

20: MEDITERRANEAN JEWS IN A CHRISTIANIZING EMPIRE

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One hallmark of the Christianization of the Roman Empire in Late Antiquity was a preoccupation with dividing people into discrete categories.¹ Primarily motivated by concerns over the porous boundaries that imperfectly separated various religious communities from one another in social reality,² this drive to define “self” and “other” represented a potent means for managing – while never homogenizing or eliminating – difference.³ Indeed, this period saw the rapid crystallization of the ideological desire *and* institutional capacity of both church and state to classify, manage, and, in some cases, subject to targeted acts of violence various dissident religious groupings with whom Christians might feel themselves to be in conflict, Jews among them.⁴

Jewish historians and scholars of rabbinic Judaism have persuasively stressed the formative impact that the Christianization of the Roman Empire had on the nature of Jewishness as a social category, as well as on the forms and structures of Jewish culture and society from the late fourth to early sixth century.⁵ Yet, at the same time, it has been rightly

¹ Averil Cameron, “Ascetic Closure and the End of Antiquity,” in *Asceticism*, ed. Vincent L. Wimbush and Richard Valanthesis (New York, 1995) 147–161, esp. 156.

² Jonathan Z. Smith, “What a Difference a Difference Makes,” in “*To See Ourselves as Others See Us*”: *Christians, Jews, “Others” in Late Antiquity*, ed. Jacob Neusner and Ernest S. Frerichs (Chico, Calif., 1985) 3–48.

³ Andrew S. Jacobs, *Christ Circumcised: A Study in Early Christian History and Difference* (Philadelphia, 2012).

⁴ Fergus Millar, *A Greek Roman Empire: Power and Belief under Theodosius II, 408–450* (Berkeley, 2006) 116–129.

⁵ Seth Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society, 200 B.C.E. to 640 C.E.* (Princeton, N.J., 2001); Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia,

observed that, to a significant degree, the Jewish populations of the Roman Empire remained fully integrated in the venerable structures of Mediterranean life well into the sixth century.⁶ What, then, are we to make of this puzzling juxtaposition between the far-reaching impact of Christianization on Jews and Judaism, on the one hand, and the broad continuities in the fabric of Mediterranean society, on the other?

This chapter explores the impact of Christianization on Mediterranean Jewish life during the “long fifth century,” from Theodosius I (r. 379–395) to Anastasius (r. 491–518). We begin by proposing a model of Christianization that gives due consideration to the intense competition, shifting allegiances, and even bitter invective that existed within and across imperial and ecclesiastical domains. Not only did church and empire only occasionally align but, more important, they often fought openly about Jewish populations and their institutions. We then turn to three episodes of Christian violence against Jews in the late fourth and early fifth century. We argue that the complex relationship between ecclesiastical and imperial institutions disclosed in these episodes provides insight into the anatomy of Christianization, as this process unfolded both locally and empire-wide, and, accordingly, helps explain both the continuities and the changes in Jewish life throughout Late Antiquity.

In emphasizing moments of conflict and violence between Jews and Christians, we do not intend to downplay either the ongoing daily interactions among these groups or the generative impact of Christian idioms and institutional forms on Jewish literary and material culture. Rather, we believe that these episodes will allow us to move beyond the grand narratives of this period to consider the variegated conditions of Jewish communal life at the conjunction of church and empire.

CHRISTIANIZATION AND THE SHIFTING CONJUNCTIONS OF CHURCH AND EMPIRE

The concept of “Christianization” requires us to take great care, especially as it relates to the transformation of Jewish life in Late Antiquity. In fact, there is powerful explanatory value in treating “church”

2004); Peter Schäfer, *The Jewish Jesus: How Christianity and Judaism Shaped Each Other* (Princeton, N.J., 2012).

⁶ Paula Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews: A Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism* (New York, 2008).

and “empire” as distinct analytical categories, so that the historian can trace how these institutional forces intersected at times and diverged at others.⁷ In this regard, applying the label “Christian” to the Roman Empire from Constantine onward can be misleading. Imperial privilege was not extended to a single and continuous group of “orthodox” Christians. The specific Christians that received imperial support – that is, those designated as orthodox – frequently shifted according to the sympathies and practical concerns of the emperors and their officials.⁸ In other words, Christianization should not be conceptualized in overly general terms as a uniform, empire-wide process in which the “Christian” empire replaced its “pagan” forerunner. Rather, this notion must be nuanced to account for the complex processes of appropriation through which ecclesiastical and imperial elites Christianized traditional Roman forms of knowledge and educational institutions.⁹

In light of the imperial–ecclesiastical situation, it should come as no surprise that late antique Christians held divergent views about the proper relationship between church and empire and also about the extent to which the empire could genuinely be understood as Christian. Robert Markus has demonstrated that there were different perspectives on the relationship between empire and church, both immediately before and immediately after the sack of Rome in 410.¹⁰ At one end of the spectrum, Eusebius viewed the empire under Constantine as the eschatological culmination of Christian salvation history.¹¹ At the other end, Augustine divided the church and the empire into separate categories (or “cities”), the latter encompassing all earthly rule (not just the Roman Empire) and only occasionally and inscrutably intersecting with the former.¹²

⁷ Millar, *Greek Roman Empire*, 140–148. For critique of overly general or uniform models of Christianization, see Edward D. Hunt, “Christianising the Roman Empire: The Evidence of the Code,” in *The Theodosian Code*, ed. Jill Harries and Ian Wood (Ithaca, N.Y., 1993) 143–158.

⁸ Millar, *Greek Roman Empire*, 168–191.

⁹ Hervé Ingelbert, *Interpretatio christiana: Les mutations des savoirs, cosmographie, géographie, histoire, dans l'antiquité chrétienne, 30–630 après J.-C.* (Paris, 2001).

¹⁰ Robert A. Markus, “The Roman Empire in Early Christian Historiography,” *Downside Review* 81 (1963) 340–354.

¹¹ E.g., *Praeparatio evangelica*, 1.4; *Historia ecclesiastica*, 10.1.3–6; *Oratio de Laudibus Constantini*, 1.6; 3.5–6; 18.12; *Vita Constantini*, passim. See also, Prudentius, *Contra Symmachum*, 1.587–590.

¹² *De civitate Dei*, 28.53.1–2; 20.11. In Markus's words, “In Augustine's hands the Roman Empire has lost its religious dimension. . . . [T]he Empire is no longer

In addition, certain believers in Jesus, who suffered real or perceived persecution under this self-proclaimed Christian empire, questioned the extent to which the empire was truly Christian at all.¹³ In the early fifth century, the so-called Donatists of North Africa grew increasingly alienated from imperial institutions and ultimately suffered state-sponsored repression and violence.¹⁴ Christian hesitation about – or even direct criticism of – the Roman Empire did not abate with the tighter embrace of “orthodoxy” under Theodosius II. On the contrary, the later fifth and sixth centuries saw the deep and lasting rupture between the imperially sponsored Chalcedonian churches and the anti-Chalcedonian opposition. Thus, Stephen, the anti-Chalcedonian bishop of Herakleopolis Magna, deploys the stark language of the Apocalypse of John to describe his Chalcedonian opponents, including the emperor Justinian, who rigorously promoted and defended the Chalcedonian faith: “I saw, said John in his Apocalypse, a star that had fallen from heaven. The pit of the abyss was opened. Smoke of a great fire went up. The sun and the air became dark through the smoke of the pit, the pit of the impiety which the rulers had gathered up who had come together to Chalcedon. This very pit of the abyss was opened again in the days of the Emperor Justinian.”¹⁵ Even as the relationship between church and empire hardened in imperial discourse, voices such as Stephen’s offer us important perspective on the “Christian empire” from those Christians whose theological commitments were out of step with the imperially sponsored form of Christianity.¹⁶ For Stephen and other anti-Chalcedonians, imperial support for the Chalcedonian faith meant that there was a rupture between the empire and the “true” church.¹⁷ Thus, rather than a “Christian empire,” anti-Chalcedonians

God’s chosen instrument for the salvation of men, no longer is it indispensable for the unfolding of his plan in history” (“Roman Empire in Early Christian Historiography,” 347).

¹³ Averil Cameron, “The Violence of Orthodoxy,” in *Heresy and Identity in Late Antiquity*, ed. Eduard Iricinschi and Holger M. Zellentin (Tübingen, 2008) 102–114; Garth Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth: Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Princeton, N.J., 1993) 125–127.

¹⁴ On this intra-Christian conflict, see Brent D. Shaw, *Sacred Violence: African Christians and Sectarian Hatred in the Age of Augustine* (Cambridge, 2011).

¹⁵ Karl Heinz Kuhn, ed. and trans., *A Panegyric on Apollo, Archimandrite of the Monastery of Isaac, by Stephen Archbishop of Heracleopolis Magna*, 2 vols. (Louvain, 1978) 2: 10–11.

¹⁶ For the date of the *Panegyric on Apollo*, see Kuhn, *Panegyric on Apollo*, 1: xii.

¹⁷ David W. Johnson, “Anti-Chalcedonian Polemics in Coptic Texts, 451–641,” in *The Roots of Egyptian Christianity*, ed. Birger A. Pearson and James E. Goehring

and other marginalized Christian groups saw themselves as confronting a “heretical empire.”¹⁸

These diverse perspectives should remind us that the portrait of a single, unified Christian empire was largely a construct of the powerful and so runs the risk of obfuscating the spectrum of opinions on church–empire relations as well as the shifting configurations of church and empire throughout Late Antiquity.¹⁹ We suggest, therefore, that the Christianization of the empire between the late fourth and early sixth centuries is best seen as an uneven process that unfolded, without strict coordination, at various social, institutional, and symbolic registers.

This complex relationship between church and empire is especially significant for our purposes since Mediterranean Jewish life during the long fifth century was increasingly shaped at the intersection of imperial and ecclesiastical forces. As we shall see, imperial protection of Jews, their property, and their communal institutions was largely dependent upon the ability of the empire to restrain the more extreme elements of the church. Yet, the dynamic and shifting nature of the interaction between church and empire meant that the precise impact of these forces on Jewish life could vary tremendously from context to context.

MEDITERRANEAN JEWS AT THE INTERSECTION OF CHURCH AND EMPIRE

Although imperial legislation in the post-Constantinian period typically treated “heretics” as outlaws, it took a more nuanced approach to the relationship between Jews, the empire, and various other groups and institutional interests in society, including the church.²⁰ In fact, beginning in the late fourth century, Jews enjoyed the official protection of the empire specifically against Christian violence.²¹ Two laws

(Philadelphia, 1986) 216–234; Tito Orlandi, “Patristic Texts in Coptic,” in *Patrology: The Eastern Fathers from the Council of Chalcedon (451) to John of Damascus († 750)*, ed. Angelo di Berardino (Cambridge, 2006) 491–570, esp. 555–565.

¹⁸ Markus, “Roman Empire in Early Christian Historiography,” 345.

¹⁹ Peter Brown, “Christianization and Religious Conflict,” in *The Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. 13: *The Late Empire, A.D. 337–425*, ed. Averil Cameron and Peter Garnsey (Cambridge, 1998) 632–664.

²⁰ Millar, *Greek Roman Empire*, 149–157.

²¹ Edward D. Hunt, “St. Stephen in Minorca: An Episode in Jewish–Christian Relations in the Early Fifth Century AD,” *Journal of Theological Studies* n.s. 33 (1982) 106–123, here 117.

issued by Arcadius (with Honorius) on 17 June 397 exemplify this protection. The first law (*Codex Theodosianus*, 16.8.12) requires a meeting of governors to ensure their knowledge of the necessity “to repel the assaults of those who attack Jews, and that their synagogues should remain in their accustomed peace.”²² The second law (*CTh* 9.45.2) prohibited Jews from feigning Christian conversion in order to avoid paying debts owed. The latter law was a significant blow to Christian proselytization to the Jews, which relied heavily on the appeal of asylum.²³

This legal imperative to protect the Jews and their synagogues from acts of violence occasionally angered certain Christians. For instance, the Syriac *Life of Simeon Stylites* records a letter that Simeon wrote to Theodosius II containing a stark prediction of divine retribution against the emperor for his wrong-headed support of the Jews:

Now that your heart is exalted and you have disregarded the Lord your God who gave you the glorious diadem and the royal throne, now that you have become a friend and companion and protector to unbelieving Jews, behold suddenly the righteous judgment of God will overtake you and all who are of the same mind as you in this matter. You will lift up your hands to heaven and say in your affliction, “Truly this anger has come on me because I broke faith with the Lord God.”²⁴

These ominous words – whether they are Simeon’s or merely the work of his anonymous biographer – stress that imperial support of the Jews will provoke God to punish not only the emperor but his entire empire. More important, this testimony epitomizes the pressures exerted on the emperors during this period to achieve balance between

²² Translated in Amnon Linder, *The Jews in Imperial Roman Legislation* (Detroit, 1987) 198. All translations of *Codex Theodosianus* are taken from Linder’s book.

²³ Linder, *Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation*, 199. An additional law, dating to 24 September 416, allowed Jews who had converted to Christianity in order to escape financial obligations to return to Judaism (*CTh* 16.8.23). Conversely, imperial legislation also placed significant restrictions on Jewish proselytization of Christians (e.g., *CTh* 3.1.5).

²⁴ *Life of Simeon Stylites*, 121–123, trans. Millar, *Greek Roman Empire*, 128. The *vita* was probably written shortly after the death of Simeon in 459; see Frederick Lent, trans., *The Life of Saint Simeon Stylites: A Translation of the Syriac Text in Bedjan’s Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum* (Merchantville, N.J., 2009) ix.

administrating a successful empire and appeasing the convictions of certain Christians.²⁵

This balance did not always tip in favor of Jewish interests in legislative action. Increasingly during the fifth century, many imperial laws were issued that placed heavy restrictions on the Jews, especially in instances in which the Jews and their customs were perceived to threaten Christian hegemony or imperial stability.²⁶ One notable area of legislation surrounds the future construction of synagogues. Although imperial law continued to protect synagogues from being destroyed, various laws prohibited the construction of new synagogues. For example, *CTh* 16.8.27 states, “What we legislated recently concerning the Jews and their synagogues shall remain in force, namely, that they shall never be permitted to build new synagogues, neither shall they dread that the old ones shall be seized from them.”²⁷

Yet, despite such laws against the construction of synagogues, it is precisely in the late fourth and fifth century that we find a proliferation in the building of synagogues.²⁸ The tension between law and reality reflects problems that premodern empires faced more generally, both in terms of the sheer limitations of enforcement and the general ideology of governance.²⁹ Even more, the synagogue emerged during this period as the preeminent institution of Jewish life, as Jews in Palestine and elsewhere engaged with – and actively appropriated – newly hegemonic forms of Christian piety, ritual practice, and notions of sacred space. For instance, local Jewish communities commissioned the first figural mosaics for synagogue floors and began to place chancel

²⁵ Millar, *Greek Roman Empire*, 128.

²⁶ See especially the following laws from the *Codex Theodosianus* or transmitted in later witnesses to it: *CTh* 3.1.5 (preserved in the *Breviarium Alaricianum* 3.1.5); 16.2.31 together with 16.5.46 (cf. *Constitutiones Sirmondianae* 14); 16.5.44; 16.8.6 (cf. 16.9.2); 16.8.7 (received by *Brev.* 16.3.2 and *Codex Justinianus* 1.7.1); 16.8.18 (received by *Cod. Just.* 1.9.11); 16.8.19; 16.8.22, 25, 27. In a law dating to 438, Theodosius II barred Jews from political or military service on the grounds that incorrect belief may lead to treachery (*Novellae Theodosianae* 3.2).

²⁷ The earlier legislation alluded to here probably refers to *CTh* 16.8.25, dating to 15 February 423 (Linder, *The Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation*, 290). This law instructs that “no synagogue shall be constructed from now on, and the old ones shall remain in their state.” See also *CTh* 16.8.27 and *Cod. Just.* 1.9.8.

²⁸ Jodi Magness, *The Archaeology of the Holy Land from the Destruction of Solomon's Temple to the Muslim Conquest* (New York, 2012) 309–319.

²⁹ Clifford Ando, *Imperial Ideology and Provincial Loyalty in the Roman Empire* (Berkeley, 2000).

screens in front of the Torah shrine at that same time that comparable artistic and architectural forms came to characterize church buildings throughout the Mediterranean.³⁰ And these synagogues served as the performative locus for a novel form of Hebrew liturgical poetry (*piyyut*) with significant poetic, prosodic, and thematic affinities to contemporary genres of Christian hymnology in Syriac, Greek, and other languages.³¹ These expressions of Jewish piety would continue to develop and flourish – in tandem with their Christian counterparts – over the subsequent several centuries. Thus, not only was repressive legislation more often honored in the breach than in the observance, but Christianization forged cultural resources that proved generative for Jewish religious expression. As Hayim Lapin has written, one facet of Christianization was “the emergence of Jews as a particular kind of subject, governed by specific rules that neither prohibited their existence or practices – as Roman law attempted for Christian heresies and for pagans – nor fully incorporated them without religion- or ethnos-specific limitations.”³²

These imperial laws also reveal that Jewish life within the Christianizing Roman Empire varied according to the religious and political conditions on the ground. Indeed, Christianization did not look the same at all times and in all places. Not only did the particular group or belief-structure that was considered “Christian” from the vantage point of the empire frequently change, but limits were placed by the empire on what Christians could or could not do to the Jews. It should be highlighted that this distinction between the institutions of church and empire should not imply that “religion” and “politics” were separate categories in antiquity.³³ We now turn to consider three examples that demonstrate some of the diverse configurations of

³⁰ Lee I. Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue: The First Thousand Years*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, 2005) 210–249, 466–498, 519–529; Joan R. Branham, “Sacred Space under Erasure in Ancient Synagogues and Early Churches,” *Art Bulletin* 74 (1992) 375–394.

³¹ Ophir Münz-Manor, “Liturgical Poetry in the Late Antique Near East: A Comparative Approach,” *Journal of Ancient Judaism* 1 (2010) 336–361.

³² Hayim Lapin, *Rabbis as Romans: The Rabbinic Movement in Palestine, 100–400 CE* (Oxford, 2012) 17; see also the succinct formulation in Brown, “Christianization and Religious Conflict,” 642–643.

³³ On the problem associated with “religion” as a discrete category in antiquity, see now Brent Nongbri, “Dislodging ‘Embedded’ Religion: A Brief Note on a Scholarly Trope,” *Numen* 55 (2008) 440–460; Nongbri, *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept* (New Haven, Conn., 2013).

imperial and Christian forces, and their impact on Jewish life in the fifth century.

JEWISH COMMUNITIES AT THE
INTERSECTION OF LOCAL AND GLOBAL FORCES:
THREE TEST CASES

Jewish life within the Christianizing Roman Empire of Late Antiquity depended largely on the particular interaction of three microforces: the local Jewish community, the local Christian community, and the local presence of imperial representatives. These localized factors were further influenced by empire-wide dynamics of church and empire. In some cases, church and empire, as Mediterranean-wide structures, were absent in interactions between local Jews and Christians, while, in other cases, Jewish-Christian interactions were ultimately shaped by these “global” forces. In this sense, we believe it more useful to approach examples of anti-Jewish violence not as chapters in a single, empire-wide story of Jewish-Christian relations, but rather as punctuated moments in which the ever-shifting relationship between church and empire crystallized at the local level.

Based on what can be reconstructed from the fragmentary literary, documentary, and archaeological record, relations between Jews and Christians during the fifth century varied considerably across the Roman Empire. Sometimes relations were peaceful or at least not marked by physical violence.³⁴ For instance, in 402 Christians in Tripolitania consulted with Jewish scholars concerning the proper translation of the Hebrew Bible after a riot erupted over Jerome’s new Latin translation.³⁵ John Chrysostom also alludes to close relations between Jews and Christians in Antioch – albeit much to his chagrin. He writes: “If, then, the Jews fail to know the Father, if they crucified the Son, if they thrust off the help of the Spirit, who should not make bold to declare plainly that the synagogue is a dwelling of demons? God is not worshipped there. Heaven forbid! From now on it remains a

³⁴ For “peaceful coexistence” between Jews and Christians, see Leonard Victor Rutgers, “Archaeological Evidence for the Interaction of Jews and Non-Jews in Late Antiquity,” *American Journal of Archaeology* 96 (1992) 101–118; John S. Crawford, “Jews, Christians, and Polytheists in Late-Antique Sardis,” in *Jews, Christians, and Polytheists in the Ancient Synagogue: Cultural Interaction during the Greco-Roman Period*, ed. Steven Fine (London, 1999) 190–200.

³⁵ Augustine, *Ep.* 71.3.5; Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 284.

place of idolatry. But still some people pay it honor as a holy place.”³⁶ Chrysostom here expresses his concern that some of the Christians within his flock did not have sufficient theological or social reservations about visiting synagogues or turning to Jewish ritual experts for blessings.

The pluralistic posture adopted by some Christians well reflects the function of synagogues within local communities. As several scholars have noted, synagogues served as local municipal buildings that facilitated quotidian interactions between Jews, Christians, and other local residents, ranging from business and civic matters to more mundane contacts.³⁷ Of course, synagogues served a unique and special function for Jews as a marker of religious identity and difference. Paula Fredriksen captures the social function of the synagogues in the late antique city when she argues that synagogues were exclusive for Jews, but inclusive for outsiders.³⁸ In many – if not most – places in the “Christian empire,” Jews and Christians interacted on a regular basis without tension and certainly without the overt threat of verbal confrontation or physical violence.

Nevertheless, interactions between Jews and Christians occasionally turned violent. We have already seen the various imperial laws issued to protect Jews and synagogues from Christian aggression and expropriation. These laws indicate that there were instances of Christian violence against Jews and their synagogues.³⁹ In addition to evidence implicit within imperial legislation, we possess literary sources documenting specific instances of Christian violence against Jews and their institutions. As a general pattern, the literary record suggests that such violent outbreaks tended to take place in contexts in which imperial presence was absent, thin, or overshadowed by ecclesiastical forces, thus leaving Jews vulnerable to the more extreme factions of the local church and its bishop.

³⁶ *Adversus Judaeos*, 1.3.3. Translation from Paul W. Harkins, trans., *John Chrysostom, Discourses against Judaizing Christians* (Washington, D.C., 1979) 11.

³⁷ See, e.g., Paula Fredriksen, “What Parting of the Ways? Jews and Gentiles in the Ancient Mediterranean City,” in *The Ways that Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Adam H. Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed (Tübingen, 2003) 35–63.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 52.

³⁹ For the classic analyses that emphasize conflict between Jews and Christians, see Jean Juster, *Les juifs dans l'empire romain*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1914); Michael Avi-Yonah, *The Jews of Palestine: A Political History from the Bar-Kokhba War to the Arab Conquest* (Oxford, 1976).

Bishops at the edges of the empire could take advantage of the weak imperial presence in their cities and, under the right circumstances, could enact violence against local Jews. A good example of how a bishop could exploit a gap in imperial power is found in the coerced conversion of the Jews on the Balearic island of Minorca off the coast of Spain. We learn from an encyclical letter written by Bishop Severus of the Minorcan city of Jamona (*Epistula Severi*) that the recently “discovered” relics of the proto-martyr Stephen (Acts 6:8–8:1) were brought by “a certain priest, conspicuous for his sanctity” to a church in another Minorcan city (Magona) in 416.⁴⁰ According to Severus, the presence of Stephen’s bones so moved Christians that they were compelled to confront local Jews, with whom they had previously enjoyed friendly relations (*Ep. Sev.* 5.1–2). In Severus’s words, “In every public place, we battled against the Jews over the Law; in every household, we fought for the faith” (*Ep. Sev.* 5.2). In reality, however, the power of these relics was channeled into anti-Jewish sentiment through the preaching of Severus for over a year and a half.⁴¹ In early February 418, Severus led an energized mob of Christians from Jamona to Magona and together they gained control over the synagogue and set it ablaze (*Ep. Sev.* 13.3–14.1).⁴² Eventually – so legend has it – the entire Jewish community of Magona converted to Christianity and was forced to pay for a basilica to be built on the site of the former synagogue.

While Severus’s account contains many far-fetched details, it is unlikely that it is pseudonymous or that it is a complete fabrication.⁴³ As Scott Bradbury has observed, not only does Severus demonstrate correct calendrical knowledge of the year 418, but the mass conversion of Jews in Minorca is also attested in other near contemporary sources, especially a letter written by Consentius to Augustine (ca. 419).⁴⁴ More recently, Ross Kraemer has supplemented Bradbury’s argument for its

⁴⁰ Scott Bradbury, ed. and trans., *Severus of Minorca, Letter on the Conversion of the Jews* (Oxford, 1996). All translations are taken from Bradbury’s book.

⁴¹ Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews*, 359.

⁴² While Severus fails to mention who started the fire, it seems clear that Christians were involved since they had control over it.

⁴³ For a rejection of the authenticity and historical reliability of *Ep. Sev.*, see especially Bernhard Blumenkranz, *Die Judenpredigt Augustins: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der jüdisch-christlichen Beziehungen in den ersten Jahrhunderten* (Basel, 1946) 57–58. Blumenkranz’s objections, here and elsewhere, to the authenticity and historicity of *Ep. Sev.* are treated at length in Bradbury, *Severus of Minorca*, 10–15.

⁴⁴ For discussion of Consentius’s letter and other contemporaneous sources, see Bradbury, *Severus of Minorca*, 9–15. This letter (plus another) was discovered with

authenticity and general historicity by pointing to the rather restrained anti-Jewish invective of the letter, which stands in marked contrast to the more vituperative anti-Jewish tractates of episcopal authors like Chrysostom.⁴⁵

The balance between church and empire in the Minorcan affair swung heavily in favor of the church. Although *Epistula Severi* is dated in reference to the reign of Emperor Honorius and to the (second) consulship of Constantius (*Ep. Sev.* 31.1), the account gives the impression that the imperial presence in Magona was limited to two Jews with the title *defensor*, Theodorus (*Ep. Sev.* 6) and Caecilianus (*Ep. Sev.* 19.6–8).⁴⁶ Despite Severus's focus on Theodorus, Caecilianus was in fact the senior civic magistrate in Magona in 418.⁴⁷ As *defensores*, Theodorus and Caecilianus would have been charged with protecting the weak in Magona from abuse at the hands of its powerful citizens.⁴⁸ There is also a passing reference to Litorius, father of Meletius's wife Artemisia, who is said to have been a *comes* (*Ep. Sev.* 24.2). The letter's presentation of a Jewish *comes*, however, must be met with considerable skepticism since it was during the early fifth century that the empire began limiting the number of court positions for Jews.⁴⁹ Moreover, the traditional associations with Artemisia's name (e.g., water and honey) and their correspondence to her conversion narrative in *Epistula Severi* (she converts when her servant brings her water that smells and tastes like honey [24.3–11]) raise serious questions about the historicity of this episode and, hence, makes it even more improbable that she had a Jewish father who was a *comes*.⁵⁰ In the end, whatever imperial representatives were present in Magona, they were unable to stop the mob

manuscripts of Augustine's letters and published as Epistle 12* by Johannes Divjak, *Oeuvres des Saint Augustin* (Paris, 1987).

⁴⁵ Ross S. Kraemer, "Jewish Women's Resistance to Christianity in the Early Fifth Century: The Account of Severus, Bishop of Minorca," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 17 (2009) 635–665, here 644.

⁴⁶ On the office of *defensor civitatis*, see Robert M. Frakes, "Late Roman Social Justice and Origin of the *Defensor Civitatis*," *Classical Journal* 89 (1994) 337–348. A law issued in 409 states that *defensores* were required to be Christian (*Cod. Just.* 1.55.8), although it was not until 438 that Jews were specifically prohibited from holding the office (*Nov. Theod.* 3.2). The need for such a law suggests that Minorca was not unique in having a Jewish *defensor*.

⁴⁷ Bradbury, *Severus of Minorca*, 38.

⁴⁸ A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire, 284–602: A Social Economic and Administrative Survey* (Oxford, 1964) 145.

⁴⁹ Hunt, "St. Stephen in Minorca," 121.

⁵⁰ Kraemer, "Jewish Women's Resistance," 655–656.

of Christians from destroying the synagogue despite imperial legislation already in place to prevent this very kind of violence.⁵¹ In fact, Severus and his followers could deploy a combination of physical violence, threats, and intimidation to compel the Jews to convert and to do so without facing any interference from imperial authorities.⁵²

This incident on Minorca also illustrates how local and global Christian traditions could intersect in highly specific ways, sometimes with devastating results for Jews. That Stephen's relics were used as a pretext for the persecution of Jews is hardly surprising, given the emphasis on Jewish guilt for the stoning of Stephen in Acts 6:8–8:1.⁵³ And, indeed, there is some evidence that incidents of anti-Jewish violence linked to the arrival of Stephen's relics occurred elsewhere as well.⁵⁴ Yet, in each case where we hear of anti-Jewish violence or the expropriation of Jewish communal property triggered by the relics of Stephen, we find highly specific local conditions in which an episcopal figure is in a position to capitalize on the absence of empire.⁵⁵ This event – or perhaps cluster of events – demonstrates how local religious and political dynamics gave concrete expression to Christian traditions and objects that circulated throughout the Mediterranean; it was only under certain conditions that these sacred objects exerted their powerful impact on Jewish life.

Violence against Jews was not limited to tiny islands at the edges of the empire; it could also occur in traditional imperial strongholds. In 388, Christians, at the instigation of the town's bishop, burned a

⁵¹ Theodorus is said to have converted to Christianity, seemingly under coercion (*Ep. Sev.* 16.16, 18.18). For imperial legislation prior to 416 that protected Jews and synagogues from Christian violence, see *CTh* 16.8.9; 16.8.12; 6.8.20, together with 2.8.26 and 8.8.8. For discussion, see Linder, *Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation*, 262–267.

⁵² Kraemer, “Jewish Women’s Resistance,” 649; see also Carlo Ginzburg, “The Conversion of Minorcan Jews (417–418): An Experiment in the History of Historiography,” in *Christendom and Its Discontents: Exclusion, Persecution, and Rebellion, 1000–1500*, ed. Scott L. Waugh and Peter D. Diehl (Cambridge, 1996) 207–19.

⁵³ On the anti-Jewish dimensions of the “martyrdom” of Stephen in the book of Acts, see Shelly Matthews, *Perfect Martyr: The Stoning of Stephen and the Construction of Christian Identity* (Oxford, 2010).

⁵⁴ It has been suggested that the arrival of Stephen's relics in the Syrian city of Edessa provided its bishop, Rabbula, a pretext for the conversion of a synagogue into a church dedicated to Saint Stephen, much like what occurred in Minorca; see Hans J. W. Drijvers, “The Protonike Legend, the *Doctrina Addai*, and Bishop Rabbula of Edessa,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 51 (1997) 298–315.

⁵⁵ Bradbury, *Severus of Minorca*, 23.

synagogue in Callinicum, a city on the Euphrates known for its strong defense and vibrant trade.⁵⁶ Upon hearing of this event from the eastern count (*comes orientis militarium partium*), Theodosius I (347–395) ordered that the synagogue be rebuilt at the expense of the church and that the monks responsible receive due punishment.⁵⁷

Word of the Callinicum affair and Theodosius's reaction to it quickly reached Ambrose of Milan, who was then in Aquileia in northern Italy (*Epistula* 41.1). In response, Ambrose wrote a chastising letter to the emperor, condemning him for requiring the bishop to pay for the rebuilding of the synagogue (*Ep.* 40). From Ambrose's perspective, by asking the bishop to pay for the synagogue, Theodosius was in fact demanding that the bishop either follow orders, whereby he would betray his Christian faith, or reject the imperial imperative and run the risk of becoming a martyr (*Ep.* 40.7). Further complicating matters, Ambrose's earlier intervention had already prompted Theodosius to exempt the bishop of Callinicum from paying for the rebuilding of the synagogue.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, at least from Ambrose's perspective, this exemption was insufficient, as Theodosius had simply transferred the financial – and theological – burden to the *comes orientis* (*Ep.* 40.9).⁵⁹ Ambrose confronted the emperor directly in a sermon delivered in his presence (*Ep.* 41.2–26).⁶⁰ Theodosius finally consented to drop all compulsory retribution when Ambrose refused to allow him to receive the Eucharist until he had withdrawn all previous orders concerning Callinicum.

The despoliation of the synagogue at Callinicum offers important insight into the shifting conjunction of Christianity and the Roman Empire and its impact on the empire's Jews.⁶¹ Like the case of Minorca, the event provides a clear example of the kinds of violent actions that were possible when and where the local imperial presence was overshadowed by (or embodied in) the town's bishop. Indeed, the immediate imperial action taken was at the intermediary level (the eastern count)

⁵⁶ The primary source for the destruction of the synagogue at Callinicum is Ambrose, *Eps.* 40 and 41, on which see Neil McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan: Church and Court in a Christian Capital* (Berkeley, 1994) 301.

⁵⁷ On the title *comes orientis militarium partium* in Ambrose's letter, see McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, 298 n. 26.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 300.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 300–301.

⁶⁰ On Ambrose's rhetoric of violence, see Thomas Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity: Militant Devotion in Christianity and Islam* (Philadelphia, 2009) 81–107.

⁶¹ For other possible motives, see McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, 302.

and in the form of a letter subsequently written to the emperor. What is more, the count's motivations for involving the emperor in this affair are unclear. Was his intention to demand justice on behalf of the Jews or to assuage imperial wrath against the local Christians?⁶² In either case, what is clear is that the Jews of Callinicum were very much at the mercy of the city's bishop, with little immediate support from external imperial forces.

At an empire-wide level, the destruction of the synagogue at Callinicum and the events that ensued epitomize the tenuous position of the Jews in the dynamic relationship between the global institutions of church and empire. While Theodosius's initial stance was to demand restitution from Christians on behalf of the Jews for the destruction of their synagogue, he was forced by a powerful bishop from a different region to rescind his order, thus momentarily aligning church and empire to powerful effect. But Theodosius's approach to the empire's role in Jewish-Christian disputes was to change yet again. In a law issued just five years after the despoliation of the synagogue at Callinicum, the same Theodosius – perhaps with the experience of Callinicum in mind – ordered that “those who presume to commit illegal deeds under the name of the Christian religion and attempt to destroy and despoil synagogues” ought to be punished (*CTh* 16.8.9). Thus, over the course of only half a decade and under the rule of a single emperor, the legislative and administrative map for the conjunction of empire, Judaism, and Christianity was drawn in multiple – and, at times, contradictory – ways.

The relationship of a local Jewish community to imperial and ecclesiastical forces took on yet a different configuration in the great urban center of Alexandria in the early fifth century. In 415, Cyril, bishop of Alexandria expelled the Jews from the city against the wishes of the augustal prefect, Orestes.⁶³ That Cyril removed *all* Jews from the city has been appropriately questioned, given the apparent size of the Jewish population in Alexandria and their centrality in local industry and trade.⁶⁴ It is unlikely, however, that Socrates invented out of whole

⁶² *Ibid.*, 299 n. 27.

⁶³ Socrates Scholasticus, *Historia ecclesiastica*, 7.13.15. Cf. John of Nikiu, *Chron.* 84.89–99. See Robert L. Wilken, *Judaism and the Early Christian Mind: A Study of Cyril of Alexandria's Exegesis and Theology* (New Haven, 1971) 54–68; Christopher Haas, *Alexandria in Late Antiquity: Topography and Social Conflict* (Baltimore, 1997) 295–316; Victor Tcherikover and Alexander Fuks, eds., *Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum*, 3 vols. (Cambridge, Mass., 1957–1963) 1: 98–101.

⁶⁴ E.g., Wilken, *Judaism and the Early Christian Mind*, 57. See also *CTh* 13.5.18.

cloth Cyril's act of violence against the Alexandrian Jews. This conflict between Cyril and Orestes was a reflex of the broader power struggle in Alexandria between bishops and imperial authorities. As Socrates notes, "Now Orestes had long regarded with jealousy the growing power of the bishops, because they encroached on the jurisdiction of the authorities appointed by the emperor."⁶⁵

Although it is difficult to reconstruct from the highly partisan sources the underlying causes for the expulsion of the Jews from Alexandria, Robert Wilken has plausibly suggested that Cyril's actions were precipitated by his anti-Jewish reading of the Bible.⁶⁶ What is abundantly clear is that Orestes' influence over Alexandrian life was limited insofar as he could not curb the anti-Jewish inclinations of the Alexandrian bishop.⁶⁷ Christopher Haas sums up the situation: "Given the instability of imperial administration during 414 and the strong line taken against dissenters by 415, it is not surprising that Cyril should have acted confidently in his dealings with Alexandria's Jews and pagans. This also goes a long way toward explaining the ineffectiveness of the augustal prefect, Orestes."⁶⁸ The "instability" in the imperial administration of the city may explain why there was apparently no imperial response to the letters written by either Orestes or Cyril.⁶⁹ In this case, the fate of the Jews depended entirely on a local struggle between the imperial and ecclesiastical forces on the ground in Alexandria. Unfortunately for the Jews, the latter prevailed and many were probably expelled from the city. The expulsion of the Jews from Alexandria during the bishopric of Cyril thus demonstrates that, even in regions with traditionally strong ties to the empire, bishops could exploit momentary weaknesses in the central imperial administration to circumvent local authorities and to enact punishments against the Jews.

⁶⁵ Soc. Hist. eccl. 7.13. Translation from Andrew C. Zenos, trans., *Socrates Scholasticus, Ecclesiastical History*, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers 2.2 (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1957) 159.

⁶⁶ Wilken, *Judaism and the Early Christian Mind*, 61; see also Haas, *Alexandria in Late Antiquity*, 300–301.

⁶⁷ Haas, *Alexandria in Late Antiquity*, 302; Tcherikover and Fuks, *Corpus papyrorum Judaicarum*, 98. Cyril's political shrewdness can also be seen in his subsequent dealings with the emperor over the Nestorian controversy; see Susan Wessel, *Cyril of Alexandria and the Nestorian Controversy: The Making of a Saint and of a Heretic* (Oxford, 2004) 74–111.

⁶⁸ Haas, *Alexandria in Late Antiquity*, 302.

⁶⁹ Soc. Hist. eccl. 7.13.18–19. On the lack of imperial response to these letters, see Millar, *Greek Roman Empire*, 127.

CONCLUSION

Certain patterns emerge from these instances of Christian aggression or violence against Jews in the Roman Empire of Late Antiquity. In each case, local bishops were the primary players in inflicting violence against the Jewish community with which they were in contact. Whether they were constrained by imperial authorities (Stephen of Minorca and the bishop of Callinicum) or had to square off against local officials (Cyril of Alexandria), bishops could reshape the relationship of Jews to their immediate urban context as well as to the larger structures of empire. Yet even Jews who lived in cities with traditional and significant ties to the empire could not depend on the protection of local imperial institutions. The most powerful bishops, such as Ambrose or Cyril, could even compel emperors to change course on violence against Jews – albeit temporarily – or expel the Jews against the wishes of the local imperial representative.

The circumstances at Minorca, Callinicum, and Alexandria conform to the basic pattern presented in legal texts of imperial protection of Jews against Christian violence. Despite the occasional restrictive law, the empire offered a great deal of protection to the Jews against those Christians bent on confrontation. The reason behind this largely positive approach to the Jews is not clear. The assessment offered by Bernard Bachrach remains the most plausible: “An anti-Jewish policy was not pursued during the first century and a half following the Edict of Toleration because the imperial government had a sound understanding of political realities. It saw the potential cost, in terms of social dislocation, economic decline, and military conflict, that the Jewish *gens* could impose if it were attacked.”⁷⁰ But the empire’s capacity to manage the confrontational impulses within Christian communities was not the same everywhere and at all times. The power of the empire was limited or overshadowed by the church in many regions, particularly at the “edges” of the empire, where local bishops exerted considerable formal and persuasive power. Indeed, Stephen and his episcopal impresario had little in their way when they impelled a group of Christians to march against the Jewish community of Magona in a corner of the Mediterranean world.

⁷⁰ Bernard S. Bachrach, “The Jewish Community of the Later Roman Empire as Seen in the *Codex Theodosianus*,” in Neusner and Frerichs, “*To See Ourselves as Others See Us*,” 399–421, here 421.

These case studies make clear how much the ever-shifting negotiations of church and state could reframe the conditions of Jewish life in the Roman Empire. Yet, at the same time, these moments of conflict tell only a small part of the story of Christianization, which simultaneously constrained and stimulated Jewish cultural expression. These emergent forms would gradually reshape Judaism in the Mediterranean world, as the transitional period of the fifth century gave way to the more assertively governed empire and more sharply delineated society of the Age of Justinian.

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