

B. Papers

Mehmed II's Copy of the Apocalyptic *Book of Daniel* (Ms. Ayasofya 3367) and the Limits of Interpretation

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“Apocalyptic speculation has social functions that are geared to the specific groups to which the texts are intended, and the concerns and needs of those audiences differed.”¹

—Lorenzo DiTommaso

“Here, [Ibn Ezra] interpreted ‘the Fourth Kingdom’ as the kingdom of Islam, and he interpreted the legs of steel of King Nebuchadnezzar’s vision as the kingdom of Islam.”

— Marginalia in Ms. Ayasofya 3367²

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- 1 L. DiTommaso, “The Four Kingdoms of Daniel in the Early Mediaeval Apocalyptic Tradition”, in A. B. Perrin, L. T. Stuckenbruck, M. Hama (eds), *Four Kingdoms Motif Before and Beyond the Book of Daniel* (Leiden 2021), 208.
 - 2 כְּסֵפֶת הַדָּנִיֵּאל (Book of the Prophet Daniel), TSMK Ms. Ayasofya 3367, fol. 22a. NB: I was only able to render the title in Syriac with the Estrangela script as I was not able to find a Western Syriac (Sertō) keyboard for rendering the title properly. Our anonymous scribe

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Introduction

Sometimes it is better to start a paper with a perplexing problem rather than a confident hypothesis. Such an analytical *Ansatz* is pertinent for a publication concerned with the supernatural history of the Ottoman empire. The strange and unusual should not bend so easily to the scientific predilection for precision. This is especially true of apocalyptic visions generally, which are temporally transcendent and epistemologically otherworldly, and of Ottoman cosmocratic claims to eschatological authority specifically.³ The padişahs were quite the

identifies Ibn Ezra on 22b: “among the Jews is a commentator named Abraham bin Ezra.” Otherwise, Mehmed’s translator simply refers to Ibn Ezra as “a commentator” (e.g. fol. 7b, *qāl šāriḥ*) or as in fol. 22a with “he interpreted” (*fassar...*). Though not rendered in the definite, one could idiomatically consider Ibn Ezra as *the* commentator sine qua non for our scribe.

- 3 J.J. Collins, “Toward the Morphology of a Genre”, *Semeia*, 14 (1979), 9. Despite its age, this definition lines up perfectly with my own observations on Islamic eschatological apocalypses, especially concerning the genre of *jafī*, in the Ottoman empire. Ottoman imperial eschatology, which portrays positively the dynasty as the cause of the End-Times, is *per se* preternatural. Consider, for example, Oruç Bey (d. early sixteenth century), who in his *Tarih* states, “He who is called the Mahdi, a scion of the Prophet Isaac, will undertake a military expedition. He will conquer the city (i.e. Constantinople) by saying ‘God is Great’. And when they speak of conquest by the sword, they mean the emperor of Islam and the Muslim,” who is “Sultan Mehmed, the Conqueror of Constantinople.” Oruç Beğ, *Oruç Beğ Tarihi - Giriş, Metin, Kronoloji, Dizin, Tıpkıbasım*, ed. N. Öztürk (İstanbul 2008), 112. Mevlânâ Īsâ (d. late sixteenth century) declares in his *Cāmi’ül-meknūnāt* that the sultan’s military success “will be a sign / the Resurrection is near.” See Leiden Universiteitsbibliotheek (hereafter: LUB) Ms. Cod. Or. 1448, fol. 127a: *bu yılda hem iştiğāl bir ‘elāmet / yakın oldukça dērlerdi kıyāmet*. Mevlânâ Īsâ continues to prophecy the Ottoman conquest of Rome and France: *varısar leşker-i Islām Rūme / ne Rūme Mağreb ü Maşrek-i kadime / kilisesine varub giriserler / kamu küffārī aında kırışarlar / uşadub pulların malın alalar / varub Franka iline dölalar*; cf. fol. 126a for the use of the title “Lord of the Conspicuous Conjunction” (Ot. *şāḥib-i kırān*). In Taslıcalı Yaḥyā’s elegy of Süleyman, we are told that, “He is the Lord of the Conjunction of this world; / blessed is he with miracles. / He is the sovereign of the masses and the Shadow of God. / Verily, he is the consummate saint.” Qtd. in H. İnalçık, *The Ottoman Empire: Sultan, Society, and Economy* (İstanbul 2018), 50. I have adjusted the translation. The Ottoman is as follows: *Olki şāḥib-i kırānī ‘ālemdir / her kerāmāt ile mükemmeldir / vālī-yi ḥalk ü-sāye-yi Ḥaqqdır / fī’l-ḥaqqıka velī-yi muṭlaqdır*. Two centuries of this kind of apocalyptic propaganda begat the most robust text of imperial eschatology: *The Tree of Nu‘mān Concerning the Ottoman Empire* (*al-Şağarah al-nu‘māniyya fī al-dawlah al-‘uthmāniyyah*) composed between 1560~1578/79 by Pseudo (Ps.)-Ibn al-‘Arabī. See Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi (SK) Ms. Beyazıd 4609, entire copy; İstanbul Üniver-

existential party-poopers, whether your soul desired redemption or not.⁴ But it is not just the essentially cryptic nature of End-Times visions that confound analysis. Apocalypses, perhaps more so than other supernatural texts, can be read simultaneously in the mode of insider vs. outsider, empire vs. underdog, stakeholder vs. rebel. Cryptic revelations and eschatological prophecy change with the audiences that read them.

Enter the Ottoman interest in one of the most popular biblical apocalypses. Mehmet II's (r. 1444–1446, 1451–1481) commissioned copy of an Arabic translation of a Syriac *Vorlage* of the *Book of Daniel* (Ms. Ayasofya 3367) poses such an interpretive conundrum.⁵ First, the historical, linguistic, confessional, and canonical layers alone suggest a complex tradition: from the second century BCE to the fifteenth century CE, from Aramaic and Hebrew through Syriac into Arabic, from a Jewish to Syriac Orthodox to Sunni Islamic setting, and from Hebrew Bible through Orthodox Christian canon and then as stand-alone Ottoman booklet. 'Imbricate bricolage' describes the sultan's edition of *Daniel* perfectly. Second, literature on this Ottoman apocalyptic curio has evaded in-depth scholarly analysis. Mehmed's *Book of Daniel* is found more often in footnotes or, when part of analysis, it is implicitly identified as an obvious text of imperial interest *sans* further investigation. What is so obvious about Mehmed's interest in Jewish prophecy? Or, more poignantly, does the inclusion of a book in an imperial library necessarily indicate that the sultan read it? It is not as though we have a card catalogue of the sultan checking it out.

tesi Kütüphanes (İÜK) Ms. A. 4884, fols. 1b–48a; Bayezid Yazma Eserler Kütüphanesi (BYEK) Ms. Veliyüddin 2292/2 fols. 40a–65a; Princeton University—Yahuda Collection (PYah) Ms. 4497, fols. 20b–49. See also W. S. Chahanovich, "Ottoman Eschatological Esotericism: Introducing Jafr in Ps. Ibn al-'Arabi's *The Tree of Nu'man*", *Correspondences*, 7.1 (2019), 1–48.

- 4 In Islamic eschatological tradition, the Turks are often associated with Gog and Magog; correcting this widely held belief was an obstacle for the Ottomans. And as for the Christians (*banū asfar*) of Byzantium and in the Catholic West, the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople proved that Mehmed and his coterie were the Antichrist. See Y. Kiyamoto, "The Influence of Medieval Prophecies on Views of the Turks: Islam and Apocalypticism in the Sixteenth Century", *Journal of Turkish Studies*, 15 (1991), 129 ff. Martin Luther infamously associated the Turkish sultan and the pope with the Antichrist.
- 5 J. Raby, "Mehmed the Conqueror's Greek Scriptorium", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 37 (1983), 19. The books *Bel and the Dragon* and *Susannah and the Elders*, which are included in Mehmed's copy, are not part of the Hebrew Bible; they are, however, included in Eastern Orthodox and Catholic bibles as "deuterocanonical" or "paracanonical."

Collections do reflect interest, personal curiosity, and connoisseurship.⁶ But the book could have first been introduced to the sultan and/or his library by a scribe charged with gathering various works. Consider Mehmet's copy of the *Testament of Solomon* (TSMK Ms. GI 17), an Arabic translation of Georgios Gemistos Plethon's Zoroastrian Compendium, another neo-platonic worked called the *Chaldean Oracles* also from Plethon's library, and the *Nomoi* which is a fragment of hymns to Zeus. The same applies to the contemporary world of antiquities dealings and auction houses. The rich and famous often consult specialists about their collections. But just because a rich connoisseur has in their collection a rare book or priceless piece of art does not automatically mean the owner read the book or has even hung up the art work to admire. Some reservation is necessary when it comes to an imperial Ottoman book collection as well. So, nothing is *per se* obvious about the inclusion of *Daniel* in the library. And as “the only full-blown example of apocalyptic literature in the Hebrew Bible,” *Daniel* does not lend itself to clean-cut interpretation.⁷ Third, as mentioned above, *Daniel* can be analyzed from an “outsider/revolutionary”—i.e. oppressed—perspective *and* an “insider/imperial”—i.e. overlord—perspective.⁸ Imperial coercion vs. oppressed resistance, sultan vs. subject, Islam vs. marginalized *millet*s are unavoidable modes of reading that Mehmed, his scribe, or his interlocutors must have been aware of.

With the conquest of Constantinople functioning as a “metahistorical event” that transformed the Ottomans into an empire poised to conquer the world in fulfillment of Islamic apocalyptic prophecy, why would Mehmed want to read a text that might question the stability of his reign or his righteousness as ruler?⁹ Reinterpreted at the hands of some of the earliest chroniclers of the

6 I would like to thank Dr. Bronwen Gulkis (University of St. Andrews) for discussing this with me.

7 J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1998), 85.

8 DiTommaso, “Four Kingdoms”, 237; A.E. Portier-Young, *Apocalypse Against Empire: Theologies of Resistance in Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids, MI, 2011), 223–279.

9 G. Necipoğlu, “Visual Cosmopolitanism and Creative Translation: Artistic Conversations with Renaissance Italy in Mehmed II’s Constantinople”, *Muqarnas*, 29 (2012), 1. Necipoğlu refers to Ayasofya 3367 on p. 12; cf. p. 60, footnotes 58 and 59. See also C. Fleischer, “A Mediterranean Apocalypse: Prophecies of Empire in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries”, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 61.1–2 (2018), 68. The qur’anic surah 30, vv. 2–3 is generally considered the revelatory *locus classicus* for predictions about

empire, Constantinople was the “pleasant country” (*baldatun tayyibatun*) of qur’anic prophecy (Q34:15) and its conquest was foreordained.¹⁰ Mehmed was completing the grand cosmic arc of redemptive Islamic history. *Daniel* somehow fit into this nascent imperial self-narration. The complex nature and imperial appeal of Ms. Ayasofya 3367 demands expanded investigation. Sadly, I was not allowed permission to reproduce any illustration from the manuscript.

Codicological Information

Before we begin, a few philological comments on the text are appropriate. Translated by an anonymous (former?) Syriac Christian, Mehmed commissioned his copy of *Daniel* for his newly built palace’s Imperial Inner Treasury (*hizāne-i ‘āmīre-i enderūnī*).¹¹ The dedication makes this imperial directive clear: *bi-rasm hizānat...al-Sultān bin al-Sultān bin al-Sultān al-Sultān Muḥammad bin al-Sultān Murād bin Bāyazīd Hān* (sic). Note the genealogical error; the father of Murad II was most certainly not Bayezid I (r. 1389–1402) but Mehmed I (r. 1412–1421). As such, the text was subsequently passed into the possession of

the Islamic conquest of Byzantium, even though the original meaning was probably meant to describe the Byzantines’ victory over the Sassanids. See T. Tesei, “The Romans Will Win!” Q30:2–7 in Light of 7th c. Political Eschatology”, *Der Islam*, 95.1 (2018), 1–29.

10 F. Giese, *Die altosmanischen anonymen Chroniken, Tevārīḫ-i Āl-i ‘Osmān*. Vol. II (Breslau, 1925), 99, 148. This corpus, composed at an early point during the reign of Murad II was used by ‘Āṣīkpaşazāde and, via ‘Āṣīkpaşazāde, by Oruç Beğ cited in footnote 3 above. Amongst other things, the Ottomans were pressed to insert themselves into an otherwise exclusively ethnic Arab drama of apocalyptic conquest. Preserved in some hadith reports, we are told that the walls of Constantinople would be brought crushing down as the Arab Banū Ishāq proclaimed “God is Great!” The sons of Isaac are converted into the Ishāqiye, a Turkish dervish order of Abū Ishāq Kazeruni (d. 1034). See B. Flemming, *Essays on Turkish Literature and History* (Boston 2017), 207. Flemming, however, cites the verse prior to the actual verse in which “pleasant country” is mentioned. Interestingly, the verse is quite clear as to what it refers: Sheba (Yemen), not Byzantium nor for that matter Constantinople. Rather, as Giese notes, it is for the numerological value of the Arabic letters of *baldatun tayyibatun* that this verse is selected. Added up, *baldatun tayyibatun* equals 857 AH which is the year of the conquest of Constantinople. Chapter 17 in Flemming’s *Essays* is in its entirety a treasure trove for sources on the conquest of Constantinople, its place in Islamic apocalyptic, and Ottoman interpretations of the conquest. Ibid. 205–208.

11 There is nothing in the text that outwardly suggests the translator-*cum*-scribe converted to Islam.

Sultan Bayezid II (r. 1481–1512), the conqueror's son and successor, hence his almond-shaped seal on the titular page (fol. 1a) and on the colophon (fol. 44b).¹²

Daniel is recorded by 'Atufi, the royal librarian of Bayezid II, in his catalogue—composed between 908–909/1502–1504—of the imperial library under the genre of occult sciences (Fig 1).¹³ Later, it evidently came into the possession of Mahmud I (r. 1730–1754), hence his distinct round imperial stamp and the oval hallmark of his *waqf* inspector. Mehmed's *Daniel* was henceforth stored in Mahmud's Ayasofya collection.¹⁴ It is now kept in the Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Kütüphanesi (TSMK). Thus far, all things seem quite factual, clean, and precise. But codicological information is the simplest information one can provide concerning *Daniel*.

Initial Quandaries

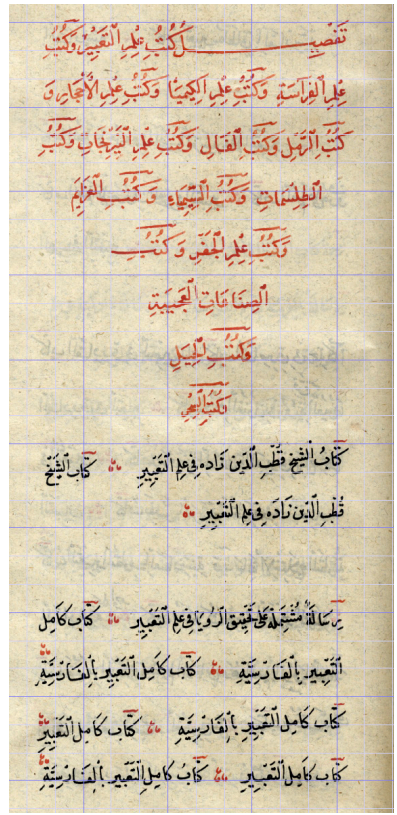
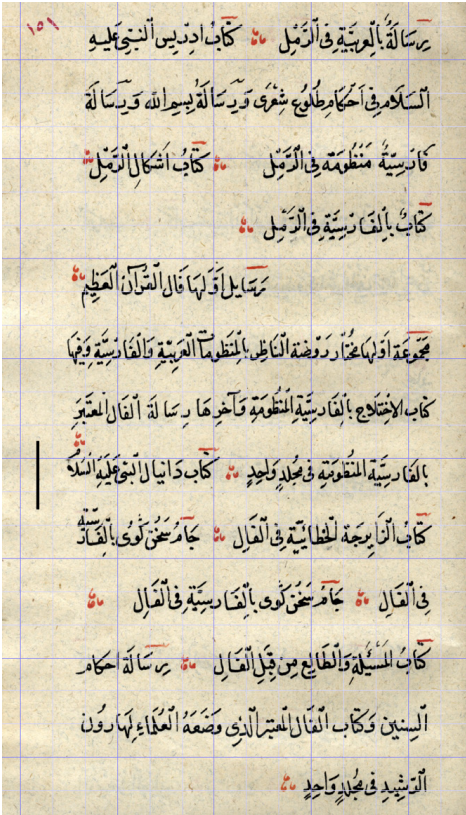
Questions rather than answers abound when analyzing the biblical apocalypse's place in Mehmed's library, its appeal to the sultan, the marginalia therein contained, and its reception. Why would Mehmed be interested in *Daniel* given its intrinsically anti-imperial mode over, say, an Arabic translation of the prophecy of Ezekiel, if we are to presume that the sultan was interested in biblical apocalypse generally and not in eschatological prophecies *per se*? Or consider the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* which critically shaped Byzantine apocalyptic tradition and the idea of Last World Emperor.¹⁵ Perhaps a translation of the

12 On the establishment of Mehmed's library, see İ. E. Erünsal, "The Catalogue of Bayezid II's Palace Library", *İstanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Kütüphanecilik Dergisi*, 3 (1995), 59; D. A. Deissmann, *Forschung und Funde im Serai: Mit einem Verzeichnis der nichtislamischen Handschriften im Topkapu Serai zu Istanbul* (Berlin 1933), 35–36. Deissmann remarks the following as Mehmed's chief interests: the Alexander legend, war history and war technology, geography, mathematics, astronomy, philosophy, poetry, and Old and New Testament material. However, in this publication, he does not, curiously, make mention of the Daniel translation in the catalogue of non-Islamic manuscripts.

13 See Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (hereafter: LHAS) Ms. Török F.59, fol. 308; N. Gardiner, "Books on Occult Sciences", in G. Necipoğlu, C. Kafadar, and C. Fleischer (eds), *Treasures of Knowledge: An Inventory of the Ottoman Palace Library (1502/3–1503/4)* (Leiden, 2019), 742.

14 I thank Dr. Ahmet Tunç Şen for helping me identify the seals.

15 C. Bonura, "When Did the Legend of the Last Emperor Originate? A New Look at the Textual Relationship between the Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius and the Tiburtine Sibyl", *Viator*, 47:3 (2016), 47–100. For a discussion of the succession of kingdoms in Pseudo-Methodius, see P. Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition* (Berkeley 1985), 18 ff.



Figs. 1 from Ms. Török F.59, fols. 302a (on the left) and 308a (on the right). The occult title section on fol. 302a, under which *Daniel* is included (see vertical black line above in margin), lists the following esoteric sciences/arts: dream interpretation, physiognomy, alchemy, supernatural properties of jewels and rare stones, geomancy, various talismanic sciences, the conjuring of spirits, the Islamic eschatological prophetic genre *par excellence* known as *jafr*, automated device production, and—of course—magic. I presume that Daniel is included in this section because of some implicit categorical affiliation with either dream interpretation (*‘ilm al-ta‘bir*), *fāl*, or *jafr*.

Syriac *Alexander Legend*, given the evident appeal of Syriac literature, seems more suitable than a biblical tale of exile and persecution. It is well-documented that the Ottomans self-identified as heirs of the Macedonian warrior to assert their legitimacy.¹⁶ After taking Constantinople, wouldn't Mehmed want to

16 W. S. Chahanovich, “Alexander and Gog and Magog in Ottoman Illustrated Texts: Presenting the Padişah as the End-Times’ World Sovereign in an Age of Eschatological Enthusi-

summon more textual proof to advance his family's claims to Islamic power and universal dominion?

Or should we see Mehmed's interest in *Daniel* because, and not in spite, of its outsider perspective? Does it align, in this light, with Tursun Beg's account in his *Tārīkh-i Ebü'l-Fetḥ* of Mehmed's humility upon entering the dilapidated Aya Sofya:

The spider serves as chamberlain at the Palace of Khusraw
The owl sounds the hours at the castle of Afrasiyab¹⁷

In other words, as in Tursun Beg's account, do we also see the greatest Islamic monarch of his time seeking reflection and pause in Daniel's ill-omened vision of empire? An Ozymandias moment *avant la lettre*? The trope of contemplating ruins (Ar. *atlāl*) runs deep in Islamicate poetry. As Byzantine grandeur had passed, leaving behind it only the hollowed shell of one of the greatest churches of Late Antiquity, Tursun Bey's Mehmed pauses to understand what has happened. His own empire—built upon the ruins of eastern Christendom—could likewise dissipate into the historical ether, leaving only spiders and owls to guard over erstwhile glory.

Other contemporary Ottoman writers expressed an equal sense of reserve or worry around the final defeat of the Byzantines. For example, the *Dürr-i meknun*, composed if not immediately after, then within a decade following the defeat of the Byzantines, warns of the dangers of an overly ambitious overlord

asm", in G. Tamer, A. Mein, and L. Greisiger (eds), *Gog and Magog: Contributions toward a World History of an Apocalyptic Motif* (Berlin 2023), 533–574. For the early stylization of Ottoman sultans as scions of Alexander the Great, see *Alexander Legend (İskendernâme)* of Tâceddîn Aḥmedi (d. 815/1412): Bibliothèque nationale de France (hereafter: BnF) Ms. Suppl. Turc 635, with the history of the Ottomans on fols., 263b–297a; *World Chronicle (Kitâb-ı Cihânnümâ)* of Meḥmet Neşri (d. 926/1520): Neşri, *Ġihânnümâ, Die altosmanische Chronik des Mevlânâ Meḥmed Neschrî*, ed. F. Taeschner, vol. I (Cod. Menzel) (Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1951), 5.

17 Tursun Beg, *The History of Mehmed the Conqueror*, H. Inalcik and R. Murphey (eds) (Minneapolis 1978). Inalcik and Murphey include a facsimile of the Topkapı Ms. Ayasofya manuscript. I cite from that. The line is found on fol. 51a: *perdeh-i dâri mî konad dar ṭâq-i Kosrâ 'ankabût / bôm neebet mî konad dar qal'e-yi Efrâsiyâb*. I rely on the translation here: N. İ. Hüner Cora and M. Pifer, "Introduction to Entangled Literatures and Histories in the Premodern World", *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association*, 7.2 (2020), 13.

and the “inauspiciousness” of Constantinople.¹⁸ At best, the disputed author of the *Dürr-i meknun* considers Mehmed’s victory fulfilling Islamic prophecy and therefore a sign that the Qur’anic “Final Hour” (*al-sā‘ah*) was nigh; at worst, we also see evidence of extreme doubt.¹⁹ The author is intensely concerned with the fate of the dynasty. The final victory over Byzantium was “an ominous sign of a tyranny to come.”²⁰ As we shall see below, a parallel with the arc of Daniel’s prophecy is observed. All things come to pass. But given the preponderance of other evidence, the Ottomans from at least Murad II, and most certainly from Selim I, understood their success on the battlefield as proof to the apocalyptic pudding; the sultan was a glorified warrior of God and handyman of the Mahdi, if not the Mahdi himself. Let the End-Times come!

Lastly, how, in the absence of any other direct historical documentation, did the eschatological visions of Daniel fulfill the needs of Ottoman imperial ideology and apocalyptic belief? I am afraid that I can provide no precise answers to any of these questions, at least for now. All that is certain is that of all the books of the Hebrew and Christian bibles, *Daniel* appealed to Mehmed and/or his scribe on some practical, political, spiritual, and intellectual level. Not even the *Apocalypse of John* warranted an Arabic translation for the sultan’s private library, a fact that surprised me all the more.

The Book of Daniel: An Outline of an Apocalypse Against Empire

In order to shed some light on this enigmatic text, let us first introduce a résumé of the biblical story. For those unfamiliar with the book, Daniel’s prophecies both of the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar’s dream (Ch. 2; Ms. Ayasofya fols. 3b–8b) and of the Jewish visionary’s own oneiric revelation (Ch. 7; fols. 21b–24b) separate world history into four consecutive kingdoms, the last

18 S. Yerasimos, *La fondation de Constantinople et de Sainte-Sophie dans les traditions turques: légendes d’Empire* (Istanbul and Paris 1990), 193; K. Şahin, “Constantinople and the End Time: The Ottoman Conquest as a Portent of the Last Hour”, *Journal of Early Modern History*, 14 (2010), 339.

19 Qur’ān [hereafter: Q] 79:42; 7:187. For the phrases “the Hour is coming” (*al-sā‘ah ātīyah*), see Q 15:85; 20:15; 22:7; 40:59. Also see references for “the Last Day” (*al-yawm al-āhīr*) in Q 2:8, 62, 126, 177, 228, 232, 264; Q 3:114; Q 4:38, 39, 162; Q 5:69; Q 9:18, 19, 29, 44, 45, 99; Q 24:2; Q 33:21; Q 58:22; Q 60:6; Q 65:2.

20 C. Grenier, “Solomon, His Temple, and Ottoman Imperial Anxieties”, *BSOAS*, 85.1 (2022), 28.

of which being the most deleterious and unholy. Of key importance are the themes of iniquitous foreign administration, dynastic collapse, and the restitution of a fifth, final, and righteous monotheistic—and specifically for Daniel, Jewish—kingdom through the divine intervention of God in human history. These key points are what make Mehmed's interest in the *Book of Daniel*, especially following his conquest of Constantinople in 1453, intriguing.

The biblical apocalypse claims to have been written by a Jewish figure named Daniel who is called to serve at the court of Nebuchadnezzar (r. ca. 605–561 BCE) during the Jewish Babylonian captivity (ca. 598–538 BCE) following the destruction of the First Temple. Though a compelling narrative idea, this is not the case. Apocalypses are, generally, written pseudepigraphically and retrospectively vis-à-vis the events they claim to foresee.²¹ Critical scholarship generally agrees with the third-century CE philosopher Porphyry that the *Book of Daniel* was in fact composed in the second century BCE by a Jewish scribe living during the reign of the Hellenic-Seleucid King Antiochus IV Epiphanes (r. 175–164 BCE), who is more popularly associated with the Channukah narrative of Jewish victory over foreign iniquity.²² The Jews' Seleucid overlords and especially Antiochus are identified with oppression, persecution, and the imposition of polytheistic belief and practice. Thus, the apocalypse is considered in its origin as an “outsider” or revolutionary account of foreign domination and Hellenistic cruelty. Enter the historiographic schema of four kingdoms.

The Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar is visited with a terrible dream (Ch. 2), wherein he sees a statue composed of four metals in decreasing value: gold head, silver arms and chest, bronze stomach and thighs, steel legs and feet of mixed steel and clay. When Nebuchadnezzar's Chaldean astrologers and ma-

21 See my discussion of Ps.-Ibn al-ʿArabī's *The Tree of Nu'mān Concerning the Ottoman Empire* (*al-Šağarah al-nu'māniyya fi al-dawlah al-uthmāniyyah*) in Chahanovich, “Ottoman Eschatological Enthusiasm: Ps.-Ibn al-ʿArabī's *Tree of Nu'mān* as an Early Modern Islamic Esoteric Apocalypse in the Service of Empire”, unpublished dissertation, Harvard University, 2021, 34–69. See also L. Nasrallah, “Out of Love for Paul: History and Fiction and the Afterlife of the Apostle Paul”, I. Ramelli and J. Perkins (eds), *Early Christian and Jewish Narrative: The Role of Religion in Shaping Narrative Forms* (Tübingen 2015), 93; K. King, “‘What Is an Author?’ Ancient Author-Function in *The Apocryphon of John* and *The Apocalypse of John*”, in W. Arnal, R. Ascough, and R. Derrenbacker (eds), *Scribal Practices and Social Structures Among Jesus' Adherents: Essays in Honour of John S. Kloppenborg* (Leuven 2016), 15–42.

22 Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 87–88.

gicians fail to interpret his dream, the rigorous monotheist Daniel is called to court (vv. 10–26, Ms. Ayasofya 3367, fols. 4a–5a). With an appeal to God to help him in his task, Daniel proclaims that the statue is a message from God and a warning (vv. 31–35; Ms. fols. 6b–7a):

Your Majesty looked, and there before you stood a large statute...While you were watching, a rock was cut out, but not by human hands. It struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and smashed them. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were all broken to pieces and became like chaff on a threshing floor in summer. The wind swept them away without leaving a trace. But the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth.

Daniel continues to interpret the enigma of the statue. Nebuchadnezzar and his dynasty are the head of gold. After him will follow another empire, that of Darius and the Medes. Then, Cyrus and the Persians will overtake the Medes and enjoy their own time as supreme Mesopotamian rulers. The chronology of empires here is, noticeably, incorrect; not only is there no such Median king known as Darius, but the Persians historically succeeded the Babylonians in 539 BCE. But that is beside the point. Lastly, the mixed empire of steel and clay is understood as the present period of the real and anonymous Jewish scribe: that of the Hellenes, and in particular the Seleucid Syrian dynasty. By implication, the Macedonian warlord Alexander and his successors, the Diadochoi, are the fourth and final kingdom. Recall that the Seleucid King Antiochus is the persecutor *par excellence* of the Israelites. Therefore, God himself will rectify the miserable position of the Jews through divine intervention. The fifth kingdom, herewith symbolized by the massive mountain, is Elohim's newly purified empire on earth.

The same “historiographic framework” of four kingdoms is repeated in Daniel's dream in Chapter 7 (fols. 21b–24b); here, the reader is told by Daniel in first person of “four-hybrid beasts that crawl out of the sea, one after the other.”²³ Increasing in monstrosity, the first is a lion with eagle's wings, the second an upright bear gnashing ribs in its fangs, and the third a winged, four-headed leopard. The fourth and final beast—herewith associated with the kingdom of steel and clay of Nebuchadnezzar's vision—is an unspecified creature with iron

23 DiTommaso, “Four Kingdoms,” 206.

teeth and bedecked with ten horns that crushes and consumes its victims (Ch. 7:7–8; fols. 21b–24a):

After this I saw in the visions by night a fourth beast, terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly strong. It had great iron teeth and was devouring, breaking in pieces, and stamping what was left with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that preceded it, and it had ten horns. I was considering the horns, when another horn appeared, a little one coming up among them; to make room for it, three of the earlier horns were plucked up by the roots. There were eyes like human eyes in this horn, and a mouth speaking arrogantly.

This fourth beast is the worst of all dynasties and therefore doomed to be decimated by the hand of God. Daniel watches as it is slain—by some anonymous force which should be understood as God—and “stripped of authority” (v. 12; fol. 24a). Thereafter, in parallel with Ch. 2, the “Ancient of Days” (Ar. *ʿatīq al-ayām*, fol. 24a) arrives and establishes the reign of the “supremely holy” (Ar. *al-qiddisīn al-ʿāliyīn*). Again, in an obvious parallel with Ch. 2, the fifth and final kingdom of God and his chosen people takes over as an empire without end for all eternity. Apocalyptic history concludes, much like a Disney movie, with a happy ending.

Marginalia Matter: Between a Fifteenth-Century Syriac Scribe and a Twelfth-Century Jewish Commentator

The marginalia tell an even more interesting story. As noted above, the historical, linguistic, confessional, and canonical layers make reading Mehmed’s copy fertile ground for a number of different studies. With the biblical apocalypse composed in both Hebrew (Chs. 1:1–2:4a, 8–12) and Aramaic (Chs. 2:4b–7:28), the anonymous translator and scribe took as his model a Syriac copy. This is made abundantly clear for the reader on fol. 1a, where he renders the title in the West Syriac (Serto) alphabet, as though to not only serve as an autobiographical note regarding his (former?) Christian identity, but also as a method of establishing the veracity of his translation for a Muslim patron. And in what seems to be another paratextual flex to prove his access to biblical and ancient truth, our anonymous scribe includes in his commentary the original Aramaic phrase of the infamous “writing on the wall” verse in Ch. 5: *Mene mene tekel uparsin* (fol. 18a). This particular chapter in the *Book of Daniel* concerns

the king Belshazzar, son of Nebuchadnezzar, who during a feast drinks wine with his Babylonian comrades from goblets pilfered from the Jerusalem Temple. Suddenly, a disembodied hand begins to write on the wall of the dining hall. Terrified, Belshazzar summons Daniel, as Nebuchadnezzar did, to understand the meaning of this paranormal graffito. Our Jewish diviner proceeds to explain the phrase word by word (v. 26):

Mene — God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end.

Tekel — You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting.

Peres — Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians.²⁴

The polyglot marginal note gives the line first in Syriac, then in Arabic transliteration, then Arabic translation and, finally, in the original Aramaic! Mehmed's scribe is no mere translator, but a scholar of a multi-confessional tradition.

As a reward, Daniel receives the gift of a purple robe. Then, without giving second thought to Daniel's ominous exegesis, Belshazzar retires for the night. Woe unto the monarch whose ears are deaf to God's warnings. In fulfillment of the prophecy, Belshazzar is slain in his sleep. Then, in reference to his warning to Nebuchadnezzar about the coming end of Babylonian dominion, the Medes arrive, overthrow the Jews' Mesopotamian captors, and establish their own dynasty, which, of course, will also come to an unsavory but celestially preordained end. No ungodly kingdom lasts forever in this book. God always has the final word. One may rightly surmise that Mehmed, who aspired to be a "philosopher king," could not have missed the memo.²⁵ Even though we have no direct proof he read or studied this text, the scribal note sticks out. The writing in the margin is as obvious as God's message on Belshazzar's banquet wall. In short, the valence of the text with the help of the marginalia transform the copy into a kind of contemplative booklet. But did Mehmed believe his own glory, too, would decay and pass like those of Kusraw, Afrasiyab, and the Babylonians? I am not so certain.

The inclusion of Syriac in Mehmed's Arabic copy is a deliberate scribal strat-

24 *Peres* is the singular of *parsin*. The proclitic *u* in the transliteration is for the Hebrew "and". As per vatic exegesis, *peres* is meant to identify the Persians. Again, note that Daniel's prophecy is unconcerned with the attested historical chronology of empires. The Medes definitely did not precede the Persians as the Babylonians' successors.

25 Necipoglu, "Visual Cosmpolitanism," 8–9; *ibid.* 1 for Mehmed's attempt to "refashion his public persona and dynastic self-image" following the conquest of Constantinople.

egy that vividly confirms a kind of spiritual/theological reliability inherent in the Syriac Christian tradition. The alphabet and language of this confessional community are paramount to magical seals of authenticity. Though Mehmed was skilled in a number of languages aside from Turkish and Arabic, such as Persian, Greek, Latin, I am unaware of testimony asserting his fluency in reading Syriac, though as we will see below Mehmed may have studied Hebrew enough to argue with rabbis about Daniel's meaning. Thus, wherever Syriac appears in the paratextual material, I contend that it serves several goals. First, it affirms the text's antiquity—kept for ages among the Syriac Christians who themselves received it from the Jews—and by extension its authority. Second, it lends the stand alone copy, otherwise denuded of its canonical position in the Bible, the aura and power of preternatural wisdom *qua* apocalypse. Especially with the title in Syriac script, the Muslim reader is meant to understand: “this comes from the people of the book.” Lastly, the idea that a Syriac copy, and not a Aramaic-*cum*-Hebrew copy, was chosen suggests that for Mehmed the language and its community of Christians were a source of legitimacy. Consider this an example of Ottoman Orientalism vis-à-vis the empire's more ‘ancient’ religious minorities and subjects. After all, only a Syriac scribe was capable of mustering the philological knowhow to include in the marginal note the meaning of *mene mene tekel uparsin* in Syriac, then Syriac transliteration, then Arabic, and then in Aramaic. Admittedly, one cannot explain how or why a Syriac Christian would be adept at writing and reading Aramaic and/or Hebrew. Enigmas abound.

Let us consider this point of the Syriac language or Syriac identity as authorizing the text. For example, the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* in its origin is a Syriac text and was composed in reaction to Arabian Muslim expansion and conquest. Having made its way over the centuries to the court of the Byzantine kings, Ps.-Methodius became a prophet of cosmocratic propaganda. Byzantine understanding of the Last World Emperor derives principally from this work. For the Ottomans, this was an equally well-known text and concept, though they preferred their own *mélange* of Chengisid, Timurid, Byzantine, and of course Islamic eschatological traditions vis-à-vis universal sovereignty.²⁶ Recall that the

26 A.F. Broadbridge, *Kingship and Ideology in the Islamic and Mongol Worlds* (Cambridge 2008), 7; B. F. Manz, “Timurane and the Symbolism of Sovereignty,” *Iranian Studies*, 21.1–2 (1988), 105–22; Bonura, *idem*; B. Flemming “Sahib-Kiran und Mahdi: Türkische Endzeiterwartungen im ersten Jahrzehnt der Regierung Süleymans,” Hans R. Roemer and Albrecht Noth (eds), *Studien zur Geschichte und Kultur des Vorderen Orients. Festschrift für Bertold*

concept of “Lord of the Conspicuous Conjunction” (*ṣāhib-i kīrān*) had particular appeal for Süleyman and his successors. Likewise, legends around Alexander the Macedonian, too, were passed on to Muslims via the Syriac tradition, a philological point of fact the Ottomans were most likely aware of as well.²⁷

And then there is the Islamo-Danielic prognosticatory tradition known as the “destinies” (Ar. sing. *malḥamah*, pl. *malāhim*; Ot. *mülheme* or *şemsiyye*).²⁸ As Alexander Fodor argues, this particular vatic genre comes from the Syriac community around Tur Abdin in modern-day Turkey’s Mardin Province, most likely taking first textual shape around the turn of the twelfth century.²⁹ Here, Daniel is depicted as the source of agricultural, astrological, and meteorological divination.³⁰ Emphasis on supernatural wisdom concerning the sublunar sphere is a logical extension of dream interpretation. An ability to predict crop yields based on weather forecasts is, in a way, a function of the kind of political prophecy in the *Book of Daniel*. Famine, floods, crop failure can undermine the stability of a dynasty. Peasant revolts were real and they often begat charismatic leaders that challenged the empire head on, such as Şeyh Bedreddin Mahmud of Samavna and his sidekick (*halife*) Börklüce Mustafa in the early fifteenth

Spuler zum 70. Geburtstag (Leiden 1981, 58–61; C. Fleischer, “Seer to the Sultan: Haydar-i Remmal and Sultan Süleyman”, in J. L. Warner (ed), *Kültür Ufukları: Talat S. Halman Armağan Kitabı* (Syracuse and Istanbul 2001) 291; H. Yılmaz, *Caliphate Redefined: The Mystical Turn in Ottoman Political Thought* (Princeton 2018), 283. For perhaps the oldest attestation of belief in the Last Emperor, see F. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam* (Cambridge 2010), 125.

27 For a very general introduction to Syriac Christians under the Ottomans, see H. van den Berg, “Syriac Literature and Christian-Muslim Relations Under the Ottomans, 16th–19th Centuries”, in D. Thomas and J. Chesworth (eds), *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History, Vol. 18—The Ottoman Empire 1800–1914* (Leiden 2021), 27–37. Much can and should be done on Ottoman impressions and awareness of Christian minority communities like the Syriac Christians.

28 See E. İhsanoğlu, *Osmanlı Astroloji Literatürü Tarihi ve Osmanlı Astronomi Literatürü Tarihi Zeyli* (Istanbul 2011), 3–6.

29 See A. Fodor, “Malhamat Daniyal”, in G. Kaldy-Nagy (ed), *The Muslim East: Studies in Honour of Julius Germanus* (Budapest 1974), 85, 90, 91. I am inclined to side with Fodor’s thesis of origins over Vajda’s insufficient critique. See G. Vajda, “Quelques observations sur la Malhamat Daniyal”, *Arabica*, 23 (1976), 84–87.

30 See J. den Heijer, “Malhamat Daniyal and Christian Arabic Literature”, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta*, 218 (1982), 223–232. For some Ottoman *Mülheme-yi Dāniyāl*, see TKSM, Ms. H.491, fols. 1b–35b; Harvard Hough Library Ms. Turk 13, fols. 1a–35b (incomplete, missing initial pages).

century, Şahqulı in Teke ili (1511–1512), Şeyh Celal of Bozoq (1519–1520), and the Bektaşî Kalender in Kırşehir (1527–1528).³¹ Note, however, that the *Mülheme-yi Dāniyāl* literature should not be confused with the much older Islamic genre of “dynastic destinies” genre (*hidthān al-duwal, malāḥim*).³² Part of this non-apocalyptic *mülheme* tradition may draw from other Syriac works such as the *Cave of Treasures* or the *Book of Medicine*.

Consider the fact as well that Mehmed’s anonymous scribe concludes in the colophon that he chose to include the parabiblical chapters “Bel and the Dragon” and “Susannah and the Elders” because “I studied them in my childhood”. Neither of these chapters are included in the Hebrew Bible; they figure only in Catholic and Eastern Orthodox bibles.³³ Consequently, by confirming his long-standing exposure to and study of Syriac, we can surmise that Mehmed received this as a positive credential. Such personal scribal note, however short, is a stamp of quality and truth. The scribe speaks through his inclusion of the Syriac script in the title, his own linguistic insertions across several languages, and his final autobiographical comment. It is as if he were saying to his reader, “trust me, through the translation of my native tongue, and through our own tradition, I can bring you closer to divine wisdom.”

But the importance of the paratextual material does not end there. For example, take the second quotation at the top of this paper: “Here, [Ibn Ezra] interpreted ‘the Fourth Kingdom’ as the kingdom of Islam, and he interpreted the legs of steel of King Nebuchadnezzar’s vision as the kingdom of Islam” (fol. 22a). Ibn Ezra (d. ca. 1138–40 CE) was a twelfth-century Jewish Andalusian scholar who, among other things, composed a commentary on the *Book of Daniel*. Our anonymous translator peppers his copy throughout with Ibn

31 E. Werner, “Häresie, Klassenkampf und religiöse Toleranz in einer islamisch-christlichen Kontakzone Bedr ed-Din und Börklüce Mustafa”, *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, 12 (1964), 255–76; A. Gölpinarlı, *Simavna Kadısoğlu Şeyh Bedreddin* (Istanbul, 1966); M. Balivet, *Islam mystique et révolution armée dans les Balkans ottomans: vie du cheikh Bedreddin, le “hallaj des turcs,” 1358/59–1416* (Istanbul, 1995); A. Y. Ocak, *Osmanlı toplumunda zındıklar ve mülhidler (15.–17. yüzyıllar)* (Istanbul, 1998), 136–202.

32 For more on that, see EI2, “Malḥama” (T. Fahd).

33 Protestant bibles pejoratively refer to these works as “apocryphal.” I thank Dr. Kelsie Rodenbiker for educating me about apocrypha, the less loaded alternative terminology (i.e. paracanonical or parabiblical), and in general about the importance of paratexts. See, for example, K. Rodenbiker, “The Second Peter: Pseudepigraphy as Exemplarity in the Second Canonical Petrine Epistle”, *Novum Testamentum*, 65 (2023), 115, 129–30.

Ezra's commentary. Aside from a single explicit reference to Ibn Ezra by name on fol. 22b, the Iberian Jewish interpreter is otherwise tersely referred to as the "commentator" (*qāl šārīh*) par excellence or as "the interpreter" (*fassar...*). One is reminded of St. Thomas Aquinas who in his *Summa Theologica* often spoke of Aristotle simply as "the Philosopher." The person in question need not be mentioned by name; his popularity is self-evident. Two questions arise: why would a Syriac Christian scribe know of Ibn Ezra? And why would he include his commentary in a copy for Mehmed? The first question is, for now, unanswerable. Any answer to the second question involves a lot of informed conjecture. Certainly it is evasive.³⁴

Specifically, Ibn Ezra associates the fourth kingdom on fol. 22a in reference to the fourth beast of Daniel's dream with that of Nebuchadnezzar's ominous vision of a statue in Chapter 2. Both are synthesized as apocalyptic predictions concerning the advent of a world-wide Islamic empire. This is not a positive development for Ibn Ezra. As a Jew, Ibn Ezra was driven from Granada in 1066 during a violent eruption of antisemitic riots. Following his return to Granada, Ibn Ezra continued to suffer under the Almoravids. Islamic dominion, in this context, is comparable with the Seleucid occupation of Israel in the second century BCE. The anti-imperial position of biblical apocalyptic is not excised from Mehmed's copy, and the marginalia apparently confirm this. With Islam as the fourth and final kingdom—and by association therefore also the most wicked one according to Ibn Ezra—the Ottomans stand out as a dynasty worthy of God's punishment. Recall that a rock will smash the statue to make way for the final apocalyptic kingdom of God. So, too, is the fourth beast in Daniel's dream defeated in preparation for the restitution of celestial kingship on Earth.

Or is it really this simple? Take, for example, the following commentary on fol. 22b:

34 Well before Mehmed succeeded to the throne, his father's premier court occult master and mystic 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Biṣṭāmī (d. 1454) in his "Key to the Comprehensive Prognosticon" (*Miftāḥ al-ḡafr al-ḡāmi'*) infused esoteric elements into this synthesized tradition of power and eschatological belief, thereby further establishing Ottoman apocalyptic ambitions as part of the court life. The oldest copy of the "Key" is SK Ms. Hafid Ef. 204 composed in 1494. Sultan Süleyman's court geomancer Haydar-i Remmal had a copy (SK Ms. Laleli 1532) composed by his eunuch Muzaffar in 943/1536 (see fol. 108b). Though not a complete list, additional copies I have found are: TSMK Mss. Bağdat 373, Revan 1697; SK Mss. Süleymaniye 1060, Bağdatlı Vehbi 941, Pertevniyal 761, Esad Ef. 1506, Şehit Ali Paşa 1817; İÜK Ms. Türkçe 6624; BnF Ms. 2669.

Ibn Ezra commented on the *Book of Daniel* and said that the small horn [of the fourth beast that emerges in Daniel's dream] represents one of the kingdoms of Islam that appear on earth. And from among these kingdoms a great king will appear who will eradicate three kings among the Muslim kings as well as a great many of the Greek and Roman princes. And he will take [text unclear]. And he will be wise (*ḥādiq*) and demonstrate proficiency in many sciences and basic principles.

The original valence of *Daniel* as an anti-imperial text and Ibn Ezra's pejorative identification of Islam as the final iniquitous kingdom, is herewith transformed into an encomium of sorts at the hand of our scribe; the scribe has transformed the meaning of Ibn Ezra's exegesis. One should understand that there is an uprising in unjust Islamic kingship. This is exemplified in Daniel's vision by the multiplication of horns on the fourth apocalyptic beast. Daniel says, "I was considering the horns, when another horn appeared, a little one coming up among them; to make room for it, three of the earlier horns were plucked up by the roots. There were eyes like human eyes in this horn, and a mouth speaking arrogantly." Daniel's vision concludes with the final horn "waging war against the holy people" (fol. 24a, *tuqātil al-aḥbār*, cf. fol. 25a where it is given as *al-qiddīsīn al-awāl*) and "changing God's laws and principles of faith" (fol. 25a, *yataḡayyir al-awābid wa-l-i'tiqādāt*). This boastful and wicked horn is then removed from power by God, the Ancient of Days. Crucially, however, any further commentary from the Syriac scribe on this section stops. Is a terminal—if even boisterous—Islamic overlord necessary, good, and even welcome. Is the final horn actually a godsend? Or rather, is the strategic silence of the Syriac scribe supposed to allow the sultan to interpret Ibn Ezra's prophecy of a final Islamic kingdom as unavoidable and therefore a restitutive act of God. I think that the greater context of Ottoman eschatological enthusiasm must be taken into consideration.

Mehmed's interest in the *Book of Daniel*—or the inspiration for his scribe's decision to introduce the work to the sultan—principally derived from an interest in apocalypticism *tout court*. The reason why the *Book of Daniel* is more appealing over any other biblical apocalypse—or conversely, why his scribe found it relevant to translate it for the sultan's personal collection—is because of its imperial focus. That is to say, if Mehmed read the work, he did not understand the subversive nature of Daniel's Babylonian visions or the anti-Islamic position of Ibn Ezra. The Jewish and early Christian tradition of reading Daniel

against empire, therefore, was totally lost on the conqueror of Constantinople. Our anonymous Syriac translator drew on two tools to drive a possible and quite narrow pro-dynastic reading: the reinterpretation of the commentary of Ibn Ezra and strategic marginal silences. First, presuming that Mehmed knew nothing of Ibn Ezra's suffering at the hand of Andalusian antisemitism, the Almoravids' oppression of the Jews, and Ibn Ezra's identification of the fourth and final beast with Islam writ large, the inclusion of Jewish commentary material loses its anti-imperial flavor, especially when the scribe implicitly suggests that a sultan like Mehmed would conquer other Muslim monarchs and be a renaissance man of culture.³⁵ Second, silence allows for a great deal of ambiguity. By not elaborating further on this particular vision of the horn, Mehmed was left with the ambiguity of interpretation. One has to fill in the gaps. Personal preference informs the hermeneutic of private literary interest. And if, as stated in the marginalia, a final Islamic kingdom *sans* qualification will overthrow three other kingdoms and emerge as the last of all earthly reigns, then the Ottoman imperial self-understanding as God's final empire pre-Last Judgment fits the bill. The horn speaks boastfully, and so too, in a loud voice that would rival the horns that brought down the walls of Jericho, a Muslim monarch would bring Constantinople to its knees by proclaiming "God is great!"³⁶ In this light, one could argue that the inclusion of *Daniel* in the imperial library derives from an effort to align Islamic tradition with a much older biblical tradition. As a rule, especially concerning apocalypses, the older a tradition or a text is perceived to be, the greater authority and truth its readers attribute to it. Although Daniel *qua* prophet is not mentioned in the Qur'an, his popularity as a visionary of the future was long established as part of Islamic culture and belief.³⁷

Secondary evidence may support the supposition that Mehmed read this

35 Evidently, Ibn Ezra may have been introduced into Christian and Islamic intellectual circles via the conversion of a Jew. Take for example the case study in D. Half, "Isma'il Qazvini: A Twelfth/Eighteenth-Century Jewish Convert to Imami Shi'ism and His Critique of Ibn Ezra's Commentary on the Four Kingdoms (Daniel 2:31-45)", in M. Hjälms (ed), *Senses of Scripture, Treasures of Tradition: The Bible in Aramaic Among Jews, Christians, and Muslims* (Leiden 2017), 281-304. I have not been able to access the rest of this collection. Further research into how Ibn Ezra became popular among Syriac Christians is extremely relevant for any further research.

36 Oruç Beğ, *Tarihi*, 112; K. Teply, *Türkische Sagen und Legenden um die Kaiserstadt Wien* (Vienna 1980), 120.

37 See L. DiTommaso, *The Book of Daniel and the Apocryphal Daniel Literature* (Leiden 2005),

text and understood it as somehow pro-imperial. Take the sixteenth-century Hebrew chronicle *Seder Eliyahu Zuta* composed in 1523 by Eliyahu Capsali (d. ca. 1550), rabbi of Candia (modern-day Heraklion). Capsali relates that Mehmed II personally undertook the study of Hebrew to read *Daniel* and employed Rabbi Isaiah Meseni to read the apocalypse out loud to him.³⁸ Interestingly, Capsali's uncle Moses (d. 1500) was Chief Rabbi of Constantinople under Mehmed II, which gives one reason to suspect that there is some kernel of truth to the narrative.³⁹ Conversely put, how or why would Capsali have known that Mehmed even possessed a copy of *Daniel* from which Meseni could read, never mind his awareness that Mehmed was interested in this particular book of the Hebrew Bible over any other. Further sources claim that Mehmed debated George Amiroutzès (d. ca. 1469–70), the sultan's most intimate and trusted Greek tutor, concerning the meaning and resonance of the apocalyptic schema of four kingdoms.⁴⁰ One rightly should doubt the veracity of both claims, but it is intriguing that any outside source, especially ones far removed from the epicenter of historical action, would be aware of Mehmed's interest in, as well as possession of, the *Book of Daniel*. With the Ottoman banner flying high over Constantinople, "Mehmed's providential destiny as Muslim heir to the Eastern Roman Empire" inspired the Ottoman monarch to portray himself as artistically, culturally, and metaphysically superior to his Christian and Islamic counterparts.⁴¹ The Byzantine's interpreted themselves positively as the "fourth kingdom."⁴² So, too, did Charlemagne and his Carolingian successors, as well as Frankish kings in medieval central Europe.⁴³ The pro-imperial interpretation

esp. 1–34 which establishes the tradition of *Daniel* legends and apocrypha from early post-biblical literature to Byzantine and even Islamic texts.

38 C. Berlin, "A Sixteenth-Century Hebrew Chronicle of the Ottoman Empire: The *Seder Eliyahu Zuta* of Elijah Capsali and Its Message", in C. Berlin (ed), *Studies in Jewish Bibliography, History and Literature in Honor of I. Edward Kiev* (New York 1971), 27.

39 For a more critical appraisal of Capsali and his *Sefer Eliyahu Zuta*, see A. Shmuelevitz, "Capsali as a Source for Ottoman History, 1450–1523", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 9.3 (1978), 339–344.

40 A. Argyriou and G. Lagarrigue, "Georges Amiroutzès et son 'Dialogue sur la foi au Christ tenu avec le Sultan des Turc'", *Byzantinische Forschungen*, 11 (1987), 161–168. The original Greek text is lost. All that remains is a Latin copy upon which Argyriou and Lagarrigue base their work.

41 *Ibid.*, 12.

42 DiTommaso, "Four Kingdoms," 216.

43 *Ibid.*, 229.

of the fourth kingdom as good was trendy. Why should Mehmed not enjoy political *translatio imperii* for his own dynastic benefit? But this is only another reading. It is not any more certain or probable than the previous hypothesis of Mehmed's interest in *Daneil* as a contemplative text *against* imperial hubris. The limits of interpretation are real.

Conclusion

As Lorenzo DiTommaso observes, apocalypses are mercurial texts, perhaps more so than any other revelatory genre. Though the *Book of Daniel* is in its origin principally against empire, the “concerns and needs” of an Ottoman imperial readership, like Mehmed and his court, require us to reconsider just how anti-imperial *Daniel* was. If we consider the literal warnings of the Jewish prophet of Babylon, then Ayasofya 3367 emerges as a contemplative text with heavily anti-imperial themes. Mehmed may have selected it as a revelatory “mirror for princes”-esque handbook as he stood at the cusp of world-dominion. Keen on knowing how to run the world and avoid falling afoul of God's plan, the prophecy against Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel's dream scenario of apocalyptic beasts presented the sultan with clear signposts. Better to learn what the “people of the book” say as a counterweight to more bombastically positive Islamic prophecies concerning the conquest of Constantinople. This aligns well with Tursun Beg's account of a conqueror concerned with the passing of time and the instability of power and the wary sentiments of the author of the *Dürr-i meknun*.

But if we explore the paratextual material, one can also see how the Syriac scribe adroitly inserted historical commentary, reinterpreted said commentary, and also left marginal silences when necessary. This is most obvious in the section concerning Daniel's vision of the four beasts. Did Mehmed receive the text as a more robustly pro-imperial work rather than anti-imperial warning? Recall that the anonymous scribe suggests that the final horn of history is that of an Islamic potentate skilled in science and statecraft. There is little here that does not also align with the Ottoman reception of Islamic political eschatology and Mehmed's own self-styled image as renaissance man of learning. And the idea of empires passing onto to other empires—herewith exemplified by the marginal emphasis on a final Islamic kingdom replacing three other Islamic dynas-

ties—mirrors what DiTommaso observed regarding the “stakeholder” reading of the Danielic apocalypse of empire:

Stakeholder groups, by contrast, applied the schema in its insider/imperial mode, modulated by the *translation imperii*, in order to preserve the present order, which they had fought to establish, not overthrow. Identifying the final kingdom [of Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel’s visions] with their own rule normalizes their political positions and provides the basis for legitimation and/or social policy.⁴⁴

The notion of *translation imperii* is key. Mehmed was now the inheritor of Byzantium and a contender for European Christian claimants to international power and prestige. Again, as Oruç Bey in his *Tarih* exuberantly states, “He who is called the Mahdi, a scion of the Prophet Isaac, will have a military expedition and conquer the city (i.e. Constantinople) by saying ‘*God is Great*.’” That man was Mehmed. With the Ottomans well on their way to establishing cosmocratic dominion in fulfillment of diverse eschatological traditions, *Daniel* now becomes in Mehmed’s hands a prophecy *pro* not *contra* imperial success and power. Our Syriac scribe deploys quotations from Ibn Ezra, otherwise taken out of context, and strategically keeps mum when it serves his employers. Thus, a *dhimmi* translator of scripture becomes an accessory to Mehmed’s claim to End-Times hegemony.

But this argument, too, requires a lot more evidence. The long and short of this article must conclude that neither the outsider mode nor the stakeholder mode are certain. Perhaps both theses should complement each other. Why choose? Mehmed could have both been interested in the text for its anti-imperial admonitions as well as for its pro-imperial proclamations. Until further historical proof emerges about *how* Mehmed read the text, the only thing one can say is that Ms. Ayasofya 3367 shows us the limits of certainty in historical interpretation. Mehmed’s *Daniel* remains as fluid as the concerns and needs of its readers across confession, empire, and time.

44 DiTommaso, “Four Kingdoms”, 237.