

Apocalypse and Identity: Ibn Al-Munadi and Tenth Century Baghdad

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Introduction

While the genre of apocalypse in Islam has gained increasing attention during the past decade or so, the apocalyptic work of Ahmad b. Ja`far b. Muhammad known as Ibn al-Munadi (d. 336/947–8) entitled *Kitab al-malahim* (*the Book of Apocalyptic Wars*) has been little studied. Ten years ago I published the lengthy Daniel apocalypse that is contained within it, which is the longest literary apocalypse known to me to have come down to us, and the only one comparable to literary apocalypses as they are known in Judaism and Christianity from the same period.¹ However, the actual text of the *Kitab al-malahim* has not been studied within its context, nor have its contents been related to other apocalyptic texts that are extant. Discussion of the text and placing it within its Baghdadi context of the tenth century will be the subject of this paper.

Apocalypse has a considerable history in Islam. One of the major themes of the Qur'an is the question of the appearance of the Hour of Judgment and the interpretation of the signs associated with the end of the world. It is clear from the Qur'an that the initial audience was very much interested in the date of the end, having asked about it no less than three times (Qur'an 7:187, 33:63, 45:32, 79:42), but that date is said to be known to none but God. In the *Kitab al-iman*, the second book of al-Bukhari's authoritative *al-Sahih*, in a composite tradition designed to define a number of problematic issues, including such vexing questions as the difference between *iman* and *islam* (which is not really resolved), the Prophet Muhammad is asked "When is the Hour?" to which he responded the standard answer "The questioned does not know more about it than

1. David Cook, "An Early Muslim Daniel Apocalypse," *Arabica* 49 (2002), 55–96.

does the questioner.”² The place accorded to this question, especially when later the questioner is said to be the angel Gabriel in disguise, within the rubric of other important theological questions at the beginning of Sunni Islam’s most authoritative and respected *hadith* collection demonstrates that the topic of the Hour and its attendant signs was one that occupied a great many Muslims.

However, it is also important to notice that while the apocalyptic imagery inside the Qur’an is dramatic, the text apparently assumes that the end is sufficiently close that there was no need for a further delineation of signs. Nor should this fact surprise us, given that Muslims were not alone in their expectation of the end at that time. Jewish and Christian apocalyptic materials abounded during the seventh century, most probably as a result of the cataclysmic war between the Sasanians and the Romans (or Byzantines mentioned in *sura* 30:1–2), as well as (probably) astronomical events such as the passing of Halley’s Comet in 610, the fact that nearly seven centuries since the appearance of Jesus had elapsed (which may have been interpreted by some Christians in terms of Jesus’ return or the appearance of a herald of his return as a monk supposedly told the Prophet’s opponent Abu Sufyan),³ as well as volcanic explosions, and the appearance of the bubonic plague (otherwise the Plague of Justinian).

Muslims during the period immediately following the death of Muhammad in 632 and the success of the great conquests began to augment the apocalyptic tradition of the Qur’an and to detail the signs that were associated with the end of the world. These came to include such varied topics as the appearance of monstrous and other-worldly beings such as the Dajjal (the antichrist), the sub-human peoples of Gog and Magog, cosmological signs such as the appearance of comets and the rising of the sun from the west, various social and moral degradations in which the Muslim community indulged, plagues, famines, dreams and visions of all sorts, and most especially political events. It is this last category that is the most interesting to the historian, as apocalypse has been seen since the work of Paul Alexander on Byzantine apocalyptic literature as an auxiliary if not strictly speaking reliable historical source.

2. Al-Bukhari, *al-Sahih* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1991), i, 22 (no. 50).

3. Abu al-Faraj al-Isfahani, *Kitab al-aghani* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, n.d.), iv, 131.

In general, the Muslims sought to place their community within the salvation history of the previous communities of Jews and Christians by explaining their position vis-à-vis the end of the world. For example, in a well-known paraphrase of the New Testament Parable of the Workers (Matt. 20:1–16), Muhammad is said to have stated:

“Your [length of] staying compared to that of the communities previous to you is like that between the afternoon prayers and the setting of the sun. The people of the Torah were given the Torah and worked with it until the middle of the day, then they could not [anymore], and were given *qirats* [as their wage]. The people of the Gospel were given the Gospel and worked with it until the mid-day prayer, and then they could not [anymore], and were given *qirats* [as their wage]. Then you were given the Qur’an, and you worked with it until the sun went down and were given double the *qirats*. The people of the Torah and of the Gospel said: ‘Lord, these have less work and more wage!’ He said: ‘Have I cheated you in your payments in any way?’ They said: ‘No.’ He said: ‘This is My bounty, given to whomever I wish’.”⁴

This is an interesting tradition, and while moving away from the indistinct groups mentioned in the New Testament parallel, it focuses both upon the supercessionism of Islam as well as upon the proximity between the appearance of the Muslim community and the end of the world. While the earlier communities worked longer in the fields—and thus were owed a more substantial reward than did the Muslims—God will favor the latter for working less. The image of the “day” allows the Muslim to understand the tradition within the framework of the so-called “World Week” in which the duration of the world parallels the days of creation, leading one to a 7000 year time-period for the entire world. If Muhammad is assumed to have been sent at the 6000 year mark, then that leaves the Muslim community

4. al-Tabarani, *Musnad* (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Risala, 1996), iv, 224 (no. 3142); and compare the following version “A likeness of you among the previous communities is between the afternoon prayers and the setting of the sun. A likeness of you and the Jews and the Christians is like a man who hired workers and said: ‘Who will work for the wage of a *qirat* until the middle of the day?’ The Jews and the Christians did so until the middle of the day for the wage of a *qirat*, and then he said: ‘Who will work from the afternoon prayers until the setting of the sun for two *qirats*—for double the wage?’ and the Jews and Christians became angry. They said: ‘We worked more and earned less!’ He said: ‘Have I cheated you of what you deserved?’ They said: ‘No.’ He said: ‘This is my bounty which I give to whomever I wish’.” (al-Tabarani, *Musnad*, iv, 144 [no. 2955]).

with a round number of 1000 years in which to convert humanity. The same proportions could be utilized with regard to the “day” mentioned in the tradition.

Earlier Muslim traditions, however, emphasized the same type of immediacy promoted by the text of the Qur’an. The world was to come to an end, not at the end of 1000 years, but much sooner. Traditions are frequently divided between those who merely stated that it was “soon” (as did the Qur’an) and those who wanted to actually date the end or at least put the signs within some chronological framework. A prominent example of the former type is the following *jihad* tradition taken from the early book of `Abdallah b. al-Mubarak:

“Behold! God sent me [Muhammad] with a sword, just before the Hour [of Judgment], and placed my daily sustenance beneath the shadow of my spear, and humiliation and contempt on those who oppose me, and whoever imitates a group is [numbered] among them.”⁵

This tradition gives us the sense that the early conquests were in fact an apocalyptic sign of God’s favor upon the Muslim community, and that the Muslim community would exist in a state of perpetual warfare until the end of the world arrived.

However, apocalyptic traditions around the year 100/718–19 began to focus not upon the perpetual warfare in which the Muslims were engaged, but upon the temptation of prosperity into which they had fallen as a result of the success of the conquests. Signs increasingly from this period were associated with the sinful society in which the Muslims were living and how that was itself a sign.

“A man came to the Messenger of God and asked: ‘O Messenger of God, what is the duration of prosperity (*rakha*)’ for your community?’ He did not answer anything and the man asked three more times without receiving an answer, so the man turned away and then the Messenger of God said: ‘Where is the questioner?’ and he turned back. He said: ‘You have asked me about something that no one in my community has ever asked about—the duration of the prosperity of my

5. `Abdallah b. al-Mubarak, *Kitab al-jihad* (Beirut: Nazih Hammad, 1971), 89–90 (no. 105); al-Awza`i, *Sunan* (Beirut: Dar al-Nafa’is, 1993), 360 (no. 1165); Ibn Abi Shayba, *Musannaf* (n.p.: n.d.), xii, 349 (no. 13056); and see Suleiman Bashear, “Muslim Apocalypses,” *Israel Oriental Studies* 13 (1993), 75–99, at 76ff., esp. 80; and M.J. Kister, “Do not assimilate yourselves...” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 13 (1989), 321–53.

community is 100 years' and he said it two or three times, and then the man said: 'O Messenger of God, is there a principality or a portent or a sign?' He said: 'Yes, swallowing up by the earth, earthquakes, and release of the bound demons upon the people'."⁶

Datable traditions of this type are available in great numbers for the period between 100–300/718–912, when they start to taper off considerably. While the earlier apocalyptic book of Nu`aym b. Hammad al-Marwazi (d. 844) contains an entire chapter devoted to these traditions, in addition to others scattered throughout the text, Ibn al-Munadi does not even include one of these traditions in his book just 100 years later. It is obvious that these types of datable apocalypses had been proven to be wrong too many times and that they were simply not credible anymore.

In general, by the period of Ibn al-Munadi apocalyptic materials among Sunnis were focusing upon the signs leading up to the end of the world from a political point of view, and to a lesser extent upon the personalities of the messianic future such as the Mahdi (to a limited extent), Jesus and the Dajjal, and other materials that were not overly controversial, while Shi`ites were bringing together substantial works on the figure of the Mahdi, characterizing him as the Twelfth Imam. During Ibn al-Munadi's lifetime, for example, the major Shi`ite writers al-Nu`mani (fl. ca. 342/953) and the apocalyptic writer al-Salili (ca. 307/919)⁷ had both penned works on apocalyptic subjects. Ibn al-Munadi's work stands out in that it fits into none of the above categories. While Sunnis were usually quite suspicious of the figure of the Mahdi, already relegating it to a minor role in the apocalypse (and sometimes preferring the figure of Jesus to the Mahdi), Ibn al-Munadi devotes a substantial discussion to him.

However, it is clear that Ibn al-Munadi was not a Shi`ite, as his Mahdi was the figure of the Hasani, descended from the elder of the Prophet Muhammad's two grandchildren, who during his lifetime received negative marks because of his willingness to make peace with the Umayyad ruler Mu`awiya, who thereupon became the fifth caliph, even though he still had

6. Ibn `Asakir, *Ta'rikh madinat Dimashq* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1995–99), lviii, 461; al-Khawlani, *Ta'rikh Daraya* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, n.d.), 98; these last bound demons are unknown to me from other Muslim apocalyptic literature—however, see Rev. 16:13–14.

7. Ibn Tawus dates the writing of al-Salili to 307 CE, see Ibn Tawus, *al-Malahim wa-l-iftan* (Beirut: al-Mu'assasa al-A`la li-l-Matbu`at, 1988), 19.

a large army supporting him. While many despised this action, gradually some Sunnis had come to see al-Hasan's action in a different light: he was a man of peace, who avoided the horrible inter-Muslim warfare that dominated the first centuries of Islam, and perhaps it was through him that there could be harmony between Sunnis and Shi'ites, as Hasan was incontrovertibly descended from the Prophet. This attitude is epitomized in the following tradition in Bukhari:

“This, my son, is a lord (*sayyid*) through whom perhaps God will make peace between two groups of Muslims.”⁸ Other later apocalyptic writers such as Ibn Hajar al-Haythami, al-Sakhawi and Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti also saw al-Hasan in this light, and it may be that Ibn al-Munadi was a more important figure in the intellectual development of Sunni apocalypticism than has hitherto been noticed.

Ibn al-Munadi

The figure of Ibn al-Munadi is quite shadowy within the biographical literature. He is said to have been born in 870 or 871 and died in 947, and most of the details that are recorded about him appear in Hanbali biographical collections. There he receives high marks as a *hadith* transmitter, the major quality important to the medieval biographers, and as a pious person generally with a high regard for the truth. The one anecdote that is related concerning him in all of the biographies is that at one time a group of students interested in *hadith* visited him in his home, and were asked to give the number of people in their group. When they miscounted by two (not counting a pair of *ghulams* or slaves), then Ibn al-Munadi is said to have dismissed them without giving any reasons. When he did this again and again, then they finally asked him why he was unwilling to see them, and he told them that they were not truthful.⁹ While it is difficult to draw any larger conclusions from such an anecdote, it seems that the personality being portrayed was a rigorous and literal one.

Such an anecdote raises some questions about the reasons why Ibn al-Munadi wrote a book on apocalyptic traditions, and whether he was

8. Al-Bukhari, *Sahih*, iv, 260 (no. 3746).

9. See al-Khatib al-Baghdadi, *Ta'rikh Baghdad* (Beirut: Dar al-Gharb al-Islami, 2001), v, 110–12 (no. 1959); and Ibn Abi Ya'la, *Tabaqat al-Hanabila* (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifa, n.d. [reprint]), ii, 3–6 (no. 578).

a Hanbali at all. While some of the earlier apocalyptic writers, such as Nu`aym b. Hammad were personally associated with Ahmad b. Hanbal, there are no other Hanbalis to the best of my knowledge who wrote books on apocalyptic traditions. Moreover, for such a rigorous personality, Ibn al-Munadi included a number of problematic traditions as we will see in the next section, in addition to personally attacking major *hadith* figures such as Sufyan al-Thawri (although we will see there was a good reason for this as well).

It would seem that the reason for Ibn al-Munadi being associated with the Hanbalis was the fact that his grandfather was whipped at the time of the *mihna* controversy under the caliph al-Mu`tasim, who favored the Mu`tazalites, and tortured those who believed in the creation of the Qur'an. Other than that fact, there is nothing else associating Ibn al-Munadi with the Hanbalis. Prominent people from whom Ibn al-Munadi is said to have related traditions include Abu Da'ud al-Sijistani, whose collection of *hadith* ranks among the Six Books venerated by all Sunnis. However, it is interesting to note that comparison of the traditions appearing in the *Kitab al-malahim* with the section on *malahim* inside the volume of Abu Da'ud does not reveal any overlaps. For example, with regard to the well-known tradition, "the nations are about to fall upon you [the Muslims] like starving people upon a bowl of food," related by both Ibn al-Munadi and Abu Da'ud their *isnads* or chains of transmitters are completely different. He is also said to have transmitted from prominent Sunnis such as Muhammad b. Ishaq Ibn Rahawahi,¹⁰ and others.¹¹

Only in Ibn Abi Ya`la's biography of him is there any indication that he was interested in apocalyptic traditions, as he is said to be the authority for a tradition on the foundation of Baghdad and the prosperity it will enjoy in the future.¹² While this tradition is included in apocalyptic collections, such as that of Nu`aym and others, including the *Kitab al-malahim*, it does

10. Al-`Ulaymi, *Minhaj al-ahmad fi tarajim ashab Ahmad* (Beirut: `Alam al-Kutub, 1984), i, 308.

11. Including Muhammad b. Ishaq al-Shaghani, al-`Abbas b. Muhammad al-Duri, Zakariya b. Yahya al-Marwazi, Muhammad b. `Abd al-Malik al-Daqiqi, Abu al-Buhturi `Abdallah b. Muhammad b. Shakir al-`Anbari, `Isa b. Ja`far al-Warraaq, and Abu Yusuf al-Qalusi.

12. Ibn Abi Ya`la, ii, 4.

not contain any prophecies of Baghdad's destruction or the other horrors with which apocalyptic books are usually filled.

The period in which Ibn al-Munadi lived was a turbulent time. Several years prior to his birth the `Abbasid caliphate had gone through a collapse, and the caliphs had come to be dominated by their Turkish slave soldiers. As a result of this collapse, much of the eastern Muslim empire came under the control of local dynasties, and even the area of Iraq suffered major revolts such as the slave rebellion of the Zanj (the black slaves of southern Iraq), which lasted between 868–881. By the end of the ninth century the Abbasid caliphate had recovered somewhat, but full control over the provinces, both east and west, was never regained. However, this period, while difficult for the `Abbasids, was a flourishing one for Baghdadi culture. In his introduction Ibn al-Munadi says that he is writing the *Kitab al-malahim* to an unnamed audience, who asked him why there is so much discord (*fasad*) and violence throughout the world, and will it ever cease. Thus, we should turn to the contents of the book to see whether this question was answered.

The *Kitab al-malahim*

Study of the *Kitab al-malahim* starts with its format. The author writes that he is aware of the fact that many scholars of the *hadith* have avoided the genre of *malahim* (he lists al-A`mash, Sufyan al-Thawri and Shu`ba b. al-Hajjaj specifically), but that because of the troubled nature of the times it is important for Muslims to have access to this material. The *Kitab al-malahim* begins with several citations from the Qur'an and then a number of lengthy semi-historical passages designed to support the authenticity of apocalyptic as a genre, connecting it to two forms of legitimacy, before going into the purely *hadith* materials:

The first is related on the authority of al-Hasan b. Ali al-Sulami and is based upon the well-known story of the debate between the Prophet Muhammad and the Jew Phinhas, which is alluded to in the commentaries to Qur'an 18:1.¹³ In Ibn al-Munadi this figure is referred to as a Fayhas, and is said to have been a magician who was asked by the Quraysh to contest with Muhammad to see which one of them had the power (very similar to the contests between Moses and the magicians of Pharaoh in Qur'an 7:102–26

13. For example, al-Tabari, *Jami' al-bayan* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, n.d.), xv, 191.

and other places). But when Fayhas approached Muhammad, in actuality he asked him a number of cosmological questions in an effort to test his knowledge. After asking for 3 days to answer the questions, Muhammad prayed for guidance, strikingly similar to the prayer that is ascribed to Daniel in Daniel 10. Similarly to Daniel, for whom answers were delayed because Michael the archangel was delayed by his conflict with the “prince of Persia” (Daniel 10:2, 12–14), also in the story of Fayhas the angel Gabriel was kept away from Muhammad. Obviously these twin delays are designed to highlight the importance of the material that is to be presented.

Then the anxious prophet was given two tablets found on the top of a mountain called Barbar by two members of the tribe of Kinda, which were the tablets of Moses, which had fallen from the heavens at God’s leave, again very strikingly similar to the contemporaneous Byzantine apocalypse “The Letter of Jesus Christ that fell from the sky.” These tablets contained the answers to Fayhas’ questions, and after he had been answered and put in his place, then those tablets were given to the possession of `Ali b. Abi Talib. Ibn al-Munadi received this particular story on the authority of Ja`far al-Sadiq to his son Muhammad, and then through the aforementioned *isnad*.

It is interesting that the contents of these tablets are strikingly similar to other esoteric materials that are related on the authority of Ja`far al-Sadiq, and begin with a cosmological narrative concerning creation, and posits a creation prior to the creation of humanity mentioned in the Qur’an. Thus when God wanted to create humanity, the Qur’an (2:29) states: “And remember when God said to the angels: I shall appoint a deputy (*khalifa*) on earth, and they answered: Will you place therein one who sows discord and sheds blood while we chant your praises and proclaim your holiness?”¹⁴ The story then continues with the theme of corruption on the earth through the first murder (of Abel by Cain) through Adam giving his testament (*wasiya*) to his son Seth, a Gnostic and Shi`ite theme.¹⁵

After this Gnostic section the tradition continues on with the story of the two lines of humanity: the line of Cain, which is said to be the ancestor of the Persian monarchs (as Tahmurth, their first king is of the line of Cain), and the other iniquitous rulers of the world, including Nimrod, Nebuchadnezzar and many others down to the time of Yazdigird II, the

14. Translation from Tarif Khalidi, *The Qur’an* (New York: Viking, 2008).

15. Ibn al-Munadi, *Malahim* (Qumm: Dar al-Sira, 1998), 38.

Persian ruler conquered by the Muslims, during whose time the world was said to be overcome with discord or corruption.¹⁶ It is obvious that this dichotomy is more or less paralleling a Sons of Light and Sons of Darkness myth in order to explain the situation of the world.

The second legitimizing tradition is associated with one Satih, who is known to have been a *kahin*, and who met with `Abd Shams, and `Abd Manaf, the ancestors of the tribe of Quraysh from several generations prior to the time of the Prophet Muhammad, and delivered to them a rhymed (in *ra*) prophecy about the rulers that would follow the latter in leading the Muslims. It is obvious that this element of the legitimizing tradition harks back to the pre-Islamic annunciations of the coming of Muhammad that are contained within the genre of the “proofs of prophethood” (*dala'il al-nubuwwa*), and indeed Satih himself is featured in the *sira* of Ibn Hisham. Included under this rubric is the vision of Khusraw in which he sees a dream at the time of the Prophet Muhammad's birth prophesying the downfall of the Sasanian empire.

The third legitimizing tradition is ascribed to the biblical figure of Daniel, with whom there are already parallels in the first story concerning Fayhas, through the otherwise unknown figure of Abu Sulayman `Abdallah b. Jarir al-Jawaliqi, who stated that he heard it “from one of the People of the Book.” This apocalypse, as previously stated, is the longest Muslim literary apocalypse known to me. I have already translated it, so will merely summarize its contents. It can be divided into 8 major sections: the historical beginning which lists caliphs that can be identified until the reign of al-Radi (934–40), the appearance of the Sufyani, an apocalyptic opponent of the Mahdi associated with the region of Syria, the fall of the Sufyani and the appearance of the Mahdi, the war with the Byzantines, the appearance of the Antichrist, the description of the messianic age, the end of the world and a postscript from Daniel.

This apocalypse is highly complicated, and describes in detail, including names and tribal affiliations a great many conflicts that will happen throughout the Muslim world. The section detailing the conflict with the Sufyani, who is seen as a messianic figure by the Syrian Muslims, while demonized by Shi'ites and Iraqis in general, takes up the balance of the apocalypse. It is not surprising to see this happen, as there was indeed a

16. Ibid., 46.

Sufyani appearance during 906,¹⁷ which is probably just before the lengthy Daniel apocalypse was composed. The Sufyani in the Daniel apocalypse, in contradistinction to the Shi`ite versions of his career is not a particularly evil figure. He is cruel to the people of Iraq, and to the Prophet Muhammad's family in general—for example, at a particular time when he takes the town of Medina he has two descendents of the Prophet, a brother and sister, killed by making them gore each other with spears—but he is capable of repentance at the end.

The hero of the apocalypse, however, is the figure of the Hasani, the descendent of al-Hasan, the eldest grandson of Muhammad, who as previously stated was sidelined by mainstream Shi`ites. The Daniel apocalypse describes him in the following terms: “God will roll up the earth for the Pure One who will appear in Mecca, whose name is Muhammad b. Ali of the descendents of the elder grandson, al-Hasan b. `Ali, who is called ‘the Imam al-Hasani’.” After he defeats the Sufyani, then the latter flees to the Byzantines, which necessitates a war against them in order both to conquer this remaining Christian empire (which is a messianic goal in Muslim apocalyptic literature) as well as to obtain the fugitive.

As the war against the Byzantines proceeds, it is interesting that the Hasani will be faced with a revolt by a man from Isfahan who will appear in the region of the Yamama (today central Saudi Arabia) and come to control the area of central and southern Iraq. This figure, called al-Muhiqq in the apocalypse, is most likely analogous to the pseudo-Mahdi of the Qarmatians described below. According to the text, the deputy of the Hasani will tell him the following: “a man who is performing magic and leading the people astray from Isfahan. He is a liar called al-Muhiqq... fighting him is absolutely necessary, and more important than fighting the Byzantines.” Eventually after al-Muhiqq is defeated then the Hasani returns to conquer Constantinople, which was the foremost goal of Syrian Muslim apocalyptic literature, and he will “enter it with his followers and destroy its great church, after taking its altar and its crosses,” and then level the city completely.

At that time the Antichrist (the Dajjal) will appear, who will also be associated with Persia, appearing in Istakhr (southern Iran). The Antichrist

17. Al-Tabari, *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa-l-muluk*, xxxviii, 181–82 (trans. Rosenthal); Ibn al-Athir, *al-Kamil fi al-ta'rikh* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1979 [reprint of Tornberg]), vii, 553.

will tempt the Muslims through the use of miracles and very graphically described tortures involving roasting alive those who reject him. Most of his followers will be Jews, Zoroastrians, *zanadiqa* (heretics), and any libertines. Because the Antichrist is anti-type of Jesus, and most of his miracles in some way or another mimic those of Jesus, in the end Jesus is his major opponent, although the Hasani is also there to help fight the Antichrist with a remnant of the Muslims in Jerusalem. After defeating the Antichrist then Jesus will order the breaking of every cross, the slaughter of every pig and the destruction of all churches and synagogues, so that everyone is converted to Islam. “Then the Byzantines, the Slavs and all of the nations when they hear the imam call them to Islam will answer affirmatively, in obedience to what they have heard from the Messiah Jesus when he called out while he was in the white cloud” while coming down from heaven. Additionally, Jesus will take Satan and any demons he can find and slaughter them in Jerusalem upon the site of the Temple (today the location of the Dome of the Rock).

The messianic age described by the Daniel apocalypse is one that is ruled by a succession of mahdis, alternatively from the descendents of al-Hasan and from the descendents of al-Husayn (the mainstream Shi`ite line), and it will be characterized as a peaceful, plentiful society: “All of the people of the world together with their kings will convert to Islam, and injustice will go, righteousness will be revived, and every harmful creature from among the animals will die and the vermin even the flies, the ants the mosquitoes and every harmful creature... wealth will be divided fairly, and arrogance and stupidity will depart from the people.” After that time then God will bring the world to an end.

This Daniel apocalypse is unusual in its length and detail and must have been created by someone who both knew the apocalyptic tradition of Islam (in both its Sunni and Shi`ite variants) extremely well, as well as knowing the Muslim world, and something of the larger world. The only region of the Muslim world that is not alluded to in the Daniel apocalypse is the far west, Morocco and Muslim Spain. We will probably never know who exactly penned this apocalypse—perhaps it was Ibn al-Munadi himself, or perhaps he redacted it to bring it up to date—but we have stories concerning forgers who are known to have penned Daniel apocalypses from the period of some 20 years prior to the time of its writing. From the *Kitab al-hiyal*, there is a story of how such an apocalypse was commissioned by one who hoped to be appointed vizier, and so he asked the forger to make a description of him so

that the caliph would see that his appointment had been prophesied. Indeed, he was appointed shortly thereafter according to the sources.¹⁸

Ibn al-Munadi's text does not stop with these three long introductory apocalypses, but instead divides the material up topically and places different traditions under each rubric. Some of them are interesting for us, as they do list dated traditions, such as "the mill of Islam will turn in the years 35, 36 or 38—if you perish at that time, then you perish, but if you survive then it will be for 70 years."¹⁹ This tradition is usually associated with the traumatic events of the first century of Islam, as the first major civil war fought between `Ali b. Abi Talib and the Umayyad Mu`awiya occurred during that period. However, Ibn al-Munadi's text does add in an interesting parenthetical remark: "We do not know which century" which most probably means that he is transposing this tradition to his own time (remembering that he died in 336).

Sections dealing with standard Muslim apocalyptic topics such as fighting the Byzantines and the Turks, both of which take up substantial sections in the work of Nu`aym from the century prior to Ibn al-Munadi, only receive a few traditions in the latter's work. It is interesting also that there is a section on the Berbers, who garnered a good deal of attention in Nu`aym as well, but in Ibn al-Munadi their section contains only some traditions about fighting a people who wear shoes made out of hair. These traditions are identical to the major traditions given about the Turks:

"The Hour will not arrive until you (the Muslims) fight a group with small eyes, wide faces, as if their eyes were the pupils of locust, as if their faces were beaten shields, wearing shoes made of hair, taking up leather shields until they fasten their horses on a palm tree [in Iraq]."²⁰

Just as Nu`aym focused upon Syria, Ibn al-Munadi primarily focuses upon Iraq. There are extensive apocalyptic prophecies associated with the city of Basra, and a section devoted to the Zanj revolt. The Zanj revolt material is all connected to the city of Basra, and rather indistinct (including prophecies that appear in Nu`aym well before the period of the Zanj), but

18. *Raqa'iq al-hilal fi daqa'iq al-hiyal*, 235–7 (trans. Rene Khawwam, *The Subtle Ruse* [London: East-West Publications, 1980]).

19. Ibn al-Munadi, 114f.

20. al-Hindi, *Kanz al-'ummal fi al-afa'l wa-l-aqwal* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risala, 1987),xiv, 206 (no. 38407).

Ibn al-Munadi states “we have seen the fulfillment of these prophecies when in the first part of Safar 270/Sept. 883 when the master of the Zanj was killed...”²¹ He quickly notes that this army was not the one that will destroy the Ka`ba according to the predictions, about which he says “how close the fulfillment of the prophecies of that were in the following section.”

Indeed, immediately afterwards he cites the predictions of the destruction of the Ka`ba at the hands of the Ethiopians, who are said to destroy it using pick-axes. These appeared already in Nu`aym as well, and so are being reinterpreted. Most probably Ibn al-Munadi is relating this tradition to the attack of the Qarmatians on Mecca in 930, which was led by several of non-Arab ancestry, although none known to have been Ethiopians. In order to corroborate this identification he cites the tradition about the Hajj procession being sacked during the month of Dhu al-Hijja (the last month in the Muslim calendar), which indeed was when the Qarmatians attacked Mecca.

Just as with the long Daniel apocalypse, the hero of Ibn al-Munadi’s text is the Hasani. In his sections on the identity of the Mahdi, Ibn al-Munadi merely states that he needs to be of the descendents of the Prophet Muhammad, but does not specify from which grandson he will descend. Later on, however, he is no longer coy about the issue, and proclaims the coming of the Hasani.²² This figure is obviously designed to unify between Sunnis and Shi`ites, as al-Hasan was a peacemaker rather than a warlord. All of these predictions follow closely the pattern of the long Daniel apocalypse. At the end of the book when discussing the figure of the Antichrist there is another interesting comment which states that he will appear after the year 280/893, by which presumably Ibn al-Munadi is identifying him with the Qarmatian leaders in general or with the eventual appearance of the Qarmatian mahdi who was proclaimed shortly after the sacking of Mecca.

Text in Context

There is no doubt that the *Kitab al-malahim* has a very strong focus towards the eastern section of the Muslim world. The beginning legitimizing traditions emphasize the Persian heritage, giving in the renditions of the

21. Ibn al-Munadi, 167.

22. Ibid., 200–4, 271–72.

tablets of Moses (according to Ja`far al-Sadiq) the Persian dynasty, while the prophecy of Satih describes the vision that Khusraw is said to have seen of his future downfall at the birth of Muhammad. Many of the events described in the Daniel apocalypse are associated with the history of the eastern Muslim world, and while the apocalypse does describe the figure of the Sufyani who is associated with Syria, most the events concerning him actually take place either in Iraq or in the Arabian Peninsula. Events that are mentioned concerning Egypt and the region of Libya and Tunisia are quite shadowy.

There is equally no doubt that like earlier round-number centuries, the year 300/912–13 was the target of speculation as to whether the world would end at that time. Already from Nu`aym, written the previous century we find the following prediction:

“In the 210s there will be bombardment, swallowing up by the earth and metamorphosis, in the 220s there will be death among the ‘*ulama*’ of the world—until none are left, in the 230s the sky will rain hail like eggs and the cattle will perish, in the 240s the Nile and the Euphrates will cease so that they will sow [fields] in their courses, in the 250s there will be brigandage, wild animals will dominate humans and everybody will stay in their own town, in the 260s the sun will cease (shining) for half an hour and half of humanity and jinn will perish, in the 270s no-one will be born, and no female will be pregnant, in the 280s women will be like donkeys—so that 40 men will have intercourse with one woman and no one will think anything of it, in the 290s the year will be like a month, the month like a week, the week like a day, the day like an hour, an hour like the burning of an ulcer such that a man would leave his house and not arrive at the city gate until sunset and in 300 the rising of the sun from the west.”²³

This type of apocalyptic prediction was extremely common, and similar types of predictions can be found for other year sequences from around the year 200/815. The author of it obviously sees an apocalyptic progression of disasters that will lead up to the rising of the sun from the west, a sign that is usually said to herald the closing of the gates of repentance after which no one can hope to attain salvation.

Other evidence for apocalyptic speculation is contained within a short notice discussing the well-known tradition of the Prophet Muhammad which stated that he pointed with his pointer and middle fingers when

23. Nu`aym, *Fitan* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1991), 427.

asked about the Hour and said that the distance until it appeared was like the difference between the two of them: “Abu Riyyan al-Himsi was asked about the meaning of the word of the Messenger of God when he was asked: When will the Hour arrive and he pointed with his third finger, so they interpreted that [to mean] 300 years, He [Abu Riyyan] said: He just meant to leave [the issue] since he did not know when the Hour would arrive.”²⁴ This notice was perhaps designed to forestall any further speculation based upon a well-known tradition.

During the middle to later period of Ibn al-Munadi’s life there were two major groups of apocalyptic events, the first of them tied to the year 300/912–3, and the second of them tied to the appearance of the Qarmatian Ismailis around the years 924–30 and their activities which will be discussed. In the first one of these groups there is a messianic appearance of one `Abdallah b. Ibrahim al-Musamma`i from the villages in the region of Isfahan. We have already noted that this region is where the Dajjal was supposed to appear according to the dominant theme in both Sunni and Shi`ite apocalyptic. 10,000 *akrad* and others are said to have gathered to him.²⁵ There is no word of their fate, but one assumes that they were destroyed by government forces.

In the west, in the region of Tunisia, the period just prior to 300/912–13 the Fatimids appeared, and the Mahdi `Ubaydallah entered Qayrawan on Jan. 15, 910. Although there is not much to say that the first Fatimids were *specifically* messianic other than the messianic titles that they took, it would seem that the enthusiasm for their cause was at least partially generated by the coincidence of their rule with the year 300. In other words, the year, their overcoming the corrupt Sunni Aghlabids, and a number of different other portents that came together at that time lent their movement with a messianic air, and a demonic one for their opponents.

Even in Baghdad there was a claimant of divinity during the year 910, as Ibn al-Athir states: “In it, in Sha`ban, a group was taken in Baghdad—it was said about them that they were followers of a man who claimed divinity called Muhammad b. Bishr”²⁶ Some portents that occurred at this

24. Al-Tawhidi, *al-Basa'ir wa-l-dhakha'ir* (Beirut: Dar Sadir, 1999), i, 15–16 (no. 21).

25. Ibn al-Athir, *Ta'rikh*, viii, 12.

26. *Ibid.*, 62 also Ibn al-Jawzi, *Kitab al-muntazam fi al-ta'rikh* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1992), xiii, 106.

time stand out in terms of their significance. The principal one of these is the comet, most frequently Halley's Comet. Perhaps this is because of the truly sensational nature of the comet, its inexplicable place in an otherwise obviously ordered universe, and the almost unique ability of the comet to speak to the vast geographical range of the Muslim world simultaneously. The appearance of Halley's Comet in 299/912 was not an event that was ignored by Muslim chroniclers:

“Three stars with tails appeared: one of them appeared on the night of 26 Ramadan [May 17, 912] in Leo. The second of them appeared on Tuesday, 11 Dhu al-Qa`da [June 30] in the east, and the third appeared on the night of Wednesday, 21 Dhu al-Qa`da [July 10] in Scorpio. It stayed a number of days and then gradually died out.”²⁷

The significance of these comets appearing just before the turn of the century cannot be underestimated. It was undoubtedly a contributing factor the rise of messianic speculation at this time.

Messianic speculation can give rise to disappointment in the type of messiah that is produced, which quickly happened in North Africa. The Fatimids rode to power on a wave of expectations associated with the Kuttama Berbers who had been their most fervent supporters. However, when the Kuttama were quickly disillusioned by the nature of the Fatimid regime another Mahdi appeared from among them in 912 who was ethnically one of their own. He is said to have been from a noble Berber family, and to have claimed prophecy, as well as claiming that revelation came to him. The text, however, does not give details of what the nature of the revelation was that he received. Not surprisingly, the Fatimids could not tolerate this Mahdi, and quickly sent out an army which took him prisoner and killed him.²⁸ Rulers usually do not have much mercy for messianic claimants whose claims conflict with their own.

The second group of messianic appearances and apocalyptic portents began approximately 12 years later. This group is a little more difficult to explain than the first, which is so obviously tied to prophecies and the round

27. Ibn al-Jawzi, *Muntazam*, xiii, 123; and note al-Mas`udi, *Muruj al-dhahab* (Beirut: Mansurat al-Jami`a al-Lubnaniyya, 1975), iii, 282, which unfortunately gives no details whatsoever.

28. *‘Uyun wa-l-hada’iq* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1865), i, 252; al-Maqrizi, *Itti‘az al-hunafa’* (Cairo: Idarat al-Awqaf, 1996), i, 68.

number of the year 300. Perhaps it has a generational issue, as there is little apocalyptic activity during the intervening years—the excitement of the year 300 had died down, and people were ready then for a second round, or perhaps it has to do with the many comets that are said to have appeared during these years. One should remember that at this particular time, even the famous poet al-Mutanabbi claimed to be a prophet, a claim that he was never able to live down and stayed with him for the rest of his life.²⁹

Or perhaps it was merely the ripple effect of the success of the Ismailiyya in the west, that as their movement moved towards the east, making attempts to conquer Egypt in 913 and 919, and with the foundation of the Qarmatian state in the region of western Arabia the claims to be associated with the Ismaili family multiplied. For example, in 312/924 a man appeared in Kufa claiming to be a descendent of Ismail (who was the eldest son of the Shi`ite imam Ja`far al-Sadiq, from whom Ibn al-Munadi received the story of Fayhas above), and gathered a large following of Arabs and the people of the Sawad of Iraq (the fertile region in-between the two rivers). He was quickly overcome by an army sent from Baghdad, and his followers were killed.³⁰

But easily the most important messianic appearance during this period was the appearance of the Qarmatian Ismailis, who were extraordinarily aggressive in establishing their control over much of Arabia. They were only narrowly deflected from conquering Baghdad in 928 (at the same time as there was another messianic appearance in Sijistan),³¹ and went on to attack Mecca in January 930. The heresiographer al-Nawbakhti states about their beliefs that they expected that Muhammad b. Isma`il was in hiding in the Byzantine Empire (the *bilad al-rum*) and that he would appear at any time, and that they were striving to conquer the region for him to bring about the expected messianic state.³² Note the parallels in this expectation with the fact that the Sufyani in the Daniel apocalypse took refuge with the Byzantines. Specifically with regard to Mecca, the Qarmatians were

29. Abu al-A`la al-Ma`arri, *Risalat al-ghufran* (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-Taqaifiyya, n.d.), 414–16; al-Tanukhi, *Nishwar al-muhadara* (Beirut: Dar Sadir, 1995), viii, 198–200.

30. Ibn al-Athir, viii, 157; Ibn al-Jawzi, xiii, 240.

31. *Ibid.*, viii, 198.

32. Istavan Hajnal, “The Pseudo-Mahdi intermezzo of the Qaramita in Bahrayn,” *The Arabist* 19–20 (1998), 187.

said to place a great deal of significance upon the tradition which reads: “Islam began as a stranger and will return to being a stranger, so blessings upon the strangers.” Therefore, their leaders apparently decided that it was important to attack the region where Islam began, Mecca, and to control it. It is interesting that this tradition attracted the attention of the *hadith* figure al-Ajurri, who penned an entire work on the subject from this period (the work is not dated, but al-Ajurri died in 360/970, so it may very well be from exactly this period). Ibn al-Munadi also cites this tradition in his book.³³

After the Qarmatians sacked Mecca, they took the Black Stone, presumably to demonstrate that the era of Islam was over, and held it hostage for the next 40 some years. Immediately after they returned from this expedition their leader Abu Tahir handed power to a young man from Isfahan (note the confluence with the location of the appearance of the Dajjal in apocalyptic literature), claiming him to be the Mahdi, and the group went through an antinomian experiment that lasted some 80 days, whereupon Abu Tahir killed him. Interpretations of this bizarre incident are varied, with some scholars believing that the entire situation was manipulated by Abu Tahir in order to gain power—although he could not have predicted the instability of this Mahdi figure, who had a number of Abu Tahir’s close relatives executed—while others see it as a period of simple messianic madness brought about by the ecstasy of having attacked Mecca and destroyed the Ka`ba. It should be noted, however, that characteristic of this Mahdi was his rejection of Islam, together with his focus upon his Persian heritage, apparently openly embracing Zoroastrianism and other non-Islamic symbols.

Conclusions

Why did Ibn al-Munadi write the *Kitab al-malahim* and what was its intended audience? My general conclusion is that he wrote it as a result of the attack of the Qarmatians upon Mecca in 319/930, which resulted in the theft of the Black Stone from the Ka`ba, and the subsequent appearance of the Qarmatian Mahdi in 931. The Iraq focus of the *Kitab al-malahim*, the detailed presentation of the Persian monarchs said according to the tradition of Fayhas to be descended from Cain, the first murderer, the description

33. Ibn al-Munadi, 146.

of the destruction of the Ka`ba (even if it was prophesied to have been at the hands of an Ethiopian), and most of all the hints about the dating of the apocalyptic events due to occur approximately during the time when Ibn al-Munadi was writing all point to this conclusion. He did not write the *Kitab al-malahim* as a casual description of the apocalypse, he wrote it either to answer the questions of some audience who was perturbed about the attack on Mecca or else for himself (with the description of the would-be audience as a literary device) for the same purpose.

One thing can be certain from the biography of Ibn al-Munadi inside Ibn Abi Ya`la, the Hanbali biographical source, which is Ibn al-Munadi's hostility towards the *hadith* establishment as epitomized by Sufyan al-Thawri. After the citation of the single apocalyptic tradition ascribed to him in this text, the anecdote goes on to say that Muhammad the nephew of Sufyan al-Thawri was sitting in the audience, and after the citation of this tradition, he shouted out that Ibn al-Munadi was a liar. It is interesting that in his introduction to the *Kitab al-malahim* Ibn al-Munadi specifies Sufyan al-Thawri among others as scholars who did not relate apocalyptic traditions because they were prejudiced against them, and thus attacks him quite directly.³⁴

Ibn al-Munadi's methodology in citation, especially citing his traditions from irregular sources, such as the lengthy Daniel apocalypse, and the material concerning Fayhas on the authority of Ja`far al-Sadiq, in my opinion indicates that his audience is not the typical *ahl al-hadith*. Comparing the types of legitimization in Ibn al-Munadi with that of Nu`aym, for example, we find them to be completely different. Nu`aym starts off his collection placing it firmly within the prophetic rubric.

“The Messenger of God said: ‘God lifted the world up for me, and I looked at it and what is to be upon it until the Day of Resurrection just as I am looking at this my hand—a revelation (*jillyan*) from God, who revealed it to His prophet [Muhammad] just as He revealed it to the prophets before him.’”³⁵

Ibn al-Munadi, instead begins his *Kitab al-malahim* with several Qur'anic citations that mainly relate to Shi`ite interpretations of Muslim

34. Ibid., 19. Sufyan al-Thawri is cited in the text about 10 times.

35. Nu`aym, 13; for the Syriac word *gelyona*—used for the book of Revelation—(correct from *jaylan* in the text).

history, such as the prophesy concerning the Banu Isra'il in Qur'an 17:4–8, where they are said to have been given two chances by God, after which he punished them. It seems quite clear that like Shi'ites, Ibn al-Munadi is relating this verse selection to the Muslim community, an interpretation that is unknown from other Sunni sources.

The *Kitab al-malahim* has other secrets that are waiting to be unlocked. For an anti-Ismaili, one has to say that Ibn al-Munadi was a bit of a cryptic writer, and it would be fascinating to recheck the manuscripts to see whether there are additional side-notes or issues that the editor left out. Connections that Ibn al-Munadi made, his esoteric bent, and his fascinating interpretations of Muslim history still await a detailed analysis.

