Anthony Rabin: Forcible circumcision by Jews of non-Jewish males in the Second Temple period
According to the Old Testament, circumcision for Jewish males on the eighth day was a sign of the covenant between Abraham and his descendants and God. Circumcision of males was also seen in the Greco-Roman world as a distinctive Jewish marker, setting Jewish males apart from others. With such a background, this paper explores the references, principally in the works of Josephus, to the occurrence in the Second Temple period of forcible circumcision by Jews of non-Jewish males, usually within the context of war. How reliable are these reports? If we believe that these events happened, why did they happen? If we believe that they did not, why would Josephus assert that they had?


Kimberley Czajkowski: Pagan perceptions of Jewish violence in antiquity: The case of human sacrifice
In his Contra Apionem, Josephus preserves an extraordinary accusation of violence perpetrated by Jews. The Jews, according to Apion, would each year capture a Greek, imprison him in the Jerusalem Temple, fatten him up and finally sacrifice him (C. Ap. II.91-96). Such accusations against the Jews by pagan authors are rare, even though anti-Jewish sentiments are far from uncommon. Jews are, in many cases, characterised as misanthropic, separatist, antisocial and secretive but this rarely leads to allegations that they committed what is considered to be the ultimate barbaric act in Graeco-Roman society: human sacrifice. Apion’s tale is therefore somewhat unusual. This paper will examine the few accusations of human sacrifice by Jews that survive to us from antiquity, with a particular focus on the Contra Apionem passage. These will be placed in the context of similar allegations against other ancient peoples and other descriptions of Jewish violence in pagan sources in an attempt to understand with what intent this charge was deployed against the Jewish people.

Lucy Parker: Christian Holy Men: Figures of Peace?

Modern historians, following the arguments of Peter Brown, have tended to depict Christian holy men as figures of peace, as ‘mediators’ and ‘arbiters’ in the evolving society of Late Antiquity. Such arguments have undoubtedly helped further our understanding of holy men, but it is also important to recognise that holy men could be divisive, intolerant, and even violent figures, who acted to undermine social cohesion and sought to impose strict boundaries between ‘orthodox’ Christians and religious ‘outsiders’. This paper will analyse a range of hagiographical sources from the fourth- to seventh-century Eastern Roman empire, suggesting that intolerance and conflict are endemic to the genre. It will consider the possibility that holy men’s opposition to religious ‘outsiders’ – from Christian heretics to pagans – often formed an essential part of their presentation by hagiographers as it offered one justification for their independent role in society. There are, however, limits to what can be discerned from hagiography about the actual behaviour of holy men, as hagiographers had their own concerns and interests which shaped their presentation of intolerance and violence. This paper will also, therefore, move beyond the hagiographic record by looking at documentary evidence including letters by Shenoute of Atripe, Barsanuphios of Gaza, and Symeon Stylites the Younger. It will examine not only the rhetoric and behaviour of holy men, but also, as far as possible, society’s reactions to this behaviour. It will show that intolerance by holy men often met with resistance not only from religious ‘outsiders’ but also from fellow orthodox Christians, and will consider what this evidence of conflict implies for our understanding of the role of holy men in Eastern Roman society.


Gaddis, M. ‘There is No Crime for Those Who Have Christ’: Religious Violence in the Christian Roman Empire (Berkeley, 2005).


Charlotte Klingelhoeffer: Intolerance and authority in the 2nd century church.

‘The paper will examine the relationship between intolerance against heresies and the establishment of authority in the 2nd century in church history. Examples will be Ignatius, Irenaeus and Tertullian. Moreover, I will ask how the perception of a common heretical enemy influences the group identity of the church and contributes to the polemical language.’


Sam Baddeley: Severus of Minorca: Letter on the Conversion of the Jews

The letter of Bishop Severus purports to describe a horrific act of violence which involved the persecution and conversion of the whole Jewish community on the small Balearic island of Minorca in 418 CE. Despite serious
doubts about its reliability as an historical source, it has been used by a number of scholars as evidence for the developing importance of the cult of saints within early Christianity, for the continuing vitality of Jewish Diaspora communities into the later Roman period, particularly - and perhaps unusually considering the general tenor of our evidence - within the Latin West, and for the development of opposing yet intertwined Jewish and Christian constructions of religious identity in Late Antiquity. It is the purpose of this paper to set the letter within the context of the wider debates which surround it and to examine the motives – both explicit and implicit within the internal evidence of the text – for religious violence in this period, a period which was formative in the development of Nicene Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism. It is hoped that this investigation will release the letter from the confines of its Late Antique origins and thus stimulate an examination of it within the context of other acts of intra- and interfaith Abrahamic intolerance and violence throughout history.


**James Bergida: Usury as warfare against foreigners and unbelievers.**

In his reading of Deuteronomy 23 in *De Tobia*, Ambrose of Milan describes usury, understood as any taking of interest, as a form of bloodless killing. Based on the Deuteronomic text, Ambrose asserts that usury is not to be demanded of one’s brethren, who he identifies as in his own day as being fellow Christians and persons under Roman law. Usury can only be exacted legitimately from the enemy. Although Ambrose will ultimately affirm that Christians are to love their enemies, he likewise affirms that usury is lawful where there is a right to war. Since Ambrose creates a loophole in the general prohibition and links that exception to warfare, a platform is created for the deployment of moneylending as a weapon against outsiders. Ambrose’s formula was received by subsequent centuries through Gratian’s Decretum, which was a collection of canons assembled in the twelfth century. Benjamin Nelson argues that the appearance of Ambrose’s formula without the caveat about love “authorized Christians to demand interest from Moslems,” who some viewed as “modern Canaanites.” Eventually, the permission was extended to include anyone “upon whom the Emperor or Pope wages war.” Thus, although Ambrose tempers his teaching with a call to love one’s enemies, it historically forms a basis for perpetuating usury as a weapon against religious and political outsiders.

Ambrose, *De Tobia*

Deuteronomy 23:19-20

Luke 6:34-35

**Marten Krijgsman: Practical and Theoretical Ethics of Warfare in the Bible and in the Ancient Near East**

In this paper, different approaches to war in the ancient world are investigated. The focus lies on Deuteronomy 20, which prescribes in detail the conduct of the Israelites when besieging cities. The theoretical description of siege warfare in the biblical book is then compared to Assyrian records – primarily Sennacherib’s invasion of Judah – in order to provide a practical counterpoint. From the comparison of available material, several
observations are drawn out. Firstly, the biblical text falls short as a manual of warfare, but is primarily concerned with the outcomes of battle and treatment of the conquered. The Assyrian texts, on the other hand, describe a fuller range of tactics in addition to the aftermath of battle. Secondly, the ethical perspective of both texts differs in radical ways. While the Assyrian texts are concerned purely with practical expansionism and consolidation of power, Deuteronomy prescribes a kind of cultural or racial purity that goes beyond merely imposing power. Thirdly, considering the position of Judah during the presumed time of composition, the biblical text propagates a fantasy of warfare rather than a manual that was ever put into practice, as opposed to the practical Assyrian text.


**Cecilia Palombo: What are stereotypes for? The function of anti-Jewish images in Christian texts from early Islamic Near East.**

My contribution will look at anti-Jewish polemical passages in Near-eastern Christian texts from the early Islamic period (seventh-eighth centuries), drawing from material available mainly in Greek and Copto-Arabic. Recent scholarship has shown how anti-Jewish attacks in Syriac and Greek literature of the period could easily hide fears concerning the Muslim conquerors (in the aftermath of the conquests), or subtle complaints about the ruling class (in the Umayyad and early Abbasid periods), thus bringing to light complex ‘inter-Abrahamic’ weaves which have been not fully untangled and appreciated as yet. This paper will focus on the use of anti-Jewish stereotypes and topical images recurring in those texts. Besides showing how anti-Jewish and anti-Muslim polemics naturally overlapped with each other in Christian sources, emphasis will be put on the function and value of ‘intolerant’ stereotypes from an *intra-Christian* perspective. While framing polemical images in their historical context (why did certain themes prevail over others in a certain age?), this analysis will lead to more general questions on the use and significance of stereotypical accusations in inter-religious controversies. Hopefully, this will give rise to possible comparisons in the discussion with other historical/literary examples of polyvalent polemical interchanges between conflicting religious groups. By questioning the category of ‘stereotype’ and ‘intolerance’, the paper will also engage with methodological questions brought about by our modern understanding of the concept and its application to the sources. Finally, this paper will offer the speaker the opportunity, albeit incidentally, for presenting a still largely unknown corpus of sources – consisting of eighth-century Copto-Arabic homilies – and for putting them side by side with much better-known Christian witnesses from the early Islamic period.


Levy-Rubin (Milka), *Non-Muslims in the Early Islamic Empire* (Cambridge, 2011)

Orlandi (Tito), *Omelie copte: scelte e tradotte, con un’introduzione sulla letteratura copta* (Milano, 1981)


Jonathon Wright: Not such bad men after all? Levi and Simeon in extra-biblical interpretation.

Simeon and Levi are (in)famous in the Bible for their violent slaughter at Shechem. Yet despite the negative interpretation of their actions by Jacob in the so-called blessings of Genesis 49, the biblical tradition assigns a generally positive attitude towards them. In a variety of extra-biblical material, Simeon and Levi’s actions are reinterpreted in interesting directions, often in the service of other exegetical priorities. This paper will explore some of the contours of this interpretation. Further, it will suggest that Christians and Muslims probably did not make more use of them precisely because of the difficulty in giving a positive reading to their actions.


The Gospel of Luke’s attitude towards violence and peace, intolerance and tolerance, is complex: it is the gospel in which Jesus commands his followers to practice non-violence in response to violence and to love enemies (6:27-35), but also to bring those who do not welcome him as king before him and kill them (19:27). This paper aims to briefly explore these paradoxes, especially focusing on 22:35-28. In this notoriously strange passage, Jesus orders his disciples to sell their possessions to buy swords, and when presented with two, replies with “It is enough”. The passage has proved troublesome to commentators, and what it tells us about the evangelist’s attitude to violence has been much-debated.


Anna Chrysostomides: Crossing the line: Christian literary and Islamic legal depictions of violence against Muslim converts to Christianity, 7th-10th centuries.

Eastern Christian martyr lives are often used as historical evidence; however, they are rarely compared with Islamic legal sources for the purposes of social history. There are several late-antique and early medieval Christian martyr lives depicting people who convert from Islam to Christianity and the reaction of the Muslim authorities, which, in the narratives, always result in the martyrdom itself.

This paper seeks to compare the Christian descriptions of the Islamic official reaction to conversion to Christianity with contemporary Islamic ḥadīth material in an effort to explore the rhetorical and symbolic nature of the trial and death scenes within both Christian and Islamic narratives. For Christianity, most aspects of these purpose-written scenes are clearly meant to paint a picture of Muslims as a dangerous ‘other,’ asking the audience to identify with early Christian martyrs and feel a part of Christian memory through the shared experience of persecution. For Islam, these ḥādīth represent a form of conquest narrative, similar to traditional Abbasid conquest narratives and diyārāt literature. They show the power of Islamic society through narratives intended to be read or heard by those already in power, re-enforcing the collective identity of Muslims as the ‘conquerors’ vs. the ‘conquered’ people and classes. The violent act of killing someone for apostasy required narrative justification in both communities, while the Christian narratives follow the traditional path by fully embracing the role of the meek victim, the Islamic ḥādīth fall in line with what may have been a very early tradition of rhetoric, one which portrays Muslims as victorious and powerful.