Jews and Syriac Christians

Edited by
AARON MICHAEL BUTTS
and SIMCHA GROSS

*Texts and Studies in
Ancient Judaism*

Mohr Siebeck

Jews and Syriac Christians

Intersections across the First Millennium

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Aaron Michael Butts and Simcha Gross

Mohr Siebeck

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Abbreviations

Rabbinic Texts

The following abbreviations are used for the citation of rabbinic texts:

m. Mishnah.
t. Tosefta, cited according to S. Lieberman, *The Tosefta* (Jerusalem, 1955–1988) and M. S. Zuckermandel, *Tosefta, Based on the Venice and Vienna Codices* (Jerusalem, 1970).
y. Palestinian Talmud, cited according to Y. Sussman, *Talmud Yerushalmi: Yotze le-or al-pi ketav yad Scaliger 3 (Or. 4720)* (Jerusalem, 2005).
b. Babylonian Talmud, cited according to the pagination of the Vilna edition (1880–1886).

The following Mishnah and Talmud tractates are referenced:

Avod. Zar.	Avodah Zarah	Meg.	Megillah
Avot	Avot	Moed Qat.	Moed Qatan
B. Bat.	Bava Batra	Naz.	Nazir
B. Metz.	Bava Metzia	Ned.	Nedarim
B. Qam.	Bava Qamma	Nid.	Niddah
Ber.	Berakhot	Pes.	Pesahim
Betzah	Betzah	Qidd.	Qiddushin
Demai	Demai	San.	Sanhedrin
Eruv.	Eruvin	Shabb.	Shabbat
Git.	Gittin	Shev.	Sheviit
Hor.	Horayot	Sotah	Sotah
Hul.	Hullin	Taan.	Taanit
Ketub.	Ketubbot	Yev.	Yevamot
Kil.	Kilayim	Zevah.	Zevahim
Mak.	Makkot	Yoma	Yoma

Additional rabbinic texts cited include:

Avot de-Rabbi Natan	Cited according to S. Schechter, *Avot de Rabbi Natan* (Vienna, 1887; corrected repr. Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1979).
Bereshit Rabba	Cited according to J. Theodor and Ch. Albeck, *Bereschit Rabba: Critical Edition with Notes and Commentary* (2nd revised ed.; Jerusalem: Wahrmann Books, 1965).
Hekhalot Rabbati	Cited according to P. Schäfer, *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur* (TSAJ 2; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1981).
Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael	Cited according to H. S. Horovitz and I. A. Rabin, *Mechilta d'Rabbi Ismael* (Frankfurt am Main: J. Kauffmann, 1931) or J. Z. Lauterbach, *Mekilta de-Rabbi*

	Ishmael (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1933).
Pesikta de-Rav Kahana	Cited according to B. Mandelbaum, *Pesikta de-Rav Kahana* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1962).
Pesikta Rabbati	Cited according to M. Friedmann, *Pesikta Rabbati* (Vienna: Selbstverlag des Herausgebers, 1880).
Shemot Rabba	Cited according to A. Shinan, *Midrash Shemot Rabbah. Chapters 1–14* (Jerusalem: Devir, 1984).
Sifra	Cited according to I. H. Weiss, *Sifra. Commentar zu Leviticus aus dem Anfange des III. Jahrhunderts. Nebst der Erläuterung des R. Abraham ben David (Rabed) und Masoret ha-Talmud* (Vienna: J. Schlossberg, 1862).

Biblical Books

Hebrew Bible / Old Testament

Genesis	Gn	Proverbs	Prv
Exodus	Ex	Ecclesiastes	Eccl
Leviticus	Lv	Song of Songs	Song
Numbers	Nm	Wisdom	Wis
Deuteronomy	Dt	Sirach	Sir
Joshua	Jos	Isaiah	Is
Judges	Jgs	Jeremiah	Jer
Ruth	Ru	Lamentations	Lam
1 Samuel	1 Sm	Baruch	Bar
2 Samuel	2 Sm	Ezekiel	Ezek
1 Kings	1 Kgs	Daniel	Dn
2 Kings	2 Kgs	Hosea	Hos
1 Chronicles	1 Chr	Joel	Jl
2 Chronicles	2 Chr	Amos	Am
Ezra	Ezr	Obadiah	Ob
Nehemiah	Neh	Jonah	Jon
Tobit	Tb	Micah	Mi
Judith	Jdt	Nahum	Na
Esther	Est	Habakkuk	Hab
1 Maccabees	1 Mc	Zephaniah	Zep
2 Maccabees	2 Mc	Haggai	Hg
Job	Jb	Zechariah	Zec
Psalm(s)	Ps(s)	Malachi	Mal

New Testament

Matthew	Mt	Acts of the Apostles	Acts
Mark	Mk	Romans	Rom
Luke	Lk	1 Corinthians	1 Cor
John	Jn	2 Corinthians	2 Cor

Galatians	Gal	Hebrews	Heb
Ephesians	Eph	James	Jas
Philippians	Phil	1 Peter	1 Pt
Colossians	Col	2 Peter	2 Pt
1 Thessalonians	1 Thes	1 John	1 Jn
2 Thessalonians	2 Thes	2 John	2 Jn
1 Timothy	1 Tm	3 John	3 Jn
2 Timothy	2 Tm	Jude	Jude
Titus	Ti	Revelation	Rv
Philemon	Phlm		

Journals, Series, and Reference Works

AB	*Analecta Bollandiana*
ACW	Ancient Christian Writers
AJEC	Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity
AJS Review	*Association for Jewish Studies Review*
AJSLL	*The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures*
AJSR	*Association for Jewish Studies Review*
ANF	A. Roberts and J. Donaldson (eds.), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969–1971).
AO	*Acta Orientalia*
AS	*Aramaic Studies*
BHT	Beiträge zur historischen Theologie
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
BSOAS	*Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*
BSOS	*Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies*
BZ	*Byzantinische Zeitschrift*
CA	Christianisme antique
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum Series Latina
CELAMA	Cultural Encounters in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages
CH	*Church History*
CHR	*Catholic Historical Review*
CHRC	*Church History and Religious Culture*
CSCO	Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium
CSS	Cistercian Studies Series
DJBA	M. Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic of the Talmudic and Geonic Periods* (Ramat-Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, and Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002).
DJD	Discoveries in the Judean Desert
DOP	*Dumbarton Oaks Papers*
DOT	Dumbarton Oaks Texts
EC	*Early Christianity*
ECS	Eastern Christian Studies

EEC	E. Ferguson (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity* (2nd ed.; New York: Garland, 1997).
EI	E. Yarshater (ed.), *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (New York: Columbia University Center for Iranian Studies, 2002–), available http://www.iranicaonline.org.
EJ	M. Berenbaum and F. Skolnik (eds.), *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Detroit: Macmillan Reference, 2007).
EQ	J. D. McAuliffe (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān* (Leiden: Brill, 2001–2006).
ÉS	Études syriaques
ETL	*Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses*
FC	Fontes Christiani
FO	*Folia Orientalia*
FoC	The Fathers of the Church
GCS	Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte
GECS	Gorgias Early Christian Studies
GRBS	*Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies*
HCMR	History of Christian-Muslim Relations
HR	*History of Religions*
HTR	*Harvard Theological Review*
HTS	*HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies*
HUCA	*Hebrew Union College Annual*
IJS	Institute of Jewish Studies (University College London)
IOS	*Israel Oriental Studies*
JA	*Journal asiatique*
JAAS	*Journal of Assyrian Academic Studies*
JAC	*Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum*
JAJ	*Journal of Ancient Judaism*
JAOC	Judaïsme ancien et origines du christianisme
JAOS	*Journal of the American Oriental Society*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JC	Judaism in Context
JCPS	Jewish and Christian Perspectives Series
JCSSS	*Journal of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies*
JE	C. Adler (ed.), *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1901–1906).
JEastCS	*Journal of Eastern Christian Studies*
JECS	*Journal of Early Christian Studies*
JJS	*Journal of Jewish Studies*
JJTP	*The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy*
JLA	*Journal of Late Antiquity*
JLAS	*Jewish Law Association Studies*
JNES	*Journal of Near Eastern Studies*
JQR	*The Jewish Quarterly Review*
JRS	*Journal of Roman Studies*
JS	*Jewish Studies*
JSAI	*Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*
JSHL	*Jerusalem Studies in Hebrew Literature*
JSIJ	*Jewish Studies, an Internet Journal*
JSJ	*Journal for the Study of Judaism*

JSJF	*Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Folklore*
JSJS	Journal for the Study of Judaism Supplements
JSOR	*Journal of the Society of Oriental Research*
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSP	*Journal for the Study of Pseudepigrapha*
JSQ	*Jewish Studies Quarterly*
JSS	*Journal of Semitic Studies*
JTS	*Journal of Theological Studies*
LAHR	Late Antique History and Religion
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LS	*Language Studies*
LSAWS	Linguistic Studies in Ancient West Semitic
MHR	*Mediterranean Historical Review*
MLR	*Mediterranean Language Review*
MPIL	Monographs of the Peshiṭta Institute, Leiden
MUSJ	*Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph*
NPNF	P. Schaff (ed.), *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* (New York: Scribner, 1898–1909).
NT	*Novum Testamentum*
NTS	*New Testament Studies*
OC	*Oriens Christianus*
OCP	*Orientalia Christiana Periodica*
OLA	Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta
OLP	*Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica*
OTM	Oxford Theological Monographs
PAAJR	*Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*
PETSE	Papers of the Estonian Theological Society in Exile
PG	P. Migne, *Patrologia Graeca.*
PISBR	Publications of the Israel Society for Biblical Research
PL	P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina.*
PLAL	Perspectives on Linguistics and Ancient Language
PMAS	Persian Martyr Acts in Syriac: Text and Translation
PO	Patrologia Orientalis
POC	*Proche-Orient chrétien*
Prooftexts	*Prooftexts: A Journal of Jewish Literary History*
PS	Patrologia Syriaca
PTS	Patristische Texte und Studien
RB	*Revue Biblique*
REJ	*Revue des études juives*
RHPR	*Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses*
RHR	*Revue de l'histoire des religions*
ROC	*Revue de l'orient chrétien*
RQ	*Revue de Qumrân*
RRJ	*The Review of Rabbinic Judaism*
RSR	*Recherches de science religieuse*
SBLSP	*Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers*
SC	Sources chrétiennes
SCH	Studies in Church History

SEA   Studia Ephemeridis Augustinianum
SFoC   Selections from the Fathers of the Church
SJHC   Studies in Jewish History and Culture
SJSJ   Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism
SLA   *Studies in Late Antiquity*
SOR   Serie Orientale Roma
SPB   Studia Post-Biblica
SSS   Studies Supplementary to Sobornost
STDJ   Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah
STMAC   Science, Technology, and Medicine in Ancient Culture
STT   Semitic Texts with Translations
SVT   Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
SymSyr II   *Symposium Syriacum 1976* (OCA 205; Rome: Pont. Institutum Orienta-
           lium Studiorum, 1978).
SymSyr IV   H. J. W. Drijvers, R. Lavenant, C. Molenberg, and G. J. Reinink (eds.),
           IV Symposium Syriacum, 1984. Literary Genres in Syriac Literature
           (Groningen – Oosterhesselen 10–12 September) (OCA 229; Rome: Pont.
           Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1987).
SymSyr V   R. Lavenant (ed.), *Symposium Syriacum 1988* (OCA 236; Rome: Pont.
           Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1990).
SymSyr VII R. Lavenant (ed.), *Symposium Syriacum VII. Uppsala University, Depart-*
           ment of Asian and African Languages, 11–14 August 1996 (OCA 256;
           Rome: Pont. Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1998).
TeCLA   Texts from Christian Late Antiquity
TEG   Traditio Exegetica Graeca
TH   Théologie historique
TSAJ   Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism / Texte und Studien zum Antiken
           Judentum
TSMEMJ   Texts and Studies in Medieval and Early Modern Judaism
TSQ   Texts and Studies on the Qurʾān
VC   *Vigiliae Christianae*
VT   *Vetus Testamentum*
WUNT   Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
YJS   *Yale Judaica Series*
ZA   *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie*
ZAC   *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum*
ZAW   *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*
ZDMG   *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*
ZTK   *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*

Introduction*

Scholarly interest in intersections between Jews and Syriac Christians has experienced a boom in recent years. This is the result of a series of converging trends in the study of both groups and their cultural productions. The present volume contributes to this developing conversation by collecting sixteen studies that investigate various intersections between Jews and Syriac Christians over the first millennium CE. These studies are both indicative of the state of the question and signal ways forward for future work on the subject. In this introduction, we outline the types of intersections that are documented in the sources as well as the various scholarly approaches to studying them.

But, first, a few words about the title of the volume: We titled the volume *Jews and Syriac Christians: Intersections across the First Millennium* to highlight the disciplinary connections we hope to draw between fields that have increasingly become the subject of comparison. These connections span many centuries, cross diverse geographical regions, and employ different corpora and methodologies, and therefore the studies in this volume fit best under the broad rubric of intersections. The use of the term intersections is, thus, deliberate. This term is purposefully general so as to allow room for various modes of contact, interaction, etc., without biasing the conversation with terminological preconceptions from the outset. In addition, the term intersections leaves room – and points to – the fact that this volume is primarily concerned with disciplines, i. e., intersections between the field of Syriac studies and the field of Jewish studies. Also in the title, the terms Jews and Syriac Christian are inherently loaded. Perhaps most relevant for this volume, these terms connote bounded and isolated communities which in reality were certainly more porous than the sources produced by religious elites would have us believe. In fact, several contributions in this volume challenge these very categories. Nevertheless, the terms Jews and Syriac Christians – especially in contrast with the abstractions Judaism and (Syriac) Christianity – serve as the best available heuristic in our view for the lived communities who defined, defended, or defied these terms.

We propose that intersections between Jews and Syriac Christians can be divided into two broad categories.[1] One of the categories involves cases in which the 'other' is explicitly referenced. This category is primarily concerned with texts, most, but not all, of which are polemical. Within this category, there are far more examples of 'Jews' appearing in Syriac Christian texts than of the inverse. But, regardless, scholars are faced with the same set of interpretative questions: Is the 'other' in the text 'real' or 'imagined'? How is the 'other' construed? If 'imagined', what is the purpose of including an 'imagined other'? What can it tell us about the one constructing the 'imagined other'? And, more broadly, what, if anything, can these representations of the 'other', whether 'real' or 'imagined', tell us about the 'other' as (s)he actually existed?

The second category can, at least initially, be defined negatively: It comprises cases in which the 'other' is *not* explicitly referenced. More practically, this category involves cases in which scholars look to Syriac Christian texts, history, culture, and more to understand better the historical context of Jews, or *vice versa*. Many examples belonging to this category, especially those related to texts, fall within research paradigms that have been increasingly problematized in recent years. Most obviously, these comparisons, which by definition lack the control of an explicit reference to the 'other', conjecture a connection where none is explicitly stated. In addition, these comparisons tend to posit directionality and to prioritize simple one-sided exchange over other, more complicated explanatory models. These criticisms should not, however, compel us to reject *a priori* either the fruitfulness of such comparisons or the utility of resorting to the texts and material culture of *both* Jews *and* Syriac Christians to understand better the broader historical context in which both these communities participated. In the next two sections, we explore in more detail these two broad categories of intersections between Jews and Syriac Christians.

'Other' Does *Not* Explicitly Appear; or, Historical Contextualization

In recent years a number of Jewish studies scholars have looked to Syriac Christianity, and especially its vast surviving literature, to help shed light on Babylonian Judaism and in particular the Babylonian Talmud. This is part of a broader trend to locate Judaism in its historical context. Since the beginning of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, scholars have investigated the Greco-Roman context of Jews located in Palestine. Traditional research in this vein culminated in the mid-twentieth century with S. Lieberman's two monumental volumes, *Greek in Jewish Palestine*

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[1] Moss (p. 207–208 below) has independently arrived at a similar categorization.

(1942) and *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine* (1950).[2] Interest in the Greco-Roman context of Jews continues until today, however, and includes new and innovative approaches, as evidenced by works such as S. Schwartz's *Were the Jews a Mediterranean Society?* (2010) and H. Lapin's *Rabbis as Romans* (2012), to name only a couple of the many examples.[3]

It is only more recently that scholars have similarly sought to contextualize Babylonian Jews and the Babylonian Talmud.[4] By far the clearest example of this recent trend is the subfield of Irano-Talmudica.[5] Scholars of Irano-Talmudica have sought to locate Babylonian Judaism in its Iranian context, and in particular they seek to explain passages in the Babylonian Talmud by recourse to Zoroastrian Middle Persian texts. The comparison of the Babylonian Talmud to Zoroastrian Middle Persian literature is not, however, without its problems.[6] One of the more serious is that the surviving Middle Persian sources leave much to be desired: The earliest Middle Persian manuscripts date well into the medieval period. They thus substantially post-date the Babylonian Talmud, even if one opts for a late date for its final redaction. While Zoroastrian Middle Persian literature no doubt preserves earlier material that originally circulated orally, distinguishing between earlier and later material is not straightforward. In addition, much of the scholarship in Irano-Talmudica has suffered from methodological issues. Most basically, the parallels offered are often not compelling, with studies that, on the one hand, border on parallelomania and, on the other hand, create low bars for comparison.[7] More broadly, most of the scholarship in Irano-Talmudica has aimed to identify parallels without asking broader, second-order questions about those parallels. These critiques should not, however, be understood as a rejection of the pursuit of such parallels or of the use of Zoroastrian Middle Persian

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[2] S. Lieberman, *Greek in Jewish Palestine* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1942); idem, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1950).

[3] S. Schwartz, *Were the Jews a Mediterranean Society? Reciprocity and Solidarity in Ancient Judaism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); H. Lapin, *Rabbis as Romans. The Rabbinic Movement in Palestine, 100–400 CE* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

[4] For exceptional, earlier work, see the histories of scholarship in S. Secunda, *The Iranian Talmud: Reading the Bavli in its Sasanian Context* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 10–14 and G. Herman, "Ahasuerus, the Former Stable-Master of Belshazzar and the Wicked Alexander of Macedon: Two Parallels between the Babylonian Talmud and Persian Sources," *AJS Review* 29 (2005): 284–288. For some possible motivations for scholars' reluctance to investigate the historical context of the Babylonian Talmud, see S. Gross, "Irano-Talmudica and Beyond: Next Steps in the Contextualization of the Babylonian Talmud," *JQR* 106 (2016): 248.

[5] See the bibliographies in Secunda, *The Iranian Talmud* as well as G. Herman and J. L. Rubenstein, "Introduction," in eidem, *The Aggada of the Bavli and its Cultural World* (Providence: Brown Judaic Studies, 2018), xii–xiii.

[6] See most forcefully R. Brody, "Irano-Talmudica: The New Parallelomania?," *JQR* 106 (2016): 203–232.

[7] See the discussion in Secunda, *Iranian Talmud*, 111–126, which does not in our view entirely redress the issues.

literature.[8] We remain convinced that the Irano-Talmudica school will continue to enrich our understanding of Babylonian Judaism, especially as it adopts more careful methodologies for identifying and analyzing comparison, as it is more cognizant of both the potentialities and limitations of the Middle Persian sources, and as it expands its interest beyond Zoroastrian literature to other kinds of royal and elite literature produced under the Sasanian Empire.[9]

In the wake of this turn to the Sasanian context of Babylonian Judaism, some scholars have also looked to Syriac.[10] Two articles stand out as especially foundational in this enterprise. The first was published by I. Gafni in 1982.[11] In this article, Gafni pointed to a number of interesting overlaps in the terminology used to describe East Syriac and rabbinic academies and suggested that other comparisons between these institutions would be fruitful. This line of inquiry was subsequently aided by advances in our understanding of both East Syriac and rabbinic academies, though much work still remains to be done.[12] The second article was published by Sh. Naeh in 1997, in which he argued that the word *ḥeruta* in b. Qidd. 81b is best understood in light of Syriac *ḥeruṯā* 'freedom', with its "Janus-like duality of meaning" – to use Naeh's words – of self-control, suppression of influence, and so even celibacy, on the one hand, and the debauchery and licentiousness that can arise from uncurbed freedom, on the other.[13] Naeh's

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[8] A position adopted by Brody ("Irano-Talmudica: The New Parallelomania?"), whose critique is, however, based at least in part on models of Sasanian feudalism and rabbinic insularity that have long been, and should be, rejected.

[9] See already Gross, "Irano-Talmudica and Beyond." Our position is similar to that of Rubenstein below (see p. 256). Exemplary studies, in our view, include G. Herman, "'Bury my Coffin Deep!': Zoroastrian Exhumation in Jewish and Christian Sources," in J. Roth, M. Schmeltzer, and Y. Francus (eds.), *Tiferet leYisrael: Jubilee Volume in Honor of Israel Francus* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary, 2010), 31–59; idem, "'Like a Slave before his Master': A Persian Gesture of Deference in Sasanian Jewish and Christian Sources," *ARAM* 26 (2014): 101–108; idem, "One Day David Went out for the Hunt of the Falconers: Persian Themes in the Babylonian Talmud," in S. Secunda and S. Fine (eds.), *Shoshanat Yaakov: Jewish and Iranian Studies in Honor of Yaakov Elman* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 111–136; S. Gross, "Rethinking Babylonian Rabbinic Acculturation in the Sasanian Empire," *JAJ* 9 (2019): 280–310.

[10] See the excellent summary in Herman and Rubenstein, "Introduction," xvii–xxx.

[11] I. Gafni, "Nestorian Literature as a Source for the History of the Babylonian *Yeshivot*," *Tarbitz* 51 (1982): 567–576 (in Hebrew).

[12] A. H. Becker, *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom: The School of Nisibis and the Development of Scholastic Culture in Late Antique Mesopotamia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006); idem, "The Comparative Study of 'Scholasticism' in Late Antique Mesopotamia: Rabbis and East Syrians," *AJS Review* 34 (2010): 91–113. Scholars of the Babylonian Talmud now regularly rely on this comparison; see, for instance, J. Rubenstein, *The Culture of the Babylonian Talmud* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 35–37; R. Kalmin, *Jewish Babylonia between Persia and Roman Palestine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 3–4; D. Boyarin, "Hellenism in Jewish Babylonia," in C. E. Fonrobert and M. Jaffee (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Talmud and Rabbinic Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 336–363.

[13] Sh. Naeh, "Freedom and Celibacy: A Talmudic Variation on Tales of Temptations and Fall in Genesis and its Syrian Background," in J. Frishman and L. Van Rompay (eds.), *The Book of*

proposal illustrates the utility of turning to Syriac literature to illuminate the Babylonian Talmud, and in particular, the stories (*aggada*) therein. These studies of Gafni and Naeh did not, however, immediately spawn a wave of similar studies. Rather, the turn to Syriac took time to percolate. But, by the second decade of this millennium, a number of studies began to appeal to Syriac texts to shed light on Jewish Babylonian literature, and this work continues to the present.[14] In fact, several contributions in this volume, including those by M. Bar-Asher Siegal (pp. 27–46), G. Herman (pp. 145–153), R. Kalmin (pp. 155–169), and J. Rubenstein (pp. 255–279), fall within this trajectory, which could, we propose, be call Syro-Talmudica.

In theory at least, Syriac studies has much to offer for the contextualization of Babylonian Judaism. Syriac and Jewish Babylonian Aramaic are both dialects of

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Genesis in Jewish and Oriental Christian Interpretation (TEG 5; Leuven: Peeters, 1997), 73–89. The Hebrew version was published as Sh. Naeh, "Ḥeruta," in *Issues in Talmudic Research: Conference Commemorating the Fifth Anniversary of the Passing of Ephraim E. Urbach, 2 December 1996* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 2001), 10–27. See also Bar-Asher Siegal's contribution to this volume (pp. 27–46 below), which builds upon Naeh's insight.

[14] Among the many studies that could be cited here, see M. Bar-Asher Siegal, *Early Christian Monastic Literature and the Babylonian Talmud* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); A. Becker, "Bringing the Heavenly Academy Down to Earth: Approaches to the Imagery of Divine Pedagogy in the East-Syrian Tradition," in R. Boustan and A.Y. Reed (eds.), *Heavenly Realms and Earthly Realities in Late Antique Religions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 174–191; idem, "The Comparative Study of 'Scholasticism' in Late Antique Mesopotamia;" idem, "Polishing the Mirror: Some Thoughts on Syriac Sources and Early Judaism," in R. Boustan et al. (eds.), *Envisioning Judaism: Studies in Honor of Peter Schäfer on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), vol. 2, 897–916; S. Gross, "When the Jews Greeted Ali: Sherira Gaon's Epistle in Light of Arabic and Syriac Historiography," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 24 (2017): 122–144; idem, "A Persian Anti-Martyr Act: The Death of Rabbah Bar Naḥmani," in Rubenstein and Herman, *The Aggada of the Babylonian Talmud and its Cultural World*, 211–242; G. Herman, *A Prince without a Kingdom: The Exilarch in the Sasanian Era* (TSAJ 150; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012); R. Kalmin, *Migrating Tales: The Talmud's Narratives and their Historical Context* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014); R. Kiperwasser and S. Ruzer, "Zoroastrian Proselytes in Rabbinic and Syriac Christian Narratives: Orality-Related Markers of Cultural Identity," *HR* 51 (2011): 197–218; eidem, "To Convert a Persian and Teach him the Holy Scriptures: A Zoroastrian Proselyte in Rabbinic and Syriac Christian Narratives," in G. Herman (ed.), *Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians: Religious Dynamics in a Sasanian Context* (JC 17; Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2014), 91–127; N. Koltun-Fromm, *Hermeneutics of Holiness. Ancient Jewish and Christian Notions of Sexuality and Religious Community* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Y. Moss, "Fish Eats Lion Eats Man: Saadia Gaon, Syriac Christianity and the Resurrection of the Dead," *JQR* 106 (2016): 494–520; Y. Paz and Tz. Weiss, "From Encoding to Decoding: The AṬBḤ of R. Hiyya in Light of a Syriac, Greek and Coptic Cipher," *JNES* 74 (2015): 45–65; Y. Paz, "'Meishan is Dead': On the Historical Contexts of the Bavli's Representations of the Jews in Southern Babylonia," in Rubenstein and Herman, *The Aggada of the Babylonian Talmud and its Cultural World*, 47–99; J. Rubenstein, "A Rabbinic Translation of Relics," in K. Stratton and A. Lieber (eds.), *Crossing Boundaries in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity: Ambiguities, Complexities, and Half-Forgotten Adversaries: Essays in Honor of Alan F. Segal* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 314–334; C. Shepardson, "Interpreting the Ninevites' Repentance: Jewish and Christian Exegetes in Late Antique Mesopotamia," *Hugoye* 14 (2011): 249–277.

Aramaic, and they share much in common linguistically, from lexicon to morphology and syntax.[15] In addition, Syriac Christians were present throughout the Sasanian empire, where they undoubtedly lived alongside Jews.[16] A huge corpus of literature survives in Syriac, whether written by Christians in the Sasanian empire, in the Eastern Roman Empire, or elsewhere. In fact, this corpus, which consists of tens of millions of words, is larger than all other surviving ancient Aramaic texts combined. Extant Syriac texts cover a range of genres, such as biblical exegesis (including but not limited to commentaries), canons, hagiography, history, law, liturgy, magic, philosophy, poetry, medicine, and science.[17] A large number of Syriac texts were written during Late Antiquity, and, what's more, not a small number of them are preserved in manuscripts from this period.[18] Thus, in many ways, the corpus of Syriac literature presents fewer methodological challenges than Zoroastrian Middle Persian literature as a comparandum for the Babylonian Talmud, though to be sure this is not a zero-sum game: Different projects and questions require different sources.

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[15] A point of clarification is needed: It is often remarked in this regard that Syriac is an East Aramaic dialect like Jewish Babylonian Aramaic. This is not, however, so straight-forward. Traditionally, Syriac was indeed classified as a late East Aramaic dialect along with Mandaic and Jewish Babylonian Aramaic. This was, however, challenged by D. Boyarin, who argued that Syriac shares several innovations with the late West Aramaic dialects of Christian Palestinian Aramaic, Jewish Palestinian Aramaic, and Samaritan Aramaic (D. Boyarin, "An Inquiry into the formation of the Middle Aramaic dialects," in Y.L. Arbeitman and A.R. Bomhard [eds.], *Bono homini donum. Essays in Historical Linguistics in Memory of J. Alexander Kerns* [Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1981], vol. 2, 613–649). In light of Boyarin's article, it can no longer be maintained that Syriac is simply East Aramaic, even if it remains disputed how exactly to understand Syriac's relationship to the other Late Aramaic dialects (for further discussion, see A.M. Butts "The Classical Syriac Language," in D. King [ed.], *The Syriac World* [New York: Routledge, 2019], 224–225).

[16] A new history of Syriac Christians in the Sasanian Empire is needed. The classic study of J. Labourt (*Le Christianisme dans l'empire perse sous la dynastie Sassanide* [Paris: Victor Lecoffre, 1904]) has long been outdated, in terms of data and, even more so, in terms of methodology. Better is A. Christensen, *L'Iran sous les Sassanides* (Copenhagen: Levin & Munksgaard, 1936), but it is still in need of update. Several recent studies have opened new avenues of research on Christians in the Sasanian Empire, especially R.E. Payne, *A State of Mixture. Christians, Zoroastrians and Iranian Political Culture in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015) and K. Smith, *Constantine and the Captive Christians of Persia: Martyrdom and Religious Identity in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016). See also the recent overview in G. Herman, "The Syriac World in the Persian Empire," in King, *The Syriac World*, 134–145. We should note that the same could be said of the history of Jews in the Sasanian Empire: J. Neusner's *A History of the Jews in Babylonia*, 1–5 (Leiden: Brill, 1965–1970) is in desperate need of replacement.

[17] Unfortunately, there is no up-to-date history of Syriac literature. The *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage* (*GEDSH*), however, contains entries for most authors of Classical Syriac. It is now available online at https://gedsh.bethmardutho.org.

[18] For an overview of Syriac manuscripts, see J.F. Coakley, "Manuscripts," in *GEDSH*, 262–263 and F. Briquel-Chatonnet, "Writing Syriac. Manuscripts and inscriptions," in King, *The Syriac World*, 243–265.

In addition, there is tangible evidence that suggests that comparison between the Babylonian Talmud and Syriac literature is promising. For instance, the Babylonian Talmud seems to be aware of some traditions from the New Testament, especially according to its Syriac version, including one passage (b. Shabb. 116a–b) with a quotation of Mt 5:17, arguably according to the Syriac Peshiṭta version.[19] In addition, the various versions of *Toledot Yeshu*, which emerged at some point in Late Antiquity, possess much knowledge about Christian traditions, and at times particularly Syriac traditions, which they parody at length.[20] Despite connections such as these between Syriac Christians and Babylonian Jews, the results of Syro-Talmudica have not been as earth shattering as at least some scholars had initially expected. As A. Becker wrote in 2013, "With few exceptions, there are no smoking guns, no simple parallels, no Syriac tales that serve as potential sources that clearly and definitively explain obscurities in rabbinic texts."[21] This is, however, slowly starting to change with several more recent studies showing how Syriac literature, at least occasionally, does in fact provide the proverbial key to unlock our understanding of passages in the Babylonian Talmud.[22] But, even when such 'smoking guns' – or even slightly less direct comparisons – are deemed plausible, the identification of such parallels should not become an end in itself without asking second-order questions of *how* and *why*. As P. Schäfer, among others, has argued, identifying "influence" necessarily comes with understanding how "the recipient actively digests the transmitted tradition, transforms it, and creates something new."[23] By avoiding the search for parallels for their own sake, Syro-Talmudica, which is still very much in its infancy, can circumvent many of the pitfalls that attended the exciting but problematic beginnings of Irano-Talmudica. We are convinced that further reflection on the methodological – if not theoretical – underpinnings of Syro-Talmudica, as well as Irano-Talmudica, will only enhance our scholarship: What are we doing? Why are we doing it? How could we do it better?[24] Such reflection is one of the principal aims of this volume.

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[19] P. Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); H. Zellentin, *Rabbinic Parodies of Jewish and Christian Literature* (TSAJ 139; Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck 2011), 137–166, *passim*; Y. Paz, "The Torah of the Gospel: A Rabbinic Polemic against The Syro-Roman Lawbook," *HTR* 112 (2019): 517–540.

[20] See D. Stökl Ben Ezra, "An Ancient List of Christian Festivals in Toledot Yeshu: Polemics as Indication for Interaction," *HTR* 102 (2009): 481–496.

[21] Becker, "Polishing the Mirror," 901.

[22] See, for instance, Gross, "A Persian Anti-Martyr Act: The Death of Rabbah Bar Naḥmani" as well as several contributions in this volume.

[23] See his *Mirror of His Beauty: Feminine Images of God from the Bible to the Early Kabbalah* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 232, and surrounding discussion.

[24] To quote Becker once again: "… to take advantage of these [Syriac] sources, scholars must reflect methodologically and theoretically on the nature of comparison as well as on the cultural conditions of antiquity that make comparisons historiographically productive" (Becker, "Polishing the Mirror," 897).

While comparative scholarship often defaults to searches for 'smoking guns', this is hardly the only type of comparative study. Rather, Syriac literature and the Christian communities that produced it provide a corpus of texts and a range of historical and social data that are linguistically, chronologically, and geographically proximate to that of the Babylonian Talmud with which to contextualize Babylonian Jews. As a first step, we will mention here one alternative approach to the search for parallels that we find particularly promising: to investigate how Syriac Christians and Babylonian Jews (as well as other communities) responded to common stimuli within their Sasanian context.[25] This approach does not look for influence or depend on interaction between Syriac Christians and Babylonian Jews, but rather in this approach the two groups serve as foils for one another, enabling scholars to find meaning among dissimilarities as well as similarities. Becker has used this methodology in analyzing the East Syriac School of Nisibis and the Babylonian Yeshivot.[26] A similar methodology has been employed by Herman in his studies of the Jewish *resh galuta* and the East Syriac Catholicos.[27] Such an approach opens further avenues of exploration, such as studies that do not select a single community as a starting point but instead view them with a significant level of abstraction to ask broader questions about the experience of non-Iranian or non-Muslim minorities in the Sasanian and Islamic Empires, respectively.

So far in this section we have focused exclusively on how scholars of Jewish studies have looked to Syriac texts to illuminate our understanding of Babylonian Judaism. Scholars in Syriac studies have, in turn, looked to Jewish texts to further their research in Syriac Christianity. This line of enquiry has, however, developed along a different trajectory.

Syriac Christianity, as well as Christianity writ large, shares of course a common heritage with Judaism. So, perhaps it is only natural that scholars in Syriac studies have often looked to this common heritage to explain various features of Syriac Christianity, especially in the early period. The most straight-forward example of this is the Old Testament Peshiṭta: There is now general consensus that the Old Testament Peshiṭta was translated directly from Hebrew, and on this basis, as well as others, most Syriac scholars maintain that the text was translated by Jews and only later – even if only *slightly* later – adopted by Syriac Christians.[28]

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[25] See Becker, "Polishing the Mirror," 900–901; A.M. Butts and S. Gross, *The History of the 'Slave of Christ': From Jewish Child to Christian Martyr* (PMAS 6; Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2016), 8 fn. 21; Gross, "Irano-Talmudica and Beyond." For an application of this approach, see S. Gross, *Empire and Neighbors: Babylonian Jewish Identity in its Local and Imperial Context* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Yale University, 2017).

[26] Becker, "The Comparative Study of 'Scholasticism' in Late Antique Mesopotamia;" idem, "Bringing the Heavenly Academy Down to Earth."

[27] See Herman, *A Prince without a Kingdom* and especially his contribution below (pp. 145–153).

[28] The classic articulation of this argument is M.P. Weitzman, *The Syriac Version of the Old Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). See, published around the same

Thus, with the Old Testament Peshiṭta, we have a part of the Syriac tradition that diachronically derives from Judaism.

This connection has been further developed in a now classic study by S. P. Brock in which he compares the Syriac phrase *ʾetgli ʿal* 'it was revealed *over*' to similar phrases in the Jewish Targumim, especially in Targumim of Palestinian provenance.[29] According to Brock, this feature of the Syriac language first entered Syriac Christianity by way of Jewish converts (for him, the same ones who served as the pivot for the Old Testament Peshiṭta), and it is in this way that the feature was then transmitted to fourth-century Syriac authors, such as Aphrahaṭ (fl. 336–345) and Ephrem (d. 373), as well as beyond. For Brock, this transmission from Judaism into Syriac Christianity was not limited – and this is important – to this single linguistic feature, but rather this feature is representative of a broader pathway from Judaism into Syriac Christianity. In Brock's words:

… it would seem best to posit the existence … of other Christian communities in the area of northern Mesopotamia whose origin was in Judaism, and whose orientation remained decidedly Jewish in character. Such a view would seem to accord best with the evidence, of which the phrase *ʾetgli ʿal* considered here is just a single strand. It will have been from such communities that at least most of the Jewish features in fourth-century Syriac writers derive, and, one might add, it was thanks to them that narrative haggadic techniques continued to live on in Christian Syriac literature for some centuries.[30]

According to this argument, which we will label 'the inheritance model', "Jewish features" such as the "narrative haggadic technique" that is found in Syriac texts like the two fifth-century metrical homilies (*mēmrē*) on Abraham and Isaac, to which Brock alludes here, are due to the Jewish heritage of Syriac Christianity, having been transmitted from Judaism into an early Syriac Christian community "whose origin was in Judaism" through fourth-century Syriac authors such as Aphrahaṭ and Ephrem up to the fifth century.[31]

This inheritance model, if accepted, would seem to offer *prima facie* a good deal of explanatory power. It could, for instance, perhaps explain the many

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time, S. P. Brock, "The Peshitta Old Testament. Between Judaism and Christianity," *Cristianesimo nella Storia* 19 (1998): 483–502. We should mention that ter Haar Romeny has put forward a slightly-different proposal: Instead of Weitzman's 'Jews on their way to Christianity', ter Haar Romeny maintains that the translators were 'Christians who were just recently Jews' – the wordings in scare-quotes are ours (R. B. ter Haar Romeny, "Hypotheses on the Development of Judaism and Christianity in Syria in the Period after 70 c.e.," in H. van de Sandt [ed.], *Matthew and the Didache. Two Documents from the Same Jewish-Christian Milieu?* [Assen: Van Gorcum, 2005], 13–33). This does not, however, affect our argument here, since the Old Testament Peshiṭta would still be explained by the Jewish heritage of Syriac Christianity. For discussion of this debate, see Gross, pp. 121–144, in this volume.

[29] S. P. Brock, "A Palestinian Targum Feature in Syriac," *JJS* 46 (1995): 271–282.

[30] Brock, "A Palestinian Targum Feature in Syriac," 282.

[31] The two fifth-century metrical homilies on Abraham and Isaac to which Brock alludes are edited with an English translation in S. P. Brock, "Two Syriac Verse Homilies on the Binding of Isaac," *Le Muséon* 99 (1986): 61–129.

commonalities between Ephrem's exegesis and Jewish texts: There are so many
of these commonalities in fact that Narinskaya, the most recent author of a book
on the topic, labeled Ephrem "a 'Jewish' Sage"![32] The inheritance model has also
been used to explain the alleged 'Jewish' nature of Syriac asceticism.[33] Or, to take
one final example, Rouwhorst in a frequently cited study invokes the inheritance
model to explain 'Jewish' features of Syriac liturgy as well as relatedly of church
architecture.[34]

   Several of the underlying presuppositions of the inheritance model have, how-
ever, been undermined by recent scholarship. One series of challenges arises
from scholarship on 'The Ways that Never Parted'.[35] In most of its iterations, the
inheritance model assumes a *relatively early* split between Judaism and Syriac
Christianity. For Brock, for instance, there is an early point where Christian com-
munities in northern Mesopotamia "remained decidedly Jewish in character,"
but – and this is crucial to the model – this shortly gave way so that by the fourth
century Christianity and Judaism were distinct, reified entities.[36] Recent scholar-
ship has, however, questioned whether the distinction between 'Christians' and
'Jews' were widespread, if operative at all, before the fourth century in the Roman
Empire.[37] This is not to say of course that some authors as early as Justin Martyr
(d. 165) or even Ignatius of Antioch (d. ca. 108) were not trying to reify a distinc-
tion between 'Christians' and 'Jews' but only that such a reification was not perva-
sive at the time of their writing. It has further been suggested that the distinction
between 'Christians' and 'Jews' would have materialized even later in the eastern
parts of the Roman Empire and especially in the Sasanian empire.[38] In addition,

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[32] E. Narinskaya, *Ephrem, a 'Jewish' Sage: A Comparison of the Exegetical Writings of
St. Ephrem the Syrian and Jewish Traditions* (Studia Traditionis Theologiae 7; Turnhout:
Brepols, 2010). The present authors have many issues with Narinskaya's study (for one example,
see fn. 88 below). See also the review of J. E. Walters, in *Hugoye* 16 (2010): 195–198. We should
also mention the earlier work of T. Kronholm, *Motifs from Genesis 1–11 in the Genuine Hymns
of Ephrem the Syrian, with Particular Reference to the Influence of Jewish Exegetical Traditions*
(Lund: Gleerup, 1978).
[33] See, for instance, the classic statement in A. Vööbus, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian
Orient: A Contribution to the History of Culture in the Near East* (CSCO 184, 197, 500; Leuven:
Peeters, 1958–1988), vol. 1, 9–10, as well as the extended discussion, with many references, in
Gross's contribution below (pp. 121–144, esp. pp. 134–140).
[34] G. Rouwhorst, "Jewish Liturgical Traditions in Early Syriac Christianity," *VC* 51 (1997):
72–93.
[35] The classic statement is A.Y. Reed and A.H. Becker (eds.), *The Ways that Never Parted:
Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (TSAJ 95; Tübingen: Mohr
Siebeck, 2003).
[36] It is crucial to the model because otherwise fourth-century Syriac authors would not need
to derive their Jewish traditions from an earlier time period, as Brock has it.
[37] Immensely influential in this regard has been D. Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and
the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), esp. 1–41.
[38] See the intriguing but still largely unrealized suggestion in A.H. Becker, "Beyond the Spa-
tial and Temporal Limes: Questioning the 'Parting of the Ways' Outside the Roman Empire,"
in Becker and Reed, *The Ways that Never Parted*, 373–392.

the inheritance model also assumes a *definitive* split between Judaism and Syriac Christianity: Again, for Brock, most of the "Jewish features" in fourth-century Syriac writers derive from the earlier Jewish heritage of this community, inherited relics of a bygone age.[39] This is presumably at least in part because fourth-century Syriac writers would not have had the opportunity to acquire such "Jewish features" in their own historical context. More recent scholarship on 'The Ways that Never Parted' has, however, pointed out that, regardless of when and where distinctions between 'Christians' and 'Jews' become operative, there can be – and often are – continued interactions between the two communities. Thus, there is no reason to assume that Ephrem did not acquire 'Jewish features' from his own historical context.[40]

Another challenge to the inheritance model comes from scholarship that questions, if not entirely rejects, the quest for origins.[41] Even if we accept that Syriac Christianity has, at least in part, a Jewish origin – whatever that might mean, this does not necessarily inform our understanding of later periods of Syriac Christianity. Consider again Brock's example of *ʾetgli ʿal*: According to the inheritance model, at least as conceptualized by Brock, Ephrem would not have realized that this Syriac phrase derived diachronically from Jews. In addition, his fellow Syriac Christians would not have either. And, what's more, Jews in the area would also not have drawn any conclusions about the commonality of the Syriac phrase with one of their own. Thus, if one adopts the inheritance model here, there is in fact synchronically nothing 'Jewish' about the Syriac phrase *ʾetgli ʿal*. It is synchronically Syriac Christian even if diachronically Jewish. In this way, the inheritance model suffers from the etymological fallacy: It may proffer the occasional diachronic novelty, but it does not offer any explanatory power to the scholar who is interested in, for instance, Ephrem in his fourth-century context.[42]

None of this is to say that scholars cannot look to Jewish texts to illuminate Syriac texts. But, again, we would like to advocate for more methodological – if not, theoretical – sophistication in this undertaking. As we see it, recourse to

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[39] We should point out that in other publications Brock adopts different models: In his editions of the two fifth-century metrical homilies on Abraham and Isaac, for instance, he suggests that Jewish traditions entered in the fifth century (see Brock, "Two Syriac Verse Homilies on the Binding of Isaac," 98). Or, in another place, Brock states, "these [Jewish traditions] will have reached Ephrem indirectly, and perhaps by way of oral tradition, for there is absolutely no evidence that he drew directly on Jewish literary sources in either Aramaic or Hebrew" (S. P. Brock, *The Luminous Eye. The Spiritual World Vision of Saint Ephrem* [CSS 124; Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1992], 20).

[40] Again, Brock seems to accept this in other publications (see fn. 39 above).

[41] See especially Gross's contribution to this volume (pp. 121–144).

[42] The etymological fallacy is most often invoked in lexicography (see the classic study of J. Barr, *Comparative Philology and the Text of the Old Testament* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968]), but there is no reason that it cannot extend to other domains.

alleged 'Jewish' origins of Syriac Christianity has very little to offer in terms of explanatory power, and at the same time it introduces a number of potential pitfalls. Instead, the possibility of later moments of contact and exchange should not be jettisoned but explored. Identifying such moments should not, however, be treated as the goal of academic study but again as an opportunity to ask second-order questions. In addition to a more sophisticated examination of parallels, the limits of which we outlined above, we further propose an undertaking that follows in the same lines as the use of Syriac texts to inform Jewish texts: namely, to use Jewish sources to understand better the broader historical, social, and cultural conditions in which these communities lived. While Syriac sources far outsize Jewish sources, they were mainly produced by male ecclesiastical figures who often depicted the world as they desired it to be. Jewish sources can help problematize the picture offered by Syriac Christian texts, helping scholars interrogate the rhetoric of self-fashioning, authenticity, and boundary maintenance found in these texts that served to conceal the very contextual forces to which they may in fact be responding and purposefully erasing.[43]

'Other' *Does* Explicitly Appear; or, Constructing the 'Other'

If Jewish studies and Syriac studies both featured, even if in different ways, in our first category ('Other' Does *Not* Explicitly Appear; or, Historical Contextualization), the same is not true here in the second category ('Other' *Does* Explicitly Appear; or, Constructing the 'Other'). This is due to the nature of the surviving sources: While there are many 'Jews' in Syriac texts, there are very few '(Syriac) Christians' in Jewish texts. Thus, here, we focus primarily on Syriac depictions of 'Jews', only looking at 'Christians' in Jewish texts at the very end of this section.

The study of Christian anti-Jewish polemics has seen a revolution over the past quarter of a century. Following the publication of M. Simon's *Verus Israel* (1948), scholars tended to see Christian anti-Jewish polemic as a reflection of a social reality in which Christians were in conflict with Jews.[44] This 'conflict model', as it was termed by M. Taylor, interpreted (negative) rhetoric as proof of the existence of the (hostile) 'other'.[45] Recent work has, however, been more cautious in

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[43] In his contribution to this volume (pp. 145–153), Herman makes a similar argument for how Jewish texts can be used to inform our understanding of Syriac Christian ones.

[44] M. Simon (trans. H. McKeating), *Verus Israel. A Study of Relations between Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire (135–425)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986). For examples, see N. R. M. De Lange, *Origen and the Jews: Studies in Jewish-Christian Relations in third-century Palestine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976) and R. L. Wilken, *John Chrysostom and the Jews: Rhetoric and Reality in the late 4th Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

[45] M. S. Taylor, *Anti-Judaism and Early Christian Identity: A Critique of the Scholarly Consensus* (Leiden: Brill, 1995).

positing a social reality based on polemical rhetoric. In particular, a number of scholars have argued that some Christian texts construct an 'imagined' Jew for a variety of purposes but perhaps most often to negotiate internal issues of identity.[46] Thus, at least some Christian anti-Jewish polemic does not have a 'real' Jew standing behind it.

This reconfiguration of the study of Christian anti-Jewish polemic is part of a larger trend in the study of early Christianity – as well as in the discipline of history more broadly – that has been dubbed the 'linguistic turn'.[47] As applied to the discipline of history, including history of Christianity (or: of Judaism, for that matter), the linguistic turn questions whether 'the past' – often conceptualized in the sense of Ranke's *wie es eigentlich gewesen* – is recoverable. Instead, the object of study for the historian is textual representations (of 'the past'). There are many well-known consequences of this shift, but of primary interest to the topic of Christian anti-Jewish polemic is that the linguistic turn stresses the literary aspect of textual representations. Textual representations are no longer, as previous scholars would have maintained, sources to be culled to discover 'what actually happened', but rather they are literary productions that demand more nuanced reading strategies from the historian.

Scholars studying Jews in Syriac texts have unfortunately been slow to embrace the linguistic turn and the important implications that it has for the analysis of Christian anti-Jewish polemic. Consider, for instance, scholarship on the fourth-century Syriac author Aphrahaṭ and his *Demonstrations*.[48] Among the twenty-three *Demonstrations*, numbers 11–13 and 15–21 are framed explicitly as anti-Jewish, addressing topics such as circumcision (*Dem.* 11), Passover (*Dem.* 12), and Sabbath (*Dem.* 13). Given their relatively secure fourth-century date and their probable location in the Sasanian empire, these *Demonstrations* could *in theory*

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[46] See, for instance, Taylor, *Anti-Judaism and Early Christian Identity* (with the criticism in J. C. Paget, "Anti-Judaism and Early Christian Identity," *ZAC* 1 [1997]: 195–225) and, in a different way (see fn. 61 below), J. Lieu, *Image & Reality: The Jews in the World of the Christians in the Second Century* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996).

[47] For the 'linguistic turn' in the study of early Christianity, see especially E. Clark, *History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004). For its application to the study of Christian anti-Jewish polemic, see the brief but insightful discussion in D. Brakke, "The Early Church in North America: Late Antiquity, Theory, and the History of Christianity," *CH* 71 (2002): 486–490.

[48] The *Demonstrations* are edited with a Latin translation in I. Parisot, *Aphraatis Sapientis Persae Demonstrationes* (PS 1.1–2; Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1894–1907), 541–572. English translations are available in A. Lehto, *The Demonstrations of Aphrahat, the Persian Sage* (GECS 27; Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2010). For convenience, we retain Aphrahaṭ as the author of the *Demonstrations*, though we are generally sympathetic to Walter's recent proposal that the *Demonstrations* as we now have them represent a collection of pre-existing writings (J. E. Walters, "Reconsidering the Compositional Unity of Aphrahat's *Demonstrations*," in A. M. Butts and R. D. Young [eds.], *Syriac Christian Culture: Beginnings to Renaissance* [Washington: Catholic University of America Press, forthcoming]). The authorship of these pre-existing writings remains, however, an open question for us.

provide extremely valuable historical information about Jews in this region at this time.[49] It is with this goal that a number of previous scholars have approached the *Demonstrations*. In a well-known book, for instance, J. Neusner used the *Demonstrations* as evidence for the existence of a non-rabbinic group of Jews.[50] Similarly, J. G. Snaith argued that Aphrahaṭ referred to a Jewish community who only followed the Hebrew Bible but had no oral-Torah.[51] More recently (2012) and so more problematically, E. Lizorkin has suggested that Aphrahaṭ was in dialogue with "para-rabbinic" Jews.[52] All these scholars have used Aphrahaṭ's *polemical* depiction of Jews as evidence for a particular form of Judaism different from that represented in the Babylonian Talmud.[53] Each of these scholars has, however, failed to account for the literary nature of the *Demonstrations* themselves: What can the rhetoric of the text actually tell us about the 'other' in this case? Are we sure that Aphrahaṭ knows 'real' Jews? And that he has not constructed an 'imagined' Jew? More broadly, what can these literary representations of the past tell us about the past as it actually happened? Questions such as these, informed by the linguistic turn, have traditionally been left unasked in studies of Syriac Christian anti-Jewish polemic.[54]

Thankfully, there are indications that the linguistic turn is beginning to have more influence on Syriac studies. In the case of Aphrahaṭ, J. Walters in his contribution to this volume (pp. 291–319) argues, in contrast to the approaches mentioned in the previous paragraph, that the Jews in the *Demonstrations* are a

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[49] The *Demonstrations* are dated by a note in the text itself: "These twenty-two *mēmrē* I wrote according to the twenty-two letters (of the alphabet). I wrote the first ten in 648 (= 336/7 CE) of the rule of Alexander the son of Philipos, the Macedonian, as is written at the end of them; these other twelve I wrote in 655 (= 343/4 CE) of the kingdom of the Greeks and Romans, which is of the rule of Alexander, and in year 35 of the Persian king" (*Dem.* 22, section 25). This note, with its dating formula according to the "Persian king," also suggests that the text should be geographically located in the Sasanian empire.

[50] J. Neusner, *Aphrahat and Judaism: The Christian-Jewish Argument in Fourth-Century Iran* (Leiden: Brill, 1971).

[51] J. G. Snaith, "Aphrahat and the Jews," in J. A. Emerton and S. E. Reif (eds.), *Interpreting the Hebrew Bible: Essays in Honor of E. I. J. Rosenthal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 236–250.

[52] I. Lizorkin, *Aphrahat's Demonstrations: A Conversation with the Jews of Mesopotamia* (CSCO 642; Leuven: Peeters, 2012).

[53] For bibliographic completeness, we should mention that there are also those who have maintained that Aphrahaṭ was in conversation with rabbinic Jews; see, e. g., F. Gavin, "Aphraates and the Jews," *Journal of the Society of Oriental Research* 7 (1923): 95–166; N. Koltun-Fromm, "A Jewish-Christian Conversation in Fourth-Century Persian Mesopotamia," *JJS* 47 (1996): 45–63 and, with more nuance, her *Jewish-Christian Conversation in Fourth-Century Persian Mesopotamia. A Reconstructed Conversation* (JC 12; Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2011).

[54] There is of course the occasional exception, such as L. Van Rompay, "A Letter of the Jews to the Emperor Marcian Concerning the Council of Chalcedon," *OLP* 12 (1981): 215–224. For more on this article, see below.

literary invention that help to construct Christian identity.[55] In a move similarly in line with the linguistic turn, C. Shepardson has argued that the anti-Jewish rhetoric in the *Hymns on Faith* by Ephrem is best read as anti-Arian polemic.[56] Similarly, in a recent book, we have argued that the Syriac *History of the 'Slave of Christ'* constructs an 'imagined' Jew based on the Hebrew Bible, and that therefore the text cannot be used as straight-forward evidence for historical interactions between Jews and Christians, as previous scholars have done.[57] All these approaches are informed by the linguistic turn in that they begin from the position that Syriac anti-Jewish polemic must first be analyzed as a literary artefact. As E. Clark enjoins, "Christian writings from late antiquity should be read first and foremost as literary productions before they are read as sources of social data."[58]

In light of these studies and the theoretical work underlying them, we propose that one of the first questions that we as scholars should ask of Syriac texts in which Jews appear is whether we are dealing with 'real' or 'imagined' Jews. In some cases, the answer is relatively straight-forward. Consider, for instance, the short *Letter of the Jews to Emperor Marcian*, which exists in several different forms. Similar versions are found in two miaphysite chronicles: the *Chronicle of Zuqnin* (written in 775) and the *Chronicle* of Michael the Syrian (d. 1100); the letter is also found in collections of miaphysite texts appended to the *Didascalia*.[59] The letter reads:

To the merciful Emperor Marcian. The Hebrews, that is the Jews, who are in Jerusalem, give peace in Adonai to your majesty (or: kingdom). After our peace to your majesty (or: kingdom), we write as follows: For all of this time, we have been regarded as those who had crucified God and not a human. But, given that this Synod of Chalcedon has gathered and showed that we crucified a human and not God, may this transgression be forgiven to us. We seek from you that our synagogues be opened. May peace increase to your majesty (or: kingdom).

As Van Rompay has observed, this letter undoubtedly presents an 'imagined' Jew: a literary construction of a miaphysite author who seeks to oppose the

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[55] See also, with more detail, his dissertation *Aphrahat and the Construction of Christian Identity in Fourth-Century Persia* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Princeton Theological Seminary, 2016). For an earlier study that raises similar questions, see A. Becker, "Anti-Judaism and Care for the Poor in Aphrahat's *Demonstration* 20," *JECS* 10 (2002): 305–327.

[56] C. Shepardson, "'Exchanging Reed for Reed': Mapping Contemporary Heretics onto Biblical Jews in Ephrem's Hymns on Faith," *Hugoye* 5 (2002): 15–33 as well as her *Anti-Judaism and Christian Orthodoxy. Ephrem's Hymns in Fourth-Century Syria* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2008).

[57] Butts and Gross, *The History of the 'Slave of Christ'*, esp. 5–8, 43–79.

[58] Clark, *History, Theory, Text*, 159.

[59] The Syriac text is edited with an English translation in Van Rompay, "A Letter of the Jews to the Emperor Marcian Concerning the Council of Chalcedon." See also A. B. Schmidt, "Syrische Tradition in armenischer Adaption. Die armenische Rezeption des Geschichtswerks von Michael Syrus und der antichalcedonische Judenbrief an Kaiser Markianos," in *SymSyr* VII, 359–371.

Council of Chalcedon. The Jews in the letter ask that their transgression be for-given since it was decided at Chalcedon that God had not been crucified but only a human had been crucified. From the miaphysite perspective, Chalcedon de-creed that Christ was not fully God, and therefore that God had not been cruci-fied. Christians have a long history of designating any doctrine that minimizes or negates the divinity of Christ as 'Jewish' and its followers as 'Jews'. In the fourth century, for instance, Christians – including Ephrem, as convincingly argued by Shepardson, as noted above – accused followers of Arius of being 'Jews' since they emphasized the Father's divinity over the Son's. Similar rhetoric is found in the context of the fifth-century Christological debates that concern us here.[60]

With this letter, then, we have a relatively-clear example of 'imagined' Jews. Unfortunately, in the vast majority of cases, it is not so obvious. Thus, each of the many Syriac texts in which Jews appear needs to be analyzed anew with an eye toward determining whether we are dealing with 'real' or 'imagined' Jews. Determining this is not, however, the end of the story but only the beginning. For, a number of questions follow once it has been established that we are dealing with an 'imagined' Jew. Perhaps first among these is who is the intended target of this rhetoric? It could of course still be Jews: That is, Christians can construct an 'imagined' Jew to combat 'real' Jews.[61] But, other, especially internal Christian, targets are also possible and even likely. We have already seen that anti-Jewish polemic can be directed against Arians, as in the case of Ephrem, and against dyophysites (whether Chalcedonian or not), as in the case of the *Letter to Marcian*. What other internal Christian opponents are targeted with anti-Jewish po-lemic? In addition, external opponents are also possible: There are, for instance,

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[60] In his first homily after being consecrated as patriarch, for instance, the miaphysite leader Severus of Antioch assails "the madness of the new Jews – I am speaking about those who gath-ered at the synod of Chalcedon and divided this indivisible one into two natures" (M. Brière and F. Graffin [with C. J. A. Lash and J.-M. Sauget], *Les Homiliae cathedrales de Sévère d'Antioche. Traduction syriaque de Jacques d'Édesse. Homélies I à XVII* [PO 38.2; Turnhout: Brepols, 1976], 252–269, at 258–267). This homily was so popular that Severus apparently had to deliver it again two days later (see the discussion in Y. Moss, *Incorruptible Bodies: Christology, Society, and Authority in Late Antiquity* [Oakland: University of California Press, 2016], 46–47, with the references in fn. 17). Or, to take an example closer to the Syriac world, the fifth-century *Life of Rabbula* tells of Rabbula going to Constantinople to "confute the ancient error of the recent Jew, Nestorius" (Syriac in J. J. Overbeck, *S. Ephraemi Syri Rabulae episcopi Edesseni Balaei alio-rumque Opera selecta* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1865], 198; English translation in R. Doran, *Stewards of the Poor. The Man of God, Rabbula, and Hiba in Fifth-Century Edessa* [CSS 208; Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 2006], 97; a more recent Syriac edition with English trans-lation is available in R. R. Phenix, Jr., and C. B. Horn, *The Rabbula Corpus* [Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017], 68–69). These are just two of the many examples in which miaphysites employ anti-Jewish polemic against their dyophysite adversaries. A book on this topic, tentatively entitled *Mapping the 'Other' onto Jews: Syriac Anti-Jewish Polemic during the Christological Controversies and their Aftermath*, is currently in progress by A. M. Butts.

[61] In contrast to the approach of Taylor (*Anti-Judaism and Early Christian Identity*), Lieu leaves more room for 'real' Jews to be standing behind the 'imagined' Jews that are rhetorically constructed in some texts.

a number of cases in which Christians employ anti-Jewish polemic against Muslims. In his *Letter 40*, for instance, the Church of the East Catholicos Timothy I (d. 823) contrasts "those old Jews" from the days of Herod and Pilate with the "new Jews among us."[62]

The approach for which we are advocating here can, we think, provide new answers to long-unanswered questions in the study of Syriac anti-Jewish polemic. To give but one example: It has long been asked why the anti-Jewish polemic of the miaphysite Jacob of Serugh (d. 521) is so much harsher than that of his dyophysite contemporary Narsai (d. ca. 500).[63] The difference between Jacob of Serugh and Narsai is, however, readily explainable, we think, once it is established that miaphysites regularly employed anti-Jewish polemic against their dyophysite adversaries.[64] On the one hand, some and maybe even most of Jacob's anti-Jewish polemic may actually be directed against dyophysites; on the other hand, Narsai would have had good reasons to shy away from anti-Jewish polemic, since it was often directed against dyophysites like him.[65]

In addition, the approach for which we are advocating here offers new insights into other questions in Syriac studies, not just those associated with anti-Jewish polemic. To return to Jacob of Serugh, it is often asked why his *mēmrē* appear so divorced from the contentious theological debates of his day. That is, apart from his *mēmrā* on the Council of Chalcedon, which is explicit in its criticisms, it is quite often difficult to ascertain Jacob's stance on the pressing Christological questions of his days. In a recent book, Forness provides a number of insightful observations that help to explain this conundrum.[66] Here we want to add a further suggestion: What if much of Jacob's anti-Jewish polemic is actually anti-dyophysite polemic? Viewed through such a lens, Jacob's *mēmrē* fit their historical context rather well: Jacob speaks directly about the theological issues of his day but through a charged anti-Jewish rhetoric that vilifies those who espouse positions better associated, in his view, with the ultimate Christian 'other'.

Finally, analyzing Syriac texts in this more critical way can also make a contribution to the broader field of early Christian studies: There is a sizeable body of Syriac anti-Jewish polemic from various authors written over an extended time period (more than a millennium).[67] If this is analyzed critically, we will

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[62] H. P. J. Cheikho, *Dialectique du langage sur Dieu: Lettre de Timothée I (728–823) à Serge* (Rome: Giovanni Canestri, 1983), 274–275 (f. 216a, ln. 19–f.216b. ln. 25), 186 (French). For discussion and the broader context of this passage, see M. Penn, *Envisioning Islam. Syriac Christians and the Early Muslim World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 83.

[63] See most recently L. Van Rompay, "Judaism, Syriac contacts with," in *GEDSH*, 234.

[64] See fn. 60 above.

[65] See the hint at this solution already in J. Frishman, "Narsai's Homily for the Palm Festival – Against the Jews: For the Palm Festival or against the Jews?," in *SymSyr* IV, 217–229, at 228–229.

[66] P. M. Forness, *Preaching Christology in the Roman Near East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

[67] For an overview, see the contribution of Becker in this volume (pp. 47–66).

undoubtedly gain new insights into the various ways in which Christians constructed Jews (the *how* question) and for what purposes they did this (the *why* question).[68]

So far, we have dealt primarily with 'imagined' Jews. We would, however, be remiss not to mention that 'real' Jews are also likely to be found in Syriac texts. In fact, one of the earliest instances in which Jews are explicitly referenced in a Syriac text may well involve 'real' Jews. Toward the end of the *Book of the Laws of the Countries*, which was probably written in the first quarter of the third century in Edessa, Bardaiṣan invokes Jews as an example of a group of people who are spread throughout the world but who follow the same customs.[69] He then proceeds to provide details of these customs, including a list of activities that Jews refrain from on Shabbat. In his contribution to this volume (see pp. 89–102), S. Cohen argues – convincingly in our view – that the author of the *Book of the Laws of the Countries* learned these Jewish prohibitions about Shabbat from his own familiarity with Jews in Edessa. If so, and this seems most likely, we would have 'real' Jews here.

There are other examples of 'real' Jews appearing in Syriac texts. Jacob of Edessa (d. 708), for instance, had a keen interest in Jews and especially their writings.[70] In his *Letters*, Jacob discusses the *Book of Enoch* as well as a work that he calls "The Jewish Histories," which is undoubtedly related to the *Book of Jubilees*.[71] He also valued the Hebrew language and may have even had limited knowledge of it.[72] More to the point here, Jacob seems to have been familiar with some Jewish practices. In a "Scholion" to his revision of the Syriac translation of Severus of Antioch's *Cathedral Homilies*, Jacob discusses the name of God among the "Hebrews."[73] He is particularly concerned with dissuading Syriac Christians

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[68] Becker in this volume (pp. 47–66) innovatively proposes that some anti-Jewish conversations may be regularly "triggered" by other themes or topics, a kind of literary or theological reflex, which may help explain many anti-Jewish passages.

[69] H. J. W. Drijvers, *The Book of the Laws of Countries: Dialogue on Fate of Bardaiṣan of Edessa* (STT 3; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1965), 56.21–58.20 (Syriac), 57–59 (English).

[70] For an introduction to Jacob of Edessa, see B. ter Haar Romeny (ed.), *Jacob of Edessa and the Syriac Culture of his Day* (MPIL 18; Leiden: Brill, 2008), especially the contributions of A. Salvesen, "Jacob of Edessa's Life and Work: A Biographical Sketch" (pp. 1–10) and of D. Kruisheer, "A Bibliographical Clavis to the Works of Jacob of Edessa (Revised and Expanded)" (pp. 265–293).

[71] See W. Adler, "Jewish Pseudepigrapha in Jacob of Edessa's Letters and Historical Writings," in ter Haar Romeny, *Jacob of Edessa and the Syriac Culture of his Day*, 49–65.

[72] See the discussions in A. Salvesen, "Did Jacob of Edessa Know Hebrew?," in A. Rapoport-Albert and G. Greenberg (eds.), *Biblical Hebrews, Biblical Texts: Essays in Memory of Michael P. Weitzman* (JSOT Supplement Series 333; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 457–467; eadem, "Was Jacob Trilingual? Jacob of Edessa's Knowledge of Hebrew Revisited," in G. Y. Ibrahim and G. A. Kiraz (eds.), *Studies on Jacob of Edessa* (GECS 25; Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2010), 93–105.

[73] The Syriac text is edited with a French translation in M. Brière, *Les Homiliae Cathedrales de Sévère d'Antioche. Traduction syriaque de Jacques d'Édesse. Homélies CXX à CXXV* (PO 29.1; Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1960), 190–207.

from calling God by the name "Pipi" (ﬣﬡﬤ). As Jacob explains in detail, this erroneous name arose from the Hebrew tetragrammaton, which was written in Hebrew script in some Septuagint manuscripts and then was subsequently misunderstood as Greek uncials (ΠΙΠΙ). Jacob's discussion is remarkable in many ways, not the least of which is that Greek manuscripts of the Septuagint survive that have the tetragrammaton written in Hebrew script, such as the Greek Minor Prophets scroll from Naḥal Ḥever (albeit here the tetragrammaton is in paleo-Hebrew script).[74] Throughout this discussion, Jacob mentions a number of practices of Jews. For instance, he states that the tetragrammaton is called the *šem pāroš*, literally 'separate(d) name', among the Jews.[75] This seems to be a reference to the Jewish *šem ha-məporāš*, found already in Tannaitic sources.[76] In another place, Jacob explains that when Jews are reading Hebrew and encounter the tetragrammaton they do not pronounce it, but in Jacob's words: "instead of it they say the word 'Adonai' (ﬡﬢﬤﬡ), which means 'Lord.'"[77]

To take one final example, in his *Letter 47*, the previously-mentioned Timothy I (d. 823) tells of the discovery of Hebrew manuscripts in the region of Jericho: "The dog of an Arab man who was hunting went into a cleft after some game and did not come out. Its owner went after it and found a chamber in the mountain, in which there were many books."[78] Timothy goes on to speak about how these books were eventually interpreted by Jews from Jerusalem who could read Hebrew, and the books included the "Old Testament" as well as other books in Hebrew, such as a Psalter that contained "more than two-hundred psalms." This fascinating story, which anticipates the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls by more than a millennium, takes on even greater import given the existence of the so-called Syriac Apocryphal Psalms.[79] The Syriac Apocryphal Psalms are a group of five poetic compositions, numbered 151–155, that are first attested in a Syriac manuscript datable to the twelfth century (i. e., ms. Baghdad [*olim* Mosul],

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[74] See the edition in E. Tov, with R. A. Kraft and P. J. Parsons, *The Greek Minor Prophets Scroll from Naḥal Ḥever (8ḤevXIIgr) (The Seiyal Collection 1)* (DJD 8; Oxford; Clarendon Press, 1990).

[75] Brière, *Les Homiliae Cathedrales de Sévère d'Antioche. Traduction syriaque de Jacques d'Édesse. Homélies CXX à CXXV*, 190 (Syriac), 191 (French translation).

[76] See the now out-dated discussion in E. Nestle, "Jakob von Edessa über den Schem hammephorasch und andere Gottesnamen. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Tetragrammaton," *ZDMG* 32 (1878): 465–508, 735–736.

[77] Brière, *Les Homiliae Cathedrales de Sévère d'Antioche. Traduction syriaque de Jacques d'Édesse. Homélies CXX à CXXV*, 198 (Syriac), 199 (French translation).

[78] The Syriac text is edited with a German translation in M. Heimgartner, *Die Briefe 42–58 des ostsyrischen Patriarchen Timotheos I* (CSCO 644–645; Leuven: Peeters, 2012). An English translation is available in S. P. Brock, *A Brief Outline of Syriac Literature* (2nd ed.; Kottayam, India: SEERI, 2009), 240–245. See also the older edition in O. Braun, "Ein Brief des Katholikos Timotheos I über biblische Studien des 9. Jahrhunderts," *OC* 1 (1901): 299–313.

[79] For the Syriac Apocryphal Psalms, see A. M. Butts, "Psalms 151–155: Syriac," in A. Lange (editor in chief) and M. Henze (volume editor), *Textual History of the Bible*, vol. 2 (Leiden: Brill, 2019).

Library of the Chaldean Patriarchate 1113 = 12t4).[80] Shockingly, two of the Syriac Apocryphal Psalms, 154 and 155, have Hebrew *Vorlagen* in the Qumran Psalms Scroll (11QPs[a]).[81] We deem shocking an appropriate adjective here because these two Psalms are unknown in any other tradition, including the earlier Syriac Peshiṭta and the Septuagint. So, how did Psalms 154 and 155 make their way into Syriac? Based on the manuscript evidence, Apocryphal Psalms 154 and 155 must have entered into the Syriac tradition sometime after the sixth century but before the twelfth century. In addition, the Syriac Psalms seem to have been translated directly from Hebrew. Could Psalms 154 and 155 perhaps have been found in the very manuscript of the Hebrew Psalter that Timothy mentions and then have been translated into Syriac? Though such a reconstruction is highly positivistic, it is difficult to reconstruct a different scenario that would account for all the details so well.[82] If this proves to be the case, then the existence of Psalms 154 and 155 in Syriac would irrefutably corroborate Timothy's interactions with 'real' Jews.

In all these cases involving 'real' Jews, we continue to be confronted by the challenges of the linguistic turn: We still do not have access to the 'other' as (s)he actually was – to adapt slightly Ranke's phrase. Rather, we are faced with textual representations of the 'other'. These are of course not unbiased accounts, and there is undoubtedly still much that is 'imagined' of the 'other', even if there is a 'real other' lurking behind the text.[83]

It is not only Jews who appear in Christian texts, but also Christians appear in Jewish texts, just less frequently. The question of the *minim* in the Babylonian Talmud is especially well-known and fraught.[84] These characters are clearly

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[80] The standard edition is W. Baars, "Apocryphal Psalms," in *The Old Testament in Syriac according to the Peshitta Version*, part IV, fas. 6 (Leiden: Brill, 1972).

[81] Edited in J.A. Sanders, "Two Non-Canonical Psalms in 11QPs[a]," *ZAW* 76 (1964): 57–75; idem, *The Psalms Scroll of Qumrân Cave 11 (11QPs[a])* (DJD 4; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 64–76. An additional Hebrew parallel to Syriac Psalm 154 seems to be found in 4Q448; see H. Eshel and E. Eshel, "4Q448, Psalm 154 (Syriac), Sirach 48:20, and 4QpIsa[a]," *JBL* 119 (2000): 645–659 with further literature cited there.

[82] So Butts, "Psalms 151–155: Syriac."

[83] Our position here is the inverse of that of Lieu, *Image & Reality*, who stresses the importance of *also* considering "the actual position of Jews and Jewish communities" (p. 2) when reading the rhetoric of Christian anti-Jewish polemic. See fn. 61 above.

[84] The bibliography is vast, but see, for instance, M. Goodman, "The Function of Minim in Early Rabbinic Judaism," in H. Cancik, H. Lichtenberger, and P. Schäfer (eds.), *Geschichte, Tradition, Reflexion: Festschrift für Martin Hengel zum 70. Geburtstag* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996), vol. 1, 501–510; R. Kalmin, "Christians and Heretics in Rabbinic Literature of Late Antiquity," *HTR* 87 (1994): 155–169; C. E. Hayes, "Displaced Self-Perceptions: The Deployment of Minim and Romans in b. Sanhedrin 9ob-91a," in H. Lapin (ed.), *Religious and Ethnic Communities in Later Roman Palestine* (Bethesda: University Press of Maryland, 1998), 249–289; N. Janowitz, "Rabbis and their Opponents: The Construction of the 'Min' in Rabbinic Anecdotes," *JECS* 6 (1998): 449–462; Boyarin, *Border Lines* (Philadelphia; University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); A. Schremer, *Brothers Estranged: Heresy, Christianity, and Jewish Identity in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); J. Marcus, "*Birkat Ha-Minim* Revisited," *NTS* 55 (2009): 523–551.

literary constructions, and they often serve as stand-ins for a host of positions that the rabbis wished to mark as other. Yet, scholars continue to suggest identifications of *min(im)* in certain stories with Christians – a practice surely to continue for some time. In addition, 'real' Christians also appear in other Jewish texts. In his contribution to this volume (pp. 207–229), Moss discusses a most interesting case in which the Rabbanite community leader, Saadia Gaon (882–942), argues against Christian charges that Jews have altered the biblical text for anti-Christological reasons. As Moss shows, these Christian charges can be traced back to the previously-mentioned Jacob of Edessa (d. 708). Thus, we have here not only a case in which a 'real' Christian appears in a Jewish text, but it is even a Christian who is known from other sources, including in this instance Christian ones. Such possibilities for the medieval period are enhanced by the revealing anecdote of one of the heads of the Rabbinic academies in Babylonia in the early eleventh century instructing his student to ask the Catholicos how they interpret a verse, which is then cited in a form nearly identical to the Peshiṭta.[85]

Finally, we should mention that the two categories that we propose here ('Other' Does *Not* Explicitly Appear; or, Historical Contextualization and 'Other' *Does* Explicitly Appear; or, Constructing the 'Other') are distinct but also potentially complimentary depending on the object of study. Consider, for instance, the most well-known Syriac author Ephrem (d. 373): Scholars, on the one hand, have frequently noted Ephrem's supposed indebtedness to Jewish traditions, especially in biblical exegesis.[86] And, on the other hand, Jews frequently appear in Ephrem's oeuvre, prompting scholars to analyze his anti-Jewish polemic.[87] Thus, our two proposed categories interact in interesting and complicated ways if one seeks a comprehensive picture of intersections between Ephrem and Jews.[88]

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[85] See Y. M. Dubovick, "'Oil, which shall not Quit my Head': Jewish-Christian Interaction in Eleventh-Century Baghdad," *Entangled Religions: Interdisciplinary Journal for the Study of Religious Contact and Transfer* 6 (2018): 95–123.

[86] Of the many publications that could be cited, see Kronholm, *Motifs from Genesis 1–11 in the Genuine Hymns of Ephrem the Syrian, with Particular Reference to the Influence of Jewish Exegetical Traditions.*

[87] See especially Shepardson, "'Exchanging Reed for Reed': Mapping Contemporary Heretics onto Biblical Jews in Ephrem's Hymns on Faith" as well as her *Anti-Judaism and Christian Orthodoxy. Ephrem's Hymns in Fourth-Century Syria.*

[88] This is one place (of many) in which Narinskaya's *Ephrem, a 'Jewish' Sage* falls short: Narinskaya argues that since Ephrem's biblical exegesis is indebted to Jewish traditions, he could not be anti-Jewish: "If he was anti-Judaic, Ephrem would have to reject Judaism entirely along with its theology; instead Ephrem embraces Jewish concepts and methods. This makes Ephrem a pro-Judaic writer working within the framework of the Semitic mindset." (p. 45). It is this two-pronged argument (Ephrem is indepted to Jewish traditions and is not [really] anti-Jewish) that leads Narinskaya to call Ephrem "a 'Jewish' Sage." The problems with Narinskaya's arguments are manifold: What is called for is more sophisticated analyses *both* of Ephrem's anti-Jewish polemic *and* of his supposed indeptedness to Jewish traditions*,* and it is upon these analyses that one could then paint a more comprehensive picture of intersections between Ephrem and Jews.

Ephrem is a prominent example in which our two categories potentially interact but certainly not the only one.

The Present Volume

The present volume contains sixteen papers that explore various intersections between Jews and Syriac Christians. The papers chronologically span the first millennium CE, starting with the beginnings of Syriac Christianity in the first centuries CE, with the paper of S. Gross (pp. 121–144), and concluding with Saadia Gaon (882–942), in the paper of Y. Moss (pp. 207–229). The majority of the studies are located geographically in the Sasanian Empire and thus deal with Babylonian Jews. Several studies do, however, move further west into the Eastern Roman Empire. The articles are written by scholars of Jewish studies, by scholars of Syriac studies, as well as by the rarer hybrid scholar who is at home in both fields. While some of the articles fall into clear groups, such as those of Syro-Talmudica discussed above, others stand alone whether in methodology, in content, or in both. For this reason, we have decided against separating the articles into groups, which would necessarily be arbitrary – and we feel ultimately unhelpful. Instead, we have ordered the articles simply by author's surname.

M. Bar-Asher Siegal (pp. 27–46) revisits Naeh's classic study in Syro-Talmudica: the meaning of *ḥeruta* in b. Qidd. 81b.[89] Bar-Asher Siegal accepts Naeh's argument that *ḥeruta* should be understood in light of Syriac *ḥerutā*, but she challenges us to look even more broadly to the wider cultural and historical context of Syriac Christianity. In this particular case, she argues that R. Hiyya is presented in a way similar to the contemporary Christian holy man. Reading R. Hiyya in this light helps to explain, Bar-Asher Siegal contends, several features of the Talmudic story that have not yet been adequately understood.

A. H. Becker (pp. 47–66) provides a systematic survey of the large corpus of Syriac anti-Jewish texts. These include both texts that are explicitly directed against Jews, which he includes as part of the broader category of *Contra Iudaeos*, as well as other works within the broader Syriac literary corpus that contain anti-Jewish polemic. In the course of his discussion, Becker makes a number of important methodological observations, including on the question of 'real' versus 'imagined' Jews, porous boundaries between the communities, the use of anti-Jewish polemic for internal Christian adversaries, as well as particular themes that may have "triggered" anti-Jewish polemic among Syriac Christians.

B. Belinitzky and Y. Paz (pp. 67–88) locate Aphrahaṭ's concept of excommunication, particularly the verb √*šmd* 'to ban', within its broader Sasanian context. Through a comparison of the uses of this verb, as well as related imagery and

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[89] For the bibliography to Naeh's original study, see fn. 13 above.

formulae concerning the ban, in Aphrahaṭ, the Babylonian Talmud, and the incantation bowls, the authors are able to reconstruct the deployment of a similar institution of excommunication among both Christian and Jewish communities in the early Sasanian Empire, distinct from institutions attested among their coreligionists in the west, that is employed to consolidate and further establish their authority.

S. J. D. Cohen (pp. 89–102) analyzes what is one of the earliest passages in Syriac literature that explicitly mentions Jews: the previously-discussed list of Jewish Shabbat prohibitions in the *Book of the Laws of the Countries* (written ca. 220). Some of these prohibitions could have derived from the Bible, but others, such as killing an animal, sitting as judge, participating in a judicial proceeding, tearing down, and building, have no scriptural basis. Cohen asks how these prohibitions found their way into the *Book of the Laws of the Countries.* He proposes three possibilities: from the Jews of Edessa, from Philo, or from the Mishnah (or possibly another rabbinic text). Ultimately, Cohen argues for the first: "Bardaiṣan's list of Sabbath prohibitions most probably derives from his own eye-witness familiarity with the practices of the Jews of Edessa."

S. H. Griffith (pp. 103–120) discusses the role that 'Jewish Christians' have played in scholarship on the Qurʾān. A number of scholars, both past and present, including most recently the late P. Crone,[90] have looked to 'Jewish Christians' to illuminate the Qurʾān's depictions of Christians. Griffith, however, notes that there is no evidence for 'Jewish Christians' in the sixth-century Arabian milieu of the Qurʾān. In addition, he goes further to question what value, if any, the concept of 'Jewish Christians' has for historical studies. Instead, Griffith stresses that the Christians whom we find in the Qurʾān are none other than the Christians whom we know from a variety of other sources inhabited the late antique Near East.

S. Gross (pp. 121–144) presents a scholarly genealogy and critical assessment of the hypothesis that Syriac Christianity emerged from Judaism. While the idea of the Jewish origins of Syriac Christianity is somewhat less prominent in recent studies, Gross argues that it continues to underlie many longstanding and persistent scholarly assumptions and characterizations of Syriac Christianity, such as its supposedly distinct asceticism. By eschewing these problematic appeals to origin moments, Gross suggests that figures, texts, and ideas often labeled and therefore sidelined as "Syriac Christian" must be incorporated into scholarly accounts of early Christianity and its development more generally.

G. Herman (pp. 145–153), returning to the study of the Jewish exilarchate,[91] illustrates how a comparative study of this institution and that of the East Syriac Catholicos can be mutually informative. As is well known, no contemporary

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[90] P. Crone, "Jewish Christianity and the Qurʾān," *JNES* 74 (2015): 225–253; 75 (2016): 1–21.
[91] See his earlier *A Prince without a Kingdom.*

non-Jewish source even mentions the Talmudic exilarchate. Thus, the large body of Syriac literature, especially synod proceedings and chronicles, on the comparable institution of the East Syriac Catholicos proves invaluable for understanding the exilarchate. In turn, Herman argues that Jewish sources can provide a necessary corrective on how to read the Syriac sources for the history of the East Syriac catholicate, since the Jewish sources provide a less center-based assessment of such an institution.

R. Kalmin (pp. 155–169) locates two narratives in the Babylonian Talmud within their late antique context. He begins with a discussion of the legend of Manasseh's execution of Isaiah in b. Yev. 49b–50a, which he compares with a passage in the Syriac *Acts of Sharbil*. He then proceeds to the miracle of the Septuagint in b. Meg. 8a–9a, which he illuminates with a variety of Christian texts, including especially Epiphanius's *On Weights and Measures*. Through these two examples, Kalmin argues that the Jews and Christians of late antique Mesopotamia were culturally linked, and, what's more, that the relationship is so close that the story of one community may hold the "hermeneutical key" to interpret a story in the other.

N. Koltun-Fromm (pp. 171–186) explores Syriac Christian and rabbinic writings about Jerusalem, both its physical reality and especially its mythological stature. Instead of investigating social-historical questions, she looks at intellectual, theological ideas. In particular, she shows how the Syriac *Cave of Treasures* builds upon earlier Christian traditions – those found in Syriac authors, such as Aphrahaṭ and Ephrem, as well as those of Greek authors, such as Eusebius of Caesarea and Cyril of Jerusalem – along a path that is similar to Jewish cosmogonic musings about the temple and Jerusalem.

S. Minov (pp. 187–205) analyzes two Christian stories in which a holy man engages in a staring contest with women doing laundry: Jacob of Nisibis in one and Ephrem in the other. In the course of his analysis, Minov discusses a number of rabbinic texts, especially from the Babylonian Talmud, that provide a rich source of comparative material for the Christian stories. In light of these rabbinic texts, Minov is able to show more clearly how these two Christian stories represent women, construct gender, and articulate identity. This article, thus, flips the script on the Syro-Talmudica paradigm by showing how rabbinic sources can help us better understand Syriac Christian texts.

Y. Moss (pp. 207–229) investigates a cross-generational conversation on the interpretation of Genesis 5 between the Syriac Christian Jacob of Edessa (d. 708) and the Rabbanite community leader Saadia Gaon (882–942). In his *Commentary on the Octateuch*, Jacob claims that Jews purposefully altered the biblical text for anti-Christological reasons. Writing a little over two centuries later, Saadia Gaon responds to Jacob's accusation with a counter-claim that Christians altered the biblical text. As Moss rightfully stresses, this exchange provides a new

window into intersections between Jews and Syriac Christians since, unlike most if not all cases from Late Antiquity, here we can read each side of the polemic.

O. Münz-Manor (pp. 231–253) provides a comparative analysis of Jewish and Syriac liturgical poetry. He begins by highlighting poetic similarities between Hebrew, Jewish Palestinian Aramaic, and Syriac poems. He then offers three case studies that highlight thematic and liturgical similarities: the dispute between body and soul, the binding(s) of Isaac, and the tabernacle as microcosm. By turning to liturgical poetry, Münz-Manor taps an under-utilized corpus in the study of intersections between Jews and Syriac Christians, and in doing so he provides a fascinating argument that religious affiliation was not the only category that defined the cultural boundaries of individuals or groups in Late Antiquity.

J. L. Rubenstein (pp. 256–279) addresses the question of how Syriac Christian sources can be used to inform the study of the Babylonian Talmud, or, as we have termed it in this introduction, Syro-Talmudica. He begins with a valuable *prolegomena* in which he situates Syro-Talmudica within the broader scholarship on the Babylonian Talmud as well as offers a number of important insights on the comparative method. He then proceeds with a series of comparative case studies: 1. the Geonic text known as Pirqoy ben Baboi and the synod of Gregory I (612); 2. the "righteous donkey" in the *Martyrdom of Pusai* and stories involving donkeys in b. Hul. 7a–7b and b. Taan. 24a; 3. the Sadducees in the Syriac *History of Rabban Mar Saba* and in b. San. 90b; 4. mocking students in the Syriac *Martyrdom of ʿAqebshma* and in b. B. Bat. 75a (= b. San. 100a), as well in other Christian and Jewish sources; 5. collapsing buildings in John Rufus's *Life of Peter the Iberian* and in b. Taan. 20b and 21a; 6. sorcerers and blasphemers in Syriac *Persian Martyr Acts* and in b. Shabb. 75a and b. San. 43a; 7. the portrayal of inter-religious dialogue in *The Life of Saint Eustace* and in Talmudic sources. These examples aptly display a variety of comparative approaches between Syriac and Babylonian rabbinic literature.

C. Stadel (pp. 281–290) provides a comprehensive overview of what he terms Judaeo-Syriac, which includes instances of the Jewish square script employed to write the Syriac language – either in transcription or in transliteration – as well as Jewish adaptions of a Syriac literary *Vorlage*. Though the Judaeo-Syriac corpus is small, it provides important data for the use of Syriac texts by Jews. In an appendix, Stadel discusses an interesting case in the Judaeo-Arabic treaties "Account of a Disputation of the Priest" (*qiṣṣat mujādalat al-ʾusquf*), in which Syriac language serves as a religio-linguistic marker.

J. E. Walters (pp. 291–319) offers a theoretically-informed analysis of the anti-Jewish polemic in the *Demonstrations* by Aphrahaṭ (fl. 336–345). In contrast to previous scholarship that tended to see Aphrahaṭ's anti-Jewish polemic as reflecting a historical Jewish community or a historical Jewish-Christian encounter, Walters argues that the Jews in the *Demonstrations* are a literary invention that help to construct Christian identity. Walters focuses primarily on the topics

of circumcision, Passover, and Sabbath/Shabbat, arguing that each of these is likely motivated by an inner-Christian controversy. Though limited primarily to three *Demonstrations*, the arguments presented here are relevant for all of the *Demonstrations* and revolutionize the way in which the anti-Jewish polemic of this text is to be read.

R. D. Young (pp. 321–335) analyzes the anonymous Syriac *Mēmrā on the Maccabees*. Previous scholarship has proposed that this is an ancient Jewish pseudepigraphon. Young, however, successfully dismantles this claim showing definitively that the *mēmrā* is in actuality a Christian composition. This represents an important methodological intervention, calling to mind J. Davila's foundational work on the provenance of pseudepigrapha.[92] Young proceeds to locate the *Mēmrā on the Maccabees* within the broader corpus of Syriac literature related to the Maccabees.

Every reader will undoubtedly be able to think of topics that should have been included in a representative sample of the field. Future avenues of research include studies on the so-called parting of ways/ways that never parted, commonalities between Jewish and Christian biblical exegesis, or Syriac Christian depictions of Muslims as Jews, to name only a few. Though the volume does not aim to be comprehensive or exhaustive, it is meant to be representative of the types of intersections we find between Jews and Syriac Christians as well as of the various methods scholars are currently using to analyze such intersections. In this way, the volume aims to provide the *status quaestionis*. It is our hope that this snapshot of the current state of the field will encourage new robust research on intersections between Jews and Syriac Christians.

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Aaron Michael Butts
Simcha Gross

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[92] J. Davila, *The Provenance of the Pseudepigrapha: Jewish, Christian, or Other?* (SJSJ 105; Leiden: Brill, 2005).

Syriac Monastic Motifs in the Babylonian Talmud

The Ḥeruta Story Reconsidered (b. Qiddushin 81b)*

Michal Bar-Asher Siegal

The flourishing field of Jewish-Christian relations in Late Antiquity has recently turned to the riches offered by early eastern Christian writings, especially those written in Syriac.[1] The main Jewish comparanda for eastern Christian writings are found in the Babylonian Talmud.[2] The Babylonian Talmud preserves the main literary evidence of the largest concentration of Jews in the Diaspora, from the third to seventh centuries,[3] located in the area surrounding the narrow meeting of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, in close proximity to Ctesiphon, the Sasanian winter capital.[4] As such, Christians and Jews lived in close proximity,[5] and they shared a language – Aramaic. The two communities spoke different but very

[1] For a survey of these, see M. Bar-Asher Siegal, "Judaism and Syriac Christianity," in D. King (ed.), *The Syriac World* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 146–156; G. Herman and J. Rubenstein, "Introduction," in eidem (eds.), *The Aggada of the Babylonian Talmud and its Cultural World* (Providence: Brown University Press, 2018), xvii–xxx.

[2] While the Palestinian Talmud and later Palestinian midrashim may very well offer evidence of a literary relationship to Syriac sources, very little work has been done on this topic. See, for example, J. Rubenstein, "Hero, Saint, and Sage: The Life of R. Elazar b. R. Shimon in Pesiqta de Rab Kahana 11," in M. Bar-Asher Siegal, C. Hayes, and T. Novick (eds.), *The Faces of Torah: Studies in the Texts and Contexts of Ancient Judaism in Honor of Steven Fraade* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017), 509–528; M. Bar-Asher Siegal, "Sayings of the Desert Fathers, Sayings of the Rabbinic Fathers: Avot Derabbi Nattan and the *Apophthegmata Patrum*," *ZAC* 20 (2016): 211–227.

[3] I. M. Gafni, "The Political, Social, and Economic History of Babylonian Jewry, 224–638 CE," in S. T. Katz (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, vol. 4. *The Late Roman–Rabbinic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 805.

[4] There were also Jewish settlements in northern Mesopotamia, most notably in Nisibis, probably dating back to early rabbinic times (Late Second Temple period, as reported for example by Josephus). See B. J. Segal, "The Jews of North Mesopotamia before the Rise of Islam," in J. M. Grintz et al. (eds.), *Studies in the Bible Presented to Professor M. H. Segal* (Jerusalem: Qiryat Sefer, 1964), 32–63. See especially his map on p. 806.

[5] J.-M. Fiey, "Topographie chrétienne de Mahozé," *OS* 12 (1967): 397–420.

similar dialects of Aramaic: Syriac for the Christians, Jewish Babylonian Aramaic for the Jews, both traditionally categorized (together with Mandaic) within the same eastern dialect branch of Late Aramaic.[6] The differences of dialect (and script) marked out the different communities, but, importantly, the close proximity of the dialects still permitted the language to serve as an important vehicle of communication between the two communities.[7]

For scholars seeking to study the rabbinic and Christian corpora comparatively, and specifically those studying the rabbinic passages within the Babylonian Talmud, this historical background offers great potential. The linguistic and literary relationships between the Babylonian Talmud and Syriac literature – and the chronological and geographical proximity of their authors – suggests that a side-by-side reading at the very least deepens our understanding of the *Sitz im Leben* of the Babylonian Talmud and its readers and, in many cases, sheds light on previously misunderstood passages. At times, a comparison between these literatures can even supply actual historical information on the relationship between the two religious communities.

For scholars of this field, Shlomo Naeh's 1997 article "Freedom and Celibacy: A Talmudic Variation on Tales of Temptation and Fall in Genesis and its Syrian Background," and its Hebrew version (published in 2000), is considered a scholarly turning point.[8] This article treats a well-known Talmudic story in b. Qidd. 81b:[9]

רב חייא בר אשי הוה קא רגיל כל יומא[10] דהוה נפיל על אפיה ואמ׳. הרחמן יציליני מיצר הרע. יומא חד שמעת׳ דביתהו. אמרה. הא כמה שני דפריש ל׳ מינאי מאי טעמ׳ אמ׳ הכי. יומא חד הוה קא גריס

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[6] For a recent review of the literature regarding the relationship between Syriac and Jewish Babylonian Aramaic, see E.A. Bar-Asher Siegal, *Introduction to the Grammar of Jewish-Babylonian Aramaic* (2nd rev. and extended ed.; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2016), 25–27. For a detailed study which compares the two dialects diachronically, see idem, "From a Non-Argument-Dative to an Argument-Dative: The Character and Origin of the *qṭīl lī* Construction in Syriac and Jewish Babylonian Aramaic," *FO* 51 (2015): 59–111.

[7] See F. Millar, "A Rural Jewish Community in Late Roman Mesopotamia, and the Question of a 'Split' Jewish Diaspora," *JSJ* 42 (2011): 351–374; D. Taylor, "Bilingualism and Diglossia in Late Antique Syria and Mesopotamia," in J. N. Adams et al. (eds.), *Bilingualism and Ancient Society: Language Contact and the Written Text* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 298–331.

[8] Sh. Naeh, "Freedom and Celibacy: A Talmudic Variation on Tales of Temptations and Fall in Genesis and its Syrian Background," in J. Frishman and L. Van Rompay (eds.), *The Book of Genesis in Jewish and Oriental Christian Interpretation* (TEG 5; Leuven: Peeters, 1997), 73–89. The Hebrew version was published as Sh. Naeh, "Ḥeruta," in *Issues in Talmudic Research: Conference Commemorating the Fifth Anniversary of the Passing of Ephraim E. Urbach, 2 December 1996* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 2001), 10–27.

[9] Text according to ms. Vatican 111 as found in *Ma'agarim: The Historical Dictionary Project of the Academy of the Hebrew Language.* Since, unfortunately, Naeh did not refer to the variations in the manuscripts versions, I will detail them in what follows. Ms. Oxford, which covers most of tractate Qiddushin, does not cover this part of the tractate. The English translation is my own.

[10] Ms. Munich and the printed editions have הוה רגיל כל עידן/נא. Besides the lexical difference of כל יומא vs. כל עידן, there is also a grammatical distinction: Ms. Vatican has the durative

בגינתיה.¹¹ קשטה נפש׳ וחלפה ותניא קמיה.¹² אמ׳. מאן את. אמרה ליה. אנא חריתא דהדרי מיומא. תבעה. אמרה לי. אייתי לי מן הדין רומני דריש צוציתא. שוור אייתיה ניהלה. כי מטא לביתיה הוה קא שגרא תנורא. סליק וקאי יתיב בגויה. אמרה ל׳. מאי האי. אמ׳ לה. הכי והכי הוה מעשה. אמרה ל׳. אנא הואי.¹³ [אמ׳ לה. אנא] מיהא לאיסורא איכווני.

R. Hiyya b. Ashi was prostrating himself all day and saying: "May the Merciful One save me from the evil impulse." One day his wife heard him. She said: "Behold, he has refrained from sexual contact with me for several years already. Why does he say that?" One day as he was studying in his garden, she adorned herself and she repeatedly passed in front of him. He said to her: "Who are you?" She said to him: "I am Ḥeruta, and from today[14] on I'm back / I have returned from a day." He propositioned her.[15] She said to him: "Bring me that pomegranate from the top of the branch."[16] He jumped up and retrieved it for her. When he returned home, he found his wife firing the oven. He got up and sat in it. She said to him: "What is [the meaning of] this?" He said to her: "Such and such occurred." She said to him: "That was me." He said to her: "But I intended to do something forbidden."

The story focuses on R. Hiyya b. Ashi and his relationship with his (nameless) wife. The story has three parts, moving from inside to outside the house and back in again. The first part of the story is the description of R. Hiyya's daily routine. He prostrates daily, asking to be spared from his evil impulse. We also learn that he has been celibate for years, refraining from sexual relations with his wife. This section of the story ends יומא חד "one day" when his wife hears him and is confused by his words, being intimately familiar with their marital situation. Interestingly, her confusion is not self-evident. She supposedly assumes that her husband's evil inclination can only be related to wanting (or not wanting) *her*. In other words, the wife here understood his celibacy as stemming from a lack of general sexual inclination. The words she hears make clear that the inclination is very much still there. This highlight the mystery that the readers, alongside the wife, must understand. What is the nature of R. Hiyya's evil impulse?

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marker קא and therefore it must be translated as "was prostrating himself all day" (unlike Naeh's translation which is "used to prostate himself daily"). According to the other version, the durative marker is missing, and therefore this expression indicates habitual "used to prostate himself *every time* (כל עדן)". See Bar-Asher Siegal, *Introduction to the Grammar of Jewish-Babylonian Aramaic*, 183 regarding the difference between durative and iterative (habitual) in Jewish Babylonian Aramaic.

[11] Here the durative ("he was studying") is expected, and indeed ms. Vatican 111 and the printed editions have the durative marker קא. It is, however, missing from ms. Munich.

[12] Ms. Munich has here ואתי׳ קמי׳ "and she came towards him."

[13] Here, in the printed editions, a sentence was added: לא אשגח בה עד דיהבה ליה סימני "he did not believe her until she gave him evidence (*literally* signs)."

[14] The translation of יומא as "today" is based on the way the Hebrew expression היום is used in Babylonian Hebrew (for example in b. Git. 84a). Sokoloff (*DJBA*, 432) also translated יומא in our context as "today."

[15] *Literally* "he demanded her," often in sexual contexts.

[16] *Literally* "from the top of the small branch" (Sokoloff, *DJBA*, 955). Ms. Vatican 111 has צוציתא דדיקלא "branch of a palm tree."

The second part of the story starts, as well, with the words חד יומא "one day." Now the story moves to the garden, where R. Hiyya is studying. His wife dresses up and walks in front of her husband. She manages to attract his attention, and he asks for her identity. Not only is it not clear why the husband, who fights to keep his desires under tight control, refrains from having intercourse with his legal wife, but now he does not recognize her. She identifies herself as חרותא. He propositions her (תבעה), and she asks him to perform a laborious task: Pick a pomegranate from a very top branch, which he does. The story does not explicitly describe the sexual encounter that it implies clearly follows.

The third part of the story happens back at the couple's home. R. Hiyya decides to commit suicide by climbing into the oven his wife just fired. This dramatic display confuses the wife, to whom he now confesses his transgression. She tries to explain that he did nothing wrong by revealing herself to be חרותא. Legally, they are married, and as such R. Hiyya has not transgressed any commandment. But he refuses to be consoled, because he intended to commit a transgression. The story ends here in all of the manuscripts. The clear implication of the story is that it concludes with the death of R. Hiyya. The printed editions subvert this implication by adding: כל ימיו של אותו צדיק היה מתענה עד שמת באותה מיתה "that righteous man fasted all his life, until he died thereof." But, as rightly pointed by Jonah Fraenkel,[17] this later addition "spoils" the original intent of the story, making R. Hiyya into a "righteous man" who does not die in the oven.

This story has attracted the attention of many scholars, notably because of its depiction of the unusual relationship between R. Hiyya and his wife.[18] Some scholars have highlighted well-known literary tropes and folkmotifs used in the story, such as a man's attraction for what he thinks is a foreign woman, only to learn that he was mistaken about her identity,[19] or the rejected wife disguised

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[17] J. Fraenkel, "Remarkable Phenomena in the Text History of the Aggadic Stories," *Proceedings of the Seventh World Congress of Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1981), 59–61 (in Hebrew).

[18] Among them see: Fraenkel, "Remarkable Phenomena"; J. Hauptman, *Rereading the Rabbis: A Woman's Voice* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998), 43–44; I. Rosen-Zvi, "The Evil Impulse, Sexuality and Yichud: A Chapter of Talmudic Anthropology," *Theory and Criticism* 14 (1999): 55–84 (in Hebrew); Sh. Valler, *Women in Jewish Society in the Talmudic Period* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2000), 40–51 (in Hebrew); R. Calderon, *The Market, the Home, the Heart: Talmudic Legends* (Jerusalem: Keter, 2001), 49–57 (in Hebrew); I. Hevroni, *An Arrow in Satan's Eye: Symbols and Domains of Significance in a Compilation of Temptation Stories from Babylonian Talmud, Kiddushin 81 a–b* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Bar Ilan University, 2006), 174–211 (in Hebrew); H. Mack, "On Men Who Were Tempted but Did Not Sin," in J. Levinson et al. (eds.), *Higayon Leyona* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2006), 433–456 (in Hebrew); A. Kosman, *Women's Tractate: Wisdom, Love, Faithfulness, Passion, Beauty, Sex, Holiness* (Jerusalem: Keter, 2007), 83–93 (in Hebrew); A. Walfish, "Creative Redaction and the Power of Desire – A Study of the Redaction of Tractate Qiddushin: Mishnah, Tosefta, and Babylonian Talmud," *JSIJ* 7 (2008): 56–79 (in Hebrew); D. Stein, "Let the 'People' Go?: The 'Folk' and their 'Lore' as Tropes in the Reconstruction of Rabbinic Culture," *Prooftexts* 29 (2009): 228–230.

[19] Mack, "On Men."

as a prostitute,[20] or R. Hiyya as the "fallen conceited."[21] Others have noticed the placement of the story within tractate Qiddushin, within a group of stories about men and the evil inclination.[22] Scholars have stressed the portrayal of the wife, "speaking out about her desires and needs."[23] But even more jarring is the attitude revealed in R. Hiyya's actions towards women and sexuality. His ascetic attitudes revealed in his daily mantra, as well as his wife's admission of his sexual abstinence, are unique in the rabbinic landscape.[24] R. Hiyya is portrayed critically, his abstinence ridiculed, and his ending marked as tragic, signaling the ineffectuality of ascetic behavior, according to the rabbinic author(s).

In what is widely regarded as one of the first examples of a scholarly article using Syriac traditions to better understand a Babylonian Talmudic tale, Shlomo Naeh recognized in the name *ḥeruta*, provided by R. Hiyya's wife, a loanword from Syriac Christian literature.

Prior to Naeh, scholars explained the name *ḥeruta* as referring to the name of a famous prostitute,[25] a symbol to the wife's return to her vivacity,[26] or even relying on a unique variation of this word (חדוותא) to mean "bride."[27] By contrast, Shlomo Naeh read the word in its Christian sense, in which it appears as a janus word, referring to both abstinence from sexual relations as well as sexual license, thus shedding new light on the Talmudic story about the ascetic R. Hiyya b. Ashi. In so doing, Naeh reveals the story to be a mockery of the favorable Christian view of abstinence.

In this article, I wish to acknowledge the significance of Naeh's article for the development of the field of Jewish-Christian relations in Late Antiquity. I will also demonstrate that his argument is only partial, and that it should be expanded. I will delineate the shortcoming of a solely lexical approach and suggest broader comparisons which, to my mind, are more useful. In this case, I will propose that Naeh's argument would have benefited from a broader survey of monastic texts in which women are viewed as incarnations of the holy man's

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[20] See Stein, "Let the 'People' Go?," 229. She rejects there the folkloristic reading of the story suggested by G. Hasan-Rokem, "Conglomeration: Proverb as a Key for Complexity of Plot: or, What did the Clever Woman do to her Husband?" in eadem, *Proverbs in Israeli Folk Narratives: A Structural Semantic Analysis* (Folklore Fellows Communications 232; Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1982), 77–93.

[21] Rosen-Zvi, "The Evil Impulse."

[22] See for example Hevroni, *An Arrow in Satan's Eye*; Rosen Zvi, "The Evil Impulse."

[23] Hauptman, *Rereading the Rabbis*, 44.

[24] E. E. Urbach, "Asceticism and Suffering in Rabbinic Thought," in S. Baron et al. (eds.), *Yitzhak F. Baer Jubilee Volume* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1961), 48–68 (in Hebrew). Though, Urbach's lenses were geared towards certain kinds of findings, see E. Diamond, *Holy Men and Hunger Artists: Fasting and Asceticism in Rabbinic Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 3–20.

[25] Rashi, ad loc.

[26] Fraenkel, "Remarkable Phenomena in the Text History of the Aggadic Stories," 61: חרותא דהדרי= המצומקת שחזרתי להיות רעננה.

[27] Hevroni, *An Arrow in Satan's Eye*, 197–202.

illicit desires and his struggles against this temptation. Such a reading could have better illuminated the Talmudic story of R. Ḥiyya as a unique portrayal of an ascetic rabbi fighting his urges, in the mold of the monastic holy man. This reading is based on my previous research in which I suggested that a literary connection can be found between rabbinic sources, especially the Babylonian Talmud, and contemporaneous monastic sources.[28] The literary analogies between these corpora have the potential to shed light on both religious communities and their ties. Thus, in the case of the *Ḥeruta* story, I suggest that a more nuanced approach, than previously proposed, will allow for a better description of Jewish-Christian relations as they appear in rabbinic literature.

Ḥeruta

Naeh finds in the name of R. Hiyya's wife – Ḥeruta – a "key word" according to which the entire story should be understood. According to Naeh, she "masquerades as a prostitute and tries to attract the attention of her husband, the rabbi, who notices her and attempts to engage her services."[29] The word *Ḥeruta*, claims Naeh, should be read according to its uses in Syriac literature. There, *Ḥeruta* refers to both a life of self-control and suppression of impulse and ascetic celibacy, as well as the "freedom" that "entails unrestrained behavior, debauchery and licentiousness."[30] Naeh concludes that "the multivalent semantic load of Heruta in the field of sexual restraint is entirely appropriate to its status as the key word in our story."[31] The polyvalence of the term highlights the fact that:

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[28] M. Bar-Asher Siegal, *Early Christian Monastic Literature and the Babylonian Talmud* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); eadem, "The Making of a Monk-Rabbi: The Background for the Creation of the Stories of R. Shimon bar Yohai in the Cave," *Zion* 76 (2011): 279–304 (in Hebrew); eadem, "Shared Worlds: Rabbinic and Monastic literature," *HTR* 105 (2012): 423–456; eadem, "Talmudic Monks: Early Christian Monastic and Rabbinic Literatures," *Zemanim* 120 (2012): 110–117 (in Hebrew); eadem, "Ethics and Identity Formation: Resh Lakish and the Monastic Repentant Robber," in K. Berthelot, R. Naiweld, D. Stökl Ben Ezra (eds.), *L'identité à travers l'éthique: Nouvelles perspectives sur la formation des identités collectives dans le monde gréco-romain* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), 53–72; eadem, "Prayer in Rabbinic and Monastic Literature," in *Jewish Prayer: New Perspectives* (Jerusalem: Ben Gurion University Press, 2016), 63–77 (in Hebrew); eadem, "Moses in the *Apophthegmata Patrum* and Rabbinic Literature," in M. Sommer, E. Eynikel, V. Niederhofer, and E. Hernitscheck (eds.), *Mosebilder Gedanken zur Rezeption einer literarischen Figur im Frühjudentum, frühen Christentum und der römisch hellenistischen Literatur* (WUNT 390; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 403–414; eadem, "The Collection of Traditions in Monastic and Rabbinic Anthologies as a Reflection of Lived Religion," *Religion in the Roman Empire* 2 (2016): 72–90; eadem, "Saying of the Desert Fathers, Sayings of the Rabbinic Fathers: Avot deRabbi Nattan and the Apophthegmata Patrum," *ZAC* 20 (2016): 211–227.

[29] Naeh, "Freedom and Celibacy," 74.

[30] Naeh, "Freedom and Celibacy," 83.

[31] Naeh insists that the word *Ḥeruta* "is not a description of her status but a personal name by which she introduces herself." He bases this assertion on the word order in the sentence: "since

both characters undergo a sharp reversal from extreme celibacy to licentiousness. The woman, unwillingly "guarding her freedom," masquerades as a prostitute and offers the man an opportunity for freedom, for libertine debauchery. The man, who had been vigilant in the ascetic struggle for freedom from sexual urges, all at once capitulates to the other aspect of freedom – the unleashing of passion.[32]

The use of the Syriac term is intentional, says Naeh, as it marks the word as "belonging to a foreign culture, and this can serve to indicate the lesson the story is intended to teach its listeners."

Naeh's argument is indeed convincing and has therefore served as a touchstone for other scholars' own search after such Syriac connections. Yet, Naeh's approach narrowly focuses on key words.[33]

Lexical Approach to Comparative Research

However, this approach, which selects one word, imports its meaning in the other contexts or languages, and applies it to its new place, ignores a possible wider comparison of the full literary depiction, parallel to contemporary Christian sources. In this case, the sources I shall discuss below can show that, in fact, the full literary depiction of the figure of R. Hiyya in this story, and not just a single word, frames him as a monastic figure.

I propose that this narrower lexical approach, represented by Naeh's work, is rooted in the history of the study of rabbinic literature. For instance, in Saul Lieberman's groundbreaking work, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine*, he famously pushes scholars for a comparative look at Rabbinic and Greco-Roman sources. But when he frames his entire project, he stresses that:

… although we possess no evidence that the Rabbis borrowed their rules of interpretation from the Greeks, the situation is quite different when we deal with formulation, terms, categories and systematization of these rules. The latter were mainly created by the Greeks, and the Jews most probably did not hesitate to take them over and adapt them to their own rules and norms.[34]

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in Babylonian Talmudic Aramaic (and other dialects as well) the subject pronoun comes at the head of identification statements – as in our sentence:אנא חרותא – only if the predicate is a proper noun" (Naeh, "Freedom and Celibacy," 83–84). However, we can find cases in which the pronoun appears first and the predicate is not a proper noun (see Bar-Asher Siegal, *Introduction to the Grammar of Jewish-Babylonian Aramaic*, 109), as the following examples demonstrate: אני ואת אחי "you and I are brothers" (b. Yev. 97b) and אנא מלך ואיהו ריש גנבי "I am a king, and he is the head of the thieves" (b. Shabb. 156a according to ms. Vatican). Therefore, it is still possible to read *ḥeruta* as an adjective, rather than a proper noun or name.

[32] Naeh, "Freedom and Celibacy," 83.
[33] Naeh, "Freedom and Celibacy," 73.
[34] S. Lieberman, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1950), 78. Liberman's stress on the rabbis' aversion to Greek content is seen elsewhere too. See for example, p. 27: "… no evidence is available that the Rabbis were acquainted with

The rabbis, according to Lieberman, took from the Greco-Roman writers only formulations, terms, and categories but never the actual rules. The actual rabbinic content, stressed Lieberman, is wholly unaffected by "external influences." Just the terms, the structure, and categories are borrowed, adapted, and incorporated. While Lieberman himself strayed from time to time from stating this explicitly, still, much of his work is based on a lexical approach that searches for Greek words to illuminate thus-far misunderstood passages in rabbinic texts.[35]

In his use of *ḥeruta*, Naeh follows Lieberman's lexical methodology – this time focusing on Syriac terms rather than Greek. The focus of Naeh's inquiry starts and ends with the word *ḥeruta* as it appears in Syriac dictionaries and the sources quoted in the entries used to demonstrate its meaning. There is no attempt to compare other elements in the story, or the story as a whole, to other contemporaneous non-Jewish texts.

Yet, in this case, the same monastic sources upon which the dictionaries based their definition of the term *ḥeruta* also supply a broader literary framework and paint a worldview that can potentially shed light on much more than a single borrowed word. They portray the world in which the monastic characters lived, or better yet, the way these lives were preserved in the hagiographic texts. Moving beyond the dictionary entries to the stories themselves gives access to the whole rather than one puzzle piece. This is especially true in the case of *ḥeruta*, which is in fact *not* an ideal case for a lexical approach, as the word contains two contrary meanings: self-control and freedom; suppression of impulse and ascetic celibacy as well as debauchery and licentiousness. This makes for a more nuanced and complex argument on the part of Naeh but not a clear-cut lexical study. A wider, comparative view of the rabbinic and Christian sources, to my mind, confirms Naeh's reading in a much stronger and substantiated way than a simple import of the local lexical meaning of a term.

R. Hiyya and Monastic Literature: Opening Remarks

In the story, R. Hiyya is celibate and struggles with his evil inclinations. He prostrates and uses a single line of prayer to combat these thoughts, studies alone,

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the literary works of the Greeks which either condemned idolatry or commended it. The Jewish teachers were primarily concerned with the practical rites of idolatry in so far as they might affect the behavior of the Jews, and they composed a whole tractate (Abodah Zarah) on this subject. The material contained therein is taken not from literature but from personal contact and oral information, and is consequently of precious value for the understanding of the religious rites and practices of the heathens. We shall therefore devote the following chapters to this subject."

[35] This approach suffers not only from its limited scope but also because the direction is always one sided: The whole purpose of this scholarly project is the use of non-Jewish words and terms to shed light on rabbinic literature.

surprisingly not with his rabbinic colleagues but rather in his garden, in nature, in solitude. This mirrors a typical depiction of the life choices and struggles of monastic holy men. These Christian holy men, we are told by the many sources of the time, combat their evil inclinations by isolating themselves in nature, in seclusion, and fighting various manifestations of these desires. A survey of the various literary elements of the story of R. Hiyya in comparison with monastic sources reveals the various ways in which the story is dependent on – and playing with – monastic tropes.

R. Hiyya's Prostration

We begin with R. Hiyya's prostration. Jewish worship in the Biblical and Second Temple periods was characterized by "primary and nearly exclusive use of the gesture of prostration ..."[36] However, this form of bodily gesture is marginalized in the later rabbinic literature which promotes bowing as the main gesture in their discussions of prayer.[37]

Ehrlich assigns this shift to changes in the interpersonal sphere where a shift occurred between biblical times, when prostration was a conventional gesture before a human ruler, and later Hellenistic-Roman times, when standing and bowing were the common gestures. But both Louis Ginzberg and Gerald Blidstein also noted the possible influence of Christian prayer practices on this shift regarding the use of prostration in prayer.[38] Ginzberg saw the rabbinic opposition to the Christian adoption of prostration as the main reason for the rabbinic turn to bowing. He even compares Palestinian and Babylonian rabbinic views on this issue:

Since, however, opposition to Christianity was no factor of religious life in Babylonia, as it was in Palestine, and there was, therefore, no necessity for modifying ancient religious customs in obedience to it, the Palestinian prohibition of prostration was modified in Babylonia to the extent that the complete proskynesis, with extended hands and feet, was forbidden outside of the Temple; other Forms of Adoration were permitted.[39]

Blidstein however stressed that prostration did not become common Christian prayer practice until the late second century,[40] not allowing, chronologically, for this to be the reason for the earlier Palestinian rabbinic shift away from the

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[36] U. Ehrlich, *The Nonverbal Language of Prayer: A New Approach to Jewish Liturgy* (TSAJ 105; Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 29–63, esp. 42–47.

[37] Naeh, "Freedom and Celibacy," 42

[38] L. Ginzberg, "Adoration," in *JE*, vol. 1, 208–11; G. J. Blidstein, "Prostration and Mosaics in Talmudic Law," *Bulletin of the Institute of Jewish Studies* 2 (1974): 19–39.

[39] Ginzberg, "Adoration," 210.

[40] Blidstein, "Prostration and Mosaics in Talmudic Law," 21. He also suggested that it is unlikely that Jews would relinquish prostration that was "meaningfully their own" since biblical times, which I find less convincing as an argument. Ehrlich, however, adopted this view (Ehrlich, *The Nonverbal Language of Prayer*, 43).

gesture. Blidstein himself does suggest that the later Jewish adoption of a posture seen by Christian and Jews alike as the sign of ultimate penance and submission "could then only have seemed to support the Christian polemic that the Jews were a people rejected by God."[41] This contributed to its elimination from daily Jewish prayer.[42]

This puts R. Hiyya's behavior, his prostrations, in opposition to the prevalent direction of rabbinic *halacha*. However, if, contrary to Ginzberg's assertion, one assumes possible connections between the rabbinic and contemporary Christian communities in the Persian Empire, then the portrayal of R. Hiyya as prostrating, alongside other monastic elements, makes sense as well. Monks were known to exhibit extreme physical prayer gestures such as bowing, kneeling, and prostrating. John Moschus, the sixth-century Byzantine monk, who lived in Palestine and Egypt, writes:

By day I would carefully observe the rule of prayer, and at night I would go to pray in the cave where the saintly Theodosius and the other holy fathers were buried. As I went down into the cave, I would make a hundred prostrations to God at each step; there were 18 steps. (*The Spiritual Meadow*, 105)[43]

Archeological tests in remains of skeletons of fifth-century monks from the École Biblique in east Jerusalem support such practice: They show "an arthritic response in the majority of individuals at all sites of muscle, ligament, and tendon attachment associated with deep flexion of the knee."[44]

"Monologistos" Prayers

In addition, R. Hiyya uses a single line of prayer to express his struggle with his desires: הרחמן יצילֵינִי מיצר הרע "May the Merciful One save me from the evil impulse." As pointed out by Hevroni,[45] while we find other rabbinic formulations of private requests in prayers, this specific formulation is not found elsewhere. Also, it is the only place where such private requests are accompanied with a description of the bodily position, in this case prostration. The content of the request, to be saved from evil inclination, is known from other prayer formulations, but

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[41] Blidstein, "Prostration and Mosaics in Talmudic Law," 26

[42] Notice, that Blidstein focuses on the verb להשתחוות rather than נפילת אפיים but the general sense of full bodily prostration is still the same. See Ehrlich, *The Nonverbal Language of Prayer*, 29–63 and Hevroni, *An Arrow in Satan's Eye*, 180–184.

[43] *PG* 87.3.2961–64. For an English translation, see J. Wortley, *The Spiritual Meadow* (CSS 139; Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1992), 83.

[44] M. S. Driscoll and S. G. Sheridan, "Every Knee Shall Bend: Liturgical and Ascetical Prayer in V–VII Century Palestine," *Worship* 74 (2000): 130–137. See also C. Stewart, "The Practices of Monastic Prayer Origins, Evolution, and Tensions," in P. Sellew (ed.), *Living for Eternity: The White Monastery and its Neighborhood, Proceedings of a Symposium at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, March 6–9 2003* (Leuven: Peeters, 2003), 97–108.

[45] Hevroni, *An Arrow in Satan's Eye*, 186.

they always appears as part of a longer list of requests.[46] This, thus, should also be viewed, I claim, as part of the presentation of R. Hiyya as a monastic character.

And indeed, monks frequently employed "Monologistos" prayers: single sentences, often verses, uttered repeatedly to ward off evil thoughts.[47] Lucien Regnault describes how this early form of prayer was used by the holy man:

> So, frequently, especially at times when the danger is more urgent, he shouts to the Lord, calling on his mercy and help. As a castaway in danger, he repeats tirelessly his prayer … Words can vary from one old man to another, according to the times and circumstances of each person's life. Of this or that formula, it is said that it was the prayer of a monk for three, thirteen, or thirty years … And when it is reported from an old man that he was always or constantly in such prayer, we are not sure that this prayer was really continual and that the same formula has been used for a long time. But we can however speak in most cases we have noted, of prayer monologistos, as expressing in different forms the same vital need, the same urgent necessity.[48]

Different passages reveal different formulae of these short and repetitive prayers. Just to name a few: In fifth-century Palestine, "the Jesus prayer" emerged, which entailed the repetition of short phrases similar to: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me" (well-known from later Byzantine and Russian Orthodoxy).[49] And John Cassian, Evagrius's student, called for the constant repetition of Psalm 70:1: "God, come to my aid; Lord, make haste to help me."[50] In the *Apophthegmata* we find the words of Abba Lucius:

> … I will show you how, while doing my manual work, I pray without interruption. I sit down with God, soaking my reeds and plaiting my ropes, and I say, "God, have mercy on me; according to your great goodness and according to the multitude of your mercies, save me from my sins." (Psalms 51:3).[51]

Viewed in light of this background, the prostration and use of a single, repetitive sentence by R. Hiyya fits very well with contemporaneous descriptions of the acts of holy men and their use of such prayers.

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[46] See, for example, b. Ber. 16b and 17a.

[47] L. Regnault, "La prière continuelle 'monologistos' dans la littérature apophthegmatique," *Iranikon* 47 (1974): 467–493. See also I. Hausherr , "Comment priaient les pères," *Revue d'ascétique et de mystique* 32 (1956): 33–58, 284–296.

[48] Regnault, "La prière continuelle 'monologistos' dans la littérature apophtegmatique," 486–487 (my translation of the French).

[49] W. Harmless, *Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 351. And see also K. Ware, "The Origins of the Jesus Prayer: Diadochus, Gaza, Sinai," in C. Jones, G. Wainwright, and E. Yarnold (eds.), *The Study of Spirituality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 175–184 and G. Bunge, "'Priez sans cesse': Aux origines de la prière hésychaste," *Studia Monastica* 30 (1988): 7–16.

[50] Cassian, *Conferences*, 10.10 (E. Pichery, *Jean Cassien. Conférences* [SC 42, 54, 64; Paris: Cerf, 1955–1959], vol. 2 [SC 54], 85–90; B. Ramsey, *John Cassian. The Conferences* [ACW 57; New York: Paulist, 1997], 379–383).

[51] *Apophthegmata*, Lucius 1 (*PG*, vol. 65, 253). And see also Benjamin 4 (*PG*, vol. 65, 145), Epiphanius 3 (*PG*, vol. 65, 164)

The Garden

Next, the story depicts R. Hiyya studying in his garden. This literary plot has been explained by scholars as an allusion to the garden of Eden,[52] or as a liminal place between the house and the outside world, out of the house but still allowing private intimacy with *Ḥeruta*.[53] But the promotion of one's spiritual life by seclusion from the world and devoting one's life to religious contemplation is also a clear defining characteristic of the monastic movement.

Whether this was a continuation of earlier Jewish secluded desert sects, as suggested by John C. O'Neill,[54] or due to economic causes;[55] a casual mention of Isaac "a monk (*monachos*)" in a document that dates to 324 (P. Coll. Youtie 77) might indicate that Christian monasticism was established by then in rural Egypt.[56] The famous Anthony, described by Athanasius as the founder of monasticism, retreats to the desert to fight with his demons and desires. And "from then on there were monasteries in the mountains and the desert was made a city by monks, who left their own people and registered themselves for citizenship in the heavens."[57] Seclusion in the desert served to distant the monk from earthly desires but also as the battleground for combating such desires in a dramatic fashion. So too, R. Hiyya departs the house where his wife is to combat his desires in the secluded garden.

As mentioned above, this departure into the garden is surprising when compared to other rabbinic passages. R. Hiyya prays to combat his *yetser*, apparently the source of his inappropriate sexual desires. This parts with the depiction of the *yetser* and the means of combatting it found throughout rabbinic literature. As Ishay Rosen-Zvi says, comparing the *daimones* of pseudo-Clementine with the rabbinic *yetser*:

Unlike the [Christian] Homilies rabbinic *yetser* is not identified with the body and its pleasures, and "abstinence and fasting and suffering of afflictions" (Hom 9.10) is nowhere

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[52] Naeh, "Freedom and Celibacy," 88.

[53] Hevroni, *An Arrow in Satan's Eye*, 190–191

[54] J.C. O'Neill, "The Origins of Monasticism," in R. Williams (ed.), *The Making of Orthodoxy. Essays in Honour of Henry Chadwick* (Cambridge: Cambridge Unviersity Press, 1989), 270–287.

[55] W. H. C. Frend, "The Monks and the Survival of the East Roman Empire in the Fifth Century," *Past and Present* 54 (1972): 3–24.

[56] This is the view expressed by M. Dunn, *The Emergence of Monasticism. From the Desert Fathers to the Early Middle Ages* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 1 (and see there pp. 1–24). Other scholars, such as J. Goehring, *Ascetics, Society, and the Desert: Studies in Early Egyptian Monasticism* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1999), express more caution when reading this term. On this document, see E.A. Judge, "The Earliest Use of Monachos for 'Monk' (P. Coll. Youtie 77) and the Origins of Monasticism," *JAC* 20 (1977): 72–89.

[57] *Life of Antony* 14 (R.C. Gregg, *Athanasius. The Life of Antony and the Letter to Marcellinus* [Classics of Western Spirituality; New York: Paulist Press, 1989], 42–43).

suggested as a cure for yetser. In their stead the house of study is the major weapon with which *yetser* is fought in rabbinic literature.[58]

Rosen-Zvi's conclusions describe accurately the rabbinic literature as a whole and highlight the exceptional nature of R. Hiyya's story. R. Hiyya *does* fight his *yetser* using abstinence, as revealed by his wife's comments, and avoids the use of the study house as a weapon for his struggles. R. Hiyya's resistance is thus consistently anomalous: He prostrates, employs repetitive one line prayers, and sits in his secluded garden to combat his *yetser* alone.

Manifestation of One's Inclinations

In what follows I will suggest that R. Hiyya viewed his wife as a manifestation of his sexual inclinations. Holy men often visualized their inner battle with their desire by conjuring them as entities such as snakes, demons, and women. They often use the above mentioned "Monologistos" prayers to fight off these manifestations of their desires. This is clearly illustrated by the story about Abba Arsenius in the *Apophthegmata Patrum*:

It happened that when Abba Arsenius was sitting in his cell that he was harassed by demons. His servants, on their return, stood outside his cell and heard him praying to God in these words "O God, do not leave me. I have done nothing good in your sight, but according to your goodness, let me now make a beginning of good."[59]

In this case, Abba Arsenius's fought his visualized demons with this short prayer asking for God's help.

Desires and inclinations were often also visualized as females. This is based on the age-old link between women and sin. Thus, when an aristocratic women wished to see Arsenius in his cell in Canopus in Egypt, he shames her for forcing him to look at her. The local archbishop explained to the woman the reason behind Arsenius' harsh words to her:

The archbishop said to her, "Do you not realize that you are a woman, and that it is through women that the enemy wars against the Saints?"[60]

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[58] I. Rosen Zvi, "*Yetser Ha-Ra* and *Daimones*: A Shared Ancient Jewish and Christian Discourse," in P. J. Tomson and J. Schwartz (eds.), *Jews and Christians in the First and Second Centuries: How to Write Their History* (Brill, Leiden 2014), 439. See also A. H. Becker, "The 'Evil Inclination' of the Jews: The Syriac *Yatsra* in Narsai's Metrical Homilies for Lent," *JQR* 106 (2016): 179–207, where he points out that fifth-century Syriac Christian author Narsai, likewise, "calls for the study of God's self-revelation in Scripture and in the order of creation as a means to resist the *yatsra*'s wicked drive" (p. 204).

[59] *Apophthegmata* Arsenius 3 (*PG*, vol. 65, 88C).

[60] *Apophthegmata* Arsenius 28 (*PG*, vol. 65, 97A). On this source and others on women and piety in social context, see G. Cloke, *This Female Man of God: Women and Spiritual Power in the Patristic Age, 350–450 AD* (London: Routledge, 2003), 25–46, esp. 29–30.

As David Brakke writes:

With a few notable exceptions, monastic authors did not equate the female with the de-
monic, but the female body provided a flexible tool for visualizing an interior battle …
Satan and his demons appeared sometimes as men, sometimes as women, sometimes as
neither men nor women; but women remained firmly tethered in the monastic imagina-
tion to the body, the world, sexuality – in short, to the visible materiality that monks sought
to transcend through their ascetic regime.[61]

Women were the ultimate manifestation of sexuality, for a monk fighting his de-
sires in seclusion. This is strikingly depicted in the famous account of the life of
St. Antony:

And the beleaguered devil undertook one night to assume the form of a woman and imi-
tated her every gesture solely in order that he might beguile Antony. But in thinking about
the Christ and considering the excellence won through him and the intellectual part of
the soul, Antony extinguished the fire of his opponent's deception. Once again the enemy
cast before him the softness of pleasure but he angered and saddened (as we might expect)
pondered the threat of the fire of judgment and the worm's work, and setting these in op-
position, he passed through these testings unharmed.[62]

"Who are You?"

The appearance of women as the manifestation of one's sexual desire can shed
light on another aspect of the Talmudic story: Why did R. Hiyya not recognize
his wife when he saw her while sitting in the garden? Rashi proposes that the wife
masqueraded as a prostitute, and this is why he did not recognize her. As Tal Ilan
pointed out,[63] Naeh and others adopted this reading, even though the story itself
never states that the woman was a prostitute. Moreover, if we look up the verb
used to describe the wife's change, קישטה נפשיה, we find that *in all other* uses of
the verb, both in Hebrew and Aramaic, it means to spruce oneself up, and never
an actual disguise.[64]

   Rashi's introduction of the prostitute into the story left such a lingering im-
pression that even scholars careful in the philological examination of the story
imposed the prostitute disguise on the text. Thus, when Naeh translated his ar-
ticle to English, he was careful to translate קישטה נפשיה in the body of the story as
both "dressed and made herself up," but he quickly reverts to describing the wife
solely as "masquerades as a prostitute." Ishay Rosen-Zvi beautifully points out
the wife's perspective: She "does not bother to masquerade," but simply adorns
herself, as a wife is supposed to do according to Talmudic law to signal to her

   [61] D. Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk*: *Spiritual Combat in Early Christianity*
(Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 211.
   [62] *Life of Antony* 5 (Gregg, *Athanasius*, 34).
   [63] T. Ilan, *Silencing the Queen: The Literary Histories of Shelamzion and other Jewish Women*
(TSAJ 115; Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 89–90.
   [64] See Sokoloff, *DJBA*, 1048.

husband her wish to engage in intercourse.[65] But even he, on the very next page, calls the wife's actions "Haruta's masquerading as a prostitute."[66]

Rashi's reading, while not present in the story itself, at least renders the story understandable. After all, if indeed the wife did *not* disguise herself, why did her husband did not recognize her? I wish to suggest that if we read the story in light of monastic stories, R. Hiyya believed the woman whom he saw was a manifestation of his evil desires rather than his actual wife. We know he had been combating his inclinations based on his "Monologistos" prayer, similar to other holy men. In light of this, I propose to read the Talmudic story as describing the hour of temptation. R. Hiyya sees a female figure, who he believes is there to tempt him. Indeed, she calls herself "Freedom," and offers a change from both their abstinence. And R. Hiyya is ultimately tempted, as sometimes happens to holy men, and succumbs to his evil inclination.

If indeed this is the correct reading, we no longer need to add the prostitute's disguise. R. Hiyya's wife adorned herself in order to signal her desire for intercourse. R. Hiyya, however, treats her as a figment of his mind, incarnated to tempt him, as part of his struggle with his desires. Thus, he does not recognize her true identity: his actual physical wife.

The Pomegranate

Before R. Hiyya and his wife, whom he considers a manifestation of his desires, engage in intercourse, she asks him to fetch her a pomegranate from the high branch of the tree. This strange request was often viewed in scholarship in light of the biblical story of Tamar and Yehuda (Gn 38) where the object serves as sign of recognition for the wife in her attempt to convince him of her identity. And indeed, an extra line appears in the printed editions of the story that explicitly attributes "giving the signs" to R. Hiyya's wife and thus explains the pomegranate in the story. However, as pointed out by Fraenkel, this line is missing in all manuscript versions of the story, and the pomegranate never re-appears in the story when R. Hiyya comes back to his wife. To that observation of the lower textual criticism, we should also add that the pomegranate does not fit at all as a recognition piece: Yehuda gives Tamar clearly identifiable personal objects, namely his staff and seal. By contrast, the pomegranate is not recognizable and does not exclusively belong to R. Hiyya. Also, when Tamar asks for Yehuda's staff and seal, she is wearing a disguise. She knows she will need these objects in order to prove her claims later on in the story. R. Hiyya's wife, as we established, does not disguise herself and is clearly surprised by her husband's belief that he sinned at the end of the story. She clearly did not plan to prove her identity later in the story.

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[65] Rosen-Zvi, "The Evil Impulse, Sexuality and Yichud," 80.
[66] Rosen-Zvi, "The Evil Impulse, Sexuality and Yichud," 81.

I therefore wish to offer a different reading of the pomegranate element of the story. John M. Riddle surveyed cuneiforms tablets and artifacts to show that pomegranates symbolize fertility control and were used as such in incantations in the Neo-Assyrian period and after it, as seen in the following example:

Incantation. If a woman looks upon the penis of a man. Either a giš.hašhur [apple?] or one giš.nu.úr.ma (pomegranate): You shall recite the incantation three times either to an apple or to a pomegranate. Give (the fruit) to the woman (and) have her suck their juices. That woman will come to you (and) you can make love to her.[67]

Riddle goes on to survey works of art and literature, ancient myths, and stories involving the use of pomegranate as a "love potion" that allows making love without getting pregnant. As Riddle concludes, the "most effective contraceptive of their time was the pomegranate."[68]

This ancient remedy was actually confirmed by modern medicine showing that pomegranates have "a relatively high concentration of *bona fide* naturally occurring estrogens."[69] Estrogen is currently used in contraceptives to disrupt ovulation, and indeed experiments done on animals show the efficacy of pomegranate as contraceptive. Female rats, given pomegranates, had a 72 percent reduction in fertility, and guinea pigs fed pomegranates were 100 percent safe from conception.[70]

And indeed ancient Greek and Roman medical writers prescribed pomegranate seeds and rind to prevent contraception, as is found in the Hippocratic corpus, as well as in Soranus (second century CE), Dioscorides (first century CE), and Aetius of Amida (sixth century CE). For example, Soranus (and later repeated by Aetius) gives the following recipes for contraceptive vaginal suppositories:

1. Pine bark and tannin in equal amounts, soaked in grape wine and made into pad with wool. Insert in vagina and leave in for two or three hours and withdraw it before coitus. 2. Another. Cimolian earth [gypsum and/or lime], root of opopanax [*panax*] in equal quantities and when stricky apply in like manner [to recipe no. I]. 3. Another. Fresh pomegranate flowers mixed with water and ground in and inserted [into the vagina] 4. Another. Two

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[67] J. M. Riddle, *Goddesses, Elixirs, and Witches: Plants and Sexuality throughout Human History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 20.

[68] Riddle, *Goddesses, Elixirs, and Witches*, 31.

[69] D. M. Harris, E. Besselink, and N. P. Seeram, "Assessment of Estrogenicity of Pomegrante in an *In Vitro* Bioassay," in N. P. Seeram, R. N. Schulman, and D. Heber (eds.), *Pomegranates: Ancient Roots to Modern Medicine* (Boca Raton: CRC Taylor & Francis Press, 2006), 144. The following survey of modern medical literature is based on Riddle, *Goddesses, Elixirs, and Witches*, 18.

[70] E. Heftmann, S.-T. Ko, and R. D. Bennett, "Identification of Estrone in Pomegranate Seeds," *Phytochemistry* 5 (1966): 1337–1339; P. D. G. Dean, D. Exley, and T. W. Goodwin, "Steroid Oestrogens in Plants: Re-Estimations of Oestrone in Pomegranate Seeds," *Phytochemistry* 10 (1971): 2215–2216.

parts pomegranate and one part oak galls, pulverize by grinding, shape into a small suppository and administer at point of cessation of menstruation …[71]

In total, five of Soranus suppository recipes for contraceptives use pomegranate peel or rind.[72]

In light of this information, R. Hiyya's wife's request for the fetching of the pomegranate fruit becomes clear. I wish to claim that she asks her husband to supply them both with contraceptives before they engage in the sexual act. She turns to her husband and demand that he takes an active part in the strenuous preparation for the act. In other words, this request is the ancient parallel to modern day "you go out in the snow and buy the condom," thus signaling the understanding between the two that what will follow is meant for sheer pleasure and not breeding. A real and pure succumbing to the sexual need between the man and woman.

Other rabbinic stories use the same physical challenge before surrendering to sexual desire: For example, Resh Lakish planted his sword in the Jordan and jumped to the other side of the river to peruse, what he thought was, a beautiful woman bathing there (b. B. Metz. 84a). But more importantly, the story of R. Hiyya is the fifth in a series of stories in tractate Qiddushin in which a rabbinic sage surrenders to his sexual desires and in the process preforms an arduous physical task: Rav Amram grabbed a ladder that ten men together could not lift, lifted it on his own, and began climbing to reach captive women in his attic; Rabbi Meir crosses a ferry-less river to reach what he thinks is a women, using only a rope bridge; and R. Akiva climbs a steep palm tree to reach what he thinks is a woman. R. Hiyya here, in the fifth story, is also willing to perform a difficult task of picking the pomegranate from the high branch. These physical acts are obviously symbols of virility and masculinity. Some of these stories even emphasize that once the sexual desire dissipates, so does the physical strength (R. Akiva in the middle of his climb, R. Meir in the middle of his tight rope walk, and Resh Lakish when trying to go back to the river bank after discovering that the "female" he was pursuing was actually R. Yohanan). Here, R. Hiyya's act, in its virility, is combined with the end result of getting the pomegranate, to perform the sexual act for pure pleasure.

Entering the Oven

Hiyya returns home after the deed and punishes himself by sitting in the oven. This act of climbing into an oven in connection with forbidden sexual acts is found in a story in b. Qidd. 40a:

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[71] Quoted in J. M. Riddle, *Contraception and Abortion from the Ancient World to the Renaissance* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 93–94.

[72] Riddle, *Contraception and Abortion*, 25.

דר׳ צדוק תבעתיה ההי׳ מטרוניתא. א׳ל. חליש לי ליבא איכ׳ מידי למיכ׳. אמרה ל׳. איכא דבר טמא. אמ׳
ל׳. מאי נפקא מינה. דעביד [האי] אכיל האי. [הוה] שרגא תנורא וקא מנחא ליה. סליק ויתיב בגויה.
אמ׳ ל׳. מאי האי. א׳ל. דעביד האי נפיל בהאי. אמרה ל׳. אי ידעי לא ציערתיך

Rabbi Tzadok was propositioned by a certain noblewoman. He said to her: My heart is
weak and I am incapable at present; is there something to eat? She said to him: There is
something unclean. He said to her: What difference is there? One who performs such an
act eats such food as well. She lit the oven and placed [the non-kosher food] in it [to warm].
He climbed and sat in [the oven]. She said to him: What is the meaning of this? He said
to her: One who performs this act falls into this. She said to him: If I had known, I would
not have caused you such anguish.[73]

This story shares with our story the possibility of, what the male character deems,
an inappropriate sexual interaction and the self-inflicted punishment of the man.
In this story, it is the woman rather than the man (with the same curt verb: תבעה/
תבעתיה) who propositions, but in both cases the man punishes himself in the
oven lit by the woman. In this story, the man explains that the fire is a symbol of
the type of punishment reserved for this kind of transgressions: "One who per-
forms this act falls into this."

   The difference between the stories is clear: This second one presents the man
positively, as being able to reject the woman's advances. The use of the oven is just
a means to explain his refusal. In the R. Hiyya story, the oven is the self-inflicted
punishment for the act already committed.

   And indeed, many ancient cultures use the well-known symbol of purifica-
tion by fire, or an ordeal by fire in the Last Judgment.[74] In Jewish and Christian
sources fire is not only reserved for all of humanity but for individuals as well.
Christian holy men often used hot iron to atone for their sexual thoughts, as we
can see for example in the story of Apelles:

We saw another presbyter in the district of Achoris named Apelles, a righteous man who
had previously been a blacksmith and had abandoned his trade to turn to discipline
[*askesis*]. Once, while he happened to be forging tools for the monks, the devil came to him
in the form of a woman. In his zeal he grabbed a burning piece of iron from the fire and
badly seared her entire face and body. The brothers heard her screaming in the cell. From
then on the man was always able to hold burning iron in his hand without being harmed.
He received us courteously and told us about the men worthy of God who had been with
him and who were still present there.[75]

While here the holy man uses fire to combat the devil's appearance as a woman,
we again see fire used as a means to fight evil inclinations.

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[73] Text according to ms. Vatican 111. English modified from The William Davidson digital
edition of the *Koren Noé* Talmud, as found in Sefaria.org
[74] C.-M. Edsman, "Fire," *Encyclopeadia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Com-
pany, 1987), vol. 5, 344.
[75] *The History of the Monks in Egypt*, 13.1–2 (ed. A.-J. Festugière, *Historia Monachorum in
Aegypto. Editio critique du texte grec et traduction annotée* [Brussels: Société des Bollandistes,
1971]).

R. Hiyya's horrified wife tells him: It was me, the *real* me. Not a hallucination of your desires. But of course, it does not matter for R. Hiyya, who considers his defeat in his inner struggle as the sin itself.

Conclusions

To summarize my reading of the story: R. Hiyya is portrayed via literary tropes as an ascetic, monastic, holy man, abstinent from sexual relations with his wife, fighting his urges using repeated short prayers and prostration, on his own, in nature. He sees what he thinks is a manifestation of his desires in the figure of his wife and succumbs to his desires. On her part, after overhearing her husband's prayers for help with his evil inclination and understanding that his abstinence does not reflect lack of desire, she decides to arouse his, in an attempt to rekindle their relationship. She does not understand that he sees her as something other than herself. In other words, while Naeh and others assume one dimension to the story, that R. Hiyya's wife tricks him into believing that she is a prostitute, in my reading R. Hiyya's wife believes he knows who she is, while in fact R. Hiyya does not even think she is "real," but rather is an apparition of his evil inclination. While his wife takes their intercourse at face value, to R. Hiyya it represents his surrender to his inclinations. The moment of revelation arrives when R. Hiyya's wife understands he did not know her and reveals that it was indeed her. But it is too late.

The key sentence of the story – אנא חרותא דהדרי מיומא – can thus be translated "I am Ḥeruta/freedom, and from today, I'm back." That is, I am no longer staying behind, because I now know you desire me. R. Hiyya hears these words, and they seem to him to come from his delirious mind, but he succumbs to their meaning, and the desire he feels.[76]

This reading solves a few textual problems in the story, most notably, R. Hiyya's failure to recognize his wife. This problem is the main reason that Rashi's understanding of R. Hiyya' failure to recognize his wife because she was disguised as a prostitute caught on so thoroughly, even though the textual evidence contradicts it. Beyond the question of the interpretation of this specific element of the story, the parallels to the different elements of the rabbinic story in monastic writings outlined in this article are still illuminating in themselves: They portray R. Hiyya as uniquely ascetic and close to contemporaneous literary depictions of monastic figures.

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[76] I prefer this translation of the Aramaic, rather than "I have returned from a day," since I do not see how returning from the day makes sense here, if the woman is no longer presented as a prostitute.

Therefore, the talmudic story not only refers to a Syriac term suggesting abstinence from choice, as Naeh suggested, but in fact portrays a rabbinic figure as a contemporary Christian holy man, struggling with his decision to abstain from his wife. He is described using literary motifs found in contemporary popular monastic sources and is fully incorporated within its new context. The story is therefore illustrative of the level of acquaintance the Talmudic authors had with Christian traditions and joins other recent findings of parallels between ascetic Christian holy men traditions, especially as found in Syriac literature, and rabbinic literature.[77]

The story of R. Hiyya is therefore a useful lens with which to contrast earlier lexical approaches that use Syriac literature to illuminate rabbinic texts and the more robust contextual comparisons of more recent work. The story does not only reveal the use of a specific Syriac monastic term but rather the at times shared preoccupation of both religious communities with issues of abstinence, solitude, struggles with inner demons, and even the use of ancient contraceptive methods. The lexical approach is no longer enough to reveal fully the complexities of these ancient rabbinic texts, in comparison to contemporaneous corpora. A wider examination of the cultural and theological contexts has great potential for revealing much about both.

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[77] Just to name a few: A. H. Becker, "The Comparative Study of 'Scholasticism' in Late Antique Mesopotamia: Rabbis and East Syrians," *AJS Review* 34 (2010): 91–113, has suggested we must undertake a broader comparative examination of the ancient sources produced by these two religious minorities in the Persian Empire, rather than looking only for Christian texts that illuminate specific rabbinic passages. See also J. L. Rubenstein, "A Rabbinic Translation of Relics," in K. Stratton and A. Lieber (eds.), *Crossing Boundaries in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity: Ambiguities, Complexities, and Half-Forgotten Adversaries: Essays in Honor of Alan F. Segal* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 314–334; S. Gross, "A Persian Anti-Martyr Act: The Death of Rabbah Bar Naḥmani," in Rubenstein and Herman, *The Aggada of the Babylonian Talmud and its Cultural World*, 211–242.

Syriac Anti-Judaism

Polemic and Internal Critique*

Adam H. Becker

It may be redundant to say that anti-Judaism is foundational to Syriac Christianity because in fact it seems to be an essential part of Christianity itself until the limited attempts to purge it from the tradition in the latter half of the twentieth century.[1] Such a purging is not an easy task, as if anti-Judaism were an impurity simply precipitated out through the added agent of liberal tolerance. Anti-Judaism is deeply ingrained in Christian tradition and was constitutive of Christianity in its origins. Recall that the term *christianismós* first appears in the early second-century letters of Ignatius of Antioch as something to be clearly distinguished from *ioudaïsmós*.[2] Furthermore, several of the dichotomies that make up the discourse of modernity, such as the distinctions between belief and ritual, universal humanity and ethnic parochialism, and innovation and tradition, derive from Christian anti-Judaism, and Judaism remains today a paradox as the exemplary ethno-religion.

To be sure, "heresy" and "idolatry" were significant categories of difference used by Christians to define who was of correct practice and belief, and concerns about the two helped instigate polemical reactions against heretics, Manichees, other orthodox churches in the post-Chalcedonian period, and "pagans." However, anti-Judaism infects Christianity more deeply: It is intimate, originary, and generative. Polemics have deeper structures out of which they emerge, and they resonate with other aspects of the broader tradition, but the ubiquity of anti-Judaism suggests that it structured the Christian tradition from the ground level up. For Judaism seems to have enjoyed a deeper symbolic value in Christian thought than that of idolatry and heresy.

[1] Most recently see the grand survey of D. Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition* (New York: Norton, 2013).

[2] E.g., Ignatius, *Letters*, *Magn* 10; *Phil* 6 (J. B. Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer, *The Apostolic Fathers* [2nd ed., rev. by M. W. Holmes; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992]).

The range of evidence for anti-Judaism in the Syriac Christian tradition is wide.[3] It may be divided into two parts, one easily delineated, the other scattered throughout the literary corpus. The former is the group of works directly aimed, at least rhetorically, at Jews, *Contra Iudaeos* literature as it is sometimes called, a genre of anti-Jewish polemic, whereas the latter is the myriad passages, some long and detailed, others simply containing comments in passing, which mark the Syriac tradition as anti-Jewish.[4]

A Sketch of the Syriac *Contra Iudaeos* Literature

Of the works specifically devoted to attacking Jews we have the following:

In the mid-fourth century Aphraḥaṭ composed twenty-three so-called *Demonstrations* (*taḥwyāṯā*) eight of which are explicit anti-Jewish treatises, but anti-Jewish arguments can be found in others as well. His work seems to have been composed in two parts. According to the text, *Demonstrations* 1–10 were written in 336/7 and 11–23 in 345. The greater focus on anti-Judaism in the latter part of his works may be contextualized within the violence Christians, particularly clergy and devoted laity, suffered under the Sasanian regime of Shapur II.[5] Per-

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[3] For general works, see A. H. Becker, "Beyond the Spatial and Temporal Limes: Questioning the 'Parting of the Ways' Outside the Roman Empire," in A. H. Becker and A. Y. Reed (eds.), *The Ways that Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (TSAJ 95; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 373–392; A. P. Hayman, "The Image of the Jew in the Syriac Anti-Jewish Polemical Literature," in J. Neusner and E. S. Frerichs (eds.), *"To See Ourselves as Others See Us": Christians, Jews, "Others" in Late Antiquity* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1985), 423–441; A. Camplani, "Declinazioni dell'antigiudaismo nel cristianesimo siriaco delle origini," *Quaderni di Vicino Oriente* 6 (2013): 15–39; J.-M. Fiey, "Juifs et chrétiens dans l'orient syriaque," *Hispania Sacra* 40 (1988): 933–953.

[4] On the *Contra Iudaeos* literature in general, see O. Limor and G. G. Stroumsa, *Contra Iudaeos: Ancient and Medieval Polemics Between Christians and Jews* (TSMEMJ 10; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996) and S. Morlet, O. Munnich, and B. Pouderon, *Les dialogues aduersus Iudaeos: Permanences et mutations d'une tradition polémique* (Paris: Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 2013).

[5] Most recently, see E. Lizorkin, *Aphrahat's Demonstrations: A Conversation with the Jews of Mesopotamia* (Leuven: Peeters, 2012); see also A. H. Becker, "Anti-Judaism and Care for the Poor in Aphrahat's Demonstration 20," *JECS* 10 (2002): 305–327; F. Gavin, "Aphraates and the Jews," *JSOR* 7 (1923): 95–166; N. Koltun-Fromm, "A Jewish-Christian Conversation in Fourth-Century Persian Mesopotamia," *JJS* 47:1 (1996): 45–63 and more generally N. Koltun-Fromm, *Hermeneutics of Holiness: Ancient Jewish and Christian Notions of Sexuality and Religious Community* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); J. Neusner, *Aphrahat and Judaism: The Christian-Jewish Argument in Fourth-Century Iran* (Leiden: Brill, 1971); J. G. Snaith, "Aphrahat and the Jews," in J. A. Emerton and S. C. Reif (eds.), *Interpreting the Hebrew Bible: Essays in Honour of E. I. J. Rosenthal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 235–250; A. Spijkerman, "Aphrahat der persische Weise und der Antisionismus," *Liber Annuus* 5 (1954–1955): 191–212. For a recent, more pessimistic reading of his anti-Judaism, see J. E. Walters, *The Demonstrations*

haps simplistically, one may even suggest that the so-called "Great Persecution" put pressure on the Christian community, at least wherever Aphrahaṭ lived in upper Mesotamia, and this led to the greater appeal of Judaism within the region, and he is responding to this. This is speculative, especially because the "Great Persecution" itself has been dismantled in recent scholarship on the Persian Martyr Acts.[6] What is certain is that Aphrahaṭ shares certain exegetical motifs and hermeneutical approaches with the Rabbis but seems to be an outlier from the later Syriac tradition.

For all his anti-Judaism – and there is a lot of it – Ephrem does not seem to have composed many specifically anti-Jewish works. Certain collections do seem to contain more anti-Jewish material than others, but his works, however anti-Jewish, do not usually become so as a polemical genre.[7] There is reference to a now lost collection of *Hymns against the Jews*, but such collections of his works may have been composed posthumously, and the titles of collections do not necessarily characterize their contents.[8] For example, not all the *Hymns on Nisibis* are on Nisibis. For this reason I would like to return to him below, even though the ongoing presence of his ideas and imagery can be felt in the work of his successors of the fifth and sixth century.

Narsai, the prolific but not so lovely East Syrian poet of the fifth and possibly early sixth century, has only one explicitly anti-Jewish work among his over eighty *mēmrē* (metrical homilies), that is, his *Mēmrā on Palm Sunday*, which is also titled *Against the Jews* in the manuscripts.[9] Anti-Jewish statements appear scattered in his other works, especially his Lenten homilies, but the Palm Sunday text is the only one with a format of debate in which a Jew is addressed throughout.[10] We also have a dialogue poem, wrongly attributed to Narsai, that stages a

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of *Aphrahat and the Formation of Religious Identity in Fourth-Century Persia* (Ph.D. Thesis: Princeton Theological Seminary, 2016) and his contribution to this volume (pp. 291–319).

[6] K. Smith, *Constantine and the Captive Christians of Persia: Martyrdom and Religious Identity in Late Antiquity* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016); R. Payne, *A State of Mixture: Christians, Zoroastrians, and Iranian Political Culture in Late Antiquity* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015); A. H. Becker, "The Invention of the *Persian Martyr Acts*," in A. M. Butts and R. D. Young (eds.), *Syriac Christian Culture: Beginnings to Renaissance* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, forthcoming 2020).

[7] See, for example, Hymns 17–19 in the *Hymns on the Unleavened Bread*, edited in E. Beck, *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Paschahymnen (de Azymis, de Crucifixione, de Resurrectione)* (CSCO 248; Leuven: Peeters, 1964). For an English translation, see J. E. Walters, *Ephrem the Syrian's Hymns on the Unleavened Bread* (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2012), 76–88.

[8] E. g., A. M. Butts, "Manuscript Transmission as Reception History: The Case of Ephrem the Syrian (d. 373)," *JECS* 25 (2017): 291.

[9] J. Frishman, "Narsai's Homily for the Palm Festival – Against the Jews: For the Palm Festival or against the Jews?," in *SymSyr* IV, 217–229.

[10] A. H. Becker, "The 'Evil Inclination' of the Jews: The Syriac *Yatsra* in Narsai's Metrical Homilies for Lent," *JQR* 106 (2016): 179–207.

debate between the Pharisees and Jesus.[11] This text as well as other anti-Jewish dialogue poems are related to Palm Sunday.[12]

Isaac of Antioch is a difficult author to deal with because the numerous works attributed to him, about 200 *mēmrē*, could be by three different Isaacs (Isaac of Antioch, Isaac of Amida, and Isaac of Edessa), and scholars have still not determined exactly which texts are by whom. Their dates thus range from the late fourth century into the sixth. There seem to be stylistic and thematic similarities among many of the texts, but differentiating precisely three separate corpora may prove impossible. Within this corpus there is one *mēmrā* against the Jews, which like Aphrahaṭ's work, refers to itself as an apology (*mappaq b-ruḥā*).[13] In contrast to the elusive "Isaac," we know more about Narsai's junior contemporary, Jacob of Serugh, a prolific homilist who inherited some of the artistry of Ephrem. Seven of Jacob's approximately 380 surviving *mēmrē* are anti-Jewish tracts.[14] One of these is a dispute poem between the figures of the synagogue and the church.

The format of all these texts is noteworthy: They are in the language of debate, at times even forensic debate. The authors address the Jews, or more often a Jew, directly. We find terms like *drāšā* ('dispute'), even *dinā* ('legal case'), for the interaction implied and performed by the text, and the textual flow is guided by imperative demands, rebuke, and conditional statements leading into questions. Underlying their arguments is a presupposed logic or rationality within which the foolishness of the Jews is purportedly demonstrated. As it should be clear, relative to the size of the corpora of these authors (with the exception of Aphrahaṭ), anti-Jewish texts are only a small fraction.

In the post-conquest period, Syriac Christians continued to produce anti-Jewish polemical texts. We have a long disputation composed by Sergius the Stylite in the eighth century in the area of contemporary Ḥomṣ (what is left of the city today).[15] As the editor of this text pointed out in an article surveying anti-Judaism within the tradition, Sergius purports to quote from a layman who says, "If Christianity is good, behold, I am baptized as a Christian. But if Judaism

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[11] "Soghitha on the Pharisees and Our Lord," edited in A. Mingana, *Narsai doctoris syri homiliae et carmina* (Dominican Press: Mosul, 1905), vol. II, 396–401, based upon F. Feldmann, *Syrische Wechsellieder ein Beitrag zur altchristlichen syrischen Hymnologie; nach einer Handschrift der Koniglichen Bibliothek Berlin* (Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1896), 27–32 (VII).

[12] S. P. Brock, *Sughyotha Mgabbyotho* (Glane: St Ephrem der Syrer Kloster, 1982), 44–49, 80–82, 83–87.

[13] S. Kazan, "Isaac of Antioch's Homily against the Jews," *OC* 46 (1962): 91; I. Parisot, *Aphrahat. Demonstrationes* (PS 1; Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1894), 532.20.

[14] M. Albert, *Jacques de Saroug. Homélies contre les Juifs* (PO 38.1; Turnhout: Brepols, 1976). See earlier M. Albert, "Mimro de Jacques de Saroug sur la synagogue et l'église," *L'Orient Syrien* 7 (1962): 143–162 and I. K. Cosgrove, *Three Homilies against the Jews by Jacob of Saroug, Edited with Introduction, Translation and Notes* (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of London, 1931).

[15] A. P. Hayman, *The Disputation of Sergius the Stylite against a Jew* (CSCO 338–339; Leuven: Peeters, 1973). The editor of this text has demonstrated Sergius's reliance on a prior testimonia collection as well as a Syriac translation of Josephus's *Jewish War*s.

is also useful (*pāqḥā*), behold, I will associate partly with Judaism that I might hold on to the sabbath."[16] The broader chapter from which this quotation derives is part of a discussion between the literary Sergius and his Jewish interlocutor in which the Jew points out that if the Christians are correct in their critique of Judaism, then it does not make sense that "Christians associate with us in the synagogue" (*meštawtp̄in ʿamman b-knuštā*).[17] Sergius's response is that "in every religion (*deḥltā*) which exists weak (*krihē*) and feeble (adherents) are found."[18] Thus, Sergius's work may serve as evidence for blurry boundaries between the Jewish and Christian communities at this time in the area of modern Ḥomṣ.[19]

One anti-Jewish dialogue is part of a larger work belonging to one of two different West Syrian authors whose works have at times been confused: Moses bar Kepha of the eighth century or John of Dara of the first half of the ninth century. In 2006 I published a text from a British Library manuscript referred to in its title as the "Discourse (*mēmrā*) on Priesthood."[20] This text consists of two parts. The first and longer is a dialogue between a Jew and a Christian on the abrogation of the Israelite priesthood. Employing a philosophical logic and arguments derived ultimately from the Epistle to the Hebrews the Christian seeks to make his point. The second part is a bulleted list of criticisms of Judaism. Three years later Geoffrey Herman published a note identifying the source of this text.[21] It is part of a longer work on the priesthood extant in several manuscripts.[22] What is striking is that this anti-Jewish dialogue appears later in this longer work: It in fact was originally its third chapter.[23] This means that the author thought dialectically about his own prior argument and decided to use a dialogue between a Jew and a Christian as a tool such as this one for further developing that argument.[24] Therefore, even an apparently anti-Jewish text could belong to a larger work on a broader theme, the polemic only functioning to make an intra-Christian theological point. In contrast, the anti-Jewish portion of this text was understood to

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[16] Hayman, "The Image of the Jew,"440; Hayman, *The Disputation of Sergius the Stylite*, 22.15.

[17] Hayman, *The Disputation of Sergius the Stylite*, 22.1.

[18] Hayman, *The Disputation of Sergius the Stylite*, 22.2.

[19] See evidence and secondary literature collected in A. M. Butts and S. Gross, *The History of the 'Slave of Christ': From Jewish Child to Christian Martyr* (PMAS 6; Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2016), 69–79.

[20] A. H. Becker, "The Discourse on Priesthood (BL Add 18295, ff. 137b–140b): An Anti-Jewish Text on the Abrogation of the Israelite Priesthood," *JSS* 51 (2006): 85–115.

[21] G. Herman, "Note on the Recently Published Discourse on Priesthood (BL Add. 18295, ff. 137b–140b)," *JSS* 54.2 (2009): 389–391.

[22] M. Breydy, "Les compilations syriaques sur le sacerdoce au IXᵉ siècle: Jean de Dara," *SymSyr* II, 267–293.

[23] It begins: "Perhaps against these things a Jew will be embittered and through zeal against the two of them he will threaten and say: …" (Becker, "The Discourse on Priesthood," 99). The text then goes on to quote the Jew's critique of the Christian position. The "two of them" here seems to be the first two chapters of the longer work.

[24] See ms. Vatican Syr. 100, f. 126v.

be sufficiently self-integrated that it could be separated in the manuscript tradition and transmitted as an autonomous work.

A much later anti-Jewish treatise was composed by Dionysios bar Ṣalibi (d. 1171).[25] Dionysios was a synthesizer of the Syriac intellectual tradition, composing commentaries on the whole of the Old and New Testaments, the liturgy, the *Kephalaia Gnostica* of Evagrius of Pontus, and Aristotle's logical works. There are polemical works extant by him against Armenians, Muslims, Melkites, "Nestorians," and even one against "idolaters."[26] His anti-Jewish treatise begins with reference to his one against the "Arabs," that is, Muslims, and describes the different Jewish sects of antiquity. The tone of the work, including its arguments about origins, suggests it may fit better into the genre of heresiology than anti-Jewish polemic. Dionysios seems to have been engaged in defining the limits of the Syriac Orthodox Church through a series of polemical treatises about the various religious communities of his world (and those that no longer even existed, such as "idolaters").

Actual Debates?

In the Syriac *Contra Iudaeos* literature we find a variety of themes and arguments, some typical of anti-Jewish texts from Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages. These include: the abrogation of Jewish law, the Biblical prophets' prediction of Jesus the Messiah, the existence of God's son and the trinity, the uselessness of circumcision, the fulfillment of the Old Testament in the New, and the spiritual life of faith in contrast to the carnal life of the law.

These texts often present themselves as descriptive of, or aimed at, real debate. This leads to an interpretive impasse. Do these works reflect, or at least serve as models for, real debates with Jews? Or are they simply literary constructions for Christian consumption? Of course, this is not necessarily an either/or case. Christians created certain constructions of Jews for their own literary and ideological purposes, but these constructions may have reflected real Jews or at least affected how Christians interacted with them. One approach to these texts, and Syriac anti-Judaism in general, is to find traces in the literature of ambiguous relations with Jews, instances of Jewish-Christian interaction to which these elite texts could be responding. The passage from the *Disputation of Sergius the*

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[25] J. de Zwaan, *The Treatise of Dionysius bar Salibhi against the Jews*, part 1. *The Syriac Text Edited from a Mesopotamian Ms. (Cod. Syr. Harris. 83)* (Leiden: Brill, 1906). For a translation, see R. H. Petersen, *The Treatise of Dionysius bar Salibhi 'Against the Jews': A Translation and Commentary* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Duke University, 1964); see also B. Keryo, "Dionysius bar Slib's Treaty against the Jews," *The Harp* 13 (2000): 141–146.

[26] A. Baumstark, *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur* (Bonn: Marcus und Weber, 1922), 297. On his polemics, see R.Y. Ebied, "Dionysius bar Salībī's Syriac Polemical Treatises: Prejudice and Polarization towards Christians, Jews and Muslims," *The Harp* 20 (2006): 73–86.

Stylite, mentioned above, is one of these traces. There are a number of similar passages in the literature, particularly statements forbidding fraternizing with Jews, such as the church canon from 676 forbidding Christians from drinking in Jewish stalls on Sundays.[27] We could read these texts as evidence specifically for what they forbid. However, this raises a methodological problem: To what extent can we connect the dots and make an argument about ongoing anxieties around social and religious boundaries?

Take, for instance, the letter of Philoxenus of Mabbug (512–518) condemning Stephen bar Sudayli, most likely the author of the *Book of the Holy Hierotheos,* as a dangerous heretic. Philoxenus describes how the pantheist ideas advocated by Bar Sudayli led to the idea that the Jews could be saved: "They related before me that to a certain Jew, who was by the sepulcher of the Patriarchs of the house of Abraham, he said this word, coming up and sitting by him: 'Fear not, neither be concerned that thou art called crucifier (*zāqopā*), for thy lot (*ḥelqāḵ*) is with Abraham:' instead of saying 'thy portion (*mnāṯāḵ*).'"[28] Note that the term Bar Sudayli used, according to Philoxenus, was the same as we find in the famous line at the beginning of m. San. 10, "All of Israel has a portion (*ḥeleq*) in the world to come." Such an anecdote certainly points to Christians interacting with Jews and coming out with thoroughly unorthodox positions regarding them, but this may simply be an exceptional instance of a mystic going off the deep end in the holy land. It had happened before and has many times since. Another interesting example from Philoxenus's corpus is a letter which seems to be to an actual Jewish convert to Christianity and yet has almost no trace of anti-Jewish polemic.[29] In this case when the Jewish recipient is real there is little sign of the confrontational tone we find in most references to Judaism.

Furthermore, the problem of the relationship to Judaism immediately raises questions pertaining to the development of Syriac Christianity in general. Should we assume, as scholars seem to, that the anti-Judaism of Aphrahaṭ and Ephrem in the fourth century were attempts to distinguish Christianity from its Jewish origins, as the anti-Judaism of the second century seems to be? Judaism and Christianity are often discursively and socially intermingled such that the anti-Judaism

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[27] Canons of George I, #17 in J.-B. Chabot, *Synodicon Orientale ou recueil des Synodes Nestoriens publié, traduit et annoté* (Notices et extraits de la Bibliothèque Nationale 37; Paris: Imprimerie Nationale 1902), 225. See also John of Phenek's comment about "friendship with Jews" as a current sign of the endtime: A. Mingana, *Source syriaques* (Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1908), vol. 1, 152 (trans. 180) (cf. Fiey, "Juifs et chrétiens dans l'orient syriaque," 934). In general, see Butts and Gross, *The History of the 'Slave of Christ'*, 71–76.

[28] A.L. Frothingham, *Stephen bar Sudaili, the Syrian Mystic, and the Book of Hierotheos* (Leiden: Brill, 1886), 44, transl. 45.

[29] M. Albert, "Une letter inedite de Philoxene de Mabboug," *Orient Syrien* 6 (1961): 41–50; B. Bitton-Ashkelony and S. Minov, "'A Person of Silence': Philoxenus of Mabbug, Letter of Exhortation Sent to Someone Who Left Judaism and Came to the Life of Perfection," *OCP* 82 (2016): 101–125.

of the fourth century onward may not simply result from ambiguities remaining from Christian origins. This raises an old question in Syriac studies, one Han Drijvers moved in the right direction when he argued, "All the available evidence points in the direction that Syriac-speaking Christianity in northern Mesopotamia and in the East Syrian region was mainly of Gentile origin and that some of these Christians were more attracted by Judaism than the Jews were drawn to Christianity."[30]

Judaism and Christianity: Porous Boundaries?

To be sure, some early Syrian texts, which were transmitted in Syriac, demonstrate blurry boundaries between Judaism and Christianity (at least from the perspective of later normitivities). Take for example the *Didascalia Apostolorum*,[31] the *Apostolic Constitutions*,[32] and the Pseudo-Clementine literature.[33] All these sources were originally composed in Greek. Their translation into Syriac certainly tells us something about the earliest community, but it is not certain what exactly. These texts were copied and passed on even in later communities that seem to have had very different concerns than the possible Jewish-Christianity and blurred boundaries we may find evidenced in them.

The number of early sources composed originally in Syriac, those from before the fourth century, is few and most of them show little evidence of a Jewish context. Take Bardaiṣan's (or his student's) *Book of the Laws of the Countries*.[34] This work derives from the court of Abgar VIII in the late second and early third century. Written in the form of a Platonic dialogue and giving off a heavy odor of Hellenism, it is a philosophical discussion about the role of fate, freewill, and custom in different peoples' lives. The Jews only appear in this text as one of

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[30] H. J. W. Drijvers, "Syrian Christianity and Judaism," in J. Lieu, J. North, and T. Rajak (eds.), *The Jews among Pagans and Christians in the Roman Empire* (London: Routledge, 1992), 124–46 (141). His position here diverges from that of H. J. W. Drijvers "Jews and Christians at Edessa," *JJS* 36 (1985): 88–102.

[31] C. E. Fonrobert, "The *Didascalia Apostolorum*: A Mishnah for the Disciples of Jesus," *JECS* 9 (2001): 483–509.

[32] P. Lanfranchi, "Entre construction liturgique et polémique anti-juive: La collection de bénédictions d'origine juive des Constitutions Apostoliques," in C. Batsch and M. Vârtejanu-Joubert (eds.), *Manières de penser dans l'antiquité méditerranéenne et orientale. Mélanges offerts à Francis Schmidt par ses élèves, ses collègues et ses amis* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 215–229; M. E. Lenk, *The Apostolic Constitutions: Judaism and Anti-Judaism in the Construction of Christianity* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Harvard University, 2010).

[33] A. Y. Reed, "'Jewish Christianity' after the 'Parting of the Ways': Approaches to Historiography and Self-Definition in the Pseudo-Clementines," in A. H. Becker and A. Y. Reed (eds.), *The Ways that Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Tübingen: Morh Siebeck, 2003), 189–231.

[34] H. J. W. Drijvers, *The Book of the Laws of Countries: Dialogue on Fate of Bardaiṣan of Edessa* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1965).

various ethnic groups, but one which is distinctive in the text's treatment in that they precede the Christians who are considered free from local custom.[35]

One of the earliest texts that has been treated as particularly Jewish is the bizarre *Odes of Solomon*, but the various motifs in this collection, which has even been (wrongly) linked to the Qumran community, could just as easily be found in the Biblical Psalter or other early Christian texts.[36] Even the Peshiṭta Old Testament, although it seems to be a translation by Jews, does not tell us ultimately that much about the earliest Syriac Christian communities (except for that they somehow received their translation of the Old Testament from Jews).[37] This is the case even despite the Hebrew origins of certain early Syriac religious vocabulary.[38] In general, I am hesitant to make strong claims about anything before Aphrahaṭ and Ephrem. There are very few texts and notably some of the earliest are preserved in unique manuscripts, such as the *Book of the Laws of the Countries* and the *Letter of Mara bar Serapion*, both of which are extant only in ms. Brit. Libr. Add. 14,658.[39] This suggests that the vagaries of history could have provided us with a fundamentally different set of evidence. Furthermore, in later centuries there was an apparent increase in anti-Jewish rhetoric, such as in the sources for the School of Nisibis,[40] or with the translation of texts like John Chrysostom's *Homilies against the Judaizers*.[41] We should therefore tread lightly here.

Such an increase may be even noted when we compare the works of Ephrem (and Aphrahaṭ) in the fourth century to those works that preceded them. The Jewish background of Ephrem's approach to scripture as well as of many of his ideas and terms (and similarly Aphrahaṭ's) suggests a greater ideational

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[35] Drijvers, *The Book of the Laws of Countries*, 56, 58. See Shaye Cohen's contribution in this volume (pp. 89–102).

[36] E.g., H. F. D. Sparks, *Apocryphal Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984), 684.

[37] As Gillian Greenberg begins her 2004 article, "The question of the faith of the Peshitta translators, whether Jewish or Christian, has of course been intensively pursued." (G. Greenberg, "Indications of the Faith of the Translator in the Peshitta to the 'Servant Songs' of Deutero-Isaiah," *AS* 2 [2004]: 175).

[38] J. Tubach, "Die Anfänge des Christentums in Edessa," *ZAC* 19 (2015): 5–15.

[39] On the latter, see A. Merz and T. Tieleman, *The Letter of Mara bar Sarapion in Context* (Leiden: Brill 2012), but also criticisms by K. McVey, in *Hugoye* 18 (2015): 420–426.

[40] Anti-Jewish statements can be found *passim* in Cyrus of Edessa's *Explanations* (edited with English translations in W. F. Macomber, *Cyrus of Edessa, Six Explanations of the Liturgical Feasts* [CSCO 355–356; Leuven: Peeters, 1974]); Abraham of Beth Rabban is described as attacked by Jews (F. Nau, *Barhadbeshabba 'Arbaya, La second partie de l'histoire ecclésiastique* [PO 9.5; Turnhout: Brepols, 1913], 626–627; translation in A. H. Becker, *Sources for the Study of the School of Nisibis* [Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009], 81–82), whereas we are told elsewhere of how John of Beth Rabban composed a disputation with Jews (A. Scher, *Mar Barḥadbešabba 'Arabaya, Cause de la fondation des écoles* [PO 4.4; Turnhout: Brepols, 1908], 388; translation in Becker, *Sources for the Study of the School of Nisibis*, 154).

[41] Ms. Brit. Libr. Add. 14,623 excerpts this text.

movement between Jews and Christians in the fourth century.[42] Ephrem's works have anti-Jewish polemical statements throughout, though rarely is any one piece dedicated to anti-Judaism alone.[43] This demonstrates all the more how deeply anti-Judaism guides his works. He need not focus on it because it always has the potential of arising. As with other authors it is not always clear what social context and practices we should extrapolate from Ephrem's anti-Judaism. Scholars have suggested that the Jewish community was significant in Nisibis and Edessa, particularly in the former, and that Ephrem needed to respond to this.[44] It has even been suggested that Ephrem is writing in response to Jewish proselytism, a position which goes back to Marcel Simon's influential claims in *Verus Israel*, his foundational study of Christian anti-Judaism.[45] An important development in understanding Ephrem's approach to Jews is offered in Christine Shepardson's 2008 book.[46] Shepardson points to the intra-Christian aspects of his polemic, that is, Jews function as stand-ins in Ephrem's works for Christians he deems heretical. This tendency continues, as I will address below, in later works which use Jews to engage in ethical criticism of the Christian community.

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[42] S. P. Brock, "Jewish Traditions in Syriac Sources," *JJS* 30 (1979): 231 (reprinted in his *Studies in Syriac Christianity* [Aldershot: Ashgate, 1992], Chap. IV). Also see the articles cited at E. G. Mathews, Jr., and J. P. Amar, *St. Ephrem the Syrian, Selected Prose Works* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1994), 62–63, fn. 17 and more recently Y. Monnickendam, "Articulating Marriage: Ephrem's Legal Terminology and its Origins," *JSS* 58 (2013): 257–296.

[43] P. J. Botha, "Polarity: The Theology of Anti-Judaism in Ephrem the Syrian's Hymns on Easter," *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 46 (1990): 36–46; idem, "The Poetic Face of Rhetoric: Ephrem's Polemics against the Jews and Heretics in Contra Haereses XXV," *Acta Patristica et Byzantina* 2 (1991): 16–36; D. Cerbelaud, "L'antijudaïsme dans les hymnes De Pascha d'Éphrem le Syrien," *Parole de l'Orient* 20 (1995): 201–207; idem, "Je t'aime, je te hais. Éphrem le Syrien et le judaïsme," in P. Abadie and J. P. Lémonon (eds.), *Le Judaïsme à l'aube de l'ère chrétienne. XVIIIe congrès de l'ACFEB (Lyon, septembre 1999)* (Paris: Cerf, 2001), 345–361; R. Darling, "The 'Church from the Nations' in the Exegesis of Ephrem," in *SymSyr* IV, 111–122; K.-H. Kuhlmann, "The Harp Out of Tune: The Anti-Judaism/Anti-Semitism of St. Ephrem," *The Harp* 17 (2004): 177–183; K. E. McVey, "The Anti-Judaic Polemic of Ephrem Syrus' Hymns on the Nativity," in H. W. Attridge, J. J. Collins, and T. H. Tobin (eds.), *Of Scribes and Scrolls: Studies on the Hebrew Bible, Intertestamental Judaism, and Christian Origins Presented to J. Strugnell on the Occasion of His Sixtieth Birthday* (Lanham / New York / London: University Press of America, 1990), 229–240; C. E. Morrison, "The Jews in Ephrem's Commentary on the Diatessaron," *JCSSS* 8 (2008): 23–43.

[44] Ephrem's anti-Judaism is at times used to locate his texts, the assumption being that there was a denser Jewish context in Nisibis as opposed to Edessa. On Ephrem's Nisibene background, see P. S. Russell, "Nisibis as the Background to the Life of Ephrem the Syrian," *Hugoye* 8 (2005): 179–235.

[45] M. Simon, *Verus Israel* (2nd ed.; Paris: de Boccard, 1964); on the reception of this work, see A. I. Baumgarten, "Marcel Simon's 'Verus Israel' as a Contribution to Jewish History," *HTR* 92 (1999): 465–478.

[46] C. C. Shepardson, *Anti-Judaism and Christian Orthodoxy: Ephrem's Hymns in Fourth-Century Syria* (Patristic Monograph Series 20; Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2008); eadem, "'Exchanging Reed for Reed': Mapping Contemporary Heretics onto Biblical Jews in Ephrem's Hymns on Faith," *Hugoye* 5 (2002), 15–33; eadem, "Anti-Jewish Rhetoric and Intra-Christian Conflict in the Sermons of Ephrem Syrus," *Studia Patristica* 35 (2001): 503–507.

Jews as Adversaries and Figures of Internal Enemies

The most obvious example of Jews as stand-ins for enemies within the Christian community is the supposed letter of the Jews to the emperor Marcian (450–457).[47] In this forged document the Jewish community writes to the emperor Marcian thanking him for supporting Chalcedon because the council confirmed their own claims about Jesus not being divine. Clearly this text was composed by Miaphysites who wanted to tarnish the reputation of Chalcedon and its supporters by pointing out that the Jews, a group who would of course wrongly construe things, agreed with the council. Jews in fact were commonly characterized as heresiarchs. For example, Simeon of Beth Arsham's genealogy of "Nestorianism" up to the time of his contemporary enemies at the School of Nisibis begins with the Jews (before 548 CE).[48]

Jews appear as antagonists in a range of Syriac narrative texts. This derives in part from Christian readings of the Gospels where the Jews are understood to be the enemies of Jesus, a role that is disputed by scholars in how they read the Gospels in their original context. The Gospel of John does seem to treat the Jews in this way, whereas, in contrast, Matthew, despite renowned passages such as Mt 27:25 ("His blood be on us and on our children!") may be interpreted instead as prophetic condemnation.[49] This use of Jews in narrative is already apparent in certain Greek texts that were translated into Syriac, for example, the second-century *Martyrdom of Polycarp* where the Jews further instigate the death of the hero.[50] The *Acts of Thomas*, which is typically dated to the early third century, describes "Israel" as disobedient because of its "evil inclination," a connection drawn in several later works.[51]

Eusebius of Caesarea's early fourth-century *Ecclesiastical History*, which was foundational for later Syriac historiography, begins with a list of the main impetuses behind the movement of his narrative and one of these is what the Jews endured after their attack on the savior.[52] The Jews are commonly called "crucifiers"

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[47] L. Van Rompay, "A Letter of the Jews to the Emperor Marcian concerning the Council of Chalcedon," *OLP* 12 (1981): 215–224. See also discussion on pp. 15–16 above.

[48] J. S. Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis Clementino-Vaticana, in qua manuscriptos codices syriacos recensuit* (Rome, 1719–1728), vol. I, 346–347. English translation in Becker, *Sources for the Study of the School of Nisibis*, 25–26.

[49] E. g., D.A. Hare, "The Rejection of the Jews in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts," in A.T. Davies (ed.), *AntiSemitism and the Foundations of Christianity* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 27–47 and J.T. Townsend, "The Gospel of John and the Jews: The Story of a Religious Divorce," in Davies, *AntiSemitism and the Foundations of Christianity*, 72–97.

[50] The text appears in the Syriac translation of Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History* (N. McLean and W. Wright, *The Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius in Syriac* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1898], 205–218 [4.15])

[51] W. Wright, *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1871), vol. 1, 240 (Syriac); vol. 2, 207 (English). Cf. Becker, "The 'Evil Inclination' of the Jews," 182, 206.

[52] McLean and Wright, *Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius in Syriac*, 4.

(ṣālōḇē, zāqōp̄ē) in the Syriac tradition, and this is the role they most often play in these narratives, as they do on occasion in the so-called Persian Martyr Acts where they can represent a two-dimensional chorus demanding the death of Christians.[53] The Jews' role as persecutors appears in the *Martyrdom of Simeon Bar Ṣabbāʿē*, a possibly fifth-century account of the death of the fourth-century Catholicos at the hand of the Sasanian authorities.[54] In the *Martyrdom of Tarbo* we are even told the queen shares beliefs with the Jews, which again attributes Christian persecution to Jewish meddling.[55]

The Jews attempt to suppress knowledge of the location of the true cross in the so-called *Protonike Legend*, which is one of several versions of the story of the discovery of the cross.[56] Based on the stories of Helena, the mother of the emperor Constantine, traveling to Jerusalem to find the true cross, Protonike, the wife of the emperor Claudius, is miraculously aided against the Jews who attempt to disrupt her mission.[57] Jews inspire much ire in such stories. They know their scripture and, according to texts like this one, they recognize the truth but deny it. This story was linked to the fifth-century *Teaching of Addai*, the account of the introduction of Christianity to Edessa, an early version of which is attested in Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History*.

In the *Teaching of Addai* King Abgar states in the letter he writes to Jesus inviting him to Edessa that he has heard about the abuse Jesus has received from the Jews, even that he will be killed by them.[58] This text has been foundational for the idea that the earliest Syriac Christian community emerged from Jewish converts. However, instead of following the scholarly trend of finding a historical kernel in it we should focus rather on how the Jews are used here as a marker of a truth that supercedes their own Judaism. The *Teaching of Addai* may be linked to circles associated with the controversial bishop of Edessa, Rabbula (411–435), who, we are told, destroyed a local synagogue in the city and replaced it with a

[53] J. L. Rubenstein, "Martyrdom in the Persian Martyr Acts and in the Babylonian Talmud," in G. Herman and J. L. Rubenstein (eds.), *The Aggada of the Bavli and Its Cultural World* (BJS 362; Providence: Brown University, 2018), 175–210. One noteworthy text is the *History of the 'Slave of Christ'* (see Butts and Gross, *The History of the 'Slave of Christ'*).

[54] This appears in both the *Martyrdom* (13–14) and the later *History* (12–15) (K. Smith, *The Martyrdom and the History of Blessed Simeon bar Ṣabbaʿe* [Piscataway: Gorgais Press, 2014]).

[55] P. Bedjan, *Acta martyrum et sanctorum syriace*, 7 volumes (Leipzig – Paris: Harrassowtiz, 1890–1897), vol. 2, 254.

[56] H. J. W. Drijvers and J. W. Drijvers, *The Finding of the True Cross. The Judas Kyriakos Legend in Syriac. Introduction, Text and Translation* (Leuven: Peeters, 1997), 14–16. See also J. W. Drijvers, "The Protonike Legend, the Doctrina Addai and Bishop Rabbula of Edessa," *VC* 51 (1997): 298–315. A later anti-Jewish narrative, the *Apocryphal History of the Apostle Philip*, relies on a similar theme of Jewish persecution: W. Wright, *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles*, vol. 1, 73–99 (Syriac), vol. 2, 69–92 (English).

[57] For a later anti-Jewish dialogue poem on this episode, see in the East Syrian Ḥudrā (Trichur [Kerala, India]), III (1962): 739–742 (723–726).

[58] G. Phillips, *Doctrine of Addai* (London: Trübner, 1876), 4 (translation 4).

church.[59] Notably, in the *Life of Rabbula* the Jews are fabulously described as mourning Rabbula at his death, thus adding insult to injury.[60]

One important development in anti-Jewish narrative derives from Ephrem's *Hymns against Julian* and the broader anxieties we find in a number of Greek authors in the late fourth century around the apostate emperor's supposed alliance with the Jews. This is best attested in his expressed desire to rebuild the temple (and thus to demonstrate the falsity of Christian claims about the end of Judaism).[61] Ephrem describes the Jews as frolicking with their pagan peers, joyous about the new opportunities offered for their own self-assertion. Following Ephrem's lead, the *Julian Romance*, a sixth-century Edessene narrative, depicts the Jews supporting Julian's paganism and Chalcedonians as the new Jews, enemies of Christ.[62]

Another set of Syriac narrative texts from the sixth century with a strong anti-Jewish emphasis is the literature pertaining to the so-called martyrs of Najran in south Arabia. Whatever the actual history was, the material is framed with the tool of persecuting Jews, who make, for example, the claim we see elsewhere that Jesus was simply the child of an adulterous affair.[63]

This is not just a reference to Jewish calumny against Jesus but part of a tendency to link Jews to anti-Mariology. In his dissertation on the *Cave of Treasures*, a text he dates to the late sixth or early seventh century, Sergey Minov suggests that this text that has often been understood as a repository of Jewish learning seems to respond specifically to Jewish criticisms of Mary.[64] Minov argues that the success of the Jewish community within the Sasanian empire and ongoing conflict between Jews and Christians lie behind this defense of Mary. I suspect it also has to do with an increase in interest in Mary within the Sasanian Christian community with the spread of the Syriac Orthodox eastward in the sixth

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[59] I. Guidi, *Chronica Minora*, I (CSCO 1–2; Leuven: Peeters, 1903), 6 (LI). See Drijvers, "The Protonike Legend," and J. W. Drijvers, "The Syriac Julian Romance: Aspects of the Jewish-Christian Controversy in Late Antiquity," in H. L. J. Vanstiphout (ed.), *All Those Nations … Cultural Encounters Within and With the Near East. Studies Presented to Han Drijvers at the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday by Colleagues and Students* (Groningen: STYX, 1999), 31–42.

[60] J. J. Overbeck, *S. Ephraemi siri, Rabbulae episcopi Edesseni, Balaei aliorumque opera selecta* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1865), 207.9; English translation in R. Doran, *Stewards of the Poor: The Man of God, Rabbula, and Hiba in Fifth-Century Edessa* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian, 2006), 104 (although the text mentions his charity to and subsequent conversion of Jews in Edessa and therefore the Jews here may be a reference to these converts [pp. 193.10, 194.27; trans. 92, 94]).

[61] E. Beck, *Ephrem, Hymnen de Paradiso und Contra Julianum* (CSCO 174–175; Leuven: Secretariat of the CSCO, 1957). For an English translation of these texts, see K. E. McVey, *Ephrem the Syrian. Hymns* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1989).

[62] D. Schwartz, "Religious Violence and Eschatology in the Syriac Julian Romance," *JECS* 19 (2011): 582; Drijvers, "The Syriac Julian Romance."

[63] I. Shahîd, *The Martyrs of Najrân. New Documents* (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1971), 50. See also S. Minov, *Syriac Christian Identity in Late Sasanian Mesopotamia:* The Cave of Treasures *in Context* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2013), 98–99.

[64] Minov, *Syriac Christian Identity in Late Sasanian Mesopotamia*.

century.[65] We find a lively anti-Judaism also in other texts more specifically about Mary, such as the *History of the Blessed Virgin Mary* and the *History of the Likeness of Christ*, versions of which were transmitted in Syriac.[66] There is evidence that Mary was a point of Jewish attack on Christianity. We know that this was the case from early on.[67] However, perhaps also Mary somehow triggered Christian anti-Judaism in some way.

The Triggering of Anti-Jewish Polemic

I want to focus on this idea of "triggering" for the rest of my discussion. Anti-Jewish polemic seems to be *triggered* by certain themes. Such triggering can occur in the middle of texts that seem to have no initial anti-Jewish concern. Take for example Jacob of Serugh's *mēmrā*, "On the Chariot which the Prophet Ezekiel Saw," which provides an extensive meditation and commentary on the well-known chariot vision of Ezekiel 1 and 10. It was common to speculate in antiquity about the chariot Ezekiel describes, and the early Jewish mysticism of the Medieval period is in fact call *merkavah* mysticism, that is, the mysticism of the chariot.[68] At one point, when Jacob is deep in the middle of his text, he suddenly begins to address a Jew: "Come, Jew, friend (*ḥaḇrēh*) of the night, and bring with you / the beloved scroll of that Ezekiel, the member of the Exile. / Seek in your ark (*ʾāronāḵ*) and if it has not been torn up by you, behold, it will be there. / Bring it and let us read it and let it be interpreted for us regarding his revelation."[69]

For several subsequent pages Jacob uses the language of debate to address this Jew. The terms he uses in this passage may reflect more than an imaginary biblical Jew. Does the appellation, "friend of the night" (*ḥaḇrēh d-lēlyā*) reflect the Rabbinic tendency to use a similar term (Hebrew *ḥāḇēr*, Aramaic *ḥaḇrā*) for fellow scholars? In any case, the ark (*ʾāronā*) in which his Jew keeps his scrolls is

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[65] We even have an East Syrian scholastic "cause" text devoted to Mary from the early seventh century (G. J. Reinink, "The Cause of the Commemoration of Mary: Author, Date, and Christology," in G. A. Kiraz [ed.], *Malphono w-Rabo d-Malphone: Studies in Honor of Sebastian P. Brock* [Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2008], 517–534), which should be compared to Narsai's *mēmrā* on Mary from the late fifth century (*The Homilies of Mar Narsai* [San Francisco: Patriarchal Press, 1970], vol. 1, 104–128 [which is a reproduction of a late manuscript dated to 1901]).

[66] E. A. W. Budge, *The History of the Blessed Virgin Mary and The History of the Likeness of Christ which the Jews of Tiberias Made to Mock At: The Syriac Texts Edited with English Translations* (Luzac's Semitic Text and Translation Series 4–5; London: Luzac and Co., 1899).

[67] M. Marcovich, *Origen, Contra Celsum Libri VIII* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), I.28 (pp. 29–30).

[68] A. Golitzin has suggested that Jacob's text shows an awareness of these *merkavah* traditions and is responding to them (A. Golitzin, "The Image and Glory of God in Jacob of Serug's Homily 'On that Chariot that Ezekiel the Prophet Saw'," *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 47 [2003]: 323–364.). I am agnostic on this issue.

[69] P. Bedjan, *Homiliae Selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis* (Paris – Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1905–1910), vol. 4, 587. Reprinted (with an additional volume) as P. Bedjan and S. P. Brock, *Homilies of Mar Jacob of Sarug* (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2006).

the standard place for depositing sacred texts in the ancient synagogue (and this is not a term that appears in the New Testament).

Jacob then debates for the next few pages with a literary Jew who "has denied" (*ṭlam*) the virgin birth.[70] Finally he demands, "Come, Jew, read in the prophet and behold you will find / The image of the son who is revealed and stands as a luminary."[71] There are several significant features in Jacob's attack on Jews in this text. First, he seems to use the language of debate we find elsewhere in anti-Jewish literature. For example, "to affirm" (*ašar*) is a term that appears in his anti-Jewish *mēmrē*. Moreover, some of his debate terminology is loaded. For example, the root in the verb "to deny" (*ṭlam*) is used in the word *ṭlumyā*, "oppression," which is a common characteristic of Jews, "oppressors" (*ṭālomē*), those who oppressively deny Christ (on this term, see below). Second, whereas most anti-Jewish literature seems to reflect a stereotypical Jewish interlocutor who could theoretically be drawn from the Christian Bible alone, there are traces in Jacob's text of an awareness of post-Biblical Jews.

The most striking aspect of his anti-Judaism with regard to my argument is that Jacob's homily takes up about 68 pages in its printed edition and the anti-Jewish material is from a stretch totaling only three pages (pp. 587–590 within pp. 543–610). Why is it that he decides to invoke a Jewish interlocutor at this point in his text after there has been no appearance of Jews throughout? What has triggered this image of debate and what does it do for his larger argument?

The virgin birth was something Jews notoriously rejected, and the Jews' denial of it became a common theme. The chariot with the divine being as a human sitting upon the throne is here described by Jacob as referring to Christ born as a human within the womb of Mary. Jacob seems to be concerned to respond to the potential reading of Ezekiel's text as not being about Christ.

In the passage just before this section attacking the Jew, Jacob addresses Ezekiel directly, repeatedly commanding him to consider the image of the son of God that he saw on the chariot (582ff). Jacob explains how Jesus was the fulfillment of Ezekiel's prophetic vision. The chariot vision was known as an object of Jewish speculation in antiquity and through the Middle Ages, but Jacob seems to hit upon his Jewish interlocutor through the logic of his own argument. Regarding Ezekiel's revelation he states: "His word became great and everyone recognized how reliable (*šarrir*) he was, / And, behold, his beautiful name is praised in the assemblies (*knušāṯā*). / If our Lord had not arisen upon the earth as a human being, / That revelation which was to Ezekiel would be quite ordinary (*šḥim*)."[72]

According to Jacob, various contradictions in Ezekiel's vision would not have been resolved if Christ had *not* come as a human being. He concludes:

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[70] Bedjan, *Homiliae Selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis*, vol. 4, 587–590.
[71] Bedjan, *Homiliae Selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis*, vol. 4, 590.
[72] Bedjan, *Homiliae Selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis*, vol. 4, 584–585.

That revelation would have been despised by the wise,
If our Lord had not come in the flesh as a human being.
But now (*hāšā*) that he has come and the son of man [or: a human being] came
    into being from the womb,
The beauty of the prophecy has shown forth in the whole world,
And material has come into being for all the teachers of the assemblies
to interpret about the chariot in a loud voice.[73]

Note that the Syriac *knušāṭā*, 'assemblies', very often means 'synagogues', but can also mean 'churches'. The usage of the term in Jacob's text, particularly its context before any reference to Jews, suggests that it should be read as 'churches', although the ambiguity in the term's meaning comes out as the text progresses into Jacob's direct address to the Jew. In any case, the Jew is introduced into the text as part of a larger discussion of the logic behind Ezekiel's revelation: The incarnation is the e*x post facto* reason for what the prophet saw.

Jacob's apparently sudden introduction of the Jew and the debate style suggest that perhaps other texts with the language of debate are also not aimed at addressing actual Jews or even preparing Christians for future arguments. Just as certain developments in the logic and argument in Jacob's text created a context he deemed appropriate for engaging in anti-Jewish polemic, so there may be whole works that are anti-Jewish but which are simply triggered in a similar way. Jacob's focus on the incarnation as the tool for understanding Ezekiel's vision may suggest that his polemical target is not Jews at all but rather those Christians against whom his community were in theological controversy: Dyophysites, in particular, "Nestorians." His text would not be the only instance in which "Jew" is a stand-in for those who were on the other side of the *Theotokos* debate. Take, for example, the supposed letter from the Jews to Marcian, mentioned above. In a recent paper, Aaron Butts has suggested that this text is not an exception but simply a more overt example of a possibly common phenomenon.[74] It may point the way to how carefully we need to approach all instances of anti-Judaism in Syriac literature. Behind the Jew in the text may lie in fact real Dyophysites or some other theological adversary of the author. Several anti-Jewish texts are candidates for this approach, such as Narsai's *mēmrā* on Palm Sunday or some of Jacob's anti-Jewish *mēmrē*.

Another example of how anti-Judaism is occasionally triggered in Syriac texts is offered in one of the various works attributed to Isaac of Antioch that are titled, "On Rebuke" (*makksānuṭā*), which seems to be a genre going back to Ephrem

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[73] Bedjan, *Homiliae Selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis*, vol. 4, 585.
[74] A. M. Butts, "Mapping the 'Other' onto Jews: Syriac Anti-Jewish Polemic during the Fifth and Sixth Centuries," paper given at the North American Syriac Symposium, Brown University, June 16–19, 2019. See also pp. 12–18 above.

himself.[75] A common theme in these texts is the hoarding of wealth and in this text Isaac (or whoever the author is) uses the motif of the Golden Calf (Exodus 32), which is also an important tool in Ephrem's anti-Jewish repertoire.[76] With regard to salvation, Isaac points out that if Christ promised salvation to one of the thieves on the cross, he will provide it all the more to those who continually serve him. He then switches directions:

Let us not resemble the people of old, who acted wantonly before the calf,
Whom the good one brought out from Egypt, and the calf was praised instead of him.
The sustainer brought down manna, but the one with a shut palate was glorified;
The good one brought up quail, but the deaf one was lauded.
The creator split the sea, but they thanked the created thing;
He allowed them to pass amidst the waves (of the Red Sea), but they glorified the caste (metal) one abundantly.
But, behold, it was through the ears of their wives that that calf came to be among the peoples;
How did it save them and allow them to pass, that which the wives, behold, even carried about?
It was not able to make itself pass, for their daughters took it up and it passed,
But to that abundant people they were saying, "This is the one who allowed us to pass."
Also Moses, as one who is discerning, brought about its sinking in the waters,
So that the foolish people might be accused through their god as it sank, (saying)
"Because you thought to yourselves that it preserved you among the waves,
Behold, see how it is not even able to carry itself upon the water."
Who then gave us (the responsibility), like the sharp-witted Moses,
To come and rebuke now [*hāšā*] the worshippers [*sāḡōḏē*] (of God) as oppressive deniers [*ṭālomē*]?
For, behold, that calf which Moses sank in the desert wilderness
Now [*hāšā*] springs forth from the chambers [*tawwānē*] and is honored by everyone.
For who does not worship the mute gold in their purses?
For, behold, everyone is exhausted on account of it as he works for it.
The Hebrews openly worshipped the gold that came from the fire,
But we secretly have worshipped mammon which has become a master for us.[77]

The use of the term *ṭālomē*, 'oppressive deniers', is significant because it marks the Hebrews of old as the Jews of the time of Jesus and also of Isaac's day. Much of this seems to be the same as what we find in Ephrem's use of the Golden Calf motif, but there is a difference in polemical target. Whereas Ephrem uses the account of the Golden Calf to attack his opponents, who are Jews as well as those he deems heretics, Isaac is explicitly criticizing members of his own community

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[75] P. Bedjan, *Isaac of Antioch. Homiliae* (Paris – Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1903), 180–213 (Bedjan #18; Mathews Checklist #4 at website: syri.ac).
[76] Shepardson, *Anti-Judaism and Christian Orthodoxy*, 80–98.
[77] Bedjan, *Isaac of Antioch, Homiliae*, 184–185. Such comparisons appear elsewhere in Isaac's works on rebuke, e.g., Bedjan, *Isaac of Antioch, Homiliae*, 627.

and even himself ("we").[78] The term *tawwānē*, 'the chambers', could refer to "the chambers of the heart" (e. g. Prov 20:27), but it is more likely that this is a reference to private as opposed to public space. Sin is now coming out of doors.

For Isaac *we* are all potentially like the Hebrews who went astray: Christians, the "worshippers (of God)," *sāḡoḏē*, are like *ṭālomē*, the Jews. Ephrem was part of an orthodox community that felt itself beleaguered, challenged by various other forms of Christianity, whereas Isaac is writing perhaps over a century later when Christianization's failure to eradicate sin is apparent. This shows the flexibility of the anti-Jewish paradigm, in this case, the story of the Golden Calf.[79]

Isaac's meditation on failed Christianization continues later in the same text. He states:

We do not resemble the living, nor have we been similar to the dead.
The prophets shout like peals of thunder and the apostles like trumpets;
But the sound has not pierced our ears, for we have been careless for ourselves and paid
   no heed.
When we take up scripture we read, shut our eyes, and forget;
We read the books of our Lord as if they were transitory books.
There is not in us a limb that is healthy so that he (or: we) may heal whoever is sick;
For, behold, the whole body is ill from laxity, as if with a fever.
Regarding us it was fulfilled what was said regarding that people of old,
For from the soul of the foot to the head there is no secure [*šarrir*] place in it
   (Isaiah 1:6).[80]

Thus, the Jews provide a model of failure, the negative example par excellence.

Isaac later addresses the sickness of both body and soul, both of which are from demons. The demons of sickness can be exorcized from our bodies, whereas there are other demons that "abide in our minds," such as the demon of "rage" (*ḥemṭā*), a figure which plays on the "heat" of a fever.

Behold, your demon is in you all the time; for your rage is an evil demon.
A demon [*šē'dā*] is not evil like your rage nor is a demon [*daywā*] like your strife.
For a demon is moved by the truth, but strife contends with it.
Legion (Mk 5:1–20; Mt 8:28–34; Lk 8:26–39) was frightened of our Lord and his whole
   camp was moved,
But his crucifiers dared to seize him and fix him on the lofty wood.
Accursed demons acknowledged that he was the child of the most high,
But Judas stretched out his left hand and counted and took his payment.
Legion worshipped before him, but that accursed one struck his cheek;
Weigh out, oh you listeners, which is more bitter than the other:

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[78] Shepardson, *Anti-Judaism and Christian Orthodoxy*, 91; on pp. 82–83 she quotes Ephrem's *Homily on our Lord*, which contrasts secret and open worship of the calf (E. Beck, *Ephrem, Sermo de domino nostro* [CSCO 270–271; Leuven: Peeters, 1966], sections 6 and 17).

[79] For the *Nachleben* of this theme in Muslim tradition, see, e. g., M. Pregill, *The Living Calf of Sinai: Orientalism, 'Influence,' and the Foundations of Islamic Exegetical Tradition* (Ph.D. Thesis, Columbia University, 2007).

[80] Bedjan, *Isaac of Antioch, Homiliae*, 192.

Demons were begging from him but the crucifiers beat him with a reed;
Decide as judges, you, what side is more guilty.
Behold, their distinctions are set upon your tongues as if upon the scales (of a balance),
And the mind has weighed and the scale of the crucifiers has gone down.
Whereas that side of the demons is food for the fire,
Nevertheless (the other) is so very bitter in its rage, more so than the demons.[81]

In sum, according to Isaac, Jews are worse than demons because at least the de-mons acknowledged Jesus in the Gospels, whereas the Jews simply abused and crucified him. However, the context of this analogy is noteworthy: It is employed when Isaac is addressing anger and social division among Christians. He is thus making a historical analogy to talk about the present. This present, represented by the repeated use of the word "now" (*hāšā*) in Isaac's *mēmrā*, points to the tem-porality into which he and his audience have been boxed. Christ came, and yet the selfishness and violence associated with the Jews of the Bible persist, even within the Christian community. This is a paradoxical temporality: "now" is both descriptive of contradiction and prescriptive of perfection, and the Jews are the past and present antitype of the Christian present. Two of the major themes in Isaac's *mēmrā* are the oppression (*ṭlumyā*) of the poor by the rich and the prob-lem of socially divisive "rage" (*ḥemṯā*), both of which are, according to Isaac, characteristics typical of the Jews.

Conclusion

I have addressed late antique texts primarily. In conclusion I would like to note how anti-Judaism has remained a part of the tradition into the modern period. It is apparent in the liturgy and can be found in Syriac and Neo-Aramaic literature of the modern period.[82] In reference to anti-Jewish themes in East Syrian texts from between 1500 and 1850, Heleen Murre-van den Berg aptly notes:

Of course, not much is new here; the gist of these comments can easily be traced to exegeti-cal traditions that go back to the earliest phases of Christian history and in some cases have an unambiguous basis in the text of the New Testament. What struck me, however, is that despite the relative prominence of these anti-Jewish themes, I have not so far encountered a single reference to the Jewish population of the time in the texts of this period. Neither in the poetry, nor in the colophons or other historical texts do the Jews of northern Meso-potamia play any role.[83]

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[81] Bedjan, *Isaac of Antioch, Homiliae*, 203.

[82] Anthropologist D. P. Wolk has written an ethnographic piece on contemporary anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism among Assyrians in Chicago, D. Wolk "Migration and the Transfor-mation of Assyrian Stereotypes of Jews: A Conceptual, Historical Approach" (manuscript 2007).

[83] H. Murre-van den Berg, "Apostasy or 'a House Built on Sand.' Jews, Muslims and Chris-tians in East-Syriac texts (1500–1850)," in C. Adang and S. Schmidtke (eds.), *Contacts and Con-troversies between Muslims, Jews and Christians in the Ottoman Empire and Pre-Modern Iran* (Würzburg: Ergon, 2010), 227.

And this is despite the large community of Jews who spoke a dialect of Aramaic similar to that of local Christians.

Although there is some continuity up to the present it is important to emphasize that this is a different trajectory from the Western tradition of anti-Judaism where, for example, medieval stories of Jewish desecration of the host are in the long term ultimately related to modern anti-Semitism and the violence of the Holocaust. The understandable tone of anxiety we find in some scholarship on anti-Judaism is unnecessary in approaching the Syriac material.[84] To be sure, there was occasional violence, but the Syriac anti-Jewish tradition is not something we need to wring our hands over. Medieval violence against Jews and the modern violence of the Holocaust have no connection to the historical Middle East except that Christianity derives from this same region.

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[84] M. Rubin, *Gentile Tales: The Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 5–6.

Bound and Banned

Aphrahaṭ and Excommunication in the Sasanian Empire*

Bar Belinitzky and Yakir Paz

Introduction

In the Gospel of John a previously unattested Greek term, ἀποσυνάγωγος, appears three times (9:22; 12:42; 16:2) to designate the Jewish practice of excommunication (נידוי).[1] In the Syriac Peshiṭta and Ḥarklean translations the Greek term is rendered literally as 'outside of the synagogue' (ܠܒܪ ܡܢ ܟܢܘܫܬܐ).[2] However, in two of its three appearances, the Old Syriac Gospels (Sinaiticus), datable to the end of the fourth or beginning of the fifth century,[3] uses the verb √šmr (ܢܫܡܪܘܗܝ; ܢܫܡܪܘܢ).[4] This verb, which could mean 'to dispatch; to let loose', although not completely out of a place in this context, is never used to denote excommunication. In light of this, Friedrich Schulthess, followed by Carl Brockelmann and Michael Sokoloff,[5] has convincingly suggested that √šmr (ܫܡܪ) should be slightly amended to √šmd (ܫܡܕ), which means 'to ban/excommunicate', similar to the Babylonian Jewish Aramaic (and Mandaean) verb √šmt.[6] Schulthess though

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[1] See, e.g., G. Friedrich et al. (eds.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (trans. G. W. Bromiley; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), vol. 7, 848–852. All later uses of ἀποσυνάγωγος are dependent on John. See G. W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1961), 214 (s. v. ἀποσυνάγωγος).

[2] See G. A. Kiraz, *Comparative Edition of the Syriac Gospels: Aligning the Sinaiticus, Curetonianus, Peshîṭtâ and Ḥarklean Versions* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), vol. 4, 181, 243, 289.

[3] On ms. Sinaiticus, see Kiraz, *Comparative Edition,* 1: xxi–xxiii. For a description of the ms., see A. S. Lewis, *Catalogue of the Syriac Mss. in the Convent of S. Catharine on Mount Sinai* (Studia Sinaitica 1; London: C. J. Clay and Sons, 1894), 43–47.

[4] The third occurrence of ἀποσυνάγωγος (Jn 16:2) is translated in Sinaiticus literally, identical to the Peshitta: ܢܥܒܕܘܢ ܠܟܘܢ ܠܒܪ ܡܢ ܟܢܘܫܬܗܘܢ. This might indicate that the scribe here intentionally adjusted the translation.

[5] F. Schulthess, "Aramäisches," *ZA* 19 (1905): 132–133; M. Sokoloff, *A Syriac Lexicon: A Translation from the Latin; Correction, Expansion, and Update of C. Brockelmann's Lexicon Syriacum* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2012), 1570 (s. v. #2 ܫܡܕ; s. v. ܫܡܕܐ); C. Brockelmann, *Lexicon Syriacum* (2nd ed.; Halle: M. Niemeyer, 1928), 785 (s. v. II ܫܡܕܐ).

[6] This should be differentiated from √šmd which means 'to scoff; to be wanton' (Sokoloff, *Syriac Lexicon*, 1570 [s. v. #1ܫܡܕ]).

rightly does not consider this to be merely a scribal error but rather a deliberate correction by the scribe who did not recognize the verb √*šmd* in this particular sense. Indeed this use of the verb is extremely rare in Syriac. In fact, up to the seventh century, it would seem to be documented, apart from the Sinaiticus Old Syriac Gospels, only in the writings of Aphrahaṭ and in the Synods of the Church of the East, that is, only in works of Syriac authors active in the Sasanian Empire.

The rarity of this verb is contrasted by the ubiquity of √*šmt,* the standard term for excommunication in Jewish Babylonian Aramaic, which appears dozens of times in the Babylonian Talmud. It is also documented in many magic bowls – Jewish, Mandaean,[7] and Syriac.[8] It does not, however, appear in any of the western dialects of Aramaic and is unattested among the Jews in Palestine.

It would seem that by using √*šmd* the translator of Sinaiticus adopted the common term used among Babylonian Jews, which in his mind would perfectly reflect the Palestinian Jewish practice of ἀποσυνάγωγος. Yet, as noted by scholars, the Jewish Babylonian institution of excommunication differed from that of Palestine, reflecting their own particular social, cultural, linguistic, and historical context.[9] How then did the Christians in the Sasanian Empire use and

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[7] See E. S. Drower and R. Macuch, *A Mandaic Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963), 470 (s. v. ŠMT), 469 (s. v. šmata 2).

[8] For √*šmt* in Syriac incantation bowls, see M. Moriggi, *A Corpus of Syriac Incantation Bowls: Syriac Magical Texts from Late-Antique Mesopotamia* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 49 (6.13); 53 (7.11); 89 (16.4); 155 (32.2). On the origin of √*šmt* see now Y. Paz, "Banned and Branded: On the Mesopotamian Background of the *šamata*," (forthcoming).

[9] See discussion below for some of the differences. The most comprehensive studies of excommunication in Palestine and Babylonia remain the two classic articles of G. Libson, "Determining Factors in Ḥerem and Nidui (Ban and Excommunication) during the Tannaitic and Amoraic Periods," *Annual of the Institute for Research in Jewish Law* 2 (1975): 292–342 (in Hebrew); idem, "Excommunication and the Excommunicated in the Eyes of the Tannaim and the Amoraim," *Annual of the Institute for Research in Jewish Law* 6–7 (1979–1980): 177–202 (in Hebrew). Further on excommunication in the Babylonian Talmud, see Y. Elman, "Socioeconomics of Babylonian Heresy," *JLAS* 17 (2007): 80–127; Y. Brenner-Wigoda, "Bringing from one Domain to Another: An Analysis of the Excommunication Sugya, b.Moed Qat. 14b–17b" (MA Thesis, Hebrew University, 2012) (in Hebrew).

For a recent and rather problematic study, see J. S. Mokhtarian, "Excommunication in Jewish Babylonia: Comparing b. Moʻed Qatan 14b–17b and the Aramaic Bowl Spells in a Sasanian Context," *HTR* 108 (2015): 552–578. The author completely overlooks the use of excommunication in Syriac Christianity and prefers to compare Jewish excommunication with Zoroastrian texts even though he admits that "Zoroastrian literature does not contain a concept of excommunication with which to compare potential talmudic parallels" (p. 556). In addition, the parallels presented between the bowls and the Babylonian Talmud are based on outdated editions and cannot be trusted (see fn. 34 below).

Further on excommunication (mainly in Palestine), see, e. g., G. Forkman, *The Limits of the Religious Community: Expulsion from the Religious Community within the Qumran Sect, within Rabbinic Judaism, and within Primitive Christianity* (Coniectanea biblica 5; Lund: Gleerup, 1972); C. Hezser, *The Social Structure of the Rabbinic Movement in Roman Palestine* (TSAJ 66; Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 143–150; W. Horbury, "Extirpation and Excommunication," *VT* 35 (1985): 13–38; S. T. Katz, "The Rabbinic Response to Christianity," in idem (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, vol. 4. *The Late Roman Rabbinic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge

understand the term √*šmd* and the function of the ban? In this article we wish to address this question by analyzing and contextualizing Aphrahaṭ's references to bans, for all of which he uses the verb √*šmd*. The choice to focus on Aphrahaṭ is due to the fact that he reflects an earlier stage of Syriac Christians in Mesopotamia, prior to the first council of 410, when the ban becomes a fully institutionalized sanction (even gaining the support of the Sasanian king) and is partially modeled after the contemporaneous western use of *anathema*.[10] In addition, Aphrahaṭ's depiction of the ban has not received its due scholarly attention and its similarity to contemporary literature in the Sasanian Empire has not been investigated. In the first part of the paper we offer a close reading of the three sections in which Aphrahaṭ uses √*šmd*. The second part points to striking lexical, semantic, and social similarities between the practice described by Aphrahaṭ and that found in the Babylonian Talmud and the incantation bowls.

Part 1: Aphrahaṭ on Excommunication

The verb √*šmd* is documented only four times (in three separate units) in Aphrahaṭ's *oeuvre*, all in the 14th *Demonstration*, which was composed, according to the colophon, in 344.[11] It is in fact a synodical letter addressed to the church

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University Press, 2006), 271–276; Y. Eldan, *Excommunication, Death and Mourning* (Tel Aviv: Resling, 2011) (in Hebrew).

[10] So, for example, while Aphrahaṭ never uses the verb √ḥrm (ܐܚܪܡ) in the context of excommunication, it becomes the main verb to designate excommunication in the synods, as the exact rendering of *anathema* (see, e.g., J.-B. Chabot, *Synodicon Orientale ou recueil des Synodes nestoriens publié, traduit et annoté* [Notices et extraits de la Bibliothèque Nationale 37; Paris: Imprimerie Nationale 1902], 21.10; 24.22; 30.32; 34.26, 30). In addition, as we shall see, excommunication according to Aphrahaṭ is delivered orally, while in the synods it is a written document signed by the religious authorities.

The sole monograph to deal with excommunication in the Church of the East remains P. Cheikho, *Les peines ecclésiastiques dans l'ancien droit de l'église chaldéenne* (Rome, 1935). On excommunication in the western church, see, e.g., W. Doskocil, "Exkommunikation," in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1969), vol. 7, 1–22; idem, *Der Bann in der Urkirche: Eine rechtsgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (Munchen: Zink, 1958); K. Helm, *Eucharist and Excommunication: A Study in Early Christine Doctrine and Discipline* (Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang, 1975); J. E. Lynch, "The Limits of Communio in the Pre-Constantinian Church," *Jurist* 36 (1976): 159–190.

[11] Aphrahaṭ, *Demonstration* 14:50: "This letter is written in the month of Shebat, in year six hundred and fifty-five of the kingdom of Alexander son of Phillip the Macedonian, and in the thirty-fifth year of Shapur, king of Persia" (Syriac text in W. Wright, *The Homilies of Aphraates, the Persian Sage*, vol. 1 [London – Edinburgh: Williams and Norgate, 1869], 304–305; English translation in A. I. Lehto, *The Demonstrations of Aphrahat, the Persian Sage* [Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2010], 360). The translations of Aphrahaṭ throughout the article are based on Lehto's (with slight modifications), as well as the division of the paragraphs.

On the colophon, see G. Herman, *A Prince without a Kingdom: The Exilarch in the Sasanian Era* (TSAJ 150; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 129 esp. fn. 289; T. D. Barnes, "Constantine and the Christians of Persia," *JRS* 75 (1985): 126–136; G. Nedungatt, "The Authenticity of Aphrahat's

of Seleucia-Ctesiphon. In the letter Aphrahaṭ critiques the bishop and other ecclesiastical leaders for their arrogance, corruption, and abuse of power.[12]

Throughout the letter Aphrahaṭ indirectly links the current persecutions of the Christians by Shapur II with the corrupt behavior of ecclesiastical leaders.[13] He surveys many biblical precedents which demonstrate the downfall of various leaders as a result of corruption and disregard of their community. Aphrahaṭ outlines the correct conduct and concludes by promoting values of peace and love.

"Bind and Ban and Receive Honour"

The first appearance of √*šmd* is in a section which deals with greed and the harm it causes, where Aphrahaṭ critiques the pursuit of honor by the leaders of the church:

Because what we have written to you, friends, you [now] know that it is as a result of greed that the keepers of the Law and the power among our people are envious and jealous, while our teaching matches our way of living. We walk contentiously because we have been instructed contentiously (ܗܠܝܢ ܡܬܢܝܢ ܘܗܟܢܐ ܐ. ܡܬܢܝܢ).[14] With respect to the laying on of hands (ܣܝܡ ܐܝܕܐ), the consecration which some among us have received, they struggle to achieve only what is necessary for it. It is rare in our times to find someone asking, "Who is it that fears God?" Rather, [the question is], "Who is the oldest for the laying on of hands?" And when they say, "Such and such is the oldest," they say to him, "You may recline at the head of the table." And there is no one who remembers the saying of the Saviour when he denounces the scribes and the Pharisees and said to them, *"Woe to you who love [prominent] seats in the synagogue and taking your place at dinners, and who love it when people call you, 'Rabbi! Rabbi'"*[15] Brothers! Titles (ܫܡܗܐ) do not come [with us] into life, nor do they enable [us] to escape death, just as they did not deliver Nadab and Abihu nor did they save Hopni and Pinchas. But with titles are required good works, for actions without

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Synodal Letter," *OCP* 46 (1980): 62–88. They all rightly reject previous scholarly efforts to cast doubt on the date in the colophon (for example, J.-M. Fiey, "Notule de littérature syriaque. La Démonstration XIV d'Aphraate," *Le Muséon* 81 [1968]: 449–454, argued that the date of the letter should be before 329).

[12] Herman, *Prince*, 129: "The demonstration however leaves the impression of an open community. It may even have been addressed to Simeon Bar Sabaē, despite the shining reputation he acquired in the eastern ecclesiastical tradition following his martyrdom." On the status of the bishop, see Herman, *Prince*, 129.

[13] On the exact chronology and the dates of the persecution in *Demonstration* 14 and a discussion of the state of the Persian church at the time, see, e.g., R.W. Burgess, "The Dates of the Martyrdom of Simeon bar Sabbaʿe and the 'Great Massacre'," *AB* 117 (1999): 41–42; M.J. Higgins, "Aphraates' Dates for Persian Persecution," *BZ* 44 (1951): 265–271; M.-J. Pierre, "Un synode contestataire à l'époque d'Aphraate le Sage Persan," in A. Le Boulluec (ed.), *La controverse religieuse et ses formes* (Paris: Cerf, 1995), 243–279.

[14] Scholars seem to have overlooked the fact that this line is based on Lev. 26: 23–24 (ܘܐ ܗܟܘܬ. ܒܗܠܝܢ ܠܐ ܬܬܪܕܘܢ ܠܝ. ܘܬܗܠܟܘܢ ܥܡܝ ܩܪܝܐ ܐܦ ܐܢܐ ܐܗܠܟ ܥܡܟܘܢ ܒܩܪܝܐ). These verses appear in the context of national catastrophes that would befall the people of Israel if they break the covenant. It would seem that by alluding to these verses, Aphrahaṭ once again points to the corruption of the Church and its leaders as the reason for the persecution of the Christians in his day.

[15] Cf. Mt 23:6–8.

titles save those who do them, but titles without good works are not useful or profitable, as we wrote to you above. Our brothers take pride in the titles that they have received, and through them they bind and ban and receive honour (ܠܐܣܪܝܢ ܗܘܘ ܘܡܫܡܬܝܢ ܘܡܬܝܩܪܝܢ), as if to say, "I am powerful! (ܕܠܗ ܐܝܬ ܚܝܠܐ)." (Aphrahaṭ, *Demonstrations*, 14:25)[16]

Aphrahaṭ claims that people who act well are no longer respected, but rather titles and the laying of hands have become the only criterion for honor. He cites verses from Matthew 23, a chapter in which Jesus blames the Pharisees for hypocrisy and chasing respect, which takes form in prominent seating and the use of the title "Rabbi." Aphrahaṭ equates his contemporaneous priests with these Pharisees. Titles though, he states, do not save from sin without good deeds, as revealed by biblical precedents of priests who abused their power, such as Nadab and Abihu and Hofni and Pinchas.

Aphrahaṭ's description is founded on the assumption that a title is what accords one the authority to excommunicate. Aphrahaṭ does not directly criticize this fact but rather addresses his criticism to the abuse of the power given to the heads of the community.

In addition, it is important to note that Aphrahaṭ uses the verbs √'sr 'to bind' (ܐܣܪ) and √šmd 'to ban' alongside each other. As we shall see this is true for all four occurrences of the verb √šmd in Aphrahaṭ's work.

"Destroy all his Brothers and Bind and Ban"

Later in the letter, Aphrahaṭ addresses the following argument which could be raised by one of the priests:

You say to me, "I am honorable and virtuous, and God has chosen me and anointed me that I might rule over my people." (Aphrahaṭ, *Demonstrations*, 14:27)[17]

In order to refute this argument, Aphrahaṭ presents several biblical precedents which demonstrate that it is indeed possible to reject people who were chosen and anointed and that anointing does not grant immunity. Pinchas received an eternal priestly covenant for himself and his descendants. However, the sons of Eli, from the stock of Pinchas, transgressed the law and were thus rejected. Similarly, God chose Saul to be king, and yet when he disobeyed Him, He rejected him and chose David. The next precedent discussed by Aphrahaṭ is that of Jehu (2 Kgs 9):

They embellish and bring to us, brothers, a weak and inappropriate excuse: "It is because the times are evil that God has established us to govern his people, in the likeness of Jehu, who was anointed in an inner chamber." But what if someone asked you, O wise scribe, "When was the promise given that Jehu would be anointed, and when was the anointment given to him?" What would you say to him? Elijah received a command on Mount Horeb,

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[16] Wright, *Aphrahat*, 268–269; Lehto, *Demonstrations*, 328.
[17] Wright, *Aphrahat*, 273; Lehto, *Demonstrations*, 331.

and [God] said to him, "Go and anoint Jehu, that he might be king over Israel and destroy the house of Ahab." Elijah was commanded [thus] and he served for many years until he was taken up [to God], and after him [came] Elisha. When the time of Jehu came, and the measure of the sins of the house of Ahab abounded, Elisha sent for a member of the company of the prophets, and he went and anointed Jehu as he was commanded. If then it is to Jehu that they compare the situation, likewise is the priest commissioned to govern the people, and when in power would destroy all his brothers and bind and ban (ܢܐܣܘܪ ܘܢܚܪܡ ܐܢܘܢ) them, as Jehu destroyed the house of Ahab? (Aphrahaṭ, *Demonstrations*, 14:27)[18]

Aphrahaṭ cites a possible argument of the priests, comparing themselves to Jehu, who was anointed secretly as a temporary provision. Thus, if it is God's will, the anointing and laying of the hands could be done far from the public eye. In addition, Jehu was not necessarily the perfect candidate, or the most righteous, but he was good enough for that generation.

   Aphrahaṭ retorts: Do the priests really want to compare themselves to Jehu who was anointed in order to destroy the entire house of Ahab? Aphrahaṭ here directly compares the killings by Jehu to the binding and banning by the priest. Both consist of the use of institutional power. Excommunication is therefore considered by Aphrahaṭ as a form of lethal violence. By comparing themselves to Jehu the priests have unintentionally revealed their true intention – the right to abuse their monopoly of violence against their own congregation. As we shall see, violence lies at the very heart of the concept of the ban in the Sasanian Empire.[19]

"You are Bound and You are Banned from Heaven and Earth"

The most detailed description of the ban and its imagery is found towards the end of *Demonstration* 14:

Our lord has opened before us a great treasure full of all good things. In it is love, peace, friendship, healing, purity, and all manner of good, beautiful, and excellent things. He has given authority to his stewards (ܠܪ̈ܒܝ ܓܙܐ) over all the treasure house, and has also placed chains, prisons, and fetters (ܫܫ̈ܠܬܐ ܘܒܝܬ ܐܣܝܪ̈ܐ ܘܣܘܛ̈ܡܐ) into the hands of the stewards, and authorized them to bind and set free (ܠܡܐܣܪ ܘܠܡܫܪܐ). But the stewards have forsaken love and peace and friendship and all the rest of the treasure. They have become prison wardens, prosecutors, and executioners (ܠܪ̈ܒܝ ܐܣܝܪ̈ܐ ܘܩܛ̈ܝܓܢܐ ܘܩ̈ܛܘܠܐ), instead of stewards of the treasure of all good things. Whoever enters in is imprisoned, and whoever goes out is detained. Then there is the one who sins and offends God, but tries to

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please the prison wardens, and they free him from his chains (ﬦﬥﬤﬡ ﬢﬣ ﬤﬥﬡﬢ) and say to him, "God is compassionate and forgives sins. Enter, and go to prayer!" But if anyone offends them, even by some insignificant thing, they say to him, "You are bound and you are banned from heaven and earth. Woe even to the one who speaks to him! (ﬡﬢﬣﬤ ﬥﬦﬡ ﬢﬣﬤﬥﬡﬢﬣﬤﬥﬦﬡﬢﬣﬤﬥﬦﬡ)" We hope, brothers, that when the king sees his stewards, who have transgressed the law and changed the commandment which he gave to them and established their own decrees, he will bind them with fetters they so loved (ﬡﬢﬣﬤﬥﬦﬡﬢﬣﬤﬥﬦﬡﬢ.), demand payment from them for the blood of his servants, and take away from them his treasure, because they did not cherish it.

Our Lord taught, "If your brother offends you, rebuke him, [just] between you and him, and if he repents, forgive him. But if he doesn't listen to you, take one or two [others], so that the whole matter might be established in the eyes of two or three witnesses. And if he doesn't listen to these, speak to the congregation, you must look upon him as an unbeliever or a tax collector, since he has not accepted [your] argument."[20] But with us, we do not lodge complaints with each other, nor before two or three [witnesses], nor [before] the congregation. There is no judgement or accusation, only "bound and banned! (ﬡﬢﬣ ﬤﬥﬦﬡﬢ)." (Aphrahaṭ, *Demonstrations*, 14:44)[21]

Aphrahaṭ opens this unit with a graphic parable which describes the gifts given by the Lord to his stewards. However, the Lord not only gave them the keys to his treasury but also various tools for torturing and punishing: "chains, prisons, and fetters."[22] The stewards, rather than bestowing the treasure on the people, became "prison wardens, prosecutors, and executioners." Aphrahaṭ is clear and explicit about the meaning of the parable: The stewards are the ecclesiastical authorities, and the "chains, prisons, and fetters"[23] refer to the ban – "You are bound, and you are banned" – which they deliver gratuitously. The ban is thus associated both lexically and visually with binding. The comparison of the priests to "prison wardens, prosecutors, and executioners" highlights once again the lethal violence of the ban, which goes beyond its social ramifications. This violent aspect is further underscored by the divine punishment the stewards are to receive: "He will bind them with fetters they so loved, demand payment from them for the blood of his servants."

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[20] Mt 18:15–17.

[21] Wright, *Aphrahat*, 297–298; Lehto, *Demonstrations*, 353–354 .

[22] For the relation of the king and stewards, see Lk 19:12–26. See also Aphrahaṭ's similar parable earlier on in this demonstration § 8–9 (Wright, *Aphrahat*, 251; Lehto, *Demonstrations,* 312): "Among you, our brothers, is found one who has tied on a diadem, but his country is not aware of him. He has drawn near to other kings who are distant from him, and has sought chains and fetters from them, and has begun to distribute them in his country and his city." See Herman, *Prince*, 130–131 who rejects the possibility that this may support the argument that the bishop at the time had the full powers of the Catholicos.

[23] The possibility that Aphrahaṭ also refers to concrete physical sanctions should not be excluded. See Herman, *Prince*, 131: "The use of the Persian term here for prison-warden, (*zedīnīqīa*) suggests that he has departed from the parable to reality. The bishop seems to have possessed real powers of enforcement, and perhaps imprisonment, although it is not to be precluded, if unlikely, that all the references to imprisonment here refer to the spiritual ban". However, as we shall, the "spiritual" ban was perceived to have had severe physical ramifications.

Aphrahaṭ blames the religious leaders for using the ban as a form of punishment against those who they perceive to have slighted their honor "even by some insignificant thing." In contrast, they release from the ban's bindings those who flatter them, while concealing their selfishness by claiming that "God is compassionate and forgives sins." They prefer their own honor over that of God. Thus excommunication is used by elite church figures to establish themselves forcefully and to snuff out any form of criticism or insult. As we shall see, a very similar practice is documented, uncritically, in the Babylonian Talmud.

As part of his criticism of the corrupt behavior of the priests, Aphrahaṭ also describes *en passant* the way the ban was performed, and supplies us with a citation of a formula which the priest would have delivered orally:

ܐܣܝܪ ܐܢܬ ܘܡܚܪܡ ܐܢܬ ܡܢ ܫܡܝܐ ܘܡܢ ܐܪܥܐ. ܘܝ ܐܦ ܠܡܢ ܕܡܠܠ ܥܡܗ

You are bound, and you are banned from heaven and earth. Woe even to the one who speaks to him! (Aphrahaṭ, *Demonstrations*, 14:44)[24]

The fact that this citation is given offhandedly, strengthens its historical credibility. It seems to be part of a reality well known to him and to the addressees of the epistle. Indeed a similar formula – but lacking the verb √*šmd* – is found in the excommunication edict of Batai in the synod of 410: ܢܗܘܘܢ ܐܣܝܪܝܢ ܘܡܚܪܡܝܢ ܒܫܡܝܐ ܘܒܐܪܥܐ "That they shall be bound and anathematized in heaven and earth."[25]

The formula cited by Aphrahaṭ, despite its seeming casualness, has a historical importance which has hitherto been overlooked by scholars: It is likely the earliest recorded ban formula in the Sasanian Empire.

Surprisingly, despite the lengthy discussions of the ban, or *šamata*, in the Babylonian Talmud, there are only a few instances of what would seem to be a partial formula: "May X be in a ban (בשמתא)."[26] However, they all appear in the anonymous layer as part of a story, and thus most likely postdate Aphrahaṭ.[27]

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[24] Wright, *Aphrahat*, 297–298; Lehto, *Demonstrations*, 353–354.

[25] Chabot, *Synodicon orientale,* 34.30. Compare a different formula in the same synod: ܢܗܘܐ ܒܚܪܡܐ ܡܢ ܟܠܗ ܥܡܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܘܠܐ ܬܗܘܐ ܠܗ ܫܘܠܛܢܐ ܒܥܕܬܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ "He shall be in anathema from all the people of God, and he shall not have any authority among the church of the Messiah" (21.9–11).

[26] See, e.g., תיהוי ההיא אתתא בשמתא "May that woman be in a ban" (b. Ned. 50b); ליהוי ההוא גברא בשמתא "May that man be in a ban" (b. Eruv. 63a; b. Moed Qat. 17a); ליהוו הנך אינשי בשמתיה "May these men be in his ban" (b. Avod. Zar. 26b; b. Moed Qat. 27b). The story of Resh Laqish is a Babylonian rendition of a Palestinian version in y. Moed Qat. 3.1 (81)d, where the formula is: ייא ההוא גוברא מחרם "May that man be anathematize." There are also similar formulae in the incantation bowls, see e. g. S. Shaked, J. N. Ford, and S. Bhayro, *Aramaic Bowl Spells: Jewish Babylonian Aramaic Bowls*, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 153 (JBA 26.3–5).

[27] A possible earlier indirect formula is cited in the name of R. Hisda in b. Hul. 132b (see below): אמ' רב חסד'. האי כהנא טבחא דלא מפרש מתנתאה ליהוי בשמתא דיי אלהי ישר' "R. Hisda said: A priest who is a butcher who does not set aside the (priestly) gifts, may he be in the ban of YHWH the God of Israel."

In light of the use of similar idioms in the Babylonian Talmud and the incantation bowls, some of which shall be discussed below, it is possible that the formula that appears in Aphrahaṭ was not unique to eastern Christians but might have also been shared with other Aramaic-speaking communities in the Sasanian Empire.

The formula presented by Aphrahaṭ is comprised of two parts: The first part – "You are bound and banned from heaven and earth" – declares the ban and states that this is not only an earthly action but also heavenly; it is not merely a juridical-social act but also a divine sanction.[28] The second part – "Woe even to the one who speaks to him!" – includes the prohibition to speak with the banned individual. The conjunction *ʾāp̄* 'even' indicates that speaking is only a minor part of a much more encompassing prohibition on any interaction with the banned individual.[29]

It is important to note that in the first part of the formula the banned individual is in the second person whereas in the second part in the third person. It is possible to argue that the transition in person is because the formula cited is abbreviated and that Aphrahaṭ is citing isolated sections of it. According to such an approach, the full formula was possibly so well-known that it was not necessary to repeat it in its entirety.

However, we believe that Aphrahaṭ is indeed citing the full formula. The transition in person is most probably due to the fact that the first section is addressed to the person being excommunicated whereas the second part is addressed to the public. In addition, it is also possible that upon stating the first part the ban

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[28] A similar formula can be found in a Mandaic incantation bowl (C. Müller-Kessler, *Die Zauberschalentexte in der Hilprecht-Sammlung, Jena und weitere Nippur-Texte anderer Sammlungen* [Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2005], 111 [38 HS 3011.24–28]): עסירתון באסארא רבא ד-שומיא וגמיטיתון בגמאטא תאקיפא רבא ד-ארקא "You are bound with the great binding of heaven and fettered with the mighty (and) great fetter of earth." Another formula that highlights the collaboration of earthly and heavenly authorities is found in a Jewish incantation bowl published in D. Levene, *A Corpus of Magic Bowls: Incantation Texts in Jewish Aramaic from Late Antiquity* (London: Kegan Paul, 2003), 40–41 (M101.10–11), slightly modified: ומי שלו ישמע יהא מנודה לטעצש יהוה אלהי ישראל לו ולכתר ראשו ולכיסי כבודו ולבית דין של מעלה ולבית דין של מטה ולכל צבא בית דין מרום "And whosoever shall not obey will be excommunicated to ṬʿṢŠ YHWH God of Israel. To him and to the crown of his head and to the throne of his glory and to the law court above and to the law court below and to all the host of the law court of heaven." See also discussion p. 42 and parallel in Hekhalot Rabbati (ed. Schäfer, § 92).

[29] Aphrahaṭ's formula prohibits even talking to the banned individual. In the Babylonian Talmud the restrictions includes eating and drinking or standing within four cubits of the excommunicated person (b. Moed Qat. 16a: לדאכיל ושתי בהדיה וקאי בארבע אמין דיליה דקאיי בהי). Although speaking is not directly mentioned, these restrictions prevent all normal social interaction. Compare the prohibitions in the ban edict of the Synod of 410 (Chabot, *Synodicon orientale,* 34.30–35.1): ܡܠ ܕܢܫܬܘܬܦ ܠܗܘܢ ܘܢܩܒܠ ܐܢܘܢ ܘܢܨ ܠܐ ܥܡܗܘܢ ܘܢܥܠ ܐܢܘܢ ܠܒܝܬܗ. ܡܫܬܕܝܢ ܡܢ ܟܠܗ ܥܕܬܐ ܘܡܢ ܡܪܥܝܬܗ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ "And whosoever interacts with them [i.e., the banned individuals], and receives them and prays with them and lets them enter his house, they will be cast out from the entire church and the flock of the Messiah."

is instated and from that moment onwards it is no longer possible to address directly the banned individual. The grammatical transition would thus highlight the simultaneity of the utterance and the changed reality.

After citing the formula, Aphrahaṭ uses Jesus' instructions in Matthew in order to construct what he views as the correct procedure prior to excommunication:

1. Personal rebuke
2. Rebuke before two or three witnesses
3. Rebuke before the entire congregation

Only if all these stages are performed and the individual has not yet recanted is he to be regarded as "as an unbeliever or a tax collector," which Aphrahaṭ might have understood as implying excommunication. However, the main reason that these verses are regarded as laying the foundation for the ban procedure is based on the pivotal verse which follows in Matthew and which Aphrahaṭ does not cite:

ܘܐܡܝܢ ܐܡܪ ܐܢܐ ܠܟܘܢ ܕܟܠ ܡܐ ܕܬܐܣܪܘܢ ܒܐܪܥܐ ܢܗܘܐ ܐܣܝܪ ܒܫܡܝܐ܂ ܘܡܕܡ ܕܬܫܪܘܢ ܒܐܪܥܐ ܢܗܘܐ ܫܪܐ ܒܫܡܝܐ܂

Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. (18:18, translation from NIV)

There has been much scholarly debate about the exact meaning of the Greek terms 'bind' (δέω) and 'release' (λύω) in this verse and in Matthew 16:19.[30] Regardless of the original meaning of these terms, it seems clear that Aphrahaṭ understood them in the context of excommunication. As we have seen, Aphrahaṭ always links the verbs √*šmd* 'to ban' and √'*sr* 'to bind'. Thus Aphrahaṭ would seem to have understood this verse as the final stage in the excommunication procedure, following the three stages described in the previous verses.

Moreover, there is a striking similarity between the verse and the formula cited by Aphrahaṭ:

Aphrahaṭ	Matthew 18:18
ܐܣܝܪ ܐܢܬ ܘܡܫܡܕ ܐܢܬ ܡܢ ܫܡܝܐ ܘܡܢ ܐܪܥܐ You are bound, and you are banned from heaven and earth	ܕܟܠ ܡܐ ܕܬܐܣܪܘܢ ܒܐܪܥܐ ܢܗܘܐ ܐܣܝܪ ܒܫܡܝܐ whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven

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[30] Scholars have argued that these verbs refer to exorcism (e.g., R. H. Hiers, "'Binding' and 'Loosing': The Matthean Authorizations," *JBL* 104 [1985]: 233–250); to freeing and bounding from sin (e.g., H. W. Basser, "Derretts 'Binding' Reopened," *JBL* 104 [1985]: 297–300); or to excommunication (e.g., P. Billerbeck and H. L. Strack, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* [Munchen: Beck, 1922], vol. 1, 792–793). Most scholars though regard these terms as equivalent to the rabbinic legal pair אסר/התיר: either 'forbidding' and 'permitting' (e.g., U. Luz, *Matthew 8–20: A Commentary* [trans. J. E. Crouch; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001], 365, 454, with further references; J. D. M. Derrett, "Binding and Loosing [Matt 16:19; 18:18; John 29:23]," *JBL* 102 [1983]: 112–117) or 'absolving' and 'releasing' vows (e.g., Z. W. Falk, "Binding and Loosing," *JJS* 25 [1974]: 92–100).

It is possible that Aphrahaṭ might have viewed this verse as the basis and inspiration for the excommunication formula he cites.[31]

Aphrahaṭ uses the verses from Matthew as a blueprint for constructing a procedure of excommunication. It would seem though that this reflects Aphrahaṭ's own vision rather than the actual procedure used by the ecclesiastical authorities of his time.

Based on his reconstructed procedure, Aphrahaṭ criticizes the priests for not lodging complaints with each other, nor before two or three witnesses, nor before the congregation. The result is that "there is no judgement or accusation" but rather the priests ban immediately upon feeling insulted or challenged. As we shall presently see, the Babylonian rabbis seem to have acted in a very similar way.

Part II: Contextualizing Aphrahaṭ

We can now turn to compare Aphrahaṭ's use of √*šmd* with other texts from the Sasanian Empire, especially the Babylonian Talmud and the incantation bowls. The following is not meant to be an exhaustive analysis of the use of the ban in these sources. Rather, the goal is to highlight several shared linguistic and social aspects: the association of binding and banning; the ban as violence; and the use of the ban by entitled authorities to protect their honour.

Banning as Binding

A striking feature of all four occurrences of √*šmd* in Aphrahaṭ's work is that they always appear alongside the verb √*'sr* 'to bind'. The two verbs seem to function almost as a hendiadys, or at the very least they are perceived to be part of the same semantic field.

The coupling of bind and ban is also found in the letter of excommunication against Batai of Mashmahig, in the first synod of 410:

ܒܛܝ ܕܝܢ ܐܣܝܪܐ ܘܡܫܡܬܐ ܗܘ ܕܡܫܡܗܝܓ ܐܣܝܪ ܘܚܪܝܡ ܐܪܝܩ ܘܡܫܬܕܐ ܡܢ ܟܠܗ ܣܘܢܗܕܘܣ ܗܕܐ

Batai, the bound and the banned, the one of Mashmahig, is bound, anathematized, removed, and excommunicated from this entire synod.[32]

Similarly, binding is mentioned explicitly in the Babylonian Talmud as part of the effort of Rava, a contemporary of Aphrahaṭ, to anchor the different stages of excommunication (שמתא) in various biblical verses:[33]

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[31] A direct connection between excommunication and Matthew 18:18 is made in the Synod of 544 (Chabot, *Synodicon orientale*, 78.2–5).

[32] Chabot, *Synodicon orientale*, 34.26–27.

[33] Citations from rabbinic literature follow *Ma'agrim: The Historical Dictionary Project* (http://maagarim.hebrew-academy.org.il/Pages/PMain.aspx), unless stated otherwise.

ומנא לן דכפתינן ואסרינן ועבדינן הרדפה. דכת׳ "הן למות הן לשרושי הן לענש נכסין ולאסורין"

Whence do we learn that we tie up, bind, and do *hardafa*?[34] For it is written: "whether for death or for banishment or for confiscation of goods or for imprisonment" (Ezr 7:26) (b. Moed Qat. 16a)

Rava is most likely referring to actual physical sanctions to be implemented on the banned individual, and thus binding here is used in a more literal sense.[35] Nonetheless, binding and banning are viewed as part of the same procedure.

It is in the language of the incantation bowls though that the verbs 'to bind' and 'to ban' appear alongside one another most often, as in the following Jewish Aramaic bowl:

וישמתון ויסרון יתהון

And may they ban and bind them.[36]

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[34] The meaning of the hapax legomenon *hardafa* is unclear. Following this statement most manuscripts have מאי הרדפה "What is *hardafa*?" However, the answer to the question is missing. In ms. Vatican 108 (and in a gloss in ms. Columbia 294–295 as well as in several medieval commentators) the full version is preserved: מאי הרדפה אמ׳ רב פפא ניצבא דקני "What is *hardafa*? Rav Papa said: poles of reeds." In light of this M. Jastrow (*Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* [New York: Pardes, 1950], 366 [s. v. הרדפה]) already suggested that *hardafa* refers to some form of imprisonment ("within a narrow enclosure of reeds or poles"). J. N. Epstein (*Studies in Talmudic Literature and Semitic Languages* [Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1983], vol. 1, 50–51 [in Hebrew]) noted that נצבי דקני is identical to the Akkadian *naṣṣabu ša qanê*, a reed pipe, possibly used to restrain prisoners. See also Sokoloff, *DJBA*, 771 (s.v נצבא דקני). The understanding of *hardafa* as imprisonment could be further strengthened when comparing the tripartite list of sanctions in the Babylonian Talmud – "we tie up, bind, and <u>do *hardafa*</u>" (כפתינן ואסרינן ועבדינן <u>הרדפה</u>) – with the similar tripartite list given by Aphraḥaṭ that was cited above: "chains, <u>prisons</u>, and fetters" (ܐܣܘ̈ܪܐ ܘܒܝܬ ܐܣܝܪ̈ܐ ܘܩܘܠܪ̈ܐ).

For a recent misguided treatment of this term, see Mokhtarian, "Excommunication," 565 fn. 49, 567–568. The author seems to be unaware of the textual variants and the lexicographic literature and assumes that *hardafa* simply means chasing, pursuing (from the root RDP). The author also wishes to compare the supposed use of מעבדי רידופי 'persecuting acts' and חרמי 'anathemas' in an incantation bowl (IM 76107 [Nippur 11 N 78]) with the Babylonian Talmud's use of *hardafa* and חרם 'anathema'. Unfortunately, *none of these words* actually appear in this bowl. The author had used the outdated edition of S. A. Kaufman ("Appendix C: Alphabet Texts," in M. Gibson, *Excavations at Nippur: Eleventh Season* [Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1975], 151–152) and apparently was unaware that this bowl has received several updated editions, in all of which these words do not appear. Thus, as is made clear in the most recent edition by J. N. Ford ("A New Parallel to the Jewish Babylonian Aramaic Magic Bowl IM 76106 [Nippur 11 N 78]," *AS* 9 [2011]: 276) Kaufman misread הדמי 'body parts' for חרמי 'anathemas' and מעבדי דקיפא 'powerful acts' for מעבדי רדופי 'persecuting acts'. Mokhtarian's other comparison of talmudic material to the bowls (568–569) is equally unconvincing.

[35] The verses in Ezr 7:25–26 describe the authorization to use judicial violence granted by the Achaemenid King to Ezra. It is possible that this echoes similar authorization given by the Sasanian Kings to the Rabbis. Compare Mokhtarian, "Excommunication," 566.

[36] D. Levene, *Jewish Aramaic Curse Texts from Late-Antique Mesopotamia: "May These Curses Go Out and Flee"* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 81 (VA.3381.ln. 13–14).

Similarly, a Syriac incantation bowl reads:

ܠܐܝܢ ܣܐܝܚ ܘܡܚܕܐܒ ܐܘܡܚ ܦܚܢܒ ܘܗ ܚܢܒ ܠܐܓܠܐ ܡܝܢܐ ܐܝܢܐ ܐܘܡܦܐ ܝ ܐܘܚ ܐܠܒ ܡܠܟ ܘܚܘܐܝܐ

Cut, excommunicated and banned, bound, tied and repressed are curses and vows and invocations, outcries, shames and derisions (?).[37]

The verb √*šmt* used here and elsewhere in the Syriac incantation bowls is the Eastern Aramaic form rather than the Classical Syriac √*šmd*, which indicates that the formula as such probably reflects a Jewish or Mandaic formula.[38] Indeed an almost identical formula appears in a Mandaic magical manuscript:

ʿsirtun upkiritun uḥtimitun umšamtitun

You are bound, tied, sealed, and banned.[39]

In a Mandaic bowl the following formula appears, which regards √*šmt* as a synonym of binding:

ʿsir lišanun bpumaiun lgiṭia siptatun rgipia rgilia umšmtia kakaiun

Bound are their tongues in their mouths, clasped are their lips, shaken, hobbled, and banned are their teeth.[40]

The lexical juxtaposition of banning and binding points to proximity of the incantation formulae and the apparent legal ban presented by Aphrahaṭ and the rabbis, once again highlighting the porousness of the artificial boundary between magic and law.[41]

In addition, Aphrahaṭ's detailed graphic description of the ban as fetters, bonds, and prisons is clearly aligned with the visual imagery known from the many magic bowls, where demons are often presented as bound in various ways.[42]

The bowls are usually dated to the sixth to eighth centuries. Aphrahaṭ demonstrates that binding was viewed, both lexically and visually, as integral to the ban already in the fourth century, and most probably even earlier, since Aphrahaṭ clearly presents an already well known practice of his time. This would seem to reflect a common heritage shared by Christians, Jews, and Mandaeans.

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[37] Moriggi, *Syriac Incantation Bowls*, 155 (32.2–3, translation slightly modified). Cf. Moriggi, *Syriac Incantation Bowls*, 89 (16.4).

[38] Moriggi, *Syriac Incantation Bowls*, 89.

[39] Müller-Kessler, *Zauberschalentexte*, 138 (41f DC 43 Aa.35).

[40] E. M. Yamauchi, *Mandaic Incantation Texts* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1967), 226 (20.6–7). Cf. Yamauchi, *Mandaic Incantation Texts*, 272 (27.7–8); Müller-Kessler, *Zauberschalentexte*, 113 (38a CBS 16013.6–7).

[41] See A. Manekin-Bamberger, "Jewish Legal Formulae in the Aramaic Incantation Bowls," *AS* 13 (2015): 69–81.

[42] For a detailed overview, see N. Vilozny, *Lilith's Hair and Ashmedai's Horns: Figure and Image in Magic and Popular Art: Between Babylonia and Palestine in Late Antiquity* (Jerusalem: Yad ben Zvi, 2016) (in Hebrew).

Finally, the inherent connection of banning and binding indicates that the ban was not necessarily conceived by the Aramaic-speaking minorities in the Sasanian Empire as a distancing, banishing, or removal of individuals (or demons) from the community (*ex-communio*), but rather as a form of incapacitation or hindering created by binding and imprisoning.

Ban as Lethal Violence

The direct link of banning and binding highlights the violent aspects of the ban. Indeed, as we have seen, Aphrahaṭ explicitly associates the ban with lethal violence several times. Thus, the use of the ban is equated with the destruction of the house of Ahab:

If then it is to Jehu that they compare the situation, likewise is the priest commissioned to govern the people, and when in power would destroy all his brothers and bind and ban. (Aphrahaṭ, *Demonstrations,* 14:27)[43]

Similarly in his detailed parable, Aphrahaṭ paints a brutal picture of the religious authorities:

But the stewards have forsaken love and peace and friendship and all the rest of the treasure. They have become prison wardens, prosecutors, and executioners. (Aphrahaṭ, *Demonstrations,* 14:44)[44]

This stark imagery might seem to be merely a rhetorical flourish intended to further highlight Aphrahaṭ's criticism of his opponents. Yet, the integral connection between ban and violence and the view of the ban as a form of a curse are also found in the Babylonian Talmud and the incantation bowls.

A clear example is found in the etymology of the term *šamata* 'ban' offered by the famous Babylonian sages Rav and Shmuel, who were active in the first half of the third century:[45]

מאי שמתא? אמר רב: שום מיתה. ושמואל אמר: שמה תהיה.

What is *šamata*? Rav said: name of death (*šum mita*). Shmuel said: there shall be a desolation (*šama tihye*) (b. Moed Qat. 17a)

Rav highlights the lethal aspect of the *šamata* whereas Shmuel focuses on the aspect of desolation. Yet for both the very etymology of the word *šamata* incorporates its potential violence.

Earlier in the same *sugya*, Rava, in his effort to scripturalize the *šamata* links it directly to a verse concerning cursing:

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[43] Wright, *Aphrahat*, 273–274; Lehto, *Demonstrations*, 331–332.
[44] Wright, *Aphrahat*, 297–298; Lehto, *Demonstrations*, 353–354.
[45] See Libson, "Excommunication," 202; cf. Mokhtarian, "Excommunication," 561.

ומנא לן דמשמתינן? דכת׳ "אורו מרוז"

And whence do we learn that we ban? For it is written "curse Meroz" (Jgs 5:23) (b. Moed Qaṭ. 16a)

Several magical formulae also directly link cursing with the ban, as in the following formula:

לשידא לימא הכי הוית דפקוק ודפקוק הוית ליט תביר ומשומת בר טיט בר טמא בשם מורגיז ומוריפת ואיסטמימת

To a demon say the following: "You were DPQWQ and DPQWQ were you, cursed, broken, and banned, Bar Ṭiṭ, Bar Ṭame, in the name of MWRGYZ and MWRYPT and IYSṬMYMT" (b. Shabb. 67a, according to ms. Vatican 108)

As noted by Müller-Kessler, an almost exact parallel formula is found in a Jewish incantation bowl:

ליט ומשמת בר טיט ובר טמא

Cursed and banned, Bar Ṭiṭ, Bar Ṭame.[46]

The ban is also explicitly associated with violence, as in the following example:

אנתי רוחא בישתא ישמתון יתיכי ויתברון יתיכי ויחרמון יתיכי כמה דאית[בר]ן כרכין תקיפין דאישתדרו עליהו נוריאל רפאל ומיכאל.

You, evil spirit, they will ban you and break you and anathematize you, just as mighty fortified cities were br[oke]n, against which Nurael, Raphael, and Michael were sent.[47]

The *šamata* is also personified in many bowls as a harmful demon:

ארהיט שידי ודיוי וסיטני וסטני וליליתא ומבכלתא ומשמתתא וחיסמא בישא וזיקי בישי וכל מידעם ביש

Chase away demons and dews and prosecutors and satans and liliths and tormentors and bans and evil envy and evil blast demons, and anything evil.[48]

At times, death is viewed as the direct result of the ban, as in a bowl published by Naveh and Shaked:

וישתמת ויתבר וי(בד) וישתצי וימגר וימות ותיתי עליה שלהוביתא מן שמיא

And that he may be banned, broken, lost, finished, vanquished, and that he may die, and that a flame may come upon him from heaven.[49]

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[46] Müller-Kessler, *Zauberschalentexte*, 42 (11 HS 3016.6–7); see discussion on p. 45.

[47] Shaked et al., *Jewish Babylonian Aramaic Bowls*, 66 (JBA 4.11–12). Cf., e.g., Shaked et al., *Jewish Babylonian Aramaic Bowls*, 57 (JBA 1.11); 63 (JBA 3.11–12); 68 (JBA 5.9); Levene, *Corpus of Magic Bowls*, 115 (M156.10–11).

[48] Levene, *Corpus of Magic Bowls*, 63. cf. Moriggi, *Syriac Incantation Bowls*, 49 (6.13); 53 (7.11).

[49] J. Naveh and S. Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls: Aramaic Incantations of Late Antiquity* (3rd ed.; Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1998), 174–175 (B9.4). See also Levene, *Curse Texts*, 46 (VA.2416.8); 80 (VA3381.7–8).

A similar connection between death and ban is made in a bowl published by Levene:

ומאן דעל הדין ניבר (..)מומתא ניבר וניתבר ביה זרעיה ויתבר ביה טוהמיה ותיתחתים עליה שמתא ותיתגזר עליה גזירתא ונימות בתיהיא וניפוק בחכתא

Whosoever will transgress against this spell … transgress against this oath, may his seed be spoiled within him and his lineage crushed within him, and may there be sealed against him a ban and decreed upon him a decree and that he die in astonishment and go out (of the world) with a hook.[50]

The lethal outcome of the ban is stressed in a story in b. Ned. 50b, to be discussed below, where a women is said to have died as a result of the *šamata*:

אמר לה: [...] תיהוי ההיא אתתא בשמתא! פקעה ומתה.

He said to her: "[...] May this women be banned!" She burst and died. (b. Ned. 50b)

Several other anecdotes in the Babylonian Talmud also point to violent results of the ban.[51]

The lethal aspect of the ban stressed by Aphrahaṭ should thus not be understood as merely a metaphor or as a hyperbolic description of the result of a social sanction. Rather, the ban was considered in the Sasanian Empire to have very concrete violent manifestations.

The violence attached to the ban though is not a result of human actions but rather points to the involvement of heaven. Such an active role of heavenly powers in the ban is clear and explicit in many of the incantation bowls, a few examples of which we have seen above (e.g., "and that a flame may come upon him from heaven", the ban as a demonic entity). We even find in the bowls the expressions "the ban of God" (שמתא דאלהא) and "the ban from heaven" (שמתא מן שמיא).[52] A similar construction is found in the Babylonian Talmud: "ban of YHWH God of Israel (שמתא דיי אלהי ישראל)" (b. Hul. 132b).[53] Interestingly, it also only in the Babylonian Talmud that we find the term "excommunicated to heaven" (מנודה לשמים) (b. Pes. 113b; b. Moed Qat. 16a).[54] This echoes Aphrahaṭ's own formula, "You are bound, and you are banned from heaven and earth."

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[50] Levene, *Curse Texts*, 76 (VA.3382.13–14).

[51] Cf. the curious anecdote of the banning of a dog in b. Moed Qat. 17a. See also Rav Yosef's פתיחא 'a written ban edict' against a person who behaved violently against the Rabbis (b. Moed Qat. 17a–b). For other punishments rather than death that result from the ban, see b. Avod. Zar. 26a.

[52] For the former, see Shaked et al. *Jewish Babylonian Aramaic Bowls*, 261 (JBA 59.8). For the latter, see Müller-Kessler, *Zauberschalentexte*, 66 (13 HS 3026.1).

[53] Compare the expression found in the incantation bowl cited above in fn. 28: יהא מנודה לטעצש יהוה אלהי ישראל "He will be excommunicated to Ṭ'ṢŠ YHWH God of Israel."

[54] Libson, "Excommunication," 202. Cf. also C. D. Isbell, *A Corpus of the Aramaic Incantation Bowls* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Brandeis University, 1973), 128, 130 (42.5–6), modified: יהי גועור ויהי אסור ויהי מנודה ויהי נזוף אותו הורוח מיפני ביד ייי בדבר אילוה ובמאמר קודש "Let that spirit be rebuked, bound, excommunicated, and chastised from my presence by the Word of God and

Furthermore, in the Babylonian Talmud, in contradistinction to Palestinian sources, death, as a heavenly sanction, is viewed to be a result of the ban.[55] This would also seem to be the background for the emphasis on heaven in Aphrahaṭ's formula: "You are bound and banned from *heaven* and earth."

This intimate connection between ban, curse, and heavenly punishment should help us better understand the semantic value of √*šmd*. Sokoloff, following Brockelmann, divides the entry of √*šmd* into two meanings: 1. 'to curse' and 2. 'to excommunicate'. Both scholars even distinguish between the meanings of √*šmd* in Aphrahaṭ's use of the verb in *Demonstration* 14.[56] However, as we have seen, all of Aphrahaṭ's usages are consistent and display the same semantic range, as do the usages in the Babylonian Talmud and the bowls. In all of them, it seems that excommunication and curse are integrally intertwined in the verb √*šmd* and should not be artificially separated.[57]

It would thus seem that Aphrahaṭ, the rabbis, and the authors of the incantation bowls share the same semantic understanding of the ban, the *šamata*, as a curse which might lead directly to violent heavenly repercussion for the banned individual.

Institutional Abuse of Power

As we have seen, Aphrahaṭ criticizes the priests for abusing their powers and excommunicating people who seem to have insulted them:

But if anyone offends them, even by some insignificant thing, they say to him, "You are bound, you are excommunicated from heaven and earth. Woe even to the one who speaks to him!" (Aphrahaṭ, *Demonstrations,* 14:44)[58]

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by the holy commandment." We wish to thank Avigail Manekin-Bamberger for drawing our attention to this bowl.

[55] Indeed Libson in his comparison between excommunication in Palestine and Babylonian rightly notes: "A unique phenomenon for Babylonia is the emphasis that the excommunicated individual is not only distanced and cursed by humans, but that he is also distanced and cursed by heaven. [...] One can ascertain that the special emphasis on a non-manmade punishment inflicted on the excommunicated individual [...] is a phenomena of central Babylonia." (Libson, "Excommunication," 200–202 [our translation]).

[56] Sokoloff (*Syriac Lexicon*, 1570 [s. v. #2 ܫܡܕ]) places ܘܡܫܡܕܬܐ ܘܡܠܝܛܬܐ ܗܘܬ (Wright, *Aphrahat*, 269) and ܘܡܫܡܕ ܘܢܨܐ ܐܢܬ ܠܟ (Wright, *Aphrahat*, 273) under meaning 1. 'to curse', whereas ܡܫܡܕ ܘܡܠܝܛ ܗܘ ܡܢ ܫܡܝܐ ܘܡܢ ܐܪܥܐ (Wright, *Aphrahat*, 297) is placed under meaning 2. 'to excommunicate'.

[57] The term *anathema* went through a semantic shift and was also regarded as a curse. See K. Berthelot, "The Notion of Anathema in Ancient Jewish Literature," in E. Bons, R. Brucker and J. Joosten (eds.), *The Reception of Septuagint Words in Jewish-Hellenistic and Christian Literature* (WUNT 2/367; Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 35–52. The same association between √*ḥrm* and curse exists also in Syriac, see, e. g., ܢܗܘܘܢ ܚܪܡܐ ܘܠܝܛܐ ܢܗܘܘܢ "May they be in anathema and curse" (Chabot, *Synodicon orientale*, 24.22). On a similar connection between vow and curse, see now A. Manekin-Bamberger, "The Vow-Curse in Ancient Jewish Texts," *HTR* 112 (2019): 340–357.

[58] Wright, *Aphrahat*, 297–298; Lehto, *Demonstrations*, 353–354.

They also use it to establish their supremacy:

Our brothers take pride in the titles that they have received, and through them they bind and excommunicate and receive honour, as if to say, "I am powerful!" (Aphrahaṭ, *Demonstrations,* 14:25)[59]

While one might question whether Aphrahaṭ is here criticizing a real praxis or is instead performing rhetorical exaggeration, once again the similar praxis described in the Babylonian Talmud allows us to favor the former possibility, which also points to a shared social reality.

In Palestine during the Tannaitic period excommunication was used mainly against sages within the rabbinic circle as an effort to consolidate the rabbinic movement.[60] Later, in the Amoraic period in Palestine, excommunication was also used against individuals who offended morality or disregarded rabbinic legislation.[61] However, only relatively few cases of excommunication are documented in Palestinian Amoraic sources.

In Babylonia, in contrast, many more cases of excommunication are reported. Libson notes that in Babylonia excommunication was a means of discipline among the rabbinic circle only at the beginning of the Amoraic period, mainly in order to maintain a unified halakha.[62] Later in the Amoraic period, however, excommunication became restricted to a means of coercion only against the general public.[63] In such cases, excommunication was used to assure appearance before the court and obedience to the rabbis' verdicts.[64] Alongside such legal orientated excommunication a distinct Babylonian development, which has almost no precedent in Palestine,[65] was the use of the ban as a punishment directed

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[59] Wright, *Aphrahat*, 268–269; Lehto, *Demonstrations*, 328.

[60] Libson, "Ḥerem and Nidui," 298–314.

[61] Libson, "Ḥerem and Nidui," 319–320. For further references on excommunication in Palestine, see fn. 9 above.

[62] Libson, "Ḥerem and Nidui," 340. See, e.g., b. Yev. 60b; 121a; b. Nid. 36b; b. Shabb. 19b; b. B. Bat. 111; b. Hul. 132b. See also Libson, "Ḥerem and Nidui," 321–322.

[63] Libson, "Ḥerem and Nidui," 340. Some Babylonian authorities even explicitly state their avoidance of banning rabbinic students: e.g., b. Moed Qat. 17a: אמר רב פפא: תיתי לי דלא שמיתי צורבא מרבנן מעולם "Rav Papa said: May it befall me for I have never banned a member of the rabbinic class."

[64] For the former, see, e.g., b. San. 8a; b. B. Bat. 151b; b. Ketub. 91a; b. Hul. 132b. It was also used to prevent Jews from attending non-Jewish courts, see, e.g., b. B. Qam. 113b–114a; 117a; b. B. Metz. 108b. See also Libson, "Ḥerem and Nidui," 323. For the latter, see, e.g., b. Qidd. 39a; 72b; b. Pes. 50b; 52a; b. Meg. 5a; b. San. 26b; b. Eruv. 63a; b. Moed Qat. 4a; b. San. 25a; b. Hul. 18a; b. Ned. 7b; b. Ketub. 28a; 111a; b. Nid. 13a. See also Libson, "Ḥerem and Nidui," 323–325.

[65] A clear example of the diverging ideologies can be seen in the way the Babylonian Talmud reworks Palestinian traditions concerning excommunication for the sake of honor. Thus in y. Moed Qat. 3:1 (81d) the following dictum appears: זקן שנידה לצורך עצמו, אפילו כהלכה – אַין נידויו נידוי "an elder who excommunicated for his own sake, even according to the law – his excommunication *is not* valid." Interestingly, and very tellingly, the Babylonian version of this (mainly attributed to Palestinian sages) states the exact opposite (b. Moed Qat. 16b–17a): תלמ' חכמים שנידה לכבודו נידויו נידוי "A sage who excommunicated for his own honour – his excommunication

against lay people who were perceived to have slighted the rabbis' honor. This use is documented from the second generation of Amoraim onwards, mainly in central Babylonia, especially in Pumbedita, although it was likely prevalent also elsewhere.[66] The following source formulates this explicitly:

אמר ליה רב הונא בר חיננא: הכי אמר רב חסדא, מתרין ביה שני וחמישי ושני.
הני מילי – לממונא, אבל לאפקירותא – לאלתר.
ההוא טבחא דאיתפקר ברב טובי בר מתנה, אימנו עליה אביי ורבא ושמתוהו.

R. Huna b. Hinena said to him: Rav Hisda said the following: They warn him Monday, Thursday, Monday.
These rulings refer to monetary cases; but for insolence – immediately.
A butcher insulted R. Tubi b. Matna. Abaye and Rava decided to ban him. (b. Moed Qat. 16a)

According to an opinion in the anonymous layer, in a case of disrespect to a rabbinic authority (אפקירותא), one can ban the offender without any warning, unlike banning in the case of monetary offences.

This opinion is followed by a short story which demonstrates the point made. A butcher behaved insolently (איתפקר) towards certain Rabbis. As a result, no less than Rava and Abaye – the most prominent Babylonian sages of their generation and contemporaries of both Aphrahaṭ and the church leaders he criticizes – are said to have banned the butcher.

Several similar stories are associated with Rav Yehuda, the founder of the Pumbedita academy at the end of the third century, and with his disciples.[67] For instance, in a story briefly mentioned above, Rav Yehuda plays a pivotal role:

ההיא דאתיא לקמיה דרב יהודה מנהרדעא לדינא, ואיתחייבת מן דינא.
אמרה ליה: שמואל רבך הכי דן?
אמר לה: ידעת ליה?
אמרה ליה: אין, גוצא ורבה כריסיה, אוכם ורבה שיניה.
אמר לה: לבזוייה קאתית, תיהוי ההיא אתתא בשמתא!
פקעה ומתה.

A woman who came from Nehardea to be judged in front of Rav Yehuda, and she was found liable. She said to him: "Did Shmuel, your master, judge this way?" He said to her: "did you know him?" She said to him: Yes. Short, big bellied, black, and he had a large tooth. He said to her: "You have shown contempt, may this women be banned! She burst and died. (b. Ned. 50b)

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is valid." Similarly, R. Yehoshua b. Levi's dictum in y. Moed Qat. 3:1 (81d): שעל עשרים וארבעה דברים מנדין "Since on account of twenty four issues one excommunicates" is rendered in b. Ber. 19a as בעשרים וארבעה מקומות בית דין מנדין על כבוד הרב "On account of twenty-four issues the court excommunicates for the honour of the rabbi." See discussion in Libson, "Ḥerem and Nidui," 316–318 (see there also his discussion of one or two sources that might indicate that there were opinions in Palestine that it was possible *de iure* to excommunicate for the honor of sages).

[66] Libson, "Ḥerem and Nidui," 335–337, 341 with fn. 268.

[67] Compare Rav Yoseph statement in b. Moed Qat. 17a which, as Libson notes ("Ḥerem and Nidui," 348 fn. 286), most probably refers to a *šamata* for insulting a rabbi.

R. Yehuda rules against a woman in a legal case. In response the women mocks
the physical traits of Shmuel, R. Yehuda's teacher. R. Yehuda takes this as insult
(probably both to Shmuel and himself) and bans her with tragic results.

Another case of Rav Yehuda vehemently protecting his honor is found in the
following story:[68]

<div dir="rtl">

ההוא גברא דהוה בנהרדע׳ דאיקלע לפומבדיתא.

קרב לגבי טבח׳

א׳ל. הב לי בישרא.

אמ׳ ל׳. עכיב עד דשקיל שמע׳ דרב יהוד׳ בר יחזקאל ברישא וניתיב לך.

אמ׳ להו. מאן בר שויסקאל דנקיט מקמאי.

אזלו ואמרו ל׳ לרב יהוד׳.

אפיק שיפוריה ושמתיה

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A man from Nehardea happened to come to Pumbedita. He went to a butcher. He said to
him: "Give me meat." [The butcher] said to him: "Wait until the servant of Rav Yehuda
son of Ezekiel takes first and then I will give you." He said to him: "Who is this son of
Shviskiel[69] who receives ahead of me?" They went and told Rav Yehuda. He took out his
shofar and banned him.[70] (b. Qidd. 70a)

This story describes what seems to be a rather mundane quarrel at the queue to
the butcher. A person arriving from Nehardea is told to wait in line until the ser-
vant of Rav Yehuda completes his order of meat. The newcomer, who possibly
was not even aware of Rav Yehuda's position in Pumbedita, instead of obediently
stepping aside publically vents his anger and not only does he not acknowledge
Rav Yehuda's superior status but even parodies his name. Upon hearing that his
honour was slighted, Rav Yehuda, ever sensitive to insults, immediately bans the
offender, without even conducting a minimal investigation.

According to Aphrahaṭ, the religious authorities of his day do not follow the
required legal process for excommunication:

But with us, we do not lodge complaints with each other, nor before two or three [wit-
nesses], nor [before] the congregation. There is no judgement or accusation, only "bound
and banned!" (Aphrahaṭ, *Demonstration* 14:44)[71]

An almost identical reality is presented in most of the rabbinic sources we have
seen. No judicial process is performed; rather, the rabbis ban their offenders im-
mediately, just like the authorities criticized by Aphrahaṭ.

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[68] Another story is told of a student of Rav Yehuda (b. Avod. Zar. 25b–26a). Cf. b. Moed Qat.
16b.

[69] This is a parody of the name Ezekiel. The word most probably means 'guts of a sheep or
goat' (see the gaonic explanation brought by Sokoloff, *DJBA*, 1118 [s.v. שויסקא]).

[70] On the use of a shofar for banning and on parallels in the bowls, see M. Morgenstern and
J. N. Ford, "On Some Readings and Interpretations in the Aramaic Incantation Bowls and Re-
lated Texts," *BSOAS* 80 (2017): 224–226.

[71] Wright, *Aphrahat*, 297–298; Lehto, *Demonstrations*, 353–354.

It is worth stressing once again that, unlike Aphrahaṭ's harsh denunciation, the use of the ban as response to an insult is presented in the Babylonian Talmud as normative and is neither problematized nor criticized.[72]

Aphrahaṭ's description of the ecclesiastical authorities' honor-driven abuse of the ban should thus not be regarded as a rhetorical exaggeration. Rather, this seems to be based on a prevalent social reality. It would seem that during the same period both Christian and Jewish religious authorities (with titles) in central Babylonia acted similarly and used the ban (delivered orally)[73] also as a legitimate sanction against lay people[74] who were perceived as undermining their authority and honor.

Conclusion

The 14th *Demonstration* by Aphrahaṭ is a sustained critique of the corruption and arrogance of the ecclesiastical authorities in Seleucia-Ctesiphon. It is in this context that Aphrahaṭ mentions the ban rather cursorily in three short sections, as examples of the abuse of institutional power. However, as we have shown in this article, these brief discussions are consistent and can shed light on the way the ban was perceived and implemented in the Sasanian Empire. Aphrahaṭ, in turn, could be better understood and illuminated on the backdrop of the function of the ban in the Babylonian Talmud and the incantation bowls.

An important contribution of Aphrahaṭ is that he has preserved what is possibly the earliest formula of the ban from the Sasanian Empire, a formula which might have been shared also by other minorities.

The juxtaposition of the verbs √*šmd* 'to ban' and √*ʾsr* 'to bind' found in all the occurrences of ban in Aphrahaṭ, is especially prevalent in the incantation bowls, revealing an important lexical and conceptual overlap between magical and legal formulae. In addition, Aphrahaṭ's emphasis on the lethal heavenly violence imbedded in the ban is echoed in many formulae from the incantation bowls and in anecdotes and etymologies in the Babylonian Talmud, pointing to a shared concept of the ban as a curse.

Finally, Apharahṭ's criticism of the ecclesiastical authorities' abuse of the ban as sanction used to uphold their honor and meted without any due procedure against those who supposedly insulted them is strikingly corroborated by reports

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[72] For a critique of the abuse of power in the Babylonian Talmud (not in the context of banning) and its comparison to Aphrahaṭ's *Demonstration* 14, see Herman, *Prince*, 176.

[73] This is different from the later development, which we find in the synods, of excommunication as a written documents signed by bishops (similar to the *anathema* in the western Church). Similarly, the Babylonian Talmud mention a few times the פתיחא, an excommunication edict (b. Moed Qat. 16a; b. B. Qam. 112b), see Libson, "Ḥerem and Nidui," 327–332.

[74] This is in contrast to the Synods where excommunication is used mainly against schismatics.

in the Babylonian Talmud. This helps us better reconstruct a social reality in which leaders of minorities, who did not have the full enforcement apparatus of the Empire at their disposal, used the ban as one of their few means for consolidating their authority and upholding their honour. Aphrahaṭ, in contrast, offers us a rare critical view of these norms, a view which is by and large lacking in the Babylonian Talmud.

Aphrahaṭ and the Church leaders he criticizes are firmly anchored within the Sasanian context and share with the Babylonian Jews terminology, imagery, concepts, and social sanctions, making them at times more similar to each other in their implementation of bans than either is to their co-religionists in the west. Reading Aphrahaṭ alongside the Babylonian Talmud and the incantation bowls contributes to a richer understanding of the *imaginaire*, social dynamics, and authority construction of these minorities within the Sasanian Empire.

Jewish Observance of the Sabbath
in Bardaiṣan's *Book of the Laws of Countries**

Shaye J.D. Cohen

The *Book of the Laws of Countries* (hereafter BLC) is a philosophical dialogue between the Christian sage Bardaiṣan of Edessa (154–222 CE), the main speaker, and three of his disciples.[1] Although it was composed by Philip, one of his disciples, most scholars assume that the dialogue fairly represents the philosophy and teachings of Bardaiṣan, a position that is bolstered by ancient testimonia that attribute this text to Bardaiṣan himself.[2] The dialogue contains a detailed description of the Jewish observance of the Sabbath, specifically a list of the various activities from which Jews refrain on the Sabbath. In this article I would like

[1] The standard English language study of Bardaiṣan (often called Bardesanes in Western languages) is H.J.W. Drijvers, *Bardaiṣan of Edessa* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1966); on BLC see 60–76. See now I.L.E. Ramelli, *Bardaiṣan of Edessa: A Reassessment of the Evidence and a New Interpretation* (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2009); on BLC see 54–90. For the BLC I have used the edition by H.J.W. Drijvers, *The Book of the Laws of Countries: Dialogue on Fate of Bardaiṣan of Edessa* (STT 3; Assen: van Gorcum, 1965), which prints Syriac and English on facing pages; I have also consulted I. Ramelli, *Bardesane di Edessa Contro Il Fato detto anche Liber Legum Regionum* (Bologna: Edizioni Studio Domenicano, 2009), which prints Syriac and Italian on facing pages. There is an old translation in *ANF*, vol. 8, 723–734. The classic edition of the BLC is F. Nau, *Bardesanes. Liber legum regionum* (PS 1.2; Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1907).

[2] Drijvers, *Bardaiṣan*, 67 and 76 ("That the work faithfully renders the ideas of Bardaisan can, however, not be doubted"); similar statement in Ramelli, *Bardaiṣan*, 55. Eusebius cites the BLC as the work of Bardaiṣan in *Praeparatio Evangelica*, 6.10 (ed. K. Mras [2nd ed. with É. des Places], *Eusebius Werke*, vol. 8. *Die Praeparatio evangelica* [GCS 43; Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1982–1983). In *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 4.30 (ed. K. Lake, *Eusebius. Ecclesiastical History* [LCL 153; 265; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926]) he refers to the same work under a different title, *Against Fate*. The date of composition of the BLC is not known; it may have been composed after Bardaiṣan's death. This question does not much matter for my purposes here.

to assess the source of this list of Shabbat prohibitions and attempt to answer the question: How did Bardaiṣan come by this information?

The Book of the Laws of Countries: On Fate

The first two thirds or so of *The Book of the Laws of Countries* discusses the old philosophical question of fate and free will, good and evil, moral responsibility and determinism, the power of the stars and the planets. Bardaiṣan is willing to allow that nature, fate, and the stars play a role in determining the course of our lives even if, in the end, we humans are moral creatures and are responsible for our own actions.[3] Hence the name of the book in its Greek version, at least according to Eusebius, is *On Fate*. The Syriac version – the book is extant in its entirety only in Syriac – is called *The Book of the Laws of Countries* (*ktābā d-nāmosē d-'aṯrawwāṯa*),[4] which is an accurate description of only the last third or so of the book. The argument in this section is that astrological signs do not have any power over humans, as is evident from the fact that individual members of various countries follow their national customs, no matter what astrological sign or star was ascendant when they were born. Hence, concludes Bardaiṣan, the customs of nations are stronger than astrological powers. To make this point, Bardaiṣan briefly surveys some of the salient practices of over a dozen nations, most of them from the region of Edessa or further east (including the "silk-men" of the east and the Brahmans of India), but a few are in the west (Germany, Britain), and at least one nation (the Amazons) is entirely fictional. This anti-astrological argument, which scholars call the argument from *nomima barbarika*, has a long history in Greek philosophy; it begins with Carneades in the middle of the second century BCE and is repeated in the writings of many of his successors, including Philo (see below).[5] No doubt Bardaiṣan was familiar with this scholarly tradition and derived this catalogue of nations and customs from his philosophical education.[6]

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[3] U. Possekel, "Bardaiṣan and Origen on Fate and the Power of the Stars," *JECS* 20 (2012): 515–541.

[4] "Countries" is the standard English translation; "regions" or "districts" might be better.

[5] The classic studies of this anti-astrological argument are: P. Wendland, *Philos Schrift über die Vorsehung* (Berlin: R. Gaertner, 1892), 24–37, and F. Boll, *Studien über Claudius Ptolemäus: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der griechischen Philosophie und Astrologie* (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1894), 181–188 (section entitled "Die *nomima barbarika* als Beweis gegen die Astrologie"). See too H. Chadwick, "Origen, Celsus and the Stoa," *JTS* 48 (1947): 35, which is cited by Chadwick in his note on his translation of Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 5.27 (p. 284).

[6] In fact, Bardaiṣan remarks "I shall now begin to relate these [national laws] in so far as I remember them" (Drijvers, *The Book of the Laws of Countries*, 40.14–15 [Syriac], 41 [English]). He is reciting what he has learned.

But then something new happens, a novel development in the history of the argument from *nomima barbarika*. Bardaiṣan's interlocutor suggests that the uniformity of observance of national customs might be due to the power of the planetary rulers of the earth's zones (singular *qlimā*, from Greek *klíma*) that are posited by the Chaldeans (astrologers). Each planet controls a zone or a region and all its inhabitants. Thus the course of one's life might be determined either by one's horoscope or by the astrological ruler of the region in which one is located. Perhaps, then, the uniformity of observance of national customs proves the power of these regional rulers, who ensure that the inhabitants of their regions follow the same customs.[7]

This pro-astrology argument, which has been called the argument from *astrological geography*,[8] is rejected out of hand by Bardaiṣan: These regional rulers are fictional, he says, having been invented by the Chaldeans for the sole purpose of rebutting the argument from the *nomima barbarika*. Bardaiṣan then advances three specific arguments against the idea that astrological rulers of regions are responsible for the observance of the national customs in their regions. First, not all members of a national group necessarily observe the national customs the same way. In his survey of the national customs, Bardaiṣan had already observed that some Hindus eat human flesh, while other Hindus are vegetarian.[9] How can this be explained if all the inhabitants of India are equally under the control of their regional ruler? Second, human sages and rulers can change the laws of their provinces. Bardaiṣan adduces two specific examples. The Romans, after conquering Arabia, put an end to circumcision that had been practiced there; King Abgar of Edessa put an end to the self-emasculation that had been practiced by the devotees of Atargatis (Dea Syria). These facts are hard to understand, says Bardaiṣan, if national customs are under the tutelage of regional astrological rulers.[10] Third and last, some nations are scattered throughout the world, but wherever they live they follow the same customs. This argument is developed in two complementary ways: (a) Since people living in many different regions observe the same customs, they clearly are not under the influence of regional astrological rulers; (b) since they follow their own customs, no matter where they live, and ignore the customs of the people among whom they live, they clearly are not under the influence of regional astrological rulers. To

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[7] Drijvers, *The Book of the Laws of Countries*, 54.5–10 (Syriac), 55 (English).

[8] For astrological geography, also called mundane astrology, see Possekel, "Bardaiṣan and Origen," note 62, who refers to E. Honigmann, *Die sieben Klimata* (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1929) and T. Barton, *Ancient Astrology* (London: Routledge, 1994), 179–185. The phrase "astrological geography" goes back to Boll, *Studien*, 185 (who credits Schleiden).

[9] Drijvers, *The Book of the Laws of Countries*, 54.20–23 (Syriac), 55 (English).

[10] Drijvers, *The Book of the Laws of Countries*, 56.9–19 (Syriac), 57 (English) and 58.20–24 (Syriac), 59 (English). On King Abgar and the followers of Atargatis, see H. J. W. Drijvers, *Cults and Beliefs at Edessa* (Leiden: Brill, 1980), 76–78.

illustrate these arguments Bardaiṣan adduces Persians and Magians briefly, and Jews and Christians at greater length.[11]

These three arguments seem to be Bardaiṣan's original contribution to this debate about astrology; they are not attested anywhere before Bardaiṣan, and their later appearances, all in the works of Christian authors, may well derive from Bardaiṣan. Before Bardaiṣan the promoters of the anti-astrological argument from the *nomima barbarika* had not responded to the counter-argument from astrological geography or cited as anti-astrological evidence the trans-regional character of Jews and Christians. Bardaiṣan is advancing an original set of arguments.[12]

Bardaiṣan on the Jews

Here is Bardaiṣan on the Jews:[13]

ܘܬܘܒ ܡܢ ܟܠ ܡܕܡ ܕܝ ܡܬܚܙܝܐ ܠܘܩܒܠ ܗܕܐ ܠܓܒܪܐ ܕܝܗܘܕܝܐ܆ ܘܬܚܙܝܬܐ ܘܝܗܘܕܝܐ܇ ܐܦܠܐ ܚܕܐ ܠܗܘܢ ܚܠܛܐ܂ ܘܬܘܒ ܒܟܠܗ ܗܕܐ ܒܝܬ ܓܒܪܐ܂ ܠܩܘܒܠܗܝ ܐܬܚܙܝ ܘܕܝ ܗܘܐ ܘܝܗܘܕܝܐ ܗܢܐ ܠܗܘܢ ܂ ܐܠܐ ܡܢܗܘܢ ܠܡܣܥܪ ܡܕܡܐ ܂ ܘܬܘܒ ܡܚܘܝܝܢ ܕܝ ܒܟܠܗܝ ܕܐܝܢܐ ܂ ܐܦܠܐ ܕܒܝܬ ܠܡܐ ܂ ܘܬܘܒ ܓܒܪܐ ܚܕ ܕܗܢܐ ܂ ܐܠܐ ܐܦ ܟܕܢܐ ܡܢ ܐܘܪܚܐ ܗܝ ܐܘ ܒܚܕ ܐܘ ܬܪܝܢ ܐܘ ܚܕ ܕܗܢܐ ܐܘ ܒܟܠܗܝܢ ܂ ܘܝܕ ܘܒܒܬܗܘܢ ܐܚܕܝܢ܆ ܘܒܝܕ ܗܘܐ ܡܕܡ ܕܚܕܝܬ ܂ ܠܐ ܗܘܐ ܡܢ ܚܕ ܡܕܡ ܡܢ ܚܕ ܡܠܟܐ܆ ܐܠܐ ܚܝܠ ܕܝܗܘܕܝܐ ܕܝܗܘܕܝܐ ܂ ܐܠܐ ܟܕ ܡܛܠ ܗܕܐ ܂ ܐܝܟ ܐܬܒܝܕ ܘܒܪܟܟܢ ܠܡܐ ܂ ܘܕܝ ܕܝܗܘܕܝܐ ܕܝܗܘܕܝܐ ܂ ܘܝܗܘܕܝܐ ܒܝܕ ܗܘܢ ܂ ܘܝܗܘܕܝܐ ܒܝܕ ܗܘܢ ܂ ܠܩܐܕܬܐ ܠܐ ܪܗܛܐ ܂ ܐܝܕܐ ܕܝ ܠܡܬܒܐ ܡܛܫܐ ܡܢܗܘܢ ܂ ܚܠܝܠ ܡܢ ܚܕ ܚܕܐ ܂ ܘܟܠ ܡܢ ܚܒ ܗܘܐ ܡܢ ܚܕ ܡܕܡ܆ ܘܟܠ ܕܬܚܝܬ ܘܠܡܬܒܐ ܂ ܠܐ ܗܘܐ ܣܘܡܬܐ ܂ ܐܠܐ ܝܕܥ ܗܢܝ ܂ ܐܠܐ ܚܝܠ ܕܝܗܘܕܝܐ

[11] Persians and Magians: Drijvers, *The Book of the Laws of Countries*, 54.23–56.9 (Syriac), 55–57 (English); Jews: 56.21–58.20 (Syriac), 57–59; Christians: 58.24–60.16 (Syriac), 59–61 (English). On these arguments, see Boll, *Studien*, 185: "Der erste folgert aus der Gleichheit der Sitten und Gesetze bei den Angehörigen eines und desselben Volkes, dass nicht der Einfluss der Gestirne, sondern die Willkür menschlicher Einrichtungen das Leben des Einzelnen bestimmt. Der zweite dagegen folgert gerade umgekehrt aus der moralischen Eigenart einzelner Bewohner eines Landes, dass die Völkersitten nicht durch die Klimata und also auch nicht durch die Sterne bedingt sind, die über jedes Klima oder jeden Teil der *oikoumene* nach Ansicht der Astrologen herrschen." S. Lieberman cites Bardaiṣan as if he agreed with the Talmudic sages that "no astrological sign [has power] over Israel" (b. Shabb. 156a), but Bardaiṣan, unlike the Sages, does not attribute any special status in this regard to the Jews. For the Sages astrology has no power over Israel because of Israel's special relationship with God and Torah; for Bardaiṣan astrology has no power over any nation, because astrology has no power. Correct accordingly S. Lieberman, *Greek in Jewish Palestine* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1941; repr. 1965), 99–100.

[12] That the argument for and against astrological geography is extant exclusively in Christian authors of whom Bardaiṣan is the first was observed by Boll, *Studien*, 185–186. Bardaiṣan's originality was argued in 1910 by F. Haase (see Drijvers, *Bardaiṣan of Edessa,* 34) and repeated by Ramelli, *Bardaiṣan*, 24.

[13] Drijvers, *The Book of the Laws of Countries*, 56.21–58.20 (Syriac), 57–59 (English). The translation is that of Drijvers with some slight modifications. This passage is also extant in Greek in Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica*, 6.10.42–43 (ed. Mras [with des Places], *Die Praeparatio evangelica*, 342) and in Latin (translated from a lost Greek version) in *Recognitiones Clementinae* 9:28 (ed. B. Rehm and G. Strecker, *Die Pseudoklementinen* [3rd ed.; Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1992], 308–311). These translations are shortened and edited versions of the Syriac.

ܕܢܒܝ. ܐܠܐ ܡܚܘܝܢܐ ܚܕܐ ܥ ܐܢܐ ܕܦܩܝܕ ܠܗ ܣܓܝܐܐ ܕܡܗܝܡܢܐ ܕܡܗܝܡܢ ܐܘ ܗܢܐ ܐܘ ܗܢܐ ܡܢܝܟܐ: ܐܘ ܗܢܐ: ܘܣܝܡܐ: ܐܘ
ܢܗܝܪܐ ܐܘ ܢܚܒ: ܐܘ ܢܚܕ ܐܕܐ ܗܝ ܥ ܓ ܥ ܬܗܘܐ: ܘܚܠܡܗ: ܘܗܠܡܗ: ܗܢܪ ܐܢܫܐ ܟܠܗܝ ܕܢܬܗܘܡ ܗܟܐ ܠܗ ܡܚܠܗ ܚܕܝܢ.
ܐܦ ܐܝܣܛܘܣܐ ܥ ܬܗܘܐ ܐܢܫ ܟܕ ܠܗܘܢ. ܐܠܐ ܗܘܐ ܐܘ ܟܝܡ ܥܝܢܐ ܕܩܪ ܐܢܫܐ ܕܩܪ ܐܢܫܐ ܟܠܗܘܢ ܚܕܝܢܝ. ܚܕ ܚܕ ܚܕܡܟܐ
ܗܝܟ ܐܦ ܡܠܝ ܐܦ ܡܚܠܝܢܝ: ܘܡܚܕܬܝܢܝ ܘܡܚܕܝܢܝ. ܡܠܝ ܚܢܐ ܠܗ ܗܘܐ, ܘܥܒܕܝܠܢܝ ܘܬܢܝܟܐ.

But I shall tell you another thing too, more convincing than all the rest to fools and unbelievers.

All the Jews that have received the law of Moses circumcise their male children on the eighth day, without waiting for the coming of stars and without revering the law of the place.[14] And the star that rules their zone[15] does not have the power to rule them. But whether they are in Edom or in Arabia, in Greece or in Persia, in the North or in the South, they observe the law laid upon them by their fathers. And clearly they do not do this because of their nativity, for it is impossible that on the eighth day, when they are circumcised, Mars should be in such a position with regard to all Jews, that iron comes over them and their blood is spilt.[16]

Everywhere they are they do not worship idols, and on one day in the week they and their children desist from all work, from all building, and from all travel, and from buying and selling. Neither do they kill an animal on the Sabbath, kindle a fire, or render judgment. And among them there is found no one who is charged by fate on the Sabbath to be judged and found innocent or to be judged and found guilty,[17] or to tear down[18] or to build, or to do a single one of those things which all people do who have not received this law. They have other precepts also, through which they lead a life different from that of other people, although on this day too they beget and are begotten, fall ill and die, for over these things humans have no power.

This passage is remarkable for its tone and its content. Although written by a Christian author, it is completely devoid of anti-Jewish animus. For Bardaiṣan the Jews are simply one people of many, and their customs are simply just another set of national customs. What makes the Jews useful for Bardaiṣan is the same thing that makes Christians useful: They live in many areas, they maintain their customs no matter where they live, and their customs make them different from their neighbors. Thus Jews, like Christians, provide useful evidence against astrological geography. No hint that the Christians are the true people of God, and that the Jews are not; no hint that the Jews miscomprehend the Torah and that they observe their laws in vain; no hint that the Jews have rejected God, and that God has rejected them. Bardaiṣan identifies himself as a Christian ("us Christians") but is free of the anti-Jewish animus that will characterize so many of his Christian contemporaries and successors (like Aphrahaṭ and Ephrem).

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[14] That is, the law set up by the astrological ruler of the region (Drijvers, *The Book of the Laws of Countries*, 54.10–60.14 [Syriac], 55–61 [English]). It is possible that Bardaiṣan means the law established by the human rulers of the place (Drijvers, *The Book of the Laws of Countries*, 40.11 [Syriac], 41 [English]), but this seems to be a less natural reading.

[15] Syriac *qlm'* from Greek *klíma*.

[16] Cf. the amazing story in y. Avod. Zar. 2:2 (end) (41a) (ed. Sussman, col. 1386). This story requires study.

[17] Or "to be judged and be victorious, or to be judged and be condemned."

[18] The Greek version adds "a house" which Drijvers follows.

The passage's content is no less remarkable than its tone. What does Bardaiṣan know about the Jews? He knows that they circumcise their sons on the eighth day, that they do not worship idols, and that they do not do any manner of work on the Sabbath. Bardaiṣan knows that the Jews have many other precepts too by which they are distinguished from other people, but he mentions only these three. He provides no details about circumcision and the avoidance of idols, but he does provide details about the avoidance of labor on Shabbat. Here in list form is his description of the Jewish Sabbath prohibitions; the Jews desist from all labor, specifically:

 1. They do not build
 2. They do not travel
 3. They do not buy
 4. They do not sell
 5. They do not kill an animal
 6. They do not kindle a fire
 7. They do not render judgment
 8. They do not go to court to be judged
 9. They do not tear down
10. They do not build

If we acknowledge the repetition of building (nos. 1 and 10), a repetition for which I have no explanation,[19] we are left with nine Sabbath prohibitions.

This is an extraordinarily detailed list, perhaps the most detailed list of Sabbath prohibitions from any ancient non-Jewish author.[20] One Greek writer of the mid second century BCE reports that the Jews neither bear arms nor farm on the Sabbath. A slightly younger contemporary, a poet, seems to allude to the Jewish abstention from using fire on the Sabbath. One Roman poet of the Augustan age seems to know that Jews would not travel on the Sabbath; another seems to

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[19] Ute Possekel reminds me that in Syriac the root *bny* 'to build', can mean 'to build up, edify, compose', and the root *str* 'destroy, tear down', can mean 'to refute an argument' (see the standard lexica), thus raising the possibility that the first reference to "building" is a prohibition of construction, while the latter (together with its antonym) is a prohibition of eristic debate. This prohibition of arguing pro and con is thus related to the adjacent prohibition of going to court. The prohibition of inappropriate speech on the Sabbath is certainly attested; see the discussion in Y. Gilat, *Studies in the Development of the Halakha* (Bar Ilan University Press, 1992), 255–258 (in Hebrew), but I do not see how Bardaiṣan could have meant the verbs "build/tear down" to be understood in a metaphorical sense without alerting the reader. Surely the more natural reading is to understand the prohibition of building/destroying as prohibitions of construction and destruction. As for the repetition of the prohibition of building, perhaps this is simply a *lapsus calami*. (If we insist on an explanation with the dignity of a Latin rhetorical term, we may call this repetition an *inclusio*.)

[20] For a survey of the comments of Greek and Latin authors on the Sabbath, see P. Schäfer, *Judaeophobia: Attitudes towards the Jews in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 82–92, and Doering, *Schabbat*, 285–289.

know that Jews would not conduct business on the Sabbath.[21] Ancient Christian authors do not reveal more detailed knowledge of Sabbath prohibitions.[22] So we cannot appeal to a literary tradition of non-Jews detailing the Sabbath prohibitions of Jews. Everyone in antiquity who knew anything about the Jews knew that they refrain from work on the Sabbath, but Bardaiṣan knows more details than anyone else and knows details unknown to anyone else. Whence comes this knowledge?

Perhaps he knew some of these prohibitions from Scripture. The prohibition of kindling a fire is stated explicitly in Exodus 35:3.[23] The prohibition of travel was deduced, by some Jews at least, from Exodus 16:29.[24] The prohibition of buying and selling might easily be deduced from Jeremiah 17:19–27 and Nehemiah 13:15–22.[25] The other prohibitions, however – killing an animal,[26] sitting as judge, participating in a judicial proceeding, tearing down, and building – have no basis in Scripture and must have reached Bardaiṣan from somewhere else.[27] Whence?

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[21] References and discussion in Shaye J. D. Cohen, "'Common Judaism' in Greek and Latin Authors," in F. Udoh et al. (eds.), *Redefining First-Century Jewish and Christian Identities: Essays in Honor of E. P. Sanders* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 69–87, at 73–74 (referring to Agatharchides, Meleager, Tibullus, Horace). The exact reference of some of these passages is elusive.

[22] Aphrahaṭ, for example, provides no details about the Jewish observance of the Sabbath beyond what is stated in the Torah; see J. Neusner, *Aphrahat and Judaism* (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 41–50 (a translation of *Demonstration* 13). For a survey, see H. Schreckenberg, *Die christlichen Adversus-Judaeos-Texte und ihr literarisches Umfeld (1.-11. Jh.)* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1982), index s. v. Sabbatruhe.

[23] Bardaiṣan writes ܢܘܪܐ ܠܐ ܡܢܚܬܝ 'they do not kindle (*literally* lay down) a fire'. Compare 1 Kings 18:23 ואש לא ישימו ואש לא אשים … which is rendered in the Peshitta as ܘܢܘܪܐ ܠܐ ܢܣܝܡ … ܘܢܘܪܐ ܠܐ ܐܣܝܡ …. See too John 18:18 ܢܘܪܐ ܗܘܘ ܡܢܚܬܝ 'they were kindling a fire'. Eusebius' Greek version reads οὔτε πυρὶ χρῶνται and the Latin version of the Clementine Recognitions reads *nec igni utuntur* 'they do not use a fire'. Perhaps we may see here a reflection of an inner-Jewish debate about the interpretation of Exodus 35:3, with one side (the rabbinic Sages) arguing that kindling a fire is prohibited on the Sabbath but using (for light, for warmth, etc.) a fire which had been kindled before the Sabbath is permitted, and the other side (Samaritans, medieval Karaites, perhaps ancient Sadducees, and the book of Jubilees) arguing that no fire may remain lit on the Sabbath, no matter when it was kindled. On this debate, see Doering, *Schabbat*, 96–97, 328–331, and 492–493. The Syriac Bardaiṣan attributes to the Jews a practice consonant with that of the rabbinic sages, while the Greek Bardaiṣan attributes to them a practice consonant with that of the Karaites. It is equally possible, and I think more likely, that the Greek and Latin translators have correctly interpreted Bardaiṣan's statement. Bardaiṣan said "kindle" but meant "allow to remain burning." Compare *Didascalia Apostolorum*, 21: ܕܡܬܐܒܠ ܠܐ ܡܢܚܬ ܢܘܗܪܐ (ܢܘܪܐ) (edited A. Vööbus, *Didascalia Apostolorum* [CSCO 401–402, 407–408; Leuven: Peeters, 1979], 216.12), which is translated by Vööbus 'he who mourns kindles no light' but which clearly means 'he who mourns uses no light' – he sits in the dark.

[24] Cohen, "Origen," 165–175.

[25] And perhaps Amos 8:5 and Isaiah 58:13.

[26] I am not sure whether Bardaiṣan means "slaughtering," "hunting," or "killing insects."

[27] Nor did Bardaiṣan use the New Testament as a source; otherwise he would have mentioned the prohibitions of harvesting, healing (Matthew 12 and parallels), and carrying (John 5:10).

Bardaiṣan and the Jews of Edessa

Is it possible that Bardaiṣan learned this list of Sabbath prohibitions by observing the behavior of the Jews of Edessa or by chatting with them? Certainly some of the nine prohibitions detailed by Bardaiṣan have a public dimension that might have been noticed by non-Jews. For instance, John Chrysostom has a wonderful description of Jewish merchants in Antioch (?) who, at the approach of the Sabbath on Friday afternoon, close up shop and refuse all offers for their merchandise.[28] Did Bardaiṣan observe the same behavior in Edessa? And certainly this section of BLC – the response to the argument from astrological geography – gives the impression that Bardaiṣan is recounting information that he knows from personal experience or from living contemporaries: He speaks about recent events (the Roman takeover of Arabia), about local history (King Abgar of Edessa), about the neighbors across the border (Persians), and about "us Christians." Perhaps, then, when he is speaking about Jews, although he refers to the fact of their dispersion throughout the world, he has in mind the Jews of Edessa. If this is correct, we have recovered an important witness to the religious life of the Jews of Edessa, a subject about which we otherwise have no information. Various Christian texts imply that there was a Jewish community in the city, including a synagogue; various scholars have suggested a connection between the Jews of Edessa and the Jews of Adiabene, but no evidence has yet surfaced that reveals the inner life of the community.[29] Hence the potential value of this list of Bardaiṣan. Here at last is a window into an important aspect of the religious life of the Jews of Edessa. We get a sense of how they observed the Sabbath. Particularly interesting are the implications of number seven (and perhaps eight) on the list, according to which the Jewish community of Edessa enjoyed some kind of judicial autonomy, with its own court and its own judges. The court was closed on the Sabbath.[30]

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[28] R. Wilken, *John Chrysostom and the Jews* (Berkeley: University of California, 1983), 66.

[29] On Jews and Judaism in Edessa, see J. B. Segal, "The Jews of North Mesopotamia," in Y. M. Grintz and Y. Liver (eds.), *Sepher Segal: Studies in honor of Moshe Tsevi (Moses Hirsch) Segal* (Jerusalem: ha Hevrah le heqer ha miqra be yisrael, 1964), 32*–63*, summarized in his *Edessa the Blessed City* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 41–43, 67–69, 100–104. See too H. J. W. Drijvers, "Edessa und das judische Christentum," *VC* 24 (1970): 4–33, at 10–12 (reprinted in his *East of Antioch: Studies in Early Christianity* [London: Variorum Reprints, 1984]) and I. Gafni et al., "Edessa," in *EJ*, vol. 6, 146–147. Three Jewish inscriptions from Edessa do not reveal much: D. Noy and H. Bloedhorn (eds.), *Inscriptiones Judaicae Orientis*, vol. 3. *Syria and Cyprus* (TSAJ 99; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 128–132.

[30] On the judicial and political autonomy of Jewish diaspora communities, see the introduction to J. M. S. Cowey and K. Maresch, *Urkunden des Politeuma der Juden von Herakleopolis (144/3–133/2 v. Chr.) (P. Polit. Iud.)* (Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 2001).

This interpretation is possible, to be sure, but I do not see any way either to prove it or to disprove it.[31] While it is possible that Bardaiṣan has given us a rare and valuable glimpse of the religious life of the Jews of Edessa, there are at least two other possibilities that we must consider.

Bardaiṣan and Philo

The *De Providentia* of Philo is extant only in Armenian, but its authenticity as a genuine work of Philo is generally acknowledged by modern scholars.[32] In this text, Philo – as Bardaiṣan would do a century and a half later – argues that we humans are moral creatures, responsible for our own actions. Part of Philo's argument is drawn from the *nomima barbarika*, and, since this is Philo, the Jews head the list of nations whose customs are surveyed. Philo writes as follows:[33]

Have not the Jews freely chosen the law of circumcision, a law which they have never neglected but which they have transmitted instead to their descendants with such fidelity that no nativity and no constellation has been able to remove it? It is the law of the spirit which rules over them, not a horoscope. Likewise they cease from work on the seventh day, which they call the Sabbath. Furthermore, they abstain from those meats which the law does not permit. Now it cannot be said that one and the same nativity has befallen all of them, by which they are forcibly constrained to observe what God mandated to Moses. If therefore Jews display from the womb a nativity that differs in season, hour, and day, and nonetheless have a single manner and order of life and discipline of law, how can we say that all men are subject to horoscopes?[34]

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[31] H. Newman assumes as self-evident that Bardaiṣan is an eye-witness to the religious behavior of the Jews of Edessa, and that his testimony supports the normativity of rabbinic Judaism in diaspora communities. In contrast, I am arguing here that neither of these two assumptions is self-evident. See H.I. Newman, "The Normativity of Rabbinic Judaism: Obstacles on the Path to a New Consensus," in L.I. Levine and D.R. Schwartz (eds.), *Jewish Identities in Antiquity: Studies in Memory of Menahem Stern* (TSAJ 130; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 165–171.

[32] The authenticity of the *De Providentia* was first established by Wendland, *Philos Schrift über die Vorsehung*. On the Armenian version of the *De Providentia*, see M. Olivieri, "Philo's *De Providentia:* a Work between Two Traditions," in S. M. Lombardi and P. Pontani (eds.), *Studies on the Ancient Armenian Version of Philo's Works* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 87–124.

[33] Philo, *De Providentia*, 1.84; my translation/paraphrase is based on the Latin of J.B. Aucher, which in turn is the basis for the French of Mireille Hadas-Lebel, and the German of Ludwig Früchtel. See Hadas-Lebel, *Les oeuvres de Philon d'Alexandrie*, vol. 35. *De Providentia* (Paris: Cerf, 1973), 194–197 (who also prints Aucher's Latin) and L. Früchtel, *Philo von Alexandria. Die Werke in deutscher Übersetzung,* vol. 7 (ed. L. Cohn et al.; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1964), 317.

[34] Nonne et Judaei legem circumcisionis libero arbitrio elegerunt, quam nusquam dimisere, sed potius per successionem posteris suis praebuere: ita ut nec natalitia, neque constellationes potuerint eam tollere? Lex enim mentis imperat eis, non genethlialogia. Eodem modo cessant ab operibus die septima, quam Sabbatum ipsi appellant. Necnon ab illis carnibus, quas lex non permisit, abstinent. Nequit autem dici, quod unum ac idem omnibus contigerit natalitium quo adigantur per vim id servare quod Moysi Deus in mandatis dedit. Si ergo diversis temporibus horis ac diebus Judaei praeseferunt ex utero natalitium, et nihilominus una est illis ratio vitae ac ordo legisque disciplina, quomodo universos homines dicamus genethlialogiae esse subjectos.

Philo provides no details. His brief survey of Jewish circumcision, abstention from labor on the Sabbath, and avoidance of forbidden meat, closely resembles Bardaiṣan's survey of Jewish circumcision, the avoidance of images, and the abstention from labor on the Sabbath. The argument is the same: Do not all Jews, no matter their nativity and no matter their horoscope, observe these laws? Philo, however, does not yet know the counter-argument from regional rulers and astrological geography, and the response to it. That is Bardaiṣan's innovation, but otherwise this passage of Philo bears a striking resemblance to our passage of Bardaiṣan.[35]

In another passage Philo provides a catalogue of Sabbath prohibitions that resembles Bardaiṣan's. Philo argues that a true sage ought to be righteous as well as to be seen as righteous. Consequently, even those philosophically minded Jews who recognize the primacy of the inner (or allegorical or metaphorical) meaning of the commandments ought not to slight their literal observance, because a sage should behave in a way that will not upset his brethren.[36] Philo illustrates this argument by citing a few commandments that a sage must not slight. His first example is the Sabbath; he writes as follows:[37]

It is quite true that the Seventh Day is meant to teach the power of the Unoriginate and the non-action of created beings. But let us not for this reason abrogate the laws laid down for its observance and light fires or till the ground or carry loads or institute proceedings in court or judge[38] or demand the restoration of deposits or recover loans or do all else that we are permitted to do as well on days that are not festival seasons.

Philo's list of Sabbath prohibitions is:

1. Not to light fires
2. Not to till the ground
3. Not to carry loads
4. Not to institute proceedings in court
5. Not to judge
6. Not to demand restoration of deposits
7. Not to recover loans

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[35] Wendland noticed the striking parallel between Philo and Bardaiṣan, and, as a good German scholar of the nineteenth century, suggested a common source. A simpler suggestion is that Philo introduced the Jews into the *nomima barbarika* argument, and Bardaiṣan was inspired by Philo. But did Bardaiṣan know Philo? See below.

[36] Cf. Paul, 1 Corinthians 8.

[37] Philo, *De Migratione Abrahami*, 91 (translated in F. H. Colson, *Philo*, vol. 4 [LCL 261; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1932], 182–185). [After completing this essay I discovered that D. R. Schwartz, cited by A. Shremer, also noted the parallel between Bardaiṣan and this passage of Philo. See A. Shremer, "The Religious Orientation of Non-Rabbis in Second-Century Palestine," in Z. Weiss et al. (eds.), *"Follow the Wise": Studies in Jewish History and Culture in Honor of Lee Levine* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2010), 319–341, at 341 fn. 97.]

[38] Colson translates "act as jurors."

Philo and Bardaiṣan have three prohibitions in common: not to light a fire, not to render judgment, not to go to court.[39] In addition Bardaiṣan's prohibitions of buying and selling are thematically related to Philo's prohibitions of demanding restoration of deposits and recovering loans. In spite of these overlaps Philonic Sabbath piety does not precisely line up with Bardaiṣan's; nowhere does Philo explicitly prohibit traveling, killing an animal, tearing down, or building on the Sabbath. However, Bardaiṣan's list is similar to Philo's in length and content, and the overlap between them, as well as the parallel between the BLC and Philo's *De Providentia*, suggest that Bardaiṣan may well have derived at least some of his information about the Sabbath from Philo.[40] If this is correct, Bardaiṣan's list of Sabbath prohibitions tells us little about the Jews of Edessa in the third century but may tell us something about Hellenistic Jewry at an earlier time (first century CE?). The major objection here is that there is little evidence to support, and much reason to doubt, the suggestion that Bardaiṣan knew the works of Philo.[41]

Bardaiṣan and the Mishnah

There is one more possibility to explore. Edessa is about 400 miles (600 km) by air to the Galilee, where the sages were creating the Mishnah at precisely the same time that Bardaiṣan was discussing fate and astral determinism with his students, and a little more than 400 miles (600 km) by air to Maḥoza, the heartland of what would soon become rabbinic Babylonia. Edessenes spoke Aramaic, as did the rabbinic sages. Did the Jews of Edessa have contacts with the rabbinic sages of either Roman Palaestina or Parthian/Sassanian Babylonia? Did they know the Mishnah? Or perhaps may we imagine that Bardaiṣan had a conversation with a rabbinic Jew and thus learned about Jewish Sabbath prohibitions?

The Mishnah lists thirty-nine labors prohibited on the Sabbath. Four of Bardaiṣan's nine prohibited labors appear on the Mishnah's list: not to light a fire, not to kill an animal, not to tear down, not to build.[42] The recurrence of the oppositional pair of tearing down/building is noteworthy, since this pair of prohibitions is first attested in ancient Judaism in this Mishnah. Also noteworthy is the fact that all the remaining prohibitions on Bardaiṣan's list are also prohibited

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[39] Bardaiṣan's prohibition of going to court for trial is not exactly the same as Philo's prohibition of instituting legal proceedings, but they are close.

[40] For the Sabbath prohibitions according to Philo, see Doering, *Schabbat*, 315–366. Other lists of Sabbath prohibitions appear in Jubilees 2:29–30 and 50:6–13 and Damascus Covenant 10:14–11:18, but neither appears to have any connection with Bardaiṣan.

[41] Drijvers, "Edessa und das judische Christentum," 25, flirts with the idea that Bardaiṣan knew Philo (see too Ramelli, *Bardaiṣan of Edessa*, 23). D. T. Runia, *Philo in early Christian Literature* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1993), 22 fn. 90 reports that Drijvers later abandoned this suggestion. Ute Possekel reminds me that the works of Philo were never translated into Syriac.

[42] M. Shabb. 7:2. The Mishnah prohibits both slaughtering and hunting.

by rabbinic tradition, if not on the Mishnah's canonical list of prohibited Sabbath labors then elsewhere, if not exactly as formulated by Bardaiṣan then close to it: not to travel,[43] not to judge (and by extension not to go to court),[44] not to buy and sell.[45]

Bardaiṣan's list is entirely consistent with rabbinic Sabbath piety. May we conclude that Bardaiṣan's list of Sabbath prohibitions is evidence – our first and only piece of ancient evidence – for the extension of rabbinic piety from Roman Palaestina (or perhaps Parthian/Sassanian Babylonia) to Edessa? As before, a definitive response is beyond our grasp, but I believe that the answer is more likely to be a no than a yes. To establish a connection between the two documents or between the two pieties we should like to see some unusual law, some striking expression, some unusual observance in common.[46] In our case the strongest evidence for a connection between Bardaiṣan's list and the Mishnah is that both have the paired prohibitions of tearing down and building. That is all; is that enough? Bardaiṣan does not mention any of the most characteristic rulings and concerns of Mishnah Shabbat, such as the prohibition of transporting an item from one domain to another, the construction of an *eruv*, the prohibition of moving even within one's domain an item which has no permitted use on the Sabbath, the distinction between acts that are prohibited but non-culpable and acts that are prohibited and culpable, the importance of preparing food and utensils in advance of the Sabbath, etc. Had Bardaiṣan mentioned any of these there would be no doubt that he – or his informant or perhaps the Jewish community of Edessa – is familiar with Mishnaic law and rabbinic piety. But he does not mention any of these. I think the burden of proof is upon the one who would argue that rabbinic Jews could be found in Edessa; an ambiguous passage from the BLC of Bardaiṣan is not sufficient. The more natural assumption is that the Jews of Edessa were a Hellenistic Jewish diaspora community; such communities, to be sure, may have had connections with the rabbinic sages of Roman Palaestina, but ultimately had a separate existence.[47] The Jews of Edessa did not look to the Talmudic sages for guidance and instruction. Edessa is nowhere mentioned in either the Talmud of the land of Israel or the Talmud of Babylonia.[48]

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[43] Not to ride on an animal m. Betzah 5:2; not to travel more than 2000 cubits m. Sotah 5:3. See fn. 24 above.

[44] M. Betzah 5:2 (prohibits judging and other judicial acts); m. San. 4:1; cf. Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, 16.163 (ed. H. St. J. Thackeray, R. Marcus, and L. H. Feldman, *Josephus* [LCL 186, 203, 210, 242, 281, 326, 365, 410, 433; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926–1965]).

[45] Cf. m. Shabb. 23:1–3; b. Betzah 37a. As noted above the prohibition of buying and selling is biblical: Amos 8:5; Isaiah 58:13; Jeremiah 17:21–27; Nehemiah 13:15–22.

[46] As is the case with Origen, who mentions the prohibition of wearing nailed sandals on the Sabbath; see Cohen, "Origen."

[47] D. Mendels and A. Edrei, *Zweierlei Diaspora: Zur Spaltung der antiken jüdischen Welt* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010).

[48] Edessa is mentioned once in Bereshit Rabba; see A. Oppenheimer, *Babylonia Judaica in the Talmudic Period* (Wiesbaden: Ludwig Reichert, 1983), 133–134, *s.v.* Hadas. Relying on the

Conclusion

In his BLC Bardaiṣan includes a list of nine (ten) labors that Jews do not per-form on the Sabbath. For Bardaiṣan the universality of this Jewish practice is evidence against the belief in astral determinism and astral geography. How did Bardaiṣan learn this list of labors that Jews avoid on the Sabbath? In this essay I have surveyed three answers to this question, each of which is possible, none of which is verifiable, but each of which, if correct, bears with it a substantial scholarly novelty.

First, perhaps Bardaiṣan's source is the Jewish community of Edessa. Bardaiṣan is reporting what he saw, and he saw the behavior of the Jews of Edessa. They ob-served the Sabbath by (among other things) abstaining from these nine labors. If correct, this explanation is news indeed, for we otherwise have no information about the religious observances of the Jews of Edessa. The strongest argument in its favor is that in this section of the BLC Bardaiṣan seems to be relaying infor-mation that he knows first-hand either through personal experience or through speaking with contemporaries, but we have no way of assessing the plausibility or implausibility of this explanation.

Second possibility: Perhaps Bardaiṣan knew the works of Philo. From Philo he will have learned the utility of citing Jewish observances in an anti-astrological argument, and from Philo he might have learned at least some of the content of his list of Sabbath prohibitions. The culture of Edessa was heavily Hellenized; even the Syriac-speakers knew Greek, Greek literature, and Greek philosophy, so there is nothing implausible about this explanation. But if correct, this expla-nation is news indeed, because there otherwise is no evidence that Bardaiṣan knew Philo.

Third possibility: Perhaps there is a connection between Bardaiṣan's list and the Mishnah, which was being composed at the same time as the BLC. Perhaps a Jew from Palaestina came to Edessa with the Mishnah in his backpack[49] and told Bardaiṣan about the Mishnah's Sabbath prohibitions. Or perhaps we might imagine (returning to the first possibility) that the Jews of Edessa were observing the Sabbath rabbinically and mishnaically. The advantage of this explanation is that it accounts for all the items on Bardaiṣan's list. If correct, this explanation is news indeed, for we otherwise have no indication of any connection between the Jews of Edessa and the rabbinic sages of Roman Palaestina.

Possibilities two and three each stumble over a serious objection: If we are to believe that Bardaiṣan knew Philo or the Mishnah, we need more and better evidence than what I have provided here. This leaves the first possibility as the

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work of Jacob Neusner, Drijvers, "Edessa und das jüdische Christentum," 11, writes, "Von einem tannaitischen Judentum in Edessa ist uns nichts bekannt, und keiner von den Tannaim wird mit dieser Stadt in Verbindung gebracht."

[49] His metaphorical backpack – the Mishnah was an oral text.

most plausible. Bardaiṣan's list of Sabbath prohibitions most probably derives from his own eye-witness familiarity with the practices of the Jews of Edessa. They were a Sabbath-observant community; their Sabbath piety was consistent with rabbinic piety, but there is no evidence that they had any knowledge of the rabbinic textual tradition.

Jewish Christians and the Qur'ān

The Transit of Religious Lore in Late Antique Arabia

Sidney H. Griffith

Status Quaestionis

A constant preoccupation of many scholars pursuing the study of the history of the Qur'ān's origins has for a long time been evident in the ever popular search for sources or sub-texts supposed to have lain behind the Arabic scripture's doctrine and diction within its late antique historical context. This search for sources has often worked to the detriment of looking to the Qur'ān's own hermeneutical horizons and controlling paradigms of meaning for the right understanding of its teaching. It is almost as if it is thought that 'influences' from the past or from the Qur'ān's contemporary context have necessarily determined the content and expression of its doctrines to the exclusion of the pertinence of its own criteria of judgment vis-à-vis the truth it means to proclaim in counterpoint to the allegations of its religious adversaries. A particularly notable instance of this sort of errant historiographical preoccupation with privileging supposed 'influences' or 'sources' from the cultural environs of the Qur'ān's origins to the exclusion of considering the force of the Arabic scripture's own controlling paradigms of meaning is notably in evidence in the currently popular scholarly project to attribute the Qur'ān's teaching about Jesus of Nazareth to the influence on Muḥammad and his early 'Community of Believers' of the doctrines of 'Jewish Christian' communities supposed to have been flourishing in seventh-century Arabia. A recent case in point is the popular, journalistic, and personal account of Mustafa Akyol, *The Islamic Jesus: How the King of the Jews Became a Prophet of the Muslims*.[1] The publication of Akyol's widely read and insightful book provides the opportunity once again to reassess the seemingly perennial notion of 'Jewish Christian' influence on the Qur'ān in its origins and on its Christology in particular.

While the scholarly idea that the Qur'ān owes a debt to 'Jewish Christian' influences in its origins can be traced back in western scholarship as far as the early eighteenth century, to the publication of John Toland's (1668–1722) influential

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[1] M. Akyol, *The Islamic Jesus: How the King of the Jews Became a Prophet of the Muslims* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2017). See the review by S. H. Griffith, "The Jesus of Islam," *The Common Reader*, June 16, 2017.

book, *Nazarenus, or Jewish, Gentile, and Mahometan Christianity* (London: J. Brotherton, J. Roberts, & A. Dodd, 1718), its more recent popularity is due in no small part to the influence of Hans Joachim Schoeps' 1949 publication, *Theologie und Geschichte des Judenchristentums*.[2] Following Schoeps, numerous scholars have put forward hypotheses that postulate the presence of 'Jewish Christians' in the milieu of the Qur'ān's origins, in an effort both to identify the particular Christians whom the Qur'ān calls *naṣārā* and to account for the Arabic scripture's view of the prophetic role of Jesus the Messiah, the son of Mary.[3] Most recently and perhaps most immediately influentially, the late Patricia Crone has forcefully defended the thesis of 'Jewish Christian' influence on the Qur'ān, arguing in detail that of all the Christological views and legal provisions that may be seen to lie behind the Qur'ān, those described as 'Jewish Christian' are the most congruent with its own positions.[4]

Jews, Christians, and Nazarenes

To put the matter in the proper context for review, it is important to take into account the fact that 'Jewish Christians' are only one group whose views scholars following a source critical approach to the Qur'ān have thought to have been communally present in the milieu of the Arabic scripture's origins. The quest for sources for the Qur'ān's Christology among other topics has been driven by the fact that some of what the text claims doctrinally about Jesus the Messiah, apart from its reminiscences of the stories about him that are also to be found in earlier biblical, para-biblical, and traditional Christian lore, are in important respects not otherwise to be found in the literature and lore of the conventional, seventh-century Christian communities known to have lived within the Qur'ān's wider

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[2] H. J. Schoeps, *Theologie und Geschichte des Judenchristentums* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1949), 334–342, where, just prior to his section on "Ebionitische Elemente im Islam," Schoeps speaks of "ein sektiererisches Christentum teilweise judenchristlichen Charakters war es, das Muhammed am Beginn seiner Laufbahn unter dem Namen *Naṣara* – einer Sammelbezeichnung der Sekten Ostsyriens-Arabiens – kennenlernte." (p. 334).

[3] See, e.g., M. Roncaglia, "Éléments ébionites et elkésaïètes dans le Coran: Notes et hypothèses," *POC* 21 (1971): 101–126; S. C. Mimouni, "Les Nazoréens: Recherche étymologique et historique," *RB* 105 (1998): 208–262. Most recently this point of view has been most ably presented by F. de Blois, "*Naṣrānī* (Ναζωραῖος) and *ḥanīf* (ἐθνικός): Studies on the Religious Vocabulary of Christianity and of Islam," *BSOAS* 65 (2002): 1–30; E. M. Gallez, *Le messie et son prophète: Aux origines de l'islam*, vol. 1. *De Qumrân à Muhammad* (2nd ed.; Paris: Éditions de Paris, 2005); J. Gnilka, *Die Nazarener und der Koran: Eine Spurensuche* (Freiburg: Herder, 2007). See also the history of scholarship on this point in G. G. Stroumsa, "Jewish Christianity and Islamic Origins," in B. Sadeghi, A. Q. Ahmed, A. Silverstein, and R. Hoyland (eds.), *Islamic Cultures, Islamic Contexts: Essays in Honor of Professor Patricia Crone* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 72–96.

[4] P. Crone, "Jewish Christianity and the Qur'ān (Part One)," *JNES* 74 (2015): 225–253; eadem, "Jewish Christianity and the Qur'ān (Part Two)," *JNES* 75 (2016): 1–21.

purview. Examples of such issues would include the search for a Christian community whose view of the holy Trinity would be that its members include God as father, Mary as mother, and Jesus as son, in accord with what some scholars have thought to have been the Qur'ān's teaching on the topic. Some have proposed that this alleged Qur'ānic teaching reflects the view of the so-called Collyridians, known from Christian heresiography, whose doctrines some scholars conclude, if not the Collyridians themselves, must therefore have circulated in the Arabic-speaking milieu of the Qur'ān's origins. Some scholars have proposed that the Qur'ān's alleged teaching that Jesus the Messiah was neither crucified nor killed, but that it only seemed to be so and that someone else was killed in his place, was influenced by earlier Christian Gnostic or Docetic doctrines that were espoused by communities otherwise historically unattested in the Qur'ān's milieu.[5] By a similar logic, scholars have argued that the Qur'ān's *naṣārā* could not have been among the more conventional Christians of Late Antiquity because their Christology and their legal provisions for Christian life were not congruent with that of the majority of Christians of the time. Rather their views were in accord with those to be found in the sources of 'Jewish Christian' belief and practice. Therefore, these scholars have proposed that the Qur'ān's *naṣārā*, or Nazarenes, were actually a surviving remnant of the 'Jewish Christian' community called 'Nazarenes' by their adversaries, who, they argue, must have been present in the Arabic-speaking milieu of the seventh century though their presence there is otherwise historically unattested.[6]

In these cases, and in that of the postulated presence of 'Jewish Christians' in particular, the hermeneutical problem is that scholars have not sufficiently taken into account how the Qur'ān has in fact proposed its own distinctive teaching about Jesus the Messiah within the interpretive horizon of its own governing principles, expressed in its own counter discourse, rhetorically determined, effectively to counter the opposing views of adversaries who are actually, historically attested to have lived with its purview. On the basis of this line of reasoning one is then in a position to compare the Qur'ān's Christology with that of other communities, 'Jewish Christians' included, searching neither for trace evidence of an otherwise unattested, communal presence, nor for sources, but for doctrinal similarities and dissimilarities. Comparable, even congruent modes of doctrinal expression do not of themselves bespeak either communal presence or dependence; comparability of thought and word in different traditions does nevertheless have a place in the history of ideas. But what is one to say about the

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[5] See the discussion of these several scholarly suggestions in G. Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur'ān* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), *passim*; N. Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), esp. 18–22.

[6] This line of reasoning is more recently advanced the most insistently in Crone, "Jewish Christianity and the Qur'ān" and in de Blois, "*Naṣrānī* (Ναζωραῖος) and *ḥanīf* (ἐθνικός)."

evidentiary potential of virtual identity in narrative line and sometimes even in wording?

It seems evident on the basis of even a casual reading of the Qurʾān that in addition to its embeddedness in the linguistic culture of the Arabic-speaking peoples of Late Antiquity, thereby revealing their strong presence in the milieu of its origins, the text is also infused with the religious idiom, nomenclature, and the narrative lore of the Bible-based, monotheistic communities of its early seventh-century, Romano-Persian world of Late Antiquity. This vocabulary and the diction which informs shared narratives also bespeaks an intellectual and cultural linkage between the Arabic-speaking community of the Qurʾān's addressees and the other Arabic-speaking, scripture communities with whom its audience is familiar and with whom they are in conversation.[7]

The Qurʾān expresses its own distinctive views and even its counter discourse to that of others than its own community of believers in the common parlance they share. What the Qurʾān says about shared stories of the biblical patriarchs and prophets, for example, or about the beliefs and practices of local Jews and Christians, is therefore not 'borrowed', nor does it have a 'source' in the discourse of others. Rather the Qurʾān speaks to its audience, the community of believers and the others, in a shared religious idiom. The Qurʾānic difference is disclosed in the hermeneutical construction the Qurʾān puts upon its evocations and reminiscences of the shared religious lore, in virtue of its own distinctive paradigm of meaning, which in most instances is primarily the work of the Arabic scripture's distinctive 'prophetology', which both affirms and critiques that of the other 'scripture people' within its purview, who for the most part were Jews and the Christians.[8] For Jewish and Christian scriptural lore had long since entered the stream of common religious knowledge and discourse among Arabic-speakers. But the question now is: Which Jews and which communities of Christians are historically attested actually to have lived in the Qurʾān's Arabic-speaking environs, whose identity and objectionable views the Qurʾān's well-tailored counter-discourse ably reflects?

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[7] See in particular in this connection A. al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity: Allāh and his People* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014). See also G. Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth: Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); idem, *Before and after Muḥammad: The First Millennium Refocused* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014); J. H. G. Dijkstra and G. Fisher (eds.), *Inside and Out: Interactions between Rome and the Peoples on the Arabian and Egyptian Frontiers in Late Antiquity* (LAHR 8; Leuven: Peeters, 2014); R. E. Payne, *A State of Mixture: Christians, Zoroastrians, and Iranian Political Culture in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015).

[8] See S. H. Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic: The Scriptures of the 'People of the Book' in the Language of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013); idem, "The Sunna of Our Messengers: The Qurʾān's Paradigm for Messengers and Prophets; a Reading of *Sūrat ash-Shuʿarā*," in A. Neuwirth and M. Sells (eds.), *Qurʾānic Studies Today* (London: Routledge, 2016), 208–227.

Jews and Nazarenes in the *Qurʾān*

By the first third of the seventh century, Jewish communities had already become well established in Arabia; they had achieved political significance in Yemen and Ḥimyar by the fourth century.[9] Jews had actually established themselves in South Arabia, in Ḥimyar, and particularly in Yemen, long prior to the Common Era, where they were to remain an important cultural presence until well into the twentieth century.[10] For a brief period in the sixth century, a Jewish king, Yūsuf Dhū Nuwās (517–525), reigned in Ḥimyar,[11] during which time he engaged in a military action against the city of Najrān that resulted in the deaths of numerous Christians living there, a circumstance that yielded a rich martyrological tradition in Syriac, thus bringing news of events in deepest Arabia to the notice of the wider Christian world on the Arabian periphery.[12] It is significant that during his tenure in office, King Yūsuf is also said to have been in correspondence with Jewish religious authorities in Tiberias in Palestine,[13] indicating that he and his community were not isolated in Arabia from the wider world of Judaism in the sixth century, and suggesting a rabbinical consultation on the king's part. More to the present purpose, the existence of Jewish communities in Muḥammad's immediate ambience in the Ḥijāz in the early seventh century is also well attested.[14] In particular, it is well known that there were Jews in the oasis communities of Khaybar as well as in Yathrib (Medina), where they were known by their tribal identities as the Banū al-Naḍīr, the Banū Qaynuqāʿ, and the Banū Qurayẓa. During his time in Yathrib/Medina, Muḥammad is credited with having composed the document that has come to be known as the 'Constitution of Medina', in which he details regulations for the governance of relationships between the

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[9] See N. A. Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands: A History and Source Book* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1979); G. D. Newby, *A History of the Jews of Arabia* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1988).

[10] See C. J. Robin, "Le judaïsme de Ḥimyar," *Arabia* 1 (2003): 97–172; B.-Z. E. Klorman, "Yemen," in N. A. Stillman (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World*, vol. 4 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 627–639.

[11] See C. J. Robin, "Joseph, dernier roi de Ḥimyar (de 522 à 525, ou une des années suivantes)," *JSAI* 34 (2008): 1–124.

[12] See I. Shahid, *The Martyrs of Najrān: New Documents* (Subsidia Hagiographica 49; Brusells: Société des Bollandistes, 1971); T. Hainthaler, *Christliche Araber vor dem Islam: Verbreitung und konfessionelle Zugehörigkeit. Eine Hinführung* (ECS 7; Leuven: Peeters, 2007); Robin, "Joseph, dernier roi de Ḥimyar," esp. 37–72; J. Beaucamp et al., *Juifs et chrétiens en Arabie aux Vᵉ et VIᵉ siècles: Regards croisés sur les sources* (CNRS Monographies 32; Paris: Association des amis du Centre d'Histoire et Civilisation de Byzance, 2010). It is important also to note that Robin in a soon to be published article, "Les Chrétiens de Najran," has shown that some Christians of Najrān were supporters of King Yūsuf.

[13] See Klorman, "Yemen," 629; Robin, "Joseph, dernier roi de Ḥimyar," 70–71.

[14] See M. Lecker, *Jews and Arabs in Pre- and Early Islamic Arabia* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998); idem, *People, Tribes, and Society in Arabia around the Time of Muḥammad* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2005).

several tribal groupings of Arabic-speakers in the city, the Jews prominently included.[15]

The ubiquitous Christian communities established throughout the Roman and Persian domains on the periphery of the heartlands of Arabia in Late Antiquity had also long been extending both their political and religious influence beyond their own borders into the milieu of the Arabic-speaking peoples.[16] Unlike the case of the Jews of Arabia, however, the available evidence for the Christian presence within the ambience of the Qurʾān's origins is more circumstantial in that apart from a number of rather laconic pre-Islamic inscriptions and graffiti that include Christian symbols such as the cross and occasional confessional formulae,[17] evidence for an active Christian presence in the Ḥijāz is largely gleaned on the one hand from scattered Greek and Syriac reports of incidents in Arabian church life,[18] and on the other hand, and most importantly, from the Qurʾān itself. The Qurʾān's evidence for the currency of Christian thought and practice in the immediate milieu of its origins is abundant. In the Meccan sūrahs, much of the Arabic scripture's recollection of the biblical and para-biblical lore of the Bible's patriarchs and prophets, notably including accounts of Jesus and his mother Mary, are demonstrably in tension with contemporary Christian traditions and particularly those otherwise attested in surviving Syriac texts.[19] The same is the case with accounts of such non-biblical figures as the Sleepers of Ephesus, the Alexander Legend,[20] and even allusions to intra-Christian doctrinal quarrels, not to mention references to Christian liturgical personnel and community leaders. Sūrahs from the Medinan period of Muḥammad's prophetic career feature the well-known passages of the Qurʾān's most critical, even

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[15] See M. Lecker, *The 'Constitution of Medina': Muḥammad's First Legal Document* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 2004). See also M. Gil, "The Origin of the Jews of Yathrib," *JSAI* 4 (1984): 203–224; M. Lecker, *Muslims, Jews and Pagans: Studies on Early Islamic Medina* (Leiden: Brill, 1995).

[16] See Hainthaler, *Christliche Araber vor dem Islam*.

[17] See in particular C. J. Robin, "The Peoples beyond the Arabian Frontier in Late Antiquity: Recent Epigraphic Discoveries and Latest Advances," in Dijkstra and Fisher, *Inside and Out*, 65–77 and "Les chrétiens de Najran." See also R. Tardy, *Najrān: Chrétiens d'Arabie avant l'Islam* (Beirut: Dar el-Machreq, 1999).

[18] See the studies cited in fn. 7 above.

[19] See, e. g., G. S. Reynolds, *The Qurʾān and its Biblical Subtext* (London: Routledge, 2010). See also S. H. Griffith, "What Does Mecca Have to Do with Urhōy? Syriac Christianity, Islamic Origins, and the Qurʾān," in M. Doerfler, E. Fiano, and K. Smith (eds.), *Syriac Encounters: Papers from the Sixth North American Syriac Symposium, Duke University, 26–29 June 2011* (ECS 20; Leuven: Peeters, 2015), 369–399.

[20] See S. H. Griffith, "Christian Lore and the Arabic Qurʾān: The 'Companions of the Cave' in *Sūrat al-Kahf* and in Syriac Christian Tradition" and K. van Bladel, "The *Alexander Legend* in the Qurʾān 18:83–102," in G. S. Reynolds (ed.), *The Qurʾān in its Historical Context* (London: Routledge, 2008), 109–137 and 175–203, respectively. See also K. van Bladel, "The Syriac Sources of the Early Arabic Narratives of Alexander," in H. P. Ray and D. T. Potts (eds.), *Memory as History: The Legacy of Alexander in Asia* (New Delhi: Aryan Books International, 2007), 54–75.

polemical interreligious interactions with Christians, whom it now regularly calls *al-naṣārā*, i. e., 'Nazarenes', reflecting the currency in the contemporary Syriac- and Greek-speaking milieu of this well-known, somewhat antipathetic name for those who were regularly and most often called simply 'Christians'.[21]

There are scholars who take the Qurʾān's evidence of Christians in its milieu to be indicative not of a Christian presence in the Ḥijāz in the first third of the seventh century, but as support for their now minority position that the Qurʾān's origins in its canonical form are not in Mecca and Medina in the seventh century but further north in Syria and Iraq in later Umayyad times or even later, where the Christian presence was still pervasive in the eighth century, especially in its Syriac expression and in its several denominational communities.[22] Their hypotheses seem increasingly untenable especially in the light of on-going research into the age of the earliest surviving manuscripts of the Qurʾān's text, which scholars have determined to have been copied in a distinctively Ḥijāzī script already in the second half of the seventh century.[23] What is more, scholars who originally made the strongest case for the Qurʾān's origins outside of the Ḥijāz and well after the close of the seventh century have effectively abandoned their position in the light of subsequent research.[24]

There has been much scholarly discussion of the Christian identity of the Qurʾān's 'Nazarenes' who were present in the Arabian milieu of the Arabic scripture's origins, whose doctrines and practices the Qurʾān strongly critiques at the same time as it enlists their upholders among the 'Scripture People' (*ahl al-kitāb*) and 'Gospel People' (*ahl al-injīl*) within its purview. The available historical

[21] See S. H. Griffith, "The Qurʾān's 'Nazarenes' and Other Late Antique Christians: Arabic-Speaking 'Gospel People' in Qurʾānic Perspective," in S. H. Griffith and S. Grebenstein (eds.), *Christsein in der islamischen Welt: Festschrift für Martin Tamcke zum 60. Geburtstag* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2015), 81–106. See also S. H. Griffith, "*Al-Naṣārā* in the Qurʾān: A Hermeneutical Reflection," in G. S. Reynolds (ed.), *New Perspectives on the Qurʾān: The Qurʾān in its Historical Context 2* (London: Routledge, 2011), 301–322.

[22] See, e. g., P. Crone and M. Cook, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); J. E. Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978); S. J. Shoemaker, "Christmas in the Qurʾān," *JSAI* 28 (2003): 11–39; idem, *The Death of a Prophet: The End of Muḥammad's Life and the Beginnings of Islam* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011); J. Jandora, *The Latent Trace of Islamic Origins: Midian's Legacy in Mecca's Moral Awakening* (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2012). See also many of the studies included in C. A. Segovia and B. Lourié (eds.), *The Coming of the Comforter: When, Where, and to Whom? Studies on the Rise of Islam and Various Other Topics in Memory of John Wansbrough* (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2012). See too K.-H. Ohlig, "Das syrische und arabische Christentum und der Koran," in K.-H. Ohlig and G.-R. Puin (eds.), *Die dunklen Anfänge: Neue Forschungen zur Entstehung und frühen Geschichte des Islam* (3rd ed.; Berlin: Hans Schiler, 2007), 366–404.

[23] See B. Sadeghi and U. Bergman, "The Codex of a Companion of the Prophet and the Qurʾān of the Prophet," *Arabica* 75 (2010): 343–436; F. Déroche, *La transmission écrite du Coran dans le débuts de l'islam* (TSQ 5; Leiden: Brill, 2009).

[24] See, e. g., P. Crone, "What Do We Actually Know about Mohammed?" *Open Democracy*, June 10, 2008 (http://www.opendemocracy.net).

evidence strongly supports the view that in the Arabic-speaking world of the sixth and seventh centuries the local Christians, the Qur'ān's 'Nazarenes', were for the most part among the ubiquitous, Syriac-speaking 'Melkite', 'Jacobite', and 'Nestorian' communities who composed Late Antiquity's major Christian denominations in the Middle East, including also the Copts, the Armenians, and the Ethiopians, each with their own traditional languages and cultures, who were themselves nevertheless in close communion with the Syriac-speaking churches, especially the so-called 'Jacobites'.[25] Of course there were also other communities with Christian credentials living within the sphere of the Qur'ān's late antique horizons, most prominently the Manicheans.[26] But within this context what is one to say about the communities of 'Jewish Christians', whose presence and influence on the Qur'ān so many prominent scholars mentioned above have hypothesized?

Community and Identity in Qur'ānic Rhetoric

The most often voiced scholarly objection to the thesis that there were 'Jewish Christian' communities located in Arabia, and particularly in the Arabian Ḥijāz, in the first half of the seventh century, including the proposal that the Qur'ān's *naṣārā* were themselves 'Jewish Christians', whose Christology and legal provisions are accordingly reflected in the Qur'ān, is the fact that other than in reliance on this interpretation of pertinent Qur'ānic passages there is no other historical or archaeological evidence one can cite to support the thesis. The scholarly consensus has been that actually there is not even much reliable evidence for the survival of any 'Jewish Christian' communities properly so-called anywhere within the wide expanse of Late Antiquity after the fifth century.[27] What is more, some scholars have more recently also been reconsidering the verisimilitude of the whole notion of an independent 'Jewish Christianity', which for a time is supposed to have subsisted independently of and in opposition to a gradually

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[25] See S. H. Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); idem, "The Qur'ān's Nazarenes."

[26] See, e.g., M. Gil, "The Creed of Abū 'Āmir," *IOS* 12 (1992): 9–47; M. Tardieu, "L'arrivée des manichéens à al-Ḥīra," in P. Canivet and J.-P. Rey-Coquais (eds.), *La Syrie de Byzance à l'Islam VIIe – VIIIe siècles: Actes du colloque international, Lyon-Maison de l'Orient Méditerranien, Paris – Institut de Monde Arabe, 11–15 Septembre 1990* (Damas: Institut Français de Damas, 1992), 15–24; J. A. Bellamy, "More Proposed Emendations to the Text of the Koran," *JAOS* 116 (1996): 196–204, esp. 201–205; R. Simon, "Mānī and Muḥammad," *JSAI* 21 (1997): 118–141; F. de Blois, "The 'Sabians' (Ṣābi'ūn) in Pre-Islamic Arabia," *AO* 56 (1995): 39–61; idem, "Sabians," in *EQ*, vol. IV, 511–513; idem, "*Naṣrānī* and *Ḥanīf*"; idem, "Elchasai – Manes – Muḥammad: Manichäismus und Islam im religionshistorischen Vergleich," *Der Islam* 81 (2004): 31–48.

[27] See A. F. J. Klijn and G. J. Reinink, *Patristic Evidence for Jewish-Christian Sects* (Leiden: Brill, 1973); S. C. Mimouni, *Le judéo-christianisme ancient: Essays historiques* (Paris: Cerf, 1998).

larger, more hegemonic 'Gentile Christianity', which is said eventually and in due course to have absorbed the supposed heterodox Hebrew- and Aramaic-speaking 'Jewish Christians' of apostolic times into the wider world of the mostly Greek, Syriac, Coptic, Armenian, and Latin-speaking Christians of Late Antiquity.[28] But in fact, as we shall discuss below, the matter turns out to be much more complicated than it might seem at first sight.

Beyond the matter of the lack of historical evidence for the presence of 'Jewish Christian' communities in the Arabian milieu of the Qurʾān's origins in the early seventh century there is also a hermeneutical issue to be explored in connection with the source-critical, historiographical method of positing 'Jewish Christian' influence on the Qurʾān in the first place. It seems to have been the case that having accepted the premise of the likely presence of 'Jewish Christianity' in seventh century Arabia, posited in the first place on the basis of the Qurʾān's perceived 'Jewish Christian' Christology, interpreters then turned around and looked to the same 'Jewish Christianity' for the 'sources' of the Qurʾān's Christology, due to its perceived congruence with supposed earlier 'Jewish Christian' views, allied with the observation that in their view, what the Qurʾān and the later Muslim commentators had to say about Jesus the Messiah is incongruent with the views of contemporary, seventh-century Christian communities, which could therefore not be considered sources for the Qurʾān's views. The hermeneutic problem with this interpretive logic is twofold. First there is its circular pattern of reasoning. Second, there is its neglect of crediting the Qurʾān's own reasons for adopting a Christology, which on the one hand is seemingly in some agreement with that of the supposed 'Jewish Christian' sources, and on the other hand is also directly counter to the views of the dominant, seventh-century Christian communities known to be within the Qurʾān's wider late antique purview, not to mention the failure to take into account the rhetorical character of the Qurʾān's own Christological passages, voiced in critical opposition to the very Christian views known to be current in its milieu, in a counter discourse that mirrors the very views it criticizes and rejects.

In other places the present writer has argued that when one attends to the rhetorical style of the Qurʾān's polemical critique of the doctrines and practices of the Christians within its purview, and its censure of what these Christians say about Jesus the Messiah in particular, it becomes clear that the Arabic scripture's

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[28] See, e.g., J. E. Taylor, "The Phenomenon of Early Jewish-Christianity: Reality or Scholarly Invention?" *VC* 44 (1990): 313–334; D. Boyarin, "Rethinking Jewish Christianity: An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category (to which is Appended a Correction of my *Border Lines*)," *JQR* 99 (2009): 7–36; E. Fiano, "The Construction of Ancient Jewish Christianity in the Twentieth Century: The Cases of Hans-Joachim Schoeps and Jean Daniélou," in B. Bitton-Ashkelony, T. de Bruyn, and C. Harrison (eds.), *Patristic Studies in the Twenty-First Century: Proceedings of an International Conference to Mark the 50th Anniversary of the International Association of Patristic Studies* (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2015), 279–297; A. Y. Reed, *Jewish-Christianity and the History of Judaism* (TSAJ 171; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018).

counter charge is meant to disparage and to correct exactly what one can recognize as the creedal claims especially of the largely Syriac-speaking Christians known historically to have already been present in the Qurʾān's own, Arabic-speaking demesne. These historically attested Christians were those whom later Muslim authors would regularly categorize as 'Melkites', 'Jacobites', and 'Nestorians', reflecting their ecclesial divisions; their biblical, patristic, and liturgical heritage was linguistically Syriac, as many studies of the Qurʾān's reminiscences of Christian language and lore have shown. Furthermore, the Qurʾān's critique and correction of what the Christians say about Jesus the Messiah is phrased in full accord with, and in the distinctive vocabulary of its own paradigmatic 'prophetology', which the Qurʾān positively commends in its own distinctive Christology. It is notable that there is no place for any supposed 'Jewish Christian' influence in this historical scenario, either as a source for the Qurʾān's Christology, or as an apt characterization of the denominational identity of the Christians whom the Qurʾān calls *al-naṣārā*. That much having been said, there is nevertheless yet another dimension to explore in reference to the topic of 'Jewish Christianity' and the Qurʾān.

'Jewish Christianity': a Historiographical Concept

Well aware of the historiographical problems associated with positing the presence of actual communities of 'Jewish Christians' within the environs of the Qurʾān's origins in seventh century Arabia, Guy Stroumsa, one of the most astute proponents of the hypothesis of a role for 'Jewish Christian' ideas in Islamic origins, speaks of 'Jewish Christianity' as "a key element of what one can call *praeparatio coranica*," and he goes on to say:

> It is to its heuristic utility that the Jewish Christian track owes its strength. Its significance, however, disappears as soon as the metaphor of source rather than that of yeast is being used. A number of reasons prevent us from considering Jewish Christianity as *the* source of Islam. The evidence is too sparse, the precise mechanisms through which ideas are transmitted are too little known.[29]

Stroumsa speaks here of the "heuristic utility" of the 'Jewish Christian' hypothesis in its metaphorical role as "yeast" in the process of its function as a *praeparatio coranica.* "Heuristic utility" normally bespeaks the use of a methodological procedure or device in problem solving that in itself is otherwise unproven. The "yeast" metaphor suggests that in Stroumsa's view 'Jewish Christianity', if not an immediate source, may nevertheless in hindsight still be thought to have played a cross cultural, fermenting role in the pre-Qurʾānic religious culture of the late antique, Arabian thought-world. But to function as yeast, 'Jewish Christianity'

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[29] Stroumsa, "Jewish Christianity and Islamic Origins," 90.

would have to have existed in the milieu of the Qurʾān's origins, yet, as we have seen, in the instances in which its influence has been alleged, especially in the Qurʾān's Christology, other more proximate challenges evidently evoked the Qurʾān's counter discourse, without the fermenting influence of a non-existent 'Jewish Christianity'.

But what is one to make of the idea of 'Jewish Christianity' having historically played a role as a *praeparatio coranica* or a *praeparatio islamica*? The proposal obviously evokes the early Christian, apologetic method called *praeparatio evangelica*, so-called after the Latin title of the famous apologetic treatise of the early church father and historian, Eusebius of Caesarea (263–369). In this work Eusebius had argued for the superiority of Christianity over the beliefs and practices of the non-Christian, philosophical and religious schools current in his time, maintaining that whatever wisdom they might possess was in fact purloined from the ancient Hebrews. Other early Christian thinkers, like Clement of Alexandria (150–215), similarly promoted the theological idea that Greek wisdom itself might be considered as a preparation for the Gospel when read through the hermeneutical lens of what the theory of the the *logoi spermatikoi* or *rationes seminales*, an expression they borrowed from the Stoics, which in Christian parlance meant ideas and terms that under the guidance of the Holy Spirit might be found in pre-Christian systems of thought and interpreted as seeds that might reasonably be considered intellectually to have prepared the way or to have laid the ground work for appreciating the truth and credibility of Christian doctrines and practices. But for this role one need not and should not call upon the doubtful hypothesis of the presence of 'Jewish Christian' communities in seventh-century Arabia.

The theological exercise in the history of religious ideas that searches for concepts and modes of expression in the language and lore of communities that preceded the historical appearance of the Qurʾān, which may be thought to anticipate Qurʾānic discourse, concentrates primarily on texts, which circulated earlier in Late Antiquity and which scholars engaged in the exercise have typically designated as 'Jewish Christian' because of their apparent Jewish doctrinal and legal provisions. Prominent among such texts have been a number para-biblical, apocryphal works such as the *Gospel of Thomas*, the *Gospel of the Hebrews*, the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*, and an assortment of later works such as the *Didascalia Apostolorum*, and the fourth-century *Pseudo-Clementine Homilies and Recognitions*. The temptation for scholars has been to postulate the existence of dissident 'Jewish Christian' communities in Late Antiquity as purveyors of these sorts of texts and to coordinate them with the lists of Jewish Christian communities named in early Christian heresiographical works such as the *Panarion* of Epiphanius of Salamis (310–403), groups such as those called Nazarenes, Ebionites, and Elkasaites, to name only the most prominent of them. It is a short step from there to suppose that there may still have been

remnants of such groups in Arabia in the early seventh century, readily in place to influence the Qurʾān in its origins.

The problem is that in addition to the above mentioned lack of any historical evidence for the presence of any such 'Jewish Christian' communities in the milieu of the Qurʾān's origins, or anywhere else in late antique Christianity for that matter, all of the nominally 'Jewish Christian' texts have in fact been transmitted through the multiple streams of what one might call 'mainline' Christian intellectual history, largely flowing through Greek- and Syriac-speaking ecclesial communities, be they 'orthodox' or not by the standards of the ninth-century, Roman imperial *Synodicon of Orthodoxy*.[30] In other words, it is hard to think of the concept of 'Jewish Christian' Christianity as actually any more than a momentarily useful heuristic device which has outlived its scholarly usefulness when it comes to studying the Qurʾān in its origins. That being said, from the perspective of the history of ideas, it is nevertheless possible for the historian of ideas to trace the historical trajectory of similar doctrines and legal provisions from the Bible, through late antique Jewish and Christian texts, to the Qurʾān. The question then comes to be, how to account for the flow of comparable ideas and practices between historically related but distinct religious communities such as the Qurʾān's 'Scripture People' (*ahl al-kitāb*), without positing direct borrowing, the presence of textual sources, or scriptural influences or subtexts, mediated through intervening social entities of uncertain identity? The answer lies in the discernment of the likely manner of transmission of widespread religious ideas within and among the intersecting Greek-, Aramaic-, Syriac-, and Arabic-speaking peoples of Late Antiquity, along with attention paid to the distinct construction of meaning the Qurʾān puts upon the concepts and modes of expression its community of believers shares with others.

Scriptures in Oral Tradition

It is by now the common scholarly consensus, as Gregor Schoeler has succinctly put it, that "le premier livre de l'islam et en même temps de la literature arabe est le Coran."[31] Prior to the redaction of the Qurʾān in Arabic script by the middle of the seventh century, public use of writing in Arabia was evidently primarily epigraphic.[32] The archive of thousands of surviving inscriptions and graffiti in the several languages and scripts of pre-Islamic Arabia, from Yemen to the Ḥijāz

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[30] See J. M. Duffy, *Synodicon Vetus. Editon, Translation, and Notes* (DOT V; Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 1979).

[31] G. Schoeler, *Écrire et transmettre dans les débuts de l'islam* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2001), 26.

[32] See in this connection C. J. Robin, "La réforme de l'écriture arabe à l'époque du califat médinois," *MUSJ* 59 (2006): 319–364.

and beyond display not only a wide range of Arabian political and military interaction with countries and communities all around its periphery in Late Antiquity, but they also furnish the evidence for sketching the broader outlines of inner-Arabian tribal and political history of the time, along with the concomitant developments in religious thought and allegiance among them. For example, the study of the inscriptions has shown the widespread presence of Jewish and Christian communities among the Arabic-speaking peoples by the end of the sixth century, along with some evidence of their connections with their co-religionists beyond the Arabic-speaking milieu.[33] Most notable, however, is the corroboratory evidence the inscriptions provide for the appearance of a distinctive, indigenous monotheism among the pre-Islamic Arabians, neither Jewish nor Christian as such, but most likely inspired in response to the oral currency of Jewish or Christian lore, given its devotees' trademark veneration of the biblical patriarch Abraham.[34] What is more, as we have seen, the Qur'ān itself provides documentary evidence for a high quotient of awareness on the part of its Arabic-speaking audience of stories of selected biblical patriarchs and prophets, not to mention the beliefs and religious practices of Jews and Christians.

The fact that the Qur'ān was the first Arabic book means that the lore of the pre-Qur'ānic 'Scripture People' must have circulated among Arabic-speaking peoples primarily orally, and not textually, in such media as liturgical homilies, teaching songs, and public preaching. This feature of the transmission of Jewish and Christian religious lore in Arabic in the milieu of the Qur'ān's origins helps explain why in the Arabic scripture's reminiscences of the stories of the biblical patriarchs and prophets, for example, there are virtually no quotations from the Bible or from any other texts. The few possible instances of quotation there are serve only to prove the rule. The same lack of textual quotation is the case with the numerous instances in which scholars have proposed sources in non-Arabic, late antique languages for passages in the Qur'ān that are reminiscent of Jewish, Christian, or Manichaean doctrines or practices. The currency of knowledge of these matters in the Arabic-speaking milieu must therefore in all likelihood have been oral and not textual. The Qur'ān's textual evocation of a theme or behavior that is also to be found expressed in an earlier, non-Qur'ānic text in a non-Arabic language does not therefore bespeak textual dependence. Both texts are

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[33] See in particular Robin, "The Peoples beyond the Arabian Frontier," 33–79. See also C. J. Robin, "Ethiopia and Arabia," in S. F. Johnson (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 247–331.

[34] See in particular Robin, "The Peoples beyond the Arabian Frontier," 55. The Qur'ān's term, *ḥanīf*, pl. *ḥunafā',* is usually taken to refer to these pre-Qur'anic monotheists. See U. Rubin, "Ḥanīf," in *EQ*, vol. 2, 402. Furthermore, the Qur'ān designates the monotheism of Abraham *the ḥanīf*, as the *dīn Ibrāhīm* (Q 3:67, 95; 16:120, 123; 6: 161). See E. Beck, "Die Gestalt des Abraham am Wendepunkt der Entwicklung Muhammeds: Analyse von Sure 2, 118 (124)-135 (141)," *Le Muséon* 56 (1952): 73–94.

best understood as evidence of the widespread oral currency of such knowledge across linguistic borders in Late Antiquity.[35]

Furthermore, the Qurʾān's reminiscences of the stories of the biblical patriarchs and prophets, along with its evocation of and response to the beliefs and practices of the 'Scripture People' within its purview, are voiced in terms befitting the expression of its own distinctive message and reflecting the Qurʾān's own construction of scriptural meaning. In other words, the Qurʾān does not simply recycle passages or narratives from earlier texts verbatim. For example, the Qurʾān's reminiscences of the stories of the biblical patriarchs and prophets, however many parallels in narrative and idiom scholars may find with earlier Jewish, Christian, or Manichaean texts, are presented with the Qurʾān's own distinctive structural parameters and expressed in the idiom of its own distinctive 'prophetology', which in spite of similarities with earlier traditions, is not actually congruent with that of any of its predecessors. Rather the Qurʾān's 'prophetological' discourse presents an exegetical, counter-discourse to the 'prophetology' of the earlier 'Scripture People', the authenticity of whose scriptures the Qurʾān nevertheless confirms in principle, while rhetorically criticizing and correcting what it regards as the errant constructions of meaning espoused by the Jews, Christians, and others within its frame of reference. So the question arises, what is continuous between the biblical and non-biblical scriptures and traditions of the earlier 'Scripture People' and the Qurʾān's community of believers?

The Qurʾānic Difference

The Qurʾān's confirmation in many passages of the veracity (*taṣdīq*) of the earlier scriptures of the 'Scripture People' bespeaks on the one hand its participation in a shared religious discourse and a common scriptural canon and lexicon, while on the other hand the Arabic scripture's counter-discourse, voiced in a shared idiom, rhetorically and polemically sets itself apart from these same 'Scripture People' in terms of crucial matters of doctrine and religious practice. This disjunction marks the moment and the manner of the Qurʾān's distinctive originality; it proclaims the Qurʾānic difference. It is against this background that historians of ideas might nevertheless speak of certain streams of thought current among the earlier 'Scripture People' as providing a kind of *praeparatio coranica* in that present-day scholars can find modes of thought and expression in the earlier discourse that seem somehow to anticipate concepts and modes of expression that are current in the Qurʾān's distinctive 'prophetology', albeit

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[35] See more discussion in this connection in S. H. Griffith, "Script, Text, and the Bible in Arabic: The Evidence of the Qurʾān," forthcoming in the series, Late Antique and Medieval Islamic Near East, published by the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.

that in their similarity they are nevertheless distinctively different in meaning and nuance, due to the Qurʾān's own distinctive, paradigmatic construction of meaning. It is more of a theological undertaking than a historical one. Seeing the scholarly, heuristic invention of 'Jewish Christianity' as such a *praeparatio coranica* or *praeparatio islamica* is a case in point in that the concepts and modes of expression that can be found in various texts claimed to be 'Jewish Christian' can also be found in the Qurʾān, but now the hermeneutic horizon within which they occur bespeaks a significantly different theological perspective, which characterizes the appearance of a new community of believers, whom the Qurʾān itself distinguishes from the earlier polytheists, Jews, Christians, Magians, and Sabaeans (cf. Q2:62; 5:69; 22:17).

In the end, the generally questionable scholarly construct of 'Jewish Christianity' as a useful heuristic device with which to cast light on the history of the Qurʾān's origins has served more to confuse and obfuscate matters than otherwise. This has especially been the case when for reasons other than historical ones scholars have posited the existence of 'Jewish Christian' communities or the currency of 'Jewish Christian' ideas and verbal formulae in the late antique milieu of the Arabic-speaking peoples in the seventh century in order to allege a pre-Qurʾānic point of reference for the Qurʾān's Christology. This effort has sometimes been undertaken as the result of what seems to be an ill-advised, historiographical conviction that there must have been an independent 'source' or 'sources' for the Qurʾān's distinctive *theologoumena*, other than the working out of the implications of its own paradigmatic principles.[36] At other times, scholars have argued, seemingly out of a misplaced, interreligious irenicism, that the Qurʾān's critique of Christian articles of faith is directed not at Orthodox Christian doctrines but that they actually target the heretical views of dissident communities, such as 'Jewish Christians' or other groups thought to be heretical.[37] Sometimes, as in Mustafa Akyol's book, *The Islamic Jesus*, the idea that in Christian history there were groups of 'Jewish Christians' in the world of Islam's origins, whose views were more in accord with those of the Qurʾān, serves the author's apologetic purpose of suggesting that history itself provides a way forward in Christian/Muslim rapprochement in that one can cite in support the stream of

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[36] See this line of thinking proposed most explicitly and forcefully in Crone, "Jewish Christianity and the Qurʾān."

[37] See, e.g., the argument appealing to 'Jewish Christian' influence put forward in H. Küng, *Der Islam: Geschichte, Gegenwart, Zukunft* (Munich: Piper, 2004), esp. 75–78 and 595–599. Other authors have proposed that the Qurʾān critiques other 'heretical' views than those of 'orthodox' Christians. See, e.g., G. Basetti-Sani, *The Koran in the Light of Christ: A Christian Interpretation of the Sacred Book of Islam* (trans. W.R. Carroll and B. Dauphinee; Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1977). See also K. von Stosch, *Herausforderung Islam: Christliche Annäherungen* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2016); idem, *Streit um Jesus: Muslimische und Christliche Annäherungen* (Beiträge zur Komparativen Theologie; Paderborn: Schöningh, 2016).

'Jewish Christian' thought current in Early Christianity before it was eventually eclipsed by the superseding Orthodox Christianity of later times.

The use of the adjective 'Jewish Christian' as a theological characterization of certain pre-Qur'ānic ideas and verbal formulae as points of reference in the history of ideas, or in the service of constructing the theological concept of a *praeparatio coranica* or *praeparatio islamica*, can be seen as a virtual calque, albeit a reverse calque, on the heresiographical methodology of such early Christian authors as the aforementioned Epiphanius of Salamis, from whose *Panarion* scholars have taken the names of many of the proposed 'Jewish Christian' communities, such as 'Nazarenes', 'Ebionites', or 'Elkasaites'. Here the primary signification of the adjective 'Jewish' is theological, not historical: It is a polemical term that, on the one hand, in the view of a Christian author like Epiphanius, bespeaks the heretical denial of the divinity of Christ. On the other hand, for an author composing a theology of *praeparatio*, the adjective 'Jewish' has a positive sense, in service of the Qur'ān's confirmation of the veracity of the earlier scriptures of the 'People of Scripture', who are now supposed to have misconstrued the full meaning of their own texts.

On the level of religious practice, the designation 'Jewish Christian' has also been used to characterize a number of the Qur'ān's legal provisions, primarily in the areas of dietary prescriptions and ritual purity practices. The temptation here has also been to suppose that many of these regulations, which are in continuity with earlier and contemporary, biblical and rabbinical practice, came into the Qur'ān under the influence of 'Jewish Christians', who are supposed to have been present in the milieu of the Qur'ān's origins. But here too, largely through the recent scholarly work of Holger Zellentin,[38] it becomes clear that these prescriptions are also to be found widespread in Syriac and Greek texts that circulated in the mainline Christian communities of Late Antiquity. So even in this connection one need not postulate the presence of 'Jewish Christians' as a source or influence on the Qur'ān in its formative stage to account for the Arabic scripture's obvious participation in the realm of religious discourse it shared with the 'Scripture People', in which it phrased its own distinctive paradigm of scriptural meaning, criticizing and correcting "in clarifying Arabic" the doctrines and practices of the earlier communities of believers in dialogue with whom it was composed and delivered.

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[38] See H. Zellentin, *The Qur'ān's Legal Culture: The Didascalia Apostolorum as a Point of Departure* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013); idem, "Judaeo-Christian Legal Culture and the Qur'ān: The Case of Ritual Slaughter and the Consumption of Animal Blood," in F. del Río Sánchez (ed.), *Jewish-Christianity and the Origins of Islam* (JAOC 13; Turnhout: Brepols, 2018), 117–159; idem, "Gentile Purity Law from the Bible to the Qur'an: The Case of Sexual Purity and Illicit Intercourse," in H. Zellentin (ed.), *The Qur'ān's Reformation of Judaism and Christianity* (Routledge Studies in the Qur'ān; London: Routledge, 2019), 115–215.

In addition to the abovementioned historiographical problem entailed in postulating the existence in seventh-century Arabia of 'Jewish Christian' and other so-called heretical communities whose names, beliefs, and practices are culled from early Christian polemical literature, there also looms a significant hermeneutical problem. Most historians of the Qur'ān in its origins seem to approach the subject of their research assuming that they are studying the foundational document of a new religion, looking back on it as Islamicists from the perspective of an already historically articulated, new dispensation called Islam. This angle of historical vision presumes too much alienation from the realm of late antique religious discourse among Arabic-speaking peoples in which the Qur'ān first appeared. The more promising posture for reading the new Arabic scripture aright in its origins would be to do so from the perspective of one approaching it *a parte ante*; that is to say reading it as it first appeared, in reference to the Jewish and Christian lore then circulating orally among Arabic-speakers, who learned it from those of their neighbors whose canonical, religious languages had for the most part been Greek and Syriac, most prominently the latter. From this point of view the Qur'ān is seen to be addressing its contemporaries in a translated idiom already familiar to them due to the previously concurrent cultivation among them of the orally transmitted expressions of the Judaism and Christianity espoused largely by the Aramaic-, Syriac-, and even Ethiopic-speaking peoples whose incursions into the territories of the Arabic speakers is historically attested from as early as the fourth century. The fact that the transmission was oral and not in written Arabic was due to the fact, as we have seen, that until the Qur'ān itself became the first Arabic book some thirty to fifty years after its original proclamation, the evolution of the Arabic script had not yet reached the stage of development that would have made it capable of being the medium by means of which the lore of the Jews and Christians would have reached the Arabic-speaking peoples.

Orality as the likely medium for the circulation among pre-Qur'ānic Arabic-speakers of the wide range of Jewish and Christian lore evident in the Qur'ān requires some further discussion. It seems clear that the likeliest scenario would presume the currency of a strong interest among late antique Arabic-speakers in biblical, para-biblical narratives, and legal themes, the knowledge of which would have initially come into common Arabic parlance by way of Jewish and Christian interlocutors with whom local people would have been in conversation, either at home or abroad. By the dawn of the seventh century, biblical, liturgical, and popular homiletic texts in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Syriac verse form were commonplace in Jewish and Christian communities. They were primarily performance texts, found in the possession of religious leaders, who publicly proclaimed them on liturgical occasions. Interested Arabic-speaking inquirers could well have sought narrative details of the texts from informants. It is also not to be excluded from consideration the possibility that bilingual, Arabic-speaking

informants were literate in one or another of the non-Arabic languages of Jewish or Christian texts current in the milieu of the Qurʾān's origins. Here is not the place to pursue this matter further. Suffice it now to say now that the style of the Qurʾān's recollections of Jewish and Christian lore bespeaks oral and not textual transmission of knowledge. What is clearly historiographically and hermeneutically unwarranted is the allegation that the Qurʾān provides grounds for assuming the presence within its ambience of 'Jewish Christian' or other historically unattested communities who could be considered sources of extraneous influences on its text.

A Long Overdue Farewell

The Purported Jewish Origins of Syriac Christianity*

Simcha Gross

An interest in origins has been a regular feature of the study of early Christianity. In seeking to identify and explain unique regional features of Christian communities and the differences between them, scholars have often appealed to distinct origins as the point from which later distinctions emerged. Though the many methodological issues that attend appeals to origin moments are well-known, they nevertheless continue to play a significant role in the characterization of regional Christian identities in both explicit and unperceived ways. By defining and separating different Christian regional identities, origin moments often determine the basic geography of early Christianity.

Origin hypotheses have shaped the study of Syriac Christianity, from constructing a distinct collective known as Syriac Christianity to defining its distinguishing features. The dominant narrative of Syriac Christian origins continues to be, some important interventions notwithstanding, that it emerged – in one form or another – from Judaism. While the idea of the Jewish origins of Syriac Christianity is somewhat less prominent in recent studies, it continues to underlie many longstanding and persistent scholarly assumptions.[1] Indeed, the Jewish origin hypothesis is at least partially responsible for the partition of Syriac Christianity from the history of early Christianity more generally. The history of scholarship of Syriac Christianity is therefore diagnostic of the broader ways in which origin moments shaped and continue to shape the scholarly map of early Christianity.

This paper begins by tracing the popularization of the concept of the Jewish origin hypothesis of Syriac Christianity. It then calls attention to some of its explicit and subtle lingering effects on the characterization of Syriac Christianity

[1] See the summary of the state of the field in L. Van Rompay, "Judaism, Syriac contacts with," in *GEDSH,* 232–236.

and its allegedly distinctive regional flavor. The paper closes by inviting scholars to incorporate figures and texts often sidelined as "Syriac Christian" into accounts of early Christianity and its development more generally.

The Beginnings of Syriac Christian Origins

The theory of the Jewish origins of Syriac Christianity is, relatively speaking, rather recent.[2] To be sure, a number of scholars in the early twentieth century, most notably F.C. Burkitt, did associate Jews with the origins of Syriac Christianity.[3] However, the far more common view attributed Syriac Christianity's distinct features to either its Semitic or so-called heretical, but not specifically Jewish, roots.

The Semiticness, as opposed to the Jewishness, of Syriac Christianity was articulated by William Wright at the very beginning of his *A Short History of Syriac Literature*. Despite evoking the racialist work of Ernest Renan that ascribed essential characteristics to Semitic languages and peoples, Wright still distinguished between Hebrews and Syriac Christians, to the detriment of the latter:[4]

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[2] I flag here terminological inconsistency in the secondary literature that I will be discussing between the modifiers Syrian and Syriac. While these might appear to address different datasets – one determined by geography and one by language – the datasets are in many ways determined by these scholars' notions concerning "Syriac" or "Syrian" Christianity. For example, scholars use the label Syrian to denote different areas. To Drijvers (e.g., H.J.W. Drijvers, "Syrian Christianity and Judaism," in J. Lieu, J. North, T. Rajak [eds]*, The Jews among Pagans and Christians in the Roman Empire* [London: Routledge, 1994], 124–125) it includes Antioch, an area usually included in standard histories of Christianity, and hence his use of the geographic "Syrian" Christianity. By including Antioch, Drijvers stacked the decks in favor of his portrayal of a fundamentally Hellenized Syrian Christianity, influenced primarily by hybrid Hellenized-Syrian figures like Tatian and Bardaiṣan. To Brock (e.g., S.P. Brock, "Early Syrian Asceticism," *Numen* 20 [1973]: 2–4), Syriac Christianity includes Antioch, which, to him, is specifically *not* Hellenized but rather characterized by an indigenous culture, a reflection of its Semitic and Jewish origins. To others (e.g., A. Vööbus, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient* [CSCO 184, 197, 500; Leuven: Peeters, 1958], vol. 1, 9–10), Syriac Christianity begins in Edessa and moves eastward, oftentimes explicitly *excluding* Antioch. To still others, the chosen modifier is "Syriac," which successfully highlights the shared linguistic character of these texts, but these early Syriac texts cannot be easily harmonized. Both Syriac and Syrian create the sense of a coherent, consistent, and regionally distinct body, separable from other strands of Christianity, which is the ultimate object of this study. See G. Rouwhorst, "Jewish Liturgical Traditions in Early Syriac Christianity," *VC* 51 (1997), 72–93, esp. 74, who, though recognizing the problematics of the designation "early Syriac Christianity," ultimately conflates region, geography, and essence.

[3] G. Boney Maury, "La légend d'Abgar et de Thaddée et les missions chrétiennes a Édesse (108–180)," *RHR* 16 (1887): 269–283; F.C. Burkitt, *Early Eastern Christianity* (London: John Murray, 1904), 34, 75–76, and idem, "Syriac Speaking Christianity," *Cambridge Ancient History* 12 (1939): 492–514; F. Gavin, "Aphraates and the Jews," *Journal of the Society of Oriental Research* 7 (1923): 95–166; J. Obermeyer, *Die Landschaft Babylonien im Zeitalter des Talmuds und des Gaonats* (Frankfurt am Main: I. Kauffman, 1929), 132–135 noted that Jews may have comprised a significance base of conversion to Christianity in Mesopotamia.

[4] W. Wright, *A Short History of Syriac Literature* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1894), 1–2. On Renan, see T. Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions, or How European*

We must own – and it is well to make the confession at the outset – that the literature of Syria is, on the whole, not an attractive one. As [Ernest] Renan said long ago, the characteristic of the Syrians is a certain mediocrity. They shone neither in war, nor in the arts, nor in science. They altogether lacked the poetic fire of the older – we purposely emphasize the word – the older Hebrews and of the Arabs. But they were apt enough as pupils of the Greeks; they assimilated and reproduced, adding little or nothing of their own.[5]

As opposed to Wright's focus on Semiticness, the heretical roots of Syriac Christianity were elaborated upon in Walter Bauer's watershed *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum* published in 1934, in which he argued that the beginning of Christianity in Edessa was based on "a foundation that rests on an unmistakably heretical basis."[6] Bauer does not mention Jews or Jewish influence in his account. To Bauer, early Syrian Christianity differed from other forms of Christianity because it was largely dominated by Marcionites and Bardaisanites, in other words, groups eventually deemed heretical following the spread of "orthodox" views. A few years after the appearance of Bauer's work, Hans Lietzmann, in his *The History of the Early Church*, argued that the church in Syria and Mesopotamia largely emerged from gnostic and other influences. Lietzmann granted that Jews may have been among the earliest to convert in Arbela, but this did not leave any lasting impact on Syriac Christianity or its development.[7] According to him, the main influence on Christianity in Syria was Gnosticism emerging from Antioch. These scholars therefore maintained that Syriac Christianity was heretical, but not due to a connection with Jews or Judaism.

The heretical roots of Syriac Christianity resonated with scholarly paradigms of the time. Scholars of the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* eschewed connections between Judaism and early Christianity, prioritizing instead Hellenistic influences. Other scholars viewed Judaism and Christianity as always opposed and hostile groups: oil and water, never to mix.[8] Two larger trends, however, contributed to an explosion of interest in the Jewish origins of Christianity in general,

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Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 171–178.

   [5] Wright, *A Short History of Syriac*, 1–2. E. Renan, *The History of the Origins of Christianity*, vol. 5 (London: Mathieson and Company, 1875), 232–241, does posit Judeo-Christian influence as one of the many heretical and "foreign" influences (along Babylonian and Persian elements), that, according to him, formed Syriac Christianity.

   [6] Bauer, *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum* (BHT 10; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1934). The quotation is from the English translation by R. Kraft et al. as *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 43.

   [7] H. Lietzmann, *The Founding of the Universal Church* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1938), 266.

   [8] See, for instance, A. Baumgarten, "Marcel Simon's *Verus Israel* as a Contribution to Jewish History," *HTR* 92 (1999): 465–478. For a critique, see M. Taylor, *Anti-Judaism and Early Christian Identity: A Critique of the Scholarly Consensus* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), but see also the review by W. Kinzig, in *JTS* 48 (1997): 643–649.

and of Syriac Christianity in particular: the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the attempted theological and social reconciliation of Christians with Jews and Judaism following the Holocaust.[9]

As soon as the Dead Sea Scrolls were publicized, they were immediately heralded by scholars, such as William F. Albright, as revolutionary for the understanding of the Christian origins and "intertestamental studies."[10] Scholarly interest in Christianity's Jewish origins increased in the 1950s and 60s after the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls.[11] Noted scholars like Frank Moore Cross suggested continuities between the scrolls and New Testament texts, and a chorus of scholarly voices joined him.[12] While there were certainly precursors of the scholarly attempt to identify Jewish origins, it was only after the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls that this endeavor enjoyed wider popularity.[13]

The explosion of interest in the Jewish origins of Christianity following the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls coincided with a number of major Christian initiatives to reconcile with Judaism in the aftermath of the Holocaust. The most famous initiative was the Second Vatican Council, whose deliberations began in 1959 and extended through 1965.[14] Jewish origins were incorporated in the Council's final declaration, *Nostra Aetate*, which stated that "[The Church] also recalls that the Apostles, the Church's main-stay and pillars, as well as most of the early disciples who proclaimed Christ's Gospel to the world, sprang from the Jewish people." The Catholic Church officially declared that Christianity – at least in its first decades – sprouted from Jewish roots.

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[9] See J. Connelly, *From Enemy to Brother: The Revolution in Catholic Teaching on the Jews, 1933–1965* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), and the forum in *CHR* 98 (2012): 751–766; T. Renaud, "The Jewish Question in French Catholic Theology, 1944–1965" (http://terencerenaud.com/writings/the-jewish-question/).

[10] W. F. Albright, "Notes from the President's Desk," *BASOR* 110 (1948): 1–3.

[11] The bibliography is legion. See, for instance, W. D. Davies, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and Christian Origins* (Nashville, 1957); M. Black, *The Scrolls and Christian Origins: Studies in the Jewish Background of the New Testament* (New York: Scribner, 1961); O. P. Robinson, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and Original Christianity* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Books Co., 1958); J. M. Allegro, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Origins of Christianity* (New York: Criterion Books, 1957). The influential Philadelphia Seminar on Christian Origins at the University of Pennsylvania was inaugurated in 1963.

[12] In general, see J. J. Collins, "The Scrolls and Christianity in American Scholarship," in D. Dimant (ed.), *The Dead Sea Scrolls in Scholarly Perspective: A History of Research* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 197–216.

[13] This was often the domain of Jewish scholars. See S. Heschel, *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998) on Abraham Geiger, from the mid-nineteenth century, and more generally see the work of Joseph Klausner, at the beginning of the twentieth century. For the latter, see D. F. Sandmel, *Into the Fray: Joseph Klausner's Approach to Judaism and Christianity in the Greco-Roman World* (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 2002). See also Y. Moss, "'I am not Writing an Apology:' Samuel Krauss' *Das Leben Jesu* in Context," in D. Barbu and Y. Deutsch (eds.), *The Jewish Life of Jesus (Toledoth Yeshu) in Context* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, forthcoming).

[14] See fn. 9 above.

A key figure at the intersection of these two trends was Jean Daniélou (1905–1974). Daniélou, a French Jesuit, was involved in the early study of Jewish-Christianity and Christian origins in light of the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls.[15] He also served as a *peritus*, or theological advisor, at the Second Vatican Council at the behest of Pope John XXIII.[16] One of his early works on the subject of Christian origins in light of the Dead Sea Scrolls was titled *Les manuscrits de la Mer Morte et les origines du christianisme*, published in 1957, and translated into English the next year with the telling title *The Dead Sea Scrolls and Primitive Christianity*.[17] This work included a section titled "The Syrian Church and the Zadokites," in which Daniélou argued for a direct link between the Essenes in Qumran and Aramaic-speaking Christianity in Syria and Mesopotamia.[18] His work was highly influential on later scholars.[19]

Daniélou was followed by many others in the 1960s and 70s,[20] who also associated the origins of Syriac Christianity with the Qumran sect, summarily encapsulated in the title of J.C.L. Gibson's article in 1965 "From Qumran to Edessa."[21] Arthur Vööbus, whose work on Syriac remains influential (see below), argued that Syriac Christianity was unique for its intense asceticism and connected this with the Qumran community.[22] Robert Murray, whose book *Symbols of Church and Kingdom* was similarly esteemed, argued that early Syriac Christian terminology and imagery, such as dualism, religious conviction couched in military metaphors, and the idea of "people of the covenant," echoed ideas found in the

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[15] See E. Fiano, "The Construction of Ancient Jewish Christianity in the Twentieth Century: The Cases of Hans-Joachim Schoeps and Jean Daniélou," in C. Harrison, B. Bitton-Ashkelony, T. De Bruyn (eds.), *Patristic Studies in the Twenty-First Century: Proceedings of an International Conference to Mark the 50th Anniversary of the International Association of Patristic Studies* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), 279–297. On Daniélou's criteria for classifying a text or community as Jewish-Christian, see J. Taylor, "The Phenomenon of Early Jewish-Christianity: Reality or Scholarly Invention?" *VC* 44 (1990): 313–334.

[16] Though he was most actively involved in the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in he Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*).

[17] J. Daniélou, *Les manuscrits de la Mer Morte et les origines du christianisme* (Paris: Editions de l'Orante, 1957); idem, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and Primitive Christianity* (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1958).

[18] Daniélou, *Les manuscrits*, 110–114. It is a curious coincidence that the Dead Sea Scrolls were purchased and brought to public attention by the Syriac metropolitan and archbishop of Jerusalem. See A.Y. Samuel, *Treasure of Qumran: My Story of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966), and G.A. Kiraz, *Anton Kiraz's Archive on the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2005).

[19] The centrality of Daniélou is also noted by S. Mimouni, "Le judéo-christianisme syriaque: Mythe littéraire ou réalité historique?" in *SymSyr* IV, 269–279.

[20] Such as L.W. Barnard, "The Origins and Emergence of the Church in Edessa during the First Two Centuries A.D.," *VC* 22 (1968): 161–175.

[21] J.C.L. Gibson, "From Qumran to Edessa, or the Aramaic-Speaking Church before and after 70 A.D.," *Annual of Leeds University Oriental Society* 5 (1966): 24–39.

[22] Vööbus, *History of Asceticism*, vol. 1, 22–25.

Scrolls.[23] Michael Weitzman argued that the translators of the Old Testament Peshiṭta were Jewish and anti-cultic, pointing to a connection with the Qumran community (see below).[24] Together, these scholars and others like them created a near consensus concerning the impact of Jews on a nascent Syriac Christianity.

While many scholars focused on the relationship between the newly discovered Dead Sea Scrolls and Syriac Christianity,[25] the interest in the Jewish origins of Syriac Christianity quickly extended beyond the scrolls, and many other purported connections between Syriac Christianity and Judaism were offered.[26] Indeed, many scholars writing soon after and in response to Daniélou did not accept his hypothesis of a direct connection between the Essenes and Syriac Christians but nevertheless argued for a direct link with others Jews.[27]

The hypothesis of Jewish origins of Syriac Christianity, I would suggest, was in fact a way for these early scholars, at the height of interest in Jewish origins and in the heat of post-Holocaust reconciliation, to incorporate a persistent Jewish connection to *some* branches of Christianity and Christian history without compromising *all* of Christianity. Annette Yoshiko Reed has recently made a similar argument regarding the appeal of the "Parting of the Ways" paradigm, which, by focusing on the "moment when Christianity finally emerged as a separate 'religion'" also "functioned to *contain* … Jewishness, cordoning off the period of Christian Origins as distinct from the rest of Christian history."[28] This impulse is reflected in *Nostra Aetate* itself, where Jewish origins are recognized but within a very limited timeframe (and even then, only among "most" of

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[23] R. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1975). See also his general reflections in R. Murray, "Jews, Hebrews and Christians: Some Needed Distinctions," *Novum Testamentum* 21 (1982): 194–208.

[24] See his "From Judaism to Christianity: The Syriac Version of the Hebrew Bible," in J. Lieu, J. North, and T. Rajak (eds.), *The Jews among the Pagans and Christians* (London: Routledge, 1992), 147–173 and *The Syriac Version of the Old Testament: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

[25] To take just the *Odes of Solomon*: J. Carmignac, "Les affinités qumrâniennes de la onzième Ode de Salomon," *RQ* 3 (1961): 71–102; idem, "Un qumrânien converti au christianisme. L'auteur des Odes de Salomon," in H. Bardtke (ed.), *Qumran-Probleme* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1963), 75–108; A. F. J. Klijn, "The Influence of Jewish Theology on the Odes of Solomon and the Acts of Thomas," in *Aspects du judéo-christianisme. Colloque de Strasbourg, 23–25 avril 1964* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1965), 167–179; J. H. Charlesworth has made many versions of this argument for half a century. See, for instance, his, "Les Odes de Salomon et les manuscrits de la mer morte," *RB* 77 (1970) 522–549 and idem, *The Earliest Christian Hymnbook: The Odes of Solomon* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2009), xvii.

[26] See, for instance, M. Simon, "Réflexions sur le judéo-christianisme," in J. Neusner (ed.), *Christianity, Judaism and Other Greco-Roman Cults*, part 2. *Early Christianity* (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 53–76, esp. 73–76. I cannot here delve into the nuances in the way these scholars use Jewish versus Jewish-Christian. For my purposes what matters is the use of Jewishness in discussions of Syriac Christian origins. For an extensive and comprehensive discussion, see A. Y. Reed, *Jewish-Christianity and the History of Judaism* (TSAJ 171; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018).

[27] E. g., G. Quispel, "The Discussion of Judaic Christianity," *VC* 22 (1968): 81–93.

[28] Reed, *Jewish-Christianity,* 389.

Jesus' disciples). The Jewishness of Syriac Christianity similarly served both to acknowledge Jewish origins and to contain it – this time spatially rather than temporally.[29]

Characterizing a group as indebted to Judaism was therefore a marginalizing tactic, intended to distinguish it from Christians elsewhere. Indeed, Syriac Christianity was simply one of a number of "marginal" groups – Christian or otherwise – to which scholars assigned a particularly Jewish origin. Thus, Christianity in North Africa, as well as the famous personages therein, were said to have Jewish origins by the likes of W. H. C. Frend.[30] The same was true for Christianity in Ethiopia.[31] Other non-Christian groups, such as Mandaeans, Zoroastrians, Islam, and more, were also said to have been influenced by the Jews at Qumran in some form or other.[32] Jewishness served as a placeholder for "non-normative" and helped sideline these groups from larger narratives of early Christianity and its development.

The negative valence attached to Jewish connections is apparent from Daniélou's broader views on the relationship of Judaism to Christianity. For instance, despite Daniélou's involvement in the Second Vatican Council, he had deep reservations about aspects of *Nostra Aetate*'s new approach to the Jewish question. He objected to, among other things, the idea that Jews remained favored after Christ, saying "As we see it, the fleshly Israel lost all its privileges, and we have inherited them. Israel is now a people like all the others, exactly like all the others."[33] In this, Daniélou was consistent with his earlier articulated theological views, in which, for instance, he stated that "Certainly, the great danger for

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[29] Masuzawa (*The Invention of World Religions*) examines how the invention of the category of world religions served, in part, to bolster Christianity by decoupling it from Jewish/Semitic influences.

[30] W. H. C. Frend, "Jews and Christians in Third Century Carthage," in *Paganisme, judaisme, christianisme: Influences et affrontements dans le monde antique* (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1978), 185–194. See the critique of such an approach in E. Habas-Rubin, "The Jewish Origin of Julius Africanus," *JJS* (1994): 86–91. See also F. Decret, *Early Christianity in North Africa* (tran. Edward L. Smither; Eugene: Cascade Books, 2009), 13–15 and 31–32.

[31] E. Ullendorff, "Hebraic-Jewish Elements in Abyssinian (Monophysite) Christianity," *JSS* 1 (1958): 216–256; E. Isaac, "An Obscure Component in Ethiopian Church History," *Le Muséon* 85 (1972): 225–258.

[32] For Mandaeans, see especially the shift in Lady Drower's views on Mandaean origins in her work published prior to the discovery of the scrolls ("The Mandaeans To-day," *The Hibbert Journal* 37 [1938–1939]: 435) and her work published after ("Mandaean Polemic," *BSOAS* 25 [1962]: 448; eadem, *The Secret Adam: A Study of Naṣoraean Gnosis* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960], xiii–xv). For Zoroastrianism, see R. C. Zaehner, *At Sundry Times: An Essay in the Comparison of Religions* (London: Faber and Faber, 1958), 141–144, who suggested parallels between the dualism at Qumran and the Zoroastrian *Gathas* (an idea endorsed by U. Bianchi, *The History of Religions* [Leiden: Brill, 1975], 148). For Islam, see Ch. Rabin, "Islam and the Qumran Sect," in idem (ed.), *Qumran Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957), 21–27.

[33] Daniélou's comment is found in Connelly, *From Enemy to Brother*, 261. See also J. Daniélou, "Jésus et Israël," *Études* 258 (1948): 71.

Christianity would have been for it to remain bound to Judaism."[34] Daniélou's broader theological perspective on Judaism suggests that his argument for Jewish influence on the Syrian Church assumed that such continued Jewish influence was negative.[35]

To be sure, ascribing Jewish origins was not necessarily motivated by a negative view of Syriac Christianity. Followed to its logical extension, the Jewish origins hypothesis, coupled with the new consensus that Christ and his earliest disciples emerged from a Jewish context, suggested that Syriac Christianity was in some ways continuous with the earliest form of Christianity.[36] Nevertheless, even in this more positive configuration, the Jewish origins hypothesis served to marginalize Syriac Christianity. For instance, Robert Murray argued that Syriac Christianity was in some ways more "original" than other forms of Christianity.[37] But if Murray avoided Daniélou's overt supersessionism, he instead viewed Syriac Christian difference through the lens of the "noble savage." Thus, after praising what he identifies as Syriac Christianity's unique emphases on discipleship to Christ and a certain kind of asceticism, Murray concludes by noting: "These are the main features which belong to a brief sketch of early Syriac asceticism … [Syriac Christianity offered] by ways that had to be rejected – the attempt to form spiritual marriages in which it was hoped to 'sublimate' sex, and on the other hand the condemnation of marriage as such – and what remained was more severe than modern taste can find comfortable."[38]

Despite the context within which Syriac Christianity was ascribed Jewish origins, this idea was soon adopted by scholars of Jewish Studies. In the early seventies, Jacob Neusner argued that "Christianity took root in the Jewries in Edessa and Adiabene."[39] To Neusner these centers were particularly attracted to Christian missionizers because of the absence of a rabbinic presence there. Neusner was a vocal supporter of the Jewish origins hypothesis and is in part responsible

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[34] J. Daniélou, *The Salvation of the Nations* (trans. Angeline Bouchard; New York: Sheed and Ward, 1950), 87. See also p. 54: "It is indeed true that Judaism had to be abolished as such, so that all the nations might enter into Christianity."

[35] See also P. Berger-Marx, "Jean Daniélou, les Juifs et la Shoah," *Revue d'Histoire de la Shoah* 192 (2010): 79–100.

[36] For a helpful contextualization of a different version of the argument that Syriac Christianity preserves "authentic" features of early Christianity, see J. Gregory Given, "'Finding' the Gospel of Thomas in Edessa," *JECS* 25 (2017): 522–525.

[37] See R. Murray, "The Features of the Earliest Christian Asceticism," in P. Brooks (ed.), *Christian Spirituality: Essays in Honour of Gordon Rupp* (London: SCM Press, 1975), 69, who suggests that early Syriac Christian asceticism was identical to the "interpretation of the religious life within the church, recently reaffirmed by Vatican II …"

[38] Murray, "The Features of the Earliest Christian Asceticism," 76–77.

[39] J. Neusner, *Aphrahat and Judaism: The Christian-Jewish Argument in Fourth-Century Iran* (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 2.

for its proliferation in later Jewish and Syriac Christian scholarship, especially through his accessible *A History of the Jews in Babylonia*.[40]

Throughout this period, one scholar in particular steadfastly rejected the Jewish origins of Syriac Christianity: H. J. W. Drijvers.[41] Against the claim of any serious Jewish origins of or semitic influence on Syriac Christianity, Drijvers – harkening back to the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* – argued for the influence of Western Christian and Hellenistic ideas, mainly at the hands of Tatian and Bardaiṣan, who Drijvers saw as deeply influential during the earliest stages of Syriac Christianity.[42] Indeed, whereas all of the aforementioned scholars argued for the importance of mass Jewish conversion, Drijvers argues for its exact opposite, claiming that "Syriac-speaking Christianity in northern Mesopotamia and in the East Syrian region was mainly of Gentile origin," adding for good measure that "some of these Christians were more attracted by Judaism than the Jews were drawn to Christianity."[43] However, though Drijvers clearly rejected the Jewish origins of Syriac Christianity, he too was guided by a deep interest in origins. That is, Drijvers' view is structurally similar to his opponents, as both seek to explain the perceived uniqueness of early Syriac Christianity vis-à-vis other contemporaneous forms of Christianity by appealing to originary figures and essentializing distinctions of Hellenism versus Jewishness (and, relatedly, Semiticness).[44]

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[40] For instance, J. Neusner, *A History of the Jews in Babylonia*, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1965), 166–169. Neusner is cited in Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom,* 8–12, and in J. B. Segal, *Edessa, 'The Blessed City'* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 41–42 and 67–69. Neusner was not the first to note the possible importance of Jews in Mesopotamia as a base for conversion of Christians. See Obermeyer, *Die Landschaft Babylonien im Zeitalter des Talmuds und des Gaonats*, 132–135. A recent iteration of these arguments can be found in C. Jullien and F. Jullien, *Apôtres des confins. Processus missionnaires chrétiens dans l'empire iranien* (Bures-sur-Yvette: Groupe pour l'étude de la civilisation du Moyen-orient, 2002), 189–202.

[41] H. J. W. Drijvers, "Edessa und das jüdische Christentum," *VC* 24 (1970): 4–33; idem, "Jews and Christians at Edessa," *JJS* 36 (1985): 88–102.

[42] See, for instance, his "Syrian Christianity and Judaism," 141; idem, "Facts and Problems in Early Syriac-Speaking Christianity," *The Second Century: A Journal of Early Christian Studies* 2 (1982): 157–175; and idem, "East of Antioch: Forces and Structures in the Development of Early Syriac Theology," in *East of Antioch: Studies in Early Syriac Christianity* (London: Variorum 1984), 3. Drijvers ("Syrian Christianity and Judaism," 133–137) also posits that the battle against Manichaeism shaped Syriac Christianity substantively.

[43] Drijvers, "Syrian Christianity and Judaism," 141.

[44] W. Ball, *Rome in the East: The Transformation of an Empire* (London: Routledge, 2000)*,* 89 and 92 argues that in Edessa Hellenism "was never more than skin deep," and that "the city and region remained fundamentally Semitic in character," such that it served as a "counterbalance of the Hellenic culture of Antioch." See the critique of this binary thinking by B. ter Haar Romeny, "Hypotheses on the Development of Judaism and Christianity in Syria in the Period after 70 C.E.," in H. van de Sandt (ed.), *Matthew and the Didache: Two Documents from the Same Jewish-Christian Milieu?* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 19–20. A. H. Becker, "Beyond the Spatial and Temporal Limes: Questioning the 'Parting of the Ways' Outside the Roman Empire," in A. H. Becker and A. Y. Reed (eds.), *The Ways That Never Parted*: *Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (TSAJ 95; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 374 fn. 4,

In support of his contention, Drijvers tried to minimize the importance of Syriac among Syrian Christians, in order to emphasize how both Greek language and culture was as important in the East as in the West.[45] According to Drijvers, the Jews of Syria, like their Christian neighbors, were "as Hellenized as the rest of the population."[46] If some scholars appealed to a Jewish or Semitic past, Drijvers appealed to a Hellenized one.[47] In other words, Drijvers did not fundamentally break with the origins paradigm; in many ways he simply reverted to the position assumed by Bauer that identified Syriac Christianity as fundamentally heretical from its origins but not fundamentally Jewish.[48]

Though the Jewish origins hypothesis has received some welcome criticism,[49] it nevertheless continues to have an enduring legacy, persisting in three main ways. First, a number of the narratives offered to substantiate the Jewish origins hypothesis continue to be cited, even though most have been undermined by scholars. Second, the idea of Jewish origins continues to shape the way scholars discuss allegedly distinctive features of Syriac Christianity. Third, the Jewish origins hypothesis is often cited in support of claims of influence and borrowing between Jews and Syriac Christians in later centuries. I deal with each of these in turn.

Origins Stories

Given the interest in the Jewish origins of Syriac Christianity, scholars have offered a number of different narratives to explain the early influence of Judaism on the development of Syriac Christianity. Ultimately, what mattered to these scholars was to prove that "Christianity reached Syria and Mesopotamia very early on, probably as early as it reached Antioch or soon after, and that it reached there through Jewish or Jewish Christian mediation."[50] These stories involved origin

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critiques the fact that the debate about Syriac origins often revolves around Hellenism and Judaism as mutually exclusive categories.

[45] Drijvers, "Syrian Christianity and Judaism," 126.

[46] Drijvers, "Syrian Christianity and Judaism," 127; idem, *Cults and Beliefs at Edessa* (Leiden: Brill, 1980), 190–192. See also idem, "Syrian Christianity and Judaism," 138–139, for a particularly trenchant critique of the "nostalgic longing for an original purity" that animates those scholars seeking a Jewish or Semitic origin. Barnard, "The Origins and Emergence," 166, argued that the gnostic elements he perceived in early Syriac Christianity do not detract from the Jewish origin hypothesis, as Jews had already incorporated gnostic ideas into their own.

[47] See, for instance, A. Harrak, "Trade Routes and the Christianization of the Near East," *JCSSS* 2 (2002): 50, who says that "It seems Hellenism was Babylonized rather than the other way around. Thus, culturally the Near East remained deeply Semitic …"

[48] An updated version of Drijvers' arguments is found in Bas ter Haar Romeny, "Hypotheses."

[49] See Mimouni, "Le Judeo-Christianisme syriaque"; C. Shepardson, "Anti-Jewish Rhetoric and Intra-Christian Conflict in the Sermons of Ephrem Syrus," *SP* 35 (2001): 502–503 fn. 3; and esp. ter Haar Romeny, "Hypotheses."

[50] Gibson, "From Qumran to Edessa," 31.

figures or groups as well as mass conversions. Most of these origin stories are no longer accepted, though every so often they reappear. These largely rejected hypotheses include the idea that Jews converted *en masse* in Edessa, based on the *Teaching of Addai*,[51] or that the earliest Syriac Christians derive from the Jews in Arbela (in Adiabene), based largely on a misunderstanding of Josephus and on a single short reference in the controversial *Chronicle of Arbela*.[52] Scholars also often cited a modified version of the flight to Pella story.[53] Yet, despite greater scholarly suspicion of these narratives, origin stories themselves have not been entirely eschewed, especially in one widely-accepted scholarly theory concerning the creation of the Syriac Old Testament Peshiṭta.

The debate concerning whether the Peshiṭta of the Pentateuch is a translation of the Greek, Hebrew, or is an intermediate Aramaic Targum, is over a millennium old. However, it is now widely accepted that the Peshiṭta is a direct translation from the Hebrew,[54] and more specifically, from a predecessor of the

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[51] For discussion of this source and essential bibliography, see J.-N. Mellon Saint-Laurent, *Missionary Stories and the Formation of the Syriac Churches* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015), 36–55. For a representative example of positivist treatments of this text, see Barnard, "The Origins and Emergence"; Burkitt, *Early Eastern Christianity*, chap. 1; Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom,* 4–7. A handful of scholars persist in the attempt to identify a historical kernel of the *Doctrine*. See I. L. E. Ramelli, "Possible Historical Traces in the *Doctrina Addai*," *Hugoye* 9 (2006): 51–127, and Harrak, "Trade Routes and the Christianization of the Near East."

[52] For Adiabene, see J. B. Segal, "When did Christianity come to Edessa?" in J. D. Pearson and B. C. Bloomfield (eds.), *Middle East Studies and Libraries* (London: Mansell, 1980), 179–191, and review in Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom* (2nd edition), 8–9. These scholars understood Josephus to refer to a broad conversion of inhabitants of Adiabene, rather than the royal house alone. For critiques of this reading, see D. Goodblatt, "The Jews in the Parthian Empire: What We Don't Know," in B. Isaac and Y. Shahar (eds.), *Judaea-Palaestina, Babylon and Rome: Jews in Antiquity* (TSAJ 147; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 269–270; L. Schiffman, "The Conversion of the Royal House of Adiabene in Josephus and Rabbinic Sources," in L. Feldman and G. Hata (ed.), *Josephus, Judaism, and Christianity* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987), 295. I. Gafni, *The Jews of Talmudic Babylonia: A Social and Cultural History* (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar, 1990), 35 and 64, notes that the story does not even presuppose the existence of a local Jewish community. See also T. Rajak, "Parthians in Josephus," in eadem (ed.), *Jewish Dialogue with Greece and Rome* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 288; M. Stern, "The Jewish Diaspora," in S. Safrai and M. Stern (eds.), *The Jewish People in the First Century* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), 170–178.

[53] Daniélou, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and Primitive Christianity,* 91–92, 122; Barnard, "The Origins and Emergence," 173. The historicity of the Pella story has long been challenged. See, for instance, J. Taylor, "The Phenomenon of Early Jewish-Christianity"; C. Koester, "The Origin and Significance of the Flight to Pella Tradition," *CBQ* 51 (1989): 90–106; J. Verheyden, "The Flight of the Christians to Pella," *ETL* 66 (1990): 368–384; G. Ludemann, "The Successors of Pre-70 Jerusalem Christianity: A Critical Evaluation of the Pella-Tradition," in E. P. Sanders (ed.), *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition*, vol. 1. *The Shaping of Christianity in the Second and Third Centuries* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 161–173.

[54] As opposed to a direct translation of a Targum: see P. B. Dirksen, "Targum and Peshitta: Some Basic Questions," in P. V. M. Flesher (ed.), *Targum Studies*, vol. 2. *Targum and Peshitta* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 3–13, and M. Weitzman, "Is the Peshitta of Chronicles a

Masoretic text.[55] The Peshiṭta also presupposes quite a number of interpretive traditions that are at the very least strikingly similar, if not directly indebted, to Jewish interpretations.[56]

Ancient commentators who recognized the Hebrew *Vorlage* of the Peshiṭta did not, on the whole, speculate about the identity of the translators or how this text became authoritative among Syriac Christians.[57] While many scholars over the past two centuries did identify the translators with Jews, most did not offer explanations for the transmission of this text from Jewish to Christian hands and certainly did not connect the use of the Peshiṭta to Syriac Christian origins more broadly.[58] It simply was a historical anecdote, worthy of note.

It was Michael Weitzman who proposed an origin story for the Peshiṭta in light of the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the ensuing interest in Jewish origins. Weitzman argued that the Peshiṭta was the translation of Jews who were in some ways connected to the Jews at Qumran.[59] This was because, according to Weitzman, the "theological profile"[60] of these translators betrayed a Jewish rather than Christian perspective and therefore must originally have been translated by Aramaic-speaking Jews who then converted to Christianity. This view remains widely accepted, though some have sought to marginally tweak his hypothesis and argue that the translators were Jews who had *already* converted.[61] The con-

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Targum?," in idem, *From Judaism to Christianity: Studies in the Hebrew and Syriac Bibles* (Journal of Semitic Studies Supplement 8; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 217–264; J. Joosten, "La Peshitta de l'Ancien Testament et les targums," in F. Briquel-Chatonnet and P. Le Moigne (eds), *L'Ancien Testament en syriaque* (ÉS 5; Paris: Geuthner, 2008), 91–100.

[55] Weitzman, "From Judaism to Christianity"; idem, *The Syriac Version of the Old Testament.*

[56] For a representative list: S. P. Brock, "Jewish Traditions in Syriac Sources," *JJS* 30 (1979): 212–232; idem, "The Peshitta Old Testament: Between Judaism and Christianity," *Cristianesimo nella storia* 19 (1998): 483–502; J. Joosten, "La Peshitta de l'Ancien Testament dans la recherche recente," *RHPR* 76 (1996): 389; P. B. Dirksen, "The Old Testament Peshitta," in M. J. Mulder (ed.), *Mikra* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1988), 255–297.

[57] Brock, "The Peshitta Old Testament," 483–487; Dirksen, "The Old Testament Peshitta," 255–256; B. ter Haar Romeny, "The Peshitta and its Rivals," *The Harp* 11–12 (1998–1999): 21–31; idem, "The Syriac Versions of the Old Testament," in M. Atallah et al. (eds.), *Sources Syriaques*, vol. 1. *Nos Sources: Arts et Litterature Syriaques* (Antelias: Cero, 2005), 87–95.

[58] There are, to be sure, some outliers: see J. Bloch, "The Authorship of the Peshitta," *AJSLL* 35 (1919): 221–222. For bibliography of scholarship that addresses the question of the Jewish or Christian origins of the Peshitta, see P. B. Dirksen, *An Annotated Bibliography of the Peshitta of the Old Testament* (MPIL 5; Leiden: Brill, 1989), 90–92, and for a summary of some views see Dirksen, "The Old Testament Peshitta," 295–296. See also pp. 265–267, for the argument that the Peshiṭta was translated for the converted royal house of Adiabene.

[59] See, for instance, Weitzman, "From Judaism to Christianity," 166–168. Weitzman makes many simplistic assumptions about what a Jewish, "Jewish Christian," or Christian translator would and would not do (e.g. p. 152). By contrast, Y. Maori, *The Peshitta Version of the Pentateuch and Early Jewish Exegesis* (Jerusalem, 1995) (in Hebrew), argued that the translators were in fact immersed in rabbinic Judaism. See also his review and critique of Weitzman's book in Maori, "Is the Peshitta a Non-Rabbinic Jewish Translation," *JQR* 91 (2001): 411–418.

[60] Weitzman, *The Syriac Version of the Old Testament,* 208.

[61] Ter Haar Romeny, "Hypotheses," 28–32.

version of the translators is widely cited as evidence of the presence of Jews in and their influence on early Syriac Christianity.[62]

Rather than assume that an entire community of translators converted before or after they completed their work, it seems far simpler to suggest that Jews translated a text similar to the Masoretic text into Syriac and the text migrated into Syriac Christian hands. After all, we have a model for this: the Septuagint.[63] It too was translated by Jews before its eventual adoption by many Greek-speaking Christians, and it too contained Jewish interpretive traditions.[64] In other words, I am not sure any evidence exists to suggest that Jews could not have translated the Peshiṭta *for Jews*, and that the text was then adopted by Christians.[65] While this need not entail any Jewish conversion, if such a conversion event did indeed occur, it would require only a single Jewish convert to carry the text with them. Regardless, even if a number of Jews did indeed convert and transmit this text along with them, does this really speak to the vast influence of Jewish converts on early Syriac Christianity?[66]

Aside from the fact that the evidence of a mass Jewish conversion is simply unfounded in our sources, a more fundamental question presents itself: Did not

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[62] See Brock, "A Palestinian Targum Feature in Syriac," *JJS* 46 (1995): 282. Interestingly, Murray (*Symbols of Church and Kingdom* [1975], 9–10) argues that the earliest parts of the Old Testament Peshiṭta must have been produced in Adiabene because *that* was the early cradle of Syriac Christianity. Again, the connection between Jews, Syriac Christian origins, and the Peshiṭta are entangled. Yet, in the revised version of his book ([2004], 8) he changed his view and settled on Edessa as the major cradle of Syriac Christianity, due to Michael Weitzman's arguments about the production of the Old Testament Peshiṭta in Edessa.

[63] On earlier theories of the translation of the Septuagint, see the survey in S. Jellicoe, *The Septuagint and Modern Study* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1993), 59–73. See now B. Wright III, "Access to the Source: Cicero, Ben Sira, The Septuagint and Their Audiences," *JSJ* 34 (2003): 1–27.

[64] Weitzman (*The Syriac Version of the Old Testament,* 261–262) suggests that the reason Jews did not preserve the Peshiṭta was because it did not accord with rabbinic interpretation and because it was eventually associated with the church. The former point was based on now long-rejected approaches that assumed rabbinic authority was universally recognized by Jews. The latter point was often made about the Septuagint, but see now T. Rajak, *Translation and Survival: The Greek Bible of the Ancient Jewish Diaspora* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 278–313.

[65] Gavin, "Aphraates and the Jews," 14, says the Peshiṭta was translated by Jews for use in the synagogue. J. Pinkerton, "The Origin and the Early History of the Syriac Pentateuch," *JTS* 15 [57] (1913): 14–41 suggests that the translation was made by Jews, and then "The Christian Church took over this version" (p. 41).

[66] Here too Drijvers roundly rejects Weitzman's suggestion of Jewish origins and instead argues that "the Syriac-speaking Christians produced their own Syriac translation of the Old Testament, the Peshiṭta," even asserting that the motivation for this Christian translation was "to define themselves as different from the Jews" ("Syrian Christianity and Judaism," 140–141). Drijvers again replaces an idea of Jewish origins with its opposite, attempting to distance Jews entirely from early Syriac Christianity. Drijvers also basis his argument largely on the Peshiṭta translation of the Wisdom of Solomon, which is a strange choice. See ter Haar Romeny, "Hypotheses," 25.

Jews convert to Christianity in other regions? Is Christianity in other regions more "pagan" because its converts were made up of fewer Jews? Is this really a statistical question, where the number or percentage of Jews changes the character of Christianity in a given area? The scholarly emphasis on the supposed mass Jewish conversion forming the foundation of early Syriac Christianity marks Jewishness as a distinctly or predominately eastern affair, rather than a basic facet of early Christianity more generally.[67]

The Legacy of Origins: Syriac Christian Asceticism and Jewishness

The Jewish origin of Syriac Christianity was not simply a question of antiquarian curiosity; it was evoked to explain features of Syriac Christianity considered by scholars to be unique within the broader early Christian landscape. Indeed, the Jewish origin hypothesis is largely responsible for the persistent scholarly claim that Syriac Christianity is characterized by a form of asceticism that is distinct from other contemporary forms of asceticism.

The supposed unique asceticism of Syriac Christianity was a matter of debate in the early twentieth century. Burkitt portrayed a radical picture of Syriac asceticism based on Aphrahaṭ in which baptism was only available to celibates.[68] Burkitt was immediately challenged by scholars who argued that in fact Aphrahaṭ, and the ascetics he depicted, "answer quite clearly to a class of ascetics and virgins common wherever Christianity existed in the centuries before the rise of monasticism."[69] Nevertheless, Burkitt's view was resuscitated by Vööbus in the early 50s, who noted more generally that the "features" of Syriac asceticism "leave no doubt that they must be of exotic descent."[70] In these early publications, Vööbus never attributed these unique features to Jewish origins but instead to Manichaean influence.[71] However, with the discovery of the Dead Sea

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[67] Drijvers critiques the Jewish origin narratives but simply replaces the Jewish figures with his own "Hellenistic apostles," Tatian and Bardaiṣan, following Burkitt. See above, pp. 129–130.

[68] Burkitt, *Early Eastern Christianity*, 129, 137–138.

[69] From Mother Mary Maude "Who were the b'nai q'yâmâ?" *JTS* 36 (1935): 13–21, esp. 15. For earlier critique, see R. H. Connolly, "Aphraates and Monasticism," *JTS* 6 (1905): 522–539.

[70] A. Vööbus, *Celibacy, a Requirement for Admission to Baptism in the Early Syrian Church* (PETSE 1; Stockholm: Estonian Theological Society in Exile, 1951); idem, "The Origins of Monasticism in Mesopotamia," *CH* 20 (1951): 27–37, esp. 33.

[71] Vööbus, "The Origins of Monasticism in Mesopotamia," 33–36. For a review of the literature, see S. H. Griffith, "Asceticism in the Church of Syria: The Hermeneutics of Early Syrian Monasticism," in V. L. Wimbush and R. Valantasis (eds.), *Asceticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 231 with fn. 82 there. See also R. Murray, "The Exhortation to Candidates for Ascetical Vows at Baptism in the Ancient Syriac Church," *NTS* 21 (1974): 59–80; idem, "The Features of the Earliest Christian Asceticism," 73–74. Brock ("Early Syrian Asceticism," 7) rejects Vööbus' genealogical connection from Qumran to Syriac asceticism but nevertheless endorses his larger views throughout the article.

Scrolls, Vööbus and others would rely on Jewish origins to explain the supposed unique characteristics of Syriac Christianity, which now became widely accepted by scholars.[72] As Daniélou asserted "[a]nother characteristic feature of the Syrian Church is its asceticism."[73]

The supposed unique asceticism of Syriac Christianity was firmly rooted in the Jewish origins hypothesis. The structure and tenor of Syriac Christian monasticism and asceticism was, to Daniélou, "a powerful argument for asserting the Essenian origin of the Syrian community."[74] Barnard argued that "Syrian Christianity came to reflect a particular facet of Judaism, viz. the asceticism of Jewish sectarianism."[75] The dependence of Syriac Christian asceticism on Jewish asceticism, and in particular on the Qumran sect, was made most forcefully by Vööbus, whose work greatly influenced future scholars, most notably Murray in his own now standard work.[76] Following these scholars, while the precise description and contours of Syriac Christian asceticism has changed, the very notion of its uniqueness and its relationship to Jewish origins has rarely been questioned or challenged.

What particularly struck many scholars were two Syriac terms used by Aphrahaṭ and Ephrem in the mid to late fourth century to describe certain types of Christians: *iḥidāyē* and *bnay qyāmā*, roughly translated as "single ones" and "children/members of the covenant," respectively. These terms seemed similar to the Qumranic terms *yaḥad* and the *bnei berit*. As Quispel put it so pithily, "There is something strangely Jewish about the Syrian Sons of the Covenant."[77] It should be noted that Sidney Griffith, building on the work of others, has shown that these Syriac terms are multivalent and are taken directly from the Old and New Testaments, rather than from later Jewish intermediaries.[78]

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[72] Vööbus, *History of Asceticism.*

[73] Daniélou, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and Primitive Christianity,* 121.

[74] Daniélou, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and Primitive Christianity,* 120. See also pp. 121–122.

[75] Barnard, "The Origins and Emergence," 163.

[76] See Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom* (1975), 18, who, despite originally cautionary marks against endorsing a "pan-qumranism," ultimately circles back to Jewish influence. See also his "The Characteristics of Earliest Syriac Christianity," *VC* 22 (1968): 5–6; idem, "The Features of the Earliest Christian Asceticism," 65–66. For a discussion of Vööbus' views in dialogue with other views of the time, see G. Kretschmar, "Ein Beitrag zur Frage nach dem Ursprung fruhchristlicher Askese" *ZTK* 61 (1964): 27–67, who proffers a different Jewish influence narrative for Syrian asceticism.

[77] Quispel, "The Discussion of Judaic Christianity," 91. See also Barnard, "The Origins and Emergence," 163. See also G. Nedungatt, "The Covenanters of the Early Syriac-Speaking Church" *OCP* 39 (1973): 191–215, 419–44 and A. Guillaumont, "Monachisme et ethique judéo-chrétienne," *RSR* 60 (1972): 199–218.

[78] Griffith, "Asceticism," 228 and 230. See also S. P. Brock, *The Luminous Eye: The Spiritual World Vision of Saint Ephrem* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1992), 134. These scholars also neglect other important vocabulary in early Syriac texts because they lack clear Qumranic parallels. See Griffith, "Asceticism," 223.

The ascetic properties that Jews and Syriac Christians allegedly shared were often attributed, in turn, to their shared Semiticness.[79] For example, Vööbus combined Jewish origins and Semiticness with Syriac Christian asceticism and emphasized that these connections are quite "natural":

It is natural that the pioneer work in the expansion of the Christian faith in these Semitic areas was carried out not by Greek-speaking Hellenistic Christianity but by Aramaic-speaking Christians who possessed the lingua franca of the contemporary Orient … Finally that which we see in this twilight about the transition of the Christian message from the Aramaean Jewish community to the native Syrian communities is also quite natural … For emissaries from the small Aramaic-speaking communities quietly carried the message of the good news towards the Orient where their kinsmen in the Jewish communities, and their Semitic relatives in the Syrian Orient, lived.[80]

Vööbus' arguments about the Jewishness and Semiticness of Syrian asceticism were accepted by other scholars soon after they were published.[81] The overlap of Jewishness and Semiticness was quite common, such that we find the typical orientalist conflation of religion, race, and language, or in this case, of Jewishness, Semiticness, and Aramaic, in Quispel's remark that "Jewish Christianity in Palestine remained alive and active even after the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and was instrumental in bringing Christianity to Mesopotamia and further East, thus laying the foundations of Semitic, Aramaic speaking, Syrian Christianity."[82] Still others connected some "distinctive features of early Syrian spirituality" to the fact that "Christianity first emerged in the Syrian Orient out of the Jewish communities, largely independent of the Greco-Latin churches to the west, and with a powerful spirituality born of Semitic tradition rather than that of classical Greece and Rome."[83] Some scholars even argued that Syriac Christianity remained predominately if not exclusively Semitic through the fourth century. As Brock argued Aphrahaṭ and Ephrem "are representatives of a Syriac culture that

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[79] On the idea of an essentialized – and negative – semiticness as applied to Syriac Christian texts, see A. H. Becker, "Doctoring the Past in the Present: E. A. Wallis Budge, the Discourse on Magic, and the Colonization of Iraq," *HR* 44 (2005): 196–198.

[80] Vööbus, *History of Asceticism,* vol. 1, 9–10.

[81] See, for instance, G. Quispel, "L'Evangile selon Thomas et les origines de l'ascèse chrétienne," in *Aspects du Judéo-Christianisme* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1965), 35–51.

[82] Quispel, "The Discussion of Judaic Christianity," 81. On Quispel's similar views regarding the Gospel of Thomas, its "semitic" character, and its Edessene provenance, see now Given, "'Finding' the Gospel of Thomas in Edessa." While most studies lack explicit racist notions, this does appear in some works, such as in Barnard, "The Origins and Emergence," 173, who explains that Bardaiṣan fell out of favor among Syriac Christians because "wide-ranging, independent speculation was never a Syrian strong point …" On Daniélou's conflation of Jewish and Semitic, see R. Kraft, "In Search of 'Jewish Christianity' and its 'Theology': Problems of Definition and Methodology," *RSR* 60 (1972): 88.

[83] S. P. Brock and S. A. Harvey, *Holy Women of the Syrian Orient* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 6–7; S. A. Harvey, *Asceticism and Society in Crisis: John of Ephesus and The Lives of the Eastern Saints* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 2–5.

is still essentially Semitic in its outlook and thought patterns," and of a "pure form of Syriac Christianity."[84] In this way, the deeply problematic racialist views of the nineteenth century, such as those of Ernest Renan, followed by William Wright, reemerged in combination with or as a spinoff of the Jewish origins hypothesis.

The Jewish origins of Syriac Christian asceticism was a pervasive view, yet what made Syriac Christian asceticism unique or particularly Jewish differed among scholars, often radically. To be sure, Syriac Christianity's unique asceticism is typically characterized as more extreme than Western Christian asceticism,[85] and could be described as "grotesque and bizarre," or "exaggeratedly ascetic."[86] Yet the precise manner in which Syriac Christianity is distinct or "extreme" from other forms of Christianity differs from scholar to scholar. As Sidney Griffith put it: "… this general impression of the severity, or at least the peculiarity, of asceticism in the Syrian Orient has become almost a stereotype … with no finer distinctions required to understand what was, in fact, a more complicated social phenomenon."[87] The characterization of Syriac Christian asceticism as both unique and extreme is endorsed in broad surveys and specialized studies alike.[88]

To some, the extreme character of Syriac asceticism is nothing more than a matter of quantity, such that Brock says that "[i]t is indeed well known that rigorist attitudes towards marriage were very common in many early Christian communities, but it is clear that one area where they were especially rife was that

[84] For the former quote, see S. P. Brock, "From Antagonism to Assimilation: Syriac Attitudes to Greek Learning," in N. G. Garsoïan et al. (eds.), *East of Byzantium: Syria and Armenia in the Formative Period* (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 1982), 17–34, at 17; for the latter, see Brock, "Early Syrian Asceticism," 11. For pushback, see L. Van Rompay, "The Christian Syriac Tradition of Interpretation," in M. Saebø (ed.), *Hebrew Bible / Old Testament: The History of its Interpretation*, vol. 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 617 and 640. Brock's views on the subject evolved with time; see A. M. Butts, *Language Change in the Wake of Empire: Syriac in its Greco-Roman Context* (LSAW 11; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2016)*,* 200 fn. 15. Murray is somewhat confusing on this point. Contrast his remarks in "Earliest Syriac Christianity," 9–10, with those in "Hellenistic-Jewish Rhetoric in Aphrahat," in *SymSyr* III, 79–85. For a critique of the idea that these two writers preserved some kind of pristine Syriac culture and language, see U. Possekel, *Evidence of Greek Philosophical Concepts on the Writings of Ephrem the Syrian* (Leuven: Peeters, 1999), esp. 1–12. For more general treatments of Greek language and cultural influence on Syriac Christianity, see C. Shepardson, "Syria. Syriac. Syrian: Negotiating East and West," in P. Rousseau and J. Raithel (eds.), *A Companion to Late Antiquity* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 456–58. On the relationship between Syriac and Greek for Syriac Christians, see Butts, *Language Change.*
[85] Very influential in this regard is Vööbus, *Celibacy, A Requirement for Admission for Baptism in the Early Syrian Church.*
[86] For the former, see Vööbus, *Asceticism*, vol. 1, v; for the latter, see idem, "The Origin of Monasticism in Mesopotamia," 27.
[87] Griffith, "Asceticism," 220.
[88] For the former, see, for instance, F. M. Young and A. Teal, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon: A Guide to the Literature and its Background* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press), 128–134, based on Theodoret. For the latter, see below.

of Syria-Mesopotamia."[89] Sometimes Syriac Christian "extreme" asceticism was linked to "the Encratites," themselves linked to Jews.[90] As Barnard says, "We can then postulate the founding of the Church in Edessa among Syriac-speaking Jews who stamped an ascetic-encratite outlook on the nascent Church."[91] However, the asceticism of the Encratites is rather well-defined in heresiological sources, and no Syriac text fully accords with it.[92] These attempts to characterize broadly Syriac Christianity as exhibiting an extreme form of asceticism perpetuate heresiological labels that cannot help but marginalize Syriac Christianity.[93]

Just as the precise characterization of Syriac Christian asceticism differs between scholars, so too do the texts they treat as representative of Syriac Christian asceticism.[94] Early scholars based their arguments for a unique Syriac Christian asceticism on the *Gospel of Thomas* and Tatian's *Diatessaron*.[95] Yet, though the *Gospel of Thomas* is no longer thought to have emerged from the same milieu as other early Syriac texts, the characterization remained unchanged.[96] Some have relied on the *Book of Steps* as a witness of early Syriac Christian asceticism, while others have argued that it is both a relatively late text and that it shows influence of the spread of Egyptian style monasticism.[97] Another prime example is Tatian,

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[89] Brock, "Early Syrian Asceticism," 6. Later in the same article (pp. 11–12), Brock again qualifies the distinctive features of Syriac Christian asceticism by stating: "This type of life – which, incidentally, was not confined to Christian ascetics in this area …"

[90] For instance, Quispel, "The Discussion of Judaic Christianity;" H. Stander, "Encratites," in E. Ferguson (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity* (2nd ed.; London: Routledge, 1999), 370–371.

[91] Barnard, "The Origins and Emergence," 166. Burkitt, "Syriac Speaking Christianity," 499 attributes encratism to Tatian, and therefore through him to Syriac Christianity, without mentioning Jews.

[92] See, for instance, Drijvers, "Syrian Christianity and Judaism," 129, who categorizes Syriac Christianity as thoroughly influenced by Encratite ideas, despite attributing characteristics to encratism absent from Syriac texts. He is followed by ter Haar Romeny, "Hypotheses," 23.

[93] For a similar critique of the scholarly use of "Messalian" label, among others, see J. Goehring, *Ascetics, Society, and the Desert: Studies in Early Egyptian Monasticism* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1999), 13. For misgivings of classifying the *Gospel of Thomas* as "Encratite," see R. Valantasis, "Is the Gospel of Thomas Ascetical? Revisiting an Old Problem with a New Theory," *JECS* 7 (1999): 55–81. For a challenge to the very categorization of the *Gospel of Thomas* as ascetic, see J. J. Buckley, "An Interpretation of Logion 114 in 'The Gospel of Thomas'," *NT* 27 (1985): 245–272.

[94] For critiques of the scholarly tendency to select certain texts and treat them as representative of larger communities, without sufficient supporting evidence, see especially T. Robinson, *The Bauer Thesis Examined: The Geography of Heresy in the Early Christian Church* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1988), 36–37 and bibliography there.

[95] See especially Barnard, "The Origins and Emergence," 165–166 for the former, and 169–170 for the latter.

[96] Given, "'Finding' the *Gospel of Thomas* in Edessa." Griffith, "Asceticisim," 226, selectively continues to use the *Gospel of Thomas* as representative of the early "Syrian milieu."

[97] For these methodological correctives, see K. Smith, "A Last Disciple of the Apostles: The 'Editor's' Preface, Rabbula's Rules, and the Date of the Book of Steps," in K. H. Heal and R. Kitchen (eds.), *Breaking the Mind: New Studies in the Syriac "Book of Steps"* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2014), 72–96. Griffith, "Asceticism," 222 accepts a late

who Drijvers viewed as a purveyor of Hellenism, but whom other scholars treated as a representative of "Semitic" thought.[98] Still others base their arguments about Syriac Christian asceticism almost entirely on Aphrahaṭ and Ephrem, mid- to late-fourth-century writers, apparently assumed to preserve a kind of "pure Syriac Christianity" of the past, rather than a more complicated bricolage of their own time and place.[99] The claim of Jewish and Semitic roots of Syrian asceticism has all the tell-tale signs of essentialism: The fundamental characteristics remain stable no matter the texts or data scholars use.[100]

The notion of a unique Syriac Christian asceticism and its relationship to Jewishness is so persistent that it appears in recent scholarly works that otherwise emphasize precisely how similar Syriac Christian asceticism was to contemporary forms of Christian asceticism.[101] For instance, despite revealing the representative quality of certain features of early Syrian Christian asceticism, Daniel Caner still insists that the "apostolic imperative," the public display of asceticism for others to emulate, is indeed reflective of "the distinctive ascetic bent in Syro-Mesopotamian Christianity."[102] As possible causes for this distinctiveness, Caner lists, among other things, the influence of "Judaic sects" from Qumran and adds his own version of the Jewish origins hypothesis for Syriac Christian asceticism:

We must remember the proximity of Eastern congregations to more established Jewish communities and ideas. The zealous kind of *imitatio Christi* celebrated in Syria bears striking resemblance to the Judaic expectation that disciples would imitate their rabbinic masters – each of whom was viewed as "living Torah" – in everything they did or said.[103]

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fourth- to fifth-century dating of the *Book of Steps,* yet treats it as *both* "echoes traditional Syrian ascetical vocabulary" but also as a representative of a "more mainstream Christian discourse."

[98] Vööbus, *History of Asceticism,* vol. 1, 10–11; Barnard, "The Origins and Emergence," 168, mixes a number of these ideas together, saying that "the semitic tradition embodied in Thomas was Tatian's 'fifth' source which he drew on when compiling his Harmony." On this last point, see G. Quispel, "L'Evangile selon Thomas et le Diatessaron," *VC* 13 (1959): 87–117. Interestingly, while Tatian was originally described as encratistic, this label has been rejected by a number of recent scholars. See E. Hunt, *Christianity in the Second Century: The Case of Tatian* (London: Routledge, 2003)*,* 144–175; N. Koltun-Fromm, "Re-imagining Tatian: The Damaging Effects of Polemical Rhetoric," *JECS* 16 (2008): 1–30.

[99] See fn. 84 above. See also Griffith, "Asceticism," 235–237, who, argues both that Aphrahaṭ and Ephrem are the best evidence for earlier Syriac Christian asceticism, and that some aspects of their accounts should not be accepted because they represent specific issues and challenges of the mid to late fourth century.

[100] For a study of the questions of culture and identity in Syria vis-à-vis Greek and Roman rule, see N. Andrade, *Syrian Identity in the Greco-Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

[101] Quispel, "The Discussion of Judaic Christianity," 91 argued that the Jewish origins of Syriac Christian asceticism proves that asceticism is original to Christianity more broadly.

[102] D. Caner, *Wandering, Begging Monks: Spiritual Authority and the Promotion of Monasticism in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 79. On the "apostolic imperative," see Caner, *Wandering,* 56, 79. First argued by Murray, "The Features of the Earliest Christian Asceticism"; Griffith, "Asceticism," 225–227.

[103] Caner, *Wandering,* 79.

Caner's characterization of this apparently widespread "Judaic expectation" of behavior towards the equally widespread "rabbinic masters" is a stereotype of a broadly-shared and singular rabbinic Judaism that has long since been rejected, one that could equally characterize many teacher-disciple relationship.[104]

To be sure, I do not mean to imply that one might not find interesting, local, even unique features of asceticism in early Syriac texts, or texts composed in Syria and Mesopotamia.[105] Nor do I mean to suggest that any work on unique features of Syriac asceticism is tainted by earlier work on the subject, as this would simply commit the same etymological fallacy I here critique. Future work, replacing Vööbus and others, may discover quite interesting ascetic features in (some) Syriac/Syrian Christian texts. However, these unique features must not be overblown, either by overstating their distinctiveness, or by inflating how representative they are of a unified "early Syriac Christian asceticism."[106] Lastly, scholars must avoid appeals to an original or essential Jewishness or Semiticness in order to explain these hypothetically unique features, which can be accounted for by models other than the lingering effects of some kind of shared Jewish (or Semitic) origins.[107]

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[104] Goehring, *Ascetics,* 33, also claims that Syriac Christian asceticism is unique, which he explains by appealing to its "Semitic roots." Griffith, "Asceticism," 222 notes that early Syriac Christian ascetic organization and practice was "very similar to what recent scholars find elsewhere, in Egypt, for instance," emphasizing instead the "distinctive conceptual flavor" of Syriac asceticism, which, however, simply amounts to ascetics living within larger Christian communities.

[105] For instance, C. Stewart (*'Working the Earth of the Heart': The Messalian Controversy in History, Texts, and Language to AD 431* [OTM; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991]) argues that Pseudo-Macarius is informed by spiritual metaphors mainly found in Syriac rather than Greek texts, but he carefully shies away from claiming a shared ascetical koine among early Syriac Christians.

[106] For this kind of problematic argument, see Griffith, "Asceticism." Of course, here too other scholars argue that Syriac concepts are the same as their Greek counterparts. See Nedungatt, "The Covenanters of the Early Syriac-Speaking Church."

[107] I do not here discuss the phenomenon of stylites and other Syrian "hunger artists", which are later than the period under consideration, though at times are conflated with the broader question of Syriac origins. See generally Griffith, "Asceticism." Similarly, I have not discussed the so-called Jewish Christian texts that are often assigned a Syrian provenance (e.g. *Didache*; *Didascalia Apostolorum*; *Pseudo-Clementines*). It is worth noting, however, that the provenance of these texts in Syria is often established based on their supposed Jewish character. This creates a tautology: The Jewishness of Syria and Syriac Christianity suggests to scholars that other texts exhibiting "too much" Jewishness emerge from Syria, and this, in turn, provides more evidence of the persistent Jewishness of Syria. For a similar critique, see Bas ter Har Romeny, "Hypotheses," 15, and especially Robinson, *The Bauer Thesis Examined,* 38, who says "Our conclusion that a document is Syrian, for example, often depends solely on the assumption that there is such a thing as an identifiable Syriac Christianity." See also A. Y. Reed and L. Vuong, "Christianity in Antioch: Partings in Roman Syria," in H. Shanks (ed.), *Partings: How Judaism and Christianity became Two* (Washington: Biblical Archaeology Society, 2013), 105–132.

Judaism and Syriac Christianity: Late Connections

The Jewish origins of Syriac Christianity is still regularly invoked to explain later moments of contact and exchange between Jews and Syriac Christians, an ever-growing field of inquiry.[108] Indeed, many Jewish traditions are found in Syriac texts, and recent studies have identified elements of Syriac Christian tropes, literature, and ideas in Jewish texts.[109] These shared origins, so the argument goes, make the later interaction and influence between these two groups more plausible, even natural.[110]

This scholarly need to justify the possibility of contacts between Syriac Christianity and Judaism reflects the older "Parting of Ways" paradigm, when association between groups was believed to be rare and almost always hostile.[111] Accordingly, Jewish and Syriac Christians would require a unique relationship in order to explain the parallels between the two communities. Jewish and Syriac Christian shared origins suggests an ongoing relationship, a genetic connection shared between now distant cousins that still testifies to some bond that allows them to overcome the otherwise ever growing disparities between them.

However, it is now widely recognized that Jews and Christians could engage without vitriol and hostility throughout antiquity and beyond, and examples of engagement between Jews and Christians across the ancient world continue to be identified. As such, the interpenetration of ideas between Jews and Syriac Christians does not reflect ongoing familial bonds between the two communities or any shared notion of common origin. Rather, such contact reflects the distinct

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[108] A number of representative examples from the past two decades: N. Koltun Fromm, "A Jewish-Christian Conversation in Fourth-Century Persian Mesopotamia," *JJS* 47 (1996): 52; J. Amar, "A Shared Voice: When Jews and Christians Drank from the Same Wells," *The Times Literary Supplement* (October, 2014), 14–16; J. Tubach, "Die Anfänge des Christentums in Edessa," *ZAC* 19 (2015): 5–25; Van Rompay, "Jews and Judaism," in *GEDSH*, 232–236; idem, "The East (3): Syria and Mesopotamia," in S. A. Ashbrook Harvey and D. Hunter (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 367–368; R. Kiperwasser and S. Ruzer, "Syriac Christians and Babylonian Jewry: Narratives and Identity Shaping in a Multi-Religious Setting," in B. Bitton-Ashkelony et al. (eds.), *Patristic Studies in the Twenty-First Century* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), 436, who explicitly model their own search for a shared "Mesopotamian" heritage of Babylonian Jews and Syriac Christians on the search for a shared origin of early Christians and the Dead Sea Scrolls; A. Gray, "The People, Not the Peoples: The Talmud Bavli's 'Charitable' Contribution to the Jewish-Christian Conversation in Mesopotamia," *RRJ* 20 (2017): 139. See also Rouwhorst, "Jewish Liturgical Traditions," who inverts the question and searches for later signs of contact as *proof* of the Jewish origins hypothesis against Drijvers' alternative.

[109] For the former, see S. Minov, *Syriac Christian Identity in Late Sasanian Mesopotamia: The Cave of Treasures in Context* (Ph.D. Dissertation, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2013). For the latter, see the literature cited in S. Gross, "A Persian Anti-Martyr Act: The Death of Rabbah Bar Naḥmani," in J. Rubenstein and G. Herman (eds.), *The Aggada of the Babylonian Talmud and its Cultural World* (Providence: Brown University Press, 2018), 211–242.

[110] Most notably S. P. Brock, "A Palestinian Targum Feature in Syriac," *JJS* 46 (1995): 281–282.

[111] See Reed and Becker, *The Ways that Never Parted,* 1–33.

dynamics between Jews and Christians dependent on locale and period.[112] By eschewing appeals to shared Jewish origins, other possible accounts for shared Jewish and Syriac Christian traditions can be offered.[113]

Conclusion: Origins Moments and the Invention of "Syriac Christianity"

The Jewish origins hypothesis for Syriac Christianity is simply unsuccessful as a historical account. It mischaracterizes Syriac Christianity, and thus renders it a regionally distinct form of Christianity.[114]

By eschewing the impulse to assign a single origin for an early and essential Syriac Christianity, we are better able to appreciate the continuous formation of distinct identities around region, community, and language. In fact, early Christian writers in Syriac do not appear to have perceived themselves – or or to have been perceived by others – as distinct from Christians elsewhere. For instance, Bardaiṣan (or one of his students) emphasizes not the differences between Christianity in Edessa versus other Christian centers in the second century but rather the similarity, saying: "we all, wherever we may be, are called Christians after the one name of the Messiah. And upon one day, the first of the week, we gather together and on the appointed days we abstain from food …"[115] As Annette Yoshiko Reed has explained, the *Book of the Laws of Countries* "overarching aim is to promote Christianity as a transregional/transethnic religion."[116] Given how nearly every surviving Syriac or Syrian work from the first three centuries of the common era also exists in Greek and was known to Greek and Latin Christian

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[112] See Becker, "Beyond the Spatial and Temporal *Limes*" and Reed and Vuong, "Christianity in Antioch."

[113] A. H. Becker, "Polishing the Mirror: Some Thoughts on Syriac Sources and Early Judaism," in R. Boustan et al. (eds.), *Envisioning Judaism: Studies in Honor of Peter Schäfer on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), vol. 2, 897–915.

[114] The problems with these arguments are typical of origin claims more generally. See E. Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 373; M. Bloch, *The Historian's Craft* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953), 19–21. Bloch here uses the felicitous phrase "the idol of origins." For recent applications, see S. Weitzman, *The Origin of the Jews: The Quest for Roots in a Rootless Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 18–19, and L. Salaymeh, *The Beginnings of Islamic Law: Late Antique Islamicate Legal Traditions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

[115] H. J. W. Drijvers, *The Book of the Laws of Countries* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1965), 58–61. Compare this with the second- or early third-century inscription of Abercius, which celebrates Christian fraternity across lands, including Rome and those in Syria and east of the Euphrates. See W. Wischmeyer, "Die Aberkiosinschrift als Grabepigramm," *JAC* 23 (1980): 22–47.

[116] A. Y. Reed, "Beyond the Land of Nod: Syriac Images of Asia and the Historiography of 'The West'," *HR* 49 (2009): 69. Lietzmann (*The Founding of the Universal Church,* vol. 2, 261) already argued that Bardaiṣan belonged "unquestionably to the church universal existing everywhere."

authors soon after they were composed; that it is often unclear whether these texts were originally composed in Greek or Syriac original; and that the very provenance of these works is still a matter of some debate and speculation, it seems imprudent to posit an already existing and clear division between Syriac Christianity and other forms of Christianity at this time.

The beginnings of Syriac Christian identities – for they are multiple – lie not in an abstract moment or with a particular figure but in the coalescence of groups around shared symbols, histories, ideas, and practices over time.[117] These ever-evolving identities are best captured not through appeals to unified origins and neat genealogies but through multi-causal and non-linear models.[118]

Distinct Syriac Christian identities thus begin to emerge in the fifth and sixth century, with the formation of independent church hierarchies and synods.[119] Christians in Syria and Mesopotamia began to develop local patriotism[120] and

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[117] In other words, in a constructivist view of group formation. See F. Barth, "Introduction," in idem (ed.), *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1969), 9–38, and helpful discussion of these approaches in Weitzman, *The Origin of the Jews*, 46–47 and 146–147.

[118] For theoretical reflections, see Weitzman, *The Origin of the Jews,* 55. For studies implementing such models, see A. Collar, *Religious Networks in the Roman Empire: The Spread of New Ideas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 5–40; E. Rebillard, *Christians and Their Many Identities in Late Antiquity, North Africa, 200–450 CE* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012); N. Andrade, *The Journey of Christianity to India in Late Antiquity: Networks and the Movement of Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

[119] See, for instance, P. Wood, *"We have no King but Christ": Christian Political Thought in Greater Syria on the Eve of the Arab Conquest (c. 400–585)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 78–83; B. ter Haar Romeny, "Ethnicity, Ethnogenesis and the Identity of Syriac Orthodox Christians," in W. Pohl, C. Gantner, and R. Payne (eds.), *Visions of Community in the Post-Roman World: The West, Byzantium and the Islamic World, 300–1190* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 183–204. The fourth-century writers Aphrahaṭ and Ephrem are often presented as proof of developing Syriac Christian identity, but this confuses the growth of Syriac literature with Syriac identity more generally. For this conflation, see for instance A. Kofsky, "Syriac Christian, Greek Christian and Contemporaneous Jewish Hermeneutics (4th–5th centuries): Paradigms of Interaction," Кирило-Методиевски студии 25 (2016): 354. In the mid-fourth century, Ephrem endeavors to align Christianity in Edessa with the emerging orthodoxy of the imperially-sponsored councils. See S. H. Griffith, "Ephraem, the Deacon of Edessa, and the Church of the Empire," in T. Halton and J. P. Williman (eds.), *Diakonia: Studies in Honor of Robert T. Meyer* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1986), 22–52; idem, "Setting Right the Church of Syria: Saint Ephraem's Hymns against Heresies," in W. E. Klingshim and M. Vessey (eds.), *The Limits of Ancient Christiani; Essays on Late Antique Thought and Culture in Honor of R.A. Markus* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1999), 97–114. For the formation of the West Syrian church, see B. Flusin, "Église monophysite et église chalcédonienne en Syrie à l'arrivée des Arabes," in *Cristianità d'occidente e cristianità d'oriente: secoli VI–XI* (Spoleto, 2004), 667–705; B. ter Haar Romeny, "The Formation of a Communal Identity among West Syrian Christians: Results and Conclusions of the Leiden Project," *CHRC* 89 (2009), 1–52; Wood, *'We have no King but Christ'*, 163–208; F. Millar, "Evolution of the Syrian Orthodox Church in the Pre-Islamic Period: From Greek to Syriac?" *JECS* 21 (2013): 43–92.

[120] See V. Erhart, "The Development of Syriac Christian Canon Law in the Sasanian Empire," in R. W. Mathisen (ed.), *Law, Society, and Authority in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 116–118.

to place a premium on the Syriac language as a marker of identity.[121] In the words of Fredrik Barth, it was at this point that "self-ascription and ascription by others" to these groups became common.[122] To be sure, the councils of the mid-fifth century played a crucial role in Syriac Christian identity formation(s), and it was then and later that the "parting of ways" between different Christian identities and ecclesiastical bodies was more firmly established.[123] But this too was not a onetime change, as the ideas, institutions, and texts around which Syriac Christianity defined itself continued to evolve over time.[124] As Adam Becker has shown, this evolution continues until the modern period when, under the influence of Evangelical missionaries, some Syriac Christians reformulated their identity as a nationalist movement.[125] There is much to explore by jettisoning primordialist accounts in favor of constructivist approaches.

The Jewish origins hypothesis was merely one way in which the impression of an early, unified, and distinct Syriac Christianity was created. By eschewing it and related origins hypotheses, we are able to integrate Syriac Christianity into the broader picture of early Christianity[126] and to study the *formation* of Syriac Christianity – or better, Christianities – rather than its birth. Recognizing the ways in which this origin hypothesis constructed, characterized, and segregated Syriac Christian texts and communities invites us not only to rethink the place of Syriac Christianity in the larger map of early Christianity but suggests that it may be time to redraw the map altogether.

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[121] See M. Levy-Rubin, "The Language of Creation or the Primordial Language: A Case of Cultural Polemics in Antiquity," *JJS* 49 (1998): 306–333; Y. Moss, "The Language of Paradise: Hebrew or Syriac? Linguistic Speculations and Linguistic Realities in Late Antiquity," in M. Bockmuehl and G. Stroumsa (eds.), *Paradise in Antiquity: Jewish and Christian Views* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 120–137; S. Minov, "The Cave of Treasures and the Formation of Syriac Christian Identity in Late Antique Mesopotamia: Between Tradition and Innovation," in B. Bitton-Ashkelony and L. Perrone (eds.), *Between Personal and Institutional Religion* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), 155–194; Millar, "The Evolution of the Syrian Orthodox Church."

[122] F. Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries. The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1969).

[123] Though to be sure, these boundaries are still overstated. See, for instance, L. Van Rompay, "La littérature exégétique syriaque et le rapprochement des traditions syrienne-occidentale et syrienne-orientale," *PdO* 20 (1995): 221–235.

[124] A. H. Becker, "The Ancient Near East in the Late Antique Near East: Syriac Christian Appropriation of the Biblical Past," in G. Gardner and K. Osterloh (eds.), *Antiquity in Antiquity: Jewish and Christian Pasts in the Greco-Roman World* (TSAJ 123; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 394–415.

[125] A. H. Becker, *Revival and Awakening: American Evangelical Missionaries in Iran and the Origins of Assyrian Nationalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015); A. M. Butts, "Assyrian Christians," in E. Frahm (ed.), *Companion to Assyria* (Malden: Wiley Blackwell, 2017), 599–612.

[126] For a similar sentiment, see Reed, "Beyond the Land of Nod," 87.

Exilarch and Catholicos

A Paradigm for the Commonalities of the Jewish and Christian Experience under the Sasanians⋆

Geoffrey Herman

And Kings Shall be Your Nursing Fathers

The early fifth century is said to have heralded a new era for the Persian church. During the winter months of the year 410, a significant event had occurred in the history of Persian Christianity: The bishop of Seleucia-Ctesiphon was formally acknowledged as the head of Persian Christianity at a royally-sanctioned synod.

Yazdgird I, the Sasanian king who ruled from 399 to 420, presided over an era of peace between east and west. Yazdgird's legitimization of the Christian religion is sometimes compared to the Edict of Milan, and the synod of 410 to the synod at Nicaea. Some Christians may have entertained the hope that through Yazdgird they would have their Constantine, as well.[1]

This synod, signaling an official and public shift in the royal policy towards the Christians, took place with great pomp and circumstance in the capital city, near the palace. A detailed protocol of the synod can be found in the collection of synod proceedings of the Eastern church, often referred to as the *Synodicon Orientale*, published by Jean-Baptiste Chabot in 1902.[2] First the king had been approached and had granted an audience to highly-placed ecclesiastical figures, bishops had been summoned to the capital by royal command and expense.

⋆ An early version of this paper was read at the Association for Jewish Studies annual conference in December, 2004.

[1] See, for example, S. McDonough, "A Second Constantine? The Sasanian King Yazdgird in Christian History and Historiography," *JLA* 1 (2008): 127–140. For further details and references to additional studies on the period of Yazdgird I and his relationship to the Christians, see G. Herman, "The Last Years of Yazdgird I and the Christians," in idem (ed.), *Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians: Religious Dynamics in a Sasanian Context* (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2014), 69–90. In addition to the list of ancient sources I provide there that consider Yazdgird I not to have persecuted Christians can be added the *Martyrdom of Mar Pethion* (P. Bedjan, *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum* [Leipzig – Paris: Harrassowitz, 1890–1897], vol. 2, 559–560).

[2] J.-B. Chabot, *Synodicon Orientale ou recueil des Synodes Nestoriens publié, traduit et annoté* (Notices et extraits de la Bibliothèque Nationale 37; Paris: Imprimerie Nationale 1902), 19–36; 253–275 (trans.).
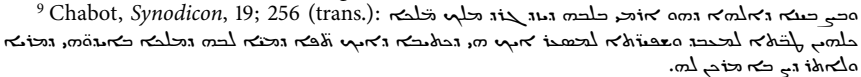
Important officials had met with the bishops. The king received profuse praise from these Christians: "And we all unanimously asked of our merciful God to add days to the days of the victorious and illustrious king, Yazdgird, the king of kings, and his years should be prolonged for generations and for all eternity."[3]

Reconciliation with the Christian population was part of a broad peace accord with the Roman empire, and from the point of view of the ecclesiastical record it was bringing the Persian church in line with the articles of faith agreed upon by the western Christian world. The political result of these events would seem to have been the creation of a recognised hierarchy over the Christians of the Sasanian empire.

At about the same time a representative group of rabbis gathered at the palace. In b. Ketub. 61a–b we find Amemar, from Nehardea, Mar Zutra, from Pumbedita,[4] and Rav Ashi, from Mata Meḥasya, waiting within the precincts of the same palace of the very same king. This occasion could be dated prior to 414 if we were to accept the datum from the Geonic source, *Seder Tanaim ve-Amoraim* that Mar Zutra died in 414:

Amemar and Mar Zutra and Rav Ashi were sitting at the gate of the house (= palace) of King Yazdgird. A royal waiter was coming and going. Rav Ashi observed that Mar Zutra's face was pale. He took (some of the food) with his finger and lay it in his mouth (i.e., of Mar Zutra). He went and said to him: You have spoiled the royal dish. They asked him: Why did you act thus? ...[5]

The Talmud denoted auspicious times. The details are of less interest than the atmosphere. Not a sense a fear and trepidation in facing the king here but instead a degree of comfort, not commonly encountered with Sasanian rulers. If this source is suggestive of happier times, the next, from b. Zevah. 19a about Huna bar Natan, is exultant:

Rav Ashi said: Huna bar Natan told me: I was standing before King Yazdgird, and my belt was hanging low, and he raised my belt and said to me: 'A kingdom of priests and a holy nation' (Ex 19:6) is written concerning you. When I came before Amemar, he said to me: It was fulfilled through you [the verse] 'and kings shall be your nursing fathers' (Is 49:23).[6]

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[3] Chabot, *Synodicon*, 20; 258 (trans.): ܘܟܠܢ ܐܟܚܕܐ ܫܐܠܢ ܡܢ ܐܠܗܐ ܡܪܚܡܢܐ ܕܢܘܣܦ ܝܘܡ̈ܬܐ ܥܠ ܝ̈ܘܡܬܘܗܝ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܙܟܝܐ ܘܢܨܝܚܐ ܝܙܕܓܪܕ ܡܠܟ ܡ̈ܠܟܐ, ܘܫ̈ܢܘܗܝ ܠܕ̈ܪܝܢ ܢܬ̈ܝܚܢ.

[4] Or perhaps Sura, as has been suggested. See A. Cohen, *Ravina and Contemporary Sages* (Studies in the Chronology of Late Babylonian Amoraim; Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 2001), 148 fn. 24; 207 fn. 121.

[5] Presented here according to ms. St. Petersburg – RNL Evr. I 187: אמימר ומר זוטרא ורב אשי הוו קא יתבי אפיתחא דבי איזדגירד מלכא הוה חליף ואזיל אבונגר דמלכא. חזייה רב אשי למר זוטרא דחוורין אפיה שקל באצבעיה, אנח ליה בפומיה. אזל ואמר ליה: אפסידתא לסעודתא דמלכא. אמרו ליה: אמאי עבדת הכי? ...

[6] Presented here according to ms. St. Petersburg – RNL Evr. II A 293/3: אמ׳ רב אשי, א׳ לי הונא בר נתן, הוה קאימנא קמיה דאיזגדר מלכא והוה מדלי לי המיניאי ותתי ניהלי א״ל 'ממלכ' כהנים וגוי קדוש' בכו כת׳. כי אתאי קמי' דאמימר א״ל, איקיים בך, 'ויהיו מלכים אומניך'.

Here Rav Ashi recalls the conversation Huna bar Natan had had with the king and Amemar – the same Amemar who appeared in the palace in the earlier source. Huna bar Natan has his belt, *hemyana*, adjusted by the king. Belts were, in Sasanian culture, not just an item of dress but often the insignia for office, and one suspects that some office is being conferred upon Huna bar Natan. Whether this Huna bar Natan was the exilarch, as described by Rav Sherira Gaon, or not, as I have argued elsewhere,[7] the image is highly auspicious. The scriptural verse let drop from the mouth of the king is also expressive, signifying some vision of the structure of Jewish society. In this period of antiquity, the verse was typically translated "You shall be kings, priests, and a holy nation" and not in its literal sense (as cited above).[8] When he informed his colleague, we are told, he was said to have fulfilled the prophetic verse from Isaiah 49:23, "and kings shall be your nursing fathers". Yazdgird has become a tool in the hands of God, realizing His prophecies in favour of the Chosen People. One recalls the preface to the Christian synod concerning the same king. It had so delightfully fit this king into the divine plan, also citing from scripture, as follows: "By the will of God, who disposed the heart of Yazdgird, the king of kings, to perform good deeds, and to practice good affairs. As it is written: 'The kings' heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the streams of water, he turns it wherever he will (Prv 21:1)'."[9]

The report, found in a later Middle Persian source that King Yazdgird married none other than the daughter of the exilarch, by the name of Šišinduxt, and that she was the mother of Warahrān Gur, may have emerged among the Persian Jewish communities with whom this Šišinduxt is associated in the source. This could be understood as an effort to write the Jews into the Persian national history,[10] a phenomenon found too, among the Sasanian Christians.[11]

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[7] G. Herman, *A Prince without a Kingdom* (TSAJ 150; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 321–329.

[8] Herman, *A Prince without a Kingdom*, 322–325.

[9] Chabot, *Synodicon*, 19; 256 (trans.): ܟܕ ܨܒܐ ܐܠܗܐ ܗܘ ܕܐܩܝܡ ܠܒܗ ܕܝܙܕܓܪܕ ܡܠܟ ܡܠܟܐ ܕܢܥܒܕ ܛܒܬܐ، ܘܢܣܥܘܪ ܣܥܘܪܘܬܐ ܛܒܬܐ، ܐܝܟ ܡ، ܕܟܬܝܒ ܕܒܐܝܕܗ ܕܡܪܝܐ ܐܦ ܠܒܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܠܒܗ ܟܡܒܘܥܝܐ ܕܡܝ̈ܐ، ܘܠܐܝܟܐ ܕܗܘ ܨܒܐ ܡܗܦܟ ܠܗ.

[10] T. Daryaee, *Šahrestānīhā ī Ērānšahr. A Middle Persian Text on Late Antique Geography, Epic, and History* (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers Inc., 2002), 15–16, 20; J. Marquart, *A Catalogue of the Provincial Capitals of Ērānshahr* (ed. G. Messina, S. I.; Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1931), 19 (47), 21 (53). A Zoroastrian would probably not have attributed a Jewish ancestry to Warahrān Gur, the focus of so much heroic Persian legend.

[11] On the tendency of Christian circles to Christianize the Persian kings, see, for example, the study of A. M. Schilling, *Die Anbetung die Magier und die Taufe der Sasaniden* (Leuven: Peeters, 2008). The reading of the Christians into Sasanian history finds full expression in the so-called *Khuzistan Chronicle*. See I. Guidi, "Un nuovo testo siriaco sulla storia degli ultimi Sassanidi," in *Actes du huitième Congrès international des Orientalistes tenu en 1889 à Stockholm et à Christiania. Section I: Sémitique (B)* (Leiden: Brill, 1891), 1–36. Edited in I. Guidi, *Chronica Minora*, I (CSCO 1–2; Leuven: Peeters, 1903), 15–39.

A Second Cyrus

We have here two religious traditions, mutually exclusive, telling a similar tale about the same king, each laying claim to his undivided affection for their religious communities. Notwithstanding the Christian sources' insistence on the unique Christian background to the events that affected them, juxtaposing them with the Jewish sources steers us in the direction of a more general shift in religious policy. Possibly, we find here an echo of a decision to centralize and incorporate the religious hierarchies of the non-Zoroastrian faiths of the empire within the royal bureaucracy and bring them under greater scrutiny. For the Zoroastrian priesthood, too, there are signs of the start of a much more closely regulated hierarchy from the first decades of the fifth century.[12]

While this is one of the clearest cases where the sources at our disposal allow us to follow the similar experience of leaders within the Jewish and Christian communities, it is unlikely to be exceptional. Jews and Christians living under the Sasanians had much in common. A similar economic and political reality, buttressed by a common biblical legacy, had given rise to similarities in rhetoric and perceptions. Whether deported by Sasanian kings, or newly converted, the Christians soon recognised and enthusiastically took up their biblical past in their new and old terrain as Jews had already been doing for centuries. Biblical sites were identified with contemporary cities. If not the Promised Land, it was certainly the Land of biblical prophets and kings. A Persian persecutor such as the kings Shapur II or Peroz would be dubbed Nebuchadnezzar, but when a benefactor, a Persian king such as Khosrow I could be called a "second Cyrus" (ܟܘܪܫ ܕܬܪܝܢ).[13] Babylonian Jewry was the "Exile" (גולה); the deported Christians of Beth Lapaṭ were "the captivity" (ܫܒܝܐ).[14] Both traditions might choose to humour the Sasanian king, telling him, as, indeed, Rav Shila does in a story in b. Ber. 58a: "Blessed is the All-Merciful who has made the earthly royalty on the model of the heavenly, and has invested you with dominion, and made you love justice …,"[15] while to themselves they confided, "To you, Oh Lord, is the greatness and the power."[16] If the Sasanian king had somehow managed to reach the conclusion, as the synod proceedings assert, that with the eastern church embracing and adopting the decisions of the Council of Nicaea the result was that "east and west are one domain under the control of my kingdom," how much the better.[17] The Persian king was, after all, seen to be as putty in the hands of God, as "a stream of water in the hands of the Lord," little more than the donkey to bear the Messiah.

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[12] For references see Herman, *A Prince without a Kingdom*, 49–50.

[13] Chabot, *Synodicon*, 69–70; 320 (trans.).

[14] See, for example, Bedjan, *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum*, vol. 2, 316–324.

[15] בריך רחמנא דיהיב מלכותא בארעא כעין מלכותא דרקיעא ויהב לכו שולטנא ורחמי דינא.

[16] לך ה׳ הגדולה והגבורה וכו׳.

[17] Chabot, *Synodicon*, 19: ܬܪܥܝܬܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܥܡ ܕܡܥܪܒܐ ܗܘܝܐ, ܠܚܘܕܝܐ ܕܡܠܟܘܬܝ.

Both traditions would stretch biblical interpretation to the limit in an effort to reinforce the status of existing leadership institutions. The exilarch claimed Davidic lineage. The Scriptural account would be annotated. Zerubbabel would have to return to Babylonia to establish the dynasty there; Nehemiah was also brought into the exilarchal-Davidide family, as was Babylonian Jewry's very own *tanna*, R. Nathan.[18]

For the Christians the establishment of the see of Seleucia was ascribed to the very beginnings of Christianity. The objective was affirming the primacy of Seleucia over other apostolic centers and Persian Christian communities. As with the exilarch, traditions went back as far as conceivable. For the see of Seleucia it meant Thomas, or Mari, or Addai, or even the three Magi![19] The later the source, it would seem, the more daring the assertion. The patriarchal lists, only known from the post-Sasanian era, provide an uninterrupted line of patriarchs to the apostle Thomas. Members of Jesus's family, "Davidides," are included in the early stages of the lists. But ultimately they could do even better. Was Abraham not from Babylonia, and did not Adam tend the Garden of Eden not far from Seleucia?[20]

The relationship between the 'new' and 'old' community is vital in both cases, and not just with respect to the leadership institutions. On the one hand, outstanding issues might be deferred to the mediation of the Western authorities, ostensibly the bearers of all answers, and authority. Talmudic sources, too, had their methods of playing real against perceived authority deriving from the west. Indeed, "there" (תמן) could, in the mind of the Babylonian Talmud resolve succession issues as in b. Hor. 14a, as well as all matters of law. The Christian Western Fathers, too, could settle inner Persian conflicts. This is found in the legends about the insurrection against Papa, the early-fourth-century bishop of Seleucia. Papa was the "Rabban Gamaliel II" of Persian Christianity who had attempted to impose centralization upon reluctant bishops. Whether he was successful depends on whom you ask: Hostile elements alleged he had been deposed, nay, punished by God with paralysis for the thought of it; centrifugal sources alleged he had appealed to the Western Fathers who reinstated him.[21]

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[18] Herman, *A Prince without a Kingdom*, 76–80, 272–273.

[19] See J. Labourt, *Le Christianisme dans l'empire perse sous la dynastie Sassanide* (Paris: Lecoffre, 1904), 10.

[20] Solomon of Baṣra, *The Book of the Bee*, ch. 51, 131 (edited in E. A. W. Budge, *The Book of the Bee* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1886]). The Catholicos Ezekiel is dubbed a "second David" in the synod proceedings from 576 (Chabot, *Synodicon*, 112). For appeal to Eden, Abraham, and the Magi, see F. Briquel-Chatonnet, C. Jullien, F. Jullien, C. M. Paliard, and M. Rashed, "Lettre du patriarche Timonthée à Maranzekʰā, évêque de Ninive," *JA* 288 (2000): 1–13.

[21] The main versions of the event appear in the synod proceedings of Dadišoʻ (Chabot, *Synodicon*, 43–52; 285–298 [trans.]); *The Acts of Mar Miles* (Bedjan, *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum*, vol. 2, 260).

Yet, at the same time there was the necessity of independence, and of a legally acceptable justification for such autonomy. One of the ways for the Babylonian rabbis to assert their right to carry out certain legal prerogatives ostensibly confined to the rabbis of the West was by alleging to be their legal agents: אנן שליחותייהו קא עבדינן.[22] On the other hand, a Babylonian rabbi, such as Rabbah b. Rav Huna, might assert his independence from the authority of the exilarchate by professing affiliation to a separate line of succession, proclaiming that his authority derived from the western rabbis – utimately with the Patriarch of the West.[23]

The forged *Letter of the Western Fathers* addressed the tensions surrounding the conflict between the perceived source of authority stemming from the 'west', and in particular, the patriarchate of Antioch, against the prerogatives maintained by the See of Seleucia-Ctesiphon. It discusses the issue of choosing a new patriarch. The bishops of the East had no innate right to elect their own patriarch, as they were inferior in rank to the patriarch. They were only electing him by virtue of their status as granted by the Western Fathers, as if representing them. Elsewhere, however, these same amorphous Western Fathers served to oppose the patriarch of Seleucia in cases where he was acting in a tyrannical fashion.[24]

Jewish tradition compared the relative importance of the patriarch (Nasi) of Palestine to the exilarch of Babylonia. In b. San. 5b, the exilarch's jurisdiction is even asserted over the regions of the Roman Empire. Likewise, in the proceedings of the synod of the Catholicos, Dadišoʻ, in 424, it was stated: "and (your power) has proceeded and extended from your See to all the bishoprics, and not in this domain, alone, *but even beyond it.*"[25]

Another source has the Palestinian patriarch, Judah I, acknowledge his own inferiority to the exilarch.[26] This is easy to say when not put to the test. But what would happen were the exilarch to make an appearance, unannounced, in Palestine? How would the patriarch react and what relative authority and hierarchy would be instituted between them? In the Eastern Christian sphere, similar situations were conjured up. What would happen were the patriarch of Antioch to turn up suddenly in Seleucia? For the Jewish storyteller, the thought of the arrival of the exilarch unnerved the Nasi, but the only exilarch to arrive was a dead one, brought over in a coffin. The Christian sources, however, offer the scenario of the live patriarch of Antioch arriving in Seleucia. It was alleged that among the Roman subjects captured by the Persian king, Shapur I, in his raid of Antioch, and

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[22] B. Git. 88b; b. B. Qam. 84b. See I. M. Gafni, *Land, Center and Diapora: Jewish Constructs in Late Antiquity* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 114.

[23] B. San 5a.

[24] For references, see Herman, *A Prince without a Kingdom*, 124–125.

[25] Chabot, *Synodicon*, 44: ܗܘ ܚܦܝܗܝ ܠܚܠܘܗ ܚܡܘܡܘܕ ܘܕܐܡܘܡܩܐ ܗܕܐ ܚܐܗܐܬܕܠܗ ܠܗ ܚܠܘܡܕ ܠܐܘܬܗ ܗܝ ܐܠܐ ܐܝܗ ܠܗܠܘܠ ܚܗܘ.

[26] Y. Kil. 9:4 (31b-c) (= y. Ketub. 12:3 [35a]); Bereshit Rabba 33:3. On this topic, see Herman, *A Prince without a Kingdom*, 92–100.

brought over to Gondisapur in 257 was the patriarch of Antioch, Demetrianus.[27] Even if such an event actually happened, undoubtedly it was more "eventful" in the centuries that followed than for contemporaries. Later tradition filled in the conversation that ensued between Demetrianus and Papa, the Catholicos of Seleucia. Recalling the Jerusalem Talmud and parallel traditions of the arrival of Rav Huna Resh Galuta in R. Ḥiyya's burial tomb, here, according to one version, Papa, the Catholicos, had offered Demetrianus his own position. He, however, refused, but a certain hierarchy was established between them. It should be evident that the tradition itself functioned within the hierarchical conflict between Seleucia and Gondishapur. This was an attempt to by-pass subordination to the central authority of the Catholicos by asserting their independence, or even patriarchal superiority on the basis of a direct link to the Western fathers. In much the same way Rabbah b. Rav Huna had denied subordination to the exilarchate by claiming that his *reshut* came directly from Palestine, from Rabbi, as already mentioned.

Recognizing the things in common is not to ignore that which is distinctive in the experience of each community, each with its own trajectory of growth in the Sasanian milieu. Evidently, leadership models were different between the Jews and Christians both in the Sasanian and Roman empires, as the ecclesiastical hierarchy of the Christians did not have an equivalent among the Jews. Much has been made of the different political situation of these two communities, especially after the Christianization of the Roman empire,[28] but not enough about their similar patterns of political allegiance to the powers that be.

There is, indeed, good reason to dwell on the virtues of a coordinated examination of many areas in the history of the exilarchate and catholicate under the Sasanians, both for an improved understanding of the history of these institutions, and for the broader realm of Sasanian history. It would certainly benefit expanding the source pool for understanding the exilarchate since no contemporary non-Jewish source even mentions the Talmudic exilarchate.

And yet the study of the catholicate is not without its own problems. Many of its sources belong to the Sasanian era and some are even contemporary to our sources on the talmudic exilarchate. Of particular value are the synod proceedings of the Persian church and the important chronicles such as the *Chronicle of Seert*, edited by Addai Scher.[29] These sources are mostly written in Syriac or appear in works that have survived only in Arabic translation. Aphrahaṭ's lengthy

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[27] The main study is P. Peeters, "S. Démétrianus, évêque d'Antioche," *AB* 42 (1924): 288–314.

[28] See S. P. Brock, "Christians in the Sassanian Empire: A Case of Divided Loyalties," in S. Mews (ed.), *Religious and National Identity: Papers Read at the Nineteenth Summer Meeting and the Twentieth Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society* (SCH 18; Oxford: Basil Blackwell), 1–19. (Reprinted in S. P. Brock, *Syriac Perspectives on Late Antiquity* [London: Variorum Reprints, 1984]).

[29] A. Scher, *Histoire nestorienne (Chronique de Séert)* (PO 4.3; 5.2; 7.2; 13.4; Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1908–1950).

Demonstration 14, dated by a colophon to 344 CE, our earliest source, is devoted entirely to the issue of the friction between the center in Seleucia and the periphery.[30] And yet, while the source material on the Catholicos is, in fact, very rich, it is of an entirely different nature than that on the exilarchate, and that is a good thing. It includes not only the detailed synod proceedings, but also correspondence, historical and ecclesiastical chronicles, sermons, hagiographic accounts, and patriarchal lists.

The distillation of all these sources and genres has its own methodological issues, too, and establishing a reliable history of the catholicate is not without its own challenges. One must grapple with concerns of the tendentiousness, polemics, legend, and the credibility of these sources. There are many issues of contention surrounding such questions as its date of origin, powers, and legitimacy.[31] Only a few of the sources are truly contemporary in the full sense of the term. Furthermore, one cannot ignore the polemical thread related to theology and doctrine that runs throughout the sources, and some of the scholarship.

In some ways the sources on the Catholicos are also of a different nature in comparison to the exilarchate, with the synod proceedings usually deriving from circles in sympathy with the catholicate, and with less direct criticism of the institution. Nothing from the Talmud can be said to derive from exilarchal circles, and a critical strain is far more typical.

Among the major questions facing the study of the exilarchate is what happens to this institution in the period when the talmudic sources run out, in the course of the late fifth, sixth, and early seventh centuries. It is for the later Sasanian period that the sources on the catholicate may be of particular interest for the exilarchate. The dire state of contemporary Jewish sources, together with the fragmentary but consistently morose Geonic reflections on the period, have lead most scholars to summarize this period as one of decline. Now the Christian sources are more detailed precisely for this era, and many are absolutely contemporary, and the situation they depict is far from one of decline and persecution. It is therefore possible to suggest a more nuanced interpretation of the period based on a working assumption that where the king pursues a strongly pro-Zoroastrian agenda, it was ill news for the Jews and Christians, alike; equally, where we learn of moderation on the side of the Sasanian religious policies towards the Christians, we may assume similar for the Jews.[32] The Jewish situation under

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[30] Edited in I. Parisot, *Aphrahat. Demonstrationes* (PS 1–2; Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1894), 573–726.

[31] For example, see J. Labourt, *Le christianisme*, 18–28; J. M. Fiey, *Jalons pour une histoire de l'église en Iraq* (CSCO 310; Leuven: Peeters, 1970), 66–84; H. Suermann, "Bedeutung und Selbstverständnis des Katholikos-Patriarchen von Seleukia-Ktesiphon," in A. Mustafa and J. Tubach (eds.), with G. Sophia Vashalomidze, *Inkulturation des Christentums im Sasanidenreich* (Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2007), 227–238.

[32] For this perspective, see G. Herman, "'Bury my Coffin Deep!': Zoroastrian Exhumation in Jewish and Christian Sources," in J. Roth, M. Schmeltzer, Y. Francus (eds.), *Tiferet leYisrael:*

Hormizd IV, in particular, needs to be reassessed, but also the reigns of Peroz and Kavad. While the post-Talmudic sources provide some limited information to fill this void, the accuracy of much of it is questionable.[33] This is, however, precisely the period when our sources on the catholicate are particularly rich.

The aim of this paper is to advocate greater interest in the comparative study of the Jewish and Christian communities under the Sasanians, and in particular, with respect to the leadership institutions. The advantage for Jewish history is evident. Indeed, the Catholicos provides us with a detailed model of the workings of the Sasanian kingdom with the representative leadership of a religious minority. As such, it may very well be, in a sense, our most important collection of sources on the real position of the Sasanian *exilarchate* – and this despite the fact that the word "exilarch" is not mentioned even once in this corpus. Yet the Jewish sources on the exilarchate can also provide nuance to the study of the Catholicos, reflecting a less center-based assessment of the leadership and provide models for religious leadership in the first half of the Sasanian period.

Jubilee Volume in Honor of Israel Francus (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary, 2010), 31–59.

[33] See Herman, *A Prince without a Kingdom*, 261–336.

Contextualizing Late Antique Rabbinic Narratives

Richard Kalmin

In recent years scholars have made great progress in situating rabbinic narratives in their late antique cultural context. They have enriched our understanding of rabbinic narratives by reading them against the background of Second Temple Jewish literature; the full gamut of classical rabbinic literature; and contemporaneous non-Jewish literatures and cultures. My recent work attempts to add depth and nuance to this scholarship by reading rich rabbinic narratives against the background of Christian literature of Late Antiquity. In brief, I argue that Christianity is a crucially important hermeneutical key to the interpretation of late antique rabbinic literature. My interest in this research is Babylonian rabbinic literature and its relationship to Christian literature east of Syria, and I argue in the ensuing discussion that it is not enough for scholars to find parallels between Babylonian rabbinic literature and Persian literature, for example, and to consider their work done. Rather, their work is only beginning, since it is necessary to examine all of the possibly relevant contexts, given the limits of our present knowledge, to determine whether there is something special about the connection between Persia and the Babylonian Talmud, or whether the commonality is symptomatic of Late Antiquity in general, or of ancient religion east of Byzantium, or the like. In fact, we will find in the material examined here evidence of the emerging but never fully realized cultural unity that was beginning to form in Jewish and Christian Mesopotamia.[1] In Late Antiquity, in other words, the rudiments of a partly shared elite culture may have been emerging in southern and northern Mesopotamia, perhaps a refinement of a rudimentary shared non-elite culture that had existed earlier, and we may find modest evidence for the emergence of this shared culture in the pages of the Babylonian Talmud. The shared motifs and sources discussed in the present paper are so specific that I believe we must posit an historical connection, either direct or indirect, between the cultures that preserve them.

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[1] See, for example, M. Sartre, *The Middle East under Rome* (trans. C. Porter and E. Rawlings; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 318 and 365–366.

Jewish and Christian Mesopotamia

New and refined methodologies have facilitated our understanding of the degree to which Babylonian Talmudic literature and Christian Mesopotamian literature impinged upon one another, although there remain substantive disagreements about the extent and meaning of parallels between rabbinic and Christian literature and how these parallels came about. Are the parallels that scholars have found real parallels, and if so, are they indications of influence or of creative appropriation? Are they symptomatic of Late Antiquity in general, or are they the result of similar cultures manifesting similar phenomena at comparable stages of development? Are the rabbis responding polemically to neighboring groups, are they reading their literature and hearing their oral traditions, or are we dealing with folkloristic motifs that transcend the boundaries of individual cultures?

This study is not a systematic examination of all of the evidence, which at present is impossible, but an attempt to show that on rare occasions it is possible to demonstrate a cultural connection between the neighboring Mesopotamian Jewish and Christian communities. Earlier generations of scholars of Judaism tended to underestimate the importance of Mesopotamian Christianity, going so far as to claim that late antique Mesopotamia was virtually Christian-free, especially compared to the situation in contemporaneous Roman Palestine.[2] At the other extreme, more recent scholars, for example Daniel Boyarin in *Socrates and the Fat Rabbis*, contend that a crucially important feature of Babylonian rabbinic discourse was mediated to Babylonian rabbis via Mesopotamian Christians.[3] Peter Schäfer, in *Jesus in the Talmud*, claims that Babylonian Jews obtained intimate knowledge of the New Testament via the *Diatessaron*, a Syriac harmony of the Gosepls, which was available to Mesopotamian Christians in Late Antiquity,[4] which Babylonian rabbis would have been able to understand due to the similarity between Syriac and Babylonian Jewish Aramaic.[5]

While I find much to admire about Boyarin's and Schäfer's books, on the issue of concern to me here I find that their claims are overly sweeping and not justified by the available evidence. Given the present state of our knowledge, it is premature to be asking whether or not there was a *close* cultural connection between Mesopotamian Jews and Christians, but rather we should be accumulating examples illustrating *any sort of* cultural connection between them, which will

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[2] See the critique of A. H. Becker, "Beyond the Spatial and Temporal 'Limes': Questioning the 'Parting of the Ways' outside the Roman Empire," in A. H. Becker and A. Y. Reed (eds.), *The Ways that Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (TSAJ 95; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 373–392.

[3] D. Boyarin, *Socrates and the Fat Rabbis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 133–140.

[4] P. Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

[5] See, for example, A. H. Becker, "The Comparative Study of 'Scholasticism' in Late Antique Mesopotamia: Rabbis and East Syrians," *AJSR* 34 (2010): 98–99.

hopefully provide methodological models for future research. What allows us to determine with reasonable certainty that Mesopotamian Christianity had an impact on Babylonian rabbis, or vice versa? In an article published fifteen years ago, Shlomo Naeh demonstrated that the key to the interpretation of a story in the Babylonian Talmud (b. Qidd. 81b) is to be found in its use of a word, *ḥeruta*, which means both sexual license and sexual restraint in Mesopotamian Christian literature composed in Syriac, but which is otherwise unattested in these senses in the Babylonian Talmud and in Babylonian Jewish Aramaic.[6] Naeh posited that the story's use of this term presupposed Babylonian rabbinic knowledge of a significant aspect of Mesopotamian Christian culture, a conclusion I find utterly persuasive. The question, however, is the extent to which this instance of Babylonian rabbinic acquaintance with Syriac Christian culture is the exception or the rule.

Hopefully the present paper will sensitize readers to the issue of the extent to which we are able to say at present that the literature and culture of the Mesopotamian Christian communities did or did not impinge on the Babylonian rabbis, and vice versa. At what period of their history did Babylonian rabbis become cognizant of Christianity east of Byzantium and what were their attitudes toward it?

The conclusion that Christianity east of Syria is crucial to contextualizing the Babylonian Talmud challenges the claims of some scholars regarding the essential importance of Persia as by far the most important hermeneutical key to understanding Jewish Babylonia, to the virtual exclusion of all other factors.[7] The Persian context is undoubtedly significant, and in fact is often absolutely essential to proper understanding of the Babylonian Talmud, but it is only one of many factors that need to be taken into account.

The ensuing discussion examines a Babylonian rabbinic narrative from approximately the fourth century, together with a Christian narrative from approximately the same time and place, to exemplify my claim that the Jews and Christians of late antique Mesopotamia were culturally linked. So close is the relationship in this one case that a story told in a Syriac Christian source holds the hermeneutical key to the interpretation of a Babylonian rabbinic story, or vice versa, since the two stories utilize the same constellation of motifs and themes to teach strikingly similar lessons. This commonality does not necessarily indicate that the rabbis borrowed these motifs from the Mesopotamian Christians,

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[6] Sh. Naeh, "Freedom and Celibacy: A Talmudic Variation on Tales of Temptations and Fall in Genesis and its Syrian Background," in J. Frishman and L. Van Rompay (eds.), *The Book of Genesis in Jewish and Oriental Christian Interpretation* (TEG 5; Leuven: Peeters, 1997), 73–89.

[7] See especially Y. Elman, "Middle Persian Culture and Babylonian Rabbis: Accommodation and Resistance in the Shaping of Rabbinic Legal Tradition," in C. E. Fonrobert and M. S. Jaffee (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Talmud and Rabbinic Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 165–197, and the literature cited there.

or vice versa, although neither possibility is out of the question. Rather, it is one small but significant demonstration that the literature of the two groups formed part of a common cultural sphere, although the differences between the motifs and how they are utilized are as interesting as the similarities.

The Legend of Manasseh's Execution of
Isaiah in the Babylonian Talmud

The rabbinic text of concern to us here, in b. Yev. 49b–50a, reads as follows:

(A) A *Tanna*[8] recited: Shimon ben Azai says, "I found a scroll of genealogical records in Jerusalem and in it was written, 'So-and-so is a *mamzer*[9] from a married woman' … and in it was written, 'Manasseh killed Isaiah.'"
(B) Said Rava, "He judged him and killed him."
(C) [Manasseh] said to [Isaiah], "Moses your rabbi said, 'For man may not see Me and live' (Ex 33:20); but you said, 'I saw the Lord seated on a high and lofty throne' (Is 6:1). Moses your rabbi said, '[For what great nation is there that has a god so close at hand] as is the Lord our God whenever we call upon Him?' (Dt 4:7); but you said, 'Seek the Lord while He can be found' (Is 55:6). Moses your rabbi said, 'I will let you enjoy the full count of your days' (Ex 23:26); but you said, 'And I will add fifteen years to your life'" (2 Kgs 20:6).
(D) Said Isaiah, "I know that he will not accept whatever I say to him. If I say [i. e., respond] to him I will make him an intentional murderer."
(E) Isaiah said [God's] name and was swallowed by a cedar tree.
[The corner of his blue fringe remained outside.][10]
They brought the cedar tree and they sawed it. When he reached [Isaiah's] mouth, he died, because [Isaiah] said, "And I live among a people of unclean lips" (Is 6:5).
(F) Nevertheless, the verses [cited in part C] contradict one another.
(G) "I saw the Lord" (Is 6:1), as it is taught [in a Baraita], "All of the prophets looked in a speculum that does not shine; Moses our rabbi looked in a speculum that shines." "Seek the Lord while He can be found" (Is 55:6); this verse refers to an individual, the other verse (Dt 4:7) refers to the community.
(H) Regarding an individual, when [can God be found]?
(I) Said Rav Nahman said Rabbah bar Abuha, "These are the ten days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur."

The claim of Rava, the mid-fourth-century Babylonian rabbi who authored the statement "[Manasseh] judged [Isaiah] and killed him," together with the

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[8] A *Tanna* is a professional repeater of traditions that derive, or purport to derive, from the land of Israel prior to the early third century. The *Tanna*'s job was to memorize traditions and make them available to rabbis when the need for them arose in the midst of or at the outset of discussions.

[9] This word is frequently, and inadequately, translated as 'illegitimate child'. It designates the legal status of a child born of a forbidden sexual union between two Jews. The nature and severity of the prohibited sexual union is the subject of debate in rabbinic sources.

[10] Ms. Cambridge, Add. 3207 and ms. Moscow, Guenzburg 594 both record the sentence that I have placed in brackets.

unattributed accusations against Isaiah that follow (parts B–C), comprise a surprisingly sympathetic, or at least ambiguous, portrayal of Manasseh. Mishnah San. 10:2 contains a Tannaitic dispute about whether or not Manasseh fully repented and thereby inherited a portion in the world to come, and b. Yev. may reflect the opinion that the king did repent. Contributing to this sympathetic or less than clearly negative portrayal is the fact that b. Yev. portrays Manasseh as innocent of murder, since Isaiah deliberately says nothing in response to Manasseh's charges. Manasseh's objections against Isaiah are serious and demand a response, however, as indicated by the fact that the Babylonian Talmud's anonymous editors (parts F–G) feel the need to respond to them.

Perhaps in tension with this idea of a sympathetic or ambiguous portrayal of Manasseh is the fact that the king consistently refers to Moses as "your [i.e., Isaiah's] rabbi," implying that he is not his own (i.e., Manasseh's) rabbi, thus reading himself out of the rabbinic movement. In addition, Isaiah in part D definitely presupposes a less than fully repentant Manasseh, since Isaiah is certain that Manasseh will not listen to reason and will kill him even if he satisfactorily responds to his objections, and will thereby be rendered an intentional murderer. The fact that Isaiah expresses his certainty, however, does not guarantee that he is correct, and in the ensuing discussion I argue that the author of the story in the Babylonian Talmud probably does not share Isaiah's clearly negative opinion of the king.

Support for this interpretation emerges when we examine the importance in the story of motifs of speech and the mouth. Everything that happens in the story is effectuated through speech, casting doubt on Isaiah's claim that nothing he would have said would have had any effect on Manasseh. After all, his words have all kinds of effects. He "says" God's name, which causes him to be swallowed by a tree (although the blue fringes of his cloak are showing, revealing his hiding place, suggesting that God wants him to receive his just desserts, i.e., his punishment for having insulted the Israelites). In addition, Isaiah "said" "I live among a people of unclean lips," which is the sin for which he is punished with death, and his death is via his mouth. He "said" things that appear to contradict what Moses "said," which gets him into trouble with the king and is the "human" cause of his death. And, as a prophet, when he says God's word he puts it into effect. Perhaps Isaiah is punished not only because of what he said, but also because of what he refrained from saying, namely the reasons why his (Isaiah's) words do not contradict those of Moses. In addition, when Isaiah says that he chooses to die rather than make the king guilty of premeditated murder, perhaps we are meant to be unsympathetic, in line with the rabbis' tendency in the Babylonian Talmud to view with suspicion those who prefer martyrdom to escaping with their lives by means of a subterfuge. Rabbinic traditions in the Babylonian Talmud frequently favor the trickster who saves his life and avoids a noble death to the "hero" who chooses martyrdom.

Also of critical importance for understanding the Babylonian Talmud's discussion is the Syriac *Acts of Sharbil*, probably written in the fourth or fifth century in Edessa, a city in northern Mesopotamia.[11] In this Christian text, like the Babylonian Talmud's text, we find the motifs of (a) the hero judged and executed by being sawn in two; (b) his death coming about because of a crime of speech; and (c) the crucial importance of the hero's mouth in his measure-for-measure punishment:[12]

And suddenly the curtain was drawn back again, and the judge cried aloud and said, "As regards this Sharbil, who was formerly priest of the gods, but has turned this day and renounced the gods, and has cried aloud, 'I am a Christian,' and has not trembled at the gods, but has insulted them; and, further, has not been afraid of the emperors and their command; and, though I have bidden him sacrifice to the gods according to his former custom, has not sacrificed, but has treated them with the greatest insult: I have looked into the matter, and decided, that towards a man who does these things, even though he were now to sacrifice, it is not fit that any mercy should be shown; and that it is not fit that he should any longer behold the sun of his lords, because he has scorned their laws. I give sentence that, according to the laws of the emperors, a strap be thrust into the mouth of the insulter, as into the mouth of a murderer, and that he depart outside of the city of the emperors with haste, as one who has insulted the lords of the city and the gods who hold authority over it. I give sentence that he be sawn with a saw of wood, and that, when he is near to die, then his head be taken off with the sword of the executioner."

And at the same moment the strap was suddenly thrust into his mouth, and the executioners seized him … And they offered him some wine to drink, according to the custom of murderers to drink. But he said to them, "I will not drink, because I wish to feel the saw with which you saw me, and the sword which you push over my neck …"

They brought carpenters' instruments and thrust him into a wooden vise, and tightened it upon him until the bones of his joints creaked with the pressure, then they put upon him a saw of iron, and began sawing him asunder; and, when he was just about to die, because the saw had reached his mouth, they smote him with the sword and took off his head, while he was still squeezed down in the vise.[13]

In the Babylonian Talmud's story the protagonist dies when they reach his mouth, and in the story of Sharbil the executioners lop off his head when they reach the mouth, so the motif does not play out exactly the same in the two contexts, but in both narratives the point is that the protagonist's mouth plays a crucial role in the "crime" that leads to his execution, and in the working out of the execution. In the Sharbil tale the executioners make the point that their

victim's crime was that of "insulting the gods" by "crying aloud, 'I am a Christian,'" the standard climax of Christian accounts of late antique martyrology trials.[14] In the story of Isaiah's martyrdom in the Babylonian Talmud, in contrast, the critical role of the mouth in the death of the martyr is not a sign of his saintliness and heroism but rather a symbol of the sin he committed for which he is punished. While the precise relationship between the Christian and the rabbinic stories is difficult to determine at present, as is the significance of the difference between the way the motifs are utilized in the two literatures, the centrality of the motifs of speech and the mouth in the Sharbil tale supports my claim that these motifs are a crucial hermeneutical key to the meaning of the Babylonian Talmud's story as well.

One might be inclined to see in b. Yev.'s high opinion of Moses and surprisingly low, or at least ambivalent, opinion of Isaiah an attempt to deliver the message that the power of the rabbi (Moses) is greater than that of the prophet (Isaiah). When we examine the passage more closely, however, we see that this explanation is unsatisfactory. First, Isaiah apparently knows how to answer Manasseh's objections; he just refrained from doing so. And as Manasseh says, Moses is Isaiah's *rav*, apparently proof that Isaiah is also a rabbi.[15] So the operative distinction is not rabbis vs. prophets, but the specific figure of Moses (who is both a rabbi and a prophet) vs. the specific figure of Isaiah (also both a rabbi and a prophet), probably viewed as paradigmatic of or superior to all other non-Mosaic prophets. Isaiah is Moses's inferior as a prophet: Moses saw clearly; Isaiah and all other prophets did not. And Isaiah condemned the Israelites, and Moses did not. Isaiah is also lacking as a rabbi: Isaiah did not respond to the objections posed by the king, even though the situation demanded a response, and it is a rabbi's stock-in-trade to respond to objections posed against problematic traditions. Presumably this discussion is directed against those rabbis and/or non-rabbis, Jews and/or non-Jews, who favored Isaiah (and other prophets) over Moses himself.

One cluster of motifs achieved literary expression in Mesopotamian Jewish and Christian literature in close geographical and chronological proximity: fourth- to sixth-century rabbinic Babylonia, on the one hand, and fourth- or fifth-century Christian Edessa, on the other. This fact appears to indicate linkage between the literatures of the Jewish and Christian communities of Mesopotamia in Late Antiquity, since no record of this precise constellation of motifs is preserved in literature from Persia or from the Greek and Roman world. It

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[14] See, for example, H. J. Lawlor and J. E. L. Oulton, *Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea, the Ecclesiastical History and the Martyrs of Palestine*, vol. 1 (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1927), 142; J. Stevenson, *A New Eusebius: Documents Illustrative of the History of the Church to A. D. 337* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1960), 42.

[15] It is possible that the meaning is that Moses is Isaiah's "master" as a prophet. Still, the fact that the story credits Isaiah with the ability to resolve objections suggests that it views him as a rabbi.

is possible that these shared motifs are indicative of contact between the two communities in Mesopotamia itself during the Sasanian period, but minimally it indicates that they inhabit a common cultural sphere. Hopefully future studies will enable us to describe more precisely the nature of the connection between the two cultures.

The Miracle of the Septuagint

The ensuing discussion focuses on a tradition of non-rabbinic origin deriving from the eastern Roman provinces during the early centuries of the Common Era, which in rabbinic literature is first attested in the Babylonian Talmud by the latest Babylonian rabbis. The same tradition is attested at approximately the same time in a Syriac Christian text from Mesopotamia, a parallel that perhaps provides further evidence of a cultural link between late antique rabbinic Babylonia and Christian Mesopotamia.

A discussion in b. Meg. 8a–9a, together with some of its most important non-Jewish parallels, will illustrate these claims. The discussion in the Babylonian Talmud opens with a Baraita quoted in contradiction to the mishnah. According to the mishnah, Torah scrolls can be written in any language, while according to the Baraita, a Torah scroll must be written in the Hebrew language and in Hebrew script. Several responses to the contradiction follow, but the one of interest to me here was authored either by Rav Ashi (a late fourth-, early fifth-century Babylonian rabbi), or by the anonymous editors postdating Rav Ashi, perhaps by a century or more. According to this response, the Baraita that requires Hebrew refers to books of the Bible other than the five books of Moses, "and [the Baraita] follows the opinion of R. Yehudah." The statement alluded to by Rav Ashi or the later editors reads as follows: "Said R. Yehudah, 'Even when our rabbis permitted Greek, they only permitted it in the case of a Torah scroll, because of the case involving Ptolemy the king.'" Rav Ashi or the anonymous editors proceed to quote still another Baraita, which tells the story of King Ptolemy, as follows:

(A) As it is taught [in a Baraita]: "It happened that Ptolemy the king gathered 72 elders and put them in 72 houses but did not reveal to them why he gathered them.
He went to each one of them and said to them, "Write for me the Torah of Moses your rabbi."
God put counsel into the mind of each of them and all of them agreed.
(B) And they wrote to him, "God created in the beginning" (see Gn 1:1); "I will make a man in the image and in the likeness" (see Gn 1:26); "And He ceased on the sixth day and rested on the seventh day" (see Gn 2:2); "Male and female He created him," but they did not write "He created them" (see Gn 5:2); "I will go down and mix up their languages" (see Gn 11:7); "And Sarah laughed to those close to her" (see Gn 18:12); "For when angry they slay an ox, and when pleased they uproot a crib" (see Gn 49:6); "And Moses took his wife and his sons and rode them on an animal that carries people" (see Ex 4:20);

"And the people Israel dwelled in Egypt and in other lands for 430 years"[16] (see Ex 12:40); "And he sent the chosen ones[17] of the Israelites" (see Ex 24:5); "And He did not send forth His hand on the chosen ones[18] of the Israelites" (see Ex 24:11); "I did not take a beloved object of any one of you" (see Nm 16:15); "That the Lord your God apportioned to give light to all of the nations" (see Dt 4:19); "And go and worship other gods that I did not command to worship" (see Dt 17:3); and they wrote to him, "And hairy legs,"[19] and they did not write to him "And the *arnevet*" (see Lv 11:6 and Dt 14:7), since Ptolemy's wife's name was Arnevet, so that he would not say, "The Jews are mocking me by placing the name of my wife in the Torah."[20]

I have divided the Ptolemy Baraita into two parts (A and B), since only part A is without parallel in Palestinian rabbinic compilations but has close parallels in Christian and Hellenistic Jewish sources.[21] It is likely, therefore, that this purportedly Tannaitic statement is a combination of originally independent traditions, one of which (part B) was a list of passages purportedly sent to Ptolemy that depart from the Hebrew text of the Pentateuch. The Jewish "elders" sent these passages to Ptolemy to prevent the king from taking offense at or forming mistaken impressions about the beliefs of the Jews.[22] The second originally independent tradition constituting the Baraita (part A) was apparently a story depicting the translation of the Torah of Moses into Greek as having been aided by divine inspiration (but see below).

As noted, part A of the Ptolemy Baraita is attested in non-rabbinic traditions from the eastern Roman provinces. In rabbinic literature, this part of the Baraita is only attested in the Babylonian Talmud, introduced into the discussion as part of the later layers of Talmudic discourse. The fact that the Babylonian Talmud's

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[16] The printed edition reads "400 years," but mss. London, Brit. Libr. Harl. 5508 (400), Munich 140, Munich 95, Oxford, Vatican 134, and Cambridge, T-S F2 (2) 73 all read "430 years."

[17] Or "the little ones." For these possible translations of *za'atutei*, see E. Tov, "The Rabbinic Tradition concerning the 'Alterations' Inserted into the Greek Pentateuch and their Relation to the Original Text of the LXX," *JSJ* 15 (1984): 13–14 and 19–20.

[18] See the previous note.

[19] See Tov, "Rabbinic Tradition concerning the 'Alterations' Inserted into the Greek Pentateuch," 7.

[20] For earlier scholarly analysis of the rabbinic traditions about the Septuagint, see, for example, G. Veltri, *Eine Tora für den König Talmai: Untersuchungen zum Übersetzungsverständnis in der jüdisch-hellenistischen und rabbinischen Literatur* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994); idem, *Libraries, Translations, and 'Canonic' Texts: The Septuagint, Aquila and Ben Sira in the Jewish and Christian Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 2006); A. Wasserstein and D. J. Wasserstein, *The Legend of the Septuagint: From Classical Antiquity to Today* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 51–94; and M. Simon-Shoshan, "The Task of the Translators: The Rabbis, the Septuagint, and the Cultural Politics of Translation," *Prooftexts* 27 (2017): 1–39.

[21] For parallels to Part B in Palestinian rabbinic compilations, see Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael *bo*, *pisha*, *parasha* 14 (ed. Lauterbach, 111–12; ed. Horovitz and Rabin, 50–51) and y. Meg. 1:8 (71d).

[22] As documented by Veltri, *Eine Tora*, 22–112, part B itself is probably an amalgam of originally independent traditions, but since my interest in this discussion is in part A, a source-critical analysis of part B is outside the purview of this study.

account consists entirely of striking motifs found in texts composed in the eastern Roman provinces as early as the third century makes it likely that the account reached Mesopotamia from the Roman Empire, and a parallel in a Mesopotamian Christian compilation roughly contemporaneous to the Babylonian Talmud raises the possibility that the tradition reached rabbinic Babylonia from the Roman East via Mesopotamian Christian literature composed in Syriac. It is unlikely that this tradition reached Mesopotamian Christians via the Babylonian rabbis since the Mesopotamian Christian tradition is almost identical to the version of *Cohortatio ad Graecos*, a third-century source from the Roman East (see below). It is also extremely unlikely that the Christian sources from the Roman East derived the tradition from the Babylonian Talmud, because of the Babylonian Talmud's later composition compared to the earliest attestation of the story in Christian traditions.

Space does not allow a complete survey of the antecedents of part A preserved in texts deriving from the Roman East, but the ensuing discussion examines a few of the most important texts.[23]

Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons in Gaul and apparently a native of Asia Minor,[24] who flourished in the third quarter of the second century, is an early Christian author who preserves most of the elements found in the Babylonian Talmud's account. According to Irenaeus, Ptolemy separated the 70 translators to prevent collusion between them, but unlike the Babylonian Talmud Irenaeus makes no mention of the king providing private dwellings for the translators. Irenaeus puts the story to Christian use, arguing for the Septuagint's superiority over competing Greek translations composed by Jews. His account is as follows:[25]

Before the Romans established their dominion and the Macedonians still ruled Asia, Ptolemy, the son of Lagus … eager to supply the library in Alexandria with the most important writings of all humanity, communicated to Jerusalemites his wish to possess their writings in the Greek language. They … sent Ptolemy seventy elders, especially learned among them in scriptural exegesis and in both languages, so that they might fulfill his wish. Since Ptolemy, fearing that they could obscure the true content of the writings by agreement, wanted to test each one, however, he separated them from one another and commanded that all should translate the same work; he did this for all the books. But when they assembled before Ptolemy, and compared their translation to one another, glory be to God, the writings were proven to be truly divine. For all had rendered the same texts with the

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[23] See Veltri, *Libraries, Translations, and 'Canonic' Texts*, 31 fn. 12, for references to collections of ancient accounts of the Septuagint legend. See also pp. 32–77 and 100–146.

[24] Wasserstein and Wasserstein, *Legend of the Septuagint*, 101.

[25] Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 3.21.2–3 (ed. A. Rousseau et al., *Irénée de Lyon. Contre les hérésies* [SC 34, 100, 152–153, 210–211, 263–264, 293–294; Paris: Cerf, 1952–1982]), quoted in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 5.8.11–15 (ed. K. Lake, *Eusebius. Ecclesiastical History* [LCL 153; 265; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926]). See M. Müller, *The First Bible of the Church: A Plea for the Septuagint* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 72–73.

same words and the same meanings … so that even the pagans present acknowledged that the books had been translated by divine inspiration.[26]

Another Christian work, the *Cohortatio ad Graceos*, probably of third-century provenance, features the same motifs and is the first Christian text to mention the 70 translators' confinement in separate rooms.[27] It is thus closer still to the Babylonian Talmud's version of the story:

Ptolemy charged the attendant ministers to see that they wanted for nothing, but to keep them from communicating with each other, in order that their agreement might afford a further proof of the accuracy of the translation. When he found that the seventy men had not merely expressed the same ideas but had employed the very same phraseology, and had not so much as in a single word failed to agree with each other … he held the books to be divine and laid them up in his library … We ourselves have been in Alexandria and have seen the traces, still preserved, of the cells in the island of Pharos, and have heard the story which we tell you from the inhabitants, who have had it handed down as a tradition of their country. You may learn it from others also, and chiefly from those wise and distinguished men who have written of it, Philo and Josephus, but there are many others besides.[28]

After this time, the motif of enforced separation in different rooms or houses becomes a commonplace in works of Christian authorship.[29]

The earliest attestation of the legend of the Septuagint in Syriac Christian sources apparently dates from the latter half of the sixth century. It is found in an ecclesiastical history attributed to Zacharias of Mitylene, but an anonymous monk of Amida, in Mesopotamia, composed most of the work. He completed it in 569 and also drew from other sources.[30] This account, composed in geographical proximity to the Babylonian rabbis, informs us that King Ptolemy Philadelphus assembled seventy men to translate the Holy Scriptures from Hebrew to Greek. It contains none of the miraculous elements found in the rabbinic account, however, stating only that Ptolemy was "moved by God."

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[26] The translation is by M. Hengel, *The Septuagint as Christian Scripture: Its Prehistory and the Problem of its Canon* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2002), 38–39.

[27] See Veltri, *Libraries, Translations, and 'Canonic' Texts*, 44–47; Hengel, *The Septuagint as Christian Scripture*, 37–38; and Wasserstein and Wasserstein, *Legend of the Septuagint*, 100 and 106–108. Pseudo-Justin, *Cohortatio ad Graecos*, 14 (*Opera Iustini*, 56) (ed. M. Marcovich, *Pseudo-Iustinus. Cohortatio ad Graecos; De monarchia; Oratio ad Graecos* [PTS 32; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1990], 4–6).

[28] The translation is by M. Hadas, *Aristeas to Philocrates: Letter of Aristeas* (New York: Harper, 1951), 75. See also Müller, *The First Bible of the Church*, 72; Wasserstein and Wasserstein, *Legend of the Septuagint*, 106–107.

[29] See P. Wendland, *Aristeae ad Philocratem epistula cum ceteris de origine versionis LXX interpretum testimoniis* (Leipzig: B. G. Teubneri, 1900), 87–166 and 228–229; Wasserstein and Wasserstein, *Legend of the Septuagint*, 95–137.

[30] See G. Greatrex, *The Chronicle of Pseudo-Zachariah Rhetor: Church and War in Late Antiquity* (TTH 55; Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011), 432. For the original Syriac, see E. W. Brooks, *Historia ecclesiastica Zachariae Rhetori vulgo adscripta* (CSCO 83–84, 87–88; Leuven: Peeters, 1919–1924). See also P. Allen, "Zachariah Scholasticus and the Historia Ecclesiastica of Evagrius Scholasticus," *JTS* 31 (1980): 472.

The earliest version of the miracle story from this part of the world seems to have been preserved in a Syriac manuscript with a colophon that dates to the seventh century.[31] Since the Babylonian Talmud was finally redacted in the sixth or seventh century (although without a doubt the Babylonian Talmud contains much earlier material), the Syriac translation of *On Weights and Measures* might be contemporaneous with the Babylonian Talmud's tradition. Epiphanius's account is close to that of the Babylonian Talmud in that it describes the translators working in separate cells and inspired by God to produce miraculously identical translations (but see below). Arguing against the Babylonian Talmud's dependence on Epiphanius, however, is the fact that Epiphanius refers to thirty-six pairs of translators in thirty-six cells rather than the Babylonian Talmud's seventy-two houses for seventy-two translators.

Proof that the Babylonian Talmud derived part A from Christian Mesopotamia may be provided by a Syriac text composed by Shahdost of Tirhan in the eighth century,[32] although it is possible that the tradition independently reached Christian and Jewish sources in Mesopotamia from the Roman East at approximately the same time. Shahdost, otherwise known as Eustathius of Tarihan,[33] knows the version of the story from *Cohortatio ad Graecos*, since the two versions are virtually identical. Shahdost's attestation of the tradition should not be regarded as certain proof of the *earliest possible* arrival of the text to Mesopotamian Christians, but rather as attestation of the *approximate date* of its first arrival, since much material composed or transmitted during Late Antiquity has perished through neglect or has not yet reached the attention of scholars. It is therefore conceivable that Babylonian rabbis received the tradition from Mesopotamian Christians rather than directly from the Roman East.

Shahdost's version of the story is as follows:

… the seventy elders whom Ptolemy, the king of Egypt sent for, summoning them from Jerusalem, in order that they might translate for him the books of the prophets from Hebrew into Greek. In order that these might be free from all disturbance, and translate rapidly, he commanded that there should be built for them small lodgings corresponding to the number of them, not in Alexandria, but at (a distance of) seventy stadia, so that each one of them should complete his translation by himself alone. And it was commanded the attendants who were stationed with them that they should meet every need. They should prevent them from talking with one another – so that it should be possible that

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[31] See W. Wright, *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum acquired since the year 1838* (London: Longmans & Co., 1871), vol. 3, 756 (pp. 717–718). See also the edition in J. E. Dean, *Epiphanius' Treatise on Weights and Measures: The Syriac Version* (Chicago: The Universitsy of Chicago Press, 1935). See also Wasserstein and Wasserstein, *Legend of the Septuagint*, 134–135.

[32] See L. Abramowski and A. E. Goodman, *A Nestorian Collection of Christological Texts, Cambridge University Library MS. Oriental 1319* (Cambridge: Cambridge Oriental Publications, 1972), vol. 2, xviii. See also Wasserstein and Wasserstein, *Legend of the Septuagint*, 139–140.

[33] Abramowski and Goodman, *A Nestorian Collection of Christological Texts*, vol. 2 (translation volume), xv fn. 2.

the accuracy of their translations would be manifestly known, through the conformity of their words. Now because he knew that these seventy men employed not only the (same) sense but also the (same) words, and had not deviated among themselves in a single word from the conformity of words, but had written there the same (words), and about the same matters, then he believed that the translation had been made by the power of God. And he knew that they were worthy of all honors, as men who love God. He gave instructions that they should return to their land with many gifts.[34]

The conformity between Shahdost's account and that of *Cohortatio ad Graecos* is obvious, down to incidental details. Shahdost's reference to 70 rather than 35 (or 36) translators, furthermore, points to the *Cohortatio* rather than Epiphanius as his inspiration. He specifies the distance from Alexandria as 70 stadia rather than the 7 of the *Cohortatio*, but this might be a scribal error or attestation of a different version. Finally, Shahdost mentions the translation of the books of the prophets, as opposed to the *Cohortatio*'s "certain ancient histories written in Hebrew characters," but it is obvious that Shahdost's version is an improvement on the version of *Cohortatio* from a late antique or early medieval Christian perspective.

The motif of the translators' working in enforced isolation but nevertheless producing identical translations due to divine inspiration was used by many Christians as proof that the Septuagint is divinely inspired and therefore on a par with or superior to the Hebrew Bible. Some Christian authors explained the Septuagint's many departures from the Hebrew text as the result of Jewish tampering with the Hebrew text, resulting in the removal of prophetic references to the Christian messiah.[35] It is ironic that the Babylonian Talmud preserved intact the motif of enforced separation as proof of divine inspiration, given its importance in Christian propaganda. Perhaps the Babylonian Talmud did so because Christian pressure against Jews in Mesopotamia had nothing to do with the Greek language. A Greek translation of the Bible played no role in the self-definition of Mesopotamian Christian communities, and therefore a tradition about the divine role in its production could be transmitted by Babylonian rabbis without fear that they were playing into the hands of their Christian adversaries (if, in fact, this rabbinic tradition does perceive the Christians as the rabbis' adversaries).

It is also possible that the Babylonian Talmud preserves the tradition because it uses its portrayal of divine inspiration in a strikingly original way. In the Babylonian Talmud, where the miracle story in part A is combined with the account of the passages changed by the elders in part B, Ptolemy is perhaps not the benevolent, knowledge-seeking king he is for Philo and other early authors who

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[34] Abramowski and Goodman, *A Nestorian Collection of Christological Texts*, vol. 1 (text volume), 56–57; vol. 2 (translation volume), 35–36.

[35] Hanhart, "Fragen um die Entstehung der LXX," 149–151.

transmitted the Septuagint story.[36] Rather, for the Babylonian Talmud the king's act of placing the elders in separate dwellings without explanation may have been the act of a tyrant taking prisoners, given the account of what transpires in part B. Ptolemy's request to them to "write the Torah of Moses your rabbi" is perhaps an attempt to discover if there is anything offensive, self-contradictory, or embarrassing to rabbinic belief in the Pentateuch. The text according to the Babylonian rabbis does not say that they translated the entire Pentateuch the same way,[37] but only that they translated potentially problematic verses the same way, several verses that appear to support beliefs that the rabbis found obnoxious,[38] and one verse that if translated literally would have personally insulted the king.[39] Perhaps in the Babylonian Talmud we have an echo of a slant on the story found already in Irenaeus, according to whom Ptolemy separated the translators because he suspected that they might try to hide the truth contained in Scripture (see above). In Irenaeus's account as well, therefore, we may find a precedent for the Babylonian Talmud's depiction of a hostile king.

There is no unambiguous evidence, therefore, despite the claims of some scholars, that the ancient rabbis approved of the Septuagint.[40] On the contrary, perhaps the Babylonian Talmud's version of the tradition is evidence that the rabbis were not happy with it. It was necessary to produce it, the Baraita might be saying, but it was not the product of divine inspiration, beyond the few texts the elders changed with the help of God to escape the wrath of the king.

I am not claiming that it is impossible to read the Babylonian Talmud as glorifying the Septuagint as the product of divine inspiration. In fact, perhaps the story was not perceived by the Babylonian rabbis as Christian propaganda, and it may have appealed to them simply as a miracle story, depicting God's intervention in the affairs of His people in the distant past and in a foreign land. Rather, I am claiming that an alternative understanding is equally plausible, according to which only the specific verses changed for Ptolemy's benefit were inspired by God. The divine inspiration, according to this understanding, enabled the translators, or even the entire Jewish people, to escape harm and embarrassment at the hands of the pagan king. This interpretation makes it easy to understand why the story found a home in the Babylonian Talmud, since the theme of God's rescue

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[36] Philo, *De Vita Mosis*, 2.36–46 (ed. F. H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker, *Philo* [LCL 226–227, 247, 261, 275, 289, 320, 341, 363, 379; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1929–1962]). See also Aristobulus, quoted in Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica*, 12.12.2 (ed. K. Mras [2nd ed. with É. des Places], *Eusebius Werke*, vol. 8. *Die Praeparatio evangelica* [GCS 43; Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1982–1983]).

[37] Although Ptolemy in part A does command them to "Write for me the Torah of Moses your rabbi."

[38] Veltri, *Libraries, Translations, and 'Canonic' Texts*, 138–139.

[39] Hanhart, "Fragen um die Entstehung der LXX," 152.

[40] See, for example, Veltri, *Libraries, Translation, and "Canonic" Texts*," ix; Wasserstein and Wasserstein, *Legend of the Septuagint*, 59.

of the Jewish people from a would-be pagan oppressor is one that clearly would have resonated in any one of a variety of late antique settings.[41]

Conclusion

This paper focused in detail on two rich narratives, or, to be more precise, on several passages and motifs within two rich narratives, which are first attested in the Babylonian Talmud by the latest Babylonian rabbis. Given the present state of our knowledge, it is difficult to know how frequently traditions deriving from Christian Mesopotamia impinged on Babylonian rabbis, or vice versa.

The traditions examined in detail above indicate a connection between Jewish and Christian Mesopotamia, but it is as yet unclear whether or not this connection qualifies as "close." In my estimation even this limited conclusion is significant, since it is so difficult to contextualize late antique Mesopotamian literatures, because they strongly tend to convey the impression of having been formed in total isolation.

This study contributes to the question of the extent to which the various cultures comprising Mesopotamia developed or reinforced their Mesopotamian identities throughout the period under study. It supports scholars who characterize the territory between the Roman and Persian Empires as culturally linked, although it would be a mistake to minimize the very significant differences that remained within this vast expanse of territory until the end of antiquity and on into the Middles Ages.

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[41] Compare Wasserstein and Wasserstein, *Legend of the Septuagint*, 60.

Syriac Fathers on Jerusalem

Naomi Koltun-Fromm

In early Jewish and Christian thought Jerusalem is both a geographic place and theological concept. Historically, the Jerusalem temples stood there; Jesus died there, and for believing Christians, Jesus was also resurrected from there. Yet in the early years post 70 CE, after the city's destruction by the Romans, Jews were banned and Christians fled. The Roman emperors thoroughly Romanized the city into a garrison town, renaming it Aelia Capitolina in the mid-second century. The Romans presumed that this transformation would put an end to any Jewish or Christian attachment to the city. How wrong they were. The destruction and renaming only intensified the degree to which Jerusalem's symbolic significance grew for many Jews and Christians. While no battles were fought against the Romans for the physical city, over the next few centuries Jews and Christians waged a different sort of war, of words and images, of a city defeated and reimagined, within their theological texts. This essay explores the many variations on the defeated/reconstructed Jerusalem theme that emerges from this context. In particular, this essay focuses on a collection of Syriac Christian and rabbinic texts because of their overlapping theological and geographic contexts. While many Greek- and Latin-speaking Byzantine Christians turned back to, visited, and built monuments in physical Jerusalem after Constantine, many Syriac-speaking Christians seemed less interested in rebuilding a defeated earthly Jerusalem when the heavenly Jerusalem, and other symbolically appointed Jerusalem(s) created elsewhere, fit their needs more closely.

This essay is part of a collection of essays on late ancient Judaism and Syriac Christianity, both sub-fields of late ancient religious studies. Over the years, scholars of both late ancient Judaism and early Christianity have discovered the usefulness of making comparisons between the texts that these groups produced. Some ask social-historical questions concerning what we can learn about Jews and Christians from texts that purport to discuss Jews and Christians, mostly in conflict (but sometimes in harmony) in the areas where known rabbinic Jewish and Syriac Christian communities thrived side by side. Although I, too, began my academic career examining social-historical questions, I have moved to more intellectual, theological questions of religious belief and practice. Thus, I am less interested here in the daily lives and interactions of Jews and Christians as I am in the development of "Judaism" and "Christianity" in

this time and place as reflected in the texts composed by these people. This has proven to be a very fruitful area of research as there is much overlap, correspondence, and tension across these texts and community expressions of faith, even when close collaboration or even interaction was limited or greatly impeded. "Jews" and "Christians" served as useful tropes for late ancient theologians attempting to demarcate theologically and ideologically construed community boundaries.

Jews and Christians, Syriac-speaking ones among many diverse Christian communities, interpreted Jerusalem, both its physical reality and its mythological stature, in many ways. In this essay, I explore motifs of Jerusalem dismissed, Jerusalem elsewhere, Jerusalem mythologized, Jerusalem rebuilt, as well as Jerusalem eschatologically situated – mythologies and ideologies all influenced by the political and historical factors that shaped Jewish and Christian worldviews in this time period. What interests me most is the continued use of the trope of forever destroyed Jerusalem and its temple as punishment for the Jews in the fourth and fifth centuries among Syriac writers, even as an actual Christian Jerusalem grew in its place in historic Jerusalem. At the same time, these very authors invoke the memory of the temple and usurp temple imagery to describe or create Jerusalems and sacred geographies elsewhere. Similarly, rabbis also invoke the memory of the temple to promote their own theological innovations. Despite the "facts on the ground," or perhaps because of them, late antique Jews and Christians clung to and reinvented mythological Jerusalems again and again, often inspired by competing constructions both real and imagined.

Jerusalem Dismissed

Undeniably, the Judean-Roman wars and the eventual destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70 and its leveling and reconstitution as Aelia Capitolina after the year 135 transformed the lives of the peoples living in Judea and the surrounding territories. Even those living outside the affected areas felt its reverberations culturally, politically, and, for those most invested, theologically. Despite the devastating effects the Roman wars must have had on the fledgling Christian communities of the Mediterranean, early Christian writers latched on to an understanding that Jerusalem's destruction was a sure sign of God's disfavor toward, if not outright rejection of, the Jewish establishment in Jerusalem. Christian theology and faith in Jesus as the source of ultimate grace and future salvation replaced the Jerusalem temple and its rituals. Jesus, through the sacrifice of his own body, became the site of worship rather than the temple and its animal sacrifices and other rituals. According to the earliest Christian writings, this theology claimed that the Jews rejected Jesus, and thus God rejected them, their city, their temple, and their rituals (Mk 13:1–4; Mt 23:37–38; Lk 13:34–35).

The destruction was just punishment for their willful disobedience of their own God's best plans for them.

This trope of "just desserts" continued to flourish in many early Christian writings. After the second Jewish revolt (named for Bar Kokhba, its leader) in 132–135, Justin Martyr criticized the distinctive Jewish practice of circumcision. According to the biblical text (Gn 17), God granted this ritual as a sign to Abraham to mark his distinction before God. After Bar Kokhba, according to Justin, it now marked the Jews as traitors because they murdered God's chosen messiah and thus suffered this divinely ordained devastating loss and dislocation.[1] Origen too carried this theme forward in his *Contra Celsum*, arguing that the destruction was just punishment for Jesus' death.[2] Finally, I bring the example of Eusebius, who opened his *Ecclesiastical History* noting that he wrote this history, in part, to demonstrate "the calamities that immediately after their conspiracy against our Saviour overwhelmed the entire Jewish race."[3] By the time he composed this work in the early fourth century, this trope was so prevalent among Christian writers that Eusebius felt that the evidence supplied by Josephus' narrative of the last days of Jerusalem simply supported his case for the Jews' collective guilt without much further elaboration. For Eusebius, Metropolitan of Caesarea, the Roman provincial capital, Aelia/Jerusalem was a has-been, divinely overturned city, left to rot in its own disgrace.

The fourth-century Syriac Christian authors carry on this very theme as expounded by earlier church fathers. Yet Christine Shepardson has recently argued that their particular social-political situations necessitated a further argument: Not only are the Jews dispersed and suffering homelessness and templelessness due to their bad behavior, but their very rituals, which they brazenly continue to practice in the fourth-century cities in which they live, are useless and illegal according to their own law (which of course they refuse to understand properly). Hence, Shepardson argues, Ephrem, Aphrahaṭ, and John Chrysostom manipulate the destroyed-temple-trope to prove that any form of Jewish practice, pre-destruction as well as post-destruction lacks any salvific value.[4]

While the Greek Chrysostom and Syriac Ephrem marshal this trope against any Jewish practice or ritual they deem dangerous because of its attractiveness to their cohorts in Antioch and Edessa/Nisibis, Aphrahaṭ also applies the trope against supposed Jewish beliefs, such as the ultimate Jewish return to Jerusalem. In *Demonstration* 19, Aphrahaṭ refutes a Jewish claim of future ingathering and

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[1] Justin Martyr, *Trypho*, 16 (trans. T. B. Falls, T. P. Halton, and M. Slusser, *Justin Martyr. Dialogue with Trypho* [SFoC 3; Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2003], 27–28).

[2] Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 1.47 (trans. H. Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953], 43).

[3] Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 1.1. (trans. G. A. Williamson, *The History of the Church from Christ to Constantine* [New York: Penguin, 1965], 31).

[4] C. Shepardson, "Paschal Politics: Deploying the Temple's Destruction against Fourth-Century Judaizers," *VC* 62 (2008): 2, 8, 12, 14, 18 ff.

return to Jerusalem.[5] To do so, Aphraḥaṭ reads the prediction for Jerusalem in Daniel 9 intertextually with Genesis 49 to construct a counter argument:

Now be persuaded that after these weeks the Messiah came and was killed for the fulfill-
ment of the vision and the prophets (Dn 9). When he blessed Judah, Jacob our father said,
"*The sceptre will not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from among his progeny, until he
to whom the kingdom belongs comes*" (Gn 49:10). Be persuaded, my friend, and consider
that the weeks have been completed, visions and prophets have been terminated, and the
kingdom has been cut off from Judah. Jerusalem has been destroyed and its people have
been scattered among every people. The descendants of Israel live without sacrifices and
without an altar, and until the completion of the decrees, Jerusalem will be destroyed and
will remain in desolation. The vineyard has withered and produced wild grapes (Is 5:2,
6); fire has consumed the two branches of the vine (Ezek 15:4). The wall of the vineyard is
broken down, its tower is torn down, and its winepress is destroyed. The silver is rejected
and is of no use (Jer 6:30). A letter of divorce has been written for Jerusalem (Jer 3:8).[6]

Building on Daniel's predictions for several years of restoration until the anoint-
ed one comes and dies, Aphraḥaṭ argues that all of Daniel's predictions have al-
ready been fulfilled, particularly in the person, mission, and death of Jesus. The
destruction of Jerusalem further substantiates this claim. That is to say, the fact
that Jerusalem remains a ruin – even in Aphraḥaṭ's day – proves that Daniel's vi-
sions have already been fulfilled. Thus he can write, "The descendants of Israel
live without sacrifices and without an altar, and until the completion of the de-
crees, Jerusalem will be destroyed and will remain in desolation." Whether or not
Jews in Aphraḥaṭ's neighborhood argued for their future redemption through
interpretations of Daniel, Aphraḥaṭ stands firm that they hope in vain.

What interests me here is how this trope juxtaposes the actuality of Jerusalem
in this period. For, in the 320s, Constantine began to rebuild and reclaim Jeru-
salem as a Christian city. Marking Jesus' historical mission in Jerusalem through
large construction projects provided the right spiritual support for Constantine's
push to legitimate Christianity in the Roman Empire. In order to explain or ac-
commodate the new situation in Jerusalem (a Christian Jerusalem), Eusebius
made a 180-degree intellectual and theological reversal circa 339 in his *Life of
Constantine*, where he described and glorified Constantine's rediscovery and
monumentalizing of sacred, *Christian* Jerusalem sites, most importantly the
tomb of Christ. Yet, Aphraḥaṭ, in 345, seems not to know or care: His Christian

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[5] It is not my purpose here to argue whether Persian Jews held this claim or not, but only
that the claim was useful to Aphraḥaṭ's argument. See my work where I do make the claim that
many rabbinic Jews did believe in a Return (N. Koltun-Fromm, *A Jewish-Christian Conversa-
tion in Fourth-Century Persian Mesopotamia* [Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2011], 94–104); and
the work of J. E. Walters, who claims it is only a rhetorical device (*Aphrahat and the Construc-
tion of Christian Identity in Fourth-Century Persia* [Ph.D. Dissertation, Princeton Theological
Seminary, 2016] as well as his contribution on pp. 291–319 below).

[6] Aphraḥaṭ, *Demonstrations*, 19.11 (trans. A. Lehto, *The Demonstrations of Aphrahat, the Per-
sian Sage* [Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2010], 420–421).

supersessionist theology stands firmly and squarely on a visibly and imagined ruined Jewish Jerusalem.

Twenty years later, Julian, perfectly aware of this Christian trope, most likely chose to rebuild the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem to reverse history: symbolically overturn Christianity's self-proclaimed triumph. Christians across the Empire let out a great sigh of relief when Julian's plans failed, but the very attempt provoked great theological anxieties.[7] One Syriac Christian writer, Ephrem, who lived within the Roman sphere of influence, clearly echoes these anxieties. After the Sasanians defeated the Romans and killed Julian in battle, they also claimed Ephrem's beloved city of Nisibis, causing Ephrem to flee to Edessa where he composed his anti-Julian hymns. There he writes:

At that time terrors were stirred up as a rebuke;
He [God] proclaimed in the whole world a truth for souls:
that cities were overthrown by the disgrace of paganism.
Jerusalem found very guilty
the accursed ones and crucifiers who dared to decide to enter
to build the desolate place desolated by their sins.

Fools and simpletons, they desolated what had been built,
and now that it has been desolated, they decide to build it.
While they possessed it, they demolished it; but when it was desolate, they loved it.
Jerusalem trembled when she saw
her demolishers entering again and disturbing her calm.
She complained to the [Most] High about them, and she was heard.

Winds He commanded, and they blew. He beckoned to earthquakes,
and they came into being,
to the lightning bolts, and they blazed forth, to the air, and it became dark,
to the walls, and they were overthrown, to the gates, and they were opened.
Fire came out and devoured the scribes,
who read in Daniel that [Jerusalem] would be desolate forever,
who read but did not learn; they were severely stricken, and they learned.

They scattered her with the Humble One who gathered her chicks,
And they thought the soothsayer's error would gather her.
They overthrew her on with the steadfast, but supported her with the unsteady.
They wanted to build her again.
They scattered His great altar by the slaughter of the Holy One;
And they thought the rebuilder of the [pagan] altars would reestablish it.
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[7] The exact details of Julian's thinking and the history of what happened in Jerusalem remain obscure, but the existential threat to their theological and political triumph created a vast literary tradition that claimed divine intervention against Julian's plans. See D. B. Levenson, "The Ancient and Medieval Sources for the Emperor Julian's attempt to Rebuild the Jerusalem Temple," *JSJ* 34 (2004): 409–460.

But Daniel passed judgment on Jerusalem and determined
that it would not again be built, and Zion believed him.
They themselves [Zion and Jerusalem] wailed and wept;
He cut off and cast out their hope.[8]

Following the trope of Daniel's predictions, Ephrem notes that Jerusalem was destroyed for its residents' sins, and so it shall remain. Not only did they crucify the messiah, but they also refused to repent and had the gall to think they could re-enter its forbidden properties. He opines how even the city itself understood that it cannot be rebuilt and called out for divine intervention at the time of Julian. As proof, Ephrem describes how Julian's attempt was rejected by a divine hand. The earthquakes and fire that stayed or destroyed the builders' projects came directly from God, proving once again the Christian faith's superiority.[9]

While Julian and the Jews may have attempted to rebuild a temple on the temple mount, down below on the other side of the city a whole Christian enclave had existed for thirty or so years, with its own "temple" in its midst. Yet this "fact on the ground" reflects not at all in these authors' worldviews and theologies. Aphrahaṭ, for his part, does not seem to acknowledge a Christian city, perhaps because the concept was yet too new for him, or perhaps he simply did not know of its existence yet. Or, possibly, as a resident of the Persian Empire, city building within the Roman Empire did not concern him. Ephrem, in contrast, acknowledges Christian sites in Jerusalem, in this very same hymn, which ends: "Bethlehem and Bethany both pledge to you two / That instead of that People that was uprooted / from all peoples they should come with Hallelujahs / to see in your wombs the grave and Golgotha."[10] But I am not convinced that he refers here to Jerusalem as a Christian city. One would think that the fact of Constantine's building projects and the investment he and others were making in reclaiming Jerusalem for Christians only would be another nail in the coffin of Jewish reclamation efforts, as Eusebius eloquently states in his *Life of Constantine*, but Ephrem does not go so far. Both Aphrahaṭ and Ephrem elide temple and city and insist that the destruction of the one equals or encompasses the demise of the other. This may indeed be influenced by their reading of Daniel in which temple and city are similarly conflated. Moreover, Ephrem's antipathy toward Jerusalem in Judea may reflect the fact that he has already resituated his Jerusalem elsewhere.

In his second hymn against Julian, Ephrem pays particular attention to the Christians in Nisibis, who manage to combat three Persian sieges of their city. Although Ephrem writes these hymns from "exile" in Edessa, after the Persians take his beloved city without a fight, his imagery is telling. Shapur, the Persian King,

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[8] Ephrem, *Hymns against Julian*, 4:18–21, 23 (trans. K. E. McVey, *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns* [New York: Paulist Press, 1989], 254–256).

[9] See also O. Irshai, "Dating the Eschaton: Jewish and Christian Apocalyptic Calculation in Late Antiquity," in A. I. Baumgarten (ed.), *Apocalyptic Time* (Leiden: Brill, 200), 114–153.

[10] Ephrem, *Hymns against Julian*, 4.25 (trans. McVey, *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns*, 257).

but not Julian, the Roman, recognized the sanctity and power of the Christian community in Nisibis. This city "heralded the truth of its savior."[11] Furthermore, he writes: "The Magus who entered our place regarded it as holy, to our disgrace. He neglected his fire temple but honored the sanctuary (*maqdšā*) … For he knew that from one temple (*hayklā*) alone emerged the mercy that had saved us from him three times."[12] Ephrem here intimates that when Shapur finally gained possession of Nisibis, he honored the Christian buildings in the city because even he, a pagan, understood their source of power. Nisibis contains Christian "sanctuaries" and one "temple," presumably Jesus or the faith he inspired in his people. Ephrem labels Shapur a magus, perhaps referencing and therefore elevating the Persian King to the level of the Magi, or wise men in the Matthew 2:7 who, though foreigners, recognize the sacredness in Jesus at his birth.

Nevertheless, Ephrem must also explain why such a good Christian city could be given over to Persian pagans. Here he comes awfully close to biblical apologies for the destruction of Jerusalem: According to Ephrem, some Christians had apostasized and caused idolatry to rise again under the reign of Julian. But God, at least this time, has mercy on his chosen-ones and allows them safe refuge in Roman territory, rather than "exile" in Persia: "the Magian king honored our sanctuary. His honoring our sanctuary has doubled our consolation. God saddened and gladdened us but did not exile us."[13] This cannot but be a stab at both Jewish and Christian notions of the Jewish exile from Jerusalem as just punishment. If Edessa is Ephrem's escape from exile in Persia, then surely Nisibis is his Jerusalem, where God's true sanctuary stands, and into which, ironically, despite his repentance, he is forbidden entrance. Thus, it seems that, in fourth-century Persian- and Syriac-speaking Christian communities, the imperially blessed Constantinian Jerusalem could not displace locally grown notions of religious community attached to particularly native sacred grounds.

The *History of Simeon Bar Ṣabbāʿē*, a late-fourth- or early-fifth-century hagiography of a bishop of Ctesiphon, martyred by Shapur II, gives us another transposition of the Jerusalem dismissed motif. Within this tale of woe and triumph appears the following narrative:

After twenty-four years [after the death of Simeon], when Constantius and Constantinus, the sons of Constantine the Victorious, had died, Julian reigned over the Romans. From the outset of his reign he sacrificed to idols. And in order to provoke Christians and falsify the words of the Messiah – who prophesied about the destruction of Jerusalem, and said: "there will not be left on it a stone upon stone that is not overturned" [Mt 24:22, Mk 13:2; Lk 21:6] – for this reason [Julian] commanded the Jews in all of his empire to ascend and rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple and to sacrifice offerings as the law commands.

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[11] Ephrem, *Hymns against Julian*, 2.19 (trans. McVey, *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns*, 240).
[12] Ephrem, *Hymns against Julian,* 2.22 (trans. McVey, *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns*, 240–241).
[13] Ephrem, *Hymns against Julian,* 2.29 (trans. McVey, *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns*, 242).

Indeed, many went up and began to dig up the foundations of Jerusalem. While these things were happening, a charlatan came to the land of the Persians and called to all the Jews and said, "The time for the Return [to Jerusalem] as appointed by the prophets [Dn 9:25; Is 27:13] is at hand and I am commanded by God to proclaim to you the Return and to ascend."

The imposter came also to Maḥoza, in Beth Aramaye, and led astray thousands of Jews who set out and left Mahoza in the hope of the Return and they went three parasangs from the city. When word of their departure reached King Shapur he sent out a force and destroyed many thousands of them.[14]

The first part of this narrative reflects the general trope of Christian anti-Julian writings: Julian called the Jews to rebuild the temple, and in the end, they failed. In Ephrem, as in many other traditions, the divine intervention stops the building project through earthquakes, fires, storms, or any combination of the three. Here, the *History* mentions no building disruption, but rather the narrative turns native. At the same time when Julian commands the Jews in Jerusalem to rebuild, an imposter Messiah comes to Maḥoza (outside Ctesiphon, the Persian capital) to call the local Jews to return to Jerusalem. This in and of itself echoes Aphrahaṭ's claim that the Persian Jews continued to believe, futilely, in a future ingathering and return. Here, when the opportunity seemingly presents itself, the Jews are again thwarted, this time by the hand of Shapur, who kills them all before they can cross the border.[15]

Although this narrative has a particularly Persian motif, it serves the same purpose of defeating the Jews in one way or another.[16] Moreover, it fits the author's narrative agenda, for it parallels the Jesus stories – unbelieving Jews die for their improper faith, which is just what the hagiographer needs in order to compare his martyr-hero, Simeon bar Ṣabbāʿē, to the ultimate martyr-hero, Jesus. And yet, Jerusalem, the physical city, Jewish or Christian, does not factor into this story, which takes place wholly on Persian soil. The actual Jerusalem Temple simply remains insignificant. This hagiographer's important battle-front encompasses a repeat of Jesus' passion – but on Persian soil, for Persian believers. The narrative remains the same, transported to native territory. Jerusalem, for the author of the *History* remains a barren city. No Church of the Holy Sepulcher or other Christian edifices exist in this author's imagination; Jerusalem is and always will be a ruin.

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[14] *History of Simeon Bar Ṣabbaʾe*, 14–15 (ed. M. Kmosko, *S. Simeon bar Sabbaʾe* [PS I.2; Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1907], 809–812; trans. K. Smith, *The Martyrdom and the History of Blessed Simeon bar Ṣabbāʾē* [PMAS 3; Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2014], 90).

[15] While there is no other historical evidence of such an event, this text may reflect the memory of an earlier event in which a Roman General, Quietus, quelled a Jewish revolt in Mesopotamia under Trajan. See Koltun-Fromm, *Jewish-Christian Conversation*, 72 fn. 94.

[16] See A. Jacobs, *Remains of the Jews: The Holy Land and Christian Empire in Late Antiquity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 12–17 and 139–199, in which he argues that many Christian narratives, particularly about the Holy Land and Jerusalem, rehash the supersessionist argument in the support of Christian imperial claims.

Jerusalem Mythologized

While pre-Constantinian Christians of all stripes distanced themselves from physical Jerusalem by burying it under rubble, Jews, and particularly rabbis, began to revisit symbolically their now forbidden city by reimagining its cosmogonic significance. The rabbinic *even shetiyah*, usually translated as "the foundation stone," is a mythological stone that appears first in the Mishnah. It was not the corner stone of the temple buildings but rather a piece of bedrock, insignificant in its shape, size, and visibility; it was only three inches off the ground and was hidden by the Ark of the Covenant in the First Temple, and used by the high priest to hold his incense pan in the Second. No mention of this rock was made before the Mishnah; rather, it emerged as a placeholder imagined by the second-to third-century rabbis to mark the location of the holy of holies, and particularly the Ark of the Covenant.[17]

The *even shetiyah* appears first in m. Yoma 5:2, where we find this very brief notice: "After the Ark was taken away a stone remained there from the time of the early Prophets, and it was called 'Shetiyah'. It was higher than the ground by three finger-breadths. On this he used to put [the fire-pan]."[18] Without explaining what *shetiyah* means or refers to, this text highlights the antiquity of the stone (it was there from the time of the earliest prophets – therefore before the building of the temple by Solomon) and its location (at the place where the Ark of the Covenant used to rest, in the *dvir*, or holy of holies, of the First Temple). This choice of place is important: For, the rock represents the Ark, and the Ark contains the Word of God (as opposed to the presence of God), which the rabbis "worship" in parallel to or in replacement for the cultic ways in which the priests used to worship the presence of God when the temple still stood. Yet neither association to antiquity or place explains the name *shetiyah*.

Thus we have to turn to the Tosefta, which adds to our mishnah, stating: "Rabbi Yosi used to say, 'from it [the stone] was founded (*nishtat*) the world, as it says: "From Zion the perfection of beauty, God shines forth'" (Ps 50:2)."[19] In this passage, *shetiyah* is understood to derive from the related root √*šty* 'to create, to found, or to weave'. The world, in creation, began at this rock and spread out like a tapestry. Our Mishnah text makes no claims to prove or support the truth of its assertion. The Rock just is and, one assumes, always was and always will be there as part of the bedrock upon which the temples once stood. The toseftan and talmudic passages, however, attempt to support this idea with biblical

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[17] I have written extensively on these rabbinic texts in two articles: N. Koltun-Fromm, "Jerusalem Sacred Stones from Creation to Eschaton," *JLA* 10:2 (2017), 405–431; eadem, "Imagining the Temple in Rabbinic Stone: The Evolution of the *Even Shetiyah*," *AJS Review* 43 (2019): 355–377.

[18] M. Yoma 5:2 (trans. H. Danby, *The Mishnah* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933], 167).

[19] T. Yoma 2:14 (author's translation).

scripture. Psalm 50:2, for the rabbis, seems to say that good things – generative things – begin at Zion. God shines forth God's glory (during the creation process, physically happening at Zion, as understood from the first line of the psalm: "God spoke and summoned the world east to west" – the "spoke" here recalling God's speaking and creating command in Genesis 1) and the world came into being. Zion and the Rock are one; the world is beholden to Zion; the Jews are beholden to the rabbis. The Palestinian Talmud, however, adds another text which appears more to the point, Isaiah 28:16: "Therefore, thus says the Lord God, I am laying in Zion a stone [*even*], a tested stone [*even bohan*], a precious corner stone [*pinat yokeret*], a sure foundation [*mosad*]. One who trusts will not panic." This passage explains, perhaps, the *shetiyah* concept through analogous words ("foundation" and "corner stones").

It has been argued that these motifs of divine presence, creation, and foundation derive from Ancient Near Eastern cosmic mountain motifs, in which the sacred mountain top houses the deity who founds the world thus creating the sacred center of that worshipping community.[20] Late biblical literatures such as Isaiah, Psalms, and Ezekiel apply these same cosmic motifs to Jerusalem, Mt. Zion, and the First Temple. The rabbis here, however, focus on a rock – not a mountain, city, or temple building – and an insignificant one at that. In addition, they go backwards in time, to a place and moment before the temples or Jerusalem existed for Israel. Their focus, I argue, is on the Ark, which also predates the temple, the holy of holies, and the priestly activity that supposedly took place there. Here, rabbinic imagination co-opts the memory of the temple and temple-focused worship to work for them and their labor: midrashic and halakhic interpretation – that activity through which they worship God, or rather, God's word, in written form. And God's word, in its container, the Ark of the Covenant, sat on this very Rock, at the point of creation.[21] While the tannaitic and Palestinian amoraic rabbis develop this tradition, the Babylonian texts carry it forward focusing on the various places from which creation might have started.

B. Yoma 54b, the talmudic passage which expands on the very mishnah in question, actually presents us with several different conversations concerning the *even shetiyah* and its place in creation:

AND IT WAS CALLED SHETHIYAH: A Tanna taught: [It was so called] because from it the world was founded. We were taught in accord with the view that the world was started [created] from Zion on. For it was taught: R. Eliezer says: The world was created from its centre, as it is said: When the dust runs into a mass, and the clods keep fast together (Jb 38:38). R. Joshua said: The world was created from its sides on, as it is said: For He said to

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[20] See R. J. Clifford, *The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and the Old Testament* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), 3.

[21] See N. S. Cohn, *The Memory of the Temple and the Making of the Rabbis* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), where he makes a similar argument about the rabbis' use of temple memories.

the snow: 'Fall you on the earth'; likewise, to the shower of rain, and to the showers of His mighty rain (Jb 37:6). R. Isaac the Smith said: The Holy One, blessed be He, cast a stone into the ocean, from which the world then was founded as it is said: Whereupon were the foundations thereof fastened, or who laid the corner-stone thereof? (Jb 38:6) But the Sages said: The world was [started] created from Zion, as it is said: A Psalm of Asaph, God, God, the Lord [hath spoken], whereupon it reads on: Out of Zion, the perfection of the world (Ps 50:2), that means from Zion was the beauty of the world perfected.

It was taught: R. Eliezer the Great said: These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth, in the day that the Lord God made earth and heaven (Gn 2:4). The generations [the creations] of heaven were made from the heaven and the generations of the earth were made from the earth. But the Sages said: Both were created from Zion, as it is said: 'A Psalm of Asaph: God, God, the Lord, hath spoken, and called the earth from the rising of the sun to the going down thereof.'(Ps 50:1) And Scripture further says: 'Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined forth' (Ps 50:2), that means from it the beauty of the world was perfected (Ps 50.2).[22]

The voices in this text ask: Where did creation begin? One rabbi suggests that it started in its center and spread out, another suggests it started at one side of the world and moved to the other. Both rabbis pull on different texts from Job 37–38, in which God describes the divine action of creation, to prove their point (even if their meaning remains unclear to us readers). Yet another rabbi suggests that God threw a stone into the ocean (the waters of chaos?), which grew into the earth, also based on this same section of Job, and certainly with the most logical warrant. Nevertheless, all of these Jobian proof-texts are swept aside by the final rabbinic suggestion, which takes us back to the Mishnah, Zion, and Psalm 50. Again, the rabbis here understand the opening verses to mean that God pulled the world out of Zion, as he spoke his generative words (of Genesis 1) at Zion. Zion, therefore, remains the starting point (whether side or center), the foundation stone of the world. In the Palestinian Talmud, the *even pinah* (the corner stone) and Isaiah 28:16, in which it is found, are used to support the idea that the *even shetiyah* is found (and was founded) on Mt. Zion. Yet in the Babylonian Talmud, the *even pinah* and Job 38:6 in which it is also found are both sunk to the bottom of the sea. Do either of these texts, in their oblique yet slightly different ways, echo and reject a Christian reading of *even pinah* as a metaphor for Christ? (e.g., 1 Pet 2:16). For why shouldn't the *even shetiyah*, as an imaginary stone, be the *even pinah* of Zion and therefore the world? The Babylonian Talmud rejects this option by twice circling back to Psalm 50. The *even shetiyah*, firmly affixed to the top of Mt. Zion on the spot of the holy of holies and under the Ark of the Covenant, embodies and reaffirms the rabbinic *axis mundi*, center of the world, and ultimately their self-declared authority.

The destruction of the Second Temple provoked an existential and theological crisis for all those who counted on the Jerusalem temple cult to keep the world

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[22] B. Yoma 54a (trans. I. Epstein, *The Babylonian Talmud*, pt. 2, vol. 3 [London: Soncino Press, 1961], 256–257).

in working order. Christians soon found a replacement theology: Jesus became their site of this worldly atonement and next worldly salvation. Thus, it became both easy and imperative to dismiss Jerusalem, its temple and its physicality, as unnecessary for Christian divine access. The rabbis also found a new source for divine access: their dedicated study of God's Word, the Torah. Yet, many Jews and Christians, much like the peoples and cultures among whom they lived, remained attached to the value of sacred place and the comfort of the visual in a world where many people were not literate. Thus, the late ancient person, surrounded by monuments to the divine, whether through natural hierophanic sites or temples dedicated to various deities, often turned to the visual and solidly earthly to mark, in the ground, the idea of the elusive divine. The rabbis, accomplish this visualization from afar, through words and descriptives, but some Christians began to return to Jerusalem, first as pilgrims and then as monument builders, searching for and locating the Christian divine in the bedrock of this once and future city.[23] Initially, the attraction was to sites associated with Jesus' passion, and for the sake of the salvation thus promised to believers through that passion. Yet, Jerusalem as divine *axis mundi* and eventually as point of creation seep into Christian mythology as well.

Thus, in the same centuries, the local Christian Jerusalem community, with the support of the new Christian Emperor, Constantine, uncovered their own sacred rocks: Golgotha and the rock-cut tomb of Jesus. Eusebius, who gives us the first description of the building of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in his *Life of Constantine*, does not actually mention Golgotha, for he focuses on the rock-cut tomb, Jesus' last resting place, that is "uncovered" by Constantine's henchmen, conveniently, from under a pagan temple that must be destroyed in the process of discovering this particular Christian truth. For Eusebius, then, the divine sacredness is embedded in this piece of bedrock, sanctified not only by Jesus' body but also by the presence of the angel that reports his resurrection.[24] Nevertheless, over the next few decades, Christian writers and pilgrims turn their attention to another rock in the Constantinian complex: Golgotha, the site of Jesus' crucifixion. Thus, within one complex, these two stones mark the sites of Jesus' death and resurrection – within a stone's throw of each other (pun intended). The gospel texts refer to Golgotha as a place, not a hill, and as the rabbinic Foundation Stone grew in mythological stature and happens to sit on a mountain, Golgotha too grew from a place into a small hill.[25] Yet unlike the *even shetiyah*,

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[23] See work on this idea of a "turn to the visual" in G. Frank, *The Memory of the Eyes: Pilgrims to Living Saints in Christian Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

[24] Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, 3.30.4 (trans. A. Cameron and S. Hall, *Life of Constantine* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990], 134).

[25] For a fuller discussion of comparative hills, see Y. Eliav, "The New Mountain in Christian Homiletics," in *God's Mountain: The Temple Mount in Time, Place and Memory* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2005), 151–188.

which marks the beginning point of the world's creation, Golgotha, in these early Christian texts, marks the world's center, a geographic mark as if on a globe or flat map. Moreover, this focal point has its own spiritual significance: It points forward, rather than backward, in time. Golgotha, with its cross, placed upon it is a beacon, calls out to the world to unite behind Christ, because the Christian path is the truest path to eternal salvation. As Cyril of Jerusalem notes, Golgotha serves as an eschatological witness, a reminder of Jesus' own redemption and especially a marker of the future promise of salvation for all adherents at the end of time. It calls out to believers to come home, to participate in that redemption that only Jesus can offer, most poignantly at the very place where he received his own redemption: Golgotha.[26]

Heavenly and Earthly Jerusalem Re-Unite

Yet much of this Jerusalem bound cosmogonic and hierophanic symbolism seems lost on the fourth-century Syriac-speaking church fathers discussed earlier, most likely for reasons of distinct geography, politics, language, and culture. For instance, Ephrem establishes his own Jerusalem elsewhere (Nisibis), but he also imagines Eden, his salvific eschatological sacred center, as the ultimate cosmic mountain at the far edge of his eastern territory. Given that Genesis describes Eden as somewhere "in the east"[27] it is not a far stretch to imagine that mountain somewhere further east of Nisibis. Describing this mountain in his *Hymns on Paradise*, Ephrem notes that it is the highest and largest, and seemingly as far from Jerusalem as possible, at the edge of the known world. Indeed, in an effort to separate edenic Jerusalem from Judean Jerusalem, he uses key temple terms to describe his Eden in the east: It is now (or: always was) a sanctuary and the holy of holies, because it is in Eden that God truly resides.[28] Those same cosmic mountain motifs that the late biblical authors and eventually the rabbis apply to Jerusalem, he applies to his far eastern mountainous Eden. Yet, he does so in order to reflect back on Christian notions of salvation. Adam may have been expelled from Eden, but to Eden he must return in the end. This Christian salvation theology opens an eschatological path to all Christian believers.

Nevertheless, by the sixth century, we begin to see a merger of these two Jerusalem mythologies. The cosmogonic mountains (ancient Near East and rabbinic) and the center of the world ideology (Hellenistic and Christian) coalesce in the later Syriac tradition. *The Cave of Treasures*, a Syriac Christian text, reconfigures

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[26] Cyril, *Catechesis,* 13.28 (trans. E. Yarnold, *Cyril of Jerusalem* [London: Routledge, 2000], 157).

[27] Gn 2:8. Both the Hebrew and the Syriac read "from the East."

[28] Ephrem, *Hymns on Paradise,* 1.4, 8; 3.5, 16, 17 (trans. S. P. Brock, *Ephrem's Hymns on Paradise* [Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1990], 78–80, 92–96).

biblical genealogy, in the style of earlier "rewritten" extra-biblical texts such as Jubilees, such that its story of Adam to Christ fits its message of creation to salvation.[29] While the plot marches forward faithfully from Adam to Christ, the narrative interweaves another lineage that connects Eden (where most of the action in this text takes place) with Jerusalem, particularly around an altar, if not a mountain. Adam, according to this text, was created "in the middle of the earth," at the site of future Golgotha but later transported to Eden. Moreover, he lives out his post-Eden days on the slopes of Mt. Eden, far away from Judea.[30]

After God expels Adam from Eden, God compensates Adam with an alternative cultic site. Here Adam and his descendants store his "souvenirs" of Eden (gold, myrrh, and incense) as well as worship God at an altar, with Adam as priest. Eventually, his body is also interred there, as are the bodies of Abel, Seth, and his descendants. All of Adam's (worthy) descendants worship God at Adam's altar in the *Cave of Treasures*. After the flood, Noah and his sons are directed by God to rebury Adam's body at Golgotha.[31] Thus, the text establishes a cultic link between Eden (via the Cave) to Golgotha/Jerusalem. Moreover, this reinterment connects Adam to Jesus; creation to salvation; and finally, locates salvation for all humankind at a specific sacred Jerusalem rock. Adam returns to his birthplace in order to be the first to participate in Jesus's salvific death and resurrection and thus to bring humanity's earthly history full circle. Jesus' death redeems

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[29] A. Toepel, "The Cave of Treasures: A New Translation and Introduction," in R. Bauckham, J. R. Davila, and A. Panayotov (eds.), *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: More Noncanonical Scriptures*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2013), 531–584. The Syriac texts can be found with a French translation in S.-M. Ri, *La Caverne des Trésors: Les deux recensions syriaques* (CSCO 486–487; Leuven: Peeters, 1987). Scholarly consensus dates the *Cave of Treasures* to the sixth century but acknowledges its dependency on earlier sources. See Toepel's introduction.

[30] *Cave of Treasures*, 2:15–16 (ed. Ri, *La Caverne*, vol. 1, 16–17; trans. Toepel, "The Cave of Treasures," 541). Here God takes a speck of dust, a drop of water, a breath of air, and a small flame to create Adam. In *Jubilees*, Adam is created outside the Garden somewhere and then placed into it by God. After his death, he is buried at the place of his creation by his family (*Jub.* 3:9 and 4:29; ed. and trans. J. C. Vanderkam, *The Book of Jubilees* [CSCO 510–511; Leuven: Peeters, 1989]). In *the Life of Adam and Eve*, he is buried near Paradise by the angels (*Life* 48). According to Bereshit Rabba 14:8 (see also y. Naz. 7 [56b]) Adam was created from the place of his atonement (כפרתו). That is to say, he was created from the dust on the temple mount-to-be (or perhaps the dust of place of the altar itself), because the future temple would be a place of atonement for all his descendants. According to Origen, Adam's skull was buried under Golgotha (Origen, *Comm. Matt.* 27:32–33. See also Jerome, *Ep.* 46.3). The Jerusalem Breviarius, an itinerary of pilgrimage to Jerusalem, also notes that Adam was formed at Golgotha (J. Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims before the Crusades* [Jerusalem: Ariel Publishing House, 1977], 59).

[31] *Cave of Treasures*, 22.1–9 (ed. Ri, *La Caverne*, vol. 1, 167–171; trans. Toepel, "The Cave of Treasures," 556). Here, our author streamlines the biblical genealogy by including Melchizedek in the Shemite line: He is great-great-grandson to Noah via Shem and his son Arpakhshad and his son Malakh, and deputized by Noah to be the priest at Golgotha, the "Middle of the Earth." Melchizedek is identified with Shem several times in the rabbinic texts as well (e.g., b. Ned. 32a, Bereshit Rabba 56:10, and Avot de-Rabbi Natan A:2); but there, their identities are merged, rather than genealogically sequenced.

Adam's sin in Eden, and Adam, representing all humankind, is reborn at Golgotha. Yet, in this text, Golgotha futher acts as a Bakhtian Chronotope, absorbing many more layers of mytho-history in support of its core salvation narrative.[32] Thus, in reference to Golgotha, the text elaborates:

Know that Christ resembled Adam in everything, as it is written. At the same place where Melchizedek ministered as priest and Abraham made his son Isaac ascend upon the altar, the wood of the cross was fastened. This place is the middle of the earth, where the four points of the compass embrace one another. When God created the earth his great power ran in front of him and the earth ran after it from the four points of the compass. There in Golgotha God's power stood still and rested, and there the four directions of the earth were joined together. When Shem brought Adam's body up, this place was the earth's entrance … When the cross of Christ, the redeemer of Adam and his children, was put above it, the entrance of this place opened at Adam's face. When the wood was fastened above it and Christ was struck by the lance, there came forth from his side blood and water. They went down into Adam's mouth and were baptism for him, so that he could be baptized by them.[33]

Golgotha, as we saw in the earlier Christian texts, marks the center of the earth. Yet, this text also presumes that other biblical narrative actions happened at this place as well. Melchizedek and Abraham both sacrifice on this same rock. While 2 Chronicles 3:1 places Abraham's near sacrifice of Isaac in Jerusalem (Mt. Moriah becomes Zion), the *Cave of Treasures* moves that event to Golgotha. And while some early Jewish texts merge Melchizedek's home town of Salem (Gn 13:18) with Jerusalem (see Ps 76:3), the *Cave of Treasures* places his altar on Golgotha. Furthermore, "middle of the earth" takes on yet another connotation in this text: It connects back to creation. Here, God finishes creation at Golgotha, where the divine powers stopped and rested, and the four cardinal directions join together into one geographic point. The *Cave of Treasures* may be the earliest Christian text to absorb a version of this rabbinic and Near Eastern cosmic mountain/creation of the world mythology into its Golgothan and Adam theology.[34] Whereas in the rabbinic myth creation began at the Foundation Stone, here, in the *Cave of Treasures*, creation comes to completion at Golgotha, mirroring the text's salvific orientation. Thus, the *Cave of Treasures* weaves together several different layers of mythology, all of which point towards the text's

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[32] Golgotha and the Foundation Stone can be seen as interrelated or competing chronotopes. See R. Adelman, "Midrash, Myth and Bakhtin's Chronotope: The Itinerant Well and the Foundation Stone in *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer*," *JJTP* 17:2 (2009): 143–176 as well as V. Aptowotzer, "Les éléments juifs dans la légend du Golgotha," *REJ* 79 (1924): 145–162.

[33] *Cave of Treasures*, 49.1–10 (ed. Ri, *La Caverne*, vol. 1, 406–9; trans. Toepel, "The Cave of Treasures"). The tradition that Melchizedek's altar was located at the center of the earth, where Adam was created and buried, can also be found in 2 Enoch 71:35.

[34] For the Jewish myths of Adam, Melchizedek, and Abraham, see I. Gafni, "Pre-Histories of Jerusalem in Hellenistic, Jewish and Christian Literature," *JSP* 1 (1987): 5–22.

overriding theme, which brings Adam, Jesus and Christian salvation together into one seamless narrative.

While the New Testament book of Revelation imagined a heavenly Jerusalem hovering in the sky above the ruins of the earthly Jerusalem, by the sixth century, the concrete reality of Byzantine Jerusalem brought that eschatological city down to earth again. Eusebius co-opts the memory of the temple by reapplying its glory to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, calling it a *naos* and noting how it sits in opposition and a position of strength *vis-a-vis* the old, now destroyed, useless Herodian temple. A century later, Cyril writes his catechisms while sitting near the very cross and sacred rock, in this new Christian edifice, which he describes as a beacon; he claims to sit at the center of the world geographically and spiritually. Yet in the fourth century Aphrahaṭ and Ephrem seem oblivious to these developments, and Ephrem in particular builds sacred sites elsewhere; by the sixth century the *Cave of Treasures* attempts to reconcile these two poles of sacrality. What is most interesting therefore in this particular text is how the author triangulates between three different traditions, the one of a Mount Eden in the east, the second of Golgotha as center, and the third of creation attached to another Jerusalem stone. This third development is an extension, borrowing, or affiliated midrashic development similar to the rabbis' cosmogonic musings. Eusebius' and Cyril's sacred rocks are distinctly non-cosmogonic; rather, they commemorate Jesus' passion and are future focused. It takes this strain of the Syriac tradition to bring these three elements together. And yet, the *Cave of Treasures* turns the Jerusalem-stone-as-foundation-stone myth into a Christian myth, not only by attaching it to Golgotha, but by pulling creation and its foundation stone into its Christian salvation narrative in which God completed creation at Golgotha in anticipation of Christian salvation through Jesus. It is most likely, as well, that this Syriac tradition then passes into Muslim hands and greatly influences their own developing Islamicizing Jerusalem mythologies. Ironically, only after the Muslim conquest and its resultant political and religious re-alignments of the Middle East and Mediterranean basin, rabbinic texts begin to infuse the *even shetiyah* theo-mythologies with forward-thinking eschatology that rebuts or resists Christian and Islamic eschatologies.

Staring Down a Laundress

Reading Hagiographic Literature from Syria-Mesopotamia Alongside Rabbinic Writings*

Sergey Minov

Introduction

Examples of direct or indirect Jewish influence upon the Christians of Syria and Mesopotamia during Late Antiquity are multiple and variegated.[1] Whereas a great deal of scholarly attention in this field of research has been focused, quite understandably, on mutual influence in the realm of biblical exegesis, some other areas of possible interaction between the two religious traditions remain underexplored, including that of hagiography. There is a growing awareness among scholars of rabbinic Judaism of the importance of Christian hagiographic works, especially Syriac ones, for contextualizing the rich literary output of the Jewish sages of Palestine and Babylonia, which has already yielded a number of illuminating case studies.[2] At the same time, it is still much less common among the

[1] See S. P. Brock, "Jewish Traditions in Syriac Sources," *JJS* 30 (1979): 212–232; S. Minov, "Syriac," in A. Kulik et al. (eds.), *A Guide to Early Jewish Texts and Traditions in Christian Transmission* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 95–137; J. Joosten, "La Peshitta de l'Ancien Testament et les targums," in F. Briquel-Chatonnet and P. Le Moigne (eds.), *L'Ancien Testament en syriaques* (ÉS 5; Paris: Geuthner, 2008), 91–100; A. F. J. Klijn, "The Influence of Jewish Theology on the Odes of Solomon and the Acts of Thomas," in *Aspects du judéo-christianisme. Colloque de Strasbourg, 23–25 avril 1964* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1965), 167–179; N. Séd, "Les hymnes sur le Paradis de saint Ephrem et les traditions juives," *Le Muséon* 81 (1968): 455–501; G. A. M. Rouwhorst, "Jewish Liturgical Traditions in Early Syriac Christianity," *VC* 51 (1997): 72–93; M. Moriggi, "Jewish Divorce Formulae in Syriac Incantation Bowls," *AS* 13 (2015): 82–94.

[2] See B. L. Visotzky, "Three Syriac Cruxes," *JJS* 42 (1991): 167–175; S. Gero, "The Stern Master and his Wayward Disciple: A 'Jesus' Story in the Talmud and in Christian Hagiography," *JSJ* 25 (1994): 287–311; Sh. Naeh, "Freedom and Celibacy: A Talmudic Variation on Tales of Temptation and Fall in Genesis and Its Syrian Background," in J. Frishman and L. Van Rompay (eds.), *The Book of Genesis in Jewish and Oriental Christian Interpretation* (TEG 5; Leuven: Peeters, 1997), 73–89; J. L. Rubenstein, "A Rabbinic Translation of Relics," in K. B. Stratton and A. Lieber (eds.), *Crossing Boundaries in Early Judaism and Christianity: Ambiguities, Complexities, and Half-Forgotten Adversaries: Essays in Honor of Alan F. Segal* (SJSJ 177; Leiden: Brill, 2016),

students of Christian hagiographical works, including those in Syriac, to turn to rabbinic literary corpus in search for comparanda.[3]

In what follows, I would like to contribute to this neglected area of Syriac studies, aiming to demonstrate how rabbinic sources may supply the students of Christian hagiography with promising comparative material. With that purpose in mind, I will study a particular set of stories that are found in the hagiographical works coming from the region of Syria and Northern Mesopotamia, in which two Christian holy men from the fourth century, Jacob of Nisibis and Ephrem the Syrian, are depicted as engaging in a staring contest with women doing laundry. As I intend to show, when these accounts are read against the backdrop of rabbinic literature, a wide range of parallels emerges, which can significantly facilitate our understanding of various aspects of the literary strategies employed by learned members of the male elites of the two monotheistic traditions in the late antique Near East to represent women, to construct gender, and to articulate their identity.

Man Wins: Jacob of Nisibis

The first account comes from the *Religious History*, a fifth-century collection of the biographies of Christian ascetics, who were active in various parts of Syria during the fourth and fifth century. Written by Theodoret, an influential theologian and exegete of the Antiochene school, who served as the bishop of Cyrrhus in Syria during the years 423–457, this Greek composition contains a rich trove of information on the early history of monasticism in late Roman Syria and Mesopotamia.[4]

314–332. An important attempt to provide a systematic analysis of the impact of Christian hagiographic tradition, first and foremost of the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, upon such masterpiece of the rabbinic collective creativity as the Babylonian Talmud has been carried out recently by M. Bar-Asher Siegal in her *Early Christian Monastic Literature and the Babylonian Talmud* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). See also C. Hezser, "Apophthegmata Patrum and Apophthegmata of the Rabbis," in *La narrativa cristiana antica: Codici narrativi, strutture formali, schemi retorici. XXIII incontro di studiosi della antichità cristiana, 5–7 maggio 1994* (SEA 50; Rome: Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, 1995), 453–464.

[3] Yet, see S. Weingarten, *The Saint's Saints: Hagiography and Geography in Jerome* (AJEC 58; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 17–80; A. H. Becker, "Polishing the Mirror: Some Thoughts on Syriac Sources and Early Judaism," in R. S. Boustan, K. Herrmann, R. Leicht, A. Y. Reed, and G. Veltri (eds.), *Envisioning Judaism: Studies in Honor of Peter Schäfer on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), vol. 2, 897–915, esp. 909–914.

[4] On Theodoret's life, ecclesiastical career, and literary output, see I. Pásztori-Kupán, *Theodoret of Cyrus* (The Early Church Fathers; London: Routledge, 2006); J.-N. Guinot, *Théodoret de Cyr: Exégète et théologien* (Paris: Cerf, 2012). On the *Religious History* and its portrayal of Syrian monasticism, see P. Canivet, *Le monachisme syrien selon Théodoret de Cyr* (TH 42; Paris: Beauchesne, 1977); T. Urbainczyk, *Theodoret of Cyrrhus: The Bishop and the Holy Man* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002).

In the first chapter that describes the life of Jacob, the famous fourth-century bishop of Nisibis, Theodoret reports the following miracle that was performed by this holy man when he set out on a journey to Persia "to observe the piety planted there and convey to it the help it needed."[5] As he was passing by a spring of water, Jacob happened to come across a group of young women (κόραι), who were washing their clothes. Whether they did so while aware of the holy man's true identity or not is unclear, but the laundresses are said to have violated the norms of modesty as they "stared at the man of God with brazen looks and eyes dead to shame" and "did not cover their heads, nor even let down their clothes, which they had tucked up." Affronted by such behavior, Jacob decides to teach the maidens a lesson, "in order to free them from impiety by means of a miracle." With that purpose in mind, the bishop curses (ἐπηράσατο), first, the spring, which dried up at once, and, then, the women themselves, whose hair turned gray: "their black hair was changed, and they looked like young trees decked in spring with the leaves of autumn." The frightened maidens run into the town and relate what has happened to them. It is only the subsequent intercession of the townspeople, who entreat Jacob to reverse the punishment, that helps to restore the water flow in the spring. As for the laundresses, they were not so fortunate. At first, the holy man acquiesces to the pleas of the citizens to restore their daughters' hair to its former color on the condition that the guilty party would come to him in person. However, as the women fail to do so, he lets "the punishment stand, as a lesson in self-control, a reason for good behavior, and a perpetual and clear reminder of the power of God."

The story is deployed by Theodoret in order to illustrate the point about the holy man's unhindered ability to work miracles due to his "familiar access" (παρρησία) to God and the grace of the Holy Spirit bestowed upon him.[6] It constitutes one of several accounts of punishing miracles in the *Religious History*, of which the hagiographer seems to have been particularly fond in his portrayal of holy men.[7] The images of holy men as punishing agents presented by Theodoret

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[5] *Hist. rel.* 1.4–5. For the Greek text, see P. Canivet and A. Leroy-Molinghen, *Théodoret de Cyr. Histoire des moines de Syrie* (SC 234, 257; Paris: Cerf, 1977, 1979), vol. 1, 166–168; for English translation, see R. M. Price, *A History of the Monks of Syria by Theodoret of Cyrrhus* (CSS 88; Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1985), 13–14. On various aspects of Jacob's portrayal by Theodoret, see H. J. W. Drijvers, "Hellenistic and Oriental Origins," in S. Hackel (ed.), *The Byzantine Saint: University of Birmingham Fourteenth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies* (SSS 5; London: The Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius, 1981), 25–33, at 28–30; D. Bundy, "Jacob of Nisibis as a Model for the Episcopacy," *Le Muséon* 104 (1991): 235–249, at 243–245.

[6] For an analysis of miracles in the *History*, see Canivet, *Le monachisme syrien*, 117–145; A. Adnès and P. Canivet, "Guérisons miraculeuses et exorcismes dans l'‘Histoire Philothée’ de Théodoret de Cyr," *RHR* 171 (1967): 53–82, 149–179.

[7] For the references, see Canivet, *Le monachisme syrien*, 120 fn. 12. For discussion of these miracles, see D. Eastman, "Cursing in the Infancy Gospel of Thomas," *VC* 69 (2015), 186–208, at 200–205; T. R. Hawkins, *Cursing, Control and Christianity: The Iambikê Idea in Late Antiquity* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Stanford University, 2003), 175–186.

draw on several traditions, such as the biblical notion of prophets chastising the chosen people or the Roman ideal of *paterfamilias*, whose responsibility would include correction of the straying members of the household.[8]

Extolling Jacob as a "new Moses," Theodoret draws a typological parallel between the Christian miracle worker and Elisha, as he evokes the famous episode from the biblical prophet's life when he cursed a group of children, who mocked him, and they were killed by she-bears (2 Kgs 2:23–24).[9] However, the comparison of the bishop with such a fearsome biblical character is mitigated in the narrative by the hagiographer's emphasis that in distinction from Elisha the holy man tempers his justice with mercy and inflicts upon the offenders only a mild form of punishment instead of the death penalty, thus embodying the virtue of clemency.[10] In the sentence that may ring ironically to a modern ear, Theodoret extols Jacob for his "gentleness" (πραότης) in dealing with the women, to whom the bishop gave "a lesson in both piety and good behavior" by applying "a harmless correction that involved only a slight disfigurement." As for the latter description, it might be noted that this form of punishment, i.e., the changing the women's hair color, can be understood as functionally analogous to that of branding criminals in the Roman legal practice.[11]

The rhetoric of "correction" (παιδεία) and "lesson" (δίδαγμα) employed by Theodoret signals that the punishment was meant to have educational value. As has been pointed out by Krueger, this measure would correspond to the women's offence of breaking the rules of modesty by "rendering them unattractive and incapable of licentiousness."[12] In addition to that, one can recognize another motive underlying this account. The author's unusual picture of a double punishment inflicted by the holy man not only on the directly responsible human offenders but also on the water source can be seen as symbolically striking at the very core of the livelihood of an agricultural community since it revolves around the issue of fertility.[13] The act of stopping the water flow, for which Theodoret chooses the feminine noun πηγή and not, for instance, the masculine ποταμός, emphasizes subtly the climacteric aspect of the chastisement inflicted upon the

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[8] On the latter, see R. P. Saller, *Patriarchy, Property and Death in the Roman Family* (Cambridge Studies in Population, Economy, and Society in Past Time 25; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 133–153.

[9] For a discussion of the typological aspects of Jacob's presentation by Theodoret, see D. Krueger, *Writing and Holiness: The Practice of Authorship in the Early Christian East* (Divinations: Rereading Late Ancient Religion; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 24–27.

[10] On the importance of this notion in Roman society, see M. B. Dowling, *Clemency and Cruelty in the Roman World* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006).

[11] See C. P. Jones, "*Stigma*: Tattooing and Branding in Graeco-Roman Antiquity," *JRS* 77 (1987): 139–155.

[12] Krueger, *Writing and Holiness*, 25.

[13] This aspect of Jacob's punishment has been noticed by Hawkins, *Cursing, Control and Christianity*, 183.

maidens, the turning of whose hair gray is an unambiguous reference to old age. The holy man is thus presented by the hagiographer as a master of fertility, whose power stretches over the world of nature as well as over that of humans.

It is unclear on what kind of source Theodoret relied for this miracle account or, for that matter, for the whole chapter on Jacob.[14] One can only speculate whether he made use of some oral traditions about the legendary bishop or had at his disposal a (now lost) version of Jacob's life, be that in Greek or in Syriac.[15]

It should be mentioned that there exists a Syriac version of this story. It appears in the Syriac *Life of Jacob of Nisibis*, an adapted and slightly abbreviated translation of the Greek account of the bishop's career from Theodoret's *History*.[16] Since there is not yet a critical edition of this work, it is not clear when exactly and under what circumstances this translation was carried out. However, given the fact that the oldest surviving manuscript that contains it, i. e., British Library, Add. 14612, is dated to the sixth or seventh century,[17] it seems very probable that this part of the *History* was rendered into Syriac already during Late Antiquity.[18]

Woman Wins: Ephrem the Syrian

Another example of a staring contest between holy man and woman is found in the *Life of Ephrem*, an original Syriac composition that presents the career of one of the most famous figures in the history of Syriac Christianity, Ephrem the Syrian.[19] This fourth-century poet and exegete was a native of the city of Nisibis, who spent the last years of his life in Edessa, where he died in the year 373. Although

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[14] For a discussion, see Canivet, *Le monachisme syrien*, 104–108.

[15] On the development of Jacob's hagiographical dossier, see P. Peeters, "La légende de saint Jacques de Nisibe," *AB* 38 (1920): 285–373; P. Krüger, "Jakob von Nisibis in syrischer und armenischer Überlieferung," *Le Muséon* 81 (1968): 161–179; D. Bundy, "Jacob of Nisibis as a Model."

[16] For the Syriac text of our story, see P. Bedjan, *Acta martyrum et sanctorum* (Paris – Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1890–1897), vol. 4, 265–266.

[17] See W. Wright, *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum, Acquired since the Year 1838* (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1870–1872), vol. 3, 696–701. The Syriac text published by Bedjan (*Acta martyrum*, vol. 4, 262–273) is based on mss. Paris, Bib. Nat. Syr. 234 (12th cent.) and London, Brit. Libr. Add. 12,174 (12th cent.).

[18] See also B. Outtier, "Notule sur les versions orientales de l'*Histoire Philothée* (*CPG* 6221)," in *ΑΝΤΙΔΩΡΟΝ: Hulde aan Dr. Maurits Geerard bij de voltooiing van de Clavis Patrum Graecorum / Hommage à Maurits Geerard pour célébrer l'achèvement de la Clavis Patrum Graecorum* (Wetteren: Cultura, 1984), vol. 1, 73–80.

[19] For the Syriac text and English trans., see J. P. Amar, *The Syriac Vita Tradition of Ephrem the Syrian* (CSCO 629–630; Leuven: Peeters, 2011). For a discussion of the work's date and milieu, see E. G. Mathews, Jr., "The *Vita* Tradition of Ephrem the Syrian, the Deacon of Edessa," *Diakonia* 22 (1988–1989): 15–42; J. P. Amar, "Byzantine Ascetic Monasticism and Greek Bias in the *Vita* Tradition of Ephrem the Syrian," *OCP* 58 (1992), 123–156; N. Kavvadas, "Die *Vita* Ephrems des Syrers in Edessa des 6. Jh.s: Versuch einer Interpretation," in T. Khidesheli and N. Kavvadas (eds.), *Bau und Schrift: Studien zur Archäologie und Literatur des antiken Christentums für Hans*

the hagiographic tradition about Ephrem began to develop soon after his death, the *Life of Ephrem* as we have it now was composed apparently not earlier than the sixth century, two hundred years after the saint's lifetime. Far from being a historically accurate presentation of the poet's life and achievements, this hagiographic work is a result of the long process of mythologization of the person of Ephrem, who became a foundational figure for Syriac-speaking Christians.[20] Moreover, as has been demonstrated by scholars, the portrait of Ephrem in this composition is heavily influenced by the ascetical and hagiographical conventions that were typical for the later Greek-speaking Christian tradition and that began to gain momentum among Syriac Christians only after the time of the poet's death.

The story that interests us appears in chapter 11 of the *Life*.[21] While on his journey to the city of Edessa, chosen by Ephrem as his final destination when he was fleeing from the anti-Christian persecution in Nisibis, the holy man approaches the river Daiṣan. Standing on the river's bank, he beholds a group of women doing their laundry. At that moment, one of the laundresses starts to stare back at Ephrem and would not turn her gaze away from him. Unnerved by such insolent behavior, the holy man tries to shame the woman and to make her avert her gaze downwards toward the ground. In response, however, she tells Ephrem that it is he who should lower his gaze to the matter from which man was created, whereas she has a full right to look at him, because woman was created from man. Astonished by this sophisticated allusion to the biblical story of creation of the first couple, Ephrem praises the wisdom of the citizens of Edessa.

Before proceeding further, I shall briefly address the problem of the dating and tradition history of this account. The Syriac text of the *Life* is preserved only in relatively late manuscripts, the earliest of which is dated to the tenth century.[22] As has been noted by scholars, it features a number of anachronisms, which prevent us from dating this work earlier than the sixth or seventh century. For example, in the case of our story, the depiction of the river Daiṣan as "encircling" (ḥādar) the city of Edessa is incompatible with the fourth-century reality, since at that time the river was actually traversing the city and only two centuries later, during

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Reinhard Seeliger (Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum, Ergänzungsband: Kleine Reihe 12; Münster: Aschendorff, 2015), 255–263.

[20] On this aspect of Ephrem's image, see S. H. Griffith, "Images of Ephraem: The Syrian Holy Man and His Church," *Traditio* 45 (1989–1990): 7–33; S. P. Brock, "St. Ephrem in the Eyes of Later Syriac Liturgical Tradition," *Hugoye* 2 (1999), 5–25; L. Van Rompay, "*Mallpânâ dilan Suryâyâ*. Ephrem in the Works of Philoxenus of Mabbog: Respect and Distance," *Hugoye* 7 (2004): 83–105; S. Minov, "The *Cave of Treasures* and the Formation of Syriac Christian Identity in Late Antique Mesopotamia: Between Tradition and Innovation," in B. Bitton-Ashkelony and L. Perrone (eds.), *Between Personal and Institutional Religion: Self, Doctrine, and Practice in Late Antique Eastern Christianity* (CELAMA 15; Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), 155–194, at 157–165.

[21] Amar, *Syriac Vita Tradition*, vol. 1, 24 (Syr.); vol. 2, 27–28 (trans.).

[22] See Amar, *Syriac Vita Tradition*, vol. 1, v–xvi.

the reign of Justinian, its course was changed by means of a dam, so that it would flow around the city.[23]

Whatever the date of the *Life* in the form that we have it now might be, the situation with the dating of our story is complicated by the fact that the *Life* is not the only literary composition where it is attested. A similar description of the meeting between Ephrem and a woman appears in the *Ecclesiastical History* of Sozomen, a Greek-speaking historiographer from Palestine, who was active during the first half of the fifth century. In the 16th chapter of the third book of his *History*, dealing with Ephrem, Sozomen tells a story about how his ascetical virtue of refraining from even gazing at women was put to a test by a certain licentious woman. In order to enable easy comparison with the Syriac version, I present both accounts synoptically:

Life of Ephrem 11	Sozomen, *Hist. Eccl.* III.16.8–9
As he was about to enter the city, he approached the river called the Daiṣan which encircles the city. As he crossed the river he saw women there washing their clothes. Now one of them raised her eyes, looked at the blessed one, and stared at him shamelessly. The holy one became angry with her and said to her: "Woman, are you not ashamed? Stare at the earth; do not stare insolently (at me)!" The woman answered him and said: "O man, it is appropriate for you to stare at the earth, for you were taken from it. But it is not inappropriate if I stare at you because in the beginning I was taken from you." When blessed Mar Ephrem heard this woman's statement he was astounded and thought to himself: "If the women of this city are this wise, then how wise must the men here be?"[24]	He was so serious and so careful to avoid giving occasion to calumny, that he refrained from the very sight of women. It is related that a woman of careless life, who was either desirous of tempting him, or who had been bribed for the purpose, contrived on one occasion to meet him face to face, and fixed her eyes intently upon him. He rebuked her, and commanded her to look down upon the ground. "Wherefore should I obey your injunction," replied the woman; "for I was born not of the earth, but of you? It would be more just if you were to look down upon the earth whence you sprang, while I look upon you, as I was born of you." Astonished at the woman, Ephrem recorded the incident in a book, which Syrians regard as one of the best of his productions.[25]

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[23] This point was made by A. Vööbus, *Literary, Critical and Historical Studies in Ephrem the Syrian* (PETSE 10; Stockholm: Estonian Theological Society in Exile, 1958), 29.

[24] ܟܕ ܩܪܝܒ ܠܡܥܠ ܠܡܕܝܢܬܐ܆ ܡܛܐ ܥܠ ܢܗܪܐ ܕܡܬܩܪܐ ܕܝܨܢ ܕܗܘ ܠܗ ܠܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܡܚܕܪ ܠܗ ܝ.. ܘܟܕ ܥܒܪ ܠܗ ܢܗܪܐ܆ ܚܙܐ ... ܘܚܕܐ ܡܢܗܝܢ ܐܪܝܡܬ ܥܝܢܝܗ̇ ܘܚܪܬ ܒܛܘܒܢܐ ܘܚܪܬ ܒܗ ܒܡܪܚܘܬܐ. ܘܪܓܙ ܥܠܝܗ̇ ܩܕܝܫܐ ܘܐܡܪ ܠܗ̇. ܐܢܬܬܐ ܠܐ ܒܗܬܐ ܐܢܬܝ̄. ܒܐܪܥܐ [ܚܘ]ܪܝ ܘܠܐ ܒܡܪܚܘܬܐ ܬܚܘܪܝܢ. ܥܢܬ ܐܢܬܬܐ ܘܐܡܪܐ ܠܗ ܐܘ ܓܒܪܐ ܠܟ ܝܐܐ ܕܒܐܪܥܐ ܬܚܘܪ ܡܛܠ ܕܡܢܗ̇ ܐܬܢܣܒܬ. ܠܝ ܕܝܢ ܠܐ ܦܐܐ ܐܢ ܒܟ ܚܝܪܐ ܐܢܐ܇ ܡܛܠ ܕܒܪܝܫܝܬ ܡܢܟ ܐܬܢܣܒܬ. ܟܕ ܫܡܥ ܡܠܬܗ̇ ܕܐܢܬܬܐ ܡܪܝ ܐܦܪܝܡ ܛܘܒܢܐ ܬܡܗ ܘܐܬܚܫܒ ܒܢܦܫܗ. ܕܐܢ ܢܫܐ ܕܗܕܐ ܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܗܟܢܐ ܚܟܝܡܢ܆ ܟܡܐ ܟܝ ܓܒܪܐ ܕܗܪܟܐ ܚܟܝܡܝܢ (Amar, *Syriac Vita Tradition*, vol. 1, 24 [Syr.], vol. 2, 27–28 [trans.]; the passage is quoted according to ms. V [Vatican Syr. 117]).

[25] σεμνὸς δὲ καὶ τὰς διαβολὰς ἐπὶ τοσοῦτον εὐλαβούμενος, ὡς πάσης γυναικὸς καὶ αὐτὴν

As one can see, there are significant differences between the version of the *Life* and that of Sozomen, including: (1) the general setting of the encounter, i. e., the river bank versus some unspecified location; (2) the character of the woman, who challenges Ephrem, i. e., the laundress versus the loose woman; (3) the general purpose of the anecdote, i. e., the demonstration of the intellectual superiority of the citizens of Edessa versus a vignette meant to illustrate the ascetic profile of Ephrem. Notwithstanding these differences, however, both versions share the core element, namely the staring contest between Ephrem and the woman, during which she gets the best of him using the scriptural allusion to the story of creation of Adam and Eve. This shared kernel compels us to regard these two versions as genetically related, making it necessary to attempt to establish which of the two should be considered as primary and which as derivative.

It seems natural to suggest that Sozomen relied on the *Life* for this story. The main difficulty that such a reconstruction faces is the relatively late sixth-century dating of the *Life*, which to a large degree is based on the text of our account, with its mention of the Daişan "encircling" Edessa. In contrast, an opposite direction of borrowing, i. e., from Sozomen to the *Life*, is also imaginable, especially in light of a recognizable tendency among the students of the hagiographical dossier of Ephrem to regard the Syriac *Life* as secondary and completely derivative from Greek sources.[26] For instance, Mathews goes as far as to characterize this composition as "little more than a scissors and paste job using the above named (i. e., Greek) sources and other hagiographical *topoi* known from Hellenistic hagiography."[27] Yet, not denying the profound influence exerted by Greek hagiographical and ascetical traditions on the development of Ephrem's image in Syriac literature, including the *Life*, I would argue that this approach is open to a charge of a certain reductionism, since it fails to take into account various expressions of local Syrian agendas and concerns that are still recognizable in this work.

It is, I believe, one of such little discussed local aspects of the *Life*, namely manifestation of the civic pride of the citizens of Edessa, that provides us with a key for understanding the difference between the two versions of our story and

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τὴν θέαν φυλάττεσθαι. λόγος γοῦν ποτε γυναῖκά τινα ἀμελῆ τὸν βίον, ἀναιδῆ δὲ ἴσως τὸν τρόπον, ἢ αὐτὴν τὸν ἄνδρα πειρῶσαν ἢ ἐπὶ μισθῷ τοῦτο ἄλλοις σπουδάζουσαν, ἐπίτηδες ἐν στενωπῷ ἀντιπρόσωπον ὑπαντῆσαι ἀσκαρδαμυκτὶ ἐς αὐτὸν βλέπουσαν· τὸν δὲ ἐπιτιμῆσαι αὐτῇ καὶ εἰς γῆν ὁρᾶν παρακελεύσασθαι· "καὶ πῶς", ἔφη ἡ γυνή, "ἥτις οὐκ ἀπὸ γῆς, ἀλλ' ἐκ σοῦ ἐγενόμην; δικαιότερον γὰρ εἶναι σὲ μὲν εἰς γῆν ὁρᾶν, ἀφ' ἧς ἔχεις τὴν γένεσιν, ἐμὲ δὲ εἰς σέ, ὅθεν εἰμί." θαυμάσας δὲ τὸ γύναιον Ἐφραὶμ εἰς σύγγραμμα τὸ συμβὰν ἐσχημάτισεν, ὅπερ Σύρων λόγιοι ἐν τοῖς σπουδαίοις τῶν αὐτοῦ λόγων τετάχασι (ed. J. Bidez and G. C. Hansen, *Sozomenus. Kirchengeschichte* [GCS nf 4; 2nd rev. ed.; Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1995], 129; translation modified from C. D. Hartranft, "The Ecclesiastical History of Sozomen, Comprising a History of the Church from A. D. 323 to A. D. 425," in P. Schaff and H. Wace [eds.], *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church: Second Series* [New York: Christian Literature Company, 1890], vol. 2, 296).

[26] See references in Brock, "St. Ephrem in the Eyes," 7.

[27] Mathews, "*Vita* Tradition of Ephrem," 24.

for clarifying its redaction history. In the *History*, Sozomen brings the story of the meeting between Ephrem and the woman as an illustration of how this holy man would hold on firmly to such typically monastic virtue as guarding oneself from any contact with women. As it appears in the *Life*, however, our story seems to be more nuanced, since it has there an additional layer of meaning, absent from the version of Sozomen. Whereas the lesson in humility might still be recognizable in this narrative, the main emphasis of the story lies not in the realm of ascetic excellence but in that of collective pride of the Edessenes, as the concluding sentence makes explicit. The woman's triumph over Ephrem serves as an expression of the Edessene civic patriotism, a phenomenon well-attested in various Syriac sources from the fifth and sixth centuries.[28] The version of our story in the *Life* promotes this agenda by demonstrating that even such a relatively low-standing member on the social ladder of Edessan society as a woman, not affluent enough to pay someone else to do her laundry, has such an advanced mastery of scriptural knowledge that it enables her to challenge successfully the renowned poet and theologian. It should be noted that our story is not the only expression of the Edessene local patriotism in the *Life*, as it was apparently an important issue for the compiler of this work.[29]

Moreover, taking a closer look at the two versions of our story from the angle of the efficiency of their plot, one may notice that the *Life*'s version possesses substantially greater literary integrity than that of Sozomen. Whereas in the *Life* the laundress' triumph over Ephrem serves one well-defined purpose, i. e., to glorify the citizens of Edessa, the woman's role in Sozomen's account is less coherent, as she combines there two rather different narrative functions, i. e., that of a temptress, at which she fails, and that of a sharp-witted interlocutor, at which she does have the upper hand. Accordingly, while in the *Life* the defeat of Ephrem is meant to emphasize the excellence of the Edessenes, the message of Sozomen's version is confused, since the success of the holy man at not giving up to the temptation is neutralized here by his immediately following defeat in the staring down contest.[30]

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[28] On various expressions of the Edessene local patriotism during Late Antiquity, see J. B. Segal, *Edessa, 'The Blessed City'* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 73–78, 173–178; P. Wood, *'We Have No King But Christ': Christian Political Thought in Greater Syria on the Eve of the Arab Conquest (c. 400–585)* (Oxford Studies in Byzantium; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 82–162.

[29] See the hymn in praise of Edessa incorporated into ch. 38 of the *Life*, where Ephrem describes it as "the city which is a shadow of that heavenly Jerusalem" (Amar, *Syriac Vita Tradition*, vol. 1, 88 [Syr.], vol. 2, p. 96 [trans.]).

[30] For an example of how a typical and internally consistent account of failed seduction looks, one can refer to another story about the unsuccessful attempt to seduce Ephrem by a prostitute, which appears in the Alphabetical Collection of the *Apophthegmata Patrum* (*PG* 65, col. 168; translation in B. Ward, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection* [CSS 59; 2nd rev. ed.; Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1984], 59–60).

The internal inconsistency of Sozomen's narrative is best understood if we consider his version to be the result of a not too careful reworking of an earlier original story. In fact, such a scenario is suggested by the historian himself, who adds at the conclusion of his account that Ephrem recorded the story about his meeting with the woman in a "book" (σύγγραμμα), which was regarded by Syrians as one of the poet's best compositions. This remark indicates that Sozomen relied for this anecdote on a certain written source that he thought was authored by Ephrem. The exact nature of this source is difficult to establish since none of the extant genuine writings of Ephrem contains our story. Neither does it appear in such early Pseudo-Ephremian work as the Syriac *Testament of Ephrem*, which was composed during the fifth century and with some form of which Sozomen seems to have been acquainted.[31] We also do not know whether the written source mentioned by Sozomen was in Greek or in Syriac. In light of his earlier comment that translation of Ephrem's works into Greek started already during the poet's lifetime and was still carried on during his own time (*Hist.* III.16.2), one might assume that this "book" was a part of the growing corpus of *Ephraem Graecus*. At the same time, one should not forget that for Sozomen, a native of the village Bethelia near Gaza, where a local dialect of Aramaic was most likely spoken, it would be not such a great challenge to master Syriac.[32]

We are therefore faced with two possibilities: Either both Sozomen and the compiler of the Syriac *Life of Ephrem* derived our story from a genuine Ephrem or Pseudo-Ephremian composition that was in circulation during the first half of the fifth century, or the story was taken by Sozomen from what appears to be an earlier version of the Syriac *Life*, and the historian just failed to identify his source correctly. Given that there is no evidence of existence of a work ascribed to Ephrem that would contain our story, the second scenario seems to be more plausible.

The *Life*, thus, preserves, although with some later modifications, an earlier version of our story that existed already during the first decades of the fifth century. In this original version, Ephrem's figure does not have much to do with the monastic ideology and values but is used as a foil for giving expression to Edessene civic pride. It is noteworthy that a similar pro-Edessene predilection can be found in another specimen of Syriac Ephremiana, the *Testament of Ephrem*. In this work, the poet praises Edessa in terms very similar to those of the *Life* as the "mother of the wise men" (*'emmā d-ḥakkimē*).[33] This shared emphasis on the

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[31] See the list of Ephrem's seven disciples in *Hist.* III.16.4, which coincides exactly with that of the *Testament* (edited E. Beck, *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Sermones*, IV [CSCO 334; Leuven: Peeters, 1973], 56–58). See B. Outtier, "Saint Éphrem d'après ses biographies et ses œuvres," *PdO* 4 (1973): 11–33, at 20–21.

[32] See P. van Nuffelen, *Un héritage de paix et de piété. Étude sur les histoires ecclésiastiques de Socrate et de Sozomène* (OLA 142; Leuven: Peeters, 2004), 48.

[33] Beck, *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Sermones*, 50, ln. 233–238.

"wisdom" of the Edessenes strengthens the hypothesis that both the *Testament* and an early form of the *Life* originated in the same Syriac-speaking circles of Edessa during the first decades of the fifth century, if not earlier.[34]

As for Sozomen's version, the historian reworked this original account, adapting it to his own agenda by omitting the Edessene bias and presenting the famous Syrian poet as a monastic figure, in accordance with the patterns typical for the contemporary monastic ideology of the Greek-speaking Christianity. The *History* bears witness to the early stage of the process of redressing the "Semitic" Ephrem into the Greek monastic garb, which started at the beginning of the fifth century with writers such as Palladius of Helenopolis and Sozomen himself, and culminated in compositions like the Greek *Encomium on Ephrem*. When analyzing these works, however, one should still bear in mind that this reworking of Ephrem's image took place not in a vacuum but had to rely at least in part on some traditions about the poet that originated in the Syriac-speaking milieu of Edessa.

At the conclusion of this section, it should be noted that the story about the meeting between Ephrem and the sharp-witted woman is found also in another Greek work, the *Encomium on Ephrem the Syrian*, transmitted under the name of Gregory of Nyssa.[35] As several scholars have demonstrated, this composition cannot be a genuine work of Gregory and, most likely, does not pre-date the sixth century.[36] It appears that in constructing his image of Ephrem the author of the *Encomium* relied among other sources on Sozomen's *History*. Yet, even if he did so, the author reworked his source substantially, to adapt it to his own narrative framework. While the version of the *Encomium* shares with the *History* such details as the woman's portrayal as a "whore" (πόρνη) and the pivotal element of the staring contest between her and the poet, in which the woman gets the better of the holy man, it also features a number of elements that are absent from Sozomen's account. For instance, in contrast with the *History*, and in agreement with the Syriac *Life*, the author of the *Encomium* describes the meeting between Ephrem and the woman as taking place when the saint approached the city of Edessa. Yet, contrary to both the *Life* and the *History*, Ephrem there encounters the woman by chance, mistaking her for a certain "learned man" (λόγιος), whom he hoped to meet in the city in order to exchange wisdom with him. While a comprehensive investigation of the literary sources and the authorial strategy of the composer of *Encomium* is still a *desideratum*, it is clear that as far as our story is concerned this witness cannot be regarded as earlier than and/or independent from the version of Sozomen.

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[34] Cf. Griffith, "Images of Ephraem," 11.

[35] For the Greek text, see *PG* 46, cols. 820A-849D. Our story appears in col. 833B.

[36] On this work and its dating, see Vööbus, *Literary, Critical and Historical Studies*, 42–45; A. Corcella, "L'uso di Coricio in Pseudo-Gregorio di Nissa, *In sanctum Ephræm*," *AB* 124 (2006): 241–251.

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In both Christian stories about staring contests with women, that of Jacob and that of Ephrem, we see how the holy man faces a challenge from women upon approaching a stream of water. Underlying this scenario of social interaction between the sexes is the function of the water courses suitable for doing laundry, such as rivers or springs, as places where the boundaries between public and private spheres are blurred and where the normal rules of modesty are suspended. Open to everyone's access, the riverbank in these stories emerges as a liminal space, where the conventional public-private distinction collapses as a result of its temporary privatization by women engaged in laundry work. It is this liminality of the laundry spot as a sociospatial site, governed by its own rules, that conditions the peculiar character of the gender dynamics in both our stories, the starting point of which is the moment when the heterovisual script of masculine gaze gets interrupted by the unexpected reaction of women. The riverbank functions as a space where the usual gender balance is upset in women's favor and where the standard scripts of interaction between men and women are suspended. One of the most notable outcomes of this suspension is the temporary empowerment of women, who, enjoying security conferred on them by belonging to a group, feel confident enough to break one of the main taboos regulating female behavior in public, namely the imperative of avoiding to gaze directly at a man.

The scene of semi-naked women challenging a man by staring shamelessly at him does certainly have sexual connotations.[37] Yet, both our stories present a more nuanced scenario of gender interaction than that of a straightforward sexual advance to a man by a woman, given that in the case of laundresses at a river the man is constrained by the presence of other women from taking on such a sexually-charged challenge in an expected manner. This constraint prevents the man from asserting his male supremacy by sexually assaulting the woman and puts him on the defensive, transposing the entire script into that of an honor/shame negotiation. We can see how in both stories the male protagonists succeed in defending their honor, albeit in different ways. Whereas Jacob does it by proving his potency through successfully cursing the women, Ephrem's case is more subtle, since although having had lost face in the staring contest with the woman, he manages to save it by readdressing the victory to the men of Edessa.

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[37] It is, perhaps, this aspect of the original version of the anecdote about Ephrem that was noticed by Sozomen and caused the historian to rework it into the story of a straightforward sexual temptation.

Rabbis and Their Women

Alongside non-Jews and heretics, women comprised a major cognitive category in the mindset of the rabbis, who would evoke feminine figures and images on a wide variety of occasions in order to demarcate their system of values and articulate their identity.[38] It is hardly surprising that the corpus of rabbinic writings from late antique Palestine and Babylonia abounds with stories about women. When we turn to this rich trove of narratives, a number of motifs and images emerge that can be brought forward to compare with the two Christian accounts.

To begin with, in what concerns the topographic location in which our hagiographic narratives are situated, the rabbis, similarly to the Christian storytellers, would occasionally imagine the river bank as a site where the integrity of a holy man could be put to a test by a woman. For instance, the Babylonian Talmud presents in b. Qidd. 81a a story about R. Meir being tempted by Satan on account of his arrogance towards sinners, in which the tempter appeared to the rabbi "as a woman on the other side of the river" (כאיתתא בהך גיסא דנהרא).

The rabbis were also well aware of the voyeuristic temptation inherent in the situation involving women doing their laundry in a public space. For instance, in the *sugya* discussing number and hierarchy of the biblical commandments in b. Mak. 23b–24a, Rabbi Hiyya bar Abba explains the virtue of a man who "shuts his eyes from looking upon evil" (Is 33:15) as referring to someone "who does not stare at women when they stand washing clothes" (אינו מסתכל בנשים בשעה שעומדות על הכביסה). In another *sugya* in b. B. Bat. 57b, this interpretation is contextualized more specifically as related to the situation of a jointly owned courtyard, in the semi-private space of which women from the households owning it would do their laundry, so that they could avoid the embarrassment that might result from doing that in the public venues. As the *stam* explains, "it is not fitting that the daughters of Israel should be despised while doing laundry" (אין דרכן של בנות ישראל להתבזות על הכביסה).

If we return to the story of Jacob of Nisibis, it should be pointed out that, similar to the Christian holy men, the rabbis were believed to possess among other supernatural powers the ability to curse, bringing misfortune or even death upon

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[38] On various aspects of rabbinic construction of women, see T. Ilan, "Women in Jewish Life and Law," in S. T. Katz (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, vol. 4. *The Late Roman-Rabbinic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 627–646; J. R. Baskin, "Woman as Other in Rabbinic Literature," in J. Neusner and A. J. Avery-Peck (eds.), *Judaism in Late Antiquity*, part 3. *Where We Stand – Issues and Debates in Ancient Judaism* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), vol. 2, 177–196; J. R. Baskin, *Midrashic Women: Formations of the Feminine in Rabbinic Literature* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2002); Sh. Valer, *Women and Womanhood in the Talmud* (translated by B. S. Rozen; BJS 321; Providence: Brown Judaic Studies, 1999); M. L. Satlow, *Tasting the Dish: Rabbinic Rhetorics of Sexuality* (BJS 303; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995).

their enemies.[39] It was believed that a curse uttered by a rabbi could be efficacious even when it was gratuitous.[40] Cursing, thus, served as an important means of social control in rabbinic circles. This function is well attested in rabbinic literature, in the form of narratives about rabbis cursing those who would trouble or disrespect them, as in the story about Rava cursing the dream-interpreter Bar Hedya (b. Ber. 56a–b), or in that of a certain disciple of the rabbis who was harassed by a bully (b. Moed Qat. 17a–b).

When we look at the story of the meeting between Ephrem and the woman through the lens of rabbinic literature, several important parallels come to light. The Christian storyteller employs a popular hagiographic topos of a holy man being put to shame and/or taught a lesson by a figure, taking a lower position in the social hierarchy. Using the words of Elizabeth Clark, the woman in this narrative is deployed as "a shaming device for Christian men."[41] Similar examples of a female protagonist used for the shaming of learned men could be found in rabbinic literature, including the image of a woman who challenges not only social norms of modesty but of intellectual passivity and does so relying upon her profound knowledge of the Bible and/or of rabbinic tradition.

The most prominent example of this kind is Brouria, the learned wife of Rabbi Meir, who demonstrates "a profound knowledge of biblical interpretation, an admirable ability to handle traditional texts, and a quick wit."[42] In one of the stories about her in the Babylonian Talmud (b. Ber. 10a), Brouria bests her learned husband on the question of how to deal with criminal neighbours. She makes Rabbi Meir correct his prayer against these sinners, basing her claim on a biblical text, i. e., Psalms 104:35. In another story about Brouria, also found in the Babylonian Talmud (b. Eruv. 53a), she mocks Rabbi Yose the Galilean for transgressing the mishnaic prohibition against talking too much with women when he asks her the way to the city of Lod.[43] The latter Talmudic account comes very close to the story of Ephrem in that both the Jewish storyteller and Christian hagiographer depict a woman who does not hesitate to use her knowledge of authoritative texts to put a learned man to shame.

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[39] See J. Neusner, *A History of the Jews in Babylonia*, vol. 4. *The Age of Shapur II* (SPB 14; Leiden: Brill, 1969), 351–352.

[40] B. Ber. 56a: "a curse uttered by a sage, even when undeserved, comes to pass" (קללת חכם אפילו בחנם היא באה); cf. b. San. 90b; b. Mak. 11a.

[41] E. A. Clark, "The Lady Vanishes: Dilemmas of a Feminist Historian after the 'Linguistic Turn'," *CH* 67 (1998), 1–31, at 29.

[42] Baskin, *Midrashic Women*, 82. On this female figure, see also D. M. Goodblatt, "The Beruriah Traditions," *JJS* 26 (1975): 68–85; T. Ilan, *Integrating Women into Second Temple History* (TSAJ 76; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 175–194; Sh. Strauch-Schick, "A Re-Examination of the Bavli's Beruriah Narratives in Light of Middle Persian Literature," *Zion* 79:3 (2014): 409–424 [in Hebrew].

[43] See m. Avot 1:5: "Yose b. Yohanan of Jerusalem said: Let thy house be opened wide and let the needy be members of thy household; and talk not much with womankind." (translation according to H. Danby, *The Mishnah* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933], 446).

Finally, there is another remarkable rabbinic parallel to be taken into consideration in a source-critical examination of the story about Ephrem. This parallel is related to the sophisticated scriptural allusion, based on the account of the creation of Adam and Eve in Genesis 2:7, 21–22, that was presented as an argument by Ephrem's female interlocutor. It is striking that a very similar connection between the different kinds of matter from which the first couple was created and the appropriate direction for the male and female gaze is found in several rabbinic sources.[44]

The earliest attestation of this exegetical motif comes from Bereshit Rabba, a midrashic exposition of the book of Genesis that was produced in Palestine during the late-fourth or early-fifth-century. Embedded in a series of questions-and-answers attributed to Rabbi Yehoshua, it is a part of the section dealing with Genesis 2:21, where among other things the creation of Eve from Adam's rib is discussed. The first question in this series asks "why does a man come out with his face turned downwards, and a woman comes out with her face turned upwards," referring, apparently, to the position of children during birth. The answer provided by the rabbi is that it happens because the man looks towards the place of his creation, i.e., the earth, while the woman towards the place of her creation, i.e., another human being.[45]

A somewhat different version of this tradition is found in the Babylonian Talmud (b. Nid. 31b) and some later midrashic works. Although its formulation in the Babylonian Talmud is rather elliptic, the biblical story of creation seems to provide an answer to the question of why during the normal, i.e., missionary, position taken by a couple during sexual intercourse the woman looks upwards at the man and the man looks downwards at the earth: "And why the man's face is (turned) downwards, and the woman's face is (turned) upwards, towards the man? This one is (turned) to the place, from which he was created, and that one is (turned) to the place from whom she was created."[46]

Besides different points that the story of the creation of Adam and Eve is used to illustrate in Bereshit Rabba and in the Babylonian Talmud, there is also disagreement in the attribution of this exegetical tradition between the two sources. Whereas the Palestinian midrash attributes it to the second-generation Tanna Rabbi Yehoshua, the Talmud transmits it under the name of Rabbi Dostai ben

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[44] This parallel has previously been noted by R. Neis, *The Sense of Sight in Rabbinic Culture: Jewish Ways of Seeing in Late Antiquity* (Greek Culture in the Roman World; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 145–146. However, she discusses only Sozomen's version and does not try to explain the relationship between the Jewish and Christian sources.

[45] Bereshit Rabba 17:8 (ed. Theodor-Albeck, vol. 1, 158–159): שאלו את ר׳ יהושע מפני מה האיש יוצא פניו למטה והאשה יוצאה פניה למעלה, אמר להם האיש מביט למקום ברייתו והאשה למקום לברייתה. A similar version of this midrash appears in Shemot Rabba 1.14, where it is ascribed to R. Ḥanina.

[46] B. Nid. 31b: ומפני מה איש פניו למטה ואשה פניה למעלה כלפי האיש זה ממקום שנברא וזו ממקום שנבראת. Compare Avot de-Rabbi Natan B:9 (ed. Schechter, 25): מפני מה האשה מסתכלת באיש והאיש מסתכל באדמה אלא שהאשה מסתכלת בברייתה והאיש מסתכל בברייתו.

Yannai, a fourth-generation Tanna. Without going into a detailed discussion of the relationship between various versions of this tradition, I think it may be safely assumed that a basic form of the midrash connecting the difference in the directions of male and female gaze with the biblical account of the creation of the first couple was in circulation among the Jews of Palestine at least during the late Tannaitic period, i. e., the end of the second century. As one can see from the sources quoted above, it was later used by various Amoraic and post-Amoraic authorities for different rhetorical purposes.

It is not difficult to recognize a fundamental similarity between the rabbinic midrash and the woman's argument in the story about Ephrem. Both Jewish and Christian storytellers employ the scriptural notion of the two different substances from which the first man and woman were created for making a point about the appropriate direction for the male and female gaze. While the Syriac source embeds this exegetical tradition into a more developed narrative framework of the hagiographic account, one can still recognize at its core the same midrashic hermeneutic in the way he makes use of the story of the creation in Genesis 2.

Appearance of such distinctive and sophisticated exegetical connection in the writings of the two different religious traditions can hardly be explained as a coincidence, resulting from their independent inner development. One should, thus, look for an explanation of how this shared tradition originated within one religious milieu and was subsequently appropriated by another. Given the fact that in rabbinic sources it is attested two centuries earlier than in Christian ones, and in light of what we know about the development of early Syriac Christianity and its significant indebtedness to Judaism, the most likely scenario seems to be that the Christians of Edessa received this tradition from their Jewish neighbours. If so, this case should be added to the growing inventory of Jewish exegetical traditions in Syriac sources that has been started by Brock.[47] Unfortunately, our information about the Jewish community of Edessa and its relationship with the city's various Christian groups during the third or fourth century is very scarce, preventing us from offering a satisfactory explanation of how exactly this exchange of scriptural knowledge might have occured.[48] It is only in a way of

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[47] Brock, "Jewish Traditions." See also T. Kronholm, *Motifs from Genesis 1–11 in the Genuine Hymns of Ephrem the Syrian, with Particular Reference to the Influence of Jewish Exegetical Traditions* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1978); D. A. Machiela, "Some Jewish Noah Traditions in Syriac Christian Sources," in M. E. Stone, A. Amihay, and R. A. Clements (eds.), *Noah and His Books* (SBL Early Judaism and Its Literature 28; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010), 237–252; S. P. Brock, "Midrash in Syriac," in M. A. Fishbane and J. Weinberg (eds.), *Midrash Unbound: Transformations and Innovations* (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2013), 83–95; S. Minov, "Satan's Refusal to Worship Adam: A Jewish Motif and Its Reception in Syriac Christian Tradition," in M. Kister et al. (eds.), *Tradition, Transmission, and Transformation from Second Temple Literature through Judaism and Christianity in Late Antiquity* (STDJ 113; Leiden: Brill, 2015), 230–271.

[48] See J. B. Segal, "The Jews of North Mesopotamia before the Rise of Islam," in J. M. Grintz and J. Liver (eds.), *Studies in the Bible Presented to Professor M. H. Segal by His Colleagues and*

speculation that one might think, for instance, about Jewish-Christians or Judaizing Christians, whose presence in late antique Edessa is confirmed by a number of sources,[49] as a possible channel of transmission for this kind of material.

Conclusion

The two accounts about staring contests provide us with a good example of how the Syrian hagiographers instrumentalized women in order to promote their vision of Christian masculinity. Whereas both stories present the riverbank as a liminal sociospatial site, where the heteronormative male gaze may come under threat from women, there is a marked dissimilarity between their plots, conditioned by the different narrative agendas of their authors. Theodoret pursues the aim of presenting his holy man as a powerful and fearsome agent of God's influence who would not tolerate disrespect, while the primary goal of the author of the *Life of Ephrem* is to co-opt the renowned poet and theologian on behalf of the civic ideology of Edessa.

In the course of my analysis, the importance of rabbinic writings as a rich source of comparative material for the students of Syriac hagiographic literature (and vice versa) has become evident. The wide range of parallels presented, from the most general to the most detailed, attests that Christian hagiographers and rabbinic sages inhabited a very similar discursive world. The Christian storytellers share with the rabbis the general preoccupation with creating a particular ideal of masculinity, which included fixing the male gaze in the right direction.[50] One recognizes at once that the monastic imperative of total abstention from gazing at women, expressed in Sozomen's reworking of the story about Ephrem, concurs with the ethos of visual asceticism promoted by the rabbis, who expected

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Students (PISBR 17; Jerusalem: Kiryat Sepher, 1964), 32*–63*; D. Noy and H. Bloedhorn, *Inscriptiones Judaicae Orientis*, vol. 3. *Syria and Cyprus* (TSAJ 102; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 128–132; H. J. W. Drijvers, "Jews and Christians at Edessa," *JJS* 36 (1985): 88–102.

[49] See H. J. W. Drijvers, "Edessa und das jüdische Christentum," *VC* 24 (1970): 4–33; Ch. Jullien and F. Jullien, "'Aux temps des disciples des apôtres'. Les sabbatiens d'Édesse," *RHR* 218 (2001): 155–170; R. B. ter Haar Romeny, "Hypotheses on the Development of Judaism and Christianity in Syria in the Period after 70 C. E.," in H. van de Sandt (ed.), *Matthew and the Didache: Two Documents from the Same Jewish-Christian Milieu?* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 2005), 13–33.

[50] For a comprehensive discussion of rabbinic visuality, see Neis, *Sense of Sight*. A comparable study of Christian attitudes to the sense of sight during Late Antiquity remains a *desideratum*. Meanwhile, see E. A. Castelli, "Visions and Voyeurism: Holy Women and the Politics of Sight in Early Christianity," *Protocol of the Colloquy of the Center for Hermeneutical Studies* NS 2 (1995), 1–20; D. T. M. Frankfurter, "Martyrology and the Prurient Gaze," *JECS* 17 (2009): 215–245; V. Limberis, "The Eyes Infected by Evil: Basil of Caesarea's Homily, *On Envy*," *HTR* 84 (1991): 163–184; B. Leyerle, "John Chrysostom on the Gaze," *JECS* 1 (1993): 159–174.

men to have complete control over their gaze, especially when it comes to avoiding looking at women.[51]

By anchoring their plot in a particular topographical locus, that is the liminal site of the riverbank, our stories bear witness to how the Christian authors spatialized gender, using women to meditate on marginal and intermediate spaces. This procedure is comparable to some of the discursive strategies employed by the rabbis to negotiate gender in space.[52] The peculiar gender dynamics at the riverbank, presented as a site of the female empowerment, conditioned by its temporary privatization, recalls analysis of the quasi-domestic sites in rabbinic sources by Baker, who comes to the conclusion that "domestic-activity areas almost always exceeded the bounds of any domestic enclosure, such that much 'public' space was inevitably used as an extension of domestic space."[53]

In addition to these general aspects of contiguity between our hagiographic narratives and rabbinic literature, a number of more specific parallels have been pointed out, such as the awareness of the threat posed to the male gaze by women doing laundry in a public space, the ability of Christian holy men to curse effectively their enemies, the topos of a holy man being taught a lesson by a woman well-versed in authoritative texts, and the exegetical tradition connecting the difference in the directions of male and female gaze with the biblical story of the creation of Adam and Eve. When trying to explain these shared motifs, however, one should not rush to assume that they are all the result of a direct exchange between the two religious communities. As Becker has rightly pointed out in his discussion of the possible use of Syriac sources as a background for the Babylonian Talmud, "It may ultimately be more productive not to think in terms of influence, but rather about the larger structural parallels and analogies that may have existed between the East Syrians and the Rabbis."[54] Becker's call to approach Syriac Christian and Jewish rabbinic cultures as "dialects of a shared language," instead of focusing too narrowly on the question of influence, does certainly offer a fruitful avenue of research.[55] But even so, as the case of the scriptural argument

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[51] On this aspect of the rabbinic ideal of masculinity, see Neis, *Sense of Sight*, 129–146. For an overview of rabbinic views on masculinity, see M. L. Satlow, "'Try to Be a Man': The Rabbinic Construction of Masculinity," *HTR* 89 (1996): 19–40.

[52] For a seminal discussion of the gender-space nexus in rabbinic culture, see C. M. Baker, *Rebuilding the House of Israel: Architectures of Gender in Jewish Antiquity* (Divinations: Rereading Late Ancient Religion; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).

[53] Baker, *Rebuilding the House of Israel*, 118.

[54] Becker, "Polishing the Mirror," 900.

[55] Becker, "Polishing the Mirror," 902. For recent studies that pursue this avenue, see A. H. Becker, "The Comparative Study of 'Scholasticism' in Late Antique Mesopotamia: Rabbis and East Syrians," *AJS Review* 34 (2010), 91–113; A. H. Becker, "The 'Evil Inclination' of the Jews: The Syriac *Yatsra* in Narsai's Metrical Homilies for Lent," *JQR* 106 (2016): 179–207; M. Bar-Asher Siegal, "Shared Worlds: Rabbinic and Monastic Literature," *HTR* 105 (2012): 423–456; R. Kiperwasser and S. Ruzer, "Zoroastrian Proselytes in Rabbinic and Syriac Christian Narratives: Orality-Related Markers of Cultural Identity," *HR* 53 (2012): 197–218; R. Kiperwasser and

brought by the woman in the *Life of Ephrem* illustrates well, one should not become oblivious to such "smoking guns," ruling out completely a possibility of the exchange of ideas between rabbis and their Christian neighbors.

Versions and Perversions of Genesis

Jacob of Edessa, Saadia Gaon, and the Falsification of Biblical History*

Yonatan Moss

Methodological Introduction

Encounters between Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity are only very rarely signposted explicitly in the literatures of the period.[1] Given this fact, most scholars interested in reconstructing such encounters follow one of two main paths. One path is to focus on an interpretation, a notion, or a behavior documented *either* in a Jewish *or* in a Christian text and to try to understand it in terms of similar interpretations, notions, or behaviors the scholar has detected in the other tradition. The similarity is then explained as a matter of adaptation, as polemic, or as a coincidence stemming from a common background.[2] The other path is to focus on an explicit mention of Jews in Christian texts (the far more common case) or of Christians in Jewish texts (less common). One then tries to assess whether one tradition's picture of the other tradition reflects a historical reality, based on an actual encounter with the other, or is rather a rhetorical construction designed to shape one's own identity.[3] The net result of these different scholarly

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[1] On the rarity of such "signposting," see E. Grypeou and H. Spurling, "Abraham's Angels: Jewish and Christian Exegesis of Genesis 18–19," in eaedem (eds.), *The Exegetical Encounter between Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity* (JCPS 18; Leiden: Brill, 2009), 181–203, at 197.

[2] The bibliography on Jewish-Christian relations in the first millennium is vast. If we limit ourselves to encounters revolving around the book of Genesis, and involving Syriac materials, we may cite the following studies as representative instances of these three models of explanation. For the "adaptation" model, S. P. Brock, "Jewish Traditions in Syriac Sources," *JJS* 30 (1979): 212–232; for the "polemical" model, Sh. Naeh, "Freedom and Celibacy: A Talmudic Variation on Tales of Temptation and Fall in Genesis and its Syrian Background," in J. Frishman and L. Van Rompay (eds.), *The Book of Genesis in Jewish and Christian Oriental Interpretation: A Collection of Essays* (TEG 5; Leuven: Peters, 1997), 73–89; for the "coincidence" model, J. Frishman, "'And Abraham had Faith:' But in What? Ephrem and the Rabbis on Abraham and God's Blessings," in Grypeou and Spurling, *Exegetical Encounter*, 163–179.

[3] See A. S. Jacobs, "The Lion and the Lamb: Reconsidering Jewish-Christian Relations in Antiquity," in A. H. Becker and A. Y. Reed (eds.), *The Ways that Never Parted: Jews and Christians*

trajectories is that, more often than not, studies of Jewish-Christian relations in Late Antiquity read like a dialogue of the deaf, transcribed.

During this period, one rarely finds explicit evidence of a Jewish-Christian interaction from *both* its sides.[4] In other words, it is uncommon to find a documented Christian claim about Jews that is directly addressed in a Jewish text (or a documented Jewish claim about Christians directly addressed in a Christian text), with explicit reference to the original claim. Jewish texts will very rarely say, with reference to claim X documented in a Christian text: "the Christians say X about us." Addressing claim Y found in a Jewish text, Christian texts will very rarely say: "the Jews say Y about us." Signs of concrete knowledge and actual interaction between the sides are subtle, tenuous, and often disputable.

This state of affairs is largely due to the notorious difference in literary genre between Jewish and Christian texts of Late Antiquity. The inward-looking, collective, and often anonymous character of rabbinic literature makes it challenging to read in dialogue with the extroverted, individualistic mode of almost all early Christian literary production.[5]

In the centuries after the Islamic conquest, especially following the rise of the Abbasid caliphate, as Jews in the geonic period began to adopt the same "Hellenistic" literary genres as their surrounding Christian and Muslim neighbors, we start to find clearer cases of particular Jewish-Christian interactions from *both* sides of the divide.[6] Consequently, scholars of the early medieval period may find themselves in a better position than their counterparts in Late Antiquity to track the Jewish-Christian encounter from both its sides.[7]

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in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages (TSAJ 95; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 95–118. See also a shorter version of the same argument in his *Remains of the Jews: The Holy Land and Christian Empire in Late Antiquity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 200–209.

[4] The situation changes later in the Middle Ages. Consider, e.g., the famous Barcelona debate, for which we have reports from both the Christian and the Jewish sides. See R. Chazan, *Barcelona and Beyond: The Disputation of 1263 and its Aftermath* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

[5] See M. Hirshman, *A Rivalry of Genius: Jewish and Christian Biblical Interpretation in Late Antiquity* (translated by Batya Stein; Albany: SUNY Press, 1996), 109–118; 125–130; S. K. Gribetz and M. Vidas, "Rabbis and Others in Conversation," *JSQ* 19 (2012): 91–103.

[6] See A. H. Becker, "Beyond the Spatial and Temporal *Limes*: Questioning the 'Parting of the Ways' Outside the Roman Empire," in Becker and Reed, *Ways that Never Parted*, 373–392, esp. 383–392; D. Boyarin, "Hellenism in Jewish Babylonia," in C. Fonrobert and M. Jaffee (eds.), *Cambridge Companion to Rabbinic Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 336–363, at 358. One of the genres that Jews started to engage, beginning in the ninth century, was polemical literature, which provides rich evidence for Jewish-Christian encounters. See D. J. Lasker, "The Jewish Critique of Christianity under Islam in the Middle Ages," *PAAJR* 57 (1991), 121–153, esp. 121–125.

[7] This point is generally lost in the current trend within rabbinic scholarship to connect most everything to Christianity. For a diagnosis of this trend, see R. A. Anisfeld, *Sustain me with Raisin Cakes: Pesikta de-Rav Kahana and the Popularization of Rabbinic Judaism* (SJSJ 133; Leiden: Brill, 2009), 11: "[N]ew books about rabbinic texts seem to all make some claim of relationship to Christianity." For one attempt to resist this trend, see L. I. Levine, "Jewish Collective Memory

The following study is centered on one such case. It features a Christian accusation against the Jews that is explicitly defended against by a Jew and turned back upon the Christians. This case concerns an argument about the correct textual readings of Genesis 5. The West Syrian polymath Jacob of Edessa, writing in Syriac in the early eighth century, charges the Jews with willfully altering the biblical text for anti-Christological reasons. This charge is directly addressed, and countered, by the versatile scholar and Rabbanite community leader, Saadia Gaon (882–942), writing in Judeo-Arabic in Baghdad, a little over two centuries after Jacob.

A consideration of the precise wording of these two texts, read in the contexts of their respective times and traditions, not only gives us a window onto a particular Jewish-Christian exegetical encounter, but, perhaps more importantly, grants us a better understanding of each of the sides involved. Unlike most studies of Jewish-Christian exegetical encounters in Late Antiquity, which, due to the evidence's methodological challenges described above, usually employ only one side of the encounter to understand the other side, this chapter, focusing on texts belonging to a slightly later time and a substantially different cultural and intellectual environment, will use *each* of the two sides to understand the other.

Varying Versions of Genesis 5

The Pentateuchal narrative is famously disproportionate. Whereas the first 11 chapters of Genesis span several millennia, the rest of the book treats a much shorter period of just over two centuries, and the following four books of the Pentateuch cover about 120 years, with the main focus on just forty of them. In order to encompass thousands of years in minimal narrative space, the early chapters of Genesis offer two genealogical lists detailing the generations from Adam to Noah (chapter 5) and then from Noah's son Shem to Abraham (chapter 11). In these chapters each progenitor is named and provided with his age at the time of the birth of his firstborn,[8] and at the time of his death. Inasmuch as the count begins with the creation of Adam, by adding all the ages of each progenitor at the time of his son's birth one can arrive at "absolute" dates for the biblical chronology of the world. The ancient textual branches diverge radically, and fairly consistently, on precisely this point.

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in Late Antiquity," in G. Gardner and K. L. Osterloh (eds.), *Antiquity in Antiquity: Jewish and Christian Pasts in the Greco-Roman World* (TJAJ 123; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 217–254, at 247–248. See further A. H. Becker, "The Comparative Study of 'Scholasticism' in Late Antique Mesopotamia: Rabbis and East Syrians," *AJS Review* 34 (2010): 91–113, at 112–113.

[8] Actually, not necessarily the firstborn, but the son by which the genealogical line continued. See on this point, Augustine, *City of God*, 15.15 (P. Levine, *Augustine. City of God* [LCL 414; Cambridge: Harvardy University Press, 1966], 492–495).

The Masoretic figures are, as a rule, one hundred years shorter than the Septuagint ones. Thus, in the Masoretic version Adam is 130 years old at the birth of Seth, while he is 230 in the Septuagint. Seth is 105 at the birth of Enosh in the Masoretic text and 205 in the Septuagint, and so forth.[9] The Samaritan version mostly lines up with the Masoretic figures in Gn. 5, but is virtually identical with the Septuagint in Gn. 11.[10] As would be expected, the Peshiṭta follows the Masoretic tradition, while the Latin tradition initially followed the Septuagintal version until Jerome and Augustine's defense of the Hebrew figures reoriented it towards the Masoretic branch.[11]

Given the fact that the versions diverge precisely with regard to the ages at the time of the birth of the next generation, rather than with regard to ages at the time of death, which are uniform, the absolute chronology differs considerably between the different textual traditions. According to the Masoretic text, the flood occurred 1656 years after creation (henceforth: A.M.) and Abraham was born 390 years after that. While there is a degree of textual fluidity within the Septuagint branch,[12] it is generally accepted that the flood occurred in 2242 A.M., and Abraham was born another 1170 years after that.[13] Commentators, ancient and modern, could not help but notice the significant difference of close

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[9] There are exceptions, such as Jared, who has the same age at the birth of this son (162) in the LXX and in the Hebrew. Compare the Samaritan, which gives 62 years, in keeping with the general pattern.

[10] See the tables conveniently provided in J. Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis* (2nd ed.; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1930), 134; 233. For fuller scale recent treatments of the question, including considerations of other ancient evidence, such as that provided by Jubilees, Philo, Ps. Philo, and Josephus, see G. Larsson, "The Chronology of the Pentateuch: A Comparison of the MT and LXX," *JBL* 102 (1983): 401–409; D.V. Etz, "The Numbers of Genesis V 3–31: A Suggested Conversion and its Implications," *VT* 43 (1993): 171–189 (see especially Etz's tables on pp. 188–189); M. Alexandre, *Le commencement du livre Genèse I–V: La version grecque de la Septante et sa réception* (CA 3; Paris: Beauchesne, 1988), 379–395; M. Rösel, *Übersetzung als Vollendung der Auslegung: Studien zur Genesis-Septuaginta* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1994), 129–144. For Josephus, see D. Fraenkel, "Die Überlieferung der Genealogien Gen 5:3–28 und Gen 11:10–26 in den 'Antiquitates Iudaicae' des Flavius Josephus," in A. Pietersma and C. Cox (eds.), *De Septuaginta: Studies in Honour of John William Wevers on his Sixty-Fifth Birthday* (Mississauga: Benben, 1984), 175–200.

[11] On Augustine and Jerome, see further below.

[12] Much of this fluidity reflects secondary adaptations to the Hebrew, on which see P. Walters (and D.W. Gooding), *The Text of the Septuagint: Its Corruptions and their Emendations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 275–277. In addition, there is an exegetical difficulty that arises with regard to the accepted Septuagintal chronology: Methuselah comes out as dying 14 years after the flood. Thus, according to Josephus, Julius Africanus, and some LXX manuscripts, Methuselah was, at the birth of his son, twenty years older than the age commonly reported, and thus the date of the flood was also twenty years later, namely 2262 A.M. See Jerome, *Hebraicae quaestiones in Genesim,* 5.25–27 (in *PL* 23, 946B-947C; translation in C.T.R. Hayward, *Saint Jerome's Hebrew Questions on Genesis* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995], 35–36); Augustine, *City of God*, 15.11 (trans. Levine, *Augustine. City of God*, 464–469); and see M. Harl, *La Bible d'Alexandrie: La Genèse* (Paris: Cerf, 1986), 123–124.

[13] See the table provided in Skinner, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 233.

to 1400 years between the two main textual branches of Genesis. While it seems quite clear that the differences between the two schemes are not accidental, the reason for the differences and the solution to the question of which of the two branches is more original, have yet to be found.[14]

Opinions differed in antiquity, as they do in modern scholarship, as to which of the versions is original and which a deviation. Although the current balance is shifting towards a prioritization of the Masoretic version,[15] in antiquity opinions were more evenly divided. But, while Jewish sources of Late Antiquity show awareness of various other discrepancies between the Greek Pentateuch and their Hebrew text,[16] there survives no explicit Jewish reaction to the particular discrepancy concerning the Genesis chronologies,[17] prior to Saadia Gaon. We cannot understand Saadia's position without first reviewing the late ancient Christian treatments of the question, of which several are in evidence.

Late Ancient Christian Accounts of the Variation

Greek and Latin Christian writers of the fourth and fifth centuries are divided on whether to insist, in keeping with the traditional Christian adherence to the Greek Bible, on the priority of the Septuagintal figures, or to explain why in this

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[14] S. Jellicoe, *The Septuagint and Modern Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 245, characterizes this problem as "defying solution." His judgment is just as relevant today as it was fifty years ago.

[15] See the summary of modern treatments of this question in E. Tov, *The Text-Critical Use of the Septuagint in Biblical Research* (2nd ed.; Jerusalem Biblical Studies 8; Jerusalem: Simor, 1997), 253. The most recent defense of Septuagintal priority cited by Tov is from the turn of the twentieth-century. Recent advocates of Masoretic priority include Larsson, "The Chronology of the Pentateuch" and B. Z. Wacholder, *Essays on Jewish Chronology and Chronography* (New York: Ktav, 1976), 106–135, both of whom see the Septuagintal dates as apologetic attempts to expand biblical chronology in light of other contemporary chronological systems that granted the world greater antiquity. See, however, Rösel, *Übersetzung als Vollendung*, 135, who views the current Masoretic figures as secondary developments, reflective of the Hasmonean period. See also R. W. Klein, "Archaic Chronologies and the Textual History of the Old Testament," *HTR* 67 (1974): 255–263, arguing that our three main surviving versions are reflections of an earlier tradition, changed in all three sources; and J. W. Wevers, *Notes on the Greek Text of Genesis* (SBL Septuagint and Cognate Studies Series 35; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), 73, who offers rationales for the LXX, on the one hand, and for the Samaritan, on the other hand, and states: "It is MT which makes little sense, combining some of the larger figures with some of the smaller ones but in no rational order."

[16] For a presentation and analysis of the various rabbinic and post-rabbinic sources dealing with these discrepancies, see A. Wasserstein and D. J. Wasserstein, *The Legend of the Septuagint: From Classical Antiquity to Today* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 51–94.

[17] Unless we consider Josephus' syncretic usage of the Masoretic and Septuagintal figures a "reaction" to the problem. In any case, this is not an explicit reaction. See Fraenkel, "Die Überlieferung."

case the ages found in the Hebrew text are to be preferred.[18] Eusebius of Caesarea, writing towards the beginning of the fourth century, argues for Septuagintal priority.[19] Pointing out that the Hebrew appears less consistent than the Greek inasmuch as the first five generations procreate at ages closer to 100, while later generations do so at ages around 200, Eusebius reasons that the Greek figures, all of them consistently around 200, must be more original.[20] He surmises that the Jews lowered the numbers for the earlier generations in order to portray the Bible as endorsing procreation at "youthful" ages.[21]

Both writing around the turn of the fourth and fifth centuries, Jerome and Augustine acknowledge the general Christian preference for the Septuagintal figures,[22] but they argue for the authenticity of the Hebrew figures. On the basis of an exegetical conundrum, famous in his day, according to which the Septuagintal numbers lead to Methuselah dying only after the flood,[23] Jerome concludes that the higher figures must, as in many other instances, be erroneous.[24] Augustine essentially agrees, but is less resolute than Jerome. He also allows for the possibility, which he attributes to others, that the lower figures were in fact introduced by Jews "in order to diminish the authority of our version."[25] There is no hint, however, that those who claim this think the Jews were motivated by Christological considerations.

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[18] See Harl, *La Bible*, 123–124; W. Adler, "The Jews as Falsifiers: Charges of Tendentious Emendation in Anti-Jewish Christian Polemics," in D. M. Goldenberg (ed.), *Translations of the Scripture* (Philadelphia: Annenberg Research Institute, 1990), 1–27, at 23–27.

[19] J.-B. Aucher, *Eusebii Pamphili Caesariensis episcopi Chronicon bipartitum* (Venice, 1818), 124–125 (Armenian and modern Latin translation); J. Karst, *Eusebius Werke: Die Chronik* (GCS 20; Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1911), 40 (German translation).

[20] A similar claim made has been made in modern scholarship; see Wevers, *Notes on the Greek*, 73.

[21] This explanation is quite "far-fetched" (as Adler, "The Jews," 24, writes) since even the "young" progenitors are still begetting between the ages of 65 and 130! Scholarly discomfort with this claim by Eusebius stretches back to J. Scaliger, *Thesaurus temporum* (Amsterdam, 1558), 410, who dubs it "this barker's insanity" (*huius latratoris vaecordia*).

[22] They each speak of the Septuagintal figures as what is found "in our codices" (*in nostris codicibus*). See Jerome, *Hebraicae quaestiones in Genesim*, 5.3 (*PL* 23, 946A); Augustine, *City of God*, 15.10 (trans. Levine, *Augustine. City of God*, 460).

[23] See fn. 12 above.

[24] Jerome, *Hebraicae quaestiones in Genesim,* 5.25–27 (*PL* 23, 947A): *Restat ergo, ut quomodo in plerisque, ita et in hoc sit error in numero*. Regarding Jerome's defense of the Hebrew text in discontinuity with earlier Christian tradition, see Adler, "The Jews," 10–23.

[25] Augustine, *City of God*, 15.11 (trans. Levine, *Augustine. City of God*, 464–469). See also Augustine's *Quaestiones in Heptateuchum* 1.2, on Gen. 5.25 (*PL* 34, 549), written at the same time as book 15 of the *City of God*. In the former work, Augustine champions a third possibility as "the truth": The Septuagintal version is to be preferred but according to the minority manuscripts which provide a lower figure in the case of Methuselah, allowing him to die six years before the flood. On the difference between Jerome and Augustine's attitudes to the question of the relation between the Hebrew and Septuagintal versions more generally, see S. Kamin, "The Theological Significance of the *Hebraica Veritas* in Jerome's Thought," in eadem, *Jews and Christians Interpret the Bible* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1991), 1–11, esp. 4–5.

To round off the presentation of the fourth- and fifth-century discussions of the varying textual versions, mention should be made of Eusebius of Emesa, active in the mid-fourth century. He signals his awareness of the discrepancy and its particulars but does not express an opinion as to which is the most authentic.[26]

What is striking about these early Christian views of the genealogical discrepancies is the absence of any charges of Jewish manipulation motivated by Christological considerations. This is striking for two reasons. First, because it is often in the context of Jewish-Christian debates about the messiahship of Jesus that other textual differences between the versions arise. This is a common theme of anti-Jewish polemic, ever since Justin Martyr, who, in the mid-second century, accuses the Jews of perverting Scriptures in several different instances so as to repress Christological hints present in the Septuagint but absent from the Hebrew.[27]

The absence of any claim on the part of Christians in the fourth and fifth centuries of Christologically-motivated Jewish falsification is also striking given the fact that this claim does indeed surface in subsequent centuries. The charge, as might be expected given the nature of the texts in question, was based on chronological considerations.

Our first hint of such chronological considerations emerges in the work of Pseudo-Zacharias, a West Syrian author writing in Amida around 569, who expanded and continued the *Ecclesiastical History* by Zacharias of Mytilene from earlier in the sixth century.[28] Pseudo-Zacharias dedicates the second and third chapters of the first book of his work to the question of the textual discrepancies in the genealogies of Gn. 5 and 11.[29] Unlike his predecessors, who cited the Hebrew text for the lower numbers, Pseudo-Zacharias, writing in Syriac, cites the

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[26] See F. Petit, L. Van Rompay, J. J. S. Weitenberg, *Eusèbe d'Émèse: Commentaire de la Genèse: Texte arménien de l'édition de Venise (1980); Fragments grecs et syriaques* (TEG 15; Leuven: Peeters, 2011), 86–89; 104–105; 212–213; 288–289.

[27] See, e. g., Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 71–73 (ed. M. Marcovich, *Iustini Martyris Dialogus cum Tryphone* [PTS 47; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1997]; trans. T. B. Falls, T. P. Halton, and M. Slusser, *Justin Martyr. Dialogue with Trypho* [SFoC 3; Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2003]); Adler, "Jews," 4–10; Wasserstein and Wasserstein, *Legend*, 61 fn. 27; 69; Hayward, *Saint Jerome*, 127–128.

[28] For a summary introduction to Pseudo-Zacharias in relation to Zacharias of Mytilene, see, most recently, F. Millar, "The Evolution of the Syrian Orthodox Church in the Pre-Islamic Period: From Greek to Syriac?" *JECS* 21 (2013): 43–92, at 77–78.

[29] E. W. Brooks, *Historia ecclesiastica Zachariae rhetori vulgo adscripta* (CSCO 83; Leuven: Peeters, 1953), 7–17. Brooks published a complete Latin translation of this work, but his and other translations into English habitually skip these chapters. See F. J. Hamilton and E. W. Brooks, *The Syriac Chronicle Known as that of Zachariah of Mitylene* (London: Methuen, 1899); G. Greatrex (together with R. R. Phenix; C. B. Horn; S. P. Brock, and W. Witakowski), *The Chronicle of Pseudo-Zachariah Rhetor: Church and War in Late Antiquity* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011). A German translation can be found in K. Ahrens and G. Krüger, *Die sogennante Kirchengeschichte des Zacharias Rhetor* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1899), 6–16.

Syriac version.[30] After comparing the versions, and laying out the discrepancies with the help of a detailed table, Pseudo-Zacharias comes down in favor of the Greek, while acknowledging that in some cases the Syriac preserves the correct version.

Pseudo-Zacharias does not seem to have been aware of the Hebrew. He proposes a garbled theory about the source of the corruptions in the Syriac version. Citing an idea he attributes to Epiphanius of Salamis, he explains that it was produced by the exiled priest whom King Shalmanesar sent to the Babylonian Samaritans he had resettled in the land of Israel.[31]

Thus, Pseudo-Zacharias views the Septuagint as essentially correct, with the exception of the Methuselah dates. These, he admits, cannot be correct due to the exegetical problem discussed above, but he does not explain how they crept into an otherwise correct text.[32]

On the basis of the Septuagintal figures, Pseudo-Zacharias calculates that the year 880, by the Seleucid reckoning (= 568–569 CE, presumably around the time of his writing), is 5908 years since Adam.[33] Then, however, Pseudo-Zacharias concludes the chronographic discussion with the following statement, which sheds light on the historical context of all these calculations:

However, according to the reckoning of Josephus and according to two or three other writings, whose authors are unknown, the seventh era has already begun, since the sun darkened, the earth quaked and soon thereafter there was universal pestilence.

While Pseudo-Zacharias' own chronographic computation led to locating his present time a little less than a century shy of six millennia after Adam, according to this alternative calculation, the world has already been in existence more than six-thousand years. The seventh millennium had already begun. The reference to Josephus, as with several other sources Pseudo-Zacharias quotes, is unclear. Flavius Josephus' figures are significantly lower than the Septuagintal figures, not higher than them as this reckoning would require.[34] Nevertheless,

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[30] Although Eusebius of Emesa does mention the Syriac alongside the Hebrew. See R. B. ter Haar Romeny, *A Syrian in Greek Dress: The Use of Greek, Hebrew, and Syriac Biblical Texts in Eusebius of Emesa's commentary on Genesis* (TEG 6; Leuven: Peeters, 1997), 248–250, at 248.

[31] Ps. Zacharias, *Ecclesiastical History,* 1.3 (Brooks, *Historia ecclesiastica Zachariae*, 12–13; Ahrens and Krüger, *Die sogennante Kirchengeschichte des Zacharias Rhetor*, 11). See 2 Kgs 17:27–28. Needless to say, there is no mention there of the priest being connected to any textual activity. It is unclear what source in Epiphanius (if any) Ps. Zacharias has in mind here. See R. Pummer, *Early Christian Authors on Samaritans and Samaritanism* (TSAJ 92; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 233, who also points out that the genealogical figures in Ps. Zacharias' discussion have nothing to do with the Samaritan text.

[32] Ps. Zacharias, *Ecclesiastical History,* 1.3 (Brooks, *Historia ecclesiastica Zachariae*, 14; Ahrens and Krüger, *Die sogennante Kirchengeschichte des Zacharias Rhetor*, 13).

[33] Ps. Zacharias, *Ecclesiastical History,* 1.3 (Brooks, ed., *Historia ecclesiastica Zachariae*, 16; Ahrens and Krüger, *Die sogennante Kirchengeschichte des Zacharias Rhetor*, 15).

[34] See Fraenkel, "Die Überlieferung."

the oblique reference to the "seventh era" is founded on a longstanding Christian chronographic tradition, according to which each of the first six millennia in the history of the world corresponds to one of the six days of creation, to be followed by the messianic era, corresponding to the seventh Sabbatical day.[35] This "chiliastic" tradition took two forms: According to the more dominant current, the incarnation of Jesus occurred 5,500 years after creation. Supporters of this theory believed that 500 years would elapse between Jesus' incarnation and the final inauguration of the kingdom of heaven.[36] According to an alternate, and much rarer, tradition, there was no in-between period; the kingdom of heaven arrived with the incarnation which occurred precisely 6,000 years after creation.[37]

Anyone reckoning according to the chiliastic tradition would agree that by the sixth century the eschaton had already begun. As insinuated by "Josephus," the extreme winter conditions of the years 535–536 (which included earthquakes and eclipses),[38] and the widespread bubonic plague, which first broke out in the

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[35] The idea was first popularized in the early third century by Julius Africanus and Hippolytus (or the author of the *Commentary on Daniel* attributed to him). See V. Grumel, *Traité d'études byzantines: La chronologie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1958), 5–24; A. A. Mosshammer, *The Easter Computus and the Origins of the Christian Era* (Oxford Early Christian Studies; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 28. It should be noted that not everyone followed this tradition. Eusebius did not; and neither, as noted above, did Ps. Zacharias in his initial calculation. See Grumel, *Chronologie*, 24–25. For a helpful collection of many of the Syriac sources attesting to this notion (not including those discussed here), see W. Witakowski, "The Idea of *Septimana Mundi* and the Millenarian Typology of the Creation Week in Syriac Tradition," in *SymSyr* V, 93–109.

[36] Mosshammer, *Easter Computus*, 327–329, 389–394.

[37] H. Gelzer, *Sextus Julius Africanus und die byzantinische Chronographie II.1* (Leipzig: J. C. Heinrichs, 1885), 130–133, referring to the sixth-century Constantinopolitan chronographer, John Malalas, and to the passage attributed to Hesychius, as cited in L. Dindorf, *Chronicon Paschale* (Bonn, 1832), 116–117. On the identity of this Hesychius, see A. Kaldellis, "The Works and Days of Hesychios the Illoustrios of Miletos," *GRBS* 45 (2005): 381–403, at 393. It may be suggested that Hesychius was the source that Pseudo-Zacharias is citing here in the name of "Josephus." Pseudo-Zacharias, or a subsequent scribe copying his work, could have mistaken Hesychius for Josephus. In Syriac, these two words are graphically quite similar (ܚܣܝܟܘܣ and ܝܘܣܦܘܣ), and given the relative rarity of the name Hesychius it is possible that it was assimilated into Josephus, whose name had already appeared earlier in the discussion. See further the Latin version of this rarer form of the tradition, found in the late seventh-century text referred to as the *Laterculus Malalianus*, recently attributed to Theodore of Tarsus, archbishop of Canterbury. See J. Stevenson, *The Laterculus Malalianus and the School of Archbishop Theodore* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 173–174. See also Witakowski, "The Idea," 102, where a statement from a letter of Jacob of Serugh is cited that suggests that Jesus' death took place in 6000 A. M. See also Witakowski, "The Idea," 109, where a line is cited (in the name of J. F. Coakley) from Moses bar Kepha's (on whom, see below) *On the Annunciation* (ms. Cambridge Add. 2918, fol. 17v) indicating that the incarnation occurred in 6000 A. M. This is in keeping with Bar Kepha's comment about Jewish falsification cited at fn. 70 below.

[38] See J. D. Gunn (ed.), *The Years Without Summer: Tracing A. D. 536 and its Aftermath* (BAR International Series 872; Oxford, 2000); R. Sallares, "Ecology, Evolution, and Epidemiology of Plague," in L. K. Little (ed.), *Plague and the End of Antiquity: The Pandemic of 541–750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 231–289, at 284–285.

540s and which so characterized Justinian's reign,[39] seemed to confirm this. This can help explain the general resurgence of chronographic concerns in the age of Justinian.[40] One response to these eschatological computations was to deny them by means of recalculation.[41] Although the natural disasters might have appeared to be portending the end, the kingdom of heaven still did not seem to be arriving.[42] Thus, Pseudo-Zacharias himself, contrary to his citation from "Josephus," recalculated the age of the world to be close to a century younger than what was claimed by the early Christian chiliastic tradition.

Nevertheless, it is not just the contemporary anxieties about the imminent end-time that provide the context for Pseudo-Zacharias' choice to dedicate multiple pages of the opening chapters of his *History* to the chronographic calculations of the age of the world. The heart of his discussion revolves around the discrepancies between the two main versions of Genesis. While this problem, as we saw, was indeed raised several times prior to the sixth century, Pseudo-Zacharias is the first to deal with it extensively within the Syriac context. It was arguably no coincidence that the problem first surfaces in that context towards the end of the sixth century, particularly in a West Syrian milieu. It was in this period that a specifically "Syrian Orthodox" Church begins to coalesce.[43] This new religious and cultural community was, on the one hand, clearly distinct from both the

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[39] See P. Horden, "Mediterranean Plague in the Age of Justinian," in M. Maas (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 134–160; L. K. Little, "Life and Afterlife of the First Plague Pandemic," in idem, *Plague and the End of Antiquity*, 3–32.

[40] See S. A. Harvey, "Remembering Pain: Syriac Historiography and the Separation of the Churches," *Byzantion* 58 (1988): 295–302, at 299 (correcting A. A. Vasiliev, "Medieval Ideas of the End of the World: West and East," *Byzantion* 16 [1944], 462–502, which downplayed the advent of the year 6000 in the eyes of sixth-century contemporaries). See also R. Landes, "Lest the Millennium be Fulfilled: Apocalyptic Expectations and the Pattern of Western Chronography, 100–800 CE," in D. Verbeke et al. (eds.), *The Use and Abuse of Eschatology in the Middle Ages* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1988), 137–211, at 163–164; and see the similar corrective with reference to scholarly treatments of medieval Western European responses to the advent of the millennium in R. Landes, "The Fear of an Apocalyptic Year 1000: Augustinian Historiography, Medieval and Modern," *Speculum* 75 (2000): 97–145.

[41] Compare O. Irshai, "Dating the Eschaton: Jewish and Christian Apocalyptic Calculations in Late Antiquity," in A. I. Baumgarten (ed.), *Apocalyptic Time* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 113–153, at 129–133; 153.

[42] See A. A. Mosshammer, *The Chronicle of Eusebius and Greek Chronographic Tradition* (London: Associated University Presses, 1979), 146–147.

[43] On this period of West Syrian church formation, see B. Flusin, "Église monophysite et église chalcédonienne en Syrie à l'arrivée des Arabes," in *Cristianità d'occidente e cristianità d'oriente: Secoli VI–XI* (Spoleto, 2004), 667–705; B. ter Haar Romeny, "The Formation of a Communal Identity among West Syrian Christians: Results and Conclusions of the Leiden Project," *Church History and Religious Culture* 89 (2009), 1–52; P. Wood, *'We have no King but Christ:' Christian Political Thought in Greater Syria on the Eve of the Arab Conquest (c. 400–585)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 163–208; Millar, "Evolution of the Syrian Orthodox Church."

Chalcedonian Byzantine Church and from the East Syrian Church, and yet, on the other hand, it had much in common with each of those other communities.

One issue with regard to which the West Syrians found themselves located, as it were, in the inner-region of this Venn diagram, was their scriptural tradition. Whereas the Chalcedonian Christians, whether the Greek-speaking ones or their Syriac-speaking Melkite counterparts, strictly adhered to the Septuagintal version, the East Syrians used only the Peshiṭta.[44] The West Syrians simultaneously used both versions, to varying degrees and for different purposes.[45] During the sixth and seventh centuries, as part of the process of gradually carving out their own identity, West Syrian intellectuals weighed and debated the relative advantages of the two textual branches of Genesis and other parts of scripture.[46] Within this context, West Syrian scholars produced updated translations of the Septuagint into Syriac.[47] It is also within this context that we must view Pseudo-Zacharias' elaborate discussion of the genealogical discrepancies between the Septuagint and the Peshiṭta.

Pseudo-Zacharias' defense of the Septuagintal version over and against the Peshiṭta should not be viewed as merely a matter of antiquarian concern but as part of a broader contemporary religio-cultural debate within his West Syrian community. This inner West Syrian context must be borne in mind as we turn to the next Christian evidence for discussion of the varying versions of Genesis, in which the claim of Jewish falsification on Christological grounds is first documented as an explanation for the variation.

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[44] See S. P. Brock, *The Bible in the Syriac Tradition* (2nd ed.; Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2006), 22–24; idem, "The Use of the Syriac Versions in the Liturgy," in B. ter Haar Romeny (ed.), *The Peshitta: Its Use in Literature and Liturgy* (MPIL 15; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 3–25, at 7–9. It should be noted that I am referring to liturgical and communal usage of the text, rather than employment in scholarship. From the ninth century onwards, East Syrian scholars display an awareness of the Septuagintal branch, but they do not use it in their lectionaries. See A. Salvesen, "Syro-Hexapla," in *GEDSH*, 394–395, at 395; eadem, "Hexaplaric Readings in Isodad of Merv's Commentary on Genesis," in Frishman and Van Rompay, *The Book of Genesis in Jewish and Oriental Christian Interpretation*, 229–252.

[45] See Brock, "Use of the Syriac" and Jerome A. Lund, "Genesis in Syriac," in G. A. Evans et al. (eds.), *The Book of Genesis: Composition, Reception, and Interpretation* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 537–560, at 537–8.

[46] See Lund, "Genesis in Syriac," 537–538; B. ter Haar Romeny, "The Greek vs. the Peshitta in a West Syrian Exegetical Collection," in idem, *The Peshitta*, 297–310; idem, "Jacob of Edessa on Genesis: His Quotations of the Peshitta and his Revisions of the Text," in idem (ed.), *Jacob of Edessa and the Syriac Culture of his Day* (MPIL 18; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 145–158, at 157.

[47] Namely Paul of Tella's Syrohexapla, produced around 615 and Jacob of Edessa's retranslation of the Old Testament, which drew both on the Peshiṭta and on the Septuagint, produced at the turn of the seventh and eighth centuries. See the studies cited in the previous note together with Salvesen, "Syro-Hexapla;" eadem, "Yaʿqub of Edessa," in *GEDSH*, 432; and see further below.

The Perversion Theory: Jacob of Edessa

Modern scholarly treatments of the relative roles of Greek and Syriac within the young West Syrian Church often cite the case of Jacob of Edessa (d. 708),[48] a man who has been dubbed "the most learned Christian in the early days of Islam."[49] The career of this polymath reflects his community's double Greek and Syriac heritage, and the ongoing tensions, which could be alternately productive and disruptive, between these elements. Jacob was educated both in the Qenneshre monastery, an important seat of Syriac and Greek learning,[50] and in Greek-speaking Alexandria.[51] Having left the episcopate of Edessa, due to differences over the enforcement of canon law, Jacob was invited to revive the teaching of Greek at the convent of Eusebona (near Antioch), only to be forced to leave some years later under pressure exerted by some of the brethren who "hated the Greeks."[52]

Perhaps the most emblematic aspect of Jacob's double adherence to the Greek and Syriac traditions is his revision of the Old Testament Peshiṭta in light of the Septuagint.[53] A significant amount of this large-scale project, completed in the first decade of the eighth century, still survives, though almost all of it remains unpublished.[54] Although we do not know precisely what motivated Jacob to

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[48] D. Taylor, "Bilingualism and Diglossia in Late Antique Syria and Mesopotamia," in J. N. Adams, M. Janse, and S. Swain (eds.), *Bilingualism in Ancient Society: Language Contact and the Written Text* (Oxford: Oxford Unviersity Press, 2002), 298–331, at 328–329; ter Haar Romeny, "Formation of a Communal Identity," 19.

[49] Romeny, *Jacob of Edessa*, vii, citing earlier literature.

[50] On Qenneshre, see J. Tannous, "Qenneshre, Monastery of Qenneshrin," in *GEDSH*, 345–346; A. Burg, "Het klooster van Qennesrin en de vorming van de Jacobietische Kerk in de 6e eeuw," *Oosten en Hereniging* 11 (1958): 97–108; 12 (1959): 168–181.

[51] Thus, at least, according to Jacob's medieval biographers, Michael the Syrian and Barhebraeus. See A. Salvesen, "Jacob of Edessa's Life and Work: A Biographical Sketch," in Romeny, *Jacob of Edessa*, 1–10, for sources. Jacob's detailed knowledge of Alexandrian liturgical practices would seem to confirm this claim. See H. G. B. Teule, "Jacob of Edessa and Canon Law," in Romeny, *Jacob of Edessa*, 83–100, at 90, 93–94.

[52] See Salvesen, "Jacob of Edessa's Life and Work," 2. See also eadem, "Scholarship on the Margins: Biblical and Secular Learning in the Work of Jacob of Edessa," in M. Doerfler, E. Fiano, and K. Smith (eds.), *Syriac Encounters: Papers from the Sixth North American Syriac Symposium* (ECS 20; Leuven: Peeters, 2015), 327–344, at 328.

[53] See A. Salvesen, "The Genesis Texts of Jacob of Edessa: A Study in Variety," in W. Th. van Peursen and R. B. ter Haar Romeny (eds.), *Text, Translation, and Tradition: Studies on the Peshiṭta and its Use in the Syriac Tradition Presented to Konrad D. Jenner* (MPIL 14; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 177–188; Romeny, "Jacob of Edessa on Genesis." One of the major concerns of modern scholarship on this version is to show that Jacob's employment of the LXX was via the independent Greek tradition, rather than through the mediation of the Syrohexapla.

[54] So far only 1–2 Samuel have been published. The most complete manuscript for the Pentateuch is ms. Paris, Bibl. Nat. Syr. 26, of which only snippets have been published. See the reviews in Salvesen, "Genesis Texts," 177–180; D. Kruisheer, "A Bibliographical Clavis to the Works of Jacob of Edessa (Revised and Expanded)," in Romeny, *Jacob of Edessa*, 265–293, at 270–273. According to Romeny, "Jacob of Edessa on Genesis," 154, the Paris manuscript confirms that

undertake this project,[55] his version has been shown to equally "value both the Greek and Syriac traditions of scripture,"[56] and to be a "compromise between the two positions defended in the Syrian Orthodox Church: the position …[which] would have liked to replace the Peshitta with a literal rendering of the Septuagint, and that [position which]… thought that the Syriac version was reliable."[57]

Nevertheless, in producing his new biblical text, in every given discrepancy between the two versions, Jacob had to make a defensible decision. Was one to adopt a Greek reading or a Syriac one?[58] In the case of the chronological discrepancies in the ages of the patriarchs, Jacob, in line with Pseudo-Zacharias, sided with the Greek out of messianic chronographic concerns. But unlike the latter, Jacob fleshed out the implication of Jewish falsification. In his *Commentary on the Octateuch*, apparently authored early in the eighth century, in conjunction with his textual revision of the Old Testament, Jacob writes:[59]

In the more precise Hebrew accounts we find that Adam was 230 when he begot Seth. Wishing, however, to corrupt the historical account, in order to show that the Messiah has still not come, certain Hebrews have cut off 100 years before the begetting of Seth … And Seth was 205 when he begot Enosh. The Hebrews cut off 100 years from this figure as well … And Enosh was 120 when he begot Kenan. The Hebrews cut off 100 years from this figure as well … And Kenan was 170 when he begot Mahalalel. The Hebrews cut off 100 years from this figure as well … And Mahalalel was 165 when he begot Jared. The Hebrews cut off 100 years from this figure as well … And Jared was 162 when he begot Enoch[60] … And Enoch was 62 when he begot Methuselah.[61] And Enoch pleased God for three-hundred years after he begot Methuselah. And the sum of his years before his transfiguration was 365 years. And Methuselah was 187 when he begot Lamech … And when Lamech was 86 he begot Noah. And Lamech lived after begetting Noah 596 years. The sum of his years was 682. He saw Adam for 31 years. And when Noah was 500 he begot Shem, Ham and Japheth … And after the flood he lived for 450 years. The sum of his years was 1005. The Hebrews cut off 100 years from this figure as well; such that all the years which the Hebrews removed add up to 600. From Adam 100; from Seth 100; from Enosh 100; from Kenan 100; from Mahalalel 100, and from Noah 100. The accusers did this after the ascension of Christ, so

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Jacob used in his version the Septuagintal, rather than the Peshiṭta/Masoretic figures for the patriarchal chronologies (with the exception of Methuselah, where, as we have seen, following the Septuagint would create a major exegetical difficulty).

[55] Salvesen, "Scholarship on the Margins," 332.

[56] Salvesen, "Genesis Texts," 188.

[57] Romeny, "Jacob of Edessa on Genesis," 157.

[58] For a study of the distribution of Jacob's decisions on this question, see A. Juckel, "Septuaginta and Peshitta: Jacob of Edessa quoting the Old Testament in Ms BL Add 17134," *Hugoye* 8 (July 2005). See also Salvesen, "Scholarship on the Margins," 339–340.

[59] See B. ter Haar Romeny, "Ephrem and Jacob of Edessa in the Commentary of the Monk Severus," in G.A. Kiraz (ed.), *Malphono w-Rabo d-Malphone: Studies in Honor of Sebastian P. Brock* (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2008), 535–557, at 543–544.

[60] The two textual branches agree on this figure.

[61] The Masoretic text and the Peshiṭta have age 65; the Septuagint has 165. It is possible that the age of 62 in Jacob is a scribal error, especially in light of the continuation of the text, describing Enoch's transfiguration at age 365, 300 years after he begot Methuselah.

that by means of this corruption (ﺣﺒﺎﻟﻮﺗﺎ) they may contradict the Messiah's coming, claiming that he did not come at the time that was written, and thus, they say, we must deduce that Christ is not the Messiah we expect.[62]

Jacob does not spell out why shortening the age of the world would prove that the Messiah had not yet arrived, but it is clear that the claim rests on the chronographic assumptions discussed above in the context of Pseudo-Zacharias. If the messianic era was thought to begin 6,000 years after creation, according to the Septuagintal figures this era had already arrived – either by the time of Jesus, or by the time of Jacob. Thus, Jacob charges the Jews with deliberately lowering the figures so as to demonstrate that the world is not yet 6,000 years old, and, therefore, the messianic era has not yet arrived.[63]

It is unlikely that Jacob actually found, as he states at the beginning of the passage, any Hebrew manuscripts with higher, "Septuagintal" figures. It makes more sense to understand "Hebrew" here as a code-word for Syriac, in which manuscripts of the Syrohexapla with the higher, Septuagintal figures, were indeed abundantly attested. While there is no reason to think that Jacob did not

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[62] Ms. Vat. Syr. 103, fol. 35r. The first two sentences of this comment can be found (with Latin translation) in J. S. Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis Clementino-Vaticana* (Rome: Sacrae Congregationis de Propaganda Fide, 1719–1728), vol. 1, 65–66. An edition of Jacob's *Commentary* is forthcoming by Dirk Kruisheer. See also Romeny, "Jacob of Edessa on Genesis," 154–156, for a brief discussion of this passage, as well as M. Conterno, "Found in Translation: Agapius, the Septuagint, and the 'Falsified' Torah of the Jews," in M. Conterno and M. Mazzola (eds.), *Intercultural Exchange in Late Antique Historiography* (OLA 290; Leuven: Peeters, forthcoming).

[63] Yet one question remains. Why does Jacob speak of "only" a 600 year discrepancy, taking into account only the antediluvian generations, if the actual difference between the Septuagintal and the Masoretic versions is closer to 1400 years (see the discussion at fn. 13–14 above), including the generations between Noah and Abraham? Perhaps this has to do with the fact that Muhammad lived (and died) some 600 years after Jesus. By attributing precisely 600 years to the "Hebrew" attempt to lower the age of the world, Jacob demonstrates that avoidance of Jesus' messiahship leads to the implicit endorsement of Muhammad's (a conclusion no Jew or Christian could accept)! On Jacob and Islam, see H. G. Teule, "Jacob of Edessa," in D. Thomas and B. Roggema (eds.), *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, vol. 1. *600–900* (HCMR 10; Leiden: Brill, 2009), 226–233; M. P. Penn, *Envisioning Islam: Syrian Christians and the Early Muslim World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 66–69, 145–172. Incidentally, early Islamic authors were not unaware of the millenarian implications of Muhammad's chronographic location. An early tradition, cited by al-Ṭabarī, dated Muhammad to approximately 6500 from creation. See M. J. de Goeje, *Annales quos scripsit Abu Djafar Mohammed ibn Djarir at-Tabari* (15 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 1879–1901), vol. 1, 15; F. Rosenthal, *The History of al-Ṭabarī (Taʾrīkh al-rusul waʾl-mulūk)*, vol. 1. *General Introduction and From the Creation to the Flood* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 183 (see more at fn. 71–72 below). This would seem to accord with the "minority" opinion in early Christian chronology, dating the incarnation to 6000 A.M. See above at fn. 37. See also further below, where al-Ṭabarī cites a Christian calculation, according to which 5,992 years elapsed between Adam and Muhammad. That latter calculation accords with the "majority" opinion, dating the incarnation to 5500 A.M. See above at fn. 36. On another occasion, Jacob states that it is impossible for anyone to know the precise age of the world, and hence all the discrepancies in the different calculations. See F. Nau, "Lettre de Jacques d'Édesse à Jean le Stylite," *ROC* 5 (1900): 581–596, at 584, 589.

The competition within the West Syrian community between advocates of the Peshiṭta, on the one hand, and champions of the Greco-Syriac versions of the Old Testament, on the other, did not die down. Moses bar Kepha (d. 903), writing in Northern Mesopotamia, close to two centuries after Jacob, presents both sides of the debate and hints at the lingering presence of the claim of Jewish falsification within this debate.[67] Bar Kepha writes as follows:

In our Syriac tongue there are two translations of the Old Testament: the one, the Peshiṭta, in which we read, was translated from Hebrew into Syriac. The other, however, is the Seventy, which was translated from Greek into Syriac … Some say that of all translations,[68] the Peshiṭta, having been translated from Hebrew into Syriac, is the correct one. And this, they say, is clear because the Hebrew language is akin to Syriac. Philoxenus of Mabbug[69] says that of all the translations, the Septuagint is the true and correct one. This is proven by the fact that our Lord and his apostles cite testimonies from it in the Gospel and in Acts. And Paul as well cites testimonies from it in his epistles. Further Philoxenus says: Because the Septuagint emerged through the effort of King Ptolemy of Egypt, many years before the appearance of Christ, the Jews have no reason to be envious. But in the rest of the translations many similar passages were corrupted due to the envy of the Jews.[70]

Bar Kepha does not refer to the claim of Jewish textual corruption within the particular context of the patriarchal genealogies. However, more precise knowledge of this claim in Bar Kepha's day is attested in the work of his famed Muslim contemporary, his fellow Iraqi intellectual, Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī

See J. N. Hillgarth, *Sancti Iuliani Toletanae sedis episcopi opera*, part 1 (CCSL 115; Turnhout: Brepols, 1976), 141–212, at 206.

[67] For more on Moses Bar Kepha, see J. Reller, *Mose bar Kepha und seine Paulinenauslegung nebst Edition und Übersetzung des Kommentars zum Römerbrief* (GORS 35; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1994); Y. Moss, "Scholasticism, Exegesis, and the Historicization of Mosaic Authorship in Moses bar Kepha's *On Paradise*," *HTR* 104 (2011): 325–348; J. F. Coakley, "Mushe bar Kipho," in *GEDSH*, 300.

[68] Bar Kepha speaks of "all translations" even though here he mentions only two Syriac translations, because earlier he had discussed the other Greek translations of the Old Testament: Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion.

[69] Philoxenus of Mabbug (ca. 450–523) was an early and highly influential anti-Chalcedonian leader. Bar Kepha quotes from him often. I have not been able to track down the source of this citation, but it is in keeping with what we know about Philoxenus' activities in biblical scholarship. He sponsored a new, more accurate translation of the New Testament and probably also commissioned translations of certain books of the Septuagint of which fragments survive (see S. P. Brock, "Greek, Syriac translations from," in *GEDSH*, 180).

[70] L. Schlimme, *Der Hexaemeronkommentar des Moses bar Kepha* (2 vols.; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1977), 1.172–173, on the basis of ms. Paris, Bibl. Nat. Syr. 241, 27v–28r. Compare the parallel in G. Diettrich, *Eine jakobitische Einleitung in den Psalter* (Giessen: J. Ricker, 1901), 113–114, based on the slightly defective ms. Harris 65, plus the lacuna at the end supplied in the Mosul manuscript, ms. Vatican Syr. 508, as recorded in J. M. Vosté, "L'Introduction de Mose bar Kepa aux Psaumes de David," *RB* 38 (1929): 214–228, at 227. This passage has enjoyed a degree of fame among biblical scholars because it contains the first known reference to the Peshiṭta by that name. See S. P. Brock, "Peshitta," in *GEDSH*, 326–331, at 326.

(d. 923).[71] The latter's *History* presents a discrepancy between, on the one hand, Jewish calculations, based on the Torah "they possess today," of the time from Adam to Muhammad, as adding up to 4,642 years, and, on the other hand, the reckoning of "the Greek Christians," according to "the sequence (*siyāq*) of the Torah which is in their hands," which leads to 5,992 years.[72] Al-Ṭabarī attributes to these Christians the explanation for the discrepancy as resulting "from the fact that the Jews rejected the prophethood of Jesus, the son of Mary, since (for them) his description and the time of his being sent are firmly established in the Torah …(and that time) has not yet come."

Al-Ṭabarī's designation "Greek Christians" should not necessarily be understood as referring to Melkite Christians per se.[73] The force of his assertion is in the biblical text involved. It is upon the Greek version of the Torah (or, for that matter, the Greco-Syriac version), rather than the Syriac Peshiṭta, that the Christian claim of Jewish rejection is based.

Our first external reference to the particular group of Christians that made this claim is to be found in R. Saadia Gaon's *Commentary on Daniel*, written about ten years after al-Ṭabarī's death.[74] As we shall see, Saadia's rebuttal of the Christian charge of Jewish falsification does not mention Jacob of Edessa or the West Syrian community by name, but it includes certain elements that are only relevant to that particular Christian community.

Perversion of the Perversion: Saadia Gaon

Universally recognized for his revolutionary role in the "shaping of medieval Jewish culture,"[75] Saadia Gaon has been demonstrated to have engaged repeatedly with various Christian sources and arguments circulating in his day.[76] While

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[71] For more on the connection between Bar Kepha and al-Tabari, see Moss, "Scholasticism," 334, 346–347.

[72] De Goeje, *Annales*, 16–17; Rosenthal, *History of al-Ṭabarī*, 184–185. Note the millenarian implications of the date of Muhammad according to al-Tabari's attribution to the Christians. See above, fn. 63. For more on Syriac chronographic readjustments of eschatological calculations in light of Islam, consult F. J. Martinez, *Eastern Christian Apocalyptic in the Early Muslim Period: Pseudo-Methodius and Pseudo-Athanasius* (Ph.D. Dissertation, The Catholic University of America, Washington, 1985), 185–186.

[73] See R. Steiner, *A Biblical Translation in the Making: The Evolution and Impact of Saadia Gaon's* Tafsir (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Center for Jewish Studies, 2010), 62.

[74] On the date of Saadia's *Commentary on Daniel*, see H. Malter, *Saadia Gaon: His Life and Works* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1921).

[75] See R. Brody, *The Geonim of Babylonia and the Shaping of Medieval Jewish Culture* (Expanded ed.; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 235–248.

[76] Besides a series of explicit, polemical engagements with Christianity, discussed in D. J. Lasker, "Saadya Gaon on Christianity and Islam," in D. Frank (ed.), *The Jews of Medieval Islam: Community, Society and Identity* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 165–178 and E. Schlossberg, "The

many of the links between Saadia and these surrounding cultural currents are not explicitly indicated by Saadia himself, there are several cases where he directly signals that he is engaging with contemporary Christian claims. One such case concerns the question of the conflicting versions of Genesis 5.

In his commentary on the book of Daniel, Saadia polemicizes against the Christological interpretation of the Seventy Weeks prophecy in Daniel 9.24–27.[77] He accuses the Christians of tampering with biblical chronology in order to accommodate their interpretation of the passage in Daniel and relates that the Christians made similar accusations against the Jews.[78] He then goes on to write:

> They did the same concerning the chronology of Genesis. In fact, they learned by hearing that the Messiah comes in the fifth millennium from creation. Yet, when they counted, they found the existence of their master in the fourth millennium, [so] they added one thousand years to the chronology so that he would be in the fifth millennium. We examined them[79] and found that they state that Adam lived two hundred thirty years before the birth of Seth. Then [Seth] lived two hundred and five years before the birth of Enosh … In such a way, they add close to one thousand years from Adam to the flood. Worse than that, they claim against us, that it is we who deducted [the numbers] out of prejudice against their master … Stranger than this, however, is that the chronology of the copies of the Torah that they have is the same as the chronology we have. Nonetheless, they claim that they found a copy with this chronology in the coffer of the wicked Ptolemy that different scribes had

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Polemic of R. Se'adyā Gaon against Christianity," in J. Blau and D. Doron (eds.), *Heritage and Innovation in Medieval Judaeo-Arabic Culture* (Ramat-Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 2000), 243–262 (in Hebrew), see also Saadia's covert debt to Christian sources, as demonstrated in Y. Moss, "Fish eats Lion eats Man: Saadia Gaon, Syriac Christianity and the Resurrection of the Dead," *JQR* 104 (2016): 494–520.

[77] For a study of Saadia's polemic on this matter, see E. Schlossberg, "The Character and Exegetical Goal of the Commentary of Rav Saadia Gaon to the Book of Daniel," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 56 (1990): 5–15 (in Hebrew); R. Chazan, "Daniel 9:24–27: Exegesis and Polemics," in O. Limor and G. G. Stroumsa (eds.), *Contra Iudaeos: Ancient and Medieval Polemics between Christians and Jews* (TSMEMJ 10; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996), 143–159, at 146–152. See also, at greater length, E. Schlossberg, *Concepts and Methods in the Commentary of R. Saadia Gaon on Daniel* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Bar Ilan University, Ramat Gan, 1988), 290–350 (in Hebrew).

[78] See also Saadia Gaon, *Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, 8.9 (ed. with Hebrew trans. J. Kafih, *Kitāb al-mukhtār fī al-amānāt wal-iʿtiqādāt* [New York and Jerusalem: Sura, 1970], 257–260; trans. S. Rosenblatt, *Saadia Gaon: The Book of Beliefs and Opinions* [YJS 1; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948], 319–322).

[79] The Arabic is *istaqrīnāhim*. Thus according to J. Alobaidi, *The Book of Daniel: The Commentary of R. Saadia Gaon* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2006), 343. Joseph Kafih (*Daniel with the Translation and Commentary of Saadia Gaon* [Jerusalem: Dror, 1981], 178) erroneously gives *istaqdīnāhim*. See the correction in J. Blau, *A Dictionary of Medieval Judaeo-Arabic Texts* (Jerusalem: The Academy of the Hebrew Language; The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 2006), 537, s. v. *qr'*. Alobaidi, *Book of Daniel*, 603, translates "we inquired about them", but the verb's pronominal suffix would seem to indicate a direct object, rather than an indirect one. The natural referent is the subject of the previous sentence "the Christians." In other words, this verb seems to affirm Saadia's direct contact with Christian informants.

transmitted.[80] However, they do not correct their copies according to its contents. They are truly blind in what they claim.[81]

Saadia's discussion here can be broken down into three components, all of which reflect first-hand knowledge of contemporary Christianity.[82] Firstly, Saadia's knowledge of the two versions of Genesis 5 and the discrepancy between them is accurate. Although earlier rabbinic sources discuss several other discrepancies between the Septuagint and the Masoretic versions, they display no awareness of the genealogical differences in the ages of the antediluvian patriarchs.[83] Secondly, while not mentioning the name of Jacob of Edessa, Saadia correctly cites his accusation of Jewish perversion. We need not assume that he learned of it directly from Jacob's writings, but the third component of Saadia's discussion, his response to the Christian claim of perversion, is best understood if we postulate that Saadia did indeed encounter this claim in, or from, a source hailing from Jacob of Edessa's West Syrian tradition. For, only in this manner can we make sense of Saadia's line of attack. In addition to reflecting the charge of falsification back at the Christians – a reasonable tactic in the case of any discrepancy ("it is not we who changed the original, as you claim, but you who did so!"),[84] Saadia accuses them of inconsistency. While, on the one hand, accusing the Jews of perversion on the basis of the Septuagintal version ("Ptolemy's copy"), the Christians still continue to use another version which has the same figures as the Jewish one – in other words, the Peshiṭta!

Saadia's charge of inconsistency fits best if it refers to the West Syrians. No other Christian group in Saadia's day was as "promiscuous" in its equal reliance on *both* the Septuagintal *and* the Masoretic versions. The Melkites tended to use the Septuagintal branch, and the East Syrians relied exclusively on the Peshiṭta. Only the West Syrians were consistent in their inconsistency.[85] While there is no

[80] Thus according to Alobaidi's translation. Kafih opts for "without the copyists having copied it." The difference hinges on two meanings of *ghayr*.

[81] Alobaidi, *The Book of Daniel*, 343 (Jud.-Ar.), 603–604 (trans.). See also the earlier edition and Hebrew translation by Kafih, *Daniel with the Translation and Commentary of Saadia Gaon*, 177–178. Note that Schlossberg, "Polemic," 261–262, discusses this passage and adduces a parallel in Al-Biruni, but he is not cognizant of the septuagintal textual and contemporary Christian polemic background of this claim.

[82] See Schlossberg, "Polemic," 261–262, and *Concepts*, 349–350, which deal with this passage but do not identify its Christian referent.

[83] See above at fn. 16.

[84] The same argument was made 920 years after Saadia by none other than the famed nineteenth-century German-Jewish historian Heinrich Graetz. He does not cite, and presumably did not know, what Saadia had to say on the matter. See H. Graetz, "Fälschungen in dem Texte der Septuaginta von christlicher Hand zur dogmatischen Zwecken," *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 2 (1853): 432–436.

[85] See R. Vollandt, *Arabic Versions of the Pentateuch: A Comparative Study of Jewish, Christian and Muslim Sources* (Biblia Arabica 2; Leiden: Brill, 2015), 135. Steiner, *A Biblical Translation*, 62–63, correctly deduces that Saadia cannot be referring here to the East Syrians, loyal adherents of the Peshiṭta, but he proposes the Melkites as the target of Saadia's polemic. Yet, while

a priori reason to assume that Saadia limited his contacts with Christians to one particular group, it seems that in this case he is polemicizing against the West Syrians *per se*.

This particular identification of Saadia's target is supported by the evidence presented earlier in this article indicating that the portrayal of Masoretic chronology as stemming from anti-Christological calculations originated in inner West Syrian polemics about the relative values of the two Biblical versions available in their community.

It should be noted, however, that the West Syrian origin of the claim does not preclude its secondary uses by other Christian communities. This is precisely what happened a decade or two after Saadia's engagement with the charge, when we find a similar claim documented in the *Universal History* by the Melkite author Agapius (or Maḥbūb) of Mabbug.[86] According to Agapius' telling, it was emperor Constantine who first uncovered the Jewish abbreviations of the ages of the antediluvian patriarchs.[87] This falsification was introduced by the Jewish high priests Ananias and Caiaphas after Jesus' resurrection in order to "deny the advent of the Messiah."[88]

While Agapius must have borrowed the basic structure of this story from Jacob of Edessa, he puts it to different use.[89] Whereas for Jacob it serves as an argument

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the Melkites could (and subsequently did, as we will see) explain the discrepancy between their Septuagintal and the Masoretic versions as the result of Jewish tampering, Saadia's charge of inconsistency fits the West Syrians better. There is evidence from close to the time of Saadia that the East Syrians generally supported the "Jewish" chronology, as the Peshiṭta would require. In his commentary on Gen. 2:2 (God's rest on the seventh day), Ishoʻdad of Merv indicates that the seventh millennium has not yet begun (i.e., that one has not yet reached the year 6000 A.M.), but he also says that others believe that the millennial period will only begin in the year 7000 A.M. See J.M. Vosté and C. Van den Eynde (eds.), *Commentaire d'Išoʻdad de Merv sur l'Ancien Testament*, vol. 1. *Genèse* (CSCO 126; Louvain: L. Durbecq, 1950), 51. This latter option could be pointing to the West Syrian position. See also Witakowski, "The Idea," 106–107.

[86] On the dating of Agapius' *Universal History* (composed in Arabic) to between 942–956, see M.N. Swanson, "Maḥbūb ibn Qusṭanṭīn al-Manbijī," in D. Thomas, B. Roggema, and J.P. Monferrer Sala (eds.), *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, vol. 2. *900–1050* (HCMR 11; Leiden: Brill, 2010), 241–245, at 241. For a recent treatment of this passage, see J.C. Lamoreaux, "Agapius of Manbij," in S. Noble and A. Treiger (eds.), *The Orthodox Church in the Arab World (700–1700): An Anthology of Sources* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2014), 139–140. And see further A. Treiger, "From Theodore Abū Qurra to Abed Azrié: The Arabic Bible in Context," in M.L. Hjälm (ed.), *Senses of Scripture, Treasures of Tradition: The Bible in Arabic among Jews, Christians and Muslims* (Biblia Arabica 5; Leiden: Brill, 2017), 11–57, at 21–27.

[87] A.A. Vasiliev, *Kitab al-ʻunvan. Histoire universelle écrite par Agapius (Mahboub) de Menbidj*, vol. I.1 (PO 5; Paris: Firnim-Didot, 1910), 646.

[88] Vasiliev, *Kitab al-ʻunvan*, 581, 646.

[89] On the vexed question of Agapius's chronographic sources, see A. Hilkens, "Andronicus et son influence sur la présentation de l'histoire postdiluvienne et pré-abrahamique dans la Chronique syriaque anonyme jusqu'à l'année 1234," in P. Blaudeau and P. Van Nuffelen (eds.), *L'historiographie tardo-antique et la transmission des saviors* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 55–81. Another hint of this debate in a Melkite source can be found in the *Book of Master and Disciple*,

for the importance of the Septuagintal version *alongside* the Syriac, for Agapius it functions as a battering ram against the Peshiṭta and the two major communities, his competitors, as well as, perhaps, elements within his own community, that use that version in their liturgy. He writes:

Thus, nowadays the Christians in the East and in the West do not know the reason for the discrepancy between the Greek Torah, translated by the Seventy, and the Syriac Torah, based on the corrupted, diminished, Hebrew text. And all the Christians read it in their churches.[90]

Agapius extends the thrust of Jacob of Edessa's argument to its logical conclusion. If the Syriac version is based on a corrupt Hebrew text it should be rejected altogether. Only the Septuagint can be trusted as reflective of the original Old Testament. The Christian communities "in the East and in the West," who "read the Syriac Bible in their churches" – in other words the East Syrians and the West Syrians who use the Peshiṭta – are equally inferior to the one community, the Melkite one, that relies solely on the Septuagint.[91]

Be Agapius' inner-Christian polemic as it may, it appears that Saadia did not have Melkite Christians like Agapius in mind in his own apologetic polemic against the Christian charge of falsification. Besides the fact that Saadia wrote at least ten years before Agapius, Saadia's claim of Christian inconsistency makes best sense, as I have argued, if read as referring to West Syrians.

Conclusion: Jacob of Edessa and Saadia Gaon Explaining Each Other

At the beginning of this article I stated that the fact that Jews in the geonic period began writing texts in the same literary genres as their Christian neighbors facilitates reading them in conversation with each other. It is no coincidence that Jacob and Saadia each develop their comparative chronographic and textual discussions within their respective biblical commentaries. The commentary's sequential and "rationalized" treatment of the biblical text, formulated in

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attributed to Thaddeus of Edessa, but which was probably written by Theodore Abū Qurra in ca. 810, as demonstrated recently by Alexander Treiger. In this treatise reference is made to the difference between the 5,500 years until Christ, according to "us" vs. the Jewish 4,000–year figure. As far as I can tell there is no discussion there of the Genesis figures. See A. Treiger, "New Works by Theodore Abū Qurra Preserved under the Name of Thaddeus of Edessa," *JEastCS* 68 (2016): 1–51, at 6–8.

[90] Agapius, *Kitab al-ʿunvan*, 659.

[91] See, however, Conterno, "Found in Translation," as well as M. L. Hjälm, "Between Hebraica Veritas, Graeca Veritas and Taḥrīf: Exegetical Strategies in Early Rūm Orthodox Polemic Tracts" (Forthcoming) who both put more stress on Agapius's inner Melkite polemical concerns here.

accessible, non-technical language, encourages precisely the kind of compara-
tive, exegetical question Jacob and Saadia ask about the genealogies of Gn 5.[92]

However, while both men wrote biblical commentaries on numerous books of
the Bible, Jacob did so as part of a long tradition of Christian literary production.
Saadia's employment of the genre was, by contrast, a fresh development in Jewish
literary production, largely spearheaded by Saadia himself.[93] This development
is to be understood within the context of Saadia's more general religio-cultural
project of "rationalizing" rabbinic literature in light of the Hellenistic, and par-
ticularly Aristotelian, philosophical and scientific modes of discourse that were
popular among Christians, Muslims, and Jews of his day.[94]

This broader context can help explain how Saadia might have come to be
exposed in the first place to the Christian charge of textual falsification. While
there is no reason to suppose that Saadia would have limited his contacts with
Christians to a specific community, it does stand to reason that his "rationaliza-
tion" project would have made him particularly interested in the West Syrian
Church.[95] For, among the different Christian communities within the Islamic
world, it was this Church that was historically identified with the preservation of
Greek learning.[96] It would make sense that Saadia was exposed to the charge of
textual falsification through his contacts with the West Syrian community, since
it was in that community, as I have argued, that this claim was first developed
and where it continued to be primarily located.

In sum, Saadia's engagement of a claim documented in Jacob of Edessa has
helped us pinpoint and clarify the specific, West Syrian context of Jacob's claim.

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[92] For the meaning and place of the category "rationalization" in religious culture, see, most
recently, Y. Friedmann and C. Markschies (eds.), *Rationalization and Religions* (Berlin: De
Gruyter, 2019).

[93] See R. Drory, *Models and Contacts: Medieval Arabic Literature and Its Impact on Jewish
Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 2000); Brody, *Geonim*, 241–244, 312–315; S. Stroumsa, "Prolegom-
ena as Historical Evidence: On Saadia's Introductions to his Commentaries on the Bible," in
C. Fraenkel et al. (eds.), *Vehicles of Transmission, Translation, and Transformation in Medieval
Textual Culture* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), 129–142.

[94] See I. Heinemann, "Rabbi Saadia Gaon's Rationalism," in J. L. Fishman (ed.), *Rav Saadia
Gaon* (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1942), 191–240 (in Hebrew).

[95] See Moss, "Fish eats Lion eats Man," 518–520.

[96] See J. W. Watt, "From Sergius to Mattā: Aristotle and Pseudo-Dionysius in the Syriac Tradi-
tion," in J. Lössl and J. W. Watt (eds.), *Interpreting the Bible and Aristotle in Late Antiquity: The
Alexandrian Commentary Tradition between Rome and Baghdad* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2011),
250–251; D. King, "Why Were the Syrians Interested in Greek Philosophy?," in P. Wood (ed.),
History and Identity in the Late Antique Near East (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013),
61–82. This is not of course to say that by the time of the Abbasid period the other Christian
communities were not also robustly involved in Greek learning, but the West Syriac tradition
was still then considered the traditional storehouse of Greek wisdom. See J. W. Watt, "Les pères
grecs dans la curriculum théologique et philologique des écoles syriaques," in A. Schmidt and
D. Gonnet (eds.), *Les pères grecs dans la tradition syriaque* (ÉS 4; Paris: Geuthner, 2007), 27–41,
at 37–38.

Saadia's identification of the inconsistency of this claim within the West Syrian context highlights the likelihood that the claim was first employed by Jacob in the service of internal West Syrian polemics. At the same time, the presence of this claim in Jacob and other West Syrian sources has enabled us to better understand the nature of Saadia's encounter with Christianity. Saadia was especially interested in West Syrian intellectual culture, due to its particularly robust preservation and development of the Hellenistic tradition.[97] Reading between the lines of his polemical language, we realize just how intently Saadia was listening to his Christian neighbors.

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[97] This conclusion accords with my findings in Moss, "Fish eats Lion eats Man," that Saadia drew, either directly or indirectly, on the West Syrian authors John of Dara and Moses bar Kepha in his discussions concerning the resurrection of the dead.

Hebrew and Syriac Liturgical Poetry

A Comparative Outlook

Ophir Münz-Manor

The characteristics held in common by the corpora of Jewish and Christian liturgical poetry, which were created in the eastern Byzantine Empire during the late antique period, have not received the scholarly attention that they deserve.[1] The poetic corpora of these two cultures were both composed in closely related Semitic Languages, within an integrated geo-cultural space, and within similar performative contexts, and they share a great number of similarities – stylistic, thematic, and liturgical. These connections should be seen in light of the active religious-cultural interchange that took place during this period[2] and in particular in light of the variegated connections between Syriac Christians and Jews,[3] since the overwhelming majority of the poems that I will be discussing belong to these two cultures.[4]

In what follows I elaborate on these connections by examining several texts that were composed by Jewish and Christian poets beginning in the fourth

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[1] For a detailed presentation of the history of the comparative study of Late Antique liturgical poetry, see O. Münz-Manor, "Liturgical Poetry in the Late Antique Near East – A Comparative Approach," *JAJ* 1 (2010): 341–345.

[2] See, for example, G. Bowersock, *Mosaics as History: The Near East From Late Antiquity to Islam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006); D. Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); G. Hasan-Rokem, *Tales of the Neighbourhood: Jewish Narrative Dialogues in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

[3] See H. J. W. Drijvers, "Syrian Christianity and Judaism," in J. Lieu et al. (eds.), *The Jews Among Pagans and Christians in the Roman Empire* (London: Routledge, 1992), 124–146; idem, "Jews and Christians at Edessa," *JJS* 36 (1985): 88–102. For the historical background in Palestine, see H. Sivan, *Palestine in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[4] See J. Neusner, *Aphrahat and Judaism: The Christian-Jewish Argument in Fourth-Century Iran* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999). For an up-to-date discussion of Aphrahat and the Jews, see A. H. Becker, "Anti-Judaism and Care for the Poor in Aphrahat's Demonstration 20," *JECS* 10 (2002): 305–327. See also S. P. Brock, "Jewish Traditions in Syriac Sources," *JJS* 30 (1979): 212–232; idem, "Some Syriac Legends Concerning Moses," *JJS* 33 (1982): 237–255; idem, "A Palestinian Targum Feature in Syriac," *JJS* 46 (1995): 271–282; B. L. Visotzky, "Three Syriac Cruxes," *JJS* 42 (1991): 167–175; G. Rouwhorst, "Jewish Liturgical Traditions in Early Syriac Christianity," *VC* 51 (1997): 72–93; idem, "Liturgical Time and Space in Early Christianity in Light of Their Jewish Background," in A. Houtman et al. (eds.), *Sanctity of Time and Space* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 265–284.

century.[5] I first highlight the poetic and prosodic similarities between the He-
brew, Jewish Palestinian Aramaic, and Syriac poems and then I continue with
three cases studies in which thematic and liturgical aspects are compared.

It is no secret that liturgical texts are often underplayed in historical discus-
sion of Judaism and Christianity in Late Antiquity. Liturgical texts are usually
discussed in the context of theology and exegesis as if they were versified ver-
sions of rabbinic or patristic writings. However, scholars are increasingly aware
today of the significant and independent role liturgy played in the formation of
the self and communal identities of many Christians and Jews, especially the lay
or unlettered, and of the pivotal role of poetry in the liturgical context.[6] Liturgy
offers us a gateway to one of the central places where these identities were shaped
in practice; considering liturgy will broaden our perspective and give us a better
understanding of these processes.

Similarity in Poetic Technique between Poems

The relationship between Jewish and Christian liturgical poetry from the late
antique period is grounded in a similarity in poetic technique between a great
number of poems, regardless of the contents of the poems or their respective li-
turgical functions. Thus, the poems were selected solely on account of the formal
and stylistic similarities between them and not on account of their respective
contents, and it would be easy to replace any one of these poems by many tens
of others that are available to us.

The first poem, dedicated to a description of the death of Moses, was written
in Jewish Palestinian Aramaic. The following are the first four lines of the poem:

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[5] The poems of Ephrem, the great Syriac poety, as well as those of Marqa, the pivotal Samari-
tan sage, were composed in the fourth century. For an overview of their work, see A. Rodrigues-
Pereira, *Studies in Aramaic Poetry (C. 100 B. C. E.–C. 600 C. E.): Selected Jewish, Christian, and
Samaritan Poems* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1997), 110–271. The first Jewish poet known to us by
name is Yose ben Yose, who was active during the fifth century and composed in Hebrew. The
scholarly consensus, however, is that his compositions bring to a close the first developmental
stage of Hebrew liturgical poetry (*piyyut*), which dates to the fourth century. See E. Fleischer,
"Piyyut," in Sh. Safrai et al. (eds.), *The Literature of the Sages, Second Part* (Assen: Fortress
Press, 2006), 363–374.
[6] See, for example, S. A. Harvey, "Spoken Words, Voiced Silence: Biblical Women in Syriac
Tradition," *JECS* 9 (2001): 105–31; G. Frank, "Romanos and the Night Vigil in the Sixth Cen-
tury," in D. Krueger (ed.), *A People's History of Christianity*, vol. 3 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press,
2006), 59–80; D. Krueger, "Romanos the Melodist and the Christian Self in Early Byzantium,"
in E. Jeffreys (eds.), *Proceedings of the 21st International Congress of Byzantine Studies,* vol. 1.
Plenary Papers (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2006), 255–76; O. Münz-Manor and T. Arent-
zen, "Soundscapes of Salvation: Resounding Refrains in Jewish and Christian Liturgical Poems,"
SLA 3 (2019): 36–55.

A cry went out / throughout the land / at the time of the death / of Moses the Prophet
The River Nile / mourned for him, / "The man whom I raised / from his youth!"
All Israel's tribes / wailed and cried / like flocks in the steppe / with no shepherd
Shedding tears / the House of Israel say, / "Who will give us / a man like Moses?"[7]

A number of characteristics, which I would like to describe, are clearly recognizable here. From the formal point of view, we should note the use of an alphabetic acrostic and the tetrastichic structure of the poetic lines. The style of the poem is narrative-descriptive, namely it describes an entire episodic unit in a consecutive manner, while considerably expanding the scriptural source. Alongside the voice of the narrator of the poem, which provides its main developmental outline, are inserted direct speech from various personages, in the present case those of the Nile in the second line and Israel in the fourth.

The following lines are taken from a Syriac poem that describes the encounter between Joseph and Benjamin (as narrated in Genesis 44–45):

O brothers, have you never seen / two brothers seated / speaking one with another / one not knowing the other?
I wonder at you, youth / how bitter is your soul / how straitened your heart / how free-flowing your tears!
I'll confide in you, my lord the king, / the great sorrow that's mine / that the light of Joseph's eyes / burns within me without end.[8]

In the first line, the narrator of the poem addresses his audience in a kind of introduction, laying out before them the dramatic situation. From this point onwards, the poem describes, in alternating lines of direct speech, the dialogic exchange between the brothers. Only at the end of the poem, which is not given here, is the voice of the narrator heard once more. The narrative dimension is present here as in the Jewish Aramaic poem that I quoted above, together with the interweaving of the different voices. From the formal perspective, the Syriac poem also employs an alphabetic acrostic together with a tetrastichic line. These formal characteristics are likewise present in the following example from Hebrew poetry, taken from the beginning of one of the early *Seder Avodah* for Yom Kippur:[9]

You established / the world from the beginning
    You founded the earth / and formed creatures
When You surveyed the world / of chaos and confusion
    You banished gloom / and put light in place

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[7] The Aramaic text is found in J. Yahalom and M. Sokoloff, *Jewish Palestinian Aramaic Poetry from Late Antiquity, Critical Edition with Introduction and Commentary* (Jerusalem: ha-Aqademyah ha-le'umit ha-Yiśre'elit le-mada'im, 1999), 244–245 (in Hebrew).

[8] The Syriac text is found in S. P. Brock, *Sughyotha Mgabyotho* (Glane: St Ephrem der Syrer Kloster, 1982), 15.

[9] See M. Swartz and J. Yahalom, *Avodah: An Anthology of Ancient Poetry for Yom Kippur* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), 1–42.

You formed from the earth / a lump of soil in Your image
    and commanded him / concerning the tree of life
He forsook Your word / and he was forsaken from Eden
    but you did not destroy him / for the sake of the work of your hands.[10]

Beyond the by-now familiar structural aspects that are attested in this poem, it is important to once again note the outstanding narrative dimension of the composition, which describes the history of the world from the time of its creation by means of a re-working of the scriptural story.

I mentioned above in passing the use of alphabetic acrostic and the similar partition of the poetic line, and it is worthwhile to elaborate more on these two matters. As is well known, the acrostic principle is attested already in the Bible, including the Peshiṭṭa, whereas its use in the Ancient Near East is rare.[11] There is no doubt that biblical acrostics served as a model for the late antique poets when they decided to employ this structural device. This, however, is not sufficient to explain the *renaissance* experienced by acrostics in Christian and Jewish poetry that was composed in Semitic languages starting with the fourth century CE. In other words, the existence of the ancient source in itself cannot explain how, after hundreds of years during which it was almost entirely out of use, the alphabetic acrostic became an obligatory device in the poetic traditions of both Christian as well as Jewish poets. Since we do not possess handbooks on poetics that are contemporaneous with the compositions – whether because these have been lost, or were transmitted by oral tradition – it is very difficult to determine how precisely this poetics was formulated, and how it was diffused among the poets.[12]

A similar picture emerges from an investigation of the structure of the poetic lines, together with their rhythmic organization. Here, too, there exists a fundamental principle that unites the different poetic corpora, a principle that reflects a true poetic revolution. In ancient Semitic poetry, and in this context it is biblical poetry that is of primary importance, there exists only one principle

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[10] The Hebrew text and English translation are found in Swartz and Yahalom, *Avodah*, 70–71.

[11] In the Hebrew Bible, the alphabetic acrostic is attested, for example, in Psalm 119, Proverbs 31, and Lamentations 1–4. In the Peshiṭṭa the acrostic is retained only in Lamentations. In the Greek Septuagint only the fact that the Hebrew original contains an acrostic is indicated. For this whole matter, see D. Krueger, *Writing and Holiness: The Practice of Authorship in the Early Christian East* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 169–174. For the broader Ancient Near East context, see J. Brug, "Near Eastern Acrostics and Biblical Acrostics – Biblical Acrostics and Their Relationship to Other Ancient Near Eastern Acrostics," *Paper presented at the NEH Seminar: The Bible And Near Eastern Literature* (New Haven: Yale, 1997) [http://www.wlsessays.net/files/BrugAcrostics.pdf]. For this device in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, see R. Marcus, "Alphabetic Acrostics in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods," *JNES* 6 (1947): 109–115.

[12] On later Syriac manual of poetics, see J. Watt, "Antony of Tagrit as a Student of Syriac Poetry," *Le Muséon* 98 (1985): 261–279.

for the organization of the poetic line: parallelism.[13] Every line of biblical poetry is built symmetrically, but there is no regularity either in the number of stichs in every line or in the length of the lines. As opposed to Classical Greek poetry (and Latin Poetry in its wake), in which every poetic line is subject to a basic, unified metrical pattern, there is no such system either in biblical poetry, or in other poetic corpora from the Ancient Near East. At the most, it is possible to identify some sort of regularity in them – in the number of stresses, syllables or other units – a regularity that is not obligatory, and in any case is not systematic. In contrast, in the poems with which I am concerned here, one notes an insistence on a regular, primarily four-part, division of the poetic line in its entirety. The rise of this obligatory principle in the poetic corpora discussed here cannot be explained as an accident either, in particular on account of the fact that, as mentioned above, before us is a revolutionary innovation in the history of poetry composed in Semitic languages. The later poets instituted another great innovation: the counting of units that are precisely defined (to one degree or another), which are repeated in all of the lines of the poem and serve to organize them from beginning to end. Indeed, in every one of the branches of the poetic tradition the poets counted different units. For example, the Syriac poets counted syllables, in most cases twelve or fourteen syllables in every line.[14] In Jewish and Samaritan poetry from the fourth and fifth centuries the reigning principle was "the four-part rhythm" (*miqtzav meruba'*), as it is termed in the scholarly literature. This "meter" counted accented words, according to a division of two main stresses in every one of the four stichs.[15] The counting principle is also preserved in the "metrical" system known as "word meter" (*mishqal ha-teivot*), which is known from a limited number of Hebrew poems (for an example, see below). The "word meter" stipulates a fixed number of words in every line. From the point of view of rhythm, this is a loose "meter" indeed, since in it a very short and a very long word are reckoned as being equivalent for purposes of the word count. However, it is precisely this fact that underscores the principle underlying the system that is at work in the poetry of the late antique period: the specification of a basic number of units that undergirds all of the lines of the

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[13] Regarding biblical poetry, see J. Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and Its History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981).

[14] For meter in Syriac poetry, see S. P. Brock, *St. Ephrem the Syrian, Hymns on Paradise* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1990), 36–39. It should be pointed out that, because of the insistence on a four-part structure of the basic poetic unit, the metrical organisation of the line frequently looks as follows: 7 + 7 / 7 + 7.

[15] From the strictly prosodic point of view, this is not a precise meter, but despite this, the poet did count a fixed number of units in every line. In later stages, around the sixth and seventh centuries, Hebrew poetry switched to a freer stress meter, though care was taken to impose the pattern throughout the whole composition (or, occasionally, within every one of its parts). For meter in ancient Hebrew poetry, see B. Harshav, *The History of Hebrew Versification from the Bible to Modernism* (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 2008), 41–55.

poem. In this regard, therefore, by instituting a fixed number of countable units in every line of a given poem, the eastern poets approached their colleagues composing in Greek and Latin, who continued to employ quantitative meters. It is interesting to note that evidence of a sort for the possibility that Syriac poetry adopted its meters from Greek poetry may be obtainable from a short notice by the fifth-century Christian historiographer Sozomen, though there are those who doubt the veracity of this tradition.[16] Be that as it may, the fact that poetry composed in Semitic languages beginning from the late antique period adopted an innovative structural-rhythmic principle is additional proof of my contention regarding the existence of a shared poetic tradition.

Even from this cursory investigation of the most basic level of composition together with general literary characteristics we learn of the existence of a common poetic foundation that is revealed in a sizeable number of poems.

The Dispute between Body and Soul

Theological discussion concerning the relationship between body and soul abound in patristic and rabbinic writings from Late Antiquity. Most of these discussions have a distinct scholarly nature and were intended for a limited audience, consisting primarily of learned men. In contrast, presentations of the relationship between body and soul in contemporary liturgical compositions, written mainly in verse, were overall less scholarly and aimed at a much more diverse audience. In the context of liturgy, the theological concern was presented many times by means of a dispute poem that portrays a debate between body and soul each of whom tries to convict the other of responsibility for a person's sins. Each side in the dispute addresses its opponent (and at times also God) and brings proofs and arguments that exemplify its own innocence and the other's guilt.[17]

The poems, Jewish and Christian alike, share the same verdict: Both body and soul are responsible for sins, and both should be punished. Scholars of eastern Christianity are well aware of Syriac dispute poems, including disputes between body and soul, but interestingly similar texts on this theme are also known from Jewish literature, a fact that has gone almost completely unnoticed.[18] Some of the

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[16] H. J. W. Drijvers, *Bardaisan of Edessa* (Assen: Van Gorcum & Comp, 1966), 180–182; Brock, *Paradise*, 37.

[17] The roots of the poetic dispute genre go back to ancient Mesopotamian, particularly Sumerian and Akkadian, literature. On that see S. P. Brock, "The Dispute Between Soul and Body: An Example of a Long-Lived Mesopotamian Literary Genre," *ARAM* 1 (1989): 53–64; idem, "The Dispute Poem: From Sumer to Syriac," *JCSSS* 1 (2001): 3–10.

[18] See, for example, S. P. Brock, "Tales of Two Beloved Brothers: Syriac Dialogues Between Body and Soul," in L. S. B. MacCoull (ed.), *Studies in the Christian East in Memory of Mirrit Boutros Ghali* (Publications of the Society for Coptic Archaeology, North America 1;

Jewish poetic disputes between body and soul have been known for years while new texts have been reconstructed in recent years from manuscripts of the Cairo *Genizah*, and these findings shed new light on the subject matter.[19]

The first mention of a dispute between body and soul in verse appears briefly in the fourth century in Ephrem the Syrian's *Hymns on Nisibis*:

Body and Soul go to court
to see which caused the other to sin
The wrong belongs to both for free will belongs to both. (69.5)[20]

Several key features of the poetic disputes that are examined here are present already in this brief couplet: The explicit mention of body and soul (*paḡrā* and *nap̄šā*), the usage of trial vocabulary (here *dwn* 'to judge') and the notion that both are culpable. From the prosodic viewpoint, we notice here the quadruple division of the couplet and the use of syllabic meter, which characterizes Syriac poetry in this period. Later Syriac poets elaborated on the body and soul dispute and depicted it in many details. This is found, for example, in the opening and concluding couplets of an anonymous sixth-century Syriac poem that was recited on the third Sunday of Lent:

Soul and Body fell into dispute
and became engaged in a great struggle.
Let us now listen to what they are saying
in the great contest in which they are engaged
....
Both of you now have acted together
and a single judgement is reserved for you.
Join one another and do not be separated,
for there is no division between you.[21]

Here too the poet uses the same wording for body and soul (*paḡrā* and *nap̄šā*), mentions the trial twice (using the same root for judgment, *dwn*) and concludes with the joint responsibility of body and soul. Likewise, the prosodic set up of the couplet is similar.[22]

Washington: Society for Coptic Archaeology, 1995), 29–38. Scholars sometimes discussed parallel Jewish materials but only in midrashic prose; see most notably Murray, "Dispute-Poems," 157–187.

   [19] For the critical edition of the Hebrew texts, see O. Münz-Manor, "Jewish and Christian Dispute Poems on the Relationship between the Body and the Soul," *Jerusalem Studies in Hebrew Literature* 25 (2013): 187–209. (in Hebrew)

   [20] The Syriac text was published by Edmund Beck, *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Carmina Nisibena*, vol. II (CSCO 240–241; Leuven: Peeters, 1963), 111. The English translation comes from Brock, "Beloved Brothers," 32.

   [21] Brock, "The Dispute Between Soul and Body," 53–64.

   [22] For an additional Syriac poetic dispute with the same features, see H. J. W. Drijvers, "Body and Soul: A Perennial Problem," in H. Vanstiphout and G. Reinink (eds.), *Dispute Poems and Dialogues in the Ancient and Mediaeval Near East* (Leuven: Peeters, 1991), 121–134.

As already mentioned, there existed similar Jewish liturgical poems written in Jewish Palestinian Aramaic and Hebrew. The following poem is a Jewish Palestinian Aramaic dirge from roughly the same century as the previous Syriac poem. Here too I present the opening and concluding couplets of the dispute:

The King exalted
glorious and unequaled
He will judge
body and soul as one
Soul and body
contend at law together
rendering an account
of every deed
…
The Mighty One sees
all the acts of mankind
and says to the body
and to the soul
You both
will be judged
for every deed
on the day of reckoning.[23]

The Jewish Aramaic wording for soul (*napšā*) is the same as the Syriac one, whereas the word for the body (*gwph*) differs from the Syriac one (*paḡrā*).[24] The Jewish Aramaic poem also frequently uses the root *dwn* (both in verbal and noun forms, for example, *dyn* and *lhdwn*) to refer to the judgement.

We find a similar dispute in a Hebrew dispute poem that dates to the fifth century and was recited on the Day of Atonement.[25] Below are the opening and judgment couplets from the poem:

When You set forth judgment, You call to the heavens to render the soul,
Thus also the earth You call from below to raise up the flesh.
When they are examined, "Who sinned unto Me?" You say, and each other they reprove.
The soul is Yours and the body Your making, Have mercy on your creatures!
…
He from on high at them mocks for the deception they harbor.
The one with the other, exchanging arguments to be saved from judgment.
Summoned one against another, they place hand on mouth for there is naught to answer.
The soul is Yours and the body Your making, Have mercy on your creatures!
They are likened to a pair, the lame and the blind, guardians of a king's orchard.
The fruits were stolen by the efforts of both, but they deceived in the admission.

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[23] English translation by M. Rand and O. Münz-Manor. The Aramaic text was published in Sokoloff and Yahalom, *Aramaic Poetry*, 300–305.

[24] The Hebrew cognate פגר denotes a dead body hence not suitable in our context.

[25] As noted above the Syriac disputes were written for Lent hence also the liturgical settings of the Christian and Jewish poems are quite similar.

The king hastened to expose their deception in the court, so he combined and
 convicted them.
The soul is Yours and the body Your making, Have mercy on your creatures![26]

The poet uses here more than one word to refer to body and soul: In the refrain
he uses the words *nəšāmā* and *guṗ* and in the couplets *neṗeš* and *bāśār* (*liter-
ally* flesh).[27] This does not seem to bear any theological significance, rather it is
used to contribute to the poem's richness and beauty. We can also discern here
once more the use of the root *dwn* 'to judge' (in a verbal form in the last verse
[*dānom*]) and the mention of the king, here, primarily the earthly one from the
parable although it quite clearly refers to God. It is clear, then, that also in this
poem the close connection to Jewish Palestinian Aramaic and Syriac poems is
maintained, albeit with some variations. Thematically, we see that the poem
opens with an interesting allusion to Psalms 50:4: "He calls to the heavens above
and to the earth, that he may judge his people."[28] The poet modifies the verse as
if indicating that God summons the soul and the body from the heavens and the
earth, respectively.

On the one hand, the poetic disputes between the body and the soul supply
concrete evidence of the influence of the Ancient Near Eastern heritage on the
poetic tradition that flourished in Late Antiquity, while on the other hand they
lay bare the great innovation evidenced by the compositions stemming from the
late antique period. First and foremost it must be noted that late antique poets
borrowed from the Ancient Near Eastern tradition only the basic format of the
poetic dispute between two personified entities, but not the dispute between the
body and the soul specifically, as the latter is not attested in the ancient tradition.
All in all, the Syriac, Hebrew, and Jewish Palestinian Aramaic dispute poems
exemplify perfectly the literary and theological interaction between these po-
etic traditions. Unfortunately, for lack of implicit evidence we cannot say much
about the exact historical circumstances behind this interaction. What we can
say is that firstly there is a clear shared theological background. As Robert Mur-
ray wrote, "questions of responsibility and imputability will always be acute for
religious traditions which, like both Judaism and especially Syrian Christianity,

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[26] For the Hebrew text, see J. Yahalom, "The World of Grief and Mourning in the Genizah,"
Ginzei Qedem – Genizah Research Annual 1 (2005): 133–34 (in Hebrew). English translation
by M. Rand and O. Münz-Manor. See also J. Yahalom, "'Syriac for Dirges, Hebrew for Speech':
Ancient Jewish Poetry in Aramaic and Hebrew," in Sh. Safrai (ed.), *The Literature of the Sages*,
part 2. *Midrash and Targum, Liturgy, Poetry, Mysticism, Contracts, Inscriptions, Ancient Science
and the Languages of Rabbinic Literature* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 2006), 375–391.

[27] On the interchangeability of *nəšāmā* and *neṗeš* in rabbinic Hebrew, see M. Bregman, "The
Parable of the Lame and the Blind: Epiphanius' Quotation From an Apocryphon of Ezekiel,"
JTS 42 (1991): 130 fn. 21.

[28] The first verse of the poem reads: בערכך משפט תקרא לשמים לתן הנפש / בכן אל הארץ תקרא
מתחת בשר להעמיד and the verse from the Psalms: יקרא אל השמים מעל ואל הארץ מתחת לדין עמו.
Note that the biblical verse refers to judgment and also uses the root *dwn*.

strongly emphasises human free will."[29] Secondly, there existed the shared versification tradition of late antique poets, Christians and Jewish alike, and finally we
can also note the distinctive ritual performative traits of this "school" of poetry.
There were probably additional elements that partook in the formation of these
parallel traditions, and naturally they could also develop in (relative) separation
one from the other. But taken together with other examples, some of which I
will discuss shortly, they suggest a dynamic cultural and religious interchange.

The Binding(s) of Isaac

The biblical story of the binding of Isaac enjoyed great popularity in Late Antiquity: Numerous passages in verse and prose elaborate on and embellish the
events we find narrated in Genesis 22 with events, dialogues, and drama not
found in the biblical passage. The centrality of the scene to the formation of Jewish and Christian identity in Late Antiquity has been discussed in many studies.[30]
Nevertheless the conceptual difference between the prose and verse versions has
not been adequately addressed. From the perspective of themes and content one
can hardly find significant differences as both genres tell the tale in similar ways
and offer similar exegetical, homiletical, and theological insights on the events.
Yet there are some notable literary and performative differences; the prose compositions quote biblical verses to support their exegetical or theological claims,
they are almost always fragmentary and usually bring several possible interpretations to the verses or events under discussion. The liturgical poems, in contrast,
are almost the opposite; only rarely do they quote biblical verses verbatim, their
version is much more coherent in terms of presenting conflicting traditions, and,
finally, they offer a continuous narrative that supersedes the entire biblical account. Meaningful differences can be found also in the performance and function of the different compositions. The prose accounts have a scholarly nature
and belong first and foremost to the rabbinic study hall, monastic circles, and
the like. The liturgical poems, alternatively, belong to the house of worship and
reflect a distinct performative character alongside their intellectual and didactic

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[29] R. Murray, "Aramaic and Syriac Dispute-Poems and Their Connections," in J. Greenfield et
al. (ed.), *Studia Aramaica: New Sources and New Approaches* (Oxford: Oxford University Press,
1995), 160; see also O. Münz-Manor, "The Parable of the Lame and the Blind in Epiphanius and
its Relations to Jewish Sources: New Texts," *JTS* 68 (2017): 593–606.

[30] The literature on the subject is immense; see, for example, E. Kessler, *Bound by the Bible: Jews, Christians and the Sacrifice of Isaac* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004);
W. van Bekkum, "The Aqedah and Its Interpretation in Midrash and Piyyut," in E. Noort and
E. J. Tigchelaar (eds.), *The Sacrifice of Isaac: The Aqedah (Genesis 22) and Its Interpretations*
(Leiden: Brill, 2002), 86–95; S. P. Brock, "Genesis 22 in Syriac Tradition," in P. Casetti, O. Keel,
and A. Schenker (eds.), *Mélanges Dominique Barthélemy: Études bibliques offertes à l'occasion
de son 60ᵉ anniversaire* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981), 2–30.

facets. The liturgical poems on the Binding of Isaac are not merely memorials of his sacrifice but a representation thereof that sought to involve the congregation in the sacred past, to shape the liturgical present, and to promote salvific expectations. God is reminded of the merits of Isaac and Abraham by means of reenactment of the sacred past, or in other words by the *verbal sacrifice* of Isaac by the congregation.[31]

Below are some key strophes from an anonymous Hebrew poem that was composed in Palestine sometime in the fifth century and was recited on the Day of Atonement:

Benign One, when you said to him
"I desire your child as a fragrant offering"
he rushed to fulfill the command
he lost no time at all

Quickly he split the wood
took up the fire and the knife
loaded his favored one, Isaac
with the faggot for the burnt offering

Then he went on to build the altar
stood up and placed his lamb upon it
he took the sword in his hand
and took no pity at all

The Almighty cried out to him
Drop your hand at once
Instead of your son I desire the ram
caught by his horns in the thicket

O God, heed these ashes
credit us with the covenant
favor us for his binding
reward our self-denial
redeem us, Mighty One![32]

The poem's main concern is Abraham's hastiness, which is beautifully represented by the short verses and the frequent use of active verbs at the beginning of many verses (in the Hebrew original, of course). However, as the drama unfolds the poem departs from the artful reworking of the biblical account and becomes – in the concluding strophe – a petitionary prayer. The appeal to God

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[31] On the idea of *verbal sacrifice* in this context, see O. Münz-Manor, "Narrating Salvation: Verbal Sacrifices in Late Antique Liturgical Poetry," in A. Y. Reed and N. Dohrmann (eds.), *Jews and Other Imperial Cultures in Late Antiquity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 154–166, 315–319.

[32] Hebrew text in B. Septimus, "Hananto leme'a peri: From Early Piyyut to the Babylonian Talmud," *Leshonenu* 71 (2009): 79–95 (in Hebrew); English translation by T. Carmi, *The Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse* (New York: Penguin, 1981), 201–202.

is well structured: Each of the concluding verses opens with the last character of the Hebrew alphabet (in compliance with the acrostic) and follows one grammatical structure – a verb (in the future-imperative) followed by a direct object. This repetitive pattern, which is reminiscent of contemporary Hebrew mystical hymns,[33] intensifies the appeal as well as the allusion to Isaac's ashes (according to some traditions Isaac was sacrificed and later revived).[34] In this poem, then, we find a ritual re-narration of the sacrifice of Isaac that stands for the biblical sacrificial narrative (which in itself is about a sacrifice and its substitute) and accordingly, God is expected (one may even say, driven) to forgive and atone.

The next poem differs in style and content from the Hebrew poem yet its cultic function is similar. In this account, written in Jewish Palestinian Aramaic and dating to the fifth or sixth century, Isaac stands at the focal point of the poem whereas Abraham is passive. Here are some selected verses from the poem:

Isaac said / to his father / "how pleasant is the altar / you built for me, my father,
Stretch out quickly / and take your knife / while I pray / before my Lord …
This is the day / about which they will say / a father did not pity / a son did not tarry …
Blessed are you, father / they will say / I am the ram for the burnt offering / of the
    living God …
Like a merciless man / take up your knife / and slaughter me / lest I shall become
    unclean …
Give me your knife, my father / that I can touch it / I beg you / not to defile me,
My eyes see / the woodpiles put in order / a burning fire / on the day of my sacrifice.
Open your mouth / and say a blessing father / I will listen / and say amen,
My throat is stretched out / to you father / whatever you please to do / please do."[35]

The poem opens *in medias res* with Isaac's praise for the "pleasant altar" and with his depiction as a conscious and active agent.[36] We could say that the first two lines encapsulate the poem's prime sentiment, namely Isaac's martyrological passion and Abraham's hesitancy.[37] At any rate, in this piece we find not only the reenacted drama but also (self-)awareness of the cultic and performative dimension of the poem. This is clearly shown in the third line where Isaac foresees

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[33] M. D. Swartz, *Mystical Prayer in Ancient Judaism: An Analysis of Ma'aseh Merkavah* (TSAJ 28; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992), 171–210.

[34] Sh. Spiegel, *The Last Trial: On the Legends and Lore of the Command to Abraham to Offer Isaac as a Sacrifice* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1969), 38–44.

[35] Sokoloff and Yahalom, *Aramaic Poetry*, 124–131. English translation is taken from Van Bekkum, *Akedah*, 94–95. For a short English introduction to the Jewish Aramaic poems, see M. Sokoloff and J. Yahalom, "Aramaic Piyyutim from the Byzantine Period," *JQR* 75 (1985): 309–321.

[36] The description of Isaac as a willing victim (here and in the other poems) relates to ancient Mediterranean sacrificial rituals that were designed to elicit a sign of consent from the victim. See S. Stowers, "On the Comparison of Blood in Greek and Israelite Ritual," in J. Magness and S. Gitin (ed.), *Hesed ve-Emet: Studies in Honor of Ernest S. Frerichs* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 179–194.

[37] On the reworking of this biblical narrative in rabbinic literature, see Y. Elbaum, "From Sermon to Story: The Transformation of the Akedah," *Prooftexts* 6 (1986): 97–116; M. Niehoff, "The Return of Myth in Genesis Rabbah on the Akeda," *JJS* 46 (1995): 69–87.

the significance of his sacrifice to later generations. That is to say, the author of the poem puts in Isaac's mouth a prediction that later generation will tell Isaac's story; by this referential hint the poet constitutes the verbal ritual and validates it at the same time. Another notable characteristic of this poem is its proximity to Christian discourse; perhaps the best example is Isaac's declaration that he is "the sacrificial lamb of God." This idea, to be sure, is rooted in the Bible where Isaac asks Abraham "where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" (Gen 22:7); yet the poet's insertion of the word "God" to the verse resonates with the famous Lamb of God in the Gospel of John 1:29. In the next verse we encounter more sacrificial elements, namely the concern that the sacrifice will be defiled. Isaac instructs his father to slaughter him without hesitation, to make sure the knife is legitimate, and to make a blessing before he acts.

Interestingly enough this Jewish Aramaic poems is very similar in content, style, and function to a Syriac one that dates to the second half of the fifth century.[38] This poem is much more extensive than the former and covers not only the sacrifice proper but also the preceding and following events. The description of Isaac and Abraham on the mountain is as follows:

I know, my father, / that it is coming to me / to be the lamb / for the whole offering,
Draw near, father, / and bind me, / tie tightly / for me my bonds,
lest my limbs / should shake / and there is a blemish / in your sacrifice …
So Abraham / bound his son / carried him / and placed him on the pyre,
He raised his eyes / up to heaven / and cried out / "Bless, O Lord";
He stretched out his hand / for his knife / and it reached / his dear's son neck …
And without mention / of your name, Abraham / an offering / shall not be accepted.[39]

In more than one way, this poem is very close to the Jewish Aramaic one: The figure of Isaac stands at the heart of the binding scene, the danger of defilement is spelled out, and Abraham blesses before he acts. A noteworthy feature of this poem is the declaration that "without mention / of your name, Abraham / an offering / shall not be accepted." As in the former Jewish poem this self-referential declaration reflects the ritual function of the liturgical piece and at the same time validates the interrelation between narration and sacrifice. Finally, we should note that unlike the former two poems the Syriac account is more straightforward in regard to the divine intervention and Isaac's redemption at the end, although we do find in a parallel Syriac poem references to Isaac "who dies, though alive, being wrapped in a symbol" or "Isaac, who is sacrificed, though not killed."[40] In both cases Isaac's martyrdom (or semi-martyrdom) is celebrated; for

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[38] S. P. Brock, "Two Syriac Verse Homilies on the Binding of Isaac," *Le Muséon* 99 (1986): 61–129.

[39] Syriac text and English translation in Brock, "Two Syriac Verse Homilies on the Binding of Isaac," 119, 124.

[40] Brock, "Two Syriac Verse Homilies on the Binding of Isaac," 111.

the Christian audience he is a prefiguration of Jesus whereas for the Jewish congregants Isaac prefigures their own martyrs.[41]

The last example is taken from a poem by the celebrated Byzantine hymnographer Romanos the Melodist. Romanos, who lived in the sixth century, was a native of Syria, and his sacred poetry is a fascinating mixture of Semitic and classical poetic models. Romanos introduced the Syro-Palestinian tradition into Byzantine culture and arguably contributed much to the formation of its liturgy.[42] Romanos dedicated one of his *kontakia* to the story of Abraham and Isaac, and even a brief look reveals its proximity to the former poems. When Romanos comes to describe the sacrifice proper we find him do it in familiar ways:

O father, have you sharpened the knife for me?
  For I see the altar as a tomb, O father;
As though in a mirror I see you binding and slaying me.
  If, then, what I see is a true vision, tell me;
Do not kill me against my will if you are to find
  In me, your son, your acceptable sacrifice.[43]

The metaphor of the mirror here is indicative of the cultic dimension of the poem as Derek Krueger pointed out:

Romanos the Melodist's image of the mirror, in which Isaac sees his father binding and slaying him, serves as an apt metaphor for the whole liturgical process of biblical repetition. In a logic that applies beyond the work of this Christian poet, the recounting of the biblical narrative reflects the narrative, and thus becomes its true image. Or perhaps it is a ritualized vision of themselves that the congregants see in the mirror?[44]

From the mirror metaphor and Romanos's declaration earlier in the poem that he wishes to imitate Abraham, we learn thay he too is aware of the cultic dimension

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[41] See Spiegel, *Last Trial*; D. Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 117–118. It is interesting to note that in Christian literature a similar role is played also by Jephtah's daughter who, in contrast to the biblical Isaac, was in fact sacrificed. On her image in Syriac poetry and its relation to Isaac, see S.A. Harvey and O. Münz-Manor, *Jacob of Serug's Homily on Jephtah's Daughter* (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2010).

[42] The classical study on Romanos' life and work is J. Grosdidier de Matons, *Romanos Le Mélode et les origines de la poésie religieuse à Byzance* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1977). For an up-to-date view of Romanos, see D. Krueger, *Writing and Holiness: The Practice of Authorship in the Early Christian East* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 159–188. See also L. Van Rompay, "Romanos Le Mélode: Un poète syrien à Constantinople," in J. den Boeft and A. Hilhorst (eds.), *Early Christian Poetry: A Collection of Essays* (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 283–296. It is worthwhile to mention that some scholars believe that Romanos was of Jewish descent (see the studies above), but this assertion has very little bearing (if any) on the question of the intersection of Romanos' poetry and Jewish sources.

[43] M. Carpenter, *Kontakia of Romanos, Byzantine Melodist*, vol. 2. *On Christian Life* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1973), 67–68.

[44] From Derek Krueger's response to an earlier version of this essay that was presented at the fourteenth Gruss Colloquium in Judaic Studies at the University of Pennsylvania (April 30, 2008). I am grateful to Derek Krueger who kindly shared with me the text of his response.

of his liturgical poem. In the next strophe, we find yet another link to the former poems. Here we find that Abraham:

bound the feet and hands of the one whom he had engendered
  as he said "first I shall bind and then kill him,
So that his movement may not prevent my quick attack."[45]

As already noticed by Sebastian Brock,[46] this statement has a close connection with the Syriac poem we just read – and now we can add, also with the Jewish-Aramaic one. Finally, in Romanos' *kontakion*, as in the Hebrew poem that opened this part of the essay, we find a direct connection between re-narration and salvific petition in the concluding strophe of the composition:

Do not reject our prayers as vain,
  Do not slay in thy anger those for whom thou wast crucified
Be our intercessor, Father, to bring us to a good end
  Thou, the Giver of all good, and Savior of our souls.[47]

The connection here between the biblical sacrifice of Isaac and the verbal sacrifice offered by the congregation is clear. The entire narrative of this lengthy poem and the verbal reenactment of the biblical myth all come down to this petition; and as in the past God is entreated to forgive and reward the believers.[48]

The Tabernacle as Microcosm

The last test case of this essay concerns liturgical poems that elaborate on the interrelation between the cosmos and the Tabernacle.[49] This connection between the two is hinted already in the Hebrew Bible,[50] but became a central theme in

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[45] Carpenter, *Romanos*, 68.

[46] Brock, "Two Syriac Verse Homilies on the Binding of Isaac," 91–96.

[47] Carpenter, *Romanos*, 70.

[48] The same picture emerges from other late ancient poems on the subject. See E. Lash, "Sermon on Abraham and Isaac" (http://www.anastasis.org.uk/AbrIsaac.htm); idem, "Metrical Texts of Greek Ephrem," in M. Wiles and E. Yarnold (eds.), *Studia Patristica XXXV: Papers Presented at the Thirteenth International Conference on Patristic Studies held in Oxford 1999. Ascetica, Gnostica, Liturgica, Orientalia* (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 433–448; T. Hilhorst, "The Bodmer Poem on the Sacrifice of Abraham," in *The Aqedah and its Interpretations*, 96–108; P. van der Horst, "A New Early Christian Poem on the Sacrifice of Isaac (Pap. Bodmer 30)," in idem (ed.), *Jews and Christians in Their Graeco-Roman Context: Selected Essays on Early Judaism, Samaritanism, Hellenism, and Christianity* (WUNT 196; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 190–205; K. J. Kalish, *Greek Christian Poetry in Classical Forms: The Codex of Visions from the Bodmer Papyri and the Melding of Literary Traditions* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Princeton University, 2009).

[49] In general, see O. Münz-Manor, "The Ritualization of Creation in Jewish and Christian Liturgical Texts from Late Antiquity," in L. Jenott and S. K. Gribetz (eds.), *Jewish and Christian Cosmogony in Late Antiquity* (TSAJ 155; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2013), 271–286.

[50] M. Weinfeld, "Sabbath, Temple and the Enthronement of the Lord – The Problem of the Sitz im Leben of Genesis 1:1–2:3," in A. Caquot and M. Delcor (eds.), *Mélanges bibliques*

Jewish and Christian thought only in the first century of the Common Era in
the writings of Philo and Josephus.[51] Philo, as expected, offers an allegoric in-
terpretation in which various elements of the Tabernacle correspond to parts of
the cosmos. Furthermore, according to Philo, on Mount Sinai, God presented
before Moses a model – a sort of platonic form – of the Tabernacle, which Moses
later conveyed to Bezalel, the designer of the Tabernacle.[52] Likewise, the author
of the Epistle to the Hebrews in the New Testament understood the Tabernacle
to be a "copy and shadow" (8:5) of a heavenly sanctuary.[53] Numerous Church
Fathers (especially in the East) commented on the Tabernacle and followed, to
varying degrees, the model outlined by Philo and the Epistle to the Hebrews.[54]
In Jewish writings of the same period we do not find much material concerning
the Tabernacle or its relation to the cosmos, in part since most of the related dis-
cussions are centered on the Temple.[55] In contrast, we do find such references in
liturgical poems for the feast of Hanukah. Since Hanukah is not mentioned in
the Hebrew Bible and no other canonical text concerning the feast was available
in the late antique period, the liturgy of the feast revolved around the building

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et orientaux en l'honneur de M. Henri Cazelles (Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker, 1981), 501–512;
G. Anderson, "Towards a Theology of the Tabernacle and its Furniture," in R. A. Clements and
D. R. Schwartz (eds.), *Text, Thought and Practice in Qumran and Early Christianity: Proceedings
of the Ninth International Symposium of the Orion Center for the Study of the Dead Sea Scrolls
and Associated Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 161–194.

[51] Philo, *De Vita Mosis*, II, 15, 71–72, 140 (ed. F. H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker, *Philo* [LCL
226–227, 247, 261, 275, 289, 320, 341, 363, 379; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1929–
1962]); Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* III, 6 (ed. H. St. J. Thackeray, R. Marcus, and L. H. Feld-
man, *Josephus* [LCL 186, 203, 210, 242, 281, 326, 365, 410, 433; Cambridge, MA: Harvard Uni-
versity Press, 1926–1965]). On the two others, see J. Daniélou, "La Symbolique du Temple de
Jérusalem chez Philon et Josèphe," in R. Bloch (ed.), *Le symbolisme cosmique des monuments
religieux* (SOR 14; Rome: Instituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1957), 83–90.

[52] On the relationship between the Tabernacle and Plato, see H. Attridge, "Temple, Taber-
nacle, Time, and Space in John and Hebrews," *EC* 1 (2010): 271.

[53] On the Tabernacle in the Epistle to the Hebrews, see Attridge, "Temple, Tabernacle, Time,
and Space in John and Hebrews," 261–274.

[54] Most prominent among them are Clement of Alexandrian, Origen, Ephrem, Gregory of
Nyssa, and Theodore of Mopsuestia. On the role of the Tabernacle in the writings of these au-
thors, see K. McVey, "The Domed Church as Microcosm: Literary Roots of an Architectural
Symbol," *DOP* 37 (1983): 111–114.

One of the central late antique works that elaborates on the cosmos-Tabernacle connec-
tion was the so-called *Christian Topography* by Constantine of Antioch, a sixth-century author
known traditionally as Cosmas Indicopleustes. The literature on this text is immense; for an
updated discussion, see M. Kominko, "The Map of Cosmas, the Albi Map, and the Tradition
of Ancient Geography," *MHR* 20 (2005): 164–165. On the text in its Jewish context, see Sh.
Laderman, "Cosmology, Art, and Liturgy," in K. Kogman-Appel and M. Meyer (eds.), *Between
Judaism and Christianity – Art Historical Essays in Honor of Elisheva (Elisabeth) Revel-Neher*
(Leiden: Brill, 2009), 121–138.

[55] The only late antique (or perhaps early medieval) text that is devoted to the subject, the
Baraita de-Melekhet ha-Mishkan, deals only with the terrestrial aspects of the Tabernacle. On
this text, see R. Kirschner, *Baraita de-Melekhet ha-Mishkan: A Critical Edition with Introduction
and Translation* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1992).

and inauguration of the desert Tabernacle and to some extent also around the establishment of Solomon's Temple.[56] The performance of these liturgical compositions in the synagogue granted them a special ritual meaning. Since the late antique Synagogue was perceived as a substitute for the Jerusalem Temple,[57] accounts concerning the Tabernacle and the Temple were associated with the Synagogue in a straightforward manner. A similar phenomenon existed in contemporary liturgical texts of eastern Churches, especially the Syriac. In this section, I examine four poems, two in Hebrew and two in Syriac, in which the correspondence between the Tabernacle and cosmos contributes to the liturgical experience in general and to the construction of the synagogue and church as a holy place in particular. I begin with several verses from the concluding parts of a composition by the sixth-century poet Yannai. The composition was recited during a Sabbath that fell on the feast of Hanukah:

The rings of the curtain below
  Are as precious as those that are spread above
The Cherubim shield with their wings below
  As those who minister with their wings sing above
The candelabrum of seven candles below
  Is likened to the seven signs above ...
... And You are in the Tabernacle below
  As You dwell above
And while You are above
  Your likeness is below.[58]

The underlying idea behind this section of the poem is that the terrestrial Tabernacle corresponds to various elements of the cosmos and other celestial beings.[59] The poem is arranged in couplets, the endings of which alternate between the words 'below' and 'above'.[60] Each couplet juxtaposes a detail in the Tabernacle and its corresponding cosmic element. Thus we read that the seven candles of the golden candelabrum correspond to the seven planets or that the Cherubim on

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[56] Interestingly enough, these lengthy poetic compositions make no mention of the Maccabees, their battles against the Seleucid dynasty, or any item or custom that relates to the festival. Instead, they focus on the construction and inauguration of the desert Tabernacle following the Torah reading for the day. See O. Münz-Manor, *The Liturgical Poetry of Elazar Birabi Qilir for Hanukkah* (forthcoming).

[57] See S. Fine, *This Holy Place: On the Sanctity of the Synagogue during the Greco-Roman Period* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1997); E. Reiner, "Destruction, Temple and Holy Place: On the Medieval Perception of Time and Place," in R. Livneh-Freudenthal and E. Reiner (eds.), *Streams into the Sea* (Tel Aviv: Alma College, 2001), 138–152.

[58] Z. M. Rabinowitz, *The Liturgical Poetry of Rabbi Yannai*, vol. 2 (Jerusalem: Bialik Press, 1987), 241–243.

[59] Here Yannai juxtaposes the terrestrial Tabernacle with the cosmos; in other parts of the composition he aligns it with the heavenly sanctuary.

[60] Curiously, in the last couplet the order is reversed and thus instead of an 'above-below-above-below' sequence the poem ends with 'below-above-above-below'. This chiastic formation is used here as a literary device to emphasise the end of the poetic section.

the Ark of the Covenant reflect the heavenly angels. The ritual aspects of the composition become clearer as the poem introduces the correspondence between the congregation's prayer and the heavenly praise of the angels:

The ones up high say: "His glory is above the heavens"
And those down under say: "the whole earth is full of His glory"
And both say together: "blessed is He"...[61]

These three verses that open this section of the poem build on biblical verses of praise that relate directly to the Sanctus that is indeed recited after a few more poetic lines. In other words, the poem ritualizes the idea that the cosmos and the Tabernacle correspond by means of repetitive narration and by drawing parallels between the terrestrial and celestial liturgies. Nearly a century later another Jewish poet, Elazar birabi Qilir, followed Yannai and connected the Tabernacle and the cosmos even more elaborately.[62] The entire composition, which contains hundreds of verses, opens with the following description of Moses:

He ascended to the Heavens and descended
And hastened to build below what he had seen in the Heavens.[63]

Similar to the Philonic idea mentioned above as well as to a roughly contemporary Midrash,[64] Elazar birabi Qilir speaks here of the prototype of the Tabernacle that Moses saw in the Heavens. It is worthwhile mentioning that in another section of the composition the poet even claims that the Tabernacle was built during the creation of the world and waited, disassembled, since then for roughly two thousand and five hundred years until it was erected in the desert.[65] Towards

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[61] Rabinowitz, *Liturgical Poetry,* 243.

[62] In another poem for Hanukah by the same author there is an intriguing association between the Tabernacle and the organs of the human body (Münz-Manor, *Liturgical Poetry*). Although this is the only text known to me from that period to juxtapose the two, it builds on the notion that the human body reflects the cosmos. This notion is mentioned, for example, in Plato's *Philebus*, 28d–30d (ed. H. N. Fowler and W. R. M. Lamb, *Plato. Statesman; Philebus; Ion* [LCL 164; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925]). On this idea, see D. E. Hahm, *The Origins of Stoic Cosmology* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1977), 138. For a more general discussion of such lists in late antique Jewish literature, see I. Rosen-Zvi, "Bodies and Temple: The List of Priestly Bodily Defects in Mishna Bekhorot, Chapter 7," *JS* 43 (2005–2006): 49–88.

[63] Münz-Manor, *Liturgical Poetry.*

[64] "When Moses ascended to the heavens God opened before him the seven skies and showed him the celestial temple and the four colors out of which he created the Tabernacle" (Pesikta Rabbati 20:98). In Jewish sources is it usually the Temple that exists in the Heavens, but here the Tabernacle is also mentioned. The classical study of the celestial temple in rabbinic literature is V. Aptowitzer, "The Celestial Temple as Viewed in the Aggadah," *Tarbitz* 2 (1931): 137–153, 257–277 (in Hebrew).

[65] The calculation is based on the rabbinic notion that two-thousand four-hundred and eight years had passed since the creation of the world until the Exodus from Egypt and that the Tabernacle was built two years later. For the text, see Münz-Manor, *Liturgical Poetry.*

the end of the composition we find the long list of correspondences between the cosmos and the Tabernacle:

In this the world was renewed
And in that the world was established
For against the creation of the world
A tent was prepared in the world
In it are reflected the elements of the world ...
Seven clouds corresponding to seven skies
The bright lampstand corresponding to the sun (and moon)
The seven candles corresponding to seven stars
Clasps and loops corresponding to the stars.[66]

The basic premise of the section is that without the Tabernacle the creation is not complete or, in other words, that the construction of the Tabernacle is the final stage of creation. This idea is expressed in a very clear fashion in the contemporary midrash Pesikta de-Rav Kahana (1:4), which indicates that "until the Tabernacle was set up, the earth was unstable. After the Tabernacle was set up, the earth became stable."[67] The specific details of the comparison between the cosmos and the Tabernacle (included here only in part) are similar to many found in Philo, Josephus, a few rabbinic sources, and Yannai's poem. It is crucial, though, to stress that the comprehensive list appears for the first time ever in this poem, and it is only known much later from the medieval midrash Numbers Rabba. Moreover, here again the liturgical context is of great importance; like in the case of Yannai, here too the section leading to the *Sanctus* and the overall context is the consecration of the Tabernacle (and the Temple), the forerunners of the synagogue in which the composition was recited. The sacred pasts – both of the world's creation and the Tabernacle's erection – are thus merged with the liturgical present within the synagogue space.

I turn now to the Syriac liturgical poems that were recited on the occasion of a consecration of a church. As we shall see it is not only the content of the Syriac examples that is similar to the Hebrew ones but also the liturgical setting and the ritual experience they seek to create. The first example is from a poem by Narsai, the celebrated poet of the Church of the East that lived during the fifth century. In the beginning Narsai establishes the connection between the creation of the world and the erection of the Tabernacle, linking the two similarly to Elazar birabi Qilir:

A second creation did the Creator create through Moses
    that man learn that it is He who created the creation in the beginning

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[66] Münz-Manor, *Liturgical Poetry*.
[67] For translation, see W. G. Braude and I. J. Kapstein, *Pesikta de-Rab Kahana* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1975), 13–14.

After several couplets Narsai elaborates on the consequences of the double cre-
ation:

Corresponding to the inhabited world, the Tabernacle was extended to the four corners
    and it was disposed according to the disposition of the months of the year

And from here Narsai goes on and enumerates parallels between the Tabernacle
and the created world:

As a symbol of the luminaries was the candelabrum looking at them with its flames
    and they towards it as seedlings in the direction of the sun …
The entire disposition of the luminaries was disposed in it
    and the number of days and the change of months were contained in it
The week of days was depicted in it and it in the week
    and seven lamps according to the number of days were atop it.[68]

Narsai bases his poem on a longstanding exegetical tradition within Syriac
Christianity,[69] and he narrates for his audience the many resemblances between
the cosmos and the Tabernacle, which also represents the church in which the
poem was recited. Judith Frishman rightly points out the ritual meaning of Nar-
sai's poem:

For Theodore [= of Mopsuestia] and Narsai the Tabernacle is also a symbol of the church.
The latter is a realization of the Old Testament sanctuary yet a type of that which is to
come, providing a taste of the heavenly state and sustenance through the church and the
sacraments in which the force of the spirit is at work. It is the same force which empowers
the priest to act as an intermediary.[70]

The liturgical consequences of the cosmos-Tabernacle relationships become
even more distinct in another Syriac poem by Jacob of Serugh, the prolific fifth-
sixth century author. In one place, Jacob describes Moses' vision of the Taber-
nacle upon ascending to Mt. Sinai, a description that relates directly to Elazar
birabi Qilir's poem that I discussed previously:

Through Moses the Church was imprinted by a mystery
    And the Tabernacle was designated as the type (of the Church)…
He stamped her imprint mysteriously and left and passed away …
    And Moses testifies that he saw her image on Mount Sinai.[71]

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[68] J. Frishman, *The Ways and Means of the Divine Economy. An Edition, Translation and Study
of Six Biblical Homilies by Narsai* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Leiden, 1992), 93–97.
[69] Frishman, *The Ways and Means of the Divine Economy*, 156–168.
[70] Frishman, *The Ways and Means of the Divine Economy*, 167. But compare K. McVey's asser-
tion that "The cosmos is in the image of the Tabernacle, but Narsai equates neither Tabernacle
nor cosmos with the Christian Church, whether as eschatological concept or as architectural
actuality" (McVey, "The Domed Church as Microcosm," 115). The statement, it should be em-
phasized, refers to a different homily by Narsai on creation.
[71] McVey, "The Domed Church as Microcosm," 116.

Like the Jewish poets, Jacob relies on the tradition that upon ascending to Mt. Sinai and the heavens, Moses saw the heavenly sanctuary that served as a prototype for the terrestrial Tabernacle, the Jerusalem temple, and ultimately the Christian Church.

In another poem that was recited during the dedication of the cathedral church of Edessa in the middle of the sixth century,[72] the poet elaborated on the relationship between the cosmos and the Tabernacle and Church:

Oh Being Itself who dwells in the holy Temple, whose glory naturally [emanates] from it, grant me the grace of the Holy Spirit to speak about the Temple that is in Urha.

Bezalel constructed the Tabernacle for us with the model he learned from Moses, and Amidonius and Asaph and Addai built a glorious temple for You in Urha.

Clearly portrayed in it are the mysteries of both Your Essence and Your Dispensation. He who looks closely will be filled at length with wonder.

For it truly is a wonder that its smallness is like the wide world, not in size but in type; like the sea, waters surround it.

Behold! Its ceiling is stretched out like the sky and without columns [it is] arched and simple, and it is also decorated with golden mosaic, as the firmament [is] with shining stars.

And its lofty dome – behold, it resembles the highest heaven, and like a helmet it is firmly placed on its lower [part].

The splendor of its broad arches – they portray the four ends of the earth. They resemble also by the variety of their colors the glorious rainbow.[73]

The poet repeats here many details that appeared in the previous poems I have already discussed, but the important feature of the poem is the special attention that he gives to the architecture and the decoration of the church. In her discussion of the poem, Kathleen McVey describes it as "architectural θεωρία, a contemplation of the church building" and discusses the poem in the context of Byzantine liturgical commentaries. Although McVey sees some differences between the architectural θεωρία of the poem and the liturgical θεωρία of the commentaries she asserts that "[t]he two remain closely related since the place of the action (the building) and the instrument of the action (clergy, vestments, altar, ambo, vessels) are closely related to the actions themselves."[74] A similar relation existed, I would argue, between the four poems I discussed here and the space in which they were performed. The intrinsic interrelation between liturgy (including liturgical poetry), art, and late antique synagogues (and to some extent also churches) has been singled out in many studies.[75] Jodi Magness has argued recently that late antique churches and synagogues resembled the cosmos

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[72] McVey, "The Domed Church as Microcosm," 91.

[73] McVey, "The Domed Church as Microcosm," 95.

[74] McVey, "The Domed Church as Microcosm," 110.

[75] See, for example, S. Fine, "Art and the Liturgical Context of the Sepphoris Synagogue Mosaic," in E. M. Meyers (ed.), *Galilee through the Centuries: Confluence of Cultures* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 227–237; G. Foerester, "Representations of the Zodiac in Ancient Synagogues and Their Iconographic Sources," *Eretz Israel* 18 (1985): 380–391 (in Hebrew).

in their architecture and mosaic pavements. Moreover she claims a connection between the Zodiac mosaics and the representations of the Tabernacle and Temple in synagogues.[76] Rina Talgam agrees with Magness on this point and stresses that in contemporary churches there are no representations of the zodiac, hence the connection between the church and the cosmos is instead achieved through topographic and cartographic elements.[77] I believe that the arguments suggested above can be taken one step forward. It has been claimed in the past that there is correspondence between the content of the mosaics and the liturgical poems, especially those centered on the signs of the zodiac.[78] It seems that from the current discussion concerning the ritual meaning of the liturgical poems on the cosmos and Tabernacle we can deduce that the combination of liturgy and art operated in the same realm. That is, the recitation of poems that emphasized the continuum between the cosmos, the Tabernacle, the Temple, and the Synagogue in a physical space that conveyed the same message through its mosaic depictions created a holistic and powerful experience. Of course, this can only be true on those liturgical occasions in which these specific poems were recited, but it should be emphasized that the current discussion is but one example of a much larger phenomenon.

Conclusion

At the basis of the poems that have been analyzed in this article lies a specific poetics, which is expressed primarily in their structure and formulation. This shared poetics together with the thematic links between the poems on the one hand, and the clear differences between this poetics and biblical poetry as well as contemporaneous Greek and Latin poetry on the other, together throw new light on the different poetic corpora that were in existence in the eastern portion of the Byzantine Empire in the late antique period, corpora that until now were considered by most researchers to have subsisted independently of one another.

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[76] J. Magness, "Heaven on Earth: Helios and the Zodiac in Ancient Palestinian Synagogues," *DOP* 59 (2005): 16–20. See also Z. Weiss, "The Tabernacle, Temple and Sacrificial Service in Ancient Synagogue Art and in Light of the Judeo-Christian Controversy," in R. I. Cohen (ed.), *Image and Sound: Art, Music and History* (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Press, 2007), 65–86 (in Hebrew).

[77] R. Talgam, "The Zodiac and Helios in the Synagogue: Between Paganism and Christianity," in Z. Weiss et al. (eds.), *"Follow the Wise" – Studies in Jewish History and Culture in Honor of Lee I. Levine* (Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2010), 75 (in Hebrew).

[78] See Foerester, *Representations*; J. Yahalom, "The Zodiac in the Early Piyyut of Eretz-Israel," *JSHL* 9 (1986): 313–322 (in Hebrew). For a more skeptical view, see S. Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society – 200 B.C.E to 640 C.E.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 270–272. And see now O. Münz-Manor, "'Take Pity on Zion, Rebuild the Walls of Jerusalem': A Late Antique Hebrew Elegy on the Destruction of Jerusalem," in I. Pardes and O. Münz-Manor (eds.), *Psalms In/On Jerusalem* (Berlin: De Gruyter 2019), 27–42.

The main contribution of the essay lies in the expansion of the range of Jewish-Christian interrelationships in the late antique period and in a call for the inclusion of the rich corpus of Christian and Jewish liturgical poetry within scholarly discourse regarding these interrelationships. If, moreover, my suggestion as to the existence of a poetic tradition that crosses religious-social boundaries is correct, then before us lies a precious witness to the fact that in the late antique period religious affiliation was not the only category defining the cultural boundaries of individuals or groups. This notion was already rendered moot about twenty years ago, with regard to Latin poetry in the late antique period. Michael Roberts stressed in this context that "aesthetic, and particularly stylistic, preferences do not follow religious affiliation. It would be a mistake to speak without qualification of, for instance, a Christian style, as distinct from a pagan style. Stylistic affinities cut across differences of devotional status."[79] Interestingly but by all means not surprisingly, these connections manifest themselves primarily in Syriac and Jewish liturgical poems. The linguistic proximity, the shared Semitic literary heritage, and similar geocultural conditions must have played a significant role in bringing these two varieties of religion together. It is to be hoped that the opening of new, comparative directions in research into Jewish and Christian poetry in the late antique period will contribute significantly to the effort of reconstructing the colourful cultural mosaic of this formative era.

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[79] M. Roberts, *The Jeweled Style: Poetry and Poetics in Late Antiquity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 6.

Syriac Christian Sources and the Babylonian Talmud

Jeffrey L. Rubenstein

The point of departure for this paper is a difficulty that confronts the critical study of the Babylonian Talmud and in particular the study of Talmudic narratives, primarily biographical anecdotes of the lives and deeds of the rabbinic sages whose legal traditions are scattered throughout the Talmud. This problem is that of studying the Babylonian Talmud in its wider cultural context, namely the Persian Sasanian Empire: How do we get outside the confines of the Babylonian Talmud? It goes without saying that a comprehensive understanding of any text requires a solid appreciation of the ambient historical setting, material conditions, and culture in which it was produced. This is particularly true of ancient texts which can be so alien to us moderns due to the vast temporal gap separating us from the cultures that produced them. Empirically the study of rabbinic texts from the Land of Israel of the Roman-Byzantine era – the Mishnah and Tosefta, the Jerusalem Talmud, and the Amoraic midrashim – has been enriched enormously by setting the sources in the context of the classical world. Words, idioms, and references to institutions, artifacts, and even literary genres that were impenetrable to medieval commentators have been explained by modern scholars through their knowledge of classical literature, philology, and archeology.

Critical study of the Babylonian Talmud, by contrast, at least until very recently, has been conducted to a large extent in a type of cultural vacuum, without much engagement with the ambient literature, archeology, and ambient Persian culture. There are compelling reasons for this scholarly deficiency:

First, archeology of the Sasanian era has been limited, due to lack of interest and funding in former times, and to current political conditions.[1] Remains of material culture are meagre, mostly consisting of coins, cylinder seals and stamps, and rock reliefs. In 2007 the *Asia Society and Museum* in New York featured an exhibit of Sasanian art and artifacts entitled "Glass, Gilding, and Grand Design: Art of Sasanian Iran (224–642)," billed as among the most comprehensive such

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[1] See D. Huff, "Archeology iv. Sasanian," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica* [accessed 12 July 2016]. Ali Mousavi, "A Survey of the Archaeology of the Sasanian Period during the Past Three Decades," *e-Sasanika* [accessed 12 July 2016]. Online http://sasanika.org/wp-content/uploads/e-sasanika-Arch-1–Mousavi.pdf.

collections ever assembled. It was very unimpressive: some drinking goblets, fragments of textiles and mosaics, broken glass, a bit of silver.[2]

Second, the corpus of Middle Persian (Pahlavi) literature, the obvious point of access to Sasanian culture, presents various problems and obstacles. Pahlavi is only taught in a handful of universities. This makes it difficult in practice for many Talmudists to acquire linguistic competence even if they so desire. More problematic is that much of the extant corpus dates to the ninth century and was redacted in the Islamic cultural context. While some scholars assume that the texts faithfully reflect earlier times, or the times of their composition, others emphasize that elements of the texts were censored and edited due to Islamic theology and Islamic cultural sensibilities.[3] This calls into question whether the Pahlavi texts accurately reflect Sasanian culture and complicates their utility for comparative Talmudic study. In addition, there are few critical editions of these works, and even experts disagree in many cases on the meaning of basic passages. The truth is that our knowledge of Sasanian history and culture itself is severely limited because of these very issues, which clearly makes comparative study particularly challenging. Despite these difficulties, scholars in recent years have employed Pahlavi texts in many rich and important studies and made significant contributions to the understanding of numerous obscure Talmudic passages, as well as to Talmudic culture more broadly.[4] These studies should be continued, though the methodological difficulty of the late dating remains.[5]

Third, incantation bowls inscribed with Aramaic spells and incantations, apparently written by Jewish sorcerers/magicians, have been made available to scholars and published in recent years. The spells often quote biblical verses, a few of them mention rabbis (especially R. Yehoshua b. Perahia), and one or two even quote a line of Mishnah. These bowls are a source of great potential to shed light on some Talmudic traditions and should be a focus of further study. One major difficulty is that the precise dating and the geographic and archeological

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[2] Exhibition announcement: http://asiasociety.org/arts/asia-society-museum/past-exhibiti ons/glass-gilding-and-grand-design-art-sasanian-iran-224%E2%80%93642; Exhibition catalog: http://asiastore.org/product/9780878481064–glass-gilding-and-grand-design/. Accessed 16 June 2016.

[3] See Sh. Shaked, *Dualism in Transformation: Varieties of Religion in Sasanian Iran* (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1994); M. Macuch, "Pahlavi Literature," in R. E. Emmerick and M. Macuch (eds.), *A History of Perisan Literature*, vol. 17 (New York and London: I. B. Taurus, 2009), 116–196.

[4] See the many studies of Y. Elman, Sh. Secunda, R. Kipperwasser, Y. Kiel, G. Herman, and others listed in the bibliography of Sh. Secunda, *The Iranian Talmud: Reading the Bavli in its Sasanian Context* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 215–238. And see now the brief review of Pahlavi literature and Talmudic aggadah in G. Herman and J. L. Rubenstein, "Introduction," in eidem (eds.), *The Aggada of the Bavli and Its Cultural World* (BJS 362; Providence: Brown University, 2018), xii–xvii.

[5] See R. Brody, "Irano-Talmudica: The New Parallelomania?," *JQR* 106 (2016): 209–232, and the responses there by Sh. Secunda and S. Gross.

provenance of most of the bowls are unclear, and that the bowls are targeted toward a few specific ends. In addition, the range of topics engaged by the bowls is narrow, and the bowls reflect popular, not scholastic culture.[6]

The difficulties of moving outside of the boundaries of the text of the Babylonian Talmud to the ambient Sasanian culture are therefore formidable. No solution may prove fully equal to the problem. However, I propose that there is an under-exploited corpus of literature, despite some recent studies, that should be employed, namely Christian hagiographic and martyrological texts, as wells as Church canons and other writings of the Christian schools, from the Sasanian Empire.[7] This literature has great potential to shed light on the Babylonian Talmud for several reasons.[8] First, in contrast to Pahlavi literature, many of these texts are written in Syriac, a dialect of Aramaic, with shared words, expressions, and concepts with the Jewish Babylonian Aramaic of the Babylonian Talmud. Second, much of the literature dates from the fourth through seventh centuries. This literature is therefore contemporaneous with the period of the later generations of the Amoraim (the named sages in the Talmud, ca. 200–500 CE), the Stammaim (the post-Amoraic anonymous author-editors of the Babylonian Talmud, ca. 500–700 CE), and the redaction of the Babylonian Talmud. It is earlier than the Pahlavi literature, much of which dates to the Islamic era, as noted above. Third, some of the Syriac texts provide more specific geographical data as to where within the Sasanian Empire they were composed, and in some cases they derive from much the same geographic region as the rabbinic communities of "Babylonia," i. e., present-day Iraq, as opposed to Pahlavi literature, which probably derives from southern Iran, from Fars and its surroundings. Other Syriac texts come from nearby regions of Armenia, Georgia, and Eastern Syria, which were at times within the Sasanian borders and were part of a similar cultural sphere.[9] Texts composed in Georgian, Sogdian, Armenian, and other lan-

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[6] See Sh. Shaked and J. Naveh, *Amulets and Magic Bowls* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1985); Sh. Shaked, J.N. Ford, and S. Bhayro (eds.), with M. Morgenstern and N. Vilozny, *Aramaic Bowl Spells: Jewish Babylonian Aramaic Bowls* (Leiden: Brill, 2013); J.S. Mokhtarian, *Rabbis, Sorcerers, Kings, and Priests: The Culture of the Talmud in Ancient Iran* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), 124–143.

[7] Some scholars have drawn on this literature through P. Brown's work, including his influential article "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man," *JRS* 61 (1971): 80–101. See, e.g., M. Hirschman, "Moqdei qedusha mishtanim: honi unekhadav," *Tura* 1 (1989): 113–116; R. Kalmin, "Holy Men, Sages, and Demonic Rabbis in Late Antiquity," in R. Kalmin and S. Schwartz (eds.), *Jewish Culture and Society under the Christian Roman Empire* (Leuven: Peeters, 2003), 211–249; D. Levine, "Holy Men and Rabbis in Talmudic Antiquity," in J. Schwartz and M. Poorthuis (eds.), *Saints and Role Models in Judaism and Christianity* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 45–58, and Ch. Safrai and Z. Safrai, "Rabbinic Holy Men," in *Saints and Role Models in Judaism and Christianity*, 69–78.

[8] I do not mean to establish strict and artificial geographical boundaries. This literature can also illuminate rabbinic texts composed in the Land of Israel.

[9] See, e.g., J.R. Russell, *Zoroastrianism in Armenia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987).

guages from regions within the Sasanian Empire, or translated from Syriac into these languages, have much the same potential as the Syriac literature. This is not to deny that there are some similar problems in determining the dating and precise geographical provenance of many of these texts as with the Pahlavi literature and the incantation bowls. Nevertheless, one could argue that these texts are the best comparanda for the Babylonian Talmud, given the late dating of much of the Pahlavi texts. Moreover, as minority "sister" religions facing the officially sponsored Zoroastrian religion of the Sasanian Empire,[10] Jews and Christians presumably faced similar challenges, and their literature should contribute to the understanding of the other.[11]

A methodological note is in order. The main criticism of comparative studies such as this is the danger of "parallelomania." What do we ultimately learn from literary and cross-cultural parallels? At this point in scholarship, it is a commonplace that rabbinic Judaism, whether in Palestine or Babylonia, was not isolated from its environment but shared the same general cultural world. (Indeed, this can probably be said of just about any minority culture at any point throughout history.) We know that there were influences, borrowings, and shared conceptions. To find similar motifs, plot-patterns, and images in Syriac literature and rabbinic stories is therefore to be expected. Nevertheless, there is much to be gained from the study of parallels. At minimum, they help us gain a better sense of the degree of cultural interaction and appreciate some details of the process. The more and the more similar the parallels, the more we should assume Judaism and Christianity interacted with one another and exchanged ideas. In some cases study of parallels allow us to understand a Talmudic source (or Syriac source) better, or differently, than we otherwise would have, in the absence of the parallel.[12] Comparative study also may help sharpen our understanding of common topics, such as master-disciple relationships, sin and temptation, the use of

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[10] I am aware of the problem of anachronism in terms like "minority" religion. See A. H. Becker, "Political Theology and Religious Diversity in Sasanian Iran," in G. Herman (ed.), *Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians: Religious Dynamics in a Sasanian Context* (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2014), 17–36.

[11] See, e. g., A. H. Becker, "The Comparative Study of 'Scholasticism' in Late Antique Mesopotamia: Rabbis and East Syrians," *AJS Review* 34 (2010): 91–113 as well as the following note.

[12] See, e. g., Sh. Naeh, "Freedom and Celibacy: A Talmudic Variation on Tales of Temptation and Fall in Genesis and its Syrian Background," in J. Frishman and L. Van Rompay (eds.), *The Book of Genesis in Jewish and Oriental Christian Interpretation* (TEG 5; Leuven: Peeters, 1997), 73–89; G. Herman, "'Bury My Coffin Deep!': Zoroastrian Exhumation in Jewish and Christian Sources," in J. Roth, M. Schmeltzer, and Y. Francus (eds.), *Tiferet leYisrael: Jubilee Volume in Honor of Israel Francus* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary, 2010), 31–59; R. Kiperwasser, "The Visit of the Rural Sage: Text, Context and Intertext in a Rabbinic Narrative," *JSJF* 26 (2009): 3–24 (in Hebrew); R. Kiperwasser and S. Ruzer, "Zoroastrian Proselytes in Rabbinic and Syriac Christian Narratives: Orality-Related Markers of Cultural Identity," *HR* 51 (2012): 197–218; J. L. Rubenstein, "A Rabbinic Translation of Relics," in K. Stratton and A. Lieber (eds.), *Crossing Boundaries in Early Judaism and Christianity: Ambiguities, Complexities, and Half-Forgotten Enemies. Essays in Honor of Alan F. Segal* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 314–334.

the Bible, prayer, and engagement with Persian political and religious authorities.[13] This is the case even when there are also parallels in Palestinian rabbinic works that were probably the sources of the Babylonian Talmud's material. That the Babylonian Talmud included these Palestinian sources, and, in most cases, reworked them, suggests that they were meaningful to the Babylonian rabbis, so appreciating the wider cultural context can help to better understand these sources too.

Criticism of the study of parallels has a degree of merit, as some scholars use literary parallels irresponsibly, claiming parallels on the flimsiest of evidence, or asserting evidence of cultural borrowing when the parallels may have resulted from parallel internal development. Other scholars, however, seem to have a very high bar for what sort of evidence is deemed to provide insights into the relationships between cultures almost to the point of delegitimizing all comparative study. In my opinion, the pendulum has swung too far in this direction such that we have replaced parallelomania with parallelophobia.[14] This is not the forum to address this question comprehensively.[15] My sense is that we still have a great deal of work to be done in identifying parallel motifs, tropes, and ideas in rabbinic and Syriac Christian literature before an assessment can be made as to their utility, and this paper is directed toward that end.[16]

Eastern Superiority

Before turning to the Talmudic sources I would like to begin in the early Geonic period with two sources that shed light on the self-conception of the Babylonian rabbinic community and its rivalry with the Palestinian rabbis. Competition between the rabbis of Babylonia and those of Roman Palestine, and efforts by the

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[13] See M. Bar-Asher Siegal, *Early Christian Monastic Literature and the Babylonian Talmud* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

[14] I thank Steven Fraade for bringing this term to my attention. See, e.g., I. J. Yuval, "Christianity in Talmud and Midrash: Parallelomania or Parallelophobia," in F. T. Harkins (ed.), *Transforming Relations: Essays on Jews and Christians Throughout History in Honor of Michael A. Signer* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 50–64; W. W. Hallo, "Compare and Contrast: The Contextual Approach to Biblical Literature," in W. W. Hallo, B. W. Jones, and G. L. Mattingly (eds.), *The Bible in the Light of Cuneiform Literature: Scripture in Contrast*, vol. 3 (Lewiston: E. Mellen Press, 1990), 16–17.

[15] Another approach involves detailed study of a single motif or term in one Syriac author, whose dating and geographic location is known, compared with rabbinic parallels, which allows for a more specific context. See, e.g., A. H. Becker, "The 'Evil Inclination' of the Jews: The Syriac *Yatsra* in Narsai's Metrical Homilies for Lent," *JQR* 106 (2016): 179–207. These approaches are not mutually exclusive. See too I. Rozen-Zvi, *Demonic Desires: Yetzer Hara and the Problem of Evil in Late Antiquity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 117–119.

[16] I am also not so concerned here with the thorny problem of "influence," or whether we deal with "shared cultural concerns" or "common culture," or other such terms, which seem to be increasingly used this day to avoid addressing the issue head on.

Babylonians to have their halakhic traditions recognized as authoritative and superior to those of their Palestinian colleagues, began in the Talmudic period and intensified in the immediate post-Talmudic era.[17] Babylonian propaganda and polemics are seen most clearly in a text known as "Pirqoy ben Baboi" after its author, a disciple of Yehudai Gaon, head of the Sura academy, ca. 760 CE.

And therefore the Holy One, blessed be He, established two academies (*yeshivot*) for Israel (= Sura and Pumbedita) where they study Torah both day and night, and they gather together twice each year, in Adar and in Elul, from all places and they debate in the war of Torah until they establish each point clearly and determine the halakhah truly. And they bring support from the Bible and from the Mishnah and from the Talmud so that Israel never stumble in matters of Torah.

And those two academies never experienced captivity or persecution or pillage and neither Greece nor Rome ruled over them. For God took them with their Torah and their learning out [of the land of Israel] twelve years before the destruction of Jerusalem, as is written, *He (= the King of Babylon) exiled all of Jerusalem: all the commanders and all the mighty – ten thousand exiles – as well as all the craftsmen and smiths; only the poorest people in the land were left (*2 Kgs 24:14). What kind of "mighty" are those who go into exile? But these are the mighty in Torah …

Even in the days of the Messiah, they (the Babylonian academies) will not experience the travail of the Messiah …[18]

Pirqoy ben Baboi emphasizes the greatness of Babylonian academies on account of the extent and depth of their study of Torah. They study continually (day and night), comprehensively (assembling a great number of rabbis twice per year),[19] thoroughly (debating until the conclusion emerges), and compellingly (bringing support from the appropriate sources.) He proceeds to a second argument that centers on the *purity* of their tradition. The Babylonian academies – unlike those of the Land of Israel – never were subject to the devastation caused by foreign invasions. His reference to the destruction of Jerusalem is that of the first temple in 586 BCE as the Biblical citation makes clear. Pirqoy interprets the biblical reference to the "mighty" (*giborei hayyil*) as a reference to the scholars of the academy, those "mighty in Torah," thus finding a prooftext for his claim that the rabbis were exiled to Babylonia in the sixth century BCE. This extreme retrojection

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[17] I. Gafni, "Expressions and Types of 'Local Patrioism' among the Jews of Sasanian Babylonia," in Sh. Shaked (ed.), *Irano-Judaica 2* (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 1990), 63–71; R. Brody, *The Geonim of Babylonia and the Shaping of Medieval Jewish Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 113–122.

[18] B.M. Lewin, "Miseridei hagenizah," *Tarbiz* 2 (1931): 395–396; cf. Sh. Spiegel, "Pirqoi ben Baboi's Polemic," in S. Lieberman et al. (eds.), *Harry Austryn Wolfson Jubilee Volume* (Jerusalem, 1965), 272 (in Hebrew); cf. Taḥuma Noah #3: ולפיכך קבע הקב״ה שתי ישיבות לישראל שהוגין בתורה יומם ולילה ומתקבצין שתי פעמים בשנה באדר ובאלול מכל המקומות ונושאין ונותנין במלחמתה של תורה עד שמעמידין דבר על בורו והלכה לאמתה ומביאין ראיה מן המקרא ומן המשנה ומן התלמוד כדי שלא יכשלו ישראל בד״ת...ואותן ב׳ ישיבות לא ראו שבי ולא שמד ולא שלל ולא שלט בהן לא יון ולא אדום והוציאן הקדוש ברוך הוא י״ב שנה קודם חרבן ירושלים בתורתן ובתלמוד כדי שלא יכשלו ישראל בד״ת וכו.

[19] This probably refers to associates of the academies who were not in full-time residence but lived elsewhere.

of the founding of the Babylonian academies inures them completely from the subjugations of the Second Temple Period. Consequently the post-biblical persecutions of Antiochus IV ("Greece") and of the Romans never impacted them either. Pirqoy even claims the Babylonian rabbinic community will live securely in perpetuity, marshalling some midrashic support that they will not experience the travails of the messianic age that the rest of the world can expect.

The implications of the different historical experiences of the two rabbinic communities are delineated in a subsequent passage:

> A decree was enacted against (the Jews) of Palestine, that they should not recite the Shema or pray. They used to allow them to congregate on Sabbath mornings … and they would say … "Holy" and Shema surreptitiously, and they did these things under compulsion. Now that the Holy One, Blessed by He, has ended the Kingdom of Edom and revoked its decrees and the Ishmaelites have come and permitted them to engage in (the study of) Torah and recite the Shema and pray, it is forbidden to say anything other than in its proper place … Know that it is thus, and it is an *institution of persecution* (*taqanat shemad*).[20]

In this explicit attack on the liturgical customs of the Jews of Palestine, Pirqoy claims that they were forced to alter the proper way of reciting the most important prayers due to the persecutions of the Romans (= Kingdom of Edom). Although the Arabs (= Ishmaelites) defeated the Byzantines/Romans and now rule over Palestine, and although they no longer restrict Jewish religious practice, the Palestinian Jews have retained their former ways. These practices Pirqoy derisively labels as "institutions of persecution." This etiology is invented – many aspects of the laws of prayer do not have a clear basis in the Mishnah and Talmud and simply developed differently in the two rabbinic communities, or resulted from different interpretations of earlier sources. However, the charge that the Palestinian tradition was corrupted and discontinuous amounts to a claim that the Babylonian tradition is pure and original. Pirqoy also uses the term "custom of persecution" (*minhag shemad*) to delegitimize the Palestinian practices.[21]

Pirqoy's polemic against the practices of the Palestinian rabbis can be compared profitably with a passage from the Synod of Gregory I, written in 612.[22]

> In the land of the Persians, from the time of the apostles to this day, no heresy has arisen, causing schisms and divisions. In the land of the Romans, by contrast, from the time of the apostles to the present, there have been numerous and diverse heresies, which have contaminated many people. When they were chased away from there, following their flight

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[20] Translation from Brody, *The Geonim*, 115. See too David Goodblatt, *Babylonian Instruction in Sasanian Babylonia* (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 13–14. Lewin, "Miseridei hageniza," 398–400: שגזרו שמד על בני ישראל שלא יקראו קריאת שמע ולא יתפללו והיו מניחין אותן ליכנס שחרית בשבת ... והיו אומרים ...קדוש ושמע בגניבה והיו עושים דברים הללו באונס ועכשיו שכילה שכילה הקב״ה מלכות אדום. וביטל גזרותיה ובאו ישמעלים והניחום לעסוק בתורה ולקרא קרית שמע ולהפלל אסור לומר אלא דבר אחר דבור במקומו. ותדע לך שכן היא ותקנת שמד היא.

[21] Brody, *The Geonim*, 116.

[22] Not much is known about Gregory/Grigor. See A. Voobus, *History of the School of Nisibis* (CSCO 266; Leuven: Peeters, 1965), 314–317; L. Van Rompay, "Grigor I," in *GEDSH*, 183.

their shadows arrived here. These include Manichaeans, Marcionites, and also the Severan 'Theopaschites' with their malicious doctrine.[23]

The author is explaining why the theology of the Church of the East is superior to that of the West, claiming that their own theology is pure, while that of the Church in the Roman Empire is corrupt. Similarly, in a canon from 585 the authors assert: "This is [the True Faith] which Our Lord first preached and transmitted through His twelve [disciples] to all who embraced and became disciples of His Gospel, [the Faith] which the ancient Fathers preached and taught in their generations perfectly and without anything removed … This catholic faith has been preserved and preached without any corruption among us in all the churches of God forever."[24]

Thus the teaching of the Church of the East is the original theology taught by Jesus to his disciples and preserved accurately throughout the centuries. This theology has not been corrupted by heresies as was that of the Church in the Roman Empire, the Western Church, which accounts for the theological differences between East and West. A brilliant if devious ploy depicts Manichaeism as a heresy that originated in the West and secondarily appeared in the East, as the historical truth is exactly the opposite.[25] Mani was a Parthian, born in 216 CE, reared in the Sasanian Empire, began preaching his religion there, and died in a Persian prison; it took several decades for his teachings to reach Egypt, Palestine, and then Rome.

Both Pirqoy ben Baboi and the Synod authors are engaged in a similar struggle for primacy against the authorities of "the West." Whereas both Christianity and rabbinic Judaism originated in Roman Palestine, both authors attempt a type of reversal of the true historical movement from West to East by claiming their tradition more faithfully preserves the original: Belatedness and geographic distance from the point of origin are advantageous due to the irenic conditions that prevailed there. Both authors charge that the western tradition has been corrupted due to disruptions, namely persecutions for Pirqoy and heresies for the synod. Pirqoy construes his polemic in the language of Jewish law, that the Palestinian halakhic tradition has been distorted, whereas the synod authors employ the language of heresy, that the western Christian theology has been adulterated. Thus each author employs the leading mode of discourse of his religion and the

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[23] J.-B. Chabot, *Synodicon Orientale ou recueil des Synodes Nestoriens publié, traduit et annoté* (Notices et extraits de la Bibliothèque Nationale 37; Paris: Imprimerie Nationale 1902), 567, ln. 18–23 (Syriac), 585 (French). English Translation from J. Walker, *The Legend of Mar Qardagh: Narrative and Christian Heroism in Late Antique Iraq* (Berkeley: University of California Press 2006), 94 fn. 28.

[24] Chabot, *Synodicon*, 394; 132, ln. 23–29 and 133, ln. 1–2 (Synod of 585). Translation Walker, *Mar Qardagh*, 93.

[25] See S. N. Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China: A Historical Survey* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), 125.

main touchstone of normativity: Halakhah/law for rabbinic Judaism and theology for Christianity. These passages offer a fine example of common aspects of the worldview and struggles of the leaders of Jewish and Christian communities in Mesopotamia and how comparative study can be mutually enriching.

Pious Donkeys

The *Persian Martyrs Acts* (= PMA), a corpus of about sixty accounts of Christian martyrs (including a few confessors) in the Sasanian empire, is a rich source of biographical anecdotes that has much in common with rabbinic traditions.[26] The *Martyrdom of Pusai*, set in the year 344, though probably written in the early fifth century,[27] relates that after Pusai's martyrdom, a Christian soldier collected his bones and put them in the saddlebag of his donkey (or ass; ḥmārā).[28]

One of the troops who was waiting there arose from his place, he and his servant, and they approached and put the corpse of the victorious Pusai into a sack. They helped and put it on the donkey. They went and entered the city. When they entered the city, immediately before they arrived at their dwelling (ʾašpāzhon), there was a great darkness. While those people were stumbling here and there on account of the darkness, the donkey walked before him. It did not go straight to the dwelling (ʾašpāzā) of its master but walked down another path. It came and stood at the gate of a certain women, one of the "daughters of the captivity."[29]

The animal waits outside the gate of the courtyard of this ascetic woman, a pious Christian. When the woman's servant girl opens the gate in the morning, the donkey runs into the courtyard. The two women try to shoo the donkey out of the courtyard, but it refuses to move, though they "beat it many times" and even summon the woman's brother to strike it with a stick. Unable to make the donkey budge, they examine the bag, find the bones, and recognize the face of Pusai. The woman and her brother then take the relics, treat them with "great honor," and place them in a shrine for the residents of that city.

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[26] For bibliography on the *Persian Martyr Acts*, see S. P. Brock, *The History of the Holy Mar Maʾin with a Guide to the Persian Martyr Acts* (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2008), 77–95; Herman, "'Bury My Coffin Deep!','' 33 fn. 11. For the texts, see P. Bedjan, *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum* (7 vols.; Paris – Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1890–1897). And see R. Payne, *A State of Mixture; Christians, Zoroastrians, and Iranian Political Culture in Late Antiquity* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015).

[27] See Payne, *A State of Mixture*, 65–66, 298.

[28] Bedjan, *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum*, 2:230–232. Sometimes rendered "Posi."

[29] ܗܘ ܚܕ ܡܢ ܦܠܚܐ ܕܗܘܝܢ ܗܘܘ ܬܡܢ: ܩܡ ܡܢ ܕܘܟܬܗ ܗܘ ܘܡܫܡܫܢܗ: ܘܩܪܒܘ ܘܣܡܘ ܗܘ ܫܠܕܗ ܕܦܘܣܝ ܢܨܝܚܐ ܠܓܘ ܣܩܐ܆ ܘܣܥܪܘ ܘܣܡܘ ܥܠ ܚܡܪܐ. ܘܐܙܠܘ ܘܥܠܘ ܠܡܕܝܢܬܐ. ܘܟܕ ܥܠܘ ܠܡܕܝܢܬܐ: ܡܚܕܐ ܥܕܠܐ ܢܡܛܘܢ ܠܐܫܦܙܗܘܢ: ܗܘܐ ܚܫܘܟܐ ܪܒܐ. ܘܟܕ ܐܢܫܐ ܗܢܘܢ ܡܬܬܩܠܝܢ ܗܘܘ ܠܟܐ ܘܠܟܐ ܡܛܠ ܚܫܘܟܐ: ܚܡܪܐ ܗܘ ܐܙܠ ܗܘܐ ܩܕܡܘܗܝ. ܘܠܐ ܐܙܠ ܬܪܝܨܐܝܬ ܠܐܫܦܙܐ ܕܡܪܗ: ܐܠܐ ܐܙܠ ܒܐܘܪܚܐ ܐܚܪܬܐ. ܘܐܬܐ ܩܡ ܥܠ ܬܪܥܐ ܕܐܢܬܬܐ ܚܕܐ ܡܢ ܒܢܬ ܫܒܝܬܐ...

The fabula ends here, suggesting that the establishment of a shrine, the future cult site of Pusai, was of great importance to the author; such etiologies of martyr cults are often found in the PMA.[30] The righteous donkey is thus the instrument by which the relics arrive in pious hands such that they may be preserved in an appropriate location, a shrine or Church, rather than the private possession of an individual. For this reason the soldier who first collected the relics was prevented by the donkey from bringing them home, as he may have secreted them away for his own benefit. This tension between private possession of relics as opposed to shared and open access in recognized Churches was a point of contention in the fifth and sixth centuries, as Richard Payne has shown.[31]

This "righteous donkey" recalls the rabbinic story of the donkey (*hamar*) of Pinhas b. Yair in b. Hul. 7a–7b.

> He (Pinhas b. Yair) reached a certain inn (*'ušp̄iza*). Barley was placed before his donkey but it would not eat. They beat (the barley) but it did not eat; they sifted it, but it did not eat. He said to them, "Perhaps (the barley) was not tithed." They tithed it and (the donkey) ate.[32]

The donkey refuses to eat food that is forbidden, namely untithed produce, despite several efforts to ameliorate the situation, until tithes are duly extracted. The larger Talmudic *sugya* adduces this story to illustrate a theological claim, "If the Holy One, blessed be He, does not bring stumbling by way of the animal of the righteous, so much the more so to the righteous themselves."[33] As Leib Moskowitz has shown, the fit between this general principle of providence and the story is poor, and the theological claim problematic in and of itself.[34] The story itself shows the outstanding piety of the donkey, and presumably its owner, in adhering to the supererogatory halakhic standards.[35] Interestingly, the two accounts

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[30] See, e.g., A.M. Butts and S. Gross, *The History of the 'Slave of Christ': From Jewish Child to Christian Martyr* (PMAS 6; Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2016), 33–34.

[31] See R. Payne, "The Emergence of Martyrs' Shrines in Late Antique Iran," in P. Sarris, M. Dal Santo, and P. Booth (eds.), *An Age of Saints? Power, Conflict and Dissent in Early Medieval Christianity* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 89–113.

[32] אקלע לההוא <u>אושפיזא</u> רמו ליה שערי לחמריה לא אכל חבטינהו לא אכל נקרינהו לא אכל אמר להו דלמא לא מעשרן עשרינהו ואכל אמר ענייה זו הולכת לעשות רצון קונה ואתם מאכילין אותה טבלים.

[33] השתא בהמתן של צדיקים אין הקדוש ברוך הוא מביא תקלה על ידן, צדיקים עצמן לא כל שכן...

[34] See L. Moskovitz, "'The Holy One Blessed be He ... Does Not Permit the Righteous to Stumble': Reflections on the Development of a Remarkable BT Theologoumenon," in J.L. Rubenstein (ed.), *Creation and Composition. The Contribution of the Bavli Redactors (Stammaim) to the Aggada* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 125–180. See especially pp. 138–40 on what food is forbidden for the donkey to eat. On these stories of R. Pinhas b. Yair, see too L. Jacobs, "The Story of R. Pinhas ben Yair and his Donkey in B. Hullin 7a–b," in P.R. Davies and R.T. White (eds.), *A Tribute to Geza Vermes: Essays on Jewish and Christian Literature* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 183–205; E. Yassif, *The Hebrew Folktale: History, Genre, Meaning* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 116–120, 125.

[35] Moskovitz, "'The Holy One Blessed be He ... Does Not Permit the Righteous to Stumble'," 140.

employ cognate terms for the home/domicile of the soldier, Syriac ʾašₚāzā, and the inn/lodging, Jewish Babylonian Aramaic ʾušₚiza, both of which derive from MP *aspinǰ*, "hospitality, inn."[36] In addition, the martyrdom account continues immediately with an acknowledgement of providence: "These events happened through the providence of God,"[37] which bears some affinities to the Talmud's principle.

Another account of a righteous donkey appears in b. Taan. 24a.

He [= R. Yose of Yoqrat] had a donkey. When they hired it they would send it back in the evening with the payment of hire on its back and it would go to its master's house. If they paid too much or too little it would not move. Once someone left a pair of sandals on the donkey by mistake and it would not move until they were removed.[38]

This donkey, like that of R. Pinhas b. Yair, will not be complicit in any violation of halakha, even if it comes about through no fault of its own. Like the donkey in the *Martyrdom of Pusai*, R. Yose b. Yoqrat's pious donkey refuses to move and also balks at returning to his master's house.

In this case the Babylonian Talmud clearly has not borrowed the motif of the righteous donkey from the Syriac account, as a version of the story of R. Pinhas b. Yair's donkey appears in the Yerushalmi (y. Demai 1:2 [21d]).[39] Here the donkey is first stolen by thieves but refuses to eat anything for three days while in their possession until they decide to return it. Even back home the donkey still refuses to eat barley placed before it, and R. Pinhas b. Yair discovers that the barley had not had *demai* removed from it.[40] He explains that, while *demai* technically need not be removed from animal food, "What shall we do for this unfortunate [beast], who takes stringencies upon itself?" That is, the righteous donkey held itself at the higher standard required only of produce intended for human consumption. The story could be encouraging the audience to supererogatory piety, and may also be meant as criticism of rabbis who do not aspire to such standards. At all events, both the Talmudic stories and *Martyrdom of Pusai* probably draw on the

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[36] See Sokoloff, *DJBA*, 98; idem, *A Syriac Lexicon* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 107; C.A. Ciancaglini, *Iranian loanwords in Syriac* (Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 2008), 118–119; H. W. Bailey, "Iranian Studies II," *BSOS* 7 (1933): 74.

[37] Bedjan, *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum*, vol. 2, 232. In what appears to be a coincidence, the word "stumbling block" (*tiqla*) appears in the Babylonian Talmud passage, while the Syriac text narrates that the people were "stumbling" (*meṭṭaqlin*) on account of the darkness.

[38] הויא ליה [ר׳ יוסי דמן יוקרת] ההוא חמרא כדהוו אגרי לה כל יומא לאורתא הוו משדרי לה אגרה אגבה ואתיא לבי מרה ואי טפו לה או בצרי לה לא אתיא. יומא חד אינשו זוגא דסנדלי עלה ולא אזלה עד דשקלונהו מינה והדר.

[39] Also in Bereshit Rabba 60:8 (ed. Theodor-Albeck, 648–650). Avot de-Rabbi Natan A:8 (ed. Schechter, 19b), tells the story of the donkey of Hanina b. Dosa. See too b. Shabb. 112b, which mentions "the donkeys of Hanina b. Dosa and R. Pinhas b. Yair," clearly intending their special status. On the unclear referent of the donkey of Hanina b. Dosa, see Moskovitz, "'The Holy One Blessed be He … Does Not Permit the Righteous to Stumble'," 139 fn. 43.

[40] *Demai* is the tithe required from doubtfully-tithed produce.

biblical account of Bilaam's donkey in Numbers 22:21–32, so neither tradition need be indebted to the other.[41]

Both the rabbinic storytellers and Christian hagiographer employ the motif of the righteous donkey for their didactic aims. In both cases the refusal of the beasts to proceed reveals the hand of providence. In the martyrdom account, the donkey helps prevent the improper private possession of relics, which leads to the appropriate establishment of the martyr's cult site for communal worship. In the Talmudic accounts the donkeys prevent violations of halakhah and encourage the highest level of piety. The motif is adapted by each tradition to support specific religious practices and theological aims.

Sadducees

I turn now to another of the Persian Martyr Acts, the *History of Rabban Mar Saba*, probably written in the early seventh century.[42] After converting a village of pagan Kurds to Christianity, a conversion motivated in part by Mar Saba causing their idol to shatter, Mar Saba is accosted by the "Chief Sadducee" from a nearby village of Sadducees, two miles distant from the Kurds.

There was there a village of Sadducees … and when the Chief Sadducee of the place … saw them (= Mar Saba *et al.*) he greeted them and he opened his mouth to say to them, that there is no resurrection, nor revivifying the dead, nor judgment …"[43]

Mar Saba responds that if the Sadducee is correct, he will return to his village in peace, but if there is resurrection and revival of the dead, he will not return safely. Immediately the Sadducee is lifted from his carriage, raised up a considerable distance, and dashed to the ground. Then an angel of the Lord strikes him dead. At this point all the onlookers cry out and say, "Great is the God of the Christians."[44] Shortly thereafter Mar Saba waves his hand at a mountain crag, and immediately the mountain moves from its place and squashes the entire Sadducean village such that "the place of that village is unknown to the present day."

The curious reference to a village of Sadducees in a sixth-century text has provoked scholarly interest. Sadducees are also mentioned in a fifth-century Syriac

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[41] See too 2 Peter 2:16. For some discussion of stories of rabbinic Holy Men and animals in general, see E. Diamond, "Lions, Snakes, and Asses: Palestinian Jewish Holy Men as Masters of the Animal Kingdom," in R. Kalmin and S. Schwartz (eds.), *Jewish Culture and Society under the Christian Roman Empire* (Leuven: Peeters, 2003), 254–283.

[42] Bedjan, *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum*, vol. 2, 673–677. On Mar Saba, see J. M. Fiey, *Saints syriaque* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 2004)*,* 163–164; Payne, *A State of Mixture*, 51, 54.

[43] Bedjan, *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum*, vol. 2, 673–674: ... ܟܕܐ ܗܘܐ ܟܐ ܒܗ ܕܘ ܒܥܕܬ ܕܘܩܝܐ ܟܐ ... ܗܟܢ ܕܘܩܝܐ ܟܢ ܟܐ ܐܝܟ ܗܘ ... ܟܕ ܐܝܟ ܗܘ ܟܢ ܒܟ ܟܐ ܟܟܝܐ ܟܢ : ܩܗܗ ܩܗܗܒ ܠܟܕܗܟܐ ܠܗܗ ܟܢ : ܕܠܕ ܟܒܟܐ ܟܐ: ܟܐܒ ܒܝܢ ܗܟܐ ܐܟܝܐ: ܟܢܐ ܟܗܟܐ ܐܟܕܐ: ܟܒܐ ܗ.

[44] Cf. y. B. Metz. 2:5 (8c) where Shimon b. Shetah hopes his piety will motivate a gentile to state, "Blessed is the God of the Jews."

text, the *Life of Rabbula*.[45] The general trend has been to understand the reference to the Sadducees as a veiled reference to some gnostic or heretical Christian group, such as the Borborians (or Borborites) mentioned by Epiphanius of Salamis in his *Panarion* ("Against Heresies") or the Audians, a fourth-century Christian "sect."[46] Evidence of these groups in the Sasanian empire in the sixth century, however, is lacking. And the Sadducee's rejection of resurrection does not correlate with what we know of these heretical groups, though it does match what is said about the Sadducees in the New Testament, Josephus, and a stray tradition in Avot de-Rabbi Natan.[47] Rather than adopting an orientation that trusts the historicity of these hagiographic texts and which seeks a "historical kernel" behind them, we should view them instead as fictional and didactic writings and seek to understand their agendas.

The Babylonian Talmud discusses Sadducees in several passages, although these mostly comment on mentions of Sadducees in Tannaitic sources.[48] It also contains various dialogues between rabbis and *minim*, heretics, for which censors or printers substituted "Sadducees" in vulgate editions.[49] However, in some

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[45] See R. Doran, *Stewards of the Poor: The Man of God, Rabbula, and Hiba in Fifth-Century Edessa* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 2006), 93–94. "As for the Audians and the Sadducees who are heretics, who had separated themselves from contact with the Church as anathematized by the truth and had begotten for themselves a false priesthood in the likeness of the true one, straying, blind to the truth, after babbling visions: that true shepherd acted towards them so as to take care of his flock. He scattered their assemblies. He made them strangers to the church they had adorned and he expelled them from it. In their place he settled brothers who were partakers of our sacrament. Those who repented he made partakers in his own flock."

[46] See J. G. E. Hoffmann, *Auszüge aus syrischen Akten persischer Märtyrer übersetzt und durch Untersuchungen zur historischen Topographie erläutert* (Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1880), 122–128. On the Borborians, see S. Gero, "With Walter Bauer on the Tigris: Encratite Orthodoxy and Libertine Heresy in Syro-Mesopotamian Christianity," in C. W. Hedrick and R. Hodgson Jr. (eds.), *Nag Hammadi, Gnosticism, and Early Christianity* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1986), 287–307.

[47] In Matthew 22:23 = Mark 12:18 = Luke 20:27: "The Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Jesus …"; cf. Acts 4:1–2. In Acts 23:8: "For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor an angel, nor a spirit." See too Josephus, *Antiquities*, 18.1.4 (ed. H. St. J. Thackeray, R. Marcus, and L. H. Feldman, *Josephus* [LCL 186, 203, 210, 242, 281, 326, 365, 410, 433; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926–1965]): "But the doctrine of the Sadducees is this: That souls die with the bodies; nor do they regard the observation of anything besides what the law enjoins them." Cf. Josephus, *Antiquities*, 13.5.9. [171] and *Wars*, 2.8.14 [165]; Avot de-Rabbi Natan A:5, B:10 (ed. Schechter, 13b).

[48] See e. g., b. San. 52b; b. Nid. 33b.

[49] C. Hayes observes that "[m]ost scholars agree that *minim* is an indeterminate term for all those who questioned rabbinic Judaism. It serves as a catch-all word that denotes heretics and sectarians of various types: Jewish Christians, gentile Christians, gnostics, pagans, apostates, Samaritans, and even Sadducees depending on context" ("Displaced Self-Perceptions: The Deployment of Minim and Romans in B. Sanhedrin 90b–91a," in H. Lapin [ed.], *Religious and Ethnic communities in Later Roman Palestine* [Potomac: University of Maryland Press, 1998], 260–262 and fn. 29). See too A. Schremer, *Brothers Estranged: Heresy, Christianity, and Jewish Identity in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

cases "Sadducees" appears in the manuscripts and seems to be the original reading. Thus b. San. 90b:

> The Sadducees asked Rabban Gamaliel: How do we know that the Holy Blessed One revives the dead? He said to them: [There is proof] from the Torah, and from the Prophets, and from the Writings ...[50]

Only the Vilna printing reads *minim* here. Earlier printings (Barko 1497; Venice, 1520) read "Sadducee," as do mss. Harav Herzog, Florence, and Munich, the Geniza fragment published by A. Katsch, and some medieval citations.[51] Hayes has argued that such dialogues with heretics and non-rabbis are best seen not as real encounters but as fictional products of rabbinic anxieties that allow rabbis to displace and externalize problematic ideas onto "others" where they can be more safely explored and refuted.[52] That the Torah, together with most of the Hebrew Bible, indeed lack the doctrine of resurrection is good reason to see this dialogue as a product of rabbinic anxiety over the seeming absence of a foundational belief in the authoritative scriptures. As in the Christian text, here too is a challenge to a religious authority from a group that rejects resurrection.[53]

The encounter of Mar Saba and the Sadducees can be analyzed along similar lines. His triumphs over the pagan Kurds and Sadducees demonstrate his superior powers to pagans and heretics. We need not see the Sadducees as representing any specific group, but rather as a generic literary representation of potential opponents. The anxiety here is not, as in the rabbinic texts, as much doctrinal or exegetical ("why believe in resurrection, and where is it derived from scripture?") but about authority and personality: Does Mar Saba, the future martyr, truly possess divine might? The shattering of the pagan village's idol and then the destruction of the Sadducees prove that the Holy Man indeed has been conferred God's power and authority. Note that Mar Saba does not seek to refute the Sadducees with theological argumentation but demonstrates his ability with miracles and their obliteration. Both the Talmudic storytellers and hagiographic author employ "literary" Sadducees to address their anxieties, portraying challenges to the legitimate religious authorities which are successfully met. Each employs the authoritative currency of his tradition: the ability to perform miracles vs. the ability to interpret the scriptures. Again we have a common motif adapted to the specific needs and forms of each tradition.

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[50] שאלו צדוקין את רבן גמליאל: מניין שהקדוש ברוך הוא מחייה מתים? אמר להם מן התורה, ומן הנביאים, ומן הכתובים, ולא קיבלו ממנו.

[51] A. Katsch, *Ginze Talmud Bavli* (Jerusalem: Rubin Mass, 1975), vol. 2, 104, 225. See the references there.

[52] Hayes, "Displaced Self-Perceptions," 274.

[53] S. Miller has also noted that a number of debates between rabbis and *minim* in Palestinian sources grapple with challenges to the doctrine of resurrection ("The *minim* in Sepphoris Reconsidered," *HTR* 86 [1993]: 377–402).

Mocking the Master

The *Martyrdom of ʿAqebshma*, also found in the PMA, set in 377 and written in the fifth century, relates that a priest named Papa Badoqa, that is Papa "the Teacher,"[54] prophesies that Bishop Aqebshma will die a martyr.[55] Another bishop, hearing the prognostication "said to that brother, as if laughing, 'And for me, my son? Do you know then what will happen to me?'" This unnamed bishop, in other words, expressed skepticism about Papa Badoqa's prediction. Papa Badoqa responds that "when you are going on the way to the region of Arran you will die," i. e., in a routine and mundane way, not the glorious death of a martyr. The narrator then informs the reader: "As he spoke, so it was. The Holy Aqebshma was killed in martyrdom, and he went and died in Arran."

A mocking student appears in b. B. Bat. 75a (= b. San. 100a): When R. Yohanan expounds a tradition concerning the immense size of the jewels to be used in the construction of the eschatological gates of Jerusalem, "a certain student mocked him (*ligleg alav*)." That student, when traveling on a ship, saw the angels preparing those stones under the sea, and then returned to R. Yohanan and verified his exposition. R. Yohanan, however, reacted angrily: "'Scoundrel! If you had not seen it, you would not believe it. You are a mocker (*melagleg*) of the words of the sages.' He set his eyes on him and turned him into a heap of bones." The Palestinian version of the story in the midrashic collection Pesikta de-Rav Kahana 18:5 tells of a heretic, not a student, who mocks R. Yohanan.[56]

A story of R. Eliezer, found already in Tannaitic sources and included in both Talmuds, relates that when a student rendered a legal decision in the presence of R. Eliezer, thus failing to show proper deference to a teacher, R. Eliezer told his wife that the student would not survive the week and he died as foretold (in the Babylonian Talmud, the time given is a year).[57] When asked if he is a prophet, R. Eliezer answers, "I am neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet. But this I have received [a tradition]: He who renders a legal decision in the presence of his master incurs a sentence death."

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[54] *Literally* "the interpreter." The exact function of the *bāḏoqā* is unclear. See A. H. Becker, *Sources for the Study of the School of Nisibis* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008), 8; idem, *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom: The School of Nisibis and Christian Scholastic Culture in Late Antique Mesopotamia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 3.

[55] Bedjan, *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum*, vol. 2, 362–363. On the date of composition see Payne, *A State of Mixture*, 38, 298. Sozomen renders the name Acepsimas (*Ecclesiastical History*, 2:13; ed. J. Bidez and G. C. Hansen, *Sozomenus. Kirchengeschichte* [GCS nf 4; 2nd rev. ed.; Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1995]).

[56] Pesikta de-Rav Kahana 18:5 (ed. Mandelbaum, 297–298). English translation in W. Braude and I. Kapstein, *Pesiqta de Rab Kahana* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1975). On these sources, see R. Kalmin, *Jewish Babylonia between Persia and Roman Palestine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 88–101.

[57] Sifra, *Shmini* 2:32–33 (ed. Weiss, 45b); y. Git. 1:2 [43c]; b. Eruv. 63a; Pesikta de-Rav Kahana 26:5 (ed. Mandelbaum, 393).

Another such story appears in the *Lives of the Eastern Saints* of the miaphysite John of Ephesus (ca. 507–586), a Syriac collection of the biographies of over fifty ascetic holy men and women, mostly from Syria and Mesopotamia, written in the 560s.[58] In the "Life of Simeon the Mountaneer," Simeon tonsures a boy and girl (together with other children he had gathered for education), which distresses their parents, who then take the children away from Simeon. He cautions that the children will not live until the next week if the parents take the children back. But the parents "mock him (*'ahhel[w] bēh*)," and say: "If you think your curses are so well heard, go and curse these Huns." The children indeed die within three days, although the author, somewhat apologetically, has Simeon disavow direct responsibility, claiming that it was not because he cursed them, but simply that "God chastised you yourselves for your presumption against his word."[59]

Thus we find several variations of this motif. In the *Martyrdom of 'Aqebshma*, the stories of R. Yohanan in the Pesikta de-Rav Kahana and in the Babylonian Talmud, and in "Simeon the Mountaneer," the sage is mocked, although the "mocker" varies from a bishop, to heretic, to disciple, to ordinary people. However, the title Papa Badoqa (the "Teacher") points to a position of authority, as does Papa's prophetic ability, even if the scoffing bishop or "brother" is not a formal disciple. This story and the Babylonian Talmud's account of R. Yohanan with the mocking student clearly function to instill proper respect for teachers in scholastic settings where master-disciple relationships are crucial to the functioning of the school.

R. Eliezer's student does not mock him but shows a different type of insolence, a quintessentially rabbinic form of disrespect, delivering a formal legal decision in the territory of his teacher, to whose authority he ought to have deferred. Here then is an adaptation of this motif to the halakhic purposes of rabbinic culture, namely to warn against encroaching on a teacher's authority to issue legal decisions.

Another variation is that R. Yohanan actually causes the death of the disciple/heretic, whereas R. Eliezer, Papa Badoqa, and Simeon the Mountaneer simply foretell the death. Note that both R. Eliezer and Simeon offer explanations to others that account for the death in ways that remove themselves from responsibility. Because the motif appears in Palestinian sources, again we are dealing with a shared cultural trope rather than influence among the Babylonian Talmud and the Syriac texts. In both traditions to mock or otherwise disrespect teachers and holy men was very dangerous behavior that could result in death.[60]

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[58] See S. A. Harvey, *Asceticism and Society in Crisis: John of Ephesus and the* Lives of the Eastern Saints (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990). Many of the John's subjects lived in and around Amida.

[59] E. W. Brooks, *Lives of the Eastern Saints* (PO 17.1; 18.4; 19.2; Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1923–1925), vol. 1, 244–246.

[60] For other stories of rabbis causing death of their opponents, see y. Shev. 9:1 (38d), y. Taan. 3:4 (66d), b. Shabb. 34a, b. Ber. 58a.

Collapsing Structures

John Rufus's *Life of Peter the Iberian* is a Syriac hagiographic work, probably a translation from a Greek original, written in the late fifth or early sixth century.[61] Peter lived ca. 410–491; Iberia here is modern-day Georgia, also called Iberia or Caucasian Iberia, and was part of the Sasanian Empire at times, and constantly subject to Sasanian influence.[62] The author illustrates the holiness of the Saint's grandmother and caretaker through their success at preventing the collapse of buildings:

(16) Osduktia, the paternal grandmother of the blessed Peter, was so holy in every [respect] that after her death, when a guard post that was under construction was collapsing during an earthquake, the collapsing (*mappultā*) ceased immediately when her body was brought out and laid there like that of one of the saints.[63]

(17) The blessed Zuzo who reared the blessed one was so holy that when Peter as an infant, while he was sleeping at her side, she would often drench him with tears when she rose up at night and was saying the following words in the Iberian language: "Lord Jesus, my God and Giver of my life, have mercy on me!" Once when there was an earthquake and everything was shaking, while the blessed one was running about in her house, which had eight apses, she held on to each of the pillars and cried out with boldness, "Lord, see how I have served you, and spare me and my children!" Her prayer did not allow her house to suffer any loss, although this earthquake ruined many at that time.[64]

These sources recall the stories of rabbis who prevent dilapidated houses and walls from collapsing, including Rav Adda b. Ahavah (b. Taan. 20b) and Nahum Ish Gamzu (b. Taan. 21a). Rav Huna wished to remove wine from a dilapidated house, so he brought Rav Adda b. Ahavah inside the house while he removed the

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[61] See C. B. Horn and R. R. Phenix, Jr., *John Rufus: The* Lives *of Peter the Iberian, Theodosius of Jerusalem, and the Monk Romanus* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008). The attribution to John Rufus, of whom little is known in any case, is uncertain. See the introduction, pp. lvii–lxiii. On the language of composition, see lxiii, lxix–lxxv. And see C. Horn, *Asceticism and Christological Controversy in Fifth-Century Palestine: The Career of Peter the Iberian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

[62] Horn and Phenix, *John Rufus*, xix–xiv, xxvi–xxxii: "Shah Yazdegard II (438–457) undertook the complete subjugation of Armenia and Georgia. Part of his policy was to assimilate their populations *in toto* into Zoroastrianism" (xxviii). See too Payne, *A State of Mixture*, 14–15; N. Garsoïan, "The Two Voices of Armenian Mediaeval Historiography: The Iranian Index," *Studia Iranica* 25 (199): 7–43.

[63] ܟܐܘܣܕܘܩܛܝܐ ܕܝܢ ... ܐܡܬܐ ܪܒܬ ܕܝܬ ܕܐܒܐ ܕܛܘܒܢܐ ܦܛܪܘܣ ܕܒ ܩܕܝܫܬ ܗܘܬ ܒܟܠܡܕܡ ܕܡܢ ܒܬܪ ܡܘܬܗ. ܘܐܬܬܢܝܚܬ ܒܗ ܕ ܕܬܟܠܗ ܗܘܬ. ܟܕ ܐܝܠܝܢ ܕܐܝܬ ܦܘܪܩܢܐ ܕܐܬܒܢܝ ܗܘܐ ܐܬܥܪܩܠ ܗܘܐ ܒܙܘܥܐ ܕܐܪܥܐ: ܫܠܝܬ ܥܠܬ ܡܦܘܠܬܐ.

[64] ܛܘܒܢܝܬܐ ܕܝܢ ܙܘܙܘ ܗܝ. ܕܪܒܝܬ ܠܛܘܒܢܐ ܕܩܕܝܫܬ ܗܘܬ ܕܒܟܠܡܕܡ ܕܟܕ ܦܛܪܘܣ ܗܘܐ ܥܘܠܐ ܟܕ ܕܡܟ ܒܥ ܠܘܬܗ. ܘܬܒ ܥܝܢ̈ܝܗ ܒܠܠܝܐ ܗܘܬ ܡܫܕܐ ܥܠܘܗܝ ܕܡܥ̈ܐ ܘܐܡܪܐ ܗܘܬ ܒܠܫܢܐ ܐܝܒܪܝܐ. ܡܪܝ ܝܫܘܥ ܐܠܗܐ ܕܝܠܝ. ܗܝ ܡܪܝ ܥܒ݁ܕܬ ܠܟ: ܘܦܛܪܝ ܠܝ ܘܠܒܢ̈ܝ. ܨܠܘܬܐ ܕܝܠܗ ܠܐ ܫܒܩܬ ܕܢܬܢܟܐ ܒܝܬܗ. ܟܕ ܗܘܐ ܕܝܢ ܙܘܥܐ. ܕܝܠܗ ܗܘܬ ܒܝܬܐ ܕܝܠܗ ܕܐܝܬ ܗܘܐ ܒܗ ܬܡܢܐ ܩܡܪ̈ܐ ܐܚܝܕܐ ܗܘܬ ܒܟܠ ܚܕ ܚܕ ܡܢ ܥܡܘܕ̈ܐ ܘܩܥܝܐ ܗܘܬ ܒܦܪܪܗܣܝܐ. ܕܝܢ ܐܝܬܘܗܝ ܒܝܬܐ ܗܘ. ܐܝܬ ܗܘܐ ... ܘܗܘܐ ܗܘ ܥܡ ܟܠ ܐܝܠܝܢ ܕܚܒܠ ܗܘܐ ܙܘܥܐ ܕܐܪܥܐ ܒܗ.

wine, and when Rav Adda b. Ahavah departed, the house collapsed.[65] Nahum
b. Gamzu instructs his students first to remove the vessels from the dilapidated
house in which he lies, prior to removing him and his bed, as he knows the house
will not fall as long as he is inside; they do so, and when his bed is removed, the
house immediately falls.[66] Rav attributes this power of Rav Adda b. Ahavah to his
"great merit" (נפישא זכותיה), and the Babylonian Talmud subsequently lists vari-
ous meritorious deeds (עובדיה), including that he never lost his temper within
his house, never walked in front of his superior in learning, never went without
Torah and tefillin, never rejoiced in the misfortune of a neighbor, and so forth.[67]
The supernatural powers of Nahum b. Gamzu derive from the horrible suffer-
ings he imposed upon himself as self-inflicted punishment for failing to help a
poor man quickly enough, willing that his arms and legs be cut off, his eyes be
blinded, and his body covered with boils.

Again the motif is employed in slightly different ways: In the rabbinic sources
the rabbis prevent a rickety or dilapidated (רעיעתא and רעיע)[68] wall or house
from collapsing, whereas in the accounts of the *Life of Peter the Iberian*, the holy
women prevent the collapse of a sound house and guard house (though one un-
der construction) during an earthquake. Moreover, Zuzo prevents the collapse
through prayer, whereas in one of the Babylonian Talmud anecdotes, Rav Adda
b. Ahavah does not even realize the house is unstable: His presence in and of
itself prevents the collapse. In all of these cases, however, the protective power
of preventing buildings from falling is a mark of extreme holiness. This type of
miracle, as far as I can tell, is comparatively rare even in medieval Jewish and
Christian hagiography and in world literature.[69]

In the Christian sources this power marks the holiness of the Saint's ancestor
and governess, thus contributing to what we might call a genealogy of holiness,
which is an important theme of the *Life of Peter the Iberian*.[70] His holy ancestry
and holy upbringing contributed to Peter becoming the "Holy Man" he became.

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[65] רב הונא הוה ליה ההוא חמרא בההוא ביתא רעיעא, ובעי לפנוייא, עייליה לרב אדא בר אהבה להתם,
משכיה בשמעתא עד דפנייה. בתר דנפק נפל ביתא. ארגיש רב אדא בר אהבה איקפד (תענית כ,ב). Cited
according to the standard printings. The manuscript variants do not impact the analysis here.
See too y. Taan. 3:13 (67a).

[66] אמרו עליו על נחום איש גם זו שהיה סומא משתי עיניו, גדם משתי ידיו, קיטע משתי רגליו, וכל גופו מלא
שחין, והיה מוטל בבית רעוע ורגלי מטתו מונחין בספלין של מים כדי שלא יעלו עליו נמלים. פעם אחת [היתה
מטתו מונחת בבית רעוע]. בקשו תלמידיו לפנות מטתו ואחר כך לפנות את הכלים. אמר להם: בניי, פנו את
הכלים ואחר כך פנו את מטתי. שמובטח לכם שכל זמן שאני בבית – אין הבית נופל (תענית דף כא, א). The
variants do not impact this analysis.

[67] The list of deeds actually comes in response to students who ask the Rabbi why he led such
a long life. But the juxtaposition following the account of the dilapidated house suggests that his
deeds also explain the miraculous power.

[68] See Sokoloff, *DJBA*, 1090.

[69] For one example, though told of a relic, see E. Cousins, "The Life of St. Francis," in *Bo-
naventure* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 247.

[70] See Horn and Phenix, *John Rufus*, xxxii, 5.

The author also notes that the governess Zuzo's daughter "who was called Ota and who was the blessed one's nurse, spent all her days in holiness, in fasting and in prayer."[71] Even the milk which nourished the (future) saint came from a holy source! The Talmud uses the ability of Rav Adda as a didactic opportunity to list acts of piety that the audience might wish to emulate so as to attain that level of holiness. The pietistic acts of Rav Adda include a miscellany of rabbinic mitzvoth, most of them ethical (not losing his temper or rejoicing in the misfortune of a neighbor) but some ritual (not walking without tefillin). Perhaps this is a secondary purpose of recounting Zuzo's nightly liturgies, i. e., to model such piety, especially among caregivers.[72] Her deeds are exemplary Christian worship practices, tears and nocturnal vigils, especially for women. Thus in this case too we have a common motif adapted for the didactic purposes of the authors/storytellers of each tradition.

Another episode from the *Life of Peter the Iberian* should be mentioned in passing. The author recounts that Peter made a trip to Arabia to bathe:

On one occasion it pleased the blessed one to go to the regions of Arabia to bathe in the hot spring because of his infirmity. [This spring] is at Livias and is called "St. Moses' Spring." For already since his earliest age he treated his body with insolence and inflicted it with severe pain from many toils and various [kinds] of asceticism. That body having vanished, only skin was spread out over the dried-up bones, and this [skin] was very thin.[73]

The visit to the hot springs is reminiscent of R. Shimon Bar Yohai's visit to the bathhouse after his thirteen-year sojourn in the cave, which was also meant to heal the damage to his body and clefs in his skin. Michal Bar-Asher Siegal has connected various motifs that only appear in the Babylonian Talmud's version of this story, and not in the parallel accounts in Palestinian texts, including this visit to the baths, to Christian monastic practices, as monks were also encouraged

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[71] Horn and Phenix, *John Rufus*, section 18, p. 23.

[72] Nahum of Gamzu's self-imposed suffering at the expense of his arms and legs is more difficult to see as a model of piety, as the bodily mutilation he brings upon himself is extreme, even unattested elsewhere. Self-imposed suffering of rabbis to benefit others is also rare, though we do find a few such stories: see b. B. Metz. 85b (R. Eleazar b. R. Shimon), b. Taan. 24b–25a (R. Hanina b. Dosa's fasts), and perhaps b. Ned. 50b–51a (R. Yehudah haNasi). However, Nahum's students do insist that he is a "completely righteous" individual (*tsadiq gamur*), so the righteousness may be the source of his power.

[73] Horn and Phenix, *John Rufus*, 169–171. Cf. the Georgian version of the *Life of Peter the Iberian*, in D. M. Lang, *Lives and Legends of the Georgian Saints* (London: Allen & Unwin; New York: Macmillan, 1956), 74: "Once the Saint happened to go into the regions of Arabia to take a cure by bathing in the thermal waters of Livias, which are called the Spring of Moses. Since his youth he had bruised his body and tormented it by various forms of ascetic discipline, so that his flesh had wasted away and only his skin – and a thin one at that – was stretched over his dried up bones. In his old age, indeed, he became so weak that he threw up with bloody vomit even what little food he swallowed. This was his motive for going to the hot springs at Livias."

to visit baths for healing and cleansing.[74] The anecdote about Peter the Iberian is a good example of a Holy Man attempting to find relief by bathing after ascetic practices injured his bodily flesh. Here Christian writings such as this probably influenced the Babylonian Talmud tradition, as descriptions of ascetic practices are much more common in Christian than rabbinic sources.[75] The Babylonian Talmud, however, adapts the motif to the rabbinic worldview: When Pinhas b. Yair weeps upon seeing R. Shimon b. Yohai's injured flesh, the latter explains that his suffering was the price for becoming so learned in Torah, and not connected to ascetic pursuit per se.

Sorcerers and Blasphemers

Magians and kings in the *PMA* often refer to the Christian martyrs as "sorcerers" (singular *ḥarrāšā*) and their miracles as "sorcery" (*ḥarrāšuṭā*). In *The History of Simeon bar Ṣabbā‘ē*, King Shapur orders: "As for Simeon, the head of the sorcerers, let him be bound and brought to me, for he has rejected my kingdom and chosen that of Caesar by worshipping his god but mocking my gods."[76] In the *Martyrdom of Gubralaha and Qazo*, the King says to Qazo: "Have you too gone astray in this sorcery?" She answers, "Would that you had known the sorcerers of my brother!"[77] In the *Martyrdom of Pusai*, Pusai responds to the King's accusation that he "stands in the teaching of those sorcerers" that: "sorcery has not led me astray. But I have been a Christian from my youth, and Christians drive away demons, and Christianity is contrary to sorcery."[78] Of course in the fictional attributed dialogue it is really the Christian authors reporting (imagining?) what these "Others" would say about Christianity, which suggests that Christians spoke of the Persian religion as sorcery. Indeed, the hagiographers refer to Persians as "sorcerers." Thus in the *Martyrdom of Pethion and Adurhormizd*, the author relates that Anahid, a Mobed's daughter, was afflicted by an "evil spirit that did not leave her alone or cease troubling her day and night. Numerous Jews and Manichees and Magian sorcerers came from all over the place" but could not

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[74] Siegal, *Monastic Literature*, 147, 164–166. Siegal notes the Palestinian versions also mention R. Shimon bar Yohai visiting the baths of Tiberias but do not associate the visit with healing his flesh. Also see H. Zellentin, *Rabbinic Parodies of Jewish and Christian Literature* (TSAJ 139; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 176.

[75] I am not claiming that this specific text influenced the Babylonian Talmud but the general motif of the holy man visiting the baths for healing, which appears to have been relatively widespread.

[76] Text and translation in K. Smith, *The Martyrdom and the History of Blessed Simeon Bar Sabba‘e* (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2014), 94–95. For other examples, see Bedjan, *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum*, vol. 2, 18, 215, 341, 361, 366, 369, 610–612, 672; vol. 4, 143–144.

[77] Bedjan, *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum*, vol. 4, 155–156.

[78] Bedjan, *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum*, vol. 2, 222.

heal her.[79] It is not clear if the author believes these Persian sorcerers to be Zoroastrian clergy (typically referred to as "Mobeds") or another type of religious functionary. At all events, the Christian author's perception that the Persians would conceive of Christians as sorcerers corresponds to his own understanding of Persian religion as sorcery.

The *PMA* also have Persians refer to Christians as "blasphemers." In the *Forty Martyrs of Chaldean Persia*, after the Christians are arrested, the King asks the Mobeds and Magi:

"Where did you see these sorcerers? And what opinion and belief do they hold? And what do they speak and say?" The Mobed answered and said. "Good King. Behold, it is not in the power of a human mouth to say before you that which they execrate and speak and blaspheme (*mḡaddp̄in*) about your kingdom.[80]

Likewise, in the *Martyrdom of the Captives of Beth Zabdai*, the Magians slander the Christians to the King, charging that they "increased cursing you and blaspheming (*mḡaddp̄in*) the gods of the Persians." The Christian martyrs in return charge their opponents for blaspheming. After Mar Qardagh calls the Persian King a "wretched man," the king's agents "stopped up their ears and said one to another, 'Retreat! Retreat! Let us not hear blasphemy (*guddāp̄ā*) against the King of Kings,'" to which Mar Qardagh responds, "Truly you are wretched, you who blaspheme against God the Creator."[81]

Similar terms are used in the Talmud. In b. Shabb. 75a, we find: "Magianism: Rav and Shmuel [differed]. One said 'sorcerers.' And one said 'blasphemers' (מגושתא: רב ושמואל. חד אמר חרשי. וחד אמר: גדופי.)." Likewise, the Talmudic term for Zoroastrian priests, *ḥabara*, meaning "charmer," points to an association

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[79] Bedjan, *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum*, vol. 2, 565. Translation from S. P. Brock and S. A. Harvey, *Holy Women of the Syrian Orient* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 82. See too Bedjan, *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum*, vol. 2, 566, 603. In the *Martyrs of Tur Berʿain*, the King sends to his subordinate, "Since you have written to say that it is through sorcery which they [=the Christians saints] have learnt that no one can harm them, I have accordingly sent the chief sorcerer (*rišā d-ḥarrāšē*), along with two other sorcerers to overpower them." The narrator subsequently relates: "When the sorcerers saw that they had toiled away for two days without achieving anything, they said to the saints, 'What kind of sorcery is it that you have learnt? For we have been unable to overcome it.'" The saints reply to the sorcerers, "Do you want to see our power (*ḥaylā*)." See S. P. Brock (with an introduction by P. C. Dilley), *The Martyrs of Mount Berʿain* (PMAS 4; Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2014), 75, 80. This text was probably composed in the seventh century CE; see pp. xii–xiv. Cf. Pesikta de-Rav Kahana 4:6 (ed. Mandelbaum, 74), where a "certain gentile" tells R. Yohanan b. Zakkai that the ritual of the ashes of the red heifer "looks like magic (*keshafim*)," and the rabbi responds by describing a similar gentile practice, which satisfies the gentile but not the rabbi's students.

[80] Bedjan, *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum*, vol. 2, 341.

[81] Bedjan, *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum*, vol. 2, 495; Walker, *Mar Qardagh*, 61. In the ensuing dialogue one of the magi throws a clod of earth at Qardagh saying, "Woe upon that mouth that utters blasphemies against the gods."

with sorcery.[82] Christianity is not discussed in detail in the Talmud, but b. San. 43a reports that Jesus was put to death for practicing magic and leading Israel astray (שכישף והדיח והסית את ישראל), and other sources also portray Jesus as a magician.[83]

In the absence of a category of "religion" akin to the modern use, the "religion" of the other was considered sorcery or blasphemy or both.[84] The rabbis, the Christian hagiographers, and the Persians as imagined by those hagiographers, all refer to other religions as sorcery or blasphemy.[85] It is also worth noting that the word "magic" for the trade of the magician/sorcerer, together with its negative connotations, is related to the Persian "Magus/Magi," another indication of the "Oriental" perspective on Persian religions.[86]

Interreligious Dialogue

I close with a passage from *The Life of Saint Eustace*, a martyr text set in 544, and probably written not long thereafter. This text is written in Georgian, not Syriac, but the territories of Georgia, Armenia, and Iberia (= Iberia of the Caucasus), as noted above, were within the Sasanian empire for long historical periods, and Christians there were subject to some of the same persecutions in the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries as were Christians in the Sasanian Empire proper.[87] Some scholars have made use of Armenian literature to illuminate Tal-

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[82] See Sokoloff, *DJBA*, 429; Herman, "'Bury My Coffin!'," 44–45 and fn. 74, and the references there.

[83] See P. Schaefer, *Jesus in the Talmud* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 38–40; M. Smith, *Jesus the Magician* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), 45–67.

[84] See B. Nongbri, *Before Religion. A History of a Modern Concept* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015). See, however, the review by J. Broucek, "Thinking About Religion Before 'Religion'. A Review of Brent Nongbri's *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept*," *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 98 (2015): 98–125. And see too A. H. Becker, "Martyrdom, Religious Difference, and 'Fear' as a Category of Piety in the Sasanian Empire: The Case of the Martyrdoms of Gregory and of Yazdpaneh," *JLA* 2 (2009): 300–336.

[85] Cf. the account of the trial of R. Akiba in y. Ber. 9:5 (14b) = y. Sotah 5:7 (20c) where "Turnusrufus the Wicked" says to R. Akiba "Either you are a sorcerer (ḥaraš) or you scorn sufferings." However, in this case the charge is due to R. Akiba's laughing while undergoing the torture. See too Mokhtarian, *Rabbis, Sorcerers, Kings, and Priests,* 141–142.

[86] See G. Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 79. On the history of the term "magus, magi" in Greek and Latin, and its use for both Persian priests and magicians/sorcerers, as well as confusion among its uses, see A. De Jong, *Traditions of the Magi: Zoroastrianism in Greek and Latin Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 387–394.

[87] Shapur I seized Armenia from the Romans in 244 CE, but various parts of Armenia had been within the Achaemenid and Parthian empires earlier. A form of Zoroastrianism was the main religion from Achaemenid times until the conversion to Christianity in the fourth century CE. In Sasanian times the area is sometimes called "Persarmenia."

mudic sources, given the difficulties with the Pahlavi material.[88] The text relates the story of a Zoroastrian convert to Christianity who takes the name Eustace.[89] He recounts his conversion to Christianity as follows:

I used to belong to the land of Persia, the country of the Arshakids, the city of Gandzak. My father was a Magian, my brothers were Magians, and my father instructed me in the Magian religion also. But I had no love for the faith of my fathers, and I said in my mind: I do not like this creed. Now let me listen to that of the Jews and the Christians, and whichever is best, that faith I will adopt. By day my father would instruct me in the Magian religion, but at night when the Christians rang the bell I used to go and listen to their liturgy and observe the service which the Christians performed in honour of God. *I also went with the Jews into their temple and watched their service.* But in the prayers of the Christians I heard their voices as the voices of angels, and exceedingly fragrant and pleasant is their liturgy. *But when at night I went into the Jews' temple, I could not understand what they were saying.*

Afterwards I went back again, and Archdeacon Samuel, a man learned in the faith, approached me and said, "Why do you come to church so assiduously?" But I said to him, "Master, you know what class of man I am, but I do not like this faith of my fathers, and I want someone to explain to me the faith of the Jews and that of the Christians, and whichever creed be the holier, that I will adopt."

At this point Samuel offers a summary of the biblical narrative, beginning with God's call to Abraham, culminating with an explanation that the Jews were massacred, scattered, and enslaved because they did observe the law, such that "Christians now bear the name of 'Israel'." Eustace then reports that he chose Christianity over Judaism and was baptized and became a Christian.

Gandzak/Ganzak is located in Northern Iran, in the Province of Medea, east of Armenia, in what is now Azerbaijan. An important fire-temple was located there, and in 590 it was the site of the final battle between the war of Khosrow II Parvēz and Bahrām Čōbīn.[90] The "interreligious" dialogue portrayed in this text is worthy of note. The account suggests it was easy to wander into the religious institutions of the other, observe the liturgy and rituals, and inquire about customs and beliefs. Eustace seems to have spent some time investigating Jewish and Christian worship in synagogues and Churches even before he presented himself to Samuel as a potential convert. In other words, the doors seem to have been open to others to attend and observe, even those not "formally" interested in converting. Eustace's claim that he "examined every feature of the creeds of the Jews and of the Christians," though exaggerated rhetoric, implies that he not

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[88] See G. Herman, "The Story of Rav Kahana (BT Baba Qamma 117a–b) in Light of Armeno-Persian Sources," in Sh. Shaked (ed.), *Irano-Judaica,* vol. V (Ben Zvi Institute, Jerusalem, 2008), 53–86.

[89] Lang, *Lives and Legends of the Georgian Saints,* 101 ff. S. H. Rapp, *The Sasanian World through Georgian Eyes: Caucasia and the Iranian Commonwealth in Late Antique Georgian Literature* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2014), 45–46, notes that the text is not about a formal persecution but only relates that Eustace was denounced by local Zoroastrians and then arrested and killed by a high-ranking local Sasanian official.

[90] See M. Boyce, "Ganzak," in *EI* (accessed 21 July 2016).

only observed but had detailed discussions about Jewish beliefs, as he had with Samuel. This picture, to the extent it accurately reflects other Sasanian areas as well, may shed some light on how rabbis and other Jews themselves learned of Zoroastrian and Christian religions, and also the forums where they may have interacted with Zoroastrians and Christians. While Eustace's autobiographical account may involve some fictional elements, there are no supernatural or miraculous happenings, and no reason to doubt that the type of interactions he describes were possible.[91]

In his recent book *The Iranian Talmud*, Shai Secunda surveys the possible ways in which rabbis and Jews could have interacted with Persians and learned Zoroastrian texts.[92] That Rav reportedly stated, "He who learns anything from a *magus* is worthy of death" (b. Shabb. 75a), Secunda takes an attempt to prevent what Jews in fact were doing.[93] Secunda also defends the interpretation of earlier scholars that the *bei abedan* mentioned in several Talmudic sources refers to "a generic, unspecified temple, or even the temple of the deity Bagdana." This place may have housed religious disputes between Jews and Zoroastrians, which some rabbis sought to avoid, while others attended.[94] Eustace's account suggests a "Magian son of Magian" could have interacted with Jews and rabbis in the synagogue itself. The text also is far clearer than the opaque traditions of the *bei abedan* in pointing to the existence of a type of interreligious dialogue in the Sasanian empire.[95] If Jews and Christians were also making the rounds of the temples of the other religions in the way that this Zoroastrian was, it may show us how rabbis acquired the detailed knowledge of Christianity and Christian exegesis that various scholars have noted.[96]

Clearly there is a great deal more work to be done in comparative study of Talmud and Christian Syriac literature, as well as the texts in other languages composed within the Sasanian empire. As one of the few literary sources from

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[91] See too Butts and Gross, *The History of the 'Slave of Christ'*, 71–77, for Church canons and other sources that prohibit Christians from eating or fraternizing with Jews, again suggesting that such interaction was common.

[92] Secunda, *The Iranian Talmud*, 35–55.

[93] Secunda, *The Iranian Talmud*, 43.

[94] Secunda, *The Iranian Talmud*, 51–58. See too idem, "The Talmudic *Bei Abedan*, and the Sasanian Attempt to 'Recover' the Lost Avesta," *JSQ* 18 (2011): 343–366. And see the *Martyrdom of Mar Qardagh* (Bedjan, *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum*, vol. 2, 500): "Great crowds of Christians, Jews, and pagans gathered and came from all lands and settled in huge camps surrounding the fortress of the blessed one, waiting to see the day of the crowning of the Athlete of Righteousness" (trans. Walker, *Mar Qardagh*, 64, and see p. 66). This text is a fiction but the author is probably drawing on some experience where Christians, Jews, and pagans (= Persians) gathered together, as he has no real reason to mention the Jews in this passage.

[95] Thus some scholars have questioned this identification of the *bei abedan*. See G. Herman's review of Secunda, *The Iranian Talmud*, in *JQR* 39 (2015): 170–173.

[96] See Schafer, *Jesus in the Talmud*, 115–122; Sh. Naeh and M. Halbertal, "Maayney hayeshua," in J. Levinson et al. (eds.), *Higayon Leyonah* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2007), 179–198.

this era and geographic locale, these Christian texts have the potential to provide contextualization for Talmudic stories and other sources. This type of study is not easy, as there are few shortcuts or resources available, such as concordances to the Syriac texts, and even these would be of limited help. Granted the material has some limitations, nevertheless the difficulty of getting outside of the Talmud requires scholars to exploit all available texts to their fullest.

Judaeo-Syriac

Syriac Texts in Jewish Square Script
(with an Appendix on Syriac as a Religio-Linguistic
Marker in a Judaeo-Arabic Treatise)

Christian Stadel

Language is important as a vehicle for cultural expression, and in the literate so-
cieties of the Hellenistic and Roman Near East, any one language was normally
closely associated with one script, and vice versa.[1] This nexus – the unity of lan-
guage and script – was broken in the Middle Ages, when the Jewish, Syriac, and
to a lesser extent the Samaritan alphabet came to function as markers of religious
affiliation and were used to write Arabic (and sometimes other languages) in
addition to the Aramaic dialects of the respective communities, and Hebrew in
the case of the Jews and Samaritans. But only rarely was the script of one com-
munity used to write the language associated with another. This, however, is the
case with Judaeo-Syriac.

The term 'Judaeo-Syriac'[2] will be used here in a broad sense to include in-
stances of the Jewish square script employed to write the Syriac language, either
in transcription – i.e., by representing the sounds of the Syriac language with
the Hebrew alphabet – or in transliteration – i.e., by replacing the Syriac letters
one-by-one with their Hebrew counterparts.[3] Jewish adaptions of a Syriac liter-
ary *Vorlage*, viz. partial rewritings according to the grammatical rules of a Jewish
Aramaic language, will be included as well, as long as they retain distinct Syriac

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[1] Cf. J. J. Price and Sh. Naeh, "On the Margins of Culture: The Practice of Transcription in
the Ancient World," in H. M. Cotton et al. (eds.), *From Hellenism to Islam: Cultural and Linguis-
tic Change in the Roman Near East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 257–258.

[2] To the best of my knowledge, the term was coined in 1889 by J. Jacobs, *The Fables of Aesop
as First Printed by William Caxton in 1484* (London: Nutt, 1889), 155 in order to describe the
language of Landsberger's Aesopic Fables.

[3] Thus, Syriac ܡܪܝ 'my lord' yields מרי in transliteration, but מר in transcription, since the word
is pronounced *mār* in Syriac. Note that S. Bhayro, "Judeo-Syriac," in L. Kahn and A. D. Rubin
(ed.), *Handbook of Jewish Languages* (Brill's Handbooks in Linguistics 2; Leiden: Brill, 2015),
630, uses only "transcription" in his definition (although he mentions cases of transliteration as
well), whereas Ch. Müller-Kessler, "A Trilingual Pharmaceutical Lexical List: Greek – Aramaic –
Middle Persian," *Le Muséon* 130 (2017): 33, excludes anything but strict transliterations. Both
these usages are infelicitous, since they restrict a small corpus even further.

linguistic elements. Even according to this broad definition, texts in Judaeo-Syriac are few and far between, but they are interesting as a cultural phenomenon since they attest to the knowledge of the markedly Christian Syriac Aramaic language and script in Jewish circles, and they evince cultural appropriation or adaption of a text and its language in a different religious milieu.

In the following, I shall provide an overview – in roughly chronological order – of all Judaeo-Syriac texts known to me. The overview will include references to pertinent editions and manuscript sources, a tentative evaluation of the provenance (both location and time) of each text, and an assessment of its orthography and language (transliteration vs. transcription and pure Syriac vs. linguistic Judaization).[4]

The earliest texts that would fall under our definition of Judaeo-Syriac are three funerary inscriptions from the environs of Edessa, which have been dated to the second or third century CE.[5] Even though these texts are very short, two of them demonstrably contain Syriac linguistic material.[6] This small epigraphic corpus is clearly *sui generis* among the Judaeo-Syriac texts.[7] The texts are not literary, they predate all other witnesses by at least six centuries, and they are almost certainly original compositions, i.e., these are not Jewish copies or adaptions of existing Syriac texts.

All remaining Judaeo-Syriac texts are medieval. The earliest ones are probably three non-religious texts that were presumably converted to square script sometime before the tenth century CE. A ninth- or tenth-century leaf from the Cairo Genizah contains a short fragment of a Syriac-Greek-Middle Persian list of pharmaceutical substances with additional medical instructions in Aramaic.[8]

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[4] The overview is based on Ch. Stadel, "The Judaeo-Syriac Version of Bel and the Dragon: An Edition with Linguistic Comments," *MLR* 23 (2016): 1–6, which should be consulted for fuller bibliographical references. In the present sketch, references are restricted to major studies for each text as well as new publications. The sketch also includes additional texts: Syriac plant and mineral names in the *Sefer Refu'ot* of Asaf the Physician, a list of names of Christian festivals in *Toldot Yeshu*, and pseudo-Syriac words in a Judaeo-Arabic polemical treatise.

[5] D. Noy and H. Bloedhorn, *Inscriptiones Judaicae Orientis*, vol. 3. *Syria and Cyprus* (TSAJ 102; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 128–129 (nos. Syr 78–80).

[6] For a discussion of the language, see J. F. Healey, "Targum Proverbs and the Peshitta: Reflections on the Linguistic Environment," in G. Khan and D. Lipton (eds.), *Studies on the Text and Versions of the Hebrew Bible in Honour of Robert Gordon* (SVT 149; Leiden: Brill, 2012), 331–332.

[7] Knowledge of a predecessor of the Syriac script in Jewish circles is attested by a first century CE inscription on the sarcophagus traditionally attributed to Queen Helena of Adiabene. Interestingly, this inscription follows slightly different orthographic standards than the parallel one in the Jewish square script. In this case, the nexus of script, orthography, and language(?) was apparently retained. On the script of the sarcophagus, see J. Naveh, *Early History of the Alphabet: An Introduction to West Semitic Epigraphy and Palaeography* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1987), 149–151.

[8] S. Bhayro, "The Judaeo-Syriac Medical Fragment from the Cairo Genizah: A New Edition and Analysis," in L. Lehmhaus and M. Martelli (eds.), *Collecting Recipes: Byzantine and Jewish Pharmacology in Dialogue* (STMAC 4; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), 273–300; Müller-Kessler, "A Trilingual Pharmaceutical Lexical List." G. Bohak ("Manuals of Mantic Wisdom: From the

While the Syriac *Vorlage* is clearly connected with Mesopotamia or Persia (as evinced by the Middle Persian glosses), the Judaeo-Syriac copy could also have originated in Syria. The language and orthography of the text was adapted to Jewish Aramaic standards, and Syriac forms appear in transcription rather than in transliteration, e.g., איתיו for Syriac ܐܝܬܐܘ /'īṯaw/ (verso l. 4).

The *Sefer Refu'ot* attributed to Asaf the Physician contains Judaeo-Syriac as well but not as running text. The date and provenance of this compilation remain uncertain,[9] just as the exact extent of Judaeo-Syriac contained in it. These questions will have to await the publication of a critical edition that takes the variegated manuscript evidence into account.[10] For now it is established that two sections preserved in manuscripts of the Bayrische Staatsbibliothek Munich and the Bodleian Library in Oxford have retained more than 100 Syriac plant names in the Hebrew running text.[11] A list of 122 medical plants (ms. Munich 59v–86r) is a Hebrew reworking of a lost Syriac version of Dioscorides' *Simplica* and preserves some 60 Syriac lexemes.[12] The head-to-toe list of ailments that precedes it in the manuscript (ms. Munich 47r–59v) is also rife with Syriac plant names.[13] Occasionally, Syriac designations of minerals or animals are found in collections of recipes in the same manuscript.[14] I am currently working on a more detailed study of the Judaeo-Syriac lexemes from ms. Munich.

A much longer text that contains 67 Aesopic fables was presumably produced in the same cultural milieu of Abbasid Syria or Mesopotamia. The text is preserved in an eleventh-century manuscript from northern Italy and has been

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Dead Sea Scrolls to the Cairo Genizah," in H. Najman [ed.], *Tracing Sapiential Traditions in Ancient Judaism* [JSJS 174; Leiden: Brill, 2016], 202 fn. 28) has announced the discovery of two similar fragments, which remain unpublished for now.

[9] Cf. the recent overview in T. Visi, "Medieval Hebrew Uroscopic Texts: The Reception of Greek Uroscopic Texts in the Hebrew 'Book of Remedies' Attributed to Asaf," in Y. T. Langermann and R. Morrison (eds.), *Texts in Transit in the Medieval Mediterranean* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2016), 165–166.

[10] For the main manuscripts, see the summary by R. Yoeli-Tlalim, "Exploring Persian Lore in the Hebrew *Book of Asaf*," *Aleph* 18 (2018): 125–126. Yoeli-Tlalim is preparing a critical edition (p. 126).

[11] For a partial translation of the former manuscript, see L. Venetianer, *Asaf Judaeus, der älteste medizinische Schriftsteller in hebräischer Sprache* (Strassburg: Trübner, 1916–1917), for a (philologically problematic) edition of the latter see S. Muntner, "Asaf the Physician, Book of Remedies" *Korot* 3 (1965): 396–422, 533–560; *Korot* 4 (1968): 11–40, 170–207, 389–443, 531–572, 691–730; *Korot* 5 (1971): 27–68, 160–187, 295–330, 435–473, 603–649, 773–807; *Korot* 6 (1972): 28–51.

[12] In his translation of this section, Venetianer (*Asaf Judaeus,* 125–168) highlights obvious correspondences to Dioscorides. I. Löw, *Aramäische Pflanzennamen* (Leipzig: Engelmann, 1881), 25–26; idem, *Die Flora der Juden*, vol. 4. *Zusammenfassung, Nachträge, Berichtigungen* (Wien: Kohut-Foundation, 1934), 167–169, has argued convincingly for a Syriac, not a Greek, *Vorlage.*

[13] Löw, *Flora*, vol. 4, 171–174 has a preliminary list of the Syriac lexical material in ms. Munich.

[14] Some are mentioned in passing by Venetianer, *Asaf Judaeus*, 122–124.

known for more than 150 years,[15] but an unedited sixteenth-century manuscript contains the same composition.[16] Both witnesses ultimately derive from a single *Vorlage*. As with the medical fragment, the Syriac text is given in transcription rather than transliteration and has been adapted in language and orthography to Jewish Aramaic dialects.[17] This linguistic Judaization must have been a gradual process that accompanied the copying of the witnesses, since each of the manuscripts preserves original Syriac forms that have been eliminated in the other.

While it may be an accident that the earliest Jewish adaptions of Syriac texts constitute non-religious literature, it is possible that the initial reason for Jews to learn the Syriac script and language was to get access to Semitic translations of Greek works, not to engage Christian religious writings. In the period under discussion, Greek philosophical and scientific literature was being translated to Arabic from Syriac intermediaries, and the Judaeo-Syriac medical texts and Aesopic fables can be seen as evidence for the same phenomenon of transfer of knowledge to Jewish circles. If this line of thought is correct, the place of origin of the aforementioned Jewish adaptions is to be sought in Mesopotamia (and not in Syria), where knowledge of Greek was not widespread in the Jewish communities.

In contradistinction to these non-religious works, the next group of Judaeo-Syriac texts attests to interaction in the sphere of religion. Two Judaeo-Arabic pieces each contain a few words of Syriac in Jewish square script. The Judaeo-Arabic commentary on Canticles by Joseph b. Judah Ibn ʿAqnīn (twelfth/thirteenth century) includes a story attributed to Shmuel Ha-Nagid, who relates that Hai Gaon (died 1038) sent his student R. Maṣliaḥ b. al-Baṣaq to the Catholicos of Baghdad to inquire about the meaning of a difficult verse in the book of Psalms. The answer included the text of the Peshiṭta to Psalm 141:5aβ, a corrupted version of which is preserved in ʿAqnīn's commentary.[18] The *qiṣṣat mujādalat al-ʾusquf* or 'Account of a Disputation of the Priest', an early anti-Christian polemic from Mesopotamia or Syria, includes two short made-up quotations of Christian

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[15] J. Landsberger, *Die Fabeln des Sophos: Syrisches Original der griechischen Fabeln des Syntipas* (Posen: Louis Merzbach, 1859).

[16] B.Y. Goldstein, "The Jewish Recension of a Syriac Version of Aesop's Fables," in T. Li and K. Dyer (eds.), *From Ancient Manuscripts to Modern Dictionaries: Select Studies in Aramaic, Hebrew, and Greek* (PLAL 9; Piscataway: Gorgias, 2017), 67–68; 73 fn. 76, provides preliminary editions of two fables.

[17] Aspects of the linguistic Judaization of the text have been treated in some detail by Goldstein, "The Jewish Recension," 66–72 as well as by C. Stadel, "Animal Names in a Judeo-Syriac Version of Aesop's Fables," *LS* (forthcoming). The Janus-faced character of the language has had surprising consequences in Aramaic lexicography, for the very same text is cited both in R. Payne Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1879–1901), e.g., vol. 1, 155 (*s. v.* ܩܐܪܐ) and in Sokoloff, *DJBA*, e.g., 1174b.

[18] A.S. Halkin, *Josephi b. Judah b. Jacob Ibn ʾAḳnīn, Divulgatio mysteriorum luminumque apparentia: Commentarius in Canticum Canticorum* (Jerusalem: Mekize Nirdamim, 1964), 494–495. Incidentally, it is quite clear that the Judaeo-Syriac version conforms to the later reworking of the verse, not to the original translation, cf. I. Carbajosa, *The Character of the Syriac Version of Psalms: A Study of Psalms 90–150 in the Peshitta* (MPIL 17; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 262–268.

content in Aramaic.[19] The Judaeo-Syriac is probably not original to the work and was added prior to the fourteenth century. Since the material has never been discussed in the context of the Judaeo-Syriac texts, it will be treated in more detail in the appendix. Both these tidbits attest to the use of Syriac in inter-religious contact, for polemic and non-polemic purposes. In addition, both imply that at that time, Syriac texts were not readily available to the Jewish authors.

The situation was demonstrably different in thirteenth-century Aleppo. When Shmuel b. Nissim Masnuth compiled his commentaries on the books of Genesis, Leviticus, Job, and Daniel, he must have had access to at least some of the Peshiṭta books.[20] For he frequently adds (corrupted) transliterations of the Syriac version of verses from the books of Genesis, Leviticus, Psalms, Job, and Daniel, which he labeled ת״א or תרגום ארמי 'Aramaic Targum'.[21] The prevalence of Peshiṭta quotations from Daniel and Genesis in particular makes it likely that Masnuth had before him a full square-script transliteration of these books (if not the full Old Testament). Obviously, one has to assume a similar cultural milieu for the evolution of Targum Proverbs, the most famous Judaeo-Syriac text.[22] This medieval Jewish adaption of the Syriac version of the book must have sprung from circles in which fully transliterated Peshiṭta books were available. However, for now, lack of a critical edition of the Targum makes it difficult to assess its exact relation to the Peshiṭta and the nature of its linguistic adaptions.[23] Still, both Masnuth's quotations and Targum Proverbs attest a degree of readiness to consult Syriac Old Testament translations that is unparalleled in the earlier Judaeo-Syriac corpus.

Jewish acquaintance with the Syriac Old Testament apparently started with those books that are also part of the Jewish canon, and the Christian version was consulted for comparison. However, the last group of Judaeo-Syriac texts attests to a slight shift in purpose. It consists of quotations from three deuterocanonical Peshiṭta Old Testament books, that can all be connected to thirteenth-century

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[19] D. J. Lasker and S. Stroumsa, *The Polemic of Nestor the Priest: Qiṣṣat mujādalat al-Usquf and Sefer Nestor ha-Komer* (Jerusalem: Yad Ben Zvi, 1996).

[20] The commentaries survive in single fourteenth- and fifteenth-century manuscripts: M. Hacohen, *Midrash Bereshit Zuta by R. Shmuel b. R. Nissim Masnuth* (Jerusalem: Rav Kook Institute, 1962); S. Buber, *Majan Gannim: Commentar zu Job von Rabbi Samuel ben Nissim Masnuth* (Berlin: Itzkowski, 1889); I. S. Lange and S. Schwartz, *Midraš Daniel et Midraš Ezra auctore R. Samuel b. R. Nissim Masnuth (saec. XIII)* (Jerusalem: Mekize Nirdamim, 1968). Two manuscripts that contain parts of commentaries on the books of Leviticus and Numbers, respectively, remain unpublished. A cursory reading of the former confirmed that it, too, contains Peshiṭta quotations.

[21] H. Yalon, "What is Tav-Alif in Bereshit Zuta?" *Sinai* 53 (1963): 278.

[22] Healey, "Targum Proverbs and the Peshitta."

[23] Cf. E. Noam, *The Language of Targum Proverbs and the Degree of Its Dependence on the Peshitta: A Comparative Linguistic Analysis Between the Jewish-Aramaic Elements and the Syriac Elements* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Bar-Ilan University, Ramat-Gan, 2005).

Spain.[24] The longest text is a Judaeo-Syriac adaption of the story of Bel and the Dragon (Daniel 14), which is partially preserved in the *Midrash Rabba de-Rabba*, in Ramón Martí's *Pugio fidei* (quoted from a source he calls *Bereschit rabba*), and in the manuscript of *Bereshit Rabbati*, which preserves interpretations of R. Moshe Ha-Darshan (lived in eleventh-century Provence).[25] Presumably, the Judaeo-Syriac version originated in the Near East, reached Europe through Byzantine channels, and was then disseminated more widely in a work of Moshe Ha-Darshan. One might surmise that the Judaeo-Syriac versions of the books of Judith and Wisdom of Solomon took similar routes to Europe before they finally made it into the hands of Naḥmanides (1194–1270). In his Torah commentary, which he composed while still in Spain, he quotes the Peshiṭta version of Judith 1:7–8, 11 (labeled *Megillat Shoshan*) in his comments on Dt 21:14 and Wisdom of Solomon 7:4–8a, 17–21 in the introduction to the book of Genesis. From his remarks in one of his sermons, it is clear that Nachmanides identified these apocrypha as authentic Jewish literature in Christian translation, which were therefore worthy of study.[26]

Another text that possibly preserves some Judaeo-Syriac words comes from the *Acts* of the Hebrew *Toldot Yeshu*, a late medieval addition preserved in some manuscripts.[27] This section of the work includes an equation of Jewish festivals with their Christian counterparts, the names of which are given in Aramaic.[28] Stökl Ben Ezra has argued for an authentic Syriac text and suggested a late fourth- or early fifth-century date.[29] If his identification of the Christian festival names

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[24] R. Leicht, "A Newly Discovered Hebrew Version of the Apocryphal 'Prayer of Manasseh'," *JSQ* 3 (1996): 359–373 tried to identify linguistic traces of a Syriac *Vorlage* in a tenth-century manuscript with the Hebrew Prayer of Manasseh from the Cairo Genizah, but his argument has been refuted by W. Th. Van Peursen, "Linguistic Observations on the Hebrew Prayer of Manasseh from the Cairo Genizah," in E. Tigchelaar and P. Van Hecke (eds.), *Hebrew of the Late Second Temple Period; Proceedings of a Sixth International Symposium on the Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Ben Sira* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 112–131. Nevertheless, this is another case of an authentic deuterocanonical Second-Temple Jewish text preserved in Christian circles and then readopted by Jews. Note that Van Peursen has also put to rest the linguistic argument for a Syriac *Vorlage* of the Hebrew Ben Sira from the Cairo Genizah: W. Th. Van Peursen, "The Alleged Retroversions from Syriac in the Hebrew Text of Ben Sira Revisited: Linguistic Perspectives," *Kleine Untersuchungen zur Sprache des Alten Testaments und seiner Umwelt* 2 (2001): 47–95.

[25] Stadel, "Bel and the Dragon," 6–14. J.C. Reeves and L. Waggoner, "An Illustration from the Apocrypha in an Eighteenth Century Passover Haggadah," *HUCA* 59 (1988): 259–261 also have a short discussion of the three witnesses and their relation to the Peshiṭta version, which I had overlooked.

[26] M. Himmelfarb, "R. Moses the Preacher and the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs," *AJS Review* 9 (1984): 76–77.

[27] The respective part has tentatively been dated to the end of the fourteenth or beginning of the fifteenth century by M. Meerson and P. Schäfer, *Toledot Yeshu: The Life Story of Jesus* (TSAJ 159; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), vol. 1, 105.

[28] See Meerson and Schäfer, *Toledot Yeshu*, vol. 1, 106 for the main witnesses.

[29] D. Stökl Ben Ezra, "An Ancient List of Christian Festivals in 'Toledot Yeshu': Polemics as Indication for Interaction," *HTR* 102 (2009): 481–496, esp. 493, taking up an idea of S. Krauß,

(and – depending on it – his dating) is correct, this was an independent source incorporated only at a very late date in *Toldot Yeshu*.[30] However, whether or not this *Vorlage* was indeed in Syriac (and consequently: whether the classification of these words as Judaeo-Syriac is correct), is still an open question that invites a more detailed study.

With such a small corpus, it is difficult to identify general characteristics of Judaeo-Syriac. The extant texts attest to both transliterations and transcriptions of Syriac originals (and thus to some knowledge of the Syriac script and language) and show varying degrees of linguistic Judaization. Obviously, the language of each text has to be judged in its own right. However, critical editions are lacking for most of the material, and these are a prerequisite for a more nuanced linguistic study.

But granted that the few extant texts are representative of the Jewish use of Syriac, one might venture to identify two trends in the material. One concerns the content of the Syriac texts that were of interest to Jews. At first, knowledge of Syriac was used for non-religious purposes, as a way to get access to Greek wisdom. Later on, it was employed in order to engage the Christian versions of books of the Hebrew Bible, i.e., to compare the Christian understanding of the shared heritage. And in a last stage, Syriac deuterocanonical literature was exploited as a source of what was (correctly) perceived by some as authentic Jewish midrashic material in Christian translation, a conscious act of "back-borrowing."[31] In addition to the change in content, one also observes a general westward movement of the use of the Judaeo-Syriac texts. The early texts probably originated in Mesopotamia, but later texts were produced in Aleppo. Coming from the Near East, these texts then reached Europe via Byzantine Italy and Provence. This westward movement coincides with and reflects the shifting importance of the centers of Jewish learning over time.

Appendix: Judaeo-Syriac as a Linguistic Marker

The Judaeo-Arabic treatise *qiṣṣat mujādalat al-ʾusquf* or 'Account of a Disputation of the Priest' is an early anti-Christian polemic presumably composed in the middle of the ninth century in Syria or Mesopotamia.[32] The complete text is preserved only in a late manuscript from the fifteenth or sixteenth century (ms. P), but numerous Genizah fragments testify to at least two earlier versions of the

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"Neuere Ansichten über 'Toldoth Jeschu' (Schluß)," *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 77 (1933): 47. The gist of Stökl Ben Ezra's argument was accepted by Meerson and Schäfer, *Toledot Yeshu*, vol. 1, 107.

[30] This is rightly stressed in Meerson and Schäfer, *Toledot Yeshu*, vol. 1, 107–108.

[31] See A.Y. Reed, *Fallen Angels and the History of Judaism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 270–271.

[32] Lasker and Stroumsa, *Polemic of Nestor the Priest*, vol. 1, 19.

work.[33] Since the passages with the Judaeo-Syriac words are not preserved in Genizah fragments that contain the early and intermediary stages of the work,[34] they were probably not part of the original text and must have been interpolated sometime after the ninth century. The earliest Genizah fragment that attests to the Aramaic has been dated to the fourteenth or fifteenth century,[35] which serves as the *terminus ad quem* for the interpolation.[36] However, it could have been added considerably earlier. In what follows, I shall edit the Judaeo-Syriac pieces according to the different manuscripts.

Section 69 of the *qiṣṣat mujādalat al-ʾusquf* contains about a dozen words in Aramaic.[37] The text is attested in four manuscripts:[38]

ms. P (fifteenth/sixteenth cent.):

אבא חד ובכל מריא וישוע משיחא ובריך הוא רוחא דקדישא הוא תלתה אנן

ms. LG (fifteenth cent.):

אָבָא חַד ובכל מריא וְיֵשׁוּע מְשִׁיחָא וּבְרִיך הוא רוּחָא דַקוּדשָׁא הוא תְּלָתָה אִינון

ms. LV (fourteenth/fifteenth cent.):

אבא חד ובכל מריא ויסוע משיחא ובריך הוא רוחא דקושא הוא תלתה אינון

ms. N:[39]

אבא חד ובכל ממריה וישוע משיחא ובריך רוחא דקדשא הוא תלאתה אינן

These words have been rendered in the edition of the *qiṣṣat mujādalat al-ʾusquf* as "The father is one, and Mary is the virgin, and Jesus is the Messiah. Blessed is the Holy Spirit, they are three."[40] However, it does not take an expert in Aramaic to realize that this is a very optimistic translation.[41] For it is not at all clear whether the nominal phrases that can be identified with certainty were indeed meant to be read as a string of nominal clauses. Before discussing the language of this piece in detail, I shall give the second Aramaic text, which is preserved in

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[33] Lasker and Stroumsa, *Polemic of Nestor the Priest*, vol. 1, 25–26, 41–48. I use the manuscript sigla employed in this edition.

[34] Viz. mss. K, ARH, B, LIG, see Lasker and Stroumsa, *Polemic of Nestor the Priest*, vol. 2, 49, 88 (section 69). In the early ms. K in particular, the extant text seems to attest to an Arabic version parallel to the Judaeo-Syriac of the later manuscripts.

[35] According to the catalog of the Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts at the National Library of Israel.

[36] The fact that the twelfth-century Hebrew 'Polemic of Nestor the Priest' is based on the earlier version (Lasker and Stroumsa, *Polemic of Nestor the Priest*, 29–31) cannot be used to date the Syriac: The earlier and later Arabic versions might have existed side by side.

[37] Lasker and Stroumsa, *Polemic of Nestor the Priest*, vol. 2, 49.

[38] Lasker and Stroumsa, *Polemic of Nestor the Priest*, vol. 2, 49. Since this publication, a few additional manuscripts of the work have been added to the catalog of the Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts. None of these contain section 69.

[39] Not dated in Lasker and Stroumsa, *Polemic of Nestor the Priest*, vol. 1, 45 and in the library catalogs.

[40] Lasker and Stroumsa, *Polemic of Nestor the Priest*, vol. 1, 66.

[41] Lasker and Stroumsa (*Polemic of Nestor the Priest*, vol. 1, 151) stress that the text is corrupt.

section 172 and which repeats two of the nominal phrases from the longer piece, on which it might depend:[42]

ms. P (fifteenth/sixteenth cent.):

אבא חד ורוחא קדישא

In their present form, both Aramaic sections do not contain well-formed sentences, and the longer one evinces a number of obvious corruptions: ms. LV has דקושא for דקדשא 'of holiness' and the Arabicized ויסוע 'and Jesus'. The word ממריה in ms. N is also definitely corrupted, and תלאתה 'three' is again Arabicized. In addition, Lasker and Stroumsa have suggested translating ובכל מריא as 'and Mary is the virgin', implying a heavy corruption (shared by all witnesses) from ובתולתא מריא or something of the like.[43] But the unemended text can be parsed differently and rendered as 'and over everything is the Lord'. The Aramaic would then still be slightly awkward, but this understanding might nevertheless be preferable.[44] The variant readings of the noun phrase 'the Holy Spirit' – רוחא דקודשא (ms. LG), רוחא קדישא (ms. P, section 172), and רוחא דקדישא (ms. P) – are just that: variants. While the last one is probably secondary (due to the relative rarity of the syntagma), it is impossible to establish which one of the other readings is original.[45]

As far as it is reconstructible, the original Aramaic of section 69 must have been very close to the string of letters preserved in the manuscripts and is best translated as "The father is one, and over everything is the Lord, and Jesus is the Messiah. Blessed is the Holy Spirit, they are three." It is unlikely that this text is based on an authentic Syriac *Vorlage*. What's more, due to its shortness, the text contains very few diagnostic grammatical traits that would allow for a specification of the Aramaic dialect: Most words could represent Syriac or any other kind of contemporaneous Aramaic. And the two morphological traits that can be associated with specific dialects, the pronouns אינון and הוא,[46] are not Syriac. Such forms are rather characteristic of the Jewish dialects of Targum Onqelos and Biblical Aramaic. If anything, the use of the third person (enclitic) pronouns in the last two nominal sentences[47] can be interpreted as a distinctive Syriac trait, for it is characteristic of that language and less common in other dialects of Aramaic.[48]

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[42] Lasker and Stroumsa, *Polemic of Nestor the Priest*, vol. 2, 84.

[43] They find partial support for this in ms. LG, where ובתל might be read (Lasker and Stroumsa, *Polemic of Nestor the Priest*, vol. 2, 49). Note, however, that Mary is ܡܪܝܡ in Syriac. A Greek(?) form with final *a* is not normally used to designate the mother of Jesus.

[44] The spelling מריא 'master' is found in other Judaeo-Syriac texts, e.g., in Masnuth's commentary on Lv 12:1.

[45] Cf. M. Sokoloff, *A Syriac Lexicon: A Translation from the Latin, Correction, Expansion, and Update of C. Brockelmann's Lexicon Syriacum* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 1446 for the phrase.

[46] In the given context, it is highly unlikely that הוא represent the Perfect ܗܘܐ.

[47] One of the pronouns was omitted in ms. N.

[48] E.g., Th. Nöldeke, *Kurzgefasste syrische Grammatik,* with an appendix by A. Schall (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1966), 236–237.

Despite the fact that the text has no Syriac *Vorlage*, and despite the fact that the Aramaic of the text shows no decisively Syriac language traits, it has nevertheless been identified as Syriac,[49] and rightly so. To put it more accurately, the text is in all likelihood a fake Syriac text, with Syriac-like language features. It is an affectation, included to make the work sound more authentic. As such, it does not add anything to the argument, nor does it require knowledge of Syriac on behalf of the Jewish readers.[50] It does, however, imply that Jews depicted Christians as prototypically speaking Aramaic or at least using it in a religious context.[51] The provenance of our text and additional circumstantial evidence suggest that the Christian Aramaic dialect Jews were thinking of was Syriac, the language of Eastern Christianity.[52] This dialect could be evoked by using authentic Christian phraseology: אבא 'father', the combination ישוע משיחא 'Jesus is the Messiah', the location רוחא דקודשא 'the Holy Spirit', and the concept of Trinity are all key phrases in any creed or prayer.[53] Interestingly, use of the distinct Syriac script was not deemed necessary for the confessional tagging. Since the author of the *qiṣṣat mujādalat al-ʾusquf* was not reluctant to use real quotes of Christian scripture in Arabic translation, it is unlikely that whoever interpolated the Syriac-like phrases deliberately used gibberish in order not to tempt the Jewish readers. Rather, the fabricated text would imply that an authentic Syriac piece was not available to the author.

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[49] Lasker and Stroumsa, *Polemic of Nestor the Priest*, vol. 1, 19, 86, 151, 167.

[50] D. J. Lasker, "Latin into Hebrew and the Medieval Jewish-Christian Debate," in R. Fontaine and G. Freudenthal (eds.), *Latin-into-Hebrew: Texts and Studies*, vol. 1. *Studies* (SJHC 39–40; Leiden: Brill, 2013), 341.

[51] This is also implied by the burial account in the Hebrew *Toldot Yeshu*, where "some villains of his people," viz. Christians, are explicitly addressed in Aramaic, see Meerson and Schäfer, *Toledot Yeshu*, vol. 1, 178 (translation), vol. 2, 92 (text). In many manuscripts, the address is then quoted in Aramaic-like gibberish (see Meerson and Schäfer, *Toledot Yeshu*, vol. 2, 92, 121 for the longest version). However, the attempt by Krauß ("Neuere Ansichten über 'Toldoth Jeschu' [Schluß]," 46) to read these words as genuine Syriac was too optimistic. While some forms or lexemes resemble Aramaic, others remain obscure. If this was a deliberate attempt to use pseudo-Syriac as a religio-linguistic marker, it was less successful than the one in the *qiṣṣat mujādalat al-ʾusquf*. But note that here, too, the Aramaic-like piece comes in an anti-Christian polemic.

[52] The mentioning of 'Nestor' as a reference to the divide in eastern Christianity also points to a non-Byzantine setting for the work (Lasker and Stroumsa, *Polemic of Nestor the Priest*, vol. 1, 29). That Babylonian Jews knew about the Aramaic dialect of their Christian neighbors is clear from Gaonic sayings, see, e. g., Goldstein, "The Jewish Recension," 62 fn. 3.

[53] Lasker and Stroumsa, *Polemic of Nestor the Priest*, vol. 1, 151.

Anti-Jewish Rhetoric and Christian Identity in Aphrahaṭ's *Demonstrations*

J. Edward Walters

Introduction

The twenty-three texts commonly known as the *Demonstrations* (ܬܚܘܝܬܐ) survive as one of the few textual vestiges of early Syriac Christianity situated within the Persian Empire.[1] The texts are arranged as an acrostic of the Syriac alphabet, as Demonstration 1 begins with the letter *alaph*, and each subsequent Demonstration begins with the successive letter of the alphabet. The Syriac alphabet has only twenty-two characters, so the twenty-third and final Demonstration ("On the Grapecluster") begins again with *alaph*. According to various passages from the text itself, the *Demonstrations* were composed in three stages, with precise dates for each set: *Dems.* 1–10 were composed in the year 336/7, *Dems.* 11–22 in 343/4, and *Dem.* 23 in 345.[2]

The *Demonstrations* are traditionally ascribed to an author known as Aphrahaṭ, the Persian Sage,[3] though the name "Aphrahaṭ" originates in the later reception history of the text.[4] At the earliest stages of circulation, the *Demonstrations* were

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[1] Two versions of the Syriac text have been published: W. Wright, *The Homilies of Aphraates, the Persian Sage, edited from Syriac Manuscripts of the fifth and sixth Century in the British Museum*, vol. 1. *The Syriac Text* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1869) [note: this was intended as a two volume set with an English translation in the second volume, but the second volume was never completed]; and D. I. Parisot, *Aphraatis Sapientis Persae Demonstrationes I–XXII* (PS 1.1; Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1894), and D. I. Parisot, *Aphraatis Sapientis Persae Demonstrationes XXIII* (PS 2.2; Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1907), columns 1–150 (with accompanying Latin translation). In recent years, modern translations of the Demonstrations into French, German, English, and Italian have appeared: M.-J. Pierre, *Aphraate le Sage Persan. Les Exposés*, I–II (SC 349, 359; Paris: Cerf, 1988, 1989); P. Bruns, *Aphrahat. Unterweisungen* (FC 5.1–2; Freiburg: Herder, 1991, 1992); K. Valavanolickal, *Aphrahat. Demonstrations* (Mōrān 'Eth'ō 23–24; Kottayam: St. Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute, 2005); A. Lehto, *The Demonstrations of Aphrahat, the Persian Sage* (GECS 27; Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2010); and G. Lenzi, *Afraate: Le esposizioni*, 1–2 (Testi del Vicino Oriente antico; Brescia: Paideia, 2012). There are also a number of published translations of individual Demonstrations; for a full list of these, see Lehto, *Demonstrations*, 534–537.

[2] See *Dem.* 22.25; 23.69.

[3] For a brief introduction to Aphrahaṭ, see S. P. Brock, "Aphrahaṭ," in *GEDSH*, 24–25.

[4] The literary corpus of the *Demonstrations* as it was transmitted in Syriac (and preserved in two early Syriac manuscripts) may be the product of an editor who took pre-existing writings and put them together in the acrostic format. See my "Reconsidering the Compositional Unity

attributed either to an anonymous "Persian Sage" or to someone named "Jacob."[5] In at least some stages of transmission and reception history, this Jacob was identified as Jacob of Nisibis.[6] However, beginning in the eighth or ninth century (at least in the Syriac tradition), the name Aphrahaṭ became permanently attached to the title "Persian Sage" and thus to the text of the *Demonstrations*.[7]

The writings included in the first book of the *Demonstrations* (*Dem.* 1–10) cover a range of topics pertaining to the Christian life, some of which appear to be aimed at a more general audience (particularly *Dem.* 1–4: "On Faith," "On Love," "On Fasting," and "On Prayer"), while others appear to be aimed at a monastic community (*Dem.* 6: "On the Covenanters") and/or ecclesiastical leaders (*Dem.* 7: "On the Penitent," *Dem.* 9: "On Humility," and *Dem.* 10: "On Shepherds"). Most of the writings found in the second book of the *Demonstrations* (*Dem.* 11–22), though, have a common thread: They are framed as arguments "against the Jews."[8] Because of the significant attention that Aphrahaṭ pays to a presumed Jewish opponent in these texts, the *Demonstrations* have frequently been used

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of the *Demonsrations*," in A.M. Butts and Robin Darling Young (eds.), *Syriac Christian Culture: Beginnings to Renaissance* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, forthcoming).

[5] The earliest manuscript witness of the *Demonstrations*, ms. London, Brit. Libr. Add. 17,182 is actually two different manuscripts that have been joined together. The first part, containing *Dem.* 1–10, which was copied in 474, attributes the writings only to "the Persian sage." The second part, containing *Dem.* 11–23, which was copied in 512, names the Persian sage "Mar Jacob." See the full description of this manuscript in W. Wright, *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum Acquired since the Year 1838*, part 2 (London: Longmans & Co., 1871), 404–405. George, Bishop of the Arabs, the first Syriac author to refer explicitly to the *Demonstrations* does not know the identity of the author, though he does refute the claim that it was written by a student of Ephrem (George, *Letter* 4; cited according to the unpublished edition and translation of Jack Tannous).

[6] Primarily, this association occurs in the Armenian translation of the *Demonstrations*, which was likely made in the second half of the fifth century. The *Demonstrations* actually first appeared in a Western language translation (Latin) from an Armenian version: N. Antonello, *Sancti patris nostri Jacobi episcopi nisibeni Sermones, cum praefatione, notis & dissertatione de ascetis, quae omnia nunc primum in lucem prodeunt* (Rome: Typis Sacrae Congregationis de Propaganda Fide, 1756). There are also a significant number of manuscripts of the Armenian version of the *Demonstrations*, though especially by comparison with the Syriac manuscripts, all of these manuscripts are late. For a detailed introduction to the *Demonstrations* in the Armenian tradition, along with a critical edition and translation, see G. Lafontaine, *La version arménienne des oeuvres d'Aphraate le Syrien* (CSCO 382–383, 405–406, 423–424; Leuven: Peeters, 1977–1980).

[7] Possibly the earliest correlation of the name Aphrahaṭ with the title "Persian Sage" and with the text of the *Demonstrations* in Syriac occurs in the eighth-century *Anonymous Commentary on the Pentateuch* preserved in ms. (*olim*) Diyarbakir 22. For a full discussion of this reference, as well as an overview of the afterlife of the *Demonstrations* in the Syriac tradition, see L. Van Rompay, "Aphrahat, 'A Student of the Holy Scriptures', The Reception of His Biblical Interpretation in Later Syriac Tradition," in C. Baffioni, R. B. Finazzi, A. Passoni Dell'Acqua, and E. Vergani (eds.), *Storia e Pensiero Religioso nel Vicino Oriente: L'età Bagratide – Maimonide – Afraate* (Orientalia Ambrosiana; Biblioteca Ambrosiana: Bulzoni, 2014), 256–270.

[8] With the exception of *Dem.* 14 ("On Dissent" – a presumed synodal letter addressed to ecclesiastical leaders in Seleucia-Ctesiphon) and *Dem.* 22 ("On Death and the End Times"), every Demonstration in this second book features anti-Jewish arguments.

as a historical resource for reconstructing Jewish-Christian relations in the early fourth century within the Sasanian Empire. Indeed, although Aphrahaṭ remains a lesser-known figure within the study of late antique Christianity (especially in comparison with his near contemporary, Ephrem the Syrian), the question of Aphrahaṭ's relationship with a Jewish community has received somewhat significant scholarly attention, to which I now turn.

Overview of Scholarship

At the earliest stage of scholarship on Aphrahaṭ, the scholars who edited and published the text of the *Demonstrations* did not show much interest in the question of Aphrahaṭ's anti-Jewish polemic. Indeed, in his edition of the *Demonstrations*, William Wright mentions this polemic only in passing: "The principal opponents of Aphraates are the Jews, against whom several of the discourses are directed."[9] Surprisingly, Parisot's introduction, much longer and more detailed than Wright's, virtually ignores the topic of anti-Jewish rhetoric.

The first major treatment of Aphrahaṭ's possible relationship with Judaism came from Salomon Funk, who argued that Aphrahaṭ was aware of rabbinic Jewish texts and traditions, as evidenced by Funk's comparison of statements from the *Demonstrations* with comparable sayings from rabbinic sources.[10] There are numerous problems with Funk's approach, not the least of which is that many of the "parallels" he proposes are not actually parallels in any meaningful sense of the word. That is, Funk assumes that a similarity in exegesis between Aphrahaṭ and any rabbinic text is proof of Aphrahaṭ's reliance on the rabbis.

The next important treatment of Aphrahaṭ's relationship with the Jews – that of J.-M. Chavanis[11] – introduces an important theme that continues to resound in scholarship on Aphrahaṭ and the Jews: the escalation of enmity between Christians and Jews as a result of the persecution of Christians by Shapur II, spawned by hostilities with Constantine and the Roman Empire. Thus, Chavanis concludes, "Quoiqu'il en soit, Afrahat considère les Juifs comme des ennemis jurés."[12] This presumed hostility between two religious communities shapes much of the re-constructed historical context for Aphrahaṭ's anti-Jewish polemic in scholarly literature.

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[9] Wright, *Homilies*, 10.

[10] S. Funk, *Die Haggadischen Elemente in den Homilien des Aphraates, des persischen Weisen* (Wien: M. Knopfmacher, 1891).

[11] J.-M. Chavanis, *Les lettres d'Afrahat le sage de la Perse: Étudiés au point de vue de l'histoire et de la doctrine* (Saint-Etienne: Impr. de l'institution des sourds-muets, 1908; Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2012).

[12] Chavanis, *Lettres*, 25.

In his important study on the topic, Frank Gavin also relied upon the narrative of Jewish-Christian hostility in the wake of the Persian persecution.[13] Indeed, he states even more clearly than Chavanis that the primary reason for Aphrahaṭ's polemical *Demonstrations* was "the danger of [Christians] lapsing into Judaism" as a result of the persecution, which affected only Christians and not Jews.[14] However, although Gavin assumes this historical context for Aphrahaṭ's writings, the bulk of his project is an attempt to show similarities between the thought of Aphrahaṭ and contemporary Jews. With a more subtle technique than Funk (i. e., searching for examples of general agreement rather than specific literary details), Gavin provides a survey of doctrines on which Aphrahaṭ and the rabbis show signs of similarity. Despite his difference in approach, however, Gavin's shared presupposition with Funk that Aphrahaṭ must have been influenced by contemporary Jews leads him to the same conclusion: "[Aphrahaṭ] was thoroughly conversant with, and dependent upon Jewish tradition."[15] Indeed, one of Gavin's most enduring legacies on the topic of Aphrahaṭ and the Jews is his description of Aphrahaṭ as a "docile pupil of the Jews."[16]

In his work *Aphrahat and Judaism*, Jacob Neusner criticized the approaches of his predecessors like Gavin and Funk, primarily on the grounds discussed above (i. e., that they assume dependence where there is only correlation).[17] On an even more foundational level, Neusner also admonishes these studies for conflating "Judaism" with "rabbinic Judaism" and for assuming that either of these terms represents a stable entity at the time of the fourth century.[18] In light of the complexity of dealing with diverse rabbinic traditions and writings over a long period of time, Neusner provides a more nuanced approach of how comparisons of an author like Aphrahaṭ with the rabbis should be conducted in view of the complicated compilation history of rabbinic materials. In the end, Neusner concludes that Aphrahaṭ was unaware of what might be called "rabbinic Judaism," and likewise, neither were rabbinic authors aware of Aphrahaṭ's critiques of Judaism.[19] For Neusner this does not mean, however, that Aphrahaṭ was un-

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[13] F. Gavin, *Aphraates and the Jews: A Study of the Controversial Homilies of the Persian Sage in their Relation to Jewish Thought* (New York: AMS Press, 1966), 8–10.

[14] Gavin, *Aphraates*, 31.

[15] Gavin, *Aphraates*, 36.

[16] Gavin, *Aphraates*, 58.

[17] "Common cultural and linguistic characteristics surely do not necessitate the conclusion that one party borrowed from another." (J. Neusner, *Aphrahat and Judaism: The Christian-Jewish Argument in Fourth-Century Iran* [Leiden: Brill, 1971], 155).

[18] "Gavin, not alone, sees 'Judaism' and 'rabbinic Judaism' as pretty much identical, and to him rabbinic Judaism is a monolith, unchanged and unchanging from some remote time in antiquity until the completion of the Babylonian Talmud and even later, medieval midrashic compilations. These conceptions are obviously false." (Neusner, *Aphrahat*, 155).

[19] "The corollary of our earlier observations on Aphrahaṭ's lack of dependence upon the rabbis is the rabbis' complete independence of Aphrahaṭ. Just as Aphrahaṭ was not a docile pupil

aware of Jews, only of rabbinic Jews.[20] Thus, Neusner concludes that, unlike his anti-Jewish predecessors like Justin Martyr, Aphrahaṭ is engaging "actual, not imaginary Jewish opponents."[21] Neusner's distinction between Jews and rabbinic Jews is important, as it allows for a more nuanced conversation about Aphrahaṭ's knowledge of his contemporary Jewish neighbors without assuming his knowledge of any Rabbinic writings or traditions.[22] Finally, Neusner utterly rejects Gavin's claim that Aphrahaṭ could be considered a "docile pupil" of the Jews, given both his ignorance of rabbinic traditions and the gravity of the case he builds against Judaism.[23]

In the introduction to her French translation of the *Demonstrations*, Marie-Joseph Pierre provides a brief discussion of the relationship of Aphrahaṭ to a Jewish community. In this discussion, she engages a broader approach to comparing Aphrahaṭ with contemporaneous Jews, including discussions of the Babylonian Amora Rava, noting a number of interesting points of correspondence.[24] However, despite these points of contact, Pierre does not conclude that Aphrahaṭ was aware of or directly influenced by rabbinic Judaism. Indeed, Pierre is not convinced that Aphrahaṭ's anti-Jewish polemic is directed against an external Jewish opponent at all. She rejects the interpretation that the purpose of the *Demonstrations* is to prevent Christians from converting (or re-converting) to Judaism under the pressure of the Persian persecution, citing a lack of evidence from the text of the *Demonstrations*.[25] Instead, Pierre suggests that the problem Aphrahaṭ addresses in his anti-Jewish *Demonstrations* is the result of Judaizing tendencies or influences.[26] She does not, however, provide any suggestions or possibilities of the origin of these influences, concluding only that Aphrahaṭ was trying to protect "la liberté en esprit" from legalistic practices or beliefs.[27]

Peter Bruns, however, is not as dismissive as Pierre of the possibility that conversion (or re-conversion) to Judaism stands as the primary purpose behind

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of rabbis, so rabbis were utterly unfamiliar with Aphrahaṭ and the views of others like him." (Neusner, *Aphrahat*, 187).

[20] "We find no hint that Aphrahaṭ knew about, or argued against, an Oral Tradition. He never referred to a concrete and specific rabbinic tradition. Aphrahaṭ never openly mentioned Jewish doctrines other than those he found in the Written Scriptures, particularly in the Pentateuch." (Neusner, *Aphrahat*, 147).

[21] Neusner, *Aphrahat*, 244.

[22] "Aphrahat's Jews based their Judaism on the Hebrew Scriptures and took literally both the theology and the practical commandments they found in them … Everything [Aphrahaṭ] did say points to a single phenomenon, and that is, a Judaism based upon canonical Scripture and little else." (Neusner, *Aphrahat*, 148).

[23] Neusner declares, "I cannot think of a less docile pupil, if Aphrahat directly learned anything at all from Jews, rabbinical or otherwise." (Neusner, *Aphrahat*, 154).

[24] Pierre, *Exposés*, vol. 1, 118, 124–127.

[25] "Je ne vois aucune allusion à cela dans l'oeuvre d'Aphraate." (Pierre, *Exposés*, vol. 1, 129–130).

[26] Pierre, *Exposés*, vol. 1, 130.

[27] Pierre, *Exposés*, vol. 1, 130.

Aphrahaṭ's polemic.[28] Moreover, Bruns is also convinced that there is a real Jewish opponent with whom Aphrahaṭ interacts, demonstrated particularly by the conversations that Aphrahaṭ presents with a Jewish teacher.[29] While Bruns is not convinced by the search for exact parallels in the work of Funk and Gavin, he is generally convinced of a shared exegetical and hermeneutical milieu for Aphrahaṭ and rabbinic Jews, namely in the form of midrash.[30]

In a brief, but illuminating treatment, Matthias Henze argues for a specific instance of Aphrahaṭ's likely knowledge of Rabbinic interpretation of Scripture.[31] The topic in question is the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's madness in Daniel 4, which Aphrahaṭ mentions on more than one occasion. Henze notes that Aphrahaṭ's interpretation of this passage bears significant similarity to that of the rabbis and stands "isolated" from other early Christian interpretations.[32] This leads Henze to the ultimate conclusion that Aphrahaṭ "was well informed about the rabbinic exegetical traditions of his time" and "stood in immediate proximity to rabbinic Judaism."[33]

In a 2002 article, Adam H. Becker highlights the anti-Jewish rhetoric of Demonstration 20 ("On Care for the Poor"), which – prior to Becker's treatment – had not generally been considered one of the polemical Demonstrations.[34] In this article, Becker contextualizes Aphrahaṭ's argument about care for the poor against the historical backdrop of the Persian persecution of Christians under Shapur II. That is, Becker understands the "internal logic" of *Dem.* 20 as representative of a historical scenario in which "Christians were visiting synagogues to receive charity."[35] With this historical context in mind, Becker reads *Dem.* 20 – and particularly Aphrahaṭ's exegesis of the story of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk 16:19–31) – as an anti-Jewish polemic intended to cast the Jews in the role of the greedy rich man, denying care to the poor and needy.[36] Although Becker reads *Dem.* 20 as evidence of a historical encounter between Jews and Christians, he also allows for a broader "discursive" element of the *Demonstrations* that may

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[28] "Offensichtlich standen zahlreiche Christen, namentlich Konvertiten aus dem Judentum, in Gefahr, sich der Verfolgung unter Schapur durch eine Konversion zur tolerierten Judenschaft zu entziehen. Aus diesem Grunde ist Aphrahat sehr darum bemüht, den Heilsanspruch jüdischer Gebräuche abzuweisen und den christlichen Glauben als Höhepunkt und Vollendung alttestamentlicher Verheißungen darzustellen." (Bruns, *Unterweisungen*, vol. 1, 54).

[29] "An der Authentizität der von Aphrahat erwähnten Begegnungen besteht kein Zweifel …" (Bruns, *Unterweisungen*, vol. 1, 55).

[30] Bruns, *Unterwisungen*, vol. 1, 55–56.

[31] M. Henze, *The Madness of King Nebuchadnezzar: The Ancient Near Eastern Origins and Early History of Interpretation of Daniel 4* (Boston: Brill, 1999), 147–155.

[32] Henze, *The Madness of King Nebuchadnezzar*, 150.

[33] Henze, *The Madness of King Nebuchadnezzar*, 155.

[34] A. H. Becker, "Anti-Judaism and Care for the Poor in Aphrahat's *Demonstration 20*," *JECS* 10 (2002): 305–327.

[35] Becker, "Anti-Judaism and Care for the Poor," 306.

[36] Becker, "Anti-Judaism and Care for the Poor," 315–316.

not be rooted in specific historical events.[37] Becker also helps push the question of Aphrahaṭ's relationship to Judaism further by suggesting that the "Judaizing" Christians whom Aphrahaṭ is likely addressing in *Dem.* 20 may not have seen themselves as such; that is, they may not have recognized "Judaism" and "Christianity" as distinct entities with mutually exclusive loyalties.[38] Although Becker still reads the anti-Jewish argument of *Dem.* 20 as a response to the Persian persecution, his study allows for a more nuanced approach to religious identity and social boundaries.

Through a series of publications, Naomi Koltun-Fromm has become undoubtedly the most prolific author on the topic of Aphrahaṭ and the Jews.[39] There are two particular issues on which Koltun-Fromm's work has made significant contributions: 1) with regard to the possibility that Aphrahaṭ's anti-Jewish Demonstrations offer examples of "real" dialogue with rabbinic Jews (or at least Jews aware of rabbinic interpretations of Scripture); and 2) a more nuanced approach to understanding the shared exegetical and hermeneutical traditions between Aphrahaṭ and the rabbis.

First, in *Jewish-Christian Conversation*, Koltun-Fromm sets out to reconstruct the "other" side (i.e., the Jewish side) of Aphrahaṭ's conversation with his Jewish opponent. By consulting a wide array of rabbinic texts, Koltun-Fromm finds a number of correspondences between the claims and/or scriptural supports deployed by Aphrahaṭ's Jewish opponent in rabbinic literature. This allows Koltun-Fromm to conclude, *contra* Neusner, that the conversations Aphrahaṭ includes as part of his *Demonstrations* might actually represent real, historical dialogues that could have taken place.[40]

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[37] Becker, "Anti-Judaism and Care for the Poor," 307–308, 325.

[38] Becker, "Anti-Judaism and Care for the Poor," 325–326.

[39] Much of N. Koltun-Fromm's research is found in a series of articles or essays in collected volumes: "A Jewish-Christian Conversation in Fourth-Century Persian Mesopotamia," *JJS* 47 (1996): 45–63; "Aphrahat and the Rabbis on Noah's Righteousness in Light of the Jewish-Christian Polemic," in J. Frishman and L. Van Rompay (eds.), *The Book of Genesis in Jewish and Oriental Christian Interpretation: A Collection of Essays* (TEG 5; Leuven: Peeters, 1997), 57–72; "Psalm 22's Christological Interpretive Tradition in Light of Christian Anti-Jewish Polemic," *JECS* 6 (1998): 37–57; "Sexuality and Holiness: Semitic Christian and Jewish Conceptualizations of Sexual Behavior," *VC* 54 (2000): 375–395; "Yokes of the Holy-Ones: The Embodiment of a Christian Vocation," *HTR* 94 (2001): 207–220; "Zipporah's Complaint: Moses is Not Conscientious in the Deed! Exegetical Traditions of Moses' Celibacy," in A.H. Becker and A.Y. Reed (eds.), *The Ways that Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (TSAJ 95; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 283–306; and much of this research can also be found, in expanded form, in her two monographs: *Hermeneutics of Holiness: Ancient Jewish and Christian Notions of Sexuality and Religious Community* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) and *Jewish-Christian Conversation in Fourth-Century Persian Mesopotamia* (JC 12; Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2011).

[40] Thus, one of Koltun-Fromm's conclusions is: "With this textual methodology I have been able to reconstruct a rabbinic voice to a fourth-century Jewish-Christian polemical conversation. This reconstruction, in turn, supports the assertion that some Jews actively participated in a polemic against the Christians around the time that Aphrahat wrote, at the height of the

The second major advancement made by Koltun-Fromm's research is a more nuanced understanding of the exegetical similarities between Aphrahaṭ and the rabbis. As represented by her excellent treatment of the topic of Jewish and Christian attitudes with regard to sexuality and holiness in *Hermeneutics of Holiness*, Koltun-Fromm looks beyond simple linguistic and thematic parallelisms and points to a broader phenomenon of two streams – Jewish and Christian – of exegesis and hermeneutics that originate from a common social milieu, develop side-by-side, yet independently, and culminate in two bodies of work: rabbinic texts and early Syriac Christian texts (including Aphrahaṭ).[41] This more complex method of comparison allows Koltun-Fromm to explain the vast amounts of similarity in exegetical approach between Aphrahaṭ and the rabbis, while accounting for the differing conclusions that the two parties reach as a result of their interpretations without having to rely on arguments about direct reliance or influence.

This latter approach to the question of the relationship between Aphrahaṭ and his Jewish contemporaries is a significant development, even from Koltun-Fromm's earlier work, which seeks to find points of direct influence. By contrast, the comparative model that demonstrates shared exegetical traditions that predate both bodies of literature (i.e., Aphrahaṭ's corpus and rabbinic texts) seem to be the best way to account for both the similarities and differences between them with regard to biblical interpretation.

The most recent scholarly work dedicated to Aphrahaṭ and the Jews is by Eliyahu Lizorkin.[42] Lizorkin's treatment is, in many ways, a synthesis and revision of Neusner's basic argument, though it does incorporate some critiques of Neusner's premises. This synthesis leads Lizorkin to conclude that Aphrahaṭ and his community did, in fact, interact and dispute with real Jews, and that these Jews had some knowledge of halakhic traditions that also found their way into the Babylonian Talmud. And yet, Lizorkin ultimately maintains the heart of Neusner's argument by arguing that these Jews are "Para-rabbinic Jews," which Lizorkin defines as "Jews who were influenced by various essential and non-essential rabbinic interpretations … [but] did not abide by all rabbinic rulings."[43]

Persian anti-Christian persecutions … I argue that echoes of rabbinic complaints against Christianity and proselytizing tactics can be heard in the rabbinic texts." (*Jewish-Christian Conversation*, 165).

[41] "The Aphrahatic and rabbinic positions on sexuality and sacred community evolved slowly, over centuries, out of a complex matrix of inherited biblical exegesis, interpretive strategies, and localized cultural influences – many of which they shared in common." (Koltun-Fromm, *Hermeneutics of Holiness*, 239).

[42] E. Lizorkin, *Aphrahat's Demonstrations: A Conversation with the Jews of Mesopotamia* (CSCO 642; Leuven: Peeters, 2012).

[43] Lizorkin, *Aphrahat's Demonstrations*, 19. The allowance that Lizorkin provides for calling these Jews "Para-rabbinic" is that they were "not always in full compliance with the contemporary rulings and ideas" of rabbinic teaching, either because of geographic distance from centers of rabbinic activity or because of the time lapse of development in rabbinic thought.

Essentially, this is a way of supporting Neusner's claim that non-rabbinic Jews stand behind the Jews of Aphrahaṭ but modifying it to allow for points of resonance in practice and belief between the Jews described by Aphrahaṭ and rabbinic literature.[44] In other words, the Jews that Lizorkin describes are not rabbis themselves but are aware of some rabbinic teachings.

Lizorkin thus concludes that Aphrahaṭ interacted with real Jews, but these Jews were not rabbis and were not necessarily representative of "rabbinic" Judaism because that category was in flux at the time and difficult to define rigidly. These Jews can be described as "Para-rabbinic," however, because in the arguments that Aphrahaṭ records with his Jewish opponent, the Jews show some similarities with traditions that would end up being recorded as rabbinic teaching in the Babylonian Talmud. And likewise, Lizorkin argues that some of Aphrahaṭ's arguments against Judaism end up being included in the Babylonian Talmud indirectly in the form of anti-Christian polemic, veiled though it may be.

Thus, various scholars have offered a range of opinions regarding the extent, nature, and purpose of Aphrahaṭ's interaction with Jews and subsequently the value of Aphrahaṭ's testimony for evaluating the historical Jewish community at whom his polemic is directed. Neusner's work represents a turning point regarding the question of Aphrahaṭ's interaction with Rabbinic Judaism, as scholars before Neusner tended to interpret similarities between Aphrahaṭ and Rabbinic writings as evidence of direct influence, and scholars after Neusner have provided a more nuanced approach to the question of direct/indirect influence.

Yet nearly all of these approaches, regardless of their specific conclusions about Aphrahaṭ and his Jewish opponent, still assume that Aphrahaṭ's writings do tell us something about a historical Jewish community. That is, in most scholarship on Aphrahaṭ and the Jews, the authors assume that Aphrahaṭ's anti-Jewish polemic is rooted in a real historical controversy between two communities, and as a result, Aphrahaṭ's accusations can be taken at face value as historical data for identifying those Jews. There is, of course, a continuum on this topic within previous scholarship, with Koltun-Fromm's *Hermeneutics of Holiness* representing the most cautious approach on one end (i.e., similar exegetical and hermeneutical approaches are evidence of common tradition but not necessarily direct interaction), and Funk's "parallelomania" on the other end. The approaches of Neusner and Lizorkin represent something of a middle ground in that they maintain some amount of suspicion regarding the identity of Aphrahaṭ's Jews but nevertheless assume a real, historical Jewish community stands behind the polemic.

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[44] Lizorkin does criticize Neusner's treatment of the topic (see esp. *Aphrahat's Demonstrations*, 163–165), particularly on this point. He argues that since Neusner only allowed for two categories of Jew (i.e., rabbinic and non-rabbinic), he could not adequately address some of the more complex issues of Aphrahaṭ's polemic with a Jewish community (Lizorkin, *Aphrahat's Demonstrations*, 164).

In what follows, I hope to complicate the assumption that Aphrahaṭ's anti-Jewish arguments represent either a historical Jewish community or a historical Jewish-Christian encounter. I do not intend to argue that Aphrahaṭ was entirely unaware of Jews or Jewish exegetical traditions. Rather, I will argue that "the Jews" as represented in the *Demonstrations* are a literary invention, created to suit particular rhetorical aims. Thus, setting aside the question of whether Aphrahaṭ actually knew any "real Jews," I propose here that the Jews of the *Demonstrations* are "imagined Jews."[45] In order to make this case, I will examine the ways that Aphrahaṭ represents the Jews, paying particular attention to the ways that a Jewish opponent functions rhetorically within the broader arguments that Aphrahaṭ makes in the anti-Jewish Demonstrations.

"Show Me, O Sage": Aphrahaṭ's Jewish Interlocutor

Throughout the anti-Jewish *Demonstrations*, Aphrahaṭ frequently invokes a Jewish opponent, whom he addresses as a "sage" (ܚܟܝܡܐ) (*Dem.* 11.1), a "wise teacher" (ܚܟܝܡܐ ܡܠܦܢܐ) (*Dem.* 17.9), a "debater" (ܕܪܘܫܐ) (*Dem.* 12.3; 15.5; 18.3), or a "scribe" (ܣܦܪܐ) (*Dem.* 15.5). Some scholars have claimed that this provides evidence of Aphrahaṭ's interaction with a real Jewish opponent, and that this perhaps even represents attempted Jewish missionary activity among Christians. However, upon closer examination, the rhetorical features of Aphrahaṭ's use of this interlocutor call into question the historicity of these supposed interactions. Indeed, it is interesting that this interaction has not received more scrutiny, given that the "dialogue" with a rhetorically constructed opponent was a standard format of early Christian anti-Jewish literature.[46] With this in mind, in this section I will examine Aphrahaṭ's opponent as a literary, rather than historical, character.

If we look at the collective references to Aphrahaṭ's interlocutor, it is their formulaic nature that stands out most. The interlocutor appears first in *Dem.* 11, the very first anti-Jewish *Demonstration*, introduced by a rhetorical challenge: "Show me, o sage …" I note the wording of this introduction because it occurs

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[45] The term "imagined Jews" is intended to describe Aphrahaṭ's literary construction of a Jewish opponent. One could also use the phrase "rhetorical Jews" to describe the same phenomenon; see L. Rutgers, *Making Myths: Jews in Early Christian Identity Formation* (Leuven: Peeters, 2009), 131.

[46] R. Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1974); Ruether claims, "At a period contemporaneous with the latest books of the New Testament, the imaginary dialogue became a favorite Christian method for presenting this [i. e., anti-Jewish] material" (119). Moreover, Ruether goes on to say, "These dialogues are almost useless as sources for what Jews might actually have said about Christianity. The Christians' opponents are the Jews of Christian imagination" (120).

seven times throughout the anti-Jewish *Demonstrations* in a similar format.[47] The very fact that this phrase is repeated suggests that it is a literary device, and a close reading of these passages supports this conclusion.

Beyond the particular wording of the challenge, there is a pattern in Aphrahaṭ's use of the interlocutor. Each instance occurs in the context of Aphrahaṭ interpreting a passage of Scripture, and invariably the passage under discussion offers a critique of Israel/the Jews or involves a challenge to a Jewish interpretation of the passage at hand. For example, in *Dem.* 11.1, Aphrahaṭ uses the prophet Isaiah's indictment of the inhabitants of Judah in his day as "rulers of Sodom" and "people of Gomorrah" (Is 1:10) in service of his argument that the Jews have been replaced by Christians as the people of God. In this context, Aphrahaṭ offers his challenge to the sage to "show him" how to interpret the passage from Isaiah in any way other than the clear meaning (i. e., that "the Jews" are no better than the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah).

The most significant part of Aphrahaṭ's formulaic challenge, though, is the fact that the "sage" is never given the chance to respond. The Jewish opponent does not even get to serve the role of "interlocutor," because Aphrahaṭ only lets us hear one half of the conversation. As a result, Aphrahaṭ's challenge to the sage rings hollow, and the absence of a Jewish response speaks volumes about his rhetorical construction of a Jewish opponent.

On one occasion, Aphrahaṭ claims that he was challenged by a "sage of the Jews," but he does not use the "show/tell me" formula along with it.[48] This challenge also breaks the formula discussed above because here Aphrahaṭ does actually provide a two-sided verbal exchange between himself and the sage, and their back and forth conversation is somewhat extensive (*Dem.* 21.1–4). And yet, despite the fact that this example breaks the previous pattern, there is still good reason to view this exchange as a literary construction instead of a report of a real conversation. First, the conversation ends with a long monologue from Aphrahaṭ with no response or interjection from the interlocutor.[49] Second, the sage's arguments and answers in this exchange too conveniently set up the points that Aphrahaṭ wishes to make. In this sense, this exchange reads like other early Christian, anti-Jewish "dialogues" such as Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho* and Tertullian's *Against the Jews*, insofar as the Jewish opponent frequently appears as a "flat" character, serving only the rhetorical purpose of setting up the author's arguments. And finally, immediately following this long response, the

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[47] "Show me, o sage ..." (*Dem.* 11.1); "I ask you, o wise debater of the people ... show me ..." (12.3); "Tell me, o scribe, wise debater of the people ..." (15.5); "Now tell me, o wise teacher of Israel ..." (17.9); "Tell me, o debater of Israel ..." (18.2); "Prove to me ... o wise debater of the people (18.3); "Listen, o debater of Israel ..." (19.2).
[48] "It happened one day that someone called a 'sage of the Jews' challenged me ..." (*Dem.* 21.1).
[49] Aphrahaṭ's final response in this conversation extends from the middle of 7.3 all the way through 7.4.

argument of the Demonstration turns from this report and addresses the reader: "I have written out this whole persuasion (ܡܦܝܣܐ)[50] for you because the Jews boast, 'We will yet be gathered together'" (*Dem.* 21.5). Aphrahaṭ's framing of this "persuasion" suggests that it is not a real conversation at all but rather a rhetorically crafted dialogue meant to persuade the audience.

The above analysis shows that Aphrahaṭ employs a Jewish interlocutor as a rhetorical device. The silence of Aphrahaṭ's opponent serves the purpose of solidifying his argument. The reader, presumably, can only conclude that a Jewish sage has no response to Aphrahaṭ's exegetical challenges. The mute sage thus serves as a stand in for anyone who would disagree with Aphrahaṭ's argument – Jewish or otherwise. Aphrahaṭ's interlocutor cannot be taken as a historical Jewish opponent, and these exchanges do not reflect a Jewish-Christian conversation. The sage serves as a flat character, a literary device, whose voice (or lack thereof) provides the negative space around which Aphrahaṭ constructs his argument.

But the sage is more than just a rhetorical device for particular exegetical points. The sage represents a larger rhetorical project for Aphrahaṭ's representation of the Jews: the construction of difference.[51] Aphrahaṭ appeals to a Jewish sage as his opponent precisely because Jews and Christians share things in common – Scripture, exegetical methods, rituals, even God. As such, Aphrahaṭ presents his Jewish sage as someone who misunderstands those things they share in common. And when we consider Aphrahaṭ's anti-Jewish polemic more broadly, we can trace this same theme throughout his various arguments with "the Jews."

Aphrahaṭ's Polemical Treatment of Jewish Ritual Practices

Aphrahaṭ spends a great deal of time in the anti-Jewish *Demonstrations* arguing against Jewish ritual practices, likely because these practices would have been the most identifiable traits of Jewish communities. So, it is tempting to view Aphrahaṭ's arguments on these topics as evidence of his contention with

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[50] The Syriac word ܡܦܝܣܐ derives ultimately from Greek πειθῶ 'to persuade' (A. M. Butts, *Language Change in the Wake of Empire: Syriac in its Greco-Roman Context* [LSAWS 11; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2016], 122, cf. 218). In Greek, πεῖσις, a noun derived from πειθῶ, came to be synonymous with a rhetorical style of "persuasive oratory." Cf. J. T. Kirby, "Greek Rhetoric," in Theresa Enos (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric and Composition: Communication from Ancient Times to the Information Age* (London: Routledge, 2010), 299.

[51] In sociological literature, the construction of similarity and difference is a significant aspect of boundary markers between communities. And as this literature notes, it is frequently necessary to construct difference when there are otherwise significant similarities between communities. This act of constructing difference is an attempt to define the "insider" community through the act of delineating the "outsider" community. For a excellent overviews of communal identity formation, see R. Jenkins, *Social Identity* (2nd ed.; London: Routledge, 2004) and A. P. Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (London: Routledge, 1985).

a historical Jewish community who served as a competitor with his own community in the religious marketplace. However, upon closer examination, there are reasons to cast doubt on whether or not Aphrahaṭ's treatment of these topics provides any proof of historical inter-religious encounters. In what follows, I offer three case studies of Aphrahaṭ's engagement with the Jews over their ritual practices, and in each case, I argue that Aphrahaṭ depicts a rhetorical image of the Jews that does not reflect a real, historical Jewish opponent.

Circumcision

In the very first anti-Jewish *Demonstration* (11), Aphrahaṭ takes up the topic of perhaps the most distinctive Jewish ritual in antiquity: circumcision. The heart of Aphrahaṭ's argument in this *Demonstration* is that Jews continue the practice of circumcision but do so in vain because they fail to recognize the intent – and thus the scope – of circumcision as a marker of God's people. According to Aphrahaṭ, the Jewish failure to understand the true meaning of circumcision has cut them off from its benefit.

Aphrahaṭ sets up his dispute over the meaning of circumcision with a quote that a Jewish opponent presumably declares: "We are circumcised, chosen, and distinguished from the peoples!" (*Dem.* 11.1). Immediately following this declaration, Aphrahaṭ offers his rebuttal, the thesis of this *Demonstration*: "It is obvious to everyone who understands [that] circumcision is useless without faith. [It has] a certain utility, because faith preceded circumcision, and circumcision was a mark." (*Dem.* 11.2). Because circumcision was a divine command linked directly to a covenant between God and Abraham,[52] Aphrahaṭ recognizes the utility (ܚܫܚܬܐ – or 'value') of circumcision but only as a mark (ܪܘܫܡܐ) – a thing that signifies something else. Thus, for Aphrahaṭ, it is not the signifier – in this case, circumcision – that matters but the signified: God's covenant established through faith. Aphrahaṭ can even go so far as to say that circumcision, when practiced in conjunction with faithful practice of the Law, was a source of life for the Jews (*Dem.* 11.2). However, for Aphrahaṭ, it is precisely the fact that circumcision could be maintained as a distinctive practice *without* keeping the rest of the Law that shows the true value of the mark.

Given his devotion to Scripture, Aphrahaṭ must take seriously that circumcision was given by God as part of the covenant with Abraham. In order to show that circumcision was merely a mark and not to be confused with the covenant itself, Aphrahaṭ considers the nature of God's covenants (ܩܝܡܐ) more broadly with reference to the covenants with Adam and Noah (*Dem.* 11.3). There are two key components of Aphrahaṭ's treatment of covenants: First, God's covenants in

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[52] Aphrahaṭ even quotes Gn 17:10 explicitly: "This is my covenant, which you will keep by circumcising every male" (*Dem.* 11.2).

the Hebrew Bible are frequently temporally limited.[53] The subtext of this observation is that circumcision itself is subject to the temporal nature of God's covenants.[54] This is how Aphrahaṭ can regard circumcision as a divine command yet ultimately argue that it is no longer binding. The more significant conclusion from Aphrahaṭ's covenant comparison is that circumcision was not given along with the other covenants, so it cannot be an integral part of divine covenants in general.[55] In Aphrahaṭ's synopsis, circumcision represents an incidental component of one covenant; the focal point of all of God's covenants is faith.[56]

Ultimately, Aphrahaṭ's primary concern in this *Demonstration* is to dissociate the practice of circumcision from faithfulness to God by distinguishing "the uncircumcised who believe" from "the circumcised who do not believe" (*Dem.* 11.3). Much of Aphrahaṭ's argument in the rest of the *Demonstration* is an attempt to provide exegetical support for this distinction. Unsurprisingly, Aphrahaṭ pays particular attention to passages from the Hebrew Bible that distinguish between the act of circumcision and the true meaning of circumcision, particularly the use of the phrase "circumcision of the heart."[57] This scriptural turn of phrase allows Aphrahaṭ the freedom to re-interpret true circumcision as the circumcision of the heart, associated with faith, which subsequently allows him to claim that Christians are heirs to the covenant through faith, regardless of the actual practice of physical circumcision (*Dem.* 11.11–12).

Aphrahaṭ is not, of course, the first follower of Jesus to argue that Christians are heirs of God's promise to Abraham through faith and through circumcision of the heart. Indeed, despite the fact that Aphrahaṭ never actually cites the apostle Paul's Epistle to the Romans in this *Demonstration*, his argument has a great deal in common with Romans 2–4. Paul also frames his discussion of circumcision with regard to the Jews boasting (Rom 2:17, 23; 3:27), speaks of the value (ὠφέλεια) of circumcision (Rom 2:25; 3:1), distinguishes between "physical" and "spiritual" circumcision by appealing to the circumcision of the heart (Rom 2:27–29), separates the act of circumcision from the promise of God's covenant with Abraham (Rom 4:1–15), and argues that the uncircumcised have access to this promise through faith (Rom 4:16–25). Paul's influence on Aphrahaṭ for this argument is undeniable, but he does not cite Paul for any of these points. In fact, Aphrahaṭ's only citation of Paul in this whole *Demonstration*

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[53] "With all generations and tribes, God made covenants from time to time (*literally* from generation to generation), and [these covenants] were kept in their times, but [then] replaced." (*Dem.* 11.3).

[54] This subtext becomes explicit when Aphrahaṭ returns to this topic at the end of the *Demonstration* (11.11).

[55] "Circumcision was not given along with any of the former covenants" (*Dem.* 11.3).

[56] "When [God] chose Abraham, it was not because of circumcision … but because of faith" (*Dem.* 11.3).

[57] Aphrahaṭ employs citations including this phrase from Jer 9:25–26 (11.5) and Dt 10:16 (11.5; 11.6).

is his re-appropriation of Paul's admonition to the Galatians that those who are clamoring for circumcision should mutilate themselves (Gal 5:12).

Aphrahaṭ's veiled reliance on Paul in this *Demonstration* raises the question of whom, precisely, he is arguing against. On the one hand, the fact that Aphrahaṭ relies primarily on passages from the Hebrew Bible without resorting to Paul suggests that he may, in fact, be responding to a Jewish boast about the continued value of circumcision, assuming that a contemporary Jew might be more persuaded by Aphrahaṭ's "original" exegesis than by mere citation of Christian Scripture. On the other hand, Aphrahaṭ makes it quite explicit at the end of the *Demonstration* that there are people who are part of the covenant who are considering circumcision, and from the context it is clear that he means members of the "new" covenant, i. e., Christians.[58] Such Christians – not Jews – are the inspiration for Aphrahaṭ's use of Paul's harsh words from Galatians.[59]

Moreover, aside from Aphrahaṭ's claim of the boasting of the Jews at the beginning of the *Demonstration*, there is no evidence that Aphrahaṭ has any knowledge of the contemporary practice of circumcision among the Jews. The "Jews" of Aphrahaṭ's argument are entirely rhetorical, constructed from the words of Scripture. His most devastating critiques of circumcision are simply reconfigurations of Pauline arguments from Rom 2–4, and his evidence from the Hebrew Bible is little more than a lexical survey of "circumcision" passages that appear to support the distinction between physical and spiritual circumcision. This fact, coupled with the explicit acknowledgement that this issue appears to be an internal Christian disagreement regarding the role of circumcision suggests that this *Demonstration* is not evidence of a live debate between Christians and Jews. Rather, the Jews of *Dem.* 11 occupy the role of a flat, two-dimensional opponent whose silence in response to Aphrahaṭ's argument – like that of the Jewish "sage" – serves as rhetorical support for Aphrahaṭ's argument.

Passover

Aphrahaṭ's use of the Jews as a literary opponent in his deconstruction of Jewish ritual practices becomes even more apparent when we consider other examples of this trope. In *Dem.* 12, Aphrahaṭ takes up the topic of the Passover and argues that the continued practice of the Passover ritual meal (or *seder*) violates its true meaning. Once again, Aphrahaṭ amasses a series of prophetic critiques in his exegetical argument, primarily from Isaiah and Jeremiah (see esp. *Dem.* 12.4), and distinguishes between those who keep the Passover correctly (Christians) and those who do so incorrectly (Jews) (*Dem.* 12.8). Passover also serves as a

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[58] "Anyone who is part of the covenant, and yet yearns for circumcision …" (*Dem.* 11.11).

[59] For further examples of such prooftexts from the Hebrew Bible employed in arguments with Jews, see A. M. Butts and S. Gross, *The History of the 'Slave of Christ': From Jewish Child to Christian Martyr* (PMAS 6; Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2016), 43–45.

signifier for Aphrahaṭ, but instead of being simply a "mark," Passover is a "mystery" (ܐܪܙܐ) that is only fully understood by followers of Christ, who fulfilled the mystery (*Dem.* 12.5; 12.9). And finally, Aphrahaṭ once again makes it explicit at the end of this *Demonstration* that there is an internal Christian dispute that has prompted this response, not a concern with a contemporary Jewish community.[60]

So what is the cause of the dispute that Aphrahaṭ addresses? There seem to be two issues at stake in Aphrahaṭ's argument. The first is a question about the proper interpretation of the "three days" between Jesus' death and resurrection.[61] In an interesting rhetorical role reversal, Aphrahaṭ poses this challenge in the "show us, o sage …" format, but in this case Aphrahaṭ himself is the sage: "Now show us, o sage, what are the three days and three nights in which our savior was among the dead?" (*Dem.* 12.7). Unlike his silent Jewish sage, though, Aphrahaṭ responds to this rhetorical challenge.[62] Nowhere does Aphrahaṭ suggest that this challenge comes from a Jewish opponent. Quite the opposite, when Aphrahaṭ reiterates this point in *Dem.* 12.12, he explicitly frames it as an issue of dispute among the "members of your church" (ܒܢܝ ܥܕܬܟ) of the person(s) to whom he is writing the *Demonstrations* (*Dem.* 12.12).

The second, and more pressing, issue that provoked Aphrahaṭ's response about the Passover is the proper timing of the Christian celebration of *Pascha* – the Christian re-appropriation of Passover that celebrated the death and resurrection of Jesus.[63] Aphrahaṭ asserts that there are "ignorant" people who question the Christian celebration of the *Pascha* (*Dem.* 12.5), and ultimately it becomes clear that the issue at stake is the precise days on which Christians should celebrate their festival (*Dem.* 12.8; 12.12). More specifically, Aphrahaṭ distinguishes the primary day of the Christian *Pascha* festival, the fifteenth of Nisan, from the

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[60] "Since you have been persuaded, you may now also persuade the brothers, members of your church, who are troubled about the timing of the Passover." (*Dem.* 12.12).

[61] *Dem.* 12.6–7, and then he returns to this topic in 12.12.

[62] The content of Aphrahaṭ's answer is not necessarily important for the present argument. However, Aphrahaṭ's answer to this problem of the "three days and three nights" is fascinating and, as far as I know, unique. He argues that the reckoning actually begins on the night that Jesus "gave his body to be eaten and blood to be drunk," i. e., on Thursday evening. So Thursday night counts as the first night. Then, the morning of Friday counts as the first day, up until the darkness "from the sixth to the ninth hour" (cf. Mt 27:45; Lk 23:44). This period of darkness is, for Aphrahaṭ, the "second night," and the remaining hours of Friday after the temporary darkness count as the second day. Then, Friday night counts as the third night, and the Sabbath counts as the third day. Thus, in Aphrahaṭ's reckoning, there are three days and three nights in which Jesus was "among the dead" (*Dem.* 12.7). For further information on such calendrical issues, see B. Hartung, "The Significance of Astronomical and Calendrical Theories for Ephrem's Interpretation of the Three Days of Jesus' Death," in Butts and Young, *Syriac Christian Culture.*

[63] In order to distinguish between the two religious festivals, I employ the somewhat arbitrary linguistic descriptions "Passover" and "Pascha." I say this is arbitrary because Aphrahaṭ does not use two different words for the Christian and Jewish practices; in both cases, he uses the word ܦܨܚܐ. Aprhahat does make it clear, though, that he is referring to the *Pascha* as a "festival" (ܥܕܥܐܕܐ) that Christians celebrate (*Dem.* 12.13).

Jewish day of Passover, the fourteenth of Nisan.[64] But it is clearly not the Jewish celebration of Passover that concerns Aphrahaṭ; again, Aphrahaṭ explicitly states that it is "members of the church" who are "troubled about the time of the *Pascha*" (*Dem.* 12.12). Although Aphrahaṭ does not tell us precisely what these "members of the church" think about the *Pascha*, it is highly likely that the problem is related to the Quartodeciman controversy.[65] This controversy was so significant within Aphrahaṭ's lifetime that it was taken up at the Council of Nicaea in 325, and the fourth-century heresiologist Epiphanius even names a sect in Antioch – the Audians, who continued practicing the Christian Passover in accordance with the Jewish calendar and in violation of Nicene orthodoxy.[66] When viewed within this context, Aphrahaṭ's argument about the proper dating of Easter must be read as a dispute among Christians and not reflective of a debate with Jews over the proper practice of Passover.

Even if Aphrahaṭ was not directly arguing with Jews about the dating of the Passover, the question remains whether *Dem.* 12 betrays any knowledge of contemporary Jewish practices or beliefs regarding the Passover. The answer, as in the case with *Dem.* 11, is no. Aphrahaṭ does briefly ruminate on the Jewish practice of Passover in his own time but only vaguely.[67] He critiques the Jews of his own day for celebrating the Passover while "scattered among the peoples" (*Dem.* 12.3), despite the fact that the Israelites were commanded to only perform the Passover sacrifice in Jerusalem.[68] Far from showing any knowledge of the contemporary practice of Passover among Jews, Aphrahaṭ flattens his opponent by reading the Jews of his own day through the lens of Ezekiel's critique of Israel (Ezek 4:13–14). Aphrahaṭ does not note that Jews ceased from practicing the Passover sacrifice after the destruction of the Jerusalem temple; instead, he collapses the Passover sacrifice with the Passover meal. For Aphrahaṭ, the destruction of the temple and subsequent exile of the Jews from Jerusalem negates even the possibility of a continued celebration of the Passover, which suggests that he has very little knowledge – or at least no real concern – with the contemporary Jewish practice of Passover.[69]

Later in the *Demonstration*, Aphrahaṭ offers a typological comparison of the Christian and Jewish practices of Passover (*Dem.* 12.8). But none of his observations about the Jewish Passover reflect knowledge of contemporary practice.

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[64] Aphrahaṭ calls the fifteenth "our great day of suffering" (*Dem.* 12.8; 12.12).

[65] G. Rouwhorst, "The Quartodeciman Passover and the Jewish Pesach," *Questions Liturgiques* 77 (1996): 156. Rouwhorst argues that Aphrahaṭ, along with Ephrem and the Syriac *Didascalia* (in its final, edited form), reflects a "Quartodeciman past" in the early Syriac tradition.

[66] Epiphanis of Salamis, *Panarion*, III.70.9 (ed. K. Holl, *Epiphanius, Ancoratus und Panarion* [GCS 25, 31, 37; Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1915, 1922, 1933]).

[67] Twice in *Dem.* 12.3 he says something about the Jewish Passover "in our day" or "today."

[68] Aphrahaṭ cites Dt 16:5–6 in support of this argument (*Dem.* 12.2).

[69] For more on this topic, see C. Shepardson, "Paschal Politics: Deploying the Temple's Destruction against Fourth-Century Judaizers," *VC* 62 (2008): 233–260.

Aphrahaṭ provides only surface-level observations about the Jewish celebration of Passover (it is practiced on the 14th of Nisan, they observe a seven-day festival of unleavened bread, they eat bitter herbs, etc.). In other words, Aphrahaṭ's representation of the Jewish Passover here is based upon the biblical account of the institution of the Passover feast. This typological comparison offers no evidence that Aphrahaṭ knew anything about the Jewish Passover as practiced in his own day. The Jews depicted in *Dem.* 12 are a construct of Aphrahaṭ's exegetical imagination. They are imagined, not real, Jews.

Sabbath Observance

In Aphrahaṭ's treatment of circumcision and Passover in *Dem.* 11 and 12, we have seen the way that he uses Scripture selectively to provide a critique of Jewish ritual practices. In both of these arguments, a clear pattern emerges in which Aphrahaṭ makes a case for the original intent of the ritual, argues that the Jews have lost sight of this original meaning, and assembles a pastiche of prophetic critique to support his claims. These same themes appear in Aphrahaṭ's treatment of the Sabbath (*Dem.* 13), providing further proof of Aphrahaṭ's piecemeal construction of the Jews.

"We live because we keep the Sabbath and its traditions!" (*Dem.* 13.1). So says Aphrahaṭ's Jewish opponent at the beginning of *Dem.* 13 ("On the Sabbath"). The Sabbath, Aphrahaṭ responds, was given for rest, not as a matter of "death and life" or "righteousness and sin" (*Dem.* 13.2). Following this, Aphrahaṭ launches into a lengthy exegetical argument in support of his claim (*Dem.* 13.2–9). The primary point of Aphrahaṭ's argument is that many "righteous" people lived before the Sabbath was instituted at Sinai, so the practice of the Sabbath cannot be a requirement for righteousness.[70] Later in the argument, Aphrahaṭ offers examples of righteous people who violated the Sabbath, such as the Maccabees (*Dem.* 13.12, with reference to 1 Maccabees 2:29–44). Then, as expected, Aphrahaṭ includes prophetic support for his argument about the proper interpretation of Sabbath (*Dem.* 13.13, relying primarily on Is 56:2–5).

There is one notable difference in *Dem.* 13 from those discussed above, though: There is no immediately apparent intra-Christian argument to which Aphrahaṭ responds through his anti-Jewish polemic. This is not to say that there are no specific issues that prompted Aphrahaṭ's response; rather, it is simply not explicitly clear that Aphrahaṭ's argument in this *Demonstration* is directed against fellow

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[70] "If the Sabbath had been given for righteousness before Israel, why was it not given to Adam so that he might keep it and be made righteous by it?" (*Dem.* 13.4); "If righteousness were in the Sabbath, then Enoch and all those of his generation would have been pleasing to God through it." (*Dem.* 13.5); and ultimately, "If it was [a matter of] death and life, or wickedness and righteousness, the Sabbath would have been given to these righteous people mentioned above, so that they might keep it and live." (*Dem.* 13.9).

Christians, as was the case with *Dem.* 11 and 12. Thus, the underlying issue at hand in *Dem.* 13 demands a closer look.

In *Dem.* 13.10–11, Aphrahaṭ engages a specific argument about whether or not God can grow weary based on the exegesis of the phrase "God rested" from Gn 2:2. It is tempting to view Aphrahaṭ's argument here as a mere exegetical excursus, ruminating on the meaning of a phrase that pertains to the Sabbath without any specific context. However, upon closer inspection, it seems likely that Aphrahaṭ is engaging a specific argument and is attempting to persuade his reader on this point. On three occasions in this brief argument, Aphrahaṭ orders his reader to "listen" (ܫܡܥ) and then immediately uses a form of the word ܦܝܣ (v. "to persuade, convince"; n. "persuasion, argument").[71] Moreover, Aphrahaṭ makes it abundantly clear that he is refuting a specific opponent at the end of his argument: "This [phrase] 'God rested from his works' is understood by foolish people to mean that God grew weary" (*Dem.* 13.11). Thus, it seems clear that Aphrahaṭ is attempting to correct a particular interpretation of the Sabbath regarding the question of whether God can grow weary.

It remains unclear, though, whom this argument might be directed against. It is unlikely that the interpretation Aphrahaṭ rejects originates from a Jewish source, as passages from the Hebrew Bible, Philo, and the rabbis explicitly reject the idea of God getting "weary."[72] Neusner also finds it unlikely that Aphrahaṭ has a Jewish opponent in mind here, suggesting instead that this may be one of the few places where Aphrahaṭ directly confronts Zoroastrian critiques of the Jewish-Christian God.[73] Thomas Kremer, in his study of Ephrem's *Commentary on Genesis*, compares Aphrahaṭ's treatment of God's "rest" on the Sabbath with Ephrem's, and he also suggests that the two Syriac authors are at odds with their religious surroundings.[74] In addition to the possibility of Zoroastrians, Kremer also mentions Marcion as a potential target of this polemic because Marcion's disparagement of the creator God includes the idea that this God became "fatigued and laid down."[75] Unfortunately Kremer does not provide any primary source text reference for this claim. Ephrem's Hymn 33 of the *Hymns against the*

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[71] *Dem.* 13.10: "Listen, and I will persuade you ..." (ܫܡܥ ܘܝ ܐܦܝܣܟ); 13.10: "Hear [this] argument ..." (ܘܫܡܥ ܦܝܣܐ); and 13.11: "Listen, and be persuaded ..." (ܫܡܥ ܘܝ ܘܐܬܬܦܝܣ).

[72] Is 40:28; Ps 120:4; Philo, *On Cherubim*, 87 (ed. F. H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker, *Philo* [LCL 226–227, 247, 261, 275, 289, 320, 341, 363, 379; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1929–1962]); and Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael *yitro, bahodesh, parasha* 7 (ed. Horovitz and Rabin, 230). There is also a passage in Bereshit Rabba (ed. Theodor-Albeck, 10:9) that takes up the interpretation of God's rest in Gn 2:2, but it does not discuss the issue of God growing weary.

[73] Neusner, *Aphrahat and Judaism*, 125.

[74] "Mit ihren polemischen Ausführungen, mit denen Aphrahat und Ephräm die Unermüdlichkeit Gottes verteidigen, treffen sie ganz verschiedene religiöse Auffassungen ihrer Umwelt." (Th. Kremer, *Mundus primus. Die Geschichte der Welt und des Menschen von Adam bis Noach im Genesiskommentar Ephräms des Syrers* [CSCO 641; Leuven: Peeters, 2012], 234–235).

[75] "Auch bei Markion zeigt sich die Inferiorität des Schöpfergottes darin, dass er ermüdet und sich schlafen legt." (Kremer, *Mundus Primus*, 235).

Heresies appears to take issue with Marcionites mocking God for "awaking as if from slumber" (a reference to Ps 68:75).[76] However, this text does not explicitly accuse Marcionites of claiming God grew weary.

If we consider Ephrem's works more broadly, though, it is worth noting that there are significant parallels between Aphrahaṭ and Ephrem (as well as Ps.-Ephrem in Armenian) on the topic of God's rest. In his *Commentary on Genesis* (I.32.2), Ephrem cites Gn 2:1–2 and asks rhetorically, "From what toil does God rest?"[77] Ephrem goes on to say that God did not need the day of rest because God "does not weary." And, like Aphrahaṭ, Ephrem ultimately argues that the Jews miss the true meaning of the Sabbath, since it is a "mystery" that is only fulfilled in the Christian reception of "true rest." This theme of "mystery" and the "true Sabbath" also appear in the *Armenian Commentary on Genesis*, which is (spuriously) attributed to Ephrem.[78] There are even more parallels with Aphrahaṭ's argument about the meaning of God's rest in the *Armenian Commentary on Exodus*, also (spuriously) attributed to Ephrem. In this text we also find the argument that God did not require the Sabbath for Adam, Enoch, and Abraham, examples of righteous people who broke the Sabbath, and a critique of the Sabbath that collapses it with animal sacrifices.[79] There is no explicit evidence of polemic in the treatment of this topic in these commentaries, though, so these parallels do not provide corroboration of a specific opponent.[80] They do, however, provide corroboration that Aphrahaṭ's treatment of God's rest should be read within a larger Christian exegetical tradition. The fact that such similar themes appear in both Ephrem and Aphrahaṭ (as well as the Armenian Ps.-Ephrem) on this topic perhaps suggests a broader context in which there was some question about the proper interpretation of God's Sabbath rest among Christian exegetes. It is at least plausible, then, to read Aphrahaṭ's argument about God's rest in *Dem.* 13 as part of an inter-Christian debate over the interpretation of Gn 2:2.

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[76] E. Beck, *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen contra Haereses* (CSCO 169–170; Leuven: Peeters, 1957), 131–132.

[77] E. G. Mathews and J. P. Amar, *St. Ephrem the Syrian. Selected Prose Works: Commentary on Genesis, Commentary on Exodus, Homily on Our Lord, Letter to Publius* (FoC 91; Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1994), 96. Syriac edition of Ephrem's *Commentary on Genesis*: R. M. Tonneau, *Sancti Ephraem Syri In Genesim et In Exodum Commentarii*, vol. 1 (Louvain: Durbecq, 1955).

[78] E. G. Mathews, *The Armenian Commentary on Genesis Attributed to Ephrem the Syrian* (CSCO 572–573; Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 13, ln. 19–21.

[79] E. G. Mathews, *The Armenian Commentary on Exodus-Deuteronomy Attributed to Ephrem the Syrian* (CSCO 587–588; Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 39–42.

[80] The *Armenian Commentary on Exodus* perhaps provides a hint of a Marcionite opponent, by linking this interpretation of God's rest to the claim that "God is the creator and maker of everything" (Mathews, *Armenian Commentary on Exodus-Deuteronomy*, 38), which could easily be read as an anti-Marcionite polemic. But nowhere in the text is it explicit that there is an opponent.

Jewish Ritual, Christian Symbol

I have argued above that the proper interpretation of Jewish ritual practices features prominently in Aphrahaṭ's rhetorical presentation of a Jewish opponent, and yet, I have also argued that Aphrahaṭ's treatment of these rituals does not necessitate the existence of a real, historical Jewish community that served as a rival to Aphrahaṭ's community. Indeed, I have argued above that it is best to regard the Jews of Aphrahaṭ's polemic as "imagined Jews," who exist only in Aphrahaṭ's constructed discourse. So, the question remains: why? If there was no real external Jewish threat to Aphrahaṭ's community, why does anti-Jewish polemic feature so heavily in the second half of the *Demonstrations*? It is to this question that I now turn.

Ritual and Christian Identity

The primary problem of Christian identity is the question of the relationship to Judaism. This problem is evident from the earliest strata of Christian literary evidence, the letters of Paul, and remains a persistent problem through the early centuries, into Late Antiquity, and indeed even to the present. The root of this problem is the commonality between Christians and Jews: a shared God, a shared narrative past, and shared Scriptures. As such, the onus was on Christians, as the newcomers, to express the rationale for their appropriation of Jewish religious symbols. The earliest Christian dispute – the infamous Paul-Peter confrontation over table fellowship in Galatians 2 – shows the prominence of this problem in Christian self-definition. Moreover, in the second and third centuries, we see varying Christian attempts to deal with this problem, from Melito's diatribe to Justin Martyr's dialogue, from Marcion's rejection to the "gnostic" reinterpretations. The very fact that there were so many different types of responses to the issue of Christian identity and its precise relationship to Judaism proves that it was a question that demanded an answer. By laying claim to the Jewish Scriptures, Christians had to formulate an identity that could both explain the similarities with Jews, and yet explicate the differences between them. And it is evident, again even from Paul's dispute with Peter, that Jewish rituals played a prominent role in this process.

It is no coincidence, then, that the question of the Christian's relationship to Jewish rituals features prominently in other early Christian anti-Jewish literature. For example, Justin Martyr asks Trypho if the Jews have any accusations about Christian morals other than the fact that they "do not observe the law, circumcise the flesh … or keep Sabbaths" (*Dial.* 10.1). Trypho responds:

But this is what we are most puzzled about, that you who claim to be pious and believe yourselves to be different from the others do not segregate yourselves from them, nor do you observe a manner of life different from that of the Gentiles, for you do not keep the

feasts or Sabbaths, nor do you practice the rite of circumcision. You place your hope in a crucified man, and still expect to receive favors from God when you disregard his commandments. Have you not read that *the male who is not circumcised on the eighth day shall be eliminated from his people?* This precept was for stranger and purchased slave alike. But you, forthwith, scorn this covenant, spurn the commands that come afterwards, and then you try to convince us that you know God, when you fail to do those things that every God-fearing person would do. (*Dial.* 10.3)[81]

Trypho eloquently states the problem of Christian identity: that Christians claim to "know God," and yet do not do any of the things that this God explicitly requires (Sabbath, circumcision, etc.).

Justin responds to this challenge by claiming that although Christians do, in fact, claim the same God as Jews (*Dial.* 11.1), this same God has been known to replace "old laws" with new (*Dial.* 11.2) and, in fact, promised through the prophets do begin a new covenant for the salvation of the nations (*Dial.* 11.3).[82] Then, Justin argues that Christians find in Jesus the fulfillment of this prophetic promise for a new covenant, the proof of which is found in the number of people who "have turned to God, leaving behind them idolatry and other sinful practices" (*Dial.* 10.4).[83] Following this argument, Justin claims:

We have been led to God through this crucified Christ, and we are the true spiritual Israel, and the descendants of Judah, Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham, who, though uncircumcised, was approved and blessed by God because of his faith and was called the father of many nations. (*Dial.* 10.5)[84]

With eloquence equal to that of his opponent, Justin succinctly expresses the Christian claim, "We are the true spiritual Israel." That is, Justin contends that the Jewish rituals that define Israel's relationship with God are defunct because that covenant has been replaced. However, Justin does not stop here. He goes on to argue that it is not the rituals themselves that are the problem, but rather the Jewish practice of these symbolic rituals. Justin claims that Trypho needs "another circumcision" to replace the focus on the "fleshly" one, that he should observe "perpetual Sabbath" instead of just celebrating one day, and that "unleavened bread" brings no pleasure to God.

Justin is no Marcionite. Neither the God nor the Scripture of the Jews is to be rejected by Christians. In fact, some scholars go so far as to say that Justin's *Dialogue* is written in response to Marcion's arguments about the Jewish God.[85]

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[81] Translation from T. B. Falls, *St. Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho* (SFoC 3; Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 18–19. Edition in M. Marcovich, *Iustini Martyris Dialogus cum Tryphone* (PTS 47; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1997).

[82] Citing Is 51:4–5 and Jer 31:31–32.

[83] Falls, *Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho*, 21.

[84] Falls, *Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho*, 21.

[85] M. S. Taylor, *Anti-Judaism and Early Christian Identity: A Critique of the Scholarly Consensus* (Studia Post-Biblica 46; Leiden: Brill, 1994), 172–173. For a more recent argument in this

Even Jewish rituals are not to be rejected, insofar as they have been reinterpreted in the new covenant. But it is precisely this act of reinterpretation that stands at the center of Christian identity formation. In order to lay claim to the God of the Jews and that same God's written revelations, Christians had to articulate a theology of the past that identified them with the God of circumcision, of Sabbath, and of dietary laws but also distinguished them from Jewish practices. In order to do so, Christians had to re-articulate the symbolic universe of Jewish practice, stripping Jewish terms, beliefs, and practices of their "Jewishness" and investing them with new meanings. The symbolic reinterpretation of Jewish rituals – particularly the rituals that stood at the heart of Jewish identity – is the foundation of Christian self-identification.[86]

Justin is not unique for this in early Christian anti-Jewish literature. Tertullian echoes many of the same themes in his *Against the Jews*, including the argument that the new covenant has replaced the old, and that practices associated with the old covenant – namely circumcision and keeping the Sabbath – were temporary practices that have ceased (*Against the Jews* 3.10–4.5). Tertullian also explicitly reinterprets these words, so that it is not the terms themselves that must be rejected, only the Jewish practices: "So, therefore, before there was a temporal sabbath, an eternal sabbath had been foreshown and foretold, just as even before there was a circumcision of the flesh, a spiritual circumcision had been foreshown" (*Against the Jews*, 4.5).[87] Thus, for both Justin and Tertullian, it was necessary to delineate between Christian and Jew by reinterpreting Jewish practices as Christian symbols with "spiritual" instead of "fleshly/literal" meanings.

The reinterpretation of Jewish rituals seems to have become a standard trope in the Christian literary attack on Judaism, regardless of the intended audience of the work.[88] That is, regardless of the precise context of anti-Jewish polemic in Christian sources, there are repetitive thematic elements across anti-Jewish literature that reveal the ways that Christian authors internalized and repeated this expression of self-definition. In the remainder of this study, I will analyze the ways that Aphrahaṭ participates in this broader literary tradition and contributes to Christian identity formation through the symbolic re-purposing of Jewish ritual practices.

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vein, see M. Den Dulk, *Between Jews and Heretics: Refiguring Justin Martyr's Dialogue with Trypho* (London: Routledge, 2018).

[86] For more on Justin's rhetorical strategies in constructing difference through circumcision, see N. E. Livesay, "Theological Identity Making: Justin's Use of Circumcision to Create Jews and Christians," *JECS* 18 (2010): 51–79.

[87] Translation from G. D. Dunn, *Tertullian* (The Early Church Fathers; London: Routledge, 2004), 75. Compare *Against the Jews*, 6.1.

[88] See, for example, Taylor's discussion of the trope of the fulfillment of the Law (*Anti-Judaism and Early Christian Identity*, 132–134). Taylor also goes on to argue that these sources cannot be used uncritically to reconstruct Christian-Jewish interactions (141).

Aphrahaṭ's Symbolic Reinterpretation of Jewish Rituals

For each of the Jewish ritual practices discussed above in Aphrahaṭ's construction of his Jewish opponent, Aphrahaṭ offers an explicit reinterpretation of the practice in question that erases the Jewish meaning of the symbol and replaces it with a Christian meaning. And when these arguments are considered together, it becomes clear that there is a pattern to Aphrahaṭ's symbolic deconstruction of Jewish symbols.

In Aphrahaṭ's treatment of circumcision, the first step of his reinterpretation is to separate the ritual practice from its true *meaning*. In order to complete this first step, Aphrahaṭ argues that circumcision was simply a mark, the purpose of which was to distinguish the Israelites from their neighbors (*Dem.* 11.6). This mark itself was not synonymous with God's promise or the covenant with Abraham, which was made through faith (*Dem.* 11.3). Aphrahaṭ then sets out to show that the "mark" of circumcision carries no particular favor, based on a series of biblical exemplars (*Dem.* 11.6–10), accompanied by prophetic critiques of Israel's failure to live out the "circumcision of the heart" that was supposed to accompany that of the flesh (*Dem.* 11.5).[89] Having built his case to divest the Jewish practice of circumcision from any true benefit, Aphrahaṭ then delivers the final blow: the re-articulation of the symbolic meaning of circumcision in Christian language.

Following a brief typological comparison of Jesus with Joshua's "re-circumcision" in Joshua 5 (*Dem.* 11.12), Aphrahaṭ declares, "Blessed are the uncircumcised who are circumcised of heart and born of water, a second circumcision. They are the inheritors of Abraham." (*Dem.* 11.12). In Aphrahaṭ's newly constructed symbolic universe, circumcision – that is, true circumcision of the heart – is signified not by the Jewish "mark" of cutting the foreskin but by the Christian mark of baptism. Aphrahaṭ thus baptizes the Jewish symbol of circumcision, washing it clean of all its former associations and raising a new symbol of belonging within the community of God's people. Aphrahaṭ's symbolic reinterpretation preserves the meaning of circumcision without preserving the act, which allows Christians to maintain their claim on the God who required circumcision and the Scriptures that seemingly demanded it.

Likewise in *Dem.* 12, Aphrahaṭ redefines Passover by first emptying the Jewish practice of the festival of its meaning and then offering a new interpretation of this symbol for his audience. Aphrahaṭ's primary strategy in this regard in *Dem.* 12 is to recognize the significance of the original Passover only insofar as it points to the "true" Passover of Jesus' death. As such, Aphrahaṭ frequently refers to the events of the Jewish Passover as "mysteries" (ܐ̈ܪܙܐ).[90] Aphrahaṭ's near contempo-

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[89] Here Aphrahaṭ cites Jer 9:25–26 along with the Deuteronomic basis for the "circumcision of the heart" (Dt 10:16).

[90] Or "symbols." See *Dem.* 12.2, 3 9; also in the singular "mystery" in 12.3, 5, 10.

rary Ephrem employs a similar strategy in his *Hymns on the Unleavened Bread*.[91] It appears that for both Aphrahaṭ and Ephrem, it is useful to employ "mystery/ symbol" language because it allows them to argue that the Jewish Passover had (past tense) meaning, but that this meaning became null and void upon the death of Jesus. In fact, both authors say this explicitly. Ephrem proclaims: "In this feast[92] our Lord poured out / the treasures which were filled with the symbols (ܐܪ̈ܙܐ) of his death. In this feast our Lord dismissed the symbols (ܐܪ̈ܙܐ) / that struggled in his proclamation. In this feast the lamb of truth abolished / the paschal lamb, which had run its course."[93] And Aphrahaṭ summarizes this same sentiment succinctly: "You have heard, my friend, what I have told you about the Passover sacrifice, that its mystery (ܐܪܙܐ) was given to the former people, but its truth is now heard among the peoples." (*Dem.* 12.5).

For Aphrahaṭ and Ephrem, the Jewish Passover was a placeholder, a ritual that signified God's saving actions – but only for a time. Once Jesus came and died, as Ephrem says, the paschal lamb had "run its course," fulfilled its duties. Thus, for both Aphrahaṭ and Ephrem, the biblical imagery and language of Passover did not lose its significance for Christians when Jesus died; rather, the story of Israel's Passover in Egypt only receives its true meaning after Jesus fulfilled its symbolic mystery. Just as the meaning of Passover was temporally limited, so too was the human ritual response – the Jewish celebration of Passover – temporally limited. Once Jesus fulfilled the mystery of Passover, the Jewish Passover feast was emptied of its meaning, and it continued in practice among Jews only as a reminder of their rejection of the true Paschal lamb.

Like the case with circumcision, Aphrahaṭ's argument about Passover also relies on prophetic critiques of ancient Israelites, primarily from Jeremiah and Isaiah (esp. *Dem.* 12.4), accusations of misunderstanding Scripture (esp. *Dem.* 12.3), and typological comparison (*Dem.* 12.8). With each of these tools at his disposal, Aphrahaṭ deftly reconstructs the ritual practice of Passover in distinctly Christian architecture. The fall of the temple in Jerusalem signifies the end of the Jewish Passover, and in its place Aphrahaṭ names "the church of God" as the home of the only ritual paschal sacrifice pleasing to God.[94]

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[91] See esp. 6.9–14; 12.1–5; 17.4–17; 19.1–4. Indeed, there is a striking similarity between Aphrahaṭ's argument about the Israelites not being allowed to celebrate Passover anywhere but Jerusalem in 12.3 and Ephrem's treatment of the same topic in *Hymns on the Unleavened Bread* 21.2–9. For critical text and German translation of these hymns, see E. Beck, *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Paschahymnen: De azymnis, de crucifixione, de resurrection* (CSCO 248–249; Leuven: Peeters, 1964); for English translation, see J. E. Walters, *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns on the Unleavened Bread* (TeCLA 30; Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2011).

[92] I.e., the "Last Supper" in which Jesus symbolically reinterpreted the Passover feast.

[93] Beck, *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Paschahymnen*, 12.2–4; Walters, *Unleavened Bread*, 50–51.

[94] "Concerning this sacrificial lamb of the Passover, be persuaded, my friend, about why the Holy One commanded that it should be eaten in one house and not many houses – the one

The practice of Sabbath observance receives similar treatment. The Jews misunderstand its original intent (*Dem.* 13.2), and they fail to grasp the significance of prophetic critiques that were meant to separate the true meaning of the concept from the practice (*Dem.* 13.10–11). As such, the Christian interpretation of the Sabbath stands in stark contrast with the empty Jewish ritual it replaced. The Jews may have kept the Sabbath day, but Christians keep the rest of God, which Aphrahaṭ defines as "whatever gives rest to God's will" (*Dem.* 13.13).

By stripping these ritual practices of their original meaning and using biblical prophetic critiques of ancient Israel against "contemporary" Jewish practices, Aphrahaṭ presents the Jewish practices as mere "symbols" that have run their course, mysteries that have been fulfilled. And by re-appropriating the language and symbolism of these practices for a Christian audience, Aphrahaṭ provides a way of understanding Christian rituals that is both intimately linked with the Jewish past, and yet completely removed from the Jewish present.

From Ritual to Symbol: Re-Interpreting the Past, Re-Imagining the Present

I have used the language of "symbol" in the above discussion following sociological literature on identity theory, which argues that symbols play a key role in the interpretation of the past, a central aspect of identity construction.[95] Symbols are malleable, which means that the shared history of a community is malleable as well.[96] I contend that this sociological concept helps modern readers make sense of Aphrahaṭ's arguments about Jewish ritual practices.

Christianity inherited a language from Judaism, a symbolic universe in which specific words and concepts were tied to aspects of Jewish piety. Some of these concepts needed to remain constant – monotheism, the identity of the God about whom Jesus spoke as the creator God of Genesis, and the various revelations of God to the ancestors and prophets of former times. Other concepts, however, were no longer useful to Christians in their Jewish form and needed to be reinterpreted and redefined, including various rituals and practices that seemed to be commanded by God in the Hebrew Bible. Thus, when Christians sought to establish their own identity, it was necessary to define Christianity in terms that would show its dependence upon Judaism, yet provide necessary differentiation. One key aspect of this process, as we have seen in Justin Martyr, Tertullian, and now Aphrahaṭ, is the reinterpretation of key symbols. And it is no coincidence that the ritual practices that were most central to Judaism, particularly from the perspective of outsiders, were the ones that Christians most needed to re-appropriate, such as circumcision, Passover, and Sabbath observance.

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house is the church of God." (*Dem.* 12.9). For a broader treatment of the use of the trope of the fall of the temple in Jewish-Christian Paschal conflict, see Shepardson, "Paschal Politics."

[95] See, for example, the discussion in Cohen, *Symbolic Construction of Community*, 15–16.

[96] Cohen, *Symbolic Construction of Community*, 21.

As I have shown above, Aphrahaṭ carefully divests Jewish ritual practices of their "Jewishness," and he does this by re-interpreting passages from the Hebrew Bible in order to show that the Jews misunderstand their own practices. The prophetic critique is crucial in each case because it allows Aphrahaṭ to provide proof to his audience that there is Scriptural warrant for rejecting Jewish rituals. In doing so, Aphrahaṭ helps his community "re-remember" the past by linking contemporary Jews with the ancient Israelites targeted by the prophets. As a result, Aphrahaṭ aligns his Christian community with the message of the prophets, creating continuity between his community and the "word of the Lord" that came to the prophets. In effect, through his exegetical deconstruction of Jewish rituals, Aphrahaṭ constructs a past for both Jews and Christians that is linked to his overall rhetorical aim. The past of "the people" (i. e., the Jews) is depicted in stark terms, seen through their stubborn rejection to heed the divine call to reform their ways; ultimately, the Jews of Aphrahaṭ's day are stuck in this past precisely because they continue to practice these rituals. By contrast, Aphrahaṭ's community – the people from among the peoples – has a past linked to God's true intention behind the ritual practices. Christians do not circumcise because they are "circumcised of the heart;" Christians have their own *Pascha* festival because the Passover festival has served its purpose; Christians do not observe the Sabbath because, by following God, they allow God's will to rest.

By redefining these ritual practices, Aphrahaṭ takes symbols that were crucial to the lived practice of Judaism and re-signifies them for his Christian audience. Through this manipulation of symbols, Aphrahaṭ shapes his community's identity by giving them a shared past, linked to the God of the Hebrew Scriptures, but not limited by the divine commands of those Scriptures. In effect, Aphrahaṭ's community stands in continuity with the past of the Hebrew Bible because they fulfill God's true intentions, and they stand in contrast with contemporary Jews, whose past is linked only with the failures of the ancient Israelites. By radically re-remembering the past, Aphrahaṭ shows his community how they may lay claim to the Jewish heritage – including the Jewish God and the Jewish Scriptures – without maintaining their key practices. Aphrahaṭ justifies the very existence of his community by invalidating the existence of another.

Yet, Aphrahaṭ's arguments do not hinge on the existence of a real, historical Jewish opponent. Aphrahaṭ shows almost no concern for, and virtually no knowledge of, contemporary Jewish practices that he argues against. Aphrahaṭ does not need a real Jewish opponent for the anti-Jewish rhetoric to hit its mark. The Jews of Scripture are the only Jews who draw his attention. They are literary characters who serve a rhetorical function, not active opponents who present a real challenge to his community.

Conclusion: Anti-Jewish Rhetoric and Christian Identity

From the very beginning of the Christian movement, a problem emerged in Christian self-identification, namely, that Christians were intimately connected with Jews and even dependent upon Jewish history, but in practice Christians increasingly rejected rituals and practices of their Jewish ancestors. The apostle Paul attempted to settle various issues that resulted from this tension, but the problem of Jewish and Christian identity was by no means settled. As we have seen in this article, authors like Justin Martyr and Tertullian continued to grapple with the ways that Christianity was dependent upon Judaism, yet distinct from it. And the anti-Jewish rhetoric of fourth-century Christian literature more broadly shows that Christians still had difficulty defining their Christian identity without resorting to constructing a Jewish straw man in order to tear it down.

Identity theory, and especially the language of similarity/difference, helps shed light on the prevalence and endurance of this problem in early Christianity. Boundaries are forged (or re-forged) between communities when similarities threaten to overshadow differences. Thus, the continued existence of Judaism posed a persistent threat to Christian self-identification because Christians were constantly forced – through their interactions with both Jews and non-Jewish outsiders – to justify their differences from Jews when they shared so many things in common with them. This Jewish-Christian boundary was particularly fluid in the first few centuries of Christianity, as various Christian communities struggled to articulate a distinctly Christian identity. Moreover, this boundary had to remain fluid, as the categories of "Christianity" and "Judaism" took shape in antiquity. Each new encounter between "Jew" and "Christian," at least until the fourth century, merited a re-negotiation of the location of the Jewish-Christian boundary. It was precisely because of their similarities – the texts and beliefs they held in common – that the differences had to be exposited so carefully and so often.

With this in mind, Aphrahaṭ's anti-Jewish polemic emerges, not as an idiosyncratic problem of "Semitic" Christianity that bore particular relationship to its Jewish roots, but as one piece in the much larger puzzle of Christian self-identification in Late Antiquity. Moreover, it is unnecessary to posit a historical persecution as the context for Aphrahaṭ's polemic. Aphrahaṭ may not have known the writings of Justin Martyr and Tertullian, but he shared the same problem – Christianity had not yet emerged as a fully formed entity from the shadow of Judaism. And apparently, as I hope to have shown above through my analysis of Aphrahaṭ's writings, this continued to cause problems for members of the Christian community to whom Aphrahaṭ wrote. That is, the need to construct boundaries and clearly delineate Jewish and Christian identity was not for the sake of outsiders but insiders. Aphrahaṭ does not address a Jewish opponent as though he is trying to convince Jews of the truth of Christian claims about

Scripture, nor does he seem particularly concerned with Christians "backsliding" into Judaism; he addresses Christians who appear to misunderstand the nuanced relationship that Christians have with their Jewish past. Even Christians, apparently, allowed the similarities between Christians and Jews to obscure the exact location of the boundary between them. Thus, Aphrahaṭ writes to re-enforce the boundary, to remind his audience of their shared past, and to re-interpret the symbols that distinguish Christian identity from Jewish identity.

The Anonymous *Mēmrā on the Maccabees*

Jewish Pseudepigraphon or Late Antique Festal Poem?

Robin Darling Young

By the end of the sixth century, groups of Christians had come to cherish their divisions. Allegedly formed to protect orthodox teaching from heretical distortion, they allowed for a multiplication of authority and privilege on the part of clergy and monastic groups. Despite these divisions, however, all Christian groups shared certain stories that allowed them to claim an ancient past, particularly (and ironically) stories of the holy people of Second Temple or pre-Exilic Judaism. One such story, early adopted into Christianity and then diffused among its warring factions, is the tale of the Jewish, Maccabean martyrs. Benefactors dedicated two churches and various shrines in solidly Chalcedonian Constantinople to their cult.[1] In the medieval Christian west, separated from and hostile to the Greek church, they were honored in the French word *macabre* and in the *danse macabre*. They continue to be celebrated on August 1 among all eastern Christian groups.

One example of this veneration is an anonymous *mēmrā* in Syriac, of unknown date and provenance. A recent claim that this *mēmrā* is actually itself an ancient Jewish text and therefore worthy of inclusion among those works often-unhelpfully called biblical apocrypha and pseudepigrapha, deserves examination – and that is what this essay attempts to do.

The Maccabean "Martyrs" as Christian Witnesses

The story of the Maccabean resistance to, and warfare against, Hellenistic rule, told in the first and second books of the Maccabees, included both an account of the patriotic overthrow of Hellenistic rule in Judaea and the establishment of a native – if not unproblematic – regime. Its histories of successful guerilla warfare came to include, in the course of the composition of 2 Maccabees, several accounts of non-insurgents who underwent exemplary trials of suffering and

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[1] A. Berger, "The Cult of the Maccabees in Eastern Orthodoxy," in G. Signori (ed.), *Dying for the Faith, Killing for the Faith: Old Testament Faith-Warriors (1 and 2 Maccabees) in Historical Perspective* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 105–123.

were put to death as part of a reign of terror; the longest of these tells the story of a quasi-judicial process supervised by the notorious Greek Seleucid king, Antiochus IV Epiphanes. In this purported trial, Antiochus offers – one after another – an aged priest and a family of seven brothers and a mother a choice between breaking a dietary law and suffering gruesome death.

The tale of these particular legendary heroes (or, in more recent terminology, "faith-warriors")[2] who uphold the law has clear connections to episodes in earlier books in the Hebrew Scriptures: the willingness of Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, for instance; or the resistance of Daniel and his companions to the demands of foreign kings as in the Book of Daniel. The later expansion of the these themes of heroic resistance in the further development of the tale of the Maccabean victims is the sole subject of the Book of Fourth Maccabees, written perhaps around 100 CE – of "noble death," now colored with a Stoic and Middle Platonic philosophical vocabulary emphasizing the conquest of the emotions in the service of unwavering devotion to the Jewish law and community.[3] Its title, "The Supremacy of Reason," expresses a common theme of Hellenistic Jewish literature in Greek – and considers how a weaker people can triumph over an apparently-irresistible force, in which the Maccabean "martyrs" stand in for the Jewish people, and the Greeks for the Roman.[4]

For the later appropriation of both accounts, the story of these observant Jewish heroes detached easily from the larger history of the conflict between Hellenistic rule and Jewish resistance and became available for reuse in the later development of both Christian and Jewish literature when writers in each community wanted to give an example of valor against a hostile and foreign power. These stories, later included in the biblical canon of the Septuagint, inspired numerous retellings after the first century.[5]

Origen of Caesarea was the first to use the heroes extensively, as an inspiration for persecuted Christians, in his mid-third century treatise *On the Exhortation*

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[2] Signori, *Dying for the Faith, Killing for the Faith*.

[3] G. W. Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[4] See P. Jordaan, "Ritual, Rage and Revenge in 2 Maccabees 6 and 7," *HTS* 68 (2011): 1–5. The numerous works of Philo of Alexandria also retell biblical episodes in a framework of philosophical reinterpretation. For a recent discussion, see M. R. Niehoff, *Philo of Alexandria: An Intellectual Biography* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), 209–225.

[5] For a recent examination of the development of Christian interpretation of the Maccabean martyrs in the medieval west, see D. Joslyn-Siemiatkoski, *Christian Memories of the Maccabean Martyrs* (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2009). See also R. D. Young, "One, Two, Three and Four Maccabees," in C. A. Newsom and S. H. Ringe (eds.), *The Women's Bible Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 317–334 and eadem "The 'Woman with the Soul of Abraham': Traditions about the Mother of the Maccabean Martyrs," in A.-J. Levine (ed.), *Women Like This: New Perspectives on Jewish Women in the Greco-Roman World* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), 67–81. For a recent discussion of the development of Jewish interpretation and embellishment, see S. J. D. Cohen, "The Name of the Ruse: The Toss of a Ring to Save Life and Honor," in Z. Weiss (ed.), *Follow the Wise: Studies in Jewish History and Culture in Honor of Lee I. Levine* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2010), 25–36.

to Martyrdom, but in the later fourth century, as Christian leaders worried about the emperor Julian's anti-Christian legislation, the Maccabees became a touchstone for the briefly-necessary (and largely imaginary) resistance: Gregory Nazianzus's sermon on the Maccabees might be seen as part of his defense of a Christian Hellenism. But John Chrysostom and Augustine also preached sermons on the group, now viewed as anticipatorily Christian martyrs, and expanded their exploits, interpreting them more thoroughly in a Christian vein, certainly still as Jewish but as pre-Christian predecessors of Christian valor.[6] As Leonard Rutgers has shown, these sermons mark the beginning of a Christian ritual (if not shrine-related) cult of the martyrs in the late fourth century. By means of that cult, Christians were able to appropriate some of the respectable antiquity of the Jews.[7]

Rutgers has disputed the claim that among Jewish communities there was also continuing interest in the Maccabees, and that this interest only increased as Christianity began to constrict the traditional rights of Jews in the Roman empire. According to Rutgers, Jews were indifferent to the Maccabees in antiquity, and only in the medieval period did Christians "find" their bones in Antioch. But Daniel Boyarin and Samuel Shepkaru have described Jewish responses to the increasing power of Christianity and its restrictions upon the Jewish communities of the successor-states to the Roman Empire; their work, and particularly Boyarin's, suggests a shared tradition of the Maccabean martyrs, thanks to scriptural traditions that made it possible for each community to continue to adapt the tale.[8]

The scholarly discussion of late ancient and medieval reuse of the Maccabean hero-tale has concentrated upon its transmission in the medieval, Latin-speaking west. And not only Greek or Latin sermons were the site of such interpretations; they began to enjoy a cult and shrines in the Syriac-speaking regions of the East Roman and Persian empires, and because the inspiration for both Syriac and Armenian imagined defiance against their own imperial, menacing, non-Christian "persecutors."

Still, there have been far fewer discussions of the eastern Christian adaptations, especially among Armenian- or Syriac-speakers.[9] For this reason too, a

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[6] R. Ziadé, *Les martyrs Maccabées de l'histoire juive au culte chrétien: Les homélies de Grégoire de Nazianze et de Jean Chrysostome* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

[7] L. V. Rutgers, *Making Myths: Jews in Early Christian Identity Formation* (Leuven: Peeters, 2009).

[8] D. Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1999); Sh. Shepkaru, *Jewish Martyrs in the Pagan and Christian Worlds* (Cambridge: University Press, 2006), 54–70.

[9] For the Maccabean martyrs, and the Books of the Maccabees, as models for Armenian accounts of resistance to Sasanian Persian (and therefore, in Armenian accounts, anti-Christian, Zoroastrian rule), see R. W. Thomson, "The Maccabees in Early Armenian Historiography," *JTS* 26 (1975): 329–341. For the Maccabean martyrs in Syriac martyr acts, see K. Smith, "Constantine

recent doctoral thesis on a later, Syriac *mēmrā* on the Maccabean heroes is valuable for describing and attempting to account for the origin of the work. But its author Sigrid Peterson claimed that the *mēmrā* was not a Christian work but an ancient Jewish composition, composed so early that it was reused as one of the components (along with 2 Maccabees) of the first-century 4 Maccabees. Peterson concluded that the lengthy *Mēmrā on the Maccabees* preserved a rare example of an ancient Jewish work in Syriac – one that would have been the product of a Jewish community in ancient Persia and necessarily antecedent to the Hellenistic Greek 4 Maccabees, which it inspired. She thus proposed that the work should be known as "6 Maccabees," considered part of the pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament, and thus restored to its Second Temple-era Jewish context.

Her suggestion is an intriguing one, because even though the work is known to have been in three, but preserved in only one, Christian manuscript (two other alleged manuscripts are now lost), it might be thought to be a Jewish work with a few later interpolations to make it fit for a Christian audience that had adopted it. Only a few lines seem to name specifically Christian themes, such as "Jesus" and "churches," but this lengthy poetic work expands in elaborate detail upon Jewish heroes, and with even more gruesome accounts of their torments. Surely it is a defensible thesis, Peterson argued, that a Christian had heard of, and copied, the text for the use of Christian communities, inadvertently preserving an ancient Jewish work.[10]

Yet after an examination of the structure, vocabulary, and continuous themes within the work, this proposal collapses – it is so unlikely as to be impossible. Even if the *mēmrā* does elaborate upon the specifically Jewish character of the martyrs and their resistance to a series of gruesome tortures, it is reasonable to conclude that the anonymous author held the well-established Christian viewpoint that the story was a typological anticipation of both the death of Christ and the later, imitative death of Christian victims of persecution.

Of course, Christians did preserve and use Jewish writings of the pre-first century CE era. The practice of typological interpretation, already clearly outlined in Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho* and expanded by numerous later Christian teachers, allowed Christian exegetes to leave virtually all scriptural works by Jews intact – since they could be regarded as foretelling the struggles of the Messiah and his followers. As a collective foreshadowing of Christ and persecuted Christians, the Maccabees had become prophetic persons already in the third century,

and Judah the Maccabee: History and Memory in the Acts of the Persian Martyrs," *JCSSS* 12 (2012): 16–33.

[10] S. Peterson, *Martha Shamoni: A Jewish Syriac Rhymed Litugical Poem about the Maccabean Martyrdoms (Six Maccabees)* (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 2006).

just as other figures of the Jewish scriptures had become in Christian eyes the prophecies of Jesus, Mary, and John the Baptist.[11]

If this is a reasonable principle, however, it is still necessary to examine the *mēmrā* in order to show why, from the point of view of language and outlook, this later Syriac work participates in the Syriac-speaking Christian tradition of celebration of the Maccabees. It attests to a practice of writing hagiography, often of legendary figures, in order to amplify and extend the antiquity and alleged bravery of a community; in the case of East Syrian Christianity, to make possible a community history to rival that of the formerly-persecuted churches to the west.

The Mēmrā on the Maccabees

Before the late-nineteenth century, the anonymous *Mēmrā on the Maccabees* was unknown even to the small number of Syriac scholars in European universities. The first notice of the manuscript that contains the *mēmrā* is in Robert Payne Smith's 1864 catalogue of Syriac, Garshuni, and Mandaic works in the Bodleian Library of Oxford.[12] The catalogue does not describe the provenance of the work, other than to note that the manuscript contains two works:

Codex chartaceus in quarto, ff. 169 constans, A.C. 1822 Gulielmo Mill, D.D. Collegii Episc. apud Calcuttenses principali, a Mar Dionysio syrorum in agro Malabarico metropolita dono datus, nuper charactere Nestoriano exscriptus. Inest;

1. Commentarius in quatuor Evangelia. Neque titulus, nec nomen scriptoris extat. Ad calc. fol. 137, Disputatio de diversis in S. Matthaei et S. Lucae evangeliis D[omin]i nostri genealogiis.

2. Carmen in metro dodecasyllabo de Samonae et septem filiorum ejus martyrio, fol. 142.

Paper codex in quarto size, containing 169 folios, given as a gift (in) 1822 to William Mill, D.D., first principle of Bishop's College in Calcutta, by Mar Dionysius of the Syrians in the metropolitan district (*literally* field) of Malabar, recently written in the Nestorian script. It contains:

1. Commentary on the four Gospels. Neither the title nor the name of the writer is extant. At the calculated folio 137, Disputation of the diverse genealogies of Our Lord in St. Matthew and St. Luke.

2. Song in twelve-meter [verse] concerning the martyrdom of Shamuni and her seven sons, folio 142.

Payne Smith adds to this brief catalogue description a section from the first part of the manuscript. This section tells the story of the arrival of the Babylonians in

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[11] Origen of Alexandria, for instance, in *Exhortation to Martyrdom*, 22–27; for the English version, see R.A. Greer, *Origen: An Exhortation to Martyrdom, Prayer and Selected Works* (New York: Paulist, 1979), 56–59.

[12] *Catalogi codicum manuscriptorum bibliothecae bodleianae pars sexta: Codices syracos carshunicos, mendaeos complectus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1864), 419–421.

Mesopotamia and a brief notation about the characteristics of Zoroastrianism. Presumably it was worth quoting in order to point to the origins of the particular commentary upon the genealogy of Jesus in the two Gospel prologues, but since the manuscript has not been studied or printed, it is inaccessible. It might well shed light upon the text of the *mēmrā*, however, since presumably one scribe, or a scribe under the direction of an abbot or a bishop, deliberately copied both anonymous works into the same quarto-sized (8.25 × 11.75 inch) book.

Payne Smith's catalogue description indicates that William Hodge Mill, first Principal of Bishop's College, Calcutta obtained the whole book as a gift from a Syriac Orthodox bishop, Dionysius. Mill had been a scholar at Trinity College, Cambridge in the second decade of the nineteenth century and was ordained as an Anglican priest. He was posted to Calcutta along with the expansion of the British colonial presence in India and from 1820 to 1838 lived in India as a teacher and a scholar of Sanskrit and Arabic.[13] Before he became ill and returned to England, he had translated a version of the "gospel story" and the Sermon on the Mount into Sanskrit and the Book of Common Prayer into Arabic. He returned to England and to Cambridge, becoming a Canon of Ely and Regius Professor of Hebrew in 1848.[14]

Evidently Hodge Mill had come into contact with a Bishop Dionysius at some point during his tenure in Calcutta and may have acquired this manuscript as part of his project to write a history of the Syrian Christians in India.[15] But it was Robert Lubbock Bensly, reader in Hebrew at Gonville and Caius College in 1863, fellow in 1876, lecturer in Hebrew and Syriac, and Lord Almoner's Professor of Arabic in 1887 and examiner in the Hebrew text of the Old Testament in the University of London, who first intended to publish the second part of Mill's acquisition as the "Song in Twelve-Syllable Metre of Samone and her Seven Sons." Bensly travelled with Lewis and Gibson in 1893 to St. Catherine's Monastery in Egypt, edited the Syriac version of 4 Maccabees, and wrote *Our Journey to Sinai*.[16]

Although he did not live to see their publication, Bensly had collected and edited a group of "Syriac Documents Describing the Passion of the Maccabean Martyrs," including the Syriac version of 4 Maccabees and other, later texts on the same subject. His collection, edited by W. E. Barnes, also of Cambridge, was published in 1895 by Cambridge University Press. Its other contents included a sermon by Gregory Nazianzus, two versions of a sermon by Severus of Antioch,

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[13] K. Ingram, *Reformers in India, 1793–1833: An Account of the Work of Christian Missionaries on Behalf of Social Reform* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), 56.

[14] http://venn.lib.cam.ac.uk/cgi-bin, accessed 8 September 2018.

[15] http://www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/dept/scwmss/wmss/online/1500-1900/mill/mill.html, accessed 8 September 2018.

[16] See recently J. Soskice, *The Sisters of Sinai: How Two Lady Adventurers Discovered the Hidden Gospels* (New York: Knopf, 2009).

an anonymous discourse (*tašʿīṯā* 'history'), a *madrāšā* of Ephrem the Syrian, and "an anonymous poem in twelve-syllable verse."[17]

Barnes did not produce a detailed study of the text, but he did note the widespread commemoration of the Feast of the Maccabean martyrs at the beginning of August.

All the … documents are connected with the Commemoration … This festival was early in its origin and popular in its reception. All Syriac speaking Christians observed it. It is noticed in Monophysite, Nestorian, and Maronite liturgies; it has its proper lesson (Mat x.16 ff.) in the Melchite lectionary published by Miniscalchi; it is found noted in the present day in the Surgada or Calendar published for the Eastern Syrians at Urmi.[18]

The yearly celebration of the deaths of the Maccabean martyrs had by the nineteenth century gained a place in all the Christian churches retaining an unreformed liturgical calendar – not only in the "Oriental" churches but also in the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches as well – this, as Barnes notes, because it had early been promoted by Christian teachers in Greek (Gregory and Severus) as well as in Syriac. Although Barnes does not note it, the festival had already spread to the Latin west, attested by the sermons of Augustine, and at an only slightly later date become part of the Armenian epic histories that established a parallel between the Maccabees and the Armenian Christians defending their church and "nation" against the Zoroastrian Persians. They became a model for pious Armenian Christian resistance in, for instance, Ełishe Vardapet's *History of Vardan and the Armenian War*. Furthermore, and doubtless because Barnes was concerned with publishing as quickly as possible the late Bensly's work, rather than engage in an extensive study, he did not mention the numerous churches dedicated to St. Shimouni among the East-Syriac Christians.

The anonymous *mēmrā* in twelve-syllable meter evidently puzzled Barnes. Of it he writes:

Of the last document printed in this book the present Editor can give no satisfactory account. Professor Bensly, so far as it is possible to discover, left behind him nothing but a text written out ready for printing together with one or two marginal notes in pencil. Nothing has been found among his papers to lead to the identification of the three MSS. used to construct the text. A search in the Bodleian however resulted in the identification of the MS. Designated "A" with Bod. Or. 624 … [see above]. It is a Malabar MS. Given to Mill in 1822, and is described as *recently* ("nuper") written in Nestorian characters … In order to give a possible clue to some future inquirer into the identity of the MSS. denoted B and C by Professor Bensly, it may be mentioned that these two MSS. were originally denoted C1 and C2 by him.[19]

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[17] R. L. Bensly (introduction and translations by W. E. Barnes), *The Fourth Book of Maccabees and Kindred Documents in Syriac* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1895), xxi.

[18] Bensly and Barnes, *The Fourth Book of Maccabees and Kindred Documents in Syriac*, xxi.

[19] Bensly and Barnes, *The Fourth Book of Maccabees and Kindred Documents in Syriac*, xxv.

Barnes thus was forced to publish a diplomatic edition of one manuscript where Bensly had produced a critical edition. Had all three manuscripts been available to Barnes, later scholars might have had insight into the wider use of the text in Syriac-speaking communities *beyond its possession by a bishop of the Malabar, Mar-Thoma church* and a better idea of how it fit into the tradition (whether Jewish or Christian) of the celebration of the Maccabean martyrs. Barnes, however, evinced little interest in the contents of the manuscript:

> The poem would be not unfairly described as a paraphrase of the greater part of IV Maccabees. It follows its arrangement and echoes its language. Marginal references to IV Maccabees are therefore added to the translation of the poem. The great difference between the two works is that in the poem a speech is ascribed to the other before each execution of a son, and is given in full. There is little that is new in these utterances.[20]

Barnes, possibly diverted from his own work by the duty to publish Bensly's, issued here a judgment that could fairly be called dismissive. If the *mēmrā* was meant for recitation at the First of Ab feast of the Maccabees in a Syriac church probably belonging to the East-Syrian tradition (now preserved in the traditions of the Chaldean Church or the Church of the East), its value was its quality as a literary composition that could be presented as an oral production meant to stir its audience in their annual celebration. Furthermore, there is in fact material in the *mēmrā* that does not exist in the canonical 4 Maccabees. But Barnes may have suggested inadvertently to later scholars, including Peterson, that the reason there is "little that is new," is that the book preserved a far more ancient piece of literature – something that looks like 4 Maccabees because it allegedly preceded it.[21]

The Characteristics of the *Mēmrā*

The *Mēmrā on the Maccabees* follows, but expands upon, the sequence of events in the canonical books of the Maccabees. It reproduces the narrative device of the courtroom scene already found in 2 Maccabees, in which Antiochus Epiphanes summons noncompliant, observant Jews and subjects them to a test of loyalty. The aged Eleazar and the widowed mother of seven brothers each undergo a

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[20] Bensly and Barnes, *The Fourth Book of Maccabees and Kindred Documents in Syriac*, xxv.

[21] It is not listed in D. Bundy's "Pseudepigrapha in Syriac Literature," *SBLSP* 30 (1991): 745–765, which, however, does note the existence of 4 Maccabees in Syriac, with 10 manuscript witnesses, and 5 Maccabees, an Arabic text known to have circulated in Garshuni script in Syriac-speaking communities; no manuscripts have been found thus far, p. 753. A paper distributed by James Davila to the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha Section of the International Society of Biblical Literature meeting in 2004 at Groningen, "Did Christians Write Old Testament Pseudepigrapha That Appear to be Jewish?," does not discuss the *mēmrā*, and although it touches upon the work of Ephrem the Syrian, it is an exploratory and cursory treatment of a few later Christian authors' expansion on Old Testament subjects.

demand to break Jewish dietary laws; each refuses; each is tortured. The *mēmrā* has preserved these incidents and elaborated upon them.

Yet between the production of the canonical works and the composition of the long *mēmrā*, this particular tale of the Maccabees has undergone – as it did in the Greek- and Latin-speaking west – a development based upon the Christian understanding that these Jewish victims – like the children killed under Herod – were in actuality the forerunners of Christ. Typological interpretation – and probably not an ongoing Jewish cult of the Maccabean martyrs – has allowed a series of Christian preachers and biblical interpreters, pressed by the need to find and strengthen connections between the old and new testaments, to interpret the deaths of the Maccabees as a pattern for the heroic death as witnesses that Christian audiences evidently appreciated.

Thus, in the third century, Origen of Caesarea had already pointed to the episode as an example for Christians. Origen wrote at a time when the prosecution of Christians had expanded from the local efforts that had, for example, led to the death of his father in Alexandria, to a more general policy of the empire – though not a policy consistently carried out. But the mid-third century saw persecutions identified in the church as imperial and associated with the emperors Decius and Valerius. And the persecution that began under Diocletian and continued under Licinius in the eastern Roman Empire, memorialized in the *Ecclesiastical History* of Eusebius and in his *Martyrs of Palestine*, led to the incorporation in Christian histories of a narrative of periodic imperial persecution and heroic Christian response. The swift translation of both these works into Syriac made for an appreciation of martyrdom – and the creation of martyr accounts – in the Syriac-speaking region of Mesopotamia and Persia, where persecutions did not occur at the same time. Combined with the Christian practice of honoring the graves of martyrs and seeking their intercession, this history of persecution managed to reproduce itself – and has become an enduring part of Christian self-understanding.[22]

With respect to the Syriac tradition, however, which had its own tradition of self-understanding as persecuted, the translation efforts beginning in the early fifth century added an elaborate literature coming from Greek to the literature of martyr-accounts in Syriac. The extent of the tradition has been surveyed in a useful article by Witold Witakowski, "Mart(y) Shmuni, the Mother of the Maccabean Martyrs."[23] Witakowski's interest is primarily focused on the development of the figure of the mother in Syriac literature and liturgical sources, over the course of Late Antiquity and the early medieval Syriac historians Michael the Syrian and Bar Hebraeus, and the anonymous chronicles. Yet Witakowski

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[22] See E. Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory: Early Christian Culture-Making* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

[23] Published in *SymSyr* IV, 153–168.

also connected the growing interest in the Maccabees with the daily prayer of the Chaldean church, which gives the same names to the sons and mother as does the *mēmrā*.[24]

As noted above, the anti-Christian actions of the determinedly Hellene emperor Julian were the impetus not only for further attention to Christian resistance to imperial "persecution": They also spurred certain Christian rhetors and preachers to return to the Maccabean literature for models, just as Aphrahaṭ's reference to the Maccabees in *Demonstrations* 5 ("On Wars") and 21 ("On Persecution) and Ephrem the Syrian's attacks on Julian as a persecuting emperor may well have spurred attention to the Maccabees in later Syriac literary circles. And with the establishment of saints' shrines and the beginnings of the Christian festal calendar in the regions where churches and monasteries had developed, Syria provided a ready site for the translation, reception, and imitation of Greek literature.[25]

Thus two sermons of famous Christian orators were quickly translated into Syriac – Gregory of Nazianzus and John Chrysostom. These, in turn, seem to have spurred imitations by Syriac writers. In fact, the volume of Bensly and Barnes contains a *maḏrāšā* on the Maccabees attributed to Ephrem but not regarded as counting among his genuine works.

The *mēmrā* under consideration here is the last of Bensly's collection. It was not copied in manuscripts along with other, earlier productions; its inclusion in Bensly's collection was a thematic decision on his part, and he effectively created a "canon" of works about the Maccabees from divergent Syriac works. Although also in the volume of Bensly and Barnes is collected the *mēmrā* on the Maccabees ascribed to Ephrem, it is clear that the author of the anonymous *mēmrā* had both texts from the canonical literature in front of him.

But there is a significant difference between the *mēmrā* and the scriptural work: The language he infuses into the traditional structure of the narrative is the language of monastery and monastic literature, juxtaposed with the language of conflict and torture mediated through the Syriac translations of the Maccabean literature. This conjunction points not only to the precedents of Aphrahaṭ and (pseudo-) Ephrem as ascetic authors but to the probable context of the unnamed author of this *mēmrā*.

To trace the lines of development among these works is impossible for this essay. Instead, it will suffice to point out what the anonymous author has added to the tale that might locate it in its cultural context These additions are both structural – in the form of insertions into the text that suggest a certain context – and at the level of vocabulary. In the case of the first, these are additions that make

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[24] Gadday, Maqqbay, Tarsay, Hebron, Hebson, Bakkos, and Yonadab. See S. Giamil, "Autenticità ed antichità dei nomi di VII Martiri Maccabei," *Bessarione* 2 (1901): 450.

[25] K. Smith's discussion of the Maccabees as points of reference in the *Martyrdom of Simeon Bar Ṣabbāʿē*: *The Martyrdom and the History of Blessed Simeon Bar Sabbaʿe* (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2014), 18.

clear that the work is intended for oral performance at the feast-day of a saint. In the case of the second, the insertions show that the *mēmrā* is probably the work of an ascetic, or at least the work of someone familiar with vocabulary from a Syriac ascetic tradition – some of which have their origin in Greek.

Contextual Insertions

The *mēmrā* has 678 lines and begins with a prologue emphasizing the prowess of the performer as he introduces the struggle, not of the martyrs but of the army of the initial revolt:

Who can tell the story of the men, the blessed ones of the house of Judah Maccabee, demonstrated to be heroes (*ṭannānē*)?

In this eighteen-line introduction, the text anticipates the description of each character's torments by describing them as looking forward to the spiritual contests envisioned in the Pauline corpus:

Who for the Law and the commandments entered upon the boxing-matches, the struggles, and trials (*’aḡonē*) and were mighty men in battles and turned armies to flight, as Paul said.

Here the author seems to have in mind the numerous passages in Pauline letters that borrow eschatological language to describe Christian conduct as a military battle: Phil 2:25, Phlm 1:2, 2 Tm 2:3–4, 1 Cor 9:7, and Eph 6:10–18. This allows the author to make a connection between the ancient Jewish heroes and the presumed struggles of his own audience, as he makes a petition: "For this [fight against the Greeks and their idolatry] they gave themselves to all afflictions, Let their prayer be a wall to the believers!"

   A transitional pair of lines encourages the audience to imagine the struggles as the author describes them: "Let us draw near to a deed full of wonder / Of men worthy of wonder who offered themselves up on behalf of the truth …" (19–20). These first twenty lines, then, make it clear that the setting of the *mēmrā* is very likely set for the day of the Feast of the Maccabees. The audience is invoked, and asked to participate in imagining – by means of the detailed imagery that will follow – the wars of the Maccabees and the sacrifices and struggles of the martyrs. But it is also asked to consider the larger significance of their struggle. They did not turn back from death, but bested "the rabid dog" Antiochus IV, because they had certain virtues:

Because their reason had rule over the passions of the body
And their intelligence ruled over desires for the world that passes away
And the gaze of their mind was fixed on the world to come
And because of this [concentration upon the invisible world] the men of wonder
   conquered all struggles.

At this point it might be asked whether these themes are not present in the older, canonical literature, which would suggest that the thesis of Peterson is correct. But the allusion to the letters of Paul, and the invocation of "men of wonder" suggests a developed Christian tradition of the thaumaturge who is also a philosopher – i. e., a combination of the philosophical themes found in Origen with the heroic qualities of numerous earlier Christian martyrs whose lives had been translated into Syriac and were available to this author.

Telling in this regard is the author's own petition, found in a five-line transitional section between the introduction and the narration of the nine martyrdoms that the text will recite.

Eleazar, I mean, the precious old man
And Shamonē the faithful martyr full of hope
For her seven sons, illustrious youths, splendid in beauty
For whom I the wretched one have cared with brief pains
And for whom I have made this short discourse.
And I have borne their praise and this glorious sackcloth
That their prayer may be at every time a help for me,
And that they may give me from the table of their delights one crumb
That I may cheerfully pay this writing, for every sin
They were sons of Abraham and from that blessed
Root had sprung these seven wonderful branches
And because of this they overcame the wiles of the enemy,
Let their prayer be a wall to us every hour. (ll. 48–50)

This passage portrays the author as wearer of a *sakka* – very likely a monk who is an ascetic and a penitent in need of the prayers of the martyrs, and it closes with the suggestion that they will help the listeners resist the "wiles of the enemy." Both the Maccabean fighters and the martyrs, then, are invoked as advocates in an unnamed struggle. Part of that struggle is against sin, but the poem may also envision the martyrs in much the same way as the Persian Martyrs – as an imaginary resistance against the Zoroastrian Persians and their legendary (in both senses) oppression of Christians.[26] It is possible that the author of this *mēmrā* has taken the typological connection between the Maccabees and Christian martyrdom and made it much more specifically connected to his own presumably East-Syrian situation, by making it a typological prediction of the Christian predicament under the Sasanians.

As Witakowski notes, based on studies by J.-M. Fiey, interest in the mother of the Maccabees only increased after the (likely) composition of the *mēmrā*:

Shmuni apparently became quite a popular figure and there are numerous texts concerning her. She occurs for instance in the Nestorian Diptichs and in a Hymn on the holy

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[26] As in, for instance, the *Legend of Mar Qardagh*. See J. Walker, *The Legend of Mar Qardagh: Narrative and Christian Heroism in Late Antique Iraq* (Berkeley: University of California Press 2006).

women, also Nestorian. There also exist pieces of devout poetry (*'unnaye* & *'unyata*) in honour of her and her sons, possibly to be recited on the day of their commemoration.[27]

And as Witakowski further notes, East-Syrian martyrologies and West-Syrian menologia contain references to their festival; their cult, rather than declining in the modern period, actually seems to have increased:

> But the cult of Shmuni is not limited to texts and commemoration festivals. We can see it also in churches being dedicated to her. This is the case especially in Northern Iraq, in the region near Mosul, as the evidence gathered by J.-M. Fiey shows. No less than fifteen churches in this region are dedicted to her and her sons in fourteen villages, Qaraqosh having two. Often local tradition connected with such a church has it that the Maccabean martyrs are buried in the village.[28]

A later article by Michael Abdalla lists thirty-nine "Assyrian churches" of varying dates, dedicated to the mother of the martyrs, that were standing at the time he wrote.[29] Although the modern devotion to the mother of the Maccabees is outside the scope of this essay, a remark of Abdalla's about contemporary awareness of the origin of the story might well apply to the fifth- or sixth-century *mēmrā* as well:

> In general the cult of this martyr is not associated with the Jews … Apart from the clergy and a narrow ring of the initiates an average Mesopotamian Christian is unaware that popular St. Shmuni was a follower of Judaism and … her death was inflicted in the times preceding the beginnings of Christianity by one and a half century [sic]. It is even unclear to some clergymen whether she was an Old Testament character or a Christian martyr of unknown descent by the name of Shmuni.[30]

Abdalla's observation is important for its bearing on Peterson's thesis: Both scribes and people of a late antique Christian church might not have made a distinction between Jewish and Christian heroes, because they might not have associated them with a canonical book, datable by later scholarship.

Thus it is far more likely that the *mēmrā* is a composition of Late Antiquity, adding details that further incorporated its heroes into the Christian context. A full study of the *mēmrā* would probably be able to pinpoint its era much more specifically, but nonetheless, several other passages tend to confirm this hypothesis, and they are worth noting.

First, in the trial of the old man (originally described in 2 Maccabees 6), Eleazar makes a direct address to God depicting himself as a sacrifice, after which,

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[27] Witakowski, "Mart(y) Shmuni, the Mother of the Maccabean Martyrs," 152.

[28] Witakowski, "Mart(y) Shmuni, the Mother of the Maccabean Martyrs," 165, citing J.-M. Fiey's *Assyrie chrétienne: Contribution à l'étude de l'histoire et de la géographie ecclésiastique et monastique du nord de l'Iraq*, vol. 2 (Beirut: Institut de letters orientales de Beyrouth, 1965).

[29] M. Abdalla, "The Cult of Mart Shmunie: A Macccabean Martyr in the Tradition of the Assyrian Churches of Mesopotamia," *JAAS* 23 (2009): 22–39.

[30] Abdalla, "The Cult of Mart Shmunie: A Macccabean Martyr in the Tradition of the Assyrian Churches of Mesopotamia."

like Christ, the text announces that he gives up his spirit (72–126). At the entry of Shamoni and her seven sons, Antiochus urges obedience, delivers threats, and urges the abandonment of Jewish customs. For this, the author gives a lengthy prediction of Antiochus enduring the reverse of his own tortures, in a hell that more closely corresponds to Christian hellscapes than earlier, Jewish ones (187–199).

As in 2 Maccabees 7 and 4 Maccabees, Shamoni addresses and encourages her sons one after another, and the *mēmrā* becomes a repetition of maternal encouragement; defiant speech; list of tortures; death of son. But far from being a mere repetition of Jewish themes of upholding the law, there are numerous connections to Christianity. For instance, in line 238 the eldest son Gaddi, on the verge of death, "was transfigured and became incorruptible" … "and when he had said these things [exhortations to his brothers] [he] inherited the kingdom and light and bridal chamber (248)." Each son dies and enters a heaven that is described in distinctly Christian terms; the second son, for instance is urged by his mother to "inherit life that does not pass away in the new world" (lines 266–270). The third son "gave up his pure soul victorious over all, and … he enjoys pleasure in the Eden of delights." As they do this, demons (absent in canonical Maccabees) departed:

Your words afflicted Antiochus the tyrant / and from your victories the companies of the devils betook themselves far off / and by your request the [companies] of Israel were delivered / And your prayers went up to heaven.

Similarly, when Shamoni encourages the third son at his torments, the *mēmrā* repeats and expands the canonical texts' affirmation that the family dies for the Law: "We for the sake of our teachings (*yulpānayn*) endure all tortures … And when he had said these things the approved one among martyrs gave up his spirit / and inherited the life that is eternal." But especially striking is the line that locates the *mēmrā* in the setting of Christian daily prayer:

Sweet is your commemoration, oh Martyr Hebron / And angels and men will marvel at you / Devils too, tyrants of the house of the powers will marvel at you / and idol-worshippers shall be broken by your wonderful story / And in prayer every day make mention of thy name in the church (or: 'congregation', *ʿēdtā*)

Other passages in the *mēmrā* also include Christian references: God is invoked in Greek transliterated into Syriac as "ho Theos", and the poem asks the martyrs to preserve the Christian clergy: "May your prayer preserve all the priests (*literally* sons of the clergy)"; Antiochus receives, in line 540, the name "Antichrist." Their "tale of victories [is] told throughout the world [and their] endurance in the contest known among all peoples," in line 609. Certainly the *mēmrā* retains references to the books of Maccabees, but in the light of these distinct references to Christian cult or belief, and considering the development of devotion to the Maccabees as saints who are Christian by anticipation, this *mēmrā* can

certainly be treated as an example of Christian appropriation of Jewish heroes, who have now been repurposed as Christian saints and benefactors.

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