

MESSIANIC POSTURES OF
ASHKENAZIM AND SEPHARDIM

(Prior to Sabbethai Zevi)

BY
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LEO BAECK MEMORIAL LECTURE 9

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OFFICES OF THE LEO BAECK INSTITUTE

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JERUSALEM: 33, Bustanai Street, Jerusalem, Israel

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

ALTHOUGH THE subject of my paper is temporally—and to some extent even spatially—far removed from the themes usually discussed under the auspices of this Institute, it will, I trust, not be devoid of interest to students of modern Jewish history and particularly to the broader concerns of the Leo Baeck Institute. As heirs to a long tradition, Jews of our own day consciously and unconsciously give expression to ideas, and reflect patterns of behavior, the roots of which are enmeshed in the depths of the remote past. No better or more obvious example is afforded than by modern Zionism, which through its political, social, and cultural achievements has set Jewish history on an entirely new course. Yet Zionism drew much of its substance and momentum from the traditional Jewish messianic faith, a faith which has been transmitted through the ages.

In examining some of the roots of pre-modern messianism, we must inevitably touch on a second subject, which also is not without interest to us: that is, the Jewish response to pressure and persecution, to alternatives of life through compromise, or of death through steadfastness and martyrdom. For messianism provided the energy and ideological substance for Jewish resistance in a world in which the Jews were always outnumbered and in which they frequently had to contend with unbridled animosity. In scrutinizing some of the forms and circumstances in which Jewish ultimate hope was persistently maintained, we offer some humble

tribute to the name of the man who for our age was the symbol *par excellence* of Jewish faith in vindication and of steadfast hope while in the very bowels of darkness. To Leo Baeck the *Essence of Judaism* and *This People Israel* meant eternity and ultimate redemption; and to countless of his people Israel, Leo Baeck spelled a hold on faith, hope, justification.

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While the Jewish hope for "our Messia that is yet to come"¹ is so well known as to be a virtual commonplace, close examination of the way this hope was expressed will reveal considerable differences among various Jewish groups. Like any other cultural phenomenon, this religious national dream underwent a certain amount of development and took on many different forms not only in ancient times but throughout the medieval period as well.

To make but brief reference to the earliest messianic movements of the Middle Ages, Near Eastern Jewish messianism found expression in three distinct, and frequently mutually exclusive, types of behavior. The first may be categorized as an elitist-rabbinic-quietist millenarism, which was expressed in the Hebrew apocalyptic tracts that were compiled in Palestine in the first two centuries of the Muslim conquest.² Although quite violent in *tone*, these documents paradoxically became vehicles of emotional release for a Jewish ruling class whose interests and program of life led them to renounce all millenarist activity which might upset the smooth and steady functioning of their community. Rabbinism in the Near East realistically channeled messianism into commemorative ritual and into vi-

¹ Christopher Marlowe, *The Jew of Malta*, Act II, ed. by R.W. Van Fossen (Lincoln, Neb., 1964) pp. 52, 1. 305.

² These have been collected, edited, and annotated by J. Even-Shmuel in *Midreshay Geulah* (2nd ed., Jerusalem, 1954).

sionary fantasy.³ At best, the rabbis tolerated the yen of some Jews to settle in the Holy Land, but the extremely restricted extent of such settlement betrays the true nature of the elitist-rabbinic messianic posture. Israel was to hope and to be ready for the end, but it was not to anticipate it. We shall see that while later rabbinic authorities of Europe played several variations on this theme, their policy and programs were basically identical with that of the elitist elements of Palestine and Babylonia.

② The second type of messianic expression in the Near East consisted of popular uprisings under leaders, who, on occasion, combined aggressive military action with extreme pietism or sectarian innovation.⁴ While the military programs of each of these visionaries were nipped in the bud, the leaders of these uprisings were able to begin their movements by generating local popular sentiment to white heat, thereby inducing many to follow them into battle, flee to the desert, dispose of their possessions and subsequently, even after defeat, to organize themselves into loyal fellowships that became known as distinct sects. What is revealing about their respective fates is not that they encountered the quick and determined opposition of the Muslim government, but that the gentile overlords found willing allies in the rabbinic authorities themselves, who helped eliminate these dissidents as active threats to the peace and well-being of the Jewish community.

③ The third type of messianic expression can be conveniently subsumed under the rubric of mature Karaism. While the extent of the messianic orientation of Ananism and early Karaism is a matter of considerable scholarly dis-

³ Cf. further A.S. Halkin, ed., *Zion in Jewish Literature* (New York, 1961), pp. 38 ff., 65 ff., 83 ff.

⁴ For a convenient collection of the relevant texts, see A.Z. Aescoly, *Jewish Messianic Movements* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 1956), pp. 117 ff. Cf. further S.W. Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, V (2nd ed. Philadelphia, 1952-65), 182, 191 ff.

pute, the Palestinocentrism of later Qumisian Karaism is not subject to question.⁵ Indeed, it has been recently, and I believe plausibly, argued that the renowned mourners of Zion, far from having been one of the elements which Karaism drew upon, were actually an outgrowth of the new schism, which incorporated settlement in the Holy Land, and/or extreme mourning for its desolation and subjection, into its ideology as one of the pivots of its anti-Rabbanite orientation.⁶ Be that as it may, the messianic posture of Karaism is best understood not as pure messianic activism but as a compromise between the extreme quietism of the Rabbanite elite and the explosive activism of fringe groups in the Iraqi and Persian Jewish community. Daniel al-Qumisi's brand of messianism—settling in Palestine and hastening the end of time by wailing and weeping over the destruction and the Dispersion—was a new form of nomian quietism, a carefully harnessed pre-millenarism, which gratified and yet controlled the hopes of restive and disaffected masses.

These salient types of messianic posture in the Near East afford us considerable insight into the variety of forms of Jewish messianism on the Continent of Europe. As is well known, the two branches of medieval Jewish culture—namely the Andalusian-Spanish, or Sephardic, and the Franco-German, or Ashkenazic—trace their cultural parentage to Babylonia and Palestine, the early Sephardic drawing almost exclusively on Babylonian books and teachings, the Ashkenazic deriving much of its heritage from Palestine. What was true of *halakah*, philosophy, liturgy, poetry and Hebrew style had its counterpart in messianic posture and expression as well.

⁵ For the latest discussions of the stages in the development of Karaism, cf. M. Zucker, *Rav Saadya Gaon's Translation of the Torah* [in Hebrew] New York, 1959), pp. 145 ff.; Baron, *op. cit.*, V, chap. XXVI.

⁶ M. Zucker, "Tegubot li-Tenu'at Abaylay Zion ha-Qarraiyyim ba-Sifrut ha-Rabbanit," *Sefer ha-Yobel le-R. Hanokh Albeck* (Jerusalem, 1963), pp. 378 ff.

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שׂוֹרֵק → שְׂוֹק
 שׂוֹר → שְׂוֹ

① Spanish Jewry: pietism of Talmudic messianism

② Ashkenaz: none

If we survey the history of messianic activity and speculation in Europe, we are immediately confronted with several striking differences in the manifestation of this faith between Andalusian and Spanish Jewry, on the one hand, and Franco-German or Ashkenazic Jewry on the other. In the first place, we must note the remarkable phenomenon that while between c. 1065-1492 there were close to a dozen messianic pretenders—and I include under that category men who claimed only to herald the Messiah—in Andalus, Christian Spain, and North Africa, there is not a single unequivocal instance of such activity among Franco-German Jewry.⁷ The only apparent exception was a messianic movement, which Maimonides reported to have taken place c. 1065 in the city of Linon in Ifranja, or the land of the Franks.⁸ While most scholars have identified this place as Lyon, France, I believe there are cogent reasons to locate the incident in Leon of Christian Spain, which Arab geographers also called the Land of the Franks, and with which the Jews of Andalus did have relatively easy and indeed direct contact.

It may not be inappropriate to mention here that just shortly before this messianic incident, the descendants of the Babylonian exilarch, Hezekiah, had moved from Andalus to Christian Spain, while one of them, the renowned Ḥiyya al-Daudi, was buried in the land of Leon c. 1150.⁹ Whether there was any connection between the appearance of these Davidides in the north and the messianic incident reported by Maimonides, we, of course, have no way of

⁷ For surveys of medieval Jewish messianic efforts, see Aescoly, *op. cit.*, chaps. IV-VI; A.H. Silver, *A History of Messianic Speculation in Israel* (Boston, 1959), chaps. III-V.

⁸ Moses Maimonides, *Epistle to Yemen*, ed. by A.S. Halkin (New York, 1952), pp. 102/103; Eng. trans. *ibid.* (by B. Cohen), p. xx.

⁹ Abraham ibn Daud, *Sefer ha-Qabbalah*, ed. and trans. by G.D. Cohen (Philadelphia, 1967), Hebrew text, p. 45 l. 148 and variants; Eng. trans., VI. 217; *idem in Medieval Jewish Chronicles*, I, (ed. by A. Neubauer), 67.

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knowing. But the fact that all of our information on this family comes from Andalusian sources strengthens our feeling that the Linon mentioned in Maimonides' *Epistle to Yemen* is to be identified with the Leon of Spain. While from the point of view of an Andalusian like Maimonides, the Jews living there were dwelling among Franks, the contiguity of the northern Spanish community to Andalusian culture makes it highly likely that the incident was fomented by a Jew or Jews very much under the influence of Judeo-Arabic culture. The incident is probably a case of Sephardic messianism, not French.

The location of other instances of messianic activity in Spain is far less equivocal.¹⁰ Some forty years after the incident in Linon-Leon (i.e., c. 1105), a certain Ibn Aryeh in Cordova was designated as the Messiah after astrological signs were interpreted to point to the year, the place, and the man. Some fifteen to twenty years after that, a Moroccan Jew, who had been educated in Lucena under Rabbi Joseph ibn Megash, stirred up a messianic affair in Fez. The incident had repercussions in Spain, of which Morocco was culturally a branch, for the father of Maimonides tried desperately to stop people from following his lead. Why there should have been three such incidents in relatively rapid succession, I shall try to explain later on.

The rabbinic authorities of Spain rebuffed Abraham Abulafia, a prophet of Avila, a pretender of Ayllon, and perhaps one or two other would-be messiahs in the latter part of the thirteenth century. Whatever the extent of their adherents, these messiahs and their followers were all Spaniards.

Throughout this period, no segment of Ashkenazic Jewry is known to have risen in messianic revolt. Indeed, we may go even further and say that there is not a single case of a

¹⁰ On the following incidents see Moses Maimonides, *op. cit.*, pp. 100/101 ff.; Eng. trans., pp. xix ff.; Aescoly, *op. cit.*, pp. 194 ff.; Silver, *op. cit.*, pp. 87 ff.

messianic movement or of a pseudo-messiah known from Ashkenazic Jewry until the beginning of the sixteenth century, and even that one instance, namely the call of Asher Laemlein, is an obscure and short-lived affair, which shows traces of Sephardic influence on the mind of an Ashkenazic Jew.¹¹

On the other hand, again, the great messianic ferment after the expulsion from Spain, which was expressed in a variety of ways—in Abravanel's tracts, in the great attempts of David Reubeni and Solomon Molko, in the millenarian activity of the kabbalists of Safed, and finally in the first real *mass* messianic movement that swept all strata of the Jewish population off their feet, that of Sabbetai Zevi—emanated from and found greatest support in the Sephardic elements of Jewry.¹² To be sure, even the Sephardic messianic attempts were few and far removed from each other, but surely it is a matter of no mean interest that whatever messianic activity occurred in Western Europe almost entirely emanated from one corner of occidental Jewry.

I trust that my remarks will not be misconstrued to mean that there were never any messianic movements elsewhere. The surprises held in store for us moderns in the arcana of the Cairo Geniza have been too rich and revolutionary in their revelations to deny that new instances will not yet turn up. Indeed, from the Geniza, we have learned of two messianic incidents in Byzantium, c. 1096, and in Sicily, at a time which has not yet been definitely determined.¹³ But

¹¹ Cf. Silver, *op. cit.*, pp. 143 ff. For reasons which will be fully spelled out elsewhere, I have not reckoned either reports about Jewish messianic movements that are not attested by Jews, or obscure incidents that cannot as yet be dated with certainty.

¹² To be sure, a number of Jews of Ashkenazic descent were prominent in the messianic "ferment" in the century and a half following the Spanish expulsion, but the dominant Jewish temper in the Ottoman Empire, where this speculation took place, was clearly Sephardic.

¹³ Aescoly, *op. cit.*, pp. 154 ff., 286 ff.

in the first place, each of these two communities had cultural affinities with the East and Spain respectively. Moreover, they seem to have been isolated incidents of hysteria that left no impression in Jewish literature. The basic classification we have laid down, that messianic activity in Europe was essentially of Babylonian-Spanish vintage, still holds true.

In this connection we must repeat the findings of sober scholarly analysis that another seeming exception to our generalization is reflected by the migration of several hundred rabbis from France and Germany to the Holy Land in 1210 and 1211. That event, however, does not constitute an exception at all, for the migrants betrayed little, if any, messianic activity. Certainly they made no move to carry masses of Jews along with them. The migration, which probably did not number the hundreds of whom later chroniclers wrote, seems to have been motivated by general considerations of piety rather than by millenarist anticipations.¹⁴

This is as we should expect, for messianic acts in Europe no less than in Asia were usually undertaken without rabbinic sanction. Those rabbis of Spain from whom we do have opinions, like the Geonim before them, in their charitable moments looked on messiahs as sadly deluded men, or more probably, downright impostors. There is no reason to believe that in this regard at least, the rabbis of France and Germany were any different from those of Babylonia, Spain,

¹⁴ J. Prawer, "The Jews in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem" [in Hebrew], *Zion*, XI (1945-46), 50 ff.; *idem*, *A History of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem*, II [in Hebrew] (2 vols., Jerusalem, 1963), 387 ff.; *idem*, "Hobebay Zion bi-May ha-Baynayyim," *Ma'arabo shel Galil we-Hof ha Galil* (Jerusalem, 1965), pp. 129 ff. Certainly the considerations of piety motivating settlement of the Holy Land were messianically oriented, but they were "pre-millenarist" in character, very similar to those motivating the move of Judah ha-Levi; cf. below. On Ashkenazic realism and coolness to migration to Palestine at that time, cf. E.E. Urbach, *The Tosaphists* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 1955), pp. 108 ff., 231.

millenarism = anti rabbinic establishment

and North Africa. In other words, messianic activity in Europe was, as it had been in the East, a manifestation of popular revolt against what the millenarists considered "the establishment."¹⁵

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Although, as far as we can determine, the attitudes of the Sephardic and Ashkenazic rabbimates to popular messianic uprisings were basically identical, there were some notable differences in the way the two Jewish elites gave expression to the traditional messianic hope. Among the many differences in the type of literary productivity which emanated from Sephardic and Ashkenazic circles, and these embrace differences in approach to, and expression of, the Hebrew language, exegesis, halakic codification, writing in the vernacular, belles-lettres, science, and philosophy, we must also include the genre of messianic speculation. While in Spain messianism appears constantly to have been on the agenda of scholarly exchange and to have evoked a whole string of messianic tracts, such discussion was extremely limited in medieval France and Germany and has left only the faintest traces in literature.

By way of documentation, perhaps it is best to begin this aspect of our survey with Ashkenaz, which until the sixteenth century produced no original messianic literature whatever. This startling phenomenon stands out in much bolder relief if we examine closely the nature of those literary traces of early messianic speculation in France and Germany that have come down to us. Actually, they amount

¹⁵ On Maimonides' views, cf. Halkin's introduction to *Epistle to Yemen*, pp. xxvi ff. On Abulafia's conflict with traditionalists, cf. Aescoly, *op. cit.*, pp. 198 ff.; G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (3rd ed., New York, 1961), pp. 128 ff. On the anti-"establishmentarian" character of messianism, cf. *idem*, *Subbethai Zevi*, I (2 vols., Tel-Aviv, 1957), 9 ff., 74 ff.

in sum total to three fragmentary statements and one exegetical work. The first consists of a late tenth-century (906) query from the sages of the Rhineland to the academy of the Holy Land concerning the expected date of the messianic redemption. The inquiry, Professor Marx has suggested, was evoked not by any spontaneous messianic ferment but by the text of the "Apocalypse of Zerubbabel" which had by that time gained a quasi-official status and which seemed to point to a date close at hand.¹⁶ In other words, the logic of a text, not the independent research of a learned group, stimulated curiosity. No less significant is the fact that the inquiry seems to have been a brief one and was appended to a second question concerning the criteria for disqualifying ritually slaughtered meat. The text gives not the faintest trace of any real messianic awakening.

The second Ashkenazic literary manifestation of any overt interest in messianism is Rashi's commentaries to the Book of Daniel and the Talmud, in which he indicated that the Messiah was to be expected in 1352 or in 1478.¹⁷ However, Rashi's conclusions, far from betraying an avid expectation of the messianic redemption, actually lend support to our contention. Rashi's dates were nothing more than an exegete's elucidation of texts, which he interpreted with no

¹⁶ For the text and bibliography, see *Sefer ha-Yishub*, II, ed. by S. Assaf and L.A. Mayer (Jerusalem, 1944), pp. 22 no. 30, 113 no. 20; Aescoly, *op. cit.*, pp. 133 ff. Aescoly recounts all the scholarly conjectures on the fragment with the exception of the one which, it seems to me, best explains the motivation of the query, namely that of A. Marx, "Studies in Gaonic History and Literature," *JQS*, NS, I (1910-11), 75 ff. Aescoly's efforts to connect the question of the rabbis of the Rhineland with the "mourners of Zion," described in a gloss to Benjamin of Tudela's *Itinerary*, is unconvincing. Whatever the historical value of that gloss, it does not reflect messianic activity or ferment, but only messianic faith, which all Jews shared and which some expressed a bit more conspicuously than others; cf. Aescoly, pp. 152 ff.

¹⁷ J. Sarachek, *The Doctrine of the Messiah in Medieval Jewish Literature* (New York, 1932), p. 59; Silver, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

greater emphasis than he had the rest of the vast corpus of Scripture and the Talmud. He could not very well have skipped over these particular passages in Daniel and the Talmud. But there is a far more revealing point about Rashi's interpretations, which excludes them from the genre of genuine messianic speculation. If there is one characteristic that underlies two thousand years of messianic literature from the Book of Daniel in the second century B.C.E. to the commentary of Rabbi Meir Leibush Malbim in the nineteenth century C.E., it is the relative imminence of the messianic denouement. The function of messianic tracts is to alert and console the audience in the context of contemporary events, not by postponing comfort to the remote future, which the author's audience could not have the faintest hope of living to see and enjoy. Far from being messianically oriented, Rashi's commentary, by postponing the end some three or four centuries, was the very antithesis of millenarist excitation.

How quiescent Franco-German Jewry really was may be seen from the reports of several authors that the Messiah was expected to come sometime between Tishri of 1084 and Tishri of 1103, or in the 256th cycle of creation. The date was derived from a word in Jeremiah 31:6: "For thus saith the Lord: Sing with gladness for Jacob [רנו ליעקב שמחה], and shout at the head of the nations; announce ye, praise ye, and say: 'O Lord, save thy people, the remnant of Israel.'" However, this calculation did not make its way into Ashkenazic literature until considerably after it had failed to materialize. What is more, even this messianic symbol seems to have come to Ashkenazic circles from the outside, for the Jews of France and Germany apparently first became aware of it through the *Leqah Tob*, in which Rabbi Tobiah ben Eliezer of Castoria had recorded this date as his own discovery.¹⁸ Now, Rabbi Tobiah was a Byzantine, not an

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 58 ff.; A.M. Habermann, ed., *Sefer Gezerot Ashkenaz we-Sarfat* (Jerusalem, 1945), pp. 24, 83; Tobiah ben Eliezer, *Leqah Tob*, ed. by S. Buber (Vilna, 1880), part 2, p. 20.

Ashkenazi. Moreover, as we have already indicated, the messianic ferment in Salonica and its environs at the time of the First Crusade, with which this messianic date was connected, was a local and ephemeral affair which was confined to visions and miraculous manifestations that had no repercussions, and the stimulus for which is to be sought outside the Jewish community itself. But whatever the case, the event betrays no sign of having been connected with a general messianic ferment in the Jewish communities of the world or of having been inspired by other Jewish messianic incidents.

A rash of messianic predictions did begin to crop up, almost dramatically, in France and Germany in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in the circles of the Tosafists and German mystical pietists. However, what is revealing about this wave of speculation is the nature of the predictions and the extent to which they were communicated. Interestingly enough, much of the Tosafistic-pietistic messianic speculation is communicated to us second-hand, that is to say not by the speculators themselves but by reporters who heard of their statements. Thus, Rabbi Joseph Bekhor Shor cites the Spaniard Abraham bar Hiyya for his computation, while Rabbi Isaac ben Judah ha-Levi invokes the authority of Rabbi Joseph and of the biblical commentary known as *Sefer ha-Gan*.¹⁹ The derivative character of the messianic communications of the pietists is even more apparent in a little messianic excursus inserted into a thirteenth century commentary on the *Ethics of the Fathers* by an as yet not fully identified member of the German pietist school.²⁰ What this little parenthesis affords us is a report of messianic computations made by the author's father, a certain Rabbi Solomon, and the latter's teachers and colleagues.

¹⁹ Rabbi Joseph Bekhor Shor, *Payrush 'al ha-Torah*, III (Jerusalem, 5719), p. 65; Silver, *op. cit.*, pp. 85 ff.

²⁰ A. Marx, "Ma'amar 'al Shenat ha-Geulah," *Hazofeh le-Hokmat Israel*, V (1921), 194 ff.

Most prominent among the latter are the renowned Rabbi Judah of Paris, Rabbi Samuel he-Hasid and his son Rabbi Judah he-Hasid, Rabbi Isaac of Dampierre, Rabbi Ezra the prophet of Montcontour, and Rabbi Troestlin the prophet. Mention is also made of a certain book of visions or visionaries, *Sefer ha-Hozim*, from which the astrological signs associated with the advent of the messianic era are cited.²¹ Apart from these few instances, and they are decidedly not evidence of a messianic literature of the kind we encounter from Spain, there has come down no real messianic literary genre from France and Germany. To the contrary, the few fragments that have survived from Ashkenaz: testify to speculation that was conducted esoterically, in the confines of a very restricted circle. Most important, we have no evidence of any communal reverberations of messianic speculation in France or Germany. The only trace of some wider echo of these computations is from a letter written in Arabic, in other words from an oriental or Andalusian area, to the community of Alexandria. This letter tells of reports arriving from Marseille and from France generally to Qabes in Tunis of the arrival of Elijah, expected sometime after 1225/6, and of the coming of the Messiah in 1232/33. Among those reported to have verified the prophecies, which the late Professor Assaf conjectured were uttered by Rabbi Ezra of Montcontour, was the renowned Rabbi Eleazar Rokeah²² At best, then, we have in this letter the echo of an isolated incident. Nevertheless, careful analysis of some of the circumstances surrounding these prophecies of the Franco-German pietists will once again serve to place the nature of the far different Spanish messianic activity in bolder relief.

The most salient characteristic of the messianic predic-

²¹ On the eschatological interests of that circle, cf. Scholem, *Major Trends*, pp. 88 ff.

²² Aescoly, *op. cit.*, p. 188; S. Assaf, *Meqorot u-Mehqarim* (Jerusalem, 1946), pp. 146 ff.

tions of the Franco-German rabbis is the prophetic character of the informants and of their information. Thus, two of the pietists mentioned in the little German appendix, Rabbi Ezra and Rabbi Troestlin, are specifically called prophets.²³ Rabbi Ezra of Montcontour was reported to have ascended to Heaven and determined the date of the end by consulting with Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. Rabbi Samuel and Rabbi Judah, the pietists, and Rabbi Meir ben Baruk of Rothenberg ascertained the date of the end through information imparted in dreams.²⁴ It hardly needs belaboring that such messianic calculation as well as the title of prophet were distinctly alien to the Sephardic rabbinic temper. Indeed, the only upper-class Spaniard who was openly recognized as a prophet, Rabbi Sheshet Benveniste of Barcelona, was a product of the French academy of Narbonne.²⁵ One need but recall the reception that Abraham Abulafia reports he received and Rabbi Solomon Ibn Adret's fulminations against would-be prophets to appreciate the vast difference between the Sephardic and Ashkenazic ways of eschatological speculation.

To be sure, there are points in common in the detailed explanation of messianic dates of the Sephardim and Ashkenazim. Both groups, for example, worked with gematriaot (cryptographs) and with symmetrical periodizations of Jewish history. However, here again there is a thin, but

²³ A.J. Heschel, "Al Ruah ha-Qodesh bi-May ha-Baynayyim," *Alexander Marx Jubilee Volume* (New York, 1950), Hebrew vol., p. 184; and cf. Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 85.

²⁴ Marx, *op. cit.*, pp. 195 ff.; Heschel, *op. cit.*, p. 184; and cf. L. Zunz, *Gesammelte Schriften*, III (3 vols., Berlin, 1875-76), 227. On knowledge acquired in dreams in Ashkenazic rabbinic circles, cf. Heschel, *op. cit.*, pp. 195 ff.; R. J. Z. Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo* (Oxford, 1962), pp. 42 ff. On an inquiry on the date of the Messiah in a dream, cf. *ibid.*, p. 43, n. 1.

²⁵ Heschel, *op. cit.*, pp. 185 ff. Significantly, Sephardim occasionally used the term "prophet" to designate a poet; cf. D. Yellin, *Torat ha-Shirah ha-Sefaradit* (Jerusalem, 1940), p. 3, n. 1.

quite palpable, line that divides them. Whereas in Sephardic calculations the *gematriaot* play an ancillary role, and are usually invoked as vital only for points in the remote past, in Franco-German calculations the *gematriaot* are central to the calculation and as often as not point to the future, to the denouement of history. For example, the Sephardim frequently cited the Talmudic mnemonics of תת"ץ ונושה"ם בתמ"ה but these were always invoked as classically attested dates or hints, and only as *part* of a much wider exposition on messianic calculation.²⁶

In the case of the Ashkenazic computations, the *gematriaot* are often quite novel and point to the exact date of the end of the present stage of history: for example, רנו ליעקב שמחה ("Sing with gladness for Jacob"—Jeremiah 31:6), as pointing to the 256th cycle of creation (1084-1103); or דודי צה ואדום ("My beloved is white and ruddy"—Song of Songs 5:10), as referring to the year 1238 C.E.; or הסתר אסתיר ("I will keep . . . hidden"—Deuteronomy 31:18), as being equal to 1235 years in Daniel 12:12; and so on.²⁷

²⁶ Cf. Abraham b. Hiyya, *Megillat ha-Megalleh*, ed. by A. Poznanski (Berlin, 1924), pp. 36 ff.; Maimonides, *Epistle to Yemen*, pp. 82/83; and cf. G. D. Cohen, "The Story of the Four Captives," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*, XXIX (1960-61), 102 n. 146, 104 nn. 148, 150. For an Andalusian view of *gematriaot*, cf. Abraham ibn Ezra to Gen. 14: 14. That Ibn Ezra's skepticism was not peculiar to him may be seen from Nahmanides' impassioned defense of *gematriaot* in his treatise on redemption; *Kubay Ramban*, I, ed. by D. Chavel (2 vols., Jerusalem, 1963), 262. The freest use of *gematria* by a Sephardic Jew known to me is in the third chapter of Abraham b. Hiyya's *op. cit.*; cf. pp. 67, 79 ff. However, even he uses *gematriaot* only as supporting evidence and not as the sources of his findings. Moreover, as a Jew of Barcelona, Abraham b. Hiyya may well have been inspired in this regard by northern scholars, who were closer to the Ashkenazic spheres of influence and to the emphasis on the power of letters propounded in *Sefer Yesira*, which strongly influenced Ashkenazic circles.

²⁷ Cf. Silver, *op. cit.*, pp. 59 ff., 85 ff. On the importance attached to *gematriaot* in Ashkenazic circles, cf. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, VII, 178; Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 100.

Now the modern student, to whom *gematria*-style thinking is so basically alien, may easily be tempted to lump Spanish and Franco-German *gematriaot* into one medieval bag. But in reality, there is a chasm dividing them. As traditional Jews, the Spaniards invoked *gematriaot* that had been formulated by their rabbinic forebears. However, the German mystics took the ancient *gematriaot* as a hint that all of classical Jewish literature—the Bible as well as the liturgy—was worded in accordance with the principles of *gematria*. Accordingly, they were forever coming up with new *gematriaot*, thus extending to messianic calculation the methods they employed in their liturgical devotions.

To a certain extent, it is true, the new tendencies in Ashkenazic messianic calculation may also be discerned in thirteenth-century Spanish kabbalistic circles, notably in the writings of Nahmanides and especially in the works of Abraham Abulafia and the Zohar. These Spanish circles are notorious for the new techniques of substitutions of letters and words of equal numerical values which they employed for mystical theosophy and messianic calculation.²⁸ However, it is hardly an accident that the first Sephardim to employ these characteristically Ashkenazic techniques were those dwelling in Christian Spain at the very time when the influence of Ashkenazic literature and orientations had made significant inroads into Spain. The men of Spain who indulged in these typically Franco-German interpretations of texts were people who had been subjected to much influence from areas beyond the Pyrenees and who attempted to integrate the wisdom of Ashkenaz with the legacy of Andalus. These were the very times and the very same areas in which the controversy over the works of Maimonides was inflaming Jewish passions as a consequence of the Ashkenazic challenge from Provence and France. Ashkenazic fundamentalism had gained ground in many respectable areas in Spain, and even some fine Sephardim had more or less absorbed the northern temper.

²⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 127, 135; Aescoly, *op. cit.*, pp. 196 ff. Cf. also n. 26.

But the new cross-influences were by no means unilateral, for the men, academies, and literature of Spain had a deep impact on Ashkenazic leadership. Whatever the source of Provençal and Franco-German mysticism, it is significant that this speculation north of the Pyrenees was undertaken largely by men who had either studied in Spain or had access to Sephardic literature and especially to the works of Saadiah and Maimonides. I am not suggesting that Franco-German pietism drew its inspiration from Spain; what I do contend is that these circles did have access to Andalusian literature and reflected the effects of some of its seminal ideas. And among the Sephardic preoccupations which could easily have excited the pietists of Ashkenaz and stimulated them to further speculation was the authentically Jewish concern with the date of the messianic redemption. In other words, even the brief messianic ferment among the pietists of Ashkenaz probably drew much of its inspiration from Sepharad. How crucial the influence of the Andalusian Maimonides was on the messianic computations of the Ashkenazim may be seen from the way the French pietists cited legends about Maimonides and Arabs in support of their calculations.²⁹ Maimonides' *Epistle to Yemen* came to Provence no later than 1215, and though the work was not translated into Hebrew until at least a decade later,³⁰ it may well be that its messianic calculation had made its way northward even before Ibn Tibbon released a Hebrew version. In short, France and Germany had little by way of an indigenous tradition of messianic speculation, and this tradition, to the extent that it did exist, had few literary or public reverberations.

By way of contrast, Andalus had a long, continuous, and, what is most important, public tradition of messianic calculation. Beginning with Abraham bar Hiyya's *Megillat ha-Megalleh* down to Isaac Abravanel's *Mashmī'a Yeshu'ah*, *Ma'ayenay ha-Yeshu'oh*, and *Yeshu'at Meshiho*, the date of

²⁹ Marx, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

³⁰ Halkin's introduction to *Epistle to Yemen*, p. xxxii.

the Messiah was forever being discussed publicly and with an originality of approach in each new work that puts this whole body of literature on an entirely different plane from the fragments deriving from Franco-German circles. Circa 1125, Abraham bar Ḥiyya calculated the advent of the messianic age from several points of view: from the account of creation in Genesis, from the Torah as a whole, from astrological signs, and from an exegetical analysis of Daniel. In other words, he used what a medieval man recognized as strictly empirical data. Now, although Abraham bar Ḥiyya's tract is the first full-scale discussion in Spain of the date of the Messiah, there is ample evidence that his was not the first public conjecture on the messianic end in the rabbinic circles of Andalus. Abraham ibn Ezra reports that Solomon ibn Gabirol early in the eleventh century had also invoked astrological data to predict the end, while not much earlier Samuel ibn Nagrela had infuriated the Muslim Ibn Ḥazm by contending that he was himself a fulfillment of the messianic promise "until Shiloh come." If we recall that not much earlier (c. 950) Ḥisdai ibn Shaprut was said to have written to Joseph, King of the Khazars, and to have inquired, among other things, whether the Khazar monarch had any trustworthy information on the date of the messianic end, we begin to realize that Abraham bar Ḥiyya's work was perhaps the first systematic treatise and the climax of several generations of speculation, but by no means the inauguration of a totally new genre.

Indeed, five of Abraham bar Ḥiyya's contemporaries, some of them far removed from one another, testify to the extent of the elitist but open discussion in Andalus of the probable date of the fulfillment of the messianic promise. Judah ben Barzillay of Barcelona, though he was opposed to astrological calculation, reaffirmed the tenability of other methods of calculation based on older rabbinic schemes of discerning the fulfillment of history.³¹ At approximately the

³¹ Judah ben Barzillay, *Commentar zum Sepher Jezira*, ed. by J. Halberstamm (Berlin, 1885), pp. 237 ff.

same time Judah ha-Levi expressed in poetry the general grief that the Messiah had not come at the date popularly believed to be the time of the end (1069), and then proceeded to recount his own vision of the imminent fulfillment of another classically attested rabbinic promise.³² A Jewish prophecy of the age, predicting on astrological grounds the beginning of the messianic era for 1186-87, made its way into Christian circles and has been preserved in Latin.³³ At about the same time, Maimon the Dayyan imparted to his children a tradition which he had received from his father—that the messianic age would be initiated with the reinstatement of prophecy around 1210 or 1216. Although his son Moses Maimonides, in his renowned *Epistle to Yemen*, protested vigorously against public speculation on the date of the end and obliquely criticized others for doing so, he himself proceeded in good Andalusian fashion to report and explain the tradition he had received from his father.³⁴ Shortly after Maimonides had written his *Epistle*, Abraham ibn Daud of Toledo wrote a series of works in each of which he vigorously reaffirmed the traditional messianic faith. My own investigation into Ibn Daud's work has led me to the conclusion that his historiography was in reality a thinly disguised trilogy, the real purpose of which was to reassure the learned classes that the messianic age would soon be inaugurated by great upheavals in Spain in 1188-89. In other words, far from being objective historiography, Ibn Daud's works deserve to be reckoned among the Sefhardic works dealing at least in part with eschatology.³⁵

Before going any further with examples of Spanish literature in this vein, it would be well to pause and recapitulate

³² Silver, *op. cit.*, pp. 67 ff.; Cohen, *op. cit.*, p. 104, n. 150.

³³ Y. Baer, "Eine jüdische Messiasprophetie auf das Jahr 1186 und der dritte Kreuzzug," *MGWJ*, LXX (1926), 113 ff.; *idem*, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain* (2 vols., Philadelphia, 1961-66) I, 66.

³⁴ Moses Maimonides, *Epistle to Yemen*, pp. 58 ff., 80 ff.

³⁵ Cf. the Analysis in my ed. of *Sefer ha-Qabbalah*, chaps. III-V, where this interpretation is documented in detail.

some of the features of this learned Sephardic messianology. Apart from the fact that this speculation was conducted quite out in the open with little practical regard for the rabbinic injunction against messianic speculation, the conjectured dates are reported to us at first hand—that is, by the speculators themselves. What is more, without indulging in apocalyptic fantasy, the Sephardim created or revived eschatology as a Jewish literary genre. Far more important, Spanish calculations were derived not by mystical techniques but by means of rationalist exegesis either of Scripture or of rabbinic traditions. This point must be underscored, for just as Franco-German speculation constituted an extension of the literary canons of German pietism to messianology, so, too, the Spanish calculations were made in consonance with the general *weltanschauung* of the Andalusian elite.

It is noteworthy that every one of the names I have mentioned in connection with Sephardic messianic calculation is known to us as a protagonist of the distinctly Andalusian Jewish way of life, and is associated with the golden age of Spanish Jewish creativity. Rationalism, science, philosophy, and Hebrew classicism were the hallmarks of this group. Superstition and non-rational exegesis were anathema to them all. Indeed, much of their intellectual energy was expended in reinterpreting into rational categories what they regarded as the embarrassing legacy of miracles, anthropomorphisms, and trivial stories of their classical literature. Hence, they would have little truck with apocalyptic fantasy. Accordingly, it is not surprising to discern in their writings an effort to calculate the end by the movements of the stars or by rhythmic periodizations of history. Having been trained in philosophy, they regarded the universe and human history as mechanisms or organisms, the functioning of which had been committed by the Creator to immutable laws. Built into these mechanisms as part of the law of their operation they postulated laws of time which would—

Andalusians = anti-apocalyptic, rationalistic

in the fullness of time—catapult the elect segment of the cosmos—indeed, the world at large—into a happier and more harmonious course. Since it was all a question of a particular manifestation of the laws of nature, fixed by God, to be sure, but capable of rational analysis nonetheless, if one could but permeate the complex secrets of the essential part of the machine or organism, one could determine when its course would change.

Accordingly, in the view of the Sephardim, the key to the secret of the destiny of Israel lay not in ecstatic ascents to Heaven for revelations by angelic powers, who would inform men whether the Almighty had decided that the Jews had had enough; rather, it lay in a study and proper understanding of God's books of laws—the Bible and the Talmud—and of their prerequisites, logic, mathematics, physics, astronomy, metaphysics, and history. Sephardic messianology was harmoniously blended with philosophy and a rationalist approach to life.

While eschatology obviously bespeaks an intense yearning for national redemption and rebirth—and the predominance of this longing in Andalusian Hebrew poetry is too well known to be belabored here—the two, the prayer for redemption and messianic speculation, were by no means synonymous. Jews have prayed for the sound of the horn of redemption since ancient times, but relatively few gave way to the temptation to permeate the heavenly veil concealing the secret of the time appointed for the end. Indeed, there were strong religious injunctions inhibiting the Jews against giving vent to their impatience or against revealing what they believed to be the appointed time. The open speculation of the philosophers of Spain, however well intentioned and however well preceded by earlier generations, was not likely to appeal to meticulous adherents of classical rabbinic teachings. Even Maimonides had qualms about divulging the tradition he had inherited on this score. And if a philosopher felt squeamish about such speculation,

how much more so would a penitent like Judah ha-Levi have felt about men who enter areas strictly forbidden to them!³⁸

Viewed from this perspective, Judah ha-Levi's apparently messianic act of leaving Spain for Palestine was not a logical conclusion of Andalusian messianism but a total rejection of it. His decision, it will be recalled, was taken only after the rationalist system in which he had been reared had, in his estimation, broken down. The rabbi in ha-Levi's *Kuzari* and Judah ha-Levi in his later poems rejected, bag and baggage, the whole mechanistic view of the universe which had become the regnant view of life in the circles of the Spanish-Jewish upper classes. It is no coincidence that the very work of medieval Jewish philosophy that reaffirmed in unequivocal terms the traditional forms of Jewish faith—the superiority of Israel, the uniqueness of the Holy Land, the mystery of prophecy—offered no solace in the form of a messianic prediction. The *Kuzari* suggested no date for the Messiah, for such speculation had become alien to a man who had reappropriated Talmudic faith in God's Providence. The Almighty would act in His good time; man's task was but to try to earn His mercy. Judah ha-Levi's departure for Palestine was an act in that direction and nothing more. Far from attempting to anticipate the Messiah, ha-Levi's move was a rejection of the Sephardic culture of his day; it was a Franco-German-type act of piety that committed all into the hands of a free and inscrutable God.

One of the factors that doubtless helped ha-Levi rationalize his latter-day negative evaluation of Andalusian Jewish culture was the wide currency which a second type of Sephardic messianic speculation, totally at variance with the predominant Sephardic eschatological schools, had gained in his environment. Grounding its views in a scien-

³⁸ Judah ha-Levi's famous suggestion of a date for the fall of the Muslim Empire, which ha-Levi credited to a dream, could easily be dismissed by his contemporaries as poetic fancy; cf. Judah ha-Levi, *Diwan* (ed. Brody), II, 302.

Judah HaLevi = proto-pietist of Ashkenazi school
rejects both rationalists & sceptics

* Sceptics denied contemporary validity of biblical eschatology

tific study of Scripture, this school of exegesis denied whole blocs of biblical messianic lore as valid sources of hope or prediction for the future. The three names associated with this type of exegesis are Moses ha-Kohen ibn Gikatilla and Judah ibn Bala'am, of the eleventh century, and Ḥayyim Galipapa of the fourteenth. From Nahmanides and Abravanel's reports, it would seem that a fourth name is to be added to this list, namely that of Abraham ibn Ezra of the twelfth century. In reality, they were by no means the only skeptics of Spain.

The view shared by all these exegetes was that the messianic prophecies in the Bible could not be interpreted eschatologically. Rather, these visions were to be understood as exhortations and predictions that the prophets had intended for immediate fulfillment. Indeed, study of history convinced these rationalists that these prophecies had been fulfilled in the days of Hezekiah and especially in the early days of the Second Temple. Whether the prophecies were *ad hoc* predictions or merely sermons *ex eventu*, they could not serve as sources of hope to the Jews of the Middle Ages, for their capital had run out long since. These men, it should be emphasized, did not deny the validity of the messianic dogma; they affirmed it as a rabbinic tradition only, not as a legacy of Scripture. However, there can be little doubt that many in Spain regarded the messianic reaffirmation of these exegetes as mere lip service, as formal concessions to the requirements of official piety. With the undermining of the Scriptural foundations for faith in the messianic redemption, to many a thinking person the messianic dogma seemed to rest on thin air.

To Judah ha-Levi the skepticism engendered by this school of thought was only one or two steps removed from the rationalism that saw in Scripture the clues to the mathematics of the Divine economy. Nor was he wrong, for, in its own way, the more tradition-oriented rationalism had also conceded its embarrassment with some of the graphic promises of miraculous upheaval and had thereby added

fuel to the fire of doubt and even despair. The outstanding literary expression to the watered-down traditionalist view, the writings of Moses Maimonides, appeared long after ha-Levi's death, but the views Maimonides expressed on the subject were well known in Spain much earlier. Far from innovating in this respect, Maimonides' attenuation of certain traditional messianic hopes betrays how widespread the skepticism had become, had indeed permeated even the highest rabbinic circles.³⁷ Thus, whether Maimonides had really meant originally to eliminate the doctrine of the resurrection—one of the cardinal promises vouchsafed for the messianic era—from his creed of Judaism, and substitute for it the more philosophically fashionable doctrine of immortality, is a matter on which latter-day Maimonists and anti-Maimonists are still divided. What is beyond question is that Maimonides and many of his disciples considered the promises of resurrection and even of the messianic deliverance far less important than the more rationally acceptable assurance of immortality. Moreover, in his *Guide of the Perplexed*, Maimonides made it very clear that he considered many of the miraculous portents foretold by the prophets for the messianic age mere figures of speech that had not been meant literally. From this last position he never retreated, and even in his legal magnum opus, he indicated that he was not committed to belief in their literal fulfillment.³⁸

³⁷ In support of his views Maimonides refers to Ibn Bala'am and Ibn Gikatilla approvingly; cf. "Maimonides' Treatise on Resurrection," ed. by J. Finkel, *PAAJR*, IX (1938-39), Hebrew section, p. 21, par. 31.

³⁸ Cf. Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, II, 29, trans. by S. Pines (Chicago, 1963), 337 ff.; *idem*, *Mishneh Torah*, Melakhim, 12.1 ff.; cf. also J. Levinger, *Maimonides' Techniques of Codification* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 1965), p. 163. On the curious silence of Joseph ibn Aqnin on messianic dogmas, see A.S. Halkin, "Li-Demuto shel R. Joseph b. Judah ibn Aqnin," *Harry Austryn Wolfson Jubilee Volume* (Jerusalem, 1965), Hebrew vol., p. 111.

- 2 Sources of Spanish eschatology:
- 1) rationalism
 - 2) reaction to the sceptics

Maimonides, of course, was in the first instance the great spokesman of an intelligentsia that was bent on restructuring all of Jewish education and indeed even community life on rationalist principles. While the Maimonist controversy in the thirteenth century was soon focused on the question of allegorical interpretations of the ritual commandments and the study of philosophy as the source of all evil within the Jewish community, it should not be forgotten that the first signs of protest against the *Guide* were evinced by Arabically cultured Jews who were astounded at the flippancy with which Maimonides had treated the promise of resurrection.³⁹ And the promise of resurrection, be it not overlooked, is the central rabbinic motif in its representation of the messianic promise. These protesters sensed, quite rightly, that an authoritative rabbinic license to gloss over the resurrection struck at the root and the heart of the Jewish messianic faith.

While Maimonides' orthodoxy was vindicated, the continued extreme skepticism in the camp of the Andalusian intelligentsia on the meaning of messianic doctrines gave renewed stimulus to the traditionalists to add to the corpus of Spanish eschatological literature. In the thirteenth century, Moses Nahmanides defended the integrity of the traditional messianic faith not only in his commentary on the Pentateuch, but in a special treatise on the messianic redemption, as well as in his Hebrew summary of the disputation of Barcelona in 1263. While recapitulating many of the older arguments, Nahmanides' treatise on redemption reflects the newer emphasis of the rabbinic circles of which he was a member, on *gematriaot*, thereby providing a bridge between the Franco-German computations and the indigenously Andalusian literary genre. In the middle of the fourteenth century, when Abner of Burgos shook the Jewish

³⁹ Cf. "Maimonides' Treatise on Resurrection," pp. 10 ff.; Meir ben Todros ha-Levi Abulafia, *Kitab al-Rasail*, ed. by J. Brill (Paris, 1871), p. 1.

sceptics trad. eschat. called to combat the sceptics
| "in"

community of Spain by his apostasy, and then proceeded to rationalize his defection by eschatological arguments, his Porphyrian-like exegesis of Daniel evoked a vigorous denunciation coupled with a defense of traditional messianism on exegetical grounds by Rabbi Joseph Shalom.⁴⁰ That the eschatological debate, provoked by continued skepticism in upper-class circles, remained alive, may be seen in the vigorous reaffirmation of Hasdai Crescas, the equivocal acceptance of Joseph Albo, and the compendious recapitulations of the whole question by Dov Isaac Abravanel. Thus, a second source of Spanish eschatology was a widespread skepticism over messianic articles of faith, of which we have no evidence from Ashkenazic circles, and which prompted Sephardic traditionalists to speculate on the end of history in much the same way that rationalist Andalusians had done much earlier.

* * *

Having seen that underneath the consistent rabbinic opposition to messianic movements there was a vast difference between the rabbis of the Sephardim and of the Ashkenazim in their treatment of the traditional messianic dogma, the question that commands our attention is whether there is any discernible relationship between elitist expression and the behavior of the laity. Given the rabbinic renunciation of any precipitous messianic behavior, is it nevertheless possible to correlate Spanish intellectual expression with the messianic behavior of occasionally rebellious Spanish laity and the French rabbinic posture with the behavior of French-Jewish masses?

It will be noted that in posing the question this way, we have quite deliberately sought to account for particular messianic postures in the psyche of the Jews themselves rather than in any external or objective set of circumstances.

⁴⁰ J. Rosenthal, "From 'Sefer Alfonso'" [in Hebrew], *Studies and Essays in Honor of Abraham A. Neuman* (Leiden, 1963), pp. 621 ff.

For, if there is any one conclusion that the data force upon us, it is that, contrary to the popular impression, there is no discernible connection between persecution and messianic movements. Jewish messianic movements were not "the religion of the oppressed."⁴¹ The Crusades, the Almohade invasion, the expulsions from England and France, the blood libels, the Pastoureaux onslaughts, and the persecutions at the time of the Black Death, indeed, even the expulsion from Spain and the Chmelnitzki massacres did not generate a single messianic movement. Conversely, all the messianic efforts made in Iraq and Persia, and above all in Spain and North Africa, were undertaken in areas and periods of relative stability. Active messianism or quiescence must have derived from sources other than political or economic. If Franco-German Jewry produced neither a messianic pretender nor a messianic literature, it must be because quiescence and passivity had somehow so permeated the whole mentality of that community as virtually to eliminate such aggressive behavior. Doubtless fear of failure and reprisal played a major role; but hysteria is often strong enough to overcome realistic considerations and we must, accordingly, seek other explanations.

Perhaps the explanations I shall suggest will be a bit more cogent if we revert to the contrast afforded by the data from Spain. Intellectual activism in the form of open speculation on the date of the end by the intellectual elite was paralleled by occasional unbridled eruptions of Jews who could not wait. Activism of two kinds, literary and physical, seems to have permeated Spain much more than France and Germany. But it was a peculiar form of activism, quite unlike the military-sectarian ventures known from Babylonia. In Spain this activism consisted in reading the signs of the times independently of rabbinic authorities and then proceeding to announce miraculous portents and the advent of the redemption. It was, paradoxically enough, Spanish traditionalist rationalism carried to its logical end

⁴¹ See the observations of G. Scholem, *Sabbethai Zevi*, I, 1 ff.

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by the acting out of what Spanish rabbis had merely contemplated. Put differently, it was the translation of the theory of the elite into acts of popular piety. The announcement of a miracle or portent could induce credulous groups of ingenuous believers to divest themselves of their wealth and assemble in readiness for the great deliverance. Conversely, the intellectual quietism of the rabbis of Ashkenaz, motivated in the first instance by religious injunctions against calculating the date of the Messiah, doubtless percolated outward and downward to the laity and lower strata of society and inhibited them from attempting to alter their destiny.

However, in reality, this explanation only pushes the problem back a step. The fact is that the rabbis of Spain, no less than those of France and Germany, advocated political quietism, and both groups of leaders grounded their stance in very much the same classical rabbinic sources. Given the basic uniformity of the classical rabbinic tradition in Spain and France and Germany, what in Jewish culture oriented the one group to intellectual or physical activism and the other to a basic passivity? In the first instance, it seems to me, we must go back to the particular cultural roots of each of the two branches. Ever since the downfall of Bar Kokhba, Palestinian Jewry had politically been fairly quiescent. Its leadership released deep emotions of hostility and hope in prayer, poetry, and apocalyptic literature. But as custodians of the *Pax Romana* in Palestine, the patriarchate and the rabbinate taught submissiveness and acceptance of the Divine decree until the Almighty should intervene in history and restore His people. This basic attitude of submission permeated even the ostensibly explosive literature of Palestinian mysticism and apocalypticism. As in the case of Daniel of old, so, too, in later apocalyptic literature, while the visionary is reassured of Divine vengeance against the Gentiles, he is no less emphatically enjoined to wait for the deliverance of God. In the meantime, he may take comfort in violent and bloody fantasies that

Seco apocalyptic lit as essentially passive, surrogate for political action

will one day become a reality. In other words, far from inciting to riot, apocalyptic literature actually tranquilized and served as a release, a channel by means of which excess emotions were syphoned off. So it was in the case of the Dead Sea sect and the early Christians; so it was in Roman and medieval Palestine.

This attitude and posture were doubtless conveyed to all parts of the Diaspora over which the academies of the Holy Land exercised influence. It is not surprising, therefore, that when in 960 the elders of the Rhineland sent their two inquiries to the Holy Land—on the date of the Messiah and the laws of *terefot*—they were roundly rebuffed on the first question: "You are unworthy of a reply concerning the advent of the Messiah. Do you not trust the words of the sages and the signs which they provided? These have not yet been fulfilled." The mere question was an affront, a violation of religious propriety.

How much the Franco-German spirit owed to its Palestinian progenitor is also reflected in some of the forms surrounding Ashkenazic messianic speculation. Like its Palestinian apocalyptic models, which circulated in France and Germany as early as the tenth century, Ashkenazic calculation depended largely on information gleaned in the course of mystical ascents to the heavens, where a prophet or angel disclosed the secret.

The quietism of the Palestinian-Ashkenazic branch was given its endorsement by the tenth-century Italian paraphrase of Josephus in Hebrew, Sefer Yosifon. The major burden of the work was to demonstrate that the Zealots, the lawless ones of Israel who had tried to defy the Divine decree which had installed the fourth empire as mistress of the world, had brought incalculable misery and suffering on their people. Conversely, the righteous of old willingly accepted their fate of martyrdom, confident in the fulfillment of the promises of the great illumination and the resurrection which were vouchsafed for them. What Josephus had failed to convey to his people in Aramaic and Greek, a

Palestinian quietism → Ashkenazi "prophecy"
 " apocalyptic →

pseudepigrapher now avidly embraced in Hebrew, and his authority as an authentic interpreter of Jewish history was widely acknowledged.⁴²

Spain, on the other hand, modeled itself largely on Babylonian paradigms. From Baghdad it had received not only Gaonic responsa, a translation of and commentaries on the Bible in Arabic and legal codes, but also the guidelines for a Jewish philosophy, and to a large extent the foundations of their own *weltanschauung* and *paideia*. Like the Babylonians in Babylonia, the Sephardim in Andalus became extremely nativist, proud of their genealogy, sensitive to the challenges of Arabic poetry, science, and philosophy, and speculative on the secrets of the universe and of Jewish history. And as in Babylonia, the Jews of Spain witnessed two types of political posture: elitist cooperation with the government, and dissident revolt on the part of disaffected groups. Hence, even though Abraham ibn Daud gave his full approbation to the political stance of *Yosifon*, his endorsement could not dissipate the basic restlessness in the Sephardic temper. Indeed, the very same Ibn Daud had preached quietism out of one side of his mouth and theorized on the end of history out of the other.

However, there were other factors as well. To a certain extent, the political successes of Jews in Spain must have whetted the appetites of the elite for even further conquests. The rise of Jews to heights of power unknown since ancient times was accompanied by a neo-classicism that revived biblical Hebrew and biblical imagery in "secular" as well as religious poetry. It was a Jewish vizier of Granada who defiantly proclaimed: "I am the David of my generation."⁴³

⁴² Y. Baer, "Sefer Yosifon ha-'Ibri," *Sefer Dinaburg* (Jerusalem, 1949), pp. 178 ff.

⁴³ Samuel ibn Nagrela, *Diwan*, ed. by D.S. Sassoon (Oxford, 1934), p. 41, line 38 (= ed. A.M. Habermann and S. Abramson, I, part 1, p. 37); J. Schirrmann, *Ha-Shirah ha-'Ibrit bi-Sefarad u-bi-Provence*, I, 111. For the ascent to the heights of the moon, cf. *ibid.*, p. 83 (ed. Habermann, I, part 3, p. 5).

Babylonia/Spain : nativist, scientific speculation
1) elitist cooperation with gov't
2) dissident revolt

To a potential David, relative deprivation is much more irritating than absolute deprivation. To a would-be king, as the same Ibn Nagrela confessed, nothing short of conquest of the heavens and the heights of the moon would satisfy. The elite of Spain were restive and eager; and lesser pretenders caught the bug and from time to time announced their messiahship.

Moreover, political success underscored the new confidence in the powers of human understanding that was born of the scientific and philosophic studies cultivated in Spain. While the elite would forever be prudent and judicious, the more deprived and the less stable would lose their inhibitions and jump to messianic action.

* * *

But in the final analysis the two different messianic postures of medieval European Jewry betray two different approaches to the same religious faith. Quiescence, passive resistance, is symptomatic of absolute faith in the total transcendence of God, in His unbounded liberty and power, and of perfect certainty that the Divine promise will be fulfilled. It was no coincidence that Ashkenazic Jewry was always basically fundamentalist, unabashed by anthropomorphism or outlandish legends. Who was man to sit in judgment on God or His word?

Activism of the Andalusian type, on the other hand, emanated from a society, which, although formally proclaiming its faith in the classical God of Israel, had in reality appropriated much of the Hellenic scientific spirit; it was largely fatalist-predestinarian and committed to a belief in the inexorable law of nature and, we may add, of history. When the time came for the end to unfold, if indeed it ever would, nothing could stop it.

This difference in underlying faith, of which the form of messianism is but one significant symptom, is far more important than what appears on the surface, for I believe

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that it provides a clue to understanding the Jewish posture in the face of pressure and dire persecution. While, as I have already affirmed, there is no demonstrable connection in Jewish history between periods of extreme persecution and messianic uprisings, the record of history does entitle us to establish a close connection between a particular type of faith generally, and of messianic faith in particular, and the Jewish response to the challenging alternative of conversion or death. That is because messianism is the substance on which all Jewish tenacity was predicated. God's elect would be vindicated, and on the basis of that promise alone Jews would endure not only persecution but interminable alienation and humiliation. It is a reasonable assumption, then, that the form of a Jew's ideology of resistance will be reflected in the nature of his response to physical threats.

During the Middle Ages, there were four instances of which we have some rather full accounts in which scores of Jewish communities and thousands of Jews were confronted by the alternative of apostasy or death, two of them affecting Ashkenazic Jewry and two of them Sephardic. I make reference, of course, to the First Crusade of 1096, to the Almohade persecutions in North Africa and Spain beginning in 1147, to the riots of 1391 in Spain and the persecutions that followed, and to the Cossack uprisings in Poland and Russia in 1648 and after. Now in each of these instances, many Jews were killed outright; some fought back; some preferred martyrdom to apostasy; some converted as a means of saving their lives. Of the latter, some attempted to return to Judaism; others had found the final solution to their Jewish problem and remained Christians or Muslims. However, if no one description will suffice to describe the behavior of all the Jews involved in any one of these upheavals, it is nevertheless fair to say that in each of these instances there was a dominant behavioral pattern, one that was so pronounced as to make an indelible impression on eye-witnesses and chroniclers.

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In each of the two cases involving Ashkenazic Jewry, those of 1096 and 1648 and after, the outstanding feature of the Jewish response was kiddush ha-shem—martyrdom. In both of the persecutions endured by Sephardim, although *kiddush ha-shem* was by no means lacking, the dominant behavioral pattern, the one that left the greatest impression on witnesses and future generations, was apostasy and marranism.

There were, of course, basic differences between each of the two experiences affecting Ashkenazic Jewry, even with respect to the martyrdom accepted by the Jews involved. In the later Chmelnitzki onslaught, it would seem that far fewer Jews had any choice in the matter than in the other three cases. The Cossacks often seemed to have been bent on outright murder, rapine, and pillage. But even in those cases where Jews were in a position to choose between alternatives, they elected to die fighting or to die passively at the hands of their attackers.⁴⁴ That had not been quite the case in 1096. Then, while many Jews died fighting or even passively, many of them took an active hand in their martyrdom by committing a kind of ritual suicide. The ritual slaughter-knife was used, a blessing was pronounced, and blood of the human sacrifice was even smeared on the pillar of the ark in the synagogue.⁴⁵ Martyrdom was not mere sanctification of the Name through faith; it was an atonement sacrifice, an *aqedah*. That is important to bear in mind, for the commemorative chronicles, dirges, and penitential prayers that subsequently emerged from Ash-

⁴⁴ While there were, of course, instances of suicide even in the Chmelnitzki onslaughts, the contrast with the widespread and organized suicides of 1096 is quite evident. For sources on the events of 1648, see *Gezerot Tah* [in Yiddish] (Vilna, 1938); M. Hendel, *Gezerot Tah-Tat* (Jerusalem, 1950); S. Bernfeld, *Sefer ha-Dema'ot*, III, 109 ff.; H.J. Gurland, *Le-Qorot ha-Gezerot 'al Israel* (Odessa, 1892).

⁴⁵ See the account of Solomon ben Simeon in Habermann, *Sefer Gezerot Ashkenaz ve-Şarfat*, pp. 24 ff. For the sprinkling of the ark, cf. p. 37.

kenaz frequently construed martyrdom as an *aqedah* sacrifice, as the highest act of worship, the martyr being referred to as ha-Qadosh, the saint.⁴⁶ Hence, despite the different circumstances surrounding the voluntary death of thousands of Jews in the two great massacres of Ashkenazic Jewry, the ideal of service to God through martyrdom, in whatever form, had become for Ashkenazic Jewry the only legitimate choice in times of persecution. This is not to say that Ashkenazim did not sympathize with those who could not stand up to the ultimate test. What it does mean is that, under such circumstances, death on behalf of God was the only admissible solution in theory. Consequently, every martyr, willing or unwilling, would attain the rank of the saint, of the one who had willingly, indeed gladly, offered up his life as a sacrifice.

Now the obvious feature of voluntary martyrdom is its stance of profound trust, its unflagging certainty of vindication and ultimate triumph. In Jewish literature, the souls of the righteous were described as stored under the Throne of Glory, accepted into the great light vouchsafed for the world to come, and held in readiness for the resurrection and redemption.⁴⁷ Quiescence, passivity, resignation were possible for thousands of Ashkenazic Jews, for to them the age of the Messiah was not merely a concept, a vision of

⁴⁶ See the classic study of S. Spiegel, "The Legend of Isaac's Slaying and Resurrection" [in Hebrew], *Alexander Marx Jubilee Volume*, Hebrew vol., pp. 471 ff. and especially pp. 477 ff., 534 ff., where the connection of the *aqedah* with sacrifice and resurrection is documented; cf. also *idem*, "Payrur me-Aggadot ha-Aqedah," *The Abraham Weiss Jubilee Volume* (New York, 1964), pp. 553 ff.; H.J. Zimmels, *Ashkenazim and Sephardim* (London, 1958), pp. 263 ff.

⁴⁷ On the rewards vouchsafed the martyrs, cf., in addition to the works listed in n. 46, Y. Baer's paper referred to in n. 42; *idem*, "Geseret Tatnaw," *Sefer Assaf* (Jerusalem, 1953), pp. 126 ff. For the sources of these expressions cf. V. Aptowitz, "Bet ha-Miqdash shel ma'alah 'al Pi ha-Aggadah," *Tarbiz*, II (1930-31), 264, n. 8; S. Lieberman, "The Martyrs of Caesarea," *Annuaire de l'Institut de Philologie et d'histoire Orientales et Slaves*, VII (1939-44), 443 ff.

bliss, or primarily an age when the Holy Spirit would be restored to Israel. The day of messianic redemption was the one when "eye to eye they would see the Lord restoring Zion" (Isaiah 52:8), that is, themselves, their loved ones, their people, their Temple, their king, their home. Quiescence and martyrdom sprang from a classical faith untroubled by rationalist doubts or scholastic distinctions between the intentions of the heart and the utterances of the lips.

That this was the case may be seen by a closer examination of the circumstances under which Ashkenazim preferred to undergo martyrdom. At the time of the First Crusade, many of the leadership and learned preferred suicide to death at the hands of their tormentors, despite the formal prohibition in Judaism against suicide; for they construed the Talmudic injunctions against suicide in the context of Talmudic literature as a whole. Now, while rabbinic law formally prohibits suicide, there are a considerable number of cases in the Talmud recording suicide as a religiously praiseworthy act not only to avoid apostasy or forced immorality, but even as a form of voluntary atonement. The penitent, in popular views, could justifiably impose the death penalty on himself as a form of expiation.⁴⁸ To many, the willingness of Isaac to be sacrificed by his father Abraham, in proof of which there was an amplitude

⁴⁸ On the meritoriousness of martyr-suicide in earlier literature, cf. *Mishnah of R. Eliezer* (ed. Enelow), p. 169; H. Fischel, "Martyr and Prophet," *JQR*, NS, XXVII (1946-47), 275; Cohen, *The Story of the Four Captives*, pp. 59, 74. On meritorious suicides of remorse and repentance, cf. *Bereshit Rabba* 65:22 (ed. Theodor-Albeck), pp. 742 ff.; B.A.Z. 18a (the latter is told of a Gentile executioner). I hope to deal with the subject at greater length in another paper. On the sentiment in Ashkenaz, cf. J. Katz, *Exclusiveness and Tolerance* (Oxford, 1961), pp. 90 ff.; N. Guedemann, *Geschichte des Erziehungswesens und der Cultur der Juden*, I (Vienna, 1880), 150, n. 5. The sacrificial and expiatory quality of physical suffering, especially of death, although quite evident in rabbinic literature, is given renewed emphasis by the German pietists; cf. Eleazar of Worms, *Rokeah* (Jerusalem, 1960), p. 3.

of rabbinic legend, was construed as a form of voluntary religious martyrdom.⁴⁹

Please do not misunderstand me as arguing the halakic rectitude of their acts. That is a matter for jurists to decide, though I may add that I have support for my understanding of their behavior in the juridic defenses of these acts by outstanding halakists of the Middle Ages.⁵⁰ What I am trying to do is to understand their religious temper. The Ashkenazim were not at all *emotionally* passive in their martyrdom. To the extent that their religious sentiments would allow the chroniclers and poets to admit, many of the martyrs and their contemporaries expressed great resentment over the fate that God had meted out to them. While some piously rehashed the ancient platitudes of Job's friends that it was because of their sins that they were suffering, others protested that it was not because of their shortcomings that they were dying but because of their perfection. As a generation unmatched in piety since the days of Rabbi Akiba and the ten martyrs, they had been elected to serve as the sacrifice of atonement for all others.⁵¹

It may well be that the Christian environment had stimulated them to think along these particular rabbinic lines rather than along others, which I will suggest influenced many Sephardim. But the crucifixion motif as a vicarious atonement had ample parallels in authentically Jewish sources to allow them to construe their choice as a totally Jewish one.⁵² In a word, they treated *aggadah* and *halakah* as a unit and behaved accordingly.

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⁴⁹ Cf. n. 46.

⁵⁰ Menahem ben Solomon ha-Meiri, *Magen Abot* (Jerusalem and New York, 1958), p. 89; cf. also Zimmels, *op. cit.*, p. 263, n. 4; cf. also n. 55.

⁵¹ Cf. Solomon ben Simeon, *op. cit.* (ed. Habermann), *passim* and especially pp. 25, 27, 46.

⁵² Cf. G.F. Moore, *Judaism*, I, 546 ff.; S. Schechter, *Some Aspects of Rabbinic Theology*, pp. 310 ff. On the souls of the righteous—who have already died—as the materials of sacrifice in the heavenly Temple, cf. Aptowitz, *op. cit.*, pp. 257 ff.

In the case of the dominant Sephardic responses to persecution through marranism and even unqualified apostasy, the situation is far more complex. Many doubtless elected to live out of sheer instinct. But why assume that Ashkenazic instincts are weaker than Sephardic ones? Obviously other factors came into play, and it is these that interest us in the present context.

In his famed *Treatise on the Sanctification of the Name*, Maimonides informs us that some Jews, although they had the opportunity to escape to safer pastures, elect to remain under Almohade rule as marranos, for they were sure the Messiah would soon be at hand in any case.⁵³ This is a most revealing statement, for the same messianic faith that prompted Ashkenazim to elect death at their own hands prompted some Sephardim—of whom the North Africans were a part—to try to have their cake and eat it too. What better evidence do we need of the messianic predestinarianism that had circulated in Sephardic circles? Nor can this be dismissed as the quirk of a few Jewish crackpots, for Maimonides regarded the notion as sufficiently serious to treat it as a problem. The fact of the matter is that this point of view became one of the dominant characteristics of marranist thinking in the second great period of persecution confronting Sephardic Jewry, that is, in the persecutions of 1391 and after. What Professor Baer has regarded as evidence of a messianic movement on the part of many marranos shortly before the expulsion from Spain, will, upon more dispassionate examination, be seen to be not so much a movement as expressions of hysterical guilt, of hope and of reaffirmation of faith in the *inevitability* of the imminent messianic deliverance.⁵⁴ In other words, whereas Ashkenazic

⁵³ Moses Maimonides, "Iggeret ha-Shemad," *Hemdah Genuzah*, ed. by Z.H. Edelmann (Königsberg, 1856), p. 12 a-b; = *Rambam La'am* (Mosad ha-Rav Kuk), XX, 66.

⁵⁴ Y. Baer, "Ha-Tenu'ah ha Meshihit bi Sefarad bi-Tequmat ha-Gerush," *Zion*, V (1932-33), 61 ff. Cf. also Aescoly, *op. cit.*, p. 295. Needless to say, inquisitors would inflate such local manifestations into major movements.

political quiescence could generate mass emotional religious activism in the form of martyrdom, the open speculation and even occasional active outbursts of the Sephardic milieu would, in times of severe stress, produce extreme religious passivity.

In the case of the marranos of the Almohade period, we are beset by a lack of copious source materials. There are only two circumstances that do appear worthy of mention in the present context. While Maimonides unequivocally recognized the martyrs of the Almohade persecutions as sacrifices in sanctification of the Name, he nevertheless urged Jews to avoid martyrdom if they could. He, of course, justified his directive on strictly halakic grounds. But I wonder if it is not more than a coincidence that a representative of those circles of Judaism that had reservations at least on the primacy of the resurrection in the messianic fulfillment should be more reluctant to put his stamp of approval on wholesale martyrdom? As is widely known, even after all the apparent halakic differences on martyrdom between Maimonides and the Franco-German codifiers have been leveled and harmonized, there exists a hard core of dispute between them which cannot be resolved and of which many Jewish jurists have taken note. That is the question of the option open to a person to undergo martyrdom in certain situations when the law does not prescribe it. Maimonides in his *Mishneh Torah* absolutely forbade it, while the Franco-Germans proclaimed almost to a man that it is a matter for the individual himself to decide.⁵⁵ Although what was formally at issue was the interpretation of classical texts, I cannot help but feel that in borderline cases the spokesman of each branch of Judaism read the texts in accordance with the overall pattern of his thinking.

⁵⁵ For a full discussion and references to earlier literature, see M. Krakovsky, *Abodat ha-Melek* (Vilna, 1931), f. 6a and seq. to Maimonides *Mishneh Torah*, *Yesoday ha-Torah*, 5, 1,2,4; cf. also Jacob ben Asher, *Tur*, *Yoreh Deah*, par. 157 and Joseph Caro's notes thereto.

The hesitancy that attended such reservations on the ultimate reward and on the right of a man to decide his own destiny through martyrdom doubtless percolated down to the laity and influenced their behavior. Add to this the widespread skepticism of the extreme type that we discussed earlier and you have the seedbed on which marranism could sprout and ultimately become a phenomenon of major proportions.

If that is a matter of conjecture in the case of the Almohade persecutions, in the case of the riots of 1391, and the environment of the fifteenth century, the pattern is much clearer. Indeed, a whole complex of Jewish factors was available to rationalize sympathy for the "forced converts." Whatever rationalizations were invoked after the fact, Baer has argued convincingly that the deep religious skepticism that had spread in the economically higher classes of Sephardic Jewish society was one of the chief factors in bringing about wholesale Spanish apostasy. Christian polemicists and missionaries made capital of the widespread doubts in the messianic fulfillment that had become part of many a Jewish man's spiritual baggage. Despair of the messianic promise to Israel was doubtless a major factor in swaying many to make the decision they did between 1391 and 1492.⁵⁶

Coupled with skepticism there was yet another product of the Andalusian golden age that colored the Spanish temper. That was the posture of the Arab-type philosopher, the conclusion that true salvation was being held in store for the worthy individual rather than for the group as a whole. Secondly, what counted ultimately was not what one did so much as what one believed. If one's heart remained steadfast, then formal defection was of secondary importance. Add to this the ever-growing conviction in respectable Jewish circles that Christianity was not really an

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⁵⁶ Y. Baer, *History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, II, 253 ff. 273 ff.

idolatry⁵⁷ and you have fertile soil for the rationalization of those marranos who remained secretly loyal, and above all for the indubitable and widespread rabbinic sympathy for them. They knew that the Messiah must come and soon, and they were sure that those who could justify their innermost intentions would also be redeemed. Spanish activism coupled with Spanish sophistication and skepticism helped to produce the characteristic Sephardic response to the Messiah and His challengers.

To sum up, two traditions, two distinct medieval approaches to the Messiah gained strong footholds in medieval society. Although the times and circumstances that generated them changed radically, the traces of these two approaches, and variations on them, have remained down to modern times.

⁵⁷ Katz, *op. cit.*, pp. 115 ff.