THE MAN AND THE MYTH:
HERACLIOUS AND THE LEGEND OF THE LAST ROMAN EMPEROR

By

CHRISTOPHER BONURA

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The legend of the Last Roman Emperor is one of the most persistent themes in Medieval European apocalypticism. And yet its origin remains uncertain. In the late nineteenth century Ernst Sackur, while editing an eleventh-century sibylline oracle that contained this legend, proposed an original fourth-century source. Paul Alexander, perhaps the twentieth century’s foremost expert on Byzantine eschatology, dated the legend to the time of Theodosius I, until later changing his mind. Recent scholars place the date of the legend later, to around the time of Roman Emperor Heraclius (r. 610-641 AD). And yet, Heraclius’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem with the True Cross bore striking resemblance to the actions attributed to the mythical Last Roman Emperor.

Thus the question of the date of the Legend of the Last Roman Emperor is crucial in understanding the return of the True Cross to Jerusalem by Heraclius, one of the most significant events in early Byzantine history. It has not been clear whether Heraclius was inspired by, or inspired, the apocalyptic legend of the Last Emperor. The first securely datable text to mention the Last Roman Emperor is the Syriac Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius, which dates from just after Heraclius’ reign. But is it possible that Pseudo-Methodius drew on an earlier source, one that, as Sackur believed, also
inspired the post-Ottonian Tiburtine Sibyls? By exploring these eleventh-century western sources, and comparing them to Eastern apocalyptic literature, this thesis will explore the influence and interaction of the historical Roman Emperor Heraclius with the legendary story of the Last Roman Emperor.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION: THE ESCHATOLOGICAL EMPEROR

On March 21 in the year 630, the Emperor Heraclius made his way through the city of Jerusalem, clasping in his arms a silver box containing perhaps the most revered relics in Christendom. The first, and ultimately the last, Christian Roman Emperor to enter that holiest of cities, Heraclius’ adventus was a scene imbued with enormous symbolic meaning. The box he carried contained the relic of the True Cross, which had been carried away from the city sixteen years before during its sack by the Persian army of Khusro II, when “the new Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem and carried away the Ark of the New Covenant, after razing the city with fire.” As Heraclius entered the Martyrion basilica, originally built by Constantine on the site of the discovery of the True Cross, “there was the sound of weeping and wailing; the tears flowed from the awesome fervor of the emotion of their hearts and from the rending of the entrails of the king, the princes, all the troops, and the inhabitants of the city. No one was able to sing the Lord’s chants from the fearful and agonizing emotion of the king and the whole multitude.”

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1 March, 630, is the currently the most widely accepted date of Heraclius’ adventus into Jerusalem. However, there has been a great deal of debate on the subject. See Norman H. Baynes, “The Restoration of the Cross at Jerusalem.” The English Historical Review, vol. 27, No. 106 (April, 1912), 287-299; and Agostino Pertusi, Giorgio di Pisidia, Poemi I: Panegirici epici (Ettal: Buch-Kunstverlag, 1959) 230-236. Ann S. Proudfoot, in “The Sources of Theophanes for the Heracleian Dynasty,” Byzantion, vol. 44 (1974), 383, dates it earlier, to 629, while Venance Grumel, in “La Reposi


3 Flusin, Saint Anastase le Perse, vol. 1, 209.

believed to have been crucified, Heraclius restored the relic to its rightful place just outside the church.  

In the years previous to this momentous occasion, Emperor Heraclius had fought a long and brutal war against the Persians, and emerged victorious. By the time that peace was made in 628 the war had dragged on for an entire generation. Urban life was utterly devastated in the once prosperous cities of the Near East. Jerusalem, the holiest city of Christianity, had been sacked and burned, and Constantinople, the capital of Christendom, had only barely escaped destruction by overcoming a determined siege. In turn, the holiest Persian Zoroastrian temple-center had been destroyed by a vengeful Christian army. In a quarter-century of unrelenting bloodshed, not only had the urban and religious centers of the two great empires been ravaged, but the world order that had prevailed for centuries had been violently interrupted. As a result, apocalyptic hopes and fears were running high, and not just among Christians.
It was against this backdrop that Heraclius brought the relics of the True Cross, returned from Persia as part of the peace treaty at the end of the war, to Golgotha. The symbolism of this event is obscured by a difficult source tradition, but nonetheless it has been studied by a number of historians. Several have pointed to this occasion as having oblique eschatological overtones. Heraclius had been on campaign against Persia for six years, and now the seventh provided an earthly Sabbath, a period not just of rest but of millennial importance. According to some scholars, the return of the True Cross represented the beginning of this new age. Indeed, Heraclius held his adventus on March 21, believed to be the date upon which the universe was created, a fitting decision for an Emperor whom George of Pisidia, his client poet, addressed as στρατηγὲ κοσμικοῦ γενεθλίου, “strategist of the cosmic birthday.” Heraclius seemed to be presiding over the rebirth of the κόσμος in both its Byzantine senses: his return of the True Cross came at the same time he was attempting to heal the universal church by

12 Flusin, Saint Anastase, II, 314-315: “la reposition de la Croix a Jérusalem marque le début d’un nouvel âge dans l’histoire de la Création.”
13 George of Pisidia, Heracleias, 1.20; Tartaglia, 206. For the belief that the world was created on March 21, 5508 BC, see Elias J. Bickerman. Chronology of the Ancient World, (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1980), p.73. The Chronicon Paschale, Ludwig Dindorf, Chronicon Paschale ad exemplar Vaticanum, vol. 1. (Bonn: E. Weber, 1832), written during the reign of Heraclius, puts the beginning of the world at 21 March, 5507.
reconciling the schisms formed in the wake of the Council of Chalcedon, while ruling over a secular world in which Roman supremacy had been restored. Describing the evidence from the poet George of Pisidia’s works on Heraclius, Irfan Shahîd concluded that “Heraclius might very well have thought he was opening the last phase of the millennium as a praeparatio for the Second Coming.”

Of course, George of Pisidia’s words may just be hyperbole. But modern scholars have also looked to Heraclius’ policies in the wake of this journey to Jerusalem for proof of the apocalyptic sentiment that imbued his regime. He seemed intent on spreading Christianity to all nations, particularly to the Persians. He also attempted to lead an effort to convert the Jews both inside and outside his empire. At the end of the nineteenth century, Franz Kampers already described the return of the True Cross as an event attempting to open the gates of paradise. G.J. Reinink has provided an explanation for the use of apocalyptic acts on the part of Heraclius. He has asserted

15 See George of Pisida, Hexameron, lines 1845-1850 (PG 92, col. 1572); Tartaglia, 418-420, lines 1799-1804.
16 Shahîd, “The Iranian Factor,” 308. Shahîd sets forth this position based on the fact that Heraclius had, just before his adventus into Jerusalem, adopted the title πιστὸς εν Χριστῷ βασιλεύς, “the Christ-believing King,” in place of his former titles of Augustus and αὐτοκράτωρ. According to Shahîd, “the assumption of the basileia in 629 may be related to these hopes; the title basileus was most appropriate for reflecting an imperial image which was conceived by contemporaries as messianic or even a self-image which had in fact become messianic.”
17 With the military assistance of Heraclius, Shahrbaraz occupied Ctesphion and seized power, executing the seven-year old Shah Ardashir III. Heraclius married one of his sons to Shahrbaraz’s daughter, and Heraclius made arrangements for Shahrbaraz to be succeeded by his son Niketas, who was a Christian (Walter Kaegi, Heraclius: Emperor of Byzantium (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 188-190). All this came to naught, however, when Shahrbaraz was assassinated.
that seventh-century writers were attempting to co-opt the apocalyptic fervor of the time to support the legitimacy of Heraclius’ regime.\textsuperscript{20} By reappropriating and inverting apocalyptic themes that had been popular during the uncertain days of the war with Persia, these supporters of Heraclius tried to reverse the sense of impending doom and instead portray his regime as part of a golden age, a time when, according to Heraclius’ court historian Theophylact Simocatta, τὴν ἀνέστερον ἡμέραν ἔνδημεῖν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις, “the day without evening would dawn for men.”\textsuperscript{21} Reinink leaves open the possibility that Heraclius himself was attempting to promote these “positive eschatological views,” and that his actions may have been influenced by a belief that he was living in the end times.\textsuperscript{22}

While it seems clear that George of Pisidia and other authors of Heraclius’ time attempted to use apocalyptic symbolism, the idea that “imperial policy was indeed inspired by the eschatological preoccupations of the time,” is much harder to prove.\textsuperscript{23} Actions such as the conversion of the Jews and of Persia could very well have been practical policy decisions rather than attempts to bring about the eschaton. However, Heraclius’ decision to return the True Cross to Jerusalem stands out among his acts, and it bears a striking resemblance to a particular apocalyptic prediction, the Legend of the Last Roman Emperor. According to what is undoubtedly the most famous version of the legend, written by Pseudo-Methodius in the late seventh century:

\textsuperscript{21} Theophylact Simocatta, 5.15.7; for English translation see Michael Whitby and Mary Whitby, \textit{The History of Theophylact Simocatta} (Oxford: Claredon Press, 1986),153. Theophylact puts the prediction of the golden age in the mouth of Heraclius’ greatest enemy, king Khusro II of Persia, having him prophesize both his initial victories over the Romans, and then the defeat of the Persians, followed by the coming of the eschaton.
\textsuperscript{22} Reinink, “Heraclius, the New Alexander,” 91.
\textsuperscript{23} Quote in ibid.
As soon as the Son of Perdition is revealed, the king of the Greeks will go up and stand on Golgotha, and the Holy Cross will be put in that place where it had been erected when it bore Christ. And the king of the Greeks will put his crown on the top of the Holy Cross and stretch out his two hands to heaven.

This text, attributed to the fourth-century bishop Methodius of Olympus in the Syriac original (called Methodius of Patara in Greek translation), was probably written around the end of the seventh century, over fifty years after Heraclius placed the Cross on Golgotha. However, it begs the question whether Pseudo-Methodius was basing his apocalyptic predictions on Heraclius’ actions or whether he was drawing on a tradition that predates Heraclius and upon which Heraclius also drew for symbolic meaning.

Not only is it uncertain which came first, but no scholar to date has actively engaged this question. Jan Willem Drijvers implies that they are somehow related in order to assert that Heraclius’ return of the True Cross was inspired by apocalyptic sentiments, but he does not explore the question in any detail. Paul Magdalino has been one of the few scholars to even address the problem of which, the man or the myth, depended on the other, but concluded only that “it is not entirely clear whether

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24 This is from the Syriac; the Greek translation is essentially the same, except that “Emperor of the Greeks” (malkō deiouniē), is changed to “Emperor of the Romans” (βασιλεύς τῶν Ῥωμαίων), or sometimes the two are equated (τῶν Ελλήνων, τοιτιότι τῶν Ῥωμαίων); see the critical edition of the Greek text in W. J. Aerts and G. A. A. Kortekaas, Die Apokalypse des Pseudo-Methodius: die ältesten griechischen und lateinischen Übersetzungen, CSCO, vol. 569 (Leuven: E. Peeters, 1998), 70-198.

25 Pseudo-Methodius, 14.2-3; in Die Syrische Apokalypse des Pseudo-Methodius, ed. G.J. Reinink, CSCO vol. 540 (Leuven: E. Peeters, 1993), 44; translated in Martinez, Eastern Christian Apocalyptic, 152; for a more recent German translation, see Die Syrische Apokalypse des Pseudo-Methodius, transl. G.J. Reinink, CSCO vol. 541 (Leuven: E. Peeters, 1993), 71-72. For further citations of Pseudo-Methodius, I will give the chapter and section, followed in parentheses by the page in Reinink’s critical edition, then the page in Martinez’s English translation, and finally the page in Reinink’s German translation.


27 Drijvers, 186-187.
[Heraclius] was inspired by, or inspired, the apocalyptic legend of the Last Emperor." 28

By this logic, the question must rise or fall on whether the Legend of the Last Roman Emperor and his return of the Cross to Golgotha predates or postdates Heraclius’ adventus into Jerusalem: the real-life events and the eschatological tradition preserved in Pseudo-Methodius appear too similar for coincidence. If the legend did predate Heraclius’ actions, it is reasonable to believe that it informed them. Thus, if it can be shown that the legend was in fact circulating before 630, it would strongly suggest that Heraclius was trying to portray himself, among other things, as the Last Roman Emperor, whose entry into Jerusalem had clear and manifest eschatological significance. This question has further implications. The existence of a legend that inspired Heraclius would have also inspired the later writings of Pseudo-Methodius. The Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius was perhaps the most influential eschatological work of the entire medieval period, 29 and in order to properly understand this work, it is necessary to determine the source of the legend of the Last Roman Emperor.

The aim of this thesis, then, is to assess the evidence for the origin of this legend and to determine whether the Last Emperor legend inspired Heraclius’ return of the True Cross or if, conversely, it was based on that event. Besides tackling the question of the relative dates of these texts and traditions, this thesis will also assess the modern

28 Paul Magdalino, “The history of the future and its uses: prophesy, policy, and propaganda.” The Making of Byzantine History; Studies dedicated to Donald M. Nicol. (Aldershot: Ashgate/Variorum, 1993), 19. To my knowledge he is the only scholar who has directly engaged this question, but he mentions it only briefly and remains agnostic on the issue, stating in a footnote that the question comes down to whether or not the description of the Last Roman Emperor in the Tiburtine Sibyl is an interpolation. Günther Stemberger, in “Jerusalem in the Early Seventh Century,” in Jerusalem: Its Sanctity and Centrality to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, ed. Lee I. Levine (New York: Continuum Publishing, 1999), 265, writes that in Pseudo-Methodius “the restoration of the Holy Cross to Jerusalem by Heraclius is not explicitly mentioned, but it is to be understood as central to the scene when all earthly rule comes to its end.”

29 Sackur, 6, claims that the influence of Pseudo-Methodius in the middle ages was surpassed in importance only by the Bible and the writings of the Church Fathers.
historiography of the Last Roman Emperor legend, evaluating arguments both for the
date of the origin of the legend, and for the implications of these arguments for the
legend’s role in history.

This is not the first study to try to analyze the apocalyptic influences on late
antique and medieval rulers. For example, scholars have shown that at almost precisely
the same time as Heraclius’ triumph, the T’ang Emperors of China were legitimatizing
the rule of their new dynasty by portraying themselves as the messianic emperor Li
Hun (李弘) of Daoist eschatology. Also, in the seventh century, Heraclius’ arch-rival,
Khusro II, was briefly ousted from his throne by the general Bahram Chubin, whose
usurpation, though brief, was cast in terms of Zoroastrian apocalyptic belief in a king-
redeemer. Geographically closer to Heraclius, Justinian’s propaganda may have
sought to cast him as “God’s representative, preparing the way for the Second
Coming,” while Godfrey of Bouillon, as Jerusalem’s first crusader king, consciously
tried to act out the Last Emperor prophesies.

A study of Heraclius’ place in the Last Emperor tradition, however, is important
and long overdue. If it can be shown that Heraclius was imitating the Last Emperor
tradition, it would provide a basis for the idea that his rule was inspired by
eschatological thought. It is clear that Heraclius had some role in the development of

30 Stephen Bokenkamp, “Time after Time: Taoist Apocalyptic History and the Founding of the T’ang
Dynasty,” Asia Major, Third Series, vol. 7 (1994), 59-88 (88: “Li Yuan [r. 618-626], coming to the throne in
an age troubled by apocalyptic expectations and yearning for a Sage-ruler…sought to fulfill those
expectations”); Anna Seidel, “The Image of the Perfect Ruler in Early Taoist Messianism,” History of
Millenarianism at the End of the First Crusade,” in The Legend of Charlemagne in the Middle Ages:
the Last Emperor motif, but up until now it has been far from clear in what sense. Better understanding this phenomenon will also allow clearer insight into the Last Roman Emperor in the history of medieval thought.

The Last Roman Emperor legend played a central role in medieval apocalypticism, both East and West. In the Byzantine Empire, this figure played a central role in almost every apocalyptic text, with the end of his rule marking the rise of the Antichrist to power. In Western Europe, he evolved into the Last World Emperor, a figure central to Holy Roman political ideology and whose impending appearance inspired people as diverse as Christopher Columbus and the defenders of Vienna in 1683. While Paul Alexander did much work on tracing the origin of the Last Emperor legend, he died in 1977, before his task could be completed. Alexander made significant progress in tracing the legend’s origins, but research has advanced much in the last three and a half decades. It may now be possible to get a more complete sense of how the apocalyptic theme of the Last Emperor and the tradition concerning Heraclius’ return of the True Cross fit together. This question cannot be resolved, however, just by looking at Byzantine texts. Indeed, this study must begin geographically and temporally remote from Heraclius, in research concerning apocalyptic thought in the post-Ottonian Holy Roman Empire.

35 For the importance of the legend to Columbus, see Roberto Rusconi. The Book of Prophecies Edited by Christopher Columbus (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997),171-175 ; for the defenders of Vienna, see Michael Kmosko, “Das Rätsel des Pseudomethodius,” Byzantion, vol. 6 (1931), 273-274.
CHAPTER 2
HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE LAST EMPEROR LEGEND

A Latin play survives from around the year 1160 entitled *Ludus de Antichristo,* the “Play of the Antichrist.” The play represents political metaphor expressing support of Holy Roman Emperor Frederick Barbarossa.¹ It certainly reflects the propaganda of his reign, as it tells of an Emperor of the Romans and his struggle against the King of the Franks, the King of the Greeks, and the incarnate Heathen. In his quest for world domination, the good emperor is finally pitted against the King of Babylon for control of Jerusalem.² The stage directions from this scene read:

*Meanwhile, the Emperor and his men advance to battle, and, when the Chorus’ response is finished, they attack the King of Babylon; when he is defeated and in flight, the Emperor and his men enter the Temple. The Emperor worships there; then, taking his crown from his head, he places it, along with a scepter and his imperial dignity, before the altar, singing:*

Receive, O Lord, my grateful gift, for I
Resign my rule to Thee, the King of Kings,
Through Whom kings reign, and Whom alone we call
The Emperor and Ruler of us all.

*He Places these gifts on the altar and returns to the seat of his ancient kingdom.*³

After this act, the Antichrist enters the play. It was the surrender of power by the Emperor of the Romans that provides the catalyst in the narrative for the unfolding of the eschatological drama.

² Such a play was rather appropriate for Frederick Barbarossa, who would die in a crusade to recover Jerusalem. Indeed, soon after that, sibylline prophesies tended to cast Frederick Barbarossa as the Last Roman Emperor, who would return from the dead at the end of time.
³ Young, 377: *Interim Imperator cum suis procedat ad prelium, et, finito responsorio, prelio congregiatur cum Rege Babylonis; quo superato et fugam ineunte, Imperator cum suis intret templum, et postquam ibi adorauerit, tollens coronam de capite et tenens eam cum sceptro et imperio ante altare canter:*

*Suscipe quod offero, nam corde benigno
Tibi Regi regum imperium resigno
Per quem reges regnant, qui solus Imperator
Dici potes et es cunctorum gubernator

*Et eis depositis super altare, ipse reuertitur in sedem antiqui regni sui.*
This text was rediscovered and edited in the late nineteenth century by the German theologian Gerhard von Zezschwitz. He was looking for the roots of German national stories, and concluded that the legend of a great emperor surrendering his power in Jerusalem had to originate in Greek sources. He believed that the source of the apocalyptic material in the play was Adso of Montier-en-Der’s famous letter on the Antichrist written to Gerberga of Saxony in the tenth century, one of the oldest attestations of the Last Emperor legend in the Latin West. In this letter, Adso wrote that he had heard from doctores nostri that a last, great Emperor of the Franks and Romans will go to Jerusalem at the end of times and surrender his crown and scepter to God on the Mount of Olives. Zezschwitz decided that Adso’s unnamed sources must have been drawing on an earlier Byzantine tradition. This led him to the Greek text of Pseudo-Methodius, which he concluded must have been the source of the story. Zezschwitz noticed the similarity between the actions of the Last Roman Emperor and Heraclius’ return of the True Cross, and speculated that it may have been the inspiration for the legend. He noted that like the Last Roman Emperor, legends about Heraclius mentioned that he removed his crown and royal vestments upon entering Jerusalem.

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6 Zezschwitz, 43-48.
7 Ibid, 57-61.
Nineteenth-century Germany was the birthplace and center of the academic study of medieval apocalypses, and a review in the *Historische Zeitschrift* by the renowned German scholar Alfred von Gutschmid catapulted Zezschwitz’s work to major attention in the German scholarly community. Gutschmid built on Zezschwitz's argument for a seventh-century origin of the Tiburtine Sibyl and Pseudo-Methodius, and asserted that the Last Roman Emperor in the former text, who is named in the text as Constans, referred to Constans II, the grandson and successor of Heraclius, and reflected a messianic hope of victory against the Arabs inspired by the failures of that emperor. He believed that this sibylline version of Constans II provided the source for the Last Emperor in Pseudo-Methodius.

The legend of the Last World Emperor taken from medieval legends and combined with the concept of the messianic return of Emperor Frederick Barbarossa provided a mythohistory for the new German nation, and scholars were eager to trace its development. As 1896, the twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of the German Empire, neared, German scholars sought medieval and ancient roots for famous German myths. In particular, there was heightened interest in the “deutschen Kaisersage.” Wilhelm Bousset wrote a famous and still useful book on the history of Antichrist prophesies, Franz Kampers published *Kaiserprophetieen und Kaisersagen im

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10 Gutschmid, 149.
Mittelalter, and Ernst Sackur released *Sibyllinische Texte und Forschungen*, all three of which were extremely influential and all published within three years of each other.

In his book, Sackur edited the primary three early representations of the Legend of the Last Roman Emperor in Latin: Adso’s letter on the Antichrist, the text of the Latin translation of Pseudo-Methodius, and a text known as the Tiburtine Sibyl. The Tiburtine Sibyl, which had originally been attributed to Bede, was already a subject of a debate concerning its origins. Rudolf Usinger noticed that a text attributed to the Cumaean Sibyl seemed to be an earlier version of the Tiburtine Sibyl material attributed to Bede.¹² Hermann Friedrich Gerss, on the other hand, asserted that the version of the text printed by Migne as part of the *spuria* of Bede, and also represented in the *Pantheon* of Godfrey of Viterbo, was the earliest surviving version,¹³ Sackur agreed with Gerss in giving primacy to the material attributed to the Tiburtine Sibyl as opposed to the Cumaean, as well in believing that these sibylline oracles represented a prophecy handed down from the ancient Roman Empire.¹⁴ For Sackur, this myth of a Last Roman Emperor shared by both the Roman and German Empires provided a bridge over history linking the two. It is not surprising, considering the German nationalistic climate under which he was living, that Sackur was searching for the origins of the myth of the messianic emperor, an important myth for the German Empire, in Constantine’s Roman Empire.


¹³ Holdenried, 8-11. Gerss was countering the claims of Rudolf Usinger that the most authentic representation of the Sibylline prophecy was contained in the so-called Cumaean Sibyl, discussed below.

¹⁴ Sackur, 162. For another contemporary to hold a similar view, see Kampers, 29-39.
Sackur’s major effort in the part of his book dealing with the Tiburtine Sibyl was separating the ancient Roman text from the later medieval interpolations. Sackur turned to a pair of lists of kings that formed a major part of the Tiburtine Sibyl. He believed that this was a vaticinium ex eventu, a list of historical kings masquerading as prophecy. \(^{15}\) Sackur realized that these were thinly-veiled lists of real Lombard and Frankish kings, and identified the actual figure associated with each encoded name. \(^{16}\) There are two king lists in every version. The first terminates in a figure who is transparently Otto III (r. 996-1002), then proceeds to start the discussion of the rise of the Last Emperor. This narrative is interrupted by a second king list, giving descriptions of the kings that followed Otto III. This suggests that an original, lost version of the Tiburtine Sibyl was written under the reign of Otto III, with a king list that terminated with that ruler (this lost version will be called version 1). Subsequent surviving versions of the Sibyl updated the work with a second king list that include later rulers. \(^{17}\)

Though the second list differs from manuscript to manuscript, Sackur compared the lists to determine which was oldest, based on which had the earliest version of the second king list. \(^{18}\) Using the texts with the oldest version of the list, Sackur edited what appeared to be the earliest extant version of the Sibyl, referred to by Paul Alexander

\(^{15}\) For the method of using vaticinium ex eventu for dating medieval apocalypses, see Paul Alexander, “Medieval Apocalypses as Historical Sources,” The American Historical Review, vol. 73, no. 4 (April, 1968), 998-1001.

\(^{16}\) Holdenried, 28-29, provides a detailed chart of the regnal lists in the various versions of the Tiburtine Sibyl and the changes made in each version as the medieval copyists struggled to keep the lists up-to-date, which give a sense of just how painstaking Sackur’s efforts were.

\(^{17}\) Sackur, 132-133.

\(^{18}\) Sackur, 132-135. The list in each manuscript tended to take the prophecy up to the time of writing. Thus, the text in Migne, Patrologia Latina, 90, col. 1181-1186, (attributed to Bede) has a long list of kings that terminates with Henry IV (r. 1190-1197), though the earliest manuscripts of the Tiburtine Sibyl end with Conrad II (r. 1024 – 1039); see Holdenried, 12.
(and hereafter in this paper) as \( w^1 \) (version 2), from six manuscripts.\(^1\) He showed that this text was composed in eleventh-century Lombardy under the Holy Roman Emperor Conrad II (d. 1039), the final king in the earliest king list.\(^2\)

Sackur concluded that the Tiburtine Sibyl originated long before the time of Heraclius, and was derived from a Roman Urtext (hereafter \( \Sigma \)) written in the middle of the fourth century. He believed that certain elements of the prophecy meant that it had to predate Heraclius.\(^2\) Since the Last Roman Emperor in the Tiburtine Sibyl is named Constans, Sackur believed that this name was a relic from the civil strife that broke out after the death of Constantine the Great in 337. Constantine’s three sons, Constantine II, Constantinus II, and Constans, vied for control of the empire. Eventually Constantine II was eliminated, and the Roman Empire was split between Constantius II and Constans. Constans was a supporter of the council of Nicaea, while Constantius opposed it. In 350, Constans was killed and Constantius II took control over the entire empire and attempted to moderate the definition of the faith formulated at Nicaea. According to Sackur, Nicene Christians, outraged at having an “Arian heretic” as their emperor, must have seen this as a sign of the end of times. Thus, he believed the Tiburtine Sibyl was written in this period by Nicene Christians who anxiously awaited the messianic return of their orthodox emperor.\(^2\) The surviving version of the Tiburtine Sibyl, Sackur believed, was an eleventh-century copy of the fourth-century text, updated

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\(^1\) The text of the manuscript is found in Sackur, 177-187. Those elements considered interpolations by Sackur are presented in italics.

\(^2\) Sackur, 129-137.

\(^2\) Sackur, 167: “Es liegt weder ein Grund vor, sich hier auf die Heracliuslegende zu berufen, noch den betreffenden Abschnitt später als den Kern der Sibylle selbst zu datieren. Im Gegenteil, wir haben wieder ganz sichere Hinweise darauf, dass dieses eschatologische Element in der uns erhaltenen Form der Zeit der Konstantiniden angehört.”

\(^2\) Since there were no references to Julian the Apostate, Sackur believed that the text must have been written sometime between the death of Constantine and the reign of Julian; see Sackur, 162.
and interpolated by scribes who added details (such as the contemporary king lists). It was Sackur’s contention that the original text was written in Greek, and was soon after translated into Latin (manuscript $w^a$).\(^{23}\) This Latin text was lost but provided the basis for an eleventh-century reworking ($w^b$, aka, version 1), also lost, from which was derived $w^1$ (version 2- the text edited by Sackur), $w^2$ (version 3), and $w^c$ (the latter of which was also lost, but from which there derived several later variations of the work, including version 4).

If Sackur’s views on this text are correct, then the Tiburtine Sibyl preserves a version of the Last Roman Emperor legend that predates Heraclius’ entry into Jerusalem by almost three centuries. However, Sackur’s work has caused debates over both the date of the Tiburtine Sibyl specifically and the Last Emperor theme in general, debates which have yet to be resolved. In order to determine whether this text could have inspired Heraclius and Pseudo-Methodius, it is necessary to take a closer look at the text.

**The Tiburtine Sibyl**

The Tiburtine Sibyl is part of a long history of texts attributed to the sibyls of the ancient world. The importance of sibylline predictions goes back to the early days of ancient Rome. According to later sources, Rome’s last king, Tarquinus, bought three books of oracles from the Sibyl.\(^ {24}\) These books, written in Greek hexameter, were kept in a vault in the Capitoline Temple of Jupiter and consulted by priests in times of

\(^{23}\) Sackur, 164. Kampers had expressed this opinion earlier (Kampers, 32).

\(^{24}\) Lactanius, *Institutiones Divinae*, 1.6. The story goes that the sibyl offered King Tarquinus nine books of oracles for an exorbitant prince. When he refused, she burned three and returned to him asking the same price for the remaining six books. When again he refused, she burned three more and again returned, still asking for the original price. At this point Tarquinus gave in and bought the three surviving books.
national emergency, such as when Hannibal invaded Italy. Since these books were so revered by the Romans, and imitations proliferated around the Roman world, their format was copied by Jewish writers, who wrote Greek hexameters in opposition to Roman imperialism and polytheism around the beginning of the first millennium, and whose apocalyptic prophesies foreseeing the end of Roman power claimed the authority of the Sibyl for their tracts. Later Christian writers did the same, and put words predicting the birth of Christ in the mouth of the pagan prophetess. Thus the Sibylline Gospel, the supposed words of the Sibyl predicting the life of Christ, gained special importance in the early Christian community.

With the legalization of Christianity under Constantine, the Sibyl was upheld as a pagan symbol that could validate the new faith. In the early fourth century, Lactantius gave the history of the Sibyls and named the ten different ones in his *Divinarum Institutionum*, taking his information from a now lost work of the pagan Marcus Varro. Lactantius cited sibylline oracles in this Christian treatise more than any Old Testament prophet. He also included an apocalypse in this work for which he claimed the authority of a Sibyl, writing that at the end of times a powerful king, a version of the Antichrist, will arise. This king institutes a great persecution, killing and destroying indiscriminately, until the last of those who resist him flee to a mountain and are surrounded by the king’s army. The resisters cry out to heaven for help. Then, says Lactantius, “God shall hear them, and send from heaven a great king to rescue and free

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27 Lactantius, *Divinarum Institutionum*, 1.6.
28 Holdenried, 56.
them, and destroy all the wicked with fire and sword”

By this “great king” Lactantius means Christ, though it is not for another two chapters that he makes this explicit. Lactantius also quotes another Sibyl, who proclaimed in Greek, “And then God shall send a king from the sun, who shall cause all the earth to cease from disastrous war.”

Augustine, who adamantly opposed apocalyptic speculation, nonetheless believed in the importance of sibylline predictions in foreseeing the birth of Christ, and included an acrostic poem attributed to the Erythraean Sibyl in *The City of God*. This same poem appears at the end of the Tiburtine Sibyl. With the endorsement of the Church Fathers, the popularity of the Sibyls persisted into the Middle Ages, and a great number of texts were produced purporting to be the words of the various sibyls. The Tiburtine Sibyl was one such text.

Bernard McGinn characterizes the Tiburtine Sibyl as a medieval bestseller, pointing to the fact that over a hundred Latin manuscripts of her supposed words survive, almost a quarter of which predate the thirteenth century. The text gives the story of one hundred Roman senators who all have the same dream one night, in which they see a sky filled with nine different suns. They ask the Sibyl to interpret the dream, and she claims that each sun represents one of the nine ages of the world. The Sibyl

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29 Lactantius, *Divinarum Institutionum*, 7.17: *Et exandiet cos Deus, et mittet regnem magnum de caelo, qui eos eripiat ac liberet, omnesque implos ferro ignique disperdat.*
30 Ibid, *Item alia Sibylla*: *Καί τότ´ ἐκ ἡμέριοι πίμψεις θεός βασιλεια,*
31 Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, 18.23.
32 Bernard McGinn, “Teste David Cum Sibylla: The Significance of the Sibylline Tradition in the Middle Ages,” *Women of the Medieval World: Essays in Honor of John H. Mundy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), 24; Holdenried, *The Sibyl and her Scribes*, xvii, 10-11. These manuscripts preserve four distinct versions of the Sibyl’s oracle. Sackur knew of only twelve of the manuscripts, and made use of six of them for his critical edition, but focused on w1, which he considered to be the most authentic version of the original late antique text. Holdenried, p. 3 n. 3 and 177-197, over a century later, confirms Sackur’s position, finding that around half of the surviving copies of the work are of the version of the text chosen by Sackur for editing (called version 2).
33 The different manuscripts vary as to whom the Sibyl gives her prophecy: in some it is senators, in some it is consuls, in others it is Emperor Trajan, while in others it is a Trojan emperor; see Sackur 172-173.
described how the characteristics of each sun represent the aspects of the age it represents. The Sibyl predicts the early ages of man, the crucifixion of Christ, and then the long succession of kings whose reigns lead up to the end of the world. Sackur’s text ends with the description of the Last Roman Emperor. "He will be tall of stature, of handsome appearance with shining face, and well put together in all parts of his body." This messianic king will defeat all the enemies of the Christian empire. “He will devastate all the islands and cities of the pagans and will destroy all idolatrous temples; he will call all pagans to baptism and in every temple the Cross of Christ will be erected...whoever does not adore the Cross of Jesus Christ will be punished by the sword.” At the very end of his reign, “the Jews will be converted to the Lord and ’his sepulcher will be glorified by all.”

The defeat of the pagans and Jews brings a golden age of peace and plenty, but it is interrupted by the eschatological invasions of Gog and Magog, who break free from behind the “Gates of the North,” built by Alexander the Great, before finally being defeated by Constans. Then, the final enemy, the Antichrist, is revealed. At this point Constans goes to Jerusalem and surrenders his rule to God. Enoch and Elijah return to lead the struggle against the Antichrist, who is killed by an archangel on the Mount of Olives.

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35 Sackur, 185: *Omnes ergo insulas et civitates paganorum devastabit et universa idolorum templum destruet, et omnes paganos acl baptismum convocabit et per omnia tenipla crux Iesu Christi erigetur... Qui vero cruce Iesu Christi non adoraverit gladio punietur*; translated in McGinn, *Visions of the End*, 49-50.

36 Ibid: *Iudei convertentur ad Dominum, et erit ab omnibus sepulcrum eius gloriosum.*

37 Sackur, 186-187.
Of the four versions of the Tiburtine Sibyl that seem to have existed in the eleventh century, each has widely varying structure and wording. The text edited by Sackur, version 2 is the oldest surviving version, from around 1030. Another, slightly later version, from c. 1090, was included in a short text attributed to the Cumaean Sibyl, the text noticed by Rudolf Usinger in the nineteenth century (version 2). Version 4, written around 1100, was edited by McGinn in 1998 and shows clear evidence of having borrowed heavily from the Latin translation of Pseudo-Methodius. Since none of the surviving versions of the Tiburtine Sibyl are based on each other, but have a number of similarities and differences, all must be independently derived from the lost version written under Otto III around 1000 (version 1). It is this text which Sackur believed to be an updating of the late antique prophecy.

The Latin and Greek Sibyls

Still, the question of the relationship between the Tiburtine Sibyl and Pseudo-Methodius remains open. If the Tiburtine Sibyl was in fact written in the fourth century, how did the Legend of the Last Roman Emperor make its way into Pseudo-Methodius in the late seventh century? And if Pseudo-Methodius took the concept of an eschatological emperor’s trek to Jerusalem from the Tiburtine Sibyl, did Heraclius do so

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38 Holdenried, 3-5. Holdenried asserts her belief that the so-called Bedan recension, the version printed by Migne and wrongly attributed to Bede, constitutes a fifth version, though she admits that this view is not pervasive among scholarly critics.

39 Erdmann, 396-398.

40 Bernard McGinn, “Oracular Transformations. The SibyllaTiburtina in the Middle Ages,” Sibillelinguaggioccolari: mito, storia, tradizione, ed. Ileana Chirassi Colombo and Tullio Seppilli (Pisa: Istituti editoriali e poligrafici internazionali, 1998), 636-644. McGinn called the text the “Newberry Sibyl” because the manuscript is kept in the Newberry Library in Chicago. Although at the time of editing this was the only known complete copy of version 4, Holdenried has since identified ten additional manuscripts, some of which predate McGinn’s, see Holdenried, 209.

41 A comparison of the three surviving versions and the Latin Pseudo-Methodius can be found in appendix 2.


43 Sackur, 162.
as well when he journeyed to Jerusalem? Sackur found it questionable that Pseudo-
Methodius would take the Legend of the Last Roman Emperor from the Tiburtine Sibyl
alone. Perhaps influenced by Bousset's linking of the Last Roman Emperor's enemy,
the Antichrist, to Babylonian mythology, Sackur proposed that perhaps the
*Depositionsakt* was derived from an older, Syrian-Chaldean tradition. Indeed, Sackur
believed that the author of Pseudo-Methodius was a Syrian writing in Greek.

Following Sackur's work, the next major advance in the study of Pseudo-
Methodius came around 1930 when Michael Kmosko found an early manuscript of
Pseudo-Methodius in the Vatican archives written in Syriac and concluded that the text
was originally written not in Greek but in Syriac. Years later, Paul Alexander edited
and translated the text and asserted that Syriac was definitely its original language. The
Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius is now universally accepted as a work composed in
Syriac and part of a complex Syriac literary milieu.

While the origins of the Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius were being uncovered,
new developments took place that affected the understanding of the Tiburtine Sibyl.
Sackur had always believed that the Tiburtine Sibyl originated in Greek, and in 1949,
S.G. Mercati announced the discovery of Greek versions of the Tiburtine Sibyl,
preserved in a twelfth and a fourteenth century manuscript. These, along with a third

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44 Wilhelm Bousset, *The Antichrist Legend: A Chapter in Christian and Jewish Folklore*, translated into
45 Sackur, 168.
46 Ibid, 53-55. Sackur even mentions the possibility here that it was written in Syriac, but dismissed this
idea because no Syriac version was yet found.
47 Kmosko, 273-296.
48 See especially G.J. Reinink, “Pseudo-Methodius: A Concept of History in Response to the Rise of
Islam.” in *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East*, ed. Averil Cameron and Lawrence Conrad
Greek manuscript, were later edited with extensive analysis by Paul Alexander.\footnote{Paul Alexander, \textit{The Oracle of Baalbek: The Tiburtine Sibyl in Greek Dress.} (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks Center for Byzantine Studies, 1967).} Based on the new information gleaned from this Greek version of the Tiburtine Sibyl, which he called the Oracle of Baalbek and dated in its original form to the early sixth century, Alexander adjusted the date of Σ (the text upon which the Greek and Latin sibyls must have been derived from) to the reign of Theodosius the First, thus titling it the “Theodosian Sibyl.”\footnote{Alexander redated the text on the basis that a reference to the death of Valens is preserved both in the Baalbek oracle and in the Latin Tiburtine manuscripts derived from \textit{w}° (Newberry Sibyl). Alexander, in \textit{Baalbek}, 63, concluded that this reference “must likewise have occurred in an ancient (pre-medieval) Latin version (\textit{w}°) of the Sibylline text, now lost, which was still free from the interpolations of medieval rulers such as those now preserved in the Latin versions.” Since no ruler is mentioned between Valens and the Lombard king Aldoin in this Latin version, the latter clearly being a medieval interpolation, Alexander asserted that the text from which the Latin and Greek Sibyls were derived must have originated soon after Valens’ death. \cite{Alexander, \textit{Baalbek}, 41-42.} This reference is retained in the Newberry Sibyl, edited by Bernard McGinn, in “Oracular Transformations,” 640 (lines 108-109). Although this text dates from the end of the eleventh century, this reference must be based on some earlier source, and Alexander claimed that this source must have been the fourth-century prophecy which contained a prediction that Constantinople would fall sixty years after its foundation, which would have been in the 390s, around the time he believed such a prophecy was written; see Alexander, \textit{The Oracle of Baalbek}, 53-54.} The last event predicted by the Sibyl in the Greek Oracle of Baalbek is the outbreak of war with Persia during the reign of Anastasius, demonstrating that the work must have been written just after 502. The work also must predate 510, because it was in that year that this war ended, though not in the apocalyptic manner the text predicted.\footnote{Ibid, 49, 53-54. Paul Alexander points out on several occasions that such methods of altering dates to gloss over failed predictions is incredibly common in medieval apocalyptic literature.} The Latin Tiburtine Sibyl, on the other hand, must be drawing on an earlier source because some surviving versions of it predict that the city of Constantinople will perish sixty years after its foundation, implying a date just before 390.\footnote{\textit{This reference is retained in the Newberry Sibyl, edited by Bernard McGinn, in “Oracular Transformations,” 640 (lines 108-109). Although this text dates from the end of the eleventh century, this reference must be based on some earlier source, and Alexander claimed that this source must have been the fourth-century prophecy which contained a prediction that Constantinople would fall sixty years after its foundation, which would have been in the 390s, around the time he believed such a prophecy was written; see Alexander, \textit{The Oracle of Baalbek}, 53-54.} This prediction is altered in the Greek Baalbek Oracle to be “thrice sixty years,” again confirming that the text was composed around 510, which was 180 years after the consecration of Constantinople.\footnote{\textit{Ibid, 49, 53-54. Paul Alexander points out on several occasions that such methods of altering dates to gloss over failed predictions is incredibly common in medieval apocalyptic literature.}}
A date of around 510 would place the text near the height of eschatological sentiments before the seventh century. While apocalyptic fears in the time of Heraclius were based around the long wars, religious chaos, and political collapse that pervaded the Byzantine Empire, apocalyptic speculation a century before was based more on dates. By church calculations, the start of the sixth century marked six thousand years since the creation of the earth. Taking literally Psalm 90:4, “For a thousand years in your sight are like a day,” each millennium was regarded as a day in the week of God. Since God had created the world in six days, and the sixth day marked the creation of man, so too did the sixth millennium mark the creation of Christ, the “Son of Man,” (at 0 AD, 5500 since the creation of the world, halfway through the sixth millennium) who would return at the end of the millennium. Likewise, just as the seventh day marked the Sabbath, the seventh millennium would mark the Golden Age, when Christ would rule from Jerusalem for a thousand years. This premillennialist apocalyptic calculation goes back at least as far as Hippolytus of Rome, and there is evidence that as the year 500 (year 6000 by contemporary measurement) neared, anxiety heightened over the perceived coming of the End. The early sixth-century pagan philosopher Simplicius of Cilicia, in his commentary on Aristotle, mentions and mocks these expectations held by a Christian scholar: “That man believes that the heaven came to be over six thousand years ago and he is certainly pleased to suppose that it is now in its last days. How is it, then, that it has given us no indication that it is past its prime and heading toward its

54 Wortley, 11.
56 According to the Alexandrian computation (the most widespread before the Byzantine calendar was developed in the seventh century), the world had been created on 25 March 5493 BC, which would make the start of the seventh millennium begin in the year 507; for the Alexandrian computation, see Bickerman, p. 74.
end?" In addition, the sudden and unexpected war with Persia, to which the oracle refers, was a major break in the relations that had existed between the two empires for generations, and threatened the stability of the late antique world. It is in this milieu, as a number of contemporaries believed the world was heading toward its end, that the Oracle of Baalbek was written.

Paul Alexander has demonstrated that although the Greek Oracle of Baalbek has an updated prediction about Constantinople, there are also older aspects within the Greek text, revealing that neither the Oracle of Baalbek nor the Tiburtine Sibyl could have derived solely from the other. Rather, they both must have come independently from a common source, which Alexander took to be Σ (the lost Urtext), and they later evolved in different directions. Thus, a late antique prophecy must have existed on which both texts were based.

Like the Tiburtine Sibyl, the Oracle of Baalbek describes the common dream of one hundred Roman senators, who call in the Sibyl to interpret it. The structure is fairly similar to the Latin work, with the nine suns in the dream being interpreted as nine ages.


59 Ibid, 51-53. For example, in the Greek text the Sibyl issues her dream interpretation on the Capitoline Hill of Rome, the epicenter of pagan worship in the city of Rome. In the Latin text, however, the senators meet the Sibyl in loco stercoribus pleno et diversis contaminationibus pollute, but the Sibyl request that they move to the Aventine Hill before she issues her prophecy. Alexander speculates that since the Aventine Hill was the principal site of Christian churches in the fourth century, this must be a later innovation to remove the stain of paganism, associated with the Capitoline, from the text.

60 David Flusser, in “An early Jewish-Christian Document in the Tiburtine Sibyl,” Judaism and the Origins of Christianity (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Magnes Press, 1988), 153-183, disputes this. He claims that both derive independently from a much older source, one of the sibylline oracles that proliferated in the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire in the first century, written by Jews and perhaps some proto-Christians. This idea is rather problematic in that the Tiburtine Sibyl and Oracle of Baalbek show an interest in the close connection of the Roman Empire and Christianity, an idea that would have been out of place in such a period. I would agree with McGinn, “Oracular Transformations,” 612, that this theory is unconvincing.
of man. Just as in the Tiburtine Sibyl, the Sibyl’s explanation of Christ is interrupted by a Jewish priest who suddenly appears in the text. Unlike the list of medieval Lombard and Frankish kings in the Tiburtine Sibyl, the Oracle of Baalbek contains a list of Roman Emperors, some of them explicitly named, others with their names very thinly disguised, which ends with Anastasius, as stated above.\(^6\)

Most relevant to the discussion of the Last Roman Emperor, however, is the fact that the Oracle of Baalbek never mentions one. Nor does the text mention any of the major events associated with him— the defeat of Gog and Magog, or the journey to Jerusalem, for instance— anywhere in the text. The oracle describes a succession of minor good and evil eschatological kings who make war upon each other, and then jumps immediately to the rise of the Antichrist and the return of Enoch and Elijah.\(^6\) If the Tiburtine Sibyl and the Oracle of Baalbek were drawing from the same source, it appears that this source would not have included the Last Roman Emperor legend, but the legend was interpolated into the Latin Tiburtine Sibyl somewhat later. The Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius was translated into Greek and then Latin very quickly, and the earliest Latin manuscript dates from the 720s.\(^6\) Thus, the Latin Tiburtine Sibyl texts could easily have derived the story of the Last Roman Emperor from Pseudo-

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\(^6\) Ibid, 21-22, 29. The apocalyptic section of the Oracle of Baalbek seems to begin on lines 173-177, and Sackur’s text of the Tiburtine Sibyl, at the top of 184, has very similar wording in Latin, with both texts describing how men will become rapacious and greedy, and the land and the cities will be devastated. But this is the last time the two texts follow each other. After this, instead of proceeding to the eschatological events as the Greek text does, Sackur’s text shifts to another list of interpolated Frankish and Salic kings, and then begins the story of the Last Roman Emperor.

Methodius. If this was the case, the Last Roman Emperor legend clearly post-dates Heraclius and could not have served as an inspiration for his return of the True Cross.

**The Problem**

“I no longer believe that the passage on the Last Roman Emperor in the Latin Sibyl is fourth century,” Paul Alexander scribbled in the margins of the manuscript of his *magnum opus, The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*. “So this interpolation, if not derived from Pseudo-Methodius, is contemporary with it, or may have a common source.”

Alexander died before he could edit the text of the book to fit with this change of heart, and his posthumously published book still treats the Latin Tiburtine Sibyl and the birth of the Last Roman Emperor legend as a product of the fourth century, with his later comments relegated to a footnote by the editor. Containing the only major monographic study of the historical development of the Last Roman Emperor legend, the usefulness of the section in *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition* dealing with the Last Roman Emperor is severely undermined because all its conclusions are based on Alexander’s earlier opinion that the legend originated in a fourth-century version of the Tiburtine Sibyl. Alexander’s reversal of opinion, however, was reflected in his article, “Byzantium and the Migration of Literary Works and Motifs,” published the year of his death. Here he contends that Pseudo-Methodius was the original source of the Last Roman Emperor prophecy.

Although some scholars, especially of Syriac literature, are willing to assert that “this legend, involving the abdication of the last Roman emperor in Jerusalem,

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64 Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, 163, n. 44.
65 Alexander, “Byzantium and the Migration of Literary Works,” n. 35.
originates in [Pseudo-Methodius] is today an established fact, no such consensus exists. Despite Alexander’s change of heart, and the fact that the absence of the Last Roman Emperor prophecy in the Oracle of Baalbek seems to be a decisive argument against the early existence of the legend, the impression of its fourth-century origin has endured, and not just in *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*. Bernard McGinn’s comprehensive and authoritative compendium of medieval Christian apocalypses, *Visions of the End: Apocalyptic Traditions in the Middle Ages*, begins with the Tiburtine Sibyl’s account of the Last Roman Emperor, calling it “the earliest and most cogent proof of the revival of apocalypticism in the Christian Roman Empire of the fourth century.” While McGinn later casts doubts upon the early nature of the Last Roman Emperor, nonetheless the Tiburtine Sibyl retains its privileged position at the beginning of the book in the updated 1998 edition, and the impression remains that this text is the starting point for the medieval apocalyptic genre. Joshua Prawer, the noted historian of the crusades, in his detailed article on the long history of Jerusalem in medieval Christian thought, put the appearance of the Last Roman Emperor prophecy contemporary with Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 313-386), based on the Tiburtine Sibyl. Even John Wright’s monograph on the above-mentioned *Ludus de Antichristo* starts from the assumption that the Last Roman Emperor story can be traced to the fourth century.

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67 McGinn, *Visions of the End*, 43. McGinn translates only the part of the text that deals with the Last Emperor, further giving the impression of the legend’s fourth-century origin.
70 Wright, 21.
More recently, in his highly influential book *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*, Fred Donner, while not explicitly insisting on a fourth-century date for the legend, based some arguments on the idea that the legend predated the seventh century. He has argued that Jerusalem was of vital importance to the early Islamic *umma* because of their knowledge of the Last Emperor legend, and that the early *amir al-Mu'minins*, that is the Rashidun Caliphs, inspired by Muhammad’s revelations concerning an eminent *Yawm ad-Din*, believed that they were the Last Emperors come to fulfill the prophesy. Thus, Donner speculates, the humble and pious entry of 'Umar into the holy city upon its capture may have reflected his own belief that he was fulfilling the role of the Last Emperor.\(^7\) If the Last Emperor legend originated in Pseudo-Methodius at the end of the seventh century, it would undermine Donner’s theory.

While the idea that the Last Roman Emperor prophecy goes back to the fourth century may derive at times from an uncritical acceptance of the views of Sackur and Alexander, some scholars have put forth positive arguments for the acceptance of a fourth-century origin for the legend. Prior to Alexander’s publication of the Oracle of Baalbek, Robert Konrad argued in a book on Adso’s letter about the Antichrist that the Tiburtine Sibyl must have been drawing on a tradition separate from Adso and Pseudo-Methodius, and that the language in the Tiburtine Sibyl suggests a fourth-century date for its description of the Last Roman Emperor.\(^7\) About a decade later, Maurizio Rangheri also argued that the legend of the Last Roman Emperor was indeed of fourth-century provenance, and that the absence of any reference to it in Oracle of Baalbek

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must have been because the writer of that text deleted it, or because it first appeared in a fourth-century Latin translation of the Theodosian Sibyl. Rangheri disputes the idea that the Last Roman emperor of the Tiburtine Sibyl is a later interpolation of Pseudo-Methodian origin. The version of the legend in Pseudo-Methodius is, according to Rangheri, “tramandata in forma diversa, più evoluta.” Thus, he argued, the Tiburtine Sibyl’s depiction of the Last Roman Emperor could not have been drawn from Pseudo-Methodius. Despite the fact that Paul Alexander redated the text to the later reign of Theodosius, a time when the supporters of the Council of Nicaea had regained power, both Konrad and Rangheri want to push the date of the text back to the time of Constantine’s son Constans.

More recently, however, McGinn has argued against the existence of a fourth-century Σ text, and thus the basis for a Last Roman Emperor prophecy that existed in early sibylline oracles. He postulates that the Latin versions of the Tiburtine Sibyl were based on a lost reworking of the Oracle of Baalbek after the year 700, which had incorporated the Last Roman Emperor prophecy from Pseudo-Methodius. This was translated into Latin, and was the basis of the surviving versions of the Tiburtine Sibyl. McGinn, however, has reiterated that this is purely theoretical, and that both Konrad and Rangheri make convincing arguments for accepting a fourth-century date for the Last Roman Emperor legend. In the end, however, he concludes that, “given our present information, no final conclusion is possible.”

74 Ibid.
75 Konrad, 42; Rangheri, 708-709 n. 79.
78 McGinn, Visions of the End, 44.
Accepting that no final conclusion is possible, however, leaves one of the most fundamental questions of medieval apocalypticism unresolved. Indeed, although the tradition of the Last Roman Emperor is complicated and at times confusing, a detailed analysis of the arguments for and against its fourth-century origin can shed light on this controversy. If these arguments for an early date do not stand, the only alternative remaining is that the legend originated in Pseudo-Methodius, and therefore cannot have developed before Heraclius.
CHAPTER 3
THE ORIGIN OF THE LEGEND

As one of the most popular themes in medieval apocalyptic, the Last Emperor legend holds the potential for a lot of interesting work, especially concerning its spread and adaptation by various cultures throughout the middle ages. However, before any such sweeping projects may be undertaken, it will be necessary to discern where and how the legend originated. This question can only be addressed through a very careful, technical study of the relationship between Pseudo-Methodius and the Tiburtine Sibyl and by fixing a date for the Tiburtine Sibyl tradition.

It is easy to get bogged down in trying to determine how the various versions of the Tiburtine Sibyls relate to each other, and some aspects of their interconnections will probably never be fully understood. In the search for the origins of the Last Roman Emperor Legend, however, there are a few things we do know. First, the last Roman Emperor prophecy is not contained in the Oracle of Baalbek, so it either did not exist yet, or, less likely, it was deleted (as Rangheri suggests). We also know that the Tiburtine Sibyls share a common tradition with the Oracle of Baalbek, inasmuch as both textual traditions are based on the story of the Sibyl's explanation of the dream of nine suns. And we know that the Last Roman Emperor story must have been in the lost Sibyl of around year 1000, since all the surviving texts of the Tiburtine Sibyl include it, though none of them are solely derived from any other surviving texts. Moreover, we know that the earliest version of the Tiburtine Sibyl that survives, Sackur's text, shows little evidence of direct, word-for-word borrowing from Pseudo-Methodius, in contrast to later versions, especially version 4. Finally, we know that Adso also knew of a Last Roman Emperor prophecy in the tenth century, though he based his claims on hearsay,
and seems to have been unaware of both the Tiburtine Sibylline tradition and the Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius.

Having established these facts concerning the texts, we can move on to analyze the various arguments for and against a fourth-century date for the Last Roman Emperor story. Most of these arguments involve the contention that Sackur’s version of the Tiburtine Sibyl, and its depiction of the Last Roman Emperor, reflects a “separate, if not anterior, tradition,” because it lacks the obvious influence from Pseudo-Methodius found in later recensions.¹ Since Pseudo-Methodius was written at the end of the seventh century, only such a separate tradition would indicate that the story of the Last Emperor could have originated earlier, that is, in the fourth century. However, I see no evidence of such a tradition, and an examination of the evidence will show that the position that the Last Roman Emperor Legend originates in the fourth century is untenable. All the major aspects of the Last Roman Emperor prophecy came from Pseudo-Methodius or later material, and therefore Heraclius could not have known of it. In order to demonstrate this, it will be necessary to assess the arguments about the date of the tradition in Sackur’s text one-by-one.

**Vocabulary**

Robert Konrad has argued that the Last Roman Emperor tradition as preserved in the Tiburtine Sibyl must originate from a separate tradition from the one in Adso and in Pseudo-Methodius. The language of the Tiburtine Sibyl, he contends, differs from that

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of the other traditions and seems to derive from the fourth century. Konrad developed the following chart illustrating his point:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of the Last Emperor</th>
<th>Tiburt. Sibylle</th>
<th>Pseudo-Methodius</th>
<th>Adso</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>rex Romanorum et Grecorum = Constans</td>
<td>rex Gregorum sive Romanorum</td>
<td>rex Francorum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>His insignia</td>
<td>capitis diadema et regius habitus</td>
<td>corona</td>
<td>sceptrum et corona</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The name of his empire</td>
<td>regnum Christianorum</td>
<td>regnum Christianorum</td>
<td>Romanorum christianorumque Imperii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place of the deposition</td>
<td>Ierosolyma</td>
<td>Golgotha</td>
<td>mons Oliveti</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Let us consider these linguistic arguments one at a time. We can skip over the “character of the Last Empire” since the language in both Pseudo-Methodius and the Tiburtine Sibyl agree on this account. Also, the title of the last king shows similarity rather than difference between the two. In these cases, it is Adso’s text that is different.

Where Pseudo-Methodius and the Tiburtine Sibyl differ is in the inclusion of the name Constans and his physical description (which does not appear in any other text outside the Tiburtine tradition). This aspect of the Tiburtine Sibyl thus deserves further exploration.

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2 Konrad, 46. Konrad relied almost exclusively on Sackur’s edition of version 2 of the Tiburtine Sibyl.
3 This does not necessarily mean that Adso is using a completely different tradition: he was relying on the words of the doctores nostri, and he mentions earlier in the text that the Frankish Empire is Rome, and reconciling this with his claim that the Frankish Empire is the Roman Empire, Adso makes the Last Roman Emperor a Frankish king.
4 Though it is usually claimed that the Tiburtine Sibyl is the only text to ever give the Last Emperor a name, some Islamic texts that seem to be reporting on the Last Emperor tradition give a name, but in these works the name is Tiberius; see David Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic* (Princeton: Darwin
The Name Constans

The name Constans, as we have seen, has been used to lend weight to the idea that the Last Roman Emperor story developed in the wake of the religious and political conflict after the death of Constantine the Great. However, Paul Alexander’s redating of the hypothetical original Σ to after the death of Valens seriously undermines this argument. Valens was the last Arian emperor, so the idea that the text was written to express hope for a ruler such as Constans I that would deliver the empire from the Arians no longer fits.

Indeed, the name Constans certainly need not suggest a fourth-century provenance at all; Constans is the diminutive form of Constantine. And there was another ruler who went by that name, but this one ruled in the seventh century. Heraclius’ own grandson was named Constantine, but since he ascended the throne at age ten, and because his short-lived father was Emperor Constantine III, the name Constans, “little Constantine,” stuck. Taking the throne the same year Heraclius died, Constans II ruled in a period of heightened eschatological expectations, in the period when, according to McGinn, the connectivity between Eastern and Western apocalyptic was beginning to reach its height, and a time when the end of the world seemed far nearer than in the fourth century. Heraclius’ war against the Persians sparked apocalyptic speculations, and Heraclius and Constans II were often conflated. Also,
Contans II had strong connections with the West, and even visited Rome in AD 663, which accounts for why his name might appear in a Latin text.

Thus, the name Constans does not necessarily point to a fourth-century date, but could instead be a reference to the seventh-century ruler of the same name; or it could mean a little (i.e. second) Constantine, that is, a generic Christian emperor. Finally, there is another alternative. Even Bousset, though he believed that the Tibutrine Sibyl originated in the fourth century, dismissed the name Contans as support for this assertion because, he suggested, Constans was not supposed to be the emperor’s name at all. Constans was supposed to be an adjective describing him, that is, the Last Emperor will be steadfast.  

The Diadem

The remaining two arguments of Konrad concern the object surrendered by the Last Emperor and the place of surrender. The nature of the crown and its surrender by the Last Emperor is an important part of the legend, and one that has been frequently used in attempts to date the text. According to Konrad, taking up an argument made earlier by Sackur, the reference to the diadem in the Tiburtine Sibyl points to a late antique origin of the text because the diadem was reintroduced by Constantine I and was worn by his successors. Sackur had mentioned that the capitis diademate et omni habitu regali which the Last Roman Emperor removes in Jerusalem sound like they were taken out of a line in the account of Constantine the Great in the Epitome de Caesaribus attributed to Aurelius Victor: abitum regium gemmis et caput exornans

and David Thomas (Lieden, Boston: Brill, 2006), 78. The conflation, however, is almost always in the other direction, i.e., attributing acts of Constans to the more well-known Heraclius.

8 Boussett, 62-63. Although Sackur’s edited text reads, Et tunc surget rex Grecorum, cuius nomen Constans, he notes in his apparatus that a variant manuscript reading is Et tunc surget rex Grecorum nomine et animo Constans.

9 Sackur, 167-168.
perpetuo diademate."\textsuperscript{10} By the time of Pseudo-Methodius, however, Konrad surmises that the diadem was falling out of use.\textsuperscript{11}

Sackur also pointed to the fact that Constantine and his successors hung crowns from above the altar in Hagia Sophia, and he recognized a late antique custom of consecrating crowns in Jerusalem.\textsuperscript{12} In addition, he pointed to a tradition of depositing crowns in Jerusalem that must have predated Pseudo-Methodius. First he mentioned the fact that the sixth-century Piacenza Pilgrim, in his travel account of Jerusalem, mentions that in the tomb of Christ “there are ornaments vast in number, which hang from iron rods: armlets, bracelets, necklaces, rings, tiaras, plaited girdles, belts, emperors’ crowns of gold and precious stones, and the insignia of an empress.”\textsuperscript{13} Sackur also notes that the Ethiopian king Kaleb Ella Atsbeha (also known as Elisbaan) sent a crown to Jerusalem in the sixth century to be hung over the door of Christ’s tomb.\textsuperscript{14}

Sackur also pointed out that the reference to crowns in Jerusalem can be found in the Syriac Alexander Legend as well. The Alexander Legend presents a version of the life of Alexander the Great is presented in the mold of a late antique Christian kings. At the beginning of this text, Alexander the Great proclaims:

And if the Messiah, who is the Son of God, comes in my days, I and my troops will worship Him. And if He does not come in my days, when I have gone and conquered kings and seized their lands, I will carry this throne, which is a seat of

\textsuperscript{10} Sexti Aurelii Victoris Liber de Caesaribus. Praecedunt Origo gentis Romanae et Liber De viris illustribus urbis Romae ; subsequitur Epitome de Caesaribus, ed. Franz Pichlmayr (Leipzig: Teubner, 1911), 41.11.
\textsuperscript{11} Konrad, 47: “Zur Zeit der Abfassung des Pseudo-Methodius war daneben wahrscheinlich noch die Stirnbinde gebrauchlich.”
\textsuperscript{12} Sackur, 165-167. For a seventh-century example of hanging crowns over the altar of Hagia Sophia, see Theophanes, ed. de Boor, 281.
\textsuperscript{14} Sackur, 166; Wilkinson, 83 n. 30, implies that it may have been Elisbaan’s crown that the Piacenza Pilgrim saw at the tomb.
silver upon which I sit, and will place it in Jerusalem...my royal crown shall be taken and hung upon that seat which I have given to the Messiah; and the crown of every king who dies in Alexandria shall be taken and hung upon that silver seat which I give to the Messiah.\textsuperscript{15}

Finally, at the end of the Romance, after Alexander has sealed up Gog and Magog behind his wall and conquered the Persian Empire, Alexander worships in Jerusalem, and, upon his death, his throne is installed in there.\textsuperscript{16}

Sackur believed that the \textit{Alexander Legend} dated from the sixth century, and thus reflected a tradition existing before Pseudo-Methodius. More recent research, however, reveals that the \textit{Legend} was written later. Reinink has convincingly argued that it was written during the reign of Heraclius, in order to emphasize the idea that Heraclius, the great king and conqueror of the Persian Empire, was a New Alexander.\textsuperscript{17}

It also corresponds with Reinink's concept of optimistic eschatology under Heraclius, predicting that the Roman Empire, having laid waste to Persia, would conquer the world at the end of time.\textsuperscript{18} Thus, the references to Jerusalem which Sackur saw as part of the same tradition as the Tiburtine Sibyl, and originating earlier than Heraclius, were actually based on Heraclius. As Reinink puts it, “the profanation of the Christian Holy

\begin{footnotes}
\item[16] Ibid, 158. Recall that Theophylact Simocatta also put the prophecy of the Roman Empire's ascendance at the end of the world into the mouth of a Persian king (see supra, n. 21).
\item[18] Budge, \textit{The History of Alexander}, 275 (Syriac), 158 (English ). Compare this with George of Pisida, \textit{Hexameron}, lines 1845-1850 (PG); Tartaglia, lines 1799-1804, 418-420, in which George claims that Heraclius’ victory over Persia means that Rome, in the coming seventh day of creation, will “rule all places under the sun.”
\end{footnotes}
City by the Persians in 614 and the restoration of the Cross to Jerusalem by Heraclius in 630 form the historical background of Jerusalem’s role in the Alexander Legend.”¹⁹ The *Alexander Legend*, and the importance realization that it was written in the reign of Heraclius, will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

As for the claim of Sackur, and Konrad after him, that the consecration of crowns dated back to Constantine, this cannot be disputed. Votive crowns were well known in the late antique and early medieval world.²⁰ And obviously there would have been votive crowns, whether they were sent by kings or not, hanging over altars in Jerusalem. However, was this the tradition to which the Last Roman Emperor legend refers? The idea of hanging a crown over an altar is different from surrendering it upon the Cross. Once again, the work of G.J. Reinink on the Syriac roots of Pseudo-Methodius can solve this problem.

Reinink has pointed to the fact that the laying down of a crown on the Cross is part of a Syriac literary theme that originates in the Syriac *Julian Romance*. The date of this work, which depicts Emperor Julian as an evil tyrant fighting a war against Christianity, has been the subject of controversy, but Emmanuel Papoutsakis has shown evidence of influence from Jacob of Serugh in the text, implying that it was composed in the sixth century.²¹ In the *Julian Romance*, after Julian the Apostate is struck down by God for his arrogance and blasphemy, he is succeeded by his pious

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²⁰ For the most famous example, see the votive crown of the Visigothic king Recceswinth in the Treasure of Guarraza.
Christian general, Jovian. Jovian at first refuses to become emperor, as he has no interest in power, but instead places the imperial diadem upon a large cross, and then proceeds to pray for guidance before the cross. The cross miraculously ascends into the heavens and the crown comes back down to rest upon Jovian’s head. Reinink has argued that this text provided the direct inspiration for the Depositionsakt in Pseudo-Methodius. In addition, a reworking of the apocalypse from Edessa, which Reinink dates to a year or so after Pseudo-Methodius, makes the comparison explicit, comparing the actions of the Last Roman Emperor to those attributed to Jovian. Thus, the surrender of the diadem on the Cross in Jerusalem comes from a tradition that postdates the Tiburtine Sibyl and is deeply rooted in Syriac literature, drawing on the Syriac Alexander Legend and Julian Romance.

Finally, we must address the difference in wording between Pseudo-Methodius and the Tiburtine Sibyl which Konrad used to conclude that the two reflect different traditions. While Pseudo-Methodius uses the word corona, the Tiburtine Sibyl uses diadem. However, the idea that the use of the word diadem need imply a fourth-century date is untenable. The word is found in many later texts. One example of this should suffice. Two seventh- or eighth-century Latin texts, roughly contemporary to the

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22 Hermann Gollancz, Julian the Apostate, Now Translated for the First-Time from the Syriac Original- the Only Known Ms. in the British Museum. (London: Oxford University Press, 1928), 216-218. For the scene in a slightly more accurate German translation, see Johann G. E. Hoffmann, Julianos der Abtrünnige: Syrische Erzaehlungen, (Leiden: Brill, 1880), 201. Emmanuel Papoutsakis is currently preparing a new English translation of the text.

23 Reinink, “The Romance of Julian the Apostate,” 75-86. Compare to the scene in the Julian Romance to Pseudo-Methodius 14.4 (44; 152; 73): “The Holy Cross on which the Christ was crucified will be taken up to heaven, and the royal, crown with it.”


25 Note that only Sackur’s version of the Tiburtine Sibyl uses diadem. The other surviving versions use corona as well, but these versions borrow language directly from Pseudo-Methodius in a way that Sackur’s version does not; see appendix 2.
translation of Pseudo-Methodius into Latin, describe the return of the True Cross to Jerusalem by Heraclius. In both texts, the crown Heraclius removes from his head as he enters Jerusalem is specifically called a *diadem*. The date and context is remarkably similar to that of the Latin Pseudo-Methodius, so the decision of the translator to use *corona* instead of *diadem* in the latter text must be regarded as purely a stylistic choice, and does not suggest that either word reflects a specific date. Nor is there any good reason to believe that the word *diadem* had fallen out of use.

**Place of Deposition**

Konrad also argues Pseudo-Methodius says that the crown is to be laid down at Golgotha, while the Tiburtine Sibyl is not as specific about the location, and so the idea that the surrender took place at Golgotha had not developed yet. However, the fact that Sackur’s Tiburtine Sibyl does not mention Golgotha proves nothing, since this could simply be a gloss. Indeed, the passage describing the surrender at Jerusalem is much terser in the Tiburtine Sibyl, and thus a detail such as Golgotha may have been spared. This would not be the only text that would subtract details. In the work of Pseudo-Ephrem, which survives only in Latin translations in two manuscripts of the eighth and ninth centuries, but which probably originated in Syriac, the general order laid out in Pseudo-Methodius is maintained, but there is no mention of the Last Roman Emperor. On this basis, and the fact that Gog and Magog are not specifically named in

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27 Again, though Sackur’s version does not mention Golgotha, all other versions of the Tiburtine Sibyl do mention it.

28 The earliest edition can be found in Carl P. Caspari, *Briefe, Abhandlungen und Predigten aus den zwei letzten Jahrhundertendes kirchlichen Alterthums und dem Anfang des Mittelalters* (Christiania : Mallingsche Buchdruckerei, 1890), 208-230, with a commentary on pages 429-472. Caspari believed he
the text, some have argued that the text should be dated before Pseudo-Methodius, even as early as the fourth century. Reinink, confirming a theory originally set out by Sackur, has shown, however, that the Latin text shows signs of borrowing from the Syriac of Pseudo-Methodius, and postulates that it is a “sermon epitomizing Pseudo-Methodius.” Clearly, not all works that used Pseudo-Methodius as a source necessarily reproduce every detail of that apocalypse. Indeed, some, like Pseudo-Ephrem, do not even mention the Last Roman Emperor prophecy. Thus, the differences in language between Pseudo-Methodius and the Tiburtine Sibyl cannot be used to prove two separate traditions. Despite the fact that McGinn claims that these language differences were strong arguments that complicate his belief in a later date for the Last Roman Emperor legend, these arguments fall apart upon close examination.

**Length of Rule**

Another difference between the texts, passed over by Konrad but mentioned by McGinn, is the fact that the Tiburtine Sibyl assigns Last Roman Emperor a bizarrely long reign, lasting either 120 or 122 years, depending on the manuscript. There is no indication of such a long reign in Pseudo-Methodius, and this might suggest a different tradition. Some have suggested that this was simply a scribal error, and that it was

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supposed to say 12 years.\textsuperscript{33} This would make sense, and reinforce the case for the Tiburtine Sibyl being derived from Pseudo-Methodius: in the latter text, Alexander the Great, who serves as a basis for the Last Emperor,\textsuperscript{34} is said to reign for twelve years in Alexandria.\textsuperscript{35}

However, even if the long reign is not an error, an unnaturally long reign for the Last Emperor is not unprecedented. The Edessene Fragment (a fragment of a Syriac reworking of Pseudo-Methodius from c. 692) describes the defeat of the Ishmaelites by the Last Roman Emperor, followed by a peace of 208 years. After this long period, Gog and Magog are freed, the Antichrist arises, and the Last Emperor makes his journey to Jerusalem with the True Cross.\textsuperscript{36} Reinink has argued that in this version there are two Last Roman Emperors, the one who defeats the Arabs and the one who surrenders the empire.\textsuperscript{37} However, there is no evidence that the two reigns are separate in the text, and this would be a massive and unprecedented break from Pseudo-Methodius. In fact, there is no mention of the emperor who defeats the Ishmaelites dying, and he and the emperor who lays down his \textit{imperium} at Jerusalem are called the same thing, the King of the Greeks (\textit{malkō deiaunoīē}), with no distinction made between the two. Thus, it seems that they are meant to be the same man, and it is likely that in at least some

\textsuperscript{34} See chapter 3 below.
\textsuperscript{35} Pseudo-Methodius, 8.3 (14;132;21).
\textsuperscript{36} The Edessene fragment was originally edited and translated into French by François Nau in “Révélations et légendes. Méthodius - Clément - Andronicus,” \textit{Journal Asiatique}, series 11, no. 9 (1917), 415-471. Nau, working before the discovery of the Syriac Pseudo-Methodius, believed that this text was the original Pseudo-Methodius. It has since become clear that the Edessene Fragment was a slightly later reworking of Pseudo-Methodius. Martinez, \textit{Eastern Christian Apocalyptic}, 206-246, has been reedited and translated the Edessene Fragment and provides a commentary that takes into account the updated research.
\textsuperscript{37} Reinink, “The Romance of Julian the Apostate,” 83-84.
versions of the prophecy an unusually long life-span and rule were assigned to the Last Emperor, probably as a reflection of his great holiness.

**Different Development**

According to Rangheri, even though it seems that the Last Roman Emperor Legend was not in the original version of the sibylline tradition, it was added shortly after the death of Constantine the Great.\(^3^8\) While Rangheri’s arguments are not as detailed as those of Konrad, he suggests that Pseudo-Methodius is more evolved than the Tiburtine Sibyl, and so the less developed text could not have drawn on the more evolved text.\(^3^9\) Although an acquaintance with epitomes and abbreviated works makes this an unconvincing position, in order to get at the heart of Rangheri’s argument, and to give him the benefit of the doubt, I have now created a chart to illustrate the major differences in order and sequence of events between the two texts:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tiburtine Emperor (w(^1))</th>
<th>Pseudo-Methodian Emperor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Emperor arises</td>
<td>1. Emperor arises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Time of prosperity</td>
<td>2. Emperor defeats the Ishmaelites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Emperor defeats the pagans and Jews</td>
<td>3. Time of prosperity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Gog and Magog freed</td>
<td>5. Gog and Magog defeated (by angel)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Gog and Magog defeated (by the Emperor)</td>
<td>6. Rise of the Antichrist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Surrender at Jerusalem (without cross)</td>
<td>7. Surrender at Jerusalem (with cross)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A number of distinctions stand out. Besides slight differences in the order of events, the enemies of the Last Roman Emperor are different. In the Tiburtine Sibyl, his enemies are the pagans and Jews, and eventually Gog and Magog, whereas in Pseudo-Methodius his role is primarily to defeat the Ishmaelites, that is, the Muslim Arabs. Also,

\(^{3^8}\) Rangheri, “La ‘Epistola ad Gerbergam,’” 708-709 n.79.
\(^{3^9}\) Ibid.
the surrender of the Last Emperor’s power at Jerusalem does not include the True Cross, which plays a major role in Pseudo-Methodius.

These details may suggest an earlier date for the Tiburtine Sibyl. For example, while the perceived existential threat to the unity and piety of the Christian Roman Empire in the fourth century were the pagans and Jews, by the seventh century the emergence of Islam and the Arabs during the reign of Heraclius became the most severe danger to the empire, and thus the two texts reflect Christian anxieties from their respective eras. This idea seems to have informed Paul Alexander’s earlier interpretation of the dates of the texts. However, there is a problem with this interpretation. The Last Roman Emperor in the Tiburtine Sibyl will devastate insulas et civitates paganorum. Why would fourth-century pagans have their own islands and cities? In this period, they were not an external threat, but an internal one. They shared the same cities as the Christians. I would suggest a different interpretation. These pagans discussed by the Tiburtine Sibyl seem to be a better fit with the Muslim Arabs, often called pagans by medieval Christians. These pagans did rule over cities, and indeed many of the islands of the Mediterranean – Cyprus, Rhodes, and parts of the Aegean already in the time of Pseudo-Methodius - were under their rule. Indeed, Pseudo-Methodius’ Last Emperor fights a war against the Ishmaelites, that is the Arabs,

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41 G.J. Reinink, in “The Romance of Julian the Apostate as a Source for Seventh Century Syriac Apocalypses,” 79-81, has argued that Pseudo-Methodius purposely stresses that Muslims are pagans, comparing the Islamic domination to the period of pagan rule under Julian the Apostle.
42 The Greek translation of Pseudo-Methodius includes a passage describing the Muslims devastating the cities and islands of the Christians (it is not present in the Syriac and Latin, however); Aerts and Kortekaas, 170; English translation in Martinez, *Eastern Christian Apocalyptic*, 194. In the seventh-century Syriac Life of Maximus the Confessor, 23, translated by Sebastian Brock, “An Early Syriac Life of Maximus the Confessor,” *Analecta Bollandiana*, vol. 91 (1973), 312-313 (Syriac), 318 (translation), it is stated that the Arabs conquered all the islands of the sea, and the Arabs in this text are specifically identified as pagans, see 18, 310 (Syriac), 317 (translation).
and under him they will “be given over to the sword, to destruction, captivity, and
slaughter.” And Pseudo-Methodius goes to great lengths to show that the Muslims are
no different than pagans.\footnote{Pseudo-Methodius, 13.11 (38-39; 149; 63).}

In fact, in the king list in the Tiburtine Sibyl, which makes no attempt to sound
ancient and freely talks of Salic and Lombard kings, pagans are also mentioned, and in
the reign of the Otto II it says that there will be fighting between Christians and
pagans.\footnote{Reink, “Ps.-Methodius: A Concept of History,” 182-184.} This fighting cannot be against the pagan polytheists of the fourth century,
and (especially considering a reference to the blood of the Greeks) seems like a
reference to the fighting in southern Italy between Otto II, the Byzantine Empire, and the
Emirate of Sicily. As for the hostility toward the Jews, although such hostility had existed
for centuries, it was not in the fourth but during the seventh century that the Jews were
perceived as a real threat to the Roman Empire, and Heraclius was the first emperor to
try to convert them forcefully.\footnote{Sackur, 182: \textit{Et de ipso O procedet alius O potentissimus et erunt sub eo pugne inter paganos et
christianos et sanguis Grecorum fundetur}; for the identification of this "O" with Otto II, see Holdenreid, 28.}

More significant, perhaps, is the fact that the earliest surviving version of the
Tiburtine Sibyl lacks any mention of the True Cross during the emperor’s visit to
Jerusalem. Although to my knowledge no one has considered this, it is possible that this
could mean that the text is earlier than Heraclius, whose return of the relic may have
then inspired its inclusion in later works dealing with the Last Emperor such as Pseudo-
Methodius. Could the \textit{Depositionsakt} of the Tiburtine Sibyl have inspired Heraclius
during his \textit{adventus} into Jerusalem, which in turn inspired later versions of the Last
Roman Emperor returning the True Cross? While this is possible, and seems to me the best argument for an early date for the version of the Last Roman Emperor in Sackur’s version of the Tiburtine Sibyl, it is not the only explanation, nor the most likely. The author of that Sibyl could simply have overlooked the True Cross because it was not important to his narrative, just as he passed over mentioning Golgotha. Indeed, in Sackur’s version of the Tiburtine Sibyl, the entire surrender of power by the Last Emperor in Jerusalem is reduced to a single sentence.

**The Double Rise of the Antichrist**

In addition, despite the differences between Sackur’s version of the Tiburtine Sibyl and Pseudo-Methodius, there are many similarities. For example, both present a time of prosperity interrupted when Gog and Magog break out of Alexander’s Gate. Also, both have the bizarre double rise of the Antichrist; that is, both texts describe the Antichrist arising during the reign of the Last Emperor, and then repeat the fact that the Antichrist will arise after describing the Emperor giving up his power at Jerusalem. The fact that they both have this same awkward repetition suggests that one text is dependent on the other.

Paul Alexander noticed that the original Syriac of Pseudo-Methodius used the same verb both times the Antichrist is revealed (*metgele*), while the Greek translator must have been troubled and therefore used slightly different verbs and varied the word order. The Latin translator, in turn, used the same verb both times (*apparere*) but added *manifestus* to the second appearance to differentiate it. Alexander, however,

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48 Ibid, 198-199. thus in Aerts and Kortekaas, 185: *et cum suplebuntur decem et demedium anni, apparebit filios perditiones*; and Aerts and Kortekaas, 189, 191: *Tunc distruetur omnem principatum et*
seems to have overlooked the fact that while the Tiburtine Sibyl, in contrast to Pseudo-Methodius, uses different verbs (surget and revelabitur), it does the same thing, adding manifeste in order to clarify that one appearance of the Antichrist must be secret, while the second is overt. Since the addition of manifestus in the Latin Pseudo-Methodius seems to have been the translator’s attempt to deal with the confusing double rise of the Antichrist in the original text, it would appear that the author of the Sackur’s Tiburtine Sibyl is following him. Thus, the Tiburtine Sibyl repeats both the awkward repetition in the original Pseudo-Methodius, and the solution devised by its Latin translator. This further suggests that the author of the Tiburtine Sibyl knew of the Latin Pseudo-Methodius, used it as a source, and thus could not predate it.

**Gog and Magog**

The inclusion of the story of Gog and Magog, locked behind the Gates of Alexander, may give some more clues as to the date of the Last Emperor story in the Tiburtine Sibyl. Indeed, it seems to have been the decisive factor that led Paul Alexander to change his mind about the date of the text, deciding that “the combination of Gog and Alexander is not attested before the seventh century.” However, neither he nor any later scholars have given a detailed explanation as to why the combination of Gog and Alexander derives from the seventh century.

In fact, the date of the tradition combining Gog and Alexander is controversial, but the earliest estimate seems to be that of Friedrich Pfister, who concluded that the association of Gog and Magog with Alexander and his gate must have developed in the

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*potestatem, ut appareat manifestus filius perditiones.* Sackur, 93 and 94, has the same verbs in his edition.

49 Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, 163, n. 44.
first century AD, probably among the Jews of Alexandria.\textsuperscript{50} I would follow Andrew Anderson, however, who wrote the most comprehensive monograph on the subject, and conclude that this is far too early.\textsuperscript{51} In fact, Gog and Magog are mentioned in the early Sibylline Oracles, probably composed by the Jews of Alexandria, but they are named among a list of other nations, assigning them no eschatological significance, and locating their homeland not on the northern steppes, but in Ethiopia. Thus, Anderson concluded that “it is more likely that the fusion [of Gog and Magog and Alexander’s Gate] did not take place until after the invasion of the Huns in 395 A.D. or later.”\textsuperscript{52}

Josephus makes the first known reference to Alexander’s construction of gates to shut up a passage in the north, asserting that Alexander did so in order to keep the Scythian tribes at bay.\textsuperscript{53} Elsewhere, Josephus identifies the Scythians with Magog.\textsuperscript{54} However, just because the elements necessary for the development of the legend were in place does not mean that it can be assumed that it developed so early. There is little evidence of the tradition until two centuries later, when in 399 Jerome reported the invasions of the Huns, a people who had broken out of their homeland “between the icy Tanais and the rude Massagetae; where the gates of Alexander keep back the wild

\textsuperscript{50} Friedrich Pfiester, “Gog und Magog,” \textit{Handwörterbuch d. deutschen Aberglaubens}, vol. 3 (1930), 910-918.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid. Indeed, there is no mention of Gog, Magog, or Alexander’s gate in the Greek Alexander Romance of Pseudo-Callithenes, which was written in Alexandria around the third century, suggesting that this tradition did not yet exist.
\textsuperscript{53} Josephus, \textit{Jewish War}, 7.244-46
\textsuperscript{54} The Antiquities of the Jews, 1.6.1. “Magog founded those that from him were named Magogites, but who are by the Greeks called Scythians.” Μαγώγης δὲ τούς ἀπ’ αὐτῶν Μαγώγας ὀνομασθέντας ἤκισεν, Σκύθως δὲ ὑπ’ αὐτῶν προσαγορευμένος. As Sverre Bøe points out in \textit{Gog and Magog: Ezekiel 38-39 As Pre-Text for Revelation 19,17-21 and 20,7-10} (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001),185-186, Josephus does not make any reference to the eschatological significance of Magog, though he must have known of it from Eziekel.
peoples behind the Caucasus.”55 While he does not identify these wild people as Gog and Magog, in 411 he identified Gog with the Scythians (a term used for the Huns and practically all tribes north of the Danube), and acknowledged their eschatological relevance.56

Indeed, the invasion of Rome’s Asian provinces by the newly arrived Hunnic tribes at the end of the fourth century seems to have sparked a renewed interest in Gog and Magog, as well as the idea that these biblical people were associated with the steppe barbarians in the north. Syrian Christians probably combined the eschatological importance of Gog and Magog with Alexander’s Gate and the tribes of the Eurasian steppe in the late fourth or early fifth century.57 Perhaps this is how Jerome picked it up. However, the first text to combine specifically the Huns with Gog and Magog and to place them behind Alexander’s Gate, and to claim that they will escape at the end of the world, is the Syriac *Alexander Legend*, which, as we have seen was not composed until the reign of Heraclius.58 Again, it is from the Syriac literary tradition that the elements of the Last Roman Emperor prophecy seem to be derived, and from a seventh-century milieu.

Indeed, the story of Gog and Magog locked behind Alexander’s Gate suddenly seems to circulate widely in the seventh century. The story found its way into the

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Qur’an, which predicts that Gog and Magog will be freed from the gate at the end of the world as a punishment for sinners. In addition, the seventh-century Armenian historian known as Pseudo-Sebeos presented in his work a new understanding of the prophecy in Daniel 7. In his calculation the four beasts are Rome, Persia, Gog and Magog, and the Islamic Caliphate. Timothy Greenwood, in his thorough study of the text, notes that Pseudo-Sebeos makes no mention of the deeds of the third empire, Gog and Magog, but speculates that a lost section of the work which is known to have included an account of Heraclius’ dealings with the Turks north of the Caucasus mountains, would have identified these steppe people as Gog and Magog. The Frankish chronicler Fredegar, who was surely writing in the seventh century, makes the relation between Gog and Magog and Heraclius’ Turkic allies explicit. He reports that Heraclius “sent representatives to the Caspian Gates, which the Macedonian Alexander the Great had built of brass above the Caspian Sea and had shut to check invasion by the untamed barbarians living beyond the Caucasus. Heraclius ordered these gates be opened, and through them poured 150,000 mercenary warriors to fight the Saracens.” Though Fredegar places this in the context of the wars against the Muslims instead of the Persians, Gog and Magog and Alexander’s Gate were themes connected to Heraclius.

60 Pseudo-Sebeos, 141-142 (Thomson, 105-106).
The Armenian historian responsible for the *History to the Year 682* gives an account of the Turks who traversed the passes of the Caucasus Mountains and aided Heraclius in defeating the Persians which bears a strong resemblance to the description of Gog and Magog in Pseudo-Methodius. Indeed, similar New Testament allusions were used both in this Armenian account of the Turks and in Fredegar’s description of Gog and Magog, written around the same time but in Latin and in Gaul, further implying that the invasion of the Turks in cooperation with Heraclius was associated with the freeing of Gog and Magog from the Gates of the North. Once again, the context of the Last Roman Emperor prophecy appears seventh-century more than fourth-century.

Still, the evidence from Jerome suggests that it was possible for a late fourth-century author to conceive of the story of Gog and Magog being enclosed by Alexander and getting free at the end of world. All the basic elements were in place. It would, however, be unlikely, and such an author would have been far ahead of his time. In any case, this does not necessarily obviate the possibility that the reference to the Last Roman Emperor in the Tiburtine Sibyl came from the fourth century, even if it did raise doubts in Paul Alexander’s mind. Also, as McGinn has pointed out, just because certain elements of the Last Roman Emperor prophecy must date from at least the seventh century, does not mean the whole concept of an eschatological Last Roman Emperor is necessarily that late. The mention of Gog and Magog could have been a later addition.

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63 Movses Dashkurnats’i, *Patmut’yun Aghvanits’ Ashkharhí*, (ed.) Varag Arak’elyan (Erevan: Hayastan Hratarakch’ut’yun, 1969), 134-140; translated in C. J. F. Dowsett in *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1961). Movses was writing in the tenth century, but according to James Howard-Johnston, in *Witnesses to a World Crisis: Historians and Histories of the Middle East in the Seventh Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 111-112, the core of the text, which is a more detailed account of seventh century events and includes the passage on the invasion of the Turks, was lifted from a source that can be dated rather precisely, to around 682.

64 Van Bladel, 192-192.
to the fourth-century text, derived from Pseudo-Methodius. It does, however, tell us that, if it is an interpolation, the author of the earliest extant version of the Tiburtine Sibyl was once again using Pseudo-Methodius.

**The Psalm**

The next piece of evidence that the Last Roman Emperor legend in the Tiburtine Sibyl is dependent on Pseudo-Methodius is another linkage between the two texts. The same verse, Psalms 68:31 (68:32 in the Hebrew Bible), “princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God,” appears in both the Latin Tiburtine Sibyl and all the versions of Pseudo-Methodius. Bernard McGinn sees the shared use of this biblical allusion as proof that at least part of the Last Roman Emperor story in the Tiburtine Sibyl was an interpolation inspired by Pseudo-Methodius. Paul Alexander, presumably writing before he changed his mind concerning the date of the Last Roman Emperor in the Tiburtine Sibyl, however, asserted that the verse was intended differently in the earlier Tiburtine Sibyl context. Alexander, again seeing the pagans of the Tiburtine Sibyl as the fourth-century polytheists, believed that Egypt and Ethiopia represented paganism, the islands and the cities that the Last Roman Empire will convert. Leaving aside my belief that the pagans described in the text are actually Muslims, Alexander’s contention could make sense. In the fourth century, at a time when the Serapeum still operated in Alexandria and Ethiopia had yet to be visited by

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65 The text reads: *Et exurgent ab aquiline spurcissime gentes, quas Alexander rex Indus inclusit, Gog et Magog*. Sackur marked *rex Indus* as an interpolation in the text. Nonetheless, it could be that the entire subordinate clause about Alexander is an interpolation. A medieval copyist could easily have inserted the allusion to Alexander in an existing discussion of the defeat of Gog and Magog, or inserted a discussion of the defeat of Gog and Magog in an existing narrative of the Last Roman Emperor.


Christian missionaries, these two places might have served as synecdoche for paganism.

Once again, however, there are major problems with the case for an earlier date for the version of the Last Roman Emperor in the Tiburtine Sibyl. The Psalm verse fits much better in Pseudo-Methodius. It is here that Ethiopia has a special significance. Pseudo-Methodius goes to great lengths to prove that the Greeks and Romans are descended from the Ethiopians, so that “the one who will surrender to God is the son of Kushat, daughter of Pil, king of the Kushites.” According to Pseudo-Methodius, the Kushite king Pil's daughter was the mother of Alexander the Great. After Philip of Macedon died, she married again, this time to Byzas, founder of Byzantium. Later, their daughter Byzantia married Romulus, the king of Rome. Thus, Pseudo-Methodius demonstrates that the Last Roman Emperor, as a descendent of all these people, was the true Kush. This was necessary because Pseudo-Methodius, taking a uniquely Syriac interpretation of Psalm 68:31 (68:32) to mean that Kush would fulfill 1 Corinthians 15:24 and will not only stretch his hands, but hand over the kingdom to God, believed that the prophecy about Kush would be fulfilled by the Last Roman Emperor.

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68 Pseudo-Methodius, 14.5 (44-45; 153; 73-74).
69 Martinez, Eastern Christian Apocalyptic, 181, explains why Pseudo-Methodius interpreted it in this way: “The Hebrew text of Ps. 68:31 (32 in Hebrew) reads: kūš tārîs yāḏāyw lē lōhîm. This has to be translated: ‘Let Kūsh extend his hands to God.’ But the verse was translated in the Syriac Bible with kūš tašlem īdā l-ālāhā. ‘Ašlem īdā is a Syriac idiom which means ‘to hand over the power, to yield, to surrender.’ This usage explains how the text could be invoked in an apocalyptic speculation concerning the final fate of the Christian kingdom. Since in 1 Cor. 15:24, we are told that the end will take place when Christ ‘hands over the kingdom to God the Father’ (mašlem malkūtā l-ālāhā ʾabbā) it was perfectly natural for a Syrian exegete to bring together the two texts and to read Ps 68:31 in light of 1 Cor. 15:24.”
70 Pseudo-Methodius was likely arguing that the prophecy would not be fulfilled by the Christian kingdoms of Axum or Makuria, but by the Roman Empire. Many of the areas conquered by the Arabs, like Egypt and Syria, had very large populations of monophysite Christians. No doubt some of them looked to Ethiopia for liberation instead of the Melkite Romans. Psalms 68:31 may well have been used to give scriptural weight to this hope, arguing that monophysite Ethiopia would liberate the Christians of the
Although the Latin Tiburtine Sibyl and Pseudo-Methodius use the verse in different ways, the problem remains that they both use it. Alexander concluded that “it remains puzzling why the Latin version of the Tiburtine Sibyl and the Pseudo-Methodian tradition agreed in connecting this verse with the Last Emperor but disagreed in the activity concerned.” However, their shared use of the verse cannot be mere coincidence. Since Pseudo-Methodius’ use of it comes from a very real mistranslation in the Peshitta, it seems that the Latin Tiburtine Sibyl must have taken the reference from Pseudo-Methodius. The author of the Tiburtine Sibyl probably believed the verse important to the description of the Last Roman Emperor, but since the Tiburtine Sibyl lacks any reference to the Ethiopian ancestry of the Last Emperor the verse had to be forced to fit rather artificially into the text. Perhaps it can be argued that the presence of the verse in the Tiburtine Sibyl was yet another interpolation based on Pseudo-Methodius added into an earlier version of the Last Roman Emperor in the Tiburtine Sibyl, but the supposed interpolations are adding up quickly. There is little foundation left for a version of the Last Roman Emperor that could have predated Pseudo-Methodius.

Levant. However, Pseudo-Methodius seems to be arguing that liberation, and the final consummation, will come at the hands of the Romans, whom he shows to the true Kush. Pseudo-Methodius’ doctrinal affiliation is uncertain. Whatever his Christological views, however, overall Pseudo-Methodius seems to be preaching the unity of all Christians denominations in the face of Islam, as pointed out by Martinez, Eastern Christian Apocalyptic, 28.; also by Reinink, “Pseudo-Methodius und die Legende vom römischen Endkaiser,” in Non Nova, sed Nove: Mélanges de civilisation médiévale dédiés à Willem Noomen, ed. Martin Gosman and Jaap van Os (Groningen: Bouma’s Boekhuis, 1984), 107-108, and idem, “Ps.-Methodius: A Concept of History,” 167-168.

72 See note 69 above.
73 In fact, the Tiburtine Sibyl has to play with the wording of the verse to make it fit the context. Although the Latin Vulgate has Venient legati ex Aegypto, Aethiopia praevenient manus eius Deo, and the Latin translation of Pseudo-Methodius uses the exact same wording (Aerts and Kortekaas, 94), in the Tiburtine Sibyl it is rendered as Tunc namque preveniet Egiptus et Etiopia manus eius dare Dei (Sackur, 185).
Solutions

As we have seen, the arguments for a fourth-century date for the Last Roman Emperor legend in the Tiburtine Sibyl do not hold up to scrutiny. And arguments that seemed strong in Sackur’s time are no longer so compelling in light of more recent research. McGinn left the door open that the differences between Pseudo-Methodius and the Tiburtine Sibyl suggest that perhaps the author of the latter was drawing on an additional tradition, and while this is certainly possible, there is no reason to believe that this tradition predated Pseudo-Methodius, not to mention originated in the fourth century. Still, there remain several aspects of the Tiburtine Sibyl that can be found in multiple versions of the text, but which do not have roots in Pseudo-Methodius. The description of a measure of wheat, wine, and oil each selling for a denarius in the reign of the Last Emperor (taken from Revelation 6:6) is present in versions 2 and, in a very confused state, version 4; the text in front of the face of the emperor that promises him victory (might this text actually be Pseudo-Methodius?) is present in versions 2 and 3; and the emperor’s physical description is present in versions 2 and 4. But there is no reason to believe that any of this material predated Pseudo-Methodius. It could have easily originated in the lost version of the Sibyl dating from c.1000 AD.

Perhaps the most damning piece of evidence against idea that Heraclius knew of a Last Roman Emperor legend is that no such legend is mentioned in any sources describing his return of the True Cross. If the story was well known, why did no contemporary make the connection? George of Pisidia makes countless allusions in his

74 McGinn, Visions of the End, 294-295 n.7.
75 Since Revelation was most widely used by apocalyptists in the medieval west and was of dubious canonicity in the east, especially in the fourth and fifth centuries (see John Meyendorff, Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes (New York: Fordham University Press, 1974), 7-8), this further suggests a later, non-Greek development, instead of some vestige of a fourth-century eastern source.
poem on the return of the Cross --comparisons between Heraclius and Constantine, comparisons of the Cross with the Golden Fleece and with the Ark of the Covenant, references to the writings of Paul and the resurrection of Lazarus-- but he does not mention anything about a Last Roman Emperor. A short reference in the poem has been seen as apocalyptic,\textsuperscript{76} where George states “For I think the resurrection of the dead should come again with the appearance of the Cross,”\textsuperscript{77} but even so, he makes no reference to a prophesy that the Cross would be returned to Golgotha at the final consummation.

Indeed, Heraclius waged a committed propaganda campaign both during and after his war with Persia, yet there is no mention of the Last Roman Emperor in any of his propaganda. The account of the return of the True Cross in Antiochos Strategius,\textsuperscript{78} though it seems to be highly influenced by Heraclius propaganda,\textsuperscript{79} does not mention anything remotely related to the Last Roman Emperor. If Heraclius was inspired by it, he made no indication. In fact, no source whatsoever that can be securely and uncontroversially dated before Pseudo-Methodius mentions the Last Roman Emperor. The closest we can come is an ambiguous reference in Lactantius, and even that is really meant to be a reference to Christ. Simply put, there is no evidence that anyone

\textsuperscript{76} Drijvers, 187.
\textsuperscript{77} In restitutionem sanctae crucis, 109-110 (Tartaglia, 246): ἔδει γάρ, οἶμαι, τῇ νεκρῶν ἀναστάσει / σταυροῦ γενέσθαι καὶ πόλιν μνήμονα. In fact, I disagree with Drijvers that this statement is apocalyptic; more likely this line references the fact that Constantinople, where George was at the time, received word of the return of the Cross on Lazarus Saturday.
\textsuperscript{78} Strategios account does not survive in Greek, but the Georgian and Arabic translations are extant and have been edited: G. Garitte, \textit{La Prise de Jérusalem par les Perses en 614}, CSCO 202-3, Scriptores Iberici 11-12 (Louvain: Peeters, 1960) and \textit{Expugnationis Hierosolymae A.D. 614 Recensiones Arabicae}, CSCO 340–1 and 347–8, Scriptores Arabici 26–9 (Louvain: Peeters, 1973–4). For an English translation of the section concerning the return of the True Cross, see Conybeare, “Antiochus Strategos’ Account of the Sack of Jerusalem in A.D. 614,” 516-517.
\textsuperscript{79} Howard-Johnston, \textit{Witnesses to a World Crisis}, 166-167.
knew of the Last Emperor prophesy before the time of Pseudo-Methodius, after which it suddenly appears in several texts, and soon becomes a common theme in Byzantine, Syriac, and Coptic apocalyptic literature. It defies Occam’s razor to suggest that the legend originated in a Greek text, was translated into Latin, was then used by Pseudo-Methodius in Syriac, only to be translated back into Greek and then popularized from there.

Indeed, no theory can explain how, if the Tiburtine version of the Last Emperor existed before the seventh century, Pseudo-Methodius could have picked up on it. The only solution might be that both texts got it from an Eastern source. The Sibylline prophecy was certainly Eastern in character. Not only does the Oracle of Baalbek, the earliest known version, originate in the early-sixth century Greek-speaking East, but later versions of the prophecy appear in Arabic, Ethiopian, Old Church Slavonic, Romanian, and other languages. If the Last Roman Emperor prophecy existed in the early Eastern sibylline texts, then Pseudo-Methodius could have picked it up from there. But there is no evidence that it did. None of the sibylline texts that continued circulating in the East throughout the Middle Ages in any of these languages included the Last Roman Emperor legend. They give the Sibyl’s dream interpretation without a Last

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80 After its inclusion in Pseudo-Methodius, the Last Emperor legend is seen in the near-contemporary Edessan Fragment, as well as the Greek and Latin translations of the prophecy, and many apocalyptic texts. Considering the fourth and fifth century are much better documented than the seventh, one would expect that if the legend were circulating during these earlier centuries be would have some record of it.


Roman Emperor. It seems that the combination of the Last Emperor with the sibylline
tradition was a distinctly Latin phenomenon, and one which cannot be accounted for
before the year 1000.

Since the earliest of the four versions of the Tiburtine Sibyl in Latin comes from
the year 1000, and this is the earliest Tiburtine text that must have included the Last
Roman Emperor prophecy, the simplest and best explanation is that it was added at
this point. Indeed, with the heightened fears that the turn of the millennium would usher
in the end of the world, it is not difficult to imagine a contemporary author from the Holy
Roman Empire trying to synthesize eschatological prophesies known to have been long
circulating among the ancient monasteries of the East. Combining the sibylline
explanation of the Dream of Nine Suns with the Last Roman Emperor of Pseudo-
Methodius, and perhaps sprinkling in oral traditions about the Last Roman Emperor that
had developed in the Latin West, this author of the eleventh century produced the first
Latin Tiburtine Sibyl. Though this work is lost, it was copied and brought up to date in
the three extant versions of the eleventh century.

In the end, McGinn is right that the Tiburtine Sibyl is a post-700 update of the
Greek original, but he is too cautious in granting the possibility of an earlier Last
Roman Emperor prophecy in that tradition. Although it is impossible to prove a negative,
to prove that the Last Roman Emperor did not originate in the fourth century, none of
the arguments for such a date of origin holds up. I would agree with McGinn that the

83 Holdenried, 6.
84 Adso’s mention that he derived his knowledge from the doctores nostri shows that there was an active
oral tradition concerning the legend of the Last Emperor (Konrad, 36-38, believes that the doctores nostri
refers to Pseudo-Methodius, but Rangheri, 711-712, argues convincingly that this is cannot be; thus
Adso must have been relying on word of mouth; Alexander, in The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition, 158,
notes that Adso may have been also drawing on a lost work of Pseudo-Hippolytus).
concept of the Last Emperor developed slowly over time, and had some fourth- and fifth-century roots. Despite the fact that Pseudo-Methodius seems to be the main source for the Last Roman Emperor prophecy, McGinn points out, “this does not, however, prove in conclusive fashion that the entire account of the Last Emperor is drawn from Methodius.” McGinn stresses that the development of the concept of the Last Emperor was probably a gradual process, starting in the fourth century and evolving over the centuries. However, the kings in late antique works that he cites --such as the Coptic Apocalypse of Elijah and the Oracle of Baalbek--are underdeveloped, briefly mentioned, and none are said to have anything to do with Jerusalem or the True Cross. All this seems to suggest that the Last Roman Emperor prophecy developed slowly out of an interest in eschatological kings, but did not exist in any recognizable form before Heraclius. Thus, he could not have been inspired by it. Considering these realizations about the transmission of apocalyptic thought, recent work on the Last Roman Emperor legend, especially its legacy in the west and in the Islamic world, needs to be reevaluated and reinterpreted. This, then, leads to the final question in this inquiry, namely whether Heraclius himself served as the inspiration for this legend.

87 McGinn, Antichrist, 89.
CHAPTER 4
THE CROSS, THE CROWN, AND THE CONCEPT OF IDEAL CHRISTIAN KINGSHIP

Having explored the reasons why the Tiburtine Sibyl and its version of the Last Emperor could not have predated Pseudo-Methodius, the latter text now provides the earliest known version of this eschatological figure. Not only is it the earliest text attesting to the tradition, but, as we will see, the idea of the Last Roman Emperor fits with the historical context and polemical objectives of Pseudo-Methodius.

Unraveling the Revelations of Pseudo-Methodius

Pseudo-Methodius seems to have written his *Revelations* in Singara (Sinjar) in upper Mesopotamia at the end of the seventh century.1 Various attempts at a more precise date have been attempted, and scholarly consensus has mostly settled on the year 691AD, as Pseudo-Methodius seems to be directly responding to the construction of the Dome of the Rock on the Temple Mount. Also, Pseudo-Methodius expresses fear about a new tax policy against Christians. This can be identified with the poll tax and census introduced by Abd al-Malik in the last decade of the seventh century which increased taxes on Christians by 400%, no longer allowed taxes to be paid in-kind, but allowed for exemptions for converts to Islam.2 Pseudo-Methodius also repeatedly states that the occupation by the Ishmaelites will last “ten weeks of years,”3 i.e. 70 years. If he

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1 In the introduction to the text, which is absent in the Greek and Latin translations, Pseudo-Methodius claims that the text is an account of the revelations received by Bishop Methodius on Mount Singar (PM, 1; Martinez, 122; Reinink, 1); see Reinink, “Ps.-Methodius: A Concept of History,” 160; Brock, “Syriac Views on Emergent Islam,” 18; Martinez, 26; Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, 28. Since the historical Methodius had nothing to do with Singar, this suggests that the actual author was talking about where he lived. The only scholar to oppose to view that I know of is Harald Suermann, who in *Die geschichtstheologische Reaktion auf die eintfallenden Muslime in der edessenischen Apokalyptik des 7. Jahrhunderts* (Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang, 1985), 160, suggests that it was composed in Edessa.


3 Pseudo-Methodius, 5.9 (10; 23; 35), 10.6 (130; 139; 147), 13.2 (15; 39; 57).
was calculating from the first year of the Islamic calendar, ten weeks of years would end in the year 691. This would have also been a period when the Roman Empire was regrouping its power and extracting tribute from Abd al-Malik, making their recovery believable, but just before their decisive defeat at Sebastopolis in 692 when the situation was reversed. While a date of 691 can only be an estimate, Pseudo-Methodius’ polemics against Christians who gave into pressures to convert to Islam, pressures first institutionalized in the 690s by the Umayyad authorities, firmly situates the text at the end of the seventh century.

Pseudo-Methodius was thus writing at a time of immense change. The early years of Islamic occupation of the lands that had once been part of the Roman and Persian Empires seems to have changed relatively little. Religious interference by the Islamic authorities was rare. Recent research suggests that this was because the religious borderlines between the newly forming Islam and Christianity were not firmly established. Some Christians, especially Miaphysites who had been persecuted by Heraclius’ government, welcomed the Arabs and found greater religious freedom under their rule. After the Islamic Empire was nearly torn apart in the Second Fitna, however,

4 Brock. “Syriac Views on Emergent Islam,” 18-19, 203 n. 63; Brock points out that the Hijra was already in use by other Syriac Christians for dating.
5 Ibid.
6 Martinez, *Eastern Christian Apocalyptic*, 30-32, largely agrees with this dating, but presents some problems with it, such as the appearance of seven, not ten, weeks of years in the Latin and Greek versions, and cautions against placing too much certainty on any exact date.
10 The issue of Miaphysite support for the Arabs is complex. Some seem to have supported them, but other miaphysites did not. For a classic study in the question, see John Moorhead, “The Monophysite Response to the Arab Invasions,” *Byzantion*, vol. 51 (1981), 579-91.
the new Umayyad Caliph ‘Abd al-Malik found it necessary or expedient to stress Islam as separate and superior to the monotheistic religions that preceded it.\textsuperscript{11} His policies included not only tax reforms meant to incentivize conversion to Islam, but also the construction of the Dome of the Rock. This structure, built atop the Temple Mount, was meant to announce the supersession of Islam over the old Abrahamic religions, and it was decorated with Qur’an verses polemicizing against the Christian understanding of Christ and the trinity.\textsuperscript{12}

With these sudden assaults as his inspiration, Pseudo-Methodius wrote his book of revelations. The work is not just an apocalypse, but an account of world history, starting with Adam and Eve, and written from Pseudo-Methodius’ unique Christian perspective. His concept of history is complex, and as Reinink explains, Pseudo-Methodius “uses the typical Syriac method of typological and symbolic exegesis to explain and describe historical phenomena.”\textsuperscript{13} He asserts that in ancient times the Ishmaelites, i.e. the Arabs, conquered the world, but were defeated with the help of God by the Israelites under Gideon. Thus, for Pseudo-Methodius, biblical history reflects contemporary events, and he predicts that after ten weeks of years the Ishmaelites shall be conquered again, this time by the Romans.\textsuperscript{14} He claims that the Arab Empire was not one of the legitimate empires prophesied by Daniel, but simply a temporary chastisement sent by God.\textsuperscript{15} However, unlike many contemporary writers who blamed this chastisement on heresy, and thus used the Arab invasions to polemicize against

\textsuperscript{11} Donner, \textit{Muhammad and the Believers}, 194-224.
\textsuperscript{13} Reinink, “Ps.-Methodius: A Concept of History,” 153.
\textsuperscript{14} Pseudo-Methodius, 5.2-9 (8-10; 128-130; 11-15)
\textsuperscript{15} Reinink, “Ps.-Methodius: A Concept of History,” 158.
Christians of other Christological beliefs, Pseudo-Methodius saw the Arabs as punishment for more general sins, especially sexual misconduct by Christians (transvestitism, prostitution, homosexuality, incest, and various combinations thereof), and avoided placing any blame on heresy. Instead, he stressed Christian unity and avoided any statement that might support one Christian faction over another.

He invents an Ethiopian ancestry for Alexander the Great, and takes pains to show that the rulers of Byzantium, Rome, and Alexandria all descend from Alexander the Great’s supposed Ethiopian mother, Kushat. He sees Alexander the Great as the founder of the Roman Empire, conflating the “Empire of the Greeks” and the Empire of the Romans. For Pseudo-Methodius, the Empire of the Romans is also universally synonymous with the Christian Empire. Thus, the Last Roman Emperor will be the final descendant of Alexander the Great, and his surrender in Jerusalem would fulfill the special role granted by God to the Roman Empire as the Empire of Christ. For Pseudo-Methodius, interpreting the Syriac (mis)translation of Psalm 68 (“Kush will extend its hands to God”) to mean that it would be an Ethiopian who would accomplish the surrender to God, it was necessary to prove the connection between the Roman Emperor and Ethiopia in order to show that salvation would come from the Roman Empire.

16 See, for example, Pseudo-Methodius’ contemporary, John bar Penkaye, who saw “the ills to which we had been exposed as a result of the interference of Christian kings who wanted us to ascribe suffering to that Nature which is above suffering - something that perhaps not even demons had ever dared to do... And so, when God saw that no amendment took place, He summoned against us the Barbarian kingdom - a people that is not open to persuasion;” from John Bar Penkaye, Ktābā Rīs Mellē, ed. Alphonse Mingana, Sources Syriques, (Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1908), 144-145; translated in Sebastian P. Brock, “North Mesopotamia in the late 7th Century: Book 15 of John Bar Penkaye’s ‘Rīs Mellē’,” Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam, vol. 9 (1987), 59-60.
17 Pseudo-Methodius, 11.6-7 (25; 140-141; 44).
18 One can only assume, since this is a common attribute in Syriac literature, that because the Romans maintained the use of Greek language and the propagation of Greek culture in their eastern provinces, the transition from Greek to Roman rule was seamless or nonexistent in the historical memory of the Semitic people of the region.
Having established this association in his section on Alexander, he describes the final chastisement of the Christians at the end of the world, the violent coming of Ishmael from out of the desert. The Arab “Ishmaelites,” he contends, did not bring a new religion; instead, they were simply pagans.\(^{19}\) He describes vividly the horrors of Arab occupation. However, he predicts, when the Ishmaelites claim that the Christians have no savior, the Last Emperor will arise “like a man who has shaken off his wine.”\(^{20}\) The Last Emperor will drive the Ishmaelites back into the desert, killing and enslaving them, so that “their oppression will be one hundredfold stronger than their own yoke.”\(^{21}\)

He claims that it will be at this point that the great peace will reign on earth, only to be interrupted by the opening of the Gates of the North and the invasion of Gog and Magog. With their defeat, the Antichrist will be revealed (the first time) and the Last Emperor will go to Jerusalem, surmount Golgotha, place his crown upon the Cross, and surrender the empire to God. Then the Antichrist (revealed for the second time) will go to Jerusalem and dwells in the temple. But with Christ’s Second Coming the Antichrist will be banished to hell, and the world will end with the Last Judgment.\(^{22}\)

There has been some debate as to what sort of traditions influenced Pseudo-Methodius’ Last Roman Emperor, but G.J. Reinink has done much to establish that the apocalyptist was drawing on Roman concepts of kingship and Syriac literary traditions


\(^{20}\) Ibid, 13.6-11(38; 149; 60-62); this is taken from Psalm 78:65, which describes God suddenly awakening to beat back his enemy like a warrior who has shaken off his wine. It is also used in the Syriac Cave of Treasures, XXI.18-22; ed. Su-Min Ri, La caverne des trésors: les deux recensions syriques (Leuven, 1987; CSCO 486-87, Scr. Syri 207-208), 162-65 (text); 62-63 (trans.), where it is attributed to Christ.

\(^{21}\) Pseudo-Methodius, 13.13 (39; 149; 64).

rather than Jewish Messianic expectations. Another open question concerns the Christological allegiance of Pseudo-Methodius. Scholars have found their own reasons to proclaim Pseudo-Methodius a Chalcedonian, a Miaphysite, or a Nestorian. But it is important to note that any of the possible theological identifications is uncertain because he makes no overt or controversial Christological statements, and the work could, and was, embraced alike by supporters and opponents of the Council of Chalcedon. This seems to have been Pseudo-Methodius’ intention. As already noted, he does not accuse a particular denomination of heresy, nor does he blame any one Christian faction for angering God. His concern was not with inter-religious feuding, but with Christian apostasy to Islam. He stressed Christian unity in the face of the threat of the newly established Muslim rule. Quite simply, he was encouraging all Christians living in the Caliphate to put aside their doctrinal differences, look rather to the Roman Emperor, ruler of the Christian Empire, and await the day when he would deliver them from the Ishamelites, an event which, by its very nature, would bring about the end of days.

23 Paul Alexander, in “The Medieval Legend of the Last Roman Emperor and its Messianic Origin,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 41 (1978), 1-15, argued that the Last Roman Emperor was derived from Jewish Messianic ideas, a figure who would deliver God’s chosen people (Christians now instead of Jews) back to Jerusalem. G.J. Reinink, in “Die syrischen Wurzeln der mittelalterlichen Legende vom römischen Endkaiser,” 195-209, however, objects to this idea, claiming that the Last Roman Emperor was an expression of the Byzantine ideal of kingship.

24 Paul Alexander believed he was a Jacobite, see Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, 29; while Kmosko, 291, and later, Sebastian Brock, in “Syriac Views of Emergent Islam,” in G.H.A. Juynboll, ed., *Studies on the First Century of Islamic Society* (Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1982), 19-20, claims that he was a Chalcedonian trying to appeal to monophysites.

25 Chalcedonians, Monophysites, and Nestorians all placed great importance on the text, and it was embraced by both Greek and Latin audiences no matter their Christological opinions; see Brock, “Syriac Views on Emergent Islam,” 19-20.

The Man and the Myth Reconsidered

This thesis began with the assertion that the return of the True Cross to Jerusalem by Heraclius and the Despostionsakt in Jerusalem by the Last Emperor are so similar that it suggests one had been inspired by the other. Since we have determined that it is exceedingly unlikely that the Last Emperor tradition predated Heraclius, can we establish that the Last Roman Emperor of Pseudo-Methodius was inspired by Heraclius? It is a tempting proposition. Pseudo-Methodius describes the Last Emperor’s sudden war against the Arabs when “he arises like a man who has shaken off his wine.” This description seems to correspond closely with Heraclius’s career. The period of 614 to 621, just before his offense against the Persians, was the most inactive stage of Heraclius’ life. But then, in 621, like a man shaking off his wine, he launched a series of campaigns that regained the eastern provinces for the Roman Empire. In this campaign Heraclius regained Egypt, western Mesopotamia, and the Levant for the Roman Empire, and those very lands were now under Muslim rule in Pseudo-Methodius’ time. His ousting of the Persians would have provided a convenient model and parallel for a new Emperor who would drive out the Arabs and restore Christian rule to the Near East. After all, after twenty years of occupation in the Levant the Persians may have seemed like they were there to stay. But they turned out to be but a temporary occupier before the return of Roman rule, and Pseudo-Methodius presented the Arabs as the same sort of temporary scourge. Moreover, the Last Emperor’s triumphal return to Jerusalem after the defeat of the Arabs would have been appropriate for a ruler following in the footsteps of Heraclius, whose entry into Jerusalem was the highpoint of his reign.

27 Kaegi, Heraclius, 100.
It is not difficult to see why scholars such as Shahîd, Drijvers, Mango, and Magdalino have made insinuations as to the close relationship between Heraclius and the Last Emperor legend.\(^{28}\) However, it is also easy to see why scholars have been loath to move beyond mere insinuation. There is little direct evidence to suggest such a connection. Pseudo-Methodius makes no explicit mention of Heraclius whatsoever in his text. At the same time, though Pseudo-Methodius' work was not a treatise on recent history and is, at times, purposely vague, he was cognizant of the history of Heraclius' reign. He mentions the victory of the Greeks over the Persian Empire just prior to the coming of the Ishmaelites (this can only be Heraclius' successful war),\(^{29}\) the four generals dispatched by Abu Bakr to conquer the Roman Near East,\(^{30}\) and the decisive battle of Gâbitâ (Yarmuk) where, he claims to predict, the army of the kingdom of the Greeks will be destroyed.\(^{31}\) But his interest lies in the history of the Arab conquests, not in Heraclius' achievements or return of the True Cross. Heraclius had failed miserably in keeping the Muslim advance in check, and his example was not one for a messianic Last Roman Emperor to follow.

How, then, do we explain all the material in Pseudo-Methodius relating to the importance of the Cross and its location atop Golgotha? And how to we resolve the similarities between the historical Heraclius and the Last Emperor legend? First, we must take a closer look at the apparent similarities.

\(^{28}\) For the positions of these scholars, see the introduction of this paper.
\(^{29}\) Pseudo-Methodius, 11.3 (24; 140; 42).
\(^{30}\) Ibid, 11.4 (25; 140; 42-43).
The All-Conquering Cross

The importance and power of the Cross is a reoccurring theme in Pseudo-Methodius. This power protected the Roman Empire, which was synonymous with the Christian Empire. “There is not, therefore, a nation or kingdom under the heavens that could overcome the kingdom of the Christians, as long as it takes refuge in the living cross, which was set up in the middle of the earth,” he writes.\(^{32}\) The reference to the middle of the earth is at first puzzling, until one realizes he means Golgotha, which is often called the middle of the earth in Syriac literature. Does he mean that it was set up there by Heraclius? This is a possibility, but it is far more probable that he means that it was set up there when Christ was crucified. It is Golgotha’s role as the place of Christ’s crucifixion that would have stood out in the mind of any Christian reader.

Still, the Cross is “the invincible armor that conquers everything,”\(^{33}\) its power keeps the Antichrist at bay,\(^ {34}\) and the Roman Emperor’s possession of it guarantees that his empire will never be conquered. “For, which is the power or the kingdom or the nation under heaven that is powerful and strong enough to overcome the great power of the Holy Cross, in which the kingdom of the Greeks -- which is that of the Romans -- has taken refuge?” Pseudo-Methodius asks.\(^ {35}\)

The idea of the Cross as a powerful weapon truly emerges in the propaganda of Heraclius after his long military struggle in its name and his return of the relic to Jerusalem. To George of Pisidia, the Cross is more powerful than the Ark of the Covenant, and, “upon being beheld, dispatches living missiles,” a weapon that killed the

\(^{32}\) Pseudo-Methodius, 9.8-9 (20; 32-33; 136).
\(^{33}\) Pseudo-Methodius, 5.9 (10; 130; 15).
\(^{34}\) Ibid, 10.2 (21;137; 35-36).
\(^{35}\) Ibid, 9.9 (20; 137; 34).
Persian king for his insolence. Sophronius of Jerusalem, in his account of the return of the Cross, calls it “God’s greatest weapon, the strongest defense of mortals, the best remedy for suffering.” While undoubtedly an integral part of Christianity since the religion’s beginning, the Cross was imbued with a new militaristic sense after its role in the seventh-century Persian War.

Pseudo-Methodius was surely influenced by this heightened sense of militarism connected to the Cross. But does this mean that he was specifically drawing on the legacy of Heraclius in his formulation of the character of the Last Emperor? In fact, there is no evidence of this. Why then does he make it so central to his ideology? There is a much more convincing and immediate reason.

As already discussed, Pseudo-Methodius’ work was a polemic against the authority of the Muslim rulers under which he lived. To the new Islamic rulers of the Near East, the ritual display of the Cross was an affront to the teaching of Muhammad that Christ had not been crucified, but had been assumed bodily into heaven. As Sidney Griffith has stated, “One of the earliest memories of the coming of the Muslims preserved in the Christian communities is the record of the newcomers’ antipathy to the cross.” A number of sources, all presumably based on the lost early eighth-century Syriac Christian chronicle of Theophilus of Edessa, report the story of the Muslim authorities, supposedly acting on the advice of the Jews, removing the Cross that

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38 Qur’an, 4: 157-158.
overlooked Jerusalem on the Mount of Olives soon after capturing the city. Likewise, the Syriac chronicles record the story of an edict by ‘Amr ibn Sa’d, an early Islamic governor of Damascus, forbidding the public display of the Cross. His decree provoked violent attacks on crosses throughout the city, again attributed to the Jews.

‘Abd al-Malik, the Caliph under whom Pseudo-Methodius wrote, intensified this already existing policy whereby images of the Cross were specifically targeted by the Muslim authorities. In the late 680s, ‘Abd al-Malik’s brother, who held the position of governor of Egypt, “commanded to destroy all the crosses which were in the land of Egypt, even the crosses of gold and silver.” This edict against crosses would probably have been issued less than five years before Pseudo-Methodius wrote.

Because the cross was attacked by the Muslim government, it gained renewed symbolic meaning and capital for the Christian community. Pseudo-Methodius discusses the cross so often as to set up a contrast. In the Empire of the Greeks, as Pseudo-Methodius called the Roman Empire, the cross was still prominently displayed, adorning not just churches but coins and emblems of the empire, and even the emperor’s standard. Thus, the Roman Empire is different from the Islamic Caliphate and is “truly the Empire of the Christians.” Because they “take refuge” in the Cross, the Romans please God and are therefore assured final victory. For this reason, Pseudo-

41 Michael, 11.8c; Michael, p. 422; Chronicle of 1234, 89 (Palmer, Seventh-Century Syriac, 169-170).
Methodius assures his readers, it is to the Roman Empire that they should look for salvation.

When formulating the scene of the *Depositionsakt* in Jerusalem, Pseudo-Methodius seems not to have looked to the return of the True Cross by Heraclius but to a different emperor. He based the scene, as already stated above, on the *Julian Romance*, portraying the Last Emperor as a new Jovian, a Christian emperor who emerged after a period of pagan persecution. His description of this scene, his combination of the Cross and crown, deliberately drew from the account of Jovian in the *Julian Romance* in order to compare the “pagan” Arabs who had recently built the Dome of the Rock on the Temple Mount in clear antagonism toward Christianity, with the pagan Julian, who had tried to rebuild the Jewish Temple on the Temple Mount. Just as Emperor Jovian had overcome the pagan tyranny of Julian (at least in the Romance), so too would the Last Emperor break the tyranny of the Arabs. The Last Emperor’s placement of his crown on the cross was meant to invite comparisons by his readers to the scene in which Jovian placed his crown on a cross, only to have the crown returned to his head. For Jovian, God had decreed that the Roman Empire must continue, but under Christian rule instead of pagan oppression. Once the Last Emperor had conquered the enemies of God, the historical mission of the Roman Empire would be fulfilled and the cross and crown could ascend to heaven.\(^4\)

Since Heraclius in many ways contributed to the heightened importance of the image of the Cross as a symbol of victory, Pseudo-Methodius may be inadvertently drawing on the legacy of Heraclius’ return of the True Cross, but Pseudo-Methodius’

explicit goals have far more to do with the contemporary events developing around him as a Christian living within the new Islamic Empire.

Building a Christian Consensus

In a recent monograph, Philip Wood has looked at the creation of a separate Miaphysite Christian identity in Syriac-speaking Mesopotamia before the Arab conquest, one that went hand in hand with the rejection of the authority of the Chalcedonian emperor in Constantinople. This movement looked instead to alternative political authorities, Arab phylarchs and the Ethiopian king, for authority. It is in this context that Pseudo-Methodius must be read. He was responding to a long standing rejection of Roman rule by the Miaphysites. Their experiment with foreign rule had failed, leading to worse persecutions than they had experienced under the Romans. He was urging all Christians to return to the Roman fold, to accept the Roman Emperor as the representative and protector of Christianity, and to accept the Roman Empire as the Christian Empire, the one and only home for all Christians.

This notion of the Roman emperor as a unifying force for Christians suggests another problem with the idea that Heraclius inspired the legend of the Last Roman Emperor. Heraclius was not a popular emperor among communities of Christians who did not subscribe to the Council of Chalcedon, and not the sort of figure an author like Pseudo-Methodius, intent on stressing the unity of all Christian factions, would want to look to in order to excite fellow Christians. Heraclius was remembered largely as a persecutor, especially among Miaphysite Christians. Whether or not Pseudo-Methodius himself was a Chalcedonian or non-Chalcedonian, if he wanted his supra-

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45 Philip Wood, *We Have No King but Christ*, see especially 209-255.
denominational appeals to resonate, it would have been unwise for him to remind his audience of a polarizing figure such as Heraclius.

Clearly, Heraclius was not the sort of figure Pseudo-Methodius would want to exalt as an exemplar of a ruler who would unite all Christians. Earlier in the century, non-Chalcedonians who had been living for nearly a generation under the Persians found that the return of the Roman Empire under Heraclius brought with it harsh repression. The persecutions of Heraclius, his seizure of Miaphysite churches, his bitter treatment of Miaphysites, are all recorded in sympathetic Syriac historical works. In addition, if Pseudo-Methodius really was from Singar as the text suggests, he would have lived in lands that had been part of the Persian Empire, for whom Heraclius was not a liberator but a raider.

Pseudo-Methodius promises his audience that the Last Roman Emperor, the one that would save Christians from the tyranny of the Arabs, would be an entirely different emperor. The Last Emperor of Pseudo-Methodius is an emperor for all Christians. His enemies are only those who deny Christ. Under the Arabs, Pseudo-Methodius reports, “A great part of those who are sons of the Church will deny the true faith of the Christians, and the Holy Cross and the lifegiving Mysteries. Without violence, torments, or blows, they will deny Christ and make themselves like the pagans.” It was those people, those who had abandoned the church in favor of the tax incentives and social status conferred by Islam who had to be opposed, not any Christians, no matter how many natures they believed Christ possessed. It was apostates whom the Last Emperor

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47 Most significantly in the works derivative of Pseudo-Dioysius of Tel-Mahre, see Michael the Syrian, 409:34-410:29, 11.3c; the Chronicle of 1234, p. 236/185; Palmer, The Seventh Century, p. 140. See also Watt, 73-79.
48 Pseudo-Methodius, 12.3 (33; 145-146; 54-55); see also Reinink, “Ps.-Methodius: A Concept of History,” 181.
would persecute. “Egypt will be laid waste, Arabia will burn…and all the fierce anger of the king of the Greeks will run a full course with those who had denied [Christ].”

Unlike Heraclius, the Last Roman Emperor will not bring a persecution of Christians who denied Chalcedon, but a punishment of those who denied Christ.

It should also be pointed out that at the very time that the Umayyad authorities were enforcing a strict Islamization of society (against which Pseudo-Methodius was writing), they were also circulating the idea that Heraclius had been a proto-Muslim. Lawrence Conrad speculates that the reason behind this was to discourage the hope of Christians living within the Caliphate to look to the Roman emperors for liberation, and instead to encourage them to join the Islamic community by stressing that it had received an endorsement from Heraclius. We should not forget that Pseudo-Methodius was living within the Umayyad Empire, and his view of Heraclius may have been affected by propaganda meant to portray Heraclius as sympathetic to Islam. This is all the more reason to suspect that Pseudo-Methodius did not have Heraclius in mind when he was crafting the Last Roman Emperor story, but rather a Roman emperor who would be substantially different, a complete enemy of the Muslims.

Heraclius and the Alexander Legend

Considering how unlikely it seems that Pseudo-Methodius was consciously drawing on the legacy of Heraclius, how can we account for the similarities between the

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49 Pseudo-Methodius, 13.5 (40; 150; 65).
50 Reinink, “Pseudo-Methodius und die Legende vom römischen Endkaiser,” 111.
Last Emperor and Heraclius which have been repeatedly pointed out in this paper? The solution lies in a text we have already encountered.

One of the sources utilized by Pseudo-Methodius was the Neşḥānā dīleh d-Aleksandrōs, the Syriac Christian Alexander Legend. G.J. Reinink has convincingly demonstrated that this text was written around 628-630 in order to portray Heraclius as a new Alexander. The Alexander Legend was written, it seems, in an attempt to convince Miaphysite Christians, who had enjoyed a respite from persecution while under the Persian occupation (and were sometimes even treated better than the Chalcedonians), that they should welcome back Roman rule. The author as writing in the genre of Alexander Romances, fanciful accounts of Alexander the Great’s adventures in the East, that had been circulating for centuries already, and which would become especially popular in the middle ages. In this work, however, the author stresses the idea that Alexander founded the Roman Empire, and ruled it as a proto-Christian king.

By narrating the campaigns of Alexander in a manner reminiscent of those of Heraclius against Persia, the author sought to convince his audience that Heraclius was not a hostile persecutor, but the rightful emperor of all Christians. His goal seems to have been to remind his readers, as he narrated his story of Alexander, that the Roman

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52 The title Alexander Legend is commonly used instead of Alexander Romance, which is generally reserved for the work of Pseudo-Callisthenes and the more general later traditions.
53 Reinink, “Die Entstehung der syrischen Alexanderlegende,” 279-80; idem, “Alexander the Great in 7th-century Syriac ‘Apocalyptic’ texts,” 152-158; idem, “Heraclius, the New Alexander,” 84-92. Reinink has also demonstrated that a homily version of the Legend written in verse, and falsely attributed to Jacob of Serugh, was slightly later and reacted against the optimism about the fate of the Roman Empire in the prose Legend. Since Pseudo-Methodius certainly used the prose Legend, though it is impossible to tell whether he also knew of the poem, this discussion will be limited to the prose Legend.
54 The text may also be attempting to counter the claim of Heraclius’ enemy, the Persian shah Khusro II, that the Virgin Mary had anointed him the Second Alexander; see Reinink, “Heraclius, The New Alexander,” 89-90.
Empire was the rightful Empire of the Christians (and its emperor the rightful leader of the Christians), with a special place in the history of salvation and in the eschaton.\textsuperscript{55} Like Pseudo-Methodius, the author does not discuss Christology, but rather seems to encourage all Christians to view the Roman Empire as their home.\textsuperscript{56}

The \textit{Alexander Legend} also has a strong apocalyptic element. In this source Alexander predicts that the unfolding of the end times would begin 940 years in the future. If the author was going by the Seleucid era, the most common dating system in Syriac works and also considered the number of years since the reign of Alexander, this would come out to 629 or 630 AD, just after Heraclius’ victory over the Persians and the same time George of Pisidia was writing his \textit{Hexameron} and predicting the world conquest of the Roman Empire. The \textit{Alexander Legend} also predicts that it will conquer the world at the end of time. A notion that fits with the triumphal mood in the Roman Empire after Heraclius’ victories over the Persians. The author attributes the prediction to Alexander himself, and has the priests and oracles of the Persian king confirm it toward the end of the work. The suggestion is that the Roman Empire will take the leading role in the unfolding of eschatological events, events which were finally unfolding after Heraclius’ victory over Persia. Christians of every denomination would thus be well-served by unity under the Roman Empire.

If Miaphysite historical sources are any indication, the author largely failed in his attempt to bring Miaphysite sympathies to Heraclius’ cause.\textsuperscript{57} Nonetheless, the text seems to have circulated widely. It probably spread to or was disseminated among

\begin{footnotes}
\item[56] Reinink, “Alexander the Great,” 163-164; idem, “Die Entstehung der syrischen Alexanderlegende,” 280 n. 47.
\item[57] Watt, 73-79. Reinink, in “Alexander the Great,” 167-168, even speculates that the Alexander Poem might have been a Miaphysite rebuttal of the pro-Roman sentiments of the \textit{Alexander Legend}.
\end{footnotes}
Heraclius’ Miaphysite subjects, especially the Ghassanid Arabs, whose loyalty was crucial as they defended the desert frontier.\(^{58}\) Since the version of the exploits of Alexander (“Dhul-Qarnayn”) in the Qur’an has much in common with the *Alexander Legend*, either the *Legend* or stories derived from it may have reached the members of the early Islamic *umma* in the Hejaz. Recent scholarship suggests that the story in the Qur’an was dependent on the *Alexander Legend*, but written with the intention of refuting the main premise that the leading role in eschatological events belonged to the Roman Empire.\(^{59}\) The *Alexander Legend* clearly continued to circulate after the Islamic conquests, as elements such as its unique description of the customs of the Huns found their way into the ninth-century Greek chronicles of Theophanes and Nicephorus.\(^{60}\)

It is clear that Pseudo-Methodius, writing at the end of the seventh century, was quite familiar with the *Alexander Legend*. He used it both to understand Alexander’s place in Christian history and as a model for an ideal Christian ruler. Reinink has argued that Pseudo-Methodius saw the biblical past reflected in the eschatological future, and thus he looked to the figure whom he believed to be the founder of the Roman Empire, Alexander the Great, as a typologically connected antecessor of final ruler of the Roman

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\(^{58}\) Van Bladel, 190.

\(^{59}\) Ibid, 189-196. For a similar, but slightly different take, see Karl-Heinz Ohlig: *Der frühe Islam. Eine historisch-kritische Rekonstruktion anhand zeitgenössischer Quellen* (Berlin: Schiler, 2010), 34-37. This is in opposition to Brannon Wheeler’s opinions on the history of the Alexander story in the Qur’an in “Moses or Alexander? Early Islamic Exegesis Of Qur’an 18:60-65,” *Journal Of Near Eastern Studies*, vol. 57 (1998), 191-215, whose conclusions on the subject are severely flawed, notable because 1) he does not address the *Alexander Legend* but instead deals only with the verse work attributed to Jacob of Serugh, and 2) he believes that the poem really was written by Jacob, therefore, like Sackur, mistaking the actual date and context of the work; as a result, Wheeler posits an overly complicated system of borrowing between Syriac Christian sources, Islamic sources, and the Babylonian Talmud (!). For a much clearer understanding of the relation between the prose *Legend* and the poem, see Reinink, “Alexander the Great,” 153.

\(^{60}\) Oddly, the description of the customs of the Huns, lifted seemingly straight from the *Alexander Romance*, is used to describe instead the pagan rituals of the people of Pergamon. For an examination of the complex yet intriguing question of how this description made its way from the *Alexander Legend* to the Byzantine chroniclers, see Wolfram Brandes, “Apokalyptisches in Pergamon,” *Byzantinoslavica*, vol. 48 (1987), 1-11.
Empire. Reinink has not noticed, however, that Pseudo-Methodius had access to other sources on Alexander. These sources were probably more accurate. For example, Pseudo-Methodius knows that the Persian king defeated by Alexander was Darius, while the *Alexander Romance* makes it a fictional king named Tubarlaq. However, Pseudo-Methodius chose to rely heavily on the highly fictionalized *Alexander Legend* for a reason. The Alexander of the *Legend* provided him with a reason to believe that the Roman Empire had been founded by the authority of God, and provided a model for the sort of ideal Roman leader that Pseudo-Methodius wanted to see come to the rescue of oppressed Christians. He seems to have based his belief that the Roman Emperor would surrender to God from the *Alexander Legend*. The apocalyptic prophesy in the *Alexander Legend* provided the basis for the idea of such a surrender at the end of time:

> And Alexander took with himself in writing the king's and his nobles' prophecy of what should befall Persia: that Persia would be laid waste by the Romans, and that all the kingdoms would be laid waste, but that the kingdom of the Romans would last and rule to the end of times and that the kingdom of the Romans would deliver the kingdom of the earth to Christ, who is to come. 

Pseudo-Methodius adopted this concept and made it part of his Last Emperor's mission. It is clear, however, that this idea is coming out of the *Alexander Legend*. One need only compare Pseudo-Methodius' prophecy to the one above. Pseudo-Methodius writes:

> The kingdom of the Christians will prevail over all the kingdoms of the earth; by means of it, every sovereignty and power will be destroyed and come to an end... there will not remain any sovereignty or power in the whole earth, except the kingdom of the Greeks, which will surrender to God. 

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62 For Darius, see Pseudo-Methodius, 8.3 (14; 132; 21).
63 Budge, *The History of Alexander*, 275 (Syriac), 158 (English); I have taken this slightly improved translation from Reinink, “Alexander the Great,” 161.
64 Pseudo-Methodius, 10.2-3 (21-22; 137; 35-36).
Just as the founder of the Roman Empire, Alexander the Great, received the prophecy of its fate, the Last Emperor of Pseudo-Methodius would be the man who would fulfill this prophecy.

In short, the Last Roman Emperor of Pseudo-Methodius was an Alexander redivivus based on the Alexander Legend, which had in turn attempted to cast Heraclius as an Alexander redivivus. Thus, by using the version of Alexander the Great in his text as a model for the Last Roman Emperor, Pseudo-Methodius was unknowingly basing the Last Roman Emperor on Heraclius. Perhaps that is why the Last Roman Emperor and Heraclius share many similarities: the association with the Gates of the North and the eschatological people beyond them,65 both of them are pious Christian warrior-kings, and both are closely associated with Jerusalem.66

For example, in the Alexander Legend, the author also tries to present Alexander's victories against the Persians as the result of divine favor, clearly a nod to the idea that Heraclius’ own victories against the Persians were heaven-sent. Before the final battle against the Persian king, Alexander removes his crown and purple clothes and presents them to God. God, riding his chariot of Seraphim, then personally appears on the battlefield and helps Alexander defeat the Persians.67 It is tempting to see this scene, with the removal of the crown and the yielding of earthly power to god, as an early prototype of the Depositionsakt in Pseudo-Methodius. Also, in the Alexander

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65 Especially in Fredegar, 66.
66 Reinink, “Alexander the Great,” 164-165, believes that the Alexander Legend was written in the immediate aftermath of the return of the True Cross, which accounts for the importance of Jerusalem to Alexander in the Legend.
67 Budge, The History of Alexander, 157; For the scene in the later Alexander Poem, see Reinink, Das syrische Alexanderlied, 272-274 (Syriac), 156-157 (German translation).
Legend, Alexander sends his silver throne to Jerusalem, and Reinink has suggested that this was meant as an analogy with the return of the True Cross to Jerusalem. 68

We can get the clearest sense of the transmission of ideas about Heraclius entering the Syriac literary corpus, specifically the work of Pseudo-Methodius, by looking again at the Gates of Alexander tradition. In both Fredegar and the Alexander Legend (in the latter under the guise of Alexander), Heraclius is associated with the Gates of the North and the people beyond them. It is probably not possible to definitively trace how Fredegar picked up on the idea that Heraclius opened the Gates of the North, but the best explanation is that it derived from a source common to both Fredegar and the author of the Alexander Legend, a source that was eager to associate the Persian campaigns of Heraclius with those of Alexander the Great and accomplished this by claiming that Heraclius opened the gates that Alexander had shut centuries earlier. The Alexander Legend, as argued above, clearly also wanted to link Alexander and Heraclius. For this reason it told the story of the building of the gates and included the prophecy that under a new king the Empire of the Roman would take over the world in the Seleucid year 940 (c. 630AD), and that the Roman Empire would hand over authority to God.

The Alexander Legend, as a pro-Heraclius propaganda piece written along the same vein as George of Pisidia’s similarly intentioned Hexameron, clearly intended its readers to believe Heraclius’ victory over Persia symbolized the beginning of a new era of world domination in which all the enemies of the Christian Roman Empire would be defeated, thus perfecting the world and allowing the empire to pave the way for the

Parousia. But this is not what happened. Instead the triumphalism that marked the era of George of Pisidia and the Alexander Legend gave way to sudden panic and pessimism as the Arabs exploded onto the world scene and soon humbled the Roman Empire.\textsuperscript{69} The later reworking of the Alexander Legend, as the Alexander Poem, reflects this. The (probably Miaphysite) author of this poem (wrongly attributed to Jacob of Serugh) cast the mission of Alexander not as the foundation of a great empire, but strictly the construction of the Gates of the North, so that the people beyond them might fulfill their eschatological role at the end of time.\textsuperscript{70} Alexander predicts a very different future for the Roman Empire in the Poem: “the (Lord’s) anger will rise and blot out with the sword Great Rome. It will pull and throw it down from the height into the depth, and it will throw down all the lands of Rome.”\textsuperscript{71} In this narrative, all the kingdoms of men must be violently destroyed before the end of days begins.

For whatever reason, it does not seem to be this latter text that came down to Pseudo-Methodius, but the more optimistic Alexander Legend. Pseudo-Methodius, finding the Alexander Legend sixty years after it was written, would not have known that it was written to glorify Heraclius. The predictions in this popular work had not come true, but it is unlikely that Pseudo-Methodius would have understood the original context of those predictions. The hope that the Roman Empire, weakened after continual defeat against the Arabs, would conquer the world could have no longer seemed possible short of a miraculous change in fortune. A divinely sent Roman Emperor, an Alexander redivivus was the only hope for such a radical change in the fortunes of the Christian

\textsuperscript{70} See Reinink, “Alexander the Great,” 165-168. The Alexander Poem has been edited and translated into German by Reinink, in Das syrische Alexanderlied.
\textsuperscript{71} Reinink, Das syrische Alexanderlied, 130-131.
Empire. Thus, Pseudo-Methodius created the Last Roman Emperor as an ideal liberator based in contemporary literary tropes.

This would have resulted in the many similarities between the Last Emperor and Heraclius. Pseudo-Methodius, then, was unconsciously using the legacy of Heraclius because of his dependency on the Christian Alexander of the Syriac Legend in his construction of the Last Roman Emperor.

**Solutions**

Magdalino’s dichotomy, his idea that Heraclius either inspired or was inspired by the Last Roman Emperor, is too simple. Heraclius’ campaigns made a deep impact on the Near Eastern consciousness, one that crept into Syriac literary thought. Themes inspired by Heraclius made their way indirectly into the apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius and served as building blocks for the Last Emperor tradition. But the real source of the Last Roman Emperor material in Pseudo-Methodius is that author’s attempt, using earlier Syriac texts such as the *Alexander Legend* and the *Julian Romance*, to portray the Roman Empire as the one empire of the Christians, and the Roman Emperor as the rightful ruler, against the objections of the non-Chalcedonian Christians who would have been hesitant to support an empire in which they were persecuted.

While G.J. Reinink has worked extensively on Pseudo-Methodius and demonstrated that the apocalyptic author drew on both the *Alexander Legend* and *Julian Romance*, and elsewhere he has argued that the former text was in turn meant to glorify Heraclius and the Roman Empire,. Yet no study to date has combined these insights in order to draw larger conclusions about the influence of Heraclius on Pseudo-Methodius.
At this point it should be clear that the Last Roman Emperor legend was a product of a mind steeped in Syriac literary thought polemicizing against Islamic rule over Christians and offering the Roman Empire as the single hope for oppressed Christians. In the Last Emperor, Pseudo-Methodius created his ideal ruler, a man who would follow in the footsteps of Alexander the Great and Jovian (as he understood them from Syriac literature). Like these leaders from before the time of Chalcedon, this ruler would not divide the Christian community but unite it. Unlike the Muslim tyrants, this ideal Christian emperor would trust in the cross: like Jovian he would honor it, and like Alexander the Great he would see Jerusalem sanctified in preparation for Christ’s coming. He would be a great military leader, but like Alexander and Jovian he would also be a pious servant of God. He would be a Roman whose Ethiopian blood would allow him to fulfill Rome’s eschatological mission predicted in the *Alexander Romance* while at the same time fulfilling the prophecy of Psalm 68.

The original context of the Last Roman Emperor legend was thus Arab-controlled Mesopotamia of the late seventh century. An earlier date is untenable. The circumstances that made the creation of the Last Roman Emperor theme possible and necessary simply did not exist until the time of Pseudo-Methodius.
So far we have mainly been following a reverse trajectory; from the Tiburtine Sibyl to Pseudo-Methodius, and then back to the sources of that work, trying to get at the origins of the Last Roman Emperor legend. To conclude, however, it will be most productive to present the proposed theory on the development of the Last Roman Emperor legend in chronological order.

Before the seventh century, Christian apocalyptic literature was devoid of a messianic Last Emperor figure. Initially, Roman emperors were villainous figures in such works, either supporting the Antichrist or the Antichrist himself. Yet as Christianity became more closely associated with the Roman state, apocalyptic authors no longer viewed the emperor as a negative figure. There was much interest in emperors and kings who would rule at the end of the world, and a general view seems to have prevailed that a succession of good and bad kings would lead up the last days, though these rulers were described in generic terms. One example of such an apocalyptic perspective was the tradition concerning the Sibyl’s interpretation of a dream by the Roman senate wherein she determined that each of the nine suns of the dream represented one of the ages of man. Though obviously originating earlier, this tradition survives in its earliest extant form in the Greek Oracle of Baalbek.

The reign of Heraclius, from 610-641AD, saw massive shifts in the political map of the Eastern Mediterranean world, and brought with it corresponding shifts in eschatological thought. The Persian invasions, under which the Roman Empire’s eastern provinces were overrun, inspired a sense of hopelessness and impending doom throughout the empire. However, Heraclius’ lightning campaigns shattered the Persian
forces and brought the collapse of the Persian government of Shah Khusro II, and a sudden reversal of power as defeated Persia was reduced to the status of almost a vassal of Constantinople. A mood of triumphalism arose in the Roman Empire after this sudden victory, and Heraclius’ court writers, George of Pisidia and Theophylact Simocatta, presented Heraclius’ reign as the start of a new golden age. They appropriated the pessimistic apocalypticism that had spread during the twenty-six year long war and recast the eschatological themes to stress the idea that the final age before the Parousia had arrived with Heraclius. This would be a glorious age presided over by a Roman Empire that maintained its rightful dominion over all the earth.

This same sentiment was expressed by the author of the Alexander Legend. This author attempted to convince the Miaphysites, Christians who had prospered under the Persians and now were once again under the rule of a Roman state that considered them heretics, to accept Roman rule as proper and God-appointed. Toward this end he tried to show that Alexander the Great had founded the Roman Empire for all Christians under the instruction of God. He described Alexander in terms meant to remind his audience of Heraclius, and thereby to stress the idea that Heraclius was the divinely ordained ruler of Christians, and that Miaphysites should accept his authority.

With the sudden conquests of the Islamic Arabs, which overran the Roman eastern provinces, the idea of world-wide Roman hegemony could no longer be maintained, and a sense of pessimism prevailed over the Roman Empire. The Alexander Legend was answered with a verse text paralleling the narrative, but stressing the need for Rome to fall before the Second Coming.
While Miaphysites initially may have been glad to be free of Roman rule, and some even welcomed the Arab conquerors as liberators, the feeling did not last. Under the Marwanid dynasty of the Umayyad Caliphate, starting with Caliph ‘Abd al-Malik, the Islamic government began to enforce strict religious borderlines and to encourage conversion to Islam. ‘Abd al-Malik’s government increased taxes on Christians while allowing for exemptions for converts to Islam, cracked down on the public display of crosses, and oversaw the construction of the Dome of the Rock on the Temple Mount of Jerusalem, which was designed to announce that the old religions had been superseded.

In this climate, Pseudo-Methodius took up his pen and encouraged Christians of every persuasion to put aside their differences and recognize Islam as their true enemy. Influenced by the *Alexander Legend*, he viewed the Roman Empire as the single Christian Empire behind which all Christians should unite. He wrote a discourse on history that ended with an apocalyptic prediction that a Last Roman Emperor would arise and free all Christians from Islamic rule and punish the apostates. This Last Roman Emperor was meant to be a reflection of the first Roman Emperor—that is, according to Pseudo-Methodius, Alexander the Great. Pseudo-Methodius based this emperor on the *Alexander of the Alexander Poem*, which in turn, was based on Heraclius. Thus, although he was trying to court the very Miaphysite communities that had welcomed Islamic liberation from the oppressive rule of Heraclius, Pseudo-Methodius unwittingly based his Last Roman Emperor partly on this image of Heraclius. He also based the Last Roman Emperor on Emperor Jovian of the *Julian Romance*, another ideal Christian ruler.
Pseudo-Methodius’ apocalyptic work achieved enormous popularity, appealing not just to the Christians living under the Umayyad Caliphate, but also those living within the Roman Empire who despaired that God had seemingly abandoned them by allowing repeated Muslim victories. Written around 691AD, Pseudo-Methodius’ apocalypse was soon translated into Greek, and by the 720s, into Latin. Soon the belief in a messianic Roman Emperor took on a life of its own, and was found in works besides Pseudo-Methodius. Adso of Montier-en-Der was able to speak of it in the tenth century in a manner completely divorced from its context in Pseudo-Methodius.

In the meantime, the sibylline tradition concerning the dream of nine suns had made its way west as well, probably in its form as the Oracle of Baalbek. It is impossible to know the precise route it took, through it probably made its way into Western Europe by way of Constantinople.¹ (One might fancifully imagine Kallinikos taking it with him to Constantinople along with his new invention, Greek Fire, as he fled there after the Arabs overran his native Baalbek.) While the Greek Oracle of Baalbek could not have been the direct basis for the Tiburtine Sibyl’s narrative,² a common source of the sibylline dream interpretation (Σ) must have also survived, but has subsequently been lost.

Around the turn of the new millennium, as apocalyptic fears were resurfacing within Christendom, a scribe living within Holy Roman Empire got his hands on both the Latin Pseudo-Methodius and a Latin translation of the sibylline dream of nine suns (seemingly not the Oracle of Baalbek, but a version containing some earlier material such as the prediction that Constantinople would only stand for sixty years). He

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¹ While the Oracle of Baalbek was written, as its name suggests, in Roman Phoenicia, the surviving manuscripts, which date from the twelfth through fifteenth centuries, are from Europe, the earliest of which is from Mount Athos; see Alexander, *The Oracle of Baalbek*, 4-7.
² See the analysis of the two texts in chapter 1 above.
attributed the sibylline prediction to the Tiburtine Sibyl, and added a great deal of his own material. He replaced the list of Roman Emperors (if it was still present) with his own list of Lombard kings and Holy Roman Emperors, ending with Otto III, of whom he had a negative view and whom he also thought would be the last emperor before the unfolding of the *eschaton*. He also included Pseudo-Methodius’ description of the Last Roman Emperor to the final age in the dream interpretation. He added additional details about the Last Roman Emperor, either making them up himself or drawing on other lost sources, giving the emperor a name and a physical description. This initial version of the Tiburtine Sibyl is no longer extant, but it was copied and modified in subsequent years and later versions have survived.

These later versions added a second king list to fill in Holy Roman Emperors who had reigned since Otto III. While the narrative of the Last Roman Emperor in almost all of these versions of the Tiburtine Sibyl showed an obvious debt to Pseudo-Methodius, one version, the earliest surviving version, is more ambiguous. This has led many scholars, such as its editor Ernst Sackur, to believe that it was preserving a tradition separate from, and earlier than, Pseudo-Methodius. This error has led scholars down further blind alleys, such as the idea that an early version of the Last Roman Emperor could have inspired the Emperor Heraclius.

After a careful analysis of this text, version 2 of the Tiburtine Sibyl, it becomes obvious that it, like all other versions, is derived from Pseudo-Methodius. There is nothing particularly fourth-century about the name and description of the Last Emperor, nor does the description of his exploits in the text reflect material that had to originate before the Arab conquests. In addition, the text includes an allusion to Psalm 68 that
only makes sense in the Syriac context in which Pseudo-Methodius was writing. Clearly, the Last Roman Emperor tradition in the Tiburtine Sibyl has its origin in the late seventh-century work of Pseudo-Methodius. The idea that Heraclius could have known the legend of the Last Roman Emperor is untenable, nor does he seem to have been the impetus behind it.

This thesis has firmly demonstrate that the idea that Last Emperor tradition originated before the seventh-century can no longer be maintained, and that the outdated but oft repeated assertion that it originated in the fourth century, as well as the very recent work that has asserted that it may have been known by and inspired the early Islamic leaders must be abandoned. Studies that have asserted that Heraclius’ return of the True Cross was a “deliberately apocalyptic act,” such as those of Jan Drijvers and Cyril Mango, must be reexamined. Other evidence besides the similarity between the adventus of Heraclius and the Last Emperor Legend must be put forward if those conclusions are to be sustained. Barring any future discoveries, Pseudo-Methodius’ late seventh-century work should be seen as the first instance of the Last Roman Emperor legend. Moreover, the circumstances under which Pseudo-Methodius was writing strongly suggest that he created the idea of the Last Roman Emperor to achieve his polemical ends. Finally, research on Pseudo-Methodius’ apocalyptic milieu must expand to take account of other influences on that author’s creation of the Last Roman Emperor besides Christian-Roman theological and political thought. Such approaches present important and exciting new opportunities to explore the Islamic influence on his work.

3 Mango, 206.
Finally, this thesis has important implications for understanding apocalypticism in both the fourth and seventh centuries. By demonstrating that the Last Emperor legend did not develop in the fourth century, it reveals that many of the eschatological elements that would become important in medieval apocalyptic literature were not yet part of Christian thought in this earlier period. At the same time, this research reveals much more about seventh century apocalyptic thinking. It has long been acknowledged that the challenges Christians of the late seventh century faced, namely the threat of Islam as a new religion that could contend with Christianity on a global scale, led to a renaissance of apocalyptic thinking. But firmly placing the Last Emperor legend in the seventh century heightens our understanding of the new ideas and directions with which seventh-century eschatological writers were experimenting. It shows that the new and unprecedented threat of Islam did not simply lead to the recycling of old apocalyptic ideas, but the creation of new concepts designed to combat Islam polemically. In the end, the Last Roman Emperor legend proved to be perhaps the most innovative and enduring of these new concepts.

It is worth repeating at the end of this thesis that one of the most telling pieces of evidence that the Last Emperor legend originated in the seventh century under Islamic domination is the rapid permeation of the legend into so many traditions in subsequent years. Eighth-century Islamic apocalyptic tradition held that at the end of time a member of the house of Heraclius would arise to take control of the Roman Empire. This would be Tiberius, the last of Heraclius’ royal line, who was killed as a small boy in the bloody overthrow of his father, Justinian II, in 711. Muslim writers believed that this murdered child would return as an adult and lead the Romans in a
final eschatological battle, but in the end would be defeated by the Muslims. This concept seems to have been inspired by the Last Emperor tradition and perhaps by Muslim apocalypticists who noticed the similarities we have explored between Heraclius and the Last Emperor.

The Last Emperor Legend seems to have also made its way into Jewish medieval apocalyptic thought. The apocalyptic 'Otot attributed to Rabbi Simon ben Yohai, preserved in the Cairo Genizah, enumerates a list of signs of the end of the world. The seventh states: “The King of Edom will come forth and enter Jerusalem. All the Ishmaelites will flee from him…The king of Edom will return to Jerusalem a second time. He will enter the sanctuary, take the golden crown off his head, and place it on the foundation stone. He will say ‘Master of the Universe! I have now returned what my ancestors removed.” Obviously this is a Jewish adaptation of the Last Emperor tradition, reinterpreting the final Depositionsakt as an apology for the usurpation of power by the Christian Empire. Other apocalypses attributed to Simon ben Yohai are also indebted to the Last Emperor tradition, and prophesy a period prosperity under a renewed Christian empire after the fall of the Islamic empire and before the dawning of the Messiah.

The Greek translation of Pseudo-Methodius apparently spread the Legend of the Last Roman Emperor around the Byzantine world, where it became a standard apocalyptic trope. His reign became an important component in the very famous Apocalypse of St. Andrew the Fool, and lesser known contemporary works such as that

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of Pseudo-Chrysostom. New elements were added to his career, such as the conquest of the “Blond Peoples,” and the notion that he will originate from, or later conquer, Italy. The Last Roman Emperor legend made its way to the Slavic world in the Slavonic Daniel, a work whose strange language makes it clear that it was translated from a lost Greek original. The concept of the Last Roman Emperor became a central part of the Byzantine psyche, and throughout periods of disaster and reversals of fortune against Muslim adversaries it provided hope for future deliverance. Thus, it is not surprising to find a letter addressed one month after the fall of Constantinople in 1453, written by a Greek clergyman to a friend: “I entreat you, my good sir, to send me the book of St. Methodius of Patara, either an old copy or a newly written one, if you happen to have it. Please don’t neglect to do so because I have great need of it. I beg you also to send me, if you can find it, some dried fish roe.”

It was in Western Europe, probably the furthest point of transmission of the legend from its origin in Mesopotamia, that the Last Roman Emperor legend became most influential. Starting at least with Adso, the Last Roman Emperor was interpreted as a Holy Roman Emperor, a fact that served the political goals of those rulers. The legend helped bolster the belief that this empire was the true heir of the Roman Empire. During the Crusades, the Last Emperor legend lent eschatological support to the quest

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8 A commentary and translation of the Slavonic Daniel can be found in Alexander, The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition, 62-72.
9 Translated in Mango, 213-14.
10 Daniel Callahan, in “Al-Hakim, Charlemagne, and the Destruction of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in the Writings of Ademar of Chabannes,” in The Legend of Charlemagne in the Middle Ages: Power, Faith, and Crusade, ed. Matthew Gabriel and Jace Stuckey (New York: Palgrave, 2008), 47-49, suggests that Adémar de Chabannes consciously tried to cast Charlemagne, whose tomb was discovered by Otto III, as the Last Roman Emperor, ready to rise from the dead to fight for Christendom. Interestingly, Ademar’s chronicle seems to have been written in or just after 1028; Sackur’s sibyl is generally dated to 1030.
of Christian kings to reclaim Jerusalem.\textsuperscript{11} When the Turks overran Eastern Europe, the need for an apocalyptic Last Emperor for the Christians was rediscovered. During the 1683 siege of Vienna, early printing presses reportedly produced copies of Pseudo-Methodius to boost the morale of the city defenders.\textsuperscript{12} It is perhaps one of the great accidents of history that this Last Roman Emperor legend inspired some of the major turning points in civilization. Christopher Columbus, in his \textit{Book of Prophecies}, records Pseudo-Methodius’ Last Emperor prophesy nearly word-for-word from the Latin translation. In a letter to the Spanish crown he asserts his belief that Ferdinand of Aragon was the Last Emperor, and that his voyages should be sponsored in order to bring new converts to Christianity and to gain access to gold mines in the east with which “Jerusalem and Mount Sion are to be rebuilt by the hands of the Christians.”\textsuperscript{13}

As this thesis has made clear, one event which the Last Emperor legend did not inspire was the return of the True Cross to Jerusalem by Heraclius. And though Heraclius cannot be said to have directly inspired the legend either, his subtle impact on Syriac literary thought did help shape it. Contrary to any expectation, these obscure Syriac themes made their way into Pseudo-Methodius, which fired the imagination of medieval Christendom and had a perceptible impact on western thought for the next thousand years.

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{11} Rubenstein, “Godfrey of Bouillon vs. Raymond of Saint-Gilles,” 41-49. \textsuperscript{12} Kmosko, “Das Rätsel,” 273-274. \textsuperscript{13} Translated in R.H. Major, \textit{Select Letters of Christopher Columbus} (London: Hakluyt Society, 1847), 197.}
APPENDIX A
THE TEXTUAL TRADITION OF THE LATIN TIBURTINE SIBYL

Figure 1: Paul Alexander's hypothetical schema for the textual history of the Tiburtine Sibyl (From Alexander, The Oracle of Baalbek, 66).
Figure 2: Robert Konrad’s schema for the textual tradition of the Last Roman Emperor Prophecy (From Robert Konrad, *De Ortu et Tempore Antichristi*, 53)
Figure 3: My schema illustrating Bernard McGinn’s theory of the textual tradition of the Tiburtine (Based on McGinn, “Oracular Transformations,” 613-614).
Figure 4: Holdenried’s attempt at synthesizing Sackur, Alexander, and McGinn’s theories on the textual history of the Tiburtine Sibyl. (From Anke Holdenried, *The Sibyl and Her Scribes*, 30).
Latin Pseudo-Methodius, translated c. AD 720:


(After describing how the genealogy of the Roman Emperors can be traced back to the Ethiopian queen Chuseth):

Providens autem beatus David spiritalibus oculis et praenosce, quomodo Chuseth, filia Phol regis Aethiopiae, incipiet exsuscitare regnum Romanorum, praefatus est dicens: “Aethiopia praeveniet manus eius Deo.” Quidam igitur consideraverunt, quia propter Aethiopum regnum conopulsus beatus David haec locutus est, sed mentiti sunt veritate, qui haec ita existimant, siquidem etenim ex semine Aethiopissg constituito regno hoc constructum est magnum et venerabilem lignum sanctae et honorificum et vivificatoria crucis, <quod> in medio terrae conhexum est: unde fortassis, ut competet, ipse effatus est antiquus pater David, ita pronuntians: “Aethiopia praeveniet manus eius Deo.” Non est enim gens aut regnum sub caelo, quae praevalere possunt superare regnum christianorum, sicuti iam enim praeefati locuti sumus superius-, quod in medio terrae vivificans confixa et solidata est crux, a quo et orbis terrae fines valde sapienterque disribununtur constare secundum latitude quoque et longitudo et altitudo vel profundum. Qualisve possit vel quis poterit virtutem superare umquam sanctae crucis adpraehendere potentiam? Sic enim obtinet venerationem Romani imperii dignitas, pollens per eum, qui in ea pependit, dominum nostrum Iesum Chrostum. (Pseudo-Methodius, 9.7-9; Aerts and Kortekaas, pp. 125-127)

… (Description of Roman history, of how the sons of Ishmael, the Saracens, overrun the Roman Empire, but are defeated by the Last Roman Emperor).

Erit enim laetitiam super terram et commorabuntur hominis in pace et reaedificabunt civitatem et liberabuntur sacerdotes de necessitatibus suis et requiescent homines in tempore illo a trationibus suis. Et haec est pax, quam beatus Apostolus exposuit, quia “cum dixerint: ‘pax et securitas’, tunc eis superveniay subito interitus,” et continuo Dominus in evangelio sic inquiens: “sicut enim in diebus Noe erant homines manducantes et bibentes, nubentes et nuptui tradentes, ita erit et in novissimo die.” In hac igitur pacem sedebunt homines super terra cum gaudio et laetitia, commedentes et sese potantes, nubentes et dantes ad nuptias, exultantes et gaudentes, et aedificationes construentes, et non erit in corde eorum timor vel sollicitudo. Tunc reserabuntur portae aquilonis et egredientur virtutes gentium illarum, quas conclusit intus Alexander, et concutietur omnis terra a conspectu earum et expaviscunt homines et fugientes conterriti abscondent se in montibus et in speluncis et in monumentis. Et mortificabuntur a timore et corrumpentur prae pavore
quamplurimi, et non erit, qui corpora sepeliat. (Pseudo-Methodius 13.16-19; Aerts and Kortekaas, pp.181-183)

... (Long description of the terrible and disgusting customs of the “gentes,” who are Gog and Magog)

Post ebdomata vero tempores, cumque [iam] conpraehenderint civitatem loppen, emittit dominus Deus unum ex principibus militiae suae et percuciet eos in uno momento temporis. Et post haec descendit rex Romanorum et demorabitur in Hierusalem septimana temporum et dimedia, quod est X anni et dimidium, et, cum suplebuntur decim et demedium anni, apparebit filios perditiones.


Tiburtine Sibyl Version 1 (Ottonian Sibyl), c. 1000:  
The text of this version in completely lost.

Tiburtine Sibyl Version 2 (Sackur’s text), c. 1030:


Et tunc surget rex Grecorum, cuius nomen Constans, et ipse erit rex Romanorum et Grecorum. Hic erit statura grandis, aspectu decorus, vultu splendidus atque per singula membrorum liamiutea decentar conpositus. Et ipsius regnun C et XII annis terminabitur. In illis ergo diebus erunt divitiae multe et terra abundanter dabat fructum ita ut tritici modium denario uno venundetur, modium vini denario uno, modiurn olei denario uno. Et ipse rex scripturam habebit ante oculos dicentem: “Rex Romanorum omne sibi vindicet regnum christianorum.” Omnes ergo insulas et civitates paganorum devastabit et universa idolorum templa destruet, et omnes paganos ad baptismum convocabit et

Version 4 (Newberry Sibyl), c. 1100:


Et veniet filius perditionis qui est Antichristus. Nasci vero habet de tribu Dan et ex muliere nascitur in Korozaim et in Bethsaida nutritur. Et cum apparuerit ipse filius
perditionis in terra ascendet rex Romanorum sursum in Golgatha in quo fixum est lignum sancte crucis tolletque coronam capitis sui et ponet eam super crucem et expandet manus suas ad celum tradetque regnum Christianorum Deo Patri. Et assumetur crux sancta in celum simul cum corona regis. Et cum venerit Dominus ad iudicandum seculum per ignem tunc apparebit crux ante eum ad redarguendam infidelium perfidiam. Cumque exaltaverit se crux sancta in celo sursum tradetque cum sceptro rex Romanorum spiritum suum et destruetur omnium principatus et potestas et apparebit filius perditionis.

… (Description of the Last Judgment)…

Ante tempus Antichristi sub rege Romanorum erunt divitie multe per universum orbem. Modium tritici et modium vini et olei simili modo vendentur. Tunc conflagabunt gladios suos in vomeres et lanceas suas in falces et disperdentur omnia templa deorum et erit pax in his temporibus qualis umquam non fuit.
APPENDIX C
TRANSLATION OF THE END OF SACKUR’S TIBURTINE SIBYL AND PSEUDO-METHODIUS

A portion of W¹ of the Tiburtine Sibyl, translated from Latin:

Then will arise a king of the Greeks whose name is Constans. He will be king of the Romans and the Greeks. He will be tall of stature, of handsome appearance with shining face, and well put together in all parts of his body. His reign will be ended after one hundred and twelve years. In those days there will be great riches and the earth will give fruit abundantly so that a measure of wheat will be sold for a denarius, a measure of wine for a denarius, and a measure of oil for a denarius. The king will have a text before his eyes that says: “The king of the Romans will claim the whole Christian empire for himself.” He will devastate all the islands and the cities of the pagans and will destroy all idolatrous temples; he will call all pagans to baptism and in every temple the Cross of Christ will be erected. “Then Egypt and Ethiopia will be eager to stretch their hands to God.” Whoever does not adore the Cross of Jesus Christ will be punished by the sword. When the one hundred and twelve years have been completed, the Jews will be converted to the Lord, and “his sepulchre will be glorified by all.” In those days Judah will be saved and Israel will dwell with confidence. At that time the Prince of Iniquity who will be called Antichrist will arise from the tribe of Dan. He will be the Son of Perdition, the head of pride, the master of error, the fullness of malice who will overturn the world and do wonders and great signs through dissimulation. He will delude many by magic art so that fire will seem to come down from heaven. The years will be shortened like months, the months like weeks, the weeks like days, the days like hours, and an hour like a moment. The unclean nations that Alexander, the Indian king, shut up (i.e., Gog and Magog) will arise from the North. These are the twenty-two realms whose number is like the sand of the sea. When the king of the Romans hears of this he will call his army together and vanquish and utterly destroy them. After this he will come to Jerusalem, and having put off the diadem from his head and laid aside the whole imperial garb, he will hand over the empire of the Christians to God the Father and to Jesus Christ his Son. When the Roman Empire shall have ceased, then the Antichrist will be openly revealed and will sit in the House of the Lord in Jerusalem. While he is reigning, two very famous men, Elijah and Enoch, will go forth to announce the coming of the Lord. Antichrist will kill them and after three days they will be raised up by the Lord. Then there will be a great persecution, such as has not been before nor shall be thereafter. The Lord will shorten those days for the sake of the elect, and the Antichrist will be slain by the power of God through Michael the Archangel on the Mount of Olives.

A portion of the Latin version of Pseudo-Methodius, translated from Latin:

... Then suddenly tribulation and distress will arise against them. The king of the Greeks, i.e., the Romans, will come out against them in great anger, roused as from a drunken stupor like one whom men had thought dead and worthless (Ps. 77:65). He will go forth against them from the Ethiopian sea and will send the sword and desolation into Ethribus their homeland, capturing their women and children living in the Land of
Promise. The sons of the king will come down with the sword and cut them off from the earth. Fear and trembling will rush upon them and their wives and their children from all sides. They will mourn their offspring, weeping over them and all the villages in the lands of their fathers. By the sword they will be given over into the hands of the king of the Romans-to captivity, death, and decay.

The king of the Romans will impose his yoke upon them seven times as much as their yoke weighed upon the earth. Great distress will seize them, tribulation will bring them hunger and thirst. They, their wives, and their children will be slaves and serve those who used to serve them, and their slavery will be a hundred times more bitter and hard. The earth which they destituted will then be at peace; each man will return to his own land and to the inheritance of his fathers-Armenia, Cilicia, Isauria, Africa, Greece, Sicily. Every man who was left captive will return to the things that were his und his fathers, and men will multiply upon the once desolate earth like locusts. Egypt will be desolated, Arabia burned with fire, the land of Arabia burned, and the sea provinces pacified. The whole indignation and fury of the king of the Romans will blaze forth against those who deny the Lord Jesus Christ. Then the earth will sit in peace and there will be great peace and tranquility upon the earth such as has never been nor ever will be any more, since it is the final peace at the End of time...

Then the “Gates of the North” will be opened and the strength of those nations which Alexander shut up there will go forth. The whole earth will be terrified at the sight of them; men will be afraid and flee in terror to hide themselves in mountains and caves and graves. 35 They will die of fright and very many will be wasted with fear. There will be no one to bury the bodies. The tribes which will go forth from the North will eat the flesh of men and will drink the blood of beasts like water. They will eat unclean serpents, scorpions, and every kind of filthy and abominable beast and reptile which crawls the earth. They will consume the dead bodies of beasts of burden and even women's abortions. They will slay the young and take them away from their mothers and eat them. They will corrupt the earth and contaminate it. No one will be able to stand against them.

After a week of years, when they have already captured the city of Joppa, the Lord will send one of the princes of his host and strike them down in a moment. After this the king of the Romans will go down and live in Jerusalem for seven and half-seven times, i.e., years. When the ten and a half years are completed the Son of Perdition will appear. He will be born in Chorazaim, nourished in Bethsaida, and reign in Capharnaum. Chorazaim will rejoice because he was born in her, and Capharnaum because he will have reigned in her. For this reason in the third Gospel the Lord gave the following statement: “Woe to you Chorazaim, woe to you Bethsaida, and to you Capharnaum—if you have risen up to heaven, you will descend even to hell” (Luke 10:13,15). When the Son of Perdition has arisen, the king of the Romans will ascend Golgotha upon which the wood of the Holy Cross is fixed, in the place where the Lord underwent death for us. The king will take the crown from his head and place it on the cross and stretching out his hands to heaven will hand over the kingdom of the Christians to God the Father. The cross and the crown of the king will be taken up together to heaven. This is because the Cross on which our Lord Jesus Christ hung for the common salvation of all will begin to appear before him at his coming to convict the lack of faith of the unbelievers. The prophecy of David which says, "In the
last days Ethiopia will stretch out her hand to God" (Ps. 67:32) will be fulfilled in that these last men who stretch out their hands to God are from the seed of the sons of Chuseth, the daughter of Phol, king of Ethiopia. When the Cross has been lifted up on high to heaven, the king of the Romans will directly give up his spirit. Then every principality and power will be destroyed that the Son of Perdition may be manifest. ...
APPENDIX D
TIMELINE

(all years *anno domini*)

360: Approximate date of original lost Tiburtine Sibyl, according to Sackur

380: Approximate date of original lost Tiburtine Sibyl, according to Paul Alexander

508: Probable date of the composition of *Oracle of Baalbek*

628: Victory of Heraclius over the Persian Empire

Composition of the Syriac *Alexander Legend*, according to Reinink

630: Widely accepted date for the return of the True Cross to Jerusalem by Heraclius

634: Beginning of the Islamic Conquests

640: Approximate date for composition Syriac Alexander Poem, according to Reinink

641: Earliest possible date for the composition of Pseudo-Methodius in Syriac

691: Most widely accepted date for the composition of Pseudo-Methodius in Syriac

692: Widely accepted date for the composition of the Syriac “Edessene Fragment”

700: Approximate date for the translation of Pseudo-Methodius into Greek

720: Approximate date for the first translation of Pseudo-Methodius into Latin

950: Approximate date for the composition of Adso’s letter on the Antichrist

1000: Approximate date for the earliest composition of the Tiburtine Sibyl in Latin

1030: Approximate date for the earliest surviving version of the Tiburtine Sibyl in Latin
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Christopher Bonura attended the University of Florida as an undergraduate. He discovered his love of medieval history there after taking a course in medieval archaeology. He graduated in 2009 with a bachelor’s degree in history and classical studies. From there, he entered the master’s program in history at the University of Florida. He is fascinated by late antique and early medieval history, and intends to focus his future studies on the history of the seventh-century. He intends to take the next step in pursuing this interest by getting a Ph.D. in history.