Jerusalem was not one of the great cities of the Middle East in antiquity. Its position, set well back from the coast, a stiff climb from the rich plain of Sharon, on the edge of the dry Judaean upland, inhibited its development into a metropolis. It was no more than a bloated fortress, occupying a natural acropolis, the Temple Mount, and several nearby defensible hills. It had been able to develop into a respectable urban settlement, thanks to a relatively abundant water supply. In human terms, it did not stand out from the mass of cities which studded the Middle East in its late-antique heyday. But its past history invested it with extraordinary status. For it was the meeting-place between the immaterial and material worlds. In the deep past God had directed his chosen people across the Jordan. He had aided Joshua as he led the army of Israel into their allotted land and conquered it, city by city. He had authorized David to bring the Ark of the Covenant into the city and to place it in the Holy of Holies in the Temple. Jerusalem was thus the central place in his providential scheme for mankind, in that early era when the Jews were the instruments for the realizing of his will on earth.

With each new stage in the development of monotheism, the status of Jerusalem was enhanced. It provided the setting for the drama which inaugurated the second era of human history. It was there that God incarnate, the single person of Christ, perfect in his divinity and perfect in his humanity, submitted to a human court, was convicted and sentenced to a lingering, painful death by crucifixion. It was there that, by the climactic act of the Resurrection, the godhead enmeshed in the flesh had opened the way to salvation for all mankind. It was no wonder then, that the supernatural aura of Jerusalem grew ever stronger, that places associated with the Passion were increasingly venerated, as this new, complex, proselytizing form of monotheism infiltrated the Roman empire, east and west. So intense was the devotion of Christians to the holy places that a direct link was soon established between them and the imperial authority, once Constantine had adopted the new faith. The legend of the discovery of the True Cross by his mother Helena, and the dispatch of a fragment to the new imperial city which bore Constantine’s name, provided the vital connection between the Gospel story and the role of the Christian Roman empire as the divinely authorized director of earthly affairs.

Jerusalem thus acquired unrivalled status as a sacred place in late antiquity. In religious terms, it was the *omphalos* of the earth, that central point from which the divine debouched into the human world. As holy city, it easily outranked the great
metropoleis of the Mediterranean, which, by virtue of their wealth and political dominance, had become the principal cities of the Christian world. If, breaking loose from the trammels of chronology, we look ahead for a moment into the third, Islamic era, in which a purer, more austere monotheism was disseminated throughout the world, we will see that Jerusalem’s role was yet more elevated, raised up to a cosmic level. A strange rock which wells up from the surface of the Temple Mount was identified as the place where God’s feet had rested when he created the whole visible universe. It was also scheduled to be the place where the Last Judgement would take place at the end of time.⁴

Despite its special providential role, despite the strength of its natural and man-made defences, Jerusalem was not impregnable. Its capture by Pompey in 63 BC, like its earlier sack by Nebuchadnezzar in 587–6, marked a key stage in its history and that of the Jews – the incorporation of the city and the people into the Roman empire, in preparation for the inauguration of a new era in the reign of Augustus with the Incarnation and the supersession of the Old by the New Testament.⁵ Over the next thousand years or so, four armed assaults were successfully made – by Roman legions against rebel Jewish forces (twice), by Persians in the course of the last Persian-Roman war (603–630), and by the First Crusade.⁶ Each caught the attention of a listening world and resonated down the years, none more so than its capture by the Persians in May 614. For it fell to the forces of a great rival power, devoted to an alien dualist and idolatrous faith. Damage was done to the holy places and there were atrocities in the course of the city’s sack which could be and were magnified in the propaganda subsequently pumped out by the Roman authorities.⁷ Worst of all – at least this became the central theme of Roman propaganda – the fragments of the True Cross were unearthed, torn away from their proper setting and deported to Ctesiphon-Veh Ardashir, capital of the Persian Sasanian empire.

The fall of Jerusalem came at a low point in the Roman empire’s fortunes, when its innermost line of defence on the Euphrates had been breached and Persian forces had conquered Syria, from which they had pushed south into Palestine and occupied

⁵ The most scholarly of Byzantine universal historians, George Syncellus, duly divided his history in two at 63 BC – Torgerson 2015, 93–117, at 97–111.
⁶ There was no Arab siege. The city submitted along with the rest of Palestine in 634 (Howard-Johnston 2010, 466).
⁷ A mass burial in a cave by the pool of Mamilla (or Maqella) outside the Jaffa Gate corroborates the massacre there reported by Strategius, c.11.2, ed. & trans. G. Garitte, La prise de Jérusalem par les Perses en 614, CSCO 202–3, Scriptores Iberici 11–2 (Louvain, 1960) and Expugnationis Hierosolymae A.D. 614 recensiones Arabicae, CSCO 340–1 & 347–8, Scriptores Arabici 26–9 (Louvain, 1973–4). Several hundred skeletons were found piled up in a cave which is fronted by a funerary chapel, with a mosaic inscription praying for the salvation and succour ‘of those whose names the Lord knows’. The latest of the 130 coins found in the cave was a gold solidus of the Emperor Phocas (602–610). See Reich 1996, 26–33, 60; Corpus inscriptionum Iudaeeae/Palaestinae, ed. H.M. Cotton et al., I.2 (Berlin, 2012), 245–246 (no. 869).
the provincial capital, Caesarea. While the commander-in-chief, Shahbaraz, showed good sense and kept his forces away from the holy city, content merely to send in a small control commission, feelings began to run high inside the city as Easter approached, eventually breaking out into riots in the course of which the members of the control commission were killed and a pogrom began. The Jews appealed for help. Shahbaraz had no choice but to intervene.⁸

He advanced swiftly. The Patriarch Zacharias was filled with foreboding and bewailed what he saw lying in store for his flock and the holy places. His policy of accommodation was in ruins. All he could do was to send off an emissary, Modestus, abbot of St Theodosius, to ask the Roman force at Jericho to launch a diversionary attack.⁹ The siege began at the very end of April when the Persians surrounded the city and began to construct siege-towers and artillery pieces. Inevitably damage was caused to sites in the vicinity. The size of the Persian army deterred the Roman force summoned from Jericho, which promptly withdrew. Their departure allowed the Beduin to raid widely, prompting a general evacuation of the monasteries in the Judean desert immediately to the east of Jerusalem. The mood plummeted inside Jerusalem. There were premonitions of disaster outside. A monk of St Sabas had a vision first of Christ on the Cross at Golgotha, turning away from the entreaties of the faithful, and then of the church of the Holy Sepulcher awash with mud. He was killed a few days later. Two prisoners, monks from Phoenicia, were watching the city, when they saw its protective angels leave under orders from above, sixteen or seventeen days into the siege. Three days later, probably on 17th May, the walls were breached by mining, by the Damascus Gate on the north-east side, and the Persians fought their way into the city.¹⁰

Shahrbaraz probably did what he could to restrain his men during the sacking of the city. When order was restored three days later, his chief concern was to identify and remove trouble-makers, the political and religious leadership headed by Zacharias, and those with useful skills. He also sought out the fragments of the Cross, probably so as to assuage the feelings of the large Christian communities of Mesopotamia who might otherwise become restive at the news from Palestine. He then withdrew, back to Caesarea, still reluctant to impose Persian rule directly on the holy city and most of Palestine. There was no question, though, of the Roman government’s neglecting the opportunity to make capital out of the episode. The only way to strike back at the enemy and to sustain spirits (and the regime’s standing) at home was by a propaganda campaign. Every stop was pulled out to blacken the Persians. Much

⁹ Ps.-Sebeos 115,23–5; Strategius cc.5,1–20.
was made of the capture and removal of the Cross, presented as a latter-day analogue to the Babylonian Captivity. Such propaganda was, however, double-edged. It could and did, indeed, cause damage to east Roman prestige in Latin Christendom, undermining the empire’s status as an empire, as a superordinate power.¹¹

Two years after the fall of Jerusalem, the Persians resumed their advance. They occupied the whole of Palestine in 616 and restored order and security. Two large raiding expeditions across Asia Minor in 617 – intended probably to distract the Romans – were followed, after a year’s preparations, by the invasion in massive force of Egypt in 619. Alexandria was captured and within little more than a year the whole of Egypt was brought under effective Persian control.¹² Then, in 622, came the final phase of the long war, the phase which would lead to the annihilation of the Roman empire. Notwithstanding the Emperor Heraclius’ bold but forlorn counteroffensive targeted on Transcaucasia in 624–625, the Persians retained the initiative and organized an attack on Constantinople and the metropolitan area, from east and west, by two Persian armies and a 80,000-strong host led by their ally, the khagan of the nomadic Avars.¹³ One of three contemporary sources for the ten-days siege which followed (29th July–7th August 626), a long sermon delivered probably within a month of the siege’s end by the Patriarch Sergius’ Syncellus, Theodore, latched on to an Old Testament episode which prefigured Constantinople’s survival, when Jerusalem weathered a concerted attack from Samaria and Assyria in the time of Ahaz. The awkward fact that Heraclius, like Ahaz, had sinned, could be passed over, since Heraclius, unlike Ahaz, was not in the city. Theodore’s sermon is a fine example of the art of giving historical depth and significance to contemporary events, and of avoiding the giving of offence. A certain superiority was imputed to Constantinople, since it had not fallen unlike Jerusalem later to Nebuchadnezzar.¹⁴

The turning point in the war came in August 626. Not only were the Avars thwarted by the entirely manmade fortifications of Constantinople, despite the array of advanced siege-engines which they brought to bear and waves of attack by land and, eventually, sea, but also one of the two Persian armies was defeated in northern Asia Minor and, even more ominous from the Persian point of view, the great power of the northern world, the Turkish khaganate, which controlled the steppes from the inner Asian frontiers of China to the Crimea, intervened on the Roman side, an army being dispatched across the Caucasus with an ultimatum instructing the Sasanian king, Khusro II, to withdraw from Roman territory and to return all prisoners of war, or

¹¹ An important source for the dissemination of this propaganda was Strategius’ account of the sack and its aftermath (cc.8–12). Cf. Flusin 1992, II, 159–172.
else face Turkish might. It was assuredly the grim prospect of war in the north rather than a last foolhardy thrust by Heraclius and his small expeditionary force across the Zagros and south against the Sasanian metropolitan region which triggered the successful palace revolution which dethroned Khusro, ended the fighting and opened the way for peace negotiations in spring 628.

Eventually, in a third round of negotiations with a third Sasanian regime, that of Khusro’s daughter Boran, terms for peace were agreed. They included the symbolically all-important return of the True Cross to Christian hands, those of Heraclius, and its restoration to its proper place in Jerusalem in a carefully choreographed ceremony on Wednesday 21st March 630.

How on earth is the modern observer, living in an irreligious age, to retroject himself into a distant time where notions about the supernatural role of Jerusalem were deeply embedded in the collective consciousness of Christians, Jews and, later, Muslims? How is one to breathe something of the charged atmosphere at the end of the greatest war between the Roman and Persian empires, as Heraclius prepared to restore the True Cross to its proper place on Golgotha? No contemporary could deny that God had intervened in human affairs with the most spectacular results. None, however eminent their position in the hierarchies of state or church, could emancipate themselves from the ambient thought-world. But ideas, hopes and fears, attitudes surely varied considerably between milieux and individuals. And there is no single source which can be used as an authoritative guide. Thus, we cannot simply extrapolate from the views expressed by George of Pisidia, who wrote a short poem about the restoration of the Cross but did not witness it in person. He may well have been more representative of contemporary views than usual when, ten days after the ceremony, the news reached Constantinople and the poem began to take shape in his mind. He seems to have been in a state of high excitement, his attention shifting hither and thither (like the eye of a spectator flitting over the procession) as different thoughts came into his head. But even in this comparatively artless poem, written, one suspects, in some haste, he avoids the obvious Biblical comparisons of Heraclius with Joshua and David, and introduces one with Jason (retrieving the golden fleece) which is unlikely to have crossed anyone else’s mind.

Still the imaginative leap must be made. We must strive to view events from within as well as without, with the aid of other extant accounts of the solemn ceremony which celebrated the triumph of the Romans as Christians, as agents of God’s will.

Heraclius waited at Hierapolis for the return of the delegation which he had sent to Ctesiphon.¹⁹ This distant heir of Constantine the Great (something advertised by the name which he gave his eldest son) readied himself to receive back the Cross which God, in his anger, had allowed to fall into Persian hands.²⁰ He had outdone Constantine. He had not merely threatened war but with the boldness of an Alexander had penetrated deep into the interior of the Persian empire.²¹ Both these images were in the air, but Heraclius preferred to portray himself more modestly as Pious Basileus in Christ, stripping off the other titles (Imperator, Augustus) and honorifics which exalted Roman imperial power. His authority was shown thus to be derived from God rather than (manipulated) human election.²² Like an Old Testament king, he had been acting as God’s agent in his campaigns. Just as God had encouraged the Israelites by sending down manna, he had given Heraclius’ men a sign of his favor on their entry into Persian territory in 624 when they saw what should have been a desiccated landscape bathed in unseasonal dew.²³ Heraclius had campaigned with all the tactical acumen of Joshua, achieving surprise by ambush and night march, and with the same God-sanctioned ruthlessness in victory. Like Joshua, he had conquered the holy land, although, in his case, the fighting had taken place far away.²⁴ It was therefore as much as Old Testament king as Roman emperor that he was going to take the Cross back to Jerusalem.

The instrument of degrading punishment had long since been transformed into the symbol of Christian victory.²⁵ For contemporary observers the wooden fragments of the original Cross were imbued with awesome supernatural power. When they described it as instrument of Christian victory, they were not simply speaking figuratively. The Cross became the inanimate pendant to Heraclius in the working out of God’s will on earth. It was guarantor of the safety of the whole civilized world for a contemporary Palestinian monk. Sophronius, future Patriarch of Jerusalem, at the time a refugee in north Africa, described it as destroyer of death and demons,

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grantor of life to mortals, in the anacreontic poem which he wrote to celebrate its return. In his anger, God had allowed the Persians to capture it as they rampaged over Roman territory, but the Cross had killed Khusro, “the generator of war, the evil king of evil, the cruel persecutor of sweet peace,” rolling that perpetrator of universal slaughter easily out of life.²⁶

George of Pisidia touched on this obvious theme. For him too the Cross was laden with power, a Christian analogue to the Ark of the Covenant which likewise belonged properly to the holy city. He too saw its removal by Khusro, described as the plaything/sport of error, as a punishment for sin. But it had been retrieved from the Persian furnace. Its wood had quenched Persian fire. The spiritual missiles it shot had caused internecine conflict. The Cross was the most precious, the most powerful of Christian relics. Universally venerated, its return to Golgotha could be universally celebrated by Christians.²⁷

Not by Jews, though. It is here that we touch on the grim underside of the celebrations. At each stage of its progress through Roman territory, the Cross was not only reminding Christians of what they had in common but of what the Saviour had suffered at the hands of the Jews. The Cross, as instrument of crucifixion, could not but rouse anti-Jewish feeling, could not but direct the collective Christian memory back to the ills inflicted on them by the Jews. There had been some active collaboration on the part of the Jews of Palestine at the time of the Persian invasion. But it was Persian intervention to stop the Jerusalem pogrom, the atrocities (much exaggerated but real) committed after the fall of the city, and the unusual license enjoyed by the Jews of the city over the following two years of indirect Persian rule, which had firmly cast the Jews as allies of the Persians. The return of the Cross, which had been torn with their help from the holy city, was bound to re-activate Christian rancor, to heighten tension wherever Jews and Christians lived side by side, to lead to violence on a greater or lesser scale.²⁸

The True Cross was received reverently by Heraclius at Hierapolis, probably towards the end of February 630. He had a large body of troops with him, representing the army which had, by its endeavors, recovered it. He was also accompanied by dignitaries, who formed a peripatetic court. He set off on a solemn progress south. Besides the Cross, he was taking back precious vessels belonging to the churches of Jerusalem which had been spirited out the city and kept safe in Constantinople.²⁹ He travelled south through Galilee, where, according to a plausible story retailed by Eutychius, he received a warm welcome from the Jews and promised that there would be no reprisals. However, the conversion, under pressure, of a rich Jew in whose house he stayed at Tiberias, did not augur well for the future, and, on his arrival at Jerusalem, Heraclius is said to have rescinded his promise when he saw with

²⁹ Ps.-Sebeos, 131.9–14.
his own eyes the mass grave of executed Christians at Maqella, just outside the western wall. That was probably the occasion for his declaration of a three-mile exclusion zone around the city, which is reported by Theophanes. Unequivocal evidence of anti-Jewish sentiment in high places at this time is provided by two well-placed observers: Sophronius ended his short poem with the wish that Jewish diatribes against the Cross might rebound against their heads, while George of Pisidia slipped in an aside calling on them to abandon their misguided ancestral faith.

Only the barest outlines can be recovered of the ceremony which took place at Jerusalem. The most informative source – an early medieval sermon known under the title of Reversio Sanctae Crucis – is, in essence, a miracle story. Whatever happened has been reworked, embellished and re-interpreted. It is hard to separate solid substance from elaboration and invention, save on a priori grounds. Still it is worth entertaining, at least as a possibility, the scenario which it suggests. As Heraclius, whose name is deformed into Gracchus, approaches, the people go out to meet him rejoicing, carrying palm leaves, candles and lights, singing hymns and psalms. He rides down the Mount of Olives and stops outside the Golden Gate on the east side of the Temple Mount, because, according to the Reversio, at that moment the gate was miraculously blocked and an angel instructed Heraclius to take off his imperial regalia. He obeys, and walks barefoot, clad in nothing save a loincloth, and, as the stones which have fallen miraculously rearrange themselves around the gate, enters the city, carrying the Cross.

There are two key points to this miracle story: the vice-gerent of God enters the city by the same route as Christ took on his way to the Passion; he discards his imperial robes and shoes, then passes through the gate and enters the city as a humble mortal, carrying the Cross. Risky it may be, but I see no reason to reject this picture. It may exaggerate the lengths to which the emperor went in his self-abasement but it does accord with an already documented downgrading of the emperor’s earthly authority. It may also be conjectured that the Golden Gate, a large and ornate vestibule with two domed passageways through it, was built to commemorate the ceremony. If its construction (known to antedate the Arab conquest) can be placed in the early

30 Eutychius’ notices about the Jews of Palestine (ed., M. Breydy, Das Annalenwerk des Eutychios von Alexandrien: Ausgewählte Geschichten und Legenden kompiliert von Sa‘id ibn Battriq um 935 A.D., CSCO 471, Scriptores Arabici 44 [Louvain, 1985], 127.10 – 129.14, trans. op.cit., CSCO 472, Script.Ar. 45 [Louvain, 1985], 107 – 109) are partially corroborated by Theoph. p. 328.15 – 23 de Boor. There was no question, it should be noted, of Heraclius’ expelling Jews with established residence from the city. The widespread unrest which such an act would have caused, would have greatly complicated the already difficult task of reimposing Roman authority across the Middle East. Unequivocal evidence for the presence of a large and influential Jewish community in Jerusalem shortly after the Arab conquest is provided by Ps.-Sebeos 139.25 – 140.22.
32 Reversio sanctae atque gloriosissimae crucis Domini nostri Jesu Christi, PL 110, cols. 131 – 134, at 133C-134C; see Borgehammar 2009.
33 But see Viermann 2021, 293 – 303.
seventh century, as is suggested by the style of its sculptural decoration, it must surely be dated after the end of the war, when defensive strength was no longer a vital necessity. A connection is also suggested by its alignment, more or less on the axis of the Holy Sepulcher, the destination of the procession led by Heraclius.⁴³

The emotions roused on Wednesday 21st March 630 as the procession made its way into the city before a large crowd of spectators are caught best by Ps.-Sebeos. ‘There was no little joy on that day as they entered Jerusalem. There was the sound of weeping and wailing; their tears flowed from the awesome fervor of the emotion of their hearts and from the rending of the entrails of the king, the princes, all the troops, and the inhabitants of the city. No one was able to sing the Lord’s chants from the fearful and agonizing emotion of the king and the whole multitude’.³⁵ The two great poles of the empire had come together. The Cross was in the hands of an emperor, who was, for the first time, visiting the holy city. It was an extraordinary conjunction which impressed itself deeply on the collective consciousness. No wonder George of Pisidia, invited Constantine to return and to applaud Heraclius and viewed the Cross as the Ark of the new dispensation.³⁶

Heraclius and the dignitaries with him led the way up onto the Temple Mount, then down into the city, along the Via Dolorosa to the complex of shrines enclosed in the church of the Holy Sepulchre.³⁷ It was there, at the small protuberant rock identified as Golgotha, that a small piece of public theatre was staged (if we can trust the report of it given by Nicephorus). Heraclius handed the reliquary containing the Cross over to Modestus, the senior churchman left in Jerusalem after the deportation of the Patriarch Zacharias in 614. Modestus inspected the seal and declared that it was intact. A hymn of thanksgiving was sung. The Cross was taken out of the reliquary, unlocked by the key which Modestus had kept, restored to its proper place on Golgotha and venerated by all who were there.³⁸

³⁶ Translatio reliquiarum S. Anastasii, c.1, ed. & trans. Flusin, Saint Anastase, I, 98–9; GP, In Restituzioneem, 49–63, 73–74. A visit by the last emperor to Jerusalem where he hands his crown back to God was to become a key event in the scenario of the last days presented in the late seventh century Apocalypse of Ps.-Methodius – ed. & trans. G.J. Reinink, Die syrische Apokalypse des Pseudo-Methodius, CSCO 540–1, Scriptores Syri 220–1 (Louvain, 1993) and B. Garstad, Apocalypse Pseudo-Methodius, An Alexandrian World Chronicle (Cambridge, Mass., 2012), 1–139.
³⁷ Shalev-Hurvitz 2015, 55–76.
The solemn, contrite mood which had gripped all participants and spectators at
this awesome ceremony probably lightened somewhat when it was over. Heraclius
resumed the demeanor of an emperor. Soon afterwards, possibly on the same day,
he appointed Modestus Patriarch in succession to Zacharias who had died in
exile. He stayed on for a while, conducting the everyday business of government.
He was still there when a bishop arrived from Persian Mesopotamia with a letter
from the new Nestorian Catholicos, Ishoyahb. He had time to visit and take pleasure
in the holy places, outside as well as inside Jerusalem. He bestowed largesse on the
patriarchate, returned the church plate which had been kept safe in Constantinople,
distributed alms to the poor and made grants to cover the cost of incense in the city's
churches. He also made plain his regard and respect for the whole body of Palestin-
ian monks, whose ascetic striving and prayers benefited all their fellow men.

Steps were also taken to enhance the new confidence engendered in Christians.
Modestus himself sponsored a new cult, that of St Anastasius the Persian martyr. The
Life which he commissioned was completed during his short tenure of the patriarch-
ate (between March and September 630). It provided an additional illustration of
the power of the Cross. For it was the news of the arrival of the Cross in Mesopotamia
which had set Anastasius on the road to conversion. And it provided an uplifting ex-
ample for the monks of Palestine and elsewhere. By the death for which he had striv-
en, inspired by voracious reading of the acts of the early Christian martyrs, Anastas-
sius had shown that martyrdom was still within man's reach in that late age. A Life,
however, could not by itself create an enduring cult. A shrine was needed to act as a
focal point, and that shrine should contain authentic relics for veneration by the
faithful. So one of the two monks who had accompanied Anastasius on his journey
towards death was sent back to Mesopotamia, on an officially sanctioned mission to
recover the martyr's body. He travelled out in the party of the Nestorian bishop who
had been negotiating with Heraclius and Modestus, and, with the backing of the
Catholicos (and some apparently supernatural help), managed to spirit the body
out of the monastery where it was already venerated, consoling the monks
with a small piece of it, thanking the Catholicos with another.

Rather more than a year after the restoration of the Cross, there was much rejoic-
ing when the martyr's body was brought back to Palestine. Large crowds turned out
to watch its arrival at the main cities, Tyre and Caesarea, on its circuitous route to
Jerusalem. Popular enthusiasm generated a subsidiary cult at Caesarea (paralleling
those which sprang up in Mesopotamia). The celebrations reached a climax on the
2nd of November 631 when the procession reached Jerusalem and the martyr's

39 Strategius, c.24.10; Translatio, c.2.3–8.
40 Translatio, c.1.7–2.8; Ps.-Sebeos, 131.21–23.
42 Translatio, c.2.8–5.6.
body was installed in the monastery which had sheltered him during his seven years of ascetic striving and earnest study.\textsuperscript{43}

Anti-Jewish sentiment was fanned by the religious fervor generated by these celebrations. There is no solid evidence of an official, empire-wide campaign of coerced baptism, but the imperial government made no move to protect its Jewish subjects. Programmed as it was to defend and propagate Christianity, it could not adopt an even-handed policy as the Persians had. For Jews, the ambient Christian world was becoming increasingly threatening. Pressure to accept Christianity grew stronger.\textsuperscript{44} Rabble-rousers were all too likely to cause trouble in the streets, and the local authorities might, in a surge of religious enthusiasm, introduce a campaign of conversion (as they did in north Africa in 632). In Jewish eyes, Heraclius’ image darkened and merged with that of the embodiment of evil, Armilus or Hermolaos (a combination of Romulus and Eremolaos, ‘Waster of Peoples’), son of Satan and a stone statue, who would be a fierce, merciless adversary of the Jews on the eve of the last days.\textsuperscript{45}

Christians, for their part, regarded Jews as misguided adherents of an outmoded faith. They tested their attachment by applying social pressure to convert. They also prised the Old Testament away from their possessive grasp, taking current events to have been prefigured, like the Gospel story itself, in the Biblical past. The final step in this assault on Judaism would have been for Christians to appropriate the Temple Mount, which had been left derelict throughout late antiquity. The construction of the Golden Gate, if it can be securely associated with Heraclius, and the contemporary, similarly decorated double gate on the south side, may perhaps be taken as a first move in a staged appropriation of the site. Then, if the Reversio is to be believed, the Cross itself was carried in procession over the Temple Mount, a ritual act of great importance in which the assembled dignitaries of the Christian empire implicitly asserted a claim to the site. It may be possible to discern a third planned move, namely permanent occupation, if we attend carefully to the clues left by an extraordinary artefact of a later age.

The Joshua Roll is an archaizing illuminated manuscript, securely dated to the middle of the tenth century. Fifteen sheets of parchment were glued together to form a roll, just over 10.5 m long and 30 – 31.5 cm high. It presents a continuous picture frieze, which illustrates Joshua’s campaigns of conquest in the holy land (I Joshua 1 – 12, of which the first and last chapters are not covered in the roll which is in-

\textsuperscript{43} Translatio, cc.5.6 – 6.18.
complete). Short excerpts from the Biblical text act as captions. The action is set in an illusionistic landscape, individual episodes being separated by trees, steep hillsides, and pieces of classical architecture. Personifications, familiar in late-antique secular art, materialize from time to time. The Joshua Roll looks out of place in the tenth century: its form, a roll, is classical (as against the medieval codex) and the lines of text run parallel to the main axis of the visual field (as in antiquity), rather than descending vertically (as in the middle ages); style and iconography are equally redolent of late antiquity. It seems virtually certain that it is a tenth century copy of an earlier illustrated roll, faithful save for a few lacunae in the captions (where the text in the original was illegible) and some parallel pictorial errors (betraying misunderstanding of minor iconographic details).

The motivation behind so extensive an illustration of Joshua’s campaigns was surely contemporary relevance. They were taken to prefigure parallel military feats in the Christian era which had a similar result, conquest of the holy land. Of the two historical episodes which spring to mind, John Tzimiskes’ single, swift thrust towards Jerusalem in 975 can be ruled out, because the extant Joshua Roll is a mere facsimile of an earlier roll (and, insofar as it can be dated on stylistic grounds, appears to predate Tzimiskes’ campaign). That leaves Heraclius’ Persian campaigns as the likely latterday analogue to those of Joshua and the religious celebration of victory at Jerusalem as the occasion for its production.

What, though, was the intended function of the original roll? To judge by the later copy, it was not a finished work – the rendering of figures and settings is spare, executed with a handful of colors. If anything, it looks like a cartoon for a larger, monumental work. There is indeed a sculptural quality about the frieze of figures, which recalls the traditional Roman triumphal column. It is but a small step, from these widely canvassed hypotheses of art historians, to conjecture that the original Joshua Roll was a cartoon, commissioned by Heraclius, for a triumphal column to be erected in Jerusalem to commemorate the victory of the Christian empire with the same combination of biblical iconography and classical styles as was used in the David Plates.

It is a rather larger step to conjecture that the chosen site lay on the Temple Mount, but that was where the statement of Christian victory would be most visible, that was where the beginning of new era of Christian solidarity and dominance could be publicly declared to greatest effect. A surge of Christian confidence at the end of the great war may, on these conjectures, have emboldened the authorities of state and church to embark on a final act in the long process of Christianization of the Near East – the full incorporation of the holiest of Jewish pla-

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46 Wander 2012, 17–82.
48 Dalton 1906, 1–24, at 1–13, 23–24 (circumstances of discovery and other items concealed); Dodd 1961, no. 58–66 (stamps and date); Weitzmann 1979, 475–483 (the best short description, save for the identification of the covenant of David and Jonathan as the scene depicted on the most problematic of the small plates); Wander 1973, 89–104 (full analysis of iconography).
ces into the Christian city of Jerusalem. The Joshua Column would presumably have been followed by a larger building program. Discarding hindsight, and staring forward into a murky future from the year 630, we might pick out the dim outline of a massive domed structure or a great basilica or a complex of both standing on the Temple Mount, built as a focal point for the whole of Christendom in what was hoped would be a new era of unity ...

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