Doctrina Iacobi and the Rise of Islam [*]

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The anti-Jewish tractate known as *Doctrina Iacobi nuper baptizati*, or 'The Teachings of Jacob, the Newly Baptised', is amongst the oldest extant sources containing an allusion to the nascent movement that eventually came to be called Islam and the waves of military conflict that gave rise to the formation of the first Muslim empire. Its tantalising adumbration of the emergence of a self-styled prophet who is leading 'Saracen' forays into Byzantine Palestine and professes to hold the keys to paradise has made it of special appeal to Islamicists, and it has fittingly been accorded pride of place in many recent accounts of the rise of Islam and of the history of Christian-Muslim interactions,[1] whilst its narrative setting—Carthage in the first few years following Heraclius's forcible baptism of Byzantine Jewry—has attracted the attention of many a Byzantinist to it as well.

It is hardly surprising, then, that this fascinating composition has spawned a veritable body of scholarship, with much of it focusing on the date of its composition. The main stream of this scholarship dates it to the first half of the seventh century CE (mostly opting for as early a date as 634 CE), but most discussions of the *Doctrina* simply date it to the 630s without producing any arguments in support of such a dating. Those who do purvey an argument for an early dating, however, usually base themselves either on the seeming accuracy of the historical details

[*] I feel particularly privileged to express my unqualified gratitude to Andrew Jacobs, Barbara Roggema, Martha Himmelfarb, Nadine Viermann, Peter Sarris, Phil Booth, and Zara Pogossian for giving freely of their time and commenting on an earlier draft of this paper, and to Cecilia Palombo, Barbara Roggema, and Nadine Viermann for insightful discussions. The responsibility for all errors and interpretations remains with me alone. Work on this contribution was concluded with the generous support of the Gerda-Henkel-Stiftung, within the framework of the project 'Group Formation and Maintenance in the Abbasid Caliphate, 750-1000 CE'.

[1] E.g., Robert G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* (Princeton 1997), 55-61; David Thomas and Barbara Roggema (eds), *Christian-Muslim Relations, a Bibliographical History*, vol. 1: *(600-900)* (Leiden 2009), 117-19; Stephen J. Shoemaker, *A Prophet Has Appeared: The Rise of Islam through Christian and Jewish Eyes, a Sourcebook* (Oakland, California, 2021), 37-44.

furnished by the text, or claim that a response to Heraclius's forced baptism of the Jews in the form of the *Doctrina* would have only made sense in the immediate aftermath of the Heraclian decree.[2] But the argument from historical verisimilitude is surely far from decisive, and the assertion that Heraclius's anti-Jewish campaign is the text's raison d'être is a questionable characterisation. In fact, a forensic examination of the text would reveal that the author's polemical agenda, which consisted of refuting Judaism while also presenting Jews as being fully aware of the truth of Christianity, required that the narrative be framed against the backdrop of a forced conversion, which is one of the principal arguments of the present contribution.

Conversely, this early dating of the *Doctrina* has recently been contested by Sean Anthony, who has traced the lineage of the motif of 'the keys to paradise' in late ancient Christian and Jewish as well as early Islamic kerygma, concluding that it must have found its way to the tractate via early Umayyad jihad discourse on the Byzantine frontier, and pushed for a date in the last quarter or so of the seventh century CE for it.[3] However, one wonders if the *Doctrina* is indeed as late a composition as Anthony would have it, what is to be made of the value of its crucial testimony to such otherwise poorly documented episodes as the Heraclian compulsory baptism of the Jews and the first Muslim incursions into the Byzantine Near East. While most of the observations made by previous scholars on this text is cogent, then, none of the arguments marshalled in support of one date or the other are definitive and, therefore, the debate is still raging.

In what follows, I shall first proffer a close reading of select passages pertaining, chiefly, to messianic dramas from the text, providing further evidence that the author must have hailed from a Palestinian Jewish background. Thereafter, I shall turn my attention to the *Doctrina*'s account of Muhammad's appearance, arguing that taking a holistic approach to the text shows that the text is principally concerned with shattering Jewish messianic aspirations, and that it

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[2] Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 55-61; James Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses to a World Crisis: Historians and Histories of the Middle East in the Seventh Century* (Oxford 2010), 155-7; Stephen J. Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet: The End of Muhammad's Life and the Beginnings of Islam* (Philadelphia 2012), 20-22.

[3] Sean W. Anthony, *Muhammad and the Empires of Faith: The Making of the Prophet of Islam* (Oakland, California, 2020), 41-58. See also Pavel Pavlovitch, '"Mechovete sa klyuchovete ot raya" i *Doctrina Jacobi*: Predstavata za dzhikhada v myucyulmanskyte predaniya i edin ranen khristiyanski izvor', *Godishnik na Sofiyskiya universitet SV Kliment Okhridski* 105 (2012): 197-237, who remains equivocal on the dating of the text.

is in this context that its denial of the authenticity of Muhammad's revelatory experience should be understood. I will then move on to the text's depiction of Muhammad as a harbinger of the Messiah, which, I will argue, exhibits a close affinity with seventh-century Jewish messianic understandings of the rise of Islam as witnessed by such compositions as the *Secrets of Rabbi Shimon ben Yohai*, in particular in its portrayal of Muhammad as a charioteer, which, in the light of its detailed knowledge of Jewish eschatological lore, may evidence its reliance on similar messianic receptions of the Muslim conquests. This is then followed by an interrogation of the author's possible motives for writing the text to demonstrate that one need not necessarily read the text as a response to the events of the last decade of Heraclius's reign, but that it could just as well have be read as a work of fiction whose author felt obliged to ensconce it in the context of a forced baptism.

The text

The *Doctrina*'s express purpose, as a later copyist[4] has set out in the incipit, is to demonstrate that, 'it is not necessary to observe the Sabbath after Christ's coming' and that, 'the one who came is truly Christ'. The mise en scène is the exarchate of Africa not a long time after Heraclius's order decreeing the coercive Christianisation of the Jews of his empire was issued, the format more a novel than anything else, and the medium of argumentation a dialogue between the eponymous Jacob, a Palestinian Jew, who, after his forcible baptism, has come to be convinced of the truth of Christianity and taken up the cudgels on behalf of the true faith, and a number of other Jews, who, in spite of their coercion into Christianity, are still sceptical and insist on Judaising while also maintaining belief in Jesus Christ;[5] midway through the text, and whilst wavering in their attachment to Jewish practices, they are joined by one Justus, another Palestinian Jew who is an old acquaintance of Jacob's, who, freshly arrived from Palestine, vociferously counters Jacob's arguments in support of the truth of Jesus Christ and castigates the other protagonists for failing to cling to Jewish customs and beliefs. Eventually, and unsurprisingly, however, Justus, too, becomes, somewhat anti-climactically, convinced of the truth of the Christian religion and enters a theological echo chamber with Jacob, wherein the

[4] Vincent Déroche, 'Doctrina Jacobi nuper baptizati', in Gilbert Dagron and Vincent Déroche, *Juifs et chrétiens en Orient byzantin* (Paris 2010), pp. 47-229, at 70, n. 3.

[5] *Doctrina* 1.12. All references are to the edition of the text in Déroche, 'Doctrina Jacobi', and the English translation of the Greek based on this edition by Andrew S. Jacobs, available online at http://andrewjacobs.org/translations/doctrina.html (last accessed 27 September, 2023).

two men simply produce further arguments in support of each other's statements. The crux of the majority of these arguments is that the end is nigh and, with no time left for a messiah to show up, Jesus must have indeed been the Messiah awaited by the Jews, and that other messianic claims of the past and present are all false. The text specifically adumbrates two such messianic claims, one involving a Tiberian priest who, during Jacob's and Justus's childhood, had a vision of the birth of the Messiah, which Justus admits was false,[6] and the other a prophet who has appeared amongst the Saracens and of whom Justus's brother Abraham has informed him. At this point the dialogue has Justus avow his firm belief in Jesus, 'the saviour and king of Israel',[7] which culminates in his preparation for baptism and instruction by Jacob in Christian doctrine, bringing the story to a close—although not before giving a precis of Jacob's life up until his forced baptism, then true conversion, and eventual setting sail for Constantinople.[8]

The text of the *Doctrina* has been noted to contain three absolute dates, as well as two references to contemporary events. It is also apparent both from the incipit and the reference to some activities as having taken place 'when Phocas reigned in Constantinople' (602-610 CE) as well as to 'when in Constantinople the Greens dragged Bonosos in the street'[9] (610 CE) that the dialogue situates itself in the reign of Heraclius. On the face of it, this abundance of absolute and relative dates in the text would seem to make the dating easy, but, as will be seen presently, this is not exactly the case. I shall begin with the clues in the text that help with its relative dating.

The most obvious reference in the text that has led to an early dating for it is its mention of the Saracen prophet and his forces bursting into Palestine, which has been taken by modern scholars to be an allusion to the opening phases of the Muslim conquest of the wider Near East, which, it is assumed, started in ca. 634 CE. This reference, however, was identified as problematic already in 1977: in their controversial reconstruction of the rise of Islam, Patricia Crone and Michael Cook passingly noted that taking the *Doctrina*'s evidence at face value would entail that Muhammad died after the onset of the conquests, rather than in 632 CE, as is traditionally

[6] *Doctrina* 5.6.

[7] *Doctrina* 5.16.

[8] According to Déroche, 'Doctrina Jacobi', 60 and 216-17, n. 144, the part on Jacob's baptism in the Greek version originally belonged to the beginning of the text, but it reads as an integral part of the narrative. In the non-Greek testimonies, however, this precis also appears as an appendage to the main text.

[9] *Doctrina* 1.40.

assumed.[10] This suggestion was later taken up by other scholars, who asserted that, based on the testimony of the *Doctrina* and other sources, Muhammad must have led what modern scholarship calls 'the Muslim conquests' in their earliest phases.[11] Nevertheless, there are references to Muslims campaigning in the region of Palaestina Tertia already during the lifetime of Muhammad (and before 632 CE), only that they are not referred to by our sources as 'conquests' (*futūḥ*). The construal of these events as ad hoc, punitive campaigns, as against a group of events known as 'the conquests' that followed later is, as I have attempted to show elsewhere, the product of our uncritical reliance on the highly stylised periodisation schemes bequeathed to us by later Islamic historiography, and, therefore, the modern historian should pause before automatically equating every reference to campaigns in this region in this period with 'the conquests' that supposedly started in 634 CE. Therefore, the *Doctrina*'s reference to Saracen forays into Palestine cannot provide us with a precise chronological framework for its triangulation.[12] What is more, even if the reference is to the events of 634 CE, it does not necessarily follow that the text was also composed at the same time.[13]

Doctrina Iacobi as apologia

[10] Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge 1977), 3-4.

[11] Shoemaker, *Death of a Prophet*.

[12] See Mehdy Shaddel, 'Periodisation and the *futūḥ*: Making Sense of Muḥammad's Leadership of the Conquests in non-Muslim Sources', *Arabica* 69 (2022): 96-145.

[13] The idiosyncratic stratification of the text and its dating to the eight century CE by Paul Speck, 'Die *Doctrina Iacobi nuper baptizati*', in idem, *Beiträge zum Thema byzantinische Feindseligkeit gegen die Juden in frühen siebten Jahrhundert, nebst einer Untersuchung zu Anastasios dem Perser* (Bonn 1997), pp. 267-439, has failed to gain traction with later commentators; cf. Joshua Holo, *Byzantine Jewry in the Mediterranean Economy* (Cambridge 2009), 47, n. 33; Walter E. Kaegi, *Muslim Expansion and Byzantine Collapse in North Africa* (Oxford 2010), 36, n. 103; Pieter W. van der Horst, 'A Short Note on the *Doctrina Jacobi nuper baptizati*', in idem, *Studies in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity* (Leiden 2014), pp. 203-8, at 203, n. 4; Anthony, *Muhammad*, 43. Samuel Noble and I are preparing an edition of the Arabic recensions of the *Doctrina*, which constitute the healthiest body of manuscript witness to the text, with due attention to the Ethiopic and Old Church Slavonic versions, and our close scrutiny of these translations and their *Vorlage*s does not support a contorted textual history such as that ventured by Speck.

The main argument for an early dating of the dialogue has indeed been that the elaborate story would only make sense if the chief issue it purports to address, lack of bona fide belief on the part of the forcibly baptised Jews, still posed so formidable a challenge to Christian society as to elicit a response in the form of *Doctrina Iacobi*.[14] This argument, however, misses two important points. First, that the narrative's presentation of the forcibly baptised Jews as still sceptical of the truth of Christianity only exacerbates, rather than alleviate, the concerns with regard to the sincerity of the conversion expressed by Maximus the Confessor, which have been identified, rather counterintuitively, as representative of the kind of objection that the author of the *Doctrina* sought to address.[15] Maximus feared that the forcible nature of the baptism would bring to the Church's fold droves of Jews who had only converted in name and would thus dent the purity of Christian belief, and the *Doctrina*'s dramatis personae are, in keeping with Maximus's worries, closet Jews who secretly continue to practise their Judaism.[16] If anything, then, the *Doctrina* concurs with Maximus's reservations rather than respond to them. Second, that the author of the dialogue was a Jewish convert[17] and that the burden of conversion weighs heavy on the shoulders of the convert. With conversion comes upbraiding from the convert's old community[18] and, at times, even severance of all ties and loss of the social networks of support,

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[14] Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 59; Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses*, 156; Shoemaker, *Death of a Prophet*, 20. The strongest case for the *Doctrina* being a response to Heraclius's forced Christianisation campaign has been put together by Christian Boudignon, '"Le temps du saint baptême n'est pas encore venu": Nouvelles considérations sur la *Doctrina Jacobi*', in Sébastien Morlet, Olivier Munnich, and Bernard Pouderon (eds), *Les Dialogues adversvs ivdaeos: Permanences et mutations d'une tradition polémique: Actes du colloque international organisé les 7 et 8 décembre 2011 à l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne* (Paris 2013), pp. 237-56.

[15] Boudignon, 'Le temps du saint baptême', 251-6.

[16] On Maximus's letter, now see Ryan W. Strickler, 'The "Wolves of Arabia": A Reconsideration of Maximus the Confessor's *Epistula* 8', *Byzantion* 86 (2016): 419-39.

[17] On which more below.

[18] Accusations of social climbing levelled against converts even made it to Christian apologetic literature of the Abbasid period; cf. Barbara Roggema, 'A Christian Intellectual Declines to Convert to Islam: Ḥunayn b. Isḥāq (d. 260/873)', in Nimrod Hurvitz, Christian C. Sahner, Uriel Simonsohn, and Luke Yarbrough (eds), *Conversion to Islam in the Premodern Age: A Sourcebook* (Oakland, California, 2020), pp. 123-7, at 124, who mentions Abū Rāʾiṭa al-Takrītī, ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, and Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq (I thank Barbara Roggema for drawing my attention to such accusations).

thereby impelling the convert to proffer a defence of their deeds. 'The Pre-Eternal One has bidden me to pen this tract of mine', declares the ninth-century Christian convert to Islam ʿAlī ibn Rabbān al-Ṭabarī in his refutation of Christianity, 'so as to... present the Christians with a vindication (*iʿdhār*) [of my actions] and an admonition (*naṣīḥa*), so that they, or others, would not say that by leaving the Christian faith... and turning to the Abrahamic (*ḥanīfī*) creed of Islam, I aspired to barter [my erstwhile] religion for worldly possessions'.[19] A text like the *Doctrina* would, therefore, be probably better read as an apologia for its author's actions than a genuine attempt at winning the hearts of Jews, be they Christianised or otherwise. The aim of such a composition is not so much winning the author's old community over as taking the sting out of their opprobrium; it certainly also does go some way in procuring legitimacy for the convert's actions in her or his own eyes—it is the psychological factor that plays the larger role here. In this latter respect, one can almost say that the 'dialogue' is in truth a monologue, with the convert as its both author and audience.

With no prospect of securing the conversion of one's former coreligionists, it is only natural for an apology such as the *Doctrina* to present its Jews as being recalcitrant and refusing to admit the truth despite being fully cognisant of it: 'I was truly misled by the devil and I hated Christ, not ever wanting to hear the prophecies about Christ',[20] admits Jacob, adding that, 'always our people the Jews have been hard-hearted and disbelieving, fighting God';[21] 'it seems to us that there is no other Christ except the one who came and was born from Mary',[22] aver Justus's father and another Jewish elder without converting, leading Jacob to comment, 'the conscience of our fathers always goaded them';[23] 'I fear that the Christ who came earlier, whom the Christians worship, was the one sent by God', notes the learned man Justus's brother had approached to ask about Muhammad, adding, 'we Jews have a mistaken and hardened heart'.[24] This is not dissimilar to what ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī has to say of his own former brethren: 'I have composed this tract... even though I labour under no delusion that they [scil., the Christians] will

[19] ʿAlī ibn Rabbān al-Ṭabarī, *al-Radd ʿalā al-naṣārā*, ed. Rifaat Ebied and David Thomas, *The Polemical Works of ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī* (Leiden 2016), 62 (translation mine).

[20] *Doctrina* 1.40.

[21] *Doctrina* 1.41.

[22] *Doctrina* 5.6.

[23] *Doctrina* 5.7.

[24] *Doctrina* 5.16. Cf. also *Doctrina* 1.19.

turn their faces and their ears away from it and wander off, refusing to admit'.[25] The dialogue even gives us to understand that, even if granted the opportunity, the Jews would refuse to seek out the truth: 'we did not want to hear anything concerning Christ, nor could we behold with pleasure the divine scriptures about Christ... This is why God gave us the idleness of the Sabbath, so that we would pray and examine the divine scriptures for when Christ comes... but every Sabbath we... sought out the works of the world in our love of money, and we had no care for divine things',[26] observes Jacob. But, if the *Doctrina*'s Jews are so adamant as to not accept the truth, how does the hero of the story, himself a Jew, come to be convinced of the veracity of Christian teachings? It is here that forcible baptism enters the story as a narrative device: 'I... was reassured [after the compulsory baptism] that he is Christ... and I thank God that they baptised me even though I was unwilling';[27] 'he [scil., Jacob] was baptised unwillingly. And after that he cried out to God to show him if he was misled... and after that with weeping and fasting every day he pored over the holy scriptures, and he was persuaded... that Christ... was he who had come';[28] the incipit introduces the text as the 'teaching of Jacob, newly baptised... against his own will... having had a good pretext to come to know Christ'.[29] The message is clear: left to their own devices, Jews would never ponder upon the truth, although it is obvious to them. It was only through the happenstance of coercive Christianisation that Jacob started scouring the scriptures for the truth about Christ. Had it not been for this good fortune, he, like all the other unbelieving Jews, would have languished in his pitiable state of aberration. Not atypical of disputative literature, the author is reassuring their audience (and themself) that their erstwhile brethren are well aware of the truth of Christianity and thus, deep in their hearts, know that conversion is the only right course of action.

Just in the same way that the mention of the Saracen prophet fulfils a narrative function in the tractate, then, the narrative setting of a forced baptism is, likewise, a device that aids the author in advancing their polemical agenda, and need not have been the original context in which they were writing. Indeed, Jacob's purported presence at virtually every significant turn

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[25] al-Ṭabarī, *Radd*, 64 (translation mine).

[26] *Doctrina* 1.6.

[27] *Doctrina* 1.7.

[28] *Doctrina* 5.20.

[29] This part does not appear in the Arabic and Old Church Slavonic versions, leading Déroche, 'Doctrina Jacobi', 70, n. 3, to conclude that it is a later addition. In any case, the text seethes with this sentiment; cf. also *Doctrina* 1.40, 3.3, 5.9.

in the reign of Phocas strikes one as fanciful: he is present in Constantinople during the violence instigated by the circus factions that led to the Greens' burning of the Mese and the immolation of Green demarch John Crucis as a retribution; we then find him in Antioch during Bonosos's persecution of the Greens there; later at Constantinople again, at the scene of Bonosos's violent end,[30] where he personally drags the disgraced general on the ground;[31] still later at Rhodes he is again involved in factional riots on the side of the Greens;[32] then, presumably at the time of the Persian invasion during the reign of Heraclius, he takes part in the burning of a church in Ptolemais;[33] and he is said to have engaged in seditious activities directed against Christians in Constantinople, Pylai, Pythia, Cyzicus, Charax, Aegae, and Ptolemais![34] To all appearances, then, the author was writing at some temporal remove from the events narrated, and was basing their reconstruction of the historical setting on information purveyed by written sources or informants.[35]

Doctrina Iacobi and messianic expectancy

As mentioned above, the *Doctrina* refers to two rumours, which it dismisses as unfounded, about the proximity of the advent of the Jewish Messiah that had created eschatological fervour amongst the Jews. The first prophecy is a childhood memory which Jacob and Justus share. It involved a Tiberian priest who, during the reign of the emperor Maurice (r. 582-602 CE), had a vision of the birth of the Messiah from a virgin in eight years' time. Justus admits the prophecy was false, and adds that his own father and an elderly man had expressed doubt as to whether, 'there is no other Christ except the one who came and was born from Mary'.[36]

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[30] *Doctrina* 1.40.

[31] *Doctrina* 1.41.

[32] *Doctrina* 5.20. For the infighting amongst the circus factions in this period, consult Phil Booth, 'Shades of Blues and Greens in the Chronicle of John of Nikiou', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 104 (2011): 555-601.

[33] *Doctrina* 5.12; with the reference to the Persian invasion in *Doctrina* 4.4.

[34] *Doctrina* 1.41. Said to be murder, which he denies he has ever committed.

[35] The question of the text's sources for the early seventh century is beyond the purview of this contribution, but it bears reminding that this would not be the first time that a text composed at some temporal remove from the events it describes purveys accurate information about them.

[36] *Doctrina* 5.6.

It is perhaps not insignificant that the mention of the Jewish Messiah's mother here ranks amongst the very first but also very few instances in which ancient Jewish texts show any interest in her.[37] The mother of the Jewish Messiah makes her debut in *Sefer Zerubbabel*,[38] a Jewish apocalypse that is widely believed to have been composed at the close of the Sasanian-Byzantine war of 602-629 CE,[39] to be followed, shortly thereafter, by a cameo appearance in another Jewish apocalyptic composition, a piyyut known as *'Oto ha-yom*, which is commonly held to have been written in the mid-630s CE, in the immediate wake of the first wave of the Muslim conquests.[40] She then vanishes from the historical record for five centuries, when it briefly resurfaces, apparently under the influence of *Sefer Zerubbabel*, in a manuscript from the Rhineland in the 1160s CE at the earliest, before gradually fading into obscurity.[41] Also mentioned in the tractate is the figure of Armilus (spelt Ἐρμόλαος throughout), the Jewish doppelganger of the Antichrist.[42] Interestingly, Armilus likewise makes his first fully-fledged appearance in *Sefer Zerubbabel*, although he is also passingly mentioned in the near-contemporary Hebrew text *Sefer Eliyyahu*.[43] Additionally, as David Olster has observed,[44] the *Doctrina* ascribes a belief in two

[37] Hagith Sivan, *Palestine in Late Antiquity* (Oxford 2008), 241-2, has already noticed, albeit in passing, the appearance of the motif of the Messiah's mother in this text.

[38] There however is the peculiar tale of the eccentric mother of an infant messiah in the fifth-century *Talmud Yerushalmi*, which may reflect earlier preoccupations with the theme as postulated by Martha Himmelfarb, *Jewish Messiahs in a Christian Empire: A History of the Book of Zerubbabel* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2017), 46-7, but we have to wait until the seventh century for such preoccupations to make their presence felt. For the tales, see ibid., 39-47.

[39] Hillel I. Newman, 'Dating *Sefer Zerubavel*: Dehistoricizing and Rehistoricizing a Jewish Apocalypse of Late Antiquity', *Adamantius* 19 (2013), 324-36, has argued for a six-century dating of *Sefer Zerubbabel*, more specifically to ca. 570 CE, with interpolations following in the wake of the last Byzantine-Sasanian war. But this is of little bearing on the present discussion.

[40] Himmelfarb, *Jewish Messiahs*, 35-59. For the date of the apocalypse, see ibid., pp. 13-34.

[41] Ibid., 122-4. Her next, and final, resurgence is in the thirteenth-century Zohar, compiled in Muslim Spain.

[42] *Doctrina* 1.5, 3.8, 3.9, 4.3, 5.1, 5.2, 5.4, 5.5, 5.16.

[43] Himmelfarb, *Jewish Messiahs*, 56. On its significance, cf. also David M. Olster, *Roman Defeat, Christian Response, and the Literary Construction of the Jew* (Philadelphia 1994), 173; Shoemaker, *Death of a Prophet*, 284, n. 10.

[44] Olster, *Roman Defeat*, 173.

messiahs to Jews.[45] This is an apparent reference to the idea of a Josephite messiah, Nehemiah ben Hushiel, preceding the advent of the Davidic messiah, Menachem ben Ammiel, a scenario similarly popularised by the *Sefer Zerubbabel*.[46] Whilst no other Jewish text appears to know of the mother of the Messiah as a virgin,[47] the references to her, to Armilus, and to the two messiahs are further evidence that our text is thoroughly conversant with the Jewish eschatological lore circulating in the Near East in the wake of the last Sasanian-Byzantine war, and, together with the detailed knowledge it exhibits of Palestinian geography and of Jewish social life,[48] lend more credence to the theory of the Palestinian Jewish origin of its author.[49] None of these, it must be noted, are known to be emblematic of the *adversus iudaeos* literature, and are peculiar to the *Doctrina*.[50]

The second claim about the proximity of the Messiah's parousia follows slightly later in the text, where Justus mentions a missive he had received from his brother Abraham, telling him of a false prophet who has appeared:

> for at the time when (Sergius[51]) the candidatus was slaughtered by the Saracens I was in Caesarea—Abraham says—and I went out by boat to Sykamina. And they said: 'the candidatus was slaughtered'. And we Jews rejoiced greatly. And they said that a prophet appeared, coming with the Saracens and he is proclaiming the arrival of the coming Anointed One and Christ. And when I went out into Sykamina I communicated it to a certain very scriptural old man and I said to him: 'what do you say to me about this

[45] *Doctrina* 3.8.

[46] Himmelfarb, *Jewish Messiahs*, 99-119. It must be pointed out that there are earlier reference to a Josephite messiah, but they first appear in conjunction with each other in *Sefer Zerubbabel*. On the Jewish apocalyptic messianism of this period, see more broadly Alexei M. Siverstev, *Judaism and Imperial Ideology in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge 2011).

[47] Martha Himmelfarb, personal communication. The virginisation of the Jewish Messiah's mother might have been an attempt on the part of the author to portray the Jews as having sufficient information to recognise Jesus as the true Messiah, but failing to do so out of obstinacy.

[48] Averil Cameron, 'The Jews in Seventh-Century Palestine', *Scripta Classica Israelica* 13 (1994): 75-93, at 83-5; Gilbert Dagron, 'Commentaire', in Gilbert Dagron and Vincent Déroche, *Juifs et chrétiens en Orient byzantin* (Paris 2010), pp. 230-73, at 240-46; Van der Horst, 'Short Note'.

[49] Perhaps most concertedly argued for by Olster, *Roman Defeat*, 160-79.

[50] Cf. ibid., 158-79.

[51] Only attested in non-Greek versions.

> prophet who is appearing with the Saracens?' And with a great groan he said: 'he is a deceiver (πλάνος). Do prophets come with swords and chariots (ἅρματος)? Really these are works of disorder set in motion today, and I fear that the Christ who came earlier, whom the Christians worship, was the one sent by God and instead of him we shall accept Hermolaos. For Isaiah said that we Jews have a mistaken and hardened heart, until all the land is made a desert. But go forth, Mr. Abraham, and learn about this prophet who is appearing.' And I, Abraham, thoroughly investigating, heard from those who met him that you find nothing true in this so-called prophet, except shedding human blood. For he says that he has keys of paradise which is unbelievable.

Justus then declares his firm belief in the true Messiah, Jesus, 'the saviour and king of Israel', setting the stage for the narrative's denouement.[52]

The incipit and the contents thus make it amply clear that the dialogue's principal aim is to prove the truth of Jesus Christ and, in the process, to also combat contemporary rival messianic pretensions. Muhammad, who is denounced as a sham and deceiver[53] interested solely in shedding human blood, is not exactly said to have harboured such pretensions, but is rather said to have claimed to be in possession of the 'keys to paradise' and to be the forerunner of the Messiah—claims, it is intimated, some Jews found themselves to be amenable to. Muhammad's status as a prophet, therefore, is of concern inasmuch as it presages the advent of the Messiah, whom the dialogue strives to prove has already come.[54] Insofar as the text shows any interest in Islam, it is to prove Judaism false and Christianity true; in and of itself, Muhammad's message does not seem to have been thought of as a formidable ideological challenge.[55] And this should come as no surprise, as Christian awareness of and polemics against Islamic doctrines would not appear before the next century. Even the late seventh-century *Hodegos* of Anastasius of Sinai is

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[52] *Doctrina* 5.16.

[53] The word πλάνος is also applied to Armilus in the tractate (e.g. *Doctrina* 1.5), though it is employed in reference to other characters (e.g. *Doctrina* 3.1, where it is applied to Jacob) as well.

[54] Cf. Johannes Pahlitzch, 'Doctrina Iacobi nuper baptizati', in David Thomas and Barbara Roggema (eds), *Christian-Muslim Relations, a Bibliographical History*, vol. 1: *(600-900)* (Leiden 2009), pp. 117-19, at 118.

[55] Averil Cameron, 'Byzantines and Jews: Some Recent Work on Early Byzantium', *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 20 (1996): 249-74, especially 259; cf. Vincent Déroche, 'Anti-Jewish Polemic and the Emergence of Islam', in Averil Cameron and Robert Hoyland (eds), *Doctrine and Debate in the East Christian World, 300-1500* (Abingdon 2011), pp. 85-107.

believed to have the refutation of Monophysitism as its main purpose, with 'Arabs and their beliefs... mentioned... only incidentally to this principal objective, and then only as part and parcel of the argument against the Monophysites'.[56] For a full hundred years after the rise of Islam, Near Eastern Christianity confined itself to commenting on Islam in passing rather than dedicate whole treatises to its confutation.[57]

As to Muhammad presaging the Messiah, Anthony notes that a quranic verse (Q 43:61) may, according to one reading, depict Jesus as the sign of the approach of the eschaton, and that Muhammad is also portrayed as the harbinger of Jesus in some early Islamic traditions.[58] But this perhaps overstates the case: one, ambiguous quranic verse, if it refers to Jesus in the first place,[59] pales into insignificance before the rich idiom of eschatology in which the book trades,[60] and the Quran is not known for otherwise betraying any messianic concerns or envisioning a return of Christ.[61] In fact, the quranic Jesus may not even be alive.[62] In general, quranic Christology is very minimalist, and only accords the position of a mere prophet, akin to the ones before him, to Jesus (Q 5:75). Although the Quran concedes that Jesus was born to a virgin and had no father (Q 3:47), and that he did not die but was raised to heaven (4:157-8), his mission is considered fulfilled with his departure from the earth, with no need for a Second Coming.[63]

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[56] Sidney Griffith, 'Anastasios of Sinai, the *Hodegos*, and the Muslims', *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 32 (1987): 341-58, at 347. For its date, see Karl-Heinz Uthemann, *Anastasios Sinaites: Byzantinisches Christentum in den ersten Jahrzehnten unter arabischer Herrschaft* (Berlin 2015), 22-4.

[57] G. J. Reinink, 'The Beginnings of Syriac Apologetic Literature in Response to Islam', *Oriens Christianus* 77 (1993): 165-87, especially 168-71; Sidney H. Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam* (Princeton 2008), 23-44, most explicitly at 35.

[58] Anthony, *Muhammad*, 43-4, n. 60.

[59] Gabriel Said Reynolds, 'Jesus, the *qāʾim* and the End of the World', *Rivista degli studi orientali* 75 (2001): 55-86, at 60-61.

[60] On quranic eschatology, see Andrew Rippin, 'The Commerce of Eschatology', in Stefan Wild (ed.), *The Qur'an as Text* (Leiden 1996), pp. 125-35.

[61] See, in general, Fred M. Donner, 'La question du messianisme dan l'islam primitif', *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée* 91-94 (2000): 17-28.

[62] Gabriel Said Reynolds, 'The Muslim Jesus: Dead or Alive?' *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 72 (2009): 237-58.

[63] The only post-mortem duty with which he is entrusted is to act as arbiter between those who believed in him and those who did not on judgment day (Q 3:55). On Jesus's role in the Quran

The Muslim tradition also fails to offer any substantive leads in this regard: on the one hand, its minimalist Christology notwithstanding, the Quran, having recognised, or understood to recognise, Jesus as the Messiah awaited by the Jews,[64] leaves no room for the possibility that early Muslims might have preached the impending arrival of the Jewish Messiah. On the other, whilst certainly early, it is not clear when exactly belief in Christ's Second Coming at the end of time was incorporated into early Islamic eschatology. The role assigned to Christ in classical Sunni eschatology is somewhat ambiguous, inasmuch as he now eclipses the Mahdī, now is relegated to a secondary role.[65] But it would appear that in the earlier periods it was he who occupied centre stage in most Muslim tales of the eschaton: the title of *mahdī* may have accrued to itself indeterminate salvific connotations by the later Umayyad period,[66] but it is not before the Abbasid revolution (750 CE) that the Mahdī—with a capital M—solidifies his status as one of the principal messianic actors of the Islamic drama of the end.[67]

Be that as it may, traditions in which Muhammad is depicted as a harbinger of Christ's Second Coming are not aplenty. A Syrian tradition puts the following words into Muhammad's mouth: 'the best of this community are those at its beginning and those at its end: those at its

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and Islamic eschatology, see the pithy account in Reynolds, 'Jesus, *qāʾim* and the End', especially 56-61.

[64] He is called 'the Messiah' (*al-masīḥ*) no less than eleven times in the Quran, in Q 3:45, 4:157, 4:171, 4:172, 5:17, 5:72, 5:75, 9:30, 9:31.

[65] Reynolds, 'Jesus, *qāʾim* and the End', 62-6.

[66] Patricia Crone and Martin Hinds, *God's Caliph: Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam* (Cambridge 1986), pp. 36-7. The attestations of the term *mahdī* in the context of the Second Muslim Civil War (680-692 CE) do not constitute evidence for belief in a messiah, as demonstrated by Sandra Campbell, 'Millennial Messiah or Religious Restorer: Reflections on the Early Islamic Understanding of the Term *mahdi*', *Jusûr* 11 (1995): 1-11. Torsten Hylén, 'Mukhtār and the Mahdī: A Critical Inquiry into the Sources', *DIN: Tidsskrift for Religion og Kultur* 9 (2018): 138-157, has debunked the idea that al-Mukhtār's use of the term *mahdī* in reference to Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafiyya has a messianic significance.

[67] As is apparent from the rivalry over this title between different participant groups in the revolution in its immediate wake, which would have had its roots in revolutionary-era messianist propaganda; Amikam Elad, 'The Struggle for the Legitimacy of Authority as Reflected in the *ḥadīth* of al-Mahdī', in John Nawas (ed.), *'Abbasid Studies, II: Occasional Papers of the School of 'Abbasid Studies Leuven 28 June-1 July 2004* (Leuven 2010), pp. 39-96.

beginning have the messenger of God in their midst and those at its end Jesus'.[68] Another has Muhammad declare that, 'God will never bring low a nation of which I am the first and Christ is the last'.[69] Both of these traditions seem to allow for a considerable time-lapse between Muhammad and the Second Coming, and there is no indication in either that the former's ministry is supposed to somehow precipitate the latter's return. But, assuming that they truly represent Muhammad as a prefiguration of the Second Coming, is the *Doctrina*'s statement that Muhammad's appearance was taken to portend the impending parousia of the Messiah an echo of such early Muslim beliefs? It may or may not be, but, whatever the case, I should like to contend that there is evidence for a more immediate source for the dialogue's understanding of Muhammad's eschatological function.

Muhammad and seventh-century Jewish messianism

The seventh and eighth centuries witnessed the production of a plethora of Jewish texts waxing apocalyptic about the cataclysmic crises that engulfed the world around them. Many of them dealt at length with the rise of Islam and the coming to power of the 'kingdom of the Ishmaelites', an event which was received favourably by most of them. Perhaps the best known of them is the *Secrets of Rabbi Shimon ben Yohai*, a Hebrew composition whose understanding of the eschatological function of Muhammad's mission has long been observed to evince affinities to *Doctrina Iacobi*.[70] But previous scholars have confined themselves to merely noting this affinity, without elaborating on its potential implications, and most of them have still considered the *Doctrina*'s report on the first Muslim inroads into Palestine and the Jewish reception of Muhammad to have been an eye-witness account. What is wanting here is an appreciation of the possibility that the *Doctrina*'s prima facie first-person narration is not a

[68] Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣfahānī, *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ*, no ed. (Beirut 1996), vol. 6, 123.

[69] Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaf*, ed. Ḥamad ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Jumuʿa and Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Luḥaydān (Riyadh 2004), vol. 13, 419-20; cited by Anthony, *Muhammad*, 43-4, n. 60. Or, variously, 'a nation of which I am the first and Jesus is the last will never be annihilated'; al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān fī taʾwīl al-Qurʾān*, ed. ʿAbd al-Sanad Ḥasan Yamāma (Cairo 2001), vol. 5, 449.

[70] Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*, 4-5; Moshe Gil, *A History of Palestine, 634-1099* (Cambridge 1992), 62; Robert G. Hoyland, 'Sebeos, the Jews and the Rise of Islam', in R. L. Nettler (ed.), *Medieval and Modern Perspectives on Muslim-Jewish Relations* (Luxembourg 1995), pp. 89–102, at 92; Gilbert Dagron, 'Introduction historique: Entre histoire et apocalypse', in Gilbert Dagron and Vincent Déroche, *Juifs et chrétiens en Orient byzantin* (Paris 2010), pp. 17-46, at 43; Anthony, *Muhammad*, 57-8; Guy G. Stroumsa, *The Making of Abrahamic Religions in Late Antiquity* (Oxford 2015), 83-4.

contemporaneous memorandum, but is rather an ancillary assessment reliant on the depictions of Muhammad in Jewish apocalyptic lore circulating in the seventh-century eastern Mediterranean.

The text of the *Secrets*,[71] as we now possess it, likely dates to late 762 CE: its last stratum makes mention of a rebel of servile origins, an obvious reference to the Abbasid kingmaker Abū Muslim al-Khurāsānī's humble background, who would overthrow the Ishmaelite (i.e., Umayyad) kingdom (750 CE);[72] what is evidently the Abbasid strongman ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAlī's failed bid for power (754-5 CE);[73] his brothers holding the major governorships;[74] the caliph al-Manṣūr's reign (754-75 CE); his treacherous elimination of Abū Muslim (755 CE);[75] his suppression of, apparently, the Berber revolt (761-2 CE);[76] what seems to be the start of his foundation of Baghdad[77] (August 762 CE[78]); and the apparition of a comet in the eastern quadrant

[71] A full translation may be found in John C. Reeves, *Trajectories in Near Eastern Apocalyptic: A Postrabbinic Jewish Apocalypse Reader* (Leiden 2005), 78-89.

[72] On his alleged slave origins, consult Jacob Lassner, 'Abū Muslim al-Khurāsānī: The Emergence of a Secret Agent from Khurāsān, Irāq, or Was It Iṣfahān?', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 104 (1984): 165-75. He was also derisively called *ʿabd* ('slave'), a shortened form of his given name, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ('slave of the Merciful One'), by his detractors; e.g., in al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, ed. Suhayl Zakkār and Riyāḍ Ziriklī (Beirut 1996), vol. 4, 148. Cf. also Bernard Lewis, 'An Apocalyptic Vision of Islamic History', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 13 (1950): 308-38, at 329.

[73] On which, see Jacob Lassner, *The Shaping of ʿAbbāsid Rule* (Princeton 1980), 19-38.

[74] On whom, see al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, vol. 4, 117-41.

[75] Agreeing with the more plausible reading by Lewis, 'Apocalyptic Vision', 330, against Reeves, *Trajectories*, 88 (I am grateful to Ahmad Al-Jallad for helping me with the Hebrew).

[76] On which, see Hugh Kennedy, *The Early Abbasid Caliphate: A Political History* (London 1981), 50, 83.

[77] This is the statement that this ruler would ferry gold and silver up the Euphrates, which must be a reference to material for the construction of the town being transported to the site via the Euphrates and the Ṣarāt canal.

[78] A. A. Duri, 'Baghdād', *Encyclopaedia of Islam, New Edition*, vol. 1: *A-B* (Leiden 1960), 894-908, at 896.

of the night sky, whose sighting (August-October 762 CE) is also reported in other sources,[79] heralding the advent of the Davidic messiah.[80]

In its present form, the text shows an occasionally less-than-charitable appreciation of Islam, but it also contains more positive elements in the earlier part which has led modern scholars to posit a seventh-century *Vorlage* with a pronounced pro-Islamic slant for it.[81] Cast in the form of a conversation between Metatron, the angel of divine presence, and the second-century CE Rabbi Shimon ben Yohai, the apocalypse presents the rise of Islam as a godsend to deliver Israel from the iniquities of 'Edom', a common codeword for Byzantium in Jewish texts from this period. It then prophesies that God, 'shall raise up over them a prophet in accordance with His will, and He will subdue the land for them, and they shall come and restore it with grandeur'. Incredulous, Rabbi Shimon demands scriptural proof for this statement, whereupon Metatron states, 'did not Isaiah the prophet speak thusly? "And should he see chariotry (*rekhev*) of a pair of riders, one riding an ass, one riding a camel"' (Isaiah 21:7), and then goes on to expound how, in spite of the textual sequence of the verse, the rider on a camel in fact prefigures the rider on an ass—that is, the Messiah.[82] This citation of Isaiah 21:7 is perhaps the first extant instant of this biblical verse being adduced as a prediction of Muhammad. But while later Muslim theologians would quote it as Isaiah's prophecy of Jesus's coming to be followed by Muhammad,[83] here it is produced as evidence that Muhammad presages the advent of the Jewish Messiah, which chimes very well with the *Doctrina*'s insinuations about Jewish reactions to the first wave of Muslim invasions of the Byzantine Near East.

Of special interest to us here is the references to Isaiah 21:7, whose camel-rider is identified with Muhammad and whose ass-rider with the Messiah. The term 'chariot(ry)'

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[79] David Cook, 'Messianism and Astronomical Events during the First Four Centuries of Islam', *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée* 91-94 (2000): 29-54, at 40.

[80] Lewis, 'Apocalyptic Vision', 329-30; Reeves, *Trajectories*, 87-9.

[81] Lewis, 'Apocalyptic Vision', 323; Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*, 4-5; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 308-12; Reeves, *Trajectories*, 77; Shoemaker, *Death of a Prophet*, 28-9. For the text and the bundle of associated compositions, see Reeves, *Trajectories*, 76-8.

[82] Reeves, *Trajectories*, 79-80.

[83] Suliman Bashear, 'Riding Beasts on Divine Missions: An Examination of the Ass and Camel Traditions', *Journal of Semitic Studies* 37 (1991): 37-75.

(*rekhev*)[84] has been used in reference to both of them in the verse, as has been in the quotation thereof in the *Secrets*. Is it entirely a coincidence that the *Doctrina*, which is cognisant of such messianic construal of Muhammad's eschatological role as we see in the *Secrets*, also characterises Muhammad as coming with a chariot? Whilst it is possible that chariots and swords are meant to serve the narrative's purpose of constructing an imagery of war and violence unbecoming of a true prophet, depictions of Muhammad as a charioteer in Christian and Jewish accounts of the conquests are otherwise unheard of,[85] and, as a matter of fact, chariots can be part of the paraphernalia of imperial grandeur in Byzantine apocalyptic.[86] In the light of the fact that the *Secrets*, the only other Jewish text to construe Muhammad as a messianic harbinger,[87] also uses the imagery of chariot-riding, one may, therefore, entertain the possibility that his portrayal as a charioteer in the *Doctrina* is informed by the same chiliastic reception of the conquests whose reverberations can be heard in the *Secrets*—a contention which would seem all the more plausible if one recalled that the *Doctrina* is in close conversation with seventh-century Near Eastern Jewish apocalyptic lore.[88] One may also argue that the term *rekhev* in the Bible and the *Secrets* was intended to evoke different imagery (say, that of a 'rider'), but it is exactly this ambiguity that enabled the author of the *Doctrina* to cast Muhammad in a negative light by presenting him as a chariot-riding warrior craving nothing but blood. Here as elsewhere, then, the dialogue is playing on pre-existing tropes (another example of which being that of Muhammad possessing the 'keys to paradise'), which, disconcertingly for its author, some Jews had found themselves to be agreeable to. Although squarely incidental to the tractate's principal objective of rebutting the notion that the Messiah has yet to come,[89] engaging with

[84] The Septuagint renders the relevant part of the verse as ἱππεῖς δύο, which can mean 'two charioteers/horsemen'.

[85] The only thing that comes close to an exception is the eighth-century Greek version of the *Apocalypse of pseudo-Methodius*, which speaks of Ishmaelites as coming with chariots; Benjamin Garstad, *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius: An Alexandrian World Chronicle* (Cambridge, MA, 2012), 54 (text), 55 (translation). The passage cannot be found in the Syriac original and is peculiar to some of the Greek manuscripts; ibid., 341, n. 54.

[86] Paul J. Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition* (Berkeley 1985), 92.

[87] That is, besides the *Secret*'s dependants, for which consult Reeves, *Trajectories*, 76-8.

[88] Déroche, 'Doctrina Jacobi', 208, translates the passage as 'armés de pied en cap' rather than 'come with swords and chariots', but in the light of the above-discussed depictions of Muhammad I find the latter a more plausible rendering.

[89] See supra.

and refuting these claims would have been a sine qua non of any attempt to demonstrate the falsity of Muhammad's prophetic pretensions, thence the rhetorical query 'do prophets come with swords and chariots?'

A date?

Tracing the genealogy of the motifs and tropes invoked in *Doctrina Iacobi*—the mother of the Messiah, Armilus, the two messiahs, Muhammad as a precursor of the Messiah, Muhammad as a charioteer—points to an Umayyad-era Jewish Palestinian origin for the author, but it falls well short of providing us with clues for a more accurate dating of the text. Possible reliance on Jewish messianic interpretations of the rise of Islam and the conquests would interpose a temporal gap between the events narrated in the text and the time of its writing, but one still too inexact to provide us with a solid terminus post quem. What we do know is that the conquering armies were received with open arms by (some) Jews, and, in an account that is not without some trappings of authenticity, pseudo-Sebeos of Armenia (writing ca. 660 CE) even informs us of what might have been a brief interlude in the immediate wake of the Muslim conquest of Palestine, during which the Temple in Jerusalem was administered jointly as a condominium by Muslims and Jews before that arrangement fell apart following acrimonious quarrels[90]—a contention that finds seeming corroboration in the Hebrew apocalyptic composition known as *Pirqe Mashiah*.[91] Sebeos's claim notwithstanding, we still find Jews, alongside Christians, amongst the attendants of the Dome of the Rock,[92] a structure built on the site of the Temple in the reign of ʿAbd al-Malik, possibly as a Third Temple.[93] Messianic Judaeo-Islamic movements would continue to revere Muhammad as some kind of paradigmatic figure

[90] R. W. Thomson and James Howard-Johnston (with assistance from Tim Greenwood), *The Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos* (Liverpool 1999), 102-3.

[91] Reeves, *Trajectories*, 156-7.

[92] Ibn Murajjā al-Maqdisī, *Faḍāʾil Bayt al-Maqdis wa-l-Khalīl wa-faḍāʾil al-Shām*, ed. Ofer Livne-Kafri (Shafā ʿAmr 1995), 61-2.

[93] Archaic Muslim traditions seem to indicate as much; e.g., ibid. 63-4. Many Jews also considered the structure to be a rebuilt Temple, as the evidence of Hebrew apocalyptic material shows, such as the *Jewish Apocalypse on the Umayyads*; Israel Lévi, 'Une apocalypse judéo-arabe', *Revue des études juives* 67 (1914): 178–82, at 178-9.

well into the eighth century CE,[94] and as late as the ninth century CE a Judaeo-Persian apocalypse could refer to Muhammad as a camel-driver who, 'comes on a camel… from the south'.[95] This apocalypse speaks of the Islamic prophet, whom it denies is a prophet at all, in none too positive terms, but the reference to him as a camel-driver, which no doubt ultimately derives from the Isaiah verse, is surely a remnant of earlier, more sympathetic apprehensions of the coming of Islam. Generally, apocalyptic compositions indicate that Jewish attitudes to Islam were at worst ambivalent until the end of the Umayyad period: the so-called *Jewish Apocalypse on the Umayyads*,[96] for instance, characterises Muʿāwiya's building activities on the Temple Mount as having been undertaken 'at God's behest', and otherwise evinces a wholly positive frame of mind in respect of the Umayyad caliphs.[97] What we can say with certainty is that if such messianic interpretations of Muhammad's role were thought to be deserving of a rebuttal by the author of the *Doctrina*, they must have been fairly ubiquitous at the time—the text itself certainly speaks of Jews 'who have mixed up with the Saracens'.[98] This would indicate that the *Doctrina* was, in all likelihood, composed before the fall of the Umayyad dynasty in 750 CE but a few decades after the 630s to allow enough time for the wide permeation of chiliastic ideas associating Muhammad and Islam with the coming of the Jewish Messiah. I feel hesitant to attach too much weight to the statement, preserved only in one Arabic manuscript, that Jacob died on 25 May, 677 CE,[99] but is it a coincidence that *Doctrina* 1.22 reckons 640 years since the crucifixion of Christ? And can the reference to 600 years of Jewish humiliation in *Doctrina* 2.6 be to the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE—all three of which would place the composition sometime in the 670s

[94] See Sean W. Anthony, 'Who Was the Shepherd of Damascus? The Enigma of Jewish and Messianist Reponses to the Islamic Conquests in Marwānid Syria and Mesopotamia', in Paul M. Cobb (ed.), *The Lineaments of Islam: Studies in Honor of Fred McGraw Donner* (Leiden 2012), pp. 21-59.

[95] James Darmesteter, 'L'Apocalypse Persane de Daniel', in *Mélanges Leon Renier* (Paris 1887), pp. 405-20, at 409. The text, as we possess it, has undergone two redactions, datable to, respectively, ca. 813-19 and 837-8 CE; Mehdy Shaddel, *Apocalypse, Empire, and Universal Mission at the End of Antiquity: World Religions at the Crossroads* (Leiden, unpublished PhD dissertation, forthcoming).

[96] Something of a misnomer, given that the beginning and end of the text are missing from the fragment.

[97] Lévi, 'Apocalypse judéo-arabe', 178-9.

[98] *Doctrina* 5.17.

[99] Déroche, 'Doctrina Jacobi', 52.

CE? Whilst this is possible, I would suggest that the debate is far from settled, and that the text ought to be more safely treated as a product of the Umayyad period (661-750 CE).

Conclusion

The foregoing analysis made a case that the narrative on Muhammad's activities in Palestine and the first wave of Muslim inroads into the wider Near East in *Doctrina Iacobi* is, contrary to received wisdom, not an eyewitness account, that there is no reason to treat it as a particularly early witness either, and that it almost certainly draws on Jewish messianic perceptions of the significance of Muhammad's ministry and of the Muslim conquests. In conclusion, the possibility that the *Doctrina*'s information on Muhammad may have ultimately derived from Jewish messianic interpretations of the Muslim conquests has serious implications for our understanding of the value of its testimony, in particular, and for writing the history of nascent Islam, in general. It does not necessarily negate the likelihood that Muhammad was involved in military activity in southern Palestine in the late 620s and early 630s CE, which, after all, is also reported by the so-called Muslim sources,[100] but, first and foremost, it is a cautionary tale in how even those sources that purport to be eyewitness testimonia to an event may have a contingent understanding of it, and that alleged 'contemporaneousness' of a source ought not to provide the historian with leave to quote freely from it, without due consideration for its form, genre, context, biases, historical outlook, and agenda. Few, if any, historical sources, it bears recalling, are the minutes of a business transaction taken by a disinterested clerk with no stake whatsoever in or understanding of the goings-on. In thrall to our sources we doubtless are and shall always remain, but, it should be remembered, a given set of sources cannot boast a higher truth value, or, for that matter, lay a better claim to being closer to 'historical reality', on the grounds of it having originated within a certain timeframe or religio-linguistic tradition.[101] It is high time we,

[100] For a fresh appraisal, the reader is referred to my 'Periodisation and the *futūḥ*'.

[101] Here I am echoing Antoine Borrut's thoughtful observations on the pitfalls associated with thinking of our sources in such terms as 'Muslim' and 'non-Muslim'; Antoine Borrut, 'La circulation de l'information historique entre les sources arabo-musulmanes et syriques: Élie de Nisibe et ses sources', in Muriel Debié (ed.), *L'historiographie syrique* (Paris 2009), pp. 137-59, at 138-40; and Antoine Borrut, 'Court Astrologers and Historical Writing in Early ʿAbbāsid Baghdād: An Appraisal', in Jens Scheiner and Damien Janos (eds), *The Place to Go: Contexts of Learning in Baghdād, 750-1000 C.E.* (Princeton 2014), pp. 455-501, at 476-81; cf. also Robert G. Hoyland, 'Arabic, Syriac and Greek Historiography in the First Abbasid Century: An Inquiry into Inter-cultural Traffic', *Aram* 3 (1991), pp. 211-33.

as historians of early Islam, broke the oppressive epistemological mould of the *ancien régime* of von Rankean positivism and started grappling with the ramifications of the Whitean revolution of 1973.