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ON CONSIDERING EARLY ISLAM AS A MILLENARIAN MOVEMENT

Garry W. Trompf*

Abstract: This article embraces the difficult challenge of considering Islam sociologically as it entered its Golden Age. How does a sociologist characterise and explain one of the most extraordinary instances of socio-military expansionism in all human history? The remarkable speed of the early waves of Islamic conquest that lay the basis of a great, emergent civilisation reflects an intense fervour, hope and expectation of a Divinely guided finale. One well-used sociological paradigm that may best satisfy the description and quality of the case is that of the 'millenarian' or 'chiliastic' movement, and this article tests the viability of such a claim.

Keywords: *Islam*, *sociology*, *conquest*, *end-times*, *millenarianism*, *chiliasm*, *Qur'an*, *Muhammad*

INTRODUCTION

A momentous preface to the so-called Golden Age of Islam was the extraordinary Arab conquests (634–*ca*. 750 CE), which first established the classic geographical compass of the Islamic world, between Iberia and India, the Caspian and North Africa. This highly complex phenomenon involved strong collective motivations responding to the messages of the Qur'an and prophet-leadership of Muhammad. What follows is a heuristic attempt to conceive these initial intensities and consequent expansiveness under the sociological category "millenarian," entailing acute awareness of being a participant in events at the end of the known order. This article contributes to the special issue's focus on the *Sociology of the Islamic Golden Age* by re-examining the tremendous upheaval that took Islam into many new lands outside Arabia and provided new bases for a distinctive trans-cultural Islamic civilisation to emerge in its Golden Age.

THEORETICAL PRELIMINARIES

The conceptual invention of the "millenarian movement," or revolutionary collective agitations arising from expectations of the End-time, is one of the most impressive developments of late modern sociology. Various formulations of it have arisen within the sociology of religion, in particular, and many other disciplines – history, anthropology, political

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science, the study of religion, and theology. Consequently, the focus on millenarian, apocalyptic, messianic and eschatologically oriented social activities has attracted lively interdisciplinary scholarship.[1] Nowadays, the majority of related literature has concentrated on beliefs about the Last Times in new religious movements. However, a cluster of historians, interestingly most of Jewish origin, have made a small industry researching early modern millenarist outbursts in Europe and colonial America in the context of the Reformation conflict – especially Norman Cohn, David Katz and Richard Popkin. This apparently is due to the largest messianic movement ever to affect Jewry, Sabbateanism, occurring in that period.[2] Israeli sociologist Yonina Talmon (1923–1966) produced the most durable *definition* of "Millenarian Movements" that accounts for "heightened expectations about the end of the known order," whether in ancient, mediaeval or later times and in varied cultural settings. On her account, these movements' members "expect imminent, total, ultimate, this-worldly collective salvation."[3] The question posed in this article is whether early Islam, or the foundational religion (*ad-dīn*) of myriad Muslim followers (Q. 5:3),[4] falls under this challengingly wielded sociological category. After all, the social phenomenon of Islam erupted into history based on urgent prophetism embodied in the Qur'an, with many evocations about coming Divine judgement redolent of Biblical apocalyptic messages.[5]

Sociologists have become used to reading the term millenarian (millennial/millenarist) typologically, staring down any purist objection that the usage should be strictly tied to the Biblical idea of the Millennium. Thus, the beginning of the "thousand-year reign of Christ and the martyrs" in the Christian Apocalypse[6] stands in today's scientific literature for any fiercely anticipated foreshadowing of an extraordinary new order (a "new heaven and a new earth"[7]) within various cultural settings.[8] Social-scientific scholarship in German on *Chiliasmu*s carries the same general purport of imminence, the evoking of the original New Testament Greek idiom χίλιοι for a 'thousand'[9] somehow intensifying a high expectation now stressed by

1 Garry Trompf, ed., *Cargo Cults and Millenarian Movements: Transoceanic Comparisons of New Religious Movements*, Religion and Society 29 (Mouton De Gruyter, 1990); Richard Landes, ed., *Encyclopedia of Millennialism and Millennial Movements: 1* (Routledge, 2000); Catherine Wessinger, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Millennialism* (Oxford University Press, 2011); Tristan Sturm and Andrew Crome, eds., *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Apocalypticism and Millennialism* (Bloomsbury, 2025).

2 Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages* (Oxford University Press, 1970); David S. Katz and Richard H. Popkin, *Messianic Revolution: Radical Religious Politics to the End of the Second Millennium* (Hill & Wang, 1999); Gershom Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah, 1626–1676*, trans. R. J. Zwi Werblowsky (Princeton University Press, 1973).

3 Yonina Talmon, "Millenarian Movements," *Archives Européennes de Sociologie* 7 (1966): 159; Yonina Talmon, "The Pursuit of the Millennium: The Relation between Religions and Social Change," *Archives Européennes de Sociologie* 3 (1962).

4 Cf. Wilfred Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion: A New Approach to the Religious Traditions of Mankind* (Mentor, 1964), 75–108.

5 Francis Peters, *Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: The Classical Texts and their Interpretation* (Princeton University Press, 1990), esp. 1169–92.

6 Rev. 20:4b, 6b; cf. vv. 1–3, 7, 12.

7 Rev. 21:1.

8 For example, Kenelm Burridge, *New Heaven, New Earth: A Study of Millenarian Activities* (Blackwell, 1970).

9 From Rev. 20:1–7.

modern theorists.[10] Significantly, the best candidate for "the first millenarian movement" is the Jewish Essene-related sectarians desperately anticipating the Divine overthrow of the Roman yoke in Jesus' time. They expressed the roundedness of the world's final and total resolution in terms of 'thousands.'[11] They were ascetic desert-dwellers who believed themselves chosen to engage in the last great battle as the victorious "sons of Light,"[12] who shall "live for a thousand generations"[13] after God triumphs in the last "Day of Vengeance," when the Divine Messianic "Hero" (*gibor*) bends his bow," and "the everlasting gates are opened to let war-weapons of gold and silver" be given out by (soldier-)angels to the resurrected elect.[14] The yearned-for Jewish Messianic Age in Late Antiquity was to see the earth yielding its riches "ten-thousandfold," especially its archetypal "vines" of fecundity.[15] The anticipated Time would arrive as an endless, uncountable "thousand (Old Slav. *tysǫšti*) of years," distinct from the millennia before it.[16] The application of the epithets chiliastic or millenarian movement can appear less convincing, then, when located by modern scholars outside or well before a Jewish/Christian context, if it is maintained to apply, for instance, in the much more ancient religious revolution in Egypt under Ikhnaton in the 1360–40s BCE.[17] By contrast, for Islam, a tradition so familially and genealogically related to Judaism and Christianity, talk of its millennial qualities would seem less unexpected or jarring.[18] When Muhammad announces the momentous choice between happiness and destruction in his apocalyptically charged recitations, well-known motifs of the End-times abound. As the records of everyone's lifework are made manifest in Allah's heavenly "Scrolls (*Al-Zubur*)," the sky splits or is stripped away, the pit of hell blazes and its chains encase, Gog and Magog rise to battle with God, and the righteous see paradisiacal beauties.[19]

Now, it is not as if "millenarian movements" from within the history of Islam have been neglected. Take Mahdism in the crisis under British colonialism in the Sudan (1884–1885),[20] for example, or the Nation of Islam under Elijah Muhammad and Louis Farrakhan in the United States (1930–).[21] During the Muslim Golden Age, activity surrounding the Fatimid Shi'a

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10 For example, Wilhelm Mühlmann, ed., *Chiliasmus und Nativismus: Studien zur Psychologie, Soziologie und historischen Kasuistik der Umsturz-bewegungen* [Chiliasm and Nativism, Studies in the Psychology, Sociology and Historical Case-by-case Analysis of Revolutionary Movements], Studien zur Soziologie der Revolution 1 (Dietrich Reimer, 1964).

11 Garry Trompf, "When was the First Millenarian Movement? Qumran and the Implications of Historical Sociology," in *The Sum of our Choices; Essays in Honour of Eric J. Sharpe*, ed. Arvind Sharma, McGill Studies in Religion 4 (Scholars Press, 1996), 247.

12 Among the Dead Sea Scrolls they produced, see War Scroll: 1QM 1.

13 The Damascus Document also from the Dead Sea Scrolls: 4QD/CD 8:44–45.

14 1QM 12:5, 8–9; 16:32.

15 2 Baruch 29:5–6.

16 2 Enoch 33:1–2 [Old Slavonic]; cf. [Babyl. Talm.] Sanhed, 97a.

17 Richard Landes, *Heaven on Earth: The Varieties of Millennial Experience* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 149–84.

18 Cf. John Hall, *Apocalypse: From Antiquity to the Empire of Modernity* (Polity, 2009).

19 For example, Q. 21:96–105; 47; 54:48, 52, 54; 69:25–26, 30–32, 81:10–13; 83:9, 1; 84:1–7; cf. Rev. 20:1–2, 6, 8–9, 11b, 12, 15; Ezek 38–39.

20 Esp. Carl Brown, "The Sudanese Mahdiya," in *Protest and Power in Black Africa*, ed. Robert Rotberg and Ali Mazrui (Oxford University Press, 1970).

21 Dennis Walker, "Louis Farrakhan and America's 'Nation of Islam': Black Millenarianism and Micronationalism in the U.S. Northeast," in *Islands and Enclaves: Nationalisms and Separatist Pressures*

Caliphate of Al-Ḥākim bi-Amr Allah (996–1021) and his alleged divination around Jesus' millennium year has been commonly cited for its chiliastic intensity and influence.[22] In addition, it is not as if "Islam" (as a Great Tradition) has not been given entries in handbooks of millenarianism;[23] however, this 'ism' (*-ismus*, *-isme* etc.) can be considered a broad matrix of belief and action that receives some expression in all major religions, including "apocalyptic movements" within Islamic history.[24] It is crucial to draw a working distinction between the millennium, millenarianism etc. as commonly shared *ideas* and these same ideas being taken up and strongly voiced in *social movements*.[25] When addressing the general collective concept of "early Islam as a millenarian movement," one must proceed with caution because relevant ideas detectable in foundational (particularly Qur'anic) texts of and about Islam may not reflect or correspond precisely with what emerged in social phenomena. Actually, it is a relief (one might say a blessing) that the acclaimed Divine revelations of the Qur'an can be disconnected from the multiple actions of Muslims responding to it, especially as I will be mainly discussing what (according to Muslim tradition) happened *after* the death of Muhammad (632) and only when the "coming down" of its holy book receives his last recitation (whether at Q. 2:281 or 5:3). Perhaps one need not have anxiety over such matters, but a reduction of pristine Islam, including its revelation, into a (mere) social-scientific construct called a "millenarian movement" would be insensitive, if not impertinent. Of course, nowadays, Muslim sociologists are not so hesitant about stating the obvious that foundational Islam was a "social movement,"[26] but our challenge here is how to apply sociological categories more specifically.

Earliest Islam as a *response* to its revelation, however, is a matter for free historical investigation of human agency, when the "rightly guided" are needed amid undesired deviations predicted by the Prophet,[27] and a quest for human explanations of complex events becomes defensible and much less encumbered by consensus dogmatic principle. We must make a fundamental observation (and reiteration) about the Qur'an, though, to clarify what is being argued. In all its sublimity, its uncanny capacity to rise above all temporal contingency and convey spiritual depths in whatever corner it is recited, the Qur'an carries a message of

in Island and Littoral Contexts, ed. Garry Trompf (Sterling, 1993); Dennis Walker, *Islam and the Search for African-American Nationhood: Elijah Muhammad, Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam* (Clarity, 2005), 338–58.

22 For example, Ess, Josef van. *Chiliastische Erwartungen und die Versuchung der Göttlichkeit: Der Kalif al-Hâkim (386-411 H.)* [Chiliastic Expectations and the Search for Divinity: The Caliph Al-Hākim] (Carl Winter, 1977); cf. Shaukat Ali, *Millenarian and Messianic Tendencies in Islamic History* (United, 1993).

23 For example, Saïd Arjomand, "Islamic Apocalypticism in the Classical Period," in *The Encyclopaedia of Apocalypticism*, vol. 2, *Apocalypticism in Western History and Culture*, ed. Bernard McGinn (Continuum International, 1998) [revised for *The Continuum History of Apocalypticism*, ed. Bernard McGinn, John Collins and Stephen Stein (Continuum, 2003)]; Richard Landes, "Islam," in *Encyclopedia of Millennialism and Millennial Movements:* 1, ed. Richard Landes (Routledge, 2000); David Cook, "Islamic," in *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Apocalypticism and Millennialism*, ed. Tristan Sturm and Andrew Crome (Bloomsbury, 2025).

24 See David Cook, "Early Islamic and Classical Sunni and Shi'ite Apocalyptic Movements," in *The Oxford Handbook of Millennialism*, ed. Catherine Wessinger (Oxford University Press, 2011).

25 Trompf, *Cargo Cults and Millenarian Movements*, 2–5; Garry Trompf, "Millenarism: History, Sociology and Cross-Cultural Analysis," *Journal of Religious History* 24, no. 1 (2000): 106.

26 For example, Ahmed Afzaal, "The Origin of Islam as a Social Movement," *Islamic Studies* 42, no. 2 (2003).

27 For example, *ahadith* [hereafter H] Al- Tirmidhi, in An-Nawawi, *Riyad as-Salihin.* [Bk.] 28 [sect.] 40.

intense urgency concerning Allah's pending Day of Judgment (typically *Yawm ad-din*) (invoked 270 times) as well as the real threat of Hell (around 245 times), often as *Jahannam* (*Gehenna*) or *al-Nar* (the Fire) (Q. 9:35, 5:72). Allah commands the world of *Jāhilliyah* (of "barbarism," idolatry, injustice, unbelief) to change forever (Q. 3:154, 5:50, 48:26).

THE MILLENNIALIST TONE AND EARLY ISLAMIC DISCOURSE

In Qur'anic language, turning back (*tawwab*) to God brings forgiveness, averting His punishment that would otherwise be carried out by the angels (lit. "unseen soldiers sent down") against unbelieving opponents (*kuffaar*) (esp. Q. 9:26–27), such as in 630 CE, when Muhammad's forces fought the crucial battle of Hunayn after the takeover of Mecca and shortly before they expected to face the full might of the Byzantines at Tabuk.[28] Familiar apocalyptic language jumps out: the Hour (mainly *as-sa'ah*) has come near (Q. 54:1; cf. Rom 13:11) but will arrive unexpectedly (Q. 47:18, 43:66, 22:55; cf. Matt. 24:44); "the Trumpet will be blown" announcing the Day of Resurrection (Q. 39:67–68; cf. 1 Thess 4:16; 1 Cor 15:52);[29] neglectful women will run out of needful lamp-lights on "the Day" (Q. 57:13; cf. Matt 25:8); the Beast (*al-dabba*) comes before the End (Q. 27:82–84; cf. Rev 13; 16–17); and if among Christians there was talk of Antichrist (1 John 2:18), the equivalent figure in Islam soon appeared, *ca* 650, as "the False Messiah" (*al Masīḥ da Dajjal*).[30] In the early development of "mainstream" Islamic eschatology, Jesus, as the apocalyptically charged messiah (*al-Masīḥ*) (Q. 4:172) and sign of the Hour (Q. 43:61), has to destroy his opposite in Jerusalem[31] (some say after descending at Damascus); and the cosmic actions of Moses, Jesus and even Mary follow in the wake of al-Mahdī ("the Guided") who eliminates injustice and evil in the "Last Days."[32]

Out of the Qur'an, on this reading, there arose the collective inference that the new (largely Arab) "Believers" (*al-Mu'minūn*) were involved in a universally significant purification and mission at the approach of the End. There was no terminology of millennium then, yet *ahadith* record that for Muhammad, the Hour was as close as 100 years or a lifetime.[33] However, weaker traditions have it that he expected his movement to last at least 500 years. For him, the unknown Hour would come after great and pending internal conflict and socio-environmental anomalies.[34] In any case, the intensity and sense of immediacy of the followers' role in some "great cosmically rectifying" eruption was undeniable at classical Islam's inception, and scholars need to face it as a sociological datum. The universalist aspect was at first sporadic but then was increasingly affected by the penetrating influences of surrounding socio-religious

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28 Ibn Isaq, *Sirat* [ed. Guillaume], 840–69, 894–904.
29 See John Penrice, *A Dictionary and Glossary of the Kor-an* (Libraires de Liban, 1990 [1873]), 55.
30 H Nawawi, *Riyad*, 33.229.
31 Esp. Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad* [ed. al-Khattab], 434-5.
32 For example, Victor Danner, "The Last Days in Judaism, Christianity and Islam," in *Fragments of Infinity: Essays in Religion and Philosophy*, ed. Arvind Sharma (Prism, 1991), 73–75.
33 H Al-Mawsali, Abu Ya'la, *al-Musnad* [ed. Asad], [no.] 2758; with Bukhāri, *Al-Sahīh* [ed. Khan et al.] [Bk] 78.193 [no. 6167].
34 For example, H Bukhāri, 92.68 [7275]; cf. 88.172–250 [7048–7360; esp. 7128].

blocks who had minority presences within the Arabian Peninsula and had invested in beliefs with millenarian connections in Muhammad's time – the Jews looking to the Messiah, Christians to the Second Coming, and Zoroastrians to the Saoshyant (End-time Saviour) toward the end of millennial ages.[35] These anticipatory expectancies enabled the early Muslims to picture themselves acting within a final drama over the whole earth, though in sociological terms we are best to talk of an early "millenarian-type impetus" rather than one focused on a hoped-for messianic deliverer.[36]

ISLAMIC CONQUESTS

We have come to the extraordinary phenomenon of Islamic conquest and expansion: from 634, in the space of barely 15 years, the Muslim armies under Muhammad's successors (the Rashidun/Umayyad Caliphs) unified Arabia, overtook the eastern edges of the Byzantine Empire (from Edessa through the Levant to North Africa), and absorbed Sasanian Persia under their sway. No sensible scholar would say this was not surprising in its persisting force, with Islamic territories expanding to reach Nîmes (southern France) to the west and Kabul to the east by 750.[37] All this the more unexpected because these initial military successes went on despite three civil wars (*fitan*) during 656–661, 680–692, 744–747, with the first beginning the Sunni/Shi'ite division and the third heralding the serious Caliphate change by 750 (Umayyad to the rather 'anti-Arab' Abbasids) in the development of Islam's so-named Golden Age.[38] Now, the sociologies of war and conquest are special sub-fields, and it is well known that a founder-figure in sociology, Max Weber (1864–1920), considered Islam to have begun and continued long enough as a "warrior religion,"[39] and others, using Weberian theory of charisma, have treated Muhammad as Islam's "initial charismatic leader."[40] But the historical record holds a plethora of warriorhood religions, tribal and super-tribal, requiring comparative analysis and an assessment of leadership patterns,[41] although one would be hard pressed to find a ready parallel to the suddenly expansive Arab case.

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35 Cf. [Babyl. Talmd]: Sanhed 98a–99a; *Bet ha-Midrash* [ed. Jellinek] 78–82; Pseudo-Methodius, *Apoc*. 11; Yasht [Mid.-Pers.] 19; Zand i Vahman Yasht 3; cf. Jacobus, *Doctrina* [ed. Bonwetsch], 85–86. Cf. also Garry Trompf, *The Idea of Historical Recurrence in Western Thought*, vol. 1: *From Antiquity to the Reformation* (University of California Press, 1979), 202–4, 207.

36 Fred Donner, "La Question du messianisme en Islam primitif" [The Question of Messianism in Primitive Islam], *Revue des Mondes Musulman et de la Méditerranée* 91–94 (2000).

37 Francesco Gabrieli, *Muhammad and the Conquests of Islam*, trans. Virginia Luling and Rosamund Linell (Wiedenfeld and Nicolson, 1968), 103–223.

38 Hasan Balyuzi, *Muhammad and the Course of Islam.* (George Ronald, 1976), 190–220; Heather Keaney, *Medieval Islamic History: Remembering Rebellion*, Routledge Research in Medieval Studies 5 (Routledge, 2013), 21-46.

39 Bryan Turner, *Weber and Islam*, International Library of Sociology (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974); cf. Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, ed. Günther Roth and Claus Wittich (University of California Press, 1978 [1921]), 574–75.

40 For example, Hamid Dabashi, *Authority in Islam: From the Rise of Muhammad to the Establishment of the Umayyads* (Routledge, 2017); cf. Weber, Max. *The Sociology of Religion*, trans. Ephraim Fischoff (Beacon, 1963 [1922]), esp. 25–32, 46–47, 54.

41 Garry Trompf, "Reflections on Indigeneity and Religion," in *Religious Categories and the Construction of the Indigenous*, ed. Christopher Hartney and Daniel Tower, Supplements to Method and Theory in the Study of Religion 7 (Brill, 2017).

The famed Alexander created an empire from Macedonia to Trans-Oxiania in 13 years (336–323 BCE),[42] in part, the late source Plutarch alleges, on a mission to plant Hellenic institutions abroad.[43] The Romans held off the Carthaginian foe and founded their empire "in less than 50 years," ostensibly on the basis of sound political institutions.[44] The Gothic and other so-called barbarian peoples made occasional speedy inroads into the Roman orbit during the centuries before Islam; and at the end of the Muslim Golden Age, the first Mongol invasion achieved brutal wreckage and wide superficial control in 75 years. The Arab successes have not unfairly been attributed to weaknesses left by an exhaustingly prolonged Byzantine–Sasanid conflict (602–628), to inner Byzantine religious (especially Orthodox/ Monophysite) differences, and to the mistreatment and underpaying of Ghassanid defenders on the Roman imperial buffers of northwest Arabia.[45] It is also worth asking what a suddenly united agglomerate of tribes does when there is no one to fight. Yet the rapidity, quality and purpose of early militant Islam retains its distinctness and dedication-based pointers to victory. Even in terms of the three largest civilisational shifts in history – the Indo-European spread, Islam, and Western colonialism – the second one is quickest, atmospherically Semitic, unencumbered by caution and protocol, and powerfully fusing religious and conquering spirit by claiming to struggle for and under the one true God.[46] The special phenomenology of post-Qur'anic conquests beckons a proper sociological inquest.

One controversial accounting, from the 1970s, has early Islam as a fundamentally irredentist movement; that is, one focused on restoring the rightful children of Abraham, or the true heirs of the Abrahamic patrimony, the descendants of Ishmael, Abraham's first son through his Egyptian maidservant Hagar (Gen. 16, 21; cf. Ps. 83:6) and a prophet in the Qur'an (2:125–127, 3:67–68, 19:54). According to this theory, the Ishmaelite expansion gets bound up with the Jewish messianic hope of restoring Judaic values – including the commandments given Abraham to circumcise and sacrifice – and of rebuilding the Temple of Jerusalem after colonial power is removed from its domain, these as eschatological events and a "returning to a true home."[47] Now, no one should ignore the common overlap between "millennial and irredentist hope" (as in Africanist Ethiopianism or Melanesian cargo cultist dreams of some lost *Heimat* of perfect reciprocity).[48] The trouble is, does the so-called "Hagarist" theory really fit the case?

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42 Arrian, *Anabasis Alexandri* vii.

43 *De Alex. Magni fortuna aut virtute* 328C–329H.

44 For example, Polybius, *Historiae* I, i,5-6; cf. VI, ii, 8; iii, 4; v, 2.

45 James Howard-Johnston, "Heraclius' Persian Campaigns and the Revival of the Eastern Roman Empire, 622–630," in *Late Antiquity on the Eve of Islam*, ed. Averil Cameron, The Formation of the Classical Islamic World 1 (Ashgate, 2013) (Byzantine/Sasanid conflict); Garry Trompf, *Early Christian Historiography: Narratives of Retribution* (Equinox, 2007), 331–32 (religious tensions); Philip Wood, *'We Have no King but Christ': Christian Political Thought in Greater Syria on the Eve of the Arab Conquest (c. 480–595)*, Oxford Studies in Byzantium 8 (Oxford University Press, 2010), 253–55, 259 (Ghassanids).

46 Garry Trompf, "Three Great Eruptions of History" (lecture presented at the book launch of *Islamic Revivalism* by Dr Jan Ali, University of Western Sydney, March 30, 2012).

47 Crone, Patricia and Michael Cook. *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge University Press, 1977), 5, 12–13, 19.

48 George Shepperson, "Ethiopianism and African Nationalism," *Phylon* 14, no. 1 (1953); Theodore Ahrens, *Unterwegs nach der verlorenen Heimat: Studien zur Identitätsproblematik in Melanesien* [On the Way to

Certainly, virtually all the main human characters evoked in the Qur'an belong within the traditional Biblical sphere of "the Holy Land" (*al-Muqaddasah*) or in Arabia; and there is enough inspiration for the earliest Muslims from the challenge to Moses "not to turn back" from taking "possession of that which He had not given anyone among the worlds," and fight against "people of tyrannical strength" (Q. 5:20–26 [Mehri trans.]). Entry into "the city" (Jerusalem) will bring forgiveness of sins (Q. 7:160–161). According to traditional Biblical picturing, a new Jerusalem is the last focal point of time for all peoples.[49] It is the embodiment of true riches as against the perverted coming and going of cargoes in doomed "Babylon" (Rev. 18:9–18) and divested of all idolaters and evildoers (21:8). The Qur'anic *sura* earlier named "The Children of Israel," connects their future united "gathering" (*lafīfan*) in "the Land" with "the appointment of the final things" (ٱلْأَخِرَةِ وَعْدُ) (Q. 17:104), warning what retribution befell early disbelieving peoples since Noah (17:17, 59) and how temptations of the Devil (*Iblis*) to be "partners in the wealth" of the deluded bring adverse recompense, not true bounty (17:63–70). Early *ahadith* connect this *sura* with Muhammad's vision of the highest heavens, where he finds Abraham above Jesus and Moses, after he has been spiritually transported to Jerusalem, toward which he oriented his prayers as he established protection for his earliest followers (under 12 leaders).[50] Since there is no holier Islamic site outside Arabia, prayers made from there were made as if from heaven.[51] It is significant that many sources, including the earliest known commentary on the Qur'an, the *tafsir* of Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (*flor*. 740–50s), place the Day of Resurrection and Judgment at Jerusalem, involving the serried ranks of angels and the last Trumpet blast, at *Madīnat al-Quds* (the Holy City).[52]

The conceptual links between the holy places in Arabia and the nearby Bible Land were undoubtedly crucial for the momentum and sense of Divine legitimacy of the expansionist Muslim forces, especially through replacing the great powers of Byzantium and Persia that competed over apocalyptic roles in the region while also appropriating Jewish-based anti-imperialist energies there.[53] But in early Islamic memory, there were definite qualifications to any ongoing rapprochement with Jewry. Admittedly, among the tightest treaties of brotherhood in history to that point was between the early followers of Muhammad and the Jewish tribes at Yathrib (Medina) (622), yet Jews were seriously involved in the breach of that covenant, and after two expulsions, a retributive massacre resulted on the traitors at Banu Qurayza (627).[54] The death of Muhammad by poisoning was also ascribed to a Jewess;[55] and if in the longer run

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the Lost Homeland: Studies in Identity Problematic in Melanesia], Erlanger Monographien aus Mission und Ökumene 4 (Verlag der Ev[angelisch]-Luth[erischen] Mission, 1985).

49 For example, Isa 60; Ezek. 41–48; [Dead Sea Scroll] 11QT; Rev 21:1–6, 11–27.

50 See esp. *Sirat* 263–71, 294, 297.

51 Ibn al-Faqīh, *Al-Buldan* [ed. De Goeje], 94–95.

52 David Zucker and Jane Smith, "Jerusalem, the Sacred City: Perspectives from Judaism and Islam," J*ournal of Ecumenical Studies* 32, no. 2 (1995): 253–55.

53 Stephen Shoemaker, *The Apocalypse of Empire: Imperial Eschatology in Late Antiquity and Early Islam* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 111–15; Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity, AD 150–750* (Thames and Hudson, 1971), 165–70.

54 Qur'an 33:9–10, 33:26–27, 33:60–61; *Sirat* 341–6, 351–409; H Bukhāri 64: 161–63 [4117–9]; Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir* 33:26 [ed. Mubarakpuri, vol. 7, 667–9].

55 *Sirat* 764–5.

the collective massacre of the Jews was projected as an End-time event,[56] that only reflects Qur'anic warnings of everlasting punishment befalling "the many of them allying themselves to disbelievers."[57] It is more to the point that, as the messiness of intertribal conflict between the Arabs dissipated during and after Muhammad's death, in 630–633,[58] the *purpose* of Islam quickly clarified at the indigenous centre of Mecca. Marginalised, often inferiorised, even humiliated, militarily experienced Arab groups quickly realised their powerful agency in a wider world of cosmic associations prepared for them in their holy book and the traditions of their prophet (*sunnah*).

THE APOCALYPTIC/MILLENARIAN MOVEMENT

It is fair to conclude that a hiatus occurred between the years just before the death of the Prophet and the immediate successorship by his father-in-law Abu Bakr, as if practical organisation of the gains made in uniting the Arab tribes took priority over religious fervour, or that at least the collective focus was on local affairs. The atmosphere was rather "nativist," a basking in a "missing *Heimat* glory" that had been previously blocked, especially by Ethiopian control of Yemen to the south and by the Byzantine province of Arabia Petraea to the northwest (a continual Byzantine/Sasanid battlefield until the barefoot, long-haired and semi-naked "Bedouin" Muslim forces broke through).[59] Trading became less restricted in both directions. Nativism and millenarism in social study can be complementary,[60] yet the lasting impression of these turning point years is, despite the mysterious apocalyptic tenor in their one great Scripture, the early Muslims were laying the bases for firm alliances, military tactics, currency usage, trade dominance, common ritual life and legal ethics.[61] This goes some way to explaining why an armload of scholars over the past two centuries concentrate on Muhammad as a strategist, prophet of social justice, political reformer, and even "reluctant warrior,"[62] as if one should never know that the impending judgment of the Hour is "ranked

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56 For example, Abu Huraira, apud *Sahih* Muslim 54, 103 [2922].

57 Qur'an 5:80.

58 See Stephen Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet: The End of Muhammad's Life and the Beginnings of Islam* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

59 Hermann von Wissmann, *Die Geschichte von Saba' II: Das Grossreich der Sabäer bis zu seinem Ende im frühen 4. Jh. v. Chr.*, ed. Walter W. Müller, Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse, Sitzungsberichte 402 (Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1982); Patricia Crone, "What did the Bedouin of the Arab Conquests Look Like?" in *Islam, the Ancient Near East and Varieties of Godlessness: Collected Essays*, by Patricia Crone, ed. Hanna Siurua (Brill, 2016), esp. 1–3.

60 Ralph Linton, "Nativistic Movements," *American Anthropologist* 45 (1943).

61 See, for example, Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad, Prophet and Statesman* (Oxford University Press 1961), 212–28 (alliances); David Nicolle, "Arms of the Umayyad Era: Military Technology, in a Time of Change." In *War and Society in the Eastern Mediterranean, 7th to the 15th Centuries*, ed. Yaacov Levi, The Medieval Mediterranean: Peoples, Economies and Cultures, 400-1453 9 (Brill, 1996) (tactics); Stefan Nebehay, "Muslimische Münzen aus dem Jemen" [Muslim Money from Yemen], in *Jemen: Im Land der Konigin von Saba*, ed. Alfred Janata, Herbert Karner and Renate Meissner (Museum für Völkerkunde, 1989), 112 (coinage); Philip Curtin, *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History* (Cambridge University Press, 1985), 106–9 (trade); Alfred Guillaume, *Islam* (Penguin, 1956), 66–74 (ritual); Wael Hallaq, *The Origins and Evolution of Islamic Law*, Themes in Islamic Law 1 (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 29–56 (law).

62 For example, Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca* (Clarendon Press 1953); Francis Peters, *Muhammad and the Origins of Islam* (SUNY, 1994), 152–56 (quotation); Asma Afsaruddin, *The First*

after the unity of God as the second great doctrine of Islam"[63] or "the second most prominent theme of the Qur'an which Muhammad relayed."[64] That relative prepossession simply does not work well sociologically in explaining the explosive events that followed. What a social–psychological difference to be able to occupy *in tense actuality* the Holy Land, once-pharaonic Egypt, Syria, and Persia!

However, this does not downplay the Jewish and Christian influences at Islam's incipience – some Jews tried to create a holy land in Arabia and some strands of Semitic Christianity that accepted Jesus' messiahship without his divinity had apocalyptic hopes.[65] Mandaeans were also known, presumably on the northern or Mesopotamian edges of the peninsula and at a time when their growth was so extensive they were called the third "People of the Book" (Q. 2:62, 5:69) – the Sabeans (or followers of John the Baptist).[66] The "anti-imperialist egalitarian" impetus of the Mazdakite refugees in northern Arabia presented new possibilities arising from among the so-called "fire-worshipper" Zoroastrians of Persia.[67] In addition, there is the issue of extra-Arab contribution to the *written* textualisation and *grammatical* "pointilism" of the Qur'an, up to Uthman's Caliphate or *ca*. 650, *en route* to its scriptal standardisation under Caliph ʿAbd al-Malik (690s).[68] My position does not exclude the scholarly right to search out and date the earliest *inscribed texts* of the Qur'an, which I understand first developed out of oral reception and effective memorisation for which Semitic peoples are famed. Such research will reveal early Islamic interaction with more literate cultures,[69] and the kinds of connections just introduced swayed the conquest-ready Arab-*Mu'minūn* forces that they would find support outside Arabia and that their mission was universal. They were not collectively of a mind to "start a new religion among the other religions," as our unthinking contemporary presumptions can dispose us to deduce: they were suddenly proud of their newly established "place in the

Muslims: History and Memory (Oneworld, 2008); Omid Safi, *Memories of Muhammad: Why the Prophet Matters* (HarperCollins, 2009), 33, 97–101, 115, 123; Mahan Mirza, "Muhammad," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Politics and Islam*, ed. Emad El-Din Shahin (Oxford University Press, 2014), 88, 91; with Al-Tabari, *Tārīkh al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk* [History of the Prophets and Kings], ed. and trans. Montgomery Watt and Michael McDonald (SUNY, 1988, vol. 6 for background).

63 Richard Bell, *Introduction to the Qur'ān*, University of Edinburgh Publications, Language and Literature 6 (Edinburgh University Press, 1953), 155.

64 Stephen Shoemaker, "'The Reign of God has Come!' Eschatology and Empire in Late Antiquity and Early Islam," *Arabica* 61 (2014): 520.

65 Hamilton Gibb, "Pre-Islamic Monotheism in Arabia," *Harvard Theological Review* 55 (1962) (monotheisms); Trompf, "When was the First Millenarian Movement?" 252, 263; Kamal Salibi, *The Bible came from Arabia* (Jonathan Cape, 1985) (re-creating Israel); Hans-Joachim Schoeps, "Ebionitische Apokalyptik im Neuen Testament" [Ebionite Apocalyptic in the New Testament], *Zeitschrift für Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche* 51 (1960), 101–2; Martiniano Roncaglia, "Élements Ebionites et Elkésaïtes dans le Coran" [Ebionite and Elkasite Elements on the Qur'an], *Proche-Orient-Chrétie*n 21 (1971) (Ebionites on Jesus only a human messiah).

66 Brikha Nasoraia, "Probing the Relationships between Mandaeans (the Followers of John the Baptist), Early Christians, and Manichaeans," in *Patristics: Essays from Australia*, ed. Garry Trompf (MDPI, 2025), 231–42 (influence); Daniel Chwolsohn, *Die Ssabier und der Ssabismus* [The Sabeans and Sabeanism], vol. 1: *Die Entwicklung der Begriffe Ssaber und Ssabismus etc*. (Kaiserliche Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1856), vol. 1, 100–38 (Sabeans as Mandaeans).

67 Milad Milani, *Sufism in the Secret History of Persia*, Gnostica 8 (Acumen, 2013), 103–89.

68 Sheila Blair, *Islamic Calligraphy* (Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 79–81.

69 Cf. Ahmad Shboul, *Al-Mas'ūdī and his World: A Muslim Humanist and his Interest in Non-Muslims* (Ithaca, 1979); Milani, *Sufism*, 166–69.

sun" (as that old neglected conceit has it),[70] but now as a Divinely ordained unity under one God to bear and fervently impress his Message (revealed through *RasūlAllah*) to the whole world. They could do this with any group of people – from isolated Hanifs even to Manichaeans – who came to share their monotheistic stringency along the way (e.g., Q. 3:64, 5:82) in a general impulse as "believers" without as yet in need of a confessionalist identity as "Muslims."[71]

The spectacular outward reach, as Fred Donner argues, was a *second phase* of earliest Islam and highly relevant to our social analysis. Basically, concurring with his approach, American Professor Stephen Shoemaker sums up Donner's view and underscores the point that the Muslim conquerors' vision inextricably bound religious mission with political action:

> Their goal was not so much to acquire earthly might and glory but rather to attain individual and collective salvation in the swiftly approaching judgment of the Hour. In Muhammad God had raised up one final prophet to warn of the impending last day, and it was thus imperative to spread his message of pious submission to God's commandments as quickly as possible to as many people as possible, by expanding this inter-confessional movement to include righteous members from the other monotheist communities of the late ancient Near East. Likewise the Believers were committed to struggle against those who were unbelievers and the wicked, in order to eradicate sinfulness from the earth and to establish obedience to God's law in advance of the imminent judgment through the dominion of their faithful polity.[72]

In the present re-construal, in terms of the sociology of millennialism, and by redeploying Talmon's guiding vocabulary, I contend that powerfully motivated *Mu'minūn* felt they were *participating within*, in their group-imaging *bringing about*, Allah's eschatological work of "imminent, total, ultimate, this-worldly collective salvation."[73] The End-time was unfolding before their eyes and with their heightened heartbeats in the forging and exponential spread of their righteous community. They were in a movement the likes and dimensions of which seemed to them Divinely guided towards some great finale beyond just victory: we can fairly ask if it was ever again to be successfully mimicked by any doughty and committed bonds of Saracens or Crusaders. Thus, while the multitude of intricacies is lost in time, the societal imprint is detectably intense, and enough evidence mounts for the handy social-scientific category of "millenarian" to be considered. Its apparent audacity leads into the work of building a new order, a shared-enough driving impetus for creating the Golden Age of Islam.

It is perhaps exaggerating to insist (in the interest of studies in comparative religion) that the Believers understood they were bringing in the Kingdom of God, in a "final struggle" to "purge the sinful world."[74] The language of Allah's everlasting rule or command (*amr*)

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70 Richard Coke, *The Arab's Place in the Sun* (Butterworth 1929), esp. 278; Trompf, "Reflections on Indigeneity and Religion," 27.

71 Fred Donner, "From Believers to Muslims: Confessional Self-identity in the Early Islamic Community," *Al-Abḥāth* 50–51 (2002–3).

72 Fred Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam* (Belknap, 2011), 85–89; summed up by Shoemaker, "The Reign of God has Come!" 529.

73 Talmon, "Millenarian Movements," 159.

74 Ibid., 167. Also see Shoemaker, "The Reign of God has Come!" 514, 517.

(Q. 10:25, 11:48, 16:1) or Kingly dominion (*mulk*) over all (Q. 57, 67:1), however, is part of the "applied theophany" we are considering,[75] and even thought to presage the coming of Divine "Empire."[76] Certainly, one can no longer pretend that the collectively apprehended "struggle for Allah" – the Qur'an calls it *jihād* some 90 times – was overwhelmingly defensive: it betokened the fulfilment of military action as sacred.[77] At this stage of analysis, though, it is not our purpose to mull over legitimations of war, assess the extent of bloodshed, evaluate the despoliations of civilisations, or weigh up the consequences of the territorial takeovers for the relative toleration or "dhimmitude" of the conquered in the sociology of the Islamic Golden Age. In any case, the details of the conquests were messy and, compared to others, have been notoriously difficult to plot.[78] As a result, this study remains focused on the flush of mental and social dynamics in the millennial moment of the opening conquests (to around 642). These conquests steadily lose their vitality and more or less normalise as "campaigns": for this process Weber's concept of "routinisation" is pertinent.[79] If the unfolding of expansion includes the Shi'ite schism(s) (from 656), there develops a kind of "eschatological postponement" through the religio-political Imaginal that Allah is present in supreme leaders as successive Imams (from Muhammad's son-in-law 'Ali), until the last can be readily identified as the Mahdi at the End-time.[80]

To my knowledge, only one scholar has clearly considered early Islam as an "apocalyptic movement" in a way that is tantamount to a millenarian one: David Cook (in a chapter first published in 2005).[81] "Apocalyptic" and "millenarian (or millennial) movements" are commonly enough made equivalent to each other in social study,[82] although the latter is distinctly favoured by sociologists.[83] Cook, currently Professor of Religion at Rice University,

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75 Cf. also Meir Kister, "'A Booth like the Booth of Moses…': A Study of an Early Hadith," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 25 (1962): 150–51 on *ahadith*.

76 Edward Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon* (Williams and Norgate, 1865), Book I, Part 2, 473; Peter von Sivers, "Prophecies Fulfilled: The Qur'anic Arabs in the Early 600s," in *The Study of Islamic Origins: New Perspectives and Contexts*, ed. Metter Mortensen, Guillaume Dye, Isaac Oliver, and Tommaso Tesei (De Gruyter, 2021) on contemporary prophecies of such an empire.

77 David Cook, *Understanding Jihad* (University of California Press, 2005), 11–25; David Cook, "Jihad and Martyrdom in Islamic History," in *The Blackwell Companion to Religion and Violence*, ed. Andrew Murphy (Blackwell, 2011), 282–4 (although the majority of passages on *jihad* in the Qur'an refer to spiritual struggle). Cf. Rizwi Faizer, "Expeditions and Battles," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, ed. Jane McAuliffe, vol. 2 (E-I) (Brill, 2002), 144.

78 Ernst Honigmann, "Die Ostgrenze des Byzantinischen Reiches von 363 bis 1071" [The Eastern Frontier of the Byzantine Empire between 363 and 1071], in *Byzanz et les Arabes*, ed. Alexander Vasiliiev, Corpus Bruxelles Histoire Byzantinae 3 (L'Institut de Philologie et d'Histoire Orientales. 1935).

79 Weber, *Economy and Society*, 246–54.

80 M. Husayn Tabataba'i, *Shi'ite Islam*, ed. and trans. Seyyed Nasr (SUNY, 1975), 161–89; with Al-Qummī, *Risālat al-Iʿtiqādāt* (The Shi'ite Creed).

81 David Cook, "The Beginnings of Islam as an Apocalyptic Movement," in *War in Heaven/Heaven on Earth: Theories of the Apocalyptic*, ed. Stephen D. O'Leary and Glen S. McGhee, Millennialism and Society 1 (Routledge, 2014).

82 For example, John Hall, "Apocalyptic and Millenarian Movements," in *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements*, ed. David Snow, Donatella della Porta, Bert Klandermans and Doug McAdam (Blackwell, 2013).

83 For example, Peter Worsley, "Millenarian Movements in Melanesia," *Rhodes-Livingstone Institute Journal* 21 (1957); Nonie Sharp, *Millenarian Movements: Their Meaning in Melanesia*, LaTrobe Sociology Papers 25 (LaTrobe University, 1976); Trompf, *Cargo Cults and Millenarian Movements*, esp. 108–9.

Texas, does not reference Donner or Shoemaker, so he treats the origination of Islam more as a seamless whole and with less concern with early social dynamics and shifts just beyond Arab "unification." But his work has the highly relevant value for asking what were the socially significant elements in the Qur'an and early developing *sunnah* that inspired, reinforced and gave advantage to the Arabs in traversing and taking previously unimaginable control of new lands. Stimuli for victory abound, and as with Donner, the fighters are read as Believers, not yet Muslims. We can list what comes quickly to mind from Cook's major account.[84] Muhammad acknowledged he had been commanded to fight against those who did not declare "there is no God but Allah,"[85] and since his livelihood had been "under the shade of my spear," he could fairly warn that anyone "who disobeys my orders will be humiliated."[86] The Qur'an derives iron from Allah, bringing "great military might that benefits the people" (57:25), and righteous war brought the reality of "destroying the wealth of the [land of the] Pharaohs" (as in 10:88b) or of taking righteous vengeance for the destruction of the Jerusalem temple. A common catchcry that "Swords are the keys to Paradise"[87] was a persuasive means for getting armed men who grasped the triumphal course of the great incursions to join in.[88] The promise of booty (including land and slaves) in the Qur'an (esp. 8:41, 8:69, 48:20) was always an incentive for faithful victors.

Other scholars have noticed the obvious things: martyrdom in war brings the best heavenly rewards, concretely attractive for warriors, whereas flight from the battlefield is a terrible sin deserving hell.[89] Only warriors, not merchants or farmers, many contended, were taking religion (*dīn*) seriously, and in the flush of things, some saw fighting more precious than praying and fasting.[90] The daring role of racing horsemen communicating between multiple prongs of advance also comes into consideration in conveying a sense of binding (implicitly Divinely guided) unity on the ground. From my research I have noticed elements of religious simplicity that affect the bands making decisions in highly mobile situations. The Qur'an has its ways of paring back what to recognise among the defeated as the most basic acceptable (non-idolatrous) beliefs: that there is "one God and the hereafter" (e.g., Q. 5:69, 16:22). There is the opportune call to prayer: the Mass in this volatile context is too cumbersome; in any case, "drinking the blood of the gods" occurred in the partaking of the old Arabian pagan sacrifices, and the Syrian monks already exemplified how desert asceticism made ritual communion less

84 Cook, "Beginnings of Islam as an Apocalyptic Movement," 83–87.

85 See H Bukhāri 56, 158 [2946]; 88, 7 [6924–5]); Meir Kister, "Illa bi-Haqqihi - A Study of an Early Hadith," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 5 (1984).

86 H Bukhāri 56, 126 [2913].

87 H Muslim, *Sahih* 33, 211 [4681].

88 Sean W. Anthony, "Muḥammad, the Keys to Paradise, and the Doctrina Iacobi: A Late Antique Puzzle," *Der Islam* 91, 2 (2014).

89 Robert Garland, *What to Expect when you're Dead: An Ancient Tour of Death and the Afterlife* (Princeton University Press 2025), 135–37 on Q. 56:69–70. Also see Abdel Haleem, *Understanding the Qur'an: Themes and Style* (Tauris 1999), 93–106; Christian Lange, *Paradise and Hell in Islamic Traditions* (Cambridge University Press, 2016).

90 Karen Armstrong, *Fields of Blood: Religion and the History of Violence* (Bodley Head, 2014), 171 on the texts of al-Hindi, *Kanzu'l-Ummal* [ed. Osmania], vol. 4, 282 [10, 5000], and Ibn Abi Asim, *Kitāb al-Jihād* [ed. al-Hammid] vol. 1, 140–1 [11]).

relevant.[91] Festival life was sparse in early Islam while in early medieval Jewish, Christian and Zoroastrian affairs it was increasing in complexity.[92] On the other hand, as hadith scholars often explain, every aspect of personal life gets saturated with multiple stories of how the Prophet, as great exemplar, did this or opined that, right down to the way you brush your teeth.[93]

Moreover, as I have previously argued, three not-to-be-forgotten theoretical issues require reckoning in the study of millennial "showdowns" – to do with "meta-technological engagement," retribution, and the millenarists' embracing of broad "narrative frameworks."[94] The Arabic of the Qur'an is constantly working with insights of recompenses, bargaining, rewarding and punishing out of a prevenient discourse of payback in tribal conflict and group exchange. In such a verb as *jazā*, for prime instance, issues of who is requiting becomes a matter of semantic jostling, since fighters were constantly involved in bargaining, alliance and punition that were not clearly independent from the work of God. Their punishments, the extraction of the *jizya* (a cognate word for compensatory tax) and so on, were meta-technologically engaged in great, final acts of retributive resolution.[95] In the early Islamic case, as well, the collective apprehension of the Last Transformation, as neighbouring cities and peoples were being contested, were affected by the Qur'anic punctuated but not insignificant narrative that Allah had punished previous cities for their disobedience and evil deeds – Sodom and Gomorrah, 'Aad and Thamūd, Qārūn, Hāmān and Pharaonic Egypt (Q. 29:34, 38–39), Iram (Q. 89:7), Madyan (Q. 7:85), Babylon (Q. 2:102) and the likes.

CONCLUSIONS

One should feel no ideological pressure from consideration of "early Islam" as a "millenarian movement": to overplay the sociological category as some final descriptor is absurd, since all such colligatory concepts are at best heuristic devices in our attempts to make life intelligible, with imperfect language and inevitably provisional statements of facts. Our humble exercise here is, most of all, to show how the sociology discipline can help us make sense of the startling datum of the rapid emergence of one of the world's major religions and immense cultural influences. The "absolute urgency of spirit" we find in a known plethora of so-called millennial and apocalyptic events through world history and in contemporary affairs may be the helpful explanatory insight we need in the case of early Islam to credibly and accurately assess a great body of intricate (yet often not adequately available) evidence of transformative activity. It also avoids domesticating social and social-psychological intensities into banal statements about expansionism, *Wanderlust*, one among other imperial-type

91 Robertson Smith, *The Religion of the Semites, First Series: The Fundamental Institutions* (Adam and Charles Black, 1901), esp. 230–4, 337–8 (blood rituals); Ashley Hall, "The Role of the Eucharist in the Lives of the Desert Fathers," in *Studia Patristica* 41, ed. Frances Young, Mark Edwards and Paul Parvis (Peeters, 2006).

92 Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (Adam & Charles Black, 1945), 738–39; H. Bozorg-zad, *National and Religious Ceremonies in Iran before Islam* (n.p., 1971).

93 For example, Muhammad Ali, *A Manual of Hadith* (Ahmadiyyah Anjuman Isha'at Islam, 1992).

94 Trompf, "Millenarism," 117–18.

95 Cf. William Tremmel, *Religion, What is it?* (Harcourt Brace, 1997), 65–66.

invasion or barbarian ferocity, or a rather clinically prepared set of assaults, or a kind of military transhumance that desert peoples from time-to-time make on settled countries.[96] In their generally perceived *personae*, early *Mu'minūn* were impositional, peremptory, righteously self-assured in moral bearing, brashly totalistic in thinking, emotionally pent-up and frightening in environments utterly new for them. We should not be shy of acknowledging this as an integral part of one of history's sharpest upheavals, any more than we should leave myths of the peaceful acceptance of Islam to prevail unquestioned and suppress the narratives of resistance and continued conflict.[97] The way one reckons with these realities and the verbiage deployed, though, matters in social scientific description, so words like "bigots" and "fanatics" (the latter an unfortunate epithet commonly used by founder-figure in the theory of millenarism Norman Cohn [1915–2007][98]) are loaded and inappropriate for "relative objectivity" (and do not capture the innovative feel of "Allah's Mission").

It is expected that collective human fervour loses momentum, at least for a time. By constantly fighting over a changing border, for instance, Byzantium and Islam became bitter enemies, even if they traded with each other. "Raids into Byzantine territory were almost annual occasions," damaging yet with "little effort to conquer."[99] Over time, the original Arab initiative gave way to a diversity of culturo-religious expressions of the new monotheistic firmness. Significantly, having responded in their own ways to the extraordinary mystery of the Qur'an, the mounted, unflinching Heralds of the Hour not only portended the Islamic Golden Age, they left their indelible mark on Islam – the readiness to struggle for righteousness. Millennialism, sociologically speaking, is one key marker of significant "social change," often radical, or revolutionary, against some former stasis,[100] and there is no good reason to neglect its impact, not only on Islam's golden years, but on its entire history.

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96 For the last see Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimah* I, 2–3.

97 See, for example, Scott Savran, *Arabs and Iranians in the Islamic Conquest Narrative: Memory and Identity Construction in Islamic Historiography, 700–1050*, Culture and Civilisation in the Middle East 57 (Routledge, 2017).

98 Cohn, *Pursuit of the Millennium*, esp. ch. 13; cf. Norman Cohn, "Réflexions sur le millénarisme" [Reflections on Millenarism], *Archives de Sociologie des Religions* 5 (1958); Norman Cohn, *Cosmos, Chaos and the World to Come: The Ancient Roots of Apocalyptic Faith* (Yale Nota Bene, 2001).

99 Hugh Kennedy, "The Mediterranean Frontier: Christianity Face to Face with Islam, 600–1050," in *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, vol. 3: *Early Medieval Christianities, c. 600–c. 1100*, ed. Thomas Noble, Julia Smith and Roberta Baranowski (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 181.

100 Note esp. Sylvia Thrupp, ed. *Millennial Dreams in Action: Studies in Revolutionary Religious Movements* (Schocken, 1970); Talmon, "The Pursuit of the Millennium," 125.

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