

Sheyris Yisroel -

An 18th Century Yiddish History of the Jews

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The publishers named the set "The Three Crowns" (following Avot 4:13), and coronated each book individually.

The Sefer Tam Veyashar is called "The Crown of Torah" because all its matters are from the Torah. The Sefer Yossipon is called "The Crown of Priesthood" because it was composed by a "priest annointed for war," and also because it discusses the Hasmonean priests who brought great salvation unto Israel. And Sheyris Yisroel, which is a continuation of Yossipon, is called "The Crown of Magesty" because it tells how Jews must suffer the yoke of monarchs while in exile, and also because it speaks of the kingdom of Judah which still exists in many places. As it is written "the sceptre shall not depart from Judah" (Gen. 49:10) which we hope to see speedily in our day.⁴

The three-volume set constitutes the first post-exilic attempt at a universal Jewish history.

The publishers took special pride in the publication of the Sheyris Yisroel volume, claiming that it was valuable reading even for rabbis and scholars (the greatest praise conceivable for a Yiddish book). They ridiculed those who had doubted their ability to bring their plans to fruition, and praised Menakhem Man Amelander for his selfless devotion in the completion of his work. They took note of the lucidity and clarity of his style, claiming that even a child could understand it (the standard praise for a Yiddish book).

In this paper we will examine some basic aspects of Sheyris Yisroel and attempt to appraise its historical significance.

II. Amelander and His Works

Who was Menakhem Man Amelander? As is so commonly the case in Jewish intellectual history, little is known about the man lurking behind the book. Nowhere in Sheyris Yisroel, his only original work, does he refer to his family, his teachers or his life experiences. His name may indicate that he or his ancestors hailed from the Dutch province of Ameland (and not from Amsterdam, as is commonly conjectured). He earned a living as an editor, proof-reader and translator at various Amsterdam Hebrew publishing houses--first for the Dayyan, R. Moshe Frankfurter, generally held to have been his teacher; and later for the competing publishers Shloyme Proops and Naftoli Hirtz Royfe. He was a learned man, as is evidenced by his editorial work on scholarly treatises,⁵ and by the titles which his publishers bestowed upon him. In his early publications he is referred to as התורני ("the scholar"); in Sheyris Yisroel he is introduced as האלוף התורני והמוקדק
איש חי רב פעלים
("the great Torah-scholar, the grammarian and man of many deeds").

Amelander had already established himself as a skilled Yiddish stylist well before he was commissioned to compose Sheyris Yisroel. He had worked as the Yiddish translator of the Pentateuch for the Hebrew-Yiddish Magishey Minkhe Bible with considerable success.⁶ In his translation, he was able to weave Rashi's commentary into his Yiddish rendition of the text, without leading matters too far astray from the flow of the original narrative. The Magishey Minkhe subsequently acquired enormous popularity, "and during a long period time - also in the 19th century - served as the basis for Bible study."⁷

It is noteworthy that Amelander began his Yiddish writing career with a translation of the Pentateuch. Bible translation was the oldest genre of Yiddish writing; one of the few genres unquestionably beyond all opposition and condemnation. Skillful translation of Scripture was valued and appreciated at all levels and in all circles of Jewish society.⁸ By means of his translation, Amelander acquired a popularity and respectability as a Yiddish writer which were hard to match. His reputation, as well as his being a "Torah-scholar and grammarian" must have made Amelander a very attractive candidate for authoring a Yiddish "best seller" on the history of the Jews which would be both readable and informative.

If the publishers of "The Three Crowns" indeed made such calculations in their selection of Amelander, they were proven absolutely right. Sheyris Yisroel was an immediate and long-lasting publishing success. Perhaps the most revealing indication of its popularity in 18th century Amsterdam is the fact that Amelander's continuation of Yossipon generated a number of "continuations" of its own.⁹ It was reissued five times before 1800. The work was deemed important enough to merit its translation into Hebrew (thus vindicating the publishers' contention that it was suitable "even for rabbis and scholars") and enjoyed eleven Hebrew editions during the 19th century.¹⁰

Modern scholars have been somewhat less enthusiastic than previous generations in their reception of Sheyris Yisroel. They have criticized its lack of originality on the one hand, and its inclusion of legendary material on the other.

Students of Old-Yiddish literature have been more favorably disposed towards the work. Thus Zinberg describes it as:

Undoubtedly the most important work of all of Old-Yiddish historiographical literature...Menakhem Man diligently collected the material required for his chronicle not only from Jewish sources but also from various European sources.

But Zinberg was quick to add the following qualification:

Like most historians of his day, he wasn't always able to discriminate critically between common legends and reliable historical facts.¹¹

Historians, on the other hand, have been much less generous in their appraisal. Dubnow, noting Amelander's "indiscriminate" use of his sources, concludes:

An ordinary compiler, Amelander was even unable to compose an independent chapter about the history of the Jews in HollandThe book became popular thanks to the fairytale "histories" and the light style of the spoken Yiddish.¹²

As we shall see, one's historical evaluation of Sheyris Yisroel depends to a great extent upon whether one views the work primarily within the context of old Yiddish literature or upon the backdrop of 16th century Hebrew historiography.

III. Sources: Borrowing and Blending

Sheyris Yisroel is a lengthy work: 146 two-sided pages (292pp.) in small "vayber-taytsh" print, divided into 35 chapters. Moreover, it is universal in scope. It is an attempt to cover all of Jewish history (since 68 C.E.) throughout the entire world--in the East, in Palestine and in the West--in a continuous chronological narrative. In its

design, it surpasses all previous works in Jewish historiography; a characteristic of which Amelander himself was well aware.

Since /Josephus/ we have had no writers who have described the things which occurred to us Jews from his time on in all corners of the earth. This is due to the many expulsions we have experienced, during which many books were lost. It may also be that they were dispersed so far from each other, that they did not know enough about the others to write about them. Therefore I have undertaken to write a description of all corners of the earth where we were dispersed, and that which occurred to us during the last 1,675 years; from the time our second Temple was destroyed till the year 5503 (=1743 C.E.).¹³

Most of the content of Sheyris Yisroel is unoriginal. Even a cursory reading of Amelander's work reveals that a great deal of its material is lifted (with or without citation) word for word from earlier Hebrew writings. Most prominent among these are, of course, the classics of 16th century Jewish historiography; Yuhasin by Avraham Zacutto, Zemah David by David Ganz, Shevet Yehuda by Shlomo Ibn Verga, and to a lesser extent Yosef Hacoheh's Divre Hayamim Limalkhe Tsarfat Ubeit Otaman.¹⁴ A whole slew of other Hebrew sources are brought, in part or in their entirety, in various contexts: Yitshak b. Avraham Akrish's description of the ten tribes Kol Mevaser (found in many editions of Igeret Orhot Olam) (Chap. 1); Abravanel's introductions to his commentaries on Joshua and Kings, as well as his remarks at the end of the book of Kings (Chaps. 25 and 3 respectively); the chronicle of Natan Habavli (found in editions of Yuhasin) (Chaps. 6, 12); Maaseh Bustenai (found in Igeret Orhot Olam) (Chap. 8);

the correspondence between Hasdai Ibn Shaprut and the Chazar king Yosef (found in Igeret Orhot Olam) (Chap. 10); a summary of Benjamin of Tudela's itinerary (Chap. 15); Maimonides' letter to Judah Ibn Tibbon (Chap. 16); Eliezer b. Natan's Crusade-chronicle (from Divre Hayamim) (Chap. 14); Shlomo Molkho's autobiographic letter (also from Divre Hayamim) (Chap. 29); Shabtai Cohen's chronicle of the Chmielnicki massacres Megilat Eifah (found in later editions of Shevet Yehudah) (Chap. 32); the second account of the Sabbatean movement found in Jacob Emden's Torat Hakenaot (Chap. 26); Shlomo Zalman of Dessau's Oz Mivteha on the 1730 Hamburg blood-libel (Chap. 32); and lengthy excerpts from Massaseh Ben Israel's Mikve Yisrael (Chap. 35).¹⁵

Sheyris Yisroel is to a large extent an instance of Jewish "scissors and paste" history. It provides its readers with an excellent anthology of previous Jewish historical literature.

Amelander himself confessed that by far the greater part of his book consisted of quotations and translations from earlier works, citing none other than Josephus as the inspiration for this method of history-writing.

For I am in this endeavor just like Josephus. That which occurred in his own day he wrote on his own. But that which occurred before his day he copied from other books written by Gentile scholars, as he states many times in his Sefer Yossipon. I have done the same, and have copied everything which occurred to us Jews from holy books, such as Zemah David, Shalshet Hakabala, Divre Hayamim of R. Yoseph Hacoheh, and Sefer Orhot Olam by R. Avraham Farissol, and Sefer Mikve Yisrael by R. Mannaseh Ben Israel and several other important books. In addition, I have brought things from several Gentile writers who are known to be truthful.¹⁶

Amelander's use of non-Jewish sources has been frequently noted.¹⁷ And yet the important role they play in Sheyris Yisroel has not been sufficiently underscored (let alone analysed). On virtually every other page, events are recorded along with the introductory phrase דיא סופרי האומות שר"בן ("the writers of the Nations write"). At the very outset of his history (Chapter 1, p. 1a) Amelander deals directly with his frequent use of non-Jewish sources. He notes the general absence of comprehensive Jewish histories, cites the Talmudic adage that "whoever says a word of wisdom - even a Gentile - is called a wiseman" (Megilla 16a), and finally confesses: "It would have been impossible to derive all these things from Jewish books, because they have written very little about recent times."

Amelander consistently lumps his Gentile sources under the stock-phrase of "writers of the Nations," offering us no clue to their identity. As it turns out, his prime source was Jacques Basnage's Histoire Des Juifs Depuis Jesus-Christ Jusqu'a Present, subtitled Pour Servir De Continuation A L'histoire De Joseph (Rotterdam 1706-1711; second revised edition, the Hague 1716). Basnage's Magnum Opus gained great popularity during the early 18th century. It was translated into English in 1708, appeared in a pirate French edition in Paris 1710-1712, and was used by numerous plagiarizers, copiers and imitators.¹⁸ Moreover, Basnage was published in Dutch translation in a now-rare 1726 Amsterdam edition (based upon the second revised French version). It is from this edition, in all probability, that Amelander translated and adapted virtually all of his "Gentile" material.¹⁹

Whether Basnage's Histoire Des Juifs inspired Amelander (or for that matter, the brothers b. Gavriel) with the idea of composing a Jewish continuation of Josephus is a moot point. Yossipon was so tremendously popular in Jewish society that its conclusion was a natural reference-point for any future history of the Jews. In any case, the notion of beginning where Josephus had left off did not belong to Basnage, but originally to Mannaseh Ben Israel, who announced such a book among his unpublished works. Miguel de Barrios also intended to author a Historia Universal Judaica as a follow-up to Josephus.²⁰ Amelander accredited none of his predecessors with the idea, presenting it as entirely his own.

Less questionable is the impact of Basnage upon the structure of Sheyris Yisroel. The last three books of Basnage, which deal with the history of the Jews (the first six discuss Jewish theology, ritual, literature, institutions etc.) served as the model upon which Amelander based his work. This becomes evident from a comparison of the Table of Contents of both books. Amelander's chapter-headings follow Basnage's with slight variations. Certain chapters are omitted due to their being inappropriate or uninteresting for a Jewish readership (e.g., Basnage book IX, chap. 14 "a Collection of Church Decrees Against the Jews"; book IX, chap. 30 "Reflections on the Conversion of the Jews"). In one instance, Amelander adds a chapter of his own (Sheyris Yisroel, chap. 32, on the 1648 Chmielnicki-massacres).²¹

Basnage's Histoire Des Juifs is the single most important source used in the composition of Sheyris Yisroel. A number of chapters are almost entirely based upon it (comp. SY chap. 21 to Basnage book IX, chap. 19; SY chap. 23 to Basnage book IX, chap. 22; SY 28 to Basnage book IX, chap. 28); more often, Basnage and Hebrew sources are skillfully integrated into one chapter (SY chaps. 18 and 29 are good examples of this). Even on such an important and delicate religious issue as Jewish pseudo-Messiahs throughout history, Amelander reproduces Basnage's account with little variation. Chapter 17 of Sheyris Yisroel which surveys nine early medieval Jewish messianic movements is mostly a translation from Histoire Des Juifs (book IX, chap. 11). The following passage, on an alleged 5th century messianic movement in Crete, is brought as a representative of dozens of such translations:

Histoire Des Juifs
(book VIII, chap. 6
volume 12, p. 200)

The losses of the Church were repaired by an accident that happened in the year 434 in the island of Candia, where there were a great many rich Jews, most whereof were converted, after they had been grossly deceived by a false Messiah. This Messiah's name was Moses, and he pretended to be the ancient law-giver of the people, who descended from heaven to procure them a glorious deliverance, by leading them through the sea to return them to the land of promise, as they had done when they had left Egypt. We can't conceive how a man could be so mad as to attempt such a miracle, or to persuade himself that he was able to effect it. But yet Socrates affirms that he not only had this imagination, but also, that he had occasion but for one year to run over all the cities and villages of the island and to persuade the inhabitants of his religion. The infatuation was so great that, in expectation of the day appointed to themselves into the sea, the ploughman neglected the tillage of his fields and the proprietors abandoned the possession of their lands and houses to the first comer; everyone contenting himself with taking what he could carry away. Moses having mustered up his flock upon the top of a rock, the first at hand threw themselves into the water without any wavering of faith: the women and children plunged themselves in with an equal ardor. It was quickly perceived that Mo-

שארית ישראל
(דף כב עמ' א)

בעת ההיא אין דיא זעלכיגי ציטן
דש וואר אין דש יאר דש מן צילט ד'
אלפים קפ"ד (424) איז א"ן גזירה
גועזן אונטר דיא יהודים דיא גוואר-
נט האבן אין דש אילנד קאנדיא דורך
אינדר דר זיך אויף גווארפן האט אונ'
האט גזאגט ער איז משיח. און ער האט
גהייסן משה. אונ' ער האט צו זיא ג-
זאגט ער וואר משה רבינו דר פון דען
הימל וואר קומן אום זיא ווידר צו
דער ליזן גלייך אלש ער האט ישראל
אויש גליזט אויש מצרים, און דש ער
זיא ווערט דורך דש ים טרוקן פוס
דורך פירן גלייך משה רבינו האט ג-
טאן אום זיא צו ברענגן נאך ארץ
ישראל. עש איז כאלו אומגלובליך דש
דיא מענשן זוא בוטן איר פרשטאנד
אום דז צו גלאכן דז ער אזו א"ן
וואונדר ווערק קענט טאן. דאך פיל
שריברש פר זיכרין דש ער זיך דש
א"ן גכילט האט דש ער עש קענט טאן
אונ' האט א"ן גאנץ יאר דורך ג-
כראכט אום אלי דיא שטעט אונ' דער-
פר פון דש אילנד דורך צו לאפן אום
אלי דיא יהודים דיא אין דש אילנד
וואונטן א"ן צו רידן. אונ' ער האט
זיא אלי דש א"ן גרעט. דא נון דיא
כשטימטי טאג וואר דש ער זיא זעלט
דורך דש ים פירן דא זינן זיא אלי
כ"א אננדר גקומן אונ' האבן גלאזט
שטיין איר פאשטי גיטר אונ' איר הי-
זר דען זיא זינן זער ריך אויף דש
אילאנד גועזן, אונ' איטליכר האט
מיט זיך גנומן וואש ער האט גקענט
טראגן אונ' דש איכריגי האבן זיא
גלאזט שטיין פר דעם עש נעמן וויל,
אונ' זינן צו דען משה גקומן אויף
דען שפיץ פון א"ן בארג. דא ווארפטן
זיא זיך אין דש ים מאנן ווייבר אונ'
קינדר, דען זיא האבן זיך פר לאזן
אויף דען משה אונ' האבן זוא הארט
אן אים גלאכט דש ווען זיא אין דש
ים ווערן קומן ווערט זיך דש ים פר
זיא שפאלטן אונ' ווערן טרוקן פוס

ses was an imposter; some were drowned; others were saved by the Christian fisherman who happened to be there with their barks, and went to acquaint their brethren how near their crudulity had been to cost them their lives. They attempted to seize the imposter, but he had disappeared; which made it suspect (Says Socrates) that it was a Devil who had assumed the figure and the name of Moses to deceive this credulous nation. But this notion is another piece of folly; for if the imposter believed the miracle he had promised, he perished with the rest in the sea; and if he did not believe it, he took care in good time to his retreat, wherein he had leisure to reflect upon the extravagance of those that had believed him. Most of them grew wise, and being ashamed of putting so much confidence in an imaginary Messiah, they sought the true one and became Christians.

דורך גיין אכר זיא זײַן כאלד גוואר
 גווארן דש זיא פון דען משה כטראגן
 זײַן, דען פיל זײַן פון זיא פר
 טרונקן אונ' פיל זײַן נאך גהאלפן
 גווארן פון דיא פישרס פון דיא או-
 מות דיא נאהנט דר כײא ווארן. דיא
 האבן אן דיא נדרי יהודים כקענט
 גמאכט דש איר לײכט גלאכן איר
 לעבן האט כאלד גקאשט. מן האט דען
 כטריגר משה גוועלט פאנגן מאר ער
 איז פר שוואונדן דש פיל גלאכט
 האבן דש ער דר שטן וואר דר זײַך
 אן גנומן דען נאמן פון משה אום
 דיא לײכט גלאכיגי צו כטריגן. זוא
 שרײכט סוקראטש דער דיזי גשיכטניש
 שרײכט, אכר עש קענט וואול זײַן דש
 עש אויף אנדרי מאניר גשאך אונ'
 עש האט ניט גהאט ניטיג דר שטן צו
 זײַן, דען ווען דר משה זעלכר גלאכט
 האט דש אים דש נס ווערט גשעהן קען
 עש זײַן דש ער זײַך זעלכן האט אין
 ים גווארפן אונ' איז אך מיט דיא
 אנדרי פר טרונקן. אונ' ווען ער עש
 זעלכן ניט גלאכט האט נײארט דש
 ער דיא יהודים האט גוועלט כטריגן
 האט ער צײט גנוק גהאט אום זײַך
 אײן פר כארגן אורט צו זוכן, אום
 פון דש אורט צו קומן. איכר דיזי
 זאך דער וײל זיא גזעהן האבן דש
 זיא זײַן פון דען גמאכטן פאלשן
 משיח כטראגן גווארן האבן זײַך פיל
 פון דיא יהודים דיא פון קאנדיא
 וואונטן כעונותינו הרבים כופר
 גוועזן.

Such translated passages bring with themselves an "external" perspective on Jews and their history rarely found in a Jewish work. Roman Jews are depicted as ridiculing Christianity by crucifying "Haman" on Purim day, in defiance of an Imperial decree against such practice (SY p. 21b; Basnage vol. 12, pp. 192-3); Avveroes is identified as Maimonides' personal philosophy tutor, who taught him everything he ever knew (SY p. 62a; Basnage vol. 13, p. 268). Numerous characterizations, incidents and facts unflattering to Jews have thus crept into Sheyris Yisroel unaltered. In addition, a large number of blatant factual errors, unbecoming for a "Torah-scholar," owe their origins to borrowings from Basnage: Yehuda Halevi is alleged to have translated the Kuzari from the Chazar-tongue (SY p. 31b; from Basnage vol. 13, p. 2); Sefer HaYereim by Eliezer b. Samuel of Metz is attributed Yonah Gerondi (author of Sefer HaYirah; SY p. 82a from Basnage vol. 14, pp. 515-516); Meir b. Todros Abulafia is alleged to have written "many letters against Nachmanides" (instead of Maimonides; SY p. 82a, from Basnage vol. 14, p. 515); etc.

Of course, Amelander's most important tool in his use of Basnage is that of selectivity. The Histoire Des Juifs required abridgement on Amelander's part for several reasons: its historical section was five volumes long; dry in style, as well as confusing and wandering in its presentation; much of its material was unacceptable for a Jewish readership; much more of it was expendable, due to the existence of superior Hebrew sources. In one instance, Amelander records his conscious decision to exclude material of Gentile origin from Sheyris Yisroel:

Christian writers explain the cause of the expulsion from France in several ways, which I did not want to write down for certain reasons. The major cause was that the King was very greedy....(SY p. 80b)

The story excluded by Amelander is brought by Basnage:

Christian historians attribute it /the expulsion from France/ to a miracle wrought in a Host that a Jew had purchased. He threw it into a caldron of boiling water, and at the same time saw the appearance of a child of extraordinary beauty. Instead of being moved by so manifest a miracle, he went to murder the miraculous infant. But it fled and shifted from one side of the caldron to the other....The sight surprised his children who went and acquainted their mother and then published it abroad. The people and clergy came in and saw the miracle of the preserved host, for the child was already vanished. The Jew was condemned to be burnt...Platina believes they were then exiled for their magic. But the true and only cause was the avarice of the King.... (Histoire Des Juifs Book IX, chap, 21; vol. 14, pp. 583-584; English verion, p. 674)

Other noteworthy deletions: Amelander omits Basnage's lengthy analysis to prove that Yossipon is a forgery by an 11th century French rabbi (Book IX chap. 6; in vol. 13, pp. 151-187); while Basnage devotes considerable space to Spinoza's life and philosophy (vol. 15, pp. 1032-1041), Amelander mentions his name only in passing, noting that:

Orobio de Castro also wrote a book against Spinoza, who was also a Sephardic Jew, who wanted to introduce a new religion. Many Christians also wrote against him. (SY p. 133b)

To indicate the derivative nature of Sheyris Yisroel and to identify its sources is, however, not enough. Much of Amelander's accomplishment lies in his skillful control of the sizeable literature from which he drew, and in his talented translation of it into a Yiddish which was natural and easily understood.

Amelander was able to combine materials from several sources and blend them into a coherent, flowing chronological narrative. He frequently brought together passages from Tsemah David, Shevet Yehudah and Histoire Des Juifs (without citing their origin) in order to produce a fuller description of an event or period. This integration of sources--which required among other things a total reorganization of the contents of Shevet Yehudah along chronological lines--was done with such editorial skill that it is practically undetectable to the lay-reader. To the 18th or 19th century reader, most of Sheyris Yisroel appeared to be the original creation of a single pen.²²

Amelander's vernacular-like Yiddish style made Sheyris Yisroel enjoyable and easy reading. In his translation, he simplified matters whenever possible, and elaborated whenever a point required explication.

Amelander's skills as editor and translator, which he had employed so successfully in his Yiddish rendition of the Pentateuch, were thus major elements in his composition of Sheyris Yisroel. They were instrumental in his creation of a text which was more thorough in its account (hence more informative) without being choppy or cumbersome in its style (hence readable and enjoyable).

IV. Legends, History, Critique of Sources

There is a considerable amount of unhistorical material in Sheyris Yisroel - legends, folklore and fiction. Most of these passages originate from Amelander's various Hebrew sources. Basnage on the other hand, in his Histoire Des Juifs, is so hyper-critical and skeptical towards his sources, that he rejects numerous truthful historical reports along with the fallacious ones. Amelander himself was cautious and selective in his use of Basnage, and excluded what he considered unreliable reports by Christian writers. The largest chunks of unhistorical material in Sheyris Yisroel are the various tales about the ten lost tribes (chaps. 1 and 35), the fictitious dialogues taken from Shevet Yehudah (found in chaps. 13, 18, 20), and the legends about Maimonides and Abraham Ibn Ezra (found in chap. 16; the lone contribution made by Shalsholet Hakabalah).

The role of legends in Sheyris Yisroel has been exaggerated by many of the scholars who have characterized the book. It is neither replete with "fairytale 'histories'" nor "indiscriminate" in the use of its sources, as Dubnow would have it.²³ While Sheyris Yisroel would certainly be found lacking when compared with modern historical standards, Amelander frequently expresses his genuine concern for historical truth and displays a critical approach towards his sources.

In his introduction, Amelander offers his devotion to historical truth as one of the reasons for naming his book Sheyris Yisroel. Citing Zephaniah 3:13 ("the remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies, neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth..."), he proudly proclaims:

I, the author, am also from the remnant of Israel. I have therefore written nothing false in this book. I have researched very carefully whether these matters are true, and I have excluded much which I could have written, but was doubtful whether it was actually so. ("author's introduction," p. 3)

Certain figures are especially certified as reliable and trustworthy sources of information.

On Benjamin of Tudela:

This man was a truthful man whom one may believe. When he completed his journal and returned to the land of Castille, in 4933 (=1173 C.E.), he was examined to determine whether he should be believed. It was concluded that he was a great wiseman and a scholar in the Torah and in all that he was questioned. It was determined that he was a truthful man, and that one may rely upon his words, and that they are pure truth. (p. 54a)

An on Abravanel:

I will write what occurred to the exiles from Spain as I found in Don Isaac Abravanel's introduction to Kings, for he was able to tell the truth, for he was there at the time. (p. 96a)

Amelander's "love of truth" is amplified in several passages in which he openly challenges and criticizes his sources. It is noteworthy that in many of these statements he rejects the reports of his Hebrew sources in favor of the conclusion reached by Basnage in his Histoire Des Juifs.

Because of my love the truth, I cannot pass on without mentioning that the Shevet Yehudah states that Emperor Augustus did much evil to the Jews and beat them. But whoever told him this, lied to him. For all the truthful writers relate that he was a good friend of the Jews. Also in Yossipon, he writes that he gave the Jews a privilegium... /with many rights/... Thus it is evident that the Shevet Yehudah erred. This

Augustus gave the Jews the rights of citizens, that is, to be equal with the other peoples in all affairs. (p. 5b; comp. Basnage vol. 11, p. 205)²⁴

We find nothing in any Jewish book regarding the Temple (בית המקדש) built by Omar Ibn Quataf except in Divre Hayamim by Yosef Hacoheh. And it appears to me that he erred, for I have found that the writers of the Nations write that he built on the spot where the Temple stood a Mosque - that is a house of prayer of the Mohammedan religion. And even if Zemah David writes the same, it is clear that he took it from Divre Hayamim by Yosef Hacoheh. (p. 25b; comp. Basnage vol. 12, p. 313)

Certain writers write that King Henry expelled the Jews from England in 5020 (=1260 C.E.). But this cannot be true...It was rather in the year 5050 (=1290 C.E.) by Edward, King Henry's son. (p. 92b)

In this latter passage, Amelander has concealed the identity of the conflicting sources. Basnage, however, does not:

The Jews say this misfortune /the expulsion from England/ befell them in the year 1260 or 5020...the number, being noted by several Jewish historians (note: Shelshet Hakabalah, Shevet Yehudah, Zemah David), it must necessarily be owned that they have impertinently antedated their exile by twenty years...The Dominicans of Colmar say in their annals that it was in the year 1291. And 'tis better to follow them, though strangers, than the historians of the country, because the council of London, held in 1291, caused their destruction. (Basnage vol. 14, p. 638)

There are also instances when Amelander rejects reports found in Basnage, which the latter accepts without hesitation.

Regarding Montalto, the Jewish doctor of Mary de Medicis, the Queen of France, he states:

The writers of the nations write something which I cannot believe because it is in opposition to the words of the sages. They say that this doctor once refused to treat a Christian who was ill, because it was the Sabbath. (p. 90b; comp. Basnage vol. 14, p. 606)

Regarding the miracles allegedly performed by Pope Sylvester during a religious disputation with the Jews:

This history is written by a Christian, who translated it from Arabic, and many Christian writers do not believe it. Similarly, they tell many things of those times which cannot be believed. (p. 20b; comp. Basnage vol. 12, p. 114)

Regarding the alleged pagan practices of the Jews of China:

I have copied this from the books of the nations. Although I cannot believe the entire report - that the Jews should have become so estranged as to do things against the holy Torah - nonetheless, the least that we learn from it is that there are very many Jews in these lands, and that they have lived there since many years before the destruction of the second Temple. (p. 141b; comp. Basnage vol. 15, pp. 1075-1082)

In one instance, Amelander allies a Jewish and a Gentile source in criticism of yet a third book:

I must inform the dear reader that the chronicle found in the 1719 calendar printed by the late Chaim Druker states that the Sephardic synagogue was inaugurated in the year of 1672. This is incorrect. What I have written above /1675/ is the truth, for I have found it in the book written by Mahrin Maarsen who lived at the same time, and whose writings have been found truthful. I also found it in the book of Basnage (כאני ישי) who writes as I have. (p. 132b) ²⁵

V. Sheyris Yisroel In Perspective

The appearance of Sheyris Yisroel was unquestionably a milestone in the propagation of historical knowledge among the non-scholarly rungs of Jewish society. It provided the Yiddish reader for the first time with some perspective on the chronological depth and continuity of Jewish history, and its geographic breadth.

Prior to Sheyris Yisroel, Yossipon and Shevet Yehudah were the foremost historical works available in Yiddish.²⁶ The latter was the only available work dealing with a broad span of Jewish history after 70 C.E. (All other writings, whether original historical ballads or works translated from Hebrew, dealt with individual isolated events.²⁷) As historiography, Ibn Verga's book had two major limitations. First, it was overwhelmingly devoted to the history of the Jews of Spain (and slightly to France and Portugal). Second, it was chronologically out of kilter, presenting episodes from different centuries in an unorderly fashion. From both these standpoints Sheyris Yisroel was a considerable improvement.

As a contribution to Jewish historiography, Sheyris Yisroel constitutes a rather modest advance beyond the accomplishments of the 16th century. Its advantages over its predecessors may be outlined as follows:

1. It was chronologically and geographically more comprehensive, and in general more inclusive.
2. It provided somewhat fuller accounts of events by combining and blending the reports of earlier sources.

3. It introduced a large amount of material previously unknown in Jewish historiography, taken from Basnage's Histoire Des Juifs.

4. It contained some original material; primarily on the history of the Jews in Holland and Germany during the 17th and 18th centuries (chapter 34).

And yet, to view Sheyris Yisroel solely within the context of Jewish historiographic literature is insufficient and misleading. It causes us to overlook the real literary context in which it arose and the dynamics behind its creation. Historiography was not an active, creative genre of Jewish literature at the time when Sheyris Yisroel appeared, and had not been one for over a century.

The writing of history was never a major "highway" of Hebrew writing during the Middle Ages. While there were numerous accounts and analyses of the rabbinic "chain of tradition," few works were written which were concerned with the recording of events. Most of these were immediate, "journalistic" accounts of occurrences (e.g., the Crusade-chronicles). Very few possessed any diachronic depth, displaying a historical memory which went beyond the immediate. Till the 16th century the only works of this kind were The Chronicle of Ahimaaz, Yossipon, and Ibn Daud's Sefer Hakabalah. During the 16th century, probably in response to the expulsion from Spain, there was a sudden effervescence of such works. While some--such as Avraham Zacuto's Yuhasin and Gedalia Ibn Yahya's Shalsholet Hakabalah--remained tied to the preoccupation with the rabbinic

"chain of tradition," many others were bonafide works of historiography: David Ganz' Zemah David, Ibn Verga's Shevet Yehudah, Yosef Hacohen's Divre Hayamim and Emek Habakha, Samuel Usque's Consolacam as Tribulacoens de Israel, Elijah Capsali's Seder Eliyahu Zuta.

But by the 18th century all of this was over and done. The effervescence of the 16th century died in the 16th century. No new historical treatises were published during the 17th and early 18th centuries.²⁸ The writing of history had ceased to be an active, creative genre within Jewish literature. What, then, was the literary context from which Sheyris Yisroel emerged? In what literary setting did it arise?

Clearly, Sheyris Yisroel and all historical prose in Yiddish, arose and flourished as part of the vast Yiddish "mayse bikhl" literature which thrived during the 17th and 18th centuries. To the common Yiddish reader, Yossipon, Shevet Yehudah and Sheyris Yisroel were "maysim"--stories. Their content was considered to be in no way different than that of the Mayse Bukh (Basel, 1602), which collected its tales from various Jewish and non-Jewish sources. Yossipon and Shevet Yehudah flourished in Yiddish translation not as historiography, but as masterpieces of narrative prose.²⁹ Conversely, Zemah David never gained any success in Yiddish--it was published in Frankfort in 1698 and never reprinted. Although Ganz's chronicle provided a good outline of Jewish history, and devoted much space to Ashkenazic Jewry, it was a dry, disjointed listing of events. It had no plots, no dramas, no stories, and was therefore of no interest to the Yiddish reader.³⁰

The real historical significant of Sheyris Yisroel is revealed only if it is considered within the context of Yiddish "mayse-bikhl" literature.

* * *

Since its earliest beginnings in 16th century Italy,³¹ Yiddish narrative prose consisted of two types of "maysim": Those parables and fables which were based in an abstract, mythic "once upon a time and place ", and those legends and parables which were focused upon concrete historical events and figures. "Maysim" of the latter type, dealing with the death of Moses, the destruction of the Temple, the story of Hannukah, the miracles performed by R. Meir b. Isaac ("Ba'al Hanes"; author of "Akdamot"), are among the earliest known instances of Yiddish narrative prose. The first major compilation of Yiddish narratives, the Mayse Bukh (Basel, 1602) contained numerous tales and parables of both kinds. Those "maysim" rooted in historical time and space were based primarily upon the Midrash and the literature of Hasidei Ashkenaz. Many of its tales are hagiographic in nature, including an entire cycle of stories about R. Samuel and Judah Hasid.

During the course of the 17th and early 18th centuries--the heyday of "mayse Bikhl" literature--it appears that Yiddish narrative prose became increasingly more rooted in historical time and space, exhibited a greater degree of historical consciousness, and included a greater amount of historically truthful material. While a detailed account and analysis of this process requires an independent study, let us note some of the major milestones in this development:

1. The anthology Mayse Nisim, by Yiftakh Yezefa b. Naftoli (written mid-17th century, first published Amsterdam 1696),³² was exclusively devoted to legends concerning the Jews of Worms (including a number of stories about R. Eleazar Harokeakh). Two of its twenty-five stories were, however, actual accounts of persecutions which the Worms community had experienced; no. 9: "a 'mayse' which occurred in my time, in the year 1615....," and no. 10: "and it occurred in the year 1430...." The author concluded the latter passage with the following statement:

Oh Lord, we have suffered so many calamities! When one recalls everything which befell us in Worms alone! Add to that everything which befell us in other communities in the lands of Ashkenaz, Spain and France, and they become too numerous to write down.

In 18th century editions of Mayse Nisim, a translation of one of the Hebrew Crusade-chronicles, and two poetic laments were appended to the text.

2. The hagiographic anthology Maysei Hashem by Akiva-Ber Henukhs (Part I - Frankfurth, 1961; part II - Furth, 1694)³³ was primarily devoted to legends about Kabbalistic luminaries down through the ages. It included also tales taken from various historical works: Yossipon, Shalsholet Hakabalah, Shevet Yehudah and Yuhasin (no. 47: "A fine 'mayse' from Sefer Yuhasin"). In 18th century editions, the work was appended by an account of the expulsion of

the Jews from Austria in 1420, taken from the Trumat Hadeshen; a description of the Posen blood-libel of 1690; and "several 'maysim' which occurred in Rome and Spain," taken from the Shevet Yehudah.

3. Beys Yisroel by Aleksander b. Moshe Enthauseh (Offenbach, 1719)³⁴ was written as a brief history of the Jews from Abraham till the destruction of the second Temple. The work--an outline-history interwoven with Midrashim--was intended to serve, among other things, as a review-book for school children. While Enthausen's work was entirely unoriginal in content, it is the first conscious attempt to write history in Yiddish.

Three causes moved me to write this book. First, because I saw that the Nations are great lovers of history (רַבֵּי הַיָּמִים). Each king and potentate investigates as far back as possible from whence his nation came. Each state and town keeps its own chronicle, even though it is based upon human memory. Only we Jews, whose origins are recorded in histories which were Divinely inspired, have not a single book written about it. (in author's introduction)

Enthausen added a second part to his book, entitled Beys Habkhire, offering a detailed description of Jerusalem in the days of its past glory.

These three works--Mayse Nisim, Maysei Hashem and Beys Yisroel--were extremely popular during the late 17th and early 18th centuries. All three, in addition to the Mayse Bukh, were published (along with their additions and appendages) in Amsterdam in 1723 by Solomon Proops, and there are some indications that Amelander referred to them in his composition of Sheyris Yisroel.³⁵

Sheyris Yisroel may thus be seen as the culmination of a gradual process during the 17th and early 18th centuries in which history was increasingly injected into Yiddish "mayse bikhl" literature.

A culmination--but also a turning-point and a rejection. Sheyris Yisroel marked the first time that an author had established historical truth as the major consideration in the composition of a work of Yiddish narrative prose. Amelander's quest for truthful "geshikhtes" (the term "maysim" is significantly absent in Sheyris Yisroel) led him to reject the bulk of "Mayse Bikhl" literature, and turn instead to the historiographic literature of the 16th century.

Amelander rejected and discarded one of the hallmarks of "mayse bikhl" literature--hagiography. Legends concerning Talmudic sages, rabbinic giants and mystic luminaries are conspicuously absent from Sheyris Yisroel. (The lone exception to this, chapter 16, parallels the content of Basnage's Histoire Des Juifs, Book IX, chap. 10.) R. Meir, R. Judah HaNasi, R. Shimon Bar Yohai, R. Judah Hasid, R. Jacob Tam, R. Isaac Luria, R. Joseph Karo, R. Moshe Isserles --these figures receive at most a line or two of attention. The subject of Sheyris Yisroel is the Jewish people and its suffering--not Jewish saints and scholars. Amelander consistently avoids hagiography, referring the reader to other available works in Yiddish.

Said the author: Since I have undertaken to write down all the events (גשיכטניס) which occurred to us Jews from the destruction of the second Temple till now, it occurred to me that if I were to write all the events which occurred in the times of

the Talmudic sages after the Temple, 300 folio would not suffice. It also occurred to me that this would not be useful, for most of the things found in the Talmud and Midrash are already written in Yiddish books such as Tsene Verene, Mayse Bukh and many other such books... (SY p. 12a)

In the days of R. Judah HaNasi there were three Emperors - Antoninus, his son-in-law Marcus Aurelius, and his son Cadus. All three were very good friends with R. Judah HaNasi, as is well-known from the many tales (מעשיות) found in Yiddish books... (SY p. 15b)

And R. Amnon died a martyr, as it is written in the Mahzor and in the Mayse Bukh. We have therefore not written it here. (SY p. 94b)

Simultaneously, Amelander consciously preserved the literary quality of the "mayse bikhl" in Sheyris Yisroel. At all stages of his editorial and translatorial work--in his choice of one account over another, in the decision to combine several accounts, in the adaptation of his sources, in their abridgement, elaboration and translation--Amelander sought to produce an enjoyable belletristic narrative. In its relatively light and idiomatic style and in its elements of drama, tragedy and humor, Sheyris Yisroel was in the "mayse bikhl" tradition.

Sheyris Yisroel was thus both a major innovation in Yiddish literature, and a continuation of the conventions of Yiddish narrative prose. It introduced the truthfulness and thoroughness of historiography, while preserving the belletristic qualities of a "mayse bikhl." It attempted to avoid the dry and boring listing of events of Zemah David on the one hand, and the miraculous legends and tales of the Mayse Bukh on the other. While at times it failed on both of these counts, more often than not it was a

successful combination of "mayse" and history, which was enjoyable, informative and inspiring for generations of readers.³⁶

NOTES

1. "Publishers' Apology," Sheyris Yisroel, p. 148b. (All references are to the original 1743 Amsterdam edition.)
2. Quote from R. Arye Leyb's letter of approbation found in the beginning of Sheyris Yisroel. There is no trace of a 1743 Amsterdam edition of Tam Veyashar, and the work may never have appeared. (No such edition is listed in Ben-Jacob's and Friedberg's bibliographical lexicons.) The addition of new material to bridge the gap between the end of the Pentateuch (the conclusion of most Tam Veyashar editions) and the beginning of the second commonwealth (Yossipon's beginning in earnest) may have posed a greater obstacle to the publishers than they had expected. While in their introduction to Yossipon, the publishers speak of the three books as "The Three Crowns," in their introduction to Sheyris Yisroel they refer merely to "the two twin books."
3. "Publishers' Introduction," Yossipon, Amsterdam 1743.
4. Yossipon, loc. cit.
5. Amelander's editorial activities include: proof-reading R. Moshe Frankfurter's "Mikraot Gdolot" edition of the Bible entitled Kehilos Moshe (1724-1727); proof-reading (together with Naftoli Hirsh Fas) an edition of Avudraham published by Frankfurter (1726); proof-reading the entire four-volume Magishey Minkhe Hebrew-Yiddish Bible (1725-1729); proof-reading the Proops-edition of Midrash Tanhuma, with the addition of a glossary and a short commentary (1733); proof-reading, glossary and a short commentary for the Proops-edition of Reshit Khokhma (1737); proof-reading a Pentateuch published by Royfe and his son-in-law in 1767. In this latter work he is referred to as z"l. Thus, Amelander must have died shortly before 1767.
6. On the title page to the Magishey Minkhe Pentateuch, Eliezer Zusman Rodelsheim--Amelander's brother-in-law--is mentioned as co-translator. However, as Rodelsheim explains in his achrostic poem at the end of the volume, he was forced to discontinue his translating work after completing less than half the Torah. This was due to the pressing need to support his wife and children. It therefore appears that Amelander both completed the Pentateuch-translation and edited it in its entirety.

7. Khone Shmeruk, Sifrut Yiddish: Prakim Litoldoteha, Tel Aviv University, 1978, p. 115. Cf. Judah Jaffe's article "Di Amsterdamer Tanakh Iberzetsung 'Magishey Minkhe' Fun 1755 (?)" YIVO Bletter XIV, 3-4 (March-April, 1939) in which he lists 20 editions during the 18th and 19th centuries. Jaffe, correcting a long-standing bibliographical error, indicates that only the Pentateuch translation of Magishey Minkhe is new, while the translations of the Prophets and Haggiographia are taken from the Sefer Hamagid, popularly attributed to R. Yankev b. Yitskhok Ashkenazi of Janow.
8. Cf. Chmeruk, op. cit., chap. 4, "Bama'agal Hamikrai," pp. 105-146.
9. Avrom Khayim Braatbard's Ein Naye Kronik Fun 1740-1752 (Amsterdam, 1753) was probably intended as a continuation to Sheyris Yisroel. See Leo Fuks' most recent article on Braatbard's "Kronik" in Pinkes Far Der Forshung Fun Der Yidisher Literatur, vol. III (New York, 1975) pp. 221-250 in which he favors this contention. The Amsterdam 1771 edition of Sheyris Yisroel appended an additional 36th chapter written by the publisher Kosman b. Yoysef Borekh, covering up to 1770. Zalmen Prinz reveals in the epilogue to his Kronik for 1784-1788 that his pamphlet is merely an excerpt from a larger book Sheyris Am Kodesh which he hopes to publish. "In addition," he states, "I have written another chronicle as a continuation of Sheyris Yisroel, which is kept until the appointment of R. Moses the Cantor /Moses b. Phoebus Glogau, 1786/." See Fuks, "Jewish Historiography in the Netherlands in the 17th and 18th Centuries," Salo Wittmayer Baron Jubilee Volume (Jerusalem, 1974) vol. I, pp. 433-466, esp. pp. 461-2, 454-5. Finally, Yiddish and Hebrew editions of Sheyris Yisroel since the mid-19th century included a description of the 1840 Damascus-affair.
10. Hominer, in his introduction to She'erit Yisrael Hashalem (Jerusalem, 1964) lists the following editions: In Yiddish--Amsterdam 1743; Furth 1767; Furth 1771; Amsterdam 1771; Nowy Dwor 1785; Dihrenfurth 1799; Ziolkow 1807; Lwow 1850. In Hebrew--Lwow 1804; Vilna 1811; Lwow 1846; Lwow 1852; Zhitomir 1858; Koenigsburg 1858 (or 1860); Zhitomir 1873; Lwow 1874; Warsaw 1874; Warsaw 1879; (for details see his introduction pp. 20-28). One should add to his list: In Yiddish--Vilna 1877; Vilna 1895. In Hebrew--Warsaw 1839. Most 19th century editions are considerably shorter than the original Sheyris Yisroel, and Yiddish versions have been linguistically modernized.
11. Geshikhte Fun Der Literatur Bay Yidn (revised and annotated Yiddish edition, Buenos Aires, 1967) vol. VI, pp. 211-212.

11. (cont.)
Similarly Erik, Di Geshikhte Fun Der Yiddisher Literatur
(Warsaw, 1928) pp. 377-378.
12. S. Dubnow, World History of the Jewish People (New York, 1971) Vol. IV, p. 297. Cecil Roth, in his survey of Jewish historiography in EJ vol. VIII, p. 560 states merely that Sheyris Yisroel "gave the Jewish reader some idea of the continuous history of his people."
13. Sheyris Yisroel, p. 1a.
14. In contrast, the role played by Gedalia Ibn Yahya's Shalshet Hakabalah is minimal. See below pp.
15. Amelander also copied a Yiddish translation of Uri Phoebus Halevi's Memoria para as siglos futuros concerning the first settlement of Sephardic Jews in Amsterdam. This translation must have been taken from the "luah" printed by Chaim Druker in 1719 (mentioned in Sheyris Yisroel, p. 132b). Cf. S. Seeligman "Uber Die Erste Judische Ansiedlung In Amsterdam" Mitteilungen Zur Judischen Volkskunde, NS II, 1 (#17); (1908) pp. 1-13.
16. Author's Introduction in Yiddish; second column.
17. Zinberg, Erik, Dubnow, Fuks, Hominer all make mention of it. Shmeruk, op. cit., p. 85, is the only one to venture that these Gentile sources were in Dutch.
18. In English: The History Of The Jews From Jesus Christ To The Present Time, containing their antiquities, their religion, their rites, the dispersion of the ten tribes in the east and the persecutions this nation has suffered in the west, being a supplement and continuation of the history of Josephus. English translation by Tho. Taylor A.M., London 1708. On Basnage and his impact: Ben Sasson in EJ VII, 560; Bernfeld "Historians" in Hashiloah, II, 198-201 (1897); and Moses Gaster "A Hebrew Manuscript of A History of the Jews Written by A Christian" in Historishe Shriftn, II, 9-17 (1937). Gaster discovered a Hebrew abridged translation of Basnage, probably written in Italy by Christian Hebraists. It is based upon the first edition of the Histoire Des Juifs, while Sheyris Yisroel is based upon the second revised version.
19. In Dutch: Vervolg Of Flavious Josephus Of Algemene Historie Der Joodsche Naatsie...alles yan de geboorte van Christus...Door Jakob Basnage (available in N.Y. Public Library). Amelander certainly knew and read Dutch. On page 138b he refers his readers to a book in Dutch on the Ludenscheid blood-libel (Jan Jacob Mauricius, "Kort Beicht Wegens De Historie van Zekeren Izaak Saxel en de Beschuldiging der Joden te Nijmegen over het Slachten ein Christen Kint," Amsterdam 1716.)

20. Ct. C. Roth, A Life of Manasseh Ben Israel, p. 105 and the revised French version of Basnage's Histoire des Juifs, book I, vol. I, p. 22.
21. See appendix A. Amelander's subservience to Basnage's structure is the cause of a significant structural flaw in Sheyris Yisroel. While discussing the Sabbatean movement of 1665-6 in chapter 26 on the Jews in the East (as Basnage does in Book IX, chapter 27), Amelander introduced material not found in Basnage, under the latter's chapter-headings. Thus the 16th century adventures of David Hareuveni and Shlomo Molkho were fitted into chapter 29 (on the Jews of Africa and Ethiopia); the story of Asher Lemlein, which occurred in 1590--into chapter 30 (on the Jews of Germany); and the Chmielnicki-massacres of 1648--into chapter 32. All three were, of course, important as antecedents to the Sabbatean movement.
22. Even Hominer, who annotated some of Amelander's sources in his Hebrew edition of She'erit Yisrael Hashalem, seems to have been unaware that he was retranslating much of Shevet Yehudah, Zemah David and Yuhasin back into the original Hebrew.
23. Cf. above, p. 6; also Eric (op. cit., p. 377): "Menakhem Man Amelander's chronicle is a compilation of Jewish and Christian writings, without any critical approach to its sources."
24. The Yiddish term used here is נארגויר רעכט (in the French original--Droit de Bourgeoisie). It appears twice more in Sheyris Yisroel--on p. 6a (in the French, Droit de Bourgeoisie) and on p. 16a (in the French, "que les Juifs etoient regardez comme Citoiens Romains," vol. 12, p. 49). This is one of the earliest usages of the term (and concept) of citizenship in Jewish literature.
25. This is the only reference to Basnage in Sheyris Yisroel.
26. Yiddish Yossipon: Zurich 1546; Prague 1607; Amsterdam 1661; Frankfort 1692; Frankfort 1797. Yiddish Shevet Yehudah: Cracow 1591; Amsterdam 1648; Sulzbach 1669; Sulzbach 1700; Amsterdam 1700; Furth 1724.
27. On Yiddish historical ballads and other works written in or translated into Yiddish, cf. Zinberg, op. cit., chap. 9, pp. 208-236 and Erik, op. cit., pp. 371-393. A lone edition of Zemah David in Yiddish appeared in Frankfort in 1698.
28. Seder HaDorot, written by the Lithuanian scholar Yekhiel Heilprin in 1696, was first published in 1769.

29. Cf. Y. Dan, "The Artistry of Narrative in Shevet Yehudah," Molad NS Vol. 4 (1972), #24, pp. 671-679.
30. Note Aleksander b. Moshe Ethausen's remarks in the introduction to his Beys Yisroel: "Although the author of Zemah David did much in this matter /i.e., relating the events of the past/, and although he placed everything according to its year, it is very brief, like a calendar, which is fine for great scholars but not for simple people." Cf. below, p. 29.
31. Cf. Chone Shmeruk, "The Beginnings of Yiddish Narrative Prose and Its Center In Italy" in Sefer Zikaron LeAryeh Leone Carpi, Jerusalem-Milano, 1967, pp. 119-140.
32. Reprinted (pre-1743 editions only) Frankfurth 1702; Amsterdam 1723; Hamburg 1723. On Mayse Nisim cf. Zinberg, op. cit., pp. 183-187.
33. Reprinted (pre-1743 only): Part I--Frankfurth 1691; Frankfurth 1707; Amsterdam 1708; Amsterdam 1723. Part II--Furth 1694; Frankfurth 1695; Frankfurth 1722; Frankfurth 1724; Frankfurth 1725; Henau 1725; Wilhelmsdorf 1732. On Maysei Hashem cf. Zinberg, op. cit., p. 312; Erik, op. cit., pp. 364-365.
34. Reprinted (pre-1743 only): Amsterdam 1723. This interesting work which has been virtually unnoticed by historians of Yiddish literature is deserving of an independent study. It is not mentioned by Zinberg. Cf. Erik, op. cit., p. 377.
35. Amelander reproduces the legend on the origins of the Jews of Worms found in Mayse Nisim, no. 1 (SY p. 1b). The legends concerning Maimonides and Ibn Ezra found in SY chapter 16, cited from Shalsholet HaKabalah, are also found in Maysei Hashem, nos. 32, 33. Abravanel's account of the origins of European Jewry (SY 10b) is also found in Beys Yisroel, p. 28b-29b. Amelander also refers his readers to the Mayse Bukh in SY, p. 94b.
36. See Appendix B.

Appendix A

Histoire Des Juifs

Sheyris Yisroel

Book 7

פרק

1. "The Sources of the Miseries of the Jews"
 2. "The Dispersion of the 10 Tribes in the East"
 3. "Different Reports of Jewish Authors on the Dispersion of their Nation in the East"
 4. "Whether the 10 Tribes Passed Into Tartary, and From there to America and the East-Indies"
 5. "The Origins of the Jews in Indies and China"
 6. "The True Situation of the 10 Tribes..."
 7. "The Origins of the Jews in Egypt and Arabia"
 8. "The Dispersion of the Jews in Italy"
 9. "The antiquity of the Jews in Spain, Germany, France etc."
 10. "The Origins of the Jews of France"
 11. "History of the Jews from the Taking of Jerusalem till the rebellion under Hadrian"
 12. "History of the Jews' rebellion; Barchochebas and Akiba"
 13. "The Disciples of Akiba, and other learned men of the time"
- א. "וויא עש גואנוגין איז מיט דיא צעהן שבטים דיא פר טריבן זיין גואריין..."
- ב. "פון וועלכי צייט דש דיא יהודים זיך בזעצט האבן אין רומא..."
- ג. "וועלכי צייט דאש דיא יהודים אין שפאניא, טייטש לנד, פראנקרייך, ענגילאנד... זיין גקומן"
- ד. "וואש דיא יהודים איז איכר גקומן נאך דען חורבן בית שני... דש מעשה פון בן כורזיבא דר זיך אויש גגעבן פר משיח"
- ה. "וואש גפאלן איז פון דיא צייטן פון ר' שמעון בן גמליאל... ביז דען אנפאנג פון אלף החמישי"

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Sheyris Yisroel

Book 8

פרק

1. "History of the Jews from 138 till Severus' reign"
2. "History of the Jews in the Roman Empire till the end of the third century"
3. "The Jews of Babylonia from Severus - end of third cent; the Princes of Captivity"
4. "History of the Jews during the fourth century"
5. "History of Jews during rule of Julian and following emperors"
6. "History of Jews in Greek Empire in 5th century"
7. "History of Jews in the West during the 5th century"
8. "History of the Jews of Persia in the 5th century"
9. "State of the 10 tribes in Persia, Arabia, Ethiopia till 7th century"
10. "Continuation of 7th century"
11. "The Immereneans and Jewish Homerites"
12. "State of Jews in Roman Empire, Constantinople, Italy, Spain, France in 6th and 7th centuries"
13. "Continuation of same"

(פרק ה)

ו. "וויא עש דיא יהודים איז גואנגיין אין ככל נאך חו- רבן בית שני...די ראשי גלות"

ז. "וויא עש דיא יהודים איז גואנגיין פון דיא צ״ט דש קאנסטאנטינוס...האט אנ- גנומן די אמונת הנוצרים דש וואר אין דש יאר ד' אלפים ע"ה (314) ביז דש יאר שע"ר (614)"

ח. "וויא עש איז אויף גקומן די אמונת הישמעאלים דורך איר פאלשר נביא מחמד, און וואש ישראל איז איברגקומן אין זיין צ״ט אונ' אונטר דיא מלכים נאך אים גוועזן און אך דש מעשה פון בוס- חנאי"

ט. "וויא עש איז גואנגיין מיט דיא יהודים אין דיא צ״ט דש אירוקיליוס קיסר איז גוועזן, אין דש יאר ד'שע"ב (612), און אין שפאניא אונטר שישבוט, און אך אין פראנקרייך ביז דש יאר ד'ח"ק (740)"

Histoire Des Juifs

Sheyris Yisroel

Book 9

פרק

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. "History of the Cozar-King" 2. "History of the tribes in the East during 8th, 9th cents." 3. "History of Jews in Empire, Italy, Spain, France, Germany in 8th and 9th centuries" 4. "Jews in East during 10th, 11th centuries" 5. "Jews in West in 10th, 11th cents.; persecution in Spain" 6. "The False Josephus; massacres of Jews in England" 7. "The Jews in Germany; massacres during Crusades" 8. "General account of Jews in E. and W. in 12th century; from Benjamin of Tudela's voyage" 9. "Petachia'a account of Jews in 12th century" 10. "Great men among Jews in 12th c" 11. "False Messiahs in 12th cent." 12. "Events which occurred to Jews in East and West in 12th cent." 13. "Reasons for severe laws vs. Jews" 14. "Collection of church-decrees vs. Jews" 15. "Continuation of same" 16. "Jews in East: 13th,14th cent." 17. "Jews in Spain: 13th,14th cent." 18. "Continuation of same" | <p>י. "וויא זיך דר קינג פון דש לנד כוזר האט מגי'ר גוועזן"</p> <p>יא. "וויא עש דיא יהודים אין פראנקרייך איז גאננגן אונ-טר קיסר קארלוס דער גרויסר און לודוויג דער גוטארדיגער"</p> <p>יב. "וויא עש איז גאננגין מיט דיא יהודים אויף דיא מזרח זיט..."</p> <p>יג. "...דיא יהודים אין שפאניא פון דש יאר ד'תשכז (967) ביז תתנ"ו (1096)"</p> <p>יד. "דיא גזירות און הריגות אין אשכנז, פראנקרייך, ענגילאנד, פיהם, אונגארן פון ד'תת"ן (1090) ביז תתנ"ו (1096)"</p> <p>טו. "וויא עש גאננגין איז מיט דיא יהודים אויף מזרח אונ' מערב, אויס ספר מסעות בנימין"</p> <p>יו. "דיא גרושי חכמים מופלגים אונטר ישראל..."</p> <p>יז. "דיא ניין כטריגוס דיא זיך האכן אוישגועכן פר משיח"</p> <p>יח. "וויא עש איז גאננגין אין איטליא, פראנקרייך, טייטשלאנד פון ד'תתק (1140) ביז תתק"ס (1200)"</p> <p>יט. "דיא יהודים אן מזרח זיט פון תתק"ס (1200) ביז ה'צד (1334)"</p> <p>כ. "דיא יהודים אין שפאניא: ה'ט"ז-ה'ק"ט (1257-1349)"</p> |
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Sheyris Yisroel

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| 19. | "History of Jews in Italy in 13th and 14th cents." | כא. "דיא יהודים אין איטליא: ד'תתקפה-ה'קנ"ד (1394-1225)" |
| 20. | "History of Jews in France: 13th cent. - expulsion" | כב. "דיא יהודים אין פראנקרייך פון דש יאר ה'ט (1249)...ווי זיא זיין גאנץ פון טרייבן גווארן אויש פראנקרייך" |
| 21. | "Continuation of the same" | |
| 22. | "The Jews expelled from England-13th c; return in 17th c." | כג. "דיא יהודים אין ענגילאנד; וויא זיא זיין פון טרייבן גווארן און ווירר אריינגקומן" |
| 23. | "Jews of Germany, Hungary, etc. in 13th, 14th century" | כד. "דיא יהודים אין טייטש לנד, פיהם, אונגארן..." |
| 24. | "Jews in Spain in 15th cent.; their expulsion in 1492" | כה. "וויא עש דיא יהודים זיין פון טרייבן גווארן אויש שפאניא אין דש יאר ה'רנ"ב (1492) און אויש פורטיגאל אין דש יאר ה'רנ"ז (1497)" |
| 25. | "History of the exiles from Spain and Portugal" | |
| 26. | "History of Jews in the East in 15th, 16th and 17th cents." | כז. "וויא עש גאנטיגן איז מיט דיא יהודים דיא אויף מזרח זייט וואונן...פון דש יאר שצ"ח (1638), און פון דען פאלשר משיח שחתי צבי..." |
| 27. | "Continuation of the same; the false Messiah Sabbetai Zevi" | |
| 28. | "The Jews of Judea, Safed, Jerusalem" | כז. "דיא יהודים אין דיא לנדן דיא אוטאמאניש'ר ייך" |
| 29. | Jews in Ethiopia, Egypt, Africa during last two cents." | כח. "דיא יהודים אין ארץ ישראל ק"ק צפת און ירושלים" |
| 30. | "Jews in Ottoman Empire during last two centuries" | כט. "דיא יהודים אין עטיאפיע און אין דש גאנצי לנד אפריקא" |
| 31. | "Jews in Italy in 15th, 16th, 17th centuries" | |
| 32. | "Continuation of the same" | |
| 33. | "Jews in Germany: 15th and 16th cent" | ל. "דיא יהודים אין טייטשלאנד, פיהם, מאהריין פון דש יאר ה'ק"ע (1410) ביז דש יאר שצ"ד (1614)" |
| 34. | "State of the Jews before beginning of reformation" | לא. "וואש דיא יהודים ווייטער איז איי-כרגקומן אין טייטש לנד, פולין, פיהם, פון דש יאר ה'שער (1614) ביז דש יאר ת"ח (1648)" |
| 35. | "Jews of Poland, Bohemia, Germany during last cent." | לב. "די גזירות אין פולין אין דש יאר ת"ח (1648) און אנדרי גזירות אין טייטשלאנד עד הנה" |

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| 36. | "Settlement of Jews in Holland and their present state" | לג. "ווי די שפאנישי און פור-טובאלישי יהודים ז"נן גקומן אין הולאנד" |
| 37. | "Continuation of the same" | לד. "ווי דיא ט"ששי און פוילישע יהודים ז"נן גקומן צו אמ-שטרדם... און ווי זיא איז גאננין" |
| 38. | "Present state of Jews in all parts of the world" (including China, etc.) | לה. "די יהודים דיא וואונן אין אינדיא, סינא און קושין" |
| 39. | "Reflections on the conversion of the Jews, and methods used to accomplish it." | |

Appendix B

Stories From The Past

All is quiet in the house. Father and mother are fast asleep. A candle burns on the table, and the boy lies in bed and reads in the semi-darkness a story from "Sheyris Yisroel":

On the eve of Passover, the Jews in the ghetto are preparing themselves for the holiday. They are sewing, scrubbing, washing, cleaning and baking matzah.

The mud is drying up and grass is beginning to sprout in the gardens....But a calamity has just occurred. A dead Christian child was found near the ghetto-gates. The police arrived, and before long caught the Rabbi and thirty-one distinguished Jews, chained them and placed them in prison.

In prison they were tortured, to confess to the crime. The Jews claimed that they were innocent. They were sentenced to be burned alive.

Dry branches and wood were placed in the middle of the market place. The townspeople gathered to see the Jews be burned.

The drums began to beat, and those sentenced were led into the market place...

The thirty-one Jews and the Rabbi were surrounded by soldiers; before them marched a Priest, who spoke while waving a cross:

--Soon the flames will devour you. Confess, Oh sinful souls, confess. Abandon your cursed religion, become Christians, and we will forgive your great sin and let you live.

The Jews do not answer, turning their faces away from the cross.

They approach the bonfire. They are lined up and encircled with wood. The executioner lights the dry branches. Fumes begin to rise. The flames appear. The Rabbi winks to the Jews and all thirty one join hands and begin singing "Alenu Lishabeah: We must praise God"...

The bishop orders:

--Beat the drums, soldiers; drown out the song of the cursed ones!

The drums beat; but the song sounds higher and higher

--More wood! Increase the flames!--the bishop orders.

The fire is increased and the thirty-one holy Jews and the Rabbi are devoured by the flames...

The boy lies in bed. He can almost hear the sound of Alenu Lishabeah. He lies, quivering with excitement:

In the past, Jews were great. Only great, holy people could go to their death so peacefully. Could he have done it? And Avreml wants to test himself. He wants to know if he could commit martyrdom like those Jews. He gets out of bed, goes over to the candle, closes his eyes, and blindly sticks his finger into the flame. The fire scalds his finger, he bites his lips and murmurs: Alenu Lishabeah...

The next day Avreml sits in Heder with a bandaged finger, ashamed of himself: -- I snatched away my finger immediately. I couldn't endure it...

He looks staringly and can see them - a procession of Inquisitors, with torches in their hands, extending over streets. The bells are ringing; he can hear them ringing. He can see the martyrs surrounded by inquisitors. The Jews keep their heads aloft. They walk proudly. They are going to sacrifice themselves for their faith, to die a martyr's death.

The boy sits pensively. He is in a distant world. Childish voices resound in the background, with the old nign of the gemore.

-from the memoirs of the Yiddish poet and Socialist leader Abraham Liessin
(in Shloyme Simon, Kinder Yorn Fun Yidishe Shrayber, book 1, pp. 56-58)

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