

The Jews in Seventh-Century Palestine*

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There can be few more powerful experiences for a historian of the seventh century AD than a first visit to Jerusalem. In the Old City, the large paved area cleared in front of the Wailing Wall, which incorporates the stones remaining from Herod's Temple, backs on to old houses leading to the Haram al-Sharif, on which stands the Umayyad Bayt al-Maqdis, with its great dome dominating the whole city. On the opposite side of the cleared space, right up against the wall of the Temple, are the excavated remains of massive Umayyad buildings, probably an administrative centre. Looking over the Old City from one of the hills which ring Jerusalem, the first thing one notices, apart from the walls, is the Dome of the Rock. In comparison, Constantine's Church of the Anastasis is almost hidden from view at street level, and has to be pointed out with some difficulty, even to someone looking across from the vantage point of one of the hills.

The extensive and carefully targeted building works undertaken in Jerusalem after 1967 remind us of similar and earlier transformations of the urban landscape of Jerusalem. One of the most far-reaching of these moments of cultural transformation from my present perspective came in the 320s AD, when Constantine the Great made Jerusalem into a central place of Christian worship and pilgrimage. The seventh century provided several comparable occasions, first in the aftermath of the capture of Jerusalem by the Persians in AD 614, then with the triumphant return of the Byzantine emperor Heraclius, probably in AD 630, and then again, following rapidly and dramatically afterwards, with the surrender of the city to the Arabs and the legendary confrontation of the patriarch Sophronius with 'Umar; nor can we fail to be struck by the evident determina-

* I had the privilege of visiting Jerusalem for the first time late in 1991, as a guest of the Hebrew University, Jerusalem and the University of Tel-Aviv, with the aid of financial help from King's College London and the Academic Study Group. I am very grateful to the many friends and colleagues who made the visit so memorable, and especially to Yoram Tsafir, Yizhar Hirschfeld, Richard Harper and Benjamin Isaac. This paper is partly based on lectures given in Jerusalem and Tel-Aviv on that occasion; I must also thank audiences at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton and the Institute of Classical Studies, London, for comments and suggestions, and Nicholas de Lange for generous help.

tion of the Umayyads later in the seventh century to stamp their own identity on the city. Umayyad Jerusalem has attracted many scholars recently. Not for nothing is a notable recent collection of essays subtitled "'Abd al-Malik's Jerusalem".¹ The purpose of this article is to draw on some of the work currently under way by specialists in different disciplines on that very critical period in the history of Palestine in order to see whether it can offer a better way of approaching the still surprisingly obscure history of the Jews of Palestine in the seventh century AD, in the period of their passage from Byzantine to Islamic rule. Though a genuinely interdisciplinary and integrated approach, using archaeology, epigraphy and the full range of textual evidence, is what is needed, it is perhaps too much to hope for as yet, and I can only present the subject as seen from the perspective of a Byzantine historian; in particular, the Jewish written material, in Hebrew and Aramaic, needs to be brought together into a synthesis with the evidence from outside the Jewish tradition. But there is enough, I think, to show that despite all that has been written to date, the subject would repay further and closer study.

The study of a particular region often benefits from wider trends in scholarship, and such is also the case with the present topic. As often happens after a period of neglect, the eastern provinces during the seventh century AD have attracted an increasing amount of scholarly attention from Byzantinists in recent years.² The nature of the Islamic conquests and the actual degree of change which they brought to the former Byzantine provinces in the eastern Mediterranean are the subject of equally intense debate, which arises in this instance both from a reassessment of the historical sources and from a wealth of new archaeological evidence.³ But despite a renewal of interest in contemporary Chris-

¹ J. Raby and J. Johns, ed., *Bayt al-Maqdis. 'Abd al-Malik's Jerusalem I, Studies in Islamic Art 9.1* (Oxford 1992).

² Notable is J. Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century. The Transformation of a Culture* (Cambridge 1990); see also the papers in Averil Cameron and Lawrence I. Conrad, ed., *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East I: Problems in the Literary Sources* (Princeton 1992), with Judith Herrin, *The Formation of Christendom* (Princeton 1987). Also of major importance is the clear influence exerted in Constantinople and in Sicily and S. Italy from the seventh to the ninth centuries by various individuals from the east, especially from the milieu of Jerusalem and the monastery of Mar Saba, emphasised in a series of articles by Cyril Mango and others: see recently C.A. Mango, "Greek culture in Palestine after the Arab conquest", in G. Cavallo, G. de Gregorio and M. Maniacci, ed., *Scrittura, libri e testi nelle aree provinciali di Bisanzio, Atti del seminario di Erice*, 18-25 sett., 1988 (Spoleto 1992), 149-60.

³ For the latter, see the important area surveys in Geoffrey King and Averil Cameron, ed., *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East II. Land Use and Settlement Patterns* (Princeton 1994).

tian anti-Jewish polemic,⁴ the Jewish population of Palestine in this crucial period still demands more detailed attention than it has so far received.⁵ It will not give rise to any surprise if I add that one of the first and most difficult tasks will be to disentangle fact from fiction in the available evidence. At the same time, consideration of the Jews in Palestine in the seventh century AD (and still more, of course, in the formulation ‘the Jews in the Land of Israel’) leads us into the dangerous territory of historical and ideological/religious periodization. Not simply does it ask to be related to the conventional division of this era of Jewish history into ‘rabbinic’ and ‘geonic’ or post-rabbinic phases;⁶ it has also given rise in the past, as now, to the potentially explosive comparison between the condition of the Jews under Christian Byzantine rule and under Islam.⁷ A thoroughgoing re-examination from a historical point of view of the position of Jews

⁴ The recent articles in *Travaux et Mémoires* 11 (1991) by G. Dagron and V. Déroche are particularly important, both for the *Adversus Iudaeos* texts and for the general issues: see further below.

⁵ For the standard works on the Jews in this period see N. de Lange, “Jews and Christians in the Byzantine empire: problems and prospects”, in D. Wood, ed., *Christianity and Judaism, Studies in Church History* 29 (Oxford 1992), 15-32, and see particularly A. Sharf, *Byzantine Jewry from Justinian to the Fourth Crusade* (London and New York 1971); for the seventh century (‘the darkest age of Byzantine Jewry’), see de Lange, 23. The valuable article by S. Reif, “Aspects of medieval Jewish literacy”, in R. McKitterick, ed., *The Uses of Literacy in Early Medieval Europe* (Cambridge 1990), 143-55, rightly points out that detailed discussion of this period (as opposed to general histories), is still lacking. I am grateful to Nicholas de Lange for letting me see an unpublished paper, “The mystery of the missing Byzantine Jews”, and cf. his “Qui a tué les Juifs de Byzance?” in D. Tollet, ed., *Politique et religion dans le judaïsme ancien et médiéval* (Paris 1989), 327-33.

⁶ AD 638 is taken to mark the end of ‘primitive’ and rabbinic Judaism in P. Schäfer, *Geschichte der Juden in der Antike* (Stuttgart 1983). A parallel division exists in the frequent contrast made between ‘Palestinian’ and ‘Babylonian’ trends; for this and for periodization in Jewish history, see Reif, *art. cit.*, 135, 138-39, 140; on the Jews under Islam, see below. The term ‘Byzantine’ also has a local usage in works on Palestine, especially among archaeologists, denoting the ‘period’ ending with the Arab conquest, after which ‘Islamic’ is in standard use; this terminology is awkward for Byzantinists proper, as well as being highly question-begging.

⁷ Note the common tendency to use AD 634, 638 or 640 as *termini ante quem* or *post quem* for modern works on the Jews of Palestine: so e.g. M. Avi-Yonah, *The Jews under Roman and Byzantine Rule. A Political History from the Bar Kokhba War to the Arab Conquest* (repr. Jerusalem, 1984); G. Alon, *The Jews in their Land in the Talmudic Age (70-640 CE)* II, trans. G. Levi (Jerusalem 1984); M. Gil, *A History of Palestine, 634-1099* (Cambridge 1992); J. Prawer, ed., *The History of Jerusalem. The Early Islamic Period (638-1099)* (Jerusalem 1987) and often. It is hard to escape an element of apologetic in such period divisions.

in Palestine and elsewhere in the east in the seventh and eighth centuries could thus have consequences well beyond the immediate topics under discussion.

The importance for the history of this area of the Persian invasion of Syria and Palestine, culminating in the capture and sack of Jerusalem in AD 614, has of course long been recognized.⁸ Nevertheless, consideration of these events, as of our whole subject as represented in the Christian sources, demands a far more thoroughgoing critique than most historians have been willing to admit. As we shall see, a large element of fantasy pervades much of the contemporary material and the later Christian sources alike. This is perhaps hardly surprising, since for both Jews and Christians the Persian invasion and the discomfiture of the Byzantines brought back old hopes and fears in acutely sharpened form.⁹ When the Sasanian army returned north, taking with it the patriarch Zacharias and many Christian prisoners,¹⁰ it left behind a situation of religious and cultural turmoil. The damage and the slaughter are luridly described by contemporary Christian sources, who blame the Jews of the city for helping the invaders to round up Christian victims.¹¹ At least some of the surrounding monasteries suffered attack, including the monastery of Choziba, again if we believe contemporary witnesses from the monastery itself, although it does not seem from archaeological evidence that the general damage was in fact great.¹² Later Christian writings,

⁸ D. Olster, *The Politics of Usurpation in the Seventh Century: Rhetoric and Revolution in Byzantium* (Amsterdam 1993), deals with the earlier disturbances connected with the last year of Phocas, AD 609/10, in which Jews also figure prominently in the sources; see further below on the *Doctrina Jacobi*, and see the introduction by G. Dagron, "Juifs et chrétiens dans l'Orient du VIIe siècle. Introduction historique: entre histoire et apocalypse", *T&M* 11 (1991), 17-46, at 18-22.

⁹ See the interesting discussion by Robert Wilken, *The Land Called Holy* (New Haven 1992), chaps. 10 and 11.

¹⁰ The literary and archaeological evidence for these events is discussed by R. Schick, *The Christian Communities of Palestine in the Early Islamic Period, Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam*² (Princeton 1994), and see Dagron (n. 8), 22f. Extremely little is known of the internal situation of the eastern provinces during the period of Sasanian rule.

¹¹ The main accounts are those by 'Strategios', a monk of Mar Saba, extant in several versions, and the *Life of George of Choziba* by Antony, a fellow monk; details and discussion in Wilken, *Land Called Holy*, 202-207, and see the annotated translation of the *Life of George of Choziba* by Leah Di Segni (*Nel deserto accanto ai fratelli* [Magnano 1991]). On the *Acta of Anastasius the Persian* (ed. H. Usener, Bonn 1894) see now B. Flusin, *Saint Anastase le Perse*, 2 vols. (Paris 1993). A similarly emotional tone pervades the anacreontic poems on the subject by Sophronius, later patriarch of Jerusalem (ed. M. Gigante, Rome 1957; see Wilken, 206, 226-32).

¹² This is the view of the survey team which has worked recently on the remains of the Judaean monasteries: Y. Hirschfeld, *The Judaean Desert Monasteries in the Byzantine Period* (New Haven 1992), 16. I am grateful to Leah Di Segni for discussion on this topic.

like the tenth-century *Annales* by the patriarch Eutychius, or indeed the early ninth-century *Chronicle* of Theophanes, have worked up the stories of Jewish collaboration with the Persians to the extent of envisaging large armies of Jews assisting in the capture of towns such as Tyre, and the near-contemporary *Doctrina Jacobi*, on which further below, tells stories of Jews pillaging churches and stealing books from the patriarchal library. It is quite obvious — though many historians have accepted these accounts more or less at face value¹³ — that these are deeply biased and distorted accounts.¹⁴ Christian sources also allege that the invaders left the Jewish population in charge of Jerusalem as their agents when they retired to the north — a measure which would have been a direct challenge to the Christians, for whom the destruction of the Jewish Temple in AD 70 was a cornerstone of Christian self-identity in relation to their Jewish heritage. Had not Christ Himself said to his disciples as they looked across at the Temple, ‘Truly, ... there shall not be left here one stone upon another, that will not be thrown down’ (Math.24.2)? Using this text, Christians had argued for centuries that the ruin of the Temple, more than any other sign, showed that the Jews were not the Chosen People: that role had passed to the Christians and was proved by the extent of the Roman and Byzantine empires.¹⁵ Sophronius had lamented in his classical anacreontics the loss of the Christian holy places to the Persians; now, in the story of his meeting with ‘Umar, as told by Theophanes, he is made to quote from the vision of Daniel proclaiming the abomination of desolation and destruction of the Temple after the coming of the Messiah, a text beloved of Christian anti-Jewish works of the period.¹⁶ For Christians the Temple must never be rebuilt, for the Messiah had come, and the Temple was destroyed, in

¹³ Cf. even the valuable article by G. Stroumsa, “Religious contacts in Byzantine Palestine”, *Numen* 36 (1989), 16-42, at 28-29; see also Dagron (n. 8), 25. The idea has had understandable appeal for Jewish historians, but for acceptance it demands much better evidence than is found in the highly tendentious fantasy in Eutychius’s *Annales* (ed. and trans. M. Breydy, *CSCO* 471, *Script. arab.* 44 [Louvain, 1985]) and similar accounts.

¹⁴ For more critical discussion see S. Leder, “The attitudes of the population, especially the Jews, towards the Arab-Islamic conquest of Bilad al-Sham and the question of their role therein”, *Die Welt des Orients* 18 (1987), 64-71.

¹⁵ The argument was a basic platform of the *Adversus Iudaeos* tradition, for which see J. Parkes, *The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue* (London 1934); A.L. Williams, *Adversus Iudaeos* (Cambridge 1935); for the continuance of these themes in Byzantine visual art see the important discussion by K. Corrigan, *Visual Polemics in the Ninth Century Byzantine Psalters* (Cambridge 1992), chap. 3.

¹⁶ Theoph., *Chron.*, A.M. 6127, p. 339 de Boor; cf. Daniel 9. 26-27; for the parallel account in Eutychius, and for the Muslim accounts, see Wilken, *The Land Called Holy*, 235-39. The prophecy of Daniel, and the passage in Matthew 24, foretold the coming of the end; as such they feature in seventh-century Christian apocalyptic, such as the *Apocalypse* of Ps. Methodius (Wilken, 239-44).

accordance with Old Testament prophecy. Not surprising, then, that Julian's provocative attempt to restore it in AD 363 had evoked panic among fourth-century Christians such as Gregory Nazianzen and Ephrem Syrus, and stirred up virulent anti-Jewish feeling.¹⁷ Wisely and deliberately, in contrast, Constantine himself had concentrated on the Christian holy sites, and left the remains of the ruined Temple strictly alone. They were taken by Christians as visible proof of God's support for Christianity and His condemnation of the Jews.

During the events of the early seventh century the Temple Mount in Jerusalem became again the centre of passionate contention. Sources of varying date and credibility seem to allude to the possibility, to put it no more firmly than that, of the Jews again acquiring access, or even being allowed to reestablish worship there by the Persians during their short period of control.¹⁸ If this did indeed happen, it was very short-lived; indeed, if the sources can be believed, the Persians seem rapidly to have reversed their initial policy.¹⁹ In any event, the return in triumph of Heraclius put an abrupt stop to such hopes, and it has been argued that the construction associated with the Golden Gate to the Temple Mount may be attributable to him.²⁰ It was claimed that on his triumphal return he expelled all Jews from Jerusalem, forbidding them to come within three miles of the city;²¹ however, the Christian sources here are even more tangled than usual, and the reasons for the claim only too apparent. Shortly afterwards, Heraclius became the first Byzantine emperor to pass a law demanding

¹⁷ See recently J.W. Drijvers, "Amianus Marcellinus 23.1.2-3: the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem", in J. den Boeft, D. den Hengst and H.C. Teitler, ed., *Cognitio Gestorum. The Historiographic Art of Amianus Marcellinus* (Amsterdam 1992), 19-26, arguing that Julian's measure was not primarily directed against Christians. Even if not, their reaction was predictable.

¹⁸ See discussion in F.E. Peters, *Jerusalem* (Princeton 1985); *Jerusalem and Mecca. The Typology of the Holy City in the Near East* (New York 1986); Wilken, *The Land Called Holy*, 212-13; for a Hebrew liturgical fragment to this effect, see E. Fleischer, "Solving the Qiliry riddle", *Tarbiz* 54.3 (1984-85), 383-427, and cf. *id.*, "An early Jewish tradition of the end of Byzantine rule in Eretz Israel", *Zion* 36 (1971), 110-15 (Hebrew); I am grateful to Prof. M. Herr for pointing this out to me; see also Dagon (n. 8), 26-27, summarising its contents.

¹⁹ See Dagon (n. 8), 26.

²⁰ See C. Mango, "The Temple Mount, AD 614-638" in Raby and Johns, ed., *Bayt al-Maqdis*, 1-16; for an Umayyad date: M. Rosen-Ayalon, *The Early Islamic Monuments of Al-Haram al-Sharif, Qedem* 28 (Jerusalem 1989), 39; so also R. Hamilton, "Once again the 'Aqṣā' in Raby and Johns, ed., 142; possible approach road: Y. Tsafir, "The 'massive wall' east of the Golden Gate", *IEJ* 40 (1990), 280-86, with earlier bibliography.

²¹ Theoph. *Chron.* A.M. 6120, p. 328.26-28 de Boor; Dagon, *art. cit.*, 26; however, for Jews in Jerusalem later see Wilken, *The Land Called Holy*, 250.

the forced baptism of all Jews in the empire.²² In view of what followed, its impact was much less even than it might have been, given the difficulty of enforcing such laws; it was, as Gilbert Dagron points out, as much a symbolic gesture as a realistic measure,²³ and as such it was repeated a century later by Leo III, and in the later ninth century by Basil I, as well as twice more by later emperors.²⁴ Nevertheless, a Christian Greek text from only a few years later purports to tell the story of one such enforced convert, and the measure was discussed in apocalyptic terms by the Christian theologian and writer Maximus Confessor as far afield as Carthage.²⁵ Whether there were really as many converts as was claimed seems extremely doubtful — again we are in the realm of orthodox Christian self-definition.²⁶ But the Sasanian invasion and period of rule had already made a strong impression on local Jews, bitterly hostile to the ‘rule of Edom’, as is evident from Jewish apocalyptic.²⁷ Yet when the same Sophronius became patriarch of Jerusalem only four years after the Byzantine recapture, and only two years after the decree of forced baptism, his *Synodical Letter* was preoccupied with internal Christian divisions, and he does not, as became customary in other Christian texts, include the Jews among his long list of heretics.²⁸ His Christmas homily, apparently of the same year, had to explain to his congregation the arrival of the new threat from Arabia, and the capture of Bethlehem by Arabs.²⁹ Only a few years later again, he found himself surrendering the city to them.

The local population in Palestine, then, especially in Jerusalem, experienced a quite extraordinary series of reversals of fortune during these years. It would seem that Muslim interest in the Temple Mount showed itself from an early

²² For discussion and date see Dagron, *art. cit.*, 28-38; cf. Haldon (n. 2), 346-48; P. Yannopoulos, *La société profane dans l'empire byzantin des VIIe, VIIIe et IXe siècles* (Louvain 1975), 243-51.

²³ *Art. cit.*, 29.

²⁴ According to De Lange, “Jews and Christians in the Byzantine empire” (n. 5), 23 (with references), the immediate effect of Heraclius’s measure was ‘mass emigration’; so too Dagron (n. 8), 32; on this I am somewhat doubtful, given the amount of bias and distortion in the Byzantine sources; the ‘evidence’ consists largely of the claims made by Michael the Syrian, *Chron.* XI.4.

²⁵ See Dagron (n. 8), 30 ff., 39, and for the *Doctrina*, see below; on Maximus, C. Laga, “Judaism and the Jews in Maximus Confessor’s works: theoretical controversy and practical attitudes”, *Byzantinoslavica* 51 (1990), 178-83.

²⁶ Converts: Dagron (n. 8), 43f.; Jewish conversion a theme at II Nicaea (AD 787): *ibid.*, 45.

²⁷ For the *Book of Elijah* and the *Book of Zerubbabel*, see Wilken (n. 21), 207-13; Dagron (n. 8), 38ff.

²⁸ *PG* 87.3.3148-3200 (translation and notes in preparation by P. Allen); on Jews and Byzantine heresiology, see further below.

²⁹ Ed. H. Usener, *Rh.Mus.*, ser. 3, 41 (1886), 500-16.

stage. One Jewish apocalyptic text praises Mu‘awiya for loving Israel and restoring the Temple, and there was also a tradition that he wanted to make his capital at Jerusalem, and was indeed actually crowned there.³⁰ The pilgrim Arculf’s report in AD 670 or 680 of a wooden structure capable of holding some three thousand faithful shows that Muslim desire for symbolic control of this important site is not to be attributed simply to the policies of ‘Abd al-Malik later in the century. Several sources of varying reliability refer to clearance of the Temple site and construction of a mosque even in the time of Sophronius, though we are lacking in solid information about the so-called ‘mosque of ‘Umar’.³¹ One of the tales of Anastasius of Sinai maintains that it was rumoured that what was being built at the end of the seventh century was the Temple of God.³² This is not the place for further discussion of the much-debated reasons behind the construction of the Dome of the Rock, except to reiterate that its commanding and carefully chosen position on the Mount alone, even without its inscriptions and its architecture and decoration, made its symbolic point in relation to both Christians and Jews crystal clear. The Dome of the Rock being a shrine rather than an assembly place for prayer, the latter need was also filled by the construction of the al-Aqsa mosque, very close by on top of the Mount. Just as strikingly, the massive Umayyad buildings revealed in the recent excavations south of and below the Temple Mount demonstrate the extent of Muslim investment in this emotionally charged religious site.³³ Apparently the seat of civil administration, these large constructions would fit with an Umayyad date for the Golden Gate, and the construction of an approach to the great new Muslim religious sites on the Haram.³⁴ Jewish hopes were dashed once and for all. We continue to see the effects of these initiatives, as well as the emotions they engendered, in the Jerusalem of today, just as we have seen the same process of claiming the holy city by means of symbolic construction, the same protectiveness towards holy sites and the same fears of loss.

³⁰ Peters, *Jerusalem and Mecca*, 93; B. Lewis, “An apocalyptic vision of Islamic history”, *BSOAS* 13 (1949-50), 309-38, at 324-5, 328. See further Peters, *Jerusalem and Mecca*, 92-94 and *Jerusalem*, 201f.

³¹ See B. Flusin, “Les premières constructions musulmanes sur l’Esplanade du Temple selon deux ‘récits édifiants’ byzantins”, *REG* 101 (1988), xxv-xxvi, and “L’Esplanade du Temple à l’arrivée des arabes d’après deux récits byzantins” in Raby and Johns, edd. (n. 1), 17-32; Mango (n. 20), 1-2.

³² B. Flusin (n. 31); *idem*, “Démons et Sarrasins. L’auteur et le propos des *Diègemata stèrikika* d’Anastase le Sinàïte”, *T&M* 11 (1991), 381-409, at 386 and 408. These ‘edifying tales’ in fact provide some of the best anecdotal evidence for day-to-day living conditions in the Palestine of the 680s and earlier.

³³ M. Ben-Dov, *The Dig at the Temple Mount* (Jerusalem 1982) (Hebrew). For the Dome of the Rock see now Sheila Blair, “What was the date of the Dome of the Rock?” in Raby and Johns edd., *Bayt al-Maqdis* (n. 1), 59-88.

³⁴ Above (n. 20). See however Mango (n. 20), 15.

For a good deal of our information about Jews in this period we have to make use of Christian literary sources, which, as we shall see, need to be treated with considerable caution. Nevertheless, there is a good deal of apparently authentic information about certain Jewish communities in seventh-century Palestine in the so-called *Doctrina Jacobi nuper baptizati*, or *Teachings of Jacob the Newly Baptized*, dating from the 630s.³⁵ This Greek work purports to be about a converted Jew, and to have been written for the instruction and encouragement of others in the same position. The narrator, a certain Joseph, describes the edict about baptism, and how it was put into practice in Carthage by the Byzantine eparch; the baptized Jews are in need of a Christian catechism when a stranger arrives from Palestine, Jacob himself, who has been converted and who delivers a monologue to reassure Jews like himself. A certain Justus, apparently a rabbi, arrives a little later, but resists conversion and opposes Jacob at first, until he is won over by the latter's arguments. Clearly this is a Christian apologetic text, even though it seems to show actual knowledge of Jewish communities; it takes the form of an anti-Jewish dialogue with an unexpected twist, in that Jacob, who answers 'those of the circumcision', is of course a Jew himself. The dramatic date is precise — AD 634, the year of the arrival of the Arabs before Ptolemais.³⁶ Justus's dead father, Samuel, is evoked as a Jew who had suspected the truth of Christianity and recognised, or nearly recognised, Jesus as the Messiah. Much of the work consists of standard Christian anti-Jewish argument, in the tradition of the *Adversus Iudaeos* texts; these arguments were highly formal and traditional, and while conversion of the Jewish interlocutor or interlocutors is often the literary conclusion of an individual text, as in the so-called *Trophies of Damascus*, of later seventh-century date, both the arguments and the texts were surely aimed at a Christian, not a Jewish audience.³⁷ Here it is Justus who is won over in symbolic defeat. Nevertheless, the circumstantial material in the *Doctrina* is separable from the formal parts; the text reveals communities of Hellenized Jews, especially in the coastal cities like Ptolemais, with rabbis and learned elders. Once converted, Justus departs to return via Constantinople to Ptolemais, where the Arab invaders are already a presence, and some knowledge

³⁵ The critical edition by V. Déroche, with historical discussion by G. Dagron, *T&M* 11 (1991), 17-273, supersedes earlier editions by Bonwetsch and Nau; there are versions extant in Greek, Ethiopic and other languages: see Wilken, *The Land Called Holy*, 329, n. 31.

³⁶ See Dagron (n. 35), 234. Far from deflecting Christian attention from the Jews, alarm at the Arab invaders seems to intensify hostility against them, in a general apocalyptic context, as is particularly evident in the reaction of Maximus Confessor: Dagron, "Judaïser", *ibid.*, 359-80, at 362-63.

³⁷ Conspectus of seventh-century examples, with bibliography, in V. Déroche, "La polémique anti-judaïque au VI^e et VII^e siècle. Un memento inédit, les *Képhalaia*", *T&M* 11 (1991), 275-311, at 278-80; see also Walter E. Kaegi, Jr., *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests* (Cambridge 1992), 220-27, 231-35.

is revealed of their ideological and religious aims as the followers of a prophet. Some of the Jews alluded to in the text are represented, like Jacob himself, as engaging in business and trading enterprises which involved travelling to the large cities of the eastern Mediterranean, including Antioch, Constantinople and Carthage, where they would expect to find fellow-Jews.³⁸ Jacob himself had been involved in local political rivalries including the urban riots between Blues and Greens in eastern cities in the last days of Phocas. The young Jacob had been a tearaway, 24 years old in AD 610, and is made to claim that he had enjoyed beating up Christians on such occasions. This is another sign of the Christian orientation of this text: these riots, again, are presented in the Christian sources in the guise of Jewish insurrections.³⁹ To cite only the chronicler Agapius: 'there occurred a great catastrophe in Syria. And the reason was that the Jews who lived there and in Mesopotamia intended to kill all the Christians in the towns and destroy the churches. While they plotted this, they were denounced to the authorities. Then the Christians attacked them and killed many'. Theophanes reports that 'the Jews of Antioch rioted against the Christians and disemboweled the great patriarch Anastasius and forced him to eat his own intestines'.⁴⁰ After the sack of Jerusalem in 614, Jacob had been engaged as a man of business to a rich merchant, and so came to Carthage. His patron, it seems (and this is a more realistic touch altogether), provided him with a letter which he could show in order to obtain protection from hostile Christians.

The Jewish communities in certain towns were evidently substantial — the *Doctrina* focuses on Ptolemais (Akko), Tiberias, Caesarea and Sycamina (Sycmania).⁴¹ Similarly the Persian army in its southward advance moved through major Jewish centres — Tiberias, Sepphoris, Caesarea and Lod (Lydda).⁴² These were among the evidently prosperous and Hellenized communities in the coastal strip, and round the northern edges of the Sea of Galilee,

³⁸ Y. Dan, "Two Jewish merchants in the seventh century", *Zion* 36 (1971), 1-26 (Hebrew).

³⁹ See Olster, *The Politics of Usurpation* (n. 6), 101ff; Dagron, (n. 35), 20-21.

⁴⁰ Agapius, ed. A. Vasiliev, *PO* 8 (Paris 1912), 449; cf. Theoph., *Chron.*, p. 296 de Boor; the two accounts draw on similar sources. In contrast, Michael the Syrian attributes the death of the patriarch to the Persians: see Olster, 87.

⁴¹ See Dagron (n. 35), 240f.; Sycmania: Wilken, *The Land Called Holy*, 319, n. 30; the earlier history of Ptolemais: Fergus Millar, *The Roman Near East, 31 B.C. - AD 337* (Cambridge, Mass. 1993), 267-70; the coastal cities under the Umayyads: A. Elad, "The coastal cities of Palestine during the early Middle Ages", *The Jerusalem Cathedra* 2 (1982), 146-67. Ptolemais, Caesarea, Lod and Gaza are among the cities depicted in the eighth-century floor mosaic at the Church of St. Stephen at Um er-Rasas discovered in 1986: M. Piccirillo, *Chiese e mosaïci di Madaba* (Jerusalem 1989), 283ff. Livias and Noara: Dagron (n. 8), 24, n.36.

⁴² For the latter see J.J. Schwartz, *Lod (Lydda), Israel. From its Origins through the Byzantine Period 5600 BCE - 640 CE*, *BAR, Int. Ser.* (Oxford 1991).

whose patronage had produced fine synagogues with spectacular and costly mosaic decoration — at Gaza, for example, right by the sea, at Hammat Gader, on the east coast of the Sea of Galilee, at Scythopolis (Bet Shean), with Helios and the zodiac.⁴³ We now know that Christian mosaic floors continued to be laid and refurbished in churches in some areas at least, possibly even in the late eighth century;⁴⁴ similarly, there is no reason in principle to suppose that the many fine synagogues did not also continue in use. Scholars differ as to the degree of separation or coexistence between Jews and Christians living in the Golan in this period, but epigraphic evidence indicates a substantial degree of Jewish settlement.⁴⁵ That there were concentrations of Jews in certain places is likely enough, but the onus still seems to be on those who would argue for separation of settlement; both Christians and Jews were to be found in the cities, as at Tiberias itself. The latter, it is clear, remained the centre of Jewish learning throughout the Umayyad period and long afterwards, and is presented in the Christian texts as the heart of the Jewish presence; here too, however, Christians lived as well, and built churches, and, it would seem, monasteries, even in the 'Abbasid period.⁴⁶ The very large and flourishing city of Scythopolis (Bet Shean) has not yielded the expected churches to set beside its important synagogue; yet a substantial monastery existed on its outskirts. We are told by the Christian sources that in northern Mesopotamia Heraclius met with Jews while on his campaign against the Persians in the late 620s, and Theophanes has him greeted by a rich Jew at Tiberias, while Eutychius claims that he was met by Jews of Tiberias, Nazareth and Galilee seeking guarantees of safety.⁴⁷ There is much Christian prejudice and fancy in these reports, as surely also in the story that the Jews of Tyre wrote letters to their fellows in other places in order to stir them up against the Byzantines;⁴⁸ yet the places mentioned — Jerusalem, Cyprus, Damascus, Galilee and Tiberias — carry some verisimilitude, in that they are probably indicative of contemporary realities in terms of Jewish population and settlement.

It is no easier to put figures on the Jewish population of the area in the seventh century than it is to quantify the Muslim and Christian presence. It is still

⁴³ See Lee I. Levine, ed., *The Synagogue in Late Antiquity* (Philadelphia 1987); also discussion in Wilken, *The Land Called Holy*, 194–202, with bibliography.

⁴⁴ See Piccirillo (n. 41).

⁴⁵ See the forthcoming publication by Robert Gregg and Dan Urman, *Jews, Pagans and Christians in the Golan Heights, Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam* (Princeton).

⁴⁶ I refer to the ongoing excavations conducted by Dr. Y. Hirschfeld.

⁴⁷ P. 328 de Boor, AD 630; Eutych., *Ann.*, 18.5; Dagron, (n. 8), 28.

⁴⁸ Only in Eutychius, *Ann.* 17.29; accepted by Dagron, (n. 8), 25, who debates the date of the supposed episode. Alon, *The Jews in their Land II* (n. 6), 757, supposes that at the end of the 'Byzantine period' in Palestine (i.e. at the time of the Arab conquest), Jews and Samaritans together outnumbered Christians.

more difficult to assess the degree of settlement change which came about as a result of the gradual establishment of Arab rule. But several other Christian texts appear to indicate that the presence of Jews remained for Christians a matter for concern, for instance the so-called *Trophies of Damascus* of AD 661 or 681, a work with a dramatic setting in the city of Damascus which adopts a deeply satirical tone towards the Jews there, who are depicted at the end of the dialogue as wholly defeated and dismayed by the Christian arguments. A closer look at the final passage reveals that even within its literary confines, only a small minority of the apparently large number of Jews envisaged as being present at the debate actually offered themselves for baptism. It is claimed by the anonymous author that the debate took place in the presence of many spectators, who included 'Hellenes [i.e. pagans], Saracens, Samaritans, many Jews and a group of Christians, in a word, a large number of spectators'.⁴⁹ From time to time these spectators intervene in the proceedings, often to mock at the Jewish interlocutor. In order to add weight to the proceedings, the author introduces into the debate a 'priest from Jerusalem'.⁵⁰ At the end, he presents the Jews as devastated by their defeat; they disperse, muttering among themselves. The author pokes fun as he envisages their remarks: 'how wrong we were! how much pork we could have been eating!'⁵¹ 'Some' immediately became friends of the Christians instead of their enemies, while those 'most dear' to the writer 'came to the church in all simplicity and truth and received the seal [of baptism], and bravely maintained their faith against the Jews, fighting on our behalf'. Again, the Jews are viewed not merely from the Christian perspective, but also from within a literary tradition; it would be assuming much too much to relate the elements of dramatic scene-setting in this work to contemporary realities in seventh-century Damascus. Even the familiar Christian claim that God has given them empire over the whole world continues, regardless of the contemporary political situation under the Umayyads, and reappears in enhanced form in a later text of the same genre.⁵² But while they belong to a long past tradition, these unevenly presented 'dialogues', of which perhaps half a dozen are known from our period, can also be seen as a kind of prototype of the Christian-Muslim disputation texts which begin to appear not long afterwards;⁵³ moreover, I would argue, they are symp-

⁴⁹ Ed. G. Bardy, *PO* 15 (Paris 1927), 233-34; the terms are not to be taken literally, but stand symbolically for 'all peoples' (Dagron, [n. 35], 363).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 234.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 275.

⁵² The so-called *Dialogue of Papius and Philo with a Monk*, ed. A.C. McGiffert (New York 1889). Even the *Trophies* can claim that Christian empire extended as far as Britain. See Déroche, *T&M* 11 (1991), 281-83; Kaegi, *loc. cit.* (n. 37), for the problems of date and interrelation between these texts.

⁵³ The Greek examples begin in the eighth century with the "Dispute between a Saracen and a Christian" (*CPG* III, 8075) attributed to John of Damascus; see T. Adel

omatic of the heightened religious tensions and rivalries that had come to a head in the eastern provinces since the beginning of the seventh century.

However, the *Adversus Iudaeos* texts are only the tip of the iceberg. This period saw what seems to have been an extraordinary increase in the general level of Byzantine demonologizing of Jews. Many contemporary texts not specifically addressing themselves to the topic nevertheless routinely include diatribes against or condemnation of Jews;⁵⁴ such is the case for example with Anastasius of Sinai's *Hodegos*,⁵⁵ or Sophronius's Christmas homily of AD 634,⁵⁶ or the *Lives* of Symeon the Fool and John the Almsgiver by the Cypriot Leontius of Neapolis (also the author of an *Apology against the Jews*).⁵⁷ John of Damascus's three *Orations in Defence of Images*, the classic defence of religious images against the iconoclasts, written in the monastery of Mar Saba near Jerusalem, abound with accusations and insinuations against Jews, as does the official record of the Second Council of Nicaea held in Constantinople in AD 787, where Jews were openly and casually blamed for all false doctrine among Christians.⁵⁸ We have seen how the early ninth-century Greek chronicler Theophanes, partly basing himself on eastern sources, ascribes all evils to Jewish intervention; in the same vein he ascribed the iconoclastic decree of the Caliph Yezid II to the influence of a 'Jewish wizard', in the year following the reenactment of Heraclius's order of forced conversion for all Jews by the Byzantine emperor Leo III.⁵⁹

Khoury, *Les théologiens byzantins et l'Islam, textes et auteurs (viii - xiii s.)* (Louvain 1969). For the Syriac examples see now Sidney H. Griffith, "Disputes with Muslims in Syriac Christian texts: from Patriarch John (d. 648) to Bar Hebraeus (d. 1286)", in *Religionsgespräche im Mittelalter, Wolfenbütteler Mittelalter-Studien* (Berlin 1993), 251-73.

⁵⁴ See the examples cited by Dagron (n. 35), 367-69, where the development is analyzed in more detail.

⁵⁵ Before AD 681, though with scholia later added by the author: see the edition by K.-T. Uthemann, *CCSG* 8 (Leuven 1981); Anastasius is also credited with anti-Jewish writings, see Kaegi (n. 37).

⁵⁶ Ed. H. Usener, *RhMus.* ser. 3, 41 (1886), at 514.

⁵⁷ On the latter see V. Déroche, "L'authenticité de l'"Apologie contre les Juifs" de Léontios de Néapolis", *Bull. Corr. Hell.* 110 (1986), 655-69; for the former, A. Festugière, with L. Rydén, *Léontios de Néapolis, Vie de Syméon le Fou et Vie de Jean de Chypre* (Paris 1974).

⁵⁸ See the useful discussion in Corrigan (n. 15).

⁵⁹ *A.M.* 6215, p. 401 de Boor; for Theophanes's 'eastern source' see Lawrence I. Conrad, "Theophanes and the Arabic historical tradition: some indications of cultural transmission", *Byzantinische Forschungen* 15 (1990), 1-44; *id.*, "The conquest of Arwad", in Cameron and Conrad, edd., *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East I* (n. 2), 317-401. On Theophanes's possible dependence on George Syncellus and his connections with the patriarchate of Jerusalem and the Judaean monasteries

These are only a very few out of many possible examples. They suggest that the anti-Jewish strain which had been strong in certain Christian texts since the second century received a new impetus with the events of the seventh century, and perhaps especially with the perceived threat to Christian control posed by Sasanian favour shown to the Jews. In addition, however, they reflect a heightened awareness of Jews and of Jerusalem and the Holy Land as a result of the Persian and Arab conquests. In this case, though, historical reality and myth-making went together; at a deeper level again, the fact that the iconoclasts were represented by their rivals as Judaizers⁶⁰ meant that the eventual triumph of the iconophiles would, when it came in and after AD 843, take on even more of an anti-Jewish flavour. Defeated though it was, Byzantine iconoclasm bequeathed to later centuries an even sharper and more caricatured representation of Jews and Judaism than had been seen before.

It remains striking that for more than a century after the Arab conquests, the Christian authors who might have been expected to be tackling the question of Muslim teachings in fact devoted their attention even more than they had done before to their old enemy, the Jews. The question therefore arises as to whether this represents some kind of displacement of a perceived threat by a more familiar one. In fact, however, the earliest Greek author to show knowledge of specific Islamic teaching is Anastasius of Sinai, whose work has already been cited, and who also refers to having 'discussions' with Muslims;⁶¹ in general, the Greek Christian writers of the seventh century focused on the Arabs merely as hostile invaders.⁶² While a relation may plausibly be seen between the nature, and indeed some of the themes, of anti-Jewish and anti-Muslim Christian polemics,⁶³ the Christian obsession with Jews in the seventh and eighth centuries was much more than a cover for a new fear of Islam as a religious force; indeed, the latter seems to have taken a considerable time to develop. The Jews counted already among the lists of 'heretics' which are such a feature during this period.⁶⁴ But there were also reasons for renewed preoccupation with certain of the traditional themes of Christian-Jewish polemic; in particular, the arguments over pictorial representation and other kinds of religious images which were already

see Cyril Mango, "Who wrote the Chronicle of Theophanes?" *ZRVI* 18 (1978), 9-17; for the 'eastern source' see 13.

⁶⁰ For which see Dagron (n. 35), 367ff.

⁶¹ See Sidney H. Griffith, "Anastasius of Sinai, the *Hodegos*, and the Muslims", *Greek Orthodox Theol. Rev.* 32 (1987), 341-58.

⁶² See W.E. Kaegi Jr., "Initial Byzantine reactions to the Arab conquests", *Church History* 38 (1969), 139-49.

⁶³ For some indications see M. Cook, "The origins of kalam", *BSOAS* 43 (1980), 32-43.

⁶⁴ Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century*, 337-48; see also Dagron (n. 35), 365-66.

going on among Christians in the later seventh century found a ready place in anti-Jewish texts. The argument there attributed to the Jews that such images implied the worship of created objects — wood or stone — was regularly met with the question, ‘had not the Jews of the Old Testament done the same in the case of the tabernacle, the ark, the burning bush, the manna from heaven?’⁶⁵ Conversely, among the ‘questions’ to which answers are provided in such texts as the ps-Athanasian *Questions to Antiochus* is the following: ‘why do we venerate images and the cross, when God forbade us through the prophets to worship created objects?’⁶⁶ The approved orthodox answer, strongly put by John of Damascus in the eighth century and repeated with the vindication of religious images at the Second Council of Nicaea (AD 787), was already canonical among Christian apologists a century earlier; it had everything to do with distinguishing Christians from Jews.⁶⁷ The logical conclusion was of course the simple use of the terms ‘Jew’ and ‘Jewish’ for blanket abuse — a conclusion so obvious in these sources that it is surprising to find historians still prepared to take such references as carrying factual content.

We can observe the same process taking place in visual art. It has recently been observed that depictions of the Tabernacle made in the wilderness, and its replacement in the Temple, are ‘among the most frequently depicted subjects in Jewish art of the Late Antique period’.⁶⁸ But the very point of the depiction of the Tabernacle in Byzantine art was to illustrate its supersession, just as the crucifixion was held to have annulled Jewish sacrifice.⁶⁹ Appropriately, depictions of the crucifixion showing the dead Christ on the cross, also begin to appear during our period, and are even debated in texts to illustrate that Christ Himself was a creature and suffered in the flesh,⁷⁰ while in what seems an ironic reversal, the Jewish Tabernacle itself came to be depicted in Byzantine art in support of the

⁶⁵ See further Averil Cameron, “The language of images: icons and Christian representation”, in D. Wood, ed., *The Church and the Arts, Studies in Church History* 28 (1992), 1-42.

⁶⁶ *PG* 28.597 ff., question 39, on which see Dagron (n. 35), 368 and n. 50.

⁶⁷ John cites Leontius of Neapolis, ‘when we Christians adore the substance of the Cross, we look not to the material wood, but rather see it as the seal, stamp and image of Christ Himself’ (*PG* 94.1384), and Stephen of Bostra, ‘Tell me, O Jew, if you reject things made by human hands, what is there that is venerated on earth that is not made by human hands? Is not the Ark of the Lord man-made? or the altar and the Tabernacle, the Cherubim, the gold vessel holding manna...?’ (*ibid.* 1376).

⁶⁸ Herbert L. Kessler, “Through the Temple veil: the holy image in Judaism and Christianity”, *Kairos* 32/33 (1993), 53-77, at 56.

⁶⁹ Kessler, *art. cit.*, 66-67.

⁷⁰ See the interesting discussion by Anna Kartsonis, *Anastasis* (Princeton 1986), again drawing on Anastasius of Sinai, with Cameron, “The language of images” (n. 65). The physical death of Christ was a cardinal point disputed by Muslims: see further Corrigan (n. 15), 81ff.

argument for religious images.⁷¹ Even while attacking the Jews, the iconophile Christians found support for their own position in Jewish religious tradition. The situation is similar in visual art, especially in the illuminated psalters produced with the ending of Byzantine iconoclasm in the ninth century. Here, depictions of Jews and themes from anti-Jewish polemic feature on numerous occasions, particularly crudely in the contemporary Chludov and Pantokrator psalters, as those who have rejected and murdered Christ⁷² — a depiction which picks up both theme and treatment in Christian homilies on Good Friday by such writers from the eastern provinces as the Anastasius of Sinai.

Thus several factors operated together to bring about an increased sharpness in Christian hostility to the Jews in this period. Anti-Jewish arguments were much used in the internal Christian debates about created matter and the status of religious images — arguments, incidentally, which were carried on with as much vehemence by writers in Greek in Palestine and the east as they were in Constantinople. At the same time, the Jews of Palestine were consistently blamed by Christian writers, first for the loss of the holy places, and then for being the antecedents and precursors of the Muslims and of Islam.

Why then do we have so little Jewish response to these concerted attacks? Part of the answer is surely that the intensity of overt hostilities, as of the degree of conversion to Christianity, is grossly exaggerated in our sources in comparison with the ideological developments.⁷³ Nicholas de Lange has also pointed out in answer to the same question that apart from the apocalyptic and the liturgical poetry, there was little tradition in contemporary Judaism of direct engagement with Christian polemic; for political expression of attitudes towards Byzantium, we have to look elsewhere, for example to the *midrashim*, which are indeed not always negative.⁷⁴ There was in fact a mass of Jewish literature in the period, with an interesting linguistic variation, ranging from liturgical poetry to targums and *midrashim*. Yet its concerns were generally quite other than the confrontation of Christian polemic,⁷⁵ though Biblical exegesis may have served as one, albeit indirect, form of expressing an alternative to Christian interpretations of the same texts. Whether Jews and Christians actually debated on their age-old differences may be doubted, though public disputations of various sorts certainly did take place in this period, especially in relation to internal Christian divisions, and the motif of the public confrontation passed into Christian apologetic litera-

⁷¹ Kessler (n. 68); Corrigan (n. 15), 34-35.

⁷² Corrigan, 46-48.

⁷³ Whose picture is followed by Dagron (n. 35), 370, also accepting the occurrence of real and frequent religious disputations on Jewish initiative

⁷⁴ De Lange, "Jews and Christians in the Byzantine empire" (n. 5), 27-29.

⁷⁵ See Reif, "Aspects of medieval Jewish literacy" (n. 5), especially 139-41.

ture directed against Islam.⁷⁶ This apparent lack of response from the Jewish side of course confirms what one had already supposed, namely that the Christian *Adversus Iudaeos* literature and other writing of its kind was not in fact addressed to Jews but rather to other Christians; it did not so much invite Jews to reply as provide further reassurance to Christians that even in a time of such stress and challenge, their traditional answers were still superior.⁷⁷ As for the constant appearance of Jews in Byzantine texts and art of the Iconoclast and post-Iconoclast period, they are the imaginary Jews of prejudice, not the real Jews of Byzantium or of Palestine.

If we turn from this often distorted evidence in the Christian literary sources to the results that can be drawn from study of the material remains, it is the picture of ordinary living given in the tales of Anastasius of Sinai that is confirmed, rather than these lurid caricatures. Energetic archaeological work currently being conducted on Byzantine and early Islamic sites in Israel, Syria and Jordan increasingly indicates that the Islamic conquest did not in practice represent the massive and immediate cultural divide that has usually been assumed, and which is still affirmed in much of the scholarly literature.⁷⁸ Life went on in most places more or less as before; it would appear that more allowance has to be made for the disruption of the Persian invasion and the subsequent mystery of what happened during the period of Persian control than for the Arab conquests, though even here, as we have seen, the archaeologists who have surveyed the monasteries of the Judaeen desert emphasise that the degree of disruption and damage was far less in practice than is suggested by the literary evidence. Archaeology also reveals some direct signs of positive coexistence on a daily basis between the local population and the Muslims — a bilingual balance in Greek and Arabic, for example, and a Greek inscription referring to both the Greek era and the era of Mu'awiya — and it seems not to have been until the end of the century that the Umayyads adopted a more aggressive policy towards Christians and towards Greek as a language.⁷⁹

Good evidence for the conditions experienced by either Christians or Jews in the early Umayyad Caliphate is sparse and uneven. But Christians did lose their

⁷⁶ See Averil Cameron, "Disputations, polemical literature and the formation of opinion in the early Byzantine period" in G.J. Reinink and H.L.J. Vanstiphout, ed., *Dispute Poems and Dialogues in the Ancient and Mediaeval Near East, Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta* 42 (Leuven 1991), 91-108.

⁷⁷ And thus constituted a kind of catechetical literature; see on this J. Munitiz, "Catechetical teaching aids in Byzantium", in J. Chrysostomides, ed., *Kathegetria. Essays presented to Joan Hussey* (Camberley 1988), 69-83.

⁷⁸ See King and Cameron, ed. (n. 3), with much further bibliography.

⁷⁹ For the change, see now Sidney H. Griffith, "Images, Islam and Christian icons. A moment in the Christian/Muslim encounter in early Islamic times", in P. Canivet and J.-P. Rey-Coquais, ed., *La Syrie de Byzance à l'Islam, VIIe -VIIIe siècles* (Damascus 1992), 121-38.

position of superiority to the Jews, both having been reduced by the Muslims to the status of non-Muslim subjects and therefore inferiors. If anything, the Muslim attitude may have been somewhat more hostile to the Christians than it was towards the Jews. It is not surprising, however, if for reasons not totally to do with historical scholarship, there exists sharp disagreement among modern scholars as to the treatment of Jews under Islam, with one view envisaging something like a 'golden age', contrasting the supposedly tolerant treatment of Jews in Islamic lands with antisemitism in Europe and repression by Byzantium.⁸⁰ A more recent tendency is to present a far more gloomy picture, in which the Jews of Islam suffered a truly miserable lot as the particular target of Arab hostility.⁸¹ It is not difficult to recognise the *parti pris* in both views. Not only does neither extreme do justice to the complexities of the subject; both tend to assume that AD 634 or AD 640 (the exact year varies according to choice) marked a sharp and obvious divide.⁸² But revisionist scholarship on the origins of Islam and recent archaeological work on the eastern provinces in the seventh century indicate rather that change was gradual and piecemeal for a considerable period after the conquests. For this reason, the condition of Jews in the developed Arab empire of the Abbasids and later may not be a very good guide to their situation in the Holy Land in the first years of Islam. The population figures given for Jews by authors of a much later period are not exactly good guides either. Yet a substantial Jewish population certainly continued to exist in the Holy Land until the Crusades, and the tradition of Jewish scholarship and learning was maintained here, as elsewhere, in this 'geonic' period.⁸³ Indeed, one of the features of the period is that of the similarities and contrasts between the Babylonian and Palestinian *ge'onim*.⁸⁴ It is perhaps understandable that, as I mentioned at the beginning of this paper, most of the general histories of the Jews are disappointingly brief about the fifty or so years after the Arab conquests, and in practice derive most of their evidence about the Jews under Islam from later centuries:⁸⁵ there is, after all, nothing for this period that can compare with the kind of evidence provided for later medieval times by the Cairo Geniza. But some of the new directions which I have tried to indicate may point towards

⁸⁰ So Reif (n. 5), 139, and references at n. 11.

⁸¹ So Bat Ye'or, *The Dhimmi: Jews and Christians under Islam* (Eng. trans., New Jersey, London, Toronto 1985); for discussion see M. Cohen, "Islam and the Jews: myth, counter-myth and history", *The Jerusalem Quarterly* 38 (1986), 125-37, with further bibliography; "The neo-lachrymose conception of Jewish-Arab history", *Tikkun* 6.3 (1986), 55-60. I am grateful to Mark Cohen for information here.

⁸² See above, n. 7; also J. Starr, *The Jews in the Byzantine Empire, 641-1204* (Athens 1939).

⁸³ Reif (n. 5).

⁸⁴ S. Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, 18 vols (New York 1952-58), 6. 152-313; see above, n. 7.

⁸⁵ E.g. H. Ben-Sasson, *A History of the Jewish People* (London 1976); Baron, *art. cit.*

a less prejudiced and more realistic way of looking at the surely very crucial question of the fate of the Jews in Palestine in the period of transition between Byzantine and Arab rule.

As Nicholas de Lange has shown, the Jews have almost been written out of mainstream Byzantine history by the lack of interest, if not actual prejudice, displayed by modern historians. In the same way, the Jews of seventh-century Palestine have found relatively few to study them in detail. On the one hand, they have made their appearance in the Byzantine sources and in Byzantine art in the shape of the archetypal enemy and the stereotyped Jew. On the other, their fate has been to have been thrown in with their counterparts of later times as a minor component in a composite picture either of Byzantine Jewry or of the Jews under Islam. Perhaps we can hope that even at this late stage it may be possible to disentangle that double process and to give the Jews of seventh-century Palestine better treatment.

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