

JUDAISM
AND
IMPERIAL
ESCHATOLOGY
IN
LATE
ANTIQUITY

ALEXEI M. SIVERTSEV

**JUDAISM AND IMPERIAL IDEOLOGY
IN LATE ANTIQUITY**

This book explores the influence of Roman imperialism on the development of messianic themes in Judaism in the fifth through the eighth centuries A.D. It pays special attention to the ways in which Roman imperial ideology and imperial eschatology influenced Jewish representations of the Messiah and messianic age. Topics addressed in the book include: representations of the Messianic kingdom of Israel as a successor to the Roman Empire, the theme of imperial renewal in Jewish eschatology and its Roman parallels, representations of the emperor in late antique literature and art and their influence on the representations of the Messiah, the mother of the Messiah in late antique and Byzantine cultural contexts, and the figure of the last Roman emperor in Christian and Jewish tradition.

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Preface

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Introduction

THIS BOOK TAKES ITS CUE FROM THE CONCEPT OF “BYZANTINE Commonwealth” originally formulated by Dimitri Obolensky and Garth Fowden to describe the Byzantine political and cultural system in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages. The term was first proposed by Obolensky in a relatively narrow sense to describe the unique mode of “Byzantium’s relations with the peoples of Eastern Europe” during the Middle Ages. According to Obolensky, the Byzantine Commonwealth was based on a sense of cultural commonality between the empire and a number of neighboring East European countries, whose “ruling and educated classes were led to adopt many features of Byzantine civilization, with the result that they were able to share in, and eventually to contribute to, a common cultural tradition.” In Obolensky’s opinion, this cultural commonality ran sufficiently deep “to justify the view that, in some respects, [these countries] formed a single international community.”¹ Although politically independent, the members of the commonwealth shared a common cultural identity which provided them with a sense of unity above and beyond political borders.

Fowden has significantly broadened Obolensky’s definition by projecting it back into the period between the late fifth and the seventh centuries, and suggesting that during that time an “empire,” a geopolitical entity that dominated earlier Near Eastern history, evolved into a “commonwealth.” The commonwealth represented a new “politico-cultural entity,” in which groups that were more or less politically independent formed a common identity on the basis of shared cultural and

¹ Obolensky, *Byzantine Commonwealth*, 13.

religious values. Fowden referred to the sixth-century situation as the First Byzantine Commonwealth to distinguish it from Obolensky's "Second Commonwealth," which emerged several centuries later and mostly included Slavic peoples of Eastern Europe. Fowden's First Commonwealth was essentially Miaphysite in character: a group of small states and tribal groups across the Near East that embraced a (predominantly) Miaphysite form of Christianity and formed more or less explicit political alliances with the Orthodox (Chalcedonian) Byzantine Empire. The commonwealth included Iberia, Armenia, Ethiopia, Southern Arabia, Nubia, and some Arab tribes. Its existence was defined by a complex web of the multiple identities and loyalties of its members, most of whom identified with the empire and its culture while at the same time seeing the imperial Christian orthodoxy as deeply flawed and misguided.²

Of all the characteristics of Byzantine Commonwealths noted by Obolensky and Fowden, I will focus on a particular type of supersessionist narrative, in which various members of both late antique and medieval commonwealths engaged with remarkable persistence. Whether in its Eastern European version discussed by Obolensky or in its Miaphysite version suggested by Fowden, the Byzantine Commonwealth's views of the imperial center at Constantinople were shaped by complex dialectics of admiration, emulation, and rivalry, all of which developed within a paradigm established by Constantinople's own myth of origins. By the fifth century, Constantinople's claim to be a Second or a New Rome became a fundamental part of the city's religio-political identity. The fact that there could be a Second Rome, however, inevitably led to the possibility that there could also be a Third. The myth of *translatio imperii* created by Byzantine ideologists to justify the imperial status of Constantinople could be used equally well to justify the claims of the other members of the Byzantine Commonwealth to be Constantinople's and Rome's next heirs, destined to inherit and fulfill the two cities' universal mission. In the words of Fowden:

The capital's transfer from the Tiber to the Bosphorus already demonstrated that Romes might be multiplied, according (among other factors) to the

² Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth*, 100–137. Cf. Meyendorff, *Imperial Unity and Christian Divisions*, 95–126.

shifting geography of faith and, naturally, of local self-interest. The Byzantine Commonwealth was no less the product of provincials' mimicry of the center and awareness of their personal, vertical relationship with God, than of imperial impetus and missionary monotheism, universalism's horizontal plane.³

The empire's own mythology was conducive to this sort of claim, and, as a result, the Commonwealth potentially contained within itself a number of alternative holy empires and alternative Romes ready to spring forth and assert themselves in the face of the imperial center's perceived inadequacy.⁴

Religio-political mythologies, which developed on the Miaphysite periphery of the late Roman and early Byzantine world between the fifth and the eighth centuries A.D., provide a good illustration of this kind of supersessionism. From the Miaphysite point of view, the imperial center's perceived inadequacy had to do with its acceptance of the Council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D. The latter was seen as a Nestorian victory by Byzantine Miaphysites, and so, within the Miaphysite collective memory, 451 became the year when the empire lapsed into heresy by abandoning the true faith of the councils of Nicaea and Ephesus. For the Miaphysite community, the years between the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D. and the Council of Chalcedon in 451 became associated with the never realized promise of the "orthodox" Christian empire, whereas Constantine the Great personified the ideal of a Christian ruler. To quote Fowden once more, "the [Miaphysite] commonwealth substituted a more specifically Constantinian and Nicaean persona for generalized identification with Rome and the Church."⁵ The myth of origins developed by the Miaphysite communities within the empire and quickly adopted by local Miaphysite rulers on the empire's periphery portrayed an ideal "orthodox" ruler as a successor of Nicaea, Constantine, and Constantine's imperial vision, that is, of the legacy which the heretical emperors in Constantinople failed to preserve.

³ Fowden, 125. For a later period, cf. Obolensky, *Byzantine Commonwealth*, 142–57, 316–34, and 466–73.

⁴ On the *translatio imperii* doctrine in Byzantine political theory, see Dölger, "Rom in der Gedankenwelt der Byzantiner," 93–111; Irmscher, "'Neurom' oder 'zweites Rom,'" 431–39; Nicol, "Byzantine Political Thought," 58–60.

⁵ Fowden, 127.

In the process the Miaphysite historical mythology adopted and internalized a series of imperial symbols and narratives which, as a rule, met two conditions. On the one hand, they played a significant role within the dominant imperial discourse, and on the other, they could be relatively seamlessly integrated into the Miaphysites' own teleological narrative. By integrating the elements of the dominant imperial discourse into their own teleology, Miaphysites could, among other things, claim ownership of this discourse and position themselves as the discourse's only legitimate recipients. Even though it was subversive with respect to the existing power relations, the resulting Miaphysite narrative was essentially the product of the Byzantine Commonwealth's cultural environment and symbolic universe.⁶

The myth of Constantine and Nicaea was central to Miaphysite collective memory precisely because of its centrality to the dominant imperial discourse and its adaptability to Miaphysite counter-narrative. When the fifth-century Ethiopian rulers advertised themselves as "New Constantines" by using "the triumphant cross" symbolism on their coins, they effectively claimed for themselves the Byzantine imperial discourse.⁷ The same holds true for references to the Constantinian past scattered across the *Kebra Nagast*, as well as for recurring themes of Constantine's reign in Miaphysite Syriac literature, and for the use of Byzantine, and specifically Constantinian, imagery in medieval Nubian court culture.⁸ The *Kebra Nagast* explored a related venue when it traced the origins of the ruling Ethiopian dynasty back to King Solomon. By doing so the *Kebra Nagast* claimed Ethiopian ownership for another symbolic figure who featured prominently in Byzantine self-representation. In the book's narrative the myth of Solomon is inseparably intertwined with that of Constantine, reflecting the fact that both Solomon and Constantine were important precisely because of their prominence in the imperial master narrative.

⁶ In addition to Fowden, see Meyendorff, *Imperial Unity and Christian Divisions*, 251–92, and more recently Van Rompay, "Society and Community in the Christian East," 239–66.

⁷ See Bowersock, "Helena's Bridle," 390–91.

⁸ See Fowden, 109–16, 136–37 (on Southern Arabia and Ethiopia), 116–19, 135–36 (on Nubia), as well as 127, n. 112 (on reverence for Constantine in Ethiopia and Nubia). On Constantine in Miaphysite Syriac literature, see Drijvers, "The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles," 189–213.

The road from biblical Jerusalem to Axum lay through imperial Constantinople. In all of these cases, religious and ethnic groups located on the empire's margins, both socially and geographically, created counter-narratives that positioned them at the empire's center as successors to the dominant imperial culture as well as to that culture's symbols and mythology. Although subversive with respect to existing power relations, these counter-narratives asserted the imperial culture's fundamental values and sought to perpetuate them into the future.⁹

GOALS AND PLAN OF THE PRESENT STUDY

The hypothesis behind this study is that the "commonwealth" paradigm suggested by Obolensky and Fowden can be productively used to describe Jewish experience in the Byzantine Empire in the period between the fifth and the early eighth centuries A.D. Like the Miaphysite community, the Jewish population of the empire constituted a distinct entity within the empire's borders. Like Miaphysites, the Jewish community transcended the political borders of the empire by cultivating close contacts with Jewish communities in Sasanian Babylonia. Like Miaphysites, the Jewish community in the sixth and seventh centuries was becoming increasingly alienated from the imperial Greek culture, increasingly inward-looking and ethnocentric. Along with Coptic and Syriac, and at the expense of Greek, Hebrew was making a comeback as a language of high culture and communal identity.

As I hope to demonstrate later in this work, however, Byzantine Jews very much remained part of the empire. They shared many of its cultural symbols and codes, and identified with many of its institutions and values. Jews constituted a distinct ethnic, religious, and cultural group that nevertheless participated in the symbolic universe of Byzantine culture. In this sense Jews were part of the Byzantine commonwealth. I will argue that, like other Byzantine provincials, Jews developed a coherent worldview that did not merely seek to subvert, undermine, and overturn the dominant imperial discourse. Instead, Byzantine Jews attempted to

⁹ See Shahid, "The *Kebra Negast* in the Light of Recent Research," 133–78; Bowersock, "Helena's Bridle," 383–93; Lourié, "From Jerusalem to Aksum through the Temple of Solomon," 152–54, 166–72 (in Russian).

appropriate this discourse as part of Judaism's own narrative, by following the same fundamental principles as did Ethiopians, Nubians, Syrians, or, later, Slavs. Jewish authors chose elements within the imperial mythology with which they could identify and then integrated these elements into their own teleology. By doing so they positioned themselves as the Byzantine imperial narrative's sole legitimate heirs.

Methodologically my approach has both similarities and differences to recent attempts by David Biale and Ra'anan S. Boustan to interpret some of the Byzantine Jewish literary compositions as examples of "counter-historical" and "counter-geographical" engagement with dominant Byzantine literature.¹⁰ As noted by Biale, the counter-history is a form of revisionism in which the counter-historian, rather than proposing a new theory or finding new facts, "transvalues old ones."¹¹ In other words, the counter-historian acts within an old symbolic universe, appropriating it to express his/her own vision of reality, often at the expense of traditional meanings embedded in this universe. The studies by Biale and Boustan have shown that the use of counter-cultural techniques, including "counter-history" and "counter-geography," was an essential element in Jewish appropriation and internalization of Byzantine cultural codes. To quote Boustan, in a series of late antique and early medieval Jewish texts, such as *Sefer Zerubbabel*, *Toldot Yeshu*, traditions describing the fate of Temple vessels, and the story of R. Ishmael's postmortem mask, "the late antique Jewish writers both mocked and mirrored Roman imperial ideology and the narratives that underwrote it."¹²

Although fundamentally agreeing with Biale's and Boustan's assessment of Byzantine Jewish literature as "counter-historical," I would also like to suggest that part of this counter-historical narrative's goal was to create a distinct ideological system that was every bit as totalizing as Byzantine imperial ideology itself. An essential characteristic of this ideological system was its ability to draw on and claim ownership of the dominant imperial discourse. Byzantine Jewish literature participated in the symbolic universe of Byzantine imperial culture by partly

¹⁰ See Biale, "Counter-History and Jewish Polemics against Christianity," 130–45; Boustan, "The Spoils of the Jerusalem Temple," 362–70.

¹¹ Biale, "Counter-History," 131.

¹² Boustan, "Spoils," 370. On the story of R. Ishmael's martyrdom and postmortem mask, see Boustan, *From Martyr to Mystic*, 121–30.

appropriating and partly subverting the mainstream meaning of the latter's cultural codes. In the latter case, Jewish texts often engaged ambiguities and anxieties already present within the dominant culture. The resulting narrative created new meanings but did so within an old symbolic universe and by using traditional cultural codes. In fact, the preservation of traditional cultural codes was essential to the very project of counter-history. Without them the counter-historical and broader counter-cultural narrative would lose much of its power.

In other words, whereas Biale and Boustán seek to uncover ways in which Jewish counter-history deconstructed the dominant ideological paradigm, I will analyze ways in which Jewish counter-history attempted to build its own ideological master narrative through constant dialogue with the dominant imperial culture. I will also argue that part of this master narrative involved the conscious positioning of Judaism as the successor of Rome's and Constantinople's universalism, in a way that was not significantly different from imperial fantasies taking shape among other marginalized ethnic and religious groups of the Byzantine Commonwealth.

Following Biale's and Boustán's choice of source material for their argument, I will focus my discussion on eschatological Jewish writings produced in the course of the fifth through eighth centuries A.D. These texts were preserved in multiple literary formats, which include sections in classical rabbinic compositions, late antique and early medieval apocalyptic literature, such as *Sefer Zerubbabel* and *'Otot ha-Mashiah*, and finally liturgical poems, *piyyutim*, composed mostly during the turbulent decades of the seventh century. On the Christian side, I will predominantly focus on the sources produced between the fifth and the eighth centuries A.D., with occasional excursions into earlier and later periods. Thus Eusebius' writings will be used extensively due to their seminal role in the formation of Christian imperial ideology and their lasting impact on subsequent Byzantine literature. On the opposite chronological pole, the writings of Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus will also be occasionally consulted because, although composed in the tenth century, they most likely incorporated sources from a much earlier period.

The structure of the book is as follows: The first chapter will explore possible conceptual affinities between Romano-Byzantine imperial eschatology and eschatological motifs in midrashic and Talmudic

literature. Chapter 2 will focus on a particular eschatological scenario preserved in one of the versions of *'Otot ha-Mashiah* and analyze it within its seventh-century Byzantine literary and ideological context. Chapter 3 will revisit different versions of Hephzibah legend, once again discussing them within broader parameters of contemporaneous Byzantine culture. Chapter 4 will take up the *renovatio imperii* theme and trace its applications in Byzantine Jewish literature. Finally, Chapter 5 will discuss the possible impact of late Roman and Byzantine “emperor mystique” on the representations of the Messiah in Jewish eschatological writings. I conclude this book by offering some thoughts about the broader implications of Byzantine Jewish eschatology for the study of Judaism.



Esau, Jacob's Brother

IN HIS HOMILY COMMEMORATING THE DEFENSE OF CONSTANTINOPLE against the Avars and the Persians in 626, Theodore Syncellus hails the sacred and eternal nature of the Byzantine Empire and its capital city by portraying them as the true Israel and New Jerusalem, respectively.¹ Theodore presents an elaborate exegesis of prophetic and historical books of the Old Testament arguing that they should be read as references to the events of 626. Among other things, according to Theodore, the sack of the Old Jerusalem and the salvation of the new one took place on the same date.² This providential coincidence marked the special destiny of the New Jerusalem, Constantinople, to be the religious center of the true Israel as well as the geographic center of the inhabited world, “the navel of the world,” binding the world together in religious and imperial unity.³ Theodore Syncellus stands in a long line of Byzantine authors who used the theme of succession from Israel to Byzantium as a way to buttress the triumphant universalism of the empire. The supersessionist narrative that portrayed Israel as a typological precursor of Christian Byzantium became a ubiquitous feature of Byzantine religio-political discourse and court ritual.⁴

¹ For the edition of the text, see L. Sternbach, *De Georgii Pisidae apud Theophanem aliosque historicos reliquiis* (Cracovia, 1900). Sternbach's edition was reprinted with French translation in F. Makk, *Traduction et commentaire de l'homélie écrite probablement par Théodore le Syncelle sur le siège de Constantinople en 626* (Szeged, 1975).

² Sternbach, 309, lines 1–310, line 36.

³ Sternbach, 314, lines 18–318, line 7. On Constantinople as the navel of the world, see Sternbach, 317.29–31. On Theodore's view of the empire as New Israel, see Spain Alexander, “Heraclius, Byzantine Imperial Ideology and the David Plates,” 222–23, 231–32; Olster, *Roman Defeat*, 72–79.

⁴ See Von Ivánka, *Rhömäerreich und Gottesvolk*, 49–61; Spain Alexander, “Heraclius, Byzantine Imperial Ideology and the David Plates,” 227–29.

Christianity did not invent Roman universalism. The ideology of Rome's eternal rule had a long and deeply rooted pre-Christian history, going all the way back to the Golden Age of Augustus and past him to the republican period.⁵ Yet the Christian Roman Empire and its ideologists proved to be worthy recipients of this age-old doctrine. As a result, an imperial Christian ideology was born that embraced the traditional universalism of Rome and transformed it into a new vision of the eternal Christian empire with a special mission to fulfill. By combining Roman imperial universalism with the messianic universalism of the Hebrew Bible as well as early Christian millenarian expectations, late antique Christianity succeeded in producing a comprehensive and coherent ideological framework that tied together the destiny of imperial Rome with that of Christ's kerygma.⁶

As noted by Milton V. Anastos, many Byzantine authors continued to accept the traditional Jewish and early Christian view of Rome as the fourth in Daniel's fourfold succession of world empires destined to perish just as its predecessors did and "be succeeded by the Last Judgment and the inception of the heavenly kingdom, ushered in by Christ in his Second Coming." There was also, however, a persistent sentiment that the empire of Rome was unique in that it stood right on the border of the two worlds of human and heavenly imperialisms and served as the crossing point between them.⁷ In addition to being the last link in the succession of earthly empires, Rome was the beginning of the heavenly empire of the eschatological future. This view embraced an earlier Roman doctrine that saw Rome as the fifth and ultimate world empire, and combined this doctrine with Daniel's vision of the fifth kingdom "that shall never be destroyed."⁸

Some Christian writers, such as Ephrem the Syrian in the fourth century, viewed Rome as precisely this liminal "fifth" kingdom and the first

⁵ On the Hellenistic and Roman background of this ideology, see Instinsky, "Kaiser und Ewigkeit," 313–55; Von Ivánka, *Rhömäerreich und Gottesvolk*, 13–49.

⁶ See Podskalsky, *Byzantinische Reicheschatologie*, and "Représentation du temps dans l'eschatologie impériale byzantine," 439–50; Mango, *Byzantium*, 201–17; Magdalino, "The History of the Future," 3–34; Olster, "Byzantine Apocalypses," 48–73.

⁷ See Anastos, "Political Theory in the Lives of the Slavic Saints," 21, and, in general, 17–29.

⁸ Dan 2:44. The original relationship between Daniel's vision and the Roman doctrine of Rome as the fifth kingdom remains unclear. See Swain, "The Theory of the Four Monarchies," 1–21, but cf. Mendels, "The Five Empires," 330–37.

step in the transformation of earthly imperial order into the universal kingdom of God.⁹ For Cosmas Indicopleustes, who wrote his *Christian Topography* in the sixth century, the Roman Empire was no longer identical to the last of Daniel's kingdoms, the Iron Kingdom with the feet of clay.¹⁰ Instead, the fourth kingdom of Daniel represented the Hellenistic successors of Alexander the Great, whereas Rome stood in a separate category all by itself: "The Kingdom of the Romans shares in the dignity of the Kingdom of Christ our Lord, surpassing all others as far as possible in this life, and remaining undefeated until the final consummation."¹¹ For Cosmas, Daniel's model of human history ends with the birth of Christ and the age of Augustus, which together usher in an entirely new ontological paradigm.¹² In that sense, the Roman Empire was neither the successor to the previous world empires, such as Babylonians, nor the successor to the Kingdom of Israel, which it destroyed and the institutions of which it abolished. Rather, being providentially contemporaneous with the birth of Christ, the empire of Augustus and his successors received its dominion from God "as the servant of Christ's dispensations."¹³ The imperial rule of Rome was made both eternal and universal by participation in the kingdom of Christ. For Cosmas, God's promise in Daniel 2:44, to "set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed," while referring to Christ, also "enigmatically included the kingdom of the Romans which arose at the same time as Christ our Lord."¹⁴ As a result, the empire was destined to remain undefeated until the end, so as to ensure the worldwide spread of Christianity.¹⁵

In other words, rather than being the last link in Daniel's sequence of four world empires, the Roman Empire of Cosmas constitutes an entirely new religio-political category. It serves as a bridge that crosses

⁹ See Podskalsky, *Byzantinische Reicheschatologie*, 15–16; Griffith, "Ephraem, the Deacon of Edessa, and the Church of the Empire," 22–52; cf. Guran, "Genesis and Function," 282–85, for a broader literary context.

¹⁰ In addition to Podskalsky's works listed earlier, see MacCormack, "Christ and Empire, Time and Ceremonial in Sixth Century Byzantium and Beyond," 287–309; Magdalino, "The History of the Future," 10–11.

¹¹ Cosmas, *Christian Topography*, II, 75. For critical edition, see Cosma Indicopleustès, *Topographie Chrétienne* (ed. W. Wolska-Conus; vol. 1; SC 141; Paris: Cerf, 1968).

¹² Cosmas, *Christian Topography*, II, 69–74.

¹³ Cosmas, *Christian Topography*, II, 74.

¹⁴ Cosmas, *Christian Topography*, II, 74.

¹⁵ Cosmas, *Christian Topography*, II, 75.

over from historical into eschatological reality, from earthly kingdom into the kingdom of heaven, and by means of which the kingdom of Christ will descend to humanity. The Roman Empire becomes a symbol of the heavenly kingdom in that it continuously participates in the strength of its prototype and will ultimately play the role of the receptacle that will receive the prototype into itself, thus uniting forever heaven and earth within a new creation. In the meantime, the political universalism of Rome serves the universal mission of Christianity by allowing Christianity to spread across the world, thus preparing the world for ultimate consummation. In the words of Paul Magdalino, Cosmas “saw the Kingdom of Heaven as being both imminent and immanent in the Christian Empire.”¹⁶ As a result, the imperial Christian discourse tended to shift away from Daniel’s original message about the transiency of imperial rule and toward the notion that Rome’s embrace of Christianity assured the last empire’s continuous existence until the time of final consumption, which, in its own right, was often perceived as growing rather seamlessly from Roman imperial universalism.¹⁷

The amended reading of Daniel’s four-kingdom scheme went hand in hand with an innovative reading of the eschatological prophecy in 2 Thessalonians 2:6–8. Among other things, the epistle warned the faithful about the imminent arrival of “the Lawless One” during the last days:

And you know what is now restraining him [the Lawless One], so that he may be revealed when his time comes. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work, but only until the one who now restrains it is removed. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will destroy with the breath of his mouth, annihilating him by the manifestation of his coming.¹⁸

Whatever the original meaning of the restraining force preventing “the Lawless One” from coming might have been, in late Roman and Byzantine Christian literature this phrase came to be understood as a reference to the Roman Empire, the continuous presence of which prevented the Antichrist from coming. According to this scenario, after imperial rule

¹⁶ Magdalino, “The History of the Future,” 11.

¹⁷ See Podskalsky, *Byzantinische Reicheschatologie*, 55, n. 332; Rauh, *Das Bild des Antichrist im Mittelalter*, 60–64.

¹⁸ Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations from the Bible follow the *New Revised Standard Version*.

was removed it would be replaced by the universal reign of the Antichrist, which would eventually be brought to an end by Christ's Second Coming.

Like the previous tradition, this one also envisioned a special mission for the Roman Empire. Yet, whereas in the first case the transition from the kingdom of Rome to the kingdom of heaven was rather seamless and straightforward, the second scenario added considerably more drama to the process. The transition's smooth flow would be interrupted by the demonic antipode of Rome's universal empire: the universal rule of the Antichrist.¹⁹ The latter, in fact, might have been envisioned by some readers as growing straight from and on the basis of the empire's universal embrace. Even when such a direct correlation was lacking, however, the Antichrist's rule looked much like a caricatured inversion of Rome's universalistic mission. Before the latter could find its ultimate fulfillment in the Second Coming and the Universal Kingdom of Christ, it had to experience its ultimate profanation in the reign of the Antichrist. Despite all the differences between them, both scenarios coexisted rather peacefully within the late Roman and Byzantine eschatological imagination, establishing the basis for what is called in modern scholarship "byzantinische Reichseschatologie" by Gerhard Podskalsky and "imperial eschatology" by G. Reinink: an eschatological model that focused on the destiny of the Roman and, later, Byzantine Empire during the last days.²⁰

I shall presently argue that by the time Theodore Syncellus was composing his homily, Byzantine Jews had also developed their own supersessionist narrative that both internalized and inverted a traditional Christian Roman supersessionism. This narrative envisioned Jews as the legitimate heirs of the Roman imperial legacy. The vision was a complex one: On the one hand, it was based on the notion that Jews were merely taking back what was originally theirs. The messianic kingdom of Israel was the restoration of the original Davidic kingdom that alone could be the true holder of sacred statehood. All subsequent empires that claimed such statehood were usurpers of the right originally intended for the Israelite kingdom but then taken away from it because of the sinfulness of its rulers and people. On the other hand, the specific visions of messianic restoration in Byzantine Jewish texts were presented in terms

¹⁹ Cf. Olster, "Byzantine Apocalypses," 67–68.

²⁰ See Reinink, "Heraclius, the New Alexander," 83.

borrowed from the Byzantine imperial culture. In that sense, the messianic kingdom of Israel was portrayed as a direct successor of Rome, or, to put it differently, Rome served as a bleak prototype, an inadequate symbol, foreshadowing the true reality of sacred empire to be embodied in the messianic kingdom of Israel. In this context, the imperial features of the Byzantine state were perceived as dim and garbled reflections, the true meaning of which could be expressed only by Israel. In the grand task of building heaven on earth that Rome misunderstood and at which it ultimately failed, Israel was to succeed, because God intended Israel, not Rome, to be the true recipient of sacred statehood. Whereas Theodore Syncellus envisioned Byzantium as the true Israel and Constantinople as the New Jerusalem, Jewish apocalyptic texts saw the messianic kingdom of Israel as the ultimate world empire, the fifth kingdom of Rome's political mythology, which would serve as the bridge from human to divine universalism. The road from Davidic Israel and its capital city to messianic Israel and its capital city lay through the Empire of Rome.²¹

ISRAEL AS ROME'S HEIR

In the late third and early fourth centuries, the Alexandrian theologian Origen and his student, Eusebius, the bishop of Caesarea, formulated views on the symbiotic relationship between the Roman *basileia* and the Christian Church that would become a cornerstone of Byzantine political philosophy for centuries to come.²² According to Origen and Eusebius, it was the universal Roman Empire of Augustus that set a stage for Christ's arrival and the ultimate spread of the Christian Gospel to all corners of the inhabited world. The *Pax Augusti* removed differences among peoples on political, administrative, and economic levels, thus creating conditions in which the successful preaching of Christianity became possible. Roman

²¹ Cf. Klausner's observation to the effect that "the fall of the Roman world-empire would make possible the appearance of the Messianic world-empire." See Klausner, *The Messianic Idea*, 433. Klausner's overall argument about the this-worldly nature of the messianic age needs to be revisited in this context (Klausner, 408–19). See also Schäfer, "Zur Geschichtsauffassung des rabbinischen Judentums," 37–43.

²² Origen, *Contra Celsum* 2.30; Eusebius, *Dem. Evang.* 3.7.30–35. See Peterson, *Der Monotheismus als politisches Problem*, 63–81; Dvornik, *Early Christian and Byzantine Political Philosophy*, vol. 2, 604 (on Origen), and 614–16 (on Eusebius).

imperial universalism met the Christian universalism of faith, and for Origen and Eusebius the two were a perfect match.

As time went on, the idea of the universal Roman Empire creating a setting for triumphant Christianity would become virtually commonplace in fourth-century patristic philosophy.²³ The Messiah came into the world dominated by Augustan Rome to transform imperial rule into the kingdom of God and perhaps also to renovate the empire itself into a mystical body politic that bridged the chasm between heaven and earth. In fact, it has been argued that, in the course of the first three centuries A.D., the ecclesiastical order of the Christian Church often developed in conscious imitation of that of the imperial cult. In doing so the Church constructed its own counter-culture, which provided its members with either a sense of participation in or a viable alternative to the ideals, symbols, and rituals of Roman imperial culture. In the process, the nascent Church, along with many other local eastern cults of the day, both internalized and reconfigured the imperial universalism of Rome, and eventually positioned itself as the only true embodiment and ultimate fulfillment of Rome's universalistic mission. Origen and Eusebius merely provided one of several possible philosophical articulations for an ideology that had long been in the making.²⁴

Jewish eschatological fantasies of the first two centuries A.D. also routinely described the messianic age as following directly in the wake and, perhaps, growing out of the Roman Empire. 4 Ezra 6:8–10, an apocalypse most likely composed at the turn of the first and second centuries A.D., interprets the story of Esau's and Jacob's birth in Genesis 25:23–26 as a prophecy of succession:

From Abraham to Isaac, because from him were born Jacob and Esau, for Jacob's hand held Esau's heel from the beginning. For Esau is the end of this age, and Jacob is the beginning of the age that follows. For the beginning of a man is his hand, and the end of a man is his heel, between the heel and the hand seek for nothing else, Ezra!²⁵

²³ See Peterson, *Der Monotheismus als politisches Problem*, 91–98; Dvornik, *Political Philosophy*, vol. 2, 725–26; Podskalsky, "Représentation du temps," 439–50.

²⁴ See Brent, *The Imperial Cult and the Development of Church Order*; Elsner, *Roman Eyes*, 225–52.

²⁵ I follow Metzger's translation.

Indeed, as the subsequent revelation to Ezra makes clear, Rome will be succeeded by the prolonged yet finite reign of the human Messiah, ending with his and the rest of humanity's death, the seven-day period of "primeval silence," resurrection of the dead, and the Last Judgment.²⁶ Although the details of messianic reign are lacking, it seems likely that the Messianic Age is understood to copy the universalistic rule of Rome in a way that resembles counter-cultural narratives of the early Church.²⁷

Another roughly contemporaneous apocalypse, 2 Baruch, follows a similar approach to history by seeing Rome as the final kingdom in Daniel's four-kingdom sequence. With Rome's fall, "the dominion of my Anointed One which is like the fountain and the vine" is ushered in.²⁸ In a scene that, in the words of Philip F. Esler, may have been intentionally designed as "a parody of the Roman triumph," the last ruler of Rome will be bound and brought before the Messiah's trial, which will take place on Mount Zion.²⁹ The Messiah will convict and kill him, and the Messiah's own dominion "will last forever until the world of corruption has ended."³⁰ As noted by John J. Collins, 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch share the same eschatological scenario, which "has no clear precedent in earlier traditions" and represents "an attempt to combine different eschatological traditions, one of which looks for a kingdom on this earth while the other looks for resurrection of the dead and a new creation, by having each tradition define a stage in the eschatological process."³¹ In both instances, it must be added, the earthly messianic kingdom represents a millenarian application of Roman imperial ideology. Both 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch create a narrative that portrays the messianic kingdom as the successor to Roman universalism and, at the same time, as the institutionalized transition from the world of human empires to the world of new creation. This narrative was further developed in later rabbinic tradition.

It has been often argued that rabbinic Judaism viewed the fall of Rome as a prerequisite for the Messiah's arrival. Even though rabbinic literature

²⁶ 4 Ezra 7:26–44, esp. 28–31.

²⁷ Elsewhere in 4 Ezra the Davidic Messiah is described as pronouncing eschatological judgment over the Roman Empire. See 4 Ezra 11:1–12:35. Cf. 4 Ezra 13:1–56.

²⁸ 2 Baruch 39:7 (Klijn's translation).

²⁹ See Esler, "God's Honour and Rome's Triumph," 257, and, in general, 239–58.

³⁰ 2 Baruch 40:1–4. Cf. the judgment of nations by the Messiah in 2 Baruch 72.

³¹ See Collins, *The Scepter and the Star*, 186.

often exhibited a conciliatory approach toward Roman rule, stressed the policy of accommodation, and discouraged Jews from actively trying to bring about the messianic redemption by rebelling against Rome, rabbis still believed that in the eschatological future the fall of the "evil kingdom" of Rome would be the fundamental element to usher in the messianic era.³² To some extent this view is certainly correct. Yet, as I hope to show presently, it also needs to be considerably more nuanced to allow room for Jewish adaptations of contemporaneous imperial eschatology and the resulting vision of a close relationship between the universal rule of Rome and Israel's messianic future.

The notion that the rule of Rome served to establish peace and security across the world, widely attested in the third- and fourth-century patristic literature, was not entirely alien to the early rabbinic literature either, even though this view was more than balanced by negative assessments of Rome's authority.³³ Nor was the notion that Israel would inherit the world dominion from Rome a foreign one:

A [Roman] prefect asked a member of the family of Sallu: "Who will take hold of [the kingdom] after us?"

He brought a blank piece of paper, took a quill and wrote on it: "And after that his brother emerged, his hand holding Esau's heel; and his name was called Jacob" (Genesis 25:26).

Of this it was said: "See how ancient words become new in the mouth of a sage."³⁴

Along the lines of 4 Ezra, the midrash applies the story of Esau's and Jacob's birth to the succession of kingdoms. Just like Jacob, Esau's younger brother, emerged from his mother's womb immediately following his

³² See, recently, Schremer, "Midrash and History," 5–36. On the fall of Rome, see also Hadas-Lebel, *Jérusalem contre Rome*, 468–73; Feldman, "Rabbinic Insights," 284–88. On the conciliatory approach toward Roman rule, see de Lange, "Jewish Attitudes," 272–81; Hadas-Lebel, 245–75. Cf. Glatzer, "The Attitude to Rome," 9–19, for the view that the Sages chose to completely abandon this-worldly messianism in favor of spiritual messianism. For a broader review of rabbinic attitudes to Rome, see Stemberger, "Die Beurteilung Roms," 381–95, and *Die Römische Herrschaft*, 106–46.

³³ See Hadas-Lebel, *Jérusalem contre Rome*, 351–82; Feldman, "Some Observations," 63–67 (on positive views), and 67–80 (on criticism). De Lange, "Jewish Attitudes," 274, correctly points out that both praises and complaints of this sort would be typical for any provincial.

³⁴ *Gen. R.* 63:8 (Theodor and Albeck, 692). The translation follows Freedman in *Midrash Rabbah*, vol. 2, 565, with slight changes.

elder brother and clasping his brother's heel, so too the kingdom of Israel was destined to emerge in the immediate wake of the Roman Empire, inheriting world dominion from it. By identifying Rome and Israel with Esau and Jacob, the midrash implies more than just simple succession of empires. The two kingdoms are indeed brothers, born of one mother and standing in intimate relationship with one another. According to Origen and Eusebius, the *Pax Augusti* unified the entire world under its rule to prepare it to receive the Gospel of Christ. According to midrash, Rome the Esau opened his mother's womb so that his younger brother Jacob could follow in his wake. Elsewhere the *Genesis Rabbah* states that the last Roman emperor, who succeeds the emperor Titus (Diocletian?), is destined to amass treasures (תיסוויית) for the royal Messiah of Israel (למלך המשיח). In the meantime, the prophet Elijah watches over the rulers of Rome to make sure that they do not squander the riches amassed by their forefathers and presumably earmarked for the Messiah.³⁵ For both Christian and Jewish authors, the universal Roman Empire was there to prepare the world for the arrival of the messianic kingdom, and the messianic kingdom was destined to inherit and complete the universalistic mission of the Roman Empire.

There was profound ambivalence in rabbinic attitudes toward Rome. On the one hand, Rome was widely perceived as the fourth of Daniel's beasts (world empires) destined to rule the earth.³⁶ In that sense it was no different from the preceding three kingdoms, perhaps surpassing them in brutality but fundamentally belonging to the same category as they did. On the other hand, there was a distinct school of thought that saw Rome as having a special relationship with Israel. After all, Edom was Jacob's brother. In this sense, as de Lange has perceptively observed, imperial Rome was Israel's brother as well. The two of them had a shared destiny to rule the world.³⁷ In fact, as another passage of *Genesis Rabbah*

³⁵ *Gen. R.* 83:4 (Theodor and Albeck, 1000). On this story, see Daniel Sperber, *Magic and Folklore in Rabbinic Literature* (Jerusalem: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1994): 127–30. On Diocletian in rabbinic literature, see Stemberger, "Die Beurteilung Roms," 378–81, and *Die Römische Herrschaft*, 97–100.

³⁶ On the "four empires" scheme in rabbinic literature, see Hadas-Lebel, *Jérusalem contre Rome*, 473–82; Raviv, "The Talmudic Formulation of the Prophecies," 1–20.

³⁷ See de Lange, "Jewish Attitudes to the Roman Empire," 269–71. On the shared destiny/mission of Rome and Israel, see Cohen, "Esau as Symbol," 25–26; Feldman, "Some Observations," 46–48. Cf. Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb*, 10–20, and Schremer, *Brothersnged*, 126–34.

observes, it was ordained that sovereignty would belong sequentially to two brothers, first to Esau and then to Jacob, because the world was not big enough to contain both at the same time. Knowing that, Jacob had voluntarily surrendered the imperial purple to his elder brother.³⁸

According to a different tradition, when Jacob had a vision of the heavenly ladder in Genesis 28:12, he saw a sequence of the guardian angels of four world empires ascending and descending the ladder. Two interpretations of the vision follow. The first interpretation claims that Jacob saw the angel of Edom (Rome) going all the way up to heaven, with no one to stop him. Upon asking God whether Rome would ever lose its power, Jacob received an answer that although the angel of Rome seemingly reached heaven, he would be all the same brought down by God. According to the second interpretation, Jacob saw the angels of four world empires, including Rome, ascending and descending the ladder. Being afraid that upon going up the ladder he would eventually have to come down as well, Jacob disbelieved God's promise of eternal rule and refused to ascend. As a result, instead of making himself and his descendants the world's last and ultimate rulers, Jacob doomed them to become subjects to the other four kingdoms until the time of final redemption.³⁹

Jacob's ladder, on which the angels of four world empires attempt to scale the heavens, echoes Cosmas Indicopleustes' claim that Rome is destined to share "in the honors of the Kingdom of Christ our Lord." Whereas Cosmas looks for the ultimate fulfillment of the Roman Empire in its union with the Kingdom of Heaven, the midrash, at the first glance, seems to critique such an approach. Yet, the midrash's critique of imperial ideology is far from absolute. Rather than dismissing the paradigm of imperial ascent altogether, the midrash reserves it for Jacob/Israel, who is portrayed as the sole intended recipient of this paradigm. The midrash entertains for a moment the option of Rome's successful ascent on the ladder, perhaps reflecting the readiness of some Jews to accept the narrative of Rome's invincibility, but then decisively rejects such a scenario. It is Israel, not Rome, for whom the honor of uniting the Kingdom of Heaven and imperial universalism is ultimately intended.

³⁸ *Gen. R.* 75:4 (Theodor and Albeck, 882).

³⁹ See *Lev. R.* 29:2 (Margulies, 670–71).

For rabbis Rome was more than just another kingdom in the sequence of Daniel's four empires. By identifying Rome/Esau as the brother of Israel/Jacob, rabbinic tradition singled out the Roman Empire as being both different from its predecessors and, at the same time, having a special connection to Israel. Rome's special mission was to perfect the principle of imperial universalism and to transfer it to Israel, Rome's brother and imperial heir. Such an approach both internalized and transformed Roman historiosophic discourse. On the one hand, rabbis recognized Rome's special status among earlier world powers; on the other hand, they took away from Rome and assigned to Israel a unique distinction as the world's last great empire destined to ascend Jacob's ladder all the way up to heaven. The imperial eschatology of Origen, Eusebius, and Cosmas Indicopleustes was destined to find its fulfillment in the messianic kingdom of Israel.

RESTORATION OF THE CROWN

One fundamental difference between Christian imperial eschatology and rabbinic literature should not be overlooked. Unlike Eusebius, the authors of Jewish texts do not envision the messianic kingdom of Israel as the act of *renovatio imperii Romani*.⁴⁰ Instead they embrace a supersessionist model of history. Although it grows out of the world empire of Rome, the world empire of Israel does not serve to bring about the former's renewal in a way that the Christian empire of Eusebius does. Instead Israel supersedes Rome as the last universal kingdom on earth but also as the restored Davidic kingdom: the first and archetypal world empire the glory and universal rule of which were temporarily inherited by Rome. In rabbinic historical mythology, the rise of Rome was directly related to the failure of Davidic Israel to live up to Torah's moral and religious standards:

It is on the day on which the Romans seized power . . .

Said R. Levi: It is the day on which Solomon intermarried with the family of Pharaoh Necho, King of Egypt. On that day Michael came down and thrust

⁴⁰ On Eusebius, see Ladner, *The Idea of Reform*, 119–25. For a later period, see Alexander, "Strength of Empire," 348–54.

a reed into the sea, and pulled up muddy alluvium, and this was turned into a huge pot, and this was the great city of Rome.

On the day on which Jeroboam set up the two golden calves, Remus and Romulus came up and built two huts in the city of Rome.

On the day on which Elijah disappeared, a king was appointed in Rome: "There was no king in Edom; a deputy was king" (1 Kings 22:47).⁴¹

According to this story, which appears to be a moralizing reworking of the Roman historiosophic *topos* on the sequence of world empires, the stages in Rome's rise to power corresponded to the stages of Israel's moral downfall.⁴² As Phillip Alexander has noted, the very creation of Rome from a chunk of mud lifted from the sea by Michael's reed can be read as a mockery of Jerusalem's status as the navel of the earth in rabbinic tradition.⁴³ When Solomon sinned by marrying into the family of a foreign ruler, a parody on the navel was created: a new navel of the earth, "the great city of Rome."

In addition to providing a moral, the story also conveys a political message. The city of Rome emerges as the historical successor of Davidic Israel. Israel's failure to follow Torah made Rome the new navel of the earth and the new world empire. By intermarrying with the Pharaoh Necho's family, Solomon initiated the transition of power. Later generations of Israel completed it by committing further religious transgressions. Rome's power lies in its appropriation of the descent from the Davidic kingdom of Israel. In fact Rome's power *is* that of Israel. The roots of Rome's supremacy go back to the archetypal superpower of rabbinic tradition: the kingdom of David and Solomon. It was through the divinely orchestrated transition of power from the lapsing Davidic dynasty to "the great city of Rome" that the latter's status as the world's superpower was established. Such a narrative both legitimizes Rome's

⁴¹ y. 'Abod. Zar. 1:2 (39c). The translation is from Neusner, *The Talmud of the Land of Israel*, vol. 33, 22–23. Slightly different versions of the same legend appear also in some manuscripts of *Sifre Deut.* 52 (Finkelstein, 119), where they seem to be a later addition to the text, *Song R.* 1:6:4, b. Sanh. 21b, and b. Shabb. 56b. See Krauss, *Paras we-Romi*, 14–19; Stemberger, "Die Beurteilung Roms," 393–94, and *Die Römische Herrschaft*, 118 (including earlier literature cited there); Hadas-Lebel, *Jérusalem contre Rome*, 358–59; Bohak, "The Hellenization of Biblical History," 4–8; Feldman, "Some Observations," 59–62, and "Abba Kolon," 239–66, esp. 239–42.

⁴² On Roman parallels, see Trieber, "Die Idee der Vier Weltreiche," 321–44.

⁴³ Alexander, "Jerusalem as the *Omphalos* of the World," 116.

present status as the world's dominating force and creates a historical vision within which Rome's power can ultimately be reclaimed by its original and true owner, Israel.⁴⁴

The rabbinic mythology of Rome as the successor of Davidic Israel also included a series of legends that described the transition of royal insignia from Israel to the subsequent world empires. As Ra'anan Boustan has recently argued, these legends used the physical movement of Israel's royal regalia to trace "the historical trajectory of divine favor, from Israel's glorious past to Roman ascendancy and, finally, to Israel's future vindication."⁴⁵ One example of such a narrative, analyzed by Boustan, can be found in the midrashic commentary on the book of Esther, which tracks the whereabouts of the throne of Solomon.⁴⁶ According to the midrash, the Persian king Ahasuerus was denied the honor to sit on the throne of Solomon, because only the universal ruler (קוֹמָקְרָטוֹר) could sit on it.⁴⁷ Because Ahasuerus' kingdom did not quite qualify as the world empire, its ruler had to satisfy himself with an inferior replica of Solomon's throne.

The tradition that Ahasuerus sat on the throne of Solomon was already known by the mid-third century. Two frescoes on the western wall of the Dura Europos synagogue depict King Solomon and King Ahasuerus administering justice from two identically-looking thrones.⁴⁸ The Dura Europo frescoes provide no indication that Ahasuerus' royal seat was in any way an inferior replica of Solomon's throne. Most likely, the tradition that informed these paintings postulated that King Ahasuerus inherited the throne of King Solomon. Perhaps, this tradition further idealized Ahasuerus as a "Second Solomon": a wise monarch whose treatment of the Jews in the Book of Esther paralleled the wise judgment of Solomon. The midrash's dismissive treatment of Ahasuerus and his

⁴⁴ Cf. Jerome's view of biblical Israel as *imperium*. See Fanning, "Jerome's Concepts of Empire," 243–44.

⁴⁵ Boustan, "Spoils," 363. Cf. Shimoff, "Hellenization among the Rabbis," 185–86.

⁴⁶ *Esth. R.* 1:12. On other versions of this legend, see Ginzberg, *Legends*, vol. 6, 296–98, n. 69–73.

⁴⁷ On the title *cosmocrator* in Rabbinic literature, see Krauss, *Paras we-Romi*, 87–89; Shimoff, "Hellenization among the Rabbis," 184–85. Cf. Jerome's reference to Ahasuerus as *imperator*, in Fanning, "Jerome's Concepts of Empire," 242–43.

⁴⁸ See Kraeling, *The Synagogue*, 88–93, plate XXVIII (Solomon), and 157–64, plate LXV (Ahasuerus).

throne should be seen, in part, as a polemic against this positive image of Ahasuerus.⁴⁹

The midrash continues with a multilayered interpretation of the throne, saying that the throne was modeled on the divine chariot, and its six steps symbolically represented the six firmaments, the six orders of the Mishnah, the six days of creation, the six patriarchs, and the six moral guidelines that the king had to follow. The throne, in other words, symbolically embodied the totality of creation. Whoever ruled from it exercised universal rule modeled on the universal rule of God. This view of Solomon's kingship appears to be commonplace in Byzantine Jewish literature. Another midrash, *Song of Songs Rabbah*, states even more explicitly that, "just as the throne of the Holy One, blessed be He, has sway from one end of the world to the other, so the throne of Solomon had sway from one end of the world to the other."⁵⁰ That is, Solomon's throne and the king's universal reign were modeled on the throne and the universal rule of God.

It was as a result of Solomon's failure to live up to the latter that eventually his throne was lost to other world rulers. When Solomon died, the Egyptian Pharaoh Shishak came and captured the throne from Israel. Because Shishak took the throne as his daughter's marriage settlement, the midrash apparently identifies Shishak with the Pharaoh whose daughter Solomon had married in violation of one of the commandments that the throne itself symbolized. Afterward, the throne was captured from Shishak by Zerah the Ethiopian and taken back from Zerah by king Asa of Judah. "It has been taught," – the midrash adds, – "that Asa and all the kings of Judah sat upon it." When Nebuchadnezzar sacked Jerusalem he brought the throne to Babylon. From Babylon it was captured by Persia, then by Greece, and eventually by Rome, where its remains were still kept.

The midrash portrays Solomon as more than just Israel's greatest king. He is also the archetypal world ruler, the *cosmocrator*, modeled after Roman and Byzantine emperors but introduced as their forerunner.

⁴⁹ One may wonder if the standard portrayal of Ahasuerus in Jewish literature as a paradigmatically comic and dim-witted monarch also came as a reaction against his idealization in some Jewish circles.

⁵⁰ *Song R.* 1:1:10 (Simon's translation in *Midrash Rabbah*, vol. 9, 14).

That in turn makes Davidic Israel the first universal empire that established the pattern for all subsequent world empires of human history. It also produced the insignia the possession of which legitimized the imperial claims of all subsequent world rulers. Only the *cosmocrator* had the right to sit on Solomon's throne, the quintessential symbolic embodiment of universal imperialism extending far beyond the earth's confines, embracing the six firmaments of heaven and the six days of creation, and ultimately patterned on the divine chariot. The story of the throne's peregrinations has its double in the story that credited the biblical Joseph with amassing "all the gold and silver in the world" and bringing it to Egypt.⁵¹ The treasure was later taken by Israelites fleeing Egypt during the Exodus and belonged to Israel until it was seized first by Shishak of Egypt, then by Zerah of Ethiopia and other world rulers. The treasure eventually made it to Rome, where it was still kept at the time of the midrash, presumably to finance the expansion of Rome's world empire. All these legends share the common theme of ancient Israelite rulers laying down the foundation of universal imperialism, either by inventing the imperial insignia the possession of which legitimized the status of later world rulers or by amassing treasures that sustained subsequent empires.

According to Boustán's interpretation of the *Esther Rabbah* story, "the fate of Solomon's throne indexes the political fortunes of the numerous great empires that have shaped the history of Israel from its earliest beginnings."⁵² The throne "embodies divine favor itself, as it is passed from Egypt to Ethiopia to Babylonia to Persia to Greece to Rome." In addition to using the eschatological four-empire scheme of Daniel, however, the story also draws on multiple elements within contemporaneous Byzantine historical mythology. The sixth-century historian John Malalas describes the peregrinations of the Palladium of Troy in similar terms. Before it is finally brought by Constantine the Great to Constantinople, thus securing the city's status as the successor of both Rome and Troy, the palladium (a small statue of Pallas Athena) repeatedly changes hands, moving from one mythical character to another and from one city to the next, until it is taken by Romus [sic] to Rome, and then, eventually,

⁵¹ B. Pes. 119a. See Krauss, *Paras we-Romi*, 258–60.

⁵² Boustán, "Spoils," 363.

by Constantine to Constantinople.⁵³ Unlike the *Esther Rabbah*, which focuses on the succession of empires and its rulers, the story of the paladium's travels as narrated by Malalas seems to be more concerned with individual cities and personages associated with them. Apart from this distinction, the genre of the two accounts is remarkably similar. Both texts envision the transmission of sacred relics as being essential for the empire's myth of origins. Both of them are designed, in the words of Elizabeth Jeffreys, "to show the continuity of talismanic authority."⁵⁴ The midrash merely substitutes Israelite relics for the Roman ones, so as to claim for biblical Israel the place of honor in the empire's historical mythology, but also to provide grounds for Israel's restorative claims.

By bringing up biblical Israelite heritage, the midrash also uses and reinterprets the contemporaneous Byzantine narrative of Christian Rome as the sole legitimate successor of Davidic Israel. The idea of Constantinople as the New Jerusalem that overshadows and supplants the old one, and the related concept of the Byzantine emperor as the new David/Solomon who inherits the office of his Israelite forerunners had become a common feature of Byzantine religio-political rhetoric at least since the fifth century.⁵⁵ In part, as Gilbert Dagron has observed, this emphasis on biblical royal ancestry had to do with the nature of Byzantine imperial succession within which the idea of biologically perpetuated dynasty never quite took root.⁵⁶ Rather than biological descent, the main qualification required of the emperor was his election by God, the requirement that often opened up the imperial office to the most successful bidder who potentially could be of low origins. In the absence of a biological lineage, a mythical one had to be created, and it was created for the office itself rather than for individual emperors who occupied it at any given moment. By entering the office, the emperor succeeded to a line of kings that descended from the early rulers of the Bible. The office had the power to sanctify its holder no matter what his origins were. By becoming the emperor, the person automatically acquired the ancestry

⁵³ For a list of relevant passages, see Jeffreys, "Malalas' World View," 58, n. 4.

⁵⁴ Jeffreys, "Malalas' World View," 58.

⁵⁵ See Spain Alexander, "David Plates," 227, n. 53, and 54. On Constantinople as New Jerusalem, see also Magdalino, "The History of the Future," 11–12.

⁵⁶ See Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, 24–35, 48–50.

of biblical kings and entered, to quote Dagron, “a sort of ideal dynasty which weakened the role of hereditary ties or compensated for their absence.”⁵⁷ It remains unclear to what extent claims to possess actual Israelite insignia by Byzantine emperors were part of this rhetoric at its early stages. These claims were certainly important later on during the reign of the Macedonian dynasty, when the *pignora imperii* theme was further developed. According to this theme Constantinople’s possession of such imperial relics as the Staff of Moses and the Throne of Solomon guaranteed the sanctity and permanence of the empire. Unfortunately there is insufficient evidence to prove that Israelite relics played the same role in the earlier period, and for now the question must remain unresolved.⁵⁸

Quite in line with Byzantine political theory, the *Esther Rabbah* portrays the Roman/Byzantine emperor as a successor to Israel’s imperial office as well as the recipient of Israel’s royal insignia, the true repositories of divine power that make the very existence and success of the empire possible. According to the midrash, the legitimizing *sacra* of the empire are indeed Israelite in nature, but rather than guaranteeing Rome’s permanence and invulnerability, they spell its doom. At the end the imperial insignia will be restored to their sole rightful owner, Israel, which will replace Rome as the true sacred kingdom. Midrash *Leviticus Rabbah* 13:5 interprets the list of unclean animals in Leviticus 11:4–8 as a symbolic code designating Daniel’s four world empires that will dominate Israel and their respective characteristics. The swine is taken to refer to Rome, the last world empire:

“The swine” (Lev 11:7) is an allusion to Edom; “Which does not chew the cud (גֵּרָה לֹא יִגֵּר),” i.e., which will not bring in its train (נִרְרָה) another empire to follow it.

And why is the last-named called swine (חֲזִיר)? Because it will yet restore the crown to its owner (שְׂמֹחֶזֶר עֲטֶרָה לְבַעֲלָה). This is indicated by what is written,

⁵⁷ Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, 271.

⁵⁸ On biblical relics in the Middle Byzantine period, see Treitinger, *Die oströmische Kaiser- und Reichsidee*, 129–35; Flusin, “Construire une nouvelle Jérusalem,” 51–70. On historical and ideological context, see Brubaker, “To Legitimize an Emperor,” 139–58; Markopoulos, “Constantine the Great in Macedonian Historiography,” 159–70; Tougher, “The Wisdom of Leo VI,” 171–79.

“And saviors shall come up on Mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau; and the kingdom shall be the Lord’s” (Obadiah 21).⁵⁹

In the eschatological future Israel will reclaim its insignia (in this case, the crown) from the empire of Rome, thus ending the succession of world empires and establishing its own messianic rule. Emperor Constantine made wearing a diadem an important part of Roman imperial symbolism. During the reigns of later emperors the diadem acquired a variety of new meanings, both political and religious, and gradually became one of the central attributes of Christian imperial rule.⁶⁰ Our midrash belongs within this Christian Roman and Byzantine ideological context. By reclaiming the crown from Rome, eschatological Israel reclaims the mystical force of Israel’s royal insignia that served to empower the world’s greatest empires. What Israel gets back is the *same* crown that made Rome’s rule possible. It is the *same* crown that belonged to David. According to midrash, there is only one crown that originated in Davidic Israel, went to Rome, and eventually came back to sanctify the messianic kingdom of Israel.

The story’s emphasis on a particular physical object as the legitimizing force behind imperial succession presupposes the view that special powers are contained only within certain insignia and nowhere else. Only such objects can be passed on from a previous ruler to the next to legitimize the new ruler’s status as the emperor. It still remains unclear to what extent Byzantine imperial tradition of the fourth through sixth centuries attached special significance to particular objects, rather than considering any manufactured insignia to be a legitimate sign of accession.⁶¹ The

⁵⁹ Margulies, 295. The translation follows that of Slotki in *Midrash Rabbah*, vol. 4, 176, with minor changes. A slightly different version of this midrash appears in one of Yannai’s poems, in which Rome is expected to restore “the kingdom to its holy owner,” but there is no reference to the crown. See Rabinowitz, *Halakhah we-aggadah bi-fiyute Yannai*, 232–33. Cf. also *Qoh. R.* 1:28, which reads “the greatness and the kingdom” instead of “the crown.”

⁶⁰ On the range of meanings that the imperial diadem had in Hellenistic and Roman political symbolism, see Alföldi, “Insignien und Tracht,” 38–41, and 145–50. On the role of Constantine and subsequent development of diadem’s symbolism, see Kolb, *Herrscherideologie in der Spätantike*, 76–79, 105–108, 113–14, and 201–204. See also Cameron, *Corippus*, commentary on 2.162, and literature cited there. On references to the imperial crown in rabbinic literature, see Krauss, *Paras we-Romi*, 44–47.

⁶¹ MacCormack, *Art and Ceremony*, 184–85, argues that, during this period, the objects in themselves were acquiring special and sacred status. Cf. Cameron, *Corippus*, commentary on 2.86f, for a different view.

midrash assumes that there could be only one crown, the transmission of which in the course of human history legitimized the world rule of its owner. As a result, the restoration of the crown reclaims for Israel the sole right to exercise world dominion, the right that has been arrogated by others, thus resulting in Daniel's scheme of four world empires. The midrash transforms the myth of eternal Roman Empire into that of the eternal kingdom of Israel. Israel takes the place of Rome as the last world empire destined to rule until the end of time.

Despite its supersessionist narrative (or, perhaps, because of it), the midrash fully embraces the script of Byzantine political mythology as outlined by Dagron. Israel inherits the imperial office (symbolized by the crown) through election by God, just as numerous late Roman and Byzantine emperors did. In addition, just like them, Israel becomes another link in the mythical lineage of the imperial office that goes back to the early kings of the Bible. In both instances the office is perceived as having power of its own to sanctify and legitimize whoever was chosen by God to take hold of it. The ability of Byzantine political theory to accommodate newcomers fully entitles Israel to receive the crown within Byzantium's own discourse of political legitimacy. The midrash's attempt to portray Israel as the ultimate recipient of the imperial office that originated with biblical kings and served to sanctify Roman rulers does not undermine the dominant ideology. Rather it uses this ideology to justify Israel's claims for eschatological imperialism. Israel is implicitly portrayed as the legitimate successor not only of the Davidic kingdom but of the Roman Empire as well.

It appears that when a Byzantine Jew imagined the Davidic kingdom of the past that kingdom looked very much like the Byzantium of his/her own time. Scholars have noticed a tendency by Byzantine midrashim to ascribe to the Davidic rulers of Ancient Israel, and particularly to King Solomon, royal attributes that clearly derived from Byzantine imperial practices, such as the imperial coinage, celebrations at the Hippodrome, and the use of Byzantine-style automata in "Solomon's throne."⁶²

⁶² See Perles, "Thron und Circus des König Solomo," 122–39; Ville-Patlagean, "Une image de Salomon en basileus byzantin," 9–33; Shimoff, "Hellenization among the Rabbis," 176–86; Bohak, "The Hellenization of Biblical History in Rabbinic Literature," 10–15; Fine, *Art and Judaism in the Greco-Roman World*, 103–08. Byzantine evidence for the throne of Solomon being used in official ceremonies in the great hall of Magnaura

The sixth-century synagogue mosaic from Gaza depicts King David in the guise of Orpheus but also of a Byzantine emperor sitting on the throne and wearing imperial dress and crown.⁶³ In other words, at the same time as Byzantine Jews envisioned the messianic kingdom of Israel as the restorer of the Davidic kingdom's past glory, they also projected back onto the Davidic kingdom the imperial greatness of Byzantine civilization.

This view of history is once again similar to that of John Malalas, whose world chronicle presupposes rather seamless continuity in terms of political institutions and cultural conventions across human history and constantly projects features of his contemporary Byzantine imperial setting back in time.⁶⁴ Thus Constantine's foundation of Constantinople is said to have replicated in minute detail Romulus' foundation of Rome, including the building of the Hippodrome and the transfer of the Palladium of Troy to the city.⁶⁵ Earlier in the chronicle, however, Malalas describes the foundation of Rome by projecting onto it institutions that were central to sixth-century Constantinople. As a result, Rome's imagined topography becomes dominated by the imperial palace and the Hippodrome, whereas the city's populace is divided into competing circus factions copied from those of Constantinople.⁶⁶ Malalas spends considerable time describing the Hippodrome's cosmic symbolism and political purpose (to distract Rome's inhabitants from rioting and civil unrest), both of which seem to be lifted directly from the sixth-century Byzantine experience. In other words, while claiming continuity between his day's Byzantium and Rome of the past, Malalas establishes this continuity by making Rome look like Byzantium.

appears to be medieval rather than late antique. References to the throne, along with other Old Testament relics, may have originated in the Macedonian dynasty's appeal to Ancient Israelite archetypes of the imperial rule. See Dagron, "Trônes pour un empereur," 188–89.

⁶³ See Ovadiah, "Excavations in the Area of the Ancient Synagogue at Gaza," 193–98; Hachlili, *Ancient Jewish Art*, 297–98; Barasch, "The David Mosaic of Gaza," 1–41. Barasch, among other things, notices possible messianic connotations of the image and draws attention to shared themes with the roughly contemporaneous Great Palace pavement in Constantinople.

⁶⁴ See Jeffreys, "Malalas' World View," 60–61.

⁶⁵ Malal. 13.7 (Dindorf, 319–21).

⁶⁶ On the palace, see Malal. 6.24 (Dindorf, 168), and 7.1 (Dindorf, 171); on the Hippodrome and circus factions, see Malal. 7.4–5 (Dindorf, 173–77). On these passages, see Moffatt, "A Record of Public Buildings," 89–90, 98.

Midrashic descriptions of Israel's Davidic past operate along similar lines. Just as Malalas's ancient Rome is dominated by the characteristic features of sixth-century Constantinople, so too is midrashic Jerusalem. Yet, in light of the restorative eschatology discussed earlier in this chapter, this projection of late Roman institutions into Israel's past raises a question of how exactly Jewish authors might have imagined the eschatological restoration of Israel. What would the eschatological Jerusalem look like? Would it indeed include among its buildings a Hippodrome patterned after the one in Constantinople? Would the royal palace of the Davidic Messiah feature an automated "Solomon's throne," resembling the one used by Byzantine emperors? The crown restored by Rome to Israel would most likely carry with it the baggage of Roman imperial culture. The eschatological Jerusalem would probably have more features in common with the historical Romes, both Old and New, than with any other place in the history of mankind.⁶⁷

Byzantine Judaism actively engaged the supersessionist narrative of contemporaneous Byzantine Christianity by accepting its premises (Imperial Rome/Constantinople and the successor of Davidic Israel) and then reinterpreting them to assert the superiority of Israel over Rome. Jews also appreciated the value of Roman imperialism. Instead of denying the imperial claims of Rome, Jews internalized them by claiming that the Roman Empire was merely a shadow of the true archetypal empire first built by David and Solomon and ultimately destined to be restored in the form of the messianic kingdom of Israel. At the same time, Jews portrayed that archetypal Davidic empire by projecting onto it the characteristic attributes of Roman imperial rule. The restoration of the Davidic kingdom, then, could also mean the projection of these attributes into the eschatological future. The restored kingdom of Israel would flow seamlessly out of the Roman matrix. Would anyone notice a change?

⁶⁷ On the Hippodrome in Constantinople and its functions, see Janin, *Constantinople byzantine*, 183–97; Dagron, *Naissance d'une capitale*, 320–47. On the throne, see Alföldi, "Insignien und Tracht," 124–39; L'Orange, *Studies on the Iconography*, 110–13, 134–37 (on the Byzantine throne), and 37–47 (on the Sasanian throne); Cameron, *Corippus*, 188, and literature cited there. On the significance of automata in Byzantine court culture, see Brett, "The Automata in the Byzantine Throne of Solomon," 477–87, and Trilling, "Daedalus and Nightingale," 217–30.

THE TOWER OF BABEL REBUILT

It is often assumed that Jewish liturgical poetry in Late Antiquity was uniformly anti-Roman and looked forward to the future fall of Rome as an important element in the eschatological scenario of Israel's triumph. There is indeed plenty of evidence to support this view, and yet this view may be misleadingly oversimplified.⁶⁸ In what follows, I would like to take a closer look at one of the *kerovot* to the readings from the Book of Genesis, composed by the sixth-century *payytan* Yannai. This particular composition focuses on the story of the Tower of Babel narrated in Genesis 11. As one reads through Yannai's rendering of the Tower of Babel story, it becomes clear that the latter symbolizes for him the Christian Roman Empire:

One crowd and one speech // They took counsel together with one accord
And taught and instructed one another // To make a second one to one God.⁶⁹

The unity of the Tower's builders that makes them feel arrogant and empowered to challenge God's kingship is one of the *piyyut*'s central themes, a constantly repeated refrain that runs throughout the poem. In this passage, however, the reference to unity becomes more specific and ironic. The unity and single-minded purposefulness of the builders is contrasted with their desire to split God into two deities by adding "a second one to one God," a standard accusation leveled against Christians in Rabbinic literature.⁷⁰ The *payytan* wants to highlight a profound flaw in builders' logic: They betray their own unity by failing to recognize it in God. By denying God this unity, the builders, in a mirror-like fashion, lose it themselves through the dissolution of their commonwealth. As Yannai observes earlier in the *piyyut*, the builders intended to abolish the divinely imposed separation between heaven and earth, divine and human, by establishing their rule on earth and in heaven, but ultimately failed to reach heaven and lost their dwelling on earth.⁷¹

⁶⁸ See Stemberger, *Die Römische Herrschaft*, 124–30; Weinberger, *Jewish Hymnography*, 34–40. A good example of such a *piyyut* can be found in Rabinowitz, *Mahazor piyute Rabi Yanai*, vol. 1, 197–201, lines 75–113.

⁶⁹ Rabinowitz, *Mahazor*, vol. 1, 113–14, lines 59–60.

⁷⁰ See Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven*, 33–155.

⁷¹ Rabinowitz, *Mahazor*, vol. 1, 113, lines 51–52.

In other words, Yannai's critique of the Tower of Babel is not unconditional. Its failure had to do with the failure of its builders to grasp the true meaning of their task. The fundamental icon-like correspondence between the divine unity and that of human society remains to be fully realized in the eschatological future through the agency of Israel. The *payytan* calls upon God:

Uproot from the earth the kingdom of Dumah // And cast down fear upon every nation

All those who have not called on your name will call on your name // And your name will be called over those who call on your name

Yah, just as your unification is in your people // Change all the peoples to a pure language to declare your unity

As it is written: "At that time I will change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech, that all of them may call on the name of the Lord and serve him with one accord" (Zephaniah 3:9).⁷²

Here, the call for the destruction of Rome (the kingdom of Dumah from Isaiah 21:11) is moderated by an eschatological program that effectively transforms Roman imperial ideology of unity into Israel's eschatological mission. Only now it is imperialism done right. Unlike the builders of the Tower of Babel and their Roman successors, Israel will recognize the cause and effect relationship between the unity of God and imperial universalism. The *payytan* interprets prophecy in Zephaniah 3:9 to mean that the nations of the world will get back their unity and their pristine ("pure") language, the language that they once spoke before the Tower of Babel debacle, when they recognize and profess the unity of the God of Israel.

The ultimate triumph of eschatological imperialism will be sealed by means of God's name. All the peoples will join Israel in calling God's name by reciting the Shema. At the same time, in apparent allusion to Deuteronomy 28:10, persons who call the name will be called by the name. The nations will profess the oneness of God contained in God's name and by doing so unite with the name and with one another in a new universal commonwealth. The commonwealth will internalize the power of the name through the profession of God's unity and thus

⁷² Rabinowitz, *Mahazor*, vol. 1, 110–11, lines 31–33.

become the true icon of this unity by faithfully reflecting and partaking in qualities of God's nature. The reciprocity between imperial unity and God's unity, which the builders of the Tower failed to recognize, will be restored through the mediation of Israel and expressed by means of the eschatological kingdom attaching itself to God's name and God's powers contained within it.⁷³

Yannai's vision represents a complex adaptation of dominant imperial discourse, which goes well beyond simple hope for ultimate collapse of the Roman Empire. The Jewish poet internalizes the Christian empire's fundamental value of political universalism, which corresponds to and ultimately derives its strength from religious universalism. Indeed, Yannai partially acknowledges just that by drawing parallels between the failed Tower of Babel (a symbol for Rome) and the triumphant kingdom of the eschatological future built by Israel. At the same time, Yannai claims that he has discovered the fatal flaw in the imperial design that destroyed the Tower and will eventually bring down Christian Rome: the belief in "the second" deity is the aberration of true divine unity and hence the aberration of imperial unity as well. Only the people who recognize the true oneness of God can hope to fulfill the dream of imperial oneness on both political and mystical levels.

IMPERIAL ESCHATOLOGY IN THE SEVENTH CENTURY

The question about the eschatological destiny of the Roman Empire once again came into focus during the turbulent events of the late sixth and seventh centuries. First wars between Byzantium and Persia and then Muslim conquest of the Middle East called to life a large body of writings that sought to reaffirm and reassess the standard *topos* of the Roman Empire as a divinely sanctioned entity destined to play an important role in the eschatological triumph of Christianity. Much of this literature has been recently studied by G. J. Reinink, to whose excellent analysis my present brief review is greatly indebted.⁷⁴ The so-called Alexander

⁷³ Yannai's view of powers contained in God's name is fairly close to views expressed in Hekhalot literature. See Rabinowitz, *Mahazor*, vol. 1, 278–79, lines 31–43.

⁷⁴ See Reinink, "Die Entstehung der syrischen Alexanderlegende als politisch-religiöse Propagandaschrift für Herakleios' Kirchenpolitik," 263–81; "Heraclius, the New Alexander," 81–94; "Alexander the Great in Seventh-Century Syriac Apocalyptic Texts," 150–78.

Legend represents one of the earliest witnesses to this new form of eschatological imperialism.⁷⁵ The Legend takes form of a pseudohistorical narrative that describes Alexander's journey to the ends of the world, his attempt to build a brass gate in the north to confine the Huns, his victory over the Persians, and predictions about the future of Alexander's empire. As Reinink has convincingly demonstrated, however, the Legend's Alexander looks very much like the seventh-century Byzantine emperor Heraclius, whereas the legend itself addresses fundamental religious and geopolitical questions that faced the empire in the wake of its war with Persia in 628.

The Alexander Legend was most likely composed during a five-year period that separated Heraclius' victory over Persia in 628 from the first Muslim incursions in 633. During this time, Byzantium was left to reflect on its newly acquired status as the sole regional superpower.⁷⁶ The Legend's visions of the future of Alexander's empire apparently came out of such a reflection. Having completed the gates constructed to block the barbarian peoples (the Huns) of the north, Alexander puts an inscription on the gate in which he predicts the mutual annihilation of these peoples and the Persians. Afterward, Alexander's kingdom will come to dominate the world:

And my kingdom, which is called "that of the house of Alexander the son of Philip the Macedonian," shall go forth and destroy the earth and the ends of the heavens. And there shall not be found any among the nations and tongues who dwell in the world that shall stand before the kingdom of the Romans.⁷⁷

A similar prediction is made by the magicians of Alexander's chief adversary, Tubarlaq, who writes their prophecy down and gives it to Alexander:

And Alexander took with himself in writing the king's and his nobles' prophecy of what should befall Persia: that Persia would be laid waste by the Romans, and that all the kingdoms would be laid waste, but that that [kingdom of the Romans] would last and rule to the end of times and that

⁷⁵ For edition and English translation, see *The History of Alexander the Great, Being the Syriac Version of the Pseudo Callisthenes*, ed. by E.A.W. Budge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1889).

⁷⁶ On this period see, in particular, Kaegi, *Heraclius Emperor of Byzantium*, 192–28. Cf. Shahid, "Iranian Factor," 295–320.

⁷⁷ Budge, 270 (text), 155 (trans.).

that [kingdom of the Romans] would deliver the kingdom of the earth to Christ, who is to come.⁷⁸

The last part of the prophecy introduces a new theme: Alexander's empire would serve as bridge between historical present and eschatological future. At its consummation, the world empire of the Romans will deliver itself and thus "the kingdom of the earth" to Christ.

The Alexander Legend embraces the thoroughly Christianized ideology of eternal Roman Empire and projects it into the future. Just like the *Christian Geography* of Cosmas Indicopleustes discussed earlier in the chapter, the Legend envisions the Christian world empire crossing over into eschatological eternity by converging with the kingdom of heaven in a new reality beyond time. Alexander's kingdom sets a stage for the direct rule of Christ, and in this rule the kingdom finds its ultimate fulfillment. The empire's avowed destiny is to open itself up to receive the heavenly lordship of Christ, who will sit on the silver throne of Alexander and wear Alexander's crown. Other texts from approximately the same period share this view. Thus the seventh-century Byzantine historian Theophylact Simocatta reports a prophecy in the name of the Persian king Chosroes II. Chosroes predicts that the "Babylonian race (i.e., the Persians) will hold the Roman state in its power for a threefold cyclic hebdomad of years." Then, "Romans will enslave Persians for a fifth hebdomad of years." Finally, "the day without evening will dwell among mortals and the expected end of power will come, when the forces of destruction will be handed over to dissolution and those of the better life hold sway."⁷⁹ Once again in this prophecy the world dominion that Rome achieves in the final hebdomad of years translates into the eschatological "day without evening." The empire serves as a receptacle for eternity.

The loss of the Middle East to Islam provided Byzantine eschatological imperialism with a new impetus. In the course of several decades, a series of apocalyptic treatises were produced, most of them trying to reassert the belief in the eternal nature of the Roman Empire in the face of its

⁷⁸ Budge, 275 (text), 158 (trans.). My translation follows Reinink, "Alexander the Great," 161.

⁷⁹ Theophylact, *History* 5.15.6–7. Cf. *Pirqe R. El.* 18 (Horowitz, 66) on the seventh 'olam which is "all Sabbath and rest in the everlasting life." This text quotes m. Tamid 7.4, but adds reference to the seven 'olamot, "worlds" or perhaps "aeons," not found in the Mishnah.

defeat at the hands of Muslim Arabs. By far the best-known text of that time was the Revelation of Ps.-Methodius, which, due to its enormous popularity, brought in its wake a number of spin-off apocalyptic writings and introduced literary *topoi* that would shape both Western and Eastern Christian eschatology for centuries to come. The text was composed in 691–92 in North Mesopotamia.⁸⁰ Ps.-Methodius embraces the same fundamental notion that the empire built by Alexander the Great and later inherited by the Romans is the last world empire destined to become a gateway into the eschatological future. Muslim success is dismissed as unimportant and temporary. Ps.-Methodius also comes up with an elaborate legend of the last Roman emperor to describe the process as a result of which the universal kingship of Rome that unites under one suzerainty the whole earth is handed over to God and into eternity. I will discuss this legend in more detail later.⁸¹

All these texts share a deep conviction that the world empire of Rome has profound ontological and eschatological significance. By uniting the earth under one rule, the empire serves to deliver it to God. The heavenly *basileia* serves as the consummation of the earthly one. Just as, according to the earlier Church Fathers, the universal *Pax Augusti* prepared the world for receiving the Gospel, the eschatological empire of Rome prepares the world to receive the dominion of heaven in a single stroke. Despite all the challenges of the seventh century, the imperial eschatology of that period existed in stubbornly asserted continuity with that of Cosmas Indicopleustes and his contemporaries. We shall now examine the application of related themes in the Babylonian Talmud and seventh-century Jewish apocalyptic writings.

MESSIANIC IMPERIALISM

The belief that the Roman Empire was indeed destined for unhampered ascent on Jacob's ladder, ultimately reaching heaven, was apparently shared by some Jews as well.⁸² At the same time, as I have argued

⁸⁰ See Brock, "Two Apocalyptic Texts," 225; Reinink, "Pseudo-Methodius und die Legende vom römischen Endkaiser," 82–111, and "Ps.-Methodius: A Concept of History in Response to the Rise of Islam," 149–87.

⁸¹ See Ps.-Methodius, X, 2–3, and XIV, 2–6.

⁸² It appears that *Lev. Rab.* 29:2 (Margulies, 670) is intended to counter precisely this kind of fears. See also Krauss, *Paras we-Romi*, 5.

earlier in this chapter, a more creative way to engage Roman imperial eschatology by replacing Rome's eschatological mission with that of the messianic kingdom of Israel was also taking shape. In the spirit of the latter approach, the Babylonian Talmud embraces a vision of the empire-dominated world as the historical setting in which Israel's Messiah will arrive to fulfill the ultimate destiny of imperial universalism.⁸³ B. Yoma 10a lists a series of rabbis' opinions on whether Rome or Persia will dominate the world in the future. Two opinions are quoted in favor of the latter option, one of them based on the interpretation of Jeremiah 49:20, another on the logical inference *a minori ad majus*. Then Rav is quoted as stating that, on the contrary, "Persia will fall into the hands of Rome," for it is the will of God that builders of the temple (Persians) should fall into the hands of its destroyers (Romans), and also because the Persians themselves were guilty of destroying some unspecified synagogues. Then Rav continues:

The son of David will not come until the evil kingdom of Rome will have spread [its sway] over the whole world for nine months, as it is said, "Therefore will he give them up, until the time that she who travails has brought forth. Then the residue of his brethren shall return with the children of Israel." (Micah 5:2)

Rav maintains, based on the exegesis of Micah 5:2, that Rome's dominion over the world is a prerequisite for the coming of the Messiah. According to a different version of Rav's statement in b. Sanh. 98b, "the son of David will not come until the [Roman] power enfolds Israel for nine months." In both cases the world empire of Rome sets a stage for the revelation of the son of David which occurs in nine months (corresponding to the nine months of pregnancy) after Rome's global rule was established. The universalism of Rome's empire is the necessary forerunner of the Davidic kingdom of Israel.

In other instances, the Babylonian Talmud's vision of the eschatological future is somewhat less totalizing. When b. 'Abod. Zar. 2b describes God's judgment of peoples in the last days, it singles out both Persia and

⁸³ The source-critical analysis of messianic texts in the Babylonian Talmud remains a major desideratum. In particular, drawing a distinction between the stammaitic editorial layer and earlier sources would greatly enhance our understanding of the diachronic development of these traditions and allow us to better contextualize them within contemporaneous Romano-Byzantine and Iranian apocalyptic literatures.

Rome as two kingdoms whose “reign will last till the coming of the Messiah.” Instead of one universal empire, two kingdoms will divide the world between themselves. Just like the writings of its Byzantine contemporaries that acknowledged the parity between Rome and Iran by comparing them to two eyes illuminating the world, this text envisions the world dominated by two empires rather than one.⁸⁴ The Babylonian Talmud’s hesitance to choose the precise imperial setting into which the Messiah arrives reflects the broader ambiguity of contemporaneous geopolitical theory, which constantly oscillated between the universalizing pretensions of individual empires to rule “the whole of the earth” and the sober realization that, in the words of Garth Fowden, “the world was big enough for more than one universalism.”⁸⁵ Rabbis held different opinions regarding who would emerge victorious from the conflict between Rome and Sasanian Persia, and a number of rabbinic texts entertain the possibility of Persian rather than Roman universalism as a setting for the Messiah’s arrival.⁸⁶ Yet, whatever the exact scenario might have been, the imperial setting was still a must. The messianic kingdom was expected to grow out of the empire-dominated world as its most immediate successor.

The Babylonian Talmud is not alone in associating the rise of the Messiah with the universal rule of Rome. *’Otot ha-Mashiah*, an apocalyptic text of uncertain date but probably pre-dating the Muslim conquest, also claims that, before the Messiah comes, “the Holy One, blessed be He, will establish the sovereignty of the evil Edom over the entire world. A king will arise in Rome, and he will rule the entire world for nine months and destroy many regions.”⁸⁷ After nine months the Messiah, son of Joseph, will come to destroy the king of Edom and restore the Temple vessels to Jerusalem. Along with the exegetical justification of the nine months scheme that appeared earlier in the *’Otot*, this text has clear affinities with

⁸⁴ For references, see Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth*, 18, n. 21, and in general, on the sharing of universal power between Rome and Iran, see pp. 12–36. On the ideology of a power-sharing agreement between the two “great kings,” those of Byzantium and Sasanian Iran, that developed in the wake of Heraclius’ war with Persia and this ideology’s messianic overtones, see Shahid, “The Iranian Factor in Byzantium during the Reign of Heraclius,” 297, and 305–08.

⁸⁵ Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth*, 13.

⁸⁶ See Krauss, *Paras we-Romi*, 5–6, 27–31; Feldman, “Rabbinic Insights,” 292–96. Cf. Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth*, 24–36.

⁸⁷ Even Shemuel, *Midreshe Geulah*, 320, lines 57–58.

b. Yoma 10a, quoted earlier in this chapter, and probably stems from the same literary tradition. It also seems to reflect a more detailed version of this tradition and may in fact have served as a source for a much more concise Talmudic statement, although the development could go in the opposite direction as well.

Be that as it may, the idea that the messianic kingdom would grow out of the Roman Empire clearly enjoyed popularity among Jews. According to *Sefer Zerubbabel* and the Fragmentary Targum to Exodus 12:42, the Messiah starts his journey to redeem Israel in the empire's heart, the city of Rome/Constantinople, and then proceeds to the Land of Israel and Jerusalem where the messianic kingdom is rebuilt and delivered to God.⁸⁸ The famous account in b. Sanh. 98a, which describes the suffering Messiah sitting at the gates of Rome, is a version of the same narrative. At the end, *Sefer Zerubbabel* sums up its eschatological vision by stating that, after the Messiah slays Armilos, the last demonic ruler of the Roman Empire, "Israel will acquire the kingship; 'the holy ones of the Most High will receive the kingdom' (Daniel 7:18)."⁸⁹ Israel's messianic kingdom is inherited from Rome and Rome's last ruler.⁹⁰ It fulfills Rome's dream of a universal and timeless kingdom, as Jerusalem becomes the city in which all peoples and all kingdoms are gathered together.⁹¹ Quite appropriately, at least according to some texts, the Messiah's arrival will be followed by the act of universal homage, when nations and their rulers come to prostrate themselves before Israel and serve it.⁹² To be sure all this can be seen simply as another application of the universal messianism of the Hebrew Bible along the lines of Isaiah 49. Indeed, in the late

⁸⁸ See Stemberger, "Die Beurteilung Roms," 394–95; Boustani, "Spoils," 368–70.

⁸⁹ See Lévi, "L'apocalypse de Zorobabel et le roi de Perse Siroès," 144. The translation is from Himmelfarb, "Sefer Zerubbabel," 81.

⁹⁰ *Doctrina Jacobi Nuper Baptizati*, a seventh-century anti-Jewish dialogue composed in the wake of initial Muslim conquests, has Jews defend the permanence of the Roman Empire because the latter provides the setting into which the Messiah will eventually come. The Christians of the dialogue, on the contrary, argue that the Empire is nearing its collapse, which will be followed by the final consummation of the world. See Dagron and Déroche, 165–73. I bring up this source with considerable diffidence, because it may very well reflect an internal Christian polemic rather than the actual knowledge of contemporaneous Judaism. See Olster, *Roman Defeat*, 158–79, esp. 168–71, and Cameron, "Byzantines and Jews," 258–65, for different assessments of the historical value of this text.

⁹¹ See 'Abot R. Nat. A 35 (Schechter, 53b).

⁹² See, for example, b. Ta'an. 14b–15a, b. 'Erub. 43b, *Sefer Elijah* in Even Shemuel, 45, lines 59–65.

fourth century Jerome explained restorative themes in contemporaneous Jewish eschatology by tracing them back to the literalist interpretation of Isaiah 49 *more Iudaico*, “in Jewish fashion.”⁹³ Yet, in my opinion, although biblical messianic visions created an important frame of reference for Jewish authors in Late Antiquity, these visions were thoroughly reinterpreted in light of the late Roman and Byzantine imperial eschatology (a great deal of which, I must add parenthetically, also grew on the basis of biblical models).⁹⁴

In all these texts the universal rule of Rome sets a stage on which the final consummation of earthly *basileia* takes place through the messianic kingdom of Israel. Rome delivers the world to the son of David, who comes only when the earth is united under one rule, that of Rome. In the process, the messianic kingdom of Israel claims for itself Rome’s status as the ultimate world empire by the mediation of which the kingdom of heaven will finally descend to earth. Rome, who is also, it must be remembered, Israel’s brother Esau, has a special role to play by uniting the world for the benefit of the messianic kingdom’s ultimate universalism. Whereas late Roman and Byzantine imperial eschatology portrayed the Roman Empire as being different from the previous world empires precisely because of its unique mission to serve as the earthly receptacle for the kingdom of heaven, the contemporaneous Jewish eschatology appropriated exactly the same role for the messianic kingdom of Israel. Israel, not the Rome of Cosmas Indicopleustes, the Alexander Legend, or Ps.-Methodius, was destined to set a stage for the Kingdom of God.

In the eschatological era the brotherly intimacy between Rome and Israel will be grudgingly recognized once again. B. Pes. 118b observes that in the future Egypt, Ethiopia, and Rome are destined to bring gifts to the Messiah. After the gifts of Egypt and Ethiopia have been accepted, “the evil kingdom of Rome” will also bring gifts, saying to itself, “If those who are not their brothers are thus [accepted], all the more so, we who are their brothers.” Yet Rome’s gifts will be rejected by God. This story ties two themes of Israel’s messianic kingship together. On

⁹³ Jerome, *Comm. in Esaiam* XIII (Isaiah 49:23), (CCSL 73a, 546, lines 38–59). See Wilken “The Restoration of Israel,” 457–58, and *The Land Called Holy*, 208. On Jerome’s references to Jewish eschatological expectations, see Wilken, “The Restoration of Israel,” 446–53.

⁹⁴ See Peterson, *Der Monotheismus als politisches Problem*, 63–65, and 80–81.

the one hand, the story depicts eschatological Israel as the ultimate ruler of the world receiving homage and gifts from other kingdoms, in line with other rabbinic traditions according to which Israel is expected to exercise universal rule at the end of days.⁹⁵ On the other hand, the story acknowledges the special relationship between the messianic Israel and “the evil kingdom of Rome” who are indeed brothers, presumably not only in the biblical lineage but also in the kind of universal power that they exercise. In fact, there is a sense that Israel inherits its status from Rome. The story concludes with God commanding Gabriel to rebuke Rome and “take the possession of the congregation (of Israel?).” The eschatological rule of God exercised either through Gabriel or through the Messiah, or indeed through both of them (this part remains unclear), succeeds the rule of Rome. Despite the rejection of Rome’s gift, the ambivalence about Rome’s relation to Israel and the implications of such a relation persist.

The messianic kingdom of Israel also resembled the Roman Empire institutionally. Byzantine midrashic texts envisioned the future Jerusalem as the imperial city modeled after the *metropoleis* of Rome and Constantinople: “One day Jerusalem will be made into a metropolis for all cities (מטרופולין לכל המדינות) and draw [them] to her as a stream to honor her.”⁹⁶ This reference to idealized Jerusalem of the messianic future echoes the reference by the fourth-century pagan orator Themistius to idealized Rome and Constantinople of the imperial present as “the two *metropoleis* of the *oikoumene*.”⁹⁷ Themistius’ oration was designed,

⁹⁵ In addition to the texts mentioned, see Jerome, *Comm. in Esaiam* XVII (Isaiah 60:1–3), (CCSL 73a, 692–93, lines 17–23, 25–28), who describes a thousand-year messianic reign expected by Jews and Christian *semiudaei*. During that time a golden and jeweled Jerusalem will descend from heaven, all nations along with their rulers will serve Israel and rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, and caravans from Midian, Ephraim, and Saba will bring gold and incense to Jerusalem. In Eusebius, *V. Const.* 4.7 and 49–50, embassies and gifts from distant lands serve to highlight the universal nature of Constantine’s empire. See further, Cameron and Hall, *Eusebius*, 312–13, and literature cited there.

⁹⁶ *Song Rab.* 1.5.3. On Jerusalem as a metropolis, see Urbach, “Heavenly and Earthly Jerusalem,” 160, and Werblowsky, “Metropolis of All Countries,” 172–78; Grossman, “Jerusalem in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature,” 302; Wilken, *Land Called Holy*, 71. Urbach and Grossman emphasize the difference between the Hellenistic Jewish view that Jerusalem serves as the metropolis for the Jewish Diaspora communities and the rabbinic view that the eschatological Jerusalem will become the universal metropolis for all cities. None of the authors, however, addresses the imperial connotations of the term “metropolis” as it is used by rabbis.

⁹⁷ Themist., *Orat.* 182a. On the image of Constantinople as the sole metropolis of the Eastern Roman Empire, see Dagron, *Naissance d’une capitale*, 60–76.

among other things, to claim equality for the recently established city of Constantine with the “great city” of Rome. In fact, it is in this oration that Themistius makes one of the earliest known references to Constantinople as “second Rome.”⁹⁸

Midrash does not call Jerusalem of the messianic age a second Rome. Like Constantinople of Themistius, however, messianic Jerusalem is modeled on Rome and inherits its status as the imperial center, “the metropolis for all cities.” In that sense, eschatological Jerusalem is as much a second Rome as Constantinople claims to be. Indeed, in parallel to messianic Jerusalem, fifth-century Constantinople could also be described as “a universe inhabited by the sea of people,” which received newcomers “flowing from everywhere like rivers.”⁹⁹ The oceanic imagery, natural for Constantinople but somewhat artificial in the case of Jerusalem, served to portray the empire’s capital city as overflowing with the streams of people drawn to it from across provinces. As recently noted by Raymond Van Dam, this idea was central to Rome’s and later Constantinople’s self-representation and to the image that the two cities sought to project among their subjects.¹⁰⁰ It appears that messianic Jerusalem was imagined along similar lines.

Rabbinic texts made occasional attempts to describe Israel’s Messiah in terms that associated him with the Roman emperor. B. Sanh. 98b compared the respective roles of the future Messiah and the historical King David to those of “an emperor and a viceroy” (קיסר ופלג קיסר), thus symbolically playing with parallelism between the Messiah’s and the emperor’s functions. When Targum Onkelos applied Jacob’s prophecy about Judah in Genesis 49:8–12 to the future Messiah, it interpreted Genesis 49:11 (“he washes his garment in wine, and his robe in the blood of grapes”) as referring to the Messiah’s purple robe: “His raiment shall be of goodly purple, and his garment of the finest crimson-died wool.”¹⁰¹ Onkelos’ choice seems to reflect the author’s awareness of the significance of purple garments in Roman and later Byzantine state symbolism. In Rome and Constantinople, wearing a purple robe was the traditional

⁹⁸ Themist., *Orat.* 184a.

⁹⁹ See Theodoret, *Epistulae* XV (Azéma, vol. 1, 87, lines 1–5).

¹⁰⁰ Van Dam, *Rome and Constantinople*, 5–24 (Rome), 53–62 (Constantinople).

¹⁰¹ Other targumim interpreted the same verse as referring to the Messiah’s vestment stained with the blood of his enemies. See, for example, *Ps.-J.*, and Fragmentary Targum *ad loc.*

prerogative of emperors; this view was also shared by contemporaneous rabbinic texts.¹⁰² Claiming purple dress automatically implied laying claims to the imperial power. The acceptance of purple dress by rulers of the newly formed Germanic states during the fifth and sixth centuries implied their claims for parity with the Byzantine emperor, whereas the refusal to wear purple symbolized their client-like status and was generally encouraged by Byzantium. In the symbolic language of the day, the Messiah's purple raiment made him into a successor of Roman imperial rule.¹⁰³

CONCLUSION

It has been noted that Byzantine eschatological literature that grew in the wake of the upheavals of the seventh century was characterized by the profound conservatism of its expectations. No radical cosmic or even social transformation was envisioned. Instead, the eschatological ideal had to do with the recovery of established imperial institutions and the overall stabilization of imperial rule, which would lead the Christian Roman Empire to unprecedented glory and economic prosperity before it was ready to be handed over to the direct rule of God. Byzantine eschatology that developed in the course of the seventh century was remarkably this-worldly.¹⁰⁴

So, too, was the eschatology of late antique and early medieval Judaism.¹⁰⁵ Among the different forms that Jewish eschatology took in Late Antiquity, there was a distinct trend to portray the messianic kingdom of Israel as growing out of the world empire of Rome. This trend should be understood in the broader context of fourth- through seventh-century Romano-Byzantine literature. Whereas in the latter the

¹⁰² See Samuel Krauss, *Paras we-Romi ba-Talmud uwa-Midrashim*, 37–38, 43–44.

¹⁰³ On the significance of purple, see Treitinger, *Die oströmische Kaiser- und Reichsidee*, 58–62; McCormick, Kazhdan, and Cutler, “Purple,” 1759–60, with literature; Kolb, *Herrscherideologie*, 49, 117–20. On the use of purple by Germanic kings, see McCormick, *Eternal Victory*, 261 (Vandals), 267–70 (Ostrogoths), 299 (Visigoths), 336 (Franks).

¹⁰⁴ See Podskalsky, *Byzantinische Reichseschatologie*, 101–03, and “Représentation du temps,” 445–46; Brandes, “Endzeitvorstellungen,” 54–59.

¹⁰⁵ Brandes, in “Endzeitvorstellungen,” 44–46, notices the similarity but interprets it in terms of a Jewish influence on Byzantine imperial eschatology. Cf. Suermann, “Der byzantinische Endkaiser bei Pseudo-Methodios,” 140–55.

universal rule of Rome was interpreted as creating the setting for the final deliverance of humanity, Jewish eschatology reserved this role for the messianic kingdom of Israel, assigning to Rome the role of Israel's imperial precursor destined to establish geopolitical conditions necessary for Israel's mission. Whereas Roman geopolitical theory justified the historical uniqueness of the Roman Empire by viewing the empire as the basis on which the eschatological kingdom was to be built, or the receptacle into which the kingdom of heaven was to descend, Jewish texts added another step to the process by making the messianic kingdom of Israel both Rome's political successor and the true heir to Rome's eschatological mission. Late antique and early medieval Jewish writers no less than their Christian counterparts embraced the concept of eschatological imperialism and used it to convey their visions of a messianic future.

It would be too hasty, in my opinion, to see Jewish eschatology of Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages as a seamless development from pre-Destruction and early post-Destruction Jewish apocalypticism. Indeed, as Martha Himmelfarb observes in her recent book, "it is unlikely that the author of *Sefer Zerubbabel* was aware of the apocalypse as a genre."¹⁰⁶ Although some degree of continuity with earlier literature was certainly preserved, many late antique eschatological themes grew within the framework of contemporaneous Roman and Byzantine imperial eschatology, either in conscious dialogue with or unintentional participation in the latter. In part, eschatological narratives of the dominant imperial culture created lenses through which earlier apocalyptic and messianic themes were refracted before they could become an integral part of late antique and early medieval Jewish discourse. This process was akin to what Annette Yoshiko Reed has dubbed the "back-borrowing" of Second Temple literary themes by late antique and early medieval Judaism through the medium of Christian literature and culture.¹⁰⁷ In part, eschatological themes were without precedent in pre-Destruction literature. In what follows I shall attempt to trace some of the specific topics that Romano-Byzantine imperial eschatology and contemporaneous Jewish messianic beliefs shared in common.

¹⁰⁶ Himmelfarb, *The Apocalypse*, 119.

¹⁰⁷ See Reed, *Fallen Angels and the History of Judaism*, 270–71.



Coronation in the Temple

UNLIKE HIS PREDECESSORS, THEODORE SYNCELLUS WAS WRITING at a time when the validity of his triumphalist narrative was increasingly called into question by historical reality. The 626 A.D. siege of Constantinople ended in total defeat for the Avars and Persians followed by an even more spectacular victory of the Emperor Heraclius in Mesopotamia, the very heart of the Sasanian kingdom. For the moment, the triumphalist rhetoric of the true Israel appeared to be justified, as the Christian empire found itself within striking distance of dominating the inland Near East. Within a decade, however, the tables were turned when Muslim armies took control of Palestine, Syria, Egypt, and later North Africa, effectively ending Byzantine dreams of a universalistic Christian empire. Soon afterward, the greatly reduced Byzantium found itself in the grip of the Iconoclast controversy, which challenged the very basics of orthodoxy. The image of Byzantium as the universalistic and triumphant true Israel was becoming increasingly out of touch with reality.

These upheavals of the seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries triggered a new interest in the apocalyptic genre among the Byzantines, as well as other ethnic, cultural, and religious groups constituting the Byzantine Commonwealth. In the situation in which the seemingly eternal political and religious edifice of the Byzantine Empire was starting to crumble, the dynamic eschatology of apocalyptic predictions was once again more appealing than a static vision of the empire as the eternally realized heaven on earth. All of a sudden history was once again relevant, and the theme of eschatological change came to the forefront of

religious and political discourse.¹ Jewish apocalyptic writings constituted an important component within this general upsurge of eschatological imagination. The period witnessed the composition of such texts as *Sefer Elijah*, *Sefer Zerubbabel*, and multiple versions of *ʾOtot ha-Mashiah*.² All of them reflected Jewish responses to the historical turbulence that the empire was going through. It would probably be inaccurate to speak of a uniform set of eschatological and messianic expectations in Byzantine Judaism any more than in its Second Temple forerunner. Different texts reflect different trends, many of which are not easily reconcilable with one another.³ In what follows, I shall focus on some of these trends while making no attempt to reconstruct a comprehensive picture of late ancient and early medieval Jewish apocalypticism. In my discussion I intend both to draw on and further develop the argument previously made in the works of Martha Himmelfarb, David Biale, Peter Schäfer, and most recently Raʿanan Boustán, who have demonstrated how Jewish eschatological narratives integrated distinctly Byzantine cultural elements and internalized distinctly Byzantine religious, political, and cultural anxieties of the time while preserving a Jewish religious agenda.⁴ The relationship between Byzantine Judaism and Byzantine Christianity was characterized by a complex cultural dynamic through which, in the words of Boustán, Byzantine Jews were “simultaneously drawing themselves into and distancing themselves from a whole universe of discursive practices that they shared with their Christian neighbors.”⁵ I will make this observation a starting point of my own discussion.

¹ On Byzantine apocalyptic literature, see Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*; Podskalsky, *Byzantinische Reicheschatologie*; Mango, *Byzantium*, 201–17; Magdalino, “The History of the Future,” 3–34; Brandes, “Die apokalyptische Literatur,” 305–22, and “Endzeitvorstellungen,” 9–62.

² For excellent introductions to Jewish apocalyptic writings in Late Antiquity and early Middle Ages, see Reeves, *Trajectories in Near Eastern Apocalyptic*; Alexander, “Late Hebrew Apocalyptic: A Preliminary Survey,” 197–217.

³ See Schäfer, “Die messianischen Hoffnungen,” 214–43; Neusner, *Messiah in Context*; Schiffman, “Messianism and Apocalypticism in Rabbinic Texts,” 1053–72.

⁴ See Biale, “Counter-History and Jewish Polemics against Christianity,” 130–45; Himmelfarb, “The Mother of the Messiah,” 369–89; Schäfer, *Mirror of His Beauty*, 212–16; Boustán, “The Spoils of the Jerusalem Temple at Rome and Constantinople,” 327–72.

⁵ Boustán, “Spoils,” 372.

THE LAST EMPEROR IN *’OTOT HA-MASHIAH*: THE TEXT

Earlier rabbinic traditions on the eschatological destinies of Rome and Israel find their new expression and interpretation in the Hebrew apocalyptic text known as *’Otot of R. Shimon b. Yohai*. It belongs to the literary genre of *’Otot ha-Mashiah* (“The Signs of the Messiah”): the enumeration of a series of events (“signs”) that usher in and accompany the last days and the arrival of the Messiah. Two different redactions of this text have been preserved in two manuscripts: a Genizah fragment now at Cambridge and a manuscript at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America in New York. The Cambridge fragment was published by Arthur Marmorstein, and the New York text by Michael Higger. There is no critical edition. Although they tell fundamentally the same story, the two redactions are sufficiently different to warrant two separate translations. In what follows, I shall provide the translation of relevant passages from each manuscript, starting with the version published by Higger.⁶

’Otot ha-Mashiah lists ten signs of the Messiah’s arrival. The seventh sign starts with the “king of Edom” (i.e., Rome) entering Jerusalem:

The seventh sign: The king of Edom will come forth and enter Jerusalem. All sons of Ishmael will flee from him, and go to Teman. They will gather themselves into a mighty army, and there shall come forth with them a man whose name is Hoter (הטר). He will become the king, and all of them will go to Botzrah (בצרה).⁷ The king of Edom will hear [about this] and go after them. They will wage war against each other, in accordance with what is said: “For the Lord has a sacrifice in Botzrah, [a great slaughter in the land of Edom]” (Isa 34:6); “Those who eat the flesh of pigs, [vermin, and rodents, shall come to an end together, says the Lord]” (Isa 66:17). Hoter will kill many from Edom, and the king of Edom will come back to Jerusalem a second time. He will enter the Temple (היכל), take the golden crown (עטרת הזהב) which is on his head, and place it on the foundation stone (אבן שזיה). He will say: “Master of the Universe! I have already returned what my fathers took.” There will be trouble during his days.

⁶ See Marmorstein, “Les signes du messie,” 176–86, and Higger, *Halakhot we-Aggadot*, 115–23. Even Shemuel, *Midreshe Geulah*, 311–14, with textual notes on 422–24, conflates both editions and should be used with caution.

⁷ Reeves, *Trajectories*, 113, n. 38, interprets this as a reference to the fall of Bostra in 634 to the invading Arab armies.

The eighth sign: Nehemiah son of Hushiel and (sic!) the Messiah son of Joseph will bring forth the crown which the king of Edom had returned to Jerusalem. The fame of Nehemiah will become wide-spread in the world.⁸

The Cambridge redaction of the text published by Marmorstein supplies details missing in the New York version:

Seventh sign: The king of Edom will come forth and enter Jerusalem. All sons of Ishmael will flee from him, [and go to Teman. They will gather themselves into] a mighty army, [and there shall come forth] with them a man whose name is Mantzur (מנצור). He will become the king over them, and they will go to Botzrah. The king of Edom will hear [about this] and go after them. They will wage war against each other, as it is said: "For the Lord has a sacrifice in Botzrah, [a great slaughter in the land of Edom]" (Isa 34:6). And it also says: "Those who eat the flesh of pigs, vermin, and rodents, shall come to an end together, says the Lord" (Isa 66:17). Mantzur will kill many from Edom, and the king of Edom will flee from him. Mantzur will die, and the king of Edom will come back to Jerusalem a second time. He will enter the place of the foundation stone (מקום אבן שתייה), take the crown (הכתר) which is on his head, and place it on the foundation stone. He will say: "Master of the Worlds! I have returned what my fathers took." Israel will be in great trouble during his days.

Eighth sign: The Holy One, blessed be He, will suddenly bring forth Nehemiah son of Hushiel, [who is] the Messiah son of Joseph, as it is said: "Suddenly the Lord whom you seek will enter His Temple" (Mal 3:1). He will do battle with the king of Edom and kill him, and will put on the crown (העטרה) which the king of Edom had put on the foundation stone. The fame of Nehemiah will spread to the ends of the world.⁹

In both redactions, the story then continues with the ninth sign, describing the birth of Israel's archenemy Armilos, who establishes his throne in the land of Israel but outside of Jerusalem (either in Gaza, according to Higger's version, or in "Emmaus, the city of his fathers," according to Marmorstein's), and then demands that all nations accept his Torah and worship him as God. The demand results in Armilos' confrontation with Nehemiah, the execution of Nehemiah inside the Temple, and the

⁸ Higger, 121, lines 37–48. Here and later in text my translation is based on Reeves, *Trajectories*, 113–14, and was adjusted when necessary. Reeves based his translation on Even Shemuel's eclectic text.

⁹ Marmorstein, 182–83.

persecution of the Jews. Finally, at the tenth sign, the Davidic Messiah puts an end to Armilos' reign and brings deliverance to Israel.

A quick look at both texts shows that, as already noted by Even Shemuel, the New York redaction is significantly shorter than the Cambridge redaction.¹⁰ The expansion is particularly evident in two sections of the text. The Cambridge redaction adds an account of Mantzur's victory over the king of Edom, the king's flight, and Mantzur's subsequent death, which allows the king of Edom to return to Jerusalem. The New York redaction never states explicitly that the king of Edom is defeated by Hoter. After observing that Hoter kills "many" from Edom, the story immediately shifts focus to the king's return to Jerusalem, which may be understood as the return from his expedition against Hoter, who is never heard of again: The entire first part of the narrative appears to be missing closure. The Cambridge redaction also adds drama to the events of the eighth sign by providing details on the confrontation between Nehemiah son of Hushiel and the king of Edom. Nehemiah's taking possession of the crown is presented there as the direct result of Nehemiah's military triumph over the king. Finally, the Cambridge redaction structures the whole eighth sign around Malachi 3:1, a biblical text which is altogether missing from the New York redaction of the story. As a result, it is no longer Nehemiah who "brings forth" the crown deposited in the Temple by the king of Edom, but God who "brings forth" Nehemiah in fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy.

The purpose of both expansions is to eliminate perceived disjuncture within the narrative by adding extra content. In the first case, the story of confrontation between Hoter/Mantzur and the king of Edom is provided with clear outcome, the defeat of the king of Edom, and the mentioning of Hoter/Mantzur's death explains why, after the defeat, the king of Edom is able to come back to Jerusalem. In the eighth sign, the battle between Nehemiah and the king of Edom, along with the latter's death, explains what happened to the king after he had put the crown on the foundation stone. The Cambridge redaction establishes continuity between the story of the king of Edom and that of Nehemiah, just as it earlier established continuity between the story of the king's battle with Hoter/Mantzur and the story of the king's return to Jerusalem. The New York redaction reads

¹⁰ See Even Shemuel, *Midreshe Geulah*, 422–24.

like a series of snapshots of single events, indeed, as a list of disconnected signs of the Messiah's arrival. The Cambridge redaction is constructed as a smoothly unfolding narrative that ties these events together by supplying logical links between them.

There may be other indications that the Cambridge redaction is a reworking of the New York redaction. Possibly in conscious reference to the crown mentioned in midrash *Leviticus Rabbah*, the New York redaction consistently refers to the crown deposited by the king of Edom and later claimed by Nehemiah as *העטרה* or *עטרת הזהב*.¹¹ The first time it mentions the crown, the Cambridge redaction calls it simply *הכתר*. Yet, in the context of Nehemiah's self-coronation, the story reverses itself, and *הכתר* once again becomes *העטרה*. This inconsistency may point to the fact that *העטרה* of the New York redaction was, in fact, the original term, and that, for whatever reason, the author of the Cambridge redaction chose to replace it with *הכתר*, but eventually failed to use this new terminology in a consistent manner. As far as cultural background goes, the Cambridge redaction appears to be more thoroughly "Islamicized." The biblical *Hoter*, likely an allusion to "a shoot" in Isaiah 11:1, becomes *Mantzur*, a name that acquired messianic significance in the early Abbasid period.¹² The "Temple" of the New York redaction becomes the "place of the foundation stone" in the Cambridge redaction, a more cautious and realistic term coined in tacit recognition of the fact that the Dome of the Rock was not quite the Temple. I would suggest, on the basis of these considerations, that the New York redaction reflects an earlier stage in the development of the *'Otot*, whereas the Cambridge redaction belongs to a later period.

The dating of the *'Otot* in modern scholarship has varied greatly. Marmorstein identified references to the Ishmaelites and their leader Mansur in the text with the Persians and Khusrau II, respectively. As a result, he dated the work to "between 628 and 638."¹³ Later scholars have widely criticized Marmorstein's identifications as improbable and, by and large, have rejected them. Yet, at the same time, many also agreed with Marmorstein that the work should be dated to the seventh century. Although some accepted Marmorstein's pre-Islamic dating and even tried

¹¹ See the previous chapter for the discussion of midrash.

¹² See Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 144–47.

¹³ Marmorstein, "Les signes," 180.

to further justify it, most suggested that the text was composed in the wake of Muslim conquest.¹⁴ A much later date, however, was proposed by Robert G. Hoyland who assigned the text to the late eleventh century. Hoyland's argument is largely based on the work's claim that the king of Rome eventually takes Jerusalem back from the Ishmaelites. As Hoyland observes, "only in the time of the Crusades did the Muslims flee before Romans from Jerusalem."¹⁵ Hence, the late eleventh century was the most likely time of composition.

I do not find Hoyland's arguments convincing. In my opinion, the *'Otot* is roughly contemporaneous with a series of late seventh-century Syriac Christian apocalypses composed as a reaction to the deep sense of crisis caused by the success of the Muslim conquest and by the loss of vast areas of the Byzantine Middle East to Muslim armies.¹⁶ An earlier version of the *'Otot*, reflected in the New York redaction, should be dated to the late seventh or early eighth century, whereas the Cambridge redaction was likely composed sometime during the eighth century.

Two shared characteristics of the Hebrew apocalypse and Syriac eschatological writings stand out. First, most of these documents view the Muslim advance as being of no lasting significance. The focus of the *'Otot* is also still on the Christian empire and its rulers. The Ishmaelites represent a temporary, although significant, threat. Eventually the Ishmaelites are defeated by Edom, and the struggle of the Messiah is with Edom and its kings. At the same time, as Reinink has convincingly shown, the view that Christian Rome will maintain its status as the last world empire constitutes one of the central messages of such late-seventh-century Syriac compositions as Ps.-Ephraem and Ps.-Methodius.¹⁷ Both authors sought to reassert Christian Rome's triumphant imperialism in

¹⁴ See Stemberger, *Die Römische Herrschaft*, 141; Dagron and Déroche, "Juifs et Chrétiens," 41; Olster, *Roman Defeat*, 174; Möhring, *Der Weltkaiser der Endzeit*, 369–70. Himmelfarb, *The Apocalypse*, 133, cautiously notes that "the Signs is difficult to date, but it clearly postdates the Muslim conquest."

¹⁵ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It*, 318. Hoyland refers solely to Marmorstein's edition of the text and never mentions Higger.

¹⁶ On the literary context of the period, see Brock, "Syriac Views of Emergent Islam," 9–21; Reinink, "Early Christian Reactions," 227–41, and "Alexander the Great," 150–78.

¹⁷ See Reinink, "Pseudo-Methodius und die Legende vom römischen Endkaiser," 82–111; "Ps.-Methodius: A Concept of History in Response to the Rise of Islam," 149–87; "Pseudo-Ephraems 'Rede über das Ende' und die syrische eschatologische Literatur des siebenten Jahrhunderts," 437–63.

the face of the Muslim threat. Both of them played down the long-term impact of Islam. The Roman Empire was destined to crush all its earthly enemies and to present itself to God for eschatological consummation. It appears that the *’Otot* shares the same basic view of history and thus differs from Jewish apocalyptic compositions of a somewhat later period that recognize the established nature of Muslim rule and integrate it into their eschatological schemes.¹⁸

The Hebrew apocalypse also contains what looks like a version of the legend of a last Roman emperor that features prominently in Ps.-Methodius and which most likely developed in the context of the political upheavals of the seventh century. It is to this legend that we shall now turn.

THE LAST EMPEROR IN *’OTOT HA-MASHIAH*: THE CONTEXT

The *’Otot*’s interest in the figure of the last Roman emperor can be traced back to sources both inside and outside Jewish tradition. As I noted in the previous chapter, according to the late first- or early second-century apocalypse of 2 Baruch, the “last [Roman] ruler left alive at that time will be bound” and brought to Mount Zion.¹⁹ There he will be tried, convicted and killed by the Messiah. Despite some apparent similarity with the *’Otot*, the story in 2 Baruch suggests no institutional continuity between the Roman Empire and the messianic kingdom of Israel. Even though its description of messianic dominion may owe a great deal of inspiration to Roman imperialism, 2 Baruch emphasizes the decisive break between the two kingdoms. In contrast, the *’Otot* stresses precisely the fact of legitimate succession from Rome to the messianic kingdom of Israel complete with the ritualized transfer of royal insignia from the last Roman emperor to Israel’s messianic ruler.

The *’Otot* comes much closer to and, in fact, is likely to intentionally draw on another story I analyzed in the previous chapter: the story of Israel’s ownership rights to Rome’s imperial crown found in *Leviticus Rabbah*. There, too, in the eschatological future Rome is expected “to restore the crown to its owner” (i.e., to Israel). Compared to the story in

¹⁸ See Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 307–21, and Yahalom, “The Transition of Kingdoms,” 7–17, for the review of relevant texts.

¹⁹ 2 Baruch 40:1–2.

Leviticus Rabbah, the 'Otot adds drama to this claim and tells how the transfer is actually going to happen. The fairly unspecific transfer projected into a distant future by the midrash is transformed here into a carefully scripted and precisely localized ritual. It is the details of this ritual that find their most immediate parallel in non-Jewish sources. Scholars have long since noticed that behind the story about the king of Edom surrendering his crown in Jerusalem stands a widespread Byzantine literary motif: the legend of a last Roman emperor.²⁰ This observation, however, was usually made in passing and did not lead to an in-depth analysis of the two narratives. In what follows I intend to take a closer look at the two traditions, their mutual relationship, and their place within the broader literary context of the time.

The legend of a last Roman emperor came to play a prominent role in Byzantine and European apocalyptic traditions in the late seventh century A.D. and remained part of these traditions ever since. After it was first analyzed by Paul J. Alexander, a number of significant contributions to the understanding of the legend's literary and historical context were made by G. J. Reinink.²¹ Much of what follows in my present discussion will be based in one way or another on these scholars' work. Perhaps the earliest version of the legend appears in the Syriac Apocalypse of Ps.-Methodius.²² According to this text, the military onslaught and blasphemies of Arabs will cause "a king of the Greeks" to rise out of obscurity and wage a successful war against them.²³ The war would result in the total destruction of the enemy and the introduction of a period of

²⁰ See Dagron and Déroche, "Juifs et Chrétiens," 41–42; Olster, *Roman Defeat*, 174; Möhring, *Der Weltkaiser der Endzeit*, 369–70; Reeves, *Trajectories*, 113, n. 40; Himelfarb, *The Apocalypse*, 133–34.

²¹ See Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, 151–84, and "The Medieval Legend of the Last Roman Emperor and its Messianic Origin," 1–15; Reinink, "Pseudo-Methodius und die Legende vom römischen Endkaiser," 82–111; "Ps.-Methodius: A Concept of History in Response to the Rise of Islam," 149–87. For further bibliography, see Brandes, "Die apokalyptische Literatur," 310–12.

²² For the edition and German translation of Ps.-Methodius, see G. J. Reinink, *Die syrische Apokalypse des Pseudo-Methodius* (2 vols.; CSCO; Leuven: Peeters, 1993). For Greek and Latin translations, see W. J. Aerts and G. A. A. Kortekaas, *Die Apokalypse des Pseudo-Methodius: Die ältesten griechischen und lateinischen Übersetzungen* (2 vols.; CSCO; Leuven: Peeters, 1998). For a complete English translation of the text, see Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, 36–51. A partial English translation by Brock appears in Palmer, *The Seventh Century in the West-Syrian Chronicles*, 222–42.

²³ Ps.-Methodius, XIII, 11, 6–8.

unparalleled peace and prosperity among the king's subjects. Then the "Gates of the North" will open, and the last apocalyptic invasion led by the mythical nations of Gog and Magog will be unleashed. An angel of the Lord will eventually destroy the invaders "in the plain of Joppe."²⁴ Afterward, "the king of the Greeks descends and settles in Jerusalem."²⁵ At that time the Antichrist becomes revealed in Galilee. He is conceived in Chorazin, born in Bethsaida, and sets up his rule in Capernaum, thus providing an apocalyptic explanation for the woes pronounced on these towns by Jesus in Matthew 11:20–24. When this happens, the narrative reaches its high point:

And immediately when the Son of Perdition is revealed, then the king of the Greeks will go up and will stand on Golgotha and the Holy Cross will be set in that place in which it was set up when it carried the Christ. And the king of the Greeks will place his diadem on the top of the Holy Cross, and will stretch out his two hands to heaven and will hand over the kingship to God the Father. And the Holy Cross on which Christ was crucified will be raised to heaven and the crown of kingship with it [. . .] And immediately the Holy Cross will be raised to heaven, and the king of the Greeks will give up his soul to his creator. And immediately every leader and every authority and all powers will cease.²⁶

The surrender of power by the last emperor ushers in the period of the Antichrist's rule terminated by the Second Coming of Christ and the Final Judgment.²⁷ The Legend of the last Roman emperor elaborates the same basic theme of the empire's eschatological destiny as do earlier seventh-century Byzantine compositions such as the Alexander Legend. The dominant idea remains the same: At the end of time, the Roman Empire will deliver itself and mankind to God. The historical destiny of Rome is to be the last human empire and a gateway through which the kingdom of heaven will finally arrive on earth. The last Roman emperor

²⁴ Ps.-Methodius, XIII, 21, 2.

²⁵ Ps.-Methodius, XIII, 21, 5–6.

²⁶ Ps.-Methodius, XIV, 2, 4–6, 8. The translation is from Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, 50.

²⁷ Ps.-Methodius applies the prophecy of 2 Thessalonians 2:6–8 about the restraining force that prevents the Antichrist from appearing to the Christian Roman Empire. The latter derives its power from the cross established in the center of the world. When the crown-carrying cross ascends to heaven, the last obstacle to the Antichrist's reign is removed, and the Antichrist is unleashed. See Reinink, *Die syrische Apokalypse des Pseudo-Methodius*, vol. 2, 71, n. 1–2.

surrenders his crown to its true owner: God, whose authority will from that point onward replace human authority on earth. To describe this act of surrender, Ps.-Methodius applies to the last Roman emperor the passage from 1 Corinthians 15:24 originally intended to describe Christ's delivery of his kingdom to God the Father in the end of days: "Then comes the end, when he [Christ] hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power." Through the intentional confusion of personalities, Ps.-Methodius portrays the last Roman emperor as Christ's earthly *alter ego* sharing in Christ's powers and will.²⁸

The similarities between the Christian legend of the last Roman emperor and its Jewish version are fairly obvious. It seems likely that the author(s) of *'Otot ha-Mashiah* had access to a version of the legend that was similar to that of Ps.-Methodius. In both versions of the legend, the last Roman emperor establishes his headquarters in Jerusalem and spends some time there before carrying out the ritualized act of relinquishing his royal powers. In both cases, he relinquishes them by taking a royal diadem off his head and placing it either on the cross on Golgotha where Jesus was crucified or on the foundation stone in the Temple.

It is also clear, however, that the Jewish author has reworked the legend to convey a rather different eschatological message. First, according to *'Otot ha-Mashiah*, by laying down his crown on the foundation stone the last Roman emperor "returns what his fathers took." In other words, he returns the imperial insignia to their original and rightful owner: Israel. Second, whereas in the Christian version of the legend the last Roman emperor, acting in the capacity of Christ's earthly *alter ego*, surrenders his power and kingdom directly to God, in the legend's Jewish version the power is handed over to Nehemiah son of Hushiel, the Messiah son of Joseph. Instead of immediate eschatological consummation the *'Otot* envisions a ritualized transfer of royal power and its attributes from the king of Edom (Rome/Byzantium) to the Messiah of Israel. The eschatological scenario that ushers in the direct rule of God is reworked into a political succession scenario that replaces the Roman

²⁸ Cf. Ps.-Methodius, X, 3. See Reinink, "Pseudo-Methodius und die Legende," 101, and "Ps.-Methodius: A Concept of History," 154.

Empire with the Jewish messianic kingdom. As a result, the Jewish Messiah becomes the legitimate successor of the last Roman emperor, and the Jewish messianic kingdom finds itself in a direct line of succession from the Roman Empire. At the heart of this succession scenario stands the symbolism of the royal insignia. The kingdom is transferred from the last Roman emperor to Nehemiah son of Hushiel through the symbolic act of transferring the imperial insignia, specifically the diadem/crown, “returned” by the Roman emperor to Jerusalem only to be reclaimed by Nehemiah.

In the process, the figure of the Messiah son of Joseph itself undergoes transformation. Most rabbinic references to the Messiah son of Joseph (or alternatively the Messiah son of Ephraim) outside the apocalyptic genre contain relatively little data about his whereabouts.²⁹ He is “the Anointed for War” destined to destroy the Kingdom of Edom/Rome, but also, at least according to some traditions, to fall in battle and be subsequently resurrected by the Messiah son of David. Byzantine Jewish apocalypses embrace the image of the Messiah son of Joseph as the warrior Messiah responsible for defeating Edom and add more details to his portrayal. The Messiah son of Joseph gathers in the exiles of Israel to Jerusalem, rebuilds the Temple there, and resumes sacrifices. A seventh-century *piyyut* contains an enigmatic statement that the Messiah will “expound scripture in a small temple,” whereas another one explicitly refers to the Messiah son of Joseph offering sacrifices in the restored Temple.³⁰ In *Sefer Zerubbabel*, the Messiah’s figure is clearly overshadowed by those of Hephzibah and her son, although a seventh-century *piyyut*, which reflects a different version of the same story, identifies the Messiah son of Joseph with Hephzibah’s son.³¹ Some texts openly downplay the significance of the restoration that takes place on his watch. According to the *piyyut*

²⁹ For the review of sources, see Heinemann, “The Messiah Son of Joseph,” 1–15. Cf. Berger, “Three Typological Themes in Early Jewish Messianism,” 141–64. A distinct tradition in the *Pesiqta Rabboti*, 34–37, depicts the Messiah son of Ephraim as the primordial Messiah who accepts suffering on behalf of Israel. This tradition seems to be a separate development that has little relation to a more widespread portrayal of the Messiah son of Ephraim as a warrior Messiah appearing before the arrival of the Messiah son of David. See Goldberg, *Erlösung durch Leiden*, 55–56, 170–71; Schäfer, *Die Geburt des Judentums*, 135–36.

³⁰ See Fleischer, “Solving the Qilliri Riddle,” 414, line 23, and Yahalom, “On the Validity,” 132, line 52.

³¹ Yahalom, “On the Validity,” 131–32, lines 34–54.

published by Fleisher, the Messiah son of Joseph takes control of a “small temple” rebuilt by Jews in the wake of the Persian victory over Rome and is appointed (presumably by the Persians) as “the leader and the head” of the Jewish community, only to be murdered inside the Temple by the Persian “commander-in-chief.”³² According to an earlier version of the *’Otot*, the Messiah son of Joseph defeats Rome on his own and even brings the Temple vessels back to Jerusalem, yet the extent of his victory is limited: He establishes control over Jerusalem and its adjacent territory “up to Damascus and Ashkelon” but not beyond that, even though the fear of him spreads across the world.³³ He makes alliances with other regional leaders, such as an anonymous ruler of Egypt, but clearly enjoys no universal rule. In most versions of the story, the Messiah son of Joseph gets killed in the confrontation with Armilos and then resurrected by the Messiah son of David. Beyond vague statements, texts have little to say about any power-sharing agreement between the two.

The scale of authority attributed by our version of *’Otot ha-Mashiah* to the Messiah son of Joseph differs considerably from that found in other traditions. By taking the emperor’s crown, Nehemiah son of Hushiel inherits the world empire of the Romans. He is no longer depicted as a local Jewish ruler of passing significance, but as the ruler of the last universal kingdom on earth, the messianic kingdom of Israel, which inherits and grows out of the universal empire of Rome. The figure of the Messiah son of Joseph becomes radically reinterpreted and integrated into the religio-political and eschatological discourse of the Byzantine Near East. The vision of Rome as the last world empire that played a central role in Roman imperial ideology is interpreted by the author(s) of the *’Otot* to apply to Israel. The *’Otot* merely adds an extra stage to the eschatological drama envisioned by late Roman and Byzantine apocalyptic literature. After Nehemiah son of Hushiel accepts the crown, the events return to the course envisioned in other Byzantine apocalyptic texts: The peace and prosperity of the last world emperor’s reign are replaced by the evils of his demonic counterpart’s rule (the Antichrist in Christian texts, Armilos in Jewish tradition) and, finally, by the general consummation and the reign of Christ or the Davidic Messiah. The

³² Fleischer, 414, lines 22–28.

³³ Even Shemuel, *Midreshe Geulah*, 320, lines 71–73.

'Otot operates strictly within the eschatological parameters established by Byzantine apocalyptic thought and draws on these parameters to establish a Jewish version of Byzantine imperial eschatology.

THE CROSS AND THE CROWN

During the fourth century, the Christian symbolism of the cross acquired a new range of meanings. After Constantine's vision of the "trophy of the cross of light" on the eve of the battle at the Milvian Bridge in 312, the cross was no longer just a religious symbol of Christ's saving death.³⁴ From this time onward, the cross also became a symbol (perhaps, *the* symbol) of the empire's power and triumph. In this triumph Christ's victory over death and the emperor's victory over his enemies came together in the existential victory over the forces of chaos and decay by the life-bearing Christian kingdom and its earthly and heavenly ruler.³⁵ It is possible that Constantine himself conceived of the cross not in exclusively Christian terms but as a sign of his personal religious intimacy with the Supreme God and his universal triumphant rule exercised as a result of such intimacy.³⁶ In his writings, Eusebius also emphasized the spiritual and cosmic rather than physical nature of the cross. For him, the cosmic cross ("the Sign") and the empire's new alliance with heaven received their strongest expression in the cross-shaped army standard, the *labarum*.³⁷ During the reign of Theodosius II (408–450), the elongated cross replaced a traditional Roman *tropaeum* in the hands of Victoria on imperial gold coins. By then the symbolism of the protective and triumphant cross already constituted an essential element of the Christian religio-political narrative as well as popular veneration.³⁸

Apparently it was sometime in the fifth century that the Syriac *Romance of Julian the Apostate* was composed in the Syriac-speaking milieu of

³⁴ See Eusebius, *V. Const.* 1.28–32; Lactantius, *De Mort. Pers.* 44.5.

³⁵ See Eusebius, *Laud. Const.* 6.21, 9.8 and 18, 10.3.

³⁶ As may be concluded from Eusebius' "Tricennial Oration," see Drake, *In Praise of Constantine*, 71–73. Cf. Rudolf Leeb, *Konstantin und Christus* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1992), 29–52.

³⁷ Eusebius, *V. Const.* 2.7–9, 3.2–3, and 4.21; *Laud. Const.* 9.12 and 9.14.

³⁸ See Storch, "The Trophy and the Cross," 105–117; Gagé, "Σταυρὸς νικοποιός," 370–400; Dinkler, "Das Kreuz als Siegeszeichen," 55–76; Stockmeier, *Theologie und Kult des Kreuzes bei Johannes Chrysostomus*, 212–17.

the late Roman Near East, perhaps in Edessa.³⁹ Its author created an idealized image of Julian's successor, Jovian, as a new Constantine and the restorer of the Christian Roman *basileia*. The symbolic high point of this restoration comes when Jovian accepts the imperial crown offered to him by the troops after Julian's death. Jovian, however, agrees on the condition that the soldiers abandon paganism and return to Christianity: "And let Christ be king over you first, secretly as God, and then will I also be king over you as man, publicly."⁴⁰ When they comply, Jovian takes the Cross, which went in front of the army as its *labarum*, and fixes it upon a hill facing the troops. He then commands his soldiers to place the emperor's crown on top of the Cross as an offering to Christ:

Let it not be that the crown of a pagan with which he adored idols should be set on my head before it is placed on top of the Cross. And when Christ has become king over you by His Cross and the crown of our kingdom has been blessed and sanctified by it, then also I will accept it fittingly and rightly from the blessed right hand filled with holiness, by which the unclean were sanctified and sins were remitted. Approach then, and put the crown that is in your hands on top of the Cross, and come, let us implore Christ by the worship of His Cross for peace and the sustenance of your kingdom.⁴¹

Jovian then prays before the cross "for the victory of the Romans and for the sustenance of their kingdom," acknowledging the cross as the place of refuge for the guilty, and asking God that he may receive the crown from His hands.⁴² When Jovian finishes the prayer he makes the sign of the cross on his breast and his forehead and bows down before the cross:

And the royal crown descended, and placed itself on his head, the hand of man not having approached it. And all the people of the Romans were

³⁹ See *Julianos der Abtruennige. Syrische Erzählungen*, ed. J. G. E. Hoffmann (Leiden, 1880). An English translation by H. Gollancz, *Julian the Apostate* (London: Oxford University Press, 1928) is often unreliable and should be used with caution. On the history of this text, see Michael van Esbroeck, "Le soi-disant roman de Julien l'Apostat," 191–202, and Drijvers, "The Syriac Romance of Julian, its Function, Place of Origin and Original Language," 201–14. Muraviev, "The Syriac Julian Romance and Its Place in the Literary History," 194–206, provides a detailed review of relevant scholarship.

⁴⁰ Hoffmann, 199.9–11. Here and below the translation is from Reinink, "Ps.-Methodius: A Concept of History," 172–73.

⁴¹ Hoffmann, 200.5–12. For the iconographic context of the "triumphant cross" and its adoration, including the offering of crowns, see Grabar, *L'empereur dans l'art byzantine*, 230–34, and 239–43. Cf., however, Mathews, *The Clash of Gods*, 157–67.

⁴² Hoffmann, 200.17–19, 26.

stupefied and marveled at this great miracle which was wrought, and they cried out, and said: "Henceforth, Christ is King over us in heaven, and Jovian is king over us on earth."⁴³

Reinink has convincingly demonstrated that the story of Jovian in the *Romance* served as an important source of Ps.-Methodius' legend of the last Roman emperor.⁴⁴ Both texts share the basic narrative of the imperial rule as an icon of Christ's kingship. Jovian received his crown as Christ's deputy on earth. By placing the crown back on the cross, the last emperor returns to God what already belongs to Him: the World Empire of the Romans. The emperor formally acknowledges the end of the human kingship that ruled the empire as a visible manifestation of the heavenly kingship of Christ. From the moment that the crown-bearing cross ascends to heaven the rule over the empire passes directly to Christ, and the eternal kingdom of heaven that has previously been hidden behind the veil of human kingship finally sets in. For both Ps.-Methodius and the *Romance*, the cross plays the role of the central symbol of imperial rule on earth and the empire's intimate connection with heaven. It is the ontological axis around which the empire forms itself, in which it finds refuge, and from which it receives sustenance.

From the late fourth century onward, the imperial cross narrative received an additional dimension in a series of legends that formed around the discovery of the remains of the True Cross in Jerusalem by Constantine's mother Helena. The legend probably developed in circles close to Bishop Cyril of Jerusalem and reflected the imperial project to restore Jerusalem as one of the sacred centers of the empire, the "New Jerusalem" of Constantine,⁴⁵ as well as Cyril's own policy of integrating Jerusalem and its *sancta* into this new religio-political narrative.⁴⁶ With the help of Cyril's efforts, the triumphant imperial cross acquires physical dimension in the remnants of the True Cross and becomes localized in Jerusalem, from which its pieces radiate across the empire in the form of potent relics. Helena's legend plays a crucial role in this process. In

⁴³ Hoffmann, 201.8–15.

⁴⁴ See Reinink, "The Romance of Julian the Apostate as a Source for Seventh Century Syriac Apocalypses," 75–86, and "Ps.-Methodius: A Concept of History," 170–74.

⁴⁵ V. Const. 3.25–33. See Kühnel, *From the Earthly to Heavenly Jerusalem*, 81–93; Van Dam, *The Roman Revolution of Constantine*, 293–305.

⁴⁶ Drijvers, *Helena Augusta*, 81–93, and 131–45. See also Frolow, *La Relique de la Vraie Croix*, 55–72; Klein, *Byzanz, der Westen und das 'wahre' Kreuz*, 19–27.

the legend, parts of the cross are transferred from Jerusalem to Constantinople, thus securing the Christian character and overall prosperity of the empire, whereas the nails found along with the cross are made part of the emperor's horse bridle, helmet, and, according to some versions, crown.⁴⁷ The imperial ideology of the cross receives its physical manifestation in the remains of the True Cross discovered in Jerusalem. Jerusalem itself was increasingly perceived as the city of the palpable yet invisible presence of Christ, who delegated the visible tokens of his power in the form of relics to the emperor and received imperial homage in the form of donations and pilgrimages. By the fifth century, intimate personal ties are forged between Jerusalem and ruling emperors through various types of imperial patronage and pilgrimages, and Jerusalem is established as an important center in the sacred geography of the Christian empire. It is the city that, along with Constantinople, generates the empire's supernatural strength.⁴⁸

The bond between the two narratives of the cross, the imperial and the local Jerusalemite ones, becomes further strengthened by the events of the early seventh century. In the spring of 614, Jerusalem was captured by the Persians, under whose control it remained for fourteen years. The Persians captured and carried away the remains of the True Cross, which were kept sealed in a special reliquary. In 628 the Byzantine emperor Heraclius once again restored Jerusalem to Christian rule as part of his comprehensive victory over the Persians. As Jan Willem Drijvers has observed, "it seems that only after his defeat of the Persians in 628, did it dawn on Heraclius how he could exploit the symbol of the Cross for ideological purposes."⁴⁹ Prior to then, contemporaneous sources, such as hymns by George of Pisidia, contain no reference to the cross as an objective of Heraclius' campaign. The clause about the restitution of the relics of the cross was probably included in the peace treaty with

⁴⁷ Drijvers, *Helena Augusta*, 95–117. On the subsequent veneration of the True Cross in Constantinople, see Klein, "Constantine, Helena, and the Cult of the True Cross in Constantinople," 31–59, and *Byzanz, der Westen*, 32–68.

⁴⁸ See Hunt, *Holy Land Pilgrimage*, 6–49, 221–48; Wilken, *The Land Called Holy*, 82–100. Cf. Kühnel, *From the Earthly to the Heavenly Jerusalem*, 63–72, on the early fifth-century representation of the cross and Jerusalem in the apse mosaic of St. Pudentiana in Rome.

⁴⁹ Drijvers, "Heraclius and the *Restitutio Crucis*," 182. See also Spain Alexander, "Heraclius, Byzantine Imperial Ideology and the David Plates," 224–26; Flusin, *Saint Anastase le Perse*, 312–19.

Persians made in the summer of 629. In the following year, Heraclius made a triumphal entry (*adventus*) into Jerusalem followed by the formal ceremony of the restoration of the holy relic to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher on Golgotha.⁵⁰

The event has been commemorated by George of Pisidia in the poem *In Restitutionem Sanctae Crucis*, our main source of information about this event. The details of the ceremony itself are sketchy, but ideological meanings read into it are clear. According to MacCormack, “the theme which does hold the poem together is the link which is established between the emperor and the cross, the instrument of the emperor’s victory.”⁵¹ More specifically, “the cross, the principle whereby Christ conquered death, was also the principle whereby the emperor ruled the empire and could conquer his enemies.” As such, it “illustrates a unity of purpose between Christ and emperor.”⁵² The cross secured the imperial triumph over the Persians by the same power with which Christ triumphed over “the tyrants of death and gave life to the corpse of Lazarus.” “Indeed,” according to George, “it was fitting that the new revelation of the cross [by Heraclius] should coincide with the resurrection of the dead.”⁵³

George further compares the restored cross to the biblical Ark of the Covenant, thus perhaps drawing parallels between Heraclius and David.⁵⁴ According to George, however, the cross is more potent than the Ark.⁵⁵ It brings confusion among the enemies, allowing the emperor to “keep silence bearing crown and the scepter, like the umpire surrounded by athletes” while ruling over his enemies.⁵⁶ The immovable and silent emperor aligned with the cross finds himself on the axis that governs the universe. He is the center of the world, the place from which the world’s ability to function is generated. By restoring the relic of the cross

⁵⁰ See Flusin, *Saint Anastase le Perse et l’histoire de la Palestine au début du VIIe siècle*, 293–327; Klein, *Byzanz, der Westen*, 28–31.

⁵¹ MacCormack, *Art and Ceremony*, 84.

⁵² MacCormack, *Art and Ceremony*, 85.

⁵³ *In Rest.*, 104–10. Here and later in text the translation is from MacCormack.

⁵⁴ On Heraclius as a new David, see Spain Alexander, “Heraclius, Byzantine Imperial Ideology and the David Plates,” 226–37; Ludwig, “Kaiser Herakleios,” 93–104.

⁵⁵ *In Rest.*, 73–77. See also Antiochus Strategos, who observes that, just like the Ark, the chest that contained the cross was never opened while in captivity. See Conybeare “Antiochus Strategos’ Account of the Sack of Jerusalem in A.D. 614,” 516.

⁵⁶ *In Rest.*, 97–98.

to Golgotha, Heraclius restores the *axis mundi* centered on Golgotha and Jerusalem:

Oh Golgotha, dance; again the entire creation
Honors you and calls you God-receiving.
For the emperor coming from Persia
Shows forth the cross which is raised upon you.
Acclaim him with words of song.
But since the stones have no words,
Prepare new palm branches
For the welcome of the new bearer of victory.⁵⁷

The text associates Heraclius' *adventus* in Jerusalem with that of Christ on Palm Sunday, thus creating for it messianic overtones. It also interprets the emperor's victory as an act of cosmic renewal accomplished through the restoration of the *axis mundi* on Golgotha. The restored cross constitutes the pole that secures the empire and the entire world by providing them with a mystical centeredness. It keeps the universe together by preventing it from falling apart.

When in the late seventh century Ps.-Methodius attempts to reassert the eschatological role of the Christian empire, he largely embraces the Eusebian ideological vocabulary later revived by Heraclius. For Ps.-Methodius:

There is no people or kingdom under heaven that can overpower the kingdom of the Christians as long as it possesses a place of refuge in the life-giving Cross, which is set up in the center of the earth and has its power over height, depth, length and breadth.⁵⁸

The cross, in which the Christian empire "possesses a place of refuge," is the ultimate source of its power and invincibility, "the unconquerable weapon that conquers all."⁵⁹ The cross forms the *axis mundi*; it is set up in the center of the earth and rules over height and depth. By identifying itself with the cross, the empire also identifies itself with the center of the world. It becomes the *axis mundi* constituted by "the priesthood and the kingship and the Holy Cross"⁶⁰ that carries the world. The language

⁵⁷ *In Rest.*, 1–8.

⁵⁸ Ps.-Methodius, IX, 8, 3–9, 6. Cf. Eusebius, *Laud. Const.* 9.8.12 and 18.

⁵⁹ Ps.-Methodius, IX, 9, 12–13, and V, 9, 13–14.

⁶⁰ Ps.-Methodius, X, 2, 7–8.

of the empire's centeredness on the cross and the world's centeredness on the empire is crucial for Ps.-Methodius. After this axis is removed in the time of the last emperor and the crown-bearing cross ascends to heaven, the world is flung open to the reign of the Antichrist and final consummation.

The transfer of the crown by the last Roman emperor from Constantinople to Jerusalem marks the transfer of delegated power back to its original owner. To do so, the emperor has to make a pilgrimage to the seat of Christ's invisible rule, from which earlier emperors used to receive the signs of their power. The last emperor traces this route backward. As Gilbert Dagron has perceptively observed, by going to Jerusalem and removing the crown from the head, the emperor follows the same set of guidelines that Byzantine emperors followed every time they entered the church (and particularly the church of Hagia Sophia) on ceremonial occasions. According to these guidelines, the ruling emperor was required to remove his crown and then receive it back from the Patriarch upon leaving the church.⁶¹ The emperor could not be wearing the crown as long as he was in the realm administered directly by God, to whom the crown ultimately belonged and from whose hands it was delegated to the emperor. In Jerusalem the last Roman emperor returned the crown along with the empire to Christ, thus ushering in Christ's own kingdom and direct rule, no longer mediated by way of Eusebian mimesis by either the earthly empire or the earthly emperor.

Reinink suggests that Ps.-Methodius' argument developed as a reaction to the building of the Dome of the Rock by the Umayyad caliph 'Abd al-Malik in 691–692.⁶² By asserting the role of the cross as the true *axis mundi*, Ps.-Methodius also reiterated Golgotha's status as the sole center of the world, repudiating rival claims by the Temple Mount. The Roman Empire, and not its Arab rival, possessed real access to the center of the world, thus securing for itself the status of the last world empire. The Cross, not the Rock, was the true *axis mundi* that justified its possessor's claims for world dominion. It is also likely that at least some

⁶¹ Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, 104.

⁶² See Reinink, "Pseudo-Methodius und die Legende vom römischen Endkaiser," 82–111, "Ps.-Methodius: A Concept of History in Response to the Rise of Islam," 149–87, and "Early Christian Reactions to the Building of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem," 227–41.

Christians saw the construction of the Dome as an attempt to rebuild the Jewish Temple. Ps.-Methodius responded by rejecting the value of the Temple Mount as the center of the world. In doing so, he reiterated and emphasized a long-standing Christian belief that it was the Christian Church, and more specifically, the Christian “new Jerusalem” centered on the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and Golgotha, that became the true heir of the Jewish Temple’s sanctity. The center of the world shifted from the Temple Mount to Golgotha never to return to the Temple Mount again. According to Reinink, Ps.-Methodius’ polemic was directed not against the Jews, but against the Muslims and their attempt to build a rival sanctuary on the Temple Mount.

Reinink’s hypothesis may very well be correct. One has to remember, however, that Ps.-Methodius’ view of Golgotha and the cross as the religio-political *axis mundi* and the foundation of the Christian empire already can be found in the poem by George of Pisidia. George also asserts the superiority of the cross over the Israelite Ark as the source of true power with which the triumphant kingdom should identify itself. In his work, Ps.-Methodius sharpens some of the earlier arguments but does not invent anything radically new. His view of the Christian empire and its sacred center derives from the triumphal rhetoric of the Heraclian era. It is possible that this rhetoric was used by Ps.-Methodius to address the new danger of the Dome of the Rock being constructed on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, but the rhetoric itself was old and could be traced back at least to the aftermath of Heraclius’ Persian campaign.

THE EVEN SHETIYAH

The earliest reference to the foundation stone located within the Jerusalem Temple’s Holy of Holies comes from the Mishnah:

After the Ark had been taken away, there was a stone from the days of the earlier prophets, called Shetiyyah, three fingers above the ground, on which he [the High Priest] would place [the pan of burning coals].⁶³

⁶³ M. Yoma 5:2. On traditions associated with the foundation stone, see Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, vol. 5, 14–16, n. 39; Jeremias, “Golgotha und der heilige Felsen,” 91–108; Patai, *Man and Temple*, 57–58, 85–86; Alexander, “Jerusalem as the *Omphalos* of the World,” 104–119; Busink, *Der Tempel von Jerusalem von Salomo bis Herodes*, vol. 2, 1174–78; Eliav, *God’s Mountain*, 224–27, and literature cited there in n. 106.

The Mishnah mentions the foundation stone in the context of a highly technical description of the liturgical ceremony that took place in the Temple on Yom Kippur. The purpose of the stone in this description is equally technical: In the First Temple, it used to serve as the base on which the Ark of the Covenant was set up. In the Second Temple, the High Priest would place on it the pan of burning coals used to burn incense inside the Holy of Holies. As Louis Ginzberg has observed, the dating of the stone to the time of the early prophets (i.e., the era of David and Solomon) precludes any chance of its being the primordial starting point of creation.⁶⁴ The original purpose of the foundation stone in rabbinic literature was purely technical and antiquarian: The stone played an important role in Yom Kippur's liturgical ceremony, which once took place in the Temple.

The Tosefta makes explicit the liturgical function of the stone: "In the beginning the ark was placed on it. When the ark was taken away, on it they would burn the incense before the innermost altar."⁶⁵ So far the purpose of the stone remains technical and antiquarian, just as the Mishnah would have it, but the last sentence in the Tosefta adds an entirely new perspective: "R. Yose says, From it the world was created, as it says, 'Out of Zion, the perfection of the world' (Ps 50:2)." This statement introduces a theme that would come to dominate subsequent discussion of the foundation stone. The stone served as creation's starting point, a ground zero from which the rest of the world was created.⁶⁶

Both Talmuds embraced R. Yose's brief but tantalizing explanation, adding to it new details and completely forgetting the original Mishnaic interpretation of the stone. Y. Yoma 5:3 (42c) used R. Yose's statement to explain the name of the stone: "Why was it called *Shetiyyah*? For from it the world was founded." Talmud also provided another explanation for the name – the stone was called *Shetiyyah* because "from it the world was given water to drink," and added Isaiah 28:16 as another proof text.

⁶⁴ Ginzberg, *Legends*, vol. 5, 15.

⁶⁵ T. Yoma 2:14. I follow Neusner's translation.

⁶⁶ R. Yose's statement is probably another reflection of the Hellenistic Jewish belief that the Temple Mount served as ground zero for the creation of both the world and the human being. Legends that have Adam created from the dust gathered on the Temple Mount constitute another facet of this tradition. See Aptowitz, "Les elements juifs dans la legend du Golgotha," 145–62; Gafni, "Pre-Histories of Jerusalem in Hellenistic, Jewish, and Christian Literature," 10–16.

Elsewhere the Yerushalmi associates the word *Shetiyyah* with weaving, because the world can be likened to a fabric woven from the stone. In the same passage, however, the Talmud also advocates a decisively historicizing approach to the Even Shetiyyah: The stone perished when the Temple was destroyed on the ninth of Av. As a result, some women abstained from spinning on that day in commemoration of the stone out of which the spinning of the world took place.⁶⁷

Compared to the Yerushalmi, b. Yoma 54b provides a much more elaborate account focused primarily on cosmological functions of the stone. The Talmud starts by asserting “the view that the world was started from Zion on.” It then presents and discusses different opinions on the exact progression of creation: Was the world created from the center or from its sides on? Did God “cast a stone into the ocean, from which the world was then founded”? The majority of rabbis held to the opinion that “the world was created from Zion,” based on the interpretation of Psalm 50:2. Moreover, the majority of sages were also of the opinion that both “generations of heavens” and “generations of earth” were created from Zion. As the Talmud sums up the discussion: “From Zion was the beauty of the world perfected.”⁶⁸

In other words, as one moves from the Mishnah to the Tosefta and then to the two Talmuds, one also moves from the liturgical to the cosmological and mythological interpretations of the foundation stone.⁶⁹ It is, however, only in the Byzantine *Midrash Tanhuma* that one can observe the shift from a cosmological to a religio-political interpretation of the foundation stone. In fact, the two appear side by side and deeply interconnected. *Tanhuma Qedoshim* 10 contains the following interpretation of Ecclesiastes 2:5: “I made gardens and orchards for myself and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them”:

Because Solomon was wise, he planted all the species of trees. R. Yannai said: Solomon even planted peppers, but how did he plant them? It is simply that

⁶⁷ Y. Pes. 4:1 (30d) = y. Ta'an. 1:6 (64c). According to the anonymous pilgrim from Bordeaux who visited Jerusalem in the 330s, Jews conducted an annual ritual of anointing the “Pierced Stone” situated in the Temple area with oil. See *Itinerarium Burdigalense* 591:4–6 (Geyer and Cuntz, 16). Eliav, *God's Mountain*, 228, and n. 114, interprets this account as a reference to liturgical ceremonies commemorating the Even Shetiyyah.

⁶⁸ See Jeremias, “Golgotha,” 91–108, for a comprehensive review of cosmological traditions associated with the foundation stone.

⁶⁹ See Schäfer, “Tempel und Schöpfung,” 122–33.

Solomon was wise and knew the root of the foundation of the world. Where is it shown? “Out of Zion God has shined forth as the perfection of beauty” (Ps 50:2). Out of Zion has all of the whole world been perfected. Why is it called foundation stone? Because out of it the world was founded. Now Solomon knew which vein went to Cush and planted peppers on it. They produced immediately. See what he says: “And I planted all kinds of fruit trees in them” (Eccl 2:5).

Another interpretation: Just as the navel is set in the center of a person, so the land of Israel is the navel of the earth, as it is said: “those who live at the navel of the earth” (Ezek 38:12). The land of Israel sits in the center of the world, Jerusalem in the center of the land of Israel, the Temple in the center of Jerusalem, the sanctuary in the center of the Temple, the Ark in the center of the sanctuary, and the foundation stone – from which the world was formed – sits in front of the sanctuary.

Now Solomon, who was wise, stood upon the roots that went out from [that stone] into the whole world and planted all species of trees in them. He therefore said: “I made gardens and orchards for myself” (Eccl 2:5).⁷⁰

Tanhuma embraces the cosmological mythology of previous interpretations: The foundation stone is the starting point for the creation of the world. Out of it the rest of the world was founded. *Tanhuma* also adds something new, however. Now the unique cosmological function of the stone serves to enhance the status of Jerusalem and its kings, specifically King Solomon. *Tanhuma* uses a cosmological mythology to create a political one.

It does so in two ways. First, *Tanhuma* interprets Ecclesiastes 2:5 as a reference to Solomon’s ability to grow all kinds of trees from all over the world, including highly praised spices from India (Cush). How could he do that? Solomon had access to the foundation stone, which contained “the root of the foundation of the world.” *Tanhuma* follows here the rabbinic view of an embryo’s development, attested more explicitly in b. Yoma 85a. There, Abba Saul maintains that the formation of an embryo starts “from the navel which sends its roots into every direction.” The formation of the earth apparently followed the same pattern. It started with the foundation stone, which then “sent its roots into every direction,” thus forming the earth. All Solomon had to do was to figure out which

⁷⁰ *Tanh. Qedoshim* 10 (Buber 39b).

root went in what direction and plant on it an appropriate kind of tree. For example, he used the root that went into India to plant peppers, and so on. What looks like a pretty folktale has, in fact, an underlying political message. Solomon's access to the foundation stone provided him with immediate and effective access to the entire world and its riches. Solomon ruled the world, in a nutshell, by controlling the embryo from which this world sprang into existence. He could literally pull the cords that carried the earth, or at least plant trees on them. Solomon emerges from the tale as the world ruler who governs the earth by holding its umbilical cords in his grip.

This image of Solomon stands in direct relationship with the image of the Even Shetiyyah as the navel of the earth. According to *Tanhuma*, the Land of Israel, Jerusalem, the Temple, the Ark, and the foundation stone form the *omphalos*: a central point from which the world has expanded in different directions at the moment of creation. It has been argued, in my opinion persuasively, that the image of *omphalos* is Hellenistic in origin and should be traced back to the Second Temple period.⁷¹ In the Hellenistic era, references to a particular place as the world's *omphalos* served to justify that place's political claims by basing them on the place's unique cosmological status. Geography, cosmology, and politics were tied together within the image that was literally geopolitical in nature. In a highly suggestive article, Felix Böhl has argued that the text in *Tanhuma Qadoshim* 10 indeed represented a new stage in the development of Even Shetiyyah's lore. According to Böhl, in this text the traditional rabbinic view of Even Shetiyyah as the universal embryo from which the rest of creation unfolded was combined with the Hellenistic concept of Jerusalem and the Temple Mount as the navel of earth/world. As a result, a new and fairly unique (as far as rabbinic literature is concerned) concept of Even Shetiyyah as the earth's *omphalos* was brought into existence.⁷² In what appears to be an independent line of argument, Philip S. Alexander has observed that the story in *Tanhuma* might have

⁷¹ See Seeligman, "Jerusalem in Jewish-Hellenistic Thought," 192–208; Talmon, "TABUR HAAREZ and the Comparative Method," 163–77; Alexander, "Jerusalem as the *Omphalos*," 104–19; Busink, *Der Tempel*, vol. 2, 1174–78. In their arguments, these scholars emphasize the difference between the Hellenistic tradition of the *omphalos* and the Near Eastern/biblical tradition of the Holy Mount. Cf. Jeremias, "Golgotha," 91–108.

⁷² See Böhl, "Über das Verhältnis von Shetiya-Stein und Nabel der Welt," 253–70, esp. 267–70.

been directed specifically against Rome's claims to be the center of the world. Alexander further compares the Even Shetiyyah to the *Milliarium Aureum*, the "golden milestone," which indicated the road distance from Rome to key points in the empire. Just as Rome was situated in the hub of networks governing the empire, so too was Jerusalem placed at the origin of the roots that the Even Shetiyyah sent into the rest of the world. Just as Rome's rulers enjoyed the benefits of being at the center of the world, so too did Solomon.⁷³

I would like to further develop Böhl's and Alexander's lines of argument by suggesting that *Tanhuma* ties together the themes of an emperor, an imperial city, and the world's *omphalos* in a way that closely resembles the sixth- and seventh-century Roman imperial propaganda. As a result, the Even Shetiyyah of *Tanhuma*'s story becomes a symbolic tool of King Solomon's universal rule, akin in its significance to the role played by the triumphant cross in late Roman imperial discourse. In a famous description of Justinian's equestrian statue set atop the column in the Augusteion, a square in front of the imperial palace in Constantinople, Procopius notes:

Upon this horse is mounted a colossal bronze figure of the Emperor [. . .] And in his left hand he holds a globe, by which the sculptor signifies that the whole earth and sea are subject to him, yet he has neither sword nor spear nor any other weapon, but a cross stands upon the globe which he carries, the emblem by which alone he has obtained both his Empire and his victory in war.⁷⁴

The message conveyed by Justinian's statue is the same as the message conveyed by the *Tanhuma*'s story of King Solomon. Both Justinian and Solomon are represented as universal rulers. Solomon's ability to stand "upon the roots that went out into the whole world" and plant "all species of trees in them" signifies the same mastery of "the whole earth and sea" as the globe in Justinian's left hand. Both rulers' universal power derives from their access to objects that grant this power. In the case of Solomon, it is the foundation stone "from which the world was formed." In the case of Justinian, it is the cross "by which alone he has obtained both his Empire and his victory in war." The cross, which is

⁷³ Alexander, "Jerusalem as the *Omphalos*," 115–16.

⁷⁴ Procopius, *Buildings*, 1.2.7–11 (Dewing's translation).

described as “standing upon the globe,” parallels the foundation stone in its function as the world’s *omphalos*, “the root of the foundation of the world.” Justinian and Solomon take possession of the center of the world and exercise their universal rule by aligning their powers with the power of the cosmic center, whether it is the cross or the Even Shetiyyah.

The location of Justinian’s column within the urban space of Constantinople was also significant. As already noted, the statue stood in the Augusteion, a public square in front of the imperial palace which, among other things, served to mark transition from imperial residence to the rest of the city.⁷⁵ Immediately to the west of the statue there was another monument, the *Milion*. Just like Rome, Constantinople had its own golden milestone, a tetrapylon located at the convergence of several major streets in front of the palatine complex and the church of Hagia Sophia.⁷⁶ The *Milion* was shaped in the form of a triumphal arch and was richly decorated with the statues of emperors, scenes from history and mythology, the cross, and the figure of the city’s Tyche, so that the golden milestone of Constantinople could reflect not only the geographical but also the political and religious centrality of the city for the rest of the empire. In fact, the colonnaded street, the Regia, connected the *Milion* and the Chalkè gate, the main entrance to the palace, and was routinely used by the emperors in their public processions to and from the palace. In the opposite direction, another colonnaded street, the Mese, connected the *Milion* to the Forum of Constantine and the Column of Constantine, from where it continued as the city’s main avenue connecting the city’s inner street grid to that of the empire’s thoroughfares. Constantinople’s *Milliarium Aureum* thus sat on the spatial axis that served to project the imperial presence and authority from within the palace and out into the empire.⁷⁷ Constantinople was the regal city whose topographical characteristics were at one with its political status.

As noted by several scholars, the location of Constantinople’s *Milion* on a street intersection in front of the imperial palace reflected a style

⁷⁵ On the Augusteion and the statue of Justinian, see Bauer, *Stadt, Platz und Denkmal*, 148–67, 265–66, and 343; Mayer, *Rom ist dort, wo der Kaiser ist*, 112–14.

⁷⁶ See Janin, *Constantinople Byzantine*, 103–104, and Mango, *The Brazen House*, 47–48.

⁷⁷ See Lathoud, “La consécration et la dédicace de Constantinople,” 296–314; Krautheimer, *Three Christian Capitals*, 55–56; Mango, *The Brazen House*, 78–81. On the Chalkè, see Mango, 21–35, 73–107; Janin, *Constantinople Byzantine*, 110–11.

of palace building that was ubiquitous in Late Antiquity.⁷⁸ In the case of Diocletian's palace in Antioch, a similar tetrapylon in front of the palace could be referred to as "an omphalos, stretched out toward each quarter of the heaven" by means of four colonnaded avenues ("stoas") proceeding from it.⁷⁹ The shortest and most beautiful of the stoas led to the entrance of the palace, the other three led to city gates. The palace was imagined to have the world's *omphalos* for its entrance point, with the empire's thoroughfares proceeding from the *omphalos* like world's umbilical cords.

The same was true for Christian Jerusalem. The Church of the Holy Sepulcher and Golgotha were referred to as the navel of the earth by authors both inside and outside of Palestine.⁸⁰ Like other late imperial cities, Jerusalem's status as *omphalos* was formed by the combination of religious and political themes. The city and the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, on which the city was centered, were envisioned by Constantine and his successors as the shrine of Christ's invisible, universal rule. Christian Jerusalem, the "New Jerusalem" of Constantine, was the palace city of the heavenly king, just as Constantinople and "the new city" of Diocletian in Antioch could be thought of as palace cities of earthly emperors.⁸¹ Jerusalem's status as the world's *omphalos* derived from the city's association with Christ, just as Antioch's or Constantinople's claims to the same effect derived from their association with Diocletian, Constantine, and their successors.

It seems that the location of Justinian's column next to the *Milion* was not accidental. Rather it served to emphasize the connection between the ruler and the world's center. Indeed, Justinian's building program in the Augusteion and adjacent areas undertaken in the wake of the devastating Nika revolt of 532 further elaborated ideological themes already present in the *Milion*'s earlier decoration. By Justinian's time the tetrapylon was crowned with the statues of Constantine and his mother Helena with the cross standing between them. A column with the equestrian statue of Emperor Theodosius holding the globe in his hand was erected nearby.

⁷⁸ See Mango, *The Brazen House*, 79–80; Ćurčić, "Late-Antique Palaces," 67–90, esp. pp. 68 and 71; Mayer, *Rom ist dort, wo der Kaiser ist*, 110–11.

⁷⁹ Libanius, *Orat.*, XI, 204. The translation is from Downey, "Libanius' Oration," 675.

⁸⁰ See Jeremias, "Golgotha," 74–90; Wilken, *Land Called Holy*, 94–95, and 120.

⁸¹ On Diocletian's construction in Antioch as "the new city," see Libanius, *Orat.*, XI, 203. On the term and its broader implications, see Ćurčić, "Late-Antique Palaces," 67–90.

This column and the statue probably served as a model for Justinian's own column. All these statues sought to convey the same message of an emperor standing on world's *omphalos* and ruling the world through the sign of the triumphant cross. The cross set atop the globe in Justinian's hand and the *Milion* set in front of the imperial palace conveyed the same message of the emperor's universal dominion. It is likely that the statue and the *Milion* were meant to be viewed in each other's context, just as the statue was meant to be viewed in the context of the neighboring domed church of Hagia Sophia, another symbolic representation of the totality of the cosmos ruled by God.⁸²

Claims to the status of the world's *omphalos* in the Byzantine Empire carried with them a whole complex of religious, political, geographical, and cosmological connotations, intertwined within the totalizing imperial discourse. I believe that, rather than a direct continuation of *omphalos* themes in Second Temple Jewish literature, the *Tanhuma*'s reference to Jerusalem as the navel of the earth should be read as an attempt to internalize this discourse by projecting onto Jerusalem and its Davidic rulers the image of imperial capital developed in connection with Constantinople, Christian Jerusalem, and other imperial cities of Late Antiquity. According to *Tanhuma*'s version of the myth, Solomon's Jerusalem, not Antioch or Constantinople, was the true navel of the earth, just as it was the true capital city of the true universal empire.

Tanhuma imagines Solomon's Jerusalem as a late Roman imperial city, whose identity and topography are centered on the figure of a ruling emperor and the imperial residence within the city. The centrality of Solomon's presence to the identity of Jerusalem parallels the centrality of emperor's presence to the identity of imperial city. The city, its ruler, the Temple, and the world's *omphalos* integrated into the cityscape are conceptually tied together in the case of *Tanhuma*'s Jerusalem, just as they are tied together in Justinian's Constantinople. Just as Justinian's reconstruction of the Augusteion combines the emperor's statue, the domed church of Hagia Sophia, and the *Milion* within a single architectural unit designed to convey the ideology of universal and divinely sanctioned imperium, so too does the midrash. Like the triumphant cross atop the

⁸² On Hagia Sophia and Justinian's statue, see Stichel, "Zum Bronzenkoloß Justinians," 133–34.

globe in Justinian's left hand, the Even Shetiyyah becomes "the emblem," by which the emperor holds sway over his realm.

As we trace the development of the Even Shetiyyah imagery from its inception in Mishnah Yoma to Byzantine midrashic collections such as *Tanhuma*, we observe a gradual change from purely religious to religio-political symbolism. This development differed somewhat from that in the Babylonian Talmud, in which the Even Shetiyyah acquired cosmological and mythological (but no identifiable political) meaning. In Byzantine Jewish literature, however, the foundation stone had come to symbolize the imperial status of Jerusalem and its Davidic rulers, by projecting onto them images of Byzantine imperial authority and mythology. It is within this context that one has to analyze the role of the Even Shetiyyah in *'Otot ha-Mashiah*. There the religio-political meaning of the foundation stone becomes even more pronounced, and the stone itself becomes the sacred ground on which the transfer of the imperial crown from Rome to Israel takes place.

THE EVEN SHETIYYAH AND THE CROSS

The *'Otot* completes the process, as a result of which the Even Shetiyyah acquires symbolic characteristics associated with the Cross in contemporary Christian imperial ideology. Both the Cross and the Stone constitute the *axis mundi* around which the triumphant Christian empire and/or the triumphant messianic kingdom of Israel establish themselves. In their Byzantine context, both symbols serve to combine religion and politics to produce the religiously sanctioned imperial utopias of Rome and Israel. The association of the Even Shetiyyah with the crown in the *'Otot* parallels the association of the cross and the crown in Christian narrative. In the fifth-century *Julian Romance* and seventh-century Ps.-Methodius, the cross constitutes the pole on which the imperial crown has to be placed in recognition of Christ as the crown's ultimate owner, but also to provide divine legitimization and empowerment to the Roman Empire. According to some versions of the Helena legend, the nails found alongside the remains of the True Cross were incorporated into the imperial diadem, both consecrating the empire to God and guaranteeing its eternal survival. In what appears to be a related development, both cross and nails come to feature prominently in visual

and literary representations of the imperial diadem during the period of the fourth through seventh centuries A.D.⁸³

The function of the Even Shetiyyah is similar. It carries the crown just as, according to the Mishnah, it used to carry the Ark, thus providing divine legitimization to Israel's past and future kingship. Moving from the Mishnah to the *'Otot*, the meaning of the stone's symbolism changes from purely religious to religio-political. In a manner similar to the cross it now "illustrates a unity of purpose" between God and the messianic ruler, and establishes the sacred foundation on which the messianic kingdom of Israel is built. The messianic mission of Nehemiah son of Hushiel is closely associated with the Temple both at the time of the mission's inception, when Nehemiah claims for himself the crown left by the Roman emperor, and at the time of its end, when Nehemiah is murdered inside the very sanctuary in which he claimed the crown. Like a Christian emperor, Nehemiah is the ruler who stands in special relationship with the Temple and the priestly office, although he is not quite a priest himself. The Messiah son of Joseph emerges from other roughly contemporaneous Jewish apocalyptic writings as the military leader who not only initiates the rebuilding of the Temple, but also preaches in the Temple to the congregation of Israel, and offers sacrifices there on Israel's behalf. The *'Otot* blurs an already unclear distinction between the imperial and sacerdotal functions of the Messiah son of Joseph even further, when it portrays Nehemiah son of Hushiel as the ruler whose messianic kingdom is centered on the Temple and the imperial insignia kept there.

According to Ps.-Methodius, the cosmic cross, in which the Christian empire "possesses a place of refuge," and which is "set up in the center of the earth and has its power over height, depth, length and breadth," finds its physical embodiment in the cross, which is established in Jerusalem and on which the last Roman emperor places his crown. This legend belongs to a long-standing tradition that associated the cosmic cross with Jerusalem, the remains of the True Cross found there, and the mountain of Golgotha. The tradition was probably started at the court of Constantine and was part of a larger project to use Jerusalem as a way to identify and localize the cosmic Christ's invisible presence within

⁸³ See Koenen, "Symbol und Zierde auf Diadem und Kronreif," 170–99; Drijvers, Helena Augusta, 95–117; Kolb, Herrscherideologie, 113–14.

the empire's sacred geography. In the course of the fourth century the cosmic cross of imperial triumph became associated with the rock of Golgotha within a single spatial, architectural, and conceptual complex of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, whereas Christian authors depicted Golgotha and the True Cross as physical manifestations of the imperial cross symbolism.⁸⁴ This tradition clearly informed Heraclius' actions during the restoration of the cross ceremony as well as the description of these actions by George of Pisidia. By restoring the cross to Golgotha, Heraclius acted as the restorer of the *axis mundi*, cosmic peace, and prosperity. Later on, this tradition would find its further development in the poetry of Sophronius, the Patriarch of Jerusalem, who refers to Golgotha as "the navel point of the earth, that divine Rock in which was fixed the wood which undid the curse of the tree,"⁸⁵ and in Ps.-Methodius' legend of the last Roman emperor.

In my opinion, the story in *'Otot ha-Mashiah* represents a Jewish reaction to the Heracleian imperial mythology, even though the book itself was likely composed in the late seventh or early eighth century. As noted earlier in text, the triumphalist narrative of the Heracleian restoration tied together claims for Heraclius' status as the New David with anti-Jewish supersessionist rhetoric. George of Pisidia, for once, both compared the True Cross to the biblical Ark of the Covenant and claimed the superiority of the former over the latter.⁸⁶ Ps.-Methodius emphasizes the role of the cross as the center of the earth and the source of absolute power that guaranteed the invulnerability of the Christian empire. In response, the *'Otot* reclaims the Even Shetiyyah's status as the true navel of the earth and the source of unlimited power. The messianic kingdom of Israel, centered on the Temple Mount and the Even Shetiyyah, asserts itself in the face of the eternal Roman Empire centered on Golgotha and the cross. The *'Otot* inverts the supersessionist rhetoric

⁸⁴ See Jeremias, "Golgotha," 74–90; Busse and Kretschmar, *Jerusalem Heiligtumstraditionen*, 77–81, 92–97; Walker, *Holy City, Holy Places*, 252–60; Eliav, *God's Mountain*, 181–86.

⁸⁵ Sophronius, *Anacreonticon* 20.30–32. The translation is from Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims before the Crusades*, 158. For Greek text, see *Sophronii Anacreontica*, ed. by M. Gigante (Roma: Gismondi, 1957), 124.

⁸⁶ *In Rest.*, 73–77. On the anti-Jewish component in the Heracleian restorative ideology, see Linder, "Ecclesia and Synagoga," 1040–42; Dagron and Déroche, "Juifs et Chrétiens," 28–32.

of George and Ps.-Methodius by reclaiming the traditional symbols of the Davidic kingdom as symbols of the messianic future. Whereas the Christian empire of Ps.-Methodius “possesses a place of refuge in the life-giving Cross, which is set up in the center of the earth and has its power over height, depth, length and breadth,”⁸⁷ the messianic kingdom of Israel possesses its place of refuge in the Even Shetiyyah. The latter is also set up in the center of the earth, and its cosmogonical potency also translates into the political triumph of the kingdom that has the Even Shetiyyah as its center.

CORONATION IN THE TEMPLE

At the same time the imaginary Temple of the 'Otot with the Even Shetiyyah at its heart acquires distinct characteristics of seventh-century Byzantine churches that combined imperial and religious features and inside which the coronation of the new emperor had to be performed. Since the early seventh century, the act of coronation of the new emperor took place inside a church and, in particular, inside the church of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople.⁸⁸ The performance of a coronation ceremony inside a church was a novelty. Prior to the seventh century, the coronation of a newly chosen emperor usually took place either outside the city walls, on the parade ground at the Hebdomon, followed by the triumphant entry of the newly crowned emperor into Constantinople, or in the Hippodrome. Coronations that involved the orderly transition of power from a senior emperor to his designated junior successor were usually conducted inside the palace. In this case, it was the senior emperor himself who crowned his junior colleague.⁸⁹

In 602 the new emperor Phocas, who came to the throne as a result of a bloody coup against his predecessor Maurice, was crowned by the Patriarch in the church of St. John at the Hebdomon outside the city walls.⁹⁰ This new ceremony, probably intended to add legitimacy to Phocas' seizure of power, was repeated in 610 after Phocas himself had been overthrown by Heraclius. The latter was crowned by the Patriarch

⁸⁷ Ps.-Methodius, IX, 9, 12–13.

⁸⁸ See Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, 59–69, and McCormick, “Coronation,” 533–34.

⁸⁹ Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, 70–83; McCormick, “Court and Ceremony,” 158–59.

⁹⁰ See Theophylact, *History* 8.10.6, and *Chronicon Paschale* (Dindorf, 693).

either in the palace chapel of St. Stephen (according to John of Nikiu and Theophanes) or in Hagia Sophia (according to the *Paschal Chronicle*).⁹¹ The first coronation inside Hagia Sophia clearly attested by the sources took place in 641, when the future emperor Constans II was crowned by the “senior emperor” Heraclonas in the ambo of the Great Church.⁹² Since then, coronations would routinely take place in Hagia Sophia and were performed either by the senior emperor or, in the case of dynastic disruptions, by the Patriarch who acted as a representative of God bestowing the imperial crown on the emperor of God’s choice.

Although the earliest clear evidence for coronation inside the church does not predate the beginning of the seventh century, thus making this practice a relatively late development, the ideological and ceremonial roots of the practice are much older. The seventh-century ritual reflected a long-standing Byzantine ideology of God as the sole owner of kingship and the emperor as God’s delegated representative on earth, expressed already in the cross story of the *Julian Romance* and Ps.-Methodius’ legend of the last Roman emperor. The influence of this ideology on coronation ceremonial was apparent as early as 457, when, after his coronation at the Hebdomon outside the city gates, Leo I entered Constantinople in a procession that involved a series of stops at churches along the way. At each stop the emperor would remove his crown, pray, and then get his crown back upon leaving the church.⁹³ The ritual was clearly intended to establish a hierarchic relationship between God and the emperor and to claim for God the ultimate ownership of *imperium* and its insignia. The gradual transition of the coronation ceremony to the inside of a church building was a logical conclusion of this trend. Especially in cases when the orderly dynastic succession was disrupted, the crown was given back to its ultimate owner, God, and it was up to God to transfer it to the next emperor. The church thus acquired the unique status as the place where, in the case of dynastic disruption, the legitimate transfer of the crown to a new ruler was expected to happen.⁹⁴

⁹¹ See John of Nikiu, *Chron.* 110.9; Theophanes, *Chronographia*, (de Boor, 298–99); *Chronicon Paschale* (Dindorf, 701).

⁹² Nikephoros, *Breviarium*, 31 (Mango, 82).

⁹³ Const. Porph., *De Cerimoniis* I, 91 (Reiske, vol. 1, 412–15).

⁹⁴ See Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, 104; Guran, “Genesis and Function,” 292–96.

By the tenth century the church's connection to the divine ownership of the imperial crown became part of state ideology. According to the tractate *De Administrando Imperio* written by the emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, the church of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople served as a depository in which imperial crowns were kept hanging from a ceiling above the altar as "the church's ornament." Other royal vestments were kept on the altar of Hagia Sophia, because ultimately they also belonged to God. It was God who delegated them through the hands of the Patriarch to the divinely chosen emperor, and it was to God that the imperial vestments had to be returned. On the occasion of major church holidays, the Patriarch sent the appropriate vestments and crowns to the palace, and after the ceremonies they were returned to Hagia Sophia. In other words, or so Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus claimed, the transfer of the crown from Hagia Sophia to the emperor could be made only by the Patriarch and only temporarily. Afterward, the crown along with other vestments had to be restored to the church.⁹⁵

Porphyrogenitus' account belongs to the realm of political mythology.⁹⁶ The emperor's main goal in stressing the insignia's numinosity was to keep them out of hands of neighboring rulers, who occasionally made requests to receive some of the insignia as part of their alliances (marital or political) with Byzantium. In reality, the imperial insignia were kept in the palace, not in Hagia Sophia, and were controlled by specially appointed imperial officials, not by the Patriarch. As with any successful mythology, however, to be taken seriously Porphyrogenitus' narrative had to have some basis in reality. The reality was that, as Dagron has observed, "the Great Church, like the capital's other sanctuaries, held only votive crowns specially made or crowns offered by the emperors in their lifetime or by their family after their death, like those of Maurice and Herakleios, or trophies seized from enemy kings, like the Bulgarian

⁹⁵ Const. Porph., *De Admin. Imp.* 13.24–72 (Moravcsik and Jenkins, 66–68). A version of the same legend appears in the mid-Byzantine *Patria* in connection with Justinian's building of Hagia Sophia. See Dagron, *Constantinople imaginaire*, 249–50, n. 168, and 310–11.

⁹⁶ The practice is said to have originated with Constantine the Great, which is clearly a myth. On imperial vestments being kept in the palace rather than in Hagia Sophia, see Nelson, "Symbols in Context," 106, n. 40; Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, 214–17.

crowns brought home by John Tzimiskes in 972.⁹⁷ After the crown was consecrated to God, it could no longer be removed at will by the emperor. From that point on it was up to God and God's ecclesiastical servants to either (temporarily) restore the crown to its imperial holder or to keep it in God's own domain of the sanctuary. Any attempt by the emperor to remove a consecrated crown and appropriate it for his personal use was considered a sacrilege and was duly punished by God. The story of the emperor Leo IV, whose willful action of seizing the consecrated crown from the church resulted in his sudden demise, served as a warning. After the emperor's death his widow Irene expiated her husband's sin by restoring the crown to Hagia Sophia on Christmas day in 780.⁹⁸

The act of depositing the crowns of departed rulers in Hagia Sophia as well as the act of using a previously consecrated crown for a new coronation acquired special symbolic significance. The crowns often served a particular ruler's desire to emphasize either continuity or discontinuity with his/her predecessors. The deposition of the predecessor's crown in the Hagia Sophia could imply a break with earlier policies and/or family succession. The use of the crown for coronation indicated the restoration of the dynasty, the return to the predecessor's policies, and, in general, instilled a sense of continuity (often fictional) into the succession process. When the emperor Heraclius died in February 641, he was buried wearing a golden and richly jeweled crown that he wore during his lifetime. In a matter of days, however, his firstborn son Constantine III had Heraclius' sarcophagus opened and removed the crown. After the death of Constantine in May 641, Martina, Heraclius' second wife and Constantine's rival, became the *de facto* ruler of the empire at the side of her 16-year-old son Heraclonas. After having been proclaimed emperor, Heraclonas brought the crown of his father to Hagia Sophia and "dedicated [it] to God in the sanctuary." This crown, however, was soon reclaimed once again and used for the coronation of Constantine's son Constans II as the co-emperor of Heraclonas. The ceremony was likely seen by many as

⁹⁷ Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, 216. For a summary of sources on Hagia Sophia as a depository of imperial crowns, see Jean Ebersolt, *Les arts somptuaires de Byzance*, 32, and Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, 104–105.

⁹⁸ Theophanes, *Chronographia*, (de Boor, 453–54).

the restoration of the legitimate dynastic line and paved the way for the eventual downfall of Martina and Heraclonas.⁹⁹

As a rule, the emperor's crown was removed from his head after the emperor's death and then deposited at the sanctuary of Hagia Sophia.¹⁰⁰ Hence, the premature deposition of the crown to the Hagia Sophia by a ruling emperor was widely seen as a bad omen and a sign of that emperor's impending demise. On Easter day in 601, the two Augustae, Sophia and Constantina, presented Constantina's husband emperor Maurice with a richly decorated crown, which he then ordered to be suspended by golden chains over the altar of Hagia Sophia. The empresses took affront to the emperor's action, and his action was probably later interpreted as a sign of Maurice's future fall.¹⁰¹ By depositing the crown in Hagia Sophia, the emperor symbolically returned it to God, abdicated his regal status, and left the crown up for grabs. A similar ceremony, according to the Greek version of *Martyrium Arethae*, was performed by the Ethiopian king Ella Atsbeha when he decided to renounce kingship and retire to the monastic life. The king sent his crown to the Anastasis Church in Jerusalem to be suspended above the tomb of Christ.¹⁰²

It appears that, functionally, the Temple of the 'Otot plays a role similar to that of Hagia Sophia and perhaps other Near Eastern sacred sites of the time.¹⁰³ The Temple serves as a depository in which the imperial crown is placed and through whose medium it is transferred from one keeper to another. Even Shetiyyah in this context plays the role of the altar of Hagia Sophia, on and near which the imperial insignia were kept. The Temple is still very much the house of God, but it is one that also acquires important political connotations. God is the ultimate owner of the crown who delegates it to a particular earthly ruler. By

⁹⁹ Nikephoros, *Breviarium*, 30 and 31, (Mango, 80–82).

¹⁰⁰ See Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, 82.

¹⁰¹ Theophanes, *Chronographia* (de Boor, 281).

¹⁰² See *Martyrium sancti Arethae* in *Acta Sanctorum*, month of Oct., vol. X, p. 759. The text is usually dated to the late sixth century. See Shahid, *The Martyrs of Najran*, 200–31. Guran, "Genesis and Function," 292, correctly associates this text with the legend of the last Roman emperor.

¹⁰³ Theophylact, *History* 4.7.9, quotes a letter sent by Vahram to Khusro, demanding that the latter "lay down the crown in the holy place and withdraw from the royal places," thus surrendering the kingship to Vahram. See also 4.12.6. Whitby, *The Emperor Maurice and His Historian*, 235–36, believes that Theophylact had access to copies of original letters.

returning the crown to the Temple, the last ruler of Edom restores it to God and renounces his own position as the emperor. In the absence of direct succession designated by the emperor himself, it is God who must choose the successor. Just like many real emperors of Byzantine history, the 'Otot's Messiah acts in the capacity of an outsider who takes hold of imperial power and establishes himself as a new emperor chosen solely by God.¹⁰⁴ In addition, it is directly from God and through the medium of God's Temple that he receives the emperor's crown. The transition of power envisioned by the 'Otot is thus perfectly Byzantine in nature. In the words of Janet L. Nelson, the Byzantine coronation "did not confer qualification to rule. It constituted, instead, a recognition that the chosen emperor was already so qualified."¹⁰⁵ The coronation ceremony served as the visual recognition of the divine choice by the totality of the religio-political community. In the 'Otot the political symphony between heavenly and earthly rule made manifest through the rituals of imperial investiture associated with Hagia Sophia finds its other expression in the imagined rituals associated with the eschatological Temple of Jerusalem.

THE TRANSFER OF THE CROWN

Sometime between the fourth and the sixth centuries the imperial insignia acquired a profound meaning within the religio-political ideology of the empire. In the late-sixth-century poem on the accession of Justin II by Corippus, the insignia simultaneously symbolized the sacred nature of the imperial office, its continuity and immutability in the process of transition from Justinian I to Justin II, as well as the legitimacy of the new emperor as the rightful successor to the office.¹⁰⁶ In a broader sense the insignia came to symbolize the sanctity and political supremacy of the empire itself. When Justin I sent the royal regalia to Tzath, king of the Lazi, the insignia were carefully selected to highlight

¹⁰⁴ On the principles of Byzantine imperial succession, see Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, 13–53; Nicol, "Byzantine Political Thought," 63.

¹⁰⁵ Nelson, "Symbols in Context," 108. Cf. a similar observation on the meaning of the unction in Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, 270–74.

¹⁰⁶ Corippus, *In laudem Iustini*, 2. See Cameron, *Corippus*, 154–65 for a detailed commentary. On the importance of insignia, see esp. commentaries on 2.86f and 2.162 (the diadem).

the exalted yet vassal-like status of the king.¹⁰⁷ It was highly significant that, after dethroning the last Western Roman emperor, Romulus Augustulus, in 476 A.D. the leader of the Germanic *foederati* Odoacer sent the captured imperial insignia to the Emperor Zeno in Constantinople.¹⁰⁸ By doing so, Odoacer recognized the political hierarchy of the time and specifically the unique and sacred nature of the Roman emperor's status. No ordinary chieftain, no matter how great his military accomplishments were, was allowed to make himself equal to the emperor. By sending the insignia to Constantinople, Odoacer symbolically delegated his power to the emperor and acknowledged his own subordinate role. As MacCormack's analysis of the fifth- and sixth-century panegyric literature and art has shown, the subsequent Ostrogothic rulers of the Western Empire developed a complex symbolic system of representations that both emphasized their rising status vis-à-vis the emperor in Constantinople, and yet acknowledged, for a time being, the latter's hierarchical superiority. Specifically, putting on the imperial diadem was conspicuously avoided in their accession rituals.¹⁰⁹ In contrast, the late sixth- and early seventh-century Visigothic rulers of Spain were famous for using the diadem for their coronations. Along with other political, religious, and cultural attributes, the diadem was consciously borrowed from Byzantium to underscore the claim of equality with the empire, which became an essential element of Visigothic religio-political discourse. In the early seventh century, this claim gradually evolved into the idea of the Visigothic kingdom as the empire's youthful successor destined to replace its ailing ancestor.¹¹⁰

The coronation of Charlemagne in 800 A.D. was also accompanied by the rhetoric of imperial renewal and served to further deny Byzantine emperors the exclusivity of their claims to be the sole successors of

¹⁰⁷ See Agathias, *Hist.* 3.15.2, Malal. 17.9 (Dindorf, 413), and Theophanes, *Chronographia*, (de Boor, 168). Cf. Procopius, *History of the Wars*, 3.25.3–8, and *Buildings*, 3.1.17–23, on insignia granted by Justinian to Mauric chieftains and Armenian rulers.

¹⁰⁸ Anon. *Val.* 64. See Stein, *Histoire du Bas-Empire*, vol. 2, 47, n. 1, and McCormick, "Odoacer, Emperor Zeno and the Rugian Victory Legation," 212–22, esp. 214.

¹⁰⁹ MacCormack, *Art and Ceremony*, 229–40, see esp. p. 236 on reservations about using the diadem.

¹¹⁰ For a summary of Visigothic religio-political doctrine and view of history, see Herrin, *The Formation of Christendom*, 220–49. On Visigothic coronation rituals, see Moore, "The King's New Clothes," 101.

Rome.¹¹¹ By the tenth century, however, the use of the imperial insignia still remained essential to Byzantine imperial ideology and foreign policy. The Emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus' tractate on the principles of Byzantine diplomacy, the *De Administrando Imperio*, advised the emperor's heir on how to respond to the demands of Byzantium's northern neighbors (Turks, Khazars, and Rus) for the imperial vestments and diadems. The refusal had to come on the grounds that the insignia were too numinous in nature to be removed from St. Sophia, where they were deposited for safekeeping.¹¹²

In other words, the imperial insignia came to symbolize the sanctity of the imperial rule. Their possession implied the legitimate nature of succession not only between the two Emperors, but between the empires as well. The demand for the insignia by a foreign ruler was read as an indication that he/she had designs on the imperial succession. The kingdom that acquired the insignia could symbolically position itself as an heir to the Byzantine Empire, a New Byzantium of sorts, just as the Old Byzantium positioned itself as an heir to Rome and biblical Jerusalem/Israel. Byzantine imperial ideologues lived in the perennial danger of such demands. In fact, this danger was unavoidable. The ideology of Byzantium was too deeply rooted in the idea of imperial succession, so much so that this idea easily could be turned against Byzantium itself. The imperial sanctity could move from Constantinople elsewhere just as easily as it previously moved from Rome and Jerusalem to Constantinople. Within the Byzantine religio-political narrative, the legitimizing force of the imperial insignia was a double-edged sword that both strengthened the empire's claims for uniqueness and undermined them. By laying demands for the imperial insignia as symbols of imperial succession and by trying to translate imperial sanctity from Constantinople to other places, the potential challengers of Byzantine supremacy acted strictly within a Byzantine historiosophic paradigm.¹¹³

'*Otot ha-Mashiah* internalizes and rethinks this paradigm by depicting Israel as the original owner of the imperial crown of Rome. In doing so, it further elaborates the prediction that eventually Rome would "restore

¹¹¹ See Herrin, *The Formation of Christendom*, 445–76.

¹¹² Const. Porph., *De Admin. Imp.* 13.24–72 (Moravcsik and Jenkins, 66–68).

¹¹³ See Dölger, "Rom in der Gedankenwelt der Byzantiner," 98–111; Nicol, "Byzantine Political Thought," 58–60.

the crown to its owner” already found in *Leviticus Rabbah*. In the *’Otot*, the last king of Edom returns his crown to the Temple site in Jerusalem with an explicit acknowledgment: “I have already returned what my fathers took.” When Nehemiah son of Hushiel takes the crown, he acts fully within the spirit of late Roman and Byzantine political theory, which emphasized the election of the new emperor by God over the emperor’s hereditary right and the ruler’s “ideal lineage” over his familial pedigree. As observed in the previous chapter, the notion of dynastic entitlement never quite took root in the Byzantine mentality. Instead it was balanced by a notion that every new emperor had to be elected by God, and, as a result, the regular change of ruling family was taken as a matter of course. More often than succeeding their biological parents, the emperors succeeded the mythical ancestral line of kings that descended from biblical rulers. The office took precedence over parentage, and mythical lineage took precedence over the biological one.

By taking the crown surrendered by the last Roman emperor inside the Temple’s precincts, Nehemiah son of Hushiel reclaims for himself and for Israel the lineage of biblical kings. When the emperor restores the crown to the Temple, he also abdicates his right to be part of the “ideal dynasty” of biblical rulers to which his predecessors claimed succession and which served to legitimize their universal rule. The succession thus passes away from Christian emperors and to Nehemiah son of Hushiel, who is presented by the story as the sole true heir to Israel’s ancient royalty. The *’Otot* acknowledges Roman imperial claims on Davidic lineage and works with them to construct its own vision of dynastic legitimacy. The story’s restorative ideology, however, should not obfuscate the fact that the Messiah son of Joseph finds himself grafted onto the “ideal dynasty” of Israel’s past just like Christian Roman emperors once were.

Within the eschatological program of *’Otot ha-Mashiah*, the surrendering of the crown by the last Roman emperor made Israel both the vindicated true owner of a divinely sanctified kingdom and the legitimate successor to Byzantium. The succession took place strictly within the legal framework of Byzantine imperial ideology. By acquiring the imperial insignia returned by the last Roman emperor, Nehemiah son of Hushiel became the divinely appointed and hence rightful successor of Rome, as much as he was the restorer of the Israelite kingdom. The narrative thus concludes with the double legitimization of the Jewish

messianic kingdom as an heir to biblical Israel as well as the Byzantine Empire. Far from discarding Byzantine imperial ideology in favor of messianic eschatology, *'Otot ha-Mashiah* firmly positions itself within it.

CONCLUSION

Finally, one has to discuss the possibility of the *'Otot* story being written to address the building activity on the Temple Mount by the Umayyad caliph 'Abd al-Malik in the late seventh century. This explanation is particularly enticing because, according to Reinink's theory, Ps.-Methodius was composed precisely in response to the building of the Dome of the Rock.¹¹⁴ There are indications within our text that it was composed after the Christians had already lost Jerusalem to the Muslims. In the Cambridge redaction, the *'Otot* envisions the defeat of the king of Edom by Mantzur and the subsequent abandonment of Jerusalem by Edom. Eventually the king of Edom has to return to the city "a second time" following the death of his opponent. The New York redaction is less clear and does not state explicitly that Hoter captures Jerusalem or even, for that matter, defeats Edom in battle. Still, dating the *'Otot* composition to the late seventh or early eighth century raises the possibility that the attention paid to the Even Shetiyyah by the text may reflect a broader Muslim interest in the Temple Mount and the foundation stone.

There is no evidence, however, that the *'Otot's* view of the Temple Mount and/or the foundation stone reflects any distinctly Muslim mythology of either of these two sites. The eschatological events of the story still unfold within the world dominated by Christian Rome and in Jerusalem, which remains the Roman Empire's sacred city. The Muslim danger is described as challenging yet temporary in nature. Pending more evidence to the contrary, it is presently safer to suggest that the *'Otot's* "counter-geography" works with the traditional Christian topography of Jerusalem centered on Golgotha and the Holy Sepulcher, and perhaps also engages the broader Christian geography of the Roman Empire centered on Rome/Constantinople. Even if composed in the wake of 'Abd al-Malik's building of the Dome, the text fails to give credit to the newly emerging Islamic myth of Jerusalem.

¹¹⁴ See earlier in text.



Mother of the Messiah

ONE OF THE MOST ELABORATE VISIONS OF APOCALYPTIC TRANSFORMATION in early medieval Jewish writings comes from *Sefer Zerubbabel*. The work was most likely composed in the early seventh century and reflected the apocalyptic mindset that formed in the wake of the bloody war between Byzantium and Sasanian Persia. *Sefer Zerubbabel* creatively combines traditional apocalyptic themes, elements of rabbinic literature, and new images to create a remarkably powerful vision of apocalyptic upheaval. The book's symbolism was destined to play an important role in the formation of Jewish messianic and apocalyptic themes well into modern times.¹

It has long since been noted that two female characters, the mother of the Jewish Messiah and the mother of his demonic adversary, feature prominently in *Sefer Zerubbabel* and indeed are central to its plot. The majority of scholars have argued that both women reflect a complex reaction to the figure of the Theotokos in contemporaneous Byzantine theology. Thus David Biale used the female characters of *Sefer Zerubbabel* as an example of “counter-history” produced by the Jewish inhabitants of the Byzantine Empire to engage and subvert the symbolic universe

¹ Hebrew text exists in multiple redactions. As of now there is no critical edition. In my discussion I will use the edition by Lévi, “L’apocalypse de Zorobabel et le roi de Perse Siroès,” 129–60. Other versions of the text appear in Jellinek, *Beit ha-Midrash*, vol. 2, 54–57, and Wertheimer, *Bate Midrashot*, vol. 2, 497–505. See also Even Shemuel, *Midreshe Ge’ulah*, 71–88, 379–89 (including those of Lévi and Jellinek). A number of important manuscripts still remain unpublished. See Even Shemuel, *Midreshe Ge’ulah*, 67–70, and Reeves, *Trajectories*, 40–41. Unless otherwise noted, the translation is from Himmelfarb, “Sefer Zerubbabel,” 67–90.

of the dominant Christian culture.² In the text that follows I shall take this discussion one step further by arguing that the female figures in *Sefer Zerubbabel* are part of a broader narrative that developed in early medieval Judaism and attempted to reinterpret Byzantine imperial and religious symbolism to discover its “true” meaning within Jewish messianic context. I shall argue that, among other things, the two women of *Sefer Zerubbabel* are part of the narrative that portrays Jerusalem as the true Constantinople that realizes and fulfills the sacred destiny of its predecessor. At the same time, Hephzibah’s character cannot be reduced to a single prototype. It ties together a number of cultural, religious, and ideological themes independently attested in contemporaneous art and literature. More than just a polemical response to the dominant imperial culture and an example of Jewish “counter-culture” in the Christian Roman Empire, the figure of Hephzibah reflects active involvement of the Jews in the construction of culturally multivalent Roman imperial discourse.

THE MOTHER OF THE MESSIAH AND THE IMPERIAL CITY

Hephzibah, the mother of the Messiah Menahem son of Ammiel, appears four times in *Sefer Zerubbabel*, three of them in an explicitly military context. The first time, Hephzibah is introduced as a protector of Jerusalem against the kings of Yemen and Antioch:

“The Lord will give Hephzibah, the mother of Menahem son of Ammiel, a staff for these acts of salvation,” he [Metatron] said. “A great star will shine before her. All the stars will swerve from their paths. Hephzibah, the mother of Menahem son of Ammiel, will go out and kill two kings whose hearts are set on doing evil. The names of the two kings: Nof, the king of Yemen, who will wave his hand at Jerusalem. The name of the second, Iszinan, king of Antioch. This war and these signs will take place on the festival of weeks in the third month.”³

From the very first passage dealing with her, the mother of the Messiah is associated with Jerusalem. At least one of the kings, Nof the king of

² See Biale, “Counter-History,” 139–41. Cf. Himmelfarb, “Mother of the Messiah,” 384–85; “Sefer Zerubbabel,” 69, and *The Apocalypse*, 121–22; Schäfer, *Mirror of His Beauty*, 214–16.

³ Lévi, “L’apocalypse de Zorobabel,” 134.

Yemen, is explicitly described as “waving his hand” at the city, and the king of Antioch apparently did the same. In other words, Hephzibah is not just a supernaturally assisted female warrior. She is a guardian of Jerusalem who personifies the strength of the city, shielding it from invaders.

Two other descriptions further contribute to this portrayal. Hephzibah appears the second time to confront Shiroi, king of Persia, who wages war against the first of two Messiahs, Nehemiah son of Hushiel, and presumably against Jerusalem, which is where the Messiah is staying and governing Israel. Hephzibah “will go out with her staff that the Lord God of Israel gave her.” God sends “a spirit of confusion” into Shiroi’s army leading it to mutual slaughter and destruction.⁴ Once again, Hephzibah performs her duty as the protector of Jerusalem and Israel against a foreign invader by miraculously causing the enemy’s confusion and self-destruction. The ultimate test of Hephzibah’s powers, however, comes when Armilos, the Antichrist of Jewish apocalyptic literature, kills the Messiah, Nehemiah son of Hushiel, and drives Israel into the wilderness. Yet his attempt to take Jerusalem apparently fails as “Hephzibah, the mother of Menahem son of Ammiel, will stand at the east gate so that wicked man will not come there, in order to fulfill the verse, ‘But the rest of the population shall not be uprooted from the city’” (Zechariah 14:2).⁵ Hephzibah shields the gates of Jerusalem to prevent the demonic opponent from entering the city. At the end, when the Davidic Messiah Menahem son of Ammiel is revealed, his mother Hephzibah meets him (apparently again at the gates of Jerusalem where he brings Nehemiah son of Hushiel back to life) and hands over to him “the staff by which the signs were performed.”⁶ After that, Hephzibah disappears from the scene, giving way to the two Messiahs, Elijah, and ultimately God Himself to complete the redemption.

Generally speaking, the military function of Hephzibah in *Sefer Zerubabel* is closely associated with the defense of Jerusalem. Hephzibah’s presence is strictly localized. She is never mentioned apart from the city. Hephzibah personifies Jerusalem and embodies its strength. She keeps Jerusalem sealed and protected against adversaries trying to capture the city, and then delivers it to the Messiah. It is worth recalling

⁴ Lévi, 135–36.

⁵ Lévi, 137.

⁶ Lévi, 138.

at this point that the name Hephzibah, which literally means “my delight is in her,” is used in Isaiah 62:4 as a symbolic name for the restored Zion and Jerusalem.⁷ In a direct allusion to this verse, the Hephzibah of *Sefer Zerubbabel* may also serve as a symbolic personification of Jerusalem. To use contemporaneous Greco-Roman terminology, Hephzibah plays the role of Jerusalem’s Tyche, the personified city’s “fortune.” The Tyches of individual cities featured prominently in late ancient art and coinage. As Kathleen Shelton has observed, “The city, the basic unit of civilized society for both the Greeks and the Romans, appears to emerge in the fourth century A.D. as a central image in the iconography of empire. And the assemblies of Tyches would depict the late Roman state as a ‘commonwealth of self-governing cities.’”⁸ Individual city Tyches were usually depicted as female figures dressed in tunics and carrying a series of attributes, such as a mural crown, a cornucopia, a lance, a staff, or a scepter. The most common city personifications included those of Alexandria, Antioch, Trier, and Carthage, but local artists in Madaba also depicted their home town as a personified Tyche among three city personifications in the mosaic in the so-called Room of Hippolytus.⁹

Two sixth-century images of Tyche were also found at Beth Shean and in the church of St. Bacchus near Horbat Tinsmet in Israel. The Beth Shean image is part of a mosaic floor and depicts Tyche wearing an imperial cloak and a mural crown with towers and holding a cornucopia.¹⁰ The image from the church of St. Bacchus is carved in the medallion and features Tyche richly adorned with strings of necklaces, bracelets, and earrings, and wearing a mural crown with three towers and a gate in the middle. She holds a cornucopia in her left hand and a scepter with a rounded head in her right.¹¹ These images prove that representations of Tyche remained ubiquitous in Byzantine Palestine at least until the late sixth century A.D.

⁷ The only other occurrence of the name “Hephzibah” in the Hebrew Bible is in 2 Kings 21:1, where it appears as the name of the mother of the wicked king Manasseh.

⁸ Shelton, “Imperial Tyches,” 29.

⁹ See Shelton, “Imperial Tyches,” 27–38, Bühl, *Constantinopolis und Roma*, 80–142; Moffatt, “A Record of Public Buildings,” 105–07, and Bowersock, *Mosaics as History*, 1–29, 65–88.

¹⁰ See Foerster, Tsafir, et al., “Glorious Beth Shean,” 28 and 30.

¹¹ See Dahari, “Horbat Tinsmet,” 68 (English section), and 104 (Hebrew section).

Among other city Tyches, the personification of Rome clearly stood out, as that of the empire's capital city, perhaps a reminiscence of *Thea Roma*, the Goddess of Rome whose cult Greek cities of the East introduced during the late Hellenistic period. Unlike other city Tyches, that of Rome was usually depicted helmeted and armed, and occasionally carrying a globe. As the role of Constantinople grew from the early fourth century onward, the New Rome's personifications increasingly emphasized the equality between the two capital cities of the empire. As a result, Constantinople could be depicted both as a fairly typical city Tyche of the east, wearing a mural crown and holding a cornucopia, and as the New Rome figure virtually identical to the traditional depiction of Rome and carrying attributes of imperial power, such as the helmet or the globe.¹² The feminine character of Constantinople was further enhanced by the visual experience of statues of empresses, which adorned the city in large numbers. The city itself was routinely referred to as *basilissa polis*, "the Queen City," a term that underlined both the city's imperial quality and its feminine persona.¹³

There are relatively few specific parallels between the description of Hephzibah and artistic representations of Tyche, although functional similarities between these two figures certainly exist. The martial quality of Hephzibah parallels martial themes that dominate the personifications of Rome and, to some degree, Constantinople. All three of them serve, to quote Judith Herrin, as "an allegory in female form of male power."¹⁴ Whether the bellicose appearance of Hephzibah hearkens back to the official depictions of Rome and New Rome/Constantinople as an Amazon-looking warrior is hard to tell. It is possible, however, that Hephzibah's figure was indeed influenced by the motif of a city Tyche in general and that of the capital city's Tyche in particular. In terms of specific attributes, Hephzibah's staff resembles the scepter or the staff

¹² On Constantinople's Tyche, its relation to the Tyche of Rome and other cities, see Lathoud, "La consécration et la dédicace de Constantinople," 180–90; Dagron, *Naissance d'une capitale*, 43–45, 55–60; Limberis, *Divine Heiress*, 14–21. See also Bühl, *Constantinopolis und Roma*, 10–78, 143–231, and Cameron, "Consular Diptychs," 394–97, for numismatic and pictorial evidence. Cf. Toynbee, "Roma and Constantinopolis in Late-Antique Art from 312 to 365," 135–47, and "Roma and Constantinopolis in Late-Antique Art from 365 to Justin II," 261–77.

¹³ See Herrin, "The Imperial Feminine," 6–12.

¹⁴ Herrin, *Byzantium*, 7. On Hephzibah, cf. Himmelfarb, "Mother of the Messiah," 385.

often associated with city personifications, and Tyche's mural crown calls to mind Hephzibah's association with city walls and gates of Jerusalem. There are also similarities in the relationships between Hephzibah and her son and between the imperial city's Tyche and the emperor.

As Sabine MacCormack has convincingly demonstrated, the imperial principle *Roma et Augustus*, which emphasizes the intimate connection between the emperor and his capital city, constitutes an important motif of the fourth- through sixth-century accession panegyrics and art.¹⁵ The artistic representations of the emperors frequently have personified figures of Rome and/or Constantinople seated or standing next to the ruler. On the early fifth-century consular diptych of Constantius, the top section depicts Honorius and Theodosius enthroned between the nimbate personifications of Rome and Constantinople. Constantinople keeps her hand on the shoulder of young Theodosius in "an affectionate and protective gesture."¹⁶ The fourth-century panegyrics described the relationship between Rome and Augustus as that between a bride and bridegroom. Without the emperor, his capital city is "bereft and widowed," and when the emperor arrives in Rome the city comes from her *thalamus* to greet him as the bride greets her mate. In another panegyric, Constantinople is described in similar language as being intimately associated with the emperor, welcoming and wreathing its ruler.¹⁷ In the early seventh century, George of Pisidia symbolically portrays Constantinople as Heraclius' mother whom the emperor had to abandon to lead the Persian campaign and whose "milk" he is asked to pity by returning to the capital.¹⁸

Hephzibah's role as the mother of the Messiah and her close relation to Jerusalem make her figure look like another interpretation of the *Roma et Augustus* theme. The relationship between Hephzibah and her son is based on the dialectics of separation and reunion. While the Messiah is still hidden, Hephzibah faithfully awaits his return while repelling unworthy suitors. When the Messiah returns, she comes out to greet him and hand over her power to him in the *adventus*-like ceremony. Hephzibah's

¹⁵ See MacCormack, "Roma, Constantinopolis, the Emperor and His Genius," 139–42, 147–49, and *Art and Ceremony*, 222–29. Cf. Bühl, *Constantinopolis und Roma*, 151–164, 197–230.

¹⁶ MacCormack, *Art and Ceremony*, 210. Cf. Cameron, "Consular Diptychs," 391–93.

¹⁷ MacCormack, "Roma, Constantinopolis, the Emperor," 142 and 148. See also MacCormack, *Art and Ceremony*, 40–41 and 225.

¹⁸ *Bon.*, line 143. See Whitby, "Defender of the Cross," 261–62.

status as the Messiah's mother parallels the status of Rome and Constantinople as the emperor's mother or bride. As Ernst Kantorowicz has convincingly argued, the theme of a city's or province's female personification greeting the emperor's *adventus* to the city/province was a common feature of Roman imperial art that would eventually come to influence the depictions of Jesus' messianic entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. Of particular interest in this respect are the two sixth-century diptychs that depict Jesus being greeted by the female personification of Jerusalem, who wears a mural crown on her head and holds a cornucopia in her left arm.¹⁹ Kantorowicz interprets this scene as being the projection of the Roman imperial ideology of *adventus* into the realm of Christian sacred history. In other words, by the sixth century Byzantines imagined and depicted the Messiah's arrival in Jerusalem along the lines of the imperial *adventus* ceremony. When Hephzibah greets her son at the time of his entry to Jerusalem and hands her staff and her power over to him, she reenacts with some important variations the actions of the personified Jerusalem figure from the Christian diptychs. In both instances we encounter a shared theme of the city receiving her emperor and her savior, to whom this city is connected by intimate personal bonds.

The personification of the city's Tyche was an important cultural theme that fed into the multivalent image of Hephzibah, but it most likely was not the only one. After all, by the time of *Sefer Zerubbabel*, cities' personifications were very much things of the past. By the early seventh century they largely disappeared from both the coinage and artwork. As far as Constantinople was concerned, the personified Tyche of the empire's capital city was replaced by the city's new heavenly patron: the Theotokos.²⁰

HEPHZIBAH AND THE THEOTOKOS

To the best of my knowledge, Martha Himmelfarb was the first modern scholar to draw a detailed comparison between the figures of Hephzibah and the Theotokos. Among other parallel functions of both characters,

¹⁹ Kantorowicz, "The 'King's Advent' and the Enigmatic Panels in the Doors of S. Sabina," 215–16. See also Bühl, *Constantinopolis und Roma*, 300–07.

²⁰ For a detailed discussion of this process, see Frolow, "La dédicace de Constantinople dans la tradition Byzantine," 88–115. Cf. Limberis, *Divine Heiress*, 123–42, and Pentcheva, *Icons and Power*, 12–21.

Himmelfarb specifically emphasized a military one. Both Hephzibah and the Theotokos fulfilled the same role of a *palladium*: a military symbol granting victory in battle against the enemy.²¹ It must be added, however, that in seventh-century Byzantium the role of the Theotokos as a *palladium* was to a large extent related to her unique status as the patron and the symbol of the imperial capital city, Constantinople.²² It was in the context of this status that the military function of the Theotokos was most often displayed. It would be reasonable to suggest that the function of Hephzibah in *Sefer Zerubbabel* was similar. She was not merely a warrior mother of the Messiah but also the patron and protector of Jerusalem, a life symbol of the capital city. To further explore this theory, one has to review the contemporaneous literary images of the Theotokos and her relationship with Constantinople, and then compare them to the depiction of Hephzibah in *Sefer Zerubbabel*.

The veneration of the Theotokos as the supernatural patroness and guardian of Constantinople begins to form toward the end of the fifth century in connection with the church at Blachernae, which was built by the emperor Leo and his wife the empress Verina shortly before 475 just outside city walls to house the Virgin's robe transferred to Constantinople several years earlier.²³ In the Akathistos hymn, composed sometime in the fifth century, the Theotokos is referred to as "the precious diadem of pious kings" and the "impregnable wall of the kingdom" through whom "trophies are raised up" and "enemies fall."²⁴ All these references may indicate that the cult of the Theotokos as the supernatural patroness of the empire and the emperor was well under way, although they contain no discernible reference to Constantinople as such. Already in the sixth

²¹ Himmelfarb, "Mother of the Messiah," 384–85, "Sefer Zerubbabel," 69, and *The Apocalypse*, 121–22. Cf. Schäfer, *Mirror of His Beauty*, 214–16; Speck, "The Apocalypse of Zerubbabel," 189, n. 26. On the role of *palladia* in Byzantium, see Kitzinger, "The Cult of Images," 109–12.

²² See Frolov, "La dédicace de Constantinople," 61–127; Cameron, "The Theotokos in Sixth-Century Constantinople," 79–108; "The Virgin's Robe: an Episode in the History of Early Seventh-Century Constantinople," 42–56; "Images of Authority: Elites and Icons in Late Sixth-Century Byzantium," 18–24; Mango, "Constantinople as Theotokoupolis," 17–25.

²³ See Mango, "The Origins of the Blachernae Shrine," 61–76, and "Constantinople as Theotokoupolis," 17–25. Cf. Cameron, "The Theotokos in Sixth-Century Constantinople," 79–108.

²⁴ See Akathistos 23, lines 10–15 (Trypanis, 30). The translation follows Peltomaa, *The Image of the Virgin Mary*, 19. On the images, see Pentcheva, *Icons and Power*, 12–16.

century A.D., however, when describing the churches of Blachernae and Pege, both dedicated to the Virgin and both located along the outer perimeter of Constantinople's Land Walls, Procopius emphasizes the symbolic significance of the churches' locations at the two ends of city walls (by the sea, in the case of Blachernae, and toward the Golden Gate, in the case of Pege) and calls them "invincible defences to the circuit-wall of the city."²⁵

By the early seventh century A.D., the veneration of the Theotokos acquires a popular dimension, and the Virgin becomes widely recognized as the supernatural patroness and protector of the city. The first document to unambiguously attest this new function of the Theotokos is an anonymous account, attributed by modern scholars to Theodore Syn-cellus, which describes the transfer of the Virgin's robe from the church of Blachernae in the unwalled suburb of Constantinople to the city itself.²⁶ The transfer took place in the summer of 623 and was prompted by Avar raids in the city's vicinity. When the danger had passed, the robe was brought back to its original place in an elaborate ceremony. A special feast was instituted to commemorate the event. During the time between removal and deposition, the robe was revealed as a miracle-working relic symbolizing the special connection between the Virgin and the imperial capital city. The document appears to be an eyewitness account that describes these events. It concludes with a prayer that implores the Virgin:

Preserve your grace eternally for your city and let not in future the eye of man behold the tottering of the divine church or the desertion of this your humble city. Turn away from it every barbarian of whatever race, who plots hostility against it, making manifest that the city is fortified by your power.²⁷

This prayer is among the earliest texts that explicitly postulate the special relationship between the Virgin and the capital city of the empire. Constantinople is twice called "your" city fortified by the power of the Virgin. The Theotokos is more than just a symbol or the guardian of the city, she *is* the city: the supernatural embodiment of Constantinople's soul and the source of its strength.

²⁵ Procopius, *Buildings*, 1.3.9 (Dewing's translation).

²⁶ Cameron, "Virgin's Robe," 42–48.

²⁷ The translation is from Cameron, "Virgin's Robe," 55. For Greek text, see Loparev, "Staroe svidetelstvo o polozhenii rizy Bogoroditsy vo Vlahernah," 610–11.

This function of the Theotokos would become fully manifest during the epic siege of Constantinople by Persian and Avar troops in 626. The Virgin's role was further enhanced by the fact that the Emperor Heraclius was not present in the city during the siege, as he was leading his main army through the Caucasian mountain passes against the Sasanian heartland. In the absence of the emperor, the defense of the city was entrusted to the patriarch Sergius and *patrikios* Bonos, but, according to the overwhelming belief of Constantinople's citizens, it was Christ and the Theotokos who took care of the city. After several defeats on land and sea, the Khagan of the Avars lifted the siege and withdrew from Constantinople. In the wake of victory, the Theotokos became firmly established in Byzantine public sentiment as a supernatural guardian of the city. When Heraclius victoriously returned from his expedition, he received back his capital city preserved by the Virgin and her divine Son.²⁸

Two texts in particular reflect the early stages of the Theotokos myth that developed in the wake of the 626 siege of Constantinople. The first is the epic poem *Bellum Avaricum* composed by George of Pisidia most likely in 626.²⁹ A highly sophisticated court poet with an impressive classical education, George was also a deacon of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople and made an impressive administrative career in the patriarchate, probably due in part to the patronage of the patriarch Sergius.³⁰ In the *Bellum* George produced an elaborate epic account of the events to which he himself was a witness. The poem is designed to lionize the role played by the patriarch Sergius, George's patron and benefactor, during the siege. One of the dominant themes in the poem is the direct intervention of the Virgin in the course of events. George emphasizes two aspects of this intervention in particular. First, the Virgin appears as a supplicant for the city and its inhabitants before her divine son. By

²⁸ On the events of the siege, see Barišić, "Le siège de Constantinople par les Avars et les Slaves en 626," 371–95; Howard-Johnston, "The Siege of Constantinople in 626," 131–42.

²⁹ For the text's critical edition and translation into Italian, see Giorgio di Pisidia, *Poemi. I. Panegirici Epici*, ed. by Agostino Pertusi (Ettal: Buch-Kunstverlag, 1959).

³⁰ On George of Pisidia, see Nissen, "Historisches Epos und Panegyrikos in der Spätantike," 298–325; Whitby, "A New Image for a New Age," 197–225; "George of Pisidia's Presentation of the Emperor Heraclius," 157–73, and "Defender of the Cross," 247–73.

organizing a supplicatory procession and beseeching intercession from the Virgin, the patriarch Sergius secures the Virgin's advocacy before Christ and, as a result, the victory in battle, described by George as a judicial trial before God.³¹ Second, the Virgin takes a hands-on role as a supernatural combatant during the siege itself and particularly during one of its turning points: a sea-battle against the fleet of Slavs allied with Avars. She herself shoots arrows, deflects and delivers blows with a sword, inflicts wounds, and overturns and sinks enemy vessels, eventually wiping out the attackers.³² George asks his listeners not to be amazed (apparently some were) at this. After all, the earlier capture of the church at Blachernae by Avars "pierced" the Virgin's soul, "wounding" her very being.³³ By destroying the Slav fleet, the Virgin merely fought back.

The *Bellum's* Virgin is closely associated with the church at Blachernae, one of the most venerated Constantinopolitan shrines built in the late fifth century and housing the relic of the Virgin's robe.³⁴ The Virgin is physically manifest and visually present through the church, although there is no indication at this point that the relic of the robe possesses any special protective qualities.³⁵ Rather it is the building complex itself, including the sacred spring in the church's vicinity, which is understood to constitute the earthly presence of the Virgin. As noted earlier in this chapter, the capture of the church by Avars quite literally wounds the Virgin herself, causing her to unleash the full fury of her wrath on the attackers. This theme is further developed in two epigrams from the apse of the church at Blachernae and the basin of the spring nearby, preserved in the tenth-century *Anthologia Palatina* and attributed to George of Pisidia. The epigrams virtually identify the church of the Virgin with the Virgin herself by applying the same imagery to both of them. Both the Virgin and her church are the "the dread throne of God on Earth,"

³¹ *Avar.*, lines 366–89. Speck, *Zufälliges zum Bellum Avaricum*, 27–29, argues against the icons of the Virgin being paraded during the ceremony. See also Pentcheva, *Icons and Power*, 37–59. In my opinion, the text of George is sufficiently ambivalent to allow both interpretations.

³² *Avar.*, lines 451–56.

³³ *Avar.*, lines 457–61.

³⁴ See Speck, *Zufälliges*, 30–59.

³⁵ It seems that only in the later period does the robe housed at Blachernae become widely perceived as the source of Constantinople's supernatural protection. See Pentcheva, *Icons and Power*, 62–63. Cf., however, Mango, "Constantinople as Theotokoupolis," 23, and a hymn quoted there.

“a second gate of God,” and an ark through which God rendered himself physically present on earth.³⁶ The epigram written on the basin concludes by praising the Virgin’s power to crush and subdue the barbarians “by water not by spear.” In other words, for George, it is the church complex of Blachernae, including the sacred spring, more than anything else that renders the Virgin’s presence tangibly manifest.

Scholars have long since noticed stylistic similarities between George’s description of the Virgin and the portrayal of fighting Olympian gods, Athena in particular, in classical Greek literature.³⁷ Given the routine usage of classicizing literary clichés by George, his view of the Theotokos as a warrior virgin may reflect a particular brand of archaizing literary taste among the Constantinopolitan elite of his day. In fact, George opens his poem with a different description of the Theotokos that specifically emphasizes the Christian paradox of virgin mother who repeatedly conquered nature, first by giving birth without seed to humanity’s salvation, and then by saving Constantinople without using weapons. She remained a virgin and “without change” in battle as well as in birth.³⁸ By its nature the miracle of Constantinople’s rescue was associated with the miracle of the virgin birth. George later compares Constantinople to the Virgin’s child “wrapped in swaddling clothes,” saved through the Virgin’s tearful intercession before God.³⁹

The dramatically passionate Virgin of George stands in sharp contrast with a more majestic, mysterious, and serene image of the Theotokos painted by George’s contemporary Theodore Syncellus in a sermon delivered one year later, on the first anniversary of the siege on August 7, 627. Like George, Theodore belonged to the Constantinopolitan elite of the day. He witnessed the events of 626 firsthand and actively participated in them by joining the Byzantine embassy sent to the Khagan in the beginning of the siege. In many ways his 627 sermon further elaborates themes already addressed in the earlier anonymous speech on the transfer of the Virgin’s robe to the church at Blachernae mentioned earlier in text and also attributed by most scholars to Theodore Syncellus.

³⁶ *Greek Anthology*, I, 120–121. See Speck, *Zufälliges*, 54–57.

³⁷ See Frolov, “La dédicace de Constantinople,” 107–115; Nissen, “Historisches Epos,” 311–12; Pentcheva, *Icons and Power*, 63–65.

³⁸ *Avar.*, lines 1–9.

³⁹ *Avar.*, lines 130–60. See Pentcheva, *Icons and Power*, 65–69.

The dominant theme in both compositions is that of the capital city of the empire fortified and preserved by the power of the Virgin. Constantinople is “the city of God, fortified by the Virgin.”⁴⁰ The words Theodore put into the mouth of the defeated Persian general aptly summarize the overall message of the sermon: “It is clear that a divine and superhuman power guards the city and has preserved it invulnerable. No one is capable of harming it.”⁴¹ The divine and superhuman power is, first and foremost, that of the Theotokos. When the emperor leaves for the Persian campaign he entrusts the city, his children, and palace to God and the Virgin.⁴² In fact, as Heraclius himself acknowledges, the Virgin is the true ruler of the city. She condescends to entrust it and its people to the emperor. In the absence of the latter, she takes care of her own, *her* city.⁴³ It is to her that the patriarch Sergius and the people of Constantinople address prayers to save them and keep the city intact in the absence of the emperor.⁴⁴ Once again the church at Blachernae is singled out as “the unconquerable guardian of the city” that eventually safeguards Constantinople and its inhabitants from the enemy.⁴⁵

Unlike George, Theodore shies away from the dramatized portrayal of the bellicose Virgin who throws herself into the heat of battle wrecking havoc on the enemy. His Virgin is more detached. During the sea-battle that destroyed the Slav fleet, she “aroused her own force and power,” but not like Moses, who divided and then united the waters of the Red Sea by his staff, destroying the army of Pharaoh. Rather she drowned enemy “by sole gesture and will.”⁴⁶ Later on, the Virgin is also contrasted with Phineas who used a lance to transfix an Israelite cohabiting with a Midianite woman. Unlike him, the Virgin defeated Avars and Persians “solely by word and will, overthrowing and driving away each one of them at the same time.”⁴⁷ Instead of directly participating in battle, as George would have it, the Virgin is the source of supernatural strength that fortifies and protects the city and its defenders. Her will

⁴⁰ Sternbach, 302, line 24.

⁴¹ Sternbach, 314, lines 11–13.

⁴² Sternbach, 302, lines 11–13, and 303, lines 7–14.

⁴³ Sternbach, 320, lines 1–5.

⁴⁴ Sternbach, 303, lines 14–32.

⁴⁵ Sternbach, 308, lines 11–13. See also Sternbach, 318, lines 4–8.

⁴⁶ Sternbach, 311, lines 26–29.

⁴⁷ Sternbach, 314, lines 1–5. See also Sternbach, 312, lines 19–20.

mysteriously translates into the power of defenders and the weakness of attackers.⁴⁸

Finally, Theodore attributes a much greater role to the icons of the Theotokos set by the order of the patriarch on the western gates of Constantinople. This whole event is never mentioned by George, who instead focuses on the supplicatory procession led by the Patriarch Sergius in what is described by George as the scene of a divinely administered court trial between the city and the besieging enemy. The procession carries what was most likely the *acheiropoietos* icon of Christ used as the city's intercessor to mitigate divine judgment. The Theotokos' intervention on behalf of the city before her divine Son is also mentioned, although it is never explicitly associated with her icons. For George, the Theotokos' presence on earth is revealed not through her icons but through her church at Blachernae. Although Theodore also identifies the church as the prime *locus* from which and through which the power of the Virgin is mediated, he also adds the detailed description of the icons and their role in the city's supernatural defense. According to the homily, when the siege began, Sergius ordered the icons of Christ displayed on the city walls, and also put icons depicting the Virgin on the city gates with the goal of projecting the protective power of the Theotokos against the advancing enemy. In Theodore's words, the icons were "like the immovable sun, chasing away the darkness by its rays."⁴⁹ It was against them that, according to the patriarch Sergius, the "foreign and devilish" troops of Avars undertook the war.⁵⁰ As a result, "the holy image of the Virgin carrying in her arms him whom she had borne, the Lord,"⁵¹ painted on the icons, receives more attention in Theodore's sermon than it does in George's poem.

Overall our texts envision several ways in which the Theotokos' supernatural presence was rendered visually and made tangibly manifest during the siege of 626. For George of Pisidia, the Theotokos was physically present at the siege through her church at Blachernae. It was through the church that the protective power of the Theotokos was mediated.

⁴⁸ Sternbach, 305, line 37 – 306, line, 12.

⁴⁹ Sternbach, 304, lines 6–7.

⁵⁰ Sternbach, 304, lines 9–10.

⁵¹ Sternbach, 304, lines 7–8. On the protective function of icons depicting the Theotokos, see Frolow, "La dédicace de Constantinople," 102–05.

One gets an impression that George identifies the physical building of the church with the Virgin's body. As a result, the capture of the church by the Avars "wounds" the Virgin and causes her to unleash destruction on the attackers. Theodore Syncellus broadens the scope of media by adding protective icons of the Theotokos set by the Patriarch on the city gates. Their function is remarkably similar to that of the church, as they both render the supernatural presence of the Theotokos visibly manifest and serve as a source of power that keeps the enemy at bay. Both the church and the icons make visible the Virgin's power safeguarding the city. In a sense, the Virgin herself physically stands by the city's side in the guise of the church at Blachernae or at the city's gates in the guise of the icons, mysteriously protecting Constantinople against the advancing hordes by the sheer force of her will. Finally, a roughly contemporaneous account in the *Paschal Chronicle* adds another element to the picture by attributing to the Khagan of the Avars a vision of an apparition of "a woman alone in stately dress hurrying around on the wall." The vision allegedly convinced the Khagan of his inability to fight against the city.⁵²

There are obvious similarities between *Sefer Zerubbabel's* Hephzibah and the role of the Theotokos as the supernatural guardian of the capital city of the empire. Hephzibah is the guardian of Jerusalem just as the Theotokos is the guardian of Constantinople. She is entrusted with protecting Jerusalem in the absence of her son, the Messiah, just as the Theotokos is entrusted with protecting Constantinople in the absence of the emperor Heraclius. Eventually Hephzibah hands over the miracle-working staff and Jerusalem to her son, Menahem son of Ammiel, just as the Theotokos hands over Constantinople to the triumphant Heraclius in whose absence she preserved the city. In other words, both figures serve as supernatural patronesses of the city, who protect it in the absence of its ruler. Their power becomes manifest precisely at a time when the ruler is away from the scene. As Michael McCormick has observed, the post-626 veneration of the Theotokos developed precisely as "the capital's special cult of Mary," complete with public liturgical processions that involved the city's population.⁵³ In the prologue to the Akathistos

⁵² *Chronicon Paschale* (Dindorf, 725).

⁵³ McCormick, *Eternal Victory*, 76. Cf., however, Cameron, "Theotokos in Sixth-Century Constantinople," 79–108, on the role of the imperial court in the veneration of Theotokos. See also Holum, *Theodosian Emperresses*, 139–46, and 227.

hymn, composed either in the wake of the 626 siege or after the 717/718 siege of Constantinople by Arabs, and intended for public liturgical performance, the city of Constantinople addresses the Theotokos, the “defender and general” who possesses “invincible strength,” as “I your city” and dedicates to her “the thanksgiving for victory.”⁵⁴ By the time of the eighth-century homily on the Akathistos, attributed to Andrew of Crete, the image of the Theotokos as the victory-granting, mystical co-ruler of the emperor and the supernatural protector of the empire was well established.⁵⁵ Both Mary and Hephzibah served as supernatural sources and personifications of their respective cities’ strength made manifest in the absence of a traditional male protector of the city, whether the emperor or the Messiah.

As the personified strength of their capital cities, both Mary and Hephzibah are particularly associated with city gates and city walls. Hephzibah stands at the east gate of Jerusalem barring Armilos from entering the city, whereas the icons portraying “the holy image” of the Theotokos were set up on the western gate of Constantinople, protecting the city from Avar and Persian “foreign and devilish” troops, and the church at Blachernae, just outside the city walls, was referred to as “the unconquerable guardian of the city.” The physical appearance of Hephzibah at the east gate shielding Jerusalem from Armilos also finds a close parallel in the alleged vision of the Avar Khagan, who saw the veiled figure of the Virgin appearing on Constantinople’s walls and frustrating his attempts to enter the city. The two legends, however, may ultimately traced to a much earlier body of lore represented by the late fourth- or early fifth-century story of Alaric’s vision of Athena Promachos guarding the walls of Athens. According to the fifth-century pagan historian Zosimus, who narrates this story, Athena “looked just as she can be seen in statue form” and ready to defend her city. It was this vision that forced Alaric not to sack Athens.⁵⁶ Whether she appeared in the form of the Theotokos,

⁵⁴ See Trypanis, *Fourteen Early Byzantine Cantica*, 29–30, Prooemium II, lines 1–7. On the Akathistos, see also Wellesz, “The ‘Akathistos,’ A Study in Byzantine Hymnography,” 141–74; Cameron, “Images of Authority,” 5–6; Limberis, *Divine Heiress*, 89–97. On the post-717/718 dating of the prologue, see Speck, *Artabasdos*, 169–71. On the theme of the dedication of Constantinople to Mary in other liturgical compositions, see Frolow, “La dédicace de Constantinople,” 69–74.

⁵⁵ Pentcheva, *Icons and Power*, 20–21. See Themelis, “Ο Ἀκάθιστος ὕμνος,” 826–33, for the edition of the text.

⁵⁶ Zosimus, *Hist. Nov.* 5.6. The translation follows Buchanan and Davis, *Zosimus: Historia Nova*, 198.

Hephzibah, or Athena, the city's supernatural guardian was envisioned in the Byzantine imagination as a protective female taking care of her subjects and shielding them from the adversary.

Our sources disagree, however, about exactly how the protective force is projected. The Virgin of George of Pisidia fights in battle using weapons to destroy the enemy. The Virgin of Theodore Syncellus, in contrast, uses solely her gesture, will, and speech to bring her strength and power into action. Hephzibah does not engage in battle herself, either (at least there no indication of that in *Sefer Zerubbabel*). Instead she acts from a distance by mysteriously projecting her power onto the enemy. When confronting Shiroi, the king of Persia, Hephzibah destroys enemy troops by causing confusion and strife among them. Similarly, according to Theodore, the Virgin made the Avars set their own siege engines on fire and withdraw from Constantinople.⁵⁷ When Armilos approaches the east gate of Jerusalem, Hephzibah prevents him from entering the city by merely standing at the gate. One can easily attribute to Armilos the reaction of the Persian general quoted earlier in text regarding "the divine and superhuman power" that guards the city of Constantinople, keeps it safe, and prevents anyone from harming it. The way in which *Sefer Zerubbabel* describes Hephzibah's power seems to be more akin to Theodore's description of the Virgin's power, with his emphasis on the supernatural, mysterious, and ineffable. Hephzibah is not the warrior Virgin of George, nor is there any reference to her intercession before God to mitigate the divine judgment of the besieged city. Instead, Hephzibah resembles the mysterious Theotokos of Theodore and the *Paschal Chronicle*, whose majestic presence emanates supernatural power that protects the city and keeps its enemies at bay.

The figure of Hephzibah as the guardian of Jerusalem and the figure of the Theotokos as the guardian of Constantinople reflect the same motif of the capital city symbolically identified with its supernatural female patron. Just as Constantinople is the Virgin's own city "fortified" by her power, so, too, Jerusalem is Hephzibah's city whose strength lies in the power of its guardian. The myth of Jerusalem produced by *Sefer Zerubbabel* drew upon the same system of images and ideas as did the myth of Constantinople in contemporaneous Byzantine writings.

⁵⁷ Sternbach, 312, lines 19–39.

By applying to Jerusalem the mythology of Constantinople, however, the author(s) of *Sefer Zerubbabel* also suggested a major role reversal between the two cities. Jerusalem and Hephzibah, not Constantinople and the Virgin, contained the true meaning of Byzantine imperial symbolism. Constantinople was merely an inadequate shadow of the sacred reality embodied in its apocalyptic successor. In broader cultural terms, the personified pair of Jerusalem and Rome/Constantinople resembled somewhat earlier personifications of Rome and Constantinople that featured so prominently in the official imperial ideology, literature, coinage, and art of the fourth and fifth centuries. The personified pair of Rome and Constantinople usually emphasized the balance and parity between the two cities, even though by the fifth century at least some imperial panegyrists increasingly saw Constantinople as overshadowing Rome in political importance. Jewish texts abandoned this balanced vision for a more dramatic and eschatologically charged view of Jerusalem replacing Rome/Constantinople as the seat of imperial holiness, similarly to the way the Byzantines claimed that Rome/Constantinople had once replaced Jerusalem as the capital city of the true Israel.

THE STAFF OF MOSES

There is one important difference, however. Hephzibah's power derives from the staff of Moses with which, as *Sefer Zerubbabel* repeatedly reminds us, she performs all her miracles. The staff is explicitly given to her by God "to perform these acts of salvation" at the very moment when Hephzibah first appears in the text. In my opinion, it is this role of the staff as the medium through which Hephzibah exercises supernatural powers that distinguishes Hephzibah's defense of Jerusalem from the Theotokos' defense of Constantinople.

Late antique Jewish tradition routinely attributed special powers to the staff of Moses. According to rabbinic literature, Moses performed some of his most spectacular miracles by using the staff.⁵⁸ The staff was listed among ten special objects created by God *ex nihilo* on the eve of Sabbath

⁵⁸ See *Mek. Wayassa* (Horovitz & Rabin, 175). On rabbinic traditions associated with the staff of Moses, see Meilicke, "Moses' Staff and the Return of the Dead," 345–72, esp. 347–52, and Reeves, *Trajectories*, 187–99. Cf. Rabinowitz, *Halakhah we-agadah bi-fiyute Yannai*, 229.

of the first week of creation.⁵⁹ It was allegedly made of sapphire and even of the stone of which the heavenly throne of God was made.⁶⁰ By the time of *Sefer Zerubbabel* the staff of Moses came to be identified with the rod of Aaron, and their whereabouts were also conflated. According to the legend, the king Josiah concealed the rod of Aaron along with other sacred objects associated with the Ark of the Covenant to prevent it from being taken into Babylonian captivity.⁶¹ It was apparently at this or a later stage that the tradition about the concealment of the staff of Moses, as it appears in *Sefer Zerubbabel*, gained popularity as well. According to this tradition, the staff, made of almond wood, was given by God to Adam, Moses, Aaron, Joshua, and King David, until it was finally hidden by Elijah in the city of Rakkath/Tiberias.⁶² The story does not elaborate on how exactly the staff is discovered, stating only that God gives it to Hephzibah to perform “acts of salvation.”⁶³ Eventually she hands it over to her son along with the city of Jerusalem.⁶⁴

Arguably the function of the staff in *Sefer Zerubbabel* is similar to that of the relics, especially the remains of the True Cross, in contemporary Byzantine literature.⁶⁵ All these objects constitute the source of supernatural power ensuring victory for the messianic kingdom of Israel or for the Byzantine Empire, respectively. They are *palladia* projecting divine power in the service of triumphant *basileia*.⁶⁶ Starting in the fifth century, imperial coins began to add Christian attributes to the traditional depictions of Victoria. This new style of coinage persisted through the early seventh century, when finally the Victoria figure was dropped altogether. On the coins Victoria was usually depicted holding an elongated cross or a cross-shaped scepter, in a way that combined the

⁵⁹ M. 'Abot 5:6, *Mek. Wayassa* (Horovitz & Rabin, 171), and *Tg. Ps-J.* to Exodus 2:21.

⁶⁰ *Mek. Wayassa* (Horovitz & Rabin, 175), and *Tg. Ps-J.* to Exodus 4:20. *Sifre Deut* 355 (Finkelstein, 418) lists the rod of Aaron instead of the staff of Moses.

⁶¹ The lists of objects vary. See t. Yoma 2:15, t. Sotah 13.1, y. Sheqal. 6.1 (49c) (= y. Sotah 8:3 [22c]), and b. Yoma 52b. Cf. the list in 'Abot R. Nat. A 41 (Schechter, 67a), that explicitly distinguishes between the staff of Moses and the rod of Aaron. On Aaron's rod being identified with the staff of Moses, see Ginzberg, *Legends*, vol. 6, 106–07, n. 600.

⁶² Lévi, 135.

⁶³ Lévi, 134.

⁶⁴ Lévi, 138.

⁶⁵ See Frolov, *La Relique de la Vraie Croix. Recherches sur le développement d'un culte*, esp. 73–80; Klein, *Byzanz, der Westen und das 'wahre' Kreuz*, 19–92.

⁶⁶ See Gagé, “Σταυρὸς νικητοῖός,” 370–400; Dinkler, “Das Kreuz als Siegeszeichen,” 55–76.

traditional Roman symbolism of imperial victory with the new Christian one.⁶⁷ Whether intentionally or not, the figure of Hephzibah armed with the staff of Moses serves as a Jewish application of imperial symbolism widely disseminated by means of imperial coinage. In both cases a female figure armed with a victory-granting relic serves to project the notion of victory as a key element within the (messianic?) empire's self-understanding.

Functional similarities between the staff of Moses and Byzantine mythology of the triumphant cross run even deeper. The staff in *Sefer Zerubbabel* performs two major tasks: It causes the destruction of Israel's enemies and brings about (or at least is associated with) the resurrection of the dead. The same combination of functions is attributed by George of Pisidia to the cross in his poem *In Restitutionem Sanctae Crucis*, written to celebrate the restoration of the True Cross by Heraclius in the wake of his Persian campaign in 628. On the one hand, the cross is the instrument of the emperor's victory that grants military triumph to Heraclius. The cross causes confusion and civil strife among the enemies, and becomes the instrument with which the emperor rules the universe.⁶⁸ On the other hand, the cross is the instrument with which Christ conquered death.⁶⁹ By restoring the True Cross to Jerusalem, Heraclius combines the two triumphs, that over the political enemies of the state and that over death, into one universal and eternal triumph of his imperial might. As MacCormack has observed, the cross "illustrates a unity of purpose between Christ and emperor. The cross, the principle whereby Christ conquered death, was also the principle whereby the emperor ruled the empire and could conquer his enemies."⁷⁰

The staff of Moses in the hands of Hephzibah performs a similar function. It is portrayed in *Sefer Zerubbabel* as the source of Israel's supernaturally enhanced military power. It causes confusion and internal strife within enemy's ranks, just as the cross does in George's poem. It is with and through the staff's miraculous properties that Hephzibah protects Israel and keeps Israel's enemies at bay until the moment of her son's arrival on the scene. The transition of the staff from Hephzibah to

⁶⁷ See Pentcheva, *Icons and Power*, 19.

⁶⁸ *In Rest.*, lines 73–103.

⁶⁹ *In Rest.*, lines 104–110.

⁷⁰ MacCormack, *Art and Ceremony*, 85.

her son is immediately followed by the resurrection of the dead performed by him. Even though no direct connection is established between the two events, the connection by association is certainly there.

Along with the “great star” that shines before Hephzibah, the staff of Moses is the key attribute that serves to introduce Hephzibah to the reader.⁷¹ At first glance this combination of Moses’ staff and the star would merely provide another parallel to Byzantine representations of the Theotokos. In one of his hymns on the Nativity, the sixth-century poet Romanos the Melodist compares the star that, according to Matt 2:1–10, guided the Magi to Bethlehem to the staff of Moses with which the latter brought Israelites out of Egypt and through which “the light of the divine knowledge” shone to them.⁷² Earlier in the hymn, Romanos identifies the star seen by the Magi with the star of Balaam’s prophecy in Numbers 24:17 predicting the birth of the Messiah.⁷³ Overall, throughout the poem the star is repeatedly mentioned in connection with the scene of the Nativity, in general, and as an attribute of the Virgin, in particular.⁷⁴ In fact, by the seventh century the connection between the Theotokos and the star would become a stock motif in Byzantine hymnography and iconography.⁷⁵ In that sense the representation of Hephzibah would share one more element in common with the contemporaneous representations of the Theotokos.

When it comes to the role that the staff plays in the “acts of redemption” performed by Hephzibah, the situation is different. *Sefer Zerubbabel*’s insistence on the centrality of the staff for Hephzibah’s role as the protector of Jerusalem contradicts the explicit statement of Theodore that at the siege of Constantinople the Virgin acted not like Moses, who divided

⁷¹ The “great star” shining before Hephzibah is probably an allusion to Numbers 24:17: “a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel” and the text’s messianic interpretation in later Jewish tradition. See Schäfer, *Mirror of His Beauty*, 214.

⁷² Romanos, *Hymnes*, X. 18, line 7 – 19, line 3 (de Matons, 2:68–70).

⁷³ Romanos, *Hymnes*, X. 4, line 9 – 5, line 10 (de Matons, 2:54).

⁷⁴ See Romanos, X. 8 (de Matons, 2:58). Romanos, X. 12–13 (de Matons, 2:62–64) may imply cross-imagery between the star and the Virgin, as it refers to the latter as “shining” in 13, line 1.

⁷⁵ Usually in connection with the Nativity scene and the star that led the Magi. See, for example, the Akathistos hymn that refers to the Theotokos as “the star that reveals the sun” (Akathistos 1, line 14 [Trypanis, 30]), “the mother of the star that does not set,” and “the dawn of the mystical day” (Akathistos 9, lines 6–7 [Trypanis, 33]). On relevant iconography, see Wellen, *Theotokos*, 14–16, and Grabar, *Christian Iconography*, 132–33.

and united the waters of the Red Sea by his staff. Instead she used sheer will to repel the foes. In other words, whereas the miraculous power of the Theotokos is her own, the power of Hephzibah comes from her temporary possession of Moses' staff.⁷⁶ When Hephzibah hands the staff over to her son, she hands over her power as well and fades away from the scene. This scenario denies to Hephzibah the innate supernatural powers characteristic of the Theotokos in the parallel Christian tradition and ensures that Hephzibah never crosses the line between the earthly and heavenly realms, as the Theotokos does.⁷⁷ Despite a number of similarities, Hephzibah is not a Jewish equivalent of the Theotokos, and one has to look for other parallels within the contemporaneous Byzantine culture to account for Hephzibah's multiple characteristics more fully. Although she was an important source of imagery for the figure of Hephzibah, the Theotokos probably was not the only one.

HEPHZIBAH AUGUSTA

From the fifth century onward, the increasing veneration of the Theotokos at the Byzantine court and society went hand in hand with the creation of powerful images of Byzantine empresses in imperial court culture. In fact these two trends continuously informed and shaped each other.⁷⁸ In the text that follows, I shall examine to what extent the figure of

⁷⁶ In an interesting parallel to Theodore, some rabbinic texts explicitly denied that the staff of Moses served as the source of his power, attributing miracles instead to the direct intervention of God. See Meilicke, "Moses' Staff and the Return of the Dead," 350–51.

⁷⁷ On Theotokos, see Delius, *Geschichte der Marienverehrung*, 112–26. Cf., however, a legend of the palm branch that, according to some versions of the Dormition story, Theotokos receives from an angel on the Mount of Olives. Before she passes away Theotokos gives the branch to the Apostle John. This palm branch is eventually received by the Jew Iephonias, who converted to Christianity after the incident at Theotokos' burial, at which he tried to attack her bier, was punished by having his hand cut off, but then was healed by Theotokos. The branch becomes the source of healing for any Jew who touches it. In the meantime, the Archangel Michael removes the body of Theotokos from her earthly tomb and buries it in Paradise under the Tree of Life. See M. van Esbroeck, "Les textes littéraires sur l'Assomption," 265–85, esp. 268–76. The story appears to belong to the *Transitus Mariae* cycle of legends, on which see Schäfer, *Mirror*, 150–52, 173–91.

⁷⁸ See, in particular, Holum, *Theodosian Empresses*, 147–74; Limberis, *Divine Heiress*, 53–61; Herrin, "The Imperial Feminine," 12–19. Cf. James, "The Empress and the Virgin," 145–52, for a somewhat different interpretation. On the empress's status in contemporaneous Byzantine society, see also James, *Empresses and Power in Early Byzantium*.

Hephzibah may reflect not just the Byzantine image of the Theotokos but also the idealized portrayal of a Byzantine empress, just as Hephzibah's son, the Messiah, shared a number of common features with the idealized Byzantine emperor.

The ideal empress of Christian Byzantium was Helena Augusta, the mother of the first Christian emperor Constantine the Great. The cycle of legends associated with her name came into existence during the late fourth and early fifth centuries, creating a myth and a paradigm for what the true Christian empress of Byzantium was supposed to be.⁷⁹ The ideal held from that time forward, with idealized descriptions of subsequent empresses, such as Pulcheria, the sister of Theodosius II, adding new touches to the portrait. An essential part of the portrait was the role played by the empress in strengthening the Christian *basileia* by her personal piety, in general, and by her discovery and appropriation of a wide range of holy relics for the needs of the empire, in particular.⁸⁰ Helena's legend of the discovery of the True Cross in Jerusalem blazed the trail, and was followed by other stories of relics' discoveries well into the eighth century and later. It is within this context that Hephzibah's possession of the staff of Moses will now be considered.

It is the initial discovery of the staff that makes Hephzibah's role similar to those of Helena, Pulcheria, and other imperial women of Byzantium. She is the first one to acquire the long-hidden relic. In *Sefer Zerubbabel's* version of the events, Hephzibah takes the place of Elijah as the person responsible for the restoration of the staff to Israel and, more specifically, to her son, Menahem son of Ammiel.⁸¹ According to *Sefer Zerubbabel*, Elijah is the one who hides the staff in the city of Rakkath, but he is not the one who recovers it for Israel's Messiah. It is unclear whether one should read much into this, yet I would venture a suggestion that Hephzibah's role in the transmission of the staff is akin to that of the Byzantine empresses.

In a situation in which the ruler died without having an heir, female relatives of the deceased were often expected to exercise the transmission

⁷⁹ On the development of the Helena legend, see Drijvers, *Helena Augusta*, 95–145. On Helena's symbolic value, see Brubaker, "Memories of Helena," 52–75.

⁸⁰ See Hunt, *Holy Land Pilgrimage*, 6–49, 221–48; Holum, *Theodosian Empresses*, 79–111.

⁸¹ On Elijah being expected to restore the rod of Aaron along with other sacred objects, see *Mek. Wayassa* (Horovitz & Rabin, 172). This tradition is later attested in Yannai's poetry. See Rabinowitz, *Halakhah we-agadah bi-fiyute Yannai*, 229.

of power through marriage (sometimes fictive) to the prospective imperial successor. The empress who was the mother of the underage heir apparent had the right to exercise the guardianship of her son until he reached maturity, and thus, once again, function as the transmitter of power from one male emperor to the next. As a result, in the words of McCormick, the Augustae “supplied a family continuity that the emperors generally lacked” and “helped transmit an imperial tradition within an emerging court society.” McCormick especially emphasizes the contribution of imperial women to “the development of the symbols of power which is so prominent in this period,” citing the role played by Pulcheria in preparing Theodosius II for ceremonial duties and the initiative taken by Sophia and Constantina in commissioning a crown for Maurice. The latter act may be construed as a symbolic transmission of power from the previous emperors Justin II and Tiberius through Justin’s wife Sophia and Tiberius’ daughter Constantina to Constantina’s husband and the new emperor Maurice.⁸²

Hephzibah enacts the transmission of power symbolized by the staff of Moses on two levels. She transmits it from the generations of biblical priests, prophets, and kings to the eschatological Messiah, and, more specifically, from King David to his descendant and her son, Menahem, who was born in the time of King David but then hidden until the time of final redemption.⁸³ *Sefer Zerubbabel* twice identifies Hephzibah not only as the mother of Menahem son of Ammiel, but also as the wife of Nathan the Prophet. The latter probably combines two originally independent characters from 2 Samuel: Nathan the Prophet, who was prominent at King David’s court, and Nathan, the son of King David, mentioned along with David’s other children in 2 Samuel 5:14 (although very rarely identified with Nathan the Prophet outside of *Sefer Zerubbabel*).⁸⁴ There is no clear evidence, however, that *Sefer Zerubbabel* integrates into its

⁸² McCormick, “Emperor and Court,” 146–47. See also Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, 24–29, 40–42; Herrin, “The Imperial Feminine,” 19–20, 28–29; James, “Goddess, Whore, Wife or Slave,” 125–26, and *Empresses and Power*, 74–75.

⁸³ According to the version of the text published by Wertheimer, Menahem was born at the time of Jerusalem’s capture by Nebuchadnezzar. This version, however, may have been influenced by the story in y. Ber. 2:4 (5a). According to it, the Messiah was born on the day when the Temple was destroyed.

⁸⁴ Lévi, 135 and 142. Wartheimer’s text explicitly identifies Nathan as the son of David. See further Himmelfarb, “Sefer Zerubbabel,” 89, n. 116, and “The Mother of the Messiah,” 387–89.

narrative the biblical reference to Hephzibah, the mother of the wicked King Manasseh, and, presumably, the wife of the righteous King Hezekiah in 2 Kings 21:1, even though such a connection would be quite natural and, indeed, has been suggested by several scholars.⁸⁵

Either way, the figure of Hephzibah serves to bridge the gap between Israel's biblical past and its eschatological future by transmitting the insignia of power from the former to the latter. The capacity in which she acts is fairly similar to that within which Byzantine empresses were occasionally expected to act: as the guarantor of the continuity of the imperial line and the female guardian who securely transmits imperial authority in the case of a gap in adult male succession. Like a Byzantine empress, Hephzibah assures "the dynastic continuity of the empire," in her case, the dynastic continuity between the Davidic empire of the past and the messianic empire of the future.⁸⁶ The choice of Hephzibah over Elijah as the restorer of the staff of Moses may not have been accidental after all.

In *Sefer Zerubbabel* there is no formal discovery story, like the story of Helena Augusta and the True Cross. It merely states that God "will give Hephzibah, the mother of Menahem son of Ammiel, a staff for these acts of salvation." Because the staff "is hidden away in Rakkath, a city in Naphtali," one may suppose that some sort of discovery was presumed. What seems to be certain, however, is that in both cases the discovered relic secures imperial victory and survival. Helena sends parts of the True Cross to her son Constantine, and then incorporates crucifixion nails found nearby into the emperor's horse's bridle and his helmet (or his diadem, according to some versions of the story).⁸⁷ All this guarantees both the security of the empire and its Christian nature. After winning three battles by using the staff, Hephzibah hands it over to her son, ushering in the final act of the messianic drama. Interestingly, the staff is never heard of again, but it still appears to play the role of the depository of the divine power that insures the Messiah's success until the moment of the direct revelation of God and, in fact, creates conditions for this revelation.

⁸⁵ See Himmelfarb, "The Mother of the Messiah," 386–87; Schäfer, *Die Geburt des Judentums*, 19.

⁸⁶ The quote is from Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, 40.

⁸⁷ See Drijvers, *Helena Augusta*, 95–117, for different versions of the legend.

Helena's legend had created an archetypal image of the Byzantine empress that was subsequently amplified by her successors. The so-called Trier ivory (named after its present location in the Trier Cathedral Treasury), dated to the period between the fifth and seventh centuries, depicts what looks like the translation of relics in a solemn procession. The procession is led by the emperor and greeted by the empress (both are dressed in imperial costumes) at the entrance to a church building. The empress holds an elongated cross in her left arm and is greeting the procession with her right. In light of the absence of any identifying signs, scholars have associated the scene with a number of fifth- through eighth-century empresses who were known for taking part in the translation of relics to Constantinople.⁸⁸ The historical precision aside, the Trier ivory depicts an archetypal vision of the Byzantine court and its ideology. According to the observation of Kenneth Holum, who identifies the ivory's empress with Pulcheria, the sister of Theodosius II, and the transfer of relics with that of the Protomartyr Stephan in 421, the scene contributes to a broader cultural perception of the Byzantine empress as sharing in the imperial title of "master of victory" and other attributes of military triumph traditionally associated with male emperors.⁸⁹ Within this perception, the focus of the imperial triumph gradually shifted away from celebrating the military prowess of the ruler to celebrating his/her religiosity as the prime cause of victory. The notion that military victory was secured through the ruler's piety created room for the image of a triumphant empress, whose devotion to God and God's saints, including the transfer of their protective relics to the empire's capital city, could now guarantee imperial invincibility.⁹⁰

The figure standing at the entrance to the church, holding an elongated cross in her left arm, and greeting the approaching procession in the Trier ivory may also help us visualize the figure of Hephzibah standing at the gates of Jerusalem, holding the staff, and either greeting

⁸⁸ See Holum and Vikan, "Trier Ivory," 120–26, for a detailed description of the Trier ivory, and James, "Bearing Gifts from the East," 121–22, for a list of different attributions of this artifact.

⁸⁹ See Holum and Vikan, "Trier Ivory," 126–32; Holum, "Pulcheria's Crusade," 153–57 and 162–67; *Theodosian Empresses*, 104–111.

⁹⁰ See also James, "Goddess, Whore, Wife or Slave," 123–39, and *Empresses and Power*, 90–98, 148–63.

the messianic procession led by her son or barring the onslaught of the demonic Armilos. Both female figures seem to reflect the same archetype of a female ruler that crystallized in Byzantine culture during the period of the late fourth through seventh centuries. In both instances, women came to be associated with the ideology of imperial triumph, securing the continuous existence of Christian *basileia* in one case, and that of Israel's messianic kingdom in the other. Hephzibah's power derives from her "chosenness" by God to usher in the time of Israel's salvation, just as the empress' piety could make her an important player within the system of Byzantine power relationships.

We can now revisit the earlier observation about Hephzibah's overall function as a *palladium*, the sign or the iconic representation imbued with special powers and securing victory for those who venerate it. A passage from the Syriac Poem on Alexander the Great, attributed to Jacob of Serug (451–521 A.D.), portrays the final onslaught of Gog and Magog on Jerusalem in terms that closely resemble *Sefer Zerubbabel's* story of Hephzibah and her defense of Jerusalem against Armilos. The Poem's relevant section runs as follows:

They [the hordes of Gog and Magog] shall not, however, enter into Jerusalem, the city of the Lord. For the sign of the Lord shall drive them away from it, and they shall not enter it. All the saints shall fly away from them to the mount Sanir, all faithful true ones and the good and the wise. They shall not be able to approach mount Sinai, for it is the dwelling place of the Lord, nor to the high mountains of Sinai with their shame. By Jerusalem shall fall by the sword the hosts of the children of Agog and of the house of Magog with great slaughter.⁹¹

Hephzibah's defense of Jerusalem looks similar:

Then they [Armilos and those who join with him] will exile Israel to the wilderness in three groups. But Hephzibah, the mother of Menahem son of Ammiel, will stand at the east gate so that wicked man will not come there, in order to fulfill the verse, "But the rest of the population shall not be uprooted from the city" (Zech 14:2). This war will take place in the month of

⁹¹ The text appears with minor alterations in all three recensions of the Syriac text. See Reinink, *Das Syrische Alexanderlied*, 114–17 (I, 628–635; II, 663–670; III, 717–722). The translation is from Budge, *The History of Alexander the Great*, 196–97. It is based on the first of Reinink's three recensions.

Av, and there will be trouble in Israel such as there never was before. People will flee to citadels, mountains, and caves; no one will be able to hide from him.⁹²

In both instances Jerusalem is the ultimate prize for the armies of an eschatological adversary. In both instances the faithful remnant of either Jews or Christians flees into the desert to escape the onslaught. In both instances the eschatological adversary fails to enter Jerusalem because the city is protected by a *palladium* of one sort or another. In the case of the Poem, it is “the sign of the Lord” that drives the attackers away. In the case of *Sefer Zerubbabel*, it is Hephzibah, who, armed with the staff of Moses, “will stand at the east gate so that wicked man will not come there.” The Poem’s “sign of the Lord” most likely refers to the sign of the cross in its traditional (at least since the time of Constantine) function as the victory-granting sign of combined religious and imperial triumph. Hephzibah’s power is contained in the staff of Moses, with which and through which she performs her miracles. Together they shield Jerusalem from its foes, just as the cross does in the Poem. In *Sefer Zerubbabel*, Hephzibah functions as the human carrier of the staff who identifies with and participates in the divine power communicated through the staff, but also provides a human agent through whom these powers can be wielded. In this way, she resembles the Byzantine empresses who, from Helena onward, identified with and participated in the power of the cross, but also served as human agents through whom the powers of the cross made themselves manifest.

THE OTHER HEPHZIBAH

Whereas the Hephzibah of *Sefer Zerubbabel* has received much well-deserved attention in recent scholarship, the Hephzibah of the *piyyut* *’Oto ha-Yom* has been less fortunate. The *piyyut* has come down to us, in either partial or complete form, in six Genizah manuscripts. Israel Lévi, who first published fragments of the *piyyut* as part of his commentary to *Sefer Zerubbabel*, referred to it as “un piout inédit inspiré

⁹² Lévi, 137.

du S. Zeroubabel.”⁹³ Although in his introduction to the *piyyut*’s critical edition Joseph Yahalom suggested that *’Oto ha-Yom* might in fact be the earliest literary witness of the apocalyptic tradition best known in the form of early medieval *Sefer Zerubbabel*,⁹⁴ other researchers continued to see the *piyyut* as largely secondary to and derivative of the *Sefer Zerubbabel*’s version of the legend.⁹⁵ Neither of the views has ever been extensively argued, let alone proven, and as of now both of them remain more or less impressionistic and intuitive in nature. I shall presently argue that although they belong to fundamentally the same tradition, the two Hephzibah narratives diverge in a number of important details. This divergence makes them equally important and equally authentic witnesses of how the Hephzibah tradition modulated and changed across seventh-century Jewish literature. Rather than prioritizing one version over the other, we have to view them synoptically as multiple facets of what appears to be a rich and evolving body of texts on the mother of the Messiah.

As noted by Yahalom, *’Oto ha-Yom* consists of two parts.⁹⁶ The first half of the *piyyut* describes a series of political and military upheavals that the *piyyut* interprets as signs of the Messiah’s arrival and which have been identified by modern scholars with the events accompanying the Muslim conquest of the Middle East in the seventh century.⁹⁷ This observation allowed scholars to assign the composition of the *piyyut* (or at least of its first half) to the seventh century, thus making the poem an elder contemporary of *Sefer Zerubbabel*, usually dated to the time right before the Muslim invasion of Palestine in 634 A.D.⁹⁸ The second half of the *piyyut* deals directly with Israel’s eschatological future by making use of such

⁹³ Lévi, “L’apocalypse de Zorobabel,” 61.

⁹⁴ See Yahalom, “On the Validity of Literary Works,” 128, and “The Temple and the City,” 278–80.

⁹⁵ See Stemberger, “Jerusalem in the Early Seventh Century,” 270. Cf. Reeves, *Trajectories*, 48–49.

⁹⁶ See Yahalom, “On the Validity of Literary Works,” 128, and “The Temple and the City,” 278–80. On the first half of the poem, see also Lewis, “On That Day,” 197–200.

⁹⁷ Yahalom, 130–31, lines 1–31. On the signs of the Messiah’s arrival, see specifically lines 1–2.

⁹⁸ For a seventh-century dating, see Lewis, “On That Day,” 197–200; Yahalom, “On the Validity,” 125–29, and “The Temple and the City,” 278–80; Stemberger, “Jerusalem in the Early Seventh Century,” 270. Cf. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 319–20, for a more cautious assessment.

stock motifs as the arrival of two Messiahs (the Messiah son of Joseph and the Messiah son of David), the rebuilding of the Temple by the Messiah son of Joseph, his confrontation with Armilos, the death of the Messiah son of Joseph and his resurrection by the Messiah son of David, and, finally, the restoration of the kingdom of Israel.⁹⁹ Unlike the first part it contains no historical references that would allow for its precise dating. It is unclear whether the two parts originated independently from one another and were later combined into a single composition, or if the *piyyut* always existed in its present form. The former seems to be more likely because, within their present setting, both parts function much like self-contained literary units.

The first (“historical”) section concludes with the description of the Messiah, who is revealed at the end of military tribulations and consoles Israel. His arrival is greeted with songs and praises sent to God and brings about the final judgment over the “evil ones.”¹⁰⁰ The *piyyut* provides no further description of the Messiah, and the section looks like a logical closing to the historical section of the poem. Immediately after that, however, the second half of the *piyyut* takes over with a much more elaborate account of Israel’s messianic future, an account which, among other things, features two Messiahs and not one as the previous section does.¹⁰¹ Overall, the purpose of the second half of the *piyyut* seems to be to provide details about the nature of messianic rule which are otherwise missing from the first half. At the same time, the second part appears to have originated independently and within a slightly different messianic tradition than the first part. It is also within the second part of the *piyyut* that most parallels to *Sefer Zerubbabel* (including the account of Hephzibah) are to be found. It is my impression that the second half of *’Oto ha-Yom* predates the first half and should be dated around the time of *Sefer Zerubbabel*. The two parts were put together either to “upgrade” an earlier Byzantine account of Israel’s redemption with the reference to the events of Muslim invasion or to satisfy the audience’s curiosity about specific details of the redemption which were otherwise missing from a “historical” section of the *piyyut*.

⁹⁹ Yahalom, 131–33, lines 32–94.

¹⁰⁰ Yahalom, 131, lines 28–31.

¹⁰¹ Yahalom, 132, lines 45–62. Cf. Yahalom, 130, line 1, and 131, line 28.

The story of Hephzibah serves as the opening segment of the *piyyut*'s second half. It runs as follows:

And the vision of the Son of Shealtiel will come,
Which God has shown to him.
And He will give the staff of Israel's salvation,
In the city of Naphtali in Kadesh in Galilee, He gives the staff of God.
And Hephzibah will come before God,
And she will kill two kings with the word of God,
In order to awaken in her Menahem son of Ammiel.
God gave her from of old¹⁰²
To Adam, Methuselah, with whom God made peace,
Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Israel,
Judah, Moses, Aaron, the holy one of God.
And she [is the one] who blossomed by the word of God.¹⁰³

The *piyyut* then identifies Menahem as the "Messiah son of Joseph son of Israel" and tells his story in a way that is more or less identical to the standard version of the whereabouts of the Messiah son of Joseph. The *piyyut*'s account of Hephzibah thus exhibits an intricate mix of similarities to and differences from *Sefer Zerubbabel*. In both texts, Hephzibah is the mother of the Messiah Menahem son of Ammiel, but according to the *piyyut* her son is the Messiah son of Joseph eventually killed by Armilos, not the triumphant Davidic Messiah, who later emerges out of nowhere to resurrect Messiah Menahem son of Ammiel and establish the messianic kingdom. Compared to Menahem's elaborate pedigree, the Davidic Messiah remains a shadowy figure in the *piyyut*.

¹⁰² The meaning of the verse is not entirely clear. It may also refer to Menahem rather than his mother. In this case the translation would read: "In order to awaken in her Menahem son of Ammiel // whom God gave to her from of old // God completed (made whole) Adam, Methuselah // Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Israel // Judah, Moses, Aaron, the holy one of God // and she [is the one] who blossomed by the word of God." Although possible, I find this translation less appealing for stylistic and grammatical reasons.

¹⁰³ Yahalom, 131, lines 32–44. Other possible translations: "in the word of God," "through the word of God," or "with the word of God." The last four lines were originally published among the *piyyut*'s fragments by Lévi, who understood them to refer to the staff of Moses along the lines of *Sefer Zerubbabel*. See Lévi, 62, as well as Even Shemuel, 107–108, and 393. I am particularly grateful to Alexandra Polyan of Moscow State University and Alexei Lyavdansky of the Russian State University for the Humanities for discussing this text with me and making valuable suggestions on translation.

To the best of my knowledge, the only other text in the early rabbinic corpus that identifies the Messiah Menahem son of Ammiel with the Messiah son of Joseph is a passage in the *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer*.¹⁰⁴ There, in the fulfillment of the prophecies of Deuteronomy 33:17 and Psalms 2:2, the Messiah whose “horns are taller than those of all animals” is expected to fight “the kings of the earth,” leading against them “the myriads of Ephraim” and “the thousands of Manasseh,” but then eventually to be killed in battle. Even though *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* contains no reference to Hephzibah, the midrash and the *piyyut* seem to hearken back to the same tradition about Menahem son of Ammiel. Just like the midrash, the *piyyut* later uses the proof-text from Deuteronomy 33:17 to describe Menahem’s military endeavors. Unlike the midrash, however, the *piyyut* attributes the death of the Messiah to Armilos rather than to the highly nonspecific “kings of the earth.”¹⁰⁵

In her analysis of *Sefer Zerubbabel*, Himmelfarb has noted that there the figure of Hephzibah “fits only uneasily with the by now traditional picture of two Messiahs; she appears first with the Messiah son of Ephraim and only later with the Davidic Messiah, who is designated as her son.”¹⁰⁶ In *Sefer Zerubbabel*, the Messiah son of Ephraim is called Nehemiah son of Hushiel. He is hidden in the city of Tiberias along with the staff of Moses, reveals himself five years after the arrival of Hephzibah, gathers Israel together, resumes sacrifices in Jerusalem, and fights off the enemies of Israel side by side with Hephzibah until he is finally killed by Armilos.¹⁰⁷ One may very well wonder if originally Hephzibah was indeed the mother of the Messiah son of Ephraim, called Menahem son of Ammiel, rather than the triumphant Messiah son of David. In that case, whereas the *piyyut* preserves this original version of the story, *Sefer Zerubbabel* transforms Hephzibah into the mother of the Davidic Messiah, perhaps in an attempt to integrate the story of Hephzibah with the story of Menahem son of

¹⁰⁴ See *Pirke R. El.* 19 (Horovits, 70). On this passage, see Goldberg, “Die Namen des Messias,” 232–33. On *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer*, see Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction*, 356–58. The midrash was most likely composed sometime in the eighth or the ninth century. Lévi, 63, believes that the author of the *piyyut* was influenced by *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer*, but offers no explanation.

¹⁰⁵ Yahalom, 132, lines 48–50 (reference to Deuteronomy 33:17), and line 54 (on Armilos).

¹⁰⁶ Himmelfarb, “Sefer Zerubbabel,” 82, n. 8.

¹⁰⁷ Lévi, 135–37.

Hezekiah and his mother that was borrowed by *Sefer Zerubbabel* from earlier rabbinic tradition.¹⁰⁸

Alternatively, the two versions of the Hephzibah legend might have circulated independently, or indeed the *piyyut*'s author could have confused the two messianic figures, attributing part of the Davidic Messiah's background to the Messiah son of Ephraim. Given the inconclusive nature of our evidence, all these options must presently remain on the table.

Other differences between the *piyyut* and *Sefer Zerubbabel* are more programmatic and can hardly be explained by mere confusion. Whereas *Sefer Zerubbabel* focuses almost exclusively on the martial role of Hephzibah as the protector of Jerusalem in her son's absence, the *piyyut* mentions only one of her victories, the destruction of two kings, which apparently corresponds to the Hephzibah's first victory in *Sefer Zerubbabel*. The *piyyut* also never explicitly connects Hephzibah to Jerusalem, even though this connection, as I have argued earlier in this chapter, is central to *Sefer Zerubbabel*'s narrative. Instead, the *piyyut* focuses on Hephzibah's motherhood, a theme which remains fairly marginal for *Sefer Zerubbabel*. There, although it is mentioned when Hephzibah is first introduced as Menahem's mother, the theme of Hephzibah's motherhood never gets fully elaborated, as the focus of the narrative quickly moves to Hephzibah's military achievements. On the contrary, the *piyyut* seems to be interested precisely in Hephzibah the mother, as opposed to Hephzibah the warrior.

At the heart of the *piyyut*'s portrayal of Hephzibah stands her symbolic association with the staff of Moses. For the *piyyut*, Hephzibah is the staff, "which/whom God gave from of old" to the generations of biblical characters from Adam to Aaron. The list is similar to (although not identical with) the list of characters who, according to *Sefer Zerubbabel*, received and passed on the staff of Moses before it was hidden away by Elijah in the city of Tiberias. In the case of the *piyyut*, however, it is not just the staff of Moses, but Hephzibah herself who, according to a fairly awkward and potentially ambiguous sentence, is said to have been transmitted by God "from of old" until finally she "blossoms by the word of God" with her child, Menahem son of Ammiel. There seems to be an

¹⁰⁸ On Menahem son of Hezekiah and his mother, see y. Ber. 2:4 (5a) and *LamR* 1:16. For analysis, see Himmelfarb, "The Mother of the Messiah," 369–89.

intentional confusion, a play, between the staff of Moses and Hephzibah, when the latter assumes the characteristics of the former, and the two of them merge together into one image.

In contrast, for *Sefer Zerubbabel* the staff is, first and foremost, a victory-granting relic: the instrument of Hephzibah's military triumph. In fact, one of the staff's functions within the narrative is to limit the scope of Hephzibah's supernatural qualities by providing a rational explanation for her military success. Hephzibah is able to protect Jerusalem not because of her inherent powers but because she is armed with the miracle-working staff of Moses which was preserved, concealed since the time of Elijah, for precisely this occasion. When Hephzibah's role as her son's temporary substitute is complete, she surrenders the staff, along with her powers contained in it, to her son Menahem and fades away from the scene. In that sense the role of Hephzibah is significantly (and perhaps programmatically) different from that of the Theotokos who defends Constantinople "by sole gesture and will" and not like Moses who used the staff to destroy the Pharaoh. In *Sefer Zerubbabel*, Hephzibah is explicitly denied what the Theotokos is credited with in contemporaneous Christian texts.

Not so in the *piyyut*. It draws no connection between the staff and Hephzibah's martial qualities. The mother of the Messiah kills the two kings "with the word of God" and not with the staff of Moses. She comes much closer to the Theotokos vanquishing Avars and Persians "solely by word and will" than does the Hephzibah of *Sefer Zerubbabel*. In the *piyyut*, the staff of Moses loses its role as Hephzibah's weapon. Instead, as just noted, the prime function of the staff in the *piyyut* is to serve as a symbol for Hephzibah herself. She is said to have "blossomed by the word of God," giving birth to her son, the Messiah, just as, according to Numbers 17:8, the rod of Aaron miraculously blossomed inside the Tabernacle. The symbolic association between the rod of Aaron and the future Messiah was apparently standard in Byzantine Jewish writings. In one of Yannai's *piyyutim*, the blooming rod of Aaron, "the shoot of priesthood which sprouted and blossomed," was interpreted, in apparent reference to Isaiah 11:1, as a symbolic foreshadowing of the future "shoot of kingdom" which will "sprout and blossom."¹⁰⁹ In the apparent development of established

¹⁰⁹ See Rabinowitz, *Halakhah we-aggadah bi-fiyute Yannai*, 125–26. Rabinowitz suggests a parallel with *Gen. R.* 71:5 (Theodor & Albeck, 827), but, in my opinion, the midrashic

symbolic connection between Aaron's rod and the Messiah, our *piyyut* applies the messianic symbolism of the rod not to the Messiah himself but to his mother.

In other words, whereas in *Sefer Zerubbabel* the staff of Moses serves primarily as a relic with which Hephzibah performs her miracles, according to the *piyyut*, the staff is Hephzibah herself. By being the one who defeats enemies and blossoms with the word of God, Hephzibah internalizes powers associated with the staff. The reference to the staff at the beginning of the *piyyut*'s Hephzibah section symbolically foreshadows her appearance. It is quite natural then, that after being mentioned in the beginning, "the staff of Israel's salvation" is never heard of again, at least, not as an inanimate object. Instead, the *piyyut*'s focus shifts entirely to Hephzibah who takes the narrative's center stage as the true and the only staff of Israel's salvation, blossoming with her son, Menahem son of Ammiel.

Whereas the Hephzibah of *Sefer Zerubbabel* can be productively compared to the Theotokos, the supernatural patron of Constantinople, the Hephzibah of 'Oto *ha-Yom* shares some characteristics with the Theotokos, the mother. On the most basic level, the identification of Hephzibah with the blossoming rod of Aaron is paralleled by the application of the symbolism of Aaron's rod to the Theotokos in Byzantine Christian homilies and liturgical poetry. The fifth century Proclus, bishop of Constantinople, used the blossoming rod's symbolism to describe the mystery of the virgin birth, as did Romanos the Melodist in the sixth century, and John of Damascus in the eighth.¹¹⁰ Within the Christian tradition, the point of comparison was the paradoxical nature of the virgin birth that took place without male intervention. As a result, the rod of Aaron that "blossomed without being watered" was seen as a symbolic foreshadowing of "Mary who blossomed without being tilled."¹¹¹ The rod of Aaron was also identified, however, with a shoot predicted to come out from the stump of Jesse in Isaiah 11:1, an identification made easier by

text lacks the eschatological dimension central to the *piyyut*. It also contains no reference to Isaiah 11:1.

¹¹⁰ Proclus, *Hom.* 4. 3, lines 69–73 (Constatas, 232), and 5. 2, lines 65–66 (Constatas, 260); Romanos, *Hymnes* XII. 4 (de Matons, 2:122); John of Damascus, *Dorm.* I. 7, lines 28–29 (Kotter, vol. 5, 492). For further references, see Eustratiades, *He Theotokos en te hymnographia*, 68–69.

¹¹¹ Romanos, *Hymnes* XII. 4, line 1, and 6 (de Matons, 2:122).

the fact that both “the rod” and “the shoot” have been translated in the Septuagint as *ravdos*.¹¹² As a result, in addition to symbolizing the virgin birth the blossoming rod of Aaron also symbolized messianic redemption brought about as a result of this birth. Although the motif of the virgin birth is entirely absent in the case of Hephzibah, the *piyyut* uses the rod of Aaron as a symbol of the Messiah’s birth and identifies Hephzibah with “the staff of Israel’s salvation” that blossoms with the Messiah, just as the Theotokos of contemporaneous Christian writings is compared to the rod of Aaron blossoming with Christ. The shared image did not necessarily imply direct borrowing but rather a common cultural milieu and shared symbolic language.¹¹³

The similarities in symbolic language should not be mistaken for shared theology. The description of Hephzibah lacks the most fundamental characteristic that came to dominate Byzantine views of the Theotokos ever since the Council of Ephesus in 431: Unlike the Theotokos, Hephzibah is not the mother of God. As a result, “the rhetoric of paradox,” to use Averil Cameron’s terminology, that plays such a prominent role in Byzantine references to the Theotokos, is nowhere to be found in the *piyyut*.¹¹⁴ Whereas much of Byzantine literature on the Theotokos takes special delight in contemplating her ability to contain the uncontainable or to give birth and a beginning in time to someone who has neither beginning nor end, the role of Hephzibah seems to be significantly more this-worldly. Just like her counterpart in *Sefer Zerubbabel*, she is the human mother of the human Messiah. The Hephzibah of Byzantine Jewish tradition is never elevated to the status of a gateway between heaven and earth, God and man, that the Theotokos acquires in Byzantine Christian tradition.

¹¹² Romanos, *Hymnes* XII. 4, lines 2–3 (de Matons, 2:122). Remarkably, Yannai uses the same parallelism between the rod of Aaron and a shoot from the stump of Jesse in Isaiah 11:1 in the *piyyut* discussed earlier. See Rabinowitz, *Halakhah we-agadah bi-fyyute Yannai*, 126, n. 3. The exact relationship between Yannai’s interpretation of the rod of Aaron in light of Isaiah 11:1 and the symbolism of *ravdos* in Byzantine Christian texts merits further attention.

¹¹³ The theme of the Virgin blossoming with Christ is ubiquitous in Byzantine liturgical texts, even though it does not always get explicitly connected to the image of Aaron’s rod. See, for example, Akathistos 5, lines 6–13, and 13, lines 1–11 (Trypanis, 31–32 and 35).

¹¹⁴ See Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire*, 165–70. Cf. Delius, *Geschichte der Marienverehrung*, 104–26.

CONCLUSIONS

By the early eighth century, the remains of the True Cross and the icons of the Theotokos were perceived as *palladia* that together guaranteed the safety of Constantinople, and so they were carried together along the city walls during the 717–718 Arab siege of the city.¹¹⁵ Hephzibah, armed with the staff of Moses and standing before the gates of Jerusalem, constitutes another version of the same protective image. The figure of Hephzibah cannot be reduced to a single prototype within contemporaneous Byzantine culture. Rather it combines several themes that are independently attested in non-Jewish sources of the time. These themes include female personifications of the empire's capital city, the growing veneration of the Theotokos in general and in the specific capacity as the divine guardian of Constantinople, and the role of Byzantine empresses as "masters of victory" securing, along with their male counterparts, the triumphant nature of the *basileia*. The elements of each of these themes can be found in the description of Hephzibah by *Sefer Zerubbabel*. Her image would be immediately recognizable to a Byzantine reader of the day, calling to mind numerous cultural, literary, and religious allusions. It would be difficult, however, to single out one particular theme that could explain all aspects of Hephzibah's character. She is not exactly a Jewish equivalent of the Theotokos, neither is she a New Helena, nor the female Tyche of Jerusalem, although she shares numerous characteristics with all three of them.

Several scholars have noticed the lack of precedent for Hephzibah's figure within Jewish tradition.¹¹⁶ To properly contextualize her image one has to search contemporaneous Byzantine writings, not earlier Jewish texts. It is likely that by the seventh century Hephzibah's legend circulated in multiple redactions. Each of them emphasized particular aspects of Hephzibah's character deemed to be most appropriate for the context. Thus whereas *Sefer Zerubbabel* develops the warrior image of Hephzibah, *'Oto ha-Yom* stresses her redemptive motherhood. There is no solid textual evidence to claim chronological priority for either of the two

¹¹⁵ See Speck, *Artabasdos*, 155–78. Cf., however, Pentcheva, *Icons and Power*, 44–49.

¹¹⁶ See Biale, "Counter-History," 141; Schäfer, *Mirror*, 214. Even the closest parallels found so far differ significantly from the figure of Hephzibah. See Himmelfarb, "The Mother of the Messiah," 369–89; Schäfer, *Die Geburt des Judentums*, 19–21.

Hephzibahs. The *piyyut*'s emphasis on Hephzibah's motherhood may indicate that we have here a version of the original Hephzibah's legend, the one which is implied but almost entirely skipped over in *Sefer Zerubbabel*. At the same time, several literary and exegetical traditions shared with the eighth- or ninth-century *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* seem to point to a somewhat later period. In contrast, although collected and preserved in *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer*, these traditions could very well be of seventh-century provenance. Broadly speaking, we seem to be looking at a period that spans roughly three centuries, from the seventh to the ninth century A.D., the period that was marked by the transition from Greco-Roman to Arab civilization of the Near East.

Overall, it would be safest to treat both versions of the Hephzibah story as equally valid witnesses to what looks like a complex and highly developed literary tradition. The Hephzibah character appears to be as diverse and multifaceted as that of the Theotokos in contemporaneous Christian texts, with meanings ranging, in both cases, from the mother of the Messiah to the warrior and protector of the capital city. It probably would not be an exaggeration to suggest that Hephzibah's legend in its multiple versions constituted a stock motif in Byzantine Jewish eschatology.¹¹⁷ At the end of the day, Hephzibah represents an attempt by Byzantine Jews to read cultural and symbolic codes of contemporaneous Byzantine society through the lenses of Jewish religious tradition. She is a perfect example of the vibrant and creative exchange between Jews and the dominant culture of the empire.

¹¹⁷ As noted by Himmelfarb, Hephzibah disappears from Jewish writings after the rise of Islam. Probably due to a changing religious environment and new cultural codes, the character loses its cultural relevance. See Himmelfarb, *The Apocalypse*, 122. In light of the present discussion, Himmelfarb's observation that "*Sefer Zerubbabel* marks both the beginning and the end of Hephzibah's career" is problematic.



Renovatio Imperii

IN A RECENT STUDY, RA‘ANAN BOUSTAN HAS PROVIDED A DETAILED analysis of the story of Temple vessels in what appears to be one of the earlier redactions of *’Otot ha-Mashiah* and this story’s relation to a broader literary motif of Temple spoils kept in Rome.¹ As noted by Boustan, this redaction of *’Otot ha-Mashiah* displays no knowledge of a confrontation between Christian Byzantium and Islam. Instead, the eschatological struggle takes place strictly between Jews and Rome. Already in the opening sections of the text the latter is portrayed as the ultimate persecutor of Jews and Judaism. The sixth sign that contains the story about Temple vessels constitutes the culmination of the struggle between the two. A king rules in Rome for nine months, during which time he devastates numerous lands, levies heavy taxes upon Israel, and promulgates numerous decrees against it. After nine months Nehemiah son of Hushiel, the Messiah son of Joseph, is revealed. He launches a war against the king of Edom:

The Messiah son of Joseph will come and wage war against the king of Edom. He will win a victory against Edom and kill heaps and mounds of them. He will kill the king of Edom and lay waste the province of Rome. He will take out some of the Temple vessels which are hidden in the palace of Julianos Caesar² and come to Jerusalem. Israel will hear [about this] and gather to him.³

¹ Boustan, “Spoils,” 327–72.

² For possible identifications of Julianos Caesar, see Boustan, “Spoils,” 365, n. 108.

³ Even Shemuel, *Midreshe Geulah*, 320, lines 68–71. The translation is mine. Cf. Reeves, *Trajectories*, 124, and Boustan, “Spoils,” 365–66.

Upon entering Jerusalem, Nehemiah makes a peace treaty with “the ruler of Egypt” and slays “all the people of the regions surrounding Jerusalem up to Damascus and Ashkelon.” Then the text moves on to the seventh sign, the story of Armilos, the death of the first Messiah, and the subsequent revelation of the Davidic Messiah.

In his analysis of the story, Boustán suggests that “the distinctive emphasis on ‘sacred relics’ within this discourse was shaped in large measure as part of a dialogue with Byzantine Christian culture.”⁴ I would like to take Boustán’s observation one step further: The story of sacred vessels in the *’Otot* engages in a dialogue with foundation legends for a newly established regal city that developed in fifth- and sixth-century Byzantine literature in connection with Constantinople. During this period, the status of the City of Constantine as the New Rome became increasingly articulated and formalized through a variety of official media, including coinage and legislation.⁵ The creation of a distinct city mythology was part of this process. The legendary history of Constantinople associated the foundation of the city by Constantine and its transformation into the capital city of the empire by subsequent emperors with a series of supernatural portents, including the transfer of imperial arcana from the Old Rome to New Rome. In my opinion, the foundation mythology proposed for messianic Jerusalem shared a number of common characteristics with the foundation mythology of New Rome. It would be worthwhile to take a closer look at some of them.

The sixth-century chronicle of John Malalas supplies one of the earliest references to Constantine’s transfer of the legendary Palladium of Troy from Rome to Constantinople. According to Malalas, Constantine’s building projects in Byzantium, such as the hippodrome and the palace, intentionally mimicked those in Rome, thus projecting the Roman urban landscape onto a new capital city. Among other things, Constantine built a forum, in the middle of which he set up a porphyry column topped with “a statue of himself with seven rays on his head”:

He had this bronze statue brought from where it had stood in Ilion, a city in Phrygia. Constantine took secretly from Rome the wooden statue known

⁴ Boustán, “Spoils,” 363.

⁵ See Dagron, *Naissance d’une capitale*, 49–55; Dölger, “Rom in der Gedankenwelt der Byzantiner,” 93–111; Irmscher, “‘Neurom’ oder ‘zweites Rom,’” 431–39.

as the Palladion and placed it in the forum he built, beneath the column that supported the statue. Some of the people of Byzantion say that it is still there.⁶

The mythical ancestry of Constantinople thus included both Rome and Ilion or Troy.⁷ The act of bringing sacred artifacts from both sites to Constantinople established this connection in a symbolic as well as a physically tangible way. Constantinople inherited the ancient glory of its predecessors through the transfer of their arcana to the city. The sacred topography of the new imperial capital was centered on the relics of the capital's mythical past. It was more than just a history, however. In the mind of Byzantines, New Rome meant quite literally the rejuvenated Rome: the Rome of old that went through a second birth, received a second youth, and stood ready to reclaim the past "golden age" of its imperial vitality. The transfer of the arcana that symbolized the might and energy of Rome's past to Constantinople also signified Rome's ontological renewal, achieved through the act of Constantine's will. Subsequently, the list of relics hidden beneath the Column of Constantine would be expanded to include a series of items from the Christian empire's biblical past. Within the empire's myth of origins, Constantinople was a double heir to Rome as well as Jerusalem.⁸

Back in the sixth century Procopius of Caesarea referred to the story of the Palladium of Troy as a popular belief current in his time.⁹ He himself, however, reserved judgment as to the story's historical veracity. Despite his apparent skepticism in this case, Procopius contributed a great deal to the further development of Constantinople's foundation mythology by including a story of the Capitoline imperial treasure in the *Vandalic War*.

⁶ Malal. 13.7 (Dindorf, 320). The translation is from *The Chronicle of John Malalas*, trans. by Elizabeth Jeffreys, et al. (Melbourne: Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, 1986), 174. On Malalas and his work, see articles collected in Jeffreys, Croke, and Scott, eds., *Studies in John Malalas*.

⁷ On the significance of the Palladium of Troy in Rome's mythical history, see Virgil, *Aeneid* 2.162–70. On the application of this mythology to Constantinople, see Alföldi, "On the Foundation of Constantinople," 11, and Bassett, *The Urban Image of Late Antique Constantinople*, 68–71, 188–92. On the translation of Rome's monuments to Constantinople, see also Bassett, "The Antiquities in the Hippodrome," 93–94.

⁸ See Dagron, *Naissance d'une capitale*, 37–41; Lathoud, "La consécration et la dédicace de Constantinople," 299–305; Frolow, "La dédicace de Constantinople dans la tradition Byzantine," 76–78.

⁹ Procopius, *History of the Wars*, 5.15.11–14. Here and below the translation is from H. B. Dewing in the Loeb Classical Library.

After his sack of Rome, so the story goes, the Vandal king Gizeric took off to his capital city of Carthage in North Africa with the Roman princess Eudoxia, her children, as well as:

An exceedingly great amount of gold and other imperial treasure, [...] having spared neither bronze nor anything else whatsoever in the palace. He plundered also the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus and tore off half of the roof. Now this roof was of bronze of the finest quality, and since gold was laid over it exceedingly thick, it shone as a magnificent and wonderful spectacle.¹⁰

The story of Gizeric taking back to the Vandal capital the spoils of his sack of Rome was part of the larger rhetorical strategy used by Procopius to depict the sorry state of the empire on the eve of Justinian's reign, and this story was not the only one. In the first book of his *Gothic War*, Procopius tells a similar story, but this time about the Goths and their ruler Alaric, who brought to the city of Carcassone in Southern France "the royal treasure [...] taken as a booty when he captured Rome" in 410:

Among these were also the treasures of Solomon, the king of the Hebrews, a most noteworthy site. For the most of them were adorned with emeralds; and they had been taken from Jerusalem by the Romans in ancient times.¹¹

Whether manufactured or historically accurate these two stories follow the same rhetorical structure (to the point of providing similar descriptions of stolen treasures' breathtaking beauty) and ultimately address the same goal. They both lament the disintegration of the Roman Empire by depicting its sacra, including but not limited to the treasures of Solomon, being ravished away by barbarian kings. The underlying message of both accounts is that the restorer of the empire would not only have to restore the empire's territorial integrity, but return the empire's symbolic relics as well. It was now up to the emperor Justinian and his great general Belisarius, on whose staff Procopius served and whose military accomplishments he lionized, to recover the empire's former glory along with its treasures from the hands of barbarians.

¹⁰ Procopius, *History of the Wars*, 3.5.3–4.

¹¹ Procopius, *History of the Wars*, 5.12.41–42.

The story of victory over the Vandals culminates in Procopius' famous account of Belisarius' triumph. As part of his triumphal procession, Belisarius displayed the recovered imperial treasure:

And there was also silver weighing many thousands of talents and all the royal treasure amounting to an exceedingly great sum (for Gizeric had despoiled the Palatium in Rome, as has been said in the preceding narrative), and among these were the treasures of the Jews, which Titus, the son of Vespasian, together with certain others, had brought to Rome after the capture of Jerusalem. And one of the Jews, seeing these things, approached one of those known to the emperor and said: "These treasures I think it inexpedient to carry into the palace in Byzantium. Indeed, it is not possible for them to be elsewhere than in the place where Solomon, the king of the Jews, formerly placed them. For it is because of these that Gizeric captured the kingdom of the Romans, and that now the Roman army has captured that of the Vandals." When this had been brought to the ears of the Emperor, he became afraid and quickly sent everything to the sanctuaries of the Christians in Jerusalem.¹²

Once again, whatever the historical value of this passage is, its restorationist appeal is quite evident. Procopius is careful to identify the treasure paraded by Belisarius as the royal treasure once taken by Gizeric from the Palatium in Rome. By returning it to Constantinople, Belisarius acts as the restorer of Rome's past glory, while at the same time transferring physical artifacts associated with this glory to the empire's new capital. Within Constantinople's foundational mythology the recovery of the treasure of the Palatium conveyed a message similar to that of Constantine's transfer of the Palladium of Troy. Both stories provided a sense of historical continuity that the new imperial capital badly needed. Through the New Rome the Old Rome was mysteriously reborn. The new city restored the Old Rome's past youthfulness and vigor, and recovered its universal rule along with the arcana of the Old Rome's imperial might. Both narratives functioned within a broader Byzantine ideological paradigm that perceived the rejuvenating rebirth of the empire and its capital city as the

¹² Procopius, *History of the Wars*, 4.9.5–9 (Dewing's translation with slight revisions). For the most recent analysis of Procopius' account along with the review of earlier scholarship, see Boustán, "Spoils," 356–62. Boustán correctly emphasizes the legendary nature of the account and dismisses earlier attempts to link the story to the fate of the actual Temple vessels looted in 70 A.D.

recovery of the empire's past "golden age" along with that age's symbolic attributes of power.¹³

The Temple spoils, singled out by Procopius from the rest of Rome's treasure on two occasions, also served to highlight the past military might of imperial Rome, which was now recovered by Justinian and Belisarius. Procopius' choice of this particular illustration of Rome's "golden age" tied together the Roman and biblical pasts of the Christian Roman Empire. Indeed, as noted by Boustán, "the vessels from the Jerusalem Temple were in many respects unique in their ability to embody simultaneously the glories of both the Solomonic and Roman pasts."¹⁴ The motif of Temple vessels allowed Procopius to tie together the classicizing description of Roman triumph possibly recalling the triumph of Titus in 70 A.D. with a nonclassical reference to the biblical vessels from Solomon's Temple and the omen that required the restoration of these vessels to Jerusalem.¹⁵ The relationship between the two pasts was not an easy one, however. Roman military triumph over Israel and Israel's Temple was at the same time the triumph of Rome's Christian successors. By choosing to emphasize the Temple spoils, Procopius chose to construct the Byzantine past in a way that combined Rome's triumphant imperialism with biblical supersessionism.¹⁶

The sacred geography of the Christian Roman Empire, envisioned by Procopius, was different from that of the empire's pagan predecessor in at least one respect: Instead of keeping the Temple spoils in the imperial palace in Constantinople, Justinian sent them back to Jerusalem, where they were to be kept in local Christian churches presumably perceived as heirs to Solomon's Temple. The Temple vessels emerge from Procopius' description as another example of the allegedly Old Testament relics housed in the Christian holy sites of "New Jerusalem."¹⁷ Whereas

¹³ See Dölger, *Byzanz und die europäische Staatenwelt*, 93–98; Alexander, "Strength of Empire and Capital," 348–54. On problems with Procopius' restorationist rhetoric, see Cameron, *Procopius*, 19–32.

¹⁴ Boustán, "Spoils," 362. Cf. Van Dam, *Rome and Constantinople*, 62–67.

¹⁵ On the combination of classicizing and nonclassical motifs in Procopius' discourse, see Cameron, *Procopius*, 29–32.

¹⁶ For the literary and cultural context, see Cameron, "Remaking the Past," 1–20. For a similar combination of Roman triumphalism and biblical supersessionism, see Ps.-Methodius, IX, 4.

¹⁷ On the transfer of relics and narratives associated with the Temple to the Christian holy sites in Jerusalem, and in particular to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, see Busse and

Constantinople succeeded Rome as the city of the earthly emperor, Jerusalem, since the time of Constantine, was increasingly seen as the seat of Christ's invisible presence and universal kingship, of which the imperial rule in Constantinople was a visible manifestation. The act of dispatching vessels to the churches in Jerusalem instead of keeping them in the imperial palace along with the rest of the Roman treasure might have reflected the synergetic nature of the universal rule shared by Christ and his earthly vicar, the Christian Emperor.¹⁸

The stories in John Malalas and Procopius of Caesarea highlight several common elements in the grand myth of Constantinople's origins. The physical artifacts or relics of Rome's legendary and historical past are central to both narratives. The function of these artifacts is twofold. On the one hand, they create a sense of continuity with Old Rome's history and mythology, both of which are now internalized as the history and mythology of the New Rome. On the other, the artifacts serve as tangible manifestations of Rome's "golden age," which is now brought back through the old capital's rebirth in Constantinople. Finally, both John and Procopius stress the intimate connection between the artifacts and the emperors who bring them to the New Rome. In Byzantine political mythology, it is the act of the emperor's will (or rather the divine will in which the emperor partakes) that restores the youthful vitality of the Old Rome by building a new one. The New Rome is first and foremost the city of the emperor and the visible manifestation of the emperor's power to bring about *renovatio imperii*. In this context, the transfer of the arcana, undertaken by the ruler, serves to emphasize the ruler's connection to the city's supernatural sources of power and his ability to tap them in the renewal effort.

The story of the recovery of Temple vessels in the 'Otot envisions the messianic restoration of Jerusalem along similar lines. In this story

Kretschmar, *Jerusalem Heiligtumstraditionen*, 81–111. Cf. Schwartz, "The *Encaenia* of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher," 265–81; Kühnel, *From the Earthly to the Heavenly Jerusalem*, 83–84; Wilken, *The Land Called Holy*, 93–100.

¹⁸ The New Jerusalem of Constantine was designed as the city of Christ, the heavenly king and Constantine's *comes*, just like the New Rome of Constantine was designed as the city of the emperor. In that sense the two cities worked as mirror images of each other. See Heisenberg, *Grabeskirche und Apostelkirche*, vol. 2, 115; Grabar, *Martyrium*, vol. 1, 234–44; Leeb, *Konstantin und Christus*, 93–120; Van Dam, *The Roman Revolution of Constantine*, 293–309. On Justinian as God's representative on earth in the writings of Procopius, see Cameron, *Procopius*, 87–88.

Nehemiah son of Hushiel, the Messiah son of Joseph, acts in a way that closely resembles the imperial promotion of Byzantium as the New Rome. Only now it is Jerusalem that is reborn. The restoration of the Temple vessels in this context serves as the recovery of the arcana of Jerusalem's "golden age," the transfer of which back to Jerusalem is essential to the restoration program. The Rebuilt Jerusalem, just like the New Rome, forms its identity around the relics of the past. In addition, it is a duty of the Messiah, just like it is a duty of Roman emperors and their generals, to recover these relics. The story in the *'Otot* comes particularly close to the story of Belisarius' triumph, because in both cases the sacra of the kingdom's golden past need to be recovered from the hands of "barbarians" who have unjustly appropriated them as symbols of their own imperial reigns.

By bringing the *spolia* of historical Jerusalem from Rome and by using them to build the New Jerusalem of the eschatological future, the Messiah engaged in an activity that since Constantine was practiced by a number of Byzantine emperors and rulers of the Germanic successor kingdoms in the West. Upon inaugurating Constantinople in 330, Constantine made sure that the city was lavishly adorned with statues brought there from other provinces of the empire.¹⁹ The transfer of statues to Constantinople was part of a broader interest in classical collecting that characterized late antique culture and resulted in the creation of massive art collections of statues, reliefs, and building parts, assembled by wealthy individuals and imperial cities alike. The ancient statues and reliefs removed from their original settings and transferred to Constantinople and Rome constituted a ubiquitous feature of the two cities' public areas as well as private domains. Old construction parts were used to build the Lateran Basilica and the Arch of Constantine in Rome. Old statues from Rome, Greece, and Asia Minor were brought to Constantinople to adorn the Hippodrome, the baths of Zeuxippus, the forums, and other public spaces within the city. As time went on an increasing number of relics of the Christian and biblical past were also transferred to the imperial capitals. In the words of Jaś Elsner, "in effect, an entire myth-historical past was

¹⁹ Eusebius, *V. Const.* 3.54.2–3. See commentary in Cameron and Hall, *Eusebius*, 301–02, and Bassett, *The Urban Image*, 50–78.

manufactured through the collection, in the midst of which the populace of the Christian capital came to bathe.”²⁰

It appears that Constantine was the first emperor to programmatically integrate *spolia*, the original parts from ancient buildings and works of art, into new constructions. There were both a new aesthetics and a new ideology behind this trend.²¹ By integrating the remains of old Roman buildings into new constructions, the ruler invoked Rome’s collective past, but he also projected it into the city’s collective future. To create Rome’s future, Rome’s past had to be atomized and selectively reused. The future thus derived its strength from the past and yet was not identical with it. Sarah G. Bassett’s observation to this effect is worth quoting in full:

That the ornamentation of the Hippodrome was accomplished with *spolia* was probably no accident. Spoils are, by nature, Janus-like. Their value lies in their capacity to envision the future through evocation of the past. In the Hippodrome, in a clever combination of imitation and physical presence, the neat armature of obelisks so lavishly hung with antiquities captured what in the history and tradition of Rome was pertinent to the Constantinopolitan present. The imagery of victory and sport was complemented by that of history and tradition to create an environment radiant with the idea of power on the Roman model. At the same time, the construct of the Hippodrome was patently artificial. It was Rome-like, but not Roman in the sense that the particular combination of images was unknown in the old capital. Thus, even as *spolia* referred to the authority of the past, they created a new vision for the future. It was this distinction which gave the Hippodrome collection its vitality and force. The arrangement was no banal imitation, but a neatly crafted ensemble that described a vision of power in its past, present, and future manifestations. With *spolia* the Hippodrome was ornamented for its role as the didactic centerpiece of the new capital of an ancient empire.²²

²⁰ Elsner, *Imperial Rome*, 190. See further Mango, “Antique Statuary,” 55–59; James, “Pray not to Fall into Temptation,” 12–20; Elsner, *Imperial Rome*, 186–97. On individual collections of statues in Constantinople, see Cameron and Herrin, *Constantinople in the Early Eighth Century*, and Bassett, *The Urban Image of Late Antique Constantinople*. On similar practices in Rome, see Curran, “Moving Statues,” 46–58.

²¹ See Kinney, “Rape or Restitution of the Past? Interpreting *Spolia*,” 53–62; Brenk, “*Spolia* from Constantine to Charlemagne,” 103–09; Elsner, “From the Culture of *Spolia* to the Cult of Relics,” 149–84.

²² Bassett, “Antiquities in the Hippodrome,” 95–96.

By using ancient *spolia* in new construction projects, the ruler was making a programmatic statement about the nature of a new world he was about to build. This new world derived its strength and vitality from the memories of the past reconfigured in a way that allowed them to become building blocks for the future. The future in its turn integrated scattered elements of the past into a new universe. The restored empire was thus a new text that included within its narrative phrases and sentences from past texts, even though the new text's overall meaning could be very different. To quote Elsner again, the programmatic reading of *spolia* "conflated past and present, and displayed the past only in so far as the past is validated by, fulfilled in and made meaningful through the present."²³

The messianic Jerusalem envisioned by the 'Otot was just such a text. It integrated within itself sacred artifacts from the biblical past, which, for this purpose, were transported all the way back from Rome. In this sense the eschatological Jerusalem served as the restoration of the old city of King David. The eschatological Temple included in its arrangement the vessels from the old Temple just as the Arch of Constantine included Trajanic, Hadrianic, and Aurelian reliefs, and the Hippodrome incorporated ancient statues. The dynamic of engagement with the dominant discourse of *spolia* can be illustrated by comparing the 'Otot story with John Malalas's legendary account of Cherubim transferred by Vespasian from the Temple in Jerusalem to the city gates of Antioch in Syria:

Titus celebrated a triumph for his victory and went off to Rome. Out of the spoils from Judaea Vespasian built in Antioch the Great, outside the city gate, what are known as the Cherubim, for he fixed there the bronze Cherubim, which Titus his son had found fixed to the temple of Solomon. When he destroyed the temple, he removed them from there and brought them to Antioch with the Seraphim, celebrating a triumph for the victory over the Jews that had taken place during his reign.²⁴

Malalas's description is characteristic of the genre of *Patria*, which was becoming increasingly popular in the Byzantine world and included mostly legendary accounts of a particular city's origins and stories

²³ Elsner, "Culture of *Spolia*," 176.

²⁴ Malal. 10.45 (Dindorf, 260–61). Translation follows Jeffreys, 138.

associated with city's monuments.²⁵ The description demonstrates that the theme of Jerusalem's spoils was not limited to Rome and Constantinople but constituted a stock motif in the legendary histories of the *metropoleis* of the Byzantine Near East. The 'Otot story represents both another application of the same literary genre, this time to construct the *Patria* of messianic Jerusalem, and the reversal of this genre's major theme: the assimilation of spoils captured in the Temple of Jerusalem into the architectural programs of Roman cities. The 'Otot reverses this dynamic by reclaiming Jewish ownership of the Temple's *spolia* and using them as building blocks for the new Jerusalem of the messianic future, but it does so in (conscious?) mimicry of the dominant cultural narrative.

In line with Bassett's observation quoted earlier, rather than being a mere repository for artifacts from the past, the eschatological Temple conveys ideas never intended before. The messianic future manipulated phrases and sentences from the biblical past to create new meanings without obliterating the old ones. The story in the 'Otot changes the meaning of the restored Temple artifacts from religious to religio-political. The vessels are recovered from "the palace of Julianos Caesar" in the wake of the Messiah's military victory over Rome. The location is significant. The fact that the vessels are kept hidden in the imperial palace (literally, "the house of Julianos Caesar") makes them symbols of imperial power. Indeed, the 'Otot's story develops in what appears to be a conscious dialogue with the sixth-century imperial master narrative which sought to portray the imperial palace in Constantinople as a depository of artifacts that established a sense of symbolic continuity with Roman power. Corippus in his panegyric to Justin II thought it necessary to dwell at some length on the jewels that Cleopatra once "gave in supplication" to Caesar and which now glittered with light in the innermost halls of the imperial palace in Constantinople.²⁶ The 'Otot's story assumes a similar fate for the Temple vessels.

It is remarkable how both Procopius and the 'Otot transform the official narrative by adding nonclassical elements to it. Procopius has

²⁵ Despite often valid critique by later scholars, Dagron's *Constantinople imaginaire* remains a classical work on this genre of Byzantine literature. Cf. Cameron and Herrin, *Constantinople in the Early Eighth Century*. See also references and discussion later in this chapter.

²⁶ Corippus, *In laud. Iust.*, III, 8–21 (I follow Cameron's translation).

Justinian transfer the vessels to churches in Jerusalem instead of keeping them in the palace, and thus underscores Jerusalem's vital place on the map of empire's sacred geography. Moreover, by depicting Justinian as acting out of fear, Procopius casts doubt, however subtly, on Justinian's claims to wield absolute power. Unlike the jewels of Cleopatra, the vessels of the Temple do not quite affirm the seamless flow of power and its symbolic attributes from Rome to Constantinople. The *'Otot* is even more radical. There, the act of recovery reverses the system of power relationships between the imperial center and the provinces famously summarized by Jerome's statement that "Constantinople was dedicated by stripping nude nearly all other cities" of the empire. These relationships, among other things, were rendered tangibly manifest by the imperial center's right to transfer to itself whichever *spolia* it deemed necessary.²⁷ By bringing Temple *spolia* back to Jerusalem, the Messiah ends Rome's imperial status vis-à-vis Jerusalem and takes away the imperial right, in the words of Raymond Van Dam, to steal and appropriate the histories and the memories of other cities.²⁸

That is not all. The Messiah also claims for Jerusalem the status of the imperial center previously enjoyed by Rome. Within the context of the *'Otot*, the return of the vessels to Jerusalem marks the latter's ascent as the new center of universal rule. Later in the story, the ruins of the very Temple in Jerusalem, to which the vessels have been restored, serve as the place in which the Davidic Messiah establishes his royal throne.²⁹ In other words, just like the *Even Shetiyyah* legend discussed earlier in the book, the *'Otot* narrative attributes political significance to the Temple relics. The relics now become the arcana of the new world empire, the messianic kingdom of Israel, in a way that almost perfectly mimics the imperial connotations of the arcana of the might of Rome transferred to Byzantium. Just like Constantinople, messianic Jerusalem does not merely restore the memories of its own past. The Temple vessels recovered from the palace of Julianos Caesar also conjure the memory of Rome, around which the messianic empire is born. Like Constantinople, messianic Jerusalem appropriates memories and histories of other cities to construct its own.

²⁷ Jerome, *Chron.* s.a. 330. See Bassett, *The Urban Image*, 47–49.

²⁸ See Van Dam, *Rome and Constantinople*, 62–67.

²⁹ Even Shemuel, *Midreshe Geulah*, 322, line 136.

The messianic Jerusalem envisioned by the *'Otot* was built from the *spolia* of the past. Its myth included sentences and phrases borrowed from the city's earlier texts and integrated into a new context of messianic metropolis. The meaning of these sentences and phrases changed in the process. Temple vessels were no longer simply religious objects. Neither was the Temple to which they were restored. The vessels were transferred from the imperial palace of the Roman emperors to the Temple in Jerusalem, the ruins of which now served as the location of the Messiah's throne and thus the imperial palace on their own accord. Both the ruins of the Temple and the Temple vessels recovered from Rome were *spolia* of Israel's past used in the construction of Israel's messianic future. The New Jerusalem constructed as a result of this process, however, was centered on the Messiah's imperial figure and served to convey the ideas of messianic autocracy, which had little precedent in earlier Jewish tradition about the Temple. In a similar way, the urban text of Constantinople was created through the process of borrowing physical artifacts and elements of city planning from the Old Rome. The explicit goal of this process, at least since the time of the Theodosian dynasty in the late fourth and the early fifth centuries A.D., was to establish Constantinople as Old Rome's imperial twin, the New Rome. In reality, however, Constantinople's topography and monuments were shaped and dominated by figures of its rulers to a degree unprecedented in Old Rome. The city embodied the ideology of imperial autocracy in a way that constituted a break with Rome's political tradition.³⁰

Just like the collection of ancient statues in the Hippodrome of Constantinople, the restored vessels of the Temple were "no banal imitation, but a neatly crafted ensemble that described a vision of power in its past, present, and future manifestations."³¹ Also, just like late antique Rome, Constantinople, Ravenna, or Aachen, the messianic Jerusalem was a city built according to the Constantinian and post-Constantinian aesthetic and ideological program. It seems logical that, with the arrival of Islam, the *'Otot* legend about the recovery of Temple vessels from Rome was further embellished with details (including the lists of objects recovered) and incorporated into Muslim historical apocalypses. There, the

³⁰ See Mayer, *Rom ist dort, wo der Kaiser ist*, 105–74.

³¹ See Bassett's quote earlier in this chapter.

legend served to present the triumph of the Muslim world empire as a restoration of biblical Israel and long-awaited revenge against Israel's old nemesis Rome. The transfer of the attributes of Israel's sacred past back to Jerusalem, now under Muslim control, created a sense of imperial legitimacy and continuity.³²

The *'Otot* portrays the Messiah's restorationist efforts in Jerusalem in a way that resembles the foundation legends of Constantinople. Both scenarios postulate a close bond between the ruler and his capital city. Both scenarios play out within the same religio-political paradigm that perceives the recovery of ancient relics as essential to the new city's myth of origins. The relics form a mystical center around which the rejuvenated capital city and the rejuvenated empire are then built. In the text that follows I shall further examine the extent to which the foundation myth of messianic Jerusalem might have been modeled on the ideology of imperial renewal.

MENAHEM SON OF AMMIEL AND THE LAST ROMAN EMPEROR

Sefer Zerubbabel's story about the rise of the Messiah opens with the account of Zerubbabel being miraculously brought to Rome. There he finds a despised and suffering person who reveals himself to Zerubbabel as the future Messiah. The story belongs to a rich and multifaceted rabbinic tradition that describes the Jewish Messiah as a despised beggar dwelling at the gates of Rome until the time when God summons him as the redeemer of Israel.³³ The best known version of this story is probably the one found in b. Sanh. 98a:

R. Joshua son of Levi asked [Elijah], "when will the Messiah come?" – "Go and ask him himself," was his reply. "Where is he sitting?" – "At the gate of Rome." "And by what sign may I recognize him?" – "He is sitting among the poor lepers: all of them untie [their bandages] all at once, and rebandage them together, whereas he unties and rebandages each separately, [before treating the next], thinking, 'Should I be wanted, [it being time for my appearance as the Messiah] I must not be delayed [through having to bandage a number of sores].'" So he went to him and greeted him, saying, "Peace be upon you, Master and Teacher." "Peace be upon you, son of Levi," replied he. "When

³² See Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 54–66.

³³ See Berger, "Captive at the Gate of Rome," 1–17; Himmelfarb, *The Apocalypse*, 122.

will you come, Master?" asked he. "Today," he answered. When he returned to Elijah, the latter inquired: "What did he say to you?" – "Peace be upon you, son of Levi," he answered. [Elijah] observed: "He thereby assured you and your father of [a portion in] the world to come." "He spoke falsely to me," he rejoined, "stating that he would come today, but has not." He [Elijah] answered him: "This is what he said to you: 'Today, if you would listen to his voice' (Psalm 95:7).

The Babylonian Talmud's version of the story both plays down the immediacy of the Messiah's arrival and shifts the responsibility for it onto Israel, whose failure to follow Torah delays the Messiah's and Israel's own redemption. According to this story, the Messiah himself is in need of redemption, which can be accomplished only by Israel's listening to God's voice (i.e., Israel's readiness to observe the ethical and *halakhic* norms of Torah). As Boustán has indicated, however, the redactors of the Babylonian Talmud appear to have reworked the tradition by shifting emphasis from the imminent messianic redemption to "the individual Jew's ethical and *halakhic* responsibility in the pre-messianic age."³⁴ In the text that follows I shall argue that, whereas the Babylonian Talmud transforms the Messiah's legend into a didactic tale, the *Sefer Zerubbabel*'s version of the same tradition engages Romano-Byzantine political mythology of *renovatio imperii* by both internalizing and subverting it. I shall further argue that the story of the suffering Messiah in *Sefer Zerubbabel* shares a number of common elements with Ps.-Methodius' legend of the last Roman emperor, as both texts work off the same *renovatio imperii* script and represent two adaptations of it to fit the changing circumstances of the seventh century.

Sefer Zerubbabel describes the original encounter between Zerubbabel and the Messiah as follows:

Then He [God] said to me, "Go to the house of disgrace, to the house of merriment."³⁵ I went as He commanded. "Turn yourself this way," He said. When I turned, He touched me and I saw a man, despised and wounded, lowly and in pain. Now the despised man said to me, "Zerubbabel, what is your business here? Who brought you here?" "The spirit of the

³⁴ Boustán, "Spoils," 368, n. 118.

³⁵ The translation is based on Lévi's emendation. The original text reads: "go to the house of disgrace to the market place." The emendation is accepted by Himmelfarb, but cf. Reeves, *Trajectories*, 52, n. 87.

Lord lifted me up," I answered, "and deposited me in this place." "Fear not," he said, "for you have been brought here in order to show you." When I heard his words, I took comfort, and my mind was at rest. "My lord," I asked, "what is the name of this place?" "This is Rome the Great, in which I am imprisoned," he said. "My lord, who are you," I asked, "and what is your name? What do you seek here? What are you doing in this place?" "I am the Lord's anointed,"³⁶ he answered, "and I am imprisoned until the time of the end." When I heard this, I was silent and I hid my face. His anger burned within him.³⁷ I beheld him and was afraid. "Come closer," he said, and my limbs trembled. He extended his hand and supported me. "Fear not," he said. "Do not be afraid in your heart." He strengthened me and asked, "Why did you fall silent and hide your face?" "Because you said, 'I am the servant of the Lord and His anointed, and the light of Israel,'" I replied. [Suddenly] he looked to me like a young man, a handsome and comely youth.³⁸

Zerubbabel sees the despised condition of the future Messiah and is taken aback by it. The Messiah comforts Zerubbabel by shedding his lowly appearance and revealing his true nature as "a young man, a handsome and comely youth." This sudden transition from lowliness to strength, from debasement to empowerment, constitutes the focal point of the encounter. The hidden nature of the Messiah shines forth from his present despised condition. The encounter between Zerubbabel and the Davidic Messiah foreshadows the moment when the Messiah will reveal himself to the rest of Israel and usher in the time of final redemption in the midst of Armilos' brutal reign. That second revelation virtually replays the earlier one on a grander and more public scale:

Menahem son of Ammiel will come suddenly in the first month, and he will make a stand in the valley of Arbael which belongs to Joshua son of Jehozadak the priest. The sages of Israel who have survived will all go out to

³⁶ The Bodleian manuscript used by Lévi adds "the son of Hezekiah," but according to Lévi these words have been subsequently erased. The name "Hezekiah" does not appear in the versions of the text published by Jellinek and Wertheimer. The Bodleian manuscript's reference to Hezekiah is the only *explicit* statement that identifies Menahem son of Ammiel of *Sefer Zerubbabel* and Menahem son of Hezekiah of rabbinic texts, although the book clearly uses rabbinic traditions on Menahem son of Hezekiah to describe Menahem son of Ammiel.

³⁷ As amended by Himmelfarb following another redaction of the text. See Himmelfarb, "Sefer Zerubbabel," 84, n. 32. The manuscript reads, "My anger burned within me."

³⁸ The translation is from Himmelfarb, "Sefer Zerubbabel," 72. For the Hebrew text, see Lévi, "L'apocalypse de Zorobabel," 132–33.

him, for only a few will survive the attack and pillage of Gog and Armilos and the plundering of the plunderers. Menahem son of Ammiel will say to the elders and sages, "I am the Lord's anointed. The Lord sent me to bring you good news and to save you from the hands of these enemies." But the elders will look upon him and despise him, for all they will see is a despised man in worn-out clothes, and they will despise him as you [Zerubbabel] did. Then his anger will burn within him. He will put on clothes of vengeance as a garment and wrap himself in a mantle of zeal.³⁹

The sages of Israel are taken aback by the apparent lowliness and poverty of the Messiah, just as Zerubbabel was. Also, just as in the case of Zerubbabel, the Messiah responds by shedding off his weakness and revealing the true power hidden within him. He burns with anger. In the blink of an eye, he is transformed from a downtrodden outcast into a mighty warrior ready to crush the enemies. Once again this sudden transformation from lowliness to strength constitutes the centerpiece of the Messiah's revelation.

The *Sefer Zerubbabel*'s story of the Messiah's origins draws on earlier rabbinic literature but also reworks it so as to fit the book's own agenda.⁴⁰ In addition to being described as a suffering prisoner, the Messiah is later identified as Menahem son of Ammiel, the descendant of King David, "hidden" in Rome until "the time of the end." He was born during David's reign, at which point "a wind lifted him up and hid him in this place [Rome]."⁴¹ Unlike other rabbinic texts, *Sefer Zerubbabel* localizes the place of the Messiah's concealment in Rome, thus making the Messiah's occultation at the time of King David part of the historical drama that involves Israel and Rome as two protagonists.⁴² Thus the Messiah is both

³⁹ The translation is from Himmelfarb, "Sefer Zerubbabel," 77, with minor alterations. For the Hebrew text, see Lévi, "L'apocalypse de Zorobabel," 138.

⁴⁰ See especially the story of Menahem son of Hezekiah in y. Ber. 2:4 (5a) and *LamR* 1:16, as well as a somewhat cursory and enigmatic statement in b. Sanh. 98b. On some of these parallels, see Himmelfarb, "The Mother of the Messiah," 369–89.

⁴¹ Lévi, 134. On Menahem's name and its Davidic connotations, see Goldberg, "Die Namen des Messias," 230–33.

⁴² Cf. *MidP*sto Psalm 21:1–2 (Buber, 89a), which also expects the Davidic Messiah to remain "hidden" until the time of the end, but provides no further details. See also *Ruth R.* 5.6: The Messiah is expected to suffer, be temporarily deprived of his sovereignty, but eventually regain his throne. He will be hidden for forty-five days, *after* he has already revealed himself to Israel. During this time he will lead Israel into the wilderness, where Israel will be tested. Once again, no historical details are given.

“hidden” (צִפּוּן) and “imprisoned” (אֶסוּר) in Rome until the time of eschatological consummation. This ambivalence about his status may reflect the composite nature of *Sefer Zerubbabel*’s story and its dependence on several different traditions that dealt with the whereabouts of Menahem son of Hezekiah but also with the sufferings of the imprisoned Messiah and/or the Messiah’s occultation. The author(s) of the *Sefer Zerubbabel* eventually combined these traditions into a single narrative within which the stories of Menahem son of Hezekiah, the Messiah’s imprisonment, and the Messiah’s concealment served to compliment each other.

The attention to the historical dimension of the Messiah’s arrival and the centrality of imperial rhetoric distinguishes the suffering Messiah of *Sefer Zerubbabel* from another Byzantine version of the suffering Messiah figure: the *Pesiqta Rabbati*’s suffering Messiah son of Ephraim.⁴³ The two Messiahs indeed share a number of characteristics in common. Both of them are imprisoned and have to go through a prolonged, although finite, period of suffering. Both of them are subjected to initial mockery and rejection by the rest of Israel and its leaders due to their downtrodden condition. Both of them emerge triumphant at the end, and their individual triumphs translate into the eschatological triumph of Israel. Differences between the two figures are as impressive as the similarities, however. The *Pesiqta*’s Messiah suffers for Israel’s sins. The purpose of his suffering is to ensure that not a single soul from Israel will be lost to salvation. The imprisonment and sufferings of the Messiah son of Ephraim take place within a broad cosmological context with no apparent connection to Rome or political soteriology.⁴⁴ In *Sefer Zerubbabel*, there is no reference to Israel’s sins as the cause of the Messiah’s suffering. Indeed the latter appears to be conditioned by the dynamics of world history more than by anything else. The Messiah, born at the time of King David, is imprisoned (and/or hidden) in Rome, the usurper of David’s imperial universalism, waiting there for the moment of Israel’s renewal and restoration. His figure literally personifies Israel’s political and historical fortunes. The *Pesiqta*’s cosmic soteriology is thus quite distinct from the

⁴³ *Pesiqta Rabbati*, 34–37. For in-depth analysis of these chapters, see Goldberg, *Erlösung durch Leiden*. Cf. Fishbane, “Midrash and Messianism,” 57–71; Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb*, 33–38; Schäfer, *Die Geburt des Judentums*, 133–78.

⁴⁴ See Goldberg, *Erlösung durch Leiden*, 56–60, 109–17, and 176–95.

Sefer Zerubbabel's imperial eschatology. The two of them may serve as good examples of how diverse the applications of the same paradigmatic theme of the Messiah's suffering could be.⁴⁵

In visualizing the downtrodden condition of Menahem son of Ammiel, *Sefer Zerubbabel* takes its cue from the description of the suffering Messiah in Isaiah 53:2–9. The text's reference to "a man, despised and wounded, lowly and in pain" clearly echoes the description in Isaiah 53:3, whereas the repeated failure to recognize the Messiah, first by Zerubbabel himself and later by the sages of Israel, expands on Isaiah 53:2. The story of Menahem, however, is more than just the creative expansion of a biblical motif. As I shall argue later in text, it also serves to create a Jewish counter-narrative that simultaneously engages, internalizes, and critiques the contemporaneous Romano-Byzantine imperial eschatology. The suffering Messiah of Isaiah 53 is localized in Rome, where he undergoes his sufferings and from where he will emerge as the eschatological leader of Israel destined to replace the universal rule of Rome with Israel's universal rule. The imagery of Isaiah 53 is appropriated and reworked to convey a new set of meanings conditioned by Jewish participation in the late Roman and Byzantine symbolic universe.

Several decades after *Sefer Zerubbabel*, an anonymous author of Syriac Ps.-Methodius told a story of the last "King of the Greeks" who was destined to restore the Roman Empire to its former glory, destroy the invading Muslim armies as well as the northern hordes of Gog and Magog, and eventually hand over the empire to God by placing the imperial crown on the cross in Jerusalem. The Ps.-Methodius story would eventually evolve into a medieval legend of the last Roman emperor and create a powerful myth for imperial eschatology well into the modern period. The legend begins with the last Emperor's rise to power in the wake of the Muslim Arabs' (called "the Sons of Ishmael") sweeping military successes against the empire. Exuberant with their seeming victory, the Sons of Ishmael will finally proclaim that "the Christians have no savior." This blasphemy will trigger the rise of the last Emperor at the

⁴⁵ The *Pesiqta Rabbatī's* version of the suffering Messiah narrative was most likely shaped by the interests and beliefs of the Mourners of Zion, a fairly idiosyncratic Jewish movement responsible for the composition of this text. See Goldberg, *Erlösung durch Leiden*, 131–44.

moment when the cruelties of the Ishmaelites reach their apex and the Christians' hope of delivery is at the lowest point:

Then suddenly the pangs of affliction as [those] of a woman in travail will be awakened against them and the king of the Greeks will go out against them in great wrath and "awake like a man who has shaken off his wine" (Ps 78:65), who was considered by them as dead. He will go out against them from the sea of the Ethiopians and will cast desolation and destruction in the desert of Yathrib and in the habitation of their fathers. And the sons of the king of the Greeks will descend from the western regions and will destroy by the sword the remnant that is left of them in the land of promise.⁴⁶

This account already introduces themes that would become dominant in subsequent versions of the legend. In his initial assessment of the legend, Paul J. Alexander suggested tracing the legend's origins to the Jewish apocalyptic tradition. Alexander's theory was later criticized by G. J. Reinink, who saw the legend as growing out of a Byzantine and specifically Syriac literary tradition.⁴⁷ In particular, Reinink called attention to the use of Psalm 78:65 to describe the last Emperor's awakening, and traced it back to the use of the same text by the Syriac *Cave of Treasures* as a symbol of the crucifixion, death, and resurrection of Christ. In other words, Ps.-Methodius modeled the empire's initial collapse followed by the last Emperor's awakening on the death and resurrection of Christ. In doing so, the legend emphasized the *mimetic* nature of imperial eschatology: Both the empire and its ruler participated in Christ's death only to be resurrected with him in the act of ultimate triumph over death and foes.⁴⁸

This theme of the Emperor's transformation is further elaborated in the Greek version of Ps.-Methodius. Although remaining essentially faithful to its Syriac original, the Greek translation introduced several minor changes into the text, strengthening the theme of the emperor's initial weakness:

Then suddenly will come upon them [Ishmaelites] affliction and duress. There will come out against them with great fury an emperor of the Greeks

⁴⁶ Ps.-Methodius, XIII, 11. The translation is from Reinink, "Ps.-Methodius," 151.

⁴⁷ See Alexander, "The Medieval Legend," 1–14, and Reinink, "Die syrischen Wurzeln," 195–209. Reinink, "Ps.-Methodius: A Concept of History," 175, n. 116, summarizes subsequent literature on the subject. Cf. Suermann, "Der byzantinische Endkaiser bei Pseudo-Methodios," 140–55.

⁴⁸ See Reinink, "Ps.-Methodius: A Concept of History," 152–53.

or Romans. He will awaken from sleep like a man who had drunk much wine, whom men considered like one dead and utterly useless.⁴⁹

The Syriac Ps.-Methodius reference to Psalm 78:65 (Psalm 77:65 in the Septuagint) is no longer explicit in the Greek text. Instead, the rhetorical emphasis shifts entirely to the emperor's destitute state from which he awakens. The emperor comes out of a drunken sleep in which he was perceived by unspecified "men" (*hoi anthropoi*), "like one dead and utterly useless." To the description of Syriac Ps.-Methodius, the Greek text adds further reference to the emperor's perceived uselessness. As a result, the Christ-like Emperor of the Syriac version, whose awakening from wine-induced sleep is merely a symbolic reference to the Resurrection, becomes an outright lowly and despised Emperor in the Greek Ps.-Methodius.⁵⁰ Once again it is the "great fury" that brings the Emperor out of his lowliness. Later Byzantine apocalypses will embrace this vision of a despised Emperor rising up in fury to destroy the Ishmaelites. They will further elaborate it by gradually adding the notion of poverty to the original condition of the ruler. Overall, the tradition of the sudden arousal of the last Emperor from utter weakness to utter power will become a stock element of the last Emperor's legend well into the Middle Ages, both in Byzantium and in the Latin West.⁵¹

After Reinink's masterful analysis there is no longer a need to postulate direct dependence of Ps.-Methodius on Jewish apocalypticism. It still may be useful to discuss them in each other's context, however. This case is especially true for Jewish compositions of the early Byzantine period, such as *Sefer Zerubbabel*. Instead of searching for direct influence of one text on another, one would probably have to look for a shared intellectual and cultural environment that produced these works and the ways in which each work reflected this shared environment. When it comes to *Sefer Zerubbabel* and Ps.-Methodius' legend of the last Roman

⁴⁹ The translation is mine, but uses that of Alexander, *Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, 153. For the Greek text, see Aerts and Kortekaas, *Die Apokalypse des Pseudo-Methodius*, 174.

⁵⁰ See Alexander, *Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, 153, for textual analysis.

⁵¹ See Alexander, "Byzantium and the Migration of Literary Works and Motifs," 47–68; Möhring, *Der Weltkaiser der Endzeit*; Brandes, "Apokalyptische Literatur," 310, n. 4.

emperor, there is little to suggest any direct knowledge on the part of their authors of each other's work. At the same time both compositions seem to share at least one common theme, which is also fundamental for Late Roman and Byzantine imperial eschatology in general: the theme of the imperial renewal. Both texts take the theme of the imperial renewal as their starting point and spin their narratives from it. Both texts serve as projections of this theme into the eschatological future, by applying it respectively to the restored Greco-Roman Empire and the last Roman emperor (Ps.-Methodius), and the restored kingdom of Israel and the Davidic Messiah (*Sefer Zerubbabel*).

When viewed from this perspective, the story of Menahem son of Ammiel in *Sefer Zerubbabel* shares a number of common elements with the Byzantine legend of the last Roman emperor. *Sefer Zerubbabel* and Ps.-Methodius explicitly emphasize the "sudden" nature of the ruler's rise to power in response to persecutions and blasphemies of an eschatological enemy bent on rooting out either Judaism or Christianity. Although the reference to a "sudden" appearance of the redeemer may ultimately derive from the messianic prophecy of Malachi 3:1, none of the texts makes this connection explicit.⁵² At the center of both narratives stands the miraculous transformation of the last Emperor/Messiah from a lowly and despised condition to the condition of limitless power and military triumph. At the first encounter, Menahem son of Ammiel appears "despised and wounded, lowly and in pain," a "despised man in worn-out clothes" either pitied or despised by onlookers including Zerubbabel himself and the sages of Israel. The last Emperor's original condition is no better. He is asleep like a man who was considered dead by his enemies, according to Syriac version, or "like a man who had drunk much wine, whom men considered like one dead and utterly useless," according to Greek version. Both descriptions draw on biblical texts for their imagery: *Sefer Zerubbabel* models Menahem on the suffering Messiah of Isaiah 53:2–3, whereas Syriac Ps.-Methodius derives its image of the last Roman emperor from Psalm 78:65, and the Psalm's subsequent interpretation in light of Christian kerygma in Syriac interpretive tradition. Different biblical texts yield somewhat different images; Menahem is never portrayed

⁵² Cf. the explicit reference to this verse in *ʿOtot ha-Mashiah* (Even Shemuel, 312, lines 45–48).

as a sleeping drunkard, and, at these earlier stages, Christian texts contain no explicit reference to the Emperor's poverty, although it would come to feature prominently in the later versions of the legend.⁵³ The overall thrust of the narrative is the same, however: The final redeemer comes from a despised and lowly condition. Until he reveals his true glory the redeemer remains unrecognized by other people (sages and elders in *Sefer Zerubbabel*, anonymous "men" in Greek Ps.-Methodius). In both cases the original lowliness of the redeemer comes to the fore of the narrative.

The motif of "great fury" or burning anger is equally central to the story of the redeemer's transformation in both Christian and Jewish accounts. In all of them the transition from the despised condition to the exalted one happens in a state of fury, wrath, or anger through which the true triumphant self of the redeemer is revealed. In *Sefer Zerubbabel*, Menahem's "anger burned within him" provoked by the failure of others (first, Zerubbabel, then elders and sages) to recognize him as the Messiah, whereas in Ps.-Methodius the king of the Greeks "goes out in great wrath" against the Ishmaelites in reaction to their atrocities. In both cases, however, the redeemer's burning wrath is the essential part of his revelation. As *Sefer Zerubbabel* phrases it, appropriating the imagery from Isaiah 59:17, he "puts on clothes of vengeance as a garment and wraps himself in a mantle of zeal."

According to *Sefer Zerubbabel*, the physical appearance of the Messiah also undergoes transformation. Although at first he appears to Zerubbabel as "a man, despised and wounded, lowly and in pain," at the end of their conversation the Messiah shows himself "like a young man, a handsome and comely youth." None of the extant versions of Ps.-Methodius describes the last emperor's youthful appearance although, as I shall argue later in this chapter, they may very well imply it. In a broader context, the visually stark contrast between the downtrodden appearance of the Messiah at the beginning of his encounter with Zerubbabel and his youthful look at the end of the encounter could very well convey the mythical message of the collective rejuvenation of Israel personified in the figure of the Messiah, just as the ascent of the new Byzantine emperor was often described and ritually visualized as the collective rejuvenation of the empire, which has grown senile under his predecessor. In at least

⁵³ See Alexander, *Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, 155.

some texts the personalities of old and new rulers were intentionally blurred within a phoenix-like symbolism of succession.⁵⁴

NEW DAVID AND *RENOVATIO IMPERII*

The theme of the Messiah's imprisonment and concealment in Rome seems to be uniquely Jewish.⁵⁵ Ps.-Methodius is characteristically silent about the precise location at which the last Emperor reveals himself. There are indications that in an original version of the legend it might have been Ethiopia, because the Emperor launches his military campaign against the Sons of Ishmael from "the sea of the Ethiopians (Cushites)."⁵⁶ Ps.-Methodius' final editor, however, vehemently denies the Ethiopian connection. Instead "Cush" is interpreted as a reference to the Byzantine Emperors, who are the descendants of a Cushite princess according to Ps.-Methodius' imaginative genealogy.⁵⁷

In contrast, the Messiah's location in Rome is central to *Sefer Zerubbabel's* narrative. The future Messiah's birth in the time of King David and his subsequent concealment/imprisonment in Rome until "the time of the end" reflect the intricacy of succession among the three great empires of Jewish imagination: the Davidic kingdom of Israel, the Roman Empire, and the eschatological kingdom of the Davidic Messiah. The hidden Messiah becomes the personified arcana of Rome's power inherited from the Davidic kingdom, not unlike the Palladium of Troy and biblical relics concealed beneath the Column of Constantine.⁵⁸ In addition, the Messiah is not the only example of Israelite arcana concealed

⁵⁴ See, for example, the first book of Corippus' *In laudem Iustini*, in which the death of Justinian I and the accession of Justin II are woven together in the complex ritual of imperial *renovatio*. See Cameron's commentary in Flavius Cresconius Corippus, *In laudem Iustini minoris*, ed. A. Cameron (London: Athlone Press, 1976), 147–50, and MacCormack, *Art and Ceremony in Late Antiquity*, 150–58.

⁵⁵ The *Slavonic Daniel*, an Old Slavonic translation of the early ninth-century Greek apocalypse, contains a version of the last Roman emperor legend in which the future emperor is discovered in the midst of a "Rebel City" carrying two coins "in order to receive crumbs." See Alexander, *Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, 69. Given the late date of the composition, its relevance to our discussion is unclear. On the history of *Slavonic Daniel* and its place in Byzantine apocalyptic literature, see Alexander, 61–64.

⁵⁶ Ps.-Methodius, XIII, 11, 9.

⁵⁷ See Reinink, "Ps.-Methodius: A Concept of History," 161–68, and earlier literature cited there.

⁵⁸ See discussion earlier in the chapter.

in Rome. The Temple vessels “hidden (גְּנוּזִים) in the palace of Julianos Caesar” according to *’Otot ha-Mashiah*, are another set of Israelite relics temporarily kept in Rome until the time of their recovery and restoration to Jerusalem by the Messiah son of Joseph.⁵⁹ Like the Palladium of Troy and biblical relics hidden beneath Constantine’s Column, the Temple vessels function as the arcana of Rome’s power, the transfer of which to the city (and specifically to the imperial palace) serves as a token of Rome’s universal rule. All these stories appear to draw on an older rabbinic tradition, which paradoxically claims that after Israel’s defeat at the hands of the Roman Empire the divine presence established its residence in Rome, thus legitimizing, for the time being, Rome’s rise to universal power.⁶⁰

Whereas the Palladium guarantees the permanence of the regenerated empire, the Messiah’s and the vessels’ presence in Rome is more sinister. After all, the Messiah is not merely hidden in Rome. He is also imprisoned there, just as the vessels are. He is the suffering arcana of Rome’s universal rule, whose presence both legitimizes Rome’s rise to power as the successor of the Davidic kingdom and as the place of the Messiah’s concealment and, at the same time, spells the city’s doom by foreshadowing the ultimate restoration of power to the eschatological kingdom of Israel. Thus the root cause of Rome’s greatness contains within it the seeds of future destruction. The Palladium-Messiah and the Temple vessels hidden in the imperial palace are not just the sources of unlimited imperial power, but also the surety that this power will ultimately return to Israel.

The Messiah’s concealment in Rome allowed for the completion of a historical cycle. It legitimized Rome’s present status as the imperial successor of Davidic Israel, in a manner similar to that in which the Palladium of Troy and biblical relics established mythical continuity among Constantinople, Rome, Troy, and Jerusalem. The concealment, however, also claimed mythical continuity for the messianic kingdom of Israel as both the eschatological *renovatio* of the ancient Davidic kingdom and the imperial successor of Rome. *Sefer Zerubbabel* reworks Byzantine

⁵⁹ Even Shemuel, 320, lines 69–70. The story of R. Ishmael’s postmortem mask kept in the Roman imperial palace and used in public performances may contain a similar message. See Boustán, *From Martyr*, 121–30.

⁶⁰ See Goldberg, *Untersuchungen über die Vorstellung von der Schekhinah*, 160–64, 494–95.

eschatological and imperial themes to convey a distinctly Jewish message. The revelation of the Messiah does not just usher in eschatological deliverance. It also reverses the historical dynamic that allowed Rome both to occupy the position of the world empire originally intended for Davidic Israel and to make use of the arcana of Israel's power. The geographic specificity of *Sefer Zerubbabel* distinguishes it from contemporaneous Christian apocalypses and serves an important role within the overall program of its text.

As just indicated, in my opinion, both *Sefer Zerubbabel* and Ps.-Methodius participate in a broader narrative of imperial renewal that was characteristic of Late Roman and Byzantine imperial ideology from the time of Constantine onward. Eusebius' portrayal of Constantine created a literary model for subsequent representations of Christian emperors as agents of *renovatio imperii* and the restorers of the empire's golden age. Eusebius' own view of Constantine's role is best summarized in the inscription that Constantine allegedly engraved on his statue in Rome and that referred to the cross held by the right hand of the statue: "By this saving sign, the true proof of courage, I saved your city from the yoke of the tyrant and set her free; furthermore I freed the Senate and People of Rome and restored them to their ancient renown and splendor."⁶¹ The restoration of the empire, however, was only part of the larger process of universal renewal, which also involved "the re-establishment of the divine spiritual edifice in our soul" and the restoration of the divine likeness in mankind, the likeness that was lost as a result of humanity's Fall.⁶² In other words, the empire's rebirth served as an outward sign of humanity's spiritual progress, purification, and restoration jointly coworked by Constantine and Constantine's divine *comes*, the Logos.⁶³

The emperor himself embodied this act of renewal, and, in the words of Eusebius, "displayed such super-human greatness as to be forever in his prime and to remain young throughout his life."⁶⁴ This image of the superhuman and ever youthful Constantine would be captured and immortalized by the emperor's bronze statue placed on the top of the Column of Constantine in the newly founded Constantinople. The statue

⁶¹ Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 9.9.10–11. The translation is from Williamson and Louth, *Eusebius, The History of the Church*.

⁶² Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 10.4.55–60.

⁶³ See Ladner, *The Idea of Reform*, 119–25.

⁶⁴ Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 10.4.18.

was made either from an earlier statue of Apollo Helios, or from that of a Hellenistic ruler, by replacing the original statue's head with that of Constantine. The emperor's head, with seven rays of light radiating from it, still very much resembled that of the sun god. The emperor held a lance in his left hand and a globe surmounted by what was most likely the city's Tyche in his right. The column constituted one of the main *sacra* and topographical focal points of Constantine's "own city."⁶⁵ The city was "bearing his name" and thus participated in its founder's personality as well as his vital energy through which the empire's renewal was achieved. According to a medieval Byzantine apocalyptic tradition, the city's destiny was inseparably bound with that of the column: The collapse of the Column of Constantine would mark the end of the city.⁶⁶

After Constantine, the theme of the empire's rebirth through the figure of a new emperor would become a standard feature of Christian Roman and Byzantine religio-political discourse. As noticed earlier in this chapter, the act of renewal was perceived as repeating itself every time the new emperor ascended the throne, and it would become institutionalized through a series of rituals and highly publicized mystical visions that marked the transition of power from the deceased or dysfunctional emperor to his successor. The reign of Heraclius in particular witnessed the resurgence of the renewal theme in the wake of the emperor's victory over Sasanian Persia. In his poems George of Pisidia hails Heraclius as the restorer of the empire and its cities, and praises the emperor's victory as a new Creation, comparing the six-year campaign in Persia to the six days of creation in the first chapter of Genesis.⁶⁷

Ps.-Methodius' story of the last Roman emperor, whose rise to power serves as the ultimate act of triumphant renewal for the decaying empire,

⁶⁵ On the column and statue of Constantine, see Dagron, *Naissance d'une capitale*, 37–39; Lathoud, "La consécration et la dédicace de Constantinople," 296–314; Janin, *Constantinople byzantine*, 77–80; Krautheimer, *Three Christian Capitals*, 55–56; Cyril Mango, "Constantine's Column"; Leeb, *Konstantin und Christus*, 12–17; Bassett, *The Urban Image*, 68–69, 192–204.

⁶⁶ On the foundation of Constantinople as an act of renewal, see Dagron, *Naissance d'une capitale*, 19–47; Dölger, *Byzanz und die europäische Staatenwelt*, 81–98. On the city's end, see Charles Diehl, "De quelques croyances byzantines sur la fin de Constantinople," 193–94.

⁶⁷ *Her.* 1.80–83, and 192–206. See Olster, "The Date of George of Pisidia's 'Hexaemeron,'" 161–69; Whitby, "The Devil in Disguise," 119, and "A New Image for a New Age," 214–16; Ludwig, "Kaiser Herakleios," 104–28.

flows seamlessly from the previous *renovatio imperii* discourse, perhaps taking it to a new level of eschatological urgency but not fundamentally altering it. The situation with *Sefer Zerubbabel* is more complex. On the one hand, *Sefer Zerubbabel*'s description of the Davidic Messiah envisions the history of Israel in accordance with what Reinink calls "a typological pattern in which [the empire's] first ruler could be compared with its last ruler, its beginning to its end."⁶⁸ In the case of Ps.-Methodius, the last Roman emperor is implicitly identified as *Alexander redivivus*: the last world ruler in whom the founder of the Greco-Roman empire is revived and through whose efforts the empire itself is renewed. He is placed at the end of a fictitious genealogical line that goes back to Alexander's father Philip and his Ethiopian wife Cusheth, and ties together all subsequent rulers of Macedonia, Ethiopia, Greece, Rome, and Byzantium. The character of the last Roman emperor and his actions are shaped by this typology and by the fundamental unity of his personality with that of Alexander the Great.⁶⁹

The Davidic Messiah, Menahem son of Ammiel, plays a similar role.⁷⁰ Through his awakening, the glory of the Davidic dynasty is awakened as well, even though *Sefer Zerubbabel* does not dwell on Menahem's genealogy in any detail. Menahem starts as a despised beggar in Rome who is transformed into the redeemer of Israel destined to reestablish the Israelite kingdom, vanquish Israel's enemies, and rebuild Jerusalem – in other words, to perform actions associated in Jewish historical memory with King David. He is *David redivivus*, just as the last Roman emperor is *Alexander redivivus*, and, just like the latter, he accomplishes *renovatio imperii* by restoring the Davidic kingdom. In his discussion of the Messiah's names in rabbinic literature, Goldberg has noted that, by and large, the future Messiah was expected either to come from the Davidic lineage or to be King David himself.⁷¹ In the words of y. Ber. 2:4 (5a), "if this King Messiah is from the living, his name is David; if from the dead, his name is David."⁷² B. Sanh. 98b states succinctly that the expected

⁶⁸ Reinink, "Ps.-Methodius," 166.

⁶⁹ See Reinink, "Ps.-Methodius," 165–68, and "Alexander the Great," 175–76.

⁷⁰ On the coming of the Messiah as an act of renewal, cf. Goldberg, "Die Namen des Messias," 272–73.

⁷¹ See Goldberg, "Die Namen des Messias," 208–74, esp. 213–45, 270–71.

⁷² Cf. *Lam. R.* 1.16. See Goldberg, "Die Namen des Messias," 225–30.

Messiah is “another David” (דוד אחר). To elaborate on Goldberg’s observation, one may argue that the future Messiah was expected to be a “New David,” just as Byzantine emperors were expected to be New Davids, New Alexanders, or New Constantines. It would be unimportant whether the Messiah would be David himself, or David’s descendant, or even someone who claimed fictitious Davidic lineage. In any case, the Messiah would be *David redivivus*, his personal identity merged with the mythical identity of King David.

The Messiah’s individuality would be less important than “a role and an office” into which he entered.⁷³ Just like late imperial portrait sculptures, which, due to their intentionally depersonalized facial features, could be claimed by multiple rulers as *their* portraits, references to the Davidic Messiah sought to create an ideal type rather than to accurately reflect an individual ruler’s likeness and personal identity.⁷⁴ Among the Messiah’s names and epithets analyzed by Goldberg there were few that highlighted the expected redeemer’s distinct individuality. Most of the names blurred the Messiah’s personhood by entangling it into a web of references to and associations with David, Israel’s archetypal ruler. The Messiah’s names revealed a view of the ruler’s personality akin to that of Byzantine imperial typology, which identified ruling emperors with the ideal mythical rulers of the past. In either case the ruler was expected to merge multiple bodies and multiple personalities by sharing them with his or her mythical prototypes. The emperor’s persona was not quite his or her own. Rather it was shaped by participation in the mythical personae of earlier rulers, who, in their turn, were made tangibly present through each new emperor. Ultimately both the Byzantine Emperor and the Jewish Messiah were, in Kantorowicz’s words, “temporal incarnations of the god’s or hero’s image, his perpetual substance and power of life. They were time-bound owners of the ‘halo’ of their divine or heroized prototypes.”⁷⁵ In the case of the Messiah, “the hero’s image” and “his perpetual substance and power of life,” of which the Messiah would be an incarnation, were those of David.

⁷³ I am borrowing Dagron’s felicitous phrase. See Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, 53, and in general, pp. 48–53.

⁷⁴ See Smith, “The Imperial Court,” 211; Bauer, *Stadt, Platz und Denkmal*, 339–49 (including a helpful review of earlier literature); Kolb, *Herrscherideologie*, 110–12.

⁷⁵ See Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies*, 83.

THE DEMONIC ADVERSARY

Sefer Zerubbabel does not merely internalize the *renovatio imperii* model by applying it to the Davidic Messiah. It also generates an elaborate critique of this model's application to Rome by depicting Menahem son of Ammiel in confrontation and dialectical tension with his Roman counterpart Armilos. The Armilos figure has elicited multiple interpretations from scholars.⁷⁶ His name was derived from Romulus, the eponymous founder of Rome, and thus he was seen as the personification of Rome and its empire. He was identified with the emperor Heraclius but also with the figure of the Antichrist in contemporaneous Christian texts. I believe that all these interpretations are correct. Just like the figure of Hephzibah, the figure of Armilos ties together a number of cultural and religious themes as well as historical experiences. Some of the issues related to this figure, particularly the story of Armilos' birth from the ancient statue, I shall discuss later in the chapter. In the analysis that follows I would like to locate Armilos within the broader context of the *renovatio imperii* narrative and that narrative's critique in *Sefer Zerubbabel*.

In a manner similar to the last Roman emperor, Armilos is both the last ruler of Rome and the reincarnation of the Rome's founder Romulus. Earlier rabbinic texts embraced the figure of Romulus as the eponymous founder of Rome and, by extension, Rome's empire.⁷⁷ *Sefer Zerubbabel* used this tradition to create its own version of the typology, which identified the last ruler of the Roman Empire with its founder. *Romulus redivivus*, the last Roman emperor Armilos, "will rule over all, and his dominion will reach from one end of the earth to the other."⁷⁸ Armilos also possesses clear characteristics of a Christian Emperor, however. In *Sefer Zerubbabel* these characteristics are more implied than explicitly stated: Armilos "will worship strange gods and speak falsehood" – make

⁷⁶ See Biale, "Counter-History," 137–38; McGinn, "Portraying Antichrist in the Middle Ages," 1–48; Berger, "Three Typological Themes," 155–62; Dan, "Armilus: The Jewish Antichrist," 73–104; Yahalom, "On the Validity of Literary Works," 129.

⁷⁷ See Krauss, *Paras we-Romi*, 14–19.

⁷⁸ Lévi, 136. Cf. Boustán's suggestion that the name of the emperor Lupinus in *Hekhalot Rabbati* derives from the Latin word for wolf, the animal that played a crucial role in Rome's myth of origins along with Romulus and Remus. See Boustán, *From Martyr*, 227.

the rest of the world worship idols at the altars constructed by him.⁷⁹ He will eventually make the marble statue that gave birth to him into an object of universal veneration.⁸⁰ In various versions of *'Otot ha-Mashiah*, however, the Christian features of Armilos are described more explicitly. After subduing all regions of the world, Armilos will ask that "his Torah that he gave" to the descendants of Esau be brought before him. He will then demand that "the nations of the world" believe in him as their God and Messiah. Armilos will also reject the Torah of Israel because it does not support his claims of being a god.⁸¹ All these characteristics of Armilos make him resemble Christian Roman emperors with their combined claims to universal imperial rule and religious expansion. Moreover, as Biale has correctly noticed, Armilos "is not just the Byzantine Emperor but, in fact, Jesus himself."⁸² To take Biale's observation one step further, he is the *christomimetic* Emperor of Byzantine political mythology. The two-headed Armilos is a parody on the Christian emperors who, starting with Constantine, quite literally shared their wills and their personalities with Christ-Logos.⁸³ The figure of Armilos personifies more than just Rome. It personifies the Christian revival of the Roman Empire, serving almost as a caricature of Eusebius' Constantine and subsequent emperors who modeled themselves on Constantine.⁸⁴

One did not have to be familiar with the myth of Armilos to realize that the Byzantine emperor was a liminal figure. There was a fine

⁷⁹ Lévi, 136 and 143.

⁸⁰ Lévi, 143.

⁸¹ See Even Shemuel, 320–21, for what appears to be an earlier version of the *'Otot*. Cf. also Even Shemuel, 313.

⁸² Biale, "Counter-History," 138. In a similar way, Boustan observes that when b. Git. 56b–57a places the Roman Emperor Titus and Jesus side by side in hell it "updates and, implicitly, Christianizes the Jewish image of imperial Rome." See Boustan, "Immolating Emperors," 231.

⁸³ Cf. the images of Samael and the emperor Lupinus in *Heikhalot Rabbati* (*Synopsis*, §§ 108–121), where Lupinus, according to Boustan's observation, "serves as the earthly counterpart to Sama'el, the heavenly embodiment of Rome." See Boustan, *From Martyr*, 229, and, in general, pp. 211–39. At the same time Boustan argues against the story of Samael being part of the original Lupinus microform (pp. 211–17). Cf., however, Reeg, *Die Geschichte von den Zehn Märtyrern*, 42 and 56. In my opinion this entire argument needs to be revisited.

⁸⁴ On Constantine as a model emperor in Byzantine literature, see Whitby, "Images for Emperors," 83–93. Cf. Magdalino, "Introduction," 3–5, and Haldon, "Constantine or Justinian," 104–07. On Heraclius as the New Constantine, see also Spain Alexander, "David Plates," 225–26; Drijvers, "Heraclius and the *Restitutio Crucis*," 181–84.

line between being the earthly co-ruler of Christ and Christ's demonic antipode, the Antichrist. The *Secret History* of Procopius is famous for portraying Justinian as literally being the son of the devil: a headless and sleepless demon roaming the imperial palace at night.⁸⁵ In the late sixth or early seventh century, Andreas of Caesarea composed one of only a few surviving Byzantine commentaries on the Apocalypse of John. In it Andreas remained uncertain as to whether "Babylon the Great" of the Apocalypse referred to the Persian capital or to Rome/Constantinople and expected the Antichrist to reveal himself as a Roman emperor.⁸⁶ In the early seventh century the emperor Phocas, although not quite identified with the Antichrist, was subjected to particularly virulent and dehumanizing rhetoric by the historian Theophylact Simocatta and the poet George of Pisidia, both of them writing in the wake of Phocas' deposition and murder by the new emperor Heraclius. Both authors depicted Phocas as evil incarnate by comparing him to the most outlandish monsters of classical Greek mythology. In the epithets like, "the steel-encircled Calydonian tyrant [who] entered the royal court, a barbarian mongrel of the Cyclopean breed, the Centaur, who most brutally ravaged the chaste purple, for whom monarchy was a feat of wine-swilling," Phocas' humanity was entirely subsumed under the emperor's alleged monstrosity.⁸⁷ The latter literally reached mythical proportions, thus creating rhetorical, moral, and religious justification for Phocas' brutal murder by Heraclius.⁸⁸ Finally, with the ascendance of the Iconoclast emperors in the eighth and ninth centuries, their opponents would

⁸⁵ Procopius, *Secret History* 12.20–32. See Cameron, *Procopius*, 56–57; Brandes, "Die apokalyptische Literatur," 307, and literature cited there.

⁸⁶ Schmid, *Studien zur Geschichte des griechischen Apokalypse-Textes*, vol. 1, 136–37, 181, 184, and 201–02. See Magdalino, "History of the Future," 9–10. Cf. Podskalsky, *Byzantinische Reicheschatologie*, 86–88; Mango, "Le temps dans les commentaires byzantines," 434–35.

⁸⁷ Theophylact, *Historia*, Dialogue 4, cf. *Historia*, 8. 10. 4. The translation follows Whitby, *The History of Theophylact Simocatta*, 3. Cf. George of Pisidia, *Avar.* 49–57, and *Her.* 11–13. See Whitby, "A New Image for a New Age," 209; Nissen, "Historisches Epos," 306–07; Hunger, "On the Imitation," 24. Olster, "The Date," 162, compares the demonization of Phocas to that of the Persian king Chosroes in other poems by George of Pisidia.

⁸⁸ In *Ex Africa* 56–58, George of Pisidia justifies the murder of Phocas by drawing a parallel between Heraclius and the biblical Phinehas (Numbers 25:6–15). In other places, Heraclius is compared to classical heroes of Greek mythology who were famous for fighting and destroying monsters. See Whitby, "A New Image for a New Age," 206–12.

routinely draw parallels between the quasi-religious status of imperial office and the powers of the Antichrist.⁸⁹

Not unlike Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, the saintly emperors of the Byzantine imagination always had their menacing doubles lurking behind them.⁹⁰ The demonic universalism of the Antichrist was constantly present within the Byzantines' minds, like the potential dark side and mirror image of the Christian universalism of Constantine and his successors. It has often been noticed that, to describe Armilos, *Sefer Zerubbabel* appropriates literary clichés, images, and rhetorical forms used in contemporaneous Christian literature to describe the Antichrist. In fact, the two characters may very well have existed in mutually enriching literary symbiosis.⁹¹ David Biale takes the discussion one step further by emphasizing the counter-historical nature of this appropriation. In other words, by engaging the figure of the Antichrist, Jews constructed their own counter-history, which "not only reflects Christian motifs but also systematically inverts them for polemical and eschatological purposes."⁹² While essentially agreeing with Biale's argument, I also believe that the Armilos figure does not just invert an otherwise unambiguous master narrative of the dominant Christian culture by "standing another Christian apocalyptic tradition on its head."⁹³ Rather it explores and exploits the profound ambivalence inherent within the tradition itself, the ambivalence which is fully apparent to and is often contemplated by the tradition's staunchest adherents. The myth of Armilos fully engages Byzantine cultural and religious anxieties of the day and constructs a Jewish eschatological counter-narrative in a way that does not merely deconstruct, undermine, and invert the dominant narrative but also finds solutions to that narrative's perceived problems and inner discontents. By doing so, the authors of the Armilos mythology effectively claimed ownership of a Byzantine master narrative for themselves.

When viewed together, Armilos and Menahem son of Ammiel represent two facets of the *renovatio imperii* theme in *Sefer Zerubbabel*. On

⁸⁹ Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, 181–91.

⁹⁰ Cf. Cameron's observation on the demonization of Justinian in Procopius' *Secret History*. See Cameron, *Procopius*, 56–58.

⁹¹ See McGinn, "Portraying Antichrist in the Middle Ages," 1–48. Cf. Berger, "Three Typological Themes," 155–62; Dan, "Armilus: The Jewish Antichrist," 73–104.

⁹² Biale, "Counter-History," 138.

⁹³ Ibid.

the one hand, the fundamental elements of this theme become accepted within Jewish eschatological narrative and are applied to the figure of the Davidic Messiah, Menahem ben Ammiel, whose awakening in Rome has many of the characteristics of a standard *renovatio imperii* motif applied to the messianic kingdom of Israel. At the same time, the figure of Armilos serves to deny precisely this kind of eschatological hope to Rome. Rome's last emperor will not be a savior destined to renew the empire, but a monstrous creature destined to ruin it. In particular, the myth of Armilos seems to challenge the dominant narrative of Christianity as the revitalizing force in the act of the empire's renewal. A demonic mockery of Eusebius' Constantine, Armilos spells the empire's doom rather than its restoration. At the same time, the saga of the Messiah's awakening and Israel's rebirth inherits the *renovatio imperii* mythology from Rome but also inverts it. The Davidic Messiah sets out from Rome, yet his goal is not the renewal of the Roman Empire but that of Israel, which supplants Rome as the ultimate world empire centered on the rebuilt city of Jerusalem. On the other hand, the myth of Rome's failed renewal finds its ultimate expression in the legend of the statue that gives birth to Armilos. It is to this legend that we shall presently turn.

A TALE OF TWO CITIES

Whereas Jerusalem finds its symbolic and mythic identity in Hephzibah, Rome's identity is expressed by Hephzibah's demonic counterpart: "a marble stone in the shape of a virgin" whose "beauty of appearance was wonderful to behold." According to *Sefer Zerubbabel*, after having intercourse with the Satan this statue gives birth to a son named Armilos.⁹⁴ Another Jewish apocalyptic text known as *'Otot ha-Mashiah* narrates a slightly different version of the events. According to this text, the marble statue of a virgin "was not made by a human hand, rather, the Holy One, blessed be He, created her so by His power." Instead of the Satan, "certain wicked ones of the gentile nations, sons of Belial, will come, excite her, and have intercourse with her." God preserves their seminal emissions within the statue and creates an offspring out of them. The statue splits

⁹⁴ Lévi, 136.

open and gives birth to “Armilos the Satan.”⁹⁵ Apparently the myth circulated in multiple redactions, because other versions of *’Otot ha-Mashiah* share with *Sefer Zerubbabel* the theme of the satanic impregnation of the statue.⁹⁶ *Sefer Zerubbabel* further states that after Armilos has achieved full domination over his subjects, he will take “his mother, the stone from which he was born, out of the house of disgrace of the scoffers” and make it the object of universal worship. “From all over, the nations will come to worship that stone, burn incense, and pour libations to her. No one will be able to look upon her face because of her beauty. Whoever does not bow down to her will die, suffering like an animal.”⁹⁷ The stone thus becomes the sacred heart of the unholy empire built by its son.

Whereas Armilos takes center stage in the Jewish counter-narrative to the Christian Antichrist legend and functions as a figure that polemically combines the characteristics of both the Byzantine emperor and perhaps Jesus himself, the mother of Armilos has often been identified as a polemical inversion of the Theotokos image.⁹⁸ Himmelfarb notes the combination of attraction and deep anxiety that characterizes the legend’s attitude toward the statue. The stone is both appealing because of its “unsurpassed beauty” and dangerous because at the end it produces the demonic arch-villain Armilos. According to Himmelfarb, this combination of appeal and anxiety might have reflected Jewish attitudes to the figure of the Virgin as well.⁹⁹ It must be added here that in Byzantine and medieval lore the birth of the Antichrist was often seen as a result of the union between a woman and a demonic spirit. A demonic parody of Christ, the Antichrist was expected to be conceived in a way that at once mimicked and mocked Christ’s conception from the Virgin and the Holy Ghost.¹⁰⁰ It appears that the Jewish version of the Antichrist works

⁹⁵ Even Shemuel, *Midreshe Ge’ulah*, 320.

⁹⁶ See Even Shemuel, *Midreshe Ge’ulah*, 312, lines 49–51. Finally, at least one version refers to Armilos’ birth from the stone rather than a virgin-shaped statue. See Even Shemuel, 313, lines 76–78.

⁹⁷ Lévi, 143.

⁹⁸ Lévi, “L’apocalypse de Zorobabel,” 59–60; Himmelfarb, “Sefer Zerubbabel,” 69; Biale, “Counter-History,” 140–41; Schäfer, *Mirror of His Beauty*, 213–14. It would be wise, however, not to confuse a statue with an icon; see Speck, “The Apocalypse of Zerubbabel,” 183–90.

⁹⁹ Himmelfarb, “Mother of the Messiah,” 385, and *The Apocalypse*, 121.

¹⁰⁰ See, for example, Romanos, *Hymnes*, L. 7, lines 1–7 (Matons, 5:242). For other examples, see Emerson, *Antichrist in the Middle Ages*, 74–75, 81–82.

from the same template, making full use of Christians' own ambivalence toward the sacred figures of their tradition. Still, in the text that follows I would like to broaden the scope of the discussion by arguing that the mother of Armilos represents a highly complex and multivalent cultural symbol. There is little doubt that her figure engages and inverts the Byzantine ideas of the Theotokos, but not only. Like Hephzibah, who ties together a number of cultural themes and symbols of contemporaneous Byzantium, the mother of Armilos derives her identity from the creatively reworked range of Byzantine cultural *topoi*.

On the most basic level, and like Hephzibah, the mother of Armilos resembles the personified Tyche of her city. Whereas Hephzibah personifies Jerusalem, the mother of Armilos personifies Rome/Constantinople. The two women are rivals, just as Jerusalem is the rival of Rome. The pairing of the two may be a reflection of another pairing that, since the late fourth century, was widely attested in imperial coinage and art: that of Rome and the New Rome, Constantinople.¹⁰¹ From the late fourth century onward, imperial art sought to visualize the theme of Constantinople as Rome's equal and the second capital city of the empire. Often the two appear on coins seated together in poses that underscore their equality. In these instances, the Tyche of Constantinople may be depicted as a traditional city Tyche wearing the long tunic and a mural crown, whereas the helmeted and armed Tyche of Rome preserves her traditional martial appearance. In other cases the Tyche of Constantinople becomes increasingly assimilated in its appearance to the Tyche of Rome, to the point that often the two look exactly alike. These representations of Rome and Constantinople as equals reflected the increasing recognition of Constantinople as the New Rome and the empire's Eastern capital. Through the assimilation of features of the Tyche of Rome, Constantinople's mystical body was gradually becoming that of Rome as the city itself was increasingly recognized as the Second Rome, or simply, as Rome. To quote Kantorowicz again, "The Byzantines, long before, had claimed that the so-to-speak 'haloed' essence of ancient Rome on the Tiber, or her sempiternal *genius*, had been transferred to New Rome on

¹⁰¹ See Dagron, *Naissance d'une capitale*, 43–47, 49–55; Bühl, *Constantinopolis und Roma*, 10–78, 143–231; Cameron, "Consular Diptychs," 394–97; Toynbee, "Roma and Constantinopolis in Late-Antique Art from 312 to 365," 135–47, and Toynbee, "Roma and Constantinopolis in Late-Antique Art from 365 to Justin II," 261–77.

the Bosphorus, and that whatever remained on the banks of the Italian river, was bricks and stones and the rubble of buildings out of which the *genius loci*, the life perennial, had evaporated.”¹⁰²

This complex narrative of equality, succession, and replacement, through which one Rome becomes substituted by another, finds its version in a theme of rivalry between Rome and Jerusalem in *Sefer Zerubbabel*. There “the marble stone in the shape of a virgin” whose “beauty of appearance was wonderful to behold” personifies Rome/Constantinople, the old capital of the old empire, and the warlike Hephzibah personifies Jerusalem, the new capital of the eschatological kingdom of Israel. In *Sefer Zerubbabel*, the theme of succession from Rome to Constantinople gets reinterpreted as the succession from Rome/Constantinople to Jerusalem, in which the old imperial center is superseded by the new. The Tyche of the old capital city becomes the marble statue giving birth to Armilos and destined to perish alongside her demonic son; the Tyche of the new capital city becomes the triumphant mother of the Messiah destined to rule in eternity. Whereas the imperial city’s “haloed body” passes on to Jerusalem, her material body identified as a marble statue is left behind.¹⁰³

Still, unlike bricks and stones of the Old Rome, the marble statue in *Sefer Zerubbabel* is not merely antiquarian. It is demonic. By portraying her in this way, *Sefer Zerubbabel* masterfully engages and amplifies the Byzantines’ own disconcert about their pasts, both historical and mythical. It is true that, from the moment of the city’s origins, the feminine aspect came to play a prominent role in Constantinople’s mythology and self-representation. According to the pagan historian Zosimus, Constantine ordered the ancient statue of the goddess Rhea to be brought to Byzantium and transformed into a praying female figure watching over the city, most likely another representation of the city’s Tyche.¹⁰⁴ Likely related to this account is the myth of the transfer of the Palladium (a statue of Pallas Athena) from Rome to Constantinople discussed earlier in the chapter. By the time *Sefer Zerubbabel* was written, however,

¹⁰² Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies*, 82. Cf. Bowersock, “Old and New Rome,” 37–49.

¹⁰³ Cf. Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies*, 82–83.

¹⁰⁴ Zosimus, *Hist. Nov.* 3.31. See further Lathoud, “La consécration,” 183–87; Limberis, *Divine Heiress*, 14–21. On the feminine personifications of Constantinople, see also Herrin, “The Imperial Feminine,” 6–12.

Byzantine society felt deeply ambivalent about traditional city personifications. Rather than representing the city's supernatural "fortune," the personifications came to be increasingly associated with the demonic specters of pagan deities ever present in the group subconscious of Byzantine culture. Indeed, when in the late sixth century Justin II attempted to put the personified Tyche of Constantinople on his coins, the populace rioted, mistaking her for the pagan deity Aphrodite.¹⁰⁵ The virgin's marble statue in *Sefer Zerubbabel* uses this ambivalence to buttress the Jewish supersessionist narrative: The personified "fortune" of the empire's capital city is indeed a demonic statue that gave birth to the demonic empire of Rome, thus justifying the empire's eventual doom. The story of the marble statue works from a template provided by the Byzantines' own sense of insecurity about their past.

A DEMONIC STATUE AND ITS BYZANTINE VIEWER

Sefer Zerubbabel's choice to depict the mother of Armilos as an ancient statue is highly significant in light of the complex attitude of Byzantine culture toward its classical heritage in general, and statues in particular. In the seventh and eighth centuries A.D., ancient statuary still constituted an important visual element of the Byzantine urban landscape. The presence and prominence of predominantly pagan works of art produced a complex feeling in contemporaneous Byzantine observers, a feeling that originated in the profound sense of continuity and discontinuity with Christian Byzantium's classical past. A Byzantine viewer both creatively engaged ancient statues by finding new cultural meanings for them and exhibited a heightened sense of anxiety about the statues' potential dangers and power to cause harm. Any discussion of the mother of Armilos should take into account the place of ancient statues in the Byzantine cultural narrative of the time. It is to this narrative that I shall turn first in my discussion.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ John of Ephesus, *Hist. Eccl.* 3.14 (Brooks, 1935).

¹⁰⁶ On Byzantine attitudes toward classical statues, see Mango, "Antique Statuary and the Byzantine Beholder," 53–75; Saradi-Mendelovici, "Christian Attitudes toward Pagan Monuments in Late Antiquity and Their Legacy in Later Byzantine Centuries," 47–61; Bassett, "The Antiquities in the Hippodrome of Constantinople," 87–96.

In Byzantine lore, ancient statues were widely believed to be a dwelling place of supernatural forces and demons. A standard late antique and Byzantine *topos* claimed that statues and images in general served as receptacles for the powers of their originals. As a result, statues could be consecrated and animated to obtain oracles from them, or, depending on interpretation, they could be bewitched and inhabited by spirits, thus becoming gateways to the world of the spirits and mediums of its knowledge.¹⁰⁷ In the view of Eusebius, pagan statues worshipped as gods were quite literally the habitation of demons who deluded the worshippers.¹⁰⁸ Forced to explain Constantine's extensive program of bringing ancient statuary from across the empire to the newly founded city of Constantinople, Eusebius emphasized the fact that, by being transferred from their cultic settings to a purely aesthetic one, the statues were stripped of their religious significance and became merely the objects of artistic curiosity. Constantine's actions, in other words, served to deal a blow to the pagan veneration of statues and thus represented genuine Christian piety.¹⁰⁹ Presumably the transfer of the statues to their new setting within the art collections of Constantinople served to render the demons that used to inhabit them innocuous, yet, within the increasingly Christianized environment, the presence of ancient statues was bound to become a lingering source of apprehension. Although no longer venerated as religious objects, the statues did not become religiously neutral either.

By the early seventh century, the belief in the magical power of statues and their ability to serve as mediums for prophecies was an essential part of Byzantine popular religion. Generally the prophecies received through these statues would be prophecies of doom. According to the early-seventh-century historian Theophylact Simocatta, clairvoyant statues played an important role in connection with events that accompanied the deposition and execution of the emperor Maurice by his rival Phocas in 602. According to Theophylact, on the night of the emperor's

¹⁰⁷ See Cameron and Herrin, *Constantinople in the Early Eighth Century*, 31–34, and James, “‘Pray not to Fall into Temptation,’” 15–16. For a broader historical and cultural context, see Dodds, “Theurgy and Its Relationship to Neoplatonism,” 55–69.

¹⁰⁸ Eusebius, *Praep. ev.* 5.2.

¹⁰⁹ Eusebius, *V. Const.* 3.54.1–3.

deposition an Alexandrian calligrapher was coming back from a celebratory feast when several “of the most famous” statues in the city’s area of Tychaeum came down from their pedestals, approached him, and told him what had just happened to the emperor in Constantinople. Theophylact then identified the statues that produced oracles about Maurice as demons, probably implying that the statues were inhabited or “impregnated” by spirits.¹¹⁰ Increasing anxiety about the supernatural powers of ancient statues should be seen against the growing veneration of images in Byzantine Christianity during the sixth and seventh centuries A.D. Functionally, it appears, ancient statues served as shadowy doubles and perhaps demonic inversions of Christian icons, which were widely believed to contain and transmit the powers of Christ, the Theotokos, and the saints portrayed by them.¹¹¹

The mixed sense of attraction and anxiety with which a Byzantine observer approached ancient statues of his or her capital city (or, for that matter, of any city that publicly displayed ancient statuary) also stemmed from the very nature of late antique and early medieval Byzantine culture. The search for cultural continuity between the classical pagan past and the Christian present was one of the dominant themes in the Byzantine mentality.¹¹² The past remained ever present in the form of literary genres, classical texts, historical memories, or works of art. By the time of Heraclius’ reign, the elements of classical and biblical narratives were creatively reassembled, combined, and interpreted as the collective memory of Christian Byzantium. Imperial ideology drew on these elements to create a new mythology for society and its rulers.¹¹³ This newly constructed past had to be absorbed within the new, integrated self that Byzantine civilization aspired to be. The cultural anxiety about ancient statues reflected, among other things, the complexity of such integration and the conflicting senses of both continuity and discontinuity with the past. The history of Byzantine civilization during the sixth through

¹¹⁰ Theophylact, *History* 8.13.7–14. Cf. Theophylact, 2.2.2 on Persian prophetesses as being “impregnated by demons.”

¹¹¹ See Kitzinger, “The Cult of Images,” 83–150; Herrin, *The Formation of Christendom*, 307–15.

¹¹² See Hunger, “On the Imitation (*mimesis*) of Antiquity in Byzantine Literature,” 15–38; James, “‘Pray not to Fall into Temptation,’” 12–20.

¹¹³ See Trilling, “Myth and Metaphor at the Byzantine Court,” 249–63; Whitby, “A New Image for a New Age,” 197–225.

eighth centuries A.D. is that of an ongoing attempt to create an integrated self out of the two different paradigms and to produce new forms of knowledge that sought to integrate diverse cultural elements into a uniform discourse. In part this attempt was no doubt successful, but in part it produced the elements of a split personality that characterized the new civilization.

The sense of both fascination and insecurity caused by the encounter with ancient statues still very much present in the urban landscape of Constantinople reflected the challenge of creating an integrated self for Byzantine culture as a whole. Having been removed from their original historical settings, and with their original meaning more or less forgotten, the statues became the subject of historical fantasies and mythology that endowed them with new history and new meanings. In the process, the statues acquired the haunting quality of displaced shells, emptied of their original content and memories but wide open for whatever new content and whatever new memories could be read into them. Stripped of their past, statues came to be associated with the future. They were rumored to contain signs and portents about Constantinople's future in general, and the city's inevitable demise in particular.¹¹⁴ From very early on, the Byzantine popular imagination portrayed Constantinople as the doomed city the rise of which out of nowhere was destined to come full circle in the city's ultimate disappearance. The city's antique statuary served as the witness and symbolic embodiment of Constantinople's own birth and destiny. The abnormality of statues that had no past and no innate meaning reflected the abnormality of the city brought into existence by an act of will of Constantine and his successors. Both of them had the quality of phantasmagorias destined for oblivion.¹¹⁵

The early eighth century has left us a remarkable composition known as *Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai*, published and extensively analyzed by Averil Cameron and Judith Herrin. This document represents a collection of accounts describing works of art (predominantly statues) scattered across the city of Constantinople. The precise purpose of the *Parastaseis*, as well as its authors, remains unknown. Although on the surface the

¹¹⁴ See Cameron and Herrin, *Constantinople*, 253–59; Diehl, “De quelques croyances Byzantines,” 192–96; Pertusi, *Fine di Bisanzio*, 5–18.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Dagron, *Naissance d'une capitale*, 39: “l'histoire aurait été inventée pour donner confiance à une cité obsédée par l'idée de sa fin.”

document seems to present an encyclopedic collection of knowledge about the ancient statuary of the capital city, the quality of this knowledge and the sources behind it are highly uneven. Imaginative interpretations, anecdotes, and hearsay often mask the lack of real knowledge about the provenance and meaning of any given artifact or inscription. The evidence was apparently drawn from multiple heterogeneous sources and then combined into a single collection of fairly disconnected entries. The *Parastaseis* represents an early witness to what would become an extremely popular genre in medieval Byzantine literature and a source of Dagron's *Constantinople imaginaire*: Constantinople's imagined history, which in the course of the Middle Ages came to supplement and often supplant real historical knowledge of the city's past.¹¹⁶

What characterizes the *Parastaseis*' attitude toward ancient statues is the same mix of fascination and anxiety as one observes in earlier Byzantine literature or, for that matter, in the legend about the mother of Armilos. Statues are both attractive and potentially dangerous. They possess hidden meanings concealed from uninitiated observers and waiting to be deciphered, but they can also cause injuries and death if approached without due caution. The story about one such death caused by a falling statue concludes with a moral: "Take care when you look at ancient statues, especially pagan ones."¹¹⁷ Statues could occasionally become sources of prophecy about the future of Constantinople. In that case, the prophecy would almost always be enigmatic and ominous in nature, predicting doom for the city and emperors.¹¹⁸ Statues were perceived as reservoirs of hidden power and meaning. These powers could be potentially destructive, although sometimes they could also be tamed and manipulated by a knowledgeable person.

It seems to me that the legend of a virgin-shaped marble statue giving birth to Armilos plays off these cultural anxieties. The dialectics of attraction and repulsion, fascination and fear toward the statue is very Byzantine. The story is built around the standard *topoi* of contemporaneous Byzantine literature. It deals with the mystery of a beautiful

¹¹⁶ See Cameron and Herrin, *Constantinople*, esp. 9–31, 38–45. Cf. Dagron, *Constantinople imaginaire*, and James, "'Pray not to Fall into Temptation and Be on Your Guard,'" 12–20.

¹¹⁷ *Par.* 28.

¹¹⁸ See *Par.* 41, 61, and 64 and the commentary on *Par.* 64 in Cameron and Herrin, *Constantinople*, 253–59.

ancient statue that gets bewitched by an evil spirit and spells out the doom of the empire as a result.¹¹⁹ When slightly scaled down, the story could easily become another anecdote about the potential dangers and demonic possession of ancient statues from the *Parastaseis* collection or Theophylact. The scale is important, however. At least since Eusebius, the Christianization of the empire was interpreted as an act of renewal. By embracing Christianity, the old body of the empire imbibed new vitality and rejuvenated itself.¹²⁰ This ideology of renewal found its aesthetic and artistic expression, among other things, in the programmatic use of *spolia* for new constructions. The foremost example of this trend is the Arch of Constantine in Rome. The Arch contains the original statues of several Roman emperors (mostly from the empire's golden age of expansion: Trajan, Hadrian, Marcus Aurelius), removed from their settings and integrated into a new composition by having the head of Constantine recut into their bodies. In the words of Elsner, "the Arch of Constantine collects around the emperor the images of his own distinguished predecessors into whose very forms he has been merged by replacing their features with his own."¹²¹ To expand somewhat on Elsner's analysis, I believe that the new composition visually expressed the idea of imperial renewal by having Constantine's features inserted into the bodies of the select earlier emperors whom he chose to see as his forerunners.¹²² With Constantine, the empire's old body literally acquired a new head and with it a new life. In a similar way another symbol of imperial renewal, the bronze Statue of Constantine atop the column in Constantinople's Forum of Constantine, was most likely made by replacing the features of Apollo Helios (or the features of an anonymous Hellenistic ruler) on the original statue with those of Constantine. The statue's transformed identity served to proclaim the fundamental unity between the emperor and the ever-young sun god in way similar to that in which Constantine's tomb in the Church of the Apostles served to assert the special relationship

¹¹⁹ As already noticed by Lévi, 59. Cameron and Herrin, 33–34, convincingly argue that this *topos* is not as prominent in *Parastaseis* as in the later Byzantine writings of the same genre. For the prominence of this theme in later texts, see Mango, "Antique Statuary," 59–64. On the similar use of statues in Neoplatonic theurgy, see Dodds, "Theurgy," 61–65.

¹²⁰ See Ladner, *Idea of Reform*, 119–25, and Alexander, "Strength of Empire," 348–54.

¹²¹ Elsner, "Culture of *Spolia*," 158.

¹²² Cf. Elsner, "Culture of *Spolia*," 163, whose terminology I am using here.

between the emperor buried in the company of twelve apostles and his divine “friend” (*comes*) Christ.¹²³

Jewish apocalyptic narrative recognizes this aesthetic of imperial renewal and transforms it from an ideological *trope* into a symbolic vision of the empire as an ancient statue that is impregnated by the Satan and gives birth to a two-headed mutant. Now the story reads as a sophisticated critique of the imperial master narrative. The programmatic carving of new heads into old statues’ bodies is doomed to fail. Rejuvenation has brought about a Frankenstein’s monster-like creature. Instead of the heroic emperors of the past on the Arch of Constantine in Rome, or the youthful statue of Constantine-Apollo in Constantinople, Jewish apocalyptic tradition personifies the imperial rebirth through the abnormal monstrosity of the world tyrant Armilos: an unnatural offspring of an unnatural union.

The birth of monsters was a standard theme of Byzantine chronicles. Theophylact provides a series of such reports. Every time the event is recorded, it is unambiguously qualified as a bad omen either for the emperor and the empire or for the city in which it occurred. On one such occasion Theophylact mentions two boys, one of whom was born with four legs, and the other with two heads. The birth of these “monsters” was interpreted as being a bad omen for the cities in which it happened. Both boys were shown to the emperor Maurice and then killed.¹²⁴ Another time, when the emperor was leading troops on campaign, he himself witnessed the birth of a “monster.” The latter lacked both eyes and hands, but had a fish tail growing from the rib. Along with other bad omens, the encounter dispirited the emperor and was taken by him to foreshadow disasters in the future.¹²⁵ In other words, when read through Byzantine cultural lenses, the birth of the monster by the marble statue meant, among other things, a sign of doom and a bad omen for the

¹²³ On the statue of Constantine, see literature cited earlier in this chapter. On the Church of the Apostles, see Elsner, “Culture of *Spolia*,” 157–62 and 177; Mango, “Constantine’s Mausoleum and the Translation of Relics”; Cameron and Hall, *Eusebius*, 337–39; Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, 138, n. 43, contains a helpful review of earlier literature.

¹²⁴ Theophylact, *History* 6.11.1–2. The birth of a two-headed child was also a theme in rabbinic *aggadah*. There, however, it did not carry the same ominous connotations as it occasionally did in Roman and Byzantine literature. The two-headed baby was rather seen as a curiosity and a potential halakhic problem. See Sperber, *Magic and Folklore*, 13–14.

¹²⁵ Theophylact, *History* 6.1.5–2.2.

empire. It was a warning that all was not going well in the *basileia*. Something was abnormal. Women, who instead of giving birth to healthy children produced “monsters,” reflected the inner sickness of the empire. By depicting the last Roman emperor as a two-headed creature, Jewish apocalyptic tradition drew upon the established cultural vocabulary of its day. The gloomy repercussions of having a two-headed emperor would have been fairly clear to any Byzantine reader.¹²⁶

As a whole, Jewish authors use images of cultural ambiguity embedded in Byzantine literature to express their own views of the monstrous abnormality of the Christian empire. What in Byzantine texts constituted a perennial anxiety about cultural integrity and historical continuity within the civilization provided a form of expression for the Jewish ontological critique of the empire itself. The choice of an ancient statue was very much in line with the Byzantines’ own cultural mythology and their view of ancient statuary as a source of cultural uncertainty and the portent of Byzantium’s eventual fall. Jewish apocalyptic narrative picked up on the profound duality of Byzantine Christian civilization that constantly tried to negotiate between its two bedrock components: classical culture and Christianity. The narrative also correctly identified the profound anxiety resulting from this duality and turned it into a symbolic image of Byzantine civilization as a whole. What happened with Byzantium, according to Jewish narrators, was an unnatural union between the marble statue of a beautiful virgin and a demonic spirit that impregnated it with a monstrous offspring. The cultural dilemmas, anxieties, and inconsistencies of Byzantine civilization are the direct result of the abnormality and perversity of such a union.

We can now revisit the identification of the statue with the Theotokos. I believe that the allusion to the Theotokos is clearly part of the complex web of allusions and symbolic meanings present in this narrative. According to the latter, what Christians understand to be the mother of the Messiah is in fact a marble statue inhabited by demons. The city of Rome/Constantinople symbolically identified with her is not the holy

¹²⁶ The view that the birth of monsters was the result of the inner sickness of society being reflected in the sickness of nature was an old Roman concept. See, for example, Lucan, *Pharsalia* 1.562–63, 589–91; Livy, 41.21.12; Ammianus Marcellinus, *History* 19.12.19. For religious and political context, see Brent, *The Imperial Cult*, 19–59. There could be other, more symbolic, interpretations of such births, however. Cf. Procopius, *History of the Wars*, 8.14.39–40.

heart of the sacred empire but a product of the abnormal and ultimately failed attempt at mating a dead stone with a demonic spirit. The Christian Roman Empire, its capital city, and its supernatural patron are a ghostly mockery of the true sanctity to be revealed through Jerusalem, its supernatural patron, and ultimately the messianic kingdom. The true mother of the Messiah is Hephzibah, and the true imperial capital city is Jerusalem, protected by her. Far from discarding the validity of the basic concept of the sacred empire, Jewish apocalyptic narratives interpret it as pointing to the Jewish messianic kingdom that succeeds and fulfills the mission of its dysfunctional prototype, the Byzantine Empire.

CONCLUSIONS

Sacred empire was a highly ambivalent concept. In the Christian imagination of Late Antiquity, the holy empire created by Constantine had its shadowy double in the unholy empire that the Antichrist was expected to establish before the last days. The universal rule of the Antichrist was often modeled not only on the universal rule of Christ, but also on that of Christ's earthly alter ego, the Roman Emperor. The ambivalence of the emperor's power and religious status readily offered itself to the creation of saintly Constantine's counter-figure, the imperial Antichrist, whose imagined attributes were more or less an inversion of those of an ideal Christian ruler. As a matter of course, the Antichrist was expected to be Jewish. In the words of David Olster, "the transition from the Roman Empire to the 'Jewish' empire is an important consequence of the last emperor motif in Byzantine apocalypses."¹²⁷ In the Christian imagination, the unholy antipode of the Christian Roman Empire would be established in the land of Israel and centered on the rebuilt Temple in which Antichrist would be worshipped as God in accordance with the prophecy of 2 Thessalonians 2:4.

In their everyday experience, Byzantine Jews lived through the reality of what Byzantine Christians imagined to be an apocalyptic nightmare. For the Jews, the rule of Armilos did not have to be fantasized, for it was ever present in the form of the Christian Emperor's rule. The holy empire of Jewish imagination was a thing of the future, whereas their

¹²⁷ Olster, "Byzantine Apocalypses," 67–68.

present was dominated by the evil kingdom that turned to *minut*. In their eschatological fantasies, however, Jews fully embraced the universe of imperial symbolism and power relationships established by Christian Rome. What they dreamed of was the restoration of the *true* holy empire, the Davidic kingdom, which would fully realize the imperial promise once made to David and then imperfectly applied by world kingdoms throughout history. The restored empire of King David established by the New David, the Messiah, was expected to achieve renewal on two levels. First, the Davidic kingdom itself would be renewed and restored to its proper place as the ultimate universal power. Second, the empire of Rome, the last imperfect and abortive image of the perfect prototype, would be swept away and replaced by the true holy empire of Israel's messianic kingdom. In all these speculations, the imperial present with its essential attributes and symbols was projected both backward, to the Davidic past, and forward, to the Davidic future. The epistemological value of sacred imperialism in Jewish thinking in Late Antiquity remained enormous.



King Messiah

IN HIS CLASSICAL STUDY OF BYZANTINE IMPERIAL ART, ANDRÉ Grabar has made an argument about the impact of imperial representational techniques on Christian images from the fourth century onward.¹ Among other examples, Grabar singles out images of the majestically enthroned Christ which share multiple artistic elements with contemporaneous images of frontally enthroned emperors. The enthroned figure of the emperor was a common motif in Late Roman and Byzantine art. It was designed to convey the ideas of motionless serenity and eternal grandeur. The enthroned emperor was an ageless, haloed figure exercising universal dominion.² Artistic representations of the imperial Christ and Christlike emperors were part of a broader trend within the religio-political discourse of Late Antiquity that assimilated the imperial office to a divine prototype. As a result, it was not an individual emperor who was divinized or rendered Christlike, but rather the imperial office itself that deified *by participation* those persons who happened to hold it at any given moment.

In the text that follows I shall argue that at least some late antique and Byzantine Jewish texts imagine the office of the Messiah in a similar way. I have noted in the previous chapter that it was not so much the personality of the Messiah as his association with and assimilation to the

¹ See Grabar, *L'empereur dans l'art byzantin*, 189–95. For an elaborate critique of Grabar's approach to "emperor mystique," see Mathews, *Clash of Gods*, 3–22. Cf., however, the review of Mathews by Peter Brown in *Art Bulletin* 77 (1995), 499–502.

² See Grabar, *L'empereur dans l'art byzantin*, 196–200; MacCormack, *Art and Ceremony*, 188–92, and 214–21; Elsner, *Imperial Rome*, 82–87. On the imperial halo, its Hellenistic origins and meaning, see Alföldi, "Insignien und Tracht," 139–45; Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, 78–86.

Davidic archetype (or the Davidic office) that were emphasized in Jewish messianic speculations of the time. In this chapter I shall draw further parallels between the office of the Messiah and the office of the emperor. Functionally both of them, in my opinion, reflected the same type of religio-political theory that emphasized the icon-like properties of earthly kingship and its exercise of power by participation in the divine archetype of universal rule. It has to be noted once again that the messianic and eschatological speculations of late antique Judaism were diverse and that the arrival of the autocratic Messiah was certainly not the only possible eschatological scenario.³ The belief in the Messiah's imperial rule, however, did constitute an important element in late antique and early medieval Jewish literature, and so it is to this belief that we shall now turn.

MESSIAH IN THE TEMPLE

In the 1984–85 issue of *Tarbiz*, Ezra Fleisher published what he believed was a *piyyut* composed by the famous seventh-century *payytan* Eliezer ha-Qallir in the wake of the Persian capture of Jerusalem in 614 and the Emperor Heraclius' subsequent return of the city in 628.⁴ The publication was based on two separate manuscripts from Cairo Genizah. According to Fleisher, these two manuscripts were two parts of a single composition that addressed political and military upheavals in Palestine of the early seventh century and, specifically, the events of the Persian conquest of Palestine in 614. The author of the poem viewed these events as precursors to the eschatological redemption of Israel and the beginning of the messianic era. The *piyyut* weaves together history and literary *topoi* of Jewish eschatology to create a comprehensive and colorful picture of the “pangs of the Messiah,” of which the author of the *piyyut* apparently considered himself a contemporary.

Fleisher's theory was later revised by Joseph Yahalom, who dated one of the two original *piyyutim* discovered in the Genizah (the first half of

³ As were rabbinic constructs of ideal kingship. See, most recently, Yair Lorberbaum, *Subordinated King. Kingship in Classical Jewish Literature* (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2008) (in Hebrew). Directly relevant to my argument is Lorberbaum's discussion of the elements of “royal theology” in rabbinic literature.

⁴ See Fleischer, “Solving the Qilliri Riddle,” 383–427.

Fleisher's hypothetical *piyyut* starting with the words (העת לגעור) to the period between the Persian and Muslim conquests of Jerusalem, and the other one (the second half of Fleisher's *piyyut* starting with the words (ולא לעד תעזבי) to the period after the Muslim conquest of Palestine.⁵ It is with the concluding section of that second half of Fleisher's *piyyut* that I shall begin my discussion.

The concluding section of the second *piyyut* describes the restored kingdom of Israel. Each line of the description ends with the word 'olam used interchangeably in its two basic meanings that designate eternity and universality. The first fourteen lines of the description detail the relationship between God and Israel by stressing the ontological correspondence between the eternity/universality of God and the eternity/universality of Israel. Then the *piyyut*'s focus shifts from Israel to Israel's messianic ruler. The final lines portray God and the Davidic Messiah ruling the redeemed universe in perfect agreement with each other:

And the Lord will come and reign forever,
 And the king will reign, may his name endure forever,
 And he will rule over the entire world,
 From eternity to eternity,
 [David shall be the prince forever],
 And his throne will be established [forever],
 [In the Te]mple built forever,
 [From before] time.⁶

Direct quotations from or allusions to the Hebrew Bible constitute a large segment of this text. In their original biblical setting, these verses apply either to God or to the king of Israel. Although the *piyyut* preserves in some instances the original subject of a verse, in other cases it changes the subject by applying verses originally intended to describe the kingship of God to the kingship of the messianic king of Israel. Thus the phrase "may his name endure forever" is a quotation from Psalm 72:17, where it describes Israel's ideal ruler, just as it does in the *piyyut*, but the statement that the king will rule "from eternity to eternity," which follows

⁵ Fleischer, 412, line 1, and 418, line 113, respectively. See J. Yahalom, "The Transition of Kingdoms," 6, n. 21.

⁶ Fleischer, 426, lines 268–75. The translation is mine. Bracketed words are reconstructions proposed by Fleischer on the basis of parallel manuscript readings.

immediately afterward, comes from Psalm 106:48, where it describes the universal rule of God. In the *piyyut*, the verse is used to underscore the universality of the Messiah's kingship. A subsequent reference to David probably draws on Ezekiel 37:25, in which the power of the messianic ruler of Israel is described. The next line probably draws on God's promise to David about Solomon's future reign in 1 Chronicles 17:12 ("He shall build a house for me, and I will establish his throne forever") and in 1 Chronicles 17:14 ("I will confirm him in my house and in my kingdom forever, and his throne shall be established forever").⁷ Whereas the original intent of this promise was to emphasize the intimate relationship between monarchy and the Temple, the Davidic ruler and God, but at the same time to preserve a distinction between the two, the *piyyut* interprets the promise in the sense that the Davidic throne will be established forever *inside* the Temple. As a result, the two centers of power in 1 Chronicles that were ontologically related but institutionally distinct merge together in the *piyyut*'s vision of Israel's eschatological future.

The *piyyut* thus exhibits a fairly consistent pattern of applying biblical verses originally intended to describe the universal rule of God to the universal rule of the Davidic Messiah. As a result, the personalities of God and God's earthly viceroy, the Messiah, are no longer entirely distinguishable from one another. The Messiah rules by participating in God's universal rule, so that biblical verses composed to describe divine suzerainty can be applied to the Messiah's suzerainty as well. In the *piyyut*'s vision, the eschatological kingdom of Israel is shaped by the harmonious synergy of human and divine wills. Whereas on the level of literary form this synergy is expressed through the intentional confusion of subject in biblical quotations, on the level of content the *piyyut* places the Messiah's throne inside the eschatological Temple of Jerusalem. Just like the confusion of subject, the location of the Messiah's enthronement in the Temple effectively blurs the distinction between human and divine authority. Now the eschatological Temple functions as a throne chamber of the royal palace: the area from which the joint will of God and the Davidic king radiates across the universe.

⁷ Fleischer's commentary, 426, ad loc, suggests parallel with Psalm 93:2. In my opinion, however, 1 Chronicles 17:12 and 14 provide a much closer parallel to the *piyyut*'s text.

The notion that the royal seat of the Davidic Messiah will be established in the Temple is not unique to the *piyyut*. Another Byzantine Jewish text, *'Otot ha-Mashiah*, states that after the Davidic Messiah is revealed, he “will come to Jerusalem, climb the steps of the Temple ruins, and take his seat there.”⁸ In this case, the throne of the Messiah is established among the ruins of the historical Temple in Jerusalem, not inside the eschatological Temple “established forever from eternity,” but the overall effect remains the same: The Temple (or the Temple site) serves as the spot from which the Davidic Messiah projects his power. Finally, the early fourth-century *Selections of Prophecies* by Eusebius mentions an alleged Jewish interpretation of Psalm 2:6: “I have set my king on Zion, my holy mountain.” According to this interpretation, the verse applies to the earthly kingdom of the Messiah, who will establish his seat on Mount Zion (the Temple Mount?) in Jerusalem. Eusebius rejects this interpretation in favor of an allegorical reading of the Psalm as a reference to the heavenly king and heavenly kingdom.⁹ Assuming that Eusebius’ information reflects actual Jewish tradition and not a Christian hermeneutical construct, one can trace the belief in the Messiah’s enthronement on the Temple Mount to the late third and early fourth centuries at the latest. In all these texts, the Temple is consistently depicted as the heart of Israel’s eschatological kingdom, in which religious functions are interwoven with political ones.

At first glance, this view of the Temple as the location of the Messiah’s royal seat seems to revive the biblical doctrine of sacred kingship with its emphasis on the shared rule of God and Davidic king. Pre-exilic Psalm 2:4–6, in which God, enthroned in heaven, promises to install the king on “Zion, my holy mountain,” and Psalm 110, with its promise to seat the king at God’s right hand and reference to the king as “a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek,” come closest to the *piyyut*’s vision of the enthroned Messiah. In their original context, these and other

⁸ Even Shemuel, *Midreshe Geulah*, 322, line 136.

⁹ Eusebius, *Eclogae propheticae* 2:2 (PG 22. 1093). Eusebius’ reference looks suspiciously close to the Christian belief in a Jewish Antichrist who was expected by some persons to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem and be worshipped there as God. See Bousset, *The Antichrist Legend*, 160–66; Jenks, *The Origins and Early Development of the Antichrist Myth*, 69–72; Rauh, *Das Bild des Antichrist*, 55–71; Bernard McGinn, *Antichrist*, 41–45, 58–63, 70–71, and 74. On the medieval application of this theme, see also Emmerson, *Antichrist in the Middle Ages*, 90–95.

related Psalms were probably intended to underscore the intimacy of the king's relationship with God and possibly even the king's quasi-divine status.¹⁰ In the early Second Temple period, the Chronicles would refer to Solomon as chosen by God "to sit upon the throne of the kingdom of the Lord over Israel" (1 Chronicles 28:5) or simply "on the throne of the Lord, succeeding his father David as king" (1 Chronicles 29:23).¹¹ Although not directly referenced in the *piyyut*, these passages likely provided a literary and ideological context which helped shape the *piyyut*'s vision of Israel's eschatological future. In contrast, unlike late Roman and Byzantine texts reviewed earlier in this chapter, biblical texts tended to separate the king's palace and God's Temple as distinct, although ideologically related, entities rather than to confuse the two. The Bible's vision of sacred kingship imagined the house of God and the house of David (both in the sense of royal palace and royal dynasty) established side by side in mutually beneficial symbiosis. An explicit transfer of David's throne to the Temple was fairly novel for Judaism and reflected not merely revival, but new and creative interpretation of the biblical paradigm.

In the Second Temple period, the most immediate parallel to the Messiah's enthronement inside the Temple comes from a diverse group of writings which describe the Messiah's enthronement in heaven. In some of these writings the Messiah, in the words of John J. Collins, "is a heavenly preexistent figure, rather than an exalted human king."¹² Such is the Messiah of the *Similitudes of Enoch* who is expected to sit on and dispense justice from the throne of glory.¹³ In other instances, Second Temple texts envision the heavenly ascent of a human figure, either Moses in the *Exagoge* of Ezekiel the Tragedian or an anonymous personage of 4Q491 11, culminating in that person's heavenly enthronement.¹⁴

In none of the above cases, however, is the Messiah's enthronement localized inside the earthly Temple. The Messiah's throne in Second Temple writings is almost always a heavenly one, and the Messiah sitting on it is either a heavenly being or a transformed human being. In contrast,

¹⁰ See Collins, *The Scepter and the Star*, 142, and literature cited there. For the Psalm's literary and ideological context, cf. Collins, 22–23.

¹¹ Cf. also 2 Chronicles 9:8: "Blessed be the Lord your God, who has delighted in you and set you on his throne as king for the Lord your God."

¹² Collins, *The Scepter and the Star*, 143.

¹³ See 1 *En.* 45:3; 47:3; 51:3; 55:4; 60:2; 61:8; 62:2, 3, 5; 69:27, 29.

¹⁴ On these and other texts, see Collins, *The Scepter and the Star*, 136–53.

the Messiah's throne in Byzantine texts is an earthly counterpart of the heavenly throne. Instead of being a quasi-divine figure ruling from the heavenly throne, as in the *Similitudes*, or a deified man, as in the *Exagoge* and 4Q491, the Byzantine Messiah is a human king who takes possession of the heavenly throne's earthly icon set up in the restored Temple. This difference is, in my opinion, indicative of the different cultural *milieux* in which Second Temple and Byzantine Jewish texts were composed.

MESSIAH AND IMPERIAL COURT RITUALS

In late Roman and Byzantine culture the difference between the imperial palace and God's church remained intentionally blurred, both conceptually and architecturally. The similarity between the ways in which earthly and heavenly courts were depicted reflected a broader ideology that saw imperial and divine authorities as mutually reflective and synergistic. The enthroned emperor served as the earthly image ("icon") of the enthroned God, whereas God served as the ultimate prototype of the enthroned emperor. Just as an icon partook in the qualities of its prototype, so, too, did the enthroned emperor partake in the divine qualities.¹⁵

In fourth-century panegyrics, the palace itself was often identified as the holy grounds where the emperors' "sacred countenances" were adored by those persons allowed "within the innermost sanctuary."¹⁶ Addressing Constantine in the prologue to his Tricennial Oration, Eusebius speaks of the court as "the sacred precincts," "the sanctuary of the holy palace, that innermost, most inaccessible of places" modeled after the heavenly court, and compares the right of access to the imperial

¹⁵ On the relationship between image and its prototype in Byzantine art and liturgy, see Kitzinger, "The Cult of Images," 137–50; Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 47–77; Zhivov, "‘Mistagogiya’ Maksima Ispovednika i Razvitie Vizantiyskoi Teorii Obraza," 108–27, esp. 115–21. On related themes in Jewish art and literature, cf. Smith, "The Image of God," 473–512, esp. 474–81 and 507–12.

¹⁶ See *PL* 11.11.1–3, (on Maximian). Cf. 2.21.1 (on Theodosius I). References to the "sacred palace" become standard in later literature. See, for example, Corippus, *In laud. Iust.*, II, 284. On the sacred nature of the imperial palace, see also Alföldi, "Die Ausgestaltung des monarchischen Zeremoniells am römischen Kaiserhofe," 29–38, esp. 31–33; "Insignien und Tracht," 124–34; Treitinger, *Oströmische Kaiser- und Reichsidee*, 50–52; MacCormack, *Art and Ceremony*, 25–26, and 191; Kolb, *Herrscherideologie*, 41–44. On Iranian and earlier Roman parallels, see L'Orange, *Studies on the Iconography of Cosmic Kingship in the Ancient World*, 18–34.

palace to the right of access to the heavenly gates.¹⁷ In Corippus' description of the official reception given to the Avar embassy by Justin II, the imperial court acquires attributes of the heavenly court, whereas Justin, who sits on the canopied throne symbolizing the heavenly vault, takes on qualities of the earthly icon of the divine ruler.¹⁸

This concept of imperial power found its architectural expression in the *Chrysotriklinos*, the "Golden Chamber," a new throne room in the imperial palace, the building of which was initiated by Justin II and which was intended to serve as a prime ceremonial location inside the palace complex. In the words of Averil Cameron, the chamber's "whole conception and décor expressed the idea of the emperor in his throne-room as a microcosm of God in heaven." As a result the room was "modeled not on previous palace architecture, but on ecclesiastical; its closest architectural parallels are churches and its pictorial decoration consisted of scenes from the life of Christ."¹⁹ The influence went both ways, however; whereas the *Chrysotriklinos* was modeled on centrally planned cathedral buildings, the fourth-century basilicas of Constantinian churches were likely modeled on palatial reception halls and throne chambers. There, once again, shared architectural styles conveyed the ideology of joint rule exercised by Christ and his earthly *comes*, the emperor. Ecclesiastical and palatial spaces absorbed each other through architectural *mimesis* and created a single sacred space that existed in multiple manifestations. The mirror-like semblance of imperial churches and imperial palaces derived from and epitomized the mirror-like semblance of the two powers that ruled the empire.²⁰

Just as the figures of the enthroned emperor and Christ replicated each other, so, too, did their thrones. The image of Christ's throne, often shown unoccupied and carrying the symbols of Christ's power, such as

¹⁷ Eusebius, *Laud. Const.*, prologue, 3–5, and 2.5. For a similar comparison by pagan panegyrics, see *PL* 12.16.5. On Eusebius' terminology and its implications, see Straub, "Constantine as ΚΟΙΝΟΣ ΕΠΙΣΚΟΠΟΣ," 49–50, and 53–54.

¹⁸ Corippus, *In laud. Iust.*, III, 151–230. See Cameron's commentary on pp. 185–90, and, more recently, Carile, "Imperial Palaces and Heavenly Jerusalems," 97–101.

¹⁹ Cameron, "Images of Authority," 17. Cf. Krautheimer, *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture*, 75–78, 217–19, and 230–32; Lavin, "The House of the Lord," 15–24; Featherstone, "The Great Palace," 50–56.

²⁰ See Krautheimer, "The Constantinian Basilica," 117–40, and *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture*, 41–50; L'Orange, *Art Forms and Civic Life in the Late Roman Empire*, 70–85; Leeb, *Konstantin und Christus*, 71–86; Kolb, *Herrscherideologie*, 82–83.

the crown, the cross, or the book, had its parallel in the image of the unoccupied imperial throne carrying the attributes of imperial power. The latter was commonly used in Hellenistic and Roman iconography to symbolize the invisible presence of the emperor and to serve as the object of veneration in place of the emperor, just as Christ's throne served to symbolize the invisible presence of its occupant.²¹

Public appearances of the emperor were carefully staged to place the emperor in a position of absolute and timeless power by co-joining his body and his personality with those of god(s). In his famous description of the emperor Constantius' entry into Rome in 357, Ammianus Marcellinus emphasized the motionless posture of the triumphant emperor, who resembled "a graven image of a man" (*tamquam figmentum hominis*) detached from and unaffected by what was happening around him. Constantius' calm serenity placed him not only above his human subjects but seemingly above time itself, just like the *piyyut*'s Messiah, who was expected "to rule over the entire world, from eternity to eternity."²² Each ruler functioned as an icon projecting the presence and qualities of its divine prototype onto the world. In a brief but highly suggestive statement attributed to him by *midrash Genesis Rabbah*, R. Judan observes in connection with the story of rebellion against David in 2 Samuel 20:1–22 that "whoever is insolent toward a king is as if he were insolent toward the Shechinah."²³ Unless it is purely metaphorical, R. Judan's comparison envisions the Davidic royal office as an earthly icon of God's presence, in a way similar to that in which the imperial office was portrayed by Ammianus in his description of the triumphant Constantius. Both descriptions stem from the same *milieu* of late Roman political theology and foreshadow a somewhat later portrayal of the Davidic Messiah by the *piyyut*.

The Messiah's enthronement inside the Temple served the same function and conveyed the same message as the emperor's enthronement

²¹ See Alföldi, "Insignien und Tracht," 134–39; Grabar, *L'empereur dans l'art byzantine*, 199–200, and 214–16.

²² Ammianus Marcellinus, *History* 16.10.9–12. On this passage, see MacCormack, *Art and Ceremony*, 39–45, and Matthews, *The Roman Empire of Ammianus*, 11, 231–34. For other examples, see Kolb, *Herrscherideologie*, 121–22. On eternity and timelessness as characteristics of imperial rule, see Treitinger, *Oströmische Kaiser- und Reichsidee*, 122, n. 372; Kolb, 122–25.

²³ *Gen. R.* 94:9 (Theodor and Albeck, 1183).

inside the palace: In both instances, the personality of the ruler was co-joined with the personality of his Creator to the effect that the two served to project joint presence and joint action that was both human and divine. The Temple's setting in the *piyyut* resembles that of the Constantinian palace in which Eusebius delivered his Tricennial Oration:

[The Oration] we delivered a little later, having made the journey to the city named after the Emperor, in the Emperor's own hearing, thus having a second opportunity to praise God, the universal Emperor, in the imperial palace. The friend of God, while he listened to it, was like a man overjoyed.²⁴

Eusebius intentionally blurs the subjects here: The oration is delivered in the city named after the emperor (Constantinople) in the imperial palace in the presence of the emperor. The oration is also delivered in the presence of God, who, as the universal Emperor, is praised in the palace of his earthly "friend" (*comes*) and coruler. The blurred distinction between the Temple and the palace evident in the *piyyut* and other contemporaneous Jewish texts just mentioned corresponds to the concept of the palace as "the innermost sanctuary" evident in Late Roman and Byzantine accounts. In both instances the disappearance of boundaries between the two institutions highlights the notion of joint rule exercised by God and God's representative on earth: the emperor or the Messiah.

We can now revisit the tradition of the Messiah's enthronement in the Temple and approach it from the standpoint of Byzantine court ceremony. As noted by Kantorowicz, the depiction of the enthroned emperor in Byzantine art served to establish a visible and iconic relationship between the emperor and God:

The Pantokrator in Heaven and the Autokrator on Earth face one another; they reflect each other; they inter-penetrate each other, and finally become transparent with one visible only through the other, as though the monarch and his *σύνθρονος θεός* were interchangeable figures in the seat of the throne.²⁵

²⁴ V. Const. 4.46. The translation is from Cameron and Stuart, *Eusebius: Life of Constantine*, 171.

²⁵ Kantorowicz, "Ivories and Litanies," 73.

It is worth recalling here that, according to the tenth-century treatise *De Cerimoniis* by Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, the Byzantine emperor quite literally shared his throne with Christ.²⁶ Upon entering the *Chrysotriklinos*, a throne room of the imperial palace, on ordinary days, the emperor would not sit on the main throne located in the center of the chamber's apse but on a golden chair placed at the throne's left side. The main throne was left vacant for the invisible presence of Christ. Only on special occasions would the emperor, acting in his capacity as the earthly representation of Christ, sit on the main throne. The emperor's two thrones served as a ritualized enactment of what Kantorowicz has dubbed the "king's two bodies" in reference to the human and divine bodies of the king. By taking the seat on the central throne, the emperor quite literally stepped into the body of Christ, but only temporarily and by participation. On regular days the two of them sat side by side as the universal king and his human viceroy. It is unclear how old this custom was by the time Constantine described it, yet it is possible that when the *Chrysotriklinos* was built by Justin II in the late sixth century it already featured an image of an enthroned Christ depicted in the apse right above the emperor's throne.²⁷ Such an arrangement of ceremonial space visually underscored the emperor's subordination to Christ but also his status as Christ's earthly coruler and vicar. In general, Byzantine references to throne sharing between the emperor and God appear to be Christian versions of an older Hellenistic belief that gods and earthly rulers could share a temple and a throne, but they also reflected a newly found interest in the concept of the ruling emperor as an icon of God's kingship.²⁸

In a suggestive article entitled "Trônes pour un empereur," Gilbert Dagron argues that the act of the emperor's enthronement served to convey different messages in different court settings.²⁹ Dagron distinguishes among three settings in particular: that of the emperor's *kathisma* in the Hippodrome, that of the great reception hall of Magnaura, and that of the *Chrysotriklinos*. The emperor's enthronement in each of these locales

²⁶ Const. Porph., *De Cer.*, 2.1 (Reiske, vol. 1, 521). On this ritual, see Dagron, "Trônes pour un empereur," 191–201, esp. 193–95; Featherstone, "The Great Palace," 54–56.

²⁷ See Cameron, "Images of Authority," 17; Kitzinger, "The Cult of Images," 126–28; Lavin, "The House of the Lord," 22–23. The main source on the image of Christ is a ninth-century epigram in *Greek Anthology*, I, 106.

²⁸ See Nock, "Σύνναος Θεός," 1–62.

²⁹ Dagron, "Trônes pour un empereur," 184–203.

carried a different meaning. Enthronement in the *kathisma* allowed the emperor's presence to be publicly displayed to his subjects and thus had the quality of an epiphany complete with the solar symbolism of the emperor's appearance. When the emperor sat on the famous Solomon's throne in the Magnaura during state receptions of foreign embassies and official meetings with state dignitaries, the enthronement was designed to project a sense of absolute and unlimited power, the emperor's universal autocracy. Finally, the religious symbolism of an emperor's enthronements in the *Chrysotriklinos* served to present the emperor as Christ's earthly agent who rules by using powers delegated to him by God and who literally shares his throne with Christ. Dagron's categories may be a little too neat. In reality, the meanings conveyed by different enthronements probably overlapped, even though in some settings some meanings were articulated more than were others. The Messiah's enthronement in the Temple seems to combine all three of Dagron's categories within one programmatic statement on the nature of the Messiah's rule.

The Messiah's status as God's eschatological coruler would reenact Byzantine court rituals and ultimately reflect the Byzantine ideal of the joint rule of God and the emperor. According to the *piyyut*, the establishment of God's universal rule and the enthronement of the Davidic Messiah inside the Temple constitute two parts of the same process. One would expect that the divine rule should radiate from the Temple in Jerusalem, and indeed it does, albeit mediated by the Messiah's royal power. The two act in perfect synergy. The Messiah's location in the Temple indicates that his power is there to serve as an active image and projection of God's power and will. He participates in God's glory, partakes of heavenly strength, and acts with God's will. He is the "friend" of God very much after the image applied to Constantine by Eusebius. The author of the *piyyut* joins countless other Byzantine thinkers in claiming for God the ultimate sovereignty over the empire, and thus translating the latter from the plain of history to the plain of timeless eternity.³⁰

A THRONE IN JERUSALEM

To further investigate the Byzantine background of the enthronement scene in the *piyyut*, it is necessary to revisit another seventh-century

³⁰ See Anastos, "Political Theory," 29–34.

composition, the Alexander Legend, discussed earlier in this book in connection with the imperial eschatology of Heraclius' reign. The Legend presents Alexander the Great as an archetypal ruler and the idealized founder of the Roman Empire. The latter, according to the Legend, is destined to "last and rule to the end of times," and, eventually, "deliver the kingdom of the earth to Christ, who is to come." When, at the beginning of his journey to the ends of the world, Alexander prays to God and asks for help in establishing a world empire, he dedicates this empire to God. Alexander also promises that, if the Messiah does not come during his lifetime, then after his death his royal throne of silver with his crown hung upon it will be placed in Jerusalem as a seat for Christ:

And if he [the Messiah] does not come in my days, when I have gone and conquered kings and seized their lands, I will carry this throne, which is a seat of silver upon which I sit, and will place it in Jerusalem, that when the Messiah comes from heaven, He may sit upon my royal throne, for his kingdom lasts forever . . . And whether I die in one of the [other] regions of the world, or here in Alexandria, my royal crown shall be taken and hung upon that seat which I have given to the Messiah. And the crown of every king who dies in Alexandria shall be taken and hung upon that silver seat which I give to the Messiah.³¹

Indeed, according to the Legend, when Alexander died, "he gave his royal throne of silver to be in Jerusalem."³² Alexander's throne thus serves as a tangible symbol of continuity between Roman and messianic imperialism. No disruption between the two is envisioned. At the dawn of the messianic era, the attributes of Roman imperial power, the throne and the crown, will pass on to the Messiah, when the latter comes from heaven to assume the imperial office.

Composed most likely some time between the victory of Heraclius over the Persians and the Muslim conquest of the Byzantine Middle East, the Legend is an early contemporary of the *piyyut*. In both compositions the throne serves as the sign of synergy between imperial and divine reigns accomplished through the messianic triumph. According to both scenarios, this triumph is realized in Jerusalem. There are also differences. Whereas the Legend's "seat of silver" and the crown are imperial insignia

³¹ Budge, 257–58 (text), 146–47 (trans.).

³² Budge, 275 (text), 158 (trans.). On the symbolism of an empty throne in Roman and Byzantine art, see earlier in this chapter.

later assumed by the heavenly Messiah, in the *piyyut* the order is reversed. The Davidic Messiah will sit on the throne established in the Temple and presumably belonging to God. In other words, God's universal rule in the Legend is institutionalized through the offices of imperial power, whereas in the *piyyut* the Messiah's rule is institutionalized through the Temple and God's cosmic kingship.

Both texts represent the seventh-century eschatological application of the σύνθρονος θεός theme discussed earlier in this chapter. They share the same discourse that emphasizes the unity of purpose between earthly imperialism and heavenly universalism and makes this unity tangibly manifest through the image of a throne, either Alexander's imperial throne occupied by divine Christ, or God's throne in the Temple occupied by the Davidic Messiah.

DAVID AND SOLOMON ON GOD'S THRONE

The notion of an Israelite king, either historical or eschatological, using an earthly replica of the divine throne was a fairly common theme in late antique and Byzantine Jewish literature. Thus the throne of Solomon was believed to be constructed after the pattern of the divine throne. According to a midrashic account of Solomon's throne, God made Solomon rule over both earthly and heavenly beings, by making Solomon's earthly throne an exact replica of God's own throne of glory placed among heavenly beings (ועשה לו כסא בתחתונים דמות כסא הכבוד אשר בעליונים).³³ In this context the term *demut kisse ha-kavod* ("image of the throne of glory"), used to describe the relationship between Solomon's throne and its heavenly prototype, may be analogous to the Greek *eikon* that describes the relationship between the emperor's throne and the throne of God. The implications are that the throne of the earthly ruler does not merely resemble that of the Heavenly King in outward appearance but also shares properties of the latter and translates these properties to the earthly setting.

The description of King Solomon's throne just quoted belongs to a cluster of traditions on the throne and the Hippodrome of King Solomon. The cluster itself is of uncertain date and provenance, may be medieval

³³ Jellinek, *Bet ha-Midrash*, vol. 5, 34.

as well as late antique, and so must be approached with caution.³⁴ The notion that King Solomon ruled, whether metaphorically or literally, from God's throne is relatively early, however. As noted earlier in text, this notion is explicitly and repeatedly articulated in the Books of Chronicles. In a *dictum* attested in *Sifre*, R. Judah used 1 Chronicles 29:23 ("Then Solomon sat on the throne of the Lord") to interpret Exodus 17:16 as a command to Israel to establish monarchy before finally destroying "the seed of Amalek."³⁵ The interpretation also seems to imply the fundamental unity of the king's and God's powers in securing the land of Israel and defeating Israel's enemies. As Lorberbaum has recently observed, R. Judah's *dictum* may very well reflect ancient Near Eastern, Hellenistic, and Roman "royal theology" with its attribution of divine or quasi-divine status to the king.³⁶ Still, one could also argue that this statement was more of a metaphor that portrayed an ideal Israelite king as a political and military agent of God's will but not necessarily as literally God's earthly co-regent. Given the brief nature of the *dictum* and its relatively narrow political application, complete certainty either way is impossible.

In the Palestinian Talmud's story of Solomon's temporary deposition from kingship, however, the mystical quality of Davidic royal office becomes unmistakable. In the story, God orders the king to step down from "my [i.e., God's] throne" (רַד מִכְסֵּאִי) and then sends an angel who takes the likeness of Solomon and sits on the throne in the king's stead (יֵרֵד מֶלֶאךָ וְנִדְמָה כְּדִמּוּת שְׁלֹמֹה וְהֶעֱמִידוּ מִכְסֵּאִי וּישָׁב תַּחְתָּיו).³⁷ In this narrative, Solomon's throne serves the same purpose as the emperor's throne placed in the *Chrysotriklinos* beneath the depiction of the enthroned Christ: Both settings embody the ideology of synergetic rule exercised jointly by God and God's earthly vicar, the emperor. In both cases the throne chamber constitutes liturgical space within which imperial office iconically represents and translates to earth God's universal kingship.

³⁴ See Jellinek, *Bet ha-Midrash*, vol. 5, 34–39. See Chapter 1 of the present work for secondary literature. A detailed and critical study of all available versions of this tradition is certainly a desideratum. At present it is unclear whether the tradition is medieval or late antique in origin.

³⁵ *Sifre Deut.* 67 (Finkelstein, 132). Cf. b. Sanh. 20b, which reports this tradition in the name of R. Yose.

³⁶ See Lorberbaum, *Subordinated King*, 57–66. Cf. Blidstein, "The Monarchic Imperative," 20.

³⁷ Y. Sanh. 2:6 (20c).

What is more important, the angel who takes on Solomon's appearance and rules in his stead and the enthroned Christ depicted in the *Chrysotriklinos'* apse reflect the same notion of the king as, in the words of Kantorowicz, a *gemina persona* or a "twinning being": "a fiction of a royal super-body conjoined in some mysterious way to the king's natural and individual body."³⁸ As further noticed by Kantorowicz, late Roman coinage, including the coinage of Constantine the Great, routinely depicts profiles of an emperor and his heavenly *comes* in such a way that the facial features of the latter are visibly assimilated to those of "his human-imperial double." The following observation may be equally well applied to Solomon and his substitute angel:

We recognize a gemination indicating that some sort of double-being was suggested – a human-divine duplication representing Constantine and *Sol invictus* as interchangeable magnitudes and displaying the ruler's human body which is mortal together with his concomitant super-body which, being a god, is immortal and divine.³⁹

Solomon's removal from the throne plays off this duality of the king's natural and mystical bodies, his body as a man and his body as a king. After being removed from the throne, Solomon's human body wanders around "synagogues and houses of study" being laughed at, taking beatings, and receiving alms, while his mystical body continues to rule. Therefore, when Solomon pronounces the famous, "I, Qohelet, was king over Israel in Jerusalem" (Ecclesiastes 1:12), his listeners respond: "The king sits in his basilica and you are saying, 'I am Qohelet.'" The point here may be more than just a comedy of errors and mistaken identities. Rather, Solomon's "body natural" (to use Kantorowicz's terminology again) is being told that it is literally not the king, whereas the real king, Solomon's angelic twin and/or his mystical body, continues to rule. The overall effect of the story is not unlike that noted by Kantorowicz in connection with the late medieval and Renaissance funerary custom of displaying a deceased monarch's body next to the effigy that portrayed the same monarch in the state of royal *Dignitas*, so that "the two bodies,

³⁸ See Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, 46, and in general, pp. 42–61, and 496–505.

³⁹ Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, 503–04.

unquestionably united in the living king, were visibly segregated on the king's demise."⁴⁰

Whereas midrashic narratives discussed so far claim to describe Israel's historical past, the so-called "David apocalypse" establishes the Davidic office within the realm of a timeless heavenly vision. This text describes a vision of R. Ishmael, during which he witnessed an elaborate liturgical performance carried out by King David accompanied by kings of Israel and Judah on the one hand and angelic beings on the other. The text appears as a distinct literary unit in multiple compositions including some manuscripts of *Hekhalot Rabbati*. In her detailed study of this document, Anna Maria Schwemer makes an attempt to place it within the Second Temple literary context.⁴¹ In my opinion, however, there are reasons to doubt such an early dating. A late Roman or Sasanian provenance is more likely. The main consideration here is the relatively late attestation of the text. There seem to be no traces of it in any early rabbinic compositions. Instead the text becomes quite popular in early medieval collections. Its provenance may thus be attributed to the early Byzantine period, along with the bulk of *Hekhalot* writings.⁴² Whether the "David apocalypse" originated in a late Roman or Sasanian cultural setting is unclear. Indeed, when it comes to court culture, the very distinction between the two may be artificial. As Matthew P. Canepa has recently argued, between the third and the seventh centuries A.D., the Roman and Sasanian elites developed a shared culture of rituals, symbols, and meanings that effectively transcended political boundaries between the two empires.⁴³ The "David apocalypse" borrows a great deal of its imagery from this trans-imperial court culture.

The relevant part of R. Ishmael's vision starts when he sees groups of ministering angels sitting and preparing garments of redemption, along with crowns of life and wine for the righteous.⁴⁴ R. Ishmael notices a

⁴⁰ Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, 423. See pp. 419–36, on funerary effigies.

⁴¹ See Schwemer, "Irdischer und himmlischer König," 309–59. Cf. Boustán, *From Martyr to Mystic*, 224, n. 81, and Schäfer, *Origins of Jewish Mysticism*, 257–58, for a more cautious assessment.

⁴² On *Hekhalot* literature as a "post-Rabbinic phenomenon," see Schäfer, *Hekhalot-Studien*, 289–95. I would like to thank Peter Schäfer for calling my to the possible Sasanian provenance of the "David apocalypse" to my attention.

⁴³ See Canepa, *The Two Eyes of the Earth*, esp. pp. 100–225.

⁴⁴ For a detailed analysis of this section, see Schwemer, "Irdischer und himmlischer König," 314–27. See also Boustán, *From Martyr to Mystic*, 224–25.

particularly richly adorned crown and inquires about its intended recipient. In response he learns that the crown is intended for King David. R. Ishmael then asks for permission to see the glory of King David and is allowed to stay to witness the arrival of David.⁴⁵ David's appearance is staged as a liturgical procession in which David appears as the head of "the kings of the house of David." The latter are introduced as characteristically nameless and faceless avatars of David, whose personalities are assimilated to that of the dynasty's founder. As it arrives, the procession is greeted by the entire heavenly host singing opening verses of Psalm 19, as well as the concluding verse from the Song at the Sea (Exodus 15:18). Although originally applied to God's universal and eternal kingship, in their present context these verses are appropriated to usher in the arrival of David and the kings of his house. All of the latter are wearing crowns, apparently the ones seen by R. Ishmael earlier in the vision, but the crown of King David stands out, with "the sun and the moon and the twelve signs of zodiac fixed in it" and its radiance spreading from one end of the world to the other. In another application of attributes traditionally associated with God to the king of Israel, David's crown is described by using astral and light imagery that in earlier rabbinic literature is used to describe the divine garment.⁴⁶

David's arrival culminates when he takes his place "on the throne which was prepared for him opposite the throne of his Creator."⁴⁷ The rest of the kings of the house of David sit down before him, and all the kings of Israel stand behind him. David immediately starts reciting "hymns and praises" to God. The recital is antiphonal with "Metatron and all of his *familia*," the holy beasts of the divine chariot, heaven, earth, and, finally, the kings of the house of David joining in. The recital consists of a series of biblical verses carefully woven together to convey an image of joy about God's universal and eternal kingship. In this case biblical royal imagery seems to be consistently applied to God, yet in light of earlier correspondence between God's kingship and the Davidic kingship, one may wonder if David becomes the indirect recipient of

⁴⁵ *Synopse*, § 124.

⁴⁶ *Synopse*, § 125. Cf. *Synopse*, § 105; *Gen. R.* 3:4 (Theodor and Albeck, 20).

⁴⁷ According to manuscript Budapest 238. Manuscript New York 8128 has a slightly different reading that involves scribal emendations, but its overall meaning remains the same.

praise as well. The praise concludes with the kings of the house of David reciting Zechariah 14:9, "The Lord will become king over all the earth. On that day the Lord will be one and His name one." The cosmic unity of God and the heavenly court finds its earthly icon in the unity of the Davidic dynasty gathered around its founder.⁴⁸

R. Ishmael's vision is thus centered on a series of ceremonial and liturgical performances that tie together the mundane and heavenly realms into one ontological entity. Two ceremonial acts in particular, the entry of King David and his entourage and David's subsequent enthronement, constitute the focal points for the rest of the vision. Both acts establish David and the kings of his house as human counterparts to God and God's angelic *familia*. As Philip S. Alexander has noted, the depiction of God in Hekhalot literature projects into heaven the setting of the late Roman and Byzantine imperial court portraying God as the heavenly *basileus* seated in sacred royal chambers on the throne behind the curtain and surrounded by angelic courtiers and by the *familia caelestis*.⁴⁹ The latter adore God in accordance with the conventions of Byzantine court ceremonial. The "David apocalypse" adds another dimension to this portrayal of the heavenly court by describing God's *familia caelestis* in relation to the court of the kings of Israel. At the moment of David's entry, the heavenly court is described as greeting the members of the earthly court, whereas David's enthronement explicitly serves as a mirror image of God's own enthronement. The narrative further develops the concept, attested elsewhere in rabbinic literature, that the earthly ruler shares in attributes and insignia of the divine power.⁵⁰ Wearing the radiant crown which is modeled on the luminous properties of the crown and garment of God and sitting on the throne which is set "opposite the throne of his Creator," David acts as God's human icon that shares in the powers of its original.

As noted by Schwemer, the belief in David's enthronement side by side with God is not unique to the "David apocalypse." B. Sanh. 38b attributes a version of this view to R. Aqiva.⁵¹ The latter interpreted the reference

⁴⁸ *Synopse*, § 126.

⁴⁹ Alexander, "The Family of Caesar and the Family of God," 276–97.

⁵⁰ See discussion later in this chapter.

⁵¹ The tradition also appears in b. Hag. 14a. See Schwemer, "Irdischer und himmlischer König," 321–22; Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven*, 47–49; Schäfer, *Die Geburt des Judentums*, 79–96. Both Schwemer and Segal attribute this tradition to the time of R. Aqiva (i.e., to

to multiple “thrones” to be established in heaven according to Daniel 7:9 as an indication that, in the eschatological future, two thrones would be set up: one for God and the other for David. The Talmud responds with a scathing critique of this interpretation, probably proving that the interpretation was popular enough to merit special debunking. There has been some debate as to whether R. Aqiva’s reference to David meant the Davidic Messiah or, as Maurice Casey puts it, “that the real historical David will rise from the dead and take part in the final judgment, sitting on one of the thrones.”⁵² Although the majority of scholars opted for a messianic interpretation, in my opinion, the alternative itself is misleading. As I have argued in the previous chapter, drawing on Goldberg’s analysis of the Messiah’s names in rabbinic writings, the future Messiah’s personality (just like those of “the kings of the house of David” in the “David apocalypse”) tended to be assimilated into that of King David. In the words of b. Sanh. 98b, he was expected to be “another David” (דוד אחר).

Other Jewish texts describe heavenly enthronement that explicitly involves the two figures of King David and the Davidic Messiah, but do so in a way that makes one figure almost an extension of the other. A Hekhalot midrash from the eleventh-century manuscript Sassoon 522 published by Peter Schäfer contains a reference to the thrones of “David the righteous” and the Messiah established next to the throne of the “King of kings, blessed be He.”⁵³ There the thrones of David and his eschatological descendant are explicitly distinguished, and yet the two figures appear to be interconnected. One thinks immediately of the reference to David and the Davidic Messiah as “an emperor and a viceroy” (קיסר ופלג קיסר) in b. Sanh. 98b, following an already quoted reference to the Messiah as “another David.” The Messiah is King David’s double, a “New David” of Byzantine political mythology.⁵⁴

Like a Byzantine emperor, the Davidic Messiah has multiple bodies. On the one hand, he shares in the mystical body and personality of King

the second century A.D.). This, in my opinion, is anachronistic. Cf. Schäfer, *Die Geburt des Judentums*, 94–95, who suggests that the tradition originated in Babylonian cultural milieu.

⁵² Casey, *Son of Man*, 87. Cf. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven*, 47–49; Caragounis, *The Son of Man*, 133–34; Schäfer, *Die Geburt des Judentums*, 83–84.

⁵³ See Schäfer, *Hekhalot-Studien*, 114, lines 3–4.

⁵⁴ Cf. Schwemer, “Irdischer und himmlischer König,” 320.

David, Israel's archetypal ruler. As a result, references to the Davidic Messiah and King David as holders of eschatological kingship are more or less interchangeable from one text to another. The *piyyut* analyzed earlier in the chapter seems to be referring to the same person when it speaks – first, of the Messiah who will rule forever over the world, and then, if Fleischer's reconstruction is valid, of David whose throne shall be established forever.⁵⁵ To use Kantorowicz's language once again, what matters about the Messianic ruler is his oneness with David. His mystical body is that of David, a permanent and sempiternal king of Israel, of whom the Messiah's material body is a time-bound manifestation.⁵⁶ On the other hand, both the Davidic Messiah and David himself are human icons through which the divine presence on earth is made manifest and palpably present. The motif of David's and God's thrones established side by side or across from one another creates a second dimension for the Messiah's or David's "twinning beings": their mystical body is identical with the body of God. The enthroned Messiah's "body natural" rules by participation in God's mystical body, the participation which is rendered liturgically visible by the mystery of two thrones and two bodies sitting on them.

Compared to other messianic texts, the "David apocalypse" is unique in introducing the notion of messianic dynasty. The body of King David in the "David apocalypse" is replicated through the bodies of other members of his dynasty, "the kings of the house of David" and "the kings of the house of Israel," who accompany King David on his heavenly *adventus*. This dynastic arrangement diminishes individuality for all its participants. Whereas the nameless and featureless kings who accompany David are clearly dominated by and assimilated to his towering figure, King David's own distinctiveness also becomes blurred. It is not so much an individual King David but a collective King David, King David's dynastic body that matters in the heavenly vision of the "David apocalypse."

Rabbinic texts that deal with the Messiah's enthronement are most likely inspired by biblical references to David's sacred kingship and, in particular, by God's promise to David in Psalm 110:1: "Sit at my right

⁵⁵ Fleischer, 426, lines 269–71, and 272–73, respectively.

⁵⁶ See Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, 78–86, and 385–95.

hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.” In the case of the “David apocalypse,” parallels with Revelation 4–5 are sufficiently numerous to suggest some degree of familiarity, either with Revelation itself or with later Christian traditions based on the book. In particular, the description of twenty-four elders seated on the thrones around the throne of God, wearing golden crowns on their heads, and singing hymns in front of God, is strikingly similar to the description of David’s retinue in the “David apocalypse.”⁵⁷ On the other hand, the “David apocalypse” features details not attested in Revelation. The scene of David’s advent, for example, is without biblical parallel. It is possible that rather than postulating direct borrowing from Revelation, one should explore the possibility of culturally mediated influence of scenes from Revelation on the “David apocalypse.” The scene of David’s advent in particular seems to be late antique rather than biblical.

David’s advent calls to mind the sixth-century mosaic of St. Vitale’s church in Ravenna famously depicting a gift-bearing liturgical procession led by Emperor Justinian and his wife, Empress Theodora. As it moves on both sides of the sanctuary circuiting the altar and accompanied by clergy, courtiers, and guards, the imperial couple visibly connects the empire to God by acknowledging the suzerainty of Christ (depicted in the apse just above the procession as the universal Emperor seated on the globe and surrounded by an angelic retinue) on whose behalf Emperor Justinian rules. In the words of Otto G. von Simson, “In the mosaics of San Vitale the Byzantine liturgy appears as a grandiose theodicy of Justinian’s imperium.”⁵⁸

Although the procession of kings in the “David apocalypse” does not carry Eucharistic gifts, it reflects the same combination of liturgy and imperial ceremonial as St. Vitale’s mosaic does. Instead of the Eucharist, the singing of hymns constitutes the central part of liturgical performance jointly enacted by angelic and Davidic courts. One has to recall that, on the sixth-century synagogue mosaic from Gaza, David is depicted wearing Byzantine imperial dress and crown.⁵⁹ It is not hard to imagine a Justinian-looking David leading the procession of the kings of Israel and Judah in a way visually and conceptually similar to St. Vitale’s mosaic.

⁵⁷ Revelation 4:2–11 and 5:6–10.

⁵⁸ See O. von Simson, *Sacred Fortress*, 36–37, and in general, 27–39.

⁵⁹ See Chapter 1 of this work for details.

An iconographic motif of the procession of saints carrying crowns in their hands, which was common in late Roman and Byzantine art, might have also contributed to the entry scene in the “David apocalypse.”⁶⁰ Although the saints were routinely depicted as bringing their crowns as an offering to Christ rather than wearing them, the spatial and liturgical arrangement of saints’ processions could be another inspiration behind the procession of Davidic and Israelite kings. Just how easily the scenes of royal and saintly processions morphed into one another becomes apparent from the history of the sixth-century mosaic of S. Appollinare Nuovo. Whereas the mosaic originally portrayed a royal procession of Ostrogothic King Theodoric and his court moving from Theodoric’s palace on the one end of the nave toward enthroned Christ on the other, in the wake of the Byzantine conquest of Ravenna the original figures in the procession were replaced with those of Crown-bearing saints.⁶¹ The latter and possibly the former were, according to L’Orange:

Equal in height, with the same figure and with the same step, in the same venerable pallium costume, varied only in its detail, bearing the wreath of martyrdom, haloed, each of a singularly solemn, wide-eyed type which, for the beholder in Antiquity, was associated with the idea of man become divine. Thus, the natural individuality recedes before a meaningful stereotype which characterizes the essence of the saints and indicates their place in an eternal hierarchical order.⁶²

The procession of kings in the “David apocalypse” could be another metamorphosis of the same basic theme.

Whereas St. Vitale’s mosaic depicts the two courts sharing in the Eucharistic sacrament, the apocalypse envisions earthly and heavenly courts joined together around the enthroned presences of King David (and/or the Davidic Messiah) and God. Within this arrangement the king’s presence serves to render God’s presence visibly and tangibly manifest, just as the figures of an enthroned Byzantine emperor or Sasanian “king of kings” served to display the otherwise invisible presence of their divine partners.⁶³ Although the events described by the

⁶⁰ See Mathews, *The Clash of Gods*, 157–67.

⁶¹ See Deichmann, *Ravenna*, vol. 2, part 1, 144–45. Cf. Deliyannis, *Ravenna in Late Antiquity*, 160–72, esp. 171–72, on the procession as representing “the heavenly court.”

⁶² L’Orange, *Art Forms and Civic Life*, 25.

⁶³ See Canepa, *The Two Eyes of the Earth*, 147–49.

apocalypse appear to take place in heaven, the notion of God's and the king's thrones set up one opposite the other serves to render the very distinction between heaven and earth meaningless, just as Byzantine and Sasanian court ceremonials served to create a new reality within which earthly and heavenly realms are made iconically transparent to each other. David's essential humanity does not seem to be diminished; there is no talk of transformative ascent. Instead, the earthly and heavenly realms appear to converge within a new reality in which the energies of the divine *pantokrator* and human king are humanized and divinized, respectively, by participation in one another.

Similar to Byzantine and Sasanian court ceremonials, Jewish texts on the two thrones emphasize the liturgical quality of ideal kingship.⁶⁴ R. Ishmael's vision, in particular, may serve as another example of the blurred distinction between palatial and religious space in a way that was typical for late Roman, Byzantine, and Sasanian architecture. Like Byzantine and Sasanian audience halls, the heavenly hall in which God and David are coenthroned combines the characteristics of both the temple and the palace.⁶⁵ I find it remarkable that the vision contains no reference to priesthood, either human or angelic, officiating in God's heavenly residence. Instead the liturgical performance is carried out entirely by the members of earthly and heavenly royal courts, with angelic hosts being depicted not as counterparts of the Israelite priesthood but as the heavenly analogy of Israelite royalty. Within this context, the Israelite monarch finds himself leading the rest of creation in the display of universal praise to the Creator, not unlike the emperor Constantine, whose prime duty as a monarch, according to the Tricennial Oration of Eusebius, was to lead his subjects in unceasing praise of their Creator and Constantine's personal friend (*comes*) and universal coruler, Christ.

⁶⁴ Schwemer, "Irdischer und himmlischer König," 319, n. 24, argues that David in R. Ishmael's vision enters the heavenly Temple, *bet miqdash*, rather than the heavenly study house, *bet midrash*, as most manuscripts of the story would have it. I suspect that the entire last sentence of § 125, starting with the words *בין שעלה דוד*, may be a later addition because of the repetitive nature of its opening (cf. the first words of § 126), parallels with *Shi'ur Qomah's* imagery otherwise unattested in the "David apocalypse" (see Schwemer, 319–20, n. 25), and the reference to the heavenly court as *bet midrash*, which likely reflects the influence of mature Rabbinic Judaism and seems to be out of touch with the rest of the apocalypse.

⁶⁵ See Canen, *The Two Eyes of the Earth*, 100–06 and 130–49.

THE "FRIENDS" OF GOD

Overall the rule of Israel's Messiah envisioned by Byzantine Jewish texts operates within the same broad set of principles as that of the Byzantine emperor. The first author to formulate these principles for a Christian audience was Eusebius of Caesarea in the early fourth century, although the principles themselves had long been in vogue as part of the Hellenistic doctrine of kingship.⁶⁶ Although it remains unclear what Constantine's own perception of his divinity might have been, the emperor emerges from Eusebius' descriptions as a ruler who acts as the earthly representative of God the Father and stands in special relationship and partnership with Christ the Logos.⁶⁷

As noted earlier in this chapter, Eusebius repeatedly stresses the sacrosanct nature of the imperial palace. From inside this palace the emperor rules by entering into a special partnership with God and the Logos. In his Tricennial Oration, Eusebius addresses the emperor as the "friend" (*comes*) of the Logos "who derives imperial power from above and is made strong by being called after the divine name."⁶⁸ Eusebius also refers to both the Logos and the emperor as the "prefects" of God, who, through the unity of their wills, govern the cosmos and the empire on God's behalf, shielding them from "the twofold barbarian race" of human adversaries and demons alike.⁶⁹ Indeed the emperor "directs, in imitation of God Himself, the administration of the world's affairs" by virtue of "bearing the image of the higher kingdom" from and through the Logos of God.⁷⁰ The two universal empires, the earthly and the heavenly, are thus at one with each other just as their rulers are. The emperor's personal virtues also derive from his imitation of God and "friendship" with the Logos.

⁶⁶ See Baynes, "Eusebius and the Christian Empire," 168–72; Straub, *Regeneratio Imperii*, 70–88; Dvornik, *Political Philosophy*, vol. 2, 614–22; Leeb, *Konstantin und Christus*, 121–26, 143–49. On related themes in Hellenistic literature, see Goodenough, "The Political Philosophy of Hellenistic Kingship," 55–102, and Nock, "The Emperor's Divine Comes," 102–16.

⁶⁷ See Kolb, *Herrscherideologie*, 63–72; Van Dam, *The Roman Revolution of Constantine*, 283–316. Van Dam correctly emphasizes Arian underpinnings of Eusebius' political theology.

⁶⁸ *Laud. Const.* 2.1. Cf. *Laud. Const.* 5.1. The translation follows Dvornik, vol. 2, 617; in most other cases the translation is from H. Drake, *In Praise of Constantine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), with slight revisions. Drake's work also provides a detailed and helpful introduction to the Eusebian religio-political doctrine.

⁶⁹ See *Laud. Const.* 2.1–4, 3.6, and 7.13.

⁷⁰ *Laud. Const.* 1.6. Cf. *Laud. Const.* 1.3.

The emperor is a philosopher-king who “models himself after the archetypal form of the Supreme Sovereign, whose mind reflects as in a mirror the radiance of its virtues, by which he has been made perfectly wise, good, just, courageous, pious, and God-loving.”⁷¹ As a result, already during the emperor’s lifetime his will and personal qualities transcend his humanity by being at one with those of the Logos.⁷² Furthermore, the emperor’s special relationship with God and the Logos justifies for Eusebius the eternity of the imperial rule. With some diffidence Eusebius seems to suggest that Constantine will continue to govern even after death, because partnership with the Logos puts the emperor beyond the life-and-death dichotomy. Constantine’s thirty-year universal rule on earth crosses over rather seamlessly into the eternal rule of the Logos and, by participating in it, “extends into far distant eternity.”⁷³

The Eusebian interpretation of imperial rule created the basis on which Byzantine political philosophy grew in the course of subsequent centuries. The increasing passivity of Byzantine emperors from the early fifth century onward and their growing confinement to the palace headquarters in Constantinople might have contributed to the popularity of the idea that the emperor ruled by radiating his will (which ultimately was not his but God’s) from the palace and across the rest of the empire.⁷⁴ Through a series of adaptations and revisions of the Eusebian imagery, the Church historians of the fifth century, such as Sozomen, Socrates, and Theodoret, envisioned the court of Theodosius II as the sacred embodiment of imperial powers in which a pious and bookish emperor sustained the prosperity of the empire by his prayer and religious devotion rather than military prowess.⁷⁵ The religious austerity of the court called for comparisons with the monastery, whereas the transfer

⁷¹ *Laud. Const.* 5.4.

⁷² *Laud. Const.* 5.1–8. Cf. prologue, 2–3.

⁷³ *Laud. Const.* 6.2 and 6.18–21. In *V. Const.* 1.1, and 4.71.2–72, Eusebius nuances the expectations of Constantine’s eternal rule by saying that after his death the emperor continues to rule in and through his sons. Cf. *V. Const.* 4.48, and 4.67.3.

⁷⁴ On the imperial palace, see Dagron, *Naissance d’une capitale*, 92–97; Janin, *Constantinople byzantine*, 106–22; Mango, *The Brazen House*. Holum, *Theodosian Emperresses*, 79–80, provides a vivid summary.

⁷⁵ Socrates, *Hist. Eccl.* 7.22.3–6; Sozomen, *Hist. Eccl.* 9.1.1–10, 3.1–3; Theodoret, *Hist. Eccl.* 5.36.4. On the atmosphere of the Theodosian court, see also Hunt, *Holy Land Pilgrimage*, 224–25, and Rapp, “Comparison, Paradigm and the Case of Moses in Panegyric and Hagiography,” 281–85. On the application of the Constantinian model to Theodosius II, see Harries, “‘Pius Princeps,’” 35–44, and more broadly Van Dam, *The Roman Revolution*, 317–53.

of saints' relics to the palace chapel served to strengthen the supernatural dimension of imperial power and emphasize its participation in divine rule.⁷⁶ The imperial court and its ceremonies were increasingly assuming sacred status, a process that would reach its climax by the Middle Byzantine period. Perhaps it was no accident that precisely during this time Byzantine emperors found themselves embroiled in debates about the relationship between human and divine natures, energies, and wills in the person of Christ.

Be that as it may, in the early sixth century Deacon Agapetos reiterated and systematically summed up the main points of Eusebian political philosophy in his own work on kingship addressed to the emperor Justinian.⁷⁷ According to Agapetos, the emperor's "scepter of earthly power modeled after the likeness of the heavenly kingdom" (*Expositio*, 1 [PG 86.1164]) was handed to him by God, and, as a result, the power of the emperor and his very will are not his but God's (*Expositio*, 40 [PG 86.1176]). The emperor "bears the image of God, who is over all, and through Him he holds rule over all" (*Expositio*, 37 [PG 86.1176]). The emperor rules by making his soul a spotless receptacle for the divine light and achieving what amounts to the complete union of wills with God: "The soul of the *basileus*, full of many cares, must be wiped clean like a mirror, so that it may always shine with divine light, and learn thereby the discernment of affairs" (*Expositio*, 9 [PG 86.1168]). Agapetos envisions the earthly rule of the emperor as a ladder; by climbing it, the emperor achieves the heavenly glory and the heavenly kingdom (*Expositio*, 59 and 72 [PG 86.1181 and 1185]). As a result, "the glory of god-like government is prolonged for eternal ages, and it sets its possessors beyond the reach of oblivion" (*Expositio*, 15 [PG 86.1169]). According to Agapetos' famous formula, "In the nature of his body the *basileus* is equal to all other men, but in the authority of his dignity he is like God who rules over all; for no one on earth is higher than he."⁷⁸ Within his persona an ideal emperor

⁷⁶ See James, "Bearing Gifts from the East," 119–31.

⁷⁷ Agapetos, *Expositio capitum admonitoriorum*, (PG 86.1164–85). For critical edition of the text, see Agapetos Diakonos, *Der Fürstenspiegel für Kaiser Justinianos*, ed. by R. Riedinger (Athens, 1995). The translation follows Barker, *Social and Political Thought in Byzantium*, 54–61, with revisions. See also Henry, "A Mirror for Justinian," 281–308, and Dvornik, *Political Philosophy*, vol. 2, 712–15.

⁷⁸ On this formula, its classical antecedents and medieval applications, see Goodenough, "The Political Philosophy," 76; Ševčenko, "A Neglected Byzantine Source," 141–79; Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, 498–500.

mediates between earthly and heavenly worlds: "Though he is honored as the image of God, yet he remains mixed with dust of the earth whereby he is taught his equality with other men" (*Expositio*, 21 [PG 86.1172]). Through his rule, the emperor of Agapetos translates divine power to earth and projects it onto his human subjects (*Expositio*, 8 [PG 86.1168]).

It appears that Agapetos' work merely summarizes what by then had become a standard approach of Byzantine political philosophy to the nature of an emperor's rule.⁷⁹ In the panegyric that celebrated the ascent to the throne of Justinian's successor Justin II, Corippus praises the emperor for acting *more dei* by performing acts of *philanthropia* (such as the release of prisoners) after his inauguration. Justin then launches an explanation for what may seem an outrageous comparison:

For he is a god who with one word seeks to make the evil just and to rescue them from the midst of death. Believe this sincerely: I did not say it hastily. Whoever does this is a god. God is in the hearts of our rulers: whatever orders God gives, these are the ruling principles for our rulers. Christ gave earthly lords power over all: He is omnipotent, and the earthly king is the image of the omnipotent (*ille est omnipotens, hic omnipotentis imago*).⁸⁰

In the last sentence, Corippus recaps Agapetos' political theory by referring to the emperor as "the image of the omnipotent" which shares in the absolute power of its prototype and rules over human subjects by projecting this power onto them. Once again, the fundamental passivity of an ideal emperor and his mirror-like transparency to the divine *energeia* are highlighted above everything else. The emperor is a conduit for the divine will; his heart is inhabited by God and his acts are guided by God's orders.

As to Justinian himself, his references to the nature of the emperor's power, scattered across official legislation and conveniently summarized by Francis Dvornik, demonstrate that the emperor fully embraced the religious meaning of his office and his resulting status as an image of and conduit for the divine will, wisdom, and power by and through which all of his activities were accomplished.⁸¹ When in the seventh century

⁷⁹ See Dvornik, *Political Philosophy*, vol. 2, 706–11; Fotiou, "Plato's Philosopher King," 17–29; Cameron, *Procopius*, 248–52, and literature cited there.

⁸⁰ Corippus, *In laud. Iust.*, II, 422–28. The translation is from Cameron, 102. See Cameron's commentary on pp. 178–79.

⁸¹ See Dvornik, *Political Philosophy*, vol. 2, 717–20. Cf. Cameron, *Procopius*, 256–57.

George of Pisidia described Heraclius' military triumph as the act of new creation accomplished through the joint act of the will of the emperor and God and the emperor's *christomimetic* suffering, he largely found fresh poetic expression for the long-standing view of imperial power.⁸² In 629 Heraclius replaced the old Roman title Augustus with the new one, *pistos en Christo basileus*, which better expressed the fundamental unity of ruling wills between Christ and his earthly companion, the emperor.⁸³

The *piyyut*'s Messiah is a product of the same discourse. Like an exemplary Christian emperor, he acquires qualities of an icon that participates in the active will of God and channels it down to humanity. The *piyyut* seems to reflect a broader rabbinic tradition that envisioned the ruling Messiah as God's "prefect" (רַבִּי) whom God calls after his own name and who shares in God's attributes of royal authority, in a way that almost exactly mimics the Eusebian Constantine, "a prefect of the Great Emperor," who imitates through his actions both God and God's other prefect, Christ the Logos.⁸⁴ Both the Tricennial Oration and the *piyyut* also emphasize the eternal quality of this rule. Like Constantine, the Davidic Messiah rules "from eternity to eternity," from the throne "established forever" inside the Temple "built forever."⁸⁵ The Messiah's eternal rule stands in direct relationship with that of God: "And the Lord will come and reign forever // And the king will reign, may his name endure forever // And he will rule over the entire world // From eternity to eternity."⁸⁶ The Messiah shares in the timeless quality of God's universal reign, just as Constantine's rule, by virtue of its participation in the universal and eternal rule of God, transcends the boundary between this world and the next.⁸⁷ Like most of the post-Constantinian Roman

⁸² *Her.*, 1, lines 82–83, 107–09, and 201–06. See Olster, "Date of George of Pisidia's 'Hexaameron,'" 161–62.

⁸³ See Shahid, "Iranian Factor," 293–320; Cameron, "Images of Authority," 16; Magdalino, "The History of the Future," 18–20. On eschatological application of this ideology, see Reinink, "Die Entstehung der syrischen Alexanderlegende," 275–81.

⁸⁴ *MidPs* on Psalm 21:1–2 (Buber, 89b). On God's royal attributes shared by the Messiah, see discussion later in this chapter. The reference to the "prefect" is missing in the *Tanh. Wa'era* 7 (Buber, 11b–12a) version of midrash. Cf. *Laud. Const.* 7.13 (Constantine as the prefect of God), and 3.6 (the Logos as the prefect of God).

⁸⁵ Fleischer, 426, lines 271–75.

⁸⁶ Fleischer, 426, lines 268–71.

⁸⁷ On the timeless nature of God's eschatological rule in rabbinic literature, see Lehnardt, "Der Gott der Welt ist unser König," 296–97. On the eternity of David's reign, see Goldberg, "Die Namen des Messias," 225–30.

emperors, the *piyyut's* Messiah is not just a New David, he is also a New Constantine.

Both the Byzantine emperor and the *piyyut's* Messiah remained fully human, however. Their sharing of divine qualities existed strictly *by participation*. This deification by participation rather than through the outright divinization of nature became a distinct characteristic of Byzantine Christian orthodoxy.⁸⁸ The Byzantine emperors ruled through participation in Christ's imperial office but always retained their human nature. The Byzantine emperors' programmatic humanity distinguished them from earlier Roman predecessors who claimed personal divinity for themselves. Instead, to use Elsner's terminology, the Byzantine emperors served as human mediators between their subjects and Christ, and ruled by participation in Christ's universal rule.⁸⁹

The Messiah's humanity likewise remains undiminished. Nowhere in the *piyyut* is there an indication that, although seated inside the Temple, he is anything but human. Just like the emperor, the Messiah is sanctified by the grace of God and rules by participation in divine attributes, remaining fully human at the same time. Indeed, this emphasis on the emperor's and the Messiah's essential humanity reflects a broader premise of Byzantine philosophy that human nature remains intact and undiminished even in its union with God. By making this claim, Byzantine Christianity moved away from the earlier concept of divinization by nature and on to the notion that in the union humans stay humans by nature while becoming gods by participation and grace. The Byzantine emperor was no longer a divinity but rather a human icon through which God's rule made itself tangibly manifest on earth.

GOD'S HUMAN ICON

The Byzantine ideological stance that the ruling emperor has to be approached by his/her subjects as a living image of divine kingship that acts with its prototype's *energeia* finds another expression in the account

⁸⁸ For a similar interpretation of imperial themes in Christian art as opposed to earlier Roman art, see Elsner, *Art and the Roman Viewer*, 159–89.

⁸⁹ See Elsner, *Art and the Roman Viewer*, 177–89. Cf. Kantorowicz, "Deus Per Naturam, Deus Per Gratiam," 253–77, on the Hellenistic background and medieval applications of this concept.

of messianic rule in the *Pesiqta Rabbati*. The account serves as the culmination and conclusion of a distinct literary unit in *Pesiqta Rabbati* 34–37 that deals with the story of the suffering Messiah of Ephraim.⁹⁰ Whereas the story's earlier sections, which describe the Messiah's origins and suffering, contain no obvious allusions to Byzantine political theory, the concluding section, which deals with the Messiah's elevation to power, borrows a great deal of inspiration from contemporaneous descriptions of the emperor's religio-political status.

The account opens with the description of seven successive garments that God puts on at different stages of the history of the world and of Israel, starting at creation and ending in the eschatological future with the arrival of the Messiah and destruction of Rome (Edom). Each garment corresponds to a particular quality of God's rule displayed at a given moment in history (glory and majesty, haughtiness, strength, forgiveness, vengeance, righteousness, and the red garment that God will put on when he punishes Edom). The story concludes its first part by applying a verse from Isaiah 61:10 – “As a bridegroom puts on a priestly diadem” – to God, and then continues with the description of the Messiah's garment:

Another comment: “As a bridegroom puts on a priestly diadem” (Isaiah 61:10). This text teaches that the Holy One, blessed be He, will put upon Ephraim (our righteous Messiah)⁹¹ a garment whose splendor will stream forth from world's end to world's end. And Israel will make use of his light and say “Blessed is the hour in which he was created! Blessed is the womb whence he came! Blessed is the generation whose eyes behold him! Blessed is the eye which yearned for him whose lips open with blessing and peace, whose speech is pure delight, whose heart mediates in trust and tranquility. Blessed is the eye which merits seeing him, the utterance of whose tongue is pardon and forgiveness for Israel, whose prayer is a sweet savor, whose supplication is purity and holiness. Blessed are the forefathers of him [the Messiah?] who merited the goodness of the world who are hidden for the eternity.”⁹²

⁹⁰ See the previous chapter for literature. Schäfer, *Die Geburt des Judentums*, 174–77, argues convincingly for the first half of the seventh century as the time of composition.

⁹¹ These words are missing in manuscript Parma.

⁹² *Pesiq. Rab.* 37 (Ulmer, 2:844). I follow Braude's translation with revisions. A version of this tradition appears in some manuscripts of *PRK* (Mandelbaum, 469–70). But there it appears to be a later addition, see Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction*, 320.

Within the midrash's narrative, the description of seven garments that God puts on leads to and culminates in the description of the Messiah's garment. The latter, in other words, appears in some way to be related to the former. The nature of the Messiah's garment is further elaborated in a slightly earlier passage in the *Pesiqta*, according to which "the Holy One, blessed be He, will lift the Messiah up to the heaven of heavens and will spread over him from the splendor of His glory" or simply "from His splendor," according to manuscript Parma.⁹³ Here the splendor of the Messiah's garment is explicitly identified as originating in God's own splendor. When other *Pesiqta* passages speak of the light with which the Messiah is expected to illumine Israel and the rest of humanity in the eschatological future, they most likely refer to the light of the Messiah's garment that transmits to earth God's luminosity.⁹⁴

According to Arnold Goldberg's observation, however, the Messiah's elevated status does not diminish his essential humanity.⁹⁵ The Messiah remains fully human even as he mediates the flow of divine light to Israel. I shall add to this observation that the garment woven from God's splendor is "spread over" the Messiah's human nature in the act of perfect synergy that closely resembles the synergy of the human and divine wills in the person of the Byzantine emperor. The Messiah's garment, which shines with divine light, calls to mind Agapetos' description of the emperor's soul, which "must be wiped clean like a mirror, so that it may always shine with divine light." The Messiah who puts on the royal dress and crown of God is virtually indistinct from the emperor who receives from God "the scepter of earthly power modeled after the likeness of the heavenly kingdom." The Messiah, from and through whom eternal light radiates to Israel and the rest of humanity, acts like the emperor who "bears the image of God, who is over all, and through Him holds rule over all." As a result, in both instances, "the glory of god-like government is prolonged for eternal ages, and it sets its possessors beyond the reach of oblivion." Ultimately Agapetos' classical statement about the sacred nature of the

⁹³ *Pesiq. Rab.* 37 (Ulmer, 2:839).

⁹⁴ Some manuscript versions of the *Pesiqta* identify the Messiah's throne with God's throne carried by the four creatures of Ezekiel 1. See Goldberg, *Erlösung durch Leiden*, 202–04; Schäfer, *Die Geburt des Judentums*, 160–62 and 172–73. Due to the nature of the manuscript evidence, however, it is unclear whether this section should be considered part of the original composition or a later addition.

⁹⁵ Goldberg, *Erlösung durch Leiden*, 54–55, 60.

imperial office can be applied to the Messiah's office as well. When read in the context of this statement, the Messiah's essential humanity emphasized by Goldberg parallels the essential humanity of *basileus* who "in the nature of his body is equal to all other men," whereas the splendor of God's glory which becomes the Messiah's luminous garment parallels the emperor's "authority of dignity" in which "he is like God who rules over all."

As Goldberg has also noted, the *Pesiqta's* discussion of the Messiah's garment reflects a broader midrashic tradition according to which the Messiah will receive a portion of God's glory in the form of God's own royal insignia.⁹⁶ Goldberg's prime evidence for such a tradition comes from the *Midrash on Psalms*.⁹⁷ The midrash interprets the reference of Psalm 24:10 to God as "the king of Glory" as a description of God's ability "to share from His own glory with those who fear Him." The midrash continues by drawing a series of contrasts between a mortal king, who does not allow anyone to share his attributes of authority, and God, who bestows the attributes of His power on Israelite rulers and prophets. Thus Moses was allowed to use God's scepter, Solomon sat on God's throne, and Elijah rode God's horse. Unlike the mortal ruler who does not share his crown or his purple raiment with anyone, God gives His crown and His purple dress to the king Messiah. Ultimately, unlike the mortal king, who never calls his prefect "king," God called Moses "god," and referred to Israelites as both "gods" and "the holy ones." In the future, God will call the king Messiah as well as the city of Jerusalem "after His own name." The midrash concludes with an Aramaic statement (attributed to R. Levi), which I shall discuss later in the chapter, and with the quote from Micah 5:4: "[The king] shall stand and shepherd in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God."

Similar to the *Pesiqta* that describes the Messiah as someone partaking of the splendor of God's glory, the *Midrash on Psalms* characterizes the Messiah as sharing in God's name and God's strength. The meaning of both descriptions seems to be the same: The Messiah rules through the act of synergy with God's active will. Images used to describe this act vary from one text to another. As a result, the Messiah can be described as

⁹⁶ See Goldberg, *Erlösung durch Leiden*, 319–21.

⁹⁷ *MidPs* 21 (Buber, 89a–b). For a slightly different version of this tradition, cf. *Tanh. Wa'era* 7 (Buber, 11b–12a).

sharing in God's glory, God's name, or, by quoting Micah 5:4, as sharing in God's strength. No matter what specific terminology is used, the messianic authority is defined first and foremost by its relation to God, just as the emperor's power is defined in contemporaneous Byzantine texts. Both the *Pesiqta* and the *Midrash on Psalms* use the image of shared royal insignia to render the concept of shared power visually and symbolically manifest. Whereas the *Pesiqta* talks about the splendor of the Messiah's garment, the *Midrash on Psalms* provides a longer list of insignia that includes the crown, the scepter, the throne, and the horse of God. The *Midrash* also makes clear that there is no fundamental difference between the office of the Messiah and that of early biblical rulers of Israel, as both of them were characterized by the same key quality of participating in the attributes and powers of divine rule. Just like the *Pesiqta's* Messiah and the ideal emperor of Byzantine literature, the Messiah of the *Midrash on Psalms* is human and rules through participation in the universal suzerainty of God.

The second part of *Pesiqta Rabbati's* description contains a series of blessings that recount personal qualities of the Messiah, with special attention being paid to the Messiah's liturgical devotion. The Messiah's heart mediates in trust and tranquility, his prayer is a sweet savor, his supplication is purity and holiness. Once again, Goldberg has noted this dimension of the description and has suggested that it might reflect speculations about the liturgical functions of the Messiah, whose spiritual devotion becomes an eschatological alternative to the sacrificial cult of historical Israel.⁹⁸ More recently, Boustán has both developed and added nuance to Goldberg's observation by noticing similarities between the blessings in the *Pesiqta Rabbati* and a Hebrew hymn in praise of R. Ishmael that appears in several collections of stories concerning R. Ishmael's miraculous conception and heavenly visions.⁹⁹ Boustán traces the hymn as well as the collection of blessings in the *Pesiqta* back to the 'Avodah liturgy for the Day of Atonement with its descriptions of the High Priest

⁹⁸ Goldberg, *Erlösung durch Leiden*, 328–29.

⁹⁹ Boustán, *From Martyr*, 139–47. Parallels do not include liturgical duties attributed to the Messiah in *Pesiqta Rabbati*. Instead the emphasis in the hymn is on R. Ishmael's birth, parentage, and upbringing. Textual parallels with 'Avodah hymnography noticed by Boustán center on the different versions of the phrase "happy are the eyes that beheld," common to all these texts, but do not include specific references to liturgical activities characteristic of the *Pesiqta Rabbati's* version.

officiating in the Temple. In other words, both Goldberg and Bousttan emphasize the priestly function of the messianic figure described in the *Pesiqta Rabbati*, and contextualize the Messiah within priestly (or pseudo-priestly) lore of late antique and early medieval Judaism.

I would like to add further nuance to the argument by suggesting that the midrash's emphasis on the Messiah's liturgical performance should be seen in the context of similar descriptions by Eusebius of Constantine's liturgical piety. These descriptions established something of a literary standard for subsequent idealized portrayals of the emperors. In other words, rather than simply being patterned on biblical and rabbinic priestly archetypes, the Messiah of the *Pesiqta Rabbati* draws on the combination of priestly and royal powers characteristic of the late Roman and Byzantine imperial ideology. The Messiah of the *Pesiqta Rabbati* is not merely an eschatological high priest. He is the eschatological application of the archetypal pious emperor of contemporaneous Byzantine literature.

As noted earlier in this chapter, the Eusebian Constantine personifies the unity of imperial universalism in its heavenly and worldly dimensions by acting as God's image on earth whose power and will are brought in complete alignment with those of the Logos. Constantine's liturgical devotion constitutes an important element of this alignment. Like a participant in sacred mysteries, he secludes himself daily in the secret places of his royal chambers in solitary conversations with the Logos.¹⁰⁰ The intimacy of their friendship is confirmed by direct revelations that the emperor receives from the Logos.¹⁰¹ Constantine offers his own soul and mind, as well as those of his subjects, as a bloodless sacrifice to God.¹⁰² He runs the palace quarters "after the manner of a church of God" by leading his court in studying Scriptures and holding regular prayer sessions.¹⁰³ By constantly conversing with the Logos, the emperor achieves full participation in the activity of his divine *comes*. Through his rule, Constantine translates the activities of the Logos to his human subjects. Toward his subjects the emperor acts "like some interpreter of the Logos of God" who leads them "on earth to the Only-Begotten

¹⁰⁰ *V. Const.* 4.22.1.

¹⁰¹ *Laud. Const.* 18.1–3. Cf. *V. Const.* 2.12.

¹⁰² *Laud. Const.* 2.5.

¹⁰³ *V. Const.* 4.17. Cf. *Laud. Const.* 9.11.

and Savior Logos” and “makes them suitable for His kingdom.”¹⁰⁴ The upward-looking emperor of Eusebius implements on earth the heavenly model of monarchic rule which he contemplates through the constant interaction with his heavenly *comes*, the Logos:

Thus bearing the likeness of the kingdom of heaven, he pilots affairs below with an upward gaze, to steer by the archetypal form. He draws strength from his imitation of monarchic rule, which the Ruler of All has given to the race of man alone of those on earth.¹⁰⁵

By doing so the emperor cooperates in the plan conceived by the Logos, who, according to Eusebius’ famous description of the empire, “has modeled the kingdom on earth into a likeness of the one in heaven, toward which He [the Logos] urges all mankind to strive, holding forth for them this fair hope.”¹⁰⁶

In the Eusebian portrayal of the ideal emperor, the boundary between a statesman and a hierophant becomes extremely blurred. The statcraft and the liturgy find themselves intertwined within a new religio-political dispensation personified in Constantine, who is quoted by Eusebius as referring to himself as “a bishop over those outside [the church],” and whose palace quarters are said to resemble the church.¹⁰⁷ The Church historians of the Theodosian Age would eschew the confusion between imperial and ecclesiastical offices while embracing and further developing the notion that the emperor’s personal devotion performed in the seclusion of the palace (now compared to a monastery rather than a church) secured the empire’s lasting prosperity.¹⁰⁸ The *Pesiqta*’s reference to the Messiah’s heart meditating in trust and tranquility (הירדהור לבו בטח ושלאין) immediately reminds one of Constantine secluding himself in the innermost parts of his palace for the purpose of solitary

¹⁰⁴ *Laud. Const.* 2.4 and 2.2.

¹⁰⁵ *Laud. Const.* 3.5. Cf. *V. Const.* 4.15. On the artistic representation of this posture, see Cameron and Hall, *Eusebius*, 315–16; L’Orange, *Apotheosis*, 90–94, 110–29. Cf. Leeb, *Konstantin und Christus*, 53–70.

¹⁰⁶ *Laud. Const.* 4.2.

¹⁰⁷ *V. Const.* 4.24. On this phrase and its possible meanings, see Cameron and Hall, *Eusebius*, 320, and literature cited there. See also Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, 132–35, who argues that Eusebius uses clerical imagery metaphorically and “emptied of its institutional sense.” On the application of clerical titles to later emperors, see Dagron, 303–06.

¹⁰⁸ See Socrates, *Hist. Eccl.* 7.22.3–6; Sozomen, *Hist. Eccl.* 9.1.1–10, 3.1–3; Theodoret, *Hist. Eccl.* 5.36.4.

conversations with his divine *comes*, the Logos. The Messiah's prayer offered "as a sweet savor" (תפילתו ריח ניחח) and his supplication in purity and holiness (תחינתו טהרה וקדושה) echo Constantine's resolve to run his court after the manner of God's church by having regular study and prayer sessions.

Both the Messiah and the emperor offer their souls and minds as a bloodless sacrifice to God, and then rule through the unity of wills achieved as a result of this offering. Just as the emperor's personal qualities derive from his transparency to divine will, goodness, and philanthropy, so, too, the Messiah's character is formed by its participation in and assimilation to the divine attributes. Just like the ideal emperor of Eusebius and Agapetos, the Messiah becomes the mirror reflecting the luminosity of divine virtues. As a result, "his lips open with blessing and peace," "his speech is pure delight," and "the utterance of his tongue is pardon and forgiveness for Israel." Just like the light of his garment, the goodness of the Messiah's character comes from the divine source, although the Messiah himself remains human. The *Pesiqta's* triumphant Messiah belongs to a category of characters along with Constantine of Eusebius; Theodosius II of Socrates, Sozomen, and Theodoret; the anonymous emperor of Agapetos; and other idealized imperial figures of Byzantine literature.

CONCLUSION: THE RULER AND HIS CITY

In conclusion I return to the passage from the *Midrash on Psalms* on the attributes of power shared by God and Israelite rulers and specifically to an Aramaic statement attributed to R. Levi at the end of this passage.¹⁰⁹ Within its present context, R. Levi's statement serves to elaborate a brief observation made as part of the midrash's main Hebrew text to the effect that, in the future, both king Messiah and the city of Jerusalem will be called after God's own name. R. Levi then continues "It is good for the city when her name is the same as the name of her king, and the name of her king is the same as the name of her God." Unlike other sections of the same midrash, which focus on the participation of human rulers

¹⁰⁹ *MidPs* 21 (Buber, 89b). Versions of this midrash appear also in *LamR* 1.16, and some manuscripts of *PRK* 22 (Mandelbaum, 330–31). See Goldberg, "Die Namen des Messias," 250–53.

in the powers of God, this last section adds the city of Jerusalem to the equation. What emerges as a result is the grand vision of unity among the messianic king, his city, and God accomplished by all three of them sharing the same name.¹¹⁰

The place occupied by Jerusalem within this vision resembles that of Constantinople, the city known from early on as the βασιλέως ἐπώνυμος πόλις, “the city that bears the name of the emperor,” and later, as the βασιλεύουσα πόλις, “the Queen City.” Brought into existence by an act of will of one man and his successors, the sacred topography of the New Rome was shaped by the monuments of imperial autocracy.¹¹¹ The Statue of Constantine atop the column portrayed the city’s founder in the guise of the ever-young and light-radiating Apollo Helios, who watched over his city and his empire. The palace, located at the eastern tip of the city, was the dwelling place of the emperor and was sacred ground. The Hippodrome, connected to the palace within a single architectural complex, provided open space into which the emperor emerged as the sunlike figure during popular celebrations and games.¹¹² Finally, there was the Church of the Apostles built by Constantine on one of the highest points in the city, away from the palace and yet dominating the city’s skyline. The church started as Constantine’s mausoleum with his tomb in the middle surrounded by twelve cenotaphs commemorating the apostles. It was probably originally intended to mark the deceased emperor’s special status as a participant in the universal and eternal rule of his divine *comes* and coruler, Christ, and to serve as the place from which Constantine, in Eusebius’ words, continued “even after death to hold on to empire.”¹¹³ The original meaning was quickly glossed over, however, as the church became the dynastic shrine in which emperors and empresses were laid to rest in the company of saints’ relics.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ Cf. *V. Const.* 4.46, discussed earlier in the chapter.

¹¹¹ See Dagron, *Naissance d’une capitale*, 51–55, 77, 86–92; Krautheimer, *Three Christian Capitals*, 41–67; Mango, “Constantinopolitana”; Bauer, “Urban Space and Ritual,” 28–50; Mathews, *Byzantium*, 17–32; Bassett, *The Urban Image*, 17–97, 121–36; Kolb, *Herrscherideologie*, 80–84.

¹¹² See Dagron, *Naissance d’une capitale*, 320–47, and “Trônes pour un empereur,” 180–85; Lyle, “The Circus as Cosmos,” 827–41; Carile, “Imperial Palaces and Heavenly Jerusalem,” 84–86.

¹¹³ *V. Const.* 4.71.2. See also, *V. Const.* 1.1.2.

¹¹⁴ On the Column of Constantine, the Hippodrome, the Church of the Apostles, and the imperial palace, see literature cited earlier in the book. On other relics associated with Constantine, see Linder, “The Myth of Constantine,” 55–56.

The city's personality was at one with that of its founder, but because the emperor's rule was at the same time the image and reflection of heavenly rule, Constantinople was also the city of the heavenly king. As the ruler, the emperor did not belong to himself. He was a transmitter of God's power: a polished mirror that reflected the rays of divine radiance and philanthropy, directing them toward the imperial subjects. The emperor did not shine with his own light but with the light that he received through communion with God. At least this is how Eusebius and his successors interpreted the imperial solar imagery inherited from Byzantium's Hellenistic and Roman past. The imperial palace was also the place where the ongoing personal interaction between the emperor and God took place, the interaction that shaped the emperor's human will in conformity with the active will of God. To say that Constantinople was the city of the emperor implied that it was also the city of God, whose goodness, power, and glory shone through the emperor's personality. The monumental architecture of Constantinople attested not only to the greatness and megalomania of individual Byzantine rulers but also to the constant presence of divine glory made visible through their autocracy.¹¹⁵

Whereas Constantinople was the city of imperial rule, the Christian Jerusalem was the city of Christ's invisible royal presence. Constantine built the "New Jerusalem" as a donation to Christ, the heavenly *comes* of the earthly emperor. Jerusalem was the city where, according to the Alexander Legend, Alexander the Great left his royal throne of silver with the crown hung upon it as a seat for Christ. It was also the city in which it was predicted that the last Roman emperor would surrender his crown and his empire to God. The Christian Jerusalem was steeped in memories and physical vestiges of Christ's first arrival, constantly remembered through elaborate stational liturgies, but also projected into the future in expectation of Christ's second coming. In the present, however, Christ, while still invisibly ruling in Jerusalem, delegated the attributes of his power to Constantinople and the emperor. The pair of Constantinople and Jerusalem made geographically tangible the Byzantine theory of the emperor as a visual icon of the divine rule on earth.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ See Frolow, "La dédicace de Constantinople," 63–69, and 86–88. Cf. Leeb, *Konstantin und Christus*, 9–28; Van Dam, *The Roman Revolution*, 305–09.

¹¹⁶ In addition to the literature cited in the previous chapter, see Kühnel, *From the Earthly to the Heavenly Jerusalem*, 87–88, 91–93, 96. Along with the Church of the Holy

According to the Jewish messianic texts discussed earlier in this chapter, the Temple would serve as a place from which the joint rule of God and the Messiah radiated across the universe, the rule accomplished through a miraculous synergy of human and divine wills. In their essence, however, both Jerusalem and Constantinople represented the same type of an ideal city that served as a seat for the universal imperial rule jointly exercised by human and divine wills merged together by God and the God-chosen ruler. Messianic Jerusalem embodied some of the same religio-political principles that historical Constantinople did, and perhaps in the end the two cities' sacred topography would not be all that different.

If we were to imagine the messianic Jerusalem of Byzantine Judaism, its skyline would probably be dominated by the restored Temple, the ultimate House of God. This Temple, however, would also double, at least according to some views, as the seat of the royal power of the Davidic Messiah and the place where the Messiah's throne was established into eternity. It has been argued that the choice of the basilica-form building by Christian architects served to model churches on the grandeur of imperial throne chambers and reception halls. Could the restored Temple building also be envisioned as a basilica, or could it, perhaps, have a centrally planned design mimicking that of the *Chrysotriklinos*, the golden audience chamber of Constantinople's Great Palace, but also of centrally planned cathedrals such as the Hagia Sophia? More likely, the restored Temple could be imagined as a combination of basilicas and centrally planned structures within a single ecclesia-palatial complex akin in its spatial organization to what Thomas F. Mathews has dubbed the "novel planning unit of imperial palace, plaza, and church" designed to project the idea of symphonious rule between God and the emperor.¹¹⁷ Incidentally, one such unit was constructed by the Umayyad caliphs in the late seventh and early eighth centuries precisely on the Temple Mount. It included the Dome of the Rock, the Aqsa Mosque, and the palace complex south and southwest of the mount.

Sepulcher, Kühnel notices the topographical prominence of the column established in the forum that was situated by what is today the Damascus gate. Although originally crowned with the statue of an emperor (possibly Hadrian), in the Christian period the column had a cross installed on its top. One may wonder if this column played a role analogous to that of the Column of Constantine in Constantinople, just as the Church of the Holy Sepulcher had its functional double in the Church of the Apostles.

¹¹⁷ Mathews, *Byzantium*, 21.

The midrashic references to the Hippodrome and the throne of Solomon indicate that Jerusalem of the past was sometimes imagined as a standard late Roman and Byzantine capital city centered on a palace/circus complex.¹¹⁸ Would the Jerusalem of the Davidic Messiah also feature the Hippodrome and the throne chamber(s) of the kind ascribed to the historical Jerusalem of David and Solomon? In general, could the Jerusalem of the eschatological future be modeled on the Rome/Constantinople of the historical present, just as many of the royal and ecclesiastical residencies of early medieval Europe were?¹¹⁹ These are tantalizing questions that cannot be fully answered but which certainly deserve further study.

¹¹⁸ See Cameron, *Circus Factions*, 180–83.

¹¹⁹ See Luchterhandt, “Stolz und Vorurteil. Der Westen und die byzantinische Hofkultur im Frühmittelalter,” 171–211.

Conclusion

THIS CONCLUSION, A FEW WORDS REMAIN TO BE SAID ABOUT THE broader historical, cultural, and religious implications of Jewish eschatological narrative. The seventh and eighth centuries A.D. witnessed the defeat of the Byzantine Empire at the hands of Muslims; its gradual disintegration and the loss of such vital territories as Palestine, Egypt, Syria, and North Africa; and finally the Iconoclast policy of Byzantine emperors. The sense of failure triggered a variety of responses. On the one hand, the notion of the Church being a distinct entity no longer associating itself with an empire but rather asserting its own universalism gained momentum not only in the Latin West but also in the now Muslim East.¹ On the other hand, a variety of political and religious ideologies looked forward to the restoration of the Roman Empire and its phoenix-like renewal. Most Byzantine apocalyptic narratives produced in the centuries immediately following the collapse belonged to the second category. They called for the miraculous revival of the empire and the restoration of its triumphant universalism, envisioning both of them as final steps leading toward direct divine rule on earth.

Remarkably, many restorationist ideologies envisioned the impulse for the restoration of the empire coming not from Constantinople nor even, for that matter, Rome.² It appears that Syriac Ps.-Methodius was composed, among other things, to argue against the widespread view

¹ See Herrin, *The Formation of Christendom*, esp. pp. 295–476. On a variety of eastern responses, see Olster, *Roman Defeat, Christian Response*, 99–179.

² See Alexander, *Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, 96–122, (on western traditions); Shahid, “The *Kebra Negast* in the Light of Recent Research,” 133–78, and Bowersock, “Helena’s Bridle and the Chariot of Ethiopia,” 383–93 (on Ethiopia).

that the restoration of the empire would come from Ethiopia. Vaguely discernible traces of the Ethiopian origins of the last Roman emperor could be part of that original narrative. Later on, during the ninth century, a new series of apocalyptic writings envisioned the king of the Franks as the restorer of the empire. In the Middle Ages, this tradition would be adjusted to fit the Ottonian dynasty of Saxon German rulers. Overall there seemed to be a fairly popular train of thought that imperial redemption and renewal would start on the outskirts of the Byzantine Commonwealth and be consummated in Constantinople and/or Jerusalem. At least in part this tendency could be explained by the belief that the empire itself needed a renewal, its sacred vitality no longer strong enough to guarantee the empire's triumphant universalism. The power of renewal could no longer be found within Constantinople but outside of it. The shift of focus of imperial sacred geography from the imperial center to the periphery sought to restore the vitality of mythical Byzantium through the inversion of the established canons of imperial sacred space. In the situation in which the imperial center lost its strength, once-peripheral parts of the empire claimed this strength for themselves, positioning themselves as the legitimate successors of Constantinople.

The Jewish response to the imperial crisis was somewhat more complex. Byzantine Jewish texts both accepted and inverted the general line of Byzantine discourse that legitimized the empire's existence by tracing it back to the Israelite Davidic kingdom. Jews recognized that Byzantium was a historical successor of Davidic kings that received its power as part of the divinely sanctioned *peregrinatio imperii*, but they also believed that this power would eventually return to its original owner, the restored kingdom of Israel. Messianic Israel would bring about the true sacred empire and the true fulfillment of the Davidic kingdom that historical Byzantium attempted but failed to produce. Just as in Byzantine imperial ideology, the Davidic kingdom was a faint symbol of the Byzantine Empire, in contemporaneous Jewish eschatology, Byzantium itself was a faint symbol of Messianic Israel's triumphant universalism. It should come as no surprise that Byzantine Jewish texts were deeply steeped in uniquely Byzantine imperial symbolism, borrowed not directly from the Hebrew Bible or later rabbinic tradition but from the Byzantine narrative of their own days. What these texts envisioned was no simple restoration of the old Davidic kingdom within a new messianic format. Rather, the

Jewish eschatological kingdom was intended to be the true realization of the Byzantine Empire, whereas restored Jerusalem was the true realization of Rome/Constantinople. Both Constantinople and Byzantium were dim symbols and precursors of Jerusalem and the messianic kingdom of Israel.

At the same time, Jewish eschatological discourse was not out of step with the restorationist ideologies of contemporaneous Christian writings. They shared the same quest for the restoration of the true holy empire in the place of collapsing Byzantium. In addition, in both quests the peripheral ethnic, religious, and cultural elements of the Byzantine Commonwealth (Franks, Slavs, Miaphysite Ethiopians, or Jews) were to assume the central role of restorers and redeemers. In that sense, Jewish eschatological visions constituted part of a broader response among various ethnic and cultural groups within the Byzantine Commonwealth to the decline of Byzantium. In the situation in which the historical Roman Empire was quickly becoming a thing of the past, its idealized and religiously potent specter was rising to become part of Christian and, indirectly, Jewish religio-political narratives for centuries to come.

Jewish eschatological responses to the political and military upheavals of the seventh century came as a natural outcome of the broader cultural situation, which I described in the Introduction to this book as Jewish participation in the Byzantine Commonwealth. The participation was characterized by the critique of dominant culture, but, at the same time, by the sharing of fundamental cultural values, discourses, and meanings created by the Commonwealth's imperial center. We cannot properly understand the Jewish "counter-culture" of Late Antiquity without realizing that Jews of the Christian Roman Empire accepted and internalized some of the fundamental principles of imperial discourse, including the imperial discourse on theology and symbolic representations of power. Messianic imperialism of late antique Jewish literature developed within the frame of reference established by the imperial theology/ies and eschatology/ies of the day. In that sense it was not significantly different from the Miaphysite religio-political fantasies of the same period or from the late medieval doctrine of Moscow as the "Third Rome." To go back to Obolensky's definition of the Byzantine Commonwealth, with which I started the Introduction, one could argue that at least some groups among Jewish "ruling and educated classes were led to adopt many

features of Byzantine civilization, with the result that they were able to share in, and eventually to contribute to, a common cultural tradition,” not simply by following this tradition but even more so by actively challenging, inverting, and further enriching it through various forms of “counter-culture.”³

In the concluding chapters of his *Imperialism and Jewish Society*, Seth Schwartz proposes that the Christianization of Roman society and culture led to social, political, and cultural marginalization of the Jewish community within it.⁴ Especially in Byzantine Palestine there was a “tendency to form inward-turning, partly self-enclosed religious communities” on the part of Jewish population.⁵ This in turn led to another related development, that of “Judaization.” Jewish communities became culturally and religiously autonomous, forming their distinct identity around the Torah and the synagogue. Jewish tradition made a comeback in the form of elaborate religious poetry (*piyyutim*), biblical commentaries (*midrashim*), and translations (*targumim*). In a situation of social marginalization, Jews embraced cultural uniqueness and self-sufficiency, moving from a highly integrated Jewish community in the earlier Roman Empire to an introverted religious entity in the medieval world. Unintentionally the Christianization of the Roman Empire became responsible for the creation of a uniquely Jewish religious culture centered on the Torah, the synagogue, and memories of the Temple.

I believe that, despite its obvious merits, Schwartz’s argument about Jewish cultural introversion in the Christian Roman Empire needs to receive further nuance. As I have attempted to argue throughout this book, Jews remained wedded to imperial ideology until the collapse of Christian rule in the Near East in the seventh and eighth centuries A.D. The messianic kingdom of David was constructed by appropriating and creatively developing fundamental principles of Roman imperialism as well as by projecting these principles into the eschatological future. Intellectually and conceptually, the Jewish view of history was shaped by the imperial model established by Rome. All this was happening at the same time as Jewish religious culture was becoming in some of its functions

³ Obolensky, *Byzantine Commonwealth*, 13.

⁴ Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society*, 179–289. See also Schwartz, “Some Types of Jewish-Christian Interaction in Late Antiquity,” 197–210.

⁵ Schwartz, *Imperialism*, 199.

increasingly inward-looking and self-enclosed, but so, too, was the contemporaneous Byzantine civilization in general.⁶ In my opinion, Jewish religious culture in the Christian Roman Empire was characterized by the same combination of participation in and alienation from the dominant imperial culture as were the religious cultures of other members of the Byzantine Commonwealth(s). The apparently introverted characteristics of Jewish culture tell only part of the story and constitute only one vector of development. The other vector is formed by the ongoing participation of Jews and Judaism in the symbolic and conceptual universe of the empire. It is through this dialectic of participation and alienation that Jewish cultural life at the end of antiquity can best be understood.

⁶ See Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century*, 425–35.

Abbreviations

PRIMARY SOURCES

'Abot R. Nat. A	'Abot de-Rabbi Nathan, version A
Agathias, <i>Hist</i>	Agathiae Myrinaei Historiarum libri cinque
Anon. <i>Val.</i>	Anonymous Valesianus
<i>Avar.</i>	George the Pisidian, <i>Bellum Avaricum</i>
b. (with name of tractate)	<i>Bavli</i> (Babylonian Talmud)
<i>Bon.</i>	George the Pisidian, <i>In Bonum patricium</i>
Const. Porph., <i>De Admin. Imp.</i>	Constantine Porphyrogenitus, <i>De Administrando Imperio</i>
Const. Porph., <i>De Cer.</i>	Constantine Porphyrogenitus, <i>De Cerimoniis Aulae Byzantinae</i>
<i>1 En.</i>	<i>1 Enoch</i>
<i>Esth. R.</i>	<i>Esther Rabbah</i>
Eusebius, <i>V. Const.</i>	Eusebius, <i>Vita Constantini</i>
Eusebius, <i>Hist. eccl.</i>	Eusebius, <i>Historia ecclesiastica</i>
Eusebius, <i>Praep. ev.</i>	Eusebius, <i>Praeparatio Evangelica</i>
Eusebius, <i>Laud. Const</i>	Eusebius, <i>De laudibus Constantini</i>
<i>Ex Africa</i>	George the Pisidian, <i>In Heracliam ex Africa redeuntem</i>)
<i>Gen. R.</i>	<i>Genesis Rabbah</i>
<i>Her.</i>	George the Pisidian, <i>Heraclias</i>
<i>In Rest.</i>	George the Pisidian, <i>In restitutionem S. Crucis</i>
Jerome, <i>Comm. in Esaiam</i>	Jerome, <i>Commentariorum in Esaiam</i>
John of Damascus, <i>Dorm.</i>	John of Damascus, <i>On the Dormition of the Virgin</i>
John of Ephesus, <i>Hist. Eccl.</i>	John of Ephesus, <i>Historia ecclesiastica</i>
John of Nikiu, <i>Chron.</i>	John of Nikiu, <i>Chronicle</i>
<i>Lam. R.</i>	<i>Lamentations Rabbah</i>
<i>Lev. R.</i>	<i>Leviticus Rabbah</i>
m. (with name of tractate)	Mishnah
Malal.	<i>The Chronicle of John Malalas</i>
<i>Mek.</i>	<i>Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael</i>
<i>MidPs</i>	<i>Midrash on Psalms</i>

<i>Par.</i>	<i>Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai</i>
<i>Pesiq. Rab.</i>	<i>Pesikta Rabbati</i>
PRK	<i>Pesikta de-Rav Kahana</i>
Proclus, <i>Hom.</i>	Proclus, <i>Homilies</i>
Romanos, <i>Hymnes</i>	Romanus Melodus, <i>Hymns</i>
<i>Pirqe R. El.</i>	<i>Pirqe de Rabbi Eliezer</i>
Ps.-Methodius	Syriac Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius
<i>Qoh. R.</i>	<i>Qohelet Rabbah (Ecclesiastes Rabbah)</i>
<i>Ruth R.</i>	<i>Ruth Rabbah</i>
<i>Sifre Deut.</i>	<i>Sifre to Deuteronomy</i>
Socrates, <i>Hist. Eccl.</i>	Socrates, <i>Historia ecclesiastica</i>
<i>Song R.</i>	<i>Song of Songs Rabbah</i>
Sozomen, <i>Hist. Eccl.</i>	Sozomen, <i>Historia ecclesiastica</i>
<i>Synopse</i>	<i>Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur</i>
t. (with name of tractate)	Tosefta
<i>Tanh.</i>	<i>Tanhuma</i>
<i>Tg. Ps-J.</i>	<i>Targum Pseudo-Jonathan</i>
Themist., <i>Orat.</i>	Themistius, <i>Orations</i>
Theodoret, <i>Hist. Eccl.</i>	Theodoret, <i>Historia ecclesiastica</i>
Theophylact, <i>History</i>	Theophylactus Simocatta, <i>Historiae</i>
y. (with name of tractate)	<i>Yerushalmi (Palestinian Talmud)</i>
Zosimus, <i>Hist. Nov.</i>	Zosimus, <i>Historia Nova</i>

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AJP	<i>American Journal of Philology</i>
ANRW	Temporini, H., and W. Hasse, eds., <i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt: Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neuen Forschung</i> (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1972-)
BA	Byzantina Australiensia
BAR	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i>
BBA	Berliner byzantinistische Arbeiten
BJRL	<i>Bulletin of the John Rylands Library</i>
BSGRT	Bibliotheca scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana
BZ	<i>Byzantinische Zeitschrift</i>
CCSL	<i>Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina</i>
CFHB	Corpus fontium historiae Byzantinae
CQ	<i>Classical Quarterly</i>
CSCO	Corpus scriptorum christianorum orientalium
CSCT	Columbia Studies in the Classical Tradition
CSHB	Corpus scriptorum historiae byzantinae
CSHJ	Chicago Studies in the History of Judaism
CUF	Collection des universités de France
DOP	<i>Dumbarton Oaks Papers</i>
EHR	<i>English Historical Review</i>
GCS	Die griechische christliche Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte

GRBS	<i>Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies</i>
HSCP	<i>Harvard Studies in Classical Philology</i>
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
IEJ	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
JAC	<i>Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum</i>
JHS	<i>Journal of Hellenic Studies</i>
JRA	<i>Journal of Roman Archaeology</i>
JRS	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
JSIJ	<i>Jewish Studies Internet Journal</i>
JSJ	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Periods</i>
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament. Supplement series</i>
JSP	<i>Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha</i>
JSQ	<i>Jewish Studies Quarterly</i>
JSS	<i>Jewish Social Studies</i>
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
JWCI	<i>Journal of the Warburg and Courtland Institutes</i>
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
MLS	<i>Medievalia Lovaniensia Series</i>
MTS	Münchener theologische studien
OCA	Orientalia christiana analecta
OLA	<i>Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta</i>
PIH	Papers on Islamic History
PAAJR	<i>Proceedings of the American Academy of Jewish Research</i>
PG	Migne, J.-P., <i>Patrologiae cursus completus: Series graeca</i>
PL	Migne, J.-P., <i>Patrologiae cursus completus: Series Latina</i>
PTS	Patristische Texte und Studien
RBPH	<i>Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire</i>
RHPR	<i>Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses</i>
RHR	<i>Revue de l'histoire des religions</i>
REJ	<i>Revue des études juives</i>
SChr	Sources chrétiennes
SCH	<i>Studies in Church History</i>
SFSHJ	South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism
SLAEI	Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam
SPB	Studia patristica et byzantine
SVC	Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae
TSAJ	Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum
TU	Texte und Untersuchungen
ThZ	<i>Theologische Zeitschrift</i>
VTs	Vetus Testamentum Syriace
WBS	Wiener byzantinistische Studien
YCS	<i>Yale Classical Studies</i>
ZDMG	<i>Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft</i>
ZTK	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>

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