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SPIRIT
POSSESSION
IN JUDAISM

Cases and Contexts from the
Middle Ages to the Present

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Joseph Dan



Wayne State University Press
Detroit

City of the Dead: Spirit Possession in Sixteenth-Century Safed

J. H. CHAJES

Several times I was with my teacher, z'l, walking in the field, and he would say to me: "Here is a man by the name of so-and-so, and he is righteous and a scholar, and due to such-and-such a sin that he committed in his life, he has now transmigrated into this stone, or this plant. . . . My teacher, z'l, never knew this person, though when we inquired after the deceased, we found his words accurate and true. There is no point in going on-at length about these matters, since no book could contain them. Sometimes he would gaze from a distance of 500 handsbreadths at a particular grave, one among twenty thousand others, and would see the soul [*nefesh*] of the dead there interred, standing upon the grave. He would then say to us, "in that grave is buried such-and-such a man by the name of so-and-so, and they are punishing him with such-and-such a punishment for such-and-such a crime. We would inquire after that man, and found his words to be true. [There are] so many and great examples of this that one cannot imagine.¹

R Hayyim Vital recalls in this passage—one of many of its kind—how his teacher, R. Isaac Luria, constantly beheld the dead in his midst.² Luria would gaze at the dead, and see the soul. . . . standing upon the grave; in the paragraphs that follow this passage in *Sha'ar ha-Gilgulim* (Gate of Transmigrations), Vital reiterates that Luria saw these individuals "with his eyes" and did not merely feel their presence or conjure them up with the aid of his "sacred imagination."³ For Luria, the dead mingled with the living and appeared with transparent immediacy in the rocks and trees of Safed and, of course, in and about its graves, marked and unmarked.

City of the Dead

Safed, then as now, is a city that lives with its dead, its stone domiciles and synagogues poised on sloping hills that are home to "twenty thousand"

dead, whose graves begin only a few steps beyond the homes of the living. Safed embraces its graveyard, which, like the stage of an amphitheater, is always within view, commanding one's attention. Not far in the distance, every denizen of Safed can see hills filled with the graves of rabbinic-era sages, culminating with Mt. Meron, graced with the remains of R. Shimon bar Yohai, Moses of the mystics, and, in their eyes, author of their "Bible," the Zohar.⁴

Sixteenth-century Safed was a city shared by the living and the dead, a sacred space that might be compared to the sixteenth-century Spanish churches, "where the dead were relentlessly buried under the worshipers' feet."⁵ Many who made their way to Safed did so in order to partake in this sacred space and the special benefits it afforded their souls. R. Moshe Alsheikh, Vital's teacher in rabbinics,⁶ described Safed in his *Hazut Kashah* (Terrible Vision) of 1591 as a city

which has forever been a city of interred dead, to which people from throughout the lands of exile came to die, and from a holy place, a city of our God from the day of its founding, to die there and there be buried, which has within it many more than 600,000 men, not including the bones of men continuously brought, beyond measure to the righteous in its midst, for "there is no end to its corpses" [Nah. 3:3]. Who from all the cities of the exile, near and far, does not have in her [Safed] a father or brother, son or daughter, mother or sister, or some other of their flesh, them or their bones.⁷

According to others, being in Safed was conducive to penetrating the secrets of the Torah as well as to achieving a good death. R. Abraham Azulai, born in Fez (1570) to a Castilian family, wrote the following about Safed around 1619, some twenty years after his arrival in the Land of Israel:

Safed is also 21 and with the word itself 22,⁸ corresponding to the 22 letters of the Torah, alluding to Safed's being ready and receptive to the attainment of the depth of the Torah and its secrets, for there is no purer air in the whole of the Land of Israel than the air in Safed. . . . And Safed is also gematria (570),⁹ to allude that all who dwell in Safed have an advantage over all other cities in the Land of Israel. And one who dies and is buried there, since it is a high place with air purer and cleaner than any city in the Land of Israel, his soul therefore speedily sails and flies to the Cave of Makhpelah¹⁰ in order to pass from there to the lower Garden of Eden.¹¹

Mystical experience and death, according to Azulai, are Safed's specialties.¹² The literature produced in this hothouse of morbid ecstasy is replete with encounters with apparitions of the dead, encounters at once mystical and moribund.¹³ Few, however, could aspire to the powers of Luria to behold with their own eyes such apparitions before them. Vital's accounts of Luria's abilities certainly underscore their exceptional nature.

Though few could see the dead as did Luria,¹⁴ Safed and its environs remained a region with death underfoot, whose relics did much to attract the leading lights of the Jewish world in the course of the sixteenth century. By virtue of its unique appeal as well as its economic health,¹⁵ Safed soon outstripped every other center in the Land of Israel both in the quantity and "quality"¹⁶ of its population. According to the *Mufasssal Defteler*, or detailed registers of the cadastral surveys undertaken by the Ottomans in Palestine, Safed's Jewish population tripled between 1525 and 1555, from 232 to 716 households.¹⁷ During that time, the composition of the population changed markedly as well. By mid-century, *Mus-tarib* (native Arabic-speaking) Jews were no longer the large majority of the Jewish population. Their absolute number in fact declined, as Jews from Portugal, Cordoba, Aragon, Seville, Calabria, and other lands added hundreds of new households to the community. *Conversos* also chose to settle in Safed in substantial numbers.¹⁸ Safed thus took on a cosmopolitan character, with a strong European—and particularly Iberian—component. These new Safedians seem to have arrived bearing a particularly intense preoccupation with death, a characteristic of Spanish culture that has often been noted by scholars.¹⁹ We do know that the Iberian Jews who produced zoharic literature in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries had a more positive, sacral orientation to the grave and its denizens than did their Ashkenazic counterparts, for whom the world of the dead "was an abode of dread and danger."²⁰ Indeed, it was the zoharic *image* of the Galilee and its holy relics that attracted many of these figures to Safed in the sixteenth century.

While they could not see the dead hovering over graves or suffering in their transmigrations into the minerals, plants, and animals around them, these new residents of Safed did have one way of encountering the dead face to face, "not in a dream, but while wide awake."²¹ The dead appeared to the living of Safed chiefly through a process of displacement. The dead could become visible to all by commandeering the bodies of the living and making them their own. For the first time in Jewish history, possession by the dead—by ghosts—became the most common variety of spirit possession in sixteenth-century Safed. While the identification of a possessing spirit as a ghost seems to have been frequent among late medieval and early

modern Christians, clerical authorities generally suppressed such notions when summoned to begin the process of exorcism.²² In so doing, they were following theological traditions going back to Augustine that denied this possibility.²³ Such clerical objections did not, however, entirely succeed in eliminating the phenomenon of possession by the dead.²⁴ Thus, while Christian clerics attempted to suppress the notion that the dead could possess the bodies of the living, Jewish religious authorities came to regard spirit possession as typically resulting from just such an etiology. The dead appeared to the living Jews of Safed *in* the living Jews of Safed.

After more than a millennium for which we have no extant Jewish spirit possession narratives, a dozen or more such narratives treat cases that ostensibly occurred in the sixteenth century.²⁵ Of them, more than half treat cases in Safed, while the remainder chronicle cases that took place on the Italian peninsula. While my approach to these narratives is similar to that adopted by recent historians of hagiographic literature and therefore not committed to ascertaining the historicity of the "facts" involved so much as determining how the accounts of these facts reflect the mentality of their producers,²⁶ it is still important to carefully delineate the provenance of the sources for these early cases to insure that we do not confuse sources *about* sixteenth-century Safedian cases—but produced later and elsewhere—with sources written then and there. My examination of these early sources has, in fact, led me to conclude that they are best treated in two distinct discussions. The first, which follows here, will attempt to learn something about Safedian culture in the mid-sixteenth century through a reading of these sources; the second, which I have treated elsewhere,²⁷ examines the *uses* of these possession narratives in seventeenth-century works and their role in bolstering the aims of authors and editors engaged in various polemical, didactic, and hagiographic enterprises.

Let us begin with a brief bibliographic survey of these narratives. The earliest extant manuscripts that include accounts from the sixteenth century are of seventeenth-century provenance. These include copies of earlier, no longer extant manuscripts and new works composed in the seventeenth century that include possession accounts. Examples of the former include *Tzafnat Pa'aneah* (Decipherer of Mysteries) of Judah Hallewa, a work composed in 1545 that survives only in a single, later copy.²⁸ Vital's memoirs, known as *Sefer ha-Hezyonot* (Book of Visions) (and later as *Shivhe R. Hayyim Vital* [Praises of R. Hayyim Vital]), also contain references to Safedian cases of the 1570s as well as to a 1609 Damascus case.²⁹ Far more numerous are examples of the latter, including manuscripts of Jacob Zemah's *Ramu le-Ya'akov* (Joy for Jacob) and *Meshivat Nafesh* (Restoration

of the Soul), Samuel Garmison's *Darkbe No'am* (Ways of Pleasantness), and Joseph Sambari's *Divre Yosef* (Words of Joseph). Zemah and Garmison included two Safedian cases in which Vital was the exorcist, while Sambari included four Safedian cases in his chronicle of its "golden age."

Turning to printed works, we find that a Safedian case figures in only one work printed in the sixteenth century: *Ma'ase ha-Shem* (Acts of the Lord) of R. Eliezer Ashkenazi, published in Venice in 1582. Gedalia ibn Yahia's *Shalshelet ha-Kabbalah* (Chain of Tradition), published in Venice in 1586, recounts ibn Yahia's own experience with a possessed woman in Ferrara and mentions a multiple possession case in Ancona but includes no Safedian cases.³⁰ At the cusp of the sixteenth and seventeenth century, the *Ma'aseh Buch* (Story Book) appeared in Basel, featuring a possession narrative that, in Sambari's version, was reported as having taken place in Safed.³¹ It was only in the seventeenth century that the classic Safedian accounts began to be published widely: from Joseph Delmedigo's 1628 *Ta'alumot Hokhmah* (Mysteries of Wisdom) to Naftali Bacharach's *Emek ha-Melekh* (Valley of the King) and culminating in Menasseh ben Israel's 1651 *Nishmat Hayyim* (Soul of Life).³² This last work contained many accounts of spirit possession among Jews, a number of which were said to have taken place in Safed. In the works published in the latter half of the seventeenth century and beyond containing possession accounts, these early narratives would be reprinted time and again.³³

In summary, we have a number of cases that were mentioned in contemporary sources:³⁴ the Karo exorcism in Hallewa's work and the famous Falcon case of 1571. The possession of the young man first published in the *Ma'aseh Buch* cannot with certainty be located in Safed, as that identification depends solely upon Sambari's late-seventeenth-century text, other versions³⁵ not stating specifically that the case took place in Safed. At the same time, Sambari's work contains the *best* text of the Falcon case, copied as it was from Falcon's manuscript.³⁶ The major accounts of spirit possession involving R. Hayyim Vital were not printed until the efflorescence of Hebrew hagiographic literature in the mid-seventeenth century,³⁷ though they were at least mentioned in Vital's own manuscripts, if not recounted at length. Let us now focus on these accounts and explore the ways in which they suggest something about Safed's particular environment, its society of the living and the dead.

Falcon's A Great Event in Safed

Elijah Falcon, in the aftermath of a dramatic possession case that began on 16 February 1571, penned what was to become one of the best-known

accounts of spirit possession in Jewish history: *The Great Event in Safed*.³⁸ Falcon's account, signed by three other prominent rabbis of Safed who, like himself were eyewitnesses and participants in the affair, was circulated in the Diaspora as a broadsheet by the late 1570s.³⁹ R. Eliezer Ashkenazi, writing in Poland after having departed from Italy, wrote that he had heard "in this, our own time" of cases of spirit possession, and that only "this year, in 5340" (1579–80) had he become familiar with the phenomenon, when he received a broadsheet from Safed that described such a case. Gedalia ibn Yahia, in his *Shalshelet ha-Kabbalah* (Venice, 1586), mentions having seen this signed broadsheet as well.⁴⁰ Falcon, it would seem, was an early publicist in Safed's bid for acknowledged centrality and preeminence in the Jewish world.⁴¹ Falcon's didactic and dramatic broadsheet is less hagiographically oriented that we might have expected and asserts Safed's aspirations for leadership on the basis of its being the center of Jewish values and their instruction as well as a locus of ongoing divine incursion into the historical process. In this case, the divine incursion came in the form of the return of the dead to the society of the living, constituting a dramatic reification of traditional Jewish values in a period of transition and crisis.⁴²

Falcon opens his account with an exhortative prologue in which he laments that human nature leads people to indulge themselves in the sensory pleasures of the body. This inclination leads to the impoverishment of the soul and to the abandonment of the Torah and its directives. Falcon bemoans the fact that even "believers and the punctiliously observant" generally fail to overcome this inclination. Their inability to champion the cause of their soul and the holy Torah, writes Falcon, is chiefly due to the inability of the spirit to impress itself sufficiently upon the flesh. The most sublime elements of the soul make but faint traces alongside the powerful desires of the body. Few have the capacity to recognize the folly of their material pursuits, so long as the claims of the spirit fail to compete with the those of the flesh. In Falcon's view, there is only one conceivable way for people to overcome the hedonism and epicureanism that naturally vanquish the still, small voice of the spirit in the contest for the shaping of human will: for the spirit to become flesh. Nothing in the Torah, he writes, can possibly make a strong enough impression upon a person to enable him "to separate himself from any aspect of evil and wrongdoing, whether in speech, thought, or action." The opportunity to meet a soul who has passed over into the realm of the dead is incomparably effective in inducing one to accept that the soul lives on after the death of the body, that reward and *especially* punishment await the sinning soul upon its departure from its short stay in the corrupting body.

And verily, it is known to him from one who came from that World, and told to him by one who has crossed over there. For perhaps the Holy One, Blessed be He, sent him so that they might fear Him, as the Sages of blessed memory said, “‘And God does it, so that men should fear him’ [Eccles. 3:14]—this is a bad dream” [BT Berakhot 55a]. And this is not a dream but while awake, before the eyes of all.⁴³

While a nightmare might have sufficed in former good days to inculcate fear of the Lord, such phantasms pale before the persuasiveness of a face-to-face meeting with a denizen of the world of the dead. Here and throughout his account, Falcon emphasizes the embodied presence of the dead before the living, who gathered in large numbers to see the evil dead *with their own eyes*. He is only one eyewitness among many, and his broadsheet begins and ends with this repeated refrain. “I was there, and my eyes saw and my ears heard all this and more—he who sees shall testify,” signed Shlomo Alkabetz.⁴⁴ “I too was summoned to see this matter, and my eyes have seen, and my ears have heard,” added Abraham Aruty.⁴⁵ Lest the reader have any doubts, we are told that some one hundred people attended the exorcism, including many sages and dignitaries.⁴⁶

Before this “great assembly,” the dead began to appear through the lifeless body of the possessed woman. Responding to the adjurations of the exorcists, a voice erupted from the woman’s throat, unformed by any movement of her tongue or lips. This inchoate growl was like the roar of a lion rather than any human voice. Gradually, the exorcists forcefully imposed the standards of human language upon this rumble, and the voice became “like the voice of men.” Such a development cannot but bring to mind de Certeau’s analysis of the role of exorcists in reinstating within established language that which “manifests itself as speech, but as an uncertain speech inseparable from fits, gestures, and cries.”⁴⁷ Tempting as it may be to assume that the human speech emerging from the woman’s mouth—as we have it in the account—was entirely a projection of the anonymous exorcists or Falcon himself, its content would seem to belie such an interpretation. While we do well to recall that our sources were written by rabbinic figures rather than by the possessed, possession accounts often include statements by the possessed that suggest themselves as faithful renderings of the possessed’s speech. In his analysis of the demonic possession of a Silesian girl in 1605, H. C. E. Midelfort notes this phenomenon. On the one hand, possession accounts were written by learned writers and were crafted accordingly, as apparent in the theologically learned arguments that the devil pursued with Tobias Seiler, the exorcist in the case. As Midelfort writes, these arguments were so complex that “any reader is

bound to conclude that Seiler was composing not only his own lines, but the Devil’s, too.” On the other hand, threats to defecate in the pastor’s throat until he became hoarse “have the ring of spontaneous reporting.” Thus, Midelfort suggests, “if we can take the shape and color of the lens into account, we may yet be able to say something of what demon possession was like to the demon-possessed, and, more generally, what ordinary people in the German-speaking lands thought of the Devil.”⁴⁸ If we try to listen for the voice of the possessed in these accounts, we also stand to restore some degree of agency to these victims—agency denied to them originally on theological grounds and more recently by historiographic trends that emphasize political and ecclesiastical circumstances, psychoanalytic readings that analyze the self the possessed could not herself know, or, as with de Certeau, interpretations stressing the semantic aggression of the exorcists.⁴⁹

And what does the woman in the Falcon case actually say? What can we find out about her and her relationship to the soul possessing her? Here, Sambari’s text is invaluable—for it alone preserves all the proper nouns found in Falcon’s manuscript. Menasseh ben Israel’s version and subsequent works dependent upon it have simply “so-and-so” where the identities of the spirit and the victim’s in-laws are mentioned.⁵⁰ According to Sambari, the victim is the young daughter-in-law of “the venerable Joseph Zarfati.”⁵¹ We learn neither the name of the girl herself nor anything else about her. We can offer only something of a wild conjecture about the girl’s origins, that she may have been from a *converso* family. Slender clues point in that direction: the usage of an expression from Esther 4:16 (“What can I do, if I perish, I perish”) which, if not a literary embellishment of Falcon’s, may disclose the special identification with Esther known to have existed among *conversos*.⁵² Neither do we learn anything about her husband, Joseph’s son, other than that at the time of the episode, he was away from Safed in Salonika. The spirit, however, declares himself to be Samuel Zarfati. This Samuel Zarfati explains that he died in Tripoli, leaving one son, two divorcees, and a widow.⁵³ The third wife was now married to a certain Tuvia Deleiria.⁵⁴ Samuel seems to have been well known in the community, as Falcon mentions a number of times that the spirit’s words accorded with what people remembered about the deceased. While it is hard to understand why, if these details were known to many in the crowd in attendance, they should have been considered unknowable to the young possessed woman, Falcon indicates that these details were considered validating marks of the authenticity of the possession. “Then we recognized, all of us present, that the spirit was the speaker,” he writes after hearing the spirit recount his family tree (sec. 7). In addition

to this description of his family, other details considered convincing were the spirit's identification of his profession—money changer (sec. 20)—and his synagogue, the local prayer hall of the Castilian exiles, *Bet Ya'akov* (sec. 15).⁵⁵ Many in attendance also confirmed that the spirit's admission of his most egregious sin was known to them: the assertion that all religions were the same.⁵⁶ "Many testified before us that he would say such things while still alive," notes Falcon (sec. 8).⁵⁷ Samuel was also known for taking oaths and breaking them (sec. 18). If Samuel was no particular champion of the Torah, his son seems to have been no better. When asked by the exorcists if his son should recite the mourner's prayer *kaddish* or learn Torah on behalf of his soul, Samuel replies that such a notion was untenable and that his son was wholly unsuited to learn Torah (sec. 12). Still, some doubts as to the authenticity of the possession seem to have lingered, and the exorcists decided to test the spirit's ability to speak the languages he was known to have spoken when still alive. The spirit's successful display of his linguistic prowess in Hebrew, Arabic, and Turkish—coupled with his inability to understand Yiddish—must have been especially convincing, as "the woman did not know any of these languages."⁵⁸

Clearly an important question is whether this Samuel Zarfati had a relationship with Joseph Zarfati's daughter-in-law, within whom he had lodged himself. A recent cultural history of ghosts found that in over three-quarters of the cases studied, percipients of early modern apparitions knew the identity of the apparition before them; possession cases in which the spirit was viewed as a disembodied soul seem to have worked similarly.⁵⁹ Simply the fact that the possessed woman was married into the Zarfati family would suggest the possibility of familiarity. Many of those present knew Samuel, who would have probably been an older contemporary of hers (his widow had recently remarried), perhaps even her brother-in-law.

Samuel seems to have been quite a cad—married three times and an irreligious skeptic. As a spirit he relates to the adulterous intimations of his presence with urbane humor. In an exchange deleted from Menasseh ben Israel's version, the exorcists ask the spirit pointedly: "And if she is a married woman, have you no reservations about copulating with her?" The spirit responded, "And what of it? Her husband isn't here, but in Salonika!"⁶⁰ Shortly after this remark, the exorcists worked diligently to expel Samuel from her tortured body, and she began to writhe and kick violently. In the process, she exposed herself immodestly.⁶¹

[Samuel] raised her legs and lowered them one after the other, with great speed, time and again. And with those movements, which he made with great strength, the blanket that was upon her fell off her feet and thighs,

and she uncovered and humiliated herself before everyone's eyes. They came close to her to cover her thighs; but she had no self-consciousness in the course of any of this. Those who were acquainted with her knew of her great modesty, but now her modesty was lost. (sec. 21)

This image seems to amplify the exorcists' concern, and the spirit's admission, that some sort of intercourse was taking place between Samuel and the woman.⁶² The possibility that women could have intercourse with spirits was discussed in the rabbinic literature of the period, and rabbis were called upon to determine whether women who had engaged in such forms of deviant sexual behavior were classifiable as adulteresses, prohibited to their husbands—precisely the concern voiced by the exorcists in this case.⁶³ The final detail suggesting the sexual nature of the relationship between the woman and Samuel—at least in this young woman's mind—was the spirit's chosen point of departure from her body, her vagina. The account is discreet about this point, but the woman seems to have maintained that blood flow from her vagina was due to his departure and sufficed to demonstrate that he had left.⁶⁴ Unfortunately for her, however, he soon returned, and only eight days later she died.⁶⁵ Given the amount of smoke to which she was subjected in the course of the exorcism, it seems likely that irresponsibility on the exorcists' part may have brought about her death—attributed in the account to "choking" at the hands of the spirit.

Untangling what we have learned about this case, we may distinguish a meaning that this event may have had for the young woman possessed and perhaps for her family and others who gathered around her during those difficult days out of concern and curiosity. Another meaning may be discerned in Falcon's *use* of the event in his constructed narrative, printed as a broadsheet for circulation throughout the Jewish world. What was Jewry at large to learn from the suffering and death of this innocent woman?

Whatever the etiology of the affliction that brought so much suffering upon this young woman, the disclosure of a network of filiations between the possessed and her possessor certainly suggests that the episode was a meaningful struggle between familiar parties. A psychodynamic reading would highlight the sexual anxiety felt by this woman, left behind by her husband—perhaps away on business—and some lurking feelings of guilt over improper feelings for Samuel. The "other" that has displaced her "self" has confessed his lust for her and his utter disregard for her husband; he has also given voice to sentiments at odds with the pietistic standards that climaxed in the years around the possession. Perhaps struggling with a *converso* legacy, her "other" spoke the voice of Esther, the hidden one, risking transgression in the hope of eliciting the King's compassion.⁶⁶ And

only the degenerate who was Samuel could utter the guilelessly heretical words of a popular *philosophia perennis*: all religions are equal.

For those who witnessed this incursion of the dead into the land of the living, several points therefore emerged with palpable clarity:⁶⁷

1. Life persists after death. Few could have imagined otherwise then, but the appearance of the dead made the conclusion inescapable. In a later period, when this tenet became contentious, Falcon's account, along with others, was called upon to prove decisively what had once been obvious.⁶⁸
2. The wicked are punished after death. Judging from Falcon's introduction alone, this tenet was all too imaginable. During the case itself, Falcon did not miss the opportunity to ask the spirit to describe the punishments he suffered after death (sec. 13).
3. The dead are in close proximity, still embedded in networks of association with the living.⁶⁹ Not only in the graveyard a few paces away, they are in and about the synagogue, blocking Samuel's path as he seeks respite within its walls (sec. 15). New associations with the living may also be formed, as with the exorcists who were called in to rectify the spirit's soul even as they ejected it from the victim's body. A certain dependence of the dead upon the living is thus apparent.
4. The dead cast social and ethical ideals into relief by articulating their transgression.⁷⁰ Sexual propriety is encouraged by the spirit's flagrancy, yet for Falcon at least, there is no more serious violation of communal codes than the subverting of Judaism's exclusive authority. The spirit, in denying this exclusivity and the traditional claim of Judaism's singular truth and in disregarding the most solemn oaths of the Torah, had placed himself beyond redemption. His inability to enter *Gehinnom* signifies this unredeemability—rectifiable only through the intercession of the living saints, the kabbalists. These latter do not, however, always succeed. "One can search in vain," wrote Midelfort, ". . . for Catholic accounts of unsuccessful exorcisms."⁷¹ Not so in the Jewish literature of the period, which begins with failures and is thereafter regularly punctuated with them. The didactic punch of these early accounts might even have been weakened by success, for in becoming a hagiographic genre, the fear of heaven inculcated by the spirit's travails might be supplanted by the benign hope of miraculous, salvific intercession regardless of one's sins. For writers like Falcon, religious authority could be strengthened no less by the didactic inculcating

of its values (through fear) than by the hagiographic amplification of its leading personalities.

The Young Man in Safed

Sambari's text conjoins another possession episode with the Falcon account. This second case does not seem to have been part of the original broadsheet, as the signatories on the latter appear immediately after the recounting of the woman's death. The case, as we have noted, is said to have taken place contemporaneously in Safed by Sambari, where other versions omit its location. It certainly pairs well with the Falcon account, in any case, with which it has much in common. This time, the victim was a young man, into whom the spirit of another dead young man entered. The spirit's greatest lament was not his own cruel fate but that of his young widow. Because he had died at sea, his young bride was trapped in *agunah* status. Such a status applies to the wife of a man who has disappeared without granting her a divorce, who is thus forbidden from remarrying unless reliable news of his death arrives.⁷² While we are given no details, the account relates that the spirit argued assiduously with the assembled rabbis to permit her to remarry, even "invoking rabbinic teachings" in defense of his position (sec. 2).

Then come the disclosures and revelations: the woman, unable to remarry, is engaged in illicit sexual relationships; the spirit's bitter fate is also a punishment for his having had intercourse with a married woman in Constantinople, a transgression punishable by death in classical Jewish sources beginning in the Bible (Lev. 20:10). His death by drowning thus fulfilled the requirement that one guilty of adultery die by choking, a neat fact that may bespeak the learned construction of the whole account.⁷³ When a group of young men comes in to examine the possessed, the spirit is quick to reveal clairvoyantly that they too were guilty of adulterous activities, which they immediately confess. Like the Falcon case, then, the case of the possession of the young man in Safed suggests a network of sexual intrigue on the part of the victim, his spirit, and his family—here his wife. If the account is at all factual, it is hard to allay the suspicion that the possessed man was somehow involved sexually with the widow. Psychodynamically, the emergence of the dead on the scene facilitated the dramatic demand for her release from the accursed *agunah* status while allowing for the transference of the possessed's feelings of guilt at his involvement with a married woman upon her husband and all the young men who come to see their peer. The ability of the spirit to argue with the sages

bespeaks a degree of learning that would prompt guilt over adultery, if not its avoidance.⁷⁴

While sexual transgression may be most prominent in this account, the Torah is also championed: by the dead who would still abide by its rules and by the implementation of its statutes even when lack of evidence, let alone judicial autonomy, prevented ordained penalties from being carried out. The Torah called for the choking of the adulterer, and choke he did. Thus the dead man continued to live; he was punished; he made claims of, and was dependent upon, the living; and his sins, manner of death, and ongoing participation in learned dialectical modes of argumentation reestablish core values of the religious tradition and its overall cogency.

The Luria Cases

1571: The Spirit in the Widow/Woman of Safed

Although they were already in Safed, neither Luria nor Vital participated in the exorcism documented by Falcon. They did, however, participate in other exorcisms in 1571, including one or two⁷⁵ involving a possessed woman, and another involving a possessed young man. The reports of these cases became standard inclusions in seventeenth-century hagiographic works dedicated to Luria and his circle. The case of the possessed widow of Safed was even printed twice in Naftali Bacharach's *Emek ha-Melekh* (Amsterdam, 1648).⁷⁶ The other oft-published case involving a woman is quite similar to the account of the widow and may simply be a reworking of the same material; the two cases were not printed alongside one another until 1720, when a collector of these accounts, Shlomo Gabbai of Constantinople, failed to note their essential similarity. In addition to these widely circulated accounts, Vital's "private" diary, *Sefer ha-Hezyonot*, provides some external corroboration of this case.⁷⁷ Indeed, while the report of the possession of the widow is presented by an anonymous narrator, the other reports purport to be first-person accounts written by Vital himself.

The possession of the young nephew of R. Yehoshua Bin Nun is itself preserved in two distinct forms, one reported by an anonymous narrator, the other ostensibly by Vital. The two versions have much in common: a young man, suffering for years from a recurring illness, is diagnosed by Luria as a victim of spirit possession. In each, the spirit explains at Luria's command that he has possessed the nephew to avenge the wrong committed against him by the young man in his previous incarnation.⁷⁸ Luria

prevails upon the spirit to abandon his quest for vengeance and to leave the young man voluntarily. The spirit agrees, but on the condition that the young man be isolated from any contact with females for a full week. Luria, while recognizing the difficulty of these terms, accepts them. At this point, the spirit departs, and Luria establishes a watch over the boy.⁷⁹ According to both accounts, the young man was left alone mistakenly in the course of the watch; during that time, his aunt arrived to celebrate his recovery. Finding the young man, she kissed him with joy. At that moment, the spirit returned and choked the lad to death.⁸⁰ Having been associated with the episode, Luria quickly departs from Safed to escape punishment from the Turkish authorities in connection with the young man's demise.⁸¹ This short, simple account focuses on the dramatic consequences of sin, exemplifying the indefatigable relentlessness of what we might call transmigrational *lex talionis*. While blessed with magical gifts and extraordinary powers, even Luria is ultimately unable to rescue this poor young man from his deceased avenger. It may be no accident that this account is the only one in which Luria plays the role of exorcist actively; in other cases, Luria provided others with the requisite instruction to expel unwelcome spirits as we will see below.

With the account of the possession of the widow of Safed, we return to a case of Falcon-like proportions. Unlike the Falcon report, this account opens without any didactic introduction.⁸² In this case, we are confronted immediately by the penetration of the spirit into the poor widow, a penetration that caused her great suffering. Her suffering notwithstanding, however, we are told that the immediate consequence of this affliction was her transformation into a public attraction in Safed. She was visited by many people, answering their questions and revealing their innermost troubles and desires. Two of the three major versions of the account portray the scene in terms that seem to normalize her newfound clairvoyant powers and relation to her community, while the third adheres more strictly to a problematized portrayal of the situation.⁸³ In the latter, the visitors never cease imploring the spirit to leave the poor widow in peace so that she may support herself and her children, while the spirit's clairvoyance is devoted to the exposure of the visitor's sins, to their public embarrassment. When a sage finally visits the woman, the spirit declares himself to be this rabbi's former student.⁸⁴ Again, the same sources that normalized the woman's interactions with her previous visitors leave us here with a picture of the spirit as at least a formerly learned rabbinical student, while the third supplements the encounter with the spirit's admission that while a student of the sage, he was often rebuked for his foul behavior.⁸⁵

Finally, according to all accounts, the woman's sufferings became so unbearable that her family sought out the services of R. Isaac Luria, whom they hoped would exorcise the spirit. Unable or unwilling to attend to the matter personally, Luria sent Vital to the woman after empowering him through the laying of hands and furnishing him with mystical intentions and threats that had the capacity to evict the spirit against its will.⁸⁶ Thus prepared, Vital made his way to the widow's house. Vital never forgot this first meeting with the woman and included a description of the encounter in his diary decades later. This private journal entry is very similar to the versions presented in the three "popular" accounts.

The year 5331 [1571]. When I was in Safed, my teacher of blessed memory taught me to expel evil spirits by the power of the unification that he taught me. When I went to him, the woman was lying on the bed. I sat beside her, and he turned his face away from me to the other side. I told him to turn his face to me to speak with me, that he depart, though he was unwilling. I then squeezed his face with my hand, at which point he said to me, "Is not turning my face towards you a reason to strike me? I did not do this out of evil, but because your face is alight with a great burning fire and my soul is incinerated if I look at you from the extent of your holiness."⁸⁷

While clearly afflicted, and indeed bedridden, the woman's clairvoyant powers are unabated. Her avoidance of face-to-face contact with Vital, the spirit explains, was due to Vital's sublime holiness, a quality of Vital's that seems to have been appreciated primarily by men and women gifted with clairvoyant powers.⁸⁸ For Vital, this meeting was recalled as an encounter with yet another visionary who was able to assess his spiritual stature. While quite willing to accept the testimony of visionary women to this effect,⁸⁹ this short entry exhibits, through its evident confusion of gendered pronouns, the acute cognitive dissonance felt by Vital in encountering a visionary of this kind—demonic/clairvoyant/female/male.⁹⁰ The *woman* was lying on the bed; he sat beside *her*. Yet *he* turned *his* face away. Vital did not hesitate to use physical force to respond to this perceived insolence, and "squeezed *his* face" with his hand to bring about the face-to-face encounter.⁹¹

Here we might note the small but telling differences between the accounts of this meeting in *Sefer ha-Hezyonot* and in the three other accounts. The popular accounts fail to mention that the woman was in bed when Vital arrived; they also claim that Vital used a "decree" to force the spirit to face him. Finally, it is the sinfulness of the spirit that, in the popular

accounts, explains the spirit's inability to face Vital rather than the spirit's visionary insight of Vital's spiritual grandeur. From these differences, we may see precisely the areas in which accounts that have some factual basis are reported quite accurately but with omissions and additions that bowdlerize the texts where they might prove embarrassing or insufficiently didactic. Apparently a portrait of Vital grabbing a visionary woman in her bedchamber was not what the writers and redactors of these accounts had in mind.⁹²

Sexual transgression is at the heart of this case, the spirit's sin being the fathering of bastards in an adulterous affair with a married woman. In his conversation with Vital, the spirit recounts his sins and (at greater length) the travails he has undergone since his death by drowning.⁹³ After having been refused entry into *Gehinnom* by ten thousand sinners more worthy than he, the spirit attempted to find refuge in a Jewish inhabitant of the city of Ormuz, near India.⁹⁴ To his misfortune, not a single Jew in that city could provide him with an inhabitable body. Here again, sexual transgression figures prominently. Owing to their "fornication with menstruating and Gentile women," the bodies of these Jews are filled and surrounded with the forces of defilement. The account of this case, perhaps more than any other, is indeed rife with images of bodies filled—filled with these forces of defilement, with souls of the living and the dead, and even with fetuses.⁹⁵ As the spirit could not enter these Jewish bodies in Ormuz, so polluted as to have done injury even to his reprobate soul, in desperation he entered a doe in the wilderness of Gaza.⁹⁶ This doe, however, was itself an unsuitable container—"for the soul of a human being and the soul of a beast are not equal, for one walks upright and the other bent. Also, the soul of the beast is full of filth and is repulsive, its smell foul before the soul of a human being. And its food is not human food." To make matters worse, the doe was pregnant, and therefore already quite full—painfully so for the spirit as well as the doe, for "three souls cannot dwell together" in a single body. The doe, in agony, ran wildly in the hills and through rocky terrain, her belly swollen, until it split open, pouring out the three occupants with her death.⁹⁷

The next bodily container for the spirit was to be a Kohen (a Jew of the priestly caste) in the city of Nablus. This gentleman, apparently realizing that he was possessed, called in the local expert exorcists for assistance. In this case, the spirit tells us, not kabbalists but Muslim clerics were summoned. This detail accords well with what we know about Jewish life in mid-sixteenth-century Nablus. Unlike the Jews in Safed, who lived in a separate Jewish quarter, the Jews of Nablus lived in mixed Jewish-Muslim neighborhoods.⁹⁸ It also reminds us of the acceptance of

non-Jewish magical healers in Jewish society.⁹⁹ The Islamic holy men, using incantations, adjurations, and amulets, do, in fact, succeed in exorcizing the spirit from the Kohen. Here again, it is the bodily vessel and its contents that determine the matter. Responding to Vital's astonishment that the Muslims' magio-mystical arsenal was capable of effecting the exorcism, the spirit explains that the techniques employed by the Muslims infused the Kohen's body with so many defiling spirits that he had to leave to avoid the kind of contamination he had feared contracting from the impure contents of the bodies of the Jews of Ormuz.¹⁰⁰

Now to the question of the motivation underlying the spirit's possession of the widow. Early modern Christian attitudes regarding demonic motivations underlying possession reflected theological premises quite remote from Jewish conceptions. In his *Traicté des Energumènes* of 1599, Pierre de Bérulle (Léon D'Alexis) explained the devil's motives in a manner that reveals how broad the gulf could be between Jewish and Christian views. The devil, he argued, being "the ape of God,"¹⁰¹ is dedicated to incarnating himself in men, as did Christ himself. This, he suggested, accounts for the proliferation of possession since the birth of Christ.¹⁰² Most Catholic theologians of the sixteenth century indeed assumed that demonic possession was most likely to occur as a punishment for the sins of the possessed, while popular accounts most commonly portray victims of possession as "pious young Christians."¹⁰³ Is there a similar disparity between learned and popular views of this issue in Jewish culture? R. Moses Cordovero stated in his *Drisbot be-Inyane ba-Malakhim* (Inquiries concerning Angels) that "the types of *ibbur* depend on a man's moral and spiritual state, whether his soul is entered by a good soul—because he has done a *mitzvah*—or an evil soul—because he has committed some sin."¹⁰⁴ While we have few sources that can directly provide a "popular" Jewish conception of the typical victim of spirit possession, we may be able to infer a disparity of this kind from the degree of inner confusion on this point displayed in Jewish sources. Early modern Jewish possession accounts shift inconsistently between affirmations of the innocence and even piety of the victim and ascriptions of blame—often of the same person. When the exorcists in the Falcon case asked the spirit of Samuel Zarfati what allowed him to possess a "kosher" woman, he replies that the woman had inadvertently cast some mud upon him as he was hovering in her midst.¹⁰⁵ In the case currently under consideration, we know that the most egregious sin of the spirit was sexual, but what of the widow? The sin that allows for the possession to take place seems not much less trivial, though "justifiable" on the basis of the positions staked out in the contemporary Jewish demonological literature. As Vital himself wrote in his treatise on transmigration,

"it sometimes happens that notwithstanding the presence in a person of a pure and sublime soul, he may come at some point to anger. Then, [that soul] will depart from him, and in its place will enter another, inferior soul."¹⁰⁶ Before concluding his exorcism of the widow (and the woman in case 4), Vital asks the spirit how he obtained permission to enter his victim's body:

The spirit responded: "I spent one night in her house. At dawn, this woman arose from her bed and wanted to light a fire from the stone and iron, but the burnt rag did not catch the sparks. She persisted stubbornly, but did not succeed. She then became intensely angry, and cast the iron and the stone and the burnt rag—everything—from her hand to the ground, and angrily said, 'to Satan with you!' Immediately I was given permission to enter her body."¹⁰⁷

What appears to us as a small matter, a casual curse out of frustration, was evidently taken quite seriously. This severe approach to cursing had its basis in the strict enforcement of the third commandment, and traditional Jewish law prescribed penalties for such verbal crimes that paralleled those meted out to witches and idolators.¹⁰⁸ Sixteenth-century Jews were not alone in regarding the consequences of cursing most gravely; Christian tales of possession often dealt with the consequences of the curse "the devil take you."¹⁰⁹ M. Flynn has recently noted that "blasphemy was the most frequently censured religious offence of the Spanish people in the early modern period, far outnumbering convictions on charges of Judaism, Lutheranism, Illuminism, sexual immorality or witchcraft."¹¹⁰ Moreover, J.-P. Dedieu's work has shown that, as in the expression by the woman in the possession case under our consideration, the Spanish Inquisitors were concerned with "petty crimes . . . of the word . . . that never attained the status of formal heresy, much less of unbelief."¹¹¹ These types of verbal offenses, known in Spain as *palabras*, seem to have been particularly prevalent in the mid-sixteenth century. In addition to her angrily spoken words, the woman had thrown down the stone and rag in frustration. Such an act, like cursing, was traditionally considered an invitation to the demonic forces to act, as we read, for example, in zoharic passages.¹¹² Nevertheless, according to our account, Vital could not accept the idea that a woman could be possessed for letting an ill-chosen word, rock, or rag slip on that cold morning. The spirit, for his part, was forthcoming with a more serious transgression that indeed justified his siege. Here, we return again to the issue of skepticism; the curse was merely the outward expression of a deeper heretical posture.

“Know,” the spirit tells Vital, “that this woman’s inside is not like her outside.” While participating in the religious observances of Safed’s Jewish community, the widow had her doubts.

For she does not believe in the miracles that the Holy One, Blessed be He, did for Israel, and in particular in the Exodus from Egypt. Every Passover night, when all of Israel are rejoicing and good hearted, reciting the great *Hallel*¹¹³ and telling of the Exodus from Egypt, it is vanity in her eyes, a mockery and a farce. And she thinks in her heart that there was never a miracle such as this.¹¹⁴

At this point, Vital turns his attention away from the spirit and focuses upon the widow.

Immediately the Rav said to the woman, “Do you believe with perfect belief that the Holy One, Blessed be He is One and Unique, and that He created the heavens and the earth, and that He has the power and capacity to do anything that He desires, and that there is no one who can tell him what to do?” She responded to him and said, “Yes, I believe in it all in perfect faith.” The Rav, may his memory be a blessing, further said to her, “Do you believe in perfect faith that the Holy One, blessed be He, took us out of Egypt from the house of slavery, and split the sea for us, and accomplished many miracles for us?” She responded, “Yes, master, I believe in it all with perfect faith, and if I had at times a different view, I regret it.” And she began to cry.

This confrontation concluded, Vital speedily exorcises the spirit with little difficulty.¹¹⁵

Finally, in an epilogue that again raises the issue of the woman’s skepticism and religious identification with the traditional community, we are told that the spirit continued to threaten the woman after its exorcism from her body. Concerned, her relatives returned to Luria for help, and he again sent Vital as his emissary. This time, Vital was to check the integrity of the mezuzah of her home to insure that she was adequately protected from evil.¹¹⁶ Upon inspection, however, Vital discovered that the woman had no mezuzah whatsoever upon her doorpost.

Once again, then, we are confronted with an account that presents a possessed woman who, by virtue of her possession, is able to function as type of clairvoyant figure in the community, providing “services” not far removed from those provided by figures such as Luria.¹¹⁷ She attracts substantial numbers of people and is able to discern their hidden sins and desires. Her visionary ability also results in a caustic encounter with Vital,

recorded by him in his journal years later. By comparing the various versions of the story that have survived, we note apparent evidence of discomfort with aspects of this scenario—bowdlerization of unsavory details and the heightening of didactic elements signifying later redactions of an account that may have originally been penned by Vital himself. Moreover, the spirit’s presence in the woman fulfills the functions considered above: his appearance before and among the living demonstrates the persistence of life after death, while his suffering dramatizes and embodies the doctrine of punishment for the wicked. While there is little that suggests a relationship between the spirit and the widow, he is not unknown in the community and soon establishes himself as a former student of a leading rabbinic figure in Safed. Finally, the sins of the spirit, and those of the widow no less, by stark transgression cast in bold relief the values and aspirations of the rabbinic writers who crafted the account, if not broader sectors of the cultural environment. Sexual licentiousness and popular skepticism emerge in this account, as in others we have examined, as fundamental threats to communal leadership struggling to establish a community on the basis of pietistic ideals.

In seeking to understand the apparent proliferation of the phenomenon of spirit possession in sixteenth-century Safed, these efforts to forge a pietistic community cannot be forgotten. In addition to the Iberian cultural influences on these developments,¹¹⁸ Safed constituted a pressure cooker uniquely capable of stimulating apparitional contact with its dead through the idiom of possession. We ought to recall that in northern Germany, Midelfort discovered twice as many cases of demon possession in this period than in southern Germany, with the greatest frequency “among nunneries and among the most gnesio-Lutheran areas.” In his estimation, this concentration was due to the fact that “in both situations the attempt to live an ever more perfect life may have led to stronger temptations [manifested as demonic possession] than those felt in other parts of Germany.”¹¹⁹ It would be difficult not to notice how aptly this observation applies to the religious environment of sixteenth-century Safed, the epicenter of the possession phenomenon in Jewish culture. As Scholem described it, “Ascetic piety reigned supreme in Safed. At first the religious ideal of a mystical elite only, asceticism now allied itself to an individual and public morality based on the new kabbalism; it struck deep roots in the collective consciousness.”¹²⁰ Joseph Dan has also commented upon the “megalomaniacal” posture that reigned in Safed in this period:

The very pretension of Safed to be a spiritual center and the epicenter of ordination in the Jewish world after the destruction of the center in Spain has within it something of megalomania: a remote village, which even

in its apex of development had a population smaller than scores of Jewish communities in Europe—and which lacked the vitality of a large and crowded assembly of Jews, with a high level of culture and organization—dared to aspire to serve as a replacement for the tremendous center that was destroyed in Spain, and to carry the miracle of redemption to the whole community of Israel.¹²¹

In short, every element was present in the culture of mid-sixteenth-century Safed to make it a conducive environment for a substantial increase in the incidence of spirit possession. Situated in an Islamic world with active traditions of *jinn* possession and exorcism, on more than one occasion rabbis called on Arab sorcerers for assistance in the difficult task of expelling the spirits.¹²² Moreover, substantial number of Spanish and Portuguese immigrants, carrying with them stories, memories, theory, and praxis as well as inner conflicts and turmoil, elation and despair, faith and doubt, had made Safed their new home. Rabbinic leadership in Safed was also leading a campaign to make of this newly developed community a new spiritual center for world Jewry, producing didactic texts designed to inculcate its values and discipline its people. Finally, embracing the cemetery at its very heart, the people of Safed were living with their dead in exceedingly close proximity. With visionary mystics beholding apparitions of the dead at every turn, with farm animals being disclosed as deceased relatives, and with the quotidian brushes with death faced by a society still beleaguered by plagues and the tragic mortality of the young, possession by the dead could be regarded as “normal.” Its etiology was certainly familiar to all; if each possession case required careful diagnosis and inquiry to be established as authentic, no doubts were voiced as to its fundamental plausibility. The men and women who were thus possessed were full somatic participants in the ferment that characterized their cultural environment. Their experience and its diffusion through the accounts carefully drafted by leading Safedian figures was to resonate for centuries in Jewish communities around the world for whom Safed, itself long since in decline, had come to represent pietistic aspiration and achievement.¹²³

Notes

This essay is a revision of chapter 5 of my doctoral dissertation, “Spirit Possession and the Construction of Early Modern Jewish Religiosity,” (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1999). Another version of the essay will appear in my book, *His-*

stories of the Spirits: Dybbuk Possession, Magical Exorcism and Early Modern Judaism (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, forthcoming.)

1. H. Vital, *Sha'ar ha-Gilgulim*, vol. 10, *Kitve Rabbenu ha-Ari ZT”L*, ed. Y. Z. Brandwein (Jerusalem: n.p., 1988), chap. 24, 59a.

2. See, for example, the material in *Toledot ha-Ari, Studies and Texts*, ed. M. Benayahu (in Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 1967), 236–37.

3. Vital emphasizes the positive role played by the sacred imagination in cultivating mystical experience. See *Sha'are Kedushah* (Jerusalem: Eshkol, 1985), 3:gate 5, 89–90. Nevertheless, here he emphasizes the nonimaginary nature of Luria's visions. Compare *Sha'ar ha-Gilgulim*, 117b.

4. See M. Benayahu, “Devotional Practices of the Kabbalists of Safed in Meron” (in Hebrew), in *Sefer Zfat [Sefumot 6]*, ed. M. Benayahu and Y. B. Zvi (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 1962), 10–40; P. Giller, “Recovering the Sanctity of the Galilee: the Veneration of Sacred Relics in Classical Kabbalah,” *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 4 (1994): 147–69; M. Ish Shalom, *Kivve Avot* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1948); A. Yaari, “History of the Pilgrimage to Meron” (in Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 31 (1961): 72–101. A. David treats the location of the Jewish quarter of sixteenth-century Safed in *To Come to the Land: Immigration and Settlement in Sixteenth-Century Eretz-Israel*, trans. D. Ordan (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1999), 95–97.

Sha'ar ha-Gilgulim concludes with a kind of traveler's guide to the tombs of Safed and its environs, including examples of tombs identified (or reidentified) by Luria. See 181a–185b.

5. C. M. N. Eire, *From Madrid to Purgatory: The Art and Craft of Dying in Sixteenth-Century Spain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 518–19.

6. Alsheikh (c. 1507, Adrianople or Salonika–1597, Damascus) ordained Vital in 1590. Notwithstanding his desire to study Kabbalah with Luria nearly twenty years earlier, Alsheikh—like his own teacher, R. Joseph Karo—was not accepted as a student by the master. On this matter, see Vital's account in *Sefer ha-Hezyonot*, ed. A. Z. Aescoly (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1954), 8; and D. Tamar's discussion in “On the Book *Toledot ha-Ari*” (in Hebrew), in his *Mehkarim be-Toldot ha-Yehudim be-Eretz Yisrael u'Ve-Italia* (Jerusalem: Rubin Mass, 1986), 166–93, esp. 176–77. Tamar established the date of Alsheikh's death in “Towards the Clarification of the Years of the Deaths of the Great Sages of the Land of Israel and Turkey” (in Hebrew), in his *Mehkarim be-Toldot ha-Yehudim be-Eretz Yisrael u'Ve-Artzot ha-Mizrab* (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1981), 94–106; he posited the existence of a second “Moshe Alsheikh” in “Gleanings regarding *Sefer ha-Hezyonot*” (in Hebrew), *Sinai* 46.91 (1982): 92–96. See also the lengthy treatment of Alsheikh in M. Benayahu, *Yosef Behiri: Maran Rabi Yosef Karo* (Joseph, My Chosen: Our Master Rabbi Joseph Karo) (Jerusalem: Yad Harav Nisim, 1991), esp. 233–55. On the *hatzer* (literally, court) in which Alsheikh and Vital studied, see M. Benayahu, “R. Hayyim Vital in Jerusalem” (in Hebrew), *Sinai* 30 (1952): 65–75; and Chajes, “Spirit Possession,” chap. 6.

7. Cited from the critical edition prepared by M. Pachter, “Terrible Vision,”

by R. Moses Alsheikh" (in Hebrew), in his *From Safed's Hidden Treasures: Studies and Texts concerning the History of Safed and Its Sages in the Sixteenth Century* (Jerusalem: Shazar Center, 1994), 69–117; citation from 112–13.

8. Safed's numerical value is 21 if one drops the zeros from each of its letters (*mispar katan*). Thus צ=90, פ=80, ה=400 gives us 9+8+4=21. Adding the entire word itself (the *kollel*) brings us to 22.

9. א. ע. ח. ק. נ. Now simply 90+80+400=570. Azulai explains earlier in this chapter the significance of the word חקע (literally "pitch," as in Gen. 31:25) as alluding to the Cave of Machpelah, the passageway to the Garden of Eden given its numerical equivalence to עובר לסוחר (literally, current money with the merchant). This latter phrase was mystically interpreted in earlier kabbalistic literature as "passage to the supernal worlds." See, for example, Zohar 1:123b and 141a; 3: 128b.

10. The Cave of Makhpelah, the first and foremost grave in the Bible (Gen. 23), was the resting place of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs. Located in Hebron, this cave was held by mystical tradition as the entrance to the Garden of Eden. See, for example, Zohar 1:127a, 219a, 248b.

11. A. Azulai, *Hesed le-Avraham* (1685; reprint, Jerusalem: Ben-Yishai Hotza'ah le-Or, [1996]), 115–16.

12. On the especially intense link between spiritual ecstasy and death in early modern Spain, see Eire, *From Madrid to Purgatory*, 6–7, 396–98, 411–12.

13. A longing for death is also apparent in Safedian mystical literature, from R. Joseph Karo's wishes to be burned at the stake—inspired by the martyrdom of Shlomo Molkho—to the frequent meditations on death and martyrdom in the prayer intentions of Luria. On Karo's death wish, see J. Karo, *Maggid Mesbarim* (Amsterdam, 1708), 65a; and R. J. Z. Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo: Lawyer and Mystic*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1977), 98–99. On "martyrological devotion during prayer" from the thirteenth to the nineteenth century, see M. Fishbane, "The Imagination of Death in Jewish Spirituality," in *Death, Ecstasy, and Other-Worldly Journeys*, ed. J. Collins and M. Fishbane (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 183–208. Luria's "daring" amplification of death meditations in worship is discussed on 199–202. Fishbane's full treatment of the subject may be found in his *The Kiss of God: Spiritual and Mystical Death in Judaism* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1993). See also E. R. Wolfson's contribution to the *Death, Ecstasy and Other-Worldly Journeys* volume, "Weeping, Death, and Spiritual Ascent in Sixteenth-Century Jewish Mysticism," esp. 230–31.

On the phenomenon of apparitions, see W. A. Christian Jr., *Apparitions in Late Medieval and Renaissance Spain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981); C. M. Staehlin, *Apariciones* (Madrid: Razón y Fe, 1954).

14. Another Safedian who was associated with frequent contact with the dead was R. Lapidot Ashkenazi. See *Sefer ba-Hezyonot*, 5. On this figure and the stories associated with him, see M. Idel, "R. Yehudah Hallewa and His *Tzafnat Pa'aneah*" (in Hebrew), *Shalem: Studies in the History of the Jews in Eretz-Israel* 4 (1984): 119–48, esp. 145–48; R. Meroz, "From the Compilation of Ephraim Penzieri: The Ari's Homily in Jerusalem and the Intentions for Eating" (in Hebrew), in *Jerusalem*

Studies in Jewish Thought, vol. 10, *Kabbalat ha-Ari*, ed. R. Elior and Y. Liebes (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1992), 235; D. B. Ruderman, *A Valley of Vision: The Heavenly Journey of Abraham ben Hananiah Yagel* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 220–21; idem, *Kabbalah, Magic, and Science: The Cultural Universe of a Sixteenth-Century Jewish Physician* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), 125–26.

15. See S. Avizur, "Safed—Center of the Manufacture of Woven Woolens in the Fifteenth Century" (in Hebrew), *Sefunot* 6 (1962): 43–69.

16. For a poetic introduction to the superabundance of rabbinic talent that gathered in sixteenth-century Safed, see the classic essay by S. Schechter, "Safed in the Sixteenth Century: A City of Legists and Mystics," in idem, *Studies in Judaism*, 2nd ser. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1908), 202–328.

17. See B. Lewis, *Notes and Documents from the Turkish Archives: A Contribution to the History of the Jews in the Ottoman Empire* (Jerusalem: Israel Oriental Society, 1952), 5–7; A. David, "Demographic Changes in the Safed Jewish Community of the 16th Century," *Occident and Orient: A Tribute to the Memory of Alexander Scheiber*, ed. R. Dan (Budapest: Akademiai Kiado, 1988), 83–93.

18. See A. David, "Safed, foyer de retour au judaïsme de 'conversos' au XVIIe siècle," *Revue des études juives* 146.1–2 (1986): 63–83.

19. See, for example, B. Bennassar, *The Spanish Character: Attitudes and Mentalities from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Century*, trans. B. Keen (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), esp. chap. 9.

20. Giller, "Recovering the Sanctity," 155.

21. See appendix A, case 3, sec. 4. Visitations of the dead in dreams were not unknown. See, for example, E. de Vidas, *Reshit Hokhmah ba-Shalem*, ed. C. Waldman (Jerusalem: Or Hamussar, 1984), 1:238, 471 (Gate of Fear 12:49; Gate of Love 6:35).

22. See M. Sluhovsky, "A Divine Apparition or Demonic Possession? Female Agency and Church Authority in Demonic Possession in Sixteenth-Century France" *Sixteenth Century Journal* 27.4 (1995): 1036–52. In all of the cases discussed here by Sluhovsky, the possessed initially "identified their possessing agency as a messenger who reappeared from the dead to demand stricter obedience by family members of religious precepts."

23. See the discussion in J.-C. Schmitt, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages: The Living and the Dead in Medieval Society*, trans. T. L. Fagan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

24. See P.-A. Sigal, "La possession démoniaque dans la région de Florence au XVe siècle d'après les miracles de Saint Jean Gualbert," in *Histoire et société: Mélanges offerts à Georges Duby*, vol. 3 (Aix-en-Provence: Publications de l'Université de Provence, 1992); Schmitt, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages*; Christian, *Apparitions*; N. Caciola, "Discerning Spirits: Sanctity and Possession in the Later Middle Ages" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1994), part 2. The Islamic parallel must also be noted. See E. Zbinden, *Die Djinn des Islam und der altorientalische geisterglaube* (Bern: Paul Haupt, 1953). On the tension between Islamic teachings and

popular beliefs with regard to the evil dead and their ability to harm the living, see p. 94.

25. See my "Judgments Sweetened: Possession and Exorcism in Early Modern Jewish Culture," *Journal of Early Modern History* 1.2 (1997): 124–69.

26. See, for example, the excellent recent discussion and bibliography in P. J. Geary, "Saints, Scholars, and Society: The Elusive Goal," in idem, *Living with the Dead in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 9–29. See also Eire, *From Madrid to Purgatory*, 371–76.

27. See my *Histories of the Spirits*.

28. MS. B.5.27, Trinity College, Dublin. This work and its author have been treated by M. Idel in two articles: "Inquiries into the Doctrine of *Sefer ha-Meshiv*" (in Hebrew), *Sefunot* 2.17 (1983): 185–266; and "R. Yehudah Hallewa and His *Zafnat Pa'aneah*" (in Hebrew), *Shalem: Studies in the History of the Jews in Eretz-Israel* 4 (1984): 119–48.

29. I treat the Damascus case at length in a forthcoming article, "Off the Kabbalistic [Accepted] Path: Jewish Mystical Women in Light of R. Hayyim Vital's *Sefer ha-Hezyonot*," (in Hebrew) *Zion* (forthcoming). Vital's *Sefer ha-Hezyonot* is now available in an English translation in *Jewish Mystical Autobiographies*, trans. and ed. M. Faierstein (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1999).

30. There is little to suggest that the case of *dybbuk* possession in ibn Yahia's *Shalshelet ha-Kabbalah* resulted from Safedian influence. *Shalshelet ha-Kabbalah* was published in 1586, decades before the Safedian cases were published for the first time. J. Dan posits such influence in "The Case of the Spirit and the She-Demon" (in Hebrew), *Ha-Sifrut* 18–19 (1974): 74–84, esp. 75.

31. See M. Gaster, ed., *Maaseh Book* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1934), 301–03.

32. On Menasseh ben Israel (1604–57), see *Menasseh ben Israel and His World*, ed. Y. Kaplan, H. Méchoulan, and R. H. Popkin (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1989). For further bibliographic information, see J. H. Copenhagen, *Menasseh ben Israel: Manuel Dias Soeiro, 1604–1657: A Bibliography* (Jerusalem: Misgav Yerushalayim, 1990).

33. A list of these works and the accounts they contain may be found in appendix 1 of Chajes, "Spirit Possession."

34. If we include the evil *ibburim* suffered by mystics in Luria's circle (including Vital and Yehudah Mishan), the number of cases would grow. We might also note that Vital writes that it was Luria's practice to send him to perform exorcisms, indicating that he did so on a somewhat regular basis. See "*Ma'aseh Nissim shel ha-Ari Z"L* (*Shivve ha-Ari*)," in *Me'irat 'Ainayim*, ed. S. b. D. Gabbai (Constantinople: n.p., 1666), 17a–17b (misprinted as 16a–b).

35. For example, the Yiddish version in the *Ma'aseh Buch*, and the version in Menasseh ben Israel's *Nishmat Hayyim*.

36. Sambari prefaces his reproduction of this account with the phrase, "as I found written in the autograph of the great tamarisk, our teacher the rabbi, R. Elijah Falcon, his memory for life everlasting." *Sefer Divre Yosef by Yosef ben*

Yitzhak Sambari, ed. S. Shtober (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 1994), 319. Compare Benayahu, *Toledoth ha-Ari*, 104, n. 6. Sambari's text contains a number of details missing from other versions, all of which indicate its greater accuracy and freedom from the bowdlerization that plagues all printed versions of these cases. See below.

37. See J. Dan, "Toward the History of Hagiographic Literature" (in Hebrew), *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Folklore* 1 (1981): 82–100; and idem, "Hagiographic Literature: East and West" (in Hebrew), *Pe'amim* 26 (1986): 77–86.

38. On Falcon, see Chajes, "Spirit Possession," chap. 2, n. 135.

39. On the publication of this story as a broadsheet, see Benayahu, *Toledoth ha-Ari*, 47 and 104, n. 6. It is possible, though unlikely, that the printing could have been accomplished in Safed, as the earliest printing press in Safed—and in the entire region—was founded in 1577. See A. Yaari, *Ha-Defus ha-Ivri be-Artzot ha-Mizrah* (Hebrew Printing in the East) (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Press, 1936), 1:10.

40. See *Shalshelet ha-Kabbalah* (Jerusalem: Ha-Dorot ha-Rishonim ve-Korantam, 1962), 204.

41. This centrality was indeed acknowledged by world Jewry. As Pachter notes, "the recognition of the centrality of Safed became one of the unquestioned givens of the period." See his "Terrible Vision," 76, n. 36, and below. On the contemporary propagandistic writing of R. Shlomo Alkabetz (c. 1505, Salonica–1584, Safed) on behalf of Safed, see Pachter's "The Parting Sermon of R. Shlomo Alkabetz in Salonika" (in Hebrew), in idem, *From Safed's Hidden Treasures*, 17–38. On Alkabetz generally, see B. Sack, "The Secret Teaching of R. Shlomo haLevi Alkabetz" (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1977).

42. Many anthropologists have identified possession as a response to "lack of structure and socio-political indeterminacy" or "as an attempt to enrich the spiritual armoury of a community beset by chronic environmental uncertainty, or rapid and inexplicable social change." See M. Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (London: Barrie and Rockcliff, 1970); This is the approach generally advocated by I. M. Lewis as well, in his *Ecstatic Religion: A Study of Shamanism and Spirit Possession* 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1989).

43. Ben Israel, *Nishmat Hayyim*, book 3, chap. 10, 109a–11a. Compare Shtober, *Divrei Yosef*, 319–24.

44. See n. 40.

45. Another sage of Safed (from a well-known Spanish-Portuguese family) whose name also appears alongside those of Joseph Karo and Moses Trani in a halakhic responsum from 1560.

46. Sambari's version has "more than one hundred," while the version in *Nishmat Hayyim* has "nearly one hundred." Accounts of the other Safed exorcisms of the early 1570s also stress the large numbers of people who assembled to observe the proceedings. See, for example, the account published in *Emek ha-Melekh*, 16b–17a.

47. M. de Certeau, "Discourse Disturbed," in idem, *The Writing of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 244–68 (citation 255–56).

48. H. C. E. Midelfort, "The Devil and the German People: Reflections on the Popularity of Demon Possession in Sixteenth-Century Germany," *Religion and Culture in the Renaissance and Reformation, Sixteenth Century Essays and Studies* 11 (1989): 99–119 (citation 119).

49. The problem of agency in demonic possession is an intractable one. It is no less a distortion to suggest that the possessed sought or desired their possession than that they were helpless victims of circumstances beyond their control. Sluhovsky's article, "A Divine Apparition or Demonic Possession?" includes a thoughtful discussion of this problem.

50. *Nishmat Hayyim*, book 3, chap. 10, 109a–11a. See appendix 1 of Chajes, "Spirit Possession," for later works incorporating this account, all of which seem to have found it in Menasseh ben Israel's work. On such bowdlerization by editors seeking to remove "objectionable or offensive references to living or revered personalities," see the remarks of Werblowsky in *Joseph Karo*, 31.

51. Zarfati is a surname given to Jews of French origin. Well-known families by this name lived in Italy and Morocco beginning in the late fifteenth century. The Italian branch included a number of figures by the name of Joseph and Samuel, the names that figure in this possession case. On conversions to Christianity in the Italian Zarfati family in the mid-sixteenth century, see R. Segre, "Sephardic Refugees in Ferrara: Two Notable Families," in *Crisis and Creativity in the Sephardic World, 1391–1648*, ed. B. R. Gampel (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 164–85, esp. 167.

Joseph Zarfati (Sarfati), a rabbi in Fez in the early sixteenth century, converted to Christianity and actively preached against Jews and Judaism under the auspices of his godfather, Pope Julius III (1550–55). This Joseph Zarfati, whose vehemently anti-Jewish sermons were heard by Michel de Montaigne, was an instigator of the condemnation of the Talmud and its subsequent burning in Rome in 1553. See *Encyclopedia Judaica*, s.v. "Sarfati (Zarefati, Sarfatti)," by R. Spiegel. See also K. Stow, *The Jews in Rome*, 2 vols. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1997).

52. See C. Roth, "The Religion of the Marranos," in idem, *A History of the Marranos* (New York: Sefer-Hermon Press, 1992), 168–94; and the doctoral dissertation in preparation by D. Siegman of Columbia University. The spirit's pronouncement of his worst sin also carries a *converso* scent and might be read as a transference of an issue particularly acute for the woman to the spirit within her. See below.

53. This according to Menasseh ben Israel's version, which reads three *wives* rather than *daughters*, as in Sambari. This reading accords better with the expression "from the third one, he passed away," which seems to express that he left her a widow, rather than a divorcee, and makes little sense if referring to his daughter. It also makes the spirit's mention of her current husband more intelligible. Then again, *lexio difficilis* could give Sambari's text the nod.

54. I have not been able to find any information about a figure by this name, spelled די ליריא in Sambari. The name indicates that the man's family was of Portuguese origin, from the town of Leiria.

55. This synagogue was founded around 1525, and led by R. Moses Trani for some fifty years.

56. שכל הדרתה שווא, according to Sambari. Menasseh ben Israel's version has the somewhat more generic "he would speak against the Torah of Moses our teacher, of blessed memory." See sec. 8.

The spirit's statement that "all religions are the same" bespeaks a type of popular skepticism that has not been studied sufficiently. Treatments of skepticism in this period have been primarily devoted to the elite, neo-Pyrrhonist skepticism of figures such as Zarfati's contemporary, Michel de Montaigne. The most significant studies of this high skepticism of the sixteenth century are R. H. Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza*, rev. and enl. ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979); and *The Skeptical Tradition*, ed. M. Burnyeat (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983). Also worthy of mention among the foremost works treating sixteenth-century skepticism is L. Febvre, *The Problem of Unbelief in the Sixteenth Century: The Religion of Rabelais*, trans. B. Gottlieb (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982). See also the suggestive treatment of J. L. Sánchez Lora, *Mujeres, conventos y formas de la religiosidad barroca* (Madrid: Fundacion Universitaria Española, 1988), esp. 217. A trailblazing study of popular skepticism in the early modern period is C. Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms*, trans. J. and A. Tedeschi (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980).

Skepticism among *conversos* has been studied by a number of scholars, though generally they concentrate on the seventeenth century. See Y. Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics: The Marrano of Reason* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989). Dr. Juan de Prado allegedly made the claim in 1643 that all religions were equal, according to inquisitorial testimony discussed by Yovel, 62. See also the recent contributions of D. B. Ruderman in *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery in Early Modern Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), esp. 153–84, 276–80; and the many studies of Y. Kaplan, including his *From Christianity to Judaism: The Story of Isaac Orobio de Castro*, trans. R. Loewe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), esp. 319–22. See also J. Faur, *In the Shadow of History: Jews and Conversos at the Dawn of Modernity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992).

57. I will return to this admission and its meaning in my discussion of skepticism in these accounts below.

58. This example of xenoglossia was examined by Raphael Patai in his article "Exorcism and Xenoglossia among the Safed Kabbalists," *Journal of American Folklore* 91 (1978): 823–35. Patai writes that given the skeptical frame of mind of the exorcists as the identity of the spirit, one must assume that the spirit's display of mastery of the three languages was sufficient to convince them that it was indeed the spirit who was speaking because it exceeded by far any rudimentary knowledge

the woman could have had. That is to say, the account as it stands must be taken as prima facie evidence of an authentic multiple xenoglossia (827–28.)

59. R. C. Finucane, *Appearances of the Dead: A Cultural History of Ghosts* (London: Junction Books, 1982), 84.

60. R. Lamdan has argued that adultery became quite widespread in the Jewish communities of Palestine and Egypt of the sixteenth century. See her “Deviations from Norms of Moral Behavior in the Jewish Society of Eretz Israel and Egypt in the Sixteenth Century” (in Hebrew), in *Sexuality and the Family in History*, ed. I. Bartal and I. Gafni (Jerusalem: Shazar Center, 1998), 119–30.

61. Underwear had not yet been invented. See E. Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 37.

62. For an anthropological study arguing that possession is a means for sexually deprived women to find some measure of sexual satisfaction, see M. E. Spiro, *Burmese Supernaturalism* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1967).

63. See, for example, the responsum by R. Haim Joseph David Azulai (the *Hida*) (1724–1806), *She’elot u’Teshuvot Hayyim Sha’al*, 1:sec. 53. The *Hida* cites responsum sec. 117 of the *Maharam mi-Lublin* to the same question. These responsa also treat male intercourse with female spirits, which is a less halakhically problematic phenomenon. See H. J. Zimmels, *Magicians, Theologians, and Doctors: Studies in Folk-Medicine and Folk-Lore as Reflected in Rabbinical Responsa (12th–19th Centuries)* (New York: Feldheim, 1952), 82.

Jewish mystical literature is replete with discussions and stories of incubi and succubi. See, for example, Zohar 3:276a; R. Hayyim Vital, *Arba Me’ot Shekel Kesef*, Kitve Rabbenu ha-AR”I zt”l ed. Y. Z. Brandwein, (15 vols.) vol. 12 (Jerusalem: n.p., 1998) 252; Ibn Yahia, *Shalshelet ha-Kabbalah*, 195; “*Shivbe ha-Ari*,” in *Sefer ha-Kavanot u-Ma’aseh Nissim*, ed. S. b. M. Gabbai (Constantinople, 1720), 3b. See also Menasseh ben Israel’s extended treatment of the problem in *Nishmat Hayyim*, book 3, chap. 16.

64. While she may simply have been menstruating, it is also possible that the woman hemorrhaged vaginally in the course of her violent seizures. St. Teresa of Avila hemorrhaged vaginally shortly before her death, leading some to suspect that she may have had epilepsy. See M. B. Barton, “Saint Teresa of Avila: Did She Have Epilepsy?” *Catholic Historical Review* 68 (1982): 581–98; Eire, *From Madrid to Purgatory*, 404, n. 17.

65. Rapid repossession was a common phenomenon. Barthélemy Perdoux, an early seventeenth-century French doctor, described it in his *De Morbis Animi* of 1639. His explanations are discussed in S. Ferber, “The Demonic Possession of Marthe Brossier, France 1598–1600,” in *No Gods Except Me: Orthodoxy and Religious Practice in Europe, 1200–1600*, ed. C. Zika (Melbourne: University of Melbourne, History Department, 1991), 59–83, esp. 63.

66. The expression of resignation to the possibility of destruction from Esther 4:16 follows her declaration of determination to come before the king in violation of the law.

67. This analysis of the cultural functioning of spirit possession is based on Finucane, *Appearances of the Dead*, 85–86. Eire has made use of Finucane’s categories in his analysis of St. Teresa’s apparitions. See *From Madrid to Purgatory*, 475.

68. See chapter 7 of Chajes, “Spirit Possession.”

69. The reciprocity between the living and the dead in Ashkenazic Jewish culture is examined by C. Weissler in “The Living and the Dead: Ashkenazic Family Relations in Light of Hebrew and Yiddish Cemetery Prayers,” in idem, *Voices of the Matriarchs: Listening to the Prayers of Early Modern Jewish Women* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998). Early modern Catholic views and Protestant critiques of those views are discussed in N. Z. Davis, “Ghosts, Kin, and Progeny: Some Features of Family Life in Early Modern France,” in *The Family*, ed. A. Rossi, J. Kagan, and T. Hareven (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978), 87–114.

70. These transgressions emerge in the course of the revelations made by the spirit, including the sins that brought him to his insufferable limbo state as well as his disclosure of the sins of many in attendance (in other cases).

71. Midelfort, “The Devil and the German People,” 118.

72. The status of the *agunah* and the requirement to rule legally on her behalf are discussed in Maimonides, *Mishnah Torah*, Laws of Divorce, chap. 13, sec. 28. Earlier rabbinic discussions of the status may be found in the Jerusalem Talmud, *Gittin* 20a and BT *Babba Kamma* 80a and Rashi and Tosaphot there. On the *agunah* problem and young brides in sixteenth-century Egypt, Syria, and Palestine, see R. Lamdan, “Child Marriage in Jewish Society in the Eastern Mediterranean during the Sixteenth Century,” *Mediterranean Historical Review* 11 (1996): 37–59, esp. 49–50.

73. See appendix A, case 2, sec. 2 and note 47 above. Compare Rashi on Lev. 20:10: “‘The adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death’: All death [penalties] mentioned without specification in the Torah are carried out by strangulation.” See also BT *Ketubot* 30a–b; BT *Sanhedrin* 37b; *Numbers Rabbah* 14.6.

74. See Lamdan, “Deviations from Norms of Moral Behavior.”

75. There is some question as to whether one account is merely an adaptation of the other rather than a separate case.

76. On this work, see Y. Liebes, “Toward a Study of the Author of *Emek ha-Melekh*: His Personality, Writings, and Kabbalah” (in Hebrew), *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 11 (1993): 101–37; and chapter 7 of Chajes, “Spirit Possession.”

77. Vital, see below. M. Oron argues that Vital’s autobiographical journal was intended to remain private in “Dream, Vision, and Reality in Hayyim Vital’s *Sefer ha-Hezyonot*” (in Hebrew), *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 10 (1992): 299–309. Compare Benayahu, *Toledoth ha-Ari*, 99.

78. See appendix A, case 5, sec. 1.

79. See *ibid.*, case 5, sec. 2.

80. See *ibid.*, case 5, sec. 3.

81. See *ibid.*, case 5, sec. 4. According to the accounts, Luria’s speedy departure was accomplished through a magical technique known as *kefitzat ha-derekh*.

On this technique, see M. M. Verman and S. H. Adler, "Path Jumping in the Jewish Magical Tradition," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 1 (1993–1994): 131–48. The technique is also part of the Islamic magical tradition. See the references in G. Bos, "Moshe Mizrachi on Popular Science in 17th Century Syria-Palestine," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 3 (1996): 250–79, esp. 261, n. 68.

82. A didactic prologue introduces the account in Bacharach's *Emek ha-Melekh*, but not the accounts in the earlier *Ta'alumot Hokhmah* or in Sambari's manuscript. For a synoptic edition of this account see appendix 2, case 5, sec. 1 of Chajes, "Spirit Possession."

83. *Emek ha-Melekh* and *Ta'alumot Hokhmah* on the one hand and Sambari on the other. See appendix A, case 5, sec. 3–4.

84. Our sources differ as to the identity of this sage, owing to the probability that the earliest written source of the account provided no more than his initials, ש"ח. As it would happen, these initials were shared by a number of leading rabbinic figures in Safed in 1571: Isaac Luria (Ashkenazi), Joseph Ashkenazi, Joseph Arzin, Isaac Arha, Joseph Alton, Jacob Altaraz, Israel Auri, Judah Ashkenazi, and others. Here again we come to an issue that has been smouldering for thirty years in the prodigious—and contentious—output of M. Benayahu and D. Tamar. According to Benayahu, Joseph Ashkenazi is correct here, while Tamar argues for Joseph Arzin. See, for example, Benayahu, *Toledot ha-Ari*, 46; D. Tamar, "On the Book *Toledot ha-Ari*," 191.

85. See appendix A, case 3, sec. 1.

86. A comparative morphological analysis of Lurianic exorcism technique may be found in chapter 3 of Chajes, "Spirit Possession." See appendix A, case 3, sec. 2.

87. *Sefer ha-Hezyonot*, p. 36. Compare appendix A, case 3, sec. 3. There are a number of parallels to this incident in *Sefer ha-Hezyonot*. When Vital consulted with sorcerers who engaged in divinatory practices involving the adjuration of demons, the sorcerers were unable to proceed due to the reluctance of the demons to appear in Vital's presence. See, for example, sec. 19, sec. 21.

88. While Vital's spiritual stature was recognized by Karo's *maggid*, Luria, R. Lapidot Ashkenazi, the shamanic kabbalists Avraham Avshalom of Morocco and Shealtiel Alsheikh of Persia, palm readers, Arab seers, and a number of visionary women in Safed and Damašcus, he appears to have been underappreciated by those lacking visionary powers. See *Sefer ha-Hezyonot*, 1–13.

89. See Chajes, "Off the Kabbalistic [Accepted] Path."

90. Vital's discussions of the problems associated with the "normal" transmigration of male souls into female bodies also suggest just how complex and troubled was his construction of gender. Vital believed, for example, that his wife Hannah had a male soul, the reincarnation of Rabbi Akiva's father-in-law. See *Sba'ar ha-Gilgulim*, 139b–140b. He discusses the complications of male-souled females in pregnancy and birth in *Sba'ar ha-Gilgulim*, introduction 9, 33a–35b.

91. Vital seems to have had an inclination to violence, stemming, according to Luria, from his transmigratory origin as Cain. Luria required Vital to be especially careful to keep this tendency in check, ordering him to avoid killing even the most insignificant of creatures such as fleas or lice (Luria himself, Vital reports, killed no creatures intentionally), to remove knives from the table before reciting grace after meals, and never to function as a *mobel* (circumciser) or slaughterer-butcher (or even to observe them at work). See *Sba'ar ha-Gilgulim*, 128b, 132b, 133b. Compare *Sba'ar ha-Gilgulim* (Radomsk ed., Przemysl, 1875), 33c; *Sefer ha-Hezyonot*, 238. In the case of the possessed woman of Safed (case 7), Vital writes that Luria sent him to perform exorcisms specifically because of his Cainic descent. See Chajes, "Spirit Possession," appendix 2, case 7, sec. 3.

92. In the parallel case, the spirit anticipates Vital's arrival prophetically and questions Vital's capacity to evict him from his abode in the woman's body, but then greets Vital with great respect upon his entry. See appendix A, case 4, sec. 2.

93. The circumstances of the spirit's death are presented after a dialogue between Vital and the spirit over the meaning a rabbinic passage (*Eduyot* 2,10). See n. 47 above. See appendix A, case 3, sec. 3. This close parallel with the account of the young man discussed above probably, though not necessarily, indicates literary dependence of one account on the other.

94. Until 1622, Ormuz was a Portuguese outpost at the mouth of the Persian Gulf. My thanks to Prof. Geoffrey Parker for providing me with this identification.

95. L. Roper has written on sixteenth-century notions of the body as a container. In the literature of excess, the body is imagined as a container for a series of processes: defecation, sexual pollution, vomiting. Fluids course about within the body, erupting out of it, leaving their mark on the world outside. The body is not so much a collection of joints and limbs or a skeletal structure as a container of fluids, bursting out in every direction to impact the environment. See *Oedipus and the Devil: Witchcraft, Sexuality, and Religion in Early Modern Europe* (London: Routledge, 1994), 24.

96. Benayahu located a reference to this episode in Abraham Galante's commentary on the Zohar, *Yerah Yakar* (MS. Jerusalem, Jewish National and University Library, 8§ 493, p. 263b). See *Toledot ha-Ari*, 101.

97. See appendix A, case , sec. 6.

98. See Lewis, *Notes and Documents*, 8.

99. See the recent comments of M. Rosman in *Founder of Hasidism: A Quest for the Historical Ba'al Shem Tov* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 57. I also discuss this issue in chapter 4 of "Spirit Possession."

100. Given what we know of Vital's own frequenting of Muslim wonderworkers, this astonishment seems either disingenuous or a literary embellishment by someone unfamiliar (or uncomfortable) with Vital's openness in these matters. The entire passage of the account relating to the possession of the Kohen in Nablus is absent from Sambari's version, which has the doe wandering "crazily" until arriving in Safed, and the spirit vacating the doe for the widow,

who was among a crowd of people observing the strange behavior of the suffering doe.

101. On the history and significance of this image, see R. J. Z. Werblowsky. "Ape and Essence," in *Ex Orde Religionum (Geo Widengren Festschrift)* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1972), 318–25. My thanks to Prof. M. Idel for this reference.

102. See Léon D'Alexis [Pierre de Bérulle]. *Traicté des Energumènes, suivy d'un Discours sur la possession de Marthe Brossier, contre les calomnies d'un Médecin de Paris* (Troyes, 1599), 38–39. Cited by H. C. Lea, *Materials toward a History of Witchcraft*, ed. A. C. Howland (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1939), 3:1062.

103. See Midelfort, "The Devil and the German People," 112.

104. M. Cordovero, "Derisbot be-Inyane ha-Malakhim me-ha-RM"K," in *Malakhe Elyon*, ed. R. Margalioth (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1945), 64–114, citation 64–65 (now in *Or Yakar*, vol. 17 [Jerusalem: Hevrat Ahuzat Yisra'el, 1989]). Translation from Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo*, 81. Compare G. Scholem, "The Maggid of R. Yosef Taitatzak [Taytatzack] and the Revelations Attributed to Him" (in Hebrew), *Sefunot* 13 (1971–77): 69–112, esp. 71–72.

105. See appendix A, case 1, sec. 9.

106. *Sha'ar ha-Gilgulim*, 24b.

107. See appendix A, case 3, sec. 7. The early sixteenth-century kabbalistic work *Galya Raza* maintained that Satan and the *Sitra Abra* oversaw the entire realm of transmigration. See R. Elior, "The Doctrine of Transmigration in *Galya Raza*," in *Essential Papers on Kabbalah*, ed. L. Fine (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 243–69.

108. See, for example, the discussions in BT Sanhedrin 45b ff., where the death penalty applied to blasphemers, witches, and idolators is discussed in a single Mishnaic passage. See also the remarks by I. Ta-Shma, "Notes to 'Hymns from Qumran'" (in Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 55.3 (1986): 440–42; J. Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition: A Study in Folk Religion* (New York: Behrman's Jewish Book House, 1939), 58–59; E. Yasif, *Sippur ha-Am ha-Ivri* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1994), 394.

109. See D. D. Hall, "A World of Wonders: The Mentality of the Supernatural in Seventeenth-Century New England," in *Seventeenth-Century New England*, ed. D. D. Hall and D. G. Allen (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1984), 246.

110. M. Flynn, "Blasphemy and the Play of Anger in Sixteenth-Century Spain," *Past & Present* 149 (November 1995): 29–57.

111. J.-P. Dedieu, "Les causes de foi de l'Inquisition de Toledé (1483–1820)," *Melanges de la Casa de Velazquez* 14 (1978): 148ff. (cited by Flynn, "Blasphemy and the Play of Anger").

112. See, for example, Zohar 2:267b; Compare Menasseh ben Israel's discussion of this matter in *Nishmat Hayyim*, book 3, chap. 27, esp. p. 268.

113. *Hallel* designates the Psalms 113–18, which are included in the liturgy on special occasions to express thanksgiving and joy.

114. See appendix A, case 3, sec. 7. On Passover night and its rituals, see *The Passover Haggadah: Its Source and History*, ed. E.D. Goldschmidt (Jerusalem, n.p., 1969).

115. While managing to bring about the spirit's expulsion, Vital was unable to rectify the spirit, who was consigned to his torments until the last of the bastards whom he had fathered had died (appendix A, case 3, sec. 7) The irrevocability of the spirit's punishment and Vital's inability to assist in his rectification brought "the many assembled" to tears and repentance (appendix A, case 3, sec. 7).

116. The mezuzah, a parchment-based phylactery, must be written properly and in good condition to be "kosher," fulfilling the biblical command (based on Deut. 6:9). While earnest efforts were made by some rabbinic authorities to mitigate the widespread perception of the mezuzah as affording amulitic protection to those within the houses bearing them, this perception remained dominant. Indeed, the inscription on the outside of the parchment, *SD* "I, normally translated as the divine name "Almighty," was taken as an acrostic for "Keeper of the Doors of Israel."

117. See Tzvi Mark's essay in this volume for a study of this phenomenon in Hasidic eastern Europe.

118. See above and chapter 2 of Chajes, "Spirit Possession."

119. Midelfort, "The Devil and the German People," 118.

120. G. Scholem, *Šabbatai Ševi: The Mystical Messiah, 1626–1676*, trans. R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 19.

121. J. Dan, "Rabbi Joseph Karo: Halakhist and Mystic" (in Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 33 (1964): 89–96, citation 93. Dan is here summarizing the argument made in J. Katz, "The Ordination Controversy between R. Jacob Berab and R. Levi b. Habib" (in Hebrew), *Zion* 16 (1951): 28–45 (English version: "The Dispute between Jacob Berab and Levi ben Habib over Renewing Ordination," *Binah: Studies in Jewish History, Thought and Culture* 1 [1989]: 119–41). In the lines that follow those quoted, Dan notes that even more astounding than the audacity of the megalomaniacal aspirations of individuals (for example, Karo and Vital) is the fact that their aspirations—nonmessianic, at least—were realized! Safed and its rabbis indeed became the font of legal and mystical teaching for the entire Jewish world.

M. Pachter's studies also provide generous evidence of Safed's pietistic aspirations while asserting the relative marginality of the circle of Luria on the larger Jewish population. See, for example, the large number of synagogues and study halls noted in Pachter, "Terrible Vision," 76–77. On Luria and the larger community of Safed, see his "The Eulogy of R. Samuel Uzeda upon the Death of the AR" T" (in Hebrew), in *From Safed's Hidden Treasures*, 39–68.

122. Cultural historical studies of Islamic magic in the early modern period are a clear desideratum and will ease the task of studying Jewish magic in this period comparatively. For now, recent anthropological studies of spirit possession in the Islamic world are helpful, if problematic. See esp. J. Boddy, *Wombs and Alien Spirits* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1989).

123. While the Kabbalah of Safed may have had little impact on popular Jewish culture in the decades following Isaac Luria's death (1572), the pietistic message seems to have spread quite effectively. With it, we may suppose, the plausibility of demonic possession in Jewish communities around the world certainly increased. See Z. Gries, *Sifrut ha-Hanbagot: Toldoteha u'Mekomah be-Haye Haside R' Yisrael Ba'al Shem Tov* (Conduct Literature [Regimen Vitae]: Its History and Place in the Lives of Beshtian Hasidim) (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1989); M. Idel, "One from a Town, Two from a Clan"—The Diffusion of Lurianic Kabbala and Sabbateanism: A Re-Examination," *Jewish History* 7.2 (1993): 79–104.

Pneumatic Mystical Possession and the Eschatology of the Soul in Lurianic Kabbalah

MENACHEM KALLUS

Recent research has pointed out the fact that at the forefront of interests in the circle of R. Isaac Luria (the AR"l) were types of mystical speculation and practice that focused on discovering and connecting with the soul roots of its members.¹ This pursuit was even more central for Luria and his associates than the cosmogonic theories that so much interested an earlier generation of Kabbalah scholars,² though the two issues cannot in fact be separated.

Evidence for this can be found in the diary of R. Hayyim Vital, Luria's chief disciple, wherein one finds that the issue of soul roots continued to occupy the minds and dreams of Vital's circle long after the passing of the AR"l in 1572.³ For example, in a 1608 entry Vital records the dream of a disciple in Damascus, one of many such dreams experienced in his circle.⁴ The student dreams he is with Vital visiting the graves of the righteous around Safed, an important Lurianic practice.⁵ While immersed in this apocalyptic dream atmosphere, he discusses the relationships of the souls of Mishnaic sages and biblical personages to the soul of Adam.⁶

Interest in the issue of soul roots can be found especially in the literature on theurgic practices for achieving higher levels of soul manifestation in order to expedite the soul's attainment of eschatological fulfillment.⁷ This literature discusses soul roots and soul families⁸ as well as the different types of "new" souls and the cosmic ecology underlying the theurgy that produces them.⁹ There is thus a major distinction in these writings between new and reincarnated souls.¹⁰ The texts consider differences between reincarnated souls and "soul impregnation" (*ibbur*) and their implications for moral responsibilities between souls sharing the same root.¹¹

The following discussion of these issues presents a schematic topology of possession and soul impregnation phenomena along with a discussion