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Apocalypticism and imperial criticism: (re)reading the *Dürr-i meknün* (*The Hidden Pearl*, 1472–73) in the context of Ottoman–Akkoyunlu imperial confrontation

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Abstract

The *Dürr-i meknün* (*The Hidden Pearl*) is one of the most fascinating and enigmatic works of fifteenth-century Ottoman literature. It consists of a digest of Islamic cosmology and cosmography engaging with a wide array of subjects, beginning with the Creation and concluding with the Last Judgement. The *Dürr-i meknün* has long been attributed to the mystic and scholar Ahmed Bîcân and has accordingly been dated to between 1453 and 1466. However, building on the most recent research, which shows that Ahmed Bîcân could not possibly have penned the *Dürr* and that the text is in fact anonymous, this article provides a critical reading and new dating of the text by focusing on the apocalyptic prophecies found in Chapter 16. Using a novel methodology that integrates contextual and historical reading, with computations of Arabic gematria, my analysis demonstrates that the *Dürr* was composed in 1472–73, in anticipation of the Ottoman–Akkoyunlu confrontation at the Battle of Başkent, when fears were running high that the end of Ottoman rule was at hand.

Keywords: *Dürr-i meknün*; apocalypticism; imperialism; Ottoman; Akkoyunlu; imperial criticism

Introduction

The *Dürr-i meknün* (*The Hidden Pearl*) is one of the most fascinating and simultaneously enigmatic works of fifteenth-century Ottoman literature. Written in simple Turkish prose, it is a digest of Islamic cosmology and cosmography engaging with a wide array of subjects. Consisting of 18 short chapters, each addressing a separate topic, the book opens with the creation of the universe and concludes with the Last Judgement. Chapters 7 and 8 include a forceful apocryphal account of the foundation and history of Constantinople and its iconic sanctuary Hagia Sophia. The *Dürr* characterizes the city as an ominous and accursed place that is periodically subjected to God's wrath and remains destroyed, and it portrays the city's rulers as ungodly tyrants aspiring to be worshipped as divine, whom God crushes, along with the city.¹ Written with a strong apocalyptic tone, Chapter 16, dedicated to the science of prognostication (Tr. *cifr*, Ar. *jafr*), conveys a sense of impending doom and presents a selection of apocalyptic prophecies announcing that the 7,000-year-long history of humanity, which began with the fall of Adam and Eve, is about to come to an end.² Drawing on Chapter 16, Chapter 17 then

¹ Ahmet Demirtaş, *Yazıcıoğlu Ahmed Bîcân Dürr-i Mekkûn* (Istanbul, 2009), 153–5, 160–3.

² Demirtaş, *Dürr-i Mekkûn*, 208–15. For the references to the length of earthly time as 7,000 years, see 103, 117, 208–9, 214. It was a widely accepted belief in medieval Islamic sources that the life of the world would last seven

describes the eschatological events leading to the final consummation of history, which include the invasion and ruin of the Islamic lands by the apocalyptic enemy, the *Benî Aşfer* (the Yellow People or Blond Races), the advent of the Muslim saviour Mehdi and, subsequently, the appearance of other eschatological figures and signs.³

The work lacks a colophon, but internal evidence shows that it was composed after the conquest of Constantinople in 1453.⁴ The *Dürr-i meknûn* has long been attributed to the mystic Ahmed Bîcân (d. after 1466), younger brother of the famous Ottoman scholar from Gelibolu Yazıcıoğlu Mehmed (d. 1451), and has accordingly been dated to between 1453 and 1466.⁵ In a recent study, however, Carlos Grenier has persuasively demonstrated that the absence of an authorial claim in the *Dürr* by Ahmed Bîcân – a distinguishing characteristic of all his signed works – as well as other significant differences in linguistic preferences, use of sources, selection of ethical and philosophical content and the divergent geographic focus between the *Dürr* and Ahmed Bîcân's oeuvre indicate that Ahmed Bîcân could not possibly have penned the *Dürr*. This leaves the *Dürr* as an anonymous work, and its previously assumed date of composition can no longer be deemed valid.⁶

The most significant challenge to working on and with the *Dürr-i meknûn* is that there are no extant copies originating from the fifteenth century. The oldest manuscripts come from the very end of the sixteenth century, with the rest mainly dating from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁷ As a result, some words and phrases have been corrupted incorrigibly by later copyists unfamiliar with the immediate historical context in which the *Dürr* was composed. The lack of contemporary copies has consequently compromised the quality of the two otherwise impeccable critical editions of the work that are available. The first was undertaken in 2007 by Laban Kaptein, who relied on a rich selection of manuscripts found in Turkish, European and Egyptian libraries.⁸ In 2009, the Turkish scholar Ahmed Demirtaş published another edition, using copies found in Turkish libraries. The main weakness of Demirtaş's version is that he did not consult Kaptein's work, which led him to commit reading errors at several critical points.⁹ In addition to these two works, a popular edition drawing on a single late sixteenth-century copy was published by Necdet Sakaoğlu in 1999.¹⁰ Although Sakaoğlu's edition falls short of complying with the standards of a scholarly edition, it can still contribute to reconstructing many corrupted words that puzzled Kaptein and Demirtaş and led to misinterpretations.

This article provides a critical reading and new dating of the work by primarily focusing on the apocalyptic prophecies found in Chapter 16. Using contextual analysis and

millennia; see Ibn Khaldûn, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, (trans) Franz Rosenthal, vol. 2 (London, 1958), 204–5.

³ Demirtaş, *Dürr-i Mekkûn*, 215–28.

⁴ The text refers to the famous scholar ‘Abd al-Rahmân al-Bištâmî (d. 1454) as dead; see Demirtaş, *Dürr-i Mekkûn*, 210. For the post-conquest dating of the work, see also Stéphane Yerasimos, *La Fondation de Constantinople et de Sainte-Sophie dans les traditions turques: légendes d'Empire* (Istanbul; Paris, 1990), 61–2.

⁵ Âmil Çelebioğlu and Kemal Eraslan, “Yazıcı-oğlu”, *İslam Ansiklopedisi: İslam Alemi Coğrafya Etnografya ve Biyografi Lugatı* (Istanbul, 1940–93) (hereafter *İA*); V. L. Ménage, “Bidjan, Ahmed”, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, second ed. (Leiden, 1960–2005) (hereafter *EI(2)*); Yazıcıoğlu Mehmed, *Muhammediye*, (ed.) Âmil Çelebioğlu (Istanbul, 2018), 15–51; Âmil Çelebioğlu, “Ahmed Bîcan”, *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi* (Istanbul, 1988–2013) (hereafter *DİA*).

⁶ Carlos Grenier, “Reassessing the authorship of the *Dürr-i meknûn*”, *Archivum Ottomanicum* 35, 2018, 1–19.

⁷ The two oldest copies are both dated to 1598: one in the Topkapı Palace Museum Library, Istanbul, H.427, and the other in the National Library of Egypt, Cairo, Nr. 1562. For the list of the *Dürr-i meknûn* manuscripts, see Laban Kaptein, *Ahmed Bican Yazıcıoğlu Dürr-i meknûn: Kritische Edition mit Kommentar* (Asch, 2007), 593–5; Demirtaş, *Dürr-i Mekkûn*, 9–11.

⁸ Kaptein, *Dürr-i meknûn*.

⁹ Kaptein's work is not even mentioned in the bibliography; see Demirtaş, *Dürr-i Mekkûn*, 249–57.

¹⁰ Yazıcıoğlu Ahmed Bîcan, *Dürr-i Mekkûn Saklı İnciler*, (ed.) Necdet Sakaoğlu (Istanbul, 1999).

computations of Arabic gematria (i.e. the abjad numerals), I decipher them in the historical context in which the work was completed. My analysis shows that the *Dürr* was composed in 1472–73, on the eve of the Ottoman–Akkoyunlu confrontation at the Battle of Başkent, when fears ran high that the end of Ottoman rule was at hand.¹¹

Review of scholarship

The *Dürr-i meknûn* was first critically examined by the late Stéphane Yerasimos in his seminal book focusing on the legendary history of Constantinople and the Hagia Sophia; it is included as a self-contained chapter entitled “The History of Constantinople from Its Beginning to the Present” in the *Anonymous Chronicle of the House of Osman*.¹² Yerasimos pointed to the considerable textual overlap between the sections on Constantinople and the Hagia Sophia given in the *Dürr* and the chapter in the *Anonymous Chronicle*. He also demonstrated that the legends of Constantinople contained a vitriolic attack on Mehmed’s imperial project to build a world empire centred in Constantinople, which had been proclaimed as the new seat of the Ottoman sultan after the conquest and was refurbished as an imperial capital with restoration and new constructions.¹³ Drawing on the close intertextual relationship between the legends of Constantinople in the *Anonymous Chronicle* and the relevant portions in the *Dürr*, and the identification of the city – the crown jewel and ultimate symbol of Mehmed’s imperial project – as a doomed place in both accounts, Yerasimos concluded that the *Dürr* was also written to denounce Mehmed’s ambitions for the universal rule.¹⁴ Yerasimos’s position has recently been criticized by Kaya Şahin, who, in an article focusing on the apocalyptic content of the work, disagreed that the *Dürr* contained an anti-imperial subtext. Instead, arguing for the opposite interpretation, Şahin claimed that the *Dürr* promoted a messianic imperial image for Mehmed, identifying him as the eschatological Muslim conqueror.¹⁵

Despite their differing interpretations, both Yerasimos and Şahin have attributed the authorship of the *Dürr* to Ahmed Bicân and assumed that the text dates from the 1460s, shortly before Ahmed’s death. Based on this assumption and dating, they associated the composition of the *Dürr* with the apocalyptic sentiments ignited in Ottoman society by the conquest of Constantinople. They pointed out that the city’s fall had long been identified as a portent of the Last Hour by both Byzantine and Islamic apocalyptic traditions, and Mehmed’s conquest was seen as the fulfilment of these prophecies, which they understood as prompting the apocalyptic content of the *Dürr*.¹⁶ However, given Grenier’s recent observations regarding the *Dürr*’s anonymous authorship, Yerasimos’s and Şahin’s arguments must be reconsidered. First and foremost, their association of the *Dürr* with the apocalyptic fervour incited by the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople cannot be corroborated by internal evidence, as the *Dürr* contains no mention of this event. It recounts instead the reconquest of the city by the *Benî Aşfer* in the imminent apocalyptic future,

¹¹ I relied mainly on Demirtaş’s edition but often consulted Kaptein’s and Sakaoğlu’s editions, as indicated in the notes. Translations are mine unless otherwise stated.

¹² For the *Anonymous Chronicle of the Ottoman dynasty*, see Hasan Hüseyin Adaloğlu, “Osmanlı Tarih Yazıcılığında Tevârih-i Âl-i Osman Geleneği”, in Güler Eren (ed.), *Osmanlı*, vol. 8 (Ankara, 1999), 286–92; Dimitris Kastritsis, “Ottoman anonymous chronicles”, in Graeme Dunphy and Cristian Bratu (eds), *Encyclopedia of the Medieval Chronicle* (Brill, 2010). http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2213-2139_emc_SIM_01989; Necdet Öztürk (ed.), *Anonim Tevârih-i Âl-i Osman; Anonim Osmanlı Kroniği* [Osmanlı Tarihi (1299–1512)] (İstanbul, 2015), xxi–xxxvii.

¹³ Çiğdem Kafescioğlu, *Constantinopolis/Istanbul: Cultural Encounter, Imperial Vision, and the Construction of the Ottoman Capital* (University Park, 2009).

¹⁴ Yerasimos, *La Fondation de Constantinople*, 60–1, 68–74, 123–38, 193–245.

¹⁵ Kaya Şahin, “Constantinople and the end time: the Ottoman conquest as a portent of the last hour”, *Journal of Early Modern History* 14/4, 2010, 317–54, esp. 317–18, 324, 328, 335–43, 348–50.

¹⁶ Yerasimos, *La Fondation de Constantinople*, 183–99; Şahin, “Constantinople and the end time”, 322–8, 343–51.

followed by its last and final Muslim conquest by the Mehdi, which is included among the signs of the approaching end of time.¹⁷ Moreover, although the apocalyptic significance of the fall of the city cannot be denied, associating the eschatological content of the *Dürr* exclusively with the apocalyptic resonance of the fall of Constantinople reduces the phenomenon of Ottoman apocalypticism to a single event without considering the broader context of Ottoman imperial apocalypticism in the fifteenth century.¹⁸ As the analysis of Chapter 16 below shows, the *Dürr* instead links the end of the world to the fall of the Ottoman Empire, which, it argues, will occur at the hands of the Turcoman Akkoyunlu emperor Uzun Hasan (r. 1452–78) in 1473.

Analysis of Chapter 16

Chapter 16 is seemingly devoted to the science of prognostication, called *cifr* (Ar. *Jafr*).¹⁹ In late medieval Islamdom, *cifr* had become virtually synonymous with the science of letters, *‘ilm al-ḥurūf*. Also known as letter mysticism, *‘ilm al-ḥurūf* denotes the divinatory technique that sought to predict the future and signs of the end time by studying the esoteric and spiritual meanings of the 28 letters of the Arabic alphabet. *Cifr* most particularly relied on the use of the abjad numerals, in which each letter is assigned a value in a decimal numerical system, consisting of ones (1–9), tens (10–90) and hundreds (100–900), with the letter *ḡayn* assuming the value 1,000. The numerical value of names, words and phrases was used as a heuristic to decipher the hidden code of divine will in the universe and reveal the secrets of the Creation and its end.²⁰

The *Dürr-i meknûn* names the famous Ottoman-Mamluk mystic scholar ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Biṣṭāmī – whom it refers to as deceased – as the great master of the science of *cifr*. Biṣṭāmī was primarily known for his magnum opus, *Miftāḥ al-Jafr al-Jamī‘* (The Key to Comprehensive Divination). Written in Arabic, the *Key* was an encyclopaedic work dedicated to the science of letters, expounding on their occult and mystic properties, as well as a compendium of apocalyptic prophecies of signs and events associated with the end time.²¹ After this brief introduction, the *Dürr* moves on to a selection of

¹⁷ Demirtaş, *Dürr-i Mekkûn*, 217–19.

¹⁸ Paul J. Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1984); Agustino Pertusi, *Fine di Bisanzio e fine del mondo: significato e ruolo storico delle profezie sulla caduta di Constantinopoli in Oriente ed Occidente* (Rome, 1988), 35–109; Paul Magdalino, “The history of the future and its uses: prophecy, policy, and propaganda”, in Roderick Beaton and Charlotte Roueché (eds), *The Making of Byzantine History Studies Dedicated to Donald M. Nicol* (London; Aldershot, 1993), 3–34; Paul Magdalino, “The end of time in Byzantium”, in Wolfram Brandes and Felicitas Schmieder (eds), *Endzeiten Eschatologie in den monotheistischen Weltreligionen* (Berlin and New York, 2008), 119–33; David Olster, “Byzantine apocalypses”, in Bernard McGinn (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, vol. 2 (New York, 1998), 48–73; Benjamin Lellouch and Stéphane Yerasimos, *Les traditions apocalyptiques au tournant de la chute de Constantinople* (Paris, 1999); Feridun M. Emecen, “Lanetli Şehir Düştü: İstanbul’un Fethi ve Kıyamet Senaryoları”, *Osmanlı Araştırmaları XXII*, 2003, 191–205; Feridun M. Emecen, “Emperyal Kentlerin Uğursuzluğu: İstanbul ve Apokaliptik Temalar”, in *Antik Çağ’dan XXI. Yüzyıla Büyük İstanbul Tarihi*, vol. 2 (İstanbul, 2016), 348–63; Feridun M. Emecen, *Fetih ve Kıyamet 1453* (İstanbul, 2012), 30–8, 38–62, 260–2.

¹⁹ Demirtaş, *Dürr-i Mekkûn*, 208–15.

²⁰ Ibn Khaldûn, *The Muqaddimah*, vol. 3, 171–226; Ibn G. Weil and G. S. Colin, “Abjad”, *EI(2)*; Mustafa İsmet Uzun, “Ebcad”, *DİA*; Metin Yurdağür, “Cefr”, *DİA*; Toufic Fahd, “Djafr”, *EI(2)*; Toufic Fahd, “Ḥurūf (‘ilm al-’), *EI(2)*; Toufic Fahd, *La divination arabe: études religieuses, sociologiques et folkloriques sur le milieu natif de l’Islam* (Leiden, 1966), 219–24, 228–34; Mehmet Emin Bozhüyük, “Hurūf”, *DİA*; Noah Gardiner, “Jafr”, *EI(3)*; İlker Evrim Binbaş, *Intellectual Networks in Timurid Iran: Sharaf Al-Din ‘Alī Yazdī and the Islamic Republic of Letters* (Cambridge and New York, 2016), 150–64.

²¹ For al-Biṣṭāmī, see M. Smith, “Al-Biṣṭāmī”, *EI(2)*; İhsan Fazlıoğlu, “İlk Dönem Osmanlı İlim ve Kültür Hayatında İhvanu’s-Safâ ve Abdurrahmân Bistâmî”, *Divan* 1/2, 1996, 229–40; H. Algar, “Beṣṭāmī, ‘Abd-al-Raḥmān”, *Encyclopaedia Iranica*; Denis Gril, “Ésotérisme contre hérésie: ‘Abd al-Rahmān al-Bistāmī, un représentant de la science des lettres à Bursa dans la première moitié du XVe siècle”, in Gilles Veinstein

apocalyptic prophecies quoted from Biṣṭāmī's *Key*. These are a set of chronologically arranged *ex eventu* predictions. The first prophecy reads as follows:

When the date reaches that year, the secret of which is its beginning, oh Yusuf, beware of ʿayn. Greet the ʿayn, but the *ṣīn* is a violent name, new sovereignty, a steadfast rider, and an evil occurrence. He will conquer many lands; he will show clemency to some and drive out some others. If you believe that construction and prosperity are the sources of happiness, [you should know] that everything will be ruined and destroyed by him. He is also a murderer of children.²² Woes to the lands and towns of Rūm, and the lands of Crimea at that time due to his oppression, tyranny, cunning, and viciousness, for he will murder scholars and hurt the poor and needy [. . .] And this year is the year of dissolution and unfolding. Battles, slaughter, and chastisements will happen. The learned people will run away, and the ignorant will stay put.²³

The prophecy opens with the Central Asian conqueror Timur's sack of Sivas in Anatolia at the beginning of the first month (5 Muharram) of the Islamic year 803 (= 27 August 1400).²⁴ After the ruin of Sivas and the massacre of its inhabitants, the devastation wreaked by Timur continued unabated throughout 803. He first turned south to the Mamluk lands, attacking Bahasna and Malatya, before marching on Syria, where he sacked and burnt Aleppo, Hama, Homs and Damascus. He then advanced on Baghdad, which he razed to the ground, massacring its entire population.²⁵ Timur is designated by the letter code *ṣīn*. Although the *Dürr* does not provide an explicit identification, a prophecy found in Biṣṭāmī's *Key* unequivocally establishes Timur as the evil *ṣīn*. This prophecy mentions the forthcoming appearance of a comet in the west that will be the sign of the rise of the one with a face that looks like a flat shield, called the *ṣīn*, who will be a conqueror and killer by the sword.²⁶ The expression "with a face that looks like a flat shield" draws on the description of Turks found in the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (the

(ed.), *Syncretismes et heresies dans l'Orient seldjoukide et ottoman (XIVe-XVIIIe siècle)* (Paris, 2005), 183–95; Cornell H. Fleischer, "Ancient wisdoms and new sciences: prophecies at the Ottoman Court in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries", in Masumeh Farhad and Serpil Bağcı (eds), *Falnama: The Book of Omens* (Washington, DC: 2009), 232–43; Cornell H. Fleischer, "A Mediterranean apocalypse: prophecies of empire in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries", *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 61, 2018, 42–8.

²² The main manuscript used by Demirtaş – Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi [hereafter SK], Pertevniyal 456, dated 1681 – reads "kâbil ü fettândur (he was a fomentor of discord and dissension)" instead of "the murderer of children (*katl-i fetân*)". However, the second manuscript he consulted – Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Kütüphanesi [hereafter TSM], Koğuşlar 916, dated 1633 – and the manuscripts Kaptein used for his edition render it as (*kâtil-i fetân*); see Kaptein, *Dürr-i meknûn*, 551.

²³ Demirtaş, *Dürr-i Mekkûn*, 211–12.

²⁴ The word "*bed'et* (بَدْءٌ)" ("beginning") is misspelled in all the manuscripts that Kaptein and Demirtaş consulted. Demirtaş misread it as "*bir'atbūr*", which does not mean anything, because the copyist spelled it incorrectly as "*bid'at* (بِدْءٌ)"; see Demirtaş, *Dürr-i Mekkûn*, 211, 870/140b. In the manuscripts studied by Kaptein, on the other hand, instead of "*bed'et*", the word "*serât* (سَرَاتٌ)", which also means beginning, is used. However, it is misspelled as "*sür'at*, (سُرْءٌ)", denoting velocity, which resulted in mistranslation; see Kaptein, *Dürr-i meknûn*, 299, 550, Appendix B. Only Sakaoğlu's transcription renders it correctly as "*ser'idir*"; see Sakaoğlu (ed.), *Dürr-i Mekkûn Saklı İnciler*, 118.

²⁵ Ibn Taghri Birdi, *History of Egypt 1382-1469 AD*, Part II (1399-1411 AD), (trans) William Popper (Berkeley, 1954), 33–60; Ahmed Ibn Arabshah, *Tamerlane or Timur the Great Amir*, (trans) J.H. Sanders (London, 1936), 116–69.

²⁶ Bahattin Yaman, "Osmanlı Resim Sanatında Kıyamet Alametleri: *Tercüme-i Cifru'l-Câmi* Ve Tasvirli Nüshaları", PhD thesis, Hacettepe Üniversitesi, 2002, 119–20, 233. Al-Biṣṭāmī might have witnessed and survived Timur's sack of Aleppo in November 1400; see Smith, "Al-Biṣṭāmī". The *Miftāḥ* also quotes a different prophecy predicting the rise of Timur and that his conquests of Iran, Khorasan, Iraq, Anatolia, Syria and Upper Mesopotamia would occur in the year AH 803; see Yaman, "Tercüme-i Cifru'l-Câmi", 88–9, 237. In the Turkish

hadith). After the Mongol invasions of the thirteenth century, the hadith was interpreted as a reference to the Mongols.²⁷ The comet associated with the rise of the conqueror and murderer *sīn* is that of 1377, whose appearance from the west was observed in Damascus and recorded in contemporary Mamluk chronicles.²⁸ Timur's conquests of the Islamic lands began a few years later, in 1379, when he crossed the Oxus and conquered Khorasan, initiating the subjugation of Iran and the other core lands of Islam to the west.²⁹

Yusuf, to whom the prophecy is addressed, refers to the Mamluk boy-sultan al-Nāṣir Faraj (b. 1389, r. 1399–1405/1405–1414). Yusuf, which is the Arabic rendition of the biblical name Joseph, was associated in the Islamic tradition with the throne of Egypt, where the Hebrew patriarch Joseph, also regarded as a prophet in Islam, was believed to have lived and ruled.³⁰ The prophecy represents a premonition and warning for Sultan Faraj, whose Syrian lands were brutally ravaged by Timur: it was expected that after devastating Syria, Timur would then march on Egypt and conquer the Mamluk sultanate, as he had repeatedly declared to be his intention.³¹ Thus, the prophecy bespeaks the fearful suspense pervading the Mamluk lands in 803.

The gloomy prediction also urges the Mamluk ruler to act with caution against the *ʿayn*, which serves as a stand-in for Ottoman Sultan Bāyezīd I (or, “the Thunderbolt”, r. 1389–1402). As the name Osman is written with the letter *ʿayn* (ʿUthmān) in the Arabic script, and the Ottoman rulers were called Ibn (son of) ʿUthmān in the Mamluk parlance, the warning “beware of *ʿayn*” is an allusion to Bāyezīd’s well-known ambitions to conquer the Mamluk sultanate.³² When Mamluk Sultan Barquq died in 1399, throwing his sultanate into disarray and resulting in internal strife among the leading emirs, Bāyezīd did not waste any time in taking advantage of the Mamluks’ weakness. He invaded the Turcoman Dulkadirid principality, a Mamluk vassal at the border, and seized the Mamluk stronghold Malatya, which guarded the mountain passes connecting the Anatolian plateau to the Syrian plain, signalling an impending full-fledged campaign of conquest.³³ However, after Timur invaded Anatolia in 1400, Bāyezīd experienced a rapid change of heart, dispatching an envoy to Cairo with a proposal to forge an alliance against Timur. However, his overtures of friendship were rebuffed by the Mamluks, who did not

translation of the work, made at the end of the sixteenth century, the year 803 is substituted with 903 to maintain the apocalyptic relevance of the text in the new historical context; see Yaman, “Tercüme-i Cifru’l-Câmi”, 89.

²⁷ David Cook, “Apocalyptic incidents during the Mongol invasions”, in Brandes and Schmieder (eds), *Endzeiten Eschatologie in den monotheistischen Weltreligionen*, 293–312; David Cook, “The image of the Turk in classical and modern Muslim apocalyptic literature”, in Wolfram Brandes, F. Schmieder and R. Voß (eds), *Peoples of the Apocalypse* (Berlin and Boston, 2016), 225–36; Judith Pfeiffer, “Faces like shields covered with leather: Keturah’s sons in the post-Mongol Islamicate eschatological traditions”, in İlker Evrim Binbaş and Nurten Kılıç-Schubel (eds), *Horizons of the World: Festschrift for İsenbike Togan* (Istanbul, 2011), 557–95.

²⁸ Hussain Ali M. Al-Trabulsi, “Investigation of some astronomical phenomena in medieval Arabic chronicles”, MA thesis, Durham University, 1993, 82. The appearance of comets was identified as a sign of the Day of Judgement in the Islamic tradition; see Yaman, “Tercüme-i Cifru’l-Câmi”, 25.

²⁹ H.R. Roemer, “Timūr in Iran”, in Peter Jackson (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 6 (Cambridge, 1986), 47–8.

³⁰ In the part telling the story of the Prophet Yusuf, the *Dürr* mentions that Yusuf became first the vizier and then the sultan of Egypt; see Demirtaş, *Dürr-i Mekkûn*, 126. For the association of Yusuf with the throne of Egypt in the *Key*, see Yaman, “Tercüme-i Cifru’l-Câmi”, 95–96, 233.

³¹ Anne F. Broadbridge, *Kingship and Ideology in the Islamic and Mongol Worlds* (Cambridge; New York, 2008), 189.

³² For examples, see Cihan Yüksel Muslu, *The Ottomans and the Mamluks Imperial Diplomacy and Warfare in the Islamic World* (London, 2014).

³³ Kemal Silay, “Ahmedî’s History of the Ottoman Dynasty”, *Journal of Turkish Studies* 16, 1992, 138, 156; Shai Har-El, *Struggle for Domination in the Middle East: The Ottoman-Mamluk War 1485–1491* (Leiden, 1995), 68; Broadbridge, *Kingship and Ideology*, 175; Muslu, *The Ottomans and the Mamluks*, 82–5.

trust his goodwill and sent the Ottoman delegate back home empty-handed.³⁴ In hindsight, the famous Mamluk historian Ibn Taghrī Birdī criticized the rejection of Bāyezīd's offer, admitting that it would have been the right course of action to help repel Timur and save the Muslims from destruction.³⁵ Seen in this light, the prophecy's second exhortation regarding Bāyezīd – “greet the ‘ayn” – followed by the announcement of the rise of Timur, can be read as an appeal for Yusuf, or rather the Mamluk sultan, to accede to Bāyezīd's proposition to make a defensive alliance against the common enemy.

The Timurid historiography, which flourished under the patronage of Timur and his descendants in the fifteenth century, portrayed him as a divinely sanctioned world conqueror whose conquests punished evil-makers and tyrants and purified the Islamic lands, restoring their unity in peace and order. Timur was famously called *ṣāhib-kirān* (“The Lord of the Auspicious Conjunction”), an imperial title associating world conquest with planetary constellations and thus claiming divine sanction for Timur's dazzling conquests.³⁶ In fifteenth-century Ottoman and Mamluk accounts, however, Timur is represented as the ultimate embodiment of evil and tyranny, violating every ethical, moral and religious principle known to Islam.³⁷ The prophecy quoted by the *Dürr* reflects these hostile depictions, and its allusions to Timur's atrocities concur with Ottoman and Mamluk sources.

For instance, Ibn Taghrī Birdī describes Timur's capture of and atrocities in Sivas as follows:

After a siege of 18 days, he took it [Sivas] on Muharram 5, 803 AH; and seizing its armed men, three thousand individuals, he dug for them an underground vault into which he threw them and then covered them with earth. This was after he had sworn to them that he would shed the blood of none of them; and he then said: “I have kept my oath, since I have not shed the blood of any of them.” He then put the inhabitants to the sword and destroyed the city, wiping out every trace of it.³⁸

Ibn Taghrī Birdī also attests to his brutal killing of children in Aleppo:

The women and children fled to the great mosque of Aleppo and to the smaller mosques, but Tamerlane's [Timur's] men turned to follow them, bound the women with ropes as prisoners, and put the children to the sword, killing every one of them.³⁹

³⁴ Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *History of Egypt*, Part II, 33–34; Shai Har-El, *Struggle for Domination in the Middle East: The Ottoman-Mamluk War 1485–1491* (Leiden, 1995), 68; Broadbridge, *Kingship and Ideology*, 189; Muslu, *The Ottomans and the Mamluks*, 83–4.

³⁵ Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *History of Egypt*, Part II, 33–4.

³⁶ For Timur's characterization as *ṣāhib-kirān*, see Broadbridge, *Kingship and Ideology*, 169–70; A. Azfar Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Islam* (New York, 2012), 23–55; Binbaş, *Intellectual Networks in Timurid Iran*, 251–61. For Timurid propagandistic historiography, see John E. Woods, “The rise of Timurid historiography”, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 46, 1987, 81–108; Charles Melville, “The Mongol and Timurid periods, 1250–1500”, in Charles Melville (ed.), *Persian Historiography: A History of Persian Literature* (London; New York, 2012), 190–2.

³⁷ Ibn Arabshah, *Tamerlane*, 117–69; Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *History of Egypt*, Part II, 35–51, 59–60; Walter J. Fischel, “A new Latin source on Tamerlane's conquest of Damascus (1400/1401): (B. de Mignanelli's ‘Vita Tamerlani’ 1416)”, *Oriens* 9/2, 1956, 201–32; Johann Schiltberger, *The Bondage and Travels of Johann Schiltberger in Europe, Asia and Africa, 1396–1427* (London, 1879), 20–4, 124–30; İbn Kemal, *Tevârih-i Âl-i Osman IV. Defter*, (ed.) Koji Imazawa (Ankara, 2000), 375–401.

³⁸ Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *History of Egypt*, Part II, 59. The Ottoman historian İbn Kemal mentions this couplet as he describes Timur's ruin of Sivas: “Oldı Sıvas ehlinün hâli ħarâb/Didiler ol yıl için sâl-i ħarâb” (The people of Sivas were destroyed/They called that year the year of destruction). The word “ħarâb” (destruction) equates to the numeric value of 803 (ħ+r+a+b=600+200+1+2); see İbn Kemal, *Tevârih-i Âl-i Osman IV. Defter*, 383; İbn Arabshah, *Tamerlane*, 116–17.

³⁹ Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *History of Egypt*, Part II, 38. See also İbn Kemal, *Tevârih-i Âl-i Osman*, 47; Schiltberger, *The Bondage and Travels of Johann Schiltberger*, “How Tamerlin caused MMM children to be killed”, 27; İbn Kemal, *Tevârih-i Âl-i Osman IV. Defter*, 379–81.

In a later passage, he laments Timur's appalling destruction in Damascus, which "was the most beautiful and flourishing city of the world", describing it in gruesome detail:

Tamerlane (may God curse him) departed from Damascus on Saturday Sha'ban 3, having been there 80 days. The whole city had burned, the roofs of the Omayyad Mosque had fallen in because of the fire, its gates were gone, and the marble cracked – nothing was left standing but the walls. Of the other mosques of the city, its palaces, caravanseries [*sic*], and baths, nothing remained but wasted ruins and empty traces; only a vast number of young children were left there, who died, or were destined to die of hunger.⁴⁰

The prophecy's other content can also be corroborated by historical facts and descriptions of Timur found in contemporary accounts. The Ottoman-Mamluk historian Ibn 'Arabshāh, in his venomous biography of Timur, gives a list of the famous religious figures of Damascus who were tortured and slain by Timur's army.⁴¹ Likewise, the woes to the lands of Rūm in the prophecy evince the havoc Timur wreaked in Ottoman Anatolia in 1400, and again in 1402–03 following his crushing defeat of Bāyezīd I in the Battle of Ankara in 1402, where he took the latter captive.⁴² The woes to the lands of Crimea refer to Timur's invasion of the Khanate of the Golden Horde in 1395.⁴³ Finally, the prediction "he will show clemency to some and drive some others out" refers to the singular mercy that Timur showed to the inhabitants of Homs. Ibn 'Arabshāh remarks that after massacring the populaces of Aleppo and Hama and subjecting them to unspeakable tortures, he spared the lives of the inhabitants of Homs when he was told that the city was the resting place of the companions of the Prophet Muhammad, including Khālīd b. al-Walīd and Ka'b al-Aḥbār.⁴⁴ In addition, references to Timur's craftiness and cunning are also noted in historical accounts.⁴⁵

The *Dürr* affirms Timur's invasions of Anatolia, Syria and Iraq in 1400–01 as the turning-point events that ushered in the apocalyptic final period of history, leading to its consummation. This is borne out by the prophecy immediately following the one concerning Timur: "The *Benī Aşfer* will arise in a short time, with the infidels of ruddy complexion coming ahead of it."⁴⁶ The *Benī Aşfer* first appears in pre-Islamic Arab poetry, where it designates the Romans (Byzantines).⁴⁷ The oldest Muslim apocalyptic traditions originating from the seventh-century Arab-Byzantine frontier milieu in Syria identify the *Benī Aşfer* as a massive military force led by a Christian (Roman/Byzantine) emperor who will invade the Islamic lands to exterminate Islam when the end of times draws close. Subsequently, there will be one final battle (i.e. the great *melḥame*) between the Islamic and Christian armies in northern Syria, where the Muslims will annihilate the Christians and then march on and conquer Constantinople.⁴⁸ During the crusade period

⁴⁰ Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *History of Egypt*, Part II, 50–1.

⁴¹ Ibn Arabshah, *Tamerlane*, 145–6, 160–2.

⁴² Ibn Arabshah, *Tamerlane*, 117–19, 187–202.

⁴³ Ibn Arabshah, *Tamerlane*, 76–82.

⁴⁴ Ibn Arabshah, *Tamerlane*, 135, 163; Nihat Azamat (ed.), *Anonim Tevâriḥ-i Âl-i Osman-F. Giese Neşri* (Istanbul, 1992), 40.

⁴⁵ Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *History of Egypt, 1382–1469*, Part I (1382–1399 AD), 138; Part II, 37, 43, 44, 46–7, 58–9; Ibn Arabshah, *Tamerlane*, 135, 140, 178–9; Broadbridge, *Kingship and Ideology*, 191.

⁴⁶ Demirtaş, *Dürr-i Mekkûn*, 212.

⁴⁷ For the origins of the word, see Ignaz Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, (eds) S.M. Stern and C.R. Barber, vol. 1 (London, 1969), 243–4; Maribel Fierro, "Al-Aşfar", *Studia Islamica* 77, 1993, 175–6; Nadia Maria El Cheikh, *Byzantium Viewed by the Arabs* (Cambridge, MA, 2004), 24.

⁴⁸ Suliman Bashear, "Apocalyptic and other materials on early Muslim-Byzantine wars: a review of Arabic sources", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Third Series, 1/2, 1991, 174–90, 201. For examples of the apocalyptic

and in the following centuries, however, the *Benī Aşfer* came to be associated in the Islamic Mediterranean context with the crusader armies arriving from the Latin West or, as the Muslims called them, the Franks.⁴⁹ In line with late-medieval Islamic usage, the *Dürr* also identifies the *Benī Aşfer* as the apocalyptic crusade against Islam, seeking to extirpate the latter as a religion and political sovereignty. This is indicated first by the phrase “with the infidels of ruddy complexion coming ahead of it [*Benī Aşfer*]”. In the original Ottoman text, the Arabic “*ilj*” is used to indicate the word “infidel”. A pejorative word meaning barbarian, in Islamic sources from the crusade period “*ilj*” (pl. “*ulj*”) describes the crusaders arriving from Latin Christendom.⁵⁰

The *Dürr* places the rise of the *Benī Aşfer* or the attack of a grand crusade, and thus the beginning of the apocalyptic time, shortly after 909.⁵¹ The Islamic year 909 corresponds to 1503–04 of the Common Era. Relying on this internal evidence, scholars have concluded that the *Dürr* anticipated that the end of the world would occur around 1503–04.⁵² This, however, is not an accurate interpretation. In several places, the *Dürr* expands on the distinction between the solar year and the lunar year, the latter of which is adopted by the Islamic calendar beginning with the Prophet’s migration from Mecca to Medina in 622 CE, and remarks that the lunar year is 12 days shorter than the solar one consisting of 360 days. For the apocalyptic computations of historical time, the *Dürr* adheres to the solar year system.⁵³ Therefore, the lunar year 909 must be converted to solar years: $909 \text{ (lunar)} - [909 - [(909 \times 12) \div 360]] = 878 \text{ (solar)}$, which corresponds to 1473–74 CE.

The final part of Chapter 16 is dedicated to a series of chronologically arranged apocalyptic prognostications related to the Mamluk, Akkoyunlu and Ottoman empires from Timur’s invasions in AH 803/1400–01 CE to AH 878/1473–1474 CE. First is listed a set of *ex eventu* prophecies related to the Mamluks and the Akkoyunlu confederation. A partial translation is given below:

Before their [the *Benī Aşfer*’s] appearance, there will be three great battles in the Sea of Rüm [*deryā-yı Rüm*] and two other battles in the lands of Greeks [*diyār-ı Yünān*]. Before the manifestation of these, the *mīm* will forgive the crested *ķāf*. As shown

usage in the early Islamic apocalypses, see Nu’aym b. Ḥammād al-Marwazī, “*The Book of Tribulations*”: *The Syrian Muslim Apocalyptic Tradition*, (ed. and trans) David Cook (Edinburgh, 2017), 13, 250–1, 306, 312.

⁴⁹ For the identification of the *Benī Aşfer* with the crusaders, see Richard Hartmann, “Eine islamische Apokalypse aus der Kreuzzeugszeit” Ein Beitrag zur Ḡafr-Literatur”, in *Schriften der Königsberger gelehrten Gesellschaft, Geisteswissenschaftliche Klasse, 1–3* (Berlin, 1924), 90–1. For the association of the *Benī Aşfer* with the crusaders in Ayyubid and Mamluk literary and historical sources, see Carole Hillenbrand, *The Crusades: Islamic Perspectives* (Edinburgh, 1999), 240; Daniel G. König, *Arabic-Islamic Views of the Latin West: Tracing the Emergence of Medieval Europe* (Oxford, 2015), 224; Niall Christie, *The Book of the Jihad of ‘Alī ibn Tahir al-Sulami (d. 1106): Text, Translation and Commentary* (Farnham, 2015), 218; Osman Latiff, *The Cutting Edge of the Poet’s Sword Muslim Responses to the Crusades* (Brill, 2018), 89–90, 145; Kenneth A. Goudie, *Reinventing Jihād: Jihād Ideology from the Conquest of Jerusalem to the end of the Ayyūbids (c. 492/1099–647/1249)* (Brill, 2019), 112–13.

⁵⁰ El Cheikh, *Byzantium Viewed by the Arabs*, 24, 169; Latiff, *The Cutting Edge of the Poet’s Sword*, 63–4, 115, 133. Demirtaş misread the word “*ilj*” (infidel) as “*alaca*” due to incorrect vocalization by the copyist; see Demirtaş, *Dürr-i Mekkûn*, 214. Kaptein’s edition renders it correctly as “*ilj*”; see Kaptein, *Dürr-i meknûn*, 302, 552.

⁵¹ Demirtaş, *Dürr-i Mekkûn*, 214. In some manuscripts, the year 909 is updated to 999; see Laban Kaptein, *Apocalypse and the Antichrist Dajjal in Islam: Ahmed Bijan’s Eschatology Revisited* (Asch, 2011), 45, n. 36; Kaptein, *Dürr-i meknûn*, 307.

⁵² Şahin, “Constantinople and the end time”, 348.

⁵³ Demirtaş, *Dürr-i Mekkûn*, 102f, 214. The *Anonymous Chronicle*’s apocalyptic calculations, like those of the *Dürr*, are also based on the solar year. As shown by Yerasimos, the earliest extant copy of the legends of Constantinople appears in an incomplete form in a copy of the *History of Oruç Bey*, a text closely related to the *Anonymous Chronicle*. Decoding the years given in this incomplete text by converting lunar years to solar years, Yerasimos established the date of its composition as AH 872, or 1467–68 CE, where history is cut off at the end; see Yerasimos, *La Fondation de Constantinople*, 70–1.

by the sign of the fortified *hemze*, do not ever be unwary, even within the enclosed walls of the fortification, of the devil of the infidels [i.e. western Christians] because it [the crested *kāf*] is the vessel of priests, the shrub of polytheists, and the gathering place of the degenerates, debauchees, and the wicked. [. . .] A beautiful boy will soon rule the Arab lands. Also, do not forget those with tiny eyes, the Tatars. [. . .] A man of good fortune will be apparent with the letters of *yā* and *alif*. He will be from the lands of Greeks, that is, from Iraq. He will be blameless, have an illuminated face, and be of dark complexion and high stature. Half of his name will include weak Arabic letters [i.e. the letters of *wāw*, *alif*, and *yā*]. He will rescue the imprisoned one. After him, the secret of earthquakes, eclipses, and numerous commotions will manifest. After these days, the Arab dominion will be ruined, and, afterward, some Mediterranean islands will be ruined. But in those days, there will be safety and security.⁵⁴

The three sea battles in the Sea of Rūm, the Mediterranean, must refer to the three consecutive Mamluk expeditions against the kingdom of Cyprus undertaken during Sultan Barsbay's reign (1422–38) in 1424, 1425 and 1426, which reduced Cyprus to a tributary vassal of the Mamluk sultan.⁵⁵ It is very likely that the two land battles in the lands of the Greeks signify the Mamluk campaigns conducted against the Karamanids in 1417 and 1419, as the designation of “the Greek lands” was used in this period to denote the territories of the Karamanid principality, centred in the present-day Konya and Karaman provinces of Turkey.⁵⁶ The mention of the *mīm* forgiving the crested *kāf* is an allusion to the truce made between King Janus of Cyprus (r. 1398–1432) and Sultan al-Mu‘ayyad Shaykh (r. 1412–21) in 1414, stipulating the cessation of Christian raids from the island to the Egyptian and Syrian coasts.⁵⁷ Sultan al-Mu‘ayyad Shaykh is signified by the first letter of his name, *mīm*; likewise, Cyprus is identified with the *kāf*, the first letter of the Arabic word for the island, *Ḳubrus*.⁵⁸ King Janus's breaking of the agreement and resumption of forays into Mamluk domains prompted the subsequent punitive campaigns that culminated in the Mamluk conquest of Cyprus.⁵⁹

The *Dürr* also assumes an overtly inimical position towards the kingdom of Cyprus, as attested by the use of vitriolic expressions such as the “devil of the infidels”, “ship of the priests”, “shrub of the polytheists” and “gathering place of the degenerates, debauchees and wicked” to describe the kingdom of Cyprus.⁶⁰ The code “the fortified *hamza* [*hemze-i*

⁵⁴ Demirtaş, *Dürr-i Mekkûn*, 212; Kaptein, *Dürr-i meknûn*, 552.

⁵⁵ Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *History of Egypt*, Part III, 46, 69–71; Part IV (1422–1438 AD), 19–20, 25–8, 33–45; Mustafa M. Ziada, “The Mamluk sultans, 1291–1517”, in Kenneth Setton (ed.), *A History of the Crusades* (Madison, WI, 1975), vol. 3, 492–8; Sir Harry Luke, “The kingdom of Cyprus, 1369–1489”, in Setton (ed.), *A History of the Crusades*, 372–5; Nicholas Coureas, “Latin Cyprus and its relations with the Mamluk sultanate, 1250–1517”, in A. J. Boas (ed.), *The Crusader World* (Abingdon, 2016), 395; İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, *Anadolu Beylikleri ve Akkoyunlu, Karakoyunlu Devletleri*, sixth ed. (Ankara, 2011), 19–20; Shai Har-El, *Struggle for Domination in the Middle East*, 70–1; Muslu, *The Ottomans and the Mamluks*, 91, 93.

⁵⁶ Demirtaş, *Dürr-i Mekkûn*, 212. For the association of the Karamanid lands with those of *Yūnān*, see Sara Nur Yıldız, “Razing Gevele and fortifying Konya: the beginning of the Ottoman conquest of the Karamanid principality in South-Central Anatolia, 1468”, in Andrew C.S. Peacock (ed.), *The Frontiers of the Ottoman World* (Oxford, 2009), 311–12.

⁵⁷ For the truce of 1414, see Luke, “The kingdom of Cyprus”, 371–2; Coureas, “Latin Cyprus”, 394.

⁵⁸ A. H. de Groot, “Ḳubrus”, *EI*(2).

⁵⁹ Luke, “The kingdom of Cyprus”; Coureas, “Latin Cyprus”.

⁶⁰ Demirtaş, *Dürr-i Mekkûn*, 212: “Hemze-i maḥsūreniñ işareti ile çevre hişār içre daḥi gāfil olma küffāruñ iblisinden. Zīrā ol iḥbāruñ sefinesidür ve işrāk şecerresidür ve fācirleriñ müfsidlerüñ derneḡidür”. In the SK copy, the words “*maḥsūr*”, “*iḥbār*” and “*işrāk*” are misspelled as “*maḥzūr*”, “*aḥbār*” and “*esrār*”, respectively, whereas the TSM manuscript renders them correctly. They are also misspelled in Kaptein, *Dürr-i meknûn*, 552.

maḥsūre]” represents the Christian attack and brief capture of Alexandria in 1365, when a joint crusade fleet, organized and led by the king of Cyprus, breached the walls of Alexandria and captured it, ransacking the city and massacring its population before burning it down.⁶¹ Alexandria is written in the Arabic script with the letter *alif*, which has the same numerical value as that of *hamza*, the character designating the glottal stop in the Arabic alphabet. Thus, the phrase “*hemze-i maḥsūre*” refers to the fortified city of Alexandria.

The “beautiful boy” who is to rule the Mamluk sultanate as the end of times nears refers to Sultan Barsbay’s 14-year-old son Yusuf, who briefly ruled as his father’s successor from June to September 1438. The prophecy that warns against the Tatars alludes to the resurgence of the Timurid threat under Timur’s son and successor Shahrukh (d. 1447) after the 1420s.⁶² And finally, the man of good fortune, whose outer appearance is that of a very handsome figure, indicates the founder of the Turcoman Akkoyunlu principality, Kara Osman, also known as Kara Yöyük. Although the true meaning of the Turkish appellation “Yöyük” remains a mystery, John Woods has drawn on contemporary sources to suggest that Kara Osman received the sobriquet because of his dark complexion and clean-shaven face in his youth, which accords with the physical description given by the *Dürr*. Furthermore, as the prophecy announces, half of his name – that is, his nickname Yöyük, written in Arabic as YLWK, YWLWK or YWLK – includes two weak Arabic letters, namely *yā* and *wāw*.⁶³ And the letter *alif* appears in the first half of his name (*kara*), which means black or dark in Turkish. Kara Osman was arguably the biggest winner in Anatolia from Timur’s invasions. He was one of the first Turcoman leaders to submit to Timur and secure his recognition, participating in the latter’s campaigns in Syria and Anatolia. He later took advantage of the political vacuum resulting from Ottoman and Mamluk weakness in the aftermath of Timur’s conquests and succeeded in building an independent state centred in Diyarbakir and Erzincan. Kara Osman also enjoyed the backing of Shahrukh, and occasionally even the Mamluk sultan, against his chief rivals, the Karakoyunlu Turcoman principality. Finally, the prophecy’s mention of Kara Osman having rescued the prisoner might concern his involvement in the release of his brother Pir Ali from Timur’s captivity.⁶⁴ The last section of the Mamluk and Akkoyunlu prophecies notes the ruin of the Mamluk lands due to persistent famine and plague in the first half of the fifteenth century.⁶⁵ The section closes with a remark about the two unsuccessful Mamluk expeditions against the Knights Hospitaller of Rhodes, in 1440 and 1444, and the restoration of relative stability under Sultan Jaqmaq (r. 1438–53).⁶⁶

Next, the *Dürr* proceeds to tell the last phase of the apocalyptic time in which all the signs of the rise of the *Benī Aşfer* will become evident. It defines this period as one of calamities and troubles during which rivers of blood will flow. All prophecies in this section relate to the Ottomans, and in contrast to the Mamluk prophecies, the Ottoman passage provides specific dates. The first appears in the prediction that this tumultuous period will last throughout the early years of the tenth century of Islam, clarified by

⁶¹ Kenneth M. Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia, 1976), 258–84.

⁶² Shai Har-El, *Struggle for Domination in the Middle East*, 72–3; Muslu, *The Ottomans and the Mamluks*, 101–04.

⁶³ John E. Woods, *The Aqquyunlu: Clan, Confederation, Empire*, rev. and expanded ed. (Salt Lake City, 1999), 39.

⁶⁴ Uzunçarşılı, *Anadolu Beylikleri*, 188–9; Woods, *Aqquyunlu*, 33–59.

⁶⁵ Ziada, “The Mamluk sultans”, 492–7; Melanie Alexxann Koskella, “A universal approach to plague epidemics in fifteenth century Mamluk Egypt and Syria: contemporary bias, classical Islamic medicine, and the voices of the Ulama”, PhD thesis, University of Utah, 2014, 136–94.

⁶⁶ Ziada, “The Mamluk sultans”, 497–9; Ettore Rossi, “The hospitallers at Rhodes, 1421–1523”, in Setton (ed.), *A History of the Crusades*, vol. 3, 319–20. For the peacefulness of Jaqmaq’s reign, see also Ibn Taghri Birdī, *History of Egypt*, Part V (1438–1453 AD), 163.

the expression that “boys born after 909 will be able to witness it”.⁶⁷ As shown above, when converted to solar years, the lunar year 909 translates to 878, corresponding in turn to 1473–74 CE. The year 878 was critically important for the Ottomans, the Akkoyunlus and the Mamluks, marking the date of the Battle of Başkent, fought on 16 Rabi ‘I AH 878 /11 August 1473 CE, in which Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II annihilated the forces of Akkoyunlu Emperor Uzun Hasan (grandson of Kara Osman) near Erzincan at Tercan, consequently saving the Ottoman Empire from destruction and Anatolia and Syria, and most likely also Egypt, from Turcoman domination.⁶⁸

The first Ottoman prophecy announces the accession of Mehmed II (r. 1444–46/1451–81) to the throne. The *Dürr* does not demonstrate a favourable opinion of Mehmed, remarking, “The one who will then be the ruler of Rüm will be a young boy whose beard has not grown out yet (*yalm yüzlü oğlan*). Woes to the lands of Rüm at that time! There will be two letters of *mīm* in his name; it will be either Mehmed or Mahmud, with one *mīm* at the beginning and one *mīm* in the middle.”⁶⁹ This prophecy is unmistakably a reference to Mehmed’s first accession to the throne in 1444 at the age of 12, following his father Murad II’s abdication.⁷⁰ The unflattering prophecy is succeeded by a vitriolic comment on Mehmed’s reign, namely, that this will be when the deserving and learned are ruined and when the despicable and vile rise to become the highest-ranking officials. This disparaging observation is accompanied by another hostile prophecy announcing that Ottoman rule will end after 900 years, corresponding to 872 solar years, or 1467–68 of the Common Era. The impending fall of Ottoman rule is reinforced by the following prognostication calculating the duration of the Ottoman dynasty as 204 years. The number is derived from the numerical value of the letters *k*, *b*, *k*, *b* ($100 + 2 + 100 + 2 = 204$). Subtracting 204 from 872 results in 668 solar years or 688 lunar years. The date perfectly matches the year 689 provided in the *Anonymous Chronicle of the Ottoman House*, with which the *Dürr* shares close affinities, as the beginning of the reign of Osman Bey, founder of the Ottoman dynasty.⁷¹

The *Dürr* continues with prophecies concerning Mehmed that identify him as the apocalyptic emperor. First comes a warning: “using good deception, stratagem, and intelligence, be on your guard against the *kāf*”.⁷² The *Dürr* firmly identifies this menacing apocalyptic *kāf* with Mehmed, noting, “The *kāf* is intended to be understood as *kaşşer*.”⁷³ The Arabic rendition of Caesar – *kaşşer* – was used in Islamic political parlance to refer to the Roman (Byzantine) emperor.⁷⁴ After the conquest of Constantinople, Mehmed, who had assumed the rank and place of the Roman emperors, also began to be called “*kaşşer*”.⁷⁵ Then comes an apocalyptic prophecy in Arabic attributed to the Prophet Muhammad: “The Hour will not arrive before a man named *jahanjāh* rules.” In nearly all the manuscripts examined by Kaptein and Demirtaş, the word “*jahanjāh*” is misspelled in various ways, with “*jahjāh*” being the most common version, and the corruption

⁶⁷ Demirtaş, *Dürr-i Mekkûn*, 213.

⁶⁸ İbn Kemal, *Tevârih-i Âl-i Osman VII. Defter*, (ed.) Şerafettin Turan (Ankara, 1991), 346–58; Uzunçarşılı, *Anadolu Beylikleri*, 191–2; Woods, *Aqquyunlu*, 115–23; Tursun Bey, *Târîh-i Ebû'l-Feth*, (ed.) Mertol Tulum (Istanbul, 1977), 158–67; İbn Kemal, *Tevârih-i Âl-i Osman VII. Defter*, 332–69; Selâhattin Tansel, *Osmanlı Kaynaklarına Göre Fatih Sultan Mehmed'in Siyasî ve Askerî Faaliyeti*, fourth ed. (Ankara, 2014), 313–24; Franz Babinger, *Mehmed the Conqueror and His Time* (Princeton, 1978), 311–15; Colin Imber, *The Ottoman Empire 1300–1481* (Istanbul, 1990), 214–17.

⁶⁹ Demirtaş, *Dürr-i Mekkûn*, 213.

⁷⁰ For Mehmed II’s first accession in 1444, see Halil İnalçık, *Fatih Devri Üzerinde Tetkikler ve Vesikalar*, third ed. (Ankara, 1995), 56–67.

⁷¹ Demirtaş, *Dürr-i Mekkûn*, 213. For the beginning of Osman’s reign, see Azamat (ed.), *Anonim Tevârih-i Âl-i Osman-F. Giese Neşri*, 10.

⁷² Demirtaş, *Dürr-i Mekkûn*, 212; Ziada, “The Mamluk sultans”, 492–7.

⁷³ Demirtaş, *Dürr-i Mekkûn*, 213.

⁷⁴ Rudi Paret and İrfan Shahid, “*Kaşşar*”, *El(2)*; El Cheikh, *Byzantium Viewed by the Arabs*, 86–7.

⁷⁵ For examples, see İbn Kemal, *Tevârih-i Âl-i Osman VII. Defter*, 265, 316, 439.

of the word has frustrated attempts to decipher its meaning.⁷⁶ The *Dürr*, however, provides clues to uncovering it. It remarks that this name has Maghrebi (North African/western Islamic) origins, and the *cîms* must be understood as *sîn*. In the western Islamic abjad numerals, which show minor differences from the eastern Islamic abjad, the letter *sîn* has a value of 300; in the eastern Islamic system, however, the letter *shîn* has the value 300.⁷⁷ Thus, the name must be read as *shahanshâh*, a Persian, particularly Sasanian, imperial title meaning “king of kings”. The title was prevalent in Persian or Persianized panegyric court poetry,⁷⁸ and there are several examples contemporary to Mehmed in which he is addressed as *shahanshâh*.⁷⁹ However, the religious authorities traditionally did not approve of the title, which they viewed as an appellation appropriate only for God, and denounced its use by rulers as blasphemous.⁸⁰ Its condemnation on Islamic grounds was also affirmed by a prophetic tradition included in Imam Bukhari’s authoritative hadith compilation, stating, “The most awful (meanest) name in Allah’s sight is (that of) a man calling himself king of kings. What is meant by ‘the king of kings’ is *shahanshah*.”⁸¹ Thus, the mention of the title in relation to Mehmed must be understood as yet another hostile remark on the part of the *Dürr* regarding the sultan.

The *Dürr* identifies the Akkoyunlu emperor Uzun Hasan, who had turned his grandfather Kara Osman’s small tribal principality into a territorial empire after a series of spectacular victories spanning 1467–69, as the ruler who is to rout Mehmed and bring Ottoman rule to an end. After consolidating his position in Iran, Iraq and Azerbaijan in 1469, Uzun Hasan turned his attention to the Ottomans, intending to defeat Mehmed in open battle and bring an end to Ottoman imperial formation in Anatolia. To this end, Uzun Hasan took under his protection the rulers of the Isfendiyarid and Karamanid principalities and the Empire of Trebizond, whom Mehmed had subjugated and driven out of their lands, promising them assistance in their ongoing struggle against Mehmed to recover their states.⁸² In addition, he had also been in close contact with Mehmed’s enemies in the west, most notably Venice, to form an alliance to launch a coordinated attack against Mehmed from east and west simultaneously, intending to destroy the Ottoman Empire and divide up its dominions. These contacts climaxed in 1472 when Uzun Hasan officially joined the Christian League against Mehmed.⁸³

This background confirms that the *Dürr* was composed shortly before the Battle of Başkent, when expectations and fears ran high that the Akkoyunlu emperor was about to

⁷⁶ Kaptein, *Dürr-i meknûn*, 305, \$16.90 provides all the versions, together with the manuscript details.

⁷⁷ Ibn Khaldûn, *The Muqaddimah*, vol. 3, 173; Weil and Colin, “Abdjad”.

⁷⁸ F.C. de Blois, “Shâh ‘King’, and Shâhanshâh”, *El(2)*.

⁷⁹ Refet Yalçın Balata, “Hunkarnâma (Tavârih-i ‘Âl-i Osmân) Mîr Sayyid ‘Alî b. Muzaffar-i Ma‘âli”, PhD thesis, İstanbul Üniversitesi, 1992, 5 (Persian text); M. Ebrahim M. Esmail, “Kâşîfî’nin Gazânâme-i Rûm Adlı Farsça Eseri ve Türkçe’ye Tercüme ve Tahlili”, MA thesis, Mimar Sinan Güzel Sanatlar Üniversitesi, 2005, 3a (Persian text).

⁸⁰ De Blois, “Shâh ‘King’, and Shâhanshâh”.

⁸¹ Sahih Bukhari, vol. 8, Book 73, no. 225: <https://www.sahih-bukhari.com/Pages/results.php> (accessed 14 August 2023).

⁸² For Uzun Hasan’s career and imperial pretensions, see Domenico Malipiero, “Annali veneti dell’anno 1457 al 1500 (Ordinati e abbreviati dal Francesco Longo, con prefazione e annotazioni di Agostino Sagredo)”, in *Archivio Storico italiano* 7/1 1843, 25–110; İbn Kemal, *Tevârih-i Âl-i Osman VII. Defter*, 316–66; Uzunçarşılı, *Anadolu Beylikleri*, 190–4; Tansel, *Fatih Sultan Mehmed’in Siyasi ve Askeri Faaliyeti*, 299–334; Bekir Sıtkı Baykal, “Uzun Hasan’ın Osmanlılara Karşı Kati Mücadeleye Hazırlıkları ve Osmanlı-Akkoyunlu Harbinin Başlaması”, *Belleten* 21/82, 1957, 261–96; H.R. Roemer, “The Türkmen dynasties”, in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 6, 168–82; Woods, *Aqquyunlu*, 87–120, esp. 112–15.

⁸³ For Uzun Hasan’s diplomatic negotiations with the western powers to organize an alliance against the Ottomans, see Malipiero, “Annali veneti”, 25, 33–4, 44, 67–9, 71–2, 75–6, 82–4, 89–90; Babinger, *Mehmed the Conqueror and His Time*, 297–9, 305–7; Şerafettin Turan, “Fâtih Mehmet–Uzun Hasan Mücadelesi ve Venedik”, *Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi* III/4, 1965, 63–138; Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant*, vol. 3, 311–16.

vanquish Mehmed, destroying the imperial unity that he had most recently overseen. Although Uzun Hasan is not explicitly named, many clues, couched in a coded language that draw on prophecies, the science of letters and numerical calculations, leave no doubt that the prophecy concerns him. To begin with, the *Dürr* writes that this new conqueror will arise from Iraq (i.e. Mesopotamia) and that his name will have the letter *mīm* in the middle.⁸⁴ After his victories over Jahanshah Karakoyunlu in 1467 and the Timurid Abu Sa'īd in 1469, Uzun Hasan emerged as the lord of Persian Iraq, denoting the lands of western Iran, and Arabian Iraq, which comprises Mesopotamia. Although the letter *mīm* does not appear in Hasan, it is the middle letter of the name Osman, grandfather of Uzun Hasan. According to the fifteenth-century chronicler 'Abd Allāh al-Baghdādī, the middle *mīm* in Osman referred to Uzun Hasan, who represented the third ruler of the Osmanid dispensation.⁸⁵

Moreover, the year 872, or 1467–68 CE, prophesied by the *Dürr* as the date after which the fall of the Ottoman dynasty would occur, coincides with a major event in Uzun Hasan's political career, when he destroyed his arch-rival Jahanshah and unified the Turcoman confederations of Akkoyunlu and Karakoyunlu. This made him the sole master of the lands stretching from Iran to Mesopotamia, Azerbaijan and eastern Anatolia. Uzun Hasan proclaimed his victory and new imperial status to his Mamluk and Ottoman neighbours through pompous letters claiming that his defeat of Jahanshah was divinely sanctioned and, by implication, that he was God's chosen sovereign of the Muslims. In them were cited verses 1–5 of chapter 30 of the Qur'an, *Sūrah al-rūm*, which includes a prophecy: "The Romans have been defeated in a nearby land. But they, after their defeat, will be victorious in a few years (*biḍa' sinīn*)." The Akkoyunlu letters interpreted them esoterically as a reference to the Akkoyunlu, associating them with the Romans. The defeat mentioned in the prophecy was construed as an allusion to the past Akkoyunlu defeats suffered at the hands of their neighbouring Karakoyunlu, and the numerical value of the words *biḍa' sinīn*, 872, was regarded as indicating Hasan ibn Osman, since the summation of the letters of Hasan amounts to 118; the middle letter of Osman, M, to 40; Ibn to 53; and Osman to 661, all adding up to 872.⁸⁶

Composed shortly before Mehmed's eastern campaign, which culminated in the decisive defeat of Uzun Hasan, the *Dürr* reinforces Uzun Hasan's identity as the apocalyptic conqueror from the line of Osman by quoting an Arabic prophecy, which is also in part quoted in Bisṭāmī's *Miftāh*.⁸⁷ The translation reads as follows:

A healthy and good-natured man (Ar. *'salīm*) from the House of Osman must take the Arabian Peninsula into his possession at the end of times. Give the good news of the *yā'* and *rā'* to *kāf alā* (or *'alī*) *kāf* that [he should] hope for all his wishes; and there are also *cīm*, [the letter of] *wāw*, [the letter of] *yā'*, *cīm*, [the letter of] *wāw*, [the letter of] *bā'*, *cīm*, and *alif* and *nūn* in his name. And they are at the end [of the name]. In his youth, he will be afflicted with a disease but then will recover in a short time. But the *nūn* will be victorious with the aid of Allah. He will gain sovereignty with the help of the *sīn*, and his rule will run from east to west. He will be of high stature, with red cheeks, a handsome face, good nature, and fierce eyes. His upper half is larger than his lower half. And before the emergence of the Mehdī, he will take the two noble sanctuaries and all the Arab lands into possession.

The first sentence of the prophecy is attributed to the North African Mehdī Ibn Tūmart (d. c. 1130). Still, it is undoubtedly an ancient one, as it was already present in Ibn

⁸⁴ Demirtaş, *Dürr-i Mekkân*, 213.

⁸⁵ Woods, *Aqquyunlu*, 102.

⁸⁶ Woods, *Aqquyunlu*, 102f.

⁸⁷ Yaman, "Tercüme-i Cifru'l-Câmi", 99, 234.

Ṭalḥa's thirteenth-century *Kitāb al-durr al-muntazam*, from which al-Biṣṭāmī must have copied it.⁸⁸ In the medieval Mediterranean Islamic context, the prophecy was generally interpreted as referring to the conquest of the Mamluks, for they held the prestigious title of 'Servitor of the Two Noble Sanctuaries' (Mecca and Medina) and were therefore regarded as the sovereigns of the Arab lands.⁸⁹ Uzun Hasan's ambitions to conquer the Mamluks are well known and had become most conspicuous after the grand conquests he had made between 1467 and 1469 against his eastern rivals. Furthermore, following his participation in the crusade league in 1472, control of Syria, connecting eastern Anatolia to the Mediterranean, had become even more critical, not least because the firearms he requested from his western allies would be delivered via the ports of the southeastern Mediterranean coast of Anatolia. Therefore, before his final engagement with Mehmed, he first attacked the Mamluk lands in November 1472 and besieged Aleppo to gain access to the mountain passes leading to the Mediterranean coast. His forces, however, were defeated and repelled by the Mamluks the following spring (1473).⁹⁰ This further affirms that the *Dürr* was written sometime between 1472 and 1473.

The prophecy "Give the good news of the [letters of] *yā'* and *rā'* to *kāf 'alā* (or '*alī*) *kāf* that [he should] hope for all his wishes; and there are also *cīm*, [the letter of] *wāw*, [the letter of] *yā'*, *cīm*, [the letter of] *wāw*, [the letter of] *bā'*, *cīm*, and *alif* and *nūn* in his name" is challenging to decode, as each of the extant copies provides a different set of letters.⁹¹ Nevertheless, relying on internal evidence and contextual analysis, its meaning can be reconstructed. The numerical value of the first part, involving the letters *yā'* (10) and *rā'* (200), is 210. When 210 is added to 668, noted above as the foundation year of the Ottoman state based on the solar system, it equals 878, which corresponds to 1473–74 CE, the same year as the Battle of Başkent. The second half of the prophecy encodes the number 872, which, as indicated above, was associated by the Akkoyunlu propagandists with "Hasan ibn Osman":

$$[(kāf 'alā kār)] = (100 + 1 + 80 + 70 + 30 + 10 + 100 + 1 + 80) = 472] +$$

$$[(cīm + [the letter of] wāw + [the letter of] yā' + cīm + [the letter of] wāw + [the letter of] bā' + cīm + alif + nūn) = (3 + 10 + 40 + 6 + 10 + 3 + 10 + 40 + 6 + 2 + 3 + 10 + 40 + 1 + 30 + 80 + 50 + 6 + 50) = 400] =$$

$$(472 + 400) = 872.$$

⁸⁸ Denis Gril, "L'énigme de la *Šağara al-nu'māniyya fil-dawla al-utmaniyya*, attribuée à Ibn 'Arabī", in Benjamin Lellouch and Stéphane Yerasimos (eds), *Les traditions apocalyptiques au tournant de la chute de Constantinople* (Paris, 1999), 145, n. 23; Cornell Fleischer, "Seer to the sultan: Haydar-i Remmal and Sultan Sleyman", in Jayne L. Warner (ed.), *Cultural Horizons: A Festschrift in Honor of Talat S. Halmanē* (Syracuse, 2001), 293. M. Fierro, "Le mahdi Ibn Tūmart et al-Andalus: l'élaboration de la légitimité almohade", in M. Garcia-Arenal (ed.), *Revue des Mondes Musulmans et la Méditerranée* nos. 91-4 (= *Mahdisme et Millénarisme en Islam*) (Aix-en-Provence, 2000), 107-24. For the quotation of the prophecy in the *Miftāh*, see Yaman, "Tercüme-i Cifru'l-Câmi", 81.

⁸⁹ Bernard Lewis, "*Khādīm al-Haramayn*", *EI*(2); P.M. Holt, "Power and position of the Mamlūk sultan", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 38, 1975, 237-49; Broadbridge, *Kingship and Ideology*, 12-16. In the illustrated manuscripts of the *Miftāh*, the prophecy is accompanied by a miniature depicting the Ottoman Sultan Selim I, who conquered the Mamluk lands in 1516 and 1517, on the throne of Egypt; see Yaman, "Tercüme-i Cifru'l-Câmi", 81-2, 234.

⁹⁰ The conquest of Egypt as an apocalyptic event is also foreshadowed by a prophecy found in Chapter 7, which states that "Egypt will remain unconquered until the end of times, when a group of people with golden caps will arrive and take it"; see Demirtaş, *Dürr-i meknûn*, 151-2. Like the Janissaries, who wore gold-embroidered caps, the Akkoyunlu soldiers also wore golden turbans; see Cristelle Baskins, "The bride of Trebizond: Turks and Turkmens on a Florentine wedding chest, circa 1460", *Muqarnas* 29, 2012, 83.

⁹¹ The letter *bā'*, with the numerical value two, seems to have been skipped by some copyists inscribing the text in the late sixteenth century and seventeenth century, long after the date of composition, as they could no longer understand the authentic meaning of the prophecy; see Kaptein, *Dürr-i meknûn*, 553-4; Demirtaş, *Dürr-i meknûn*, 213, 874.

In brief, the prophecy intends to give Uzun Hasan the good tidings that Ottoman rule will soon collapse, and he will achieve all his ambitions, including the conquest of the Mamluk sultanate and universal dominion.

After the Arabic prophecy announcing the imminent fall of the Ottomans and the rise of Uzun Hasan's world rule, the *Dürr* provides more specific information about him, writing that his exaltation in power will be due to a certain Ali. Naturally, this must refer to Jahanshah Karakoyunlu's son and successor Hasan Ali, whose reckless decision to ask for aid from the Timurid Sultan-Abu Sa'id against Uzun Hasan resulted in the former's defeat and death at the hands of Uzun Hasan – a development that made Uzun Hasan the sole master of Iran and Iraq in 1469.⁹² Last but not least, the flattering depiction of Uzun Hasan's appearance and nature in the prophecy concurs with the Venetian historian Malipiero's account, in which Uzun Hasan is described in such superlative terms as valiant, handsome, generous, kind and gracious.⁹³

Then follows a set of genuine prophecies predicting what will happen after Mehmed's defeat at the hands of Uzun Hasan. It is intimated that Mehmed will fall on the battlefield, precipitating a civil war in the Ottoman realm, which the *Dürr* expresses with a prophecy: "Since the *seb'-i şidād* is destroyed, there will be fighting and war among the sons." The *Dürr* defines the "*seb'-i şidād*" as seven great rulers who exercised sovereignty and ruled independently.⁹⁴ According to this definition, Mehmed II represents the seventh Ottoman sultan, as the brief reigns of Bāyezīd I's sons Süleymān and Mūsā Çelebis in the early fifteenth century, during which neither could rule over the whole Ottoman realm single-handedly, disqualify them from being counted among the "*seb'-i şidād*".⁹⁵ None of the princes is mentioned by name, but the *Dürr* does refer to two *sīns* and a *mīm*, as well as two *ʿayns*, who are cast as secondary actors. In the context of 1472–73, the two *sīns* and the *mīm* must represent Mehmed II's three princes, who were his eldest son Bāyezīd (later Bāyezīd II, r. 1481–1512), his second son Mustafa and the youngest prince, Cem. The *Dürr* also implies that the Ottoman civil war will spill over into the neighbouring states, prophesying that there will be a great war among the *alif*, *mīm* and *kāf*, during which one of the *ʿayns* will martyr the *kāf*. It is likely that the *alif* represents Uzun Hasan Akkoyunlu, written with *alif*, and *kāf* the Mamluk Sultan Qayitbay (r. 1468–96). Such an association would also account for Uzun Hasan's prophesied domination over the Arab lands in the apocalyptic time.

The *Dürr* describes the time of the Ottoman civil war, instigated by the defeat and death of Mehmed II, as one of constant warfare and killing in the lands of Rūm and the environs of Constantinople. It writes that there will be great massacres, and many, even those who have taken refuge within fortifications, will perish – some from sickness, some from fighting and some from famine.⁹⁶ The Christians will attack the Ottoman lands from all sides and rivers of blood will flow, with the Muslims being taunted by the dhimmis, the protected Jews and Christians living under Muslim rule. In light of this, the *Dürr* advises people of sound judgement and prudence to go up to the mountains to take refuge during this time.⁹⁷

⁹² Uzunçarşılı, *Anadolu Beylikleri*, 191–2; Woods, *Aqquyunlu*, 97–9; İsmail Aka, *İran'da Türkmen Hâkimiyeti (Kara Koyunlular Devri)* (Ankara, 2001), 76–82.

⁹³ Malipiero, "Annali veneti", 25.

⁹⁴ Demirtaş, *Dürr-i Mekkûn*, 213.

⁹⁵ Dimitris J. Kastritsis, *The Sons of Bāyezīd: Empire Building and Representation in the Ottoman Civil War of 1402–1413* (Leiden; Boston, 2007), 50–9, 111–23, 144–94.

⁹⁶ Demirtaş, *Dürr-i Mekkûn*, 213.

⁹⁷ Demirtaş, *Dürr-i Mekkûn*, 214.

And the end

Chapter 16 is the bridge, chronologically, thematically and geographically, to Chapter 17, which is devoted to describing the ten signs of the end time, with the rise and attack of the *Benī Aşfer* identified as the first portent and the final destruction of the physical world as the tenth.⁹⁸ As noted above, the *Dürr*, in line with the late medieval Muslim apocalyptic tradition, associates the *Benī Aşfer* with a pan-European crusade against the Islamic lands that aims to extirpate Islam as a religious and political force. Building on the chronological framework delineated in Chapter 16, Chapter 17 places the end time around the year 900 of the Islamic calendar (1494–95 CE), about 20 years after the Ottoman–Akkoyunlu encounter. To reaffirm the date, the *Dürr* quotes an apocalyptic hadith in which the Prophet advises Muslims to seek devotional reclusion after the year 900 to evade the wickedness of the people at that time, who will no longer have respect for the divine law or any regard for the Day of Judgement.⁹⁹

The *Dürr* describes this last phase of apocalyptic time as a total collapse and subversion of the political, social and religious order, and one of moral depravity. It writes that people at that time will reject the guidance and recommendations of religious leaders, and as religious corruption gains ground, the Islamic establishment will collapse. As a result, God will afflict Muslims with unabated calamity and disaster. The Islamic lands will be continuously ruined by internal strife; oppression and tyranny will fill the world; the prescriptions of divine law will be ignored and violated; and God will punish people with numerous tribulations and abnormal phenomena, such as torrents, earthquakes, eclipses, plagues, incurable illnesses and famines. Finally, God will pass sovereignty of the Islamic lands to the infidels, coded in the apocalyptic term “*Benī Aşfer*”.¹⁰⁰

Although the *Dürr* presents the rise of the *Benī Aşfer* as a punishment for Muslims for their moral and religious misconduct, the root of the criticism is aimed at Mehmed, whom the *Dürr* primarily blames for the collapse of peace and order in the Islamic lands. It is implied that Mehmed’s insatiable imperial ambitions tipped the balance of power in the region and provoked Uzun Hasan’s aggression against the lands of Rüm, which was legitimized by the grievances of the Turkish princes whom Mehmed had stripped of their lands and sovereignty. Although the *Dürr* does appear to portray Uzun Hasan in a more favourable light than Mehmed, it is only a matter of degree, not of kind, and the *Dürr* by no means endorses or condones the imperial unification effected by Uzun Hasan in the eastern Mediterranean Islamic lands; in fact, it categorically rejects any universal empire, regardless of the emperor who stands behind the project.

The *Dürr* reveals its contempt for universal imperial rule most notably in the section describing the attack of the *Benī Aşfer* on Islam. It writes that the *Benī Aşfer* will arise when Muslim sovereignty of the Islamic lands comes together in the lands of Rüm – in other words, in Anatolia.¹⁰¹ In the prophecy announcing Uzun Hasan’s triumph over Mehmed and his rise to sovereignty over the Arab lands, the *Dürr* implies the existence of a political picture in which Egypt, Syria and Anatolia are united under Uzun Hasan’s rule. Nevertheless, as the *Dürr* indicates, this political unity hardly promotes strength and robustness in the Islamic lands. When the crusaders, or the *Benī Aşfer*, attack, their armies swiftly overrun Egypt, Syria and Anatolia without encountering any effective Muslim resistance and easily conquer Constantinople by driving the Muslim forces out of the city and out of Anatolia, pursuing them down to Syria.¹⁰² After this Christian victory,

⁹⁸ Demirtaş, *Dürr-i Mekkûn*, 215–28.

⁹⁹ Demirtaş, *Dürr-i Mekkûn*, 216.

¹⁰⁰ Demirtaş, *Dürr-i Mekkûn*.

¹⁰¹ Demirtaş, *Dürr-i Mekkûn*, 217.

¹⁰² Demirtaş, *Dürr-i Mekkûn*, 217–18.

the Muslims find themselves under the rule and oppression of the *Benī Aşfer* for some unstipulated time.

Muslim suffering finally comes to an end with the appearance of the Mehdī, the saviour-ruler who is shown to be a conqueror arising from the eastern Islamic lands, namely, Bukhara, in modern-day Uzbekistan.¹⁰³ In accordance with the well-known Muslim apocalyptic traditions, the Mehdī ultimately annihilates the *Benī Aşfer*, recovers the lost territories and reconquers Constantinople one last time in the name of Islam, redeeming the Muslims from Christian domination.¹⁰⁴ However, after Islam's final vindication, the *Dürr* does not culminate in a millenarian endpoint. On the contrary, the reign of the Mehdī is far too brief – foretold to last only seven to nine years – to effectuate any long-term peace, prosperity and happiness for the Muslims. Besides, most of his short career is spent in China, far from the *Dürr*'s main geographic focus on the eastern Mediterranean Islamic lands, and is occupied fighting the false-prophet Deccāl, whose tortures and tribulations bring the Muslims no less suffering and hardship than the *Benī Aşfer*.¹⁰⁵ In the end, the Mehdī remains wholly ineffective against the devil's incarnate Deccāl, who is eventually killed by Jesus Christ, descending to the earth on God's command to save humanity. At this point, the *Dürr* quickly dispenses with the Mehdī, who has no further role in the eschatological drama.¹⁰⁶ Events slip out of the hands of human agency, and the eschatological figures take over completely and remain in charge until the destruction of the world and the Day of Judgement.

The *Dürr* identifies Mehmed's imperial politics and his conflict with Uzun Hasan, which eventually climaxed with the Ottoman–Akkoyunlu showdown at Başkent, as the primary cause not only of the imminent collapse of the Ottoman Empire but also of the end of peace and order in the Islamic world and of the destruction of Islam by the Christians. Behind this assessment lies the *Dürr*'s characterization of Mehmed as a selfish, tyrannical and oppressive ruler, one who is possessed by insatiable greed and lust for power. In this respect, the anonymous author of the *Dürr* finds Mehmed to be no different from the Central Asian tyrant Timur.

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¹⁰³ For the description of the Mehdī, the author seems to have relied on the well-known Muslim eschatological traditions associating the Mehdī with a saviour-conqueror figure arising from Khorasan or Transoxania. See David Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic* (Princeton, 2002), 147–54.

¹⁰⁴ For Muslim traditions on the Mehdī, see Nu'aym b. Ḥammād al-Marwazī, "The Book of Tribulations", 187–215; Ibn Kathīr, *Book of the End Great Trials and Tribulations* (Riyadh Daruussalam, 2006), 50–5; W. Madelung, "al-Mahdī", *EI(2)*; Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 137–82; Yaman, "Tercüme-i Cifru'l-Câmi", 80–7, 90–2, 118, 124–5, 127–8.

¹⁰⁵ Demirtaş, *Dürr-i Mekkûn*, 219–22.

¹⁰⁶ Demirtaş, *Dürr-i Mekkûn*.

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