

## II. HISTORICAL THEOLOGY

### THE RELIGIOUS POLICY OF EMPEROR HERACLIUS (610-641) IN REGARDS TO HEBREWS: PREMISES, ACCEPTANCE AND CONSEQUENCES

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**ABSTRACT.** Our study sets out to discuss the religious policy of Emperor Heraclius (610-641) in regards to Hebrews. Before the relic of the Holy Cross was reinstalled in Jerusalem (31 March 630), Emperor Heraclius's relations with the Hebrews do not seem to be tense. Starting with 630, Heraclius retaliates against the Hebrews as a punishment for their collaboration with the Persians, as well as for their involvement in the massacre of Christians when Jerusalem was conquered by the Persians (614). The Emperor issued an edict for the forced conversion of Hebrews to Christianity. The scope of this edict covered the entire Byzantine Empire, but it was only enforced in Cartagena (May 31, 632). Saint Maximus the Confessor condemns Heraclius's decision to forcibly convert Cartagena Hebrews to Christianity. Heraclius's decree was contested among the Hebrews. Their forced christening caused their migration to Persia. Also, Heraclius's anti-Hebrew policy determined them to facilitate the Arab expansion in Byzantine territories.

**Keywords:** religious policy, emperor Heraclius, Hebrews, conversion, baptism

The last two years of Emperor Phocas's reign (602-610) are marked by the resurgence of conflicts between Christians and the Jewish population; these conflicts increase in intensity on the backdrop of the Persian expansion over Byzantium. The Persian invasion of the Byzantine Orient exacerbated the secular hatred between Christians and Hebrews; the latter were accused of helping the Persians, whom they considered to be their liberators from the shackles of the Byzantine yoke. In his turn, Emperor Phocas triggers a series of bloody persecutions against Monophysites and Hebrews in Syria, Palestine and Egypt. These oppressions turned out to be directly responsible for the

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collapse of the Byzantine rule under the attacks of the Persians in the eastern provinces of the Empire, determining Monophysites and Hebrews to become the main allies of the Sassanids.

In 610, the Hebrews of Antioch revolted against the Christians; they killed Chalcedonian patriarch Anastasios II (598-610)<sup>1</sup> and a few noblemen of the city. The Judaic revolt was repressed with barbarity by Bonosus, "Count of the East" many Hebrews were killed, and those who escaped death were mutilated or expelled from Antioch<sup>2</sup>. The Jewish revolt was intertwined with a series of civil conflicts that started in Antioch as well as in the entire Orient, and whose protagonists were members of the local demes (the Green and the Blue)<sup>3</sup>. Doubtlessly, the Hebrews were involved in these conflicts either as actors, or as victims. The state of anarchy taking over the Empire was the exposition of an imminent civil war<sup>4</sup>.

The critical state of the Byzantine Empire coincided with the ascension of Emperor Heraclius to the throne (610-641). He proved to be the most eminent among the Byzantine sovereigns to occupy the throne of Constantinople after the death of Justinian I. The new emperor received a "heavy inheritance" from his predecessor, Phocas. In order to overcome the crisis in the Empire, Heraclitus initiated an ample series of reforms, perfected by his successors<sup>5</sup>. The Church played an important role in the reforming politics advanced by

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<sup>1</sup> Remus Rus, *Dicționar enciclopedic de literatură creștină din primul mileniu*, (București: Ed. Lidia, 2003), 44 (s.v. *Anastasios II of Antioch*).

<sup>2</sup> Theophanes, *The Chronicle*, an English translation of anni mundi 6095-6305 (A.D. 602-813), with introduction and notes by Harry Turtledove, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), Annus Mundi 6101, 7.21.1.1.1.9., 7 (hereinafter referred to as *The Chronicle*); Michel le Syrien, *Chronique*, vol. II, éditée pour la première fois et traduite en français par J.-B. Chabot, (Paris: Ernest Leroux Éditeur, 1901), X, 25, 379, (hereinafter referred to as *Chronique*); see also Jean, évêque de Nikiou, *Chronique*, in "Notices et extraits des manuscrits de la Bibliothèque Nationale", XXIV, 1<sup>re</sup> partie, texte éthiopien publié et traduit par H. Zotenberg, (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1883), CV, p. 420 (hereinafter referred to as, *Chronique*); *Chronicon Paschale*, vol. I, ed. Ludovicus Dindorfius, in "Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae," 11-12, Bonn: 1832, 699.

<sup>3</sup> Theophanes, *The Chronicle*, 7.21.1.1.1.9., 7; Michel le Syrien, *Chronique*, vol. II, X, 25, 378-379; Jean, évêque de Nikiou, *Chronique*, CIV-CV, 419-420; see also *Les plus anciens recueils des miracles de Saint Démétrius et la pénétration des slaves dans les Balkans*, vol. I, ed. Paul Lemerle, (Paris: Éditions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1979-1981), I, 10, chap. 81-82, 112.

<sup>4</sup> For a description of the political and religious circumstances that led to the Hebrew revolt in Antioch and the civil conflicts in the Byzantine East (Syria, Palestine Egypt, Mesopotamia), see Gilbert Dagron, "Introduction historique. Entre histoire et apocalypse", in *Juifs et Chrétiens en Orient byzantin*, ed. Gilbert Dagron, Vincent Déroche, (Paris: Association des amis du Centre d'histoire et civilisation de Byzance, 2010), 19-22.

<sup>5</sup> Georgije Ostrogorski, *Histoire de l'État byzantin*, (Paris: Payot, 1996), 121-124; Jean Meyendorff, *Unité de l'Empire et divisions des Chrétiens. L'Église de 450 à 680*, traduction de l'anglais par Françoise Lhoest revue par l'auteur, (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1993), 353.

Heraclius, being one of the supporting pillars of the imperial power. Since the beginning of his reign, Emperor Heraclius dealt, from a religious perspective, with the often bloody conflicts between the Christians and the Hebrews from the eastern provinces of Byzantium. The Hebrews rebelled by taking advantage of the conflicts that started in many cities of the Orient, between the demes of the Greens and the Blues.

Our study aims to present, based on the analysis of literary sources, the premises and the consequences of Emperor Heraclius's religious policy, the measures proposed and taken by the Byzantine basileus for settling the disputes between Christians and Hebrews, as well as the way in which they were perceived by the Church as well as by Judaic communities.

## 1. Relations between Christians and Hebrews between 614 and 630

In the Orient, the Persian Empire remained the most imminent danger for Byzantium. Between 611 and 613, the Persian troops conquered the main Syrian cities of Antioch, Emessa and Damascus. After occupying Syria, the Persians infiltrated Palestine, which was shortly afterwards occupied with the help of the Judaic communities.

The Hebrews perceived the Persian invasion as “a prelude for Messiah's coming, as well as an opportunity for retaliation against 'the Romans'.”<sup>6</sup> As the Persian conquest progressed, the Hebrews were suspected of collaborating with the enemy and were at the center of the uprising propagating in all cities; they took advantage of the situation in order to get even with the Christian population. The Hebrews in Ptolemaïs (today Acra, Israel) set Christian churches on fire and massacred the Christians in the citadel; at the same time, they offered Christian prisoners to save their life in exchange for converting to Judaism<sup>7</sup>.

The complicity of the Hebrews with the Persian conquerors was nowhere more evident and more symbolic than in Jerusalem, in the year 614, during the siege of the “Holy City” by the Persians. Patriarch Zacharias of Jerusalem led the resistance against the besiegers. According to the information provided by literary sources, the Hebrews backed Zacharias's proposal for an immediate surrender of Jerusalem to the Persians without a fight.

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<sup>6</sup> Gilbert Dagron, Pierre Riché, André Vauchez, ed. *Histoire du Christianisme des origines à nos jours*, tome IV: *Évêques, moines et empereurs (610-1054)*, (Paris: Desclée, 1993), 13, (hereinafter referred to as *Évêques, moines et empereurs*).

<sup>7</sup> *Doctrina Jacobi nuper baptizati*, édition et traduction par Vincent Déroche, in “Juifs et Chrétiens en Orient byzantin,” ed., G. Dagron, V. Déroche, (Paris: Association des amis du Centre d'histoire et civilisation de Byzance, 2010), IV, 5, 180-181, 241.

After conquering the “Holy City,” Hebrews become the main allies of the Persians, who allow them to rob and destroy numerous Christian churches, massacre Christians and force them to convert to Judaism<sup>8</sup>. A large number of Jerusalem inhabitants, including the patriarch himself, are taken prisoners. The relic of the Holy Cross falls into the hands of the conquerors and is taken to Ctesiphon as plunder: “The Persians captured and led off to Persia Zachariah the patriarch of Jerusalem, the precious and life-giving wood,<sup>9</sup> and many prisoners.”<sup>10</sup> The Hebrews take full advantage of this favorable turn of events. They practice an aggressive proselytism among Christians who no longer benefit from the protection of state authorities<sup>11</sup>. At the same time, it seems like the Hebrews tried to take advantage of the Persian conquest in order to reconstruct their political unity. According to Eutychius of Alexandria, the Hebrews of Tyr planned to conquer Jerusalem and banish Christians from the Holy City. Yet their plan was baffled by local authorities<sup>12</sup>.

Shortly after the conquest of Jerusalem (614), the relations between Persians and Hebrews took a sudden downturn; the Hebrews were banished from the Holy City. In its place, a close collaboration between Persians and Christians started to form. This was either due to the excesses committed by the Hebrews after the conquest of Jerusalem by the Persians, or, most likely, to Persians' intention to obtain the Christians' support in order to impose and consolidate their authority over Palestine. In this sense, the letter of Patriarch Modestus – Zacharia's successor on the patriarchal see of Jerusalem – addressed to the Armenian Catholicos Komitas (617-625) evokes “God's mercy, who turned yesterday's enemies into allies (meaning Persians), and allowed the banishment of the Hebrews, who had burned Jerusalem to the ground, from the Holy City.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Dagron, Riché, Vauchez, ed., *Évêques, moines et empereurs*, 17-18; Saint Theophanes the Confessor, (*The Chronicle*, Annus Mundi 6106, 5.26.6.6.6., 11), writes that the Hebrews ransomed 90,000 Christian prisoners in order to kill them. We are of opinion that the information provided by Theophanes should be taken with restraint, considering the anti-Judaic polemic engrained into the Christian sources about the events that took place during the first half of the 7th century.

<sup>9</sup> I.e., a fragment of the True Cross on which Christ was crucified.

<sup>10</sup> Theophanes, *The Chronicle*, Annus Mundi 6106, 5.26.6.6.6., 11; Michel le Syrien, *Chronique*, vol. II, XI, 1, 400.

<sup>11</sup> G. Dagron, “Judaïser,” in *Juifs et Chrétiens en Orient byzantin*, ed. G. Dagron, V. Déroche, (Paris: Association des amis du Centre d'histoire et civilisation de Byzance, 2010), 372-373, 375.

<sup>12</sup> Eutychius, *Annales*, in “Patrologia Graeca; Patrologiae cursus completus, series graeca”, 111, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne, (Paris: 1863), col. 1084-1085 (hereinafter abbreviated as PG); see also, Dagron, “Introduction historique”, 24-25.

<sup>13</sup> Pseudo-Sébastien, *Histoire d'Héraclius*, traduite de l'arménien et annotée par Frédéric Macler, (Paris: Ernest Leroux Éditeur, 1904), 24-25, 69-73.

## 2. Emperor Heraclius and the Hebrews

In the fall of 622, Emperor Heraclius launches a military attack against Persians. As he is reconquering the territories and cities that had been occupied by the Persians, Heraclius is enforcing a policy meant to reconsolidate the Empire's political unity and eliminate the religious schisms of which the Sassanids had taken advantage. The Emperor's policy mostly targets Monophysites and Hebrews.

Literary sources do not provide solid information on Heraclius's religious policy in regards to Hebrews between 614 and 630. In any case, before the relic of the Holy Cross was reinstalled in Jerusalem (31 March 630), Emperor Heraclius's relations with the Hebrews do not seem to be tense. Historian Agapius of Maboug recounts that Heraclius ordered his brother Theodore, who had reconquered Edessa (628), not to massacre the Jewish population, even though they had sided with the Persians against Christians<sup>14</sup>. In 630, on his way to Jerusalem and carrying the wood of the Holy Cross with him, Heraclius lodged in Tiberias; here, the Emperor was greeted by a notable Hebrew, Benjamin; Christians complained to Heraclius that Benjamin had oppressed them. In order not to break the rules of hospitality, Heraclius did not punish Benjamin; moreover, he convinced him to receive the Christian baptism. Benjamin was baptized in the home of a Christian man, Eustace of Neapolis who, in his turn, had offered the Emperor his hospitality:

“In this year at spring the Emperor left the imperial city to travel to Jerusalem, bringing back the precious and lifegiving wood to restore it as a thanksgiving to God. When he came to Tiberias, the Christians denounced a man named Benjamin on the grounds that he had mistreated them. He was very rich, and received the Emperor and his army. The Emperor condemned him and asked: ‘For what reason did you mistreat the Christians?’ He said: ‘Because they are enemies of my faith,’ for he was a Jew. Then the Emperor warned him, persuaded him to convert, and baptized him in the house of Eustathios the Neapolitan, a Christian who had received the Emperor.”<sup>15</sup>

Despite the fact that Theophanous the Confessor describes the tolerant and reconciliatory attitude of Heraclius in regards to Benjamin, we tend to believe that the Emperor in fact forced the latter to convert to Christianity<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> Dagron, “Introduction historique”, 28; see also, Michel le Syrien, *Chronique*, vol. II, XI, 3, 410.

<sup>15</sup> Theophanes, *The Chronicle*, Annus Mundi 6120, 19.1.20.20.10, 30.

<sup>16</sup> Dagron, “Introduction historique”, 28; see also, Louis Bréhier, René Aigrain, *Histoire de l'Église depuis les origines jusqu'à nos jours*, vol. V: *Grégoire le Grand, les États barbares et la conquête arabe (590-757)*, (Paris: Bloud et Gay, 1938), 108-109.

According to Eutychius<sup>17</sup>, while still in Tiberias, Heraclius received a delegation of the Hebrews from Galilea, who requested amnesty for the Jewish population. The Emperor issued a written document guaranteeing protection for the Hebrews<sup>18</sup>.

After the triumphal celebrations in Jerusalem, marking the reinstallation of the Holy Cross in the Holy City, Emperor Heraclius changed his attitude to Hebrews drastically. He started enforcing retaliatory measures against the Hebrews as a punishment for their collaboration with the Persians, as well as for their involvement in the massacre of Christians during the conquest of Jerusalem (614).<sup>19</sup> In spite of the promise made to Hebrews' representatives in Tiberias, it seems that the Emperor ordered the massacre of the entire Jewish population around Jerusalem and Galilea. According to Eutychius, Heraclius was overwhelmed with remorse for having broken his promise to the Hebrews in Tiberias; in order to make up for it, he instituted a special holiday accompanied by lent and prayer which, according to the same Eutychus, had been celebrated by the Melkite Church of Egypt ever since his era<sup>20</sup>. Theophanes the Confessor writes that Heraclius expelled Hebrews from Jerusalem, prohibiting them to get within three miles of the city: "He expelled the Hebrews from the Holy City, ordering that they should not be allowed to come within three miles of it."<sup>21</sup>

### 3. Heraclius's edict of forced conversion of Hebrews to Christianity

According to Heraclius's vision, the danger that the Hebrews posed for the Empire would disappear the moment they embraced Christianity; that is the only explanation for the Emperor's decision to decree the forced christening of all the Hebrews in the Empire, recorded by literary sources. The decision to baptize all the Hebrews was announced by Heraclius, most likely, as early as 630, after the reinstallation of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem<sup>22</sup>.

Although Heraclius ruled the forced christening of all Hebrews in the Empire, the enforcement of his decree is only recorded in Cartagena; here, according to the statements of Saint Maximus the Confessor, George, Prefect of

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<sup>17</sup> Eutychius (877-940) was a Melkite patriarch of Alexandria (January 22, 935 – May 11, 940), see Sidney H. Griffith, s.v. "Eutychios of Alexandria", in *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, vol. 2, ed. Alexander P. Kazhdan, et al. (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 760.

<sup>18</sup> Eutychius, *Annales*, PG, 111, 1089-1090.

<sup>19</sup> Theophanes, *The Chronicle*, Annus Mundi 6106, 5.26.6.6.6., 11.

<sup>20</sup> Eutychius, *Annales*, PG, 111, 1089-1090; see also, Bréhier, Aigrain, *Grégoire le Grand*, p. 109.

<sup>21</sup> Theophanes, *The Chronicle*, Annus Mundi 6120, 19.1.20.20.10, 30.

<sup>22</sup> Dagron, "Introduction historique," 31.

Africa enforced the imperial decree; thus, tens of thousands of Hebrews were christened on the day of the Pentecost (May 31, 632):

“The blessed servant of God and illustrious prefect [George of Cartagena], upon returning from the queen of all cities [Constantinople], *christened all Hebrews and Samaritans [arrived here] from the entire Africa, native-born as well as foreigners, at the order of our faithful Emperors [Heraclius and his son, Heraclius Constantine]; together with their women, children and servants, they were taken by force to the holy baptism - tens of thousands of souls, in total - on the day of the Holy Pentecost of the fifth year of the current indiction [632]. I hear that the same was done in the entire Roman Empire, which terrifies me tremendously.*”<sup>23</sup>

The decree refers to Hebrews as well as Samaritans, native and foreign, who had migrated to Cartagena from the entire Africa, as well as from the Byzantine East.

This forced christening is the subject of the work *Doctrina Jacobi nuper baptizati* (The Teachings of Jacob, the Newly Baptized), written in 640 by an anonymous Christian from Palestine.<sup>24</sup> *Doctrina Jacobi* tells us that Emperor Heraclius decreed the forced baptism of all Hebrews in Cartagena, without exception. The imperial decree was enforced rigorously by George, Prefect of Africa<sup>25</sup>.

It is not by chance that Heraclius's edict was enforced in Cartagena. During the third and fourth decades of the 7th century, Cartagena was an economically prosperous city. Also, here lived a strong Jewish community. This is how it is explained that the African metropolis had become a refuge for Jewish people from the entire Orient, who migrated here in order to escape

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<sup>23</sup> Robert Devreesse, “La fin inédite d’une lettre de saint Maxime: une baptême forcé de Juifs et de Samaritains à Carthage, en 632,” *Revue des Sciences Religieuses*, no. 17/1, (1937): 34-35: “Ὁ εὐλογημένος δοῦλος τοῦ Θεοῦ τῶν ἐνταῦθα πανεύφημος ἐπαρχος, ἐπανελθὼν ἀπὸ τῆς βασιλίδος τῶν πόλεων, πάντας τοὺς κατὰ πᾶσαν τὴν Ἀφρικὴν Ἰουδαίους καὶ Σαμαρείτας αὐτόχθονάς τε καὶ ἐπήλυδας κατὰ κέλευσιν τῶν εὐσεβεστάτων ἡμῶν βασιλέων πεποίηκε Χριστιανούς σὺν γυναιξὶ καὶ τέκνοις καὶ οἰκέταις εἰς πολλὰς ψυχῶν μυριάδας συντεινούσας προσαχθέντας τῷ παναγίῳ βαπτίσματι ἡμέρᾳ τῆς ἁγίας Πεντηκοστῆς τῆς ἐνεστῶσης πέμπτης ἐπινεμήσεως. Ἀκούω δὲ τοῦτο γεγενῆσθαι κατὰ πᾶσαν τὴν Ῥωμαίων ἀρχήν.”; see also, Dagron, “Introduction historique,” 31.

<sup>24</sup> *Doctrina Jacobi* is part of the literary genre of anti-Judaic polemics, which flourishes again in the 7th and 8th centuries, see G. Dagron, “Commentaire. I. Le scénario et ses ancrages historiques” in *Juifs et Chrétiens en Orient byzantin*, ed. G. Dagron, V. Déroche, (Paris: Association des amis du Centre d’histoire et civilisation de Byzance, 2010), 230, 247; see also, Dagron, Riché, Vauchez, ed., *Évêques, moines et empereurs*, 74.

<sup>25</sup> *Doctrina Jacobi nuper baptizati*, ed. and trans. V. Déroche, I, 2, 70-71.

persecution<sup>26</sup>. Yet it is specifically Cartagena where the decision of forced conversion to Christianity - applicable in the entire Empire - was enforced most strictly. Therefore, the Jewish fell into a trap here<sup>27</sup>.

Doubtlessly, Heraclius's decision of forced conversion of the Hebrews to Christianity was determined by their collaboration with the Persians, during the Persian occupation of the eastern Byzantine provinces. The forced baptism was a harsh reply to the trauma suffered by the Christian world due to the conquest of Jerusalem.

#### **4. The position of the Church in regards to the forced christening of the Hebrews**

Heraclius's decision to convert the Jewish by force was met by a deaf opposition from the Church. Literary sources do not record any measures taken by the Church in order to enforce Heraclius's edict.

Saint Maximus the Confessor is the only theologian who had the courage to condemn this controversial measure. He was the eye witness of the anti-Judaic policy pushed by the Byzantine Basileus. On May 31 632, while in Cartagena, Saint Maximus was present during the forced baptism of the Hebrews decreed by Heraclius. In a letter addressed to abbot John of Cyzicus, Maximus writes about this terrible event which he found revolting. In his opinion, forced conversion to Christianity would bring nefarious consequences for those baptized, as well as for the true faith. Saint Maximus believes that a forced conversion infringes the freedom of the baptized, in the absence of a voluntary adherence to the faith. On one hand, this type of conversion could cause the definite and final loss of those who, in secret, remain faithful to Judaism or wish to return to their former faith. On the other, Hebrews forced to convert would not show the slightest respect for the new religion - which he finds much worse. Thus, they could freely desecrate the holy sacraments and commit sacrileges, which would set a negative example for the other believers<sup>28</sup>. Maximus expresses his complete disagreement regarding Heraclius's decision

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<sup>26</sup> *Doctrina Jacobi* tells us that the Hebrews who had taken refuge in Cartagena came from Constantinopol, Ptolemaïs (Acra), Sykamina and Caesarea Palestinae, see Dagron, "Commentaire," 245.

<sup>27</sup> Dagron, "Introduction historique," 32.

<sup>28</sup> *Sfântul Maxim Mărturisitorul (580-662) și tovarășii săi întru martiriu: papa Martin, Anastasie Monahul, Anastasie Apocrisiarul. „Vieți” - actele procesului - documentele exilului*, translated and presented by Deacon Ioan I. Ică jr., (Sibiu: Deisis, 2004), 51-52 (hereinafter referred to as *Sfântul Maxim și tovarășii săi*); Devreesse, "La fin inédite," 34-35.



of forced conversion of the Hebrews in Cartagena to Christianity, which would contribute to the undermining of the Empire's religious unity. As a consequence, Saint Maximus is of the opinion that the forced baptism of the Hebrews was the first step towards the general apostasy and the end of the world; he places it in an apocalyptic scenario, assimilating it to the coming of the Antichrist<sup>29</sup>; seen from this perspective, the conversion of the Hebrews is comparable to the invasion of the Persians and especially to the Arab expansion<sup>30</sup>.

According to Maximus, the conversion of the Hebrews is nothing but „a meddling” that would defile the purity of the true faith. Through the underlying image of a „spoiled” faith, the dogmatic rigor of Saint Maximus the Confessor has, in reality, a strong undertone of anti-judaism. It is significant that, in order to discredit the compromise that imperial power struck with Monophysites - by means of the deliberate conception of Monothelism - in order to bring them back to the Imperial Church, Maximus invokes the example of the Hebrews, against whom he believes the only way to fight is mercilessly: “I mean that tomorrow, the hateful Jews will also begin to say: ‘Let’s arrange peace with one another, and unite, and let us remove circumcision an you baptism, and we won’t fight with each other anymore.’”<sup>31</sup> In this passage, Saint Maximus makes a vague allusion to the anti-Judaic policy of Emperor Heraclius, which he condemns in his letters<sup>32</sup>.

## 5. The reception of Heraclius's anti-Judaic policy by Jewish communities

The forced christening decreed by Heraclius would contribute to the intensification of their aversion and hatred for Byzantines. *Doctrina Jacobi super baptizati* records the reactions of the Jewish population to Heraclius's anti-Judaic policy. The entire Jewish community in Cartagena is terrified. They protest in silence, gathering in secrecy in isolated places, manifesting their disagreement and profound indignation for their forced conversion.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>29</sup> *Sfântul Maxim și tovarășii săi*, 53; see also, Maxime le Confesseur, *Lettres*, XIV, introduction par Jean-Claude Larchet, traduction et notes par Emmanuel Ponsoye, coll. Sagesses chrétiennes. (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1998), (310), 167.

<sup>30</sup> Dagron, “Introduction historique,” 37, 40.

<sup>31</sup> *Maximus the Confessor and his Companions. Documents from Exile*, edited and translated by Pauline Allen and Bronwen Neil, Oxford Early Christian Texts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), chap. 4, 57: “Αὔριον γὰρ καὶ ἰο ἰδυσώνυμοι Ἰουδαῖοι λέγουσιν· Οἰκονομήσωμεν τὴν πρὸς ἀλλήλους εἰρήνην, καὶ ἐνωθῶμεν, καὶ ἱπεριέλωμεν ἡμεῖς μὲν τὴν περιτομὴν, καὶ ὑμεῖς τὸ βάπτισμα, καὶ ἰμηκέτι ἀλλήλους πολεμήσωμεν.”

<sup>32</sup> Dagron, “Introduction historique,” 38.

<sup>33</sup> *Doctrina Jacobi nuper baptizati*, ed. and trans. V. Déroche, I, 4, 74; III, 2, 152.

They are afraid that Christians will denounce them to local authorities for their refusal to convert to the true faith<sup>34</sup>. They go through an identity crisis; at least this is what we make of Jacob's account of a Jewish man newly converted to the true faith:

“Ever since I was baptized, day and night, in tears, sighing and fasting, I have been reading *The Law* and *the Prophets* in Greek, borrowing *the holy books of the Church* from my Christian friends from a convent in Cartagena, trying to understand whether I was lost after being baptized as a Christian.”<sup>35</sup>

In their turn, the Hebrews from Caesarea Palestinae were extremely happy to find out about the defeat of Sergius, the Governor of Palestine, and his death in the battle against Arabs<sup>36</sup> which had taken place near the city:

“When [i.e. Sergius] *Kandidatos*<sup>37</sup> was killed by the Sarasins, I was in Caesarea ... and they were saying: *Kandidatos* [i.e. Sergius] was killed! And we, the Hebrews, were extremely happy. They were saying that the Prophet appeared, accompanying the Sarasins, and that he predicted the coming of Christ Messiah who was to come.”<sup>38</sup>

The above-cited fragment registers the appearance of a new prophet amongst the Arabs, who cannot be anyone else but Mohammed. The Hebrews from the Caesarea Palestinae perceive Mohammed as a precursor of Messiah, who was going to return and set them free from under the Byzantine yoke.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 43, 135; II, 5, 145.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 7, p. 77: “ Ἐξ ὅτε δὲ ἐβαπτίσθη νυκτὸς καὶ ἡμέρας μετ’ ἀδακρῶν καὶ ἰκλαυθμοῦ ὅσα ἰνηστείας οὐκ ἐπαυσάμην ψηλαφῶν τὸν νόμον καὶ ἰτοῦς προφήτας τῆ ἑλληνίδι γλώσσει, ἀπ’ οὗτῆς ἐκκλησίας χρώμενος βιβλία δι’ ἀφίλων Χριστιανῶν ἀπὸ ἐνὸς μοναστηρίου ἐν Καρθαγένῃ, ζητῶν μήπως ἐπλανήθην βαπτισθεὶς καὶ ἰγενόμενος χριστιανός.”

<sup>36</sup> This battle took place in Dâthina (al-Dâbiya) in 633 and considerably facilitated the conquest of Palestine by the Arabs, Dagron, “Introduction historique,” 39; see also, Theophanes, *The Chronicle*, Annus Mundi 6124, 37: “Sergios had just come from Palestinian Caesarea with a few soldiers; he engaged the Arabs in battle but was the first one killed. So were three hundred of his soldiers. The Arabs withdrew after a decisive victory, having taken many prisoners and much booty.”

<sup>37</sup> Cf. gr. *κανδιδατος* – an officer, see E. A. Sophocles, *Greek Lexicon of the Roman and Byzantine Periods (from B. C. 146 to A.D. 1100)*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1914, p. 626.

<sup>38</sup> *Doctrina Jacobi nuper baptizati*, ed. and trans. V. Déroche, V, 16, 209: “ Ὅτε γὰρ ἐσφάγη ὁ «Σέργιος» Κανδιδατος ὑπὸ τῶν Σαρακηνῶν, εἰς Καισάρειαν ἤμην ... καὶ λέγουσιν· Ὁ Κανδιδατος ἐσφάγη. Καὶ ἔσχαμεν οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι χαρὰν μεγάλην. Καὶ λέγουσιν ὅτι ὁ προφήτης ἀνέφανε ἔρχομενος μετὰ τῶν Σαρακηνῶν καὶ κηρύσσει τὴν ἔλευσιν τοῦ ἐρχομένου Ἑλλειμμένου καὶ Χριστοῦ.”

<sup>39</sup> V. Déroche, “Commentaire II. Les intentions de l’auteur,” in *Juifs et Chrétiens en Orient byzantin*, ed. G. Dagron, V. Déroche, (Paris: Association des amis du Centre d’histoire et civilisation de Byzance, 2010), 264-265.

## 6. The consequences of Heraclius's anti-Judaic policy

The compulsory baptism of the Hebrews caused their migration. They tried to escape forced conversion and persecution. In this regard, the chronicler Michael the Syrian writes that:

“In this era, the Emperor ordered that all the Hebrews that lived in all Roman territories would become Christians. For this reason, Hebrews ran away from Roman territories. First, they came to Edessa; when they began being attacked here, they ran to Persia. Many of them received the baptism and became Christians.”<sup>40</sup>

The violence enforced against the Hebrews in Jerusalem and Palestine starting with 630, in addition to their compulsory baptism decreed by Heraclius, determined a massive wave of migration from Edessa to Persia<sup>41</sup>, Arabia<sup>42</sup> or Egypt<sup>43</sup>.

Also, Heraclius's anti-Hebrew policy determined them to facilitate the Arab expansion in Byzantine territories. Arabs were perceived by Hebrews as their liberators from under the Byzantine shackles. At least at the beginning of the Arab conquest we can think of a complicity and a real alliance between Hebrews and Arabs, that Maximus the Confessor alludes to. In his opinion, the Arabs are the Hebrews' main allies in a vast plan of undermining Christianity<sup>44</sup>. In his turn, Theophanous the Confessor writes several times about the complicity and collaboration of the Hebrews with the Arab conquerors, to the detriment of Christians. Theophanous writes that a Jewish man bought the remains of the Colossus of Rhodes, one of the major monuments of Antiquity, after its destruction by Arab general Muawiyah<sup>45</sup>.

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<sup>40</sup> Michel Le Syrien, *Chronique*, vol. II, XI, 4, 414.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Pseudo-Sébéos, *Histoire d'Héraclius*, trad. F. Macler, 30, p. 319; see also Theophanes, *The Chronicle*, Annus Mundi 6122, 34-35.

<sup>43</sup> Euty chius, *Annales*, PG, 111, 1089-1090.

<sup>44</sup> Maxime le Confesseur, *Lettres*, XIV, trad. Emmanuel Ponsoye, (310), 167; see also, Dagron, Riché, Vauchez, ed., *Évêques, moines et empereurs*, 77.

<sup>45</sup> Theophanes, *The Chronicle*, Annus Mundi 6145, 12.8.1.10., 345, 44: “In this year [653/654], Muawiyah over ran Rhodes and destroyed the Colossus of Rhodes 1370 years after its erection. A Jewish merchant from Edessa bought it and carried off its bronze on nine hundred camels”; see also Bréhier, Aigrain, *Grégoire le Grand* 111 and note 4.

## Conclusions

In order to consolidate the Empire's political and religious unity, Heraclius devised a plan whose purpose was to eliminate religious minorities. Similarly to Emperor Justinian I, Heraclius was not tolerant to religious pluralism. And this is the direction that he took in regards to the Hebrews, a policy that complemented his religious unification with non-Chalcedonians. On one hand, the Emperor's decision of forced conversion to Christianity was based on his desire to eliminate any political dissidence among the Hebrews and the risk of the reinstatement of the „Temple;” it served his goal of strengthening the Empire's cohesion by means of the religious unification of its subjects. On the other, this controversial decision started from the idea that history is coming to an end, and the Christian Emperor had an important role to play in this last stage of redemption oeconomy.

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