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THE JEWISH COMMUNITY OF CONSTANTINOPLE FROM THE KOMNENAN TO THE PALAIOLOGAN PERIOD*

The Jewish traveller Benjamin of Tudela has left us a brief, yet invaluable account of the thriving Jewish community he encountered in Constantinople in the early 1160s¹. Some forty years later, in 1203-1204, the Latin armies participating in the Fourth Crusade besieged and eventually captured the Byzantine capital, which suffered severe hardship. Large sections of the city were burned down, including the Jewish quarter, and the Latin conquest was followed by a massive exodus of the Greek population². The fate of the Jews of Constantinople in the following decades has hitherto remained unknown. However, an overlooked testimony in an anti-Jewish work sheds some light on their presence in the city during the period of Latin rule, which lasted from 1204 to 1261. It is imperative to consider it within the context of Constantinople's evolution from the Komnenan to the Palaiologan period.

Jews resided in the Empire's capital since the fifth century and, despite fragmentary evidence, appear to have continuously lived there up to the Fourth Crusade. At an unknown date before the eleventh century, the imperial authorities began to enforce upon them a policy of residential segregation motivated by religious considerations. About 1044 they tightened this policy by removing the Jews from their quarter, located within the city walls, to the suburb of Galata or Pera across the Golden Horn, where they still resided at the time of Benjamin of Tudela's visit³. Pera had then a semi-rural character, which it still retained by the early fourteenth century⁴. Yet the Jewish quarter appears to have been densely covered with wooden houses, as implied by the swift spreading of the fire that destroyed it in 1203⁵. The quarter extended on the slope of Pera facing Constantinople, in the vicinity of the tower on the shore to which the chain closing the Golden Horn was attached⁶. This location is indirectly confirmed by the activity of the Jewish tanners mentioned by Benjamin. Since they needed water for the exercise of their craft, they must have resided in the lower section of the suburb. Benjamin ascribed the animosity of the Greeks of Pera toward the Jews to these tanners, who by spilling into the streets the malodorous

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¹ M. N. Adler (ed.), *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela*, (London, 1907) [hereafter: BT], Hebrew text pp. 14-17; trans., pp. 1-14. The dating of Benjamin's travels within the Empire to the early 1160s will be discussed elsewhere.

² For details, see below.

³ See D. Jacoby, "Les quartiers juifs de Constantinople à l'époque byzantine," *Byzantion*, 37 (1967), pp. 168-189, repr. in idem, *Société et démographie à Byzance et en Romanie latine*, (London, 1975), no. 2.

⁴ See G. I. Brătianu, *Recherches sur le commerce génois dans la mer Noire au XIII^e siècle*, (Paris, 1929), pp. 92-93; M. Balard, *La Romanie génoise (XIII^e - début du XV^e siècle)*, (Rome, 1978), vol. 1, pp. 184-185; Jacoby, "Les quartiers juifs," p. 186; idem, "Les Génois dans l'Empire byzantin: citoyens, sujets et protégés (1261-1453)," *La Storia dei Genovesi*, 9 (1989), pp. 268 and 284, n. 120.

⁵ On this fire, see Jacoby, "Les quartiers juifs," pp. 176, 178, 188 and n. 4. An earlier fire, in 1077, had also inflicted heavy damage upon the Jewish quarter: *ibid.*, p. 178.

⁶ See Jacoby, "Les quartiers juifs," pp. 175-178, 185-187, and the plan of Pera in Balard, *La Romanie génoise*, vol. 1, p. 189, on which the tower is marked as "château de Galata."

liquids deriving from the processing of the hides incommodated their neighbors⁷. Benjamin also referred to other occupational groups within the Jewish community, namely Jewish silk workers and merchants, some of whom were wealthy. He singled out the Jewish physician of Manuel I Komnenos, Solomon the Egyptian, because of his privileged status and his intercessions with the emperor on behalf of the Jews of the Empire.

Several documents preserved in the Cairo Geniza or synagogue archive provide additional information about the Jewish community of Constantinople in the Komnenan period. A noteworthy feature of this community since the early eleventh century was the coexistence in its midst of two congregations. The Rabbanites belonged to the mainstream of Judaism, which relied on rabbinical tradition based on the Talmud, while the Karaites rejected this tradition and advocated the literal exegesis of the Hebrew Bible. The Karaite movement developed at first in the Muslim East, where its main congregations were located. Karaite immigrants apparently began to settle in Constantinople about the year 1000⁸. The existence of two distinct congregations in the city, each with its own institutions, is confirmed by a letter sent to both of them in the second decade of the twelfth century⁹. At the time of Benjamin's visit, the Karaite group numbered some 500 individuals, compared to some 2,000 Rabbanites, and thus represented about one fifth of the total Jewish population of the city. The two congregations resided then side by side in Pera, a wall separating the residences of their respective members. The events leading to the building of this partition are apparently recorded in an undated eleventh-century Jewish letter, which provides a wealth of information on the Jewish community of Constantinople in the early Komnenan period¹⁰. The issues this letter raises warrant a close examination, since they offer an insight into the internal development of the community, the latter's connections with other Jewish communities, its insertion within the networks of long-distance trade and shipping and, finally, the imperial policy to which it was subjected.

The author of the epistle, a recent immigrant from Egypt, belonged to the Rabbanite congregation. He sent his eyewitness account of the events from an unspecified location in the Empire to his brother, who had remained in Fustat or Old Cairo. In the past, a severe ongoing dispute between Rabbanites and Karaites about the Jewish festival calendar had repeatedly generated severe tension between the two congregations. In the year preceding the writing of the letter, the Karaites had again relied on information received from Erets-Israel, the Land of Israel, to determine the date of the Passover festival. On the other hand, the Rabbanites maintained their own stand on the strength of letters received from Egypt, and Jewish merchants from Russia

⁷ There is good reason to believe, however, that the Greek animosity was more deeply ingrained and of a more general nature: see D. Jacoby, "Les Juifs de Byzance: une communauté marginalisée," in *Οι περιθωριακοί στο Βυζάντιο*, ed. Ch. A. Maltezos, (Athens, 1993), pp. 142-143, on the use of tanning as a simile for Judaism in anti-Jewish ecclesiastical polemics in the Empire.

⁸ Z. Ankori, *Karaites in Byzantium. The Formative Years, 970-1100*, (New York, Jerusalem, 1959), remains the only comprehensive study on the Karaites in the Empire, yet requires substantial emendations on several important issues. On Karaite immigration to Constantinople, see D. Jacoby, "The Jews of Constantinople and their Demographic Hinterland," in C. Mango and G. Dagron (eds.), *Constantinople and its Hinterland. Papers from the Twenty-seventh Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Oxford, April 1993*, (Aldershot, Hampshire, 1995), p. 225.

⁹ Ed. A. Neubauer, "Egyptian Fragments," *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 9 (1896-1897), p. 32; partial trans. by J. Starr, *The Jews in the Byzantine Empire, 641-1204* (Texte und Forschungen zur byzantinisch-neugriechische Philologie, 30), (Athens, 1939), pp. 214-215, no. 163. The letter was sent "to the holy congregations" of Constantinople; note the plural. For the dating after 1112, see S. D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society. The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1967-1993), vol. 2, p. 281.

¹⁰ Ed. J. Mann, *Texts and Studies in Jewish History and Literature*, (Cincinnati, Philadelphia, 1931-1935), vol. 1, pp. 48-51, and see vol. 2, p. 1458; trans. and discussion in Starr, *The Jews in the Byzantine Empire*, pp. 182-184, no. 125; further discussion and new dating by Ankori, *Karaites in Byzantium*, pp. 148-150, 322-334, and A. Sharf, *Byzantine Jewry from Justinian to the Fourth Crusade*, (London, 1971), pp. 120-121. Yet see below, for a revised dating.

who happened to be at the site of the dispute concurred with them. The strain between the two congregations intensified to the extent that the Rabbanites assaulted the Karaites, who filed a charge against their opponents with the Byzantine authorities¹¹. These held the Rabbanite congregation responsible for the disturbances and imposed upon it a huge fine of about 1,000 "dinars hyperpyra"¹².

The feud within the Jewish community described in the letter has been located by some historians in Thessalonike and by others in Constantinople. For several reasons, this last attribution appears definitely more plausible. First, the sheer size of the fine, discussed below, points to a large Jewish Rabbanite congregation, which would fit the one existing in Constantinople. According to Benjamin of Tudela, in the early 1160s the Rabbanite group in Constantinople consisted of some 2,000 individuals, whereas in Thessalonike the total number of Jews did not exceed the 500 mark. We may safely assume that the Rabbanite congregation in the capital had always been the largest in the Empire. Secondly, the intensity of the feud described in the letter implies the existence of a sizeable Karaite congregation challenging its Rabbanite opponent. Since the beginning of their settlement in the Empire the Karaites were undoubtedly more numerous in Constantinople than in any other Byzantine city. Their congregation in Thessalonike is not mentioned by Benjamin, nor by other sources before the early thirteenth century¹³. In any event, it must have been rather small. The numerical strength of the Karaites in Constantinople, long before the 1160s, would have clearly warranted the construction of the partition in the midst of the Jewish quarter of Pera some time after the calendar feud described in the epistle¹⁴.

The suggested dating of this dispute to the 1060s or 1070s must be revised¹⁵. We have already noted that the author of the letter mentions a fine of 1,000 "dinars hyperpyra." The hyperpyron was introduced by Alexios I Komnenos in 1092, in the framework of his monetary reform. To be sure, the name of this gold coin had occasionally been applied to the nomisma earlier in the eleventh century, yet the reference to it in connection with the fine implies that the imperial authorities had stated the amount to be paid in this denomination and that the hyperperon was already in circulation¹⁶. We may thus safely assume that the letter was written after 1092. The reference to the letters from the Land of Israel upon which the Karaites of Constantinople relied offers an additional clue for the dating of the calendar feud in this city. About 1078 the Karaite academy of learning in Jerusalem was transferred to Tyre, which harboured an important Karaite congregation. At that time there was also a significant Karaite group in Ascalon. Yet since neither of these cities was considered by Jews to be within the boundaries of the biblical Land of Israel, the Karaite letters dealing with the calendar must after all have been dispatched from Jerusalem. To be sure, the religious authority of the Karaites' center in this city had been weakened by the removal of the academy to Tyre, yet Karaite scholarly activity is attested in the Holy City as late as 1095¹⁷. The crusader conquest of Jerusalem in 1099 put an abrupt end to the existence of the city's Jewish congregations¹⁸. In view of the severe disruption of communal

¹¹ The language of the letter points to a physical assault, and the building of a partition between the two groups, aimed at preventing such clashes, supports this interpretation; on the partition, see also below.

¹² I have checked the reading of the word following "dinar," which clearly is *hyperp*, or "hyperpyron," and not *ipernir* as in Mann, *Text and Studies*, vol. 1, p. 50, line 37.

¹³ See below, pp. 8-9.

¹⁴ Further arguments in favor of Constantinople are adduced below.

¹⁵ I correct here the dating adopted in Jacoby, "Les quartiers juifs," p. 178.

¹⁶ See M. F. Hendy, *Coinage and Money in the Byzantine Empire, 1081-1261*, (Washington, 1969), pp. 14, 34-37; idem, *Studies in the Byzantine Monetary Economy, c. 300-1450*, (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 513-517.

¹⁷ On the Karaite congregations of Tyre and Ascalon since the capture of Jerusalem by the Seljuqs in 1071, see M. Gil, *A History of Palestine, 634-1099*, (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 416-418, 744-774, and on Jerusalem in 1095, *ibid.*, pp. 417, 802, 820.

¹⁸ See J. Prawer, *The History of the Jews in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem*, (Oxford, 1988), pp. 19-34.

life caused by this event, it is difficult to imagine that in the following years Karaite refugees from Jerusalem should have been in a position to advise their brethren in Constantinople on religious matters¹⁹. We may thus consider 1099 a *terminus ad quem* for the calendar feud described in the letter.

An even more precise dating appears possible. Significantly, the writer of the letter fails to refer to the western contingents of the First Crusade arriving in Constantinople since the 1st of August 1096, nor does he record the messianic movement that this expedition generated in several Jewish communities of the Empire, including that of Thessalonike. Moreover, he fails to mention another instance, datable to September 1096, in which Rabbanites and Karaites in Constantinople differed as to the date of the Jewish New Year²⁰. It follows that the events he reports must have occurred between 1092 and August 1096, at the latest. This dating is further supported by the peculiar way in which he records the fine imposed by the imperial authorities upon the Rabbanite Jews. After mentioning gold dinars, with which his brother living in Egypt was acquainted, he refers to hyperpyra, the Byzantine gold coins in which the penalty was actually stated. The brother was apparently not yet familiar with these coins, the circulation of which had begun only a short time earlier. This would explain why the author of the letter deemed it necessary to quote jointly the two denominations.

The epistle of the Egyptian Jew contains yet another piece of information enhancing the location of the calendar feud in Constantinople and the dating of the events surrounding it to the years 1092-1096. The writer entrusted his letter to a Christian merchant from Amalfi who was about to sail from the Empire to Alexandria and with whom another Jew was acquainted²¹. Amalfitans had traded in both Constantinople and Egypt since the tenth century. They are attested in the Byzantine capital in 944. An Amalfitan colony was established along the Golden Horn before 1053, and Amalfitan *ergasteria* are mentioned in the same urban area in the charter which Alexios I Komnenos issued in favor of Venice in 1082. Naval assistance provided in 969 to the Fatimid conquest of Egypt ensured the Amalfitans of friendly relations and favorable trading conditions in this country in the following period²². By the mid-eleventh century they had extended the geographic range of their maritime trade in the eastern Mediterranean and were regularly sailing between Constantinople and Alexandria. About 1060 some Amalfitans brought three Jews captured by Byzantine pirates to the Jewish community of Alexandria and freed them in return for the sum they had paid as ransom²³. Egyptian Jews appear to have entertained friendly relations with Amalfitan merchants and occasionally travelled on board Amalfitan ships. Our epistle implies that this was also the case in the 1090s²⁴. Incidentally, the regular sailing of Amalfitan craft between Constantinople and Alexandria in the second half of the eleventh century goes far to explain the

¹⁹ On these refugees, see S. D. Goitein, "Geniza Sources for the Crusader Period: a Survey," in B. Z. Kedar, H. E. Mayer, R. C. Smail (eds.), *Outremer. Studies in the History of the Crusading Kingdom of Jerusalem, Presented to Joshua Prawer*, (Jerusalem, 1982), pp. 311-314.

²⁰ These events are reported in a letter and a Karaite treatise, respectively: ed. Neubauer, "Egyptian Fragments," pp. 27-29, and Aaron ben Elijah, *Gan 'Eden*, ed. J. Savsakan, (Eupatoria, 1866), I. 8, p. 8d; trans. and discussion by Starr, *The Jews in the Byzantine Empire*, pp. 203-206, 208-209, nos. 153-154. The case reported in the treatise occurred at the time the "Ashkenazim" or Latins participating in the First Crusade came to Constantinople, thus since early August 1096. On the meaning of "Ashkenazim," see also Goitein, "Geniza Sources," p. 312.

²¹ *Mulfitanin*: this word is identified here for the first time.

²² See M. Balard, "Amalfi et Byzance (Xe-XIIIe siècles)," *Travaux et mémoires*, 6 (1976), pp. 87-92, yet the presence of Amalfitans in Constantinople in 944 does not point to the existence of a colony; S. Borsari, *Venezia e Bisanzio nel XII secolo. I rapporti economici* (Deputazione di storia patria per le Venezie, Miscellanea di studi e memorie, 26), (Venice, 1988), pp. 7-8; B. Figliuolo, "Amalfi e il Levante nel medioevo," in G. Airaldi e B. Z. Kedar (eds.), *I Comuni italiani nel Regno crociato di Gerusalemme* (Collana storica di fonti e studi, diretta da Geo Pitarino, 48), (Genoa, 1986), pp. 582-588.

²³ See Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society*, vol. 1, p. 329.

²⁴ For an earlier period, see S. D. Goitein (trans.), *Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders*, (Princeton, NJ, 1973), pp. 42-45, no. 5: in the mid-eleventh century a Jew travels on an Amalfitan ship from Alexandria to Amalfi.

establishment of Amalfitan hospices in Antioch and Jerusalem, presumably in the 1070s, as well as Amalfitan pilgrimages to the Holy City before the First Crusade²⁵. In our specific context, though, it is important to stress that there is no evidence for Amalfitan activity in Thessalonike, which provides yet another argument against the location of the calendar feud in this city.

As mentioned above, our epistle includes an allusion to Jewish merchants from Russia. A Jewish Rabbanite congregation is documented in Kiev as early as the first half of the tenth century²⁶. About the year 1000, a Jew from Russia, who spoke his native Russian tongue, yet knew neither Hebrew, Greek nor Arabic, arrived in Thessalonike, where he met his relative who had just returned from Jerusalem²⁷. On the basis of this piece of evidence it has been suggested that Russian Jews came to Thessalonike to attend the annual fair of St. Demetrios and that, consequently, the calendar feud should be located in this city rather than in Constantinople. One should note, however, that *Timarion*, a work composed about 1110 and thus reflecting later conditions, clearly stresses that while most commodities arrived directly at the fair of St. Demetrios, those of the Black Sea were first shipped to Constantinople and carried from there by land²⁸. It would seem, then, that Russian merchants did not proceed beyond the Empire's capital to attend the fair of St. Demetrios. In addition, it appears excluded that they should have travelled by land from a Black Sea port to Thessalonike and bypassed Constantinople, because of the long distance involved in such a journey²⁹. In any event, the temporary presence of the two Russian Jews in Thessalonike about the year 1000 does not imply that Russian merchants or Jews regularly visited the city at that time³⁰. We are on safer ground with respect to Russian trade with Constantinople, stimulated by the tenth-century treaties concluded between the princes of Kiev and the Empire³¹. Russian merchants continued to appear in Constantinople in the following century³². This was apparently also the case with Jewish merchants from Russia. A Rabbinic

²⁵ On Amalfitan trade in the Levant and pilgrimage to Jerusalem, see Figliuolo, "Amalfi e il Levante," pp. 589-593, 609-610, and on the hospices, R. Hiestand, "Die Anfänge der Johanniter," in J. Fleckenstein und M. Hellmann (eds.), *Die geistlichen Ritterorden Europas* (Vorträge und Forschungen, 26), (Sigmaringen, 1980), pp. 33-37.

²⁶ See N. Golb and O. Pritsak, *Khazarian-Hebrew Documents of the Tenth Century*, (Ithaca, London, 1982), pp. 5-15, 20-32.

²⁷ Ed. J. Mann, *The Jews in Egypt and Palestine under the Fatimid Caliphs*, (London, 1920-1922), vol. 2, p. 192, and see vol. 1, pp. 165-166; trans. and discussion by Starr, *The Jews in the Byzantine Empire*, pp. 171-172, no. 119.

²⁸ R. Romano (ed.), *Pseudo-Luciano, Timarione. Testo critico, introduzione, traduzione, commentario e lessico*, (Naples, 1974), pp. 54-55, lines 147-157. Romano's translation on pp. 96-97 is erroneous and misses the main point concerning the Black Sea merchants. Sound arguments for the re-dating of the text by E. Th. Tsolakes, Τιμάρτιον. Μία νέα Ανάγνωση, in *Μνήμη Σταυμάτη Καρατζά* (Thessalonike, 1990), pp. 109-117.

²⁹ This route has recently been suggested by N. Oikonomides, "Le marchand byzantin des provinces (IXe-XIe s.)," in *Mercati e mercanti nell' alto medioevo: l'area euroasiatica e l'area mediterranea* (Settimane di studio del centro italiano sull'alto medioevo, 40), (Spoleto, 1993), p. 649. The author points to the absence of Constantinopolitan intermediaries in this context, yet it should be stressed that Timarion is concerned with the origin of the commodities arriving at the fair, and not with the merchants bringing them. Thus, for instance, there is a fair chance that the goods originating in Egypt and "Phoenicia," i. e. the crusader Levant, were shipped to Thessalonike by Venetian merchants, who about that time conducted trade between the Empire and the Eastern Mediterranean lands: see Borsari, *Venezia e Bisanzio nel XII secolo*, p. 17.

³⁰ While Bulgarian merchants did so: see N. Oikonomides, "Le kommerktion d'Abydos, Thessalonique et le commerce bulgare au IXe siècle," in V. Kravari, J. Lefort et C. Morrisson (eds.), *Hommes et richesses dans l'Empire byzantin*, (Paris, 1989-1991), vol. 2, pp. 244-248, esp. 247.

³¹ See their recent analysis by M. Hellmann, "Die Handelsverträge zwischen Kiev und Byzanz," in *Untersuchungen zu Handel und Verkehr der vor- und frühgeschichtlichen Zeit in Mittel- und Nordeuropa, Teil IV, Der Handel der Karolinger- und Wikingerzeit*, ed. Kl. Düwel et al. (Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen, Philol.-histor. Kl., Dritte Folge, 156), (Göttingen, 1987), pp. 644-666. See also J. Ferluga, "Der byzantinische Handel nach dem Norden im 9. und 10. Jahrhundert," in the same volume, pp. 629-642; G. G. Litavrin, "Die Kiever Rus' und Byzanz im 9. und 10. Jahrhundert," *Byzantinische Forschungen*, 18 (1992), pp. 43-59.

³² For 1043, see G. Cedreni, *Historiarum compendium*, ed. B. G. Niebuhr, (Bonn 1839), vol. 2, p. 551, lines 1-7; Litavrin, "Die Kiever Rus' und Byzanz," pp. 46-47. See also N. Oikonomides, Ρώσοι έμποροι και στρατιώτες στην Κωνσταντινούπολη, in *Χίλια χρόνια Ελληνισμού - Ρωσσίας. Hellas-Russia. One Thousand Years of Bonds*, (Athens, 1994), pp. 41-51.

responsum dated to 1031-1040 refers to a Jew who arrived in Constantinople, presumably from Russia, after having been ransomed by a Byzantine or a Russian Jew³³. Our epistle adds yet another testimony, this time for the 1090s³⁴. One may wonder whether the Jewish merchants from Kievan Russia visiting Constantinople were subject to the same residential restrictions as the other Russian merchants³⁵, or whether they were allowed to stay in the Jewish quarter of Pera for an unlimited period, like the local Jews.

Our epistle of the 1090s reveals some aspects of the imperial policy applied to the Jews of the Empire. The authorities clearly considered each community a single body, regardless of its internal division between Rabbanites and Karaites. This is illustrated by the removal of the entire Jewish population from Constantinople proper to Pera about 1044 and by the residential segregation imposed on both congregations in the same urban area, where they lived side by side³⁶. In addition, in Constantinople the Eparch of the city either appointed a single Jewish official or confirmed him in his function as head of the entire community, a procedure applied in Thessalonike. A Greek satirical work composed in Constantinople shortly after 1158, thus approximately at the time of Benjamin of Tudela's visit, refers to the ἐξαρχῶν and τῆς συναγωγῆς ὁ πρῶτιστος³⁷. From Benjamin we may gather that he belonged to the Rabbanite congregation, because it was larger than its Karaite counterpart³⁸. This official was surely entrusted with the levy of the collective taxes imposed upon the entire Jewish community and their orderly delivery to the imperial treasury. The division of the fiscal burden between Rabbanites and Karaites was an internal Jewish matter, which obviously required some degree of cooperation between them, even in times of tension. Such collaboration was anyhow common in matters such as the ransoming of captives and the extension of financial support to the Jewish community of Jerusalem³⁹. As a rule the Jewish communities of the Empire enjoyed a large degree of autonomy, and the authorities abstained from interfering in their internal life or in religious controversies. However, the serious disturbances generated by the calendar feud in Constantinople had clearly amounted to a breach of public law and order, which prompted the government to depart from its traditional policy in two ways. First, it imposed a fine on a section only of the local Jewish community. Secondly, since the tension between Rabbanites and Karaites ran high, it appears most unlikely that they should have reached by themselves an agreement about the construction of a wall separating their respective residences. Rather, it would seem that, exceptionally, the imperial authorities intervened in the affairs of the community and imposed the building of the partition. This step conformed with their general policy, aimed at the preservation of peace and tranquillity in the Empire's capital.

The concentration of all the Jews of Constantinople in Pera accounts for the magnitude of the catastrophe that befell them at the time of the Fourth Crusade. After capturing the tower

³³ Trans. and discussion in Starr, *The Jews in the Byzantine Empire*, pp. 192-193, no. 136.

³⁴ Russian merchants also visited Constantinople later, in the 1160s, according to Benjamin of Tudela: BT, Hebrew, p. 14; trans., p. 12.

³⁵ On these restrictions in time, place and movement in the city, see above, n. 31.

³⁶ See above, n. 3.

³⁷ D. A. Chrestides (ed.), *Μαρκιανὰ ἀνέκδοτα. Ἀνάχαρις ἢ Ἀνανίας. 2. Ἐπιστολές - Σιγίλλοι*, (Thessalonike, 1984), p. 259, lines 938-939; for the dating, see pp. 45-47.

³⁸ BT, Hebrew, pp. 13 and 16; trans, pp. 11 and 14. Benjamin had high regard for the *parnas* in Constantinople, which implies that the latter was indeed a Rabbanite. See also Jacoby, "Les quartiers juifs," p. 184. Jewish taxation in Byzantium remains a vexed question; see the latest treatment by S. B. Bowman, *The Jews of Byzantium, 1204-1453*, (University of Alabama, 1985), pp. 41-48.

³⁹ Letter of 1028 from both congregations in Alexandria about captives from Byzantine Attaleia: ed. A. Cowley, "Bodleian Genizah Fragments, IV," *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 19 (1906), pp. 251-254, and trans. by Starr, *The Jews in the Byzantine Empire*, pp. 190-191, no. 132; common campaign for Jerusalem: Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society*, vol. 2, pp. 96, 472.

of Pera in July 1203, the crusaders set fire to the suburb. The Jewish quarter was entirely destroyed⁴⁰, and there is good reason to believe that the surviving Jews left the area and settled elsewhere⁴¹. Pera was still sparsely populated in the early 1260s, and this surely facilitated its partial grant to Genoa by Emperor Michael VIII Palaeologos in 1267 and the settlement of the new Genoese quarter, which began shortly afterwards. In 1303 Andronikos II bestowed an additional section of Pera upon Genoa⁴². At the request of the Genoese, Michael VIII was supposed to remove to Constantinople all the Greeks residing in the territory he had allotted, yet some of them remained there⁴³. There is no evidence of a similar removal of Jews from the site, nor are Jews attested in Pera up to the 1390s, although the Genoese quarter included the area in which the Jews had lived prior to the Fourth Crusade. It is impossible to determine since when a *contrattia Judeorum* existed within the Genoese quarter. Yet its Jewish residents either were newcomers or the descendants of immigrants attracted by the intense economic activity of this quarter and wishing to enjoy the benefits deriving from settlement in it. As implied by their Greek names, some of these Jews, if not most of them, hailed from Byzantine or from former Byzantine territories such as Chios⁴⁴. In short, there was no Jewish residential continuity in Pera from the early thirteenth to the late, or at any rate to the mid-fourteenth century⁴⁵.

One of the Western chroniclers recording the destruction of the Jewish quarter of Pera in 1203 claimed that the Jews had perished in the fire of 1203⁴⁶. This is clearly an overstatement. It is flatly contradicted by the overlooked testimony mentioned at the beginning of this paper, at present the only known one bearing on the Jews of Constantinople in the Latin period⁴⁷. Soon after the Latin conquest of the city, Pope Innocent III sent Benedict Cardinal of Santa Susanna as his legate to conduct talks and reach an accommodation with the Greek Church. Benedict left Rome for Constantinople late in May or early in June 1205, and apparently returned there by the summer of 1207. His stay in Constantinople lasted from November 1205 to January 1207. Either on his journey to the city, on his return voyage, or on both occasions he stopped for some time at Athens, Thebes and Thessalonike, three cities in which he held disputations with Greek clerics and theologians. Benedict was accompanied by Nicholas of Otranto, who served as his interpreter and may already have been then a monk at the Greek monastery of Casole (Terra d'Otranto), subject to papal authority⁴⁸. Nicholas became abbot of this monastery in 1219 or 1220⁴⁹. Some years later, between 1220 and 1223, he completed a long polemical work entitled *Διάλεξις κατὰ Ἰουδαίων*, or "Discourse against the

⁴⁰ See above, n. 5.

⁴¹ This last point is discussed below.

⁴² On the quarter, see Balard, *La Romanie génoise*, vol. 1, pp. 50-51, 113-114, 181-198.

⁴³ See Jacoby, "Les Génois dans l'Empire byzantin," p. 253.

⁴⁴ See Balard, *La Romanie génoise*, vol. 1, pp. 277-279, 350, who lists Jewish men and women with Greek names; also Jacoby, "Les quartiers juifs," pp. 215-216. On economic motivation to settlement in Constantinople, see Jacoby, "Les Génois dans l'Empire byzantin," pp. 260-261, and 278, n. 73.

⁴⁵ Contra Balard, *La Romanie génoise*, vol. 1, pp. 277-278; see also Jacoby, "Les Génois dans l'Empire byzantin," p. 278, n. 72. Bowman, *The Jews of Byzantium*, p. 52, wrongly assumes the existence of a Genoese quarter in Pera at the time of the Fourth Crusade, when it was still located within the city proper: see Balard, *ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 108-112.

⁴⁶ L. de Mas Latrie (ed.), *Chronique d'Ernoul et de Bernard le Trésorier*, (Paris, 1871), p. 366: there "the Jews lived, before they were burned" (*li Juifs manoiēt devant qu'ils fussent ars*).

⁴⁷ In a previous study, I mistakenly assumed that no such source existed: see Jacoby, "Les quartiers juifs," pp. 188-189. Bowman, *The Jews of Byzantium*, pp. 52, 60, has followed me in this respect, although he used the anti-Jewish work in which the testimony appears in another context, without being aware of its important implications for the issue discussed here: see *ibid.*, pp. 32-33.

⁴⁸ See J. M. Hoeck and R. J. Loenertz, *Nikolaos-Nektarios von Otranto Abt von Casole. Beiträge zur Geschichte der ost-westlichen Beziehungen unter Innozenz III. und Friedrich II.*, (Ettal, 1965), pp. 30-35, 52-54.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

Jews”⁵⁰. In it he claims to have gained considerable knowledge about the Jews and their creed by conducting with them disputations, in which his knowledge of Hebrew served him well⁵¹. Nicholas reports that in Constantinople, Thessalonike and Thebes (fol. 22v, 85v) he debated theological questions with both parts of the Jewry, in other words with Rabbanites and Karaites: εἶδον κἀν (sic) ἐν Κονσταντινουπόλει τὰ ἄμφω μέρους διαλεγόμενα καὶ ἐν Θεσσαλονίκῃ καὶ Βοιωτίᾳ. At one point he asked a Jewish opponent whether he belonged to the “heresy” of the Rabbanites or that of the Karaites, τῶν ῥαββανιτῶν ἢ τῶν λεγομένων καρρανιτῶν (sic). He illustrates the distinction between the two groups by some points of contention between them (fol. 22v).

The information which Nicholas of Otranto incidentally offers about these groups in three major Byzantine cities is trustworthy. Indeed, the reference to the two congregations and the tension between them recalls Benjamin of Tudela’s description of the Jewry of Constantinople⁵². The evidence supplied by Nicholas is also of particular importance because it reflects the existence of a Jewish community in this city in the years 1205-1207, thus shortly after the destruction of the Jewish quarter of Pera. It is hardly plausible that Byzantine Jews should have immigrated to Constantinople from the provinces soon after the Latin conquest of 1204. They would have refrained from taking this step due to the widespread destruction in the city, its depopulation, and the severe economic contraction generated by the combination of these two factors. Moreover, the prospect that, as Jews, they would be subjected to harsher conditions under Latin rule than under Byzantine dominion must have also served as a deterrent. We may safely assume, therefore, that the Rabbanites and Karaites whom Nicholas encountered in Constantinople were not newcomers, but local Jews who had outlived the destruction of their quarter in 1203 and had decided to remain in the city⁵³. The coexistence of the two congregations clearly perpetuated the situation existing in the Komnenan period. Yet the physical continuity of the Jewish community and its two groups in Constantinople in the period of transition from Byzantine to Latin rule did not necessarily entail residential continuity. Unfortunately, Nicholas of Otranto does not reveal whether all the Jews of Constantinople were concentrated within a specific urban area, which seems likely, nor does he record where they lived at the time of his sojourn in the city from 1205 to 1207. Several factors, though, suggest that they had left Pera for Constantinople proper.

The fire which destroyed the Jewish quarter of Pera must have also inflicted heavy damage upon Greek houses in the vicinity. It appears rather unlikely, though, that the suburb should have been rebuilt in the period of Latin rule⁵⁴. In addition to Pera, Constantinople proper also suffered from depopulation, since the large Greek exodus that followed the city’s conquest in 1204 was not compensated by the rather limited influx of Latin immigrants⁵⁵. Despite the heavy

⁵⁰ Preserved in a fourteenth century copy: ms. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, gr. 1255. On dating and content, see Hoeck und Loenertz, *Nikolaos-Nektarios von Otranto*, pp. 82-88, and E. Patlagean, “La ‘Dispute avec les Juifs’ de Nicolas d’Otrante (vers 1220) et la question du Messie,” in M. G. Muzzarelli, G. Todeschini (eds.), *La storia degli Ebrei nell’Italia meridionale: tra filologia e metodologia*, Istituto per i beni culturali naturali della regione Emilia-Romagna, Documenti/29, (1990), pp. 19-27.

⁵¹ On which see Hoeck und Loenertz, *Nikolaos-Nektarios von Otranto*, pp. 23, 87; Patlagean, “La ‘Dispute avec les Juifs,’” p. 22.

⁵² Nicholas is the only source documenting the presence of Karaites in Thessalonike and Thebes, if the calendar feud examined above indeed occurred in Constantinople, as I firmly believe.

⁵³ On others who apparently left the city, see below, n. 59.

⁵⁴ This would also explain why it was sparsely inhabited in the 1260s: see above, p. 7.

⁵⁵ Nicetas Choniates, *Historia*, ed. I. A. van Dieten, (Berlin 1975), pp. 593-594, on the bad reception given to refugees in Thrace. On those at Nicaea, in Paphlagonia and in the Turkish territories of Anatolia, see M. Angold, *A Byzantine Government in Exile. Government and Society under the Laskarids of Nicaea (1204-1261)*, (Oxford, 1975), pp. 10-11; idem, “The Establishment of the Latin Church in the Empire of Constantinople (1204-1227),” *ibid.*, p. 46, on the flight of the Greek clergy. The last two studies are reproduced in B. Arbel, B. Hamilton and D. Jacoby (eds.), *Latins and Greeks*

destruction caused by the fires of 1203 and 1204⁵⁶, there were surely numerous abandoned houses in the city in which those who had lost their homes could resettle. The Jews appear to have adopted this solution, an assumption supported to some extent by the location of the Jewish quarter in the city proper in the early Palaiologan period. The Arab chronicler al-Jazari is the first to mention this new Jewish quarter. In 1293 he met in Damascus an Arab merchant who had lived in Constantinople for twelve years and reported the existence of a Jewish and a Muslim quarter, each of which was enclosed by a wall⁵⁷. The chronicler failed to specify, though, whether the Jewish quarter already existed in 1281, at the time of the merchant's arrival in the city. In any event, from a letter written by the humanist Maximos Planoudes shortly after 1296 and other sources we may gather that it was situated at Vlanga, an area in the southern part of the city close to the harbor of Kontoskalion⁵⁸. Planoudes explicitly refers to the Jewish tanners established in this quarter, who recall those whom Benjamin of Tudela had encountered in Pera in the early 1160s⁵⁹.

In the absence of reliable evidence, the date at which the Jews of Pera or their descendants settled in Vlanga remains a matter of speculation. This move may have already taken place spontaneously shortly after the events of 1203-1204. It appears more likely, though, that it was Michael VIII who established the Jewish tanners in this area. After recovering Constantinople in 1261, he allowed the Genoese, the Pisans and the Venetians to resettle in their old quarters and, in 1267, enforced the relocation of the Genoese in Pera⁶⁰. It stands to reason, therefore, that he also resumed the traditional imperial policy of residential segregation imposed upon the Jews and the Muslims and assigned to each of these groups a specific quarter, which was later surrounded by a wall. It is a fair guess that ecological considerations determined his choice of Vlanga for the Jews. Because of the evil smell deriving from tanning, it was customary in the Middle Ages to remove the exercise of the craft beyond the city wall or, at any rate, to sparsely populated urban areas. Vlanga was an appropriate location in this respect, particularly since the neighboring harbor of Kontoskalion could serve as a sewer for the dirty waters which the tanners spilled⁶¹. The settlement of the Jewish tanners eventually determined the site at which all the Byzantine Jews of Constantinople would live in the Palaiologan period. Such an imperial ini-

in the *Eastern Mediterranean after 1204*, (London, 1989), with identical pagination. On repopulation after 1261, see D. G. Geanakoplos, *Emperor Michael Palaeologus and the West, 1258-1282. A Study in Byzantine-Latin Relations*, (Cambridge, Mass., 1959), pp. 114, 122-123, 131-135; K.-P. Matschke, "Grund- und Hauseigentum in und um Konstantinopel in späbyzantinischer Zeit," *Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, 1984, vol. 4, pp. 106-109. The number of Latins settling in Constantinople after 1204 cannot be established, yet it must have remained small. In 1261 some 3,000 Latins fled the city, a figure that presumably included a majority of the settlers as well as travelling merchants who happened to be there at the time of the Byzantine reconquest.

⁵⁶ On which see T. F. Madden, "The Fires of the Fourth Crusade in Constantinople, 1203-1204: a Damage Assessment," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 84/85 (1991/1992), pp. 72-93.

⁵⁷ Trans. by M. Izzedin, "Un texte arabe inédit sur Constantinople byzantine," *Journal asiatique*, 246 (1958), pp. 454-455.

⁵⁸ P. A. M. Leone (ed.), *Maximi monachi Planudis epistulae*, (Amsterdam, 1991), p. 64, lines 10-18, no. 31, and see Jacoby, "Les quartiers juifs," pp. 189-196. On the harbor, see R. Guiland, "Les ports de Byzance sur la Propontide," *Byzantion*, 23 (1953), pp. 196-202, repr. in idem, *Etudes de topographie de Constantinople byzantine*, (Berlin, Amsterdam, 1969), vol. 2, pp. 88-91.

⁵⁹ The presence of these craftsmen in Constantinople both in the Komnenan and the Palaiologan period does not necessarily point to a continuous Jewish presence in the city, since some of them may have arrived there after 1261: see below. It is noteworthy that, by contrast to the tanners, the Jewish silk workers mentioned by Benjamin of Tudela are not attested later. An explanation for their absence from the city is offered in D. Jacoby, "The Jews and the Silk Industry of Constantinople," in A. Lambropoulou (ed.), *Ἡ Ἑβραϊκή παρουσία στον ἑλλαδικό χώρο, 4ο-19ο αἰώνας*, (Athens, 1995) (in press).

⁶⁰ See Geanakoplos, *Emperor Michael Palaeologus and the West*, pp. 133-134. Venice resumed authority over its quarter only after the ratification of its treaty of 1268 with the Empire: see *ibid.*, pp. 214-216. On the background of the Genoese relocation, see Balard, *La Romanie génoise*, vol. 1, pp. 49-51.

⁶¹ As suggested by Bowman, *The Jews of Byzantium*, p. 55. This harbor was restored by Emperor Michael VIII: see Guiland, as above, n. 58.

tiative would have also conformed with the emperor's general demographic and economic policy. Indeed, Michael VIII took various measures to repopulate the city and enhance its economic activity. It is quite possible, therefore, that he also promoted Jewish migration from the provinces, in particular that of craftsmen⁶². In any event, a spontaneous migration of that type took place at a later period⁶³.

Our latest considerations further narrow the chronological gap between Nicholas of Otranto's testimony and al-Jazari's description, which at best hints at the existence of the Jewish quarter in 1281. We are still left with a period of several decades, from 1205-1207 to the 1260s, for which we lack both direct and indirect information about the Jews of Constantinople. We may nevertheless conclude that while the city's Jewish community was severely affected by the Fourth Crusade, it survived through the years of Latin rule, and the same holds true of the Rabbanite and Karaite congregations in its midst. Yet the presence of Venice and Genoa in Constantinople in the Palaiologan period introduced an additional division of the Jewish population, along "national" lines. It generated the emergence of two more Jewish communities and residential areas, located in the respective quarters of these maritime powers⁶⁴.

⁶² On repopulation, see above, n. 55. On the economic aspect of this policy, see Jacoby, "The Jews of Constantinople and their Demographic Hinterland," pp. 228-229.

⁶³ See D. Jacoby, "Les Vénitiens naturalisés dans l'Empire byzantin: un aspect de l'expansion de Venise en Romanie du XIII^e au milieu du X^e siècle," *Travaux et mémoires*, 8 (1981), pp. 227-228, 230-231, repr. in idem, *Studies on the Crusader States and on Venetian Expansion*, (Northampton, 1989), no. 9; also idem, "Les Génois dans l'Empire byzantin," p. 260.

⁶⁴ On this development, which is beyond the scope of the present study, see Jacoby, "The Jews of Constantinople and their Demographic Hinterland," pp. 229-230.