

# Reading the *Adversus Iudaeos* Dialogues Through Narratology

## Creating in Writing a Culture of Jewish-Christian Disputations in Late Antiquity

**Abstract** Late Antiquity was replete with intense religious antagonisms and disputes. Intra-Christian debates were part of this environment, and the Church's Ecumenical Councils were based on such religious meetings. Although we know much about debates between Christian groups, we know less about debates between late antique Jews and Christians. However, in the Christian literature, the *Adversus* or *Contra Iudaeos* dialogues, a large corpus of dialectical texts against the Jews, portray imaginary discussions between Christians and Jews. This article considers narratology as a methodological framework to read *Adversus Iudaeos* dialogues. By investigating elements of *temporality* in an example text, the 'Dialogue of Gr̄egentios with Herban the Jew', I analyse three categories of time: *duration*, *order*, and *frequency*. I explain how time creates an effect of realism, which was conducive for the dialogue author to construct an effective rhetorical space that allowed him to give the impression that such debates between a Christian and a Jew were once organised, recorded, and composed as memories of real events, thus propagandising (through their composition) for the correctness of his theological beliefs as outlined in the dialogue.

**Zusammenfassung** Die Spätantike ist geprägt von intensiven religiösen Antagonismen und Auseinandersetzungen. Innerchristliche Streitgespräche waren ein Teil dieser Kultur, und auch die ökumenischen Konzile der Epoche bauten auf solchen Debatten auf. Über Streitgespräche zwischen Christen und Juden wissen wir hingegen verhältnismäßig wenig. Mit den *Adversus Iudaeos*-Dialogen gibt es allerdings ein breites Textkorpus, im Grunde ein

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ganzes Genre, das solche Diskussionen fingiert, um Argumente gegen den jüdischen Glauben zu verbreiten. Dieser Aufsatz betrachtet die Narratologie als methodologischen Rahmen für die Lektüre der *Adversus Iudaeos-Dialoge*. Anhand der Untersuchung von Elementen der Zeitlichkeit in einem Beispieltext, dem ‚Dialog des Grēgentios mit dem Juden Herban‘, analysiere ich drei Kategorien von Zeit: *Dauer*, *Reihenfolge* und *Häufigkeit*. Zeitlichkeit wird hier als Mittel interpretiert, das es dem Autor erlaubte, Realismus herzustellen. Im rhetorischen Raum des Dialogs erweckt er den Anschein, dass die Diskussion tatsächlich stattgefunden hat und aufgezeichnet wurde und auf diese Weise die Richtigkeit der theologischen Überzeugungen, wie sie im Dialog dargelegt werden, zu propagieren.

## Introduction: Narratology and Realism

The *Adversus Iudaeos* dialogues, written between Late Antiquity and the late Middle Ages, comprise a large corpus of multi-topic and lengthy conversations between a ‘Christian’ and a ‘Jew’, who are portrayed as meeting in order to discuss matters of Christian belief and practice.<sup>1</sup> The dialogue authors present the ‘Jews’ as challenging the Christian faith of their interlocutors and the ‘Christian’ disputants as responding to these challenges, giving expositions of their religious beliefs. In the end, the ‘Jew’ either is portrayed as converting to his interlocutor’s Christian dogma, convinced by his theological arguments, or he is depicted as unsatisfied and unconvinced by them.<sup>2</sup>

This genre of texts can be seen within the broader context of religious antagonisms and public debates in Late Antiquity,<sup>3</sup> particularly between Christians and Jews.

1 Throughout this article, I place the words ‘Christian’ and ‘Jew’ inside quotation marks when I refer to them as interlocutors in dialogue(s) to denote that these are not real characters and that we cannot know whether or not they represent real characters. However, when I refer to Jews and Christians as possible interlocutors outside the literary framework of the *Adversus Iudaeos* dialogues or as the subject of Christian theology, I do not place them inside quotation marks.

2 For recent discussions on an array of questions regarding the *Adversus Iudaeos* dialogues see the excellent collection of articles in the edited volume: Sebastien MORLET, Olivier MUNNICH and Bernard POUDERON (eds.), *Les Dialogues Adversus Iudaeos: Permanences et mutations d’une tradition polémique*. Actes du colloque international organisé les 7 et 8 décembre 2011 à l’Université de Paris-Sorbonne, Paris 2013.

3 Peter VAN NUFFELEN, *The End of Open Competition? Religious Disputations in Late Antiquity*, in: David ENGELS and Peter VAN NUFFELEN (eds.), *Religion and Competition in Antiquity* (Collection Latomus 343), Bruxelles 2014, pp. 149–172.

The texts can also be seen as part of their authors' effort for "religious orthodoxy"<sup>4</sup> and religious legitimacy of practice and belief.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, the *Adversus Iudaeos* dialogues need to be considered vis-à-vis the broader issue of contacts between late antique Jews and Christians, against which ancient Christian authors inveighed and wrote.<sup>6</sup> Even though these works were written to portray disputations and there is scant information from some ecclesiastical writers, such as Origen,<sup>7</sup> Severus of Menorca,<sup>8</sup> and John Moschus,<sup>9</sup> who allude to Jewish-Christian debates,<sup>10</sup> by no means could these dialogue texts be considered records of actual discussions between Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity, for, inter alia, it is hard to account with certainty whether late antique Jews and Christians actually held public disputations. Still, accounts of such debates open a window into the interlocutors' world, or, to be more precise, into the dialogue authors' world: that is, a world of disputations to which the readers of these stories could have been able to relate, and which the authors of these texts seem to (re)construct in writing, having in mind 'Jews' and 'Christians' as protagonists.<sup>11</sup> In this paper, I suggest that one way to approach and study the *Adversus Iudaeos* dialogues is by treating them as narratives.

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- 4 Alberto RIGOLIO, *Christians in Conversation. A Guide to Late Antique Dialogues in Greek and Syriac*, Oxford 2019, p. 12.
  - 5 See Michail KITSOS, *Speaking as the Other: Late Ancient Jewish and Christian Multivocal Texts and the Creation of Religious Legitimacy*, PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2020, in which they argue that Christian and rabbinic authors in their dialogues with 'others' deployed characters as foils whom they impersonated to argue for legitimacy of opinion in matters of practice and belief.
  - 6 The most representative example of such anti-Jewish rhetoric against contacts between Jews and Christians in fourth century Antioch is John Chrysostom's 'Against the Judaizers'. See Robert L. WILKEN, *John Chrysostom and the Jews. Rhetoric and Reality in the Late 4th Century*, Eugene 2004. On Jewish-Christian contacts see Adam H. BECKER and Annette Yoshiko REED (eds.), *The Ways That Never Parted. Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, Minneapolis 2007; Lori BARON, Jill HICKS-KEETON and Matthew THIESSEN, Introduction, in: Lori BARON, Jill HICKS-KEETON and Matthew THIESSEN (eds.), *The Ways that Often Parted. Essays in Honor of Joel Marcus*, Atlanta 2018; Dan JAFFÉ (ed.), *Juifs et chrétiens aux premiers siècles. Identités, dialogues et dissidences*, Paris 2019. On an overview of the Christian anti-Jewish polemics see Samuel KRAUS, *The Jewish-Christian Controversy*, vol. 1: History, ed. by William HORBURY, Tübingen 2008, esp. pp. 1–51.
  - 7 Origenes, *Contra Celsum libri VIII*, ed. by M. MARCOVICH (*Vigiliae Christianae Supplements* 54), Leiden 2001, 1.45, 1.55, 6.29.
  - 8 Severus of Menorca in his 'Letter on the Conversion of the Jews' refers to cases of debates between Christians and Jews in the early fifth century CE. See Severus of Minorca, *Letter on the Conversion of the Jews*, ed. and transl. by Scott BRADBURY, Oxford 1996, 5,1, pp. 85; 12.1–9, pp. 91–93.
  - 9 In his 'Spiritual Meadow', John Moschus talks about a certain Cosmas who composed works to be used in Jewish-Christian debates to convert the Jews (John Moschus, *Pratum Spirituale* PG 87.3:3040C-3041B).
  - 10 We can only be speculative about Jewish-Christian disputations in Late Antiquity. The information we have about intra-Christian debates is more substantial.
  - 11 In that regard, RIGOLIO (note 4), p. 14, notes that these dialogues "may nonetheless contain more or less distorted echoes of historical debates and real confrontations with contemporary Judaism."

As narratives, the *Adversus Iudaeos* dialogues have a plot or diegesis, and they appear to represent a world that seems plausible to exist. A narrative, as Monika FLUDERNIK explains,

is a representation of a possible world in a linguistic and/or visual medium, at whose centre [sic] there are one or several protagonists of an anthropomorphic nature who are existentially anchored in a temporal and spatial sense and who (mostly) perform goal-directed actions (action and plot structure). [...] The narrator or narrative discourse shape the narrated world creatively and individualistically at the level of the text, and this happens particularly through the (re)arrangement of the temporal order in which events are presented and through the choice of perspective (point of view, focalisation).<sup>12</sup>

The authors of the Christian anti-Jewish dialogues serve as narrators who ‘recount’ stories of ‘lively’ meetings and discussions between ‘Christians’ and ‘Jews’, during which unexpected incidents occur, such as miracles, divine interventions, (forced) conversions, and even unexpected deaths. In these diegetic or metadiegetic narratives,<sup>13</sup> which are developed upon the dogmatic and theological expositions that comprise the thematic backbone of these works, realism seems to play an integral role.

Realism is “a mode of writing that gives the impression of recording or ‘reflecting’ faithfully an actual way of life”.<sup>14</sup> Its complexity in narratives hinges on an observation according to which “modern criticism frequently insists that realism is not a direct or simple reproduction of reality (a ‘slice of life’) but a system of conventions producing a lifelike illusion of some ‘real’ world outside the text, by processes of selection, exclusion, description, and manners of addressing the reader”.<sup>15</sup> Thus, we may see the applicability of Ian WATT’s observation, as given by FLUDERNIK, concerning realism in novels (this observation applies to the *Adversus Iudaeos* dialogues as well), according to which novels “create [a] vivid world which, to a large extent, replicates that of their real-life readers”.<sup>16</sup> As FLUDERNIK eloquently explained, the intensity of realism and the power it exercises on the audience stems from incorporating images from real life

12 Monika FLUDERNIK, *An Introduction to Narratology*, transl. by Patricia HAÜSLER-GREENFIELD and Monika FLUDERNIK, London 2009, p. 6.

13 Gerard PRINCE, *Diegetic*, in: *A Dictionary of Narratology*, Lincoln 1989, p. 20. According to Prince, the term diegetic pertains “to or part of a given diegesis [...] and, more particularly, that diegesis represented by the (primary) narrative.” According to the same scholar, “[m]etadiegetic narrative [is] a narrative embedded within another narrative and, more particularly, within the primary narrative; a hypodiegetic narrative”, *ibid.*, p. 50. In the dialogue texts, we encounter both diegetic and metadiegetic, as well as extradiegetic, narratives.

14 Chris BALDICK, *Realism*, in: *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 3rd ed. (2008), p. 281.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 282.

16 FLUDERNIK (note 12), p. 53. See Ian WATT, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding*, Berkeley 1957.

or from referring to aspects of reality.<sup>17</sup> The illusion of realism does not aim to depict the exact real world through the narrated story but “to make the world of the novel seem like part of the real world”.<sup>18</sup> Put differently, realistic narratives do not strive to imitate reality but to “refer to aspects of reality which are already familiar to readers; these are then perceived as part of a conceptual frame and ultimately integrated into the world that the readers know”.<sup>19</sup>

Literary realism appears to comprise a principal component of the *Adversus Iudaeos* dialogues, whose authors try to convince their readers that the narrated stories drew from real-life events. Due to these works’ structure, content, and literary elements, I propose using (several) narratological concepts, which may help us explore possible reasons why these works were composed.

## Temporality

*Temporality* is one component that enhances the sense of realism in the *Adversus Iudaeos* dialogues. It manifests in various forms beyond the deictic time, upon which narrated events are described to have occurred. Thus, the study of time in narratives requires considering three aspects of time analysis: *duration*, *order*, and *frequency*.<sup>20</sup>

*Duration*, a temporal characteristic found in all narratives (both historical and fictional), involves two different categories of time: (1) the story time, which is the length of time the narrated events are portrayed as having occurred, and (2) the discourse or narrative time, which is the time the reader needs to read a text.<sup>21</sup> We find story time only in some *Adversus Iudaeos* dialogues in which their authors meticulously inform their readers of how long the dialogues last, when the interlocutors meet, and at what time during the day the discussions end. On the other hand, discourse or narrative time appears in all the *Adversus Iudaeos* dialogues.

*Order* concerns the arrangement of the events in a narrative (including the *Adversus Iudaeos* dialogues), and whether these events follow a linear progression (namely, the events follow chronological order) or occur disjointedly (in which case

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17 FLUDERNIK (note 12), p. 55.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

20 On the different categories of time analysis, that is order, duration, and frequency, see Gérard GENETTE, *Narrative Discourse. An Essay in Method*, transl. by Jane E. LEWIN, Ithaca 1980, pp. 33–85, 87–112, 113–160; Shlomith RIMMON-KENAN, *Narrative Fiction. Contemporary Poetics*, London 1983, pp. 43–58; Michael J. TOOLAN, *Narrative. A Critical Linguistic Introduction*, London 1988, pp. 48–67.

21 Manfred JAHN, *Narratology. A Guide to the Theory of Narrative*, N5.2.2, “Tense, Time, and Narrative”, <http://www.uni-koeln.de/~ame02/pppn.htm#N5.2> (7 January 2020). See also GENETTE (note 20), pp. 33–34; RIMMON-KENAN (note 20), pp. 44–45, as quoted by JAHN.

we are dealing with anachrony<sup>22</sup> in the form of flashbacks and flashforwards).<sup>23</sup> The author determines the order of the described events, and their meticulous arrangement intensifies the realistic parameters of a narrative. Recognising that “sequence is another managed and customised dimension of human temporal experience”, as Michael FLAHERTY puts it, allows us to acknowledge the role it plays in referring to real-life experiences from which a narrative could draw.<sup>24</sup>

Finally, *frequency* addresses the number of times an event happens within a narrative. Manfred JAHN defines three “frequential modes” of frequency in narratives: “singulative telling, [which refers to] recounting once what happened once; repetitive telling [that is] recounting several times what happened once; [and] iterative telling, [which is] recounting once what happened n [sic] times.”<sup>25</sup> In the *Adversus Iudaeos* dialogues, frequency is seen by the number of times the interlocutors are described as meeting and by the number of times the debaters discuss the same topic.

As a case study from the corpus of the *Adversus Iudaeos* dialogues, I will turn to the ‘Dialogue of Grēgentios bishop of Taphar with the Jew Herban’<sup>26</sup> (going forward ‘Dialogue of Grēgentios with Herban’). In this text, like in other *Adversus Iudaeos* dialogues, we find the temporal elements of duration, order, and frequency as deliberate additions by its author. I argue that by manipulating these temporal elements in his dialogue, the author strove to persuade his audience that disputations with Jews were possible events that happened in time, providing opportunities to the Christian participants to demonstrate the ‘correct’ exposition of their faith so that the outcome would usually justify the Christian rhetoric of orthodoxy. The portrayed efficiency of these dialogues may explain the persistence of their composition from the second until the fifteenth century CE. Namely, by creating realistic accounts of such encounters, the authors of *Adversus Iudaeos* dialogues seem to construct a rhetorical space to propagandise for the correctness of their positions during the different compositional times of their texts.

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22 See JAHN (note 21). JAHN offers a succinct but informative explanation of the different sub-categories of anachronism for factual events. See also GENETTE (note 20), pp. 35–85; TOOLAN (note 20), pp. 49–50; RIMMON-KENAN (note 20), pp. 46–51; Jiwei CI, *An Alternative to Genette’s Theory of Order*, in: *Style* 22, 1 (1988), pp. 18–41, as quoted by JAHN.

23 See JAHN (note 21).

24 Michael G. FLAHERTY, *The Textures of Time. Agency and Temporal Experience*, Philadelphia 2011, p. 58.

25 JAHN (note 21); GENETTE (note 20), pp. 113–160; RIMMON-KENAN (note 20), pp. 46, 56–58; Toolan (note 20), pp. 61–62, as quoted by JAHN.

26 Grēgentios, *The Dialogue of Grēgentios bishop of Taphar with the Jew Herban*, in: Albrecht BERGER (ed.), *Life and Works of Saint Gregentios Archbishop of Taphar. Introduction, Critical Edition and Translation* (Millenium-Studien zu Kultur und Geschichte des ersten Jahrtausends n. Chr. 7), Berlin 2006, pp. 450–803.

## The ‘Dialogue of Grēgentios with Herban the Jew’

The ‘Dialogue of Grēgentios with Herban’ is presented as ‘recording’ a public debate between Grēgentios, the bishop of Himyar (modern-day Yemen), and a ‘Jew’ named Herban. Although this is a separate work (‘Dialexis’), it is connected to two other texts – Grēgentios’s ‘Bios’ (Life) and his ‘Nomoi’ (Laws) – all of which are part of a “dossier of texts relating to Grēgentios, a 6th-century saint from Lyplianes (mod. Ljubljana, Slovenia).”<sup>27</sup> Although scholars have proposed alternative dates that situate the composition of the text between the sixth and the ninth centuries CE,<sup>28</sup> Albrecht BERGER has convincingly argued for a post-ninth century compositional date of this dialogue based, among other textual evidence,<sup>29</sup> on “allegorical interpretations of passages from the Old Testament [...] for which parallels can only be found in sources from the ninth century and later”,<sup>30</sup> and on a scene that describes praying “with the hands put together”,<sup>31</sup> a posture which the author of the text seems to consider an acceptable way of praying when in the ninth century such a posture was rejected “by the official Byzantine Orthodox Church”.<sup>32</sup> Specifically, BERGER has suggested the mid-tenth century as the most probable date of the text’s composition<sup>33</sup> also on account of strong evidence that suggests identifying the author of the ‘Dialogue of Grēgentios with Herban’ with the author of the ‘Bios’ and the ‘Nomoi’, with both of the two latter texts to have been composed around the same time.<sup>34</sup> Given the three texts’ authorial association, Constantinople also seems to be the place of the dialogue’s composition.<sup>35</sup>

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27 Sarah INSLEY, *Gregentius, Life of S.*, in: *The Oxford Dictionary of Late Antiquity*, 1 (2018), p. 683. On the dossier of Grēgentios see also BERGER, *The Dialexis*, in: BERGER (note 26), pp. 109–113, and BERGER, *The Dossier of Saint Gregentios*, in: BERGER (note 26), pp. 109–113. According to his ‘Bios’, a text written in Constantinople in the mid-tenth century CE, Grēgentios was born in Lyplianes, Slovenia. From there, he travelled to Italy, North Africa, Asia Minor, and Egypt. In Egypt, he was ordained a priest and then a bishop of Taphar. He continued his travels to Ethiopia, and from there to Taphar, Yemen, the place of his bishopry. BERGER, *The Bios*, in: BERGER (note 26), pp. 1–6, 6–47.

28 These dates are based either on references to theological issues that troubled the Church, such as Monothelētism; or on the absence of any mention to Iconoclasm when the discussions touch on the veneration of the icons; or on allusions to the debate on the filioque. BERGER, *The Dialexis* (note 27), pp. 91–94.

29 *Ibid.*, pp. 94–95.

30 *Ibid.*, pp. 96–97.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 97.

32 *Ibid.*

33 *Ibid.*, pp. 100–105.

34 *Ibid.*, pp. 107, 108, and BERGER, *The Dossier of Saint Gregentios* (note 27), pp. 110–111, where BERGER discusses the similarities between the ‘Bios’ the ‘Dialexis’ and the ‘Nomoi’ as works of the same author. For a detailed analysis of the date and origin of this work see BERGER, *The Dialexis* (note 27), pp. 100–109.

35 BERGER, *The Dialexis* (note 27), p. 105. BERGER remarks that the author of this text, a monk of unknown name and identity, used resources from the library of his monastery of Maximina

The ‘Dialogue of Grēgentios with Herban’ is a text which its author situated “into the fictitious historical context of a remote past”<sup>36</sup> and which by no means is “intend[ed] to mirror the reality of its time of origin in detail”.<sup>37</sup> However, given the main focus of this dialogue, namely the public debate and the subsequent successful conversion of the Jews to Byzantine Orthodox Christianity, it is plausible that it may reflect incidents near to its compositional date. In particular, the forced conversions of Jews in the last quarter of the ninth century under Emperor Basileios I (867–886),<sup>38</sup> as well as Novella 55 by the latter’s son, Emperor Leon VI, which demanded that Jews follow the Christian religion,<sup>39</sup> need to be considered as having left a deep impression on Byzantine society of the tenth century. So much so that the author’s wishful desire for the successful and lasting conversion of the Jews without them returning to their religion found its way into the narrative, in particular at the conclusion of the dialogue, in which Grēgentios is portrayed as suggesting legislation that enforced intermingling ex-Jews with Christians and forbade inter-marriages between ex-Jews.<sup>40</sup> Similar echoes of Christian anti-Jewish hostility from a few decades before their composition appear to be reflected by hagiographical texts, such as the ‘Life of Saint Andrew the Fool’<sup>41</sup> and the ‘Life of Saint Basileios the Younger’,<sup>42</sup> composed around the same period as the ‘Dialogue of Grēgentios with Herban’. It is in such an environment of anti-Jewish hostility that we may situate historically the composition of the ‘Dialogue of Grēgentios’, as well as the composition of certain tenth-century hagiographical texts, and where anti-Jewish policies and actions of the immediately preceding period appear to have left an imprint on at least some of the literary production of the time.

In the text, the debate between Grēgentios and Herban lasts for five consecutive days (story time), and the participants meet an equivalent number of times. The

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in Constantinople “for the life of a fictitious [sic] Christian participant in the discussion. The result of his investigations are the figure of Saint Gregentios and his ‘Bios’. For the final part of this text, the author used a source about the mission of Yemen in King Kālēb’s time, which provided an ideal pseudo-historical background for the ‘Dialexis’. The staging of this event in pre-Islamic Yemen is, therefore, caused only by the sources used for the Bios, and has nothing to do with the theological content of the debate.” *Ibid.*, pp. 107–108.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 107.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 108.

38 ‘Vita Basilii’ talks about the conversion of the Jews but in terms of an irenic process through public debates and bribery. However, as BERGER states, other sources paint a grim image of the conversion of the Jews, which was not as peaceful as the ‘Vita’ attempts to give us. See BERGER, *The Dialexis* (note 27), p. 105 esp. nn. 73–75.

39 *Ibid.*, p. 106 n. 76. See also *Les Nouvelles de Léon VI le Sage*, ed. by P. NOAILLES and A. DAIN, Paris 1944, as quoted by the same author.

40 Grēgentios, *Dialexis E*, in: BERGER (note 26), lines 695–704, pp. 798–799.

41 Lennart RYDÉN (ed.), *The Life of St Andrew the Fool. Introduction, Testimonies and Nachleben. Indices* (*Studia Byzantina Upsaliensia* 4, 1), Uppsala 1995, pp. 41–56, esp. p. 56.

42 Lennart RYDÉN, ‘The ‘Life’ of St. Basil the Younger and the Date of the ‘Life’ of St. Andreas Salos’, in: *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 7 (1983), pp. 568–586. See also BERGER, *The Dialexis* (note 27), pp. 105–106.



narrative begins with the information that forty days predated the formal opening of the debate in order for the ‘Jews’ to prepare for the event.<sup>43</sup> The public dialogue that took place in the palace was held before the king and before a Christian and a Jewish audience,<sup>44</sup> including the ecclesiastical hierarchy, scribes, Pharisees, and rabbis.<sup>45</sup> Each day of the discussions starts in the morning and ends in the evening of the same calendar day. The king orders the opening of the conversations, with the scene having the formality of an official event. There is an order in the narrative: the king summons the participants; the bishop appears first, followed by the Jews and then by Herban. The last day of the debate is more elaborate than the previous four, with the author mentioning the presence of the senate, the priests, and the rabbis.<sup>46</sup> The debate concludes with the baptism of Herban and the whole Jewish congregation. The conversion of the Jews is followed by the law Grēgentios suggested that the king legislate to prohibit the newly converted Jews from marrying people from their community and to force them to mingle with Christians.<sup>47</sup> In this story, the duration of the debate coincides with the frequency of the meetings.

In all, the details given in the text regarding the organisation of the event enhance its realistic feeling that such a debate took place. However, it appears that this is a fictional work which its author decided to situate at least four hundred years before its composition, at the time of Grēgentios, using this character to give credibility to

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43 Grēgentios, *Dialexis A*, in: BERGER (note 26), lines 1–2, pp. 450–451.

44 *Ibid.*, lines 2–15, pp. 450–451. In the ‘Dialogue of Timothy and Aquila’ (The Dialogue of Timothy and Aquila. A Critical Text. Introduction to the Manuscript Evidence, and an Inquiry into the Sources and Literary Relationships, ed. by R. G. ROBERTSON, Th.D. Diss., Harvard Divinity School, Cambridge 1986) the dialogue takes place in an open space (The Dialogue of Timothy and Aquila, ed. by ROBERTSON, para. 3:1a), whereas in the ‘Doctrina Jacobi Nuper Baptizati’ the discussion between the interlocutors takes place in secret (Doctrina Jacobi Nuper Baptizati, ed. by Vincent DÉROCHE, in: *Travaux et mémoires* 11 [1991], I:43, pp. 135–137).

45 I am thankful to the anonymous reviewer who emphasised to me that the reference in the text to “scribes and Pharisees” who are mentioned as being part the Jewish audience along with rabbis seems to be both an anachronism and a borrowing from the New Testament that the Christian dialogue author did either purposefully or by ignorance. Although this seems to be the most likely scenario, it is virtually impossible to know why the author used these particular groups to identify some of the Jewish audience, and whether behind them the author had in mind Jews of his day. Furthermore, we cannot say with certainty how much knowledge the author of the dialogue had about contemporary Judaism; or whether he had contacts with Jews in Constantinople, and, if he had, whether these Jews did or did not follow rabbinic Judaism and, if they did, to what extent. The arguments the Christian author presents the Jewish interlocutor as using against Christianity seem to make sense from a Jewish perspective, but again these arguments are put in the mouth of a fictitious Jewish character by a Christian author whose manner and degree of acquaintance with his contemporary Judaism is hard, if not impossible, to retrieve. Finally, although the audience of this text appears most probably to have been Christian, it could have also been ex-Jews converts to Judaism. See also BERGER, *The Dialexis as a Theological Treatise*, in: BERGER (note 26), pp. 117–119.

46 Grēgentios, *Dialexis E*, in: BERGER (note 26), lines 1–4, pp. 744–745.

47 *Ibid.*, lines 668–708, pp. 796–799.

the historicity of the described debate,<sup>48</sup> and suggesting that its author could have deployed images of public debates to compose his text.<sup>49</sup>

## Duration

The temporal aspect of duration in the ‘Dialogue of Grēgentios with Herban’ manifests in the number of days the debate is presented to last (story time), and in the brevity of the exposition of the theological topics that are discussed throughout the text (discourse or narrative time).

With regard to discourse or narrative time, I examine it through the discussions on icons,<sup>50</sup> which take place on the fourth day of the debate. These discussions are divided into four parts, and they are interrupted by other theological topics.<sup>51</sup> They commence with the author portraying Herban as equating icons with idols and accusing Christians of engaging in ritual actions such as worship, the lighting of candles, and the burning of incense before them – rituals that for the ‘Jew’ fit only to God.<sup>52</sup> Grēgentios is presented as responding to these accusations by using two analogies: (1) he equates the ‘Jew’ with a blind person who cannot see the sunlight, in order to contend that Jews are similarly blind for not having recognised Christ as God;<sup>53</sup> and (2) he equates the wood of Noah’s Ark with the wood of Christian icons to underline the icons’ sanctity and salvific role.<sup>54</sup> The first part of the discussion on icons closes with a short exposition on Jesus’s visual depiction to explain the union of the human and divine natures in his person and to argue that by creating and worshipping icons of Christ, the Christians (for whom the author writes) worshipped Jesus the God in whom the two natures are united without confusion.<sup>55</sup>

In this excerpt of sixty-seven lines of edited text that comprise the first part of Grēgentios’s answer to Herban, the author, without engaging in a lengthy theological discussion and without using complex theological language, encapsulated the central tenets of the theology of the worship of icons. These are summarised as follows: (1) the icons of Christ are not idols, and Christians cannot be accused of idol worship because they do not worship the material of the icons but the portrayed image; (2) the material of the icons does not have a salvific power; it is the depicted

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48 BERGER, *The Dialexis* (note 26), p. 107.

49 See VAN NUFFELEN (note 3), pp. 149–172.

50 The discourse or narrative time applies to other topics of discussion as well.

51 BERGER, *The Dialexis as a Theological Treatise* (note 45), p. 115; Grēgentios, *Dialexis Δ*, in: BERGER (note 26), lines 232–289, pp. 674–679; lines 360–394, pp. 682–685; lines 409–492, pp. 686–693; lines 731–779, pp. 708–711.

52 Grēgentios, *Dialexis Δ*, in: BERGER (note 26), lines 232–239, pp. 674–675.

53 *Ibid.*, lines 240–255, pp. 674–677.

54 *Ibid.*, lines 253–267, pp. 676–677.

55 *Ibid.*, lines 274–283, pp. 678–679.

image that brings salvation through the icon; (3) Christ received flesh; his humanity is united with his divinity, and this union cannot be depicted visually; by depicting Jesus's body, Christians portray his human nature; and (4) despite depicting Jesus's body, Christians worship Jesus the Word of God (a title attributed to Jesus in the text of the dialogue) because his humanity is united with his divinity.

The second part of the discussion on the same topic examines succinctly Jewish aniconism as the outcome of the ethical perdition of the 'Jews' (as the author justifies it). It also explains why the veneration of the saints and their pictorial depiction cannot be considered an idolatrous act.<sup>56</sup> The author argues that by venerating the saints, one addresses their adoration towards God as the source of their sanctification.<sup>57</sup> In the third part, the author describes the demonic provenance of the accusations against the icons as idols.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, he presents the 'Jewish' position that equated idols with icons on the assumption that they both refer to a prototype,<sup>59</sup> and he explains that icons do not have a divine power by themselves, but they are merely receptacles of divine grace.<sup>60</sup> Finally, in the last part of these discussions, the author addresses several side-components of the icons' theology: the worship of the celestial powers,<sup>61</sup> the transmission of sanctity through objects,<sup>62</sup> the veneration of the dead,<sup>63</sup> and the performance of miracles through the materiality of icons and relics<sup>64</sup> are equally explained in an epigrammatic manner.

Duration, through story time and discourse or narrative time, may inform us not only about the realistic sense that the *Adversus Iudaeos* dialogues emanate – giving their readers the impression of organised events over a certain period, or the impression that these works comprised records of actual debates – but also about their possible nature as works through which their authors attempted to offer short expositions of central tenets of their Christian faith, presenting them as established and, thus, undisputed. We have seen these, for example, with respect to the 'Dialogue of Grēgentios with Herban' and the topic of the worship of icons. The theology on the icons is presented as crystallised and in the form of instruction on what one could (or should) answer in a conversation on the topic. The language used in the four excerpts

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56 Ibid., lines 394–402, pp. 686–687.

57 Ibid., line 404, pp. 686–687.

58 Ibid., lines 420–425, pp. 686–687.

59 Ibid., lines 444–447, pp. 688–689.

60 Ibid., lines 457–467, pp. 690–691.

61 Ibid., lines 731–737, 746–752, pp. 708–709.

62 Ibid., lines 753–755, 761–763, pp. 710–711.

63 Ibid., lines 767–772, 773–779, pp. 710–711.

64 In short, the author explains that: (1) the icons do not have agency; (2) the divine grace is channelled through the icons of the saints owing to them participating in the body of Christ; and (3) by worshipping an icon, one does not worship the material, but through the material and the depicted saint, one addresses one's prayers to Jesus, the source of the divine grace. The Jewish attack regarding the demonic origin of the divine powers of the icons is confuted by a concise elucidation of the relationship between divine grace and the icons of the saints.

(and elsewhere on other theological topics) is not loaded with complex theological terminology. At the same time, the brevity of the discussions may indicate that the author's goal might not be so much to argue dogmatically but to offer a concise summary of the main points of the practice of iconolatry. These features could suggest the possible function of these works as manuals that could/would instruct without verbosity, offering a synopsis of various theological beliefs, and they could also suggest that texts, such as the present one, may have been aimed at knowledgeable readers, who may have needed short answers on specific topics.<sup>65</sup>

## Order

In the same work, *order* manifests not in the orderly arrangement of the subjects (many of them are similar in content) but in their random placement dispersed throughout the text. One topic may be interrupted by another, and then the former one may be brought up again for discussion. One of the subjects through which we may examine order is the identity of the chosen people of God. This topic is analysed in four parts: twice on the first day, once on the second, and again on the third day of the debates. Each part provides a different aspect of this topic's theology in a succinct yet comprehensive fashion.

The main points of the first part of the discussion on icons on the first day of the debate can be summarised as follows: the Jews' unbelief in Christ; the equation between the Jews and the Egyptians as seen in their punishment in the desert; the Jews' unworthiness to receive the manna; the transmission of honour from the Jews to the Christians; and a reference to the Christians as the true sons of Abraham by faith.<sup>66</sup> Herban's counter-argument to Grēgentios's positions can be summarised as follows: the Christians' rejection of the light of the (old) law; God's performance of miracles to the Israelites; Christians being seen as using the Israelite prophets against the Jews; and defending the Jews' genealogical descentance from Abraham.<sup>67</sup>

In the second part of the same topic from the same day, the author introduces supersessionist theology. Speaking as Grēgentios, the author argues that Christians replaced the Jews when the latter rejected Jesus, and he parallelises Christians with Jacob and Israel with Esau; on the other hand, speaking as Herban, in response to Grēgentios's previous claims, the author presents the 'Jew' as having recourse to biblical references to Israel being called God's firstborn son.<sup>68</sup> In the meantime, other

<sup>65</sup> The brevity of the analysis of the various theological teachings throughout these compositions could facilitate comprehension and memorisation.

<sup>66</sup> BERGER, *The Dialexis as a Theological Treatise* (note 45), p. 114; Grēgentios, *Dialexis A* (note 43), lines 16–62, pp. 452–455.

<sup>67</sup> Grēgentios, *Dialexis A* (note 43), lines 16–62, pp. 452–455.

<sup>68</sup> BERGER, *The Dialexis as a Theological Treatise* (note 45), p. 114; Grēgentios, *Dialexis A* (note 43), lines 112–142, pp. 460–463. See also KITSOS (note 5).

subjects are interwoven between the two parts of the conversation. These subjects are the concept of the Trinity and its justification from the Old Testament, the identity of Jesus as the Messiah, the prefiguration of the Holy Cross in the Old Testament, the coming of Christ, and the transition to the Christians of the gifts that were given to the Israelites.<sup>69</sup>

In the third part from the second day of the debate, Grēgentios is portrayed as arguing that God rejected the Jews, dispersing them from the land of Israel where the Christians were allowed to dwell.<sup>70</sup> Here, the author argues that the punishments which befell the Israelites, and by extension the Jews, such as the expulsion from the land of Israel, the dispersion among the nations, and intermingling with them, prove that the Jews ended up being equated with the gentiles, and that Christians ended up rising to the status of the chosen people of God.<sup>71</sup> Similarly, this section is preceded by an array of discussions, such as the Jews' exile among the nations and their loss of Jerusalem, and it is followed by conversations that raise the topic of the coming of Christ and the prefiguration of the Holy Cross in the Old Testament, to name but few.<sup>72</sup>

Finally, in the fourth part of the discussions on icons from the third day of the debates, Herban emphasises the genealogical connection between the Jews and the biblical Israelites, in contrast to the Christians' gentile origins, to support the idea that his people are the chosen people of God. On the other hand, Grēgentios is presented as differentiating between their former and latter state concerning their status as God's chosen people.<sup>73</sup> Not surprisingly, this section is also positioned among topics on the rejection of the Jews, the identification of Christ with the new law, and the worship of God through Jesus.<sup>74</sup>

This meticulous randomness in the order of topics contributes to the sense of realism that these staged conversations exude. They may remind the reader of thematic interruptions that may occur in real-life discussions, in which discussants may change topics randomly and then return to topics discussed earlier. This feature enhances the possible purpose of these works as manuals of debate-making, showing how discussants may shift from one subject to another. In other words, the dialogue author engages in diegesis (narration of the discussed topics) and mimesis (imitation of how discussions unfold in real conversations), and assumes in his dialogue both the voice of the narrator and (through impersonation) the voice of the personages,

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69 BERGER, *The Dialexis as a Theological Treatise* (note 45), p. 114; Grēgentios, *Dialexis A* (note 43), lines 63–111, pp. 456–459; lines 143–491, pp. 462–493.

70 BERGER, *The Dialexis as a Theological Treatise* (note 45), p. 114; Grēgentios, *Dialexis B*, in: BERGER (note 26), lines 412–34, pp. 528–531.

71 Grēgentios, *Dialexis B* (note 70), lines 412–434, pp. 528–531.

72 BERGER, *The Dialexis as a Theological Treatise* (note 45), p. 114; Grēgentios, *Dialexis B* (note 70), lines 338–411, pp. 522–529; lines 558–583, pp. 538–541; lines 689–694, pp. 548–549.

73 BERGER, *The Dialexis as a Theological Treatise* (note 45), p. 114; Grēgentios, *Dialexis Γ*, in: BERGER (note 26), lines 624–636, pp. 636–639.

74 Grēgentios, *Dialexis Γ* (note 73), lines 633–673, pp. 636–641; lines 674–696, pp. 640–641.

as Karol Berger persuasively discussed with respect to the diegetic and the dramatic modes in a narrative.<sup>75</sup> Assuming both voices and basing his narration on a mimicry of real-life debates that we know of, especially those between Christians,<sup>76</sup> the dialogue author persuades his readers of the effectiveness of the theological arguments he uses, at the same time preparing them for swift cross-talks between topics.

## Frequency

Finally, frequency can be analysed through the number of times the same theological topic is discussed. Repeated discussions of the same topics are a characteristic of most *Adversus Iudaeos* dialogues. Here, I will consider the conversations on the rejection of the Jews. This theme, upon which Christians based their supersessionist aspirations, is scrutinised eight times: twice on the second day of the debates, thrice on the third, twice on the fourth, and once on the fifth. For brevity, I will mention the four most prominent references to this subject.<sup>77</sup>

In the first discussion of the topic on the second day of the debates, the author emphasises several aspects of the theology on the rejection of the Jews: the obsolescence of the Jewish law and its obscuring of the truth;<sup>78</sup> the scattering of the Jews among the nations as a sign of the rejection of their faith;<sup>79</sup> the disobedience of the Jews and the subsequent coming of Jesus;<sup>80</sup> the juxtaposition between the old and the new law; the accusation against the Jews of keeping the old law despite its obsolescence;<sup>81</sup> and the juxtaposition between Christians' living in a state of grace through their belief in Jesus and the Jews' falling from that state, as manifested by the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple.<sup>82</sup>

This subject opens the theological conversations on the third day of the debate. Here the argument is grounded on God's rejection of the Jewish rituals.<sup>83</sup> The conversation on this topic continues later on with the author analysing the rejection of the Jews and their deception by their teachers, who (per the author's understanding)

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75 Karol BERGER, *Diegesis and Mimesis. The Poetic Modes and the Matter of Artistic Representation*, in: *The Journal of Musicology* 12, 4 (1994), pp. 407–433. I am grateful to Mateusz Fafinski who brought Karol BERGER's article to my attention.

76 VAN NUFFELEN (note 3), pp. 156–160.

77 The other four happen on the second day (Dialexis B, lines 607–641, pp. 542–545), third day (Dialexis Γ, lines 575–618, pp. 634–637), and fourth day of the debates (Dialexis Δ, lines 135–205, pp. 668–673 and lines 1082–1144, pp. 730–735).

78 BERGER, *The Dialexis as a Theological Treatise* (note 45), p. 114; Grēgentios, Dialexis B (note 70), lines 341–346, pp. 522–523.

79 Grēgentios, Dialexis B (note 70), lines 352–55, pp. 522–525.

80 *Ibid.*, lines 356–364, pp. 524–525.

81 *Ibid.*, lines 365–372, pp. 524–525.

82 *Ibid.*, lines 376–387, pp. 524–527.

83 Grēgentios, Dialexis Γ (note 73), lines 4–18, pp. 592–593.

promised them their restoration as a nation along with the reclaiming of Jerusalem in order to prevent them from believing in Jesus.<sup>84</sup> Finally, the same topic opens the last day of the debates, referring to Christian accusations against the Jews as Christ murderers.<sup>85</sup>

The author's choice to treat the same theological themes repetitively allows us to see two things: firstly, the importance and centrality of such topics for the author of a dialogue, and, secondly, the sense of realism when the frequency of certain subjects goes in hand with their disorderly arrangement. This frequency creates an effect of a real-life situation where an important topic is brought up for discussion time and again until it has been analysed adequately.

## Conclusion

By using the 'Dialogue of Grēgentios with Herban' as a case study to examine temporality, I have proposed that we can use narratology as a methodological framework to analyse *Adversus Iudaeos* dialogues (which bridge the late antique Jewish-Christian literary disputation tradition onto the end of the Middle Ages) to help us understand what the function and purpose of these dialogue texts might have been. I showed how time played an integral part in ways that deal with the length of the narratives and the narrated events (duration), the arrangement of the subjects and the style of the topics (order), and the regularity of the narrated events and topics (frequency).

In the 'Dialogue of Grēgentios with Herban' (as well as in other *Adversus Iudaeos* dialogues), the duration of the scenes and the exposition of the topics may suggest the purpose of these works as manuals, whose objective could have been to give an exposition of their authors' Christianity concisely. The non-systematic arrangement of the subjects in these texts reproduces the sense of real-life conversations in which the interlocutors shift between topics without creating a semantic gap in the discussions. At the same time, this disorderly arrangement of the theological subjects denotes independence within the broader narrative. Each topic may stand alone with its own arguments. As such, they seem to function as predetermined or canned responses to specific theological questions, challenges, and concerns. Finally, the frequency of the topics and of the meetings between Jews and Christians may be indicative of their centrality for the authors of the dialogues. By analysing specific theological topics more than once, the authors emphasised what the important theological subjects were for them, providing, simultaneously, concise instructions on theological matters that played a leading role.

Using narratology, we may see that the dialogue authors deployed temporal features that enhanced the realism of their narratives. The temporal elements of

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., lines 488–556, pp. 628–633.

<sup>85</sup> Grēgentios, *Dialexis E*, in: BERGER (note 26), lines 1–53, pp. 744–749.

duration, order, and frequency are interwoven with each other to give a realistic image of debates between Christians and Jews. By narrating debates as if they happened in real life, these authors propagandised for their beliefs, constructing an effective rhetorical space in which they could defeat the 'Jew' and support their correctness of opinion, implying, at the same time, that their texts described what (could have) happened in real life. To create a believable story of a dialogue whose results were in favour of the Christian side has a different register, one that aims to 'show' not merely the triumph of Christianity to the extent that a Jewish community abandoned the faith of their ancestors, but in particular the triumph of the author's Christianity as the correct form of Christian dogma. Through the composition of such works, the anonymous Christian authors created in writing a culture of disputation between Jews and Christians that started in Late Antiquity and continued up to the late Middle Ages.

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