In the wake of World War II, students of European sovereignty began to ask more urgently what new thinking could unbind politics from sovereignty and its annihilating legacy of internment camps and killing fields.¹ How can the power constitutive of sovereignty—to suspend the law to produce the state of emergency and to name the enemy (who is not the neighbor?)—be undone epistemologically?² An ongoing

² The prominent German legal scholar of sovereignty, Carl Schmitt, famously argued for these two criteria of the sovereign in his diptych of works: Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of
MAKE AND LET DIE

search for an antidote has turned contemporary theorists to theology and psychoanalysis as resources for a “cure.” A recent reading of the Epistle of Paul to the Romans by the noted theorist, Giorgio Agamben, for example, has inspired him to argue for an unsovereign mode of temporality—messianic time—in which sovereign juridical conditions are transformed such that justice performs without the law, yet, paradoxically without abolishing it. He visualizes messianic


Agamben, The Time that Remains, passim, especially 98, 107.
time as a pearl inside an oyster. Just as the bivalve secretes its nacre around an irritant, so messianic time contracts around *chronos* (empty chronological time) and brings forth *kairos*, the time of the singular occasion that “seizes” *chronos*.\(^5\) Agamben’s pearl also exemplifies the centrality of figural thinking to his understanding of messianic time. In messianic figuralism, the type (for example, Adam, or an oyster) and its antitype (Messiah, or a pearl) no longer stand in the “biunivocal” figural relation (Agamben’s word) as they once did in the figural exegesis of the Middle Ages; instead, according to him, “the messianic is not one of two terms in the typological relations, it is the relation itself” and it is decisive.\(^6\) Students of Carl Schmitt (1888–1985), the brilliant and troubling theorist of sovereignty, will hear in Agamben’s rhetorical decisiveness echoes of Schmitt, who famously stated that the sovereign is the one who “decides” on the suspension of the law and the naming of the enemy.\(^7\) Even as Agamben hopes to undo modern sovereignty, formally he participates in what I call typological decision, an act which embodies a historically Christian view of sovereign authority.

Schmitt also claimed that the sovereign exception in jurisprudence is analogous to the miracle in theology.\(^8\) Schmitt was not the first to grasp this political-theological toggle between exception and miracle. Thomas Hobbes, whom Schmitt read closely, astutely observed in his *Leviathan* that one man’s miracle is another man’s plague, in other words,


\(^8\) Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 36.
the toggle can be deadly. It is in this gap between the exception and the miracle that Eric L. Santner has proposed neighbor-love as an antidote to the sovereign naming of the enemy. In his words, neighbor-love is the ‘‘miraculous’’ opening of a social link based on the creaturely deposits left by the [sovereign] state of exception that, as Freud indicates, structurally haunts the subject in and through the formation of the superego.” Santner contends that the past at issue in contemporary theories of messianic time and the miraculous is a traumatic past: “the element of the past that is at issue has the structural status of trauma, a past that in some sense never fully took place and so continues to insist in the present precisely as drive destiny, the symptomal torsion of one’s being in the world, one’s relation to a capacity to use the object-world.”

In this chapter I want to address something that, from my perspective as a trained medievalist, troubles me in these accounts of messianic and miraculous antidotes to sovereignty. In Agamben’s conceptualization, medieval figural thinking is something to be overcome in the messianic; for Santner, who thinks temporality through trauma (sovereignty, he reminds us, is itself a mode of temporality), it could be that the medieval has not yet arrived, and that it always already arrived in the death drive (those implacable forms of repetition compulsion). I am interested in how the messianic and miraculous as conceived by Agamben and Santner seem to

9 On Thomas Hobbes’s seeing that one man’s miracle is another man’s plague, see his Leviathan, eds. G.A.J. Rogers and Karl Schuhmann (Bristol: Thoemmes Continuum, 2003), 344–351; for instance, regarding Moses and Pharaoh, Hobbes writes: “And when he [Pharaoh] let them goe at last, not the Miracles persuaded him, but the plagues forced him to do it” (347). Hobbes discusses the sovereign “decision” of the miracle at 350–351.
10 Santner, On Creaturely Life, 75.
11 Santner, The Neighbor, 126.
12 Santner insightfully observes that sovereignty is a mode of temporalization, but somehow, I think, he fails to work through the implications: Santner, Psychotheology, 60–61; Santner, On Creaturely Life, 66–67.
contract around each other.\textsuperscript{13} What happens, this chapter asks, if the messianic and the miraculous are thought in parallax (looking at the same object from two separate vantage points)—does a medieval enemy lodge in the blind-spot of Agamben’s messianic; does the despot (the excess of the sovereign) haunt Santner’s miracle-making?\textsuperscript{14} I answer these questions in the affirmative, showing how the figure of the undead Muslim recurs in the various philosophers and theologians whose arguments support Agamben’s and Santner’s claims. The undead Muslim as the irritant around which the pearls of messianic time slowly accrete is thus the subject of my study. In what follows, I examine how contemporary messianic thinkers have unconsciously laminated as “dead neighbors” the traumatic irritants productive of the messianic pearl. In order for a messianic pearl to glow miraculously (as Agamben and Santner would wish it to), the new thinking of today needs to engage, I argue, in an act of neighbor-love, whereby it embraces the untimely, undead excarnations of a history of typological damage.\textsuperscript{15} Otherwise, I caution, these traumatic dead neighbors remain undead and driven in the drive of critical theories of sovereignty.

\textbf{THE UNDEAD TURK}

Let me open my archive of indigestible remainders with a brief investigation of what is arguably the most famous mod-

\textsuperscript{13} In so doing it joins with the project of Davis, \textit{Periodization and Sovereignty}.

\textsuperscript{14} For the fantastical over-proximity of notions of the despot and the sovereign forged in the Enlightenment, see Alain Grosrichard, \textit{The Sultan’s Court: European Fantasies of the East}, trans. Liz Heron (New York: Verso, 1998). The psychoanalytic discourse of neighbor-love, routed through the concept of the Thing (“excessive presence and radical absence”) echoes the discourse of the despot in uncanny ways (see note 3 for references).

\textsuperscript{15} I take this notion of the indigestible remainder from Santner, \textit{Psychotheology}, 29. He discusses the indigestible remainder as a hard kernel that can be “neither naturalized nor historicized.”
ern thesis of messianic time, that is, Walter Benjamin’s first thesis in *On the Philosophy of History*, completed in Paris in the winter of 1940 just as the Wehrmacht was breaking through the last line of French defenses. This renowned text reads as follows:

The story is told of an automaton constructed in such a way that it could play a winning game of chess, answering each move of an opponent with a countermove. A puppet in Turkish attire and with a hookah in its mouth sat before a chessboard placed on a large table. A system of mirrors created the illusion that this table was transparent from all sides. Actually, a little hunchback who was an expert chess player sat inside and guided the puppet’s hand by means of strings. One can imagine a philosophical counterpart to this device. The puppet called “historical materialism” is to win all the time. It can easily be a match for anyone if it enlists the services of theology, which today, as we know, is wizened and has to keep out of sight.¹⁶

Benjamin’s striking image draws upon a famous automaton fabricated in the late eighteenth century.¹⁷ This chess-playing machine, dubbed “the Turk,” wended its sensational way through the salons of Vienna, Paris, London, and on to New York.


The Turk inspired Benjamin’s dialectical image of the relations between historical materialism—philosophy in the guise of a Turkish puppet—and theology—the hunchbacked dwarf hidden in the machine. In a fine illustration (see Figure 1) of just one of the many efforts made during the eighteenth century to crack the illusionist gimmick of the Turk, the artist, you will observe, exposes the mechanical gears of this automaton as well as the hiding space where, it was speculated, the human agent (imagined by Benjamin as a “buckliger Zwerg,” a hunchbacked dwarf) sat and pulled the strings of the puppet, whose gloved hand moved across the chessboard as it played with a contender from the audience.

Benjamin had become acquainted with the Turk through a brilliant essay by Edgar Allan Poe (via its translation by Baudelaire). In 1836 Poe had attended a few performances of
the chess-playing machine in Richmond, Virginia. Like many before him, Poe tried to figure out its secret workings. In his subsequent publication on the phenomenon, Poe meticulously observed the Turkish puppet, also known popularly as the “oriental sorcerer.” Here is an excerpt from his eyewitness description:

The external appearance and, especially, the deportment of the Turk, are when we consider them as imitations of life, but very indifferent imitations. The countenance evinces no ingenuity, and is surpassed, in its resemblance to the human face, by the very commonest of wax-works. The eyes roll unnaturally in the head, without any corresponding motions of the lids or brows. The arm, particularly, performs its operations in an exceedingly stiff, awkward, jerking, and rectangular manner.

Poe’s concise sketch captured what contemporary theorists would term the undeadness of the Turkish puppet. Santner, in his two recent studies *On the Psychotheology of Everyday Life* (2001) and *On Creaturely Life* (2006), defines undeadness as follows: “an internal alienness that has a peculiar sort of vitality and yet belongs to no form of life.”\(^{18}\) The undeadness of the chess-playing automaton with its undecidability between what Poe called the “oriental human” and “pure machine” also fascinated Benjamin. He used this undecidability to imagine a transformative temporality, which he called a *Jetzt-Zeit*, a messianic time, in which the undead Turk would be animated and the hunch of the dwarf would be straightened.\(^{19}\) Historical materialism, Benjamin believed, had the capacity to read a “unique experience with the past” as it flashed in the present.

Benjamin based his concept of the miraculous and messianic *Jetzt-Zeit* on a structure of sign and fulfillment. He

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hoped that his new philosophy of historical materialism would reconstitute this semiotic structure of the theological miracle. By imagining the dwarf who pulls the Turk’s strings specifically as a “hunchbacked dwarf,” he further intensified the theological overtones of his dialectical image. Those readers of Benjamin familiar with the Book of Leviticus (21:20), would know that among the list of those blemished chosen people forbidden to make bread offerings to God were included the “crookbacked or dwarf” (according to the King James Bible); the “bucklig oder verkümmert” (according to Martin Luther); and most significantly “ein Buckliger oder ein Zwerg,” according to the German translation of the Hebrew text of Leviticus undertaken in the mid-1920s by Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig, renowned German-Jewish interlocutors of Benjamin. Students of Leviticus also know that in close proximity to Chapter 21 is to be found the famous proof-text of neighbor-love. In Leviticus 19:18–34, God enjoins his chosen people to love their neighbor as themselves. Benjamin’s dialectical image of the new thinking of messianic time thus juxtaposes the ghostly visual and acoustical effects of an undead Muslim and the scriptural echoes of a blemished Jew banned by God from ritual acts of sacrifice—but enjoined, nonetheless, to practice neighbor-love.

MACHINES WITHIN MACHINES

For medieval scholars, Benjamin’s Turk does not look much different from Christian figural machines eschewed, as we have already seen, by Agamben. In his depiction and discussion of the typological wheel of fortune, Jeffrey Librett has noted that each rotation of the typological gears—from literal, then to figural, and around again to truth—is always reversible and doubled. As the typological wheel turns, the

21 Jeffrey S. Librett, The Rhetoric of Cultural Dialogue: Jews and Ger-
figura, the Christian, is always at excarnating risk of becoming Jewish (again), becoming the littera, the Jew: “the literal can always come to seem the mere figure of what figures it, which is henceforth rendered literal (or in any case, … it can always come to seem the figure of something else, one knows not what).”22 What this Christian reading machine radically forecloses is becoming Muslim; such an incarnational possibility is not even entertained. In order to stop the typological spin that could render the becoming-Jewish of the Christian, or (even more fearful) the becoming-Muslim of either Christian or Jew, the Christian typologist has to decide.

It is just such a typological decision, I argue, that joins medieval typology to the form of sovereignty analyzed by Schmitt. He who decides typology, then, is just like the sovereign, thus typology and sovereignty are closely bound. With Schmitt’s political theology in mind (and Benjamin knew Schmitt’s work), let us take another look at Benjamin’s Turk. In his first thesis, you will recall, Benjamin described how the automaton produced its illusions through a “system of mirrors” (ein System von Spiegeln). Recent theoretical discussions of Benjamin’s notion of Jetzt-Zeit, messianic time, especially by Agamben, function, I think, illusionistically, just like the system of mirrors that had rendered the chess-playing automaton believable to its viewing public. In their play of illusionary reflections these contemporary theoretical texts almost manage to vanish the medieval gears of the typological reading machine that are peeking out from Benjamin’s image. The typological relation, as we have seen, is key to Agamben’s argument about messianic time as a cure for sovereignty: he claims, as you will recall, that it is the typological relation (the relation of littera and figura) that suspends the sovereign’s decision and offers a release, or perhaps an unplugging, from its undead existence. Agamben further asserts that it is the very typological relation itself that trans-

mans from Moses Mendelssohn to Richard Wagner and Beyond (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000); his typological wheel of fortune is found at 21.
22 Librett, Rhetoric, 13.
forms temporality from *chronos* (the empty, mechanical time of typological decision) to *kairos*, messianic time.\(^{23}\) For Agamben there can be no reversibility of the *littera* and *figura*; like a sovereign Agamben thus determines the figurality of messianic time.

**MYSTIC GRINDINGS**

![Capital: The Mystic Mill (twelfth century). Vézelay Basilica, France. Photograph: Art History Images.](image_url)

Agamben is not alone in his figural decisionism, and I want to offer two more examples of such decisionism drawn from

\(^{23}\) Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 74.
contemporary commentary on messianic time and miracles. In my first example, a stony piece of medieval sculpture crops up as an indigestible remainder of messianic thinking. Like pebbles in a shoe, this carving irritates Jacob Taubes’s study, *The Political Theology of Paul*. Taubes, a professor of Jewish Studies and Hermeneutics at the Free University of Berlin and an interlocutor of Carl Schmitt, gave the lectures upon which this book is based in 1987 at Heidelberg, just a few days before his death from cancer. The frontispiece to the English translation features a photograph of one of the famous nave capitals of the Romanesque church at Vézelay, Burgundy (see Figure 2). The iconography of the carving renders the typological theme of the Mystic Mill. Moses (the *littera*, or type, of Paul) pours grain into the chute of a mill.

As its gears grind, Paul, apostle and *figura*, stooped in the corner of the capital, catches the refined flour in a sack. The sculpture, which dates to the third decade of the twelfth century, was carved at a time when Vézelay was a contested node in the monastic network of the abbey of Cluny, arguably the greatest abbey of Western Christendom. Cluny and the popes who reigned over Christendom in the late eleventh and twelfth centuries were closely bound. Less than a generation before the Vézelay carving, the Cluniac Pope, Urban II, had traveled to Burgundy to call the First Christian Crusade, in 1095. In 1144, Bernard of Clairveaux stood on the church steps at Vézelay to preach the Second Christian Crusade against Muslims.

Why is this particular photograph of a medieval sculpture from the church at Vézelay set as the frontispiece to Taubes’s

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24 The typological rhetoric of such sculptural programs has been elucidated by Rachel Dressler in her study of the West Façade of Chartres Cathedral, a sculptural ensemble contemporaneous with Vézelay. See Rachel Dressler, “*Deus Hoc Vult*: Ideology, Identity, and Sculptural Rhetoric at the Time of the Crusades,” *Medieval Encounters* 1 (1995): 188–218. Dressler observes and annotates how “typological thinking was deeply ingrained in medieval Christianity and led to the use of an Old Testament paradigm as part of recruiting and victory rhetoric during the First Crusade” (195).
amazing midrashic reading of Paul and of the political theology of Carl Schmitt, with whom Taubes actually met in 1978 to discuss Paul? It should be noted that the same picture of this Vézelay capital had also appeared on the 1969 cover of an influential study of Paul the Apostle by Gunther Bornkamm, the Heidelberg New Testament scholar. At the moment in his lecture in which Taubes reflected on Chapter 9, Verse 13, of Paul’s Epistle to the Romans (“As it was written, Jacob have I loved but not Esau”), he produced the photograph of the Vézelay sculpture for his audience and informed them that he received this copy of the “marvelous picture” from his friend, Jan Assmann (Egyptologist extraordinaire and scholar of religious studies). Taubes went on to say that he treasured the picture and carried it around in his bag, because “with the naïveté of the medieval stonemason, it says everything for those who know how to read.”

Digressing, Taubes then linked the sculpture at Vézelay with a famous contemporaneous commentary by Suger, abbot (1122–51) of St.-Denis, Paris. To expound on the grand architectural refurbishments of his abbey, Suger wrote an account with the rather bureaucratic title, “What Was Done Under His Administration” (de rebus in administratione sua gestis), the purpose of which was to itemize the considerable costs incurred by the building program. Folded into Suger’s laundry list of expenditures can be found a theological gloss to the typological themes represented in a complex sequence of stained-glass roundels designed for the ambulatory of St.-Denis. Here is the text that Taubes extracted from Suger’s typological commentary on the Mystic Mill and recited at his seminar:

One of these [roundels], urging us onward from the material to the immaterial, represents the Apostle Paul turning a mill, and the Prophets carrying sacks to the mill. The verses of this subject are these: “By working the mill, thou, Paul, takest the flour out of the bran. / Thou makest

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25 Taubes, Political Theology, 38–39.
This short poem epitomizes the medieval Christian typological relation. Paul fulfills Moses, and the grain that will be baked into the sacred wafer of the Eucharist fulfills the Mosaic Law (from command to comestible).27 After attentively describing the sculpture of the Mystic Mill and its typological relations, Taubes decisively concluded his ruminations with a vehement disavowal of medieval typology: “Of course, this is not my Paul [original emphasis]. . . . What I have to say about Moses and Paul is naturally something else.”28 With this emphatic assertion, I argue, Taubes decides on typological decisionism. He seems to be saying, “I know that this medieval Christian typology of Paul is a stony, indigestible exegetical fragment (an always doubled and reversible relation), but


27 The “truth” of such fulfillment exploded on the sculpted tympanum of the main entry to the church at Vézelay, which grandiosely depicted the theme of Christ commissioning the Apostles to world mission. On the lintel of this tympanum all the Pliny-like monsters, those one-eyed, elephant-eared creatures inhabiting the edge of the world, march inexorably toward Christian conversion. The literature on this innovative portal is voluminous; it is best to start with the critical commentary by Dominique Iogna-Prat, Order and Exclusion: Cluny and Christendom Face Heresy, Judaism, and Islam (1000–1150), trans. Graham Robert Edwards (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 267–274.

28 Taubes, Political Theology of Paul, 39.
I, Jacob Taubes, decide on the meaning of Paul.” Put another way, Taubes offers his reader an example of the indigestible remainder of medieval Christian typology. Taubes encounters this indigestible remainder in the form of a chunk of sculpted stone and then decides it away, thus repeating by foreclosure, as I shall unfold for you shortly, the excarnating Christian battle over the semiotics of miracle-making inscribed in the Vézelay capital.

Before turning to an analysis of the medieval crusade about meaning-making, especially meaning-making and miracles, I want to offer the promised second example of typological decisionism at work in the contemporary understanding of political theology. This example moves us from a medieval stone to the accusation of “getting medieval” through magic that surfaced in the treatise, *The Star of Redemption* (1920), by the German-Jewish philosopher, Franz Rosenzweig.29 In the *Star*, Rosenzweig, like his interlocutor Benjamin, explicated his vision of a new philosophy capable of reconstituting the miracle in modernity. He argued that the semiotic structure of prefiguration and fulfillment was necessary for miracle-making and further asserted that, because the Quran lacked such a semiotic structure, Islam was incapable of miracle-making. His appraisal of Islam, not atypical of scholarship in the 1920s, has, nevertheless, broad implica-

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tions. Medievalists will recognize that Rosenzweig repeats almost verbatim the terms of the twelfth-century Christian polemic against Islam. That polemic, which justified the declaration of Muslims as the enemy (hostes) of Christendom, excluded Islam from the semiotics of miracle-making. Put another way, this polemic foreclosed Muslims from the symbolic order. Muslim bodies thus became the site where incarnation could not occur and thus became the site of excarnation. Moreover, to designate Muslim magic and sorcery, Cluniac monks used the word *mechanicum*.

These examples drawn from Taubes and Rosenzweig persuade me that the undeadness of Christian typological decisionism has insinuated itself into the heart of contemporary political theology and its theories of the philosophical and psychoanalytic miracles—the purported “cure” of messianic time. Taubes and Rosenzweig repeat a traumatic medieval battle over semiotics in which an imperializing Christendom excarnated Jews and Muslims as neighbors and declared


31 Walter Benjamin, a reader of Rosenzweig, echoes him in thesis sixteen of *On the Philosophy of History*. There Benjamin separated a redemptive philosophy (historical materialism) from the undeadness of the mechanical world (semiosis from mechanics): “This historical materialist leaves it to others to be drained by the whore called ‘Once upon a time’ in historicism’s bordello. He remains in control of his powers, man enough to blast open the continuum of history” (Benjamin, “Theses,” 262).

them political enemies (*hostes*). If an aim of contemporary theory is to release the undeadness of sovereignty, then it is necessary, I argue, to lay bare the gears that drive its traumatic, theoretical core.

**CHRISTIAN MIRACLES AND THE MECHANICS OF FORECLOSURE**

Let me recap briefly the kind of excarnational fantasies impelling medieval polemics at Cluny—the same kinds of fantasies that have crept unconsciously into contemporary theories of messianic time.³³ Such polemics are well known to medieval scholars, so I shall only offer a brief sketch here. Peter the Venerable, abbot of Cluny (1122-1160), launched

the semiotic crusade against Jews and Muslims in two treatises written in the 1140s: “Against the Jews and their inveterate obduracy” and “Against the Saracens [Islam] as a sect and heresy.”

A noteworthy aspect of these polemics was his pioneering use of translated excerpts from the Talmud to argue against Jews and his citations from his commissioned Latin translation of the Quran to attack Muslims (known as Saracens according to popular twelfth-century Christian nomenclature). He intertwined these polemics with Cluniac theories of the Eucharist as the “always and ever” incarnating miracle and also as an “always and ever” incarnating institution. The Eucharistic miracle, as Peter the Venerable theorized, provided the philosophical grounds for foreclosing Jews and Muslims from semiosis and rendering them excarnated bodies.

This is how Peter’s argument about semiosis works. He argued that it was only through “signs” (signa) that Christianity converted the world, and the world for Peter meant the nomos of the earth, oceans included. Peter launched his

34 R.I. Moore briefly reflects on some of the problems of analyzing the pincer-like movement of Christendom’s naming the enemy’s two bodies (Jews in Europe and Islam in the West) in the second edition of his famous study, The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Power and Deviance in Western Europe, 950–1250 (New York: Blackwell, 1987; 2nd edn., 2007). The first edition, which appeared in 1987, did not mention Muslims as the targets of a persecuting imaginary and the reflections in the 2007 edition do not really grapple with the stakes of omission.


attack from what he called a “congruent place” where his church (Cluny) and the church as a whole (corpus verum) conjoined or hinged at the altar of sacrifice, where the monk-priests of Cluny consecrated the bread and wine of the Eucharist. The altars of Cluny served as a sacrificial machine for Christendom (for example, when a professed Cluniac monk died, the monastery would commemorate him with the consecration of thirty hosts per day for a one-month period, which amounted to nine hundred Masses). Peter understood the Eucharist semiotically. He conceived of the Eucharist as an exclusive sign (signum incommunicatum) and a perpetual miracle (miracula) once and always (semel et semper), as he designated the temporality of the miracle in Latin. As the sign of typological truth, the Eucharist once and always fulfilled the Hebrew Scriptures. By implication the perpetual miracle of the Eucharist, as conceived by Peter, foreclosed the typological relation between Jews and Christians by deciding it once and always, since the sacrifice never ceased. Typology thus becomes a perpetual form of Christian sovereignty. By virtue of their power over signs (the Eucharist being the exclusive sign), Christians ruled the world: “because the Christian of the world is not converted to Christ without boundless signs” (“quod Christianus orbis absque signis immensis ad Christum conversus non est”).

Peter acknowledged that there had been miracles in the Hebrew dispensation—those performed by Moses in front of Pharaoh being examples—but these miracles were weak and superseded by the miraculous signa of Christ and the ongo-
ing miracle-workings of his apostles and his Christian disciples through time, even down to the monk-priests of Cluny. As for Islam, Peter vociferously denied its access to miracles. According to Peter’s concept of miraculous semiosis, Mohammed could be neither a miracle-worker nor a prophet. Peter drew a sharp distinction between Muslim fabulation and *mechanicum* (the arts of sorcery and magic) and the true miracle modeled on the transformation of substance in the Eucharist. Islam, in Peter’s eyes, could only triumph by virtue of armed force and seduction.

Peter the Venerable’s targeting of Jews and Muslims as enemies of medieval Christendom in his two polemics was nothing less than a semiological declaration of war. The Eucharist was the perfected, perpetual sign through which Christendom ruled land and sea. With the Eucharist, typological relations between the Hebrew Scriptures and the Christian New Testament were miraculously fulfilled once and always, foreclosing any possibility of an ongoing Jewish semiosis, or miracle-making. Islam was utterly bereft of semiotic capacity—its Quran, according to Peter, being only the confabulation of the Talmud and early heretical Christian writings. The Cluniacs, or *Ecclesia Cluniacensis*, under the leadership of Peter the Venerable, fabricated the institutional materiality of the Eucharist in their great Romanesque building programs (the church at Vézelay being an example). They sought to globalize the sign of “the republic of the Christian Church” and conflated the stone of the church altar, the *fabrica* of the Eucharist, with the church as a corporate institution, thus materializing sacred space as a new category. Peter worked to expel Islam from the semiotic and geographical space he fabricated and he effectively disincarnated Muslims as dead neighbors, the indigestible remainder of his political theology.

For Peter the Venerable, the perpetual miracle of Eucharistic decision and the monstrosity of undeadness (Islam) are conjoined. We can detect this joining at work in a famous

Cluniac sculptural artifact, the main portal to the church of St. Lazare in Autun (see Figure 3). The tympanum featured a novel example of Christ throned in majesty. The following sovereign inscription is chiseled on the border of the mandorla: “I alone dispose of all things and crown the just, those who follow crime I judge and punish.” In the right-hand corner of the central register of the tympanum, the leviathan rears up from the portals of hell. The sovereign miracle and the pestilential and monstrous are thus closely bound on the tympanum at Autun.

![Figure 3. Tympanum: Punishments of the Damned (twelfth century). Autun Cathedral, France. Art History Images.](image)

I want to jump from this medieval leviathan to its early-modern neighbor, the Leviathan depicted by Thomas Hobbes

in the famous engraved frontispiece of *Leviathan* (1660) (see Figure 4), which can be productively read as a version of a Romanesque portal or threshold to his treatise. We know that Hobbes based his startling depiction of a composite, artificial, sovereign body, the Leviathan, on an optical device he most likely viewed during his stay in Paris in the late 1640s.

*Figure 4. Title page of Thomas Hobbes’s *Leviathan* (1651). The British Library, London. HIP/Art Resource, New York.*

The Franciscan polymath, François Niceron, had perfected an anamorphic optical device at that time. To entertain and instruct his audiences, Niceron used fifteen images of Ottoman Sultans as the segments of representation that he resolved into the face of Louis XIII (see Figure 5). Inscribed

then in Hobbes’s frontispiece is a paradoxical miracle that produces the Western sovereign through the mechanically manipulated images of Muslim “despots”—the despot being a Western fantasy of an excarnated Muslim sovereign.43

Figure 5. Anamorphic figure of Ottoman Sultans coalescing into bust of Louis XIII. From Jean-François Niceron, La Perspective curieuse (1638), plate 69. Bibliothèque nationale de France.

illustrated in Malcolm, Aspects of Hobbes, fig. 4.

In the Time that Remains

Just as Jacob Taubes produced the traumatic kernel of messianic time in the form of the Romanesque capital from Vézelay, his lectures gathered in The Political Theology of Paul also, paradoxically, provide an opening onto ways of disassociating from this typological undeadness. In his introductory remarks made at Heidelberg, Taubes mentioned his teacher, Gershom Scholem, and Scholem’s famous study of Sabbatai Sevi (1626–76), the self-proclaimed Jewish Messiah who converted to Islam and ended up residing at the Sultan’s court in Istanbul. Taubes dramatically asks his audience, “Are we obliged to descend with him [Sabbatai Sevi] into this world of the abyss, Islam?”

Let us pause at this question. In his recent and provocative study entitled The Jew, The Arab: A History of the Enemy, Gil Anidjar tries to answer Taubes’s query. Anidjar urges scholars to think how the “consistent evacuation of the significance of the theological (‘a force without significance’ in Scholem’s own phrase) repeats the evacuation of the Muslim from the Jews in the double figure of the Messiah—the Messiah and the Muslims, the Messiah and the Mussulman—and that it remains, indeed, in force.” According to Anidjar’s critique, theories of messianic time, as currently understood and argued, especially by Giorgio Agamben, universalize the indigestible remainder of Christian typology as the dead Muslim neighbor, as the Mussulmen of the Nazi camps, which Agamben sees as the sovereign’s final decision.

I promised at the opening of this essay that I would try to conjure a threshold in the contemporary theory of political theology through which the untimely and undead could pass. I have been arguing that in order for there to be a relation between philosophy and theology that is not a murderous typological one, we need to traverse the symbolic process whereby Christian typology excarnated both Jews and Muslims. The monastic fantasy of the signifier that seized Peter

44 Taubes, Political Theology, 9.
45 Anidjar, The Jew, the Arab, 161.
the Venerable, which foreclosed semiosis to Islam, assigning it to a mechanical world of gears, and superseded semiosis for Jews, remains in force, I claim, in Benjamin’s first thesis on the concept of history. Indeed, I further contend that it is the Christian fantasy of the force and seduction of Islam and the supersession of Judaism that gives political theology today its incarnational consistency. Is it time for contemporary political theology to descend into its own abyss haunted by the dead neighbors that its typological machine has ground out? By rendering this machine inoperative, we can begin to ask what the untimely of typological time might look like.