

## RESEARCH ON BYZANTINE JEWRY

### The State of the Question

#### INTRODUCTION

A century and more of research on Byzantine Jewry has lifted a corner of a curtain, but little more. We are still woefully ignorant about the physical dimensions of the Jewish presence in Byzantium – how many Jews there were, and where they lived – and about many aspects of Jewish life. Nevertheless, considerable advances have been made, and my purpose in this survey is to point to some of these, to attempt to discern some trends in research, and to indicate some areas where further work is possible and desirable.

#### FOUNDATIONS

The first book-length work on Byzantine Jewry was Samuel Krauss's *Studien zur byzantinisch-jüdischen Geschichte*, published in 1914 as the main item in the XXI. Jahresbericht der israelitisch-theologischen Lehranstalt in Wien.<sup>1</sup> Krauss's book remains the starting point for research in this area, even though so much new evidence has come to light since he wrote, and particularly the documents and manuscript fragments recovered from the Cairo Genizah. Although these began to be published in the 1890s, and some were included in Jacob Mann's *Texts and Studies in Jewish History and Literature* (2 vols, Cincinnati, 1931 and Philadelphia, 1935), they were not fully integrated into Byzantine Jewish research until Joshua Starr published his *Jews in the Byzantine Empire 641-1204* (Athens, 1939).

A significant feature of Starr's book is that it consists of two parts, a synthetic account and a source book comprising English translations, notes and bibliographical references. The same format was adopted subsequently by Steven Bowman for his *The Jews of Byzantium, 1204-1453* (Tuscaloosa, 1985), which sets out to extend Starr's pioneering work to the period after the Latin conquest of Constantinople.

<sup>1</sup> Samuel Krauss (1866-1948) was professor at the Jewish Teachers' Seminary, Budapest, 1894-1906, and at the Jewish Theological Seminary, Vienna, 1906-1938. He went to England as a refugee and is buried in Cambridge. For a short appreciation see R. Loewe, Foreword to Samuel Krauss, *The Jewish-Christian Controversy from the earliest times to 1789*, vol. 1, *History*, ed. and rev. W. Horbury (Tübingen, 1996), VII-X. Krauss's papers are available in the University of Southampton library.

The period between Starr's book and Bowman's saw the publication of two monographs specifically on our subject. Zvi Ankori's *Karaites in Byzantium, the formative years, 970-1100* (New York and Jerusalem, 1959), while it is ostensibly devoted to the Karaites, deals compendiously with the whole of Byzantine Jewry in the 11th century, and makes use of a far wider range of source materials than Starr had laid under contribution.<sup>2</sup> Andrew Sharf's *Byzantine Jewry from Justinian to the Fourth Crusade* (London, 1971) is a serviceable narrative with a substantial bibliography.

General histories both of Jewry and of Byzantium have been very slow to take note of the work of this small band of specialist historians. Simon Dubnow (1860-1941), coming from a Russian background, stands out for the attention he paid to Byzantium in his monumental *Weltgeschichte des jüdischen Volkes* (10 vols, Berlin, 1925-1929), and Byzantium is also taken seriously in the other great compendious Jewish history of the twentieth century, Salo W. Baron's *A Social and Religious History of the Jews* (18 vols, New York, 1952-83). Most histories dealing with European Jewry in the Middle Ages, however, still neglect the Byzantine dimensions.

Historians of Byzantium also still generally fail to do justice to the Jewish minority, despite the growing bibliography in English. In a series of important articles David Jacoby has striven to integrate the Jews into the story of Byzantium; several of these are included in his collection *Byzantium, Latin Romania and the Mediterranean* (Variorum Collected Studies Series, CS703; Aldershot, 2001). Attention is paid to the Jews as appropriate in Angeliki Laiou, ed., *The Economic History of Byzantium: from the seventh through the fifteenth century* (3 vols, Washington, 2002).<sup>3</sup>

#### SOURCES FOR BYZANTINE JEWISH HISTORY

Several types of materials that are essential for the writing of Byzantine history in general offer little or nothing for the history of the Jews. We have no Jewish coins or seals; leaving aside the earliest period there are no excavated synagogues or other Jewish buildings, no Jewish iconography, and very few inscriptions (of these the great majority are from Byzantine Italy);<sup>4</sup> and there is almost nothing in the way of ritual objects, charms and amulets, jewellery or domestic items with a demonstrable Jewish origin. The reasons for this lacuna have not been sufficiently explored.

<sup>2</sup> Publications about the Karaites during the three decades following Ankori's publication have been surveyed by D. Frank in *Bulletin of Judaean-Greek Studies* 6 (Summer 1990). The most comprehensive treatment of the subject is *Karaite Judaism: Guide to the history and literary sources of medieval and modern Karaism*, ed. M. Pollack (Leiden, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> A monograph on the economic history of the Byzantine Jews, by Joshua Holo, is in the course of publication.

<sup>4</sup> The present author has undertaken to prepare a corpus of Hebrew inscriptions from the Byzantine empire for the series 'Monumenta Palaeographica Medii Aevi: Series Hebraica' (Brepols).

Given the dearth of other types of Jewish *realia*, heightened importance attaches to the one type of artifact that does survive in reasonable quantities, namely manuscripts. The precise number of Byzantine Hebrew manuscripts that survive in whole or part is not known, because specialists have only recently begun to develop objective criteria for identifying a manuscript as Byzantine. It has been estimated that about ten per cent of all medieval Hebrew manuscripts are Byzantine,<sup>5</sup> and if this estimate is correct there could be as many as 10,000 manuscripts and fragments in all. Dated and localised manuscripts from Byzantium begin in the 12th century; they are rare before the beginning of the 14th century but become increasingly common thereafter. Some are copies of works composed in Byzantium; many more are copies of works written elsewhere. They cover the entire range of Hebrew literature, from biblical and classical rabbinic texts through commentary and liturgy, to (particular in the Palaiologan period) mysticism and science. These manuscripts are potentially an extremely rich source of knowledge about Byzantine Jewish life, both as physical objects and for the written texts and annotations they carry. Their study has hardly begun.<sup>6</sup>

No Byzantine Jewish archives have been preserved, and only in the materials recovered from the Cairo Genizah do we have much in the way of personal or family documents, such as deeds of marriage or divorce, wills or genealogies. It is unclear whether or not the Byzantine written texts (documents, prayer books and scholarly texts) recovered from the Cairo Genizah represent the remains of one or more personal archives; we seem at least to have copies of part of the personal correspondence of one of the foremost Byzantine Karaite scholars, Tobias ben Moses.<sup>7</sup> Some documents specifically referring to Byzantium were listed in Starr's *Jews in the Byzantine Empire*; others have been identified and published more recently.<sup>8</sup> Genizah documents, including some relating to Byzantium, form the basis for the magisterial work by S. D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society* (6 vols, Berkeley, 1967-1993). However, as David Jacoby has written, "a comprehensive list of Genizah material bearing on Byzantium is highly desirable."<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup> M. Beit-Arié, 'The codicological data-base of the Hebrew Palaeography Project: a tool for localising and dating Hebrew medieval manuscripts,' in *Hebrew Studies*, ed. D. Rowland Smith and P. S. Salinger (London, 1991), 165-97, here p. 169.

<sup>6</sup> Some colophons are translated in Bowman, *The Jews of Byzantium*.

<sup>7</sup> See N. de Lange, 'Byzantium in the Cairo Genizah,' *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 16 (1992), 34-47, and further references there.

<sup>8</sup> See S. Shaked, *A Tentative Bibliography of Genizah Documents* (Paris, 1964), p. 155; N. de Lange, 'Greek and Byzantine Fragments in the Cairo Genizah,' *Bulletin of Judaean-Greek Studies* 5 (1989), pp. 13-17; N. de Lange, *Greek Jewish Texts from the Cairo Genizah* (Tübingen, 1996). A rare study of these materials is J. Niehoff-Panagiotidis, 'Byzantinische Lebenswelt und rabbinische Hermeneutik: Die griechischen Juden in der Kairoer Genizah,' *Byzantion* 74 (2004), pp. 51-109.

<sup>9</sup> D. Jacoby, 'What do we learn about Byzantine Asia Minor from the documents of the Cairo Genizah?,' in *H Byzantiniv Mikrav Asiva*, ed. N. Oikonomides and S. Vryonis (Athens, 1998), pp. 83-95, here p. 95.

The chance survival of a family chronicle compiled in the mid-eleventh century by Ahimaas of Oria (in southern Italy), and extending back some two hundred years, has shed considerable light on Jewish life in Byzantine south Italy.<sup>10</sup> Such documents are very rare. A good deal of information about individuals and about social and economic history can be gleaned from legal documents, such as responsa<sup>11</sup> and local by-laws (*takkanot*).<sup>12</sup>

The one Hebrew source that has been systematically exploited by anyone writing about Byzantium in the 12th century is the travelogue of Benjamin of Tudela, who listed the names of the leaders of each Jewish community he visited and gave its size, and sometimes added some further information. A translation of the section on Byzantium is included by Starr, Sharf and Bowman, but a new edition is long overdue.<sup>13</sup>

A good deal of historical information comes to us from the abundant Hebrew prose and verse works written in Byzantium. Many such works remain unpublished. In some cases, because of the prevailing negative attitude to Byzantine Jewish culture, authors writing in Byzantium were wrongly located elsewhere; no doubt further examples of this kind await discovery.<sup>14</sup>

Finally, there are non-Jewish written sources, in Greek and other languages, that shed light on the Jewish minority. Again, many of these are cited by Starr and Bowman, but a good deal of further work could be done. The same applies to Christian art as a source for Jewish history.

## DEMOGRAPHY

No scientific study exists of the actual presence of the Jews in the empire, and occasional estimates of population figures are largely subjective. It is questionable, given the nature of the evidence, whether reliable statistics will ever be achieved. Mapping the distribution of Jews through the various regions and towns of the empire, and indeed in the countryside, and their concentrations within specific cities at various times is probably a feasible project, although there are serious gaps in the record. The

<sup>10</sup> Italian translation, with introduction, notes and bibliography by C. Colafemmina, *Sefer Yuhasin: libro delle discendenze* (Cassano delle Murge, 2001).

<sup>11</sup> Some of these are cited by Starr and by Bowman; others remain to be collected.

<sup>12</sup> See particularly the collection of Cretan *takkanot*, collected originally by Elia Kapsali in the early 16th century and edited by E. S. Artom and H. M. D. Cassuto, *Statuta Judaeorum Candiae eorumque memorabilia* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem, 1943).

<sup>13</sup> See also J. A. Ochoa, 'El imperio bizantino en el viaje de Benjamín de Tudela,' in *Viaggiatori ebrei: atti del convegno europeo dell'ASG, San Miniato, 4-5 novembre 1991*, ed. G. Busi (Bologna, 1992), pp. 81-98; D. Jacoby, 'Benjamin of Tudela in Byzantium,' *Palaeoslavica* 10/1 (2002), pp. 180-85.

<sup>14</sup> For an exposition of this problem with some examples see N. de Lange, 'Hebrew Scholarship in Byzantium,' in *Hebrew Scholarship and the Medieval World*, ed. N. de Lange (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 23-37.

existence of designated Jewish quarters in cities is a particularly interesting question.<sup>15</sup>

Apart from numbers, there are other aspects of the Jewish population which would require closer study, such as the origins of immigrants and visitors.<sup>16</sup> Situated as it was in the centre of the medieval Jewish world, at the hub of major trade routes, Byzantium received Jewish travellers and settlers from every direction, while conversely Byzantine Jews appear in other parts of the world, as traders, students or captives. This openness has a bearing on the character of Byzantine Jewish life and civilization.

A growing interest in minority history is beginning to result in some attention being paid to the Jews within more general studies; the development of this trend should lead to a better understanding of Jewish communities within a wider context.<sup>17</sup>

The prosopography of the Jews has not so far been tackled in a systematic way. However there are signs of a greater interest in the Jewish minority among Byzantine prosopographers.<sup>18</sup>

## COMMUNAL STRUCTURES

The structure and institutions of the Jewish community still await full treatment. Despite an acute shortage of documentary evidence, it is clear that considerable change took place between late antiquity and c. 1000, when information becomes more abundant. The precise nature of the change, its causes and timing are all very obscure. The most obvious elements are that the leadership of the communities passed from archons and *archisynagogoi*, who were apparently a wealthy, energetic, not necessarily learned elite, into the hands of rabbis, whose only qualification was their learning

<sup>15</sup> D. Jacoby, 'Les Juifs de Byzance: une communauté marginalisée,' in *Praktikav hmerivda. Ol periqwriakoiv sto Buzavntio*, ed. Ch. A. Maliezou (Athens, 1993), pp. 103-54, here pp. 129-33, reprinted in his *Byzantium, Latin Romania and the Mediterranean* (Aldershot, 2001); id., 'Les quartiers juifs de Constantinople à l'époque Byzantine,' *Byzantion* 37 (1967), pp. 167-227, reprinted in his *Société et démographie à Byzance et en Romanie latine* (London, 1975); id., 'The Jewish Community of Constantinople from the Komnenan to the Palaiologan Period,' *Vizantijskij Vremennik* 55/2 (1998), pp. 31-40, reprinted in Jacoby's *Byzantium, Latin Romania and the Mediterranean* (mentioned above).

<sup>16</sup> D. Jacoby, 'The Jews of Constantinople and their demographic hinterland,' in *Constantinople and its Hinterland*, ed. C. Mango and G. Dagron (Aldershot, 1995), pp. 221-32.

<sup>17</sup> See for example A. Bon, *Le Péloponnèse byzantin jusqu'en 1204* (Paris, 1951), pp. 85-7; Ph. Argenti, *The Religious Minorities of Chios: Jews and Roman Catholics* (Cambridge, 1970); J.-M. Martin, *La Pouille du V<sup>e</sup> au XII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Rome, 1993), pp. 492-503; G. Prinzing, 'Zu den Minderheiten in der Mäander-Region während der Übergangsepoche von der byzantinischen zur seldschukisch-türkischen Herrschaft (11. Jh. - Anfang 14. Jh.),' in *Ethnische und religiöse Minderheiten in Kleinasien von der hellenistischen Antike bis in das byzantinische Mittelalter*, ed. P. Herz and J. Kobes (Wiesbaden, 1998), pp. 153-77.

<sup>18</sup> See N. de Lange, 'Jewish Sources for Byzantine Prosopography 1025-1204,' with an accompanying bibliography by J. Holo, in *The prosopography of Byzantium in the time of the Crusades*, ed. M. Whitby (forthcoming).

and particularly their legal skill. Whereas previously the synagogue was a meeting-place where, among other activities, the scriptures were read and expounded in Greek, and where apparently figurative art was part of the decoration, it became a place of worship with a fixed liturgy in Hebrew, Hebrew readings and hymns, and strictly aniconic decoration.<sup>19</sup>

Very little is known about the organisation of the synagogue as a community structure, or about the role of the rabbis and their relations with the wealthy families that must have continued to play a part in the leadership of the community.<sup>20</sup>

Nor is much known about the synagogue as a physical entity, a building with its attendant activities. Many late antique and early Byzantine synagogues have been excavated in Israel, but these belong to the earlier type mentioned above, i.e. they contain figurative art and Greek inscriptions. No medieval Byzantine synagogues have been excavated, so we know nothing about their architecture, their internal arrangement and decoration.<sup>21</sup> It is reasonable to suppose that Jews gathered in synagogues for thrice-daily prayers on weekdays, Sabbaths and festive days, but we have little idea of other uses to which the buildings were put, or what the worship was like (e.g. music). Studies of Romaniote (Byzantine rite) communities existing today may shed some light on the question.<sup>22</sup>

We do have a number of manuscript prayer books of the Romaniote rite, from which we can study the distinctive features of this rite by comparison with other medieval Hebrew prayer-rites. On the basis of these manuscripts Leon Weinberger has edited hundreds of hymns, and has incorporated their study into his literary history of Jewish hymnography.<sup>23</sup> Weinberger thinks it likely that the authors of these hymns served as congregational cantors, and even as rabbis.

## ORDINARY LIFE

Another area about which little is known is that of the ordinary life of Byzantine Jews. Again, archaeology is no help here, and apart from some stray references in Christian sources we have to rely on what we can glean

19 S. Schwartz locates the change in the sixth century: 'Rabbinization in the sixth century,' in *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman culture III*, ed. P. Schäfer (Tübingen, 2002), pp. 55–69. See also his *Imperialism and Jewish society, 200 B.C.E. to 640 C.E.* (Princeton, 2001). Bowman, *Jews of Byzantium*, p. 102, tacitly denies that any change took place, and prefers to see a continuity from the Roman through the Byzantine to the Ottoman period.

20 A document from Venetian Negroponte, possibly dating from c. 1300, tells of a conflict between a wealthy communal leader, who was also learned, and the man he appointed as "judge, scribe, butcher and teacher": see Bowman, *Jews of Byzantium*, doc. 30, pp. 234–40.

21 On architecture see I. Türkoglu, 'Basilical synagogues of Turkey – revival or survival of an ancient tradition?', *Bulletin of Judaean-Greek Studies* 31 (Winter 2002–2003), pp. 25–30.

22 See G. Drettas and S. Arom, 'A journey through Romanolot space,' *Bulletin of Judaean-Greek Studies* 27 (2000–2001), pp. 30–3.

23 L. J. Weinberger, *Jewish Hymnography: a literary history* (London/Portland, Oregon, 1998), and see bibliography therein.

from Byzantine Hebrew sources and occasional comments by Jewish visitors, who noted distinctive features of Byzantine Jewish life. From these sources we can gain some modest insight into the relations between men and women, and between rich and poor.<sup>24</sup>

Most Jewish men seem to have been occupied in commerce or manufacture of one sort or another. The production of textiles seems to have been a particularly important area of activity. We read of Jewish physicians. While most Jews lived in urban communities, there are hints of agricultural pursuits.<sup>25</sup>

Rabbinic *responsa* and other *halakhic* (legal) texts point to distinctive practices of the Byzantine Jews that were not known elsewhere in the Jewish world. Some of these display striking similarities to Christian practice, but it is not easy to determine whether they are due to direct borrowing or whether Jews and Christians alike conserved much older usages. For example a marriage celebration known as *stefanomata* conjures up the Christian use of wedding crowns, while the status of the dowry as the inalienable property of the bride's family belongs both to Byzantine and to Roman law.<sup>26</sup>

## CULTURAL ISSUES

### 1. Education

Excluded from Christian schools, Jews had their own educational system, divided in a tripartite system. In elementary schools boys learnt enough Hebrew to follow the prayers and Bible readings; those who proceeded to the intermediate stage were introduced to the Talmud and other rabbinic texts, while only a few went on to advanced study which would equip them for public office as rabbis and judges.<sup>27</sup>

There is to date unfortunately no full-scale general survey of Hebrew scholarship in Byzantium. Starr has a chapter in his book (covering the period down to the Fourth Crusade) headed "Intellectual interests and literary productions." Important in its day as a guide through poorly charted waters, it is now out of date and inadequate. The period after the Fourth Crusade is studied by Bowman, in his chapter entitled "Language and literature." Bowman, like Starr, writes around a collection of documents in translation, but he adds some useful general observations. He draws attention, for example, to the continuing engagement with Palestinian Judaism

24 Little has been written on this since S. Assaf, 'On the family life of Byzantine Jewry,' in *Samuel Krauss Festschrift* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem, 1937), pp. 169–77.

25 Bowman, *Jews of Byzantium*, pp. 117–21.

26 For these and other customs see Bowman, *Jews of Byzantium*, pp. 121–27.

27 N. de Lange, 'Jewish Education in the Byzantine Empire in the Twelfth Century,' in *Jewish Education and Learning*, ed. G. Abramson and T. Parfitt (Chur, 1994), pp. 115–28.

(with its strong homiletical and mystical interests) even at this late date and despite the pervasive influence of the Babylonian Talmud, and he remarks also on a strong interest in astronomy and Hebrew grammar. Bowman also devotes particular attention to religious poetry and to Karaite scholarship. The most recent survey is a chronologically ordered treatment paying special attention to the role of the Hebrew language, by the present author.<sup>28</sup>

## 2. Biblical study. Grammar

We have some Hebrew grammatical works based on the work of the Jerusalem grammarian Abu al-Faraj Harun; later Byzantine Karaite authors, such as Judah Hadassi, evince a knowledge of grammatical theories developed in Spain. At the same time it would probably be a mistake to suppose that there was no native tradition of textual and grammatical study in Byzantine Jewry. Discussing some Genizah fragments of otherwise unknown Bible commentaries, Richard Steiner has stated that they combine sophistication in the area of text criticism with backwardness in the area of grammar. The commentaries in question seem to derive from Rabbanite circles uninfluenced by Arabic language. Later Rabbanites, like the Karaites, were greatly influenced by the Spanish tradition of grammar.

The Byzantine commentators on the Bible have been insufficiently studied. Steiner has argued that historians of exegesis should recognise a Byzantine school alongside better-known schools such as the Andalusian or North French school, and that this Byzantine school may prove to be the "missing link" between the earlier Palestinian tradition and the medieval exegesis of Ashkenaz (north-western Europe) and Italy.<sup>29</sup> Later, western commentaries such as those of Rashi (Rabbi Shelomoh b. Isaac, 1040-1105) circulated in Byzantium, by far the most influential commentator being Abraham Ibn Ezra (c. 1092-1167).<sup>30</sup>

## 3. Talmudic and rabbinic studies

Rabbinic scholarship in Byzantine lands starts at an early date, and the region plays a pivotal role in spreading such studies both north-westwards to Ashkenaz and into the Mediterranean regions, and perhaps even to

<sup>28</sup> N. de Lange, 'A Thousand Years of Hebrew in Byzantium,' in *Hebrew Study from Ezra to Ben-Yehuda*, ed. W. Horbury (Edinburgh, 1999), pp. 147-61; cf. id., 'Hebrew Scholarship in Byzantium' (cited above).

<sup>29</sup> R. C. Steiner, 'A Jewish theory of biblical redaction from Byzantium: its rabbinic roots, its diffusion and its encounter with the Muslim doctrine of falsification,' *Jewish Studies, an Internet Journal* 2 (2003), pp. 123-67. [Available only on-line, at: <http://www.biu.ac.il/JS/JSIJ/2-2003/Steiner.pdf>.]

<sup>30</sup> See N. de Lange, 'Abraham Ibn Ezra and Byzantium,' in *Abraham Ibn Ezra y su Tiempo*, ed. F. Díaz Esteban (Madrid, 1990), pp. 181-92. See also *Bulletin of Judaic-Greek Studies* 17 (Winter, 1995), p. 20.

Spain. Byzantium was an important meeting place of the Palestinian and Babylonian schools, represented by the two Talmuds. The late Israel Ta-Shma, in a series of articles, drew attention to a variety of aspects of the connections between Byzantium and Ashkenaz.<sup>31</sup> There is room for a good deal more work on this particular subject, and indeed on rabbinic studies in Byzantium generally. One line of investigation passes through the study of the manuscript tradition of the Mishnah and Talmud (as well as their commentaries): it would be profitable to investigate the manuscripts copied in Byzantium, as well as those copied elsewhere which were used and in some cases annotated in Byzantium.

Although it is conventional to portray the Karaites as staunch opponents of the rabbinic tradition, several prominent Byzantine Karaites were keen students of rabbinics, and towards the end of the period some students frequented both Karaite and Rabbanite masters.<sup>32</sup>

## 4. Kabbalah and mysticism

Mysticism has very old roots in Byzantine Judaism as in Byzantine Christianity, and indeed direct influence in either direction is not to be ruled out. Maimonides (1135-1204) attributes the mystical treatises on the measurements of God's body (*Shi'ur Komah*) to "Greek preachers," and Byzantine Hebrew hymns refer to the tradition of speculation about the mystical cosmogony (*Ma'aseh Bereshit*), the divine palaces (*Heikhalot*) and the throne-chariot of God (*Ma'aseh Merkabah*). From the second half of the 13th century there is a strong kabbalistic activity.<sup>33</sup>

## 5. Poetry

*Piyyut* (synagogal poetry) is one of the richest veins in Byzantine Hebrew culture, and one that testifies to the high level of Hebrew education at least among the most favoured strata of society. We are fortunate to have editions of a large number of such compositions, thanks to the efforts of Leon Weinberger, who has published several volumes of *piyyutim* from Byzantium and neighbouring countries (in which the contribution of Karaite poets is not neglected). A large part of his book *Jewish Hymnography* is devoted to these regions, and his discussions of the various genres and individual poets are illustrated by translated excerpts, thus opening up this difficult but rewarding field to non-specialist scholars.

<sup>31</sup> See especially I. Ta-Shma, 'The history of cultural relations between Byzantine and Ashkenazi Jewry,' in *Me'ah She'arim*, ed. E. Fleischer et al. (Isadore Twersky memorial volume) (Hebrew) (Jerusalem, 2001), pp. 61-70.

<sup>32</sup> See for example J.-Ch. Attias, *Le commentaire biblique. Mordekhai Komtino ou l'héréméutique du dialogue* (Paris, 1991), pp. 67-89.

<sup>33</sup> See Weinberger, *Jewish Hymnography*, pp. 197-202; Bowman, *Jews of Byzantium*, pp. 156-61.

## 6. Philosophy, science, medicine

From the very beginning of Hebrew writing in Byzantium science is represented in an important group of medical writings from Italy. Little work has been done on the subsequent medical and scientific traditions, or on the history of philosophy in Byzantine Jewry. Again, one approach would be through the study of manuscripts, which preserve not only a number of unpublished writings, but also many indications of an interest in these subjects, particularly during the last century of Byzantine rule, when a large number of mathematical and astronomical manuscripts were copied.<sup>34</sup>

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

The subject studied in this article is already so vast that I have deliberately omitted mention of certain topics that might have been included. I have not referred to the large and growing bibliography on Byzantine south Italy, because this region is somewhat marginal both geographically and chronologically; however it is of great importance in terms of archaeological remains and of literary texts in Hebrew. Nor have I mentioned the Khazars, because they are really a separate entity, even if they have important connections with Byzantium and its Jewry. More radical was the decision to exclude any discussion of relations between the Jews and the Byzantine state on the one hand, and the Church on the other. The official status of the Jewish community and policy of the state towards it are clearly subjects of primary importance for Byzantine Jewish history; in a significant sense, however, their study falls within the domain of Byzantine rather than of Jewish historians. As for relations with the Church, and indeed Jewish-Christian relations at every level, these have been mainly studied through the abundant (one might almost say over-abundant) Christian literature in Greek by historians of Christian religion and literature. The Jewish materials for the study of Jewish attitudes to state and Church are more limited and much less well known, and very little work has been done on them.<sup>35</sup> This is certainly an area which is crying out for further investigation.

Other desiderata have been mentioned above. Probably the largest single need is for a comprehensive survey of extant Byzantine Jewish writings and a programme of edition and translation of those (the majority) that are only available in manuscript. Another basic project that would transform our knowledge of Byzantine Jewish culture is a full study of Hebrew

manuscripts copied or annotated in Byzantium. Byzantine culture generally is marked by transmission rather than innovation, and it is in the copying and study of written texts that Byzantine scholars made what they considered their real contribution to the intellectual tradition of Judaism. Many of the works originating in Jewish Byzantium are compilations rather than genuinely original creations. This fact has certainly contributed to a certain disdain for the Byzantine contribution in modern Jewish scholarship, too keen on "big names" and too little sensitive to the concept of tradition. Close study of the manuscripts will provide a basis for a better appreciation of this aspect of Byzantine Jewish intellectual life, as well as enhancing our understanding of Byzantine Jewish aesthetics. Religious piety is another topic that will be better understood when more work has been done on the Byzantine Jewish prayer rite and in particular on hymnography, which is the area in which Byzantine Jewish authors really distinguished themselves.

Once the main texts have been published and translated, it will be possible to study in greater detail the relationship between Byzantine Jews and their coreligionists in other parts of the world, as well as their relations with Byzantine Christians. At present such judgments as are made tend to be formed on the basis of a very narrow range of examples, often originating outside Byzantine Jewry and not necessarily expressing accurately their own sense of their place in the scheme of things. I expect that this work will confirm and extend the sense that Byzantium served as the gateway to Europe for Jewish culture coming from Israel, Iraq and Egypt, and indeed further afield (Iran and the silk route, for example). There are very close cultural links between Byzantium and Ashkenaz, and these deserve further study. As for relations between Jews and Christians, I believe that research will reveal significant differences from the conventional picture drawn mainly on the basis of materials from the Latin West.

I hope I have shown that Byzantine Judaism is a rich and fascinating area of study, and one that offers almost boundless scope for researchers.

<sup>34</sup> See for example D. Schwartz, 'Conceptions of Astral Magic Within Jewish Rationalism in the Byzantine Empire,' *Aleph* 3 (2003) pp. 165-211.

<sup>35</sup> See N. de Lange, 'Jews and Christians in the Byzantine Empire: Problems and Prospects,' in *Christianity and Judaism*, ed. D. Wood (Oxford, 1992), pp. 15-32; id., 'A fragment of Byzantine anti-Christian polemic,' *Journal of Jewish Studies* 41 (1990), pp. 92-100.