**“If You See Empires Provoking Each Other, Await the Footsteps of the Messiah”**

**Chronography and Apocalyptics in Late Antiquity[[1]](#footnote-1)\***

**A Historical Introduction to *Midrashei Geula* (Y. Even-Shmuel, New Printing)**

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Since Yehuda Even-Shmuel published *Midrashei Geula*, an eclectic collection of Jewish apocalyptic works from Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages, and prefaced the second edition with a sprawling general historical introduction,[[2]](#footnote-2) new light has been shed on these important sources by means of new commentaries (on the vision of Daniel, for example),[[3]](#footnote-3) from the very fact of their connection with their genre in the literature,[[4]](#footnote-4) and from new contemplation of the historical context in which they were created. The past two decades have seen a flowering of scholarship on these traditions and the establishment of parallels between them and apocalyptic and eschatological traditions in the Roman Christian[[5]](#footnote-5) and the Persian-Sasanian (Zoroastrian) worlds.[[6]](#footnote-6) Concurrently, attempts have been made to get a better grasp of the meaning of these traditions with the help of the historical allusions, which are becoming increasingly clear, that were encoded in classical and post-classical Hebrew *piyyutim*.[[7]](#footnote-7) The renewed interest and discoveries in the scholarship of ancient mystical literature, which also abounds with allusions to successions of empires and expectations of imminent redemption, have also contributed to this.

However, our understanding of the historical background that Even-Shmuel sketched in the first editions of his important introduction[[8]](#footnote-8) has changed greatly, even if parts of it remain valid today. This is not only due to the many discoveries that have been made since then but also, and primarily, due to the radical change in the way we perceive the entire historical-cultural tableau of the time preceding the rise of the Jewish apocalypse genre in Late Antiquity. This change is based on the growth of the historiographic paradigm known as “Late Antiquity,” which took shape in the 1960s and introduced a revisiting of the society and culture of the period between the middle of the third century CE to the second half of the eighth century. This era carved out a new socio-cultural space for itself by force of its characteristics and events, foremost “the transformation of the [Roman] Empire into Heresy [Christianity],” creating a link between the ancient classical world and the Middle Ages.[[9]](#footnote-9)

I do not intend in this brief introduction to produce an uninterrupted and complete portrait of events of that era that may have served as a background for the ascendancy of sentiments of the impending End, possibly forming the infrastructure for the apocalyptic writings in this collection—each of which having its special background. I do wish to offer the contemporary reader a few basic insights that will guide him or her in this unique arena. Here I explore mechanisms that shaped the world-picture of the “End of Days” or the redemption, with emphasis on the role of socioeconomic agents such as the *paytanim*[[10]](#footnote-10) and the Christian chronographers, and I will also suggest keys to understanding the historical-literary texture of the works themselves. I will accompany these with a linear account of historical developments from the fourth century to the seventh century that influenced the upturn in messianic tension within Jewish society until the messianic topic was committed to writing and expressed in a more crystallized way, in an ostensibly systematic doctrine such as that in the works of which the collection at hand is comprised.

In the past, surveys of these types centered on parochial events. However, the innovations of recent decades in the scholarship of that era show that one cannot delve into the apocalyptic writings and their underlying traditions without giving thought to the experiences of the ethnic groups, the affiliates of the different faiths, and the neighboring peoples in that historical sphere.

The question of the external sources (Christian, Zoroastrian, and Muslim) that further our understanding of the historical background of the Jews’ impending End experience from the fourth century onward, and in the sixth and seventh centuries in particular, deserves further elucidation. The main sources associated with the matter among the Jews are Christian; they are immensely important for our comparison, foremost due to what they say about the Jews and their expectations of the End. They are also crucial for examining the similarity of both camps’ apocalyptic and the eschatological schemes and, particularly, of the End of Days calculations that they shared. On the one hand, the Christian chronographies are grounded in linear time paradigms and their connection with the Christian millennial scheme is sometimes direct and at other times indirect or concealed. On the other hand, they often distance themselves from even the most disruptive contemporary events.[[11]](#footnote-11) Those who rely on these sources must be aware of this.[[12]](#footnote-12)

The key question concerns the origins of the genre of the works that Even-Shmuel gathered and the historical meanings of the coalescence of this literature in the form before us. After all, before the Book of Zerubbabel—the opening work in the collection—appeared, we found no subset of Late Antiquity Jewish literature works of this kind. Just the same, varying extents of concern among the Sages with the advent of the messiah were well known. In parallel, eschatology and the apocalyptic were a subject of great interest for the authors of the *Targumim*, the *paytanim*, and the authors of the mystical *Heikhalot* literature.[[13]](#footnote-13)

Just the same, we should ask where the apocalyptic-eschatological literature that was so common from the late prophecy era to the times of the Second Temple seemingly disappeared for some 500 years. Indeed, a wide gap opened between the blossoming of this literature in various circles during the Temple era and the fragments of traditions that we have been preserved through the works of the Talmudic Sages, the aggadic homilies, the *paytanim* (liturgical poets), and biblical translations. It is a fact that no Jewish apocalyptic works appeared from the late first century CE to the second half of the sixth century, after the last comprehensive writings in the genre—the Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch and Fourth Ezra and their parallels in the Christian world, such as the Book of Revelation. If such works existed, where were they? Who crowded them out? And what led to their salient reappearance in the Jewish literature in the “succession of empires” era and afterward?[[14]](#footnote-14)

Despite all the questions, it should not be assumed that expectations of the advent of the messiah waned during all those centuries and that the Sages’ speculations about the redemption, the extent of its imminence, and its various scenarios were marginalized. Admittedly, it is hard to see the Sages’ midrashim on redemption-related issues as a systematic and comprehensive corpus akin to the ramified literary canon that had developed while the Temple stood. Nevertheless, one may assemble a mosaic, albeit an incomplete one, from the scattered traditions in the Rabbinic sources and sources similar to them. This tableau may influence our study of the systematic presentation offered by the later *midrashei geula*, which definitely did not spring forth *ex nihilo*.[[15]](#footnote-15)

Many of these Rabbinic midrashim deal with reflections on when and by what prior signs the messiah would come, arising from the collection of traditions in *Pereq Heleq* in tractate Sanhedrin of the Babylonian Talmud[[16]](#footnote-16) and from allusions in classical *piyyut*. A historiographically reasonable way to present the “retreat” that occurred in the second century (and, some would say, in the third century as well) from active involvement in the question of messianism in the rabbis’ world is by contemplating the unbroken series of failures in the Jews’ struggles against Rome (the “fourth kingdom” according to the scheme of the Four Beasts in Daniel) between the destruction of the Temple and the Bar Kokhba uprising, which was led by a “messiah” who failed to produce.[[17]](#footnote-17) The re-centering of messianic speculation in the fourth century and, with greater intensity, in the fifth and six centuries, seemingly owes its origins to a chain of historical events such as the pagan Emperor Julian’s unsuccessful plan (spring of 363 CE) to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. A severe earthquake, repeatedly mentioned in the contemporary and subsequent Christian historiographic literature, that leveled many cities in Palestine and damaged Jerusalem as well appears to have contributed to the failure of the initiative. About a month after the quake, the emperor was killed on the Persian front, thus dooming the idea for good. It is reasonable to suppose that the surprising plan stirred messianic ferment among the Jews, but the scale of that passion is hard to estimate because it is largely dulled in our sources, not only because the scheme failed but also due to the suspect circumstances of its parentage.[[18]](#footnote-18)

Additional events in the ensuing decades—all taking place under the yoke of the Christian Roman Empire—caused messianic tension to grow. According to Philip Alexander,[[19]](#footnote-19) an active messianic consciousness was present on the fringes of the world of the *beit midrash*, the Talmudic study hall, but its manifestations were largely subdued until a populistic element joined forces with those who frequented the *beit midrash*. The main manifestations of this populistic element appeared in the context of the synagogue, among the *paytanim* and the authors of the *Targumim*, in circles where mystical literature flourished and in late priesthood circles. These led to the “eruption” of a variety of apocalyptic writings from the Book of Zerubbabel onward. The development of messianic consciousness among the Jews of Palestine between the fourth and the seventh centuries squares with the more general contours of the way the messianic consciousness took shape in societies that based themselves on a messianic horizon (foremost the Jewish and Christian) and also in the way this consciousness became permanent in the collective memory or, alternatively, was deleted from it. The permanent duality of the messianic consciousness, be it concealed and repressed or overt and vocalized, signifies continuum and continuity and is the basis for understanding the phenomenon in its historical context.[[20]](#footnote-20)

There is evidence that expectations of the eschaton among Jews were uninterrupted and continual; nevertheless, there were also stimuli that amplified them. These stimuli rested largely on the upturn in messianic tension in the surroundings and the historical inferences derived from it. This escalation was nourished rather strongly by the inter-power tension and eruptions of hostilities between Rome and Sasanian Persia at this time. Theological history also explained this reality: “Rome is destined to fall to Persia.”[[21]](#footnote-21) (Below I return at length to this important aspect of the Jews’ messianic expectations.) The existence of accounts that allude to other components of the historical-apocalyptic scheme in the “pool” of Rabbinic traditions forces those who wish to discuss the works in the collection at hand to be more cautious when relating to the distinction between what may certainly be seen as a later novelty and what draws on the past.

The description of the historical context in both Even-Shmuel and in Alexander, however, is missing a prime component—one that influenced and may even have fed the hidden currents of messianic consciousness among the Jews at the time until they erupted with full fury in the set of works included in the collection at hand. The component I have in mind is the connection between this effervescent messianic excitement (albeit not always overt) and the parallel Christian society, which was also experiencing rather potent messianic tension. The intersection of the Jews and their Christian neighbors pertains chiefly to reckonings of the End and, to a lesser extent, to the messianic or eschatological scheme as such.[[22]](#footnote-22) The task of fully revealing these contexts and connections still lies ahead.[[23]](#footnote-23)

As stated, the messianic tension was fueled, more than anything, by the array of eschatological calculations that served as an active mechanism of much use at critical points in time.[[24]](#footnote-24) For example, Jerome, the Church Father who settled in Bethlehem in the late fourth century, testified that the Jews were disseminating the tradition and, according to it, just as God exacted retribution against Pharaoh at the end of 430 years, so will the yoke of Rome be lifted from them at the end of the same duration of time. The Jews began the countdown, he says, upon the destruction of the Temple;[[25]](#footnote-25) therefore, at the time these matters were committed to writing, those who endorsed this reckoning expected to wait another century or so until the redemption. In this sense, seemingly, the Jews’ tradition as appropriated by Jerome (and perhaps bequeathed to him by Jewish teachers) overlaps the Rabbinic tradition in the Babylonian Talmud.[[26]](#footnote-26)

The timing of the discussion of this reckoning among the Christians, in the late fourth century, should, it seems to me, be credited to the shockwaves of Julian’s unsuccessful scheme not only to rebuild the Jews’ temple in Jerusalem but also, and mainly, to change the course of history. This emperor is likened in some Christian sources to the Antichrist, the mythical figure from the End of Days. It was a time of messianic ferment among Christian thinkers, too, some of whom plunged into eschatological reckonings.[[27]](#footnote-27) Furthermore, it seems that Julian’s resounding failure made the Jewish Temple more central in the Christian account of the redemption. A contemporary Christian thinker, Apollinaris of Laodicea, for example, described a messianic scenario in which, as part of the Christian scheme of deliverance, the Jews would rebuild their Temple. According to this scenario, the sacrificial rite at the Temple would be terminated three and a half years after the reconstruction of the edifice, as part of the struggle between the Antichrist and the redeemer, and upon the advent of the latter the battle would be decided and the redemption would come.[[28]](#footnote-28)

Another attempt to lead the Jews astray in pursuit of their messianic cravings took place a short time later, in the mysterious affair of the false messiah who operated among the Jews in Crete in the first half of the fifth century. This pretender convinced them that he was a “new Moses” who had come to redeem them, take them across the Mediterranean, and lead them to the Promised Land. The death by drowning of many Jews who leapt from the escarpments of the island into the sea, and the conversion to Christianity of many who survived, gave further evidence in the eyes of the narrator of this affair, the contemporary Christian historiographer Socrates of Constantinople, of the vanity of the Jews’ hopes and the ease with which they embraced error.[[29]](#footnote-29) Whether this affair actually took place or was presented as an illustration of the Jews’ stupidity, Socrates apparently bases his basic historiographic assumption on his readers’ familiarity with various calculations of the eschaton, Christian and Jewish, even though few of them have come down to us as written traditions.

Evidence of the power of the influence of redemption expectations in a society that fervently awaited redemption is given by the exegete’s remarks in Exodus Rabba 5:18, which reference Pharaoh’s words to Moses in Egypt when Moses appeals to the ruler’s emotions for the sake of his suffering brethren: “‘For they are shirkers. […] Let heavier work be laid upon the men; let them keep at it and not pay attention to deceitful promises’ [Ex 5:8–9]: It shows that they had scrolls, with which they entertained themselves from Sabbath to Sabbath, that is, that the Blessed Holy One is their redeemer because they would rest on the Sabbath […].” These scrolls—as the exegete’s account and the commentators’ explanations indicate—apparently told the story of the patriarchs and the promise to Abraham. Presumably, however, they also contained records and reckonings of the time of their redemption from the enslavement in Egypt. If this hypothesis is correct, we may easily detect the contemporary inference that the anonymous exegete wished to make. That we do not exactly when this exegete was active neither adds nor detracts because interpretive calculational mechanisms of these types were commonplace.

What we observe here is a welcome phenomenon in societies that base their redemption on given reckoning schemes. The tacit assumptions that matter for our discussion are not only the very existence of the various reckoning traditions, some lacking preserved documentation and some having no known clear connection with Temple traditions, but also the exegete’s awareness of the existence of a “complete” and collective mechanism for updating the end-reckonings. Therefore, and in consideration of Jerome’s remarks, we should assume in reference to the biblical promise of redemption derived from the enslavement in Egypt that the calculation of the redemption from the Fourth Kingdom hinged on a series of key dates. Were the 400 or 430 years calculated from the time of Pompey (62 BCE)?[[30]](#footnote-30) Or perhaps from that of Herod (37 BCE)? Or possibly from the onset of Rome’s direct presence and the rule of the governors (6 CE)? Or, as was customary and as we also saw in Jerome, from the destruction itself?

The biblical seventy-week calculus, reckoned from the destruction of the First Temple (as per Daniel 9:24–27), also served as a point of departure for calculating the eschaton. This count, however, was used by Christian thinkers in different ways and at different times, *inter alia* in the context of the birth of the redeemer but also to reckon the Parousia (the second coming of Jesus) either from the days of the Incarnation (at roughly the beginning of the Common Era) or from the Crucifixion (about thirty years later). All of these apparently gave sustenance to the various reckonings.[[31]](#footnote-31) We must also demur: It is hard to know whether the messianic ferment was predicated largely on apocalyptic arithmetic or whether the tradition of reckoning merely amplified this process, which rested on other factors.

There were also messianic stimuli of another kind, originating in the historical events themselves. The Roman Empire experienced many shocks in the fifth century, such as the fall of its capital to the Barbarians (in 410); the abdication of the last Roman Emperor, Romulus Augustulus, in 476,[[32]](#footnote-32) and the eruption of hostilities with the Persians (c. 500). These events may have given the messianic tension a powerful upward push, even though their direct or cumulative impact is not certain because one doubts whether the reports about the events in the imperial capital and the Christian West (including the Vandals’ conquests in Spain and northern Africa) reached the Jews of Palestine or Babylonia. If they did arrive, too, it is unlikely that they made any impression whatsoever. The escalation of tension between Persia and Rome in the late fifth century and the sunset of the institution of the governorate in the first part of that century did make an impression in the East, but these matters still entail further inquiry.

It is also hard to put much stock in the later chronographic testimonies about ferment of political-messianic origin among Babylonian Jewry, including the Jewish uprising against Persian rule in the late fifth century under the leadership of the Exilarch Mar Zutra. Even the existing vagueness in this matter, however, does not totally rule out the possibility of some upturn in passion in response to internal events in Persia at the time.[[33]](#footnote-33) We know much more about the ferment in the early sixth century in the faraway Kingdom of Himyar (today’s Yemen). At the beginning of that century, as the Semitic sphere embarked on its lengthy transition to monotheism, a local leader named Joseph Dhu Nuwas adopted a form of Judaism and began to subject Christians to systematic and cruel persecution. This, in fact, was an act of ethnic cleansing that ended in 525 when Christians from Ethiopia invaded and crushed the Jewish kingdom, which, according to contemporary Christian sources, had maintained relations with the Jewish leadership in Tiberias. Although the information about this relationship is iffy, rumors about the grave anti-Christian activity that took place in the kingdom may have reached Palestine and heralded a change.[[34]](#footnote-34)

Despite our many reservations about the extent of influence of contemporary events on shaping messianic anticipation, we should nevertheless note that the fifth century, particularly in its second half, fit well into the matrix of contemporary reckonings of the eschaton among the Christian chronographers, foremost those in the Latin West such as Hydatius of Lemica, Spain, *inter alia,* and in Rabbinic traditions (as stated above).[[35]](#footnote-35) It should be borne in mind that even among the Church Fathers one finds opponents of the messianic spirit and a few who did not believe the End was truly imminent.

For the Jewish population, in contrast, the upturn in anti-Christian hostility and the sense of imminent redemption were visibly linked. The *piyyutim* that were recited in the synagogue and elsewhere give salient indication of this.[[36]](#footnote-36) The blunt remarks of an anonymous *paytan* give a revealing example of the enmity that was at work: “The magnificence of priestly raiments we have not, and the sackcloth-wearers [= apparently a pejorative for Christian monks] govern us.”[[37]](#footnote-37) The sixth-century *piyyut* oeuvre of Yanai gives an idea of how far the contretemps were from eschatological thinking. Yanai’s *piyyutim* reflect his animus toward *Edom* (= Rome), his hopes for its imminent downfall, and his contempt for Christianity. In one of his *qerovot* on Genesis, we read: “From on high topple the minister of *Edom*. […] Set Your revenge upon *Edom*. […] Ten horns sever from *Edom*. […]Come forth and show us what will become of *Edom*. […] Take the empire away from *Edom*. [...][[38]](#footnote-38) However, Yanai warned against adopting a zealous approach toward hastening the redemption by taking action, arguing that the End is unknown and the labors of its reckoners are in vain: “The day of your bringing, who will ordain its advent. [...] It [remains] hidden in Your trove / and stored in Your heart […].” Some scholars, too, claim that the authors of the *Targumim* shared his reasoning.[[39]](#footnote-39) Pope Gregory the Great spoke in the same spirit at this time in one of his homilies: “God does not want us to know when the end will come.”[[40]](#footnote-40)

The world of creative art (*piyyut*, *Targum*, and the mystical *Heikhalot* literature) that interacted with the Palestinian synagogue in the fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries, like the artistic ornamentation and the iconographic symbols in the synagogues, based itself on central elements of the Jews’ perception of the redemption at this time: the Tabernacle, the Temple, and the resumption of the Temple rite.[[41]](#footnote-41) Were these significant manifestations of awaiting the redemption, the reconstruction of the Temple, and the resumption of its rite? Or were they just vague hopes and visions? The question acquires even a sharper edge due to thick allusions in sixth-century Christian liturgical poem that juxtapose the destroyed Jerusalem Temple (referred to as Solomon’s Temple) with the ornamented Hagia Sophia Church in Constantinople because of the proliferation of Christian traditions concerning the fate of the Temple implements.[[42]](#footnote-42) All of these may have been apologetic manifestations that revealed the Christians’ fear of the restoration of the days of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem and its rite.[[43]](#footnote-43) Still, we must be persistent and ask whether they were also an expression of a palpable messianic reality. It is a difficult question to resolve.

One may presume that the sense of imminent redemption escalated in the sixth century, particularly in its second half. Various events abetted the surge, foremost the ups and downs in Byzantium’s lengthy and tangled relationship (especially after the death of Emperor Justinian in 565) with the Sasanian Empire in the east.[[44]](#footnote-44) It should be remembered that at least in the Byzantine Christian camp, these sentiments mounted because according to the accepted end-reckonings, i.e., the lengthy calculation from Creation (*annus mundi)*, as distinct from those beginning in the days of the Redeemer (*annus Domini*), the year 500 (or 508) CE was in fact the six thousandth year from the Creation, after which the end of the world was to come. According to various schemes, this year was the threshold of the Parousia, the second revelation of Jesus. Thus, just as recalculation and readjustment mechanisms were being created, shocks of all kinds were perceived in the public mind as preliminary manifestations of the steadily approaching End.[[45]](#footnote-45)

As for the Jews, they spent this time under Justinian’s hostile rule,[[46]](#footnote-46) and even though the hostility did not manifest in quotidian life in Palestine,[[47]](#footnote-47) the main catalyst of ferment may have been the political situation at large. Nevertheless, the surging messianic tension may have been stirred by local and transitory stimuli that exacerbated the erosion of the sense of relative interfaith calm that scholars such as Bowersock emphasize.[[48]](#footnote-48) By this, I mean the somewhat far-fetched possibility of the violent Samaritan uprising in 555/556 in Caesarea, in which the Jews took part.[[49]](#footnote-49) The temporal proximity of the Samaritan uprising, in the middle of the sixth century, and the Jews’ violent involvement in it, to the now-presumed time of the composition of the core of the Book of Zerubbabel—before 570—requires more painstaking study.[[50]](#footnote-50)

In the absence of real tension in Palestine, the Jews were attracted to the possibility, more imminent than ever, of fulfilling their messianic vision without taking action to bring it on, in the spirit of R. Elazar bar Avina’s adage: “If you see empires provoking each other, await the footsteps of the messiah” (Bereshit Rabba 41 [42], G [and parallels], Theodor-Albeck edition, 409). These events reinforced the infrastructure of redemption traditions and promoted the coalescence of texts that reflected the hopes of the Jews there.[[51]](#footnote-51) Indeed, it was apparently the processes that toppled the Byzantine Empire, witnessed by the Jews, that shaped the picture evoked by the most salient work in the apocalyptic and eschatological genre—the Book of Zerubbabel, apparently composed before 570. This redating is based, *inter alia,* on that the book offers a redemption reckoning based on calculating the time from the destruction of the first Temple.[[52]](#footnote-52)

The messianic excitement appears to have begun surging already at the outset of the Persian–Byzantine hostilities in the 640s, including the Persian invasion of Antioch, Syria, on the Mediterranean coast—a hub of central Roman rule. The conquest of the city and the exiling of some of its inhabitants to Persia may well have kindled hope among the Jews of the East.[[53]](#footnote-53) The continuation of the process from the Jewish perspective was signified by the decline of Byzantium at the end of the century, roughly when the core of the Book of Zerubbabel was composed. However, its apex (reflected in the passages of the book outside the core) apparently took place after the Persian invasion, since according to testimonies (largely of Christian origin), the Jews of Palestine collaborated with the Sasanian invaders. These events apparently caused *paytanim* too, such as R. Elazar b. Qilir, to join the “seekers of redemption” in the apocalyptic interpretation of the events of their time. However, it must be conceded that according to the recent studies, the direct connection of the *paytanim* to the contemporary event and the traditions in their possession need further inquiry.[[54]](#footnote-54)

At this point, one should emphasize that tracking down historical allusions in apocalyptic midrashim is not enough to decipher them. Instead, they need to be set within the cultural-interpretative realities of the time.[[55]](#footnote-55) The sifting of real historical information from the imagined spectacle should of course be undertaken painstakingly and cautiously. So Paul Alexander counsels in a formative article, according to which the dating of an apocalyptic work is unequivocally associated with the most recent historical event that can be identified with certainty. Let us not forget that even when a text is couched in future tense, it reflects after-the-event (*vaticinium ex eventu*) wisdom and, from that moment on, the imagined spectacle passage makes use of ancient sources and schemes even though this interpretative mechanism would seem better suited to the oeuvre of non-Jewish works (Christian and perhaps Muslim as well) than to the midrashim in the collection discussed here.[[56]](#footnote-56)

The assumption about the dependency or connection between the messianic ferment in the mutually hostile religio-cultural camps (the Jewish and the Christian) makes it necessary to describe the cultural-conceptual underpinnings that underlie the central work in the collection of midrashim at hand, the Book of Zerubbabel. The purpose of such a description is not only to try to construct an eschatological scheme based on past sources but also to adopt the alternative Christian eschatological outlook and place atop it the opposite view that the Christian vision would not come to pass save by fulfilling the Jewish scheme centering on Jerusalem and the reinstitution of the Davidic dynasty.[[57]](#footnote-57) This point of view again demonstrates our foregoing remarks about the centrality of Jerusalem and the Temple in both the Jewish and the Christian vision of the redemption and the End of Days, as a result of changes that occurred in the image of Jerusalem in the two camps during the fifth and sixth centuries.[[58]](#footnote-58)

Here we need to ask whether these desires segued to actions. In the opinion of scholars of *piyyut*, foremost Ezra Fleischer, and of various historians, as the Persian occupation solidified, the Jews’ expectations were indeed accompanied by concrete actions. Apart from helping the Persian forces to cement their conquest, an attempt was made (with the conquerors’ permission) to resume the offering of sacrifices in the Temple. However, one must qualify this by noting the existence of doubts about the Jews’ having helped the Persians and, more so, about the resumption of the rite.[[59]](#footnote-59) Be this as it may, the Christians, with Emperor Heraclius at their head, eventually responded to the events with a forced-conversion edict against the Jews in 632, a move consistent, to some scholars’ minds, with the Christian viewpoint about the steadily approaching End of Days.[[60]](#footnote-60) The question is whether this emperor took additional punitive actions against the Jews of Palestine. According to Fleischer, an anonymous lamentation from that time indeed expresses hostility toward the emperor and the disappointment in his punitive actions. Here, too, however, this statement raises doubt.[[61]](#footnote-61)

The historical picture sketched here creates a backdrop for the works in this collection that, while representing a world of creation not very different from that of the bet midrash, add to the historical stratum something that one may call a “folk” stratum. The traditions at this level were also anchored in eschatological reckonings and drew inspiration from signs from heaven of the impending redemption, some of which even made their way into the literary canon.[[62]](#footnote-62)

The defeat of the Persians and the Byzantine reoccupation under Heraclius (who was likened to King David),[[63]](#footnote-63) followed by the Arabs’ inroads in the region and the expulsion of the Byzantines for good, propelled expectations of the redemption to higher levels in the seventh century. According to contemporary sources, even this new stage in the “rule of the kingdoms” was expected to be short-lived. The most significant expression of the urgency of the moment and the sense of imminent eschaton appears in the Armenian Christian work *The Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos,* recently dated to c. 655. This work seems to reflect, better than any earlier Christian historiography, the integration of historical perspective and the sentiment of the End of Days. Its anonymous author subordinated his historiographical outlook to his expectations of the impending End, expressing, on the one hand, the initial shock that the Arabs’ conquests produced among Christians of the east and, on the other hand, the escalating tensions within the Arab-Muslim camp in those years. These realities amplified the urgency of the redemption-time and the feeling that it was approaching upon the collapse of the “fourth kingdom” in the Danielic tradition, which would henceforth be identified with the Kingdom of Ishmael.[[64]](#footnote-64) This marks one of the first refittings of the biblical “vision of the kingdoms,” the Arabs replacing Rome as the “fourth kingdom” in both Jewish and Christian sources.

The keen sense of imminent redemption was shared by Jews and Christians. The need from the perspective of the Christians, mainly in the east, to banish the Muslims as a crucial stage in the tidings of the redemption was not foreign to the Jews. The identity and the overt manifestations of Jewish and Christian interests in the Empire are evident not only in the midrash proper and in the *midrashei geula* but in *piyyut* as well.[[65]](#footnote-65) The escalation of the second Arab civil war (682–692) further stirred the sense of imminent redemption in the Syriac Christian camp.[[66]](#footnote-66) The description of the impending eschaton peaked in the Syriac Christian apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius, written in the late seventh century and promptly translated and disseminated across the Christian world.[[67]](#footnote-67) But did the turbulent realities of the seventh-century east influence all of Christendom? The acute political shocks in the late sixth-century east (at the end of Maurice’ lifetime, in the time of Phocas, and possibly later as well) appear to have had no impact whatsoever on the world of those dwelling in Italy and Gaul, who had their own internal turmoil to deal with. Although signs from portenders of the End grew in frequency among them, too, two major thinkers of their generation, Pope Gregory the Great and the chronographer and exegete Gregory of Tours, interpreted them merely as indications that the public should ready itself for the End of Days. Gregory of Tours reckoned the eschaton as some 200 years away; this also tradition gained acceptance in subsequent generations under the inspiration of Isidore of Seville, whose eschatological reckonings were quite influential.[[68]](#footnote-68)

In the seventh century and in subsequent times, after conquering vast swaths of the Byzantine and Persian spheres, the Muslims also began to develop an apocalyptic and eschatological consciousness that had fascinating intersections with the surrounding Christian apocalyptic world and was also influenced by contemporary allusions. So it was at the very onset of Islam, as the Quran attests in *A-Rum,* which deals with the Persians’ defeat of Rome and the Romans’ ultimate triumph, as happened under Heraclius. The ramified hadithic tradition that dates to the late seventh century also describes the Christian-Muslim struggles in northern Syria.[[69]](#footnote-69)

Thus, the period reviewed here, the sixth and seventh centuries, was packed with events that had political, military, social, and cultural implications for the fate of the powers of the time, Byzantium and Persia. In their course, messianic expectations among the peoples and ethnic groups that made up the region’s human mosaic accelerated and jelled into a ramified apocalyptic-eschatological literary corpus that was typified by intersections.

I showed here that the messianic scheme of corporeal redemption in the fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries took shape in connection with the supra-historical, supra-political political ontology of the time, central to which were the struggles among the great powers—those midrashic “empires provoking each other.” They found clear expression in the Rabbinic tradition, which was passed on to the diverse corpus of apocalyptic works that populate the collection before us. Therefore, to study these works one must turn one’s gaze intensively and probingly to the surroundings in which they took shape and detect the diverse traditions that influenced their historical and literary contents. In the eschatological climate of the time, these works consoled their readers by assuring them that they were destined to enjoy the fruits of the approaching redemption and that their enemies were doomed to extinction or assimilation. The redemption of the former constituted, in sundry ways, the annihilation or disappearance of the latter. It should be remembered, however, that the realities of that time, which encouraged the upturn in messianic hopes, were quite far from the actions that actually accompanied them. In other words, the perceptible messianic tension did not lead to demonstrative activism; instead, it remained a discourse that appears to have stayed within its borders.[[70]](#footnote-70)

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1. This study was supported by Grant 16213 of the Israel Science Foundation. The topic of the study is titled *Trapped in the Undergrowth—The Jews in Early Christian Historiography and Chronography.* I thank my friend Hillel Newman, my partner in this volume, for his useful reservations and remarks. Errors remain exclusively mine. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The collection that Even-Shmuel compiled, although not cut of one cloth, is a welcome step that gives readers and students a quasi-panoramic view of these works by gathering them under one umbrella in their various versions, sources and times and by the detailed introductions that he added and wrote for each work. On Even-Shmuel’s modus operandi in editing the texts in the collection, see at length Hillel Newman’s remarks in this volume.

   Even-Shmuel’s second project is also noteworthy: publishing and prefacing the various parts of Aharon Zeev Eshkoli’s anthology, *The Messianic Movements in Israel*, Jerusalem, 1956 (published since then in a second and expanded edition that includes an additional preface by Moshe Idel: Jerusalem, 1987). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See Bonfil, “Vision of Daniel,” 111–147. On the rich Byzantine Christian pseudo-Danielic tradition, see at length DiTommaso, 2005, and Kraft, 2012*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Reeves, 2005. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Hoyland, 1997, 308–312. For a parallel collection of chronographic and apocalyptic sources (translated and annotated), see Palmer, 1993 [*Translated Texts for Historians,* 15]. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. For a brief but thorough survey of the sources of eschatology and apocalyptics in the Iranian-Zoroastrian world and their development (as well as the history of the scholarship about them), see Cereti, 2015, 259–272. Today, in contrast to the past, the most prominent scholars of this world of faith and beliefs (Cereti, Philippe Gignoux, etc.) hold the view that the eschatological tradition that evolved among the Jews and the Christians did not draw on Zoroastrian eschatology, which developed later, in the Sasanian era; therefore, the connections between these traditions were also essentially random. For a recent sketch of additional characteristics of the Late Antique Zoroastrian eschatology and the world of the apocalyptic seers who were active in it, see Agostini, 2014. (I thank my student Yitzhak [Yitz] Landes for calling Agostini’s article to my attention.) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See my recent article, “‘The Earthquake in the Arbel Valley.’” [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. When Even-Shmuel wrote about the Jewish apocalyptic world of Late Antiquity, the studies of scholars such as Willem Bousset, author of *The Antichrist Legend,* and Abba Hillel Silver, he of the influential *Messianic Speculation in Israel,* *inter alia*, still ruled the roost. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. This paradigm turned historical scholarship on its head (even though since then, it, too, has come under criticism). The living spirit behind its coalescence and diffusion is the renowned historian Peter Brown. See, for example, Brown, 1971*,* andBowersock et al., 1999.

   For a rediscussion of the points of departure of this paradigm, see among others, the collection that inaugurated the *Journal of Late Antiquity* (1, 2008). Another issue umbilically related to the rediscussion of the Late Antiquity paradigm, nourished by new discoveries in the material culture, is the question of the decline of Rome in the concrete sense. Here, see at length, for example, Ward-Perkins, *Fall of Rome,* and the debate in its aftermath. The paradigm stirred further interest in relation to the fascinating essence of the Mediterranean Basin and its history, which also has implications for the historical question discussed here. See Horden and Purcell, 2000. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. The connection between the *paytanim* and their oeuvre and the parallel world of Christian liturgical hymnography is still being discussed. Scholarship has taken various and sometimes clashing approaches toward the question of whether *piyyut* is the product of the bet midrash milieu only or whether it also emerged from contact with the parallel genre that evolved coevally in the Christian world. For an approach that tends to narrow the context, see, for example, Kister, 2007, 105–184, esp. 108–111 and note 3. For a different approach, based on a formal and stylistic comparison with works that developed outside the Jewish *piyyut* genre, see at length Minz-Manor, 2009. To my mind, it is hard to detach these scholarly approaches from the question of the reflection of contemporary events in *piyyut*; here, too, the approaches diverge. See at length below and also Elizur and Newman, note 53 below. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. See notes 23 and 67. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. See elaboration at the end of note 20 and in note 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Philip Alexander recently noted this duality. See Alexander, “The Rabbis and Messianism.” [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. It is thought that at least part of the broad conceptual platform of this literature during the Second Temple era made its way to the mystical *Masekhet ha-Yetsira* [??], of which the most prominent manifestation was the *Heikhalot* literature. On this, see Mach, “From Apocalypticism to Early Jewish Mysticism?” pp. 229–264. The *Heikhalot* literature belongs to the genre of apocalyptic literature that describes a celestial cosmic apocalypse, whereas the discussion in the survey before us revolves around the historical apocalypse. For more on the cosmic-celestial genre in the Byzantine Christian sphere of the early Middle Ages, see Baun, 2007*.* Ginzberg’s vehement remarks (early twentieth century) concerning the absence of an imprint from the Second Temple era apocryphal literature on the teachings of the Tannaim and the Amoraim pertain mainly to the celestial elements of the End of Days vision and not so much to the presence of a historical vision of the End in their world. See Ginzberg, “Some Observations on the Attitude of the Synagogue.” The question of the unbrokenness and continuity of the historical apocalypse genre is closely tied to the literature produced after the destruction of the Temple in various circles, e.g., the Vision of Baruch and Fourth Ezra, but mainly to the rabbinical literature. The tradition of the rabbinical literature that has reached us is rather fragmentary and it, too, relies strongly on the contents of the Second Temple era apocalypse genre (see briefly in Hillel Newman, in this volume), of which only bits and pieces have survived. See also an interesting attempt to trace traditions from the Vision of Ezra and the Vision of Baruch in Qilir’s *piyyut* “Az ba-halokh Yirmiyahu” in Novik, “Between First-Century Apocalyptic and Seventh-Century Liturgy.” For further on the same topic, see the next note. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. To get an idea of the fragmented tradition that survived from the rabbinical literature, see Ephraim Elimelech Urbach’s attempt to uncover the Sages’ complex doctrine in regard to the redemption. See Urbach, *The Sages,* 585–623 [אלה מספרי העמודים במהדורה העברית. בביבליוגרפיה נתתי את פרטי ההוצאה באנגלית]. For another stage in the ostensible attempt to sort the components of the messianic discourse in the rabbinical literature into significant categories of content, see Herr, “Realistic Political Messianism.” [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Foremost 97a–98b. Most of these traditions (some from Palestine sources) were preserved in the Babylonian Talmud, of all places, and passed through its editorial filter. This, however, is not the place to discuss this important issue. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. In regard to the messianic status of Bar Kokhba (or Bar Kosba / Bar Kosiba), the crux of which traces to rabbinical sources, see Schäfer’s interesting attempt to dislodge it from the simplistic paradigm that it has acquired in the Jewish historiographical tradition: Schäfer, 2003, 1–22, esp. 1–7. For more on Bar Kokhba as the Messiah, see Newman’s recent analysis, “Stars of the Messiah,” 2015, and Newman, ibid. on the depiction of Bar Kokhba as a star on coins from that era, as well as the linkage of the messianic star to additional messianic schemes, e.g., in the Book of Zerubbabel. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Much has been written about this affair; this is not the place to rehash it. For an excellent (although not up-to-date) summary, including the background of the emperor’s promise, the preparations, and the failure, see notes in Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors*. Christian sources offer testimony, although considerably tendentious, of the messianic atmosphere among the Jews (e.g., in an account of the Jews in the fourth and fifth invectives “Against Julian,” delivered by the Church Father Gregory Nazianzen only several months after the events). A very narrow slice of this atmosphere penetrated the rabbinical tradition: Urbach, “Cyrus’ Promise.” For a detailed look at the collection of sources relating to the event, see Levenson, 2004. For a new observation on the affair and, foremost, on the ideas that underpinned Julian’s scheme to rebuild the Jerusalem Temple and resume its rite, see Ullucci, 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Note 18 above, 243. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. The Rooster and the Owl*,* the fascinating paradigm of the medieval scholar Richard Landes, explains the performance of the forces that rivaled for the image and the collective consciousness of messianic hope between these societies. This is actually a development and an elaboration of a parable in the Babylonian Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 98b): “[Rabbi Simlai](/topics/rabbi-simlai) taught: What is the meaning of the [verse], ‘Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord. Why would you have this day of the Lord? It is darkness, and not light’ [[Amos 5:18](/Amos.5.18)]? It is like a rooster and a bat that awaited the light of day. The rooster said to the bat: I look forward to light, as light is my time. But you, why do you need light?” The difference between the rooster (Israel), who yearns for light (the redemption) and the bat (the blind Gentile), who cannot discern light even if he craves it, is a metaphor for the two patterns of human consciousness. See extensive discussion in Landes, 37–61, esp. 50–61. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. The authors of this dictum in the Babylonian Talmud (*Yoma* 10a) are Palestinian sages of Palestine from the first half of the third century, R. Joshua b. Levi in the name of Rabi (R. Judah Nasi). See ad loc the same dictum stated by Rabba Bar Bar Hanna in the name of R. Johanan in the name of R. Judah bar Illai—and, in contrast to them, the words of Rav (a contemporary leading Babylonian Amora): “Persia is fated to fall to Rome.” The discussion ad loc is fascinating because it represents the contrasting views of sages in the two centers, Palestine and Babylonia. Either way, their outlook may reflect redemptionist hopes that based themselves on historical observation and clashing desires; therefore, it needs more thorough critical study. It hardly stands to reason, however, that these rabbinical remarks were totally uninfluenced by the surrounding political reality—the ascendancy of the Sasanians in Persia or, perhaps, their Parthian predecessors, along with the decline of Rome’s strength in the east, which by the third century had already sparked bursts of hostilities between these powers. Evidence that the sages in Palestine were aware of the political changes around them is seen in the famous remark of Rabbi Abahu of Caesarea: “‘When Bela died, Jobab son of Zerah from Bozrah succeeded him as king’ [Gen 36:33]: The kingdom was already torn from Edom and Bozrah came and provided her with kings” (Bereshit Rabba 83c, Theodor-Albeck edition, 998). This passage is interpreted in several places by Saul Lieberman (pursuant to a comment by Samuel Krauss) as referring to the reign of the Roman Emperor Philip the Arab (244–249), born in Hauran. See, for example, Lieberman, “Palestine in the Third and Fourth Centuries.” Lieberman, however, narrows his perspective by so doing. It seems to me that the words of the famous Amora allude not only to a specific emperor but also to a much broader phenomenon, the intense activity among those in the provincial Arab-Syrian sphere in defending the eastern flank of the empire, cresting in the demarches of the principality of Palmyra. This hypothesis is also highly probable in reference to the Jews of Babylonia; see Gafni, 1991, 39–40.

    On the political and apocalyptic atmosphere in the Roman sphere of influence at this time, see Potter’s fascinating analyses (Potter, 1994, 98–145, and multiple references ad loc). At the center of Potter’s discussion is the Thirteenth Sibylline Oracle, written at that very time of the mid-third century and reflecting the expectations of oracles that observed the events of their time and predicted the future. For this, see Potter, 1990. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. The Talmudic parable mentioned in the previous note (from BT *Sanhedrin* 99a) is followed immediately by the following dialogue (pursuant to R. Simlai’s remarks): “And that [underlies] what a certain heretic [apparently a Christian] said to [Rabbi Abbahu](/topics/rabbi-abahu): When will the Messiah come? [[Rabbi Abbahu](/topics/rabbi-abahu)] told him: He will come when the darkness will enshroud these [i.e., your] people. The heretic said to him: Are you cursing me? [Rabbi Abbahu](/topics/rabbi-abahu) said to him, it is written [explicitly]: ‘For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth and fog the peoples, but the Lord shall shine upon you and His glory shall be seen upon you’” ([Isaiah 60:2](/Isaiah.60.2)). Evident in this dialogue, on the one hand, is the relationship between the two camps (the Jewish and the Christian) and the biblical fundament that fueled their expectations and calculations, and, on the other hand, the distance between them, if not the mutual neutralization of their prophetic visions and End of Days expectations and calculations. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. In my article (note 6 above), I briefly discuss these traditions in the world of the *paytanim*, from Qilir (sixth-seventh century) to Pinhas Ha-Kohen of Capra, near Tiberias (eighth century) as well as the apocalyptic traditions of their unnamed associates, particularly those who dealt with “pangs of the Messiah” (signs of the End of Days)— those episodes and events (such as earthquakes) that augur the advent of the Messiah, and their parallels in the coeval Christian liturgy and memory. Also discussed there, *inter alia,* are some of the traditions in the Book of Zerubbabel. See also, at length, note 9 above and also note 53 below concerning the traditions and the genres. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. On the various mechanisms used to calculate the eschaton in antiquity (up to the early sixth century) in the two camps, and on the direct and indirect evidence of their presence in, and influence on, the internal and external discourse, see at length my article, “Dating the Eschaton.” Even-Shmuel already ventured his opinion, albeit initial, on several traditions in the rabbinical literature that make veiled allusions to their broader context, in his introduction to *Midrashei Geula*, 44–46.

    One does encounter systematic eschatological traditions and schemes in both the Christian writings of the Church Fathers and in liturgical song. The main characteristic of the calculations of the eschaton that makes them special in probing the messianic excitement is that all of them hinge on biblical prophecies and visions. The apocalyptic and eschatological tradition in the New Testament also finds expression in historiography and, more so, in Christian chronology. A ramified literature has been written on the topic; here I note only a few prominent studies. First, however, it bears emphasis that the Christians’ engagement in chronography had several goals. Chronography, particularly in its eschatological contexts, was used to cope with the question of Christian time in general and in calculating it for liturgical requirements (as in the Paschal tables—the *computus*) and more, e.g., in the medieval work *De temporum tatione* by Bede, an early eighth-century monk and historian in England. In this matter, see Wallis, *Bede,* lxvii–lxxi; 353–375.

    At its outset during the reign of Julius Africanus (third century), Christian chronography based itself both on polemic and apologetic tendencies relative to the pagan world and on a linear conception of time (universal and Christian) that advances under divine providence toward an end-point. At its center stand the “eschatological end of days” (a trend based on apocalyptic revelations) and the time of the Parousia (the second revelation of Jesus). These were often described in apologetic ways that blurred and postponed the eschaton. Already in early works from the third century, in Hippolytus of Rome, and more so in the chronographic writings of Eusebius and Jerome, corrected reckonings of the second coming are provided that postpone the event by centuries—to 500 or 508. On Julius Africanus, see Adler, 496–524, esp. 519–524. Julius Africanus’ important successor in the early fourth century was Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea. In his chronographic work, the *Chronicle*, Eusebius tried to distance himself from the millennialist eschatological tendencies and described the succession of generations as converging gradually into a universal Christian chronicle, thus strongly influencing this singular genre. On Eusebius’ chronographic work, see Grafton and Williams, 133–177.

    Among the vast literature on the question of these trends in Christian chronographic writings (which included opposite currents in the millenarian eschatological context discussed here), we note for the time being only the most recent survey: Burgess and Kulikowski, 99–121.

    In our discussion of this set of traditions, it should be borne in mind that the array of Christian eschatological reckonings is, as stated, contingent on the visions in the Bible, and for this reason the two camps’ traditions and interpretations were rather closely related. Evident, for example, is the alignment in the interpretation of Christian chronographers and thinkers in the first centuries to the “seventy weeks” reckoning in Daniel 9:24–27. See VanderKam and Adler, 201–239. The “little sister” of the Hellenistic-Roman and Christian chronography, the Jewish chronography that emerged from rabbinical circles—in the only known work that belongs to this genre, *Seder Olam Rabba*—was shaped as part of this nexus but under different basic assumptions. In regard to *Seder Olam Rabba*, see Chaim Milikowsky’s comprehensive edition, vol. 1 (Introduction), 3–53, esp. 14–15, and extensive notes on 47–49; and vol. 2 (Commentary), 283–289.

    Finally, it should be noted that the reckonings that underpinned the messianic traditions also included corrective and adjustment mechanisms that “revived” calculations that did not come to pass. In this context, foremost in the Western Latin Christian society, see, at length, Landes 1988, 137–209. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. The 400-year calculation appears in Jerome’ commentary on Joel 3:19. As best as is known, the commentary was written in 406. In his commentary on Ezekiel, however, Jerome states that the Jews calculate this end-time from the destruction of their Temple. See *In Joelem,* III, 19, Adriaen, 208. In his commentary on the Book of Ezekiel, however, Jerome states that the Jews start the countdown to the redemption at the destruction of their Temple. See *In Hiezechielem,* I, 4–6, F. Glorie, 47. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Babylonian Talmud *Avoda Zara* 9b: “Rabbi Ḥanina says: After 400 from the destruction of the Temple, if a person says to you: Purchase a field worth one thousand dinars for one dinar, do not purchase it [see Rashi ad loc]. It is taught in a Tannaic tradition: After 4,231 from the creation of the world, if a person says to you: Purchase a field worth one thousand dinars for one dinar, do not purchase [it]. The Gemara asks: What is the difference between [these dates]? The Gemara answers: the difference between them is three years, as the Tannaic traditionadds three years.” Thus, according to R. Hanina’s calculations, the destruction took place in 68 CE (see Milikowsky, n. 23 above; this would make the target year 468/69, whereas in the second tradition, the target year is 470/71 CE). Cf. BT Sanhedrin 97b: [Elijah](/topics/elijah) said to Rav Yehuda, brother of Rav Sala Hasida: The world will exist no fewer than eighty-five jubilee [cycles], or 4,250 years, and upon the last jubilee the Son of David will come. He replied: At its beginning or at its end? [Elijah] answered: I do not know. [If it is indeed at the end, the reckoning squares with the second tradition in BT Avoda Zara.] See the continuation ad loc, with the tradition communicated by R. Hanan bar Tahlifa: “After 4,291 [alt. 4,261] years from the creation of the world, the world will end.” By this reckoning, the target year is 500—the accepted year according to the mainstream Byzantine tradition of the Parousia (the second coming of Jesus). These reckonings, of course, are not cut of one cloth in terms of their origins, shaping, and manner of presentation; they entail further study that is not to be performed here. I dwelled on some of these matters in my article (note 23 above), 145–153. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. See, at length, my remark on the multiple manifestations of ferment among the Christians in my article (note 23 above), 140–145, and in the literature noted ad loc. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. On likening Julian to the Antichrist, see my article, “The Jerusalem Bishopric and the Jews.” As for Apollinaris’ outlook, see Hillel I. Newman, “Jerome’s Judaizers,” 421–452, esp. 442–443. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. The uniqueness of this messianic anecdote does not rule out its authenticity. See Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica* VII, 38, in Hansen, 387–388. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Thus, for example, in the *piyyut* for Sukkot by the post-classical *paytan* Haduta, we find, among his other redemption reckonings, the following somewhat aggrieved words: “Where are your first kindnesses / and for how long will we be serving the Admonim [i.e., the Adummim/Edumeans, the Romans]? / Behold, it has been thus for seven hundred sixty-five years [= 702 CE, counting from the days of Pompey, not from the destruction of the Temple] / You extricated the first ones [= the Israelites from Egypt] / You claimed them at the end of four hundred years…” See Zulai, “The *Piyyutim* of R. Haduta,” 265–266. The Edomite kingdom is problematic here, of course, because by the time that was calculated the Admonim, i.e., the Romans (Byzantines) no longer ruled Palestine. In this matter, should apparently be accepted the reasoning of Ezra Fleischer, that Haduta (full name: Haduta ben Abraham) was not a Palestinian *paytan* but one of the ancient *paytanim* in southern Italy. See E. Fleischer, “Haduta b. Abraham—the First of the *Paytanim* of Italy?” 7–27, esp. 17–18, and idem, “Haduta(!) [spelling variant],” 9–30, esp. 10–11. According to Fleischer, Haduta, however spelled, refers to a reckoning that begins with the destruction (which, according to these traditions, occurred in 68 CE), setting the year of the redemption at 833. As for copyists’ changes, see Elizur, *Piyyutim of R. Pinhas Ha-Kohen* (in Hebrew), 211–212. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. See my article, note 23, 122–123 and 131, note 55. In this matter, Nicholas de Lange’s doubts, expressed in his article “Jewish and Christian Messianic Hopes in Pre-Islamic Byzantium,” 275, should not be accepted. As for the alternative points of departure for the Jews’ counting of the eschaton, mentioned in our remarks, one should say that apart from the last-mentioned possibility, i.e., calculating from the destruction of the Second Temple, the other dates do not pass even by way of doubt. This matter requires special caution given the Sages’ knowledge of the chronology of the Second Temple era. This is said particularly in regard to the contents of Chapter 30 of *Seder Olam Rabba* (and parallel texts); see Milikowsky (note 23 above), vol. 1, pp. 322–323 (Text), vol. 2, pp. 351–537 (Commentary). [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. It should be remembered that this date, marking the demise of the Western Empire (Hesperium imperium), as had been recognized until then, was set on the basis of historiographic observation from the capital of the Byzantine Eastern Empire, Constantinople; thus it settled into the Byzantine consciousness and that of the Latin West in the Middle Ages. See Croke, “A.D. 476,” 81–119, esp. 114–119. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. This affair is indeed shrouded in mist. For what one may learn from it, see incisive remarks in Herman, 2012*,* 287–299. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Epigraphic and written testimonies about Semitic monotheism in Himyar and the Jewish kingdom there are available in plenitude. See Bowersock, 2013*,* 78–91, and Robin, 2004. For an expanded discussion of King Joseph of the Himyarites, see Robin, 2008. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. On Hydatius and the sense of the impending End in his chronographic writings, see Burgess, 1996, and examples in my article, note 23 above. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. See, for example, poems published by Yahalom and Sokoloff, 1999*,* 28–33, 216–217. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. From the *piyyut* “We Have No Altar for Atonement*.*” See Yahalom, 1997*,* 13–14, and Minz-Manor, 2015,50–51. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. These poems, in the *piyyut*ic manner, are founded on ancient traditions and, in the case at hand, on the prophecy of Daniel (7:23–24): “This is what he said: ‘The fourth beast—there will be a fourth kingdom upon the earth that will be different from all the kingdoms; it will devour the whole earth, tread it down, and crush it. And the ten horns—from that kingdom, ten kings will arise, and after them another will arise. He will be different from the former ones, and will bring low three kings.’” On Yanai and his times, see Rabinovitz, 1985,45–54. On the *piyyut*ic passage quoted, see ibid., 198. For more on Yanai and his sources of inspiration, see Lieberman, 1939 (now also in a collection of his studies: Rosenthal, 123–152). On Yanai’s hostility to Christianity, see, *inter alia,* *piyyutim* published by Zulai, 1938*,* 339. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Quotation from the *qerovot* on Gen 49:1, Rabinovitz Edition (see previous note), p. 257. It is interesting to compare this wording with that in the Quran, “They will question thee concerning the Hour [i.e., the final day of judgment], when it shall berth. Say: ‘The knowledge of it is only with my Lord; none shall reveal it at its proper time, but He” […] (“The Battlements,” v. 186, Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted,* 196). On Yanai’s warning against turning to provocative activism, see *Qerovot on Deuteronomy 2:2* (note 36 above), p. 231. On this text and other works not included in the aforementioned collections of Yanai’s *piyyutim*, see Shalom Spiegel’s explanatory notes in Spiegel,1997, 358–362. See also Spiegel’s flowery remarks ad loc (352) about the warnings of important Palestinian Amoraim in the third century against the tendency to be drawn into the messianic breeze that occasionally pulses through the public. Yanai may have made his remarks in an attempt to chill his fellow Jews’ enthusiasm for intersecting with the Samaritans (who in the sixth century rebelled against Byzantine rule more than once) and against seeing these insurrections as a propitious time for the redemption to come, when he hinted, for example: “Beware of those around you / and do not believe in your surroundings.” In this regard, see Yahalom 2000, 76–77, and elaboration in note 48. On trends among the authors of the *Targumim*, who also preferred to bank the messianic fires, see, briefly, Gordon, note 12 above, 262–273. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Étaix, ed., *Homiliae in evangelia,* XIII, 6, 94. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. For elaboration, see Weiss (about the synagogue in Sephhoris and its unique mosaic floor), 235–262, and, more recently, Talgam, 257–303. Cf., for example, the picture on the floor of the synagogue at Khirbete Wadi Hamam, in Liebner 2010. With the discovery of the mosaic floors at the synagogues of Wadi Hamam and Huqoq, containing iconographic depictions of the life of Samson (his victories over the Philistines, the episode of the foxes), several scholars, foremost Reiner and Amit, hypothesized for the first time that Samson the Danite was a central personality whom the Galilean Jews of the time perceived as a kind of pre-redeemer or augurer of the redeemer. For elaboration, see Grey, 2013. This is quite a bold hypothesis because in the Christian tradition, too, the heralder of the messianic era and, in effect, Jesus’ rival in the End of Days, none other than the Antichrist, is from the Tribe of Dan—meaning that this tradition has deep roots. See Hill, 1995. The hypothesis, however, faces several obstacles, foremost the relation between Samson as the redeemer and the Messiah son of Ephraim son of Joseph, the redeemer who precedes the Messiah son of David from Judah. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Boustan, 2008; see further in the next note. On mentioning the demolished Temple of Solomon, see note 57 below. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. In this regard, see Millar’s (2015) convincing remarks and, in the same context, Papadoyannakis, 2008. The Christians’ dread of the resumption of the Jewish rite on the Temple Mount may also explain the disappearance of the Mount from the famous pilgrims’ map (apparently late sixth century) at the church of Madaba, Transjordan: Tsafrir, 1999, 158. For another view, holding that this “deletion” was made on ideological grounds, see Jacobs, 2004, 139–143. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. On the varying levels of tension between these powers, which spanned vast areas beyond their shared border and involved additional ethnic groups, see, for example, the detailed accounts of the contemporary historian Evagrius Scholasticus, in Whitby, 2000, vols. 5 and 6, 253–317. See further, briefly, in Dignas and Winter, 2007, 37–49 and related sources. On the escalation of ferment due to the impending End during the reign of Justinian, see Scott, 2012, part xviii, pp. 1–22. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. On the chronographic mechanism of Year 6000 enveloped in Psalms 90:4 (“For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night”), the symbols of which are the six days of Creation, see, briefly, Burgess and M. Kulikowski (note 23 above), 114–119. Indeed, as Scott remarks (note 43 above, pp. 2–3) comments, in the sixth century, in the very midst of Justinian’s reign, some refused to consider the Roman Empire part of the Four Kingdoms scheme that rested on Daniel’s prophecy, seeing it instead as an eternal empire one destined to promote the worldwide dissemination of Christianity. On the readjustment mechanisms and their workings, see, at length, Landes (note 23 above). [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. The hostility was manifested in Imperial legislation (the emperor’s Novella 146, below) and in an imperial order concerning Easter and Passover. On Novella 146, see Rutgers, 2003, which tends to understate the importance of the background of the novella. In contrast, Smelik, 2012, sketches a more realistic and reasonable tableau of the background of Justinian’s legislation in this affair, although it understates the ferocity of the measure. As for the imperial order concerning the date of Passover and its observance among the Jews of the Empire, see, briefly, my note in Irshai, 2013, [*CELAMA,* 15]. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. See Schwartz, 2001: 203–274. That era, however, saw growing manifestations of hostility in literature, historiography, and philosophy, along with subversive counter-manifestations in the apocalyptic and mystical literature of the late sixth century. In regard to the latter, see Boustan, 2009. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. See note 50. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. John Malalas, a chronographer from Antioch, testifies about the uprising and the Jews’ involvement in it (Malalas, 1986, 294; and Di Segni, 1993. We cannot explain exactly why the Samaritan uprising, a very violent event that included looting and torching of churches, broke out just then. However, there are grounds to believe that it originated, *inter alia,* in the hostile legislation against the Samaritans, which persisted even after Bishop Sergius of Caesarea appealed to Emperor Justinian and praised the Samaritans as a community that contributed to the city’s life. Although the emperor did lighten their burden in Novella 129 (year 551), the cumulative sense of hostility toward the Christians proved decisive. After the rebellion was quashed, Justin II, Justinian’s heir, issued a dramatic law that totally ousted the Samaritans from public life. See Rabello, 1997. The savage earthquake that devastated Beirut, damaged some of the Roman-Phoenician coastal cities, and was strongly felt in the coastal towns of Palestine may also have had a hand in it. According to Pseudo-Dionysius of Tel-Mahre (p. 119 in Wittakoski’s translated edition), the temblor of 551 struck “the villages of the Galilee and the land [= district] of the Samaritans.” [תרגום שלי ממובאה שקיימת באנגלית]

    The year of the earthquake is disputed. According to John Malalas (291), it was 551; Theophanes, who wrote in the ninth century on the basis of Malalas, sets it at 550 and describes it as especially powerful; see *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor*, 1997, 332. Contrarily, the Christian writer Agathias of Myrina dated the earthquake at 555; see note by Cameron, 1970, 138–139. If a powerful earthquake did occur that year, then, as in other cases, both Jews and Christians perceived it as an important stop on the road to the eschatological fulfillment; see my article (note 6 above, with many references to the literature). It should also be noted here that even though John Malalas, in his Chronicle, often mentions and elaborately describes signs from nature including earthquakes, he does not tend to mobilize them for apocalyptic or eschatological exigencies. In this matter, see Meier, 2007, 237–266, esp. 261. Either way, this event was so proximate in time to the rebellion as to generate considerable ferment. The Jews joined in the uprising, as stated, also due to the enmity they faced and the stepwise escalation of hostility from the Christian empire.

    I already remarked briefly (note 38) on the possibility that the *paytan* Yanai inveighed against the messianic fervor of his time. Now, see also the extensive discussion of his *qedushta* on Deut 2:2–3 (“At this time, the Lord said to me, ‘You have been wandering around this hill country long enough; turn to the north’”) in Rabinovitz, 1987, 123–129, and this warning, of which the background may have been the Samaritan uprising: “Until the time of the songbird desires / and the season of the sheaf / and the harvest ripens … / and the swine [= Rome] breaks through / and [He] restores the kingdom.” And the continuation: “distance yourselves from the border of Edom / until [the time of the advent of] He who comes from Edom.” See Lieber, 2009. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. On the new dating of the Book of Zerubbabel, see below, note 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. It is definitely possible that R. Elazar bar Avina found his inspiration in the somewhat chaotic realities of the Eastern Empire in the third century. Furthermore, his adage resembles the famous remark of Rabbi Abahu in Palestine (note 20 above). For more on the political realia in the Roman East in the third century, see Smith, 2013, 175–181, and much more in Potter.

    On the period preceding the Persian occupation of Palestine, see note 53 below. An elaborate *piyyut* of the rabbinical homily before us was composed by the seventh-century *paytan* R. Haduta in a *shevi‘ata* for the Sabbath: “And it will happen in the End of Days, one king will provoke another / the horse will sink into the blood of those who bow to Molekh [= idol-worshippers, apparently the Christians] / […] On that day, it will be known that there is no king in Edom / Everyone will know that He is the king / […] You will bring forth the Messiah, and he is the son of a king […].” See Fleischer, 1984.

    On the relative politico-religious placidity in Palestine until Justinian’s time, see Bowersock, 1997. A *paytan* who was active shortly after Yanai, R. Simeon bar Magas, also pleads for and eagerly awaits Rome’s imminent downfall in a *piyyut* about the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah as reported in Genesis: “We see You dressed in red / O Lord, place red / like the upheaval of Sodom / the time it will be destroyed and silenced / it is called Duma [/ [the letter *yod* … ] it will be silenced / weak from the day of Adma [= Adma, one of the Biblical cities destroyed along with Sodom and Gomorrah: Adma and Tsevoyim] / May the day of Massa Duma draw near.” In this matter, see Yahalom, 1984, 133 and 11–13 in the Introduction. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. This redating of the book (except for the passages dealing with the remnants of the Persians [השירוי הפרסי?]) is based on Hillel Newman’s recent study (2013). In Newman’s opinion, most of the text was produced before 570. For more on this, see his article in this volume, lxi–lxxii. On the “Book of Elijah,” dated by many to (roughly) the early seventh century, see again Newman, introductory chapter to this volume, lxxii–lxxix (and additional literature cited ad loc).

    On the perceptible messianic tension in the sixth century, see Magdalino, 1993. For additional references, see Newman (above), 333, and more in note 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. On these events and their reflection in the sources, including Arab and Persian sources, see Michael R. Jackson Bonner, “Eastern Sources on the Roman and Persian: War in the Near East 540–545,” in Adam J. Silverstein and Teresa Bernheimer eds., *Late Antiquity: Eastern Perspectives* (Oxford 2012), pp. 42–56. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. See Ezra Fleischer’s far-ranging commentary on Qilir’s *siluq* (for the Ninth of Av), “The Time to Scold the Animal [of the Forest]”: Fleischer, 1985. The *piyyut* was written as an apocalyptic composition (past and present events couched in future tense) and makes clear allusions to the Persian presence (Assyria in the *piyyut*). These sages’ identification of Assyria with Persia puts Fleischer’s doubts in this matter (399–400 and notes ad loc) to rest. See R. Simeon b. Yohai’s remarks: “If you saw a Persian horse tethered in the Land of Israel, await the feet of the messiah. Why is this? ‘And this man shall be the peace, when the Assyrian shall come into our land: and when he shall tread in our palaces […]’” (Micha 5:5) (Eicha Rabba 1:41 and parallels). In addition, the *paytan* mentions the permission given the Jews to build and altar and, perhaps, to reestablish the Temple—a rather fanciful idea, according to the various sources—and the mysterious Armilus (whose identity and place in the apocalyptic discourse lend themselves to diverse interpretations that need not be discussed here).

    This *piyyut* marks a visible change in the emphasis of the redemptionist passion relative to its famous precursor, that of Yanai (see above). Nevertheless, one should apply much caution when detecting historical allusions in *piyyutim* from that era. In this matter, see Shulamit Elizur’s measured remarks in Elizur, 2014, 21–36, and additional references ad loc. Despite her caution, Elizur illuminates the distress of that generation through the *piyyutim* of Yanai and his successors (ibid., 27–34), demonstrating that the requisite caution does not rule out interpretation and identification. However, even though Qilir’s *piyyut* is directly associated with events of his time, Newman’s (2016) reservations also deserve attention

    Furthermore, given Newman’s convincing proposal to predate the Book of Zerubbabel to the late sixth century, there is reason to ask once again which ancient components of the work, or which conventions from older sources, are reflected in the world of the *paytanim*. In this manner, an attempt may be made to trace the process of the formation and the chronological development of the Jewish apocalyptic traditions and literature in Late Antiquity in order to assess their interconnections with the world of *piyyut*.

    As for the contents of the Book of Zerubbabel, doubts exist about the politico-cultural realities that influenced the work at this time. According to the scholarship, these realities were much milder than are portrayed in some of the sources, including the affair of Jewish involvement in the Persian invasion. In this matter, see elaboration in Stoyanov, 2011, 46–56. Stoyanov also tries to analyze the Christian politico-eschatological outlook at the time in view of historical developments in that setting (ibid., 56–75). On the Jewish involvement, see note 58 below. For a comprehensive survey of politico-cultural realities in the Roman East on the eve of the birth of Islam, see Averil Cameron’s introduction in idem (2013), pp. xiii–xxxvii,and many additional references ad loc. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. On the duality in these works (such as the Book of Zerubbabel and *Secrets of Rabbi Simon ben Yohai*, of later provenance), see Reeves’ introduction to the English translation edition (note 3 above), 1–7, esp. 4–5. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Alexander (1968), pp. 997–1018. It should also be borne in mind that the way events or anecdotes from the past are presented is by way of future events, and that the works were prone to ongoing interpolations by various authors, as attested by their stratification. This is not to say that the Christian sources are not based on ancient textual schemes; instead, the palpable historical allusions implanted in them are more numerous and explicit. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. So in Sivertsev’s (2011) extensive thematic commentary on the Book of Zerubbabel. Remarks in this spirit were already offered by Speck, 1997, 183–190. On the unique role of Heftsiba in the Book of Zerubbabel and her association with Mary, see, briefly, Himmelfarb, 2002, 383–389, and recently, in Sivan, 2008, 240–243 (and additional references ad loc). On the Christian concern at the time for the fate of Jerusalem and the Temple as reflected in the Jewish end-of-time thinking, see our remarks in note 42 above. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. This conceptual space was populated by three focal points of ongoing polemics—Jerusalem, Rome, and Constantinople. I discuss Rome first. Due to its immense influence on the Jews and their capital, Rome was central in rabbinical polemics in various periods, their occupation with even penetrating the city’s founding myth. See Kattan Gribetz, 2016, 57–86. Kattan Gribetz’ article is limited to traditions in the two talmuds, but the same story is discussed and other aspects of the city’s founding myth are presented in the tradition of the later Palestinian aggada (sixth and seventh centuries), reflected in Song of Songs Rabba. They attest, among other things, to Christian outlooks on historico-eschatological time that were nourished on fifth-century events such as the sacking of Rome by the Visigoth army in 410. (Some disagree about the impact of this event in the context at hand here; see Lipps et al., 2013). The next event, a graver one in the process of the decline of Rome, was the city’s conquest and looting by the Vandals in 455; for a brief discussion, see Merrills and Miles, 2010, 116–118. The status of the city continued to founder until Rome passed into foreign hands in 476. This event is engraved into the Roman collective memory and had unique political meanings and cultural implications; see Croke 2001, 192–195. Its impact on the Jews still awaits extensive investigation; see Boustan and Irshai (in press).

    Rome’s status as a capital city was also eroded by Ravenna, which in the fifth century became the *sedes imperii* of the West. The Christian *Oracle of Baalbek*, written in the classic Sybilline tradition in 502–503, should be viewed in this context. (The dating was determined in accordance with the most recent historical event clearly noted in it, the eruption of war between Persia and Rome, after the two powers had been bound in an alliance for decades.) In this work, not only is the historical capital of the empire marked as being in decline but the demise of the “New Rome” on the banks of the Bosporus, Constantinople-Byzantium, is destined to occur in c. 150—“after three times sixty years from its establishment” (330 CE). The elimination of these two centers, as well as the Sasanians’ defeats of the Romans, preceded by “signs from heaven” (earthquakes, floods, eruptions of violence, etc.), reinforced the apocalyptic sense of the impending End of Days that he sketches. In regard to this apocalypse, see at length Alexander, 1967, 41–47, 106–121. Notably, in this text one encounters traditions from mixed sources—Jewish, Christian, and heretic; see ibid., 71ff. The Tiburtine Sybil from Rome (which underlay the Oracle of Baalbek) was composed more than a century earlier against the “New Rome” (Constantinople, a contender for the crown) and predicted its downfall only sixty years after it was founded (in 390), portended by signs from heaven such as an earthquake. On this, see Cameron, 2001, 45–52, and anew in a collection of Cameron’s articles: Cameron, 2016, 247–254.

    In the sixth century, relations between Jerusalem and Constantinople were typified by duality. On the one hand, Constantinople drew nourishment from a regular supply of holy relics from Jerusalem and patterned its liturgical calendar after that in Jerusalem (see Croke, 1983, above, 37–47). On the other hand, a competition of sorts evolved between them: first around the construction of the Church of St. Polyeuktos by the aristocrat Inicia Juliana, who, by building this church in the early 620s, wished to cement the perception of the renewal and perfection of Solomon’s Temple by means of the church that she had established along the lines of the temple of the End of Days in the prophecy of Ezekiel. In this regard, see at length Bartill, 2005, pp. 339–370. This idea resurfaced later in the writings of Romanos the Melodist, composer of the Byzantine *Kontakia*, who describes the “rivalry” between the emperor who rebuilt in Constantinople the Church of Hagia Sophia, which had been destroyed in 532 in the Nica uprising, while Solomon’s grand temple in Jerusalem remained in ruins. See the liturgical hymn “On Earthquakes and Fires” in Schork, 1995, 193–194. For an explanation of the hymn and its symbolism, see Catafygiotu Topping, 1978, 22–35. The same motif of Solomon’s Temple, again in the context of Justinian, recurs somewhat differently in a late tenth-century paean to Constantinople; see Berger, 2013, 75.

    It is tempting to reflect on the possibility that the rival Christian metaphor, cultivated in sixth-century Constantinople, between the churches of the “New Jerusalem” on the shores of the Bosporus and the ancient historical (Jewish) Jerusalem, and, in particular, the Temple of Solomon that rested at its core, at least indirectly influenced the anonymous authors of the Book of Zerubbabel to adopt a millennial reckoning that counted the years to the imminent redemption from the destruction of the First Temple and the re-assimilation of the scheme of the redemption being realized in its first location. This lends some support to Newman’s convincing redating of the core of Book of Zerubbabel to 570 (note 51 above). This matter, however, needs further investigation.

    In the seventh century, Constantinople endured a siege by the Avar Barbarians who intruded from the Balkans in 626. The salvaging of the city is described in a homily of victory attributed to Theodore the Syncellus, a senior official in the city’s church, as part of an End of Days scheme and even as a manifestation of the decline of Jerusalem and the triumph of Christianity over Judaism. On Theodore’s homily, see Olster, 1994, 72–79. (Views are divided on whether this homily is truly Theodore’s. Some believe it was delivered in the aftermath of a much later siege, in 860; see Wortley, 1977, 111–126). On various aspects of the tension between Jerusalem and Constantinople, see Sivertsev (note 56 above), 9–44.

    The change that occurred in the perception of Constantinople in the Jewish sources should be examined in view of the confrontation with the Jews over the inferior status of Jerusalem. This is the case even though the cities’ rivalry had not yet become part a more inclusive worldview pursuant to which, in certain scholars’ view, Constantinople was termed “the New Jerusalem.” This metaphor, if it indeed existed, was only esoteric; only in the tenth century, during the reign of the Macedonian emperors, did it begin to sink into the political thinking of the Byzantine Empire. In this matter, see Guran, 2009, 35–55. However, the theme of Constantinople as the object of divine vengeance in the End of Days quickly penetrated the Jewish tradition. In the *Targum* of the Torah attributed to Jonathan b. Uzziel, Num 24:19—”Out of Jacob shall come he that shall have dominion, and shall destroy him that remaineth of the city”—is rendered thus: “A ruler from the House of Jacob will arise and will destroy and consume a surviving remnant of the wicked city Constantinople.” In regard to this verse, see Shinan (1993), 197–198. Even though Haim Hirschberg hypothesizes that the author of the *Targum* is relating to the Muslim siege of Constantinople in 716–718, Shinan infers, for other and more material reasons, that this *Targum* should not be dated to long after the middle of the eighth century. It is hard to ignore the resemblance of this somewhat esoteric tradition in the *Targum* to the tradition in the Byzantine apocalyptic world, which formed slowly, about the final hour of the “New Jerusalem” and the transference of the setting of the events of the End to the historical Jerusalem. In this regard, see the tenth-century work in Rydén, 1995, 260–261.

    We must also ask whether a connection exists between the *Targum* and the *Secrets of Rabbi Simon ben Yohai*, which concerns the latter Umayyad caliphs *inter alia*. The author of the Targum may well have based himself on an earlier event—the series of Muslim sieges on the Byzantine capital in 667–669. These sieges almost toppled the Byzantine Empire, which was spared only due to logistical problems in the Arab army. In subsequent years, the empire won several victories in its war with the Arabs but failed to reverse the tide. Thus, it seems that the late seventh century saw a profusion of expectations of a global shock, which found their way into the apocalyptic literature. On the first Muslim siege of Constantinople and its repercussions, see at length Jankowiak, 2013, 237–320. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Fleischer (note 53 above) and, more moderately, Sivan, 2000. See also Newman’s reservations (note 53 above). Noteworthy here are Zvi Baras’ far-reaching article (1982) on the Persian conquest of Jerusalem and the Jews’ involvement in it, and Cameron’s (1994) erudite and very cautious survey. The evidence about the Jews’ aid to the Persians during the latter’s campaign of conquest, particularly in regard to the conquest of Jerusalem and the massacres of the Christian population, are harvested mainly from contemporary Christian traditions, foremost the writings attributed to the Armenian bishop Sebeos. (On this source and its testimony about the Jews’ doings, see note 64 below.) For more, see, for example, collection of testimonies believed to originate in an eighth-century chronicle by Theophilus of Edessa: Hoyland, 2011, 64–65 [= *Translated Texts for Historians,* 57]. These testimonies, however, are not certain and the archaeological findings from the city, according to Avni (below), only amplify the doubt. See Bowersock, 2012, 35–48, who bases himself mainly on the sizable gap between the findings in the field and the testimonies in the literature; on this point, see Avni, 2010. The findings attest neither to systematic destruction nor to mass burial sites, either in the numbers alleged in the Christian tradition or any count close to that. Moreover, some of them, e.g., the testimony of the martyr Anastase le Perse, even suggest routine Persian rule and rapid construction; see Flusin, 55–75. The findings illustrate hyperbole in the Christian sources as to the magnitude of the disaster that struck the city and the extent of the Jews’ involvement in killing Christians. Especially noteworthy are the difficulties attached to the massacre in Mamilla that Strategius, the Christian, attributed to the Jews—something that modern scholarship has largely accepted as fact; for further on this, see Flusin, 1992, *Commentaire,* T.2, 161–164. For skeptical remarks about what emerges from these sources, see, at length, Cameron, 2002, 57–78. A reexamination of the chronographic testimonies from contradictory Christian points of view of the events in Jerusalem during and after the conquest in the years preceding Heraclius’ return to Jerusalem has recently been proposed by Wood, 211–220. Notably, recently Israel Jacob Yovel (in a lecture at Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, October 2015, to participants in a research workshop on seventh-century Palestine) broached the hypothesis that a Jewish source of all things (*Pesiqta Rabati*, redacted at the turn of the eighth century, para. H, Meir Ish-Shalom Edition, Vienna, 1880, 29b: “I will seek Jerusalem at that time”) attests to the Sasanian monarch’s campaign of conquest—as part of a messianic demarche. While research thus far attributes the commentator’s words to the fourth-century uprising against Gallus, Yovel sees in them evidence of the Jews’ involvement in the seventh-century Sasanian conquest and their achievements as that event took place. The upshot of all the foregoing is that the last word on this tangled affair of the Persian conquest of Jerusalem in 614 has yet to be said. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Beyond the contents of note 43 above, in the same context of the Byzantine re-conquest of Jerusalem under Heraclius, see findings of van Bekkum, 2002: 95–112. The eschatological context in which Heraclius’ conversion order should be examined has been described recently by Magdalino, 2013. See elaboration on this in the next note. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Fleischer, “Lamentation on the killing of Jews of Palestine,” 1987, 209–227. Seemingly, however, Fleischer’s main historical argument in explaining the words of the lament, concerning a large-scale massacre by this monarch among various Jewish communities in Palestine, is not beyond all doubt. First, Fleischer explains the mention of Edom in the lament as Israel’s enemy as evidence of the existence of an imperial punitive campaign by direct order of the emperor. The question is whether this is how the emperor went about things and whether he subjected Jews elsewhere to similar treatment. We return to these questions below. According to Fleischer’s hypothesis, there is no clear geographic logic behind the list of communities mentioned in the lament, all parts of which have not yet been discovered, and even if one may infer from the lament that the campaign of massacre against the Jews of Palestine advanced from south to north, we should assume that it set out from Jerusalem and that the slaughter took place when the emperor and his army marched from Palestine to Antioch after celebrating the recovery of the cross on March 21, 629, which would date the event at some time in April that year. If this is the case, then there would remain a narrow window of opportunity for a far-reaching campaign of killing against the Jews of Palestine, since the emperor reached Antioch in late April or early May. (It remains within the realm of possibility the killing of the Jews continued after the emperor reached Antioch, at the hands of the emperor’s agents.) We should bear in mind, however, that the evidence of Heraclius’ slaughter of the Jews of Palestine traces to the testimony of the tenth-century Melkite chronographer Eutychois of Alexandria and is heavily swathed in legend. See M. Breydy’s translation, 1985, ch. 107–109, pp. 101–102, 270–271. See also Hebrew translation in Klein, 1976, 64–66, s.v., “*Teveria*.” This tradition, to my knowledge, has no parallel, unlike the other traditions (e.g., that concerning the expulsion of the Jews from Jerusalem [see below]). Furthermore, Eutychois presents an exclusive report (Breydy, 1985, 101–102) about the slaughter of the Jews of Tyre, which is mentioned in the *piyyut*, but Heraclius had nothing to do with it and it occurred at roughly the time the Persians took control of Palestine. Heraclius’ campaign beyond the borders of Palestine after the festive return of the cross to Jerusalem occurred hastily and took place for political reasons and not due to the need to avenge and punish the Jews. Such is the case even if, according to various sources (mainly the history of Armenia attributed to Sebeos), the Jews assisted the Persian occupation force and exacted retribution against the Christians as the east was being occupied (in Caesarea in Cappadocia and, especially, in Jerusalem). The Syrian-Christian apocalypse Pseudo-Methodius (see note 66) hinted at this: “The empire of the Hebrews and the Persians will fall to the consuming sword of the seed of Ishmael” (3, 11), but the testimonies of revenge are flimsy. Indeed, according to the Byzantine chronographer Theophanes (early ninth century), Heraclius merely expelled them from the city to a distance of three miles; so in *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor* (see note 47), 458–459. On the events of 629, Emperor Heraclius’ march on Jerusalem, and the exact dating of the return of the cross to its place in Jerusalem, see Zuckerman, 2013, 197–218.

    The main reason for the doubt, however, is that the massacre described in the lament did not resonate and the archaeological information from that time leaves no clear indication that the Jewish or Christian settlements in Galilee were harmed by mutually punitive and vengeful operations in the course of the Persian occupation, nor afterwards when the Christian grip on Palestine was restored. See Stemberger, 2006, 316–318. Furthermore, according to testimonies from those very years (629–630), it seems that Heraclius, unlike his brother Theodore, actually demanded an end to the hostilities against the Jews who sought to disrupt the Persian retreat on which the two powers’ leaders had agreed. For a brief account of this affair, see Kaegi, 2003, 180; 203–204.

    One may assume that in those very years, due to the Jews’ conduct and the profound suspicions against them, the emperor considered the possibility of issuing a conversion edict against them. Indeed, he did this in 632, but even then the extent of the measure has not been determined for sure; see Kaegi, 2003, 216–218. The promulgation of the order in the province of northern Africa, of all places, may be attributed to the emperor’s roots and strong connections in that region and to the widespread animus toward the Jews there. This hatred erupted furiously just then, as affirmed explicitly by Maximus the Confessor, who was there at the time, in his Epistle XIV, in *Patrologia Graeca* 91, cols. 537–540. On Heraclius’ deep association with northern Africa, see Kaegi, 2010, 93–97. However, some authors, such as Stemberger, 2006, see no possibility of adducing from the scanty testimonies in our possession that the order was also applied to the Jews of Palestine. In this matter, consider Hillel Newman’s doubts about a ruling in the roughly contemporary *The Doings of the Sons of the Land of Israel—*Newman, 109–112 (and additional references ad loc)—which alludes to Heraclius’ conversion order. For more on the order concerning the conversion of the Jews in an eschatological context, see Sarris, 2011, 260. The upshot of all the foregoing is that there is no definitive evidence of the Byzantine massacres and vengeance against the Jews of Palestine and one doubts whether such actions are consistent with the calculated conduct of Emperor Heraclius, who controlled his subjects ruthlessly. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Examples are the oral eschatological traditions among the Jews of Shikmona, Tiberias, and Acre on the eve of the Persian occupation, as reflected in the Christian apologetic *Doctrina Jacobi npter baptizati,* which documents these Jews’ journey to Carthage in 634 for the purpose of converting to Christianity. On these traditions, see second edition (text, translation, and commentary by Dagron and Déroche, Paris, 2010), III 12; V 6, V 16, 170–171; 192–193; 208–209. For partial translations, see s.v. in Klein, 1978, *Sefer ha-Yishuv,* vol. 1. Thus, for example, Justic the Jew, one of the main players in the Christian text, relates: “As we stood before the house of the master Marinus in Shikmona after the death of King Maurice (i.e., after 602), the head of us Jews delivered an oration and said: How delighted the Jews are that King Maurice has died as has Phocas (602–610), the bloody ruler. Indeed we have clearly seen that the Romans’ rule has waned and that the fourth kingdom, namely Rome, has been weakened, divided, and thinned as [the prophet] Daniel said … [and after these] the decline of the world and the resurrection of the dead” (based on tr. Moshe Schwabe, *Sefer ha-Yishuv,* “Shikmona,” 156). These traditions, some which are exceedingly strange (e.g., the reference to Mary, mother of the Messiah) still await elucidation; for the time being, however, see Déroche’s notes (above, 263–268). This tradition and its timing accurately reflect common contemporary sentiments among the Byzantines, particularly those living in the capital of the empire, as described by the contemporary chronographer Theophylact Simocatta (Whitby and Whitby, 1986, VIII, 8, 7–13, 14, 223–232) or the later early ninth-century Byzantine chronographer Theophanes. See, at length, the annotated translation of his writings: *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor* (note 48 above), 409–413.

    According to another later tradition (apparently from 633, from *The Teaching of Jacob the Apostate*—above, V. 6; cf. Theophanes the Confessor in 632, above, 467, where the report is quoted verbatim in the writings of the later Christian chronographer Michael the Syrian]) that whet the apostate Jews’ expectations at the time, the advent of a redeemer from among the Saracens was promoted. Presumably these sentiments and expectations, even if the author before us expressed them in an apologetic tone, were fueled by the accumulation of testimonies about Arab raids in Palestine in previous decades, in some of which Jews participated. One of these incursions took place as far back as c. 610; see, briefly, Hoyland, 2015, 41. (On the Arab invasion, see more below, note 66.)

    Furthermore, it should be noted that Michael the Syrian (twelfth century) adds a report about an earthquake that struck Palestine apparently at this time (632 or 634) to the tradition about the Arab army’s first incursion and victory in the battle at Gaza (Theophanes, above). For thirty days, the temblor was accompanied by a sign from heaven in the form of a sword, its planes initially pointing southward and then switching to northward, auguring the Arab invasion.

    Several Byzantine authors inveighed against various groups of soi-disant prophets who, in the aftermath of the earthquake, enflamed the public by linking the natural disasters with the impending End. Agathias (a sixth-century historiographer and poet), for example, claimed that in times of trouble human society never squanders a propitious opportunity to issue such prophets. See Kydell, 1967. 169–170.

    David Olster’s perspective should be adopted in part: While the apocalyptic writings should not be considered a mere stratified “folk” tradition, some materials that made their way into the literary canon did originate in mass emotions (as I demonstrated above in this note). See Olster, 2000, 48–73. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. See Mango, 1994, 109–138, esp. 122–131. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. In regard to this work, see Tim W. Greenwood’s edifying article, Greenwood, 2002, 323–397. For more on this work and its historiographic value among other contemporary opuses that documented the ongoing crisis in the seventh century, see Thomson and Howard-Johnston with Greenwood, 1999, 208–209. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. See *Pesiqta Rabati* 36 (passage Qumi Uri, Meir Ish-Shalom Edition, 162): In the name of Rabbi Yitzhak: “The year the King Messiah is revealed, all kings of the nations provoke each other, the Persian king provokes an Arab king.” See Yahalom, 1992. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. In this matter, see Reinink’s survey, 2008, 75–87, accompanied by multiple references to the literature. See further in the next note. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. In the context of *piyyut*, the question is how far one may go in regarding the traditions embedded in Qilir’s *piyyut Oto ha-Yom* (presented in the volume before us) as predicated on past events. See the version of the *piyyut* based on Geniza fragments and commentary published by Joseph Yahalom: “On the validity of literary works as a source for the investigation of historical questions,” *Cathedra* 11 (1979), 125–133 (text on 130–133). After all, this *piyyut* reflects only the role of these empires in the protracted struggle in Palestine and in one battle in Acre. The passage “And a West-King and an East-King thinned each other [ידקו?]” seemingly alludes to a battle between a king of the west (a Byzantine, perhaps Heraclius) and one from the east (the King of Persia, or perhaps the Arab armies)—and, continuing: “And Edomites and Ishmael in the valley of Acre fought, until the horses sank into the blood and roared [יהמו].”

    Recently, Professor Yahalom graciously advised me that a lengthier version of this account, with additional historical references atop those found in the brief version that he had published, was discovered not long ago in an ancient (c. ninth century) manuscript. The publication of this text has been suspended at the present writing; one can only hope that it will appear soon. For the time being, a review of the many reports in the Christian and Arab historiographic literature shows that the profusion of Galilean, Samarian, and, above all, coastal-plain toponyms mentioned in the *piyyut* has nothing to do with contemporary events and reflects nothing but the *paytan*’s wish to dress the fruit of his imagination in a mantle of reality. This is said particularly in regard to the blood-drenched battle in the Acre Valley (above), which various *piyyut* scholars (e.g., Yahalom, 2010, 91) considered the reflection of an authentic historical event, which was not so. The Byzantines and the Arabs waged no battle on the coastal plain, let alone in the Acre area (apart from a secondary movement of Arab forces along the coastal plain from Caesarea southward in 634–635, cresting with the battle of Ajnadayn, apparently near Bet Guvrin. About this battle—a rather marginal event in the war in eastern Palestine—see Athamina, 2014).

    The mention of pummeled Gaza (“And Gaza and its daughters were battered with stones”) is another example of hyperbole, given that the Byzantine garrison force in Gaza surrendered without resisting. See Haldon, 2001, 56–66, and Kaegi (note 60 above), 252–253 (re Gaza). If one wishes, a battle near Gaza was fought in the winter of 634 at Datin (Besor region), in which, according to a Syriac Christian tradition, 4,000 people in local villages—Jews, Christians, and Samaritans—were killed. Did the *paytan* have this massacre in mind in his *piyyut*? One strongly doubts it. On this tradition and for a somewhat different sequence of the battles in the Arabs’ conquest of Palestine, see Gil, 1983, 27–50. The rule is: more than this *piyyut* gives historical information that reflects contemporary realia, in the main it makes salient use of visions that had become literary conventions in the apocalyptic writings of the time, in a somewhat clumsy attempt to lend them a patina of reality.

    As for the Kingdom of Ishmael, one should note the words of the c. eighth-century apocalypticist who composed the *Secrets of Rabbi Simon ben Yohai* (see pp. 187–188 in this volume). At the beginning of this work, R. Simon ben Yohai sees the Kingdom of Ishmael in the secrets revealed to him and immediately “[begins] to cry and says: Is it not enough for us what the wicked Kingdom of Edom did to us, but the Kingdom of Ishmael, too? Metatron, the heavenly priest, appeared at once and told him: Do not fear, son of Yohai! For the Blessed Holy One is bringing the Kingdom of Ishmael solely to redeem you from this wickedness [= Edom, i.e., Rome].” Farther on, a clarification appears: “The Blessed Holy One appoints over them a prophet [= Muhammad] as He wishes, and he will wrest the land from them and they will come and build the destroyed cities and clear the roads and plant gardens and orchards and restore it to you in its grandeur.” The proof of the Ishmaelites’ advent lies in the apocalypticist’s comments on Isaiah (21:6–7): “For thus hath the Lord said unto me, Go, set a watchman, let him declare what he seeth. And he saw a chariot with a couple of horsemen, a chariot of asses, and a chariot of camels; and he hearkened diligently with much heed.” The chariot of asses and the chariot of camels, according to R. Simon ben Yohai, symbolize specific empires, Edom and Ishmael, respectively. This identification of the chariot of asses camel with the Ishmaelite redeemer is different from Pseudo-Methodius’ explanation. (On Pseudo-Methodius and the edition mentioned here, see below.) Both metaphors draw on scripture, but the ancient Muslim tradition sees them as coeval. See, at length, Bashear, 1991, 37–75. Finally, the historical accounts below indicate that details in *Secrets of Rabbi Simon ben Yohai* were based on doings of the Umayyad caliphs. For a more recent detailed discussion of this apocalypse, see Reeves (note 3 above), 76–89. On the linkages of the messianic and Jewish traditions to Muslim traditions and to the Muslim conquest of Jerusalem, see Shoshan, 2016.

    In contrast, in the Byzantine Christian world, which had been ousted from its positions of control of land and influence in the east, a string of apocalyptic works was composed, of which the most prominent, from the decades following the Arab conquest, is *The Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*. On the era of its author, see Reinick, 1992, 149–187. For a translation from the Greek and Latin version along with introduction and notes, see Garstad, 2012, vii–xviii (introduction), 37–71 (Greek), and 108–139 (Latin). Unlike *paytanim* and exegetes who accepted the possibility of splitting the fourth kingdom, as Yahalom (above) shows, and of compromising in various ways with deviation from the four-kingdoms scheme, the Christian author of the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* totally disregards the definition of the Ishmaelites as a kingdom (see Reinink, above, note 40, 158).

    The various eschatological scenarios of the time of the “last [Christian] king,” who will present his crown to the redeemer, apparently took shape as Byzantine rule in the east declined. Some authors redated these scenarios to a later time; others saw in this the possibility that it would come to pass swiftly. See lengthy discussion of all these aspects in Kraft, 2012, 82. The messianic passion that increasingly gripped Europe due to the Latin tradition of the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* may have influenced Charlemagne in various ways including, perhaps, his involvement in goings-on in Palestine and Jerusalem, particularly during the caliphate period. In this regard, see McCormick, 2011, 193–196 and additional references ad loc. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Years ago, Markus (1997, 203–205) observed the growing distance of Western thinkers from goings-on in the east and the Byzantine Mediterranean during the papacy of Gregory the Great. As for Gregory of Tours’ historiographical work *Gesta Francorum,* views are somewhat divided because, from the seventh book of *Gesta* up to the tenth (and last), the author documents a series of exceptional events (floods, earthquakes, and signs from heaven) and alongside them the appearance of charismatic and messianic personalities who draw large crowds (somewhat akin to the late sixth-century figures described by the group of Palestinian Jews (Justus, Jacob, etc.), in the Christian apologetic *The Teaching of Jacob the Apostate* (note 61 above). Gregory again alluded to the apocalyptic meaning of the events (availing himself of the Bible and the Gospels but did not define them as impending-End events. This duality stands out in his writings. See de Nie, 1987, 46–57. For a slightly different view on the connection of the events to the views of Gregory of Tours and his contemporary and creedal partner Gregory the Great concerning the Church and its efforts to organize for the End-of-Days era, see Heinzelmann, 2001), 76–87. For a summarizing review of the lives of the Franks in the shadow of eschatological events, see Palmer, 2014, 55–78.

    As for Isidore of Seville, who was active in subsequent decades, in his writings he chose to disengage from Eusebius’ and Jerome’s analytical model and adopt the Augustine method of the “six eras” of the world (patterned after the six days of Creation). Isidore, however, took the extra step of filling each era with successive events as he chose and from a range of sources. The last event that he enumerated was “the besieging of the Jews by the Visigoth King Sisebut” (early seventh century)—something that ostensibly gave this event an eschatological veneer (cf. remarks above, end of note 59, as to a similar move by Heraclius, but he immediately circumscribed this by claiming that only God knows the End. On the influence of Isidore of Seville, see Wood, 2012, 121–128. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. See Bashear, 1993, 75–99, and Cook, 2011, 267–283, along with references to additional literature ad loc. For more on the contemporary atmosphere on the basis of a wealth of traditions, see collection of seventh-century Syrian and Christian apocalypses in Palmer, note 4 above, and an abridged presentation in ibid., xxviii–xxvi. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. In this context, it is worth noting the modern historiographic image of the Persian conquest in 614. In this regard, see, at length, Horowitz, 1998. Indeed, recent archaeological discoveries (such as the golden medallion engraved with a representation of the Temple candelabrum, uncovered in excavations near the Temple Mount), uncritically matched with *piyyut*ic allusions from that time, encourage contemporaneous hopes of “restoring our days as in antiquity”—even though, as stated here, one doubts that these allusions were based on reality. See Segal, 2016. The contemporaneous national-religious discourse is indeed increasingly engaged with the reconstruction of the Temple and the resumption of its rite. In this context, see at length Miri Balberg’s fascinating article, Balberg, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)