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"A Future and a Hope" in Babylonia:
Three Sayings of Rav as a Diasporan Manifesto*

Abstract: The Jewish Diaspora is often viewed as the paradigm of exile, which implies longing for a place from which a people has been forcibly expelled. This article interprets three sayings by Rav in the Babylonian Talmud as reflecting an alternative ideology, in which living outside the Holy Land is not seen as regrettable or shameful, for God is revealed through the Jewish people's observance of the Torah and the commandments everywhere. Although the relevant sugya in BT Taʿanit 29a–b opens with catastrophe – the destruction of the Temple – Rav's three sayings here exude optimism, implying that a good life is attainable wherever Jews reside. Every moment of Torah study is the realization of the "future and hope" promised by the prophet Jeremiah.

Key words: Land of Israel, Babylonia, Diaspora, Exile, Rav.

Introduction

The prophet Jeremiah advised the Babylonian exiles: "Build houses and live in them, plant gardens and eat their fruit … And seek the welfare of the city to which I have exiled you, and pray to the Lord in its behalf; for in its prosperity you shall prosper" (Jer 29:5–7). Erich Gruen cited Jeremiah's exhortation as an antithetical approach to the negation of the Diaspora and the unbending commitment to the Land of Israel.[1] According to Gruen, Jeremiah outlined a path for the exiled community to travel toward acclimation and integration into their new whereabouts. In a footnote, however, he acknowledged: "The strategy, to be sure, is presented as a temporary one, for two generations, until God will restore his people to Israel."[2] Though Jeremiah laid the groundwork for an ideology of acclimation, Gruen emphasized that the Jews of the Greco-Roman Diaspora "omitted to contrive a theory or philosophy of diaspora."[3] He concluded that though Diaspora Jewry did not yearn to return to their homeland, neither did they "regard

the Book as surrogate to the temple."[4] In this article, I will argue to the contrary, that a short *sugya* in the Babylonian Talmud (Taʾanit 29a–b) lays the ideological infrastructure for Jewish life in the Diaspora and does indeed substitute the Torah for the Temple.

1. Exile and Diaspora

In modern terminology, exile is a negative experience, born of a calamity that drives a people from its homeland; diaspora is perceived as a neutral term that denotes dispersion, without the suffering and anguish associated with exile.[5] The Bible, however, does not recognize this distinction.[6] Expulsion from the Land is chiefly a punishment for the people's sins: "should you act wickedly and make for yourselves a sculptured image in any likeness, causing the Lord your God displeasure and vexation … the Lord will scatter you among the peoples" (Deut 4:25–27). This is reiterated both in the Pentateuch (Lev 18:25–28, 20:22; 26:33, Deut 28:63–65, 29:27) and in the Prophets (Jer 5:19, 9:15, 16:13, Hos 8:8 etc.).[7] Not only the fact of exile, but also the sojourn in exile is punishment: "The Lord will scatter you among all the peoples from one end of the earth to the other … Yet even among those nations you shall find no peace, nor shall your foot find a place to rest" (Deut 28:64–65). The period of retribution is slated to end with the return to the Land (Deut 30:3–5). Jeremiah delimits the exile to a period of seventy years (Jer 29:10), after which, "I will bring you back to the place from which I have exiled you" (Jer 29:14).

William Safran, a leading theorist of diaspora studies, viewed the Jewish Diaspora as the ideal type of the very concept of diaspora. According to Safran, a categorical commitment and yearning to return to the homeland, as well as acknowledgment of the exiled group's inability to integrate into

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4   Gruen, *Diaspora*, 252.

5   Howard Wettstein, "Introduction," in *Diasporas and Exiles: Varieties of Jewish Identity*, ed. H. Wettstein (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002) 1–17, esp. 1–2.

6   Johan Lust, "Exile and Diaspora: Gathering From Dispersion in Ezekiel," in *Lectures et relectures de la Bible: Festschrift P.-M. Bogaert*, eds. Jean-Marie Auwers and André Wénin (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1999) 99–122, esp. 99–111 demonstrates the Septuagint's thorough eschewal of the Greek term διασπορά when translating the Hebrew word for "exile."

7   For a review of the biblical conception of diaspora, see Shemaryahu Talmon, "'Exile' and 'Restoration' in the Conceptual World of Ancient Judaism," in *Restoration: Old Testament, Jewish, and Christian Perspectives*, ed. James M. Scott (Leiden: Brill, 2001) 107–146, esp. 114–119.

the surrounding society, are prerequisites of the diasporan consciousness.[8] Critics have taken aim at this theory from several angles. One important criticism argues that exile is not an unequivocally negative experience and examines the significance of the homeland or home among communities and ethnic groups who view themselves in exile.[9]

A particularly appealing method of grappling with Safran's conception of diaspora, especially in the Jewish context, is the attempt to transpose homeland and diaspora. George Steiner viewed the real homeland of the Jew as "the book," rather than a terrestrial location. In his conception, Jewish nationhood did not take shape on earth; rather, it was forged by a textual covenant between the Jewish people and God at Sinai, where the Ten Commandments and the Torah were received.[10] Thereafter, the Jewish people's true homeland wandered with them from place to place. Each reading of "the book," every new exegesis of a Jewish text, constitutes a homecoming. The Jew can have no territorial homeland, and even "when given nationality by his adopted gentile hosts, remain[s] in transit."[11] Therefore, he states, "The Temple may be destroyed; the texts which it housed sing in the winds that scatter" the people.[12]

Heinrich Heine was the first to articulate this notion, in 1834, writing that the Jews rescued the Bible from the burning of the Second Temple and thereafter it served as a *portative Vaterland* (portable homeland).[13] But the bequest of a "portable homeland" did not exempt Jews from the miseries of exile, even according to Steiner, who was well aware of Jews' ever-present feelings of otherness and alienation from surrounding societies. The Holocaust, loss and suffering are discernible in every line of Steiner's essay. A Jewish existence devoid of a terrestrial homeland with an army and security forces is the only possible way to exist Jewishly, but it is precarious.

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8 William Safran, "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return," *Diaspora* 1 (1991) 83–99, esp. 83–84.

9 See in particular the theoretical criticism of Jon Stratton, "(Dis)placing the Jews: Historicizing the Idea of Diaspora," *Diaspora* 6 (1997) 301–329, esp. 306–307, and the review of Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2008) 8–11.

10 George Steiner, "Our Homeland, the Text," *Salmagundi* 66 (1985) 8–9.

11 Steiner, "Our Homeland," 19.

12 Steiner, "Our Homeland," 21.

13 H. Heine, *Sämtliche Werke* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1887) 47. This idea has been revisited by various thinkers – for example, Franz Rosenzweig, *Star of Redemption*, trans. Barbara E. Galli (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005) 317–324 – and was recently reprised by Simon Schama, *Story of the Jews: Finding the Words (1000 BCE–1492)* (London: Bodley Head, 2013) 38–45.

In *A Traveling Homeland,*[14] Daniel Boyarin delves into the question of the Diaspora in connection with the Babylonian Talmud. The title of his book obviously alludes to Heine's term, and Boyarin declares at the outset that he aims to develop and analyze the implications of the well-known idea "that in some deep sense: a book has been the portable homeland of the Jewish people."[15] However, he says:

> I propose once more that diaspora be understood as a synchronic cultural situation applicable to people who participate in a doubled cultural (and frequently linguistic) location, in which they share a culture with the place in which they dwell but also with another group of people who live elsewhere, in which they have a local and a trans-local cultural identity and expression at the same time. None of this needs imply trauma, an original scene of forced dispersion, a longing for a homeland, or even the existence of a myth of one homeland.[16]

Boyarin's conception diverges in numerous ways from Steiner's. Firstly, Steiner perceived Jewish existence as inherently diasporan and incessantly employed the term exile, with all its negative implications. In tune with Heine, he pinned the creation of the "portable homeland" to the most traumatic moment in Jewish history: the burning of the Second Temple and subsequent exile of the Jews.[17] Boyarin negates the exile. He favors the term diaspora, which, he says, does not indicate an exodus from a homeland: rather, it is a synchronous existence tied both to the current place of residence and to another community elsewhere that shares similar values. A diaspora is not antithetical to a homeland: rather, it is an independent entity. "A homeland, real or even imagined, is not a necessary or sufficient condition for the existence of a diaspora."[18]

Nonetheless, the concept of place is integral to Boyarin's definition of diaspora. Indeed, rather than one place, Boyarin addresses two: the community's place of residence and the place of the other community with which it maintains ties and which shares its value system. The second chapter of his book explains how Babylonian Jewry transformed Babylon into Zion, the dwelling place of the Divine Spirit, and imbued Babylon with the sanctity and religious qualities that characterized the Land of Israel. In this manner, Boyarin hews to ideas expounded by his teacher, Haim Zalman

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14 Daniel Boyarin, *A Traveling Homeland: The Babylonian Talmud as Diaspora* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 2015).

15 Boyarin, *Traveling,* 5.

16 Boyarin, *Traveling,* 19.

17 Steiner, "Our Homeland," 5.

18 Boyarin, *Traveling,* 5.

Dimitrovsky, views that were substantiated and augmented by my own teacher, Isaiah Gafni.[19]

The third chapter forms the book's core. In it, Boyarin demonstrates how the discourse of the Babylonian Talmud, the Bavli, expresses the concept of diaspora as a simultaneous attachment to two places. It is "in Persia and Roman Palestine, not between them. It is itself a diaspora, a transcultural space."[20] This commitment to a doubled location is demonstrated in the presence of values, cultural practices and theoretical concepts from both the Zoroastrian-Persian and the Greco-Roman worlds. As opposed to Steiner, who emphasized the Jew's foreignness to his surroundings, Boyarin extols the Talmud's affinity with the diverse cultural worlds from which it derived. He sees the structure of the talmudic *sugya* as particularly expressive of the doubled location phenomenon. Often a *sugya* will incorporate statements of Babylonian sages and their counterparts from the Land of Israel in the same discussion. In this context, Boyarin highlights the role of the itinerant sages who travelled between Babylonia and the Land of Israel, transporting rabbinic wisdom from one place to another. In contradistinction to Heine, Steiner and others who viewed "the book" as a detached homeland, alienated from local life, Boyarin highlights the Bavli as a product of the specific centers of rabbinic activity.

Though glimmers of the concept of the book as a portable homeland run through Boyarin's book, this seems narrowed to the material dimension of the book: "The Talmud in its textual practices produces Babylonia as a homeland, and, since this Babylonia is produced by a text that can move, that homeland becomes portable and reproduces itself over and over."[21] I hope to demonstrate that in one short *sugya,* hitherto untreated in this context, the Bavli offers a great deal more. In contrast to Boyarin, who emphasizes the commitment to place(s) as driving the establishment of the Bavli as a diasporan space, I believe, in keeping with Steiner, that the Bavli undermines place and geography as constituents of identity. After a brief overview of the fundamental arguments used to validate life in the Hellenistic and Babylonian Diasporas, I will address three sayings by Rav in Ta'anit 29a–b.

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19 See below, n. 36.
20 Boyarin, *Traveling*, 72.
21 Boyarin, *Traveling*, 32.

1.1. Diaspora and Homeland: The Hellenistic-Jewish Model

Erich Gruen described Hellenistic Judaism's paradigm of the relationship of the Land of Israel and Jerusalem with the diasporan Jewish communities. Though he concurred that the Land of Israel was viewed as the Jewish homeland, he emphatically dismissed the suggestion that the Jews were "mired in misery and obsessed with a longing for Jerusalem that had little chance of fulfillment."[22] For instance, in the first century CE, Philo noted:

> … no one country can contain the whole Jewish nation, by reason of its populousness; on which account they frequent all the most prosperous and fertile countries of Europe and Asia, whether islands or continents, looking indeed upon the holy city as their metropolis in which is erected the sacred temple of the most high God, but accounting those regions which have been occupied by their fathers, and grandfathers, and great grandfathers, and still more remote ancestors, in which they have been born and brought up, as their country.[23]

Appropriation of the Greek conceptual framework negated the pejorative biblical significance of dispersion throughout the *ecumene*.[24] The Jews venerated the mother city of Jerusalem and sought its prosperity, yet they did not feel compelled to abandon the place where they lived.

Similarly, perhaps even more radically, Josephus says (paraphrasing Balaam's oracle):

> … ye shall suffice for the world, to furnish every land with inhabitants sprung from your race … but the habitable world, be sure, lies before you as an eternal habitation, and your multitudes shall find abode on islands and continent, more numerous even than the stars in heaven.[25]

According to Josephus, dispersion throughout the world is not only justified and legitimate, but it also represents the Jewish people's eternal destiny.[26] Notwithstanding, Diaspora Jewry expressed their connection with Jerusalem through pilgrimages[27] and by contributions to the Temple, which led at times to confrontations with the surrounding Gentiles.[28] Philo asserted

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22 Gruen, *Diaspora*, 234.
23 Philo, *Flacc.* 45–46.
24 Philo reprises this explanation in *Moses* 2, 225–232; *Embassy*, 412.
25 Josephus, *Ant.* 4:115–116 (Thackeray, LCL, IV, pp. 531–533).
26 Isaiah M. Gafni, *Land, Center and Diaspora: Jewish Constructs in Late Antiquity* (Sheffield: Sheffield University Press, 1997) 29.
27 There was a considerable upswing in such pilgrimages from the time of Herod onward. See Martin Goodman, "The Pilgrimage Economy of Jerusalem in the Second Temple Period," in *Jerusalem: Its Sanctity and Centrality to Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, ed. Lee I. Levine (New York: Continuum, 1999) 69–76.
28 Mikael Tellbe, "The Temple Tax as a Pre-70 CE Identity Marker," in *Formation of the Early Church*, ed. Jostein Ådna (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005) 19–44.

Jerusalem's primacy. When he heard of the Roman emperor Caligula's decision to install his statue in the Temple, he made it clear that this was of greater importance than local clashes between Jews and Gentiles in Alexandria: "small things must needs give way to big and particular to general interests, the loss of which means the perdition of the body politic."[29] Because the threat to the Temple affected the entire Jewish people, it was of national dimensions.[30]

Thus, taking Philo and Josephus as examples, we see that the Hellenistic-Jewish Diaspora's approach is largely consistent with Boyarin's definition of the term diaspora. Philo articulates his commitment to the doubled location: he is wholeheartedly loyal to his birthplace, Alexandria, and operates as the community's emissary; at the same time, he is committed to the fate of the Temple in Jerusalem. This commitment took a surprising turn among Babylonian Jewry.

1.2. Babylonian Jewry

Evidence about Babylonian Jewry during the Second Temple period and the century and a half following the destruction is scanty[31] and sometimes contradictory. The post-exilic prophets continued to anticipate a mass return,[32] but the book of Ezra-Nehemiah accepts the permanence of the exile.[33] Thus it is impossible to define this Jewry's conception of the Diaspora throughout the entire period. However, from the third century onwards it is possible to trace the contours of Babylonian Jewry, including its attitude to the Land of Israel. The tension between the sages of Babylon and the Land of Israel is captured quintessentially in the words of Rav Huna (late third century):

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29 Philo, *Embassy*, 193.

30 Aryeh Kasher, *The Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1985) 244–246. Maren R. Niehoff, *Philo on Jewish Identity and Culture* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001) 34–44 contends that Philo contrived to bolster Jerusalem's standing amongst Alexandrian Jewry, from fear that its status and importance would be eroded in view of Alexandrian Jewry' own dire political situation.

31 Geoffrey Herman, "The Jews of Parthian Babylonia," in *Parthian Empire and Its Religions: Studies in the Dynamics of Religious Diversity*, eds. Peter Wick and Markus Zehnder (Gutenberg: Computus, 2012) 141–150.

32 John Kessler, "Diaspora and Homeland in the Early Achaemenid Period: Community, Geography and Demography in Zechariah 1–8," in *Approaching Yehud: New Approaches to the Study of the Persian Period*, ed. Jon L. Berquist (Leiden: Brill, 2008) 137–166.

33 Gary N. Knoppers, "Exile, Return, and Diaspora: Expatriates and Repatriates in Late Biblical Literature," in *Texts, Contexts and Readings in Postexilic Literature*, ed. Louis C. Jonker (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011) 29–61, esp. 47–53.

"We have made ourselves in Babylonia the equivalent of Eretz Israel from the day Rav came to Babylonia."[34] Though the remark pertains solely to the Babylonian sages' expertise in divorce law, Gafni elucidates the conceptual process within it and concludes, "there emerges over the years a Babylonia enjoying all the attributes of the historically central Land of Israel: Davidic leadership, remnants of the Jerusalem Temple, links with the Patriarchs, and even hallowed earth and sacred boundaries."[35]

Gafni has demonstrated how symbols and values associated with the Land of Israel were transferred to Babylonia.[36] Thus, for example, the Divine Spirit (*Shekhina*) was purported to have departed the Temple upon its destruction, in favor of Babylonia,[37] and the lineage of Babylonian Jewry was deemed the most refined of any Jewish community in the world, including that of the Land of Israel.[38] In view of this, it is not surprising that several Babylonian sages prohibited emigration to the Land of Israel before the coming of the Messiah.[39]

Thus we find that for the Babylonian sages, engagement was with the Land of Israel, rather than Jerusalem and the Temple, and their approach was both apologetic and polemical. During the Second Temple period, the Jews of the Land of Israel and the Diaspora shared a common center: the Temple, and the question of domicile was secondary. Once the Temple had been destroyed, and even more so after the failure of the Bar Kokhba revolt, this situation changed. A new ideology of place crystallized among the sages of the Land of Israel. Declarations extolling the qualities of the Land abounded and included prohibitions against departing its borders.[40] The Torah itself was even added to its geographical virtues: "And what spice

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34 BT Gittin 6a; BT Bava Kama 80a, according to Gafni's translation in *Land*, 116.

35 Gafni, *Land*, 116; see also Boyarin, *Traveling*, 33–36.

36 Isaiah M. Gafni, "How Babylonia Became 'Zion': Shifting Identities in Late Antiquity," in *Jewish Identities in Antiquity: Studies in Memory of Menahem Stern*, eds. Israel L. Levine and Daniel R. Schwartz (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009) 333–348.

37 BT Megillah 29a.

38 BT Qidushin 69b.

39 BT Ketubot 110b–111a.

40 Mishnah Qetubot 13:11; Tosefta Avoda Zara 4:3–4; and see Isaiah M. Gafni, "Status of Eretz Israel in Reality and in Jewish Consciousness Following the Bar Kokhva Uprising" (Hebrew), in *Bar Kokhva Revolt: A New Approach*, ed. Aharon Oppenheimer and Uriel Rapport (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben Zvi, 1984) 227–231. The centrality of the Land is conspicuous in Sifre Deuteronomy 37–40 and Mekhilta Deuteronomy; see Menahem I. Kahana, "The Importance of Dwelling in the Land of Israel According to the Deuteronomy Mekhilta" (Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 62 (1993) 501–513.

(*tebel*) does it contain? Torah, as it is said, *there is no Torah among the nations* (Lam 2:9). From this we learn that the Torah dwells in the land of Israel."[41]

In Babylonia, the sages confronted the challenge imposed by their colleagues in the Land of Israel, that they abandon the diaspora in favor of the Land of Israel. Babylonian ideology grew to include halachic injunctions and aggadic material that prohibited leaving Babylonia for the Land of Israel.[42] The *sugya* in Tractate Taʾanit 29a–b discussed in what follows goes beyond transposing the virtues and values of the Land of Israel to Babylon and actually undermines the "place" itself.

2. Taʾanit 29a–b

Towards the end of Tractate Taʾanit, a series of *mishnayot* deals with the laws of mourning around the Ninth of Av. A depiction of five divine punishments that occurred on this date prefaces the discussion: "On the Ninth of Av it was decreed against our fathers that they should not enter into the Land, and the Temple was destroyed the first and the second time, and Bethar was captured, and the city was plowed up".[43] The subsequent *mishnah* concludes, "When Av comes in, gladness must be diminished."[44]

In response to this, the Bavli presents the following short *sugya*:

> Rav Judah, son of R. Samuel bar Shilath, said in the name of Rav: Just as with the beginning of Av rejoicings are curtailed, so with the beginning of Adar rejoicings are increased. R. Papa said: Therefore, a Jew who has any litigation with Gentiles should avoid him in Av because his luck is bad and should make himself available in Adar when his luck is good.
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> *To give you a future and a hope* (Jer 29:11): Rav Judah, son of R. Samuel bar Shilath, said in the name of Rav: By this is meant palm trees and flaxen garments.

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41 Sifre Deuteronomy 37; trans. Reuven Hammer, *Sifre: A Tannaitic Commentary on the Book of Deuteronomy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986) 71. It is interesting to juxtapose this homily against those that argue that the Torah was intentionally not given in the Land of Israel: "In order that the nations of the world should not have the excuse for saying: Because it was given in Israel's land, therefore we have not accepted it"; see Jacob Z. Lauterbach ed., *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2004) 318. For a similar version, see *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Shimeon Bar Yochai*, 19:2.

42 BT Ketubot 111a, and see Gafni, "How Babylonia," 344–345 and *Land*, 73–77.

43 Mishnah Taʾanit 4:6; Herbert Danby, ed. and trans., *The Mishnah* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933) 200.

44 Mishnah Taʾanit 4:7. This is the opening sentence of this *mishnah*, which deals with the laws of the week leading up to the Ninth of Av in all manuscripts of the Mishnah. In the Naples edition, *mishnayot* 6 and 7 are conflated, while in later editions Mishnah 6 concludes with the quoted sentence "in the week wherein falls the Ninth of Av."

> *And he said: See, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field which the Lord hath blessed* (Gen 27:27). Rav Judah, son of R. Samuel bar Shilath, said in the name of Rav: Like the smell of an apple orchard.[45]

The first saying's affinity to the *mishnah* is straightforward: Rav suggests the month of Adar as the antithesis of the month of Av. However, the next two sayings elucidate biblical verses that seem unconnected to the *mishnah*, and the only apparent link between the three sayings is the chain of transmission from Rav by way of Rav Judah, son of R. Samuel bar Shilath. Rashi explains: "Since Rav Judah was already being discussed, the Gemara carried on in that direction."[46] The Talmud often excerpts from other places and threads together a number of sayings with an identical and known chain of transmission,[47] but this Rav Judah transmitted some 20 different sayings in Rav's.[48] Why were these three specific sayings selected here?

2.1. "With the Beginning of Av"

All five calamities attributed to the Ninth of Av are linked to the Land of Israel. The people of Israel were denied entry to the Land after wandering the desert. The destruction of the First Temple put an end to Zedekiah's rebellion against Babylon, as did the second destruction to that of the Jews of the Land of Israel against Rome. The fall of Bethar was the concluding event of the Bar Kokhba revolt. The plowing of "the city" might relate to the plowing of Bethar in the wake of the revolt,[49] but more probably it relates

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45 BT Ta'anit 29a–b.

46 Rashi, Ta'anit 29b, s. v. "And I will give."

47 See many examples in Abraham Weiss, *Studies in the Literature of the Amoraim* (New York: Yeshiva University, 1962) 198–201. David Rosenthal collated the places where Rashi comments on this, in "Ancient Redactions in the Babylonian Talmud," (Hebrew), *Talmudic Studies* 1, eds. Yaacov Sussman and David Rosenthal (Hebrew; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1990) 201–202.

48 BT Berachot 47a, 48a; Shabbat 30b, 118b, 153a; Eruvin 14b, [85b], 93a; Yoma 76b; Sukka 46b; Ta'anit 14a; Megillah 5a; Moed Qatan 16a; Yevamot 64b; Avoda Zara 8a; Menahot 35b.

49 See the problems raised by Peter Schäfer, *Der Bar-Kokhba-Aufstand. Studien zum zweiten jüdischen Krieg gegen Rom* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1981) 20–21. Some connect the "plowing of the city" described in the Mishnah and the ceremony of the *sulcus primigenius* (first furrow) conducted by Hadrian before the revolt, which instigated the Bar Kokhba revolt according to Cassius Dio (*Historia Romana*, 69.12.1). If this is the case, then the Mishnah is not arranged chronologically, since the fall of Bethar, which concluded the Bar Kochba revolt, is cited before the "plowing of the city." For discussion, see Hanan Eshel, "'Bethar was captured and the city was plowed': Jerusalem, Aelia Capitolina and the Bar Kokhba Revolt," *Eretz Israel* 28 (2007) 21–28.

to the plowing of Jerusalem in its abandonment, confirming the prophecy "Zion shall be plowed as a field" (Mic 3:12).

Presumably, the antithesis of the Ninth of Av would be a day commemorating the return to the Land, the construction of the Temple or the restoration of Jewish sovereignty to the Land of Israel. Indeed, R. Yehoshua declared: "in Nisan, they were redeemed; in Nisan, they are destined to be redeemed."[50] The contraposition in Lamentations Rabbah is explicit: "R. Avin opened his discourse: *He has filled me with bitterness* (Lam 3:15) on the first night of the Passover festival, *sated me with wormwood* on the Ninth of Av."[51]

Rav, however, cites the month of Adar. The focal point of this month is Purim, when Haman sought to "destroy, massacre, and exterminate all the Jews, young and old, children and women" (Esth 3:13). However, ultimately the Jews defeated their enemies, "and the same month [was] transformed for them from one of grief and mourning to one of festive joy" (Esth 9:22). Thus Purim is the arena for the ongoing battle between the Gentile bent on destroying Jews wherever they dwell, and the Jew who seeks to carry on living.[52] By juxtaposing the months of Adar and Av, Rav shifts the emphasis from the destruction of the Temple and the loss of sovereignty, to the struggle between Jews and Gentiles. Rav Papa's practical advice lends support to this exegesis: it focuses on the relative auspiciousness of these months for litigation with Gentiles.

2.2. "A Future and a Hope"

The second saying elucidates the words "a future and a hope," promised by Jeremiah to the Jews in Babylonia. The prophecy begins with the imperative of sinking roots in the new area: "Build houses and live in them, plant gardens and eat their fruit" (Jer 29:5). Later, however, the prophet promises that the exile will last only seventy years, and then God will "bring you back to this place [the Land of Israel]. For I am mindful of the plans I have made concerning you … plans for your welfare, not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope" (Jer 29:10–11). The phrase "a future and a hope" appears once more in the book of Jeremiah. In response to Rachel's weeping for her exiled children, "there is hope for your future, declares the Lord:

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50 Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael 12:42; BT Rosh Hashanah 11a.
51 Lamentations Rabba, Ptichta 18 (ed. Buber, 14–15).
52 On Purim as emblematic of the triumph of Jews over Gentiles, see Elliott Horowitz, *Reckless Rites: Purim and the Legacy of Jewish Violence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

Your children shall return to their country" (Jer 31:16). "Your future" is the generation destined to return to the Land. The hope and the future are both forthcoming, and they are interconnected. The word *aharit* used here is no generic term for "future"; it generally forms part of the phrase *aharit ha-yamim*, "the end of days," which is loaded with apocalyptic overtones already in the Bible. It signifies the period of redemption, when the Temple will "tower above the hills" (Isa 2:2; Mic 4:1), and a king from the Davidic line will rule over Israel (Hos 3:5).[53]

In contradistinction to this, Rav construes the phrase "a future and a hope" as "palm trees and flaxen garments." This statement is comprehensible only when one understands the importance of palm trees and flax to the Babylonian economy and in the literary-cultural domain of the Babylonian sages. The date palm has always been the most heavily cultivated crop in Babylonia, from antiquity until the present day.[54] It distinguished the Babylonian landscape so definitively that Rav Huna mentioned sighting the palm trees of Babylonia when he ascended to the summit of Beit Baltin on the country's border.[55] The time for kindling Shabbat candles was fixed according to when the sun reached the tops of the palm trees,[56] and this was also the proper time to recite the concluding prayer of the Day of Atonement.[57] The fruit of the date palm was accorded the same status as bread, and anyone who recited the grace after meals after eating a date was considered to have discharged his obligation.[58] In times of famine, dates were the last available fruit at the market.[59] The fecundity of some palm trees was such that their proceeds were sufficient to pay their owner's poll tax.[60]

The economic significance that Rav attributed to flax was informed by his own personal experience. He and his family were flax growers.[61] The

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53 In other cases, the "end of days" indicates the future sins of Israel (e. g., Deut 31:29 and Jer 5:31). Nevertheless, here its significance is positive; see Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21–36* (New York: Doubleday, 2004) 354.

54 For information regarding the earliest cultivation of the date palm in the Middle East and in Iraq, see Margareta Tengberg, "Beginnings and Early History of Date Palm Garden Cultivation in the Middle East," *Journal of Arid Environments* 86 (2012) 139–147.

55 PT Rosh Hashanah 2:2 [58a].

56 BT Shabbat 35b.

57 PT Taʾanit 4:1 [67c].

58 BT Berachot 12a; also BT Sanhedrin 35a.

59 BT Qetubot 79a; Bava Kama 87b; also Bava Batra 52a.

60 BT Eruvin 51a. See David M. Goodblatt, "The Poll Tax in Sasanian Babylonia: The Talmudic Evidence," *JESHO* 22 (1979) 239–245.

61 PT Maʾaser Sheni 5:7 [56d]. Though the Bavli relates a similar story regarding R. Hiya, whose flax crop failed and he then consulted R. Judah the patriarch (BT Hulin 86a),

centrality of flax to the Babylonian economy is corroborated by the statement: "Public prayers are offered for goods [that have become dangerously cheap], even on the Sabbath. … For instance, linen garments in Babylon, and wine and oil in Palestine."[62] Embedded within Rav's elucidation that "a future and a hope" signify date palms and linen garments is a perception of Babylonia as a country of material abundance that guarantees comfortable economic living conditions to all its inhabitants. This is apparent in another saying of Rav: "Babylon is rich because it harvests without rain."[63] That is, its rivers supply a guaranteed water source that can be used for cultivation without relying on rainfall.[64]

This is the *sugya's* only acknowledgement of the merits of Babylonia and a kind of a local patriotism, as proposed by Boyarin. However, contrary to Boyarin, who emphasizes that cultural and value-oriented affinities to Babylonia ingrained within the Bavli,[65] only the material attributes of the place and the means of subsistence that it affords are discussed. In this respect, nothing about Babylonia distinguishes it from any other geographic area that might offer similarly favorable economic conditions.

Yet Rav's statement conveys more than an allusion to economic importance and the provision of basic existential needs. Rabbinic literature associates date palms and flax with the study of Torah in the diaspora: "Forty years before the Israelites went into exile to Babylonia, date palms were planted in Babylonia, since to have something sweet prepares the tongue to study Torah."[66] Ula explicitly stated that the Lord exiled the Jews to Babylon "in order that they might eat dates and occupy themselves with the Torah,"[67] and castigated Babylonian Jewry for not engaging in Torah despite the affordability of the dates.[68]

The cultivation of flax similarly relates to the study of Torah and to Rav's family. Rav's uncle R. Hiya was a flax grower who commended his flax for

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Moshe Beer accords greater credence to the Yerushalmi's version; see M. Beer, *Babylonian Amoraim: Aspects of Economic Life* (Hebrew; Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 1982) 191. Rav's son was also a flax grower (BT Bava Metziʿa 93b).

62 BT Bava Batra 91a.

63 BT Taʾanit 10a. This according to the ms. R. Herzog 1 and similarly ms. Munich 95, as well as Geniza fragment T-S NS 329.1011. Other manuscripts render *atidah*, which has no meaning. See also Beer, *Babylonian Amoraim*, 26, n. 21.

64 On the fecundity of Babylonia, see Isaiah M. Gafni, *Jews of Babylonia* (Hebrew; Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, 1990) 130–131.

65 Boyarin, *Traveling*, 65–69.

66 PT Taʾanit 4:5 [69b].

67 BT Pesachim 87b–88a.

68 BT Pesachim 88b, cf. Taʾanit 9b.

ensuring that the Torah would not be forgotten: he explained that flax was used to prepare nets to hunt deer, and from the deer hide he would prepare scrolls

> and then proceed to a town where there are no teachers of young children, and write out the five Books of the Pentateuch for five children [respectively] and teach another six children respectively the six orders of the Mishnah, and then tell each one: "Teach your section to your colleagues." It was this that Rabbi [had in mind when he] exclaimed, "How great are the deeds of Hiya!"[69]

The cultivation of flax thus fueled a complex economic and educational sequence, which culminated in the dissemination of Torah throughout Israel.

Although Jeremiah promises the exiles material comfort and even urges them to participate in the local economy, the future and the hope remain forthcoming, at the time God will restore the exiles to the Land of Israel. Rav, however, transposes "the future and the hope" to the Babylonia of his time. The cheap and readily available dates and flax afford the Jews there a comfortable life in the present and expedite the dissemination and study of Torah. The prophetically ordained repatriation following a stint in exile is now replaced by a life of Torah study and the propagation of Torah in Babylonia.

2.3. "The Smell of My Son"

The third homily brought down in Rav's name also interprets a biblical verse. When Jacob enters into Isaac's presence, Isaac exclaims: "Ah, the smell of my son is like the smell of the fields that the Lord has blessed" (Gen 27:27). The reference to the Lord's blessing lifts "the field" from the earthly realm of hunters to higher realms in which the term might assume additional connotations.

Sifre Deuteronomy views the field as an allusion to the Temple: "Isaac … saw it built, saw it destroyed, and saw it rebuilt, as it is said: *See, the smell of my son* (Gen. 27:27) – indicating that it was built; *is as the smell of a field* – indicating that it was destroyed; *which the Lord hath blessed* – indicating that it built and beautified in the future."[70] This midrash associates the human "smell of my son" with the smell of sacrifices in the Temple (derived from a human activity), and the "smell of the field" with a desolate and deserted location. Rav, however, offers a positive interpretation of the field: he says

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69 BT Qetubot 103b; Bava Metziʿa 85b.
70 Sifre Deuteronomy 352 (Hammer ed., 365).

it is an apple orchard.[71] It is likely that Rav's association of the smell of the field with apples was evoked by the Song of Songs: "Let me climb the palm, Let me take hold of its branches; Let your breasts be like clusters of grapes, Your breath like the fragrance of apples" (Song 7:9). However, the Song of Songs also describes the fragrances of vines (2:13) and mandrakes (7:14). What then constitutes the distinction of apples?

The apple metaphor occurs in a number of different contexts. In the Tosefta it symbolizes the relationship between the Lord and the people of Israel: "*Under the apple tree I roused you* (Song 8:5) – said the Holy Spirit; *Let me be a seal upon your heart* (Song 8:6) – said the congregation of Israel."[72]

Amoraic homilies offer further examples:

> *Like an apple tree among trees of the forest, So is my beloved among the youths* (Song 2:3). R. Huna, R. Aha in the name of R. Yose b. Zimra: Just as in the case of the apple tree, everyone avoids it, because it yields no shade, so the nations of the world fled before the Holy One, blessed be He, on the day of the giving of the Torah. Is it possible that Israel were the same way? Scripture says, *To sit in its shadow was my delight* (Song 2:3). Said R. Ahvah bar Zeorah: Just as the apple tree produces its buds before its leaves, so Israel gave precedence to doing over hearing at Sinai. Said R. Azariah: Just as the apple tree produces ripened fruit only in Sivan, so Israel was not to give forth good fragrance in the world until Sivan. When? *In the third month* (Num 19:1).[73]

According to R. Huna, when the Torah was given, only Israel was able to see the shade of the apple tree that symbolizes the Torah. Another homily also connects apples to Torah: "*Refresh me with apples* (Song 2:5) with words of Torah, whose fragrance is as good as the fragrance of the apples."[74]

In R. Ahvah bar Zeorah's homily, the imagery is inverted, and the apple becomes the symbol of Israel: just as the apple first bears fruit and only then produces leaves, so Israel gave precedence to doing over hearing.[75] Song of Songs Rabbah reiterates this saying of R. Ahvah bar Zeorah: "The apple brings out its blossom before its leaves. So Israel in Egypt declared their faith before they heard the message, as it says: *and the people were convinced when they heard that the Lord had taken note* (Ex 4:31)."[76]

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[71] The word "field" as an allusion to the Temple appears in other midrashim. See, for example, Genesis Rabbah 22:7: "*Cain spoke to his brother Abel, and when they were in the field* (Gen 4:8): now *field* refers to naught but the temple" (Freedman ed., 187).

[72] Tosefta Sotah 9:8.

[73] Pesikta de Rav Kahana 12:10 (ed. Mandelbaum, 210).

[74] Pesikta de Rav Kahana 12:3 (ed. Mandelbaum, 205).

[75] See also BT Shabbat 88a.

[76] Song of Songs Rabbah 2:3 (ed. Freedman, 99). In this case, Egypt is the backdrop, rather than Sinai.

Egypt and Israel's enslavement are also connected with the apple in a homily by R. Avira referring to the women of Israel who defied Pharaoh by bearing children:

> "… when the time of childbirth arrived, they went and were delivered in the field beneath the apple tree, as it is said: *Under the apple-tree I caused thee to come forth*" (Song 8:5). The Holy One, blessed be He, sent down someone from the high heavens, who washed and straightened the limbs [of the babies] in the same way a midwife straightens the limbs of a child.[77]

Though R. Avira was a fifth-generation Babylonian Amora, the apple is already associated with Exodus from Egypt by R. Levi, a second-generation Amora, who says of *haroset:* "It is a commemoration of the apple."[78]

The apple metaphor thus revolves around two focal points: the giving of the Torah, and the Exodus from Egypt, both of which transpired outside the Land of Israel. Rav's interpretation of the "smell of the field" on Jacob as the smell of an apple orchard represents more than an expansion into the material realm; it embodies a grievance against the persona of Jacob and challenges the exegesis of the sages of the Land of Israel of these verses. For Rav, the fragrance divinely bestowed on Jacob (described as the "smell of the field that the Lord has blessed") is not the scent of the incense and sacrifices offered at the Temple, but rather a symbol of the giving of the Torah. Though the Torah and the Temple are not intrinsically competing loci of the relationship between the Lord and Israel,[79] Rav juxtaposed them as clashing commitments, with the expectation that one should prevail: "Rav … said: The study of the Torah is superior to the building of the Temple, for as long as [the scribe] Baruch ben Neriah was alive, Ezra would not leave him to go up to the Land of Israel"[80] – that is, Ezra gave priority to studying Torah in Babylon over rebuilding the Temple in the Land of Israel.[81] The following

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77 BT Sotah 11b.

78 BT Pesachim 116a.

79 Mishnah Yomah 7:1, Ta'anit 4:8, Avot 6:10 and BT Berachot 58a, inter alia.

80 BT Megillah 16b.

81 This is also how Mordecai Tenenblatt construed the meaning of Rav's statement; see M. A. Tenenblatt, *New Chapters in the History of the Land of Israel and Babylonia in the Talmudic Period* (Hebrew; Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1966) 70. Beer argues that the purpose of this homily and its counterparts was not to detract from the importance of the Temple and the Land of Israel, but rather to stress the importance of Torah. (Beer, *Babylonian Amoraim*, 166). Jeffrey Rubenstein has elucidated this saying as appertaining to the Babylonian tendency to aggrandize the importance of Torah study as the most essential value of the Babylonian academies, according to the Stamaim; see J. L. Rubenstein, *Culture of the Babylonian Talmud* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003) 31.

saying goes even one step further: "R. Samuel b. Inia stated in the name of Rav: The study of the Torah is more important than the offering of the daily continual sacrifices, since he said to him, *now am I come* (Josh 5:14)."[82] Josh 5:13–15 refers to an encounter between Joshua and the captain of the Lord's hosts, who came to reprove Joshua. Rav explains that the people of Israel had cancelled the daily sacrificial offering, as well as the study of Torah, but they were punished only for the latter offense. In view of this Rava's saying is in line with Rav: "whosoever occupies himself with the study of the Torah needs neither burnt-offering, nor meal-offering, nor sin-offering, nor guilt-offering."[83] Thus, according to Rav, the study of Torah takes precedence over the bringing of sacrifices, and two generations later, Rava declared that Torah study obviates the need to bring any sacrifices at all.[84]

To sum up, whereas the midrash in Sifre Deuteronomy, from the Land of Israel, construes the scent of the field as an allusion to the construction of the Temple and its destruction, and frames the conflict between Jacob and Esau as revolving around the attempt to build the Temple and to destroy it, Rav proposes that the Torah embodies Jacob's intrinsic, essential nature and attests his receipt of the divine blessing. In contradistinction to the Sifre's exegesis, according to which the "field" is in the Land of Israel, Rav's Babylonian homily places the "field" outside the Land of Israel. Whether the apple orchard alludes to the Torah or to the people of Israel in Egypt, the relationship between the Lord and his people was not conceived in the Land of Israel, nor in the Temple, and is contingent on neither place.

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82 BT Eruvin 63b.

83 BT Menahot 110a.

84 BT Menahot 110a. The sages of the Land of Israel also entertained the notion of Torah study as a stand-in for sacrifices: "R. Yohanan said: It refers to the scholars who are occupied with the laws of Temple service; Holy Writ imputes it to them as though the Temple were built in their days. Resh Lakish said: What is the significance of the verse, *This is the Torah for the burnt-offering, for the meal-offering, for the sin-offering, and for the guilt-offering* (Lev 7:37)? It teaches that whosoever occupies himself with the study of the Torah is as though he were offering a burnt-offering, a meal-offering, a sin-offering and a guilt-offering" (BT Menahot 110a). See also Leviticus Rabbah 7:3. See Ephraim E. Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1987) 610–611; and Michael Fishbane, *The Exegetical Imagination: On Jewish Thought and Theology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998) 131.

2.4. Three Sayings from Destruction to Redemption

Rav's three sayings in Ta'anit 29a–b deal with different aspects of the encounter between Jews and Gentiles, but I propose that they can be seen as an integral unit, as follows. The first saying alludes to the destruction of the two Temples in the month of Av (by the Babylonians and the Romans); the second presents Jeremiah's prophecy, which deals with the hope for return from the exile incurred by the destruction; and the third brings in the verse from Genesis that pertains to the confrontation between Jacob and Esau. All three texts – independently, but even more forcefully when combined – mark the Land of Israel and the Temple as the arena in which the conflict between Jews and Gentiles is enacted.

While Rav's exegesis retains the Jewish-Gentile relationship as the axis connecting the three sayings, it denies their territorial dimension. His first saying determines that the conflict between Jews and Gentiles does not concern the Land of Israel and the Temple; rather it is omnipresent, at all times. The juxtaposition of Purim and the ninth of Av also encompasses a different conception of the present. The Ninth of Av marks the moment of destruction and the beginning of the exile, but Rav disregards this. The Jewish victory commemorated by Purim disproves the notion of the exile as the continuation of the destruction, and shows that under certain circumstances and in certain places, Jews can prevail over Gentiles. Success or failure in a confrontation with Gentiles is not measured according to whether the Jewish people have returned to their land or the Temple has been rebuilt: Jewish survival in and of itself represents a perpetual victory over the Gentiles.

In the second saying, Rav posits Babylon as a fitting alternative to the Land of Israel. The terms "future" and "hope" anticipate a time when redemption will take place in the Land of Israel. But Rav explains that a future and a hope are palm trees and flax, both of which were abundant in Babylon in his here-and-now.[85] In the same way that some midrashim extol the virtues of the Land of Israel, this saying extols the virtues of Babylon, and this praise is given at the Land of Israel's expense. If the first saying made extraneous or even neutralized the territorial dimension of the

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[85] Ze'ev Safrai discerned additional ways the Bavli posits Babylonia as the preferred dwelling place for Jews of its generation, while relegating the Land of Israel to the messianic era; see Z. Safrai, " Influence of the Babylonian Talmud on the Attitude to Aliyah," in *Ingathering of Exiles: Aliyah to the Land of Israel – Myth and Reality*, ed. Dvora Hacohen (Hebrew; Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, 1998) 43–49.

conflict between Jews and Gentiles, here it is reprised, with contemporary Babylon as the chosen land.[86]

In the third saying, the Temple and the Land of Israel are superseded by the apple orchard that alludes to the giving of the Torah at Sinai and perhaps to the Exodus as well. According to Rav, the essence of being Jewish is keeping the Torah and its commandments, which, unlike the Temple service, does not hinge on a specific time or place. Not only do the three sayings undermine the importance of the place, they also evince a conflicting conception of time. In his first two sayings Rav focuses on the present, the annual cycle and life in Babylonia of his time. In his third saying, the linear conception of time is superseded by contemporary reality, since the Torah can and should be observed in all places and times.

This group of three sayings is thus revealed as a sophisticated intellectual composition. Was it compiled and redacted from Rav's sayings by the redactors of the Talmud, or is it perhaps an original grouping created by Rav or his student, R. Judah, son of R. Samuel bar Shilath? Abraham Weiss has argued that original groupings are characterized by a common external-formal feature such as a unique transmission attribution or a recurrent phrase, while groupings fashioned by the redactor are characterized by a unifying theme linking the sayings.[87] At first glance, the three sayings of R. Judah, son of R. Samuel bar Shilath in the name of Rav are consistent with the first definition. However, further scrutiny has shown that the grouping can be seen as an intellectually coherent literary unit[88] that could be attributed to the redactor. For now, this deliberation seems unresolvable.

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86 It is important to distinguish between the legitimation that Rav bestows on the Babylonian Jewish community vis-à-vis its rivalry with the Jewish community of the Land of Israel, and the question of whether Rav viewed Babylon as the "chosen land" of his time, preferable, by dint of its intrinsic virtues, to all other diasporas. In other words, is Rav promoting local Babylonian patriotism, or are his guiding principles applicable to all Diaspora communities in which material prosperity coexists alongside Torah study? The Bavli and the Geonim evince a position that invested Babylon with intrinsic qualities as the dwelling place of the Shekhinah during the period of exile, as the birthplace of Abraham, etc., on account of which it was regarded as the "holy land." See Safrai, " Influence," 43–47; Gafni, "How Babylonia," 342–348 and *Land*, 114–117. However, Rav's statement in our *sugya* and other places does not impute immanent qualities to Babylonia.

87 Weiss, *Studies*, 176–188.

88 Shamma Friedman, "A Critical Study of Yebamot 10 with a Methodological Introduction" (Hebrew), *Texts and Studies: Analecta Judaica 1*, ed. Hayim Z. Dimitrovsky (New York: Jewish Theological Press, 1977) 316–319; Richard Hidary, "Classical Rhetorical Arrangement and Reasoning in the Talmud: The Case of Yerushalmi Berakhot 1:1," *AJS Review* 34 (2010) 33–64.

Conclusions

Safran viewed the Jewish Diaspora as a sort of Weberian ideal type of the diasporan concept that implies longing for a place from which a people was forcibly expelled. This view has been correctly criticized from the perspective of the modern world, in which political and social borders, as well as personal identities, fade and emerge redrawn in diverse and unexpected places. The Jews of Antiquity would also likely have taken issue with his approach. Hellenistic Judaism embraced the Greek model of the metropolis and its colonies as a way of defining its identity and its commitment to two homelands: Jerusalem and wherever the Jews dwelled.

Philo and his contemporaries were not expected to live in the Land of Israel; at most, they had to explain their allegiance to and veneration of the Temple. But Babylonian Jewry, during Rav's lifetime and later, had to contend with a conception that viewed life in the Land of Israel as a religious obligation; this notion was attested to by the steady stream of sages who emigrated from Babylonia to the Land of Israel, and especially the custom of transporting the dead for burial in the Land of Israel.[89] The three sayings discussed in this article offer an alternative ideology in which divine revelation does not take the form of theophany through history (battles between Israel and the Gentiles) or the divine presence in the Temple. Rather, God is revealed through the Jewish people's observance of the Torah and the commandments at all times and everywhere.

Of course Rav's words must be read in the context of his own life. He was a Babylonian sage who made his mark in the Land of Israel but returned to Babylonia and established a center of Torah learning there (at least according to subsequent generations). The ideological foundations he laid down in Babylonia supported not only his generation in their place, but also generations of diasporan Jews.

According to George Steiner:

> The ancient Greeks were probably the most talented people in human history. They have disappeared as a people. What endures of the Roman world power, what of the high culture of Egypt? Only one people have survived. Crushed time after time, carried away, scattered, at the very edge of extermination, the enduring object of social ostracism, political discrimination, driven away from one place of refuge to another. … How can one account for this almost incomprehensible, almost impossible survival? … I am convinced that this quasi-absurd survival and the continuance of living on of the Jews has a meaning or, perhaps, it possesses an ontological purpose. Because the Jew was always driven away, because he was nowhere at home,

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89 Gafni, *Land*, 79–90.

because his only true home was a text: the Torah, the Jew *per definitionem* is a guest upon this earth, a guest among all the people.[90]

These words closely approximate the Bavli's position, as elaborated in this article, but with one significant difference: the tone. Like Steiner, the *sugya* in BT Ta'anit 29a–b opens with catastrophe – the destruction of the Temple – but its mood is entirely different. The destruction does not cast a pall over Jewish life. Rav's sayings all exude optimism and vitality. The Gentile is not indomitable, and a good life is attainable wherever Jews reside, where they inhale the apple blossom-scented air. Steiner and the Bavli diverge not on the exile, but on the redemption. Steiner is painfully aware that the redemption, including the return to the Land, will occur in the future – but he emphasizes, "not now."[91] Now the Jew is foreign and must suffer. For the Bavli, however, every moment of Torah study is the realization of Jeremiah's "future and hope."

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90 George Steiner, "We Are the Guests of Life and of Truth," *European Judaism* 36 (2003) 86–87.

91 Steiner, "Homeland," 12.

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When the Jews Greeted Ali:
Sherira Gaon's Epistle in Light of Arabic and
Syriac Historiography*

Abstract: Sherira Gaon's *Epistle* has been the most important source for the study of Babylonian Jewish history, and yet scholars have often relied too heavily on this work. This article argues that Sherira Gaon's *Epistle* must first be situated in its contemporary context, which reveals the many historiographical assumptions about the past that Sherira shared with both Arabic and Syriac historiography from the same period. In particular, analysis of Sherira's account of the Arab Conquest shows that it is not a historically accurate report of the past. Instead, Sherira is indebted to widespread assumptions of his time that viewed the Conquest as a watershed moment. Moreover, his celebrated account about an encounter between Ali ibn Abi Talib and the Jews of a certain town conforms to other apocryphal conquest accounts, composed in order to secure the material and cultural capital derived from such reports.

Key words: Geonim, Rabbinic Historiography, Muslim Conquest, Late Antiquity, Syriac Christians.

Introduction

In recent years scholars of ancient history have changed how they view late antique historiographical and anthological texts. Previously, these texts were treated as repositories of sources from which to mine self-evident historical information about earlier periods.[1] Scholars have come to realize that, in fact, texts are produced by authors who craft the past in response to contemporary circumstances. Thus, scholars have had to rethink certain previously accepted historical events "supported" (as it were) by ancient textual evidence. Prime examples of this are certain "watershed moments" that are now understood as later constructions that sought to simplify lengthy, complicated and multifaceted historical processes.[2]

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1   See especially Chase Robinson, *Islamic Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 35.

2   Ramsey MacMullen, *Christianity and Paganism in the Fourth to Eighth Centuries* (New

The "Muslim Conquest" is an example of such a "watershed moment" in ancient sources that has since been recognized as a simplification of a complicated historical process that extended through the 7th century. The former view was based on 8th to 10th-century Arabic accounts, the main literary evidence for the post-Conquest period. Scholars have come to perceive that considerable gaps exist between these later literary accounts and the historical data gleaned from earlier sources composed by minority groups,[3] and that these texts are more reflections of their authors' ideas and perceptions of the Conquest period than objective historical accounts. Due to these problems, modern historians now recognize the difficulties inherent in speaking of the "Conquest" in the singular, and referring to it as "Muslim" or "Islamic," rather than "Arab."[4] They therefore shifted their scholarly focus: instead of seeking to mine the works of later Arabic historians for historical information about the periods they described, they instead began to study the perceptions of the Conquest as reflected in these works, and the contexts that gave rise to these perceptions.[5]

Scholars of Jewish history have generally not applied this approach to Jewish accounts of the early Conquest period, choosing instead to accept

Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); and *Was 70 C. E. a Watershed in Jewish History?* ed. Daniel Schwartz and Zeev Weiss (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

3 Patricia Crone and Michael Cook's *Hagarism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977) was in large part responsible for this shift (regardless of the problems with their own reconstruction). They were followed by others, including Sebastian Brock, "Syriac Views of Emergent Islam," in *Studies on the First Century of Islamic Society,* ed. G. H. A. Juynboll (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984) 9–21, 199–203; Robert Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1997); Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*; and now Michael Penn, *Envisioning Islam* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2015), and *When Christians first Met Muslims* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015).

4 For these and other methodological problems, see Fred M. Donner, "The Islamic Conquests," in *Companion to the History of the Middle East,* ed. Youssef M. Choueiri (Malden: Blackwell, 2005) 28–29; Robert Hoyland, *In God's Path* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); and Fred Donner, "Review of Hoyland's *In God's Path,*" in *al-ʿUṣūr al-Wusṭā* 23 (2015) 137–139. In the current paper, I refer to it as the Conquest, in order to reflect the constructed nature of the term.

5 This same methodological shift can be found in recent scholarship of texts produced at the same time as these Arabic ones. For Syriac sources, see Muriel Debiè, "Syriac Historiography and Identity Formation," *Church History and Religious Culture* 9 (2009) 93–114, and "Writing Histories as 'Histoires,'" in *Writing 'True Stories',* ed. Arietta Papaconstantinou et al. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010) 43–75; and Philip Wood, *Chronicle of Seert* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). For Sasanian history, see Philippe Gignoux, "Problèmes de distinction et de priorité des sources," in *Prolegomena to*

the historicity of these accounts.[6] Those who do focus on the ideology behind an account do not focus on the authors and their contexts, but only on whether the Conquest was viewed "positively" or "negatively" by Jews of that period.[7]

This article applies the methodological shift described above to a major Jewish historiographical work that parallels works of 8th to 10th-century Arabic historians and also reflects upon the Conquest period: the Epistle, or *Iggeret*, of Sherira Gaon. Composed in 986 or 987 CE, the *Iggeret* has, to quote Robert Brody, "served for the last millennium as a point of departure … of the history of the Jews of Babylonia from the third through the tenth centuries."[8] But Sherira's *Iggeret* is to Babylonian Jewish history what the Arabic historians mentioned above are to Arab history: the main literary account of events that transpired centuries beforehand. Sherira's *Iggeret*, like the works of contemporaneous Arabic and Syriac historians, is better understood when its historical accounts of the Conquest and post-Conquest periods are reconsidered from the perspective of Sherira's own milieu.

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the Sources on the History of Pre-Islamic Central Asia, ed. Janos Harmatta (Budapest: Akademia Klado, 1979) 137–141, and "Pour une nouvelle histoire de l'Iran sasanide," in *Middle Iranian Studies: Proceedings of the International Symposium Organized by the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven from the 17th to the 20th of May 1982,* ed. W. Skalmowski and A. Van Tongerloo (Leuven: Peeters, 1984) 253–262. This methodology has also been applied to the later *Sefer Ha-Kabbalah*, for which see Eve Krakowski, "On the Literary Character of Abraham ibn Da'ud's *Sefer Ha-Kabbalah*," *European Journal of Jewish Studies* 1 (2007) 219–247.

6 Michael Lecker, "The Jewish Reaction to the Islamic Conquests," in *Dynamics in the History of Religions between Asia and Europe,* ed. Volkhard Krech and Marion Steinicke (Leiden: Brill, 2012) 177–190, and "Did Muḥammad Conclude Treaties with the Jewish Tribes Naḍīr, Qurayza and Qaynuqāʾ?" *Israel Oriental Studies* 17 (1997) 29–36; and Haggai Mazuz, *Religious and Spiritual Life of the Jews of Medina* (Leiden, Brill: 2014). To be sure, old habits die hard in other fields as well; see, for instance, Christian Sahner, "Swimming against the Current," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 136 (2016) 265–284.

7 Such as in Moshe Gil, "The Babylonian Encounter and the Exilarchic House in the Light of Cairo Geniza Documents and Parallel Arab Sources," *Judaeo-Arabic Studies* (1997) 159–160; and Jacob Neusner, *History of the Jews in Babylonia*, vol. 5 (Leiden: Brill, 1969) 130.

8 Robert Brody, "Epistle of Sherira Gaon," in *Rabbinic Texts and the History of Late-Roman Palestine,* ed. Martin Goodman and Philip Alexander (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) 258. For a similar thrust, see J. N. Epstein, *Introduction to Amoraic Literature* (Hebrew; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1962) 610.

1. Contextualizing Sherira's *Iggeret*

Given the preeminence of Sherira's *Iggeret* as a source for the history of
Babylonian Jewry, scholars have attempted to extract from it reliable his-
torical kernels and sources. They have shown quite convincingly that She-
rira relied on a number of earlier prosopographical and historical sources,
both oral and written,[9] and have debated the reliability of these sources,
noting various contradictions and problems throughout the *Iggeret*.[10] Yet
all scholars agree that Sherira's work was motivated by a desire to promote
certain contemporary agendas, most prominently (i) the preeminence of
Babylonian rabbinic traditions versus those of Palestine; (ii) Pumbedita's
academic preeminence versus other academies (in particular Sura);[11] (iii)
the authenticity of the Davidic genealogy of the Exilarchate; and (iv) the
idealized transmission of the Oral Torah from the time of the First Temple,
likely in response to Karaism.[12]

Despite Sherira's overt agendas, which clearly suggest a non-historical
focus, scholars, with few exceptions, continue to mine his work for histori-
cal data as if he were merely a passive or "objective" collector, anthologizer
and preserver of sources – which fundamentally belittles his agency.[13]

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9 Isaiah Gafni, "On the Talmudic Chronology in *Iggeret Rav Sherira Gaon*" (Hebrew),
Zion 52 (1987) 1–24; Robert Brody, "On the Sources for the Chronology of the Tal-
mudic Period" (Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 70 (2000) 75–107. Brody argues that the *Iggeret* and
the earlier *Seder Tannaim ve-Amoraim* relied on a common source. See also Isaiah
Gafni, "On Talmudic Historiography in the Epistle of Sherira Gaon" (Hebrew), *Zion*
73 (2009) 271–296. This was suggested already by Moshe Beer, "The Sources of Rav
Sherira Gaon's Iggeret" (Hebrew), *Bar-Ilan Annual* 4–5 (1972) 181–196. For a helpful
overview, see Brody "Epistle," 253–264. There is a debate concerning the date of these
earlier sources. Goodblatt, for example, acknowledges that while these earlier sources
preceded Sherira, they likely postdated the period they described by centuries, thereby
questioning their reliability; *Rabbinic Instruction in Sasanian Babylonia* (Leiden: Brill,
1975) 31–33, 35–43. By contrast, Brody seems to suggest a continual composition
of these earlier sources, beginning as early as the time of Rav (early third century);
"Sources for the Chronology," 93–94.

10 For instance, Goodblatt, *Rabbinic Instruction,* 35–36 notes that Sherira's presupposition
that rabbinic academies exist throughout this period is quite problematic. His overall
conclusion has gained acceptance, with some modification. See Jeffrey Rubenstein,
"The Rise of the Babylonian Rabbinic Academy," *Jewish Studies Internet Journal* 1
(2002) 55–68.

11 David E. Sklare, *Samuel ben Hofni Gaon and His Cultural World* (Leiden: Brill, 1996)
90.

12 Gafni, "On Talmudic Historiography," 293, lists the first three; Brody, "Epistle," 259,
also includes the last one.

13 Gafni, "On Talmudic Historiography," 295–296, has suggested that Sherira might be
profitably compared with Arabic historians from roughly the same period.

Sherira's historical context, which could explain the form and content of his work, is largely ignored. This treatment of Sherira's work stems from the once-dominant approach in the scholarship of early Arabic historians of the Conquest period that has since been superseded.[14]

A few important studies of the *Iggeret* have sought to situate some aspects of Sherira's work in its historical context. Talya Fishman has argued that Sherira conceived of the Mishnah in light of notions about the Qur'an that were current in his time.[15] Adam Becker has connected Sherira's institutional history to contemporaneous histories of Syriac Christian academies in the area.[16] Gerson Cohen had already associated the *Iggeret*, and earlier Jewish chronographies like *Seder Tannaim Ve-Amoraim*, Saadia's *Sefer Ha-Galuy* and the later Abraham Ibn Daud's *Sefer Ha-Kabbalah*, with the development of three features of Islamic historiography: the *isnad,* or chains of authentication, as well as *tabaqat* and *qarn*, which grouped authorities into generations.[17] Indeed, Ibn al-Nadim, the famous Muslim scholar who used these methods, published his major work in the same year and place

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14 This also relates to Sherira's use of talmudic sources. Some scholars argue that though he often cited passages from the Talmud as though they were his prooftexts, the texts themselves were in fact insufficient to prove Sherira's claim, and Sherira must therefore have relied on earlier sources – oral or written – that are no longer extant, and cited the Talmud as a heuristic device (*asmakhta*); see Shraga Abramson, *In the Centers and in the Diaspora in the Geonic Period* (Hebrew; Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1965) 107; Beer, "Sources," 183–184, and "Exilarchs of the Talmudic Epoch Mention in R. Sherira's Responsum," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 35 (1967) 43–74; and Goodblatt, *Rabbinic Instruction,* 31–33. By contrast, others argue that Sherira was probably not relying on external sources, but deriving his information – sometimes creatively – from the Talmud; see Avraham Weiss, *The Babylonian Talmud as a Literary Unit* (Hebrew; New York, 1943) 246; Margarete Schlüter, *Auf welche Weise wurde die Mishna geschrieben?* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993) 14–15, 283–284, 371–372; Amram Tropper, "From Tatlafush to Sura" (Hebrew), *'Oqimta* 2 (2014) 1–16; Beer, "Exilarchs"; and Geoffrey Herman, *Prince without a Kingdom* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), Appendix II.

15 Talya Fishman, "Claims about the Mishna in the *Epistle* of Sherira Gaon," in *Beyond Religious Borders,* ed. David Friedenreich and Miriam Goldstein (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012) 65–77 (notes on 184–192).

16 Adam Becker, *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006) 5 and 107–110.

17 Gerson Cohen, *Sefer Ha-Kabbalah* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1967) 50–56; Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, 48 and n. 14 there. For another connection between Sherira's *Iggeret* and Arabic forms of historiography, see Joseph David, "As It Is Explained in the Book of Adam" (Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 74 (2005) 594–595. For these terms in Islamic historiography, see Franz Rosenthal, *History of Muslim Historiography* (Leiden: Brill, 1952) 82–84.

as Sherira's *Iggeret* (987–988, Baghdad).[18] These studies show the benefit of a focus on the context of Sherira and his *Iggeret*.

Applied to Sherira's narrative about the conquest of the Jews in Babylonia, as well as the consequences of it, this methodological approach reveals Sherira not as a faithful historian of the past, but as creating a past that was suitable to his own present. His historical narrative reflects the same conception of the Conquest that we find in the Arabic and Syriac historians from the 8th to 10th centuries: namely, that it was a watershed moment in Near Eastern history that dictated the status of minorities under Arab rule centuries later.

2. Ali in Peroz-Shapur

To historians (Jewish and non-Jewish) writing in the 8th to 10th centuries, stories about the Conquest were not produced out of mere antiquarian interest. They were produced because they carried social and material capital. We can see this in Sherira's report of the Conquest in the *Iggeret*.

Immediately following his report of Muhammad's birth, Sherira describes the conquest of Peroz-Shapur (west of Baghdad)[19] by Ali ibn Abi Talib, Muhammad's son-in-law and cousin, and how Mar Rav Yitzhaq Gaon, along with 90,000 other Jews, welcomed him to the city.

> R. Hananiah was in Sura during that time, and Rav Hanna was *gaon* in Pumbedita and Mar R. Yitzhak. And it was he who was in Peroz-Shapur when Ali ben Abitaleb conquered it, and Mar R. Yitzhak went out from Peroz-Shapur to meet him, and he welcomed him. At that time there were 90,000 from Israel who were in Peroz-Shapur, and they welcomed Ali ben Abitaleb with great affection.[20]

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18 Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, 3–6. *Fihrist of Al-Nadīm,* trans. Bayard Dodge, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970). Compare Sherira's sources discussed by Brody, "Epistle," with the list of al-Nadim's sources discussed by Devin Stewart, "Abū ʾl-Faraj Muḥammad ibn Isḥāq Ibn al-Nadīm" in *Essays in Arabic Literary Biography 925–1350*, ed. T. DeYoung (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2011) 138–139. More generally, see Devin Stewart, "Structure of the *Fihrist*," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 39 (2007) 369–371.

19 It was renamed Peroz-Shapur in 244 CE after the battle of Misiche (the city's former name) between the Romans and Sasanians, as described in Shapur I's inscription at Naqsh-e Rustam.

20 B. M. Lewin, *Iggeret Rav Sherira Gaon* (Hebrew; Haifa: Itzkovsky, 1921) 101. All citations of the *Iggeret* follow Lewin, and particularly the "French" or B-recension, hereafter cited as *IRSG*. English translations are my own, unless noted otherwise. For the preference of the so-called French over the Spanish version, see Goodblatt, *Rabbinic Instruction,* 19, and Brody, "Epistle of Sherira," 253–264, as well as the earlier work of

Although scholars have largely accepted the historicity of this story in some form or other, and have built rather elaborate historical reconstructions about cooperation between geonim and caliphs on the basis of it, the story's historical merits are suspect.[21] This account is consistent with other tales in which conquered peoples greet their conqueror, as we find with the Jews greeting Alexander the Great, an event that also most likely did not occur historically.[22] The story of Ali and the Jews is in fact part of a much larger cultural trope found in a range of literatures produced around the time of Sherira's *floruit*.

While historically the Arab conquerors did indeed create pacts with some of the peoples they conquered, Conquest accounts gained prominence in both Muslim and Christian texts in the late 8th to 10th centuries.[23] During this period a wealth of monographs that collect Conquest accounts of individual cities and provinces were produced.[24] The prominence of these accounts was due to their importance in serving later agendas. The reports governed the relationship between minority groups and the local and the imperial Muslim authorities: if a report depicted the acceptance of the conquerors by the minority group, the minority group was granted more rights and privileges.[25] Thus minorities were motivated to reinvent the history of the seventh century by portraying the Arabs in a positive way,

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Epstein, *Introduction to Amoraic,* 610–615; and Beer, "Sources ," 184. This encounter is also reported in Abraham Ibn Daud's *Sefer Ha-Kabbalah,* though it is clearly dependent on Sherira's *Iggeret.* See Cohen, *Sefer Ha-Kabbalah,* 34–35 (Hebrew), 44–45 (English).

21 Moshe Gil, *Jews in Islamic Countries in the Middle Ages* (Leiden: Brill, 2004) 294–297 and "Babylonian Encounter," 149. Neusner, *History,* 5.130, treats this as evidence of Jewish attitudes at the time of the Conquest. For more elaborate reconstructions, see Heinrich Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden,* vol. 5 (Leipzig: Ostar Leiner, 1895) 396; Louis Ginzberg, *Geonica* 1 (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1909) 53–54; Abraham Grossman, *The Babylonian Exilarchate in the Geonic Period* (Hebrew; Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, 1984) 105, 111 fn. 4. For a critique of these latter positions on other grounds, see Brody, *Geonim of Babylonia and the Shaping of Medieval Jewish Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998) 337–340.

22 Shaye D. Cohen, "Alexander the Great and Jaddus the High Priest According to Josephus," *AJS Review* 7/8 (1982–1983) 41–68, and Jonathan A. Goldstein, "Alexander and the Jews," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 59 (1993) 59–101.

23 Milka Levy-Rubin, *Non-Muslims in the Early Islamic Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Chase Robinson, *Empire and Elites after the Muslim Conquest* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Jan van Ginkel, "Perception and Presentation of the Arab Conquest in Syriac Historiography," *Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 2006) 171–184.

24 Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, 34.

25 Robinson, *Empire*, 8.

and by claiming that they had extended friendship to their conquerors at their initial encounter.[26]

While these narratives were used by minority communities to secure certain privileges, they were also used to communicate and foster a certain communal attitude towards the Muslim rulers. These accounts "prescribe[d] harmonious coexistence" and "anchor[ed] ideals of co-operation and co-existence in a formative beginning."[27]

The key component of a conquest account was the pact that the conquerors were alleged to have made with a certain city or community. The conquerors were reported to have been welcomed by the conquered, and in response, the latter received various dispensations and rights that continued to hold, even centuries later during the lifetime of the account's author.

For example, the Muslim jurist Abu Yusuf (d. 798) explained why *dhimmis*, protected minority communities, typically Jewish or Christian, were granted certain rights:

> the agreement between the Muslims and *ahl al-dhimma* was based upon the payment of *jizya*, and the cities were conquered on condition that their synagogues and churches inside the city and outside it would not be destroyed, and that they [the Muslims] would prevent the shedding of their blood, and that they [the Muslims] would prevent any enemy who attacked them and that they would [be allowed to] parade their crosses, and that they [the Muslims] would protect them.[28]

The Syrian Orthodox Dionysius of Tel Mahre (d. 845), when discussing the Muslim conquest of Byzantium, included the basic principles of these supposed covenants. The Arab conquerors, he said, were ordered as follows:

> Wherever you are welcomed by a city or a people, make a solemn pact with them and give them reliable guarantees that they will be ruled according to their laws and according to the practices which obtained among them before our time. They will contract with you to pay in tribute whatever sum shall be settled between you, then they will be left alone in their confession and in their country. But as for those who do not welcome you, make war on them. Be careful to abide by all the just laws and commandments which have been given to you by God through our prophet, lest you excite the wrath of God.[29]

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26 Van Ginkel, "Perception" 180. See also the early remark by Nehemia Levtzion, "Toward a Comparative Study of Islamization," in *Conversion to Islam,* ed. N. Levtzion (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1979) 2.

27 Robinson, *Empire*, 15 and 19. See also Penn, *Envisioning Islam,* 42.

28 Levy-Rubin, *Non-Muslims,* 71.

29 See Andrew Palmer, *Seventh Century in the West-Syriac Chronicles* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1993) 141 and 145. See also discussion in Van Ginkel, "Perception," 177–179.

There are also stories of cities that did not welcome the conquerors and did not secure a treaty, with calamitous consequences, such as Caesarea in Palestine.[30] Other stories depict Muslims maintaining such conquest treaties even when ordered to violate them.[31]

Claims about Ali granting protection were made by many minority groups under Islamic rule.[32] In a mid-12th-century Arabic East-Syrian Christian work, Mar Emmeh is said to have aided the Muslim conquerors of Mosul, and in return was given a letter – a contract of protection from Ali.[33] Another text grounds certain protections and tax exemptions for Armenian Christians in a meeting between the community's leaders and the very same Ali ibn Abi Talib.[34] The widespread and varied nature of these contracts and claims explains the increased effort in the eighth and ninth centuries to seek uniformity of *dhimmi* rights, as traced by Levy-Rubin.[35]

The Ali narrative in Sherira's *Iggeret* fits well within this literary phenomenon. In fact, it is not the only Jewish text to claim a connection with Ali. We have attestations of other Jewish communities that made the same claim. For instance, a document that purports to represent a treaty between

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30 *Theophilus of Edessa's Chronicle and the Circulation of Historical Knowledge in Late Antiquity and Early Islam,* trans. Robert Hoyland (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011) 123–124.

31 Thus Abu Yusuf Yaʿqub, *Kitab al-Kharaj*; trans. Shemesh, *Taxation in Islam* (3 vols; Leiden: Brill, 1969) 3.66. He describes how Muslims of Sistan refused an order by the governor in 671 to execute the leading priest and other magi and to destroy Zoroastrian sacred fires, because they had signed a treaty based on the poll-tax. See Jamsheed Choksy, *Conflict and Cooperation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997) 34.

32 See Phillip Ackerman-Lieberman, "Muḥammadan Stipulations: *Dhimmī* Versions of the Pact of ʿUmar," in *Jews, Christians and Muslims in Medieval and Early Modern Times,* ed. Marina Rustow et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2014) 195–206.

33 Mari ibn Sulayman, ed. H. Gismondi, *Maris Amri et Slibae De Patriarchis Nestorianorum Commentaria, 1: Maris textus Arabicus* (Rome, 1899) 62. See brief discussion in Stephen Gerö, "Only a Change of Masters?" in *Transition Periods in Iranian History* (Leuven: Peeters, 1987) 46.

34 The provenance and date of this text are open to question. See Johannes Avdall, "A Covenant of ʿAli, Fourth Caliph of Baghdad, Granting Certain Immunities and Privileges to the Armenian Nation," *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 39 (1870) 60–64 says that an Armenian translation was made in 1767 of an original Kufic document, which he had in his possession but was lost when he lent it to another scholar. I thank James Russell of Harvard University for his help assessing this source. There is also a tradition of an edict of toleration issued by Ibn Maslama at Dabil (modern Dwin) in Armenia in 640 to Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians; see al-Baladhuri, trans. Philip Hitti, *Origins of the Islamic State* (2 vols.; New York: Columbia University Press, 1916) 1.314–315. Al-Baladhuri also reports that the non-Muslims of Jurjan (modern Gorgan in Northern Iran) made such a deal; see Levy-Rubin, *Non-Muslims*, 37.

35 Milka Levy-Rubin, "*Shurūṭ Umar* and Its Alternatives," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 30 (2005) 170–206.

Muḥammad and the Jews of Khaybar, transcribed by Ali, was found in the Cairo Genizah.[36]

Given the high stakes and valuable privileges associated with these Jewish (or Christian) stories, it is not surprising that they were not always accepted at face value, but were sometimes contested and contradicted.[37] Thus, in *Al-Sira al-Nabawiyya*, by Ibn Kathir (1300–1373), which purports to describe events that transpired during the life of Muhammad, there is a report about the Jews of Khaybar (an oasis north of Medina) that says that Umar (d. 644) evicted those Jews who could not produce a contract allowing them to remain in what was now Muslim land. Ibn Kathir then mentions a similar event that occurred years later:[38]

> The Jews of Khabyar in latter-day times, 300 (years) afterward, claimed to have in their possession a document from the Messenger of God … in which it states that he exempted them from paying the *jizya,* the poll-tax. Some scholars have been so deluded by this document as to advocate exempting them from the *jizya* … The document is spurious and fake, devoid of authenticity; I have demonstrated its foolishness from many viewpoints in a separate book … At its end it states, "And Ali b. Abu Talib wrote it." This is incorrect, a mistake.[39]

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36 For the text itself, see Hartwig Hirschfeld, "Arabic Portion of the Cairo Genizah at Cambridge," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 15 (1903) 167–174. For a discussion and further sources, see S. D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967) 2.386–387 and notes on 611. I thank Brendan Goldman of Johns Hopkins University for this reference. Similarly, in an 11th-century letter to Jewish communities in Egypt, the Academy of Jerusalem claimed there were Jews among the Arabs during the conquest of Palestine, and of Jerusalem in particular. See Jacob Mann, *Jews in Egypt and in Palestine under the Fatimids* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1920–2) 1.44, 1.64–5, and esp. 2.189–91. Moshe Gil, *History of Palestine, 634–1099* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 71, argues that this is not historically accurate, and skepticism is voiced as well by Robert Hoyland, "Sebeos, the Jews and the Rise of Islam," in *Medieval and Modern Perspectives on Muslim-Jewish Relations,* ed. R. L. Nettler (Luxembourg: Harwood, 1995) 91.

37 Indeed, at times we have conflicting reports of what happened in a given city. See Robert Hoyland, "Arabic, Syriac and Greek Historiography in the First Abbasid Century," *ARAM Periodical* 3 (1991) 224, regarding the Muslim capture of Damascus. In Dionysius of Tel Mahre it is recorded that the denizens of Damascus made terms with the conquerors, whereas in Azdi, "Conquests of Syria," the converse is true.

38 For a fuller discussion, see W. N. Arafat, "New Light on the Story of Banu Qurayza and the Jews of Medina," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (1976) 100–107, and Robert Hoyland, "Jews of Hijaz and their Inscriptions," in *New Perspectives on the Qurʾan,* ed. Gabriel Said Reynolds (London: Routledge, 2011) 114. In a somewhat comparable scenario, Christians are said to have cited the Qurʾan to try and receive certain privileges, but were also rebuffed; see Sidney Griffith, "Jews and Muslims in Christian Syriac and Arabic Texts of the Ninth Century," *Jewish History* 3 (1988) 66.

39 Trevor Le Gassick, *Life of the Prophet Muḥammad: A Translation of Al-Sīra Al-Nabawiyya*

Ibn Kathir's account illustrates the significant stakes involved in stories about the Conquest, and how these claims were interrogated and challenged.

Other Muslim writers seem to have been more amenable to such claims.[40] At the same time, still other writers used Ali as precedent to argue that *dhimmi*s should not be allowed to live in cities with Muslims, even if they had an agreement with the conquerors.[41]

Another story suggests competing Jewish and Arab claims about the conquest, and involves Ali, with a bit of a twist. In a number of Shiʿah sources starting in the early 10th century, verses 7:163–166 in the Qurʾan are explained by the following story.[42] The people of Kufa (nearly 200 kilometers south of Baghdad, and the city to which Ali relocated the capital from Medina) asked Ali whether they could eat eels being sold in the market. Ali chose to give his answer in the form of a miracle. He approached the Euphrates and summoned an eel, who explained that eels, as well as lizards, were the incarnation of people who did not give Ali allegiance. In later Muslim exegesis, these people were none other than the Jews.[43]

Here too, what is at stake is the Jewish attitude towards Ali. The Jews did not welcome and accept Ali immediately, and were condemned. Is it possible that this story was composed to counter a claim by Jews in Kufa of having accepted Ali immediately?[44]

2.1. Why Ali?

Ali was not selected at random to appear in these stories. While he was always a central figure to both Sunnis and Shias, we may venture to add a bit of texture to this history. Starting in the 10th century in particular – Sherira's time – those who claimed descent from Ali, known as the Alids,

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(4 vols.; Reading: Garnet, 2000) 3.297–298. Ibn Kathir explains: "It refers to the *jizya*, too, even though this had not yet been legislated. This tax was first introduced and taken from the people of Najrān. They are said to have arrived at the end of 9 AH (630–631). But God knows best."

40 Hirschfeld, "Arabic Portion," 172–174.

41 Levy-Rubin, *Non-Muslims*, 63–68, esp. 66.

42 See al-Rawandi, *Kitāb al-Kharāʾij wa-al-jarāʾiḥ* (Bombay: Mirza Mohamed Shirazi, 1884) 135–136, and discussion in Michael Cook, *The Koran, A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) 97–100.

43 Gil, "Babylonian Encounter," 148–150. Gil argues that the source hints at a negative encounter that transpired between Jews and the initial conquerors, but this should be rejected.

44 To be sure, the story serves other internal Shiʿah purposes as well; see Cook, *Koran*, 97–100. For other Jewish stories that feature Ali, see Gil, "Babylonian Encounter," 139–146.

were important nobles[45] and experienced a resurgence under the previously anti-Alid Abbasids.[46] The claim of Alid descent became a means of securing status,[47] and as such, these claims were prone to being forged, contested and declared false.[48] This is what happened in the case of the Jews of Khaybar when they claimed to have made a treaty with Ali, as recounted by Ibn Kathir.

Like the claims of documents ensuring preferential treatment, claims of descent from Ali were also substantiated with stories. For instance, the early 10th-century Arabic historian Al-Tabari records that al-Muʿtadid had a dream in which Ali appeared to him, promised him that many of his descendants would be caliphs and enjoined him to deal well with the Alids.[49] Here too, as Franz Rosenthal notes, "the story was circulated for political purposes, and for all we know, the Caliph himself, or his advisors, circulated it."[50]

In part, then, the different Jewish, as well as Christian, claims to a connection with Ali can be placed against the background of the broader acceptance of the Alids and their status in Abbasid culture at this time. Both types of claim were important because they could secure tangible financial benefits.[51]

Sherira's account of the meeting with Ali appears to be a story imported into the *Iggeret* from an independent source, as it departs from the ubiquitous Aramaic and instead appears mostly in Hebrew. Since the other Conquest accounts involving Ali date from the late 9th and 10th centuries, it is

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45 Teresa Bernheimer, *The ʿAlids* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013) 4–6; Biancamaria Scarcia Amoretti, "Historical Atlas on the ʿAlids," in *Sayyids and Sharifs in Muslim Societies,* ed. Kazuo Morimoto (London: Routledge, 2012) 92–122. For the rise of genealogical literature in the 10th and 11th centuries around those who claimed descent from Ali or other important figures in Muhammad's family, see Kazuo Morimoto, "Formation and Development of the Science of Talibid Genealogies in the 10th and 11th Century Middle East," *Oriente Moderno* 18 (1999) 541–570.

46 Bernheimer, *ʿAlids,* 53–54.

47 Bernheimer, *ʿAlids,* 28–33.

48 Bernheimer, *ʿAlids*, 24–28. For the strategies used to forge genealogy, see Zoltan Szombathy, "Motives and Techniques of Genealogical Forgery in Pre-Modern Muslim Societies," in *Genealogy and Knowledge in Muslim Societies,* ed. Sarah Bowen Savant and Helena de Felipe (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014) 24–36.

49 Franz Rosenthal, *History of al-Tabari, Vol. 38* (40 vols.; New York: SUNY Press, 1985) 38.24–25.

50 Rosenthal, *History,* 38.25 n. 137.

51 For the influence of Islamic emphasis on genealogy on Jews, see Arnold Franklin, *This Noble House* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

likely that Sherira's account, whatever its source, was not written very long before Sherira's time.

But Sherira's integration of this external source does not suggest that he simply incorporated it wholesale into his work. In fact, his hand is evident in the larger context he provides for the story, which is in Aramaic. Before reporting the meeting with Ali, Sherira recounts previous persecutions of Jews at the end of the Sasanian period:

> At the end of Persian rule there were years of persecution and suffering, and [the rabbis] could not institute public lections, (nor) establish study sessions, and conduct the customs of the *geonim* until after several years, when our rabbis came from Pumbedita to the vicinity of Neherdea to the city of Peroz-Shapur.[52]

Peroz-Shapur is, of course, the very city in which Rav Yitzhak welcomes Ali in the continuation of the *Iggeret*![53] Focusing on this city enables Sherira to contrast the persecution of the Persians with the benevolent encounter with Ali.[54] This narrative structure of persecution to salvation also conforms to other Conquest accounts. According to Dionysius, Roman persecution of miaphysite Christians was brought to an end by the Muslim conquest, which was followed by a conquest treaty between the Arabs and the towns-people.[55] Both Sherira and Dionysius present the Conquest as salvation from a previous hostile regime.

It is noteworthy that in Sherira's account, the representative of the Jews of Peroz-Shapur who greets Ali is a rabbi.[56] The image of a religious rather than a political leader concluding a conquest treaty with the conqueror, conforms closely with other conquest accounts.[57]

Thus, whether or not Sherira composed the Ali story himself, he certainly understood the significance of including such a narrative in his history of Jews in Babylonia and purposefully crafted his narrative so as to differentiate Muslim rule from Persian and to portray the rabbis as especially close to imperial Muslim rule.

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52 Lewin, *IRSG,* 99.

53 Lewin, *IRSG,* 100–101.

54 See Cohen, "Alexander the Great," for a similar argument about how Josephus uses his sources (esp. 44), and how he crafts them in order to justify the transfer of power from the Persians to Greeks during the time of Alexander the Great (esp. 62–64).

55 See Palmer, *Seventh Century,* 141.

56 Mar R. Yitzhaq's academic affiliation is a matter of debate. According to Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden,* 5.396, followed by Ginzberg, *Geonica* 1.52, Mar R. Yitzhaq was a Suran. I. Halevy, *Dorot ha-Rishonim* (6 vols.; Pressburg: Alkalai, 1897) 3.164–179, strongly disagreed, associating Mar R. Yitzhaq with Pumbedita. See also Brody, *Geonim of Babylonia*, 337–338.

57 Penn, *Envisioning Islam*, 42–43, and Hoyland, *Theophilus,* 109–117.

3. Ordinance of the Rebellious Wife *(Taqqanat Ha-moredet)*

Immediately following his account of the Conquest and encounter with Ali, Sherira reports that a rabbinic decree, or *taqqanah*, was issued with respect to the case of a "rebellious wife" (*moredet*), meaning a wife who refuses to cohabit with her husband:

> And after him [Mar Rav Yitzhaq's contemporary] was Mar Rav Rava, in whose days they decreed to give a woman a divorce immediately, which is not in keeping with the report of the daughter-in-law of Rav Zevid (b. Ketubot 63b). And in his days Mar Rav Hunai Gaon was in Sura.[58]

This new ordinance counteracted the ruling in the Babylonian Talmud that a husband must wait a year before divorcing such a wife.[59]

In a different responsum, Sherira rationalized the *taqqanah* as an effort to prevent a rebellious wife from "depending upon" Gentiles to obtain a divorce by force.[60] This may refer to the concern that a woman might appeal to Gentile authorities for legal help, or even convert and marry into the Gentile community. In the same responsum, Sherira also dates the *taqqanah* to the time of the Saboraim, the generation of rabbis that precede the Conquest. But in the *Iggeret,* Sherira dates the *taqqanah* to the period of two rabbis (Rava and Hunai) named as living during the period of Ali's conquest of Peroz-Shapur.[61]

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58 Lewin, *IRSG*, 101. Sherira mentions the *taqqanah* once more a few lines later in a list of sages; see Lewin, *IRSG,* 106.

59 The position in the Bavli is problematic because it is seemingly inconsistent with biblical law, in which the prerogative to divorce lies with the husband. Many of the exact details of the *taqqanah* were subject to later rabbinic disagreements. For a detailed discussion, see Chaim Tykocinski, *Taqqanot Ha-geʾonim* (Hebrew; New York, Yeshiva University, 1959) 11–29; Robert Brody, "Were the Geʾonim Legislators?" (Hebrew), *Shenaton Ha-mishpat Ha-ʿivri* 11–12 (1984–86) 279–315, and "Maimonides' Attitude Towards the Halakhic Innovations of the Geonim," in *Thought of Moses Maimonides,* ed. Ira Robinson et al. (Lewiston: E. Mellen, 1990) 184–186 and notes there; Elimelech Westreich, "The Rise and Decline of the Wife's Right to Leave Her Husband without Fault in Medieval Jewish Law" (Hebrew), *Shenaton Ha-mishpat Ha-ʿivri* 21 (1998–2000) 123–147, and "The Rise and Decline of the Law of the Rebellious Wife in Medieval Jewish Law" in *Jewish Law Association Studies* 12 (2002) 207–218. Yaakov Elman, "'Up to the Ears' in Horses' Necks (B. M. 108a)," *Jewish Studies Internet Journal* 3 (2004) 101, briefly suggests that the discussion of the rebellious wife in the Bavli is in some ways similar to a legal discussion of "insubordination" (*atarsagayih*) in the Pahlavi *Book of a Thousand Judgments*, but these seem quite different and any connections seem coincidental.

60 B. M. Lewin, ed., *Otsar Ha-geʾonim* (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1941), Ketubot, 192, no. 478. For a discussion of the attribution to Sherira, see Tykocinski, *Taqqanot*, 15–17.

61 The manuscripts differ here, but it is clear that Sherira is referring to the two figures

Sherira's dating of the *taqqanah* to the generation after the Conquest, as well as his rationalization for it, have been accepted by scholars as historical,[62] in the belief that the Conquest immediately resulted in a disruption to the order of Jewish life.[63] A 12th-century work from Provence, *Sefer ha-ʿItur*, offers an exact date for the responsum cited in the *Iggeret*. However, the responsum in *Sefer ha-ʿItur* is clearly dependent upon Sherira's, and as such, is not an independent confirmation of Sherira's dating.[64] The only difference between the two is that the latter seeks to identify a specific date for the *taqqanah*. However, the manuscripts of *Sefer ha-ʿItur* differ in the dates they provide.[65] Despite the derivative nature of the later responsum

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he mentions in the *Iggeret* (as opposed to one figure with elements of both names, or only one of the two sages). Sherira's mention of the Saboraim, despite the fact that they lived *before* the Conquest, suggests that Sherira was aware of the attribution of the *taqqanah* to the Saboraim by earlier writers such as Natronai, and cites this alternative date precisely to make it seem like it agrees with his own dating. See also a different responsum by Sherira in Tykocinski, *Taqqanot*, 16–17. Here it is clearly phrased "after the Saboraic rabbis." The responsum discussed above could be understood to mean that the Saboraim themselves issued the *taqqanah* (see Lewin, *Otsar*, Ketubot, 192, n. 10), and some of his responsa say this (see Tykocinski, *Taqqanot,* 17–18). See also Rosenthal, "Regarding the Opening," 240–241 n.

62 Brody, "Were the Geʾonim"; Gideon Libson, "Halakhah and Reality in the Gaonic Period," in *Jews of Medieval Islam*, ed. Daniel Frank (Leiden: Brill, 1995) 67–99; Yehuda Zvi Stampfer, "Islamic Influence in the Divorce Laws of Rav Samuel Ben Hofni Gaon and the Rambam" (Hebrew), in *ʿAle ʿAsor*, ed. Daniel Lasker and Haggai ben Shammai (Beersheba: Ben Gurion University, 2008) 311–312. Tykocinski, *Taqqanot*, 26 accepts a slightly different dating, but still argues that the Conquest was a watershed and the impetus for the *taqqanah*.

63 Robert Brody, "Judaism in the Sasanian Empire," *Irano-Judaica,* ed. Shaul Shaked and Amnon Netzer (6 vols.; Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 1990) 2.54–55; Westreich, "Rise and Decline of the Law," 217–218. Brody argues that there was a fundamental difference between the treatment of Jews under Muslim and Sasanian rulers; see "Maimonides' Attitude," 185; "Were the Geʾonim?" 294 n. 63; "Judaism in the Sasanian Empire" 52–56; and "Irano-Talmudica," *JQR* 106 (2016) 209–232. However, see Shai Secunda, "'This, But Also That'," *JQR* 106 (2016) 233–241, and Alberto Cantera, "Legal Implications of Conversion in Zoroastrianism" in *Iranian Identity in the Course of History,* ed. Carlo Cereti (Rome: Italian Institute for Africa and the Orient, 2010) 53–66.

64 The responsum can also be found in Lewin, *Otsar*, Yebamot, 78, no. 175. Brody assumes that the responsum in *Sefer ha-ʿItur* is an independent source. Similarly, Tykocinski, *Taqqanot*, 21, assumes that the responsum in the *Sefer ha-ʿItur* was accessing more sources. However, it is almost a verbatim citation of Sherira's responsum, and indeed, the date the responsum provides seems to be an estimation based on Sherira's comment in his responsum that the *taqannah* was passed "nearly 300 ago and more," as already noted by E. S. Rosenthal, "Regarding the Opening Traditions of Bavli Taʿanit," in *Yaʾakov Friedman Memorial Volume,* ed. Shlomo Pines (Hebrew; Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1974) 240 n.

65 For a discussion of the manuscripts, see Brody, "Were the Geʾonim," 290 n. 49. In one manuscript the date is 590–591. Another manuscript has 629, which Brody suggests

and the variation in manuscripts, scholars have combined the *Iggeret* and *Sefer ha-ʿItur* to date the *taqqanah* to 650/651.[66]

There are, however, earlier sources that report this *taqqanah* and should be considered before accepting either Sherira's dating or his rationalization. The clearest was composed by Natronai Gaon, who flourished over a century before Sherira. Natronai had the following to say about the *taqqanah*:

> Our rabbis the Saboraim … instituted as law [*halakha le-maʿaseh*][67] to take [from her] even what she had acquired and give her a divorce document immediately, so that the daughters of Israel will not leave to *tarbut raʿah*. So the nation has spoken, and one should not budge from it.[68]

There is much in common between Natronai's and Sherira's responsa. Both attribute the *taqqanah* to the Saboraim, and both use identical language to describe the centerpiece of the *taqqanah*: that a woman receives her divorce document "immediately" (*le-altar*). Perhaps due to these similarities, Brody and others have assumed that Natronai and Sherira are in total agreement regarding the reason for the *taqqanah*. These scholars import Sherira's relatively clear rationalization of the *taqqanah* into the vaguer rationalization of Natronai's text, that the daughters of Israel should not engage in *tarbut raʿah*.[69] Thus, for example, Brody argues that Natronai's explanation is essentially the same as Sherira's: "leave to *tarbut raʿah*" means that the woman might convert or be converted to Islam. This is based on understanding *tarbut raʿah* to mean *shmad* (persecution), which in the Geonic period might refer to conversion to Islam.[70]

However, the Bavli texts that Brody cites do not support the interpretation of the term *tarbut raʿah* as persecution. In fact, in the Bavli the

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    still supports his point ("the defeat of the Sasanians at the hands of the Muslims began already then"; Brody, "Were the Geʾonim," 290 n. 49), but this date is before there was any conquest of Babylonia by Arabs/Muslims (Seleucia-Ctesiphon was conquered in 636)! Tykocinski, *Taqqanot,* 23–25 already argued that the date provided by the *Sefer ha-ʿItur* is incorrect, but did so based on Sherira's *Iggeret*. Rosenthal, "Regarding the Opening," 240–241 n., also notes the manuscript variation; he ultimately argues that the 650 date is original to the text, but rejects it as the actual date of the *taqqanah,* based on the other responsa that suggest it was passed during the time of the Saboraim.

66 Brody, "Were the Geʾonim," 290–291; Gideon Libson, *Jewish and Islamic Law* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003) 111; Lena Salaymeh, "Every Law Tells a Story," *UC Irvine Law Review* 19 (2014) 27. Gil, "Babylonian Encounter," 149 n. 27, places it in 658, without explanation.

67 See Lewin, *Otsar*, Ketubot, 189, n. 8.

68 Lewin, *Otsar*, Ketubot, 189, no. 471.

69 They have also once again read a later, derivative responsum (Lewin, *Otsar*, Ketubot 190, no. 473) into this earlier one.

70 Brody, "Were the Geʾonim," 294 and n. 62 there.

term approximates "decadence" or "licentiousness," as exemplified by an account in which Elisha ben Avuya descends to *tarbut raʿah* and solicits a prostitute.[71] This meaning is consistent with Palestinian uses of the expression, uses that the Bavli, when it glosses them, simply mimics. At times the Bavli almost dismisses *tarbut raʿah* as a minor infringement of law, which is hardly the way it would treat abandonment of the true faith.[72] The term certainly does not mean *shmad,* in the sense of persecution or conversion to another faith.

If we do not apply Sherira's later etiology to Natronai's earlier text, it is not difficult to understand Natronai's explanation on its own terms. If "leave to *tarbut raʿah*" means to engage in some illicit behavior, in the case of the rebellious wife it might refer to adultery, which the *taqqanah* sought to avoid by promptly freeing the wife from her marital bonds. In short, if not for Sherira, we would have no reason to understand Natronai's explanation as referring to conversion, persecution or Gentiles at all![73] And we would have no reason to question his dating to the Saboraim, meaning the period before the Conquest.

The dating and explanation given by Sherira in the *Iggeret* are also absent from the two earliest attestations of the *taqqanah* – the late 8th or early 9th-century *Halakhot Pesuqot* and slightly later *Halakhot Gedolot*.[74] These works draw no connection to the Conquest, nor is there any sign that the *taqqanah* is responding to Islam or to Gentiles.[75] In both these sources, the *taqqanah* is simply presented as the accepted contemporary practice (according to *Halakhot Gedolot,* even accepted by both of the *yeshivot* in Babylonia), without any additional details. The *taqqanah* receives no etiology, and there is no overt or implied reference to any larger political or historical context.

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71 *b. Hagigah* 15a. The meaning seems to be exactly the same in *b. Hagigah* 16b, the other source cited by Brody.

72 *b. Niddah* 72b.

73 Indeed, Brody, "Were the Geʾonim," 294 n. 63 and Tykocinski, *Taqqanot*, 25, go so far as to read a much later responsum back into Natronai, a responsum that glosses *tarbut raʿah* as "fornication or persecution." See discussion in Tykocinski, *Taqqanot,* 13–14.

74 For the dates of these two texts, see Brody, *Geonim of Babylonia,* 217–221 and 228–229, respectively; *Sefer Halakhot Pesukot*, ed. S. Sasoon (Hebrew; Jerusalem: Makor, 1951, 1971) 114; *Hilkhot Reʾu*, ed. A. L. Schlossberg (Versailles: Cerf, 1886) 88; Tykocinski, *Taqqanot,* 11; and Neil Danzig, *Introduction to Halakhot Pesuqot* (Hebrew; New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1993) 311. See also *Halakhot Gedolot*, ed. Ezriel Hildesheimer (Hebrew; 3 vols.; Jerusalem: Mekiqe Nirdamim, 1980) 2.243–244. Danzig, *Introduction,* 310–313, convincingly argues that the citation of *Halakhot Pesuqot* for this section by Aharon Ha-Kohen Gaon (mid-10th century) is more of a paraphrase than a direct citation.

75 Also noted by Salaymeh, "Every Law," 51.

Lack of a negative etiology for the *taqqanah* can also be found in sources which mandate that, upon her divorce, a rebellious wife is to be given some money so that "daughters of Israel not be treated as abandoned (*hefqer*)."[76] This humanitarian rationale reflects no suspicion about the woman; to the contrary, she remains among the "daughters of Israel" and is owed sensitivity because of that status.[77]

The *Iggeret*'s dating of the *taqqanah* was not accepted by any earlier or later source not directly indebted to it. A version of this *taqqanah* that follows *Halakhot Pesuqot* and *Halakhot Gedolot* and only mentions that the *taqqanah* is the accepted practice in the academies made its way back into a number of manuscripts of the Bavli, as well as into *Sefer ha-Mitzvot* of Hefetz ben Yatsliah (c. 11th century).[78] In short, other than the *Iggeret*, all other sources for the *taqqanah* employ generic dating, such as attributing the *taqqanah* to "later rabbis" (*rabbanan batra'ei*) or to rabbis who were "after *gemara*," or to accepted practice "for many years until now."[79] If not for Sherira's dating, our other sources would give us no indication whether the *taqqanah* was issued before or after the Conquest

Thus it appears that neither Sherira's dating nor his rationalization for the *taqqanah* can be accepted as historical.[80] This conclusion is further supported by the growing recognition that the post-Conquest period was at first marked by continuity rather than discontinuity.[81] Early Arab admin-

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76 Isaac ben Jacob Alfasi ha-Cohen (d. 1103) attributes this to a geonic responsum. See Lewin, *Otsar*, Ketubot, 193, no. 479, and Tykocinski, *Taqqanot*, 19. It was also cited by others; see Lewin, *Otsar*, Ketubot, 195, no. 486, and Tykocinski, *Taqqanot,* 20.

77 Brody, "Were the Ge'onim," 301 n. 105, interprets this responsum through a later one.

78 Moshe Zucker, "New Fragments from the Book of Precepts of Hefetz ben Yatsliah" (Hebrew), *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 24 (1960–1961) 58 argues that Hefetz had access to *Halakhot Gedolot*. However, Danzig, *Introduction,* 312 fn. 194 suggests that Hefetz may actually have had access to a manuscript of the Bavli that included this version, since Hefetz shows no awareness of *Halakhot Gedolot* elsewhere.

79 See two examples in Tykocinski, *Taqqanot*, 19.

80 Salaymeh, "Every Law," 50–52, also critiques scholarly reliance on Sherira and ignoring the earlier explanations for the *taqqanah*. But she still seems to accept Sherira's dating (as reported by the *Sefer ha-ʿItur*), which leads her to make untenable suggestions.

81 Michael Morony, "Continuity and Change in the Administrative Geography of Late Sasanian and Early Islamic ʾal-Irāq," *Iran* 20 (1982) 1–49; Zeev Rubin, "Reforms of Khusro," in *Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East 3: States, Resources and Armies,* ed. Averil Cameron (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1995) 242–243 and notes there. Similarly, see Hoyland, *In God's Path,* 99–100; and Peter Pentz, *Invisible Conquest* (Copenhagen: National Museum of Denmark, 1992) 74; Robert Schick, *Christian Communities of Palestine from Byzantine to Islamic Rule* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1995); Victoria Erhart, "Development of Syriac Christian Canon Law in the Sasanian Empire," in *Law, Society, and Authority in Late Antiquity,* ed. Ralph W. Mathisen (Oxford: Oxford University

istrators have even recently been described as adopting a "deliberate policy" to "make themselves as little felt as possible" and to remain "relatively inconspicuous."[82] In fact, it was only in the last decade of the 7th century that the conquests of the empire came to be identified in religious and sectarian terms, including by the conquered minority groups.[83] As such, minority communities were relatively undisturbed by the new conquerors until the end of the 7th and early 8th centuries.[84]

Conversion to Islam, or the threat and fear of it, truly begins to emerge only at the end of the 7th century.[85] Some scholars even argue that "Islam" as such did not exist until this later period, and that "conversion" in the sense of passage from one distinct religious group to another was not even

Press, 2001) 128–129; and Uriel Simonsohn, *Common Justice* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011). For the region of Fars, see Touraj Daryaee, "Effect of the Arab Muslim Conquest on the Administrative Division of Sasanian Persis/Fars," *Iran* 41 (2003) 193–204.

82 Arietta Papaconstantinou, "Administering the Early Islamic Empire," in *Money, Power and Politics in Early Islamic Syria*, ed. John F. Haldon (Burlington: Ashgate, 2010) 65 and 68, respectively.

83 Brock, "Syriac Views"; Gerrit J. Reinink, "Beginnings of Syriac Apologetic Literature in Response to Islam," *Oriens Christianus* 77 (1993) 165–187, and esp. 186–187; Han Drijvers, "Christians, Jews and Muslims in Northern Mesopotamia in Early Islamic Times," in *La Syrie de Byzance a l'Islam VIIe–VIIIe siècle,* ed. Jean-Paul Rey-Coquais (Damascus: French Institute of Damascus, 1992) 67–74. John Lamoreaux, "Early Eastern Christian Responses to Islam," in *Medieval Christian Perceptions of Islam*, ed. John Victor Tolan (London: Routledge, 2000) 15, shows that, despite virulent animosity by Christians towards the Arab conquerors, they were not viewed as having any religious component. For a daring approach concerning the religion of the Arab conquerors, see Fred Donner, "From Believers to Muslims," *Al-Abhath Journal of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, American University of Beirut* 50–51 (2002–3) 9–53, and *Muhammad and the Believers* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

84 Cf. Salaymeh, "Every Law," 47–50.

85 Richard W. Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), and *Patricians of Nishapur* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972) 15; Choksy, *Conflict and Cooperation*, ch. 3–4. The *Chronicle of Zuqnin* reports that the poll-tax started to lead to Christian apostasy to Islam in the last quarter of the 8th century; *Chronicle of Zuqnin, Parts III and IV,* trans. Amir Harrak (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1999) 321–322. We find earlier reports of non-Arabs aligning with Arabs during the conquest to avoid (high?) taxes, but this did not entail conversion (see Hoyland, *In God's Path*, 97). However, with time this seems to have changed, such that in the early 8th century non-Muslims were already converting to avoid the burden of taxes. A number of reports from the 8th century suggest this, such as the *Vita* of Saint Stephen of Mar Sabas and a report to ʿUmar II in al-Tabari *Taʾarikh II* 1354 (see Lamoreaux, "Early Eastern," 8). There are reports in later sources that people did convert in order to avoid paying taxes in the Conquest period (see Hitti, *Origins,*487–488), but these reports should not be accepted .

possible until then.[86] Some of the earliest accounts from minority communities viewed the Arab Conquest quite positively.[87] As Robert Hoyland has shown, many Jews shared this view.[88] Indeed, concerns about conversion seem not to have been expressed for quite some time. For example, at the end of the 7th century John of Fenek reported that the conquering forces included Christians and noted that the conquerors "demanded only tribute, and each of them [the conquered] could remain in whatever faith he chose."[89]

Increased use of Islamic rhetoric by Arab rulers began in earnest at the end of the 7th century, during the time of Abd al-Malik, rather than immediately following the Conquest.[90] It was only in the 8th century and after that notions of apostasy and forced conversion become central foci in Jewish, Syriac Christian and Muslim traditions.[91]

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86 Fred Donner, "From Believers," and "Review," 134–140. Robinson, *Empire and Elites*, 109 n. 3 and Hoyland, *In God's Path,* 157, suggest that at the outset of Islam, religion and ethnicity were intertwined, where Arabs were Muslims and vice versa, and Jews and Christians could not become Muslims. For more on this, see Michael Penn, *Envisioning Islam,* 142–182.

87 For the Church of the East, see the 14th epistle of Ishoyahb III*, in *Išōʿyahb Patriarchae III Liber epistularum,* ed. Rubens Duval (CSCO Syr. II.64) (2 vols.; Paris: Typographeo Reipublicae, 1904–1905) 1.251 (Syriac) and 2.182 (Latin), and John of Fenek, in Sebastian Brock, "North Mesopotamia in the Late Seventh Century," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 9 (1987) 57–58; and Penn, *When Christians,* 79–84. For Syrian Orthodox views, see the discussion concerning Dionysius of Tel Mahre, in van Ginkel, "Perception,"171–184. For other miaphysites who viewed the conquest as positive and as punishment against the Byzantine Empire for accepting Chalcedon and persecuting miaphysites, see Lamoreaux, "Early Eastern," 13–14.

88 Hoyland, *Seeing Islam,* 307–308.

89 A. Mingana, *Sources Syriaques 1* (Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1907) 147*, lines 1–6, trans. Donner, "From Believers," 44.

90 See, for instance, the report in the late 8th century *Chronicle of Zuqnin* (trans. Harrak), 147.

91 Oded Ir-shai, "The Apostate as an Inheritor in Responsa of the Geʾonim" (Hebrew), *Shenaton Ha-mishpat Ha-ʿivri* 11–12 (1984–86) 435–71. To be sure, there is some evidence for earlier conversion to Islam, such as in an epistle of Ishoyahb III, but it is quite clear according to this source that there was no compulsion to convert. See Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 180–182, Gero, "Only a Change of Masters?" 44, and Duval, ed. *Išōʿyahb Patriarchae III Liber Epistularum*, 1.248 (text), and 2.179–180 (Latin). Simeon of Revardashir (mid-7th century) says that a man who changes his religion should not inherit from his father, but he does not specify if the conversion was specifically to Islam. See *Syrische Rechtsbücher*, ed. Eduard Sachau (3 vols.; Berlin: Georg Reimer, 2014) 3.248 (Germ.) and 3.249 (Syr.). Jacob of Edessa (d. 708) discussed what to do if someone converted to Islam and then reverted to Christianity; see Arthur Vööbus, *Synodicon in the West Syrian Tradition* (4 vols.; Louvain: Secrétariat du CSCO, 1975) 1.253 (Syr.) and 2.231–32 (Eng.). Lastly, the phenomenon of Jewish and Christian slaves converting to Islam seems to have existed already at an early date, for

To summarize this deconstruction of the historicity of Sherira's account: Sherira's explanation for the *taqqanah* – that it was promulgated to reduce the risks of conversion or of Jews appealing to Gentile courts – is a later, anachronistic explanation. Moreover, dating the *taqqanah* to the post-Conquest period is not based on Sherira's available sources, but is his own invention. Finally, the *taqqanah's* now-standard dating to 650/651 CE, based on the *Sefer ha-ʿItur,* should be abandoned.

When, then, was the *taqqanah* issued? We might assume that it appeared around the time of its earliest attestations in *Halakhot Pesuqot, Halakhot Gedolot* and Natronai Gaon, which would place it before the middle of the 8th century, well after the completion of the Conquest of the Near East, in the mid-7th century.[92] Or we might trust the dating suggested by these earlier attestations, in which case the *taqqanah* would trace back to the general period of the Saboraim, probably between 500 and 600, before the Conquest. For our purposes, it suffices to note that Sherira's dating is not supported by the earlier attestations, nor does it fit with what we know about the period historically.

4. Sherira's Perspective on the Conquest

Sherira's dating of the *taqqanah* in the *Iggeret* to the post-Conquest period may not be mere happenstance, but intentional reconstruction of history. His placement of the *taqqanah* in the general time-frame of a particular rabbi's lifetime, rather than a specific date, is a device he employs elsewhere in the *Iggeret* to date personalities or events whose precise timing is uncertain.[93]

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which see Simonsohn, "Communal Membership Despite Religious Exogamy," *JNES* 75 (2016) 258–9. But slavery was always an avenue of transition between groups, such as from Christianity to Judaism; see the various legislations in Amnon Linder, *Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987). According to Islamic tradition, the earliest Jewish female "converts" to Islam were captives; see G. H. Stern, "The First Women Converts in Early Islam," *Islamic Culture* 13 (1939) 297. This relates to intermarriage between the People of the Book and early Muslims, an issue that was explored by Islamic jurists but which seems to have been more theoretical than real, as argued by Susan Spectorsky, "Women of the People of the Book," in *Judaism and Islam,* ed. Benjamin H. Hary and John L. Hayes (Leiden: Brill, 2000) 269–278.

92 If this dating is accurate, it is worth noting that none of these texts mention fear of conversion as a reason for the *taqqanah*.

93 For more on this, see Brody, "Were the Geʾonim," 293–294.

We cannot, of course, know for sure why Sherira insisted in the *Iggeret* that the *taqqanah* occurred in the immediate post-Conquest period. This insistence is consistent, however, with the tendency of historians in Sherira's time to view the Conquest as a watershed moment in history and to therefore situate major changes in Jewish life under Arab/Muslim rule in this moment.[94] The singularity of the Conquest was apparently so engrained in his historiographic mindset that Sherira could not help but retroject to the post-Conquest period the circumstances and issues facing his community under Islamic rule, including the apparently prevalent notion in his day that Jewish women would "depend upon Gentiles to acquire divorce documents for them."[95] Sherira follows what Donner calls the "overly Islamicizing trend of the later Muslim sources (mostly 9th century and later), which viewed the whole expansion as due to the impulse provided by the new religion of Islam."[96] Sherira's *Iggeret* and responsum are therefore historically inaccurate for the period whose events they purport to convey, but they do reflect the context of Sherira's own writing in terms of both historiographic assumptions and current problems.

Conclusion

Sherira Gaon's reports of both the Muslim Conquest and its immediate aftermath should therefore not be used as an unproblematic source for the history of Jews in Babylonia. Deconstructing the work's historicity is only the first step in understanding and appreciating its significance. For too long, scholarly debate about Sherira has been over his sources and their reliability. Now historians must take the discussion to the next level

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[94] The most prominent example of this is the Pact of Umar; see Mark Cohen, "What Was the Pact of Umar?" *JSAI* 23 (1999), 100–157, and Levy-Rubin, *Non-Muslims.* For other examples, see *Theophilus,* trans. Hoyland, 126–127, which retrojects a much later decree back on the Conquest period. See discussion in Sidney Griffith, "Images, Islam and Christian Icons," in *La Syrie de Byzance à l'Islam,* ed. Pierre Canivet et Jean-Paul Rey-Coquais (Damascus: French Institute of Damascus, 1992) 126–131, and Penn, *Envisioning Islam,* 43. See also R. Stephen Humphreys, "Christian Communities in Early Islamic Syria and Northern Jazira," in *Money, Power and Politics,* 53.

[95] Natronai himself responds to cases of Jews seeking help from non-Jewish courts, as well as cases of conversion to Islam in order to acquire benefits (for the latter, see Lewin, *Otsar,* Gittin, 103, no. 261). This makes it all the more striking that he does not provide foreign courts as a justification for the *taqqanah.* For reliance on Muslim courts, see Simonsohn, *Common Justice.*

[96] Donner, "Review," 136.

by asking: Why did Sherira write what he did? What larger historical contextual issues might explain his work?

I have argued that we must appreciate Sherira and his writing in the context of contemporaneous historiography – both Arabic and Syriac. In the cases studied, Sherira is entirely in keeping with larger historiographic trends about the Conquest and the importance it had for his own time. Too often, Jewish historical writings are left out of the extensive cross-cultural circulation of historical knowledge that we find in other texts during this period.[97] But the Jewish historical sources that remain from this period, few as they may be, should be included in this wonderfully diverse picture.

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97 Hoyland, "Arabic, Syriac," 211–233, and *Theophilus*.

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When Maimonideans and Kabbalists Convert to Christianity

Abstract: This article examines how three major Jewish leaders who converted to Christianity in medieval Spain – Abner of Burgos, Pablo de Santa Maria and Pedro de la Caballeria – viewed Maimonides and the kabbalists. I establish that each came from a different Jewish intellectual tradition, and my analysis shows that the way they related to Jewish sources, and in particular the esoteric messages they found in them, did not seem to change significantly in the process of conversion. While they employed different ideological arguments in their post-conversion polemical works, their personalities remained constant, even as their identities shifted from one social construct to another. Thus, an affinity with kabbala or philosophy might not be the reason for converting, but this affinity could become the intellectual tool the convert used to explain, both to himself and to others, the religious meaning of his conversion.

Key words: Conversion, apostasy, medieval Spain, religious ideological shift, philosophical affinity.

Introduction

By the beginning of the 15th century, a significant part of Spanish Jewry had converted to Christianity.[1] A not insignificant number of these converts were rabbis and other elite members of the Jewish community.[2] The traditional scholarly explanation[3] for the conversion of such a significant number of Spain's Jewish communal leaders attributes the phenomenon to

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1 See Benzion Netanyahu, *Origins of the Inquisition in Fifteenth-Century Spain* (New York: Random House, 1995) 129–210; Benzion Netanyahu, *Marranos of Spain from the Late 14th to the Early 16th Century according to Contemporary Hebrew Sources* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998); Isaac Baer, *History of the Jews in Christian Spain* (Hebrew; Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1959) 285–363; Norman Roth, *Conversos, Inquisition and the Expulsion of the Jews from Spain* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002) 15–47.

2 On the influence of the conversion of the elite on the masses of Spanish Jews, see Shalom Sadik, "Between Ashkenaz and Sefarad," *HUCA* 82–83 (2011–2012) סא-עה. Note that the conversion of the elite began before the conversion of the masses.

3 On this opinion, see Netanyahu, *Origins* and *Marranos*, and Baer, *History*; M. Galtzer, "Pablo de Santa Maria on the events of 1391," *Antisemitism through the Ages,* ed. Shmuel Almog, trans. Nathan H. Reisner (Oxford: Pergamon, 1988) 127–138. This explanation is also presented as a fact in many scholarly books that are not directly

the pernicious influence of philosophy, and more specifically, the philosophy of Averroes. According to this interpretation, a large percentage of the Jewish elite before its conversion did not believe in the traditional interpretation of religion and understood religion to be only of social importance. In a time of crisis, such people had no problem changing their religion, adopting another kind of social norm that was to them no more or less truthful than the antecedent. According to this opinion, adherents of Jewish movements in Spain that eschewed philosophy, such as the Kabbalist movement, were more faithful to Judaism and hence did not convert.

The main problem with this explanation is that almost all the sources these scholars quote are the same Jews who belonged to the anti-philosophical movements and wrote in the years following the mass conversions and later the expulsion from Spain.[4] There are no studies that try to analyze the different writings of the apostates[5] and to understand how they explained their own conversions to Christianity and their ideology as Christian's thinkers.[6]

This article focuses on how three important rabbi-apostates[7] – Abner of Burgos, Pablo de Santa Maria and Pedro de la Caballeria – used Jewish

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on the subject – for example, Yehuda Liebes, *God's Story* (Hebrew; Jerusalem: Carmel, 2008) 23.

4   A major reason for the lack of studies in modern literature based on the writings of the apostates is the opinion that the apostates were not honest in their writing and did not convert for ideological reasons, but because of the advantages of life as a Christian. All the converts we analyze could have become Christian without writing missionary works; I believe the reason they wrote these works was their wish to share with other Jews the truth that they had found in Christianity. For more on these questions, see Sadik, "Between Ashkenaz and Sefarad."

5   Analysis of the writings of Averroes' Jewish followers would be a valuable topic for research. In fact, a significant portion of the these philosophers wrote polemics against Christianity; see D. J. Lasker, "Averroistic Trends in Jewish-Christian Polemics in the Late Middle Ages," *Speculum* 55 (1980) 294–304, and *Jewish Philosophical Polemics against Christianity in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Littman Library, 2007).

6   Ryan Szpiech, *Conversion and Narrative* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 2013), analyzes the narratives of the converts and only notes their philosophical and religious arguments. Some analyses of the sources of a particular apostate exist, but no one has tried to compare the different sources of the different apostates. See also Y. Schwartz, "Images of Revelation and Spaces of Knowledge: The Jew, the Christian and the Christian-Jew" in *Christian North – Moslem South,* ed. A. Fidora and M. Tischlereds (Munster: PUB, 2011) 267–287.

7   This paper focuses on three rabbis who converted between the beginning of the 14th century and the beginning of the 15th century. An important convert like Petrus Alfonsi, who converted in the beginning of the 12th century, is not included because he lived before Maimonides and other major Jewish philosophers. Pablo Christiani and Jeronimo de Santa Fe do not use kabbalistic sources (apart from a very unclear

philosophical and kabbalistic sources to defend their decision to convert, as well as to advocate for the willing conversion of all Jews.[8] Each of them adopted a kind of dual perspective on Judaism that is classic in Christian sources. The first perspective is the Judaism of Jesus and the apostles. For the apostates we are studying, as well as some Christian polemicists, this form of Judaism found covert expression in post-biblical and even medieval Jewish sources, and it is the true Judaism. The second perspective is Judaism as an errant "Law of the flesh"[9] that Jews have to reject before they will be saved.[10] The synthesis of these perceptions constitutes the rational basis of their conversion to Christianity.

We analyze the relation of each individual to Jewish philosophy (especially the writing of Maimonides[11]) and kabbalistic sources. This investiga-

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allusion in the Tortosa: Antonio Pacios Lopez, *La disputa de Tortosa* [Madrid: Instituto Arias Montano, 1957] 145). On Jeronimo, see Moises Orfalí, "Jerónimo de Santa Fé y la polémica cristiana contra el Talmud," in *Annuario di studi ebraici* 10 (1980–1984) 157–178; Moises Orfalí, *El Tratado "De Iudaicis Erroribus ex Talmut" de Jerónimo de Santa Fé* (Madrid: Instituto de Filolgía, Departamento de Estudios Hebraicos y Sefardíes, 1987); Leo Landau, *Das Apologetische Schreiben des Josua Lorki an den Abtrünnigen Don Salomon ha-levi* (Antwerp: Teitelbaum and Boxenbaum, 1906); Carlos del Valle Rodríguez*, Errores y falsedad del Talmud* (Madrid: Aben Ezra, 2006) 9–77. Another kabbalist-convert, Paulus of Eredia, who lived in the 15th century, is not included because he converted in Italy, and therefore his conversion is more relevant to the history of the Italian renaissance than the conversion of Spanish Jewry.

8 On the utilization of talmudic literature by the apostates and the Christian polemic against Judaism, see, for example, Arthur Lukyn Williams, *Adversus Judaeos* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935); Jeremy Cohen, *Friars and the Jews* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983); Robert Chazan, *Daggers of Faith* (Berkeley: University Press of California Press, 1989); Heinz Schreckenberg, *Die christlichen Adversus-Judaeos-Texte und ihr literarisches und historisches Umfeld*, (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1982–1994); Samuel Krauss, *Jewish-Christian Controversy*, vol. 1, ed. William Horbury (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995); Robert Chazan, *Fashioning Jewish Identity in Medieval Western Christendom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Isidore Loeb, "Polemistes chrétiens et juifs en France et en Espagne," *Revue des Etudes Juives* 18–19 (1889–1890) 43–70, 219–42. On the role of the critique of the Jewish Oral Law by the elite conversos produced during their conversion process, see Pierro Capelli, "Conversion to Christianity and Anti-Talmudic Criticism from Petrus Alfonsi to Nicolas Donin and Pablo Christiani," in *Transcending Words,* ed. Görge K. Hasselhoff et al. (Bochum: D. Winkler, 2015) 89–102.

9 This phrase is found in the New Testament, especially Romans 7 and 8.

10 In my opinion it is possible that even though an apostate like Pablo de Santa Maria wrote in Latin, he still wished to reach a Jewish audience that did not read Latin. In the Middle Ages, books were very expensive, and it is not likely that a Jew would buy a Christian polemic. However, there would be real possibility that a Christian would buy this book and use it in debate with a Jew. Consequently, surprising as it may seem, a book in Latin might have been best way to proselytize a medieval Jewish public.

11 On the influence of Maimonides on Christian authors and their use of his writings, see

tion can help us understand the religious stance of the apostate as a member of the Jewish elite before his conversion.[12] Post-conversion, these former scholars used all their knowledge of Judaism to convince their fellow Jews to convert. We can assume that a Jewish philosopher knew more general philosophical sources[13] but fewer kabbalistic sources, than a kabbalist, and vice versa. Thus, if an apostate cited philosophical sources far more than kabbalistic ones, we can reasonably conclude that before his conversion, he was a part of that Jewish intellectual tradition.[14] Alternatively, if he uses very few of either of these sources outside the most widely known, it is probable that he was not a part of a specific intellectual tradition, but rather was a generic scholar in Jewish law.

The second part of each analysis examines how the subject utilized the different Jewish sources, and reviews whether he described "true Judaism" or "errant Judaism" (or a complex conflation of the two) as being the position of the Jewish philosopher or the position of the kabbalist.

The correlation of these two methods of analysis can help us to see the reason for the apostate's conversion, and by extrapolation, to formulate appropriate models that explain the conversion of the different types of members of the Jewish elite. There are two aspects to this approach. First, it leads us to understand if the key converts under discussion were, prior to their conversion, philosophers, kabbalists or at-large rabbis without a specific theological affiliation. Second, it informs us as to the relation of each convert to the different Jewish sources after his conversion. If, for example, a convert describes the truthful aspect of Judaism as the opinion of the philosopher and the errant aspect of Judaism as the opinion of the kabbalist, we can assume that his understanding of philosophy played an important role in his conversion.

We do not argue that ideological converts had no other reasons for converting.[15] However, Jews who converted primarily for materialistic reasons, or out of fear of physical violence, or for any other non-theological reason,

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Görge Hasselhoff, *Dicit Rabbi Moyses* (Würzburg: Königshausen and Neumann, 2004), esp. 221–280.

12 We have few external sources on the life of Abner of Burgos and Pablo de Santa Maria as Jews.

13 Not just Jewish philosophical sources, but also the general corpus of knowledge of the Jewish Spanish philosopher, which would include also general philosophy, especially the books of Aristotle and his Arabic commentators (especially Averroes).

14 By "philosopher" and "kabbalist" here, we do not mean membership in a particular, distinct group, but a kind of intellectual affinity with certain types of literature and arguments.

15 On the different reasons Jews in medieval Europe converted to Christianity, and for

were probably not good candidates for writing convincing proselytizing literature and neither motivated nor asked to write such tracts.[16] This is why I believe that, if an ideological convert wrote a book that explained his religious choice and tried to convince others to make the same choice, we are justified in taking his explanations seriously and accepting that he is sharing the true reasons for his conversion and for writing missionary propaganda.[17]

We will see that the apostasy of the Spanish Jewish community of the late Middle Ages touched all the different Jewish intellectual traditions; yet at the same time, the Jewish intellectual traditions touched the apostates within those traditions: Jewish philosophers became Christian philosophers; Jewish kabbalists became Christian kabbalists. The common denominator was that the Jewish apostates shifted religion even while staying within the intellectual tradition from whence they hailed, such that Jewish philosophers, kabbalists and rabbis-at-large found esoteric hints to Christianity within the respective Jewish sources where they were accustomed to seek inspiration.

1. Abner of Burgos

Abner of Burgos (later known as Alfonso de Valladolid, c. 1260–1347)[18] was perhaps the most important philosopher in the stream of Jewish Spanish

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stories of converts that decided to go back to Judaism, see Paula Tartakoff, *Between Christian and Jew* (Philadelphia; University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

16 There are some apparent counter-examples, but under close scrutiny these only underscore the point. The best known would be Profiat Duran, who converted around 1391, almost certainly out of fear during a round of forced conversions. Five years later he published an apparent diatribe against Judaism called "Al Tehi Kʾavotecha" (Do Not Be Like Your Forefathers). However, when contemporary Christian proselytizers finally realized that the tract was a clever parody of Christian claims, they promptly ordered all copies burned. In 1397 Duran published "Kʾlimat Ha-Goyim" (The Gentile's Disgrace), which was openly critical of Christianity. On Duran, see M. Kozodoy, *Secret Faith of Maestre Honoratus* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

17 The alternative approach is to contend that the writings of the apostates only appear to be ideological, but are actually just a cover for their conversion, which according to this view is never truly ideological. The basis for this is an argument that goes as follows: Given that (a) Judaism is the only true religion and (b) it is impossible to omit the truth in an ideological argument, it follows that (c) Jewish apostates (who by definition knew the truth) must be either lying or in denial. As such, this approach is more a continuation of the traditionalist, medieval debate than an historical point of view.

18 On Abner's life, see S. Grayer-Gershenzon, "A Study of *Teshuvot La-Meharef* by Abner of Burgos" (DHL diss., Jewish Theological Seminary, 1984) 6–9; C. N. Sainz de la Maza

rabbi-apostates. In the first part of his life, he was an Aristotelian Jewish philosopher. However, at the age of 60 (if Pablo de Santa Maria is a reliable source) and after years of hesitation, he became a Neo-Platonic Christian.[19]

Abner[20] quoted directly from Maimonides more than 70 times in his different books.[21] In addition, on dozens of occasions Abner quoted not only from the writings of other Jewish philosophers,[22] but also from Greek and Arab philosophical sources.[23] In contrast, there are only a handful of allusions to the opinions of the kabbalists scattered about Abner's writings. From this disparity we conclude that Abner was, before his conversion, an

Vicioso, *Alphonso de Valladolid* (Madrid: Vatican Apostolic Library, 1989) 144–196; J. L. Hecht, "Polemical Exchange between Isaac Pollegar and Abner of Burgos/Alfonso of Valladolid according to Parma MS 2440" (PhD diss., New York University, 1993) 26–31; R. W. Szpiech, "From Testimonia to Testimony" (PhD diss., Yale University, 2006) 307–324; Yehuda Shamir, *Rabbi Moses Ha-Kohen of Tordesillas and His Book* Ezer Ha-Emunah (Leiden: Brill, 1975) 40–64; Harvey J. Hames, "Truly Seeking Conversion?" *Morgen-Glantz* 20 (2010) 41–62, esp. 51–62; Ryan Szpiech, "Polemical Strategy and the Rhetoric of Authority in Alfonso of Valladolid/Abner of Burgos," in *Late Medieval Jewish Identities, Iberia and Beyond*, ed. Maria Esperanza Alfonso and Carmen Caballero-Navas (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2010) 55–76.

19 On this development of Abner's philosophy, see Shalom Sadik, "Trinity and Determinism in the Philosophy of Abner of Burgos" (PhD diss., Ben Gurion University, 2011); Isaac Baer, "The Kabbalistic Doctrine in the Christological Teaching of Abner of Burgos" (Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 27 (1958) 280–289; Isaac Baer, "Abner aus Burgos," *Korrespondenzblatt des Vereins zur Gründung und Erhaltung einer Akademie für die Wissenschaft des Judentums* (1929) 20–37, and Gershenzon, "Study," 120–167. Some scholars after Isaac Baer posited that Abner was a kabbalist before his conversion. It is my sense that this position is based essentially on a misunderstanding of the Christian Neo-Platonic position of Abner, which makes him superficially appear to be a kabbalist. On the critiques of this opinion see Szpiech, "From Testimonia," 541–555; Hecht, "Polemical Exchange," 471–480 and Shalom Sadik, "Is 'R. Abner' Abner of Burgos?" (Hebrew), *Kabbalah* 22 (2010) 331–348.

20 On the different sources of Abner, see Szpiech, "From Testimonia," 351–653. On his critique of Petrus Alfonsi, see Ryan Szpiech, "Petrus Alfonsi … Erred Greatly," in *Petrus Alfonsi and Hs Dialogus,* ed. Carmen Cardelle de Hartmann and Philipp Roelli (Florence: SISMEL, 2014) 321–348. On Abner's use of Avicenna, see Gad Freudenthal and Mauro Zonta, "Avicenna among Medieval Jews," in *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 22 (2012) 217–287; Ryan Szpiech, "In Search of Ibn Sīnā's 'Oriental Philosophy' in Medieval Castile," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 20 (2010) 185–206; Charles Manekin, "Spinoza and the Determinist Tradition in Medieval Jewish Philosophy," in Spinoza and Medieval Jewish Philosophy, ed. Steven Nadler (Cambridg: Cambridge University Press, 2014) 36–58; on the deterministic opinion of Abner and his sources in Avicenna according to Manekin, see esp. 44–50.

21 There are over 40 explicit quotes straight from the *Guide of the Perplexed.* The majority of the other quotations are from *Sefer Hamada* or *Hilchot Melachim*.

22 On these sources, see Szpiech, "From Testimonia," 529–541.

23 On these sources, see Szpiech, "From Testimonia," 424–445. He quoted especially from Aristotle, Avicenna and Averroes (more than 20 times each).

active member of the Maimonidean-Averoistic Jewish movement. This conclusion is buttressed by the testimony of one of his former disciples, Rabbi Isaac Pulgar.[24]

1.1. Abner's Opinion of Maimonides

At the beginning of his major opus, *Mostrador de Justicia*[25] (Teacher of Righteousness), Abner developed a theory that all the major rabbis after Jesus knew the veracity of Christianity, but did not publicly convert, for various material, social and/or cultural reasons.[26] In total, he gives twelve different reasons,[27] of which the eleventh is the most empathetic. According to this explanation, two psychological conditions are required for a conversion from one religion to another religion: first, the convert has to understand that his current religion has fundamental problems; and second, he needs to know that the other religion solves these problems. Following this explanation, Abner gives four reasons why people do not understand that the other religion (in this case, Christianity) is better than the former one (i. e., Judaism), and in one he expressly mentions Maimonides:

> … the third cause is because the man is isolated and does not have occasion to talk with the sages of this [second, truer] law. And he lives in a land far away from them, like the situation of Rabbi Moses the Egyptian,[28] who lived in the land of the Muslims and did not have occasion to speak with the Christian sages.[29]

We can see in this passage that Abner believed that Maimonides perceived the same problems that Abner saw in Judaism, and that it was only because of his physical and intellectual distance from Christianity that Maimonides remained unaware that Christianity could resolve these same problems,

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24 *Ezer Hadat* (Help to Religion) (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 1984) 60. Rabbi Moses of Narbonne also described Abner as a sage and a philosopher. According to him, Abner converted for materialistic reasons and only developed his deterministic viewpoint to justify his conversion; see Maurice Hayoun, "L'épitre du libre arbitre de Moise de Narbonne," *Revue des Etudes Juives* (1982) 139–167. Pablo de Santa Maria described Abner as "*philosophus Methapisicus* in the last chapter of *Scrutinium scriptutarum* (*Scrutinium scriptutarum* II, D. VI. Ca 14).

25 All quotations are from *Mostrador de Justicia*, ed. Walter Mettmann (2 vols.; Opladen: Westdeutscher, 1994–96); translations are mine.

26 *Mostrador* 1.46–49 (fol. 29–30, ch. 1 para. 5). On these arguments, see Szpiech, *Conversion,* 154–157.

27 These include the inertia that influences people to do what they are used to (causes 1–2), familial relations (causes 3–5), and loss of honor and money (causes 6–7).

28 This was the name regularly used for Maimonides in the Christian world at the time.

29 *Mostrador* 1.46–49 (fol. 29–30, ch. 1 para. 5).

Almost all the direct quotations[30] of Maimonides in Abner's works are used as affirmations of Christian theology. For example, according to Abner, the true meaning of Maimonides' theory of divine attributes leads directly to the Christian trinity.[31] He also claims that the true significance of Maimonides' explanation of the commandments lies in the difference between *mandamiantos çerimoniales* (ritual commandments) and *mandamientos morales* (moral commandments).[32] According to Abner, Maimonides' explanation[33] that only moral commandments are the aim of the Law, while ritual commandments are just intermediary for the welfare of society, signifies in fact that the practical commandments were always destined to be canceled.[34] Moreover, Abner quotes Maimonides' opinion on the lack of miracles in the age of the Messiah as a proof that the continuation of the regular nature of the world after the coming of Jesus is not a problem.[35] Abner also explains his deterministic opinion as the esoteric opinion of Maimonides in the *Guide of the Perplexed*; he sees all the explicit mentions of free will by Maimonides as a part of his populist, exoteric writing.[36]

Abner's interpretation of Maimonides is the most extensive of his analyses of philosophers, but he also treated other Jewish philosophers, such as Ibn Ezra and Abraham bar Hiyya with approximately the same approach. He applied an identical interpretation to non-Jewish philosophers like Averroes, Avicenna, and Al-Ghazali.[37]

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30 When dealing with certain interpretations of Maimonides (for example, in his interpretation of original sin in *Mostrador* 1.136–144 [ch. 3, para. 1]), Abner debated without mentioning Maimonides' name. However, it is possible that he was not criticizing Maimonides himself, but only a wrong interpretation of Maimonides by the Jews whom he was debating (and this might explain why he did not mention Maimonides by name).

31 See for example the *Response to a Blasphemer* 17:b (the blasphemer is Abner's former student, Rabbi Isaac Pulgar); critical edition in Hecht, "Polemical Exchange," 359. On Abner's opinion of the Trinity, see Harvey J. Hames, "It Takes Three to Tango," *Medieval Encounter* 15 (2009) 199–224.

32 *Mostrador* 1.95 (ch. 2, para. 1).

33 *Guide of the Perplexed,* 3.27–28.

34 On the cancelation of the sacrifices, see also *Mostrador* 1.92–93 (ch. 2, para. 1).

35 *Mostrador* 2.319 (ch. 9, para. 45).

36 Ofrenda de Zelos, VII, 51–54. See also see S. Gershenzon, "The View of Maimonides as a Determinist in *Sefer Minhat Qenaot* by Abner of Burgos, *World Congress of Jewish Studies 9, C* (1986) 93–100. Some modern scholars interpreted Maimonides in the same way: see S. Pines, "Studies in Abu Barakat's P*oetics and Metaphysics*," *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 4 (1960) 120–198; A. Altmann, "Free Will and Predestination in Saadia Bahya and Maimonides," in *Essays in Jewish Intellectual History*, Alexander Altman (Hanover; PUB, 1981) 35–64, 47–54.

37 For specifics, see Szpeich, "From Testimonia," 529–541 and 424–445.

The only place where Abner quotes Maimonides at length in order to oppose his views is in the tenth and last chapter of the *Mostrador*.[38] In this chapter, Abner criticizes Jewish law and puts forth an argument in favor of there being a higher level of morality in Christian law.[39] He explains the Jewish tradition according to the *Mishne Torah* and directly quotes from parts of the different interpretations of Maimonides to prove their lack of morality.[40]

To summarize, according to Abner, Maimonides discovered the fundamental truths of Christianity and understood that classic rabbinic Judaism was wrong. Abner attributes an esoteric secret meaning to Maimonidean philosophy, which he saw as identical with Christian dogma. According to him, the single reason for Maimonides' loyalty to Judaism was his physical and cultural distance from Christianity. The only practical effect of this fidelity was that Maimonides continued to fulfill the Jewish practical commandments, despite his awareness of their inferiority to the spiritual commandments.[41]

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38 *Mostrador* 2.357–408 (ch. 10, para. 7).

39 As opposed to the other apostates, Jeronimo de Santa Fe never wrote a complete polemical work explaining his whole argument against Judaism. In connection with the debate of Tortosa, the anti-Pope Benedict XIII asked Jerónimo to put his arguments in writing, and this led to the creation of two polemical tracts. One, *Errores y Falsedad del Talmud*, exists also in a Latin translation, *De Judæis Erroribus ex Talmuth*, and as the title suggests, is primarily an attack on the Jewish oral law. The second treatise is popularly known as *Contra Perfidiam Judaeorum* (though it does not have a clear name, so various editions assign it different titles). In this work, Jeronimo dealt mainly with questions related to the definition and nature of the Messiah, as well as issues related to the Messiah's coming. Jeronimo's use of Maimonides was different in each book – and as such follows precisely the same approach used by Abner, by whom Jeronimo was undoubtedly influenced. To wit, in his book against the Talmud, Jeronimo used Maimonides to compile what he sees as the worst examples of Jewish Law, and hence almost all the quotations are negative. By contrast, in the book on the Messiah, he used Maimonides to prove that the Messiah has already come, and therefore the citations are positive. This parallel dichotomous use of Maimonides by the two apostates in question is most striking.

40 For example, *Mostrador* 2.384 (ch. 10, para. 7).

41 Abner held that Maimonides was unaware of the immorality of the Jewish practical commandments.

1.2. Abner's Relation to Kabbala

Abner mentions kabbala only a few times in his writing and never actually quotes from kabbalistic books,[42] preferring only to describe the general opinion of the kabbalists. In fact, all the references to kabbala by Abner are in relation to the *sefirot* (*cuentos*) and their relevance to the dogma of the Trinity.

He mentions the *sefirot* to support the difference between substance and persona,[43] but in his opinion, the kabbalists misunderstood the division of the divinity when they divided it into ten *sefirot:* "There are also others of them, who are called kabbalists; they believe that there are ten persons in God."[44]

According to Abner, the kabbalists, like the Christians, accept that the multiplication of the personas does not detract from the unity of the divine substance. However, Abner criticizes the kabbalists for only understanding the existence of the divine essence in the world without recognizing the existence of the different divine personas in the transcendent divinity.[45] The kabbalists' supposed focus on the divinity of the Creation is the reason for their miscount of the divine personas. They only understood the emanation of the divinity in the world (through the ten intellects) and hence did not perceive the difference between this emanation and the intrinsic division of the divinity through the three persons. In other words, the kabbalists' understanding of divine incarnation and division of divinity was limited to the emanation of the divine essence in the world, while the existence of different divine persona in the divinity that transcends the world remained beyond their ken.

In light of his scant use of kabbalistic sources, we can presume that Abner was, prior to his conversion, a Jewish philosopher. After his conversion, he interpreted the esoteric meaning of philosophical sources according to Christian dogma, allowing him to develop his theory that all the major and important Jews after Jesus knew the fundamental truths of the Christian dogma, even if they did not recognize these truths as constituting Christianity. However, despite their acceptance of concepts similar to incarnation and divine division, the kabbalists for Abner were not part of the mainstream of Jewish rabbis whose philosophy seemed to approach Christianity,

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[42] Abner mentions Nahmanides some 20 times. The vast majority of these citations are from Nahmanides' polemic work.

[43] *Mostrador* 1.224 (ch. 5, para. 2).

[44] *Mostrador* 2.420 (ch. 10, para. 15).

[45] *Mostrador* 1.260 (ch. 5, para. 18).

and hence he viewed kabbalism as errant Judaism, because of its misconception of the division of divinity.

2. Pablo de Santa Maria

Salomon Halevi (who became Pablo de Santa Maria, also known as Paul of Burgos, c. 1353–1435) was born in Burgos, and as a Jew he was one of the major rabbis of the city, which was one of the more important communities in Old Castile. After years of hesitation, he converted to Christianity in 1390. According to all the sources we have, the reason for the conversion was his studies and understanding of the Scriptures, and not due to any philosophical consideration.[46] Later he went to study theology in Paris, and as Bishop Pedro du Luna he became a friend of the future anti-pope Benedictus XIII. After returning to Castile, Pablo was appointed Bishop of Cartagena and subsequently Bishop of Burgos. He was also very active in the political life of the church and of Spain.[47]

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46 On the story of his conversion, see the introduction of the *Additiones* (fol. 4v–5r) and his *Additiones* to the Epistle to the Romans, ch. , add. 1. On the story of the conversion based on the introduction of the *Additiones* see Ryan Szpiech, "A Fathers Bequest," in *Hebrew Bible in Fifteenth-Century Spain,* ed. Jonathan Decter and Arturo Prats (Leiden: Brill, 2012) 177–198. After Pablo's conversion, his former student, Joshua Halorki, wrote him a letter. In this letter, Halorki, who would eventually convert as Jeronimo de Santa Fe, inquired into the reason for his master's conversion and gives 16 critiques of different Christian dogmas. In the first part of the letter, Halorki mentions different reasons to convert, including the philosophical Averroistic position, but according to Halorki, this was not the reason for his master's conversion, but rather Pablo's (mis) understanding of Scripture. On Pablo's conversion and the exchange of letters between him and his former student (we have only the last part of the response of Pablo), see Michael Glatzer, "Between Yehoshua Halorki and Shelomo Halevi" (Hebrew), *Pe'amim* 54 (1993) 103–117. On the authorship of Halorki's letter, see the pamphlet by L. Landau, *Das apologetische Schreiben des Josua Lorki* (Antwerp, 1906), according to which the author of the letter is not the future Jeronimo de Santa Fe. (Almost all scholars of Jeronimo's writings repudiate this contention.)

47 Javier Martinez de Bedoya, "La Segunda Parte del *Scrutinium Scripturarum* De Pablo de Santa María," PhD diss. (Pontifical University of the Sacred Cross, Rome, 2002) 23–32 and 379; Jean Sconza, *History and Literature in Fifteenth-Century Spain* (Madison: Hispanic Seminary of Medieval Studies, 1991) 9–13 Francisco Cantera Burgos, *Alvar Gracia de Santa Maria y su familia de conversos* (Madrid: Montano Institute, 1952) 33–274 Luciano Serrano, *Los conversos, D. Pablo de Santa Maria y D. Alfonso de Cartagena* (Madrid: Bermejo, 1942) 9–118.

Pablo's two major religious books are his *Additiones* on the commentary of Nicolas de Lyra on the Bible, and his polemical[48] book *Scrutinium Scripturarum*[49] (Scrutiny of Scripture), which is divided in two different parts. The first one is a classic debate between a Jew (Saul) and a Christian (Paul). By the end of this part, Paul convinces Saul to become a Christian. The second part of the book is the continuation of the discussion between the converted Saul (now the disciple) and Paul (the master).[50]

2.1. Pablo's Use of Maimonides

Maimonides is the most quoted author in *Scrutinium Scripturarum*. Pablo quotes him more than 50 times in the book.[51] By contrast, he does not quote many philosophical sources. He quotes Aristotle and Hippocrates a few

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48 This was not Pablo's sole polemic. On the polemical aspects of Pablo's book on history, see R. Szpiech, "Scrutinizing History: Polemic and Exegesis in Pablo de Santa María's 'Siete edades del mundo,'" *Medieval Encounters* 16 (2010) 96–142.

49 All the quotations from this book are from the edition of F. Christoforo (Burgos, 1591).

50 Between the two parts of *Scrutinium Scripturarum*, Pablo tries to define a proper identity for *conversos*. Among his aims is to show the Jews that Christianity is actually true Judaism, while showing Christians that *conversos* of Jewish stock have a special role in Christian history (including in his time); see Yosi Israeli, "Constructing and Undermining Converso Jewishness," in *Religious Conversion*, ed. Ira Katznelson and Miri Rubin (London: Ashgate, 2014) 185–215. On the situation of the Jewish community after the conversion of 1391, see also Ram Ben Shalom, "Conflict between Jews and Converts in Aragon Following the Persecution of 1391," *Sefarad* 73 (2013) 97–131; Ram Ben Shalom, "The 'Innocent Converso,'" *Hispania Judaica Bulletin* 10 (2014) 55–74.

51 The two others Jewish authors that Pablo quotes extensively from in the book are Rashi (more than 20 times) and Nahmanides (ten times). The majority of the quotes are from Maimonides' *Mishne Torah* (especially "The Book of Knowledge" and "Laws of Kings and Wars"). On the critique of Rashi (based on the critique of Nahmanides in *Additiones*), see Yosi Israeli, "A Christianized Sephardic Critique of Rashi's *Peshat* in Pablo de Santa Maria *Addditiones ad Postilliam Nicolai de Lyra*," in *Medieval Exegesis and Religious Difference*, ed. Ryan Szpiech (New York, Fordham University Press: 2015) 189–218. Pablo also quotes Maimonides in *Additiones*, as follows: Genesis 1 (add. 1 [twice negatively; once positively], add. 8, and add. 9); Genesis 11 (add. 1); Genesis 12 (add. 1); Genesis 14 (add. 1); Genesis 49 (add. 2); Exodus 3 (several times); Exodus 20; Exodus 32 (add. 7); Exodus 33 (add. 4); Numbers 12 (add. 2); Numbers 20; Psalms 90 (add. 1); Isaiah 9; Isaiah 34; Ezekiel 1 (add. 1); Ezekiel 2 (add. 2); Hoshea 3 (add. 3); Zechariah 5 (add. 1); Epistle of James 2 (add. 1). In the *Additiones*, the quotations are used for the interpretation of Scripture. In the majority of the cases the citations are positive, with Pablo using Maimonides as a kind of authority in the interpretation. This is very similar to his use of Maimonides in the *Scrutinium Scripturarum* (for example, Geneses 12, add. 1), where Maimonides serves as a source for the possibility of interpreting the Bible differently from its literal meaning. In some other passages (for example, Genesis 1; Ezekiel 1; Exodus 33, add. 4), Pablo criticizes Maimonides's

times, but all these quotations are present in Thomas Aquinas's *Summae Theologia*,[52] Moreover, in Pablo's writings we see hardly any independent quotations from Averroes, Avicenna, Aristotle or Plato. It is therefore probable that he did not have a good knowledge of general philosophy, and the sparse knowledge of these sources that he did evince is simply taken from the writings of Maimonides and Thomas Aquinas.

Almost all all the quotations of Maimonides in the first part of *Scrutinium Scripturarum* are positive. Paul uses the authority of Maimonides to convince Saul to convert to Christianity. The first and most important positive quotation of Maimonides is in the beginning of the work:

> Your most important teacher, Rabbi Moses the Egyptian, in the first part of his book, the *Guide of the Perplexed*, there sets forth the intention of his book, there stating thusly: In the book of the prophet are found [divine] names that are merely equivocal, which ignoramuses understand according to their primary signification.[53]

Here we see that Pablo perceives Maimonides as the most important Jewish Rabbi,[54] and he utilizes the authority of Maimonides to establish the key point that the Bible has to be understood according to a fine examination, and that this examination does not have to be based only on the literal understanding of the Bible.[55]

In the first part of *Scrutinium Scripturarum*, Pablo based his argument on the authority of Maimonides regarding several other topics as well. For example, like Abner, he utilizes Maimonides to support his affirmation that the practical part of Jewish Law contradicts the moral and the natural law (*lege nature*, in Spanish). In his opinion, the practical commandments (such as the sacrifices, the prohibition of eating meat and milk together, and other commandments directed against idolatry) are only ceremonial. These kinds of commandments are relative to their historical context, and with the change of the context, they in turn have to be canceled.[56]

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position. In a few passages (such as Zecharia 5), Pablo describes the historically significant actions of Maimonides, i. e., his summarization of the Talmud and rendering of legal decisions.

52 See Martinez de Bedoya, "Segunda Parte," 98. In the *Additiones*, the only source Pablo quotes from amply is the Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle. Thus, it is safe to assume that he was at least familiar with this ancient text.

53 *Scrutinium Scripturarum* (I, I, 2) 108–109.

54 See also *Scrutinium Scripturarum* (I, IV, 4) 148, where Pablo quotes the proverb: "From Moses to Moses, there arose none like Moses."

55 See also *Scrutinium Scripturarum* (I, IV, 4) 148. On other utilizations of Maimonides to establish a Christian commentary on the Bible, see *Scrutinium Scripturarum* (I, IV, 1) 151; (I, IV, 3) 157; (I, IV, 4) 160; (I, IX, 4) 296; (I, IX, 2) 313; (II, I, 5) 366.

56 On this question, see *Scrutinium Scripturarum* (I, VII, 11) 263–265; (I, VIII, 14) 278.

Again similar to Abner, Pablo quotes Maimonides to support the continuation of all the natural laws in the time of the Messiah.[57] He further cites Maimonides a number of times to support his opinion that the Messiah has already come,[58] and he also notes that Maimonides criticized the calculation of the time of the arrival of the Messiah.[59]

The subject on which Pablo is most disappointed in Maimonides is the Messiah, which he discusses in the first part of the book. According to Pablo, Maimonides sets two erroneous conditions for the coming of the Messiah: the victory of the Messiah over the non-Jewish nations, and corporal welfare, which is a condition for the knowledge of God. Pablo quotes several verses of the Bible to prove that the Messiah must come without the improvement of the political and social situation of the Jews.[60]

Despite his positive view of Maimonides as a Jew who understands the theological truths of Christianity, Pablo also cites Maimonides as a preeminent representative of the errant form of Judaism, especially in the second part of the *Scrutinium Scripturarum*. For example, he criticizes the very opinion of Maimonides regarding sacrifices that he had earlier cited approvingly. According to this denigration of Maimonides, the historical explanation of the sacrifices cannot be adequate, because in the Bible we see that some early biblical characters (such as Noah and Cain) make sacrifices.[61] Pablo's conclusion is that, the historical explanation notwithstanding, people also make sacrifices in order to turn their heart to God, while another explanation sees the sacrifices as a symbol of the future sacrifice of Jesus.[62]

In this part of the book, Pablo also offers an extended critique of Maimonides' opinion against asceticism.[63] Basing himself on Maimonides, Saul

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57 *Scrutinium Scripturarum* (I, IV, 3–4) 157–160; (I, X, 8) 355.

58 *Scrutinium Scripturarum* (I, IV, 4) 148; (II, VI, 10) 522. On the utilization of the epistle to Yemen, see also *Additiones* on Isaiah 9.

59 On this contradiction in the opinion of Maimonides, see David Hartman, *Epistles of Maimonides* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1993).

60 *Scrutinium Scripturarum* (I, V, 2) 167.

61 A possible source of this critique is Nahmanides' commentatry on Leviticus (I, 9).

62 On this subject see *Scrutinium Scripturarum* (II, III, 11) 426.

63 *Scrutinium Scripturarum* (II, IV, 7–8) 453–459. See "Eight Chapters" (Shemonah Peraqim)*, esp. ch.; On the influences of Al Farabi on Maimonides on this subject, see H. Davidson, "Maimonides' *Shemonah Peraqim* and Alfarabi's *Fusūl Al-Madanī*," in *Essays in Medieval Jewish and Islamic Philosophy*, ed. A. Hyman (New York: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1977) 116–133; and R. L. Weiss, *Maimonides' Ethics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991) 9–32. On Maimonides' view of the doctrine of the mean and his attitude to the opinion of Aristotle, see M. Fox, "Doctrine of the Mean in Aristotle and Maimonides," in *Studies in Jewish Religious and Intellectual*

(the student) posits that there is nothing good in the extreme asceticism of the Christian friars and priests. Paul (the teacher) responds with a long list of quotations from the Bible and their explanation to prove the religious importance of asceticism.

Pablo's lengthiest criticism of Maimonides is on the commentary of Job.[64] Maimonides held that the correct belief on the subject of divine justice was the view of Job's friend Elihu,[65] while Job held mistaken opinions. Pablo dedicates an entire chapter trying to prove exactly the opposite: that Elihu was misleading Job, whereas it was Job who held the correct understanding of divine justice.

In general, according to Pablo, Maimonides is only right when he proves that the literal interpretation of the Bible is inferior to its esoteric meaning; Maimonides' esoteric interpretation is itself just another example of mistaken Jewish understanding. Thus, in the first part of the *Scrutinium Scripturarum*, Maimonides serves only as an intermediary to understanding the existence of an esoteric meaning of Scripture. By the second part of the *Scrutinium Scripturarum*, Maimonides becomes one of the prime adversaries of the teacher, who is trying to free his student from the mistaken esoteric Jewish interpretation of the scripture.

2.2. Pablo's Use of Kabbalist Literature

There are four different citations of kabbalist literature in *Scrutinium Scripturarum*. One is attributed to the *Bahir*, and three are from Nahmanides' kabbalistic interpretations of the Bible.[66] The most important is the quotation from the Bahir, which is in fact Paul's last argument before Saul's conversion to Christianity.[67] According to Pablo, the *Bahir*, whose author is R. Nehouma son of Kana, explains that God is present in the righteous.[68]

History, ed. S. Stein and R. Loewe (London: Institute of Jewish Studies, 1979) 93–120; D. H. Frank, "Humility as a Virtue," in *Moses Maimonides and His Time,* ed. E. L. Ormsby (Washington: Catholic University Press, 1989) 89–99; D. H. Frank. "'With All Your Heart and With All Your Soul'," in *Maimonides and the Sciences,* ed. H. Levine and R. S. Cohen (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2000) 25–33; and J. Jacobs, "Aristotle and Maimonides," in *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 76 (2002) 145–163.

64 *Scrutinium Scripturarum* (II, V) 463–493.

65 *Guide of the Perplexed,* 3.22–23.

66 There are other quotations of Nahmanides that have more to do with his interpretation of Scripture and less with his kabbalistic opinion; see *Scrutinium Scripturarum* 118, 140, 142, 149 and 522.

67 *Scrutinium scripturaru*m I, X, 9, 357–358.

68 This quotation does not exist in our edition of the *Bahir*. In my opinion it is not likely that Pablo would falsify an entire part of this book, as the result of this kind of forgery

According to Paul's explanations, the author of this kabbalist book understood the true meaning of incarnation.[69]

The most important positive[70] quotation of Nahmanides' kabbala is Nahmanides' commentary on the first verse of the Bible. According to Nahmanides, God created the world via the intermediary of his wisdom. According to Pablo,[71] Nahmanides understands that God created the world using some part of Himself, and therefore Pablo identifies the wisdom of Nahmanides with the son of God.[72]

The only negative quotation of a kabbalist source is the critique of metempsychosis (*gilgul neshamot*).[73]

At this point we can already see that before his conversion, Pablo was probably not a philosopher or a kabbalist. In the *Scrutinium Scripturarum*, he almost never uses philosophical sources, except for Maimonides and a few quotations from Aristotle and Hippocrates that he probably took from Christian sources, and his four quotations of kabbalistic sources do not show a deep knowledge of kabbala. Therefore we can conclude that Pablo was probably a member of the rabbinic elite without a particular affiliation to a specific intellectual tradition.

In the *Scrutinium Scripturarum*, Pablo cites much more from Maimonides than from kabbalistic sources, if for no other reason than because of

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in a religious debate would be disastrous for the forger. On the same debate about the utilization of Bereshit Rabbah from Moshe Hadarshan by Raimondes Martini, see Isaac Baer**, "**The Forged Midrashim of Raymond Martini and Their Place in Religious Controversies," *Studies in Memory of Asher Gulak and Samuel Klein,* ed. B. Shortmann (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Press, 1942) 28–49; Salomon Marcus Schiller-Szinessy, "The *Pugio Fidei*," *Journal of Philology* 16 (1988) 131–152; Saul Lieberman, "Raymund Martini and His Alleged Forgeries," *Historia Judaica* 5 (1943) 87–102; Lopez, *Disputa de Tortosa*, 1, 171–223; Alejandro Díaz Macho, "Reseña del estado de las cuestiones Acerca de los Midrašim falsificados de Raimundo Marti," *Sefarad* 9 (1949) 165–196; and Ursula Ragacs, "The Forged Midrashim of Raymond Martini Reconsidered," *Henoch* 19 (1997) 59–68.

69 On the Incarnation in Pablo's writing, see *Scrutinium scriptutarum* I. D. VIII. Ca XIII; II. D. Ca VII; D. VI. Ca III; *Additiones* on Exodus 33 (add. 2); Jeremiah 30; Ezekiel 1 (add. 1); Habakkuk 3; Psalm 68 (add. 1 and 3); Luke 1 (add. 5, 6 and 7); Luke 2; John 3 (add. 3); Ephesians 2.

70 In another quotation of Nahmanides (*Scrutinium scripturarum* I, VII, 13, 241), Pablo uses certain aspects of Nahmanides' interpretation of Shabbat as a parable for the resurrection. In this passage, Pablo does not posit that Nahmanides had a truly Christian understanding of Scripture, but only used Nahmanides' method of interpretation for his own Christological purposes.

71 *Scrutinium Scripturarum* I, IX, 16, 232.

72 In Nahmanides' commentary he address all ten *sefirot*. Pablo focused on just the *sefira* of wisdom because the other *sefirot* have no role in his interpretation of the trinity.

73 *Scrutinium Scripturarum* II, V, 8 489.

his authority and sway over the general Jewish community. This may also be the reason Pablo's opinion of Maimonides is more negative than his opinion of kabbala. According to Pablo, Maimonides is not completely correct on any subject. He is only necessary to help a Jew to understand that the traditional comprehension of Judaism is wrong. After this first step in the right direction, the Jew has to free himself from Maimonides' philosophy in order to understand the true Christian message.

By contrast, Pablo thinks that the kabbalists have some completely correct opinions on important questions of incarnation and the Trinity and only criticizes their opinion with regard to the minor subject of metempsychosis.

3. Pedro de la Caballeria

Pedro de la Caballeria[74] (or Bonafos Caballeria, d. 1464) was a member of the Caballeria family, one of the most prominent families of the Aragon Jewish community. He converted[75] to Christianity in 1414 upon the influence of the Tortosa debate.[76] His sole extant written work is *Zelus Christi contra Judaeos, Sarracenos et Gentiles.*[77]

In this book, Pedro quotes from only a few general philosophical sources.[78] As with the two other apostates, the most common post-talmudic

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74 On Pedro and his polemical work, see Núria Gómez Llaguer, "Polémica y razón cristiana en el *Zelus Christi contra Iudaeos, Sarracenos et Infideles* de Pedro de la Caballería," *Iberia Judaica* 5 (2013) 195–205.

75 He converted with all eight of his brothers, except for one; his mother, sisters and wife also continued to be Jewish. On the family and his conversion, see Johan Borrás, "The Dirges of Don Benvenist and Doná Tolosana," in *Studies in Arabic and Hebrew Letters in Honor of Raymond Scheindlin,* ed. J. Decter (Piscataway: Gorgias, 2007) 213–225.

76 On the disputation, see Lopez, *Disputa de Tortosa*, 1; Frank Talmage, "Trauma at Tortosa," *Mediaeval Studies* 47 (1985) 379–415; Ram Ben-Shalom, "The Disputation of Tortosa, Vicente Ferrer and the Problem of the Conversos According to the Testimony of Isaac Nathan" (Hebrew), *Zion* 56 (1991) 1–45. On the preaching of Vincent Ferrer in the same period and his influence on the conversion of the Jewish community, see Losada Carolina, "El adversario del profeta," in *Bulletin Hispanique* 114.2 (2012) 823–838; Rosa Vidal Doval, "Predicacion y Persuasion," *Revista de Poetica medieval* 24 (2010) 225–243; and Hernández Pedro Santonja, "La disputa de Tortosa," *Helmántica* 189 (2012) 133–152.

77 All quotations are according to the edition of Barezzo Barezzi (1592).

78 Aside from the writing of Maimonides, he quotes eight times from the commentary of Ibn Ezra, and once from Averroes (paras. 853–854). There are also some general allusions to philosophers, though it is not always clear if they are Jewish or Gentile philosophers.

source he quotes is Maimonides.[79] But unlike the others, Pedro makes far greater use of kabbalistic sources. He quotes from the Zohar,[80] the kabbalistic commentaries of Nahmanides,[81] and especially the writings of the 13th-century Spanish kabbalist, Rabbi Josef Gikatilla.[82]

3.1. Pedro's Relation to Maimonides

Pedro's citations of Maimonides fall into two different groups. The first consists of short snippets found in the middle of general discussions. Some of these quotations are viewed in a positive light, and some in a negative light. However, even in the positive quotations, Pedro doesn't claim that Maimonides understood the true meaning of Christianity. The second group of citations are included in relatively lengthy discussions, where Maimonides is used to represent errant Judaism, and Pedro's aim is mainly to prove that the Maimonides' opinion has certain internal contradictions.

Following is an example of Pedro's general approach to Maimonides. In the preceding text he criticizes Maimonides' opinion on resurrection (i.e., resurrection only for the wise; regular life after the resurrection, including another death), then he wites:

> Now you know that these words by Rabbi Moses the Egyptian are insane and heretical … Not only [does he become] an infidel to Judaism, but also keeps and maintains [himself] in heresy. Therefore, many better and more clever Jews hold the opposite [position]; among them are Rabbi Moses of Girona [Nahmanides] and all Gallic [French] Jews.[83]

Thus we see that Pedro not only thinks that Maimonides has a generally mistaken theology, but that he was actually a heretic even within his own Jewish system of thought. For Pedro, Maimonides is a complete infidel who went against the common basis of all monotheistic religions. At the end of the quotation, Pedro displays his utter contempt for Maimonides by claiming that better sages than Maimonides held diametrically opposed

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79 He uses Maimonides 14 times, but some of these citations involve lengthy commentaries of Maimonides (see, for example, paras. 260–288, 601–624, 662–683 and 727–735). The majority of the quotations are from *Mishne Torah*. Pablo quotes the *Guide of the Perplexed* only three times.

80 *Zelus Christi,* paras. 212–213.

81 *Zelus Christi,* paras. 590–591. Another quotation brought is only in relation to the question of the time of the Messiah, and here the only aim is to prove that all the times suggested by the different Jewish leaders have already passed.

82 *Zelus Christi*, paras. 577–589.

83 *Zelus Christi*, paras. 267–268.

opinions.[84] For Pedro, Maimonides represents a religious opinion that was even worse than the standard Jewish opinion of his day.

One of Pedro's major utilizations of Maimonides is in regard to the Trinity.[85] Pedro criticizes the condemnation of Christianity by Maimonides *Guide of the Perplexed* (I, 50).[86] Here Maimonides argues that the Christian belief system is completely wrong because it contains internal contradictions which falsify the attempted harmonization of trinitarian theory with God's unity. Pedro counters by quoting specific passages in the writings of Maimonides that he sees as supporting the trinity – for example, the unity of the Knower, the Subject of the Knowledge, and the Knowledge itself.[87] According to Pedro, Maimonides used sources that contain a part of the truth, but he never understood them adequately. This is the reason that both correct and mistaken opinions are present in the writings of Maimonides.

Pedro does the same regarding Maimonides on the Messiah. In some places, he quotes Maimonides briefly to support some aspect of his claim, such as that belief in the Messiah is an important Jewish dogma.[88] In his main discussion he argues that there is a self-contradiction in Maimonides' view.[89] According to Pedro, Maimonides' claim that nature will not be changed in the time of the Messiah contradicts the assertion of the simultaneous existence of total peace, for war is a part of the human condition, and only a miraculous change in human nature could lead to total peace in the world.

To summarize, the salient points of Pedro's view of Maimonides are that he was a Jewish philosopher whose views were even worse than errant Judaism; his writings are wrought with internal contradictions; and in conclusion, Maimonides (and probably his philosophical disciples, though he never cites them) was a kind of general heretic worse than the regular Jews.

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84 This affirmation was probably meant to justify Maimonides's excommunication by the French rabbis after his death.

85 *Zelus Christi*, paras. 731–735.

86 He either used the Latin translation of Maimonides or, possibly, the Hebrew translation of Al-Harizi. In these translations the chapter is 49.

87 *Guide of the Perplexed,* 1.68; *Mishneh Torah*, "Laws of the Principles of the Torah," 2.10.

88 *Zelus Christi*, para. 95. This quotation of the 13 principles comes to answer the position of Nahmanides in the disputation of Barcelona. On this disputation, see Robert Chazan, *Barcelona and Beyond* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

89 *Zelus Christi*, paras. 601–783. An important part of this discussion is a critique of Maimonides' opinion as representing errant Judaism.

3.2. Pedro's Use of Kabbala

In contrast to his relationship to Maimonides, all the quotations of kabbalistic sources by Pedro are positive. He even claims that the writer of the Zohar himself knew of the Trinity as the true interpretation of the divine unity.[90]

Pedro's main utilization of kabbalistic sources is his commentary on Josef Gikatilla's two books,[91] *Sha'are Orah* (*Gates of Light*) and *Sha'are Tsedek* (*Gates of Justice*).[92] He quotes eight paragraphs from *Gates of Justice* and one from *Gates of Light*, and comments on them. According to Pedro, these books espoused some of the most important Christian dogmas:

1. God will give another Law.
2. The Jews will never return to the Land of Israel.
3. The ten lost tribes will not be a part of the Messianic kingdom.
4. The Incarnation of God on Earth is a reality (three different passages from *Gates of Justice* are used to support this affirmation).
5. The Messiah will sacrifice himself.
6. The Messiah is identical with God.
7. Adam was guilty of original sin (from *Gates of Light*).

Another reference to a kabbalistic source occurs just after Pedro's commentary on Gikatilla's books,[93] where he discusses Nahmanides' kabbalistic interpretation of certain passages in the Bible. The aim of this discussion is to prove that Nahmanides accepts the possibility of the incarnation of divinity in a human being.

In general, Pedro never criticizes the opinion of the kabbalists, for according to him, the secrets of the kabbala are identical to Christian dogmas in a number of important cases. From here we can conclude that before his conversion to Christianity, Pedro was probably a supporter of kabbala, if not a kabbalist himself. Moreover, he quotes more kabbalistic sources but fewer philosophical sources than the other two individuals under discussion. Also unlike the others, hisis opinion of Maimonides is very negative: for Pedro, Maimonides was at best a representative of errant Judaism, and at worst a heretical philosopher who would have stayed closer to the truth by sticking

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90 *Zelus Christi*, paras. 212–213. Gershom Scholem, "Considérations sur l'histoire des débuts de la Kabbale chrétienne," in *Kabbalistes Chrétiens*, ed. A. Faivre and F. Tristan (Paris: Michel, 1979) 31–32. Scholem argues that this quotation is a forgery. In my opinion, this is not the case; the source of thecitation is probably Pedro's interpretation of Zohar 3.242b–243a.

91 Pedro quotes the name of the books, but not the name Gikatilla.

92 *Zelus Christi*, paras. 577–589.

93 *Zelus Christi,* paras. 590–591.

with the philosophy of Nahmanides and the rabbis of southern France. By contrast, kabbala retained Pedro's respect, for he saw it as containing the kernel of truth that he used as his inspiration for converting to Christianity, as well as the inspiration for much of his theological writings.

Conclusion

In this article we have seen how three major Jewish leaders in Medieval Spain who converted to Christianity viewed Maimonides and the kabbalists. I believe that, based on their use of sources, I have established with reasonable certainty that each came from a different Jewish intellectual tradition and intellectual affinity. Before his conversion, Abner of Burgos was a member of the Maimonidean-Averroistic tradition, and Pedro de la Caballeria was probably a kabbalist, while Pablo de Santa Maria was a rabbi and communal leader of no particular philosophical inclination.

It appears from the analysis of their work that the way a Jewish apostate related to Jewish sources such as Maimonides and kabbala, and in particular the esoteric messages he found in them, did not seem to change significantly in the process of conversion. Abner, as a Jewish philosopher, wanted to understand the deep esoteric meaning of Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*. As this work is the epitome of spiritual rationalism, Abner was presumably an opponent of kabbala and its non-rationalist mysticism.[94] After his conversion, we see that he identified the esoteric secrets of Maimonides with the Christian dogmas. His only negative citations of Maimonides are in relation to the commandments. Having been a Jewish follower of Maimonides, Abner understood that Maimonides truly believed in the obligation to continue to practice the Jewish Law, but he could no longer countenance allegiance to that part of the religion that the esoteric message of the same religion seemed to treat as spiritually irrelevant. Thus, after his conversion Abner continued to see in Maimonides spiritual relevance regarding esoteric matters, even while rejecting his relevance to understanding what ritual behavior was expected of the true believer. Abner also continued to be an opponent of kabbala, expressly stating that kabbalists do not anticipate or understand the true meaning of the Christian dogmas.

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94 In the fourth part of *Ezer Hadat*, Abner's former student Isaac Pulgar expressly criticizes the opinion of the kabbalists. Another member of the same circle of Jewish philosophers, Rabbi Isaac Albalag, also mentioned some very critical passages against the kabbala in his *Tikun Hadeot*. As a Jew, Abner added his personal note to this book.

Pablo also treated Maimonides in a dichotomous manner. He used Maimonides' ideas differently in the two parts of his *Scrutinium Scripturarum*, with the first part mostly using Maimonides to support the idea of seeking esoteric meanings to biblical texts as superior to the traditional literal approach, while the second part of the work criticizes Maimonides for missing the mark with regard to the specifics of his esotericism. In addition, Pablo found positive things to say about the kabbala vis-a-vis its attempt to see esoteric concepts such as wisdom being an integral part of the divine unity, though he was forced by his Christian views of the soul to reject the kabbala's concept of metempsychosis. Given Pablo's use of the sources, we assume that he was neither a philosopher nor a kabbalist before his conversion. Similarly, after the conversion, he displayed no particular fidelity to either approach, using both these sources strictly according to his Christian aims.

Lastly, Pedro's use of Jewish sources strongly indicates that he was probably a kabbalist before his conversion and continued to value kabbalist literature afteward. He was an opponent of Maimonides and saw Maimonides' philosophical opinions as foreign to the original meaning of Judaism. By contrast, he wanted to understand the esoteric significance of kabbalistic writings like the Zohar and to understand the kabbalistic secrets in the writing of Nahmanides and Gikatilla. After his conversion, Pedro still viewed Maimonides as a heretic in a general religious sense, while identifying the kabbalistic esoteric secrets with Christian dogmas.

All these apostate-rabbis lived a significant part of their lives as Jews. One might think that the process of conversion constituted a kind of abandonment of this previous life. According to this supposition, at some point of his life the apostate changes his mind completely, which is to say that after converting, the person continues to define Judaism as he did in his previous life, but now he believes Judaism is wrong. I believe my analysis shows that the opposite is true: Apostasy was not a break in the spiritual and intellectual life of the ideological convert, but rather was the conclusion of a process that was based on an examination of Judaism and rabbinic writings, and the apostates continued to uphold the same intellectual tradition they had belonged to before their conversion. Thus, the conversion of a Maimonidean apostate like Abner was the conclusion of research into the secret meaning of the *Guide of the Perplexed*, while the apostasy of a kabbalist like Pedro was the conclusion of an exploration of the esoteric meaning of the kabbala. And rabbis like Pablo, after their conversion, continued to find both esoteric insights and errors across the board in the Jewish sources.

The different converts employed different ideological arguments in their post-conversion polemical literature. In certain significant ways, their personalities remained constant, even as their identity shifted from one social construct to another – Jew to Christian. While in some ways fraught with consequential legal and political differences, the boundaries between Jew and Christian were in other ways a distinction that one could traverse while retaining many of one's core religious views. One's personal affinity to kabbala or philosophy was an expression of a broad religious view that could remain unchanged in the face of concurrent ideological swings .Seen in this light, an affinity with kabbala or philosophy might not be the reason per se for converting out of Judaism, yet this affinity could certainly become the intellectual tool that the convert used to explain, both to himself and to others, the religious meaning of his conversion. This natural channeling of general theological affinity is the reason why a Jewish philosopher would become a Christian philosopher, and a Jewish kabbalist would become a Christian kabbalist.

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Jewish Self-Affirmation out of the Sources of Christian Supersessionism: Margarete Susman's *The Book of Job and the Fate of the Jewish People**

Abstract: This article reconstructs the Christian-theological underpinnings of Margarete Susman's 1946 Holocaust theodicy, *Das Buch Hiob und das Schicksal des jüdischen Volkes*. It begins with an analysis of Susman's critique of Zionism and the exilic ideal she posits as its antithesis. It then demonstrates *Das Buch Hiob*'s unsettling affinities to a religious doctrine called the "witness-people myth," according to which the Jews' persecution and degradation attests to the truth of Christian salvation. Susman's valorization of Jewish diasporism and martyrdom adapts this myth by presenting the Jewish diaspora as lacking religious and communal vitality. As in the Christian variations of this myth, Susman's Holocaust theodicy takes the Jews' physical and spiritual demise as a realization of their divine destiny and exemplarity. Ultimately, *Das Buch Hiob*'s valorization of Jewish victimhood points to the limitations of universalizing the Jewish condition and trying to allegorize it in the wake of the Holocaust.

Key words: Margarete Susman, Holocaust theology, Jewish thought, theodicy.

Introduction: Odd Woman Out

In 1946 the poet and philosopher Margarete Susman (1872–1966) published a work entitled *Das Buch Hiob und das Schicksal des jüdischen Volkes* (The Book of Job and the Fate of the Jewish People). Possibly the first postwar work to articulate a comprehensive Jewish theological response to the Holocaust, *Das Buch Hiob* sought to make sense of the catastrophe and its consequences by recourse to the biblical Book of Job. The underlying premise was that Job's unfathomable sufferings prefigured the Jews' victimization throughout history and their near-annihilation during the Second World War. Susman's reading of the Book of Job as an extensive allegory for the "Jewish fate" is an attempt to invest Jewish modernity, which she primarily

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identifies with the assimilation and subsequent destruction of European Jewry, with universal significance.

Susman's turn to the Bible follows a long-standing pattern in the history of Jewish thought, wherein the meaning of collective Jewish experience is sought in, and mediated through, the models and archetypes of Judaism's canonical texts. *Das Buch Hiob* also anticipates a regnant tendency amongst post-Holocaust theologians to draw on biblical motifs in their meditations on the religious meaning of the Shoah and its implications for contemporary Jewish life. Richard Rubenstein, Eli Wiesel, Emil Fackenheim, Irving Greenberg, Martin Buber, Joseph Soloveitchik and Eliezer Berkovits all turned to the Book of Job in their writing on the Holocaust.[1] One would think that the religious and poetic intensity of *Das Buch Hiob* would merit Susman's honorable mention alongside these thinkers. Yet her name is notably absent from most scholarly discussions of post-Holocaust Jewish thought and the many anthologies devoted to the subject.

Despite her prolific career as a philosopher, cultural critic and religious thinker who wrote hundreds of essays over the course of her long life, Susman remains on the margins of 20th-century German-Jewish thought.[2] One possible explanation for her marginalization is the difficulty in classifying her as a thinker and pigeonholing her politics. Susman wrote about and drew her inspiration from such seemingly incompatible intellectual and religious movements as anarchism, Hasidism, Enlightenment philosophy, Protestant crisis theology and Cultural Zionism. Her scholarly eclecticism,

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1   These different "Jobian" interpretations of the Holocaust reflect the contested theological meanings associated with the Book of Job and the Holocaust itself. Scholars such as Dan Mathewson and Isabel Wollaston have surveyed the post-Holocaust reception of the Book of Job and demonstrated the manner in which these interpretations are imbricated with other questions concerning modern Jewish politics, identity and theology. See Dan Mathewson, "Between Testimony and Interpretation," *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 41.2 (Fall 2008) 17–39; Isabel Wollaston, "Post-Holocaust Jewish Interpretations of Job," *Oxford Handbook of the Reception History of the Bible*, ed. Michael Lieb et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) 488–501.

2   In recent years, Susman has begun to come out of the shadow of her better-known contemporaries – thanks to the important work done by scholars such as Barbara Hahn, Anke Gillier and Ingeborg Nordmann. This paper seeks to continue the scholarly effort to recuperate Susman by further exploring her uniquely imaginative and politically idiosyncratic meditations on Jewish identity. See Anke Gilleir and Barbara Hahn, eds., *Grenzgänge zwischen Dichtung, Philosophie und Kulturkritik* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2012); Barbara Hahn, *The Jewess Pallas Athena*, trans. James McFarland (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Ingeborg Nordmann, afterword to *Das Nah- und Fernsein des Fremden* (Frankfurt am Main: Jüdischer Verlag, 1992) 229–268.

which was the source of her originality as a thinker, might have also caused her posthumous descent into obscurity.

Susman's Jewish legacy is further complicated by her idiosyncratic identity politics, which fell outside of the assimilationist-dissimilationist divide. Religiously and ideologically opposed to Zionism, she nevertheless recognized the pragmatic and existential necessity of a Jewish State. A sober realist who despondently admitted that the dream of acculturation had failed, Susman remained devoted to the intellectual tradition of German-Jewish thinkers – from Moses Mendelssohn to Franz Rosenzweig – who had sustained that dream. Her deep commitment to Judaism found its expression in a highly individualistic and intellectual stance that did not correspond to any of the religious or political forms of Jewish self-affirmation prominent at the turn of the 20th century. Despite her enduring preoccupation with the dilemmas of modern Jewish identity, she never aligned herself with any of the great Jewish movements of her time.

The ideological ambiguity and religious syncretism that characterized Susman's writings and most likely hindered her recognition as a thinker and theologian are on full display in *Das Buch Hiob*. Susman's religious response to the Holocaust crystallizes her understanding of Judaism and the meaning of modern Jewish existence. *Das Buch Hiob* is an invaluable testimony to a unique form of German-Jewish self-identification, which sought to merge the liberal 19th-century universalist interpretations of Jewish election with the crisis philosophies of the interwar years. This article critiques Susman's Holocaust theodicy and its corresponding conceptions of what constitutes Jewish peoplehood and Jewish history.[3] I argue that Susman's conception of the Jews' exile and exemplarity draws on a Christian theological framework that is based on the denial of the Jews' historical self-understanding.

Das Buch Hiob's valorization of Jewish victimhood and exile as a universal symbol for human suffering is an imaginative effort to intertwine the Jews' victimization during the Holocaust with a more general historical crisis, which Susman associates with the experience of modernity. The problem with her attempt to place the Jews at the center of a religious narrative of

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3   My critique elaborates on a problematic, which Vivian Liska addresses in her analysis of Susman's 1929 essay "Das Hiob-Problem bei Franz Kafka"; see V. Liska, "Kafka's Other Job," in *Book of Job*, ed. Leora Batnitzky and Ilana Pardes (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014) 123–145. Liska criticizes Susman for her identification of Jewish election with suffering and the "unmistakable Christian undertones" of such an assertion (p. 129). Noting the continuities with Susman's post-Holocaust writings, Liska observes that *Das Buch Hiob*, "not only displays various problematic implications discernible in Susman's earlier Joban interpretation of Kafka; it also comes close to a disconcerting justification of the ultimate Jewish suffering in history" (p. 130).

universal human suffering is that it elides the specificities of Jewish dia-
sporic history, by reducing Jewish particularism to the sheer fact of victim-
hood. The book's vision of the Jewish diaspora's universalism is constructed
as an alternative to what it criticizes as Zionism's national-particularism.
Yet the underlying irony of Susman's critique of Jewish nationalism is that
it mirrors Zionism's homogenization of Jewish diasporic history, which it
views as an undifferentiated episode of persecution, suffering and collective
decline.[4] Ultimately, Susman's valorization of the Jews' diasporic exem-
plarity fails to acknowledge the anamnestic and communal strategies that
were the basis of Jewish self-understanding in the diaspora. Her reductive
identification of the diaspora with the physical demise and spiritual attenu-
ation of the Jews reproduces what is essentially a Christian – and later on a
Zionist – perspective of Jewish exile.[5]

1. Between Exilic Exemplarity and Disembodied Diaspora

In his acerbic critique of Susman's Holocaust theodicy, Swiss philosopher
Arnold Künzli accuses *Das Buch Hiob* of being an apology for God in
the wake of the Holocaust, in which Auschwitz is paradoxically justified
as a reminder of God's love for his chosen people. The image of God that
emerges from Susman's book is that of a cruel tyrant who satisfies his thirst
for blood through an arbitrary reign of terror. As Künzli writes,

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4   There is an inherent difficulty in speaking of such an ideologically and historically
    diverse movement as Zionism in the singular. Both before and after the establishment
    of the State of Israel, Zionism consisted of numerous competing ideological factions,
    which held very different social and political views with regards to the character of
    the Jewish State. One merely need compare the bi-national vision held by members
    of the Brit-Shalom group to that of the revisionist politics of the Jabotinsky-led Betar
    movement, to see the impossibility of referring to Zionism as an internally consistent
    and monolithic ideology. In this article I follow Amnon Raz-Krakotzin's use of the
    term to refer to the predominant ideological strain within Zionism that denied the
    possibility of leading a fully Jewish life or maintaining a Jewish identity in the diaspora.
5   As Raz-Krakotzkin has convincingly argued, Zionism is based on the internalization
    of the Christian supersessionist view of diasporic Judaism as ossified and lifeless. The
    call for the Jews' "return to history" via a return to the homeland is predicated on the
    belief that diasporic Jewry exists "outside of history." The history to which Zionism
    seeks to "return" is the Western history of progress, which Raz-Krakotzkin sees as
    a secularized version of Christian salvation history. See Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin,
    "Secularism, the Christian Ambivalence toward the Jews, and the Notion of Exile," in
    Secularism in Question, ed. Ari Joskowicz and Ethan B. Katz (Philadelphia: University
    of Pennsylvania Press, 2015) 289–290.

> Margarete Susman's God is a mass-murderer – driven by love, if also by anger. He arranged a genocide of his people in order to save them. And in order not to get his hands dirty he relegated the job to Satan, one of his children, who then passed it on to Adolf Hitler.[6]

Künzli derides Susman's theodicy for being a speculative "satanology," a twisted religious narrative in which Satan paradoxically serves as the realizer of the Jews' messianic destiny. Noting that the work's morally abhorrent argument undermines its theological credibility, Künzli concludes, "If ever a biblical history of salvation has been carried out *ad absurdum*, this would be it."[7]

Following Künzli's critique of *Das Buch Hiob*, it stands to reason that such a naïve theodicy should fall into obscurity, rather than be treated as a serious work of post-Holocaust Jewish thought. Although Künzli's critique accurately captures the book's moral ambiguity, his literal reading of *Das Buch Hiob* misconstrues its more nuanced arguments, taking Susman's theological terminology and mythological imagery at face value. Künzli's misreading is further compounded by the fact that he fails to take the book's historical and political context into account or situate it within the intra-Jewish dialogue it responds to. Taken at face value, *Das Buch Hiob* reads as an obscene and morally indefensible justification of the Holocaust. Yet Susman's intellectual debt to Nietzsche, Heidegger, and postmetaphysical thought in general, patently contradicts the possibility that she should be justifying the Holocaust as the work of divine providence, in a manner similar to the Satmar Rebbe, Yoel Teitelbaum.[8]

In *The Discipline of Philosophy*, Willi Goetschel offers an edifying interpretation of *Das Buch Hiob*, which I believe comes closer to the author's true intentions. Goetschel argues that Susman turns to the Book of Job, not because she wants to stay within theodicy's traditional theistic framework, but because she realizes that in the wake of the Holocaust such a framework is no longer viable. He describes *Das Buch Hiob* as a "return to the biblical legacy of Jewish tradition for the purpose of a postmetaphysical philosophy."[9] Read thus, *Das Buch Hiob* comes to represent an alternative to the

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6　Arnold Künzli, *Gotteskrise* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1998) 93.

7　Künzli, *Gotteskrise*, 100.

8　For another sustained critique of *Das Buch Hiob* that follows Künzli's lead, see Gesine Palmer, "Sinn-Sein durch Leiden," in *Grenzgänge zwischen Dichtung, Philosophie und Kulturkritik*, ed. Anke Gillier and Barbara Hahn (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2012) 196–219.

9　Willi Goetschel, "Jewish Thought in the Wake of Auschwitz," in *Discipline of Philosophy and the Invention of Modern Jewish Thought* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012) 17.

simplistic theodical undertakings that Künzli mistakenly equates it with. By framing *Das Buch Hiob* as Susman's attempt to rethink the relationship between the universal and the particular *vis-à-vis* the relationship between philosophy and "Jewish philosophy," Goetschel deflects the literalist critique of *Das Buch Hiob*, and recasts the work as a response to a broader conceptual problem.[10]

Goetschel argues that *Das Buch Hiob* draws on the biblical account of Job's sufferings in search of a "critical universalism"[11] that grounds its universality in individual experience. As Goetschel explains:

> Suffering stands as an instance of unredeemed particularity whose call for redemption has a share in the universal. The figure of Job thus does not suggest any sort of call for or legitimation of suffering – the profound failure of Job's friends – but the necessity of the contingent whose particularity is a universal requirement and a condition for the universal to take root.[12]

In this well-argued philosophical exculpation of *Das Buch Hiob*, Goetschel shifts our reading of the work from its ostensible justification of the Holocaust on theological grounds, to the challenge of reconfiguring Jewish particularism as a universal. My main difficulty with this interpretation is its uncritical acceptance of Susman's metaphorical logic, whereby Jews and Jewishness become synonymous, if not interchangeable, with particularism and difference. Following Susman's lead, Goetschel equates Jewish particularism with suffering, reproducing Susman's own indifference to the specificities of Jewish particularism. His reading implicitly accepts her dehistoricized portrayal of Jews and Jewishness as arbitrary signifiers of difference.[13] Although this compelling interpretation offers an elegant solution

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10   A variation on Goetschel's approach is found in Susanne Hillman's philosophical exculpation of *Das Buch Hiob*; see S. Hillman, "'A Germ So Tiny,'" *Soundings* 96 (2013) 40–84. According to Hillman, *Das Buch Hiob* forms part of Susman's meditations on messianism, which Hillman reads "as an unconditional embrace of the Jewish mission and a concomitant dismissal of Nietzschean nihilism" (p. 42). She argues that Susman's ideal of Jewish passivity should be understood as a rejection of the Nietzschean *Übermensch*. Positing Susman's "will to powerlessness" as the Jewish answer to Nietzsche's "will to power," Hillman reads *Das Buch Hiob* as an attempt to articulate a Jewish ethical outlook in the wake of the Shoah. Like Goetschel, Hillman salvages Susman's Holocaust theodicy by interpreting it metaphorically, and presenting it as a solution to a philosophical problem.

11   Goetschel, "Jewish Thought," 111.

12   Goetschel, "Jewish Thought," 113.

13   Goetschel is clearly aware of the fact that *Das Buch Hiob* lacks any substantive discussion of the specifics of Judaism or the Jewish tradition. To compensate for this apparent absence, he comes up with a brilliant, yet speculative reconstruction of Susman's "nonfoundational and nonessentialist" approach to Judaism. This reading hinges

to the potentially scandalous aspects of *Das Buch Hiob,* it leaves Susman's metaphorical framework – and its underlying Christian-suppersessionist logic – unchallenged.

Goetschel's oversight notwithstanding, his figurative-philosophical approach to *Das Buch Hiob* accurately captures something of the work's radicalism, which is exemplified in its rejection of traditional notions of Judaism and Jewish identity. *Das Buch Hiob* self-consciously subverts the mythical and religious language that was subsequently used to collectivize the Holocaust and turn it into the foundation of modern Jewish identity. What Susman's work so perceptively anticipates – and preemptively seeks to challenge – is the communitarian appropriation of the Holocaust.

In the representative Zionist and Orthodox responses to the Holocaust, a direct link is drawn between European Jewry's assimilation and its subsequent destruction. Yet in contrast to the Zionist and Orthodox narratives, which used the Holocaust to denounce Jewish assimilation, Susman argues that the authentic Jewishness so staunchly affirmed by Jewish nationalists had simply ceased to exist. Since the emancipation, the Jews had shed the external and internal characteristics that had previously distinguished them as a distinct religious or national community. As Susman writes:

> The Jewish people has become an invisible people (*ein Unsichtbares Volk*). Although it already lost the clear external shape of a people with its dispersal, today it has become completely invisible from without as well as from within. It is invisible to others and to itself, posing a dark unresolvable riddle by its very existence. The Jews of today are separated from the distinct national reality of the biblical Israel by the worlds in which they are dispersed and suffer.[14]

Consequently, the modern Jew could neither assimilate nor withdraw from the world in order to return to his religious roots. Insofar as the Jews were

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on Susman's choice of Job, a non-Jewish figure in the Bible, as a symbol for Jewish suffering. As Goetschel explains, "What makes Job the exemplary figure of the Jewish people is not only his destiny and the particular profoundly wise and philosophic way in which he responds to it, but also the fact that Jewish tradition recognizes this originally non-Jewish character as profoundly Jewish. The ability of openly accepting 'foreign' aspects – and sources – represents a key feature that accounts for the enduring vitality of the creative force of Jewish tradition. Job thus stands as a telling instance of how Jewish tradition creatively adopts other sources." ("Jewish Thought," 99) The problem with this imaginative and generous reading of Susman's ostensible understanding of the openness of the Jewish tradition is that Susman seems to have very little concern for the Jewish tradition, which she discounts as irrelevant to contemporary Jewish life in several places in the book. Goetschel himself acknowledges that the conception of tradition he attributes to Susman "remains unspoken" ("Jewish Thought," 99).

14 Margarete Susman, *Das Buch Hiob und das Schicksal des jüdischen Volkes* (Zürich: Steinberg, 1946) 76. English translations in this article are mine.

rejected by their European environment, they could not simply return to the "long-abandoned cultic life" and "anachronistic laws" of the Judaism of yore.[15]

For Susman, this raises the following question: if Judaism has disintegrated and no longer exists as a coherent *Weltanschauung*, collective identity or historical tradition, what "Jewish" truth could one find in the Holocaust? Her answer to this question is formulated as a critique of the national and orthodox conceptions of Judaism. She invests Jewish survival with a universal-humanist significance, which she elaborates through an extensive allegorical reading of the Book of Job, which identifies suffering as the defining feature of Jewish history.[16]

Like Job, whose very being is defined through his solitary suffering, the Jews too bear the burden of exile and persecution. The Jews find themselves in the recurring role of the scapegoat, just as Job stood falsely accused of wrongdoing by his friends. She describes the contemporary state of the Jewish people as resembling that of the leprous Job, whose friends no longer recognize him as he sits destitute and deformed on a heap of ashes.[17] Through their sufferings, Job and the Jews come to represent the human experience in its full wretchedness, and as such encapsulate its ultimate essence. To this end, Susman cites her friend, the Swiss-Protestant theologian Leonhard Ragaz, who dubs the Jews "the seismograph of the nations" – a people whose existence serves as an index for the condition of humanity as a whole.[18]

The question of meaningless suffering was not, of course, a uniquely Jewish problem, but a universal one. As such, Susman believes that one could not disentangle Jewish suffering from the suffering of mankind. In fact, she argues, it is precisely in the context of human suffering in general that one recognizes the ultimate meaning of the Jews' persecution during the

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15 Susman, *Buch*, 193–194.

16 The primary focus of this paper is not so much Susman's reading of the Book of Job as the notion of Jewish peoplehood it is meant justify, and the implications of this notion for Susman's understanding of the historical and theological meaning of the Holocaust. For a more detailed sketch of Susman's interpretation of Job, see Mark Larrimore, *Book of Job* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013) 231–239. Chapters two and four of *Das Buch Hiob* have been translated into English by Gerda Neu-Sokol and appear as an appendix to *Why Hidest Thy Face,* ed. Michael M. Caspi and Sara J. Milstein (N. Richland Hills: BIBAL Press, 2004) 279–307.

17 Susman, *Buch,* 63.

18 Susman, *Buch,* 50. On Susman's intellectual exchange with Ragaz, see Susanne Hillman, "'A Few Human Beings Walking Hand in Hand,'" *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 59 (2014) 141–162.

Holocaust, which serves as a magnified mirror for the crisis of a dehuman-
ized modernity. Thus despite the fact that it was the Jews who were singled
out for destruction, Susman believes that the historical and metaphysical
significance of their martyrdom is inseparable from Europe's collective-his-
torical fate. For Susman, it is the Book of Job that expresses the inextricable
relationship between the Jews and the rest of humanity.

> Just as the fate of Job mirrors the fate of the Jewish people and simultaneously that
> of the human fate as a whole, so is the essence of humanity inscribed in the people
> of Israel – a singular, historic people, who symbolize and represent all of humanity.[19]

Susman constructs her argument by analogy: Just as the Book of Job serves
as the biblical figuration of the Jews' trials and tribulations in exile, the Jews'
historical suffering mirrors the fate of mankind. She is not concerned with
the political or sociological causes of the Holocaust, but in articulating a
metaphysics of Jewish martyrdom.

Susman presents the Jews as a collective embodiment of the suffering
servant. They exist, she argues, not for the sake of "self-realization"
(*Selbstverwirklichung*) or by virtue of "national self-determination"
(*völkische Selbstbehauptung*), but through the act of "self-surrender" (*Selb-
staufgabe*).[20] What constitutes Jewish peoplehood is dispersion, homeless-
ness and powerlessness – all for the sake of humanity. A staunch proponent
of Jewish diasporism, Susman argues that the Jews' continued existence in
exile serves to intertwine their destiny with that of humanity. As foreigners
on the face of the earth, the Jews represent the frailty and fragility that
defines the human condition. For Susman, the Jewish people exemplify this
universalism by living in the diaspora and by transcending the boundaries
of national and ethnic belonging. The diaspora simultaneously represents
the curse of contemporary Jewish existence and the promise of a post-
national messianism, a utopian future in which nationhood and statehood
no longer obstruct universal human solidarity. The Jews can only maintain
their symbolic role as a living alternative to nationalism, so long as they
remain in exile, and resist the temptation of national self-assertion and
self-sovereignty.[21]

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19 Susman, *Buch,* 50.
20 Margarete Susman, "Hiob und Unsere Zeit," *Neue Wege* 30.7 (1936) 336–49.
21 *Das Buch Hiob* anticipates a regnant trend among a wide range of postwar thinkers
      and writers, who similarly invoke the Jew as the quintessential figure of physical and
      metaphysical homelessness. One representative thinker, whose position most closely
      approximates Susman's, is literary critic George Steiner, whose provocative meditations
      on Jewish exile have been the cause of much controversy. A vocal critic of Zionism,
      Steiner identifies Judaism with exile, arguing that that the Jews' historical vocation is to

In being called upon to be a people and not a state – that is, a people grounded by
God rather than a state established by man – it is set apart from all other nations.
In realizing its pure mission without form and borders, it is singled out in its very
collective being to represent humanity. This is its irrevocable meaning from its
beginnings to the end of times.[22]

It is along these lines that Susman asks whether the Zionism's attempt to
save the Jews by means of national revival does not, in fact, endanger their
religious and supra-national calling. For two thousand years Jews prayed
and yearned for Zion. Zion, however, "did not refer to geographical Pales-
tine, but to the ancient holy name … And this collective-concept of the true
Zion stands in diametrical opposition to the naturalistic European [notion
of the nation]."[23] In their attempt to solve the "Jewish problem," the Zionists
ceded to the nationalist European conception of a people, and sought to
turn Zion into a nation-state. Yet as Susman argues in the closing chapter
of *Das Buch Hiob*:

From a human perspective, there appears to be no solution to the Jewish problem,
just as there is no solution to the problem of humanity. The Jewish problem is inex-
tricably bound to that of humanity as a whole – because it ultimately encapsulates
nothing but the problem of being human.[24]

The attempt to "normalize" Jewish existence would thus betray the Jews'
messianic mission. For the Jews, there can be no redemption outside of
world redemption. Jewish suffering, Susman insists, cannot be resolved
in history, but only at the end of history, with the coming of the Messiah,
because "Zion remains Galut until the end of times."[25] Consequently, she

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represent a collective alternative to the blight of nationalism. Like Susman, he considers
the Jews' defining characteristic to be their ontological foreignness. For his signature
essay on the subject, see George Steiner, "Our Homeland, the Text," *Salmagundi* 66
(Winter-Spring 1985) 4–25. Numerous critiques of Steiner's position have appeared
over the years. See Moshe Idel, "George Steiner," *Modern Judaism* 25.2 (2005) 109–140;
Asaf Sagiv, "George Steiner's Jewish Problem," *Azure* 15 (2003) 130–154; Ilan Stavans,
"George Steiner's *Errata*," in *Inveterate Dreamer,* ed. I. Stavans (Lincoln: University of
Nebraska Press, 2011) 33–36; Oliver Sacks, "A Challenge to Jewish Secularism," *Jewish
Spectator* 15 (1990) 26–32.

22 Susman, *Buch*, 97.

23 Susman, *Buch*, 151–152.

24 Susman, *Buch*, 228.

25 Susman, *Buch*, 100. In her equation of Jewishness with exile, Susman follows in the
footsteps of Franz Rosenzweig, whose philosophical exposition on Jewish election, as
it appeared in his magnum opus, *Star of Redemption*, revolved around the Jews' exilic
history and their unique position as a collective that did not fit the mold of the modern
European nation-state. Susman was deeply influenced by *Star of Redemption* and
devoted several essays to expounding the significance of Rosenzweig's thought. Two
of these essays originally published in the early 1920s appear in English; see "Exodus

believes that the Zionist "negation of exile" effectively amounts to the nega-
tion of Judaism, because it is the exilic character of Jewish peoplehood that
constitutes the Jews' exemplarity.[26]

In what is possibly an allusion to Pinsker's imagery in "Auto-Emanci-
pation," Susman likens the Jews to a "walking corpse, a ghost amongst the
nations" (*einen wandelnden Leichnam, ein Gespenst unter den Volkern*).[27]
Yet what Pinsker renounced as the bane of modern Jewish existence,
Susman sees as key to the religious and moral message embodied in Jewish
peoplehood. It is the lack of earthly boundaries through which the Jews
fulfill their universal calling. Diaspora is not a betrayal of Judaism, but a
realization of its messianic mission. As Susman explains, "The innermost
law of this people (*sein innerstes Daseinsgesetz*) is to exist without delimited
and defined forms … it is meant to be spatially and temporally unbound, to
be borderless."[28] There is, she argues, no terrestrial homeland for the Jews,
who lack the political, territorial and linguistic unity needed for national
self-determination. Powerless, stateless and defenseless, the Jews embody
the insignificance (*Unwert*) of man in his bare essence.[29]

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from Philosophy" and "Franz Rosenzweig: *Star of Redemption* (A Review)" in *Franz
Rosenzweig's "The New Thinking*," ed. and trans. Alan Udoff and Barabara E. Galli
(Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999) 105–111, 133–152. Susman's idealization
of Jewish diasporic existence as the fulfillment of the Jews' universal mission similarly
continues a longstanding tradition that harkens back to the 19th-century conceptions
of Jewish exemplarity articulated by the philosopher Hermann Cohen and leading fig-
ures in the Reform movement. For German-Jewish liberals, the concept of election
was interpreted as a universal calling the Jews were meant to fulfill on behalf of humanity.
The different versions of this "mission theory" were meant to justify the Jews' diasporic
existence and explain their survival as necessary for the proliferation of their message
to humankind, a message that was alternatively designated as monotheism, humanism
or rationalism.

26 On Susman's relationship to Zionism, see Alfred Bodenheimer, "'Zion bleibt Galuth bis
zur Endzeit'," *In den Himmel gebissen*, ed. Alfred Bodenheimer and Barbara Breysach
(Munich: Edition Text + Kritik, 2011) 65–76.

27 Susman, *Buch*, 53. In his canonical essay from 1882, Pinsker famously argued that the
Gentile's "natural antagonism" towards the Jews could not be ameliorated so long as
the Jews lacked their own sovereign territory and a well-defined national identity. See
Leon Pinsker, "Auto- Emancipation," *Zionist Idea*, ed. Arthur Hertzberg (Philadelphia:
Jewish Publication Society, 1997) 181–197.

28 Susman, *Buch*, 98.

29 Susman, *Buch*, 136. In the preface to the second edition of *Das Buch Hiob*, which came
out in 1948 after the establishment of the State of Israel, Susman reaffirmed this stance,
arguing that: "In its embattled defense of itself as a state … the people has internalized a
part of the chaos, which had previously been foreign to it … thus endangering its inner
constitution. In assuming this life form, it has taken a part in the bloody aberrations of
the world of nations … it has taken a part in the curse of nationalism, in the growing
reification of life, in the apocalyptic hardening of the heart from which humanity now

Susman's glorification of exile and suffering idealizes the Jews as a mythical victim-community.[30] But this mythical community does not correspond to any ethnic, religious or national collective. Furthermore, it seems to possess no history beyond the history of its persecution. Although Susman invests Jewishness with a privileged moral position, this superiority is merely metaphorical, and is not meant to empower the Jews as a communal or political entity. Her mythic portrayal of Jewish victimhood serves the opposite purpose – the idealization of a non-national community. In *Das Buch Hiob*, the Jews merely seem to be the vehicle through which she articulates this post-national ideal. The myth of Jewish victimhood is not meant to affirm collective Jewish survival or self-determination.[31] In fact, Susman denies the very possibility of national or religious Jewish self-affirmation, because she believes that since the emancipation a historically concrete body that can authentically call itself Jewish no longer exists.

Underlying Susman's religious reading of the Holocaust is a refusal to nationalize Jewish collective memory, but this refusal ultimately leads to a complete negation of collective memory as such. In *Das Buch Hiob*, exile, persecution and passivity constitute the defining characteristics of Jewish peoplehood, but this "imagined community" remains a metaphysical abstraction. If Jewish victimhood serves as the mythological grounds for Susman's ideal of Jewishness, she nevertheless refuses to identify this ideal with "real Jews," or concrete community. As such, her idealization of Jewish suffering is not an apology for a tyrannical and sadistic God, as Künzli argues, but a critique of Jewish nationalism in a theological idiom.

Ironically, Susman's critique of Zionism is predicated on Zionism's basic premise, which holds that the Jews of the diaspora are absent from history.

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suffers. In such a reality, can the messianic legacy still be preserved?" See Margarete Susman, "Israels Weg," *Neue Wege* 42.11 (1948) 508–510.

30 See Martin Jaffee, "Victim-Community in Myth and History," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 28 (1991) 223–238.

31 In *Israel's Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), Idit Zertal observes that "an essential stage in the formation and shaping of a national community is its perception as a trauma-community" (p. 2). Narratives of victimhood, she points out, are highly effective means of mobilizing and consolidating a nation. By recounting the story of its collective victimization and miraculous rebirth, a community transforms its historical defeat into a triumphal myth, which then serves as the foundation for its collective self-understanding. As she explains, "Through the constitution of a martyrology … a shared sense of nationhood is created and the nation is crystallized" (p. 2). Susman's "martyrology" is itself such a mythical narrative, yet one that is aimed against the consolidation of any collective Jewish reality in the political, religious or social sense. As such, *Das Buch Hiob* presents its readers with an alternative to – and critique of – the nationalization of the Holocaust.

She merely inverts Zionism's negative valuation of the diaspora and rejects the notion that the Jews should "return to history." She believes that the Jews should remain resigned to their "ghostly existence" until the end of days. In *Das Buch Hiob* Zionism's ideal of Jewish autochthony is substituted for an antithetical myth of Jewish deracination. In both cases, this consignment of diasporic Jewry to a space outside of history is rooted in a Hegelian view that equates history with the history of the nation-state.[32] Susman's mythic ideal of exilic Jewishness negates Zionism's "negation of the diaspora" (*shlilat hagalut*), but ultimately shares its conceptual framework.

As Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin argues, Zionism's denigration of rabbinic Judaism and its valorization of the Jews' biblical origins reproduces the Christian-Hebraist distinction between the postexilic Jew of the present and the authentic Jew of antiquity. By adopting the Christian-supersessionist view, which identifies the diaspora with degeneration, Zionism essentially overturns the theological foundations of post-exilic Judaism.[33] At the root of Zionism's assertion of a Jewish national identity is a negation of large swaths of Jewish history, which it disregards as an insignificant stage that precedes the redemptive drama of national revival. In order to establish a linear narrative of *galut* to *geulah*, Zionism condenses the histories of the diaspora into one homogeneous phenomenon. The self-assertion of collective Jewish identity in national terms comes at the high cost of suppressing the cultural and geographical diversity of Jewish life in the diaspora.[34]

The problem Raz-Krakotzkin identifies with Zionism's reductive portrayal of Jewish history is mirrored in Susman's conception of exile, which equates the history of the diaspora with the progressive decline of Jews and Judaism. Her anti-Zionism notwithstanding, Susman uncritically accepts Zionism's lachrymose view of Jewish diasporic history. She too presents the Jewish experience of exile as a uniform historical episode of suffering, passivity and persecution. Absent from Susman's mythicized account of Jewish exile is what Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin call the "powers of diaspora,"

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32 See Jonathan Boyarin, "Hegel's Zionism?" in *Remapping Memory,* ed. J. Boyarin (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1994) 137–160.

33 He goes on to explain: "Indeed, the radical (and dominant) modern Zionist understanding of 'negation of exile' led to the explicit denial of historical Judaism: it was founded on the complete rejection of the post-biblical literary, especially Talmudic corpus, viewed as representing degenerated exilic Judaism and as a manifestation of irrationality. In other words, it was based on the denial of the corpus that was traditionally the target of Christian anti-Jewish campaigns." Raz-Krakotzkin, "Secularism," 294.

34 See Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, "Dialectical Return of Exile" (Hebrew), in *Place of Testimony*, ed. Andrea Peschel (Tel Aviv: Resling, 2004) 12–23.

referring to those strategies that have historically enabled "regeneration through statelessness."[35] Like Susman, Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin juxtapose Jewish diasporism to Jewish statehood. But in stark contrast to Susman, they posit this diasporic ideal as one that allows for the preservation of Jewish identity and its cultural continuity rather than its demise.

Susman equates diaspora with the loss of Jewish selfhood and the progressive decline of the Jews' religious and cultural identity, while valorizing this loss as a pathway to universalism. According to her dialectical approach, the attenuation of the Jews' religious and cultural identity ultimately fulfills the inherent universalism of the biblical prophets. Susman's dichotomy leaves the false impression that there are only two options: Jewish self-preservation that takes the route of "parochial nationalism," or a universalism realized through the dissolution of Jewishness. Surely, one can challenge the nationalist and territorial basis of modern Jewish identity without drawing the conclusion that the only other option is self-denial. Is the diaspora necessarily an expression of Jewish "self-renunciation," as Susman argues? Susman's heuristic construct falls into the conceptual trap that the Boyarin brothers warn against, noting that "Any possibility of linking this projective notion of diaspora as a resource in response to the legitimation crisis of the nation-state will be vitiated if the term 'diaspora' is discussed in a fashion completely removed from its formative historical and ethnic framework."[36]

By turning Zion into a metaphor, and arguing that it by no means refers to geographical Palestine, Susman misconstrues the manner in which the memory of Zion actually shaped the Jews' historical consciousness in the diaspora. Jewish diaspora is by no means a uniform phenomenon, as Susman suggests. It consists of historically and geographically distinct variations, which are continuously reshaped and reimagined. Susman's fundamental mistake is that she conflates Jewish diaspora with the condition of transcendental homelessness and modern alienation. She valorizes the marginality of the European Jew as the embodiment of a universal-human condition. Yet by reducing Jewish exile to a generalized metaphor of non-belonging, she ignores the central role that exile has historically played in consolidating communal and trans-generational kinship among Jews. Her conception of exile supersedes the Jewish experience of diaspora by excluding the specific historical meanings it had for the Jews themselves.

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35 Daniel Boyarin and Jonathan Boyarin, *Powers of Diaspora* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002) vii.

36 Boyarin and Boyarin, *Powers*, 10.

2. The "Witness-People" Myth

While Susman frames her reading of the Jewish fate by recourse to the biblical Book of Job, her glorification of Jewish suffering draws on a distinctly Christian-theological understanding of the Jews' role in the history of salvation. The theological problem faced by the Church Fathers was how to explain the survival of the Jews after Judaism's supersession by Christianity. In order to justify the persistence of Judaism after the coming of Christ, the church cast the Jews into the role of "witness-people," whose mysterious survival confirmed the truth of the New Testament and attested to God's active involvement in the course of history.[37] While the Jews' exile was interpreted as a punishment for their role in the crucifixion and their refusal to acknowledge Christ's divinity, it was also seen as a confirmation of Christianity in two important ways: first, the Jews' historical degradation was understood as a sign of Christianity's theological superiority, and secondly, the Jews, who stubbornly clung to the Old Testament, served as a living reminder of Christianity's origins. This theological interpretation of Jewish suffering and survival had nothing to do with the Jews' self-understanding as a people, but instead served to explain the meaning of their continued existence within a Christian framework.

The symbolic role that Jewish suffering and survival plays in the Christian imagination is epitomized in *The City of God*, where Augustine explains that the Jews were "uprooted from their kingdom" for killing and then renouncing Christ. For Augustine, Jewish exile is both a sign of punishment (for the Jews) and salvation (for the Christians):

> By the evidence of their own scriptures they bear witness for us that we have not fabricated the prophecies about Christ … It follows that when the Jews do not believe in our scriptures, their scriptures are fulfilled in them, while they read them with blind eyes … It is in order to give this testimony which, in spite of themselves, they supply for our benefit by their possession and preservation of those books [of the Old Testament] that they are themselves dispersed among all nations, wherever the Christian church spreads.[38]

The Jews in this passage serve as the ultimate witnesses to a divine message of salvation, which they have denied and from which they are subsequently excluded. They remain a "chosen people" not as the purveyors of the living

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37 For a highly illuminating survey of the witness myth phenomenon in Christian theology, see Stephen Haynes, *Jews and the Christian Imagination* (London: Macmillan, 1995). See also Edward Flannery, *Anguish of the Jews* (New York: Paulist Press) 50.

38 Quoted in Paula Fredrickson, *Augustine and the Jews* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010) xii.

word of God, but as a historical relic that confirms the truth of Christianity. By stubbornly clinging to the Old Testament, they serve as the "slave-librarian" for the Church. The ingenuity of this theological construct lies in the fact that it responds to the doctrinal threat posed by Judaism by subsuming its religious significance and redefining it in accordance with church doctrine. Rather than disproving Christ's prophecies, Jewish survival is interpreted as an integral part of the unfolding drama of the Christian history of salvation. In most versions of this myth, the Jews will continue to live in exile until the end of times, when many of them will finally convert to Christianity.[39]

Stephan Haynes argues that Augustine's account of Jewish survival reflects an ambivalence characteristic of all subsequent versions of the "witness-people myth," in which the Jews are cast in the role of an eternally guilty people, who paradoxically also represent the work of divine providence.[40] This paradoxical Christian construct underlies Susman's theodical myth of Jewish suffering. She too presents the Jews as a people who have gone astray through their secularization and assimilation. The blindness that Christian theologians attribute to the Jews due to their inability to recognize the divinity of Christ is reproduced in her claim that modern Jewry has lost its relationship to God, yet continues to fulfill its divine vocation in ways unbeknown to itself. It is only by virtue of the divine curse that continues to plague them that the Jewish people are still recognizable today. As Susman asserts,

> A Jewish people, in the primal sense (*Ursinne*), in the sense of a visible national-being (*sichtbaren Volkseins*), no longer exists. But the curse that was laid upon this people in its early days still remains, and has today been realized in full force … It is through the singularity of this curse alone that this people is still recognizable.[41]

The elements that Susman identifies with the Jewish condition – exile, blindness, divine curse, and isolation – are all recurrent motifs in the Christian theological portrayal of the Jew. Yet whereas Christian theologians used the fratricidal Cain as the biblical archetype for the Jews, Susman turns to the figure of Job.

As in the Christian versions of this myth, Susman sees modern Jewry as a ghostly presence in Western Europe, a people who lacks religious and communal vitality, but nevertheless continues to play an important and

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39 Flannery, *Anguish*, 50. See also Jeremy Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999) 67–72.

40 Haynes, *Jews,* 29.

41 Susman, *Buch*, 85–6.

mysterious role in its history. She too concludes her narrative of Jewish suffering with a messianic horizon, not one that culminates with the Jews' conversion to Christianity, but one in which they will finally be admitted into the community of universal human brotherhood. In both Susman's Holocaust theodicy and the Christian witness-people myth, the Jews' survival is indispensible to the salvation of mankind, and their suffering is rationalized as part of a greater eschatological drama.

In the Christian imagination, the persecution and subjugation of the Jews testifies to the truth of Christ, a truth they have denied. Susman too presents Jewish suffering as pointing to a higher metaphysical truth, the meaning of which is unavailable to those bearing its brunt. She preserves the formal structure of the Christian witness-people myth by casting the Jews as the representatives of messianic redemption. The post-national utopian future she celebrates is merely a secularized adaptation of Christian salvation history. For Susman, the Jews' dispersion and degradation makes them representatives of the "human essence." She wants to restore the Jews' human dignity by recasting them as a universal symbol for humanity. Yet her abstract, metaphysical conception of the "Jewish condition" revolves around one aspect of their historical existence alone: their persecution and victimization. The "Jewish condition," which she equates with meaningless suffering, is then conceived as a kind of exemplarity, a metaphor for human vulnerability in general.

Susman's valorization of Jewish suffering reproduces the logic of Christian supersessionism, which casts the Jews in the role of unwitting witnesses to a messianic message of salvation. She effectively reduces the Jews to passive victims whose historical existence symbolizes a drama of divine salvation, whether or not they accept its validity. The symbolic role that the Jews play in the Christian imagination assumes a different meaning in Susman's Holocaust theodicy, but the underlying structure of this Christian theological myth remains intact. As in the Christian version of the witness-people myth, Susman is not concerned with the way the Jews themselves understand their collective or historical existence. Other than the exemplary significance she attributes to their suffering as a symbol of human vulnerability, the Jews seem to possess no history, tradition or collective ways of life. Susman celebrates the Jews in their martyrdom, but has very little to say about the Jews as a living community. Consequently, her attempt to humanize the Jews comes at the high cost of reducing the concrete realities of Jewish history and culture into a mere metaphor for the human condition.

3. The Jewish Mirror

This problematic is best exemplified in Susman's metaphysical account of anti-Semitism. What lies behind the eternal hatred of the Jews, and what is its true cause, Susman asks? Is there any truth to the contemporary accusations made against the Jews? There is an inherent difficulty in resolving these questions, she argues, because since the emancipation the Jews can barely be identified as a distinct or unified people. Furthermore, any attempt to comprehend the Jews' guilt is foiled by the multiple, contradictory accusations directed at them.

> Does the guilt emerge from Israel's perseverance throughout history, and the fact that it does not perish like all other nations? Or is it the fact that Israel is not strong and pure enough to stand on its own and dissociate itself from the other nations? Is it the fault of its assimilation or separation? Is it the Jews' rigid legalism or their falling away from the law? Is it their excessive intellectualism or their crass materialism? Is it capitalism or socialism? The Jews are primarily accused of being a corrosive element amongst the nations, when in fact they are one of the most conservative peoples in history.[42]

Susman argues that none of these accusations can be wholly discounted, but the fact that they contradict one another undermines one's ability to deduce a consistent image of the Jews' "collective character." Combined, these accusations merely reflect society's prejudicial perception of the Jew. This contradictory image of the Jew, she explains, is in fact a projection of humanity's own ills.[43]

Susman's gloss on modern anti-Semitism is not framed in the terms of ideology critique, but is meant as a metaphysical commentary. To illuminate the metaphysical dimension she finds in modern anti-Semitism, Susman cites Hitler's reported statement: "Everyone of us carries the Jew within himself. It is merely easier to persecute the external Jew than the

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42 Susman, *Buch*, 64.

43 *Das Buch Hiob*'s emphasis on persecution as the defining attribute of the Jewish experience brings to mind a work that came out that same year, Sartre's *Réflexions sur la question juive* (1946). Despite the apparent theoretical and discursive differences between Susman's theological approach and Sartre's existentialist analysis of the modern Jewish condition, both take anti-Semitism as their starting point. As Sartre asserts, "The Jew is one whom other men consider a Jew … it is the anti-Semite who *makes* the Jew"; see Jean-Paul Sartre, *Antisemite and Jew*, trans. George J. Becker (New York: Schocken, 1995) 69. According to Sartre, Jewishness and Jewish identity are completely determined by the Jew's external social circumstances, first and foremost by the hostility that society bears the Jew. Similarly, both Sartre and Susman see the assimilated-secular Jew as the representative of contemporary Jewishness, and disregard alternative communal and identitarian Jewish realities that do not fit this archetype.

internal one."[44] Susman takes Hitler's distinction between the "external Jew" and the "Jew within" to explain how the Jew serves as a moral mirror for his non-Jewish environment. For Susman, this quote reveals the underlying implications of anti-Judaism, which represents more than mere animosity towards an empirical community, but illuminates a deeper process that has been taking place over the past centuries, attesting to the "self-divestiture of humanity" (*Selbstentblößung der Menschheit*).[45]

It is the Jews' "mirroring quality" that Susman takes to be their defining metaphysical attribute. What makes the Jews an ideal "mirror-people" is their ambiguous collective identity: since their exile from the Promised Land, and more recently, since their emancipation, they lack a distinct national, linguistic or cultural character. This formlessness makes them the perfect projection screen for the nations. According to Susman, the reason why the Jews can simultaneously be pigeonholed as capitalists and communists is because they have lost their identity as a people, and as such lack any stable essence. She seems to accept the anti-Semitic idea that the Jew lacks an authentic self and merely imitates his surroundings. The plasticity and adaptability of the Jew, who is alternatively associated with capitalism and communism, rootless cosmopolitanism and an exclusivist communitarianism, says something about the nature of the modern Jew, who can be anything and everything. At the same time, it is this very "inessentiality" that constitutes the Jew's exemplarity.

Susman believes that the Jews, as active members in Europe's intellectual and cultural life since the mid-1800s, are equally responsible for the chaos and alienation brought about by modernity. Thus, she explains, the repeated accusation of "the destructive element in the Jewish spirit" (*das Zersetzende im jüdischen Geist*) is more than just a mere slogan.[46] It bears a certain truth that is indicative of the historical and spiritual process the Jews have undergone in the modern era. The Jews, she explains, experienced the disintegration of the modern world in a twofold manner, in the loss of classical European culture and the loss of their own religious traditions. As participants and victims of this historical process, the Jews lost their collective identity. Underlying the erstwhile dream of assimilation was the aspiration towards full equality, of being recognized as full human beings. Yet what was left of the Jews at the end of this epoch was the complete breakdown of the Jewish reality itself. The revelatory aspect that Susman sees in this

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44 Susman, *Buch,* 123.
45 Susman, *Buch,* 124.
46 Susman, *Buch,* 79.

historical process has to do with the analogy implied in this narrative, in which the dissolution of Judaism through secularization parallels the devaluation of human life in the modern era. She writes:

> Looking at the past centuries, it appears as if the fate of the Jewish people were merely the dark shadow cast by humanity as it courses the path of history. The deeper the sun sinks on the horizon, the darker, ghostlier and more distorted its shadow becomes.[47]

The striking parallels between Susman's interpretation of the Jews as a "mirror people" and similar observations made by her contemporary, the Swiss-Protestant theologian Karl Barth, bring the Christian theological framework of *Das Buch Hiob* into focus. In "The Jewish Question and the Christian Answer," which came out in 1949, three years after the publication *Das Buch Hiob*, Barth formulated his own Christian-theological response to the Holocaust. His piece attempts to discredit racial anti-Semitism and dignify Jewish suffering during the Holocaust by reminding his audience of the religious significance that Jewish survival has for the Christian. The Jews, he explains, are chosen by God to play an important role in the unfolding drama of Christian salvation. They are God's chosen people, but this election manifests itself in the humiliation and devastation, which they are subjected to throughout history. "The permanence of the Jews in history is a mystery of faith, yet as such not entirely inexplicable," he asserts.[48] Their survival is inextricably tied to the life of another Jew, Jesus Christ, whose suffering is mirrored in their own historical existence.[49]

By drawing an analogy between the suffering Christ and the destruction of European Jewry, Barth seeks to redeem the Jews' humanity, which had been undermined by Nazi anti-Semitism and its portrayal of the Jews as a vermin-like threat to humanity. Barth refutes the racial definition of the Jew by claiming that the Jews constitute neither race nor nation. As they are a people without a shared language, country or culture, he believes that

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47 Susman, *Buch,* 11.

48 Karl Barth, "The Jewish Question and the Christian Answer," *Against the Stream* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1954) 196.

49 Like Barth, Susman sees a parallel between the suffering of the People of Israel and the suffering of Christ. She too argues that Jewish historical experience exemplifies the passion of Christ. But Susman draws a different conclusion from this parallel, using it to blur the confessional boundaries between Judaism and Christianity. She links the Christ-Israel parallel to the historical interpenetration of these two religions, arguing that the impossibility of dissociating the Jews from Jesus is analogous to the impossibility of imagining Judaism without Christianity or vice-versa. The "spirit of Christ" is so deeply intertwined with Western Judaism that neither the Synagogue nor the Church can sever itself from the other. See Susman, *Buch*, 159–173.

there is very little that unites the Jews as a distinct collective entity. Even the attempt to find a unifying religious definition for the Jews is bound to fail, due to the overridingly secular character of modern Jewry. In fact, "A Jew may very well be a pantheist, an atheist, or a skeptic, indeed even a good or bad Christian, Roman Catholic or Protestant, and yet he may remain a Jew at heart."[50] Since the time of Christ, Barth argues, the Jews have simply ceased to exist as a unified people. If it is not their racial or national character that elicits this resilient and ever-recurring hatred, what then is the cause of anti-Semitism? Anti-Semitism, Barth explains, is an inexplicable phenomenon whose virulent persistence is inextricably tied to the divine mystery of Jewish survival. It is the price to be paid for being God's chosen people. The Jew is no better or worse than anyone else, but his uncanny survival is an enduring and unwelcome reminder of a truth that most wish to suppress: that Christ died for the sins of mankind. And this, Barth argues "is the reason for the grudge we bear the Jew."[51]

Recalling Susman's contention, Barth explains that the Jew is "a mirror in which we see ourselves as we are, i. e., we see how bad we all are."[52] The anti-Semite deludes himself into believing that it is the Jew who is morally corrupt, when it is in fact his own immorality that he is confronting. The Jews' rootlessness is a "mirror of our own life and that of all mankind."[53] The encounter with the Jew is thus an encounter with a suppressed inner truth. It is this unsettling recognition of his precarious and morally fraught existence that causes the non-Jew's hatred of the Jew. The Jews' ghostly survival is a *memento mori*, a reminder that there is no permanence or security in this world. Barth finds further confirmation of this mirroring effect in the claim that anti-Semitism, the denial of the Jews' humanity, is a reflection of the Jews' denial of Christ. The two, he argues, are closely aligned, encapsulating the "permanent and terrible riddle of Jewish existence."[54]

Barth endeavors to humanize the Jews and exculpate them from the blame they bore in modern anti-Semitic propaganda, but in doing so he revives the Christian myth of the Jews as a witness people. As in earlier versions of this myth, there is an ambivalent duality to Barth's theological account, which presents the Jews as both divinely elect and eternally damned. They simultaneously bear the mark of innocence and guilt, salvation and damnation. In contrast to Augustine, who sees the Jews' suffering as

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50 Susman, *Buch,* 197.
51 Susman, *Buch,* 199.
52 Susman, *Buch,* 199.
53 Susman, *Buch,* 199.
54 Susman, *Buch,* 201.

punishment, Barth glorifies it, by likening their suffering to Christ's. Barth endows Jewish suffering with a tragic solemnity that might be commended as an inter-faith gesture of good will. The problem is that this ambivalently philo-Semitic representation of the Jew ultimately preserves the basic elements of the Augustinian discourse on Jewish survival. Like Augustine, Barth mythicizes the Jews and explains their survival within a theological framework that consigns them to the passive role of "reluctant witnesses."[55] This theological account of Jewish suffering is simply a euphemistic version of the witness-people myth. Barth's noble intentions notwithstanding, his theological response to the Holocaust retains unsettling elements of the mythical otherness found in the anti-Semitic depiction of the Jew.[56]

Both Barth and Susman construct their response to modern anti-Semitism and the Holocaust by drawing on a pre-modern theological tradition, which is itself highly suspect. In the spirit of the Christian myth of the Jews as witness people, Susman interprets the oppression and dispersion of the Jews as a sign of divine providence:

> In being sentenced for dispersal around the world its atonement and destiny are mysteriously intertwined. The punishment for this people's guilt simultaneously expresses the realization of its fate and its innermost purpose. The loss of earthly boundaries serves to fulfill its mission.[57]

Her vision of the Jews' universal calling has nothing to do with their historical identity, religious self-perception or cultural production. Instead, what Susman does is invert the anti-Semitic and Zionist image of Jewish deracination by valorizing it as a moral-utopian ideal. She subverts the negative image of the Jew, not by pointing to the diverse manifestations of Jewish culture and tradition, but by reworking the moral valence of Jewish rootlessness, replacing one metaphorical construct with another. Because she limits herself to a tropological discourse about Jews and Judaism, Susman inevitably reproduces the inherent logic of both Christian supersessionism and modern anti-Semitism, both of which reduce the living plurality of Judaism into a monolithic abstraction.

The Jews in *Das Buch Hiob* are never more than a figural expression of something other than themselves. *Das Buch Hiob* remains largely oblivious

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55 Susman, *Buch,* 197. For a comprehensive critique of the Jews' place in Barth's theology, see the chapter "Karl Barth, the German Church Struggle and the Witness-People Myth," in Haynes, *Jews,* 64–89.

56 On the necessity of demythologizing the Christian-theological perspective of the Jew, see Richard Rubenstein, "Person and Myth in the Judeo-Christian Encounter," *After Auschwitz* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992) 14–28.

57 Susman, *Buch*, 97–98.

to contemporary forms of Jewish life and culture. The only historical events it touches upon are the emancipation, the Holocaust and the rise of Zionism. Besides occasional references to German-Jewish thinkers such as Rosenzweig and Mendelssohn and writers such as Kafka and Stefan Zweig, Susman ignores other developments in modern Jewish letters taking place in Eastern Europe, Palestine and the Americas. Of course, any account of the diverse forms of modern Jewish culture, such as the burgeoning scene of Hebrew and Yiddish literature in the decades leading up to the Holocaust, would necessarily complicate Susman's neat narrative of the Jews' martyrdom.[58]

Conclusion

Das Buch Hiob is an early attempt to universalize the significance of the Holocaust without denying its primary victims their identity as Jews. As such, Susman's theological treatise stands out against its Cold War context, when the identity of National Socialism's ultimate victims was suppressed on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Despite its laudable effort to commemorate the destruction of European Jewry and reaffirm the Jews' humanity, *Das Buch Hiob* is a profoundly problematic book on two accounts. First, in seeking to redeem and dignify Jewish suffering, Susman's theological interpretation of the Holocaust drifts into the realm of metaphysical speculation and crass abstraction. Her glorification of Jewish martyrdom effaces the historical specificity of the Jews' persecution during the Second World War, thereby mystifying the political and social realities that brought about the "Final Solution." Secondly, Susman's understanding of the humanist-universal meaning of the Holocaust is premised on the denial of the Jews'

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[58] Susman might easily be grouped with that class of thinkers whom Moshe Idel has described as "a new form of Jewish elite" in reference to that emergent class of 20th-century intellectuals whose understanding of Judaism was shaped by their immersion in Central European culture; see M. Idel, *Old Worlds, New Mirrors* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010) 7. Idel argues that the questions that preoccupied this "speculative Jewish elite" bore little resemblance to the beliefs and views of their rabbinic predecessors or their Eastern European brethren. According to him, the majority of the Jewish population "would have found it difficult or impossible to relate their own beliefs and practices to the abstractions, universal missions, negativities, and religious paradoxes elaborated by a miniscule Central European Jewish intelligentsia" (p. 10). Even if she is not mentioned by name, Susman serves as prime example for the "Jewish desolates" Idel criticizes for placing undue emphasis on themes of negativity, absence and lost transcendence in their portrayal of Judaism.

collective self-determination. By trying to fit the Holocaust into a trans-historical narrative of Jewish exemplarity, she effectively reduces Jewish historical experience to an abstract symbol. Underlying her idealization of the Jew as victim for the sake of mankind is a sacrificial logic that leaves little room for communal self-affirmation and continuity.[59] In turning the Shoah into a "passion of the Jews," she valorizes it as a divine-revelatory event in which martyrdom perversely becomes the ultimate meaning of Jewish existence.

In universalizing Jewish suffering, Susman draws on a longstanding Christian discourse, which Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin have criticized for depriving the Jews' "ethnic and cultural specificity of any positive value and indeed turn it into a 'curse' in the eyes of Gentile Christians."[60] As they explain, there are "fateful consequences" to the Christian "troping" of the Jew:

> Although well intentioned, any such allegorization of the Jew is problematic in the extreme for the way that it deprives those who have historically grounded identities in those material signifiers of the power to speak for themselves and remain different.[61]

This critique is particularly germane with regards to *Das Buch Hiob*, which invests the Jews with a messianic potential, but does so at the cost of depriving them any kind of concrete, collective existence.

Susman's portrayal of the Jews as a Christ-nation suffering for the sake of mankind is not new or foreign to Judaism. As Hyam Maccoby observes, "The whole passage of Isaiah (Ch. 53) about the Suffering Servant, which Christians regard as prophetic of Jesus, is regarded by Jews as descriptive of the historical role of the Jewish people."[62] The main difference between Susman's idealization of Jewish suffering and other Jewish-authored views

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59 Steven Katz's critique of Ignaz Maybaum is highly germane in this regard, as Susman too seems to "reduce Judaism and the Jew to that set of external relations into which they enter either by choice or fate, while denying them any essential being that is truly their own." See S. Katz, "The Crucifixion of the Jews: Ignaz Maybaum's Theology of the Holocaust," in *Post-Holocaust Dialogue,* ed. S. Katz (New York: New York University Press, 1983) 248–267.There are certain affinities between Susman's Holocaust theology and that of the German Reform rabbi Ignaz Maybaum, who also interpreted Jewish suffering during the Holocaust as a realization of the Jews' "mission" amongst the Gentiles, which they fulfilled through their vicarious victimhood. One major difference between the two readings is Maybaum's implausible attempt to incorporate the Holocaust into a scheme of historical progress.

60 Daniel Boyarin and Jonathan Boyarin, "Diaspora," *Critical Inquiry* 19 (1993) 697.

61   Boyarin and Boyarin, "Diaspora," 697.

62 Hyam Maccoby, "Wandering Jew as Sacred Executioner," in *Wandering Jew*, ed. Galit Hasan-Rokem and Alan Dundes (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986) 247.

on the Christ-like character of the Jews is succinctly illustrated in Maccoby's subsequent clarification:

> The Jewish Christ-people suffers because it knows how to live, not because it knows how to die. Its sufferings are not desired; they are the inevitable consequence of its moral stance, its insistence that man's destiny is in his own hands, a message which the world rejects with horror and persecution. The Jewish people suffers not because its sufferings are essential to mankind (as Christians think); when the Jews cease to suffer the world will have grown up. And as long as the world has not grown up, the Jews will suffer. This, at any rate, has been the Jewish interpretation of the role of the Jews.[63]

Susman interprets Jewish suffering as "essential to mankind." Consequently, the only way for the Jews to realize their universal and divinely-decreed destiny is to serve as the historical embodiment of human destitution and desolation. As such, Susman's ideal of Jewishness, like the Christian myth it is modeled upon, privileges an abstract conception of Jewish martyrdom over concrete and historical forms of Jewish life. Her universalization of Jewishness follows a supersessionist logic that leaves the Jews bereft of any substantive national, religious or cultural identity. She rejects traditional forms of Judaism and Jewish life as anachronistic and outdated, but at the same time she is also unwilling to recognize secular expressions of modern-Jewish identity.

In his scathing indictment of Margarete Susman, Gershom Scholem famously associated her philosophy with "the readiness of many Jews to invent a theory that would justify the sacrifice of their Jewish existence."[64] Susman's philosophy, he argued, bespoke a "great inner demoralization," a "perversion … without meaning for the Jewish community itself." Scholem's denunciation of Susman and his critique of her "credulous demand for self-surrender"[65] is based on a rigidly literal reading of her work. His rhetorical excess and willful misreading notwithstanding, Scholem's critique points to a central pitfall in Susman's philosophy. In her determination to interweave Jewish historical experience into a broader narrative of universal human suffering, she displaces the social and religious challenges faced by Jews in the wake of the Shoah. Her recourse to a Christian theological idiom denies the Jews' history and deprives them of their cultural identity. This theological effort to universalize the Jewish experience during the Holocaust

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63 Maccoby, "Wandering Jew," 247.

64 Gershom Scholem, "Germans and Jews," *On Jews and Judaism in Crisis* (New York: Schocken, 1976) 89. See Abraham Rubin, "The 'German-Jewish Dialogue' and Its Literary Refractions," *Modern Judaism* 35 (2015) 1–17.

65 Scholem, "Germans," 89.

demonstrates the limitations of what Bryan Cheyette refers to as "the metaphorical possibilities of Jewishness."[66] As he writes, "the line between universalizing Jewish history and superseding it can be quite thin."[67] *Das Buch Hiob* encapsulates the Janus-faced danger of such universalizing endeavors, which risk turning real victims into abstract metaphorical ones.

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66 Bryan Cheyette, *Diasporas of the Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013) 25.
67 Cheyette, *Diasporas*, 30.