

A REVIVAL IN JEWISH APOCALYPTIC? CHANGE AND CONTINUITY IN THE SEVENTH-EIGHTH CENTURIES WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO *PIRQE MASHIAH*

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The seventh century is generally considered to be a critical period in the development of apocalypticism within Judaism(s) of Late Antiquity, with a number of apocalyptic tractates produced as a response to the political turmoil of the Persian and Arab conquests of the eastern Mediterranean. These conquests were regarded as a sign of the messianic era and the coming future age, which would be a time of restoration and/or reward for the Jewish people. *Pirqe Mashiah* is an apocalyptic midrash from Palestine and represents a response to this political turmoil. The compilation is of importance for highlighting elements of both change and continuity in the development of Jewish apocalypticism, drawing on a number of older traditions in outlining its apocalyptic response to the Arab conquests.

Jewish apocalyptic literature is often described as benefiting from a revival in Late Antiquity and particularly from the seventh century when political events, including the Persian and then the Arab conquests of Jerusalem, were regarded as a sign of the messianic era and the coming age. This so called ‘revival’ is highlighted, perhaps most famously, by *Sefer Zerubbabel* and *Sefer Eliyyahu* and much scholarly attention has been given to these legendary works.¹ However, in order to raise the profile of other important Jewish apocalypses from the seventh and eighth centuries,² the focus in this chapter will be on developments in Jewish apocalypticism as highlighted particularly by *Pirqe Mashiah*, an apocalyptic midrash from Palestine during this period.³

¹ For some select key works, see Martha Himmelfarb, ‘Sefer Zerubbabel’, in David Stern and Mark Mirsky (eds.), *Rabbinic Fantasies: Imaginative Narratives from Classical Hebrew Literature* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1990), pp. 67-90, Martha Himmelfarb, ‘The Mother of the Messiah in the Talmud Yerushalmi and Sefer Zerubbabel’, in Peter Schäfer (ed.), *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture, III* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), pp. 369-89, Martha Himmelfarb, ‘Sefer Eliyyahu: Jewish eschatology and Christian Jerusalem’, in Kenneth G. Holum and Hayim Lapin (eds.), *Shaping the Middle East: Jews, Christians, and Muslims in an Age of Transition, 400-800 C.E.* (Bethesda, MD: University Press of Maryland, 2011), pp. 223-238 and her various studies on the subject, David Biale, ‘Counter-History and Jewish Polemics Against Christianity: The Sefer Toldot Yeshu and the Sefer Zerubavel’, *Jewish Social Studies* n.s. 6 (1999), pp. 130-45, Wout J. van Bekkum, ‘Jewish Messianic Expectations in the Age of Heraclius’, in Gerrit J. Reinink and Bernard H. Stolte (eds.), *The Reign of Heraclius (610-641): Crisis and Confrontation* (Leuven: Peeters, 2002), pp. 95-112, Joseph Dan, ‘Armilus: the Jewish Antichrist and the origins and dating of the Sefer Zerubbabel’, in Peter Schäfer and Mark Cohen (eds.), *Toward the Millennium; Messianic Expectations from the Bible to Waco* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), pp. 73-104 and Alexei M. Sivertsev, *Judaism and Imperial Ideology in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

² A large number of apocalyptic midrashim have been preserved by Adolph Jellinek, *Bet ha-Midrash* (Jerusalem: Bamberger & Wahrmann, 1938²), including *Sefer Zerubbabel* (BHM 2:54-57), *Otot ha-Mashiah* (BHM 2:58-63), *Sefer Eliyyahu* (BHM 3:65-68), *Pirqe Mashiah* (BHM 3:68-78) and *Nistarot R. Shimon ben Yohai* (BHM 3:78-82) amongst others, and a selection of these have recently been translated by John C. Reeves, *Trajectories in Near Eastern Apocalyptic: a postrabbinic Jewish apocalypse reader* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2006).

³ The primary printed edition is that of Adolph Jellinek, *Bet ha-Midrash* 3:68-78 (Jerusalem: Bamberger & Wahrmann, 1938²), and on which all subsequent printed editions are based. A number of manuscripts of *Pirqe Mashiah* have been identified: 1) Die Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich (BSB), Cod.Hebr. 222, folios 36b-46b, which is dated to the 15th century; 2) Bibliothèque de l’Alliance israélite universelle, Paris, catalogued as AIU H 178 A, folios 137r-142v and dated to the 17th century; and 3) a fragment consisting of two folios of consecutive text in the Cairo Genizah, Taylor-Schechter Collection, Old

Pirqe Mashiah is one of a diverse array of apocalyptic texts associated with the political upheavals following the rise of Islam. The text contains a number of eschatological teachings, including descriptions of the glorification of Jerusalem, the Temple, the Messiah and the events accompanying his arrival, and Eden and Gehinnom. These traditions are supplemented with historical allusions to demonstrate that the major political changes under Arab rule from the seventh century onwards are a sign of the apocalyptic end of time. The compilation is of particular interest for its allusions to events of the seventh century, and for its perspective on relations between Jews, Christians and Muslim Arabs in this period. In this regard, it contains some cryptic references to the 'minim', provides detailed descriptions of the role and deeds of the symbolic biblical enemy Edom, and, more explicitly, outlines perceptions of the views and actions of the Arabs (ערבים) in the text. In addition, the transmission of traditions in *Pirqe Mashiah* highlights the development of eschatological ideas throughout the classical corpus of rabbinic material as found in Midrash, Talmud and Targum, and also contains motifs that can be compared with the apocalypses of the Second Temple Period. As such, *Pirqe Mashiah* raises important questions about the development of Jewish apocalypticism both in terms of the traditions that it preserves, but also how these motifs and concepts are developed in light of the contemporary political situation from the seventh century onwards. Ultimately, *Pirqe Mashiah* represents a Jewish apocalyptic response to the Arab conquests and subsequent rule, which are viewed as a sign that the end of time was near, and that this would be a time of redemption for the Jewish people.

The text is a compilation of a number of midrashic and talmudic traditions. However, although a compilation, the traditions are collected and arranged to present a clear eschatological chronology in the form of a continuous narrative. The text begins with a meeting between R. Yose and Elijah. In the discussion that follows, the significance of Torah for the Jewish people is explained, which leads on to teachings concerned to glorify Israel, Jerusalem, the Temple, God and the Messiah. Then follows a description of the events signalling the end of the current age, which includes a number of historical allusions intended to illustrate how the events of the redactor's day are a sign of the end of time. The focus is particularly on the vengeance that God will take against the enemies of Israel, which culminates with the fall of the ancient enemy Edom. Following the fall of Edom, the events of the messianic era are described, with particular emphasis on the victory of Israel. Elijah and the Messiah ben David arrive, but the Jewish people do not recognize them as their saviours. Following a number of miracles, the Jewish people accept the identity of the Messiah ben David and he kills the enemies of his people in Jerusalem. The Day of the Lord ensues, after which the Messiah conducts the resurrection of the dead. This is followed by the Day of Judgement and the opening of Eden and Gehinnom by God. The next age or the world to come is then the focus of *Pirqe Mashiah*. All Israel will be in the Garden of Eden feasting with God whilst the nations of the world are made to watch their vindication. The righteous will be rewarded and there is nothing but prosperity, both in terms of the land and children, for Israel in the next age. The compilation concludes with a series of consolatory biblical proof texts, mainly from the prophets, intended to show that it has been prophesied in Scripture that all these things shall indeed happen for Israel.

Series, Box A45.6 (T-S A45.6), which has been edited by Simon Hopkins, *A Miscellany of Literary Pieces from the Cambridge Genizah Collections* (Cambridge: CUP, 1978), pp. 11-14. References to *Pirqe Mashiah* in this chapter are taken from the BSB manuscript unless otherwise stated. The author is currently preparing a new edition of the compilation.

Pirqe Mashiaḥ is a very rabbinic apocalypse.⁴ It is not pseudepigraphical and is not presented as a vision. It clearly takes a midrashic approach through the use of rabbinically attributed traditions, rabbinic parables, hermeneutical principles such as *gal ve-homer* and *gematria*, and scriptural proof texts that are introduced by the *שנאמר* construction.⁵ Interestingly, the vast majority of the proof texts come from the Prophetic books and the Psalms, and the compilation reads as a detailed narrative on the Messiah and the future age. However, it does contain an eschatological timetable, and the typical shift from signs of the end of the current age to a description of the prophetic future often found in political apocalypses.⁶ In particular, in *Pirqe Mashiaḥ*, this is indicated by a series of apocalyptic events, which include the aforementioned historical allusions culminating in Arab control of the Temple Mount, at which point the Day of the Lord ensues and the transition to the future world begins.⁷ Thus, *Pirqe Mashiaḥ* suggests that redemption is imminent, connected to serious (sometimes supernatural) upheavals in the religious, political and natural world, and seeks a biblical basis for such assertions. Revelation in the broad sense is found throughout the text, from the revelation that the events of the time are a sign of the end to the revelation of the nature of the future world. In the specific terminology of revelation, the verb *גלה* (reveal) is used of the appearance

⁴ Moshe Idel drew a contrast between ‘popular apocalypticism and more elitist views’, Moshe Idel, ‘Jewish Apocalypticism: 670-1670’ in Bernard McGinn (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism: Volume Two Apocalypticism in Western History and Culture* (New York: Continuum, 1998), pp. 204-237 (227). More recently, Martha Himmelfarb has argued that *Sefer Zerubbabel* reflects traditions from popular Judaism rather than the rabbinic movement, highlighted by the lack of rabbinic legal debate in *Sefer Zerubbabel*, which contains allusions to scripture with few explicit quotations. This, she claims, is in contrast to *Sefer Eliyyahu* which Himmelfarb describes as ‘consciously imitating rabbinic literature’ and is more influenced by rabbinic styles and theological approaches; see Martha Himmelfarb, ‘Sefer Zerubbabel and popular religion’, in Eric F. Mason, et al. (eds.), *A Teacher for All Generations; Essays in Honor of James C. VanderKam*, vol.2 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), pp. 621-634, Martha Himmelfarb, ‘Revelation and Rabbinization in *Sefer Zerubbabel* and *Sefer Eliyyahu*’, in Philippa Townsend and Moulie Vidas (eds.), *Revelation, Literature, and Community in Late Antiquity* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), pp. 217-236, Himmelfarb, ‘Sefer Eliyyahu: Jewish eschatology and Christian Jerusalem’, pp. 223-238. In contrast, *Pirqe Mashiaḥ* represents a rabbinic apocalypse that is thoroughly embedded in rabbinic hermeneutics and ideological emphases. The compilation represents yet another example of style and approach in the broad spectrum of Jewish apocalypticism from the seventh-eighth centuries, and highlights the far reaching interest in apocalypticism in Jewish society of this period.

⁵ There are well over 100 proof texts within the BSB manuscript (itself consisting of 11 folios), which is a strong indication of the midrashic style of the compilation. For an overview of midrashic hermeneutics, see I. Heinemann, *Darkhei ha-Aggadah* (Jerusalem, 1954) [in Hebrew] and more recent works such as Günter Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 2nd edition (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), pp. 17-34 for lists of rabbinic hermeneutical principles, and pp. 254-268 on midrash, Gary Porton, ‘Exegetical Techniques in Rabbinic Literature’, *Review of Rabbinic Judaism* 7 (2004), pp. 27-51 and Rimon Kasher, ‘The Interpretation of Scripture in Rabbinic Literature’, in Martin Mulder and Harry Sysling (eds.), *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), pp. 547-594.

⁶ As highlighted of apocalypses by Paul Alexander, ‘Medieval Apocalypses as Historical Sources’, in Paul Alexander, *Religious and Political History and Thought in the Byzantine Empire* (London: Variorum, 1978), pp. 997-1018. See also Moshe Idel who describes apocalypticism as pointing to events that both separate and connect the different ages, Idel, ‘Jewish Apocalypticism’, p. 231. In addition, Bernard McGinn argues that ‘General eschatology becomes apocalyptic when it announces details of the future course of history and the imminence of its divinely appointed end in a manner that manifestly goes beyond the mere attempt to interpret the Scriptures’, Bernard McGinn, ‘Apocalypticism in the Middle Ages: An Historiographical Sketch’, *Mediaeval Studies* 37 (1975), pp. 252-286 (253).

⁷ BSB Cod.Hebr. 222, 39b; [see p.? in this article](#).

of the Messiah,⁸ regarding the revelation of the hidden things of the land,⁹ in describing the revelation of a secret which is identified as ‘the sign of the covenant’ and may well be the secret of the time of redemption,¹⁰ and God is revealed on the Mount of Olives on the Day of the Lord.¹¹ Thus, the apocalyptic nature of *Pirqe Mashiah* is evident.

It is difficult to determine the location in which *Pirqe Mashiah* has been produced, but based on instances of redaction in the compilation, Palestine is a likely locale. The text describes a messianic future centred on ‘the land of Israel’ and particularly in Jerusalem. Clearly, Jewish apocalyptic writings generally focus on Jerusalem as the place of final redemption, but the redactor also has knowledge of places in Palestine with specific reference to Jerusalem, Tiberias, the Mount of Olives, Tyre, Arabah and Sepphoris. Importantly, however, there is a description of the Sea of Tiberias on the Day of the Lord, which parallels a tradition found in BT *Sanhedrin* 95b, describing the companies that march across Israel to conquer Jerusalem.¹² In BT *Sanhedrin* 95b, however, there is no reference to Tiberias and its waters. This provides further evidence of a specific interest in this location, a well-known centre of rabbinic authority, in *Pirqe Mashiah*.¹³ Indeed, the rabbis cited in the text, where identifiable, all taught at Tiberias or Sepphoris.¹⁴ A cumulative argument therefore suggests a Palestinian origin for the compilation. The question of provenance aside, there is a concern to glorify Jerusalem throughout the text both as the earthly location of the major battles at the end of time, but also through detailed descriptions of the heavenly city’s extensive proportions in the future age. As is widely transmitted in rabbinic traditions, the eschatological rebuilt Jerusalem is a symbol of the restoration of the Jewish people.¹⁵ What is clear is that Palestine and particularly Jerusalem is the focus of the eschatological drama as the sacred space where events of the end will play out.¹⁶

⁸ BSB Cod.Hebr. 222, 38a: וּשְׁנֵי שָׁמַיִם בָּהּ וּנְתַגְלֶה בָּהּ כָּל הַמַּלְכוּת 'and the year when the Messiah comes [lit. the year which the Messiah is in it] then he will be revealed in all the kingdoms’.

⁹ BSB Cod.Hebr. 222, 40a: הַנֶּס הַרְבִּיעִי מְגַלֶּה לָהֶם גִּיזַת הָאָרֶץ 'the fourth miracle reveals to them the hidden things of the land’.

¹⁰ BSB Cod.Hebr. 222, 40a: הַנֶּס הַשְּׁבִיעִי יְגַלֶּה לָהֶם הַסֵּדֶר שֶׁנָּהוּ זֹאת אוֹת הַבְּרִית 'the seventh miracle: he will reveal to them the secret, as it is said, *This is the sign of the covenant* (Genesis 9:12)'; cf. BT *Sanhedrin* 99a.

¹¹ BSB Cod.Hebr. 222, 41b: וְשֶׁם נִגְלָה עֲלֵיהֶם הַקַּב"ה בְּכַבוֹדוֹ 'and the Holy One, blessed be He, is revealed to them there in his glory’.

¹² BSB Cod.Hebr. 222, 41a: וְנִחְלְקוּת לְשֵׁלשׁ כֶּתוּבַת כֶּת רֵאשׁוֹנָה שׁוֹתָה כָּל מִימֵי טַבְרִיָּה שְׁנִיָּה שׁוֹתָה שְׁמֵרִים. שְׁלִישִׁית. וְנָחֲלוּ וְעָבְרוּ בְרִגְלָה וְיֵאָמְרוּ אִישׁ לְרֵעֵהוּ הַמְּקוֹם הַזֶּה שֶׁל מִי הוּא 'and they will be divided into three companies. The first company drinks all the waters of Tiberias. The second drinks the dregs. The third will cross over on foot, and each man will say to his neighbour: “To whom does this place belong?”'; cf. BT *Sanhedrin* 95b and the description of the forces of Sennacherib in his campaign against the Israelites, which is compared to the forces of Gog and Magog at the end of time.

¹³ Tiberias is well known from the third century as a key rabbinic centre; see Seth Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish society, 200 B.C.E. to 640 C.E.* (Princeton, N.J.; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001), Catherine Hezser, *The Social Structure of the Rabbinic Movement in Palestine* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), esp. pp. 157-184, Aharon Oppenheimer, *Between Rome and Babylon: studies in Jewish leadership and society* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), Ben Tsiyon Rozenfeld, *Torah Centers and Rabbinic Activity in Palestine, 70-400 CE: history and geographic distribution* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

¹⁴ The rabbis that can be identified in the text taught at either Sepphoris or Tiberias, namely: R. Yose; R. Eleazar b. Jacob; R. Yohanan; R. Hiyya bar Abba; and R. Shimon b. Laqish.

¹⁵ Cf. Sifre Deuteronomy 352, Targum Neofiti Genesis 28:17, Genesis Rabbah 68:12, 69:7, Pesiqta Rabbati 30:3, 39:2, BT *Pesahim* 88a, *Pirqe de Rabbi Eliezer* 35, Targum Pseudo-Jonathan Genesis 28:11, 28:17, Tanhuma Buber *Wayese* 9, Midrash on Psalms 78:6, 81:2.

¹⁶ See Avraham Grossman, ‘Jerusalem in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature’, in Joshua Prawer and Hagai Ben-Shammai (eds.), *The History of Jerusalem: The Early Muslim Period, 638-1099* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), pp. 295-310 for the significance of Jerusalem at the end of time. Moshe Idel notes of medieval Jewish apocalypticism that it is primarily centred on Jerusalem and Rome, such that ‘Jewish apocalypticism, more than its messianism, is topocentrically oriented. It involves

Apocalyptic texts are often composed at a time of political turmoil, with the writer or redactors trying to explain the events of their day. However, when examining an apocalyptic work for historical information, the first approach must always be one of caution and scepticism as there are a number of well documented difficulties in isolating and identifying descriptions of historical events in what is not primarily intended to be a historical document.¹⁷ In *Pirqe Mashiah*, despite a clear overall eschatological chronology, the link between allusions and historical events is frequently either not explicit or chronologically coherent and is bound up with much apocalyptic terminology that cannot be tied to any historical events, such as through vague reference to the fall of cities, earthquakes and troubles. *Pirqe Mashiah* does not try to present a history of the period, but rather mentions key specific events that allow the audience to understand that the traditions refer to the time in which they are living. Undoubtedly, some allusions in the text closely resemble common apocalyptic motifs,¹⁸ however, the clues to contemporary events are found in a number of *names and places* mentioned that are not commonly found in the apocalyptic genre. In particular, the redactor of *Pirqe Mashiah* specifically refers to the Arabs (ערבים) in Jerusalem in the context of the fall of Edom, which is the common pseudonym for Byzantium in Jewish texts of this period.¹⁹ A campaign against Alexandria by a 'great king' is mentioned, which may allude to the conquest of Alexandria either by the Persians in c.616-620 CE, or the Arabs in 642 CE.²⁰ The compilation also explicitly refers to wars between the Persians and Arabs as a sign of the end.²¹ Although appropriate caution is necessary, the

dislocation, returning, immigrations of masses, battles over sacred space', Idel, 'Jewish Apocalypticism', p. 214.

¹⁷ Alexander, 'Medieval Apocalypses as Historical Sources', pp. 997-1018.

¹⁸ For example, the 'king of fierce face' of Daniel 8:23; BSB Cod.Hebr. 222, 39a: 'ומלך עז פנים יעמוד' and a king of fierce face will arise'.

¹⁹ See Gerson Cohen, 'Esau as Symbol in Early Medieval Thought', in Alexander Altmann (ed.), *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), pp. 19-48, Wout J. van Bekkum, 'The Hidden Reference: The Role of Edom in Late Antique and Early Medieval Jewish Hymnography', in Alberdina Houtman, Albert de Jong and Magda Misset-van de Weg (eds.), *Empsychoi Logoi – Religious Innovations in Antiquity: Studies in Honour of Pieter Willem van der Horst* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), pp. 527-43, and Helen Spurling, 'The Biblical Symbol of Edom in Jewish Eschatological and Apocalyptic Imagery', in Angel Urban and Juan Pedro Monferrer-Sala (eds.), *Sacred Text: explorations in lexicography* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2009), pp. 271-299.

²⁰ BSB Cod.Hebr. 222, 39a: 'ומלך גדול יצא על אלכסנדריאה במחנה' and a great king shall go forth against Alexandria with a camp'. Sources for the conquest of Alexandria by the Persians are limited; cf. C. de Boer (ed.), *The Chronicle of Theophanes* (Leipzig, 1883), p. 301, and I. Guidi (ed.), *The Anonymous Chronicle*, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 3.4 (Paris, 1903). For a discussion of the sources, see James Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses to a World Crisis: historians and histories of the Middle East in the seventh century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), esp. p. 440 note 16. On the Arab Conquest of Alexandria, see especially R.H. Charles (trans.), *Chronicle of John, Bishop of Nikiu: translated from Zotenberg's Ethiopic text* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1916). See also Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses to a World Crisis*, esp. pp. 469-470, notes 27-31, Alfred J. Butler, *The Arab Conquest of Egypt and the Last Thirty Years of the Roman Dominion*, 2nd edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), John Marlowe, *The Golden Age of Alexandria: From its Foundation by Alexander the Great in 331 BC to its Capture by the Arabs in 642 AD* (London: Gollancz, 1971), H. Heinen, 'Das spätantike Ägypten (284 – 646 n. Chr.)', in Martin Krause (ed.), *Ägypten in spätantik-Christlicher Zeit: Einführung in die koptische Kultur* (Wiesbaden: L. Reichert, 1998), pp. 35-56, P.M. Sijpesteijn, 'The Arab Conquest of Egypt and the Beginning of Muslim Rule', in Roger S. Bagnall (ed.), *Egypt in the Byzantine World* (Cambridge: CUP, 2007), pp. 437-55, Robert Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1997), esp. pp. 152-156 and Hugh Kennedy, *The Great Arab Conquests: how the spread of Islam changed the world we live in* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2007).

²¹ BSB Cod.Hebr. 222, 38a: 'מלך פרס מתגרה במלכה של ערביאה' 'the king of Persia will fight against the king (emendation of fem. מלכה) of Arabia'.

historical allusions in the compilation are a first and important indication of the dating of *Pirqe Mashiah* to the seventh – eighth centuries.²²

One of the most interesting yet obscure sections of *Pirqe Mashiah* takes the form of a dialogue between the Arabs and the Jewish people over ownership of the Temple Mount:

וישראל אומרים למלך הערבים בית המקדש שלנו הוא קה הכסף והזהב והניה בית המקדש ומלך הערבים אומר אין לכם במקדש הזה כלום אבל אם אתם בוחרים לכם בראשונה קורבן כמו שהייתם עוסקים מקדם וגם אנחנו מקריבים ומי שמתקבל קרבנו נהיה כולנו אומה אחת. וישראל מקריבין ואינם מתקבלין לפי שהשטן מקטרג לפני הקב"ה ובני קדר מקריבין ומתקבלין שנ' כל צאן קדר יקבצו לך באותה שעה הערביים אומרים לישראל בואו ותאמינו באמונתינו וישראל משיבין אותם אם תהרגו אותנו ואנו הורגים ונהרגים אין אנו כופרים בעיקר באותה שעה הרבות נשלפות.
(BSB Cod.Hebr. 222, 39b)

And Israel will say to the king of the Arabs: "The house of the sanctuary is ours. Take the silver and gold, but leave the house of the sanctuary". And the king of the Arabs will say: "There is not anything for you in this sanctuary, but if you choose for yourselves a sacrifice like you used to do before in former days, then also we will offer a sacrifice, and whoever's sacrifice is accepted, we will all become one people". And Israel will offer a sacrifice, but it will not be accepted because Satan will bring charges before the Holy One, blessed be He, but the sons of Kedar will offer a sacrifice, and it will be accepted, as it was said, All the flocks of Kedar will be gathered to you (Isaiah 60:7). At that moment the Arabs will say to Israel: "Come and believe in our faith", but Israel will answer them: "If you try to kill us, then we will kill or be killed, but we will not deny the principle of (our) religion". At that moment swords will be drawn.

This passage raises a number of interesting points, but is primarily useful for what it shows about the perspective of the redactor and the way that they have chosen to represent the Arabs. First, the Arabs are described as being in control of Jerusalem. Thus, the material has most likely been redacted after the Arab conquest of Jerusalem in 638 CE. Indeed, the passage just cited contains explicit reference to the Arabs, instead of using the expected pseudonym 'sons of Ishmael', as found in other apocalyptic traditions, both Jewish – such as *Pirqe de Rabbi Eliezer* 30, 32 and *Nistarot Rabbi Shimon ben Yohai* – and Christian – for example in the Armenian *History*

²² Indeed, John Reeves concurs with this view and has noted that *Pirqe Mashiah* contains sections that 'may be ultimately based on sources deriving from the seventh or eighth century', Reeves, *Trajectories*, p. 149. This dating is supported by the fact that no rabbis from after the second generation of Amoraim are mentioned in the text. Furthermore, the traditions in the first sections of *Pirqe Mashiah* (BSB Cod.Hebr. 222, 36b-40a), are paralleled in rabbinic sources of an earlier date of redaction, such as and primarily *Pesiqta de Rav Kahana* but also the *Tosefta*, *Leviticus Rabbah*, *Ruth Rabbah*, the *Palestinian Talmud* and *Pesiqta Rabbati*. However, *Pirqe Mashiah* is clearly a compilation that has undergone further redaction. It is important to note that the latter part of the text focusing on the eschatological description of the future world (BSB Cod.Hebr. 222, 40a-46b) contains a number of close parallels with the Babylonian Talmud. The presentation of this material suggests that it represents another level of redaction of the compilation, which incorporates Babylonian traditions. Interestingly, this redaction does not compromise the coherent eschatological schema presented in the compilation. As such, *Pirqe Mashiah* seems to present material that likely originated in the seventh century but underwent subsequent revision in the eighth century. The dating of the compilation is discussed further by the author in Helen Spurling, "*Pirqe Mashiah*: A Translation, Commentary and Introduction" (forthcoming).

attributed to Sebeos and the apocalyptic *Pseudo-Methodius*.²³ It is also after recording this dialogue between Jews and Arabs that the text departs from further historical allusion and becomes entirely concerned with eschatology, which further suggests that this passage may have been composed near to the time it describes.

Secondly, this passage reflects questions over ownership of the Temple Mount. It suggests that a ‘sanctuary’ exists, but that it belongs to the Jews and the Arabs should leave it and take plunder as a substitute. This is an ambiguous statement. It could allude to the mosque of ‘Umar, or it is possible that ‘Abd al-Malik’s Dome of the Rock has been built.²⁴ However, the passage also suggests that ownership of the Temple Mount is still an open question, but this is of course an ideology that reflects the hopes and expectations of the Jewish people. This also shows that the redactor perceived that the Arabs viewed Jerusalem and particularly the Temple Mount as a holy site, or at least a site of some religious significance.²⁵ However, it is possible that the Jewish attachment to Jerusalem led to an assumption that the Arabs would have a similar interest in the city, which is reinforced by the focus in Jewish apocalyptic and rabbinic sources on the rebuilt Temple as the ultimate sign of Jewish redemption. Thus, *Pirqe Mashiah* could contribute supporting evidence of early Muslim interest in control of the site of the

²³ See Sebeos, *History*, 42 and *Pseudo-Methodius* X:6. For the connection between the ‘sons of Ishmael’ and the Muslim Arabs in Jewish and Christian apocalyptic traditions, see Emmanouela Grypeou and Helen Spurling, *The Book of Genesis in Late Antiquity: Encounters between Jewish and Christian Exegesis* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), pp. 246-249, 272-276, 286-288.

²⁴ *Pirqe Mashiah* could provide supporting evidence for the ‘mosque of ‘Umar’ as described in detail in al-Tabari’s *History* 2403-2411, but also recorded by non-Islamic sources. Theophanes reported that the mosque of ‘Umar was built on the site of Solomon’s Temple in Jerusalem (*The Chronicle of Theophanes*, ed. De Boer, p. 342), and the pilgrim Arculf, who visited Jerusalem about 670-680 CE, records that there was a wooden structure on the Temple Mount which could hold three thousand Muslims (*Itinera Hierosolymitana*, ed. Tobler, p. 145). This can be read in conjunction with *Nistarot Rabbi Shimon ben Yohai*, which describes how ‘the second king who will arise from Ishmael will be a friend of Israel. He will repair their breaches and fix the breaches of the Temple’ but will ultimately build a place for prayer for himself upon the site of the ‘foundation stone’. In addition, there is an intriguing passage in the Armenian *History* attributed to Sebeos, 43 where he describes the plot of rebellious Jews to rebuild the Temple of Solomon during early Arab rule – they get as far as constructing a building on a platform before the Ishmaelites grow envious, expel the Jews from the site and claim it as their own house of prayer.²⁴ There are parallels here with the episode in *Pirqe Mashiah* with both Jews and Ishmaelites laying claim to the Temple Mount, as also noted by John Reeves, *Trajectories*, p. 157; cf. Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge: CUP, 1977), pp. 1-9, and Robert Hoyland, ‘Sebeos, the Jews and the Rise of Islam’, in R. L. Nettle (ed.), *Medieval and Modern Perspectives on Muslim-Jewish Relations* (Luxembourg: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1995), pp. 89-102. Thus, in exploring evidence for the mosque of ‘Umar, it becomes clear that there are traditions from Jewish, Christian and Islamic sources that suggest Jews were involved in discussion or dispute with the Arabs over the Temple Mount from the time of ‘Umar’s siege and conquest in 638 CE.

²⁵ There are a number of contrasting views on the sanctity of Jerusalem and Palestine within early Islam. However, although the point at which Jerusalem became a holy site within Islam has been much debated, it is unlikely that ‘Abd al-Malik would have built the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, if there were not some precedent for its religious significance. Indeed, Averil Cameron has outlined convincing evidence to suggest that ‘the Muslim interest in the Temple Mount showed itself from an early stage’, Averil Cameron, ‘The Jews in Seventh-Century Palestine’, *Scripta Classica Israelica* 13 (1994), pp. 75-93 (81). Although controversial, the evidence also suggests that, at the time of the conquest, the Arabs viewed Jerusalem as a holy city because Muhammad directed his followers to pray in the direction of Jerusalem. For an outline and discussion of these sources, see Angelika Neuwirth, ‘From the Sacred Mosque to the Remote Temple: *Sūrat al-Isrā’* between Text and Commentary’ in Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Barry D. Walfish and Joseph W. Goering (eds.), *With Reverence for the Word: medieval scriptural exegesis in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 376-407; cf. Q2:142-145, 149-150.

Temple Mount, and possibly the involvement of Jews in claims of ownership, but at the very least shows that this scenario was the perception of the redactor.

Thirdly, *Pirqe Mashiah* contains the intriguing reference to becoming ‘one people’ (אומה אחת), which reminds of the single community or *umma* mentioned in the Qur’an, as those who could be united under one God (Q 2:128; 3:110). The understanding of the term *umma* in the Qur’an and documents such as the Constitution of Medina has been widely discussed,²⁶ but in *Pirqe Mashiah* the term is clearly understood in terms of conversion, as highlighted by the request of the Arabs to ‘come and believe in our beliefs’ (בואו ותאמינו באמונתנו). Al-Tabari provides evidence of Jewish converts to Islam. For example, there is the famous and widespread legendary tale that a Jew called Ka’b had converted to Islam, and was with ‘Umar when he first travelled to Jerusalem.²⁷ However, letters of protection and the much discussed Pact of ‘Umar show that adherents of monotheistic faiths were allowed to live and practise their faith under Islamic rule, albeit with certain restrictions, and they would pay taxes as part of their ‘dhimmi’ status. Although Islam was a proselytising religion from its beginnings, as dhimmis, Jews and Christians were allowed freedom of religion and as such conversion to Islam would have been a slow and complex process. Furthermore, this would be a period when the Islamic movement was still in the process of establishing and defining itself. As such, Reuven Firestone reflects the consensus view when he states: ‘Certainly in the earliest period, most Jews seem to have remained faithful to their ancestral traditions’.²⁸ To return to *Pirqe Mashiah*, there is no detail on what was understood by the process of conversion, but in emphasising that the Jewish people would rather die than convert, *Pirqe Mashiah* highlights the perception of the Jewish redactor that the issue of conversion was a prominent concern and also emphasises the importance of staying faithful in the face of this perceived threat.²⁹

Finally, in *Pirqe Mashiah*, the historical reality of Arab rule faced by the redactor is presented through the enactment of a sacrificial test by the Jewish and Arab claimants to the Temple Mount. The Jewish redactor views the Arabs as gaining God’s favour instead of his own people, as highlighted by the acceptance of the sacrifice of the Arabs and the rejection of the sacrifice of the Jewish people, which in turn reflects the historical reality of conquest. This is in line with the biblical idea that if the Jewish people have not followed their laws adequately, God will support another group or empire until the Jews are righteous enough to be granted ascendancy.³⁰ Interestingly,

²⁶ See the work of Frederick Denny, ‘*Ummah* in the Constitution of Medina’, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 36 (1977), pp. 39-47, Robert Bertram Serjeant, ‘The “Sunnah Jami’ah”, pacts with the Yathrib Jews, and the “tahrir” of Yathrib: analysis and translation of the documents comprised in the so-called “Constitution of Medina”’, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 41.1 (1978), pp. 1-42, Uri Rubin, ‘The “Constitution of Medina”: some notes’, *Studia Islamica* 62 (1985), pp. 5-23, Paul Lawrence Rose, ‘Muhammad, the Jews and the constitution of Medina: retrieving the historical kernel’, *Der Islam* 86.1 (2009), pp. 1-29, Jacob Lassner and Michael Bonner, *Islam in the Middle Ages: the origins and shaping of classical Islamic civilization* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2010).

²⁷ For discussion of this episode, see Reuven Firestone, ‘Jewish Culture in the Formative Period of Islam’, in David Biale (ed.), *Cultures of the Jews: A New History* (New York: Schocken Books, 2002), pp. 267-302, esp. 291-298.

²⁸ Firestone, ‘Jewish Culture’, p. 291.

²⁹ See Richard Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979), Ira Lapidus, ‘Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period: An essay in quantitative history by Richard W. Bulliet’, *American Historical Review* 86.1 (1981), pp. 187-188, and Daniel Dennett, *Conversion and the Poll Tax in Early Islam* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1950).

³⁰ This biblical idea can be found in the deuteronomistic history and its cycle of sin, punishment, repentance and reward (see, for example, Deuteronomy 4:44-10:22, Joshua 1:1-9, Judges 2:1-3:6), with

this is a motif widely transmitted in Christian apocalyptic writings from this period, such as *Pseudo-Methodius*, which explicitly quotes this deuteronomic idea.³¹ As such, in *Pirqe Mashiah*, the Arabs are presented as having the favour of God, which is clearly explained as fulfilment of biblical prophecy, as found in Isaiah 60:7. This verse describes the gifts of the nations that are brought by the exiles returning to worship at Jerusalem in the future and explicitly states of the flocks of Kedar and rams of Nebaioth: *they shall be acceptable on my altar, and I will glorify my glorious house*. The use of Isaiah 60:7 in *Pirqe Mashiah* identifies the sons of Kedar (בני קדר) with the Arabs, perhaps a logical association in light of Genesis 25:13 and the connection with Ishmael. The prophecy in Isaiah is fulfilled when God accepts the sacrifice of the Arabs, thus proving that not only is the success of the Arabs part of the divine plan, but that the sacrifices offered by the Arabs are ultimately gathered for Israel and the glorification of the (future) Temple.³² The passage in *Pirqe Mashiah* also emphasises that the Arabs' initial victory is due to the fact that the Satan could bring charges against the Jewish people, indicating that such favour was due to the actions (or indeed inaction) of the Jews, or the involvement of *ha-Satan*, rather than the special status of the Arabs. Thus, Jewish election is not threatened, but rather *Pirqe Mashiah* presents an exhortation to proper behaviour and a theological explanation for the reality of Arab rule.

Thus, in *Pirqe Mashiah*, the Jewish people are presented in dialogue with the Arabs over ownership of the Temple Mount and which people follows the 'true' religion and has the favour of God. However, the passage concludes with the inevitability of war between the peoples, as neither will accept the other's beliefs. In this way, the reference to and representation of the Arabs is placed firmly in the context of contested religious claims.³³ Indeed, the most prominent subject in *Pirqe Mashiah* is the status of Israel and a concern with the nature of the relationship between the Jewish people and God. The compilation glorifies the Jewish religious position within an eschatological framework. The Torah is given central importance, the rebuilt Jerusalem and Temple are described, the status of Israel is exalted above that of the nations, and the vindication of the Jews at the end of time through the work of God and the Messiah is outlined. The representation of the Arabs in *Pirqe Mashiah* is clearly determined by this apocalyptic outlook on the election of Israel.

This section of *Pirqe Mashiah* contributes to the diversity of seventh and eighth century Jewish apocalyptic responses to the Arab conquests. For example, in *Nistarot Rabbi Shimon ben Yohai* it is clear that the Arabs are initially viewed positively as the instruments of salvation of the Jews, explaining that the kingdom of Ishmael has arisen

punishment of the Jewish people often executed by the ascendant empire. Such ideology also abounds in the biblical prophetic works, but see Jeremiah 25:1-14 for a classic example; cf. pseudepigraphical and rabbinic traditions that transmit variations of this ideology often within an apocalyptic or eschatological context: 4 Ezra 3:28-36, 4:22-25, 5:21-30; 2 Baruch 3:4-6, 5:1-4; Genesis Rabbah 63:7; Leviticus Rabbah 13:5, 29:2; Pesiqta de Rav Kahana 23.2; Pirque de Rabbi Eliezer 35; Tanḥuma Buber *Vayyishlah* 4; Exodus Rabbah 32.7, 42.2.

³¹ *Pseudo-Methodius* XI:1.

³² Cf. Targum Isaiah 60:7, which explicitly relates this verse to the Arabs in its translation, BT *Avodah Zarah* 24a, which teaches that 'the flocks of Kedar' refers to self-made proselytes in the time-to-come, and *Nistarot R. Shimon ben Yohai*.

³³ Interestingly, while clearly concerned with the future under Arab rule and the relative status of the Arabs and Jews, *Pirqe Mashiah* does not present an overly elaborate polemic against the Arabs. Rather, the primary focus of criticism still seems to be Byzantium, as highlighted by extensive passages against Edom, the traditional pseudonym for Rome/Byzantium. 'Rome' also features in the text in connection with Sammael, the Satan and the prince of Rome, the return of the Temple vessels from Rome prior to the final battle, and through reference to the kingdom of Italia in the war against the nations of the world on the Day of the Lord.

only for the purpose of delivering Israel from wicked Edom (that is, Rome/Byzantium).³⁴ In contrast, *Pirque de Rabbi Eliezer* 30 describes the events of the end of time with a number of allusions to the actions of the sons of Ishmael. The text describes the fifteen things that the Ishmaelites will do at the end of days, alluding to events of the seventh and eighth centuries, but ultimately describes the sound of the groaning of the Jewish people caused by the sons of Ishmael.³⁵ *Pirque Mashiah* presents an alternative and important view on the impact of the Arab conquests, and the questions raised by the changing political situation. In order to explore this further, some key themes in the compilation will be discussed, examining both elements of continuity and innovation within the apocalyptic traditions presented. In particular, as the title of the compilation suggests, messianism is a major concern, and the two messianic figures, Messiah ben David and Messiah ben Joseph, receive extensive treatment in *Pirque Mashiah*.

Dual messianic ideas, the existence of both a Messiah ben David and a Messiah ben Joseph, are a renowned and fully developed feature of Jewish apocalypses from the seventh century onwards. With regard to the Messiah ben Joseph, there has been much controversial and on-going discussion over the origins of the legend of the warrior Messiah who will die in battle.³⁶ Indeed, this motif has a long literary history in midrashic and talmudic traditions, with varied treatment in these sources from descriptions of one anointed for war at the end of time to reference to a Messiah who will be slain: a figure who is descended from Joseph or Ephraim.³⁷ However, it is clear

³⁴ *Nistarot R. Shimon ben Yohai* (BHM 3:78): מ"ה מביא מלכות ישמעאל אלא כדי להושיעכם אל תירא בן אדם שאין הב"ה מביא מלכות ישמעאל אלא כדי להושיעכם מוזאת הרשעה 'Do not be afraid, son of man, for the Holy One, blessed be He, is bringing the kingdom of Ishmael only in order to deliver you from that wicked one (i.e. Edom)'.

³⁵ The allusions in *Pirque de Rabbi Eliezer* and their possible historical basis are discussed, for example, in Reeves, *Trajectories*, pp. 70-75, Abba Hillel Silver, *A history of Messianic speculation in Israel from the first through the seventeenth centuries* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1927), pp. 40-42, Gordon Newby, 'Text and Territory: Jewish-Muslim Relations 632-750 CE', in Benjamin Hary, John Hayes and Fred Astren (eds.), *Judaism and Islam: boundaries, communication and interaction: essays in honor of William M. Brinner* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), pp. 83-96; cf. Carol Bakhos, *Ishmael on the Border: rabbinic portrayals of the first Arab* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), esp. pp. 85-128, and Spurling, 'The Biblical Symbol of Edom', pp. 271-299.

³⁶ One of the key issues of debate is to what extent the origins and development of the Messiah ben Joseph figure are a reflection of or a response to Christian messianic ideals of a dying and suffering Messiah, or the product of a Jewish context, such as through an internal development of early Jewish traditions from the Second Temple period; cf. Joseph Klausner, *The Messianic Idea in Israel from Its Beginning to the Completion of the Mishnah* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1955), Joseph Heinemann, 'The Messiah of Ephraim and the Premature Exodus of the Tribe of Ephraim', *Harvard Theological Review* 68 (1975), pp. 1-15, David Berger, 'Three Typological Themes in Early Jewish Messianism: Messiah Son of Joseph, Rabbinic Calculations, and the Figure of Armilus', *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 10 (1985), pp. 141-65, Israel Knohl, 'On 'The son of God,' Armilus and Messiah son of Joseph', *Tarbiz* 68 (1998), pp. 13-38, Robert P. Gordon, 'The Ephraimate Messiah and the Targum(s) to Zechariah 12.10', in J. Cheryl Exum and Hugh Williamson (eds.), *Reading from Right to Left: Essays on the Hebrew Bible in Honour of David J. A. Clines* (London: T&T Clark, 2003), pp. 184-95, David Mitchell, 'Rabbi Dosa and the rabbis differ: Messiah ben Joseph in the Babylonian Talmud', *Review of Rabbinic Judaism* 8 (2005), pp. 77-90, David Mitchell, 'Messiah ben Joseph: a sacrifice of atonement for Israel', *Review of Rabbinic Judaism* 10.1 (2007), pp. 77-94, Holger Zellentin, 'Rabbinizing Jesus, Christianizing the son of David: the Bavli's approach to the secondary Messiah traditions', in Rivka Ulmer (ed.), *Discussing Cultural Influences: Text, Context, and Non-Text in Rabbinic Judaism* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2007), pp. 99-127.

³⁷ *M Sotah* 7:2 and 8:1 refer to a person called 'the Anointed for Battle' based on Deuteronomy 20:2-7, and *M Makkot* 2:6 tells of a figure anointed for the purpose of leading the army in war. On the Messiah ben Joseph, see, for example, Genesis Rabbah 75.5, 99.2, 95, Song of Songs Rabbah 2.13, 4.5, (perhaps most famously) BT *Sukkah* 52a-b, Targum on Song of Songs 4.5 and 7.4, Targum Pseudo-Jonathan on Exodus 40:11, Midrash on Psalms 87.6, and Numbers Rabbah 14.1.

that in apocalypses of the seventh and eighth centuries, such as *Sefer Zerubbabel* and *Pirque Mashiah*, a far more detailed picture of the Messiah ben Joseph emerges, including the personal naming of the Messiah ben Joseph and his involvement in a range of activities beyond leading Israel in battle. In *Sefer Zerubbabel*, Nehemiah ben Hushiel, the Messiah ben Joseph, is said to be concealed in Tiberias, but appears to gather Israel together, reinstitutes sacrificial worship in Jerusalem and conducts a census, recording Israel in genealogical lists according to their families. He fights against Shiroi the King of Persia, but is eventually killed by the Satanic figure Armilus. A dual messianism is also in view in *Pirque Mashiah*. Although the title ‘Messiah ben Joseph’ is not explicitly used in the compilation, a warrior Messiah called Neḥemiah features in the text, who, judging from his activities and characteristics, is the Messiah ben Joseph of rabbinic and apocalyptic tradition.³⁸ In *Pirque Mashiah*, it is recorded that during the wars of the messianic era, Israel heads to Rome in order to bring back the Temple vessels and King Neḥemiah, the Messiah, goes with them.³⁹ They reach Jerusalem, but there is a confrontation with the Arabs at the Temple Mount followed by a battle, which results in the death of Neḥemiah at the hands of the Arabs. Neḥemiah is subsequently resurrected by the Messiah ben David. This brief outline highlights how the Messiah ben Joseph traditions became more developed in later Jewish apocalyptic literature, as the legend was adapted to reflect historical circumstances and expanded in accordance with the ideas reflected in a particular compilation. Thus, in *Sefer Zerubbabel*, Neḥemiah is attacked by Shiroi king of Persia.⁴⁰ In *Pirque Mashiah*, however, the Messiah ben Joseph fights against the Arabs as the contemporary political adversary, rather than an anonymous apocalyptic figure or Gog and Magog, as found in other Jewish traditions.⁴¹ In this way, the enemies of the Messiah ben Joseph can be a clear marker of the contemporary political concerns of the apocalyptic redactors.

The Messiah ben David also has a vital role in *Pirque Mashiah*. Many aspects of the role of the Messiah ben David build on earlier midrashic and Second Temple concepts of messianism. In *Pirque Mashiah*, the Messiah ben David is said to come with the clouds of heaven with seraphim at his side. Thus, he is identified with the son of man of Daniel 7:13, emphasising his supernatural activities.⁴² The Messiah is also

³⁸ See BSB Cod.Hebr. 222, 39b-40a.

³⁹ Ra‘anan Boustan suggests of the Temple vessels that ‘the physical movement of these artefacts traces the historical trajectory of divine favor’, see Ra‘anan S. Boustan, ‘The Spoils of the Jerusalem Temple at Rome and Constantinople: Jewish Counter-Geography in a Christianizing Empire’, in Gregg Gardner and Kevin L. Osterloh (eds.), *Antiquity in Antiquity: Jewish and Christian Pasts in the Greco-Roman World* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), pp. 327-372 (363); cf. Sivertsev, *Judaism and Imperial Ideology*, pp. 125-171.

⁴⁰ As Günter Stemberger notes, Shiroi king of Persia is most probably to be identified with the son of Chosroes II, who ascended the throne as Kavād II. Kavād II was the Persian leader who agreed a peace treaty with Heraclius in c.628 CE, which may provide the context for the production of *Sefer Zerubbabel* given the inevitable disappointment within the Jewish community at the reclaiming of Jerusalem by Heraclius. See Günter Stemberger, ‘Jerusalem in the Early Seventh Century: Hopes and Aspirations of Christians and Jews’, in Lee Levine (ed.), *Jerusalem: Its Sanctity and Centrality to Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (New York: Continuum, 1999), pp. 260-272.

⁴¹ For example, on Gog and Magog as the enemy, see Targum Pseudo-Jonathan on Exodus 40:11. Edom is also a popular enemy for the Messiah ben Joseph, which may reflect varying stages in the understanding of Edom as Rome or Byzantium; *Otot ha-Mashiah* describes in some detail how the Messiah ben Joseph will be victorious against the ruler of Edom; cf. Genesis Rabbah 99.2. *Otot ha-Mashiah* and *Nistarot R. Shimon ben Yohai* also focus on Armilus, the Satanic figure introduced in *Sefer Zerubbabel*, as a key enemy of the Messiah ben Joseph. See Berger, ‘Three Typological Themes in Early Jewish Messianism’, pp. 141-65 and Dan, ‘Armilus’, pp. 73-104.

⁴² Cf. 1 Enoch 46:1-5, 62:5-14, 4 Ezra 13, Targum 1 Chronicles 3:24, BT *Sanhedrin* 98a, Tanḥuma Buber *Toledot* 20, Tanḥuma *Toledot* 14, Midrash on Psalms 21.5 and Numbers Rabbah 13.14.

described as the son of David and undertaking the traditional warrior role of defeating the enemies of Israel at the end of time. He achieves this by telling Israel to ‘stand firm and see the salvation of the Lord’ at which point he kills the enemies of Israel with the breath of his mouth, based on Isaiah 11:4, thus acting again in fulfilment of biblical prophecy.⁴³ Following the Day of the Lord, God crowns the Messiah, sets ‘a helmet of salvation on his head’ and gives the Messiah splendour, glory and garments of honour. Then God makes the Messiah stand upon a high mountain to bear good tidings of salvation to Israel and conduct the resurrection of the dead.⁴⁴ As such, the Messiah ben David has an important role in the transition from this world to the next, but, despite his prominence in the text, the Messiah ben David is clearly subordinated to the authority and action of God, and divine intervention is the primary means by which Israel will be saved at the end of time. In particular, the Day of the Lord is conducted by God who takes vengeance on the nations of the world gathered for the war, and it is God who acts on the Day of Judgement to decide the ultimate fate of the righteous and wicked.

However, a striking feature of Jewish apocalypticism of the seventh and eighth centuries is the development of elaborate descriptions concerned with how to identify the Messiah ben David when he is revealed at the end of time. Issues around the identification of the Messiah are outlined in different ways in texts such as *Sefer Zerubbabel*, *Otot ha-Mashiah* and *Pirque Mashiah*. For example, in *Sefer Zerubbabel*, the identity of the Messiah ben David is suspect because of his lowly and despicable appearance, but affirmed when he is given the rod of Moses and he resurrects Nehemiah, the Messiah ben Joseph who was slain.⁴⁵ *Otot ha-Mashiah* takes a different approach. In this text, the Satanic figure of Armilus claims that he is the Messiah and he is accepted by the Edomites and the other nations of the world. Nehemiah the Messiah ben Joseph is commanded to bring the Torah and declare that Armilus is God, but he reads out the commandment ‘*you shall have no other Gods before me*’ (Exodus 20:3). Armilus claims that this is not to be found in the Torah and so Nehemiah and his warriors fight against him as a false messiah.⁴⁶ In *Pirque Mashiah*, Elijah and the King Messiah appear to Israel in the desert. Elijah exhorts the people to arise, but they do not believe that the Messiah has indeed arrived. Seven miracles are conducted by the Messiah in order to prove his identity, which includes the resurrection of Nehemiah, and Israel are convinced. However, following the Day of the Lord, the Jewish people question his identity again and ask the Messiah ben David if he is the one predicted in biblical prophecy, which he confirms. To prove that this is his true identity, at the request of Israel he conducts the resurrection of the dead.

The prevalence of questions about the identification of the Messiah in these texts suggests a concern over messianic claims, or other assertions of religious authority. In *Pirque Mashiah*, the redactor uses scriptural proof in order to claim that the expected Messiah ben David is about to arrive and that his actions are the fulfilment of biblical prophecy. In discussing the coming of the Messiah, the redactor has implicitly argued against the validity of any previous claims to Messiahship, and in addition describes a number of tests that will prove the identity of the Messiah. The potentially

⁴³ Cf. 1 Enoch 62:2, 1Q28b 5.25, 4Q161 in commentary on Isaiah 11:1f, 4 Ezra 13:10, 2 Thessalonians 2:8, Ruth Rabbah 5.6, Song of Songs Rabbah 6.10.1, Pesiqta Rabbati 37.1, Tanhuma *Toledot* 14, *Terumah* 7, Tanhuma Buber *Toledot* 20, *Terumah* 6, Midrash on Psalms 2.3 and 21.3.

⁴⁴ Cf. Isaiah 26:19, Daniel 12:2, PT *Ta’anit* 1:1, BT *Hagigah* 12b, Midrash on Psalms 25.1, and esp. Pesiqta Rabbati 34.2, 36.1-2, 37.1-2 and Lamentations Rabbah proem 1.

⁴⁵ *Sefer Zerubbabel* (BHM 2:55-56).

⁴⁶ *Otot ha-Mashiah* (BHM 2:60-61).

apologetic nature of these teachings in *Pirqe Mashiah* is supported by specific reference to dispute with a gentile or a heretic (גוי או מיין), and how to answer an opponent's arguments on questions of the status of Israel and Jerusalem in the future.⁴⁷ Thus, arguments are provided not only to ascertain the correct identity of the Messiah ben David but also to affirm the elect status of the Jewish people and their reward in the next age. The identity of the opponents in this text remains a matter of debate – the vagueness of the terminology precludes definite assertions,⁴⁸ but could potentially be either Christian or indeed Muslim opponents given the context and concern with identity and status – but it is clear that *Pirqe Mashiah* is aimed at an internal Jewish audience assuring them of their place in the world to come, and provides them with arguments, based on scripture, in the eventuality of debate with those who would claim otherwise.⁴⁹

However, the miracles performed by the Messiah ben David as a test of his identity in *Pirqe Mashiah* also serve another function. The eschatological scheme in *Pirqe Mashiah* portrays the future redemption as a Second Exodus, with many of the events of the messianic era paralleled in the events of the wilderness wanderings culminating at the revelation at Sinai. Thus, the Exodus is viewed as a prototype for the redemption at the end of time.⁵⁰ The compilation's opening sections explain that Israel will be saved at the end of time because of her righteousness. This righteousness is indicated by the fact that Israel 'received the Torah on Mount Sinai', which is a sign of God's love for his people.⁵¹ Thus, the context of the salvific event of the Exodus and subsequent covenant between Israel and God is made clear. Indeed, prior to the end of time, the only two events that *Pirqe Mashiah* cites as evidence of divine intervention in history are the creation of the world itself, and the giving of Torah.⁵² After the apocalyptic signs of the end, the eschatological narrative shifts to focus on those who have survived these trials who are now in the 'wilderness of Moab' and 'the land of the sons of Ammon'.⁵³ Miracles are performed for these survivors, which are reminiscent of the Exodus story. Just as with the first Exodus, the 'survivors' are in the wilderness where they are searching for food and God brings forth a spring for them.⁵⁴

This approach of mirroring the redemption at the Exodus with that at the end of time is not a new innovation in *Pirqe Mashiah*, as it is found in other Jewish apocalyptic texts of this period such as *Sefer Zerubbabel* and *Nistarot R. Shimon ben Yohai*, and

⁴⁷ See references to dispute with a *min* (מיין) or *goy* (גוי) at BSB Cod.Hebr. 222, 36b, 37a and 46a.

⁴⁸ See Martin Goodman, 'The Function of Minim in Early Rabbinic Judaism', in Hubert Cancik, Hermann Lichtenberger and Peter Schäfer (eds.), *Geschichte – Tradition – Reflexion*, volume 1 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996), pp. 501-510; William Horbury, 'The Benediction of the *Minim* and Early Jewish-Christian Controversy', *Journal of Theological Studies* 33 (1982), pp. 19-61; Lawrence Schiffman, *Who was a Jew? Rabbinic and Halakhic Perspectives on the Jewish-Christian Schism* (Hoboken, N.J.: Ktav Publishing House, 1985), pp. 51-68; Yaakov Teppler, *Birkat haMinim* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007); Günter Stemberger, 'Birkat ha-minim and the separation of Christians and Jews', in Benjamin Isaac and Yuval Shaḥar (eds.), *Judaea-Palaestina, Babylon and Rome: Jews in Antiquity* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), pp. 75-88.

⁴⁹ For more detailed discussion on the testing and identification of eschatological figures in diverse apocalyptic texts of the seventh and eighth centuries, see Helen Spurling, 'Discourse of Doubt: the testing of apocalyptic figures in Jewish and Christian traditions of Late Antiquity', *Jewish Culture and History* 16.2 (2015), 5-22.

⁵⁰ See Idel, 'Jewish apocalypticism', p. 208, Berger, 'Three Typological Themes in Early Jewish Messianism', pp. 141-65.

⁵¹ This introduction is found in Jellinek, BHM 3:68, but not the BSB manuscript.

⁵² BSB Cod.Hebr. 222, 38b-39a.

⁵³ BSB Cod.Hebr. 222, 39b.

⁵⁴ BSB Cod.Hebr. 222, 40a; cf. Exodus 15:22-27, Exodus 17:1-7 and Numbers 20:1-13 for the provision of water for the Israelites in the wilderness.

also earlier midrashim linking Moses and the Messiah, most famously in *Pesiqta de Rav Kahana* 5.7-9 but also *Ruth Rabbah* 2.14 and 5.6 and *Pesiqta Rabbati* 15.10.⁵⁵ However, the miracles performed by the Messiah ben David in the wilderness, as the place of the announcement of redemption, are described in expansive detail in *Pirqe Mashiah*.⁵⁶ Furthermore, the particular arrangement of miracles in this compilation reinforces the concept of the redemption as a Second Exodus event. Elijah and the Messiah appear in the wilderness, and, following the disbelief of the survivors of Israel, Elijah says ‘Perhaps you are looking for a sign, as in the case of Moses?’,⁵⁷ thus echoing the Israelites need for proof that God had not deserted them in the wilderness, which was provided by Moses through signs. The Messiah ben David is thus a ‘new Moses’ and some of the miracles that he performs in the eschatological age recall the desert experience. The first miracle brings Moses himself and his generation from the desert,⁵⁸ and the second miracle sees the resurrection of Korah and all his assembly.⁵⁹ The third miracle is the resurrection of the Messiah ben Joseph, but the fourth miracle reveals the hidden jar of manna and anointing oil with which Moses anointed the altar and vessels of the Tabernacle.⁶⁰ The fifth miracle brings the staff of Moses, through which the original signs were performed.⁶¹ The miraculous signs end with the grinding of the mountains of Israel and the revelation of the ‘secret’, most probably the secret of the time of redemption.⁶²

⁵⁵ The time period in the wilderness is specified as 45 days during which they consume the roots of brooms; cf. *Job* 30:4, *Ascension Isaiah* 4:13, *Ruth Rabbah* 2.14 and 5.6, *Pesiqta de Rav Kahana* 5.8, *Pesiqta Rabbati* 15.10 and *Numbers Rabbah* 11.2. *Nistarot R. Shimon ben Yohai*, *Otot R. Shimon ben Yohai*, *Aggadot ha-Mashiah* and *Sefer Zerubbabel* closely parallel the tradition in *Pirqe Mashiah*, referring to a period of distress at the end of time in which Israel spends forty or forty-five days in the desert where they eat the roots of brooms. *Pirqe Mashiah* explicitly views the forty-five days as a time without a redeemer between the death of Nehemiah and the appearance of the Messiah ben David. The period of forty-five days is calculated based on *Daniel* 12:11, which describes a period of 1290 days until the end shall come, and *Daniel* 12:12, which mentions 1335 days. The difference of 45 days is therefore considered to be the period during which the Messiah will leave Israel alone in the wilderness, just as Moses disappeared for a similar period of time.

⁵⁶ For a similar arrangement of miracles, see *Pereq R. Yoshiyyahu* (BHM 6:115).

⁵⁷ BSB Cod.Hebr. 222, 40a.

⁵⁸ Traditions on the resurrection of Moses are also found in *Targum Neofiti Exodus* 12:42 and *Pesiqta de Rav Kahana* 24.9. *Psalm* 50:5 is cited as evidence for the resurrection of Moses in *Pirqe Mashiah*. Within the Hebrew Bible, ‘my faithful ones’ refers to those who have made a covenant with God, but, in *Pirqe Mashiah*, is understood to refer to the generation of the wilderness who were with Moses; see *Exodus Rabbah* 19.5, *Tanḥuma Buber Qedoshim* 5; cf. *M. Sanhedrin* 10:3, which teaches that the generation of the wilderness will not have a share in the world to come.

⁵⁹ See *Numbers* 16:1-35; cf. *Ma'aseh de R. Joshua b. Levi* (BHM 2:48-49) in which Korah and his assembly ask Elijah when the general resurrection of the dead will occur in which they expect to take part. *Psalm* 71:20 is the proof text for this miracle, which asks for a renewal of life and deliverance from the depths of the earth; cf. *Pesiqta Rabbati* 33.6.

⁶⁰ The fourth miracle is the revelation of the hidden jar of manna (cf. *Exodus* 16:33) and anointing oil with which Moses anointed the altar and vessels of the Tabernacle (cf. *Leviticus* 8). Hidden things of the land are described in *Mekhilta Vayassa* 6:81-83, *T. Sotah* 13:1, *Song of Songs Rabbah* 2.4, *BT Horayot* 12a, *Tanḥuma Buber Noah* 7 and *Eliyyahu Rabbah* 23.

⁶¹ For example, *Exodus* 4:1-4. This staff later became the staff of Aaron, which was placed before the ark as described in *Numbers* 17:1-11; see Christine Meilicke, ‘Moses’ staff and the return of the dead’, *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 6.4 (1999), pp. 345-372; Christine Meilicke, ‘The staff of Moses: Jewish and Christian interpretations’, *Judaism Today* 12 (1999), pp. 24-30; and Reeves, *Trajectories*, pp. 187-199 for the appearance of the staff of Moses in the eschatological age.

⁶² BSB Cod.Hebr. 222, 40a: הגם השביעי יגלה להם הסוד שנ' זאת אות הברית ‘the seventh miracle: he will reveal to them the secret, as it is said, *This is the sign of the covenant* (*Genesis* 9:12)’. The proof text for the miracle is *Genesis* 9:12,17, which implies that the secret revealed is a sign of the covenant, thus its

This series of allusions to the first Exodus event is further reinforced in *Pirqe Mashiah* in the description of the future age. Following the Day of Judgement, God is presented as the teacher of Torah in the Temple, which is his *bet ha-midrash*. God and David sit on thrones, and the women who have had their sons taught Torah form a group around Zerubbabel, who is the interpreter, to hear his explanation of God's teaching. This highlights that following the second redemptive Exodus event, there will be another revelation as at Sinai. Importantly, however, *Pirqe Mashiah* does not refer to any new precepts delivered by God, rather it is a proper understanding of the Torah, whether the Law, Scripture or Mishnah (תורה מקרא משנה) that is revealed in God's teaching.⁶³ Indeed, the importance of the existing Torah is paramount throughout the compilation, and is found particularly in connection with ideas of election and judgement. *Pirqe Mashiah* emphasises the righteousness of Israel, who accepted the Torah at Mount Sinai whilst the nations did not.⁶⁴ This acceptance brought Israel merit, and it is through this merit that she will be delivered from Gehinnom at the end of time. Thus, *Pirqe Mashiah* highlights that the Torah is the means of Israel's salvation from the first revelation at Sinai to redemption in the future age.

Inextricably linked to study of the Torah in *Pirqe Mashiah* is the prominent subject of the status of Israel. The redactor devotes a great deal of space to describing the righteousness of Israel, which is bound up with the theme of election and ideas about Jerusalem and the Temple. There are numerous passages in *Pirqe Mashiah* on Israel as the elect of God. Israel is described in detail as the beloved one of God,⁶⁵ and the superior status of Israel as the 'bride of God' is outlined.⁶⁶ Alongside the Torah, an important sign of the elect status of the Jewish people was the condition of Jerusalem and the Temple. The reconstruction of the Temple was projected onto an event of the messianic future, and this fundamental symbol of election is also outlined in *Pirqe Mashiah*.⁶⁷ In addition to passages on the election of Israel, there are a number of sections that outline the final victory of Israel, with the associated rejection of the nations, and the exalted position of Israel in paradise as manifested through an eschatological banquet, canopies, booths and wreathes for the righteous, increase in progeny and abundant provisions, the splendour of the Garden of Eden and the presence of God.⁶⁸ It is because of their righteousness that Israel will receive all these rewards in the next age.

The precise recipients of this reward in the future world, and the identification of those eligible for salvation, is an interesting feature of the compilation because of the emphatic moral dualism in relation to redemption. The focus is on a collective national preservation, with Israel initially divided into the righteous and the wicked. Ultimately, however, it is the whole nation of Israel that is rewarded at the end of time, whilst the nations of the world are excluded and designated for Gehinnom.⁶⁹ The theme

revelation underlines the everlasting relationship between God and all living creatures, and the fulfilment of this covenant.

⁶³ BSB Cod.Hebr. 222, 44a-b; for further discussion, see Helen Spurling, 'The image of God in late antique apocalyptic literature: the Holy One as teacher in *Pirqe Mashiah*', *Jewish Culture and History* 12.3 (2012), pp. 385-396.

⁶⁴ See Exodus 19:8, 24:3, 24:7. The acceptance of Torah by Israel, but its rejection by the nations of the world is described, for example, in Mekhilta *Bahodesh* 5, Sifre Deuteronomy 343, Pesiqta Rabbati 21:2/3, *Pirqe de Rabbi Eliezer* 41 and *Tanḥuma Buber Berakhah* 3.

⁶⁵ BSB Cod.Hebr. 222, 36b.

⁶⁶ BSB Cod.Hebr. 222, 38b-39a.

⁶⁷ BSB Cod.Hebr. 222, 36b-37a and 42b-43b.

⁶⁸ BSB Cod.Hebr. 222, 44b-46b.

⁶⁹ BSB Cod.Hebr. 222, 43b-44b.

of repentance is integral to the understanding of the righteousness of the whole nation of Israel. *Pirqe Mashiah* teaches that repentance is possible even up to the moment of reaching the Throne of Glory on Judgement Day, and God will forgive those who repent even at the last moment. This is proven based on Hosea 14:2, which is an exhortation specifically addressed to Israel and suggests that it is only Israel who are able to repent, a privilege from which the nations of the world are implicitly excluded.⁷⁰ The wicked among Israel do receive their punishment in Gehinnom, but, even after Judgement Day, their positive response to God's teaching of Torah in the next age ensures that their punishment is revoked and God brings them into Eden alongside the righteous of Israel. Again, repentance is key, as the wicked among Israel proclaim their recognition that they have been condemned justly by God.⁷¹

Thus, even in the future world the wicked from among Israel can be forgiven and rewarded for proper acknowledgement of God's teaching, and, as such, the need for continual instruction in the future age is made clear. It is God's teaching of Torah and the positive responses to it by Israel (both righteous and wicked) that ensures all of Israel are brought into Eden where God hosts a great feast. This feast ends with blessings by David over the four cups of the *Pesah Seder*.⁷² Thus, the acceptance of Torah allows for the possibility of repentance, which in turn allows for a renewal of the covenant made at the first Exodus event, sealed at the eschatological banquet attended by all Israel. In *Pirqe Mashiah*, the tradition of the eschatological banquet mirrors the *Pesah Seder*, again linking God's major act of redemption on behalf of his people at the Exodus with the final act of redemption at the end of time.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there are a number of key aims in *Pirqe Mashiah*. First, the compilation intends to show that the events of the Arab conquests and fall of Byzantium are a sign of the apocalyptic end of time. *Pirqe Mashiah* contributes a Jewish perspective on these events, highlighting a number of concerns held by the redactor from ownership of the Temple Mount to conversion to the need to provide a theological explanation for the success of the Arabs. The redactor views the changing political circumstances as a sign of the end, God's intervention not only within history but to end history, which will lead to a new world and a time of reward and vindication for all Israel, and Israel alone.

Secondly, *Pirqe Mashiah* brings together numerous rabbinic traditions emphasising the special relationship between Israel and God and the elect status of His chosen people. In this way, the text addresses the status of the Jewish people at a time

⁷⁰ BSB Cod.Hebr. 222, 43b-44a; cf. Targum Hosea 14:2, *Pirqe de Rabbi Eliezer* 43 and *Tanhuma Buber Tazria* 11. *Pesiqta de Rav Kahana* 24.1-13, *Pesiqta Rabbati* 44.1-10 and 50.1-6 contain elaborate treatises on the power of repentance based on Hosea 14:2; see esp. *Pesiqta de Rav Kahana* 24.12-13, *Pesiqta Rabbati* 44.7 and 44.9.

⁷¹ BSB Cod.Hebr. 222, 44a-44b; cf. *Alphabet of R. Akiva* (BHM 3:27-28), *BT Eruvin* 19a, *Mekhilta Beshallah* 7:145, *Pesiqta de Rav Kahana* S6.1 and *Exodus Rabbah* 15.29.

⁷² BSB Cod.Hebr. 222, 45a; the four cups of the *Pesah Seder* correspond to the four expressions in Exodus 6:6-7 describing how God delivered the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. Each cup is drunk at a particular point of the meal – after the Kiddush, after reading the Haggadah, after the Birkat ha-Mazon and after the Hallel (Ps 113-118). A parallel to this tradition is found in *Genesis Rabbah* 88.5 (cf. *Midrash on Psalms* 11.5 and 75.4), which describes the four cups in the messianic future, based on the same biblical verses as in *Pirqe Mashiah*. Although *Pirqe Mashiah* mentions four cups, only three proof texts are cited. This is also found in *Genesis Rabbah*, but with the explanation that Psalm 116:13 should be read as 'cup of salvation(s)', and thus is two cups. Interestingly, the Cairo Genizah fragment lists five cups based on the same proof texts of Psalm 16:5, 23:5 and 116:13; cf. the dispute in *BT Pesahim* 118a as to the number of cups at the *Pesah Seder*.

of historical uncertainty regarding election. *Pirque Mashiah* provides reassurance or consolation in a time of political turmoil, and looks for a restructuring of the current reality and existing order in order to fulfil expectations with regard to Israel's relationship with God, emphasising the righteousness of Israel in this age and their reward in the next.

Thirdly, the themes that address the elect status of Israel could reflect a purpose beyond only consolation: *Pirque Mashiah* could be considered an apocalyptic apologetic. It is a means of self-definition and affirmation addressed to an internal audience so they can make their own defence if and when necessary. The compilation has been constructed in such a way as to provide an argument for the close relationship between God and Israel, which is manifest through the Torah and the sending of the Messiah. The rebuilding of Jerusalem and the Temple at the end of time will be the tangible sign that God is with his people. The apologetic function of *Pirque Mashiah* is highlighted through explicit reference to dispute with a gentile or heretic who may express disbelief at this situation. Although the identity of these opponents is an open question, it is clear that *Pirque Mashiah* is aimed at an internal Jewish audience assuring them of their place in the world to come, but also providing a defence in the eventuality of debate with those who would claim otherwise.

Fourthly, this context of competing religious claims can be seen with regard to the messianism in the text. The key opponents of the Messiah ben Joseph and the Messiah ben David reflect the historical context of the compilation with concern about both the Arabs and the fall of 'Edom'. While clearly building on earlier traditions, the activities of the Messiah ben David are developed to highlight the need for confirmation of messianic authority in light of competing religious claims. As part of this, the redactor of *Pirque Mashiah* uses scriptural proof in order to claim that the expected Messiah ben David is about to arrive and that his actions are the fulfilment of biblical prophecy, and builds on this through the elaboration of tests that will prove the identity of the Messiah. This effectively argues against the validity of any other claims to Messiahship or eschatological authority. As part of this approach, the authority and identity of the Messiah ben David is further clarified because he will act as a new Moses, linking God's major act of redemption on behalf of his people at the Exodus with the final act of redemption at the end of time.

Fifthly, the importance of rabbinic teaching, and the study of Torah, is paramount, as highlighted by rabbinically attributed traditions, rabbinic hermeneutics and frequent use of scriptural proof texts. The portrayal of the future world highlights the rabbinic nature of the world to come, which in itself validates the contemporary system and authority of the rabbis. Although a new world is described, the strongest elements of continuity with the present age can be seen in the rabbinic emphasis on the importance of continued Torah study, illustrated by the Temple re-formed as a *bet ha-midrash* with God providing a proper understanding of Torah, Mikra and Mishnah. Indeed, the interpretation of Torah is what ultimately saves the wicked from Israel even after Judgement Day. Thus, a clearly rabbinic view of the future world is found in *Pirque Mashiah*, which highlights that the compilation represents a rabbinic form of apocalypticism that not only offers reassurance but endorses rabbinic authority.

A final note: as highlighted at the start of this chapter, the events of the seventh and eighth centuries led to a well-known increase in the production of Jewish or rabbinic apocalyptic compilations, as exemplified by *Pirque Mashiah* but also *Sefer Zerubbabel*, *Sefer Eliyyahu*, *Nistarot Rabbi Shimon ben Yohai* and others. This so called 'revival' was due to the political turmoil caused first by the Persian and then Arab conquests, which led to the production of specific apocalyptic textual collections and

tractates. These sources are detailed and developed, and also include a number of new ideas not found in earlier eschatological material. *Pirqe Mashiah* contributes to the diversity of these seventh and eighth century Jewish apocalyptic works, and offers another perspective on this time of conquest and changing rule. However, it is clear that there are substantial elements of continuity with earlier messianic and eschatological haggadic traditions, including with the apocalypses of the Second Temple period. It is against the continued use of eschatological concepts and traditions that Jewish apocalypses of the seventh and eighth century flourish. As such Jewish apocalypticism experienced not so much a revival as a revitalisation.⁷³

⁷³ See Helen Spurling, “*Pirqe Mashiah*: A Translation, Commentary and Introduction” (forthcoming).