to reduce the Sons of Aram to Egyptian slavery. Woe unto us! Because we sinned, the slaves ruled over us! This was the first census (ܕܥܡܠܐ) the Arabs made.¹²⁰

The taxation imposed was “probably neither terribly rapacious not terribly efficient,” especially in comparison to the taxes of the later Abbasid period, but that hardly matters.¹²² The taking of a census has generated ill will everywhere from the bible to the modern day as the ultimate manifestation of state intrusion. And even a small tax, where there had previous been none, can smack of tyranny and oppression. The Syriac *Chronicle of 1234* (relying on earlier material) notes that during another such *ta'dil* conducted on Mesopotamia twenty years later the Muslim authorities had people wear lead seals around their necks as a way of recording their wealth and possessions; this must surely have smacked of humiliation and slavery, which is why the chronicler mentions it.¹²³

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¹²² Quote from Robinson, *Empire and Elites*, 49.

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subjugation.¹²⁴ As booty, the surplus production of the conquered Christian was to be collected through taxation and redistributed as stipends to the local Muslim community. Anyone on the *diwan al-jund*, a register of Muslim soldiers, were entitled to such stipends.¹²⁵

The result was some of the earliest conversions of free Christians to Islam in an effort to attain a favorable financial status. Conversion to Islam brought exemption from taxation. It also required joining a tribe, and usually settling in a garrison town. This meant that the non-Arab converts to Islam would be enrolled in the *diwan*. In doing so, they would go from paying into the system of stipends to collecting from it (though they received smaller stipends on account of their status as non-Arabs).¹²⁶ Though conversion to Islam was not yet very common in this period, the incentives for conversion clearly alarmed Christian leaders, and demonstrated yet another way ‘Abd al-Malik’s reforms could terrify his Christian subjects.¹²⁷

At this point a new political order truly was emerging in the Syriac-speaking lands. This order has a distinct and widely communicated ideology: Islam. Old local power structures were replaced with more centralized imperial government. The old elites lost some measure of status, and new, Muslim Arab elites were suddenly a visible presence. These elites imposed taxation on their Christian subjects, which not only took some portion of their wealth, but also made clear that they were of a lower political status.

The Syriac Christian crisis of empire had come to a head in the seventh century. The inter-imperial rivalries of that century made it possible to not just imagine, but to experiment with, a Christian community outside of empire. Especially the Arab conquests, and the weakness of the Arab conquest state in its first half-century of existence, made this possible. ‘Abd al-Malik’s imperial consolidation in the early 690s brought all this to an end. Syriac Christians were once again undeniable imperial subjects. It is little wonder, then, that in light of this resurgence of empire, some Syriac Christians turned to a subject concerned with the place of empire in history: eschatology

Conclusions: A Century of Upheaval

The seventh century in Northern Mesopotamia was violent and chaotic. Empires fell and new empires replaced them, rendering old certainties moot. First, the Sasanians inflicted severe defeats upon the Eastern Roman Empire, bringing it to the brink of collapse. Then, the Romans/Byzantines counterattacked and reclaimed their lost provinces. Next the Arabs came,

¹²⁴ See M. J. Kister, “Land Property and Jihad: A Discussion of Some Early Traditions,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, vol. 34, no. 3 (1991), 270–311.

¹²⁵ Gerd-Rüdiger Puin, “Der Dīwān von ‘Umar ibn al-Ḥaṭṭāb: ein Beitrag zur frühislamischen Verwaltungsgeschichte” (PhD dissertation, University of Bonn, 1970); Hugh Kennedy, “The Financing of the Military in the Early Islamic State,” in *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East, vol III: States, Resources and Armies*, ed. Averil Cameron (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1995), 361–378, esp 363.

¹²⁶ Patricia Crone, “The Pay of Client Soldiers in the Umayyad Period,” *Der Islam*, vol. 80, no. 2 (2003), 284–300; Crone, *The Nativist Prophets of Early Islamic Iran*, 16; Hoyland, *In God’s Path*, 157–169.

¹²⁷ See Gerrit J. Reinink, “Following the Doctrine of the Demons: Early Christian Fear of Conversion to Islam,” in *Cultures of Conversions*, edited by J. Bremmer, W. Jac. van Bakkum, and A. Molendijk (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 127–138.

destroying the Sasanian Empire and crippling Byzantium. After that, the Arabs descended into civil war and contemporary observers expected their empire to collapse as well. However, the Arab Empire recovered and was strengthened under the rule of ‘Abd al-Malik.

This period also saw violent local uprisings, climatic disruptions, increased seismic activity, bouts of plague, and famine. At the end of it, Christians in Northern Mesopotamia were subjected to new taxes and suffered a loss of political autonomy. These events naturally led Christians to wonder why God had allowed such evils to befall them.

These two concerns—the course of the history of kingdoms and empires and theodicy—were two major concerns of eschatology. Thus, some Syriac Christians responded with explorations of eschatology, especially through the genre of apocalyptic literature. The rest of this chapter will focus specifically on the exploration of the events of the seventh century in Syriac eschatology.

Part III: Syriac Apocalyptic of the Second Fitna Era

The reign of ‘Abd al-Malik appears to have had an effect on the Syriac Christian communities similar to that of Antiochus IV on the ancient Jewish community. The sense of dislocation, and the rise of what Syriac Christians interpreted as persecution at the hands of a hostile non-Christian empire, spurred new needs to reevaluate and better understand the course of history and the why God had allowed these things to happen. As a result, the end of the seventh century saw a major surge in Syriac apocalyptic writing.

Other sources from the same period that did not strictly belong to the apocalyptic genre, such as John bar Penkaye’s history, also dealt with eschatology. The following table summarizes these surviving sources:

Text	Approximate date of composition	Probable location of composition	Christological confession of author
The <i>Book of Main Points</i> of John bar Penkaye	Between 687–689	Mount Qardu	Dyophysite (Church of the East)
<i>The Homily on the End</i>	c. 690 (and before the <i>Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara</i>)	Edessa	Probably Miaphysite
The <i>Apocalypse of John the Little</i>	690s	Edessa	Miaphysite
The <i>Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara</i>	c. 689–692	Near Mount Qardu (see appendix A)	Unknown
The <i>Edessene Apocalypse</i>	690s (and after the <i>Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara</i>)	Edessa	Miaphysite

III.1: The Ending of John bar Penkaye's *Book of Main Points*

In contrast to his detailed account of the Second Fitna, John bar Penkaye gave few concrete details about the coming of the Arabs four or so decades earlier. He documents the Arab conquests only in extremely general terms: “The entire land was handed over to the Arabs. They conquered all the fortified cities, and they ruled from ocean to ocean, from east to west.”¹²⁹ John provided a cursory list of regions conquered by the Arabs (Syria, Egypt, Armenia, Persia, Cappadocia, etc.) but no further details.

John understood the Arabs as tools of divine punishment for the sins of the Romans and Persians: “[God] summoned them from the ends of the earth to use them to devastate a sinful

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As mentioned above, John suggests that ultimately the Second Fitna would bring about the destruction of the Arab Empire thanks to the rebellious non-Arab *shurte* who had seized control of Nisibis (not far from the monastery where John was composing his history). After the Arabs, he predicted only chaos and upheaval: “it seems that those who survive the sword, famine, and plague of today are being perserved for even more bitter afflictions than these. For a distant people has been summoned against them, those whose actions the prophets have truly revealed.”¹³⁷ Though John does not mention who this invader would be, he may have had in mind the eschatological armies of Gog and Magog, commonly mentioned in seventh-century Syriac apocalypses.¹³⁸ None, not even the Romans, will be spared destruction at the hands of these invaders: “For they also strive to destroy the kingdom of the Romans and greatly desire to rule over all.”¹³⁹ Then, in the absence of earthly authority, the final enemy will arise: “And beyond them [there is] another evil, an evil that is hidden in good like deadly poison in honey. [But] up to here suffices. But here is the kingdom of the Lord.”¹⁴⁰ This hidden evil is perhaps the Son of Perdition (the Antichrist), but John does not elaborate, ending his history here.

A Syriac apocalypse, titled the “*Memra* (i.e., “Homily”) of Holy Mar Ephrem, the *Suryaya* Teacher, on the End, and on the Consummation and Judgment and Punishment, and on the People of Agog and Magog, and on the False Messiah” (ܡܠܚܬܐ ܕܩܝܡܬܐ ܕܥܦܪܝܡ ܕܫܘܪܝܝܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܥܢܝܢܐ ܕܥܡܟܐ ܕܐܓܘܓ ܕܡܥܘܓܐ ܕܡܨܝܗܐ ܕܡܨܝܗܐ ܕܡܨܝܗܐ ܕܡܨܝܗܐ) which will be called here the *Homily on the End* for short, survives in two late manuscripts (Vaticanus Syriacus 566, dated to 1472; and Dublin Trinity College B519, dated to around 1625). Nonetheless, it must be much older, as it influenced a number of other Syriac apocalyptic works, including the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*.¹⁴¹ Like the *Alexander Poem*, which was

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¹³⁹ John bar Penkaye, *Book of Main Points*, XV; ed. Mingana, *Sources syriaques*, vol. 1, 167: ܡܚܕܬܐ ܕܡܝܢ ܡܢܬܐ.

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modeled on the metrical homilies of Jacob of Serugh (and falsely attributed to him), the *Homily on the End* is imitative of the *memre* of Ephrem the Syrian (d. 373), to whom it is attributed.

Despite this attribution, the *Homily on the End* was almost certainly written in the seventh century, and contains a *vaticinium ex eventu* description of the invasion of the “Sons of Hagar” or “Ishmaelites,” that is, the Arabs.¹⁴² There has been some debate as to when in the seventh century the *Homily on the End* was written. Some scholars have suggested that it was written soon after the Arab conquests, c. 640 AD, in light of the “general panic and despair which followed the catastrophic defeat” of the Romans by the Arabs.¹⁴³ More recent scholarship, however, has pointed to what seem like explicit references to the policies of ‘Abd al-Malik, and so plausibly proposes that it was written around c. 690–692.¹⁴⁴ It was probably the work of a Miaphysite, as it mentions the persecution of the orthodox by the Romans, but makes no mention of Persian persecution.¹⁴⁵ Moreover, its author, as we shall see, envisioned his community as having formerly been under Roman rule. For this reason, it was probably composed in lands that had, before the Arab conquest, been part of the Byzantine Empire, perhaps in or around Edessa, the center of Syriac Christianity in the empire.

The *Homily on the End* began with predictions of coming upheavals, including plague and famine, but especially that “nations will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.” The first invasion is a thinly disguised reference to the war of 602–628 between the Roman and Persian Empires (in which Emperor Heraclius eventually defeated the armies of Khusrav II after

Jeffrey Wickes, “Time, Wickedness and Identity in Pseudo-Ephrem's *Homily on the End*” (MA Thesis: Catholic University of America, 2007), 37–55. An earlier edition, based on one of the two surviving manuscripts, with a Latin translation, was produced by Thomas Joseph Lamy, in *Sancti Ephraem Syri Hymni et Sermons*, vol. 3 (Mechelen: H. Dessain, 1889), col. 187–212. For studies on the *Homily on the End*, see G.J. Reinink, “Pseudo-Ephraems ‘Rede über das Ende’ und die syrische eschatologische Literatur des siebenten Jahrhunderts,” *Aram*, vol. 5 (1993), 437–463; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 260–263; Harald Suermann, “The Apocalypse of Pseudo-Ephrem,” in *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History, volume 1 (600-900)*, ed. D. Thomas and B. Roggema (Boston: Brill, 2009), 160–162; Penn, *When Christians First Met Muslims*, 37–46.

¹⁴² The earliest modern scholars to study the *Homily on the End*, in the tradition of asserting early textual origins, argued that it was actually composed primarily in the fourth century, and that the material on the coming of the “Sons of Hagar” was simply a later interpolation; see for example Wilhelm Bousset, “Beiträge zur Geschichte der Eschatologie,” *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*, vol. 20 (1900), 116. More recently, Suermann, *Geschichtstheologische Reaktion*, 111–112; and idem, “The Use of Biblical Quotations in Christian Apocalyptic Writings of the Umayyad Period,” 70, 82, has updated but largely reiterated this theory. However, this dating can no longer be sustained; the *Homily of the End* contains references to multiple seventh-century events, such as the war between Heraclius and Khusrav II, and regarding these all as interpolations would leave little remaining for the base text. Thus, all recent scholarship has accepted the *Homily on the End* as a fully seventh-century work.

¹⁴³ Quotation from Károly Czeglédy, “Monographs on Syriac and Muhammadian Sources in the Literary Remains of M. Kmosko,” *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, vol. 4 (1954), 34. Reinink, “Pseudo-Ephraems ‘Rede über das Ende,’” 437–463, has suggested that it was written sometime after the Arab conquest of Northern Mesopotamia in 640 but before 683, as he detected no references to the Second Fitna. Shoemaker, *The Apocalypse of Empire*, 86 also relies on this older dating.

¹⁴⁴ Wickes, “Time, Wickedness and Identity,” 7, suggests that reference to taxation in the *Homily on the End* suggests that it was written under ‘Abd al-Malik and gives a *terminus ante quem* of 692. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 260–263, calls it “the first Syriac apocalypse to appear in Islamic times,” and suggests that it may have been composed c. 692; Penn, *When Christians First Met Muslims*, 38, calls it perhaps the “earliest extant Syriac apocalypse that mention Islam,” yet likewise adds that it dates perhaps to the time of Caliph ‘Abd al-Malik.

¹⁴⁵ See Wickes, “Time, Wickedness and Identity,” 8.

they overran the eastern provinces of the Byzantine Empire). The poem described the invaders not explicitly as Persians but as “Assyrians” (ܐܫܘܪܝܐ). The “Assyrians” will seize the Roman lands, abuse women, destroy crops, and steal treasures (lines 51–58). Yet, “like the river Nile of Egypt/ that having ascended again descends,” the “Assyrians” will be driven out and Romans will recover their ancestral lands (lines 59–64).¹⁴⁶

However, the Romans will invite punishment by their sins: “Wickedness will increase upon the earth/ and they will defile the earth with fornication (ܠܗܘܢ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ).”¹⁴⁷ The language here is echoes that found in the Peshitta version of Ezekiel (23:17), in lines about the whore Oholibah: “The Babylonians came to her to sleep with her and they defiled her with fornication (ܠܗܘܢ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ).” In Ezekiel, Oholibah served as a metaphor for the Kingdom of Judah allowing itself to be defiled by foreign idolatry. Though her sister, the prostitute Oholah, was murdered by her Assyrian lovers (representing the northern Kingdom of Israel and its conquest by the Assyrians), Oholibah learned nothing and so invited punishment at the hands of her Babylonian lovers (representing Nebuchadnezzar’s Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem).¹⁴⁸

In the *Homily on the End*, the Romans, like the ancient Jews, learned nothing from their conquest by the Assyrians (i.e., Persians), and so by sinning again invited new invasion (by the Babylonians in the case of Jews, and by the Ishmaelites in the case of the Romans). Just as in Ezekiel, fornication in the *Homily on the End* was probably not literal, but instead represented religious transgression. The religious transgressions of Romans may be their general adherence to the Council of Chalcedon, or perhaps more specifically Heraclius' persecution of Miaphysites in the wake of his victory over the Persians.¹⁴⁹

Indeed, the following lines refer to the persecution of the faithful as God punishes the transgressions of the Romans: “A cry will go up to heaven/ from the persecuted and the poor/ Then righteousness will rise up/ to cast them [the Romans] out of the land. / The holy covenant will rise up / and a cry will go up to heaven. / A people will come forth from the desert:/ the Son of Hagar, the handmaid of Sarah.”¹⁵⁰ Thus, the Arab “Ishmaelites” are sent by God to punish the sins of the Romans. Like in John bar Penkaye, the Ishmaelites are described here at first in positive terms, acting as tools of divine retribution and keeping the covenant of Abraham (a reference to Islamic religious practice, but also favorably contrasted with the transgressions of the Romans).¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁶ Homily on the End, lines 59–64; ed. Beck, *Des heiligen Ephraem III*, 61 (reprinted in Suermann, *Geschichtstheologische Reaktion* 15): \ ܠܝܢ ܡܪ ܫܡܐ ܩܕܡܐ \ ܥܠܗ ܟܐ ܫܡܐ ܩܕܡܐ \ ܡܨܬܐ ܚܝܡܐ ܘܠܡܐ ܩܦܐ .ܥܡܡܩܬܐ ܚܝܬܐ ܫܠ \ ܠܡܬܐ ܕܐ ܥܡܡܩܬܐ \ ܫܝܬܐ ܕܠ ܠܝܬܐ

¹⁴⁷ *Homily on the End*, lines 65–66; ed. Beck, *Des heiligen Ephraem*, 61 (reprinted in Suermann, *Geschichtstheologische Reaktion* 15): ܠܗܘܢ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܝܚܝܬܐ ܕܟܪܝܫܬܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܝܚܝܬܐ On these lines, and the Romans acting as fornicators, see Jeffery Wickes, “Time, Wickedness, and Identity,” 25–26.

¹⁴⁸ The line from the Peshitta version of Ezekiel can be found in *The Old Testament in Syriac According to the Peshitta Version*, Part III, fasc. 3 (Leiden: Brill, 1985), 49.

¹⁴⁹ I owe these ideas to Jeffery Wickes, from unpublished material he has shared with me.

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¹⁵¹ Ibid., line 74.

Like the Ishmaelites, the Huns are depicted in the *Homily on the End* at first as tools of God's wrath, but soon their own cruelty warrants their annihilation. The *Homily on the End* differs from the *Alexander Legend* in how their destruction comes about: instead of the Roman Empire defeating the People of the North, the *Homily on the End* assigns the destruction of the Huns to the archangel Michael. Still the Romans do enjoy regained power after the Huns are defeated: "The Kingdom of Rome / again will flourish and rise up in its place. / And will conquer the land and its borders. / There will be none to oppose it."¹⁵⁶

While Reinink and Shoemaker saw the *Homily on the End* as a pro-Roman tract, others have suspected that its author harbored antipathy toward the Romans (after all, they are described as persecutors), or have simply been baffled by the seemingly mixed attitude toward the Romans.¹⁵⁸ What is the purpose of the fleeting magnification of Roman power at the end of time? Should the *Homily on the End* be classified as pro-Roman or anti-Roman?

¹⁵⁶ *Homily on the End*, lines 351–354; ed. Beck *Des heiligen Ephraem III*, 67 (reprinted in Suermann, *Geschichtstheologische Reaktion*, 25): ܠܝܬ ܡܠܚܬܐ \ ܠܡܪܝ ܕܡܐ ܠܬܠܬ \ ܡܝܬܪܬ ܡܪܝܬ ܐܕܬ ܡܪܝܬܐ \ ܡܡܬܐ ܡܪܬܐ ܠܡܬ ܠܐ \ ܡܡܬܐܬܐ

¹⁵⁸ See especially Wickes, "Time, Wickedness and Identity," 24–33, who notes on *ibid.*, 30, that it is "difficult to understand exactly what [the author of the *Homily on the End*] intends his portrait to communicate to his audience, specifically, whether he intends to inspire Roman allegiance or not."

Nonetheless, the *Homily on the End* does not dwell on the resurgent Roman power because the analogy between the Jews and the Romans breaks down at the end of the *Homily on the End*. The Jews looked forward to an eschatological Jewish kingdom at the end of time. In contrast, there is no room in the *Homily on the End* for a Roman eschatological kingdom because for the Christian author of the *Homily on the End* the eschatological kingdom, the fifth kingdom of Daniel, had to be Christ's heavenly kingdom.

In the end, the *Homily on the End* is neither pro-Roman nor anti-Roman. The *Homily on the End*, in sum, envisions a cycle of the rise and fall of empires and peoples, in which each punishes the sin of the previous before they are in turn punished for their own sins. It narrated the wars and conquests of the seventh century through the model of the history of the suffering of the Jewish kingdoms as narrated in the Book of Ezekiel (among other books of the Bible). In this model, the Romans are the Jews; a holy kingdom that sank into sinfulness. And yet this is only the background for the true message of the *Homily on the End*, which focused on the plight of pious Christians, presumably Miaphysite Christians, caught up in the violence of seventh-century imperial rivalries.

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¹⁶¹ Ibid, lines 555–556; ed. Beck, *Des heiligen Ephraem III*, 71 (reprinted in Suermann, *Geschichtstheologische Reaktion*, 33): ܡܚܠܝ ܡܥܨܪ ܡܠܟܐ ܕܢܝܢܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܢܝܢܐ.

and suffer some of the side effects of, God's wrath. Christians must simply brace themselves for the violence of the tribulations and keep the faith.

III.3: The Apocalypse of John the Little (from the Gospel of the Twelve Apostles)

Another eschatological work from the period survives in a single manuscript under the title the *Gospel of the Twelve Apostles Together, with the Apocalypses of Each of Them*. The manuscript dates from the middle of the eighth century, and while the editor of the *Gospel of the Twelve Apostles* believed that this manuscript contained the autograph version, more recent scholarship has suggested that the *Gospel of the Twelve Apostles* had been composed slightly earlier, toward the end of the seventh century.¹⁶²

The codex containing the *Gospel of the Twelve Apostles* was likely copied in Edessa and is included in a codex filled with Miaphysite religious texts, perhaps organized for the purpose of helping bring apostates back into the Syriac Orthodox Church and to instruct members of the church in discipline and theology.¹⁶³ The *Gospel of the Twelve Apostles* itself is a collection of visions or apocalypses, with a framing narrative set at the appearance of the resurrected Christ before his apostles. In order to aid them in spreading the gospel to the world, Christ grants each of apostle knowledge of a new language, and each goes to the mountain of the transfiguration to receive a prophetic vision.

While the title of the work suggests that the revelations of all twelve apostles (Judas having been replaced by Matthias) will be described, it actually contains only three (these visions are given to three of the four apostles who ask, in Mark 13:3, for the sign of the end of the world). The first is the revelation of Simeon Kephaz (Simon Peter), and concerns the affairs of the Church, especially the struggle against Chalcedonian and "Nestorian" heresy. The second apocalypse represents the vision received by James, son of Zebedee and is specifically concerned

¹⁶² The *Gospel of the Twelve Apostles* survives in Cod. Harvard Syriac 93. It has been edited, with an English translation, by J. Rendel Harris, *The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles: Together with the Apocalypses of Each of Them* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1900). Here I cite from Harris' edition, but note: I use modern Arabic numerals, while Harris uses Syriac numerals. A new translation and introduction of just the *Apocalypse of John the Little* was made by Penn, *When Christians First Met Muslims*, 146–155. For an overview of the *Gospel of the Twelve Apostles*, see Hans J. W. Drijvers, "The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles: A Syriac Apocalypse from the Early Islamic Period," in *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East, vol. I: Problems in the Literary Source Material*, ed. A. Cameron and L. Conrad (Princeton: Darwin, 1992), 189–213. Drijvers, in *ibid*, 209–213; and Reinink, "Following the Doctrine of the Demons," 132, believes that the *Gospel of the Twelve Apostles* postdates the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, and that the latter influenced the former. This is, however, hardly self evident, and it is probably safest to say that they are close contemporaries, reacting to the same general events, so that it is difficult, and perhaps unnecessary, to say which was written first.

¹⁶³ The manuscript containing the *Gospel of the Twelve Apostles* also contains many canons by Jacob of Edessa, as well as an excerpt from Severus of Antioch against Nestorian doctrine, canons from church synods, a formula of recantation for repentant heretics wishing to rejoin the church, and the *Doctrine of Addai* (the story of the Image of Edessa). Based on this material, Drijvers, "The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles," 191, has suggested that the manuscript is a collection of Miaphysite material meant to help bring apostates back into the "Jacobite" Church and to instruct them on discipline and theology. He also provides strong evidence, including the inclusion of the *Doctrine of Addai*, that it was likely produced in Edessa. See also wePenn, *When Christians First Met Muslims*, 150.

with the history of Jerusalem up to the construction of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher by Constantine, with a strong anti-Jewish polemical argument.¹⁶⁴

The final, and most detailed revelation concerned political eschatology, and is fittingly received by James' younger brother, John the son of Zebedee, the same John who supposedly wrote the Book of Revelation. Indeed, the *Apocalypse of John the Little* shows a surprising level of influence from the Book of Revelation for a Syriac work. The most important influence upon the *Apocalypse of John the Little*, however, is the Book of Daniel. Just as the *Homily on the End* adapted a model from Ezekiel to the political upheavals of the seventh-century, the *Apocalypse of John the Little* adapts the Book of Daniel for similar purposes.

The author of the *Apocalypse of John the Little* reinterprets the idea of the four kingdoms in Daniel so that they no longer represent a world-historical sequence of kingdoms, but rather the various powers competing in Northern Mesopotamia in the seventh century. These kingdoms are each represented by one ruler who stands as the founder or representative of that kingdom.

Since the first kingdom in this scheme is the Roman Empire, the first ruler, whom it places among the kings of the north from Daniel 11 (who represented the Seleucid kings in the original context of the Book of Daniel), is Constantine the Great: “There will be among them a man who will subdue all the people by the wondrous sign that will appear to him in heaven, and he will prosper and do well.”¹⁶⁵ However, as befits the apocalypse’s Miaphysite perspective, the emperors who succeed Constantine do not maintain his piety, and the Roman Empire falls into heresy and sin: “But after him kings from the Romans will rise up [who are] despicable, evil, idol worshipers and godless, accusers, deceivers, and hypocrites. All the Roman people will fall into fornication and adultery.”¹⁶⁶ Just as in the *Homily on the End*, the sins of the Romans are described in sexual terms. The true sin of the Romans was not literally sexual, but their adoption of a heretical creed. Considering the Miaphysite context of the *Apocalypse of John the Little*, such anti-Roman polemic is not surprising.

Thus, because of the sins of the Romans, God will cause the kingship to pass to the second kingdom, that of the Persians. “Persia will prevail over them, drive them away, and expel this kingdom from the land, because they [the Romans] committed so much wickedness.”¹⁶⁷ A warlike king will rise up among the Persians and cause much destruction, but his death will mark the decline of Persian power: “And he will die by the son of his own loins. All the silver and gold that he collected will not save him. Persia will rule [only] briefly after [him] and be handed

¹⁶⁴ Drijvers, “The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles,” 196, believes that the author confused this James with the James the brother of Jesus, who was bishop of Jerusalem, as this is why a vision about Jerusalem was assigned to him.

¹⁶⁵The *Apocalypse of John the Little*, cod. Harvard Syr. 93, fol. 55r; ed. Harris, "The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles," 16–17: ⲁⲗϥⲉ ϧⲓⲛ ⲕⲏⲟⲩ ⲙⲉ ⲣⲱⲃⲟⲩⲁ ⲡⲉⲑⲓⲁⲛⲟⲩⲁ ⲡⲉⲣⲱ ⲕⲏⲟⲩ ⲙⲉⲗⲉⲗ ⲡⲉⲩⲅⲉⲛⲟⲩ ⲡⲓⲭⲓ ⲙⲉⲛ ⲡⲉⲩⲱⲛⲟⲩ .ⲙⲉ.

[illegible][illegible]

Here taxation and captivity feed into one another: Christians will have to sell their children into slavery out of necessity to pay the onerous tribute. Still, even as the apocalypse portrayed the Ishmaelites as greedy, cruel, and terrifying, it also maintained that they had the power to do such things “because their kingdom and their authority are from God.”¹⁷⁴ God had given such power to these awful people on account of the sins of the other kingdoms.

However, just as with the previous kingdoms, the sins of the Ishmaelites will cause God to put an end to their power: “The southern wind will become still, and God will end his covenant with them.”¹⁷⁵ This follows the pattern in the apocalypse in which God allows each kingdom to triumph a little while, but each kingdom becomes greedy and sinful as a result of its new power, and is in turn replaced: “After these things, God will become angry with them, as with Rome, Media, and Persia.”¹⁷⁶ Thus, God will bring about their destruction through a bitter civil war, by which the *Apocalypse of John the Little* likely means the Second Fitna.¹⁷⁷

While this civil war divides the Ishmaelites, *Apocalypse of John the Little* predicts, the king of the North (i.e. the Roman emperor) will lead his armies against them. This will be the end of Ishmaelite dominion: “The Lord will return the southern wind to the place from which it came, and he will abolish its name and its glory.”¹⁷⁸ Thus the Ishmaelites will return to the desert, though the apocalypse specifies that the northerners (the Romans) will not pursue them there. The Ishmaelites will suffer miseries in their exile, but the apocalypse ends largely with a return to the status quo, with power having cycled back to the Romans.

Like the *Homily on the End*, the *Apocalypse of John the Little* explains the suffering of pious Christians by attributing it to the side effects of God’s punishment of the sinful empires. Nonetheless, suffering is less of a focus in the *Apocalypse of John the Little*. It gives more attention to political leaders and military campaigns than to their victims. The *Apocalypse of John the Little* should thus be seen as an early attempt to make sense of the Christian tradition of political eschatology derived from the Book of Daniel in light of the very new circumstances of the seventh century. By setting the visions of Daniel within the context of the conflicts in Northern Mesopotamia in the seventh century—during which an observer from Edessa (where the author may well have lived) would have seen the city pass between Roman, Persian, and Arab control—gave these prophecies a new relevance.

However, in doing so the *Apocalypse of John the Little* downgrades the sequence of kingdoms in Daniel from a framework for the world history of kingship and empire to a localized prophecy relevant only to a narrow portion of history. Indeed, its scheme for making sense of political eschatology in the changed circumstances of the seventh century was ultimately an

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, cod. Harvard Syr. 93, fol. 56v; ed. Harris, “The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles,” 19: ܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, cod. Harvard Syr. 93, fol. 57r; ed. Harris, “The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles,” 19: ܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, cod. Harvard Syr. 93, fol. 57r; ed. Harris, “The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles,” 20: ܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, cod. Harvard Syr. 93, fol. 57v; ed. Harris, “The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles,” 21: ܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ

abandoned model, a false start; it survives by chance because the eighth century manuscript happened to be preserved, not because future generations saw fit to copy it.

Still, the *Apocalypse of John the Little* testifies to the ongoing effort at the end of the seventh and beginning of the eighth century to make sense of a tradition of political eschatology in light of political circumstances that had radically changed. Like the *Homily on the End*, it envisioned a historical sequence by which God allowed a sinful people to be conquered, and then sees fit to punish the new peoples for their sins. Like in the *Homily on the End*, empire is transient, a quite natural perspective for a Syriac writer reflecting on the events of the seventh century.

The *Apocalypse of John the Little* is also like the *Homily on the End* in the minor role that it gives to the Romans. The Roman Empire is important in the beginning, but the Romans are punished for their sins and so forfeit their power. They will return in the future to reconquer the lands lost to the Ishmaelites, but once again this role is more or less incidental. The Roman Empire is neither a force for good nor for pure evil. It is but one of several kingdoms through which power has passed or will pass.

Conclusions: Making Sense of Seventh-Century Upheaval with Eschatology

John bar Penkaye, the *Homily on the End*, and the *Apocalypse of John the Little* all shared similar concerns about the Arabs. Two major practical concerns dominate these sources: the taking of captives and the imposition of tribute or taxation (which all three refer to as ܐܕܝܢܐ). In these sources, the taking of captives and the extraction of tribute go hand in hand; they are always mentioned together.

John bar Penkaye highlights captive taking and the extraction of tribute as the two main characteristics of the Arab conquests, though he is far less pessimistic about their effects. The captives are taken from abroad, from “far-off countries and islands.” The enslavement does not affect him or his community. He mentions moreover that the Arabs did not coerce anyone to convert and “from everyone they only (ܥܠܝܗܘܢ) demanded tribute (ܐܕܝܢܐ).” Here the implication is that the tribute is not so onerous a burden, especially compared to the enslavement suffered by foreigners, and indeed John launches from here into a glowingly positive description of Mu’awiya and his reign.

The apocalypses express greater horror at the taking of captives and imposition of tribute by the Ishmaelites, more akin to that expressed in the *Zuqnin Chronicle*. Whereas John bar Penkaye suggested that tribute was a relatively minor and fair price for religious freedom, the *Homily on the End* places enslavement and tribute-taking together as the two major terrors inflicted by the Ishmaelites upon their Christian subjects. It speaks at length and in stirring language about the Ishmaelite enslavement of Christians, and adds that when everyone thinks that things will get better the Ishmaelites will impose tribute (ܐܕܝܢܐ). Likewise, in the *Apocalypse of John the Little* taxation and captivity feed into one another. Christians will have to sell their children into slavery out of necessity to pay the onerous tribute (ܐܕܝܢܐ). This

difference probably reflects the fact that the two apocalypses were written slightly later than John bar Penkaye's *Book of Main Points*; John completed his history shortly before the end of the Second Fitna, whereas the apocalypses appear to have been written just after that war, when a resurgent Umayyad state imposed a census and regular taxation on Northern Mesopotamia. Nonetheless, all three sources notably identify taxation and slave taking as the two defining characteristics of Ishmaelite rule.

The parallels between John bar Penkaye, the *Homily on the End*, and the *Apocalypse of John the Little* extend to their treatment of the place of Arabs rule within history. All portray the coming of the Arabs as punishment for Roman heresy, or as part of a cycle of rising and falling empires that has its roots in Roman heresy (in which the Sasanian Persian Empire also played a role). They agree that God initially favored the Arabs, using them as his tool to punish sin, but turned against them once they began to abuse their new power. All three sources take for granted that for this reason Arab rule will be temporary, though they provide different explanations about how Arab power will crumble: John bar Penkaye suggests that the rebellious *shurte* in Nisibis will be the cause, the *Homily on the End* suggests that the nomadic "Huns" (symbolized by Gog and Magog from Ezekiel) from the steppe would invade the Arab Empire, while the *Apocalypse of John the Little* suggests that the Byzantines would mount a counteroffensive that would force the Ishmaelites back into the desert.

Although all three sources hoped for and expected the fall of the Arab Empire, they showed no real preference for any other empire. Instead, they expressed general ambivalence toward the empires of the seventh-century Near East. Like the *Alexander Poem*, they suggest that kingdoms and empires come and go, as God wills. Indeed, each empire—the Romans, Persians, and Arabs—was sinful or oppressive, and therefore at some point incurred God's wrath. The only kingdom they await with any optimism is that of Christ at the end of time.

Needless to say, the pro-Roman eschatology of Aphrahat and the *Syriac Alexander Legend* are absent in these sources. At the same time, none of the three adopt the common political-eschatological scenario found in Greek and Latin literature, in which the Roman Empire serves as the kingdom of the Antichrist. That scenario continued to be mostly unknown in Syriac eschatology. Rather, they experimented with new conceptions of political eschatology. They drew from the books of Ezekiel and Daniel, and like pseudo-Sebeos, experimented freely with adapting the succession of empires found in the latter to the new political circumstances.

Chapter Conclusions:

Syriac Christianity was deeply shaped by the events of the late sixth and seventh centuries. This period saw the culmination of the Christological controversies, the fall of the Sasanian Empire and retreat of the Eastern Roman Empire, and the rise of a new, Arab-ruled Muslim empire. The result was a crisis of empire in which Syriac Christians were alienated from the major empires and turned inward, emphasizing orthodoxy and community identity in place of

Christian universalism. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that the seventh century marks a major break in Syriac eschatology.

A greater amount of eschatological material survives from this century than from previous centuries, and this material is quite different from what came before. Rather than celebrating the Roman Empire and awaiting its eschatological triumph, these sources were deeply suspicious of all empires. Some, such as the *Alexander Poem*, argued for Christian disentanglement from the perennial but vain drama of imperial rivalry. Others, like the *Apocalypse of John the Little*, reimagined the contemporary empires as the oppressive gentile empires that oppressed the ancient Jews of the Old Testament. They experimented freely with models and themes, but they shared similar outlooks. They all saw the Arab conquests as proof that the old order had excited God's anger, that Rome's empire especially had fallen into sin, and that none of the great powers were particularly holy or important to Christian history. The authors of these works placed their allegiance in no kingdom but that of heaven.

With this context in mind, it is now necessary to turn to the important exception to this eschatological trend. The *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* stands out from these other sources in that it adopted the view that the Roman Empire had an important positive role to play in the consummation of history. This is not to suggest that its composition was particularly remarkable: it was but one experimental takes on eschatology in a century that saw many diverse experiments. Nonetheless, it must stand out because its popularity outside the Syriac tradition—in contrast to all the works surveyed in this chapter, none of which seem to have ever been translated into another language—meant that it acted as the conduit through which Syriac eschatological ideas reached the larger Christian Mediterranean world.

CHAPTER 6: THE *APOCALYPSE OF METHODIUS OF PATARA* AND THE RETURN OF APHRAHAT'S ESCHATOLOGY

Introduction: Making Sense of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*

Aphrahat's political-eschatological innovation—namely, the idea that the Roman Empire acted as a good fourth kingdom of Daniel, holding kingship over the earth in trust until Christ returned to claim it—might have simply been forgotten in the changed world after the Arab conquests. Nonetheless, around the year 690, somewhere in Umayyad-ruled Northern Mesopotamia (probably near Mount Judi, where John bar Penkaye produced his history a few years earlier), a Christian author rearticulated Aphrahat's eschatological ideas, elaborating them in a detailed apocalypse (on the date and location of the composition of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, see Appendix A).¹

Almost nothing is known about the author of this apocalypse. One of the few clues about him (the author was almost certainly a man) comes from a comment in which he says that a line in Psalm 68:31 was often misinterpreted by “many brothers among the sons of the church”

¹ The *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* survives in five Syriac manuscript copies, dating from the thirteenth to the twentieth centuries. All these manuscripts originate in the West Syrian Syriac Orthodox Church, the so-called “Jacobite” Church, and are written in the West Syrian script (*Serto*). For a long time the most important and only manuscript available to Western scholars was Cod. Vatican Syr. 58, copied in 1584–1586 AD. The text as preserved in this manuscript is conventionally called the “Vatican recension.” The other surviving manuscripts are all closely related and preserve a slightly different recension, called the “Mardin Recension.” The oldest of these is Yale Beinecke Library 10, copied 1222/3 AD, though the second half of the text was damaged and ineptly restored in the early twentieth century. Cod. Church of the Forty Martyrs in Mardin 368 (copied 1365 AD) is an apograph of the Beinecke manuscript, though it is missing the first few folios. Finally, two apographs of Cod. Mardin 368, also held in Mardin, survive: Cod. Mardin 891 (late nineteenth century) and Cod. Mardin A (copied in 1956 AD). An early and unreliable translation of the Syriac *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* was published in Paul Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 36–51. The *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* was first edited on the basis of the only available manuscript at the time, the late sixteenth-century Cod. Vatican Syr. 58 (with corrections based on the epitome in Solomon of Basra's thirteenth-century Syriac *Book of the Bee* and the Greek and Latin versions of the *Apocalypse*) by Francisco Martinez, “Eastern Christian Apocalyptic in the Early Muslim Period: Pseudo-Methodius and Pseudo-Athanasius” (PhD dissertation, Catholic University of America, 1985), 58–121, with an English translation on *ibid.*, 122–201. Another edition based on Cod. Vatican Syr. 58, with a facing German translation, was also published by Harold Suermann, *Die geschichtstheologische Reaktion auf die einfallenden Muslime in der edessenischen Apokalyptik des 7. Jahrhunderts* (Frankfurt: Lang, 1985), 34–85. A more recent edition, part of the CSCO series, was published by Gerrit J. Reinink, *Die syrische Apokalypse des Pseudo-Methodius*, vol. 1 (Leuven: Peeters, 1993), with a German translation and extensive commentary in the companion volume, *idem, Die syrische Apokalypse des Pseudo-Methodius*, vol. 2 (Leuven: Peeters, 1993). Reinink utilized in his edition several additional manuscripts discovered in the collection of the Church of the Forty Martyrs in Mardin and a thirteenth-century manuscript, Cod. Yale Beinecke Syriac 10. Nonetheless, Reinink produced a diplomatic edition based, like that of Martinez, on Cod. Vatican Syr. 58. Thus, Reinink provided variant readings from the other manuscripts and corrections to the text in his apparatus. For this reason, here I cite from Reinink's edition, but I provide what I judge that best possible reading of the text passed on the variant's in Reinink's apparatus.

(ܡܬܕܝܘܣ ܒܝܫܦܘܬܐ ܕܡܬܕܝܘܣ ܕܡܬܕܝܘܣ). The phrase “sons of the church” (ܡܬܕܝܘܣ ܕܡܬܕܝܘܣ) was often used to mean clergy.² The author’s inclination to call the clergy his “brothers” suggests that he was perhaps a priest or a monk.

Whoever he was, this Syriac author wrote under the name of Methodius of Patara. This was itself a rather strange choice. The historical Methodius made no known claim to prophethood or revelatory visions in his own lifetime. Though many details about him remain uncertain, this historical Methodius seems to have been a well-educated late antique Greek Christian theologian, probably the bishop of a small city in southwestern Asia Minor, perhaps Olympus or Patara (though it is possible he was bishop somewhere else, or possibly never a bishop at all).³ He likely met his death in the persecution of Emperor Maximinus Daia in 311 AD, just a year before Constantine’s great victory at the Milvian Bridge.⁴ Methodius’ surviving genuine writings, far from revelatory visions of the end times, are instead dense philosophical tracts exploring Christian theological issues in the style of Platonic dialogues.⁵

² See *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary: Founded Upon the Thesaurus Syriacus of R. Payne Smith*, ed. J. Payne Smith (Mrs. Margoliouth) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1903), 54.

³ There has been much debate in modern scholarship concerning whether Methodius was a bishop, and if so, where his see was located. In opposition to the tradition that Methodius was a bishop, Kurt Quensell, *Die wahre kirchliche Stellung und Tätigkeit des fälschlich so genannten Bischofs Methodius von Olympus* (PhD dissertation: University of Heidelberg, 1952), argued that the writings of Methodius lack the concerns a bishop would have addressed and rather reveal that he was an ascetic. Quensell’s assertion that Methodius was not a bishop was initially influential, especially in German patristic scholarship, but has been rejected in more recent research. Accepting that Methodius was a bishop, however, the question of Methodius’ episcopal see presents some difficulties. Several manuscripts copies of his genuine works attribute to him the bishopric of Patara. The tenth-century Byzantine encyclopedia called the *Suda* makes him bishop of either Patara or Olympus (and later of Tyre), see *Suidae Lexicon*, vol. 3, ed. Ada Adler (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1994), 432: Μεθόδιος, Ὀλύμπου Λυκίας ἡτοῖ Πατάρων, καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα Τύρου ἐπίσκοπος. However, the fourth-century church historian Socrates, *Eccl. Hist.*, VI.13.2, ed. G. C. Hansen, calls Methodius “bishop of the city called Olympus in Lycia” (Μεθόδιος τῆς ἐν Παμφυλίας πόλεως λεγομένης Ὀλύμπου ἐπίσκοπος), and similarly Jerome, in his *De Viris Illustribus*, 83, describes Methodius as “bishop of Olympus in Lycia, and later of Tyre” (*Methodius, Olympi Lyciae, et postea Tyri episcopus*). Theodor Zahn, “Über den Bischofssitz der Methodius,” *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*, vol. 8 (1886), 15–20; Timothy Barnes, “Methodius, Maximus and Valentinus,” *Journal of Theological Studies*, vol. 30 (1979), 54–55, and Katharina Bracht, “The Question of the Episcopal See of Methodius of Olympus Reconsidered,” *Studia Patristica*, vol. 34 (2001), 3–10, have all addressed the problem of Methodius’ bishopric, and though they have different theories about how Methodius was associated with Patara and Tyre, they agree that he was most likely bishop of Olympus.

⁴ There is disagreement in the ancient sources as to whether Methodius was martyred under Maximinus Daia, or in an earlier persecution under either Decius (r. 249–251 AD) or Valerian (r. 253–260 AD). In his short biography on Methodius, Jerome, *De Viris Illustribus*, 83, he recounts two traditions about when Methodius was martyred: “at the end of the last persecution [i.e., that of Maximinus Daia in 311], or, as others assert, under Decius and Valerian” (*ad extremum novissimae persecutionis, sive, ut alii affirmant, sub Decio et Valeriano*). The tenth-century *Suda* relates only the tradition that Methodius was martyred in the earlier persecution of Decius and Valerian, see *Suidae Lexicon*, vol. 3, ed. Ada Adler, 432: ὅς περὶ τὰ τελευταῖα τοῦ διωγμοῦ ἐπὶ Δεκίου καὶ Βαλεριανοῦ ἐν Χαλκίδι τῆς ἀνατολῆς μαρτυρίῳ ἐστέφθη. Modern scholarship has reached the consensus that Methodius was martyred in the later persecution of Maximinus Daia: see Herbert Musurillo, *The Symposium: A Treatise on Chastity* (London: Longmans, Green & Co, 1958), 170–172.

⁵ On the strong influence of Plato on Methodius, see Musurillo, *The Symposium*, 3; Katharina Bracht, *Vollkommenheit und Vollendung: zur Anthropologie des Methodius von Olympus* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 176–177; Alexander Bril, “Plato and the Symptotic Form in the Symposium of St. Methodius of Olympus,” *Zeitschrift für antikes Christentum*, vol. 9 (2006), 279–302. For an overview of scholarship on Methodius’ life, thought, and writings, see Dawn Teresa LaValle, “Methodius of Olympus’ *Symposium*, Imperial Greek Literature and the Aesthetics of Hope” (PhD dissertation: Princeton University, 2015), 25–27.

Why did the author of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* assume the identity of this staid Christian philosopher and admirer of Plato? After all, though a few works of Methodius of Olympus/Patara do survive in Syriac translation, and he was cited occasionally by some Syriac authorities, he was hardly a well-known figure among late antique Syriac Christians.⁶

Gerrit Reinink has attempted to provide an explanation by pointing out that the historical Methodius was a chiliast (that is, he claimed that Christ would rule the earth in the seventh millennium of history, at the start of which the resurrection of the dead would take place) and so his views may have appealed to the author of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, who organized his historical chronology according to seven millennia.⁷ However, this is hardly a convincing explanation.⁸ There are no chiliastic ideas in the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, and its division of history into seven millennia reflected the organizing scheme of history used in the *Cave of Treasures*, one of its main sources.⁹ The seventh millennium in the *Apocalypse of*

⁶ It appears that Methodius was best known among Syriac writers for his *On the Resurrection*; see Martinez, “Eastern Christian Apocalyptic,” 54 n.109. The Syriac chronicle of Pseudo-Zacharias Rhetor, compiled in 568/9, in a passage about the preservation of beauty, describes a parable of a sculptor and his statue told by Methodius of Olympus, “from the work which he addressed to Aglaophon concerning the resurrection of the dead.” In the ninth century Isho’dad of Merv, in his gospel commentary, cites Methodius’ *On the Resurrection* offhandedly during his discussion of the story of the fish with the coin in the mouth (Matthew 17:24–27) as an authority that fish can eat everything. Michael the Syrian, writing in the later twelfth century, mentions Methodius of Olympus twice, both times alongside Epiphanius of Salamis and Eustathius of Antioch, as an opponent of Origen and as an authority affirming the bodily resurrection (information derived from *On the Resurrection*). On the other hand, the fourteenth-century the East Syrian bishop ‘Abdisho’ bar Brikha/ ‘Abdisho’ of Nisibis (ܐܒܕܝܫܘܐ ܒܪ ܒܪܝܚܐ) (d. 1318), in his *Catalogue of Syriac Literature* wrote that the writings of Methodius extant in Syriac were letters and a tract on “the succession of generations” (ܬܪܬܘܡܐ ܕܬܠܝܬܐ); see Giuseppe Simone Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis Clementino-Vaticana*, vol. 3.1 (Rome: Typis Sacrae congregationis de Propaganda Fide, 1725), 27–28; the nature of these letter is unknown, though the tract on the succession of generations is probably the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, which ‘Abdisho’ believed was one of his genuine works.

⁷ Reinink, *Die syrische Apokalypse*, vol. 2, vi–vii: “Am Wichtigsten ist aber die Tatsache, daß Methodius’ Millenniarismus dem Verfasser der Apokalypse dazu dienen konnte, seine auf der *syrischen Schatzhöhle* beruhende Einteilung der Weltgeschichte in Millennien auf die Anschauung, daß im siebenten Millennium die Endzeit beginnen würde, auszudehnen.” Reinink’s view has been adopted by Witold Witakowski, “The Eschatological Program of the *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius: Does it Make Sense?” *Rocznik orientalistyczny* 53.1 (2001) 39–40; Martinez, *Eastern Christian Apocalyptic*, 35–36.

⁸ Lutz Greisiger, “The End is Coming—To What End? Millenarian Expectations in the Seventh-Century Eastern Mediterranean,” in *Apocalypticism and Eschatology in Late Antiquity: Encounters in the Abrahamic Religions, 6th-8th Centuries*, ed. H. Amirav, E. Grypeou, Emmanouela, and G. G. Stroumsa (Leuven: Peeters, 2017), 94–99, has raised problems with Reinink’s argument, but can conclude only “it remains a mystery why the [*Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*] was ascribed to the Greek father in the first place.”

⁹ In dividing history into seven millennia, the author of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*—and the *Cave of Treasures* which he was following—was drawing from a well-established late antique chronological scheme, the so-called “world week” or “*septimana mundi*.” On the influence of the “world-week” chronology in Syriac literature, see Witold Witakowski, “The Idea of Septimana Mundi and the Millenarian Typology of the Creation Week in Syriac Tradition,” in *V Symposium Syriacum 1988*, ed. by R. Lavenant (Rome: Pont. Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1990), 93–109. He notes on 94: “By the expression “*septimana mundi*” we understand the concept of the world’s seven thousand years of existence... This typology should be strictly distinguished from the so-called “millenarian,” in the one thousand years of the earthly kingdom of Christ and his martyrs, announced in the Book of Revelation to come before the end of the world.” The “world week” probably did indeed have its origins in Christian millennial assumptions about the age of the world and the duration of history (thus many of the earliest proponents of the “world week” chronology were chiliasts), but by the seventh century it had developed into a system of chronology that had long ago diverged from its chiliastic roots.

Methodius of Patara is not the period of the peaceful rule of Christ and the saints upon the earth, but simply the contemporary era, one filled with disasters and upheaval.

I propose two alternative reasons why the author of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* likely assumed the identity of Methodius. The first is that one of the major themes in the works of the historical Methodius, especially his *Symposium*, was the danger of fornication and the importance of chastity and sexual purity.¹⁰ The *Apocalypse* shows a similar interest in sexual renunciation. As we shall see below, the author of the *Apocalypse* focused on the issue of sexual sin through history.¹¹

The second potential reason the author of the *Apocalypse* may have chosen Methodius as his *nom de plume* is that the historical Methodius wrote a commentary on the Book of Daniel. Though this commentary is lost, Jerome mentioned it in his own commentary on Daniel.¹² The whole of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* can be considered a reinterpretation of previous interpretations of the kingdoms of Daniel, based on Aphrahat's eschatological reading, and so it is fitting that it is written under the name of one of the earliest Christian commentators on Daniel.

Surprisingly, only a few scholars have dealt with the place of the Book of Daniel in the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, and nearly all have overlooked Aphrahat's influence on the

¹⁰ Methodius' *Symposium* has been edited in the Sources Chrétiennes series (no. 95) by Herbert Musurillo *Méthode d'Olympe: Le Banquet*, transl. Victor-Henry DeBidour (Paris: Les Éditions de Cerf, 1963). Herbert Musurillo had earlier published an English translation: idem, *The Symposium: A Treatise on Chastity* (New York: Newman, 1958).

¹¹ Though it appears to have been less widely read in Syriac than Methodius' *On the Resurrection*, the *Symposium* appears to have been translated into Syriac prior to the end of the sixth century. A Syriac fragment survives in a catena of the late sixth century titled a "Volume of Demonstrations of Holy Fathers Against Diverse Heresies" (ܩܕܝܫܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ), a collection of excerpts from various church fathers recognized by the Syriac Orthodox Church in order to support West Syrian (Miaphysite) theology. This catena survives in several manuscript copies cataloged by William Wright, *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum Acquired since the Year 1838* (London: British Museum, 1872); they are Cod. British Museum Add. 12155 (eighth century) (see Wright, *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts*, no. 857, 921–955, with Methodius on ibid, 932); Cod. British Museum Add. 14532 (eighth century) (see Wright, *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts*, 955–967 (no. 858), with Methodius on ibid, 960); Cod. British Museum Add. 14533 (seventh century) (see Wright, *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts*, 967–976 (no. 859), with Methodius on ibid, 969); and Cod. British Museum Add. 14538 (tenth century) (see Wright, *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts*, 1003–1008 (no. 863), with Methodius on ibid, 1005). Theodosius of Alexandria the latest author listed in the catena, so the collection was probably collated some time between c. 566 (the date of Theodosius' death) and the seventh century (the date of the earliest manuscript). Though it is possible that the catena had been translated from Greek (which would imply that only the fragment of Methodius' *Symposium*, and not the whole *Symposium*, had been translated from Greek), this appears unlikely: the fragment of Methodius is placed alongside Isaac of Antioch, Jacob of Serugh, Philoxenus of Mabug, and Rabbula of Edessa, all of whom wrote in Syriac and whose works very probably did not exist in Greek translations. Thus, a Syriac version of Methodius' *Symposium* likely existed, from which the compiler of the catena excerpted.

¹² According to Jerome, *Commentary on Daniel*, prologue; *S. Hieronymi Presbyteri Opera, Pars I, Opera Exegetica 5: Commentariorum in Daniele Libri III*, ed. Franciscus Glorie (Turnhout: Brepols, 1965), 771, Methodius' response to Porphyry was ten thousand lines long, and it was polished and logical. The only other concrete detail from Jerome is that Methodius rebutted Porphyry's attack on the authenticity of the visions and prophecies in the Book of Daniel.

Apocalypse.¹³ Javier Martinez, a rare exception, noticed the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* was concerned with the four kingdoms of Daniel and noted some thematic parallels with Aphrahat, but neither connected these two findings nor explored either in much detail.¹⁴ As a result in these oversights, scholars have responded to the contents of the *Apocalypse* with bewilderment. If early twentieth-century readers regarded it as “the crazy fever dream of a half-mad monk,” more recent scholarship has been only slightly kinder: “both faintly absurd and curiously moving,” is how one scholar has described it.¹⁵

Perhaps scholars have overlooked the influence of Aphrahat and the larger arguments about the kingdoms of Daniel in the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* because they often only read small parts of it. The *Apocalypse* can be divided into two halves: the “historical” part, written in the past tense (chapters 1–10), and the “prophetic” part, written in the future tense (chapters 11–14).¹⁶ Scholars have poured over the chapters of “prophetic part,” focusing on the *vaticinium ex eventu* descriptions of the oppression of the Arabs (called, as in other Syriac sources, “Ishmaelites”). Through the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, as Middle Eastern politics and the Islamic faith have become issues of intense study in the European and American academy, these portions of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* have been valued as an early source for Christian perceptions of the Arabs and of Islam.¹⁷ Likewise, the passages

¹³ John J. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, ed. Frank Moore Cross (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 117, could claim, for example, that the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* “makes relatively little reference to Daniel.”

¹⁴ Francisco Javier Martinez, “The Apocalyptic Genre in Syriac: The World of Pseudo-Methodius,” in *IV Symposium Syriacum 1984: Literary Genres in Syriac Literature*, ed. H. J. W. Drijvers, R. Lavenant, C. Molenberg, et al (Rome: Pontificium Institutum studiorum orientalium, 1987), 345–346.

¹⁵ The first quotation comes from Michael Kmosko, “*Das Rätsel des Pseudomethodius*,” *Byzantion*, vol. 6 (1931), 274: “Man hielt sie für das alberne Geirngespenst eines halbverrückten Mönches...” Here, Kmosko characterizes the common view of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* at the time, though he argues against dismissing it as such. The second quotation is from Hugh Kennedy, *The Great Arab Conquests: How the Spread of Islam Changed the World we Live In* (Philadelphia, 2007), 348.

¹⁶ This division into two halves originates (“*historische Teil*” and “*prophetische Teil*”) in an edition of Greek translation of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*: Anastasius Lolos, *Die Apokalypse des Ps.-Methodios*. (Meisenheim am Glan: Hain, 1976), 9–19. Lolos also divided the *Apocalypse* into fourteen chapters; although these chapters are modern interventions not found in the manuscript copies, they have become standard in all scholarly editions, and I use them here for convenience to reference the text.

¹⁷ One of the earliest such uses of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* was by Walter Kaegi, “Initial Byzantine Reactions to the Arab Conquest,” *Church History*, vol. 38, no. 2 (1969), 139–149, who regarded it as a “Byzantine” reactions to the Arab conquests—its Syriac author could be lumped among Byzantines on account of his Christianity and evident preference from Byzantine rather than Arab rule. Sebastian Brock, “Syriac Sources for Seventh-Century History,” *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, vol. 2 (1976), 17–36; and idem, “Syriac Views of Emergent Islam,” in *Studies on the First Century of Islamic Society*, ed. G.H.A. Juynboll (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1982), 9–21, put greater emphasis on the specifically local Syriac-Christian perspective of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*. The *Apocalypse* provided an important source for Robert Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1997), with a detailed study on 263–267. G. J. Reinink, “Following the Doctrine of the Demons: Early Christian Fear of Conversion to Islam” in *Cultures of Conversions*, ed. J. Bremmer, W. Jac. van Bakkum, and A. Molendijk (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 127–138, has focused on concern over Christian conversion to Islam indicated by the *Apocalypse*. Michael Penn, *Envisioning Islam: Syriac Christians and the Early Muslim World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press), made prominent use of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*,

about the Last Roman Emperor (the “King of the Greeks,” *ملك الروم*, as the *Apocalypse* calls him), who will arise to conquer the Ishmaelites in a great war, have garnered enormous attention because they provided the genesis of the Last Emperor Legend that would become popular in medieval apocalypticism.¹⁸ Little attention, however, has been given to the previous, “historical” chapters of the *Apocalypse*.

The “historical” half of the *Apocalypse* detailed history from Adam and Eve down to the conquest of Jerusalem by the Roman Empire. Admittedly, these chapters contain some of the strangest passages in the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*. In the judgment of Javier Martinez, in his study of the *Apocalypse*, the “historical” chapters made claims that “could blow the mind of any decent historian.”¹⁹ The historical narrative bears only the vaguest resemblance to real history, and many of episodes it contains (such as the marriage of an Ethiopian woman who happens to be the mother of Alexander the Great to the founder of Byzantium; and their daughter’s marriage to Romulus of Rome) can seem absurd to modern readers. Moreover, these chapters are as strange for what they exclude as for what they include. For example, the *Apocalypse* largely ignores the history of the Jews: Abraham, Moses, David, and Solomon are mentioned only incidentally, if at all. The life, death, and resurrection of Christ, the central events in Christian history, hardly come up. Nor does the *Apocalypse* even once mention Augustus, the first Roman emperor, or Constantine, the emperor most important in the conversion of the Roman Empire to Christianity, even though the *Apocalypse* is preoccupied with the notion of Rome as the universal Christian empire.²⁰

It is little wonder that scholars have so far been inclined simply to ignore the “historical” part of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, particularly those chapters that do not discuss the Ishmaelites. The two most recent English translations of the *Apocalypse* omit these chapters altogether.²¹ They are treated as if they are of little value, and when scholars do mention them it is to comment on their absurdity.²²

and the other contemporary Syriac apocalypses, as major sources for how Syriac Christians remembered the Arabs conquest.

¹⁸ On the larger history of this figure, see Hannes Möhring, *Der Weltkaiser der Endzeit: Entstehung, Wandel und Wirkung einer tausendjährigen Weissagung* (Stuttgart: Thorbecke, 2000). Nonetheless, as noted in a previous chapter, Möhring’s analysis of the origins of the Last Emperor tradition are outdated.

¹⁹ Martinez, “The Apocalyptic Genre in Syriac,” 347.

²⁰ Möhring, *Der Weltkaiser*, 63, notes with consternation: “Von den bekannten Tatsachen der römischen Geschichte in vorchristlicher wie christlicher Zeit ist mit einer Ausnahme keine Rede... Dementsprechend sind Vespasian und Titus die einzigen römischen Kaiser, die Erwähnung finden. Männer wie Caesar, Augustus oder Constantin der Große bleiben ungenannt... Nicht einmal die Geschichte Jesu wird erwähnt.” Kenneth Baxter Wolf, “Back to the Future: Constantine and the Last Roman Emperor,” in *The Life and Legacy of Constantine: Traditions through the Ages*, ed. Shane Bjornlie (London: Routledge, 2017), 115–132, attempts to explain the absence of Constantine in the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*.

²¹ These translations are that of Sebastian Brock in *The Seventh Century in the West-Syrian Chronicles*, ed. A. Palmer, S. Brock, and R. Hoyland (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1993), 230–242; and the translation of Michael Philip Penn, *When Christians First Met Muslims: A Sourcebook of the Earliest Syriac Writings on Islam* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), 116–129.

²² Kmosko, “Das Rätsel des Pseudomethodius,” 273–296, considered the historical section strange, but attributed this to its Syriac (and, by extension, Persian) literary influence; *ibid* 286: “Steht nun einmal die syrische Ursprache der Apokalypse fest, so lässt sich die scheinbar absurde, oder wenigstens extravagante

Nonetheless, only by reading the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* as a whole—“historical” and “prophetic” sections together—can its ideas and message be fully understood. Instead of dismissing the seemingly bizarre history that the *Apocalypse* narrates, it is more fruitful to attempt to understand what ideas the author was trying to convey. Though the “historical” chapters are obscure and seldom make their point explicitly, they invite and reward careful analysis. For this reason, this chapter will provide a close reading of the full *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*.

To aid in this effort, this chapter will also make occasional use of another apocalypse, the so-called *Edessene Apocalypse* (or the “Edessene Pseudo-Methodius,” as it is sometimes called), a reworking of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* (similar enough to it that when the first manuscript copy was discovered scholars initially mistook it for a copy of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*).²³ This *Edessene Apocalypse* was redacted in Edessa (as indicated by its periodic mention of that city and its surrounding monasteries) probable sometime in the 690s, and is extant in two fragmentary manuscript copies.²⁴ While only the last few folios of the *Edessene Apocalypse* survive (roughly covering material in the “prophetic” half of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*), and it clearly had nowhere near the influence of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, it is useful in that it provided explicit explanations for ideas that the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* only hinted at.

With these resources, this chapter will demonstrate that the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* relied upon the eschatology of Aphrahat (which it probably received via the intermediary of the *Syriac Alexander Legend*). Moreover, this chapter will show that the *Apocalypse* provided Aphrahat’s claims with an elaborate historical justification (the “historical” part of the *Apocalypse*). Finally, in its “prophetic” part, the *Apocalypse* developed Aphrahat’s ideas into a detailed eschatological scenario, expanding on Aphrahat’s ideas, predicting how they would be

Geschichtskonstruktion des Verfassers beinahe restlos erklären.” Möhring, *Der Weltkaiser*, 60–63, summarizes the historical sections in some detail, but deals with the historical details by noting how strange they are, ending many of the sentences with “(!)”.

²³ François Nau, “Révélation et légendes. Méthodius - Clément - Andronicus,” *Journal Asiatique*, series 11, no. 9 (1917), 415–471. When Nau wrote, the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* was well known in its Greek and Latin translations, but no Syriac manuscript had yet been identified. Nau correctly surmised that the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* had originally been written in Syriac, and upon discovering the *Edessene Apocalypse* mistook it for the original Syriac version of the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*.

²⁴ The *Edessene Apocalypse* survives in Cod. Paris Syriac 350 (copied 1646 AD), though the first few folios of the apocalypse are missing in this manuscript; and in Cod Cambridge Add. 2054 (eighteenth century), of which only two folios survive. Nau, “Révélation et légendes,” 425–434, published the text from the Paris codex. Martinez, “Eastern Christian Apocalyptic,” 206–231, reprinted Nau’s text with an apparatus based on the Cambridge manuscript and supplemented with an extensive introduction, and with an English translation on ibid, 232–246. Suermann, *Geschichtstheologische Reaktion*, 86–97, also reprinted Nau’s text, together with a German translation. The *Edessene Apocalypse* has also been translated into English (with introductory material) by Sebastian Brock in *The Seventh Century in the West-Syrian Chronicles*, 243–250; and by Michael Philip Penn, *When Christians First Met Muslims*, 130–138. On the *Edessene Apocalypse* in general, see G. J. Reinink, “Der edessenische Pseudo-Methodius,” *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, vol. 83 (1990), 31–45; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 267–270; and Lutz Greisiger, “Edessene Apocalypse,” in *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History, volume 1 (600–900)*, ed. David Thomas and Barbara Roggema (Boston: Brill, 2009), 172–175.

acted out in the last days, and making them relevant to a world in which an Arab Muslim Empire had eclipsed the Roman Empire.

Part I: Sin, Punishment, and Redemption in the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*

The *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, written in Umayyad Northern Mesopotamia in the aftermath of the Second Fitna, endeavored to explain the successes of the Muslim Arabs. It was one of several such responses, other surviving examples of which we have seen in the previous chapter. Like these other contemporary Syriac apocalypses, the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* describes the Ishmaelite occupation as a *vaticinium ex eventu* prophecy.

Scholars have often lumped the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* together with those contemporary Syriac apocalypses in that all of them suggested that God caused the Ishmaelites to come out of the desert as punishment for sin. True, they did all suggest that this was the case. However, by focusing on the prophetic half of the *Apocalypse*, these scholars have overlooked the earlier material that contextualizes the later passages and shows that the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* was making a very different argument from the other Syriac apocalypses.

In the *Homily on the End*, the Ishmaelites arrived as punishment for the sins of the Romans. After their victory over the Persians, the Romans had “defiled the earth with fornication,” and so God allowed the Ishmaelites to rise up and “cast them out of the land.” Similarly, in the *Apocalypse of John the Little*, God brought forth the Ishmaelites as punishment for the sins of the Persians (who had themselves acted as punishment for the sins of the Romans) and mysterious Medes, and as a result they devastated both the Romans and Persians. According to John bar Penkaye, God sent the Ishmaelites to punish the Romans for their heresies and the Persians for their arrogance (on these sources, see above, chapter 5, Part III). These sources reflected the skepticism and ambivalence toward the great empires, and disillusionment with continuing embrace of the Chalcedonian “heresy” by the Romans. The *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, in contrast, expressed unalloyed enthusiasm for the Roman Empire. Indeed, it is possible to view the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* as a rebuttal to the ideas in the contemporary Syriac contemporary apocalypses (and in the *Book of Main Points* of John bar Penkaye).

Not only do scholars overlook the fact that the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* actively responded to the ideas in other contemporary Syriac apocalypses, but since they have also failed to notice the influence of Aphrahat on the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, they have missed the ways in which it revived his eschatology in order to make its argument. Like Aphrahat, it suggested that the Roman Empire was a chosen kingdom tasked with ruling the world on God’s behalf and protecting Christians. The empire’s destiny was to survive to the end of time, that is, up to Christ’s second coming. If it was temporarily weakened and absent, it must certainly return and set the world aright as God intends.

The *Apocalypse* could not dispute the notion that the Ishmaelites had been sent as punishment for sin, but it diverted the blame for that sin from the Roman Empire to the greater Christian community. The empire was therefore not at fault, and in fact had an important positive

role in the fulfillment of God's plan for history, as Aphrahat and the *Syriac Alexander Legend* had suggested. In this sense, the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* represents a last great burst of the pro-Roman eschatology first formulated by Aphrahat.

Nonetheless, by the end of the seventh century much had changed since the time of Aphrahat. Indeed, much had changed even since the composition of the *Syriac Alexander Legend*, the likely source by which the author of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* learned of Aphrahat's eschatology. The *Apocalypse* had to make sense of the Roman Empire's role in a world turned upside down by the Arab conquest, and to adapt the Aphrahatian eschatology accordingly. This section will show how the *Apocalypse* countered the more negative assessment of the Roman Empire in contemporary apocalypses with a vision of Rome as an exalted empire. It will show that the *Apocalypse* did so in terms that could be acceptable to Syriac Christians who were used to regarding the Roman Empire as source of Christological heresy and had witnessed the defeat (and seeming punishment) of the Romans at the hands of the Arab armies.

I.1: Sexual Sin and Divine Punishment among the Progeny of Adam and Eve

Contemporary Christian Syriac writers could all agree that the Arab occupation, the devastation they inflicted during the Second Fitna, and the harsh measures imposed afterwards by 'Abd al-Malik were all punishment for Christian sin. Many were content to identify that sin as the Christological heresies promulgated by the Roman government. The *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* accepted Christian sin as the source of the current misfortunes, but identified a rather different source of that sin.

The *Apocalypse* had absolutely nothing to say about Christology or doctrine (scholars thus cannot agree as to whether it was composed by a Chalcedonian, Miaphysite, or East Syrian dyophysite; see Appendix A). Instead, it was far more concerned with immorality and sexual incontinence. To explain this, the *Apocalypse* began at the dawn of history, with Adam and Eve. Here, the *Apocalypse* examined the earliest sin, and the decline of humanity that caused God to wipe out most of his creation with the Flood.

As already noted above, the author of the *Apocalypse* shared with the historical Methodius of Olympus/Patara a concern over sexual transgression. Both authors developed a theory of sexuality in human history. The historical Methodius laid his out in his *Symposium*, a Christian philosophical dialogue modeled on Plato's *Symposium*. Unlike the Athenian men who talk of love and sex in Plato's work, Methodius wrote of ten virgin women discussing the merits of life-long chastity. He had one of these women, Marcella, articulate his historical theory: at the moment Adam and Eve were expelled from Paradise, humanity was utterly corrupted by sexuality. Nonetheless, people have slowly been striving for a return to the perfect prelapsarian state ever since. Thus, Marcella proposed a gradual advancement of the sexual mores of humanity, from incestuous unions (necessary among the limited progeny of Adam and Eve), to

polygamous (but not incestuous) marriages, to monogamous marriages with adultery, to faithful marriages, and finally, through Christ and the church, back to virginity.²⁵

Another speaker and mouthpiece of Methodius' ideas in the dialogue, the lady Thalia, later described the state of Adam and Eve before the fall: Adam and Eve had been created to praise God, and with their virginal and incorruptible bodies they were little different from angels. In the words of Peter Brown, Methodius presented Adam's prelapsarian body as, "a well-tuned instrument for the praise of God."²⁶ Yet, when Adam and Eve were expelled from Paradise they were initiated into the cycle of sex and death.²⁷

It is very possible that these ideas were known to the author of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, and influenced his decision to write under the alias of Methodius. Just as the historical Methodius stressed that Adam and Eve were virgins living in the ideal state in Paradise, the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* opens with an address to the reader: “Friends, let us begin our work by giving insight to careful learners: when Adam and Eve left Paradise, they were both virgins.”²⁸ Once expelled, Adam and Eve were confronted with sexuality, initiating humanity’s most constant struggle.

The author of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* laid out his history of sexuality and divine punishment in the first two chapters. After Cain murdered Abel, humanity was divided between the descendants of Cain and those of Seth (Adam and Eve's third son). The latter settled on a mountain near Paradise, while the children of Cain remained in the valley where Cain had murdered Abel, and there they descended into revelry and sexual excess: "The women rebelled against their husbands within the camp of the house of Cain, and they became whores. Men came to them shamelessly and openly fornicated with them."²⁹ Though the progeny of Seth remained steadfast and good during the first millennium, in the second millennium of history they went down from the mountain and joined in the sexual wantonness among the descendants of Cain. "Men and women went mad in the camps of the sons of Cain. The women were running after the men openly and, like mares that are in a wild herd, the women went mad in an excess of fornication, and the men along with the women."³⁰

²⁵ Methodius, *Symposium*, i.2.17–18, ed. Herbert Musurillo in *Méthode d'Olympe: Le Banquet*, transl. Victor-Henry DeBidour, Sources Chrétiennes no. 95 (Paris: Les Éditions de Cerf, 1963), 58 (Greek), 59 (French translation). See also Herbert Musurillo, *The Symposium*, 44–45.

²⁶ Quotation from Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 184–185.

²⁷ Methodius, *Symposium*, i.2.17–18, ed. Musurillo, 100 (Greek), 101 (French translation). Translation from Herbert Musurillo, *The Symposium*, 62–63.

²⁸ The *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, I.1; ed. Reinink, *Die Syrische Apokalypse*, vol. 1, 1: תְּחִלָּה יֵצֵא מִן הַבְּרִיטָנְיָה וְיֵצֵא מִן הַבְּרִיטָנְיָה וְיֵצֵא מִן הַבְּרִיטָנְיָה.

[illegible][illegible]

The latter statement is more or less a direct quotation from the *Cave of Treasures* within the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*.³¹ Indeed, most of the material in these early chapters was lifted directly from the *Cave of Treasures*, the Christian history of the ancient Jews written c. 600 AD in the Sasanian Empire. Nonetheless, the author of the *Apocalypse* selected only a small percentage of the much longer and detailed narrative in the *Cave of Treasures*, specifically choosing passages about sexual transgression.

According to the *Apocalypse*, the excess of fornication caused God to wipe out most of humanity with the Flood, so that “the work of two millennia was destroyed in a single hour.”³² Nonetheless, God spared Noah, through whose progeny humanity was reconstituted. This account of the moral lapse and divine punishment of the antediluvian world reverberates through the rest of the *Apocalypse*. The sexual immorality of Cain’s family, and the gradual corruption of the formerly upright progeny of Seth, acted as a typological forerunner of the much later Christian sins that would bring about their enslavement at the hands of the Ishmaelites. Thus the flood foreshadows the punishment that awaits similar sins of the flesh in the seventh millennium, when God will cause a new deluge, not of water but of the wicked Ishmaelites.

This duetronomistic cycle—in which God’s people sin, receive punishment, and then are forgiven and allowed to start over—was hardly unique. Yet the example the author of the *Apocalypse* chose is informative. The author of the *Apocalypse* did not choose the classic deuteronomistic story: Israel’s constant cycle of punishment and forgiveness for engaging in idolatry. Such lapses were common in the Old Testament, and late antique Christians easily read them as typologically akin to heresy (as in the *Homily on the End*). However, the *Apocalypse* ignored these. Instead, it opted for a more primordial sin, one more fundamental to humanity, and one that lacked political overtones: sex.

I.2: The First Ishmaelite Occupation

The Ishmaelites are important in the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* because they are the new flood, a typological successor to God's original scourge for punishing his people. The *Apocalypse* added another detail that appears to have been rather novel at the time: that God used the Ishmaelites more than once as punishment for the sins of his people. The author found justification for this idea in the Book of Judges.

Chapter 6 of the Book of Judges (in the Peshitta) begins: “And the children of Israel did evil before the Lord, and the Lord handed them over to the hands of the Midianites for seven years.”³³ The author of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* seems to have regarded this as an

³¹ The *Cave of Treasures*, XII.1–3; ed. Su-Min Ri, *Caverne des Trésors: les deux recensions syriaques*, (Leuven: Peeters, 1987), 88–89.

³² The *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, II.3; ed. Reinink, *Die Syrische Apokalypse*, vol. 1, 3 (with emendations from the apparatus): ⲕⲁϥⲉ ϯⲱⲧⲉ ⲛⲓⲙⲉⲩⲏⲟⲩ ⲛⲓⲣⲏⲗⲉ ⲛⲓⲃⲁⲛⲁⲥ ⲁⲑⲉ ⲛⲓⲃⲁⲛⲁⲥ

[illegible]

The *Apocalypse* placed the first invasion of the Ishmaelites in the fifth millennium, deriving this information no doubt from the *Cave of Treasures*, which begins its account of the fifth millennium simply by noting that “The children of Israel were enslaved by the Midianites for seven years, until God delivered them through Gideon, who ruled them for forty years.”³⁴ These lines introduce the chapter of the *Cave of Treasures* that culminates with the kingship of Saul and David. Thus, in the *Apocalypse*, this event from the Book of Judges can provide another example of God’s people whose sins bring about catastrophic punishment; nonetheless, usefully this is not punishment called down upon a king or kingdom—the Jewish kingdom did not yet exist—but upon the Jews as individual sinners.

³⁴ The *Cave of Treasures*, XXXV.2; Ri, *La Caverne des Trésors*, 272. ܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܚܝܬܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܚܝܬܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ
ܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܚܝܬܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܚܝܬܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܚܝܬܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܚܝܬܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ

³⁶ The *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, V.4; ed. Reinink, *Die Syrische Apokalypse*, vol. 1, 8 (with emendations from the apparatus): ܕܬܥܡܟܝܢ ܕܡܬܘܕܝܫ ܕܦܬܪܐ ܕܡܠܚܬܐ ܕܡܬܘܕܝܫ ܕܦܬܪܐ.

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The first invasion by the Ishmaelites, the *Apocalypse* claimed, was stopped by Gideon. Here, its version of events is heavily influenced by the account of Gideon's reign from the Book of Judges (chapters 7 and 8). Ultimately, Gideon was the tool of God's deliverance of his chosen people:

Thus, the first Ishmaelite occupation was put to an end by a great leader from God's chosen people. If the second Ishmaelite occupation—that is, Arab rule in the seventh century AD—was a reprisal this event that had taken place about two thousand years earlier, it would presumably proceed and resolve much like first.

While some of the places listed here are quite clear, other identifications are more difficult. “The Great Aluza” (ܐܠܘܙܐ) is perhaps Sardinia, since it is translated as such in the Greek and Latin versions (since Sardinia is beyond Rome from the perspective of a writer in Mesopotamia this makes some sense). A detailed case for this identification is made by Walter Kaegi, “Gightis and Olbia in the Pseudo-Methodius Apocalypse and their Significance,” *Internationale Zeitschrift für Byzantinistik*, vol. 26 (2000), 164-165, who argued that “Aluza” in the Syriac likely refers to the toponym *Olbia*. There were a number of cities named Olbia in the ancient world, but one of them was a major seaport on Sardinia. *Gagatnas* (ܓܓܬܢܐ) is more difficult to identify. The Greek translator rendered it as Γυήτου, and in the Latin it is *Gigitum*. Sackur, *Sibyllische Texte*, 67, identified it with Gigon in Thracia or Gigonus in Macedonia. Martinez, *Eastern Christian Apocalyptic*, 128 translates it as “Egypt,” though this defeats the idea that the Ishmaelites reached the distant west. Walter Kaegi, “Gightis and Olbia,” 161–163, argues that it refers to the Roman town of Gightis, opposite the island of Djerba in modern-day Tunisia, where there was a Byzantine fortress/port of some strategic value in the seventh century. Kaegi’s argument is compelling, though it is still difficult to explain why an author from Northern Mesopotamia knew of and mentioned such an obscure locale.

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devastate all the kingdoms of the earth, it noted that the only exception will be the Roman Empire: "It will not be overcome by any of them, for it truly possesses the invincible armor that conquers everything."⁴⁰ Thus, just as Gideon broke the first Ishmaelite occupation, the second occupation would in turn be ended by the leader of God's new chosen people, the Roman Empire.

This statement is difficult to square with reality as Syriac Christians must have seen it on the ground. The Byzantine Romans had suffered defeat after defeat at the hands of the Arabs, and although (unlike the Sasanian Persian Empire) their empire had survived, they had been expelled from Northern Mesopotamia. Nonetheless, for the author of the *Apocalypse*, the Roman Empire remained invincible. If God had allowed the Arabs to chase them away, it was to realize a larger plan.

The *Apocalypse* would later deal with the Roman defeats in its “prophetic” section, at the start of chapter 11, when it begins its narration of the second Ishmaelite occupation. When the Ishmaelites again come out of the desert, it said, they will crush the army of the Greeks (that is, the Byzantine Romans) at a place called *Gab ‘ot Ramta* (גַּבְעוֹת רַמְתָּא), i.e. “*Gaba ‘ot* the Great.” Modern scholars have tried to link this site to a historical battle in which the Arabs defeated the Byzantines, particularly the Battle of Yarmouk (c. 636 AD).⁴¹

Nonetheless, this event should be read in light of the first Ishmaelite occupation in the historical section. The name *Gaba'ot Ramta* (ܓܒܐ ܐܘܬ ܪܡܬܐ) corresponds to the place where, according to the Syriac Peshitta translation of Book of Judges (7:1), Gideon defeated the Midianites (ܓܒܐ ܐܘܬ ܪܡܬܐ, ܕܡܕܝܢܝܬܝܢ).⁴² Thus, at the very place that Gideon defeated the Ishmaelites, the Ishmaelites will win a victory and so they will be able return to enslave God's people. This reversal of Gideon's subjugation of the Ishmaelites presumably explains the temporary absence of the Greeks/Romans, an absence that allows the Ishmaelites to establish a period of oppressive occupation of all the lands from Persia to Africa.

I.3: The Second Ishmaelite Occupation

This second Ishmaelite occupation in the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, which is narrated in the future tense as a *vaticinium ex eventu*, reflects the contemporary Arab occupation of Northern Mesopotamia in the seventh century, especially after the Second Fitna. The concerns of the author of the *Apocalypse* are very similar to those voiced in other contemporary Syriac apocalypses.

⁴⁰ The *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, V.9; ed. Reinink, *Die Syrische Apokalypse*, vol. 1, 10 (with emendations from the apparatus): ܐܠܗܝܡ ܕܥܪܚܢ ܬܘܒ ܫܟܠܶܩܳܬܰܗ ܕܨܠܽܬܺܝܢܵܢܹܐ ܕܥܪܚܢ ܕܥܪܚܢ ܕܥܪܚܢ ܕܥܪܚܢ ܕܥܪܚܢ ܕܥܪܚܢ ܕܥܪܚܢ ܕܥܪܚܢ ܕܥܪܚܢ.

⁴¹ Kmosko, “Das Rätsel des Pseudomethodius,” 286; Martinez, *Eastern Christian Apocalyptic*, 186–187, Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests*, 138, follows them, and even tries to glean details about the Battle of Yarmuk from this brief mention (though he notes that caution should be taken in doing so).

⁴² Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, 32; Martinez, *Eastern Christian Apocalyptic*, 186–187; and Reinink, *Die Syrische Apokalypse*, vol. 2, 41 n.xi.1.4, all point this out, though they still allow that the author of the *Apocalypse* had the Battle of Yarmouk in mind.

Theirs will be the fish in the sea, the trees in the forests, the plants with their fruits, and the dust of the earth, with its precious stones and its crops. The commerce of the merchants, the work of the laborers, the inheritance of the rich, and the gold, silver, bronze, and iron gifts of the holy, clothing, all the precious and decorative vessels, foods, delicacies, and everything pleasurable and delightful will be theirs. Through wrath and pride they will become so arrogant that they will extract tribute from the dead lying in the dust and they will take the poll tax from orphans, widows, and holy men.⁴³

Like, the *Apocalypse of John the Little*, the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* drew a relationship between taxation and slavery. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the *Apocalypse of John the Little* asserted that under the Ishmaelite occupation: “A man will go forth from his house and find four tax collectors [at] his gate demanding tribute (ܐܬܝܢܐܝܐ). People will sell their sons and daughters out of necessity.”⁴⁴ The *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* used strikingly similar language: “A man will go to sleep in the evening and wake up in the morning to find outside his door two and three oppressors and demanders of tribute (ܐܬܝܢܐܝܐ) and money...[people] will sell their sons and daughters to the pagans for money.”⁴⁵ Likewise, the *Apocalypse* echoes the lamentations over the suffering of those taken captive found in the other contemporary Syriac apocalypses. It speaks of the long road to Yathrib (the archaic name it uses for Medina): “On it will journey old men and old women, the rich and the poor, and they will be so hungry and thirsty and tormented by the harsh chains that they will consider the dead happy.”⁴⁶

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The shared concerns and similar language suggests that the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* was part of a larger discourse concerning the difficulties and traumas face by Christians in under the reign of ‘Abd al-Malik. It is possible that the author had read these other contemporary apocalypses. The author of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* seems to have been acquainted at least with *Holy Mar Ephrem’s Homily on the End*.⁴⁷ Nonetheless, since the *Apocalypse of John the Little* and John bar Penkaye shared many of the same ideas about the cause of the Arab occupation, it is possible that such ideas were quite widespread at the end of the seventh century and the author of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* encountered them in other sources that are now lost.

Whatever the case, the author of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* added a completely new element not found in the other surviving apocalypses. The *Apocalypse* dwelled on the sexual terror inflicted by the Ishmaelites. It related this to Christian sexual transgression. It combined the idea developed in its early chapters that sexual sin was the root of divine punishment with the suggestion it made in its account of the first Ishmaelite occupation that God handed over his chosen people to the Ishmaelites as punishment for their sins.

While the *Apocalypse* was vague about the sin responsible for the first invasion of the Ishmaelites, is unambiguous in blaming the second Ishmaelite occupation on the sexual transgressions of the Christians, like those that brought about the Flood. It begins by quoting Deuteronomy 9:5 and proceeds to relate its theme to current events:

For God said to the sons of Israel through Moses, “Not out of love for you does the Lord your God bring you into the land of gentiles to inherit it, but because of the wrongdoing of its inhabitants.” Just so with these sons of Ishmael. Not because the Lord God loves them does he allow them to enter and conquer the kingdom of the Christians, but because of the wrongdoing and sin carried out by the Christians, the likes of which has not been done in previous generations. For men have dressed up in the lascivious clothes of whores. They adorned themselves like young girls, and they have stood publicly in the marketplaces of the cities, and, shamelessly rabid with drunkenness and lust, they had sex with one another. Likewise, female prostitutes stood openly in the marketplaces. A man would enter and fornicate and leave, and then his son would come and defile himself with the same woman. Brothers, fathers, and sons all at the same time would defile themselves with the same woman.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ In chapter 8 the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* describes Alexander the Great's imprisonment of the peoples of Gog and Magog behind his gate, listing the twenty-two peoples of Gog and Magog; many of the names it provides are the same as those given in the *Homily on the End*. On this, see Caterina Franchi, "'S'affacciò l'Orda, e il mondo le fu pane': Landscapes of Destruction in the Apocalyptic Tradition," in *Landscapes of Power Selected Papers from the XV Oxford University Byzantine Society International Graduate Conference*, ed. M. Lau, C. Franchi and M. Di Rodi (Peter Lang, 2014), 125–142, esp. 137–141, where Franchi explores the meaning of the names of the various peoples of Gog and Magog.

⁴⁸ Ibid, XI.5–7; ed. Reinink, *Die Syrische Apokalypse*, vol. 1, 25–26 (with emendations from the apparatus):

Moreover, sexual violation is a major touchstone of the description of the depredations inflicted by the Ishmaelites in the *Apocalypse*. After enumerating the sexual transgressions responsible for bring about the Ishmaelites, the author added: “Therefore God will hand them [the Christians] over to the defilement of the barbarians, so that the men will suffer the chastisement of afflictions and their wives will be defiled by the Sons of Defilement.”⁴⁹ Thus, the sexual sins yield sexualized punishment for Christian women. The *Apocalypse* described further violence against women, specifically targeted at their role in procreation: “They [the Ishmaelites] are defiled and love defilement. And in that time when they shall come out of the desert, they will split open pregnant women, and they will snatch babies from their laps of their mothers and, like defiled animals, they will dash them upon the rocks.”⁵⁰

Importantly, the author's preoccupation with sexual sin served to redeem the Roman Empire. As we have seen, in other contemporary Syriac apocalypses the Romans were accused of the sin of fornication. According to the *Homily on the End*: the Roman "will defile the earth with fornication."⁵³ As discussed in the previous chapter, this line alludes to Book of Ezekiel's story of Oholah and Oholibah, the Egyptian prostitutes whose insatiable cravings for sex serve as metaphors for Israel and Judah's lust for idolatry. Likewise, the *Apocalypse of John the Little* asserted that after Constantine's pious reign, his successors will be corrupt, so that "all the

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⁵¹ Ibid., XI.18; ed. Reinink, *Die Syrische Apokalypse*, vol. 1, 32: ܫܠܡܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܚܝܬܐ ܕܩܕܝܫܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܚܝܬܐ ܕܩܕܝܫܐ.

⁵³ The *Homily on the End*, line 66; ed. Edmund Beck, *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrsers Sermones, III* (Leuven: CSCO, 1972), (reprinted in Suermann, *Geschichtstheologische Reaktion* 15): ܬܚܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܢܗܝܬ.

Roman people will fall into fornication and adultery.”⁵⁴

In these two Miaphysite apocalypses, the fornication of the Romans is almost certainly a metaphor for their adherence to the Chalcedonian creed. This fit with their larger Miaphysite conception of history. Just as the Jewish kingdoms of Israel and Judah, so beloved and favored by God, betrayed God through idolatry, the Roman Empire similarly lost God's favor through a false creed. Just as God punished Israel and Judah by allowing them to be conquered by the Assyrians and Babylonians, the Romans were punished with conquest by the Ishmaelites.

Such a view was not adopted by the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*. Instead, it suggested that the Ishmaelites punish literal fornication. Nor did the Romans specifically engage in this sexual sin, but all Christians committed this sin. In fact, sexual incontinence has its roots, the *Apocalypse* suggests, in the earliest history of humanity. Just as God punished all of humanity with the flood, so he punished all of humanity with the Ishmaelites. The Romans were not singled out for destruction by the Ishmaelites, but instead the Romans alone will survive the Ishmaelites.

I.4: The Revenge of the King of the Greeks

Just as the first Ishmaelite occupation was temporary, the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* suggested, so too will be the second occupation. Soon the Romans would return to their proper place as the rulers of the world. Thus, though the Romans had seemingly been brought low by the Arab conquests, this did not mean that they had lost God's support. Just as the God had sent Gideon to rescue the chosen people from the first Ishmaelite occupation, eventually God will send the King of the Greeks (ملك الروم), i.e. the Byzantine emperor, to rescue the world from the second Ishmaelite occupation.

The doom of the Ishmaelites, the *Apocalypse* predicts, will come when they are eating and drinking and celebrating their endless string of conquests. “They will blaspheme, saying ‘The Christians have no savior.’ Then suddenly the pangs of affliction, like those of a woman giving birth, will be awoken against them. The King of the Greeks will go out against them in great anger. He will awaken like a man shaking off his wine, he who was considered by them as if dead.”⁵⁵ The King of the Greeks will lead a swift campaign that will conquer the Ishmaelites. He will attack Arabia from over the Red Sea (the “Sea of the Kushites”). In the meantime, “The followers [or “sons”] of the King of the Greeks will descend upon them [the Ishmaelites] from the countries of the west and will finish off with the sword the rest remaining in the Promised

⁵⁴ The *Apocalypse of John the Little*, cod. Harvard Syr. 93, fol. 55r; ed. J. Rendel Harris, *The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles: Together with the Apocalypses of Each of Them* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1900). 17:ⲕⲓⲁⲓⲃⲁ ⲕⲥⲁⲓⲃⲁ ⲓⲃⲁ ⲙⲓⲗⲁ ⲕⲥⲁⲓⲁⲙⲉⲧⲓ ⲕⲥⲁⲓⲁ .

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The King of the Greeks, or “Last Roman Emperor” as the literary model inspired by it has come to be known, is one of the clearest legacies of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, endlessly imitated and embellished in medieval and early modern literature and legend. Nonetheless, it is vital to understand the King of the Greeks in the original context of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, uncolored by these later traditions. Read in this light, it becomes clear that the King of the Greeks is a personification of the Syriac eschatological ideas about the Roman Empire that originated in Aphrahat.

In contrast, the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* gloried in the prospect of a Roman conquest, in the shift in power relations, the settling of scores, and the righting of wrongs that it would presumably entail. Indeed, whereas the other contemporary apocalypses spoke only in general terms of the eventual punishment of the Ishmaelites, the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* narrated a stirring revenge fantasy centered on the King of the Greeks. This ruler will pay back the Ishmaelites for their wicked treatment of Christians:

The fantasy of the future in the *Apocalypse* continues to focus on those who suffered captivity under the Arabs. The righting of all the wrongs by the King of the Greeks will involve a return of all people to where they lived before the arrival of the Arabs:

Then the land that had been devastated of its inhabitants will be at peace, and the remnant left over will return, each to his country and to the inheritance of his forefathers: [Back

⁵⁶ Ibid, XIII. 11; ed. Reinink, *Die Syrische Apokalypse*, vol. 1, 38–39 (with emendations from the apparatus): ܡܕܢܚܐ ܠܥܝܢܐ ܕܗܘܐ ܩܪܒܐ ܕܫܡܝܐ ܕܗܘܐ ܬܰܪܰܓܦܰܐ ܕܰܟܰܠܰܬܰܐ ܕܰܨܰܠܰܬܰܐ ܕܰܣܰܠܰܬܰܐ ܕܰܤܰܠܰܬܰܐ ܕܰܫܰܠܰܬܰܐ ܕܰܫܰܠܰܬܰܐ.

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The campaigns of the King of the Greeks thus brings just retribution to the Ishmaelites and restores peace and harmony to the world. Roman rule is not unjust, nor a source of sin or heresy, but in fact brings about justice.

Nonetheless, the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* was no in way chiliastic. Indeed, it makes no reference whatsoever to the Book of Revelation, the source of Christian chiliasm. The King of the Greeks did not stand in for the role of Christ as the new messiah. The King of the Greeks would be a temporal king, a mortal king; indeed, he dies near the end of the *Apocalypse*.

Thus, some scholars have seen some commonalities between the King of the Greeks and Justinian II (first reign 685–695; second reign 705–711), who was probably emperor in Constantinople at the time the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* was composed.⁶¹ James Palmer, for example, sees the description of the King of the Greeks as like “a man who has shaken off his wine, someone who had been considered by them as though dead,” as corresponding to the erratic Justinian II, and possibly to the fact that he was overthrown and

⁵⁹ Paul Alexander, "The Medieval Legend of the Last Roman Emperor and Its Messianic Origin," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 41 (1978), 1–15; idem, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, 174–184. Alexander's opinion about the Jewish messianic origin of the Last Emperor/King of the Greeks has been followed by Suermann, *Die geschichtstheologische Reaktion*, 208–12; and idem, "Der byzantinische Endkaiser bei Pseudo-Methodios," *Oriens christianus*, vol. 71 (1987), 140–155.

⁶¹ The parallels between the King of the Greeks in the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* and Justinian II have been mentioned in Reinink, “Ps. Methodius Concept of History,” 185–186; Möhring, *Der Weltkaiser*, 82–88; Magdalino, *Byzantium in the Year 1000*, 253; James Palmer, *The Apocalypse in the Early Middle Ages*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 117.

believed dead by many before he returned to power in 705 (though Justinian II's return to power took about fifteen years after the widely accepted date of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, so seems unlikely that the author of the *Apocalypse* had this emperor in mind).⁶²

Most commonly, however, the King of the Greeks is seen by scholars as a fictionalized version of the Emperor Heraclius (r. 610–641). After over a decade of inactivity (from 613–623), remaining in Constantinople while the Persians won repeated victories, Heraclius took to the field to lead a war against the Persians imbued with Christian rhetoric, and drove these Zoroastrian occupiers out of the Holy Land, in much the same way that the King of the Greeks will, according to the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, awaken like a man shaking off his wine and expel the Ishmaelites from the Promise Land.⁶³

Others have argued that the King of the Greeks was based on more generic Byzantine ideas about kingship. Petre Guran, combining Paul Alexander's messianic theory with Reinink's Byzantine theory, has argued that the King of the Greeks, though based in part on Heraclius and his grandson Constans, was intended to represent the ideal Byzantine emperor modeled after the eschatological Christ.⁶⁴ Guran, borrowing the famous phrase of Carl Schmitt, suggests that the *Apocalypse* constructed a "political theology," a theory of governance drawn from theological concepts (on the debate of Carl Schmitt and Erik Peterson over political theology, see above, chapter 4, section I.2); in this case a "*christomimetic* model" of Byzantine rulership. According to Guran: "Pseudo-Methodius is doing 'political theology' in the sense Erik Peterson applied this concept to Eusebius of Caesarea's writings."⁶⁵

Nonetheless, the search for models—either individual or thematic—for the King of the Greeks in Byzantium overlooks the clear Syriac literary context in which the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* was produced. Reinink recognized the enormous influence of the *Syriac Alexander Legend* on the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, but since he believed that the former had been produced as propaganda for Emperor Heraclius, he returned again to the idea that the King of the Greeks in the latter must have originated in Byzantine models of kinship.

⁶² James Palmer, *The Apocalypse in the Early Middle Ages*, 117; Palmer also notes that Justinian II was exiled on the far side of the Black Sea until he returned to violently seize back his kingdom from usurpers, and Palmer sees a possible echo of this in the fact that the King of the Greeks attacks from across a sea (however, in the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* it is clear that the sea is the "Sea of the Kushites," and that he was attacking the Ishmaelites).

⁶³ Already in the nineteenth century, Gerhard von Zezschwitz, *Vom römischen Kaisertum deutscher Nation: Ein mittelalterliches Drama, nebst Untersuchungen über die byzantinischen Quellen der deutschen Kaisersage* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1877), 57–58, identified the King of the Greeks as derived from popular legends about Heraclius and his entry into Jerusalem. However, after Sackur, *Sibyllinische Texte*, 158–163, made the argument that the King of the Greeks in the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* was derived from a lost fourth-century version of the *Tiburtine Sibyl*, the connection to Heraclius fell by the wayside. As Sackur's argument began to lose acceptance toward the end of the twentieth century, the connection between the King of the Greeks and Heraclius was revived.

⁶⁴ Petre Guran, "Genesis and Function of the 'Last Emperor' Myth in Byzantine Eschatology," *Bizantinistica*, vol. 8 (2006), 273–303.

⁶⁵ Guran, "Genesis and Function of the 'Last Emperor' Myth," 287. Guran does not address the fact that, according to Erik Peterson, political theology of this sort was not possible for Christians who embraced concept of the trinity, which the author of the *Apocalypse* certainly did.

In the *Syriac Alexander Legend*, the Roman Empire had two primary functions: it survives the apocalyptic wars and chaos of the last days in order to remain the last kingdom on the earth, and then it will hand over kingship to Christ at the end of history (see above, chapter 4, section II.3). This was itself an adaption of Aphrahat's understanding of the role of the Roman Empire, which he claimed could not be conquered by the Persians or any other enemy because God had entrusted it with the earthly kingship, and that when Christ returns he will take back this kingship (see above, chapter 4, introduction).

According to Aphrahat, the Roman Empire had gained its central role in the eschatological events because of its adoption of Christianity, and this role ensured it could not be destroyed before it handed over the kingship to Christ. When the Persians marched out against the Romans, Aphrahat promised that the Romans would not be conquered: “His banner is everywhere in that place; they are clothed with his armor and will not be defeated in war.”⁶⁸ The *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* agrees: the Roman Empire will not fall to the Ishmaelites “because it possesses the invincible armor that conquers everything.”⁶⁹

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⁶⁹ The *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, V.9; ed. Reinink, *Die Syrische Apokalypse*, vol. 1, 10 (with

the Huns. In the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, it was the Ishmaelites. Despite the successes of the Ishmaelites, the *Apocalypse* suggested that they were simply tools in God's plan: they acted as punishment for the sins of Christians until they were to be destroyed by God's chosen kingdom, the Roman Empire. Just as Aphrahat in the fourth century had put forward these ideas in order to encourage his fellow Christians subjects of the Sasanian Empire to place their hopes and allegiance in the Roman Empire, the author of the *Apocalypse* drew on them once again to encourage his fellow Christian subjects of the Arab Umayyad Empire to similarly trust in the Roman Empire.

In this sense, the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* was highly conservative, much more so than the other Syriac apocalypses surveyed in the previous chapter of this dissertation. It argued for a conception of the Roman Empire that had been more believable before the Christological controversies divided the church and before the Arab conquests had crippled the Eastern Roman Empire. In response to Syriac Christians ready to dismiss the Roman Empire as a sinful kingdom that was finally being punished by God, the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* asserted that all Christians had sinned and that the empire was in fact the true home of, and best hope for, all Christians. Considering that the author of the *Apocalypse* was likely a member of either the Syriac Orthodox Church or the Church of the East, this was a bold argument. Nonetheless, the chaotic days immediately after the Second Fitna generated a range of eschatological responses, and so it perhaps should not be totally surprising that someone (namely, the anonymous author of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*) attempted to resurrect Aphrahatian eschatology to address the needs of the moment.

Conclusions: That Old Made New Again

The *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* represents a late return to the political-eschatological viewpoint of Aphrahat. Here, the Roman Empire was a good fourth kingdom of Daniel that holds God's kingship as the ruler of the world until Christ's second coming. If such a positive appraisal of the Roman Empire was more difficult to believe after the Christological controversies of the fifth through seventh century, the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* shifted all attention away from the heresy or sinfulness of the Roman Empire (a major theme in other, contemporary sources written by members of the Syriac Orthodox Church and the Church of the East) by blaming the coming of the Ishmaelites on more general Christian sin, primarily sexual transgression. Like the Biblical flood and the enslavement of the Jews by the Midianites in the time of the Judges, the Ishmaelite subjugation of Christians was a temporary punishment, and not one specifically directed at the Romans. Indeed, the Roman Empire must survive and remain the last kingdom on the earth. It would do so through the leadership of the King of the Greeks, a new Gideon, who would fulfill the empire's eschatological destiny.

Part II: The Four Kingdoms of Daniel in the Historical Section

In its return to the eschatology of Aphrahat, the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* resurrected Aphrahat's notion that the Roman Empire represented a redeemed fourth kingdom of Daniel. It had to adapt this idea, however, to new circumstances. Any reading of the four kingdoms of Daniel at the end of the seventh century had to deal with the problem of the other empires. The Arab Empire (i.e., the Umayyad Caliphate) was the most glaring example. Where did it fit in the Danielic scheme? There was obviously no place for it in the interpretation of the schema by the author of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, since the author adopted the positive understanding of the fourth kingdom. But then why had God not seen fit to show Daniel anything about this great empire that had recently conquered much of the known world?

To some degree the author of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* dealt with this problem by simply refusing to call the Arabs a kingdom of empire. But this was hardly a fully satisfying solution. Whether one counted the Arabs or not, the author of the *Apocalypse* was clearly was clearly cognizant that more than four kingdoms had built mighty empires throughout history. The visions of four kingdoms in the Book of Daniel could not accommodate ancient Egypt, for example. The author of the *Apocalypse* seems also to have been aware of powerful kingdoms to the East—the *Apocalypse* repeatedly mentions a kingdom it calls “the Kingdom of Yonton” (ܡܠܟܘܬܐ ܕܝܘܢܬܘܢ), located either in Central Asia or China—which could not be accounted among the four kingdoms spoken of by Daniel.⁷⁰ Moreover, new kingdoms and empires had arisen to challenge the Roman Empire in recent times. Where did these fit?

A close reading of the historical sections of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* will show that its author adopted a novel explanation to solve these interpretative problems: an original monarchy, superior to all others, had been transmitted via a *translatio imperii* from the Babylonians to the Medes to the Persians, and, finally, to the Greeks and Romans (that is, through the four kingdoms of Daniel).⁷¹ In short, the four kingdoms of Daniel were not the only four kingdoms of the earth, but more like a series of dynasties that ruled over a continuous empire. Thus, even if new empires rose and fell, and various kingdoms were discovered in distant lands, this made little difference for the Danielic schema. The four kingdoms were simply those that inherited their kingship from Babylon.

In this sense, the author of the *Apocalypse* may have borrowed from Persian notions of

⁷⁰ Yonton is the name of a fourth son of Noah who was an important character in the *Cave of Treasures*. The Cave of Treasures is the earliest extant source to mention this fourth son of Noah. Yonton likewise plays an important role in the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*. The idea that there was a “Kingdom of Yonton” implies that this land was home to people who were not descended from Noah's other three sons—Shem, Ham, and Japheth—who were long held to be the ancestors of the people of the Middle East, Africa, and Europe, respectively. It appears that the *Apocalypse* knew of peoples further east and tried to accommodate them within Biblical genealogies by making use of the extra-Biblical fourth son of Noah, Yonton. The identity of the Kingdom of Yonton is unclear, but perhaps the author had China in mind, as China and the Arabs had begun to clash in the late seventh century, while Syriac Christian missionaries had been traveling to China since 635 AD.

⁷¹ At times this becomes confusing since the Syriac word for “kingdom” is the same as the word for “kingship” (ܡܠܟܘܬܐ).

kingship and empire. As discussed in a previous chapter (chapter 1, section 1.3), the Zoroastrian religious tradition had its own equivalent of the four kingdoms of Daniel, preserved in the *Zand ī Wahman Yasn* (called the *Bahman Yast* in older scholarship). This work, extant in Pahlavi manuscripts from the tenth century AD and later, includes a description of a dream of Zoroaster in which the prophet sees a tree with branches of gold, silver, bronze, and iron. Ahura Mazda tells him that the first three metals represent the three dynasties of Persia: Pishdadian, Kayanid, and Sasanian. The fourth, iron branch represents the Muslims, who will devastate Iran and bring an end to the Zoroastrian rites, until they are defeated and true religion is restored by a great eschatological Zoroastrian king, Bahram/Wahram.⁷²

Though scholars have long suggested that this Persian apocalypse, in some earlier form, was an influence upon the Book of Daniel, more recent studies suggest otherwise. The *Zand ī Wahman Yasn* was likely composed in late antiquity or the middle ages. In fact, it may have been influenced by Jewish and Christian explication of the four kingdoms from the Book of Daniel. Whatever the case, the *Zand ī Wahman Yasn* provides a fascinating glimpse at how Persian Zoroastrians conceptualized the four kingdoms. They understood the first three kingdoms not as separate historical kingdoms, but as dynasties through which Persian kingship had passed (associated with the two mytho-historical Persian dynasties, the Pishdadians and Kayanids, followed by the historical Sasanians). Even the Muslims, who represent a break in Persian kingship, were only an interregnum that would pass when a Persian, Zoroastrian dynasty returns to reclaim power.⁷³

True, in contrast with the Persian *Zand ī Wahman Yasn* (as well as the contemporary Syriac *Apocalypse of John the Little* and Armenian history of pseudo-Sebeos), the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* denied the Arabs a place as the fourth kingdom because it followed Aphrahat in regarding the fourth kingdom as a good kingdom. Nonetheless, it conceived of the four kingdoms, much like in the *Zand*, as holders of a continuous tradition of monarchy, with a break after the third kingdom.

This similarity is perhaps no coincidence. The *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* was written in lands that had been formerly been part of the Persian Empire, and the seeming influence of Persian thought upon it has been remarked on by several scholars.⁷⁴ There is no need to suppose a direct influence, but instead it is likely enough that they both simply reflect a way of thinking about empire.

⁷² The most recent edition and translation has been published by Carlo Cereti, *Zand ī Wahman Yasn: A Zoroastrian Apocalypse* (Rome: Istituto italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1995). The dream of the tree of four metals is contained in chapter 1 on *ibid*, 36 (manuscript facsimile), 133 (transcription), and 149 (English translation). A more complex and detailed version of the dream, perhaps a later elaboration, in which the tree has branches of seven metals, is found in chapter three.

⁷³ This Persian way of thinking about the history of empire perhaps had its roots in the ancient Achaemenid Period, before the conquests of Alexander the Great. It appears that the Achaemenids held that there had been one empire that ruled the earth and would continue to rule the earth, and so the Persian monarchy was a continuation of the previous Mesopotamian world empires (primarily the Assyrian, Babylonian, Akkadian, and Sumerian empires). See Alexandria Frisch, *The Danielic Discourse on Empire in Second Temple Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 39–48.

⁷⁴ For example, Michael Kmosko, “Das Rätsel des Pseudomethodius,” 277–279; Martinez, “*Eastern Christian Apocalyptic*,” *Byzantion*, vol. 6 (1931), 20 and 25.

Despite the seeming influence of Persian thought, the author of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* built his narrative in these chapters from historical information derived from Syriac historical sources. The author drew heavily from the Peshitta Old Testament, and from the *Cave of Treasures*. The author also drew from the Syriac *Julian Romance*, a fanciful history of the reign of Julian the Apostate (r. 361–363 AD) probably composed in the sixth century by a Miaphysite Christian in the border region between the Roman and Sasanian empires.⁷⁵ Nonetheless, the author played with these sources. As we have seen above (chapter 5, Part I.3) the *Cave of Treasures* was at times hostile toward the Romans; the *Julian Romance*, while less antagonistic toward the Rome/Byzantium, advocated for political equilibrium between Roman and Sasanian Persian power (much like the *Alexander Poem* described above in the chapter 5 introduction).⁷⁶ The *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* thus frequently inverted the meaning of the information taken from these sources to build its theory of the four kingdoms.

This section will explore the theory of the succession of Danielic kingdoms put forth by the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*. It will show how the author of the *Apocalypse* made creative use of history (and of its sources) to justify this theory. Finally, it will show how the author solved a last major problem: where Rome could fit among the kingdoms of Daniel in light of the Peshitta glosses, which had named the “Kingdom of the Greeks” as the fourth kingdom of Daniel.

II.1: The First King, Nimrod, in Syriac Literature

The concept, put forth by the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, that a special tradition of kingship had passed down through the kingdoms of Daniel, from Babylon down to the Romans, was rather unusual. It elevated the gentile empires to a status that broke decisively with

⁷⁵ The *Julian Romance* survives in Cod. British Museum 14,641, though the beginning folios are missing. Its text has been published by Johann G. E. Hoffmann, *Julianos der Abtruennige: Syrische Erzählungen* (Leiden: Brill 1880). Hermann Gollancz made a rather flawed English translation in *Julian the Apostate, Now Translated for the First Time from the Syriac Original, the Only Known Ms. in the British Museum* (London: Humphrey Milford, 1928). Hoffman’s edition has been reprinted, along with newly discovered fragments of the *Romance*’s missing beginning from Cod. Paris Syr 378 and an improved English translation of the whole text, by Michael Sokoloff, *The Julian Romance: A New English Translation* (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2016). Theodor Nöldeke, “Über den syrischen Roman von Kaiser Julian,” *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenlandischen Gesellschaft*, vol. 28 (1874), 263–292, already argued for a sixth-century date for the *Julian Romance*, but this remained controversial until recently. Philip Wood has argued for a sixth-century date in “We Have No King but Christ’: Christian Political Thought in Greater Syria on the Eve of the Arab Conquest (c.400–585) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) 141–142; as does Daniel Schwartz, “Religious Violence and Eschatology in the Syriac Julian Romance,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, vol. 19 no.4 (2011) 567–568. These scholars convincingly argue that the *Julian Romance* was written by a Miaphysite Christian to implicitly compare Justinian’s imposition of Chalcedonian orthodoxy to the paganism of Emperor Julian. Emmanuel Papoutsakis, “The Making of a Syriac Fable: From Ephrem to Romanos,” *Le Muséon*, vol. 120 (2007), 38, has shown evidence of influence from Jacob of Serugh in the *Julian Romance*, which would also suggest the sixth century date. The *Julian Romance* spends a great deal of time explaining why the Roman surrender of Nisibis to the Persians after the death of Julian was just and not shameful, and so it may have been written around that city.

⁷⁶ Thus, the *Julian Romance* suggests that part of Julian’s villainy was his megalomaniacal attempt to conquer Sasanian Persia; his idealized Christian successor Jovian, in contrast, wisely recognized the need to coexist with the Persians.

The idea that Rome had inherited its imperial role from Babylon was hardly new in Christian discourse. It was no real secret that “Babylon” in the Book of Revelation referred to Rome. Augustine had demonstrated the similarities between Babylon and Rome, mostly, however, to denigrate the latter. Orosius had used similar material in order to argue for a more positive vision of the Roman Empire, but that had required showing that the Roman Empire had diverged from Babylon, that Christianity had altered Rome’s character in a way that distinguished it from its Babylonian precursor. In contrast, the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* did not claim that Rome’s bad qualities came from Babylon, but rather its greatness. The Kingdom of Babylon had a special importance to God, and this special status was passed on in succession from one kingdom to the next, through Daniel’s four kingdoms.

Even that kingdom [i.e. the Jewish kingdom] that prevailed against Egypt, and put to death thirty-one royal dynasties of the Gentiles, and Sihon and ‘Og, the two leaders of the kingdom of the Amorites, and all the tyrants of the Philistines, could not prevail over the kingdom of Babylon. And the Kingdom of the Romans, which is of the Greeks, [also] overcame the Kingdom of the Hebrews.⁷⁷

For this reason, the *Apocalypse* devoted much time to the development of kingship at Babylon and the genealogy of its rulers. The starting point for such a discussion was the supposed founder of this first kingdom, Nimrod. In this sense, Nimrod emerges as the most important figure in the early chapters of the *Apocalypse*.⁷⁸ In order to understand the role of

⁷⁸ In the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, Nimrod largely replaces the Babylonian king in the Book of Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar. As a king who long preceded Nebuchadnezzar, Nimrod could act as a founder of the Babylonian kingdom, and, since in Daniel 2 Nebuchadnezzar is said to come from the land of Sinar, the land associated with Nimrod in the Book of Genesis, Nimrod could be construed as an ancestor to Nebuchadnezzar; for the connection between Nimrod and Nebuchadnezzar in the Book of Daniel, See Frisch, *The Danielic Discourse on Empire*, 107–109.

In Syriac literature, Nimrod was widely regarded as the founder of Babylon. This idea was read into the Biblical account of Nimrod's kingship. Nimrod (Hebrew: נִמְרוֹד; Syriac: ܢܡܪܘܕ) is introduced in the Book of Genesis 10:8–11 as a descendant of Noah's son Ham through Kush. He is described as a great warrior and a "mighty hunter before the Lord," and also a great founder of cities. The Syriac Peshitta renders the passage thus:

The association of Nimrod with Babel suggests that he was perhaps a king of the Babylonians. Modern scholars have tried in vain to connect the biblical Nimrod to a specific historical figure, but he is likely a composite of several early Mesopotamian rulers.⁸⁰

In light of this hostility, Nimrod was sometimes understood in Jewish and Christian sources as the Hebrew name for Zoroaster, the founder of the Persian religion typically maligned in such works. One of the Greek homilies falsely attributed to Clement of Alexandria described Nimrod as a magician who meddled in the heavens and was burned to ashes by lightening; as a result of his fiery death, the Pseudo-Clementine homily asserted, the Persians worship fire, and by way of a folk etymology it claimed that Nimrod attained the name Zoroaster in Greek because he was killed by a “living star.”⁸⁵ Epiphanius of Salamis (d. 403) knew a similar tradition

⁸⁰ Yigal Levin, "Nimrod the Mighty, King of Kish, King of Sumer and Akkad," *Vetus Testamentum*, vol. 52 no. 3 (2002), 350–366, believes that Nimrod was a combination of traditions about Sargon of Akkad and his later members of his dynasty.

⁸² Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, I.4.2; Jerome, *Commentary on Genesis*, X.8–10.

⁸⁴ Augustine, *City of God*, XVI.4

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identifying Nimrod with Zoroaster, though he regarded it as false.⁸⁶ The Jewish Midrash tradition, likewise, conflated Nimrod and Zoroaster.⁸⁷

More frequently, Nimrod was understood not as Zoroaster himself but as a biblical figure to whom the ancestry of the Persians could be traced back. Such an idea had an outsized influence in Syriac literature, probably because most Syriac-speaking Christians lived fairly near to, or even within, the Persian Empire. Nimrod provided them a bridge between the world of the Old Testament and the Persian imperial institutions so familiar in their contemporary world.

For example, Jacob of Serugh (d. 521), among other Syriac authors, described the three magi as coming out of “the land of Nimrod.”⁸⁸ When, in the sixth-century *Julian Romance*, Emperor Julian’s advisers push him to invade the Persian Empire, they are said to encourage him to seize “the crown of the house of Nimrod” (ܐܬܝܪܬܐ ܕܢܝܡܪܕ).⁸⁹ By virtue of Nimrod’s credit in Genesis as a founder of cities, Christians often held the Persian capital of Ctesiphon as a foundation of Nimrod.⁹⁰

Though Nimrod was associated with the Persians and Zoroastrianism, in Syriac literature he was regarded rather positively. This is evident in the early seventh-century hagiography of the Christian saint Mar Qardagh, martyred in the Sasanian Empire in 358/359, which describes the saint as the scion of a mixed marriage: his father was a Sasanian aristocrat and magus (Zoroastrian priest), while his mother was a woman of the *Suryaye*. The hagiography emphasizes that the saint was of exceedingly noble birth, from two distinguished lineages: “The holy Mar Qardagh was from a great people from the stock of the Kingdom of the Assyrians. His father was descended from the renowned lineage of the house of Nimrod, and his mother from the renowned lineage of the house of Sennacherib.”⁹¹ Nimrod thus functions in this Christian work as a Biblical ancestor for the Persians and at the same time a worthy figure from whom a Christian saint might trace descent.

Some Syriac sources held that Nimrod was the first king in history.⁹² It is possible that this idea originated among the Persians themselves, either by Iranian practitioners of Judaism or

⁸⁶ Epiphanius of Salamis, the *Panarion*, Book I, I.3.3.

⁸⁷ Yishai Kiel, “Abraham and Nimrod in the Shadow of Zarathustra,” *Journal of Religion*, vol. 95, no. 1 (2015), 35–50.

⁸⁸ *Homiliae selectae Mar Iacobi Sarugensis*, vol. 1, ed. Paul Bedjan (Paris: Harrassowitz, 1905), 93, 114, 120.

⁸⁹ *Julian Romance*, ed. Hoffmann, *Julianos der Abtruennige*, 74; reprinted with English translation in Sokoloff, *The Julian Romance*, 154–155.

⁹⁰ For example, Ephrem the Syrian, *Commentary on Genesis*, VIII.1; ed. Raymond Tonneau, *Sancti Ephraem Syri In Genesim et in Exodum commentarii* (Louvain: L. Durbecq, 1955), 65.

⁹¹ *Legend of Mar Qardagh*, iii; ed. Jean Baptiste Abbeloos, “Acta Mar Kardaghi,” *Analecta Bollandiana*, vol. 9 (1890), 5–106, with quotation on 12; English translation in Joel Walker, *The Legend of Mar Qardagh: Christian Heroism in Late Antique Iraq* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 19–70, with quotation on 20.

⁹² This idea of Nimrod as the first king seems to have originated in Syriac exegesis of the sixth century, and quickly became widely held amongst both West and East Syrian Christians. John bar Penkaye, for example, in his chronicle, calls Nimrod the first king of men, with his authority given to him by God; unfortunately, no modern edition has printed the early books of John bar Penkaye’s chronicle that contain this line, but it can be found on fol. 8v of the manuscript Mingana Syr. 179. On this, see Minov, “Syriac Christian Identity,” 254–255 (with the reference to John bar Penkaye in n368). Likely, the idea the Nimrod was the first king was an outgrowth of the story

Christianity, or in discourses between Iranians and members of these faiths.⁹³ The idea that Nimrod was the first king of the earth and ancestor of the Sasanians is also found in medieval Georgian histories.⁹⁴ Therefore, possibly these traditions were introduced by the kings of the Chosroid dynasty (r. 284–780), an offshoot of the Sasanian dynasty that ruled over Iberia (the Kingdom of Georgia) and had converted to Christianity in the fourth century. Such an association with Nimrod would have provided a Biblical gloss for their Persian royal descent.

A common trope in Christian Syriac literature (also perhaps derived from the Christian Sasanian kings of Georgia) held that Nimrod received his crown, the crown subsequently worn by the Sasanian kings, from heaven. A related story held that Nimrod had been the originator of divination. These two traditions are found together in the sixth-century *Julian Romance*: here, the Persian king Shapor II tells Jovian that he knows Jovian will soon succeed the impious Emperor Julian because the Persians monarchs know how to read the future in the stars. This art, he says, originated with Nimrod, their royal ancestor, “when he received the crown, through a revelation of it (ܠܠܡܠܟܐ), from heaven.”⁹⁵ Late antique rock inscriptions show the Zoroastrian god Ahura Mazda presenting various Sasanian kings with a crown.⁹⁶ The Sasanian Persian kings probably claimed that their crowns were bestowed upon them from heavenly god. Therefore, the story that Nimrod receiving the crown from heaven likely represents an attempt by the Christian subjects of the Sasanians (and/or the Christian Sasanian rulers of Georgia) to translate such royal claims into acceptable Christian language: the Christian God had granted the crown to the Biblical ancestor of the Sasanians, and whatever divination the Sasanians engaged in was licit because it came from God.

Likewise, the idea that Nimrod learned divination from a revelation from God made acceptable practices long identified with the Persians: astrology and divination. The Persians were commonly regarded as descendants of the Chaldeans, an ethnic group whose name became synonymous with astrology. Astrologers and other diviners were a visible presence in the

of his receiving his crown from heaven combined with a slight misreading of Genesis 10:10, “And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel...” (Peshitta: ܠܠܡܠܟܐ ܒܒܠ) to mean that the beginning of *kingship* was in Babel under Nimrod (as already noted, “kingdom” and “kingship” being the same word in Syriac); this mistaken interpretation would require ignoring the pronominal suffix on ܠܠܡܠܟܐ (perhaps the suffix was dropped in some late antique manuscripts?).

⁹³ Richard Payne, “Avoiding Ethnicity: Uses of the Past in Late Sasanian Northern Mesopotamia,” in *Visions of Community in the Post-Roman World: The West, Byzantium and the Islamic World, 300-1100*, ed. Walter Pohl, Clemens Gantner, and Richard E. Payne (London: Routledge, 2016), 219: “Nimrod was most often considered an Iranian in the late antique Near East and was valorized as such by the Iranian inhabitants of Northern Mesopotamia.”

⁹⁴ Stephen H. Rapp, Jr., “The Georgian Nimrod,” in *The Armenian Apocalyptic Tradition: A Comparative Perspective*, ed. K. Bardakjian and S. La Porta (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 188–216.

⁹⁵ The *Julian Romance*, ed. Hoffmann, *Julianos der Abtrünnige*, 103; reprinted with English translation Sokoloff, *The Julian Romance*, 212 (an earlier English translation can be found in Gollancz, *Julian the Apostate*, 112): ܠܠܡܠܟܐ ܠܠܡܠܟܐ ܠܠܡܠܟܐ. The translation above is my own, and differs from those of Gollancz and Sokoloff.

⁹⁶ Such images can be found in the rock reliefs of Bishapur (third century AD), Naqsh-e Rostam (late third and early fourth century), and Taq-e Bostan (fourth and seventh centuries).

This Christianization of the Persian monarchy and its practices is evident in the most important source for the conception of Nimrod in the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*: the *Cave of Treasures*. Though the *Cave of Treasures* is primarily concerned with the Jewish Patriarchs and the life of Christ, it devotes a long digression to Nimrod. It describes Nimrod as the founder of Edessa, Nisibis, and Harran, three important cities associated with Syriac Christianity.⁹⁸ However, Nimrod is also undoubtedly connected to Persia in the *Cave of Treasures*. For example, in one scene it refers to the Persian Empire as “the land of Nimrod” (ܐܬܪܐ ܕܢܝܡܪܕ).⁹⁹

The *Cave of Treasures* introduced Nimrod as the “first king upon the earth” (ܡܠܟܐ ܥܠ ܡܠܟܐ).¹⁰² As in the *Julian Romance*, it claimed that Nimrod received a revelation of his crown:

The name of Nimrod's weaver, Sasan (سسان), is that of the eponymous ancestor to whom the Sasanian kings of Persia traced their descent.¹⁰⁴ Thus, in the *Cave of Treasures* account, Sasan

¹⁰⁴ The crown was evidentially understood, in the image of the Sasanian crown, as a cloth diadem.

(who historically would have lived around the second century AD) is placed back in remote antiquity as a contemporary of Nimrod, eliding history and conflating the Sasanian dynastic origin story with the origin story of the Persian people. But here Sasan was also demoted to a mere servant of Nimrod, weaving the crown that Nimrod would wear (though Sasan becomes king later in the narrative).¹⁰⁵

Nimrod and Sasan both returned several chapters later in the *Cave of Treasures*, in an account that suggests an origin story for the Zoroastrian religion. Coming upon a fire rising from out of the earth, Nimrod venerates it, and in so doing introduces the fire worship to the Persians. Then, Sasan, building an idol of a horse, introduced the worship of horses to the Persians.¹⁰⁶ Interestingly, this account avoids harsh denunciation or overt polemic, and introduces these proto-Zoroastrian practices, especially Nimrod's veneration of the fire, as early and acceptable acts of piety. Only later, the *Cave of Treasures* suggested, would such practices be corrupted into the sinful practices of the Zoroastrians.¹⁰⁷

Immediately after this passage, the *Cave of Treasures* described Nimrod departing for the distant lands of the east, to the land of Nod, where he encountered Yonton, the fourth son of Noah. This is an extra-biblical story: Genesis names three sons of Noah (Shem, Ham, and Japheth); a fourth son named Yonton is nowhere mentioned in scripture. Nor is Yonton attested in any source before the *Cave of Treasures*. Yonton may have been an invention of the author of the *Cave of Treasures*, or perhaps had roots in late antique Jewish traditions, perhaps as a misspelling and reimagining of Yoktan from Genesis 10:25, a descendant of Noah through Noah's son Shem (through the wide dissemination of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, that this fourth son of Noah would be introduced throughout the Christian world).¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ Though some manuscripts of the *Cave of Treasures* attest the name as "Sisan" (سيسان), a case that the more original reading is "Sasan" (ساسان), and that this Sasan refers to the eponymous ancestor of the Sasanian dynasty, is articulated in detail in both Ri, *Commentaire de la Caverne Des Trésors*, 303–304; and Minov, "Syriac Christian Identity," 209–211. Sasan is later described as king in The *Cave of Treasures*, XXVII.4.

¹⁰⁶ The *Cave of Treasures*, XVII.1–5; Ri, Ri, *La Caverne des Trésors*, 208–211; 80 (French translation). Here, Sasan is credited with introducing the worship of horses, which is understood in Christian accounts to be a major aspect of Zoroastrian belief; for contemporary examples in a more polemical vein, see Theophylact Simocatta, III.13.14; George of Pisidia, *Expeditio Persica* I, 23–26.

¹⁰⁷ See Wood, *We Have No King but Christ*, 119.

¹⁰⁸ Stephen Gero, "The Legend of the Fourth Son of Noah," *The Harvard Theological Review*, vol. 73 no. 1–2 (1980), 321–330, sees the story of Ham's castration of Noah in Midrashic literature as a Rabbinic attempt "to suppress a type of Judaism which had Yonton and Nimrod as its heroes," (quotation on 329) and that this popular religion was preserved in Christian communities and attested in the *Cave of Treasures*. Witold Witakowski, "The Division of the Earth Between the Descendants of Noah in the Syriac Tradition," *Aram*, vol. 5 (1993) 635–656, seemingly unaware of Gero's argument, asserts that the author of the *Cave of Treasures* invented Yonton. Su-Min Ri, in the commentary on his edition of the *Cave of Treasures*, *Commentaire de la Caverne des Trésors*, 355–357, conjectured that Yonton was probably derived from the figure of Yoktan in Genesis, and makes the case that Yoktan (يوكتان) could easily have been corrupted into Yonton (يونتون), especially on account of the similarity of the letter *Qop* and *Waw* in the Estrangela script, and that Yoktan's designation as a son (in the sense of a descendant) of Noah was misunderstood as a literal son. Alexander Toepel, "Yonton Revisited: A Case Study in the Reception of Hellenistic Science within Early Judaism," *The Harvard Theological Review*, vol. 99 no. 3 (July, 2006), 235–245, makes a renewed strong case for a Jewish background for Yonton, finding traces in Jewish tradition about figures from Genesis learning in the far east to read the stars. It seems likely that Yonton was a further Christian elaboration of such existing Jewish traditions.

Nimrod's visit to Yonton in the *Cave of Treasures* was a clear continuation of the author's effort to associate Persian practices it favored with the Biblical Nimrod and blame sinful and illicit practices on the Sasanian dynasty and Zoroastrian priesthood. In this case, the issue at stake was divination. Like the *Julian Romance*, the *Cave of Treasures* sought to provide a Christian justification for Persian divination practices, the study of the heavens, and its close relationship with divinatory practice.

Nimrod, according to the *Cave of Treasures*, stayed with Yonton for three years, and learned how to study the heavens and receive revelation (ܠܠܡܕܐ).¹⁰⁹ Afterwards, Nimrod returned to Babylon, where Ardashir (ܐܪܕܝܫܝܪ), a jealous priest who ministered the fire that Nimrod had venerated, asked a demon dwelling in the fire to teach him the same art Nimrod had learned.¹¹⁰ In exchange for Ardashir having sex with his mother, sister, and daughter, the demon agreed to teach him to divine the future in the stars. Thus, this story reveals, Chaldean divination, as well as the close-kin marriages permitted within Zoroastrian religious law (a major topic in Christian polemics against Zoroastrianism), is sullied by a supposed demonic origin.¹¹¹ It also explains why some divination is permissible, while other divination is sinful.

Like Sasan, the priest Ardashir is another figure from Sasanian dynastic history who, in the *Cave of Treasures*, was sent back in time to act as a contemporary of Nimrod. And here the polemical implications are all the more clear. Ardashir I (r. 224–241 AD) was the founder and first king of the Sasanian dynasty (and probably the grandson of Sasan), and closely associated with Zoroastrianism.¹¹² In the *Cave of Treasures*, Ardashir is made the first fire priest (historically, Ardashir was the son of a Zoroastrian priest), positioned to hand down illicit teachings and practices (divination and close-kin marriages) that will corrupt the pious institution founded by Nimrod into sinful Zoroastrianism.

The *Cave of Treasures* finished this story by articulating a clear distinction between the two varieties of divination. What the demon taught Ardashir was illicit divination, “Chaldeanism” (ܟܠܕܐܝܬܐ) or “astrology” (ܐܫܬܪܐܠܘܝܬܐ), but the knowledge Nimrod learned

¹⁰⁹ The *Cave of Treasures*, XXVII.6–12; Ri, *La Caverne des Trésors*, 210–213. For an extensive discussion of this scene, with details of manuscript variants, see Ri, *Commentaire de la Caverne Des Trésors*, 319–331.

¹¹⁰ The manuscripts of the Western Recension of the *Cave of Treasures* transmit many forms of this name, and Ri, *La Caverne des Trésors*, 212–214 prints it in his edition of this recension as “Anzashar” (ܐܢܝܫܐܪ), but name forms in this recension tend to be garbled, and no such name as Anzashar is attested elsewhere. Ri, *Commentaire de la Caverne Des Trésors*, 331, provides the many variants of the name in each manuscript, and makes a case that another form, “Idashir” (ܐܕܝܫܝܪ), attested in one manuscript, was probably the original, but his arguments for this are less than convincing. In *ibid*, Ri notes that all manuscripts of the Eastern Recension give the name as “Ardashir” (ܐܪܕܝܫܝܪ); since this was a widely attested Persian name, and the uniformity on this count of the manuscripts of the Eastern Recension against the many variants of the Western Recension suggest a more stable tradition, I contend that “Ardashir” should be preferred as the correct form.

¹¹¹ The *Cave of Treasures*, XXVIII.13–17; Ri, *La Caverne des Trésors*, 220–222, vol. 2, 82–83 (French translation). The demon's demand the Ardashir have sex with his family members provides a polemical account of the origin of *xwēdōdah*, the practice of close-kin marriage permitted within Zoroastrian religious law, disparaging it as a demonic teaching; see Ri, *Commentaire de la Caverne Des Trésors*, 331–332; Minov, “Syriac Christian Identity,” 219–234.

¹¹² See Joseph Wiesehöfer, “Ardašīr I,” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. 2, fasc. 4, ed. Ehsan Yarshater (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), 371–376.

Considering that the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* follows the *Cave of Treasures* very closely throughout, and the *Cave of Treasures* is the only known source predating the *Apocalypse* that mentions Yontan, one can conclude that the story of Nimrod's meeting with Yonton in the *Apocalypse* is almost certainly based on the account in the *Cave of Treasures*.

Whereas in the *Cave of Treasures* the meeting of Nimrod and Yonton focused on the latter teaching the former about divination, in the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* Yonton instead gave Nimrod “instructions for becoming a king.” In this way, the meeting of the two men was made into a crucial historical moment in the development of kingship.

The author of the *Apocalypse* certainly knew the story of Nimrod's crown coming to him from heaven: as we have seen, it is mentioned in the *Cave of Treasures* and in the *Julian Romance*, two sources the author of the *Apocalypse* evidently used. However, this tradition was less important in the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* since it was written after the Sasanian Persian Empire had fallen. It was no longer necessary to provide a Christianized explanation for the Sasanian claim that the Persian kings received their crown from Ahura Mazda.

[illegible]

¹¹⁷ Reinink, *Die Syrische Apokalypse*, vol. 2, 7 n.iii.5.9: "Die Zurückführung des Königtums Nimrods auf die Anweisungen Yöntöns fehlt in der CT und wurde wohl von Pseudo-Methodius selbst in seine Darstellung der 'Abfolge der Könige' eingeführt, um die urzeitliche erhabene Herkunft dieser Institution hervorzuheben."

II.3: The Genealogy of the Kingship

Chapter 4 discussed war, probably based on vague historical memories from bronze and early iron age Mesopotamia, between Babylon (called the “House of Nimrod”) and the Kingdom of Egypt. It traced the progeny of Nimrod’s descendants down to a king Hormizd, and his son, Khusrau. These events culminated in Khusrau’s victory over an Egyptian army, enormous in number but armed only with clubs, thanks to Khusrau’s cavalry and war elephants.¹²³

Up to to Horazdeq, the mighty ones of the house of Nimrod—that is, the ones who held the Kingdom of Babylon—ruled. And from Horazdeq to Sasan the Elder, the Persians

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ruled from Adurbadagan. And from Sasan to Piruzdeq they ruled from Seleucia and Ctesiphon. And from Piruzdeq to Sennacherib, the kings were from Babylon.¹²⁴

All of this is quite hard to follow. The line of Nimrod and his successors, rulers of the Kingdom of Babylon, was interrupted by a Persian dynasty ruling from Adurbadagan (the Persian province known to the Greeks as Atropatene, roughly modern Iranian Azerbaijan). Then Persians ruled from Seleucia and Ctesiphon starting under a king named Sasan, which sounds like a reference to the foundation of the Sasanian dynasty (the Sasanians made Seleucia-Ctesiphon their capital when they rose to power in 224 AD). Throughout this historical jumble is a mix of ancient Babylonian kings (such as Sennacherib) and other kings with Persian, Sassanian-esque names (like Piruzdeq). Ancient Babylonian and Sasanian history bleed into one another.¹²⁵

The historical narrative tracing the history of the first three kingdoms become simpler once the genealogy reaches Sennacherib, a clear-cut Babylonian king (historically an Neo-Assyrian king, but still one who dominated Babylon; r. 705–681 BC). From this point, the author of the *Apocalypse* could draw from the historical information in the Bible, and this makes for a much smoother narrative. The remainder of chapter 6 neatly narrates the migration of kingship from one kingdom to another. The kingship remained among the Babylonians through Sennacherib, who was murdered by two of his sons, and succeeded by a third son, Esarhaddon. This corresponds to Isaiah 37:36–38 and 2 Kings 19:36–37, and the murder of Sennacherib is a well-attested story in Syriac literature.¹²⁶

According to the *Apocalypse*, Esarhaddon (historically r. 681–669 BC) was succeeded by his adviser Nebuchadnezzar, who corresponds to the historical Nebuchadnezzar II (r. c 605–c 562 BC), the king from the Book of Daniel.¹²⁷ In the *Apocalypse* he is described ahistorically

[illegible]

¹²⁵ Martinez, “Eastern Christian Apocalyptic,” 161 n.20, asserts that the author of the *Apocalypse* was probably using in chapters 3 and 6 “some popular version of the national history of Persia.” author of the *Apocalypse* were relying on a national history of Persia, however, what form did it take? Various versions of Persian national history were probably circulating in late antiquity, though the evidence for them comes from later periods. Some sort of Sasanian-era Persian national history undergirds a number of post-Sasanian works, both in Arabic and Pahlavi, such as the histories of al-Tabari and al-Tha’alibi, and Ferdowsi’s epic *Shahnameh*, as these works draw on a similar stock of stories spanning the long history of ancient Persia. The information in the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, however, bears very little resemblance to any of the Persian mytho-history preserved in Arabic and Pahlavi sources. It is possible that the author of the *Apocalypse* was relying on some unknown, lost source. However, it appears more likely that the author associated the Sasanians with the Babylonians, as both originated with Nimrod.

¹²⁶ On the story of Sennacherib's assassination in Syriac literature, see Amir Harrak, 'Tales about Sennacherib: The Contribution of the Syriac Sources', in *The World of the Arameans III: Studies in Language and Literature in Honour of Paul-Eugène Dion*, ed. P.M. Michèle Daviau, John W. Wevers and Michael Weigl (Sheffield: Bloomsbury, 2001), 168–189. Perhaps the murder of Sennacherib and his succession by his son Esarhaddon was frequently mentioned because, as kings of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, they were understood as native kings of Northern Mesopotamia and ancestors of the late antique population; on this, see Payne, *A State of Mixture*, 140–141.

¹²⁷ That Nebuchadnezzar is described as the former counselor of Sennacherib who took power at the extinction of Sennacherib's house is perhaps recognition that Nebuchadnezzar was ruler of the Neo-Babylonian

mother was the daughter of the king of Media. With the parentage reversed in the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, however, Cyrus thus could serve as the conduit through which the kingship was transferred from the Medes to the Persians. In the version of history in the *Apocalypse*, Cyrus gained his power not through conquest, but through his parentage—a marriage alliance between the Medes and Persians.

With the rise of Cyrus the Great, the migration of kingship through the first three kingdoms (the Babylonians, Medes, and Persians), was completed. Instead of a violent process of one empire defeating the preceding one in battle, the migration takes place through marriages that link the kingdoms one to another.¹³² Thus, the author of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* suggested that three kingdoms had possessed the kingship introduced by Nimrod. Notably, the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* in no way contradicted the glosses in the Peshitta. Those glosses had listed the first three kingdoms of Daniel as those of the Babylonians, Medes, and Persians. The historical narrative in the *Apocalypse* corroborated that schema.

With this task completed, the *Apocalypse* next endeavors to explain the identity of the fourth kingdom of Daniel. Here it must deal with a larger obstacle to its eschatology, namely that the Peshitta glosses identified the fourth kingdom of Daniel with Alexander “Kingdom of the Greeks.” The *Apocalypse*’s solution was a totally novel innovation based on long-overlooked symbols in the Book of Daniel.

II.4: The Four Beasts and the Four Winds

Insofar as modern scholars recognize an interest in the kingdoms of Daniel on the part of the author of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, they repeat the same claim that the *Apocalypse* was written to disprove a growing belief that the Ishmaelites represented the fourth kingdom of Daniel (a reading of the kingdoms of Daniel found in the history of pseudo-Sebeos and the *Apocalypse of John the Little*). In order to exclude the Ishmaelites from the Danielic schema, this argument goes, the author of the *Apocalypse* sought to prove that the Romans/Byzantines were the fourth kingdom of Daniel.¹³³

(ܪܕ), while Vatican Syr. 58 calls her “Rod” (ܪܕ). The Greek and Latin call her Δωρούν/Doron, with some variations in manuscripts (such as Δωρούμ in Greek, and Dorun in Latin). Reinink, *Übersetzung*, 18 nvi.6, notes that “Rod” may be the correct reading, as it could have been an attempt to name her “Rose.”

[illegible]

¹³³ Francisco Javier Martínez, "The Apocalyptic Genre in Syriac: The World of Pseudo-Methodius," *IV Symposium Syriacum, 1984: Literary Genres in Syriac Literature*, ed. H. J.W. Drijvers (Rome: Pont. Institutum

This formulation is somewhat mistaken. True, the *Apocalypse* does appear to foreclose any possibility that the Ishmaelites represent one of the historical kingdoms. It never uses the word “kingdom” (ܡܠܟܘܬܐ) in relation to the Ishmaelites.¹³⁴ This appears to have been a deliberate choice by the author of the *Apocalypse*, and one at odds with the usual terminology in other Syriac literature, which commonly spoke of an Ishmaelite or Arab kingdom.¹³⁵

Nonetheless, the main problem for the author of the *Apocalypse* was not that the Ishmaelites might be identified with the fourth kingdom; unlike the *Apocalypse of John the Little* and history pseudo-Sebeos, both of which condemned the Ishmaelites by calling them the fourth kingdom, the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* understood the fourth kingdom in a positive sense that would intrinsically exclude the Ishmaelites. Rather, the main threat to the rhetorical position of the author of the *Apocalypse* were those who identified Alexander the Great’s Macedonians, and only the Macedonians, as the fourth kingdom.¹³⁶

Such preterist interpreters, who represented the most common interpretation of the four kingdoms in the Syriac tradition, held that all Daniel’s prophecies had been fulfilled, and that the fourth kingdom was a relic of the past, brought down by the Maccabean revolt (see above, chapter 4, part I). The glosses in the Peshitta version of Daniel 7—which explicitly identified the four kingdoms as the Babylonians, the Medes, the Persians, and the Greeks—had enshrined the preterist reading of Daniel in Syriac scripture. If the fourth kingdom of Daniel had been the Alexander’s Kingdom of the Greeks, no room remained for the Roman Empire or indeed any eschatological reading of the kingdoms of Daniel. In order to argue for its Aphrahatian understanding of the fourth kingdom, the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* had to provide a solution that explained why the Peshitta glosses did not mention the Roman Empire.

Studiorum Orientalium, 1987), 337–352, argued that the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* sought to discredit the notion that the Ishmaelites were the fourth kingdom of Daniel, especially on ibid, 346. Martinez’s argument is repeated by Robert Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1997), 266; and in Gerrit J. Reinink, “Ps.-Methodius: A Concept of History in Response to the Rise of Islam,” in *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East, I: Problems in the Literary Source Material*, ed. A. Cameron and L. Conrad (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1999), 158; in Sydney Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 33–34; W. J. Aerts, “Hagar in the So-Called *Daniel-Diegesis* and in Other Byzantine Writings,” in *Abraham, the Nations, and the Hagarites: Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Perspectives on Kinship with Abraham*, ed. M Goodman, G. H. van Kooten, and J. T. A. G. M. van Ruiten (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 466; Wido van Peursen, “Daniel’s Four Kingdoms in the Syriac Tradition,” in *Tradition and Innovation in Biblical Interpretation: Studies Presented to Professor Eep Talstra on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. W. Th. van Peursen and J.W. Dyk (Leiden, Brill, 2011), 203; James Palmer, *The Apocalypse in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 116; Wolf, “Back to the Future: Constantine and the Last Roman Emperor,” 123.

¹³⁴ The author was nonetheless content to speak of the “Kingdom of the Barbarians” (composed of the Göktürks and the Avars).

¹³⁵ Brock, “Syriac Views of Emergent Islam,” 14, notes that Syriac literature often spoke of the Umayyad Caliphate as the “Kingdom of the Arabs.”

¹³⁶ Lutz Greisiger, “The Opening of the Gates of the North in 627: War, Anti-Byzantine Sentiment and Apocalyptic Expectancy in the Near East Prior to the Arab Invasion,” *Peoples of the Apocalypse: Eschatological Beliefs and Political Scenarios*, ed. W. Brandes, F. Schmieder, and R. Voß (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 78, hints at this idea, but does not explore it in detail.

In chapter 8 of the Book of Daniel, Daniel sees a vision of a goat from the west defeating a ram: “And the goat became exceedingly great; and when he grew strong, his great horn was broken (The Peshitta includes the gloss here: ‘the death of Alexander son of Philip’). And four conspicuous ones arose toward the four winds of heaven (ܕܠܐܪܒܥܐ ܕܥܡܐܢܐ ܕܝܠܕܐܢ).”¹⁴¹ An angel interprets the visions for Daniel: the ram was Persia, the goat was the King of the Greeks (Alexander),¹⁴² and the four horns are the four kingdoms that rose from the Kingdom of the Greeks. Thus, in context, the four winds here imply that the Alexander’s empire splintered between rival kingdoms in the north, south, east, and west—all the directions of the winds.

Nonetheless, the seventh-century author of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* interpreted the four winds very differently. The author may well have known of the historical interpretation—at the beginning of chapter 10, the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* states that after Alexander died, his empire was taken over by four of his generals (a number that corresponds to the Book of Daniel but not to history)—but to suit his purposes he interpreted the four winds not as the kingdoms of Alexander’s generals, but as representing the kingdoms of the Greeks, Macedonians, Kushites, and Romans.

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¹⁴³ Daniel 11:4; in *The Old Testament in Syriac, Part III, fasc.4*, ed. Peshitta Institute, 38–39: ܡܕܢܚܐ ܝܬܪܥܟܐ ܠܗ ܒܫܦܝܠܐ ܘܢܨܛܐ ܠܗ ܒܩܝܣܬܐ ܘܕܡܓܪܐ ܠܗ ܒܥܝܢܐ ܘܕܡܓܪܐ ܠܗ ܒܥܝܢܐ.

This provides a solution by which the author of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* could place the Roman Empire among the kingdoms of Daniel listed by the Peshitta glosses. In the *Apocalypse*, the Kingdom of the Greeks remained the fourth beast, in agreement with the Peshitta, but it was made up of four constituent kingdoms (symbolized by the four winds), one of which was the Kingdom of the Romans. With this, the age-old question as to whether the fourth kingdom of Daniel represented the Macedonians of Alexander or the Romans was solved: it represented both (and two other kingdoms!). Just how these four kingdoms came together to constitute the Kingdom of the Greeks the *Apocalypse* explains in its next chapter.

II.5: The Family Tree of the Kingdom of the Greeks

As in the *Syriac Alexander Legend*, Alexander the Great plays the key role in the establishment of the fourth kingdom in the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*. It described Alexander both as “the Macedonian king of the Greeks” (ܡܠܟܐ ܡܥܪܒܐ ܕܗܝܠܐ) (VIII.2), and, later, as “the first king of the Greeks” (ܡܠܟܐ ܡܥܪܒܐ ܕܗܝܠܐ) (IX.1).¹⁴⁴ Thus, the *Apocalypse* suggested that the Kingdom of the Greeks, the fourth kingdom, began with Alexander.

Alexander is accurately called the son of the Macedonian king Philip (Philip II of Macedon, r. 382–336 BC). On the other hand, contrary to historical fact, the *Apocalypse* claims that Alexander’s mother was named Kushat (ܚܫܬ), daughter of Pil (ܫܠ), king of the Kushites (i.e. the Ethiopians).¹⁴⁵ This fictional mother of Alexander plays a major role in the *Apocalypse*’s history of the fourth kingdom.

Chapter 8 of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* concerns the exploits of Alexander. It says that he built the great city of Alexandria (ܐܠܝܟܣܢܕܪܝܐ), ruled there for twelve years, and then went east and defeated and killed Darius, the Persian king.¹⁴⁶ Presumably it was at this point that Alexander inherited Nimrod’s kingship. The remainder of the chapter concerns Alexander’s travels still further east, to the land of Yonton, where he imprisoned Gog and

¹⁴⁴ Since, in chapter 11 of Daniel, the Kingdom of the Greeks is described as “still rising in power” under Alexander, the author of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* seems to understand the kingdom as beginning with Alexander; Alexander’s father was simply king of the Macedonians, while Alexander is both a Macedonian and the first King of the Greeks.

¹⁴⁵ Lutz Greisiger, “Ein nubischer Erlöser-König: Kūš in syrischen Apokalypsen des 7. Jahrhunderts,” in *Der christliche Orient und seine Umwelt. Gesammelte Studien zu Ehren Jürgen Tubachs anlässlich seines 60. Geburtstages*. Edited by Vashalomidze, G. Sophia and L. Greisiger (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2007), 206, suggests that idea in the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* that the mother of Alexander the Great was a Kushite princess may have been inspired by an episode in the Alexander Romance of Pseudo-Callisthenes in which the Macedonian meets the queen of the Nubian Empire of Meroë named Kandake (Candace). The passage portrays Kandake as a maternal figure to Alexander, and she calls him “my son.”

¹⁴⁶ Darius, in the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, is almost certainly based on Darius III (r. 336–330 BC), who was defeated by Alexander the Great. While contemporary works, such as the *Syriac Alexander Romance*, identify the king defeated by Alexander wrongly as Tubalq, the author of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* could have come across the name Darius from his source here, Daniel 11. The Darius in Daniel 11, however, is obviously meant to be Darius I (r. 522–486 BC), so it is possible that the author of the apocalypse provided the correct name of the Persian king quite by accident, thanks to the fact that the king defeated by Alexander shared the name of the great Persian monarch identified in Daniel 11.

The author of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* transformed the information from the *Julian Romance* to suit his vision of a unified fourth kingdom. Germanicus, who was a Roman king or emperor according to the *Julian Romance*, instead became a servant of King Byzas, erasing the distinction between Greek and Roman.¹⁵¹ Instead of Byzas' realm simply being annexed by the Roman Empire, the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* made Byzas an ancestor of the Romans.

Thus, according to the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, Byz and Kushat had a daughter together, whom they name Byzantia (כּוּשָׁתִי). When she came of age she was married to the king of Rome, "Armalaos" (אַרְמָלוֹס), that is, Romulus.¹⁵² Romulus then gave Rome to Byzantia as her dowry. They had three children: a younger Romulus, who became king of Rome, Urbanus (אַרְבָּנוֹס), who became king of Byzantium, and Claudius (קְלוּדִיּוֹס), who became king of Alexandria.¹⁵³

Through this rather inventive family tree, the author of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* enumerated the four sub-kingdoms (represented by the four winds) that make up the fourth kingdom of Daniel. These four constituent kingdoms were: the Greeks, or Byzantines, who ruled from Byzantium (represented by Urbanus), the Macedonians who ruled from Alexandria (represented by Claudius; the Macedonians are repeatedly identified in the *Apocalypse* with Egypt, and so the author probably had the Ptolemaic kingdom in mind); the Romans who ruled from Rome (represented by Romulus, son of Romulus); and the Kushites, or Ethiopians, represented by King Pil and his daughter Kushat, whose blood is present in all three of the royal sons.

With this, the genealogy was complete. Just as the Book of Daniel had made clear that the Kingdom of the Greeks had been divided among the four winds, the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* makes clear that the Kingdom of Greeks was divided in four through a series of marriages after Alexander's death. All four of these kingdoms held Nimrod's kingship. Nonetheless, though the *Apocalypse* did not state it openly, it implied that only one of these

Byzantium and the Bosphorus: A Historical Study, from the Seventh Century BC until the Foundation of Constantinople (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 234–235. It is not entirely clear what emperor the author of the *Julian Romance* had in mind as the inspiration for Emperor Germanicus; several Roman emperors bore the agnomen-turned-cognomen *Germanicus* in their names, but the author may perhaps have had in mind emperor Claudius (full name: Tiberius Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus) (r. 41–54 AD), under whom Thrace was annexed by the Roman Empire.

¹⁵¹ In making Germanicus a general, the author of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* may have been basing his account on a vague memory of Germanicus Julius Caesar, nephew and adopted son of Emperor Tiberius (r. 14–37 AD), who was given command over, and toured, the eastern provinces before his untimely death; see Tacitus, *Annales*, II.54–82.

¹⁵² The name "Armalaos" (אַרְמָלוֹס) appears to be a Semitic form of "Romulus." Thus, in Jewish apocalyptic literature written in Hebrew, the evil personification of Rome is called "Armilos" (אַרְמִילוֹס); see Reeves, *Trajectories in Near Eastern Apocalyptic*, 19–21.

¹⁵³ The *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, IX.4–6; ed. Reinink, *Die Syrische Apokalypse*, vol. 1, 18–19. In the Syriac, Alexandria is called the city of Claudius' father, but this makes little sense since Claudius' father is Romulus, the king of Rome. Since this line associating Alexandria with Claudius' father is not present in the Greek or Latin translations it is probably a later scribal intervention, probably a mistake that originated in an attempt at symmetry with the previous line, in which Byzantium is called the city of Urbanus' mother.

kingdoms still remained by the end of the seventh century when it was written: the Byzantines (whom it called the “Kingdom of the Greeks and Romans”). Therefore, it must be an emperor from Byzantium that would fulfill the destiny of the fourth kingdom and surrender power back to God at the end of time.

Conclusions: A New Interpretation of the Kingdoms of Daniel

Through its complex, and often confusing, genealogies, the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* established a history of the four kingdoms of Daniel. In its narrative, these were not four successive world kingdoms, but instead four kingdoms that each, in turn, inherited the original kingship of Nimrod. This tradition of kingship passed from Nimrod through the Babylonians, then it was inherited through marriage by the Medes, and then by marriage by the Persians, and finally taken up by Alexander through his conquest of the Persians. From Alexander, it was diffused through four kingdoms that made up the Kingdom of the Greeks: the Macedonians, the Byzantines, the Romans, and the Kushites.

The aim of the author of the *Apocalypse* here was not to deny the Arabs a place within the four kingdoms of Daniel, as is often claimed in much of the recent scholarship on the *Apocalypse*. Rather, the author sought to find a place for the Roman or Byzantine Empire, and to explain how the Kingdom of the Greeks in the Peshitta could be identified with the contemporary Roman/Byzantine Empire. It did so with its innovative exegesis on the four winds in the Book of Daniel, interpreting them as the four kingdoms that made up the larger Kingdom of the Greek.

Part III: The Surrender of Power

The *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* adopted the eschatology of Aphrahat, but adapted it to meet the needs of a changed world. As we have seen in section I, just as Aphrahat had argued that the Roman Empire could not be defeated by the Persians, the author of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* asserted that the Roman Empire could not be defeated by the Arabs. In section II, we saw that the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* adopted Aphrahat’s concept that the Roman Empire was a good extension of fourth kingdom of Daniel, but laid out a detailed historical explanation that avoided contradicting the Peshitta glosses.

The final and most important aspect of Aphrahat’s eschatology, upon which all the others were premised, was the idea that the Roman Empire will willingly return its power to Christ at the end of time. The *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* adopted this idea, and acted it out through the figure of the King of the Greeks, the last ruler of the fourth kingdom.

III.1: “Kush will Hand Over to God”: The Role of the Kushites

As we have seen above, the historical section of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* asserts that the fourth kingdom, the Kingdom of the Greek, is made up of four constituent kingdoms. Three of the four—the Macedonians, the Romans, and the Greeks/Byzantines—naturally go together. The Kushites, i.e. the Ethiopians, on the other hand, are an outlier. Scholars have long wondered why the author of the *Apocalypse* was so eager to introduce the Kushites into the family history of the Kingdom of the Greeks.

The author of the *Apocalypse* went some way in explaining this, though he left a few dots unconnected. The author suggests that the Kushite background of the Kingdom of the Greeks was important because it meant that this kingdom would fulfill a prophecy found in Psalm 68:31 (or 68:32 according to the Peshitta numbering), which reads: “Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God.” In Syriac, the phrase “to extend one’s hands” (ܠܝܬܬܝܬܐ ܕܝܕܐ) has an idiomatic meaning of “to hand over, to yield, to surrender.” Thus, in the Syriac Peshitta, the second half of Psalm 68:31(32) (ܠܝܬܬܝܬܐ ܕܝܕܐ ܕܝܬܝܐ ܕܝܬܝܐ) could be interpreted to mean either “Kush will stretch its hands to God,” or “Kush will hand over to God.”¹⁵⁴

The *Apocalypse* clearly suggests that the line be read in the latter sense. Kush would hand over to God. Moreover, it claimed that the prophecy referred not literally to Kush but to the Greeks: “Because the Kingdom of the Greeks, which is of Kushite lineage, will hand over to God at the end of time. For the blessed David [as author of the psalm] looked with the enlightened eye of God’s spirit and saw that the Kingdom of the Greeks would be descended from the lineage of Kushat, daughter of Pil, king of the Kushites.”¹⁵⁵ In other words, when the psalm said “Kush” it really meant the “Kingdom of the Greeks” because David, its author, was a prophet who knew that the Kingdom of the Greeks would be descended from Kush.

The author of the *Apocalypse* admitted that this was not how the verse was usually understood: “But many brothers among the sons of the church thought that blessed David spoke this statement about the Kingdom of the Kushites. And those who thought this were mistaken. For it is about the Kingdom of the Greeks, which is from the lineage of Kushat.”¹⁵⁶ Again, the

¹⁵⁴ For the verse in Syriac, see *The Old Testament in Syriac According to the Peshitta Version: Part II, fasc. 3: The Book of Psalms*, ed. Peshitta Institute (Leiden: Brill, 1980), 75. Psalm 68.31 is actually an obscure line, and in the original Masoretic Hebrew text translates closer to “Kush will hasten its hands to God,” with the Hebrew verb *tārīš* (תָּרִיץ) (“to bring something quickly”) providing the source of the confusion. In the Septuagint, *tārīš* (תָּרִיץ) is translated as προφθάσει (from προφθάνω, “to outrun,” or “anticipate”), making the line Αἰθιοπία προφθάσει χεῖρα αὐτῆς τῷ Θεῷ slightly ambiguous. On the variable ways of interpreting the Syriac phrase, see Witakowski, “The Eschatological Program of the *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius,” 39–40.

[illegible][illegible]

author of the *Apocalypse* suggests that when David wrote the psalm he was prophesying about the Kingdom of the Greeks, even though he ostensibly spoke about the Kushites. This was possible because the Romans, Greeks, and Macedonians were all of Kushite blood through their descent from Kushat, through her daughter Byzantia. The complex story of Kushat's marriages and children that made the Kushites part of the fourth kingdom becomes relevant here because it means that the supposed prophecy in Psalm 68:31 can refer to the Greeks/Romans. The *Apocalypse* quotes the line from the psalm several times subsequently as evidence of the important eschatological role that the Kingdom of the Greeks will have.

Nonetheless, this connection between the Kushites and the Greeks has only raised more questions for modern readers. What is the point of all this effort to connect the Romans to the Kushites? Why was it so important to prove that this supposed prophecy in the psalm referred to the Greeks/Romans and not the literal Kushites?

Paul Alexander introduced the idea that the author of the *Apocalypse* must have been responding to contemporary expectations, based on the supposed prophecy in Psalm 68, that the Christians under the rule of the Arab caliphate would be liberated by an Ethiopian king. He argued that such a sentiment must have been prominent among Miaphysite Christians, because the Ethiopian king of Axum was a Miaphysite. The author of the *Apocalypse*, he argued, was probably also a Miaphysite (hence he refers to his opponents on the issue as "brothers among the sons of the church") but, unlike his co-religionists, realized that deliverance from the Arabs could not be provided by the weak Axumite kingdom. The author realized that only the Byzantine Empire had the resources to defeat the Arabs. Therefore, according to Paul Alexander, the author tried to shift the hopes of his Miaphysite coreligionists from the Ethiopians to the Byzantines by showing them that the Greeks and Romans had a Kushite (Ethiopian) ancestry, and therefore the prophecy in Psalm 68 actually referred to the Roman Empire.¹⁵⁷ Alexander's explanation has been widely adopted in subsequent scholarship.¹⁵⁸

This argument might appear to be strengthened by several Egyptian apocalypses that survive in Arabic translations of lost Coptic originals, which communicate similar expectations that the Ethiopians, or the Ethiopians and Romans together, would conquer the Arabs. These include the *Apocalypse of Samuel of Qalamun* (written in Coptic around the tenth century but surviving only in Arabic translation), the tenth century *Letter of Pistentius* (also probably a Coptic composition though it survives only in Arabic), and a late medieval apocalypse called the *Prophecy of the Prophet Daniel Revealed to Athanasius*.¹⁵⁹ The latter even cited Psalm

¹⁵⁷ Paul Alexander, "Byzantium and the Migration of Literary Works and Motifs: The Legend of the Last Roman Emperor," *Medievalia et Humanistica*, vol. 2 (1971), 57–59; idem *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, 22–23.

¹⁵⁸ Sebastian Brock, "Syriac Views of Emergent Islam," in *Studies on the First Century of Islamic Society*, ed. G.H.A. Juynboll (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1982), 18; Martinez, *Eastern Christian Apocalyptic*, 179–180; Witakowski, "The Eschatological Program of the *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius," 38–39. I accepted and repeated uncritically the basics of Alexander's premise in Christopher Bonura, "When Did the Legend of the Last Emperor Originate? A New Look at the Textual Relationship between the *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius and the *Tiburtine Sibyl*," *Viator*, vol. 47 no. 3 (2016), 55.

¹⁵⁹ All three of these apocalypses survive in manuscripts of the fourteenth century and later. The

68:31(32), albeit to suggest that the Miaphysite doctrine of the Ethiopians is the true faith instead of the Chalcedonian Christianity of the Romans—a very different context from its use in the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*.¹⁶⁰ All of these apocalypses predict that the King of Rome (the Byzantine emperor in the first two; a “Frankish” king in the latter) would join with the Ethiopian king and together defeat the Arabs. Then, in Jerusalem, the Ethiopian king would persuade the Roman king to renounce the creed of Chalcedon.

Another oft-cited piece of evidence for potential Miaphysite eschatological expectations about Ethiopia is the fourteenth-century Ethiopian national epic, the *Kebra Nagast* (“The Glory of Kings”). This legendary history of the ancient Ethiopian kings celebrates Ethiopia’s Miaphysite heritage. In the later chapters, the third-century theologian Gregory Thaumaturgus appears in order to voice an *ex eventu* prophecy: though Rome was great, it would fall into heresy under an emperor named Marcian (that is, the emperor who convened the Council of Chalcedon) and be conquered, while Ethiopia will wax in its power and survive until the end of time thanks to its embrace of the true faith. Here, Gregory cites the crucial line from Psalm 68 that Kush will stretch her hands to God as confirmation that Ethiopia’s Miaphysite Christianity is God’s chosen creed, proof that Ethiopia’s faith is the true faith.¹⁶¹ The epic concludes with an account of the conquest of the Jewish Yemenite kingdom of Himyar in southern Arabia by the Ethiopian king Kaleb Ella Atsbeha with the aid of the Roman Emperor Justin (an event that took place around 525 AD). In a fictional flourish, the Roman Emperor and Ethiopian *negus* meet in Jerusalem and divide the world up amongst themselves.¹⁶²

Irfan Shahîd first suggested that an early version of the *Kebra Nagast* influenced the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*.¹⁶³ Though scholars agree that the *Kebra Nagast* was first composed in Ethiopic in the fourteenth-century, a colophon in an important manuscript copy claims that it was written in Coptic and was translated into Ethiopic via an Arabic

Apocalypse of Samuel of Qalamun has been edited with a French translation by J. Ziadeh, “L’Apocalypse de Samuel, supérieur de Deir-el-Qalamoun,” *Revue de l’Orient chrétien*, vol. 20 (1915–17), 374–404; see also Jos van Lent, “The Apocalypse of Samuel,” in *Christian-Muslim Relations*, vol. 2: 900–1050, ed. D. Thomas and B. Roggema (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 743–752. The *Letter of Pistentius* has been edited with a French translation by A. Périer, “Lettre de Pisuntios, évêque de Qeft, à ses fidèles,” *Revue de l’Orient Chrétien*, vol. 19 (1914) 79–92 and 302–323; see also Jos van Lent, “The Apocalypse of Samuel,” in *Christian-Muslim Relations*, vol. 2: 900–1050, ed. D. Thomas and B. Roggema (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 266–274. The *Prophecy of the Prophet Daniel Revealed to Athanasius*, or “Pseudo-Athanasius (called “PA Ar. II” to distinguish it from other Christian Arabic apocalypses attributed to Athanasius), has been edited by Juan Pedro J.P. Monferrer Sala, “Literatura apocalíptica cristiana en árabe. Con un avance de edición del Apocalipsis árabe copto del Pseudo Atanasio,” *Miscelánea de Estudios Árabes y Hebraicos, Sección Árabe-Islam*, vol. 48 (1999) 231–254; see also Martínez, *Eastern Christian Apocalyptic*, 253–254; Jos van Lent, “The Prophecy of Daniel to Athanasius,” in *Christian-Muslim Relations*, vol. 3: 1050–1200, ed. D. Thomas and B. Roggema (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 290–296.

¹⁶⁰ As Martínez, “The King of Rûm and the King of Ethiopia,” 251 n.23, points out, it is significant that the Arabic quotation of the Psalm here follows (*al-Habashah...tusallimu yadaha li-alahi*) the idiomatic Syriac reading suggested in the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*.

¹⁶¹ E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Queen of Sheba and Her Only Son Menyelek: Being the History of the Departure of God and His Ark, of the Covenant from Jerusalem to Ethiopia, and the Establishment of the Religion of the Hebrews and the Solomonic Line of Kings in that Country* (London: Medici Society, 1922), 221–223.

¹⁶² Ibid., 226.

¹⁶³ Irfan Shahîd, “The *Kebra Nagast* in the Light of Recent Research” *Le Muséon*, vol. 89 (1976), 174–176.

intermediary.¹⁶⁴ Though most scholars of Ethiopic literature remain skeptical that a Coptic version of the *Kebrā Negast* ever existed, Shahîd believed that the epic had indeed originated in Coptic and that this version dated to the sixth century (since the alliance of the Ethiopian king Kaleb and Emperor Justin is the latest event mentioned). Thus, Shahîd suggested that the author of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* knew the *Kebrā Negast* and sought to replace its vision of an Ethiopian kingdom that will endure until the last days with a Roman Empire that will so endure: “the Ethiopian profile of the *Apocalypse* strongly implies that the author was...boldly counterblasting a political theory concerning the Ethiopian monarchy that had been formulated...in the *Kebrā Nagast*.”¹⁶⁵ Glen Bowersock has subsequently expanded on this view, pointing to parallels with the *Kebrā Negast* in other Syriac apocalypses, particularly the *Edessene Apocalypse*.¹⁶⁶ Garth Fowden has likewise concluded: “It seems highly likely that Ps.-Methodius wrote his *Apocalypse* in response to some early version of the Ethiopian national epic.”¹⁶⁷ Is it possible that the author of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* was indeed responding to Miaphysite hopes about an Ethiopian liberating king in contemporary Coptic literature, hints of which now survive only in later Arabic and Ethiopic translations?

This appears unlikely. Martinez has shown in detail that the Egyptian Coptic/Arabic apocalypses were dependent on the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, which had been translated into Coptic in the eighth century. They were a response to, not the source of, the political claims in the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*. Moreover, Martinez made a compelling case that the existence of a sixth-century Coptic version of the *Kebrā Negast* is hardly plausible (a claim supported by experts on Ethiopian literature), and so it is likely that the *Kebrā Negast* responded to the ideas in the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, rather than vice versa.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁴ Budge, *The Queen of Sheba and Her Only Son Menyelek*, 228.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 175

¹⁶⁶ Glen Bowersock, “Helena’s Bridle and the Chariot of Ethiopia,” in *Antiquity in Antiquity*, ed. by Gregg Gardner and Kevin L. Osterloh (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 383–393. Bowersock argues that, even though the *Edessene Apocalypse* is unanimously accepted as later than the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, nonetheless it reflects an older tradition about the King of the Greeks. He argues that in the *Edessene Apocalypse*, when the King of the Greeks surrenders his power to God, he is called a descendant of Kushat and is not explicitly identified as a Roman; thus, according to Bowersock, this represents the earlier tradition in which an Ethiopian monarch surrenders power to God and which the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* opposed. However, the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* also calls the King of the Greek a descendant of Kushat in the scene in which he surrenders power. It only explores the full ancestral history of the Ethiopians, Greeks, and Romans in an earlier chapter; however, the earlier chapters of the *Edessene Apocalypse* are lost, so we have no idea what, if anything, it may have said about the genealogical connection of the Greeks, Romans, and Ethiopians.

¹⁶⁷ Garth Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth: Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 132.

¹⁶⁸ Stuart Munro-Hay, “A Sixth Century *Kebrā Nagast*?” *Annales d’Éthiopie Année*, vol. 17 (2001), 43–58, convincingly disproves the notion of a late antique version of the *Kebrā Negast*. Francisco Javier Martinez makes his case, summarized above, in, “The King of Rûm and the King of Ethiopia in Medieval Apocalyptic Texts from Egypt,” *Coptic Studies: Acts of the Third International Congress of Coptic Studies*, ed. Włodzimierz Godlewski (Warsaw: PWN-Editions scientifiques de Pologne, 1990), 247–259, esp. 257–259. Martinez makes an additional interesting point that would support his view: that the *Kebrā Negast* claims that its prophecies are in agreement with those found in the “Book of Darmayteos”; Martinez suggests that this may be a garbled version of the name Methodius.

However, if the *Kebra Negast* was not the source of the interest in Kush in the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, scholars have presented other possibilities. Lutz Greisiger has pointed to other evidence associated not with Axum in Ethiopia, but the Nubian kingdom to its northwest (in modern-day Sudan), which, in antiquity, was also included in the broader regional concept of “Kush.” He notes that the tenth-century Christian Arabic *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria* incorporates an eighth-century source that calls the King of Makuria (Nubia) the “fourth king” and the “King of the Greeks” (*al-malik al-Yunani*).¹⁶⁹ According to Greisiger, the Nubian kings must have officially adopted the title “King of the Greeks,” perhaps to stress the philhellene nature of their kingdom (Greek was the language of the royal court and of the liturgy in late antique Nubia, and Greek culture seems to have had great prestige there) and the protection they afforded to their Chalcedonian subjects. Greisiger suggests that the Nubians, bolstered by their victories over the invading Arabs at Dongola (in 642 and 652 AD), spread propaganda that they would destroy the Arabs and surrender power to God, and supported this claim with the line from Psalm 68. The author of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, Greisiger reasons, must have known about this Nubian propaganda and polemicized against it, claiming for the Byzantine emperor the title of the “King of the Greeks” and the eschatological mission of defeating the Arabs.¹⁷⁰

As with the notion that the *Apocalypse* had responded to *Kebra Negast*, there are some major problems with the idea that it responded to Nubian political claims. It makes little sense to assume the title “King of the Greeks” began as a Nubian title and that the author of the *Apocalypse* sought to claim for the emperor in Constantinople. The “King of the Greeks” is the title used in the Book of Daniel to refer to Alexander the Great. When the author of the *Apocalypse* used the term, he drew an explicit connection between Alexander and the emperors ruling from Constantinople as continuators of the fourth kingdom. Such a connection between Alexander and the Byzantine emperors had a long history in Syriac literature, as the *Syriac Alexander Legend* demonstrates.

Indeed, in general “King of the Greeks” had become in late antiquity a colloquial Syriac term for the Roman or Byzantine emperor. For example, the *Cave of Treasures* mentions that when the three magi in Persia saw the star of Bethlehem at first they worried that it was a portent indicating that the “King of the Greeks” would soon attack.¹⁷¹ Since this took place at the birth of Christ, the “King of the Greeks” must be none other than Caesar Augustus. Similar uses of the term “King of the Greeks” for the emperor at Constantinople are found in Syriac histories and

¹⁶⁹ This source is preserved in the entry on the Alexandrian Patriarch Michael I (r. 743–767) in Severus ibn al-Muqaffa’s *History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria*, a compilation of biographies of the Patriarchs of Alexandria compiled in the late tenth century; it is found in *The History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria: vol. 3: Agathon–Michael I (766 AD)*, ed. and trans. B. Evetts (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1910), 134–139. The source appears to have been a Coptic *vita* of Patriarch Michael I written by one of his aides, named John the Deacon; on this source, see Mark N. Swanson, “John the Deacon,” in *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History, volume 1: 600–900*, ed. D. Thomas and B. Roggema (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 317–321. The King of Nubia is mentioned when the Patriarch was arrested by the Arab authorities in Egypt for failure to collect taxes; the King of Nubia invaded Egypt and successfully sued for Michael I’s release.

¹⁷⁰ Greisiger, “Ein nubischer Erlöser-König,” 203–204.

¹⁷¹ The *Cave of Treasures*, XLV.7; Ri, *La Caverne des Trésors*, 362.

chronicles.¹⁷² Thus, “King of the Greeks” was not an official Nubian royal title, but an unofficial Syriac term for the Roman and Byzantine emperors with implicit associations with Alexander the Great and the Bible.

The *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* was translated into Greek and Coptic already in the eighth century, so it is more likely that if the King of Makuria really had claimed the title “King of the Greeks,” he did so because of the eschatological associations the *Apocalypse* already conferred on the Byzantine emperor.¹⁷³ Nor is it likely that the author of the *Apocalypse* wrote in order to counter Miaphysite hopes for liberation by the Nubian king—although sources are scant, the Nubian Kingdom of Makuria appears to have adhered to the Chalcedonian creed until in the eighth century.¹⁷⁴ Thus, Miaphysite Christians would have had no reason to sympathize with the Nubians over the Byzantines. In sum, there is no reason to suppose that the *Apocalypse* was responding to “Kushite”—whether Ethiopian or Nubian—political claims.

Gerrit Reinink has provided perhaps the only previous rebuttal to the assumption that the *Apocalypse* was responding to Miaphysite hopes of liberation by a Kushite king. He points out that, outside the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, the line “Kush will stretch its hands to God” was commonly interpreted as a prophecy that Ethiopia would convert to Christianity, a prophecy that had already been fulfilled by the time the *Apocalypse* was written. For example, Eusebius of Caesarea recounts that when Philip the Evangelist baptized an Ethiopian (Acts 8:26–39), this was the first step in the conversion of Ethiopia to Christianity: “through this deed the prophecy that says ‘Ethiopia stretches out its hand to God’ was fulfilled by him [Philip].”¹⁷⁵ Thus, Reinink argues, when the author of the *Apocalypse* said that “many brothers among the sons of the church” were mistaken about the meaning of the line, the author simply meant that they adhered to this traditional interpretation rather than regard it as an unfulfilled eschatological prophecy. It had nothing to do with any expectation about an Ethiopian liberator versus a Byzantine liberator.¹⁷⁶

If Reinink is correct that there existed no earlier hopes for an Ethiopian liberator, why did the author of the *Apocalypse* choose Psalm 68:31, with its reference to Kush, of all the verses in the Bible, as a centerpiece for his eschatological program? Reinink fails to find a convincing answer. His explanation is unfortunately very similar to that of Paul Alexander, and depends on

¹⁷² Jack Tannous, “Romanness in the Syriac East,” in *Transformations of Romanness: Early Medieval Regions and Identities*, ed. C. Gantner, C. Grifoni, W. Pohl, and M. Pollheimer-Mohaupt (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 471–472, where he gives examples, including a twelfth century manuscript with speaks of the campaigns of the Franks and the “King of the Greeks” in Syria. Tannous further points out that “King of the Greeks” and “King of the Romans” could be interchangeable; it is in this way that the titles are used in the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*.

¹⁷³ Greisiger, “Ein nubischer Erlöser-König,” 209, admits this possibility.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 202–203; Roland Werner, *Das Christentum in Nubien Geschichte und Gestalt einer afrikanischen Kirche* (Berlin: LIT, 2013), 62–65.

¹⁷⁵ Eusebius, *Church History*, II.1.13; ed. Gustave Bardy, *Eusèbe de Césarée: Histoire ecclésiastique* vol. 1 (Paris: Les éditions du Cerf, 1960), 52: ἐργῶ πληρωθείσης δι’ αὐτοῦ τῆς: «Αἰθιοπία προφθάσει χεῖρα αὐτῆς τῷ θεῷ» περιεχούσης προφητείας.

¹⁷⁶ Gerrit J. Reinink, “Pseudo-Methodius und die Legende vom römischen Endkaiser,” in *The Use and Abuse of Eschatology in the Middle Ages*, ed. W. Verbeke; D. Verhelst, and A. Welkenhuysen (Leuven: Leuven University Press 1988), 100 n.85; idem, “Ps.-Methodius: A Concept of History,” 161–168; idem, *Die Syrische Apokalypse*, vol. 2, 31 n. ix.7.7.

off of royal authority at the end of time. Therefore, it appears that the author *Apocalypse* went about creatively trying to find a Biblical justification for it. The line from Psalm 68 had potential to provide that justification because in Syriac it can be interpreted to mean “Kush will hand over to God” (ܟܘܫ ܕܝܠܝܕ ܕܥܠܡܐ). In this way Psalm 68 provides the elusive scriptural support for the surrender of power. The “brothers of the clergy” interpreted it wrong, in the view of the author of the *Apocalypse* both because it had never occurred to them that it concerned the Kingdom of the Greeks, and because they altogether missed its potential eschatological interpretation.

III.2: The Unconquerable Fourth Kingdom and the Three Gifts

Aphrahat had suggested that Rome, the fourth kingdom, had inherited the eschatological prerogatives initially assigned to the Jewish kingdom. The Jews had expected to rule a world empire at the end of time, but God had turned his back on the Jews and allowed the Romans to establish one instead. This fact supported Aphrahat's contention that the Roman Empire must last until the end of time and surrender power to God, because there was no other kingdom that could follow it.

The *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* accepted this same logic; if it did not arrive at this idea from Aphrahat directly, it came to the same conclusion based on its own proof texts. It read Psalm 68:31(32) and 1 Corinthians 15:24 in order to provide a prophecy that the Kingdom of the Greeks and Romans (Byzantium), under its last ruler, will surrender its power to God at the end of time. The passage from 1 Corinthians says that this will happen “when he has abolished every ruler and every authority and every power” (**عندما يذهب كل سلطان وكل سلطة وكل قوة**). Since, as we have seen, the author of the *Apocalypse* suggests that the subject of this sentence is the Kingdom of the Greeks and Romans (instead of Christ), it was this kingdom that must put an end to every ruler and every authority and every power.

The *Apocalypse* demonstrated that this is precisely what the Romans/Byzantines had done and would continue to do: “The kingdom of the Christians will prevail over all the kingdoms of the earth, and through it every ruler and every authority (ܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ) will be destroyed and abolished.”¹⁸² As proof, the *Apocalypse* enumerates the kingdoms that the Romans defeated: it destroyed the Medes, the Persians, the Armenians, and the Macedonians in Egypt (i.e. the Ptolemaic kingdom). Somewhat later, the author of the *Apocalypse* even credits the Romans/Byzantines with destroying the (Sasanian) Persian Empire.¹⁸³ Now, the Greeks/Romans were opposed by the Ishmaelites and by “the Kingdom of the Barbarians, that is, of the (Gök)Türks and Avars” (ܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ)—a reference to the nomadic steppe confederations that fought the Romans in the Balkans—but these new enemies still would not be able to defeat them.¹⁸⁴

The *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* found more proof of this in the Roman conquest of the Jewish kingdom: “The kingdom of the Romans, which is that of the Greeks, prevailed over the kingdom of the Hebrews, and destroyed and uprooted it from its foundations, without a survivor being left in it.”¹⁸⁵ Though it did not state it outright, the *Apocalypse* strongly implied that with this act the Roman Empire inherited the place of the Jews. The Jewish kingdom had initially been blessed as the kingdom that would survive up to the end of history, but God’s favor

¹⁸² The *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, X.2; ed. Reinink, *Die Syrische Apokalypse*, vol. 1, 21 (with emendations from the apparatus): ܡܬܚܝܬܐ ܕܥܠܡܢܐ ܕܡܬܘܕܝܫ ܕܦܬܪܐ ܕܗܝܟܠܐ ܕܩܕܝܫܐ ܕܥܝܣܝܐ ܕܒܪܗܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܢܐ.

¹⁸³ Ibid, XI.3; see Martinez, *Eastern Christian Apocalyptic*, 187 n.5.

¹⁸⁴ The *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, XI.5; ed. Reinink, *Die Syrische Apokalypse*, vol. 1, 23.

¹⁸⁵Ibid., X.4; ed. Reinink, *Die Syrische Apokalypse*, vol. 1, 22 (with emendations from the apparatus):
ܕܠܐ ܢܝܘ ܡܳܬ ܝܚܝܟ ܕܠܐ .ܡܫܝܚ ܥܰܡ ܡܰܪܝܡ ܕܰܡܰܢܰܠܰܐ ܕܰܚܰܒܰܐ ܕܰܚܰܠܰܐ ܕܰܡܰܣܰܬ ܕܰܡܰܠܰܟܰܐ ,ܡܰܠܰܟܰܐ ܕܰܡܰܠܰܬܰܐ

The *Apocalypse* justified this idea by appealing to symbolism derived from the *Cave of Treasures*, which associate the Jews with three gifts from God. The *Cave of Treasures* stated: “three gifts were formerly given to the Jews: kingship, priesthood, and prophecy.”¹⁸⁶ The gifts were given to Adam when God created him (on a Friday), and eventually inherited by the Jewish kingdom.¹⁸⁷ When the Jews allowed Christ to be crucified (on Good Friday) they forfeited the three gifts: “On a Friday priesthood, kingship, and prophecy had been given to Adam; and on a Friday kingship, priesthood, and prophecy were taken away from the Jews.”¹⁸⁸ The point here in the *Cave of Treasures* was simply that the Jews had lost God’s favor, and that Christians could identify proof of this because the Jewish high-priesthood was defunct, there were no more Jewish prophets, and the Jewish kingdom was long gone.

The *Apocalypse* took this as more than simply an indication of the loss of the Jews' holy status. It suggested that the Roman Empire had inherited the three gifts originally given to the Jews. This is proof that the empire has replaced the Jewish kingdom. Of the three gifts, prophecy has been superseded. Once again, the author of the *Apocalypse* seems to have derived this idea from the *Cave of Treasures*, which states: "Prophecy [was lost] on account of the cross."¹⁹⁰ In the context of the passage in the *Cave of Treasures*, the Jews lost the gift of prophecy because they crucified Christ. The author of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, however, took this far more literally: the cross replaced prophecy as one of the three gifts. As a result, the gifts held by the Romans are the priesthood, the kingdom, and the holy cross.

¹⁸⁶The *Cave of Treasures*, L.13; ed. Ri, *La Caverne des Trésors*, 419: 𐭪𐭥𐭩𐭠𐭮 𐭤𐭣𐭫𐭲𐭠𐭬 𐭤𐭣𐭫𐭲𐭠𐭬 𐭢𐭡𐭮𐭠𐭬 𐭤𐭣𐭫𐭲𐭠𐭬 𐭤𐭣𐭫𐭲𐭠𐭬 𐭤𐭣𐭫𐭲𐭠𐭬 : 𐭤𐭣𐭫𐭲𐭠𐭬

¹⁸⁸Ibid., LXVIII.29; ed. Ri, *La Caverne des Trésors*, 404–405 (taking into account additions from the apparatus): 𐎠𐏃𐎡𐎢𐎣𐎤 𐎠𐏁𐎥𐎧𐎦 𐎰𐎭𐎴𐎶 𐎬 𐎲𐎨𐎵𐎫𐎪 𐎠𐏇𐎱𐎺𐎩𐎻 𐎠𐏇𐎡𐎢𐎣𐎤 𐎠𐏁𐎥𐎧𐎦 𐎠𐏇𐎡𐎢𐎣𐎤 𐎠𐏇𐎡𐎢𐎣𐎤 𐎸𐎹𐎠 𐎳𐎿𐎮𐎽𐎾𐎿 𐎠𐏇𐎱𐎺𐎩𐎻 .𐎠𐏇𐎡𐎢𐎣𐎤 For this reading, see Toepel, “The Cave of Treasures,” 579.

¹⁹⁰ The *Cave of Treasures*, L.16; ed. Ri, *La Caverne des Trésors*, 418: 𐤏𐤃 𐤏𐤁𐤏𐤃 : 𐤏𐤁𐤏𐤃𐤏𐤁 𐤏𐤁𐤏𐤃 𐤏𐤁𐤏𐤃

and strength that it can overcome the power of the holy cross, in which the Kingdom of the Greeks, which is that of the Romans, takes refuge?”¹⁹¹ In the *Apocalypse*, the three gifts resemble the *pignora imperii*, the sacred objects that supposedly protected ancient Rome from destruction, a Christian version of which (in the form of holy relics such as the true cross and staff of Moses) Constantinople claimed through late antiquity and the middle ages.¹⁹² In the *Apocalypse*, the fourth kingdom can in no way be destroyed so long as it possesses the cross, crown, and priesthood.

This idea of the Roman supersession of the Jews is evident toward the end of the *Apocalypse*, when Gog and Magog escape the Gates of the North and devastate earth. According to the *Apocalypse*, Gog and Magog will attack in the time of peace and prosperity following the downfall of the Ishmaelites, when the earth is under the rule of the King of the Greeks: “At that time, [people] will eating and drinking, rejoicing, and glad, there being no one evil nor any thought of evil, nor any fear or trembling in their hearts. In that peace the Gates of the North will be opened and the armies of the peoples confined there will come forth.”¹⁹³ The *Apocalypse* provides gruesome details about the peoples of Gog and Magog: they eat vermin of every king, dead animals, and stillborn fetuses.¹⁹⁴

The *Apocalypse* followed the *Syriac Alexander Legend*, according to which the armies of Gog and Magog would destroy all kingdoms except for the fourth kingdom of Daniel. According to the *Apocalypse*, Gog and Magog will hasten the end times by destroying whatever kingdoms or powers remained unconquered by the Romans: “They will lay waste to the earth, and no one will be able to stand against them.”¹⁹⁵ After a week of affliction (perhaps a week of years is meant), the *Apocalypse* predicted, God will send “one of the leaders of the hosts of the angels” (ܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ) to destroy Gog and Magog. With the armies of Gog and Magog annihilated, Roman rule will resume. The King of the Greeks will continue his reign and journey to Jerusalem.

All of this stands in sharp contrast to the original prophecy in the Book of Ezekiel, in which Gog and Magog serve to wipe out all the oppressors of the Jews. Only Israelites will survive the invasion. According to the *Apocalypse*, however, only the fourth kingdom, the Kingdom of the Greeks and the Romans, will survive Gog and Magog, because they must, as the last kingdom, yield up power to God. The *Apocalypse* follows the eschatological scenario of the *Syriac Alexander Legend*, which simply implied, without stating it overtly, that the Roman Empire had become the new Israel. The *Apocalypse* appears to have sought to make clear why

[illegible]

¹⁹² On the *pignora imperii* in Byzantium, see Paul Alexander, "The Strength of Empire and Capital as Seen Through Byzantine Eyes," *Speculum*, vol. 37, no. 3 (July, 1962), 343, 339–357.

[illegible]

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., XIII.20; ed. Reinink, *Die Syrische Apokalypse*, vol. 1, 42.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid: *מחשבתם להם להצטרף אליו ויחברו ויבנו יחדיו*

this was the case. Its answer was that the Roman Empire had inherited the gifts that God had made to protect the Israelites after the Jews denied and killed the messiah. Thus, when Ezekiel spoke of the Israelites surviving the invasion of Gog and Magog, the prophecy really meant the Roman Empire.

III.3: The Surrender of the Crown and the End of the *Katechon*

Then the King of the Greeks will go up and stand upon Golgotha. He will bring the holy cross and place it where it was fixed when it bore Christ. The king of the Greeks will place his crown on the top of the holy cross, stretch out his two hands to heaven, and hand over the kingdom [or kingship] to God the Father. The holy cross will be raised to heaven together with the royal crown.¹⁹⁶

[illegible]

Reinink has offered a different explanation. He has pointed out that the surrender scene in the *Apocalypse* resembles the coronation of Jovian in the *Julian Romance*. Here, after Julian the Apostate is struck down by God, Jovian at first refuses to become emperor, and instead places the imperial diadem upon a large cross and then prays for guidance before the cross. The cross miraculously ascends into the heavens and the crown comes back down to rest upon Jovian's head as a sign that God has bestowed rule on Jovian.¹⁹⁸ Reinink has argued that the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* seeks to play this scene in reverse, so that the kingship God gave the Romans through Jovian will return to heaven.¹⁹⁹ Indeed, in one manuscript copy, the *Edessene Apocalypse* explicitly states that the King of the Greeks would return the crown that God bestowed upon Jovian: "The crown which descended from heaven upon the head of Jovian, the first king, will pass over the top of our Lord's Cross, and he [the King of the Greeks] will raise up the cross and crown towards heaven."²⁰⁰ This explanation has received widespread acceptance among scholars of Syriac literature.

Restitutionem” (MA thesis, Leiden University, 2014), argues that the abdication scene in the *Apocalypse* was directly influenced by George of Pisidia’s poem celebrating Heraclius’ return of the True Cross to Jerusalem. According to Paul Magdalino, “The History of the Future and its Uses: Prophesy, Policy, and Propaganda,” in *The Making of Byzantine History. Studies Dedicated to Donald M. Nicol on his Seventieth Birthday*, ed. R. Beaton and C. Roueché (Aldershot: Variorum, 1993), 19, Heraclius’ return of the True Cross must have either inspired, or was inspired by, the eschatological surrender of power by the King of the Greeks (depending on whether the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* was the original source of this tradition).

¹⁹⁹ Reinink, "The Romance of Julian the Apostate," 75–86.

²⁰¹ Martinez, *Eastern Christian Apocalyptic*, 231 n. 48.

The *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* closes with the reign of the Son of Perdition (the Antichrist). The author of the *Apocalypse* had little new to say about this figure. The author of the *Apocalypse* maintained the tradition that the Son of Perdition will be a Jew of the tribe of Dan, but obviously rejected the tradition that long expected that the Son of Perdition would be a Roman emperor. There are no more kings or emperors when the Son of Perdition appears.²¹⁴

Notably, the description of the deeds of the Son of Perdition in the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* is extremely brief, taking up only a few lines. Most of these lines are devoted to parsing the same proof text used by Hippolytus to establish his descent from the tribe of Dan, Genesis 49:17: “Dan shall be a snake by the roadside, a viper along the path.” Once this is established as a prophecy about the Antichrist, the *Apocalypse* moves through the reign of the final tyrant and his ultimate destruction almost breathlessly, as if an afterthought. He will be defeated at the second coming of Christ, and with that the *Apocalypse* abruptly ends.

Curiously, this leaves unresolved the identity of the Little Horn in the Book of Daniel. As we have seen, the Antichrist was long identified with the Little Horn who wages war on God's saints. In the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, the last persecution instituted by the Antichrist is no longer necessary because the Ishmaelites inflict the great persecution upon Christians. The

²¹⁴ Olster, “Byzantine Apocalypses,” in *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, vol. 2: *Apocalypticism in Western History and Culture*, ed. Bernard McGinn (New York: Continuum, 1998), 64, notices this innovation: “[In the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*] the Antichrist does not rule as a Roman emperor; on the contrary, after the death of the last emperor, ‘every realm and rule will cease,’ including the earthly Roman Empire.”

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Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara never mentions the Little Horn from Daniel, let alone tries to identify the Little Horn with any specific figure. In place of the evil Little Horn there is the good King of the Greeks.

This set up a model for future apocalypses: those medieval apocalypses that would adopt the Last Roman Emperor figure nearly all exclude the Little Horn of Daniel. The final ruler in history could either be the evil Little Horn or the good Last Emperor. The model for the evil ruler had been established by the Book of Daniel; the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* provided the alternative good emperor.

Conclusions: Acting Out Aphrahat

The *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* provided the first thorough and internally-logical answer to the common political-eschatological scenario: the final ruler of the fourth kingdom would not be the Antichrist but the heroic last King of the Greeks. The Roman Empire (and not the Sasanians) had inherited the kingship God had bestowed on Nimrod, and as the fourth kingdom through which that kingship passed it was the fourth kingdom of Daniel. It had also inherited from the Jews the gifts that God had bestowed upon them to vouchsafe their kingdom. As a result, the Roman Empire would rule on God's behalf until the end of history.

The Ishmaelites would persecute Christians, and the armies of Gog and Magog would devastate the earth. Only the Kingdom of the Greeks and the Romans would survive these calamities. Its final ruler, the last King of the Greeks, would even protect Christians from persecution and inflict vengeance upon the Ishmaelites. Then, when history was complete, the last King of the Greeks would travel to Golgotha Jerusalem, the "middle" from which the *katechon* had to be removed, and surrender back to God the kingship that God had granted to Nimrod, now the only remaining kingship left on earth. In doing so, the last King of the Greeks would fulfill the prophecy of Psalm 68:31(32) and 1 Corinthians 15:24. Then, all kingdoms would be gone, and the Antichrist would rise upon the earth. Nonetheless, this would only be a temporary state, for Christ would soon return to kill the Antichrist and inaugurate the fifth kingdom, which would last forever.

Chapter Conclusions

The *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* broke decisively with the other, contemporary Syriac apocalypses studied in the previous chapter. It argued that the Roman Empire remained the Empire of the Christians and the most important force in history. It did so by reformulating Aphrahat's eschatology in new terms that suited the needs of the late seventh century. It showed that the Roman Empire—really, the Byzantine Empire at this point—remained the good fourth kingdom fated to hold the earthly kingship through the rest of history and surrender it to Christ at the end of time. It provided a new Biblical justification, based on Psalm 68:31(32) and 1 Corinthians 15:24, which together the *Apocalypse* argued constituted a prophecy that confirmed

that the empire would hand over power at the *eschaton*. It also invented the figure of the Last Emperor, or “King of the Greeks” as it calls him, who personified the Roman Empire and acted out its eschatological destiny first formulated by Aphrahat.

In its “prophetic” section, then, it formulated a new eschatological scenario. For the rest of this dissertation I will call it the “Methodian political-eschatological scenario.” This scenario contrasted sharply with the common political-eschatological scenario detail above, in chapter 2. According to the Methodian political-eschatological scenario, a Last Roman Emperor will arise toward the end of time, defeat the enemies and persecutors of the Christians (usually identified as Arabs and/or Muslims), and then surrender power to God at the end of time. The Methodian eschatological scenario was widely adopted in the middle ages across Mediterranean Christian cultures.

Despite the popularity and influence of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* and the political-eschatological scenario it introduced, their influence in the Syriac literary tradition was minimal. Other Syriac sources occasionally quoted from the *Apocalypse*, but its political-eschatological scenario hardly caught on. The apocalyptic sources described in the previous chapter, with their ambivalence toward empire, were far more representative of Syriac Christian attitudes from late seventh century on. The *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* did not sit well with the consensus that slowly emerged in later centuries among Syriac Christians: that the Roman Empire had been oppressive, and that the Arab conquests, while violent and traumatic, had liberated the orthodox Syriac Christians from the Roman heretics. Later Syriac authors such as Michael the Syrian and Bar Hebraeus held that the Arab conquests were God’s punishment for the Roman failure to renounce Chalcedon, and suggested it was preferable to live under the Ishmaelite Arabs and pay the tax in exchange for religious freedom than to live under the heretical and coercive Christian Byzantine Roman Empire.

The true influence of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* was felt instead outside the Syriac tradition, especially in Greek, Latin, and Slavonic literature. It brought to these cultures the ideas that had originated in Aphrahat, and in so doing provided an alternative to their prevailing eschatological pessimism about empire. In other words, the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* brought Aphrahat’s ideas to a much wider world. It is to this wider world that it is now necessary to turn.

CHAPTER 7: APHRAHATIAN ESCHATOLOGY IN BYZANTIUM AND THE EVOLUTION OF BYZANTINE POLITICAL ESCHATOLOGY

Introduction: Rooting Out the Great Sin

Why did the Arab continue to win? This question haunted the Eastern Roman Empire—which may by this point be properly called Byzantium—especially through the late seventh and early eighth centuries. Like Syriac observers, the Greek-speaking, Chalcedonian Christian of the empire frequently identified the cause of the Arab victories as divine punishment for sin (for the Syriac parallel, see above, chapter 5, part III). But whereas their contemporaries writing in Syriac from within the nascent Arab Empire could point their fingers elsewhere (namely, at Byzantium), Byzantine Christians could not escape the conclusion that they had themselves done something to offend God.

Just as non-Chalcedonian Syriac sources blamed God's anger on the supposed Christology heresies endorsed by the emperors in Constantinople, at first Byzantines could explain the divine punishment by way of an intra-Chalcedonian Christological controversy. Emperor Heraclius, after his victory over the Persians (in 628 AD) had wanted to heal the schism with the Miaphysites and so worked with the patriarch of Constantinople, Sergius, to promulgate a compromise doctrine. The first iteration of this doctrine, monoenergism (proclaiming Christ's single energy in lieu of debates about the number of his natures), had gone over poorly.¹ Sophronius (d. 638), the outspoken Patriarch of Jerusalem, condemned the doctrine and, when the Arabs appeared outside of Jerusalem, he blamed the new doctrine. He wrote to the Patriarch Sergius that these barbarians would only be defeated once Sergius and emperor renounced monoenergism.²

After this false start, Heraclius and Patriarch Sergius proclaimed in the *Ekthesis*, issued in 638, the slightly emended doctrine of monothelitism (namely, that Christ had a single will). This new doctrine fared little better. It attracted few Miaphysites, and instead split the Chalcedonian community between supporters and opponents of monothelitism. Sophronius' protégé, Maximus the Confessor (d. 662), led the Chalcedonian opposition to monothelitism. As the empire continued to suffer defeats, Maximus and his followers could plausibly argue that the imperial heresy was at fault.

¹ On the monoenergist and monothelite doctrines, see Cyril Hovorun, *Will, Action and Freedom: Christological Controversies in the Seventh Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

² See Sophronius, *Synodical Letter*, edited and translated by Pauline Allen, *Sophronius of Jerusalem and Seventh-Century Heresy: The Synodical Letter and Other Documents* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 66–157, with comments on victory over the Arabs on *ibid*, 155.

When Heraclius died, his grandson, Emperor Constans II, inherited the besieged empire after a power struggle. Constans eschewed compromise and sought to mandate the end of all Christological controversy. In 648 he issued his *Typos*, in which he banned any discussion of Christ's nature or wills. Instead of enforcing a doctrine, the state would enforce silence. Nonetheless, Maximus the Confessor made his way to Italy and worked with Pope Martin to convene the Lateran Council of 649, which condemned both Heraclius' *Ekthesis* and Constans' *Typos*.

Constans II responded by having both Pope Martin and Maximus arrested and submitted to show trials in Constantinople. They were charged with treason—each accused of conspiring with attempted usurpers and aiding the Arabs (thus turning the tables and making them scapegoats for the failures of the empire). The pope, who was already ill, was exiled to Crimea, where he soon died. Maximus was tried and exiled, but when he continued to speak against monothelitism he was rearrested, and brutally punished: the eighty-two year-old's tongue was cut out and his writing hand chopped off.

Even as the mutilated Maximus died quietly in the dungeon of a remote Byzantine fortress, the imperial attempts at stifling dissent failed. Opposition to the *Ekthesis* and *Typos* continued. As Gilbert Dagron has noted: "They provoked rejection or resistance wherever the political influence of Constantinople was most contested, particularly in Palestine, Africa and Italy."³ Within less than two decades of Maximus' ignoble death, his ideas won out and became the official doctrine of the empire. This happened when Constantine IV (r. 668–685), the son and successor of Emperor Constans II, convened the Third Council of Constantinople (the sixth ecumenical council) in 681. Here, the *Ekthesis* and *Typos* were condemned, monothelitism was denounced as a heresy, and Maximus and Pope Martin vindicated. It is very possible that this sudden reversal in imperial religious policy was motivated by the continuing concern about rooting out the sin responsible for the string of defeats the empire had suffered.

Though short lived, the monothelite controversy had major implications for Byzantium. In an incisive monograph, Phil Booth has argued that in light of the blame Maximus and his followers directed at the imperial leadership for the continuing military losses suffered by the empire, Chalcedonian Christianity experienced a "crisis of empire."⁴ Booth's concept provided the model for a similar Syriac "crisis of empire" I suggested above (chapter 5); just as in the Syriac crisis of empire, in the Chalcedonian crisis, combined with the victories of the Arabs, raised important eschatological questions. What was God's plan for history? Did God intend of the empire to last through history, or had he consigned it to destruction? In light of the chaos Byzantium experienced, it appears that new answers, derived from the Syriac traditions originating in Aphrahat, began to take hold.

Some Byzantines, rather than accept that the empire was the fourth beast waging war upon the saints, appear to have experimented widely with alternative interpretations of the

³ Gilbert Dagron, *Emperor and Priest: The Imperial Office in Byzantium*, translated by Jean Birrell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 167.

⁴ Phil Booth, *Crisis of Empire: Doctrine and Dissent at the End of Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).

kingdoms of Daniel. Thy imported from Syriac literature Aphrahatian ideas about eschatology, in which the empire was righteous and invincible, and would return power to God at the end of time. Thus, it was in the late seventh through the eighth centuries, when the Byzantine Empire faced its greatest crisis yet and the future of the empire was most in doubt, that Romans/Byzantines began to glorify their empire in eschatology. It was uncertainty, not imperial triumph, that spurred the adoption of aspects of the Methodian political-eschatological scenario such as the Last Emperor's victory over the enemies of the faith and his surrender of power in Jerusalem. It was at this point that it became important to imagine the empire as God's tool for the realization of history's purpose and force for good that would last up to the end time.

At the same time, as Booth suggests, Chalcedonian opponents of monothelitism could begin to imagine a church without empire; indeed, they could imagine the empire and emperor as the enemy of the true church.⁵ The stage was set for the common political-eschatological scenario to take on heightened relevance. As we have seen above (chapter 2, part III.4), as Christianity and empire became ever more intertwined in the sixth and seventh centuries, the common political-eschatological scenario (which took a pessimistic view of the empire's future) was becoming more problematic. As we shall see in this chapter, the crisis of authority and legitimacy instigated by constant military loss and imperial enforcement of controversial theological positions brought new relevance for the idea that the empire was a sinful state, the persecutory fourth kingdom foreseen by Daniel.

This chapter will trace the two currents of eschatology up through ninth century Byzantium. First, it will examine the first signs of Aphrahat's ideas within the thought and intellectual circle of an undeniably Chalcedonian Christian: Anastasius of Sinai. Then, it will propose the likely vector by which Aphrahat's views became widespread in Byzantium—namely, through the influence of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*. Then, it will explore the continuing development of a competing eschatological tradition in Byzantium that took a far more pessimistic view of the empire's future. Finally, it will show how these two rival eschatologies often mixed and merged, neither fully eclipsing the other, as Byzantine writers experimented with ideas about what the future held for the empire.

Part I: Aphrahtian Eschatology and Anastasius of Sinai

One of the most important figures for understanding the development of Aphrahatian eschatology in Byzantium is Anastasius of Sinai. Long associated with the monastery (later called St. Catherine's) at Mt. Sinai, little is known about Anastasius outside the voluminous corpus of writings attributed to him. Anastasius was a fierce critic of monothelitism, but he wrote

⁵ See *ibid*, 329–342. Similarly, David Olster *Roman Defeat, Christian Response, Literary Construction of the Jew* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 111, has detected a change of feelings about empire already in Sophronius' opposition to the new doctrines promulgated by Heraclius and Sergius: "For the first time since Constantine, Sophronius explored the social and political implications of a church without an empire." Olster's words deserve slight emendation, for the members of the Church of the East and the Syriac Orthodox Church, as we have seen had been long exploring just those implication, but the sentiment was new for a devoted Chalcedonian.

c. 700 AD, after Constantine IV's council had put an end to that doctrine.⁶ Thus, Anastasius considered the emperors in Constantinople perfectly orthodox. Thanks to the empire's return to orthodoxy after a period of heresy, Anastasius could believe that the tide of defeats suffered by the empire would soon be reversed and fully expected that new victories were at hand.⁷

Given this optimism, it is hardly surprising that Anastasius stands out as the first known Chalcedonian Christian to engage seriously with the Aphrahatian eschatological tradition. Moreover, though Anastasius had one foot in Byzantium, the other was in the largely Syriac-speaking world of Christianity under early Arab rule. Even if he did not read Syriac (there is no evidence that he did) he likely lived cheek by jowl with many who did, including fellow monks. Perhaps for this reason, he provides a unique glimpse at the trajectory of Aphrahatian eschatology as it seeped over the political borders and religious and linguistic divides and came to be embraced by Byzantine Chalcedonian Christians.

I.3: Christian Empire and the Kingdoms of Daniel in the *Disputation Against the Jews*

The first indication of the suddenly interest of Chalcedonian Christians in Aphrahat's eschatology c. 700 is the *Disputation Against the Jews*, a work attributed to Anastasius of Sinai, presumably written to model arguments for debating with Jews.⁸ Here, Anastasius attacked the messianic expectations of the Jews. Did they not expect a messiah from the line of David? They missed the fact that Jesus, who had been from the lineage of David, had already come. Likewise, they expected that God would establish for them a world empire on the earth (that is, the Jewish interpretation of Daniel's fifth kingdom.) Once again, they missed fulfillment of the prophecy, since God had already given a world empire to his chosen people—only his chosen people were no longer the Jews.

Anastasius argued that God had allowed the Roman Empire to annihilate the Jewish kingdom because he had transferred his favor to the Romans. Thus, the Romans had inherited the status originally promised to the Jews. Christ and God gave the Roman Empire a rod of iron to rule over the nations, and so they enforced their will on earth through the Romans.⁹ Such ideas sound remarkably similar to those proposed by Aphrahat, in which the Roman Empire served as a redeemed fourth kingdom, inheriting the role of governing the earth of God's behalf that had originally been promised to the eschatological Jewish kingdom (see above, chapter 4).

Anastasius did not, however, suggest that the Roman Empire was the fourth kingdom of Daniel, but rather the fifth kingdom. Again, his arguments were seemingly aimed at Jews, who claimed that their eschatological kingdom would dawn after the fall of the Roman Empire. Anastasius responded that there could be no Jewish fifth kingdom because the fifth kingdom had

⁶ Monothelitism did survive for the time in the Maronite Church, a Chalcedonian ("Melkite") Syriac church.

⁷ See, for example, Anastasius' *Sermon 3* ("In creationem hominis secundum imaginem Dei"), ed Migne, PG 89, 1152–1180.

⁸ The *Disputation Against the Jews* of Anastasius of Sinia survives in many manuscripts, dating from the eleventh to the seventh centuries. It has been edited in Migne, PG 89, 1203–1272.

⁹ *Disputation Against the Jews*, ed. Migne, PG 89, 1209.

already been established by the Romans—all that remained was the second coming, the resurrection of the dead, and the destruction of the world, after which there would be no earthly kingdoms. The Roman Empire must be the fifth kingdom, Anastasius asserted, because the first four kingdoms had already passed away:

Was not the kingdom of the Babylonians, and the kingdom of the Medes, and the kingdom of the Persians swallowed up by those barbarians, the Turks? Did not [the empire] of the Macedonians cease to exist? But the empire of the Romans, that is of the Christians, which reigns together with our Lord Jesus Christ, will last until the end of the universe; it “will not be left to another people” because the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, will shepherd his people through it until his second coming.¹⁰

Anastasius’ suggestion that the Turks destroyed the first three kingdoms may at first seem out of place. It may be an interpolation (see below, on the date of the *Disputation*). Nonetheless, is also possible that Athanasius did write this, and that he was referring to the Göktürks, who had wrecked havoc upon the Persian Empire in the recent past. Thus, the steppe barbarians function to clear away the kingdoms of the past, much like the armies of Gog and Magog (based on such steppe nomads from the north) in Syriac apocalypses.

Somewhat later in the *Disputation Against the Jews*, Anastasius specifically invoked the statue in the dream of Nebuchadnezzar. He reiterated the point that the kingdoms represented by each portion of the statue had come and gone, since Alexander’s Macedonian empire had been the fourth kingdom and no longer existed. Thus, the stone that smashed the statue and became a mountain that filled up all the world (Daniel 2:45) was not a future Jewish kingdom, but referred to the establishment of the Roman Empire.

Interestingly, the four kingdoms of Daniel according to Anastasius—Babylon, Media, Persia, and Macedonia—do not correspond to the four commonly found in Greek exegesis on Daniel (see above, chapter 2). Rather, they are the four given by proponents of the Antiochene school, and consequently the four found in many Syriac sources, including the Peshitta glosses (see above, chapter 4, part I). Assuming that Anastasius did not read Syriac, it can be assumed that he derived this list of the four kingdoms from Cosmas Indicopleustes. Indeed, Anastasius closely followed Cosmas’ argument in the *Christian Topography* about the Roman Empire’s place as the fifth kingdom of Daniel (on Cosmas’ views, see above, chapter 4, part II.2).

Anastasius, however, was aware of the more common interpretation of the four kingdoms—that they were the Babylonians, Medes and Persians together, Macedonians/Greeks, and the Romans—and knew that many Jews favored this interpretation. Nonetheless, according to Anastasius, even if one interpreted the Roman Empire, instead of the Macedonian empire, as the fourth kingdom, one nonetheless must still conclude that the fifth kingdom had already arrived. Referencing the statue in Daniel 2, he stated: “And if you say that the iron [kingdom] is

¹⁰ Ibid, Migne, PG 89, 1212: οὐχὶ τῶν Βαβυλωνίων, καὶ οὐχὶ τῶν Μήδων, οὐχὶ τῶν Περσῶν βασιλεία κατεπόθη ὑπὸ τῶν Βαρβάρων τούτων τῶν Τουρκῶν; οὐχὶ τῶν Μακεδόνων παρῆλθεν; ἡ δὲ τῶν Ῥωμαίων βασιλεία, ἥτοι τῶν Χριστιανῶν, ὡς συμβασιλευομένη παρὰ τοῦ Κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ κόσμου οὐ παρελεύσεται, ἀλλ’ ὡς Βασιλεὺς τῶν βασιλευόντων, καὶ Κύριος τῶν κυριευόντων, δι’ αὐτῆς ποιμαίνει τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ, μέχρι τῆς δευτέρας αὐτοῦ παρουσίας, ἥτις λαῶ ἐτέρῳ οὐχ ὑπολειφθήσεται.

the kingdom of Caesar Augustus, then who [τίνα] reduced and subdued the [kingdom] of Augustus and the remaining kingdoms, and who [πλ.] conquered and defeated it?”¹¹ It was not the Jews, Anastasius pointed out, because the Jews suffered nearly total destruction at the hands of the Roman Empire. Instead, the Christians were the ones who transformed the pagan Roman Empire into the Christian Empire. “The dominion of Caesar Augustus perished, but the Empire of Christ is without end in eternity.”¹² In other words, the Christianization of the Roman state had made it part of God’s fifth kingdom. As a result it could be argued that even if the Roman Empire were the fourth kingdom, nonetheless the Christian Roman Empire could be counted as a separate kingdom, and so remained the fifth kingdom (or, at least, the first stage of the fifth kingdom), a kingdom that could not be destroyed until the end of the world. The eschatological kingdom promised to the Jews had been given to the Christian Romans, who ruled as a precursor to God’s heavenly kingdom.

Many of the ideas found here are similar to eschatology of Aphrahat. Does this mean that Anastasius was familiar with the work of that Syriac theologian? It is unlikely. More probably Anastasius took these ideas, too, from the Greek *Christian Topography* of Cosmas. Like Cosmas (and unlike Aphrahat), Anastasius concluded that the Roman Empire was not the fourth kingdom, but the fifth kingdom of Daniel, an earthly precursor to the eternal heavenly kingdom. Thus, Aphrahat’s ideas likely reached Anastasius via Cosmas.

In any case, Anastasius was certainly dabbling in Aphrahatian eschatology. As with Aphrahat and the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, we find that it is a Christian who lived outside the Roman Empire, for whom Rome represented a distant ideal rather than an everyday reality, who was willing to assign that empire an exalted status. Nonetheless, Anastasius represents an important development. Unlike Cosmas, Anastasius was expressing such views in a thoroughly Chalcedonian context. These ideas, once relegated to a Syriac, mostly non-Chalcedonian periphery, were beginning to enter the bloodstream of Greek Chalcedonian Christianity at a crucial time.

Certainly it was possible for earlier Chalcedonian authors to draw on Cosmas’ interpretation of the kingdoms of Daniel, but Anastasius of Sinai is the first surviving example of anyone doing so. It is perhaps not a coincidence that this first example corresponds to a period of upheaval for the Byzantine Empire, when its position and survival were suddenly in doubt, and come from an unapologetic supporter of the empire who was probably living among Jews, Muslims, and non-Chalcedonian Christians.¹³

Whether through Cosmas or Anastasius, or other lost sources, some later Byzantine authors adopted the idea that the empire was the fifth kingdom of Daniel. Nonetheless, this position is remained quite rare. Only two surviving sources make such a claim after the time of

¹¹ Ibid, Migne, PG 89, 1213: Εἰ δὲ εἴπῃς τὴν σιδηρᾶν Αὐγούστου Καίσαρος, τίνα ἐλέπτυνεν ἢ ἐδάμασεν ἢ Αὐγούστου καὶ τῶν λοιπῶν βασιλέων, οἵτινες καὶ ἐνίκησαν καὶ ἡττήθησαν;

¹² Ibid: καὶ παρῆλθεν ἡ τοῦ Αὐγούστου Καίσαρος ἀρχή· ἡ δὲ τοῦ Χριστοῦ βασιλεία εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα τέλος οὐχ ἔξει.

¹³ Jews, Muslims, and non-Chalcedonian Christians are frequently discussed in Anastasius’ writings, especially his *Questions and Answers*.

Anastasius. The first is the anonymous ninth-century Old Church Slavonic *Life of Cyril-Constantine* (the future apostle to the Slavs), one of the oldest surviving texts written in Slavonic (another source written by an author presumably living outside the empire). Here, the saint debates with the Jewish Khazars, whom he was attempting to convert from Judaism to Christianity. The Jews claimed that the Roman Empire was the fourth kingdom of Daniel. In response, Cyril disagreed in terms very similar to those found in Anastasius of Sinai's *Disputation Against the Jews*: the pagan Roman Empire had been the fourth kingdom, but it was long gone, and now the Christian Roman Empire, Byzantium, represented the fifth kingdom.¹⁴ The other source that attests to this idea is the late tenth-century Daniel commentary by Basil of Neopatra.¹⁵ Here, Basil asserted that the Romans before the time of Christ were the fourth kingdom, but that they had become the fifth kingdom through the spread of Christianity.

Paul Magdalino and Robert Nelson have pointed out the few cases in which the Roman (i.e. Byzantine) Empire is identified with the fifth kingdom in Byzantine literature are mostly in the context of refutations of the Jews.¹⁶ This makes some sense. In claiming that the Christian Empire was the fifth kingdom, Christians undercut the Jewish expectation in a coming messianic kingdom under the messiah. As already noted, most of these sources (two of the three) were written by Christians living outside the empire and who could therefore idealize the empire from afar.¹⁷

More commonly the Byzantines maintained the idea that their empire was the fourth kingdom of Daniel. Around the same time that Anastasius wrote the *Disputation Against the Jews*, another work descended from Aphrahat's thought appeared in Greek: the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*. This translation brought to Greek speakers the idea that as the fourth kingdom of Daniel, the Byzantine Empire could have an exalted place in God's plan for history.

I.2: Anastasius of Sinai and the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*

The influence of the Anastasius' *Disputation Against the Jews* is found in a surprising place. A long quotation from it is found in the Greek translation of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*. This seems to suggest that the translator of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* was familiar with Anastasius work, and that they shared some overlapping interests.

¹⁴ The Old Church Slavonic *Life of Cyril-Constantine* has been edited, with a facing English translation, by Marvin Kantor, *Medieval Slavic Lives of Saints and Princes* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Slavic Publication, 1983) 25–96, with the relevant lines about the kingdoms of Daniel on 52–53.

¹⁵ This commentary, which survives in two manuscript copies (Cod. Patmos, Monastery of John the Evangelist, 31, fols. 243r–246v and Cod. Vat. Gr. 1687, fols. 198r–208v), remains unedited; Pablo Ubierna is currently preparing an edition. An overview, with some of the relevant lines about the four kingdoms of Daniel, is provided by Gerhard Podskalsky, *Byzantinische Reicheschatologie: die Periodisierung der Weltgeschichte in den vier Grossreichen (Daniel 2 und 7) und dem tausendjährigen Friedensreiche (Apok. 20). Eine motivgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1972), 38–39.

¹⁶ Paul Magdalino and Robert Nelson, "Introduction," in *The Old Testament in Byzantium*, ed. P. Magdalino and R. Nelson (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2014), 28.

¹⁷ The exception to both of these categories (anti-Jewish sources and sources from outside the empire) is Basil of Neopatra. More research on Basil is needed.

As already noted, the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* was translated into Greek around the year 700.¹⁸ Little is known about where and why this translation took place, but the lines from the *Disputation Against the Jews* provide some interesting hints. The Greek translation of the *Apocalypse* contains several interpolations, some of these are present in the earliest Latin manuscripts (which date to the eighth century), suggesting that they likely originated with the translator. Others are not present in the Latin version and so must have entered the manuscript tradition later. The lines from the *Disputation Against the Jews* are also found in the Latin manuscripts, implying that they were probably inserted by the original Greek translator of the *Apocalypse*.

<u>Syriac Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara, X.4</u> For the kings of many nations have made war with the kingdom of the mighty [i.e. the Roman Empire] and have not been able to conquer it. Even that kingdom [i.e. the Jewish kingdom] that prevailed against Egypt, and put to death thirty-one royal dynasties of the Gentiles, and Sihon and ‘Og, the two leaders of the kingdom of the Amorites, and all the tyrants of the Philistines, could not prevail over the kingdom of Babylon. And the Kingdom of the Romans, which is of the Greeks, [also] overcame the Kingdom of the Hebrews.¹⁹	<u>Greek Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara, X.4:</u> For where is, or will there be, a kingdom or another power that surpasses this one [the Roman Empire]? Now if you wish to see the accuracy [of this], take from me [as proof] the people of Moses who by so many signs and wonders and the depth of the sea wiped out the Egyptians. Look for me also to Joshua the son of Nun, under whom both the sun in Gibeon and also the moon in the valley stood still, and certain other wondrous miracles occurred. And simply consider how all the power of the Hebrews was wiped out by the kingdom of the Romans. Did not Titus and Vespasian cut all of them down? Did not

	Hadrian plunder the temple and plow it under with a plow? So what other kingdom has arisen or will arise against her? We will find no other, if we consider honestly. ²⁰

The Greek version of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, which usually follows the Syriac very closely, clearly included completely different text here. When the lines in the Greek *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* are compared to similar ones in Anastasius' *Disputation Against the Jews*, it becomes clear that the one is copied from the other.

<u>Greek <i>Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara</i>, X.4:</u> For where is, or will there be, a kingdom or another power that surpasses this one [the Roman Empire]? Now if you wish to see the accuracy [of this], take from me [as proof] the people of Moses who by so many signs and wonders and the depth of the sea wiped out the Egyptians. Look for me also to Joshua the son of Nun, under whom both the sun in Gibeon and also the moon in the valley stood still, and certain other wondrous miracles occurred. And simply consider how all the power of the Hebrews was wiped out by the kingdom of the Romans. Did not Titus and Vespasian cut all of them down? Did not Hadrian plunder the temple and plow it under with a plow?²¹	<u><i>Disputation Against the Jews</i>, Migne 1212:</u> For there is not another kingdom or power that is more splendid than this one [the Roman Empire]. And if you wish to see the accuracy [of this], take from me [as proof] the people of Moses who by so many signs and the depth of the sea dispatched the Egyptians. Look for me also to Joshua the son of Nun, under whom both the sun in Gibeon and also the moon in the valley stood still, and certain other wondrous miracles. And simply consider all the power of the Hebrews. Did they not reign one thousand years? And yet their kingdom was cut off. How were they wiped out by the kingdom of the Romans? Did not Titus and Vespasian cut all of them down? Did they not plunder the temple with a plow?²²

²⁰ The *Greek Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, X.4; ed. Aerts and Kortekaas, *Die Apokalypse des Pseudo-Methodius*, 130-132 (reprinted and translated in in Garstad, *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*, 34-37): ποῦ γὰρ ἔστιν ἢ ἔσται βασιλεία ἢ ἑτέρα δυναστεία ταύτης ὑπερφανεῖσα; εἰ βούλει γὰρ σκοπῆσαι τὸ ἀκριβές, λάβε μοι τὸν Μωσέως λαὸν τὸν τοσοῦτοις σημείοις καὶ τέρασι καὶ βυθῷ θαλάσσης τοὺς Αἰγυπτίους ἐκτείλαντα· ἴδε μοι καὶ τὸν Ἰησοῦν τοῦ Ναυῆ, ὅφ' οὗ καὶ ὁ ἥλιος κατὰ Γαβαὼ ἴσταται καὶ ἡ σελήνη κατὰ φάρυγγα καὶ ἄλλα τινὰ ἐξαισία θαύματα γίνεται, καὶ ἀπλῶς ἅπαν τὸ τῶν Ἑβραίων νόησον κράτος πῶς ὑπὸ τῆς τῶν Ῥωμαίων ἐξήλειπται βασιλείας. οὐ Τίτος καὶ Οὐεσπασιανὸς κατέκοψαν ἅπαντας; οὐκ ἀρότρῳ τὸν ναὸν ἐκπορθήσας Ἀδριανὸς ἠρωτρίασεν;

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid, Migne, PG 89, 1212: οὐ γὰρ ἐστὶ τις ἑτέρα βασιλεία ἢ δυναστεία ταύτης περιφανεστέρα. Καὶ εἰ βούλει σκοπῆσαι τὸ ἀκριβές, λάβε μοι τὸν τοῦ Μωσέως λαὸν τὸν τοσοῦτοις σημείοις καὶ βυθῷ θαλάσσης τοὺς Αἰγυπτίους ἐκτείλαντα· ἴδε μοι Ἰησοῦν τὸν Ναυῆ ὅφ' οὗ καὶ ὁ ἥλιος κατὰ Γαβαὼν ἴσταται, καὶ ἡ σελήνη κατὰ φάρυγγα, καὶ ἄλλα τινὰ ἐξαισία θαύματα· καὶ ἀπλῶς ἅπαν τὸ τῶν Ἑβραίων νόησον κράτος. Οὐ χίλια ἔτη ἐβασίλευσαν, καὶ ἐξεκόπη ἡ βασιλεία αὐτῶν; Πῶς ὑπὸ τῆς τῶν Ῥωμαίων βασιλείας ἐξέλιπε; Οὐ Τίτος καὶ Οὐεσπασιανὸς κατέκοψαν ἅπαντας; οὐκ ἀρότρῳ τὸν ναὸν ἐκπορθήσαντες;

There are some minor differences in these passages, perhaps because the Greek translator of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* attempted to improve them or perhaps due to mutations that developed within the manuscript traditions of the two works (the text provided above is taken from modern editions).²³ Unfortunately, a thorough comparison of the texts is hampered by the fact that Anastasius' *Disputation Against the Jews* is available only in its edition by Migne, with no critical apparatus.

The use of the lines from Anastasius of Sinai in the Greek *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* has the potential to provide more context in which the latter was produced. Several scholars have raised the possibility that the Monastery of St. Catherine's in Sinai, the home of Anastasius, could have been the location of the translation of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, or else an important site in the transmission of the text.²⁴ This would explain how the Syriac *Apocalypse* reached a community of Greek-speakers. Though the community on Sinai performed the liturgy together in Greek, the monks there hailed from a variety of backgrounds. Certainly there would have been a number of monks on Sinai who knew Syriac. Some evidence is provided by the colophon of a Syriac manuscript completed in 837 in Edessa: the scribe makes clear that he was donating the book for the use of the monks on Mt. Sinai, making clear that there was a Syriac-speaking community there at least by the ninth century, though it would be surprising if Syriac-speakers were not already there long before.²⁵ Indeed, the library of St. Catherine's contains several other Syriac manuscripts that had originated in Northern Mesopotamia. As Sebastian Brock has observed: "Quite a number of manuscripts point to links

²³ For example, in the quoted passages, the last question in the quotation from the *Disputation* is rather awkward, with a participle (ἐκπορθήσαντες) hanging without a finite verb. It is possible that this participle was originally part of the previous sentence, but a later scribe mistakenly split it off by introducing the οὐκ; however, it seems that in his translation of the Greek *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, the translator acted to improve the sentence: he not only introduced a finite verb to fix the syntax, but introduced a new subject, Hadrian (Ἀδριανός). This had the benefit of making the two sentences less redundant. The plowing of Jerusalem also better fits Emperor Hadrian. Around the year 130 he held a ceremony in which the former boundaries of Jerusalem were ploughed over to make way for the new Roman city, this event was commemorated in Roman coins struck to mark the occasion marked with the image of the emperor driving the plough; see Avner Ecker and Hannah M. Cotton, "The Date of the Founding of Aelia Capitolina," in *The Oxford Handbook of Greek and Roman Coinage*, ed. William Metcalf (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 492. The plowing is also recorded in Jewish sources, such as the Mishna, and often seen as a fulfillment of a prophecy in Jeremiah 26:18: "Zion shall be plowed as a field; Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins, and the mountain of the house a wooded height."

²⁴ When in 1930 Michael Kmosko demonstrated the Syriac origin of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, he suggested that the author of the Syriac had perhaps been a monk of St. Catherine's, see Kmosko, "Das Rätsel des Pseudomethodius," 291-293; Kmosko, however, apparently did not yet notice that the lines from *Disputatio adversus Judaeos* were not present in his newly-discovered Syriac version and that they must have been interpolated into the Greek; on this oversight, see Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, 30 n.51. Aerts and Kortekaas, *Die Apokalypse des Pseudo-Methodius*, 15, suggests that the translator's knowledge of the *Disputation Against the Jews* implies that this translator was perhaps a monk on Mt. Sinai. This is a plausible theory, but impossible to confirm, it is just as possible that the translator was a monk at another monastery with a multiethnic/multilingual population, such as at Jerusalem or Damascus.

²⁵ Sebastian Brock, "Syriac on Sinai: The Main Connections," in *EYKOΣMIA: studi miscellanei per il 75. di Vincenzo Poggi S. J.*, ed. Vincenzo Ruggieri, Luca Pieralli, and Vincenzo Poggi (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2003), 107-108. This colophon, as well as another (Vatican Syr 623) mentions not St. Catherine's, but a shrine of Moses on Sinai, but Brock, *ibid.*, has made clear that this was probably an appellation used by Syriac writers for St. Catherine's, derived from the name of a small chapel near the monastery.

between Edessa and Sinai during the period from the eighth to the tenth century.”²⁶

Nonetheless, it is important to emphasize that the connection is with Anastasius rather than Sinai itself. Anastasius is often called the abbot of the monastery on Sinai, but it remains unclear whether this was a later invention. Moreover, Anastasius’ biography is mostly unknown: he may have spent his whole life on Sinai, returned to it intermittently, or only retired there in old age. In a study on Anastasius, John Haldon has postulated based on the theological understandings of Anastasius, especially his take on the Monothelite controversy, that he worked from the cultural and ecclesiastical metropolis of Egypt: “Alexandria is the most likely base from which Anastasius conducted much of his business and where his numerous writings were set down.”²⁷ Thus, the access that the Greek translator of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* had to an early copy of the *Disputation Against the Jews* need not suggest that he necessarily accessed the Syriac *Apocalypse* on Sinai. It does suggest some connection between Anastasius and the Greek translator of the *Apocalypse*.

Importantly, the Greek translator of the *Apocalypse* was linked to two texts: Anastasius’ *Disputation Against the Jews* and the Syriac *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*. These two texts had one thing in common: they were both interested in exploring a positive eschatological role for the Roman Empire. Both derived their understanding of political eschatology, probably through an intermediary (Cosmas Indicopleustes in the case of the *Disputation Against the Jews*; the *Syriac Alexander Legend* in the case of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*). This implies that Aphrahat’s thought was suddenly becoming important for Chalcedonian Christians, who were accessing it from various sources.

I.3: The Date of Anastasius of Sinai’s *The Disputation Against the Jews*

The arguments made in the previous sections rely on the assumption that the *Disputation Against the Jews* was written by Anastasius of Sinai and thus was composed c. 700 AD. Nonetheless, this point is controversial in modern scholarship and so must be addressed directly. This section will show that though the surviving manuscripts of the *Disputation Against the Jews* do clearly contain later interpolations, the bulk of the text shows undeniable signs of having been composed in the late seventh or early eighth century, and represent an interest in Aphrahatian eschatology from that period.

The *Disputation Against the Jews* is attributed to “Abbot Anastasius” (Ἀββᾶ Ἀναστάσιος) or simply “Anastasius” in the surviving manuscripts copies.²⁸ Possibly it was the work of some other Anastasius, or indeed if it was only later attributed to Anastasius of Sinai.²⁹ More

²⁶ Brock, “Syriac on Sinai,” 107.

²⁷ John Haldon, “The Works of Anastasius of Sinai: A Key Source for the History of Seventh-Century East Mediterranean Society and Belief,” in *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East, Volume I: Problems in the Literary Source Material*, ed. A. Cameron and L. Conrad (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1992), 114.

²⁸ For example, author is identified as “Abbot Anastasius” in the fourteenth-century manuscript Vatican Gr. 719, fol. 236r.

²⁹ The *Disputation Against the Jews* was printed by Migne among Anastasius of Sinai’s corpus. However, Karl Krumbacher, *Geschichte der Byzantinischen Litteratur*, 2nd edition (Munich: Beck, 1897), 66, argued that

importantly, several scholars have asserted that internal evidence suggests that the *Disputation Against the Jews* was written much later than Anastasius' time. A late date for *Disputation Against the Jews* is suggested by a statement within its text that over eight hundred years had elapsed since the lifetime of Christ, and later a statement that it had been over eight hundred years since the destruction (in 70 AD) of the Jewish Temple by Vespasian and Titus. Though these chronological statements conflict (the Jewish temple was destroyed half a century after the crucifixion of Jesus) both suggest a ninth-century date. Moreover, the *Disputation* makes mention of the Turks (see above), who came to wield political influence in the Middle East only in the ninth century. For these reasons, several scholars have argued that the *Disputation Against the Jews* was composed in the ninth century, and falsely attributed to Anastasius of Sinai.³⁰

On the other hand, the Byzantine historian Walter Kaegi has made a convincing argument that the core of the text, which may have been interpolated by later scribes, does in fact date to the late seventh or early eighth century and may well have been written by Anastasius of Sinai.³¹ As a guide for Christian apologists, the text of the *Disputation* was probably rather "open," susceptible to additions. The statements within the text of the *Disputation* that numbered the centuries that had elapsed since the first century are exactly the sort of changes a scribe might make to bring the text of the *Disputation* up to date.³²

Nonetheless, the *Disputation Against the Jews* contains other statements that point to an author writing c. 700, and one who, like Anastasius, was writing in the Arab-ruled lands outside the Eastern Roman Empire. One of the clearest examples that suggest that the *Disputation* had been written before the ninth century is a statement made in defense of the God-protected nature of the Roman Empire and its Christian emperor: "And what's more, no emperor of the Christians has ever been killed by barbarians, even though so many [barbarian] nations fought the [Roman] empire. They were unable not only to annihilate the emperor, but also unable to annihilate his

certain statements in the work indicate a date later than the seventh century, and suggested that it was a product of the ninth century.

³⁰ The *Disputation Against the Jews* was printed by Migne among Anastasius of Sinai's corpus, in PG, vol. 89, 1203–1272. However, Karl Krumbacher, *Geschichte der Byzantinischen Litteratur*, 2nd edition (Munich: Beck, 1897), 66, argued that it was a product of the ninth century. Maria Mavroudi, "The Occult Sciences in Byzantium: Considerations for Future Research," in *The Occult Sciences in Byzantium*, ed. P. Magdalino and M. Mavroudi (Geneva: La Pomme d'Or, 2007), 84–85 n. 140, likewise suggests that the *Disputation Against the Jews* was written in the second half of the ninth century, both because of the reference to eight-hundred years since the capture of Jerusalem by Titus, and because of the references to the Turks. A. Lukyn Williams, *Adversus Judaeos: A Bird's-Eye View of Christian Apologiae Until the Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935), 175, has dated the *Disputation* to the eleventh century, assuming that the reference to the Turks must post-date their invasion of Anatolia in that century.

³¹ Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 231–235. Shaun O'Sullivan, "Anti-Jewish Polemic and Early Islam," in *The Bible in Arab Christianity*, ed. David Thomas (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 49–68, also considers the *Disputation Against the Jews* an authentic work of Anastasius of Sinai written in the seventh century.

³² Charles Homer Haskins makes this very point about the reference to eight hundred years in the *Disputatio* in his "Pascalis Romanus, Petrus Chrysolanus," *Byzantion*, vol. 2 (1925), 231–232; it is elaborated by Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests*, 232. Both thus reject a ninth century date for the *Disputatio* and suggest instead that the seventh century was the period of its composition.

image with the cross from the coinage, even though some tyrants tried to do this.”³³ Presuming that the author of the *Disputation* is excluding the death of Valens at the Battle of Adrianople in 378 on account of the fact that Valens was an Arian heretic, the statement that no emperor died at the hands of barbarians could not have been made after 811. In that year Emperor Nikephoros I was killed in battle by the pagan Bulgars.³⁴

Moreover, the second part of the statement, that the barbarians had failed to eliminate the image of the emperor and the cross from the coinage, provides an even firmer date. This statement is out of place in the ninth century. Walter Kaegi has pointed out that this statement could only have been written before the year 720 because in that year the Byzantines began minting coins without the prominent cross that long decorated the reverse of their coins.³⁵ Nonetheless, the author of the *Disputation* here is not talking of Byzantine coins, but those minted under the “barbarians.” These “barbarians” were probably the Arab rulers under which the author lived. According to a seventh-century chronicle, at some point in his reign Mu’awiya (r. 661–680) issued his own coins without crosses but was forced to withdraw them after a backlash by his Christian subjects.³⁶ It sounds like this is the event to which the *Disputation* is referring when it says that though some tried, the barbarians could not eliminate the cross from the coinage. ‘Abd al-Malik’s coinage reforms in the year 696 did abolish the image of the emperor and the cross from Arab coinage (see above, chapter 6, section II.4), so the passage almost certainly dates between the years 661 and 696. This is exactly the period in which Anastasius of Sinai flourished.

Another statement seems to suggest that the author of the *Disputation* was a Christian living under what he still believed to be a brief Arab occupation: “And do not say that today the Christians are tormented and held prisoner. For this thing is great: that our faith, persecuted and attacked by such great foes, stands and does not perish, nor is our empire wiped out, nor our churches closed. But amongst the conquering and persecuting nations, we have churches, we set up crosses, we build churches, and we perform the sacrifices.”³⁷ This seems to be the point of view of a Christian who has experience with some minor diminution of privileges under a non-

³³ The *Disputation Against the Jews*, Migne, PG 89: 1224: Καὶ ἄλλο, ὅτι οὐδεὶς Χριστιανῶν βασιλεὺς βαρβάροις ποτὲ παρεδόθη εἰς θάνατον, καίτοι γε τοσούτων ἐθνῶν τὸ βασίλειον πολεμησάντων· οὐ μόνον δὲ τὸν βασιλέα, ἀλλ’ οὐδὲ τὴν ἐαυτοῦ εἰκόνα ἐκ τοῦ νομίσματος καταργῆσαι σὺν τῷ σταυρῷ ἴσχυσαν, καίπερ τινῶν τυράννων τοῦτο δοκιμασάντων.

³⁴ O’Sullivan, “Anti-Jewish Polemic,” 60 n.37, presumes that the author was excluding Valens on the grounds that the barbarians who killed him, the Goths, were Christians, albeit Arian Christians; it seems to me more likely, however, that the author would have counted Valens as a heretic and not a true Christian emperor on account of his Arianism.

³⁵ Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests*, 226.

³⁶ This fact is related in the Syriac Maronite *Chronicle*, ed. Jean-Baptiste Chabot, *Chronica Minora II* (Louvain: L. Durbecq, 1955), 37–57.

³⁷ The *Disputation Against the Jews*, Migne, PG 89, 1221: Καὶ μὴ εἴπῃς, ὅτι σήμερον καταπονούμεθα οἱ Χριστιανοὶ καὶ αἰχμαλωτίζόμεθα· τοῦτο γάρ ἐστι τὸ μέγα, ὅτι καὶ ὑπὸ τοσούτων διωκομένη καὶ πολεμουμένη ἡ πίστις ἡμῶν, ἵσταται καὶ οὐ παύεται, οὐδὲ τὸ βασίλειον ἡμῶν καταργεῖται, οὐδὲ αἱ ἐκκλησίαι ἡμῶν κλείονται· ἀλλὰ ἀναμέσον τῶν ἐθνῶντων κρατοῦντων καὶ διοκόντων ἡμᾶς, ἐκκλησίας ἔχομεν, καὶ σταυροὺς πῆσσομεν, καὶ ἐκκλησίας οἰκοδομοῦμεν, θυσίας ἐπιτελοῦμεν.

Christian regime, but who still considers the Roman Empire to be “our empire,” and suggests that Christians could still build churches and erect crosses.

Perhaps the most compelling evidence in favor of a seventh-century date for the core of the *Disputation Against the Jews* is that it was known to the Greek translator of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, who must have been working in the late seventh or early eighth century. The lines from the *Disputation* are already present in the eighth-century Latin manuscripts of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*. Kaegi allowed for the possibility that the Greek translation of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* predated the *Disputation*, and that the *Disputation* actually took the shared lines from the *Apocalypse*.³⁸ However, this seems very unlikely. The Greek translator of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* follows the Syriac very closely, then inserts the lines shared with the *Disputation*, which obviously do not reflect the Syriac text, and then returns to closely following the Syriac. This suggests that Greek translator interpolated the lines from another source; the most logical conclusion that that this source was Anastasius’ *Disputation Against the Jews*.

It appears, then, that the *Disputation Against the Jews* was written in the late seventh century, but before 696 and, judging by its optimism, perhaps before the Second Fitna (though it is possible that the author, writing from Sinai or Egypt, simply had not witnessed the horrors of that civil war). It cannot have been circulating for very long before the Greek translator of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* obtained a copy. It is possible that the author of the *Disputation Against the Jews* was not named Anastasius, or was a different Anastasius from the author of other texts included in the corpus of Anastasius of Sinai, but in neither case would this matter for the larger conclusions of this chapter.

The *Disputation Against the Jews* was very probably written in the late seventh century. It dates to almost exactly the same time as the Syriac *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*. Both of these texts reconsidered the place of the Roman Empire among the four kingdoms of Daniel. Considering the paucity of surviving sources from this period, the fact that two texts written at nearly the same time both made a similar point seemingly derived from the eschatological thought of Aphrahat is notable. Moreover, the Greek translator of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* was clearly familiar with both of these texts, suggesting an interest in revised notions about the Roman Empire in the events of the end times.

Part II: The Greek *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*: Syriac Eschatology in Byzantium

So far, all of the sources examined in this chapter were probably composed by Christians—even if Chalcedonian Christians—who lived outside of the empire. It is apparent, however, that soon the eschatological thought of Aphrahat began to influence writers working from within the empire. The agent of this diffusion was likely the Greek *Apocalypse of*

³⁸ Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests*, 234. Kaegi seems unaware here that the lines are not present in the Syriac original of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, but were added by the Greek translator.

Methodius of Patara, which became one of the most important sources for Byzantine eschatology.

This timing is notable. The period in which the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* was likely imported into Byzantium was a turbulent one. Despite the Sixth Ecumenical Council's condemnation of monothelitism, and the optimistic appraisal offered by Anastasius, the empire continued to suffer costly losses. Shortly after the conclusion of the Sixth Ecumenical Council, Emperor Constantine IV was defeated by the pagan Bulgars from the steppe, who proceeded to settle on Byzantine land in the Balkans.³⁹ In the coming years they would prove as intractable an enemy as the Arabs. This could not have augured well for the effectiveness of the recent church council in appeasing God's wrath.⁴⁰ Moreover, Constantine IV died suddenly four years later, at the age of thirty-three. The abandonment of monothelitism had hardly saved the empire or protected the emperors.

Justinian II, the son and successor of Constantine IV, like each of his dynastic forbearers, formulated his own response in a presumable attempt to reverse the military defeats and extirpate the great sin responsible for them. He convened the Council in Trullo (or "Quinisext Council") in 691. This church council was distinct from those previous. It did not seek to set theological doctrine, but issued a series of canons—which would become the basis of Byzantine canon law—regulating the behavior of clergy, monks, and the laity.⁴¹ The canons of the council begin with an address by the assembled bishops offering their trust in Justinian to lead his flock back to righteousness and regain God's favor.⁴²

The Council in Trullo probably attempted to enforce Christian ethics in order to placate an angry God. Like the Sixth Council of Constantinople, it apparently failed. In 692, the year after the council, Justinian II marched out with his army against the Arabs. He may have hoped that the reforms of the council had won God's favor, and that he could drive the Arabs, weakened from the Second Fitna, from the formerly Roman provinces.⁴³ Instead, the Byzantine army was crushed by Arabs under Muhammad ibn Marwan.⁴⁴

Three years later, Justinian II was overthrown, mutilated, and exiled. He regained his throne with the opportunistic help of the Bulgars, but the army mutinied in 711 and murdered him. Twice overthrown, Justinian II had at least seen the age of forty, a feat none of the previous

³⁹ Theophanes Confessor, *Chronicle*, ed. Carl de Boor, *Theophanis Chronographia* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1885), 359. Theophanes mentions the council after the invasion of the Bulgars, reversing the order of events.

⁴⁰ According to M. T. G. Humphreys, *Law, Power, and Imperial Ideology in the Iconoclast Era, c. 680-850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 42, after the defeat of Constantine IV at the hands of the Bulgars, "the Council's credibility, and the edifice of imperial legitimacy bound up with it, was undermined, with surely more than the dejected monotheletes holding the Council discredited by divine judgment on the battlefield."

⁴¹ The acts of the Council of Trullo have been edited, with an English translation, by George Nedungatt and Michael Featherstone, "The Canons of the Council in Trullo," in *The Council of Trullo Revisited*, ed. G. Nedungatt and M. Featherstone (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 1995), 41–185. On the Council of Trullo, see also Humphreys, *Law, Power, and Imperial Ideology*, 37–80.

⁴² Council of Trullo, *Logos Prosphonetikos*, ed. and transl. Nedungatt and Featherstone, "The Canons of the Council in Trullo," 45–55.

⁴³ Humphreys, *Law, Power, and Imperial Ideology*, 37, suggests that Justinian was motivated by such expectations after the council.

⁴⁴ Theophanes, *Chronicle*, ed. de Boor, 366.

rulers of his dynasty had accomplished since his great-great-grandfather, Heraclius. Now, however, the dynasty of Heraclius came to an end. The family of Justinian II was massacred. The throne passed swiftly through a succession of weak rulers with short reigns. The Bulgars continued to expand their kingdom at the expense of Byzantine territory. Meanwhile, the Arabs were building up a massive fleet and stockpiling siege weapons; it was evident to all that they were planning a decisive final assault on Constantinople.⁴⁵

In this environment, the traditional political-eschatological scenario found in Christian Greek fathers could offer little in the way of hope. Was not the empire the fourth kingdom of Daniel, destined to be divided and destroyed? As the *Doctrine of Jacob the Newly Baptized* had put it earlier in the century: “And if the fourth kingdom, that is the Roman Empire, has declined and been broken up and shattered, as Daniel said, then there is nothing left except the ten toes and ten horns of the fourth beast, and finally the Little Horn, which changes all knowledge of God, and immediately the end of the world.”⁴⁶

In this moment of uncertainty, the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* suddenly appeared in Byzantium. Not only did it appear, but it quickly became one of the most influential works on Byzantine eschatology. In the words of Paul Alexander: “In the development of the Byzantine apocalyptic tradition the translation of the Syriac text of Pseudo-Methodius into Greek marked the end of the era of Antiquity, and the beginning of that of the Middle Ages.”⁴⁷ Alexander proceeded to note that after this translation, ideas from the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*—what I have called the “Methodian political-eschatological scenario,” became standard in Byzantine apocalypses; these elements include the violent invasion of the Ishmaelites, their destruction by the Last Emperor, the invasion and then destruction of Gog and Magog, the Last Emperor’s surrender of power in Jerusalem. Moreover, many Byzantine apocalypses quote either brief passages or long excerpts from the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*.

Paul Alexander offered no explanation as to why the appearance of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* inspired such a radical break for the apocalyptic genre from its past. The following sections will suggest that its appearance in Greek was so important because it offered a new alternative to the political-eschatological scenario—which had long suggested that the Roman Empire would turn against Christians with a harsh persecution and then suffer destruction—at a time when the collapse of the empire and the lapse of its rulers into heresy provided an all too real possibility. In effect, the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* made the more optimistic Aphrahatian eschatology available to Byzantium in a compelling form.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 384–385.

⁴⁶ *Doctrine of Jacob the Newly Baptized*, III.12, ed. Gilbert Dagron and Vincent Déroche, “Juifs et Chrétiens dans l’Orient du VII^e siècle,” *Travaux et Mémoires*, vol. 11 (1991), 70–219, with quotation on 171: Καὶ ἐὰν τὸ τέταρτον βασίλειον τουτέστιν ἡ Ῥωμανία μειωθῇ καὶ διαίρεθῇ καὶ συντριβῇ, καθὼς εἶπεν Δανιήλ, ὅτως οὐδὲν ἄλλο γίνεται, εἰ μὴ τῶν δέκα δακτύλων, τὰ δέκα κέρατα τοῦ θηρίου τοῦ τετάρτου, καὶ λοιπὸν τὸ κέρας τὸ μικρὸν τὸ ἀλλοιοῦν πᾶσαν θεογνωσίαν, καὶ εὐθέως ἡ συντέλεια τοῦ κόσμου.»

⁴⁷ Paul Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 14.

II.1: The *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* comes to Byzantium

There is some reason to believe that the appearance of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* in Byzantium corresponded to a period of dissatisfaction with existing Greek eschatological literature, perhaps engendered by the upheaval the empire was experiencing. We have already seen the interest of Anastasius of Sinai in new understandings of the kingdoms of Daniel. Comparatively few sources survive from late seventh- and early eighth-century Byzantium, and yet there are indications that the common political-eschatological scenario had lost its appeal in some quarters and that a new interpretation of the place of the empire in kingdoms of Daniel was a topic of interest at this time.

For example, a number of inter-related apocalypses began to appear in Byzantium probably around the eighth century (explored in more detail below) called the Visions of Daniel (ὁράσεις τοῦ Δανιήλ) because nearly all were attributed to the prophet Daniel. The popular attribution of apocalypses to Daniel is in itself an interesting development. As we have seen above (chapter 2, introduction), the composition of new apocalypses was rare in the early Christian and late antique periods. More attention was devoted to exegesis on the Biblical apocalypses. Those apocalypses that were written were attributed to an array of ancient authors: Elijah, the Tiburtine Sibyl, etc. The sudden outpouring of apocalypses attributed to Daniel implies some concern over the content of the Biblical visions of Daniel.

Indeed, in Byzantine copies of the Book of Daniel, the chapters were each typically labeled as an ὅρασις, a “vision” (including the deuterocanonical chapters on Susanna and Bel and the Dragon).⁴⁸ In effect, the Visions of Daniel apocalypses attributed additional visions the Biblical collection of Danielic content. Since the Visions of Daniel mostly deal with the fate of the empire and the city of Constantinople, they perhaps suggest a desire to emend the meaning of the anti-imperial canonical visions in light of political circumstances in which they were judged unsatisfactory.

Other circumstantial evidence points to growing dissatisfaction with the common political-eschatological scenario. In the seventh or eighth century, a certain John the Drungarios produced a catena from the many commentaries of church fathers on the Book of Daniel (he also revised existing catenas of the Books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel).⁴⁹ Though John the Drungarios was presumably an orthodox Chalcedonian Christian, he made extensive use of non-Chalcedonian sources. In the introduction to the Daniel catena, John made clear that he has decided and defends his decision to include the exegetical opinion of heretics (he made a similar appeal in the introductions to his Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel catenas as well): “I have not done

⁴⁸ Michael von Faulhaber, *Die Propheten-Catenen nach römischen Handschriften* (Freiburg: Herder, 1899), 166–167.

⁴⁹ The catena is of Daniel is edited in Angelo Mai, *Scriptorum veterum nova collectio e vaticanis codicibus*, volume 1.2. (Rome: Burliaeum, 1825). The name “John the Drungarios” comes from Cod. Paris Gr. 159 (thirteenth-century, fol. 81r), where the catena is ascribed to John the Drungarios. See also, von Faulhaber, *Die Propheten-Catenen*, 56–57. According to von Faulhaber, John’s catenae must date to the seventh or early eighth century, as the surviving manuscript copies include several mistakes that suggest they had been copied from prototypes in majuscule.

this of my own accord, but I follow what our most holy father, Cyril, Archbishop of the Christ-loving metropolis of Alexandria, said in his letter to Eulogios: ‘It is not necessary to flee from and avoid everything the heretics say, for much that they profess we also profess.’”⁵⁰

John certainly did not flee from the opinions of heretics in his Daniel catena. The lion’s share of the excerpts in the catena come from the Daniel commentary of Polychronius of Apamea, the brother of the “heretic” Theodore of Mopsuestia, who was in turn the teacher of the arch-heretic Nestorius (it is in John’s catena that the fragments of Polychronius’ commentary on Daniel, explored above in chapter 4, section I.1, are preserved).⁵¹ Over five hundred excerpts in the Daniel catena are taken from Polychronius (the next most excerpted author was John Chrysostom with two hundred excerpts; about one hundred were taken from the Daniel commentary of Hippolytus of Rome, and twenty-five from Eusebius of Caesarea).⁵² Though it cannot be said for sure, perhaps John relied heavily on Polychronius because he found compelling the preterist interpretation of Daniel offered by Polychronius, which, as we have seen (above, chapter 4) avoided the conclusion that the Roman Empire was the fourth kingdom of Daniel.

The dissemination of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* within Byzantium at the same time heightens the impression that Byzantines were interested in alternative interpretations of the visions of Daniel. As we have seen above (chapter 6), the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* did not deny the empire’s place as the fourth kingdom of Daniel, but it did change the meaning of the fourth kingdoms in order to imply it would remain standing, and remain righteous, up to the end of history. As the fortunes of the empire reached their nadir in the early eighth century, this idea could well have come as some comfort to Byzantine readers.

What were the circumstances in which the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* came to be widely diffused in Byzantium? This might tell us why it became popular when it did. As we have seen, the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* was very likely translated in a Chalcedonian monastery around the year 700, but it is not certain when exactly it first appeared in Constantinople. Nonetheless, if the *Apocalypse* had been translated into Greek at Mt. Sinai or at one of the other Greek Chalcedonian monasteries within the Arab caliphate, there would have been plenty of opportunities for a manuscript copy to have made its way to Constantinople. The exact circumstances in which this happened, however, will perhaps never be clear.

⁵⁰ John the Drungarios, prologue to Daniel catena; ed. Faulhaber, *Die Propheten-Catenen*, 193–194: Καὶ τοῦτο δὲ οὐκ αὐτονόμως πεποίηκα, ἀλλ’ ἀκολουθήσας τῷ ἁγιωτάτῳ ἡμῶν πατρὶ τῷ τῆς Ἀλεξάνδρου φιλοχρίστου μεγαλοπόλεως ἀρχιεπισκόπῳ Κυρίλλῳ φήσαντι ἐν τῇ πρὸς Εὐλόγιον ἐπιστολῇ· Οὐ πάντα, ὅσα λέγουσιν οἱ αἰρετικοὶ, φεύγειν καὶ παραιτεῖσθαι χρή· πολλὰ γὰρ ὁμολογοῦσιν ὧν καὶ ἡμεῖς ὁμολογοῦμεν.

⁵¹ Nothing is known about the person of John the Drungarios besides his rank, drungarios (δρουγγάριος), which was approximately equivalent to a colonel in the chain of command of the Byzantine army or an admiral in the Byzantine navy, and first appeared in the seventh century. Besides Polychronius, John the Drungarios also made heavy use of the Miaphysite Severus of Antioch in his Daniel catena.

⁵² Faulhaber, *Die Propheten-Catenen*, 169. As Faulhaber, in *ibid*, 181–183, points out, Mai, in his edition, likely inflated the number of passages in the catena attributed to Polychronius (and to all the other named sources) because he attributed every anonymous excerpt in the catena to the author of the previous passage. Nonetheless, since the number of excerpts is inflated for all authors across the board, Polychronius remains by far the most quoted authority.

There is some indication that the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* became popular in Byzantium around the time of the Arab siege Constantinople in 717–718. This was perhaps the moment of greatest existential danger for the empire, though in the end the Arabs failed to capture the capital, and they retreated from Byzantine territory with heavy losses. Hardly any other moment would have so invited the comforting promise in the invincible, God-protected nature of the empire.

Some circumstantial evidence supports the idea that the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* was already circulating in Byzantium at the time of the siege. The Armenian translation of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* was attributed to a famed bishop who translated several Greek texts in Constantinople from 711–719 (though these attributions are found in late medieval sources, and it remains uncertain if they are accurate).⁵³ Moreover, most of the Greek manuscripts of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* include an interpolation, absent from the Latin manuscripts (and therefore an interpolation not made by the original Greek translator, but rather one inserted later) that describes a siege of Constantinople perhaps inspired by the Arab assault of 717–718. The interpolation begins just before the moment in text of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* when the Last Emperor (called, in the Greek version, not the “King of the Greeks,” but ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ῥωμαίων, the “King of the Romans”) arises. It described the movements of the Ishmaelites in Asia Minor: their massive hordes will overwhelm all the cities of the East, and they will winter in Pergamum, Ephesus, and Malagina.⁵⁴ This is followed by a direct address to the city of Constantinople: “Woe to you, Byzas, because Ishmael overtakes you. For every horse of Ishmael will pass through and the first among them will pitch his tent before you, Byzas.”⁵⁵ It predicted that the Ishmaelites will breach the Xylokerkos Gate, enter the city, and advance as far as the Forum of the Ox, before God finally will relent from punishing of his

⁵³ See Christopher Bonura, “A Forgotten Translation of Pseudo-Methodius in Eighth-Century Constantinople: New Evidence for the Dispersal of the Greek Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius during the Dark Age Crisis,” in *From Constantinople to the Frontier: The City and the Cities*, ed. N. S. M. Matheou, T. Kampianaki, and L. M. Bondioli (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 260–276.

⁵⁴ The Greek *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*, 13.7–8: Aerts and Kortekaas, *Die Apokalypse des Pseudo-Methodius*, 170 (reprinted and translated in Garstad, *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*, 56–57): It says that the Ishmaelites will be under three commands, they will take Phrygia, Pamphylia, and Bithynia “when it is frosty” (καὶ οὐαὶ σοι χώρα Φρυγία καὶ Παμφυλία καὶ Βιθυνία· ὅταν γὰρ παχύνῃ, ὁ Ἰσμαὴλ παραλαμβάνει σε), and the three armies will winter in Ephesus, Pergamum, and Malagina (καὶ τὸ μὲν ἐν μέρος χειμάσει εἰς Ἐφεσον, τὸ δὲ ἕτερον εἰς Πέργαμον, καὶ τὸ τρίτον εἰς τὰ Μαλαγινά). Garstad translates χειμάσει as “turn the land to winter barrenness” but notes that this word choice comes from the lexicographer Hesychius, and he believes the intention of the passage is to imply that they wintered in these places. On the other hand, he notes that Aerts and Kortekaas believe the word should mean “devastate”, as in they destroyed these cities, and thus he translated it in an ambiguous way to reflect the ambiguity of the text. Wolfram Brandes, “Die Belagerung Konstantinopels 717/718 als apokalyptisches Ereignis: Zu einer Interpolation im griechischen Text der Pseudo-Methodios-Apokalypse,” in *Byzantina Mediterranea. Festschrift für Johannes Koder zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. K. Belke, E. Kislinger, A. Külzer, and M. A. Stassinopoulou (Vienna: Böhlau, 2007), 73, has inclined toward a translation of “hibernate.”

⁵⁵ The Greek *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*, 13.7–8: Aerts and Kortekaas, *Die Apokalypse des Pseudo-Methodius*, 172 (reprinted and translated in Garstad, *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*, 56–57): Οὐαὶ σοι, Βύζα, ὅτι ὁ Ἰσμαὴλ παραλαμβάνει σε· περάσει γὰρ πᾶς ἵππος Ἰσμαὴλ καὶ στήσει ὁ πρῶτος αὐτῶν τὴν σκηνὴν αὐτοῦ κατέναντί σου, Βύζα.

people and allows the invaders to be defeated.⁵⁶ Then the interpolation ends and the narrative returns to where it left off, describing the rise of the King of the Romans and his victories over the Ishmaelites.

This interpolation was very likely added to the *Apocalypse* in the eighth century, because it is quoted along with other material from the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* by other Byzantine apocalypses that seem to have originated in some form in the eighth century.⁵⁷ Several scholars have noticed the similarity between this prophesied siege and the actual siege of Constantinople in 717–718.⁵⁸ The Arabs, however, never made it within the city, in contrast to the prophecy. Therefore, it is possible that the interpolation was added during the siege itself. Alternatively, the passage may be a later imagining of an eschatological siege based on the events of 717–718. Even if the interpolation was added later, it still suggests an identification of the near destruction of the empire during the Arab siege with the ideas in the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*.

A final, more cryptic piece of evidence seems to indicate a more general Byzantine interest in Syriac political eschatology around the time of the siege of Constantinople. It involves a ghastly story recorded by both of the two most important chroniclers of eighth-century Byzantium, Theophanes Confessor (d. 817), and Nikephoros Patriarch of Constantinople (d. 815). Both state that shortly before the Arab siege of Constantinople in 717 the residents of the city of Pergamum, desperate to ward off the approaching Arab army, cut a baby out of a pregnant woman, boiled it, and dipped the sleeves of their right arms into the brew. Neither chronicler explains the exact effect the Pergamense believed this ritual would enact, but the story implies that they hoped to gain some advantage over the Arabs. Nonetheless, the chroniclers state, God instead punished them for this sinful magic, and so delivered Pergamum to the Arabs, who utterly destroyed it.⁵⁹

The details of this story are familiar. It appears to be a bizarre recycling of the story of the barbarity of the Huns in the Syriac *Alexander Legend* and the *Homily on the End*, which states that before battle the Huns of Gog and Magog likewise rip a baby out of a pregnant mother, boil it, and dip their weapons in the brew in order to gain advantage in battle (see above,

⁵⁶ The ubiquity of the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* in Byzantium meant that the Xylokerkos was often given special attention and heavily fortified in times of siege for fear that this would be the route of the invaders who would destroy the city, and this notion influenced the urban planning of Constantinople at least down to 1886; see Andras Kraft, “Constantinople in Byzantine Apocalyptic Thought,” *Annual Meeting of Medieval Studies at CEU*, vol. 18 (2012), 25–36. Ironically, it was through the breached Xylokerkos Gate that the Turks nonetheless entered Constantinople in 1453.

⁵⁷ The siege of Constantinople interpolation is quoted by the *Discourse of Bishop Methodius* (“Diegesis of Daniel”), described below. Since the latter text quotes extensively from much of the Greek translation of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, it appears likely that the interpolation was already included in some copies of the Greek *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*.

⁵⁸ Brandes, “Die Belagerung Konstantinopels 717/718,” 71. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 2007), 296–297; András Kraft, “The Last Emperor *topos* in the Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition,” *Byzantion*, vol. 82 (2012), 226.

⁵⁹ Theophanes, *Chronicle*, ed. de Boor, 390–391; Nikephoros, *Breviarium*, 53; ed. Mango, *Nikephoros*, 120–123.

chapter 4, part III.3; and chapter 5, part III.2). However, it does not appear that either of those Syriac apocalypses was ever translated into Greek. How did this graphic description of an imagined act of sorcery from two Syriac eschatological tracts find its way into two early ninth-century Byzantine chronicles, and associated in them with opening stages of the Arab siege of Constantinople?

Wolfram Brandes has suggested an answer: the accounts of Theophanes and Nikephoros are so similar because they must have been drawing on a common source; this source, he suggests, was likely an apocalypse written in Syriac, or in Greek by someone who knew Syriac and was familiar with the Syriac apocalyptic traditions, concerning the siege of Constantinople. This apocalypse presumably applied the characteristics of the Huns of Gog and Magog to the people of Pergamum.⁶⁰ It is possible that such an author came to Constantinople in the retinue of Emperor Leo III (r. 717–741), the emperor during the Arab siege of Constantinople, who was from a Syriac-speaking region of the empire.⁶¹ If so, this may indicate a larger engagement with Syriac eschatological idea around the time of the Arab siege.

A clearer picture of the role of eschatological literature around the time of the siege of Constantinople is probably not possible. Nonetheless, the sources do suggest that in Byzantium's darkest hour, its people turned to political eschatology but eschewed the common political-eschatological scenario in favor of alternative explanations of the future, the most prominent of which was the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*.

II.2: The *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* in Early Eighth-Century Byzantium

Even if the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* came to prominence in Byzantium in the wake of the Arab siege of 717–718, it had a staying power that enabled it to become the most important apocalypse in Byzantine literature for many centuries to come. Though it was written in Northern Mesopotamia for readers living under direct Arab rule and concerned many elements of life under this non-Christian empire such as taxation, enslavement, and inducements to convert to Islam (as we have seen above, chapter 6, part I), it also turned out to be surprisingly well-suited to a Byzantine audience under constant military threat from the Arabs and other foes and concerned over the role of sin in contributing to the reversals the empire had suffered.

The principle enemies that Byzantium confronted in the late seventh and eighth centuries, the Arabs and Bulgars, mirrored the chief forces of evil in the *Apocalypse*. The Ishmaelites could easily be identified with the Arabs (that's exactly who they were intended to represent), while the Unclean People of the North (Gog and Magog) could be identified with the Bulgars, a nomadic people that had invaded Byzantine lands from the North. The *Apocalypse* promised that whatever

⁶⁰ Wolfram Brandes, "Apokalyptisches in Pergamon," *Byzantinoslavica*, vol. 48 no. 1 (1987), 1–11. Brandes suggests that the author of this apocalypse must have attributed the disgusting behavior of the nations of Gog and Magog to the people of Pergamum because Pergamum was long associated with paganism (with its giant pagan altar) and because an early eighth-century usurper originated there; these reasons are hardly convincing.

⁶¹ On the Syrian origin of Emperor Leo III, see Stephen Gero *Byzantine Iconoclasm in the Reign of Leo III: With Particular Attention of the Oriental Sources* (Louvain: CSCO, 1973), 1–31.

depredations these enemies inflicted, they could not conquer the Kingdom of the Greeks and the Romans (that is, the Byzantine Empire). Just as Aphrahat had promised to fourth century Syriac Christian readers that the contemporary Persian attack on the Roman Empire was doomed to fail, the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* assured readers that all the assaults by invaders coming out of the desert must come to nothing. Likewise, the fierce enemies from the distant North could not prevail. The Christian empire would last until the end of time.

Byzantine audiences probably did not always understand the connection, established by Aphrahat and implied in *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, between the inevitability of the empire's victory over the invaders and its role as the fourth kingdom of Daniel. Nonetheless, it was probably enough to find assurances that the empire would not collapse or be parceled up by rival kings (as the common political-eschatological scenario suggested), but would remain steadfast.

In addition, the ways in which the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* addressed the Syriac crisis of empire translated well for addressing the Chalcedonian crisis of empire. It provided an explanation for the military defeats the empire had suffered at the hands of its non-Christian enemies, an explanation which avoided the tangle of Christology. As we have seen above (chapter 6, part I), the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* responded to other seventh-century Syriac apocalypses had blamed the Roman Empire and the Christological formulations that it had promulgated in the fifth and sixth centuries. These Syriac apocalypses had described the empire's supposed Christological heresies in the language of sexual transgression. The *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* responded with the suggestion that the sexual transgression at the root of God's anger really was sex, not Christology. Sexual sin had pervaded mankind since the beginning, it claimed, and brought about the flood. In the wake of the bitter conflict over monothelitism, and the seeming inability of any Christological doctrine to assuage God's anger, there are good reasons to suppose that message of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* appealed to Byzantine readers.

Indeed, in this way the ideas in the *Apocalypse* mirrored attitudes in Byzantine sources and even in imperial policy of the late seventh and early eighth centuries. In the aftermath of the Sixth Ecumenical Council, and its failure to bring an end to the empire's misfortunes, emperors stopped addressing Christology. After all, the Arabs had inflicted defeats on the empire when the emperors embraced monothelitism, and the Arabs continued to win after 683 when the empire rejected monothelitism. It appeared that Christology was not the problem. Great onus was placed on moral reform instead. This trend was already found in the writings of Anastasius of Sinai. As Mike Humphreys states: in the *Questions and Answers* of Anastasius of Sinai, "the once-dominant Christological disputes have here receded in prominence, replaced by questions on religious rites and personal morality. Evidently the tribulations of the times, combined with the threat of a new religion [i.e. Islam] placing an onus on pietism, had shifted attitudes towards issues of practice and ethics."⁶²

⁶² Humphreys, *Law, Power, and Imperial Ideology*, 44.

A similar focus on sexual transgression is found in the hagiography of another Anastasius, in this case a Persian soldier who converted to Christianity during Khusrau II's war with Heraclius and was martyred for his abandonment of Zoroastrianism. The hagiography was probably composed in the middle of the seventh century at the monastery of St. Sabas in Palestine, and its author began by blaming the misfortunes the empire had suffered on many sins of the flesh (and comparing Roman Christians unfavorably with Persian converts like Anastasius): "Through prostitution, adultery, and countless other crimes and bad acts we have called down God's wrath upon us."⁶³

Such preoccupations were not simply held by monks on the empire's periphery, but in the imperial palace itself. The most prominent example of this effort is the Council of Trullo (or "Quinisext Council) called by Justinian II in Constantinople in 692 (around the same year the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* was likely composed).⁶⁴ The Council in Trullo and the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* shared not just a coincidence of dates, but similar perspectives on the cause of God's evident fury (it is as surprising as it is fortunate that no scholars have attempted to label the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* the "propaganda" of Justinian II).

Most scholarly attention on the Council of Trullo has been given to the canons that addressed vestigial pagan and Jewish practices, and those that evidence Byzantine concern about images (these are seen as anticipating the later Byzantine iconoclast controversy). However, canon 100, one of the two that addressed images, was actually concerned with specifically with sexual images: "We command that henceforth absolutely no pictures should be drawn which enchant the eyes, on panels or in any other form, corrupting the mind and inciting the flames of shameful pleasures."⁶⁵

In fact, a full quarter of the 102 canon of the council concern sexual mores. Other canons, while not explicitly about sex, deal with some of the same issues of sexuality and gender that bothered the author of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*. Canon 51 bans mimes and pantomimes, shows famous for their bawdy content.⁶⁶ Canon 96 bans men from braiding their hair like women, while canon 62, which bans pagan festivals, specifically states: "We decree that

⁶³ The *Life of Anastasius the Persian*, 4; edited (with French translation) by Bernard Flusin, *Saint Anastase le Perse et l'histoire de la Palestine au début du VIIe siècle, Tome I: Les textes* (Paris: Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1992), 43–46: πορνείαις δὲ καὶ μοιχείαις καὶ ταῖς ἄλλαις ἀναριθμήτοις πονηρίαις τε καὶ κακοπραγίαις τὴν ὁργὴν τοῦ Θεοῦ καθ' ἑαυτῶν ἐκκαύσαντες. On the historical context of the life, see Flusin's second volume.

⁶⁴ Nedungatt and Featherstone, "The Canons of the Council in Trullo," 43–186.

⁶⁵ The Council of Trullo, canon 100; ed. and transl. by Nedungatt and Featherstone, "The Canons of the Council in Trullo," 180–181: Τὰς οὖν τὴν ὄρασιν καταγοητευούσας γραφάς, εἴτε ἐν πίναξιν, εἴτε ἄλλως πως ἀνατεθειμένας, καὶ τὸν νοῦν διαφθειρούσας καὶ κινούσας πρὸς τὰ τῶν αἰσχροῶν ἡδονῶν ὑπεκκαύματα, οὐδαμῶς ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν οἰωδῆποτε τρόπῳ προστάσσομεν ἐγχαράττεσθαι.

⁶⁶ The most famous description is undoubtedly Procopius' description of Theodora's mime shows in the *Secret History*.

no man should wear feminine clothing, nor any women that which suits men.”⁶⁷ The concern about transvestitism was one shared by the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*.⁶⁸

This transition from concern over Christology to concern over sexuality makes some sense for Byzantine rulers. Sexual sin was a safer and more convenient scapegoat. Christological controversy was inherently oppositional. Any position the church and emperor took was bound to alienate some group, and, as Heraclius and his successors learned from their experience with the monothelite doctrine, compromise positions only fractured the debate into further camps. In contrast, everyone could agree that sexual misbehavior was sinful.

Moreover, when the empire continued to suffer defeat after the promulgation of new Christological doctrines, this implied that those new doctrines were themselves heretical. Sexual sin, on the other hand, is conveniently nebulous. The imperial government could crackdown upon sexual sin with moralizing campaigns, and yet continued military reversals and natural disasters did not invalidate this policy but rather simply suggested the need for greater stringency.⁶⁹ Sexual transgressions can never truly be eradicated; as the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* itself suggests, humanity is by its nature inclined toward sexual excess. In the face of continued military reversals and natural disasters, the state could simply turn to new methods of cracking down on immorality.

Indeed, this is precisely what happened. In 726, as Arab invasions continued to devastate Anatolia, Leo III issued new laws in his own name and that of his young son and heir, Constantine V. Unlike the Council of Trullo, these came as civil laws and not church canons, a “selection” (Ἐκλογὴ; “Ecloga”) of the laws of Justinian I, “corrected toward greater humanity.” Here, Roman civil law is conflated with the prophetic law, given by God to the Israelites, in the Old Testament.⁷⁰

The *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* had anticipated such attitudes. It specifically related the Arab conquests to the enslavement of the Israelites in the time of the Hebrew judges. Both Ishmaelite invasions had been punishment for sin. Though the author of the *Apocalypse* envisioned that the new Israelites were all Christians, and especially those of Northern Mesopotamia that had been conquered by the Arabs and who had suffered under the Second Fitna, Byzantine readers could easily read themselves as the New Israel.

For these reasons, the popularity of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* within Byzantium is hardly surprising. Yet the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* was not the only apocalyptic text widely read in Byzantium. Indeed, a vibrant medieval Greek apocalyptic tradition certainly existed. It is necessary to turn to these for the remainder of this chapter. As it will soon become clear, the ideas from the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, ultimately derived from Aphrahatian eschatology, were further disseminated by these apocalypses.

⁶⁷ The Council of Trullo, canon 62; ed. and transl. by Nedungatt and Featherstone, “The Canons of the Council in Trullo,” 142–144: μηδένα ἄνδρα γυναικίαν στολήν ἐνδιδύσκεσθαι, ἢ γυναῖκα τὴν ἀνδράσιν ἀρμόδιον.

⁶⁸ See the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, XI.6.

⁶⁹ My thanks to David Gyllenhaal for his insights on these points.

⁷⁰ M. T. G. Humphreys, *The Laws of the Isaurian Era: The Ecloga and Its Appendices* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017); idem, *Law, Power, and Imperial Ideology*, 81–168.

II.3: The “Visions of Daniel” Apocalypses and the Methodian Eschatological Scenario

An important indication about the circulation on apocalyptic texts and the contexts in which they were read in Byzantium was provided by the Italian bishop Liutprand of Cremona, who wrote an account of his visit to Constantinople as an emissary for Emperor Otto I in 968–969. He reported that the “the Greeks and the Saracens have books that they call ὀράσεις, or visions, of Daniel, and I call Sibylline books.” According to Liutprand, these foretold such things as the length of the rule of certain emperors and their military success against the Arabs.⁷¹ Some of these so-called Visions of Daniel survive in manuscript copies.

Such Visions of Daniel apocalypses, already discussed in broad terms above, represent the bulk of surviving Byzantine apocalypses.⁷² Around twenty-four different apocalypses attributed to Daniel are extant, nearly all in manuscripts of the fourteenth through seventeenth centuries.⁷³ Despite the late date from which the manuscripts survive, these Visions of Daniel texts represent a tradition of apocalypses that had probably been circulating in Byzantium since long before Liutprand’s day. The genre appears to have blossomed in the eighth and ninth centuries, since, as we shall see, many of the apocalypses retain references to eighth- and ninth-century Byzantine rulers (particularly Emperor Leo III, Constantine V, and Eirene of Athens) and events (such as the Arab conquest of Sicily that began in 827, and Arab naval campaigns in the Aegean and around Italy in 840s).

Notably, nearly all of the Visions of Daniel apocalypses make use of the Methodian political-eschatological scenario. Nearly all contain an eschatological “King of the Romans,” that is, a Last Roman Emperor who will wage war against the Ishmaelites. In a number of these, the Last Roman Emperor’s abdication in Jerusalem drops out, or, alternatively, the duties of fighting the Ishmaelites and surrendering power are divided between two emperors. Thus, for example, in

⁷¹ Liutprand of Cremona, *Relatio de legatione*; ed. Paolo Chiesa *Liudprandus Cremonensis Opera omnia*, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001), 204: *Habent Greci et Saraceni libros, quos ὀράσεις sive visiones Danielis vocant, ego autem Sibyllanos, in quibus scriptum reperitur, quot annis imperator quisque vivat; quae sint futura eo imperitante tempora, pax an simultas, secundae Saracenorum res an adversae*. Translation from Paolo Squatriti, *The Complete Works of Liudprand of Cremona* (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 262.

⁷² I use the term “apocalypse” here because the vast majority of the Visions of Daniel texts follow the conventions of the apocalyptic genre. Lorenzo DiTommaso, *The Book of Daniel and the Apocryphal Daniel Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 195–206, devotes a detailed discussion to whether the Visions of Daniel texts can be classified as apocalypses according to the definition laid out by John J. Collins, “Introduction: Toward the Morphology of a Genre,” in *Semeia, Volume 14: Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre*, ed. J. J. Collins (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1979), 1–19. DiTommaso asserts that they are “unquestionably apocalyptic, and in their content (and thus in their message) they share a close correspondence with the ‘historical’ type of apocalypse.” Nonetheless, he concludes that only about half of them can be formally described as apocalypses, and so prefers to refer to all of them in general as “apocalyptic oracles.” Such specificity of language is warranted in a discussion of the apocalyptic genre in the *longue durée*; however, for the sake of clarity and convenience, I prefer here to refer to the Visions of Daniel texts as apocalypses.

⁷³ For background and the approximate number (and an in depth discussion of the problems of identifying and distinguishing separate Visions of Daniel texts), see DiTommaso, *The Book of Daniel*, 87–97; Kraft, “The Last Emperor *topos*,” 213–257. Several of the Visions of Daniels apocalypses have been edited by Hans Schmoldt, “Die Schrift ‘Vom jungen Daniel’ und ‘Daniels letzte Vision’” Ph.D. diss., University of Hamburg 1972.

the *Vision of Daniel on the Last Times* (“Daniel καὶ ἔσται”), analyzed in more detail below, one emperor wages the victorious war against the Ishmaelites, and then rules over an era of peace for thirty-two years. After he dies, and after Alexander’s gate is opened and the Unclean People of the North overrun the earth, another emperor will go to Jerusalem to surrender power to God. Thus, András Kraft, in a study of Byzantine apocalypses, distinguishes between two archetypal figures that developed out of the King of the Greeks in the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*: the Victorious Emperor, who defeats the Ishmaelites, and the Last Roman Emperor (or Abdicating Emperor), who surrenders power to God.⁷⁴

Many of the Visions of Daniel apocalypses exhibit a belief that the Byzantine Empire will last until the end of time. Though they do not repeat the detailed historical summary given in the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* to justify the Byzantine Empire’s role as a God-protected fourth kingdom, many communicate the wider implication of this idea: the empire is a force for good that will not be destroyed by its barbarian enemies. In this way, the influence of Aphrahat’s ideas, communicated to Byzantium through the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, lived on and developed further within the Byzantine Greek apocalyptic tradition.

Conclusions: New Eschatology for a New Age

Like others for generations before, the Eastern Romans, the subjects of the Byzantine Empire, sought to understand where their empire fit in history. In the eighth century, the empire came very close to annihilation. Bitter debates about heresy had consumed the empire. The Arab invaders were halted, but at the very walls of Constantinople. And even after the lifting of the siege in 718, the empire teetered for several more decades, at least until the Abbasid Revolution (750 AD) caused a brief period of upheaval in the caliphate and so provided Byzantium breathing space to recover. If the Byzantines of the eighth century read the majority of earlier political eschatology, such as the Daniel commentaries of Hippolytus or Theodoret, or the Revelation commentary of Andrew of Caesarea, they would have been confronted with an interpretation of Biblical prophecy that suggested the empire was fated to fall, to be torn asunder in bloody strife, and that the Antichrist would don the purple as emperor.

The *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* provided an alternative interpretation of the future laid out in the Book of Daniel. The *Apocalypse* promised that the Roman Empire, even though it was the fourth kingdom, would not collapse, but must be the last remaining kingdom upon the earth. It provided a vision of the future in which the emperor from Constantinople would defeat the Arabs and restore all the lands that had been part of the Roman Empire. If the exact meaning of that surrender, with its roots in the Syriac theology of Aphrahat, was not clear to Byzantine readers, it was still probably enough to know that the empire’s power would be given up willingly. This was a revolution in thinking about the eschatology of the empire.

⁷⁴ Kraft, “The Last Emperor *topos*,” 215: “As will become clear, the initially unitary *topos* of a Last Roman Emperor became dissociated and fragmented into separate figures, most notably into the two related figures of the Victorious Emperor who carries out successful military campaigns and into the Last Roman Emperor who, first and foremost, abdicates at the end of time.”

The principle enemies that Byzantium confronted, the Arabs and Bulgars, were reflected in the *Apocalypse* by the Ishmaelites and the Unclean People of the North (Gog and Magog). The *Apocalypse* promised that whatever depredations these enemies inflicted upon the empire and upon Christians, they could not conquer the Roman Empire (that is, the Byzantine Empire). Rather, it meant that the empire must survive to the end of the world. Indeed, though the empire seemed in desperate straits, in truth once the tide of enemies abated, the empire would remain the sole kingdom upon the earth.

As such eschatology took hold, Byzantine readers could have encountered these ideas not just in the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, but in the many Visions of Daniel apocalypses based upon it. These adopted and further developed the Methodian political-eschatological scenario. Thus, the ideas formulated in the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* and aimed at a Syriac Christian audience of the late seventh century became relevant to many centuries of Byzantine readers.

As we shall see, however, the ideas in the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* never fully displaced the common political-eschatological scenario. As the eighth century progressed, events in the Byzantine Empire would inspire an outpouring of competing eschatology that resisted such hopeful visions of the empire's future.

Part III: Eschatological Pessimism and the Age of Iconoclasm

The prominence of eschatology in late seventh and eighth century Byzantine sources is not limited to the optimistic eschatology derived from Aphrahat, the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, and Methodian political-eschatological scenario. Many eschatological sources repeated aspects of the common political-eschatological scenario, or otherwise emphasized the general sinfulness and eventual doom of the empire.

This tendency seems to have been fueled, in part, by the iconoclast controversy that engulfed Byzantium in the eight and ninth centuries. The supporters of icons seem to have made use of eschatological tropes to criticize the iconoclast emperors. They listed tropes and imagery from the Book of Daniel and the Book of Revelation, and compared the iconoclast rulers to the Antichrist and Little Horn of fourth beast.

All of this implies that the glorification of the empire through Aphrahatian/Methodian eschatology never dominated Byzantine expectations. Powerful currents inherited from centuries of Christian pessimism about the future of the Roman state and fear of the Antichrist's coming persecution meant that would never been unfailingly supportive of the empire. Moreover, the rhetorical versatility that the more pessimistic eschatology offered for criticizing imperial policy ensured that these ideas never really went away.

III.1: Sacred Images, Imperial Authority, and the Fortunes of Empire

In order to understand the importance of iconoclasm in the development of Byzantine eschatology, it is necessary to see how it laid bare many of the wounds that had been opened up by the monothelite controversy. It raised again questions about the authority of the emperor to interfere in religious doctrine.

Ironically, the iconoclast controversy probably began as an extension of the above-described emphasis on pious reforms in place of more controversial Christological reforms in the late seventh and early eighth century. Emperor Leo III simply identified another potential cause for God's wrath—the Byzantine veneration of images. This was a logical extension of the greater concern over individual morality and piety evinced by the Council of Trullo called by Justinian II and Leo's own *Ecloga*. These had conspicuously evoked the model of the ancient Israelites, who were often punished by God with disaster until they repented of their sins. In such deuteronomistic histories of the Israelites, the sin in question was often idolatry. As we have seen (chapter 5, part III), in late antiquity idolatry was at times identified with Christological heresy; that is, heretics were idolaters because they worshiped a false creed. But it makes some sense that Leo III might have seen in the icons as a truer and as yet unaddressed form of idolatry, one that was responsible for God's anger.⁷⁵

In contrast to the monothelitism, iconoclasm, at least at first, seemed to work. Twenty-two years after stewarding Constantinople through the desperate Arab siege, Leo III clashed with the Arabs in the Battle of Akroinon in 740. This was the first time a Byzantine emperor had attempted to meet an Arab army in the field since Justinian II was disastrously defeated by them at the Battle of Sebastopolis in 692. In contrast to that earlier disaster, Leo III won a great victory.⁷⁶

When Leo died the following year, peacefully in his bed, he was succeeded by his son, Constantine V (r. 741–775). Though Constantine faced a challenge by his brother-in-law, Artabados, Constantine emerged victorious in the power struggle, becoming the first emperor to successfully succeed his father since Justinian II had done so fifty-five years earlier.⁷⁷ A new dynasty, the dynasty of Leo III, known as the Isaurian Dynasty, had emerged. God had seemed to confer a stable dynasty to the Isaurians.

Constantine V was evidently more stridently opposed to religious images than his father had been, and his reign represents the highpoint of the first phase of Byzantine iconoclasm.⁷⁸ In 754 he held an ecumenical council (though it ceased to be recognized as such once icons were restored) at Hieria in which icons were condemned. Whereas his father seems to have targeted images as a part of larger program of pious reform, Constantine V related the question of images

⁷⁵ For the origins of iconoclast policy under Emperor Leo III, see Leslie Brubaker and John Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era c. 680-850: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 69–155.

⁷⁶ Theophanes, *Chronicle*, ed. de Boor, 411. See also Ostrogorski *The History of Byzantine State*, translated by J. M. Hussey (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1957), 157.

⁷⁷ Theophanes, *Chronicle*, ed. de Boor, 414–415; Nikephoros, *Breviarium*, ed. Mango, *Nikephoros*, 132–135.

⁷⁸ Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era: A History*, 156–247.

to Christology, and so argued that those who defended images were heretics.⁷⁹ In doing so, he greatly raised the theological stakes.

The surviving sources for the reign of Constantine V are all hostile, and most were written well after his death, when his theological opponents had triumphed. Therefore, it can be difficult to separate fact from rhetoric in accounts of his reign. Several sources talk of his mistreatment of the monks (who tended to be identified with the pro-icon party). A monk, Stephen the Younger, was killed by imperial troops in 765, and the supporters of icons embraced him as one of their own, celebrating him as a martyr.⁸⁰ Constantine V dissolved the monasteries where the veneration of icons flourished and appropriated their possessions for the state.⁸¹ Supposedly in the year 766 he paraded monks and nuns in the hippodrome and forced them to marry.⁸² Constantine's true motives (a desire to punish the monks for supporting icons, versus an attempt to free up manpower and wealth that were tied up in monasteries) or even the factuality of these accounts is a matter of debate.⁸³ Such stories do reveal that the supporters of icons regarded him as a vile persecutor.

Whatever later generations thought of him, at the time Constantine V's mostly successful reign probably seemed to confirm the idea that God's favor had been restored, at least in part, through the abandonment of the veneration of religious images. There were no more bouts of plague after the Council of Hieiera.⁸⁴ From 746–752, Constantine V won both land and naval victories against the Arabs, and captured Theodosiopolis and Melitene from them. These were not brilliant victories, but they were enough to suggest that a revival of Roman fortunes had begun.⁸⁵ Constantine V suffered a defeat at the hands of the Bulgars in 759, but he made up for it by crushing the army of the Bulgars in 763 at the Battle of Anchialus. It took the Bulgars a decade to recover, and once they did and invaded the empire once again, Constantine V defeated them once more during the campaign season of 773–774.⁸⁶ When Constantine V passed away campaigning further against the Bulgars in 775, he was succeeded by his eldest son Leo IV “the Khazar” (on account of his Khazar mother), who raised up his young son Constantine VI as co-emperor. The Isaurian Dynasty had become the undisputed ruling family of Byzantium, again seeming to confirm God's support.⁸⁷

Nonetheless, Leo IV died under mysterious circumstances in 780 at the age of thirty, and so his young son Constantine VI ascended to the throne under the regency of his mother, Eirene of Athens. In 787, Constantine VI, under the direction of his mother, convened the Second

⁷⁹ Ibid, 189–196; Leslie Brubaker, *Inventing Byzantine Iconoclasm* (London: Duckworth, 2011), 35–39.

⁸⁰ Nikephoros, *Breviarium*, ed. Mango, *Nikephoros*, 154–155.

⁸¹ Theophanes, *Chronicle*, ed. de Boor, 445–447.

⁸² Ibid, ed. de Boor, 448; Nikephoros, *Breviarium*, ed. Mango, *Nikephoros*, 156–157.

⁸³ Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era: A History*, 234–247, for instance, are rather skeptical about whether Constantine V instituted any significant persecution of the supporters of icons.

⁸⁴ Constantinople suffered its last outbreak of plague 747; see Warren Treadgold, *The Byzantine Revival, 780–842* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 3; Brubaker, *Inventing Byzantine Iconoclasm*, 32.

⁸⁵ Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era: A History*, 166–167.

⁸⁶ Theophanes, *Chronicle*, ed. de Boor, 446–448; Ostrogorski, *A History of Byzantine State*, 168–169.

⁸⁷ Treadgold, *The Byzantine Revival*, 9–11. The half-brothers of Leo IV posed a potential danger to his succession, but he skillfully maneuvered with the help of the army to deprive them of their positions as Caesars.

Council of Nicaea. As Eirene directed, the council permitted the return of icon veneration and denounced iconoclasm as a heresy. The council presented its decision as a return to tradition after a period of unwarranted interference and innovation by the emperors. Thus, the council marked “a new demarcation of spheres of authority between rulers and church, secular and spiritual,” which was to have important implications for the empire's history in the following half-century.⁸⁸ The iconoclast emperors had seemed to dominate the church, imposing their will upon it, while the imperial supporters of icons presented themselves as allowing the church autonomy in setting doctrine.

Still, to anyone with iconoclast sympathies, the notion that the icons brought about God's wrath against the empire must have seemed to be borne out soon after they were restored. In the two years after the Second Council of Nicaea, Byzantine troops suffered defeats against the Arabs, both on land and at sea, as well as against the Bulgars in the Balkans and against the Lombards in Italy. Then, in 790 a major earthquake rattled Constantinople.⁸⁹ Moreover, the restorers of icons destroyed themselves in a series of power struggles that contrasted sharply with the peaceful successions enjoyed by the iconoclasts. Constantine VI threw off the guardianship of his mother, and Eirene famously struck back, sending soldiers in 797 who captured her son and put out his eyes, an act which probably killed him.⁹⁰ In a unique and unprecedented move, Eirene ruled the empire by herself. The rule of a woman appears to have struck at least some contemporaries as grossly unnatural. Still, Eirene reigned only briefly, before she was overthrown in 803 in a palace coup that placed one of her ministers, Nikephoros, on the throne. Irene was confined to a monastery, where she soon died. The Isaurian Dynasty, so successful under the iconoclasts, died out under the generation that had restored the icons.

Emperor Nikephoros maintained the icons. He raised his son, Stavrakios, as his heir and co-emperor, but there would be no dynasty. While campaigning against the Bulgars, Nikephoros fell into an ambush. The emperor was killed, son was mortally wounded, and the army annihilated. Supposedly the Bulgarian ruler, Khan Krum, turned the emperor's skull into a drinking cup. Nikephoros' son-in-law inherited the throne as Emperor Michael I (r. 811–813), but the Bulgars, emboldened by their victory over Nikephoros, overran the frontiers. Michael assembled an enormous army many times the size of that of the Bulgarians, but nonetheless when he met the Bulgars in battle he was soundly defeated. Emperor Michael fled to Constantinople, where he abdicated and became a monk.

⁸⁸ Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era: A History*, 285–286.

⁸⁹ Theophanes, *Chronicle*, ed. de Boor, 463–464. The important officers killed shortly after the council include Diogenes, *turmarch* of the Anatolians, killed in battle against an Arab raiding party in Asia Minor; Theophilus, *strategos* of the Kibyraiots, captured at sea after being defeated in a naval battle with the Arabsoff of Cyprus and executed when he refused to convert to Islam; Philetus, *strategos* of Thrace, killed in a surprise attack by the Bulgars; and John, the Logothete of the Military, killed battle during in a failed attempt to overthrow the pro-Frankish ruler of Lombard Benevento and replace him with a pro-Byzantine candidate.

⁹⁰ Theophanes, *Chronicle*, ed. de Boor, 471–472. Theophanes reports that the conspirators blinded Constantine “with a view to making him die” (πρὸς τὸ ἀποθανεῖν αὐτόν). The emperor probably died soon after he was blinded, though there are some, seemingly apocryphal, stories about his life after being blinded.

At this point one of the generals called Leo the Armenian seized power and was crowned as Leo V. The Bulgars besieged Constantinople, but Leo V fought them off with what remained of the army. Then, in a surprising move, he returned the empire to iconoclasm. Leo V appears to have been convinced that the ills that had befallen the empire could be blamed on the restoration of the icons. He also appears to have looked to the first iconoclast emperor, Leo III, as a model of rulership. Leo V closely imitated the coins issued by Leo III. When Leo V crowned his son Smbat co-emperor, he renamed him Constantine, the same name as Leo III's son and heir. He issued laws modeled on those of Leo III and Constantine V.⁹¹

The second iconoclastic period lasted from 814–842. The emperors of this period, Leo V, Michael II (r. 820–829), and Theophilos (r. 829–842), enjoyed more mixed success than had the early iconoclasts. Leo V was assassinated. Michael II claimed the throne, but he was challenged by Thomas the Slav, a general and former ally, resulting in a long and bloody civil war. A second round of Islamic conquests began in 827, when Arab armies invaded both Sicily and Crete, eventually wresting both islands from the Byzantine Empire. Crete, especially, was a disastrous loss, as it became a base for pirate fleets which could strike the empire's soft underbelly, ravaging the coastline of the Aegean and subjecting new areas to robbery and slavery.⁹²

Then, history repeated itself. Emperor Theophilos died suddenly and so the empire passed to his young son, Michael III (r. 842–867), under the regency of his mother, Theodora. Theodora raised up as the new patriarch of Constantinople named Methodius, a monk who had been one of the foremost critics of iconoclasm. Theodora and Patriarch Methodius engineered the return of the icons. In the year 843, iconoclasm at last came to a permanent end.

Although the history of Byzantium's iconoclast controversy is complex, the important point that bears mentioning is that, as in the monothelite controversy, imperial policy appears to have been dominated by a desire to assuage the anger of God. This led the emperors to initiate reforms that their opponents decried as an overreach of imperial prerogatives into the realm of the church. When iconoclast emperors attempted to enforce their will, the supporters of icons decried these actions as persecution. The result was a spiraling conflict between the two camps, both of which deployed whatever rhetorical tools that had at hand to polemicize against the other. All of this would have major implications for eschatology in the iconoclast era.

III.2: Emperor and Antichrist: The Common Political-Eschatological Scenario Returns

One of the few scholars to integrate apocalypses and eschatology into a narrative of the iconoclast controversy has been Gilbert Dagron.⁹³ Nonetheless, his explanation is somewhat confused. He attributes interest in the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* and the Methodian

⁹¹ See Treadgold, *The Byzantine Revival*, 207–220.

⁹² For an extensive overview of this period, see Treadgold, *The Byzantine Revival*, 225–329.

⁹³ Many scholars have studied the apocalypses of the iconoclast era, but seldom integrate them into a larger picture of the controversy.

political-eschatological scenario found in many of the Visions of Daniel apocalypses to the pro-icon party that was committed to undermining the authority of the emperor. He writes:

It was very obviously the Constantinian project that was under attack [by the pro-icon party]. And since history offered little prospect of a return to paganism, it was to the apocalypses, constantly being rewritten on the basis of the texts of the Pseudo-Methodios and the Pseudo-Daniel, that people turned to describe the coming of the impious emperor who would restore idols, have himself adored in place of Christ, empty the earthly Jerusalem, fill that in heaven with martyrs, and pave the way for the Antichrist, or himself assume that role, after a truly pious emperor had abandoned Constantinople to return his crown to the Christ of the Parousia.⁹⁴

Dagron is correct that the supporters of icons turned to apocalypticism, or, more accurately, to eschatology, to make their case. Nonetheless, they did not initially turn to the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*. How could the positive role it suggested for the Roman Empire, and the exploits of the Last Emperor (which elevated the emperor to an avenging hero and active participant in the realization of the heavenly kingdom) it described, appeal to the pro-icon party? It did not contain the impious persecuting emperor described by Dagron; rather, that persecuting emperor was a feature of the common political-eschatological scenario—he was the old model of the Antichrist as Roman emperor.

Thus, instead of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, the supporters of icons appear to have turned to the more pessimistic common political-eschatological scenario. This scenario, which as we have seen (above, chapter 2) remained widespread from the pre-Constantinian period on, provided the perfect argument against emperors who would impose their will upon the church. It held that the empire was the fourth kingdom of Daniel, which, as Daniel had foreseen, would be ruled over by a great persecutor, the Antichrist, who would wage war upon the saints. When an emperor tried to force his subjects to give up their images of the saints, when he punished those who refused his will, was he not acting like the Antichrist?

Such rhetoric directed against the emperor was familiar from the days of the fierce opposition of Athanasius of Alexandria showed to Constantius II (see above, chapter 2, part II.1). Indeed, the pro-icon authors may have become familiar with this rhetoric from that glorious past age of struggle against Arianism. Such accusations, albeit less overtly eschatological in articulation, resurfaced during the monothelite controversy. During Maximus' 655 trial, of which a transcript survives written by one of Maximus' allies and circulated among his followers, he denied that the emperor had authority in spiritual matters.⁹⁵ As Gilbert Dagron has explored, this debate laid bare a growing incongruity in the emperor's religious role: he governed on God's behalf, could convene ecumenical councils, and the imperial court had undergone a liturgification (with the result that the emperor led certain ecclesiastical rituals and processions);

⁹⁴ Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, 190.

⁹⁵ *Record of the Trial of Maximus*, 4; ed. and transl. Pauline Allen and Bronwen Neil, *Maximus the Confessor and his Companions: Documents from Exile* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 48–74, with the relevant lines on 54–59. As Booth, *Crisis of Empire*, 306–307, notes, we must be cautious in using this source, for “it has more in common with the *Apology* of Plato than with a modern legal transcript.”

and yet many other ritual functions—such as baptism, ordination, and consecration of the Eucharist—remained outside the emperor’s purview.⁹⁶ Could the emperor define orthodoxy? In the words of Phil Booth:

The ideological position developed within Maximus’s circle had proceeded hand in hand with the burgeoning crisis of empire, the perception of sin as its cause, and growing disillusionment with Constantinopolitan doctrine. From this matrix of interdependent ecclesiological, political, and doctrinal concerns, therefore, it was perhaps quite natural to extend the rhetoric so as to refute the sacerdotal pretensions of the emperor, and thus to exclude him from doctrinal interference. Thus would the pollution of monenergist and monothelete doctrine be removed; thus would sin be expiated; and thus also would divine favor be restored.⁹⁷

Nevertheless, in none of his surviving writings does Maximus make that old accusation which Athanasius had lobbed at Constantius II; never does he suggest that the emperor was the Antichrist. Maximus even stated that the great persecution described in Daniel had already occurred under Antiochus IV (as anyone who read their Josephus knew, he adds), though he added the caveat that some say that these things will happen again under the Antichrist.⁹⁸ In any case, he did not allege that they the eschatological persecutions were happening in his own time.

Though surviving sources from the first iconoclast period are very rare, those few that do survive strongly hint that the supporters of icons made overtly eschatological arguments against the authority of the iconoclast emperors. Indeed, Leo III, the emperor who initiated iconoclasm, had come from the East, he had restored some degree of imperial authority after a period of bloody civil strife between rival rulers, he enforced an impious doctrine upon the empire, and, according to many pro-icon sources, he had gained the support of the Jews. All of these things overlapped with some of the most common prophecies about the Antichrist.

An early pro-icon text, a polemic against Leo III’s son Constantine V, called *Against Constantine Kaballinos* (“Kaballinos” being a popular nickname for Constantine V), perhaps suggested as much.⁹⁹ This was the first known work to associate Leo III, with the Jews. At one point it claims that Leo had formerly been called Konon (Κόνων), but a Jew told him that if he changed his name to Leo he would one day become emperor.¹⁰⁰ The intended meaning of this story is obscure. Stephen Gero, in his study of Byzantine iconoclasm, suggests that the tale

⁹⁶ Gilbert Dagron, *Emperor and Priest: The Imperial Office in Byzantium* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); for the sections pertaining to Maximus the Confessor, see *ibid.*, 166–173. On the liturgification of the imperial court, see Haldon, *The Empire that Would Not Die*, 96–97;

⁹⁷ Booth, *Crisis of Empire*, 312.

⁹⁸ Maximus the Confessor, *Chapters on Love*, II.31; ed. Aldo Ceresa-Gastaldo, *Massimo Confessore: capitoli sulla carità* (Rome: Editrice Studium, 1963), 106. Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, 171, suggests that Maximus’ opposition to Constans II and his *Typos* was rooted in eschatology, but this is hardly evident in the surviving sources.

⁹⁹ *Against Constantine Kaballinos* survives in two version, a long and short version. The version discussed here is the long version, which has been edited by Migne, PG 95, 309–344. See also Leslie Brubaker and John Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era c. 680–850: The Sources* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), 250–251.

¹⁰⁰ This story is absent in the earliest, short version of the *Against Constantine Kaballinos*, but is present in the somewhat later, longer recensions.

originated in “some apocalyptic text in which the Antichrist is called Κόνων.” Nonetheless, Gero was unable to identify such a text and considered it lost.¹⁰¹ There are in sixteenth-century Greek apocalypses references to an eschatological ruler named Konon, though it is quite possible that these are based on the historical memory of Leo III.¹⁰² Whatever the case, Leo’s supposed association with the Jews on its own was itself reminiscent of the Antichrist. Had not Christian teachers going as far back as Hippolytus of Rome suggest that the Antichrist would be both a Jew and a Roman emperor?

A more clear association between Leo III’s succession, Constantine V, and Antichrist is made in a slightly older text (one of the oldest sources to survive from the debate over icons), the so-called *Advise of an Old Man Concerning the Holy Icons*. This work, written at some point before the Council of Hieria in 754 and extant in a single tenth-century manuscript, follows the title old man, George (probably George of Cyprus, a prominent early defend of the icons anathematized by the iconoclastic Council of Hieria). The author of the account was supposedly a young follower calling himself Theosebes, who wrote down all he had learned from the time he had shared a prison cell with George.¹⁰³

The *Advise of an Old Man* begins in the reign of Leo III, before iconoclasm was harshly enforced, when George received a vision of a coming persecution of the church, and repeated a prophecy to all who would listen. He began by exhorting his audience to remember the words of the prophet Daniel (chapter 8 of the Book of Daniel, more or less according to the Septuagint version) concerning the Little Horn: “A king will arise shameless in countenance and understanding problems and strong in his power, and what he wants will prosper [but] not by his own power, and he will destroy the powerful and the holy people,” etc.¹⁰⁴ The implication of this statement in a pro-icon text is apparent: the author suggested that George had foreseen the persecutions that Constantine V would impose and connected him to the Little Horn of Daniel. If this much were not already apparent, a marginal note in the manuscript makes it clear: “He speaks [here] of Kaballin[os].”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Stephen Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm in the Reign of Leo III, with Particular Attention of the Oriental Sources* (Louvain: CSCO 1973), 13 n. 3.

¹⁰² See, for example, Cod. Bodleian Barocci 170, fols. 17v–18r.

¹⁰³ *Advise of an Old Man Concerning the Holy Icons* survives in a single, tenth-century manuscript, Cod. Moscow Gr. 365 (fols. 142r–171v). It has been edited by Boris M. Melioranskii, Георгій Кипрянинъ и Иоанн Иерусалимлянинъ: два малоизвѣстныхъ борца за православие въ VII вѣкѣ (St. Petersburg: Skorohodova, 1901), v–xxxix. On this text, including a convincing explanation as to why it was likely written prior to 754, see Stephen Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm in the Reign of Constantine V: With Particular Attention to the Oriental Sources* (Louvain: CSCO, 1977), 25–36; Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast: The Sources*, 251–252, agree that the bulk of the work dates to before 754, but suggest that the apocalyptic vision at its beginning is somewhat later, though it nonetheless predates the first restoration of the icons in 787. Paul Speck, *Ich bin’s nicht, Kaiser Konstantin ist es gewesen: Die Legenden vom Einfluss des Teufels, des Juden und des Moslem auf den Ikonoklasmus* (Bonn: Habelt, 1990), 565–577, argues that the work belongs to the ninth century, but this view has not been widely accepted.

¹⁰⁴ *Advise of an Old Man Concerning the Holy Icons*, I; ed. Melioranskii, Георгій Кипрянинъ и Иоанн Иерусалимлянинъ, v: ἀναστήσεται βασιλεὺς ἀναιδὴς τῷ προσώπῳ καὶ συνιῶν προβλήματα καὶ κραταῖα ἢ ἰσχύς αὐτοῦ· καὶ οὐκ ἐν τῇ ἰσχύϊ αὐτοῦ κατευθύνει τὸ βούλημα αὐτοῦ καὶ διαφθείρει ἰσχυρὰ καὶ λαὸν ἄγιον...

¹⁰⁵ *Advise of an Old Man Concerning the Holy Icons*, I; ed. Melioranskii, Георгій Кипрянинъ и Иоанн Иерусалимлянинъ, v n.1: τοῦ καβαλλίν (sic) λέγει.

In an extended constellation of Biblical quotations, George's revelation encouraged steadfastness in the face of persecution and hope for deliverance from "the antichrists and God-haters" who will assail the faithful: "For a great persecution will come upon God's church in these time, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved."¹⁰⁶ The unnamed wicked one will use lies and intrigues to deceive many, another attribute of the Antichrist. Those he cannot trick he will subject to a harsh persecution, in line with the Little Horn's war upon the saints foreseen by Daniel: "And just as the prophet [Daniel] said [about the Little Horn]—'and he will destroy the marvelous and a holy people'—some he will kill and some he will exile, and others he will leave under guard."¹⁰⁷ Though this litany of crimes to be committed by the evil one are quite general, some specifically recall Constantine V: he will abuse God's virgins, and destroy of Christ's image.¹⁰⁸

The prophecy thus suggests that the Little Horn of Daniel had not been the Hellenistic king Antiochus IV, but the iconoclast Constantine V. In light of the very clear association of the Little Horn with the Antichrist, the implication of this supposed revelation is clear: the persecutions of the Little Horn are those imposed by the iconoclasts. Indeed, the *Advise of an Old Man* continues, the narrator Theosebes, after quoting George's prophecy of great suffering and persecution, adds: "Woe, brothers, for those days have arrived!"

According to the *Advise of an Old Man*, George did not cease from warning people of these things, and George's prophecy was indeed fulfilled when Leo III died and Constantine V ascended to the throne as sole ruler.¹⁰⁹ The emperor sent out loyal bishops to propagate iconoclasm, and the centerpiece of the *Advise of an Old Man* is George's debate with one of these bishops. Again and again in the debate, George's iconoclast interlocutor conflates the emperor with Christ. The debate recorded in the *Advise of an Old Man* should hardly be regarded as an accurate transcript of a real interaction between a supporter and an opponent of icons; like most religious dispute texts, it appears to have been aimed at belittling the opposition while also showing how to counter their claims. Whether or not any of the arguments of the iconoclast bishop in the *Advise of an Old Man* reflected true iconoclast positions, it is notable that the pro-icon author attributed to the iconoclasts the Antichrist-like arrogance of associating the ruler with Christ.¹¹⁰

When George complained to his interlocutor in the debate that those who venerated the icons were subjected to persecution, the iconoclast bishop answered that those who worship the icons must be punished for abrogating the will of the emperor. George responded by repeating the words of Daniel from the prophecy he proclaimed at the beginning of the work: "So the words of the Holy Spirit spoken by the prophet Daniel will be fulfilled: 'He will destroy the

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, vi: Ἰδοὺ γὰρ μεγάλη θλίψις ἐπέρχεται τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐν τοῖς καιροῖς τούτοις· ἀλλ' ὁ ὑπομείνας εἰς τέλος, οὗτος σωθήσεται.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid: καὶ καθὼς ὁ προφήτης φησὶν,—καὶ διαφθερεῖ θαυμαστὰ καὶ λαὸν ἅγιον—τούς μὲν ἀποκείνει, τοὺς δὲ ἐν ἐξορίαις, ἄλλους δὲ ἐν φυλακαῖς καταλιμπάνεσθαι.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, vi–vii.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, viii.

¹¹⁰ See discussion in Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, 185.

marvelous and the powerful and the holy people.”¹¹¹ In this way, George once again implied that that Constantine V was the Little Horn of Daniel. The bishop, aghast, replied: “You have blasphemed against the emperor and, according to our imperial law, deserve death.”¹¹² George, in turn, only scoffed at this suggestion: it was not possible to blaspheme against the emperor because he was not divine, and in fact the iconoclasts were the real blasphemers because they blasphemed against Christ. In sum, the *Advice of an Old Man* provides evidence that at least some contemporaries of Constantine V entertained the notion that he was the Little Horn of Daniel. That would mean that the iconoclastic policies he enforced represented the last great persecution.

Sources are more abundant for the period after the restoration of icons in 787. These consistently talk of Leo III, and even more so his son and successor Constantine V, in terms related to the Antichrist. Theophanes the Confessor, who compiled his chronicle at the dawn of the second iconoclast period, for example, called Leo III and Constantine V both “the precursor of the Antichrist.” The only other figure in the chronicle who earned this epithet was Muhammad.¹¹³

Such rhetoric was once again on display after the final victory of the supporters of the icons. The world chronicle of the pro-icon George the Monk (also known as George Hamartolos, “the sinner”), a history up to the second restoration of the icons in 842, probably written shortly after as a new synthesis of history in the wake of that momentous event, tells the story of the origins of iconoclasm. In lines lifted from Theophanes’ chronicle, George records that when Leo III first proposed removing the icons to Patriarch Germanicus, the patriarch warned him: “My lord, may this evil and God-hating thing not be done in your reign. For whoever does this deed is the forerunner of the Antichrist and the subverter and opponent of the coming of the word of God in the flesh.”¹¹⁴ Leo III, it turned out, literally was the precursor to the Antichrist, for a later entry notes: “After Leo, his son, Constantine the shit-named, the multicolored leopard born of the terrible lion, the asp from the seed of the serpent, the Antichrist from the tribe of Dan, ruled for thirty-four years.”¹¹⁵ Though the New Testament Epistle of John suggested the possibility of many little antichrists, the “Antichrist from the tribe of Dan” is unambiguously *the* Antichrist,

¹¹¹ *Advice of an Old Man Concerning the Holy Icons*, II; ed. Melioranskii, Γεωργίῳ Κιπρῳανίνῃ καὶ Ἰωάννῃ Ἱερουσαλὴμῳανίνῃ, xxiv: Ὁ γέρων εἶπεν· καὶ πῶς πληρωθήσεται τὸ ὑπὸ τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος λαληθὲν διὰ Δανιὴλ τοῦ προφήτου. τό· θαυμαστὸν καὶ ἰσχυρὸν καὶ λαὸν ἅγιον διαφθερεῖ.

¹¹² Ibid: εἰς τὸν βασιλέα ἐβλασφήμησας, καὶ ἄξιός ἐστι θανάτου κατὰ τὸν βασιλικὸν ἡμῶν νόμον.

¹¹³ Theophanes, *Chronicle*, ed. de Boor, 400: Κωνσταντῖνος καὶ τοῦ Ἀντιχρίστου πρόδρομος. For Leo III as precursor to the Antichrist, see *ibid*, ed. de Boor, 407. For Muhammad as the precursor to the Antichrist, see *ibid*, ed. de Boor, 418.

¹¹⁴ George Hamartolos, *Chronicle*, 633m; ed. Carl de Boor, *Georgii monachi chronicon* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1904), 741: ὁ μέγας Γερμανὸς ὑπολαβὼν ἔφη· « μὴ γένοιτο, δέσποτα, διὰ τῆς σῆς βασιλείας πραχθῆναι τὸ κακὸν τοῦτο καὶ θεοστυγές· Ἀντιχρίστου γάρ ἐστι πρόδρομος ὁ τοῦτο πληρῶν καὶ τῆς ἐν σάρκι τοῦ θεοῦ λογοῦ ἐπιδημίας ἀνατροπὴς καὶ ἀντιδικός.» Compare to the scene in Theophanes Confessor, *Chronicle*, ed. de Boor, 407: ὁ δὲ πατριάρχης ἔφη· « μὴ γένοιτο, δέσποτα, διὰ τῆς σῆς βασιλείας τὸ κακὸν τοῦτο τελεσθῆναι· Ἀντιχρίστου γάρ ἐστι πρόδρομος ὁ τοῦτο πληρῶν καὶ τῆς ἐν σάρκι τοῦ θεοῦ οἰκονομίας ἀνατροπὴς.»

¹¹⁵ George Hamartolos, *Chronicle*, 643m; ed. Carl de Boor, *Georgii monachi chronicon* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1904), 750: Μετὰ δὲ Λέοντα ἐβασίλευσε Κωνσταντῖνος ὁ Κοπρώνυμος υἱὸς αὐτοῦ ἔτη λδ', ἐκ δεινότητος λέοντος ποικιλότροπος πάρδαλις, ἐκ σπέρματος ὄφεως ἀσπίς δεινὴ καὶ ὄφις περόμενος, ὁ ἐκ Δαν ἄντιχρίστος.

the Little Horn of Daniel, the eschatological tyrant. George, writing nearly seventy years after Constantine V's death, knew that Constantine V had not literally been the Antichrist, but his words probably reflect the heated rhetoric of more contemporary sources that he relied upon (as exemplified in the *Advice of an Old Man*). Even contemporaries of Constantine V may or may not have been wholly sincere in their belief that he was the Antichrist, but the accusation was a biting one.

Such accusation were apparently resurrected under Emperor Leo V (r. 813–820), when he proclaimed a new iconoclasm. A fragment that survives from a larger lost chronicle, probably produced under the reign of the iconoclast emperor Michael II, suggests as much.¹¹⁶ “And what needs to be said about this dark night of evil?” the passage asks of Leo's crimes: he had deported the faithful to far off regions, demolished their homes, and killed pro-icon bishops and tossed their bodies into the sea. In committing all these crimes, it concludes, “he became another Antichrist.”¹¹⁷

Clearly, the charge of Antichrist was repeated hurled at the iconoclast emperors by the supporters of icons. It was a recurring theme. The *Advice of an Old Man*, a rare source written during the reign of Constantine V, explores this idea in the most detail, with reference to the prophecies from the Book of Daniel. By the later sources, the name Antichrist appears to have become so common that it became a standard epithet used to show disapproval of the emperors. Indeed, Dagron has suggested that a theme had emerged in iconodule rhetoric, a powerful accusation could be hurled at the emperors, it was “a phrase which hit home and would be repeated: ‘The Antichrist too will be an emperor.’”¹¹⁸ That is, even if Leo III and Constantine V had not been the Antichrist, a future emperor would be. Therefore, emperors must be on guard against their own propensities to meddle in theology or enforce their will upon the church, lest they become the great persecutor. At the same time, this meant that their subjects must remain wary that the emperor who ruled over them may be the great final enemy.

This idea is evident in a letter of perhaps the most famous defender of the icons, Theodore the Studite. Written in the period between first and second iconoclasm, Theodore addressed the so-called Moechian (“adultery”) controversy, in which Emperor Constantine VI sent his wife to a convent so that he could marry his mistress. The patriarch and much of the clergy had opposed the adulterous marriage, but no one dared stand up to the emperor except Theodore and his fellow Studite monks. The issue remained open even after Constantine was overthrown by his mother Eirene, since Theodore continued to loudly demand the

¹¹⁶ The fragment was long considered to originate in the same lost chronicle as another fragment, and this hypothetical historical work was called the “Chronicle of 811.” However, more recent research has cast doubt on this idea; see Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era: The Sources*, 179–180.

¹¹⁷ Francesca Iadevaia, *Scriptor Incertus* (Messina: Antonio Sfameni, 1987), 72: Καὶ τί δεῖ λέγειν τὴν σκοτόμηναν τῶν τότε κακῶν· τοὺς γὰρ μεταβάντας πιστοὺς ἐν τισὶ κλίμασι καὶ εἰς χώρας τὰς μὴ προσηκούσας αὐτῷ πέμπων εἰς τοὺς τοπάρχας, τῶν ἐθνῶν δόματα ἐζήτει πιάσαι, ἄλλος Ἀντίχριστος γενόμενος. An older edition was made by Immanuel Bekker, “Historia de Leone, Bardae Armenii filio,” in *Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae: Leonis Grammatici chronographia*, ed. B. G. Niebuhr (Bonn Weber 1842), 335–362, with quotation on 362.

¹¹⁸ Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, 191.

excommunication of the priest who had performed the marriage. Emperor Nikephoros sought to resolve the question when he took power, and organized a synod that ruled that the marriage had been permissible and the priest innocent. Theodore raged against the decision, and so the emperor sent him and a few of his fellow monks into a brief exile. It was a dress rehearsal of sorts for the antagonism between the monks and the government that would characterize the second iconoclast period, when Theodore would once again oppose the reigning emperor from exile.

In the letter, sent around the time of his banishment by Nikephoros, Theodore stressed that emperors cannot make arbitrary decisions, but are subject to the law. Only the Antichrist, when he comes, will seek to imitate God by acting above the law. Thus, anytime an emperor acts arbitrarily he presages the Antichrist. “And behold, the Antichrist arises in the word of all of them [the rulers]. For since he will be an emperor, only what he wants and orders to happen will be done.”¹¹⁹ Theodore urged great caution in dealing with the rulers, because “the Antichrist is at the gates.”¹²⁰

The political-eschatological scenario, with its suggestion that the Antichrist would rule as emperor, was a powerful weapon in the rhetorical arsenal of the supporters of the icons. When the emperor tore down the holy icons, he emulated the impiety of the Antichrist. When the emperor punished those who protected the icons or who spoke in their defense, he acted out the persecution expected under the Antichrist. When the emperor claimed authority in sacred matters, he elevated himself to the position of Christ, and so acted like the Antichrist. The whole common political-eschatological scenario was seldom spelled out in detail in the sources from this period, but the audiences of these texts probably already knew the details. They only needed to be reminded of the most important implication: the Antichrist will be an emperor.

III.3: An Iconoclast Riposte?

Against the supporters of icons who warned that the Antichrist will come as an emperor—and thus suggest that perhaps he already had—the Methodian political-eschatological scenario could have provided the perfect solution. The last emperor will not be the Antichrist, but the Last Roman Emperor, a heroic defender of Christians. Is it possible that the iconoclast emperors made use of this *topos*?

The notion of a victorious savior emperor accorded well with political strengths of the iconoclast emperors, whose near-miraculous military exploits appear to have been a major facet of legitimacy. Leo III had broken the Arab siege of Constantinople, and together with his son Constantine V, inflicted a major defeat on the Arabs in 740. Once he became sole ruler, Constantine V scored many successes on the battlefield, particularly against the Bulgars. Even

¹¹⁹ Theodore the Studite, Letter 36 (To Euprepianos); ed. Georgios Fatouros, *Theodori Studitae epistulae* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1992), 101–106, with quotation on *ibid*, 102–103: καὶ ἴδε εἰσῆλθεν ἐν τῷ λόγῳ αὐτῶν πάντως ὁ Ἀντίχριστος· βασιλεὺς γὰρ ὢν κάκεῖνος, τοῦτο μόνον ἐπιζητήσει, ὃ θέλει καὶ λέγει γίνεσθαι. On the context of this letter, see *ibid*, 179*.

¹²⁰ *Ibid*: ὁ Ἀντίχριστος ἐπὶ θύραις εἶναι.

the staunchly pro-icon former patriarch and chronicler Nikephoros, who had been deposed for opposing Leo V's reinstitution of iconoclasm, had to admit in his *Against the Iconoclasts* that many people (though, Nikephoros hastens to add, only the simpleminded and ignorant) considered that Constantine V's long life and his military victories over the barbarians indicated the righteousness of his iconoclast doctrine.¹²¹

A scene from Theophanes, recorded in the final entry of his chronicle, is instructive. In 813, after the Bulgars decisively defeated Michael I and approached Constantinople, and rumors flew of a return to iconoclasm, soldiers broke into imperial mausoleum at the Church of the Holy Apostles during a mass. They caught the attention of the congregation by throwing open the doors of the crypt in such a way that made it look as if the doors had moved supernaturally. Then, the soldiers claimed that they had seen Constantine V rise from the dead to lead the army out to fight the Bulgars and save the city.¹²²

With delight Theophanes added that these soldiers who dared glorify an iconoclast emperor were soon arrested and punished for telling lies; nevertheless, the story reveals much about the sustained popularity of Constantine V.¹²³ Constantine V had been dead for nearly forty years by the time of the incident at the Church of the Holy Apostles; even the youngest soldiers who served under him would have been old men by this time. Nonetheless, his memory among the soldiers solidified their support for iconoclasm.

Moreover, it is hard not to draw a parallel between the claims of the soldiers in the incident Theophanes recorded with *the Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, with its prophecy that the Last Roman Emperor, whom others considered dead, who would arise when the Christians appeared to have no hope of delivery from the hands of the infidels. Perhaps the similarity is just a coincidence. Yet even so, the scene makes clear that the iconoclast emperors, particularly Constantine V, were remembered for their military exploits, and these exploits lent them a mystical, supernatural quality, especially when the empire was in great danger.

Ultimately, it is impossible to know if or how the iconoclast emperors responded to the eschatological accusations against them. Unfortunately, since iconoclast sources on the whole do not survive, there is virtually no way to get an unmediated sense of how the iconoclast emperors presented themselves, or were presented by their supporters, beyond a precious few hints in sources such as Theophanes' story. It is possible to speculate that the iconoclast emperors made use of the Methodian political-eschatological scenario for their own benefit, though this must remain speculation.

That which is visible, in the apocalyptic sources that do survive, namely the Visions of Daniel apocalypses preserved in much later manuscripts, is a kaleidoscopic collection of eschatological visions. Rather than a neat divide between iconodule embrace of the common political-eschatological scenario and iconoclast adoption of the Methodian political-

¹²¹ Nikephoros, *Antirrhētikos*, III.70; ed. Migne, PG 100, 504C–505B.

¹²² Theophanes, ed. de Boor, 501.

¹²³ Ibid.

eschatological scenario, themes from both were combined in experimental ways. Ultimately, aspects of the two scenarios came to exist side-by-side in Byzantine apocalypses.

Part IV: Four Case Studies in Byzantine Eschatology

Contrary to modern narratives about Byzantine political and eschatological thought, positive eschatological expectations about the empire's role never predominated. The Methodian eschatological scenario provided an alternative to the common eschatological scenario, but never fully eclipsed it. In times of existential danger to the empire, such as when it was nearly annihilated by the Arabs in the eighth century, or perhaps when the emperors and their supporters needed to respond to challenges to their authority, the Methodian scenario could come to the fore. At other times, the common political-eschatological scenario was an effective tool, especially when criticizing imperial policy. Moreover, the common political-eschatological scenario remained common in serious exegesis: Andrew of Caesarea's commentary on Revelation remained standard in Byzantium, and the tenth-century commentary by Arethas of Caesarea, an update of Andrew's that addressed the circumstances of contemporary Byzantium and the coming of the Arabs, maintained the pessimistic common political-eschatological scenario.¹²⁴

Nonetheless, apocalyptic literature, namely the Visions of Daniel texts, attest to a blending of scenarios. The Visions of Daniel apocalypses, as we have seen, are maddeningly difficult to date, and so it is nearly impossible to develop a diachronic narrative of eschatological thought based on these sources. Instead, this chapter will conclude with four case studies from Byzantine apocalypses that show how the eschatological scenarios could be blended in different ways, without assigning precise date or contexts to these experiments.

IV.1: The *Discourse of Bishop Methodius* ("Diegesis of Daniel")

The *Discourse of Bishop Methodius* (often discussed in modern scholarship under the misnomer "Diegesis of Daniel") survives in two manuscripts of the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century, one in the Bodleian Library and the other in Montpellier, France.¹²⁵ Though it

¹²⁴ Arethas of Caesarea, *Commentary on Revelation*, ed. Migne, PG 106, 487–806.

¹²⁵ The manuscripts are Bodleian Canonicianus 19 (fols. 145r–152r), and Montpellier Bibliothèque de la Faculté de Médecine, codex 405 (fols. 105r–115r). The Bodleian manuscript was published by Istrin, "в. тексты. II видныя," 145–150, reprinted in Klaus Berger, *Die griechische Daniel-Diege: eine altkirchliche Apokalypse* (Leiden: Brill, 1976). Istrin's errors and extensive interventions into the text have been criticized by Mango, "The Life of Saint Andrew the Holy Fool Reconsidered," *Rivista di studi Bizantini e slavi*, vol. 2 (1982), 311, and G.T. Zervos "Apocalypse of Daniel, a new Translation and Introduction," in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, vol 1: Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments*, ed. James Charlesworth (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1983), 755, 762. Zervos, in *ibid*, 763–770, has provided an English translation based on the Bodleian manuscript, and indicates in his notes where his readings differ from Istrin's. The Montpellier manuscript was translated into French by Frédéric Macler, *Les apocalypses apocryphes de Daniel* (Paris: Noblet, 1895), 108–110. More recently, in Klaus

only survives in these late manuscripts, and may come down to us with later accretions through centuries of copying, the *Discourse of Bishop Methodius* is undeniably deeply concerned with the iconoclastic era.

Although it follows closely the conventions of the Visions of Daniel texts, it is not attributed to Daniel. The Montpellier manuscript simply calls it a “diegesis” (διήγησις) without mentioning an author.¹²⁶ In manuscript B it is titled *The Discourse of Our Saintly Father Bishop Methodius Concerning the Last Days and Concerning the Antichrist* (Τοῦ ἐν ἁγίος πατὴρ ἡμῶν Μεθοδίου ἐπισκόπου λόγος περὶ τῶν ἐσχάτου ἡμερῶν καὶ περὶ τοῦ Ἀντιχρίστου). Thus, rather than a prophecy of Daniel, the work seems to have been understood as the work of Methodius of Patara. Indeed, the *Discourse of Bishop Methodius* (as I will call it for short) is connected to the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* not just in name. It lifts heavily from the Greek translation of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*.

It begins by describing the campaigns of “the three sons of Hagar,” and the cities and regions they conquer, naming primarily places in Byzantine Asia Minor (Antioch, Cilicia, Trebizond, Smyrna, Bithynia, and the Thracian theme, are among those listed), until one of them “will make his camp at Chalcedon opposite Byzantium.”¹²⁷ They will come in ships with a massive army and slaughter Roman children. Further descriptions of their atrocities borrow heavily from the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*.¹²⁸

According to the *Discourse of Bishop Methodius*, the Ishmaelites, confident that they will capture Constantinople, will boast: “Where is the God of the Romans? There is no one helping them, for we have completely conquered them.”¹²⁹ Just as the blasphemous boast of the Ishmaelites introduces the siege interpolation in many manuscripts of the Greek *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, in the *Discourse of Bishop Methodius* it introduces a similar account of an Ishmaelite attack on Constantinople, though the account is embellished with additional details.

The Ishmaelites build a pontoon bridge across the Bosphorus to make their assault, and the leaders of the Romans flee the city. In dismay, the residents of the city blaspheme, saying “Woe to us, woe to us, we have a king neither in heaven nor on earth.”¹³⁰ At this, God is moved to help the Romans: “And the Lord will take away the cowardice of the Romans and put into the hearts of Ishmael, and the courage of the Ishmaelites into the hearts of the Romans. And the Lord will raise up an emperor of the Romans, who people say is dead and useful for nothing, who people

Berger, *Die griechische Daniel-Diegesis: eine altkirchliche Apokalypse* (Leiden: Brill, 1976), has dedicated a monograph to the work, wherein he has provided a critical edition using both manuscripts.

¹²⁶ The work appears in the Montpellier codex immediately following a copy of the scene from the Septuagint version of the Book of Daniel (Daniel 13) of Daniel’s defense of Susanna from the elders, but no connection between the two texts is implied.

¹²⁷ *Discourse of Bishop Methodius*, 2.2; ed. Berger, *Die Griechische Daniel-Diegesis*, 12: καὶ πῆξῃ τὸ φοσσᾶτον αὐτοῦ ἐν Χαλκηδώνῃ ἀπέναντι τοῦ Βυζαντίου.

¹²⁸ Ibid, 3.1–4.9.

¹²⁹ Ibid, 3.5; ed. Berger, *Die Griechische Daniel-Diegesis*, 12: Ποῦ ἐστὶν ὁ θεὸς τῶν Ῥωμαίων; οὐκ ἔστιν ὁ βοηθῶν αὐτούς. νενίκηται γὰρ ἀληθῶς.

¹³⁰ Ibid, 5.2; ed. Berger, *Die Griechische Daniel-Diegesis*, 13: οἱμοι, οἱμοι, οὔτε ἐν οὐρανῷ ἔχομεν βασιλέαν οὔτε ἐν τῇ γῇ.

think died many years earlier.”¹³¹ These lines follow the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* closely, though it adds the detail that not only did people think that the emperor was dead, but that they thought that he had died many years before. He will enter the city on a Friday, and go out to war, together with his two sons, on Saturday.¹³²

The *Discourse of Bishop Methodius* then supplies additional details about this emperor, but here the two manuscripts diverge in their details. According to the Bodleian manuscript, the emperor’s name begins with *eta*, and God had been secretly keeping him in Persia.¹³³ According to the Montpellier manuscript, the emperor’s name begins with *kappa*, but he also has the name of a wild beast, and God had been secretly protecting him in Persia and in the land of the Syrians.¹³⁴ The details in the Montpellier manuscript appear to correspond to Emperor Leo III, who was supposedly named Konon and changed his name to Leo (meaning “lion”), and who originated in Syria.

The *Discourse of Bishop Methodius* describes the bloodshed in this war against the Ishmaelites in great detail, again borrowing phrases from the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*. At the end of the war, there will be one empire on the earth, under the emperor and his two sons, and the world will be at peace. Swords will be beaten into plowshares, bread, wine, gold, and silver will all be plentiful, and God will be duly worshipped. The king and his two sons will pass away peacefully in an age of prosperity.

Notably, there is no abdication of power in Jerusalem in the *Discourse of Bishop Methodius*. As András Kraft has pointed out, Byzantine apocalypses based on the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* began at some point to divide the King of the Greeks and his actions into two distinct figures, a Victorious Emperor, who defeats the Ishmaelites, and Last Roman Emperor, who surrenders his power in Jerusalem.¹³⁵ The *Discourse of Bishop Methodius* is focused on the war against the Ishmaelites and includes only a Victorious Emperor, whose conquests bring peace to the world.

The *Discourse of Bishop Methodius* takes a sudden turn at this point, seemingly forgetting about the golden age it had just proclaimed. It describes the rise of a new ruler from the north who will work great impurities and many injustices. Though the text is a bit garbled, the sense of the following lines are clear: this emperor will make monks leave their monasteries and marry them to nuns, an act of terrible transgression.¹³⁶ This ruler will be followed by another, but here again the two manuscripts present very different variants. According to B, Constantinople who will be ruled by “a foul and foreign woman.” In contrast, M says that a tall,

¹³¹ Ibid, 5.4–5; ed. Berger, *Die Griechische Daniel-Diegesen*, 13: καὶ ἀρεῖ κύριος τὴν δειλίαν τῶν Ῥωμαίων καὶ βάλλει εἰς τὰς καρδίας τοῦ Ἰσμαὴλ καὶ τὴν ἀνδρείαν τῶν Ἰσμηλιτῶν εἰς τὰς καρδίας τῶν Ῥωμαίων. καὶ ἐγείρει κύριος βασιλέα τῶν Ῥωμαίων, ὅνπερ λέγουσιν οἱ ἄνθρωποι νεκρὸν ὄντα καὶ εἰς οὐδὲν χρησιμεύοντα, ὅνπερ νομίζουσιν οἱ ἄνθρωποι πρὸ πολλῶν χρόνων ἀποθανόντα.

¹³² Ibid, 5.13–16.

¹³³ Ibid, 7.6

¹³⁴ Ibid, 6.22; ed. Berger, *Die Griechische Daniel-Diegesen*, 14: τὸ δὲ ὄνομα τοῦ βασιλέως ἐκείνου θηριώνυμος καλεῖται; ibid, 7.6; ed. Berger, *Die Griechische Daniel-Diegesen*, 13: τοῦτον γὰρ φυλάσσει ὁ κύριος εἰς τὴν ἔσω χώραν τῆς Περσίδος καὶ Συριακῆς ἐθνῶν.

¹³⁵ Kraft, “The Last Emperor *topos*,” 215.

¹³⁶ *Discourse of Bishop Methodius*, 7.12–25.

foreign man will rule in Constantinople.¹³⁷

In whatever case, their reign will be full of disasters. “Woe to you, seven-hilled Babylon,” it repeats with each disaster.¹³⁸ Finally, Constantinople will be drowned by the sea. Only the Column of Constantine will remain after the deluge, and merchants, coming upon it on their ships, will lament for the city. The *Discourse of Bishop Methodius* adds that the kingdom will then be transferred to the city of Rome.¹³⁹

The remainder of the text concerns the birth and reign of the Antichrist. The details are strange: The Antichrist will arise while an evil king named Dan rules Jerusalem. The spirit of the Antichrist will inhabit a fish, which will then impregnate a virgin girl named Perdition (thus the Antichrist is the “Son of Perdition”). Numerous details are given about the physiogamy of the Antichrist. Notably, there is no influence of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* on any of this material (unless the odd details about the Antichrist’s origin are meant to explain his name and origin in the *Apocalypse*). The work ends with the Antichrist and the Jews inflicting terrible persecutions on the Christians, but promises that the day of the Lord draws near.¹⁴⁰

The *Discourse of the Bishop Methodius* is clearly a difficult text. It appears to be a composite of several different layers. It can be roughly divided into three parts. The first part includes the Ishmaelite siege of Constantinople, the rise of the Victorious Emperor and conquest of the Ishmaelites, followed by an age of peace. The second part includes the subsequent negative rulers of Constantinople, and the sinking of Constantinople into the sea. The third and final part is made up of the material on the Antichrist.

Nonetheless, most scholarship on the *Discourse of Bishop Methodius* has treated it as a single discrete work and has sought to uncover the context of its composition. Scholars have tried to identify the historical figure behind each of the rulers mentioned in the *Discourse*, but no two scholars agrees on the identity of each of them. The following chart summarizes the positions of major scholars:

	Berger ¹⁴¹	Zervos ¹⁴²	Mango ¹⁴³	Hoyland ¹⁴⁴	Olster ¹⁴⁵	DiTommaso ¹⁴⁶	Kraft ¹⁴⁷
The Victorious	Leo III	Constantine V	Theodosius III (B) /	Leo III	Constantine IV/	Leo III	Leo III

¹³⁷ Ibid, 8.1; ed. Berger, *Die Griechische Daniel-Diegesse*, 14.

¹³⁸ Ibid, 9.1–3.

¹³⁹ Ibid, 9.7–9.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 10.1–14.15.

¹⁴¹ Berger, *Die Griechische Daniel-Diegesse*, 32–37.

¹⁴² Zervos, “Apocalypse of Daniel,” 755–758.

¹⁴³ Cyril Mango, “The Life of Saint Andrew the Fool Reconsidered,” *Rivista di studi bizantini e slavi* 2 (1982) 310–313.

¹⁴⁴ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 297–299.

¹⁴⁵ Olster, “Byzantine Apocalypses,” in *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, vol. 2: *Apocalypticism in Western History and Culture*, edited by B. McGinn (New York: Continuum, 1998), 65.

¹⁴⁶ DiTommaso, *The Book of Daniel*, 135–139,

¹⁴⁷ Kraft, “The Last Emperor topos,” 16–19.

s Emperor			Leo III (M)		Leo III		
The Impure Ruler from the North	Constanti ne V	Leo IV	Prophecy	Prophecy	Prophecy	Constantin e V	Prophecy
M: The Man from the South	N/A	Not discussed	Prophecy	Prophecy	Prophecy	Leo IV	Prophecy
B: The Foul Woman	Irene	Irene	Prophecy	Prophecy	Prophecy	Irene	Prophecy
Deluge in Constanti nople/Th e transfer of power to Rome	Coronati on of Charlema gne	Coronati on of Charlema gne	Prophecy	Prophecy	Prophecy	Prophecy	Prophecy

The scholarly theories, nonetheless, can be grouped into two different larger positions about date of the *Discourse of Bishop Methodius*. The most common, held by the Klaus Berger, who edited and wrote a monograph on the *Discourse*, and by G. T. Zervos, the English translator of the *Discourse*, holds that it was written shortly after the year 800. According to this theory, the foul woman was meant to be Empress Eirene, and the comment that the kingdom will be transferred from Constantinople to Rome referred to the coronation of Charlemagne on Christmas of the year 800.

Alternatively, Cyril Mango, Robert Hoyland, David Olster, and Andras Kraft have suggested that the *Discourse* was written during the 717–718 siege of Constantinople, perhaps to boost morale in the face of the Arab threat to the city. Thus, the Victorious Emperor was meant to evoke the reigning emperor Leo III, in order to fill readers with hope that he would break the Arab siege.¹⁴⁸ All the other rulers, then, do not correspond to real emperors, but were simply prophetic fantasies.

¹⁴⁸ According to Cyril Mango, “The Life of Saint Andrew the Holy Fool Reconsidered,” *Rivista di studi Bizantini e slavi*, vol. 2 (1982), 312, both manuscript versions of the *Discourse of Bishop Methodius* were written in the context of the Arab siege of Constantinople, but B represents an earlier version. Mango argues that in B the Victorious Emperor was supposed to represent Theodosius III (r. 715–717), who reigned briefly before the start of the siege. However, when he was overthrown by Leo III the *Discourse* was reedited (represented in M) to make the victorious emperor Leo III. This is an entirely unconvincing theory, as the differences between B and M, manuscripts from c. 1500, are far more likely to represent generations of scribal interventions than two competing eighth-century redactions. Moreover, as DiTomasso, *The Book of Daniel*, 137, points out, Theodosius III was overthrown before the siege of Constantinople began, making it unlikely that he was intended here.

This latter position is attractive, since it dispenses with the tedious and tangled problem of determining which rulers in the *Discourse* corresponds to which eighth-century emperor. Nonetheless, the rulers mentioned after the Victorious Emperor—the cruel persecutor of the monks and the female ruler—sound too close to Constantine V and Irene to simply be mere coincidental inventions dreamed up before they were even born. More likely these references really are *vaticinia ex eventu*. As DiTomasso has put it: though not everything in these passages is historical, “there are simply too many specific details present to dismiss the lot as eschatological expectation.”¹⁴⁹

The major weakness of all theories on the origin of the *Discourse of Bishop Methodius* so far is the tendency to treat it as the unified work of a single author. Instead, like most of the other Visions of Daniel apocalypses, it is more likely a pastiche of several apocalypses written at different times. Therefore, I suggest a slightly new interpretation of the development of the *Discourse of Bishop Methodius*. Though Mango, Hoyland, Olster, and Kraft are probably correct that the earliest portions of the *Discourse of Bishop Methodius* were written during or shortly after the 717–718 Arab siege of Constantinople, it was probably continually updated throughout the eighth century.

The earliest version, c. 718, likely only included the first part (the first five chapters as Berger has divided it). This prophecy predicted Leo III’s utter destruction of the Arabs and an age of peace that would come at the end of his reign. It adapted and rearranged material from the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* to better fit the contemporary events, and to suggest that the reigning emperor (Leo III) might fulfill the Last Roman Emperor prophecy. One can imagine such an eschatological tract coming as a welcome message to Byzantine Christians faced with the Arab siege of Constantinople. This early version possibly also included part 3, the material on the Antichrist. Later, supporters of Leo III and his son Constantine V may have continued to edit it.

A later scribe, hostile to the Isaurian dynasty, probably realized that the Victorious Emperor was meant to refer to Leo III, and sought to turn the recraft the apocalypse in order to criticize the iconoclast dynasty. This redactor probably added the second part, with its descriptions of evil rulers. Perhaps the redactor was a supporter of icons. If this were the case, the inclusion of the foul woman ruler seems strange—she appears to refer to Empress Eirene. The redactor may have been hostile toward Irene because he was working before her restoration of images, or simply because she was a woman who had claimed too much power for herself.

Andras Kraft has raised an important objection to identifying the “foul woman” ruler with Empress Eirene. He notes that this woman represents the whore of Babylon from the Book of Revelation. After the *Discourse* mentions her, it launches into a critique of “seven-hilled Babylon” modeled on the criticism of earthly Babylon in Revelation 18. Thus, according to Kraft, all this material is meant to communicate that Constantinople is Babylon from Revelation: “The foul woman might easily be a personification of the sinfulness of the imperial capital, just as the Revelation of John uses the harlot metaphor in reference to Babylon (i.e. Rome).

¹⁴⁹ DiTomasso, *The Book of Daniel*, 138.

Consequently, the woman's figure should not be read as a historical person but as a literary motif."¹⁵⁰

Kraft is correct. The foul woman, and the critique of seven-hilled Babylon that follow her introduction, is meant to evoke the Book of Revelation. I would add that so too is the drowning of Constantinople in the sea. This is modeled closely on Revelation 18, in which Babylon is sunk to the bottom of the sea and the merchants and kings lament its loss. Thus, the transfer of power is not a *vaticinium ex eventu* about the coronation of Charlemagne, but a prophecy about the future, when Constantinople is wiped from the earth for its sins.

Nonetheless, it is possible that the "foul woman" in the *Discourse* was intended to represent both the whore of Babylon and Empress Eirene. The rule of a woman could well have reminded contemporaries of the Biblical whore of Babylon; indeed, a terrible woman who rules over Constantinople prior to the city's annihilation becomes a common trope in Byzantine apocalypses, though no such figure is found in earlier apocalypses or in Latin or Syriac apocalypses.

More importantly, the connection to the Book of Revelation is indicative of the internal tensions that characterize the *Discourse of Bishop Methodius*. Part one is heavily influenced by the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, with its eschatological glorification of Roman Empire. Its hero is the Byzantine emperor, and it has him save Constantinople from conquest. Part two is influenced by the Book of Revelation, which excoriated the Roman Empire and which was one of the central texts upon which the common political-eschatological scenario was based. In this part, Constantinople is Babylon, the abode of sins, and must be drowned in the sea. The *Discourse* shows signs of competing narratives concerning imperial legitimacy in the eighth century. The Methodian eschatological scenario was effectively countered by an update based on the common political-eschatological scenario. The competing eschatological outlooks may be the result of successive pro- and anti-icon redactors.

IV.2: The "Sicilian Apocalypse"

The work I call the "Sicilian Apocalypse" does not survive on its own or in its original form, but has been incorporated in several Visions of Daniel apocalypses. It is present in one such apocalypse called the *Discourses of John Chrysostom Concerning the Vision of Daniel*, supposedly Saint John Chrysostom's explanation of Daniel's visions.¹⁵¹ In reality, this text is primarily an abridged version of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, with the "Sicilian Apocalypse" inserted in its middle.¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ Kraft, "Last Emperor topos," 230–231.

¹⁵¹ The *Discourses of John Chrysostom Concerning the Vision of Daniel* has been edited by Schmoldt, "Die Schrift vom Jungen Daniel," 220–237.

¹⁵² The *Discourses of John Chrysostom Concerning the Vision of Daniel* is sometimes considered a version of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*. Agostino Pertusi, *Fine di Bisanzio e fine del mondo: significato e ruolo storico delle profezie sulla caduta di Costantinopoli in Oriente e in Occidente*, ed. Enrico Morini (Rome: Istituto storico italiano per il Medio Evo, 1988), 38, called it "a cento of the *Apocalypse of Methodius* with an interpolation from the Visions of Daniel." According to Kraft, "Last Emperor topos," 233: "One can say that the *Pseudo-*

The “Sicilian Apocalypse” is also found in the *Vision of Daniel the Prophet on the Emperors*, a composition that is lost in its original Greek, but it is preserved in an Old Church Slavonic translation. This *Vision of Daniel* survives in five Slavonic manuscripts, and accompanies the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* in two of the oldest and most important manuscript copies. It begins with Gabriel giving Daniel a prophecy associated with the beast dream of Daniel 7, in which Daniel sees four beasts, ten horns, and four winds. Gabriel interprets the vision for Daniel, but his interpretation itself uses the obscure language of prophecy. Each beast, horn, and wind is identified with an individual ruler. Thus the four beasts do not represent kingdoms here, but Byzantine emperors. They are barely-disguised representations of the rulers of the Isaurian dynasty: Leo III (he has the shape of a lion, and he blasphemes and destroys the altars to God), Constantine V (he will be temporarily forced from his throne by a relative), Leo IV (he will have the name of a beast and take a wife from an ancient Greek city), and Constantine VI (he will rule with his mother, but she will slay him). The identities of the ten horns are less clear. The first four are transparently Eirene (a woman ruler), Nikephoros I (the enemies he pursues in war will turn and kill him), Stavrakios (his reign briefer than all others), and Michael I (he will have the name of an angel). The later horns are less clear, and do not correspond as closely to the historical succession of emperors, though their impiety is a major theme, so they may represent the emperors of the second iconoclast period. Still, others appear to be purely invented. The *Vision of Daniel the Prophet on the Emperors* then segues into the “Sicilian Apocalypse”

The “Sicilian Apocalypse” begins with Daniel asking Gabriel why Christians will have to suffer terrible afflictions. Gabriel answers with lines out the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*: “Not because the Lord God loves Ishmael did he give to him the power to take possession of the land of the Romans, but because of the sins of those residing in it.”¹⁵³ From here, the “Sicilian Apocalypse” provides a *vaticinium ex eventu* account of the Arab conquest of Sicily.

The version in the Old Church Slavonic *Vision of Daniel the Prophet on the Emperors* is slightly longer. It includes a summary of the rebellion of Euphemius, a local commander who in 826 rose up against the governor and seized control of Syracuse, before suffering a defeat and fleeing to Africa. The Aghlabid emir provided Euphemius an army of Arabs and Berbers to retake Sicily, and it was this army that eventually began the Islamic conquest of Sicily. In the “Sicilian Apocalypse,” all this is told as a *vaticinium ex eventu*, wherein Euphemius is simply called “the rebel,” and Syracuse is referred to as the “Rebel City” (τὴν καλουμένην τυραννίδα πόλιν in the *Discourses of John Chrysostom*).

According to the “Sicilian Apocalypse,” the Ishmaelites will enter the island and inflict great suffering on its inhabitants. The “Sicilian Apocalypse” quotes the *Apocalypse of Methodius*

Chrysostomos Apocalypse is an abbreviated version of the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* with a few emendations.” Indeed, one of the two manuscript copies even contains a marginal note that reads: “This is not by Chrysostom but by Methodius!” (οὐκ εἰς τοῦ Χρυσοστόμου ἀλλὰ τοῦ ΜΕΘΟΔΙΟΥ); see E. Feron, F. Battaglini, and Giuseppe Cozza-Luzi, *Codices manuscripti graeci ottoniani Bibliothecae Vaticanae descripti praeside Alphonso cardinali Capeceletro* (Rome 1893) 229–232.

¹⁵³ See the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, XI.5; and *Vision of Daniel the Prophet on the Emperors*, 5.

of *Patara* extensively to describe the devastation the Ishmaelites will inflict. As in the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, the decisive moment will come when the Ishmaelites blaspheme and say that the Romans have no salvation. In the Rebel City the people will seize a poor man, “whom men considered as if dead and good for nothing,” and anoint him emperor.¹⁵⁴ Then he will cleanse the island of the Ishmaelites: “This man will go forth against the Ishmaelites at a certain place called Petrinon, and they will fight a fierce war... And the Lord God will surrender Ishmael into the hands of the emperor.”¹⁵⁵

Next, the new emperor will build up a fleet and sail to Italy, where he will tame the Blond Races,” who are seemingly identified with the Lombards (“in the place called Langobardia,” εἰς τόπον λεγόμενον Λωγγιβαρδίας), and with them expel the Ishmaelites from Italy, and enter Rome in triumph. There he will uncover a secret treasure, and distribute this wealth to the people. Next, he will march toward “the City of Seven Hills,” Constantinople. Whoever will rule it at the time will flee, allowing the emperor to enter.

Here, the version of the “Sicilian Apocalypse” in the *Discourses of John Chrysostom* abruptly ends, and the narrative shifts to an account of the Antichrist’s origins and rise from the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*. In the *Vision of Daniel on the Emperors*, however, the story continues a little longer: the emperor will fight a battle with enemies and triumph, and center Constantinople, where he will restore the images and rebuild the altars. The emperor dies in an age of renewed peace.¹⁵⁶ At this point, the “Sicilian Apocalypse” in the *Vision of Daniel on the Emperors* ends, and the rest of the text is taken directly from the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*: the invasion of the Unclean Peoples, the surrender at Golgotha by a (new) Last Roman Emperor, the rise of the Antichrist.

The longer version of the “Sicilian Apocalypse” in the *Vision of Daniel on the Emperors* is probably closer to the original Greek apocalypse. Its beginning and end were simply lost when it was interpolated into the *Discourses of John Chrysostom*; it seems unlikely, especially, that the material at the beginning that set the political stage for the Ishmaelite invasion of Sicily would have been interpolated later.

Thus, the original Greek “Sicilian Apocalypse” seems to have placed its hopes for the restoration of icons in a Last Roman Emperor who would arise from Sicily. This was not an unfounded expectation. Sicily had seen numerous rebellions against imperial authority. In this sense, the “Sicilian Apocalypse” probably represents a pro-icon apocalyptic composition written

¹⁵⁴ *Discourses of John Chrysostom Concerning the Vision of Daniel*, 5; ed. Schmoldt, “Die Schrift vom Jungen Daniel,” 230: ὃν εἶχον οἱ ἄνθρωποι ὡσεὶ νεκρὸν καὶ οὐδὲν χρησιμεύοντα. For the lines in the *Vision of Daniel the Prophet on the Emperors*, see Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, 69.

¹⁵⁵ *Discourses of John Chrysostom Concerning the Vision of Daniel*, 5; ed. Schmoldt, “Die Schrift vom Jungen Daniel,” 230: οὗτος ἐξελεύσεται εἰς τοὺς Ἰσμαηλίτας ἐν τόπῳ τινὶ λεγομένῳ Πετρίνω, καὶ συγκροτήσουσι πόλεμον ἰσχυρόν...καὶ παραδώσει κύριος ὁ θεὸς τὸν Ἰσμαὴλ εἰς χεῖρας τοῦ βασιλέως. For the *Vision of Daniel the Prophet on the Emperors*, see also Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, 69–70. Petrinon (Πετρίνω) is presumably to be identified with ancient Petra, modern *Petraglia* or *Petralia* (Sicilian: *Pitralia*), an inland town a little southeast of Palermo, at the base of the Madonie mountain range.

¹⁵⁶ Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, 71.

during the period of the second iconoclasm (the Arab invasion of Sicily began in 827, fifteen years before the final restoration of the icons).

Warren Treadgold has argued that the “Sicilian Apocalypse,” based on its author’s apparent knowledge of the extent of the Muslim conquest of Sicily, must have been written in 829, and has suggested that the author was the future patriarch Methodius himself.¹⁵⁷ As Treadgold points out, Methodius was a native of Syracuse and spent a long period in Rome, which would explain the familiarity the apocalypse has with the geography of Sicily and Italy, and in 829 he was imprisoned by the iconoclast government for composing false prophecies about the impending death of the emperor.¹⁵⁸ Treadgold further hypothesizes that future patriarch chose the name Methodius, which would not have been his baptismal name but rather a monastic name, because of its association with the apocalyptic genre (thanks to the fame of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* in Byzantium).¹⁵⁹

Such speculation is fascinating but impossible to prove. Whatever the case, the “Sicilian Apocalypse” is notable because it reveals the clear use of the Methodian political-eschatological scenario in a pro-icon context. Here, the Last Emperor has great military successes against the Ishmaelites of the sort only iconoclast emperors had enjoyed by c. 829. Nonetheless, when the emperor arrives in Constantinople, he restores the icons. It seems unlikely that this was an originally iconoclast composition that was rewritten by an iconodule, as I have suggested was the case with the *Discourse of Bishop Methodius*. There is absolutely nothing in the “Sicilian Apocalypse” to suggest an earlier affinity for Leo III, Constantine V, or any of the other iconoclast emperors. Instead, the version in the *Vision of Daniel the Prophet on the Emperors* includes, as we have seen, an introductory prophecy deeply hostile to the first iconoclast rulers (the Isaurians) that correlates them with the four kingdoms of Daniel.

Thus, the “Sicilian Apocalypse” probably represents an example of the coopting of the Methodian political-eschatological scenario by supporters of icons. The pro-icon seems to have experimented with the idea of a Last Emperor who would restore the icons. Indeed, the fact that the concept of the Last Emperor remained an important eschatological theme in post-iconoclasm Byzantium indicates that the Last Emperor must at some point have been freed of any strong association with iconoclast rulers.

¹⁵⁷ Warren Treadgold, “The Prophecies of Patriarch Methodius,” *Revue des études byzantines*, vol. 62 (2004), 229–237. Treadgold points out that the apocalypse knows about the siege of Henna in Sicily in 829, but not about the death of the usurper Euphemius, still accompanying the Muslim army, shortly later.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 231–233. Treadgold does not fully appreciate the pastiche nature of the Visions of Daniel apocalypses, and so he suggests that the prophecy written by Methodius must have been a Greek version of the entirety of the *Vision of Daniel on the Emperors*. Moreover, Treadgold connects this to Methodius’ supposed composition of a prophecy predicting the death of Emperor Michael II, since a figure resembling Michael II is one of the rulers described toward the beginning of the *Vision of Daniel on the Emperors*; nonetheless, this connection is unlikely, since there is no reason to assume that the “Sicilian Apocalypse” originally circulated with the material at the beginning of the *Vision of Daniel on the Emperors*.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 234.

IV.3: The “Apocalypse of Andrew the Holy Fool”

The *Life of Andrew the Holy Fool* is one of three similar hagiographies of the tenth century about fictional saints supposedly written in earlier periods (the *Life of St. Niphon*, which purports to have been written in the fourth century; the *Life of Andrew the Holy Fool* which purports to have been written in the fifth century; and the *Life of Basil the Younger*, which takes place just a few years before it was probably actually composed). All three were likely produced by the same circle of clerics at the Hagia Sophia.¹⁶⁰ Each contains a vision of the end of the world, all of them heavily dependent on the Book of Revelation.

In the *Life of St. Basil the Younger*, the narrator, Gregory, tells Basil about a vision he received. In this lengthy story-within-a-story, Gregory is led by an angel to the heavenly Jerusalem and receives a tour of it, before he witnesses the second coming. The armies of Christ defeat the Antichrist, and in a lengthy last judgment scene, he watches God consign to hellfire the pagans, Jews, and Muslims, and later Arius, Nestorius, Eutyches and Dioskoros (Miaphysite theologians), Origen, and all their followers, and then the Monothelites and iconoclasts. The vision in the *Life of St. Niphon* is focused far more on individual eschatology. He sees the Last Judgment, with Christ returning to the world with his army, led by the Archangel Michael. The armies capture the dragon, Satan, while a trumpeter announces the resurrection of the dead.¹⁶¹

The *Life of Andrew the Holy Fool* follows the other two contemporary hagiographies in having its saintly protagonist, in this case Andrew, narrate to a follower (here a man named Epiphanius) a vision of the end of the world.¹⁶² The vision in the *Life of Andrew the Holy Fool*, usually called the “Apocalypse of Andrew the Holy Fool,” is far more concerned with political eschatology than the others. It describes in detail the supposed future fate of Constantinople and its empire.

Andrew begins his discourse to Epiphanius with a prediction worthy of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*: though many nations would attack her, Constantinople will never be captured up to the end of the world. He suggests instead, however, that the empire would collapse from the inside. He charts the course of this decline through the reigns of future emperors.

¹⁶⁰ See Lennart Rydén, “The Life of St. Basil the Younger and the Date of the Life of St. Andreas Salos,” *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, vol. 7 (1983), 568–586; Paul Magdalino, “What We Heard of the Saints We have Seen with Our Own Eyes: The Holy Man as Literary Text in Tenth-Century Constantinople,” in *The Cult of the Saints in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages: Essays on the Contribution of Peter Brown*, ed. J. Howard-Johnston and P. A. Hayward (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999), 83–112. Mango, “The Life of Saint Andrew the Holy Fool Reconsidered,” 297–313, argued that the apocalyptic portion of the Life of Andrew the Holy Fool originated in the seventh century, but this few has not been widely adopted.

¹⁶¹ An edition, translation, and study of the scene is available in Vasileios Marinis, “The Vision of the Last Judgment in the Vita of Saint Niphon (BHG 1371z),” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, vol. 71 (2017), 193–227.

¹⁶² The *Life of Andrew the Holy Fool* was extremely popular in the Byzantine and post-Byzantine world. Over ninety manuscripts survive. Fragments could in a palimpsest date to the tenth century, but these pages do not include the apocalyptic scene. Lennart Rydén, “The Andreas Salos Apocalypse. Greek Text, Translation, and Commentary,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, vol. 28 (1974), 197–261, has edited the apocalyptic portion of the Life on the basis of four manuscripts, two of which date to the eleventh century. I have used his edition and English translation here.

“In the last days the Lord God will raise up an emperor from poverty.”¹⁶³ The beginning of this emperor’s reign will be a time of peace and prosperity. Eventually he will wage war against the Ishmaelites: “Therefore, [God] will alert the Emperor of the Romans and rouse him against [the Ishmaelites] and he will destroy them and kill their children with fire, and those who have been given into his hands will be handed over to violent torment.”¹⁶⁴ In this way, the emperor acts out the conquest and subjugation of the Ishmaelites that the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* predicted about the Last Emperor. Nonetheless, this emperor will, according to the “Apocalypse of Andrew the Holy Fool,” soon after die. Thus, the emperor figure fits the Victorious Emperor typology: he defeats the Ishmaelites but does not surrender power.

That emperor will be succeeded by a cruel ruler, a “son of lawlessness.” This new emperor will force all sorts of sexual depravity on his people: parents will be forced to have sex with their children, siblings will be forced to have intercourse with one another, monks will be forced to have sex with nuns, and the emperor will prostitute his own mother and sister. God, in his anger, will cause this emperor to be overthrown and war and destruction will consume the earth.¹⁶⁵

A new emperor will take power, but this one will be an apostate who delights in pagan literature and burns down churches, denies Christ, and murders many of his people. Further miseries will be inflicted upon the earth at this time, as earthquakes ravage the great cities and all the lands south of Thrace will become desolate.¹⁶⁶ The pagan emperor, too, will die. He will be succeeded by an Ethiopian emperor, who will rebuild the destroyed churches and rule for twelve years. He will be followed by an Arab emperor. Under the reign of the Arab ruler, the pieces of the true cross will be collected together and the cross reconstituted. “He will go to Jerusalem, to a place where the feet of Jesus Christ the true God stood and there he will, with his own hands, dedicate the precious wood of the cross and the imperial diadem. Together with these he will also surrender to the Lord God his soul.”¹⁶⁷ Thus, the Arab emperor represents the functions of the Last Emperor, surrendering his crown in Jerusalem.

However, in the “Apocalypse of Andrew the Holy Fool,” this act will not bring about the end of the empire or the rise of the Antichrist or beginning of Christ’s kingdom. Rather, history will continue on as if nothing happened. New rulers will arise: Three lazy and foolish young men will establish themselves in different parts of the empire, and wage war against one another. In

¹⁶³ The “Apocalypse of Andrew the Holy Fool,” 853B; ed. Rydén, “The Andreas Salos Apocalypse,” 202 (translation on *ibid*, 215–216): Ἐν ταῖς ἐσχάταις ἡμέραις ἀναστήσει κύριος ὁ θεὸς βασιλέα ἀπὸ πενίας.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 856A; ed. Rydén, “The Andreas Salos Apocalypse,” 202 (translation on *ibid*, 216; I have slightly modified this translation): 856A)

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 856D–857A.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 856C–860B.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 860C; ed. Rydén, “The Andreas Salos Apocalypse,” 206 (translation on *ibid*, 219): Καὶ αὐτὸς γενόμενος ἐν Ἱερουσαλὴμ ἐν τόπῳ οὗ ἔστησαν οἱ πόδες Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ ἀληθινοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν οἰκεῖαις χερσὶν αὐτοῦ παραθήσει ἐκεῖ τὸ τίμιον ξύλον καὶ τὸ τῆς βασιλείας διάδημα. Παραδώσει δὲ κυρίῳ τῷ θεῷ σὺν τούτοις καὶ τὴν φυλὴν αὐτοῦ.

their wars nearly all Roman men will perish. Those who survive will become depraved by their access to so many women desperate for male affection.¹⁶⁸

Then, a woman will take up power. “She will be full of Bacchic frenzy, a daughter of the devil, a sorceress, mad after men and women alike. In her days there will be mutual plotting and slaughter in public and in private.”¹⁶⁹ The empress will call herself a goddess, and open the churches to singing, dancing, and incest. She will gather together the icons of the saints, all the liturgical vessels, and all the gospels and writings of the fathers and set them ablaze in a great bonfire. Then, after destroying the church of Hagia Sophia, she will even challenge God: “You, impotent God, see what I have done and you could not even touch a hair of my head!”¹⁷⁰ She will brag to God that her powers surpass even his own.

Then, suddenly a great wave will rise and swallow her and Constantinople up into the abyss. All that will remain will be the Column of Constantine. “Only this will remain and be saved, so that the ships will come and tie up their ropes to it and [the sailors will] weep for and lament this Babylon, saying, ‘Woe to us! Our great city, in which our business prospered, has disappeared into the depths of the sea!’”¹⁷¹ The government will be transferred to other cities. God will cause Alexander’s gate to open, and the armies of Gog and Magog will surge forth. They are described in much the same language as in the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, eating all manner of unclean thing.¹⁷² After the devastation they inflict, the Antichrist will arise. He will be of the tribe of Dan. He will kill Elijah and Enoch, and lead many astray. Then, at the second coming, the Antichrist and his demons will be cast into Hell.

Since the *Life of Andrew the Holy Fool* is set several centuries before it was written, it has long been assumed that the prophecies spoken by the St. Andrew in it were *vaticinia ex eventu*. Scholars have thus attempted to mine his apocalypse for historical details and to identify the various rulers of Constantinople mentioned in it. Thus, Vasilev thought that the first, victorious emperor was Michael III and so the work must express apocalyptic concerns during his reign. Wortley, however, on account of the emperor having been “raised up from poverty” believes that the emperor must be Basil I.¹⁷³ Lennart Rydén, the editor of the *Life of Andrew the Holy Fool*, followed by Andras Kraft, believe that the five emperors are represent the emperors of the fourth century projected into an apocalyptic future. Thus, the Victorious Emperor is

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, 860C–864A.

¹⁶⁹ The “Apocalypse of Andrew the Holy Fool,” 864A; ed. Rydén, “The Andreas Salos Apocalypse,” 208 (translation on ibid, 220): Καὶ αὐτὸς γενόμενος ἐν Ἱερουσαλὴμ ἐν τόπῳ οὗ ἔστησαν οἱ πόδες Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ ἀληθινοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν οἰκείαις χερσὶν αὐτοῦ παραθήσει ἐκεῖ τὸ τίμιον ξύλον καὶ τὸ τῆς βασιλείας διάδημα. Παραδώσει δὲ κυρίῳ τῷ θεῷ σὺν τούτοις καὶ τὴν φυγὴν αὐτοῦ.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, 864C; ed. Rydén, “The Andreas Salos Apocalypse,” 209 (translation on ibid, 221): Ἰδοὺ σοὶ τι ἔκαμον, ἄδυνατε, καὶ οὐκ ἠδυνήθης κἀν τριχός μου ἄψασθαι.

¹⁷¹ Ibid, 868B; ed. Rydén, “The Andreas Salos Apocalypse,” 211 (translation on ibid, 222; I have modified Rydén’s translation slightly): Αὐτὸς οὖν μόνος μένει καὶ σωθήσεται, ὥστε παραγενόμενα τὰ πλοῖα καὶ ἐν τούτῳ τοὺς σχοίνους αὐτῶν ἀποδήσαντες κλαύσουσι καὶ θρηνήσουσι τὴν Βαβυλῶνα ταύτην λέγοντες· Ὁὐαὶ ἡμῖν ὅτι ἡ πόλις ἡμῶν ἢ μεγάλη βεβύθηται, ἐν ἣ εἰσόντες τὰς πραγματείας ἐποιούμεν καλῶς ἐν αὐτῇ.

¹⁷² Ibid, 868C–869A.

¹⁷³ Alexander Vasilev, “The Emperor Michael III in Apocryphal Literature,” *Byzantina et Metabyzantina*, vol. 1 (1946), 237–248; John Wortley, “The Warrior-Emperor of the Andrew Salos Apocalypse,” *Analecta Bollandiana*, vol. 88 (1970), 43–59.

Constantine, the lecherous emperor Constantius II, the pagan emperor is Julian the Apostate, the good Ethiopian is Alexander the Great (for some reason added among these Roman emperors), and the Arabian “Last Emperor” is Jovian.¹⁷⁴

While it is certainly possible that the description of these emperors was influenced by the historical memory of “good” and “bad” emperors, like Constantine and Julian respectively, the attempt to precisely correlate the apocalyptic rulers with actual fourth-century rulers is ultimately not a useful exercise. Instead, the “Apocalypse of Andrew the Holy Fool” should be read in the context of political eschatology.

For this purpose, Kraft has made a crucial point, in showing that the “Apocalypse of Andrew the Holy Fool” describes seven rulers in Constantinople, which matches the Book of Revelation (17:9): “The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits. They are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come.” Kraft recognized that the author had combined elements from the Book of Revelation and the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*.¹⁷⁵

What was the point of this odd exercise in literary fusion? Kraft suggests that the author was trying to reconcile the two works, and also sought show parallels between the Last Emperor/King of the Greeks in the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* with the rulers of the fourth century.¹⁷⁶ This explanation is hardly satisfactory. There is no clear reason why it would have been necessary to compare the eschatological Last Emperor with fourth-century emperors. Instead, when read in light of the tension between the common political-eschatological scenario and the Methodian political-eschatological scenario, the “Apocalypse of Andrew the Holy Fool” reveals another way the two could be reconciled.

In the “Apocalypse of Andrew the Holy Fool” we find a new counter narrative to the Methodian political-eschatological scenario. It incorporates the *topoi* from the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, which had become extremely influential, including the victory over the Ishmaelites, the surrender of power in Jerusalem, and the opening of the gates of the north. However, in the “Apocalypse of Andrew the Holy Fool,” the roles of all these *topoi* are changed. An emperor goes to Jerusalem, surrenders his diadem, and dies there. However, this act has absolutely no consequences. History and the empire continue on, as new rulers come to power in Constantinople to replace the deceased emperor.

The “Apocalypse of Andrew the Holy Fool” thus rearranges and re-narrates the crucial elements of the apocalyptic tradition originating in the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* to tell a new version of future events that denies the pro-imperial eschatology of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*. After the surrender of power in Jerusalem, the Roman Empire is divided by civil war and then it is seized by an evil woman. She is the Whore of Babylon from the Book of Revelation. Thus, Constantinople becomes Babylon. The empire is once again the evil, persecutory fourth kingdom from the Book of Daniel and Revelation. When Constantinople is

¹⁷⁴ Rydén, “The Andreas Salos Apocalypse,” 238-247; Kraft, “The Last Emperor *topos*,” 242.

¹⁷⁵ Kraft, “The Last Emperor *topos*,” 243.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, 242–24.

drowned in the sea, the prophecy of the destruction of Babylon from the Book of Revelation is fulfilled. The “Apocalypse of Andrew the Holy Fool” even paraphrases Revelation 18:11–19, in which the merchants of the earth weep for the loss of Babylon; in the “Apocalypse of Andrew the Holy Fool,” these merchants tie up their ships to the Column of Constantine, the only point remaining above the waves.

Whereas the *Discourse of Bishop Methodius* simply contradicted a narrative based on the Methodian eschatological scenario with a continuation based on the Book of Revelation, the “Apocalypse of Andrew the Holy Fool” blended the two into a more coherent narrative. It provided a sort of counter-history of the future in which the Methodian political-eschatological scenario will take place but has no meaning, and will be quickly followed by a sequence of events in which, like in common political-eschatological scenario, the empire falls into evil and is destroyed like Babylon in the Book of Revelation.

Later Recensions of the *Apocalypses of Methodius of Patara*.

The final case study here will consist of several scenes from later recensions of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* itself. The *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* survives in four Greek recensions. While the first Greek recension (the one that has been discussed so far) was a fairly close translation of the Syriac (with some interpolations, most of which have already been discussed), new recensions appear in Byzantine and post-Byzantine manuscripts. These added, subtracted, and altered the initial version. Like the Visions of Daniel apocalypses, these new recensions are virtually impossible to date. Sometimes surprisingly anti-imperial insertions were made into the *Apocalypse* in these recensions.

Such insertions are rare in the second recension, but an interesting example is to be found in the third recension.¹⁷⁷ Once the Last Emperor goes to Jerusalem to surrender power, according to this version, Constantinople will sink into the sea: “When the emperor has departed from Seven-Hilled Babylon and arrived at the place he was led [Jerusalem], the city called Babylon will be drowned.”¹⁷⁸ The theme of Constantinople’s inundation, as we have seen, was quite common in Byzantine apocalypses. It evoked the destruction of Babylon in the Book of Revelation, an association made explicit in the third recension of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* when the text calls Constantinople “Seven-Hilled Babylon.”

¹⁷⁷ The Third Recension of the Greek *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* has been edited by Anastasius Lolos, *Die dritte und vierte Redaktion des Ps.-Methodios* (Meisenheim am Glan: Hain, 1978). An earlier edition was published by Istrin, *Откровение Мефодия Патарскаго*, vol. 2, 51–66. The earliest extant manuscript of this recension, Mount Athos, Docheiariou cod. 197 (Lambros 2871), dates to the fifteenth century, but it contains only the end (from chapter XII to the beginning of XIV), and it is here attributed to “Theodosius of Patara.” Paris, BNF Suppl. Gr. 467, of the sixteenth century, also contains only the prophetic portion (opening at X.6). I have found another copy found in Cod. Venice, Marciana It. XI.6, a collection of apocalyptic material and historical material, in Greek and Italian. All the complete manuscript copies of this recension, however (i.e. those containing the historical portions) date to the seventeenth century or later, and are held by monasteries on Mt. Athos and Patmos.

¹⁷⁸ The Third Recension of the Greek *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, XIII.21; ed. Lolos, *Die dritte und vierte Redaktion*, 70: ἐξιόντος δὲ τοῦ βασιλέως ἐκ Βαβυλῶνος τῆς ἑπταλόφου καὶ ἐπιόντος ἐν τόπῳ ἀπαχθεὶς ποντισθήσεται ἡ πόλις ἡ λεγομένη Βαβυλὼν.

A fourth recension of the Greek *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* has been found in five manuscript copies, all likely dating to the seventeenth century.¹⁷⁹ Dean Sakel has shown that a number of these manuscripts, which also contain a world chronicle up to the year 1570, originate from around Serres in Macedonia. There is no way to establish a date for this recension, though it is possible that this recension dates to only after the fall of the Byzantine Empire.

The fourth Greek recension is much shortened, containing only the prophetic portion of the *Apocalypse*, and is concerned mainly with the invasion of the Ishmaelites.¹⁸⁰ It opens directly: “In the last days, because of our sins, the seed of Ishmael will rise up from Yathrib.”¹⁸¹ It notes that the Ishmaelites will long make war upon the Romans. From here it follows the final chapters of the first recension quite closely. However, at XIII.25, The fourth Greek recension contains an interpolation not present in any of the other recensions. It begins: “And before the Antichrist comes, a wicked and Satanic emperor will rise up, who will be the forerunner of the Antichrist.”¹⁸² This rest of new material concerns the reign this evil ruler and persecutions, and the natural disasters that accompany it are described in great detail. The fourth Greek recension ends with the coming of the Antichrist, but his reign and nature are not described; this recension ends abruptly by referring readers to Ephrem the Syrian for more information on the Antichrist.¹⁸³

Here the fourth recension effectively undoes all the innovation of the original *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*. The original had replaced the Little Horn, the evil final ruler, with a heroic Christian Last Emperor. The fourth recension adds an evil ruler back into the narrative, placing his rule after that of the Last Emperor and before the coming of the Antichrist.

Conclusions: The Thematic Melting Pot of Byzantine Apocalypses

The *Discourse of Bishop Methodius*, “*Sicilian Apocalypse*,” “*Apocalypse of Andrew the Holy Fool*,” and the later recensions of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* all reproduce to

¹⁷⁹ Lolos, *Die dritte und vierte Redaktion*, 15–16, identified Cod. Athos 3290 (Koutloumousiou 217) of the seventeenth century, and Paris Gr. Suppl. cod. 467. Dean Sakel, “Manuscripts of the Chronicle of 1570,” *Byzantion*, vol. 83 (2013), 363–374, gives three additional manuscript copies Athens, Greek National Library cod. 1564 (c. 1628 AD), Athens, Greek National Library cod. 2501 (1623 AD), and Manchester, Greek cod. 22 (1622 AD). The date of Paris, BNF Suppl. Gr. cod. 467 is a matter of some confusion. Lolos mistakenly numbers the latter cod. 462 on Lolos, *Die dritte und vierte Redaktion*, 16, and gives it a date of the eighteenth century (a date the conforms to Paris Gr. Suppl. cod. 462), and though he gives the correct manuscript number on *ibid*, 19, he maintains a dating of the eighteenth century. The catalog of the BNF lists cod. 467 as sixteenth century; Dean Sakel, “Manuscripts of the Chronicle of 1570,” 19 n14, dates the manuscript to the seventeenth century. I am inclined to follow Sakel’s dating.

¹⁸⁰ The Fourth Recension of the Greek *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* also has been edited by Anastasius Lolos, *Die dritte und vierte Redaktion des Ps.-Methodios* (Meisenheim am Glan: Hain, 1978). Earlier, the text was available in the version of Istrin, *Откровение Мефодия Патарскаго*, vol. 2, 67–74, based on a single manuscript (Paris, BNF Suppl. Gr. cod. 467). This recension is listed in Halkin, *BHG Supplementum*, 10, as 2036c.

¹⁸¹ The Fourth Recension of the Greek *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, X.6; ed. Lolos, *Die dritte und vierte Redaktion*, 77: ἐν ταῖς ἐσχάταις ἡμέραις διὰ τὰς ἁμαρτίας ἡμῶν ἑπαναστήσεται τὸ σπέρμα τοῦ Ἰσμαὴλ ἀπὸ Ἑθρίβου.

¹⁸² *Ibid*, XIII.25; ed. Lolos, *Die dritte und vierte Redaktion*, 77: καὶ πρὶν τοῦ ἔλθεῖν τὸν ἀντίχριστον ἀναστήσεται μία βασιλεία πονηρὰ καὶ σατανικὴ, ἥτις ὑπάρχει πρόδρομος τοῦ ἀντιχρίστου

¹⁸³ *Ibid*, XIII.28; ed. Lolos, *Die dritte und vierte Redaktion*, 78.

some degree the Methodian political-eschatological scenario. For example, they all include a heroic eschatological emperor who triumphs over the Ishmaelites; this figure was based on the King of the Greeks/Last Emperor from the original *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*. However, new *topoi* are found within these sources: an evil eschatological emperor (who, in some of these, marries monks to nuns and commits other crimes vaguely reminiscent of Constantine V); an evil female ruler (likely an allusion to Empress Eirene, but also clearly influenced by the whore of Babylon in the Book of Revelation); and a flood that drowns Constantinople under the sea (recalling the destruction of Babylon in the Book of Revelation). All of these *topoi* suggest a more pessimistic appraisal of the empire's future—it will fall into the hands of evil rulers, it will become the sinful Babylon of Biblical prophecy, and it will be justly destroyed in punishment.

Each of these sources put these elements together in different ways. These all appear to be experiments, as individual authors attempted to reconcile apocalyptic prophecies and turn them to the rhetorical needs of the present.

Chapter Conclusions

Byzantium faced major crises from the late seventh through the ninth centuries. The incursions of the Arabs and the Bulgars seriously threatened the survival of the empire. Christological controversy, and then the conflict over icons, divided the empire. God seemed to be punishing the empire. It is probably no coincidence that in this chaotic period, the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, and the Methodian political-eschatological scenario based upon its vision of the empire's future, came to be embraced in the Byzantine Empire.

The Methodian political-eschatological scenario offered a more hopeful vision of the future than had the common political-eschatological scenario. In times of great stress for the empire, this scenario had much to offer. It promised that the empire had a major positive role to plan in the consummation of history and so would last until the end of time. It suggested that the final ruler of the empire would not be the Antichrist, but a heroic Last Emperor who would protect Christians, and not persecute them.

Indeed, the continuing appeal for the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* in times of uncertainty is expressed much later, in a surviving letter addressed on July 29, 1453, two months to the day after the fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks. It was written by a Greek priest in Thrace named Demetrius to a friend: "I entreat your aid, that you send me the book of Saint Methodius of Patara, either an old copy or a newly written one, if you have it. Do not fail to send it, I entreat you, and as soon as possible I will send it back to you. For the sake of our friendship do not do otherwise, because I have need of it."¹⁸⁴ As this chapter has shown, in the history of the Byzantine Empire, he was hardly alone in this need.

¹⁸⁴ Letter of a priest named Demetrius, addressed on July 29, 1453, ed. Jean Darrouzès, "Lettres de 1453," *Revue des études byzantines*, vol. 22 (1964), 91: Παρακαλῶ τὴν ἀντίληψίν σου πάμπολλα ἵνα μοι ἀποστείλῃς τὸ βιβλίον τοῦ ἁγίου Μεθοδίου τοῦ Πατάρων, ἢ τὸ ἄρχαιον ἢ καὶ νεόγραφον, ἐὰν ἔχῃς· καὶ μηδὲν τὸ ἀμελήσης.

Nonetheless, imperial pessimism did not simply fade away. The citizens and subjects of the Byzantine Empire could not forget the apparent references to their empire in the Book of Daniel and the Book of Revelation. Though the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* provided an interpretation of the four kingdoms of Daniel which redeemed the status of the fourth kingdom, it was impossible to ignore the long tradition handed down from the church fathers that affirmed the fourth kingdom as the kingdom of the Antichrist. This tradition also had a major appeal, especially when emperors appeared to step out of line in asserting their prerogatives.

The pro-imperial eschatology derived from the Syriac tradition of Aphrahat battled the more guarded eschatology handed down from the Greek and Latin church fathers, with its apprehension toward the empire's future, for the soul of Byzantium. In the end, the conflict remained a draw.

παρακαλῶ σε, καὶ συντομώτατα τὸ θέλω στείλειν ἐξοπίσω τῇ σῇ λογιότητι καὶ μὴδὲν γένηται ἄλλως τῆς φιλίας ἡμῶν ἔνεκα, ὅτι ἔχω τὸ ἀνάγκην.

Conclusions

Writing in the last decade of the seventeenth century, Jacob Wagner von Wagenfels, tutor to the Holy Roman Emperor's son, sought to demonstrate that, despite its seeming diminution as a result of the Thirty Years' War half a century earlier and its eclipse by Louis XIV's France, the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation remained a world empire and its emperor the most important ruler in the world. In his 1691 publication—part religious tract, part political manifesto, and part mirror for princes—titled *Germany's Call to Honor (Ehren-Ruff Teutschlands)*, he asserted that the Holy Roman Empire was the fourth and last world empire, successor to those of Cyrus the Persian, Alexander the Great, and Caesar Augustus. Its world monarchy had been foreseen by many prophets, for it was the fourth kingdom spoken of by the prophet Daniel: "I say to the end that the fourth and last monarchy is our German monarchy, and (if God wills it) it will continue up to the end of the world."¹⁸⁵

The seventeenth century was replete with examples of messianic movements that declared themselves the very saints who would establish the God's fifth kingdom as a utopia prefiguring the kingdom of heaven.¹⁸⁶ Wagenfels, however, represents an entirely different tradition. His hopes lay not in the post-historical fifth kingdom, but in the "fourth monarchy." It would protect the faithful and shepherd God's people to the end of the time. Here, the fourth kingdom of Daniel was reinterpreted in positive terms.

Expanding on his theme, Wagenfels argued that the great Christian victory against the invading Ottoman army at the gates of Vienna in 1683, and the subsequent campaign in which Hungary and other territories were captured from the Turks, seemed proof that the Holy Roman Empire was the fourth kingdom prophesied by Daniel: "And what is the present war other than a fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy about the fourth kingdom? Will not the Turks (as the scripture indicates) now be broken, tread down, crushed and devoured by our iron-blooded men?"¹⁸⁷ Once again, Wagenfels transformed the viciousness of Daniel's fourth kingdom into a celebration, in this case of the Holy Roman Empire's martial qualities.

This is almost exactly the same reinterpretation of the meaning of the kingdoms of Daniel found in the eschatological thought of the Syriac father Aphrahat. It might be possible to assume

¹⁸⁵ H. J. Wagner von Wagenfels, *Ehren-Ruff Teutschlands* (Vienna: Iohann Iacob Mann, 1691), 618: "Ich sage zum letzten daß die vierdzte und letzte Monarchie bei unsern Teutschen seye, und (ob Gott will) biß zum End der Welt verbleiben werde." Wagenfels, on *ibid*, 609–619, argues that the four world monarchies are those of the Assyrians/Babylonians/Persians, the Greeks, the Romans, and finally the Germans.

¹⁸⁶ In England, the Puritan Fifth Monarchists faction of the Parliamentarians in the English Civil War believed that in overthrowing the monarchy they were participating in the destruction of the fourth kingdom and creation of the fifth; for this and related movements, see Christopher Rowland, "The Book of Daniel and the Radical Critique of Empire: An Essay in Apocalyptic Hermeneutics," in *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception*, vol. 2, ed. J. J. Collins and P. W. Flint (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 447–467. In Portugal after its war of independence from Spain, the notion that it was the fifth kingdom was a powerful intellectual current; see Maria Ana Travassos Valdez, *Historical Interpretations of the "Fifth Empire": The Dynamics of Periodization from Daniel to António Vieira, S.J.* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 223–314.

¹⁸⁷ Wagenfels, *Ehren-Ruff Teutschlands*, 638: "Und was ist der jetzige Krieg anders als eine Erfüllung der Danielischen Weissagung von dem vierdten Reich? Werden die Türcken nicht anjetzo (wie dorten die Wort lauten) von unseren Eisen arthigen Männern gleichsam zerbrochen, zertreten, zermallet und aufgefressen?"

that Wagenfels, writing over thirteen centuries later in a distant part of the world, might have hit upon the same idea on his own. However, Wagenfels cited another prophecy to support the importance of the war with the Turks in the empire's providential destiny—after crediting Leopold for the victories against the Ottomans, he states: “In consideration of this it seems that the holy bishop of Patara and martyr, Methodius, without a doubt had your imperial, majestic, and royal Roman majesty as his subject when, through revelation, he wrote the following prophecy...”¹⁸⁸

Wagenfels proceeded to quote (in Latin and then in a German translation) from the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, specifically the lines about the Last Emperor's conquest of the Ishmaelites: “He will awaken like a man from a stupor of wine,” and after a swift campaign, the Ishmaelites “will be delivered by sword into the hands of the King of the Romans, and into captivity, and death, and ruin.”¹⁸⁹ Just as the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* brought Aphrahat's ideas to early medieval Byzantium, it eventually spread them even more widely, throughout medieval and early modern Christendom.

Indeed, Wagenfels' reinterpretation of Daniel's prophecy in conjunction with the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* is not an isolated case, but rather a very late example of a long tradition. It was a view espoused by the supporters and advisers of various Holy Roman Emperors for centuries. To take one further example, in 1517 Mercurino di Gattinara, future imperial chancellor to Emperor Charles V, whom he would help guide in becoming one of the most consequential monarchs in European and American history, addressed the teenage king in a “mirror for princes” titled *A Dream of the Last World Monarchy and the Future Triumph of Christianity*, wherein he too blended an array of prophecies, including those of the Book of Daniel and the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*.¹⁹⁰

Though imbued with Gattinara's political realism, the treatise assured the young monarch that he was the fulfillment of ancient prophecies, the long-propheesied ruler who will defeat the Muslim infidels and unite the world under a universal Christian monarchy. Gattinara referenced a different part of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, in which the Last Emperor will bring an end to the fourth and last kingdom by surrendering his crown to Christ:

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, 435: “In Betrachtung dessen scheint es daß der Heilige Patarensische Bischoff und Martyrer Methodius Zweifels ohne ihr. Käyser, Majest. sambt der Röm. König. Majestät zu seinen Gegenstand werde gehabt haben, da er auß Göttlicher Offenbahrung folgend Weissagung verabfasset hat.”

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, 435: *Tunc subito in surget super eos Rex Romanorum in furore magno, et expurgiscitur tamquam homo a somno vini, quem exaestimabant homines mortuum esse et in nihilo utilem profecisse...in manum Regis Romanorum tradentur in gladio et captivitate, et morte et corruptione.* German on ibid, 436: “Alsdann wird der Römische Käyser wider sie in einem grossen Grimm und Zorn aufstehen, und gleichsam als ein Mensch von einem Weinschlaff erwachen, wiewohlen die Leuth vorher geglaubet haben er seyn todt und zu nichts tauglich... [alle] in Schwerd, in Gefangenschafft, in Todt und Verwüstung dem Käyser übergeben werden.”

¹⁹⁰ Mercurino di Gattinara, *Oratio supplicatoria somnium interserens de novissima orbis monarchia ac future Christianorum triumpho*, unpublished British library manuscript 18008. This work of Gattinara, written in 1516, was believed lost until rediscovered by Paul Kristeller and John Headley, and subsequently described in John Headley, “Rhetoric and Reality: Messianic, Humanist, and Civilian Themes in the Imperial Ethos of Gattinara,” in *Prophetic Rome in the High Renaissance Period*, ed. Marjorie Reeves (Oxford 1992), 241–269. See also Rebecca Ard Boone, *Mercurino di Gattinara and the Creation of the Spanish Empire* (Brookfield 2014), 25–36.

Perhaps the fear of death will frighten your Catholic Majesty because of what it is written will happen: that the work completed and the monarchy restored, the empire should be returned to Christ, and this king will immediately give up his spirit, as the Blessed Methodius is said to have predicted, when he says in his revelations: “The King of the Romans will ascend to Golgotha, upon which the wood of the Holy Cross was fixed, in which place the Lord endured death for us. And the king will take the crown from his head and place it on the cross and stretch out his hands to heaven and hand over the kingdom of the Christians to God the Father.” To which the words of Daniel provide corroboration, as he says: “He will pitch his royal tents Apedno between the two seas upon the glorious and holy mountain, and he will come to his end,” etc.¹⁹¹

Thus, Gattinara reassured Charles that though the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* and the Book of Daniel predict the death of the last monarch of the fourth kingdom in Jerusalem, this was a truly noble death and one that would bring about the consummation of history.

Though the original Jewish author of the Danielic prophecy likely had in mind the Hellenistic monarch and persecutor of the Jews Antiochus IV (r. 175–164 BC), centuries of Christian exegesis identified the king who “will pitch his royal tents between the two seas upon the glorious and holy mountain,” the evil king of Daniel 11, with the Antichrist. However, this is clearly not at all how Gattinara intended it. Charles V is the king who will die at the holy mountain, for Gattinara suggests that he may be the Last Emperor, the monarch destined to complete the project of the universal monarchy and hand it over to Christ in Jerusalem. The evil fourth kingdom ruled by the Antichrist was once again transformed into the Christian empire and its pious ruler.

It is perhaps not surprising that the reinterpretation of the meaning the fourth kingdom suggested by the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* appealed to intellectuals Holy Roman Empire. Like the Byzantine Empire, the Habsburg Empire claimed a direct line of descent from the Roman Empire. As such, they could hardly run away from an association with the fourth kingdom. The positive reinterpretation of the fourth kingdom of Daniel served to invert the meaning of this association and to redeem the Roman Empire from the negative implications.

Thus, the influence of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, and the revised understanding of the four kingdoms of Daniel for which it argued, was immense, and extended far beyond Byzantium. The *Apocalypse* was translated into Latin extraordinarily quickly: four

¹⁹¹ Cod. British Library 18008, fols. 93r–93v: *Terrebit forsan tuam Maiestem Catholica mortis timor, eo que scribatur id futurum, ut opere perfecto, monarachieque restaurata, sit imperium Christo restituendum, huncque monarcham continuo spiritum emissurum, prout praedixisse leguntur beatus Methodius in suis revelationibus dum ait: Ascendet tunc Rex Romanorum sursum in Golgata, in quo confixum est lignum sanctae crucis, in quo loco pro nobis Dominus mortem sustenuit, et tollet Rex coronam de capite suo, et ponet eam super crucem, et expandet manus suas in coelum et tradet regnum Christianorum Deo Patri, subdens, et tradet continuo spiritum suum Romanorum rex. Ad cuius corroboracionem adducunt verba Danielis, dum inquit, Et figet tabernaculum suum a Pedno inter duo maria super montem inclytum et sanctum, et veniet usque ad summitatem eius, et cetera.* The strange word “Apendo” here derives from the Latin of the Vulgate; it is Jerome’s attempt to make sense of a hapax legomenon in the original Hebrew by using it as a proper noun. In fact, it is likely an Old Persian word (apadāna), meaning “palace” or “throne room”; see Paul Kosmin, *The Land of the Elephant Kings: Space, Territory, and Ideology in the Seleucid Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 159–160.

eighth century Latin manuscripts survive, one of which can be precisely dated to the year 727.¹⁹² Over two hundred manuscripts of the Latin version survive, in four different recensions.¹⁹³

The *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* reached perhaps the peak of its popularity in the late medieval and early modern periods. The Italian mystic and political reformer, Cola di Rienzo, in a 1340 letter addressed to the Holy Roman Emperor of his own time, Charles IV (r. 1336–1378), mentioned that the prophecies of Methodius—along with those of mystics such as Joachim of Fiore, Merlin, and others—could be found, in beautiful copies bound in silver, in the libraries of practically all great churchmen (even if these prelates were quick to dismiss such forecasts).¹⁹⁴ Christopher Columbus, on the eve of his third voyage to the New World, would include it among the many sources for his Book of Prophecies (*El Libro de las Profecías*), dedicated to his royal patrons, Ferdinand II of Aragon and Isabella of Castile: “It should be known that the martyr Methodius, whom Jerome mentioned in his book of famous men, wrote many things, which it is said came to him through divine revelation, about the beginning and end of history.”¹⁹⁵

Indeed, by the sixteenth century a Christian library could hardly have been called complete without a copy, whatever the nationality or creed of its owner. The *Apocalypse* was

¹⁹² Cod. Bern Burgerbibliothek cod. 611 is dated to the year 727 on the basis of an Easter computus in the same codex. The other three eighth century codices that contain the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* are Cod. Vatican Barb. Lat. 671, Cod. Paris Bibliothèque National, Lat. 13348, and Cod. St. Gall Stiftsbibliothek 225. The Latin text of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* has been edited by Willem Aerts and G. A. A. Kortekaas, *Die Apokalypse des Pseudo-Methodius die ältesten griechischen und lateinischen Übersetzungen* (Leuven: Peeters, 1998). This edition has been reprinted, with an English translation, in Benjamin Garstad, *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius / An Alexandrian World Chronicle* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 74–139. An older edition can be found in Ernst Sackur, *Sibyllinische Texte und Forschungen: Pseudomethodius Adso und Die tiburtinische Sibylle* (Halle a.S.: M. Niemeyer, 1898), 59–96.

¹⁹³ For a list of manuscripts, distributed by recension, see Marc Laureys and Daniel Verhelst, “Pseudo-Methodius, Revelaciones: Textgeschichte und kritische Edition. Ein Leuven-Groninger Forschungsprojekt,” *The Use and Abuse of Eschatology in the Middle Ages*, ed. Werner Verbeke et al. (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1988), 112–138.

¹⁹⁴ Cola di Rienzo, Letter 88, ed. Konrad Burdach and P. Piur, *Briefwechsel des Cola di Rienzo*, vol. 3 (Berlin: 1912), 295: *si prophetie Merlini, Methodii, Policarpi, Ioachim et Cirilli aut ab immundo spiritu aut fabule forte sunt, cur pastores Ecclesie et prelati in libris pulcherrimis argento munitis sic libenter in libraria recipiunt armamenta?* Robert Lerner, in his historical introduction to Christine Morerod-Fattebert, *Johannes de Rupescicca: Liber Secretorum Eventuum, Edition critique* (Freiburg: Éditions universitaires, 1994), 83 n.149, suggests that Cola may have had in mind the papal library in Avignon.

¹⁹⁵ Christopher Columbus, *The Book of Prophecies*, ed. Roberto Rusconi, transl. Blair Sullivan (Eugene, Wipf & Stock, 2004), 170–173: *sciendum est quod Methodius martir, de quo in libro illustrium virorum meminit Hieronimus, de principio et consumatione seculi multa scripsit que divina revelatione accepisse dicitur*. I have slightly emended the translation of Blair Sullivan. Columbus was here lifting directly from the 1414 *Concordance of Astrology with Theology and History*, by the French cardinal Pierre D’Ailly; published *Concordantia astronomiae cum theologia et cum historica: narratione et elucidarium duorum precedentium tractatum* (Augsburg: Ratdolt, 1490), with the quotation about Methodius on fol. D 8v. Even though Columbus was simply lifting from D’Ailly, it has been plausibly argued by Adam Knobler, *Mythology and Diplomacy in the Age of Exploration* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 74, that: “Columbus’ own thought was greatly influenced by Pseudo-Methodius (via Pierre d’Ailly).” See also Mary Watt, *Dante, Columbus and the Prophetic Tradition: Spiritual Imperialism in the Italian Imagination* (Basingstoke: Taylor & Francis Ltd, 2017), esp. 18–40. On the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* in the thought of D’Ailly, see Laura Ackermann Smoller, *History, Prophecy, and the Stars: The Christian Astrology of Pierre D’Ailly, 1350–1420* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 95–101.

printed in Latin already in 1477, and an illustrated version went through eight editions between 1498 and 1569, becoming a “minor best seller.”¹⁹⁶ The Lutheran leader Philip Melanchthon cited Methodius repeatedly as a source of prophetic information about the coming of the Muslim Turks, while Johannes Eck, the fierce Catholic opponent of nascent Protestantism, included Methodius alongside Joachim of Fiore, Bridgett of Sweden, Hildegard von Bingen, the Carmelite Cyril of Constantinople, the Sibyl, and Merlin as a great seer and prophet.¹⁹⁷ Portions of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* were printed almost simultaneously in pamphlets supporting the imperial ambitions of both the king of France and those of the Hapsburg emperor.¹⁹⁸ It can be ascertained, thanks to a catalog produced around 1570 that provides a snapshot of private Greek libraries in Ottoman Constantinople, that eminent Greeks, including perhaps the most powerful Greek family in the Ottoman Empire, the Kantakouzenos clan, possessed copies of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* in Greek in their libraries.¹⁹⁹ In England, the great

¹⁹⁶ So characterized by Jonathan Green, *Printing and Prophecy: Prognostication and Media Change, 1450–1550* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 93. On these editions, see below, chapter 1.

¹⁹⁷ For the references to Methodius in the writings of Philip Melanchthon, see *Corpus Reformatorum: Philippi Melanthonis Opera quae supersunt omnia*, ed. Carl Gottlieb Bretschneider and Heinrich Ernst Bindseil (Braunschweig: Schwetschke, 1856), vol. 24, 864–65; vol. 25, 80 and 504. For Johannes Eck, see his *Sperandam Esse In Brevi Victoriam adversus Turcam* (Augsburg: Alexander Weissenhorn, 1532), fol. C1v. Though he cast doubt the trustworthiness of some of these supposed seers, Eck singles out Methodius as one of the few reliable sources of prophecy outside the Bible on fol. C4v.

¹⁹⁸ A pro-Habsburg vernacular German tract, published in 1517, *Ditz sind die Prophetien Sancti Methodii und Nollhardi* (Basel: Pamphilus Gengenbach, 1517), took several long excerpts from the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, and cast them into German rhyming verses. Methodius is portrayed being questioned by both the German Kaiser (whom he assures of his great imperial destiny and ultimate victory) on ff. C3r–C4v, and by the Ottoman sultan (to whom he prophesies defeat and destruction) on ff. E2v–F1v. On the use of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* in this work, see Violanta Werren-Uffer, *Der Nollhart vom Pamphilus Gengenbach* (Bern: Lang, 1983), 56–70. The pro-French collection, *Mirabilis liber qui prophetias revelationesque, necnon res mirandas, preteritas, presentes et futuras, aperte demonstrat* (Paris: Enguibert I et Jean II de Marnef, 1522), which opens with the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, on ff. 2v–5v, is discussed in detail below.

¹⁹⁹ This catalog of the holdings of private libraries in Constantinople is extant in cod. Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, His. Gr. 98. It lists on fol. 34v the contents of codex 24 (κδ') in the library of Antonios Kantakouzenos, which included, among other prophetic works, “the prophecy of Methodius, Bishop of Patara” (ὁ χρησμὸς Μεθοδίου, ἐπισκόπου Πατάρων). Likewise, the manuscript lists, on fol. 37v, in the library of one Manuel Eugenikos: “all the illustrated prophecies, beginning with Methodius, Bishop of Patara” (οἱ χρησμοὶ ὅλοι φηγουράδοι, ἀρχὴ Μεθοδίου, ἐπισκόπου Πατάρων). On the library catalog, see Geórgios K. Papázoglou, *Βιβλιοθήκες στην Κωνσταντινούπολη του 15' αιώνα (κώδ. Vind. hist. gr. 98)* (Thessaloniki: 1983); Papázoglou includes a transcription of the catalog on *ibid.*, 371–412. A Latin overview of the catalog was printed by Iohannes Harting, *Bibliotheca, Sive Antiquitates Urbis Constantinopolitanae* (Strasbourg: Nicolaus Wyriot, 1578), with the references to the codices with the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* on fol. D 4r and fol. F 2r. There have been well-founded doubts about the accuracy of the library catalog, and about the honesty of the scribes who produced it (John and Manuel Malaxos), most recently articulated by Marc D. Lauxtermann, “‘And Many, Many More’: A Sixteenth-Century Description of Private Libraries in Constantinople, and the Authority of Books,” in *Authority in Byzantium*, ed. Pamela Armstrong (Burlington: Ashgate, 2013), 269–282. However, even if the catalog sometimes includes made-up codices, the codices it lists with the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* did certainly exist, as several examples survive. Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, cod. Suppl. Gr. 172, copied incidentally by one of the same scribes responsible for the library catalog (John Malaxos), contains virtually the same contents the catalog lists for codex 24 of the library of Antonios Kantakouzenos, with the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* (second Greek recension) on fol. 1r–19r; see Herbert Hunger, *Katalog der griechischen Handschriften der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek*, vol 4 (Vienna: Hollinek, 1994), 105–108.

martyrologist John Foxe (d. 1587), spent several pages of his *Acts and Monuments* “touching the meanyng and methode of Methodius’ Prophetesies,” to bolster his claim that the Pope was the Antichrist,²⁰⁰ and just a few years later in Moscow, Ivan IV “the Terrible” (r. 1547–1584) could reference the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* in a public debate with a proselytizing Jesuit.²⁰¹

Despite this enormous impact, there has been little scholarly understanding of what made the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* so popular, and what was new or revolutionary about its message. Moreover, though the Syriac origins of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* remained unknown until the early twentieth century, in the near century since their discovery scholars have given scant attention to the larger Syriac eschatological tradition from which it drew. Many have instead treated the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* as a piece of Byzantine literature. Those few scholars who have delved into its Syriac context have in turn had little to say about the fact that it disseminated specifically Syriac conceptions of about the Book of Daniel, Christian kingship, and the end of time across medieval and early modern Christendom. Nonetheless, the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* should be regarded as notable because it introduced Syriac Christian exegesis to a far wider audience, helping enshrine it in European thought.

In demonstrating the influence of Syriac eschatology upon Byzantium, this dissertation has argued against previous narratives that presented Syriac Christianity as receptive to influences from Byzantium but have given little to no attention to influence in the reverse direction. The realization of a significant impact of Syriac Christian thought upon Byzantine eschatological and political concepts should reveal the importance of Syriac Christianity to wider narratives of late antique and medieval history. It is to be hoped that further work can expand upon these findings and provide a narrative of the wider influence of Aphrahat’s ideas, disseminated by the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, throughout medieval and early modern European history, as evidence by the writings of men such as Wagenfels and Gattinara.

The revisionist reading of the Book of Daniel repeated by Wagenfels and Gattinara are at this point quite familiar. They embraced more or less that same understanding of eschatology that the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* has already brought to Byzantium in the eighth

²⁰⁰ John Foxe, *Actes and Monuments*, 1570 Edition, Book 6, 931–934. According to Foxe: “Methodius sayth, not that Antichrist shall be borne among the Saracens, or Turkes, but among the people of God, and of the tribe of Israel... wherby the pope may seme rather then the Saracen or the Turke, to be described.” Foxe’s analysis of the prophecies associated with Methodius is not present in his 1563 edition, but appear in the 1570, 1576 and 1583 editions.

²⁰¹ Ivan IV’s debate was with the Jesuit Antonio Possevino. The Tsar does not mention Methodius by name, but describes a scene from the Apocalypse in familiar detail; see *Памятники дипломатических сношений древней Россіи с державами иностранными* (St. Petersburg: 1871), vol. 10, cols. 298–326; English translation by Hugh F. Graham in the appendix to his *The Moscovia of Antonio Possevino, S.J.: Translated with a Critical Introduction and Notes* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977), 173–174. On the influence of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* on Ivan’s statement, see also the abstract of Mikhail Krivov, “The Image of ‘Byzantine-Ethiopia’ in Sixteenth-Century Russia,” in *XXe Congrès international des Études byzantines: Collège de France-Sorbonne, 19–25 août 2001: Pré-Actes*, vol. 3, ed. Gilbert Dagron and Brigitte Mondrain (Paris: Collège de France, 2001), 277.

century. Nevertheless there are significant differences between how these men made use of the concept of the positive fourth kingdom from the late antique and Byzantine examples explored throughout this dissertation. Wagenfels and Gattinara were elites closely connected to the imperial court who deployed eschatology as a sort of imperial propaganda. They explicitly compared their monarchs to the Last Emperor of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, and then used their positions near the court to recommend to those monarchs that they act to bring about the coming of God's kingdom. One would be hard pressed to find equivalents figure to these men in Byzantine history. Examples of such eschatological propaganda in late antiquity or Byzantium do not survive; they were probably quite rare, if any existed at all.

This contrast is ironic, considering that Byzantium is often associated with the glorification of the state through religious ideology. Whereas in the Latin West religion was supposedly liberated from the tyranny of the state, traditional narratives hold that in Byzantium the state dominated religion. The Protestant jurist Justus Henning Böhmer, a younger contemporary of Wagenfels, coined the phrase "Caesaropapism" (the concept of the church dominated by the state) in reference to Byzantine law.²⁰² Indeed, since the sixteenth century, Byzantium has often been unfavorably compared to the European West, considered a model of both "oriental despotism" and "Caesaraopapism," and an example of a divergent and deadend path for European civilization.

The roots of this purported Byzantine despotism are often traced back to the fourth-century synergy between Constantine and Eusebius, who supposedly inaugurated the pernicious merging of church and empire. Well into the twentieth century, scholars like Arnold J. Toynbee could imagine that "the Orthodox Church had become a docile department of the Byzantine state."²⁰³ The term "Caesaropapism" is still often applied to Byzantine Christianity, even twenty years after Gilbert Dagron thoroughly dismantled the case for such a concept.²⁰⁴ Byzantium's role as foil for the Western Europe has only recently begun to be seriously interrogated, and then mostly within the field of Byzantine studies rather than outside it.²⁰⁵

The stereotypes about Byzantine religion and politics find a nexus in political eschatology. Eschatology was a theological subject, but the concern over the fate of the empire had important political consequences. Unsurprisingly, then, political eschatology from the age of Constantine down through the Byzantine era has been treated with little nuance by scholars. Serious Byzantine scholars have claimed that the late Romans and Byzantines replaced the eschatological Christ with the emperor, and the eschatological kingdom of heaven with the empire of the Caesars. Gerhard Podskalsky, one of the most important scholars of Byzantine political eschatology, claimed that it was a "perversion of the Christian faith" because it involved

²⁰² Justus Henning Böhmer, *Jus ecclesiasticum protestantium*, 5th ed., I (Halle: Orphanotropheum, 1756), 10–11.

²⁰³ Arnold J. Toynbee, *A Study of History: Volume I: Abridgement of, Volumes 1-6*, ed. D. C. Somervell (London: Oxford University Press, 1946), 15.

²⁰⁴ Gilbert Dagron, *Emperor and Priest: The Imperial Office in Byzantium*, translated by Jean Birrell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

²⁰⁵ An overview can be found in Averil Cameron, *Byzantine Matters* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), esp. 87–111.

the “prolongation, consolidation, and expansion—in short, the immortalization—of that which already exists.”²⁰⁶ In other words, the Byzantines, in thrall to their state, turned the original Christian hopes for the next world into a stale defense of the existing order. From this point of view, it became easy to view political eschatology not as genuine belief, but as propaganda issued by the ruling elites to control their people.

This dissertation has pushed back on these notions. It has sought to understand late antique and Byzantine political eschatology not as imperial propaganda, but as genuinely held concepts that aided in conceptualizing past, present, and future. In attempting to put together narratives about the end of the empire (that is, what would happen to the empire in its final days) it made various claims about the empire’s purpose in God’s plan for history. Contrary to received wisdom about the glorification of the empire in political eschatology, these claims were not all positive. In fact, they were deeply informed by the legacy of Christianity’s early experience as a persecuted religion under the Roman Empire. The Christian subjects of Constantine had inherited traditions of Christian eschatology that taught them to be wary of the Roman state and suspicious of the powers of the emperor. Despite the refrain in scholarship that the subjects of Constantine in the fourth century and their Byzantine descendants identified the Roman Empire as the Kingdom of God, in reality they largely identified it with the fourth kingdom of Daniel.

For this reason, the four-kingdom scheme of Daniel has been an instructive entry point into late Roman and Byzantine political eschatology. Few Byzantinists have explored the full history of the four kingdoms, and often assume that when the Byzantines identified their empire with the fourth kingdom they did so in a positive sense, namely to signal that it was the last of history’s empires and so must remain until the end of time. However, the detailed exploration of the development of the four-empire scheme in the first two chapters of this dissertation has shown that this was hardly the case. The fourth kingdom was the evil kingdom, the persecutory kingdom of the Antichrist, and continued to be viewed as such after the Christianization of the empire.

As this dissertation has shown, Roman/Byzantine Christians, on the basis of the Book of Daniel (supplemented by various prophecies from the New Testament) formulated what I have called the *common political-eschatological scenario*, a narrative of the political events that they believed would take place in the time leading up to the end of history. By the third or fourth century this narrative of future events was widely adopted by the Latin and Greek speaking Christians of the Roman Empire. It held that the Roman Empire was the fourth kingdom of Daniel, and as such it would at some point in the future collapse into civil war but would be reunited by the Antichrist, who would reign as the last emperor and use the Roman state to

²⁰⁶ Gerhard Podskalsky, “Politische Theologie in Byzanz zwischen Reichseschatologie und Reichsideologie,” in *Christianità d’Occidente e Christianità d’Oriente (secoli VI–XI)* (Spoleto: Presso la sede della Fondazione, 2004), 1432: “[Byzantinische eschatologie] eine Perversion des christlichen Glaubens bedeutet.” Idem, *Byzantinische Reichseschatologie: die Periodisierung der Weltgeschichte in den vier Grossreichen (Daniel 2 und 7) und dem tausendjährigen Friedensreiche (Apok. 20). Eine motivgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1972), 102: “Im Brennpunkt der Erwartung lag darum nicht die Umkehr der Herrschaftsverhältnisse, nicht revolutionäre Utopie als anarchisches Korrektiv hierarchischer Strukturen, sondern Prolongation, Festigung, und Ausbau, kurz: Verewigung des schon Realisierten.”

persecute Christianity and proclaim himself the messiah. This scenario remained widely repeated up to the sixth century in the West, and well into the seventh century in the Eastern Roman Empire. It was not propagated by imperial officials, nor did it serve any role in legitimating the Roman/Byzantine state. On the contrary, the common political-eschatological scenario had uncomfortable implications for the empire and its rulers: it suggested that the Antichrist would come in the form of a Roman emperor, and the Roman/Byzantine state was fated to become a tool for the persecution of Christians.

These findings have implications that go beyond the field of eschatology. They problematize traditional portrayals of Byzantine political thought as a Christianized doctrine of divine kingship that stressed unconditional loyalty to the emperor as God's representative on earth. The common political-eschatological scenario reined in tendencies to view the emperor as an earthly manifestation of Christ or the empire as an earthly reflection of heaven. Both the diadem and the state were constantly in danger of falling into the hands of the Antichrist.

Indeed, some scholars have recently voiced discomfort with the idea that the Byzantine political thought treated the emperor as a Christ-like figure above reproach. For example, Anthony Kaldellis has raised major problems with what he calls the theocratic "imperial idea"—that is, the concept of the emperor as God's direct representative on earth—and has criticized the prevalence of this view in Byzantine scholarship: "Without having been scrutinized, the imperial idea has become a doctrine, recycled endlessly as a self-evident truth... Ritual incantation of the imperial idea is part of being a Byzantinist."²⁰⁷ Nonetheless, Kaldellis' alternative is hardly satisfying. He argues that Byzantium was akin to a secular republic, and that the authority and legitimacy of the emperor came from the consent of the governed. Kaldellis considers the imperial idea just "God-talk," theological window dressing irrelevant to actual political practice.²⁰⁸

This dissertation proposes an alternative explanation regarding how the Byzantines understood the religious foundations of the emperor and the empire. The belief that the emperor was God's representative on earth and that the empire, when properly ruled, could imitate the kingdom of heaven, was probably not empty rhetoric. Nonetheless, it must be kept in mind that this idea was balanced out by the idea that the emperor could potentially be the Little Horn, the Antichrist, and that the empire could at any point fulfill the prophecies of Daniel by waging war against God's saints.

The scholarly preoccupation with Byzantine eschatology as imperial propaganda has obscured the importance of the political-eschatological scenario. Nonetheless, scholars are not unjustified in believing that the Byzantines glorified their empire through eschatology. The *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* remains probably the best known Byzantine apocalypse, for which reason its vision of history and eschatology tends to be regarded as normative for the

²⁰⁷ Anthony Kaldellis, *The Byzantine Republic: People and Power in New Rome* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 165–166.

²⁰⁸ Ibid, 165–198

entire Byzantine era. If a person knows only one thing about Byzantine eschatology, it is usually the legend of the Last Emperor. Moreover, scholars of Byzantine eschatology, such as Paul Alexander, have devoted substantial attention to the Visions of Daniel's apocalypses.²⁰⁹ Many of these visions adopted what I have called the Methodian political eschatological-scenario, that is, the version of future events found in the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*.

Most scholars, however, overlooked the fact that the legend of the Last Emperor, and indeed many of the other ideas found in the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, originated in Syriac eschatological thought. Those scholars who have recognized this fact, such as Gerrit J. Reinink, are still often beholden to an idea that permeates the field of Byzantine studies, namely that political eschatology was state-sponsored literature. Therefore, they suggest that Syriac eschatology simply recycled and repackaged Byzantine imperial propaganda.

This dissertation has suggested an alternative narrative in which Syriac eschatology influenced Byzantine thought, instead of the other way around. The idea that the Roman Empire was in some way a virtuous fourth kingdom of Daniel, and that it must last until the end of time, is first attested in the Syriac-speaking Persian Christian Aphrahat. This idea developed within Syriac literature mostly in isolation until the early eighth century. At that point, Chalcedonian Byzantines, faced with the near collapse of the empire in the face of the Arab conquests, became interested in Syriac eschatological ideas about the righteousness and invincibility of the empire. The clearest example of this new attitude was the translation of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* into Greek around the year 700, and its immense subsequent influence on Byzantine apocalyptic literature.

Even so, the Methodian political-eschatological scenario should not be viewed as imperial propaganda. True, iconoclast emperors may have favored the Methodian political-eschatological scenario in order to counter the polemics of their opponents, though the limited number of surviving primary sources makes it impossible to say for sure. Still, it is clear that such eschatology did not originate at the imperial court or among the rulers of the empire, but developed among Syriac Christians on the imperial periphery or even outside the empire.

Moreover, the Methodian political-eschatological scenario never fully displaced general pessimism about the future of the empire. Instead, as we have seen, pessimistic and optimistic expectations of the empire's future blended together as Byzantine apocalyptic writers attempted to make sense of the various prophecies. Byzantine political eschatology was complex and varied, but at no point was it simply a tool for enforcing loyalty to the state.

²⁰⁹ See especially Paul Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, ed. Dorothy deF. Abrahamse (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

APPENDICES:

CONTEXTUALIZING THE APOCALYPSE OF METHIDIUS OF PATARA

The *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* is one of the key sources in this dissertation. Nonetheless, important questions about this work remain unanswered. As the scholar of apocalyptic literature Lorenzo DiTommaso stated in 2017: “Our knowledge of the nature and influence of the *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius remains incomplete. Many questions remain and much work is required.”¹ Perhaps the most important questions are when and where was it written, and who exactly wrote it. Since the complex tasks of establishing the date, and place of composition, and confessional identify of the author could only distract from the larger narrative in this dissertation, I deal with such matters in these appendices.

Appendix A: Overview of Scholarship on the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*

Before delving into the date, location, and author of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, it will be useful to briefly explore the previous scholarship on it. This scholarship began in the sixteenth century as early scholars sought to discern its author, and continued present. Nonetheless, work on the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* has been fragmented across multiple fields of study. This overview attempts to unite this disparate work in a single summary.

Early Scholarship

Generations of readers regarded the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* as the work of the early Christian martyr and saint named Methodius (d. c. 311). Some speculated that the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* has been composed by the martyr in prison while he awaited execution.² Moreover, the Syriac origins of the *Apocalypse* were completely unknown. Since the historical Methodius wrote in Greek, it was widely assumed that the Greek version of the *Apocalypse* was the original.

¹ Lorenzo DiTommaso, “The *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius: Notes on a Recent Edition,” *Medioevo greco: Rivista di storia e filologia bizantina*, vol. 17 (2017), 317.

² Peter Comestor, who used the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* as a major source in his *Historia scholastica*, composed in 1173, reported that *Methodius oravit, dum esset in carcere, et revelatum est ei a Spiritu de principio et fine mundi, quod et oravit, et scriptura, licet simpliciter, reliquit*; see *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 198, column 1076. Likewise, the woodcut illustrations by Sebastian Brant first included in the printed edition of the Latin *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* in 1498 include an image of the saint peering through a prison window to see an angel with an open book, with the caption: *De revelatione facta ab angelo, beato methodio in carcere detecto*. The introduction to this edition includes a biography of Methodius of Patara and states: *multa edidit documenta et presertim de mundi creatione eidem in carcere revelata*.

The Greek version of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* was printed for the first time in Basel in 1569 by the Tübingen-educated Lutheran (later Calvinist) Johann Jakob Grynaeus (d. 1617), who published it (with the Latin text of the Furter's edition appended for comparison) in a massive two-volume collection of the writings of eastern theologians and Greek apocrypha.³ Unlike the majority of the printed Latin versions, the *Apocalypse* was not used here for a political-eschatological message, but included in a collection of Greek theological texts collected for study by Protestant scholars (produced at a time of growing ties between Protestants and the Patriarchate of Constantinople).⁴

Grynaeus situated the *Apocalypse* in the collection just before the recently rediscovered *Sibylline Oracles*, apparently intending the two works to stand as the major examples of Greek Christian prophetic literature.⁵ The placement of the Greek and Latin versions of the *Apocalypse* side by side and the scholarly nature of Grynaeus' edition made it the standard source for research on the *Apocalypse* for the next three hundred years.

In his introduction, Grynaeus attempted to historically situate the *Apocalypse*. He was skeptical about the authenticity of the *Sibylline Oracles*, and likewise harbored doubts that the Christian-Platonist theologian Methodius of Olympus would have written an eschatological vision. Still, he was willing to grant that the *Apocalypse* had a very early origin. He suggested that perhaps Methodius of Olympus and Methodius of Patara had been two different individuals, the former the author of the Christian Platonic dialogues listed by Jerome and the Suda and martyred under Maximinus Daia, the latter possibly the author of the *Apocalypse* and martyred half a century earlier under Valerian.⁶ While his hypothesis was mistaken, Grynaeus represents the beginning of attempts to understand the authorship and context of the *Apocalypse*.

³ *Monumenta S. Patrum Orthodoxographia*, ed. Johann Jakob Grynaeus (Basel: Petri, 1569), 93–99. Grynaeus derived his text of the apocalypse from the manuscript copy in cod. Vatican Ott. Gr. 418 (ff. 232r–239v). On this manuscript, see E. Feron, F. Battaglini, and Giuseppe Cozza-Luzi. *Codices manuscripti graeci ottoboniani Bibliothecae Vaticanae descripti praeside Alphonso cardinali Capececelatro* (Rome: ex typographeo Vaticano, 1893), 229–232.

⁴ Martin Crusius (Kraus), professor of Greek at Tübingen when Grynaeus studied there, participated in a mission to the Greek Patriarchate in Constantinople. The mission's principle aim was to convert the Greeks to Lutheranism. It failed, but Crusius returned with many Greek manuscripts.

⁵ *Monumenta S. Patrum Orthodoxographia*, ed. Grynaeus, 93–99. The text here represents the second recension of the Greek. The Latin text is on 100–113; the *Sibylline Oracles* are on 116–168. Upon the rediscovery of the *Sibylline Oracles* in the sixteenth century, there was extended debate whether they were, as they purported to be, the work of a pagan sibyl who had predicted the future and the life of Jesus Christ, or whether they were a later Christian composition; Grynaeus was an early proponent of the latter position; see Anthony Grafton, *Defenders of the Text: The Traditions of Scholarship in an Age of Science, 1450-1800* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 174.

⁶ *Ibid.*, fols. A 5r–A 5v: *Methodii Olympi Lyciae, postea vero Tyrensis episcopi, meminit Hieronymus. Incertum autem non est, alium esse hunc Methodium, qui librum reliquit, περί τῶν ἀπὸ συστάσεως κόσμου συμβάντων, καὶ τῶν μελλόντων συμβαίνειν εἰς τὸ ἔξῃς. De veritate quarundam Methodianarum narrationum, iudicabunt Polyhistores, quibus nota est et Regum successio et Regnorum initia et periodi, et series temporum. Methodium istum Patarensem Episcopum fuisse, et floruisse circa annum Domini 255 quidam perhibent.* Grynaeus is apparently trying to resolve the uncertainty in Jerome's biography of Methodius in *De Viris Illustribus*, 83, where he recounts two traditions about when Methodius was martyred: "at the end of the last persecution [i.e., that of Maximinus Daia in 311], or, as others assert, under Decius and Valerian" (*ad extremum novissimae persecutionis, sive, ut alii affirmant, sub Decio et Valeriano*).

Among certain readers, there long lingered a belief that the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* had been written by the historical Methodius of Olympus/Patara.⁷ However, by the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century doubts had begun to arise in some quarters about whether the Methodius martyred in the early fourth century could have composed this work which had detailed knowledge of the Arab conquests. Further, it was noticed that both Jerome in his *Book of Illustrious Men* (*De viris illustribus*), and the Byzantine reference work of the tenth century called the *Suda*, listed Methodius' writings; yet neither made mention of any prophecies or apocalypse.⁸ The early attempts to understand who really composed the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, and when, can be deemed as the beginning of scholarship on it.

In 1613, St. Robert Bellarmine (Roberto Bellarmino), in his *De scriptoribus ecclesiasticis*, mentioned the apocalypse among the works of Methodius of Olympus, but noted that the work was probably attributed to Methodius falsely.⁹ When in 1644 François Combefis produced the first edited volume of the works of Methodius of Olympus in Greek, he excluded the *Apocalypse*, noting that he examined it carefully and made the judgment that it was likely not the work of the same Methodius, and the risk of excluding the possible words of a holy father of the church was outweighed by his low opinion of such extra-Biblical prophecies.¹⁰

In 1664, the Swiss theologian and philologist Johann Heinrich Hottinger consulted both Grynaeus' edition of the *Apocalypse* and the manuscript upon which it was based, and suggested that Grynaeus had misread the title (which had been abbreviated in the manuscript); it was not the work of "Bishop Methodius of Patara," he posited, but rather "Bishop Methodius, the Patriarch."¹¹ Hottinger suggested that the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* had likely been written by Patriarch Methodius I of Constantinople (d. 847), the prelate who presided over the

⁷ Notably, at the late date of 1774, the new German translation of the *Apocalypse* asserted that Methodius had received the revelations from an angel while in prison in the year 255 (date suggested by Grynaeus): *Des heiligen Methodius Offenbarungen welche ihm im Jahr nach Christi Geburth 255. in seinen Gefängnisse durch einen Engel gegeben worden.*

⁸ Though he devoted a close analysis of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* and concluded that its prophecies seemed to have been fulfilled, John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*, (1570), 934, also expressed some ambivalence over the reliability and authorship of the *Apocalypse*, for just that reason: "And thus much touching Methodius, of whose prophecies how much or how litle is to bee esteemed, I leave it indifferent unto the reader. For me it shall suffice simply to have recited his woordes, as I finde them in hys booke conteyned: notyng this by the waye, that of this booke of Methodius, *De nouissimis temporibus*, neither Hierome in his Cataloge, nor suidas [the *Suda*], nor yet [Johannes] Aventinus in that place where hee entreateth purposely of such prophecies, maketh any mention."

⁹ Roberto Bellarmino, *De scriptoribus ecclesiasticis liber unus* (Cologne: Bernardi Gualtheri, 1613), 59: "In Bibliothecis Veterum Patrum extant Latine dumtaxat eidem [i.e. Methodius] falso tributae Revelationes de rebus quae ab initio mundi contigerunt..." Ballarmino is probably referring to the Latin text that accompanied Grynaeus' Greek edition, but Ballarmino adds that it also exists in a version with a commentary by Wolfgang Aytinger and illustrated by Sebastian Brant; this is obviously the 1498 Latin printed edition.

¹⁰ *Ss. Patrum Amphiloicii Iconiensis, Methodii Patarensis, et Andreae Cretensis opera omnia*, ed. François Combefis (Paris: Simeon Piget, 1644), xvii. Combefis' comment is reproduced in Migne, who reprinted Combefis' edition, in PG, vol. 18, 25–26.

¹¹ Johann Heinrich Hottinger, *Bibliothecarius Quadripartitus* (Zurich: Melchior Stauffacher, 1664), 98–99. Hottinger suggested that "Μεθοδίου ἐπίσκ. Πατάρων" (Vatican cod. Ott. Gr. 418, fol. 232r) should in fact be read "Μεθοδίου ἐπισκόπου Πατριάρχου" (though Hottinger renders it simply as "Μεθοδίου Πατριάρχου"). Hottinger added that the pre-Constantinian theologian Methodius probably could not have composed the *Apocalypse*.

cessation of Byzantium's second Iconoclast period.¹² Soon thereafter, the Protestant Englishman William (Guillelmus) Cave, in his own 1688 catalogue of Christian writers, proposed that the true author was either Patriarch Methodius I or Patriarch Methodius II, who held the office in the year 1240 at the exiled Byzantine court at Nicaea.¹³

The *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* came to the attention of the eighteenth-century Orientalist scholar and Maronite archbishop Giuseppe Simone Assemani (d. 1768) when, as head of the Vatican Library, he cataloged the library's Syriac holdings. Of great future consequence, Assemani found a Syriac manuscript of the *Apocalypse* in one of the codices of the Vatican Library: cod. Vatican Syr. 58, the one copied by John of Gargar in 1586 and brought to Rome by Professor Andrew Scander (see above).¹⁴ This manuscript, it turns out, is the only complete surviving witness to the original Syriac text of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, and the only manuscript of the Syriac that was known and available to scholars until the end of the twentieth century.

To aid his effort to identify Syriac works in the manuscripts, Assemani had used (and edited, with a Latin translation) the fourteenth-century *Catalogue of Syriac Literature* by the East Syrian bishop 'Abdisho' bar Brikha/ 'Abdisho' of Nisibis (ܐܒܕܝܫܝܐ ܒܪ ܒܪܝܚܐ) (d. 1318), a verse list of the major works of Christian Syriac literature: books of scripture, the important Greek works that had been translated into Syriac, and finally all the great works composed in Syriac. 'Abdisho' had included "Methodius the Bishop" (ܡܬܕܝܫܝܐ ܐܝܡܢܐ) among the Greek fathers translated into Syriac, and specified that the writings of Methodius extant in Syriac included both letters and a tract on "the succession of generations" (ܬܪܬܘܡܐ ܕܠܕܝܢܐ).¹⁵ Assemani identified the latter with the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, which he knew from the Greek version printed by Grynaeus.

Assemani, however, failed to realize that the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* was a Syriac work, and instead followed the consensus since Hottinger that it had been written by the ninth-century Byzantine patriarch Methodius I.¹⁶ He believed that the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* in cod. Vatican Syr. 58 was an early Syriac translation of the originally Greek work of Patriarch Methodius, which had been attributed at some point to Methodius of Olympus/Patara.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Guillelmus Cave, *Historia litteraria Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum a Christo nato usque ad saeculum XIV*, vol. 1 (London: Richard Chiswell, 1688), 106.

¹⁴ For details of Andrew Scander's collection, see Giuseppe Simone Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis Clementino-Vaticana*, vol. 3.1 (Rome: Typis Sacrae congregationis de Propaganda Fide, 1725), 485; Henri Hyvernat, "Vatican Syriac MSS.: Old and New Press-Marks," *The Catholic University Bulletin*, vol. 9 (1903), 95. The manuscript was Syriac 29 in Scander's collection.

¹⁵ Giuseppe Simone Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, vol. 3.1, 27–28; in the English translation of the *Catalogue* of 'Abdisho' bar Brikha in George Percy Badger, *The Nestorians and their Rituals* (London: J. Masters, 1852), 361–379, "Methodius" is mistakenly translated—over literally—as "Mitidus," and as a result of the poor translation the letters and work on the succession of generations are mistakenly included among the works John Chrysostom.

¹⁶ Assemani reasoned that it could not have been written by the thirteenth-century patriarch Methodius II, because in that case there would not have been enough time for it to have been translated into Syriac and become known to 'Abdisho' at the beginning of the fourteenth century.

As a result, a copy of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* in Syriac had been identified, but no one realized that Syriac was the original language in which the *Apocalypse* has been composed.

Thus, for two hundred years, scholarly consensus held that the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* was not a work belonging to Syriac literature but a ninth-century Byzantine Greek composition by Patriarch Methodius I.¹⁷ Still, the case for Patriarch Methodius' authorship was by no means secure, and over time scholars began more cautiously referring to the apocalypse as the work of "Pseudo-Methodius."¹⁸

Gradually, both scholars and general readers largely lost interest in the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*. The ascendancy of rationalism as an intellectual ideal in Western Europe from the Enlightenment onwards pushed the literary genre of apocalypses, along with a number of other formerly influential disciplines, to the intellectual margins. Even in the Orthodox world, which its different intellectual history, the *Apocalypse* faded into obscurity, for even though it continued to be copied in the insular fortresses of Orthodox monasticism, it was displaced by more nationalistic and explicitly Orthodox works, such as the *Apocalypse of Agathangelos* among the Greeks (which was explicitly anti-Catholic and promised the liberation of the Greeks from Ottoman rule and the rise of a mighty Orthodox empire) and the writings of Philotheus of Pskov in Russian (which presented Russia as the "Third Rome").¹⁹ In both East and West, the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* retained its former status only among Russian Old Believers and some fringe Catholic associations²⁰

Late Nineteenth-Century Nationalist Scholarship

The *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* was rediscovered thanks to interest in its political-eschatological message. Serious scholarly interest in it began in late nineteenth-century Germany, in the excited wake of the 1871 national unification and the proclamation of the king of Prussia as emperor of Germany. Now that there was again a German Kaiser, German scholars sought to discover the roots of the imperial *Kaisersage* (such as the story of the sleeping emperor

¹⁷ Thus, in the *Bibliotheca graeca*, vol. 7, ed. J. A. Fabricius and G. C. Harles (Hamburg, Bohn, 1801), 274, the "*Chronicon vel Revelationes*" attributed to Methodius is listed under the works of the Patriarch of Constantinople. This consensus held until the last quarter of the nineteenth century (see below). Though not explicitly stated, the suggestion that Patriarch Methodius I composed the *Apocalypse* could be supported by the fact that the apocalypse seemed related to the concerns of the resurgent Byzantine Empire of the ninth-century, and the tradition, mentioned in many manuscript *incipits*, that Methodius recorded it while he was in prison could have applied to the ninth-century Methodius, who had been imprisoned by the iconoclasts.

¹⁸ Heinrich Corrodi, *Kritische Geschichte des Chiliasmus*, vol. 3 (Leipzig, 1783), 5, includes the "Pseudo-Methodius" among influential prophetic texts dated from the sixth to twelfth centuries. Likewise, an early study of the Ethiopian *Book of Adam and Eve*, August Dillmann, *Das christliche Adambuch des Morgenlandes: Aus dem Äthiopischen mit Bemerkungen übersetzt* (Göttingen, Dieterichschen Buchhandlung, 1853), 139, recognized on that text the influence of "Pseudo-Methodius."

¹⁹ See Lucien J. Frary, *Russia and the Making of Modern Greek Identity, 1821-1844* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 199–202. For the letter of Philotheus of Pskov, see V. N. Malinin, *Starets eleazarova monastyria filothei i ego poslaniia* (Kiev: Kiev-Pecherskoi Uspenskoi Lavry, 1901), part 3, 50–55.

²⁰ The 1850 reissue of the German printed edition included an introduction by J.M. Laeuterer and Ambros Oswald. Oswald believed the *Apocalypse* relevant to the radical collectivist Catholic community which he led and soon after permanently settled in Wisconsin in the United States.

who would return in a time of need to save the nation, closely associated with the medieval German emperors Frederick I and Frederick II). These German scholars believed that such stories might have been transmitted into medieval German national legend from Byzantine apocalyptic sources.

Gerhard von Zezschwitz first called attention to the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* in his 1877 work on the medieval development of the emperor legends.²¹ He followed the consensus that the apocalypse, which he studied in Grynæus' *editio princeps* of the Greek, was likely the work of Patriarch Methodius I, and therefore had its origins in ninth-century Byzantine imperial ideology. Zezschwitz saw in the apocalypse a Byzantine point of origin for the traditions of the great Christian holy warrior emperor—the Last World Emperor—which came to have enormous influence on medieval thought.²²

A review of Zezschwitz's book by Alfred von Gutschmid two years later called attention to the findings and expanded upon them.²³ Gutschmid showed that the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* could not have been the work of the Constantinopolitan patriarch, but was written by a pseudonymous author who wrote in Greek under early Islamic rule. Gutschmid pointed out that the work survived in Latin in four eighth-century manuscripts (for these, see above) and was therefore certainly written earlier than the ninth century. Gutschmid suggested that it was probably written between 676–678²⁴ and voiced the need for a new critical edition.

The call was taken up two decades later by a philologist and historian of Cluniac monasticism, Ernst Sackur. In 1898 Sackur published the first critical edition of the First Latin Recension of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* in his *Sibyllinische Texte und Forschungen*, using the four manuscripts of the eighth century.²⁵

In his detailed introduction to his edition, Sackur made further vital contributions: he showed the indebtedness of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* to non-Greek, eastern traditions, and made clear its enormous influence throughout the Middle Ages. Sackur supposed the apocalypse had been written in the last years of the reign of the Byzantine emperor Constantine IV (r. 668–685),²⁶ and identified in it strong influences from Syriac and Persian

²¹ Gerhard von Zezschwitz, *Vom römischen Kaisertum deutscher Nation: Ein mittelalterliches Drama, nebst Untersuchungen über die byzantinischen Quellen der deutschen Kaisersage* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1877).

²² Ibid, 70–73.

²³ Alfred von Gutschmid, review in *Historische Zeitschrift* 41.1 (1879), 145–154; reprinted in *Kleine Schriften von Alfred von Gutschmid*, ed. Franz Rühl (Leipzig: Teubner, 1894), 495–506.

²⁴ Ibid, 151–153 (503–505 in reprint). Gutschmid was sure that only two of the manuscripts, Cod. Vatican Barb. Lat. 671 and Cod. Paris Bibliothèque National, Lat. 13348 were from the eighth century; the other two manuscripts, Cod. St. Gall Stiftsbibliothek cod. 225, and Cod. Bern Burgerbibliothek cod. 611, he placed in either the eighth or ninth century. Subsequent research has definitively shown that these codices are also from the eighth century, since they contain Easter *computi* that date them to 773 and 727, respectively.

²⁵ Ernst Sackur, *Sibyllinische Texte und Forschungen: Pseudomethodius Adso und Die tiburtinische Sibylle* (Halle a.S.: M. Niemeyer, 1898), with the edition on 59–96. Other works that merit mention in the period between Gutschmid's review of Zezschwitz's book and Sackur's edition include Franz Kampers, *Kaiserprophetien und Kaisersagen im Mittelalter: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der deutschen Kaiseridee* (Munich: Lüneburg, 1895), and Claus Caspari, in *Briefe, Abhandlungen und Predigten aus den zwei letzten Jahrhunderten des kirchlichen Alterthums und dem Anfang des Mittelalters* (Christiania : Mallingsche Buchdruckerei, 1890).

²⁶ Ibid, 47–51.

literature and ideas. For example, he noticed that its account of Biblical history was strongly influenced by the *Cave of Treasures*, a late antique collection of Syriac apocrypha that had been edited and made available in a German translation in the previous decade by Carl Bezold.²⁷ Nonetheless, Sackur believed that the author of the apocalypse was a Greek living in Egypt or, more likely, Syria, who was receptive to influences from the Syriac literary and intellectual culture surrounding him.²⁸

Sackur mentioned that direct and indirect references to the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* could be found in medieval German, French, English, Danish, Italian, Dalmatian, Armenian, Syrian, Slavic, and Byzantine authors.²⁹ He also emphasized its long use as a Christian polemical tool against Islam and briefly discussed its popularity from the fifteenth to the seventeenth century in hostile discourse against the Ottoman Turks.³⁰ Sackur's research became the starting point for early twentieth-century work on the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* in vernacular literatures. The *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* was introduced to English-language scholarship through Charlotte D'Evelyn's research on its Middle English translations.³¹

Although Sackur knew of research on the influence of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* written in numerous languages, he appears to have been unaware of the work carried out by Russian scholars simultaneously to his own. For scholars of Russian literature, the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* was particularly important because it was cited several times in two foundational texts: the early twelfth-century *Russian Primary Chronicle*, which is the earliest surviving historical work of the Kievan Rus; and the *Novgorod Chronicle*, the earliest chronicle from the state of Novgorod and extant in the oldest surviving Russian monastic manuscript. Russian scholars were thus interested in understanding this work because so much of their nation's earliest historical literature referred to it.

Nikolai S. Tikhonravov, professor of Russian literature and dean of history and philology at Moscow University, in an essay on the formation of a national literature in Russia, called attention to the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*. The text fit well into a larger

²⁷ Carl Bezold, *Die Schatzhöhle, 1: Übersetzung* (Leipzig : Hinrichs, 1883); Sackur, 12-17.

²⁸ Sackur, *Sibyllinische Texte*, 53-55.

²⁹ Ibid, 6-7.

³⁰ Ibid, 1-3.

³¹ Charlotte D'Evelyn, "The Middle-English Metrical Version of the Revelations of Methodius; with a Study of the Influence of Methodius in Middle-English Writings," *PMLA*, vol. 33, no. 2 (1918), 135-203. D'Evelyn supplemented her publication of the Middle English metrical version of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* with a history of the work. What she wrote is heavily indebted to the work of Sackur, but she focused on its influence on medieval and early modern English literature. She showed that the apocalypse was widely known, both through excerpts in the very popular twelfth-century *Historia Scholastica* of Peter Comestor and directly from Latin manuscript copies in England. Of vital importance, D'Evelyn recognized that the Middle English poems were based on a Latin version different from the one edited by Sackur, and she identified several Latin manuscripts that contain this alternative version (later called recension 2). Seven years after D'Evelyn's study, Aaron Jenkins Perry, in *Dialogus Inter Militem Et Clericum; Richard FitzRalph's Sermon: "Defensio Curatorum"; and Methodius: "De Bygynnyng of Pe World and Pe Ende of Worldes" by John Trevisa* (London: Early English Text Society, 1925), 94-112, published two prose versions of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* in Middle English which had been attributed, probably falsely, to the Cornish writer and translator John Trevisa (d. 1402).

paradigm he described whereby medieval Russian writers built upon an inherited Byzantine tradition in order to create the basis of Russian literature.³²

A young student of Tikhonravov, Vasily Istrin, provided an in-depth philological study of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, which he published in 1897.³³ Istrin gathered a number of manuscripts of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* written in Greek, Latin, and Old Church Slavonic with the goal to investigate the transmission of the work in Slavonic. He identified fourteen manuscripts of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* in Greek, mostly from Mt. Athos and the Monastery of St. John on Patmos, and classified the four distinct recensions among them. He published the text from manuscripts of each recension.³⁴ He also showed that several versions existed in Latin and published the text of one recension.³⁵ Most importantly, Istrin presented three distinct Slavonic versions, and explored their relationship to their Greek counterparts.³⁶

Istrin made no attempt to create critical editions according to nineteenth-century criteria—an enormously complicated task given the multiplicity of recensions. Still, his publication of the Greek and Slavonic texts out of several major manuscript witnesses was extremely influential, with the exception of his work on the Latin: Istrin published the text of a Latin recension unknown to Sackur, yet his contribution was overlooked because most scholars turned to Sackur's critical edition and stopped there. Istrin's publication of the Greek texts were the only ones available to scholars until the appearance of a critical edition eighty years later, and his work is still standard in the study of the Slavonic version.

Istrin's interest was primarily focused on the influence of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* in Russian medieval literature. Istrin's valuable philological work was somewhat undermined by his nationalist interpretation of the reception of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, which sought to deemphasize the role of the southern Slavs and place the Slavonic translation in Kiev.³⁷ A useful corrective was provided in 1929, when the Harvard scholar of Slavic literature, Samuel Hazzard Cross, showed that the initial translation into Old Church

³² Nikolai S. Tikhonravov, *Сочинения* (St. Petersburg: Izd. A.F. Marksa, 1898), 229-236.

³³ Vasily M. Istrin, *Откровение Мефодія Патарскаго и апокрифическія видѣнія Даниїла въ византійской и славяно-русской литературахъ* (Moscow: Univ. tip., 1897).

³⁴ Ibid, 450; 63-69.

³⁵ Ibid, 75-83.

³⁶ Ibid, 154-232.

³⁷ Istrin made clear that the surviving Old Church Slavonic translations contain linguistic features that reveal that they originated in a Bulgarian or Serbian context; that is, it was not the work of a Russian. Since the long excerpts quoted in the *Russian Primary Chronicle* do not conform exactly to any of the known Slavonic translations surviving in the manuscripts, he suggested that a Slavic translation was made from Greek in Kiev soon after the conversion of the Rus to Christianity as part of the larger influx of Byzantine culture, and it is this version, otherwise lost, which is preserved in the *Russian Primary Chronicle*; see *ibid*, 111-112. Once this version was lost, Istrin speculated, Russians had to resort to using the South Slavic translations. This gave the Russians prime role in brining the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* into the Slavic world while explaining away the inconvenient fact of the South Slavic origin of surviving translations.

Slavonic probably took place in Bulgaria in the ninth century and spread through the Slavic world from there.³⁸

Thus, at the end of the nineteenth century, German and Russian philologists, for whom the Byzantine Empire could be interpreted as a prestigious, medieval forerunner to their own absolutist imperial governments, laid the foundations of research into the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* in their attempts to find in Byzantine sources origins for their own national literatures and myths. Their primary interest was in the political outlook of the *Apocalypse*.³⁹ They realized that it contained an eschatological view that glorified monarchy and the imperial office. Conforming to a changed political environment, the focus of later scholars would shift to other themes.

Discovery of the Syriac Context

Perhaps the most important development in research on the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* in the early twentieth century was the gradual realization by scholars that it had been originally composed in Syriac. In 1917, François Nau, a Syriacist and early proponent of this theory, called attention to major influences from Syriac literature—such as the *Cave of Treasures* and the Syriac *Julian Romance*—on the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, and showed that several medieval Syriac works were familiar with the apocalypse and some even quoted it.⁴⁰

Nau published a fragmentary Syriac text he had discovered in a seventeenth-century manuscript. He believed to be the last few folios of the original Syriac version of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*. Nau's text contains many of the same elements as the concluding chapters of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* that he had read in Greek and Latin, such as the final defeat of the Ishmaelites and the surrender of power by the Christian Emperor in Jerusalem. However, it differs in some significant ways from the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* as it survived in its Greek and Latin versions.⁴¹ Nau's text is now recognized as a later, distinct work heavily influenced by the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, and conventionally called the *Edessene Apocalypse*.⁴² Still, Nau's findings were an important first step toward the recognition of a Syriac background for the apocalypse.

³⁸ Samuel Hazzard Cross, "The Earliest Allusion in Slavic Literature to the Revelations of Pseudo-Methodius," *Speculum*, vol. 4, no. 3 (1929), 329–339. The author of the *Russian Primary Chronicle*, Cross demonstrates, probably did not have a uniquely Russian translation as Istrin had contended, but was instead summarizing passages of the South Slavic translation from memory.

³⁹ It is probably no coincidence that there was no contemporary corresponding interest in the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* in Republican France or in Britain under the sway of Gibbon, despite the large numbers of Latin manuscripts of the work surviving in the libraries of both those countries.

⁴⁰ François Nau, "Révélations et légendes. Méthodius - Clément - Andronicus," *Journal Asiatique*, series 11, no. 9 (1917), 415–471

⁴¹ In order to account for the fact that the excerpts quoted by medieval Syriac writers corresponded much more closely to the Greek and Latin than his surviving fragments, Nau had to propose a rather complicated theory in which the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* had been translated into Greek and Latin, and later back into Syriac.

⁴² On this apocalyptic work, see G.J. Reinink, "Der edessenische Pseudo-Methodius," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, vol. 83 (1990), 31–45; Lutz Greisiger, "Edessene Apocalypse," in *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History, volume 1 (600-900)*, ed. David Thomas and Barbara Roggema (Boston: Brill, 2009), 172–175.

During the Sixth German Orientalists' Day in Vienna, on June 13, 1930, the Hungarian scholar Michael Kmosko presented overwhelming proof that the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* had originally been written in Syriac.⁴³ He had found the original Syriac hiding in plain sight, in the manuscript cod. Vatican Syr. 58 catalogued by Assemani. To his surprise, it had been overlooked by the numerous scholars who had worked on the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* in the previous sixty years.⁴⁴ He asserted that a comparison of Syriac text in cod. Vatican Syr. 58 with the Greek and Latin versions of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* made it abundantly clear that the original language of the work must have been Syriac. Proper names throughout the apocalypse were derived from Syriac, and statements that made little sense in Greek or Latin were clear in the Syriac, particularly interpretations of scripture (since these were written with the Syriac Peshitta version of the Bible in mind).⁴⁵

Of near comparable importance, Kmosko pointed out the deep influence of Syriac and Persian literature on the apocalypse. He asserted that the original author must have been from Mesopotamia, and that the Persian influence on the apocalypse suggested that it was perhaps written by a "Nestorian" (East Syrian) Christian subject of the Sasanian Persian Empire. Kmosko asserted that the author's interest in the Roman Empire suggested that he had relocated to Roman Empire and likely converted to Roman Chalcedonian Christianity.⁴⁶

Kmosko promised to follow up this information with a monograph on the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*. Unfortunately, he died that same year and the only publication that appeared was an article version of his lecture in the 1931 issue of the journal *Byzantion* and titled "Das Rätsel des Pseudomethodius."

During the three decades that followed Kmosko's publication, little scholarly work was done on the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*.⁴⁷ The Syriac version was available only in one manuscript located in the Vatican library, while scholarship on the Latin and Greek versions was hampered by the complicated textual history of the *Apocalypse*, for which the existing editions and printed versions provided an insufficient picture. The *Apocalypse* did earn a few brief mentions in Norman Cohn's influential 1957 book *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, which touched on its political ideas while searching for the medieval eschatological origins of fascism and communism.⁴⁸

⁴³ These findings were published in Michael Kmosko, "Das Rätsel des Pseudomethodius," *Byzantion*, vol. 6 (1931), 273–296.

⁴⁴ Anton Baumstark, *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur* (Bonn: Webers, 1922), 77 n.6, knew of the Syriac version in Vaticanus syriacus 58, but, likely following Assemani, considered it a translation from Greek.

⁴⁵ Kmosko, "Das Rätsel des Pseudomethodius," esp. 285–286.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 286–289.

⁴⁷ Lorenzo DiTommaso, "A Report on Pseudepigrapha Research since Charlesworth's *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*," *Journal for the Study of Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 12, no. 2 (2001), 179–207, demonstrates from World War I to the 1970s, little scholarly work in general was done on pseudepigrapha, whether apocalypses or other apocrypha.

⁴⁸ Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1957). At times Cohn suggests that the Last Emperor Legend provided an origin of fascist populists and would-be national messiahs, but on ibid, 72, he implies that the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* was an inspiration for proto-communistic hopes: "the poor were certainly capable of transforming the sleeping emperor of the Pseudo-Methodius according to their own desires, into a savior who would not only annihilate the infidel but also succour and raise up the lowly."

By the 1960s, Paul Alexander and Walter Kaegi took up the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* as a source on Byzantine attitudes toward political ideology and toward the Arabs, respectively.⁴⁹ Anastasios Lolos published new critical editions of the four recensions of the Greek in 1976 and 1978, which provided much-needed editions to replace Istrin's manuscript transcriptions of the Greek.⁵⁰ On the basis of the Greek, Lolos agreed with Kmosko's conclusions that the *Apocalypse* probably was a translation from Syriac.⁵¹

Recent Scholarship

A growing interest in the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* resulted in considerable new work in the 1980s and 1990s, especially from the year 1985, when a number of important studies happened to be published. During the 1960s and 1970s, Paul Alexander had continued his research into the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, and published several articles as he prepared a larger work on Byzantine apocalyptic literature.⁵² He died in 1977 before completing this major monograph. Fortunately, it appeared posthumously in 1985 under the title *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, edited by Dorothy deF. Abrahamse. Here, Alexander made invaluable contributions to the study of the apocalypse: he provided a careful analysis of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, giving firm linguistic evidence that confirmed Kmosko's claim that it must have been originally composed in Syriac. He also offered an English translation of the Syriac text as it appeared in Vaticanus syriacus 58.⁵³

Alexander's primary interest was the role of the work in the development of Byzantine apocalyptic literature. Consequently, while carefully pointing out the Syriac and Persian influences on it, he paid little attention to the context of the Syriac apocalyptic genre from which it originated and continued a long tradition of viewing the author of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* as a sort of cultural Byzantine who happened to live beyond the frontier.

⁴⁹ Walter Kaegi, "Initial Byzantine Reactions to the Arab Conquest," *Church History*, vol. 38, no. 2 (June, 1969), 139–149. Kaegi does not mention Kmosko's work in the article. Paul Alexander, "The Strength of Empire and Capital as Seen Through Byzantine Eyes," *Speculum*, vol. 37 no. 3 (July, 1962), 339–357, esp. 344, on the influence of the *Apocalypse* on the sacralization of the office of emperor and the Byzantine belief in the eternity of their empire. Six years later, Alexander also used the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* as a major test case for deriving historical information in a classic article, idem, Paul Alexander, "Medieval Apocalypses as Historical Sources," *The American Historical Review*, vol. 73 no. 4 (April, 1968), 997–1018. It should be noted that Alexander cites Kmosko, mentioning that he argued for a Syriac background of the apocalypse, but Alexander here remains agnostic on the subject; later, Alexander would make his own forceful case that the apocalypse had been written in Syriac (see below).

⁵⁰ Anastasios Lolos, *Die Apokalypse des Ps.-Methodios*. (Meisenheim am Glan: Hain, 1976); idem, *Die dritte und vierte Redaktion des Ps.-Methodios* (Meisenheim am Glan: Hain, 1978).

⁵¹ See Lolos, *Die Apokalypse des Ps.-Methodios*, 23.

⁵² Paul Alexander, "Byzantium and the Migration of Literary Works and Motifs: The Legend of the Last Roman Emperor," *Medievalia et Humanistica*, vol. 2 (1971), 47–68; idem, "The Medieval Legend of the Last Roman Emperor and Its Messianic Origin," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol 41 (1978), 1–15; idem, "The Diffusion of Byzantine Apocalypses in the Medieval West and the Beginnings of Joachimism," in *Prophecy and Millenarianism: Essays in Honour of Marjorie Reeves*, ed. Ann Williams (Essex: Longman, 1980), 55–106.

⁵³ Paul Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), with commentary on 13–33, and his translation on ibid, 36–51.

A useful corrective to this approach appeared in the unpublished 1985 dissertation of Francisco Javier Martinez, *Eastern Christian Apocalyptic in the Early Muslim Period: Pseudo-Methodius and Pseudo-Athanasius*. Martinez published the Syriac text from cod. Vatican Syr. 58. To make sense of some corrupted passages, Martinez introduced corrections based on Solomon of Basra's *Book of the Bee*—a thirteenth-century work that quotes long excerpts from the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*. Martinez also provided a heavily annotated English translation.⁵⁴

Martinez continued to explore the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* as a source for information on Northern Mesopotamia in the wake of the Islamic conquests and made a strong case that the Byzantine nature of the work had been generally over emphasized. Martinez argued against any influence from Jewish or Roman Christian apocalyptic thought, and stressed instead that it was a work steeped in the traditions and influences of Syriac Christianity and Persian legend.

Other works published in 1985 stressed even more emphatically the connection of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* to the Arab conquests. Harold Suermann published his German-language dissertation on seventh-century Syriac apocalypses. Like Martinez, Suermann focused on the Syriac literary context of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*. He provided his own edition with German translation, and placed it in the context of further apocalyptic literature written in Syriac in reaction to the Islamic conquests, explicating the relationships between these works and providing new editions and translations of many.⁵⁵ In a 1985 article, Benjamin Kedar highlighted the *Apocalypse* as a potential source for the impact of the Arabs on the environment of the lands they conquered.⁵⁶

That same year, Otto Prinz published a critical edition of a different recension of the Latin *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*. This was the Latin recension used by the early modern English and German translators. Prinz suggested that it was likely preserved in more manuscripts—and thus more widely known to medieval Latin audiences—than the earlier recension edited by Sackur.⁵⁷ Additionally, in 1985 Francis Thomson published an edition of another, newly discovered translation of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* in Old Church Slavonic, which he suggested dating to the ninth century.⁵⁸

Following these developments, a joint research project on the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* between scholars at the universities of Groningen and Leuven produced a number of important contributions. In 1988, Marc Laureys and Daniel Verhelst from Leuven published a

⁵⁴ Francisco Javier Martinez, "Eastern Christian Apocalyptic in the Early Muslim Period: Pseudo-Methodius and Pseudo-Athanasius" (Ph.D dissertation, Catholic University of America 1985) 58–203.

⁵⁵ Harold Suermann, *Die geschichtstheologische Reaktion auf die einfallenden Muslime in der edessenischen Apokalypik des 7. Jahrhunderts* (Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang, 1985).

⁵⁶ Benjamin Kedar, "The Arab Conquests and Agriculture: A Seventh-Century Apocalypse, Satellite Imagery, and Palynology," *Asian and African Studies*, vol. 19, no 1 (1985), 1–15.

⁵⁷ Otto Prinz, "Eine frühe abendländische Aktualisierung der lateinischen Übersetzung des Pseudo-Methodius," *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters*, vol. 41 (1985): 1–23.

⁵⁸ Francis Thomson, "The Slavonic translations of Pseudo-Methodius of Olympus *Apocalypsis*," in *Tärnovska knizhovna shkola*, vol. 4 (1985), 143–73.

comprehensive list of the surviving manuscripts of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* in Latin.⁵⁹ Simultaneously, philologists at Groningen devoted themselves to providing new critical editions.

In 1993, Gerrit J. Reinink, of the University of Groningen, published a critical edition of the Syriac text.⁶⁰ Although the sixteenth-century Vatianus syriacus 58 provides the only complete witness to the Syriac version of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, Reinink supplemented its version of the text with several fragmentary manuscripts of the work discovered by Arthur Vööbus in the Church of the Forty Martyrs in Mardin. Vööbus had mistakenly attributed them to a “Methodius of Petra.”⁶¹ These witnesses were unavailable to Martinez when he made his earlier edition. Reinink also used a thirteenth-century manuscript copy of *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* identified in a codex at Yale University.

In the years immediately preceding and following the publication of his critical edition, Reinink published a bevy of articles in German and English on the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* in its Syriac context, focusing on its role in inventing the medieval concept of the Last Emperor, and its usefulness as a source for Syriac Christian responses to Islam.⁶² As a scholar of Syriac literature, he was able to give a more detailed analysis on the influence of Syriac literary works, such as the *Cave of Treasures* and the Syriac *Alexander Romance*, on the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, than what Nau and Sackur had offered a century earlier.⁶³ Reinink’s work continues to be the standard on the Syriac background of the text. His edition provided the basis

⁵⁹ Laureys and Verhelst, “Pseudo-Methodius, Revelationes,” 112–136.

⁶⁰ *Die syrische Apokalypse des Pseudo-Methodius*, ed. G.J. Reinink (Leuven: E. Peeters, 1993).

⁶¹ Arthur Vööbus, “Discovery of an Unknown Syriac Author: Methodius of Petra,” *Abr-Nahrain*, vol. 17 (1976–1977), 1–4

⁶² G.J. Reinink, “Ismael, der Wildesel in der Wüste: Zur Typologie der Apokalypse des Pseudo-Methodios,” *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, vol. 75 (1982), 336–344; idem, “Die syrischen Wurzeln der mittelalterlichen Legende zum römischen Endkaiser,” in *Non Nova, sed Nove: Mélanges de civilisation médiévale dédiés à W. Noomen*, ed. M. Gosman, J. van Os (Groningen: Bouma’s Boekhuis, 1984), 195–209; idem, “Pseudo-Methodius und die Legende vom römischen Endkaiser,” in *The Use and Abuse of Eschatology in the Middle Ages*, ed. W. Verbeke, D. Verhelst, and A. Welkenhuysen (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1988), 82–111; idem, “Ps.-Methodius: a Concept of History in Response to the Rise of Islam,” in *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East, vol. I: Problems in the Literary Source Material*, ed. Averil Cameron and Lawrence Conrad (Princeton: The Darwin Press, 1992), 149–187; idem, “The Romance of Julian the Apostate as a Source for Seventh-Century Syriac Apocalypses,” in *La Syrie de Byzance à l’Islam, VII-VIII siècles*, ed. Pierre Canivet and Jean-Paul Rey Coquais (Damascus: Institut français de Damas, 1992), 75–86; idem, “Early Christian Reactions to the Building of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem,” *Xristianskij Vostok*, vol. 2 (2000), 229–241; idem, “Following the Doctrine of the Demons: Early Christian Fear of Conversion to Islam” in *Cultures of Conversions*, ed. Jan Bremmer, Wout Jac. van Bekkum, and Arie Molendijk (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 127–138.

⁶³ Gerrit J. Reinink, “Die Entstehung der syrischen Alexanderlegende als politisch-religiöse Propagandaschrift für Herakleios’ Kirchenpolitik,” in *After Chalcedon: Studies in Theology and Church History Offered to Professor Albert van Roey for his Seventieth Birthday*, ed. C. Laga, et al. (Leuven: Peeters, 1985), 263–281; idem, “Heraclius, the New Alexander: Apocalyptic prophecies during the reign of Heraclius,” in *The Reign of Heraclius (610–641): Crisis and Confrontation*, ed. G. J. Reinink, Bernard H. Stolte (Leuven: Peeters, 2002), 81–94; idem, “Alexander the Great in Seventh-Century Syriac ‘Apocalyptic’ Texts,” *Byzantinorossica*, vol. 2 (2003): 150–78.

of two partial English translations of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, by Sebastian Brock and by Michael Philip Penn.⁶⁴

The final product of the research collaboration was the publication in 1998 by two other Groningen professors, Willem J. Aerts and George Kortekaas, of new critical editions of the first recensions of both the Greek and Latin versions of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*. In their edition, they placed the Greek and Latin side by side so that the two could be compared, and provided extensive commentary.⁶⁵

The *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* has emerged as a major source for understanding the Islamic conquests. For example, in two recent books on the interaction of Syriac Christians and Muslims, Michael Penn uses the *Apocalypse* as an early Syriac Christian reaction to the Islam.⁶⁶ The twentieth-century trends in using the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* primarily as a source on the Arab conquest and early state building in the Middle East has continued into the twenty-first century as American and European interest in Islam and the history of the Middle East has grown. It is to be hoped that this dissertation, however, has returned some emphasis to the importance of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* for Christian political eschatology, a theme that evidently interested centuries of readers.

Appendix B: The Date of Composition of the Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara

The first step toward contextualizing the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* is determining when it was originally written. There is an extensive historiography on this question, but nonetheless the date of the *Apocalypse* remains contentious. The *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* certainly must have been written before the earliest extant manuscript of the text, a copy of the Latin translation from the year 727.⁶⁷

Scholars have sought to use internal evidence to establish a more precise date at which the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* must have been composed. This primarily has meant identifying the last *vaticinium ex eventu* (historical allusion masquerading as prophecy) in the

⁶⁴ Brock's translation can be found in in *The Seventh Century in the West-Syrian Chronicles*, ed. Andrew Palmer, Sebastian Brock, and Robert Hoyland (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1993), 230–242. The translation of Michael Philip Penn can be found in his *When Christians First Met Muslims: A Sourcebook of the Earliest Syriac Writings on Islam* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), 116–129.

⁶⁵ Willem J. Aerts and George A. A. Kortekaas, *Die Apokalypse des Pseudo-Methodius: die ältesten griechischen und lateinischen Übersetzungen* (Leuven: Peeters, 1998).

⁶⁶ Michael Penn, *Envisioning Islam: Syriac Christians and the Early Muslim World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press); idem *When Christians First Met Muslims*, 116–129.

⁶⁷ The manuscript is codex Bern, Burgerbibliothek, no. 611, and can be dated to 727 AD based on an Easter *computus* contained in the same volume; see Marc Laureys and Daniel Verhelst, “Pseudo-Methodius, Revelations: Textgeschichte und kritische Edition. Ein Leuven-Groninger Forschungsprojekt,” *The Use and Abuse of Eschatology in the Middle Ages*, ed. Werner Verbeke et al. (Leuven 1988) 114 item 4. This early dating for the manuscript is no outlier, as three other manuscripts containing the Latin translation of have also been dated to the eighth century based on the handwriting: Paris Bibliothèque nationale, Fonds latin 13348, fol. 93v–110v (dated to the mid-eighth century); Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Barb. Lat. 671, fol. 171r–174v (dated to the middle to late eighth century); and Sankt Gallen Stiftsbibliothek 225, S. 384–439 (dated from 760–797 AD). For more on these manuscripts, see Aerts and Kortekaas (n. 40 above) 48–56. The manuscript

Apocalypse. This follows a methodology for dating apocalypses set forward by Paul Alexander.⁶⁸ If it can be identified when the *Apocalypse* ceases to “predict” events that actually happened, and begins to make prophecies that never came true, the last event should correspond to the date at which it was written.

Unfortunately, the text of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* is often quite opaque, and there has been so far no consensus about when the *vaticinia ex eventu* end and its speculation about the future begins. Indeed, scenes that were at first regarded by scholars as predictions of the future have been subsequently viewed as historical allusions.

Historiography on the date of composition

As noted above, some of the earliest critical scholarship on the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* long regarded it as the ninth century work of the Patriarch Methodius of Constantinople. Alfred von Gutschmid demonstrated that this could not be the case when he showed the existence of the eighth century Latin manuscripts.

Michael Kmosko, in presenting his case that the apocalypse had been written in Syriac, proposed that it had been composed early in the reign of the Caliph Mu’awiya (r. 661–680), on the basis of four captains mentioned in the text, which he took to refer to the warring factions of the First Fitna, the first Islamic civil war (c. 656–661).⁶⁹ The mobilization of these captains, which Kmosko read as Arab political factions, was the last event based on real history and therefore the *Apocalypse* must have been written shortly thereafter.

Kmosko’s view was widely followed, though later scholars attempted to establish an even more precise date. Anastasios Lolos, when edited the first critical edition of the four Greek recensions of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, took this tendency to its logical extreme in precisely dating the composition of the original Syriac text in the year 655, and its translation into Greek in the year 674. Lolos arrived at such exact dates by identifying the naval campaign of Caliph Mu’awiya in the middle of the 650s as the last historical event mentioned, and asserting that the *Apocalypse* must have been written in that very year. Lolos further specified that the composition of the *Apocalypse*, as well as its translation into Greek, must have predated the so-called First Arab siege of Constantinople in the 670s on account of the fact neither the Syriac nor the Greek mention this event, which Lolos believes would have been too important to omit.⁷⁰

Paul Alexander arrived at a similar theory about the date of the *Apocalypse*: “There are rather clear indications that it cannot have been written prior to A.D. 644 or later than 678.”⁷¹ The *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* mentions the Ishmaelites, in their first incursion into the civilized world in the time of the Hebrew judges, traveled by ship and conquered many lands on

⁶⁸ Paul Alexander, “Medieval Apocalypses as Historical Sources,” *The American Historical Review*, vol. 73, no. 4 (1968), 997–1018.

⁶⁹ Kmosko, “Das Rätsel des Pseudomethodius,” 282–285. For the references to these captains, see Pseudo-Methodius XI: 15–18 and 43–45.

⁷⁰ Lolos, *Die Apokalypse des Ps.-Methodius*, 20–22.

⁷¹ Paul Alexander, “Byzantium and the Migration of Literary Works and Motifs: The Legend of the Last Roman Emperor,” *Medievalia et Humanistica*, no. 2 (1971), 57.

the Mediterranean. Alexander asserted that it would have been very unlikely that the *Apocalypse* would have been composed before the creation of the Arab navy in 644, since prior to that point it would have been impossible for a Christian author to imagine “that the landlocked inhabitants of the Arabian desert would become a seafaring people.”⁷²

On the other hand, Paul Alexander suggested that the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* was likely written soon after the Arab conquest of the near east because the author expresses a vivid memory of this conquest and describes in detailed, mournful terms the suffering experienced by the conquered Christians. It could not have been composed later than 678 because, he believed, that that was the year of the first Arab siege of Constantinople. Since the *Apocalypse* mentions neither the first *fitna* nor a treaty between Mu’awiya and Constans II concluded in 659, he believed that it was likely composed earlier than these events.

Though Alexander carefully pointed out the dangers in reading too much into silences, in the end he concluded that because the author of the *Apocalypse* was so invested in the conflict between the Roman Empire and the Arabs that: “the Arab failure before the walls of Constantinople would therefore have been grist to his mill, and it is difficult to imagine why, had he written after 678, he should have abstained from mentioning this well-known event.”⁷³ Suermann, in his monograph that appeared the same year, likewise asserted that the lack of mention of the siege of Constantinople indicted that the *Apocalypse* was written before 674.⁷⁴

An alternative theory about the date of the composition of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* has been suggested by Sebastian Brock. To Brock, passages in the *Apocalypse* complaining about the imposition of taxes provide “the key to the precise dating of the *Apocalypse*.”⁷⁵ According to Brock, they must refer to the census and poll tax imposed by Caliph ‘Abd al-Malik (r. 685–705) in 691/2. Therefore, Brock dated the *Apocalypse* to 690 or 691, just before the tax was finally put in place. He also noticed that mention of plague in the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* sounds very similar to the outbreak of plague in Northern Mesopotamia mentioned by the author John bar Penkaye at the end of the Second Fitna.⁷⁶ Moreover, this period, when the Caliphate was still reeling from the Second Fitna, saw a brief moment of Roman military superiority under Emperor Justinian II. According to Brock: “the tension between these two factors— rumors of vastly increased taxes, and Byzantine military recovery— thus provided a hotbed for eschatological ideas.”⁷⁷

Brock provided one other piece of evidence for his 690–691 dating. The *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* repeatedly mentions that the oppression of the Ishmaelites would end before the completion of ten weeks of years.⁷⁸ A “week of years,” a measure of time popularized

⁷² Paul Alexander in *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, 24–26; Alexander, “Byzantium and the Migration of Literary Works,” 65 n29.

⁷³ Paul Alexander in *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, 25.

⁷⁴ Suermann, *Die geschichtstheologische Reaktion*, 160–161.

⁷⁵ Brock, “Syriac Views of Emergent Islam,” 19.

⁷⁶ Sebastian Brock, “North Mesopotamia in the Late 7th Century: Book 15 of John Bar Penkaye’s ‘Ris Melle,’” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 9 (1987), pp. 51–75.

⁷⁷ Brock, “Syriac Views of Emergent Islam,” 19.

⁷⁸ The *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, V.9; X.6; XIII.2.

in the Book of Daniel, is seven years, and so ten weeks of years equals seventy years. Brock assumed that the author of the *Apocalypse* was calculating from the start of the Islamic calendar, the year 622, and so this would mean, according to Brock, that the author was predicting the fall of the Ishmaelites before 692. This seemed to verify his other evidence for an author working sometime around 690–691.⁷⁹

Francisco Javier Martinez called this latter argument of Brock's into question. First, Martinez argues, if the author were dating by the Islamic calendar, he would probably not use standard solar years but Islamic lunar years, which would bring the date to 690, not 692. Moreover, while the sixteenth-century Cod. Vatican Syr. 58—the sole manuscript of the Syriac text that had been available to Brock—reads “ten weeks of years,” the Greek translations and Latin translations (preserved in manuscript copies significantly older than Cod. Vatican Syr. 58), read “seven weeks of years,” i.e. forty-nine years (Martinez did not know it, but the Mardin recension of the Syriac also contains this reading).⁸⁰ Martinez decided that there was not yet enough evidence to determine which was the original wording, and so cautioned against using the “weeks of years” to date the work. Still, Martinez was convinced by Brock's argument that the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* referred to taxation and fiscal reforms by ‘Abd al-Malik, though he suggested it was perhaps slightly older than Brock hypothesized, and so provisionally dated it to 688–689.⁸¹

Gerrit J. Reinink, in scholarly dialogue with Brock and Martinez, also proposed a date around the year 690. He agrees with Brock's use of the weeks of years, and adds as further evidence another passage where the apocalypse claims that the Ishmaelites, in their earlier conquest in the time of the Hebrew judges, ruled the world for sixty years.⁸² Reinink suggested that this timeframe, though associated with the Ishmaelite conquests in the time when Gideon led the Hebrews, was mentioned in order to parallel the length of time the Arabs had ruled in the author's own time. Also dating from the year of the Hijra (622 AD) Reinink concludes that the author must have written after the year 682 AD.⁸³

Reinink also expanded upon Brock's assertion that the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* was likely written in response to the imposition of new taxes by ‘Abd al-Malik in 691/2. He pointed out that Syriac chronicler John bar Penkaye had believed the Second Fitna marked the imminent end of the Arab Empire when he was writing in around 687, and that the author of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* clung to a similar hope in the imminent fall of the Arabs

⁷⁹ Brock, “Syriac Sources for Seventh-Century History,” 34; idem, “Syriac Views of Emergent Islam,” 203 n. 63.

⁸⁰ Martinez, *Eastern Christian Apocalyptic*, 30–31. These objections are also voiced in and Shoemaker, “The *Tiburtine Sibyl*, the Last Emperor,” 229.

⁸¹ Martinez, “Eastern Christian Apocalyptic,” 31; idem, “The Apocalyptic Genre in Syriac: The World of Pseudo-Methodius,” in *IV Symposium Syriacum, 1984: Literary Genres in Syriac Literature*, ed. H. J. W. Drijvers (Roma: Pont. Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1987), 340–341 n. 9.

⁸² The *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, V.4–5. The passage first says that the Ishmaelite dominion lasted sixty years, and then reiterates that their dominion of all nations lasted “eight and a half weeks of years” (which is about sixty years).

⁸³ G. J. Reinink, “*Ismael, der Wildesel* in der Wüste: Zur Typologie der Apokalypse des Pseudo-Methodios,” *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, vol. 75 (1982), 339 n. 19.

(see above, chapter 5, section II). However, since the non-Arab rebels called *Shurte* who occupied Nisibis, and in whom John had placed his hopes, had been eliminated, the author of the *Apocalypse* had to revise the expectation to make the destruction of the Arabs come at the hands of Romans. Therefore the author of the apocalypse, according to Reinink, must have been writing shortly after John bar Penkaye, once Nisibis had been retaken by the soldiers of ‘Abd al-Malik.⁸⁴

Moreover, according to Reinink, the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* was not just a reaction to the new taxes of ‘Abd al-Malik, but the caliph’s larger policy of explicit state support for Islam that challenged the status of Christianity in his empire (see above, chapter 5, section II). These challenges included such as acts removing Christian imagery from the coinage and overseeing the construction of the Dome of the Rock, with its inscriptions that openly challenged the concept of the triune Christian God.⁸⁵ Reinink has pointed specifically to the construction of the Dome of the Rock (completed in the year 691) as a potential motivation for the composition of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*.⁸⁶ All of this has led Reinink to conclude that the apocalypse was written in 691–692.

Reinink’s conclusions remained largely unchallenged.⁸⁷ Recently, however, Stephen Shoemaker has proposed abandoning the dates proposed by Brock and Reinink, and suggests that the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* had been more accurately dated by Alexander and Suermann. He suggests that it was likely written between 644 and 670.⁸⁸

Shoemaker justifies this by returning to the problem of the “weeks of years,” the length of time the author of the *Apocalypse* assigned to Arab rule. Emerging evidence showed that the reading in Cod. Vatican Syr 58 of “ten weeks of years” was unique, and that the original Syriac (preserved in the Mardin recension and in the Greek, Latin, and all subsequent translations) instead read “seven weeks of years,” that is forty-nine years.⁸⁹

⁸⁴ G. J. Reinink, “Ps.-Methodius: A Concept of History in Response to the Rise of Islam,” in *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East, vol. 1: Problems in the Literary Source Material* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1992), 178–182.

⁸⁵ G. J. Reinink, “The Romance of Julian the Apostate as a Source for Seventh-Century Syriac Apocalypses,” in *La Syrie de Byzance à l’Islam, VII-VIII siècles*, ed. Pierre Canivet and Jean-Paul Rey Coquas (Damascus: Institut français de Damas, 1992), 85; idem, “Following the Doctrine of the Demons: Early Christian Fear of Conversion to Islam,” in *Cultures of Conversions*, ed. Jan Bremmer, Wout Jac. van Bekkum, and Arie Molendijk (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 127–138. For ‘Abd al-Malik’s policies, see Chase Robinson, *‘Abd Al-Malik* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 59–121; Fred McGraw Donner, “From Believers to Muslims: Confessional Self-Identity in the Early Islamic Community,” *Al-Abhath*, vol. 50–51 (2002–2003), 9–53.

⁸⁶ G. J. Reinink, “Early Christian Reactions to the Building of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem,” *Xristianskij Vostok* 2 (2000), 229–241.

⁸⁷ Hannes Möhring, *Der Weltkaiser der Endzeit: Entstehung, Wandel und Wirkung einer tausendjährigen Weissagung* (Stuttgart: Thorbecke, 2000), 75–82, presents a useful overview of the various attempts to date the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*, and concludes that it was probably originally composed between 685 and 690, and certainly before the end of 692. Lutz Greisiger, “Pseudo-Methodius (Syriac),” in *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History, volume 1 (600–900)*, ed. D. Thomas and B. Roggema (Boston: Brill, 2009), 163–171, follows the arguments of Brock and Reinink, and dates it to “probably 691/92.”

⁸⁸ Stephen Shoemaker, “The Tiburtine Sibyl, the Last Emperor, and the Early Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition,” 228–229.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

Following Brock's method, Shoemaker dated from the beginning of the Islamic calendar, the year 622, and came to a *terminus ante quem* of 671. Moreover, Shoemaker notes that Brock and Reinink's association of the author's focus on taxation with the new taxes imposed by 'Abd al-Malik is not a secure way to date the *Apocalypse* because complaints about taxation are standard tropes in apocalyptic literature.⁹⁰ Shoemaker adds that an earlier date of composition is also more likely because "in light of the very short interval between the Syriac original's composition and the first Latin manuscript, it would seem that a slightly earlier date for the Syriac also would fit much better with such rapid transmission into Greek and Latin."⁹¹

Recently Michael Penn has provided, in his introduction to his partial translation of the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*, a summary of arguments about the date and mentions Shoemaker's attempts to reopen the question, but states "it is not yet clear if Shoemaker's arguments will shake the scholarly consensus."⁹² It is important to make clear that Shoemaker's arguments for returning to the dating of Lolos, Suermann, and Alexander are flawed, and that Brock, Martinez, and Reinink were correct in establishing a late seventh-century date for the composition of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*.

Establishing a Date of Composition

The early dating of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* by Lolos, Suermann, and Alexander—to which Shoemaker advocates returning—was primarily based on the absence of any mention of the siege of Constantinople in the *Apocalypse*. There is, however, a major flaw in using the so-called First Arab Siege of Constantinople *terminus ante quem*. While this battle is a well-known event in modern historiography, it is unclear if it was seen as such a momentous occasion at the time. The precise history—indeed, even the exact years of this siege—are hazy, and the major source for it, the world chronicle Theophanes Confessor, was written at the beginning of the ninth century and thus interpreted the events of the seventh-century Arab conquests from this later perspective.

In fact, no contemporary Syriac work mentions this siege of Constantinople (though many document the Arab siege of 717–718 in great detail). Some scholars now even cast some doubt as to whether there was a siege of Constantinople in the 670s. James Howard-Johnston, for example, in an extensive study of seventh-century sources, calls the siege of Constantinople in the 670s a "myth"; he argues that Theophanes condensed a long, geographically extensive campaign into a set-piece battle outside the imperial capital.⁹³ Even if Howard-Johnston's revisionist position goes too far, the problematic and contested nature of evidence should give scholars pause in using this the first Arab siege of Constantinople in dating literature.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Ibid, 230 n.38.

⁹¹ Ibid, 230.

⁹² Michael Philip Penn, *When Christians First Met Muslims*, 112–116, with quotation on 115.

⁹³ James Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses to a World Crisis: Historians and Histories of the Middle East in the Seventh Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 304.

⁹⁴ For a thorough analysis of the history and historiography of this siege, see Marek Jankowiak, "The First Arab Siege of Constantinople," *Travaux et Mémoires*, vol. 17 (2013), 237–320.

More convincing is Shoemaker's assertion that the original text of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* probably read "seven weeks of years" and not "ten weeks of years." The former reading is present in the older Mardin recension of the Syriac, the Greek and Latin translations (as well as all translations made from these). Moreover, it makes sense that a scribe probably changed "seven weeks of years" to "ten weeks of years" at some point, pushing back the date when "seven weeks of years" had expired with no end to Ishmaelite rule.

The problem with using this line from the *Apocalypse* to date it is in determining from what event the author was counting. Brock assumed that the author was counting from 622 AD because that marked the first year of the Islamic calendar and is conventionally deemed the year of Islam's birth. Nearly all scholars have followed him in this assumption.

It is not impossible that the author of the *Apocalypse* would have dated from 622. Two East Syrian manuscripts of the seventh century note the Hijra year in their colophons, and John bar Penkaye does so once in his chronicle. It should be noted, however, that these examples—the two Syriac manuscripts and the lone mention in John bar Penkaye—are the only examples of the Christian use the Hijra dating before the year 750 AD, and notably these examples are all from an East Syrian (Church of the East) context.⁹⁵

Instead of assuming that the dates of Ishmaelite rule in the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* take as their beginning the Hijra, it is probable that the author of the was dating from some event that he considered the beginning of the Arab rule over his own homeland. It is uncertain which year this could be, though one possibility is the Arab subjugation of Northern Mesopotamia in 640. Seven weeks of years (forty-nine years) from this event would be the year 689. This would return the composition of the work to the timeframe proposed by Brock, Martinez, and Reinink.

If we take into account the arguments of Brock and Reinink for situating the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* into the context of the end or immediate aftermath of the Second Fitna, it is hard to discount that the *Apocalypse* was very probably composed in the last decade or so of the seventh-century. The *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* fits extremely well in the thought-world of Northern Mesopotamia in the last decade or so of the seventh century. The region had just suffered terrible depredations at the hands of the Arab armies fighting the Second Fitna, much worse than that of the initial conquest, while it was also the epicenter of an outpouring literature dealing with the Arabs and Islam, struggling understand how these fit these into its traditional late antique world.

Indeed, most telling are the references to taxation in the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*. Before the end of the Second Fitna, Northern Mesopotamia was left mostly alone to govern itself. Taxes were collected by the same local elites who had fulfilled this function under

⁹⁵ For a list of Syriac manuscripts, from the seventh to the twentieth centuries, that employ the Hijra dating, see Sebastian Brock, "The Use of Hijra Dating in Syriac Manuscripts: A Preliminary Investigation," in *Redefining Christian Identity: Cultural Interaction in the Middle East Since the Rise of Islam*, ed. J. van Ginkel; H. L. Murre van den Berg; T. M. van Lint (Louvain: Peeters, 2005), 283–290. Of a total number of twenty-eight known dated Syriac manuscripts from 622 to 800 AD, seven use the Hijra dating, amounting to a quarter of the total; see *ibid*, 290.

the previous Roman and Sasanian governments. Nonetheless, the trauma of taxation at the hands of infidel invaders is explicit in the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*. The humiliation of the capitation tax, and the poverty that results from its extraction, is one of the great tribulations associated with the “Ishmaelites”:

Theirs will be the fish in the sea, the trees in the forests, the plants with their fruits, and the dust of the earth, with its precious stones and its crops. The commerce of the merchants, the work of the laborers, the inheritance of the rich, and the gold, silver, bronze, and iron gifts of the holy, clothing, all the precious and decorative vessels, foods, delicacies, and everything pleasurable and delightful will be theirs. Through wrath and pride they will become so arrogant that they will impose tribute from the dead lying in the dust and they will take the poll tax from orphans, widows, and holy men.⁹⁶

In the end, the most convincing interpretation of the evidence is that the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* was composed in Syriac in Northern Mesopotamia at the end of the Second Fitna (Second Arab Civil War), that is, around the year 690. While the earliest known manuscript of the Latin translation dates to just thirty-seven years later, that is not an unreasonable amount of time for the work to have been translated from Syriac into Greek and from Greek into Latin. Works could circulate rapidly in the Mediterranean world, and the evident popularity of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* likely aided its spread and translation in the first decades of the eighth century.

Appendix C: The Location of the Composition of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*:

Another important question that has vexed scholars is where the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* was composed. The location of its composition poses problems as difficult as that of the exact date. However, while the date of the *Apocalypse* has been contentious, scholars generally agree upon the place where the *Apocalypse* was composition. Nonetheless, this part of the appendix will show that the widely accepted consensus about the place of composition cannot be sustained. Instead, it will propose a new location that is more like the place from which the author of the *Apocalypse* worked.

Historiography on the place of composition

Even before the Syriac origins of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* were clear, scholars realized that it must have been composed by a Christian living in lands under Islamic

[illegible]

who asserted that the apocalypse was likely composed around Edessa, or in Edessa itself, presumably because Edessa was the heart of Syriac literary culture.¹⁰³

Even so, this title is found in none of the Syriac manuscripts of the *Apocalypse* that have subsequently been discovered. In the oldest Syriac manuscript, Cod. Yale Beinecke Library 10, copied 1222/3 AD, it is simply titled: “The *memra* (homily) which was spoken by the blessed Methodius, bishop of the city of Patara, about the end of times.”¹⁰⁴ Nor is any mention of Sinjar found in the translations in Greek, Latin, or any other language. In the oldest Latin manuscripts, from the eighth century, the *Apocalypse* bears titles similar to that of the Syriac Yale codex; in Cod. Paris Bibliothèque nationale 13348 (fol. 93v) it appears as: “The homily of the Saint Methodius, bishop of Patara, about the kingdom of the nations and a sure demonstration of the end times.”¹⁰⁵ The titles in the Greek manuscripts, though they vary, are mostly very similar. Still, the theory that Sinjar was the place of composition has remained unchallenged in scholarship.

In fact, Sinjar has been reaffirmed by Reinink in his work on the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*. Reinink acknowledged that reference to Sinjar was only present in the sixteenth-century Cod. Vatican Syr 58, and not present in any of the translations. While he conceded that reference to Sinjar may have been added by a later scribe, he claimed that there was no good reason for any scribe to do so. It was more likely, according to Reinink, that the whole introduction mentioning Sinjar had simply been excised from the medieval translations and the Mardin Recension of the Syriac, probably because the association of the Greek Saint Methodius with Mount Sinjar struck later scribes and translators as odd.¹⁰⁶

Moreover, Reinink maintained that there are additional good reasons for believing that Mount Sinjar or its vicinity was the place of composition of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*. It was the site of a large community of Miaphyiste monks already in the Sasanian period (Reinink was confident that the *Apocalypse* was written by a Miaphysite). Mt. Sinjar was also at cultural and religious crossroads, which could have aided in the dissemination of the *Apocalypse* into both Miaphyiste and East Syrian circles. Moreover, the region around the mountain changed

¹⁰³ Suermann, *Die geschichtstheologische Reaktion*, 160. Suermann does not provide a detailed explanation of this theory of Edessa as the place of composition, but implies that as the heartland of Syriac literary production, this would be the most likely place of composition.

¹⁰⁴Cod. Yale Beinecke Syriac 10, p. 460: ⲁⲛ ⲡⲉϥⲓⲃⲏ ⲕⲓⲙⲟⲩ ⲗⲁⲙⲱⲣⲧⲏⲥ ϯⲁⲛⲇⲓⲭⲏ ⲛⲉⲙⲟⲩ ⲫⲓⲛⲁⲩⲁ
ⲕⲑⲁⲩⲏ ⲕⲏⲅⲓⲱ.

¹⁰⁵ See Aerts and Kortekaas, *Die Apokalypse des Pseudo-Methodius*, 71: *Sancti Methodii episcopi paterensis sermo de regnum gentium et in novissimis temporibus certa demonstratio*. The oldest Latin manuscript (from c. 727 AD), Cod. Bern Burgerbibliothek 611 (fol. 101r), gives the same title, except it calls it a “*facciuncola vel sermo*.”

¹⁰⁶ Gerrit J. Reinink, *Die syrische Apokalypse des Pseudo-Methodius*, vol. 2 (Leuven: Peeters, 1993), xxvii–xxix: “Diese Mitteilung fehlt in der kurzen Überschrift der M[ardin]-Rezension und in der griechisch-lateinischen Überlieferung und es könnte sich demnach um einen späteren Zusatz handeln. Andererseits aber ist keineswegs auszuschließen, daß die zweite Hälfte der Überschrift der V[atican]-Rezension im Ursyrer gestanden hat und bereits früh gerade deshalb ausgeschieden wurde, weil der Aufenthalt des Bischofs von Patara in dieser Gegend als merkwürdig angesehen wurde.”

Establishing a Place of Composition

Contrary to Reinink's assertion, there are many reasons why a later scribe added the mention of Sinjar. A scribe from Sinjar may have wanted to honor his home with such a tradition about the *Apocalypse*. Or perhaps a preexisting local tradition associated Methodius with the region of Sinjar. Or a scribe with no real knowledge of the historical Methodius perhaps sought to associate the revelations with a known location.

Although it has escaped notice in all previous scholarship, locations in the vicinity of another mountain—Mt. Qardu, otherwise known as Mount Judi—are twice mentioned prominently within the *Apocalypse*. In both cases these are general asides not pertinent to the narrative, and thus may reflect an interest or affiliation with the region on the part of the author.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., xxvii–xxix.

¹⁰⁸ See, for example, Benjamin Garstad, *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius / An Alexandrian World Chronicle* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), viii; Penn, *When Christians First Met Muslims*, 113. On the other hand, Möhring, *Der Weltkaiser der Endzeit*, 96–97, is somewhat suspicious of taking Sinjar as the place of composition, and suggests that the apocalypse may have been composed around Edessa or Nisibis.

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after the flood.¹¹⁰ The town of Temanon is not mentioned again in the *Apocalypse*, and the author never makes clear why he mentioned it.

The town of Temanon was a real village located at the base of Mt. Qardu. The village, and a tradition that associated it with the survivors of the great flood, was still known to Arabic geographers in the Middle Ages.¹¹¹ For example, the geographer Yaqut al-Hamawi, in his *Dictionary of Countries* (*Mu'jam al-Buldan*) composed around 1228 AD, relates a very similar Arabic tradition about the origin of the name of the town, that it was named for the number of survivors aboard the Noah's Ark.¹¹²

This detail about the foundation of Temanon in the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* was original material to the *Apocalypse*, but was drawn from one of its main sources, the *Cave of Treasures*, which includes this same story about the sons of Noah building Temanon.¹¹³ It is interesting, however, that the author of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* chose to include this story because he lifts only a tiny percentage of the numerous stories in the *Cave of Treasures*, and is very particular in what he takes from that longer work. Over the course of three chapters, the *Cave of Treasures* provides an extensive narrative about Noah and his sons' emergence from the Ark—the landing of the Ark on Mount Qardu, a discussion of how God drew back the flood waters to the lakes and seas, Noah's dispatch of a raven and then a dove, a discussion of the symbolic meaning of the dove as a new covenant, the exploration of Noah and his sons of the new land and their settling of the animals on it, the foundation of Temanon, the drunkenness of Noah and his cursing of Ham, and a long discussion of Noah's dream—out of which the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* mentions only the founding of Temanon.¹¹⁴ Thus, it is likely Temanon had some importance to the author.

The *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* includes another story tied to Mt. Qardu/Mt. Judi, though in this case it is one not included in the *Cave of Treasures*. It concerns the death of the Assyrian king Sennacherib:

¹¹⁰ The *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* famously assigns Noah a fourth son, Yonton, but it makes clear that Yonton was born after the flood.

¹¹¹ Amir Harrak, "Tales about Sennacherib: The Contribution of the Syriac Sources," in *The World of the Aramaeans III* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 176.

¹¹² Yaqut al-Hamawi, *The Dictionary of Countries* (*Mu'jam al-buldān*), vol. 2 (Beirut: Dar Sader, 1986), 84. According to al-Hamawi, the town of Temanon took its name from the number eighty (not eight as in the Syriac tradition). This difference with the Syriac tradition is understandable as the interpretation of the legendary history of the town went from Syriac to Arabic; *Temanon* is closer to eighty (*thamnun*) in Arabic; to account for this difference, Yaqut al-Hamawi reasons that eighty people survived the flood, but most of them died soon after.

¹¹³ The *Cave of Treasures*, XX.8; ed. ed. Su-Min Ri, *Caverne des Trésors: les deux recensions syriaques*, (Leuven: Peeters, 1987), 154–155. Kmosko, "Das Rätsel des Pseudomethodius," 287, suggested that the author of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* was probably from Persia, in part because the mention of Temanon (and of Noah's son Yonton) could be found in Persians writing in Arabic during the Abbasid period. Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, 26 n37, however, dismissed this idea, because the author of the *Apocalypse* likely drew this information from the *Cave of Treasures*, so the mention of Temanon, Alexander reasoned, was not relevant to the identity of the author of the *Apocalypse*.

¹¹⁴ The *Cave of Treasures*, XIX–XXI; Ri, *La Caverne des Trésors*, 146–167.

political power (though they suggest different causes of that collapse). Indeed, scholars have often remarked upon the similarity between the two works, despite the very different genres to which they belong.¹¹⁷

John bar Penkaye wrote his history from a monastery on Mount Qardu. Thus, the similarity between the two works may not be mere coincidence, but a reflection of local concerns. Perhaps the author of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* was reacting to the same events and may have had the same eyewitness knowledge of the chaotic and violent events that took place there.¹¹⁸

Resituating the composition of the apocalypse from Sinjar to Qardu does not radically affect the context of the work. Both Sinjar and Qardu were similar in a number of respects: both were mountainous regions on the crossroads of Syriac culture and had been located within the Sasanian Persian Empire before the Arab conquests. There may be some implications for the religious identity of the author of the *Apocalypse*. Whereas Sinjar was a place of significant Miaphysite presence, Qardu was the site of an East Syrian monastery. Nonetheless, Gozarta, near Qardu, was the seat of a Syriac Orthodox bishop already in 629.¹¹⁹ Therefore, it must have been home to some number of Miaphysites.

Appendix D: The Confessional Identity of the Author

The culture of the late antique and early medieval Near East was shaped in many ways by the Christological controversies that had wracked the Christian Church from the fifth century through the seventh centuries AD. Much of the religious literature was deeply influenced by the theological disputes that had brought about the existence of separate, antagonistic churches, each of which claimed to be the true orthodox and dismissed its rivals as heretics. A fierce sense of competition comes through in literature of nearly every variety, while historical misfortunes such as war, plague, and famine, and the existence of evil in general, were blamed on theological rivals who had angered God with their heresy. Chapter 5, above, dealt with the impact of such concerns on Syriac political eschatology.

Due to the importance of Christological confession in sources from this period, scholars have been eager to determine the confession of the author of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*. It has become one of the most discussed and debated topics about the *Apocalypse*. This

¹¹⁷ Gerrit J. Reinink, "East Syrian Historiography in Response to the Rise of Islam: The Case of John Bar Penkaye's *Ktābā d-Rēš Mellē*," in *Redefining Christian Identity: Cultural Interaction in the Middle East since the Rise of Islam*, ed. J. J. van Ginkel; H. L. Murre-van den Berg; T. M. van Lint (Leuven: Peeters, 2005), 83–88; Brock, "North Mesopotamia in the Late Seventh Century," 52–53: while Brock states that the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* probably originates in the same time and roughly the same place as John bar Penkaye, "The two works are, however, a long way apart in their outlook... the radical differences between these two apocalyptic outlooks are readily to be explained by the fact that the two authors belonged to different ecclesiastical bodies."

¹¹⁸ Their similar perspectives is referenced in Brock, "North Mesopotamia in the Late Seventh Century," 52.

¹¹⁹ Michael Morony, *Iraq after the Muslim Conquest* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 378.

section will give an overview of scholarship on the question, and seek to determine if it is even possible to uncover the Christology of the author,

Historiography on the author's confessional identity

Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scholars accepted as a given that the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* was the work of a Chalcedonian Christian. The discovery of the Syriac origins of the *Apocalypse*, however, threw doubt on this assumption because the Syriac language was associated with the non-Chalcedonian Christian communities of the East.

At the same time, the spiritual importance the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* assigns to the “King of the Greeks,” i.e. the Roman emperor, and its repeated assertion that the Roman is the true “Kingdom of the Christians” (ܡܠܟܘܬܐ ܕܡܬܠܟܐ) still seemed to suggest that the author belonged to the imperial church.¹²⁰ Kmosko, when he demonstrated the Syriac origin of the *Apocalypse*, provided a compromise: the author, he asserted, had perhaps been a “Nestorian” member of the Church of the East, and was thus clearly influenced by East Syrian traditions, but had converted to Chalcedonian Christianity and moved to Sinai.

While the details of Kmosko's proposed narrative are unsustainable, Martinez has more recently adopted the broad strokes of his theory. Martinez confidentially declared that the East Syrian identity of the author should “be considered as proved.”¹²¹ However, he entertains the possibility that either the author was a “Nestorian” member of the Church of the East, or: “a Melkite living in Northern Mesopotamia, and acquainted, therefore, with Eastern Syrian traditions.”¹²²

In contrast, Sebastian Brock has remained more committed to the idea that the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* was written by a Chalcedonian. Brock notes that not only is the the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* pro-Byzantine, but it is also one of very few Syriac works translated into Greek, and so the author was perhaps connected to the Chalcedonian community.¹²³

On the other hand, more recently a consensus—held by Paul Alexander, Gerrit Reinink, and Michael Philip Penn, among others—proposes that the author of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* was a Miaphysite, that is, a member of the “Jacobite” Syriac Orthodox Church. Paul Alexander saw proof of this in the discussion of Psalm 68 in the *Apocalypse*. When the author objects to “brothers of the sons of the Church” who believed that the verse applied to the Kushites of Axum, he must have been referring to a debate among Miaphysites. Miaphysites

¹²⁰ For this notion, see especially The *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*, IX.8–X.3; ed. Reinink, *Die Syrische Apokalypse*, vol. 1, 20–22.

¹²¹ Francisco Javier Martinez, “The Apocalyptic Genre in Syriac: The World of Pseudo-Methodius,” *IV Symposium Syriacum, 1984: Literary Genres in Syriac Literature*, ed. H. J.W. Drijvers (Roma: Pont. Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1987), 340–341.

¹²² Martinez, “Eastern Christian Apocalyptic,” 26–28, with quotation in 28.

¹²³ Brock, “Syriac Views of Emergent Islam,” 19–20. Brock does note that non-Chalcedonians (both dyophysite and Miaphysite) found the *Apocalypse* ambiguous enough with regard to Christology that they copied it for consumption in their respective own communities.

in particular would have attached their hopes to the Axumite kings of Ethiopia, who were Miaphysite Christians.¹²⁴

Reinink has dismissed this interpretation, contending that the author of the *Apocalypse* was not actually debating “brothers of the sons of the Church” who looked to Psalm 68 as a prophecy about an expected Ethiopian liberator. The author was simply pointing out that the surface level reference to Ethiopia in the Psalm actually stood for the Roman Empire. The author of the *Apocalypse*, Reinink insists, remained consistently conciliatory toward Christians of all Christological views, and not prone to polemic against any other Christians (on this debate, see above, chapter 6, part III.1).¹²⁵

Nonetheless, Reinink had his own reasons for believing that the author was a Miaphysite (though he initially considered the possibility that the author had been a member of the Church of the East). He believed (as we have seen, erroneously) that it had been composed on Mount Sinjar, which was a major Miaphysite center within the Persian Empire (and acted as the base for John of Tella, one of the founders of the Syriac Orthodox Church in the sixth century).¹²⁶ Michael Penn has combined the views of both Alexander and Reinink, arguing for a Miaphysite author on the basis of both the reference to the psalm and the supposed composition on Mount Sinjar.

Nonetheless, as described in detail in the body of this dissertation, the reference to the psalm in the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* had nothing to do with Miaphysite hopes for liberation by the Ethiopians. Moreover, as described above, the case that the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* was written in Sinjar is not strong. It was most likely written near Qardu, an area more heavily influenced by the Church of the East. Therefore, the consensus that the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* was written by a Miaphysite must be questioned.

Establishing the author’s confessional identity

Although it is naturally a disappointing answer, it must be admitted that the author of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* left no clues about his Christological background. He may have been a Chalcedonian Melkite, or, more likely, either a supporter of the Christological views of the Church of the East or the Syriac Orthodox Church. As Reinink and Martinez have both pointed out, the author of the *Apocalypse* was in general uninterested in Christological

¹²⁴ Paul Alexander, “Byzantium and the Migration of Literary Works and Motifs: The Legend of the Last Roman Emperor,” *Medievalia et Humanistica*, vol. 2 (1971), 57–59; idem *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, 22–23. Penn, *When Christians First Met Muslims*, 112–114. This is a position shared by Garth Fowden, *From Empire to Commonwealth: Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton university Press, 1993), 132 n. 144, who asserts that the author of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* was a Miaphysite who directed an “element of polemic against those more extreme Monophysites [sic] who opposed political alliance with Constantinople.”

¹²⁵ Reinink, “Ps.-Methodius: A Concept of History,” 162–168.

¹²⁶ Gerrit J. Reinink, *Die syrische Apokalypse des Pseudo-Methodius*, vol. 2 (Leuven: Peeters, 1993), xxvii–xxix

questions or in conflict between the various Christian churches of late antique Mesopotamia, but instead stressed Christian unity in a time of hardships.¹²⁷

No evidence for the Christology of the author of the *Apocalypse* can be gleaned from his sources. Besides the Bible, the author relied on four other known sources, all written in Syriac (there is no indication that the author read any other languages). These four are the *Syriac Alexander Legend*, the *Julian Romance*, the *Cave of Treasures*, and the *Homily on the End*. The Christological confession of the author of the *Syriac Alexander Legend* is unclear, but the other three works were all probably written by Miaphysites. Nonetheless, they appear to have circulated through all Syriac Christian religious communities. For example, as we have seen, the *Cave of Treasures* is extant in East Syrian and West Syrian versions, in which dyophysite and Miaphysite Christological statements have been interpolated.

Nor did one Christological community seem to claim the *Apocalypse* for themselves early on. As we have seen, the *Apocalypse* was soon reworked by a Miaphysite in or around Edessa as the *Edessene Apocalypse*. This apocalypse At the same time, the *Apocalypse* influenced the *Testimonies of the Prophets about the Dispensation of Christ* and the *Disputation Between a Monk of Bet Hale and an Arab Notable*; these two eighth-century works survive in East Syrian manuscripts, make explicit anti-Miaphysite statements, and were evidently authored by members of the Church of the East. Finally, the *Apocalypse* of Methodius of Patara clearly had Chalcedonian readers since it was translated into Greek around the year 700 AD. It appears that the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* had readers from among the Melkites, Miaphysites, and “Nestorians.”

In the end, the Christological identity of the author of the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* remains an insoluble mystery. While such uncertainty may frustrate scholars, it is also illuminating in itself. Christology was not important to the author. As demonstrated above (chapter 6, part I), the author shifted the blame for God’s anger from Christological heresy to the collective sexual transgressions of all Christians.

¹²⁷ Martinez, “Eastern Christian Apocalyptic,” 26–27; Reinink, “Ps.-Methodius: A Concept of History,” 156–164

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Abbreviations:

CCSL= Corpus Christianorum Series Latina

CSCO= Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium

PG= Patrologiae cursus completus: Series Graeca, edited by J. P. Migne. 161 vols. in 166 parts. (Paris, 1857–1887).

PL= Patrologiae cursus completus: Series Latina, edited by J. P. Migne. 221 volumes. (Paris, 1841–1865).

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