



Wieser, Veronika / Eltschinger, Vincent / Heiss, Johann (Hg.): *Cultures of Eschatology*. Volume 1: Empires and Scriptural Authorities in Medieval Christian, Islamic and Buddhist Communities. Volume 2: Time, Death and After-life in Medieval Christian, Islamic and Buddhist Communities. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter/Oldenbourg 2020. XVIII/XII, 834 S. m. Abb. 8° = Kulturgeschichte der Apokalypse 3. Hartbd. € 149,95. ISBN 978-3-11-069031-6.

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As the editors of this valuable, two-volume collection note in their introduction, “eschatology and apocalypticism constitute a dynamic field of research and have received much scholarly attention over the past forty years, especially from the beginning of the new millennium onwards.” In the last two decades or so, also the cross-cultural, comparative study of eschatology and apocalypticism appears to have gained momentum. In the second half of the 2010s, two international conferences devoted to the topic took place in the German-speaking countries alone: the 2015 meeting in Vienna on which the collection under review here is based, and the 2017 symposium in Erlangen, the proceedings of which are in press (ed. Hans-Christian Lehner, *The End(s) of Time: Apocalypticism, Messianism and Utopianism through the Ages*, Leiden: Brill, f.c.). The present publication boasts 32 contributions, including studies of (mostly medieval) apocalypticism in Europe, but also chapters that investigate apocalyptic and eschatological traditions of India, China, Tibet, Japan, and, especially, the Islamic world.

The 2015 Vienna conference gave participants generous leeway in choosing a topic relating to the end(s) of time: contributions dealing with cosmological notions, apocalyptic prophecies and millennialist movements, but also with death, resurrection, the last judgment, and the various after-death scenarios and abodes (reincarnation, limbo, purgatory, paradise and hell) all featured. This made for a stimulating, variegated conference, but presented the editors of the proceedings with the formidable challenge of producing a coherent publication. It is only logical, therefore, that the editors embrace a “low-threshold” definition of eschatology and apocalypticism, with the stated aim “to allow for a more pragmatic approach to comparison.” They divide the proceedings into, roughly, sections dealing with individual, communal and cosmological apocalypticism and eschatology. The first volume, *Empires and Scriptural Authorities*, stresses communal and socio-political aspects (including the connection between

apocalypticism and empire), while the second volume, *Time, Death and Afterlife*, centers on cosmological and personal dimensions.

The editors' introduction, regrettably, is short, though it provides some welcome food for thought. Valuable—though perhaps only for the non-expert—is the insight that even in cultural formations marked by a cyclical understanding of time, such as Buddhism, expectations about the “last things” can be powerful triggers for historical change: the subjective “experience” of cataclysmic events remains “linear”. The introduction also usefully highlights a major theme of scholarship on apocalypticism, that is, the link of apocalypticism and violence—without, however, simply equating the two. One may question the editors' statement that “in both Islamic and Christian theology, eschatology is bound up with a linear understanding of time.” This appears to be true in a general sense, but the present reviewer, for one, would have wished for a fuller engagement with notions of “realised eschatology”, including in Christian and Islamic traditions, as well as for more differentiation between notions of the “end of history” (the history of the future, as it were) and ideas about the “ultimate time” of eschatology, which is the opposite, rather than the culmination, of history. As scholar of religion Fritz Stolz once suggested (*ZfR* 1.1 [1993], pp. 5–24), paradises like Dilmun, Thule and Eden often function as “Gegenwelten”, or *otherworlds*, rather than as *afterworlds* in the linear perspective. It is gratifying to see, however, that some broader conceptual issues connected to this problem are revisited in the final three chapters, which are dedicated to “the afterlife of eschatology”. In particular, Kurt Appel's wide-ranging reflections on eschatological conceptions in the work of Giorgio Agamben open up fascinating new vistas on the ‘logic’ of apocalyptic thought into (post)modern times.

Despite the stated intent of the editors to “allow for comparison”, and presumably to their own regret, only a few chapters are explicitly framed in comparative terms. Phillipe Buc's ambitious and thought-provoking chapter is perhaps the most eye-catching of the lot. Buc compares examples (mostly) of the purging of “false brothers” in apocalyptic movements in medieval Christian Europe, Islam and Japan. The question is, of course, on what basis such comparisons can be meaningfully drawn. To relate the apocalyptic violence of the First Crusade to that of the Almohad movement seems apt: both movements arise around the same time in a climate of “reconquista” and “jihad” around the Mediterranean. But the argument becomes a lot more unstable and unconvincing as soon as Buc delves into the apocalyptic origins of Islam, Twelver Shi'i apocalypticism (which Buc seems to assume

remained unchanged over the centuries, after the failure of Kerbela), and even Daesh, finishing with some “presentist musings” about the apocalypticism in the rhetoric of Osama bin Laden and George W. Bush. One cannot but concur with James T. Palmer here, who observes in his chapter that “comparative history without an explicit and reasoned basis can quickly become a collection of unhelpful or meaningless differences,” concluding that “[t]he local evidence should always take priority over the model.” Comparison only works on the basis of (explicitated) commensurability.

For readers interested in eastern apocalypticism and eschatology, there are some real gems in this volume. Johannes van Oort's contribution on Manichean eschatology, for example, is very welcome, as we know so precious little about this important tradition. Vincent Eltschinger's chapter discussing various Indian Buddhist “appropriations” of the Hindu concept of *kaliyuga* is striking in its rich documentation of sources. As for Islamic apocalypticism and eschatology, the studies by Sebastian Günther and Roberto Tottoli are solid overviews of apocalyptic and eschatological motifs in a number of Muslim religious genres, the Qur'ān and Hadith in particular (Günther), but also the “Stories of the Prophets” (Tottoli). Stephen Shoemaker reprises his earlier publications on early Islam as an “instantiation” of late antique “imperial apocalypticism”, or, as he puts it, “the political eschatology that we find expressed elsewhere in Jewish, Christian, and Zoroastrian writings of this era.” Faustina Doefikar-Aerts assembles various instances of the Gog and Magog motif in Islamic literatures. Her eclectic journeys are usefully supplemented by a short chapter, by Johann Heiss, on South Arabian permutations of the Gog and Magog and the *Dhū l-Qarnayn* motifs. The chapters by Ann Christys and Johann Heiss/Erik Hovden are arguably the most surprising and novel of the lot: Christys examines apocalyptic hadiths in the universal history of the Andalusī scholar 'Abd al-Malik b. Ḥabīb (d. c. 853 CE), known to scholars of Islamic eschatology primarily as the compiler of a work entitled *The Description of Paradise (Waṣf al-firdaws)*. In his universal history, Ibn Ḥabīb relates several apocalyptic stories referring to the Islamic conquest of the Iberian Peninsula, many of which are centered on the conqueror Mūsā b. Nuṣayr, and Christys does a nice job of tracing them. Heiss/Hovden's chapter looks at how the Zaydī Imam al-Manṣūr 'Abdallāh b. Ḥamza and his followers interpreted a hailstorm that hit a village of the heterodox, so-called Muṭarrifī Zaydīs in the early 15th c. as an apocalyptic punishment and portent of the end of time (for the Muṭarrifīs, that is). The chapter is not very well imbedded in the scholarly literature on Muslim apocalypticism, but

provides a fascinating example of the political ‘usefulness’ of apocalyptic discourse in Islamic history.

In sum, not all contributions in the two volumes edited by Wieser, Eltschinger and Heiss are of the same theoretical caliber, nor do they all achieve the same level of fine-grained historical contextualisation. Despite good intentions, the comparative dimension remains underexplored in most chapters, albeit for good reasons. Finally, the conceptual remit of the volumes is broad, and therefore it is not always easy to see how the chapters hang together. Nonetheless, there is much to discover here, and the two volumes will be a major point of reference in any future attempts to write a transcultural history of apocalypticism and eschatology.