

David Cook

## Two Christian Arabic Prophecies of Liberation From Muslim Rule From the Late 18th Century<sup>1</sup>

### I. Introduction

It is comparatively rare to find late Christian Arabic apocalyptic texts, although several have been published in the past.<sup>2</sup> While the initial flowering of Christian Arabic in the early 'Abbasid period left a rich heritage of apocalypses and other literature, many of these have yet to be published. Throughout the long period of Muslim control, Christians regularly expressed themselves through the medium of apocalyptic to convey their attitudes about their political and social situation.<sup>3</sup> This phenomenon has been explored in regard to the pre-

1 I would like to thank Prof. Norman Ingham, Dr. Michael Pesenson, and Prof. John Woods for reading this and making comments.

2 E.g., R. Y. Ebied. and M. L. Young, "An Arabic Sibylline prophecy," *Oriens Christianus* 60 (1976), pp. 83-94; id., "An Unrecorded Version of a Sibylline prophecy," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 41 (1977), pp. 279-307; F. Macler, "L'Apocalypse arabe de Daniel," *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* 25 (1904), pp. 293-305; Augustin Perrier, "Lettre de Pisuntios, évêque de Qeft, a ses fideles," *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien* 19 (1914), pp. 79-92, 302-23, 445-46; J. Ziade, "Un Testament de Notre Seigneur concernant les invasions des Mongols," *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien* 21 (1918-19), pp. 264-73, 433-44; ibid., "L'Apocalypse de Samuel, Supérieur de Deir el-Qalamoun," *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien* 20 (1915-17), pp. 374-404.

3 Some have been published from other languages as well: (Greek) Lennart Ryden, "The Andreas Salos Apocalypse," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 28 (1974), pp. 198-261; Riccardo Maisano, *L'Apocalisse apocrifa di Leone di Constantinopoli* (Naples, 1975); A. Vassiliev, "Visiones Danielis," in *Anecdota Graeco-Byzantina* (Moscow, 1893), I, pp. 33-47; Alice Wheatley, "De Consummatione Mundi of Pseudo-Hippolytus: Another Byzantine Apocalypse from the early Islamic Period," *Byzantion* 66 (1996), pp. 461-69; (Syriac): E. Beck, *Das Heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Carmina Nisibena* (CSCO vol. 218, Louvain, 1972), pp. 34-71; R. Gottheil, "A Christian Bahira legend," *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 13 (1898), pp. 189-242, 14 (1899), pp. 203-68, 15 (1900), pp. 56-132, 16 (1903), pp. 125-66; F. Baethgen, "Beschreibung der syrischen Handschrift," *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentische Wissenschaft* 6 (1886), pp. 200-4; J. Chabot, "L'Apocalypse d'Esdras," *Revue Semitique* 2 (1894), pp. 242-50, 333-46; Rendel Harris, *The Gospels of the Twelve Apostles*. Cambridge, 1900; Fransesco Martinez, *Eastern Christian Apocalyptic* (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Catholic University of America, 1985); Hans Drijvers, "The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles," in A. Cameron and L. Conrad (eds.), *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East* (Darwin: Princeton, 1992), pp. 189-213; A. Mingana, "Apocalypse of Peter," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 14 (1930), pp. 182-297, 423-562, 15 (1931), pp. 179-279; (Coptic): Otto Meinardus, "A Commentary on the XIVth Coptic vision of Daniel," *Orientalia*



Ottoman period (including texts from the Umayyad, 'Abbasid, Crusader, Mongol and Mamluk periods), but as yet few texts have been published revealing the attitudes of the Christians during the Ottoman rule. In this article a pair of apocalyptic texts appearing in historical documents will be translated and analyzed for their content. As with many apocalyptic texts, there are numerous questions involving the identity of the *dramatis personae*, and more than occasionally there is extensive obfuscation of allusions. These will be noted, and a discussion of the significance of the documents will follow.

## II. A text from the 1750s

One text of this type is imbedded in the *Ta'rikh al-Sham* of the priest Mikha'il Burayk al-Dimashqi.<sup>4</sup> It cites a purported Russian document in the context of an incident containing an apocalyptic prophecy concerning the recent Russian conquests of Ottoman territory. During this period the Russian empire was slowly growing at the expense of the surrounding Muslim states, and many Christians in the Ottoman empire looked to it as a protector and sometimes even as a possible deliverer.<sup>5</sup> Therefore this apocalyptic prophecy – and along with it, the story in which it is embedded – is worth being translated in full, if only to illustrate the apocalyptic hopes and fears of the Christian community of Damascus during the 18th century (if indeed parts of it are the result of a member of this community). The text of the letter is as follows:

"[This is] the letter which the judge and the governor of Astrakhan wrote to the esteemed judge Durgharakan,<sup>6</sup> the official of the Russians (*al-Muskub*) and the Georgians in the city of Moscow, on 20 Adhar [March 20], 1756. O favorably disposed, judge and governor [whose] light is plentiful and [whose] ability is great: If you would wish for the truth of the matter about the conduct of those two frightening old men, whose mention is widely [known], who appeared lately in the city of Paris, France, as I stated, in the year 1754, in the Christian era [...]. After that, [they] appeared in the *masula yatan* [Masulapitam] in the areas of Barghulda in al-Abrishiyya<sup>7</sup>

*Christiana Periodica* 32 (1966), pp. 394-449; David Frankfurter, *Elijah in Upper Egypt*. (Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 1993).

4 For the historical circumstances of this document see Bruce Masters, "The View from the Province: Syrian Chroniclers of the Eighteenth Century", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 114 (1994), pp. 353-62.

5 John P. LeDonne, *The Russian Empire and the World* (Oxford, 1997), p. 93.

6 Apparently the Mongolian *darugha(kan)* in the pl., meaning "head official" (thanks to Prof. John Woods for this identification).

7 Probably meaning Masulapitam, in the area of Barnagore (both of these being major English factories of the time) in the region of Andra Pradesh (located in the east Deccan on the Bay of Bengal). Masulapitam (also Masulipatnam) was the paramount factory of the British East India Company in the early 17th century. However, after 1641, when the headquarters was transferred, it lost importance, and was by the period in question the principal transit



which is under the rule of the Great Mogor [Moghul], the king of India (*Hindustan*), and during the course of this [time] in this realm and city – I mean, Astrakhan – on 17 Kanun II [January 17], 1756. At present, we will clarify all of the events which occurred to your mercifulnesses, with its thanks.”

According to this introduction the two men who are the subject of the missive visited both Paris and India during the two years mentioned. It is quite remarkable that they seem to have done this without visiting any of the countries in-between, and only after these extensive wanderings do they appear in Astrakhan.

“And thus it is that two frightening-looking, white-haired, completely dreadful-appearing old men were brought to our city, and their daily sustenance was always bread and water. All of their actions were strange, and they claimed that they had the spirit of prophecy. None saw or knew from where they had entered the city, because the gates of our city, as is the custom and law in every fortress of the land (*fi kull qila’ al-kawn*),<sup>8</sup> are guarded, locked always, and especially our fortress, because the Persians are close by the boundaries [of the province].

These two old men would go through the streets of the city, wearing strange-looking clothing, of a sort which all present among us – from various countries – could not identify which religious community would wear this clothing. They went barefoot, bare-headed, shouting and saying, that the heavens were very angry because of the plethora of sins and the great evil happening among the evil Christians. [This is] especially because of their insatiable covetousness, love of silver (i.e., money), sinful profit, envy, fornication, theft, blasphemy, and the evil of every man, especially those pretending to be priests. Because of all that, they said that they were sent by God to preach (*yakraz*) repentance and [for people] to return from the[ir] sinful actions. If the evil, wretched sinners would not return, and if they did not wish to return quickly, then there was necessity that they would see, know, and be tested to the full measure of His anger and the displeasure of His wrath (*rijzihi*).”

It seems quite obvious that we have a pair who are portrayed according to the pattern of the two witnesses of Revelation 11, who come to warn the world at the end of time, just before the Judgment, of their sins and give everyone one last opportunity to repent.

“As for me, because I am the governor of the place, I feared that they were magicians [or] astrologers, and so I sent for them to be present before me. Present with me were the head of the bishops, Bar Raiskolavoff Theophonos [Theophanes] the doctor [of the church], and the heads of various monasteries and schools, and two Jesuits, [who were] intending to go to Jerusalem. The two aforementioned old men were brought, accompanied by a great mob of the people, whose numbers could not be counted, and they gave answer in our tongue, the Ayrikiyya<sup>9</sup> and in Russian, and to the head of the priests – the Generous One purify him – in Greek, and to the Jesuits in Latin and French, and to the rest in the Turkish language, and in Persian, eloquently

point for mail boats coming from Europe, from which communications would go overland to Calcutta, Bombay and Madras.

8 Reading *qila’* in place of *qala’*.

9 Probably the Uzbek language (reading Ayzbakkiya). Thanks to Prof. Wheeler Thuckston for this identification.



and with profound knowledge. And this was not only in mundane matters alone, but in spiritual matters, mostly theological matters, and in philosophical problems, both ancient and contemporary.”

The governor seems to be more than a little convinced of the veracity of their mission, if only because of their amazing ability with languages and natural eloquence. He also appears to be genuinely afraid of the response of the populace, as we see from the next section.

“With that, because I feared the unrest and stirrings of the people, since they had publicly healed a man with dried up hands, and conferred sight upon a blind man, whose name was Butros Iybyroski<sup>10</sup> – known in this city all around – I ordered them to be guarded in the prison, inside the walls of the fortress of the city, because the news about what I have mentioned had spread. I expected that the order of what to do with the two of them would come to me from the Royal Palace in St. Petersburg, [so] I placed the two of them in the prison, in the guardianship of the fortress which is inside the high walls (?) named Iynastrun, hoping to look into their affair afterwards, when we had consulted with selected learned ones about this matter. But in the morning, the head of the 100 [soldiers] and the rest of the guard came to me suddenly, and informed me that the gates of the prison and the fortress were found open, and that the two old men had escaped, fleeing. I thought because of their weakness that they had been able to cross but a short distance, and so I then sent a number of both the foot-soldiers and the mounted [horsemen] to every sub-governor under our authority, and I did not neglect to send boats to the al-Rawati River, thinking that they would cross the Caspian Sea to the land of the Turks. But it was for nothing that we wearied ourselves. I, and others, were saddened because we had not scrutinized them completely and with a complete effort. They left in the prison this prophecy which I write at the tail end [of this account]. It is similar to that prophecy found on the tomb of Dionysius the Areopagite, Bishop of Athens.<sup>11</sup> It is the same as that found in the year 1754 in the place *sar dahnus* [St. Denis],<sup>12</sup> near the city of Paris.”<sup>13</sup>

This is the text of the prophecy given by the correspondent:

“The prophecy was written in the Hebrew language, as the two aforementioned old men left it. They had been asked a number of times as to their names, but had not been able to clarify the matter in any way, shape or form; moreover they would claim, saying that ‘our names are *preachers in repentance*, and the *forerunners of the Second Return of Christ*.’<sup>14</sup>

10 Probably in Russian: Pyotr Vyborovsky (thanks to Dr. Michael Pesensen for this reading).

11 This is Pseudo-Dionysius, the manuscripts of which were known in the Orthodox Church, see *The New Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York, 1967), s.v. (F. X. Murphy).

12 Probably St. Denis outside Paris, although the text is quite garbled and so it is impossible to be sure. The reading indicates that the name came through Greek.

13 Burayk al-Dimashqi, *Ta'rikh al-sham*, pp. 54-57.

14 It is difficult to tell whether they called themselves both by both of the names or whether one of them received one of the names, and the other, the other. Because of the plural, one would suspect the former possibility.



In the year 1757 there will be fighting in the lands of Europe,<sup>15</sup>  
 in the year 1758 [there will be] annihilation,<sup>16</sup>  
 in the year 1759 the African lands will perish,  
 in the year 1760 the heretics will return [to God] and repent,  
 and in the year 1762 the city of Constantinople and the king 'Uthman will be taken,<sup>17</sup>  
 and in the year 1765 signs will happen in the heavens above (*fi al-sama'* *fawq*)<sup>18</sup> and portents on the earth below, and a cowardly man will arise,  
 [in the] year 1766 the sea will be disturbed above its natural [disturbance],  
 and from the strength of the disturbance, the earth will be disturbed with great fear from the earthquake,  
 [in the] year 1767 commanders will arise, iniquitous rulers, and there will be a terrible, frightening occurrence between them, man to man like with wild animals,  
 [in the] year 1768 it will rain blood,  
 [in the] year 1769 the sun and the moon will be darkened and other terrifying things will happen,  
 [in the] year 1770 the rest of the inhabited world will perish, and the two miraculous men will come,<sup>19</sup>  
 [in the] year 1783 the Second Appearance of Christ, and the destruction of the whole world, since the superior official did not wish to define other than these things.<sup>20</sup> These self-same matters and others like them I have written

15 Presumably the Seven Years War.

16 This is difficult to identify, however one should note that Halley's Comet appeared during this year (Dec. 25, 1758-June 22, 1759), and that there were serious earthquakes in the area of Syria throughout 1758-59: M.A. Dahman, "Le tremblement de terre d'1173 (1759) a Damas et dans ses environs," *al-Mashriq* 42 (1948), pp. 333-47; and Mu'awiya Barzangi, "The 1759 earthquake in the Bekaa Valley: Implications for earthquake hazard assessment in the eastern Mediterranean region," *Bulletin d'études orientales* 47 (1995), pp. 235-46. This identification, however, presupposes that this element of the prediction was composed in Damascus and reflects the interests of the population, which has not been established conclusively as yet.

17 I.e., the Ottoman dynasty.

18 Could this be comet D1766 G1 (Helfenzrieder), seen between April 1-29, 1766? (thanks to Gary Kronk for supplying this information).

19 The two witnesses of Revelation 11?

20 This is a little difficult to understand, but one would assume that the "superior officer" (*dābit al-kull*) was the one responsible for the interpretation of the prophecy and was unwilling to interpret it further.



about to you and sent them in haste to the city of St. Petersburg, in order to inform the most modest queen, but I believe that with this I have fulfilled my duty, incumbent upon the merciful, her highest majesty, and for that purpose, the greatest encouragement of deep service to her great mercifulness, [signed] the servant, the god-fearing, the wretched governor of Astrakhan, Kurlas."<sup>21</sup>

There does not seem to be any indication how, if the text of this prophecy was truly written in Hebrew, it was interpreted for the governor. This is a rather unusual document, and it is very likely that it is a forgery, in the sense that it is not a legitimate document coming from Astrakhan. However, by the same token, it shows no indication that it was forged in the area of Syria. Although the editor of the text believes that it was translated from the Greek, it does not bear any obvious indication that it was written in Russian in the first place, nor that it was indeed a translation. However, the pro-Russian element of the prophecy is quite striking, and the most likely way in which a document of this nature could migrate from Astrakhan would be through the medium of a Greek translation. Linguistically, the names indicate the Greek, although they correct names which would be spelled considerably differently in Greek back to the original Arabic (for example, the name 'Uthman). Strikingly, the Indian names are quite reasonably accurate, and may show some knowledge of Indian geography, which cannot have been a common attribute in the Ottoman Empire (or in the Russian for that matter). With the exception of the Seven Years War (prediction for the year 1757), it is difficult to attach any historical events to any of the other predictions and the sequence of events in the prophecy bears a passing resemblance to that of the book of Revelation.

One additional element should be noted here. The Christian writer of the Damascene chronicle appears to have placed a great deal of credence in this prophecy. Already Masters, in his reading of this chronicle, noted the inordinate number of signs and portents in it.<sup>22</sup> However, it is rather curious that Masters says "unfortunately the four writers to be discussed in this paper give few, if any, clues within their texts as to why they thought it necessary to record the events through which they lived."<sup>23</sup> On the contrary, one should see immediately that Mikha'il Burayk al-Dimashqi stops his chronicle at the year 1781. In light of the above prophecy, the most reasonable assumption to make would be that he believed that the Second Coming of Christ was imminent, and that further writing of his history would be pointless. In this he would be following a long and distinguished line of historians, who were not writing world histories, but histories of the world (in his case, on the much more modest scale of a

21 Burayk al-Dimashqi, *Ta'rikh*, pp. 57-58.

22 Masters, p. 357.

23 Masters, p. 354.



local history of Damascus). Apparently his chronicle was designed to serve the apocalyptic expectations of his audience.

### III. A text from the early 1800s

The second document is from a slightly later time-period. It is to be found in the *Mukhtaṣar ta'rikh jabal Lubnan* of Father Augustine Tanus al-Khuri, and is dateable from the period of the Napoleonic invasion of Egypt and Palestine in 1798-99. It has numerous mistakes which the edition has done little to correct, and it is unclear whether the control of numerous manuscripts was in fact used in order to achieve the edition.

"... and in the year of the foreigners,<sup>24</sup> destruction will appear, mists will be many, the veil will be lifted, and the book will be torn. These are the healing signs, the complete utterances, are bringing the matter to an end, and lifting of whips, and changing the land in length and breadth. The old woman will be judged, the jugs will be broken, the riddles solved, the treasures opened.<sup>25</sup> The foreign youth (*ghulam*) will appear, at his order, the marvel soon [happens]: leading a Christian army and a Jewish military detachment,<sup>26</sup> *wazīrat yasin wa-katibuhu tin*,<sup>27</sup> the [Ottoman] islands [in the Aegean] will be conquered, he will rip apart the silked ones, kill the oppressors, take the righteous ones captive, and deliver the cross from the disunity of the wise, the opposition of the rulers, and the hypocrisy of the deputies. The secret of the cross will appear, a king victorious, buried strong.

Understand the riddles, O enterer into the treasures! the black banners will trail with armies and soldiers, and Khurasan will be destroyed, crosses raised, and idols worshipped. The sun of fortune sets, and the moon of time. Understand, O Yasin, the time grows tighter than the white [space] of the mim.<sup>28</sup> I see the tents as if they were their tents, but the women of the tribe are not their women. Then the conjunction (of the stars) will rise twice: the first time it will rise and its blessing will stay upon the land. The second time its line will rise from the earth with the permission of the King, the Creator, and praise be to the One who returns the rule to its people. The Banu al-Aṣfar<sup>29</sup> will disembark towards Aleppo at the head of 800 crosses, and then will be

24 Reading *aghrab* in place of *ghurab*. This might be a stretch, but the text frequently refers to a *gharib*; while it seems that the reading of a "raven" gives no sense (but then again, this is a *jafr* text, where sense is subordinated to rhyme).

25 While this sounds like nonsense, it is all rhymed in the fashion of *jafr* literature, and is used as an introduction to the main point.

26 In the text: *fi jaysh 'isawi wa-sari musawi*: lit. "leading a Jesus army and a Moses detachment." Napoleon led no Jewish military formations to the best of my knowledge, but Jews did serve in his armies.

27 There does not seem to be any meaning to this phrase, which would mean "the vizierat of Yasin [who is mentioned later in the text] and his secretary, Tin." Unless these are names of actual people, the line does not seem to fit with the previous and following mention of military ventures.

28 One would assume that he means the tiny white (blank) space in the inside of the Arabic letter *mim* (m).



the great apocalyptic war [Armageddon] between the Christians and the Muslims. The fighting will be 13 times [at sea] and 19 times on land.

Between Jumada and Rajab you will see a marvel, in Sha'ban the tribulation will occur, in Shawwal, the horrors, in Muharram you will see the matter made daily (? *al-muyawwam*),<sup>30</sup> and the rule of the Turks will perish in its totality in Shawwal, and the nights will be Christian. Move the guard, O horseman! raise the attack, O attacker!<sup>31</sup> Get out the swords, O swordsman! Arouse the guide, O guide! When the judgment falls, caution is pointless. Weep over Akko, O crying soldier!

[The] rule of the caliph, count it, O reader! we have already clarified the explanation, and set forth the secrets, symbolized and observed, earlier and later, signaled and explicit, near and far<sup>32</sup> in order that these secrets would not be revealed to the ignorant, and that the negligent would not apprehend them, but the kings and the great ones, because of the secrets and essences in them [...] <sup>33</sup> a cross is able, mighty creating, acceptable life-giving in the eyes of [the] glorious king (*malik*), the Sultan [al-] *muwabbid* Salim [III],<sup>34</sup> possessor of secrets numbered previously, its import the prime of the chosen. The rule of [the] caliph, count it, O reader!

The progeny will quickly appear, and in the north there will be an evil situation. Woe upon Aleppo and Hims for the horsemen that they will encounter with [...] and a great comet will appear in the heavens, with long branches,<sup>35</sup> and these are the true proofs of the release, and they will learn about them in the lowlands and the mountains:

'Armies will come over Akko like the clouds come over the mountains,

and its houses will be splattered with the blood of a people coming to it fleeing the fighting'.<sup>36</sup>

Then beware of the disembarkation of the first of the transportation, beware of the crossing of Egypt, while Syria is gone from it. During this time Mars and above it the Sun will enter Gemini, and Sagittarius and Mars will descend. This is the clear proof, pointing the way. When you see

29 The identity of these Banu al-Asfar (usually Byzantine Greeks in classical texts, but here probably Europeans of some sort) would assist us greatly in understanding the text. Attacks of this sort are very common in early Muslim apocalyptic: S. Bashear, "Early Muslim apocalyptic materials," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 1991, pp. 173-207. Here one would sense that the Banu al-Asfar (if the above identifications are correct) are the French.

30 Compare al-Muttaqi al-Hindi, *Kanz al-'ummal* (Beirut, 1987), XI, pp. 275-76 (no. 31505), among many examples.

31 This is totally incomprehensible in the text: *wa-riqqat al-naws ya nawwas*, which I have read *wa-irfa' al-nawsh, ya nawwash*. This latter root is not very common, and the last form is not attested, but it seems to be the only solution available at the moment.

32 These readings are not certain. The speaker could be speaking in first person singular (even though previously he was speaking in the plural), though I have read these four sets of opposites in the passive referring to the *asrar* (secrets) which he mentions in the next line.

33 A lacuna in the text.

34 Reigned 1798-1807.

35 Speaking from the years 1796-98 al-Jabarti says: "During these two years there occurred no events that souls might long for ... except for ... the incidence of astronomical portents and frightening heavenly signs.." *'Aja'ib al-athar fi al-tarajim wa-l-akhbar*. trans. Phillips and Perlmann, (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1994), II, p. 446.

36 Compare M. Bakir Alawan and William Strunk, "Ta'rikh hisar al-Ifranji li-'Akka al-mahrusa wa-husul al-nasr 'alayhim," *Arabica* 20 (1973), pp. 246-60.



this becoming first, go and do not flee<sup>37</sup> with hope. People were tested before us for a long time, and [so] welcome their banner with word and deed.<sup>38</sup> They will bring the entrance of the one into Aleppo at dawn, leading a troop of the Banu Khaqan (the Turks?), thronging [around] the banner – tell me, by God, O my son! then they take it, making an example, and enter it, and kill all the residents in it. None will be safe from them but those close to death, and they will take the women captive, both mothers and barren.

Both Egypt and Syria- leave them and go! after that, mourn, O crier and increase in lamentation. From it the army of the Muslims will be destroyed in the forenoon (slaughtered), and their people will be broken by the strong dread. During Muharram, every district will mourn in the land of Damascus (*jillaq*),<sup>39</sup> from female to male, and because of the strength of the fear, every pregnant woman will abort, and you will see people preoccupied with distraction. O Hims, O Hims, your ways are widely vast (*rahab al-fada'*) and wide of residence and ruined remains (*was' al-rab' wa-l-talal*) – there is no power or might save in our Creator! Jerusalem will be destroyed in haste on Saturday – God is great! then you will encounter them at dawn fighting children, youth and elderly [...] and there will be no recourse but to a mistake (? *zilal*), a solar eclipse, earthquakes and a lunar eclipse.<sup>40</sup> The rising of the sword will be in winter and summer, and the Banu al-Asfar will come, with them the fair-blond youth (*al-ghulam al-ashqar*)<sup>41</sup> to Marj al-Akhdar, and they will come out with eight flags, and under each flag will be 12,000 crosses, and they will descend upon the land of the Byzantines (Anatolia) one and all.

Since they had already entered the residences, and the news is frequent, armies will come from the east and from the sea [and] the villages. The owl will shriek in the land of the Turks (*al-Rum*),<sup>42</sup> and woe to the people of the land in its length and breadth. As to the ruler of the sea (*shah al-bahr*) he will overcome the head of sheep (? *ris* [= *ra's*] *al-ghanam*); and as to the Christian, he will kill the Ottoman. The sea-ships will conquer Egypt, then conquer the Aegean islands in a few days,<sup>43</sup> because the child is damaged, the house is penetrated, the noble left behind, the slave discharged, and illicit sexual encounters widespread, interest going [high], the imam a slanderer, and the judge corrupt. The rulers are immoral, the viziers merchants, the subjects wolves,<sup>44</sup> and dogs, the viziers sitting drunken,<sup>45</sup> the learned one disputing and deceitful, the light cloudy, clarity muddy, the king heedless, and the vizier inattentive.

37 Reading *tanfur* in place of *tanghur*.

38 Reading *taqbilu 'alamahum* in place of *taqtulu 'ilmahum*.

39 This name for Damascus is said to be poetic.

40 "Among the greatest of these [the signs previously mentioned] was the occurrence of a total eclipse in the middle of the month of Dhu al-Hijja (May-June 1798)": al-Jabarti, II, 446; other eclipses are attested for the following years.

41 Is this Napoleon? whatever the identification, this figure is probably the same as the youth (*ghulam*) above.

42 Previously the Byzantines, but taken for the Turks. This phrase sounds a little strange in English, but it is a constant theme in Arabic apocalyptic literature (remembering that the owl is not a well-omened bird in Arabic); see the apocalyptic tract analyzed by A. Abel: *sayhat al-bum fi hawadith (bilad) al-rum* (Armand Abel, "Un hadith sur la prise du Rome," *Arabica* 5 [1958], pp. 1-14).

43 Apparently these are the British fleets. The apocalyptic writer does not seem to be aware that they are fighting the French, and only sees them as fellow Christians.

44 Reading *dhi'ab* instead of *diyab*.

45 The Persian word *qalashi* is used, the only identifiably non-Arabic word in the text.



Take caution, O Muhammad, from the crowing rooster! and the barking dog. Take caution from the brother, for this is a trap, and relatives are like scorpions. There is security in Ba'lbek, and the frightening events surround the districts of Mt. Lebanon, crushing the fortresses of Syria, and disasters surround its lands. When judgment falls, Aleppo, Damascus, Antioch, Quniya (Iconium), Constantinople, Baghdad, Nablus, the plain of Akko, Egypt, Damietta, Tarsus are blind of vision. The world comes to nothing, whoever leaves it lives, take heed of what has past, O you who come after. All of us will die, praise our Lord who does not die! The number of the date of the king caliph, count it, O reader: (numbers adding up to 660)<sup>46</sup>.<sup>47</sup> [the end of the book]

This text appears to be a partial one, since the fragment picks up in the midst of a story, and there are a number of lacunae within it, noted by the editor. The author of the text was one extensively familiar with both Christian and Muslim apocalyptic themes, and used them to great effect, focusing on the apocalyptic battles occurring in Syria. It seems quite likely that the entirety of this particular selection was composed during the period of the Napoleonic invasion of Palestine (1799), and that the author foresaw the total conquest of the Ottoman empire by the French. However, there is no indication of who the speaker is, nor to whom he is speaking (usually texts of this nature are a conversation between a saint or a holy man and someone asking for wisdom or guidance). The extensive use of Muslim themes begs the question of whether this is indeed an originally Christian composition or a Muslim text converted for Christian use.

Since the latest date in the history book is from approximately 1818, the most likely identification would be with Napoleon (had it been later, Muhammad 'Ali Pasha's son Ibrahim would have been a better fit, since he did nearly conquer the Ottoman empire in 1833-41). The form is typically that of a *jafr* composition, with a great deal of the sense being sacrificed to rhyme, and the divisions of the text beign easily discerned because of the change in rhyming letters (i.e., the end of the text is a rhyme in *ba-kha*; others are in *ya* or in *lam*). No Biblical texts are adduced in this prophecy, and the place names (with the exception of Rum, which was common among Arabic speakers) are all current, unlike many apocalyptic texts which tend to use archaic names.

These two texts illustrate common feelings of Christians in the area of

46 As is not unusual with gematrical formulae, this one is not easily deciphered. The numbers are given in multiples of 10 (30, 40, 30, 30, 60, 30, 60, 80, 50, 70, 40, 50, 10, 10, 20, [100, 200], 10), and here I am assuming that the 100 and the 2001 are actually mistakes for 10, 10, 20 in accordance with the previous pattern (although, frankly, none of the other series seem to follow any pattern, unless the repeated 30, 60, 30, 60 is one). Since this is said to be a date, one can only surmise as to which calendar is being used, since there are no further indications, or why exactly the numbers are presented in this manner.

47 Augustine Tanus al-Khuri, *Mukhtaṣar ta'rikh jabal Lubnan* in Ignace Khury (ed.), *al-Mashriq* 47 (1953), pp. 199-202.



Syria-Lebanon during the late middle period of the Ottoman Empire (entering into its last stage after Napoleon).<sup>48</sup> They are texts which long for liberation from the Muslim rule through violence and slaughter of Muslims, albeit by means of outside forces: first the Russians, and then the French. Both of them are essentially texts using a wide variety of evidential proofs to illustrate the nearness of the apocalypse, and its relevance to the Christians of Syria. The first text has the most immediate end, while the second does not seem to see further than an Armeggedon-type final battle in the area. It is easy enough to point out the Syria-consciousness of the second writer, who insists repeatedly that Lebanon is the place of safety for his readers; while the first text is more for a general audience, and is not so Syria-oriented (fundamentally in this regard it does not matter whether this first text is a forgery or not, since it must have been accepted as valid in the area of Damascus by the Christian population). Looking at these two apocalypses, one can see the restiveness of the Christians at Ottoman rule, and their readiness to support a foreign savior.

48 For a general discussion see Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis (eds.), *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1982).