

THEME SECTION / SEZIONE MONOGRAFICA

*Heretic Jews / Judaizing Heretics*

*The Construction of Christian Orthodoxy and Anti-Jewish  
Polemics in Late Antiquity and Early Middle Ages*

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(eds.)



THE IMAGE OF THE JEW, THE IMAGE OF THE HERETIC  
*Building Christian Orthodoxy between Antiquity  
and the Middle Ages*  
*A Research Perspective*

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This monographic section of “Henoah” brings out the outcomes of the conference entitled “Heretic Jews / Judaizing Heretics. The Construction of Christian Orthodoxy and Anti-Jewish Polemics in Late Antiquity and Early Middle Ages,” held at the University of Bari (3-5 November 2021). The initiative was inspired by the significant progress recently made in historical research on the relations between Jews and Christians in the Mediterranean in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages. In the last few decades, scholars have approached this topic from various perspectives, conducting numerous studies on works of an exegetical and theological nature, on the relationship between theological anti-Judaism and social reality, on the interpretation of the Bible in the context of the ongoing disputes between the two groups. Furthermore, researchers have conducted anthropological, archaeological, and epigraphical investigations. In addition to exploring the main themes of the controversy, the research focused primarily on the question of whether and how the study of the *adversus Iudaeos* texts can shed light on the dynamics between Christian and Jewish communities, as well as on the dialectical, cultural, political, and social purposes these polemical works served in their composition.

The *adversus Iudaeos* texts are read and interpreted primarily with a view to a deeper knowledge of ancient Judaism and its relationship to Christianity: the traditional portrayal of Judaism is reconsidered, for example, by emphasising the diversity of currents within Judaism, both in Judea and in the areas of the Diaspora. The terms “Judaism” and “Jews” themselves are discussed in a completely new way, especially starting from the position of Daniel Boyarin, according to whom the term “Judaism” as a designation for an alleged religion of the Jews merely reflects a Christian theological concept.

“Identity/rejection,” “preservation/assimilation” – as Sofia Boesch Gajano has pointed out – can be considered the key terms for the presence of Judaism in the Western world, a presence consisting of influences, exchanges, and intertwinement. The history of Jewish communities today can no longer be examined only through the lens of the dichotomy of tolerance and intolerance or within the framework of anti-Judaism. Instead, it should be considered in the light of a complex system encompassing a diverse Jewish identity marked with multiple social and cultural expressions, just as Christian society is no

longer perceived as a monolithic entity but is understood in its diverse manifestations and various socio-economic and cultural interconnections. Over the centuries, the relationship between Christians and Jews has very often been characterised as contradictory. While in some times and places the Jews played an active role in economic and social life, in other periods they appeared as a foreign body in the environment, in an ambiguous equilibrium that placed them simultaneously inside and outside Christian society. Questions were raised about the dynamics at the crossroads of Christian society and the Jewish minority during the Late Antiquity and Middle Ages, and about how the Jewish presence was established and sustained within various communities. The discourse on the Jewish presence can be better contextualised especially from the perspective of the new historiography, which offers a methodological reference point for understanding the history of minorities in a broader context and the dynamics between minority and majority. Studying the history of the Jews means to reflect on the significance of their “real,” “imagined,” and “symbolic” presence. Nor can we overlook the perception of the Jews that Christian society developed in different times and contexts.

This depiction is to a large extent an ideological and literary construction that runs through the texts and their reception. Research has made many efforts in recent decades to better understand this phenomenon: philological and text-critical work has made it possible to better reconstruct the manuscript traditions, which are often complex and marked by textual contamination and manipulation. For many works dated between the 2nd and 7th centuries, thanks to the research of various scholars (at least Patrick Andrist, Vincent Déroche, Gilbert Dagron and Sébastien Morlet should be mentioned here), the genesis, dating, compositional setting, manner of use and characteristics of the recipients have been clarified. It turned out that anti-Jewish polemical works are often collections of textual units of different origins, based on the use of recurring source repertoires: these textual units, common to different works and often belonging to different compositional environments, were reused, updated, enriched with new exegetical ideas, new anti-Jewish arguments or a different functional content in order to adapt the text to an evolving historical context.

This approach allows us to go beyond the close yet superficial observation that points to the repetition of themes and patterns of argumentation in these texts and concludes that they are irrelevant as historical sources. The Christian works of anti-Jewish polemics, especially in dialogical form, do indeed stage, sometimes within a realistic historical contextualisation, doctrinal disputes that almost always end with the defeat of the Jewish opponent, who in some cases is persuaded (or forced) to convert and be baptised. It is always legitimate to ask whether these texts – even if the repetitiveness and schematic character of the themes and chains of arguments give the strong impression that we are dealing with exhausted *topoi* – are, if not the faithful record, at least the faint trace of genuine controversies. The recurrence of these schemes and the popularity of the writings containing them raise the

question of why and for whom these texts were employed, prompting enquiries into the intentions of those who authored or used them and exploring the identities hidden behind the stereotypical mask of the Jew. Despite its repetition, the anti-Jewish polemic continues to be enriched by elements of the tradition that regards the Jew as an “enemy” of the faith. Hence, the typology of the Jew, which finds its origins in the earliest polemical Christian literature, lays the foundation for subsequent Christian writings. These later texts engage with emerging issues and perspectives, adapting to the specific requirements of particular contexts. In the Middle Ages, the old stereotypes were charged with new meanings and reformulated outside a religious and theological dimension, connoted in a socio-anthropological sense and considered as grounds for political accusations. Jewish identity, which preserved the ritual prescriptions of its origins, represented a threat to the whole of society and to the Church in the eyes of numerous Christian writers.

Moreover, the anti-Jewish texts, apart from their disputed historical reliability, are primarily focused on the necessity for self-definition of Christian communities. This need was particularly urgent in the first centuries, as it was a matter of creating a separate identity in distinction to Judaism. It persisted in the following centuries as disputes of a different kind emerged, involving varying interpretations of Christian doctrine that could lead to sectarianism or schism, or arising from interaction with other faiths such as Manichaeism and Islam. The dialectical tools forged in the fire of controversy with the Jews to define a consciousness of self were used to delineate a heritage of faith, even in relation to other experiences perceived as danger. Sometimes, the anti-Jewish controversy appears as a training ground to sharpen weapons against other, somehow more insidious enemies. In patristic literature, especially in polemics, it is easy to see how often Christian authors put Jews, heretics, and pagans on the same level, considering them “enemies” because of their “perversion” and stubborn resistance to the true, Catholic faith.

The point, then, is to understand how the Christian intellectuals of Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages employed strategies for analysing complex realities based on the reuse of models that had already been developed in relation to a social group perceived as different from themselves and applied them to other groups that emerged from time to time as potential adversaries. If Judaism, from which Christianity separated itself in a slow, highly intellectualised process, is the most obvious archetype of the error to be corrected for Christians who wanted to define themselves, then it is not surprising that the internal struggle between Christian communities who fought to affirm their own orthodoxy drew on this archetype from very early on. The Church Fathers drew a line of continuity between Jewish “error” – a deviation from doctrine or morals, in either case a deliberate and persistent fault – and any subsequent more or less conspicuous aberration from a proclaimed truth. The structure of the heresiologies, from the *Panarion* of Epiphanius to *De haeresibus* of John Damascene (which interpreted βαρβαρισμός, σκυθισμός, ἑλληνισμός and ιουδαϊσμός as μητέρες καὶ πρωτότυποι of all heresies), proves it.

It is now possible to reflect on how the dialectical strategies constructed in the anti-Jewish controversy were reused in the theological debate within Christianity. Based on works of different literary genres and from different periods, such an investigation can help to reconstruct a kind of “ideology” of Christians about Judaism and other religious groups and to elaborate the perception of the “others” that Christian society developed in different socio- and religio-historical periods and contexts. A diachronic trajectory – from the first centuries of Christianity to the early Middle Ages – can reveal permanence and change, as well as connections and interrelations between tradition and innovation. As Averil Cameron has pointed out, anti-Judaism and heresiology developed over the centuries through mutual integration and influence. The assimilation of Jews and heretics on the Christian side did not only mean the condemnation of “error:” Jews and heretics were seen in different eras and in different circles as a current threat to Christian identity and Orthodoxy in particular.

We asked a team of scholars, expert in Latin, Greek Byzantine, Jewish and Coptic culture, to answer some questions. When did the juxtaposition of Jews and heretics begin? Before the Arian crisis, apologetic literature tried to define Christian dogma by contrasting it with the three great opponents: paganism, Judaism and Christian heresies. Over time, the pagan threat diminished and heterodox teachings increased, while Christian dogma became more complex. As Christian doctrine adopted reasoning devices from Greek philosophy, especially in relation to Christology, the space for heretical controversy grew. In this way, Judaism gradually lost its distinguishing features and independent relevance in the eyes of Christians and became a comparative concept. Is it possible that the proximity of controversies with different aims and thus instruments encouraged such contamination from the outset? How was an ancient narrative crafted to explain the origins of this phenomenon (consider, for instance, the myth of Simon Magus as the source of all Christian heresies)? Sometimes the various interpretations of Christian dogma conceal the survival (also due to geographical closeness) of Jewish beliefs or customs, which are dismissed as mere deviation and error by the ongoing development of an ideological framework claiming itself as orthodoxy. Can we ascertain the boundaries of this phenomenon, which imparts a sense of historical acknowledgement to the parallels drawn between Jews and heretics by polemicists? Is the phenomenon more intense at certain historical moments or on certain pressing issues (e.g. subordinationism in the 4th-5th century or the depictability of the divine in the 7th-8th century)? When does the comparison take place on a more superficial level, without going into the depths of exegesis or doctrinal developments? What role did legislation play? Is it possible that the frequent association of *pagani*, *hebraei* and *haeretici* as addressees of penal norms, both in secular and canonical legislation, led polemicists to create such associations in their own writings? Can we detect a difference in the intensity of the phenomenon in different geographical areas and thus within different cultural and linguistic traditions

(Egypt, Syria, Eastern regions)? Is this difference related to the presence of significant Jewish communities that were considered potentially dangerous? During the early spread of Islam, did the encounter with the new opponent, often perceived as a new kind of Christian heresy, contribute to the entanglement between Judaism and the Christian heresies?

If the dialectical tension between Christians and Jews in the anti-Jewish texts is both real and fictitious, because an undeclared third subject appears in the background – the heretic – and because recipients and referents constantly change positions in a complicated game of reflections, we can try to apply an interpretive key that examines the relationships between all subjects: the present and the absent, the declared and the hidden. For instance, Patrick Andrist has highlighted the near-constant presence of a communication process based on triangulation. In this process, the uniqueness of the sender, acting as the guardian of truth, is juxtaposed with a dual audience: one openly acknowledged and one conspicuously absent but serving as the true focus of the dispute. The stated recipient, typically the Jewish adversary against whom a rich repertoire of motifs, biblical interpretations, and erotapocritical arguments has been assembled in tradition, often serves as a pretext for addressing (or discussing) a concealed rival perceived to be dangerously aligned with the other opponent, either in thought or in daily life. This concealed adversary is often hidden because he is too closely associated with a co-religionist whose beliefs are drifting toward heresy. Patrick Andrist traces the origins of this tripolar dialectical strategy to the early period of Christian apologetics, going back to Ignatius and Melito in the second century. He even identifies a ‘quadripolar’ framework in which the openly acknowledged opponent, the Jew, serves as a persona representing a concealed adversary – the condemned heretic. In this scheme, the author equates his opponent with the heretic in order to convince the true recipient of the text (the orthodox Christian whose faith is at risk) to stay away from doctrinal error. In this complex mechanism, the question of whether the text reflects real debates becomes idle, since three factors come into play: a real situation of controversy within a community that the author believes to be in danger; a literary tradition that provides consolidated tools for controversy; the creativity of an author who, with refined rhetorical training, assembles the elements according to goals that are not necessarily obvious.

In this centuries-long practise, the image of the Jew was subject to an uninterrupted process of revision and reconstruction, as Averil Cameron clearly describes. As the list of opponents of orthodoxy grows, the image of the Jew in the minds of Christians is also changed and shaped, for Judaism – the alleged root of all those evils that are blamed on it for various reasons – is coloured by all the nuances of these heresies: even when these nuances contradict each other. This framework does not have much to do with real Judaism, which at a certain point the author does not even need to know, except through literary mediation. This does not mean, however, that everyday reality cannot be found in the texts we read. Literature must be understood

through the means of literature and not automatically assumed to be a historical source if this is not to lead to jeopardising misunderstandings.

The study cannot be limited to examining anti-Jewish dialogical literature, i.e. the texts that are programmatically directed against a specific opponent, because this way of defining inter- and intra-religious relations affects many other literary and paraliterary forms of expression. For example, if we look at the Byzantine period – an object of interest not only for Averil Cameron, but also for Barbara Crostini and Niels De Ridder, as well as for Paola Buzi with regard to the Coptic area – we should look at the hagiographic tradition. Indeed, the lives of the saints make it possible to reconstruct a kind of Christian “ideology,” because the narrative dimension of the texts reflects the various functions that were fulfilled in the society in which they were created. The closeness to reality of the events narrated could vary, but in any case a certain correspondence with the mentality of the readers or listeners was preserved. From this rich production, expectations, hopes, models of behaviour, ideals of sanctity, devotional forms and objects, cultic and liturgical practises, the organisation of communities and relations with other religions can be read. In their changing identity, in their typological diversity, in their relationship to other testimonies and in their use by a large and heterogeneous audience of believers, hagiographic sources reflect aspects of everyday reality and reveal elements of religious innovation. The historical elements that can be gleaned from hagiography, though modest, can prove valuable when regarded not so much as evidence of real events, but rather as information that, when combined with other, more historical data, helps us to gain a deeper understanding of some aspects of the interactions between Jews and Christians, or between adherents of different interpretations of Christian doctrine. The hagiographic tradition is of indicative value when other documentary traces are absent or sparse, as in some eastern areas. The biographies of saints are useful in confirming or even merely corroborating political events and spiritual orientations.

As Niels De Ridder points out, the apparent decline in the production of anti-Jewish dialogues in the Macedonian period may simply be the result of a reordering of literary genres and the takeover of the functions of this specific genre by other textual genres, especially the *Lives* of the saints, where the contrast with the Other-par-excellence reinforces the heroic virtues of the man of unwavering faith. From the contributions of Niels De Ridder, Tessa Canella and Paola Buzi, it is clear that, compared to the writings of the Church Fathers, the hagiographic texts in which the Jews are compared to the heretics do not, in most cases, contain a definition or theoretical treatment of Judaism or of the heresies mentioned, and mostly reproduce discussions of doctrinal controversies reduced to a minimum of theological complexity. In these writings, two different models of life are presented: on the one hand, the behaviour of the Jew and the heretic, and on the other, the victorious behaviour of the Catholic bishop or saint who defends and spreads the true faith. Paola Buzi, for example, highlights how superficial the description of



the enemies of the faith is, often based on recurring stereotypes that can also be applied to other forms of heterodoxy. In the Coptic tradition, there are hagiographic texts in which the authors try to disguise the true aims of the politico-religious controversy, which in Egypt, especially from the sixth century onwards, “could not or would not express itself explicitly” (p. 419).

While in other literary genres the controversy is fought out on the level of doctrine, the attention of the hagiographers seems to shift more to a social dimension linked to specific environmental contexts and to daily relations between religious groups. The presence of the Jews is manifold: sometimes they appear as people, sometimes in their individuality, sometimes as a cultic, cultural and economically organised community. If in the patristic sources the controversy with the Jews and heretics aims at proving the superiority of the Catholic faith through the interpretation of the biblical sources, in numerous hagiographic works the theological controversy, as said, is summarised in a few lines and the miracle often occurs to give victory to the Christian and consequently to determine the conversion of the Jews and heretics. Moreover, as Niels De Ridder writes, in the *Lives* of the saints, the Jews often try to win disputes also by bribery.

In the anti-Jewish polemics of the seventh and eighth centuries, we can assume that the subject of the cult of images, or more generally of the instruments used by Christians to worship God, was the real reason for writing the text. These writings echo – as Averil Cameron, Paola Buzi and Niels De Ridder recall – the debates between Jews and Christians about iconoclasm: Jews are often associated with iconoclasts as heretics and with Muslims because of their aversion to images. While in other literary sources, especially the anti-Jewish dialogues, the debate revolves around the Christians’ defence of the value and function of sacred images according to Scripture, in the hagiographic texts the Jew is explicitly identified with the heretical iconoclast. The desecrators of sacred images are described as godless Jews and enemies of the truth, and the Jews are accused of provoking the attacks on the images in various ways. The iconoclasts are straightforwardly called Jews or Arabs or their followers.

The study of civil and ecclesiastical legislation is also useful in this respect. Thus, some contributions analyse the problem of relations between Jews, Christians and heretics in the light of council acts and imperial legislation. As Rossana Barcellona has noted, numerous pronouncements of the Church towards the Jews from the fourth century onwards make it possible to reconstruct the relationship between the two religious communities, albeit only partially and from certain points of view. The conciliar provisions towards the Jews became more numerous and more concise. Christian canon law, which was hostile to the Jews and sought to deprive them of the possibility of exercising any power or influence over Christians collectively or individually, converged with imperial legislation. As Rossana Barcellona and Raúl González Salinero have noted, Jews and heretics are often mentioned together. From the end of the fourth century, legal texts gradually equated Ju-

daism with other religions and sects that were forbidden or strictly controlled by the law; and prohibitions that formally applied only to pagans and heretics were also applied to Jews. This situation worsened in the fifth century, when Jews were gradually excluded from public life and from any form of service to the state. Increasingly, general accusations against the Jews are found in imperial laws, in which they are described as presumptuous, conceited, responsible for reckless acts against the Christian religion and as “enemies,” like heretics and pagans. As Vincent Déroche had already remarked, Judaism was often called a “sect” in the legal texts: the secular power seems to have fewer scruples than the Church when it comes to identifying the Jews directly with heretics, placing them in a juridical and sociological rather than a religious category. The Jews were not confused with heretics on theological grounds but shared with them the forms of social downgrading: the purpose of the imperial legislation was purely pragmatic. As Tessa Canella and Rossana Barcellona note, there is a small degree of theological insight in the normative texts where “the process of religious standardisation led to the grouping of communities that were considered deviant in the persecutory measures” (p. 371). Rossana Barcellona notes that the dialectic between identity and otherness gets more conflictual in times of crisis when it becomes important to affirm identity *per differentiam*. In the same legislation, from the fourth and fifth centuries onwards, not only did the tendency to refer to Christian heretics as “Jews” spread, but the need to distinguish “Judaising” heretics from “Orthodox Jews” was also seen.

Attention to the conventional and literary nature of dialectical strategies should not lead us to neglect a problem that probably cannot be solved in a blanket way, but must be examined on a case-by-case basis: namely, understanding what is historically reliable about the accusation that a certain heresy has its roots in Judaism. Even though many of the theological questions hotly debated have elicited references to Jewish civilisation, in the case of some of them the reference is consolidated and enduring, almost topical: this is the case of subordinationism, especially Aryanism, of which the refusal of the Jews to recognise in Christ the Son of God and not a creature is all too easily reminiscent (Tessa Canella mentions it); the other exemplary case – examined here in its origins by Fernando Bermejo-Rubio and then in its polemical implications by Immacolata Aulisa and Pierluigi Lanfranchi – is Manichaeism. The development of this doctrine has been ascribed to a range of influences, with the Jewish influence occasionally being downplayed, denied, or dismissed as baseless polemics fuelled by Christians. A careful examination of the sources leads to the question of whether the more pronounced anti-Jewish factors of Manichaeism are not primarily the result of the influence exerted by proto-orthodox Christianity after the phase of Mani’s preaching. Indeed, significant juxtapositions in his texts, for example with Enochian literature, reveal a much more complex situation. On the other hand, Fernando Bermejo-Rubio himself underlines that “to speak of ‘Judaism’ in the singular, as a coherent block, might be too general and a little misleading if we consider its multi-

plicity of currents” (p. 273). The scholar also highlights the use of stories in Manichaean works, drawn not only from canonical biblical texts but also from Jewish pseudo-epigraphical works and from the aggadic traditions of rabbinic Judaism: he recalls the Manichean belief that the canonical writings of earlier religions had been corrupted over time. This question, which has thwarted controversy between Jews, Christians, and heretics from the beginning, as Justin’s *Dialogue with the Jew Tryphon* shows, also appears in anti-Jewish works of a hagiographic nature. Again, Bermejo-Rubio notes that the Manichaeans did not accept the Hebrew Bible as revealed scripture, “but the use itself cannot be denied” (p. 277): images and motifs from these scriptures were often used in a context other than the original one. This brings us back to the controversial issue of the biblical text, its translations and its alleged falsification over time by the “enemies” of the faith. When the Church Fathers recommend Christians to avoid Jews and heretics because they threaten to confuse Catholics by spreading misleading teachings, this admonition is in most cases based on the fact that, according to the Catholic authors, the Holy Scriptures are misinterpreted or even falsified by both Jews and heretics.

When Leo the Great, in his condemnation and reproaches, established a link between the Manichaeans and the Jews, he thereby performed a significant historical act, perhaps without being fully aware of it. As Immacolata Aulisa has pointed out, the writings in which Leo opposes Judaism and the Jews seem to have a practical purpose as an instrument against heterodoxy. Indeed, when the pontiff recalls Judaism and heresies and contrasts them on different levels, his attention is directed to considering in his polemical attacks not so much the foreign confession – Jewish or heretical – but the issues that separated it from Christian orthodoxy. As Pierluigi Lanfranchi notes, John Chrysostom classifies heresies and the danger they pose not on the basis of a chronological criterion, but on the basis of their greater or lesser proximity to Judaism.

In many cases, the reasons for assimilation between Jews and heretics stemmed from a somewhat limited understanding of Jewish teachings and customs, mostly second-hand and obviously mediated by Christian written sources, usually from the New Testament (since the Christian exegesis of the Old Testament prevented its use as an authoritative source for gaining insights into Jewish culture). In the controversies over the eschatological theses of Origenism explored by Claudio Schiano, for example, the alignment of the heretics with the Jews, especially the Samaritans and Sadducees, on the question of the resurrection of the body can be seen both as a product of a somewhat limited understanding of the division within the Jewish community and as evidence of the concerns that arose among Christians when they engaged with that community in a particular context.

Moreover, certain Christian sects, which were generally more marginal, distanced themselves less zealously from the Jewish roots of Christianity. By maintaining this link even after several centuries, they reinforced the opinion of a further spread of Judaism as the root of heresy: among these was the

sect of the *Caelicoli* (to which Raúl González Salinero devotes his attention), which in the early fifth century aroused the concern of Augustine, and above all of emperor Honorius, because it observed Jewish rituals and related dietary rules. In the ninth century, according to Barbara Crostini, the affiliation of Patriarch Nicephorus I to the Nazorean/Nazarene group, as witnessed in the *Life* of Ignatius the Deacon, might be interpreted as testimony to the effective survival of Jewish traditions within a small community that nevertheless did not betray its faith in Christ. Thus, the dichotomous formula that Ignatius uses to describe the education of Nicephorus (θεῖα vs. μαθήματα) is assumed to reflect a juxtaposition of Christian and Jewish traditions, expressed through the hagiographer's cryptic and allusive language.

From what has been said so far, it is already clear that beyond the reliability of a dialectical strategy aimed at tracing the historical roots of numerous, if not all, Christian heresies back to Judaism, it is in the political exercise of this strategy that the explanation for its success, but perhaps also, at least in part, for its emergence, is to be sought. This is illustrated by Emanuel Fiano, who analyses the case of Queen Zenobia, portrayed by Roman propaganda not only as an enemy of the empire but also – in retrospect, in an already Christianised empire – of the Church, because she was charged of being too close to Paul of Samosata; and since Paul's monarchism demanded a rapprochement with Jewish antitrinitarianism, Zenobia and Paul shared the posthumous reproach of τὰ Ἰουδαίων φρονεῖν. The political and religious conflicts inherently involve the use of a historical narrative for guidance. Leo the Great and John Chrysostom stand out among the authors of homilies, in whose texts the intersection of Jews and heretics is very frequent, with lively, sometimes heated controversies (this has been studied by both Immacolata Aulisa and Pierluigi Lanfranchi): the commitment of the two bishops in the West and in the East to the fight against Manichaeism, which was spreading among the Roman people, becomes even more understandable when one considers that the heresy, driven out of Africa by the pressure of the Vandals, was itself a cause of concern for emperor Valentinian III who fought it with the imperial rescripts. From the end of the fourth century onwards, the persistence of the memory of the mutual support that Arians, Jews and pagans would have given each other according to the sources is – as Tessa Canella notes – the result of the tensions that existed in the Roman-barbarian kingdoms between the Arian rulers and the Catholic population. The above-mentioned accusations against the Samaritans, associated with the Origenists in Palestine, are also related to the Samaritan revolts that inflamed the region in the sixth century.

Averil Cameron has noted for the seventh and eighth centuries a steady increase in the general process of “demonising” the Jew: indeed, several texts, even if they do not refer specifically to the Jews, contain a form of condemnation of them, while focusing on controversial religious issues, especially against the Monothelites, or staging openly hostile debates with the Manichaeans and the Samaritans. In these centuries, political circumstances determined the instrumental function of the disputes. There is a causal link

between the political crisis and literary production, especially in the case of the contemporary works that allude to the decrees on forced baptism issued by Heraclius and then by Leo III and Basil I. Several emperors were convinced that enforcing orthodoxy could help secure the unity of the empire: hence, the Jews were targeted as well as the Montanists, the Monophysites and other dissenters from orthodoxy.

Above all, the dangers posed by Persian and Arab attacks played an important role. In this context, due to the Christians' lack of knowledge about the new conquerors, many forms of confusion arose in the collective mentality between Jews, Arabs and heretics, which also affected the representatives of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Some anti-Jewish works – as Averil Cameron and Niels De Ridder have pointed out – confirm that the Jews were equated not only with heretics but also with Muslims. Christians repeatedly used the traditional arguments against the Jews to defend their faith against heretics, among whom they included Muslims. In the complex entanglement between Jews, heretics and Muslims, the question therefore also arises whether the anti-Jewish texts written between the seventh and the first half of the eighth century could have the purpose of providing an indirect ideological response to Islam. This raises further questions about the role of anti-Jewish Christian literature in the seventh century, coinciding with the rise of Islam, and about the involvement of Jews in shaping this unfolding narrative. The Christians' claim to be heirs of God's promises to Israel was challenged by not just one, but two religions that were directly connected to the Old Testament. There is much debate about whether the victory of Christianity over Judaism envisioned in the anti-Jewish works can actually allude to the hope of a political victory of Christians over Muslims and whether the figure of the Jew hides a glimpse of the new enemy, the Muslim Arab.

This study must be carried out with careful attention to territorial specificities, taking into account the strength of the link between the political context and the Judeo-heretical intersection. Rossana Barcellona takes a look at Gaul, where, from the sixth century onwards, the construction of an identity for the new state of the Franks takes place through the definition of a Catholic religious identity. Jews and heretics are consistently labelled as adversaries, and this enmity escalates during the Merovingian era, often without any direct correlation to specific doctrinal differences. In Coptic Egypt, to which Paola Buzi devotes her research, anti-Judaism is combined with polemics against the Chalcedonians, which has the unique effect of associating a separate and minority community, the Jews, who have nevertheless long been present on Egyptian territory, with a dominant hierarchy linked to the centre of Byzantine power (with an enemy in the background, the Arabs, which, as mentioned, offers further and new potential for overlap). In sixth-century Palestine, an Origenist "danger" and a Samaritan "danger" clashed in an international framework of great instability. It is noteworthy that the question of divine corporeality resurfaces in the ninth century in Lyon, where Bishop Agobard (studied by Giancarlo Lacerenza) most likely encountered repre-

sentatives of a Jewish culture of Palestinian origin, influenced by Gnosticism and therefore inclined towards heterodoxy: incidentally, in this case Agobard alludes to Christian heresy in a rather vague and conventional way, but it is Jewish heresy that emerges unexpectedly. Giancarlo Lacerenza emphasises that Agobard does not indict the generally widespread cornerstones of Judaism, but “a certain handful of concepts that circulate under the radar and in relatively limited areas” (p. 435).

Pierluigi Lanfranchi, referring to Chrysostom of Antioch, underlines that in the cities where our authors were active, there was often a (precarious) dynamic equilibrium between two or more social and religious groups that differed from each other and were potentially in conflict, unable to integrate or eliminate each other. When more than two social groups are in difficult interaction, the dynamic becomes even more complex: the rhetorical strategies of triangulation that operate at the level of literary discourse reflect this complicated historical dynamic, and a comprehensive understanding of it necessitates contextualizing it within its specific cultural, political, and social milieu to the greatest extent possible.

The triggering factor for this difficult interaction between religious communities is the problem of proselytism, since the Jewish one was once again seen by Christians as heretics’ matrix and model. The issue appears in numerous works and in the imperial legislation itself. It is above all in the cities that the problem of conversions is denounced, as in Antioch in the time of Chrysostom, described by Pierluigi Lanfranchi, or in Rome in the time of Pope Leo, portrayed by Immacolata Aulisa: here the coexistence of different religious beliefs posed the problem of mutual influence and mutual attraction “in the free market of religion, where everyone could choose the model of religion that suited him best”, as Lanfranchi recalls (p. 312). For Chrysostom, heretics were not “literary scarecrows he found in the treatises of heresiologists” (p. 316), but real people who could be encountered on the streets of Antioch and who therefore always represented a tangible threat. Lanfranchi thus underlines how Chrysostom presents Judaism as a monolithic block, a relic of biblical religion, while in fighting heresy he distinguishes the various currents “with heresiological competence and precision” (p. 316). According to Averil Cameron, the conversion of the Jews was at once “a necessary aim and a conceptual difficulty” (p. 245). Heretics and pagans could be converted and assimilated as true Christians, but the Jews were different: they retained the shadow of suspicion simply because they were Jews; they had been shown the truth of Christianity but had rejected it. As the scholar points out, the attempt to convert the Jews has played a fundamental role of contrast in countless texts, up to and including, as said, the more complex problem of forced conversion.

These considerations introduce another relevant question: the perception of the Jews in “everyday life.” In some texts, such as those of Chrysostom or Pope Leo, but also, as we have seen, in numerous hagiographic or legislative works, reference is made to forms of coexistence between the different reli-

gious groups. Many Christian authors stress the need to maintain a “physical distance” from heretics and Jews, even in everyday actions (attending banquets, praying together, sharing tables and/or public spaces): for example, Christians are warned not to have lunch with Jews and heretics, and on some occasions even to greet them. Rejecting the company of Jews and heretics sometimes seems to be the best way to avoid their negative and misleading influence on the orthodox faith. Such measures were not only religious but also social in nature, for example regarding the ownership of slaves or mixed marriages. The influence of Jews and heretics was considered dangerous not only in doctrine but also in the daily life of the faithful, in their customs and practises. Public spaces or spaces designated for worship were also controversial, as evidenced by imperial legislation. Agobard of Lyon, for example – Giancarlo Lacerenza reminds us – called for the separation of Jews from Christian society in private and public spaces and sought “the perspective of a Jewish and Christian society based not on segregation but on separation” (p. 431).

This conference marks a path to exploration, leaving some questions still unanswered. To what extent were the Christian authors aware that official orthodoxy represented an ongoing and ever-evolving struggle, not just for Christianity but also for Judaism? Conversely, did the Jews know that Christians equated them with certain heresies? Did they perceive a lesser divide between themselves and these Christian “heretical” communities? In other words, were the Christian accusations of an alliance between Jews and heretics with an anti-orthodox function based on real facts? In terms of textual products, are there convergences between the anthologies of biblical testimonies or arguments against Jews and those used in anti-heretical polemics?

We would like to conclude with Averil Cameron’s quote (p. 251): “Nor was the mere condemnation of Judaism enough: the listing and the condemnation of heresies real and imagined began early and grew into a massive edifice, easily adapted as new ‘heresies’ were identified and added. It was entirely predictable that it should also find ways of encompassing Christian thinking about Judaism.”<sup>1</sup>

We are very grateful to Piero Capelli, the director of “Henoah,” for the proposal to publish the proceedings of the conference in this monographic section of the journal.

We dedicate this volume to the dear memory of Professor Emeritus Giorgio Otranto, who pioneered research at the University of Bari on Jewish-Christian relations in antiquity and on anti-Jewish literature. His invaluable contributions continue to serve as an indispensable reference point in this field of research, as in many others.

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