John of Damascus's Theology of Icons in the Context of Eighth-Century Palestinian Iconoclasm

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John of Damascus's (ca. 655–745) *Three Treatises on the Divine Images* have often been a topic of contention between Byzantinists and those who study the early Islamic period. They differ as to whether he was speaking to Byzantine Christians, Palestinian Christians, or Muslims. However, his works in defense of images have rarely been considered in concert with the eighth-century Palestinian Jewish debate on images and archaeological evidence of iconoclasm, or thoroughly with hadith literature and the eighth-century debate within early Islam regarding images.

Umayyad Palestine in the early eighth century was a religiously diverse region of competing identities, both within and between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Arietta Papaconstantinou describes the range of monotheisms as a "continuum," one in which a person could easily move between categories socially without necessarily even being aware of it.[1] Jack Tannous, who has developed the notion of the "simple believer" representing the average person in late antiquity, highlights the important concept that not every Christian, in our case during the life of John of Damascus, would have necessarily understood the difference between a Chalcedonian, Melkite, or Syrian

Orthodox Christian—a situation that was also relevant to contemporary forms of Judaism and Islam. In this way Tannous conveys a diverse response to the complex web of theology, politics, and ethnicity that is tied up in ideas of belonging to a religious community.[2]

Through the lens of this perspective, one focused more on Umayyad Jerusalem than Byzantine Constantinople, perhaps it will be useful to ask the same general questions about John and his *Treatises* that have been asked many times before but now from a different angle. When we ask what prompted John to write his *Treatises* and who inspired his work, with our focus predominantly on John's local iconoclasm, his Christian, Jewish, and Muslim neighbors in Syria and Palestine, and their internal discussions on images and idolatry as attested in both textual and archaeological evidence, we may be able to see a common thread of local image debate emerge. All three of the monotheistic traditions

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1   A. Papaconstantinou, "Introduction," in *Conversion in Late Antiquity: Christianity, Islam, and Beyond. Papers from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Sawyer Seminar, University of Oxford, 2009–2010*, ed. A. Papaconstantinou, with N. McLynn and D. L. Schwartz (Farnham, UK, 2015), xv–xxxvii, at xxix.

2   J. Tannous, *The Making of the Medieval Middle East: Religion, Society, and Simple Believers* (Princeton, 2018), 266–72, 285–301. Tannous emphasizes that the population of the late antique and early medieval Near East, "was overwhelmingly agrarian with higher-level religious instruction and sophisticated theological literature likely not in great supply (or any supply) in most areas. Though scholars have typically focused on works written by learned churchmen, Christian communities included everything from mountain tribes to suburban peasants, most of whom would not have had access to the training or the books needed to understand the debates that separated the churches to which they ostensibly belonged" (ibid., 14–15). While John spoke to an urban audience, it does not mean that his sermons were delivered to an entirely literate or perfectly informed audience.

in Palestine had their own issues with images and idols in the eighth century—even in the preceding century for Judaism and Christianity, as shown by the synagogue mosaic destruction and aniconic decorative schemes for churches in Palestine discussed below.

Quantitatively, there is no difference in the amount of primary sources linking John of Damascus to the iconoclastic debate, whether Byzantine or Umayyad. Most of the textual sources for early eighth-century iconoclasm in the Byzantine Empire were late, often carefully constructed through the late eighth and ninth centuries, as well as hyperbolic compared to the archaeological evidence.[3] From the early eighth century and from within the Byzantine Empire there is only one possibly reliable contemporary source that lists

the debated issues: the letters of Patriarch Germanos of Constantinople, preserved with the iconophile Second Council of Nicaea materials, and even then, the authenticity of these letters is questioned by some.[4] In the longest of his letters to the Bithynian Metropolitan and bishops, addressed to Thomas of Claudiopolis, Germanos covers five main points: (1) Christians do not worship created objects and do not make images of the divine; (2) because Christ appeared as human, he can be depicted "in the flesh," along with other significant Christian figures; (3) images inspire glorification of the divine; (4) images have never been condemned; and (5) Christians should not succumb to the Jewish and Muslim suspicion of images.[5]

John of Damascus is generally cited as the next best reference for iconoclastic policies within the early

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3   Evidence is scant such that it is unclear exactly what Leo III said or did to begin this era of iconoclasm. Nicephorus's *Short History*, which links Leo III's iconoclasm to volcanic eruptions, is from the late 780s; Theophanes' *Chronicle*, which gives us the Jewish wizard story line for iconoclasm, is from ca. 815; the *Life of St. Stephen the Younger*, written in 809, creates a story about a crowd defending the potentially fictional image of Christ at the Chalke Gate; a ninth-century *Synodicon Vetus* repeats the story about the Jewish wizard and his companion Beser; a tenth-century *Synaxarion* repeats the crowd story and places a saint Theodosia as its leader. The *Lives* of Gregory II and Gregory III (715–731 and 731–741) discuss struggles in Italy between the popes and emperor as well as claims that the emperor made an iconoclastic declaration and that people were persecuted. They also contain additions from the 750s that mention councils of 731, but give few details about doctrine. The letters from Nicaea II from these popes are filled with later additions to the texts and are not reliable as sources for the early eighth century. See the discussions in T. F. X. Noble, *Images, Iconoclasm, and the Carolingians* (Philadelphia, 2009), 53–56; L. Brubaker and J. Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era (ca 680–850): The Sources. An Annotated Survey* (Aldershot, UK, 2001), 168–72, 226–27; and eidem, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era (c. 680–850): A History* (New York, 2011), 79–94. For the later reconstruction of earlier sources and how this relates to Palestinian iconophile evidence, see M.-F. Auzépy, "From Palestine to Constantinople (Eighth–Ninth Centuries): Stephen the Sabaite and John of Damascus," in *Languages and Cultures of Eastern Christianity: Greek*, ed. S. F. Johnson (Farnham, UK, 2015), ch. 13. Stephen Gero observes that John "was removed from the center of the storm; the information he gives is not that of a participant or eyewitness" (*Byzantine Iconoclasm during the Reign of Leo III: With Particular Attention to the Oriental Sources* [Louvain, 1973], 107). There is also the possibility that another iconophile text from Syria-Palestine, written against what appears to have been an iconoclast treatise, was composed during John's lifetime; for the original layer of *The Adversus Constantinum Caballinum*, which has a pre-754 layer sharing similar resources to John of Damascus, see Brubaker and Haldon, *Sources*, 250–51. There are many later interpolations and editions of this work, which make dating it difficult.

4   "All of the letters appear to have been in a relatively poor state of preservation in 787, and there is clear evidence that their text was reconstructed, interpolated or supplemented in various ways for the benefit of a late eighth-century ecclesiastical audience" (Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 90, further discussion 90–96; see also Brubaker and Haldon, *Sources*, 247). For disagreement about the authorship and date of the papal letters, see D. Stein, *Der Beginn des byzantinischen Bilderstreites und seine Entwicklung bis in die 40er Jahre des 8. Jarhunderts* (Munich, 1980), 89–136; and P. Speck, *Artabasdos, der rechtgläubige Vorkämpfer der göttlichen Lehren: Untersuchungen zur Revolte des Artabasdos und ihrer Darstellung in der byzantinischen Historiographie* (Bonn, 1981), 166. For a general agreement that these letters are genuine and that the first two date from the 720s, see Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 96–98, who date the letter addressed to John of Synnada to between 720 and 730, when Leo III and Constantine reigned as co-emperors and before Germanos abdicated; see also G. Lange, *Bild und Wort: Die katechetischen Funktionen des Bildes in der griechischen Theologie des sechsten bis neunten Jahrhunderts* (Würzburg, 1969), 85; Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm*, 85–86; C. Mango, "Historical Introduction," in *Iconoclasm: Papers Given at the Ninth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, March 1975*, ed. A. A. M. Bryer and J. Herrin (Birmingham, 1977), 1–6, at 1; and L. Lamza, *Patriarch Germanos I. von Konstantinopel (715–730)* (Wurzburg, 1975), 137–40. Paul Speck ("Die Affäre um Konstantin von Nakoleia," *BZ* 88 [1995], 148–154, at 150) argues that the section in the letter to John of Synnada concerning the saints, Virgin, and theology of images was added sometime just before the Council of 787, and that the letter to Thomas of Claudiopolis was after 726. Regarding the dating of the final letter, Brubaker and Haldon (*History*, 98–105) suggest that it was after Germanos abdicated (730) and after iconoclasm had moved from an internal Church matter to a larger societal issue.

5   For further discussion of the letters, see Noble, *Images*, 88–89, who treats them as firmly reliable, and Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 98–105, who question the reliability of certain aspects of these letters while also suggesting a date after 730 for the final letter.

eighth-century Byzantine Empire for the following reasons: some of his arguments are similar to those of Germanos; he was anathematized at the significantly later iconoclastic Council of Hieria in 754; he mentions Leo III and discusses the "emperor" and Germanos in his *Treatises*; and he adopts the *adversus Judaeos* literary model. When compared to the evidence present for Umayyad Palestine regarding the licit or illicit nature of images and how members of different faith groups responded to them, however, the above reasons are not enough to categorize John's work as aimed solely at Byzantine iconoclasm. He clearly is addressing issues about images that were not only debated among Christians within both the Roman and the Byzantine Empires, but also in Palestine across faith groups of Jews, Christians, and Muslims.

The *adversus Judaeos* model, often claimed as exclusively Byzantine, was frequently aimed at the defense of images before John's time, as well as adopted during the Umayyad caliphate as a Christian theological response to the Arab conquests of the seventh century. Those common arguments took on a different meaning in an Umayyad context. John's text was intended for both a Byzantine and a local Palestinian Christian audience that was experiencing social, political, and ecclesiastical pressures from Christian and non-Christian religious communities. John's first *Treatise*, a sermon in the form of a summa conveying the official Melkite stance on images, was a justification for the rituals surrounding icons to be interpreted as veneration of a singular divinity rather than as a form of idolatry. Not long after, he revised this sermon to be more accessible to his local audience. It is absolutely necessary to interpret these texts as having been created in a milieu in which Christian and Jewish communities would have been inevitably struggling to reestablish the boundaries between internal sects and other faiths under Umayyad rule. This reestablishment of boundaries post-conquest resulted in tension between these two faith groups, all while the Muslim community was still in the process of establishing systems of authority and official stances on several issues, images being but one of them.

John's *Treatises* can also be seen as a reliable textual witness to the, at times murky, issues present in early eighth-century Palestinian iconoclasm, as opposed to being read only in the context of Byzantine textual tradition. Sidney Griffith, Najib George Awad,

Glen Bowersock, Leslie Brubaker, John Haldon, Judith Herrin, Susanna Ognibene, Christian Sahner, and many others have analyzed whether or not Christians in Palestine changed their outlook toward images due to pressure, real or perceived, which they may have felt under Muslim rule. Their discussion centers on either the 723 edict of Yazid II[6] or a sensitivity to Muslim presence in Christian sacred spaces, as was argued by Suliman Bashear.[7] There has also been a recent line of argument suggesting that Palestinian Christian iconoclasm was an internal Melkite issue, largely unaffected by outside pressures and interests, at times with a strong tie to Byzantine policies.[8] Largely established as their own sect of Christianity in Syria and Palestine under Umayyad rule, with their own authority figures outside of the Byzantine Church structure by John's lifetime, Melkites had inherited a significant amount of theological and liturgical traditions from Byzantine Christianity; some, particularly in Syria, as will be discussed below, maintained as close contact as possible with the Byzantine Church, while in Jerusalem the

6   G. W. Bowersock, *Mosaics as History: The Near East from Late Antiquity to Islam* (Cambridge, MA, 2006); J. Herrin, "What Caused Iconoclasm," *JEH* 65, no. 4 (2014): 857–66; C. C. Sahner, "The First Iconoclasm in Islam: A New History of the Edict of Yazīd II (AH 104/AD 723)," *Der Islam* 94, no. 1 (2017): 5–56.

7   S. Bashear, "Qibla Musharriqa and Early Muslim Prayer in Churches," in *The Muslim World* 81.3–4(1991): 267–82; Brubaker and Haldon, *History*; L. Brubaker, "Making and Breaking Images and Meaning in Byzantium and Early Islam," in *Striking Images, Iconoclasms Past and Present*, ed. S. Boldrick, L. Brubaker, and R. Clay (Aldershot, UK, 2013), 13–24; S. Ognibene, *Umm al-Rasas: La chiesa di Santo Stefano ed il "problema iconofobico"* (Rome, 2002); S. H. Griffith, "Crosses, Icons, and the Image of Christ in Edessa: The Place of Iconophobia in the Christian–Muslim Controversies of Early Islamic Times," in *Transformations of Late Antiquity: Essays for Peter Brown*, ed. P. Rousseau and M. Papoutsakis (Farnham, UK, 2009), 63–84; N. G. Awad, *Umayyad Christianity: John of Damascus as a Contextual Example of Identity Formation in Early Islam* (Piscataway, NJ, 2018).

8   In "Moslems, Christians, and Iconoclasm: Erasures from Church Floor Mosaics during the Early Islamic Period," in *Byzantine Art: Recent Studies. Essays in Honor of Lois Drewer*, ed. C. Hourihane (Tempe, AZ, 2009), 111–19, Henry Maguire argues that iconoclastic damage to church floors reflects internal Christian debates that had strong ties to the Byzantine church and were unrelated to Judaism or Islam; and see D. Reynolds, "Rethinking Palestinian Iconoclasm," *DOP* 71 (2017): 1–64, where it is argued that iconoclastic damage of walls and floors in eighth-century Palestine was largely a Melkite concern.

understanding of ecclesiastical authority had a more local focus on the Jerusalem patriarchate.

By looking carefully at the arguments presented in John of Damascus's *Treatises* in light of contemporary archaeological evidence and textual traditions on image debate within Jewish and Muslim communities, I hope to show that rather than one or two main catalysts, there were likely several in eighth-century Palestine, based on common arguments discussed among all the monotheistic religious groups, both internally and in dialogue with other traditions. John was not reacting simply to an internal and local Christian response to Umayyad pressures and policies, or to Muslim presence in Christian spaces. When the evidence for other monotheistic faith groups is consulted, it seems increasingly likely that some Christians were inspired to remove icons from their sacred spaces, orthopraxy, and texts due to their belief that images were potentially a negative thing throughout all strata of eighth-century Palestinian society, regardless of religion. Debates about the merit, permissibility, or even danger of images took on a dizzying array of forms for the different communities. John's ingenuity in his *Treatises* is that he bolstered his community by creating a theological stance that spoke simultaneously to issues in several relevant debates, both in the Byzantine Empire and Church and his own Umayyad context and Church.

It is difficult to dispute the textual evidence for eighth-century Palestinian Jewish, Christian, and Muslim debates, as will be discussed in detail below, or the archaeological testimony of innocuous everyday household objects, such as lamps, that were modified for a market that called for a variety of preferences regarding images.[9] But this is not an appeal to regard all three monotheistic religions in Palestine as being interchangeable, or to say that the image debates within each community did not have their own internal significance. However, the fact that the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim communities had image debates does not preclude these debates from spreading to the other faith groups and attaining a new set of meanings and parameters in their intra-faith context.

This study begins by exploring John of Damascus's *Treatises* responding to the local debate on images, and proceeds to Jewish and then Muslim eighth-century evidence for internal image debates; using John of Damascus's *Treatises* as reliable sources for early eighth-century Palestine, it will attempt to show that it is possible to see the common threads that run through the different faith communities. This is not to deny that John of Damascus was responding to Leo III's policies—those policies would have influenced John's Christian community, which was not only divided but living in the center of a debate on images between local monotheistic communities,[10] and John's responses cleverly addressed local questions, but they also spoke to the issues the community was hearing about from abroad in the Byzantine Empire. Understanding the connections between the inter- and intra-communal debates on images between the three faith traditions will hopefully inspire further research to include all three traditions when looking at eighth-century Palestinian iconoclasm.

John, His *Treatises*, and the Umayyad Christian Debate over Images

The traditional narrative of John of Damascus's life places him in the Manṣūr family of tax collectors or "treasury officials" for the Umayyads.[11] Until recently it was thought that he became a monk near Jerusalem, possibly at Mar Saba, between 706 and 715. He most likely would have received a Greek, Christian education and may have left his professional life because Caliph al-Walīd I (r. 705–715) attempted to replace Christians in his administration with Muslims.[12] He

9   E. D. Maguire, "Muslims, Christians, and Iconoclasm: A Case Study of Images and Erasure on Lamps in the Johns Hopkins University Archaeological Collection," in Hourihane, *Byzantine Art*, 121–52. Maguire presents evidence for Jewish, Samaritan, Christian, and Muslim iconoclastic tendencies regarding images on Umayyad lamps possibly dating to the early eighth century.

10   Sidney Griffith ("Crosses, Icons," 75) also observes that Byzantine iconoclasm would have affected the local inter-Christian debate on images by adding some authority to those who were against having images in sacred space, whether iconophobes or iconoclasts.

11   St. John of Damascus, *Writings*, trans. F. H. Chase Jr., Fathers of the Church, vol. 37 (Washington, DC, 1958), ix. For more on John's family history, see S. Griffith, "The Manṣūr Family and Saint John of Damascus: Christians and Muslims in Umayyad Times," in *Christians and Others in the Umayyad State*, ed. Antoine Borrut and Fred M. Donner (Chicago, 2016), 29–51. The evidence for Muslims in Christian sacred space often comes from Bashear, "Qibla Musharriqa."

12   A. Louth, *St John Damascene: Tradition and Originality in Byzantine Theology* (New York, 2002), 6; John of Damascus, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*, trans. A. Louth (Crestwood, NY, 2003), 9. For an article explaining why it was likely not Walīd I

has predominantly been considered an ascetic, reclusive intellectual, who was rarely tied to contemporary Umayyad sociopolitical events.

Vassa Kontouma, Sidney Griffith, and Sean Anthony have recently revised the traditionally received version of John's life.[13] Griffith highlights the negative stereotype of proximity to the Muslim ruling elite that both Byzantine and Umayyad Christians would have assumed about John and his family, while further locating John contextually within the Umayyad Christianity of the early eighth century. Anthony makes rewriting the chronology of John of Damascus's life possible by establishing that his given name before he became a priest was Cyrne, son of Manṣūr. He also brings to light significant details previously unknown about John's family members, particularly about his father and his relationship with ʿAbd al-Malik (r. 685–705), which may have been less influential than the one enjoyed by his grandfather, Sarjūn ibn Manṣūr al-Rūmī, who was a prominent secretary under five Umayyad caliphs. Kontouma, who uses previously neglected sources to illuminate a very different story from the traditional narrative, speculates that his birth date was likely around 655 and that he died before 745. He lived and worked at the Umayyad court in Damascus, where his grandfather and father worked before him as tax collectors[14] of the Umayyads from 655–705.[15] In 705 he likely left office upon the death of ʿAbd al-Malik, the caliph with whom his father

supposedly had a close relationship. John of Damascus then went with John V and provided support for the reestablishment of the patriarchate of Jerusalem. He remained with John V in Jerusalem as the priest at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher from 705–35.[16] After John V's death, John of Damascus continued to hold a post in the patriarchate of Jerusalem, from 735–42, but fell into disrepute; he became a victim of slander and left Jerusalem, possibly to a monastery—either the Old Lavra or Mar Sabas, depending on the source. Between 742 and 745 he lived out his days in relative isolation and revised his works.[17]

Kontouma's revision of John of Damascus's life drastically changes his purpose for writing, his audience, and the expectations and his immediate reception by contemporaries. In terms of historical perspective, John of Damascus has moved from being a retired civil servant relatively isolated at Mar Saba and pursuing his own intellectual endeavors in peace to being at the forefront of Melkite Christianity in eighth-century Syria and Palestine, the priest at one of the most visited and revered churches in Christian history, and the mouthpiece of the patriarch of Jerusalem.[18] Following Kontouma, John of Damascus must now be viewed as one of the most well-known and influential Christians

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who instituted this change of employment policy, see L. Yarbrough, "Upholding God's Rule: Early Muslim Juristic Opposition to the State Employment of Non-Muslims," in *Islamic Law and Society* 19.1–2 (2012): 11–85.

13 V. Kontouma, *John of Damascus: New Studies on His Life and Works* (Farnham, UK, 2015); Griffith, "Manṣūr Family"; S. W. Anthony, "Fixing John Damascene's Biography: Historical Notes on His Family Background," *JEChrSt* 23, no. 4 (2015): 607–27, at 625–26 (my thanks to Christian Sahner for this reference). Others have refuted the possibility that we can truly know much about his life due to the unreliability of the sources, which are often late. See Louth, *St John Damascene*, 3, and Auzépy, "From Palestine to Constantinople."

14 *Mawālī* (s. *mawlā*) were clients of an Arab family or clan, a position that allowed non-Arabs and the newly converted to access the social class of their client family and Muslim society in general. The position was one theoretically of mutual benefit—the Arab family supplied social status and protection while the *mawlā* offered his services.

15 Griffith, "Manṣūr Family," 30; Kontouma, *John of Damascus*, 2; Anthony, "Fixing John Damascene's Biography," 618.

16 Kontouma draws her evidence for John of Damascus's relationship with John V, patriarch of Jerusalem, from three of John of Damascus's works: *Letter on the Hymn of the Trisagion* (B. Kotter, *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, vol. 4, *Liber de haeresibus; Opera polemica* [Berlin, 1981], 329), *Encomium of St. John Chrysostom* (Kotter, *Schriften*, vol. 5, *Opera homiletica et hagiographica* [Berlin, 1988], 359, 370), and *Discourse against the Iconoclasts*—here referred to as his *Three Treatises* (Kotter, *Schriften*, vol. 3, *Contra imaginum calumniatores orationes tres* [Berlin, 1975], 67, 69). While this at first glance may seem sparse evidence for a lifelong close relationship for these two men, in comparison with the late and unreliable biographical literature we have about John of Damascus these paragraphs are some of the most trustworthy realistic references to John of Damascus's life. See Kontouma, *John of Damascus*, 24.

17 Kontouma, *John of Damascus*, 2, 28–30.

18 Kontouma argues that John's *Treatises* were on one level John of Damascus acting as the mouthpiece of John V, patriarch of Jerusalem. V. Kontouma, "Jean Damascène: L'homme et son œuvre dogmatique," *Connaissance des Pères de l'Église* 118 (2010): 3–28, at 7. For an account of the prestige of Jerusalem among the Melkites in the early medieval period, see S. H. Griffith, "The Church of Jerusalem and the 'Melkites': The Making of an 'Arab Orthodox' Christian Identity in the World of Islam (750–1050 CE)," in *Christians and Christianity in the Holy Land: From the Origins to the Latin Kingdoms*, ed. G. G. Stroumsa and O. Limor (Turnhout, 2006), 175–204, at 178–83.

in Umayyad Palestine. He was not only born into a privileged family but used his family's prestige and wealth to reinstate the patriarchate of Jerusalem. This was not a man of isolated erudition, but a man who continually endeavored to make a difference, to very publicly leave his mark on the world.

Regarding his material on images, John's three *Treatises* were drafts of the same work, the first two written by John himself and the third heavily edited by monastics after his death.[19] Composition of his *Treatises* has been given a wide range of dates, from the late 720s to the 750s.[20] The first two *Treatises* will be the focus of this study.

One modern edition of John's *Treatises* is by Bonifatius Kotter, compiled as part of his editions of other works by John of Damascus between 1969 and 1988, upon which Andrew Louth's 2003 English translation is based. Kotter's edition lines up the *Treatises* for comparison, showing where they are similar, at times even word for word. Another, Nikos Matsoukas's 1988 edition, is sequential, and therefore it is easier to read each *Treatise* on its own. He also provides a facing-page modern Greek translation. As for English translations before that of Louth, Mary Allies published one in 1898, followed by David Anderson in 1980, which Louth claims was merely a modification upon Allies's original. Both translations are incomplete.[21] This article relies on Louth's translation of the *Treatises* and Kotter's edition.

According to Louth and Bernard Flusin, the first two *Treatises* may have been written in the late 720s, soon after Leo III's iconoclasm begins, and the third sometime after the 730s.[22] Their justification for this dating is that the first *Treatise* does not mention Germanos's abdication of the patriarchal seat of Constantinople, which occurred in 730. The third *Treatise* mentions this, and therefore must have been written afterward, possibly even in response to this event.[23] A. A. Vasiliev, on the other hand, posits that Leo III's iconoclastic policies were probably not strongly enforced until 730 and it was the fate of the patriarch Germanos that prompted John to write the first *Treatise*.[24] Kotter proposes a date around or soon after 730 for both *Treatises*,[25] while Kontouma suspects that the first two *Treatises* were written between 730 and 741 because of a communication delay between events in Byzantium and the Umayyad caliphate.[26] However, she also argues that John probably would have been writing the first two *Treatises* on behalf of the patriarch of Jerusalem, John V, who would have felt justified in replying to Leo III's iconoclasm in the same vein as the popes Gregory II and Gregory III in 727 and 731 respectively.[27]

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19   Louth, *St John Damascene*, 199–200. For discussion of the final treatise being compiled and edited by others, see Kontouma, *John of Damascus*, 26–27.

20   Paul Speck (*Artabasdos*, 184, 191, 196, 201, 205–9) argues that the *Treatises* are not uniform texts and that they are more closely related to the historical context of the Synod of Hiereia in 754 than circumstances during John's lifetime. Bernard Flusin argues against Speck's late date in "I 'Discorsi contro i etrattori delle immagini' di Giovanni di Damasco e l'esordio del primo iconoclasmo," in *Giovanni di Damasco: Un padre al sorgere dell'Islam. Atti del XIII Convegno ecumenico internazionale di spiritualità ortodossa, Sezione bizantina, Bose, 11–13 settembre 2005*, ed. S. Chialà and L. Cremaschi (Bose, 2006), 53–86, at 59–61. Brubaker and Haldon (*History*, 120–21) also argue for a late date based entirely on occurrences within the Byzantine Empire and largely ignoring John's actual geographical and social Melkite, Palestinian, and Umayyad contexts. These arguments are untenable when taking the Melkite debate on images into account.

21   Louth, *St John Damascene*, 198. M. H. Allies, trans., *St John Damascene on Holy Images, followed by Three Sermons on the Assumption* (London, 1898); St. John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images*, trans. D. Anderson (Crestwood, NY, 1980).

22   Louth, *St John Damascene*, 193; Louth argues specifically for 726 as the date of the first *Treatise*.

23   Louth, *St John Damascene*, 208. Flusin, "I 'Discorsi,'" 59–61. Speck posits that in the second *Treatise* (John of Damascus, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*, trans. A. Louth [Crestwood, NY, 2003], 69) John is poorly informed of Patriarch Germanos's fate, thinking that Germanos was punished and beaten. The later, but Byzantine, Theophanes and Nikephoros share an earlier common source and claim that Germanos abdicated of his own volition. Theophanes states both that Germanos was "expelled from his throne" and that he "gave up his surplice": Theophanes the Confessor, *The Chronicle of Theophanes: Anni mundi, 6095–6305 (A.D. 602–813)*, ed. and trans. H. Turtledove (Philadelphia, 2006), 408–9. Nikephoros is more convinced that Germanos abdicated willingly: ὁ δὲ παρῃτεῖτο καὶ τὴν ἱερωσύνην ἀπέβαλεν (Nikephoros Patriarches, *Ἱστορία σύντομος*, ed. C. de Boor, *Nicephori Archiepiscopi Constantinopolitani opuscula historica* [Leipzig, 1880], 58.17–58.25). Both references originally found in Speck, *Artabasdos*, 179.

24   A. A. Vasiliev, "The Iconoclastic Edict of the Caliph Yazid II, A.D. 721," *DOP* 9/10 (1956): 23–47, at 26–27.

25   Kotter, *Schriften*, 3:7.

26   Kontouma, *John of Damascus*, 16, 28–30.

27   Kontouma, "Jean Damascène," 7.

The ongoing debate on the dating of John's *Treatises* suggests that we have no way of knowing exactly when they were written. Perhaps it would be more fruitful to locate them within date ranges. The *Treatises* were sermons, with the second *Treatise* referencing the first in its introduction. This reference suggests that the second *Treatise* was delivered close enough in time to the first for the parishioners of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher to be able to easily recall it—likely a year or less after.

Thus, following Kotter, Kontouma, and Vasiliev it would seem that both the first and second *Treatise* must have been written sometime around 730, depending on how long it took for the information of Germanos's abdication to reach Palestine. The first *Treatise* was likely written before Germanos's abdication and the increased intensity of Leo III's iconoclastic policies. However, the telling reference to the first *Treatise* in the second, pointing to a relatively short period between when the two sermons were given, means it could not have been long before 730.

During the early part of John's life in the mid-seventh century there was limited contact with Byzantine Christian authorities, although letters and bishops occasionally crossed the border for Synods, specifically Stephen of Dor in the Lateran Synod (649). In the late seventh century, however, bishops in Jerusalem began to send representatives to ecumenical councils, such as Theodore, *locum tenens* of Jerusalem, who sent his *apocrisarius,* George, to the sixth ecumenical council in Constantinople (680–681). It is possible that the patriarch Anastasius was present to sign the acts of the council of Trullo (692), although this could easily have been his representative's signature. None of the patriarchs from Jerusalem, Antioch, or Alexandria attended the 754 iconoclastic council in Hiereia, and at the 787 council at Nicaea, the "Oriental patriarchs" were represented by the same thirty-three-year old letter they had sent to the 754 council, which claimed that they could not go due to the "tyranny of the accursed."[28] However, letters, people, and information could still cross the border, as will be discussed below regarding the origin of John's florilegium.[29]

There was also a ten-year gap between the patriarchs John V and his successor, Theodore, likely caused by instability within the Melkite community under the Umayyads and the lack of contact with Byzantium.[30] By the end of the eighth century the Byzantine and the Melkite Christians appear to have had a more tenuous relationship than before the Arab conquest. John lived in a time when communication with Byzantium had become increasingly difficult, although still possible to some extent. John's community could have been informed of the events at the Chalke Gate in 726 relatively close to the time of occurrence, but it could as well have taken a few years.

The first *Treatise* is clearly an erudite, polemical sermon aimed at educated elements of society, and, as Kontouma posits,[31] possibly written at the request of John V as a response to Leo III. It is also possible, as suggested by Speck, that this first *Treatise* was a sermon based on an original letter written to someone senior in the Byzantine Church but not Leo III himself.[32] It reads as an official response of sorts to iconoclastic elements in the Christian community, with Leo III's policies being one of these elements. The second *Treatise* seems to have a different purpose entirely. We are told that parishioners asked John to write a more easily understandable version of the sermon for those who were not or less educated,

> But give me an ear of hearing and lay out the tables of your hearts to receive my discourse and judge for its own sake the power of what I say, in this second discourse on images that I have put

28   R. Schick, *The Christian Communities of Palestine from Byzantine to Islamic Rule: A Historical and Archaeological Study* (Princeton, 1995), 101–3.

29   Marek Jankowiak has argued that having representatives from the "Oriental bishops" stopped being a requirement for an

ecumenical council around 678 as the Umayyad Chalcedonian churches "disappeared from the mental horizon of the Byzantines." He catalogues instances of border crossings to show intermittent communication between church leaders during John's lifetime dependent entirely upon the political environment between the Umayyads and Byzantines, which resulted in an unreliable and continually changing flow of people and therefore communication. "Travelling across Borders: A Church Historian's Perspective on Contacts between Byzantium and Syria in the Second Half of the 7th Century," in *Arab-Byzantine Coins and History: Papers Presented at the 13th Seventh Century Syrian Numismatic Round Table held at Corpus Christi College Oxford on 11th and 12th September 2011* (London, 2012), 13–25, quote at p. 22.

30   M. Gil, *A History of Palestine, 634–1099*, trans. E. Broido (New York, 1992), 456.

31   Kontouma, "Jean Damascène," 7.

32   Speck, *Artabasdos*, 181.

together. Some of the children of the Church have enjoined me to do this because the first was not completely clear to everyone.[33]

The sermon is in simpler Greek than the first and, significantly, both clarifies some of John's points by providing additional explanation and inserts new points.[34] Here John is making a conscious effort to speak to all of his parishioners about what he thought mattered or should matter to them; what he wanted even the least educated among his community to know; and what they would have found compelling, interesting, and useful. Dispensing with the complicated theological version of the first sermon, John chooses more concrete and immediate examples, citing contemporary events and people, e.g., iconoclastic policies that have been enforced in Cyprus. This is apparently recent news as he claimed that there was no iconoclastic destruction in Epiphanios's church in Cyprus in the first *Treatise*.[35] He also directly discusses Leo III and mentions Germanos's abdication, although he is clearly under the impression that Germanos was ousted.[36]

The added material in the second *Treatise* highlights local issues that were important, comprehensible, and useful to his Palestinian Christian audience and also emphasizes the material in the first *Treatise* that addressed local concerns. Several passages that he elaborated on parallel issues discussed in Palestinian Jewish and Muslim communities during John's lifetime, as discussed below.

John's basic argument in the second *Treatise* can be broadly summarized as follows: Idolatry is bad and has always been a downfall of the Jews (and likely Muslims—for reasons explained below), but it is different with Christians; iconoclasm is detrimental to faith in the incarnation; a supersessionist emphasis of the New Covenant over the Old is preferred; the emperor should not meddle in church affairs;

iconoclasm is a doctrine that despises matter and is therefore Manichean; veneration of icons is not veneration of matter; and God made the first image in making humans in his image.[37]

John's discussion of the Tabernacle as proof of the licit nature of images is remarkably different between the first and second *Treatises*. In the first he discusses the nature of the incarnation in great detail, emphasizing that the images of cherubim were a shadow of divine reality and a beneficial and divinely ordered work of human hands.[38] The focus is on human veneration of the divine reality through human depictions of that reality, including a discussion of the incarnation, followed by "I do not venerate matter, I venerate the fashioner of matter."[39] In the second *Treatise* he articulates his point about the Tabernacle less theologically as well as by finding parallels in contemporary Palestinian society. Here we see one of John's supersessionist arguments that the divine gave different instructions to the early Jewish communities because they were childlike, with the understanding that his Christian community was not, and therefore required a different set of rules.[40] John follows by telling the story of Moses and the golden calf in easy to understand diction. Significantly, the golden calf story was known in all three monotheistic traditions, appearing in Exodus and Q 20:87–98, alongside oral traditions and stories.[41] Muslim communities originally understood this story through the lens of Exodus in addition to the Quran, and therefore would likely have been able to understand the references put forward in John's second *Treatise*.[42]

33   *Treatises* II.1.

34   For the linguistic elements, see A. Alexakis, "The Modesty Topos and John of Damascus as a Not-So-Modest Author," *BZ* 97, no. 2 (2004): 521–30, at 525–27. Kotter also discusses the simplified language and added contemporary events (*Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, 3:23–24). Louth explores the new arguments in the second *Treatise* (*St John Damascene*, 206).

35   Discussion of this in Louth, *St John Damascene*, 206. Compare *Treatise* II.18 with *Treatise* I.25.

36   *Treatise* II.12, II.16.

37   Louth provides an accessible overview of this in *St John Damascene*, 203–6.

38   *Treatises* I.14–15.

39   *Treatises* I.16.

40   *Treatises* II.7. For further discussion of this, see A. Chrysostomides, "Creating a Theology of Icons in Umayyad Palestine: John of Damascus' *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*," *JEH* (2020): 1–17, at 10–12.

41   *Treatises* II.8.

42   For an example of Muslim authors who showed a mixed biblical, quranic, or exegetically oriented understanding of the golden calf story, see al-Yaʿqūbī, *Historiae*, ed. M. T. Houtsma, 2 vols. (Leiden, 1883; repr. 1969), 1:26–37 (translated in M. S. Gordon, C. F. Robinson, E. K. Rowson, and M. Fishbein, eds., *The Works of Ibn Wāḍiḥ al-Yaʿqūbī*, vol. 2, Islamic History and Civilization 2 [Leiden, 2018], 294–95); Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ wa-khullān al-wafāʾ*, 4 vols. (Beirut, 1957), 2:283; and al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab wa-maʿādin al-jawhar,* ed. Y. A. Dāghir, 4 vols. (Beirut,

During his retelling he paraphrases Deuteronomy 19, "Beware lest you look up in the sky and see the sun and the moon and the stars and all the order of heaven, and being led astray venerate them and worship them."[43] This parallels the Muslim tradition of Abraham in Q 6:76–79 and in the *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* literature, the stories of the prophets, the whole point of which is to insist that Abraham learned to worship not matter, but rather the creator of matter.[44] The story of Abraham breaking idols was commonly used in Islamic hadith of the 720s to 730s on the place of images in Islam to make a case for iconoclastic policies.[45] It also makes an appearance in the *adversus Judaeos* text of *Trophies of Damascus* discussed below, suggesting that it became part of monotheistic interreligious discussion a generation before John's.[46] One notices the similarities of theme with the first *Treatise* and John's firm statement about venerating the "fashioner of matter." Yet here the theme is embedded in a story challenging what was at this point likely a Muslim oral tradition instead of focusing overly on the incarnation or the material nature of Christ and the Gospels. Immediately following this point John added an entirely new section to the second *Treatise* in which he discusses the golden calf story in more concrete fashion. He takes on the voice of Moses and claims that people are acting as if he worshiped creation over the creator.[47]

John rephrases his discussion of the Tabernacle here to emphasize the fabric with the cherubim images.

But these are the things that God commanded "they should make," it says: "the veil of the tabernacle of witness from aquamarine and porphyry and spun scarlet and twisted flax, woven work of the cherubim" and "they made the mercy seat above the ark and the two cherubim out of pure gold." What are you doing, Moses? You say, "You shall not make for yourself a carved [image] or any likeness," and you fashion the veil, "a woven work of cherubim" and "two cherubim out of pure gold?"[48]

The emphasis on the permissibility of images on cloth to show that images on other media are acceptable as well plays into local Palestinian concerns, discussed below.

In II.14 John returns to the Tabernacle as an example. Here much of the text is the same as I.16 with the exception of a few questions that seem to address more local, Palestinian issues:

What were the cherubim? Were they not right in front of the people? And the ark and the lampstand and the table and the golden jar and the rod, looking toward which the people bowed down in veneration?

Rather than beginning with the veneration of human-made objects representing the divine, a shared Byzantine and Palestinian issue, John's questions start with the location of these objects associated with veneration, which moves the discussion into the world of practical decorative choice. It seems as though he is literally discussing the physical motion of bowing to human-made objects in a sacred space, which is a more local concern. He retains similar wording and the Byzantine-leaning argument of the first *Treatise*.

Within the section of II.14, which tackles the issue of following the law from the Hebrew Bible that the New Testament is to have replaced, John emphasizes a marital technicality in the second *Treatise* that was not included in the first: "Watch that you marry the wife of your brother and raise up children for your brother."[49] Christians under Muslim rule in the Abbasid period went so far in redefining their identity

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1965–66), 1:61–62. For an exploration of the meaning of the golden calf story in Islamic tradition, see M. E. Pregill, "'A Calf, a Body That Lows': The Golden Calf from Late Antiquity to Classical Islam," in *Golden Calf Traditions in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, ed. E. F. Mason and E. F. Lupieri (Leiden, 2018), 264–96.

43 *Treatises* II.8; Chrysostomides, "Creating a Theology of Icons," 11–12.

44 See W. M. Brinner, trans., *ʿArāʾis al-majālis fī qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ or "Lives of the Prophets,"* Studies in Arabic Literature, vol. 24 (Leiden, 2002), 128.

45 Y. Mirza, "Abraham as an Iconoclast: Understanding the Destruction of 'Images' through Qurʾanic Exegesis," in *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations* 16 (2005): 413–28.

46 *Trophies of Damascus* (G. Bardy, ed., *Les trophées de Damas, controversé judéo-chrétienne du VIIᵉ siècle*, PO 15 [Paris, 1927], 250). Reference from D. M. Olster, *Roman Defeat, Christian Response, and the Literary Construction of the Jew* (Philadelphia, 1994), 124.

47 *Treatises* II.9.

48 *Treatises* II.9. The material and biblical quotes are the same as in I.16, yet the emphasis is markedly different.

49 *Treatises* II.14.

in this new religious context that they wrote canons creating an ideal "Christian family" as opposed to one that was Jewish or Muslim.[50] This likely began during the Umayyad period, as John of Damascus wrote elsewhere about the sinfulness of the more permissible view of divorce and remarriage among Muslims.[51] Shaming Jewish familial customs, or perceived familial customs, would not have been particularly effective to a Byzantine audience except to claim in a slightly different way that iconoclasts are Judaizers. Yet this topic is consciously added to this more popular, local version of the *Treatises*.

The combination of simplified language, more story-oriented arguments, and more locally relevant themes found in the second *Treatise* suggests that John's community was not dealing with typical Byzantine iconoclasm, but rather had its own variety, influenced by Palestinian factors and containing some shared trends with contemporary Jewish and Muslim debates on images. This is particularly clear regarding the veneration of objects crafted by human hands. One example comes from an eighth-century Muslim-authored text disputing Christians (Leiden, Oriental MS 951): "Do you not worship what you have made with your hands? This is what is in your churches. If it is in the Gospel, there is nothing to say to repudiate it. If it is not in the Gospel, why are you making your religion like the religion of the people of the idols?"[52] The only eighth-century Byzantine example is from Germanos's refutation of Constantine

of Nacoleia and John of Synada from the Second Council of Nicaea letters. Apparently, Constantine had an issue with objects that were "made by hands," being "worshiped."[53]

Florilegia and Christian *adversus Judaeos* Literature: Fixed Form, Changing Context

The *adversus Judaeos* genre and the iconophile florilegia are two halves of the same analytical conversation involving John of Damascus's multiple audiences. John uses these recognizable formats both to speak to Byzantine Christians in a manner they deem appropriate and to make sure for his Palestinian Melkite audience that his arguments are considered orthodox and as close to Byzantine style as possible. The *adversus Judaeos* format was particularly useful for John, as the Umayyad Christian communities he was addressing had by this point inherited this Byzantine genre and saw it as authoritative; in the century between the conquest of Syria and Palestine and John's lifetime, they had also made it very much their own.[54]

By using these two orthodox literary forms in a slightly different context John was able to make his iconophile arguments work for Byzantine Christians and also provide his local Melkite community with authoritative and orthodox lines of argument to use in their debates about images and idolatry with Jews, Muslims, and other Christians. The strategy of using orthodox forms for the larger Christian discussion and for local relevance would have been a literary style particularly suited to a community leader, voice of Patriarch John V, and priest of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in the shifting sands of Byzantine Christian and Melkite identity in Umayyad Palestine.

John applies points from the classical genre of *adversus Judaeos* texts in most of his arguments in the *Treatises*. Arguing against the Jews in defense of images was common throughout late antique Christianity; however, just before John's lifetime there was a revitalization of *adversus Judaeos* material in Christian sources. In the sixth to seventh centuries, there were real conflicts between Christian and Jewish communities,

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50   For discussion of this aspect of Christian identity formation in the medieval Near East, see L. E. Weitz, *Between Christ and Caliph: Law, Marriage, and Christian Community in Early Islam* (Philadelphia, 2018).

51   D. J. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam: The "Heresy of the Ishmaelites"* (Leiden, 1972), 68.

52   S. H. Griffith, "Bashīr/Bēsēr: Boon Companion of the Byzantine Emperor Leo III. The Islamic Recension of His Story in *Leiden Oriental MS* 951 (2)," *Le Muséon* 103 (1990): 294–327, at 327. The article includes an edition and translation of the text *The Disputation of Sergius the Stylite Against a Jew*, in which both the Jewish interlocutor (who is possibly also a stand-in for a Muslim interlocutor) and Sergius quote the prohibition of making images and likenesses from Exodus and Deuteronomy. In Syriac, the word for "to make" implies being made with human hands in this context. One term for "idol" in Syriac is literally "made by hands." For an explanation, see J. P. Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary: Founded upon the Thesaurus Syriacus of R. Payne Smith* (Winona Lake, IN, 1998), s.v. *'-b-d*. If the Jewish interlocutor also represents early Muslim concerns, then it is reasonable to assume that some early Muslim communities may have repudiated images made by human hands.

53   G. Domenico Mansi, *Sacrorum conciliorum nova, et amplissima collectio*, 13:100, §C; reference originally found in Noble, *Images*, 86.

54   Brubaker and Haldon, *Sources*, 268–69. See several examples cited and discussed below.

particularly in Palestine, Syria, and Mesopotamia.[55] The Jewish communities in Palestine became ensnared in the imperial rivalry between Phocas and Heraclius and, later, the larger rivalry between the Persian and Byzantine Empires.[56]

Use of the *adversus Judaeos* form escalated after the Persian conquest of a significant portion of Byzantine territory in 614.[57] Byzantine Christians blamed Jewish communities for the Persians' success and were bitter about their temporary rise in social status during the short stint of Persian rule.[58] Jewish communities retaliated by accusing Christians of being idolatrous through cross and icon veneration, claiming they worshiped the created over the creator.[59] However, this *adversus Judaeos* literature was not limited to making sense of the Persian conquest for Byzantine Christians; it was also used to create a sense of lasting Christian victory in the face of the Arab conquests.[60]

Adversus Judaeos material was commonly produced in the eastern Byzantine provinces, particularly in conjunction with iconophile apologetics against iconoclasts in the seventh century.[61] This likely means that the Muslim communities in these regions after the conquests would have been increasingly aware of the intra-monotheistic debate on idolatry between Jewish and Christian communities.[62] It became normative for Christians living under Muslim rule to use Jews in *adversus Judaeos* literature to represent imagined interlocutors—an abstraction of real discussions, particularly of images, between members of Jewish and Christian—and, lastly, Muslim—communities.[63] The Jewish figures whom John references throughout his first two *Treatises* rotate between representing all of these possibilities. Occasionally, they arguably represent all of these possibilities simultaneously.

John's education, social background as a Syrian Melkite, and audience would have attached different symbolic meanings to these forms following local Syrian and Palestinian precedent post-Arab conquest, when the message of Patriarch Sophronius of Jerusalem, who ruled during and after the Arab conquest of Palestine in 638, had changed, as seen in his *Orations*. As opposed to his contemporaries Theodore Syncellus and Antiochus Monachus, Sophronius disassociated Christianity from the Byzantine Empire and emphasized the internalization of Christian victory on an individual level, focusing on battling sin and participating in the heavenly city of Jerusalem in an "eternal empire." He moved the pinnacle of Christian society to

55   G. Dagron and V. Déroche, "Juifs et chrétiens dans l'orient du VIIᵉ siècle," *TM* 11 (1991): 17–273, at 19–22.

56   Dagron and Déroche, "Juifs et chrétiens," 22.

57   A. Cameron, "Byzantines and Jews: Some Recent Work on Early Byzantium," *BMGS* 20 (1996): 249–74, at 252–57.

58   Averil Cameron makes this point in "Byzantines and Jews," 252–54, 255–57; eadem, "Blaming the Jews: The Seventh-Century Invasions of Palestine in Context," *TM* 14 (2002): 57–78, at 60–61; and eadem, "Cyprus at the Time of the Arab Conquests," in eadem, *Changing Cultures in Early Byzantium* (Aldershot, UK, 1996), 27–49, at 37–39. According to Eutychios, there was suspicion that Jewish communities throughout Mesopotamia and Syria were attempting to make Jerusalem the Jewish capital once again; see Dagron and Déroche, "Juifs et chrétiens," 24–25, and for Eutychios, PG 111, cols. 1084–85; for text and translation, M. Breydy, ed. and trans., *Das Annalenwerk des Eutychios von Alexandrien: Ausgewählte Geschichten und Legenden kompiliert von Saʿid Ibn Batrīq um 935 A.D.*, CSCO 471, Scriptores arabici, vol. 44 (Louvain, 1985).

59   Cameron, "Cyprus," 37–39. Griffith suggests that the accusations by some Jewish communities of Christian cross veneration may have been appropriated by early Muslim communities; see his "Images, Islam and Christian Icons: A Moment in the Christian/ Muslim Encounter in Early Islamic Times," in *La Syrie de Byzance à l'Islam: VIIᵉ–VIIIᵉ siècles. Actes du colloque international, Lyon– Maison de l'Orient méditeranéen, Paris–Institut du Monde arabe, 11–15 septembre 1990*, ed. P. Canivet and J.-P. Rey-Coquais (Damascus, 1992), 121–38, at 137.

60   Robert Hoyland characterizes *adversus Judaeos* as "living" literature (*Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* [Princeton, 1997], 60). For questions pertaining to the paradoxical relationship between the fictional nature of *adversus Judaeos* literature and actual issues debated between Jewish and Christian

communities, see P. Andrist, "Literary Distance and Complexity in Late Antique and Early Byzantine Greek Dialogues *Adversus Iudaeos*," in *Dialogues and Debates from Late Antiquity to Late Byzantium*, ed. A. Cameron and N. Gaul (Abingdon, UK, 2017), 43–64. Patrick Andrist parses this issue by highlighting that many of these treatises were written in eras where there was considerable public discussion and debate, and although the arguments our authors use may have been based on past works, or sacred texts, there were inevitably connections to debates that were actually happening, whether publicly staged or informal.

61   Cameron, "Cyprus," 37–39.

62   See Griffith, "Images, Islam and Christian Icons." This is not to imply that there were official debates being held, but rather that these two communities were having similar discussions about images both internally and with each other.

63   Olster, *Roman Defeat*, 122–23; and S. Griffith, "Jews and Muslims in Christian Syriac and Arabic Texts of the Ninth Century," *Jewish History* 3, no. 1 (1988): 65–94, at 76–78.

the Church from the Byzantine Empire and affirmed participation in the Christian liturgy as an expression of Christian unity.[64] As David Olster argues, this eventually led to using the Jewish community as a foil for Christian victory because Jews represented an eternal opponent against whom Christians could easily visualize themselves being eternally victorious.[65]

The emphasis on the Church as the center of Christian identity, as opposed to the Byzantine Empire, created a precedent within Jerusalemite society later used by the author of the *adversus Judaeos* text *Gregentius and Herbanus*, who flourished between ca. 650 and 680.[66] This internalization of Christian victory stands in contrast to the Syrian and Constantinopolitan externalization of victory, which was empire-dependent.[67] In the social context of successive Muslim dynastic rule of Jerusalem (the first four caliphs, or Rāshidūn, for Sophronius; the Sufyānid Umayyads for *Gregentius*'s author; and the Marwānid Umayyads for John of Damascus), the internalization of Christian identity and emphasis on the liturgy as a uniting Christian ritual would have created a Jerusalem-specific rhetoric and mentality in which the Byzantine Church was a fellow member of the larger, eternal Christian empire. The Byzantine Church was an example to look to, but not necessarily an authoritative body—an older sister rather than a maternal figure. By the time John was writing his *Treatises*, he had been living and working in the Jerusalem Christian community for twenty-plus years, and it is with this nascent Jerusalem-centric, distinctly Melkite background that we should seek to understand how John organized the *adversus Judaeos* aspects of his *Treatises*, his florilegium, and a mention of the Byzantine emperor.

In the florilegia of both the first and second *Treatises*, John includes several texts by Christians against both iconoclastic Christians and Jews, creating a compilation of "dogmatic florilegia."[68] Louth suggests that florilegia were up to this point traditionally used to collect arguments for christological views, treating John's florilegia as his own creative compilations.[69] While John does use the florilegium form for something new, either to argue against "Judaizers" or to provide arguments for his local Christian community against actual Jewish interlocutors, he was likely working off of a list of iconophile florilegia that circulated among Byzantine and Melkite Christians between the Byzantine and Umayyad Empires from the 720s onward. In his analysis of Codex Parisinus Graecus 1115, which contains several works, including an iconophile florilegium and the *Doctrina Patrum*, Alexander Alexakis hypothesizes that one of the foundational documents in the creation of the iconophile florilegium in this manuscript consisted of a "Greek florilegium that dates between 725 and 729 and was compiled in Rome. Its Latin translation was used by the 731 Iconophile synod."[70] Alexakis also acknowledges that there were no quotes from the Latin fathers in this original florilegium, which later became part of what he calls "the Iconophile arsenal."[71] He convincingly posits that, rather than taking his florilegia from individual books, John compiled his florilegia from this early iconophile arsenal.[72]

64 Olster, *Roman Defeat*, 102–4. For redirection of Christian authority to Church over empire, see Sophronius, *Christmas Oration*, in H. Usener, ed., "Weihnachts predigt von Sophronius," *RhM* 41 (1886): 500–16, at 503.31–504.6, 506.28–510., 516.15–16. For emphasis on Christian unity through liturgy, see Sophronius, *Feast of Purification Oration*, 10, cols. 2.34–35, 11, cols. 2.27–33. All references found in Olster. See also P. Booth, "Sophronius of Jerusalem and the End of Roman History," in *History and Identity in the Late Antique Near East*, ed. P. Wood (New York, 2013), 1–28.

65 Olster, *Roman Defeat*, 109.

66 Ibid., 139, 153–54.

67 Ibid., 142.

68 For further descriptions of dogmatic florilegia, see A. Alexakis, "Byzantine Florilegia," in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Patristics*, ed. K. Parry (Chichester, UK, 2015), 15–50.

69 Louth, *Three Treatises*, 14, and Alexakis, "Byzantine Florilegia," 28–29.

70 A. Alexakis, *Codex Parisinus Graecus 1115 and Its Archetype* (Washington, DC, 1996), 134. For further information on the eighth-century addition of chapter 45 to the *Doctrina Patrum*, see ibid., 125–34, and also J. Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, vol. 2, *The Spirit of Eastern Christendom (600–1700)* (Chicago, 1974), 76–90.

71 Alexakis, *Codex Parisinus Graecus 1115*, 135.

72 Ibid., 125–35. I would suggest that it is possible that the iconophile florilegia may actually originate from any point in the 720s. As it was a Greek compilation, it is impossible to distinguish whether it began circulating in the Umayyad or Byzantine Empires, as Melkites in the Umayyad Empire were still using Greek. Additionally, the iconoclastic tendencies within early Islam are not yet completely understood and it is possible that there were iconoclastic Christian movements in Syria-Palestine before Yazīd II's (r. 720–724) iconoclastic edict in the early 720s prompted an iconophile response. When one considers the presence of iconophile arguments directed against Jewish communities in the *adversus Judaeos* literature, it seems likely that there was tension before either empire officially

It may prove fruitful to approach the florilegia in a similar manner as to how one approaches hadith collections for historical information—as texts with multiple geographical, authorial, and, inevitably, social contextual layers. John's *Treatises* simultaneously preserve Leontios's, and others', texts and repurpose them. For example, in the second *Treatise*, when John is clearly speaking to a more local audience and thinking along more local lines, meaning the Umayyad heartlands, he cites work from predominantly Syrian figures: John Chrysostom (from Antioch) multiple times, e.g., from his homily on Meletius, a martyr and former bishop of Antioch, and also Patriarch Anastasius (also from Antioch) in a letter to Symeon, former bishop of Bostra (in southern Syria).[73] Interestingly, he misquotes a reference from a homily by Severian of Gabala (fl. 398–408),[74] today Jableh in Syria, as a homily by Chrysostom. John uses this homily to reference the Arab conquest in a manner that would have clearly linked Arab Muslims with iconoclasm in the minds of his audience:

> And I loved the picture in wax, full of piety; for I saw an angel in an icon striking the companies of the barbarians. I saw the tribes of the barbarians trampled upon and David speaking the truth: "Lord, in your city you have brought their image to nothing."[75]

This is not how Severian would have intended his homily, yet John capitalizes on how the words affect his contemporaries, providing a victorious Christian image through a description of an icon effectively attacking barbarian armies that John's audience would have inevitably imagined as Arab Muslims. John uses Severian's work to create a reversal of reality with an imagined eternal Christian victory, now a standard Melkite theme but redirected into an iconophile argument.

John of Damascus references Chrysostom's homilies "On the Statues,"[76] which were originally written to comfort his congregation in Antioch after a riot that led to the removal of imperial statues.[77] John quotes Chrysostom, saying, "Do you not know that, if you insult the image of the emperor, you carry your insult to the archetype of his dignity?"[78] Chrysostom is referring to the actual Byzantine emperor, while John of Damascus's congregation in Jerusalem and subsequent local readers would have understood Christ to be the eternal emperor of the heavenly empire. They would most likely not have been thinking of Leo III in this context: John's eighth-century Umayyad, Melkite audience would have understood his reuse of fourth-century authoritative and orthodox references to images of the emperor to be rhetorical references to icons of Christ. Even if John was working from a circulating iconophile florilegium, his use of these quotations inevitably had a variety of different meanings for the audience he was preaching to than for those who compiled the Latin translation of the same material for the 731 Iconophile synod.

It is in this context that we should view a few of John's own statements about the "emperor" in the first and second *Treatises*, which seem to contain a mix of direct statements about Leo III and others aimed at a general category of earthly rulers.

> We shall not suffer different things to be thought at different times, changing with the seasons, and the faith to become a matter of ridicule and jest to outsiders. We shall not suffer the custom of the fathers to be subject to an imperial constitution that seeks to overthrow it. For it is not for pious emperors to overthrow ecclesiastical laws. For this is not the way of the fathers; for it is piratical for these things to be imposed by force, and they shall not prevail.[79]

From this commentary at the end of the first *Treatise*, one might assume John was making an overt comparison between Pope Leo and the "Robber Synod" of 449, despite knowing that Pope Leo was the "good guy"

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attempted iconoclastic rulings. Just two of many examples are: *The Dispute of the Jews Papiscus and Philo with Some Monk* (ca. 640–650) in Syria, which begins with a dialogue defending icons, and, of course, Leontios's work written in Cyprus and preserved by John of Damascus does the same. For a discussion of Papiscus, see Olster, *Roman Defeat*, 116–33.

73   *Treatises* II.60–66.

74   PG 56.407. Quote is Septuagint, Ps. 72:20.

75   *Treatises* II.60.

76   PG 49.15–222.

77   Louth, *Three Treatises*, 78.

78   *Treatises* II.61.

79   *Treatises* I.66, II.69.

in this encounter.[80] The juxtaposition between Pope Leo's chastizing politics at the 449 Synod of Ephesus and Emperor Leo III's iconoclastic policies makes this comment rather biting.

In the second *Treatise*, John is more direct:

> It is not for emperors to legislate for the Church. . . . Emperors did not speak to us the word, but apostles and prophets, pastors and teachers. . . . Political order is the concern of emperors, the ecclesiastical constitution that of pastors and teachers. This is a piratical attack, brothers.[81]

> We submit to you, O Emperor, in the matters of this life, taxes, revenues, commercial dues, in which our concerns are entrusted to you. For the ecclesiastical constitution we have pastors who speak to us the word and represent the ecclesiastical ordinance. We do not remove the ancient boundaries, set in place by our fathers, but we hold fast to the traditions, as we have received them. For if we begin to remove even a tiny part of the structure of the Church, in a short time the whole edifice will be destroyed.[82]

> Since many things have been handed down in unwritten form in the Church and preserved up to now, why do you split hairs over the images? Manichees composed the Gospel according to Thomas; are you now going to write the Gospel according to Leo? I do not accept an emperor who tyrannically snatches at the priesthood.[83]

John is speaking to Leo III, but not as a Byzantine. He is speaking as a fellow member of the Christian world, a small part of which Leo III rules. He allows Leo III all worldly powers, as he would any worldly ruler. Here Leo III represents both himself and also the larger concept of earthly political power as opposed to the authority of the Church, a realm with pre-established

"ancient boundaries" that must be maintained. In I.21 and II.15 John makes even more clear the distinction between earthly rulers and empires and the eternal empire of Christians with Christ as emperor:

> We represent Christ the King and Lord without divesting him of his army. For the saints are the army of the Lord. Let the earthly emperor divest himself of his own army, before he deprives his own King and Lord. Let him put aside the purple robe and the diadem, and then let him do away with those who fight most bravely against the tyrant and triumph over the passions.[84]

Here he references the concept of the Christian domain, which, for Melkites in Jerusalem and Palestine, had conceptually replaced Byzantium as an immortal symbol of Christian triumph. John's audience did not look to Leo III as their emperor but as an earthly Christian ruler, worthy of respect but not authoritative in Melkite ecclesiastical matters. This, of course, does not mean that John did not also intend for Byzantine readers to interpret this more literally.

Another choice in John's florilegia with multiple possible meanings can be found in his commentary in the first and second *Treatises* on the quote from Dionysius the Areopagite's *On the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*.[85] John mentions the portrait of Jesus's face on cloth, which was presented to Abgar of Edessa, originally found in the fifth-century *Doctrine of Addai*:

> A story has come down to us by tradition: Abgar, the prince of Edessa, ardently burning with divine love at the fame of the Lord, sent ambassadors to beg for a visitation. If he declined to come, he commanded that a likeness be fashioned of him by an artist. When he who knows everything and can do everything learnt this, he took a strip of cloth and lifted it to his face, marking it with his own form. The cloth survives to this day.[86]

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80   Louth, *Three Treatises*, 57.

81   *Treatises* II.12.

82   Ibid.

83   *Treatises* II.16.

84   *Treatises* I.21, II.15.

85   *Treatises* I.33, II.29.

86   Ibid.

This miraculous image was also used to defend images in the contemporary Iraqi *Syriac Disputation between a Monk of Bêt Ḥālê and a Muslim Arab*:[87]

> It behooves us to do everything he commands us and we worship and pay honor to his image because he impressed his countenance [on it] and handed it over to us. Whenever we look at his icon we see him and we pay honor to the king because he is the king.[88]

It is significant that John emphasizes the cloth aspect of the icon. The licitness of images on cloth, as opposed to images on other material, was debated in Jewish and Muslim communities in the early eighth century, as will be shown below. The Muslim in the *Disputation* is portrayed as being familiar with this story and image, and likely stands for many at that time.

Leontios's work written in the *adversus Judaeos* style, among others in John's *Treatises* and florilegia, provides another answer as to why he chose these texts for his florilegia, to whom they would have been familiar, and how they would have been understood in a Jerusalem-centric, Umayyad Melkite context.

Adversus Judaeos literature in Syria, John's homeland, originated partially in an attempt to create an artificial "Christian victory," as did the work of Sophronius and the author of *Gregentius and Herbanus*. While Sophronius and the *Gregentius* author a generation or so later internalized Christian victory, the Syrian authors of *adversus Judaeos* texts, such as the *Trophies of Damascus*, *The Dispute of the Jews Papiscus and Philo with Some Monk*, and *Questions to Antiochus the Duke*, drew on an external conflict that used both imperial Byzantine victory as well as the imaginary opponent of the eternal Jewish enemy as their means of expression. The catalyst for their need to express Christian victory was the Arab conquest and subsequent Muslim rule.

Although largely about internal Christian issues, the Jewish interlocutor in these Syrian texts was often a stand-in for a Muslim, particularly when discussions of persecution and circumcision arose.[89] The iconoclastic arguments that John is challenging came from multiple sectors. In addition to the Byzantine iconoclastic policies of Leo III, he dealt with local iconoclasms across the three faith groups. His use of the literary-rhetorical strategy of *adversus Judaeos* to make memorable arguments against iconoclastic communities, which could be used by all religionists, was astonishingly efficient.

John's inclusion in the florilegia of Leontios, the bishop of Neapolis, and his inter-Jewish and Christian dialogue makes it apparent that he is employing this text to speak to Christians dealing with a local Jewish or possibly Muslim argument.[90] John's use of specific issues in Leontios's work suggest that he is either familiar with these from his own experience or assumes that his community is grappling with topics current in

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87 The disputation was written in the vicinity of Kufa and al-Hira. For a more in-depth analysis of this common use of the image of Jesus's face in Edessa, see Griffith, "Crosses, Icons."

88 Syriac: Diyarbakir MS 95, item 35, fol. 11; reference and English translation from Griffith, "Crosses, Icons," 64. There is also a full edition and translation by D. G. K. Taylor, "The Disputation between a Muslim and a Monk of Bet Hale: Syriac Text and Annotated English Translation," in *Christsein in der islamischen Welt: Festschrift für Martin Tamcke zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. S. H. Griffith and S. Grebenstein (Wiesbaden, 2015), 187–242.

89 Olster, *Roman Defeat*, 122–24. For specific examples, Olster gives *Trophies of Damascus* (Bardy, *Les trophées de Damas*, 193–96, 233, 250–54, 267), and Ps.-Athanasius, *Quaestions ad Antiochum ducem* (PG 28:620). For a near-contemporary source, see A. Alexakis, "Stephen of Bostra: Fragmenta contra Iudaeos (*CPG* 7790). A New Edition," *JÖB* 43 (1993): 45–60, at 49–50. Stephen's work was only included in the florilegium of the third *Treatise*, unlikely written entirely by John and therefore not discussed here, although it would certainly have been one of the many texts that influenced him. Alexakis dates it to the lifetime of Leontios of Neapolis.

90 *Apology against the Jews* is not dated and could easily have been written on either side of the initial Arab raid of Cyprus in 649. Pre-raid, Cyprus was a common location for both traders and travelers due to its strategic position in the center of the Mediterranean. Its centrality meant that Bishop Leontios likely had heard or even had some personal experience of the new ideas coming with the army; V. Déroche, "L'apologie contre les juifs de Léontios de Néapolis," *TM* 12 (1994): 45–104, at 104. For information on Cyprus post-conquest, see Cameron, "Cyprus," 28, 31–30, 40–41; R. Lynch, "Cyprus and Its Legal and Historiographical Significance in Early Islamic History," *JAOS* 136, no. 3 (2016): 535–50; and C. Rapp, "Cypriot Hagiography in the Seventh Century: Patrons and Purpose," in Κυπριακη Αγιολογια: Πρακτικα ά Διεθνους συνεδριου, Παραλίμνι, 9–12 Φεβρουαρίου 2012 (Agia Napa, Cyprus, 2015), 397–411. Brubaker and Haldon (*Sources*, 252–53) follow Speck in positing that the author of the *Apology against the Jews* was actually George of Cyprus, writing in the early 700s, whose text was a commentary elaborating upon Leontios of Neapolis's original against the Jews. See P. Speck, *Beiträge zum Thema: Byzantinische Feindseligkeit gegen die Juden im frühen siebten Jahrhundert. Nebst einer Untersuchung zu Anastasios dem Perser* (Bonn, 1997), 131–76. Regardless of who wrote *Apology against the Jews*, John is using the text to suit his own needs.

arguments from several years earlier.[91] It is important to clarify here that John is directing Leontios's arguments at a Melkite audience he views as potentially threatened by local pressure, some of which came from Jewish and Muslim communities.

John includes Leontios's defense of venerating the cross in which he reminds his Jewish interlocutors that in Genesis 47:31 Jacob bows in veneration over his bed post, or staff, yet this act is not interpreted in Judaism as veneration of the wood itself. Rather, it is understood that, through the physical act of honoring the wood, he is venerating his son Joseph. John picks up where Leontios leaves off, and argues that if one is going to venerate God through wood, one might as well venerate an image of God on the wood.

John did not pick the segments used in his florilegia arbitrarily. They all serve to supplement his arguments in the *Treatises*. Thus, John must have chosen Leontios's text for the very fact that it defends cross veneration using Jewish scripture—scripture he knew was commonly understood by all three faiths.[92] There are similarities between Leontios's and John's arguments; they both defended images and both used Hebrew Bible scripture to do so. However, whereas Leontios was actually arguing with a Jewish community, John was attempting to consolidate a specific Christian identity that he saw as being threatened by a segment of contemporary Palestinian Jewish, and possibly Muslim, culture.[93]

It is likely that John used this particular text for its defense of both icon and cross veneration. John knew that venerating the cross was a tradition largely fixed within Melkite tradition; however, he also knew that Christians were pressured on this issue. He would have been aware that Muslim and Jewish groups who were uncomfortable with icon veneration were uncomfortable with veneration of the cross as well. Thus, while it may not have been such a central point that it needed to be addressed by the *Treatises*, it was important enough for John to insert it in the florilegia.

It should be kept in mind that some Christians struggled with cross veneration as idolatry in both the Byzantine empire and its former eastern territories, as well. There was a tradition of extreme iconoclasm in the Byzantine empire which extended to viewing cross veneration as a form of idolatry, a tradition which may have been in response to the Lenten feast of the Veneration of the Cross where the cross was venerated in its own right, not as a symbol of the crucified Christ. After Heraclius brought the fragments of the True Cross to Constantinople it notably remained "mysteriously hidden" throughout the height of Byzantine iconoclasm. John likely felt surrounded on all sides by Jewish, Muslim, and Christian communities that were either arguing with or ignoring what he thought was the orthodox Christian theology of icon and cross veneration in addition to a strong tradition of pictorial church decoration. Therefore the defense of the cross is yet another example of John attempting to consolidate a Christian belief on icons and the cross, while also creating arguments Jewish and Muslim interlocutors would understand.[94]

John's and Leontios's works are both a product of a multifaith milieu. They are both polemical and apologetic, as Averil Cameron states about *adversus Judaeos* texts generally.[95] The history of Leontios and his *Apology against the Jews* and the elaborations that John adds after these snippets of text can provide further information on the types of iconoclasts informing the arguments in his *Treatises*.

Leontios most likely wrote *Apology against the Jews*, which we have partially preserved from John of Damascus and the Acts of the Second Council of Nicaea, in the form of a dialogue.[96] This question-and-answer form itself followed a well-established

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91   Louth, *St John Damascene*, 210.

92   Louth argues that John inserts Leontios because he argued in the defense of images (Louth, *St John Damascene*, 211–12); however, texts applying to a previous time are commonly reused in later centuries for nuanced contemporary purposes.

93   Ibid., 211.

94   A. Cameron, "Intervention de Averil Cameron sur la communication de Sidney Griffith," in Canivet and Rey-Coquais, *La Syrie de Byzance à l'Islam*, 138; Cameron, "Blaming the Jews," 71–72.

95   Cameron, "Byzantines and Jews," 258. Stephen of Bostra and Anatasius of Sinai both write *adversus Judaeos* texts around the same time and in a similar context as Leontios. They also were possibly extant in the early iconophile florilegium manuscript that Alexakis has termed the "iconophile arsenal," but do not turn up in John's first or second treatise. For more on these authors and their *adversus Judaeos* works, see Alexakis, "Stephen of Bostra," and A. D. Kartsonis, *Anastasis: The Making of an Image* (Princeton, 1986), 40–63.

96   John seems to have had an earlier version of this work than the Second Council of Nicaea, substantiating Alexakis's claim that Leontios was part of the early "iconophile arsenal" florilegia

tradition of writing for the purpose of instruction, as can be seen in the seventh-century *Kephalaia epaporetika* and the *Quaestiones of Ps. Athanasius*, which functioned as handbooks to teach argumentation.[97] Christians and eventually Islamic theologians, known as *mutakallimūn,* used these texts to learn argumentation skills for discussing matters of faith with those they opposed, whether it was other Christians, Jews, or Muslims.[98] They were designed to pose the usual questions that came up in inter- or intra-faith debates to the opponents' disadvantage, and functioned as training manuals for arguing an opponent into a corner. For example, John quotes Leontios's defense of the cross: "If you accuse me again, O Jew, saying, that I venerate the wood of the Cross as God, why do you not accuse Jacob of bowing in veneration over the head of his staff?"[99]

With this background on Leontios and his contemporary context in mind, we may want to reconsider the moment in the *Treatises* when John quotes Leontios's *Apology* contending that venerating icons is a way of venerating the divine, as opposed to a type of idolatry, that Christians do not worship Mary as part of the Trinity when venerating her icon, and that Christians perceive the Trinity as a singular divinity: "One who falls down before the mother of Christ [does so] evidently, because he offers honor to her son. For no one is God, save the one acknowledged in Trinity and Unity and worshipped as One."[100] This defense of the Trinity as a form of monotheism may have originally been in reaction to Q 5:116, and the compilers of Alexakis's "iconophile arsenal" would have been aware of this context, as would John:

And [beware the Day] when God will say, "O Jesus, Son of Mary, did you say to the people, 'Take me and my mother as deities besides God?'" He will say, "Exalted are You! It was not for me to say that to which I have no right. If I had said it, You would have known it. You know what is within myself, and I do not know what is within Yourself. Indeed, it is You who is Knower of the unseen."[101]

Leontios may be reacting to this in his *Apology*, which John preserves, as it still likely occasionally came up in his lifetime as an issue between Muslims and Christians.

The *Apology* defends figural imagery generally using examples from the Hebrew Bible, icon veneration, and cross veneration all while accusing the Jews of committing the original acts of idolatry known to humanity.[102] That Leontios, who lived during the earliest stages of the development of the Islamic community and religion under the transition to caliphal rule, should address the issue of the Christian position on icon and cross veneration suggests that he felt some sort of pressure to articulate these ideas and consolidate the Christian view. John, writing several generations later, uses this text to make very similar arguments, although, as John's elaborations indicate, some of these issues have changed as the relationship between the three monotheistic communities in the Mediterranean world shifted.

John's use of Leontios in his florilegia announces that he is pursuing a similar goal of unifying the Christian understanding of icons. However, he takes the usual arguments a step farther—in his discussions of the decoration of the Tabernacle and Mercy Seat he makes points about statues and images on cloth that seem more relevant to Jewish and Muslim debates, which were less specifically about the veneration of

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manuscript that John seems to have had access to. See also Déroche, "L'apologie," 56–57.

97   Cameron, "Byzantines and Jews," 263–65.

98   For in-depth discussions of this form, see F. W. Zimmermann, "Kalām and the Greeks," in *Islamic Cultures, Islamic Context: Essays in Honor of Professor Patricia Crone*, ed. B. Sadeghi et al. (Leiden, 2014), 343–63, esp. 347–50; M. Cook, "The Origins of *Kalām*," *BSOAS* 43, no. 1 (1980): 32–43; S. Brock, "Two Sets of Monothelete Questions to the Maximianists," *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica* 17 (1986): 119–40 (repr. in idem, *Studies in Syriac Christianity: History, Literature and Theology* [London, 1992], XV); and Déroche, "L'apologie."

99   Leontios of Neapolis, *Apology against the Jews*, quoted in Louth, *Three Treatises*, 49.

100   Leontios of Neapolis, *Apology against the Jews*, quoted in *Treatises* I.56, II.52.

101   Translation, slightly modified, from Saheeh International, *The Qurʾān: Arabic Text with Corresponding English Meanings* (Jeddah, 1997). For further studies on the use of this verse in Christian–Muslim debates, see R. Hoyland, "Papyrus Schott Reinhard no. 438," in idem, *Seeing Islam*, 504; D. Thomas, "Trinity," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, ed. J. D. McAuliffe, 6 vols. (Leiden, 2001–6), 5:368–72; and M. N. Swanson, "Title Unknown. Modern Title: 'A Christian Arabic Disputation (PSR 438),'" in *Christian–Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, vol. 1, *600–900*, ed. D. Thomas and B. Roggema (Leiden, 2009), 386–87.

102   Cameron, "Byzantines and Jews," 267–68.

icons and the cross. John seems to consider that at least some of his audience would have an issue with figural decoration in addition to veneration, seeing all of it as idolatry of some kind, and he blends his arguments in a way that would make them suitable responses to accusations of idolatry on both points—figural decoration and icon veneration:

> Behold, therefore, that matter is honored, which according to you is worthless. For what could be cheaper than goat's hair and colors? Or are scarlet and porphyry and aquamarine not colors? Behold both the works of human hands and the likeness of the cherubim; and this whole tabernacle was an image. "For look," said the Lord to Moses, "that you make everything according to the type that you received on the mount." And so it was venerated from all round by the whole of Israel. What were the cherubim? Were they not right in front of people? And the ark and the lampstand and the table and the golden jar and the rod, looking towards which the people bowed down in veneration? I do not venerate matter, I venerate the fashioner of matter, who became matter for my sake, and in matter made his abode, and through matter worked my salvation.[103]

It is the context of Jerusalem and the grouping together of the People of the Book under the Umayyads that make this older argument take on new meaning. John's statement about the images of cherubim being bowed to—because these images are at eye level during prayer rather than on the floor, they are at risk of becoming idols—speaks more to the Jewish and Muslim debates, as does fabric into which images of the cherubim were woven into, which plays into the issue of whether two- or only three-dimensional images cause idolatry. John is making clear that even two-dimensional images are fashioned by human hands, possibly attempting to either confuse the issue for non-Christian interlocutors or to prompt the question: If both two- and three-dimensional images are an issue, is it possible that neither is a risk? On the other hand, only a Christian would feel a firm attachment to the idea of venerating "the fashioner of matter, who became matter for my

sake." John's point about people bowing to the rod, aside from being an argument in itself, is likely an allusion to Leontios's example of Jacob venerating his staff, quoted above. This is just one of multiple instances where he uses these objects to make a point that would have been relevant on different levels to all three faiths debating the risk or lack thereof of images in the eighth century. When considering John's *Treatises* as both a summa of the Christian theology of icons as well as a traditional instruction manual, arguments containing multiple potential uses against different interlocutors would have been ideal for local iconophile Christians who knew they may find themselves discussing the issue of idolatry with Christians, Jews, or Muslims.

A contemporary Syrian author, possibly a Melkite from Gousit near Homs, also wrote a disputation, a discussion between Sergius the Stylite and a Jew that contained a section on the defense of images.[104] Therein the Jewish interlocutor begins with the Exodus prohibition of images, and alludes to the golden calf story.[105] He also makes an argument that images in churches are licit, even when taking the Hebrew Bible prohibition into consideration, for they help spread the understanding of monotheism to the illiterate.[106] The author then states directly that images in churches do not violate the Hebrew Bible, alluding, like John, to the story of Abraham briefly recognizing the moon and sun as divinities, which Muslims would have been familiar with:

> For we do not have pictures for the purpose which you think we do, and we do not err with regard to them as you erred in every way, as the prophet Ezekiel rebuked you. For through every door which the Lord caused him to enter he saw the variety of your abominations—of the sun, of the moon, of Babylonian pictures, of the women weeping for Tammuz, and of many others with a variety of all sorts of paganism.[107]

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103   *Treatises* II.14.

104   A. P. Hayman, ed. and trans., *The Disputation of Sergius the Stylite against a Jew*, 2 vols., CSCO 338, 339 (Louvain, 1973), 2:3–5. Hayman is adamant that it is impossible to determine the christology and therefore sect of the author. This area was predominantly Melkite and Syrian Orthodox.

105   Ibid., 2:48 (ed., 1:48–49).

106   Ibid., 2:50–51 (ed., 1:51–52).

107   Ibid., 2:51–52 (ed., 1:52–53).

While he is referring to the passage from Ezekiel 8 rather than the story of Abraham, the prominence of the sun and moon in his brief allusion is notable, as they come last in the biblical narrative.

Notably, the Jewish interlocutor calls Jesus "the son of Mary," a common way of referring to Jesus in Muslim literature, including the Quran.[108] Conversation then moves from images to eating pork, yet another commonality between Muslim and Jewish communities. While directed at Christians, this work, from the region around Homs, which also saw iconoclastic activity in the early eighth century,[109] seems to be responding to a range of views embraced by Jews, Christians, and Muslims. The tone it adopts is very similar to John of Damascus's and from a similar Umayyad milieu.

Before moving on to interfaith debates about images in Syria and Palestine, it may be useful to note that John defends the oral tradition of icon veneration in his *Treatises*:

> The eye-witnesses and ministers of the word not only handed down the law of the Church in writings, but also in certain unwritten traditions. For whence do we know the holy place of the skull? Whence the memorial of life? Does not a child learn it from his father without anything being written down? It is written that the Lord was crucified in the place of the skull and buried in a tomb, that Joseph had hewn in a rock; but that these are the places now venerated we know from unwritten tradition, and there are many other examples like this. What is the origin of threefold baptism, that is with three immersions? Whence praying facing the East? Whence veneration of the cross? Are they not from unwritten tradition? Therefore the divine apostle says, "So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by our letter." Since many things have been handed down in unwritten form in the Church and preserved up to now, why do you split hairs over the images?[110]

This can be taken as a natural response to a lack of biblical texts that specifically condone image veneration. However, all Christians under early Muslim rule were pressured by Muslim and Jewish communities, who had a strong sense of law and orthopraxy, to create a legal code comparable to that of their faiths.[111] In the context of early Islam, which largely praised orality over writing as a form of traditional preservation during John's lifetime, an argument for oral Christian tradition condoning images may have been considered by some circles as acceptable. The argument for orality covers concerns about oral versus written evidence in defense of icons that were present in both the caliphate and Byzantium for different reasons. While John's insistence on relying on the precedence of previous Christian oral tradition when deciding how to manage the communal crisis about icons may be speaking more to an Umayyad than a Byzantine Christian audience, his genius lies in his ability to speak to both.

Internal Debate Regarding Images among Melkites in Eighth-Century Syria and Palestine

Melkites under Umayyad rule, particularly in Syria and Palestine, did not agree on whether or not icons were a necessary component of orthodoxy. Marie-France Auzépy has highlighted the Byzantine anachronistic literary creativity of the ninth century which for so long painted all Palestinian Christians as iconophiles and loyal to Constantinople.[112] She does this partially through Leontios, a disciple of Stephen the Sabaite—another eighth-century Palestinian Melkite based at the Mar Saba monastery. This Leontios wrote Stephen's *Life* with a lukewarm attitude toward icons—they are only mentioned once. He portrays Stephen as only ever

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108   Ibid., 2:56 (ed., 1:57). While this phrasing was occasionally used among Eastern Christian communities, here "the son of Mary" is spoken by a non-Christian and therefore more likely indicates that the "Jew" is a Muslim rather than respect for a Christian understanding of Mary.

109   Reynolds, "Rethinking Palestinian Iconoclasm," 71, and P. Donceel-Voûte, *Les pavements des églises byzantines de la Syrie et du Liban: Décor, archéologie et liturgie* (Louvain-la-Neuve, 1988), 45–53.

110   *Treatises* II.16.

111   L. E. Weitz, *Between Christ and Caliph: Law, Marriage, and Christian Community in Early Islam* (Philadelphia, 2018), 3–9.

112   Auzépy, "From Palestine to Constantinople," 400, 409–12. This is corroborated by J. S. Codoñer, who argues for a Sabaïte community in Rome, "Melkites and Icon Worship during the Iconoclastic Period," *DOP* 67 (2013): 135–87, at 159.

using oil and the cross for healing.[113] She posits that there was a split regarding the theology of icons within the Melkite community, and that Leontios and possibly Stephen himself were not on the same side as John of Damascus, who may even have been in the minority.[114]

According to his *Life*, Stephen the Sabaite was friends with the archdeacon of the Anastasis, where John had been a priest, and around the period Kontouma characterizes as John's decline, a priest of the Anastasis visited Stephen in the desert.[115] John and Stephen seem to have run in the same circles and yet also seem to have weighed the importance of icons differently.

We see something similar with Cosmas of Jerusalem (ca. 674–752), a contemporary of John of Damascus, who mentions the cross as a victorious symbol repeatedly in his canons and exhibits a distaste for "idolatry."[116] Despite referring to otherwise commonly used texts, he seems to intentionally avoid using iconophile texts. He comes across as largely indifferent to icons although his texts frequently employ symbols and imagery popular in contemporary iconoclastic texts, and he remained consistently effusive in expressing praise for the cross.[117]

In his recent contextual study of John of Damascus, Najib George Awad accounts for the likely iconoclastic stance of Cosmas of Jerusalem and Stephen the Sabaite by positing that there may have been two main factions in Palestine regarding images during John's lifetime: those who were "iconophobic," meaning that they feared Muslim retaliation for having images in sacred spaces to the point that they destroyed their own, and those who were staunch iconophiles and insisted on the importance of images within Christian

orthodoxy and orthopraxy. He concludes that John must have taken a "middle path" between these two opposing positions, one that respected icons as part of Christian tradition but did not overly emphasize their importance.[118]

The idea that Christian communities under Muslim rule may have become "iconophobic" as either a sensitive or fearful response to Muslims praying in mosques may be a reason for Christians to have rearranged tesserae, as discussed below. However, iconophobia is not likely to be a reason for Christians to have edited their internal textual tradition, and it certainly does not play a part in John's *Treatises*, which are the most reliable contemporary Christian textual source for eighth-century Palestinian iconoclasm.[119]

Auzépy, Alexander Kazhdan, and Awad's understandings of Melkite image debates fit a picture of more long-term and widespread fractures within Melkite communities during John of Damascus's lifetime, which Juan Codoñer convincingly brings to light. He posits that, had there been patriarchal support of John's anti-iconoclast work, there would have been a Melkite anathema pronounced against Leo III or Constantine V. As we have no evidence of such an anathema and as John, rather than the Melkite patriarchs, was the target of the iconoclast anathema in 754, Codoñer concludes that there was likely no such support. This suggests a splintering of the community along iconoclast/iconodule lines, or possibly larger schismatic lines that absorbed the debate over icons and images.[120] Although Orthodox, Michael the Syrian writes about Melkite schisms during the eighth century. He includes one caused by John's father and his Maximite leanings that affected multiple sees—Jerusalem, Edessa, Aleppo, and Antioch. This schism created lasting social conflict between

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113   Auzépy, "From Palestine to Constantinople," 407.

114   Ibid., 405–7.

115   Kontouma dates John of Damascus's decline from the death of John, patriarch of Jerusalem, in 735 until his death in 742 (*John of Damascus*, 28–30). See also Auzépy, "From Palestine to Constantinople," 403.

116   A. Kazhdan, "Kosmas of Jerusalem 2: Can We Speak of His Political Views?," *Le Muséon* 103 (1990): 329–46, at 331–38. For a discussion of his life, see A. Kazhdan and S. Gero, "Kosmas of Jerusalem: A More Critical Approach to His Biography," *BZ* 82 (1989): 122–32 (both repr. in A. Kazhdan, ed., *Authors and Texts in Byzantium* [Aldershot, UK, 1993], XI and X respectively).

117   The exception is can. 7.134–36; Kazhdan, "Kosmas of Jerusalem," 340.

118   N. G. Awad, *Umayyad Christianity: John of Damascus as a Contextual Example of Identity Formation in Early Islam* (Piscataway, NJ, 2018), 355–56, 362–63.

119   For further arguments based on "iconophobia," see A. Grabar, *L'iconoclasme byzantin: Le dossier archéologique*, 2nd ed. (Paris, 1984), 122; Schick, *Christian Communities of Palestine*, 218–19; idem, "Palestine in the Early Islamic Period: Luxuriant Legacy," *Near Eastern Archaeology* 61 (1998): 74–108, at 87–88; S. Ognibene, "The Iconophobic Dossier," in *Mount Nebo: New Archaeological Excavations, 1967–1977*, ed. M. Piccirillo and E. Alliata (Jerusalem, 1988), 373–89, at 385; Bowersock, *Mosaics as History*, 104–11; Brubaker and Haldon, *Sources*, 35–36; and Griffith, "Images, Islam and Christian Icons," 137.

120   Codoñer, "Melkites and Icon Worship," 150–52.

Greek-speaking, urban Maximites and Syriac-speaking, rural and monastic Chalcedonians.[121] John likely retained his family's Maximite leanings, which contextualizes his disagreement with other Melkites, but also puts the debate regarding icons and figurative imagery more generally in the larger backdrop of Melkite intracommunal tension. Michael the Syrian implies that John of Damascus was anathematized in the Iconoclast Council of 754 not solely because of his defense of icons, but also because he "upheld the teachings of Maximos."[122]

In addition to textual sources suggesting diversity within eighth-century Palestinian Christian communities, there is archaeological evidence that could be interpreted as providing evidence for iconoclasm among John's larger community—or even, as Daniel Reynolds has described it, idoloclasm. Reynolds has recently analyzed the considerable archaeological evidence, including floor mosaics and wall decorations as well as a larger pattern of church layouts, to reinforce the argument that there was an internal debate within Palestinian Melkite circles. He describes the well-known rearrangement of mosaics and the iconoclastic changes made to other church decorations as "a highly localized and short-lived expression of early medieval idoloclasm."[123]

Some Christian communities in Syria and Palestine disfigured the floor mosaics and other decorative aspects of their churches during Umayyad and early Abbasid rule. These disfigurements were not uniformly carried out and in some churches there is no evidence of any iconoclastic renovations. The changes made were often carefully and even artistically done, only damaging the human and animal figures and leaving the flora and stylized patterns. The tesserae creating the mosaic images of humans and animals were removed, rearranged, and replaced—often with the original tiles rearranged into the same shape.

Some churches now simply lack pictorial images and iconography—the cross and patterning are the sole decoration.[124] In these churches the cross became the primary decorative motif, even replacing Christ in the apse.[125] Though widespread evidence of iconoclasm in the area exists, it is difficult to pinpoint which Christian denomination embraced it based on the geographic distribution of the defacements. There seems to have been a concentration in Palestine and a smattering throughout Syria.[126] Reynolds observes that the pattern of mosaic destruction falls predominantly within the former Byzantine regions of Palestina and Arabia and more specifically within the boundaries of Melkite dioceses. Because of this, he posits that the destruction was unlikely to have been enforced by the caliphal authority and rather represents internal Melkite debates over whether or not images should be permitted in sacred space. Interestingly, most of the mosaic destruction falls in dioceses that were overseen by the Jerusalem patriarchate (Jerusalem, Elusa, Gaza, Petra, rural churches near Pella, Scythopolis, and arguably Bostra to some extent).[127] However, Reynolds admits that it is difficult to concretely identify which

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121 Maximites were followers of Maximus the Confessor (580–662), see A. Louth, *Maximus the Confessor* (repr. London, 2005); S. Griffith, "'Melkites,' 'Jacobites' and the Christological Controversies in Arabic in Third/Ninth-Century Syria," in *Syrian Christians under Islam: The First Thousand Years*, ed. D. Thomas (Leiden, 2001), 9–55; and Codoñer, "Melkites and Icon Worship," 150.

122 Michael the Syrian 4:473 (Syriac) and 2:521 (French), in *Chronique de Michel le Syrien, patriarche Jacobite d'Antioche (1166–1199)*, ed. and trans. J. B. Chabot, 5 vols. (Paris, 1899–1924). Reference found in Codoñer, "Melkites and Icon Worship," 151, who provides an excerpt in English.

123 Reynolds, "Rethinking Palestinian Iconoclasm," 3–4.

124 G. R. D. King, "Islam, Iconoclasm and the Declaration of Doctrine," *BSOAS* 48 (1985): 267–77, at 272. For further discussion of aniconic church decoration in the Near East throughout the late antique and early medieval periods, see M. Mundell, "Monophysite Church Decoration," in *Iconoclasm: Papers Given at the Ninth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, March 1975*, ed. A. Bryer and J. Herrin (Birmingham, 1977), 59–74. While her title suggests that she is certain that these churches were "Monophysite" or Syrian Orthodox, the current trend of research would suggest that it is nearly impossible to truly tell which buildings belonged to which Christian sect during the late antique and early medieval periods; see Tannous, *Making of the Medieval Middle East* (n. 2 above) and C. Sahner's response to Reynolds's claim that eighth-century Palestinian iconoclasm was an internal Melkite issue: "Images and Iconoclasm in Islam, 600–850," in *The Brill Companion to Byzantine Iconoclasm*, ed. M. Humphreys (Leiden, forthcoming). Reynolds ("Rethinking Palestinian Iconoclasm," 16–20) has a chart documenting the types of decorations in churches—figural, nonfigural, etc.—and whether or not they were subject to iconoclastic renovations.

125 King, "Islam, Iconoclasm," 272. King allows for the loss of some wall decorations in late antique and medieval Near Eastern churches due to a lack of preservation.

126 See Reynolds, "Rethinking Palestinian Iconolasm," 13, for a map of churches with iconoclastic damage.

127 Reynolds, "Rethinking Palestinian Iconoclasm," 53–54, esp. fig. 22. For a discussion of Bostra's relationship to the Jerusalem patriarchate, see W. Hotzelt, "Die kirchliche Organisation

churches belonged to which confessional community. The fluidity of Christian confessional communities has also been noted by Tannous and Sahner.[128]

Whether this damage was carried out by Melkites or it exemplified varying local Christian practice concerning images in sacred space makes little difference to the reasons for John of Damascus's efforts to convince fellow Melkites to defend images in churches and the veneration of icons. Rather, the destruction of church decoration throughout Palestine, in areas the Jerusalem patriarchate would certainly have been in communication with, affirms the need to write his *Treatises*. The replaced tesserae are difficult to date, but the majority of datable ones come from the late Umayyad and early Abbasid periods—that is, some twenty years before and after the time John was writing his *Treatises* against iconoclasm.[129] The generally accepted start date for the damage is during the 720s.[130]

Where these iconoclastic changes do occur, the variations of tesserae rearrangement in Palestine portray an overarching issue with the artistic representation of most human *and animal* figures. Thematically, these church defacements all cohere with the same ideology, one that often corresponds to both Jewish and Muslim rather than early eighth-century Byzantine Christian debates over images.[131] However, they were executed using different methods, suggesting that there were differing economic, aesthetic, and theological factors that inspired these varying levels of destruction.[132] Iconoclasts defaced figurative mosaic images in ways that can be described as "thorough"—meaning most to all figurative images in the mosaic were damaged—and "not thorough," i.e., some figurative images were defaced while other significant figurative images in the same sacred space were left intact. Within these two main categories, there are two more specific categories: "careful" destruction, i.e., the tesserae were carefully pulled up and rearranged or replaced without damaging the surrounding mosaic, or "careless"—the tesserae were pulled up without regard to the surrounding mosaic images and then were either not replaced or were replaced poorly. These categories help to understand who defaced these sacred images and why, although it must be said that at times the boundaries between the categories can be ambiguous.[133] Tesserae that were replaced carefully and even artistically testify to care for the sacred space and the monetary means to repair it tastefully. Careless replacement can suggest a lack of monetary means, and no replacement can suggest that the damage was done by an outside party, often presumed to have been non-Christians after the church was no longer in use.[134]

There was also significant diversity in how churches were decorated generally—some with only geometric, zoomorphic, anthropomorphic, foliate, or inhabited scroll motifs and some combining several of these. In Palestine churches had been built since the sixth century with aniconic motifs, suggesting a long-standing difference in how the local Christian communities viewed figural images in sacred space. This diversity continued in the destruction of images, with only eighty-seven out of 202 known churches exhibiting iconoclastic rearrangement.[135] In the vicinity of Jerusalem, there were churches that had only geometric or zoomorphic decorations, and churches that had both of those as well as foliate, inhabited scroll, and anthropomorphic motifs; four churches in the area implemented iconoclastic redecoration.[136]

The textual and archaeological evidence suggests that there was local diversity within eighth-century Palestinian Christianity regarding opinions on images in sacred space. Therefore, John did, indeed, have a local audience that may have been feeling internal Christian pressure to become more aniconic, whether it was some sort of iconophobia, true aniconism, or a fear of idolatry. The question remains, however, as to whether

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Palästinas im 7. Jahrhundert," *ZDPV* 66 (1943): 72–84, and A. Alt, "Zur Kirchengeschichte Palästinas," *ZDPV* 67 (1944): 82–101.

128   For an in-depth discussion of the fluidity of Christian confessional identity in late antiquity and the early medieval Near East, see Tannous, *Making of the Medieval Middle East*; and see Sahner, "Images and Iconoclasm in Islam."

129   Schick, *Christian Communities in Palestine*, 219.

130   Reynolds, "Rethinking Palestinian Iconoclasm," 5.

131   There seems to have been some resistance to images of animals in late eighth-century Constantinople, which is outside the time range of this study; see Maguire, "Moslems, Christians, and Iconoclasm" (n. 8 above).

132   Schick, *Christian Communities of Palestine*, 194.

133   Ibid., 191, 193.

134   Ibid., 197.

135   Ibid., 16–20, 40.

136   These churches are Khirbat Asida, Horvat Hanot, the East Church at Herodium, and Ein Hanniya. See Reynolds, "Rethinking Palestinian Iconoclasm," charts 16–20, map 46.

or not this local iconoclasm, or idoloclasm, was *solely* an internal issue or whether it was a debate shared with Jewish and Muslim communities.

The Image Debate among Jewish Communities in Eighth-Century Syria and Palestine

Like eastern medieval Christianity, Eastern medieval Judaism formed much of its identity under Umayyad rule. Jews in Palestine in particular were finding their way after the hardships the Christian Byzantines had enforced upon them.[137] The Jewish authoritative structure was far from stable. Previously, Near Eastern Jews had been divided into two communities—those living under Roman rule, governed by Palestinian authorities based in Tiberias, and those living under Sasanian rule, governed by Babylonian authorities in Iraq. Under Umayyad rule these two communities found themselves under one government, but not necessarily of one mind.[138]

The official authorities were the centers in Babylonia and Palestine, both of which functioned as Jewish courts and law-making bodies.[139] Within these centers there were four main authorities: the exilarch in Babylonia, who was more of a figurehead; the two yeshivot in Babylonia based in Sura and Pumbedita; and the yeshiva in Palestine. The exilarch had secular authority and was the connection to the Umayyad government, while the yeshivot were in charge of more religious matters.[140] However, there seems to have been a more geographical orientation to the power structure—the Babylonian Jews followed the authorities in Babylonia on theology and ritual practice and the Palestinian Jews followed their own authority on traditional practices. Though there was now more communication, these schools did not necessarily make up a unified Judaism.[141] They had disputes that varied in bitterness, and they often disagreed outright; yet these communities remained singular in name under one of the authorities or another.

The Palestinian yeshiva, also known as the Sanhedrin, existed from the Second Temple period through John's time and would thus have been a well-established school of thought.[142] The leading authority for Jewish communities in all of Palestine and the surrounding area, the Sanhedrin was located in Tiberias, between Jerusalem and Damascus.[143] It had a penchant for synagogues with mosaics of animals and people, and in the eighth century it constructed a synagogue with mosaics only depicting plants.[144] After the Muslim conquest, it was the community at Tiberias that repopulated Jerusalem with Jews.

During the early years of Umayyad rule through John's time, there were several Jewish messianic movements and revolts in Palestine, Iraq, and Iran that disturbed the burgeoning rabbinic claims to exclusive authority. There was also a trend toward messianism within this mixed culture. Jewish, Christian, and Muslim communities all composed apocalypses frequently during the first two hundred years or so of Muslim rule. The Jewish—or blurred monotheistic movements—flourished on the eve of the gaonic period, not adhering to the new authority of the rabbis, and often claimed an approaching end complete with a messiah and frequently Jewish political rule.[145] Aaron Hughes theorizes that it was their diversity and lack of definition as communities distinct from Christianity and Islam that made possible the development of rabbinic Judaism as normative.[146] As an example, the mid-eighth-century apocalyptic

137   J. P. Berkey, *The Formation of Islam: Religion and Society in the Near East, 600–1800* (New York, 2003), 93.

138   Ibid., 93–94; and Gil, *History of Palestine*, 495.

139   S. M. Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew: The Problem of Symbiosis under Early Islam* (Princeton, 1995), 29.

140   Gil, *History of Palestine*, 491.

141   Ibid.

142   Ibid., 495.

143   Ibid., 499.

144   S. Fine, "Iconoclasm and the Art of Late-Antique Palestinian Synagogues," in *From Dura to Sepphoris: Studies in Jewish Art and Society in Late Antiquity*, ed. L. I. Levine and Z. Weiss, *JRA* Supplementary Series 40 (Portsmouth, RI, 2000), 183–94, at 188, and idem, "Iconoclasm: Who Defaced This Jewish Art?," *Bible Review* 16, no. 5 (2000): 32–43, at 39–41.

145   For more on various types of Judaism in the early eighth-century Near East, see M. Gil, *Jews in Islamic Countries in the Middle Ages*, trans. D. Strassler (Leiden, 2004), 247–48; on sects, blending between Islam and Jewish religious communities and apocalyptic beliefs, see A. W. Hughes, *Shared Identities: Medieval and Modern Imaginings of Judeo-Islam* (New York, 2017), esp. ch. 4. Patricia Crone thought early eighth-century iconoclasm in Christianity and possibly even the edict of Yazīd II could be traced back to a Samaritan Gnostic sect called the Athinganoi (eadem, "Islam, Judeo–Christianity and Byzantine Iconoclasm," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 2 [1980]: 59–95, at 74–75).

146   Hughes, *Shared Identities*, 64–65.

text *The Secrets of Rabbi Shim'ōn bar Yoḥai* portrays the Prophet Muḥammad as the "fulfilment of Jewish messianic hopes," leading the conquest of Palestine. The angel Metatron speaks to Rabbi Shim'ōn, predicting the conquest as a victory for Jewish communities:

> Do not be afraid, mortal, for the Holy One, blessed be He, is bringing about the kingdom of Ishmael only for the purpose of delivering you from that wicked one (that is, Edom [Rome]). In accordance with His will He shall raise up over them a prophet. And he will conquer the land for them, and they shall come and restore it with grandeur.[147]

Jewish communities were in a state of flux with the rearranging of political boundaries and concomitant access to other Jewish groups with varying orthopraxy and theology, not to mention access to Christian and early Muslim communities, which were also in a state of flux and (re)development. It is probable that, like the early eighth-century Christian and Muslim communities, some groups were more against images than others.

While not universal, there was a surge of iconoclasm within Judaism from the late sixth through the ninth century,[148] which coincided with the growth of Christian iconoclasm in Palestine and of which there is plentiful archaeological evidence. Synagogue decorations that were damaged ranged from mosaic zodiac floors depicting angels, people, and Greco-Roman deities to stone Nike statues framing doors.[149] Judaism, historically, has never agreed on its view of human and animal portrayals in art; however, this destructive iconoclastic trend differentiates itself.[150] Before the late seventh century there is little evidence of synagogue decorations being consciously destroyed.[151]

During the preceding centuries in Byzantine Palestine there was significant variety in communal opinion toward the art of sacred spaces, as seen in both archaeological evidence and rabbinic thought.[152] Rabbis debated the meaning of Exodus 20:4–5, questioning, e.g., whether forbidden images were two- or three-dimensional—meaning that images on clothing, painting on walls, or floor mosaics may have been acceptable—and whether this only applied to images of humans, or also plants and animals. We see a similar debate in the early Islamic material.[153]

Uzi Leibner posits that rabbis in these centuries did not necessarily have control over what art was placed within synagogues. However, their preserved debates about images and the range of theological and secular ideas that can be seen reflected in the synagogue images exhibit shared views between rabbis and "common" Jews that spread through oral and cultural traditions within the communities of Palestine.[154] In an article analyzing the zodiac and sun symbolism in late antique synagogues, Catherine Hezser convincingly argues that these images were powerful in a multifaceted sense in the Byzantine Empire for Judaism and Christianity, as well as a language of divine legitimacy for Roman and Byzantine emperors. The zodiac and sun symbolism found in synagogues spoke to the audience in different ways.[155] Leibner demonstrates how every individual's interpretation of these images was formed by how religiously conservative, Hellenized, wealthy, or educated

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147   S. J. Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet: The End of Muhammad's Life and the Beginnings of Islam* (Philadelphia, 2011), 28.

148   Fine, "Iconoclasm and the Art," 188, and "Iconoclasm: Who Defaced?," 33, 35–36.

149   Fine, "Iconoclasm and the Art," 188–90, and "Iconoclasm: Who Defaced?," 41–42.

150   Fine, "Iconoclasm and the Art," 186–87, and "Iconoclasm: Who Defaced?," 35.

151   Reynolds has highlighted that the motivation for and understanding of the seventh-century Jewish destruction of images in the area of Galilee is less well researched than the contemporary phenomenon in Christian churches, and urges future researchers to be

cautious in their interpretations. However, in terms of John's life and his *Treatises*, just knowing that Jewish communities were engaging in some sort of debate during Leontios's and his own lifetime is important context for understanding the *adversus Judaeos* aspect of the *Treatises*. Not only was *adversus Judaeos* an accepted genre for Christians of John's generation, it also served as a way of discussing *current* tensions regarding images and concepts of idolatry in Palestine among and between Jewish and Christian communities in seventh-century Palestine (Reynolds, "Rethinking Palestinian Iconoclasm," 28).

152   Y. Englard, "Mosaics as Midrash: The Zodiacs of the Ancient Synagogues and the Conflict between Judaism and Christianity," *Review of Rabbinic Judaism* 6.2 (2003): 189–214, at 192.

153   Fine, "Iconoclasm: Who Defaced?," 35–36. See also below.

154   U. Leibner, "Rabbinic Traditions and Synagogue Art," in *Jewish Art in Its Late Antique Context*, ed. U. Leibner and C. Hezser (Tübingen, 2016), 139–154, at 141–42, 151–52.

155   C. Hezser, "'For the Lord God is a Sun and a Shield' (Ps. 84:12): Sun Symbolism in Hellenistic Jewish Literature and in Amoraic Midrashim," in Leibner and Hezser, *Jewish Art*, 213–36.

he or she was.[156] For Hezsner, zodiac images and the ability of diverse groups to recognize and find meaning in them represent the "interconnectedness of traditions" and "cultural hybridity" between Christianity, Judaism, and widespread Hellenistic culture up to the seventh century.[157]

If Leibner's and Hezsner's conclusions are correct, the seventh-century destruction of the zodiac symbols in Palestinian synagogues could potentially have a widely recognizable symbolism of its own. The destruction of something identified as participating in a universal symbolic language could be evidence of an attempt to shore up the boundaries between Jewish communities and other faiths—iconophile, Hellenic Christianity in particular.

The archaeological evidence suggests a significant increase in iconoclastic Jewish communities in the seventh–eighth centuries bridging Leontios of Neapolis's and John's lifetimes. This evidence also fits a possible description of the Jewish iconoclasm that John indirectly argues against, and parallels the argument in the Islamic material about whether or not images on floors were problematic.[158] Decorations that would have previously been acceptable were removed from older synagogues and new ones were constructed without such figurative embellishments. Often the tiles of specific animal and human figures in mosaic floors were rearranged or replaced entirely, leaving the image inert and a vague outline of what was replaced. This careful reconstruction of tiles within the outline of the original image is taken as evidence that the owners of the synagogues themselves defaced the images.[159]

There are examples of this type of defacement from Naʾaran, Khirbet Susiya, just south of Jerusalem, and Meroth.[160] At Naʾaran the zodiac wheel was left untouched; however, all of the symbolic images involving human or animal depictions were removed.[161] There

does not seem to have been quite as much effort put into replacing the tiles as in other synagogues, but the original tiles were removed so carefully that one can see the outlines of Virgo, of Scorpio's body, and of Helios's face. In the Khirbet Susiya synagogue, they removed representations of humans and animals in the mosaic floor, and even removed the entire zodiac, which was replaced by a round "geometric mosaic." For unknown reasons, a figure of Daniel—arms raised in prayer, a lion on either side—was not disturbed. However, his name was removed with the exception of the first and last letters.[162] At Meroth there is a figure of a Roman soldier whose eyes and hands were carefully removed, leaving his body, sword, helmet, and armor.[163]

Statues and marble screens were defaced in Kefar Baram, Capernaum, Tiberias, Khirbat Marus, and Khirbet Susiya. At Kefar Baram, Khirbet Susiya, and Capernaum, winged Nikes were removed from doorways, leaving only the wreaths behind.[164] In Tiberias a synagogue screen was defaced. The image was originally of two birds flanking a menorah; the birds' heads were carefully removed and the menorahs were left intact. The synagogue at Khirbat Marus had at one time a lintel decorated with two eagles and zodiac symbols on arch stones. All of these stone images were damaged while the figurative art in the floor mosaic remained intact.[165] Here, again, we see a link with the early Islamic debate about whether or not images were acceptable on the floor. In Khirbet Susiya, in addition to the mosaic damage, a marble screen was defaced—again, animal images were removed and Jewish symbols were left untouched.[166] Here we see evidence of the intra-Jewish debate surrounding which images were acceptable in sacred space and which were not, paralleling the debate in early Islam. Animals are seen as acceptable to some but not to others, and the same goes for images on the floor.

The iconoclastic evidence from Tiberias, as an authoritative center of Jewish thought for Palestine, is

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156   Leibner, "Rabbinic Traditions," 141–42, 151–52.

157   Hezsner, "'For the Lord God,'" 214–15.

158   See relevant discussion above.

159   Fine, "Iconoclasm and the Art," 189–90, and "Iconoclasm: Who Defaced?," 40–41.

160   Fine, "Iconoclasm: Who Defaced?," 39–41, and A. Walmsley, *Early Islamic Syria: An Archaeological Assessment* (London, 2007), 123.

161   Fine, "Iconoclasm and the Art," 189–90, and "Iconoclasm: Who Defaced?," 42.

162   Fine, "Iconoclasm and the Art," 190, and "Iconoclasm: Who Defaced?," 40–41.

163   Fine, "Iconoclasm: Who Defaced?," 39–40.

164   Fine, "Iconoclasm and the Art," 190, and "Iconoclasm: Who Defaced?," 40–41.

165   Schick, *Christian Communities of Palestine*, 202.

166   Fine, "Iconoclasm and the Art," 190, and "Iconoclasm: Who Defaced?," 41.

particularly important to this study. If the Jewish community there had iconoclastic elements, it suggests the prominence of this debate within Palestinian Jewish communities. In addition, if Jewish authorities were condoning and encouraging iconoclasm, it seems likely that John would have heard something about it, especially if iconoclasm was encouraged in order to distinguish Jewish identity in Palestine. In terms of boundary demarcation between Christians and Jews on this issue, Steven Fine suggests that a possible reason for Jewish iconoclasm was a reaction to what Palestinian Jews "perceived as Christian excesses and idolatry,"[167] and he reminds us that Jewish disapproval of Christian practices concerning images was not original to this period. He cites a poem by a sixth-century Jewish liturgical poet, Yannai. The liturgical poem (*piyyut,* pl. *piyyutim*) complains of Christians

> Who say to nothingness, save [*shoa*]!/Who chose the disgustingly repulsive,
> Who rejoice in statues of human figures/Who cleave to the dead over the living,
> Who become excited and turn aside to lies/The experienced in evil, to do evil,
> The polluted with sacrifices of the dead/Who dispute Your commandments,
> Who hide in the darkness their deeds/Who . . . to the death of their god,
> Who prostrate and pray to a bush [a reference to the cross] and are prostrated/Who are deluded by their erroneous deeds,
> Who believe in . . . to suffer/ Who are saddened on account of their idols,
> Who burn those who see their mystery/Who arrange a sacrifice [*minḥah*] of pig's blood,
> Who, by their very nature, explode with illegitimate children/Who fast and afflict themselves for emptiness,
> Who acquire assemblages of bone/Who moan to them on their festivals,
> Who guard the empty falsehood/Who seize the world with their lies.[168]

Obviously, this attitude toward Christian practice was not entirely imagined by John, or other *adversus Judaeos* authors before him. One notices not only ridicule of Christian veneration of images, but also of veneration of the cross and the idea of the risen Christ. There is also a direct accusation of idolatry: Christians are "saddened on account of their idols." Averil Cameron suggests that seventh-century accusations of idolatry may have been a defensive measure by some Jewish communities against the Christian *adversus Judaeos* texts and that this defensive measure, whether maintained by Jewish communities in reality or not, acted as the imagined Jewish opinion allowing for the *adversus Judaeos* literature to continue.[169] An Aramaic *piyyut* from the Byzantine period, in which the author portrays Jesus as an enemy of Jews and explicitly mentions Christian icons in relationship to his crucifixion, reads:

> Nailed on the wood [the cross, *qis*]
> And my image in the church [*ba-Merqoles*]
> Is painted on wood [*qis*][170]

One of admittedly many variables that fed into the eighth-century iconoclastic tendency among Jewish communities could have been an internal debate about idolatry inspired by accusations toward Christians like those in the two *piyyutim* above. Also evidencing this debate may be Christian responses, such as that of Germanos, the early eighth-century patriarch of Constantinople, who stated that all Jewish communities were hypocritical when denouncing the iconophile opinions of two of his bishops, Constantine of Nakoleia and Thomas of Claudiopolis.[171] Rather than simply a rhetorical slur, his emphasis on hypocrisy could be referring to an outsider's perspective of internal Jewish debate resulting in some people being more iconoclastic or idoloclastic than others.

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167   Fine, "Iconoclasm and the Art," 192–93, and "Iconoclasm: Who Defaced?," 42–43.

168   Fine, "Iconoclasm and the Art," 193, and an abridged version in "Iconoclasm: Who Defaced?," 42–43.

169   Cameron, "Cyprus," 37–39.

170   Fine, "Iconoclasm and the Art," 193, and J. Yahalom, "Angels Do Not Understand Aramaic: On the Literary Use of Palestinian Jewish Aramaic in Late Antiquity," *JJS* 47 (1996): 33–44, at 43. Yahalom and Fine both highlight that *merqoles* usually refers to idolatry in Rabbinic literature. However, in this particular instance it is a disparaging term for *ekklesia*. See Fine, "Iconoclasm and the Art," 193, n. 76.

171   For further discussion of Germanos and his letter, see Chrysostomides, "Creating a Theology of Icons," 2–5.

Though building a distinct identity in an empire in which Christians and Jews were lumped together as People of the Book may not have been the sole reason for this iconoclastic trend in the Jewish community, it is certainly one of many viable causes. Identity building, or at the very least identity bolstering, seems likely to be one of the more prominent reasons for John of Damascus's defense of images as well.

It is important to remember that despite the *adversus Judaeos* trend in the Christian defense of images, this was an issue debated within and between an array of Jewish communities. Not all Jews were necessarily iconoclasts; they had textual reasons not to be. There is a fragment in the Cairo Genizah of PT ʿAvodah Zarah 3.3 42d from Palestine in which two influential sages of the Amoraic period, R. Yohanan, leader of the Tiberias community, and his successor R. Abun, are recorded as pronouncing on leniency regarding images on walls and floors: "In the days of R. Johanan they permitted images on the walls, and he did not object," and "In the days of R. Abun they permitted images on mosaics and he did not object."[172] There is also an *aggadic* tradition, which Fine suggests is of Palestinian origin, in BT Berakhot 8a, which parallels some of the sayings attributed to Muḥammad in early Islamic tradition about the punishment of artists on the day of judgment:

> R. Shimron son of Pazi was recounting (mesader) legends before R. Joshua son of Levi.
>
> He (Rabbi Joshua son of Levi) said to him (R. Shimon): What is the meaning of [the verse] "May my soul bless the Lord, and all of my innards His holy name (Ps. 103:1)?"
>
> He (R. Shimon) responded [with a parable]: Come and behold that the attributes of flesh and blood are unlike those of the Holy One, Blessed be He. A person can draw an image (tsar tsurah) on a wall, but cannot place within it a soul or a spirit, innards and guts. God, however, is not so limited. He draws an image within an image (tsar tsurah betokh tsurah, i.e., forms a fetus within its mother) and places within it a spirit, innards and guts.[173]

The existence of art is acknowledged, as is the limitation of artists in comparison with the creative abilities of the divine.

Jews in Damascus and Palestine would have been reading the Aramaic Targum by Pseudo-Jonathan, which represents the faction that condoned figural art on synagogue floors.[174] This text survived until redacted sometime in the eighth or ninth century, during or shortly after John's lifetime,[175] and it would have left a lasting impression on the communities who had used it. The Pseudo-Jonathan paraphrase of Leviticus 26:1 supplements the original text with justifications condoning decorative images. Compare the original biblical passage with the paraphrase:

> You shall make for yourselves no idols and erect no carved images or pillars, and you shall not place figured stones in your land, to worship at them; for I am the Lord your God.[176]

> You shall not make idols for yourselves, or set up for yourselves carved images or pillars, or place figured stones in your land, but a pavement figured with images and likenesses you may make on the floor of *miqdasheikhon*. And do not bow down to it, for I am the Lord your God.[177]

There is some debate over what *miqdasheikhon* means. It can be taken to mean "your synagogues" or "as a reference to the Jerusalem Temple." Fine prefers the second meaning, claiming that it creates a precedent for mosaic flooring in synagogues. He suggests that this Aramaic translation represents a debate in Byzantine and early Islamic Palestine about whether decorative human and animal figures should be allowed in synagogues (and is once again reminiscent of debates in the Islamic sources).[178] It would have affected the entire worshiping community due to the physical

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172 Fine, "Iconoclasm and the Art," 186. As Fine points out, this could apply to any building, not just synagogues, as is often assumed.

173 Ibid., 186–87; Fine's formatting has been preserved.

174 "A Targum is an Aramaic paraphrase, often with expansions, of the Hebrew Bible. Pseudo-Jonathan, the most expansive of the Targums to the Pentateuch, is roughly twice the length of the original Hebrew text" (Fine, "Iconoclasm: Who Defaced?," 36–37).

175 Ibid. S. A. Kaufman, "Targum Pseudo-Jonathan and Late Jewish Literary Aramaic," *Aramaic Studies* 11 (2013): 1–26.

176 *The Harper Collins Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version* (San Francisco, 1989).

177 Fine, "Iconoclasm and the Art," 191.

178 Fine, "Iconoclasm: Who Defaced?," 36–37.

ramifications of whichever decision was reached, and while the illiterate members of the community may not have known this exact passage, or any other kind of formal example, they would have been able to talk about the stories they heard. This can be seen in John's use of the Tabernacle—a much more applicable story for Jews arguing about how to decorate sacred space.[179]

John's *Treatises* and the Image Debate in Early Muslim Communities

Many have noted from archaeological evidence that during John of Damascus's lifetime the Muslim community was not in complete agreement regarding images of people and animals.[180] However, fewer have looked into what has been preserved in Islamic hadith collections and histories on the topic. Traditions about images that can be traced to the 720–730s represent a debate more than any sort of agreement.[181] A caveat is, of course, that compilers of traditions left out reports that seemed inconsistent or incorrect to them and only preserved a few, of what were presumably many disagreeing parties and opinions, to use as either straw men or examples. Nevertheless, the idea of how to treat images in early Islam was far from decided in the early decades of the eighth century. Yazīd II's edict exhibited one extreme of many variations of belief on this topic.

John of Damascus occupied his position within the Umayyad administration during what Donald Witcomb has termed the "transitional period" in the formation of Islamic society and its polity, 661–705.[182]

This phrase encompasses the changes made by the Islamic ruling class—its articulations of power and relationships with conquered populations—during the reign of Muʿāwiya (r. 661–680), and ending with the death of ʿAbd al-Malik (r. 685–705), who heralded a more exclusively Muslim outlook and representation of government.[183] Society in the central Islamic lands in the early decades of the eighth century moved from being conceptualized as a division between conquerors and the conquered to one of distinct religious communities,[184] and Islamic jurisprudence moved from loosely associating hadith with seventh-century legal rulings and opinions (sing. *ra'y*) to understanding hadith as specifically associated with the life of Muḥammad, while Islamic caliphal power was communicated by ʿAbd al-Malik's changes to coinage and building projects.

As John spent a significant amount of his early life around Muslims and then was a priest in Jerusalem, which had a large Muslim population of permanent residents and visitors, he would have been cognizant of Islamic beliefs. It is important first to note the types of Islamic oral, and possibly written, traditions that may have been circulating during his lifetime. After Muḥammad's death, Muslims began to record and pass on stories about the early community; this early tradition of preservation did not, at first, focus on Muḥammad himself, but rather those who lived after him and established the Muslim community. Judicial decisions based on independent reasoning, or *ra'y*, made by those of Muḥammad's generation and the generation immediately following were preserved as precedent alongside stories about the prophet himself. John almost certainly overheard some of this material in the course of his life, and in his *Heresy of the Ishmaelites*, he quotes quranic verses, demonstrating an understanding of their implications for Christianity.

Islam was a religion very much in its initial stages of development during John's lifetime. He would have known Muslim beliefs and practices from a very different perspective than our own, and there is a reason he presents it as a Christian heresy in his *Heresy of the Ishmaelites*.[185] Hadith at this early time would have

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179   In *Treatises* II.9 John uses passages from Exod 34:17 and 37:6–37:7, and supplements them with passages from Deut. 4:15 throughout his discussion of these instructions for building the Tabernacle and mercy seat. See Louth, *Three Treatises*, 65–66.

180   Reynolds, "Rethinking Palestinian Iconoclasm," 6; F. B. Flood, "Faith, Religion and the Material Culture of Early Islam," in *Byzantium and Islam: Age of Transition, 7th to 9th Century*, ed. H. C. Evans with B. Ratliff (New York, 2012), 244–57; O. Grabar, *The Formation of Islamic Art*, rev. ed. (London, 1987).

181   Sahner, "First Iconoclasm in Islam." Sahner analyzes evidence from Syriac, Greek, Latin, Armenian, and Arabic. For a thorough study of the hadith evidence on the *Bilderverbot* traditions, see D. van Reenen, "The *Bilderverbot*, a New Survey," *Der Islam* 67 (1990): 27–77. I maintain that there was more debate than van Reenen allows for.

182   See D. Whitcomb, "Notes for an Archaeology of Muʿāwiya: Material Culture in the Transitional Period of Believers," in Borrut and Donner, *Christians and Others*, 11–27.

183   Ibid., 11–28.

184   R. G. Hoyland, *In God's Path: The Arab Conquests and the Creation of an Islamic Empire* (New York, 2015), 197.

185   Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam*.

consisted of sayings from early members of the community and common opinions on debated topics mingled together. With regard specifically to *Bilderverbot*, or aniconic, hadith, Daan van Reenen has shown that there was considerable discussion in the early to mid-700s between those who considered themselves, or were later considered, part of the Muslim community. Van Reenen has not only made clear the diversity of these traditions, but tracking them has revealed that a handful of the traditions claiming that Muḥammad and the angels were opposed to images were initially about other topics.[186]

The traditions on images, representing a debate among Muslims that eventually led to established customs and laws, started with questions ranging from whether or not making or owning images was allowed to where images were allowed and on which types of material. In this early stage, however, these were only questions that those identifying as Muslims debated with one another; while they may have led to established customs and laws, they did not begin as such. And the answers are not always what one might expect. A common frame story recounts Miswar ibn Makhrama visiting the Prophet's Companion Ibn ʿAbbās when he is sick and seeing his brocaded cloak and his stove full of images. They have a discussion about the brocade and Ibn ʿAbbās defends images on cloth not worn for vanity, but after Miswar leaves he orders that the garment be taken away and the heads cut off the images. He was asked why he did not take it to the market where he could sell it for more if the heads were left on—an example of some Muslims being unaware that there may have been a rule against this or disagreeing with it.[187] There are also traditions allowing images of animals and people thought to contain *rūḥ* "soul," though others claimed that such images were not allowed (and even prevented angels from entering buildings) and that the makers of such images incurred mildly unpleasant punishment in the afterlife.

A less negative statement about images that may contain *rūḥ* comes from the Yemeni hadith scholar ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī, who in his *Muṣannaf* cites Qatāda (ibn Diʿāma?) as saying: "Images of things that contain *rūḥ* are objectionable (*yukrahu*), but there is no harm in a tree."[188] The word "objectionable" translates a legal value defining an act that is not forbidden (*ḥarām*) but strongly discouraged. Nevertheless, there are many traditions of those who disagreed. One such tradition is evidenced by a statement in al-Bukhārī's authoritative collection *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, tacked on to the end of a tradition about dreams in a book about dream interpretation: "Whoever makes a picture will be punished on the Day of Resurrection and will be ordered to put a soul in that picture, which he will not be able to do."[189]

There was also some debate as to whether pillows with images were acceptable if they were intended for the floor. A hadith from the Prophet's wife ʿĀʾisha allowing such pillows reads:

> God's Messenger returned from a journey when I had placed a curtain of mine having some images over [the door of] a chamber of mine. When God's Messenger saw it, he tore it and said, "The people who will receive the severest punishment on the Day of Resurrection will be those who try to make the like of Allāh's creations." So we turned it [i.e., the curtain] into one or two cushions.[190]

Another tradition from ʿĀʾisha does not allow images at all:

> I purchased a cushion with pictures on it. The Prophet stood at the door but did not enter. I said, "I repent to Allāh for what I have done." He said, "What is this cushion?" I said, "It is for you to sit on and recline on." He said, "The makers of these pictures will be punished on the Day of Resurrection and it will be said to them,

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186   Van Reenen, "*Bilderverbot*," 34–35.

187   Ibn Ḥanbal, *English Translation of Musnad Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal*, trans. N. al-Khattab, ed. H. al-Khattab (Riyadh, 2012), 3:46, no. 2932. There is also a tradition in which no one suggests retaining the heads on the images: al-Ṭayālisī, *Musnad* (Hyderabad, 1903), no. 2730; originally found in van Reenen, "*Bilderverbot*," 48. The other option, of course, is that this report preserves evidence that there were members of his household who were of other faiths and did not have issues with images.

188   ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaf*, 11 vols., ed. Ḥ. al-Raḥmān Qāsimī (Beirut, 1970–72), 10:400, no. 19493; all citations to the hadith that follow originally found in van Reenen. On Qatāda ibn Diʿāma (ca. 680–ca. 735), see C. Pellat, "Ḳatāda b. Diʿāma," *EI2* 4:748.

189   *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 9 vols., ed. and trans. Muhammad Muhsin Khan (Riyadh, 1997), 9: bk. 91, ch. 45, no. 7042.

190   Ibid., 7: bk. 77, ch. 91, no. 5954.

'Make alive what you have created.' Moreover, the angels do not enter a house where there are pictures."[191]

This debate, encapsulated entirely within al-Bukhārī's collection, is particularly interesting in light of the mosaic rearrangements in churches and synagogues in Palestine at the time, especially those with wall images destroyed and floors left intact. Traditions permitting images of subjects with *rūḥ* on the floor were possibly under the assumption that images on the floor would not inspire idolatry.

As seen above, whether or not images were allowed on cloth is another preserved topic of debate:

> God's Messenger said: Verily, angels do not enter the house in which there is a picture. Busr reported: Saīd fell ill and we went to inquire after his health and [found] that there was hanging at his door a curtain with a picture on it. I said to ʿUbaidullah Khaulani who had been under the patronage of Maimuna, the wife of Allah's Apostle, "Did not Saīd himself inform us before about [the Holy Prophet's command pertaining to the pictures]?" Whereupon ʿUbaidullah said, "Did you not hear when he said: Except the prints on the cloth?"[192]

> ʾĀʾisha reported: We had a curtain with us which had portraits of birds upon it. Whenever a visitor came, he found them in front of him. Thereupon God's Messenger said to me: Change them, for whenever I enter the room I see them and it brings to my mind worldly life. She said: We had with us a sheet which had silk badges upon it and we used to wear it.[193]

There was a separate debate about whether or not vegetation could be depicted. Examples are preserved in ʿAbd al-Razzāq's *Muṣannaf*, as we have seen. But the hadith quoted above that says "Images of things that contain *rūḥ* are objectionable, but there is no harm in a tree" is immediately followed by a tradition from the caliph ʿUthmān, who said, "I saw [a tree] of gypsum [possibly a mosaic?] in the mosque, I commanded it to be destroyed [lit. cut up]."[194] These conflicting hadith exemplify that there was no solid rule about images at the time these and many others became circulated traditions. They show commonly held opinions and examples of certain behaviors, but that is all.

An example from al-Azraqī's (d. 837) history of Mecca claims that Muḥammad protected the images of Jesus and Mary in the Kaʿba on the day he and his followers conquered the city:

> Images of the prophets, trees, and angels were placed on its [the Kaʿba's] struts. Among them was an image of Abraham the friend of God as a sheikh casting lots with arrows and an image of Jesus son of Mary and his mother with an image of angels above them, peace be upon them all. On the day of Mecca's conquest the prophet of God, peace be upon him, entered the Kaʿba. He ordered al-Faḍil ibn al-Abās ibn Abd al-Muṭṭalib to bring water [from] Zamzam and ordered for cloths to be wet with the water. He ordered the erasure of the images so they were erased [as] he said. He stretched his palms over the image of Jesus son of Mary and his mother, peace be upon them, and said, "Wash off all the pictures except what is under my hands." Then he withdrew his hands from Jesus son of Mary and his mother and he considered the picture of Abraham.[195]

Here we have an example of Muḥammad preserving not only images but icons, quite likely exactly the type John of Damascus was defending. Interestingly, the narrative depicts Muḥammad moving his hands away from the icons of Jesus and Mary and going to look at the picture of Abraham. This reads as a natural next step, but it is part of the story that could later have been emphasized as being symbolic by those opposing images within the early Islamic community.

191   Ibid., 7: bk. 77, ch. 92, no. 5957.

192   N. al-Khattab, trans., and H. Khattab, ed., *English Translation of Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 7 vols. (Riyadh, 2007), 5: bk. 37, ch. 36, no. 85. Spelling of names has been modified.

193   Ibid., 5: bk. 37, ch. 36, no. 86. Spelling of names has been modified.

194   Ibid., 10:400–1, no. 19494.

195   Translated from Al-Azraqī, *Kitāb Akhbār Makka*, ed. F. Wüstenfeld, in *Die Chroniken der Stadt Mekka*, 4 vols. (Leipzig, 1857–61), 1:110–11.

Al-Azraqī also reports a tradition passed down by his grandfather that originally comes from a Syrian, Sulaymān ibn Mūsā al-Shāmī (d. ca. 733–737), who had heard that there was an image of Mary and Jesus in the Kaʿba and asked a foremost Meccan scholar, ʿAṭāʾ ibn Abī Rabaḥ (d. 733), about it:

> Sulaymān ibn Mūsa al-Shāmī asked ʿAṭāʾ ibn Rabāḥ, "I have heard that in the Kaʿba [there was] an image of Mary and Jesus?" He [ʿAṭāʾ] said, "Yes, I found out about an image of Mary decorated with gold (*muzawwiq*) with Jesus her son sitting on her lap [also] decorated with gold."[196]

This description matches several known icons of a seated Mary holding an infant Jesus from the seventh and eighth centuries in areas accessible from the Hijaz.[197]

A few paragraphs after the description of the icons in the Kaʿba, al-Azraqī uses the same chain of transmission (Sulaymān ibn Mūsā al-Shāmī < ʿAṭāʾ) to report that "Muḥammad entered the House once he [ʿUmar] had wiped off the images; he would not enter until it was wiped clean."[198]

Scholars have disagreed about the reliability and exact dating of these reports.[199] All agree on dating, however, that places these in circulation while John of Damascus wrote his first and second *Treatises*, and either just before, during, or just after the reign of Yazīd II. Either way, it is clear that there was a debate raging over images in the early Islamic community, including in the Levant, and that John could easily have encountered it.

In the historical reports and hadith from the early to mid-eighth century, the fear of idolatry,[200] the preservation of icons, whether images on cloth are licit, and whether images on the floor are permitted all line up with aspects of the Christian and Jewish discussions that we are aware of in eighth-century Palestine. What do these and other traditions tell us about the *Bilderverbot* debates of the early Muslim community? And can these traditions inform our reading of John's *Treatises*?

As already noted, John makes a point about idolatry using images on cloth repeatedly in his *Treatises*, as when he discusses divine instructions for the decoration of the Tabernacle.[201] His example of a cloth with images of cherubim on it seems almost designed to knock a Jewish or Muslim interlocutor off balance, as it mirrors contemporary debates within their own communities. And as seen, in addition to defending icon veneration in his *Treatises*, John of Damascus defends cross veneration, both in his own words and through Leontios of Neapolis, against the Jewish accusation of idolatry using Exodus 20:4–20:6 and Deuteronomy 5:8–5:10.[202] Accusations of idolatry using these same verses were later appropriated by Muslims.[203] By the first half of the eighth century, the cross and icons were considered together as potentially idolatrous by some segments of early Muslim society, and this connection among Muslims between the cross and icons is very relevant for how we read John of Damascus. Sporadic Umayyad policy during John's lifetime joined the concept of the Trinity with crosses and icons, at least in early elite Muslim thought. In Egypt the governor ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz ibn Marwān (r. 686–689) ordered the destruction of all gold and silver crosses, and he had statements (based in the Qurʾan) contradicting the Christian view of Jesus as part of the Trinity written on church walls, such as "Muḥammad is the great Apostle of God, and Jesus also is the Apostle of God. But verily God is not

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196   Translated from ibid., 111–12.

197   G. R. D. King, "The Paintings of the Pre-Islamic Kaʿba," *Muqarnas* 21 (2004): 219–29, at 221.

198   Al-Azraqī, *Kitāb Akhbār Makka*, 1:113.

199   For example, S. Bashear ("The Images of Mecca: A Case-Study in Early Muslim Iconography," in idem, *Studies in Early Islamic Tradition* [Jerusalem, 2004], 361–377, at 367–68) posits that the reports about Muḥammad not entering the Kaʿba until it was cleared of all images were fabricated during the lifetime of Sulaymān ibn Mūsā al-Shāmī; H. Motzki (*The Origins of Islamic Jurisprudence: Meccan Fiqh before the Classical Schools* [Leiden, 2001], 96–97), however, has defended this chain of transmission within the *Muṣannaf* of ʿAbd al-Razzāq, claiming that ʿAṭāʾ's traditions likely survived in a written form, which Ibn Jurayj followed and used in his teaching; Motzki uses the contradictions of Ibn Jurayj's traditions transmitted from ʿAṭāʾ to argue for their authenticity. If we follow Bashear's argument, we must accept that the reports were fabricated sometime before 733–37; if we accept Motzki's, then we must accept that the reports were created during ʿAṭāʾ's lifetime (though he died in 733), and that he was merely caught out contradicting himself.

200   Van Reenen, "*Bilderverbot*," 40–42.

201   See above, pp. 270–71.

202   *Treatises* I.54 in his quote from Leontios discussed above; see also II.14.

203   Griffith, "Images, Islam and Christian Icons," 121, 127.

begotten and does not beget."[204] A similar incident occurred in Damascus, either during the life of John, his father, or his grandfather.[205] The caliph ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz (717–720) also banned the public display of Christian crosses, and with his edict the more extreme Yazīd II ibn ʿAbd al-Malik ordered people to physically destroy Christian sacred objects.[206] John almost certainly knew of this caliph and his idoloclastic actions. Yazīd's declaration became law throughout the caliphate, there were to be no images of animals or humans, and crosses were barely tolerated.

Conclusion

What prompted John to write his *Treatises*? While Leo III and Christian communities across the Mediterranean may have had something to do with John's inspiration, they were certainly not the only factor. Scholars have made strong cases for overlapping ideas among Christians, Jews, and Muslims in Palestine. Both Aaron Hughes and Patricia Crone use the shared apocalyptic material as evidence.[207]

As I have demonstrated above, Muslims, Christians, and Jews debated the relationship between images and idolatry in the early eighth century ("rather than imagine this as borrowing or influence, we should see it as collective world-making in an environment wherein ideas moved freely between porous

boundaries"[208]). Idolatry was heavily debated, and everyone knew it. John of Damascus was attempting to consolidate Christian beliefs on cross and icon veneration amid what he viewed as a complete chaos of pressures and differing opinions assaulting orthodoxy from both Judaism and Islam as well as within Christian circles. John's *Treatises* may have been intended to function as a subject-specific *summa theologiae* on icon and cross veneration to bolster Byzantine and Umayyad Christian understanding of the traditional theology behind material objects used in Christian ritual. The *Treatises* set out what John thinks Christians should believe on these issues in the face of a chaotic variety of aniconic, iconoclastic, or idolatry-fearing pressures.

It is important to remember that the patriarchate in Jerusalem was reestablished during his lifetime and John himself may have played a large role in its resurrection. While the first *Treatise* was written very close upon Yazīd II's edict, he may not have been responding to it directly; John was more likely to be reacting to the debates and discussions in all of the Christian communities. Likewise, while the timing of his *Treatises* may suggest a reaction to Leo III's iconoclastic policies, and although he mentions Leo III directly in his second *Treatise* and clearly is not happy with events in the Byzantine church to which he and other Melkites would have looked to as a model for their own Christianity, we find references that apply equally in Palestine. John of Damascus was a well-educated and well-connected priest in one of the most important cities in the Mediterranean world. There is no reason to assume that he was only modeling defenses for Christians against one type of threat.

Additionally, Christian identities under early Islam were still quite fluid. Before the adoption of canon law to consolidate these communities, the debates between those adhering to differing christologies would have been continually shifting and changing with the opinions of their religious elite. Christian Sahner has highlighted the difficulty of applying labels to specific Christian communities in specific locations under Umayyad rule.[209]

This article has relied on recent discussions of Yazīd II and eighth-century Palestinian iconoclasm,

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204   King, "Islam, Iconoclasm," 270.

205   Ibid., 271. For an archaeological survey on the nature of shared sacred space between Christians and Muslims in the late antique and early medieval Levant, see M. Guidetti, *In the Shadow of the Church: The Building of Mosques in Early Medieval Syria* (Leiden, 2016), 23–30. For further discussion on this point, see Chrysostomides, "Creating a Theology of Icons," 11.

206   King, "Islam, Iconoclasm," 271, and Sahner, "First Iconoclasm in Islam." This edict was short-lived, and these types of edicts were uncommon.

207   Hughes, *Shared Identities*, 10–11, 70–71; Crone, "Islam, Judeo-Christianity and Byzantine Iconoclasm," 74. Hughes claims that commonly held apocalyptic beliefs between Jewish and early Muslim communities were so intertwined that theorizing on the origin of these beliefs is impractical and likely would lead us to the wrong conclusions; while Crone emphasizes commonly held beliefs between Christian and Jewish communities, and associates these Judeo-Christian groups with both Byzantine and Umayyad Palestinian iconoclasm, as "Islam made Judeo-Christianity a polemically viable position, and accordingly Judeo-Christians came out of hiding and began to recruit."

208   Hughes, *Shared Identities*, 77.

209   Sahner, "Images and Iconoclasm in Islam," engaging Reynolds, "Rethinking Palestinian Iconolasm."

which have provided important details of the eighth century that were previously lacking in analysis of John's life and the *Treatises*. What can John and the context of his world tell us of Yazīd II's edict and the rural mosaic damage in synagogues and churches throughout Palestine? Clearly, there was an undercurrent of discussion about the propriety of images among Jews, Christians, and Muslims in early eighth-century Mediterranean society. A concept of idolatry and one deity were both things that these communities shared. After the Arab conquests and throughout the early Umayyad period, people who were a part of these three faiths, and a variety of shades in between, were participating in collective world-making in a time and place where ideas flowed through the porous boundaries between their traditions. A particularly strict strain of thought could have existed in the rural areas where the rearranged mosaics were found—either

influencing Yazīd II or emerging as a reaction to his edict. Overreaction is not unique to any one group, either of rulers to religious ideas or of average people to rules imposed upon them, and should be kept in mind. Whatever situation John and his community found themselves in when he wrote his *Treatises*, opinion about religious imagery—for and against—was prevalent in all faith communities in Syria and Palestine. While he was obviously engaging with Byzantine iconoclasm to some extent, we must recognize that John would also have been addressing these pressing local concerns.

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