BARBARIANS OR HERETICS? JEWS AND ARABS IN THE MIND OF BYZANTIUM (FOURTH TO EIGHTH CENTURIES)

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For Averil Cameron

Averil Cameron has devoted many efforts to probing the complex relationship between Jews and Byzantines. In particular, by focusing on the sixth- and seventh-centuries polemics between Christians and Jews she has illuminated in various ways the intellectual and spiritual milieu on the eve of the Islamic conquest. In the article "Jews and Heretics—a Category Mistake," she shows how the terms 'Jew' and 'heretic' became interchangeable in the thought of Byzantine theologians. Professor Cameron concludes: "We are not, then, in the presence of a category error, after all, and any sense of discomfort is our own."[1]

Her questioning of semantic shifts in major categories of religious thought is the basis for my starting point in approaching the question of early Byzantine religious identity from the highly singular angle of its margins. *Prima facie*, a comparison between the respective perceptions of Jews and Arabs in the Christianized Eastern Roman Empire may appear to lack real intellectual justification. There seems to be little in common between Jews and Arabs in Late Antiquity. The linguistic similarities between Hebrew and Arabic would not be discovered (and the category of Semitic languages would not be invented) before Leibniz, in the seventeenth century. The Jews, whom Augustine called *librarii nostri*, shared the Bible (more precisely, the books of the Old Testament) with the Christians, while the Arabs, usually perceived as utter barbarians, nomads stemming from the desert, had very little in common with the Christians. I shall deal here with perceptions both before and after the battle of Yarmuk and the Islamic conquest

[1] See Av. Cameron, "Jews and Heretics—A Category Error?" in *The Ways That Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, eds., A. Becker and A. Yoshiko Reed (Tübingen, 2003), 345–60. This paper was read at Oxford on 5 May 2010, in honor of the retirement of Professor Dame Averil Cameron. My thanks to Maria Mavroudi and Youval Rotman for their useful comments on a draft of this paper.

of Jerusalem (in 636 and 638 respectively), which provided, of course, the main watershed in Byzantine attitudes to Arabs.

And yet, the ecclesiastical historian Sozomen (born circa 400 in Bethelia, near Gaza), tells us about various Judaizing practices, such as circumcision and a prohibition of eating pork, among the *sarakenoi*. The origin of such practices, he adds, would come from the recognition of their kinship with the Jews, through their common ancestor Abraham.[2] As shown by Fergus Millar, such a new image of the Arabs in Late Antiquity stemmed from Josephus's perception of the Ishmaelites.[3]

Let us note right away the profound difference that exists between the modern study of Jews and of Arabs in antiquity. Ethnic and religious identity, which was relatively weak among the Syrians, for example, was very pronounced among the Jews, who made a point of preserving their national identity in a cosmopolitan world, despite the loss, in the first century, of all political power and the destruction of the central symbol of their religion. In addition, research on the Jews is far more advanced than that on pre-Islamic Arabs or Christians, who unfortunately have stirred too little interest so far. What justifies a comparison between the perception of Jews and of Arabs is the fact that these were two groups of people who, although certainly very different from one another, shared the common character, from the seventh century on, of being neither Christians nor polytheists.

As I hope we shall see, the juxtaposition of Late Antique and Early Byzantine attitudes to Jews and Arabs might shed light on some fundamental ambiguities in early Byzantine consciousness and on the semantic evolution of a few major concepts through which identity, both ethnic and religious, was defined. More precisely, I shall seek to understand a little better the ways in which the concepts of 'heresy' and 'barbarism' played a role in the perception of both Jews and Arabs.

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[2] Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History*, II.4 and VI.38. On this festival, see A. Kofsky, "Mamre: A Case of a Regional Culty?" in *Sharing the Sacred: Religious Contacts and Conflicts in the Holy Land: First-Fifteenth Centuries CE*, eds., A. Kofsky and G. Stroumsa (Jerusalem, 1998), 19–30. See further E. Fowden, "Sharing Holy Places," *Common Knowledge* 8 (2002): 124–46.

[3] See, for example, F. Millar, "Empire, Community and Culture in the Roman Near East: Greeks, Syrians, Jews and Arabs," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 38 (1987): 143–64.

My purpose here is to try to take apart the mechanisms, or at least some of them, which determined how outsiders were perceived in the Christianized Roman world. It is, I think, partly due to the very fact of the remarkable linguistic continuity of the Byzantine Empire that certain major transformations of collective identity, and hence of the perceptions of what the French call '*l'autre*,' remain concealed and need to be unveiled. James Howard-Johnston has rightly noted that we should never underestimate ideological inertia in the life of states and nations. More precisely, he insists on the fact that the Byzantines did not only consider themselves to be the inheritors of the Roman Empire: they thought of themselves as Romans.[4] This is also how they were called in other languages, a fact reflected in both Arabic and Hebrew sources. In the same volume, Cyril Mango calls attention to the Byzantine perception of the various Christian heresies as reflecting Satan's many manipulations, adding that the Empire considered its principal task to be the guardian of correct ideology.[5] Both are right, of course, and the Byzantines were that oxymoron: Romans enrolled in a cosmic fight against the devil. The late Evelyne Patlagean was quite aware of this oxymoron. In her own words, "the accent is put on Christianity, as the carrier of the universal values of *Romanitas*."[6] If ideological inertia can go hand-in-hand with radical transformations, the major concepts with which the Byzantines both identified themselves and perceived outsiders could become quite inadequate for dealing with a changed reality, as Cyril Mango argued long ago. In this regard, following the sociologist Ann Swidler, I propose to see in the major concepts with which ethnic and religious identities are built and perceived repertoires of sorts, or 'tool kits' of habits, skills, and styles from which strategies of action are constructed.[7] Societies, just like individuals, make use of the cultural tools they inherit, but these are not always entirely adequate for the new tasks expected of them

[4] J. Howard-Johnston, "Byzantium and its Neighbours," in *Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies*, ed., E. Jeffreys (Oxford, 2008), 952. On the Byzantines' perception of the Romans, see R. Browning, "Greeks and Others: From Antiquity to the Renaissance," in *Greeks and Barbarians*, ed., T. Harrison (Edinburgh, 2002), 257–77.

[5] C. Mango, "Byzantium's Role in World History," *ibid*., 957.

[6] See E. Patlagean, "Byzance, le barbare, l'hérétique, et la loi universelle," in *Ni juif, ni grec*, ed. L. Poliakov (Paris, 1978), 81–90. Reprinted in E. Patlagean, *Structure sociale, famille, chrétienté à Byzance* (London, 1981).

[7] See in particular A. Swidler, "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies," *American Sociological Review* 51 (1986): 273–86.

in changing conditions. In such conditions, tensions, ambivalences, and contradictions develop. In the case of the Christianized Roman Empire, as we shall see, the problem is compounded by the fact that both as Romans and as Christians, the Byzantines retained sets of quite different concepts. They did not keep these sets of 'tool kits' separate, but used them together, creating new, complex categories, which we will try to deconstruct. The situation is even more complicated: while the Byzantines were politically and culturally Romans, religiously they were Hebrews (they were, actually, the real Hebrews, *verus Israel*, as they alone correctly understood the Scriptures and prophecies). And, of course, linguistically, they were Greeks, a fact at once trivial and highly problematic, as '*hellen*,' for Christians, referred to pagans, polytheists.

From the earliest times on, the twin terms *hellēn/barbaros* had continually undergone semantic shifts of various kinds, a fact well studied in the *longue durée* by Albrecht Dihle.[8] As far back as the earliest social groups, collective identity had always been represented in terms of a dichotomy between the self and the other. From Hellenistic times onward, contacts between the ethnicities, cultures, and religions of the Mediterranean and Near East became so complex that there ensued a series of transformations, sometimes radical, of the key concepts in ethnological designations.

Before we ask about early Byzantine ethnological categories, we must go back to earlier strata of Christian literature and to the formative period when these categories were first established, a time when the Christians were still outlawed, if not persecuted, and long before they became proud Romans. The scriptural foundation upon which Christian ethnological categories were constructed was without a doubt Colossians 3:11: "Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all."[9] Thus from the very outset Christians inherited Jewish categories, even though they rejected them: for the Jews, humanity was divided into Jews and non-Jews (*goyyim* [peoples] in Hebrew, translated as *ethnē* in LXX). For the Jews of the Hellenistic world, these *ethnē* were the Greeks, *hellēnes*, a word which became equivalent to

[8] For a diachronic study of this long span, see A. Dihle, *Die Griechen und die Fremden* (Munich, 1994). See also *Greeks and Barbarians*, ed., T. Harrison (New York, 2002).

[9] Cf. Gal. 6:15 and Gal. 3:28, which include the elimination of the categories "man" and "woman."

pagans.[10] Thus early Christians inherited a double distinction, the Greek one between *hellēnes* and *barbaroi*, on the one hand, and the Jewish one, between *hellēnes* and *ioudaioi*, on the other. Moreover, as followers of the Law of Moses, a text originally redacted in Hebrew, even Hellenophone Jews considered themselves, and were regarded by the Greeks, as followers of a *philosophia barbaros* (a wisdom written down in a foreign language, as Clement of Alexandria, following Philo, termed the Torah).[11]

In a study of early Christian ethnological representations published years ago, I asked how Christian intellectuals in Late Antiquity perceived the different peoples with whom they were in contact, and whether they succeeded in establishing their own ethnological categories, distinct from those they had inherited from the Hellenistic and Roman worlds.[12] The only answer I reached in regard to this question was admittedly disappointing. Although Christianity was conceived and presented, from its earliest beginnings, as a new truth open to all peoples, translatable into any language, accessible to all cultures, it would only be with the Spanish *frailes*, missionaries to the New World at the start of the modern era, that a truly ethnological approach, in the vein of Herodotus, a real effort to understand cultures in their own terms, would come to light.[13] It seems that the very ecumenical ambitions of the Christians blunted or even neutralized their ability to develop a real ethnological curiosity and to discern the distinctive qualities of the various peoples. After all, these peoples had all been, before their conversion, pagans. And paganism, in its many garbs, was of no intellectual interest whatsoever, as it was established upon falsehood. The same truth had been offered to all. And religious truth, the saving incarnation of God's Son, was the only thing that mattered.

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[10] It should be noted, however, that the Greeks were also differentiated from the *ethnoi* in classical literature. See, for example, Aristotle, *Politics* VII.II.3 (1324b10).

[11] *Strom*. 2.2.5, 5.9.57, 5.14.93.

[12] G. Stroumsa, "Philosophy of the Barbarians: On Early Christian Ethnological Representations" in *Geschichte—Tradition—Reflexion: Festschrift Martin Hengel* 2, eds., H. Cancik, H. Lichtenberger and P. Schaefer (Tübingen, 1996), 339–68; reprinted in G. Stroumsa, *Barbarian Philosophy: The Religious Revolution of Early Christianity* (Tübingen, 1999), 57–84.

[13] See, for example, A. Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology* (Cambridge, 1982); C. Bernand and S. Gruzinski, *De l'idolâtrie: une archéologie des sciences religieuses* (Paris, 1988); F. Diez, *El impacto de las religiones indigenas americanas en la teologia misionera del S. XVI* (Bilbao, 2000).

Truth remained one, while multiplicity was a sign of error. And yet, it would seem that the early Christian thinkers, followers of a "barbarian philosophy," should have developed at least a tacit sympathy for the barbarian nations outside the Hellenic cultural realm. Certainly until the fourth century, some Christian authors, at least, saw themselves both as followers of a "barbarian philosophy" and as being ethnic 'barbarians.' Thus Tatian, in his *Address to the Greeks*, written towards the middle of the second century, proudly presents himself as an 'Assyrian': that is, for him, a barbarian *in bonam partem*, who rejects the false wisdom of the Greeks, while possessing a better, 'barbarian' kind of wisdom. Thus Rufinus, at the very start of his *Ecclesiastical History*, written in the late fourth century, proudly describes how Christianity was introduced to the Armenians, the Ethiopians, the Iberians (or Georgians), and the Saracens (or Arabs), in compliance with the evangelical injunction: "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation."[14]

Indeed, Christians, even in the Christianized Roman Empire, while politically and culturally Romans, retained some 'barbarian' traits in their identity. Firstly, they were heirs to the Jews and thus guardians of that barbarian wisdom par excellence, the Bible, a book written in Hebrew even if read in Greek translation. And what a translation! The Greek of the Septuagint cannot, any more than that of the New Testament, be seriously considered as the polished, elegant, even sublime language one expects of a book of wisdom, especially one that claims to have been divinely revealed. Early Christian writers proudly accepted the charge leveled at them by pagan writers, such as Celsus, of being simplistic, of lacking intellectual sophistication. The very linguistic rusticity of the Christian scriptures answered the accusation: if these were written in a language of fishermen, it was precisely because they were intended to bring salvation to all in equal measure, illiterates and philosophers alike. Thus the Christians, aware of being marginalized by the intellectual elites, accepted this fact, identifying with a wisdom that was foreign to that of the Greek philosophers, and was therefore barbarian.

The absolute legitimacy of translating the scriptures became a tenet and fact of Christianity (though not of the two other Abrahamic religions), and is thus part of the legacy of early Christianity. All is trans-

[14] Mark 16:15; cf. Matthew 28:18–20.

latable: divine revelation is entirely within the realm of prose, not of poetry, as the Greeks would have it. For the Christians, it was the Greek philosophers, the old pagan elites, who had to be discredited and toppled from their pedestals by the followers of the new "barbarian philosophy." But the issue was more complicated, as the Christians were not simply another barbarian people. They lived among Greeks and barbarians alike, without quite belonging to them. The Christians, therefore, were not like any other people. They represented a people of another order, between Greeks and Jews, a third kind of people famously called in the *Epistle to Diognetus*, in the second century, *triton genos* (*tertium genus*). The Syriac theologian Aphrahat, "the Persian Sage," would speak, in the fourth century, of *ʿama de-ʿamame*, a people among peoples. Despite both their vituperative argument with the Jews and their ecumenism, the Christians refused to relinquish the historical, geographical, and ethnic roots of their religion, and insisted on seeing themselves as the legitimate successors to Israel: *verus Israel*.[15] Constantinople, therefore, would be the new Jerusalem as much as the new Rome. Only the Manichaeans would bring to its radical consequences the Marcionite tendency to give up completely on the Jewish dimension of Christian identity.

In the fourth century, "pagan" intellectuals, realizing the balance of power had shifted in a dramatic fashion, learned to recognize the virtues of religious pluralism, and developed new arguments in favour of religious toleration. Symmachus, in his *Relation* 8, puts it thus:

> Everyone has his own custom and his own rite; the divine mind has allotted a variety of religions to the city as its guardians. As different souls are distributed to the newborn, so are different spirits of destiny to each people.[16]

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[15] On this theme, the seminal book by M. Simon, *Verus Israel: Etude sur les relations entre juifs et chrétiens dans l'empire romain (135–425)* (Paris 1964 [1948]), remains unsurpassed.

[16] This text is quoted and discussed in M. Edwards, "Romanitas and the Church of Rome," in *Approaching Late Antiquity: The Transformation from Early to Late Empire*, eds., S. Swain and M. Edwards (Oxford, 2004), 187–210, see esp. 207. See R. Barrow, *Prefect and Emperor: The Relations of Symmachus, A.D. 384* (Oxford, 1973). On the dialectic of pagan and Christian attitudes, see A. Armstrong, "The Way and the Ways: Religious Tolerance and Intolerance in the Fourth Century A.D.," *Vigiliae Christianae* 38 (1984): 1–17.

Of particular import, in this context, is what one might call the privatization of religion. With the growing numbers of conversions to Christianity, it was inevitable that pluralism would become established in the empire. At issue was a new reality that had to be recognized. Themistius, another great pagan intellectual of the generation of Emperor Julian, proposes a division into three ethnic groups, or rather, three cultural and religious domains: Greece, homeland of polytheistic Hellenism; Syria, homeland of the Jews and thus also representing the Christians; and Egypt, symbolic homeland of the mystical religions.[17] As Gilbert Dagron notes in an important study, "the assimilation of major religious concepts into the major provinces of the empire has a [...] philosophical significance: it reduces the problem of rival religions to a problem of vicinity and concurrent civilizations."[18]

An analogous tripartition is found in Eusebius, between Phoenicians, Egyptians, and Hellenes.[19] With Themistius, the Syrians (alias the Christians) have replaced the Phoenicians: ethnic division has taken on a religious coloration. Indeed, Jews were often regarded by Greek philosophers (such as Porphyry, for instance, who reflects a long tradition) as having been the Syrians' intellectual and religious élite, their philosophers (just as the Brahmins represented the Indian élite). We should note the importance, in such a context, of the fact that Christianity, like Judaism, was regarded as stemming from the East.

For our purpose, it is important to observe the new manner in which relations between ethnic and religious identities were formulated in the Byzantine Empire.[20] From the fourth century and at least up to the eleventh, when Byzantine military victories led to the absorption of sizeable Muslim populations into the empire, there was an approximate equivalence between religious and political identity; until that time it was not possible to be Roman without being Christian. For the first Byzantines were also Romans—"Romans of old stock," *katharoi*

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[17] Themistius, *Orationes*, eds., I. Schenkl and G. Downey (Leipzig, 1965 [1951]), 102–3.

[18] G. Dagron, "L'empire romain d'orient au IV[e] siècle et les traditions politiques de l'hellénisme: le témoignage de Thémistios," *Travaux et Mémoires* 3 (Paris, 1968), 149–86, on p. 156.

[19] Eus. *P.E.* I; *Laud. Const.* 13.1.

[20] On this issue, compare the approach taken by Cyril Mango, who argues that the Byzantines could only express themselves using the terminology of classical literature, with that of Alexander Kazhdan. See C. Mango, *Byzantine Literature as a Distorting Mirror* (Oxford, 1974); A. Kazhdan, "Ethnology," *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* 2 (Oxford, 1991), 744b.

rōmaioi—who were directly concerned with the welfare of the empire. And they knew the barbarians were at the gates: the Huns, sowing panic in the Near East at the beginning of the fifth century; later the Bulgars and the Slavs from the Balkans; above all, the Muslims—Arabs at first, then, from the eleventh century, Turks. These were long-term confrontations that would be indelibly imprinted on Byzantine consciousness. As Hélène Ahrweiler has shown, the blend of fear and contempt that the barbarian nomads provoked among the Byzantines resonated as the very definition of "quintessential cultural alterity."[21] The Byzantines, who saw themselves as both the chosen people and as the *Kulturvolk* par excellence, drew a radical distinction between Christians and non-Christians. In this context two interesting and related concepts may be noted: *mixobarbaros*, semi-barbarian, and *mixellēn*, semi-pagan. These curious terms, found in the eleventh century on the Balkan borders in particular, were already in existence in Late Antiquity—for instance in the sixth-century writings of Dioscoros, where reference is made to a strange person living on the margins of the known world and mixing with pagans, who also represent a *Naturvolk*, though his purpose is to convert them to Christianity.[22] The Byzantines, however, like the Greeks and Romans before them, knew how to distinguish—in the case of peoples foreign to their cultural universe—between *Naturvölker* and *Kulturvölker*. From ancient times, the cultural links between the Greeks and the peoples of the Near East had given rise to a long tradition of attraction to the peoples of the East and their "barbarian" wisdom. Thus the Indians, for example, though not the Arabs, were perceived as a *Kulturvolk*, with a cultural tradition deemed to be rich even though there was virtually no knowledge of its substance, and the books in which this wisdom was expressed could not be read. Moreover, it seems that the Christian perception of Indians and their culture was not much different from the views found in Greek and Latin pagan texts.[23]

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[21] H. Ahrweiler, "Byzantine Concepts of the Foreigner: The Case of the Nomads," in *Studies on the Internal Diaspora of the Byzantine Empire*, eds., H. Ahrweiler and A. Laiou (Washington, D.C. 1998), 1–15, esp.12. On the concept of the barbarian in late antiquity, see P. Heather, "The Barbarian in Late Antiquity: Image, Reality, and Transformation," in *Constructing Identities in Late Antiquity*, ed., R. Miles (London, 1999), 234–58.

[22] For an analysis of this strange text, see Djkstra, "A World Full of the Word: The Biblical Learning of Dioscorus," 135–46.

[23] See G. Stroumsa, "Philosophy of the Barbarians." Cf. V. Christides, "Arabs as '*barbaroi*' before the Rise of Islam," *Byzantine Studies* 10 (1969): 315–24.

Let us summarize what we have uncovered so far about the complex interface between the two highly different ethnological taxonomies through which Christians perceived identity. The superposition of these taxonomies in early Byzantium meant that for Christianized Romans, the concept of "barbarian" had connotations that were distinctly negative politically and culturally, but positive with respect to religion.

As believers in Jesus Christ, they confronted the Jews.
As [the true] Israel, they confronted the pagans, or *hellenes*.
As followers of a 'barbarian wisdom,' they confronted the Greeks.
As Romans, they confronted the barbarians.

We have seen how the category *barbaros*, originally a linguistic term that Hellenistic Jews, and subsequently Christians, had used for their self-representation, retained its original meaning in Byzantium, where, side-by-side with its Christian, positive meaning, it referred to pagan peoples beyond the confines of the empire. From the fourth to the seventh centuries, the Christianization of the Arabs, both in Syrian towns and among the tribes, seems to have curtailed any ethnological interest in them. Although the Arabs remained marginal on account of their language and culture, they underwent a process of integration into the empire, and the Arab kingdoms, whether or not Christian, functioned as "buffer" territories vis-à-vis the Sassanian enemy.

The Byzantine Empire, then, defined itself through Christian Orthodoxy, which entailed the rejection of religious factions which did not receive imperial support, such as Arians and Monophysites, as heretics. Heresy was forbidden by imperial decree, just like the cult of pagan gods, a fact reflected, in particular, in book XVI of the Theodosian Code.[24] If the followers of the Monophysite Churches were not actively harried, it was above all because there was no way of eradicating a Christian movement that dominated a good part of the Near East. It has been suggested—a hypothesis that cannot be demonstrated, but which is by no means absurd—that the Byzantines were relieved when the Arabs conquered a good part of the imperial territories in

[24] On the concept of heresy in Byzantium, see, for example, J. Gouillard, "L'hérésie dans l'empire byzantin, des origines au XII^{e} siècle," *Travaux et Mémoires* 1 (1965): 299–324; also J. Hamilton and B. Hamilton, *Christian Dualist Heresies in the Byzantine World, c.650–c.1405* (Manchester, 1998).

the seventh century, and that to some extent, it even welcomed the conquest.[25] Since the end of the fourth century, and more markedly from the time of Justinian on, the Jews lost many of their civil rights and became marginalized in a society that defined itself as Christian. Yet they preserved the right to an existence that, although precarious, was a recognized fact. It should be emphasized that the Jews were the only legally sanctioned religious minority in the empire. Indeed, under Justinian, unity of worship made unity of the empire a direct function of religious unity, a fact which enabled the emperor to turn religious heresy into political contamination.[26] In practice, Justinian's religious policy compelled the Jews to define themselves as a community along the lines of the Christian orthodox model.

Justinian's proclamation, in February 553, of his Novella 146, *peri hebraiōn*, is very revealing here: at the pretext of a disagreement between the Jews over the legitimacy of the ritual reading of the Bible in translation in the synagogue cult, he decided to involve himself directly in the argument and ruling over permitted and forbidden synagogue ritual. He encouraged the Jews to read the Bible in their synagogues, not only in Hebrew, but also in translation, be it in Greek, Latin, or another vernacular (when in Greek, the only version authorized by the Novella is the LXX, which was inspired), and prohibited the study of the Mishna (*deuterōsis*).[27] Justinian's famous ruling, which has been analyzed from a number of viewpoints, certainly reflects the Byzantines' sense of cultural superiority, which made them scorn barbarian languages and ignore them. In this, they were the cultural heirs of the Greeks.[28] This scorn and ignorance they applied to the language of the revealed Bible.

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[25] See, for example, Y. Nevo and J. Koren, *Crossroads to Islam: The Origins of the Arab Religion and the Arab State* (Amherst, 2003).

[26] See N. de Lange, "Hebrews, Greeks or Romans? Jewish Culture and Identity in Byzantium," in *Strangers to Themselves: The Byzantine Outsider*, ed., D. Smythe (Ashgate, 2000), 105–18.

[27] See, for example, G. Stroumsa, "Religious Dynamics between Christians and Jews in Late Antiquity," in *Cambridge History of Christianity, 300–600*, eds., F. Norris and A. Casiday (Cambridge, 2007), 151–72.

[28] However it seems that over time, a certain bilingualism became increasingly common among high-ranking Byzantine officials. See A. Kazhdan and A. Wharton Epstein, *Change in Byzantine Culture in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Berkeley, 1990), 183 and 259–60.

Thus the Byzantine millennium did not, to my knowledge, produce a single Hebraist, no one like Jerome, defender of *hebraica veritas*.[29] By encouraging the Jews to forego the sole use of Hebrew in reading the Holy Scriptures, imperial power sought to deprive them of both their own identity and of the major linguistic 'advantage' they had over the Christians, as they alone could read the Bible in the original text. As Leonard Rutgers puts it, "Justinian realized full well that their access to Hebrew gave the Jews power."[30] By forbidding them the study of the Mishna, moreover, he was going even further in seeking to strip them of their own interpretation of Scripture. In a sense, he thus sought to leave them no alternative to eventually accepting the Christian interpretation of Scripture. As I have argued elsewhere, it is no mere chance that the redaction of the Mishna, in the last decades of the second century, strictly parallels the first mentions (by Irenaeus) of the corpus which we call the New Testament.[31] Throughout the second century, both Jews and Christians, in a series of battles over self-definition, had confronted the pagans, their own different interpretations, which would soon become 'heresies,' and one another. In a sense, one can speak of a race between the two communities, throughout the century, to find the correct hermeneutical key for the correct understanding of Scripture. Both the New Testament and the Mishna gradually became the proposed keys: either the prophecies of the Hebrew Bible were announcing the coming of the Messiah, or they were to be understood as the Law of Israel, to be interpreted through the Rabbinic authorities. By forbidding the Jews to study the Mishna, Justinian was stripping them of their own religious autonomy and transforming them, as it were, into a heterodox or heretical Christian community. He thus clearly stated the hope that reading the prophetic texts that announced the coming of Christ might eventually lead Jews to convert. All the same, if the Jews were becoming Christian her-

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[29] This total lack of curiosity regarding Hebrew might have derived in part from the Byzantines' perception that they were *verus Israel,* as argued by M.-H. Congourdeau, "Le judaïsme, coeur de l'identité byzantine," in *Les chrétiens et les juifs dans le sociétés de rites grec et latin*, eds., M. Dmitriev, D. Tollet and E. Teiro (Paris, 2003), 17–27. But it obviously reflected a traditional Greek lack of interest in other languages.

[30] See L. Rutgers, "Justinian's Novella 146 between Jews and Christians," in *Jewish Culture and Society under the Christian Roman Empire*, eds., R. Kalmin and S. Schwartz (Leuven, 2003), 385–407.

[31] G. Stroumsa, "The Body of Truth and its Measures: New Testament Canonization in Context," in *Gnosisforschung und Religionswissenschaft: Festschrift Kurt Rudolph*, eds., H. Priessler and H. Seiwert (Marburg, 1995), 307–16.

etics of sorts, they remained privileged heretics, since they still had the right to an existence, albeit constrained by various impositions, and sometimes by persecution. I should like to add that by defining a tolerated, though inferior status for the Jews, Justinian laid the foundation for the Islamic attitude to non-Muslim monotheists—"peoples of the Book" (sing. *ahl al-kitāb*) as the Qur'ran calls them, a term that would soon include Zoroastrians alongside Jews and Christians—as legitimate but subordinate minorities, or *dhimmis*, under Muslim sovereignty. The Islamic concept of the *dhimmi* can be found *in nuce* in Justinian's attitude to the Jews. The Muslim conquerors of the Near Eastern Byzantine provinces would only need to broaden its use to Christians as well.

The Byzantine transformation of Judaism into a kind of Christian heresy, which strikes us as paradoxical, made sense internally. For early Christian thinkers, the history of Christianity (and of heresy) started with humanity, rather than with the Incarnation. *Anima naturaliter christiana*, wrote Tertullian even before the end of the second century. Indeed, from the very beginnings of humanity, Christianity had represented the only authentic and legitimate religious position.[32] This idea, launched by Paul (Romans 1:18–23), had been echoed by Eusebius in the fourth century. Christian thinkers remained unable to conceive of a monotheism shared by a number of different, legitimate religions. Since Christianity was *verus Israel, vetus Israel* represented a perversion of Christian truth and was, in a way, a heresy.

Yuhanna ibn Mansur, alias John of Damascus, was the son of a high-ranking official of the Abbasid caliphate, and died around the mid-eighth century in the monastery of Mar Sabas, in the Judean wilderness. He was the last of the great Greek Patristic authors, and is the first Christian writer to mention Islam, at the end of his work on heresies. The work begins thus, following the structure of universal history: "The forbears and archetypes of all heresies are four in number: 1. Barbarism, 2. Scythianism, 3. Hellenism, 4. Judaism. It is from these four that all the others proceed." John received this particular perspective from the patristic tradition of heresiography, notably its best-known work, the *Panarion* of Epiphanius, bishop of Salamis in Cyprus

[32] *Apol.* 17.

in the fourth century and a native of Eleutheropolis (Beit Guvrin) in Palestine. Barbarism prevailed from Adam to Noah, while from Noah to the Tower of Babel it was Scythianism; Hellenism was born of the idolatry prevalent at the time of Serug, while Judaism dated from the circumcision of Abraham. John's conception of heresy retains some of the features already apparent in Josephus Flavius, which referred to political factions as much as to religious attitudes. John, who took a particular interest in Hellenism, cites Colossians 3:11 as the direct source of his taxonomy.[33] Three of the prototypes of heresy mentioned by John thus demarcate the major successive stages in the religious history of humanity. Barbarism, Scythianism, Hellenism: these were historical categories belonging to the past. Only Judaism was still alive, representing, one might say (to use Arnold Toynbee's phrase), "a fossilized religion in a Christianized world."

For John of Damascus, nascent Islam represented another kind of heresy, the most recent one, which "appeared in our time," heralded by a false prophet who in his preaching claimed to have received from heaven a book of divine revelation. This false prophet was spreading his shameless lies among barbarians who were still polytheists a short while ago. "These dogs of Ishmael, this barbarian stock that delights in murder," he calls the Arabs. In moving from *Jahilliya* (the period of 'ignorance') to Islam, according to Islamic historiography, the Arabs switched from barbarism, associated with paganism, to monotheism.[34] Other Greek testimonies on the Arabs that have reached us from the seventh century accord with this attitude. In his Christmas sermon from 734, Sophronius of Jerusalem expresses his fear of the Saracens,

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[33] The term *hellēnismos*, already in use in the sixth century B.C. in the writings of Theagnes of Rhegium (*Testimonia*, fragment 1a), occurs in a Jewish text, 2 Maccabees 4.13. For a study of John's attitude to Islam in its historical context, see *Jean Damascène, Ecrits sur l'Islam*, ed. and trans. R. Le Coz, Sources Chrétiennes 383 (Paris, 1992). On the anti-Islamic literature of Byzantium, see A.-T. Khoury, *Polémique byzantine contre l'Islam* (VIII^{e}–XIII^{e} s.), (Leyden, 1972).

[34] For a discussion of some Christian perceptions of Arabs before the advent of Islam, see, for example, D. Caner, "Sinai Pilgrimage and Ascetic Romance: Pseudo-Nilus's *Narrationes* in Context," in *Travel, Communication and Geography in Late Antiquity, Sacred and Profane*, eds., L. Ellis and F. Kidner (Burlington, 2004), 135–47. On the Arabs in Late Antiquity, one must of course mention the monumental work of I. Shahid, *Rome and the Arabs, Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fourth Century, Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fifth Century, Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century*, published in Washington, D.C. (by Dumbarton Oaks), between 1984 and 2010.

referring to the fact that the conquering army prevents Christians from walking from the holy city to Bethlehem. On his side, Maximus the Confessor (who died in 662) describes the Arabs as a barbarian people coming from the desert to ravage civilized regions like wild beasts. For him they were the instrument of divine punishment, inflicted upon the Christian empire for its sins.[35] A similar picture of the Arabs is found in the *Narrationes* of Pseudo-Nil (a text difficult to accurately date): the pre-Islamic Arabs live like ferocious animals, eat flesh, and cannot even be called idolaters since they have no gods whatsoever. But as monotheism was identical to Christianity (or to Judaism, i.e., incomplete Christianity), Islamized Arabs, whose strict monotheism could not be denied, would now be perceived, like the Jews, as heretics, side-by-side with their old perception as barbarian nomads from the desert, which would be very slow to disappear. One might add here that those Arab tribes which had converted to Christianity before the seventh century were often considered to have heretic proclivities.

After the initial shock of the seventh and eighth centuries, the Byzantines would acclimate to the Arab-Muslim enemy, as they had gotten used to the continued existence of the Jews, an existence that remained, however, a theological outrage.[36] It was a conflict that would set the scene for centuries. Elizabeth Jeffreys has clearly noted the two opposite strands in the Byzantine attitudes to the Arabs.[37] One would even sometimes tolerate the enemy and, in rare instances, respect him. Byzantium would also have its humanists, who would recognize the political, as opposed to religious nature of the conflict, and would acknowledge the respect due to the other, the Muslim. Thus, in the second half of the tenth century, for instance, Patriarch Polyeuktos rejected the demand by Emperor Nikephoros Phokas that soldiers killed in battle against the Muslims be regarded as martyrs: those whose occupation it was to spill blood should not be thus sanctified.[38]

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[35] Maximus the Confessor, *Letter* 14 (PG 91, 533–34).

[36] For the theological transformations inspired by the advent of Islam, see J. Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century: The Transformation of a Culture* (Cambridge, 1990), chapter 9, esp. 337–48.

[37] E. Jeffreys, "The Image of the Arabs in Byzantine Literature," in *The Seventeenth International Byzantine Congress—Major Papers* (New Rochelle, 1986), 305–23.

[38] Text cited in A. Ducellier, *Byzance et le monde orthodoxe* (Paris, 1986), 288. Cf. G. Dagron, "'Ceux d'en face': les peuples étrangers dans les traités militaires byzantins," *Travaux et Memoires* 10 (1987): 207–32. See also N.-M. El Cheikh, *Byzantium Viewed by the Arabs*, Harvard Middle Eastern Monographs 36 (Cambridge, 2004), and the survey by M. Mavroudi in *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* (2007). On the issue of holy war,

As for the Jews, Byzantine theologians would continue considering them as abettors of heresy, thanks to their magical gifts and their privileged connections with the devil. Moreover, there is a tantalizing possibility that certain heresies, notably in Phrygia—for example, the Athinganoi ("untouchables") of the ninth century—were close in origin to Judeo-Christian groups, groups which do not seem to have completely withered away in the Christianized Roman Empire. But that is another story.[39]

I have sought here, through some rather loose-knit observations, to reflect upon certain shifts in the key concepts employed by one society to perceive others, shifts fuelled by the existence of not one, but at least two sets of ethnological taxonomies in the early Byzantines' 'tool kit.' Whereas Christianized Rome transformed the concept of barbarian through its own ambivalence to it, Romanized Christianity expanded the concept of heresy, as it could not conceive of a non-Christian monotheistic religion. Hence, the Byzantines (like so many other societies, past and present) were unable to develop a lucid understanding of both Jews and Arabs. For them, Jews and Arabs retained an unstable status, at once barbarians and heretics, ever on the limes. This status, indeed, did not represent a category error. But it reflected a discomfort with Judaism as well as with Islam, a discomfort deeply ingrained in Christianized *Romanitas*.

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see A. Laiou, "On Just War in Byzantium," in *To Hellinikon, Studies in Honor of Speros Vryonis 1*, ed., J. Langdon (New Rochelle, 1993), 153–77; and N. Oikonomides, "The Concept of Holy War and Two Tenth-Century Byzantine Ivoires," in *Peace and War in Byzantium, Essays in Honor of George T. Dennis*, eds., T. Miller and J. Nesbitt (Washington, D.C. 1995), 62–86.

[39] On the Athinganoi, see J. Starr, "An Eastern Christian Sect: The Athinganoi," *Harvard Theological Review* 29 (1936): 93–106.

Jews in Byzantium

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