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DAILY LIFE OF JEWS IN THE EARLY BYZANTINE BALKANS AND THE AEGEAN

Alexander Panayotov

Abstract

My article aims to recover a neglected area of history, and contribute to the study of minorities within larger political structures. I will focus on the daily life, communal organisation and leadership of the Jewish community, and the social status, occupation and cultural concerns of its members. The scope of my article is defined temporally and spatially. I will discuss epigraphic, literary and archaeological evidence, dated between the 4th and the 8th century, related to the geographical areas of the Balkans and the Aegean.

Keywords: Jews, Christians, daily life, Byzantine Empire

The daily life of Jews in Byzantium remains largely an unexplored territory with many, sometimes contradictory, scholarly constructs of how it developed during the early period of the Empire. This is partially a result of the insufficient information provided by the available sources. My aim here is to present an overview of the evidence concerning Jewish life in the Balkans and the Aegean between the 4th and the 8th century. This will allow for the inclusion of the widest possible selection of literary, legal, epigraphic and archaeological sources. Turning to the available material, it is evident that the literary sources are less revealing than the archaeological and epigraphic ones. Late Roman and Byzantine authors for their part were not particularly interested in the daily life of the Jewish population of the Empire. In certain cases, Jews are mentioned only in relation to a political event they participated in, like the uprising of 641 against Patriarch Pyrrhus in Constantinople (Patriarch Nikephoros, *Breviarium* 31.18, ed. Mango 1990). Thus, the importance of archaeological data and inscriptions cannot be underestimated. The archaeological evidence includes, so far, four excavated synagogues, three Jewish tombs and a number of moveable

artefacts and miscellaneous findings. Legal sources remain a solid source for the attitude of the Byzantine government towards Jews although in certain cases, especially in the period of concern, it is possible that they might envision the Christian population of the empire that would be tempted to convert to Judaism.

The synagogue was the centre of Jewish communal life and I will continue by reviewing the archaeological evidence for the existence of synagogues in the Balkans and the Aegean. Synagogues have been excavated at Stobi, near Gradsko in North Macedonia, Philippopolis, modern Plovdiv in Bulgaria, and Onchesmos, modern Saranda in Albania, and on the islands of Aegina and Chios.

The existence of a synagogue in Stobi was documented in 1931, when the donor inscription of Claudius Tiberius Polycharmus was discovered on a column in the courtyard of a three-aisle basilica in the central area of the city (IJO I, 57–58). According to the inscription, dated to the 2nd–3rd century, Polycharmus donated the ground floor of his house, including a *triclinium* (dining room) and *tetrastoon* (study room), to the local Jewish community, but kept the upper floor for himself and his family (IJO I, Mac1). This building was discovered by the American-Yugoslav team that excavated the site in 1970–1976 and was designated "Synagogue I" (Poehlman 1981: 238). A marble plaque and a number of frescoes from Synagogue I discovered during the excavation of the Central Basilica bear inscriptions referring to Polycharmus' donation (IJO I, Mac3–4; Wiseman 2009–2011, 326–334, nos. 4–5; Babamova 2012: 31–33, nos. 20, 23–24). Polycharmus' house and the synagogue were destroyed, along with other public buildings in the city, in the late 3rd century following an earthquake (Wiseman 1986: 41).

Soon after, in the early 4th century, a new building was constructed on the same site, called "Synagogue II" by the excavators, but with a different architectural plan. In the previous period, the Jews of Stobi used to gather in a large room on the ground floor of Polycharmus' house, while the new building was specifically constructed for a synagogue. It was a long rectangular structure with one large hall measuring 13.3 x 7.6 m and two smaller rooms attached from the south. Synagogue II also had access to a building, designated "House of Psalms", located to the south of the Central Basilica, which had a number of rooms, a courtyard with large water basin with niches and a latrine (Kitzinger 1946: 134–140, figs. 186 and 191; Wiseman, Mano-Zissi 1971: 407). The connection between the two buildings would support the interpretation of "Synagogue II" and the

"House of Psalms" as a synagogue complex, with a main hall and series of ancillary and storage rooms, similar to those excavated in Ostia (1st–4th century), Bova Marina (4th–6th century), Hamam-Lif (Naro, 6th century), Saranda (Onchesmos, 4th–5th century) and Chios (4th–6th century).[1]

The main hall of the synagogue was accessed from the west through a forecourt paved with mosaic. The walls of the main hall had frescoes and graffiti in Greek scratched on the walls and the entire floor was decorated with a mosaic made of separate patches of geometric design, which suggests several stages in its construction (Kolarik & Petrovski 1975: 66–75, esp. 69). Foundation stones, probably for benches, were found in front of the south wall of the hall. A small stepped platform standing against the east wall of the main hall was, possibly, used as a bema, and fragments from a marble Torah ark were also discovered during the excavations (Wiseman & Mano-Zissi 1971: 410–411). The discovery of three *menorah* graffiti scratched on the plaster coating of one of the service rooms confirmed that the building was indeed a synagogue (IJO I: 61).

An inscription witnessing the repair of the mosaic floor of a colonnaded corridor (*peripatos*) in the late 4th or 5th century by the *phrontistes* Alexander was discovered in 1977 (Wiseman 2009–2011: 341–346, no. 10; Babamova 2012: 33, no. 25). The office of the *phrontistes* refers to a person who was chosen to oversee or supervise a reconstruction or building project and would indicate that Alexander was responsible for providing funds for the repair of the mosaic floor (Robert 1964: 53, n. 2). Another, unpublished, inscription, dating to the second half of the 4th century, refers to the size of the mosaic floor laid in the entrance room of the main hall of the synagogue. The mosaic was laid down by an anonymous donor who fulfilled a vow to the God of Israel.[2] A lead seal, dated to the 5th century, found in one of the sewer pipes of the "House of Psalms" bears the image of a *menorah* and possibly belonged to the head of the Jewish community of Stobi – Eustathius (IJO I, Mac2). At the end of the 5th century, the synagogue was supplanted by the Central Basilica. It appears that the construction of the Basilica started when "Synagogue II", or at least its main hall, was still in good condition. The roof tiles were carefully removed and stored aside while some of the original walls were repaired. This fact raised many questions about the relations between Jews and Christians at Stobi. It has been suggested by one of the original excavators that the building came into Christian possession by force (Moe 1977: 157). However, there is no direct evidence of forced transfer of the ownership.

The remains of a synagogue in Philippopolis (modern Plovdiv) were discovered in 1981–1982 during excavations of a large residential area close to the centre of the ancient city. The synagogue was a rectangular structure, measuring 13.5 m (north-south) by 14.2 m (east-west), with a north-south orientation and with a main hall 9 m wide, and two aisles each 2.6 m wide, and a large forecourt on the north side. The forecourt was probably separated from the main entrance of the synagogue by a colonnade (Kesjakova 1989: 29; Kesjakova 1999: 76). Two large, but partially destroyed, mosaic floors were discovered in the main hall of the building. The first floor contains one of the most elaborately decorated mosaics discovered in the Jewish Diaspora – the images include a *menorah* and a bunch of the "four species" (*lulab*, *ethrog*, willow (*aravah*) and myrtle (*hadass*) associated with the annual Jewish festival of Sukkot (Booths) and described in Lev. 23: 40.[3]

Figure 1. The mosaic floor of the synagogue in Philippopolis

Three dedicatory inscriptions in Greek, dating to the 4th–6th centuries, preserved in the first mosaic floor record the donation of Cosmianus and another benefactor who provided funds for the mosaics (IJO I, Thr1–2; Williams 2007). The benefactors had alternative names – Joseph and

Isaac – a practice attested among Jews in Stobi (IJO I, Mac1), Philippi (IJO I, Mac12) and Thessaloniki (IJO I, Mac14-5) in the Balkans. The inscription from the central panel of the mosaic provides information, in a similar way to the inscriptions from the synagogues in Apamea and Stobi, about the size of the mosaic donated by Isaac – approximately 35 m^2. The second floor of the building was decorated predominantly by geometric figures. The synagogue was probably built in the 3rd century, partly destroyed by the Goths in 250–251 and rebuilt in the early 4th century. It was badly damaged again in the early 5th century, but was soon restored with several alterations to the original plan, including the extension of the east and west walls and construction of a well or fountain. It is not clear, however, whether the new building continued to be used as a synagogue. The building was destroyed by fire in the late 6th century together with most of the surrounding area (Kesjakova 1982: 29–31).

The synagogue of Aegina is located in the vicinity of the harbour of the ancient city. It was excavated in 1928, but found in poor condition, with only a few parts of the original walls remaining (Mazur 1935: 26–32). The synagogue was a rectangular building with a single hall (Mazur 1935: 13 x 7.6 m; Welter 1938: 13.5 x 7.6 m) filled entirely by a mosaic floor and an apse (diameter 5.5 m) in its eastern wall. The synagogue floor comprises a mosaic with geometric design, on the eastern edge of which there is a white strip that has been identified as a safety mark indicating the spot where the stairs leading to the bema or the Ark began. The presence of such a construction, however, remains uncertain. The entrance to the synagogue hall is marked on the west by two mosaic inscriptions. The inscriptions refer to the donation of Theodorus and his son Theodorus the Younger, who provided the funds and supervised the completion of the synagogue building and mosaic (IJO I, Ach58–9). The inscriptions are dated to 300–350 and provide reference to the offices of *archisynagogos* and *phrontistes*. The synagogue was built in the 4th century and destroyed in the 6th century when a Christian necropolis and as small church were built on site (Mazur 1935: 29–31; IJO I, 205).

The remains of a late antique synagogue were discovered in Saranda (ancient Onchesmos), on the Adriatic coast of Albania, in the early 1980s, but were not explored until 2003, according to Albanian archaeologist Etleva Nallbani. The building, located near the central park of Saranda, comprises a large rectangular hall with adjoining rooms to the west. The main hall and the adjunct rooms are entirely covered in mosaics. One of the mosaics bears the image of a *menorah*, flanked by a *shofar* and *ethrog*.

Another mosaic is filled with images of animals, trees, and includes a possible representation of a Torah shrine. The synagogue has been dated to the 4th–5th centuries. It was supplanted by one of the main churches in Onchesmos in the 6th century (Nallbani et al. 2011: 66–73).

Recently, a new synagogue building was discovered in Chios. The building is located in the old part of Chios town and is currently being excavated by the 3rd Ephorate of Byzantine Antiquities. The building consisted of a main hall and ancillary rooms (Missailidis 2021: 1387–1393). The floor of the main hall is covered by an elaborate mosaic incorporating two dedicatory inscriptions in Greek. The inscriptions refer to the donation, following a vow, of Ilasius and his son Damalius, who provided funds for and oversaw the construction and decoration, with a mosaic floor, of the building (CIJG 67–8). Both donors held the office of *phrontistes*, in a similar way to the benefactors of the synagogues of Stobi and Aegina. The text of the inscriptions also provides reference to the LXX text of Ps. 119:165. Based on preliminary photographs of the mosaic inscriptions the synagogue can be dated to the 4th–6th centuries or later.

Synagogues dated to the 3rd–6th centuries are also attested epigraphically in Corinth, where we have a door lintel with partially preserved inscription, dated to the 3rd–5th centuries, designating the synagogue of the Jews (IJO I, Ach47; CIJG 70), and in Mantinea, where an inscription, dated to the 4th century, commemorates the donation of Aurelius Elpidis for the construction of a pronaos of the local synagogue (IJO, Ach54; CIJG 85). A recently discovered capital of a small marble column (*kioniskos*) bearing the image of a *menorah* may indicate the existence of a synagogue in Edessa. The partially destroyed column and the capital, together with the base of another similar column, were found during excavations of the eastern gate of ancient Edessa (Chrisostomou 2013: 522, fig. 215; 525). A lead seal with the image of a *menorah*, similar to the one found in Stobi, and the name Theodorus was also found in the same area (CIJG 39). It is possible that the seal was used by the leader of the local Jewish community, in a similar way to the seal found in Stobi, and the columns were part of a Torah shrine in the synagogue. The existence of a Samaritan synagogue in Thessaloniki is probably attested by the bilingual dedicatory inscription of Siricius from Neapolis (Nablus in Palestine). The inscription is dated to the 4th–6th centuries and includes a blessing in Samaritan Hebrew and the text of Numbers 6.22-7 in Greek (*Berakhah* – the benediction of the priests; IJO I, Mac17; CIJG 41).

The only synagogue from the areas concerned mentioned by Byzantine authors is the one in the Copper market of Constantinople. The synagogue was supplanted in the 5th century by the famous church of the Mother of God of the Copper Marker, which was built either by the empress Verina, wife of Leo I (457–474) or by Theodosius II sister Pulcheria, to house the Virgin's girdle. The sources also mention the presence of Jews engaged in manufacturing and trading of copper handiwork in the area (Panayotov 2002: 320–331). Thus, despite the increasing anti-Jewish legislation since the death of Theodosius I (379–395), we find synagogues in the main administrative centres in the Balkans – Constantinople, Philippopolis, Thessaloniki, Stobi, Corinth, Argos, but also in smaller towns like Saranda and Mantinea. Some Jewish communities were well established in the social and economic life of their cities and maintained good relations and communication with other communities, as indicated by the already mentioned unpublished inscription from Argos. The inscription suggests good family relations between the Jewish communities of Argos and Corinth in the 4th century.

The new attitude in imperial legislation toward the Jews is probably best expressed in a law promulgated at Constantinople on 15 February 423, in the names of Theodosius II (408–450) and Honorius (393–423).[4] The legislator affirms the protection of synagogues against deliberate destruction, ordering that the Jewish communities should receive places for the construction of new synagogues to replace those converted illegally into churches. But, at same time, he prohibits the construction of new synagogues. And finally, in 438, Theodosius II enacted a law that, while repeating his previous legislation on Jews and Samaritans, recognised the right of the Church to confiscate newly built synagogues.[5] This probably sealed the fate of the synagogues of Stobi, Saranda and Constantinople that were converted into churches in the 5th and 6th centuries.

However, the frequent legislation on this matter indicates that the imperial government was less than successful in enforcing these laws (Linder 1987: 74). The importance of the synagogue for the communal life of the Jewish communities did not diminish, as suggested by evidence from inscriptions and Byzantine laws. The synagogues continued to be used for community gatherings, liturgical readings of the Torah and celebration of the Sabbath and the annual Jewish festivals. The importance of these factors for the preservation of the Jewish identity of these communities is suggested by the law of Justinian from 8 February 553, which confirmed the freedom to use Greek and languages other than Hebrew in synagogue

scriptural readings (Novella 146; Linder 1987: 402–411, no. 66; Linder 1997: 32). The law also suggests a continuous tension within Jewish communities in the Byzantine Empire related to the language of the synagogue readings (de Lange 1996: 132–133). This source and the language of the inscriptions reviewed here strongly suggest that the Jews in the Balkans and the Aegean used Greek as their daily language and in synagogue services. The permitted translations of the Hebrew scriptures in Greek by Justinian's law were the LXX text and Aquilas' translation. This is confirmed by the use of the LXX text of Ps. 119 in the donor inscriptions from the synagogue excavated in Chios and in Thessaloniki, where the wall of a Jewish tomb is inscribed with a paraphrase of the LXX text of Ps. 45:8 and 12 (IJO I, Mac13; CIJG 45).

The institution and the building of the synagogue were considered holy by the Jews of Stobi (IJO I, Mac1, l. 11; Babamova 2012: 33, no. 25), where both Synagogue I and II are referred to as ἅγιος τόπος ("holy place"; IJO I, Mac1, l. 11) and ἁγίας συναγωγῆς ("the holy synagogue"; Babamova 2012: 33, no. 25, ll. 6–7).[6] A similar term ἁγιοτάτη συναγωγῆ ("the most holy synagogue") is evidenced in epitaphs from Beroea (IJO I, Mac7; CIJG 34), and Phthiotic Thebes (IJO I, Ach23).[7] The daily observation of the prescriptions of the Jewish law and personal piety and devotion was an important feature in the life of the Jewish communities of Stobi, Argos and Chios between the late 4th and 6th centuries. This is suggested by epigraphic evidence. In his donation inscription from Stobi, for example, Claudius Tiberius Polycharmus notes that "I […] lived my whole life according to (the prescriptions of) Judaism" (IJO I. Mac1, ll. 6–9) and one of the inscriptions from the mosaic floor of the synagogue of Chios begins with the exclamation "Peace to those who love your Law" – a paraphrase of the LXX text of Ps. 119:165, emphasising the importance of studying and knowing the Jewish Law (CIJG 67, ll. 1–2). But Jewish religious life in the Byzantine Empire was much more complicated. There was apparently a messianic excitement among Jews in Crete in the 5th century, which ended tragically for most of those who participated in this movement. The evidence comes from Socrates Scholasticus, who writes that a Jewish impostor claiming to be Moses gathered a large following among Cretan Jews, probably in the 430s, and led them into the sea, where they drowned or were rescued and converted to Christianity (*Hist. eccl.* 7.38; PG 67, 825–828).

The synagogue – and the Jewish community – served also as a guarantor against the violation of the graves of the deceased members of

the community and in certain cases provisions were made to receive the penalty provided for such a violation (Philippi, IJO I, Mac12; CIJG 47; Thessaloniki, IJO I, Mac15; CIJG 40). This was of special importance since Jews in the Balkans shared cemeteries with pagans and Christians. Jewish burials and cemeteries have been excavated in Thessaloniki and the site of ancient Doclea (near Podgorica in Montenegro). A number of Jewish tombs were discovered in the eastern necropolis of Thessaloniki, located just outside the walls of the ancient city on the site of the University of Thessaloniki (IJO I, 13–14). This was the principal Jewish burial place from Late Antiquity until it was destroyed by the German occupation forces, with the help of the Greek authorities, in 1942 (Molho 1962: 376–383). The necropolis was also used by pagans and Christians in the Roman and Byzantine periods and there was no separate Jewish cemetery. It contained a number of undergound vaulted tombs, two of which were painted with *menorot* and dated to the 4th–5th centuries (IJO I, Mac13). The tombs were discovered in 1961 in the south-east end of the necropolis. The Greek inscription preserved on the wall of one the tombs is a paraphrase of the LXX text of Ps 45:8 and 12 (Κύριος μεθ' ἡμῶν! "The Lord is with us!"; IJO I, Mac13; CIJG 45). This acclamation has not yet been attested on Jewish monuments, but is frequently found in Christian inscriptions. Another inscription dated to the 4th century and inscribed on a small marble plate used to seal the entrance to the tomb mentions the name of the deceased: Benjamin, also called Dometius (IJO I, Mac14; CIJG 43). From the same area also came two Jewish sarcophagi with inscriptions in Greek (IJO I, Mac15; Nigdelis 2006, 334–42, no. 20). A Jewish tomb was discovered in 1960 in the eastern necropolis of ancient Doclea. The tomb, with a *menorah* painted on the north wall, is located in the south-east end of the necropolis which otherwise includes only pagan burials. The tomb has been dated to the end of the 3rd century or the first half of the 4th century (Cermanović-Kuzmanović & Srejovic 1963/4: 56–61, figs. l, 2, 3a-b, 4; IJO I, 20).

The epigraphic evidence also provides information for Jewish communal organisation in the areas concerned. The Jewish community is described with different terms in the epigraphic and literary sources – like "the synagogue" (Thessaloniki, Beroea, Philippi and Stobi; IJO I, Mac1, 7, 12, 15; CIJG 34, 40, 47) or "the people" (ὁ λαός in Larissa; IJO I, Ach1, 3–4, 8–14: CIJG 7–14, 16–17, 19). The epigraphically attested Jewish communal offices and titles in the Balkans and the Aegean, like *presbyter*, *archegos, archisynagogos*, *archon*, were borrowed from Graeco-Roman

civic terminology and adapted to Jewish usage with no uniform meaning and function. I think that the use of this terminology actually helped the Roman and Byzantine legislators to easily regulate the Jewish communities. It was the structure of the Jewish community, with its presiding officers and their duties, that was important. Perhaps it would not be too much to suggest that this structure was seen as similar, apart from the Patriarch and the *archipherekites* in Babylonia, to that of late Roman and Byzantine public or religious institutions. In turn, the legislation could have actually influenced the use of Graeco-Roman civic terminology within the Jewish communities in the Balkans, thus helping to preserve their communal structure. The inscriptional evidence from the areas concerned suggests that the *archisynagogos* was the leader of the Jewish community whose role included a wide range of communal and religious duties. This is confirmed by the position and function applied to the office in Roman and Byzantine legislation. One local variation is attested on an epitaph from Larissa, where the head of the community holds the title *prostates* (IJO I, Ach5; CIJG 15). Another important Jewish communal office regulated by Byzantine legislators and evidenced on inscriptions from the Balkans, for example from Thessaloniki (IJO I, Mac18) and Beroea (IJO I, Mac8; CIJG 35), was that of the presbyter (elder). The presbyters were, together with the patriarchs and the *archisynagogoi*, exempt from compulsory public liturgies in the laws of Constantine the Great of 29 November 330 and Arcadius and Honorius of 1 July 397 (CTh 16.8.2, 16.8.13; Linder 1987: 132–138, 201–204, nos. 9, 27). Here the exact function of the office remains unclear, although it seems that legislators in the 4th century understood it as both an administrative and a religious one. However, for Byzantine legislators of the 6th century and later the Jewish presbyter was a communal officer with mainly religious duties related to the synagogue service as indicated by the already mentioned law of Justinian from 553 (Linder 1987: 402–411, no. 66). Here the presbyters are outlined as the community officers empowered to prevent members of the Jewish community from reading the scriptures in Greek. I think that it would be reasonable to assume that the holders of this office were members of the governing body of the Jewish community. This was recognised by the Byzantine legislators who established the presbyters as a privileged group of office holders who continued to play an important role in the Jewish community until the 9th century. Other epigraphically attested Jewish communal offices and honorary titles in the Balkans and the Aegean include *pater synagoges, pater laou, archegos, archon,* but

the exact function of these offices is difficult to determine, and it seems that its meaning varied from place to place. The *phrontistes*, attested in Stobi, Aegina and Chios, was not exclusively a Jewish office and quite possibly designated a person who was chosen to oversee or supervise a reconstruction or building project. A glimpse into the organisation of the Jewish communities in the Balkans is provided by the title *sophos* in Argos, which is rarely attested in Jewish inscriptions. The title occurs in an epitaph from Argos, dated to the 3rd–4th centuries, and was probably used with a reference to Jewish scholars or the office of the rabbi (IJO I, Ach51; CIJG 69).[8] More information about the structure of the Jewish communities and especially the synagogue service in the Balkans and Aegean during the period concerned is provided by an epitaph from Beroea dated to the 4th century that commemorates a Jewish psalm singer, saluted in the text of the inscription as "most renowned in hymns of (the) Hebrews" (IJO I, Mac9).The information from inscriptions and Byzantine law suggest that the structure of the Jewish communities in the areas concerned was not drastically affected by the anti-Jewish legislation and the established community organisation with its presiding officers continued to function at least until the end of the 6th century.

The position of the Jewish communities in the cities of their residence is difficult to determine. It most probably depended on the local social, economic and political environment. The laws of Arcadius (395–408), Theodosius II and Honorius (408–450), from 404 and 418 banned Jews and Samaritans from service in the imperial administration, but they were allowed to continue their service in the provincial and local administration (CTh 16.8.16; CTh 16.8.24). This is confirmed by epigraphical evidence from Larissa, where the Jew Alexander was a lawyer or rhetor (*scholasticus*) in the 4th–6th centuries (IJO I, Ach5; CIJG 15), and from Oescus, where, if the reconstruction of the text is correct, Ioses held the title of *principalis* – a non-commissioned officer – in the 4th century (IJO I, Moes1).

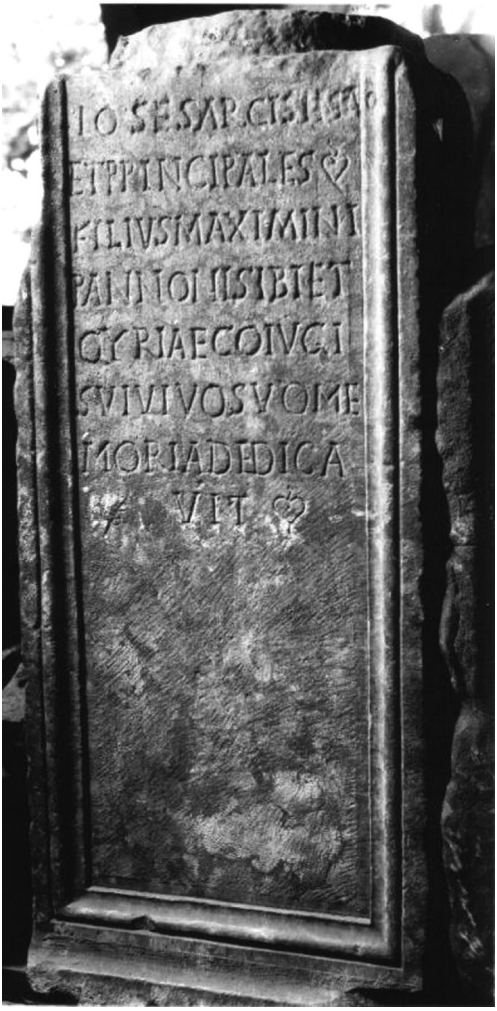

Figure 2. Funerary inscription at Oescus

There is no possibility to reveal the nature of the daily relations between Jews and Christians in the areas concerned due to the lack of evidence. However, the epigraphic evidence suggests that Jews and Christians were not violently separated communities in the Balkans and Aegean.

The only evidence of a possible confrontation between Jews and Christians is actually quite late. According to the *Passio* of St Philip, bishop of Heraclea/Perinthos, modern Marmara Ereğlisi in Turkey, composed in the late 5th or early 6th century, the Jews of Hadrianopolis mocked the saint before he was martyred in the 4th century (ASS 50.9, col. 546; de' Cavalieri 1953: 65, 130, 144, l. 7; Delehye 1933: 242–245). However, it is not clear whether Jews appear only as characters in the text for the sake of the anti-Jewish argument. The next reference is even later. According to the Byzantine historian of the 12th century John Zonaras, the synagogue in the Copper market of Constantinople was built after the local Jews bribed the prefect of the city. The story takes place in 390–394 when, during his Western campaign, Theodosius I resided in Milan. The synagogue was burned by the city mob and the emperor ruled that it should be rebuilt at the expense of the arsonists. What follows in the narrative of Zonaras is a dialogue between Theodosius and Ambrosius very similar to the one that, according to Sozomen and Theodoret of Cyrrhus, took place after the massacre of 390 in Thessaloniki.[9] The Emperor, faulted for his decision by Ambrosius, pleaded that it was in accordance with the law, but after a passionate speech delivered by the bishop, he rescinded his judgement. Then he even forbade the construction of new synagogues in Constantinople, ruling that they can be built only on the city's outskirts. However, I think we should read Zonaras account as a reflection of the conditions under which the Jewish population of Constantinople lived in the 12th century, not as evidence of anti-Jewish violence in the 4th century.

Inscriptions also shed light on the status of women and children within the Jewish communities. Three epitaphs from Byzie, modern Vize in Thrace (IJO I, Thr3), Phtiothic Thebes in Thessaly (IJO I, Ach18; CIJG 24) and Kissamos in Crete (IJO I, Cre3; CIJG 32), dated to the 3rd– 5th centuries, refer to the titles of *presbytera, archisynagogissa* and *archegissa* held by women. These titles could refer, I think, that women inherited or acquired the titles through marriage (IJO II, no. 12). However, in the inscription from Kissamos the deceased woman holds two titles, *presbytera* and *archsynagogissa*, (IJO I, Cre3; ll. 2–4) which makes their explanation even more complex. The problem here is that the exact function of the office of the *presbyter* within the Jewish community is difficult to determine, and it seems that its meaning varied from place to place (Panayotov 2014: 171–172). This was also the case of Jewish children who were also recipients of titles, obviously, inherited from their parents. Thus, in an epitaph from Beroea dated to the 4th–5th centuries a deceased three-year-old child is described

as *mellopresbyteros* ("a presbyter-to-be"; IJO I, Mac10; CIJG 35). This particular title designates a person who is going to hold the office and is similar to the titles *mellarchon* and *mellogrammateus* held by children and adults in Rome in the 3rd and 4th centuries (JIWE II, nos. 100–101, 179–180, 231, 259, 404). Unfortunately, however, the sources do not reveal much about the position of children within the Jews communities in the Balkans and the Aegean. The epitaphs, however, provide us with some, although limited information. In the Balkans, an epitaph from Senia in Dalmatia dated to the 3rd–4th centuries commemorating Aurelius Dionysius from Tiberias, a carpenter and father of three children, suggests that the deceased claimed through *ius liberorum* of Augustan legislation some advantage as exemption from public duties or guardianship (IJO I, Dal).

Some information about the day-to-day relations between Jewish and Christian children can be deduced from the Christian miracle stories concerned with the conversion of non-Christians to Christianity. Thus, the story reported both by Gregory of Tours and his contemporary Evagrius is about the son of a Jewish glass-worker who following the example of his Christian classmates and ate from the communion bread. (*De gloria martyrum* 9, ed. Krusch 1885: 44). The story apparently took place near the Copper Market of Constantinople, which was associated with Jews as early as the 4th century. The story, however, would also suggest that Jewish children were not excluded from the Christian society and that they did not separate from other non-Jewish children. The lack of separation between Jews and Christians in their daily life would facilitate a pattern of broad cultural influences between the two groups in the early Byzantine Empire – like names and terminology, as evidenced by the inscriptions placed by Jewish sailors in the Grammata bay on the island of Syros ((IJO I, Ach72–73; CIJG 65–66). This can also be observed through the evidence about the occupation of Jews in the Balkans and the Aegean.

Little is known about the occupation of Jews in the Balkans and the Aegean and the list of examples is as follows. An epitaph from Athens dated to the 3rd century refers to the office of *proscholos* held by a Jew called Beniames (Benjamin) (IJO I, Ach27; CIJG 85). The common translation of the term is "assistant schoolmaster" (LSJ s.v.), and the deceased could have been a Jewish teacher or, as Irina Levinskaya has noted, even a doorkeeper to a pagan grammarian in Athens (Levinskaya 1996: 161–162). The already mentioned epitaph from Larissa records a Jewish lawyer or rhetor (*scholasticus*) in the 4th–6th centuries (IJO I, Ach5; CIJG 15). The inscription may suggest that despite the laws of Honorius

(404 and 418), Valentinian III (425), Theodosius II (438) and Justinian I (527) that prohibited Jews from serving in the imperial administration, they continued to be involved in the local Byzantine administration (Linder 1987: 222–224, no. 33; 280–3, no. 45; 305–313, no. 51; 323–337, no. 54; 356–367, no. 56).

The appearance of Jews as lawyers or in other high positions in the public administration or the army is rare in inscriptions and literary sources. The only other evidence from the Balkans is an epitaph from Oescus (near modern Gigen, Bulgaria) dated to the 4th century. The deceased person is called Joses, possibly a Jew, who held the position of a non-commissioned officer (*principalis*; IJO 1, Moes1). Other epigraphic evidence from the areas concerned is two inscriptions placed by Jewish sailors on the rocks of the Grammata Bay on Syros and dated to the 4th century. The first inscription records the prayer of Eunomius and his fellow crewmen from Naxos for a safe sea voyage (IJO I, Ach72; CIJG 65). Another graffito from the same area is inscribed by certain Heortylis and is set as a prayer upon his safe return from his sea voyage (IJO I, Ach73; CIJG 66). It is interesting to note that both graffiti were inscribed among similar Christian and pagan prayers. Jews are mentioned in the literary sources as producers of copper handiwork, traders in old clothes, glass-workers, moneylenders, physicians, merchants and smugglers of silk garments and tavern owners (Panayotov 2017: 170–171).

In the early Byzantine period, Jews are mentioned as manufacturers and traders of copper handiwork in the area of the Copper market of Constantinople (Panayotov 2002: 320–328). More evidence is provided by the Life of St Hilarion the Hermit written by Jerome, where we encounter a Jewish dealer of old clothes in Methone in the 4th century (*Vita S. Hilarionis eremitae* 38, PL 23, 50). In the following centuries, professions of Jews are rarely mentioned in the sources. Procopius refers in the 6th century to a watchtower called Ἰουδαῖος near the fort of Dorticum (modern Vrav, Bulgaria), which was part of the Roman fortifications on the Danube (*De Aed.* IV.6.21). The tower was probably built near a tavern owned by Jews (Panayotov 2004: 52–55). Further information on professions practiced by Jews is provided by Christian hagiographic literature, miracle stories and anti-Jewish polemical texts of the 6th and 7th centuries. Thus, the already mentioned story reported both by Gregory of Tours and his contemporary Evagrius about the son of a Jewish glassmaker. He was punished by his father for eating from the communion bread together with his Christian friends and thrown into his workshop furnace. The

boy miraculously survived for three days in the furnace with the help of the Mother of God. He later converted to Christianity together with his mother. There is no need to comment on the purpose of this story, which was clearly intended as propaganda for the benefits of conversion to Christianity. However, it provides information for professions held by Jews in Constantinople. The term used by Gregory of Tours to describe the Jewish glass-worker is *vitrarius* (*uitrearius*), while Evagrius has the Greek ὑαλουργός – both referring to a person who works in a glass workshop. The Jewish glass-worker from the story could have even produced glass ware for the needs of the local Jewish community. The story apparently took place near the Copper Market of Constantinople, which was associated with Jews as early as the 4th century. Evagrius dates the story to the episcopacy of the patriarch Menas (536–552; *Historia Ecclesiastica* 4.36, ed. Bidez, Parmentier 1898: 185–186). Another miracle story related to the area of the Copper Market of Constantinople and set in the 7th century also provides information for professions practiced by Jews. In the well-known legend of the miraculous icon of Christ the Guarantor (Ἀντιφωνητής), one of the main characters of the story, the Jew Abraham, was a moneylender (Nelson, Starr 1939–1944: 289–304). Jewish physicians are also mentioned in the Christian hagiographic literature. According to the Life of St. Simeon Stylites the Younger, a Jewish physician called Timotheus attended to the ailing emperor Justin II (565–578) in Constantinople (*Vita* 208–209, ed. van de Ven 1962: 179–180). Jews were also engaged in occupations that were not always endorsed by the law. The anti-Jewish polemical text known as *Doctrina Jacobi nuper baptizati* describes the conversion of the Jewish merchant Jacob, a scholar of the Torah, who immigrated to Constantinople from Ptolemais-Akko in 602–603. In 632 Jacob was involved in the illegal export of silk garments from Constantinople on behalf of a Greek merchant (*Doctrina* V.20, ed. Déroche 2010: 214–219).

The evidence presented above suggests that Jews in the Balkans were not isolated and that they were actively involved in the daily life of the Roman and Byzantine cities. We find them practicing professions from all levels of society – from the humble dealer of old clothes in Methone to the lawyer in Larissa. Jews were also physicians, traders, builders and artisans active in industries like production of copper handy work and glassmaking. Similar professions were also practiced by pagans and Christians and there is nothing specifically Jewish about them (van der Horst 2014: 53). Jews also continued to be active in the administration of the cities and in the army, as suggested by the *principalis* in Oescus and

lawyer in Larissa, and despite the frequent anti-Jewish legislation during the Byzantine period.

Conclusion

The information presented from inscriptions, archaeological data and literary sources suggests that Jews were well established in the main administrative centres of the Balkans and the Aegean and enjoyed relative peace and prosperity until the 8th century, despite the frequent anti-Jewish legislation during the Byzantine period and the changing policies of the Christian Roman emperors – from the traditional Roman policy of protection of Jewish privileges to the reaction against Judaism and Jewish religious influence among Christians under Justinian I (527–565) and the forcible baptism of Jews under Heraclius (610–644). The restriction of Jewish civic and political rights in the Byzantine Empire did not have an overall negative impact on Jewish communal life and economic activity and individual Jews and whole communities managed, successfully, to preserve their Jewish identity.

Endnotes

1 Levine 2000, 273–81; Nallbani et al. 2011, 66–73.

2 Personal communication by Professor Ruth Kolarik, Colorado College, USA. I am grateful to Professor Kolarik for providing me with information about this inscription.

3 Photograph published under Wikimedia Commons license. Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Synagogue2.jpg (accessed 16 July 2022).

4 *CTh* 16.8.25. Consult Linder 1987: 287–289, no. 47. Nevertheless, it is certain that there was reaction against this law since a second law, *CTh* 16, 8, 26, from 9 April 423, reaffirmed it only two months after the first promulgation. Consult Linder 1987: 289–95.

5 *ThNov* 3. Consult Linder 1987: 323–37, no. 54. It is interesting to note that three years earlier, in 435, Theodosius II promulgated a law, *CTh* 16.10.25, that commanded the destruction or redevelopment of pagan temples into Christian churches.

6 The corresponding Latin term *sancta synagoga* occurs in inscription from the mosaic floor of Hammam-Lif, Naro in Tunisa, synagogue (Le Bohec 1981, 177–8, n. 13).

7 This designation occurs also in Asia Minor, in inscriptions from the synagogues of Philadelphia in Lydia, Hyllarima in Phrygia, Side in Pamphylia (IJO II, nos. 49, 20, 219).

8 This title also occurs on a sarcophagus from Trastevere, Rome (JIWE II, no. 544).

9 Sozomen, *HE* 7, 25. 1–7 (*PG* 67, 1493–1497); Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *HE* 5. 17–18 (*PG* 82, 1232–1237); and the letter of Ambrosius to Theodosius sent after the massacre, Ambrosius, *Ep.* 51 (*PL* 16, 1209–1214).

Abbreviations

AIPHOS	*Annuaire de l'Institut de Philologie et d'Histoire Orientales et Slaves*
CIJG	Corpus Inscriptionum Judaicarum Graeciae
CTh	Codex Thedosianus
De Aed.	De Aedeficiis
DOP	Dumbarton Oaks Papers
IJO I	Inscriptiones Judaicae Orientis, Band I: Eastern Europe
IJO II	Inscriptiones Judaicae Orientis, Band II: Kleinasien
JIWE II	Jewish inscriptions of Western Europe II: The City of Rome
JSJ	Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Period
PG	Patrologia Graeca
PL	Patrologia Latina

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