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Al-Suyuti the Apocalypticist

There is a profound difference between a *historian* and an *apocalypticist*. The former operates in a context delimited by a single reference point—the past. While admittedly somewhat relative due to ongoing attempts at interpretation and re-interpretation, the past nonetheless enjoys the advantage of being fixed; its events are by definition completed and thus essentially unchangeable. The disadvantage of this uni-directional orientation is, of course, that from the standpoint of the historian, the future remains completely open-ended, subject only to speculation.

The apocalypticist, however, utilizes two foci in his attempt to understand history: the past *and* the future. While the historian may deride the idea of "future history" as pure fantasy, the apocalypticist claims that access to knowledge regarding the future allows for an infinitely better representation of history in all of its aspects, including the present and even the past. Bernard McGinn has discussed the advantages of having two reference points for historical interpretation in an essay dealing with Christian eschatology, and his remarks are equally—and perhaps even more—applicable within the context of Islam:

> For the apocalypticist, history is universally conceived and deterministically structured ... [he] sees meaning where the uninitiated sees only chaos or catastrophe. Knowledge of God's plan not only gives a sense of history's general structure and meaning but also provokes the search for the "signs of the times," for the significance of current events to the coming end. This legibility of history,

the ability to read the course of events as one reads a text, requires a sense of the imminence of final times.[1]

In particular, then, apocalypticism provides "general meaning and structure" to history as a whole and significance to current events as they are made to fit into an overall structure.

The present essay seeks to chart specific developments in Islamic eschatology as seen through the eyes of a Muslim scholar who functioned as an apocalypticist in certain areas of his scholarship. Abu'l-Fadl Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti (850/1445 - 911/1505) was a Shafi'i scholar living in Cairo during the late Mamluk period. He claimed to have authored over 500 works during the course of his life, ranging over *tafsir, hadith*, the Arabic language, and history, among other disciplines.[2] He also dealt with theological topics and among these was the subject of eschatology. Under current consideration is a work that he authored entitled by J.O. Hunwick *Risala fi man yab'ath Allah li hadhihi'l-umma 'ala ra's kulli mi'at sana*[3], and by Ella Landau-Tasseron *Kitab al-Tanbi'a bi-man yab'athuhu allah 'ala ra's al-mi'a*.[4] The manuscript is listed in the ninth place in the Leiden Miscellaneous Codex no. 474.[5] Internal evidence indicates that the work was authored in 899/1493, i.e., the beginning of the tenth century of Islamic history.

Renewers of the Faith

Al-Suyuti begins with a discussion of the *mujaddidun*, or "renewers" of the Muslim faith. The tradition concerning these personages is taken from the *Sunan* of Abu Dawud, the *Musnad* of al-Hasan ibn Sufyan ibn 'Amir al-Nasawi (213/828 - 303/916), *Al-Awsat* of Abu'l-Qasim Sulayman al-Tabarani (260/873 - 360/971), the *Muqaddimat al-kamil* of Abu Ahmad 'Abd Allah Ibn 'Adi (277/890 - 365/976), *Al-Mustadrak* of Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad al-Hakim (321/933 - 404/1014), and the *Madkhal* of Abu Bakr Ahmad al-Bayhaqi (384/994 - 488/1066). The

wording of the tradition is essentially as follows: "Allah sends to this community at the head of every 100 years one who renews (regenerates) the matter of its religion." The basic meaning of this tradition has never been disputed; it is interpreted as demonstrating that Allah in His wisdom is aware of the weakness of humankind—including the Muslim community—and understands that the tendency toward moral and spiritual decline is all but inevitable. Therefore He raises up at the beginning of each 100 year period, beginning with the year of Muhammad's *hijra*, one or more persons from among the Muslims to reform the religion of Islam. Al-Suyuti was convinced that Muhammad not only left the tradition as a prediction but through divine inspiration was also cognizant of all that it implied. Speaking of a scholar who opposed his views, al-Suyuti asks:

> Does he think that the Prophet ... did not know what would happen in his
> community nor what his *khalifas* would decide after his death? This is indeed a
> far-reaching error. The Prophet ... delivered a sermon in which he reported what
> would occur in his community up until the Day of Judgment. He knew that 'Umar
> would establish [the system of] dating according to the *Hijra* after his death, and
> he did not relate this to his companions without their knowing its meaning, or
> without their asking him for a clarification of [the term] *"mi'a"* and its beginning.[6]

The advantages of such a tradition are at least twofold. First, it establishes a cyclical pattern in history according to which both people and events may be categorized. Second, it affords a psychological advantage in that events in any given time period may be understood and explained in accordance with how far a particular century has progressed. Since one knows beforehand that decline will inevitably occur over the course of a century, it becomes easier to adjust both psychologically and sociologically to catastrophic events which are experienced in

perpetuity by the human race. Without such a system of historical interpretation, these events

will appear arbitrary, chaotic, and even capricious. A psychological "lift" is imparted by the

knowledge that no spiritual downturn will last more than two generations or so, since Allah has

promised a regular succession of renewers at ordained intervals of time. Such knowledge would

be particularly encouraging for those living in, for instance, the eighth, ninth, or tenth decades of

any given century, since the tradition specifies that it will be at the "head," or end, of the century

that the *mujaddid* will appear.[7] One can imagine the sense of expectation and speculation

regarding the identity of such an individual on the part of Muslims who accepted and followed

this system of historical interpretation.

Al-Suyuti spends a major portion of his time listing the past candidates for the office of

mujaddid along with the qualifications of each. From the documents he had consulted, he

composed the following list:

First Century	'Umar ibn 'Abd al-Aziz (d. 101 A.H.)
Second Century	Yahya ibn Adam (d. 203 A.H.) Muhammad al-Shafi'i (d. 204 A.H.)
Third Century	Abu'l-'Abbas ibn Shurayj (d. 306 A.H.) Abu'l-Hasan Al-Ashari (d. 324 A.H.) Abu Ja'far Muhammad Al-Tabari (d. 310 A.H.)
Fourth Century	Abu'l-Tayyib Sahl al-Su'luqi (d. 404 A.H.) Abu Bakr Muhammad Ibn al-Baqillani (d. 403 A.H.)
Fifth Century	Al-Mustarshid Bi'llah (d. 529 A.H.) Muhammad al-Ghazali (d. 505 A.H.)
Sixth Century	Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (d. 606 A.H.) Abu'l-Qasim ibn Muhammad Al-Rafi'i (d. 620 A.H.) Taqi'l-Din 'Abd al-Ghani (d. 600 A.H.) Muhyi al-Din al-Nawawi (d. 676 A.H.)

Seventh Century	Taqi al-Din Abu'l-Fath Ibn Daqiq al-'Id (d. 702 A.H.)
Eighth Century	Siraj al-Din al-Bulqini (d. 805 A.H.) Nasir al-Din ibn bint al-Maylaq al-Shadili (d. 797 A.H.) Zayn al-Din al-Iraqi (d. 806 A.H.)
Ninth Century	Al-Suyuti himself

The author considered it possible that the tradition allowed for multiple *mujaddids* at the head of each century, depending on how one interprets the Arabic pronoun "*man*" as found in the wording of the *hadith*. With equal grammatical correctness the pronoun may be translated "one who" or "those who," and al-Suyuti was not averse to the latter rendering. He suggested that there may be several aspects of the Islamic world which would each need the exhortation of a "specialized" *mujaddid* in order to experience renewal. Such aspects might include geographical areas (i.e., The West, the Hijaz, the East), political or theological areas (i.e., a political ruler, a jurist, a traditionist), or the law schools. Indeed, al-Suyuti suggested that one could divide the Renewers in the following manner:

> And as for those who were at the head of the third century, among those in charge of affairs was [Abu'l-Fadl Ja'far] al-Muqtadir Bi'llah [d. 320/932], and among the jurists was Abu'l-Abbas ibn Shurayj among the Shafi'is, and Abu Ja'far Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Salama al-Tahawi [239/853 - 321/933] among the Hanafis, and among the Malikis was Iyas. Among the Traditionists was [Abu 'Abd al-Rahman Ahmad] al-Nasa'i [215/830 - 303/915].
>
> As for those who were at the head of the fourth century, among those in charge of affairs was [Abu'l-Abbas Ahmad] al-Qadir Bi'llah [336/947 - 422/1031], and among the jurists was Abu Hamid al-Isfarayini [344/955 -

406/1016] among the Shafi'is, and Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Musa al-Khwarizmi among the Hanafis, and Abu Muhammad 'Abd al-Wahhab [362/973 - 422/1031] among the Malikis and Abu 'Abd Allah al-Husayn [d. 403/1012] among the Hanbalis, and various other *imams*. As for those who were at the head of the fifth century, among those in charge of affairs was [Abu'l-'Abbas Ahmad] al-Mustazhir Bi'llah [d. 512/1111], and from among the jurists was the *imam* Abu Hamid al-Ghazali [450/1058 - 512/1111] among the Shafi'is, and the *qadi* Fakhr al-Din Muhammad ibn 'Ali al-Arsanabadi al-Marwazi [d. 512/1111] among the Hanafis, and Abu'l-Hasan 'Ali ibn 'Abd Allah al-Zaghuni [455/1063 - 527/1132] among the Hanbalis. These were the most famous in the above-mentioned times.[8]

Trials and Tribulations

To the concept of the *mujaddidun* al-Suyuti joins a second tradition which he considers to be parallel to the first. This tradition appears in his *Risala* in the following context:

> ... parallel to this *hadith* is what was handed down [to the effect that] at the head of each one hundred years is an event [of special significance]. Ibn Abi Hatim said in his *Tafsir*: Yahya ibn 'Abdika al-Qazwini related to us, Khalaf ibn al-Walid related to us, and al-Mubarak ibn Fadala related to us on the authority of 'Ali ibn Zayd on the authority of 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Abi Bakr on the authority of 'al-'Uryan ibn Haytham on the authority of 'Abd Allah ibn 'Amr ibn al-'As (may God be pleased with them both!), who said: "There has not been since the beginning of the world a century at the head of which there was not an event [of special significance]." Ibn 'Asakir recorded this in a longer version in his *History*,

and in it he reported the appearance of the Antichrist and the descent of 'Isa (upon

whom be blessing and peace!).

I said: That which I understand from this tradition together with that

hadith is that that there is definitely at the head of [each] one hundred years a

severe tribulation. God conjoins it with a mighty favor [i.e., the *mujaddid*], and

he is the one who is appointed by God to regenerate the religion and to revive it as

an act of compassion from Him to His servants, and [as a means of] restoring it

from the weakness which it suffered through this tribulation. And therefore Abu

Da'ud included the tradition in the section on Momentous Events as an indication

of this; when an upheaval occurred, God restored [His community] by one who

regenerates the religion, as was reported in the *hadith* that God compensates Islam

for each innovation by sending one of his *walis* to defend the religion. Thus at the

end of the centuries there would occur the most severe of the tribulations and

upheavals, which is the emergence of the Antichrist; the favor corresponding to it

would be the descent of 'Isa, [who is] mightier than anyone who came in the

preceding centuries, for the benefit will be in proportion to the tribulation so that

it forms a fitting correspondence to it.[9]

In this passage are found two significant concepts. First, the tradition regarding *fitan*

(singular *fitna*), or "tribulations," is used to provide a further reference point in the development

of a pattern of history, and, second, the return of 'Isa (Jesus) to earth is cited as being a

significant part of the overall scheme.

With regard to the first concept, the periodic "declines" which make necessary the

appearance of a renewer take on a meaning that serves to provide psychological relief to the

Muslim community. These *fitan* (trials or tribulations) are permitted by Allah for purposes of

chastisement and purification, and He then raises up the *mujaddidun* as *compensations* for these

tribulations. Furthermore, the community is not merely compensated; it is compensated

proportionally to the tribulation, so that the more severe the tribulation, the greater will be the

mujaddid who restores the community from the effects of it. Hope is thus provided for one

living in the midst of troubling times. He can take comfort from the fact that the more severe his

suffering becomes, the greater will be the eventual benefit to the community as a whole.

Modern writers have noted the Muslim community's propensity for rapid recovery from

"tribulational" experiences. Dekmejian, for instance, notes that

> throughout its fourteen centuries, Islam has shown a unique capacity to renew and
>
> reassert itself against competing ideologies and social forces through its revivalist
>
> mode, an inbuilt, self-regenerating social mechanism that is triggered when the
>
> moral integrity or physical existence of the umma is under threat. This cyclical
>
> dynamic of crisis and resurgence is discernible in various historical epochs.[10]

Al-Suyuti provides a review of the centuries since the inception of Islam and lists the

significant tribulational experiences of each:

First Century	Al-Hajjaj's reign of tyranny and evil[11]
Second Century	Al-Ma'mun's doctrine of the createdness of the Qur'an[12] and other heresies; the inquisition instituted by the 'ulama[13]
Third Century	The Carmathians' slaughter of pilgrims in Mecca and theft of the Black Stone, which was missing for twenty years[14]
Fourth Century	Al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah, who commanded the people to

	prostrate themselves when his name was mentioned;[15] a split occurred in a corner of the Ka'ba; the walls of the Prophet's tomb and of the Dome of the Rock collapsed [all in 407 A.H.]
Fifth Century	Europeans seized control of Syrian lands and Jerusalem, killing more than 70,000 persons [i.e., the Crusades]
Sixth Century	[Al-Suyuti neglected to mention the sixth century, though one would naturally expect to find the Mongol invasions here. Perhaps he took for granted that all readers would be aware of the tribulation of this century]
Seventh Century	High prices and starvation in Egypt and Syria; people were driven to eat donkeys, mules, and dogs; military exploits of the Tatars in Syria
Eighth Century	Invasions of Timur Lenk (Tamerlane)[16]; Europeans seized the Andalusian peninsula (Spain); Sunni Ali emerged in Africa;[17] the "universality of ignorance" with regard to Islamic doctrine

Al-Suyuti did not specifically mention what he believed the "tribulation" of his own time was. But his strongly worded indictments of the people of his day for the "universality of ignorance" seem to indicate his belief that the *fitna* of his time was an even more extreme version of that which had characterized the era of his immediate predecessor. He recounted the names of *mujtahids* from the previous century—twenty-six in number—but then stated that "the head of this century came without there being in any quarter of the earth a scholar resembling any one of these or coming close to him."[18]

The End of the Ages

Embedded in the discussion as to whether or not there might be a plurality of *mujaddids* for any single century is an excursus regarding the total number of *mujaddids* that could be expected before the end of time. In this discussion al-Suyuti quotes at length the *Risala al-*

maradiyya fi nasrat madhab al-Ash'ariyya of Badr al-Din ibn al-Ahdal (779/1377 - 855/1451).

Of significance are al-Ahdal's comments regarding the belief of Zayn al-Din al-Iraqi (725/1325 - 806/1404) as recorded in his *Takhrij ahadith al-ihya' al-kabir* that at the head of the eighth century would come the Mahdi or 'Isa ibn Maryam. Here is reflected the conviction that Muslim history was of limited duration. After 800 years certain ominous events would occur, among which the most significant would be the rise and short reign of the *dajjal* (the "deceiver"—the Antichrist) and his defeat by 'Isa upon the latter's descent from heaven. These events were generally believed to be among the last to occur before the Resurrection and Day of Judgment. No reason is given for al-Iraqi's supposition that the head of the eighth century would be the Mahdi or 'Isa; indeed, the statement is actually found within a poem he composed, the text of which reads: "And it is thought that the eighth is the Mahdi, who is a descendent of the Prophet, or the guiding Messiah."[19]

Speaking in this manner, al-Iraqi demonstrates the ambiguity that has always character-ized eschatological dating schemes. Indeed, the idea that Islamic history would endure eight centuries was merely one of a long line of predictions. Muhammad is alleged to have stated that the world's end would come only 200 years after the Hijra,[20] and Ibn Khaldun recorded that "with regard to how long Islam and the world in general will last, traditionists accepted the prediction that the world will last five hundred years after the coming of Islam."[21]

Al-Suyuti records al-Ahdal's dismissal of al-Iraqi's prediction:

> That which he reported—that at the head of the eighth century would be the Mahdi or 'Isa the son of Maryam because of the approach of the Hour—is not correct, for we are now in the year 830 and nothing of that has occurred.[22]

Al-Ahdal had gone on to add his own speculation with regard to the events of the end

times:

> It may be that there remains a ninth at the head of the ninth century which we are
>
> in. And the Mahdi or 'Isa the son of Maryam will be in the tenth century at the
>
> completion of the [millennial] cycle and the Arabic numeration – and God knows
>
> best!"[23]

Here is found speculation that the history of Islam would last ten centuries, a belief based

on two lines of reasoning. One line had to do with the structure of Arab mathematical theory,

which with its revolutionary decimal point arranged numbers on the basis of tens, hundreds,

thousands, and so on. The idea of ten 100-year periods—a millennium of time—certainly

accorded well with the Arab mindset. It lent a sense of precision and order to the entire concept

of historical progression.

The second line of reasoning—involving "the completion of the [millennial] cycle"—

hearkened back to a pool of ideas present both in Judaism and in Christianity. In Jewish

apocalyptic writing reference is found to the significance of the "eight" of al-Iraqi's thinking and

to the "ten" of al-Ahdal and al-Suyuti:

> *1 Enoch* 91-104 includes the so-called Apocalypse of Weeks (93:1-10; 9:12-17) ...
>
> In [this scheme], world history is divided into ten "weeks" ... at the beginning of
>
> the 8th week the messianic kingdom appears and is described as a time of
>
> righteousness in which sinners will be delivered into the hands of the righteous
>
> (91:12) ... True religion is revealed to all men, sin is banished from the earth, and
>
> the world is prepared for judgment (91:14). This great judgment comes at the end

of the 10th week.[24]

The duration of these "weeks" was generally left unspecified, but hellenistic Judaism modified the scheme slightly by proposing not ten but seven historical epochs, believing that the seven days of creation in Genesis 1 would be paralleled by seven millennia of world history. According to this theory, each epoch consists of 1000 years, limiting the span of human history to a period of 7000 years. Indeed, eternity is described in *II Enoch* as "a time of not counting, endless, with neither years, nor months, nor weeks, nor days, nor hours (33:1-2); it is the eighth eternal 'day' which follows the 6 days representing the six thousand years of the world's history and the one day of rest representing the thousand years which come after (33:2)."[25]

Within Christianity, the apostle John further refined the scheme by applying the prophecies of Daniel to a thousand year period existing between the second advent of Jesus and the Judgment Day. The events of the 19th and 20th chapters of John's *Apocalypse* may be easily fitted into *both* the eschatology of Enoch and hellenistic Judaism. There is within conservative Protestant thought an eschatological scheme which posits a 4000 year period from Creation to the first advent of Jesus, a 2000 year "church age," followed by the second advent of Jesus, who inaugurates a thousand year kingdom, followed in turn by the Judgment Day. This sequence is based upon the same creation day/world age scheme suggested by Judaism and is supported by such New Testament passages as *II Peter* 3:8: "But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day." *Hebrews* 4:3-6:9 adds: "So I declared an oath in my anger, 'They shall never enter my rest.' And yet his work has been finished since the creation of the world … It still remains that some will enter that rest … There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God." This passage is interpreted by

premillennial eschatologists as indicating that there will be a "sabbath" of time—i.e., a seventh 1000 year period—during which the people of God will enjoy bliss and "rest."

Islam apparently absorbed several of the eschatological themes of both Judaism and Christianity early on. Some of these concepts appear in the Qur'an, such as Surah 32:5: "He rules (all) affairs from the heavens to the earth: in the end will (all affairs) go up to Him, on a Day, the space whereof will be (as) a thousand years of your reckoning" (note the parallel with 2 Peter 3:8). Others are found in the *ahadith*, in such accounts as one narrated by Abu Hurayra: "Then Allah's Apostle said, "By Him in Whose Hands my soul is, son of Mary (Jesus) will shortly descend amongst you people (Muslims) as a just ruler and will break the Cross and kill the pig and abolish the Jizya …"[26] Speculation regarding the sequence of these events and how they would be fulfilled was diverse. The "signs of the Hour," including the appearance of Yajuj and Majuj (Gog and Magog), the coming of the Mahdi (an Elijah-figure), the appearance of the *dajjal* (Antichrist), the return of 'Isa, the establishment of a (brief) "kingdom of Islam," the Resurrection and the Judgment Day, and the eternal abode in either the Garden or the Fire all find equivalencies or parallels in Judaism and Christianity (cf. *Ezekiel* 38-39, *Apocalypse* 20:7-10, *Malachi* 4:5-6, *Daniel* 7:24-25, 9:26-27, *2 Thessalonians* 2:1-12, and *Apocalypse* 13 and 20-22).

The "day-age" timetable is reflected in the *Kitab al-fitan* of Nu'aym ibn Hammad (d. 228/843). Michael Cook comments on Nu'aym's use of concepts gleaned from Nath, understood to be a prophet of ancient Israel:

> Presumably what Nath intended to say was that the lifespan of this world (*al-dahr*) consists of a single "mega-week," i.e., of seven "mega-days" of a thousand

years each, with each millennium being subdivided into centuries (*'iddanat*).[27]

As has been shown, al-Suyuti adapts the idea of millennial cycles to his own view of history, positing a single thousand year period as the duration of the Islamic faith prior to the return of 'Isa. In the midst of his interaction with the propositions of al-Iraqi and al-Ahdal, he presents a summary of his own beliefs regarding the sequence of eschatological events:

> ... the Antichrist (*dajjal*) emerges at the head of a century and then 'Isa descends and kills him. The *Mahdi* will have preceded him as *khalifa* by seven years, and that is the end of the century. When the Antichrist (*dajjal*) emerges in his day, and 'Isa descends, the *Mahdi* hands over authority to him. He remains on the earth for either seven years or 40 years and then he dies, and it has already been mentioned that it is a condition of the *mujaddid* that he should come after the head of a century. Authority is transferred to 'Isa ... and it is thus clear that he ['Isa] will be the *mujaddid*.[28]

Al-Suyuti's chronology allows the construction of an eschatological chart with the following sequence of events:

1. A period of indeterminate length—but which is likely 1000 years—during which both a "trial" (*fitna*) and a "renewer" (*mujaddid*) will appear at the end of each one hundred year period.

2. The Mahdi will appear and reign as a caliph, most likely in the year '93 or later of a specific future century (preceding the coming of 'Isa by seven years).[29]

3. There will follow a seven year period during which time the *dajjal* (Antichrist) will appear.[30]

4. 'Isa ibn Maryam will descend and defeat the *dajjal*.[31]

5. After the conquest and destruction of Antichrist, 'Isa will live and reign over an

   Islamic kingdom either seven years or 40 years, and then will die.

The Second Coming of 'Isa

The question may be asked as to why it is Jesus who returns to defeat the *dajjal* and to

establish an Islamic kingdom. Why not Muhammad, who as far as Muslims are concerned

certainly enjoys pre-eminence among the Prophets? The doctrine is based upon a variety of

deductive arguments.

First, there is the fact that among all the Prophets, Jesus is the only one who is stated not

to have died but was instead translated into the presence of Allah. Sura 3:55 records Allah's

proclamation that He would take Jesus and raise him to Himself, and Sura 4:157-158 places this

event near the time that Christians allege that He was crucified. "But they killed him not, nor

crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them … nay, Allah raised him up unto Himself

…" From these verses it is concluded that Jesus never experienced physical death at the time of

his original advent, but was rescued out of his trying circumstances through a supernatural event

performed by Allah. It is thus assumed that since he never died, he could conceivably return to

this plane of existence at any time.

Second, Sura 43:61 is seen by some to point to the return of Jesus immediately prior to

the Last Hour: "And (Jesus) shall be a Sign (for the coming of) the Hour (of Judgment)." The

passage is clearly an ambiguous one, but such an interpretation is plausible and more believable

than most, given the preceding assertion.

Third, Jesus' life and ministry evince certain characteristics not seen in any of the other

Prophets. Abdullah Yusuf 'Ali sums up this uniqueness in the following manner:

> All the Prophets of whom we have any detailed knowledge, except one, had wives
>
> and children. The exception is Jesus, the son of Mary. But his life was
>
> incomplete: his ministry barely lasted three years; his mission was limited; and he
>
> was not called upon to deal with the many-sided problems that arise in a highly
>
> organized society or State."[32]

Thus the return of Jesus is necessitated by Allah's unwillingness to leave the life of one

of His prophets incomplete. If Jesus was "taken up" at approximately the age of 30, and upon

his return will establish a kingdom of forty years or so duration (according to many), the two

periods combined yield a lifespan of 70 years – the normal length of life accorded to humans.

While nothing is said in either the Qur'an or the *hadith* about a possible marriage and

fatherhood, these would not be out of the question given the length of time of his second sojourn.

 Thus the second coming of 'Isa allows not only for a final vindication of his prophethood, in

that he defeats the enemies of God and reigns in great power and glory, but also affords him the

more mundane privileges of humanity, those of "hearth and home."

Premillennialism

Students of eschatology will immediately recognize the parallels of al-Suyuti's thinking

to the Christian doctrine known as *pre-millennialism*. This interpretation of history was present

in the early church,[33] began to fade after Constantine's conversion, and died out almost entirely

after its refutation by Augustine early in the fifth century CE until it was revived again after the

Protestant Reformation.[34] The characteristics of this apocalyptic scheme are as follow:

1. There will be a time period of indeterminate duration that will be characterized by

rumors of wars, "nation rising against nation and kingdom against kingdom," and "famines and earthquakes in various places" (see Matthew 24:4-7).

2. At the end of this period a "Great Tribulation" will occur (*Matthew* 24:21-22). Believed by most commentators to be seven years in length, this period is divided into two sections of 3 ½ years each (these numbers being derived from literal interpretations of Daniel's 70th week (see *Daniel* 9:27, amplified by John in the *Apocalypse*, chapters 12:6 and 13:5).

3. Antichrist (or "the beast") appears during this seven year period, and reigns for forty-two months (cf. *2 Thessalonians* 2:3-12 and *Apocalypse* 13:5).

4. Jesus descends from heaven, accompanied by "the voice of the archangel and the trumpet call of God," and the righteous dead are raised to life at his coming (cf. *1 Thessalonians* 4:16-17). He then slays the Antichrist (cf. *2 Thessalonians* 2:8 and *Apocalypse* 19:19-21).

5. A thousand year kingdom of peace is established, presided over by Jesus who rules as King in the line of David, his physical ancestor (*Apocalypse* 20:4-6).

The parallels between the above scheme and that outlined by al-Suyuti are so precise that it is nearly impossible to conceive of the Muslim concept being developed independently of the Jewish and Christian traditions. It is admittedly difficult, however, to trace a direct connection. The Qur'an and the *ahadith* were assembled during a period lasting from the second quarter of the seventh century CE into the ninth century. But as has already been noted, the premillennial scheme was all but absent from Christianity after the fifth century and did not reappear until the late 1500s. The following suggestions may be made as to where Muslim scholars might have

encountered premillennial thinking during the early Middle Ages:

1. In the writings referred to previously and below, such as *Enoch, Esdras,* and *Baruch*, and in the writings of Irenaeus, Papias, Justin Martyr and Tertullian, to name only a few. During and after the original expansionary efforts of the seventh century, Muslims encountered all of the Christian and Jewish thinking contained in the various libraries that came under Islamic hegemony.

2. It is possible that the strongly premillennial (and "heretical") Montanist sect, members of which sought refuge in the Eastern regions of the Roman Empire in areas later conquered early on by Muslims, may have played a role. Schaff notes that "As a separate sect, the Montanists or Tertullianists … run down into the 6th century. At the time of Epiphanius, the sect had many adherents in Phrygia, Galatia, Cappadocia, Cilicia and Constantinople."[35]

3. Premillennialism did survive through the medieval period in the scattered teachings of individual Christians, most of whom lived along the Mediterranean and Southern France, near Spain. Robert Lerner mentions Joachim of Fiore (1180s), Alexander Minorita (1235), Peter Olivi (1297), Arnold of Villanova (1290), and John of Rupecissa (1345).[36] It is conceivable that the writings of any of these persons could have come to the attention of al-Suyuti or his immediate predecessors.

It should be noted that this particular eschatological orientation was derived by each of the three "Western" religious systems in the midst of specific historical circumstances. Messianic and millennial ideas were found at crisis points throughout the history of early Judaism, specifically in connection with the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities. Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel,

and Zechariah—in whose writings are found the bulk of canonical Jewish eschatology—operated in the chaotic contexts of war and conquest. Millennial hopes appeared again in *2 Enoch* 32:2 - 33:2, *2 Esdras* 7:28 and *2 Baruch* 40:3, reflecting the trauma of the Greek and Roman invasions. Christian premillennialism developed in the midst of the Roman persecutions, beginning with the emperors Nero and Domitian and ending with Diocletian. In such circumstances, "signs of the end" were easy to discover and expectations understandably high. The community of religious devotees in each instance was aided at least psychologically and perhaps in other ways as well by this orientation.

Writing in the 1490s, al-Suyuti may well have interpreted several recent events as having eschatological significance. The appearance of Halley's comet in 1456—advertised so widely by the Italians—was proclaimed by Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike as one of the portents of "The Hour." Astrological signs were again recorded in 1467-68 and in 1484.[37] The year 1492 was catastrophic for both the Jews and Muslims of Spain as the expulsion edicts of Ferdinand and Isabella were enacted. Seen from the perspective of a historical scheme built upon apocalypticism and the Arabic numeral system, al-Suyuti could easily come to the conclusion that the "tribulations" of the century he hoped to be the *mujaddid* of pointed to a deteriorating situation that could quite conceivably bring about the advent of the *dajjal* within another few decades, necessitating the return of 'Isa and the consummation of earth's history.

But these events did not occur, and the tenth Muslim century came and went with al-Suyuti's scheme unfulfilled. Yet another eschatological timetable was left to join the 200 year, 500 year, and 800 year predictions of earlier Muslim prognosticators. This fact leads to an inquiry as to the disposition of the *mujaddid* tradition in particular and Muslim eschatology in

general since the time of al-Suyuti.

Current Thinking Regarding the Renewers

Landau-Tasseron demonstrates with abundant evidence that "no connection originally existed between the *mujaddid* and the end of the world."[38] This fact, of course, would seem to allow for a relatively simple break to be made between the tradition itself and the eschatological framework that had grown up around it, and such a break was indeed made by some historians. Sharaf al-Haqq Muhammad Ashraf al-'Azimabadi, for instance, suggests names for the renewers of the tenth, eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries in a work entitled *'Awn al-ma'bud 'ala Sunan Abi Dawud* (Delhi, 1322 A.H.).[39] Students of West and North African history will immediately recognize the use of the *mujaddid/mahdi* concept in several of the reform movements initiated in relatively recent times. In Futa Jallon, the scholar Salih al-Fullani (1752/3 - 1803/4) was considered by the Indian scholar Sharaf al-Haqq Muhammad Ashraf to have been one of the two *mujaddids* of the twelfth century, the other being Murtada al-Zabidi, al-Fullani's teacher. Al-Fullani was initiated into the Sammaniyya Sufi order while in Mecca and remained in that city until his death, gathering many students to himself. Four of his followers were known to have come from West Africa.[40]

In the Sahara, Sidi al-Mukhtar al-Kunti led a resurgence of the Qadiriyya Sufi order upon his accession to the office of *khalifa* of the order in 1756/7. Al-Mukhtar claimed to be both a *mujtahid* and the *mujaddid* of the 13th century. His revival spread throughout the Sahara and Sahel, and even further inland to Futa Jallon and the Upper Niger.[41]

Slightly later appeared Shehu Usuman dan Fodio, whose campaign to revive and purify Hausaland led to the establishment of the Sokoto caliphate. These events occurred around the

year 1200/1785-86—i.e., the beginning of the thirteenth Muslim century. The fact that "twelve

centuries" had come and gone was linked with the fact that "twelve caliphs" had also reigned,

and it was believed to be time for the Mahdi to arrive. Interestingly, B.G. Martin attributes the

widespread belief that the Mahdi would come in the 13th Muslim century to al-Suyuti, who in a

pamphlet entitled *Al-Kashf 'an mujawaza hadhihi'l-ummat al-alf* wrote: "Naim also stated on the

authority of Abu Qubayl ... that people expect the Mahdi in the year 1204."[42] While this would

seem to conflict with al-Suyuti's beliefs regarding the tenth century, it may be that he is here

simply reflecting the beliefs of other writers, who were following a numerological system based

on the religiously significant number "twelve" (drawn from Judaism and Christianity) as opposed

to the more "cultural" use of the number "ten." In any case, Dan Fodio—perhaps due to his Sufi

background—refused to claim the literal title of Mahdi but instead spiritualized the concept,

asking his followers to "observe that I am not the ... Mahdi, yet I have been clothed with his

mantle, in keeping with the pattern; for every era has a Mahdi ... like the wind heralding the

raincloud, so precisely am I, in relation to the Mahdi."[43]

Not so self-effacing was the Sudanese reformer Muhammad Ahmad ibn Abdallah, who

100 years later deliberately used the *mujaddid/mahdi* idea to justify his anti-Egyptian and anti-

European uprising that was underway at the turn of the 14th Muslim century (1881-1882).[44]

The Lahori sect of the Ahmadiyya movement has also made use of the *mujaddid*

tradition, claiming that their founder Mirza Ghulam Ahmad was the renewer of the fourteenth

century (in this they distinguish themselves from the Qadiani sect, which designates Ghulam

Ahmad a Prophet of the same order as Muhammad rather than simply a *mujaddid*). The

following is a list of the candidates for this position that the Ahmadiyya has put forward for the

first fourteen centuries of Islamic history:

First Century	'Umar Ibn 'Abd al-Aziz
Second Century	Imam Shafi'i, Ahmad ibn Hanbal
Third Century	Abu Sharh, Abu al-Hasan al-'Ashari
Fourth Century	Abu Ubaidullah of Nisapur, Qadi Abu Bakr al-Baqillani
Fifth Century	Muhammad al-Ghazali
Sixth Century	Al-Sayyid Abdul Qadir al-Jilani
Seventh Century	Imam ibn Taymiyya, Khwajah Mu'in al-Din al-Chishti
Eighth Century	Ibn Hajar 'Asqalani, Salih ibn 'Umar
Ninth Century	Sayyid Muhammad Jaunpuri
Tenth Century	Imam al-Suyuti
Eleventh Century	Al-Shaikh Ahmad of Sirhind
Twelfth Century	Shah Wali Allah Muhadduth Dehlavi
Thirteenth Century	Sayyid Ahmad Barelavi
Fourteenth Century	Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad[45]

There are several items of note concerning this list. First, al-Shafi'i does not stand as the undisputed *mujaddid* of the second century; he must share this distinction with Ahmad ibn Hanbal. There is therefore no attempt here to put forth a claim for the superiority of the Shafi'i school. Second, there is a strong Sufi influence seen in this list, an influence which was lacking in previous compilations. The names of Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani and Khwajah Mu'in al-Din al-

Chishti are noteworthy for this reason. Third, al-Suyuti's claim to the position—while disputed

by some during his own time—was recognized as valid by at least some Muslims in later

centuries. Finally, the claimant for the title in the eleventh century has appended to his name the

title *Mujaddid Alf Thani*, introducing a new distinctive to the position in his statement that his

knowledge

> had been derived from the illumination of the lamp of prophethood ... and the
>
> possessor of this knowledge and wisdom is the *mujaddid* of this thousand years ...
>
> and it must be remembered that a *mujaddid* has passed at the head of each century
>
> but the *mujaddid* of a thousand years is different from the *mujaddid* of the
>
> century.[46]

Here is seen again the importance of "Arabic numerology"—the significance given to

tens, hundreds, and thousands—as well as a reference to millennial concepts, with special status

accorded to a renewer who came at the head of a millennium (a "super-*mujaddid*," so to speak).

According to al-Suyuti's original scheme, such status would naturally have been accorded to 'Isa,

but even when the *mujaddid* turned out to be other than 'Isa, significance is accorded in any case.

Recent claimants for the office of *mujaddid* have been few, although there have been

some attempts to put forth a claim to be the *Mahdi*. Shukri Mustafa of Takfir wal-Hijra, Taha al-

Samawi of Jama'at al-Muslimin lil-Takfir, and Muhammad al-Qahtani of al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin

(The Muslim Brotherhood) have all made this claim or have had the claim made for them, their

activity centering around the late 1970s and early 1980s (i.e. the head of the fifteenth Muslim

century).[47] The year 1400 A.H. began in 1979, the year of the Iranian Revolution, and so

naturally the name of the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini has been mentioned in this connection.[48]

But the examples enumerated above indicate a major change with regard to the *mujaddid* tradition. After the tenth century of Islamic history, the concept seems to have become limited to highly localized situations (i.e., the claims of Usuman dan Fodio, Muhammad Ahmad al-Mahdi, and other figures such as those mentioned above) or to "fringe" groups such as the Ahmadiyya, who apply the concept in a somewhat specialized--one might even say strictly pragmatic--sense. The doctrine may thus be considered to have declined in importance within orthodox Muslim theology and historiography. Certainly this is true with regard to mahdism, for as Dekmejian notes, "Because of its claim to divine sanction and primitivist appeal, the mahdist type of leadership has not enjoyed a widespread following in the contemporary period."[49] With such a de-emphasis, Islam is mirroring the actions of both Jewish and Christian groups, who, due to repeated disappointments regarding projected dates for eschatological events, have learned to let their apocalyptic expectations "float" in a more open-ended view of the future. After all, it was 'Isa (Jesus) who clearly stated during his ministry on earth that "no one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (*Matthew* 24:36).

NOTES

1. Bernard McGinn, "Introduction: John's Apocalypse and the Apocalyptic Mentality," in Richard K. Emmerson and Bernard McGinn, *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), pp. 8-9.

2. Al-Suyuti's autobiography *Al-Tahadduth bi ni'mat Allah* has been published by Elizabeth Sartain (2 volumes, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

3. See J.O. Hunwick, "Ignaz Goldziher on Al-Suyuti," *The Muslim World* 68 No. 2 (1978): 86 n. 24.

4. Ella Landau-Tasseron, "The 'Cyclical Reform': A Study of the *Mujaddid* Tradition," *Studia Islamica* 70 (1989): 87 n. 32.

5. Translation of this manuscript was a joint project of Dr. Robert Kraemer, Dr.

Hamidu Boboyi and the present author, under the supervision of Dr. John O. Hunwick, professor of History and Religion at Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois.

6. Al-Suyuti, *Risala*, folio 15, lines 19-23.

7. There is discussion as to whether "head" refers to the beginning or the end of a century. Hunwick demonstrates that al-Suyuti definitely interprets the term to mean the end of a century (see Hunwick, "Goldziher," p. 85 n.20.)
      From the standpoint of the present discussion, however, the difference of a few years involved from the end of a century to the beginning of a century would not be of significance as far as the overall psychological effect is concerned.

8. Al-Suyuti, *Risala*, folio 13, lines 1-8.

9. Ibid., folio 16, lines 27-31, folio 17, lines 1-7.

10. R. Hrair Dekmejian, "Islamic Revival: Catalysts, Categories, and Consequences," in *The Politics of Islamic Revivalism: Diversity and Unity*, edited by Shireen T. Hunter (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), p. 5).

11. Al-Hajjaj was Abu Muhammad al-Hajjaj al-Thakafi (41/661 - 95/714), the Ummayad governor noted for the sternness of his reign. Dietrich remarks:
      "There is no doubt that in the interests of the state al-Hajjaj could be stern
      and pitiless ... but the mass executions and other atrocities which were
      attributed to him are the inventions of his enemies" (see A. Dietrich, "Al-
      Hadjadj," *Encyclopedia of Islam (New Edition)*, v. III, p. 42). Al-Suyuti
      was apparently convinced of the legitimacy of the more negative
      reputation that al-Hajjaj had acquired.

12. Al-Ma'mun was Abu'l-'Abbas 'Abd Allah ibn Harun al-Rashid al-Ma'mun (170/786 - 218/833) who, in a move dictated by political expedience, supported the views of the Mu'tazilites regarding the createdness of the Qur'an, over against the official (and hence popular) belief that the Qur'an was uncreated.

13. The *'ulama* of this time period were particularly harsh toward Manicheanism, refusing to grant adherents of this religion *dhimmi* status, imposing upon them instead the choice of converting to Islam or execution.

14. The Carmathians (or Qaramita) were the adherents of a branch of the Ismaili Shi'ites. In 923, under the leadership of Abu Tahir al-Jannabi, they began a series of raids which culminated in 930 with the conquest of Mecca. It was at this time that the Black Stone was carried off. The stone was returned in 951 after a large ransom was paid by the 'Abbasid government.

15. Abu 'Ali al-Mansur al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah (375/985 - 411/1021) was the sixth Fatimid caliph, famous for his persecutions, particularly of Christians, and for the near-divinity which his supporters attributed to him, particularly the Druze.

16. Timur Lenk (1336-1404), an alleged descendant of Ghengis Khan, who conquered Transoxiana, the Middle East, and parts of India and Turkey, defeating the Ottoman Sultan Bayezid I in 1402.

17. Sunni 'Ali was ruler of the Songhay Empire in West Africa from A.D. 1463 - 1493. His attempt to maintain parity between Muslims and non-Muslims in his empire earned him the wrath of the *'ulama* and he was overthrown by Askia Al-Hajj Muhammad. The latter sought justification for his actions from ʿAbd al-Karim al-Maghili (d. 1503), an Algerian scholar who was named by Sidi al-Mukhtar al-Kunti (see page 20 above) as a *mujaddid* of the 9th century, making him thus a co-contender with al-Suyuti. See   J.O. Hunwick, *Sharia in Songhay: The Replies of al-Maghili to the Questions of Askia al-Hajj Muhammad* (London: The British Academy, 1985), and Nehemia Levtzion and John O. Voll, *Eighteenth Century Renewal and Reform in Islam* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1987), p. 55.

18. Al-Suyuti, *Risala*, folio 18, lines 21-22.

19. Ibid., folio 11, line 14.

20. Muhammad ibn Rasul al-Husayni al-Barzinji, *Al-Isha'a li-ishrat al-sa'a* (Cairo, 1384 A.H.), p. 68. Cited by Jane Smith and Yvonne Haddad, *TheIslamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981), p. 212 n.4.

21. Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, trans. Franz Rosenthal, ed. N.J. Dawood (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967), p. 260.

22. Al-Suyuti, *Risala*, folio 14, lines 16-18.

23. Ibid., lines 18-19.

24. D.S. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964), pp. 291-292. See also Christopher Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (NY: Crossroad, 1982), pp. 163ff.

25. Cited in ibid., p. 213. See also Jean Danielou, *The Theology of Jewish*

Christianity, vol. 1 of *A History of Early Christian Doctrine Before the Council of Nicaea*, trans. John A. Baker (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964), pp. 397-403.

26. *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Book 34, Chapter 104, Tradition 425.

27. Michael Cook, "An Early Islamic Apocalyptic Chronicle," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 52 (January 1993): 26.

28. Al-Suyuti, *Risala*, folio 14, lines 23-27.

29. Ibn Khaldun states in his *Muqaddimah*: "It has been accepted by all Muslims in every epoch, that at the end of time a man from the family (of the Prophet) will without fail make his appearance, one who will strengthen Islam and make justice triumph ... he will be called the Mahdi. Following him, the Antichrist will appear, together with all the subsequent signs of the day of Judgment. After the Mahdi, Jesus will descend and kill the Antichrist. Or, Jesus will descend together with the Mahdi, and help him kill the Antichrist." (Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, pp. 257-258).

30. According to A. Abel, the Dajjal will reign either 40 days or 40 years (see Bernard Lewis, et.al. (eds), "The Dadjdjal," *The Encyclopedia of Islam (New Edition)* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1965). In al-Suyuti's sequence, the former is the only possible time span.

31. According to tradition, 'Isa will also destroy the cross, decimate Christians and Christian places of worship, and inaugurate a period of peace and   abundance characterized by adherence to the Shari'a (see A.J. Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed* (London: Frank Cass and Co., 1965), p. 244. Regarding this belief, Wensinck is citing the writings of al-Baidawi).

[32] Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Quran: Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Brentwood, MD: Amana Corporation, 1989), p. 599, n. 1861.

33. Premillennialism characterized the thinking of Irenaeus, Papias, Justin Martyr, and Tertullian. See Stanley J. Grenz, *The Millennial Maze*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), pp. 39ff.

34. See Lorraine Boettner, *The Millennium* (Rev. edition) (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1984), who states: "... so thoroughly did Augustine do his work in refuting [premillennialism] that it practically disappeared for a thousand years as an organized system of thought, and was not seriously put forth again until the time of the Protestant Reformation. At that time it was advocated by numerous independent groups but was solidly opposed by the Reformers themselves. Since that time it has never been strong enough to be

written into any of the principal church creeds" (p. 366).

35. See Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church, v. 2 – Ante-Nicene Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1910), p. 421.

36. See Robert E. Lerner, "The Medieval Return of the Thousand-Year Sabbath," in *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, edited by Richard K. Emmerson and Bernard McGinn (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992).

37. See David B. Ruderman, "Hope Against Hope: Jewish and Christian Messianic Expectations in the Late Middle Ages," in *Exile and Diaspora* (Jerusalem Ben-Zvi Institute and Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1994), pp. 186ff.

38. Landau-Tasseron, "Cyclical Reform," p. 81.

39. Cited in Hunwick, "Goldziher," p. 85, n.20.

40. See J.O. Hunwick, "Salih al-Fullani of Futa Jallon: An Eighteenth Century Scholar and *Mujaddid*," *Bulletin IFAN* 40 (1978): 879-85.

41. See Levtzion and Voll, *Eighteenth Century Renewal*, p. 33-34.

42. See B.G. Martin, *Muslim Brotherhoods in 19th Century Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 205 n.41.

43. Cited in ibid., p. 27.

44. See P.M. Holt, *The Mahdist State in the Sudan (2nd Edition)*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971).

45. See Maulana Muhammad Ali, "The Mujaddids and Their Claims," *The Islamic Review* (May 1981): 21.

46. Cited in ibid.

47. See Dekmejian, "Islamic Revival," p. 14.

48. Moojan Momen, for instance, states that "As the momentum of the Revolution increased, the anticipation of Khumayni's return became like the anticipated return of the Hidden Imam [i.e., the Mahdi] ... then came the day of Khumayni's return--the anticipated parousia. The crowds were shouting for "Imam Khumayni" and were confident that a new age had dawned with justice for all" (Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi'ism* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1985), p. 289).

Khomeini refused this title and would never speak of himself as any more than a representative of the Hidden Imam (the Mahdi). His followers, however, continued to accord him this position, right up until the time of his death.

49. Dekmejian, "Islamic Revival," p. 14.