

The Sabbatian Posture of German Jewry

Elisheva Carlebach

ואף גם זאת בהיותם בארץ איביהם לא מאסתים ולא
געלתים לכלתם להפר בריתי אתם כי אני ה' אלהיהם
(ויקרא כו 44)

And yet for all that, when they are in the
lands of their enemies, I will not reject
them nor will I abhor them to destroy
them utterly, and to break My covenant
with them, for I am the Lord their God
(Leviticus 26:44)¹

This 'pasuk neḥama' was one of several verses of consolation cited in the great medieval anti-Christian polemical compilation, *Nizzahon Yashan*.² Seventeenth century memoirist Glikl of Hameln cited it as one of the several verses of consolation in the wake of her report on the disillusionment over the failed messianic movement of Sabbatai Zevi.³ It formed part of the arsenal of consolatory material routinely used by Ashkenazic Jews in the wake of messianic disappointment.

By the time Glikl used this passage, it had acquired a defiant connotation. It had come to signify the Jewish explanation for a seemingly irrational hope in the face of persistent and pointed mockery. Christians, and Jews who had converted to Christianity, ridiculed the passage as 'goldene Affe' (the gilded ape), a play on the Hebrew word

* I thank audiences at the University of Scranton, the Hebrew University, the Institut für Jüdische Geschichte, Hamburg, and Touro College, New York, where I delivered different versions of this lecture, for their questions and comments. Some portions of this lecture may be published in other proceedings.

1 *JPS Bible*, Philadelphia 1951.

2 *The Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages: A Critical Edition of the Nizzahon Vetus*, ed. and tr. D. Berger, Philadelphia 1979, p. 227, parag. 242.

3 *The Memoirs of Glückel of Hameln*, tr. M. Lowenthal, New York 1977, p. 197.

've-af' that opens the passage, with reference to the demonic nature of these Jewish hopes. One of the earliest mockeries of this passage appears in sixteenth century convert Antonius Margaritha's *Der gantz Jüdisch Glaub* (The Entire Jewish Faith).⁴ Son and grandson of rabbinic luminaries of fifteenth century Ashkenaz, Margaritha devoted his *magnum opus* to revealing Jewish traditions to the Christian world in the most derisive and contemptuous light. No belief of the Jews provided better grist for the mill of Margaritha, his precursors, and emulators, than the Jewish belief in the messiah yet to come.

For medieval Christians, the messianic prophecies had been fulfilled long ago in the person of their redeemer. The long duration of Jewish hopes in a future messiah was explained as the result of innate Jewish obstinacy, spiritual blindness, and even a sign that the devil had vanquished their reason. German folk-tradition often represented the devil or evil spirits in the form of an ape, an accursed and inverse image of man.⁵ By referring to their cherished hope in this particular form, 'the golden ape', Christians were taunting a belief that went to the very heart of the Jewish-Christian divide.⁶

This interplay between Jewish sustenance and Christian mockery of Jewish messianic hopes is emblematic of the tension which existed for Jews living in the Christian world. It was a theme of the great Spanish disputations, essentially staged polemics with predetermined outcomes. After Jews were expelled from most of Western Europe, the lit-

4 Antonius Margaritha, *Der gantz Jüdisch Glaub*, Augsburg 1530, p. 105a.

5 H. Bächtold-Staubli, *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens*, I, Berlin and New York 1987, pp. 206-207. For an iconographic example, see the apelike figure clutching the Antichrist as he is being put to death in the Anglo-Norman Apocalypse, ms. fr. 403, fol. 18r, BN, Paris, reproduced in R. Emmerson, *Antichrist in the Middle Ages*, Seattle 1981.

6 For other examples, see: C.L. Fels, *Weg-Weiser der Juden*, Frankfurt 1703, p. 83, who cited this passage as the greatest cause of Jewish stubbornness, since Jews use it as proof that God will lead them out of Edom. C.J. Friedenheim, *Yehudi me-ba-Hutz: das ist der äusserliche Jud in Ansehung ihres dermaligen vermeintlichen Gottesdienstes...*, Wirzburg 1785, p. 108, cited Mahari"l (R. Jacob Moellin, d. 1427) as the source of Jews' false consolation from that verse along with Deut. 30:1. He gloated that Mahari"l, who offered this solace, died 357 years earlier according to David Gans' *Zemah David*, 'and still your messiah hasn't come'. Gottfried Selig (*Der Jude*, 1772, 9:29) cited the passage as being 'of such worth that they call it the Golden Af, which designation refers to the time when the pious King Friedrich told them: The Jews have an ape ("Afen") in their holy Scriptures which they should inscribe in gold letters'. Selig linked this passage to the vain consolations among the Jews as they waited for their messiah.

erature of ridiculing Jewish hopes remained a live and widespread tradition in German and Italian lands where Jews continued to live. Many Spanish and Portuguese Jews settled in the Ottoman Empire which granted conditions that seemed magnanimous and tolerant by comparison with the Christian world. These two cultural worlds form the setting for the discussion of Jewish messianic posture to follow.

I

Classical Jewish scholarship has endowed the two preeminent Jewish cultural communities, the Ashkenazic (Jews whose predominant cultural influence in the medieval period was the Franco-German sphere) and the Sephardic (those whose primary cultural influence was the Spanish sphere) with distinctive messianic postures. In an essay written some thirty years ago, and published four times, distinguished scholar and historian Gerson Cohen mapped out an elegant and influential set of typologies. In the essay, 'Messianic Postures of Ashkenazim and Sephardim', Cohen characterized Ashkenazim as messianically quietistic, passive, with a penchant for martyrdom, and portrayed Sephardim as active, dynamic and revolutionary.⁷

It should be mentioned at the outset, parenthetically, that while Cohen never drew lines to the more contemporary resonances of his categories, notions of Jewish passivity and military activism as responses to persecution have taken on new meaning in this century. The pain filled polemics over Jewish responses during the Holocaust and the values of Zionism form a silent subtext to any discussion of Jewish activism and passivity.

Cohen's thesis was one of those far reaching programmatic statements that influenced all subsequent discussions of Jewish messianism.⁸

7 G. Cohen, 'Messianic Postures of Ashkenazim and Sephardim', Leo Baeck Memorial Lecture, 9 (1967); *Studies of the Leo Baeck Institute*, ed. M. Kreutzberger, New York 1967, pp. 117-156; *Studies in the Variety of Rabbinic Cultures*, Philadelphia 1991, pp. 271-298; and in: M. Saperstein (ed.), *Essential Papers on Messianic Movements and Personalities in Jewish History*, New York 1992, pp. 202-233. All subsequent references in this paper use the pagination of the latter edition. For other approaches, see: S. Sharot, *Messianism, Mysticism, and Magic: A Sociological Analysis of Jewish Religious Movements*, Chapel Hill 1982, esp. chs. 4, 7, and 8; M. Idel, 'Defusim shel Pe'ilot Go'elet bi-Ymei ha-Beinayim', in Z. Baras (ed.), *Meshiḥiyut ve-Eschatologia: Kovez Ma'amarim*, Jer usalem 1983, pp. 253-279.

8 Cohen's revisitation of the subject of Jewish messianism ('Messianism in Jewish

It added a new dimension to the cluster of cultural and historical characteristics commonly associated with the constructions Ashkenaz and Sepharad.⁹ Several of the categories that form the basis of Cohen's argument will require greater refinement if they are to be useful in approaching the question of Jewish messianism. These include the concepts active and passive, the definitions of popular and élite, and even the application of Sephardic and Ashkenazic as historical explanations rather than as cultural markers. I want to address each of these issues briefly before proceeding to a central problem in Cohen's thesis, the nature and limitations of the historical evidence.

To his description of Sephardic messianism, Cohen prefixed the adjective 'revolutionary' and even the startling expression, 'aggressive military action'. The Jews of Ashkenaz ostensibly provide the starkest contrast to this heroic and active profile. 'Quiescence and passivity had somehow so permeated the whole mentality of that community [Franco-German Jewry] as virtually to eliminate such aggressive behavior'.¹⁰ In Ashkenaz, from the date of Palestine's downfall through the seventeenth century, violent apocalypse replaced action, sublimated it; 'These attitude and posture were doubtless conveyed to all parts of the Diaspora over which the academies of the Holy Land exer-

History: The Myth and the Reality', *Jewish History and Jewish Destiny*, New York and Jerusalem 1997, pp. 183-212) was not a scholarly presentation and not nearly as influential. It presented a sweeping and dismissive re-evaluation of his earlier essay as well as the entire historical enterprise that has accepted Jewish messianism as an active reality.

9 The influence of these typologies has penetrated deeply. See most recently: S. Eidelberg, 'Gilgulav shel ha-Ra'ayon ha-Meshihi bein Yehudei Germania', in: S. Nash (ed.), *Bein Historia le-Sifrut: Sefer Yovel le-Yizhak Barzilai*, Tel Aviv 1997, p. 25: 'It is well known that in the history of Jews in medieval Germany there are not to be found appearances of redeemers and messiahs'. The controversial essay by I.J. Yuval, 'Ha-Nakam ve-ha-Kelalah, ha-Dam ve-ha-'Alilah', *Zion*, 58 (1993), pp. 33-90, took Cohen's essay as its point of departure, see esp. pp. 33, 59. A statement concerning a work from the medieval Judeo-Arabic world by historian M.R. Cohen, *Under Crescent and Cross: The Jews in the Middle Ages*, Princeton 1994, is another example of how deeply the typology has penetrated: 'The anecdotes are replete with depictions of classic, Ashkenazic-like responses to suffering: fasting, prayer, and chronicling of events for posterity' (p. 188), as though these 'passive' reactions to suffering were not universal human, as well as Jewish, reactions to suffering. But see the more nuanced approach suggested by Saperstein, in his introduction to *Essential Papers on Messianic Movements* (above note 7).

10 Cohen, *ibid.*, p. 219.

cised influence'.¹¹ According to Cohen's construction, the Jews of Ashkenaz embroidered on the myth of the messiah by generating literary apocalypses while those of Sepharad initiated genuinely apocalyptic messianic movements. In fact, the clash or disintegration of great empires always generated messianic activity among Jews both in the Muslim and the Christian worlds.

Messianic movements were recorded from the late fifth and sixth centuries, all apparently in anticipation of a confrontation between the Byzantine and Persian Empires. One occurred in Crete and three in Palestine, among the Samaritans. But even if we begin our discussion with the messianic figures that arose within the world of Islam, we may ask whether there was even one Jewish medieval messianic movement which can legitimately be characterized as an aggressive, *bona fide* 'military' movement. The movements which were so valorized in the influential essay by Cohen were disorganized, unarmed, often led by deluded visionaries. Cohen himself acknowledged this in a later essay.¹²

Cohen constructed an opposition between messianism and martyrdom: the first symbolizing active rebellion against history, the latter passive resignation.¹³ Martyrdom was never alien to the Sephardic world, nor messianism to the Ashkenazic, and neither accounted martyrdom as an expression of passivity.¹⁴ As the Jewish crusade chronicles graphically depicted, martyrdom was a last resort when every other

11 *Ibid.*, p. 221.

12 See the excellent discussion of 'The Jewish Messiahs of Early Islam', in S.M. Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew: The Problem of Symbiosis in Early Islam*, Princeton 1995, pp. 47-89. The most active and popular of these Jewish 'uprisings' at its most militantly confrontational moment, was described as follows: 'They claimed that when he was embattled he made a line around his followers with a myrtle stick, saying, "Stay behind this line and no enemy will reach you with weapons". [...] then Abu Isa went beyond that line, alone and on horseback, and fought and killed many Muslims [...] When he fought against the followers of Mansur at Rayy, he and his companions were killed' (p. 76). Cohen's characterization, see above note 8, p. 197.

13 See: G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, New York 1973, pp. 87-89; J. Dan, 'Gershom Scholem and Jewish Messianism', in: P. Mendes-Flohr (ed.), *Gershom Scholem: The Man and His Work*, New York 1994, pp. 75-78. Nineteenth century Jewish historiography tended to link mysticism and messianism as forcible eruptions into the generally rational Jewish psyche under extreme catastrophic pressure.

14 On typologies of Sephardic martyrdom, see most recently M. Bodian, 'Ha-^{al}Aliya al ha-Moked shel Nozerim Ḥadashim be-Einei Benei ha-Umah ha-Portugalit', *P'eamim*, 75 (1998), pp. 47-62.

active form of resistance had failed. Yet in his description of Ashkenazic death at the hands of Christians, Cohen writes of a passive martyrdom which simply does not accord with any remaining accounts. For example, while Cohen agreed that during the Chmielnicki pogroms in Poland, Jews had no choices because the Cossacks were determined to kill them all, they elected 'to die passively' at the hands of their attackers.¹⁵

Cohen linked the question of activism and pacifism to that of élite vs. popular messianic movements. In this construction, Ashkenazic quietism is 'rabbinic, élite', while Sephardic activism is 'popular'. The grand role in Jewish messianism of Sephardic rabbinic conservatism, from the *Geonim* to Maimonides through Jacob Sasportas simply did not enter into Cohen's neat typology.¹⁶ In the Sephardic communities of Geonic Babylonia and of medieval Spain, home to great Jewish population concentrations, messianic movements often took on anti-establishment, anti-rabbinic character. In Ashkenaz, movements with a messianic character were often led by the élite, the rabbis themselves, and so were of a more profound and thoroughgoing nature. In classical Ashkenazic culture, the practice of the God-fearing community carried the same weight as a sacred rabbinic text. When the rabbinic teachers, the tosafists, found contradictions between a text of the Talmud and the practice of the community, the Talmud was reinterpreted.¹⁷ In such communities, can it be as relevant to talk of anti-rabbinic animus as in Geonic Babylonia? In the smaller communities of medieval Ashkenaz there was a completely different communal configuration which gave rise to different conceptions of leadership which have little bearing on messianic postures.¹⁸

- 15 Cohen, p. 224. Emphasis on this phrase, the sole passage Cohen chose to emphasize in the original.
- 16 J.L. Kraemer, 'On Maimonides' Messianic Postures', in: I. Twersky (ed.), *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature*, II, Cambridge, Mass. 1984, pp. 109-142; D. Berger, 'Al Toze'oteha ha-Ironiyot shel Gishato ha-Razionalistit shel ha-Rambam la-Tekufah ha-Meshihit', in: A. Hyman (ed.), *Maimonidean Studies*, II, New York 1991, pp. 1-8.
- 17 H. Soloveitchik, 'Religious Law and Change: The Medieval Ashkenazic Example', *AJS Review*, 12 (1987), pp. 205-222.
- 18 On the contrast between the conception of Thomas Carlyle that history is the biography of great men and of Plekhanov who saw the great men as puppets acting out the will of the people, see: I. Malkin and Z. Tzahor, Intro., *Leaders and Leadership in Jewish and World History*, Jerusalem 1992 (Hebrew), p. 7. In the analysis of narrative in Ashkenaz and Sepharad, Sara Zfatman, *The Jewish Tale in the Middle Ages: Between Ashkenaz and Sepharad*, Jerusalem 1993, pp. 150-152, demonstrated that in Ashkenazic stories, the heroes are of the community,

The assumption that each 'Jewry', defined monolithically, must be aligned with a particular messianic typology, obscures the complexities of class, geography, and communal structure. The movements on the fringes of seventh century Persia were so different from the rarefied atmosphere of the rational courtiers of Andalusia and their mathematical messianic calculations, as to arouse questions concerning the usefulness of the rubric Sephardic for both. Differences in liturgy are not valid categories of historical causality.

Even the use of the cultural paradigms Ashkenaz and Sepharad as indicators of sweeping historical postures can be questioned. Imported from the world of custom and liturgy, 'nusakh' and 'minhag', Cohen argued that 'What was true of halakhah, philosophy, liturgy, poetry and Hebrew style had its counterpart in messianic posture and expression as well'.¹⁹ The constructs Ashkenaz-Sepharad as two absolutely distinct cultural-geographic units is constantly being reassessed. The cultural boundaries were not nearly as impermeable as was once thought. Mutual cultural influences, although they took time to interpenetrate, often affected the very core of what we perceive as Ashkenazic or Sephardic.²⁰ Certain regions, such as Provence and parts of Italy, served as centers of continuous cultural overlap.²¹ The two earliest anti-Christian polemics to be written in Christian countries – 'Milḥamot ha-Shem' by

relying on traditions of their forefathers; in Sephardic stories, they are outside the community and rely on their own talents.

19 Cohen, 1992 (above note 7), p. 204.

20 The entire issue of *Pe'amim* 57 (Autumn 1993) was devoted to this theme. For another general discussion of the pervasive myth that there was little cultural contact between the two spheres, see: Zfatman (above note 18), particularly pp. 128-129. For some specific examples, see: S. Assaf, 'Ḥalifat She'elot u-Teshuvot bein Sepharad u-vein Ashkenaz ve-Zarefat', *Tarbiz*, 8 (1936-37), pp. 162-171; A. Grossman, 'Bein Sefarad le-Zarefat', *Exile and Diaspora: Studies in the History of the Jewish People Presented to Professor Haim Beinart on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday*, Jerusalem 1988, pp. 75-101 (in Hebrew); idem, 'Zikata shel Yahadut Ashkenaz ha-Keduma el Eretz Yisrael', *Shalem*, 3 (1981), pp. 57-92; Y.M. Ta-Shma, *Ha-Nigleh she-ba-Nistar: Le-Ḥeker Shek'ei ha-Halakhah be-Sefer ha-Zohar*, Tel-Aviv 1995, pp. 19-40 on the Ashkenazic elements in the Zohar. For a modern manifestation, see I. Schorsch, 'The Myth of Sephardic Supremacy', *Yearbook of Leo Baeck Institute*, 34 (1989), pp. 35-47.

21 For example, see M. Perani, 'The Italian Genizah: Hebrew Manuscript Fragments in Italian Archives and Libraries', *Jewish Studies*, 34 (1994), p. 49. Fragments from books produced in Germany-Austria tended to remain in that location; fragments of Iberian works, in Iberia. In Italy, both Ashkenazic, Sephardic, and Italian materials were to be found.

Jacob b. Reuben and 'Book of the Covenant' by Yosef Kimḥi – were written by refugees from Muslim Spain – critiques of Christianity developed within Islamic context.²² In the sixteenth century, Josel of Rosheim, representative of German Jewry in the Empire, wrote a moralistic work which was a close paraphrase of the recently published work by Sephardic thinker Abraham b. Shem Tov Bibago, 'Derekh Emunah'.²³ R. Yair Hayyim Bacharach recalled a tradition that Sephardic philosophical classics were studied in the yeshivot of Ashkenaz.²⁴ In the wake of the expulsions from Spain and Portugal of 1492/7, figures like Eliezer Ashkenazi traversed both worlds and helped to diffuse messianic dates, calculations, and ideas, so that hopes for deliverance among Spanish Jews mingled with those of Italian and German Jews.²⁵ Factors such as demography, geographic distribution and communal structure must be taken into account along with the rubrics Ashkenaz and Sepharad.

I want to turn to consideration of another aspect of the comparative dimension of Jewish messianism: the reporting, chronicling and commitment to collective memory of Jewish messianic episodes, and the role of such memory in the shaping of subsequent messianic activities.²⁶ Did Jewish societies record their memories in markedly different ways, depending on whether their milieu was Christian or Muslim? Historian Mark Cohen has argued that Jewish chroniclers in Christian lands tended to center on the memory of persecution so that it became the defining characteristic of their exilic experience, whereas Jewish chroniclers within Islamic lands tended to bury accounts of persecution of Jews, along with reports about the suffering of local Muslims and larger political events. It was the persistence and centrality of the memory of persecution, rather than the objective number and severity of the occur-

22 D. Lasker, 'Judeo-Christian Polemics and their Origins in Muslim Countries', *Pe'amim*, 57 (1993), pp. 5-16 (in Hebrew).

23 Iosephi de Rosheim, *Sefer ha-Miknah*, ed. and intro., H. Fraenkel-Goldschmidt, Jerusalem 1970, pp. 34-52. On this phenomenon see more generally M. Breuer, "'Sephardic Influence" in Ashkenaz in the Late Middle Ages and Early Modern Period', *Pe'amim*, 57 (1993), pp. 17-18.

24 H.H. Ben-Sasson, 'Jewish-Christian Disputation in the Setting of Humanism and Reformation in the German Empire', *Harvard Theological Review*, 59 (1966), p. 371.

25 H.H. Ben-Sasson, 'The Reformation in Contemporary Jewish Eyes', *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities*, 4 (1971), pp. 241-326.

26 See: M. Idel, Introduction to A.Z. Aescoly, *Ha-Tenu'ot ha-Meshihiyot be-Yisrael*, Jerusalem 1987, p. 23.

rences that appears to have generated the noted 'lachrymose conception of Jewish history' among Jews in medieval Christian lands.²⁷ Emphasis on memories of suffering as the defining marker of existence among the nations in exile may have conditioned Jews living among Christians to see the messianic denouement as entirely transcending the prevailing order. It would have to contain decisive vengeance against these hideous oppressors.²⁸ A recent study of the transformation of one sixteenth century historiographical text, the *Shevet Yehudah*, as it passed from its original Sephardic milieu to Ashkenazic readers, exemplifies brilliantly the process of cultural and literal translation that reshaped its message.²⁹ Theologically sensitive material was simply edited out and chapters depicting conversion to Christianity, a central experience of Spanish and Portuguese Jews in the early modern period, were excised. While such an explicit and specific example of editorial reinvention may be more difficult to locate for other cases, it provides a vivid reminder of the constant process of revision and editing that rendered collective memories suitable for their intended milieu.

II

A comparison of the way Ashkenazic Jews recorded and remembered expressions of Jewish messianism within the Christian milieu, with memories among Sephardic Jews of those same events, demonstrates that there was a sharp division in the way each cultural cluster transmitted memories of messianic activism. If we juxtapose the historiographical treatment of two central messianic movements in the sixteenth century, a time in which there was both a relatively rich historiography, and considerable messianic activity, this discrepancy becomes conspicuous.³⁰ In the discussion which follows, I am not primarily concerned with sifting the actual historical details of the

27 Cohen (above note 9), pp. 186-199.

28 Yuval (above note 9), pp. 34-55.

29 M. Stanislawski, 'The Yiddish *Shevet Yehudah*: A Study in the "Ashkenization" of a Spanish-Jewish Classic', in E. Carlebach, J. Efron and D. Myers (eds.), *Jewish History and Jewish Memory*, Hanover, NH 1998, pp. 134-149.

30 It seems to me that Cohen's contention in 'Messianism in Jewish History' (above note 8), that sixteenth-century messianism differed radically from its predecessors is tendentious, if the criterion is open political activism. There was no great difference between the realism of Abulafia, Reubeni and Sabbatai Zevi. For a more accurate typology of medieval Jewish messianic-mystical activism, see: Idel (above note 7).

movements, and have uncovered no new sources. I am interested here in the subsequent memory of the events as they were preserved by the respective Jewish chroniclers.

The first Jewish messianic movement of the sixteenth century came at the very beginning of that century, when a Jew of German descent, Asher Lemlein of Reutlingen, appeared in Istria, near Venice. Reports concerning the details of his messianic activities differ. Most agree that at the very least, he announced tidings of the messiah.³¹ Renaissance Italian Jew Abraham Farissol was an eyewitness to the movement of Lemlein. He described Lemlein as an 'Ashkenazi who had pretensions, saying, "I will rule". With his little wisdom and the few actions that he undertook, and with the mediation of his disciples, he misled the entire region, concerning the coming of the redeemer, and he let it be heard that he [the redeemer] had already come'. Farissol also mentioned the intense movement of penitence that Lemlein's movement had inspired.³²

Among Ashkenazim, the movement was recorded in the historical chronicle of David Gans, *Zemah David*, published in Prague in the late sixteenth century:

Rabbi Lemmlen announced the advent of the messiah in the year 1500/1, and his words were credited throughout the dispersion of Israel. Even among the Gentiles, the news spread and many of them also believed his words. My grandfather Seligman Gans z"l smashed the special oven in which he baked matzzot, being firmly convinced that the next year, he would bake matzzot in the Holy Land. And I, the writer, heard from my old teacher, R. Eliezer Trivash, head of the *Bet din* in Frankfurt, that the matter was not without basis, and that he had shown signs and proofs, but that perhaps because of our sins he [the messiah] was delayed.³³

31 For Lemlein's writings, see: E. Kupfer, 'Hezyonotav shel R. Asher b. R. Meir ha-Mekhuneh Lemlein Reutlingen', *Kobez al Yad*, vol. 8, no. 18 (1975), pp. 385-423; D. Tamar, 'On R. Asher Lemlein', *Zion*, 52 (1987), pp. 399-401. For further background, see: S. Krauss, 'Le roi de France Charles VII et les espérances messianiques', *Revue des études juives*, 51 (1906), pp. 87-96, esp. 94.

32 Aescoly, *Ha-Tenu'ot ha-Meshihiyot*, p. 329. Farissol dated Lemlein's movement to 1502. See: D. Ruderman, *The World of a Renaissance Jew: The Life and Thought of Abraham ben Mordecai Farissol*, Cincinnati 1981, pp. 138, 200 note 38.

33 David Gans, *Zemah David*, ed. M. Breuer, Jerusalem 1983, pp. 137, #1530. Cf. the translation in A. H. Silver, *A History of Messianic Speculation in Israel: from the First through the Seventeenth Centuries*, Gloucester, Mass. 1978 [1927], p. 144.

Several points in Gans' account are worth noting. First, that Gans characterized Lemlein as a herald of the messiah, not as the messiah. Second, that Gans described in personal and poignant terms the very profound reaction to this messianic tiding within both popular circles – his grandfather the matzah baker – as well as among the scholarly élite – his rabbi. Clearly, this movement struck very deep chords among Ashkenazic Jews who heard the tidings.

An anonymous chronicle from Prague in the early seventeenth century contains this entry for 1502: 'News came of the messianic king, causing massive repentance among the many communities of Israel'.³⁴ In this report Lemlein was apparently remembered as a messianic figure. He stimulated a very widespread penitential reaction, although the entry is so terse that the meaning of the phrase 'news came' is obscure.

If we turn to Sephardic chroniclers of this event, a more painful perspective emerges. In his *Shalshelet ha-Kabbalah* (Chain of Tradition), published in Italy in the late sixteenth century, Gedaliah ibn Yaḥya reported: 'When the man [Lemlein] died and the messiah had not come, it caused many conversions, because when the fools saw that the messiah hadn't arrived, they apostatized immediately'.³⁵

Significantly, this incident was not recorded by Ibn Yaḥya as an inherently interesting and important event. Rather, it was related as a highlight in the life of Daniel Bomberg, the Christian printer of early Hebrew books. Chronicler Yoseph Ha-Kohen similarly had no kind words to spare for the 'Ashkenazi, an evil prophet, a confused man of spirit', to whom the Jews streamed, saying, 'God has sent him to rule over his people Israel, he will gather in the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth'.³⁶

34 A. David (ed.), *A Hebrew Chronicle from Prague c. 1615*, tr. L.J. Weinberger with D. Ordan, Tuscaloosa 1993, p. 24.

35 Ibn Yaḥya was born to a Portuguese refugee family that had settled in Italy. On his historiography, see: A. David, 'R. Gedalya ibn Yaḥya's *Shalshelet Hakabbalah* [Chain of Tradition]: A Chapter in Medieval Jewish History', *Immanuel*, 12 (1980), pp. 60-75; idem, 'The Spanish Expulsion and the Portuguese Persecution through the Eyes of the Historian R. Gedalya ibn Yaḥya', *Sefarad*, 56 (1996), pp. 45-59. 'ימות האיש ולא בא משיח וגלגל המרות גדולות כי בראות הפתאים שמשיח לא בא מיד המירו'. cited in Silver (above note 33), note 144.

36 Joseph ha-Kohen, *Sefer Emeq ha-Bakhah*, ed. K. Almladh, Uppsala 1981, pp. 67-68: 'יהי בימים ההם ויקם באיסטריאה אשר אצל ויניציאה איש יהודי אשכנזי אחד לימלין שמו אויל הנביא משוגע איש הרחוק ונהרו אליו היהודים ויאמרו אך נביא הוא כי ה' שלחנהו לנגיד על עמו ישראל ונפרצות יהודה יקבץ מארבע כנפות הארץ וגם החכמים נטו אחריו ויגורו צומות ויחרו שקים וישובו איש מדרכו הרעה בעת ההיא כי אמרו קרובה ישועתנו לבא וה' בעתה יחישנה'

The seventeenth century chronicler, Yosef Sambari, characterized Lemlein as an 'Ashkenazi who proclaimed himself a prophet'.³⁷ Sambari recorded:

Many of the élite, leaders and sages of Israel, tended to follow him; he imposed upon them fast days and penances but they did not obey him. Many of the sinners of Israel [apostates] repented of their evil ways, but they were immersed in mighty waters and came up empty handed, as a result of sins, as occurred in our own day, as a result of sins.³⁸

Sambari too mentioned the episode of Lemlein in the context of the Sabbatian messianic movement of his own times, rather than an inherently significant event. Lemlein is the only Ashkenazic messianic figure to appear in Sambari.

Both ibn Yahia and Sambari linked the failure of messianic movement to its polemical consequences within the Christian context, particularly the conversions to Christianity in its wake. Both Ashkenazic chroniclers were careful to avoid mentioning this aspect. Sambari noted the power of the movement to temporarily reverse the course of recent converts from Judaism to Christianity. When the movement failed, many more converted to Christianity. Sambari hinted to voices of resistance to Lemlein's message during the height of the movement.

Reactions to Lemlein reverberated beyond the Jewish community. Johannes Pfefferkorn, notorious convert to Christianity, recalled the strife among the Jews of Halle in the wake of the Jewish Messiah 'Lemmel' and urged the Jews in his *Speculum adhortationis iudaice ad Christum* (*Mirror of exhortation of Jews to Christianity*) to recognize the true messiahship of Christ. He noted that 'we' Jews were often swindled, and played the incident to the greatest polemical advantage.³⁹

37 Yosef Sambari, *Sefer Divrei Yosef*, ed. Shimon Shtober, Jerusalem 1994, pp. 266-267; Joseph ha-Kohen, *Sefer Divrei ha-Yamim le-Malkhei Zarfai u-Malkhei beit Ottoman ha-Tugar*, Sabionetta 1554, p. 123b; Gedaliah ibn Yahya, *Shalshet ha-Kabbalah*, Venice 1587, 45a-b: 'אשכנזי שעשה עצמו נביא'

38 'רבים מאצילי וקציניי וחכמי ישראל נטו אחריו והשיגה ידו לגזור עליהם צומות והפסקות ולא סרו אל משמעתו. אמנם רבים מפושעי בני ישראל שבו איש מדרכו הרעה ומן החמס אשר בכפיהם ואח"כ צללו במים אדירים והעלו חרס בידם בעוונות כמו שאירע בזמן הזה בעוונות' conversions that occurred following the collapse of Sabbatai Zevi's movement.

39 'Och wie iemerliche wir bedrogen sind'. H. M. Kirn, *Das Bild vom Juden in Deutschland des frühen 16. Jahrhunderts dargestellt an den Schriften Johannes Pfefferkorns*, Tübingen 1989, p. 30, note 68.

Sebastian Münster, Christian Hebraist and disciple of Elijah Levita, had the Christians say in 'Ha-Vikuaḥ', his polemical dialogue:

And it happened in the year 1502 that the Jews did penance in all their dwelling places and in all the lands of exile in order that the messiah might come. Almost a whole year, young and old, children and women did penance in those days, the like of which had never been seen before. And in spite of it all there appeared neither sign nor vestige, not to speak of the reality itself.

For how did that repentance of 1502 help you, when all Jews in their habitations and places in exile [...] young and old, infants and women, repented as never before and nothing was revealed to you[.] [The result was] You Jews [too] see and understand that your rabbis are confused and wrong.⁴⁰

Johannes a Lent, author of the seventeenth century 'list' that was to become the canonical reference work on Jewish false messiahs, devoted a very substantial section to Lemlein, exceeding all prior descriptions of the movement in length.⁴¹ It consisted of several reports by Jewish (Ganz and ibn Yaḥya), non Jewish (Genebrardus), and convert (Isaac Levita) sources, along with Lent's introduction and translations from the Hebrew. In both Lent's introduction to the section, as well as in the excerpts from Genebrardus and Levita, Lemlein is described as a

40 'Potissimum autem id fecerunt anno mundi q-n quies millesimo ducesimo sexagesimosecundo, qui fuit annus Christi 1502. quando omnes Iudaei fecerunt publicam poenitentiam per omnes habitationes suas, in omnibus terris & per totam captivitatem, [...] fere, per integrum annum, tam pueri quam senes, per uuli & mulieres, qualis poenitentia nunquam retroactis seculis audita est: eam autem fecerunt pro adventu Meschiae. Sed omnia frustra. Nihil enim est eis revelatum, necque signum ullum aut ullus nutus, (45) ut taceam maius quippiam. Et certe res ista est miraculum magnum, sibilus oris & complosio manuum apud cunctos qui id audiunt, quod nihil illis suffragatur, non lex, non poenitentia, non oratio neque ulla eleemosyna, quae omnia per singulos faciunt dies'. Sebastian Münster, *Messias Christianorum et Iudaeorum Hebraice et Latine [Messiah of the Christians and Jews]*, Basel 1539, pp. 44-45. I thank Professor Stephen Burnett for sending this excerpt, and for sharing with me his article, 'A Dialogue of the Deaf: Hebrew Pedagogy and Anti-Jewish Polemic, Sebastian Münster's *Messiahs of the Christians and the Jews* (1529/39)', *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, 91 (2000), pp. 168-190. English translation see in Silver (above note 33), p. 145, note 141.

41 Johannes a Lent, *Schediasma Historico Philologicum de Iudaeorum Pseudo-Messias*, Herborna 1697.

messiah.⁴² The excerpt from the former Jew turned Christian is the most polemical, chiding the blind Jews for continuing to await a messiah in their sinful state.⁴³

Until the publication of Lemlein's own writings by Ephraim Kupfer, scholars Tishby, Aescoly, and Cohen⁴⁴ linked the movement of Lemlein to the expulsion from Spain, although there was not a shred of evidence for that assumption, and despite the fact that all the chroniclers emphasized that he was Ashkenazic. His own writings show him to have been something of a champion of Ashkenazic culture and contemptuous of the Sephardic, apparently in resentment of the newly arrived refugees from Spain that entered Italy.⁴⁵ The historiography of the movement thus differed considerably depending on who was doing the reporting.

It would be even more instructive to compare the reports by Ashkenazim and Sephardim of a messianically charged event that occurred within the fuller light of history. David Reubeni appeared in 1522 claiming to represent the Lost Tribes of Israel, with a scheme to liberate the Jews in the Diaspora.⁴⁶ Armed with an offer to provide an army against

42 Lent, *ibid.*, p. 70: 'se pro Messia venditavit Rabbi Lemlem Judaeus Germanus'. Genebrardus: 'Quidam Iudaeus nomine Lemlem, imposuit quibusdam (credo in Germania) se esse verum Christum, quem exspectabant'.

43 Aescoly, in a brief translation (*Ha-Tenu'ot ha-Meshihiyot*, p. 331), did not convey the full polemical sting of Levita's words. Levita translated Maimonides' epistle on astrology into Latin, and introduced the epistle with the following paragraph on Lemlein, probably because the epistle ended with the consideration of a report of a messianic movement among the Jews of Yemen. The relevant text of the epistle, see: *Iggerot ha-Rambam*, II, ed. Y. Shilat, Jerusalem 1988, p. 479: 'Tandem Lemlem Pseudo-messias, aliis propheta, periiit, nusquamque magis apparuit, cum antea conquestus esset, impenitentiam Iudaeorum adventum Messiae retardare. In de factum, ut omnes Iudaei Anno Christi 1502 in universa dispersione sua diligentissime poenitentiam agerent, per orationem, jejunium & Eleemosynas, ut adventum Messiae tam propinqui promoverent, sed nihil effecerunt. Non enim videntur coeci homines, Messiam sic nunquam venturum, quia peccare nunquam cessabunt. Vah, quam magnifica spe vos frustra toties implestis agnoscite vel tandem o miselli, cum ne ullo seculo non seducti estis, quod haec expectatio nimis sera sit. Adveniat Messias fatemur & forte in propinquo est, sed non ea ratione, qua vos persuasi estis. Sed de his plura in fine'.

44 Idel, Introduction to Aescoly, *Ha-Tenu'ot ha-Meshihiyot*, p. 23. According to Cohen (p. 206): 'The call of Asher Lemlein is an obscure and short-lived affair, which show[s] traces of Sephardic influence on the mind of an Ashkenazic Jew'.

45 See: Idel, *ibid.*

46 Ironically, the first Jewish historians to analyze the story of Reubeni, Neubauer and then Aescoly, thought he may have been of Ashkenazic descent. His origins

the Turks, he met with the Pope and with King John III of Portugal. In Portugal he attracted the attention of Diego Pires, a Marrano who circumcised himself and took the name Shlomo Molkho. In 1532 they travelled together to Regensburg to meet Emperor Charles V. Molkho was ultimately burned at the stake in Mantua; Reubeni met his end in a Spanish prison.⁴⁷

In addition to their own writing, or that produced by their camps, Reubeni and Molkho occupied center stage in several of the chronicles written by Sephardic Jews in the sixteenth century, particularly Joseph ha-Kohen and Gedaliah ibn Yahya. Joseph ha-Kohen reported: 'And a shoot went forth from Portugal, his name was Shlomo Molkho', a distinctly messianic introduction to Molkho within a lengthy account of Reubeni and Molkho's activities.⁴⁸ The seventeenth century chronicler Yosef Sambari of Egypt wove their accounts together and created one unified chronicle.⁴⁹ His account was far lengthier than any previous report of a failed messianic figure.⁵⁰ It begins with the story of Shlomo Molkho 'who proclaimed himself the messiah', and David 'Chief of staff for the messiah'. Sambari stated unambiguously from the beginning that Molkho was regarded as a messiah. Reubeni introduced holy names, flags and the shield of 'king David' intended for use to fight the wars of God. Since the Reubeni/Molkho adventure was widely known and recounted, those contemporaries who passed over it in silence or with very minimal notice must have chosen that path deliberately.

Molkho's sojourn in Regensburg in 1532, to request permission to draft Jews into his battle against the Turks, left a deep and lasting impression on the German Jews. Josel of Rosheim, spokesman for German Jewry in the first half of the sixteenth century, recorded in his chronicle: 'There came [to Regensburg] that speaker of a foreign tongue [lo'ez], the righteous convert called R. Shlomo Molka [sic], may he rest in peace, with alien doctrines [de'ot hizoniyot] to arouse the emperor by

are still unknown but that possibility seems unlikely. See the bibliography cited in A. Shohat, 'Le-Farshat David ha-Reuveni', *Zion*, 35 (1970), p. 96, note 1.

47 For sources on the messianic careers of Reubeni and Molkho, see: A.Z. Aescoly, *Sippur David ha-Reuveni*, Jer usalem 1993; idem, *Ha-Tenu'ot ha-Meshihiyot*, pp. 357-433.

48 *Emeq ha-Bakhah* (above note 36), pp. 71-73.

49 *Sefer Divrei Yosef* (above note 37), pp. 293-302.

50 Sambari's account of the Sabbatai Zevi period was excised from the manuscript in all extant copies. A later copyist inserted the Sabbatian section from Tobias Kohen's *Ma'aseh Tovia*, editio princeps Venice 1707, chapter 1, part 6.

saying that he had come to call all Jews to war against the Turks'.⁵¹ Josel then wrote that he had sent a letter imploring Molkho to desist from his plan; when that failed he left the city so as not to be associated by the Emperor with the schemes of Molkho.⁵² He concluded his entry by describing Molkho as having died the death of a martyr, and having caused many Jews to repent.⁵³

Josel's report is remarkable, both for what it contains as well as for what it omits. The word as well as the concept of messiah are totally absent from his account. He characterized Molkho as one who espoused alien doctrines; his activities consisted solely of his entreaty to the Emperor for a joint offensive against the Turks. There was no mention in Josel's account that he was regarded by many Jews as a messiah. The name David Reubeni, whom Josel surely heard of, even if he had not met him, was suppressed. Molkho's image in this source is that of an heretical fantasist, whose primary virtue resided in his martyrdom. If no other source had survived, we might never have known the messianic character of the movement.

Other aspects of Molkho's legacy, particularly his martyrdom, were preserved with great fidelity among Ashkenazim. R. Yom Tov Lipman Heller recalled: 'Here in the Pinkas synagogue in Prague, which I had frequented prior to my appointment as head of the Rabbinical court, there is a pair of *zizit* [fringed four cornered garments] exactly the color green as in an egg yolk. It was brought here from Regensburg, and it

51 H. Fraenkel-Goldschmidt (ed.), *Ketavim Historiyim: R. Yosef Ish Rosheim*, Jerusalem 1996, p. 296.

52 On Molkho's encounter in Regensburg, see: S. Eidelberg, 'Ha-'im Nitlaveh David ha-Reuveni le-Shelomo Molkho be-Masa'o le-Regensburg?' *Tarbiz*, 42 (1972-73), pp. 148-153. That Josel's fears were not baseless can be seen in an anti-Jewish edict of 1543, in which the 'deceitful calumnies and lies spread by the Jews against the true Messiah' were cited as justification by John Frederick, Elector of Saxony. S. Stern, *Josel of Rosheim: Commander of Jewry in the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation*, tr. G. Hirschler, Philadelphia 1965, p. 155.

53 Text from Fraenkel-Goldschmidt, *Josel of Rosheim*, p. 296: 'ובאותן הימים בא האיש לועז' גר צדק המכונה רבי שלמה מולקא נ"ע בדעת חיצוניות לעורר הקסר באומרו שבא לקבוץ כל היודים לצאת למלחמה נגד התגר וכשומעי מה שעלת' ברוחו כתבתי אגרת לפניו להזהירו שלא לעורר לב הקסר פן יאכלנו האש הגדולה. וסלקתי מן העיר רעגין שפורג כדי שלא יאמר הקסר ידי אתו במלאכתו דעות חזוניות ובבואו אל הקסר נתפס בכבלי ברזלות והוליכו עד עיר בלוגיניא שמה נשרף על קדוש השם דתות ישראל ורבי' הסיר מעון נשמתו צרור' בג"ע'. Most historians assume that 'the multitudes he removed from sin', referred to Marranos, perhaps those of Antwerp. But there is no reason to assume that Ashkenazic Jews were not also intended, given the messianic significance of the encounter with the emperor.

belonged to the martyr Shlomo Molkho, may God avenge his blood. Also two of his banners, and the caftan called kittel'.⁵⁴ Once again, there is no mention of messianic aspirations. David Gans recorded in 'Zemaḥ David':

R. Shlomo Molkho, righteous convert of the conversos of Portugal, was scribe of the king who converted in secret, and adhered to David Reubeni of the land of the Ten Tribes [...] This R. Shlomo, although he was lacking in Torah from his youth, became an expert in Torah. He preached in public in Italy and Turkey and wrote a kabbalistic work. I, the writer, have seen a copy of that work in the possession of the Gaon my kinsman, my cousin R. Nathan Horodna. (His son later became Rosh Yeshiva and Head of the Rabbinical Court in Worms [143] so the tradition may have travelled there.) R. Shlomo and his companion Reubeni had audiences with the King of France and Charles V, and they tried to direct their hearts to the Jewish faith, for which R. Shlomo was condemned to the flames in Mantua, 1532/3, and they put a harness in his mouth so that he was unable to say anything.⁵⁵

The word messiah or any overt references to a messianic mission are absent. Molkho had preached a sermon before an audience of both Jews and Christians in Mantua. References to Molkho's anti-Christian polemical words were reported as pro-Jewish proselytization.⁵⁶

The anonymous Prague chronicler of 1615 referred only to the rumors that were associated with the appearance of David Reubeni in the entry for 1523: 'News of saviors from beyond the Sambatyon River spread among all the lands, in addition to other messianic expectations'.⁵⁷ The chronicler did not mention Molkho's name or messianic activities either in the entry for 1523 or in any subsequent entries. The contrast between the laconic descriptions of the Ashkenazic chroniclers and the expansive versions of the Sephardim chroniclers is striking.

Christian Hebraist Johann Albert Widmanstadt, a contemporary,

54 Yom Tov Lipman Heller, *Divrei Ḥamudot*; commentary to *Halakhot Ketanot la-Ros"h*, *Hilkhot Zizit*, end of par. 25. Additional references in par. 48, 59. Eidelberg (above note 52), p. 150. On the synagogue known as the Pinkasschul, founded in 1535, see: H. Volavkova, *The Pinkas Synagogue*, Prague 1955.

55 Gans, *Zemaḥ David* (above note 33), p. 138, for the year 1533.

56 M. Idel, 'An Unknown Sermon of Shlomo Molkho's', in: *Exile and Diaspora* (above note 20), pp. 430-436 (in Hebrew).

57 David (above note 34), p. 27.

wrote: 'R. Solomon Molkho who prophesied that he himself was the messiah of the Jews, and was burned in Mantua in 1532, at the command of Charles V [...] wrote a book on Jewish kabbalah. I saw his banner in Ratisbon [Regensburg] in 1541, with the letters מִכְּבִי'.⁵⁸ In his catalogue of Jewish false messiahs, Johannes a Lent described the movement of Reubeni-Molkho as 'qui se pro messia constanter venditavit'.⁵⁹

Several patterns emerge from the examples of the two sixteenth century messianic movements of Lemlein and Reubeni-Molkho. Ashkenazim tended to be laconic in their record and description of these movements; they tended to minimize the messianic element within historical events or omit it altogether. It is no coincidence that Abravanel, a Sephardic Jew, recorded a messianic tradition among German Jews. 'There is a tradition among the Jews of Ashkenaz, that because the seat of the emperor is there, the messiah will come there [first]'.⁶⁰ Sephardic chroniclers of messianic movements tended to be less interested in Ashkenazic figures but they did not detract from the messianic character of events that came to their attention. For their own polemical reasons, Christians or converts to Christianity did preserve the messianic character of some of these same events. Fully aware of the polemical import of these movements, Christian lenses maximized what Ashkenazic memory minimized.⁶¹ Christian Hebraists included lists of Jewish false

58 'R. Salomonis Molchi, qui se Messiam Judaeorum esse praedicavit, atque Mantuae propter seditionis Hebraicae metum, Carolo V. Rom. Imp. pro vidente, concrematus fuit anno 1532, liber de Secreta Hebraeorum Theologia. Huius vexillum vidi Ratisbonae anno 1541 cum litteris מִכְּבִי'. Cited in M.H. Landauer, *Literaturblatt des Orients*, 27 (1845), p. 419. Landauer noted that an earlier bibliographer had mistakenly attributed a manuscript of Abraham Abulafia's to Molkho because the stories of their meetings with the Pope were similar, and the bibliographer had never heard of Abulafia. Hebrew translations of the text, see: Aescoly, *Ha-Tenu'ot ha-Meshihiyot*, p. 433; idem, *Sippur David ha-Reuveni*, pp. 190-191.

59 Johannes a Lent (above note 41), p. 72, parag. XI. Lent based his erroneous account, which dated the movement at 1534 and conflated the two figures, on Juan Luis Vives' *De Veritate fidei Christianae*, p. 491. Lent's indiscriminate use of inaccurate sources renders his book useless as history, but it is valuable as a Christian reading of Jewish messianism.

60 Isaac Abravanel, *Perush al Nevi'im Aharonim*, Jerusalem 1955, Commentary to Zechariah 1:16, 281 col. 4.

61 For examples of failed messianic movements linked with conversion of Jews, see: D. Ruderman, 'Hope against Hope: Jewish and Christian Messianic Expectations in the Late Middle Ages', in: idem (ed.), *Essential Papers on Jewish Culture in Renaissance and Baroque Italy*, New York 1992, p. 299; E. Carlebach,

messiahs in their descriptions of Jews and Judaism.⁶² This explains why it was that in Ashkenaz some Jewish messianic movements were preserved only in the memory of Christian chroniclers. From these observations it follows methodologically, then, that notices of messianic movements within Ashkenaz should be read in a manner that is sensitive to the context and aware of its likely distortions. Messianic movements in Ashkenaz that were remembered in an obscure manner must still be taken seriously.⁶³ It is not that Ashkenazim did not produce movements, but that they did not preserve their memory because of their greatly negative theological valence.

Historian David Berger has noted the theological import of messianism for Jews living among Christians. Medieval Jews living in Christian lands lived in a state of perpetual rejection of a false messiah, and may well have been more sensitive to claims of messianic pretenders.⁶⁴ The question of the messiah was not simply that of Israel's history having come to its teleological end sooner rather than later, through one agent rather than another. It was a matter of reading the entire post-Christian history of the Jews as a deliberate fraud. This one issue alone contained within it the power to validate the entire Christian claim, to undermine the entire rationale for existence of Jews and Judaism in the Christian mind.⁶⁵ It should come as no wonder that Jews and Christians would distort accounts of messianic activism accordingly.

'Sabbatianism and the Jewish-Christian Polemic', *Proceedings of the Tenth World Congress of Jewish Studies*, Division C, Vol. II: *Jewish Thought and Literature*, Jerusalem 1990, pp. 1-7; Y.F. Baer (*A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, II, Philadelphia 1961, pp. 277-281) reports on messianic movement in Castile in 1295 which shook the Jewish community to its foundations. The only surviving record is an apostate's derisive and polemical account mocking Jews for their false hopes.

- 62 The culmination of this listing was the monograph by Lent (above note 41).
- 63 Cohen ignored reports of movements in Ashkenaz which he regarded as obscure yet included movements in the Sephardic world for which sources were equally obscure, such as the Leon/Lyon movement of 1068. On that movement see: S.W. Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews (=ASRHI)*, V, New York 1957, p. 199.
- 64 D. Berger, 'Three Typological Themes in Early Jewish Messianism: Messiah Son of Joseph, Rabbinic Calculations, and the Figure of Armilus', *AJS Review*, vol. 10, no. 2 (1985), pp. 162-163, note 82. This comment was made with specific reference to Gerson Cohen's thesis.
- 65 J. M. Elukin, 'Jacques Basnage and the *History of the Jews*: Anti-Catholic Polemic and Historical Allegory in the Republic of Letters', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 53 (1992), pp. 603-630, esp. 621.

Cohen's rule of evidence disregarded all accounts of messianic movements that did not come from Jewish sources. By his decision not to 'reckon reports about Jewish messianic movements that are not attested by Jews, or obscure incidents', Cohen tipped the scales in favor of the religio-cultural sphere of Islamic influence.⁶⁶ Sephardim who followed a messianist, 'whatever the extent of their adherents', were to be counted; Ashkenazic sources with equally weak reverberations were dismissed for: weak reverberations. Yet the opposite methodological approach might be more justified in this case. Christian sources highlighted aspects of messianic movements that were inimical to Jewish polemical interests, but that does not mean the incidents they described were imagined. The records of messianic movements in Ashkenaz were so fragile and elusive, that the historian can not afford to ignore evidence from sources that we have no reason to believe are fundamentally tainted. As a result of rules which eliminated entire categories of sources, Cohen passed in virtual silence over periods of messianic ferment within Ashkenazic Jewry:

Throughout this period, no segment of Ashkenazic Jewry is known to have risen in messianic revolt. Indeed, we may go even further and say that there is not a single case of a messianic movement or of a pseudo-messiah known from Ashkenazic Jewry until the beginning of the sixteenth century.

If enumerating incidents over half a millennium or more constitutes sufficient evidence to draw a paradigmatic messianic posture, then it is very likely that re-evaluation of the sources will produce a new definition of the Ashkenazic posture. Without creating an exhaustive catalogue, a re-reading of the sources indicates that a re-evaluation is in order.

For the messianism of the Crusade period, Cohen defined Jews of Byzantium as essentially Sephardic because they were eastern, yet he never removed the Sephardic designation from Jews of Christian Spain, who were western.⁶⁷ These Jews generated a great deal of active messianic ferment during the first Crusade period. In Salonika, the impend-

66 Cohen, p. 229, note 11.

67 In a messianic report from 1096, one figure was the dayyan of the Babylonian Jewish community in Egypt, the other was Gaon of the Palestinian academy at Jerusalem. A. Sharf, 'An Unknown Messiah of 1096 and the Emperor Alexius', *Journal of Jewish Studies*, 7 (1956), p. 63; J. Mann, 'Ha-Tenu'ot ha-Meshihiyot bi-Yemei Mas'ei ha-Zlav ha-Rishonim', *Ha-Tekufa*, 23 (1925), pp. 243-261.

ing Cr usades sparked a major messianic awakening: the rich gave their property to the poor, all were immersed in waves of prayer and repentance: 'They sit in their prayer shawls, they stopped working and we do not know what they are hoping for. And we are afraid that the thing might be revealed to the Gentiles and they will kill us'.⁶⁸ This ferment was communicated to western European Jewry, and it affected them deeply. The Cr usade chronicle of Solomon bar Samson opened with a statement concerning the impending redemption in a year that had turned into one of affliction.⁶⁹ It is impossible to know how widespread such thoughts were in Ashkenaz, and whether or not they influenced the martyrdom of the Rhine communities.⁷⁰ The influential compilation *Sefer Ḥasidim* already bears traces of a suppression of messianic thought and activism. The readers are warned to distance themselves from 'any person who prophesies concerning the messiah [...] for if it will be revealed to the world, in the end it will be an embarrassment and humiliation before the world'.⁷¹

The mid-thirteenth century was another locus of messianic activism among Jews in the Christian world. The fifth Jewish millennium was inaugurated in the Christian year 1240; combined with the news of the Mongol invasions the atmosphere was ripe for messianism. A Bohemian chronicler reported, 'In 1235 they [the Jews] were expelled from the city [Prague] and scattered over the countryside, because they had prepared to establish an army and showed letters in which they were notified that their messiah had come'.⁷² When Ezra of Moncontour arose in France and prophesied that Elijah would appear in 1226, the messiah in 1233 and the redemption itself would begin in 1240, the news spread almost exclusively through Sephardic channels. The news

68 J. Praver, *The History of the Jews in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem*, Oxford 1988, pp. 10-13. Cohen cited and dismissed without comment, 'two messianic incidents in Byzantium, c. 1096, and in Sicily' (p. 206) and discounted these movements because these places had 'cultural affinities with the East and Spain, respectively'.

69 Cited in A. M. Haberman (ed.), *Gezerot Ashkenaz ve-Zarefat*, Jer usalem 1946, p. 24: 'יהי [...] באחת עשרה שנה למחזור רנ"ו אשר אז קיינו לישועה ולנחמה כנבואת ירמיה הנביא רנ"ו ליעקב שמחה וצהלו בראש הגוים וגו'.

70 Baron, *ASRHJ*, IV, p. 96.

71 *Sefer Ḥasidim*, ed. Y. Wistinetsky and Y. Freimann, Frankfurt a.M. 1924, pp. 76-77, parag. 212. Cited in Eidelberg (above note 9), p. 39, note 5, although it tends to undermine his thesis rather than support it.

72 Aescoly, *Ha-Tenu'ot ha-Meshihiyot*, p. 212. Aescoly notes that all the sources were non Jewish or hostile.

was spread by a letter from Marseilles, to North Africa, to Alexandria, from whence it passed into the Cairo Geniza.⁷³

A Bavarian Chronicle reported that a comet appeared during 1337. 'During this time of great controversy between Emperor and Pope, Jews thought that the end had begun for the Roman Empire and for the Christian religion (for in their great hatred of it, they think it to be vain), and they believed that the time for the arrival of their messiah had come. Toward this end, they united throughout the German lands, against the Christians, and dared to decide that they would kill them with poison. They stole the holy wafer of the flesh and blood of Christ [...] When the matter was revealed, all the German Jews were caught and burned [...] Nothing could save them – such was the wrath of God'.⁷⁴ This is very dim memory of what may possibly have been a strong messianic movement from the time of the Armleder persecutions, and immediately following persecutions that began with shepherds.⁷⁵ In Ashkenaz the memory of this movement could be preserved only in a Christian source.

Medieval Italian Jewry, arguably a cultural unit that was neither Ashkenazic nor Sephardic did not fit neatly into Cohen's paradigm either. As historian Yosef Yerushalmi has characterized them, 'Italian Jewry was particularly susceptible to every messianic tiding and, perhaps because of its geographic location, often served as an eschatological news agency for other parts of the Jewish world'.⁷⁶ An early fourteenth century text described a messianic movement in the Italian Jewish community of Cesena in North Central Italy: 'The Jews of Italy with their families and their entire goods started out to go Overseas [Ultra Mare, Latin term traditionally used for Holy Land]; they said that the messiah, whom they were expecting, was born in those parts'.⁷⁷ This movement was probably stimulated by news of the fall of the last Crusader Kingdom in 1291; it appears to have left no traces in Jewish sources. A very

73 S. Assaf, 'New Documents Concerning Proselytes and a Messianic Movement', *Zion*, 5 (1940), pp. 112-124 (in Hebrew).

74 Aescoly (*Ha-Tenu'ot ha-Meshihiyot*, pp. 238-239) cited from the sixteenth century Johannes Adventinus, *Bayerische Chronik*, ed. G. Leidinger, Jena 1926, p. 175.

75 Aescoly, *ibid.*, p. 239.

76 Y. Yerushalmi, 'Messianic Impulses in Joseph Ha-Kohen', *Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century*, Cambridge, Mass. 1983, pp. 460-487.

77 S. Schein, 'An Unknown Messianic Movement in Thirteenth Century Italy: Cesena, 1297', *Italia*, 5 (1985), p. 98. The text is from *Annales Caesenates*, composed prior to 1334, and published in the eighteenth century.

similar expression – ‘They decided to leave their communities and emigrate Overseas [Ultra Mare], to the Holy Land without the Emperor or lord’s permission and consent’ – was used by Rudolph I of Habsburg when in 1286 he ordered confiscation of the property of Jews in Spire, Worms, Mainz, Oppenheim, and Wetterau.⁷⁸ The end of the Crusader kingdom in 1291, accompanied by the massacre of the flourishing Jewish community in the Holy Land, spurred a period of intense messianism throughout European Jewry.⁷⁹

Can collective migrations to the Holy Land be counted as messianic activities? Scholars have debated the eschatological motivation behind various ‘aliyot’, beginning with that of the ‘three hundred rabbis’ in the early thirteenth century. While not every migration to Zion was undertaken for explicitly messianic reasons, an anonymous disciple of Nahmanides writing close to 1290, makes it clear that many such migrations were impelled by an active messianism. ‘Let no man assume that the king messiah will appear in an unclean land; let him not be deluded into imagining that he will appear in the Land of Israel among the Gentiles [...] And now many are inspired and they volunteer to go to the Land of Israel. And many think that we are near the coming of the Redeemer seeing that in many places the Gentiles made their burden heavier upon Israel and many other signs have already been revealed to the Chosen’.⁸⁰ R. Menaḥem, known as Z̄ion or Z̄ioni, who

78 Baron, *ASRHI*, IX, New York 1967, pp. 153-154, from *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Constitutiones*, III, 368-369: ‘sine nostra sive domini sui speciali licencia et consensu se ultra mare transtulerint’.

79 Silver (above note 33), pp. 81-101. Abraham Abulafia calculated a date in the 1280s; Tosafot Sens, Isaac ben Judah Halevy, in his פְּנֵי הַרִּיב, calculated 1290; the author of the Zohar, 1300. For an interpretation of the fall of the Crusader kingdom as a sign that the land would only absorb its own sons, see: B.Z. Dinur, *Yisrael ba-Golah*, II, Tel-Aviv 1965, pp. 441-442. A similar interpretation of the loss of Crusader ships at sea, see: I. Perles, ‘Die in einer Münchener Handschrift aufgefundene erste lateinische Uebersetzung des Maimonidischen Führers’, *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judenthums*, 24 (1875), pp. 21-22; J. Praver, ‘Jewish Resettlement in Crusader Jerusalem’, *Ariel*, 19 (1967), pp. 60-66.

80 Perles, *ibid.*, p. 22. Yuval cited a nearly identical passage from a disciple of רִיבְנָא (d. 1210) and dated a series of messianic ‘aliyot to this time. See: I.J. Yuval, ‘Likrat 1240: Tikvot Yehudiyot, Peḥadim Nozriyim’, *Proceedings of the Eleventh World Congress of Jewish Studies*, Division B, I, Jerusalem 1994, pp. 114-115. Although some of the links between Jewish apocalypticism and the blood libel in Yuval’s thesis have been criticized as tendentious, the suggestions that he makes in this article concerning Jewish apocalyptic motivation are sound. See also: Yuval

visited Israel for a time and appended the name Zion to his name and all his writings, acts which bespeak more than a passive messianism.⁸¹ Cohen reduced the entire history of migration to the Holy Land to 'At best, the rabbis tolerated the yen of some Jews to settle in the Holy Land, but the extremely restricted extent of such settlement betrays the true nature of the elitist-rabbinic messianic posture'.⁸² Surely the restrictions were more a function of the unbearable conditions imposed by geography, economics, and hateful overlords than by rabbinic indifference.

For example, Cohen dismissed the migration of 'several hundred rabbis from France and Germany to the Holy Land in 1210 and 1211' as 'betraying little if any messianic activity'.⁸³ He characterized the movement as elitist, because 'they made no move to carry the masses of Jews along with them'. In thirteenth century Ashkenaz, hundreds of people migrating to the Holy Land was a popular movement. Given the demography of north European Jewish communities in the thirteenth century, several hundred men are masses. In the very small communities of western Europe there was not as pronounced a social distance between rabbis and lay people. Rabbinic scholars were merchants and everyone was related. The social dynamics were so different from the vast population and huge distances of class and geography that characterized movements on the fringes of the Geonic world, that a comparison of the two on the basis of popular resentment against a rabbinic elite seems to miss the mark entirely.

Cohen's study was informed by the Jewish historiographical tradition to which he was heir and its biases which were deeply embedded. In this tradition, medieval Ashkenaz became a metaphor for the 'rabbinic, elite' which was identified with fundamentalism and intolerance:

(above note 9); D. Berger, 'From Crusades to Blood Libels to Expulsions: Some new Approaches to Medieval Antisemitism', Lecture of the Selmanowitz Chair of Jewish History, Touro College, New York 1997. But cf. E. Kanarfogel, 'The aliyah of "Three Hundred Rabbis" in 1211: Tosafist Attitudes toward Settling in the Land of Israel', *JQR*, 76 (1986), pp. 191-215, who does not attribute messianic goals to this aliya.

81 On the messianic doctrines of Menahem Zion, see: I.J. Yuval, *Hakhamim be-Doram*, Jerusalem 1988, pp. 291-310.

82 Cohen, p. 203.

83 Cohen, p. 229, note 14: 'Certainly the considerations of piety motivating settlement in the Holy Land were messianically oriented, but they were "pre-millenarist" in character very similar to those motivating the move of Judah ha-Levi'.

'Ashkenazic Jewry was always basically fundamentalist, unabashed by anthropomorphism or outlandish legends [...] Andalusian type [...] had in reality appropriated much of the Hellenic scientific spirit [...] Ashkenazic fundamentalism had gained ground in many respectable areas in Spain, and even some fine Sephardim had more or less absorbed the Northern temper'.⁸⁴ The real deficiency of Ashkenaz, then, resided not in its messianic posture, but in its deficient alignment with the temper of the historian.⁸⁵

Active expressions of messianic hope were no less integral to the profile of one Jewish community than to the other, if the evidence is evaluated properly. In Islamic lands, Jewish messianism was perceived as political insubordination; whereas Jewish expressions of messianism in Christian lands were interpreted as blasphemy, an attack on the fundamentals of the Christian faith. The interplay between Jewish sustenance and Christian mockery of Jewish messianic hope is emblematic of the tension which existed for Jews living in the Christian world. As a result of this unremitting cultural pressure in a hostile environment, the recorded memories of messianic movements among Ashkenazic Jews were muted or distorted.⁸⁶ These memories shaped future perceptions of similar movements in turn. These perceptions were internalized by the chroniclers both Jewish and non Jewish who transmitted the memory of events. This mechanism was in full operation when it came to transmission of the memory of the messianic movement of Sabbatai Zevi.

III

In a recent paper, Professor Shlomo Eidelberg restated some of the popular conceptions concerning the messianic posture of Ashkenazic Jews, with specific reference to the Sabbatian posture of German Jews. 'It is well known that among the Jews of medieval Germany we find no appearances of redeemers or messiahs'.⁸⁷

Even with regard to the Sabbatian messianic movement, Eidelberg dismissed Scholem's argument concerning 'the large scale suppression

84 Cohen, p. 212.

85 *Ibid.*, p. 223.

86 It is significant that in one of the few passages in *Sefer Ḥasidim*, devoted to messianic prophecizing, the reason cited for its sharp discouragement was that 'in the end it will cause shame and humiliation before the entire world'.

87 Eidelberg (above note 9), p. 25.

of records and documents relating to the movement'. Scholem's source for this assumption was the explicit description by Samuel Aboab of reports that Jewish communities in the Holy Land, Turkey, Germany, Holland, Poland, and Russia burned all the records that mentioned Sabbatai's name and admitted that the anti-Sabbatians were correct. Aboab reported that he was an eye-witness to this process in Italy, and connected the destruction of the Sabbatian evidence to a book 'recently published' in a non Jewish language which 'to our shame', listed false Jewish messiahs, including 'the most recent and worst'.⁸⁸ The long history of self censorship in messianic matters and the polemical sensitivity of Jews living among Christians lend credence and context to Aboab's testimony and Scholem's acceptance of it.

Within his descriptions of the widespread acceptance of Sabbatai, Scholem noted a strong contrast among communities which received news of the messiah. Some communities issued festive messianic proclamations, others, 'exhortations to secrecy lest the gentiles wreak vengeance on Israel'.⁸⁹ Scholem attributed the differences to 'temperament' rather than to history. A re-reading of the evidence marshalled by Scholem in his closing arguments appears to sustain his picture of the profound belief of German Jews in Sabbatai's mission. We can take, for example, Glikl's paradoxical report in the 'Zikhroynes'. On the one hand, her account stressed that all the formal excitement took place within the Sephardic synagogue; the Ashkenazim seemed to play a more passive role. Glikl even framed the reports about Sabbatai within the most personal portions of the 'Zikhroynes'.⁹⁰ Yet when we read the account of the one person whose activity she described in detail, her father in law, the picture that emerges is the reverse of the first superficial reading. The Sephardim rushed into the synagogues and celebrated, but her Ashkenazi father in law already had his bags packed, and waited for three years in this state of limbo.⁹¹ This apparent contra-

88 G. Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, Princeton 1973, p. 763 and note 205.

89 *Ibid.*, p. 469.

90 *The Memoirs of Glückel of Hameln* (above note 3), pp. 46-47; in the Yiddish edition, *Zichroynos Moras Glikl Hamil*, ed. David Kaufmann, Frankfurt 1896, pp. 80-81; *Die Memoiren der Glückel von Hameln*, trans. B. Pappenheim, Vienna 1910, pp. 74-75. All the citations that follow are taken from the English translation.

91 'Our joy when the letters arrived [from Smyrna] is not to be told. Most of them were addressed to the Sephardim who took them to their synagogue and read them aloud; young and old, the Germans [ייִדישן] too hastened to the Sephardic synagogue. The Sephardic youth came dressed in their best finery and decked in broad green silk ribbons, the gear of Sabbatai Zvi. "With timbrels and with

diction between the demonstrative show of messianic loyalty by the Sephardim, and the deeper, more private expression of hope by the German Jews is indicative of the fundamental complication that we have encountered in assessing memories of medieval Jewish messianism. This complication was operative in the sixteenth century and certainly did not cease in the seventeenth.

There is plenty of evidence that Glikl's father in law was not atypical in his profound acceptance of the messianic news. German Jews tried to sell their property and prepared to leave; they held to their messianic beliefs long after Sabbatai's apostasy. They incorporated this belief into the records of their transactions with one another. In the well known case of the accord of 12 May 1666 between the Altona and Hamburg communities over the Ottensen cemetery, the unfolding messianic events left their mark. After agreeing that the Hamburg community would owe the Altona community 150 Reichsthaler over a period of time for the right to use the cemetery, the contract stipulated: 'Even if the redemption were to occur [...] before the stipulated time, viz. Chanuka of 5427 [1667], the Hamburg community would still be obligated to pay the 50 Reichsthaler installment to the Altona community; they can use it toward the building of the Temple. However, if the redemption were to occur between Chanuka of 5427 [1667] and [the Jewish] New Year 5428 [1668], then only 25 of the 50 outstanding Reichsthaler need be paid toward the building of the Temple.'⁹²

The few western Yiddish sources that refer to the movement also attest to a profound level of belief. Scholem described a series of Yiddish letters from Hamburg, written by Shaindel Schonchenn bas R. Solomon and Nathan ben Aaron Neumark, to Shaindel's husband Jacob Segal of Hamburg who was then languishing in an Oslo prison.⁹³ Both used tid-

dances" they one and all trooped to the synagogue and they read the letters forth with joy... Some [טייליש] sold their houses and lands and all their possessions, for any day they hoped to be redeemed. My good father-in-law, ע"ה, left his home in Hameln, abandoned his house and lands and all his goodly furniture, and moved to Hildesheim.... For the old man expected [בכפשוטא] to sail any moment from Hamburg to the Holy Land.... For three years the casks stood ready, and all this while my father-in-law awaited the signal to depart. But the Most High pleased otherwise'. I have inserted the relevant Yiddish phrases into the English text.

92 I. Lorenz and J. Berkemann, *Streitfall jüdischer Friedhof Ottensen*, II, Hamburg 1995, p. 36, parag. 13.

93 Scholem, *Sabbatai Ševi*, p. 590. But as *Beshraybung* (below note 95) shows, there is room in the Judeo-German tradition for a more active involvement in

ings of the imminent messianic denouement to buoy the spirits of the prisoner. An active Yiddish literary tradition of messianic-polemical literature existed in Glikl's time. Two Yiddish chronicles, 'Zemach David' of Abraham Kap-Serlis,⁹⁴ and the 'Beshraybung' of Leib b. Ozer, affirm a picture of profound popular involvement by German Jews who held to their messianic beliefs long after Sabbatai's apostasy.⁹⁵ Yiddish tales of the Ten Lost Tribes and their battles with the mythical king Prester John from the late sixteenth century, may have served as precursors to the Yiddish literature of Sabbatai Zevi.⁹⁶ Yiddish translations of German folktales judaized the works by adding references to the coming of the messiah.⁹⁷ Yet in their public posture, particularly toward Christian neighbors and authorities, the record shows a much more restrained reaction. Glikl's account sustains this dichotomy between deep private belief and more disengaged public posture.

A significant strand in early modern German culture, popular as well as scholarly-theological, was devoted to the theme of Jewish blindness and perfidy embodied in the Jewish hopes for a future messiah. Early modern German literature devoted many works in different genres to the theme of vain Jewish messianic expectations.⁹⁸ This was not simply a theological datum of which Jews were vaguely aware; it was an ac-

messianism, and certainly part of a literary tradition. Zfatman-Biller (below note 96) mentions a Yiddish translation of the Prester John tales of late 16th century. Although its origins were apparently within the Sephardic world, it shows how the traditions were transmitted interculturally.

- 94 Abraham Kap-Serlis, 'Zemach David', MS. JTS mic 3543, 3b. On this work, see: Ch. Turniansky, 'The First Yiddish Translations of Sefer Hayashar', *Tarbiz*, vol. 54, no. 4 (1985), pp. 567-620.
- 95 Leib ben Ozer of Amsterdam, *Beshraybung fun Shabse Tsvi*, ed. Z. Shazar, Jer usalem 1978. The *Beshraybung* is only part of the manuscript; the first twelve pages contain 'Gezeros Yeshu ha-notzri', a Yiddish version of the counter-Christian *Toledot Yeshu*. For a critical review, see: L. Fuks, 'Sabatianisme in Amsterdam in het begin van de 18e Eeuw: Enkele Beschouwingen over Reb Leib Oizers en zijn Werk', *Studia Rosenthaliana*, 14 (1980), pp. 20-27.
- 96 S. Zfatman-Biller, 'A Yiddish Epistle from the Late Sixteenth Century concerning the Ten Tribes', *Kobez al Yad*, 10 [20] (1982), pp. 217-252.
- 97 C. Daxelmüller, 'Organizational Forms of Jewish Popular Culture since the Middle Ages', R. Po-Chia Hsia and H. Lehmann (eds.), *In and Out of the Ghetto: Jewish-Gentile Relations in Late Medieval and Early Modern Germany*, Washington, D.C. 1995, p. 37.
- 98 See my forthcoming paper, 'The Last Deception: Failed Messiahs and Jewish Conversion in Early-Modern German Lands', in a volume to be edited by M. Goldish and R. Popkin.

tive, oppressive, constant live wire, with which they were continually tormented. By linking Jewish messianic hope to the most negative images of Jews in polemical as well as popular representation, early modern German-Christian culture inscribed its very inhibiting imprint upon the Sabbatian posture of German Jews.