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Jewish Memory between Exile and History

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IN HIS BOOK *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory*, Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi notes that the writing of Jewish history necessarily means the negation of what he describes as "traditional Jewish memory," namely the consciousness of those whom such a historiography is supposed to represent: "To the degree that this historiography is indeed 'modern' and demands to be taken seriously, it must at least functionally repudiate premises that were basic to all Jewish conceptions of history in the past. In effect, it must stand in sharp opposition to its own subject matter, not on this or that detail, but concerning the vital core: the belief that divine providence is not only an ultimate but an active causal factor in Jewish history, and the related belief in the uniqueness of Jewish history itself."[1] Moreover, Yerushalmi claims that "only in the modern era do we really find, for the first time, a Jewish historiography divorced from Jewish collective memory and, in crucial respects, thoroughly at odds with it" (p. 93).

Although I share some of the criticism that was addressed toward this statement, I find Yerushalmi's basic observation essential for a discussion of modern Jewish historical consciousness in the West. Nevertheless it seems that his insistence on the category of providence for the description of this tension is misleading and misses the point. The transformation of this essential concept is not exclusive to Jewish historiography, but a major aspect of modern perceptions of history and modern historiography in general. In fact, in terms of modern attitudes toward "providence," one can observe aspects of continuity with medieval perspectives as well.[2] Moreover, following Amos Funkenstein's observations, we should re-ex-

1. Yosef H. Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle, Wash., 1982), 89.
2. Amos Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination from the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century* (Princeton, N.J., 1986), 202–89.

amine the very distinction made by Yerushalmi between "traditional" and "modern" modes of memory and history, as well as the core distinction between History and Memory. By making these distinctions, he sometimes reproduces the modern perception of history rather than critically examining it from a Jewish point of view.[3]

In order to understand the tension embedded within the writing of "Jewish history," I would suggest shifting the focus and concentrating on the concept of exile and not on providence, although there are certainly points of conjunction between the two. The acceptance of the paradigm of modern historiography implies the active rejection of the historical consciousness that was the core of Jewish self-definition, and was expressed in the concept of exile. The attempt to narrate the exilic past of the Jews as autonomous and continuous actually stands in opposition to the main and common perception embodied in the concept, which rejects the existence of any meaningful history in this sense. Concentrating on the tension between "history" and "exile" definitely sharpens Yerushlami's point much more than the question of providence by emphasizing the polemical, counter Christian, dimensions of Jewish memory. Moreover, as I shall argue here, accepting the modern perception of history means, in essence, accepting the Christian one.

In fact, it is impossible to discuss the topic of "Jewish memory" without emphasizing the crucial role of the idea of exile in its construction. It is therefore quite striking that Yerushalmi hardly discusses the notion of exile in *Zakhor*. He does discuss of course major aspects associated with the concept of exile (as well as its messianic remedy), but without emphasizing this specific aspect as a key element of a distinctively Jewish memory.

In the first chapter of *Zakhor* Yerushalmi provides us with a description of the historical consciousness of exile, but without indicating any centrality of the idea in Jewish memory. His insightful discussion of the rabbinic perception of history (as demonstrated in the talmudic text itself), as well as the transition from biblical narrative to rabbinic discourse, reveals the denial of history on which the perception of exile is established. But in the following chapters, Yerushalmi consciously abandons the history of these perceptions, and concentrates on clear historical writings—those which tell a story in one way or another, refer directly to events of the

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3. Amos Funkenstein, "Collective Memory and Historical Consciousness," in *History and Memory* 1.1 (spring/summer 1989): 5–26, republished with revisions in idem., *Perceptions of Jewish History* (Berkeley, Calif., 1993), 3–22. In the essay I follow Funkenstein's understanding of historical consciousness as a mediator between historiography and collective memory.

past, reflect historical awareness, or are based on research and evidence. He mentions many aspects of memory that are essential for the construction of exilic memory, but concentrates on narratives of history. In the third chapter he makes a clear distinction between historiography and myths (particularly the Lurianic myth), although he locates both of them in messianic contexts.[4] This follows his central question: why did Jews not write history over the course of so many centuries? Yerushalmi is well aware of the limits of the question and repeatedly reminds us that the writing of history is not the sole form of historical awareness, yet he still insists on distinguishing it from other forms.

Elsewhere, in a most illuminating essay, Yerushalmi does address the question of exile; in "Exile and Expulsion in Jewish History" he emphasizes the central role of exile in shaping Jewish historical consciousness and the basic ambivalence inherent in the state of exile.[5] At the beginning of this essay Yerushalmi states that "though one might assume that any comprehensive history of the Jews is already intrinsically also a history of Jewish exile, it seems to me that a genuine historical anatomy of Jewish exile has yet to be written;" he then goes on to offer introductory remarks for such a project.[6] I think that this most important essay should be read together with *Zakhor* as a way of completing it. In fact, it is a call for a revised historical anatomy of "Jewish memory"—for injecting exile into *Zakhor*—and thus for sharpening the tension to which Yerushalmi refers.

On the most basic level, the term "exile" referred to the dispersal of the Jews, as well as to their politically and socially inferior status, their being out of place (and time). Yet this inferior status is only one aspect of the concept. In most cases, the term was not understood as equivalent to lack of sovereignty or existence outside of the land—though these were certainly important aspects in images of redemption. It was instead regarded as evidence of the condition of the entire world. Exile refers to a state of absence, points to the imperfection of the world, and embodies the desire for its replacement. According to several authorities (mainly Kabbalists), it describes the state of the divine itself—that is to say, God's

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4. For a critical discussion of Yerushalmi's attitude in this chapter from a different perspective see Robert Bonfil, "How Golden was the Age of the Renaissance in Jewish Historiography?" in "Essays in Jewish Historiography," *History and Theory*, Beiheft 27 (1988): 78–102.

5. Yosef H. Yerushalmi, "Exile and Expulsion in Jewish History," *Crisis and Creativity in the Sephardic World, 1391–1648*, ed. B. R. Gampel (New York, 1997), 3–22.

6. Ibid., 3

exile from "history," or history as a manifestation of the cosmic state of exile.

Exile, even in Yerushalmi's conceptualization, has aspects that bridge the historical and the mythic. It is manifest—and in fact, performed—in the major memorial days of the Jewish calendar, which together create a sense of continuity and rupture. The Passover Haggadah, a document that may be seen as the foundation of exilic memory, embodies the notion of continuity within exile and of exile within the domain of revelation and also liberation. The Ninth of Av, the day recalling the destruction of the two Holy Temples, commemorates rupture and absence. Meanwhile, from a *historical* point of view as well, exile is crucial for analyzing the various memories of Jewish communities that define themselves as in exile, but within and as part of concrete historical and cultural contexts. That is the implication of what Yerushalmi described as "feeling at home within exile itself."[7]

Premodern Jews developed various theories and perceptions of history (like the doctrine of the Four Kingdoms or the various messianic speculations). Providence played an important role in their thinking, and concrete events were interpreted as manifestations of a divine plan. But this does not mean they saw history as a series of events or believed the Jews were interested in joining "history" as it was. "Memory" was indeed a crucial category serving as the core of both praxis and exegesis, but it was not (apart from the chain of halakhic authority) history after the destruction. As clearly manifested in *Zakhor*, among the few historical works produced by the Jews in the Middle Ages, there are none which could be described as histories of the Jews after the destruction of the Temple apart from the writings dealing with the history of halakhah like the Epistle of R. Sherira Gaon or the *Sefer ha-kabalah* of R. Abraham ben David; these texts can be seen as the foundation of *exilic* authority. After all, viewing the present as a state of exile is the very source of the Sages' authority following the decline of prophecy. In major canonical texts, exile from the land is considered the end of "history" as a significant phenomenon.[8] Each exilic community could have its own history, local tradition, and local identity, but not in the framework of a global history.[9]

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7. Ibid., 12.

8. Cf. Lucette Valensi, "From Sacred History to Historical Memory and Back: Jewish Past," *History and Anthropology* 2.2 (1986): 283–305. See also, Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*.

9. The beginnings of this approach date back to before the destruction of the Second Temple, but only later did it become basic to the definition of Judaism and instrumental in the formation of the rabbinic—that is, historical—Judaism.

The historical perception embodied in the concept of exile received its full and concrete articulation in the framework of Jewish-Christian polemics and in response to Christian attitudes. This is also the context in which essential aspects of Jewish acts of memorializing were shaped, and is crucial for understanding the modern tension between exile and history. Jewish and Christian historical perceptions emerged simultaneously after the destruction of the Second Temple in reference to that event and in the course of a polemical/dialogical discourse. The polemics were the site on which both competitive religions and identities were shaped and defined against each other after a long process of interaction leading up to the fourth century C.E.[10]

Jews and Christians shared many aspects of historical consciousness. Both saw the present as a temporary, transitional period to be followed by a messianic conclusion. Nevertheless, the main difference concerned

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Jacob Neusner traced the crystallization of this outlook to the period of the first exile, between the destruction of the First Temple and the building of the Second, and saw it as the guiding element of the later "Judaisms": Jacob Neusner, *Self-Fulfilling Prophecy: Exile and Return in the History of Judaism* (Boston, 1987). On its biblical expressions see Binyamin Uffenheimer, "The Idea of the Chosen People in the Bible," in *Chosen People, Elect Nation, and Universal Mission*, ed. S. Almog and M. Heyd (Hebrew; Jerusalem, 1991), 17–40. The concept of exile was molded in talmudic literature and later given a wide variety of interpretations in accordance with the changing historical-cultural context. In its nature it is always defined within a concrete context. The number of studies dealing with the concept of exile is enormous. In fact, every discussion dealing with Jewish consciousness touches in one way or another on it. Several historians have tried to suggest a comprehensive discussion of the concept. Cf. Yitzhak F. Baer, *Galut* (German; Schocken, 1936), trans. R. Warshow (English; New York, 1947) and his "Eretz-Israel and Exile as Seen by Mediaeval Generations" (Hebrew), *Me'asef Zion* 6 (1934): 149–71. A partial summary can be found in Hayim Hillel Ben-Sasson, *Continuity and Change: Studies in Jewish History in the Middle Ages and the Modern Period*, ed. J. Hacker (Hebrew; Tel Aviv, 1984), 113–55. A discussion of the concept of exile in the traditional context was the basis for Arnold M. Eisen's examination of the concepts "exile" and "return" in modern Jewish consciousness in his *Galut: Modern Jewish Reflections on Homelessness and Homecoming* (Bloomington, Ind., 1986). Haviva Pedaya has provided recently some most illuminating discussions of the notion of exile. See for instance her *Name and Sanctuary in the Teaching of R. Isaac the Blind* (Hebrew; Jerusalem, 2001); idem, "The Divinity as Place and Time and the Holy Place in Jewish Mysticism," *Sacred Space, Shrine, City, Land*, ed. B. Z. Kedar, R. J. Z. Werblowsky (New York, 1998), 84–111.

10. See particularly Yisrael Yuval's reading of the Passover Haggadah as a counter-Christian text in his *Two Nations in Your Womb: Perceptions of Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Berkeley, Calif., 2006). See also Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines* (Philadelphia, 2004).

precisely this question: the status of the present and its relation to the past, paralleling the question of the relation between the New and Old Testaments. The exile of the Jews and its historical-theological significance was the key question in the polemic and a matter of central importance in the process of self-definition of Jews and Christians alike. Christianity saw the period after the crucifixion as an Age of Grace (*sub-gratia*, as defined by St. Augustine), and regarded the destruction of the temple as evidence of this. Jews rejected this view, claiming that the world was in exile, and that their existential situation was evidence of this. It is in the framework of this polemic that the concept of exile gained its relevance to the present discussion.

Accordingly, Christian authors developed a notion of historical progress from the Old to the New Testament, with a consequent distinction between those who were under Grace and those who were outside it. In this connection, the concept of exile involved a definite rejection of "history" as the context of salvation. In his discussion on Nachmanides' typological interpretation Amos Funkenstein noted: "Typologies, and for that matter all forms of historical speculations in Christianity, express a distinct sense of steady progress within history: progress from the old to the new dispensation, progress within the further history of the *ecclesia militans* and *triumphans*, extensive progress (mission) as well as intensive progress (articulation of faith and dogma). Jews lacked such a sense of progress and hence the desire to show how matters repeat themselves periodically on a higher level."[11] I would add that it is not just that Jews lacked such a notion of progress, but they explicitly rejected it.

Herein lies a major tension underlying the idea of modern historiography to which Yerushalmi refers. Writing history in the modern sense of the word means not only the denial of Jewish perceptions of history, but at least to a certain extent the adoption of the Christian one. As I have argued elsewhere, this tension can be clearly demonstrated by analyzing the concept "return to history."[12] This phrase is commonly associated with a Zionist view of history, where it received its most prominent place. But it should also be seen as a main category of many modern modes of thought (especially western-oriented ones)—indeed, as a manifestation of the core idea of assimilation. On the theological level, and in terms of

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11. Amos Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History*.

12. Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, "The Return to the History of Redemption (Or, What is the 'History' to Which the 'Return' in the Phrase 'The Jewish Return to History' Refers?)" in *Zionism and the Return to History: A Reappraisal*, ed. S. N. Eisenstadt and M. Lissak (Hebrew; Jerusalem, 1998), 249–79; idem, *Exil et souveraineté* (Paris, 2007).

pre-modern Christian-Jewish polemics, the phrase "return to history" presupposes that there is a "history" from which the Jews alone were excluded, and expresses an acceptance of the Christian view of history, with its domain of grace. In this sense, any "return to history," means a return to the history of salvation. By contrast, the idea of exile as understood from a Jewish viewpoint, was not deemed to be *outside* history, but rather was embodied inextricably in the very condition of "history." The Jews certainly did not wish to return to "history" as such. The concept of exile engendered an historical perception that permeates rabbinic literature and many later interpretations. Indeed, exile served as the axis around which Jewish rituals and communal existence revolved.

Thus, the idea of returning to history, and the concomitant historiographical "return" of the Jews to the writing of history, follows a fundamentally Christian attitude concerning the Jews and their destiny. It assumes the existence of a significant history from which the Jews alone were excluded, such that, as an essential part of it, they had become alienated from themselves. In the Christian view, the Jewish exile was indeed a retreat from history in the context of the unfolding of Grace. According to this approach, history was *historia sacra*, the history of the Church, which only embraced the believers—those who accepted the Gospel and therefore entered the domain of Grace. The Jews, in their stubbornness, had taken themselves out of history when they refused to accept the Gospel. Significantly, Christian authors also claimed that history would reach its fulfillment only when the Jews *returned to it:* that is, when they accepted Christianity and the truth of the Gospel.

This notion of history, and consequently, the concept of redemption, was of course given a different understanding in the contexts of the Enlightenment and Romanticism. The Enlightenment allegedly offered a different paradigm in which the sphere of grace was replaced by "reason" and new notions of "universalism" and "humanity" emerged which could, theoretically, embrace the Jews. Generally speaking, the Enlightenment created a teleological scheme of history that replaced the Christian concept of grace with a new one centered on "human progress."

But what should be emphasized is that from the Jewish point of view, the adoption of this concept of history was a renunciation and even a negation of the Jewish belief that the world is in exile and an acceptance of the Christian view according to which the world was progressing through an era of Grace, now in a secularized form—a new kind of a "rational" grace. In other words, for Jews, the acceptance of the modern historical perception embodied in the idea of progress meant the rejection of the essential element of medieval Jewish belief and the acceptance of

a decidedly Christian one. A basic feature of this approach was the idea that the present was an era of Enlightenment and emancipation, an era that was definitely not exile. The resulting dialectic of assimilation postulated an acceptance of Christianity's ambivalent attitude towards Judaism. Therefore, the historiographical tendency to detach Jewish identity from the Jewish-Christian polemic and to define it as autonomous paradoxically resulted in a view of history uncannily similar to that which had molded Christianity's ambivalent attitude to the Jews. If a Christian discourse concerning the Jews held that they were "outside history" and sought to re-integrate them into it, the Jewish "return to history" in fact internalized the previous Christian-Jewish polemics, only now through the acceptance of a Christian perspective. To accept the Enlightenment view of history was to accept an attitude that necessarily entailed the negation of Jewish identity.

Carlo Ginzburg has demonstrated the Christian dimension of writing modern history in general. Following his reading of Augustine's view of history he refers to Yerushalmi's statement that "if Herodotus was the father of history, the fathers of meaning in history were the Jews." Ginzburg claims "However, neither the Greeks nor the Jews ever entertained anything comparable to the notion of historical perspective with which we are familiar. Only a Christian such as Augustine, reflecting on the destined relationships between Christians and Jews, and between the Old and New Testaments, could have formulated the idea that became, by way of the Hegelian concept of *Aufhebung*, a crucial element of our historical consciousness: namely, that the past must be understood both on its own terms and as a link in the chain that in the last analysis leads up to ourselves. I am proposing that we can see, in this ambivalence, a secularized projection of the Christian ambivalence toward the Jews."[13] Following that observation, Ginzburg later concludes that "our way of knowing the past is imbued with the Christian attitude of superiority towards the Jews. In other terms: the phrase *verus Israel* (the true Israel), in as much as it is the self-definition of Christianity, is also the matrix of the conception of historical truth that remains—and here I deliberately use an all-embracing term—our own."[14]

The implications of this observation, when applied to the analysis of modern Jewish historiography, are fundamental for understanding the very concept "Jewish historiography." It suggests to us that the history

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13. Carlo Ginzburg, "Distance and Perspective: Two Metaphors," in his *Wooden Eyes: Nine Reflections on Distance* (New York, 2001), 148.

14. Ibid., 155.

of the Jews is written from a standpoint of Christian ambivalence towards them. That is, the history of the Jews was narrated in such a way as to deny the possibility that Jews or Judaism could represent themselves as *verus Israel*. This entailed a shift regarding the question of the uniqueness of Jewish history. Jewish history now became part of the process of (Euro-Christian) salvation, part of History, part of the West. No Jewish historian, especially one writing the history of the Jews, could escape it. "Our way of knowing the [*Jewish*] past is imbued with the Christian attitude of superiority toward the Jews."

Concerning the modern representation of the Jews, two dimensions of ambivalence are integrated in a way that may clarify a central aspect of modern Jewish discourse and the notion of secularization. In the Christian view, the Jews were witnesses to the truth of the Gospel, both as successors to the Jews of Christ's period and as a people who rejected the Gospel (and thus persisted in their stubbornness and blindness) on the other. In the modern Jewish context, and particularly in Zionism, this ambivalent relationship was replaced by a sense of progress with respect to the past and a concomitant denial of all aspects of exile, as was explicitly demonstrated in the Zionist concept of "negation of exile." On the one hand, the present was conceived as the realization of aspirations which had existed throughout Jewish history, and which could not be realized in the conditions of exile: in other words, as an expression of a "new gospel." But, on the other hand, the past was conceived as a partial reality on whose negation the present was founded. In accepting the values of modern culture as the basis for their self-definition, the Jews in fact submitted to the Christian-European "gospel," to the view that the world was in an age of Grace and that history represented progress. Zionist thought can be seen as an extreme manifestation of the notion of "return" and negation of exile, but the basic position is not exceptional to Zionism; it express the entire modern Jewish discourse.

The origins of the shift between "traditional" and modern Jewish consciousness can be observed in a context well familiar to Yerushalmi, and briefly discussed in the third chapter of *Zakhor*: early modern Hebraist discourse, where, for the first time, both Christian and Jewish authors were occupied with representing the Jewish past, as well as Jewish law and customs, on the basis of historical methods. In many ways, the study of Jewish traditions by Christians, and from a Christian point of view, should be considered as the mediator and turning point between "exile" and "history" (although we must add that the notion of exile received its most developed and sophisticated formulation in this period). Christian Hebraist scholars created the perspective, the terminology and basic liter-

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ature (such as bibliographies and dictionaries) that would later be developed by Jewish scholars.[15]

As Yerushalmi has pointed out, it is significant that the first to treat "Jewish history" as a separate topic, and the first to write the history of the Jews as a homogeneous narrative, was the exiled Huguenot Jacques Basnage de Beauval.[16] Basnage depicted Jewish history as a history of suffering caused by the oppression of the Catholic Church, and in the last chapter of his book he raised the idea of the return of the Jews to history—meaning their conversion as the conclusion of history. One can partially agree with Yerushalmi that Basnage's composition "is far from our notion of critical history."[17] But we must still admit that he was the one who constituted the framework that was accepted by subsequent Jewish historians. Indeed, Basnage should be seen as the founder of the very field of post-biblical Jewish history. Needless to say, Jewish historians did not accept all his conclusions, still they shared the belief that the present was the end of exile, and more importantly, that the present era, the context in which history was written, reflects the return of the Jews to history and the formation of a new "ecumenical" context that includes both Jews and Christians. On these grounds, we may regard the very practice of writing history as a kind of symbolic conversion—or at least as surrender of the desire to define Judaism as an autonomous entity within the West to a common "Judeo-Christian" civilization. This ten-

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15. See the preliminary remarks of Stephen Burnett, *From Christian Hebraism to Jewish Studies: Johannes Buxtorf (1564–1629) and Hebrew Learning in the Sixteenth Century* (Leiden, 1996).

16. Jacques Basnage de Beauval, *Histoire des Juifs depuis Jesus-Christ jusqu'a present pour servir de supplement et de continuation e l'Histoire de Joseph* (La Haye, 1716). Basnage believed that the conversion of the Jews was close, but totally rejected any attempt to impose Christianity on them. Accordingly, he gave Jewish existence an autonomous position and paved the way for the entry of the Jews into the new cultural universe. On Basnage, see Gerard Cerny, *Theology, Politics, and Letters at the Crossroads of European Civilization: Jaques Basnage and the Baylean Huguenot Refugees in the Dutch Republic* (Dortrecht, 1987); Myriam Yardeni, "New Concepts of Post-Commonwealth Jewish History in the Early Enlightenment: Bayle and Basnage," *European Studies Review* 7.1 (1977): 245–59; idem., "The Jews in French Historiography of the Sixteenth Century" (Hebrew), *Zion* 34 (1969): 145–88; Lester A. Segal, "Jacques Basnages de Beauveal's *l'Histoire des Juifs*: Christian Historiographical Perception of Jewry and Judaism on the Eve of the Enlightenment," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 54 (1983): 303–24; Jonathan M. Elukin, "Jacques Basnage and the *History of the Jews*: Anti-Catholic Polemic and Historical Allegory in the Republic of Letters," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 53.4 (1992): 603–30.

17. Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, p. 81.

dency is most obvious in Zionist discourse: Basnage's ideal of the Jewish convert was not so far from the Zionist image of the "New Jew;" both were intended to replace the exilic Jew.

But Christian Hebraism generated a larger discursive and conceptual world, one that included Jews well before the advent of Zionism. For example, the theological dimension of the transition toward modern historical consciousness can be seen in Shlomo Ibn Verga's *Shevet Yehudah* (1550), a composition whose background and context were superbly illuminated by Yerushalmi in several studies, including *Zakhor*. In the famous seventh chapter of the composition, Ibn Verga presents a conversation that supposedly took place between the Spanish King Alfonso (probably referring to Alfonso X) and a Christian scholar, a Hebraist named Thomas. Thomas sought to convince the king that the accusations against the Jews were baseless and were merely an expression of the ignorant masses. Thomas presents the Jews primarily as a tribe with a monotheistic faith, and as bearers of an ancient and authentic wisdom, wisdom that may also serve to confirm the Christian faith. In speaking with the king, the Christian sage rebuts the false accusations brought against the Jews, in particular, the blood libel, explaining that such matters explicitly contradict the Jewish faith. He rejects outright the anti-Christian positions attributed to them and explains—even as he takes exception to some of the rules—that the commandments ordering the Jews to separate themselves from Gentiles are not an expression of haughtiness, but part of an ancient system of customs. Ibn Verga presents the Jews as an ethnic group with an ancient genealogy, as well as a "religion," that is, a faith and a framework of laws and customs.

We should note the tactic chosen by the author to protect and describe Judaism in a work written after the Expulsion, and whose main purpose was to understand the catastrophes suffered by the Jews throughout the generations, especially the disaster which personally affected the author himself: the Expulsion of the Jews from Spain. The Jewish author, in a Hebrew composition directed to the Jewish public, chose to present and define Judaism for his Jewish readers through a Hebraist perspective, by citing a conversation between two Christians. The image, nature, and essence of Judaism that he seeks to inculcate in his Hebrew reader are all formulated through the medium of Thomas the Christian scholar. Identity is redefined through a Christian lens, and the Hebraist perspective is that which reformulates Jewish consciousness.

As noted above, the dialogue between the king and the Hebraist in *Shevet Yehudah* does not take up the entirety of this popular book. So while we cannot identify the author completely with the Hebraist scholar, the

relationship and even the concealed dialogue between them nonetheless play a formative role in the composition. Thus, while attempting to establish a common world that includes Jews and the Christian elite, as distinguished from "the ignorant masses," the Hebraist perspective is the one from which Jewish consciousness is imagined and construed.

As I have tried to argue elsewhere, the vision of Judaism depicted by Ibn Verga through the Christian scholar was very similar to the principles and values that guided ecclesiastical censorship from the 1550s and onward.[18] Unlike censors appointed by the Church (and some of the editors in the print shops), Ibn Verga did not convert to Christianity; instead he chose the perspective of the hegemonic Christian culture (which was also in the process of reformulation) as the starting point for his discussion of Judaism and Jewish literature. Both the Jewish author and the censor worked, each for his own reasons, in order to create a Judaism in which the anti-Christian elements are minimized. Not only does Ibn Verga use Thomas in order to reject categorically the accusations against the Jews, especially the blood libel, he also rejects the existence of any anti-Christian elements in Judaism. Throughout the narrative, Ibn Verga maintains the distinction between the Jewish and Hebraist readings, while emphasizing their commonality.

But while imbibing the values and depicting the figure of the Christian Hebraist, Ibn Verga also creates a space of difference for the Jews. He also offers up a critique of Christianity and does not shy away from theological debate concerning central issues such as the election of Israel or the Messiah. His text also includes implicit attacks on Christian beliefs, as well as new modes of anti-Christian expression. He reflects the new place at which Judaism had arrived. As a result, he foreshadowed the significance of Hebraist discourse for later Jewish historiography. In this regard, while Ibn Verga is clearly different from modern historians, he also marks out some of the main features of the later project.

In modern Jewish historiography, the Hebraist perspective is borne out not by Ibn Verga's dialogue, but by narrative. This narrative is based on the denial of the concept of exile by the very acceptance of the periodization of modernity as a new age of non-exile, and, consequently, as a period of redemption in which the difference between Christianity and Judaism is not clear. In fact, the two combine together what has become the now popular formula "Jewish-Christian civilization." In this way, the Jews are integrated into history in the sense of the history of the Chris-

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18. Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, *The Censor, the Editor, and the Text* (Philadelphia, 2007).

tian West. This self-perception of belonging to a new age followed the dominant Protestant-liberal model of history, especially the distinction between the medieval (and Catholic) past as a manifestation of darkness and anti-Judaism, on one hand, and the (Protestant) present of enlightenment and emancipation. While eschatology was removed from the domain of historical speculation, the main idea was to fit the Jewish past into the autonomous linear model of history as part of the Jews' assimilation to the West. A concomitant process was the de-orientalization of the Jews—the westernization of Jewish history. In all its main currents, modern Jewish historiography has depicted Judaism as a culture/religion/nation whose roots are in the East, but whose realization and fulfillment are part of the West. Exile, in this scheme, has been confined to "Middle Ages," a period that was succeeded by an enlightened era in which history could be written, even when the suffering of the Jews was emphasized.

And thus we are faced with an interesting tension. Historiography did not divorce itself from "Jewish collective memory" in the modern period. But it does reflect the assimilation of a decidedly Christian-European perspective. In fact, historiography should be seen as one of the few media in which this tension has been repeatedly played out. What is at work is the attempt to accommodate Judaism to the historical narrative of "modernity," but at the same time to preserve a differentiated space.

And yet, in pointing out this tension, we should be mindful of the fact that the advent of modernity for the Jews did not only entail the assimilation of Christian attitudes toward history, but a total denial of the history and historicization of the Jews. As was brilliantly argued recently by David Sorotzkin, the notion of exile was re-articulated during the transition toward modernity and was the core of the process of Orthodoxization. He follows the development of this re-articulation of history from the Maharal of Prague in the sixteenth century to the Satmar Rebbe in the twentieth and shows how their denial of history took rise in opposition to new perceptions of nature (in the fields of law, science, and particularly the emergence of the modern perception of time). Similar tendencies can also be found among writers who operated within the modern European context and wrote in European languages (particularly German), a context in which they practiced a kind of "resistance to history," as David N. Myers has suggested in a book of that title.[19] In order to write the history of modern Jewish perceptions of history, one should

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19. David N. Myers, *Resisting History: Historicism and its Discontents in German-Jewish Thought* (Princeton, N.J., 2003).

try to read both sides—the writing of history and the denial of history—as complementary aspects.

In the prologue to *Zakhor*, Yerushalmi warns that "the reader will not have understood me if he interprets the doubts and misgivings I express as meaning that I propose a return to prior modes of thought." I agree and share his following statement that "most of us do not have that choice." But we must also understand that "our way of knowing the past" is imbued with the Christian attitude of superiority towards the Jews. Accordingly, we should insert the notion of exile into history, to understand "Jewish historiography" not only as narrating Jewish pasts but as writing history from a Jewish, exilic, perspective, challenging the notion of progress,[20] and to take seriously Jewish perceptions of the past in order to "brush history against the grain."*Zakhor* continues to inspire us in its awareness of the resulting tension between assimilating and rejecting that attitude.

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20. Yerushalmi refers and expresses his debt to Salo W. Baron's seminal "Ghetto and Emancipation" *Menorah Journal* 14.6 (June 1928) that remains a source of inspiration for a critical discussion of history from a Jewish point of view.