Stephen J. Shoemaker: The Apocalypse of Empire. Imperial Eschatol-
ogy in Late Antiquity and Early Islam. Philadelphia, PA: University of
Pennsylvania Press 2018 (Divinations: Rereading Late Ancient Reli-
gion). 272 p. $ 59.95. ISBN: 978-0-8122-5040-4.

In his latest monograph, Stephen Shoemaker develops in greater detail the
arguments he advanced in two recent publications, which investigated early
Byzantine eschatology and its impact upon earliest Islam.[1] The monograph
also continues and supplements his controversial book "The Death of a
Prophet",[2] which followed in the footsteps of the classical study "Hagarism"
by emphasizing the importance of non-Muslim sources when investigating
the origins of Islam.[3] There he argued that earliest Islam was an eschatolog-
ically minded faith community that awaited the imminent end of the world.
In the "Apocalypse of Empire" he attempts to demonstrate more pointedly
that nascent Islam originated in the late antique matrix of imperial eschatol-
ogy. His argumentation is based on a synoptic treatment of Jewish, Christian,
Zoroastrian, and Muslim literary sources, upon which he applies methods
from Biblical criticism. The book is structured into six chapters, each of
which advances a partial argument in support of the overall thesis. This re-
view summarizes each argument and evaluates its soundness, coherence, and
utility to the central claim "that earliest Islam was a movement driven by
urgent eschatological belief that focused on the conquest – or liberation –
of the biblical Holy Land" (1).

In the introduction (1–9) Shoemaker points out that his thesis ultimately
aims to discard the enduring disposition in contemporary scholarship to
counterpose imperial expansionism and eschatological expectations. In-
stead, he convincingly shows that these notions could go hand in hand in

1   S. J. Shoemaker: "The Reign of God Has Come". Eschatology and Empire in Late
     Antiquity and Early Islam. In: Arabica 61, 5, 2014, 514–558, and idem: The Tiburtine
     Sibyl, the Last Emperor, and the Early Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition. In: T. Burke
     (ed.): Forbidden Texts on the Western Frontier. The Christian Apocrypha from
     North American Perspectives. Proceedings from the 2013 York University Christian
     Apocrypha Symposium. Eugene, OR 2015, 218–244.

2   S. J. Shoemaker: The Death of a Prophet. The End of Muhammad's Life and the
     Beginnings of Islam. Philadelphia, PA 2012 (Divinations: Rereading Late Ancient
     Religion).

3   P. Crone/M. A. Cook: Hagarism. The Making of the Islamic World. Cambridge
     1977.

late antique Roman, Zoroastrian, Jewish, and early Islamic eschatological thought. Ancient apocalypticism should not be seen as inherently anti-imperial, as it could serve imperial agendas just as well. The claim that there existed a variety of imperial eschatologies in Late Antiquity is vital to Shoemaker's whole argument that Islam was engendered in the context of competing eschatological narratives.

The first chapter (11–37) strives to prove that Jewish apocalypticism was not monolithically anti-imperial. Here, Shoemaker disagrees with Richard Horsley, Anathea Portier-Young, and other Biblical scholars, who uphold that Judean apocalypses are essentially anti-imperial.[4] In contrast, he shows that the *Book of Watchers* (1 Enoch 1–36) and the *Astronomical Apocalypse* (1 Enoch 72–82) are not overtly anti-imperial texts, while the *Psalms of Solomon* even presents a counter-narrative that presents its own imperial agent, namely an eschatological Davidic king, who would restore Jerusalem. Similarly, the Qumran community adhered to apocalyptic expectations that were to be realized through military victory and messianic agents. Shoemaker argues further that the first half of the canonical *Book of Daniel* (chap. 1–6) contains a tentatively pro-imperial tone while the second half (chap. 7–12) is markedly and famously anti-imperial. The repeated claim that the notion of the fourfold succession of world-empires in the *Book of Daniel* belongs to the ancient Near East would have profited from a demonstration (19–20, 30–31), as this has been contested.[5] Moreover, the larger significance of the four-empire scheme for early Byzantine imperial eschatology has not been fully brought out and thus remains far from being clear.

The greatest issue, however, rests with the attempt to discern antecedents of the quasi-messianic Last Emperor motif in virtual every ancient and late antique text that promotes the idea of a benevolent future king. It is problematic to identify prototypes in the *Sibylline Oracles* or in the third-century *Apocalypse of Elijah* without having clearly defined the concept under investigation (34–36). It is certainly a stretch to consider the Davidic Messiah in the Qumran texts (24) and the notion of a good (future?) king in the ancient Egyptian

4   R. Horsley: Revolt of the Scribes. Resistance and Apocalyptic Origins. Minneapolis, MI 2010, A. Portier-Young: Apocalypse Against Empire. Theologies of Resistance in Early Judaism. Grand Rapids, MI 2011.

5   A. Momigliano: The Origins of Universal History. In: Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa, ser. 3, 12, 2, 1982, 533–560 [Reprint in: idem: On Pagans, Jews, and Christians. Middletown, CT 1987, 31–57].

Prophecy of Neferti (36) to be the antecedents of the Christian medieval *topos* of the Last Emperor. Such speculations are not new;[6] they all suffer from the same conceptual vagueness that suggests the Last Emperor motif to be semantically coextensive with a righteous ultimate ruler, which it is not. Shoemaker closes the chapter by holding that the Babylonians and Persians, too, had a notion of an eschatological savior king, which "forms an important basis for any understanding of the rise of imperial eschatology in Christian late antiquity" (37). Unfortunately, the following chapters do not remedy the apparent lack of definitional clarity.

The second chapter (38–63) deserves most of our attention, as its main argument and methodological shortcomings reappear throughout the book. It is argued that the motif or *topos* of a quasi-messianic Last Emperor already existed in the fourth century, when it was first developed in the now lost original Greek version of the *Tiburtine Sibyl*.[7] The chapter largely reiterates Shoemaker's earlier study on the topic.[8] He begins by emphasizing the significance of Eusebios' work, which articulated a fusion of Roman political ideology and Christian eschatology (40).[9] Rome was understood as the catalyst that would bring about the Kingdom of God. While it is certainly correct that Eusebios' work can hardly be overestimated, it is doubtful whether his ideas were instantly put into practice. Many ramifications of Eusebios' synthesis took time to be developed as, for instance, the Jerusalemization of

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6   See, for instance, B. Leadbetter: A Byzantine Narrative of the Future and the Antecedents of the Last World Emperor. In: J. Burke/U. Betka, et al. (eds.): Byzantine Narrative. Papers in Honour of Roger Scott. Melbourne 2006, 368–382 (Byzantina Australiensia 16), who claims that the origin of the Last Emperor *topos* lies in Pharaonic propaganda, which was introduced into Christianity through the Coptic *Apocalypse of Elijah* and the Greek *Oracle of Baalbek*.

7   This lost Greek text has been called the *Theodosian Sibyl* by P. J. Alexander: The Oracle of Baalbek. The *Tiburtine Sibyl* in Greek Dress. Washington, DC 1967 (Dumbarton Oaks Studies 10), 64, *passim*.

8   Shoemaker: The Tiburtine Sibyl (as above, note 1).

9   He follows here in the footsteps of G. Podskalsky: Byzantinische Reichseschatologie. Die Periodisierung der Weltgeschichte in den vier Grossreichen (Daniel 2 und 7) und dem tausendjährigen Friedensreiche (Apok. 20). Eine motivgeschichtliche Untersuchung. Munich 1972 (Münchener Universitätsschriften. Reihe der Philosophischen Fakultät 9) and G. F. Chesnut: The First Christian Historians. Eusebius, Socrates, Sozomen, Theodoret, and Evagrius. Paris 1977 (Théologie historique 46), 156–166.

Constantinople, which did not begin in earnest until the later fifth century.[10]
Likewise, it seems precipitant to assume that Eusebios' equation of Christ's
kingdom with the Roman Empire immediately incited the creation of the
Last Emperor legend.

Nonetheless, Shoemaker joins the group of scholars who contend that the
Last Emperor can be first attested in the now lost Greek archetype of the
Sibyl's prophecy, which was composed in the later fourth century (c. 378–
390 AD).[11] As it is well known, the earliest witnesses of this text are (1) a
Greek redaction dating to early sixth century (502–506 AD), named by its
modern editor, Paul Alexander, the *Oracle of Baalbek*, and (2) a medieval Latin
translation from the mid-eleventh century, referred to as the *Tiburtine Sibyl*.[12]
The problem is that the *Oracle of Baalbek*, being the oldest textual witness,
does not contain the motif; it only appears in the medieval Latin version.
Thus, the dispute revolves around two possibilities: either the Last Emperor
motif is a later interpolation into the *Tiburtine Sibyl* or it has been filtered out
in the Greek version. Shoemaker advances a number of arguments in sup-
port of the latter, without, however, giving any convincing explanation why
the Greek compiler would have left out this motif, despite the fact that it
had enjoyed – according to Shoemaker – a prominent position in imperial
eschatology since the fourth century.[13]

10   See J. Erdeljan: Chosen Places. Constructing New Jerusalems in Slavia Orthodoxa.
        Leiden/Boston, MA 2017 (East Central and Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages,
        450–1450, 45), 72–143.

11   The hypothetical date of composition was advanced by Alexander: The Oracle of
        Baalbek, 64 (as above, note 7); it has been widely accepted.

12   The earliest known manuscript of the *Tiburtine Sibyl* is generally considered to be
        cod. Escorialensis &.I.3, ann. 1047. Yet there may exist a slightly earlier witness in
        cod. Leidensis, Voss. lat. Q69, fols. 1r–3v, saec. X (?), as pointed out by L. DiTom-
        maso: Book Review on A. Holdenried: The Sibyl and Her Scribes. Manuscripts and
        Interpretation of the Latin Sibylla Tiburtina, ca. 1050–1500. Aldershot 2006. In:
        Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha 21, 1, 2011, 73–77, at 74–75. See further
        K. Strecker: Zu den Karolingischen Rhythmen. In: Neues Archiv der Gesellschaft
        für ältere deutsche Geschichtskunde 34, 1909, 599–652, at 602–603, who gives the
        variae lectiones of the Leiden manuscript.

13   The problem is acknowledged but not resolved on p. 61.

Most of the arguments discussed by Shoemaker have already been made elsewhere.[14] One such argument points to the specification in the *Oracle of Baalbek* that Constantinople will be destroyed 180 years (lit. thrice sixty years) after its foundation in 324 (or dedication in 330), which amounts to the year 504 AD (or 510 AD).[15] Three twelfth-century witnesses of the *Tiburtine Sibyl* read 60 years, which Shoemaker considers to be the original number.[16] He presupposes that numbers can only be augmented with time and not reduced (45), for which I do not see any compelling reason. Alternatively, one may assume that the numeric signifier for three/thrice (γ′) was simply omitted during the copying process.[17] What is more, the years surrounding 500 AD enjoyed apocalyptic connotations since it coincided with the year 6000 *anno mundi*.[18] This cannot be said for the late fourth century. In any event, one should not attribute much importance to numbers in apocalyptic texts as these are volatile elements in the manuscript tradition.

14   See, among others, H. Möhring: Der Weltkaiser der Endzeit. Entstehung, Wandel und Wirkung einer tausendjährigen Weissagung. Stuttgart 2000 (Mittelalter-Forschungen 3), 39–52, L. Greisiger: Messias – Endkaiser – Antichrist. Politische Apokalyptik unter Juden und Christen des Nahen Ostens am Vorabend der arabischen Eroberung. Wiesbaden 2014 (Orientalia Biblica et Christiana 21), 172–180, C. Bonura: When Did the Legend of the Last Emperor Originate? A New Look at the Textual Relationship between the Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius and the Tiburtine Sibyl. In: Viator 47, 3, 2016, 47–100.

15   The (reconstructed!) phrase in its modern edition reads: μὴ καυχῶ, Βυζαντία πόλις, τρὶς γὰρ ἑξηκοστὸν τῶν ἐτῶν σου οὐ μὴ βασιλεύσεις. – "Do not boast, city of Byzantium, thou shalt not hold imperial sway for thrice sixty of thy years!" Edited and translated in Alexander: The Oracle of Baalbek, 14, ll.94–95, 25 (as above, note 7).

16   Namely, cod. Monacensis 17742, fol.48r, saec. XII and cod. Chicagoensis, Bibliothecae Newberry, Ry. 6, fol.200r, 221v, saec. XII. The respective passage is given in the critical apparatus by Alexander: The Oracle of Baalbek, 14 (as above, note 7) and by E. Sackur: Sibyllinische Texte und Forschungen. Pseudomethodius, Adso und die tiburtinische Sibylle. Halle 1898, 128, note 4 and reads: *Ne gaudeas gaudio de Byzantio inter LX annos non regnabunt.* – "Do not rejoice with joy, for they will not rule in Byzantium for sixty years" (translation by the reviewer).

17   It is noteworthy that in cod. Serdicaensis D. gr. 156, fols.246r–248v, saec. XV one finds the reverse mistake of omitting the number "sixty". On fol.247r the manuscript reads: μὴ καυχῶ, πόλις Βυζαντία· τρία γὰρ ἔτη βασιλεύσεις. – "Do not boast, city of Byzantium, for you will rule three years" (translation by the reviewer).

18   On the significance of the year 6000 AM, see, among others, W. Brandes: Anastasios ὁ Δίκορος. Endzeiterwartung und Kaiserkritik in Byzanz um 500 n. Chr. In: ByzZ 90, 1997, 24–63.

Shoemaker also argues that the *Tiburtine Sibyl* must be a reliable Latin translation of the fourth-century Greek original, since it does not mention Muslims but only pagans and thus must have been composed prior to the seventh century (52). Yet it was a common trope, not only in medieval apocalyptic texts, to refer to Muslims as pagans and thus to deny adherents of Islam a genuine confession-based identity.[19] The arguments about the term 'diadem' and of the use of Psalm 68,31 (52–58) have been discussed numerous times and do not need to be repeated here.[20]

More importantly, the author overlooks (47) that the designation *rex Grecorum,* [...] *et ipse erit rex Romanorum et Grecorum* ("a king of the Greeks, [...] and he will be king of the Romans and the Greeks") in the *Tiburtine Sibyl* hardly resounds the fourth-century self-identification of the Eastern Romans or their emperor.[21] I have yet to find a late antique or Medieval Greek prophecy that refers to the Roman emperor as a "Greek/Hellēn".[22] It does however closely resemble the wording from the Latin translation of the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodios*, which reads *rex Gregorum, sive Romanorum* (chap. XIII.11).[23]

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19   See B. Roggema: Muslims as Crypto-Idolaters. A Theme in the Christian Portrayal of Islam in the Near East. In: D. Thomas (ed.): Christians at the Heart of Islamic Rule. Church Life and Scholarship in 'Abbasid Iraq. Leiden/Boston, MA 2003, 1–18 and Bonura: Legend of the Last Emperor, 74–76 (as above, note 14).

20   See Möhring: Der Weltkaiser der Endzeit, 42, Greisiger: Messias – Endkaiser – Antichrist, 177–178, Bonura: Legend of the Last Emperor, 82–89 (as above, note 14).

21   Sackur: Sibyllinische Texte, 185 (as above, note 16). See G.L. Potestà: The *Vaticinium of Constans*. Genesis and Original Purposes of the Legend of the Last World Emperor. In: Millennium 8, 2011, 271–290, at 278, who has pointed out that the Byzantine designation of king/βασιλεύς was first introduced in the aftermath of Herkaleios' victory over the Persians in the late 620s.

22   On the derogatory quality of the designation "Hellēn" in early Byzantium, see J. Koder: Griechische Identitäten im Mittelalter. Aspekte einer Entwicklung. In: A. Avramea/A. Laiou/E. Chrysos (eds.): Βυζάντιο, κράτος και κοινωνία. Μνήμη Νίκου Οικονομίδη. Athens 2003, 297–319, at 298–300, A. Kaldellis: Hellenism in Byzantium. The Transformations of Greek Identity and the Reception of the Classical Tradition. Cambridge 2007, 122, and C. Rapp: Hellenic Identity, *Romanitas*, and Christianity in Byzantium. In: K. Zacharia (ed.): Hellenisms. Culture, Identity, and Ethnicity from Antiquity to Modernity. Aldershot 2008, 127–147, at 136–144.

23   The Latin expression is a translation of the Greek βασιλεὺς Ἑλλήνων, ἤτοι Ῥωμαίων, which in turn derives from the Syriac ܡܠܟܐ ܕܝܘܢܝܐ. In Syriac literature the Roman emperor was commonly referred to as the "king of the Greeks", see J. Tannous: Romanness in the Syriac East. In: W. Pohl/C. Gantner/C. Grifoni/M. Pollheimer-

In fact, the second Latin recension contains the exact wording *rex Romanorum et Gregorum* (chap. XIV.2).[24] The appearance of this expression in the *Tiburtine Sibyl* seems to be a later interpolation, which derives from the Latin Pseudo-Methodios. There are various other terms used in the final section of the *Tiburtine Sibyl* that portray the historical conditions of the Latin Middle Ages rather than those of the fourth century.[25]

Most significant is the argument concerning the Gog/Magog motif that forms an integral part of the Last Emperor *topos* in the *Tiburtine Sibyl*.[26] Shoemaker professes that the appearance of the Gog and Magog motif – as the eschatological peoples whom Alexander the Great had enclosed – already appeared before the first half of seventh century (58–59). This argument is necessary in order to deny that the section in the *Tiburtine Sibyl* which mentions Gog and Magog is a later interpolation. However, Lutz Greisiger has convincingly shown that the complex motif (or text-block) of Gog/Magog is a development of the first half of the seventh century. I use the term 'text-block', which has been coined by Zara Pogossian and Sergio La Porta, in order to refer to a larger, coherent unit of distinct motifs.[27] The Gog/Magog text-block consists of the following layers: (1) one layer identifies the Biblical characters of Gog/Magog with a particular ethnic group, (2) another associates them with Alexander the Great's enclosed peoples, and (3) yet another

Mohaupt (eds.): Transformations of Romanness. Early Medieval Regions and Identities. Berlin/Boston, MA 2018 (Millennium-Studien 71), 457–479. I thank C. Bonura for this reference.

24   O. Prinz: Eine frühe abendländische Aktualisierung der lateinischen Übersetzung des Pseudo-Methodios. In: Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters 41, 1985, 1–23, at 15, ll.213–214.

25   See the forthcoming study by W. Brandes: Das sog. Constans-Vaticinium und seine Datierung. Eschatologische Vorstellung im zeitlichen Umfeld der Schlacht von Yarmuk? In: M. Akpınar/F. Montinaro (eds.): The Battle of Yarmūk (636 CE). Rethinking 'Conquest' in the Late Antique Near East from Byzantium to Islam. Berlin/Boston, MA (in press) (Millennium-Studien), who shows that several *termini technici* in the *Tiburtine Sibyl* reflect the Latin vocabulary of the 9th/10th century.

26   The respective passage is in Sackur: Sibyllinische Texte, 186 (as above, note 16).

27   Z. Pogossian/S. La Porta: Apocalyptic Texts, Transmission of Topoi, and Their Multi-Lingual Background. The Prophecies of Agatʻon and Agatʻangel on the End of the World. In: L. DiTommaso/M. Henze/W. Adler (eds.): The Embroidered Bible. Studies in Biblical Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha in Honour of Michael E. Stone. Leiden/Boston, MA 2017 (Studia in Veteris Testamenti Pseudepigrapha 26), 824–851, esp. 825–826.

imports their eschatological significance known from Ez 38–39. The combination of these layers first appears in the roughly contemporaneous Syriac *Alexander Legend* and *Alexander Poem* (composed around the year 630 AD).[28] Any previous mention of the Gog/Magog motif does not present this multilayered text-block. As it is contained in the *Tiburtine Sibyl*, it is safe to assume that this section of the prophecy cannot have been composed before the first half of the seventh century.

A key argument by Shoemaker builds upon the observation that the Pseudo-Methodian description of the Last Emperor is longer than the account given in the *Tiburtine Sibyl*. The greater length comes with additional elements in the motif. Shoemaker infers from this greater detail that Pseudo-Methodios added further layers to the originally more concise literary theme (54–56). This argumentation seems to apply the philological principle of *lectio brevior*, which holds 'the shorter, the earlier' (cf. 45). Yet this principle is not readily applicable to the mechanism of *topoi* (or text-blocks), as these may also be shortened or simplified at later stages of their development.[29] Thus, a justification of the underlying exegetical principle seems to be required in order to strengthen the argument.

To his credit, Shoemaker is correct in pointing out that the *Oracle of Baalbek* assigns eulogistic, even messianic designations to various emperors, such as ushering in abundance and prosperity (cf. Is 49,10, Rv 7,16) (51). I would add to this observation that the *Oracle of Baalbek* establishes a clear association of Emperor Anastasios with Christ by specifying that "the name of the king is *hidden* from the Gentiles", which alludes to the unknown provenance

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28   L. Greisiger: Opening the Gates of the North in 627. War, Anti-Byzantine Sentiment and Apocalyptic Expectancy in the Near East Prior to the Arab Invasion. In: W. Brandes/F. Schmieder/R. Voß (eds.): Peoples of the Apocalypse. Eschatological Beliefs and Political Scenarios. Berlin/Boston, MA 2016 (Millennium-Studien 63), 63–79.

29   For instance, the Antichrist motif is reduced to its bare minimum in the mid-thirteenth century *Last Vision of Daniel* (§74–79) and even more so in the fifteenth-century *Vision of Daniel on the Seven Hills* (§2.32–33), see H. Schmoldt (ed./tr.): Die Schrift 'Vom jungen Daniel' und 'Daniels letzte Vision'. Diss. Hamburg 1972, 140–142 and 198. Likewise, the Last Emperor *topos* is stripped of most of its conceptual layers in the fifteenth-century *Oracular Interpretation of Ps-Gennadios Scholarios*, see J. Vereecken/ L. Hadermann-Misguich (eds./trans): Les Oracles de Léon Le Sage illustrés par Georges Klontzas. La Version Barozzi dans le Codex Bute. Venice 2000 (Ἑλληνο-λατινική Ἀνατολή/Oriens Graecolatinus 7), 136, ll.38–47.

of the Messiah in John 7,27.[30] However, these are not "apparent vestiges of the Last Emperor myth" (51) but rather instances of typological exegesis, which associate imperial agents with Christ-like (or Antichrist-like) characteristics. The Last Emperor *topos* is an amalgamation of various layers of typological exegesis. The *Oracle of Baalbek* contains some scattered elements, which, however, are not yet combined into the unitary *topos* that Shoemaker tries to excavate.[31] Here lies a crucial shortcoming of the monograph. Shoemaker does not clearly define the Last Emperor motif and thus does not acknowledge it to be a text-block that combines various specific elements. Each of these elements does, of course, have antecedents in earlier literary traditions. Yet, this does not mean that the unitary text-block can be traced back to its individual constituents. Since Shoemaker does not define the *topos* under investigation, he lures the reader into an indefinite investigation that seeks "the basic building blocks of the Last Emperor tradition" (60) – as we have seen – as far back as Ancient Egypt. Rather than searching for the origins of indefinite elements in time immemorial, one should acknowledge this text-block to be a product of a particular historical context in the development of "the medieval apocalyptic imagination".[32]

Although Shoemaker does not succeed in demonstrating that the Last Emperor *topos* existed already in the fourth century, his overall argument is not implausible. He claims that the *topos* was known to Muḥammad and his followers, who derived from it the importance of Jerusalem, where – according

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30   [T]ὸ δὲ ὄνομα τοῦ βασιλέως *κεκρυμμένον* ἐστὶ τοῖς ἔθνεσιν, [...] – "The name of the king is *hidden* from the Gentiles, [...]." Edition and translation in Alexander: The Oracle of Baalbek, 19, l.163, 27 (as above, note 7). Cf. John 7,27 [...] ὁ δὲ Χριστὸς ὅταν ἔρχηται οὐδεὶς γινώσκει πόθεν ἐστίν. – "[...] but when Christ cometh, *no man knoweth* whence he is." (KJV) (italics by the reviewer).

31   The element of a "hidden name" (τὸ ὄνομα τὸ κεκρυμμένον) eventually became part of the Last Emperor *topos*, as testified in the thirteenth-century *Tale of the True Emperor*, see W. Brokkaar, et al. (eds.): The Oracles of the Most Wise Emperor Leo & The Tale of the True Emperor (Amstelodamensis Graecus VI E 8). Amsterdam 2002, 92, ll.35–36. Yet this is a later development that supplements the Pseudo-Methodian *topos* of the Last Emperor.

32   I borrow this term from B. McGinn: The Apocalyptic Imagination in the Middle Ages. In: J. A. Aertsen/M. Pickavé (eds.): Ende und Vollendung. Eschatologische Perspektiven im Mittelalter. Berlin/New York, NY 2002 (Miscellanea Mediaevalia 29), 79–94, at 88–91. For an adept analysis of the likely formation of the Last Emperor text-block, see Greisiger: Messias – Endkaiser – Antichrist, 172–180 (as above, note 14).

to the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodios* and the *Tiburtine Sibyl* – the Last Emperor was believed to abdicate his power to God. Yet the importance of Jerusalem can be maintained for late antique Christian apocalyptic thought even without any reference to the Last Emperor myth.[33] The city's significance can be seen during the Byzantine–Sasanian War (602–628 AD) climaxing in Emperor Herakleios' triumphal entry in 629/630 AD. Furthermore, the exegetical techniques that Pseudo-Methodios used in designing the character of the Last Emperor were already in place for centuries. Typological hermeneutics, messianic expectations, and sacred geography were all part of the shared religious mindset of Late Antiquity. In fact, this line of reasoning may lend greater force to Shoemaker's thesis, since nascent Islam would not have had to contest a single pre-eminent motif that would have necessitated a definite antithesis, of which there is no trace. In fact, Shoemaker is reluctant to suggest that Muḥammad himself acted as a messianic king. Instead, one may suppose that the success of Muḥammad and his followers lied in articulating a minimalistic counter-eschatology that was rather inclusive of elements from Zoroastrian, Christian, and Jewish end-time visions.

The third chapter (64–89) discusses the heightened eschatological expectations during the sixth and seventh centuries. It is shown how pre-existing end-time anxieties were amplified by the Byzantine-Sasanian war, natural catastrophes, pestilences, and the computational scheme that suggested the end of the world to occur in the early sixth century. Shoemaker considers Averil Cameron's cautioning remarks not to overestimate the impact of apocalyptic allusions in the sources (65–66, 74). Still, he upholds that "[e]arly Islam did not merely 'catch' the spirit of eschatological urgency but rather seems to have been fueled by this potent religious ideology from the start." (65) It is conspicuous that the author glances over Justinian's reign (70–71, 144), instead of revisiting the sources for which a remarkable awareness of eschatological thought has been demonstrated. In particular, Justinian may not only have been caricatured as the Antichrist but also presented as its antithesis, i.e., a quasi-messianic emperor;[34] a context that may prove fruitful

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33   See M.-H. Congourdeau: Jérusalem et Constantinople dans la littérature apocalyptique. In: M. Kaplan (ed.): Le sacré et son inscription dans l'espace à Byzance et en Occident: Études comparées. Paris 2001 (Byzantina Sorbonensia 18), 125–136.

34   R. D. Scott: Malalas, The *Secret History*, and Justinian's Propaganda. In: DOP 39, 1985, 99–109, at 107–109.

to Shoemaker's claim that imperial eschatology was in the forefront at the Constantinopolitan court just prior to the rise of Islam.

The main argument of the chapter seeks to prove literary (direct or indirect) dependence of the Qur'ān on late antique Christian apocalyptic writings. Shoemaker argues (76–78) that the prophecy which Theophylaktos Simokattēs attributes to Khosrow II bears close resemblance to *sūra* 30,2–5. He sees in this resemblance "some sort of cultural contact between the world of the Qur'ān and contemporary Byzantine literature." (78) Shoemaker finds another striking resemblance between the Syriac *Alexander Legend* and *sūra* 18, the Qur'ānic account of Alexander the Great. To make the connection, Shoemaker follows Wilhelm Bousset and Károly Czeglédy in identifying two layers of redaction in the Syriac *Alexander Legend*: a first layer, composed in 514/515 AD, and a second, redacted in 628/629 AD (*pace* Gerrit Reinink's dating of the whole text to c. 630 AD). This re-dating allows him to assume that *sūra* 18 may depend on the *Alexander Legend*. Shoemaker concedes that an indirect dependence or even a later interpolation upon the not yet canonized Qur'ānic text is possible as well (83). In support of the Qur'ān's dependency upon late antique Roman apocalyptic traditions, Shoemaker lists further texts that testify to apocalyptic sensitivities during the sixth and early seventh centuries, which include the Latin Pseudo-Ephraem *On the End of the World*, Maximos' the Confessor *Letter 14*, the Syriac Pseudo-Ephraem *Homily on the End*, the *Apocalypse of John the Little*, the so-called Edessene Fragment, and the *Doctrina Iacobi* (85–89). Although some of these texts were composed in reaction to the Arab conquest, these texts demonstrate that the Arab invasion occurred at a time when eschatological expectations were prevalent. After all, apocalyptic interpretations of nascent Islam would have hardly been intelligible if there had not been a living tradition of apocalypticism beforehand. Accordingly, Shoemaker reads the reference in the *Doctrina Iacobi* that a false prophet in Palestine preaches the impending arrival of the Messiah (89) as inconceivable without a preexisting apocalyptic *Zeitgeist*, which – he assumes – must have exerted a deep impact upon Muḥammad and his followers.

The fourth chapter (90–115) shows that apocalypticism was also prevalent among Jews and Zoroastrians on the eve of the rise of Islam. The author argues that both traditions emphasized that the end would transpire through imperial triumph. Of course, both inverted Roman triumphalism, yet they abided by the imperial eschatology of Late Antiquity that saw "[i]mperial

renewal as a harbinger of the *eschaton* […]" (95). Shoemaker surveys three seventh-century Jewish apocalypses, *Sefer Eliyyahu*, *Sefer Zerubbabel*, and the *Signs of Rabbi Shimʿōn b. Yoḥai*. He argues that in all three texts the anti-messianic motif of Armilos mirrors the Last Emperor *topos* (93–96). The resemblance consists of the Armilos figure being identified with a Roman (wicked) emperor. At the same time, Shoemaker also remarks that the medieval Jewish motif of Armilos corresponds to the Christian notion of the Antichrist (93). Here the reader may be confused by Shoemaker's double association, which links the Armilos motif with the *topoi* of the Last Emperor and the Antichrist. Actually, there is no need to attribute any knowledge of the Last Emperor to the authors of these presumably early seventh-century Jewish apocalypses, since the Antichrist is a far older *topos* and is the exact conceptual equivalent of the Armilos motif.

This confusion, however, draws attention to an important issue. The Jewish Armilos motif may resemble, on a cursory reading, the Christian motif of the Last Emperor because the latter is the typological inversion of the Antichrist. The Antichrist legend was already present in early Christianity and even goes back to anti-messianic types in the Old Testament. The Last Emperor *topos*, on the other hand, was developed at a much later time. Given the deliberate antithesis of the (messianic) Last Emperor and the (anti-messianic) Antichrist, it would have been intriguing to investigate the Antichrist legend in view of isomorphic elements in the development of the Last Emperor text-block. For instance, the elements of righteous rule, the defeat of external enemies, the willful abdication of the Last Emperor, as contained in the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodios*, appear to represent the inversion of the Antichrist's unrighteous rule, deception of the faithful, and forceful destruction.[35] As Shoemaker puts repeated emphasis on the Last Emperor *topos*, it may have been fruitful to dwell deeper in a comparative analysis of these two antithetical motifs. That being said, his argument does not depend on a subtler understanding of the Armilos/Antichrist text-blocks. His whole claim is that "like the Christians, the Jews similarly believed that the Roman Empire and its emperor would play central roles in the eschatological restoration." (99) This is as true as it is apparent. This claim does not require any

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35   For further antithetical correspondences, see A. Kraft: Miracles and Pseudo-Miracles in Byzantine Apocalypses. In: M. Gerolemou (ed.): Recognizing Miracles in Antiquity and Beyond. Berlin/Boston, MA 2018 (Trends in Classics, Supplementary Volumes 53), 111–130, esp. 122.

knowledge of the Last Emperor text-block in the aforementioned Jewish apocalypses.

Next, Shoemaker surveys Zoroastrian cosmogony and eschatology. He explains how Sasanian religion promoted certain messianic figures such as the Kay Bahrām character, a mythical ruler who would overcome foreign powers and prepare the appearance of the millennium's savior, Zoroaster's first son Ušedar (103–104). It is shown by reference to the Middle Persian apocalypses *Zand ī Wahman Yasn*, *Jāmāsp Nāmag*, and *Bundahišn* that Zoroastrians held messianic expectations, which climaxed in the late sixth century with the revolt of Bahrām VI Čōbīn (r. 590–591 AD) (104, 108–113). Shoemaker closely follows the scholarship of Károly Czeglédy on this topic but ventures beyond when detecting similarities between Zoroastrian messianism and the *Tiburtine Sibyl*'s Last Emperor (104). Yet the problem with the Middle Persian material is essentially the same that Shoemaker faces regarding the medieval *Tiburtine Sibyl*. All these texts have come down in late manuscripts. The earliest surviving manuscripts of the Persian apocalypses date to the medieval or even early modern period.[36] The certainly correct remark that there is "a scholarly consensus that [...] the apocalyptic traditions in these texts are significantly older" (100) is hardly sufficient, given that no argument ensues for the antiquity of the particular literary elements under investigation. This is not to deny that messianic ideas existed in both Zoroastrianism and Christianity. But it remains unknown which particular elements were inserted at a later point into the Middle Persian narratives.

The chapter closes with the assessment that the expectation of imperial restoration – being the catalyst of the *eschaton* – was a widely held belief in Judaism, Christianity, and Zoroastrianism before the advent of Islam. The bone of contention was merely which empire would be revived. Consequently, imperial eschatology and imminent apocalyptic expectations formed the bedrock on which Muḥammad and his followers built their community.

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36   The earliest manuscript is cod. Hafniensis K20, saec. XIV² containing the apocalypse *Zand ī Wahman Yasn*. For an overview of the manuscript transmission of the respective texts, see S. Raei: Die Endzeitvorstellungen der Zoroastrier in iranischen Quellen. Wiesbaden 2010 (Göttinger Orientforschungen, III. Reihe: Iranica N.F. 6), 42, 75. A concise overview of the various dating attempts can be found in M. Macuch: Pahlavi Literature. In: R.E. Emmerick/M. Macuch (eds.): A History of Persian Literature, Vol. XVII: The Literature of Pre-Islamic Iran. London/New York, NY 2009, 116–196, at 152–156.

In the fifth chapter (116–145) Shoemaker presents a revision of the first half of his 2014 article in *Arabica*.[37] He reasserts that Muḥammad "was an eschatological prophet of the end times" (132). Contrary to the trend in contemporary scholarship that de-eschatologizes nascent Islam, the author maintains that earliest Muslim sources do contain layers of apocalypticism. He lists various Qur'ānic passages that assert the end to be near (126–128). Of course, these passages are well known and scholars usually read them as residues of Muḥammad's early preaching, in which he used apocalyptic language to win converts; he arguably abandoned this parlance once he had gained political power in Medina. Shoemaker answers this challenge by drawing upon New Testament studies: like Jesus and his followers believed in an immediate end, so did Muḥammad and his followers (120, 129, 140, 144). Furthermore, he considers it unlikely that later redactors inserted predictions about the immediate end into the Qur'ān, which by then would have been already falsified (129, 131, 143).

Shoemaker knows that the tension between apocalyptic expectations and political ambitions present modern scholarship with a conundrum. It is his view, however, that there is no real difficulty here because the *eschaton* was believed to be transacted through imperial triumph in Late Antiquity (118). Adopting Fred Donner's thesis,[38] Shoemaker holds that early Islam was an ecumenical, monotheistic, and eschatological reform movement. The *Constitution of Medina* is presented as proof that shows how Jewish tribes were incorporated in Muḥammad's religious polity. Earliest Islam was an inclusive conglomeration of monotheists who shared a concern for the impending Last Judgment. It is argued that the success of Muḥammad's followers may have been due to this nonsectarian emphasis. Only under ʿAbd al-Malik (r. 685–705 AD) did Islam start to become distinctly different from Christianity and Judaism with the invention of Arab ethnicity and the Ḥijāz as the Islamic Holy Land (135). In contrast, the real origins of Islam ought to be found in an eschatologically sensitive environment, which had its geographical focal point in Jerusalem.

The last chapter (146–179) shows how Muḥammad's movement engaged with imperial apocalypticism and how it sought to defeat the Roman empire

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37   See above, note 1.

38   F.M. Donner: Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam. Cambridge, MA/London 2010.

in order to liberate Jerusalem. Sophronios of Jerusalem and the *Doctrina Iacobi* testify to early Islam's eschatological and imperial ambitions. The *jihād* of the first Islamic century was meant to establish the rule of the divinely ordained religious polity by military force (146). Shoemaker agrees with David Cook in asserting that Muḥammad's followers saw a redemptive process in the conquests, which was necessary to pave the way for the *eschaton* to arrive (148). A similar mentality is said to have motivated the Christian Crusaders, who – in the words of Jay Rubenstein – "were waging an apocalypse" (149).[39] The repeated comparisons with the Christian tradition contextualize early Islam as a faith community that owes much to the imperial eschatology of late antique Christianity. The author reminds the reader that the Qurʾān holds elements taken from Byzantine imperial apocalypticism, namely *sūra* 18,83–101 (as argued in chapter three) and the beginning of *sūra* 30, which refers to the Roman victory over Persia and which may derive from Byzantine wartime propaganda.

The main thrust of the chapter is about the primitive concern of Islam to liberate the Holy Land from the Romans. The primary source here is Pseudo-Sebēos' *Armenian Chronicle of 661*, which is quoted extensively (154–155). Pseudo-Sebēos relates how in the wake of Herakleios' victory over Sasanian Persia, Jews and Arabs negotiated an alliance against the Roman (re-)occupation of the Holy Land. Shoemaker concurs Uri Rubin's view that the liberation of the Holy Land formed "the earliest recoverable stratum of Islamic self-identity" (158). Early Believers wanted to restore the children of Abraham to the Promised Land; a view reinforced by the fact that the *qibla* was originally oriented towards Jerusalem. Moreover, various sources, e.g., Pseudo-Sebēos' *Chronicle*, testify to early building activities on the Temple Mount (163), while the *Faḍāʾil al-Quds* (*Merits of Jerusalem*) collections and the thirteenth-century chronicle *Mirʾāt al-zamān fī taʾrīkh al-aʿyān* (*The Mirror of the Age in the History of the Famous*) by Sibṭ ibn al-Jawzī (d. 654 AH/1257 AD) describe the rituals performed in the Dome of the Rock. Shoemaker sees in these rituals proof that the "Dome of the Rock was thus genetically linked with the Jewish Temple" (167). It functioned as the "precursor" of the to-be-restored Temple.

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39   The citation is from J. Rubenstein: Armies of Heaven. The First Crusade and the Quest for Apocalypse. New York, NY 2011, 126.

The final set of evidence is derived from the *Kitāb al-Fitan* (*Book of Tribula-tions*) by Nuʿaym ibn Ḥammād (d. 228/843). This Sunnī compilation of apoc-alyptic ḥadīth relates the expectation that the death of Muḥammad together with the conquest of Jerusalem forms the first two (out of six) signs of the end (170–171).[40] Jerusalem and its liberation were at the center of the early Believers' eschatological expectations. The notions of the capture of Con-stantinople and the total defeat of the Roman Empire were developed later when the sustained delay of the *eschaton* necessitated new eschatological ob-jectives. Early Islam thus shared with Judaism and Christianity a fixation on Jerusalem.

In essence, Shoemaker presents an interdisciplinary synthesis of a consider-able number of late antique textual sources, which is a formidable achieve-ment. His aim is to demonstrate the revisionist claim that "[e]arliest Islam, or more properly, the community of the Believers, was a religious movement that arose within the broader context of widespread imminent eschatological anticipation across the late ancient Near East." (180) He acknowledges that seeing nascent Islam as an apocalyptic and martial movement is at odds with much of recent scholarship, which – he says – has tried to reinvent Islamic origins in accordance with the values of modern liberalism (181). To drive home his revisionist interpretation, Shoemaker presents a comparison with the contemporary ISIS movement (117, 182). Such comparisons serve an ap-parently didactic purpose; I doubt that they are meant to withstand scrutiny. A more serious problem is the lack of definitional clarity in the various com-parisons with which Shoemaker supports his main thesis. Most analogies are drawn between concepts that are not clearly defined. As a result, virtually anything can be compared to anything. If one seeks to investigate the con-stituent elements of a multilayered text-block, one needs to identify and label these elements clearly in order to distinguish them from the larger compo-site. Particular elements of the Last Emperor and the Gog/Magog *topoi* un-doubtedly reach back to antiquity but their composite natures, as articulated in the *Tiburtine Sibyl*, can be rather safely assigned to the seventh century AD.

Regarding its argumentative strength, the monograph's revisionist thesis is certainly a plausible interpretation of the surveyed evidence. Unfortunately,

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40   The ḥadīth in question is now also available in translation by D. Cook (tr.): "The Book of Tribulations": The Syrian Muslim Apocalyptic Tradition. An Annotated Translation by Nuʿaym b. Ḥammād al-Marwazī. Edinburgh 2017, 12–13 (no. 57).

the author does not provide sufficient proof to demonstrate it beyond doubt. The first chapters, which argue that (late) ancient Jewish apocalypticism was not inherently anti-imperial and that the apocalyptic *topos* of the Last Emperor originated in the fourth century, do not furnish ample proof. The striking textual resemblances between late antique Byzantine literature and a few Qur'ānic verses make a much stronger argument. The book's overview of Jewish, Zoroastrian, and early Islamic apocalyptic traditions provides contextual evidence that supports a merely plausible interpretation. In short, the reviewer is left with the impression that greater rigor in conceptual clarity, in the transmission history of the sources, and in philological scrutiny could have better supported the intriguing thesis that earliest Islam was a late antique apocalyptic movement. Nevertheless, the holistic approach to the plethora of late antique sources is most commendable and makes this book an instructive pleasure to engage in.

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