A Mediterranean Apocalypse: Prophecies of Empire in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries

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Abstract

This article traces the intertwining of contemporaneous Muslim and Christian millenarian beliefs and excitation from the early fifteenth to late sixteenth centuries, specifically as crystalized by the rise of the Ottoman power, the Muslim conquest of “Rome” (Constantinople) in 1453, and the sixteenth century Ottoman-Habsburg rivalry for recognition as legitimate claimants to the world empire of the last age of history. The most influential formulator of the Ottoman eschatological identity was the mystic and libertarian ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Bisṭāmī, whose works underlie the fully articulated royal messianism of Sultan Süleymān (r. 1520-1566). At Süleymān’s court the French orientalist and apocalyptic enthusiast Guillaume Postel, a proponent of French Valois universal end-time monarchy, saw al-Bisṭāmī’s work brandished in 1535. Following the trajectory of the production, consumption, and deployment of these texts in the context of revolutionary changes across the Mediterranean—not least of all in understandings of religions and their relationship to historical empire—makes clear the centrality of apocalyptic to contemporary understandings of history and the significance (and legitimacy) of the new imperial formations, and to new understandings of the interrelationship between cognate, if sometimes hostile, monotheisms.

* This piece was essentially complete and in this form more than a decade and a half ago, languishing in penultimate state but for circulation in something like this form among friends and students. While there remain a few imprints of its date, it seems to have stood up reasonably well, as the 2015 symposium for which this volume is named showed. I am grateful to Mayte Green-Mercado and Evrim Binbaş for their encouragement and for splendid editing that not only updated or augmented bibliography, but also pruned to good effect. I also acknowledge with gratitude the efforts of the three anonymous readers of the manuscript, and assure them that suggestions for improvement will be addressed in another venue.
Keywords


Introduction

The discovery of lost books, and the rediscovery in old texts of an ancient wisdom held to be of timely as well as eternal relevance, is a venerable theme of the high Renaissance. In Latin Christendom, between the fall of Constantinople in 1453 and the middle of the sixteenth century, such pursuit of discovery was not focused solely on the literary and scientific heritage of Antiquity or, for example, the study of the Hebrew Bible as illuminator of Christian truth that represented an important preoccupation of Christian Kabbalists. The century was also washed by a flood of apocalyptic prophetic texts, often validated by astrological prognostication based on the nativity of religions, that pointed to the imminence, depending upon provenance and emphasis, of millennial trials and/or redemption. Together with the tribulations of the Church, natural disasters, the strenuous competition between Spanish Habsburg and French Valois claims to imperial dignity, and the increasing urgency of calls for spiritual and political renovatio, by the early years of the sixteenth century the spectacular expansion of the Ottoman Muslim power had assumed a prominent place in this literature as clear proof of the approach of a final, apocalyptic conflict between universal religions and universalizing empires.

In the Muslim Mediterranean and its extensions, during precisely the same period, the discovery of hidden prophetic wisdom was as marked and important a phenomenon as in Christendom, and it was used and gradually interpreted in much the same fashion on the basis of analogous assumptions. Much of the Muslim world in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries awaited the troubles of the Last Days, a renovation (tajādīd) that would compass religious and political institutions, and establishment by conquest of a universal empire that would be literally as well as figuratively millennial in this tenth century of the Muslim era (1494-1592 CE). The Ottoman sultans Selim I (1512-20) and Süleymān the Magnificent (1520-66) were seen as the most likely (but not the sole) candidates to fill the role of Muslim eschatological conqueror and savior whose coming at the end of history had been foretold by ancient prophecy. In their acceptance of and belief in this role they shared much with their contemporaries and near-contemporaries: The Catholic Monarchs, Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabel of Castile; Charles VIII of France; Shah Ismā‘īl,
the messianic founder of the Shiʿī Safavid state; Francis I, The Most Christian King; and Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor. And it was in the rivalry between Habsburg and Ottoman in the sixteenth century that the apocalyptic understanding of the meaning of contemporary history became most acutely delineated (if not most acute per se) as an interpretive framework that crossed all communal, political, and social boundaries throughout the Mediterranean. The apocalyptic visions of Christian, Jewish, and Muslim communities were intimately related to one another, and in some measure interactively developed.

Although most scholarship on the subject has treated Jewish and Christian millennialist enthusiasm as particular and internal to these religious communities—and has virtually ignored the phenomenon in the Muslim context—I submit that it is precisely the addition of the Muslim component of the picture that restores integrity to a larger framework artificially fragmented by modern assumptions that communal and political cleavages imply cultural ones. The age that witnessed the Fall of Constantinople, the Fall of Granada and imposition of confessional uniformity in Spain, the Columbian discoveries, the Lutheran Reformation, and Ottoman victories on all fronts was nothing if not an era in which events were perceived as having universal, and hence revelatory eschatological, significance. Apocalyptic represented the common idiom through which, for a time, Muslims, Jews, and Christians expressed and evaluated their experience of a single history in which imperial combat could reasonably be seen as a struggle for world rule, the troubles that would precede the Millennium in which a single, purified religion would gain universal sway. As a theme it therefore offers an incipient solution to the problem posed by Fernand Braudel over forty years ago in the introduction to the English edition of The Mediterranean:

I have also devoted more attention to what is a major historical problem, a zone of formidable uncertainty: the Ottoman empire. After the conquest of the Balkans, and especially after that of the southern coast of the Mediterranean from Syria to Algiers and almost to Gibraltar, that empire covered a good half of the Mediterranean region; it was an anti-Christian endom, balancing the weight of the west. We historians of the west are in the same position as the contemporaries of Philip II, of Gianandrea Doria or Don Juan of Austria: we can glimpse the Turkish world from the outside only. The reports sent by ambassadors and intelligence agents to Christian Princes tell us something of the workings of that great body, but hardly anything of its motives. The secret, or some of the secrets, lie hidden in the vast archives of Istanbul....
Today in 1972, six years after the second French edition, I think I can say that two major truths have remained unchallenged. The first is the unity and coherence of the Mediterranean region. I retain the firm conviction that the Turkish Mediterranean lived and breathed with the same spirit as the Christian, and that the whole sea shared a common destiny, a heavy one indeed, with identical problems and general trends if not identical consequences. And the second is the greatness of the Mediterranean, which lasted well after the age of Columbus and Vasco da Gama, until the dawn of the seventeenth century or even later.¹

1 The Unity of Mediterranean Political Culture in the Sixteenth Century

Braudel’s firm conviction is a laudable one that I also hold. Yet the Mediterranean phenomenon of apocalyptic belief and the heavy traffic in prophecy that was its concomitant point to two correctives to this analysis. First, it is unlikely that Christian observers of Ottoman realities were either as excluded or as incapable of comprehending Muslim Ottoman “motives” as suggested in this passage, any more than were their Muslim counterparts who sought to inform themselves about contemporary Christendom. On the contrary, both Christians and Ottomans show themselves to be well versed in the religious and political currents then most powerful in both camps, keen observers within an interpretive structure that was, despite communal specificities, largely common. Secondly, the Ottoman “secrets”—which presumably lie in culture as well as in “data”—do not reside only in the archives on which the economic and social historian largely relies. Rather, they are to be discovered also in the political and religious discourse preserved in less formal and accessible, more expository, and sometimes more ephemeral shapes. Put another way, and more crudely, the unity of the Mediterranean cannot be convincingly demonstrated unless one can see that people were seeing and thinking similar things as well as eating them.

The general thrust of this argument can be illustrated by two examples drawn from a period in which Istanbul witnessed heavy diplomatic traffic, and here we rejoin the men of the High Renaissance in the search for hidden books of lost wisdom that illuminate the meaning of contemporary history. In 1534 Benedetto Ramberti, a member of the Venetian diplomatic mission of

that year to the Sublime Porte, described in three *libri* what he had seen and learned in Istanbul. After noting that the Turks were much given to belief in astrology, magic, and the interpretation of dreams, Ramberti detailed the leisure activities of the young Sultan Süleyman, whom he described as a reader of Aristotle well-disposed toward Christians:

Normally, once or twice a week he has someone read to him from the histories of his predecessors. He seeks to study the methods they used to ascend to exalted monarchy, having been convinced by their prophets (*dalli lor propheti*) that, just as there is one God who rules the heavens and disposes of celestial things as He wills, so the earth and terrestrial things shall come under the rule of a single sovereign, and that that sovereign is to be from this family.

Now there are historians who have written of the Ottoman victories in their language and have given him their writings; these are liars, flatterers, and opportunists, and the ruler has no interest in hearing them. But he guards like a precious treasure the true histories of the wars at home and abroad. These books are kept by his secretaries with such reverence and care that they might be sacred objects. It sometimes happens that he has particular passages read to him, when a case is under consideration that resembles a set of events in the past.

Several folios later, Ramberti praised the wealth, power, and extraordinary obedience commanded by Süleyman, adding the pious sentiment that surely God would not permit the sultan to realize his dream of universal empire because the unprecedented signs of his authority were such that, were he indeed divinely designated to such state, all people would be bound to render him obeisance.

Ramberti’s tract is no exotic travel piece; his description of a young sovereign entranced by history and the place within it prophesied for him is no embroidery wrought by a fervid Christian imagination on the already awesome

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2 First published as *Delle Cose de Turchi* by Aldo, Venice, 1539, and frequently thereafter throughout the sixteenth century without authorial ascription. Reference here is to the third of his *libri*; A.H. Lybyer published only the first two as an appendix to *The Government of the Ottoman Empire in the Time of Suleiman the Magnificent* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1913): 239-61.


5 Ibid.: 34b.
A Mediterranean Apocalypse

image of the Muslim ruler whose next goal was feared to be Rome. The closely guarded books of history and prophecy were real, kept in the Privy Chamber of the Ottoman palace. Ramberti’s reference to “their prophets” might seem to betray a naïve ignorance of Islam, which recognizes no bearers of revelation after Muhammad, but in fact the term evinces a subtle understanding of the imperial environment of the 1530’s. A Venetian of the era that witnessed Savonarola and a host of prophetic preachers would have used the term “propheti” with full cognizance of its contemporary significance; living seers and prognosticators teemed in the heart of Muslim Istanbul, and prophetic wisdom that yielded clues to the apocalyptic nature of the times, and which was culled from pre-Islamic and Islamic authorities, was “rediscovered” and reworked. Ramberti knew whereof he spoke, and used the culturally and historically appropriate idiom to express himself.

The second example derives from no less prominent and convinced an apocalyptic enthusiast than the “learned and mad” Guillaume Postel, who in 1535 accompanied the diplomatic mission of Jean de la Forêt, the purpose of which was to negotiate what would become, in Christendom, a notorious alliance between the French and Ottoman monarchies. Postel himself came to believe, partly as a result of his experiences in Ottoman lands, that he was the Angelic Pastor sent to preside over the spiritual dimension of universal renovatio and concord, together with the prophesied Last World (or Last Roman) Emperor, who would necessarily be from the Gallic house of Valois. In proof of this latter conviction, in a work composed between 1564 and 1566, Postel cited the existence of Muslim prophecies that foretold the invasion of Muslim lands at the end of history by the “Yellow Peoples” (Ben Saphra, i.e., Banū al-asfar, the Blond Races of the Byzantine and Latin legends of the Last Roman Emperor, who first oppose and then aid the Emperor in his reconquest of the Christian lands from the Muslims), who would destroy the Ottoman dominion. These

6 I list and discuss some of these summarily in “The Lawgiver as Messiah: The Making of the Imperial Image in the Reign of Suleyman.” In Soliman le magnifique et son temps, ed. Gilles Veinstein (Paris: La Documentation française, 1992): 159-77.


“Yellow Peoples”, Postel went on, were understood by Muslims to be the Franks, that is, the Gauls.

The Turks accord special authority, nearly as much as they give to their Koran, to a book of prophecies in which it is explicitly written that the prince and people of yellow color shall destroy the Turks as well as the other Ismaelites or Muhammedics, who are vulgarly called Muhammadans. From this evidence one can well believe that the Turks go to the greatest possible lengths to conceal the said prophecy from foreigners.9

Postel saw the book, though he had no opportunity to peruse it. During an audience with the ministers of state one of the viziers reviled the ambassador as a spy and traitor sent, not to negotiate a treaty, but rather to compass the destruction of the Ottoman realm. He pulled the secret book from his breast and explained volubly to M. de la Forêt that it was the Yellow Peoples who were prophesied to destroy Islamdom, and that the yellow fleur-de-lys that symbolized the French monarchy (itself of hallowed prophetic significance, on which Postel discourses further) clearly clinched the identification. The clever French emissary defused the situation by affirming the truth of the prophecy, with the correction that “yellow” referred, not to the French lily, but rather to the color of the trousers of the Landesknecht troops of the emperor Charles V. The ambassador, Postel went on, concealed from the Turks the true identity of his master, who was indeed the king of the Blond Races, destined to be the agent whereby the Christian millennial empire would be established; and so M. de la Foret lulled the Muslim ministers into a false sense of security that would serve well the interests of the innocently duplicitous French monarch.

Here it is enough for us to register two points. First, the book of which Postel spoke was real; it was almost certainly the Miftāḥ al-jāfr al-jāmīʿ (The Key to the Comprehensive Prognostication—hereafter Key), the Arabic digest of Muslim apocalyptic lore written by ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Biṣṭāmī (d. 1454) in the early fifteenth century and which circulated widely in court circles, especially in small, pocket-sized versions, in the first half of the sixteenth century. The Key enjoyed such prestige as a text that foretold the events of the Last Days and predicted that the last universal ruler would come in the tenth century from the Ottoman house that it ultimately became a kind of secret family history that was repeatedly selected for illumination (in both the original Arabic and Ottoman Turkish summary/paraphrase) in the royal ateliers.10

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9 This quote and following paraphrase are from Postel, Thrésor: 101-103.
10 For a summary description of the work see Fleischer, “The Lawgiver as Messiah.”
The second point to command our attention is that Postel, who was a renowned Kabbalist, included Muslim apocalyptic prognostication in his universal prophetic corpus as being as valid as, and indeed as validating, Christian and Jewish testimony.\(^{11}\) While he might deny the testamentary value of the Qur’an, he saw prophecy as a universal medium, universally understood. As a diplomat, Postel also saw—rightly—the very power that stood most squarely in the military and religious path of a universal Christian imperium to be wracked, amidst delicate diplomacy and negotiation, by apocalyptic prophecy. As a prophet, Postel experienced the rise of Ottoman power with the same apocalyptic anxieties and hopes as his European contemporaries. The only point he missed, as a philologist, was the degree to which Muslim apocalyptic lore (especially in its Ottoman form), beginning in the era of Ibn ‘Arabī and the Crusades, had incorporated the legend of the Last Roman Emperor—which in Latin Europe at the turn of the sixteenth century was equally powerful as the Second Charlemagne prophecy—with prophecies of more localized Muslim provenance. To turn the communal tables, we may note that the currency of the Last Roman Emperor legend, and Ottoman awareness of the apocalyptic dimension of contemporary Christian crusading rhetoric, are attested by the rendition of the exhortation to crusade delivered by Pope Alexander VI. The Ottoman poet-historian Uzun Firdevsi (Firdevsī-i Rūmī) incorporated the pope’s crusading rhetoric into his history of the Ottoman conquest of Lesbos in 1503 in the following manner:

I have read the Gospels through and through;  
Depend on it, for I am the pope of Rome (rim-pap)  
It is time for the worshippers of icons (i.e., the Orthodox) to move,  
That the Blond Peoples (Benī Asfar) should attack the Turk.  
Let them go to Constantinople  
To aid the friends of the icon-worshippers.  
Then let the Christians proceed to Adana  
And take possession of Damascus and Jerusalem.  
It is time for the Messiah to descend from heaven;  
Know that all I say is the truth.\(^{12}\)

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Muslim traditions on the Last Things (ashrāṭ al-sāʿa) and their terrestrial prelude, of course, had their own scriptural sources in the Qurʾān and, most particularly, in prophetic tradition, ḥadīth; the development of Muslim scenarios was related to, but not wholly dependent upon, that of their Jewish and Christian counterparts. In the current context the pressing question is, however, how it was that there should have been so high a degree of mutual comprehensibility between Muslims, Christians, and Jews on matters apocalyptic and imperial in the sixteenth century.

2 Apocalypticism and Prophecy in the Western Mediterranean after 1453

In 1517, the year in which the Ottoman sultan Selim the Grim terrified an already anxious Christendom by completing his conquest of Syria and Egypt, a Church synod met in Florence to deal with a problem that had come in recent decades to be a pressing one for the Church. Italy in particular was awash with prophets, often itinerant, who preached the fullness of time and the imminent arrival of the antichrist; according to these preachers, whether their prophetic authority lay in claims to inspiration or in scripturally based calculation, the apocalypse was at hand, and with it the revolutionary transformations and upheavals—including restoration of the Church to its original spiritual purity—that must precede the Last Judgment. Popular millennialism converged, furthermore, with learned and monastic expectations of the advent of the New Age. Following the directives issuing from the Fifth Lateran Council, the provincial council generally condemned free preaching by the laity of imminent Renovation, and it rendered a particular verdict against Francesco da Meleto. The son of a Florentine merchant and a Russian slave, da Meleto had lived as a young man (in 1473) in the new Ottoman capital of Istanbul, where he was probably engaged in commerce. After his return to his home in Florence,

he frequented Humanist and, in the 1490’s, Savonarolan circles. By the opening
years of the sixteenth century da Meleto was well known as a prophet in a city
that had already had more than its share of such figures. Humanist belief in the
dawn of a new Golden Age often converged—despite Savonarola’s vehement
denunciations of humanist “paganism—” with Millennium and apocalyptic visions of the New Jerusalem that Florence was to become. An author as well as a preacher, da Meleto linked the final tribulations and renovation of the Catholic church to a universal conversion to be accomplished providentially; his system of correspondence between a variety of types of prophetic calculation, including interpretation of the Book of Daniel and of the phases of Church history, showed that the crucial era of transformation would begin in 1517 with the voluntary conversion of the Jews to Christianity, to be followed by that of the Muslims, and all to be accomplished by 1536. He cited as evidence for the truth of his preaching the ambient prophecies he had heard in his youth from Jewish and, probably, Muslim scholars that, if the messiah did not appear between 1484 and 1500, these communities would embrace Christ. Not only was Renovation universal, so was the circulation and validity of prophecy.14

This latter was a view, despite the condemnation of the particular views of Francesco da Meleto as heretical, that was shared by important members of the Church hierarchy. A few years earlier two princes of the Church, the cardinals Baldassare del Rio and Egidio da Viterbo, the general of the Augustinian Order, in addressing important sessions of the Fifth Lateran had themselves announced the nearness of apocalyptic renovation and expectation of the universal conversion of Jews and Muslims in the years soon after 1500. They cited as evidence not only the Revelation of John—together with the Book of Daniel a staple of Christian apocalyptic—but also the circulation of prophecies among Jews and Muslims in the late fifteenth century predicting the imminent demise of their own religions.15 In Italy, at least, important sectors of a Church concerned to control inspired apocalyptic preaching that threatened to produce political and religious upheaval also acknowledged the ripeness of the times, the imminence of renovation, and the probability that in such times some apocalyptic inspiration was certainly genuine.


Giorgio Benigno Salviati (born Juraj Dragišić in Srebrenica ca. 1450, died 1520 in Barletta) was a Minorite friar who had experienced the Ottoman advance in Bosnia and travelled widely before settling in Florence in the 1480’s. A protégé of the Byzantine cardinal Bessarion and prominent figure in the social and intellectual life of Medicean Florence, Salviati was a skilled theologian and apocalyptic enthusiast who prophesied the imminent end of the Muslim Turkish power and renewal of the universal church under an Angelic Pope and, latterly, universal emperor, whom he identified after 1515 as the (French) Most Christian King, Francis I. As a participant in the controversies over the nature of prophetic intelligence that followed Savonarola’s execution in 1498, the Franciscan Salviati cited in support of the truth of the Dominican friar’s prophetic preaching the existence of parallel apocalyptic prophecy in England—where the Revelation of John furnished predictions linking Ottoman conquest of Italy to the imminent millennium—and Constantinople, where mantic statuary in which the history of the world was said to be secretly inscribed allegedly confirmed that a renewed Catholic church would soon hold universal sway.\(^{16}\)

Although the proper subject of this study is apocalypticism in the sixteenth century, we must here pause briefly over its prelude in the fifteenth. It was the “reverberation through the world,” the Ottoman transformation in 1453 of the Second Rome into the westernmost capital of Islamdom, that most forcefully fixed the confrontation between Christendom and Islamdom as a primary concern of the prognosticative and prophetic literature that became so luxuriant in Christian and Jewish sectors in the late fifteenth century. Most broadly, the event was read with hope and/or despair (or sometimes both) by the monotheistic communities of the Mediterranean as an eschatological portent, as Christendom literally shrank before the Ottoman advance. Byzantine traditions then in currency linked the fall of the City and end of Empire to the end of the world—according to the first Orthodox patriarch of Ottoman Istanbul, George Scholarius, the end was to occur at the end of the World-Week, in the year 7000 of the creation (1492 CE)—and these prophecies were familiar to, and influential for, Jews as well as Christians, especially as apocalyptic

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ferment in the Western Mediterranean quickened in the last decades of the fifteenth century.\textsuperscript{17}

In the Christian ambit, the consistent themes of prophecy were the imminence of cataclysmic chastisement of a sinful Christendom and Church, the political fragmentation of Christendom made all the more perilous by unified Muslim advance, and ultimate renovation through the twin agencies of a humble Angelic Pope and a virtuous and powerful Emperor, who would reunite and purify the western Roman Empire, then retake Constantinople and bring Eastern Rome under his rule, and finally gain the crown of Jerusalem; Christian political and spiritual salvation would be capped, in this millennial empire, by universal conversion of Muslims and Jews to purified Christianity. By the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, this apocalyptic literature displays two noteworthy trends. First, the universal scenario is increasingly tied to the fate of particular geographies—including not only the established locations of sacred geography, such as Rome, Constantinople, Jerusalem, and Mecca, but also new “secular” ones, either cities such as Florence and Venice, or regions like Italy and Andalusia—which will be the special locus of divine wrath and favor, thus becoming in effect the new Jerusalem, the site of millennial renovation. Secondly, the expansion of Ottoman power is ever more closely linked to the fate of the Roman Church and Empire, whether as the agent of divine punishment or as the instrument whereby the millennial empire is to be established.

3 Textual and Political Roots of Apocalyptic Fervor in the Late Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Centuries

The apocalyptic fever of the times owed much to the continuing inspiration of Joachimism. The historical vision of the twelfth-century Calabrian

abbot, whose meditations on the circular concordance between Old and New Testament histories led him to prophesy the imminence of a third and ultimate historical state of the Spirit, is everywhere in evidence. In 1509, the year of the War of the League of Cambrai, for example, the Venetian populace thronged to view prophetic mosaics in San Marco that were believed to have been executed by the Abbot himself. In the last two decades of the fifteenth century revitalized Joachimite prophecy that promised revolutionary renovation of church and society was also thoroughly preoccupied with the legends of the Angelic Pope and Last World Emperor, and with expectation of a millennial restoration of Jerusalem that was to be both spiritual and temporal, whether effected by the recovery of the terrestrial city or the emergence of a New Jerusalem. Political events brought millennialist hopes to the boil and served more strongly to intertwine the present and future histories of the three religious communities of the Mediterranean in anticipation of final ruin and redemption.

Apocalyptic and political prophecy was further interpreted by more precise prognosticative techniques that did not depend on prophetic inspiration, such as the gematric calculations of Jewish and Christian Kabbalists. Judicial astrology, for which the founding authority was everywhere the Muslim Abū Maʿshar (d. 866), came into its own in late fifteenth-century Europe; it predicted the fate of whole regions, kingdoms, and religions based on communal nativity (that is, the prophetic birth of religious laws, leges) and the planetary conjunctions. The conjunctions of Jupiter and Saturn in each house, and especially the great conjunctions that occurred every 960 years, were held to be especially portentous for the fate of polities and religions. While Abū Maʿshar’s horoscope of religions was not itself overtly apocalyptic, it was based on an assumption that the life of the world was to be seven days of a thousand years each. As a mathematical adjunct to prophecy, judicial astrology was one of the


most basic and significant areas of chronographic and cultural convergence between Christian and Jewish apocalypticisms. Columbus, who in his Book of Prophecies gave an important place to the horoscope of religions, carried with him to the New World the astronomical tables of Abraham Zacuto. In an apocalyptic treatise on the Book of Daniel that was published in Istanbul in 1510, Zacuto’s brother-in-law Abraham ha-Levi cited as evidence of the imminence of the messianic era Zacuto’s statement that the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn that was to begin in 1529 would bring about a major change in the order of the world.\(^{21}\) The combined effect of intense messianic speculation fastened on the year 1503 and of the circulation of astrological and prophetic prognostication was such that a German Jew, Ascher Lämmlein, who announced himself the messiah in 1502, acquired a considerable following that apparently included Christians as well as Jews.\(^{22}\)

In Iberia, the final phase of the Reconquista, culminating in the destruction of the remnants of Muslim power, the expulsion of the Jews, and the forced conversion of Muslims, was widely seen as an eschatological event, the beginning of the universal victory of Christianity in the Old World and in the New, where simultaneously vast new populations, in a world that until 1492 had seemed far more likely to become Muslim than Christian, were discovered to be won for Christ.\(^{23}\) The communal purification of the Peninsula owed much


to the apocalyptic enthusiasm of Cardinal Cisneros, confessor of Queen Isabel and advisor to the Catholic monarchs, whom he saw as the agents of the divine will that could not but desire the universalization, through conquest and coercion, of the true faith; and Christian victory in an Iberia as imbued with prophecy as Italy suggested strongly that the next task for Ferdinand would indeed be the recapture of Jerusalem, so that he might truly fulfill the role of Last World Emperor.24

Political prophecy, buttressed by conjunctionist astrology and informed by hopes for the imminent realization of the Joachimist dream of “a single flock under a single pastor,” was as central to the articulation of imperialist programs—whether overtly anti-papalist or not—as to other inchoate forms of dissent.25 The most widespread imperial vaticination in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries—based in its generic form on the seventh-century prophecy of Pseudo-Methodius, which gave definitive form to the Byzantine legend of the Last World Emperor, on the Book of Daniel and pseudo-Danielic apocrypha, and on Joachimist visions of a millennial Third Age to precede the apocalypse proper—predicted the coming of a second Charlemagne, who after his serial conquests of Rome, “Greece” (Constantinople), and Jerusalem (thereby destroying Ottoman power and annihilating non-Christian practice) would on Mount Olivet surrender his three crowns and his soul to God.26 These events were the necessary prelude to the ultimate phase of history that would see the earthly millennium, and as the divinely elected recipient of universal spiritual and temporal sovereignty, the Last World Emperor would


be the “saint of saints.” A French version in verse composed in reference to Charles VI of France summarized the nature of the sovereignty of the redemptive conqueror in terms that, as we shall see, would find nearly perfect echo in Ottoman Istanbul:

For the sacred arm of God Most Holy
Will everywhere be with him.
Justice too, in the very same way,
Will truly be with him;
Just like that of husband and wife,
[This joining] is a most beautiful thing.
In his life time he will possess
The most lofty dominion
Of this entire Earth.
Then his praises will be such
That, these things accomplished, all mankind
Will call him the saint of saints.\(^28\)

The Second Charlemagne prophecy served both Valois and Habsburg imperial claims, particularly in the reigns of appropriately named dynasts. The invasion of Italy by Charles VIII of France in 1494 not only precipitated the Florentine crisis from which Savonarola’s millennial republic emerged; it also sparked urgings and rumors as far away as Istanbul that Charles should next invade

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\(^{28}\) Chaume, “Une prophétie”: 34. Italics are mine.

Car le sainct bras du benoist Dieu.
Avec lui sera en tout lieu;
Justice aussi semblablement,
Avec luy sera vrayement.
Comme l’epoux avec l’epouse.
Qui est une moult belle chose.
Il possedera, en sa vie,
La tres-haultaine seigneurie.
De ceste terre universelle.
Puis sa louange sera telle,
Ces choses faictes, tous humains.
L’appelleront le sainct des sainct.

\[\text{JESHO 61 (2018) 18-90}\]
Ottoman lands to take Constantinople and Jerusalem as he had Italy.\(^{29}\) The renewed Holy Roman Empire over which Charles \(V\) sought to preside owed no small measure, in the formulation of imperial sovereignty that Charles’ chancellor Mercurino Arborio di Gattinara promoted, to a vivid sense of the immediacy of the apocalyptic drama—the reality of which was made all the more tangible by widely reported prodigies and verification of the predictions of the astrologers—in which the Roman and Ottoman emperors had leading roles. The early 1520’s, the years that saw the accession of Charles as Holy Roman Emperor and the Diet of Worms, and the proliferation of anxieties centered on the significance of the great conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in Pisces in February, 1524, were particularly fecund in prognosticative literature; much of the contemporary debate on the validity of judicial astrology centered on predictions of a deluge that would coincide with the great conjunction.\(^{30}\) After Charles’ election as Emperor Gattinara wrote, “Sire, God has been very merciful to you; he has raised you above all the kings and princes of Christendom to a power such as no sovereign has enjoyed since your ancestor Charles the Great. He has set you on the way towards world monarchy, towards the uniting of all Christendom under a single shepherd.”\(^{31}\) Gattinara, in part on the authority of astrologers and inspired prophets of the apocalypse, declared Charles the second Charlemagne, the divinely elected world emperor destined to establish the unity of Christendom, defeat “the Turk,” and reform the church just as Christ had founded it. The Ottoman sultan was expected to take Italy and to advance, in the 1520’s or 1530’s, as far as Cologne, where his final defeat at the hands of the new Roman emperor would signal the beginning of the Christian victory over Islam and inauguration of terrestrial renovation.\(^{32}\)


\(^{30}\) Kurze, “Prophecy and History”: 70; for examples of further prophecies centered on the Valois Francis I as the future universal ruler who would save Christendom by defeating the Turk (despite the ultimate French alliance with Süleyman), see Secret, “Aspects oubliés,” and literature cited therein. See also: Rebecca Ard Boone, *Mercurino di Gattinara and the creation of the Spanish Empire* (London: Pickering and Chatto. 2014)—MGM.


Ottoman victories in Rhodes (1522) and Hungary (1526, 1541), and threatening advances into Austria (1529, 1532) and the Adriatic (1538), could only lend substance to Christian fears structured by decades of prophetic preaching and apocalyptic prognostication that tied the fate of Christendom to that of Islam and its most powerful representative. It is worthwhile noting the ambivalent identity of roles the particular protagonists could play in prognosticative literature. The Ottoman sultan could conquer Rome and punish the church, as expressed in an early sixteenth-century dialogue put into the mouths of the sultan’s astrologer and his “philosopher,” a Christian convert to Islam who criticizes the hypocrisy of the Catholic clergy. The same role was also played by Charles in such a manner that the sultan and pope, as occupiers of the Holy See, were equally interchangeable.

The Ottoman, and his successes, were equally important for Jewish victims of the Expulsion. Don Isaac Abravanel, the late fifteenth-century compiler of Messianic lore and leader of the exiled Spanish Jewish community, had predicted that the messianic era would begin in 1503, and that the messiah would likely appear in Muslim lands. Abravanel suggested that the conquering Ottoman sultan might accept Judaism and so fulfill a messianic role reserved to a conquering monarch rather than that of the Messiahs of the houses of Joseph or David. An Ottoman power that stood poised to conquer and punish a persecuting Rome, and to take Jerusalem and open it for Return, could clearly

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34 Ibid.: 321.
assume a key eschatological function. Several decades later Eliahu Capsali, who lived and wrote in Crete, anxiously awaited the initiation of the Messianic era in 1530. In his Hebrew chronicle of the Ottoman house he explicitly identified the Ottoman sultans Mehmed the Conqueror (1451-81), Selim I (1512-20), the conqueror of Syria, Palestine, and Egypt, and Süleyman as filling the role of the first Messiah (he of the house of Joseph) who would restore Jerusalem. Later still in the century Josef ha-Cohen would exhibit similar reflexes in his history of the French and Ottoman monarchies, each of which was a candidate for the universal sovereignty that would prepare the way for the arrival of the Messiah and of the Millennium.

The flowering of Jewish messianism and apocalyptic speculation that is so evident between the middle of the fifteenth and middle of the sixteenth centuries—crowned by the formation of the Lurianic Kabbalism of Palestine that would in the next century give rise to the explosive Sabbataean movement—was as intimately linked to global political events as to the internal and environmental situation of Mediterranean Jewry. For Jews, the disaster of 1492 quickened (but did not initiate) messianic fevers that were further fueled, in the next few decades, by internal Christian challenges to the Roman Church (the Reformation and the Sack of Rome representing high water marks), by the spectacular expansion of Muslim Ottoman power, and the settlement of exiles in Ottoman Palestine. For Christians the final success of the Reconquista, a plethora of increasingly radical movements of ecclesiastical and social reform, Neo-Platonic and Joachimite dreams of the dawn of a new age, and the traumatic confrontations between Catholics and Lutherans, between Habsburg, Valois, Pope, and Ottoman, fueled the propagation of both optimistic and pessimistic versions of the Christian apocalyptic scenario.

Christian and Jewish apocalypticisms, despite their communal and doctrinal specificities, were closely linked by text—the Book of Daniel being an


increasingly popular point of reference for the interpretation of contemporary events in both communities—and historical circumstance. The linkage, at this period, goes deeper still. Each community played an important role in the apocalyptic drama of the other: The Christian scenario looked forward to the restoration of Jerusalem and the conversion of the Jews (and all others), while the Jewish one required the destruction of Rome to be a prelude to the Return. As the example of Francesco da Meleto cited above suggests, the physical and intellectual overlap between Christian and Jewish populations fostered a situation whereby the existence of apocalyptic excitement in one community lent authority to millennialist programs in the other; precise prognosticative techniques based on interpretation of Scripture and judicial astrology were shared, and the effects, in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, of the apocalyptic preaching of inspired prophets, and of the circulation of political prophecies commonly focused on the fortunes of French, Spanish, and Ottoman monarchies, crossed communal boundaries with apparent ease.

The close concord between the dates favored by Christian and Jewish prognosticators of catalytic events and the advent of the messianic or millennial era (for example, 1484, 1500, 1503-4, 1517, 1530) is a function of the conjunctionist astrology that buttressed apocalyptic predictions in both camps, but also of the rhythms of the tumultuous contemporary history of the Mediterranean; and those rhythms, for those of apocalyptic bent, were increasingly driven by a conflict that by the year 1500 boded to be a global one between Christian and Muslim powers. The Ottomans in particular—after Sultan Selim (1512-20) doubled the size of his empire with the conquest of Diyar Bakr, Syria-Palestine, and Egypt and was succeeded, within the year of the accession as Emperor of

Charles of Habsburg, by a son named for Solomon who immediately turned his attention to Christendom—represented a persistent focus of apocalyptic hopes and fears. The universal concord of which some dreamed, particularly Neoplatonists and Jewish and Christian Kabbalists, in which the dissolution of communal barriers in the new age would produce a terrestrial and spiritualized version of the Joachimite vision of “a single flock under a single pastor,” was intertwined with the possibility of universal peace and unity to be established by the more militant means employed by expansive Catholic Habsburg and Muslim Ottoman imperial powers; and to these positive approaches to achievement of the millennium must be added impulses that saw in the fragmentation or diminution of the established communities—whether through conversion, in the case of the Jews, or through schism, in the case of the Christians and Muslims—the signs that ultimate communal chastisement, unimagined reformulation of religious norms, and perhaps messianic redemption, were nigh.

4 

Ottoman and Safavid Power and Christian Apocalyptic Rumor

The multiple and interlocking strands of the web of Mediterranean apocalyptic thought were articulated most profoundly in rumor and fantasy grounded in real events. The Ottoman sultan Bayezid II (1481-1512), famed for his antipathy to Christendom, was said to have had sermons of Savonarola translated for him. In Italy the news of Shah Ismāʿīl’s establishment of a messianic Shiʿī state in Iran in 1501 occasioned tremendous excitement that rendered the “Sophi” a Christian eschatological savior. For the first years of the sixteenth century entries in the Diarii of Marino Sanudo described him as the “New Prophet” (il nuovo profeta) whose appearance in the East was foretold. Venetians were well aware that the appeal exerted by Ismāʿīl’s charisma and claims to being a divine manifestation and messianic conqueror represented the greatest Muslim challenge to Ottoman sovereignty and legitimacy. He and his “sect” were to destroy the Muslim law and the Ottoman menace to Christendom. While the pragmatic benefits of alliance with this mortal enemy of the Ottoman were obvious, the Venetian reports further suggested that Ismāʿīl was part of the divine plan for Christian triumph by stressing his hostility to [Sunni] Turks and his apparent sympathy, expressed theologically and sartorially, for Christians.


As the self-proclaimed manifestation of the Godhead, instituter of a new law, and direct object of the reverence of his followers, Ismā‘īl was not a Muslim as European Christians understood the category, and his symbolic eclecticism and overt hostility to an Ottoman regime that Europeans identified with an expansive Islam constituted both a virtue and an impetus to speculation. The Venetian reports stress the reverence that Ottoman subjects held for him, even in Istanbul, and the terror that his charisma inspired in the sultan Bayezid II, such that his admirers dared not speak openly of him for fear of incurring the most extreme punishments. One report of his movements noted that he dressed in many garbs, arraying himself one day as a Muslim, one day as a Christian, and yet another as a Jew. Another recounted his encounters with Muslims and Christians in Eastern Anatolia during his first incursion in 1501. When Shah Ismā‘īl asked a “Turk” [i.e., Muslim] where God was to be found, the man responded “In heaven,” and was summarily cut in two for giving the wrong answer. An Armenian priest, faced with the same query, answered “In heaven and on earth,” a response that earned him immediate rewards from the divine representative who had posed the question. Another Muslim (moro) was reportedly beheaded for simultaneously declaring his faith that the prophet Muhammad was God and acknowledging that the Prophet was dead; Christian commentators sought to link his hostility to Muslims to a suspected inclination toward Christianity fostered by the Armenian priests said to be in constant attendance on him. Furthermore, in both Venice and Florence Ismā‘īl’s appearance was linked to apocalyptic prophecy; he was expected by some to come to Italy after destroying the Ottoman, where he would take Rome and save the people from their considerable political and economic woes.

Even more “eurocentric” commentators than the gentlemen of the Serenissima, for whom Istanbul represented the most important consular posting of the day, expressed a vivid sense of the theological and social relevance of the ferment in the Islamic sphere by likening Ismā‘īl’s revolutionary activities and doctrines to those of the rebellious German peasantry. In 1511-12 the astrologer Luca Guarico identified the “Sophi” as the promised False Prophet, and

47 In addition to Amoretti see Vasoli, “Temi”: 226; Eugenio Albèri, Relazioni degli ambasciatori veneti al senato, 111/1 (Florence, 1840): 22 (Daniello de’Ludovisi, 1534), 111/111, 62 (Contarini, 1519), 132-38 (Erizzo, 1557).
noted that the years 1530-35 would witness the culmination of the prodigious events that would usher in the Last Age. A decade later a fervent opponent of astrological prognostication would rail against the self-delusion of those who believed and propagated the wealth of ambient prophecies that foretold the imminent appearance of promised prophets, of the Messiah of the Jews, and of the Antichrist of the astrologers, thereby documenting further the trans-communal character of apocalyptic fervor.\footnote{Zambelli, “Fine del mondo”: 291-368, esp. 321-3, 365-8.}

Before the Peasants’ War of 1525-6, a popular work \cite{Zambelli, Göllner, Scott and Scribner} would suggest that the true Christian could live the best Christian life in the Ottoman domains, where, Protestants noted, evangelical preaching was freely conducted. In 1526 Christian perceptions of the War itself were much colored by reports that rebellious peasants had fled to Ottoman lands, and the Ottoman army was said to have been reinforced by 80,000 Christian farmers angry with the tyranny of their Christian lords; later still (1532) the Ottoman raids into Austria were rendered the more fearful by rumors that the Muslim forces were reinforced by thousands of dissident Bavarian farmers.\footnote{Göllner, \textit{Turcica}, vol. 3, 174-181; Tom Scott and Bob Scribner (eds. and trans.), \textit{The German Peasants’ War: A History in Documents} (New Jersey: Prometheus Books, 1991): 302-303; Ebermann, \textit{Türkenfurcht}: 31-34.}

The Venetian ambassadorial reports from the first segment of Süleyman’s reign stress the Christian origins, infatuation with Venice, and unprecedented authority over every detail of the realm of the sultan’s grand vizier extraordinaire, İbrahim Pasha (1523-36), in terms that suggest that the fantasy of a revolution that would bring a secret Christian and Venetophile to the leadership of the Ottoman dominion might not lurk very far below the surface.\footnote{Albèri, \textit{Relazioni}, 111/1, 28 (Ludovisi), and Robert Finlay, “Al servizio del Sultano: Venezia, i Turchi e il mondo Christiano.” In \textit{Renovatio Urbis: Venezia nell’età di Andrea Gritti (1523-1538)}, ed. Manfredo Tafuri (Rome: Officina Edizioni, 1984): 81 (with citations therein).}

\section{Apocalyptic Prophecy in the Eastern Mediterranean in the Fifteenth Century}

Four decades ago Paolo Preto suggested in a footnote, a propos of the proliferation of western prophecy concerning the Turks, that “It would naturally be of suggestive significance to know whether popular (and not only popular) belief in prophecies was as marked in the Muslim world.”\footnote{Paolo Preto, \textit{Venezia e i Turchi} (Florence: G.C. Sansoni, 1975): 76.} At the time when I first
began researching this subject this suggestion had not been followed upon by Islamicists.52 Up to that time these latter had tended to treat apocalypticism and messianism as a largely exceptional phenomenon outside of the first three centuries of the life of the Muslim community, when eschatological expectations ran high and the doctrinal boundaries of “orthodoxy” not yet fully drawn, and the nineteenth century when messianism again became apparent in association with anti-colonialist rebellions or movements for political and religious regeneration. In the late medieval and early modern periods only the Safavid experiment of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries has received significant attention. These studies tend to reinforce a topos whereby apocalypticism and messianism, “unorthodox” as they appear from the standpoint of a putative normative Sunnism as representing the core of mainstream Islam, are largely associated with a Shi’ism assumed (in excessively marked contradistinction to Sunnism) to be inherently chiliastic, particularly associated with

Iranian religiosity or with a “popular” religion that is presumed to be both unlearned and potentially “heterodox,” often a code word for “mystical” and/or “Shiʿī.” It is somewhat ironic that the most comprehensive sources cited in the general literature for Islamic traditions concerning the Last Things originate from impeccably Sunnī sources of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, i.e., al-Qurṭūbî and Ibn Khaldūn. Despite a few spectacular examples of religious-political experimentation in the central Islamic world of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries—for example, the Hurūfism of Faţl Allâh Astarābādī (d. 1394), the revelation of whose divinity was contained in the new texts he received through inspiration and through kabbalistic contemplation of the esoteric significance of the correspondences between Creation and the letters of the Arabo-Persian alphabet; the millenarian rebellion in Rumelia and Anatolia, participated in by Jews and Christians as well as Muslims, associated with Sheykh Bedreddîn (d. 1416), a scholar whose understanding of the teachings of Ibn ʿArabi led him to affirm the eternity of the world and the contingency of historical, exoteric religions; and the notable Ottoman heresy trials of the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, in which Muslim scholars and mystics were prosecuted for teaching the equality of all revealed religions, the divinity of man, and the immanent and temporal nature of the reign of the Mahdī-messiah—the degree to which an ostensibly non-Shiʿī Islamdom was permeated with mysticism, apocalypticism, and prophecy had gone largely unnoticed, perhaps because of ambient assumptions about the monolithic nature of Muslim (i.e., Sunnī) orthodoxy.

These assumptions of the necessarily exceptional nature of apocalyptic and mahdist belief in a cultured Islamicate environment help to explain why certain books produced in that environment have been lost to modern view. In 1454, the year after the conquest of Constantinople, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Bistāmī died in Bursa, where he had lived for over twenty years as a protégé of Sultan Murād II, leaving a literary legacy that would have an extraordinary impact on the religious and political culture of subsequent generations in the Eastern Mediterranean.53 A native of Antioch probably born in the 1370s, al-Bistāmī

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53 For basic information see, H. Algar, “Besṭāmī, ʿAbd-al-Raḥmān.” Encyclopaedia Iranica; Toufic Fahd, La divination arabe: études religieuses, sociologiques et folkloriques sur le milieu natif de l’Islam (Leiden: Brill, 1966): 228-34; Denis Gril, “Ésotérisme contre hérésie: ʿAbd al-Rahmān al-Bistāmī, un représentant de la science des lettres à Bursa dans la première moitié du XVè siècle.” In Syncrétismes et hérésies dans l’Orient seldjoukide et ottoman (XIVe-XVIIIe siècle, ed. Gilles Veinstein (Paris: Peeters, 2005): 183-195. Al-Bistāmī’s corpus has yet to be fully catalogued and analyzed, and his significance as both an exemplar of the religious environment of his time and a seminal figure in the crystallization of
was early drawn to the study of mysticism—his *nisba* is derived from his association with a Sufi master, one Shams al-din al-Bistami—and to the systematic investigation of occult and mantic sciences, in which later he excelled. He was a particular adept of the sciences of letters and of names (*‘ilm al-ḥurūf, ‘ilm al-asmā‘*), which in fact constituted a vast and sophisticated cosmographic system based on gematric and non-gematric correspondences between letters, words, alphabets, prophets, successive revelations, historical eras, the zodiac, and the planets. Understanding of these correspondences and affinities could, of course, be used both to predict the future and manipulate the physical world; but al-Bistami (who in assertion of his multiple and compatible identities almost invariably signed himself “al-Bistami” [in reference to his Sufi affiliation] al-Ḥanafi” [indicating his adherence to one of the Sunnī legal rites]) insisted that Lettrism (here to be distinguished doctrinally if not functionally from the extreme Lettrism of Fażl Allāh) was distinct from magic in that its purpose was understanding of divine secrets, and that in its results if not its methods was equivalent in revelatory power to Sufism. Sufism depended upon mystical sensibility and divine inspiration (*dhawq, kashf*), while the former made the same essential understanding attainable through study and science to those not pre-disposed to ecstatic inspiration. Indeed, al-Bistami, who wrote exclusively in an elegant Arabic although he was clearly acquainted with other languages and writing systems, spoke of the “the noble Sufis and Hurufis” (*sādat al-ṣūfiya, sādat al-ḥarfīya*) as two equal, though professionally distinct, groups.54 In a work written in 1427 he stated that his science was a divine one, comprising the essence of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim revelations, and directly dependent on the teachings and inspiration of Ibn ‘Arabi, who in the thirteenth century of the Common Era had rediscovered the ancient esoteric wisdom that underlay all revelations.55 One important aspect of al-Bistamī’s divine science was understanding of the meaning and progress of history. In an early treatise based on extended contemplation of prophetic history and extension of the system

later Muslim apocalyptic traditions has yet to be studied. The information cited here is based on my own soundings in his manuscript works in the libraries of Istanbul, including his own account of his travels and scholarly career, *Durrat tāj al-rasā’il*. Istanbul Nuruosmaniye Kütüphanesi Ms. 4905.


of celestial and literal correspondence to the distribution of peoples and languages around the globe, al-Biṣṭāmī began what would be, within his own corpus, an important discourse on the nature and timing of the universal end of history which he initiated by relaying what his master Shams al-dīn had taught him about the eschaton. In composing this epistle al-Biṣṭāmī was not only indulging his own predilections, but also the preoccupations of the Syrian and Egyptian Mamluk environment in which he passed his youth, and in which an extensive and enigmatic prophetic literature (malāḥim) was already current, a literature that sought not only to prophesy the succession of rulers in Cairo (certainly a matter of immense topical concern in Mamluk times), but which also increasingly linked the apocalypse and establishment of the millennial regime to the political fate of Egypt and the identity of its last ruler.

Al-Biṣṭāmī ultimately (between 1419 and 1440/822 and 843) combined the works of apocalyptic prognostication that he either collected, edited, or composed to form the Miftāḥ al-jafr al-jāmī, The Key to the Comprehensive Prognostication, a work that effectively codified all that al-Biṣṭāmī's generation did know, and that several subsequent generations would care to know, of apocalyptic prophecy. Its sources are manifold and include: Prophetic

57 Mohammad A. Masad, “The Medieval Islamic Apocalyptic Tradition: Divination, Prophecy and the End of Time in the 13th Century Eastern Mediterranean.” PhD dissertation, Washington University, 2008. This literature forms the subject of the doctoral dissertation of my student, Mohammad Masad, for whose bibliographic assistance I here express my gratitude; his immersion in thirteenth and fourteenth-century Mamluk materials has helped to make much more comprehensible the role that the conquest of Egypt plays in the Ottoman form of Islamic apocalyptic. I am convinced that the Crusades and Mongol conquests of the thirteenth century, and the Timurid ones of the early fifteenth, as well as the nearly contemporaneous transition within the Mamluk regime from Bahri to Burji, constitute critical abutments in the development of the apocalyptic tradition centered on Syria and Egypt.
58 I have utilized Istanbul Topkapı Sarayı Kütüphanesi Ms. Revan 1752: 102 ff., dated July 1533/end 939, based on a copy of 932. The probable date of composition occurs on f. 40b, and the manuscript also contains an appendix, found in many copies, predicting the onset of the final destruction of the world to 990. I have examined 25 copies of the work located in Istanbul, Paris, and Berlin; of these nine are clearly datable to the early sixteenth century. The oldest extant copy, Istanbul Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi Ms. Hafid Efendi 204, is dated August-September 1474/Rebi’ 11 879, and is in full accord with later copies, though it lacks the appendix on the year 990.
Traditions, especially those concerning the Muslim conquest of Rome, and a number of treatises attributed to Ibn ‘Arabi, notably the works termed his Apocalypse (Malḥama), the Prognosticon (Jafr), and the Ṣayhad al-būm fi ḥawādith al-Rūm (The Cry of the Owl on the Roman Events—which was probably al-Bisṭāmī’s own creation); Israelite traditions for which the authority is Ka‘b al-Aḥbar; and several versions of the “Book of Daniel,” actually the “Visions of the Prophet Daniel” which enjoyed great currency in Orthodox and Latin Christendom, and within which the Blond Races played such an important role in the destruction of Islam.

Like other such compilations, the Key presents no single script for the Apocalypse and final judgment, thus compounding the ambiguity and enigmatic allusiveness proper to the apocalyptic genre, though it does attempt some harmonization of variants through gematric interpretation and imposition of an overarching set of chronological and geographical termini. Al-Bisṭāmī’s premise is that the prophesied end of history is close at hand. The age of the world is to be 7000 years; each millennium has a planet, an alphabet, and a letter particular to it, with the last millennium, the Lunar Age, being presided over by the Muslim revelation. He dates the onset of the final troubles to the year 903 AH (1497-98), when the Qurʾān will be abrogated, Christian and Jewish institutions will disappear, and the rule of evil will prevail for the remaining 97 years; the timing is confirmed by calculation based on Muslim, Christian, and Jewish calendars. The end of the world will occur either in 999 (1590-91) or, according to an appendix that may have been interpolated by the


60 For published references see, inter alia, Osman Yahya, Histoire et classification de l’oeuvre d’Ibn al-‘Arabi 2 vols. (Damascus: Institut français de Damas, 1964); Fahd, La Divination: 228-234; Abel, “Un hadīṯ.” The evidence for al-Bisṭāmī’s authorship is provided by the al-Bisṭāmī, Durrat: f. 30a.


early sixteenth century copyist, in 990 (1582-83). Already in the ninth century (i.e., in the lifetime of the author) anxieties produced by expectation of the prodigies and trials of the last century, including the abrogation of established religion, ran so high that geomancers, astrologers, and holy men who worked miracles had become commonplace. Under the Islamic dispensation each century is given an imam and a Renower of its religion (mujaddid), and each cycle of sovereignty (prophethood, caliphate, imamate) has its seal (khatm) or historically ultimate manifestation; the ninth century anxiously awaits the imminent appearance of the quṭb-Pole, who combines these latter identities and who will rectify the world by force as the drawn sword of God.

The focal point of immediate expectation is the arrival of the redeeming Mahdī, who combines the secret of divine wisdom with the sword of divine order. He is the Alexandrine World Conqueror (Dhū‘l-qarnayn), the microcosm and the macrocosm (al-insān al-saghīr wa’l-insān al-kabīr), the neo-Platonic emanation corresponding to the sub-lunar world (sūrat al-ʿālam al-dunyawi), the Pole of Poles (Qūṭb al-aqṭāb; the quṭb is the center or apex of the hidden saintly hierarchy in each age), and God’s vicar in heaven and on earth (khalīfat Allāh fi-l-ard wa-l-samā’) who joins sanctity and divine mandate with earthly power. Some of the signs of the approach of the messianic era are schism and sectarianism; proliferation of mosques and of the opinions of the jurists (fatāwā); multiplication of astrologers, Sufis, and Hurufis; and lavish construction of grandiose buildings and the ornamentation of copies of the Qurān. His first enemies will be the clergy par excellence, the jurists, who will refuse to believe in him and order his death. He will defeat his enemies, annihilate all sectarian belief, institute the primal pure religion (al-dīn al-khālīṣ) after the abrogation of the established religious laws (rafʿ al-sharāʾiʿ wa-l-adıyān), and conquer the world from China to Constantinople, completing his eschatological function by following his capture of the second Rome with that of the first, where a king rules (i.e., the Pope) whose status among Christians is like that of the caliph among Muslims. As the ruler (khalīfa) of the last age, Muḥammad son of ‘Abdullāh, of the line of the Prophet, he will fill the world with justice as it has been filled with injustice.

The central political drama of the last days is to be the great and final war between Christendom and Islamdom, to be fought not only in the cities that fall to the Muslims (the capture of Constantinople plays a role analogous to that of Jerusalem in Christian apocalyptic)63, but also in Anatolia and Syria,

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63 Armand Abel noted the unusual description of Rome found in what he described as an anonymous apocalyptic treatise datable to the fourteenth century (See Abel, “Un hadīt.”); in fact this section of the anonymous manuscript titled Sīr ṣ-hurūf, Bibliothèque
which will be invaded by the Greeks, Russians, Franks, Turks, and finally the destructive Blond Races, whose task will be to ensure that by the year 999 no Arabs are left on the face of the earth. Other preoccupations of the *Key* cognate with Jewish and Christian apocalyptic are the appearance from the east of the Antichrist (*Dajjāl*), the messiah of the Jews who will have combat with the prophet Khīḍr-Elijah; the descent of Jesus, who slays the Antichrist, takes a wife, and as a Muslim enjoys, together with the *Mahdī* who appears from the west, a forty-year millennial reign; the arrival of the Beast from the Land, bearing the Seal of Solomon and announcing the End; the emergence of Gog and Magog; and the eschatological function of the Turks and Tatars as the Scourge of God. A number of prophecies included by al-Bisṭāmī were more topically suggestive for Ottoman readers, beyond those concerning the conquest of Rome. The eschatological conqueror is to be identified with the last ruler of Egypt, who is to put an end to the “Turkish state” (i.e., that of the Mamluks) and to be the ruler of Rūm, that is, of the old Byzantine dominions; and this ruler, in passages derived from enigmatic texts attributed to Ibn ‘Arabī, is associated with the names ‘Uthmān, Salīm, and Sulaymān.

Our occultist polymath was no lonely enthusiast. In 1408 he left Cairo to undertake what would seem to have been a triumphal seminar tour of Ottoman lands and of non-Ottoman Anatolia, where he wrote and taught his arts to distinguished scholars eager to learn them, including Sheykh Bedreddin himself, whom al-Bisṭāmī instructed in Edirne in 1413. Ultimately, after a brief return to Mamluk dominions, he settled in Bursa where he passed the remainder of his life. Even within his own lifetime, however, he was acknowledged to be the premier authority on events to come in the ultimate phase of history, as evidenced by the anonymous *Hidden Pearl* commonly, though mistakenly, attributed to Yazıcızade Aḥmed Bī cân (d. 1463). This encyclopaedia of cosmological and

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historical knowledge in Turkish devotes its last two chapters to the Last Things, citing al-Bistāmī as virtually the sole authority and providing precious indications of the specifics of interpretation of apocalyptic prophecy in the mid-fifteenth century. The ruination of the lands is to begin shortly after the year 900 or 909 of the Hijra (1494 or 1501 C.E.), and the onset of the ultimate phase of history is to be marked by the appearance, around the year 900, of a prophet in the vicinity of Qazvin, in Iran, who will announce himself the Mahdī, or spiritual savior of the age (ṣāhib-zamān).66

6  The Convergence of Prophecy and History on the Ottoman House

Many more texts, some of them anonymous, confirm not only the growth of apocalyptic expectation in the eastern Mediterranean in the fifteenth century, but also delineate those strands of convergence of authoritative text with historical events that would become most powerful in the early sixteenth century, in the beginning of the tenth century of the Muslim era. One element common to these is the exaltation of the prophetic authority of Ibn ‘Arabī, who ultimately became at once the inspiration for religious esotericism that could, and occasionally would be, condemned as heretical, and for the messianic claims of the Ottoman dynasty. Particularly significant among the many prognosticative texts concerning the fate of Egypt assigned to him was the Crimson Tree on the ‘Uthmanid State (Shajara al-nu’māniyya fi al-dawla al-‘Uthmāniyya), which predicted both the imminent appearance of the Mahdī-messiah, called M (mīm) and his association with an eschatological ruler called S (sin) from the house of ‘Uthmān. The tree was probably more figure than text, since it appears to exist only in the (pseudepigraphic) commentaries on it by Ibn ‘Arabī’s student Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī (d. 1263) and the later Khalīl b. Aybak al-Ṣafadī (d. 1363).67

67 Denis Gril, “L’énigme de la Šājara al-nu’māniyya fi l-dawla al-‘Uthmāniyya, attribuée à Ibn ‘Arabī.” In Les traditions apocalyptiques au tournant de la chute de Constantinople, ed. Benjamin Lellouche and Stéphane Yerasimos (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1999): 133-151. In all copies I have examined (and the two are generally found together, along with two later commentaries) both works refer verbally to a diagram as the Tree. The circular figure itself, original or textually reconstructed, forms the frontispiece of British Library Ms. Delhi Arabic 1354. Given the common origins of the late medieval stock of Christian and Muslim (and Jewish) apocalyptic lore in the 12th-13th centuries, the era of the Crusades, it is suggestive that the two great masters of prophecy, Joachim of Fiore and Ibn ‘Arabī, should have expressed their historical visions by way of figurae.
The Ottoman capture of Constantinople was as important for the crystallization of Muslim apocalyptic expectation as it was for Christian and Jewish, both because of the role that possession of the City played in Muslim eschatological tradition and because of its function in Christian and Jewish apocalyptic. The Conqueror Mehmed had translated for him, from the Syriac into Arabic, the Biblical Book of Daniel including the dream of Nebuchadnezzar. The translation was made "for the treasury of the sultan ... named for the prophet of the end of time" by a Christian, and included relevant passages from the thirteenth-century Hebrew commentary on the book of Ibn Ezra, to the effect that the Fourth Monarchy would be that of Islam, and that its monarch would be the “ruler of Rum” (mālik al-Rūm), that is, of Constantinople. Mehmed, like his great-grandson Süleymanın, made the most of Ottoman possession of the Second Rome and of the stature that control of the seat of the empire of Constantine enabled them to claim; both were avid students of Roman (and Alexandrine) history. Christian and Jewish circles were, by the latter half of the fifteenth century, prepared to accord the Ottoman imperial status, be it providential or demonic. Greek and Latin humanist scholars acknowledged Ottoman assumption of the imperial dignity, though some—notably Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini, the future Pope Pius II—sought to make such recognition the instrument for securing the sultan’s conversion to Christianity, an event that would realize the dream of unitary world dominion that was also Christian. Mehmed inherited with his victory a wealth of Muslim and Christian apocalyptic prophecy concerning the history of the City and its fate. By the time that Süleyman took the throne in 1520, apocalyptic excitement had, if anything, intensified, although the fall of the realm to which all Mediterranean traditions attached such premonitory significance had not yet born full eschatological fruit. Millennial hopes and fears of all stripes then focused on the first Rome and the fate of the Papacy, and the Roman component of Ottoman imperial ideology took on a yet more specific identity: the sultan was not only the master of the historical Byzantine dominion, but also the Last Roman Emperor, an eschatological conqueror for all. The image of Alexander was equally potent for the new Ottoman imperium: Mehmed the Conqueror, Selim 1, Süleyman, and

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his vizier İbrahim Pasha were all preoccupied with the notion of replicating the exploits of the Macedonian world-conqueror by bringing the world under the sway of a single ruler prophesied to be a member of the Ottoman house.\textsuperscript{70} The medieval Alexander was the common property of Christians, Jews, and Muslims. He was an eschatological figure by virtue of his imprisonment of Gog and Magog, his association with Khiḍr/Elijah (the prophet who would reappear at the end of time), his exposure in Jerusalem to the Book of Daniel, and his identification, in the Muslim domain, with the eschatological conqueror Dhūl-qarnayn. While a monotheist with no communal specificity, Alexander was a prophet whose prophetic mission lay in his conquest of the world.\textsuperscript{71}

By the last years of the fifteenth century (ninth century AH) Mamluk and Ottoman lands of the eastern Mediterranean were in full apocalyptic fever fueled by prophecies that predicted destruction, the providential chastisement and renovation of corrupted religions, the imminence of an ultimate prophetic era that would be rendered the more tumultuous by the proliferation of false prophets, and social and spiritual salvation of the righteous through the agency of a divinely appointed ruler whose identity was as yet unknown. This is to say that those preachers and churchmen of the western Mediterranean who validated their own eschatological anxieties by pointing to the existence of convergent prophetic excitement among Muslims were right to do so; not only did the prophecies exist, but their import and context were also parallel to and cognate with those from which Christian and Jewish prophecy sprang. As was also the case in the west, prophecy in the eastern Mediterranean became ever more tied to the particular geographies that were the site of significant political and social change, and the search to identify eschatological roles with contemporary historical actors intensified. The generality of the phenomenon in the eastern Mediterranean is illustrated by a number of texts that suggest both the currency of millennial anxiety in learned as well as popular circles, and the significant spread of prophetic themes into historical literature at the end of the fifteenth century.

In 1493 (898 AH) the Egyptian scholar Jalāl al-dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 1505) composed a treatise in reaction to an environment in which everyone, it seems, was full of hadīth predicting that the end of the world would occur in the tenth century. Al-Suyūṭī, who himself wished to be recognized as the Renewer of


\textsuperscript{71} Abel, \textit{Roman:} 55-89; Berlin, “A Sixteenth-Century Hebrew Chronicle”: 27.
Religion of the tenth century by virtue of his extraordinary scholarship, took the position that the end would not occur until 1450 AH.\textsuperscript{72} About the same time in Egypt an anonymous author produced a Turkish translation of the \textit{End of the Beginning of the End: On the Tribulations and Last Wars} of Ibn Kathîr (d. 1373), a volume devoted to traditions on the apocalyptic era that the historian appended to his massive history.\textsuperscript{73} In 1488/893 one Ibn Bâlî wrote in Turkish a history of Egypt dedicated to the sultan, which he titled \textit{The Book of Wisdom (Hikmet-nâme)}.\textsuperscript{74} The last four folios of the work are dedicated to the Signs of the Hour and the events of the final stage of history, including the conquest of Constantinople and killing of the Byzantine emperor by the \textit{Mahdî}. Equally suggestive of the tenor of the times is the vocabulary in which Ibn Bâlî addresses the sultan: “Emperor (\textit{shâh}) of the people of Islam/Crowned one of the Muhammadan community ... \textit{Mahdî} of the world in his age/As well as its Alexander and universal ruler (\textit{sâhib-qirân}) ... The Anushirvân of the realm of justice/A second \textit{Mahdî} to the kingdom of righteousness.”\textsuperscript{75}

Ibn Bâlî’s Ottoman contemporary Uzun Firdevsi was similarly enthusiastic in his deployment of Old Testament and other prophetic epithets in praise of Bayezid II in his lengthy verse version of the legend of Solomon (the \textit{Süleymânnâme} which, to be sure, so displeased the sultan with its verbosity that he rejected it):

Shadow of the Creator of the tribe of Isaac, Thunderbolt Bayezid Han
He is Warrior for the Faith (\textit{gazi}) and Universal Conqueror (\textit{sâhib-qirân}),
to whom God has granted victory.
Just as Alexander took the world, he has put a lock upon its seas;
He has subjected the thousand and one nations to the Solomonic shah.\textsuperscript{76}

It is significant to note here, at the turn of the sixteenth century, two phenomena evinced by these citations. The first is the use of the term \textit{sâhib-qirân} to

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  \item\textsuperscript{73} Ibn Kathîr, \textit{al-Bidâye ve’l-nihâye}. Paris Bibliothèque Nationale Ms. Turc 97; while the manuscript is undated, internal evidence makes the date and provenance likely. The Arabic original is \textit{Nihayat al-bidaya wa al-nihaya fi’l-fitan wa’l-malahim}, 2 vols., ed. Shaykh Muhammad Fahim Abu ’Ubayya (Riyad, 1968).
  \item\textsuperscript{74} Ibn Bâlî, \textit{Hikmet-nâme}. Paris Bibliothèque Nationale Ms. Suppl. Turc Mss. 601 and 602.
  \item\textsuperscript{75} Ibn Bâlî, \textit{Hikmet-nâme}. Paris Bibliothèque Nationale Ms. Suppl. Turc Ms. 602: ff. 6b-7a.
  \item\textsuperscript{76} Firdevsi-i Rûmi, \textit{Süleymân-nâme}. Paris Bibliothèque Nationale Ms. Suppl. Turc 1293: 2b.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
designate the prophesied universal ruler. Literally meaning “master of the auspicious conjunction” and originally used to describe the conqueror Timūr (whose exploits were purportedly foretold by astrological configurations at the time of his birth), the term took on new life in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries as a result of the conjunctionist astrology that was the corollary of apocalyptic calculation, most particularly in anticipation of the Great Conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in Pisces. The universal conqueror was expected, his coming announced by apocalyptic prophecy and the correspondence between the cycles of terrestrial and celestial histories, spiritual and temporal. The second phenomenon is the wide distribution of the millenialist understanding of the nature and function of this conqueror. The poetry of Shah Ismā’īl Šafāvī, frequently cited as evidence of the extreme nature of his messianic, even incarnationist claims, has much in common with the new language of sovereignty invoked above; as such it constitutes less a heterodox exception to contemporary convention than a particularly luxuriant evocation of the prophetic rhetoric and prophetic excitement that was as much a part of urban “Sunni” life at the turn of the tenth century as it was of the pastoralist Turkman environment of eastern Anatolia. It was precisely because expectation of a new prophet/ruler and of major religious change was so rampant that the Safavids’ conquest of Tabriz caused such popular excitement (and attendant royal anxiety) in Cairo and Istanbul.

Another phenomenon likely associated with millenialist religious expectations is attested by both Christian and Muslim sources. From the late fifteenth through the seventeenth centuries there are reports of Muslims in Ottoman Istanbul who felt such a deep attachment to Jesus that they were viewed both by Europeans as secret Christians and by Muslims as possible heretics. Guillaume Postel was tutored in Arabic by one of these, who are no doubt identical with the “Christ-lovers” (Hub-Mesiḥī—“messiah love”) reported a century later by Paul Rycaut. There are indications that these Muslims who revered Jesus were present in Istanbul in the 1490’s; and two heresy trials from the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries manifest the currency of cognate notions in learned circles. One member of the learned establishment, a certain Hakīm Ishāq, preached that the Old and New testaments were genuine revelations equal in authority to the Qurān, while the scholar Molla Ḫābūz

taught that Christ was superior to Muhammad. The latter’s first trial for heresy ended in acquittal because Molla Қābıẓ confounded his judges on scholarly grounds; only the intervention of the sultan, who ordered that a new trial be conducted by the chief jurisconsult (şeyhülislām) Kemālpaşazāde, secured his execution in 1527. It seems likely that Muslim enthusiasm for Jesus—though enthusiasts still considered themselves Muslim—would have been inspired by expectation of the apocalypse, in late fifteenth and early sixteenth-century in the discussions of the identity of the Mahdī, an important strain of thought held that the ruler of the millennial age would be Jesus himself and that Jesus was either the promised Mahdī (“There is no Mahdī but Jesus [lā Mahdī illā Īṣa]”), or that the figure referred to as the Mahdī was the annunciator or the general of Jesus, the true sovereign of the millennium. In the messianic age the new pure religion would merge Christianity and Islam, just as Jesus and the Mahdī from the house of the Prophet would share millennial rule.

In the Islamicate environment of the fifteenth century the mystical confraternity had become a dominant model of religious and social organization, and, just as Sufis had become the preferred source of spiritual guidance and legitimation for the politically active and ambitious, so did mystical piety become politically powerful. Both dissent and aspiration to sovereignty were increasingly expressed in messianic and millenialist tones that drew equal strength from reverence for living and dead saints, from an esotericism that stressed the contingency of legalistic norms, and from belief in theophany reinforced by expectations focused on the Mahdī, the eschatological restorer of the godly order on earth, and the Qutb, the secret saint of saints around whom the universe revolved. His identity was soon to be revealed, and his spiritual sovereignty to be conjoined with temporal power, whether through alliance with a divinely appointed ruler or through manifestation of both sovereignties in the same individual; and in the millennium he was to be the seal of sainthood, the prophetic bearer of true religion and a new terrestrial order, whether one believed in the literal truth of the imminence of apocalypse or in the


eternity of the world. Shah Ismāʿīl was the most spectacular and successful—but by no means singular—instance of the convergence between mysticism, messianism, and politics at the beginning of the sixteenth century. His status as the inheritor of the spiritual charisma of his forebears, the hereditary guides of an important mystical order centered in Azerbaijan, and his success in cultivating the identity of the Mahdī and manifestation of God, rendered him not a rebel but the founder of a new state and orthodoxy based on Twelver Shiʿīsm.

It is generally accepted that the successful transformation of the propagation of Safavid teachings into a revolutionary military and social instrument at the very beginning of the sixteenth century was terrifying to the Ottoman dynasty and its adherents. Within the universalist understanding of sovereignty that prevailed in Islamdom in this epoch, the superiority of Ottoman legitimist claims to those of rival Muslim dynasts was by no means widely admitted. At the first news of the conquests of Ismāʿīl and his Sufis in Iran, popular sympathy for his cause was manifested even in Istanbul, while less than a decade later the rebellion of Shah Kulu, who drew both inspiration and support from the success of the Safavid movement, would play a central part in precipitating the dynastic civil war that eventuated in the forced abdication of Bayezid II in favor of his militantly anti-Safavid son Selīm. According to the Venetian reports, the multi-faceted confrontation between a centralizing Ottoman power and a Safavid one that conquered by religious propaganda as well as by force of arms not only represented a schism within the Islamic fold comparable to that from which Christendom suffered, but it was also shown to have cosmic significance by the proliferation of astrological and prophetic prediction in Muslim and Christian zones that pointed to its historical importance. The confrontation reached an initial peak in 1514, when the Ottoman Selīm defeated Ismāʿīl at the battle of Chaldıran, and even Sunni Muslim commentary evaluated the event in a mystical, messianic, and eschatological mode that reflected close linguistic affinity with the extremist matrix that gave support to Ismāʿīl’s messianic claims. To state the case for the nature of the ideological dimension of Selim’s battle with the Safavids (and the Mamluks) in the early sixteenth century in its most extreme form, the conflict was less a matter of defending a putative Sunni orthodoxy against heterodoxy than of establishing the identity

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82 Fleischer, “The Lawgiver”: 160-161.
85 Amoretti, Shah Ismaʿīl I: 23, 26-7, 120, 141, 162.
of the messianic conqueror. Ottoman messianism was as real as the Safavid variety, if less extreme in its expression. Selim was described as the “Divine Force,” the “Mahdi of the Last Age,” and he addressed his ministers of state, in exhorting them to war against the Safavis, as “my devoted disciples,” using the same language of the Sufi master as Shah Ismā’īl. By virtue of his victory he was credited with being the Renower of Religion of the tenth century. Ismāʿīl was identified as the predicted prophet from Qazvin, the conqueror from the east who would claim to be the Mahdī and ultimately be defeated in the Last Times by a king from the west. When Selim conquered Syria and Egypt two years later and put an end to the “rule of the Turks,” another set of prophecies attributed to Ibn ʿArabi was fulfilled. That Selim probably believed he was the eschatological conqueror, or wished to be seen as such, is shown by his actions on entering Damascus, where he ordered a search for the tomb of Ibn ʿArabī, which had fallen into ruin and disappeared, and ordered its restoration. The Murcian mystic had predicted of the last ruler of Egypt that “when Selim enters Shām (i.e., Damascus) the tomb of Muḥyī al-dīn [Ibn ʿArabī] will appear.”

The following year Selim had himself described as Succoured by God, Ṣāḥib-qirān, Shadow of God on Earth.

In the strictly Islamic context, the Safavid movement was by no means the only element that pressed apocalyptic thinking on an Ottoman dynasty that would later, but only later, represent itself as the unequivocal defender of a Sunni Muslim orthodoxy against heterodox challenge. In the first half of the sixteenth century, central Islamdom in general, and the Ottoman lands in particular, saw repeated and varied manifestations of yearnings for millennial change in the spiritual and socio-political order. Between 1511 and 1538 there


89 Fleischer, “The Lawgiver”: 163.

90 Fleischer, “The Lawgiver,” see also Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, Osmanlı İmparatorluğuunda: 120-137, for an overview of the dynastic posture vis-à-vis antinomian and potentially extremist religious confraternities, which changed dramatically in the reign of Süleymān.
occurred in central and southern Anatolia no fewer than six major rebellions, whether extremist (rāfiżī) or mystical in coloration, that were explicitly messianic in ideology, as well as others that were clearly antinomian if ideologically inchoate. These revolutionary movements drew support from a wide social spectrum that was largely rural: pastoralists, peasants, and members of the provincial cavalry all had good reasons to reject the financial and moral exactions, and controls and caprice, imposed by an aggressively expansive Ottoman state that was still poorly rooted in central and eastern Anatolia.

Though less overtly politically threatening to a newly coalescing Ottoman order, mystical and scholarly circles tied to urban centers also produced significant challenges to the institutionalization of doctrinal orthodoxy that dynastic coaptation of the clerical hierarchy, and assumption of the role of patron as well as protector of religion, threatened to effect; this is made abundantly clear by the spectacular heresy trials of the first half of the sixteenth century. The Melâmmi-Bayrami order, whose spiritual forebears had been intimately associated with the formation of Ottoman imperial power and with the conquest of Constantinople, developed from Ibn ʿArabī’s theory of the unicity of being (wahdat al-wujūd) a millennialist program that attracted adherents equally from the peasantry and the highest social strata in the capital. Ismāʿīl Maʾshūḳī, in whose trial this revolutionary doctrine was articulated for posterity, was the highly learned son of a Melâmmi-Bayrami master believed to harbor mahdist pretensions. The “Boy Sheikh” (Oğlan Şeyh) was executed for apostasy in 1539 after affirming his teaching of the eternity of the world, the meaninglessness of formal dogma and ritual, the transmigration of souls, the licitness of pleasures forbidden by the holy law, the divinity of man, and the identity of God with the qutb, the human Pole of the Universe whose sovereignty is both spiritual and temporal. The order of the Gülşenis, which after its


93 Ocak, “Ideologie.”

94 Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda*. The idea of the qutb-pole, the secret sovereign of the spiritual hierarchy in each generation, is shared by many mystical orders;
translation from Azerbaijan to Anatolia, the Balkans, and Egypt in the first decades of the sixteenth century became, to judge by its fashionableness among members of the Ottoman elite, even more aristocratic, propagated similar incarnationist notions throughout the Empire for a significant portion of the sixteenth century.95

Even in what might be assumed to be the staunchest of Ottoman Sunni arenas, then, in the first half of the sixteenth century the hegemony of “orthodox” doctrine was questioned or ignored, though flouting of the letter of religious norms was not necessarily directly tied either to political disaffection or to direct challenge to an emergent imperial statism that went in the direction of rendering religious institutions and some degree of doctrinal conformity—in the face of an appreciable pluralism of doctrine and practice within the Muslim population— instruments of rule. This latter was a gradual process that began in the late fifteenth century and reached definition only in the 1550's, when the imperial image, tone, and institutions of the Süleymânic regime attained a consistent, and grandiosely imposing, form.96

The ultimate creation of an Ottoman Sunni orthodoxy, supported by a religious hierarchy that was fully incorporated into the apparatus of rule, was in fact the product of a concatenation of factors: The growth of dynastic imperial ambitions in the early sixteenth century, the territorial and demographic expansion of the dominion, the dramatic change in the perception (and reality) of the threat posed by religious pluralism effected by the success of the Safavid movement, dynastic need to formulate the religious component of its ideology, and the enhanced coercive capacity of the state under the young Süleyman.97

but the Melâmî qâfîb is particular in that his status implies universal temporal sovereignty as well; see Abdülbaki Gölpinarlı, Melâmîlik ve Melâmiler (İstanbul: Devlet Matbaası, 1931).

95 Ocak, “Ideologie”: 189 and literature cited therein; on the popularity of the Egyptian lodge as a site of retirement for Ottoman officials see Fleischer, Bureaucrat: 201-213. Muhyiddin Karamani, a Gülšeni master at Gebze, was executed in 1543 for his “materialist” teaching. See Ocak, Osmanlı Toplumunda: 318-327; Side Emre, İbrahim-i Gülshani and the Khalwati-Gulshani Order. Power Brokers in Ottoman Egypt (Leiden: Brill, 2017).


97 Ocak, Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda: 126-7, notes the change in official language to describe antinomian dervishes, such that by the middle of the sixteenth century vocabulary
In the religious and political environment of the first decades of the sixteenth century, however, the relationship between state and doctrine was far from clear-cut, and not even the most elevated sectors of Ottoman society were free from larger currents of religious experimentation that flowed so freely across doctrinal and communal boundaries as to be, in any normative sense, hardly Muslim.

When the world-conquering Selim died suddenly in 1520 he was succeeded by his sole heir Süleyman as sultan and šāhīb-qirān. This latter title, reformulated and refashioned in the Timurid-dominated fifteenth century as one of the markers of universal sovereignty, would be that by which Süleyman was primarily, often exclusively, referred to for the first thirty years of his reign, until those later years when he, and others, apparently began to question his carefully cultivated and widely accepted identity as messianic ruler of the Last Age.98 Already by the first years of Süleyman’s rule both he and his father, together with other contemporary political actors, had been specifically identified with figures occurring in political prophecy. An anonymous Arabic treatise that clearly dates from the mid-late 1520’s explicates two apocalyptic odes of Ibn ʿArabī, with periodic reference to al-Bištāmī, and identifies Selim and Sulayman, because of the former’s conquest of Syria and Egypt, as together constituting the promised eschatological rulers: “As for his [i.e., Ibn ʿArabī’s] statement, ‘The letter M will appear after nine,’ this signifies after nine rulers or nine centuries. As for the rulers, the first and the last are the letter S; God knows best, it seems the first and last of them are Selim, and the letter M, signifying the Mahdī, is after them.”99 The author reproduces and explicates a mystical figure concerning the last times taken from the Sajanjal al-arwāḥ wa nuqūš al-alwāḥ (the Mirror of the Spirits and Figures of the Tables) of Sa’d al-dīn al-Hamawī, a contemporary and friend of Ṣadr al-dīn Qunawi and one of the thirteenth-century sources listed by al-Bištāmī.100 The figure shows everywhere “Salīm” and “Sulaymān” (identical in Arabic orthography except for the

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99 al-Bištāmī, Durr al-munāẓẓam fī al-sīr al-aʾzām. Istanbul Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi Ms. Pertevniyal 76; al-Bištāmī, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān. Miṣṭāh al-jafr al-jāmī. Paris Bibliothèque Nationale Ms. 2665: f. 163a, adds the marginal explanation: “That is, after nine kings of the Ottoman family.” Both copies date from the early seventeenth century, but internal evidence makes likely the early sixteenth-century date of the original. Closely related to these are two Berlin manuscripts listed as the Key: Berlin Staatsbibliothek preussischer Kulturbesitz Mss. 4219 (=We. 1212) and 4220 (=Peterman 520).
100 GAL S.I, 803.
addition of two letters at the end of the name of the son), refers to the date of accession of the later, and demonstrates the relationship of these rulers and dates to the imminent appearance of Dajjāl, Jesus, and the Mahdī. The chronological and numerical significance of the accession of Süleymān as the tenth Ottoman sultan, born in the year 900 AH, and son of the ninth ruler whose conquests dominated the beginning of the tenth century, was lost on no one.

The expectation and identification was hardly peculiar to the author of this treatise. No less a figure than the Ottoman chief jurisconsult Kemâlpaşazâde (d. 1534) wrote an epistle on the extraordinary signs attending Selim’s conquest of Syria and Egypt in the year 922 (1516-17).101 Early sixteenth-century copies of the Key of al-Bistāmi are filled with marginalia identifying specific apocalyptic events and actors, whether based on Prophetic Tradition or on the prognostications of Ibn ʿArabī as transmitted by al-Bistāmi: The emergence of Shah Ismāʿīl, Selim’s victory over the Mamluk Qānṣūḥ al-Ghawrī at Marj Dābiq in 922, the beginning of the Ruination of the Lands (kharāb al-buldān) in the same year, the death in 1520/926 of Selim, in the month of Shawwal, the accession of Süleymān in the next month, Ramaḍān (corresponding to the two cries of the Beast from the Land before the End, once in Shawwal, once in Ramaḍān), and the appointment in 1523 of the controversial Ibrāhīm Pasha as grand vizier are all predicted and confirmed.102 In one of these, the awaited quṭb-saint is identified explicitly with the great conqueror promised for the tenth century.103

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101 Ibn Kemâl, Feth-i Mıṣr hakânda ımā ve ișarât, Istanbul Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi Ms. Esad Efendi 3729.


103 Berlin Staatsbibliothek preussischer Kulturbesitz Ms. 4220: 46a, as the rubric for an illustration (“The quṭb of the Muslim state, the center around which revolves the Muhammadan nation sits on his throne in the sixtieth lunar degree of Virgo; in his days wars will be plentiful”). The problem of the iconography of the Key should be mentioned here as a subject worthy of attention. The work was written in order to be illustrated, not only with figures composed of letters, but also with symbolic portraits of monarchs and events, and with pictures representing the succession of rulers of Egypt. Often these, which occur most frequently in the earliest copies, were based on astrological figures cognate with those found in the Kitāb al-bulhān. See: Stefano Carboni, Il Kitāb al-bulhān di Oxford (Torino: Tirrenia, 1988). Copies made after the accession of Süleymān are largely blank, although space has been left for illumination. At the end of the sixteenth century a new, more “realistic” style was implemented whereby, for example, Sultan Selim is depicted on the throne of Egypt.
Selim's conquests all took place in Muslim lands. It was his great regret—or that of his son, for the sake of the father's reputation—that he had conquered no part of Christendom, though this was next on Selim's agenda. The second ṣāḥib-qirān Süleyman announced his own eschatological identity by proclaiming his regime to be that of millennial justice and by waging obsessive war against the Christian west for the first several decades of his reign. Belgrade (1521), Rhodes (1522), Hungary (1526, 1541), Austria (1529, 1532), and ultimately Italy (1537-8) were his first objects; only in 1533 did he turn his attention to the Safavids with the Iraq campaign. Shah Isma'īl had died in 1524, and under his minor son Ṭahmāsb the Safavids could contest neither the military might nor the prestige of the Ottoman. In terms of aspiration to universal rule within the western Islamic context, Selim had tipped the balance in favor of his own dynasty. Initially at least, his son Süleyman perceived the ambitions of Charles V to be the second Charlemagne and restore a universal Holy Roman Empire to be a far more serious challenge than that represented by the Safavid house.

While Süleyman's territorial inheritance was double that of his father, so, through fortunate lineage, was that of the Spanish Habsburg. Both young sovereigns had soon to prove their mettle. Charles defeated his imperial rival Francis I—whose claims were supported by Francophile prophecy—in 1525. He also had to face the Lutheran threat and accept his role as both defender and imperial renovator of a corrupt Catholic church; the 1527 Sack of Rome whereby emperor asserted himself over pope was an event read widely as prophetic and apocalyptic. Süleyman had to establish his own authority over old grandees, quell internal revolts from numerous quarters, and quickly to assert his status not only as the most just of Muslim sovereigns, but also as an ambitious warrior for the faith. For Catholic Habsburg and Muslim Ottoman (and certainly for other non-imperial spectators, notably Protestants and Jews)

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This innovation occurs most lavishly in the Turkish summary of the Key produced at the instance of the chief White Eunuch Gazanfer Ağa, though adumbrated several decades earlier when at least two copies of the Arabic original were designed for production in the Palace, with detailed instructions being given for the depiction of actual places and events in dynastic history (al-Bişāmī, Durr al-munazzam fi al-sīr al-ʿazam, Istanbul Süleymaniye Küütüphanesi Ms. Süleymaniye 1060. It is this evidence that suggests that dynastic belief in its eschatological destiny remained alive, and that al-Bişāmī’s work became a sort of secret history of the family, with Ibn ‘Arabī as its patron saint.

104 Fleischer, “The Lawgiver.”
it seemed quite clear that the final conflict was at hand. Habsburg attempts to counteract Ottoman advances and then to carry the war into Muslim lands toward Jerusalem, most notably with the conquest of Tunis in 1535, represented the next step in the salvational history to be effected on earth. By the same token, in taking Rome Charles laid claim to authority over the same city that was Süleyman’s own goal in the Muslim version of the last cycle of history.

The sanctity now required of temporal power that was to be universal, within the apocalyptic framework, was on both sides read and expressed in terms of wealth and worldly, not to say military, success. In both cases, expectation of a millennial imperium meant that spiritual and worldly sovereignty were to be conjoined, in historical events and actors. Just as Gattinara cited to Charles V the undreamed-of wealth and opportunities suddenly available to him (and as Postel would similarly do for Francis I) as signs both of the exceptional nature of the times and of the extraordinary quality of the monarch’s own destiny, so would Süleyman’s wealth, ostentation, and might become indications of his central identity within the eschatological drama of the Mediterranean.

Royal wealth, and its display and deployment in new technologies, was one of the clearest signs of the approach of the millennial era, and while Muslims may have feared the fulfillment of prophecies whereby the Blond Races would invade Islamdom, on the basis of material grandeur and success, Christians, in the first half of the sixteenth century, would calculate a clear Muslim victory unless providence, reason, and true faith intervened. In 1542-42 Guillaume Postel wrote:

> Therefore the Mohammedan law, rather than the law of God, which wishes to cherish all things, to live peaceably, and to endure by proving itself, can be called the conqueror of the world....

> Till now God has been indulgent to us, hoping that we might mend our ways and give up our luxurious habits. But now the axe has been laid to the root; and the same thing threatens us which has happened to the East. Act, therefore, dearest brethren, since the princes cannot avert this disaster from the earth; let us sharpen the swords of reason and promptly use them. Is it not shameful that we should be the only part of Europe left to Christ? How shall we excuse our idleness to God; how shall we explain that no one opposes himself to such a calamity? (De orbis terrae concordia)\(^\text{106}\)

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Süleyman, for his part, took seriously the notion that his sovereignty was to be an unprecedented one that was to be manifested in terms that were both unconventional in grandiosity and impressiveness, and unconfined by communal and cultural particularism. Süleyman and his Greek grand vizier extraordinaire, İbrahim Pasha, oversaw a thorough redesign not only of the imperial palace but also of its ceremonial, all with the theatrical goal of rendering yet more mysterious, or nearly divine, the imperial person.  

Within the first decade of the reign of Süleyman, prognostication and apocalyptic speculation in the Ottoman realm crystalized, not only around dissident claimants to spiritual and temporal authority, but also around the new sultan, whose first ten years were fully occupied with the suppression of internal rebellion—emanating even from governors and former viziers—and with the vigorous prosecution of wars of conquest against a Christendom that the Habsburg monarchy was seeking to unite. The duel between the two rivals for world dominion reached a first high point the 1520’s with the battle of Mohács (1526) and the siege of Vienna (1529); but this was by no means the end either of Süleyman’s drive to Italy—the 1537 siege of Corfu was meant to be a stage on the way to Rome—or of Charles’ ambitions in North Africa, where Habsburg fleets remained active through the 1540s. The contest of universalizing Christian and Muslim powers, in an apocalyptically charged environment, caught the imagination of Muslims across the social spectrum and, in the Ottoman ideological context, gave a particular form to the presumed eschatological identity of the dynast; he became the ṣāḥib-qirān, the Master of the Conjunction and Last World Emperor.  

In the very first year of his rule, in the face of extraordinary financial crisis, Süleyman ordered that all non-Muslim trustees (emīn) of imperial revenue sources be dismissed and replaced with Muslim ones; the command proved impossible to implement, and it is difficult to postulate practical reasons for so clearly utopian (from a Muslim perspective) a gesture. Poems, petitions, and early experimental histories submitted at the time of Süleyman’s first conquests in Christian territory (Belgrade, Rhodes, Hungary) ring with eschatological terminology, with predictions of the universal victory of Islam, declarations of the sultan’s identity with his prophetic namesake, and with exhortations

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109 Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi, Maliyeden Müdevver 29 (1520-21/927), passim.
to defeat and convert the Pope (rim pap). In a more universalist vein, the vizierial regime of İbrahim Pasha produced powerful experiments with a non-Islamic representation of sovereignty that asserted the utterly universal nature of the Süleymânic dispensation and made deliberate reference to Roman and Alexandrine models. These experiments included a quadrilevel crown, an icon utterly alien to Islamic representation, that was crafted in Venice and meant, in all likelihood, to resemble the papal tiara, the imperial crown-helmets of Charles, and, very probably, the multiple crowns of the Last World Emperor. It was deployed in imperial contexts in which the audience was largely Christian and where specific challenges to Charles’ claims to empire were deemed in order. Finally, it is significant that İbrahim Pasha, in his correspondence with his master, should have largely eschewed the use of Islamic or Islamicate terminology of sovereignty in favor of the title şâhib-qirān; it indicates that the regal grand vizier and his ruler were in fact developing a new formulation of power, one that emphasized a divine mandate for world conquest, and one that both comprehended and transcended communally particularistic notions of temporal rule.

Between 1529 and 1543 Mevlânâ ʿİsâ, an otherwise obscure magistrate who had both Halvetî Süfi affiliations and courtly connections, composed three recensions of an Ottoman history in verse called the Ğâmiʿül-meknûnât, the Compendium of Hidden things. Consciously modeled on Ahmedî’s Iskendernâme, the qadi’s exposition begins with the prophetic history of the

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110 For examples see Fleischer, “The Lawgiver”: 168 and 177 (nn. 41-43), and Flemming, “Şâhib-kirān und Mahdî”: 60.

111 See the excellent study of the crown and its implications by Necipoğlu, “Süleyman the Magnificent.”


113 Barbara Flemming is the primary authority on Mevlânâ ʿİsâ and his work, which she has studied in “Şâhib-kirān und Mahdî” and “Der Ğâmiʿul-meknûnât—Eine Quelle ‘Âlis aus der Zeit Sultan Süleymâns.” In Studien zur Geschichte und Kultur des vorderen Orients. Festschrift für Bertold Spuler zum 70. Geburtstag, ed. Hans Robert Roemer and Albrecht Noth (Leiden: Brill, 1981): 79-92, as well as in a number of unpublished studies she has been kind enough to share with me. General statements about the work here are based on “Şâhib-kirān und Mahdî” and on my own summary of ms. Istanbul University Library, İbnülemin T. 3263, which represents the last recension. Specific manuscript references here are to Ankara Türk Tarih Kurumu Kütüphanesi Ms. Y. 240 (Hereafter Compendium), which represents the first recension (with additions that probably date from ca. 1532-36), and passages transcribed and translated by Flemming are cited as such to facilitate reference.
world and makes the point that the age of the world is to be but 7000 years, with this last century of the Muslim millennium representing its final phase. Mevlânâ īsâ further notes the signs of the approach of the Hour—proliferation of mosques, oppression, loss of learning and decay of religion, the appearance of Khîdhr, etc.—and states that many of these have come to pass.\(^{114}\)

His lengthy treatment of Süleymân's rule, in the recension of 1543, takes on an extraordinary dramatic structure; its central focus is the rivalry between the Holy Roman Emperor Charles v, referred to as “Carlos” and “king of Spain,” and Süleymân, each of whom claims the status of šâhib-qirân, divinely guided universal ruler of the last age of the world. Mevlânâ īsâ marshals a wide range of arguments in support of Süleymân's legitimate claim, which are bound together by the judge's conviction that the last days are at hand and that the šâhib-qirân, who will inaugurate the millennium and the reign of a single sovereign over a unified flock, must already have appeared. His argument, stated in compressed fashion, runs as follows:

1. The world will exist for only seven thousand years, and the Mahdî will appear as the avenging sword of God to preside over the ultimate phase of history, which is to be marked by upheaval and the abrogation of established religions.

2. The Renewer of religion (müceddid) is due to appear by the year 960 AH (1552-3), which also marks the onset of the Lunar Age.

3. In 940 (1533-34) will occur the great conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in Aquarius, and in 960 the conjunction will pass into Pisces, the last sign of the zodiac. This will be the fourth such conjunction since the time of the Prophet (960 years corresponds, of course, to the Great Year of the astrologers, also associated in contemporary Christendom with the term set for the triumph of a single religion; Jupiter and Saturn are together the planets that determine the rise and fall of religions, prophetic dispensations, empires, kingdoms, and dynasties).\(^{115}\)

4. In this context, šâhib-qirân is to be understood literally as referring to the universal ruler who will institute the dominion of a single religion that is to coincide with the Great Conjunction.

\(^{114}\) In the earliest recension these passages come at the very beginning of the work in which, given its date, the treatment of Süleymân's reign is necessarily somewhat abbreviated.

5. Since the time of the Prophet, the hidden Poles (aqṭāb) have, one in each generation, held spiritual dominion over the world. There have been twenty-nine of these, and the thirtieth, and last, is now due. The thirtieth quṭb (Tr. kutb‘ul-aktāb, Pole of Poles, Saint of Saints) is to be identified with the Mahdī, who will take terrestrial power as well as spiritual and will fill the world with order, justice, and prosperity. By implication, these two figures are perhaps also to be identified with the last müceddid (Ar. mujaddid).

6. The larger conjunction between the astrological timetable, the imminence of the arrival of Renewer, Pole, and Mahdī, the approach of the end of the seventh millennium, and the proliferation of prodigies and signs of the End, point to the eschatological identity of Süleymān, who in his militant repudiation of the audacious claims of Charles to the status of world-conqueror has shown himself to be the center of this conjunction, the sāhib-qirān. The sāhib-qirān of the last age is to be identified with the Mahdī, who is accompanied and aided by the hidden saints of the spiritual hierarchy. Süleymān has displayed his sanctity (Tr. velayet) through his greatness as a ruler and general; he is likely the thirtieth Pole, and the messianic ruler of the age who joins sacred and temporal authority:

It is clear now that the ghazi Süleymān,
The sultan, son of Sultan Selīm Han
Is the epitome of bravery
And that many signs have been manifested in him.
If he had no special sanctity (Tr. velayet)
Would he have performed such prodigies of Holy War?
Great sultans are not devoid of saintliness;
Rather, it may be that sanctity is most fulfilled in them.
This one is either the mahdī or his commanding general (ser-ʾasker),
He is the paragon of all sultans.\textsuperscript{116}

The apocalyptic theme is rarely far from the surface of Mevlānā ʿĪsā’s exposition; indeed, in its first recension much of the work reads like an apocalypse with topical Ottoman historical interpolations. The eschatological ruler is called upon to display his sanctity, and identity, by attending to the corruption of the institutions of government and religion.\textsuperscript{117} In the millennial regime of the sāhib-qirān all religious differences will be abolished, and a single faith

\textsuperscript{116} Mevlānā ʿĪsā, Cāmiʿūl-meknūnāt: f. 77a.
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid.: ff. 87b-89a.
will prevail based on mysticism, learning, and sovereign authority; faith will be purified and even taxes mandated by Holy Law will be abrogated.\footnote{Flemming, “Ṣāḥib-ḳirān und Mahdī”: 61.} The ṣāḥib-qirān is given notice, in the course of Mevlānā Ḥasā’s account of the Sack of Rome of 1527, that he (or rather, the Mahdī, with whom he is identified) will be the next conqueror of the city, through the capture of which Charles has thought to bolster his claims to being the Last World Emperor (i.e., ṣāḥib-qirān).\footnote{Ibid.: 60.} In making his audacious claim to universal sovereignty (here the period concerned is likely that between 1532, the year of Süleymān’s “German Campaign”, and 1535, when Charles took Tunis) Charles declares himself the ruler of all from India to Germany, and the personification of the “Blond Peoples” who will destroy the Arab lands. Süleymān, the gauntlet having been thrown down in this fashion, will emulate Alexander-Dhūl-qarnayn by marching to the Western Sea and casting his shadow over Rome.\footnote{Ibid.: 58-9. The association of Alexandrine legend with apocalypticism also occurs in a passage concerning the return of Khīḍr to earth; he is the servant who entered the Western darkness together with Alexander, but unlike the latter found the fountain of eternal life (Cāmiʿūl-meḳnūnāt: 88a); cf. Abel, Roman, 76-82.}

It is clear that there is a close thematic relationship between al-Bīstāmī’s Key and the Compendium that Mevlānā Ḥasā began nearly a century later. Beyond the shared scheme of apocalyptic events, where the connections are most evident, both authors insisted upon the centrality of mysticism to proper devotion and its congruence with apocalyptic prophecy. Both also accord primary eschatological significance to a final confrontation between Christian and Muslim powers. While Mevlānā Ḥasā does not utilize al-Bīstāmī’s numerological schema, he does exhibit reflexes of it.\footnote{Mevlānā Ḥasā, Cāmiʿūl-meḳnūnāt: ff. 80b.} What emerges as the most significant result of comparison of the two texts is that Mevlānā Ḥasā has drawn upon the same body of apocalyptic material as that reflected in the Key (if he did not use the work itself), selected from it, and produced a streamlined synthesis that is firmly rooted in his own political and social context. Mevlānā Ḥasā reworked the plethora of eschatological personae that populate the relatively diffuse compilation of al-Bīstāmī and the traditions upon which he drew—qūṭb, mujaddid, mahdī, Dhūl-qarnayn, Roman conqueror, Rūmī master of the Arab lands—and added to them judicial astrology. From this new, augmented configuration he demonstrated the ripeness of the times and derived the ṣāḥib-qirān, a unitary eschatological identity personified by the Ottoman sultan. The appropriateness of this identification was confirmed by his military exploits and given
precise formulation by popular awareness of, and Süleymān’s adamant refusal to acknowledge, that current of Christian opinion that acclaimed Charles V the Last Roman Emperor of the Methodian and Danielic apocalyptic prophecies. It is likely, on the other hand, that Süleymān in fact sought to assert his own identity as the promised redeeming conqueror, not only to Muslim audiences, but also to the same Christian ones that were of concern to Charles—particularly dissident ones—and to the Jewish ones that were also of concern to the Catholic sovereign.122

The formulation of the sovereign and apocalyptic status of the ṣāḥib-qirān that Mevlānā ʿĪsā articulated was by no means peculiar to him. In the reign of Süleymān Ottoman historical writing, or rather historical writing focused on the past of the dynastic state, was still in its infancy, and the task of would-be historiographers was made all the more difficult by the dearth of models for the chronicling of the deeds of a living ruler. It is perhaps a moot point whether the air of apocalyptic expectation should have helped or hindered the production of histories. The fact remains that historical writing underwent an apparently spontaneous flowering in the reign of the Second Solomon, and that this historiography, though it remained eclectic and experimental until it was given a classicizing form late in the reign by the chancellors Ramazān Zade and Celâl Zade, exhibits the strong influence of the same intellectual environment that nurtured Mevlānā ʿĪsā’s Compendium.123 In these works, the most important of which exist in unique copies that were kept in the Privy Chamber of the Palace in Istanbul—these were undoubtedly among the carefully guarded books of Ramberti’s report of 1534—Süleymān is accompanied by the hidden saints, is a witness to or part of prodigies, is the pupil of the prophet-saint Hızır (Khiḍr), and communes directly with God. It is God who has appointed him ṣāḥib-qirān (the title that is consistently used to refer to him in nearly all

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Ottoman historical narratives until very late in the reign, when he becomes padishâh, emperor), and for some authors, as for Mevlânâ Īsâ, he is the conquering messiah of the last age (mehdî-yi ahir-zamân).124

Apocalyptic prophecy is, almost by definition, a genre that is never unambiguous, for the scenario of the End of Days conjoins chaos, disruption, and destruction with a utopian vision that may precede or follow utter decline and the deceit of the Antichrist. It was precisely this ambiguity, as we have seen in examples noted above, that rendered political prophecy so flexible and useful a genre in the Western Mediterranean of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries; it appealed powerfully, for example, to rival imperialists, papalists, and heretic Catholics and Protestants alike. The same is true of apocalyptic in the Eastern Mediterranean. Hence Mevlânâ Īsâ, while asserting Süleymân’s eschatological identity, can also bemoan the decline of times, the arrogantly regal behavior of imperial servitors (including, gently, that of Ibrâhim Pasha), and the growing centralization of Ottoman government represented by the proliferation of mosques and more effective and efficient taxation. He stresses by implication the need for universal renovation in the face of the corruption of religion; neither the victory over Charles, nor the creation of a purely Godly society is a foregone conclusion—unless the şâhib-qirân, if correctly identified, will realize his redeeming function. This same anxiety, the other side of the apocalyptic coin of the age, was also expressed in pessimistic prophecy that still utilized the idiom of eschatological confrontation between Muslim and Christian realms. Bartholomaeus Georgiewicz published in 1544 a Turkish prophecy that he had heard while enslaved in the Ottoman lands in the 1520’s and 30’s.125 According to this prognostication, which must have enjoyed some currency at the height of Süleymân’s stated ambition to take Italy, Rome would be captured and ruled by the Ottoman emperor; but after a reign of twelve years the sword of the Christians would rise and put the Muslims to flight.

124 See summary treatment of these authors’ works in Fleischer, “The Lawgiver,” as cited in preceding footnote.

Muslim sensibilities were as ambivalent about the nature and ultimate outcome of the Ottoman-Habsburg duel, and as engaged with its significance as a conflict both political and eschatological, as were those of their Christian and Jewish counterparts.

Engaged and anxious too was the Ottoman sovereign himself. Among the astrologers and specialists in occult practices who attended Süleymān was one Ḥaydar, a geomancer (remmāl) of foreign (probably Iranian) origin who was a trusted confidant of the sultan for much of his reign. It was Ḥaydar, whose annual prognostications were apparently kept in the Privy Chamber, who was the profeta par excellence of the Süleymānic millennium. It was probably in the spring of 1535 that he presented Süleymān—who was then on campaign in Iraq—with his New Year (nevruz) prognostication. The introductory portion of Ḥaydar’s address to Süleymān runs, in summary, as follows:

The date is the end of the Age of Saturn and the beginning of that of the Moon; this latter is a period of great opportunity. My divinatory art is the ancient geomancy of Daniel the prophet, revealed to him by Gabriel, and it is God who speaks through me in my application of this wisdom. You are the sāhib-qirān (World-conqueror) and the sāhib-zamān (Master of the Age, secret sovereign of the spiritual world), that is, the kūtb-ūl-aktāb (Ar. qaṭb al-aqtab) (Pole of Poles). The signs attendant on your horoscope are such as no other World-Conqueror, including Chosroes and Darius, has enjoyed. You are the sāhib-qirān of the last age; the signs of your

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126 For the petition of the royal talismanist to Süleymān see Fleischer, “Between the Lines: Realities of Scribal Life in the Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Empire.” In Studies in Ottoman History in Honour of Professor V.L. Ménage, ed. Colin Heywood and Colin Imber (İstanbul: The Isis Press, 1994): 45-61.

127 Ḥaydar’s activity is attested on the basis of the documents cited below at least from the 1530’s until the 1550’s (Fleischer, “The Lawgiver”: 170, 177 n.). His Iranian origin is conjectural; linguistic and orthographic infelicities in his reports to the sultan indicate that he was not a skilled writer of Ottoman Turkish, and grammatical errors in a letter of which he is the author (M. Tayyib Gökbilgin, “Rüstem Paşa ve Hakkindaki İhtimlar.” Tarih Dergisi 8 9 (1952): 11-50) suggest that his Turkish was not native.

128 The document is Ḥaydar-ı Remmāl. Remil Risalesi. İstanbul Topkapı Sarayı Kütüphanesi Ms. Hazine 1697. This treatise has no colophon, but the content and comparison with TKS Archive E 845/31 (dated around 1550), where Haydar identifies himself, make authorship certain. The New Year prognostication contains 54 folios, and was kept in the Privy Chamber. Its probable date of 1535 is provided by references to impending events, particularly the Ottoman incorporation of the lands of the Kurdish prince Bige Ardalan (34b).

See also Fleischer, “Seer to the Sultan”: 290-304.

horoscope and the geomancy of Daniel show that until the year 1000 after the Prophet there shall be no other šāḥib-qirān. Daniel’s prophecy also shows that the šāḥib-qirān of the Last Age will also be the šāḥib-zamān; while this latter identity is now an esoteric one, it will soon become manifest in you. Just as Muhammad was the seal of the Prophets, and ʿAlī the seal of the saints, so you are the seal of the World-Conquerors, and also the seal of the Secret Sovereigns (šāḥib-zamān). The signs are all clear that God has vouchsafed to you yet more blessings than those bestowed on any of the few who have embodied these identities since the time of the Prophet. One of the signs of your special distinction and success is that in the time of the Prophet leaders were neither as experienced or crafty as they are now, nor did they dispose of the amazing instruments of war that are now available.

This judgment based on the geomancy of Daniel is confirmed by reason and by learning. It is confirmed by the books you gave me to read, one by Ibn ʿArabī [i.e., either the Owl’s Cry or the Peonies] and some pieces on the science of cefr [i.e., jafr; the study of prophetic gematria that al-Bišṭāmī based his work on; the reference is likely to the Key] and the interpretation of dates; as much as I have read of cefr, which is the comprehensive form of the occult sciences based on the secret knowledge of ʿAlī, I have found its predictions to be in perfect accord with those of the geomancy of Daniel. This is yet another sign of your true identity. If all the peoples of the world but knew your secret, the Muslims and true believers would be overjoyed, and the heretics and unbelievers in dire confusion and desperation. Their vision is clouded; the only path to felicity is to support you.

There are further signs of your identity. In comparison to earlier šāḥib-qirāns and šāḥib-zamāns you enjoy far greater worldly success; the glory and pomp of your court is unparalleled, and in the observance of religion and visibility of its institutions in your regime is unmatched. You are the locum-tenens (kāʾim maʿkām) of the Prophet and of the secret Pole of Poles; in due time God will make this latter status public. Furthermore, all holy creatures—angels, prophets, saints, jinn, and the Hidden Saints—are constantly at your side and praying for you. The proof of this is that in times of trouble your prayers are immediately answered; and the invisible army has been with you in most of your battles.130 Secrets and signs

130 These motifs—including references to the actual appearance of members of the invisible army—occur also in historical narratives from this period; see Fleischer, “The Lawgiver”: 169.
have thus been manifested in your rule the likes of which have never been seen in a sovereign, the greatest of whom hoped in vain for this sort of revelation. Your own ancestors, in particular, hoped that the eschatological sovereign foretold by the books would be one of them.

Another sign is derived from your horoscope as interpreted by the geomancy of Daniel: You are to live to be ninety years old [Süleymān was born in 900 AH], and all authorities agree that this is to be the life-span of the ruler of the Last Age. All signs, including the unprecedented scope and magnificence of your regime and the approach of the Lunar Age [at the end of the century by Muslim count], show according to both the geomancy of Daniel and the cefr of ʿAlī that this is the millennial age to precede immediately the appearance of the Mahdí and the descent of Jesus. The remaining signs will appear shortly after your time. The peace and prosperity of this age will last until the beginning of the Lunar Age, when your rule will end; but other rulers, whether Muslim or not, do not know the secret, that you are the ruler of the world. The best that they can do is pray, for while they imagine that one of your children will succeed you they do not know that you will still be on the throne in your old age.

Your name, a great prophetic one, also points to your identity. While a true believer, you take full enjoyment in the sensory and material pleasures of the world. What was said about foreign rulers applies also to your servitors; they should acknowledge the power of the signs manifested in you as the recipient of divine favor and the conqueror who will bring universal triumph of the religion of Muhammad. They should prepare for the day when your mission as Pole of Poles of the Last Age is made fully manifest by God by honesty and devotion. The true lover-disciple (muḥīb) sacrifices himself in the path of the Beloved, is even slain by him. Think of how the Kızılbaş disciples of the Ṣafavī shah take pride in declaring their readiness to die for him!

The signs are that the age of the ṣāḥib-zamān will see unprecedented ordering and building of the world. There will be an unbelievable accumulation of wealth, not only from conquest, but also from mines and hidden treasures that will appear all over the world; and their appearance is one of the signs of the Last Age. The time will be one of prosperity, peace, pleasure in all things, including hunting and love. The ṣāḥib-zamān will be assiduous in the founding and construction of all things that seem good: mosques, bridges, travellers’ khans and the like will spring up

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131 For a similar appropriation of motifs proper to the mystical confraternity by Süleymān’s father see the passage from the history of Lutfī Pasha cited in Fleischer, “The Lawgiver,” 163.
everywhere. My hope is that God will extend the ninety years now ordained for your life-span to one hundred years [so that you may fully preside over the Millennium and extend its bounties].

I have only summarized the portents that the geomancy of Daniel reveals to demonstrate God’s special favor to you; a full account would require a book larger than the Book of Kings (Shāhnāmeh) of Firdawsī. God willing, I shall return to my house, and to the garden I have designed there called the Rose Garden of Secrets (Gūlšen-i rāz), and shall write carefully and fully a book on geomancy, so that there should remain some record of my art. And I would wish readers to know that I was your true and loyal servitor and that I, before all other, recognized you as the šāhīb-qirān and šāhīb-zamān of the Last Age.

In the remaining thirty-six folios of the Prognosticon, Ḥaydar turns to more topical concerns, advising the sultan on his health (as he is destined to live long, he should take care of, but not be concerned by, small discomforts), on the significance and duration of his mood swings, on his family and courtiers. He also treats extensively affairs in the East (including Iran and the Uzbek dominion), where the deaths of certain dignitaries are forecast, and in the West, whence important news will soon come. Ḥaydar was clearly well informed in international affairs, for he refers at length, though without naming names, to the impending conclusion of a treaty with France, to the activities of Barbarossa in the western Mediterranean, and to Habsburg attempts to organize an all-Christian league against the Turks; and his predictions, including one that would seem to refer to Charles V’s capture of Tunis in that year, are often skillful. He goes beyond prediction to proffer astrologically and politically grounded advice that was clearly taken: The sultan should accept the French alliance, take Basra, and capture Bahrein, which will provide wealth and a staging area that will facilitate the removal of the Portuguese from the Persian Gulf. Ḥaydar’s recommendations may, of course, simply reflect good information and integration into a wider body of Palace opinion. But one of his counsels is particularly striking in this regard, given that the sultan would soon (1536) orchestrate the secret execution of Ibrāhīm Pasha, to the astonishment of all Ottomans. Ḥaydar advises Süleymān to keep his own counsel, to trust no one with his thoughts. By careful and diligent exercise of his special abilities

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132 Ḥaydar-ı Remmāl. Remil Risalesi: ff.16a-b.
133 Ibid.: ff. 39b-42a.
134 Ibid.: ff. 28b-29b.
135 Ibid.: ff. 26b-34b.
and perceptions, he will make himself feared by all for his omnipotence and prescience.\textsuperscript{136}

Haydar was not a flash in the pan at Süleymān’s court. Fifteen years after penning this report he was still assuring the sultan that he should not be overly concerned about his health because, as the ṣāhib-qirān and ṣāhib-zamān of the Last Age he was destined to live until the year 1000 AH. He further reminded the sultan of his own fidelity and of the proven accuracy of his divinatory art; had he not, after all, warned the sultan before 1536 of the treachery of his favorite Ibrāhīm Pasha? And did not the sultan recall what Haydar had told him in complete privacy and confidence at the time of the siege of Corfu (1537), which was subsequently proven true?\textsuperscript{137} We can assume confidently that his influence was persistent, and that he was taken seriously at least until the 1550’s, when the apocalyptic fervor of the court abated, the sultan’s health and severe domestic problems probably caused him to doubt prognostications of extreme longevity, and Haydar was relocated to the princely court of Süleymān’s son Muṣṭafā at Amasya.\textsuperscript{138}

Süleymān, in his later years, was fully entangled in his sovereignty and his mortality, although the apocalyptic excitement, and texts, of his first decades left a considerable mark on the next generation of Ottomans. In 1589/998, the Sufi sheikh of a dervish cloister at Sigetvar, the site of Süleymān’s death, wrote an Arabic treatise on the Last Things. In it Ali Dede noted that the particular greatness of the Ottoman state sprang from the dynasty’s monopolization of authority, which it refused to share with its grandees; thus the Ottoman age, within the Islamic continuum, was most like the era of the Prophet when, similarly, there was no division of power. Ali Dede cited the Jafr al-jāmiʿ, which he said predicted that the Ottoman house would be the last dynasty to rule before the Mahdī, whose Party (shiʿa) and Helpers (al-Anṣār) they would represent. Ali Dede had it on good authority that this idea was mentioned to Sultan Süleymān, who was asked if he would willingly surrender his power to the messiah. He replied that he thought he would probably resist, since “the last thing to leave the hearts of the righteous is the love of rule.”\textsuperscript{139}

\textsuperscript{136} Ibid.: ff. 28a-30b; Ramberti, Libri: 34b, echoes this sentiment, noting that the rule of silence in the sultan’s presence, instituted in Süleymān’s time, was intended to emphasize the sultan’s omnipotence.

\textsuperscript{137} Topkapı Sarayi Arşivi, Series E 845/31.


됩다르's prognostications, and his lexicon, reveal three things of primary significance for this discussion. First, for the Ottoman and Islamic context he neatly, and comprehensively, brings together the threads drawn out at such length in the preceding pages and weaves of them an imperial fabric, one that is composed equally of learned tradition, popular lore and expectation, sensitivity to the religious climate of the times, and political need. Ḥaydar invokes the need to establish a divine mandate for Ottoman universal rule, the contemporary power of the mystical (and Safavid) model, the ripeness of the time, and the congruence of celestial and terrestrial chronologies; his prediction of a reign that will last until 990 AH fits exactly the periodization of the manuscript of al-Bistāmī's Key produced at just the same time. He demonstrates the significance of conquest and magnificence as a sign of sanctity, the coherence of apocalyptic with a range of divinatory and prognosticative methods—pre-Islamic, Islamic, and astrological—the presence of saintly intermediaries who themselves embody man's spiritual and temporal history and, in terms of external religious observance, the immanent primacy of the sovereign's esoteric identity over his exoteric one. Finally, Ḥaydar provides a definitive formulation of the nature of the sāḥib-qirān. He is the embodiment of the ultimate fusion of temporal and terrestrial power with historically determined sanctity at the end of the last cycle of history, the universal ruler who establishes the earthly millennium by incorporating mankind into a single flock through both force and justice; though not himself the last messiah, he thus makes the final historical step necessary to prepare the way for the Mahdī, Jesus, and the true End of Days.

Secondly, Ḥaydar provides a precious view of how ideological reformulation took place in a context in which popular expectation and learned apocalyptic were being marshaled to create a new imperial identity. Süleymān was an active participant in the process. He gave Ḥaydar books from his own library—the same works we have studied above as forming the foundation of the Muslim understanding of apocalyptic from the time of the Conquest—so that his geomancer might shed light on their immediate meaning and relevance through exercise of his occult divinatory art. It was through deployment of this science, applied to texts and to time, that another, explicit channel of communication with the divine could be established beyond that constituted by the sultan's successful prayers and the support of invisible intermediaries; thus God (who, Ḥaydar states, is the real speaker) could be made to clarify his earlier messages, to make known his plan for the fate of earthly kingdoms, and so help his designated instrument to plan effectively his actions as sovereign.

The specificity of the imperial eschatological image becomes clear from a comparison of the respective uses made by Mevlānā ʿĪsā and Ḥaydar of their
common stock of apocalyptic and prognosticative lore. The latter focuses on
the millennial character of the regime of the ṣāḥib-qirān, emphasizing the
peace, pleasure, justice, orderliness, wealth, magnificence, and sheer power
that will characterize Süleymān's era; the disorders and signs of the apocalypse
proper are not referred to directly, but lumped together by implication into
those events that will come about after the golden age of the last world em-
peror. Mevlānā ʿĪsā, by contrast, was not writing directly for the sultan, but for
(and, in terms of sharing an intellectual network, with) a larger and far more
ordinary sector of Ottoman society. While he makes a case for Süleymān's
being the messianic ṣāḥib-qirān, his image and imagery is far less theologi-
cally clear than that of Ḥaydar ("This one is either the Mahdī or his command-
ing general"). In the same manner, the place of apocalyptic, and the uses to
which it is put, is somewhat ambivalent in Mevlānā ʿĪsā's exposition; while
he too employs the motifs of order, grandeur, and justice as signs of sultanic
sanctity, he also emphasizes the upheaval and disorderliness of the Last Days,
and seems uncertain, within his own understanding of the eschaton, of how
to value the enormous changes that are part of transformative Renovation at
the end of history. Mevlānā ʿĪsā expresses fully a range of deployments of the
inherently ambiguous language of apocalyptic: the momentous changes that
the Süleymānic era produced stimulated both distress and hope, and the co-
cidence of destruction and renewal, chastisement and rewarding fulfillment
for the righteous within the apocalyptic scenario render it at once a vehicle
for critique of the social and political order, and a means to sanctify the sov-
ereign while reminding him of his moral responsibilities. The conjunction of
apocalypse and sovereignty allows, or impels, Mevlānā ʿĪsā to articulate for
his generation a simultaneous awe and disquiet engendered by the unprece-
dented wealth, ceremony, and coercive capacity that the early decades of the
Süleymānic regime displayed. Ḥaydar, not surprisingly, voices no such doubts
or ambivalences, though these were proper to Ottomans of the first gener-
ation of the tenth century. Addressing the sultan, he appropriates that same
powerful language of apocalyptic and prophecy that informs the contempo-
rary Ottoman interpretation of history to the imperial cause, and renders un-
equivocal the moral value of the sanctity conferred by wealth and power.

The third significant arena in which Ḥaydar's report is enlightening, one
that embraces the western as well as eastern extremes of the Mediterranean,
is that of prophecy. Here we see prophecy fully embedded in its political en-
vironment, not as a discrete and dissociated instrument of propaganda, but
driving events as well as interpreting them. In the apocalyptically charged and
prophetically effusive environment of the early sixteenth century, this is not
to be wondered at. Still, it is illuminating, in the face of our own tendency to
assume the reality and boundedness of our analytic categories—religion and politics, social levels and groupings, communal and political identities—to examine how thoroughly grounded in historical and material circumstances Ḥaydar’s report is. Ḥaydar’s characterization of the nature of his client, of the features of his time and regime, and the divinely-inspired guidance he provided, all expressed in an apocalyptic and prophetic idiom, were borne out. Süleymān concluded a notorious (to Christians) treaty with Francis I, he took Basra and Bahrein, he became extraordinarily secretive, and became famous for the number and scale of his building projects, as well as for the grandiosity of his court. He believed in, and played a central role in articulating, his saintly and eschatological identity. Furthermore, this articulation was far from being an artificial construction of propagandists, but was intimately linked to wider circles of opinion and belief within and without his dominions. The key to this linkage of such socially and communally disparate loci is their common awareness of the momentous and universally significant nature of the history of the times, a sense that the apocalyptic fulfillment of that history was at hand, and that the meaning and the timing of that fulfillment could be rendered intelligible, and in some degree controlled, through the mobilization of the powers and technology of prophecy.

The geomancer’s text returns us to our starting point in yet another fashion. Ḥaydar was writing within a year of the publication of the Prognosticon de eversione Europae and at the same time that Georgiewicz was undoubtedly hearing the Red Apple prophecy in the course of his Ottoman captivity. If terrestrial history, in its apocalyptic intersection with cosmic history, represented the last text of revelation, its lexicon was not solely a mundane one to be structured by authoritative text. The interpenetration of sacred and secular realms also took the form of prodigy, with which the first half of the sixteenth century was rife, and the world of the divine often intruded into the sublunar domain to add authority to the import of those wonders of construction or destruction that might seem, to the skeptical, to be purely the product of human action. In the Muslim Ottoman world, these took the form of saintly manifestation or apparition. The army of saints that, according to Ḥaydar and other contemporaries, was in constant attendance on Süleymān actually appeared at the battle of Mohács in 1526, where they were seen by all of the dignitaries on the field. This is reported by one Levḥī, whose verse history of the reign of Süleymān of ca. 1530 was one of the books kept in the Privy Chamber. The same author, who was well connected with Palace circles, stated confidently that Süleymān was instructed and guided by Hızır (Khiḍr), the undying prophet-saint who is to play a central role in the Last Days. Levḥī, after rendering an account of saintly visitations he has himself experienced in dreams, transcribes the
prodigy a friend witnessed one dawn: A heavenly host appeared at the Palace and its leader explained to the witness that they had been dispatched to bring Süleyman a cloak of investiture. Their duty done, they vanished.140

Muslims conquering Christian lands saw their holy men; Christians in Muslim lands, driven by parallel hopes and fears, saw other wonders. While some of these were of human device, as the admiring humanist literature of sixteenth-century travelers to Istanbul makes clear, others were of more mysterious origin. In the 1530’s and 1540’s there appeared a number of printed accounts of mysterious aerial combats of prophetic import that were witnessed in or on the borders of Ottoman lands. The first of these, published in Venice in 1538, was entitled “Avisi da Constantinopoli di cose stupende et meravigliose novamente apparse in quelle parti, con la interpretacione ch’anno fatto gli Astrologi et Indovini del gran Turcho circa la ruina sua.”141 The extraordinary events related are such that the author of the letter would not believe them had he not been an eyewitness, together with many others. Near to Istanbul there appeared several vast phantom armies, complete with infantry, cavalry, and artillery. Three great regal figures were part of the apparition; one of these, in whom the signs of sanctity were apparent and who was clearly an imperial entity, received the deference of the other two. At his sign there ensued a visible and distressingly audible battle that lasted for half an hour, at the end of which the armies disappeared and the only signs left of the apparition were debris of combat and a herd of pigs. The sultan, apprised of the prodigy, asked his seers and divines for its explication. One of these, named Caider, stated that it portended the victory of the sultan over his enemies, for the central figure who gave the sign for battle is none other than Süleyman. The sultan was delighted with the response, but is forced by courtesy to allow another seer, an aged and wealthy astrologer, to have his say. This Odabassi, who had counseled Süleyman against marching on Vienna, states that the signs are clear that the victorious army is that of the Christians, that the commander is the Caesar of the Christians, and that the Turkish army will be routed like a herd of pigs if the sultan does not remain on the defensive and abstain from aggression.

Despite its fantastic premise and particular inventions (“Odabassì” is clearly odabaşı, not a name but the title of the Steward of the Privy Chamber), the letter

140 Levhi, Cihâdnâme-i Sultan Süleyman. Topkapı Sarayi Kütüphanesi Ms. Hazine 1434: ff. 6a, 82a-b.
is not wholly fantastic. The divinatory and explicatory process it describes—whatever the particular object of interpretation—is not unrealistic or unimaginable in light of the foregoing pages. “Caider” is clearly our Ḥaydar, and his opponent is clearly Ibrahim Pasha, who started his palace career as Süleymān’s ḥāsodabaşı, chief of the Privy Chamber, was noted for his wealth, and was seen by some Venetians as being pro-Venetian and secretly pro-Christian. Even at the level of the popular Christian discourse of which the pamphlet was a part, Venetians knew something substantial about Ḥaydar, about Palace rivalries for influence, about the nature of consultation and prophetic prognostication in the Ottoman imperial palace, and about Süleymān’s dreams of universal empire. The author of the pseudo-letter couched that knowledge, indirectly and informally as it might have been acquired, in an idiom of prodigy and prophecy that evoked, and brought to optimistic resolution, the anxieties of both decades of globalizing Muslim-Christian military conflict, and a particularly perilous moment in Ottoman-Venetian relations. But the composition, for all of its cultural and political specificities, exhibits as much mutual comprehension, intelligibility, and recognition between Christian and Muslim sensibilities as it does fantasy. This unscholarly print of 1538 furnishes several elements in its construction that allow us finally to return to the point of entry, the apocalyptic and imperial history of the Mediterranean in the sixteenth century. Ultimate Christian victory is forecast, but not on the basis of unambiguous signs; and it is the judgment of the Muslim, not Christian, astrologer that makes the optimistic interpretation of the prodigy authoritative. Secondly, for witnesses and interpreters the Turk and the Caesar are virtually indistinguishable from one another. Both are imperial and both have universalist ambitions. On the symbolic level represented by the apparitions, which provides no apparent visible clues to identity, the question implied is not what the nature of the world order will be, but rather which of the contenders will rule the global empire.

Conclusion: The End and the Beginning

We are here confronted with an extraordinary historical moment, the implications of which bear consideration. Most fundamentally, the discovery that the Muslim cultural zone of the Mediterranean, Eastern and Western, participated fully in the apocalyptic drama that was enacted in the Christian and Jewish spheres between 1453 and 1550 restores integrity to a hitherto fragmented context. The same texts, or cognate and intimately interrelated ones, informed the generation of apocalyptic excitement throughout the region. The same set of political, demographic, and geographical developments—and a vivid
cognizance of their sameness for culturally and geographically intertwined societies—stimulated the mobilization of an interpretive framework for contemporary history and of prognosticative techniques that were, for all the recognition of differing communal agendas, considered by significant numbers of participants to be the key to ultimate concord. From one important perspective, the eagerness to cross textual and communal boundaries that is so marked a feature of this era, the willingness to seek commonalities in the midst of strife, is a phenomenon worthy of study. Christian Kabbalists immersed themselves in Hebrew, in the Torah, and in the Zohar, in the interest not only of demonstrating the prophetic validity of the Christian dispensation, but in doing so by command and interpretation of its non-Christian roots. Jewish historians of the sixteenth century—and there had been precious little in the way of Jewish historiography before that—found themselves not only writing the history of Gentile nations in Hebrew, but also defending to their audiences the necessity of doing so. Muslims, like Christians, asserted the commonality of their own prophetic traditions with those of others, which they also invoked in demonstration of the validity of prophecy in the post-Prophetic era, and appropriated as their own the same geography that was of most immediate consequence to Christians and Jews. Just as Christians and Jews knew of and adopted the eschatological excitation that prevailed in each of these two camps, so it is unlikely that Muslims should not have known of the redemptive function assigned to them by apocalyptically-minded Christians and Jews. As Abravanel could reasonably see the Ottoman power as the only non-Christian redemptive political force on the Mediterranean horizon of the late fifteenth century, so would the popes of the late fifteenth century necessarily grapple with the political and demographic preponderance of Islam within their apocalyptic world-view. A betting man in 1500 would have put money on a universal Muslim victory; and it seems clear that Muslims, in a world in which geography and demography constituted tangible measures of divine favor and disfavor, would have voiced some hope that the providential role that other communities, let alone their own, ascribed to them was genuine.

The issue here, of course, is not one of influence and cultural dominance. Ottoman Muslims not only bought into the agendas of the other communities of the Mediterranean, they also played a central role in setting those agendas, in terms intellectual and political, through participation as equals in a larger historical matrix that recognized a common end and purpose to history. In an age that, across the communal board, saw spiritual and social salvation as nearly coterminal, argument was not over the nature of the end of history, but rather over the particular identities of the historical protagonists; and even these identities were, as we have seen, quite flexible. This suggests two
considerations pertinent to, and made accessible by, the study of apocalypticism in the sixteenth century. First, apocalypticism as an historical idiom recognized no rigid communal or political boundaries; it was highly transferable and universally understood. Secondly, it was not socially restricted, but rather constituted a political and intellectual language—in part because of its association with mystical and, in the event, sectarian currents—intelligible and useful to circles that ranged from the rebellious to the establishment, from the popular to the highly intellectual.

It is this second factor that helps to contextualize the extreme portability and transferability of the apocalyptic language of historical interpretation. We have seen it to play a significant role in imperial confrontation, and despite confrontation to develop a historically specific logic of its own that is based on competition—in the context of Ottoman-Habsburg rivalry—for legitimate claim to a mutually accepted and cooperatively constituted imperial dignity rather than upon the clash of two utterly different ideologies. But it also forms the common political coin of interchange at social levels and in geographical and cultural contexts that do not cohere either with a politics of exchange and competition that takes as its basic unit of analysis the “state” and the high politics and geography that accompany it, or with a sociology of communal exclusivity. The transmission of knowledge, rumor, supposition, or conjecture held to be of import—whether for purposes of apocalyptic historicism or otherwise—took place at all social levels, across social levels, and across political frontiers, which were, in the early sixteenth century, as yet poorly defined. And this transmission, whatever its particular mode, had its impact on all social strata, from the rural revolutionary to the imperial.

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