

Hagit Amirav, Emmanouela Grypeou & Guy Stroumsa (editors), *Apocalypticism and Eschatology in Late Antiquity. Encounters in the Abrahamic Religions, 6th-8th Century*, Late Antique History and Religion 17, Peeters, Leuven – Paris – Bristol 2017, 365 pages, ISBN 978-90-429-3537-2

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As a result of the international workshop organized by the editors in the spring of 2013, this volume brings together the contributions on the subjects of apocalypticism and eschatology in Late Antiquity, two very important themes. On the one hand apocalyptic concepts prevailed in the cultural background of all Abrahamic religions: Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and, as the editors underscore, the earliest literary encounters of Christians and Jews with Islam were expressed through the medium of apocalyptic expression and all these writings share certain common motifs and traditions. On the other hand, the volume focuses on specific and well-articulated eschatological preoccupations either independent or connected with the apocalyptic phenomenon. According to the editors, the 13 papers cover various themes: “Greek Byzantine, Syriac, Armenian and Ethiopic apocalyptic, Jewish and Christian apocalypticism in the post-Islamic era, seventh-century millenarism, Zoroastrian and Manichaean apocalypticism, as well as the possible apocalyptic background of the genesis of Islam and issues of Qur’anic eschatology” (p. VIII).

The first study, *Late Antique Apocalyptic: A Context for the Qur’an?* (p. 1-19), is signed by Averil Cameron, who brings in attention a bibliographical synthesis. This explains the place of the paper at the very beginning, being a general introduction of the volume as a whole. She presents in a critical manner the main theories and hypothesis regarding apocalyptic and eschatology and she insists that much more precision is needed before it can be argued that either Late Antique apocalyptic as a whole or any specific Late Antique texts had a direct influence on the emergence of Islam, or of Qur’anic eschatology. Averil Cameron underlines that eschatology and apocalyptic thinking were and had to be extremely malleable, as they changed to suit the historical circumstances. She re-examines and reevaluates common scholarly assumptions like the theories and ideas of Brian Daley, Gerrit Reinink, Paul Magdalino, Mischa Meier, Wolfram Brandes and shows both their contributions and limits. Although the apocalyptic texts had political agendas and reflect a contemporary existential anxiety in the face of the many natural disasters and the downturn in imperial fortunes, the general experience and

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historical development were also shaped by the concerns, arguments and tensions about Christian Orthodoxy during Late Antiquity, and in particular for the Eastern Mediterranean in the period after the Council of Chalcedon. Instead of making a critical comparison between Late Antique Christian sources and the eschatology found in the Qur'an, the author emphasizes the sheer variety of apocalyptic motifs in the Christian material.

In the next paper, *'Their Evil Rule Must End!' A commentary on the Iranian Bundahišn 33:17-28* (p. 21-41), Domenico Agostini introduces us in the Iranian Apocalypitics and traces back the origins and features of Iranian apocalypticism, insisting on the chapter thirty-three of the Iranian Bundahišn. After resuming a short historical background, he points out that in the Iranian tradition the apocalyptic events may include pseudo-historical and mythical elements and may form a stage that is independent of eschatology. The chapter 33 of the Iranian Bundahišn contains mythical, historical, apocalyptic and eschatological material. The first three paragraphs [17-19] mention the Famine, the Hephtalites and Mazdak and draw an accurate historical picture of Iran between the middle of the fifth century and the end of the sixth. The following four paragraphs [20-23] describe the Arab Conquest (the battles of Qadisiyya in 636 CE and Nihavand in 642 CE) and the unsuccessful revenge of Peroz III († 679), the son of Yazdegard III († 651). The last five paragraphs [24-28] are classified by the author among the *vaticinia ex eventu* that are characteristic of Zoroastrian apocalyptic narratives. For a better understanding of the distorted and obscure information, Domenico Agostini tries to establish a connection with other medieval Zoroastrian apocalyptic texts: *Zand i Wahman Yasn* and *Jāmāsp Nāmāg*. The author considers that the narrative pattern is made up of at least three different strata (late Sasanian, post-Sasanian and mythical) and underlines that although the Arab conquest of Iran represents a reliable cause for the formation of apocalyptic texts, the initial rise of apocalyptic ideas is determined by the troublesome events which occurred between the end of the fifth and the sixth centuries.

Matthias Binder's paper, *Apocalyptic Thought Written for Monks? Some Texts and Motifs and Their Function in Greek and Syriac Antiquity* (p. 43-74), focuses on monastic apocalypticism in Greek and Syriac texts. His premise is that the apocalyptic sceneries and antichrist myths are distributed over different genres such as commentary, homily, letter, and hymn, written mostly by monks. The author searches for the apocalyptic motifs and classifies them in three categories: 1) 'end time' motifs, 2) 'transformation' motifs, and 3) 'otherworldly' motifs. This is the starting point for highlighting the monastic experiences of Heaven and Hell as an express internalization of

the apocalyptic motifs: Gehenna Internalized, Inferno for Monks who went astray, Mind's Journey to Paradise, God's Majestic Epiphany. This 'Internalized apocalypticism' may be associated with meditational practice. Although he sets out with the presupposition of a monastic character of the texts analysed, Binder concludes that they basically address all of Christianity and he cannot maintain his hypothesis that all apocalyptic thought was written for a monastic setting.

In *The Young Daniel: A Syriac Apocalyptic Text on the End, and the Problem of its Dating* (p. 75-85), Sebastian Brock presents the little-known Syriac work, entitled 'On our Lord and on the End', attributed to 'the Young Daniel'. He shows beyond doubt that *The Young Daniel* is close related with the *Syriac Apocalypse of Daniel* and identifies the common places as well as the differences. The author concludes that there seem to be a reasonably clear indication that both texts share a common source, which 'is very unlikely to be earlier than the latter part of the sixth century'.

In his paper, *The End is Coming – To what End? Millenarian Expectations in the Seventh Century Eastern Mediterranean* (p. 87-106), Lutz Greisiger explores the seemingly anachronistic (re-)appearance of millenarianist discourses in the seventh century, that contribute to reconstructing the religious and political climate during the period under discussion and to reassess the larger environment in which Islam took shape. The investigation starts from a passage from the *Apocalypse of St Andrew the Fool* and points out that according to this apocalyptic vision the glorious restoration of the people of Israel is an essential event in the millenium, but this restoration does not come as a reward but as a precondition of the Jews' conversion, which might reflect an attempt to come to terms with real events of the early seventh century. Indeed, it could be a polemic reaction to the Jews' return from exile to the Holy Land and to Jerusalem in 614 CE. Lutz Greisiger deals further with a passage from the *Syriac Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* and argues that the millenarianism of Methodius of Olympus could serve the author of the Apocalypse to expand his division of world history in millennia. But in contrast to Methodius' millenarian expectations for a perfectly spiritual condition in Gods' cosmic Sabbath, 'Pseudo-Methodius's millenium appears as an earthly feast with all bodily pleasures, eating, drinking, even work'. In the final stage of his paper, the author insists on emperor Heraclius's messianic (self-)representation, which underlines the political dimension of the millenarianism current at the time and he concludes that Heraclius and his officials propagated a post-millenarian golden age of the Empire.

Yannis Papadogiannakis' paper, *Managing Anger, Fear and Hope After the Fall of Jerusalem: Anastasius of Sinai, Antiochus, Zacharias of Jerusalem*

and *Sophronius of Jerusalem* (p. 107-124), introduces us in the landscape of Christian communities in troubled times and brings into attention a series of non-apocalyptic texts. The first one belongs to Anastasius Sinaita, who tries to explain the defeat of the Byzantine Empire and uses a typological view of history that involved 'reading the Old Testament history of Israel into the contemporary experience of the embattled Christian Empire'. As he describes the emotional state of his congregation (fear, disbelief of even anger at God), Anastasius is 'invested in the process of managing these emotions [...] castigating the moral failings of his flock and reiterating and expanding on this them in his homiletic work too'. Other examples are Antiochus' Homily on Compunction, Zacharias' letter to the Christian community in Jerusalem, and Sophronius' sermons and Anacreontic poems, through which their authors seek to interpret, manage and improve the emotions of Christian communities, 'encouraging, prescribing and authorizing specific emotions while discouraging others, developing at the same time patterns and relating that shaped both personal and collective life of their communities'.

In his study, *Universal Salvation as an Antidote to Apocalyptic Expectations: Origenism in the Service of Justinian's Religious Politics* (p. 125-161), István Perczel focuses on the doctrinal views regarding the final end of humanity, as there are reflected in the *Erotapokriseis of Pseudo-Caesarius*. He identifies this Pseudo-Caesarius with Theodore Askidas, Archbishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia, the main advisor of Justinian in religious affairs and one of the leaders of the Isochrist Origenists. Very cautious I. Perczel tries to decode the Isochrist Origenist doctrine from the content of the *Pseudo-Caesarian Questions and Answers*, and to avoid any false interpretation he formulates six general methodological principles that should guide the decoding endeavour: principles of intentionality, of individual coherence, of respect, of the existence of encoded languages, of symmetry and of efficiency. After pointing out the 'Restoration of all things' according to the anti-Origenist documents, the author presents two subtle expositions of Pseudo-Caesarius' eschatology. On the one hand he shows how Evagrius of Pontus' allegorisation of the intelligible Israel, the nations and the Church can be applied to deciphering the passages in question. On the other hand, he attempts a coherent interpretation of three passages containing the metaphor of Christ fishing the fish of the soul and fishing the Dragon/Satan. He concludes that the *Erotapokriseis of Pseudo-Caesarius* has a sophisticated doctrine, based on a deep acquaintance with Origen's and Evagrius' teachings but independently elaborating upon their exegesis.

The paper signed by Helen Spurling, *A Revival in Jewish Apocalyptic? Change and Continuity in the Seventh-Eight Centuries with Special Reference*

to *Pirqe Mashiah*' (p. 163-186), is dedicated to the developments in Jewish apocalypticism as highlighted particularly by *Pirqe Mashiah*, an apocalyptic midrash from Palestine, written during this period. This late rabbinic apocalypse is not pseudo-epigraphic and is not presented as a vision, but a compilation of several Midrashic and Talmudic traditions. 'However, although a compilation, the traditions are collected and arranged to present a clear eschatological chronology in the form of a continuous narrative'. The text suggests that redemption is imminent, connected to the upheavals in the religious, political and natural world, and seeks a biblical foundation for such assertions. The author approaches a very interesting yet obscure sections of *Pirqe Mashiah*, regarding the interactions between the Arabs and the Jewish people over ownership of the Temple Mount. Thus, the text presents an alternative and important view on the impact of the Arab conquests, and the questions raised by the changing political situation. Another research direction is the major concern for messianism, and the two messianic figures: Messiah ben David and Messiah ben Joseph. The vital role is played by Messiah ben Davi, who undertakes the traditional warrior role of defeating the enemies of Israel at the end of time, and as a result a special feature is 'the development of elaborate descriptions concerned with how to identify the Messiah ben David when he is revealed at the end of time'.

In the next contribution, *Apocalyptic Ideas in Early Medieval Armenia* (p. 187-204), Robert W. Thomson focuses on the Armenian views regarding the apocalypticism and eschatology, and concentrates on such ideas in the early writers, leading up to the transformation of the Near East after the emergence of Islam. In this context he examines in detail the biography of the inventor of the Armenian Script, Maštoc' (Mesrop), written in the 440s by his disciple Koriwn, the History attributed to Agathangelos – the standard account of the conversion of king Trdad and the life of Gregory the Illuminator –, and a catechism entitled the *Teaching of Saint Gregory*. From these texts on the author follows the long-lasting implications of the predictions made and the political destiny of the Christian kingdom from Caucasus. A shift of paradigm appears in the seventh century when Sebeos becomes the first historian who cites the prophecies of Daniel to explain the emergence of Muslims and the Arab conquests, although other Armenian historians didn't see any providential activity behind these events and this lack of interest shows that 'the medieval Armenian apocalyptic vision has Armenia firmly in centre of things, rather than a more general anticipation of a new heaven and a new earth'.

Writing about *Byzantine Greek Apocalypses and the West: A Case Study* (p. 205-218), Pablo Ubierna examines the reception of Late Antique Greek

and Syriac apocalyptic texts in the West during the High Middle Age. He focuses on the *Syriac Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* and the *Sermo de fine mundo* of Pseudo-Ephrem, that circulated in the West, including Aquitaine and the Iberian Peninsula, fact attested by the manuscript diffusion of the texts and the origins of their Latin translations. Now they were included in a different and independent Iberian tradition meant to legitimize the propagandistic claims made by the Kings of Navarre, who try to link their destiny to the legendary figure of the Last Emperor, mentioned in the *Syriac Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*.

In his extremely detailed intertextual and literary study, *The Eschatological Kerygma of the Early Qur'an* (p. 219-266), Nicolai Sinai explores the Qur'anic surahs that refer to resurrection of the dead, the ensuing divine judgement and the subsequent fate of the saved and the damned. He starts his rigorous research from surah 102, which 'concisely illustrates the early Qur'anic kerigma's most basic propositions and also provides a first occasion to probe its intersection with Biblical and Syriac-Christian literature'. Analysing the intertextual background of the distinctive virtues and vices mentioned in the previous section (regarding surahs 102:1, 89:20, 100:8, 104:2, 70:18, 92:8, 104:3, 92:11, 83:1-3, 69:34, 90:14-16, etc.), the author shows that it is important to recognize that such a background exists and compares a catalogue of virtues contained in Q 90:12-16 with a segment from the book of Isaiah (58:5-7), and states that they even exhibits a palpable structural correspondence. Further, N. Sinai focuses on the early Qur'an's evocation and portrayals of the end of the world and the hereafter, which 'primarily serve to keep awake the fearful anticipation of the Judgement that the early Qur'anic proclamations place at the centre of their moral vision. Qur'anic eschatology is therefore moralistic rather than apocalyptic'. His final conclusion is surprising: 'the Qur'anic proclamations appear to exhibit a selective engagement with earlier genres of Arabic literature that would certainly have contributed to their credibility as a properly Arabic restatement of the Biblical heritage. In this sense, one might speak of the early Qur'an as an innovative cultural translation or Arabic naturalization of Syriac eschatology'. He supports this statement on the two elaborated Addenda.

The next study, *Apocalypticism in Sunni Hadith* (p. 267-289), signed by Christopher Melchert, provides a series of sample translations with commentary from the hadith literature, especially from the Six Books, collections of hadith dating from the mid-ninth to early tenth centuries. This proves very important because many details of the end of times and Last Judgement are found in hadith only. Just here are mentioned the thorough descriptions of 'the pleasures of Paradise and the torments of Hell, the whole concept of an

eschaton, a considerable period before the Last Judgement when present-day arrangements are upended'. The numerous examples show that the apocalyptic hadith development represents a new stage of Islam, 'in which a great deal of biblical and other Jewish and Christian material is being Islamized, almost everything being projected onto the Prophet and his Companions'.

The last contribution, *'A People Will Emerge from the Desert': Apocalyptic Perceptions of the Early Muslim Conquests in Contemporary Eastern Christian Literature* (p. 292-309), belongs to Emmanouela Grypeou and focuses on earliest Christian texts, which specifically deal with Islam. These are mainly apocalyptic texts, composed during a time period that expands over five or six decades (the *Sermon of Pseudo-Ephrem on the End of the World*, the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*, the so-called *Edessene Apocalypse* and the *Apocalypse of John the Little*). 'They reflect Christian reactions to the Muslim conquests as well as to the transition into an established Muslim political rule'. Although these apocalypses were not intentionally written down as openly historical reports, they have a historical value. The author insists on some recurrent topoi: the fact that traditionally the Ishmaelites were associated in Christian literature with robbery activities, that the Muslims are stereotypically described as the godless Saracens or that they are even the Antichrist's forerunners. E. Grypeou underlines that one of the main functions of apocalyptic literature of the time was the prediction and calculation of the length of Muslim rule and of its ultimate downfall and hence explains the emergence of the messianic figure of the Last Emperor, the 'King of the Greeks'.

The apocalypticism and the eschatology prove to be crucial preoccupations for the Abrahamic Religions, although every tradition reacts different to the events of the seventh and eighteenth centuries. Learning all these details is very important not only for a better understanding of the mindsets from a millennium ago, but also for the correct interpretation of the further expectations of the three religious traditions, each of them still waiting the End of Time and the Last Judgement. The tension of this waiting must be a starting point for further interreligious dialogue.