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- The Research of Jewish Magical Literature
- Shi‘ur Komah: A Special Issue Commemorating R. Moses Cordovero’s 500th birthday.

Articles submitted for consideration should be in Hebrew or in English and will undergo peer review. Manuscripts should be sent, as MS Word files, to: asherben@bgu.ac.il
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Foreword

It is with great pride that we present the fourth issue of the annual journal, Jewish Thought, sponsored by the Goldstein-Goren International Center for Jewish Thought, at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. This issue focuses on the topic of new trends in the research of Jewish thought. It consists of 12 articles – 8 in Hebrew and 4 in English.

Some of the articles raise methodological issues regarding the research of certain areas of Jewish thought, whether in Hassidic thought, Talmudic stories, or the editing of Jewish magical texts. Others point to fields of research that are relatively new – e.g., the impact of the social networks on Jewish thought, Jewish occultism. Many of the articles focus on the relation between Jewish thought with other fields of study, such as Jewish art history, medieval Jewish law, contemporary analytic philosophy.

As in the case of the journal's first three issues, Faith and Heresy, Esotericism, and Asceticism in Judaism and the Abrahamic Religions, which can be accessed at the following link: https://in.bgu.ac.il/en/humsos/goldsteingoren/Pages/Journal.aspx, most of the articles in this issue were written by established scholars, while some were written by young scholars who are at the beginning of their scholarly career. All articles that were submitted underwent a rigorous selection process involving at least two reviewers.

The editors

"A baby boy who dies before reaching eight [days] is circumcised with a flint or reed at his grave"

(*Shulḥan ʻArukh*, Yoreh Deʻah 263:5): From Women's Custom to Rabbinic Law

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Abstract

The custom to circumcise newborns who died before being circumcised by their parents is addressed in a short but important responsum by R. Nahshon, Gaon of Sura (872–879). This article examines the development of the practice, and the way in which this geonic responsum was transmitted among later halakhic authorities. Rabbis active in Rome in the late 11th – early 12th centuries rejected this practice. Their approach that *halakhah* is directed to the living and not to the dead led them to dispute R. Nahshon's responsum, taking liberties with its language and contents in the process. In contrast, the Gaon's ruling was adopted by the sages of Barcelona and Lucena. They offered various reasons in support of their position, such as preventing the uncircumcised newborn's descent to Gehenna or assuring its place at the Resurrection of the Dead. These legal rulings, examined more broadly, reveal their image of the world after death. The responsum by the Italian sages opposing the practice was the basis for halakhic discussion in Ashkenaz even though the custom of circumcising the dead was prevalent there. The article concludes with an analysis of the tension between textual sources and the custom as practiced.

The obligation to circumcise a newborn boy who dies before his parents can enter him into the covenant of Abraham is settled *halakhah* and thus codified in *Shulḥan Arukh*. By its very nature, the fulfillment of this obligation is hidden from the eye. It is not performed festively or before a large crowd, and it seems that the Jewish masses are unfamiliar with it and with the details of its performance, even though it is carried out to this day by *ḥevra kadisha* (burial society) members around the world. This article describes the history of this practice, which is possibly *halakhah*, possibly custom, possibly a balm for the soul of a mother who has lost a child, and possibly a practice that stems from beliefs about the nature of the afterlife. Along the way, it traces the development of this practice, from the responsa of the Babylonian

Geonim in the ninth century through Italy, Spain, and the Rhineland to fourteenth-century Provence. The historical-geographical journey presented below will show that the practice of circumcising the stillborn also provoked much opposition, and its supporters advanced different reasons for upholding it. Between them, a unique conception of the function of the commandments and the nature of life after death emerges, and the journey through the history of this neglected corner of Jewish practice becomes a journey among Jewish cultures. Indeed, they all address a single brief responsum from one of the Babylonian Geonim, and they all return to it while using it to meet their needs.

The Responsum from the Sages of Rome

We read in the Laws of Circumcision in R. Isaac b. Moses of Vienna's *Or Zaru'a*: "Regarding the question that Solomon the Isaacite asked Mar Nathan, Mar Daniel and his son Mar Abraham, and our Mar R. Jehiel from the city of Rome, of blessed memory."[1] In the Laws of Rosh Hashanah, in a discussion that likewise addresses the laws of circumcision, we again read:

> And I, the insignificant one, found support for their words in a responsum from the Geonim, Rabbenu Elazar b. R. Judah and Rabbi Kalonymus the Elder of Rome, the son of our Rabbi Shabbetai, when he arrived in the city of Worms after the death of Rabbenu Jacob b. Yakar, may the memory of the righteous be a blessing. They asked him about this matter, and he produced sealed holy testimony; he revealed a letter [in which] this question had previously been asked in the city of Rome, and therein it is written: "Master Solomon the Isaacite asked of our Master Rabbi Nathan the Gaon, author of the book called *'Arukh*, and of Master Daniel his brother, and of Master Abraham his brother, and they too responded that this had already been asked in the academy of their father, Master Jehiel the Gaon, and he responded in the name of Master Jacob, the head of the academy of the city of Rome."[2]

1 Rabbi Isaac b. Moses of Vienna, *Or Zaru'a* (Jerusalem, 2010), vol. 2, §104; *The Rules of Circumcision by R. Gershom b. R. Jacob the Circumciser*, Jacob Glassberg edition, in *Zikhron Berit La-Rishonim*, vol. 2 (Krakow, 1892), pp. 126–28.

2 *Or Zaru'a*, vol. 2, §275. The similarity between the topics of correspondence inclines us to think that the two parts of the question were originally one, but

The name of the questioner, Solomon the Isaacite (ostensibly Rashi), the identity of the respondents (R. Nathan, the author of *'Arukh*, and his brothers, from Rome), and the phenomenon of the question – not a response – that Rashi directed to the sages of distant Rome all conspired to excite and perhaps mislead eminent scholars. For example, the outstanding scholar Victor Aptowitzer put back Rashi's birthdate based on this attestation,[3] and Israel Elfenbein, who edited a collection of Rashi's responsa, included these questions in his work.[4]

In recent years, the voices casting doubt on this hypothesis have grown stronger and have joined those who did not accept it from the outset. Thus, for example, Avraham Grossman, who addressed this relatively extensively, asserts: "It is almost certain that this attribution is fundamentally mistaken," though he concedes that "there are no unambiguous proofs that contradict the view that this is Rashi."[5] Several years ago, Simcha Emanuel showed that R. Samuel b. Natronai, the son-in-law of R. Eliezer b. Nathan (Raavan) of Mainz, is the R. Samuel of Bari who corresponded with Rabbenu Tam. On his migration to the Rhineland, R. Samuel b. Natronai made the sages there aware of unique and valuable information from Italy. Apparently, this includes the responsum under discussion. Emmanuel's novel contribution inclines us to think that the Solomon the Isaacite mentioned here is an Italian sage, whose question, along with the response of the sages of Rome, reached the Rhineland with the migration of R. Samuel b. Natronai. This is how the responsum found its way into the work of his nephew, Raavyah, and from there

that they were split up by the author of *Or Zaru'a* so that they could be incorporated in the proper place in his book. See also ibid., §52, a responsum on the blessing after a meal that the sages of Rome gave to "Solomon the Isaacite." See also *Sefer Raavyah*, David Deblitzky edition (Bnei Brak, 2005), vol. 1, §151, p. 120, which contains a responsum from R. Nathan and his brother R. Abraham concerning the status of apostates. The name of the addressee of this responsum is not mentioned.

3 Victor (Avigdor) Apowitzer, *Introduction to the Book of Rabiah* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 1938), pp. 396, 403. See also ibid., pp. 473–74. Evidently the first to note in scholarly literature was Solomon Judah Rapoport (Shir), "Toledot R. Natan Ba'al Ha-Arukh," [Hebrew], printed as a supplement to *Bikurei Ha-'Itim* 10 (1830), pp. 7–58 (separate pagination); idem, *Toledot Rabbenu Natan Ish Romi* (Warsaw, 1913), p. 12.

4 Israel Elfenbein, *Teshuvot Rashi* (New York, 1943), §§39–41, pp. 30–36.

5 Avraham Grossman, *The Early Sages of France* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 1995), pp. 241–43.

to Raavyah's disciple, R. Isaac b. Moses of Vienna, author of *Or Zaru'a*.[6] Yet even if the questioner is not Rashi, it seems that this question, the response to it, its incarnations within the field of *halakhah*, and its geographical-historical context are all Torah, and they must be studied.

The question posed by R. Solomon the Isaacite was exceedingly terse: "Regarding a child who dies before [he is] eight days [old], is it necessary to cut off his foreskin posthumously or not?" That is, must the parents circumcise a baby boy who dies before he is eight days old, when he would have a *berit milah* and enter the covenant of the patriarch Abraham through circumcision?[7] The questioner does not tell us where he obtained the idea that a dead child should be circumcised. This omission was filled by the respondents, who wrote: "This is the response. Our women certainly have the custom of cutting with a cane stalk (*kerumit shel qaneh*)." It stands to reason that the questioner and the respondents are referring to the same thing. The basis of the question was the custom of circumcising dead infants, and the questioner was inquiring about the propriety, justification, and legitimacy of this practice. Along the way, the respondents revealed two technical details about how the circumcision was performed: first, that women performed it, and second, that it was performed with a cane stalk, a type of makeshift wooden knife. Among the five things enumerated about this stalk in the Talmud (*BT Ḥullin* 16b) is the statement that one may not slaughter animals or perform circumcision with it. In his commentary on this passage, Rashi explains: "For when one presses down with them, shards splinter off, and there is danger in circumcision lest it pierce the penis and render

6 See Simcha Emanuel, *Fragments of the Tablets: Lost Books of the Tosaphists* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 2007), pp. 65–68. On the path of this responsum to the Rhineland via R. Samuel b. Natronai, see the discussion on p. 17.

7 The question is somewhat vague regarding the status of a baby who dies after eight days, but whose parents were unable to have him circumcised due to his weakness. The language of the question and some of the reasons that appear in the responsum clearly imply that such a child should be circumcised. However, notwithstanding the literal meaning of the question, it stands to reason that the question is more general, focusing on babies who die uncircumcised. The problem is more common among babies who die before reaching eight days of age, as none of them have been circumcised, unlike babies who die after their eighth day, some of whom will have been circumcised. It was therefore simpler to ask the question about babies who have not yet reached eight days of age.

him a *kerut shofkhah* [i.e., one whose penis has been cut off, making him ineligible for admission into the congregation (per Deut 23:2)]."

The prohibition on circumcising with a cane stalk thus stems from concern for the baby's wellbeing, a concern that is obviously absent if the baby is dead. Therefore, if there is an obligation to circumcise a dead baby, it would be permissible to do so with a cane stalk. However, this source states not only that one *may* use a cane stalk, but that it is customary; this is the way to circumcise a stillborn baby, and there is no other. It therefore seems that the respondents, the sages of Rome, implicitly conceded the existence of this practice, but in the same sentence, they also asserted that the means of performing it indicated that it was not a real *berit milah*, as it was performed with an instrument that is specifically disqualified from use in circumcisions.

It is likewise possible to explain, against this background, the emphasis that "our women" circumcise the stillborn babies. True, the second act of circumcision described in Scripture, following the circumcision of Abraham – the first to circumcise and be circumcised – was performed by Moses' wife Zipporah: "So Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin, and touched his legs with it, saying, 'You are truly a bridegroom of blood to me.' And when He let him alone, she added, 'A bridegroom of blood' because of the circumcision" (Exod 4:25–26). Nevertheless, according to talmudic law, no decision is rendered as to whether a woman may perform a circumcision. It emerges from the course of the talmudic discussion that this was a matter of dispute between Rav and Rabbi Yoḥanan,[8] and among medieval halakhists, some adopted one position and some the other.[9]

8 *BT 'Avodah Zarah* 27a. In that discussion, there is a ruling that disqualifies a circumcision performed by a non-Jew. Rav and Rabbi Yoḥanan disagreed about the source of this ruling. According to Rav, its source is the words, "But you, observe my covenant" (Gen 17:9), whereas according to R. Yoḥanan, the source is the double formulation *himol yimol* ("they must be circumcised"; Gen 17:13). Later in the discussion, the Talmud inquires, "What is the [practical] difference [between these two views]?" and suggests that the difference pertains to women. According to Rav, a woman may not perform a circumcision because she has neither the obligation nor the capability to circumcise herself; according to R. Yoḥanan, a woman may perform a circumcision because she is already "as one who has been circumcised."

9 *She'iltot De-Rav Aḥai Gaon*, Samuel K. Mirsky edition (Jerusalem, 1960), Parashat Vayera, p. 66, rules in accordance with the view of R. Yoḥanan that a circumcision performed by a woman is acceptable. This view is accepted by *Halakhot Gedolot*, R. Isaac Alfasi, and Maimonides. However, they accept the

In any event, even if we follow the view of *She'iltot* and its Ashkenazic followers who ruled that a woman may circumcise, a study of various types of sources – not all of which are halakhic – clearly shows that the prevailing and preferred practice was for men to circumcise.[10]

The reason for this is linked to two factors. First, the commandment to circumcise is essentially a masculine commandment, performed on the male body, and it is males who are commanded to ensure its performance – whether a father on his son or a man on himself if he has reached adulthood and has not yet been circumcised. It is therefore natural and expected that the commandment should actually be performed by men, even according to R. Yoḥanan, who allows women to serve as circumcisers. The second factor is the character of the *berit milah* ceremony. This can be viewed as a rite of passage, signifying the beginning of the transition from the female world, in which the male fetus lived throughout the pregnancy and during his first few days after birth, to the world of men. The transition begins with the shaping of the son's physical masculinity, and it continues with the boy's entry into school and into

principle with reservations; namely, that a woman should be allowed to perform a circumcision only when there is no capable man available. See *Halakhot Gedolot*, Hildesheimer edition, vol. 1 (Jerusalem, 1976), pp. 205–6; Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Circumcision 2:1; Alfasi, *Shabbat* 56a. This is also the view of Raavyah (see above, n. 2), vol. 1, §279, p. 269. In contrast, the Tosafists accepted the ruling of Rav that women may not perform circumcision. See *Tosafot* to *Avodah Zarah* 27a, s.v. *ishah*, and the parallel passages in *Tosafot Rabbenu Elḥanan*, Kroyzer edition (Bnei Brak, 2003), p. 170, and *Tosafot Rash MiShanz*, Blau edition (New York, 1969), p. 86. In Ashkenaz, the view that women could in principle perform circumcision was prevalent, and some local sages even permitted this without reservation, in accordance with *She'iltot*. See *Sefer Yere'im*, Schiff edition (Jerusalem, 1995), §402, p. 225; *Or Zaru'a*, vol. 2, §98, p. 143; *The Rules of Circumcision*, pp. 53–54; R. Abraham b. Isaac of Narbonne, cited in *Temim De'im* (Jerusalem, 1974), §171, at the end. For secondary literature, see Yaakov Spiegel, "Ha-Ishah Ke-Mohelet: Ha-Halakhah Ve-Gilgulehah Ba-Smag," *Sidra* 5 (1989): 149–57; Daniel Sperber, *Minhagei Yisrael*, vol. 1 (Jerusalem, 1989), p. 66; Avraham Grossman, *Pious and Rebellious: Jewish Women in Medieval Europe* (Waltham, MA, 2004), p. 190; Yosi Ziv, "Milah BiYdei Ishah Be-Sifrut Ḥazal UveMinhag Yehudei Ethiopia," *Netu'im* 11/12 (2004): 39–54; Elisheva Baumgarten, *Mothers and Children: Jewish Family Life in Medieval Europe* (Princeton, 2004), p. 65.

10 See Sperber, *Minhagei Yisrael*, pp. 60–66; Nissan Rubin, *Time and Life Cycle in Talmud and Midrash: A Socio-Anthropological Perspective* (Boston, MA, 2008), pp. 51–65.

the world of Torah study.[11] Regardless of whether one or both of these factors is correct, this can explain why even if formal *halakhah* permitted circumcision by women, this possibility was never implemented. The ascription of the ceremony to the masculine realm caused, in practice, women to be excluded from it, even if *halakhah* permitted them to take part.[12]

Returning now to the sages of Rome, we see that their response is straightforward: indeed, it is the custom of women to circumcise with a cane stalk, but this custom deviates from the parameters of *halakhah*, for a woman is not qualified to perform a circumcision, and the implement used is likewise unfit. It seems, therefore, that this response provides the elements of a polarized portrait, which contrasts the mistaken custom of women with the rulings of the sages that, in the writers' view, reflect the truth of the Torah.

The Responsum of Rabbi Naḥshon Gaon: Text and Links

The responsum from the Rome sages did not appear out of nowhere. It was preceded, and not just chronologically, by a responsum from Rabbi Naḥshon, the Gaon of Sura (872–879), in whose name the following is recorded:

> Regarding your question about a minor who dies before [he is] eight days [old]: we see that there is no need to circumcise him. Why? Because the Merciful One said, "and on the eighth day." And if they circumcise him by his grave, as is customary, it is not necessary to recite the blessing. For this is [merely] cutting flesh, so if he blesses, he utters the name of heaven in vain.[13]

11 On circumcision as a masculine initiation rite, see Lawrence A. Hoffman, *Covenant of Blood* (Chicago, 1996), pp. 78–83; Baumgarten, *Mothers and Children*, pp. 135–36. On the entry into school as a similar rite, see Ivan Marcus, *Rituals of Childhood: Jewish Acculturation in Medieval Europe* (New Haven, 1996), pp. 13–16, 107–13.

12 Perhaps the Tosafists ruled in accordance with Rav, even though the view of R. Yoḥanan is generally preferred when those two sages are in dispute, because they, as was their wont, attempted to align local practice with the written sources of *halakhah*. In this case, common practice corroborated Rav's view.

13 *Responsa Ge'onim: Sha'arei Tzedek*, compiled by Nissim Moda'i (Jerusalem, 1966), vol. 3, part 5, §5, p. 50.

Like the question asked in Italy, here too the query is about a male child who dies before reaching the age of eight days. Rabbi Naḥshon Gaon, like the sages of Rome two centuries later, asserted that there is no halakhic obligation to circumcise the deceased baby; but here their paths diverge. It emerges from the earlier responsum that R. Naḥshon was familiar with the custom and that he even included himself and his community among those who would customarily circumcise the dead child under such circumstances; he writes "as is customary" (*ki hekhi de-nehigin*) and adds that the circumcision takes place at the graveside, just prior to the burial. These words attest to an agreement with the custom. It seems likely to me that R. Naḥshon's response reflects the question. The questioners did not challenge the custom at all; they were merely uncertain about one aspect of it, which apparently was practiced in their locale: reciting a blessing over the circumcision of the dead child. R. Naḥshon completely rejected the recitation of the blessing, first stating that it was "not necessary" and concluding with the assertion that such a blessing would be in vain. His rationale is that ultimately, the circumciser is merely "cutting flesh."[14]

In contrast to R. Naḥshon, who recognized the legitimacy of the ceremony and only opposed reciting a blessing, which was evidently practiced by some, the sages of Rome deny the existence of this custom entirely, devoting the entirety of their lengthy responsum to it, the first part of which we have seen. However, this is not merely a dispute. A comparative study of the text of R. Naḥshon's responsum and the responsum of the Italian sages demonstrates that the latter reworked R. Naḥshon's responsum to the point that they completely changed its meaning. How so? The Geonic responsum contained four parts, as follows:

A. The presentation of the question, with the words "a minor who died before [he is] eight days [old]." This part appears in Aramaic in the Geonic responsum and in Hebrew in the responsum of the sages of Rome.

[14] This expression is drawn from *b. Shabbat* 136a: "R. Ada b. Ahavah said: [A baby boy who is not yet thirty days old, and thus does not yet have a presumption of viability] may be circumcised [on the Sabbath]. Whichever you desire: If he is viable, it is a *bona fide* circumcision, and if not [it is not forbidden because] he is [merely] cutting flesh."

B. An assertion that exempts halakhic circumcision in such a case: "There is no need to circumcise him." This assertion is expanded and altered by the sages of Rome, who state: "It is not [a fulfillment of] a commandment [...] and he has accomplished nothing [...] and it is forbidden." The "no need" in the Geonic responsum has become extraneous and perhaps even forbidden.

C. The rationale: "Why? Because the Merciful One said, 'and on the eighth day.'" This rationale appears further on in the words of the Roman sages, but here, instead of this rationale, the sages of Rome inserted a different claim: "For thus we have received [as a tradition] that this is [merely] cutting flesh." This claim was used by R. Naḥshon to explain why there was no need to recite a blessing. To this claim, the Roman sages added their assertion, which altered the significance of the words, that "he has accomplished nothing, and it is forbidden."

D. After establishing that there is no obligation, R. Naḥshon describes the custom: "And if they circumcise him by his grave, as is customary."

As we have already seen, the sages of Rome were familiar with the custom, and the way they reject it is by casting it in a negative light. They present the custom as the practice of women, who are disqualified from performing circumcision, and they present the implement used to perform the circumcision as one that is likewise disqualified for such use. Moreover, they change the verb used to describe the procedure: the Geonic responsum describes the act as "circumcision" ("if they circumcise him by his grave"), but the Roman sages change it to an act of cutting ("Our women certainly have the custom of cutting with a cane stalk"). If women perform the act, and a cane stalk is used, then the entire act cannot be called *milah*, the halakhic term for circumcision. It goes without saying that the sages of Rome, who deny the very existence of this custom, have no need to cite the fifth part of the Geonic responsum, which asserts that no blessing should be recited over the circumcision of deceased children. Displaying the two responsa side-by-side will, I think helps to illuminate how much the segments of the responsa share on the one hand, and how the altered structure produces a completely new meaning on the other.

The Responsum of R. Naḥshon Gaon	The Responsum of the Sages of Rome
a. A minor who died before [he is] eight days [old]:[15]	a. Regarding a child who dies before [he is] eight days [old], is it necessary to cut off his foreskin posthumously or not?
We see that there is no need to circumcise him.	d. Our women certainly have the custom of cutting with a cane stalk,
b. Why? Because the Merciful One said, "and on the eighth day."	b. but it is not [fulfillment of] a commandment,
c. And if they circumcise him by his grave, as is customary,	f. for thus we have received [as a tradition], that this is [merely] cutting flesh, and he has accomplished nothing, and it is forbidden,[16]
d. it is not necessary to recite the blessing,	
e. for this is [merely] cutting flesh,	c. because the Merciful One said, "eight days old," and this [child] is not eight days old.
f. so if he blesses, he utters the name of heaven in vain.	

15 The way that the question is presented demonstrates, as mentioned, the closeness of the two sources. As we will see below, there are other ways of presenting it. When Naḥmanides discussed the question that was asked to R. Naḥshon, he wrote: "A newborn infant who is two or three or four days old." The Karaite Yehudah Hadasi worded the question similarly. It is therefore clear that the shared mode of presentation, which describes the case as "a child who dies before [reaching] eight days [of age]," is instructive.

16 The word *ve-'asir* ("and it is forbidden") does not appear in the Geonic responsum and is also absent from the version of this responsum in R. Gershom's *The Rules of Circumcision*, p. 126. The assertion that the custom is actually forbidden does not emerge from the rationales offered in the responsum; the most that can be derived from them is that there is no commandment to do so, as appears earlier. It is therefore clear that this word was added by a copyist who wished to clarify the intimation of the responsum as a whole and to generate opposition to the cited custom.

Thus, the sages of Rome used R. Naḥshon's words as the basis for their responsum, but altered them by reshaping the custom and reordering the claims and rationales – all to produce a new assertion, which differs in character and conclusion from that of R. Naḥshon.[17] If our hypothesis is correct and the words of the Roman sages do constitute a clever manipulation of R. Naḥshon's responsum, then it casts doubt on the ongoing supposition of scholars that the practice of circumcising deceased babies originated as a women's custom.[18] It is likely that women were included in the description only to devalue the custom that had been approved by a Gaon. The assertions that women perform the circumcision, that a cane stalk is the implement used, and that the action is one of "cutting" and not "circumcising" are nothing more than a tendentious refashioning that does not necessarily describe reality. Indeed, in most sources that support this custom, we find no mention of it being performed by women. The first documentation of this element is in the responsum of the Roman sages, who oppose the custom, and their responsum is suspected of overturning R. Naḥshon's words. Clearly, the presence of the assertion that this is a women's custom specifically in this responsum demands investigation.[19]

17 It is possible that the sages of Rome copied and reworked the Geonic responsum from memory. This is supported by the verses that the responsa use as prooftexts. R. Naḥshon's responsum cites the verse, "and on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised" (Lev 12:3), whereas the responsum of the Roman sages quotes, "at eight days old, every male among you shall be circumcised" (Gen 17:12). For a similar example of a reworking of a Geonic responsum by the sages of Rome, see Moshe Hershler, "Teshuvot Ge'onim Qadmonim," *Genuzot* 1 (1984): 169–74, sections 1 and 6. See also Micha Perry, *Tradition and Change: Knowledge Transmission among European Jews in the Middle Ages* [Hebrew] (Bnei Brak, 2010), pp. 158ff. I am grateful to R. Yaakov Yisrael Stahl for directing me to these last two sources.

18 See the interesting discussion in Bitkḥa Har-Shefi, "Women and Halakha in the years 1050–1350 CE: Between Law and Custom" [Hebrew] (PhD diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2002), p. 68.

19 See, however, *Tosafot Rabbenu Peretz: 'Eruvin*, Dickman edition (Jerusalem, 1991), 19a, s.v. *bar mi-sheba*: "It is explained in the lexicon of Rabbi Makhir that this refers to the foreskins of young sons who died before they were circumcised. [The foreskins] are taken and attached to men who have relations with Gentile women. Therefore, the women have the custom of cutting [the infants'] foreskins before they bury them." It seems that R. Peretz added the last sentence ("Therefore [...] them") to the material he quoted from R. Makhir's lexicon, and he may have taken this from the responsa of the sages of Rome,

The Roman Sages' Rationale for Their Ruling

Later in their responsum, the Roman sages write: "When the Holy One, blessed is He, gives commandments, He gives them to the living, not the dead.[20] For once a person dies, he becomes free of the commandments, as it says, 'among the dead is freedom' (Ps 88:6)." This formulation nicely demonstrates the main motive for the Roman sages' ruling, and it also draws support from R. Yoḥanan's explication in the Talmud: "'Among the dead is freedom' – once a person dies, he becomes free of the commandments."[21] Not everyone agreed with R. Yoḥanan's assertion, and a close study of talmudic and medieval sources reveals a variety of approaches; occasionally, there are sages who describe a corpse as being obligated in the commandments. Needless to say, no one considered a dead person to be obligated in the practical commandments such as shaking a *lulav*, eating matzah, or procreating. Rather, the discussions of the commandments related to the dead focus on how the corpse is dressed: Can the shrouds be made of forbidden mixtures of wool and linen?[22] If the corpse is dressed in a four-cornered garment, must it have *tzitzit*?[23]

I propose that the significant efforts made by the sages of Rome to express their opposition to the circumcision of the dead is rooted in opposition to a worldview that sees the deceased as beings to whom halakhic guidelines apply, even if only passively. In their words,

which were widespread in his day. I am grateful to Prof. Simcha Emanuel for bringing this important source to my attention.

20 This sentence is absent from the version of this responsum in R. Gershom's *The Rules of Circumcision*, p. 126.

21 *BT Shabbat* 30a, 151b; *BT Niddah* 61b.

22 *M Kil'ayim* 9:4 states that there is no concern about forbidden mixtures in burial shrouds. The Talmud (*BT Niddah* 61b) concludes that such shrouds may be used at a funeral but not for burial, because when the deceased arise at the time of the final resurrection, such garments will still be forbidden to wear. Thus, the deceased may not be dressed in garments that are forbidden to the living.

23 See Yechezkel Shraga Lichtenstein, *Consecrating the Profane: Rituals Performed and Prayers Recited at Cemeteries and Burial Sites of the Pious* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv, 2007), pp. 114–73. Among the bounty of sources he cites, I wish to single one out: *Sifrei Zuta Bamidbar*, Horowitz edition (Jerusalem, 1966), p. 288: "Why was the section about the wood-gatherer juxtaposed with the section about *tzitzit*? To tell you that the dead are obligated in *tzitzit*." At the foundation of this discussion is the question of whether it is possible to improve the status and situation of the deceased. See Arye Edrei, "Atonement for the Deceased" [Hebrew], in *Meḥkarim Be-Talmud UveMidrash: Sefer Zikaron le-Tirzah Lifshitz*, ed. Arye Edrei et al. (Jerusalem, 2005), pp. 1–27.

"When the Holy One, blessed is He, gives commandments, He gives them to the living, not the dead." The Roman sages detected such a worldview in the Geonic responsum. They rejected it the moment they heard it, whether by reworking its text or by direct confrontation with its ramifications. The question of the status of the deceased vis-à-vis the world of the living, and even more so the issue of the status of a corpse – which has been buried and will decompose into the dirt to which it has returned – is at the center of the debate. According to the sages of Rome, there is a clear dividing line between the living and the dead. Circumcision, even of the most unconvincing sort, even if performed by a woman using a cane stalk, which is nothing but the cutting of flesh – even from this it is right and proper to eschew.[24]

The responsum of the Roman sages was apparently written at the end of the eleventh century or the first years of the twelfth century.[25] Similar content and stances can be found among other contemporary Italian sages, whose writings will be mentioned below.[26] However, in other areas of Jewish culture, the picture was different, and it seems that the custom of circumcising deceased babies remained in place there. Different explanations were therefore given for this practice, from which we can learn about the thinking of those who upheld it.

The Explanation of the Sages for R. Naḥshon Gaon's Ruling: "So That His Foreskin Does Not Come with Him"

R. Abraham b. Isaac of Narbonne (1080/85–1159), an early Provencal sage,[27] cites the responsum of R. Naḥshon Gaon: "The Gaon, of blessed memory, wrote that when a baby who has not reached eight [days of age] dies, so that his foreskin does not rise with him, the custom

[24] On this issue, see Rubin, *Time and Life Cycle*, pp. 166–76; Avriel Bar-Levav, "The Concept of Death in *Sefer ha-Ḥayim* (*The Book of Life*) by Rabbi Shimon Frankfurt" [Hebrew] (PhD diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1997), pp. 129–34; idem, "Death and the (Blurred) Boundaries of Magic," *Kabbalah* 7 (2002): 51–64.

[25] R. Nathan b. Yeḥiel of Rome, the author of *'Arukh*, was one of the brothers who responded. He died, it seems, around the year 1110, so the responsum cannot be dated later than this year. See *Sefer Ha-'Arukh*, Kohut edition (Vienna, 1926), vol. 1, p. 4.

[26] See below, The Attitude of Other Italian Sages to the Circumcision of Dead Infants.

[27] See Israel M. Ta-Shma, *R. Zeraḥyah Ha-Levi Ba'al Ha-Ma'or U-Venei Ḥugo* (Jerusalem, 1993), pp. 7–9.

among us is that he is circumcised at the cemetery, to remove his disgrace from him."[28] Unlike the sages of Rome, who upended the meaning of the Geonic responsum, the details and primary meaning of the responsum are preserved by the Provencal sage. However, the writer adds two explanations that are essentially the same: "so that his foreskin does not rise with him" and "to remove his disgrace from him." It seems that one is the translation of the other.[29]

R. Abraham b. Isaac seems to have received the proposed explanation for the Geonic responsum, as well as the main contents of the responsum itself, from his teacher, R. Judah b. Barzilai of Barcelona,[30] in whose name it is said:

> It is customary to circumcise a son who dies before reaching eight days [of age] [...] and thus was written by a Gaon. However, we do not know a reason for this custom, neither from the Torah nor from the words of the sages. Yet it is best to do so, so that his foreskin does not rise with him. Thus wrote R. Judah b. Barzilai, of blessed memory.[31]

We learn from R. Judah of Barcelona's attestation that the responsum of R. Naḥshon Gaon contained the ruling, but no rationale, either from the Torah or from the sages.[32] Therefore, R. Judah suggests an explanation: "so that his foreskin does not rise with him." This

28 *Sefer Ha-Eshkol*, Albeck edition (Jerusalem, 1984), vol. 2, p. 2; *Temim De'im*, §171. The *Temim De'im* version adds: "What the Gaon wrote is a custom, and we do not know its source. However, it is good to perform any custom that does not involve a prohibition, especially here, where it seems correct, so that his foreskin does not rise with him." It is evident from the content of this addition, plus its absence from *Sefer Ha-Eshkol*, that this is an explanation of the Gaon's words, which originally contained no rationale.

29 See Gen 34:14: "We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to a man who has a foreskin, for that is a disgrace for us."

30 See B. Z. Benedict, "Ha-Lamad R. Avraham b. R. Yitzḥak Mi-Narbonne etzel R. Yehudah b. R. Barzilai Be-Barcelona?" in Benedict, *Merkaz Ha-Torah Be-Provence* (Jerusalem, 1985), pp. 31–32.

31 R. Aaron Hakohen of Lunel, *Orḥot Ḥayim*, M. E. Schlesinger edition (New York, 1959), vol. 2, p. 11.

32 R. Isaac b. Abba Mari, *Sefer Ha-'Ittur*, M. Yonah edition (New York, 1956), section 3, p. 51a, likewise cites the Geonic responsum without any rationale. R. Isaac was a student of R. Abraham b. Isaac of Narbonne. This, too, shows that the original responsum contained no explanation. See also n. 28 above with regard to *Temim De'im*.

explanation eventually made its way into the writings of his student, R. Abraham b. Isaac.

It is almost certain that the explanation "so that his foreskin does not rise with him" is in dialogue with a midrashic notion that appears in *Genesis Rabbah*:

> R. Levi said: In the future, Abraham will be sitting at the entrance to Gehinnom, and he will not allow a circumcised person of Israel to descend into it. But those who sinned too much, what does he do to them? He removes the foreskin from babies who have died before they were circumcised, places it on them, and sends them down to Gehinnom. Thus, it is said (Ps 55:21): "He attacked his ally; he violated his covenant."[33]

The implication is that those babies whose foreskins are not removed are prone to descending to Gehinnom. Abraham, the first to be circumcised and to circumcise, does not identify them at the gates of Gehinnom, so one who arrives there with his foreskin – his disgrace – upon his body will not be saved from the judgment of Gehinnom. It is almost certain that the explanation of the Geonic responsum offered by R. Judah of Barcelona, and R. Abraham b. Isaac of Narbonne in his wake, was shaped by this *midrash*. These writers viewed the custom of circumcising children who had died as a reaction to the implications of the *midrash*. If one who is still uncircumcised risks being improperly classified at the gates of Hell, then we must help our patriarch, Abraham, to identify those unfortunate infants who die before they are circumcised. While not a commandment, this is a beneficial custom.[34]

[33] *Genesis Rabbah*, Theodor-Albeck edition (Jerusalem, 1965), section 48, p. 483. Though this passage does not specify the identity of those who "sinned too much," the Talmud (*BT 'Eruvin* 19a) asserts that one who has sexual relations with an idolatrous Gentile woman is deemed to have committed epispasm, and Abraham will not save him from Gehinnom. See also the editors' notes on this *Genesis Rabbah* passage.

[34] It emerges from the words of R. Peretz (see above, n. 19) that women circumcise these infants not to protect them, but to protect those who sin "too much," for if the foreskins of stillborn babies are removed, Abraham will not have enough foreskins to attach to sinners. The latter, then, stand to gain from the mothers' actions. It stands to reason that this surprising explanation implicitly contends with the question of what sin these babies, who died before they could be circumcised, had committed such that they must be sent to Gehinnom. Their circumcision is thus not for their benefit, but for others.

But there is still a catch. A close study of the *midrash* shows that even if the circumcision of deceased infants can remedy the problem of classification at the gates of Gehinnom, it also clearly emerges from the *midrash* that the practice was **not** to circumcise these babies. The main principle of the midrashic narrative is that Abraham attaches the foreskins of those babies to those who "sinned too much"; justice dictates that even if these sinners have been circumcised, they deserve to go to Gehinnom. If we systematically remove the foreskins of stillborns before burial, then they will not be available for Abraham to attach to circumcised sinners! Indeed, this was the rationale behind the sages of Rome using this *midrash* to prove their point: that the foreskins of deceased infants should **not** be removed before burial. It is not only halakhic thinking that indicates this ruling, but also an expedient midrashic attestation. It indeed clearly emerges that in the world of the authors of this *midrash*, the custom was not to remove the foreskins of dead infants. The Roman sages sum this up succinctly: "It emerges from here that they did not cut them, for if they cut them, how would Abraham remove them?"[35]

What perhaps should have been obvious from the outset is thus made clear: the opposition of the Roman sages to circumcising the dead stems from their view that only living people, who are enjoined to uphold God's commandments, act within the realm of *halakhah*. Only their choice to perform a commandment has value. Manipulating a corpse gives nothing to, and derogates nothing from, the dead, for the commandments have been given to the living. In contrast, those who upheld the custom in various times and places – and they seem to be the majority – integrated actions that originate in a different view of the world of the dead and their fate within it into their religious praxis. The rationale presented here, "so that his foreskin does not come with him," is but the first portent of this trend, and a close study of additional sources and rationales for the custom can disclose additional conceptions of death and the substance of existence in the afterlife.

[35] *Or Zaru'a* (see above, n. 1). The version of the responsum in *The Rules of Circumcision* does not include this sentence. Perhaps it is an explanatory gloss added only to the *Or Zaru'a* version.

The Sages' Explanations of Rabbi Naḥshon Gaon's Ruling: The Resurrection of the Dead

R. Naḥshon's responsum included, I believe, only a treatment of the proper modes of behavior in the event of the death of an uncircumcised infant; the explanation presented in the previous section was added to the responsum later. A different rationale than the one ascribed to the responsum emerges from the words of R. Isaac ibn Gi'at (d. 1089), the head of the rabbinical academy at Lucena during the second half of the eleventh century. He wrote:

> And Rabbi Naḥshon said: A newborn infant who is two, three, or four days old, we learned, and it is our custom, that when he dies, we circumcise him at his grave, but we do not recite the blessing "concerning circumcision," and he is given a name, so that when the heavens show mercy and the dead are resurrected, the infant will know and identify his father.[36]

In the first part of his statement (until "concerning circumcision"), R. Isaac ibn Gi'at summarizes R. Naḥshon's ruling, attesting to the custom of graveside circumcision and forbidding the recitation of the blessing over the circumcision. He then adds that it is customary to name the infant before burial so that at the time of the resurrection, he will be able to recognize his father and family. The locus of the explanation has thus shifted from the gates of Gehinnom after death to the future resurrection. According to this explanation, the entire custom seems to be a platform for giving the child a name, as ancient tradition teaches that it is customary for a name to be given on the day of circumcision.[37]

36 *Sha'arei Simḥah*, Bamberger edition (Furth, 1861), Laws of Mourning, p. 41. For R. Isaac ibn Gi'at and his works, see Israel M. Ta-Shma, *Talmudic Commentary in Europe and North Africa: Literary History* [Hebrew], part 1 (Jerusalem, 1999), pp. 162–66.

37 The custom of giving a name at the time of circumcision is ancient. The earliest evidence of it is in Luke 1:59–63, concerning the naming of John the Baptist: "On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him after his father Zechariah, but his mother spoke up and said, 'No! He is to be called John.' They said to her, 'There is no one among your relatives who has that name.' Then they made signs to his father, to find out what he would like to name the child. He asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone's astonishment he wrote, 'His name is John'" (NIV; this translation is used for all references to the Christian Bible in this article). See also Luke 2:21. This was the

This explanation for the early custom even crossed the borders of Rabbinic Judaism. The twelfth-century Karaite sage Judah Hadassi, in his *Eshkol Ha-Kofer*, writes:

> Thus, the rabbis, your shepherds, instructed and practice until today that children who die at the age of two days old or three or more are circumcised by the midwives – which your God did not command. And they say that the uncircumcised will not arise upon the resurrection of your dead. They even draw a drop of the blood of the covenant from them. This entire practice is improper before God, and He did not command such a circumcision. For He commanded his covenant [of circumcision] upon the living, as it says, "and My covenant shall be in your flesh..." (Gen 17:13), and it says, "who does not circumcise the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off" (Gen 17:14). From its saying "shall be cut off," we understand that circumcision is commanded for the living, not for the dead, who have already been cut off from your land.[38]

Hadassi links the keeping of this custom – which he deems baseless – with the Rabbinite belief in the resurrection of the dead, even though he presents this slightly differently than R. Isaac ibn Gi'at. If, according to R. Isaac, the uncircumcised infant is deserving of resurrection and his circumcision (and naming) is meant mainly so that he can identify his family on the day of revival, according to Hadassi's testimony, then the circumcision is a necessary condition for resurrection. In his words: "[The rabbis] say that the uncircumcised will not arise upon the resurrection of your dead."

Evidently, there are two different, albeit similar, traditions before us. Nevertheless, it seems that the source of Hadassi's knowledge of the custom and its explanation is found in the writing of R. Isaac ibn Gi'at or one of his predecessors or successors. Support for this, if not absolute proof, can be found in how the statement is presented. In the responsum of the sages of Rome, which is quoted at the beginning of this article, the problem addressed here was

Jewish custom throughout the generations. For example, the late eighth-/early ninth-century *Pirkei De-Rabbi Eliezer* (Luria edition [Warsaw, 1852], chap. 48, p. 114b) describes how Moses was circumcised and named Jekuthiel on his eighth day. See also *Siddur R. Sa'adiah Gaon*, Davidson edition (Jerusalem, 1941), p. 99b.

38 Judah Hadassi, *Eshkol Ha-Kofer* (Yevpatoria, 1836), §303, p. 113a.

presented with the words: "Regarding a child who dies before [he is] eight days [old]." This is how the question was presented in the responsum of R. Naḥshon Gaon that appears in collections of Geonic responsa, in the ruling of R. Judah of Barcelona, and in *Sefer Ha-Eshkol*. In contrast, R. Isaac ibn Gi'at reformulated the question and answer in the Geonic responsum in his own words, presenting the scenario as follows: "A newborn infant who is two, three, or four days old." He does not discuss a child who is less than eight days old, but only a child who is two, three, or four days old. Hadassi, the Karaite sage, described the case similarly: "children [...] of the age of two days or three or more." This style, along with the link to the topic of the resurrection, demonstrates that Hadassi's sources relied on the words of R. Isaac ibn Gi'at or someone close to him.

Naḥmanides similarly presented the responsum of R. Naḥshon using the words of R. Isaac ibn Gi'at: "A newborn infant who is two, three, or four days old [...] so that when the heavens show mercy and the dead are resurrected, the infant will know and identify his father."[39] These views were shared by R. Asher b. Jeḥiel and R. Jeruḥam b. Meshulam,[40] though the latter reformulated the passage and wrote:

> A newborn infant who is three or four days old, it is customary, and we have a tradition, that if he dies, we circumcise him at his grave and place him there as a memorial, so that he will be shown mercy from the heavens and will be revived at the resurrection, when he will have intelligence and recognize his father. Thus wrote R. Gershoni.[41]

39 Naḥmanides, *Torat Ha-adam*, in: *Kitvei Ha-Ramban*, Chavel edition (Jerusalem, 1964), p. 87.

40 R. Asher, *Piskei Ha-Rosh*, *Mo'ed Qatan* 3:88. From there, it reached R. David Abudraham (*Perush Ha-Berakhot VehaTefilot*, *Abudraham Ha-Shalem* [Jerusalem, 1963], p. 352), a student of R. Jacob, the son of R. Asher. It stands to reason that he received R. Asher's formulation through this conduit. See R. Jeruḥam, *Toldot Adam Ve-Ḥavah* (Tel Aviv, 1960), vol. 1, p. 13a. On this author and his work, see Judah D. Galinsky, "Of Exile and Halakhah: Fourteenth-Century Spanish Halakhic Literature and the Works of the French Exiles Aaron ha-Kohen and Jeruham b. Meshulam," *Jewish History* 22 (2008): 84.

41 R. Gershon b. Solomon, author of *Sefer Ha-Shalman*, who was active, evidently, during the middle third of the thirteenth century and passed away c. 1265. See Yisrael Mordechai Peles, "Din Petilat Ḥanukah 'al pi Ketav Yad me-et Rabbenu Gershom b. R. Shlomo mi-Béziers, Ba'al Ha-Shalman, Ve-Zikno Rabbenu Asher Mi-Lunel Ba'al Ha-Minhagot," *Ha-Ma'ayan* 47:2 (2007): 3–7.

For the practice of circumcising dead infants, which was approved and perhaps even partially shaped by R. Naḥshon Gaon in the ninth century, two different explanations were proposed. The first links the custom to the resurrection, and its earliest attestation is from the circle of R. Isaac ibn Gi'at. From there, it spread to Hadassi, Naḥmanides, R. Asher, and R. Jeruḥam. The second links the custom with the desire to prevent the deceased infant from arriving at the Day of Judgment with his foreskin intact, an explanation whose first attestation is from R. Judah of Barcelona, who was active in the generation after R. Isaac ibn Gi'at. This explanation can be traced to *Sefer Ha-Eshkol* and is copied into *Temim De'im*.[42]

As is typical of such processes, someone unified the two streams into a single framework and even added something of his own. We find the following in R. Aaron Hakohen of Lunel's early fourteenth-century *Orḥot Ḥayim:*[43]

> The custom is to circumcise a son who dies before reaching eight [days of age] with a flint or reed in the cemetery, to remove his disgrace from him so that he is not buried with his foreskin, for it is a disgrace for him. Thus wrote the Gaon. However, we do not know a reason for this custom, neither from the Torah nor from the words of the sages. Yet it is best to do so, so that his foreskin does not rise with him. Thus wrote R. Judah b. Barzilai, of blessed memory. Rabbi Naḥshon also wrote thus, explaining that we do not recite a blessing over the circumcision, and we bring him up so that when the heavens perhaps have mercy and there is a resurrection of the dead, the child will know and distinguish his father.

In this short passage, the author cites practices and rationales that we encountered in the previous section from the "Gaon," R. Judah of Barcelona, and R. Naḥshon Gaon.[44] To these, R. Aaron added the words at the beginning of the cited passage, writing that the circumcision of

42 See above, n. 9.

43 *Orḥot Ḥayim*, *loc. cit.* R. Aaron lived from c. 1260 to c. 1330, and he wrote and revised his book between 1295 and 1313, and perhaps a bit later. See Galinsky, "Of Exile and Halakhah," p. 84.

44 The words of R. Naḥshon and the rationales he cites from this point forward were transmitted to the author of *Orḥot Ḥayim* through the conduit of R. Isaac ibn Gi'at, as the rationales, which connect the custom to the resurrection, appear alongside it.

a deceased newborn is performed with a "flint or reed." Unlike the sages of Rome's description of the ceremony, which emphasizes that the cutting is done with a cane stalk, which is forbidden for use in circumcision, the author of *Orḥot Ḥayim* goes out of his way to emphasize the opposite approach. The infant is circumcised with a flint or rock,[45] and this act is not merely cutting, as the sages of Rome defined it, but is actually circumcision. It seems that this tiny change is instructive for understanding his view, and perhaps even the conception of his contemporaries and locale and of the meaning of the practice under discussion.

It emerges from what we have seen thus far that the ruling of R. Naḥshon Gaon, which approves and supports the upholding of the custom, was adopted and encouraged among future generations in Iberia, Provence, and perhaps even the Byzantine empire, where the Karaite sage Hadassi was active. Some ascribed the custom to the desire to prevent the baby from entering Gehinnom, some wished to prevent the patriarch Abraham from attaching the foreskins to those who, despite being circumcised, "sinned too much," and some tied the custom to the future resurrection in one of the ways we saw above. The exception was the ruling of the sages of Rome at the end of the eleventh century, some of which we have already seen. As we will see in the next section, their responsum is not only instructive about them.

The Attitude of Other Italian Sages to the Circumcision of Dead Infants

To the negative view of the Roman sages, we can add another Italian source from about a generation later: *Midrash Sekhel Tov*, by the twelfth-century Rabbi Menaḥem b. Solomon:

> A child who dies before being circumcised: we do not cut his foreskin, as it says, "But you, observe my covenant" (Gen 17:9), and once a person dies, he becomes free of the commandments, as it says, "among the dead is freedom" (Ps 88:6). One cannot argue that this is in order to grant him life in the next world; this

[45] According to *halakhah*, one may use any implement to perform a circumcision, except for a cane stalk. See *Orḥot Ḥayim*, vol. 2, p. 5, which follows Maimonides (*Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Circumcision 2:1) in its formulation.

> is unnecessary, for we learn in the Jerusalem Talmud, Tractate *Shevi'it*,[46] that the sages disagree with R. Elazar. And R. Elazar says that even the stillborn of Israel enter the next world. And the *halakhah* accords with R. Elazar, for he is later.[47]

All the arguments presented in *Sekhel Tov* had already appeared in the responsum of the Roman sages. We have already seen and analyzed the argument that "once a person dies, he becomes free of the commandments, as it says, 'among the dead is freedom' (Ps 88:6)."[48] The author of *Sekhel Tov* precedes this argument with several lines, including a biblical prooftext: "A child who dies before being circumcised, we do not cut his foreskin, as it says, 'But you, observe my covenant.'" This prooftext from Genesis is expounded in the Talmuds to prohibit Gentiles, women, and uncircumcised Jewish males from performing circumcision.[49] To this talmudic list we can now add the dead, who are not obligated to be circumcised, for "once a person dies, he becomes free of the commandments." The author of this collection, or one of his antecedents, expanded the Talmud's derivation in a manner similar to that attributed to R. Hai Gaon in the responsum of the Roman sages: "And so ruled Rabbi Hai Gaon from this verse, 'But you, observe my covenant'; anyone included in 'observance' is included in the covenant. This excludes the dead, who cannot 'observe.' Therefore, we do not cut them."[50]

46 The original mistakenly has "*Shevu'ot*."

47 *Midrash Sekhel Tov*, Buber edition (Berlin, 1900), p. 18. On this collection and its study, see Anat Raizel, *Mavo le-Midrashim* (Alon Shevut, 2011), pp. 378–82.

48 See above, n. 21.

49 Regarding women, see above, n. 8. Regarding Gentiles, see *BT 'Avodah Zarah* 26b; *BT Menaḥot* 42a. Regarding uncircumcised Jews, see *PT Yevamot* 8:1, 8d.

50 If this attribution is correct, then R. Hai, the last of the Babylonian Geonim, is the only sage who lived in the Islamicate sphere of whom I am presently aware who opposed this custom. However, the attribution of this derivation and the *halakhah* derived thereby to R. Hai Gaon is suspect. As I learned from my friend Dr. Uziel Fuchs, R. Hai does not frequently expound biblical verses as a basis for halakhic rulings, nor does he expand existing expositions (in contrast to early Ashkenazic sages). This approach, combined with the fact that this attribution appears neither in the Ashkenazic textual witness to the responsum nor in *Sekhel Tov*, reinforces the impression that the attribution to R. Hai is tendentious, similar to what we claim about another aspect of this responsum above, at n. 18. However well founded, this remains no more than a suspicion. See also Yitzḥak Gilat, *Perakim Be-Hishtalshelut Ha-Halakhah* (Ramat Gan, 1992), pp. 377–82. Of his two examples of Geonic exposition of biblical verses, one is from R. Hai Gaon.

The final argument raised by the author of *Sekhel Tov*, which relies on *PT Shevi'it*, appears earlier in the responsum of the Roman sages. A comparison of the texts shows that they used the Jerusalem Talmud to make the following argument: "One cannot argue that this is in order to grant him [life/reward in] the next world; this is unnecessary, for we learn in the Jerusalem Talmud, Tractate *Shevi'it*, that the sages disagree with R. Elazar. And R. Elazar says that even the stillborn of Israel enter the next world."[51] It is clear that the responsum of the Roman sages and the passage in *Sekhel Tov* are interdependent, whether because *Midrash Sekhel Tov* relies on the responsum of the Roman sages, or because, as I consider more likely, both of these sources depend on a third text, an urtext that was refashioned in these two sources, each for its rhetorical needs.

Moreover, it is clear that *Sekhel Tov* was familiar not only with the custom of circumcising deceased babies, but also with the rationales behind it. The passage asserts that "one cannot argue that this is in order to grant him life in the next world; this is unnecessary." This is clearly linked to the claim documented in the words of the author's contemporary, Judah Hadassi, that circumcision is necessary to enable the deceased child to be resurrected. True, in contrast to Hadassi, who linked the removal of the foreskin with the resurrection, the author of *Sekhel Tov* connected it to "life in the next world." Did one of them confuse these two concepts? Did one of them identify the resurrection with the next world, and thus the speakers are both saying the same thing, albeit with different words? I believe that the speakers were precise with their words and did not mix up these concepts.[52]

51 *PT Shevi'it* 4:10, 35c: "From when do the children of Israel have life? [...] R. Elazar said: [Even if they are] stillborn. Why? 'And restore the survivors of Israel' (Isa 49:6)." The version in *Sekhel Tov* has "stillborn of Israel," whereas the responsum of the Roman sages, as it appears in *Or Zaru'a*, has, "stillborn of the land of Israel." The additions of "of Israel"/"of the Land of Israel" that appear in the Italian sources indicate their interconnectedness, despite the differences in how they present their arguments.

52 For a definition of "Gehinnom" and "life in the next world" in the teachings of the rabbis, see Chaim Milikowsky, "Gehenna and the Sinner of Israel in Seder 'Olam" [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 55 (1985/86): 311–28. On defining the relationships between the concepts of the resurrection, the next world, the Garden of Eden, and Gehinnom, see R. Sa'adiah Gaon, *Sefer Ha-Nivḥar Be-Emunot Ve-De'ot*, Kafiḥ edition (Jerusalem, 1970), seventh treatise, pp. 218–36, and ninth treatise, pp. 261–86; Maimonides, "Haqdamah Le-Pereq Ḥeleq," *Hakdamot Ha-Rambam Le-*

Support, if not outright proof, for this assertion can be found in the commentary of Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra, who visited Rome very close to the time that *Sekhel Tov* was composed. In his commentary on the verse, "And an uncircumcised male who does not circumcise the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people" (Gen 17:14), he writes: "[The punishment of] being cut off is in the hands of heaven, but those who err think that if a lad dies and has not been circumcised, he has no share in the next world." Like the author of *Sekhel Tov*, Ibn Ezra also fought against a view that denies uncircumcised babies the goodness that is hidden away for the future. What is most significant for the issue at hand is that this goodness, in the eyes of both writers, is the next world, not the resurrection. It is thus clear that in twelfth-century Italy, a tradition circulated according to which the privilege of the next world is conditional upon a person – even a day-old boy – being circumcised. While some saw the removal of the foreskin as a "safety net" that would prevent the baby from falling into Gehinnom, and others associated it with the resurrection, in twelfth-century Italy, circumcision, even if done postmortem, was the entry ticket to the next world.

The Fate of the Custom in Ashkenaz

If this is the case, during the course of the twelfth century, there was a struggle between the sages of Italy, who were familiar with the custom of circumcising deceased babies but opposed it, and the sages of Provence and Spain, who followed the path blazed by Rabbi Naḥshon, the Gaon of Sura, and practiced this custom, even offering new and innovative rationales for it. In light of these differing approaches, it would only be proper to examine Ashkenazic custom vis-à-vis this issue, as the conventional claim is that the Ashkenazic custom originated in Italy.[53]

Mishnah, Shilat edition (Jerusalem, 1992), pp. 129–46; Naḥmanides, *Sha'ar Ha-Gemul*, in *Kitvei Ha-Ramban*, vol. 2, pp. 264–314. See also Moshe Halbertal, *Nahmanides: Law and Mysticism* (New Haven: 2020), chapter 3: "Death, Sin, Law, and Redemption," pp. 103–36; Avraham (Rami) Reiner, "From 'Paradise' to 'Bound in the Bonds of Life': Blessings for the Dead on Tombstones in Medieval Ashkenaz" [Hebrew], *Zion* 76:1 (2011): 5–28.

[53] On the Italian roots of the communities of Ashkenaz, see Avraham Grossman, *The Early Sages of Ashkenaz* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 1981), pp. 29–58. See also Israel M. Ta-Shma, *Early Franco-German Ritual and Custom* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 1992), pp. 98–101, and in the notes *ad loc*. Grossman convincingly argues that the

The responsum of the sages of Rome, with which we began this article, has survived only in two Ashkenazic works, as mentioned above. The first and more familiar work is *Or Zaru'a* by R. Isaac b. Moses of Vienna, the disciple of R. Eliezer b. Joel Halevi (Raavyah). Raavyah was the nephew of R. Samuel b. Natronai, who migrated from Bari, in southern Italy, to the Rhineland, where he married the daughter of Raavan, the sister of Raavyah's mother.[54]

The second source is *Kelalei Ha-Milah* (*The Rules of Circumcision*) by R. Gershom b. R. Jacob the Circumciser (*ha-gozer*, lit. "the cutter"). Recorded in the title of the responsum, as it appears in this work, is: "In the book of Rabbi S. b. T. I found responsa from R. Daniel, R. Nathan, and R. Abraham, sons of R. Jehiel."[55] The testimony of R. Gershom, a contemporary of the author of *Or Zaru'a*, shows that he became familiar with the responsum of the Roman sages through the book of R. Samuel b. Natronai (S. b. T.), an Italian migrant. It is therefore almost certain that the source for *Or Zaru'a* is also the book of R. Samuel b. Natronai, who, as mentioned, was the uncle of Raavyah, the primary teacher of R. Isaac b. Moses. How, then, did this Italian responsum and its halakhic cultural foundation impact Ashkenazic custom?

When the author of *Or Zaru'a* finished citing the responsum of the Roman sages, he added: "My teacher, R. Simḥah, likewise responded that even on a weekday, it is not a Torah custom to remove the foreskin of stillbirths, based on that passage from *Genesis Rabbah*." If so, R. Simḥah of Speyer, a teacher of R. Isaac b. Moses,[56] outright

Babylonian tradition had become dominant in Italy in the tenth century, and it stands to reason that this shift was reflected in the Ashkenazic sphere as well. See Avraham Grossman, "When Did the Hegemony of Eretz Israel Cease in Italy?" [Hebrew], in *Mas'at Moshe: Studies in Jewish and Islamic Culture Presented to Moshe Gil*, ed. Ezra Fleischer et al. (Tel Aviv, 1998), pp. 143–57.

54 See above, n. 5.

55 *The Rules of Circumcision*, p. 126. The editor of the work, Jacob Glassberg, published two works on circumcision: *The Rules of Circumcision of R. Jacob the Circumciser*, in *Zikhron Berit La-Rishonim*, vol. 1 (Krakow, 1892), and the aforementioned *Rules of Circumcision by R. Gershom b. Jacob the Circumciser*. Recently, Simcha Emanuel demonstrated that the attribution of these works to two different authors is premised on an error; R. Gershom wrote both works in Worms after 1215. See Simcha Emanuel, "From First to Third Person: A Study in the Culture of Writing in Medieval Ashkenaz" [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 81 (2013): 453–57.

56 On him, see Ephraim E. Urbach, *The Tosaphists* (Jerusalem, 1980), pp. 411–20. On his ties with his pupil R. Isaac b. Moses of Vienna, see Uziel Fuchs, "Iyyunim be-

forbade the circumcision of stillbirths, like the opinion of the Roman sages – not only on the Sabbath, on which there are the additional problems of carrying things that may not be carried to perform the circumcision, but "even on a weekday."[57] He explained his ruling by referring to "that passage from *Genesis Rabbah*"; namely, the *midrash* that tells how Abraham the Patriarch removes the foreskins of uncircumcised babies to cover the circumcisions of those who "sinned too much." Among the variety of claims made by the sages of Rome,[58] R. Simḥah specifically addresses this rationale in order to forbid the circumcision of stillbirths.

This midrashic story likewise bothered R. Simḥah's younger contemporary, R. Gershom the Circumciser, who asked: "If, like they say, the foreskin is removed from a baby who died, from where does the angel take the foreskin?"[59] R. Gershom wrote, "like they say," indicating that he did not agree with this custom. This formulation, coupled with the fact that R. Gershom quotes the responsum of the Roman sages at length in his work, demonstrates his hesitation vis-à-vis the custom. Nevertheless, his hesitation did not prevent him from trying to resolve the contradiction while qualifying it. His first answer is brief: "If you wish, I would say that it is necessary to place the foreskin in the baby's hand, and the angel will take it from his hand."[60] The practice remains in place, but an instruction is added to address the words of the *midrash*: the foreskin should be placed in the infant's hand, and the angel will take it from there and give it to Abraham. Is this the moment of the birth of a new custom – or, more precisely, a

Sefer Or Zaruʻa le-R. Yitsḥak b. Mosheh me-Vienna" (MA thesis, Hebrew University, 1993), p. 32; Emanuel, *Fragments of the Tablets*, pp. 154–75.

57 See below, p. 19.

58 To the claims already presented in this article, we can add a proof that the sages of Rome brought from *b. Sanhedrin* 110b. The responsum in *Or Zaruʻa* cites a similar, but not identical, passage from *y. Sheviʻit* 4:10, 35c. The responsum that appears in *The Rules of Circumcision* refers to the *Sheviʻit* passage, but does not quote it.

59 *Rules of Circumcision of R. Jacob the Circumciser*, pp. 92–93. See, however, Emanuel, "From First to Third Person," which proves that this work is by R. Gershom the Circumciser. The present transcription is based on MS Hamburg, State and University Library, Cod. Hebr. 148, p. 30. See Emanuel, ibid., p. 436.

60 The structure of the passage is quite reminiscent of the Tosafists' style. The problem is presented as a contradiction between sources – in this case, a prevailing custom against a midrashic narrative – and then three solutions are offered, separated by the talmudic formula *iba'it eima* ("if you wish, I would say").

sub-custom? To the best of my knowledge, this is the only source that mentions a procedure of this sort. It is not mentioned further in customary literature. The assumption that R. Gershom was very hesitant with respect to this custom and even saw fit to defend the contradiction between the *midrash* and the custom with three different solutions, as we will see, inclines one to think that these resolutions are purely academic, with no connection to the custom as actually practiced.

R. Gershom's second answer preserves the custom without modification. He writes: "And if you wish, I would say that the skin that is peeled back, which still remains on him, [the angel takes] that second skin and gives it to those who desecrated His covenant."[61] For our purposes, his third answer to the aforementioned contradiction is especially fascinating:

> R. Gershom, of blessed memory, posited a distinction[62] between the babies. A baby who was carried to full term, with indications – his hair and his fingernails – demonstrating this, and who would have been fit for circumcision had he not died within eight [days], his foreskin is certainly removed from him, for he is not like a full-fledged stillborn. For had he lived, we would have performed a *bona fide*, kosher circumcision. So now, too, we bestow good upon him and cut off his foreskin with a flint or cane stalk, but not with a scalpel, and without a blessing, and not because this is a commandment. For the commandment was given to the living, not the dead, as it says: "Among the dead is freedom," and once a person dies, he becomes free of the commandments. And it helps him, saving him from the judgment of Gehinnom and bringing him into the Garden of Eden with other members of the holy covenant. But *bona fide* stillbirths, who never reached nine [months in the womb], never truly lived; we do not cut their foreskins, and the Holy One, blessed be He,

[61] This implies that even though the foreskin was removed, the peeling back of the remaining skin (*peri'ah*) was not done in such cases. This is an issue discussed by later authorities. R. Tzvi Yeḥezkel Michelson, *Responsa Tirosh Ve-Yitzhar* (Bilgoraj, 1937), §155, p. 327, reports that the custom in Warsaw and Hungary at the end of the nineteenth century was not to perform *peri'ah* in the case of a posthumous circumcision, just as R. Gershom implies here.

[62] This formulation, "posited a distinction" (*natan ḥiluq*), is typical among French and German sages of the era.

> sends an angel to remove their foreskins, give them to those who have sinned too much, and bring them down to Gehinnom.

R. Gershom limited the custom to only those who were born after a full pregnancy of nine months and who died around their time of birth. His style indicates that he used the responsum of the Roman sages. Thus, for instance, he asserts that the circumcision is performed with a flint or cane stalk and emphasizes that this is not a commandment, for the commandments were given to the living – just like in the formulation of the Roman sages. If the sages of Rome altered the contents and spirit of the Geonic responsum and forbade practicing this custom, as we saw earlier, then at the beginning of the thirteenth century, R. Gershom reworked their statements when he approved of the practice vis-à-vis babies who were carried to full term. Hence, a custom that was first documented in a responsum of R. Naḥshon, which the sages of Rome rejected, even refashioning the Geonic responsum as they saw fit, was resurrected in the statements of R. Gershom, who addressed the language and contents of the responsum of the Roman sages in his own way. The responsum of R. Naḥshon Gaon was vigorously refashioned by the sages of Rome, but their refashioning itself was drastically changed by the sages of Ashkenaz.

Moreover, R. Gershom's intermediate course reflects the equivocation of the Ashkenazic sages regarding this matter. We have seen the position of R. Simḥah of Speyer, who completely rejected the custom, "even on a weekday." About three generations later, when the custom, it seems, had already become prevalent in Ashkenaz, despite the reservations that, in my view, originated in the Italian tradition, R. Meir Hakohen, author of *Hagahot Maimoniyot*, wrote the following:[63]

> Stillbirths, whose foreskins it is customary to remove with a flint [or] stone – this is forbidden even on the diasporic second festival days. For what we learned – namely, that with respect to the dead, the second festival days are like weekdays – applies specifically to a dead person who had been viable. For one who leaves the body [unburied] overnight violates a prohibition, and delay [in the burial] constitutes a disgrace. For stillbirths,

63 *Hagahot Maimoniyot*, Laws of Circumcision 1:10. This text is based on the Frankel edition of *Mishneh Torah* (Jerusalem and Bnei Brak, 2007).

> however, whom there is no commandment to bury, as it is implied in several places in the Talmud that they were cast into a pit, the festival is not superseded for their burial.[64] Moreover, the custom of removing their foreskin is not a Torah custom. Even if you should suggest that it is merely the cutting of flesh, it is nevertheless forbidden to carry him and the stone. As for the custom of removing it during the week, perhaps this is to aid sinners. For we learn in *Genesis Rabbah* that the Holy One, blessed be He, removes the foreskins from children who die without being circumcised and places them on the sinners of Israel.[65]

R. Meir Hakohen confirms the practice of this custom, but his reservations and difficulties about it are made quite clear in his formulations and rulings. He forbids the practice of this ceremony on the diasporic second festival days, despite grounds for being more lenient than on matters related to burying the dead, and in accordance with R. Gershom he asserts that the act is performed with implements – a flint or stone – that may not be used for a normal circumcision.[66] He adds, as the sages of Rome attested, that this "is not a Torah custom."

It thus emerges from the Ashkenazic record that in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, there was vigorous opposition to the custom, which finds expression in the ruling of R. Simḥah of Speyer and in *Or Zaru'a*.[67] In contrast, during the thirteenth century the custom spread in Ashkenaz, even if the local sages were not wholeheartedly in favor of the practice, as we saw from how R.

[64] Regarding the view of the Provençal sages that it is permissible to bury a deceased baby on a festival, see Pinchas Roth, "Later Provençal Sages – Jewish Law (Halakhah) and Rabbis in Southern France, 1215–1348" [Hebrew] (PhD diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2012), pp. 244–46.

[65] *Mordekhai*, *Shabbat* §471 has a similar formulation.

[66] There is a slight difference in their formulations. R. Gershom wrote that the custom is to circumcise stillborn babies "with a flint or cane stalk, but not with a scalpel," whereas R. Meir wrote of "stillbirths, whose foreskins it is customary to remove with a flint [or] stone." Nevertheless, both meant that the act should be done with an implement that is not fit for a halakhic circumcision.

[67] See also R. Judah the Pious's *Sefer Gimatriyot*, Y. Y. Stahl edition (Jerusalem, 2005), p. 701: "At the resurrection of the dead those who were circumcised at eight days will be rescued." This raises the possibility, if only speculative, that the special properties of circumcision are effective only if the baby is circumcised on time and while alive.

Gershom the Circumciser and R. Meir Hakohen, author of *Hayahot Maimoniyot*, addressed this issue.

Conclusion

Does the process described here with respect to the regions of Ashkenaz attest, on the one hand, to the fundamental dependence of Ashkenaz on Italian culture, which initially negated this custom, and to the penetration of Geonic/Sephardic influence, which intensified in Ashkenaz over time, on the other?[68] It seems that this is, indeed, the explanation for the hesitancy of the Ashkenazic sages with respect to this custom.[69] Yet it also seems that the turning points that we have seen regarding this issue – in Sura, Rome, Barcelona, Lucena, Provence, and Ashkenaz – must be examined in connection with a broader worldview, which encompasses the specifics of the discussions that have emerged here.

Attitudes toward the afterlife, together with the parents' desire for what is best for their child who tragically did not have a long life, are at play in this issue alongside – and even in opposition to – the world of *halakhah* and rabbinic guidance. Everything functions within a world of belief that originates in the circles of the sages, but is itself influenced by folk beliefs about the nature of the afterlife and who merits entering it. Hovering above this is the sense of loss and pain experienced by women who suddenly lose the fruit of their wombs, the babies they have carried for nine months. No wonder that a question of this sort, which is tied to belief and psychology, *halakhah* and theology, privileges the brokenhearted mothers who want their tender children, who never even had the opportunity to be properly circumcised, to experience the good that is reserved for the righteous.[70]

[68] In his lecture at the Sixteenth Congress of Jewish Studies in the summer of 2013, Haym Soloveitchik argued that from the very outset, there were strong Babylonian traditions among the traditions of Ashkenazic Jewry. Perhaps the present case is instructive in this context.

[69] See above, n. 53.

[70] For extensive discussions of this issue, see Saul Lieberman, "Some Aspects of After Life in Rabbinic Literature," in *Harry Austryn Wolfson Jubilee Volume,* vol. 2 (Jerusalem, 1965), pp. 525–30; Nissan Rubin, "Historical Time and Liminal Time – A Chapter in the Historiosophy of the Sages" [Hebrew], *Jewish History* 2 (1988): 12–18.

Moreover, questions like these are not limited by time, place or community. The death of infants before circumcision happens everywhere, at all times; infant mortality is a global phenomenon. Clearly, however, there is room to note similarities and differences on this issue with respect to the customs practiced within Islam and Christianity, the prevailing religions in the spheres addressed in this article. As far as I know, in the Muslim world infants and children who died before being circumcised were not circumcised posthumously, nor did they undergo any similar procedure. Documentation of a slightly different tradition emerges from the writings of Ibn Qayyim al-Gawziyyah (Damascus, 1292–1350). He wrote: "There is agreement that the circumcision of the dead is not obligatory, but is it desirable? Most scholars claim that it is not, among them the four imams (= founders of schools of *shari'a*), but a few of the later scholars maintain that circumcision is desirable."[71]

This approach seems unsurprising. Circumcision is not mentioned in the Qur'an and is not considered an obligatory commandment. It was primarily a custom of Arab tribes before the advent of Islam.[72] As a result, Muslim traditions do not view circumcision as a commandment that defines the Muslim essence, even if the custom was deeply rooted and widespread. It is therefore no wonder that there is barely any mention of this matter in *shari'a* literature.

In contrast, comparison to the Christian sphere and to the possibility of baptizing an infant posthumously is far more fruitful. The sacrament of baptism is the first in a human life, and it appears in several of the Gospels. Matthew 28:19 states: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." More significant for our purposes is a verse from Mark (16:16), "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned," while in John (3:5), we read: "Jesus answered, 'Very truly I tell you, no one can

71 See M. J. Kister, "'...And He Was Born Circumcised...': Some Notes on Circumcision in Ḥadīth," *Oriens* 34 (1990): 24. I am grateful to Nurit Tzafrir for initially referring me to the Hebrew version of this article, and to Daniella Talmon-Heller for her assistance in translating the Arabic original. On Ibn Qayyim al-Gawziyyah, see Caterina Bori and Livnat Holzman, eds., *A Scholar in the Shadow: Essays in the Legal and Theological Thought of Ibn Qayyim Al-Gawziyyah* (Rome, 2010).

72 See Uri Rubin, "'Hanifiyya and Ka'ba: An Inquiry into the Arabian Pre-Islamic Background of 'Din Ibrahim,'" *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 13 (1990): 103–5.

enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit.'"

Baptism is indeed an integral part of a person's belonging to the Church, and therefore one who is baptized, and only one who is baptized, merits redemption and Divine grace, for it is accepted that there is no redemption outside the Church. The assertion that baptism is the entryway into the realm of the faithful, the realm outside of which there is no salvation, greatly increased the intensity of the question of babies who died before baptism. The issue was further sharpened against the background of the conception that because of Original Sin, every person is tainted until they are baptized and enter the embrace of the Church, which originates with the Church Fathers and was developed in the teachings of Augustine. The direct result of the rise of this mood in Christian thought was the discussion of the fate of babies who die before baptism: on the one hand, they have not sinned, but on the other, they remain mired in Original Sin. Therefore, according to Augustine, it was decreed that these unfortunate babies must wait in Limbo, a realm with punitive connotations, even if the suffering that those who wait there can expect is decreased; after all, the Original Sin on account of which they were condemned is not their personal sin.[73] This difficult image was replaced in the twelfth century by a softer stance, when Abelard and Aquinas asserted that Limbo was an even less severe realm: those found there were not worthy to gaze upon the Divine light, but nor would they suffer from Original Sin, and they even enjoyed the natural happiness promised to those who did not sin.[74]

Either way, the fear that the deceased infant would suffer or would not become part of the Church and that they would therefore lose out on the good reserved for its members led to the development of the practice of baptizing dead infants, even if this practice was

[73] See Franz Cumont, *After Life in Roman Paganism* (New Haven, 1922), pp. 197–98. I am grateful to Prof. Zeev Gries for referring me to this book.

[74] Other existential implications of the view that excludes unbaptized babies from Christian redemption are the custom of not burying unbaptized babies on Church grounds, so that they do not contaminate the Christian cemetery, and the custom of burying such a baby with a stake driven through his or her heart. See Shulamith Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages* (London, 1992), pp. 49–52. For certain reservations based on archaeological research, see Sally Crawford, "Baptism and Infant Burial in Anglo-Saxon England," *International Medieval Research* 18 (2013), special edition, *Medieval Life Cycles: Continuity and Change*, ed. I. Cochelin and K. Smyth, pp. 55–80.

marginal. Some asked for a miracle to occur on the newborn's behalf and for it to live for just a moment until it could be baptized, while others renounced asking for such miracles,[75] like in the case of posthumous circumcision described in detail in this article.

It seems to me that the Jewish custom and the Christian custom do not allow us to posit a direct connection between them, nor an indirect influence of one on the other. It is more accurate to propose that the love of parents for their children, even those who lived but a few days, led both Christian and Jewish parents to try to improve their children's situation, each using the religious language with which they were familiar.[76]

75 See Jacques Gélis, "La mort du nouveau-né et l'amour des parents: Quelques réflexions à propos des pratiques de 'répit,'" *Annales de démographie historique* (1983): 22–31.

76 See, similarly: Eileen M. Murphy, "Children's Burial Grounds in Ireland (Cilini) and Parental Emotions Toward Infant Death," *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 15 (2001), pp. 409–428. I am grateful to Prof. Pinchas Roth for referring me to this book.

Is He a Good Knight or a Bad Knight? Methodologies in the Study of Polemics and Warriors in Hebrew Illuminated Manuscripts*

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Abstract

In this essay, I will map a range of different methodological approaches to the study of illuminated manuscripts that contain images of warriors and put them in the context of Jewish-Christian polemics, examining the images and the texts together in conjunction with military history. The importance of this study lies in its holistic reappraisal of the manner in which we think about illustrations in connection with text, the Christian milieu, and the possible meaning that the images had for the patron. Going into great detail regarding the displays of warfare allows us to broaden our understanding of the role these images played in the thought of the Jewish patrons and the reasons why they were included. I will apply the methodology of a close examination of weapons in a Jewish context. After deciphering the iconography, I will turn to the textual context and the meaning it affords the images. This article will focus on examples from four manuscripts, all displaying "bad knights," that is, warriors and knights who represent persecution and the enemies of the Jews; beginning with a close examination of the text and images of a micrography scene from the book of Jeremiah in an Ashkenazi Bible, continuing with the associative nature of images of warriors in the *North French Hebrew Miscellany*, and finally ending with examples of the wicked son in two haggadahs.

The aesthetics of warfare was a ubiquitous motif in medieval European Christian literature, theology, drama, and visual culture. Arms and armor signaled a Christian warrior or knight's rank in the feudal hierarchy, and displaying aristocratic symbols also conveyed the difference in rank between warriors engaged in combat through which they could earn knighthoods regardless of their social status and those who were noblemen from birth. As this article will

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elaborate, Jews were aware of this means of self-representing social rank and social codes. They imitated — and at times even attached original adapted spiritual meanings to — the borrowed symbols, thus demonstrating less religious and cultural differentiation between Jewish and Christian social codes than one might expect.[1] The appropriation and use of these subjects in Jewish art enhanced the polemical aspects of these images.[2] Historians have discussed the concept of Jewish writings about knighthood, as well as evidence regarding armed Jewish fighters; Eyal Levinson, Markus J. Wenninger, and Israel Yuval have studied historical documents related to Jewish warriors and have identified occasional cases of Jewish knights, mainly in the German lands.[3] Based primarily on textual sources, Ivan G. Marcus distinguishes between actual Christian knights in the Middle Ages, whom he identifies with the Crusaders, and Jews who imagined themselves as knights.[4] Warriors, especially knights, are portrayed in Hebrew illuminated manuscripts as Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike.[5] In my studies of thirteenth and fourteenth-century

1 On the Jews' differentiation and adaptation from their Christian surroundings in medieval Ashkenaz, see Elisheva Baumgarten, "Appropriation and Differentiation: Jewish Identity in Medieval Ashkenaz," *AJS Review* 42 (2018): 39–63.

2 On appropriation in art history, see Robert S. Nelson, "Appropriation," in *Critical Terms for Art History*, ed. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 160–73.

3 Eyal Levinson, *Gender and Sexuality in Ashkenaz in the Middle Ages* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Shazar, 2022); idem, "'Those Who Grow Their Forelocks and Wear the Clothes of a Knight': Young Jewish Men in Medieval Germany — Between Rabbinical Masculinity and Chivalric Masculinity" [Hebrew], *Chidushim* 21 (2019): 14–46; Markus J. Wenninger, "Von jüdischen Rittern und anderen waffentragenden Juden im mittelalterlichen Deutschland," *Aschkenas* 13 (2003): 35–82; Israel Jacob Yuval, "A German-Jewish Autobiography of the Fourteenth Century," trans. Zippora Brody, *Binah* 3 (1994): 79–99; idem, "Rabbinical Perspectives on the Bearing of Weapons by the Jews," *Jewish Studies* 41 (2002): 51–55. Joseph Isaac Lifshitz explores the Jewish view of these elements — that is, the approach to warfare aesthetics along with the concept of beauty in Ashkenazi medieval texts — see Lifshitz, "War and Aesthetics in Jewish Law," in *War and Peace in Jewish Tradition: From the Biblical World to the Present*, ed. Yigal Levin and Amnon Shapira (New York: Routledge, 2012), 103–15.

4 Ivan G. Marcus, "Why Is This Knight Different? A Jewish Self-Representation in Medieval Europe," in *Tov Elem: Memory, Community and Gender in Medieval and Early Modern Jewish Societies. Essays in Honor of Robert Bonfil*, ed. Elisheva Baumgarten, Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, and Roni Weinstein (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 2011), 139–52 [English section].

5 Jane Barlow, "The Muslim Warrior at the Seder Meal: Dynamics between Minorities in the Rylands Haggadah," in *Postcolonising the Medieval Image*, ed. Eva

Ashkenazi Bibles, *maḥzorim*, and a Provençal Passover haggadah, I have focused on the visual and conceptual differences between the violence exhibited by warriors and the lofty noble aspects of knighthood.[6] My work separates warriors and knights in Hebrew manuscripts into two categories: "good knight" and "bad knight" — that is, warriors and knights who stand for positive noble traits and knights who represent persecution and the enemies of the Jews, generally depicted as the Egyptian army in scenes portraying the crossing of the Red Sea or as the wicked son in illuminated haggadahs.[7]

> In this essay, I will map a range of different methodological approaches to the study of illuminated manuscripts that contain images of warriors and put them in the context of Jewish-Christian polemics, examining the images and the texts together in conjunction with military history. The importance of this study lies in its holistic reappraisal of the manner in which we think about illustrations in connection with text, the Christian milieu, and the possible meaning that the images had

Frojmovic and Catherine E. Karkov (London: Routledge, 2017), 218–40; Julie Harris, "Good Jews, Bad Jews, and No Jews at All: Ritual Imagery and Social Strands in the Catalan Haggadot," in *Church, State, Vellum, and Stone: Essays on Medieval Spain in Honor of John Williams*, ed. Therese Martin and Julie Harris (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 275–96; Sarit Shalev-Eyni, *Jews among Christians: Hebrew Book Illumination from Lake Constance* (London: Harvey Miller, 2010), 85–92; eadem, "Jews of Means in a Christian City: Artistic and Textual Aspects" [Hebrew], in *Image and Sound: Art, Music and History*, ed. Richard I. Cohen (Jerusalem: Shazar, 2007), 107–30; Joseph Shatzmiller, "Fromme Juden und christlich-höfische Ideale im Mittelalter," *Arye-Maimon-Vortrag an der Universität Trier, 7. November 2007* (Trier: Universität Trier, 2008), 9–29.

[6] Sara Offenberg, "Jacob the Knight in Ezekiel's Chariot: Imagined Identity in a Micrography Decoration of an Ashkenazi Bible," *AJS Review* 40 (2016): 1–16; eadem, "'Noblesse Oblige': Symbolic Portrayals of Nobility and Jewish-Christian Relations in the Provencal Barcelona Haggadah," in *Wisdom and Morals in Medieval Literature*, ed. Tovi Bibring and Revital Refael-Vivante (Jerusalem: Misgav, 2022), 169–88; eadem, "Sword and Buckler in Masorah Figurata: Traces of Early Illuminated Fight Books in the Micrography of Bible, Paris, BnF, MS héb. 9," *Acta Periodica Duellatorum* 9 (2021): 1–32; eadem, *Up in Arms: Images of Knights and the Divine Chariot in Esoteric Ashkenazi Manuscripts of the Middle Ages* (Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 2019).

[7] Sara Offenberg, "'And He Put on Righteousness as a Coat of Mail, and a Helmet of Salvation upon His Head': Double Meaning of Warriors in the Haggadah from the British Library, Add. 14761" [Hebrew], *Pe'amim* 150–152 (2017): 315–39.

for the patron. After analyzing the iconography, I will turn to the meaning of the scene displayed.[8] Images are not merely illustrations of the texts, but also extend their meaning; moreover, they unpack or divulge latent traditions of the culture not articulated in discursive text. When exploring an illuminated manuscript, it is important to note that the modern dichotomy between art history and Jewish thought did not exist for the manuscript's patron. Rather, for him/her, it was a complete corpus ordered for a specific intention. This is especially true when it comes to micrography,[9] which "forces" the viewer/reader to look at the visual aspects created by the text; thus, one cannot study the image without the text and vice versa. Although in the past two decades, many art historical studies have been undertaken hand-in-hand with other fields of research,[10] the point I wish to make is that this very notion of the possibility of employing an interdisciplinary approach has not been fully adopted by all scholars engaged in the study of Hebrew illuminated manuscripts with military aesthetics. This does not mean that the study of texts or images on their own is not of significant value, but rather that

8 On recent studies of how we think about the meaning of iconography, see Lena Eva Liepe, "The Study of the Iconography and Iconology of Medieval Art: A Historiographic Survey," in *The Locus of Meaning in Medieval Art: Iconography, Iconology, and Interpreting the Visual Imagery of the Middle Ages*, ed. Lena Eva Liepe (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2019), 16–45; Pamela A. Patton and Henry D. Schilb, "Introduction," in *The Lives and Afterlives of Medieval Iconography*, ed. Pamela A. Patton and Henry D. Schilb (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2020), 1–8.

9 "Micrography, also termed '*masorah figurata*,' has been adopted as the name for a unique Jewish art that creates the outlines of miniature ornamentation in manuscripts of the Bible and adorns their margins, carpet pages, opening word panels, verse counts, and colophons. It is generally fashioned from Masoretic Texts, which are lexical texts that are designed to preserve the biblical text and its precision": see Dalia-Ruth Halperin, "Micrography," in *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception: Volume 18, Mass–Midnight*, ed. Constance M. Furey et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), 1179.

10 Gabrielle Sed-Rajna, "The Image in the Text: Methodological Aspects of the Analysis of Illustrations and Their Relation to the Text," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library* 75, no. 3 (1993): 25–32. The claims made by Sed-Rajna and the categories and divisions in this article have been refined by other art historians in studies published over the years.

as scholars, we should be wary of forgetting the person who actually used the illuminated manuscript. With this point in mind, this study will examine the manuscript's texts and illuminations together, not as discrete units.

Going into great detail regarding the displays of warfare allows us to broaden our understanding of the role these images played in the thought of the Jewish patrons and the reasons why they were included. In what follows, I will apply the methodology of a close examination of weapons in a Jewish context. After deciphering the iconography, I will turn to the textual context and the meaning it affords the images. This article will focus on examples from four manuscripts, all displaying "bad knights," beginning with a close examination of the text and images of a micrography scene from the book of Jeremiah in an Ashkenazi Bible, continuing with the associative nature of images of warriors in the *North French Hebrew Miscellany*, and finally ending with examples of the wicked son in two haggadahs.

Sword and Buckler in Hebrew Letters: Micrography in Paris, BnF Héb. 9

Four fighting figures brandishing swords are depicted in *masorah figurata* ("figurative masorah") in the lower margins of the opening page of a Hebrew Bible, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France héb. 9, fols. 104v–105r, which was produced in the German lands (Ashkenaz) in 1304 (figs. 1, 2).[11] All four are wearing gloves with long cuffs and their outer garments are rolled up to their waists and tucked

[11] This volume of Prophets is part of a three-volume Bible, now Paris, BnF MS héb. 8-9-10. Gabrielle Sed-Rajna, *Les manuscrits hébreux enluminés des bibliothèques de France* (Leuven and Paris: Peeters, 1994), 187–91; Colette Sirat and Malachi Beit-Arié, *Manuscrits medievaux en caracteres hébraïques portant des indications de date jusqu'a 1540*, 3 vols. (Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique; Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1972–1986), 1:28; Javier del Barco, *Bibliothèque nationale de France: Hébreu 1 à 32. Manuscrits de la bible hébraïque* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 51–60; Michel Garel, *D'une main forte: Manuscrits hébreux des collections francaises* (Paris: Seuil, 1992), nº 89; idem, "Un ornement propre aux manuscrits hébreux médiévaux: La micrographie," *Bulletin de la Bibliothèque nationale* 3 (1978): 158–66. The manuscript is available online: https://www.nli.org.il/he/manuscripts/NNL_ALEPH000128732/NLI#$FL54549935.

into their belts in order to free their legs, so we can see how they are positioned and the iconography, which was adapted from German *Fechtbücher* (fight books): books of instructions, usually with illustrations, detailing the fencing arts.[12] The micrography-forming text on fols. 104v–105r of the Bible is from Jeremiah 10:22–13:1, mostly 11:22: "The young men shall die by the sword, their boys and girls shall die by famine." Thus, it is clear that the artist's choice of text for the micrography was intended to relate not only to Jeremiah's words, but also to the meaning of the opening page, with a focus on the sword and the danger about which the prophecy speaks.[13]

Figure 1: Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, héb. 9, fols. 104^{v}–105^{r}, Germany, 1304

[12] For the iconography of fight books, see Heidemarie Bodemer, "Das Fechtbuch: Untersuchungen zur Entwicklungsgeschichte der bildkünstlerischen Darstellung der Fechtkunst in den Fechtbüchern des mediterranen und westeuropäischen Raumes vom Mittelalter bis Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts" (PhD diss., University of Stuttgart, 2008); Jens Peter Kleinau, "Visualised Motion: Iconography of Medieval and Renaissance Fencing Books," in *Late Medieval and Early Modern Fight Books Transmission and Tradition of Martial Arts in Europe (14th–17th Centuries)*, ed. Daniel Jaquet, Karin Verelst, and Timothy Dawson (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 88–116.

[13] Offenberg, "Sword and Buckler in Masorah Figurata."

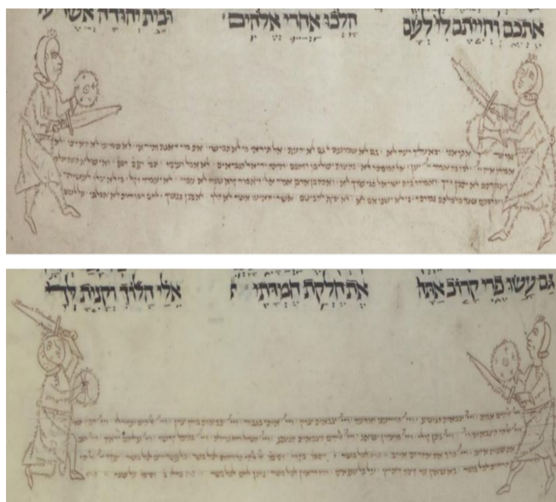

Figure 2: Detail, Paris, BnF, MS héb. 9, fols. 104v–105r.

Before deciphering the texts in the micrography, I should mention that the in-tandem study of texts and images in the micrography of Ashkenazi Bibles has received increased attention in recent years. The most cutting-edge research is presently being conducted by a group headed by Hanna Liss, which is working on a project entitled "Corpus Masoreticum: The Inculturation of the Masorah into Jewish Law and Lore from the 11th to the 13th Centuries: Digital Acquisition of a Forgotten Domain of Knowledge" and will continue to do so throughout 2023. These scholars are exploring both the philological and artistic aspects of the *masorah* and are in the process of creating an important digital humanities tool by building an accessible online database of their findings,[14] though it should be noted that MS héb. 8-9-10 is not part of this project. Important methodological issues regarding Masoretic Bibles and micrography have been discussed in recently published books by Jordan S.

[14] https://corpusmasoreticum.de/. See the recent studies by Hanna Liss, "Introduction: Editorial State of the Art of the Masoretic Corpus and Research Desiderata," in *Philology and Aesthetics: Figurative Masorah in Western European Manuscripts*, ed. Hanna Liss and Jonas Leipziger (Frankfurt, New York, and Oxford: Peter Lang, 2021), 3–39; Hanna Liss and Kay Joe Petzold, "Die Erforschung der westeuropäischen Bibeltexttradition als Aufgabe der Jüdischen Studien," in *Judaistik im Wandel: Ein halbes Jahrhundert Forschung und Lehre über das Judentum in Deutschland Herausgegeben*, ed. Andreas Lehnardt (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2017), 189–210.

Penkower, David Stern, and Yosef Ofer.[15] Apart from the studies of Leila Avrin, Joseph Guttmann, and Ursula and Kurt Schubert in the early 1980s,[16] it seems that this scholarly field only came to life at the beginning of the new millennium, especially with the work of Dalia-Ruth Halperin on the fourteenth-century Catalan Maḥzor.[17] Recent years have also seen an ongoing interest in Ashkenazi Masoretic Bibles.[18] Rahel Fronda has published several articles on micrography in Ashkenazi Bibles in which she discusses their decorative program.[19] Moreover, Annette Weber has discussed the meaning of the initial word micrography decorations in Ashkenazi Bibles, mostly in Erfurt Bible 1, Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz MS Or. fol. 1211, which was produced in 1343, and Erfurt Bible 2 in relation to esoteric concepts found in the writings of Rabbi Judah the Pious and Rabbi Eleazar of Worms.[20] In my recent publications, I have discussed the connection between esoteric texts from Ashkenaz and the micrography of knights in Masoretic Ashkenazi Bibles.[21]

15 Jordan S. Penkower, *Masorah and Text Criticism in the Early Modern Mediterranean: Moses Ibn Zabara and Menahem de Lonzano* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2014); Yosef Ofer, *The Masora on Scriptures and Its Methods*, trans. Michael Glatzer (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2019); David Stern, *The Jewish Bible: A Material History* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2018).

16 Leila Avrin, "Micrography as Art," *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 43 (1981): 377–88; eadem, *Scribes, Script, and Books: The Book Arts from Antiquity to the Renaissance* (Chicago: American Library Association; London: British Library, 1991); Joseph Gutmann, "Masorah Figurata: The Origins and Development of a Jewish Art Form," in *Sacred Images: Studies in Jewish Art from Antiquity to the Middle Ages*, ed. Joseph Gutmann (Northampton: Variorum Reprints, 1989), 49–62; Ursula Schubert and Kurt Schubert, *Jüdische Buchkunst*, 2 vols. (Graz: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1983–1992).

17 Dalia-Ruth Halperin, *Illuminating in Micrography: The Catalan Micrography Mahzor—MS Hebrew 8°6527 in the National Library of Israel* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

18 Élodie Attia, ed., *The Masorah of Elijah ha-Naqdan: An Edition of Ashkenazic Micrographical Notes* (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2015).

19 Rahel Fronda, "Micrographic Illustrations in a Group of Thirteenth Century Hebrew Bibles from Germany," in *Hebräische Schrift zwischen Juden-und Christentum in Mittelalter und früher Neuzeit: Beiträge zur 45. Internationalen Hebräischlehrerkonferenz (IÖKH) vom 8. bis 10. Mai 2015 in Erfurt*, ed. Peter Stein (Kamen: Hartmut Spenner, 2016), 37–73.

20 Annette Weber, "The Masoret Is a Fence to the Torah: Monumental Letters and Micrography in Medieval Ashkenazi Bibles," *Ars Judaica* 11 (2015): 7–30.

21 Sara Offenberg, "'For Your Eyes Only': Military Secrets, Text and Image in a Manuscript from Erfurt" [Hebrew], *Jewish Thought* 2 (2020): 376–400; eadem, *Up in Arms.*

Returning to our manuscript, Bible BnF 9, we should first look at the *masorah magna* (upper Masorah), as well as the *masorah parva* (between columns of text). On fol. 104v, it matches the MS Halle *Okhla we-Okhla* list #165 under the letter *lamed*;[22] however, I could not find the upper Masorah on fol. 105v, nor the lower Masorah — that is, the text in the micrography and between the figures — in any of the *Okhla we-Okhla* lists, so we can probably assume that it was compiled by the masorator (i.e., the individual who copied the Masorah text) and not copied from a list, at least not one that has survived.[23] The text between the figures is mainly based on verses from the Prophets. On fol. 104v, the immediate connection is the word "no" (לא):[24]

> When you pass through water, I will be with you (Isa 43:2). Evil is coming upon you. Which you will not (Isa 47:11). You had never heard, you had never known (Isa 48:8). Fear not, you shall not be shamed (Isa 54:4). Whom do you dread and fear (Isa 57:11) had never been heard or noted (Isa 64:3); never asked themselves, "Where is the LORD?" (Jer 2:8). Assuredly, thus said the LORD: Because (Jer 23:38). Shall not return to what he sold (Ezek 7:13). Throw their silver into the streets, and their gold (Ezek 7:19). My hand will be against the prophets (Ezek 13:9). He has not eaten [on the mountains or raised] his eyes (Ezek 18:16). He has not

22 *Okhla we-Okhla* is a Masoretic list. See Fernando Díaz Esteban, *Sefer 'Oklah wĕ-'Oklah: Colección de listas de palabras destinadas a conservar la integridad del texto hebreo de la Biblia entre los judios de la Edad Media* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1975), 236.

23 Salomon Frensdorff, *Das Buch Ochlah W'ochlah (Massora)* (Hannover: Hahn'sche Hofbuchhandlung, 1864); Ofer, *The Masora on Scriptures*, 56–60; Bruno Ognibeni, *La seconda parte del* Sefer 'Oklah we 'Oklah*: Edizione del ms. Halle, Universitätsbibliothek , 2 Y b 4 10, ff. 68–124* (Fribourg: Université de Fribourg, 1995); Sebastian Seemann, "The Okhla Lists in MS Berlin Or. Fol. 1213 (Erfurt 3)," in *Philology and Aesthetics: Figurative Masorah in Western European Manuscripts*, ed. Hanna Liss and Jonas Leipziger (Frankfurt, New York, and Oxford: Peter Lang, 2021), 275–99.

24 Most of the verses were cut, so they were not copied in full. I have modeled the English translation after the Hebrew text and have used square brackets to mark the words that were not included in the manuscript.
במים אתך אני. ובא עליך רעה לא. גם לא שמעת גם לא ידעת. אל תראי כי לא תבושי. את מי דאגת ותיראי. לא שמעו לא האזינו. לא אמרו איה יי'. לכן כה אמר יי' יען. אל הממכר לא. בחצת ישליכו וזהבם. והיתה ידי אל הנביאים. לא אכל ועיניו. תני' דפס'. דספ'. ואיש לא הונה חבלת. ואמרתם לא יתכן דרך. ואמרו בית ישראל דרך. בני עמך לא. ואתה בן אדם אמר אל. ויאמר קרא שמו לא עמי. לא יעמד וקל. כי לא יכלו(!) לעשות. וארבעם שנה כלכלתם במדבר. כי לא ישנו אם לא. לא יסיף להביטם. אשרי האיש אשר לא. לא נתן בנשך. לחם חמדות לא אכלתי. על לשנו

wronged anyone; he has not seized a pledge (Ezek 18:17). Yet you say, "The way [of the Lord] is unfair" (Ezek 18:25). Yet the House of Israel say (Ezek 18:29). Your fellow countrymen say, ["The way of the Lord] is unfair" (Ezek 33:17). Now, O mortal, say to (Ezek 33:10). Then He said, "Name him Lo[-ammi]" (Hos 1:9). Shall not hold his ground, And the fleet-footed (Amos 2:15). For I cannot do (Gen 19:22). Forty years You sustained them in the wilderness (Neh 9:21). For they cannot sleep unless (Prov 4:16); has turned away from them (Job 4:16). Happy is the man who has not (Ps 1:1), who has never lent money at interest (Ps 15:5). I ate no tasty food (Dan 10:3); whose tongue is not given (Ps 15:3).

Further, on fol. 105r, the words are "and the Lord" (ויי'):[25]

But the LORD is truly God (Jer 10:10). The LORD of Hosts, who planted (Jer 11:17). The LORD informed me, and I knew (Jer 11:18). O LORD of Hosts, O [just] Judge (Jer 11:20). But the LORD is with me like a mighty warrior (Jer 20:11). O LORD of Hosts, You who test the righteous (Jer 20:12). But the Lord GOD will help me (Isa 50:7). But the LORD chose to crush him (Isa 53:10). Yet the LORD, the God of Hosts, [must be invoked as] "LORD" (Hos 12:6). And the LORD roars aloud (Joel 2:11). And the LORD will roar from Zion (Joel 4:16). It is my Lord the GOD of Hosts. At whose touch (Amos 9:5). But the LORD cast a mighty wind (Job 1:4). And the LORD will manifest Himself to them (Zech 9:14). The LORD restored Job's fortunes (Job 42:10). Thus the LORD blessed the latter years of Job's life (Job 42:12). No flesh (Jer 12:12). O God, Source of the breath of all flesh (Num 16:22). The first issue of the womb of every being (Num 18:15). Let the LORD, source of the breath of all flesh, appoint someone (Num 27:16). Tumult has reached the ends of the earth (Jer 25:31). Upon all the bare heights (Jer 12:12). They shall be a horror to all flesh (Isa 66:24). Reaped thorns (Jer 12:13). Not concerned (Amos 6:6).

[25] Most of the text is based on the first words of the verses.
ויי' אלהים אמת. ויי' צבאות הנוטע. ויי' הודיעני ואדעה. ויי' צבאות צדק. ויי' אותי כגבור. ויי' צבאות בוחן צדק. ויי' אלהים יעזור לי. ויי' חפץ דכאו. ויי' אלהי הצבאות יי'. ויי' נתן קולו. ויי' מציון ישאג. ויי' אלהים הצבאות הנוגע. ויי' הטיל רוח גדולה. ויי' בהיכל קדשו. ויי' עליהם יראה. ויי' שב את שבות איוב. ויי' ברך את אחרית איוב. ~ לכל בשר ז'. דסמ' בקרי

The relationships between the verses are quite understandable, as the words are connected by one word following another in a chain of similar words (or words written in the same manner, even if their meanings are different), even in cases where the word is part of the verse but has not been copied in the folio.[26] For example, תראי is the Hebrew word for both "looking" and "fearing," but it has a different meaning in each verse: "You had never heard, you had never known" (Isa 48:8), "Fear not, you shall not be shamed" (Isa 54:4). Another example can be seen in the use of verses from the same chapter, "Yet you say, 'The way [of the Lord] is unfair'" (Ezek 18:25), with a verse from the same chapter, but with the repeating words omitted, appearing immediately afterwards: "Yet the House of Israel say ['The way of the Lord is unfair']" (Ezek 18:29).

Since the importance of the image is related not only to the copied words, but also to the relevant complete verse (or even the chapter), I have reproduced the micrography-forming verses in their entirety and have marked the words used for the *masorah figurata* in bold (the original Hebrew text is in the footnotes). Not all the words composing the image are based on Jeremiah 10–13, but most of them are taken from there. The following verse is connected to the main text of Jeremiah 11:22: "Assuredly, thus said the LORD of Hosts: 'I am going to deal with them: the young men shall die by the sword, their boys and girls shall die by famine.'" I would suggest that the choice of particular verses for the micrography was intended to relate not only to Jeremiah's words, but also to the meaning of the opening page with its focus on the sword and the danger against which the prophecy warns.

On fol. 104v (fig. 3), the sword in the hand of the figure on the right is based on Deuteronomy 11:2:[27] "**Take thought this day that it was not your children, who neither experienced nor** witnessed the lesson of the LORD your God — His majesty, His mighty hand, His outstretched arm." The buckler is based on Deuteronomy 32:17; 32:25:[28] **"They sacrificed to demons, no-gods**, gods they had never

[26] On a similar technique in the Ashkenazi Erfurt Bible 2, see Offenberg, "For Your Eyes Only."

[27] Deut 11:2: **וִידַעְתֶּם הַיּוֹם כִּי לֹא אֶת בְּנֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר לֹא יָדְעוּ וַאֲשֶׁר** לֹא רָאוּ אֶת מוּסַר ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם אֶת גָּדְלוֹ אֶת יָדוֹ הַחֲזָקָה וּזְרֹעוֹ הַנְּטוּיָה.

[28] The buckler is based on Deut 32:17; 32:25: **יִזְבְּחוּ לַשֵּׁדִים לֹא אֱלֹהַ** אֱלֹהִים לֹא יְדָעוּם חֲדָשִׁים מִקָּרֹב בָּאוּ לֹא שְׂעָרוּם אֲבֹתֵיכֶם: .... (כה) מִחוּץ תְּשַׁכֶּל חֶרֶב וּמֵחֲדָרִים אֵימָה גַּם בָּחוּר גַּם בְּתוּלָה יוֹנֵק עִם אִישׁ שֵׂיבָה.

known, new ones, who came but lately, who stirred not your fathers' fears. ... The sword shall deal death without, As shall the terror within, to youth and maiden alike, the suckling as well as the aged." The neck is based on Exodus 33:19-20:[29] **"And He answered**, "I will make **all My goodness** pass before you, and I will proclaim before you the name LORD, and the grace that I grant and the compassion that I show. But, He said, 'you cannot see My face, for man may not see Me and live.'" The abdomen is based on Numbers 6:3:[30] "He shall abstain from **wine and any other intoxicant**; he shall not drink vinegar of wine or of any other intoxicant, neither shall he drink anything in which grapes have been steeped, nor eat grapes fresh or dried." The garments' folds are based on Leviticus 21:5:[31] "They shall not shave **smooth any part of their heads**, or cut the side-growth of their beards, or make gashes in their flesh." The back is based on 1 Kings 1:18: [32] "Yet now Adonijah has become king, **and you, my lord the king, know nothing about it**."

[29] The neck and upper back are based on Exod 33:19–20: **וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנִי** אַעֲבִיר **כָּל טוּבִי** עַל פָּנֶיךָ וְקָרָאתִי בְשֵׁם ה' לְפָנֶיךָ וְחַנֹּתִי אֶת אֲשֶׁר אָחֹן וְרִחַמְתִּי אֶת אֲשֶׁר אֲרַחֵם: וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא תוּכַל לִרְאֹת אֶת פָּנָי כִּי לֹא יִרְאַנִי הָאָדָם וָחָי.

[30] The abdomen is based on Num 6:3: **מִיַּיִן וְשֵׁכָר** יַזִּיר חֹמֶץ יַיִן וְחֹמֶץ שֵׁכָר לֹא יִשְׁתֶּה וְכָל מִשְׁרַת עֲנָבִים לֹא יִשְׁתֶּה וַעֲנָבִים לַחִים וִיבֵשִׁים לֹא יֹאכֵל.

[31] The dress folds are based on Lev 21:5: לֹא יקרחה יִקְרְחוּ **קָרְחָה בְּרֹאשָׁם** וּפְאַת זְקָנָם לֹא יְגַלֵּחוּ וּבִבְשָׂרָם לֹא יִשְׂרְטוּ שָׂרָטֶת: (ו) קְדֹשִׁים יִהְיוּ לֵאלֹהֵיהֶם וְלֹא יְחַלְּלוּ שֵׁם אֱלֹהֵיהֶם כִּי אֶת אִשֵּׁי ה' לֶחֶם אֱלֹהֵיהֶם הֵם מַקְרִיבִם וְהָיוּ קֹדֶשׁ.

[32] The back is based on 1 Kgs 1:18: וְעַתָּה הִנֵּה אֲדֹנִיָּה מָלָךְ וְעַתָּה אֲדֹנִי הַמֶּלֶךְ לֹא יָדָעְתָּ

Figure 3: Detail, Paris, BnF, MS héb. 9, fol. 104v

In the figure on the left (fig. 4), the coif contains only one word from Jeremiah 11:20:[33] “O LORD of Hosts, O just Judge, Who tests the thoughts and the mind, let me see Your retribution upon them, for I lay **my case** before You.” The lower part of the garment is based on 2 Chronicles 36:17:[34] “He therefore brought the king of the Chaldeans

[33] וַה' צְבָאוֹת שֹׁפֵט צֶדֶק בֹּחֵן כְּלָיוֹת וָלֵב אֶרְאֶה נִקְמָתְךָ מֵהֶם כִּי אֵלֶיךָ גִּלִּיתִי אֶת **רִיבִי**

[34] וַיַּעַל עֲלֵיהֶם אֶת מֶלֶךְ כשדיים כַּשְׂדִּים וַיַּהֲרֹג בַּחוּרֵיהֶם בַּחֶרֶב בְּבֵית מִקְדָּשָׁם וְלֹא חָמַל **עַל בָּחוּר** וּבְתוּלָה זָקֵן וְיָשֵׁשׁ הַכֹּל נָתַן בְּיָדוֹ

upon them, who killed their youths by the sword in their sanctuary; he did not spare **youth**, maiden, elder, or graybeard, but delivered all into his hands." The lower garment and the right leg are based on Isaiah 27:17:[35] "When its **crown is withered, they break**; women come and make fires with them. For they are a people without understanding; that is why their Maker will show them no mercy, their Creator will deny them grace." The left leg is based on Isaiah 43:2:[36] "When you pass **through water, I will be with you**; through streams, they shall not overwhelm you. When you walk through fire, you shall not be scorched; through flame, it shall not burn you."you shall not be scorched; through flame, it shall not burn you."

Figure 4: Detail, Paris, BnF, MS héb. 9, fol. 104v.

[35] בִּיבֹשׁ **קְצִירָהּ תִּשָּׁבַרְנָה** נָשִׁים בָּאוֹת מְאִירוֹת אוֹתָהּ כִּי לֹא עַם בִּינוֹת הוּא עַל כֵּן לֹא יְרַחֲמֶנּוּ עֹשֵׂהוּ וְיֹצְרוֹ לֹא יְחֻנֶּנּוּ

[36] כִּי תַעֲבֹר **בַּמַּיִם אִתְּךָ** אָנִי וּבַנְּהָרוֹת לֹא יִשְׁטְפוּךָ כִּי תֵלֵךְ בְּמוֹ אֵשׁ לֹא תִכָּוֶה וְלֶהָבָה לֹא תִבְעַר בָּךְ

The abdomen of the figure on the left is based on 2 Chronicles 25:4, which is also used for the figures on fol. 105:[37] "**But he did not put their children** to death for [he acted] in accordance with what is written in the Teaching, in the Book of Moses, where the LORD commanded, 'Parents shall not die for children, nor shall children die for parents, but every person shall die only for his own crime.'" The margins and the lower part of the garment are based on Isaiah 16:10:[38] "**Rejoicing and gladness are gone from the farmland**; in the vineyards no shouting or cheering is heard. No more does the treader tread wine in the presses. The shouts have been silenced." The upper back of the garment is based on Ezekiel 3:6:[39] "**Not to the many peoples** of unintelligible speech and difficult language, whose talk you cannot understand. If I sent you to them, they would listen to you."

The garment's folds are based on Isaiah 10:7:[40] "**But he has evil plans**, his mind harbors evil designs; for he means to destroy, to wipe out nations, not a few." The right arm is based on 2 Kings 14:6:[41] "But he did not put to death the children of the assassins, in accordance with what is written in the Book of the Teaching of Moses, where the LORD commanded, 'Parents shall not be put to death for children, nor children be put to death for parents; a person shall be put to death only for his own crime.'" The left arm (holding the shield) is based on 1 Samuel 17:39:[42] "David **girded** his sword over his garment. Then he tried to walk; but he was not used to it. And David said to Saul, 'I cannot walk in these, for I am not used to them.' So David took them off." The sword includes two words: the upper one, "tombs," is associated with the verses used to design the figures on fol. 105r based on 2 Chronicles 32:33.

The appearance of the word at the top of the swords suggests an attempt at a correction, as the ink is thicker there, and it was perhaps

37 **וְאֶת בְּנֵיהֶם** לֹא הֵמִית כִּי כַכָּתוּב בַּתּוֹרָה בְּסֵפֶר מֹשֶׁה אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' לֵאמֹר לֹא יָמוּתוּ אָבוֹת עַל בָּנִים וּבָנִים לֹא יָמוּתוּ עַל אָבוֹת כִּי אִישׁ בְּחֶטְאוֹ יָמוּתוּ

38 וְנֶאֱסַף **שִׂמְחָה וָגִיל מִן הַכַּרְמֶל** וּבַכְּרָמִים לֹא יְרֻנָּן לֹא יְרֹעָע יַיִן בַּיְקָבִים לֹא יִדְרֹךְ הַדֹּרֵךְ הֵידָד הִשְׁבַּתִּי

39 **לֹא אֶל עַמִּים** רַבִּים עִמְקֵי שָׂפָה וְכִבְדֵי לָשׁוֹן אֲשֶׁר לֹא תִשְׁמַע דִּבְרֵיהֶם אִם לֹא אֲלֵיהֶם שְׁלַחְתִּיךָ הֵמָּה יִשְׁמְעוּ אֵלֶיךָ

40 **וְהוּא לֹא כֵן יְדַמֶּה** וּלְבָבוֹ לֹא כֵן יַחְשֹׁב כִּי לְהַשְׁמִיד בִּלְבָבוֹ וּלְהַכְרִית גּוֹיִם לֹא מְעָט

41 וְאֶת בְּנֵי **הַמַּכִּים לֹא** הֵמִית כַּכָּתוּב בְּסֵפֶר תּוֹרַת מֹשֶׁה אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' לֵאמֹר לֹא יוּמְתוּ אָבוֹת עַל בָּנִים וּבָנִים לֹא יוּמְתוּ עַל אָבוֹת כִּי אִם אִישׁ בְּחֶטְאוֹ ימות יוּמָת

42 **וַיַּחְגֹּר** דָּוִד אֶת חַרְבּוֹ מֵעַל לְמַדָּיו וַיֹּאֶל לָלֶכֶת כִּי לֹא נִסָּה וַיֹּאמֶר דָּוִד אֶל שָׁאוּל לֹא אוּכַל לָלֶכֶת בָּאֵלֶּה כִּי לֹא נִסִּיתִי וַיְסִרֵם דָּוִד מֵעָלָיו

meant to be "his sword" (חרבו), but the *resh* has been replaced with a *ḥeth* so that it reads "his length" (רחבו). The buckler is based on 2 Samuel 18:3:[43] "**But the troops replied,** '**No!** For if some of us flee, the rest will not be concerned about us; even if half of us should die, the others will not be concerned about us. But you are worth ten thousand of us. Therefore, it is better for you to support us from the town.'"

The text of the *masorah figurata* on fol. 105r (fig. 5) is based on Jeremiah 12:12:[44] "Spoilers have come upon all the bare heights of the wilderness. For a sword of the LORD devours from one end of the land to the other; no flesh is safe." The phrase that dominates the chosen Masorah is the "sword of the LORD." The figure on the right is based on 1 Kings 11:42:[45] "**Solomon** slept **with his fathers and was buried in the city of his father David**; and his son **Rehoboam** succeeded him as king." It is also based on 1 Kings 22:51:[46] "**Jehoshaphat** slept with his fathers and **was buried with his fathers in the city of his father David**, and his son Jehoram succeeded him as king."

Figure 5: Detail, Paris, BnF, MS héb. 9, fol. 105r

[43] **וַיֹּאמֶר הָעָם לֹא תֵצֵא** כִּי אִם נֹס נָנוּס לֹא יָשִׂימוּ אֵלֵינוּ לֵב וְאִם יָמֻתוּ חֶצְיֵנוּ לֹא יָשִׂימוּ אֵלֵינוּ לֵב כִּי עַתָּה כָמֹנוּ עֲשָׂרָה אֲלָפִים וְעַתָּה טוֹב כִּי תִהְיֶה לָּנוּ מֵעִיר לעזיר לַעְזוֹר

[44] עַל כָּל שְׁפָיִם בַּמִּדְבָּר בָּאוּ שֹׁדְדִים כִּי חֶרֶב לַה' אֹכְלָה מִקְצֵה אֶרֶץ וְעַד קְצֵה הָאָרֶץ אֵין שָׁלוֹם לְכָל בָּשָׂר

[45] וַיִּשְׁכַּב **שְׁלֹמֹה עִם אֲבֹתָיו וַיִּקָּבֵר בְּעִיר דָּוִד אָבִיו** וַיִּמְלֹךְ **רְחַבְעָם** בְּנוֹ תַּחְתָּיו

[46] וַיִּשְׁכַּב **יְהוֹשָׁפָט** עִם אֲבֹתָיו **וַיִּקָּבֵר עִם אֲבֹתָיו בְּעִיר דָּוִד** אָבִיו וַיִּמְלֹךְ יְהוֹרָם בְּנוֹ תַּחְתָּיו

The figure on the left (fig. 6) is based on 2 Chronicles 32:33:[47] "**Hezekiah slept with his fathers and was buried on the upper part of the tombs of the sons of David**. When he died, all the people of Judah and the inhabitants of **Jerusalem** accorded him much honor. **Manasseh**, his son, succeeded him." The buckler is based on 2 Chronicles 25:27–28:[48] "From the time that **Amaziah** turned from following the LORD, a conspiracy was formed against him in Jerusalem, and he fled to Lachish; but they sent men after him to Lachish and they put him to death there. They brought his body back on horses and **buried him with his fathers in the city of Judah.**"

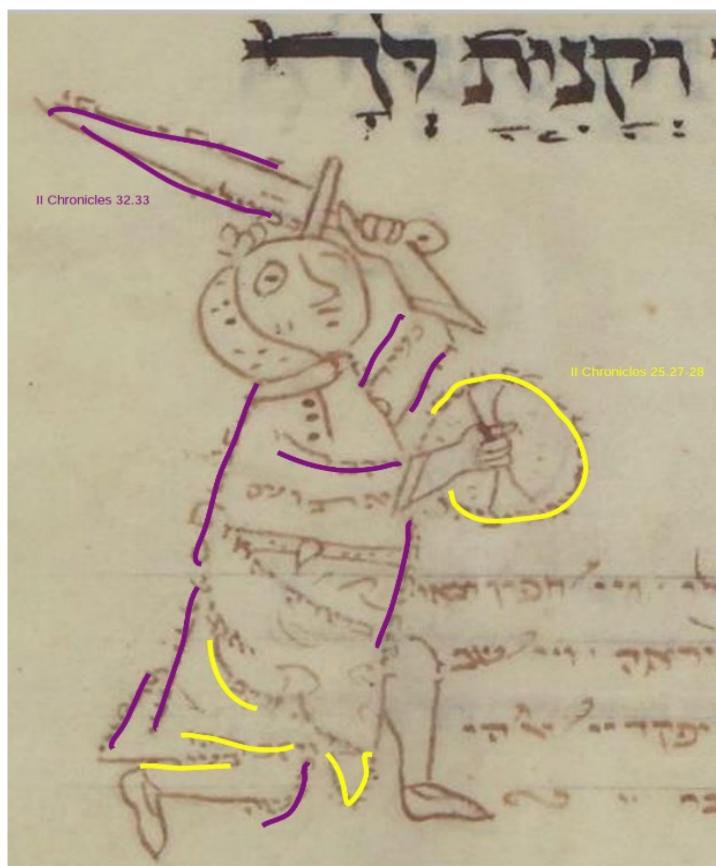

Figure 6: Detail, Paris, BnF, MS héb. 9, fol. 105r

47 וַיִּשְׁכַּב **יְחִזְקִיָּהוּ עִם אֲבֹתָיו** וַיִּקְבְּרֻהוּ **בְּמַעֲלֵה קִבְרֵי בְנֵי דָוִיד** וְכָבוֹד עָשׂוּ לוֹ בְמוֹתוֹ כָּל יְהוּדָה וְיֹשְׁבֵי **יְרוּשָׁלִָם** וַיִּמְלֹךְ **מְנַשֶּׁה** בְנוֹ תַּחְתָּיו

48 וּמֵעֵת אֲשֶׁר סָר **אֲמַצְיָהוּ** מֵאַחֲרֵי ה' וַיִּקְשְׁרוּ עָלָיו קֶשֶׁר בִּירוּשָׁלִַם וַיָּנָס לָכִישָׁה וַיִּשְׁלְחוּ אַחֲרָיו לָכִישָׁה וַיְמִיתֻהוּ שָׁם: וַיִּשָּׂאֻהוּ עַל הַסּוּסִים **וַיִּקְבְּרוּ אֹתוֹ עִם אֲבֹתָיו בְּעִיר יְהוּדָה**

In this manuscript, the *masorah figurata* in the book of Jeremiah are depicted in clothes that are not typically identified with any group or religion, unlike those on fols. 111v–112r, who are wearing Jewish hats[49] and are thus specifically identified as Jewish. As the texts imply, the figures with the swords were supposed to evoke fear in the hearts of the viewers, as they may have represented the inhabitants of the non-Jewish urban space; in other words, the imagery may point to the Jews' fear of their Christian neighbors. We should take into account the message that the book of Jeremiah conveyed to the readers/viewers in the context of contemporary Jewish-Christian relations in the German lands.

The figures' clothing is not typically identified with any particular group or religion; they are wearing coifs, which were common among all of the contemporary societal strata. The sword and buckler were used by unarmored combatants in civilian settings and ordinary foot soldiers and was carried for self-defense.[50] Thus, the figures in the micrography were deliberately portrayed as commoners rather than as aristocratic or knightly warriors. As the text implies, the figures with the swords were designed to arouse fear in their viewers' hearts, as they might well have represented the Gentile inhabitants of the urban space; that is, they might have reflected a fear of the Jews Christian neighbors. The manuscript was produced six years after the 1298 riots known as the Rindfleisch Massacres,[51] so this micrography may contain an echo of the pogrom's

[49] As a result of the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, Jews were forced to wear clothing that distinguished them from Christians, which in the German lands was the pointed hat: see Solomon Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews in the XIIIth Century: A Study of Their Relations during the Years 1198–1254, Based on the Papal Letters and the Conciliar Decrees of the Period* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1966), 308–9. There is a vast body of research on the subject; see recently Flora Cassen, *Marking the Jews in Renaissance Italy: Politics, Religion and the Power of Symbols* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 20–49; Sara Lipton, *Dark Mirror: The Medieval Origins of Anti-Semitic Iconography* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2014).

[50] David Edge and John Miles Paddock, *Arms & Armor of the Medieval Knight: An Illustrated History of Weaponry in the Middle Ages* (New York: Crescent Books, 1996), 65, 121, 129.

[51] For the Rindfleisch Massacres, see Friedrich Lotter, "Die Judenverfolgung des 'König Rintfleisch in Franken um 1298,'" *Zeitschrift für historische Forschung* 15 (1988): 385–422; Miri Rubin, *Gentile Tales: The Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 48–56; Haym Soloveitchik,

outcome, especially as the text of Jeremiah and the micrography-forming verses tell of severe judgment and harsh prophecy; the emphasis is on the sword that brings death. As the masorator also created the image, even though someone else may have designed it, there is a close connection between the text and the image it forms.

"Are You One of Us or of Our Enemies?" On Two Types of Warriors in the *North French Hebrew Miscellany*

The methodology of studying the associative connection between texts and images can prove to be productive, especially when it comes to the writings of the *Ḥasidei Ashkenaz* (German Pietists)[52] and the illuminations in the manuscripts that are related to their writings. One example is found in two illustrations in the *North French Hebrew Miscellany*, London, British Library Add. MS 11639, also known as the *London Miscellany*, which was produced in Northern France sometime between 1278 and 1280.[53] This book includes several different texts: the Pentateuch; a *maḥzor* according to the French rite; a commentary on the prayers; aspects of *halakhah*; and esoteric writings. It is rich in marginal illustrations and also features full-page depictions of biblical stories. In previous publications, I have explored the close connection between the texts (especially those written by the Qalonymos family) and illustrations in this manuscript,[54] focusing on the paratext — that is, the entire book design[55] — including extra texts (in relation to the

"Catastrophe and Halakhic Creativity: Ashkenaz—1096, 1242, 1306 and 1298," *Jewish History* 12 (1998): 71–85.

52 For the associative nature of the writings in Ashkenaz, see Haym Soloveitchik, "Piety, Pietism and German Pietism: *Sefer Ḥasidim* I and the Influence of Ḥasidei Ashkenaz," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 92 (2002): 455–93, esp. 462–63. For more on the issue of the urtext, see Daniel Abrams, *Kabbalistic Manuscripts and Textual Theory: Methodologies of Textual Scholarship and Editorial Practice in the Study of Jewish Mysticism*, 2nd ed. (Jerusalem: Magnes Press; Los Angeles, Cherub Press, 2013), 486–500. On the *Ḥasidei Ashkenaz*'s unsystematic way of writing, see David I. Shyovitz, *A Remembrance of His Wonders: Nature and the Supernatural in Medieval Ashkenaz* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), 16–18.

53 The entire ms is online: http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Add_MS_11639.

54 Sara Offenberg, *Illuminated Piety: Pietistic Texts and Images in the North French Hebrew Miscellany* (Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 2013); eadem, "'It Was Said Before': Repetition of Biblical Illuminated Stories in the London Miscellany" [Hebrew], in *Festschrift in Honor of Professor Shamir Yona*, ed. Elie Assis et al. (Samakh: Ostracon, 2022), 273–81.

55 Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewin

time period in which they were copied into the manuscript), as well as on other contemporaneous writings and images that may have influenced the author of the manuscript's conceptual space. On fol. 138r, we find an Aramaic translation of the *haftarah* [reading from Prophets] for the first day of Passover (fig. 7). The initial is adorned with a knight in chainmail and a surcoat, who is holding a triangular shield and is about to stab a dragon on his left. Even though not every miniature painting in a manuscript has to have a special meaning and at times they may be only decorative,[56] here I would like to suggest a possible meaning based on a methodology of examining the relationships between connected texts and images in the manuscript and also drawing conclusions based on other manuscripts.

Figure 7: *London Miscellany*, London, British Library, Add. MS 11639, fol. 138r, Northern France, c. 1280

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) (originally published in French as *Seuils* [Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1987]).

56 The illuminated initials in this manuscript have not received any scholarly attention beyond the stylistic study undertaken by Yael Zirlin, "The Decoration of the Miscellany, Its Iconography and Style," in *The North French Hebrew Miscellany: British Library Add. MS 11639*, ed. Jeremy Schonfield (London: Facsimile Editions, 2003), 75–161.

A few pages before the Aramaic translation, the Hebrew *haftarah* is copied on fols. 126v–127r, and the initial there displays two hybrids with a human upper body and a lower body with animal legs and a tail (figs. 8–9); each is holding a sword and buckler,[57] thus besides the text, there is also a connection between the fighting figures in the two scenes. The *haftarah* begins from Joshua 5:2: "At that time the Lord said to Joshua, 'Make flint knives for yourselves and again circumcise the children of Israel a second time.'" I believe that the key to understanding the artistic choice here is found later on, in Joshua 5:13: "Once, when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing before him, drawn sword in hand. Joshua went up to him and asked him, 'Are you one of us or of our enemies?'" Here, we may ask the same question regarding the image of the knight: "Are you a good knight or a bad one?" If we consider the swords, it may be the case that it is meant to represent a flint knife rather than a sword. This could be one explanation, and moreover, the scene takes place just before the battle of Jericho, so it makes sense that Joshua is wearing full knightly gear, except for a helmet. Nevertheless, the dragon in the scene is puzzling; what does a dragon to have to do with this?[58] Usually, if we see a dragon and a knight, most of us will think of St. George slaying the dragon, but here this does not make much sense, since this is a Jewish manuscript. However, even though the Jews were copying from a Christian manuscript, and at times, such as here, used Christian artists,[59] there must be more to it than that.

[57] This is one of the earliest images of a sword and buckler in medieval art. Cornelius Berthold has found fighting figures with swords and bucklers in marginalia of Hebrew manuscripts, such as on fols. 38r and 219v of this manuscript: see Berthold, "Marginalised Fighting: Depictions of Sword & Buckler Fencers in 13th and 14th Century Manuscript Miniatures from Europe." I thank the author for generously sharing his paper with me before publication.

[58] For dragons in Hebrew illuminated manuscripts, primarily from Ashkenaz, see Marc Michael Epstein, *Dreams of Subversion in Medieval Jewish Art and Literature* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1997), 70–95; Shulamit Laderman, "The Great Whales and the Great Dragons in Medieval Hebrew Illuminated Manuscripts" [Hebrew], in *Zekhor Davar le-'Avdekha: Essays and Studies in Memory of Dov Rappel*, ed. S. Glick (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2007), 319–35; Ilia Rodov, "Dragons: A Symbol of Evil in European Synagogue Decorations," *Ars Judaica* 1 (2005): 63–84.

[59] Zirlin, "The Decoration of the Miscellany."

Figure 8: *London Miscellany*, fols. 127v–128r

Figure 9: Detail, *London Miscellany*, fol. 127v

In order to explain the appearance of the dragon, I will briefly discuss a later manuscript, the *Second Nuremberg Haggadah*, London, private collection of David Sofer, produced in fifteenth-century Ashkenaz (fig. 10).[60] On fol. 13v, we see a description based on Exodus 4:24–26: "At a night encampment on the way, the LORD encountered him [Moses] and sought to kill him. So Zipporah took a flint, cut off her son's foreskin, and touched his legs with it, saying, 'You are truly a bridegroom of blood to me!' And when He let him alone, she added, 'A bridegroom of blood because of the circumcision.'" We see a dragon attempting to swallow Moses, and the inscription above it explains, based on Rashi's commentary on Exodus 4:24:[61]

Figure 10: *Second Nuremberg Haggadah*, London, private collection of David Sofer, fol. 13v, fifteenth-century Ashkenaz

60 Katrin Kogman-Appel, *Die Zweite Nürnberger und die Jehuda Haggada: Jüdische Illustratoren zwischen Tradition und Fortschritt* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1999). The ms is available online: https://www.nli.org.il/he/manuscripts/NNL_ALEPH002534788/NLI.

61 Kogman-Appel, *Die Zweite Nürnberger und die Jehuda Haggada*, 45–46.

> "The angel sought to kill him," because he had not circumcised his son Eliezer; and because he had shown himself remiss in this, he brought upon himself the punishment of death. ... The angel became a kind of serpent and swallowed him (Moses) from his head to his thigh, spued him forth, and then again swallowed him from his legs to that place (the membrum). Zipporah thus understood that this had happened on account of the delay in the circumcision of her son.

Thus, according to the image and commentary, the angel that came before Moses became a kind of serpent and swallowed him. This informs us that sometimes the angel of death is portrayed as a serpent or a dragon[62] and that he tried to swallow Moses from head to thigh and also another time from leg to thigh. His wife Zipporah thus understood that this had happened on account of the delay in the circumcision of her son, which is why she simply took out the knife and circumcised them both. When we look at a dragon eating Moses, or the illustration from the *London Miscellany*, we actually understand that the circumcision of the people of Israel is like fighting the dragon, which represents the angel of death rather than an actual serpent/dragon.

If we look at the whole of the opening of the *London Miscellany*, where the *haftarah* for Passover is written, we see fighting figures. The swords can be explained by another source, which is not only related to slaying the dragon or circumcision, but is also in accordance with what is written at the bottom and around the main text. The text in the outermost margins is from Psalms 44:4: "It was not by their sword that they took the land, their arm did not give them victory, but Your right hand, Your arm, and Your goodwill, for You favored them ... it is not my sword that gives me victory." The emphasis here is on the fact that the Lord says to his people that it is not by the power of the sword that victory is achieved, but only by the power of the Lord himself: thus, the sword here is not a motif of salvation; on the contrary, the hybrid fighting figures are meant to remind the viewer/reader that the true power comes not from human force, but from obeying the Lord's commands. Since the characters in the initial of the Haftara are hybrids and holding a sword and buckler — which, as already mentioned, were the weapons of common men — here, they represent

[62] Epstein, *Dreams of Subversion*, 73–74.

the negative aspect of non-believers. On the other hand, the human knight in the translation of the *haftarah* is dressed and armed with knightly gear and weapons, thus representing Joshua and the positive requirement to perform circumcision.

The Wicked Son: An Apostate Warrior

I would like to point to the importance of deciphering the details portrayed in the clothing of the wicked son in two illuminated Passover haggadahs.[63] I will begin with the fourteenth-century *Barcelona Haggadah* and continue with the fifteenth-century *Ashkenazi Rylands Haggadah*. The point I wish to make here is that examining the weapons and military gear together with the text helps us to draw conclusions regarding the negative connotation the wicked son receives, even beyond the obvious one. Adam Cohen has described how illuminated haggadahs can portray their patrons' desire for elevated status in the community, similar to contemporary personal Christian manuscripts, showing how illustrations aroused the five senses in ways that mere text could not, especially the sense of sight via the creative direction of the viewer's gaze.[64] Following Cohen's methodology, I will concentrate on an illumination portraying the "wicked son." Unsurprisingly, in most haggadahs, the illustrations of the wicked son are more negative in nature than those of the other sons. As I will demonstrate, his immoral conduct is evident both in his actions and from his appearance.

In the so-called *Barcelona Haggadah*, London, British Library, Add. 14761, which was produced in Languedoc in the fourteenth century,[65]

[63] For images of the wicked son in illuminated haggadahs, see Mira Friedman, "The Four Sons of the Haggadah and the Ages of Man," *Journal of Jewish Art* 11 (1985): 16–40; Barlow, "The Muslim Warrior at the Seder Meal"; Harris, "Good Jews, Bad Jews, and No Jews at All"; Offenberg, "'And He Put on Righteousness as a Coat of Mail.'"

[64] Adam S. Cohen, "The Multisensory Haggadah," in *Les cinq sens au Moyen Âge*, ed. Éric Palazzo (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2016), 317–20. His article mainly focuses on two manuscripts: the *Birds' Head Haggadah*, which was produced in Ashkenaz around 1300, and the *Sarajevo Haggadah*, which was produced under the Crown of Aragon during the third quarter of the fourteenth century.

[65] The ms is available online: www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Add_MS_14761. See also the facsimile edition: Jeremy Schonfield, ed., *The Barcelona Haggadah: An Illuminated Passover Compendium from 14th-Century Catalonia in Facsimile (MS British Library Additional 14761)* (London: Facsimile Editions, 1992). See also

a distinction between social ranks is evident: the wicked son wears the helmet of a common warrior, but on the opposite page, the simple son is pictured above two tournament helmets of the kind worn by normal knights (figs. 11–12). The large crest on the great helm used for tournaments was a technological development of the 1220s. Great helms with crests were worn in tournaments, but never on the field of battle.[66] Scant written and visual evidence informs us about how crests were physically attached to helms. According to Dirk H. Breiding, during the thirteenth and first half of the fourteenth century, most crests were probably attached with laces passing around the helm's crown through pairs of holes in the top and sides; these laces apparently secured both the internal lining and the crest and/or mantling.[67] Well-preserved tournament crests are rare and even Christian art provides very few descriptions of how the crest was attached to the helmet; thus, such exact detail in Jewish art is of considerable note. The helmets underneath the simple son even depict minutiae of the component that connects the crest to the helmet. This rare detail suggests that we should consider an additional layer of meaning emerging from its emphasis of the fact that the tournament knights were of higher rank.

Katrin Kogman-Appel, *Illuminated Haggadot from Medieval Spain: Biblical Imagery and Passover Holiday* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2006), 24–25, 41; eadem, "Une Haggada de Pâques provenant du Midi de la France. Le programme des images dans le manuscrit de Londres Add. 14761," in *Culture religieuse méridionale: Les manuscrits et leur contexte artistique*, ed. Michelle Fournié, Daniel Le Blévec, and Alison Stones (Toulouse: Éditions Privat, 2016), 327–47.

66 Unlike the battlefield, when the warrior required total control and maximum flexibility, tournaments were a "safer" space, so during the thirteenth century, different armor and helmets were designed for tournament knights. See Charles Henry Ashdown, *European Arms & Armor* (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1995), 90–92; Dirk H. Breiding, "Some Notes on Great Helms, Crests and Early Tournament Reinforces," *The Park Lane Arms Fair* 30 (2003): 18–35; Tobias Capwell, *Arms and Armour of the Medieval Joust* (Leeds: Royal Armouries Museum, 2018), 17–19, 45–49; Edge and Paddock, *Arms & Armor of the Medieval Knight*, 53–55.

67 In fact, from this period onward, the available documentary and pictorial evidence suggest that crests were fastened to helms in a variety of ways: see Breiding, "Some Notes on Great Helms."

Figure 11: The so-called *Barcelona Haggadah*, London, British Library, Add. 14761, fols. 34v–35r, Languedoc, fourteenth century

Figure 12: Detail, *Barcelona Haggadah*, London, BL, Add. 14761, fol. 35r

The context in which the helmets appear is important: a tournament helm is shown beneath the simple son, while the wicked son appears wearing a conical helmet and with a spear belonging to a lower-class warrior, not a nobleman or knight (fig. 13). As Mira Friedman showed, the wicked son is commonly portrayed as a soldier in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Italian and Spanish illuminated haggadahs.[68] Here, he wears a short robe, aiming his spear toward the man standing before him, who is dressed in a simple pinkish robe, and pulling his beard.[69] His wickedness is stressed by this act of humiliation. The wicked son is also bearded; however, his face has been deliberately destroyed, as mentioned by Evelyn Cohen.[70] Additional evidence for his degradation being a symbol of his lower rank is found in the similarity between him and Laban (fig. 14), whose face has also been mutilated.[71] Laban is depicted as a common warrior without the symbols of a noble knight (such as armor or a great helm). Since these chivalric displays suggest a keen awareness of social rank, as well as moral behavior, unlike the deeds of the wicked son or Laban, the symbolic meanings intended by the patrons should be interpreted in this context.

Figure 13: Detail, *Barcelona Haggadah*, London, BL, Add. 14761, fol. 34v

68 Friedman, "The Four Sons."

69 On the pulling of the beard and its connotations, see Elliot Horowitz, "On the Significance of the Beard in Jewish Communities in the East and Europe in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Period" [Hebrew], *Pe'amin* 59 (1994): 124–48. See also Tova Rosen, "The Beard as Spectacle and Scandal in a Thirteenth-Century Hebrew Maqāma," *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World* 10 (2021): 1–24.

70 Evelyn Cohen, "The Decoration," in Schonfield, *The Barcelona Haggadah*, 24–43, esp. 31.

71 Cohen, "The Decoration," 33.

Figure 14: Detail, *Barcelona Haggadah*, London, BL, Add. 14761, fol. 39v

Next to the initial word *tam* ("simple"), an elderly bearded man is seated on a chair, like other contemporary depictions of scholars. The young man before him was identified by Friedman and Cohen as the simple son, who is asking, "What is this?" (fig. 11).[72] Both characters wear long robes and their heads are covered, like the wise son in the previous illumination (fol. 34a). The simple son points toward the tournament helms so that the viewer's eyes are directed toward them, amplifying the dissonance between the wicked son's plain helmet and the higher-ranking helmets beneath the simple son. The illumination visually directs the viewer toward details in the decorated folio. The patron's choice to enhance certain items rather than others triggered symbolic meanings and encoded textual and visual messages about how he envisioned himself. Social codes express spiritual concepts, which enhances the viewer's faith. The manuscript's artistic program juxtaposes historical depictions of Egyptian slavery with the redemption, with hope for future salvation being portrayed as an upside-down world. This sophisticated mechanism updates the haggadah and its traditional Passover symbols with contemporary images meaningful to the medieval Jew. As for the relationships between different aspects of the page — that is, paratexts—the connection between text and image is evident in hand gestures that direct the viewer toward the encoded message in the illustration and text. The warriors have dual meanings: on the one hand, they represent forces hostile to Jews; on the other, Jews adopted

[72] Cohen, "The Decoration," 31; Friedman, "The Four Sons," 24. Mendel Metzger refuses to determine which of the two is the simple son; however, I agree with the opinion that it is the younger figure. See Metzger, *La Haggadah enlumineé* (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 157.

the chivalric code of knighthood in order to depict their ancient spiritual status as the Lord's chosen people, transmitting and updating this heritage in the contemporary visual language of medieval Europe.

Another image of the wicked son as a warrior appears in the fifteenth-century haggadah in Manchester, John Rylands University Library, Ms. 7, also known as the *Ashkenazi Rylands Haggadah*, which was produced in Ashkenaz in the fifteenth century and features a unique iconographical program.[73] This lavish haggadah has not received much scholarly attention beyond the preliminary work of David Heinrich Müller and Julius von Schlosser,[74] Bruno Italiener,[75] and material in Mendel Metzger's book.[76] In my book, I focused on the paratext, as well as on other contemporaneous writings and images that might have influenced the author of the manuscript's conceptual space.[77] The margins of the haggadah text contain commentaries attributed to leaders of the *Hasidei Ashkenaz*, Rabbi Judah the Pious and Rabbi Eleazar of Worms, as well as the work of other Tosafists.[78] Another commentary on the Passover rituals is that of the Maharil (Jacob b. Moses Moellin, d. 1427). Schlosser and Italiener referred to these commentaries in their analyses of the manuscript and even published some of the marginal texts, but their studies of the miniatures did not consider these texts. Here, I will briefly mention one image of the wicked son in which he is portrayed as a warrior and its relationship to different texts.

The wicked son (fig. 15) is portrayed along the entire right side of fol. 10r, opposite the wise son and the simple one (*tam*), who

[73] The manuscript is available online on the John Rylands University Library website:http://luna.manchester.ac.uk/luna/servlet/detail/Manchester~10~10~607~154965?qvq=q:haggadah&mi=0&trs=191.

[74] David Heinrich Müller and Julius von Schlosser, *Die Haggadah von Sarajevo: Eine Spanisch-Jüdische Bilderhandschrift des Mittelalters* (Vienna: Alfred Hölder, 1898), I, 181–87.

[75] Bruno Italiener, *Die Darmstädter Pessach-Haggadah: Codex orientalis 8 der Landesbibliothek zu Darmstadt aus dem Vierzehnten Jahrhundert*, 2 vols. (Leipzig: Hiersemann, 1927–1928), I, 220–31.

[76] Metzger, *La Haggada enluminée*.

[77] Offenberg, *Up in Arms*, chap. 5.

[78] This manuscript's commentaries were not included in Jacob Gellis, *Sefer Tosafot Hashalem—Passover Haggadah: Treasure of the Tosafists Commentaries* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Mifal Tosafot Hashalem, 1989). They are fully published for the first time in the Hebrew appendix of my book: Offenberg, *Up in Arms*, appendix 2.

Figure 15: *Ashkenazi Rylands Haggadah*, Manchester, John Rylands University Library, Ms. 7, fols. 9v–10r

appear in a small window.[79] At first glance, the bearded wicked son with long blond hair, who is wearing armor along with a sort of cape, seems to be dressed like the type of knight we find in other haggadahs, as described by Mira Friedman.[80] He is holding a curved sword, which Müller and Schlosser identified as a sixteenth-century weapon, although Metzger claimed that it was widely used in the fifteenth century.[81] As a point of fact, I should mention here that this is a

79 The wise son is portrayed with a beard and grey hair holding a book in his hand. The simple son, who is young and clean-shaven and wearing a fool's hat, is also holding an open book and pointing at himself. On the son who does not know how to ask being portrayed as a fool in a fifteenth-century haggadah, see Katrin Kogman Appel, *The Washington Haggadah: Copied and Illustrated by Joel ben Simeon* (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 2011), 93–96; Metzger, *La Haggada enluminée*, 159–60.

80 Friedman, "The Four Sons."

81 Metzger, *La Haggada enluminée*, 154; Müller and Schlosser, *Die Haggadah von Sarajevo*, I, 185.

European sword of the *falchion* type,[82] a light single-blade weapon that was in use as early as the thirteenth century. It was employed by all classes, not only by noble knights,[83] thus hinting at the lesser rank of this warrior (i.e., he was not necessarily a knight). However, there are ridiculous elements to the figure's appearance. Instead of a helmet, he is wearing a large crown; his right stocking is falling down, and there is no shoe on his left foot. Joachim Bumke noted that in the fifteenth century, it was fashionable for men to show their legs, often through cuts in their pants; called "knightly" or "imperial" legs, they were praised by poets.[84] Here, we find an exaggerated version of this fashion where the figure's penis appears to be visible, which suggests that the artist was making fun of men who imitate nobles without the proper decorum.

This image can be further elucidated by other texts in the manuscript. On fol. 11v, a commentary on the word *nekhar*-נכר ("foreigner") is based on Onkelos's *Translation of Exodus* 12:43: "And the Lord said to Moses and Aaron: 'This is the Law of the Passover offering: No foreigner shall eat of it.'" Onkelos explained that the *nekhar* was a son who had converted. The commentary in our haggadah goes on to say that he is like the wicked son, who converted: ומתרגמ' כל בר ישר' דאישתמד ואגב אותו בן רשע שהוזכרנו למעלה בארבע בנים שדברה תורה. כי הואיל שהוציא עצמ' מן הכלל אי איפשר ליתן לו פסח ומצה לאכול. Thus, the image here might well be a caricature of an apostate Jew. We should compare this "knight" to the other knight in this manuscript. In the scene of *Shefokh Chamatkha* (Pour Out Your Wrath; שפוך חמתך) on fol. 33a, the Messiah appears as a charging knight mounted on an ass, with his long sword raised high. This depiction as a noble knight and the true savior is set in opposition to the ridiculous wicked apostate son "knight." Elsewhere, I have shown that this haggadah was probably given to a woman as a wedding gift, where the main idea behind the artistic program of the manuscript as a whole was to educate the bride on the proper behavior; here, we find a visual warning that if she misbehaves, her son will prance about in a

82 On types of medieval swords, see R. Ewart Oakeshott, *A Knight and His Weapons*, 2nd ed. (Chester Springs, PA: Dufour Editions, 1997); idem, *Records of the Medieval Sword*, reprint ed. (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2000); idem, *Sword in Hand: A Brief Survey of the Knightly Sword* (Minneapolis: Arms & Armor Inc, 2000).

83 Ashdown, *European Arms & Armor*, 62, 87–89.

84 Bumke, *Courtly Culture: Literature & Society in the High Middle Ages* (London: Duckworth, 2004), 146.

similarly ridiculous outfit, bringing scorn and shame upon her family.[85]

I mentioned that all the examples discussed in this essay follow Christian warfare aesthetics. David Stern, among other scholars, deals with the issue of the close relationship between the Christian illuminated manuscripts and Hebrew illuminated Bibles, especially in France and Germany. He contends that when discussing Hebrew manuscripts,[86]

> there is no question that they mirror Christian book art of the period. Rather than viewing them as mere "borrowings," however, it might be more correct to characterize them, along with the other material features of the Ashkenazic Bible, as deliberate appropriations of gentile culture on the part of Jewish scribes, that is to say, active efforts to Judaize the imagery of their surrounding gentile culture.

Thus, if the manuscripts discussed here seem to follow the Christian artistic preference in book illumination, it is likely that it was done in this way in order to enhance the viewer's fear and sense of danger, or to convey a message of warning to the reader/viewer. In the words of Hans Robert Jauss:

> The historical essence of the work of art lies not only in its representational or expressive function but also in its influence ... literature and art only obtain a history that has the character of a process when the succession of works is mediated not only through the production subject but also through the consuming subject.[87]

By studying the material aspects of the objects painted in their manuscripts, we can see that medieval Jews were very much aware of their neighbors' symbols of social rank. As in Christian society, the visual aspects of the social stratum were very much present for some Jewish patrons. However, I should stress that my conclusion here does

85 Offenberg, *Up in Arms*, chap. 5.

86 Stern, "The Hebrew Bible in Europe in the Middle Ages: A Preliminary Typology," *Jewish Studies: An Internet Journal* 11 (2012): 1–88, esp. 55.

87 Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 15.

not hold for all portrayals of warriors and knights in Jewish art and that each work of art should be studied in depth in order to determine whether it warrants such a conclusion. A thorough examination of the texts and images in Hebrew illuminated manuscripts could bring us closer to understanding the message behind the artistic program and lead to further conjectures in connection with Jewish-Christian relations in the Middle Ages.

Gershom Scholem's First Lectures on Hasidism

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Abstract

Compared to his other fields of research, Gershom Scholem's studies of Hasidism were quite limited. In the major research plans which he developed in the 1920s and '30s – for example in his detailed letter to H.N. Bialik or his early plans for the Institute for Kabbalah at the Schocken Library — he makes no mention of this field of research. Still, he continually and systematically published on Hasidism over the years. Scholem's scattered articles on Hasidism were collected in recent years by David Assaf and Esther Liebes in the anthology "The Latest Phase," with updates and additions; this collection gives us a full picture of Scholem's contribution to the field. Much scholarship has also been dedicated to the controversy between Scholem and Martin Buber over Hasidism, or to be more precise, to the complex relationship between the two over the years. Some have come to read Scholem's studies of Hasidism from this vantage point alone. However, Scholem's deep interest in Hasidism was expressed in other ways: in his large collection of books which includes many Hasidic works with his handwritten marginal notes; in his drafts and notes for articles which were never completed; and in lectures on the subject which he gave over the years. This material remains hidden in the Gershom Scholem Archive and has never been collected. Of exceptional importance is a manuscript of a complete book on Hasidism in English, composed towards the end of 1948, which provided the basis of the lectures that Scholem gave in the United States in March 1949. This book, written in the context of his complicated relationship with Salman Z. Schocken, was also the basis of many studies which Scholem published years late, and he continually updated it over many years. Our interest here is in another hidden text: a series of early lectures on Hasidism which Scholem gave in Hebrew in 1945. This series – printed here for the first time – raises several fundamental questions about Scholem's studies of Hasidism and their relationship to Buber's projects, and shows with great clarity the manner in which Scholem wanted to portray Hasidism.

[1]

Compared to his other fields of research, Gershom Scholem's studies of Hasidism were quite limited. In the major research plans that he developed in the 1920s and 1930s — for example, in his detailed letter to Hayyin Nahman Bialik or in his early plans for the Institute for Kabbalah at the Schocken Library — he makes no mention of this field of research. Still, he continually and systematically published on Hasidism over the years. Scholem's scattered articles on Hasidism were collected in recent years by David Assaf and Esther Liebes in the anthology *The Latest Phase* [*Ha-Shelav ha-Aḥaron*], which includes additions and updates; this collection gives us a full picture of Scholem's contribution to the field.[1] In addition, much scholarship has been dedicated to the controversy between Scholem and Martin Buber over Hasidism — or to be more precise, to the complex relationship between the two over the years. Some have come to read Scholem's studies of Hasidism from this vantage point alone.[2]

1 Gershom Scholem, *The Latest Phase* [Heb.], eds. David Assaf and Esther Liebes, (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2009). For a summary of Scholem's contribution to the study of Hasidism, see, among others, Rivka Schatz, "Gershom Scholem's Interpretation of Hasidism as an Expression of His Idealism," in *Gershom Scholem: The Man and His Work,* ed. Paul Mendes-Flohr, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 87–103; Louis Jacobs, "Aspects of Scholem's Study of Hasidism," *Modern Judaism* 5 (1985): 95–104; Joseph Dan, *Gershom Scholem and the Mystical Dimension of Jewish History* (New York: New York University Press, 1987) 313–28; Morris. M. Faierstein, "Gershom Scholem and Hasidism," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 38 (1987): 221–33; Zeev Gries, "Hasidism: the Present State of Research and Some Desirable Priorities," *Numen* 34 (1987): 97-108-179-213; Moshe Idel, *Hasidism: Between Ecstasy and Magic* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 1-30; Rachel Elior, "Hasidism – Historical Continuity and Spiritual Change," in *Gershom Scholem's "Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism": 50 Years After*, eds. Peter Schäfer and Joseph Dan (Tübingen: Mohr, 1993), 303–23; See also note 3, below.

2 See, among others, Klaus Samuel Davidowicz, *Gershom Scholem und Martin Buber: Die Geschichte eines Missverständnisses* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1995), 104–43; Gries, "Hasidism," 189-191, 209-210; Moshe Idel, "Martin Buber and Gershom Scholem on Hasidism: A Critical Appraisal," in *Hasidism Reappraised*, ed. Ada Rapoport-Albert (London and Portland, OR: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1997), 389–402; Rachel White, "Recovering the Past, Renewing the Present: The Buber-Scholem Controversy over Hasidism Reinterpreted," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 14 (2007): 364–92; Ron Margolin, *Human Temple: Religious Interiorization and the Structuring of Inner Life in Early Hasidism* [Heb.] (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2005), 1–54; Shalom Ratzvi, "From Criticism to Denial: Gershom Scholem on Buber's Hasidism" [Heb.], in *The Latest Phase*, 358–

However, Scholem's deep interest in Hasidism was expressed in other ways: in his large collection of books which includes many Hasidic works with his handwritten marginal notes; in his drafts and notes for articles that were never completed; and in lectures on the subject which he gave over the years. This material remains hidden in the Gershom Scholem Archive and has never been collected. Of exceptional importance is a manuscript of a complete book on Hasidism in English, composed towards the end of 1948, which provided the basis for a series of lectures that Scholem gave in the United States in March 1949. This book, written in the context of his complicated relationship with Salman Z. Schocken, was also the basis of many studies that Scholem published years later, and he continually updated it over many years. (The complete manuscript will be published soon in a new edition by Jonatan Meir and Daniel Abrams, with an extensive introduction about Scholem's studies of Hasidism and the history of the manuscript, and with appendices including texts by Scholem on Hasidism which have not previously been published).[3] Yet further insight into Scholem's engagement with Hasidism comes from another shelved text: a typescript of an earlier lecture series that Scholem delivered in Hebrew in 1945. These first lectures on Hasidism raise several fundamental questions regarding Scholem's scholarship on the topic and its connection to Buber's

69; David Biale, "Experience vs. Tradition: Reflections on the Origins of the Buber-Scholem Controversy," *Simon Dubnow Institute Yearbook* 15 (2016): 33–47; idem, *Gershom Scholem: Master of the Kabbalah* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 13–14, 16, 29–30, 186–91; Hannan Hever, "Buber versus Scholem and the Figure of the Hasidic Jew: A Literary Debate between Two Political Theologies," in *Jews and the Ends of Theory*, eds. Shai Ginsburg, Martin Land, and Jonathan Boyarin (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018), 225–62.

3 For a preliminary discussion of this manuscript, see Noam Zadoff (ed.), *Gershom Scholem and Joseph Weiss: Correspondence, 1948-1964* [Heb.] (Jerusalem: Carmel, 2012), 42–43; Jonatan Meir, "Scholem's 'Archives'" [Heb.], *Tarbiz 78* (2009): 255–70. The latter discusses additional shelved material in the Scholem Archive. For brief remarks by Shaul Magid, who saw only the original text of the lectures (a second, complete text, as well as additions, updates, and supplements, are preserved in various folders at the Scholem Archive), see Shaul Magid, "For the Sake of a Jewish Revival: Gershom Scholem on Hasidism and Its Relationship to Martin Buber," in *Scholar and Kabbalist: The Life and Work of Gershom Scholem*, eds. Mirjam Zadoff and Noam Zadoff (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2019), 40–75. The monograph is also discussed in general terms in Yaacob Dweck, "Gershom Scholem and America," *New German Critique* 132 (2017): 68–69.

projects while demonstrating with great clarity the manner in which Scholem sought to portray the Hasidic movement.[4]

[2]

Scholem's lectures on Hasidism were delivered under the auspices of a seminar for Youth Aliyah counselors in 1945. This was not the first time that Scholem lectured in this framework. He had presented, several years prior, a talk on "The Idea of Redemption in Kabbalah," a lecture that was subsequently published in a thin pamphlet in 1942.[5] This was the first pamphlet in the *Arakhim* series, which over the years came to include dozens of titles. It appears that Scholem lectured in this framework on Sabbatianism as well (as much is implied from a text cited below), yet these lectures have not been preserved. In any case, it seems that the typescript of the Hasidism lectures was also intended to be published in a similar booklet. This last fact is of considerable interest given that Buber lectured in this very framework on "The Idea of Redemption in Hasidism." Buber's lecture was published in 1942 under that title as the second volume of the *Arakhim* series (it was subsequently incorporated into Buber's *Be-Pardes ha-Ḥasidut*, published in 1945).[6] Scholem's lecture on Hasidism,

4 Gershom Scholem, "Ha-Ḥasidut" (MS), Archive of Gershom Scholem, National Library of Jerusalem, 40º1599, Folder 197a. These lectures have recently been published in Jonatan Meir, "Hasidism: Unknown Lectures by Gershom Scholem from 1945" [Heb.], *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts* 43 (2019): 93–120. For similar popular lectures delivered by Scholem in 1947, see idem, "Hartsa'ot al ha-Meshiḥiyut me-Ginzei Gershom Scholem," *Dehak: Ketav Et le-Sifrut Tovah* 10 (2018): 354–418. Here Scholem unsuccessfully seeks to describe a connection between Sabbatianism and Hasidism.

5 Gershom Scholem, "Ra'ayon ha-Geulah ba-Kabbalah," *Arakhim: Sifriyat ha-Makhon le-Madrikhim* 1 (1942) (26 pages). An updated edition was published in Jerusalem in 1946 and again in idem, *Explications and Implications: Writings on Jewish Heritage and Renaissance* [Heb.] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1976), 191–216. A poster announcing the lecture is preserved in the Scholem Archive, Folder 28a.

6 Martin Buber, "Ra'ayon ha-Geulah ba-Ḥasidut," *Arakhim: Sifriyat ha-Makhon le-Madrikhim* 2, (1942) (12 pages); reprinted in idem, *Be-Pardes ha-Ḥasidut: Iyyunim be-Maḥshavto u-be-Ḥavayato* (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1945), 123–32; translated into English in idem, *The Origin and Meaning of Hasidism*, trans. Maurice Friedman (New York: Horizon Press, 1960), 202–18. Most of the book's contents were published beforehand and were certainly known to Scholem. In the beginning of the book (ibid., 5) Buber writes, "Forty years have passed since I began to champion Hasidism." Joseph Weiss later recounted the following anecdote: "I heard from Natan Rotenstreich — when Buber's book was

then, can be seen as a response to Buber — or an attempt to address the same question from a completely different angle — in much the same way that Buber no doubt utilized the title of Scholem's first lecture ("The Idea of Redemption in Kabbalah") in formulating his presentation.

Buber presented exile and redemption as the past and future consciousness of the Jewish people; he sought to demonstrate that it was only with the advent of Hasidism that common people achieved redemptive consciousness, realizing their active role in the redemption of the world. He enumerated four categories of redemption that Hasidism consolidated and rendered into a single entity, while foregrounding the "national element" within Hasidic doctrine. He concluded: "Moses Hess said that we cannot foresee the consequences of Hasidism if it will be taken up by the national movement. This is also my opinion. Because here, in Hasidism, we have something close to us in time, and its off-shoots reach into our very age. Hasidism is a great revelation of spirit and life in which the nation appears to be connected by an inner tie with the world, with the soul, and with God. Only through such a contact will it be possible to guard Zionism against following the way of the nationalism of the age, which, by demolishing the bridges which connect it with the world, is destroying its own value and its right to exist."[7] Scholem's lectures, whether in "The Idea of Redemption in Kabbalah" or in his unpublished 1945 lectures on Hasidism, were quite different. In contradistinction to Buber, Scholem devoted his attention to analyzing the connections between Sabbatianism and Hasidism. In other words, he sought to present the origins of Hasidism within the context of the history of Kabbalah, rather than in relation to contemporary concerns. Scholem opened his lectures on Hasidism from the very place where Buber left off, remarking that "Many mistakes or misunderstandings crept into the study of Sabbatianism; such is the case with Hasidism, as well. The study of Sabbatianism was dominated in many circles by viewpoints that were either decidedly

published — *Be-Pardes ha-Ḥasidut* — Scholem took the thin book and said, 'This is the essence of forty years?' (alluding to the preface...)." Jonatan Meir and Noam Zadoff, "'Divrei Shalom' or 'Ḥayei Moharash': Satiric Manuscripts from the Joseph Weiss Archives" [Heb.], *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought 20* (2017): 378.

7 Buber, *The Origin and Meaning of Hasidism*, 218. The Hebrew original appears in idem, "Ra'ayon ha-Ge'ulah be-Ḥasidut," 12; idem, *Be-Pardes ha-Ḥasidut,* 132.

conservative or rational expressions of the Haskalah. On the other hand, with respect to Hasidism, a romantic orientation increased from the time it began to be studied. One of the pitfalls with which we struggle today is the attempt to interpret every historical phenomenon in connection with the new national movement. The endeavor to turn eighteenth-century Hasidim into Zionist pioneers is entirely without basis. Hasidism is at a distance from the very matters with which Zionism is concerned. Hasidism by its very essence is placed at a remove from our affairs."[8] Scholem's opening comments are not directed only at Buber's concluding remarks, but also to a lengthy article by Ben-Zion Dinur — published not long before Scholem's lectures — that Scholem alluded to numerous times in his Hasidism lectures and sharply criticized at various other times.[9] As we see in the passage cited above, the lectures also represent his first attempt to clearly present Hasidism in connection to Sabbatianism.

Scholem's lectures continue the rigorous historical and theological analysis that he employed in his *Major Trends of Jewish Mysticism* (1941), a direction that was broadened in his shelved English monograph (1948), later fine-tuned in his dispute with Isaiah Tishby at the World Congress of Jewish Studies (1965), and which materialized in later articles, most notably his lengthy essay "The Neutralisation of the Messianic Element in Early Hasidism" (1969).

8 Scholem, "Ha-Hasidut," 1, Meir, "Hasidism," 104. Scholem made similar comments in his 1941 "Study Month" lectures, which were principally concerned with Sabbatianism. See Gershom Scholem, *History of the Sabbatian Movement* [Heb.], eds. Jonatan Meir and Yamamoto Shinichi (Jerusalem: JTS-Schocken Institute for Jewish Research, 2018), 347–51. It is interesting, in this context, to revisit an early unknown publication by Scholem, his first on Hasidism, which consists of a translation of a letter written by R. Abraham of Kalisk with an introductory footnote connecting its contents to the Zionist enterprise. Geschem [=Gerhard/Gershom Scholem], "R. Mendel von Witebsk: Hachschara," *Der Jude* 8 (1924): 147–48; reprinted with a corrected title and without the brief introduction (it seems that he had since changed his mind) as "Rabbi Abraham Kalisker: Hachschara," *Almanach des Schocken Verlags* (1933–1934): 97–98. In some copies of the last publication, Scholem's name is also omitted.

9 B. Dinburg [Ben-Zion Dinur], "The Beginnings of Hassidism and its Social and Messianic Elements" [Heb.], *Zion* 8, no. 2 (Jan. 1943): 107–15; 8, no. 3 (Apr. 1943): 117–34; 8, no. 4 (Jul. 1943): 179–200; 9, no. 1 (1944): 39–45; 9, no. 2 (1944): 89–108; 9, no. 4 (1944): 186–97; 10, nos. 1–2 (1945): 67–77; 10, nos. 3–4 (1945): 149–96. Scholem appended ten critical handwritten notes to his copy of the essay offprint, which is preserved in his library.

[3]

Scholem certainly began to develop his method of studying Hasidism in response to the approach taken by Martin Buber. The criticism he leveled at the latter (at times accompanied with praise) is readily apparent in the diaries and letters he wrote over the years, and quickly became public.[10] Buber was also present in the courses on Hasidism that Scholem delivered at the Hebrew University, in which he would speak of the former in highly critical terms.[11] Such was the case, for example, with his 1944 course on "Problems in Hasidic Doctrine." Joseph Weiss, who attended the course, summarized the main points. At the beginning of the first lesson, Scholem declared, "Hasidism has yet to be studied seriously. [The current scholarship] is mere prattle that does not rise to the level of criticism. For all intents and purposes, there are considerable questions in need of addressing, and it is amazing that hardly any of them have been investigated."

10 For an analysis of Scholem's comments on Hasidism in his youth, see Biale, *Gershom Scholem*. It should be noted that a considerable amount of material related to this affair that has not yet been considered can be found in Scholem's unpublished letters and diaries.

11 Scholem delivered a number of courses on Hasidism at the Hebrew University: (1) "Hasidism: *Sefer Magid Devarav le-Ya'akov*, *Sefer ha-Tanya*," Seminar, 1938–1939, Scholem Archive, Folder 18 (In January 1939, Scholem wrote to Shalom Spiegel: "For my seminar this year, I am reading Hasidic commentaries, and especially the illustrious *Magid Devarav le-Ya 'akov* of the Magid of Mezritch, and I have been greatly enlightened!); (2) "Problems in Hasidic Doctrine," Seminar, 1943–1944. Noes for this course were recorded by Joseph Weiss, see below note 13; (3–4) From notes from his courses at Hebrew University, it appears that he also delivered a course on "Key Problems in Hasidic Doctrine" in 1948–1949 and in 1951–1952. Fragments and outlines for one of these courses are preserved in the Scholem Archive, Folder 205; (5) "The Baal Shem Tov," Course, Summer 1951, Scholem Archive, Folder 209; (6) "Action and Contemplation in Hasidic Doctrine," Seminar, 1962–1963; (7) In the 1954–1955 academic year, he delivered a course on "Sabbatianism and Hasidism." This course was, for all intents and purposes, exclusively concerned with Sabbatianism. Notes were later printed by Rivka Schatz as *Parashat ha-Shabta 'ut* (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University, 1955). The last lecture [lecture 45], on Hasidism, is missing from the publication and can be found in the Gershom Scholem Library, Sch 176; (8) Many additional public lectures. It is also known that he delivered similar lectures in 1950 and 1952. Hence, any assumptions regarding the small space given to Hasidism in Scholem's teaching load should be disavowed. See Joseph Dan, "Gershom Scholem and the Study of Kabbalah at the Hebrew University" [Heb.], in *History of the Hebrew University Project,* ed. Lavsky, Hagit (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2008), 208–09.

Scholem then proceeded to present a rather critical in-depth analysis of the state of the field. He discussed the writings of Simon Dubnow, Samuel Abba Horodetzky, Hillel Zeitlin, Mordechai Ben-Yehezkel, Aaron Ze'ev Aescoly, Ahron Marcus, and others. When he came to Buber (according to Weiss's summary), Scholem remarked:

> Buber's books are of considerable value, for he had the ability to present key characteristics of various figures. For example, his book on the Maggid [*Der grosse Maggid und seine Nachfolge*, 1922] is a good portrayal with a serious introduction.[12] There is no reason to make light of Buber (as is customary among professors!) Buber could have written a book on Hasidism that would have surpassed all those that have been written to date. The historic question did not concern him. It is worth reading *Deutung des Chassidismus* [1935] as well. For him, the problematic of Hasidism is formed from its legend and not its doctrinal works. He argues that the legend is the primary source as opposed to the theoretical literature (these two categories are highly prominent in Hasidism). It is possible to learn the psychological reality, if not the historical truth. Scholem disagrees with Buber's method. According to Scholem, Buber exaggerates the preeminence of the legend. Regarding the legends themselves, there are tales found within the books themselves, yet the corpus of Hasidic tales (a rich literature) is replete with religious creativity, with an elementary force largely unparalleled even in the non-Jewish world! For Buber, there are 350 books of legendary literature. However, they were certainly all [published] much later. *Shivhei ha-Besht* — the first in this category — is from 1814. Afterwards, only in the '50s and '60s [of the nineteenth century]. There is much doubt with respect to the authenticity of this literature. The theoretical literature was consistently published not long after the death of their authors. The same cannot be said of the legendary literature (aside from *Shivhei ha-Besht* and the biography of R. Nahman of Bratslav), all of which were published in Lvov. They were all written by one author (Michael Fromkin Rodkinson), or maybe two, and it's highly likely that he made them all up. So far, no one has checked if there are any such manuscripts prior to the aforementioned

12 See Scholem's letter to Buber in Martin Buber, *Briefwechsel: 1918-1938* (Heidelberg: L. Schneider, 1973), 86–89.

> Michael (a *maskil*). Michael Fromkin — a famous adventurer, the nephew of R. Aaron of Staroselye (the primary disciple of R. Shneur Zalman)—the question is whether what he put on paper was actually relayed to him or whether he merely wrote belles-lettres. Others claim that Menahem Mendel Bodek of Lvov assisted him. So far there has not yet been any critical examination at all. Buber simply relied on these books [...]. Regarding Buber, he comprehended more than all of the rest combined. Do not read his *Die Legende des Baalschem* [1908] (in exceptionally grandiose German). Scholem greatly values Buber's book on the Maggid *Der grosse Maggid und seine Nachfolge* [1922] and *Das verborgene Licht* [1924] (the best book Buber wrote on Hasidism), and the thin book *Deutung des Chassidismus* [1935].[13]

Similar expressions of admiration, which, in fact, include biting criticism, reappear in Scholem's 1948 essay on Buber (the essay was published in honor of Buber's birthday and was thus quite moderate),[14] and, far more outwardly, in his unpublished English monograph written later that year. Seeing as this work is not widely known, we will cite a lengthy quote that summarizes the main points Scholem directed at Buber:

> Whereas Horodezky's Hasidic ardour is essentially naïve, his very simple and unaffected writing sometimes lovely and sometimes boring, the same cannot be said of Buber. His is a deep and penetrating mind which not only admires intuition in others but has it at its own command. Overwhelmed by the Hasidic message, when it first presented itself to him in his quest for living Judaism, he has that rare combination of a searching mind and literary refinement that makes for a great writer. His Hasidic "*oeuvre*" is highly sophisticated and polished, and the manner in which a writer of such merit and power of mind most earnestly

13 "Hartsa'ot Gershom Scholem al Shabta'ut ve-Ḥasidut" (MS, Transcription by Joseph Weiss), Joseph Weiss Archive, National Library of Jerusalem, 4°1479, Folder 21. On the hagiographic literature of the 1860s, which was penned by many writers, see Jonatan Meir, *Literary Hasidism: The Life and Works of Michael Levi Rodkinson*, trans. Jeffrey G. Amshalem (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2016).

14 Reprinted (without the original title) in Scholem, *The Latest Phase*. 325–29. On the essay's title, see Meir and Zadoff, "'Divrei Shalom'," 379.

propounded what to him seemed the very soul of Hasidism, could not but produce a deep impression on our generation. As a matter of fact, many of us have come to think of Hasidism primarily in terms of Buber's philosophical reinterpretation which has been proffered in perfect choice of words and such a wealth of seemingly irresistible evidence in the shape of Hasidic legends and sayings as to baffle the would-be critic.

Forty years of (if I may use a familiar term) neo-Hasidic teaching have provoked strong response in the Jewish world and, as far as I am aware, have found the competent scholars (if there were any) rather unwilling to ask the fundamental question whether everything in this inspired and beautifully worded interpretation may stand the critical test of sober analysis. Dubnov has, in a very general way, expressed some doubt as to the "modern" turn of Buber's Hasidism but he did not substantiate them, and the emotional (to say nothing of the artistic) appeal of Buber's writings is, of course, so infinitely greater than that of Dubnov's rather arid discussion of Hasidic thought, that there could be but little doubt with whom success would lie. Buber, on the other hand, was not interested particularly in the historical problems connected with Hasidism, and one might say that both authors complement each other and, taken together, present a fair picture of where Hasidic research stands today.

But just as there is a lot to be added to Dubnov from a purely historical point of view, both as far as historical perspective and detail are concerned, there is much in Buber that demands a critical discussion. His continuous emphasis on the eminence of legendary tradition over the theoretical literature reveals a methodological principle of approach which I consider very questionable. For aesthetical purposes of presentation, the legend has doubtless a greater advantage and appeal, and much of this material lends itself to a subjectivist interpretation more easily than the theoretical writings on which, in my humble opinion, a discussion of the meaning of Hasidic doctrine must be based. It is very interesting to note that in the course of the years, as Buber's existentialist and subjectivist philosophy became more and more developed and elaborate, his references to the theoretical literature of Hasidism became ever weaker. Almost

never did Buber quote the writings of the first theoreticians of Hasidism who, in the first few years after the founder's death, advanced their ideas in a more or less homiletic but theoretically consistent way. I do not consider this to be merely accidental. Those books were written, and published in part, many years before the Hasidic legend took shape, and to say that the originality of the movement revealed itself more genuinely in the legend, the bulk of which is at least fifty years younger than the aforementioned books, is a contention that cannot stand. Buber apparently regarded these sources as too much dependent upon earlier kabbalistical literature, and his special interest in the points of departure of Hasidism from Kabbalism made him consider them more clearly recognizable in the legends than in the theoretical teaching. But it is precisely this problem which, in my opinion, cannot be solved by building on popular legend. The question of where exactly Hasidism departs from older Jewish tradition, particularly the esoteric one, has, to my knowledge, never been answered in a satisfactory way and by a sober analysis of the primary sources, the reason being a very simple one, namely, that none of these writers, whatever their other respective merits, had any considerably knowledge of kabbalistical literature. They were, therefore, unable to state with sufficient authority exactly what was new and original in Hasidism and what represented only the continued repetition of older formulas; these writers therefore had to content themselves with generalities and more or less vague statements.[15]

But let us, again, return to Buber. Leaving aside his methodological principles, we should not forget that he has not only collected the tales of the Hasidim in his *magnum opus*, but has also repeatedly stated his views about their essential meaning in terms of a modern anthropological and existentialist approach. His Hasidic studies, which have been very thorough, and his personal philosophy are closely interrelated. It would not be easy to say how much of his philosophy has developed out of his Hasidic studies and, conversely, how much his interpretation of Hasidism has been colored by his philosophy. But it will be necessary to consider, in these lectures, at least some of the

15 Scholem, "Hartsa'ot al ha-Ḥasidut," (MS), Scholem Archive, Folder 299b, 7–9.

> fundamental points of Buber's suggestive interpretation which seem to me open to serious objections.[16]

These are just select passages on Buber from the shelved monograph, and Scholem's work is filled with similar gems directed toward others who wrote on Hasidism. In any case, it is clear that Scholem began to write in opposition to Buber's perception of Hasidism long before the 1960s, and openly criticized him in his public lectures, even if it his remarks were always mixed together with words of praise.[17] Scholem's public turn from Buber in the 1940s must be understand as stemming from two developments: the beginning of the former's systematic study of Hasidism, and the latter's attempt during those very years to spread his "Gospel of Hasidism" in Hebrew (such works as *Gog u-Magog* [1944]; *Be-Pardes ha-Ḥasidut* [1945]*: Or Ha-Ganuz* [1947]) and in English (*For the Sake of Heaven* [1945]; *Ten Rungs: Hasidic Sayings* [1947]; *Tales of the Hasidim*, vols. 1-2 [1947–1948]; *Hasidism* [1948]; *The Way of Man According to the Teachings of Hasidism* [1950]).

This criticism was brought into the open in the 1960s when Scholem delivered several comprehensive lectures on the Baal Shem Tov (Besht) and began to publish essays adapted from his monograph. A detailed analysis of these publications clearly shows that Scholem was merely returning to what was already written in the monograph, even if many of his arguments were reworked. A key turning point among these polemical activities was a 1961 lecture that he delivered in London titled "Buber's Interpretation of Hasidism" (an invitation to the lecture is preserved in Scholem's archive). This lecture received extensive press coverage, with one review beginning "Martin Buber, who preached the gospel of Hasidism to the West, did not give over a complete picture of the movement, argued Gershom Scholem in a lecture at the Institute of Jewish Studies in London. Buber treated Hasidism as a spiritual phenomenon, emphasizing its religious-

[16] Ibid., 10. Following the first lecture, which dealt with, among other topics, Buber's activities, the editors of the journal *Jewish Social Studies* turned to Scholem with a request to publish his critical essay on Buber's writings on Hasidism. Scholem turned down the request and only years later years did he publish his scathing critique of Buber [Scholem Archive, Correspondence, *Jewish Social Studies*]. Scholem most likely declined the request due to an existing contractual obligation to publish the lectures elsewhere.

[17] The presumption that Scholem only began to publicly criticize Buber in the 1960s is present in Biale, "Experience vs. Tradition," 47; Ratzvi, "From Criticism to Denial," 358–69.

existential aspect and gave literary form to the legends and aphorisms of the *tsaddikim*. But according to Scholem, Buber is unconcerned with Hasidism as a historical phenomenon."[18] This lecture served as the basis for Scholem's famous essay, "Martin Buber's Hasidism: A Critique," which caused a firestorm and brought the controversy out into the public arena. The essay concludes: "Too much is left out in his [Buber's] presentation of Hasidism, while what has been included is overloaded with highly personal speculations. These may be of a sublime character and they may appeal deeply to the modern mind, but if we are searching for an understanding of the actual phenomenon of Hasidism, both in its grandeur and its decay (which in many ways are bound together), we shall, I am afraid, have to start all over again."[19]

The timing of the publication was auspicious: celebrations of the two-hundredth anniversary of the death of the Besht (1960)—an occasion that was marked with many publications on the Besht, in both Hebrew and English; the publication of Maurice Freidman's English translations Buber's books on Hasidism, (*The Legend of the Baal-Shem* [1955]; *Hasidism and Modern Man* [1958]; *The Origin and Meaning of Hasidism* [1960]); as well as the reprinting of Buber's earlier works previously published in Hebrew and English. In 1961, Buber was awarded the Bialik prize for, among other accomplishments, his anthology *Or ha-Ganuz*, which had been reissued in an expanded edition in 1957. In an eloquent speech delivered upon accepting the prize, Buber spoke, *inter alia*, on the significance of the "renewed

[18] Robert Weltsch, "Professor Scholem on Martin Buber and Hasidism," *Haaretz* (Jun. 22, 1961). A précis of the lecture appears later on in the article. See, also, "Buber and Chassidism," *Jewish Chronicle* (Jun. 23, 1961) This article opens with a quotation from the lecture: "The merits of Martin Buber's presentation of Chassidism are very great indeed, and to a great extent it will stand the test of time. But his interpretation is not rooted in the texts of Chassidic ideology, but in his personal philosophy."

[19] Gershom Scholem, "Martin Buber's Hasidism: A Critique," *Commentary* 32 (1961): 305–16; idem, "Buber and Hasidism," *Commentary* 33 (1962): 162–63; idem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (New York: Schocken, 1972), 227–50. Scholem's essays on Buber in Hebrew were compiled in *The Latest Phase*, 325–57. Buber responded to the criticism (as well as to an essay by Rivka Schatz) on several opportunities. Important material on the controversy—which extended far beyond disagreements over the interpretation of Hasidism—is preserved in the Scholem Archive, Series 8, Folder 279.

Hasidism" for political and spiritual life in the State of Israel.[20] It is in this context that Scholem issued his fierce criticism of Buber. Buber, however, was not the only figure whom Scholem publicly criticized in those years: he also quarreled Tishby, Dinur, and others regarding the messianic question in early Hasidism (manifest in a symposium held at the World Congress of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem in 1965).[21]

Scholem was galvanized during these years to return to his shelved monograph on Hasidism, and it seems that he tried, up until the 1970s, to complete it. He extracted entire chapters, which he updated and turned into essays (among them *Demuto ha-Historit shel Ha-Besht* [1960] and "The Neutralisation of the Messianic Element in Early Hasidism" 1969), and delivered lectures in various framework that were closely related in content (for instance, three lectures on the Besht and his teachings delivered at Uppsala University in October 1959 and a lecture on "The Idea of Messianism in Hasidism" delivered at Princeton University in October 1970). All of this was, to some extent, preparation toward the completion of the monograph, a task that has heretofore never been accomplished.[22]

[4]

Scholem's interest in Hasidism was not limited to his complex relationship with Buber and was certainly not connected to any

[20] See Martin Buber Archive, National Library of Jerusalem, Ms. Var. 350, Series 1, Folder 20; Mordechai Martin Buber, "Mah Natna li ha-Ḥasidut ha-Meḥudeshet," *Davar* (Dec. 22, 1961). Writing on Buber and Hasidism increased in the wake of the prize. An exceptionally critical essay in this context is Baruch Kurzweil, "M. Buber — Ḥatan Peras Bialik," *Haaretz* (Dec. 22, 1961). He ridiculed the "aesthetic Hasidism" bereft of any meaning for contemporary man and far removed from historic Hasidism (see, also, Buber Archive, Series 8, Folder 384).

[21] Symposium participants included Gershom Scholem, Ben-Zion Dinur, Isaiah Tishby, Joseph Weiss, Joseph Dan, Abraham Rubinstein, and Rivka Schatz-Uffenheimer. A précis of the lectures can be found in a review by Joseph Dan, "Vikuaḥ al ha-Meshiḥiyut ba-Ḥasidut, *Ha-Universitah* 11 (5726): 64–69. Dan opens his remarks: "It is doubtful if all of these scholars had ever previously gathered together for a thorough discussion of the challenges of the Hasidic movement," and that "from the beginning to the end, the symposium—which carried on for approximately seven hours over two days—was marked by fierce disagreement." A complete protocol, which includes many notes that were left out of the participants' later publications, can be found in the Scholem Archive, folder 197.

[22] For further details, see Meir, "Scholem's 'Archive'," 267–69.

possibility of Hasidic renewal through academic scholarship, as others have asserted.[23] For Scholem, the study of Hasidism was an intrinsic part of writing a new history of Jewish mysticism. For such a depiction, it was first necessary to provide an alternative to Buber's populist portrayal, an alternative to the very idea that Hasidism should only be spoken of within the context of its renewal and the existential possibilities it offered to modern man. He wanted, in short, to liberate Hasidism from the clutches of Buber's spiritualism. He also sought, in the same manner, to present an alternative to the nationalist history exemplified by Dinur, who sought in Hasidism a certain messianism, or by Yitzhak Raphael who, with his populist writings on Hasidism, wished to connect Hasidism with religious Zionism.[24] The removal of the neo-Hasidic facade, as well as that of narrow nationalism, gave rise to a new perspective on Hasidism concerned with historical questions and its novel theologies that, in a certain sense, sustains scholarship until the present day.

Much has changed in Hasidic scholarship from when Scholem's first lectures on Hasidism were written in 1945, such that in many respects they should be looked at only as prologues or first attempts. The lectures are not clearly worded, and there is no clear and systematic theory underlying them. However, precisely due to this, it is possible to extract many interesting anecdotes (for instance, on Jacob Frank's frightening face; on Bratslav Hasidism as a "sect that, in a Hasidic spiritual sense, has remained alive and vigilant"; on the legends surrounding the rabbi of Kotsk and the novelty of his approach; on Berdyczewski; on Buber's interpretation of the elevation of sparks; on Yitzhak Raphael's religious Zionist historiography; and more).[25] Many points mentioned here were sharpened by Scholem in

[23] See, for example, Magid, "For the Sake of a Jewish Revival." In this context, there is considerable interest surrounding Scholem's remarks at the Eranos Conference on the duty of the scholar and identification with one's scholarship: Gershom Scholem, "Identifizierung und Distanz: Ein Rueckblick," *Eranos Jahrbuch* 48 (1979): 463–67. On this, see Paul Mendes-Flohr, "The Spiritual Quest of the Philologist," in *Gershom Scholem: The Man and his Work*, 22–23; Noam Zadoff, *Gershom Scholem: From Berlin to Jerusalem and Back,* trans. Jeffrey Green (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2018), 172–73.

[24] For a related claim in the of Scholem's Sabbatian scholarship, see Jonatan Meir and Shinichi Yamamoto, *Gershom Scholem and the Research of Sabbatianism*, trans. Samuel Glauber-Zimra (Jerusalem: JTS-Schocken Institute for Jewish Research, 2021): 19–28, 84–89

[25] See Meir, "Hasidism: Unknown Lectures," 93–120.

later years, while others have been refuted by other scholars. Even the question of the relation between Sabbatianism and Hasidism — which was central until the 1960s — has been put aside in favor of other questions.[26] Therefore, the significance of these lectures is not necessarily found in their content (even if these early texts contain much hidden wisdom), but rather in the questions they raised in their specific moment in the history of scholarship.

[26] See the important discussion in Moshe Idel, "Messianic Scholars: On Early Israeli Scholarship, Politics and Messianism," *Modern Judaism* 32 (2012): 22–53.

Prolegomena to the Study of Jewish Occultism: Definition, Scope, and Impact

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Abstract

This article presents a preliminary overview of Jewish involvement in modern occult movements and representations of occultism in Jewish culture from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries. Jews across the world at this time took an interest in occult currents that emerged in European and North American society. This entailed both a centrifugal movement on the part of Jews toward broader occult movements, as well as a centripetal incorporation of occult trends within Jewish popular culture and religious thought: many Jews joined Western esoteric movements, while occult currents were integrated into Jewish popular culture and religious literature. Those interested in occultism and esoteric movements included leading Jewish writers, scholars, rabbis, artists, and political activists. Many Jews who took part in the esoteric milieu aspired to integrate Judaism with Western esotericism, at times yielding novel modes of modern Jewish occultism. These modern Jewish occult forms, largely forgotten today, were interwoven into numerous works of Jewish literature, art, and religious thought from the late-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries, while also exerting an influence on broader alternative spiritual movements to this day. The article discusses the challenges of defining Jewish occultism and examine its scope and impact within the respective fields of Jewish studies and Western esotericism. The framework of Jewish occultism, we argue, calls into question several conventions of modern Jewish historiography. Long overlooked, the study of modern Jewish occultism stands to challenge prevailing conceptions of Jewish modernity and secularization, while offering new research paradigms for the historical study of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Judaism and Western esotericism.

Introduction

From the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries, Jews across the world took an interest in occult currents that emerged in

European and North American society. This entailed both a centrifugal movement on the part of Jews toward broader occult movements, as well as a centripetal incorporation of occult trends within Jewish popular culture and religious thought: many Jews joined Western esoteric movements, oftentimes playing leading roles in them (in some instances, special Jewish sections and lodges were established within these movements), while occult currents were integrated into Jewish popular culture and religious literature, most notably in the Yiddish-speaking Jewish communities of Eastern Europe and North America.[1] Those interested in occultism and esoteric movements included leading Jewish writers, scholars, rabbis, artists, and political activists. Many Jews who took part in the esoteric milieu aspired to integrate Judaism with Western esotericism, at times yielding novel modes of modern Jewish occultism. These modern Jewish occult forms, largely forgotten today, were interwoven into numerous works of Jewish literature, art, and religious thought from the late-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries, while also exerting an influence on broader alternative spiritual movements to this day.

Notwithstanding the central role that Jews played in modern esoteric movements and the importance of Jewish occultism in the development of modern Jewish thought and culture, academic scholarship has almost completely ignored Jewish engagement with modern occult currents. In this article, we present a preliminary overview of Jewish involvement in modern occult movements and representations of occultism in Jewish culture from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries. We discuss the challenges of defining Jewish occultism, and examine its scope and impact within the respective fields of Jewish studies and Western esotericism. The framework of Jewish occultism, we argue, calls into question several conventions of modern Jewish historiography. Long overlooked, the study of modern Jewish occultism stands to challenge prevailing conceptions of Jewish modernity and secularization, while offering new research paradigms for the historical study of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Judaism and Western esotericism.

[1] Occult currents were incorporated into Jewish popular culture in other vernaculars, as well; a survey of these developments remains a desideratum.

Jewish Occultism and the Academic Study of Western Esotericism

Before we turn to Jewish occultism, a brief discussion of the academic study of Western esotericism and occultism is in order. The terms "occultism" and "Western esotericism" denote a wide spectrum of heterodox and alternative religious and spiritual currents, from late antiquity to our days, which modern hegemonic religious and scientific establishments have generally marginalized, rejected, and disparaged.[2] Esoteric and occult currents include alchemy, Hermeticism, Rosicrucianism, Swedenborgianism, esoteric streams of Freemasonry, mesmerism, spiritualism, astrology and other mantic arts, the Theosophical and Anthroposophical Societies, the Traditionalist School, the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor, George Gurdjieff's (1866–1949) and Peter Ouspensky's (1878–1947) Fourth Way, and many others. Psychical research and parapsychology — attempts to subject occult and esoteric phenomena to scientific scrutiny, oftentimes with the aim of discovering hitherto-unknown forces of nature — may also be included. In recent decades, occult and esoteric currents previously ignored and disparaged by the academy have received considerably more scholarly attention, most notably within the framework of the emerging academic field of Western esotericism. Although the terms "esotericism" and "occultism" have different genealogies and semantic fields, there is considerable overlap between the terms, and many times they are used interchangeably to refer to the same movements and currents.[3] However, the term Western esotericism covers a much larger historical period and denotes movements and currents from late antiquity to our day, while the term occultism is more often restricted to nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century esoteric currents, where

[2] Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *Western Esotericism: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 13–14; idem, "Occult/Occultism," in *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, ed. Wouter J. Hanegraaff (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 884–89; idem, *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Marco Pasi, "Occultism," in *The Brill Dictionary of Religion*, ed. Kocku von Stuckrad (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 1364–68; Olav Hammer, "Mysticism and Esotericism as Contested Taxonomical Categories," *Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis* 29, no. 1 (2020): 5–27.

[3] Hanegraaff's definition of Western esotericism as rejected knowledge, for instance, bears a strong resemblance to James Webb's declaration that "the occult is rejected knowledge." James Webb, *The Occult Underground* (La Salle, IL: Open Court Publishing, 1974), 191.

it is popularly understood to refer to practices and beliefs believed to engage with hidden dimensions of reality.[4] In light of the chronological boundaries of this study, which is concerned with Jewish engagement with esoteric currents in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, we generally refer to Jewish occultism rather than Jewish Western esotericism, while acknowledging that much of the phenomena under consideration may fall under the rubric of Western esotericism as well.

The scope and definition of occultism and Western esotericism have been subject to much debate in recent years.[5] Notwithstanding these debates, the study of Western esotericism is flourishing, with a great number of publications on esoteric and occult currents appearing each year. Several regional and international scholarly associations (such as the European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism and the Association for the Study of Esotericism and Mysticism) foster the growth of the field. Scholars around the world study Western esoteric, occult, and alternative spiritual movements in the framework of special programs and centers (such as the Centre for the History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents at the University of Amsterdam and the Chair for History of Esoteric Currents at the L'École pratique des hautes études) or within departments of religious studies, cultural studies, history, sociology, literature, and the arts. Two peer-reviewed academic journals are dedicated to the study of Western esotericism (*Aries: Journal for the Study of Western Esotericism* and *Correspondences: Journal for the Study of Esotericism*), as well as three monograph series put out by prominent academic publishing houses (SUNY series in Western Esoteric Traditions, Aries Book Series at Brill, and Oxford Studies in Western Esotericism at Oxford University Press). A great number of recent

[4] Pasi, "Occultism," 1367.

[5] Michael Bergunder, "What is Esotericism? Cultural Studies Approaches and the Problems of Definition in Religious Studies," *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 22, no. 1 (2010): 9–36; Hammer, "Mysticism and Esotericism"; Kocku von Stuckrad, "Western Esotericism: Towards an Integrative Model of Interpretation," *Religion* 35 (2005): 78–97; Helmut Zander, "What Is Esotericism? Does It Exist? How Can It Be Understood?" in *Occult Roots of Religious Studies*, eds. Yves Mühlematter and Helmut Zander (Oldenbourg: De Gruyter, 2021), 15–43; Egil Asprem and Julian Strube, "Introduction," in *New Approaches to the Study of Esotericism*, eds. Egil Asprem and Julian Strube (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2021), 1–19.

articles, monographs, and edited volumes, as well as a comprehensive encyclopedia,[6] have been dedicated to the study of Western esoteric and occult movements, and the research of Western esotericism has expanded to new areas such as esotericism in South and East Asia,[7] Islamic esotericism,[8] esotericism in South America,[9] and African American esotericism.[10] There is a growing interdisciplinary consensus today about the importance of studying Western esotericism, occultism, and alternative spiritual movements and the influence these currents have exerted on religion, culture, politics, and the arts.

Notwithstanding the increased academic interest in occultism and the expansion of the study of Western esotericism to new areas, Jewish involvement in modern Western esoteric movements, as well as Jewish adaptations of occult beliefs and practices, remain understudied. Historically, scholars of Jewish studies, most prominent

6 Hanegraaff, *Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism*.

7 See, *inter alia*, Michael Bergunder, "Experiments with Theosophical Truth: Gandhi, Esotericism, and Global Religious History," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 82 (2014): 398–426; Helena Čapková, "A Brief History of the Theosophical Society in Japan in the Interwar Period," *CESNUR* 4, no. 5 (2020): 3–26. Mriganka Mukhopadhyay, "The Occult and the Orient: The Theosophical Society and the Socio-Religious Space in Colonial India," *Presidency Historical Review* 1, no. 2, (2015): 9–37; idem, "Mohini: A Case Study of a Transnational Spiritual Space in the History of the Theosophical Society," *Numen* 67, (2020): 165–90; Chienhui Chuang, "Theosophical Movements in Modern China: The Education Provided by Theosophists at the Shanghai International Settlement," in *Theosophy Across Boundaries: Transcultural and Interdisciplinary Perspectives on a Modern Esoteric Movement*, eds. Hans Martin Krämer and Julian Strube (Albany: SUNY Press, 2021), 149–78.

8 See, *inter alia*, Liana Saif, "What is Islamic Esotericism," *Correspondences: Journal for the Study of Esotericism* 7, no. 1 (2019): 1–59; idem, "'That I Did Love the Moore to Live with Him': Islam in/and the Study of 'Western Esotericism,'" in *New Approaches to the Study of Esotericism*, eds. Asprem and Strube, , 67–87; Mark Sedgwick, "Islamic and Western Esotericism," *Correspondences: Journal for the Study of Western Esotericism* 7, no. 1 (2019): 277–99.

9 See, *inter alia*, Juan P. Bubello, *Historia del Esoterismo en Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Biblos, 2010); Mariano Villalba, "The Occult Among the Aborigines of South America? Some Remarks on Race, Coloniality, and the West in the Study of Esotericism," in *New Approaches to the Study of Esotericism*, eds. Asprem and Strube, 88–108.

10 Stephen C. Finley, Margarita Simon Guillory and Hugh R. Page, Jr. (eds.), *Esotericism in African American Religious Experience* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2014); Justine M. Bakker, "Hidden Presence: Race and/in the History, Construct, and Study of Western Esotericism," *Religion* 50, no. 4 (2020): 479–503.

among them scholars of Jewish mysticism, have exhibited contempt for modern occult forms of Kabbalah, as well for Jews who study Kabbalah in accordance with occult interpretations. Modern scholars of Jewish Mysticism have largely denied the mystical authenticity of both Jewish and non-Jewish occult Kabbalah, dismissing them as pseudo-Kabbalah.[11] This contempt has extended to the study of Jewish occultism as a whole. The study of Jewish occultism, especially of Jewish occult interpretations of Kabbalah, thus not only broadens the field of modern Jewish thought, but also challenges assumptions embedded in the category of Jewish mysticism that have historically hindered the study of Jewish occultism and occultist forms of modern Kabbalah.

Having said that, several articles have been published in recent years on Jewish involvement in Freemasonry (a topic that was first studied by Jacob Katz in his seminal work, *Jews and Freemasons in Europe*).[12] Scholars have examined Jewish appropriations of mesmerism,[13] as well as Jewish engagement with spiritualism in the

[11] Boaz Huss, *Mystifying Kabbalah: Academic Scholarship, National Theology, & New Age Spirituality*, trans. Elana Lutsky (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 102–23.

[12] Jacob Katz, *Jews and Freemasons in Europe, 1723–1939* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970). Recent studies (most of them related to the Jewish freemason and Kabbalist David Rosenberg) include Jean-Pierre Brach and Pierre Mollier, "Franc-maçonnerie et Kabbale: les planches théosophico-maçonniques du Frère David Rosenberg (circa 1830)," *Renaissance Traditionnelle* 143–144 (July-October 2005): 203–19; Peter Lanchidi, "Between Judaism and Freemasonry: The Dual Interpretation of David Rosenberg's Kabbalistic Lithograph, *Aperçu de l'Origine du Culte Hébraïque* (1841)," *Correspondences: Journal for the Study of Esotericism* 6, no. 2 (2018): 1–27; idem, "A Kabbalistic Lithograph as a Populariser of Judaism in America—Max Wolff, *Origin of the Rites and Worship of the Hebrews* (New York, 1859)," in *Kabbalah in America — Ancient Lore in the New World*, ed. Brian Ogren (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2020), 115–37; idem, "A Kabbalistic Lithograph in Australia: Rabbi A.B. Davis's Lectures on the Origin of the Rites and Worship of the Hebrews," *Australian Journal of Jewish Studies* 34 (2021): 188–223; idem, "The Masonic Career of a Kabbalistic Lithograph: Max Wolff, *Origin of the Rites and Worship of the Hebrews* (New York, 1859)," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (2021): 191–218.

[13] Jonatan Meir. "Haskalah, Kabbalah and Mesmerism: The Case of Isaac Baer Levinsohn," in *Finden und Erfinden: Die Romantik und ihre Religionen 1790–1820,* eds. Daniel Cyranka, Diana Matut, and Christian Soboth (Würzburg: Verlag Königshausen & Neumann, 2020), 205–27; Daniel Reiser, "The Encounter in Vienna: Psychotherapy, Guided Imagery, and Hasidism Post-World War I," *Modern Judaism* 36 (2016): 277–302.

late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[14] Several studies have been dedicated to Jewish involvement in the Theosophical Society,[15] and to Jewish followers of Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925) and the Anthroposophical Society, chief among them the Jewish anthroposophist and scholar of Jewish mysticism Ernst Müller (1880–1954).[16] Further studies have been dedicated to Max Theon (1850–1927), the Jewish founder of the Cosmic Movement, and his Jewish followers,[17] the Jewish occultist Oskar Goldberg (1885–1953),[18] Moses

[14] J. H. Chajes, "Entzauberung and Jewish Modernity: On 'Magic,' Enlightenment, and Faith," *Simon Dubnow Institute Yearbook* 6 (2007): 191–200; Jonathan Sarna, "Editor's Introduction," in *Cosella Wayne: Or, Will and Destiny,* ed. Jonathan Sarna (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2019), xi–xl; Samuel Glauber-Zimra "Summoning Spirits in Egypt: Jewish Women and Spiritualism in Early-Twentieth Century Cairo," *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies & Gender Issues* 38 (2021): 25–45; idem, "Writings on Spiritualism from the Archive of R. Eliyahu Mordekhai Halevy Wolkowsky," *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts* 52 (2022): 145–90; Samuel Glauber-Zimra and Boaz Huss, "'No Religion Could be More Spiritual than Ours': Anglo-Jewish Spiritualist Societies in the Interwar Period," *Jewish Historical Studies: Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England* 53 (2022): 83–104.

[15] Boaz Huss, "'The Sufi Society from America': Theosophy and Kabbalah in Poona in the Late Nineteenth Century," in *Kabbalah and Modernity: Interpretations, Transformations, Adaptations*, eds. Boaz Huss, Marco Pasi, and Kocku von Stukrad (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 167–93; idem, "'Qabbalah, the Theos-Sophia of the Jews': Jewish Theosophists and their Perception of Kabbalah," in *Theosophical Appropriations: Esotericism, Kabbalah and the Transformation of Traditions*, eds. Julie Chajes and Boaz Huss, (Beer Sheva: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press, 2016), 137–66; idem, "'To Study Judaism in Light of Theosophy and Theosophy in the Light of Judaism': The Association of Hebrew Theosophists and its Missions to the Jews and Gentiles," in *Theosophy Across Boundaries*, eds. Krämer and Strube, 253–78; Alexandra Nagel, "The Association of Jewish Theosophists in the Netherlands: The Efforts of Louis Vet and Others to Revive Judaism," *Correspondences: Journal for the Study of Esotericism* 7, no. 2 (2019): 411–39.

[16] Ansgar Martins, *Hans Büchenbacher: Erinnerungen 1933–1949* (Frankfurt am Main: Mayer Info3, 2014); Andreas Kilcher, "Kabbalah and Anthroposophy: A Spiritual Alliance According to Ernst Müller," in *Theosophical Appropriations*, eds. Chajes and Huss, 197–222; Gerold Necker, "Ernst Müller's Encounter with Jewish Mysticism and Gershom Scholem," *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts* 40 (2018): 203–24.

[17] Boaz Huss, "Cosmic Philosophy and the Arts," *Nova Religio* 19, no. 4 (2016): 102–18; Boaz Huss and Julie Chajes, "Introduction," in *The Cosmic Movement: Sources, Contexts, Impact*, eds. Boaz Huss and Julie Chajes (Beer-Sheva: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press, 2021), 9–53.

[18] Bruce Rosenstock, *Transfinite Life: Oskar Goldberg and the Vitalist Imagination* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017).

Gaster and his esoteric interests,[19] Hillel Zeitlin (1871–1942) and his engagement with various esoteric currents,[20] and the Jewish Sufis of Lausanne and their affiliation with traditionalism.[21] With that said, many other manifestations of Jewish occultism have yet to be researched and a comprehensive study of the scope, significance, and impact of Jewish adaptations of occult ideas and practices remains a desideratum. In what follows, we first present a working definition of Jewish occultism. This is followed by a preliminary survey of Jewish engagement with modern occult currents and a discussion of the challenges and prospects of the study of Jewish occultism.

Toward a Definition of Jewish Occultism

The definition and delineation of Jewish Western esotericism and Jewish occultism presents a considerable challenge. Scholars have offered different definitions and understandings of esotericism and occultism, and the use of these terms are problematized and debated among scholars of Western esotericism.[22] Antoine Faivre, the founding father of the academic study of Western esotericism, regarded esotericism as a "form of thought," and enumerated several characteristics that are shared by different Western esoteric schools, such as the belief in an intrinsic correspondence between the different parts of the seen and unseen universe, the perception of the cosmos as a living nature, the achievement of knowledge through imagination and intermediate symbols and images, rituals, and the experience of transmutation.[23] Faivre, following the sociologist Edward Tiryakian, defined "occultism," meanwhile, as encompassing

19 Boaz Huss, "'The Quest Universal': Moses Gaster's Interest in Kabbalah and Western Esotericism," *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts* 40 (2018): 255–66; Glauber-Zimra and Huss, "'No Religion Could be More Spiritual than Ours'."

20 Oz Bluman, "The Moment of Worldwide Renewal: Hillel Zeitlin and the Theosophical Activity in Warsaw 1917–1924," *Modern Judaism* 41, no. 2 (2021): 137–61; Samuel Glauber-Zimra, "'From Time to Time I Dream Wondrous Dreams': Esotericism and Prophecy in the Writings of Hillel Zeitlin," *Correspondences: Journal for the Study of Esotericism* 9, no. 1 (2021): 5–48.

21 Paul Fenton, "Les judéo-soufis de Lausanne: un point de rencontre dans la mouvance de guénonienne," in *Réceptions de la cabale*, eds. Pierre Gisel and Lucie Kaennel (Paris: Editions de l'Éclat, 2007), 283–313.

22 See above, note 5.

23 Antoine Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994), 10–16.

the practical dimensions of esotericism.[24] Wouter J. Hanegraaff, among the leading scholars of Western esotericism today, suggests another approach, characterizing Western esotericism as the forms of knowledge that were rejected by early-modern Protestant theologians and enlightenment and post-enlightenment thinkers.[25] However, Hanegraaff contends that despite the great diversity of "rejected knowledge," there are some shared world views and epistemologies — at odds with normative post-Enlightenment intellectual culture — that characterize Western esoteric currents.[26]

Notwithstanding our recognition of the ambiguities of the terms, and the difficulties of defining them, we suggest using Jewish occultism (and, by extension, Jewish Western esotericism) as heuristic and tentative terms that refer to (1) Jewish involvement in movements and currents that are commonly denoted by the terms "Western esotericism" and "occultism" and/or (2) Jewish adaptations and appropriations of doctrines and practices espoused by these movements and currents. As noted above, although certain connections existed between Jews and earlier forms of Western esotericism, significant Jewish involvement with esoteric and occult movements, currents, and ideas began in earnest only in the late nineteenth century. We would like to emphasize that while many Jewish occultists were interested in Kabbalah and developed new forms of Jewish occult Kabbalah, Jewish esotericism and occultism should be distinguished from traditional forms of Jewish Kabbalah, which are sometimes also deemed "esoteric" and "occult." Furthermore, while there have been calls in recent years from within the field of Western esotericism to discard the qualifying adjective "Western," we have nevertheless elected to preserve the original term Western esotericism in order to maintain the distinction between Jewish esoteric traditions, i.e., Kabbalah, and those esoteric traditions that emerged within the Western cultural sphere that formed the basis of Jewish occultism, while acknowledging that Jewish occultists were active across the globe.[27]

24 Ibid., 33–35; Edward A. Tiryakian, "Toward the Sociology of Esoteric Culture", in *On the Margin of the Visible: Sociology, the Esoteric, and the Occult*, ed. Edward A. Tiryakian (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1974), 257–80.

25 Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*, 77–152.

26 Ibid., 369; idem, *Western Esotericism*, 12–14.

27 On this debate, see Egil Asprem, "Beyond the West: Towards a New Comparativism in the Study of Esotericism," *Correspondences: Journal for the*

The Scope of Jewish Occultism

A widespread occult revival took place across Europe and North America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[28] Countless individuals joined existing esoteric organizations, established new occult societies, or grew interested in non-Western religious and mystical practices. Notable movements that became broadly established in the latter half of the nineteenth century include spiritualism and the Theosophical Society, both of which attracted many Jewish followers and remained highly influential up to the Second World War. Occultism was absorbed into popular culture, and countless periodicals espoused esoteric doctrines and instructed readers on the latest occult fashions.[29] Occult movements and practices were frequently criticized and rejected by scientific and religious establishments, yet they had a major impact on nearly every aspect of modern culture from religion, literature, art, and philosophy

Study of Esotericism 2, no. 1 (2014): 3–33; Wouter J. Hanegraaff, "The Globalization of Esotericism," *Correspondences: Journal for the Study of Esotericism* 3, no. 1 (2015): 55–91; Aren Roukema and Allan Kilner-Johnson, "Time to Drop the 'Western'," *Correspondences: Journal for the Study of Esotericism* 6, no. 2 (2018): 109–15; Julian Strube, "Towards the Study of Esotericism without the 'Western': Esotericism from the Perspective of a Global Religious History," in *New Approaches to the Study of Esotericism*, eds. Egil Asprem and Julian Strube, (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2021), 45–66.

[28] For a sample of studies that capture the geographic spread of the occult revival, see Maria Carlson, *"No Religion Higher than Truth:" A History of the Theosophical Movement in Russia, 1875–1922* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Joscelyn Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1994); Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Corinna Treitel, *A Science for the Soul: Occultism and the Genesis of the German Modern* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004); Catherine L. Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007); John Warne Monroe, *Laboratories of Faith: Mesmerism, Spiritism, and Occultism in Modern France* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2008); Julia Mannherz, *Modern Occultism in Late Imperial Russia* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2012).

[29] Mark S. Morrison, "The Periodical Culture of the Occult Revival: Esoteric Wisdom, Modernity and Counter-Public Spheres," *Journal of Modern Literature* 31, no. 2 (2008): 1–22. Over one thousand nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century occult periodicals have been digitized and made freely available online by the International Association for the Preservation of Spiritualist and Occult Periodicals, http://iapsop.com/ (accessed March 21, 2022).

to psychology, politics, and science.[30] Transmitted by the Western imperial powers and the global communication networks that sprang up in the nineteenth century, late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century occultism spread across the globe. Esoteric and occult movements were active not in only in Europe and North American, but also in South America, South and East Asia, the Middle East, Northern and South Africa, as well as in Australia and New Zealand.[31] Jewish occultism, too, was a global phenomenon found in Jewish communities across the world.

Small numbers of Jews had taken interest in certain esoteric practices and movements, most notably mesmerism and Freemasonry, prior to the late nineteenth century.[32] With the occult revival of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, however, considerably more Jews, from diverse communities across Western and Eastern Europe, North and South America, Australia, South Africa, North Africa, South and East Asia, and the Middle East, began to engage with occult ideas and practices. Some took part in newly established occult groups and movements, such as spiritualism, theosophy, anthroposophy, the Traditionalist and Fourth Way schools, the Quest Society, the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and its offshoots, and others. In other cases, most apparent in the Yiddish-speaking environs of Eastern Europe and North America, occultism was integrated into Jewish popular culture, yielding a new Jewish occulture.[33] Here fortune tellers, mediums, and other occult

30 See, *inter alia*, Jason Ā. Josephson-Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment: Magic, Modernity, and the Birth of the Human Sciences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017); Julian Strube, *Sozialismus, Katholizismus und Okkultismus im Frankreich des 19. Jahrhunderts: Die Genealogie der Schriften von Eliphas Lévi* (Boston: De Gruyter, 2016); Tessel M. Bauduin, Victoria Ferentinou, and Daniel Zamani (eds.), *Surrealism, Occultism and Politics: In Search of the Marvellous* (New York: Routledge, 2017); Richard Noakes, *Physics and Psychics: The Occult and the Sciences in Modern Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

31 Nile Green, "The Global Occult: An Introduction," *History of Religions* 54 (2015): 383–93.

32 Katz, *Jews and Freemasons*; Brach and Mollier, "Franc-maçonnerie et Kabbale"; Lanchidi, "Between Judaism and Freemasonry"; idem, "A Kabbalistic Lithograph as a Populariser of Judaism in America"; idem, "A Kabbalistic Lithograph in Australia"; idem, "The Masonic Career of a Kabbalistic Lithograph"; Meir, "Haskalah, Kabbalah and Mesmerism."

33 The use of "occulture" as a research paradigm for the study of occultism in popular culture has recently been put forward by Christopher Partridge. See Christopher Partridge, *The Re-Enchantment of the West*, 2 vols. (London: T&T

professionals advertised their services widely in the Jewish press and performed on the stage, while occult terminology began to enter the religious vernacular of rabbinic literature.[34] In what follows, we present a preliminary survey of Jewish involvement in occult movements, manifestations of occultism in Jewish popular culture, Jewish occult publications, and the relationship of Jewish occultists to Judaism.

Jews in Occult Movements

Considerable numbers of Jews joined modern occult movements, and many assumed leadership roles in these groups. One of the founding members of the Theosophical Society, for example, was the Jewish scholar David E. de Lara (1796–1879).[35] Indeed, Jews were numbered among the founding members and officers of theosophical lodges and branches across the globe. Friedrich Eckstein (1861–1939), a central figure in literary, philosophic, and occult circles in fin-de-siècle Vienna, was among the founders of the first lodge of the Theosophical Society in Vienna. The German speaking theosophical circle in Prague met at the literary salon of the Jewish intellectual Berta Fanta (1866–1917), who later became a follower of Rudolf Steiner. One of the founding members of the theosophical lodge in Wellington, New Zealand, established in the late nineteenth century, was Rabbi Herman van Staveren (1849–1930). In 1917, Gaston Polak (1874–1970), who later served as the president of the Association of Jewish Theosophists, was appointed the general secretary of the Belgian section of the Theosophical Society. Several pioneering members of the Theosophical Society in South Africa, such as Lewis Walter Ritch (1868–1952), Henry Salomon Leon Polak (1882–1959) and Herman Kallenbach (1871–1945) were Jewish.[36] One of the founding members

Clark, 2004–2005); idem, "Occulture and Everyday Enchantment," in *The Oxford Handbook of New Religious Movements*, 2 vols., eds. James R. Lewis and Inga B. Tøllefsen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 2:315–32.

34 The term "religious vernacular" is taken from Catherine L. Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 9.

35 John Patrick Deveny, "D. E. de Lara, John Storer Cobb, and The New Era," *Theosophical History* 15, no. 4 (2011): 27–33.

36 Margaret Chatterjee, *Gandhi and his Jewish Friends* (London: Macmillan, 1992); Shimon Lev, *Soulmates: The Story of Mahatma Gandhi and Hermann Kallenbach* (New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2012); idem, "Gandhi and his Jewish Theosophist

and leaders of the Anthroposophical Society, Carl Unger (1878–1929), was Jewish, and other leading Jewish followers of Rudolf Steiner included Fanta, the scholar Müller, and Karl König (1902–1966), the founder of the Camphill Movement. Moses Gaster (1856–1939), an eminent scholar of Jewish folklore, former *Hakham* (chief rabbi) of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews' Congregation of London, and a leading Zionist activist, was the vice president of the Quest Society, founded by the scholar and former theosophist G.R.S. Mead (1863–1933). The inner circle of the Agni Yoga Society, a large offshoot of the Theosophical Society established in New York in the early 1920s by the Russian theosophist and artist Nicholas Roerich (1874–1947) was entirely Jewish.[37] Moina Bergson (1865–1928), the sister of the French Jewish philosopher and Nobel laureate Henri Bergson (1859–1941), was a prominent member of the Hermetic Brotherhood of the Golden Dawn and married to one of its founders, Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers (1854–1918). She later headed a successor to the Golden Dawn, the Rosicrucian Order of the Alpha and Omega. Another notable Jewish occultist active in early-twentieth-century England and North America was Israel Regardie (1907–1985), a follower of the Golden Dawn who served as the secretary of the notorious occultist Aleister Crowley (1875–1947), joined the ceremonial magic order Stella Matutina, and authored several popular books on esotericism.[38] Several highly influential promoters of spiritualism, such as the renowned Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso (1835–1909) and the British medium Maurice Barbanell (1902–1981), were Jewish.[39] The Yiddish journalist Isaac Ewen (1861–1925), a Jewish spiritualist,

Supporters in South Africa," in *Theosophical Appropriations*, eds. Chajes and Huss, 245–71.

[37] Members of the circle included the journalist Frances Ruth Grant (1896–1993), the musicians Zina (Zinaida) Lichtman (1889–1983) and her husband, Maurice Lichtman (1887–1948), and the wealthy Wall Street exchange broker Louis Levi Horch (1889–1979), and his wife, Nettie Horch (1896–1991). See Alexandre Andreyev, *The Myth of the Masters Revived: The Occult Lives of Nikolai and Elena Roerich* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2014), 80–85, 121–23.

[38] See, *inter alia*, Israel Regardie, *The Golden Dawn: The Original Account of the Teachings, Rites, and Ceremonies of the Hermetic Order* (Chicago: Aries Press, 1937–1940).

[39] For a sample of their writings on spiritualism, see Cesara Lombroso, *After Death – What? Researches into Hypnotic and Spiritualistic Phenomena*, trans. William Sloane Kennedy (Boston: Small, Maynard & Company, 1909); Maurice Barbanell, *This is Spiritualism* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1959).

publicized his spiritualist experiences in a memoir published in the New York Yiddish press.[40] Roberto Assagioli (1888–1974), the noted Italian psychoanalyst and esotericist, was born into a Venetian Jewish family. Assagioli, who developed the Psychosynthesis method, a combination of theosophic ideas and humanistic psychology, was active in the Italian section of the Theosophical Society and was the Italian representative of the Arcane school of the former theosophist Alice Bailey (1880–1949).[41] John Levy (1910–1976), Leo Schaya (1916–1985) and several other Jewish esotericists were followers of René Guénon's (1886–1951) Traditionalism and active in the traditionalist Sufi circle of Frithjof Schuon (1907–1998).[42]

A number of occult circles were established by Jewish esotericists. In 1900, the mysterious Jewish esotericist Max Theon, also known as Aia Aziz, established the Cosmic Movement. Theon, who was born in Warsaw as Eliezer Bimstein, emigrated to London, where he was active in the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor, before relocating to Tlemcen, Algeria.[43] Many of the leaders and officers of the movement, headquartered in Paris, were Jewish. Among these was Mirra Alfassa (also known as the Mother, 1878–1973), who later travelled to India and cooperated with the Indian political and spiritual leader Sri Aurobindo (1872–1950).[44] Another predominantly Jewish esoteric group with a Jewish leader was the Philosophical Group, founded in Berlin in 1925 by the German Jewish esotericist Oskar Goldberg.[45]

40 Isaac Ewen, "Mayne Erfarungen Mit Di Spiritualisten," *Der morgen zshurnal*, May–June 1922. For a partial English translation, see idem, "A Séance in the Shtetl, translated and introduced by Sam Glauber-Zimra," *The Barnacle Goose* 2 (2021): 30–33.

41 Pasi, "Theosophy and Anthroposophy in Italy," 116 n79; Hans Thomas Hakl, *Eranos: An Alternative Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 29–30. We are grateful to Marco Pasi for bringing Assagioli to our attention.

42 Fenton, "Les judéo-soufis de Lausanne."

43 Christian Chanel, "De la 'Fraternité hermétique de Louxor' au 'Mouvement Cosmique:' l'oeuvre de Max Théon," PhD diss., L'École pratique des hautes études, 1993; Joscelyn Godwin, Christian Chanel, and John P. Deveney, *The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor: Initiatic and Historical Documents of an Order of Practical Occultism* (York Beach, Maine: Samuel Weiser, 1995); Chajes and Huss, *The Cosmic Movement.*

44 Peter Heehs, "The Kabbalah, the Philosophie Cosmique, and the Integral Yoga: A Study in Cross-Cultural Influence," *Aries* 11, no. 2 (2011): 219–247.

45 Rosenstock, *Transfinite Life.*

In some cases, special Jewish sections and associations were established, at times under the aegis of larger Western esoteric and occult movements. Several Jewish spiritualist organizations were founded in the early twentieth century. These included the Jewish Spiritualist Society, founded in London in 1919; the Jewish Society for Psychic Research, established in London in 1929; and the Annette Levy Memorial Spiritualist Centre, active in the early 1930s in Brooklyn, New York.[46] A spiritualist circle of messianic Jews operated in South Africa in the 1930s and 1940s under the leadership of Reginald Hegy, who combined Judaism with spiritualism and a heterodox belief in the messiahship of Jesus.[47] A number of Jewish spiritualist circles were active in Mandate Palestine and the State of Israel between the 1940s and 1960s, including in Haifa, Tel Aviv, and Jerusalem.[48] A Jewish theosophical group was established Livorno in 1906 by admirers of the Kabbalist and philosopher R. Elia Benamozegh (1823–1900); the lodge was headed by Benamozegh's student R. Arrigo Lates (1879–1918).[49] In 1925, Jewish members of the Theosophical Society founded the Association of Hebrew Theosophists in Adyar, India, and sections of the Jewish Theosophical Association were established in India, Iraq, Poland, England, the Netherlands, and the United States.[50] In addition, a Jewish lodge of the Martinist Order was active in early-twentieth-century Salonica.[51] Following the establishment of the British Mandate

[46] Glauber-Zimra and Huss, "'No Religion Could be More Spiritual than Ours'"; Louis Minsky, "American Jewish Mystics," *B'nai B'rith Magazine* 45, no. 10 (July 1931): 341–42.

[47] Reginald Hegy, *A Witness Through the Centuries* (London: Rider & Co, 1934); idem, *The Hour Approaches* ([Cape Town]: Cape Times Ltd, 1941). On this group, see Shlomo Steyn, *Spiritualism: The Only Way of Life* (London: Regency Press, [1959]), 101–07.

[48] For rudimentary information on these groups, see ibid.; idem, *Le-Yad ha-Pargod ha-Mufshal: Masah Sipurit Ruḥit* (Tel Aviv: Negohot, 1955).

[49] Marco Pasi, "Theosophy and Anthroposophy in Italy during The First Half of The Twentieth Century," *Theosophical History* 15, no. 2 (2012): 81–119.

[50] Huss, "'To Study Judaism in Light of Theosophy and Theosophy in the Light of Judaism'"; Menashe Anzi, "Theosophy and Anti-Theosophy in Basra: Jews, the Indian Ocean and the British Empire," *History: Journal of the Historical Society of Israel* 46–47 (2021): 123–66 [Hebrew]; S. R. Goldstein-Sabbah, *Baghdadi Jewish Networks in the Age of Nationalism* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2021), 174–84.

[51] We are grateful to Henrik Bogdan, who shared with us a certificate of initiation that was issued by the Bnei Brith lodge of the Martinist Order in Salonica, dated August 1906. We have not been able to find any more information about this lodge.

in Palestine, and especially in the wake of the Nazi rise to power in Germany, a number of Jewish followers of occult movements arrived in Mandate Palestine, where they set up theosophical, anthroposophical and spiritualist circles. With the founding of the State of Israel in 1948, several lodges, branches, and associations were established in Israel. These included theosophical lodges founded in the 1950s in Tel Aviv, Safed, Jerusalem, and Haifa. The Israeli Spiritualist Association was founded in 1953, and the Israel Parapsychological Society, Jerusalem, followed suit in 1958, followed by the Elijah branch of the Anthroposophical society, established in Jerusalem in 1965. Later, Israeli followers of occult currents founded several villages and kibbutzim, such as Amirim, Yodfat, Kibbutz Harduf, and Kibbutz Neot Smadar, which were inspired by the teaching of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky, theosophy, anthroposophy, and other esoteric schools. Margot Klausner (1905–1975), the Jewish author and filmmaker, who immigrated from Berlin to Palestine in 1926 and went on to establish the Israeli Film industry, was interested in esotericism and founded the Israel Society for Parapsychology, Tel Aviv, in 1968. This big tent esoteric organization, which achieved great popularity in late-1960s- and early-1970s Israel, lay the roots for the Israeli New Age movement that continues to flourish to this day.

Jews who joined occult movements, or interacted with occultists, included leading authors, scholars, and political activists. Aside from Gaster, mentioned above, Adolphe Franck (1810–1893), a prominent early scholar of Kabbalah, was deeply interested in Western esoteric currents, praised the revival of interest in Kabbalah propagated by the Theosophical Society, and befriended the outstanding late-nineteenth-century French occultist Papus (Gérard Encausse, 1865–1916).[52] Hillel Zeitlin, a widely-read journalist, scholar and neo-Hasidic thinker from Warsaw, was interested in esoteric currents, such as New Thought and Theosophy, which had a considerable impact on his conception of prophecy, as well as his mystical messianism.[53] Notably, Zeitlin briefly studied Kabbalah with the circle of Kazimierz Stabrowski (1869–1929), a Polish painter who founded

52 Wouter J. Hanegraaff "The Beginnings of Occultist Kabbalah: Adolphe Franck and Eliphas Lévi." In *Kabbalah and Modernity*, eds. Huss, Pasi, and von Stuckrad, 107–27; Boaz Huss, "Academic Study of Kabbalah and Occultist Kabbalah," in *Occult Roots of Religious Studies*, eds. Mühlematter and Zander, 110–13.

53 Bluman, "The Moment of Worldwide Renewal"; Glauber-Zimra, "From Time to Time I Dream Wondrous Dreams."

the first lodges of the Theosophical Society in Poland.[54] Joshua Abelson (1873–1940), a British rabbi and scholar of Jewish mysticism who wrote the introduction to the first English translation of the *Zohar*, was a member of the Theosophical Society and published several articles in theosophical journals.[55] Shmuel Hugo Bergmann (1883–1975), a Zionist activist, philosopher, and the first rector of the Hebrew University, was an admirer of Rudolf Steiner (although he never joined the Anthroposophical Society) and took an interest in other esoteric and alternative spiritual thinkers, including Guénon, Ouspensky, Schuon and Sri Aurobindo, with whom he corresponded. Bergmann was also deeply interested in psychical research and was a founding member of the Israeli Society for Parapsychology. The founder of the modern academic study of Kabbalah, Gershom Scholem (1897–1982), was also interested in various occult currents, and met and corresponded with several modern esotericists, including Gustav Meyrink (1868–1932), Robert Eisler (1882–1949), Samuel Lewis (a.k.a Sufi Sam, 1896–1971), and Israel Regardie.[56] Although Scholem disparaged contemporary occultists and ridiculed their appropriations of Kabbalah, some forms of Western esotericism influenced his scholarly work.[57]

A number of Jewish authors, poets, artists, and producers maintained personal connections with occultists or were affiliated with occult movements. Naftali Herz Imber (1856–1909), the Hebrew poet who wrote "Hatikvah," the national anthem of the State of Israel, was a disciple of the English occultist Laurence Oliphant (1829–1888). Imber was also affiliated with the Theosophical Society, as well as

[54] Aaron Zeitlin, "Mayn foter," in Hillel Zeitlin, *R. Nakhmen Bratslaver: der zeer fun Polodye* (New York: Farlag matones, 1952), 38. On Stabrowski, see Karolina Maria Hess and Małgorzata Alicja Dulska, "Kazimierz Stabrowski's Esoteric Dimensions: Theosophy, Art, and the Vision of Femininity," *La Rosa di Paracelso* 1 (2017): 41–65.

[55] Joshua Abelson, "Introduction," in Maurice Simon and Harry Sperling, *The Zohar*, vol. 1 (London: Soncino Press, 1921), ix–xxx; Huss, "Academic Study of Kabbalah and Occultist Kabbalah," 116–18.

[56] Boaz Huss and Jonatan Meir, "'The Light is Burning Pretty Low': The 1948 Correspondence between Samuel Lewis and Gershom Scholem," *Correspondences: Journal for the Study of Esotericism* 8 no. 1 (2020): 45–72; Huss, "Academic Study of Kabbalah and Occultist Kabbalah," 108–09, 121–24.

[57] Ibid., 121–28.

other esoteric movements.[58] The Anglo-Jewish author and playwright Samuel Levy Bensusan (1872–1958) was a member of the Theosophical Society and an editor of its journal, the *Theosophical Review.* The author and poet Regina Miriam Bloch (1889–1938), who was born in Germany and settled in England after WWI, was involved in the foundation of the Jewish theosophical lodge in London. Bloch was also a founding member of the Jewish Society for Psychical Research and served as its first president.[59] Franz Kafka (1883–1924) participated in meetings of the Berta Fanta circle in Prague and met with Rudolf Steiner. He was also interested in theosophy and other forms of occultism, all of which had an influence on his writings.[60] The painter and decorative artist Zeev Raban (born Wolf Ravitzki; 1890–1970), who taught at the Bezalel School of Arts in Jerusalem and had a major impact on Israeli art, was interested in anthroposophy and spiritualism, and practiced mediumship.[61] The renowned Jewish dancer and choreographer, Gertrud Bodenwieser (born Gertrud Bondi; 1890–1959), was inspired by theosophy, and based her dance drama *O World* on the song "Search" by the spiritual teacher and former theosophist Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895–1986).[62] The founder of the Cosmic Movement, Max Theon, and many of its members were deeply interested in various art forms and made a significant impact on artistic circles in early-twentieth-century Paris.[63]

Occultism and Jewish Popular Culture

Apart from the many Jews who were affiliated with occult organizations, a far greater number engaged with occult and esoteric currents without officially joining any movement. This was most evident among East European Jewry and its diaspora, whose members

58 Boaz Huss, "'Forward to the East:' Naphtali Herz Imber's Perception of Kabbalah," *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 12 (2013): 398–418; Eddy Portnoy, *Bad Rabbi: And Other Strange but True Stories from the Yiddish Press* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018), 58–66.

59 Glauber-Zimra and Huss, "No Religion Could be More Spiritual than Ours."

60 June O. Leavitt, *The Mystical Life of Franz Kafka: Theosophy, Cabala, and the Modern Spiritual Revival* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

61 Batsheva Goldman-Ida, *Ze`ev Raban: A Hebrew Symbolist*, (Jerusalem: Tel Aviv Museum of Art and Yad Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, 2001) [Hebrew].

62 Jan Poddebsky, "A Jewish Dancer, Krishnamurti and India," *The Journal of Indo-Judaic Studies* 16 (2018): 31–40.

63 Huss, "Cosmic Philosophy and the Arts," 102–18.

underwent accelerated processes of modernization in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The gradual breakdown of traditional modes of behavior and belief in Eastern Europe, along with the physical dislocation engendered by urbanization and global migration, led to the reconsideration of long-held cultural norms and beliefs. Amidst these churning tides, occult beliefs and practices appealed as a solution to the problems of modern life and a source of assurance in a rapidly changing world. In contradistinction to their coreligionists in Western Europe and elsewhere, Yiddish-speaking Jews in Eastern Europe and North America generally did not partake in organized occult activity. Jewish occultism here took the form of informal engagement with popular occult teachings and practices, most prominent among them hypnosis, spiritualism, and various forms of fortune-telling and character analysis. Religious taboos against necromancy notwithstanding, spiritualist séances were commonplace wherever Yiddish-speaking Jews settled, from the *shtetlekh* of Galicia to the bungalow colonies of the Catskills.[64] Occult stage acts and wonder shows often appeared on the playbills of Yiddish theaters and a cadre of Jewish occult professionals surfaced in Warsaw, the Lower East Side of Manhattan in New York City, and other turn-of-the-century urban Jewish centers.[65] Fortune tellers blended contemporary occult practices with the folkways of traditional Jewish magic. Jewish psychic mediums, hypnotists, and fortune-tellers advertised their services in the Jewish press; the most successful, men such as Osip Feldman (1862–1912), Khaym Szyller-Szkolnik (1870–1937), and Abraham Hochman, achieved a significant degree of celebrity in both Jewish and non-Jewish circles alike.[66]

A key channel for the promulgation of occult currents among East European Jews was the daily Yiddish press that flourished in the United States beginning in the 1880s and in Eastern Europe from 1903.[67] The Yiddish press served as a space for occult professionals,

[64] Ewen, "A Séance in the Shtetl"; Vivian Gornick, *Fierce Attachments: A Memoir* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1987), 86; Glauber-Zimra, "Summoning Spirits in Egypt."

[65] Jewish popular entertainment in Warsaw, including wonder shows, are discussed in Edward A. Portnoy, "Freaks, Geeks, and Strongmen: Warsaw Jews and Popular Performance, 1912-1930," *The Drama Review* 50, no. 2 (2006): 117–35.

[66] On Hochman, see idem, *Bad Rabbi:* 73–82.

[67] For the history of the Yiddish press in North America and Eastern Europe, respectively, see Jacob Glatstein, Shmuel Niger, and Hillel Rogoff (eds.), *Finf un*

both Jewish and non-Jewish, to attract Jewish customers and market themselves to a broader public. Theater promoters announced shows in the press featuring occult performances, various organizations invited the public to lectures on occult topics, and authors and booksellers advertised occult literature. Writers such as Avner Tanenboym (1848–1913), Elazar David Finkel (1862–1918), and the Yiddish literary critic B. Rivkin (Borukh Avrom Weinrebe, 1883–1945), published hundreds of popular articles on spiritualism, parapsychology, and other occult topics in the Yiddish press; other journalists debated the merits of occultism and reported on the exploits of famous mediums. An important occult popularizer, Finkel published the first Hebrew book on telepathy, *Ha-Hargashah me-Raḥok*, itself an abridged translation of the classic work of psychical research *Phantasms of the Living*.[68]

The Jewish occulture of Eastern Europe and North America was preserved in the literary works of the Nobel laureate Isaac Bashevis Singer (1902–1991). Many of the characters who populate Singer's novels and short stories attend séances and consult psychics, with occasional reference made to the above-mentioned Feldman and other real-life occult figures from Eastern Europe.[69] Singer's colleague, the Yiddish writer Shloyme Gilbert (1885–1942), himself an occultist and student of Kabbalah, penned an autobiographical short-story, "Oyf zumer-voynung," centered around a series of séances held

zibetsik yor yidishe prese in amerike, 1870–1945 (New York: I. L Peretz shrayber fareyn, 1945); David Flinker, Shalom Rosenfeld, and Mordechai Tsanin (eds.), *The Jewish Press That Was: Accounts, Evaluations and Memories of Jewish Papers in Pre-Holocaust Europe*, trans. Haim Shachter (Tel-Aviv: World Federation of Jewish Journalists, 1980).

68 Elazar David Finkel, *Ha-Hargashah me-Raḥok: Telepatyah* (Warsaw: Ha-Tsefirah, 1904). Part of this work first appeared as idem, "Ha-Teva veha-Ḥayyim: Ha-Hargashah me-Raḥok (Telepathie)," *Ha-Tsefirah* no. 175, 12 August 1904, 458–60. A partial Yiddish translation of *Phantasms of the Living* by Finkel was subsequently serialized in the newspaper *Haynt* in August and September 1908 under the title "Tsi lebt der mensh nokh'n toydt?" The book first appeared as Edward Gurney, Frederic W. H. Myers, and Frank Podmore, *Phantasms of the Living*, 2 vols. (London: The Society for Psychical Research, 1886).

69 See, e.g., Isaac Bashevis Singer, *The Magician of Lublin*, trans. Elaine Gottlieb and Joseph Singer (New York: Noonday Press, 1961), 90–91; idem, *The Estate* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969), 77; idem, *A Crown of Feathers and Other Stories* (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1974); idem, *Love and Exile* (New York: Doubleday, 1984), 24.

in the Polish countryside.[70] Both Gilbert and Singer, as well as the Jewish spiritualist A. Almi (Eliyahu Khaym Sheps, 1892–1963), were at times part of the Warsaw literary salon of Hillel Zeitlin, which attracted many heterodox religious seekers. Zeitlin's son, the Hebrew and Yiddish poet Aaron Zeitlin (1898–1973), was himself deeply interested in telepathy and authored one of the first books in Hebrew on parapsychology (to which Singer, his close friend, contributed the forward).[71]

Occult Jewish Publications

Jewish occultists produced hundreds of lectures, articles, and books, as well as literary and artistic works, that presented Jewish perspectives on occultism and sought to integrate Jewish and occult themes, beliefs, and practices. Jewish occultists authored several books on spiritualism and parapsychology. One early such work was Heinreich Ellenberger's *Offenbarung, Kabbala, Magnetismus und Spiritismus: eine zusammenhängende Kette* (*Revelation, Kabbalah, Magnetism and Spiritism: An Interlinked Chain*), published in Budapest in 1880.[72] Later examples include A. Almi's *Di tsveyte ekzistents* (*The Second Existence*, 1921), Tobias Blaustein's *Spiritualizm* (1925), A.E. Silverstone's *The Great Beyond and Other Essays on Resurrection, Immortality, Spiritualism, and Cognate Matters* (1932), Moses Hirschkopf's *Is Revelation Possible?* (1936), Shlomo Steyn's *Le-Yad ha-Pargod ha-Mufshal: Masah Sipurit Ruḥit* (*Alongside the Unfurled Curtain: A Literary Spiritual Account*, 1955) and *Spiritualism: The Only Way of Life* (1959), and Aaron Zeitlin's *Ha-Metsi'ut ha-Aḥeret* (*The Other Reality*, 1967).[73] Jewish

[70] Shloyme Gilbert, "Oyf zumer-voynung," *Varshaver shriften* (1926–1927): 1–29 (separate pagination); republished as "Oyf a zumer-voynung" in idem, *Dertseylungen un drames* (London, Ont.: Meylekh Grafshṭayn, 1954), 126–154.

[71] Aaron Zeitlin, *Ha-Metsi'ut ha-Aḥeret* (Tel Aviv: Yavneh, 1967); idem, *Parapsikhologia Murḥevet: Ha-Metsi 'ut ha-Aḥeret*, v. 2 (Tel Aviv: Yavneh, 1973).

[72] Heinreich Ellenberger, *Offenbarung, Kabbala, Magnetismus und Spiritismus: eine zusammenhängende Kette* (Budapest: Pester Buchdruckerei-Actien-Gesellschaft, 1880). An expanded French edition appeared a year later as *Révélation. Cabale, magnétisme et spiritisme: chaîne une et continue avec supplément* (Paris: Impr. de Moquet, 1881).

[73] A. Almi, *Di tsveyte ekzistents* (New York and Montreal: Kosmos, 1921); Tobias Blaustein, *Spiritualizm: meynungen, fakten un erklerungen* (London: Fraynd, 1925); A. E Silverstone, *The Great Beyond and Other Essays on Resurrection, Immortality, Spiritualism, and Cognate Matters* (London: A. H. Stockwell, [1932]); M. Hirschkopf,

theosophists and anthroposophists presented esoteric-inspired conceptions of Judaism — together with suggestions for reforming Judaism in accordance with theosophical and anthroposophical principles — in many of their publications, such as Leonard Bosman's *A Plea for Judaism* (1926), Alex Horne's *An Introduction to Esoteric Judaism* (1928), and Walter Herz's *Unbekanntes Judentum: Israels Öffnung zur Welt* (*Unknown Judaism: Israel's Opening to the World*, 1983).[74] B. Rivkin, in addition to his articles on occult topics in the American Yiddish press, edited a short-lived Yiddish occult journal, *Natur un vunder* (*Nature and Miracle*, 1922), that drew inspiration from the theosophical teachings of Nicholas Roerich. The Hebrew writer Avraham Mordechai Harizman (1884–1978) published an anthology, *Pa'amei ha-Ge'ulah* (*Footsteps of the Redemption*, 1938) that includes Hebrew translations of passages from Krishnamurti and the German occult writers Bô Yin Râ (Joseph Anton Schneiderfranken, 1876–1943) and Karl Otto Schmidt (1904–1977), alongside writings from Jewish thinkers such as Martin Buber and R. Abraham Isaac Kook.[75] Another book, *Sefer ha-Ahavah* (*The Book of Love*, 1940), contains partial translations of *Der Magie der Liebe*, (*The Magic of Love*), a guide to sex magic by the German occultist Georg Lomer (1877–1957) and the seminal work *Cosmic Consciousness*, by R. M. Bucke (1837–1902).[76] Harizman left behind numerous esoteric manuscripts, both original works and translations, all of which remain unpublished to this day.

In other cases Jews who were affiliated with occult movements published book and articles about Kabbalah and Jewish esotericism in which they presented Jewish occult understandings of Kabbalah. A.D. Ezekiel, a Jewish theosophist from Pune, India, published an

Is Revelation Possible? (London: Rider, 1936); Steyn, *Le-Yad ha-Pargod ha-Mufshal*; idem, *Spiritualism*; Zeitlin, *Ha-Metsi'ut ha-Aḥeret*.

74 L. A Bosman *A Plea for Judaism* (Adyar: Association of Hebrew Theosophists, 1926); Alex Horne, *An Introduction to Esoteric Judaism* (Wheaton: Theosophical Press, 1928); Walter Herz, *Unbekanntes Judentum: Israels Öffnung zur Welt (*Munich: Thomas Verlag, 1983).

75 Avraham Mordechai Harizman, *Pa'amei ha-Ge'ulah: Sefer ha-Hitḥadshut* (Jerusalem: Hitḥadshut, 1938).

76 D. Ernst-Helzeher [Avraham Mordechai Harizman], *Sefer ha-Ahavah: (A) Laylah. (B) Dimdumei-Zeriḥah. (C) Ha-Shemesh* (Jerusalem: Or, 1940). Cf. R. M. Bucke, *Cosmic Consciousness: A Study in the Evolution of the Human Mind* (Philadelphia: Innes & Sons, 1901); Georg Lomer, *Die Magie der Liebe: Ein Ausflug ins Geheimgebiet der Liebe* (Pfullingen in Württ: J. Baum, 1922).

introduction to Kabbalah.[77] The Anglo-Jewish theosophists Leonard Bosman and Elias Gewurtz published a series of booklets on Kabbalah from a Jewish-theosophical perspective.[78] Another Anglo-Jewish scholar and theosophist, Joshua Abelson, who as mentioned above wrote the introduction to the first comprehensive English translation of the *Zohar*, published several theosophically-inspired scholarly books on Jewish mysticism.[79] Ernst Müller, the Jewish anthroposophist from Vienna, published a German translation of segments from the *Zohar* as well as a book on the *Zohar* and a history of Jewish mysticism that incorporated anthroposophical perspectives.[80] Israel Regardie, the Jewish follower of the Golden Dawn and its offshoots, published two books in which he presented his Western esoteric inspired perception of Kabbalah.[81] Max Theon, the Jewish founder of the Cosmic Movement, and his Jewish followers, most notably Louis Themanlys and Pascal Themanlys, integrated kabbalistic ideas in their publications.[82] Leo Schaya, the Jewish follower of Guénon and Schuon, presented his traditionalist-inspired perspective on Kabbalah in his French book, *L'Homme et l'Absolu selon la Kabbale*, which was translated into many languages, as well as a traditionalist-inspired view of Judaism in his essay "Some Universal Aspects of Judaism."[83]

A number of rabbinic works from the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries engaged positively with modern occult concepts. Oftentimes occult ideas were employed as didactic tools to

77 A.D. Ezekiel, *Introduction to the Kabbalah* (Poona: A. D. Ezekiel's Press, 1888).

78 L.A. Bosman, *The Mysteries of the Qabbalah* (London: Dharma Press, 1913); Elias Gewurtz and L. A. Bosman, *The Cosmic Wisdom as Embodied in the Qabbalah and in the Symbolical Hebrew Alphabet* (London: Dharma Press, 1914); Elias Gewurz, *The Hidden Treasures of Ancient Qabalah* (Chicago: Yogi Publication Society, 1918).

79 Joshua Abelson, *The Immanence of God in Rabbinical Literature* (London: Macmillan, 1912); idem, *Jewish Mysticism: An Introduction to the Kabbalah* (London: G. Bell & Son, 1913).

80 Ernst Müller, *Der Sohar und Seine Lehre: Einleitung in die Gedankenwelt der Kabbalah* (Wein and Berlin: R. Löwit Verlag, 1920); idem, *Der Sohar: Das Heilige Buch der Kabbalah, Nach dem Urtext* (Wien: Glanz, 1932); idem, *History of Jewish Mysticism* (Oxford: East and West Library, 1946).

81 Israel Regardie, *A Garden of Pomegranates: An Outline of the Qabalah* (London: Rider, 1932); idem, *The Tree of Life* (London: Rider, 1932).

82 Boaz Huss, "Cosmic Philosophy and the Kabbalah," in *The Cosmic Movement*, eds. Huss and Chajes, 199–231.

83 Leo Schaya, *L'Homme et l'Absolu selon la Kabbale* (Paris: Correa, 1958); idem, *Universal Aspects of the Kabbalah & Judaism* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2014), 1-26.

demonstrate the truth of traditional religious beliefs to their readers, who were presumed to be well aware of contemporary occult trends. R. Aaron Mendel Hakohen (1866–1927), rabbi of the Ashkenazic community of Cairo, cited an account of spiritualism practiced by two women from his community to argue for the immortality of the soul.[84] R. Moshe Zalman Ahrenzohn (1858–1908) pointed to hypnotism and spiritualism as irrefutable proofs for the existence of the soul.[85] R. Mordechai Aryeh Nissenbaum (1870–1951) published an apologetic work, *Mosdot ha-Emunah* (The Foundations of Faith) that presents reports of clairvoyance and telepathy as proof of the existence of miracles, and compiled a voluminous paranormal compendium, *Siḥu be-Khol Niflo'atav*, which was never published.[86] R. Avraham Duber Kahana-Shapira (1870–1943), the last chief rabbi of Lithuania, argued that the findings of parapsychology gave the lie to presumptions of scientific omniscience.[87]

Other rabbis sought to relate contemporary occult trends to traditional Jewish concepts. Aaron Marcus (1843–1916) discussed spiritualism, mesmerism, and telepathy in light of Judaism in his thick tome *Der Chassidisumus* (1901).[88] R. Shlomo Schück (1844–1916), rabbi of Karcag in Hungary, argued that the *urim ve-tumim*, a component of the biblical high priest's breastplate traditionally understood to have divinatory qualities, operated through mesmerism.[89] R. Menahem Mendel Ekstein (1884–1942) referenced concepts originating in mesmerism in his hasidic primer *Tena'ei ha-Nefesh le-Hasagat ha-Ḥasidut*.[90] Ekstein's friend, the Galician rabbi Yekutiel Aryeh Kamelhar (1871–1937), cited both Marcus and Schick in his history of Hasidism

84 Aaron Mendel Hakohen, *Ha-Neshamah veha-Kadish* (Jerusalem: Levi & Partners, 1921), ff. 45b–47a; Glauber-Zimra, "Summoning Spirits in Egypt."

85 Moses Zalman Ahrenzohn, *Moreh Nevukhei ha-Dor* (Vilna: The Widow and Brothers Romm, 1908)

86 Mordecai Aryeh Nissenbaum, *Sefer Mosdot ha-Emunah* (Warsaw: Binyamin Lifshitz, 1910). A second edition with a new introduction appeared in New York City in 1924. For information on *Siḥu be-Khol Niflo'atav*, see Borukh Rivkin Papers, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, RG 476, Folder 21.

87 Avraham Duber Kahana-Shapira, *Fortrog iber taares-hamishpokhe*, 2nd ed. (Kėdainiai: S. Movšovičiaus, 1938).

88 Verus [Ahron Marcus], *Der Chassidismus: Eine kulturgeschichtliche Studie* (Pleschen: Jeschurun, 1901).

89 Solomon Schück, *Mi-Moshe ʻad-Moshe* (Munkacs: Kahn & Fried, 1903).

90 Menahem Ekstein, *Tena'ei ha-Nefesh le-Hasagat ha-Ḥasidut* (Vienna: Union Press-Appel Brothers, 1921); Reiser, "The Encounter in Vienna."

to conclude that the Baal Shem Tov, the legendary founder of the hasidic movement, employed mesmerism to ascend to heaven.[91] R. Eliyahu Mordekhai Wolkowsky (1873–1962), a Russian-born rabbi who served on the high rabbinic court of Jerusalem, incorporated spiritualist literature into his own scientific-kabbalistic writings on creation.[92] Lastly, R. Léon Ashkenazi (1922–1996), an influential twentieth-century French-Jewish theologian, was influenced to some degree by the traditionalist teaching of Guénon.[93]

Between Judaism and Occultism

It is often difficult to assess the nature of the Jewish identity of modern Jewish occultists, the extent of their knowledge of and connection to Jewish traditions, and the impact, if any, of Jewish perspectives on their esoteric doctrines and practices. While some Jewish occultists maintained a religious, ethnic, or national Jewish identity, others were estranged from their Jewish roots, with some even hostile to Judaism (or at least Orthodox Judaism). With that, many Jewish occultists argued for the compatibility of Judaism and Western esoteric doctrines. Integrating Jewish themes into their occult teaching and practices, they interpreted esoteric doctrines from an explicitly Jewish perspective. The Anglo-Jewish spiritualists of the Jewish Society for Psychical Research, for instance, argued that spiritualism was compatible with Judaism, incorporated Jewish themes into their writings and activities, and declared that "no religion could be more spiritual than ours."[94] In similar fashion, Jewish theosophists identified theosophical doctrines with Jewish (especially kabbalistic) teachings, integrated Jewish and theosophical sources in their writings, and even planned to build a Jewish synagogue at the headquarters of the Theosophical Society in Adyar, India.[95]

The various social positions of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Jewry determined to a considerable degree the

[91] Yekutiel Aryeh Kamelhar, *Sefer Dor De'ah: Arba' Tekufot Ḥasidut Beshtit* (Biłgoraj: N. Kronenberg, 1933).

[92] Glauber-Zimra, "Writings on Spiritualism from the Archive of R. Eliyahu Mordekhai Wolkowsky."

[93] Mark Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 195–96.

[94] Glauber-Zimra and Huss, "No Religion Could be More Spiritual than Ours."

[95] Huss, "Qabbalah, the Theos-Sophia of the Jews,"; idem, "'To Study Judaism in Light of Theosophy and Theosophy in the Light of Judaism'."

involvement of Jews in occult movements, as well as broader Jewish engagement with esoteric teachings and practices. As Jews in Western Europe integrated en masse into the middle class, many became estranged from Jewish orthodoxy yet remained concerned with religious questions. Occult groups, most of whom were willing to accept Jews in their ranks, held significant appeal both as an expression of embourgeoisement and a potential source of higher meaning. With that, many Jews encountered antisemitism within occult movements, circumstances that prompted the formation of particular Jewish groups and associations within the larger currents. Jewish occultists often responded to anti-Jewish biases — in particular, accusations that Judaism was materialistic and unspiritual — by drawing attention to Jewish spiritual and esoteric traditions, such as Kabbalah. In Eastern Europe, the breakdown of traditional life at the turn of the century sparked a search for assurance which many found in occult practices such as spiritualist séances and various modes of fortune-telling. In particular, the weakening of traditional religious belief prompted many ostensibly secularized Jews to engage with occult currents. Oftentimes, spiritualism or parapsychology served as a surrogate metaphysics that replaced the lost faith of their youth.[96] Indeed, in both its and Eastern and Western European Jewish contexts, occultism appealed as a worldview that countenanced metaphysics unencumbered by the obligatory framework of Jewish law, even as many rabbinic writers cited occult phenomena in their apologetic works authored in defense of traditional Jewish beliefs. In this regard, Jewish occultism, with its pursuit of spiritual concerns outside of traditional religious frameworks, complicates conventional modern Jewish historiographical distinctions between religion and secularism.

Jewish occultists frequently engaged with Jewish issues, and many integrated Jewish doctrines and themes with Western esoteric topics. Jewish members of occult movements, such as the Theosophical Society, were particularly interested in Kabbalah and offered occult-inspired interpretations of kabbalistic teachings. While

[96] This standpoint was epitomized Isaac Bashevis Singer, who wrote that “[s]ince my religion consists of seeking God, rather than serving one already found, I am an adherent of what is called psychical research.” Isaac Bashevis Singer, *New Truths and Old Clichés: Essays by Isaac Bashevis Singer*, ed. David Stromberg (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022), 175.

some Jewish occultists had sufficient knowledge of Hebrew and Aramaic to read Jewish kabbalistic sources in their original form, most of those raised in acculturated Jewish families derived their knowledge of Kabbalah from Christian, occult, and scholarly sources, as well as translations of kabbalistic texts into European languages; few Jewish members of occult movements were connected with traditional Jewish Kabbalists.[97] With that, Jewish occultists generally engaged with kabbalistic ideas from a Jewish perspective, even if their knowledge of Kabbalah was primarily derived from Western esoteric sources. In contradistinction to the Jewish members of occult movements, many of whom came from acculturated bourgeoisie families, quite a few rabbis and Kabbalists engaged in their writings with occult concepts, which they typically cited as affirmations of traditional Jewish metaphysical doctrines. The latter generally did not identify with any occult movements, nor interact personally with occultists, but rather were exposed to occult currents that had become part of the Jewish popular culture in Eastern Europe. They tended to relate to occult currents in the same manner they related to scientific knowledge — i.e., as an order of knowledge subordinate to the Torah, yet worth investigating with the aim of bolstering traditional religious belief.

As mentioned above, scholars of Western esotericism, first and foremost Wouter J. Hanegraaff, have defined the field as encompassing rejected knowledge. Like non-Jewish esotericists, Jewish occultists were frequently scorned by their coreligionists. The participation of Jews in occult movements engendered much criticism, particularly, but not exclusively, from traditional circles. Jewish occultists were at times criticized and disparaged in the Jewish press, and pamphlets, articles and public denunciations were issued against them. In the late nineteenth century, a partial translation of the *Zohar* into Judeo-Arabic by A. D. Ezekiel, a Jewish theosophist, was banned by rabbinic authorities; in the 1920s, the Jewish theosophists

[97] On the 1932 meeting between the New York Jewish theosophists and R. Yehuda Hayyim Auerbach, the head of one of the leading kabbalistic *yeshivot* in Jerusalem, see Huss, "Qabbalah, the Theos-sophia of the Jews," 152. In the early 1930s, the Chortkov Hasidim of Vienna alleged that the anthroposophist and scholar of Jewish mysticism, Ernst Müller, clandestinely studied Kabbalah with their rebbe, R. Yisroel Friedman (1854–1934). S. Perlzohn, "Notitsen, mekubolim, mistiker, un zohar-forsher in Vien," *Lemberger togblat*, 9 January 1932, 4.

in Basra, Iraq were excommunicated by various rabbinic authorities.[98] In the interwar period, Jewish spiritualists in England were frequently assailed by local rabbis, who published sermons asserting that spiritualism was unfit for Jews.[99] Within the realm of academic scholarship, the interest of some Jewish scholars in occult currents was ignored, and at times belittled, by other scholars. Gershom Scholem criticized Ernst Müller's interest in Anthroposophy, and disparaged Oskar Goldberg. Müller's writings have only in recent years been subject to scholarly attention, and Moses Gaster's interest in occultism and spiritualism was likewise ignored by scholars until recently. Other Jewish authors, scholars, and rabbis who engaged with occultism have not yet received any scholarly attention. In light of all this, Jewish occultism may be aptly characterized as "rejected knowledge."

Apart from the interest of Jewish occultists in Kabbalah, many were also interested in other religious traditions, especially those identified at the turn of the century as spiritual or mystical. Bloch, the Anglo-Jewish spiritualist and theosophist, was interested in Sufism and published a book on the teaching of the India Sufi teacher Inayat Khan. Other Jewish occultists, such as Alfassa, S. S. Cohen (1895-1980), Paul Brenton (1898–1981), Almi, Lewis, Schaya, John Levy, and Bergmann were also interested in Buddhism, Hinduism, and Sufism, and some of them played leading roles in the formation and propagation of modern Hindu, Buddhist, and Sufi movements.[100]

Conclusion: The Significance of Jewish Occultism

This preliminary survey of modern Jewish occultism reveals the great breadth of Jewish engagement with occult currents during the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries. Across the world, Jews from a range of communities and denominations became interested in esoteric doctrines and practices; many joined occult

[98] Huss, "To Study Judaism in Light of Theosophy," 263-265.

[99] Glauber-Zimra and Huss, "No Religion Could be More Spiritual than Ours."

[100] Fenton, "Les judéo-soufis de Lausanne," 283–313; Mark Sedgwick, *Western Sufism: From the Abbasids to the New Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 225–31; Boaz Huss, "'A Jew Living in an Ashram:' The Spiritual Itinerary of S.S. Cohen," *The Journal of Indo-Judaic Studies* 15 (2017): 21–29; Emily Sigalow, *American JewBu: Jews, Buddhists, and Religious Change*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).

movements, sometimes playing leading roles in them. Apart from those Jews who actively joined occult organizations, a far greater number of Jews were exposed to occult ideas and practices through lectures, books, and articles published in both the general and Jewish press. Future studies will no doubt reveal further evidence of Jewish involvement in occult movements and broader engagement with occult ideas and practices. Additional research will enable us to map the transnational networks of modern Jewish occultists, better comprehend the unique characteristics of Jewish occultism, and deepen our understanding of the social and cultural contexts that spurred Jewish involvement in occult and alternative spiritual movements.

Jewish occultism had a considerable impact on both modern occult and Western esoteric currents and Jewish thought and culture. As we have seen, leading occultists, such as Max Theon, Mira Alfassa, Paul Brunton, Leo Schaya, and Roberto Assagioli, were of Jewish origins, and many other Jews active in occult movements wrote and spoke on esoteric topics. In certain cases, Jewish occultists introduced Jewish sources to other members of occult movements; integrating Jewish themes with esoteric doctrines, they offered Jewish perspectives on occult topics. Few studies thus far have studied the contribution of Jews to modern occultism, and further research is required to fully assess the impact of Jewish occultists on modern esoteric and alternative spiritual currents.

Jewish occultism also had a significant, albeit understudied, influence on modern Jewish thought and culture. Leading Jewish thinkers and writers such as Hillel Zeitlin, Shmuel Hugo Bergmann, Franz Kafka, Isaac Bashevis Singer, and many others engaged with occult ideas and practices. Occult currents became integrated within Jewish popular culture in Eastern Europe, yielding a new Jewish occulture enmeshed in the folkways of modern Jewish culture. Jewish occultism also had a considerable impact on the academic study of Kabbalah and Hasidism. Scholars of Jewish studies such as Adolf Frank, Moses Gaster, Joshua Abelson, and Ernst Müller were affiliated with occult movements, and their engagement with occult currents influenced their scholarly investigations of Kabbalah. Although Gershom Scholem, the founder of the academic study of Jewish mysticism, largely disparaged modern occult movements, his understanding of Kabbalah was considerably influenced by early modern forms of Western esotericism and he shared fundamental

assumptions with many contemporary Jewish occultists.[101] Lastly, traces of occultism are found throughout turn of the century rabbinic literature. Occult phenomena were frequently cited by rabbinic writers who viewed them as empirical proofs of traditional Jewish religious truth claims, even if they did not always condone engagement with occult practices. With that said, future studies promise to shed further light on the place of occultism in modern Jewish thought and culture.

Finally, it should be noted that many Jewish occultists were politically engaged and integrated social and political concerns within their esoteric activities. Many of the Jewish theosophists in South Africa supported Gandhi and his political activities there as well as subsequently in India.[102] The Jewish theosophist Salvatore Attal (a.k.a Soter, 1877–1967), the secretary of the Jewish Theosophical lodge in Livorno, was among the Jewish supporters of the Italian Fascist party.[103] Other Jewish occultists, including Imber, Gaster, Bergmann, and others, were involved in Zionist activities, and the Association of Hebrew Theosophists endorsed the Zionist cause. Both Jewish theosophists and anthroposophists who immigrated to Mandate Palestine were involved in Jewish-Arab reconciliation projects, and several Jewish occultists were noted pacifists. Many Jewish occultists were involved in other social movements, as well, including the fight for women's rights, vegetarianism, and various other social justice movements. More research is required to reveal the full impact of occultism on Jewish social and political activism.

In conclusion, the framework of Jewish occultism challenges several conventions of modern Jewish historiography. First, Jewish occultism introduces a new subject of study within the academic study of Jewish thought, and the subfield commonly designated as Jewish mysticism. The study of Jewish occultism enlarges the scope of research of modern Jewish thought, and at the same time challenges assumptions embedded in the category of Jewish mysticism that prevented the study of Jewish occultism and occultist forms of modern Kabbalah.[104] Second, Jewish life at the turn of the century is

101 Huss, "Academic Study of Kabbalah and Occultist Kabbalah," 121–27.

102 Chatterjee, *Gandhi and his Jewish Friends*; Lev, *Soulmates*; idem, "Gandhi and his Jewish Theosophist Supporters."

103 Anne-Marie Baron, *Salvatore Attal, Ésotérisme Biblique* (Paris: L'Âge d'homme, 2015), 11–34.

104 Boaz Huss, *Mystifying Kabbalah*, 102–23.

often viewed through the binary lens of religion and secularism. Jewish occultism, with its pursuit of metaphysics unencumbered by the obligatory framework of Jewish law, complicates prevalent notions of a sharp binary between traditional religious belief and secularism. Third, the history of Jewish occultism uncovers the prewar roots of the Jewish New Age revival that has flourished in the State of Israel and the diaspora from the 1960s to our day. The study of modern Jewish occultism stands to challenge prevailing conceptions of Jewish modernity and secularization, while offering new research paradigms for the historical study of Judaism and Western esotericism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

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